

Mercury(II) Trifluoroacetate-mediated Transformation of 3-Bromo-1-phenylprop-2-ynyl Aryl Ethers; a Novel Synthesis of Flavanones

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The synthesis and mercury(II) trifluoroacetate mediated transformation of 3-bromo-1-phenylprop-2-ynyl aryl ethers to flavanones is reported.

Flavanones constitute one of the most important classes of the wide group of flavanoids. They are crucial substituents in a number of naturally occurring and pharmacologically important compounds, such as *C*-aryl glycosides and *C*-glycosides. The chemistry of flavanones has been repeatedly reviewed in the literature.¹ The most widely adopted method for the construction of the 2-phenyl-2,3-dihydro-4*H*-1-benzo-pyran-4-one skeleton is the cyclisation of *o*-hydroxychalcones by acids,² bases,³ silica,⁴ light⁵ or more recently by Co^{II} Schiff-base complexes.⁶

The ease with which the 1-arylprop-2-ynyl aryl ethers undergo the Claisen transformation,⁷ as well as the success with the mercury(II)-mediated synthesis of chromanones⁸ prompted us to look into the feasibility of a short, novel synthesis of flavanones by the above route. In this Communication we report such a route to flavanones.

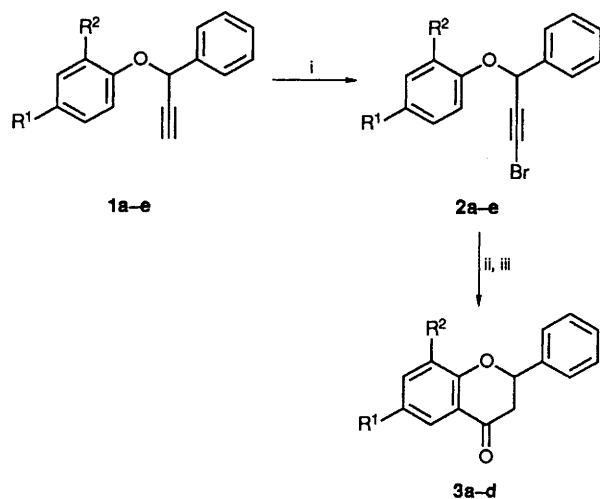
The starting ethers **1a–c** were prepared by our recently reported^{7,9} extension of the Mitsunobu coupling reaction of 1-phenylprop-2-yn-1-ol and the corresponding phenols. While these ethers failed to react with NaOBr (unlike the corresponding prop-2-ynyl aryl ethers⁸), the γ -bromo compounds

a–e were prepared by the reaction of **1a–e** with *N*-bromo-succinimide (NBS) in the presence of a catalytic quantity of silver nitrate,¹⁰ in yields of 86–92%.

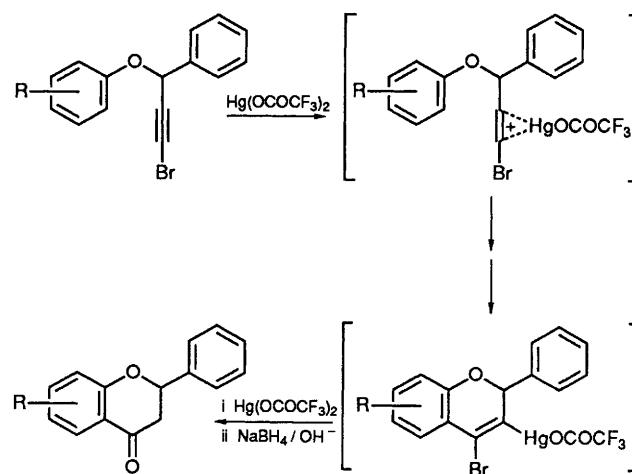
The ethers **2a–d** underwent a facile transformation to the flavanones **3a–d** in the presence of mercury(II) trifluoroacetate in dichloromethane, with yields of 90–92% after sodium borohydride work-up (Scheme 1).[†] The probable mechanism for this transformation is outlined in Scheme 2. There has been some controversy as to whether such transformations involve a sigmatropic process or a simpler electrophilic cyclisation.¹¹ The actual mechanism operating in this instance is currently under investigation with the use of aryl propargyl ethers with an optically active centre at the α -position.

Surprisingly, the ether **2e** failed to furnish the corresponding flavanone under the above conditions. This behaviour is in contrast to 3-bromoprop-2-ynyl-(4-methoxy)phenyl ether which is smoothly converted to 6-methoxychroman-4-one (84%) under identical conditions. However, the use of silver trifluoromethanesulphonate instead of mercury(II) trifluoroacetate furnished the highly unstable 4-bromoflavene **4** albeit in low yield (25%) Scheme 3. Attempts to convert **4** to the corresponding flavanone are in progress.

The cyclisation of *m*-substituted¹² γ -bromopropynyl aryl ethers showed no significant regioselectivity under the above



Scheme 1 Reagents and conditions: i, NBS, AgNO₃-acetone, 2 h; ii, Hg (OCOCF₃)₂-CH₂Cl₂, room temp.; iii, alkaline NaBH₄

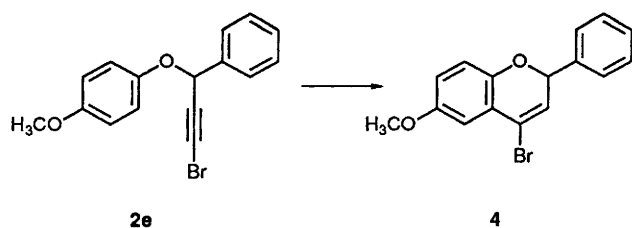


Scheme 2

Table 1 Synthesis of flavanones by a Hg²⁺ mediated transformation

Entry	R ¹	R ²	Yield of 2 (%)	Yield of 3 (%)	M.p./°C (lit.)
a	H	H	88	92	74 (76) ⁴
b	Me	H	91	90	104 (106–107) ¹⁵
c	Cl	H	86	90	95 (98) ^{4,14}
d	H	Me	86	91	86
e	OMe	H	94	—	—

[†] **Experimental procedure:** To the 3-bromo-1-phenylprop-2-ynyl aryl ether **2a–e** (1 mm) dissolved in dry CH₂Cl₂ (7 ml) was added Hg(OCOCF₃)₂ (1 mm). The solution turned red after 5–10 mins. It was stirred for a period of 2 h at room temp., and a further portion of Hg(OCOCF₃)₂ (0.5–1.0 mm) was then added and stirring continued for a further period of 1 h. The mixture was cooled to 0°C and an alkaline NaBH₄ solution (1.5–2.0 mm) was added slowly. After stirring for 1 h at room temp., the reaction mixture was filtered through celite, the filtrate was concentrated and purified by column chromatography to furnish the flavanones **3a–d** (Table 1).



Scheme 3 Reagents and conditions: Ag (OSO₂CF₃)-CH₂Cl₂, room temp., 15 min

conditions and a mixture of the regioisomers in a ratio of 3 : 2 was obtained. Under solution thermolysis conditions,¹³ in ethylene glycol or in diethylaniline, neither the flavanone nor the 4-bromoflavene could be obtained with any of the ethers **2a-e**. In fact only a rapid and extensive decomposition resulted.

Thus, a short, novel and efficient synthesis of flavanones under neutral conditions has been effected.

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