Silver(I)-Catalyzed Direct Route to Isoquinoline-N-Oxides

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Abstract: Silver trifluoromethanesulfonate efficiently catalyzes the cyclization of 2-alkynylbenzaldoxime derivatives into the corresponding isoquinoline-*N*-oxides. The current protocol provides a direct route to the latter skeleton under a very mild reaction condition.

Key words: AgOTf, isoquinoline-N-oxide, heterocycles, cyclo-isomerization

Electrophilic metal-catalyzed addition of nucleophiles onto alkyne has witnessed a significant level of development recently, leading to diverse novel syntheses of heterocycles.¹ In this effort, a search for a new reaction partner has played a pivotal role in the development of synthetic route to biologically important heterocycles.² In particular, isoquinoline derivatives are widespread in natural products and the development of their efficient catalytic synthesis fits as a suitable goal.³ Isoquinoline-Noxides, on the other hand, are an important precursor for isoquinoline derivatives including pharmaceutically important 2-amino-functionalized nitrogen heterocycles,⁴ and more recently they attracted renewed interests because of their use as a chiral scaffold in Lewis basic organocatalysis (Figure 1).⁵ In addition, their utility extends to materials science because of their interesting optochemical/physical properties, such as charge-transfer and metal (Li⁺/Mg²⁺) sensor as well as applications as a radical initiator for atom-transfer radical polymerization (ATRP).⁶ To our knowledge, however, there is no precedent for direct catalytic synthesis of isoquinoline-N-oxides and most of their preparation is still conducted by oxidation of parent nitrogen heterocycles, which suffers from poor atomeconomy and/or generality and often are not environmentally friendly.⁷



Scheme 1 Catalytic cycloisomerization into isoquinoline-N-oxides



Figure 1 Isoquinoline oxides and related chiral scaffold for asymmetric allylation of aldehyde

As a part of our ongoing projects on the reactions of substrates having N–O bond in electrophilic metal catalysis,⁸

Table I Cyclization of Ia (R :

Entry	Catalyst	Conditions ^b	Yield ^c (conv. ^d)
1	AuPPh ₃ OTf	70 °C, 12 h	(>95%)
2	Au[t-Bu ₂ P(o-biph)]OTf	70 °C, 4 h	83% (>95%)
3	Au(<i>t</i> -Bu ₃ P)OTf	70 °C, 1 h	(>95%)
4	Au[P(C ₆ F ₅) ₃]OTf	r.t., 1.5 h	(>95%)
5	Au(IPr)Otf	r.t., 5 h	(>95%)
6	Au(IMes)OTf	r.t., 0.5 h	96% (>99%)
7	In(OTf) ₃	70 °C, 2.5 h	(85%)
8	Zn(OTf) ₂	70 °C, 24 h	(>95%)
9	Cu(OTf) ₂	r.t., 12 h	NR ^e (52%)
10	CuI	r.t., 12 h	NR ^e (47%)
9	AgOTf	r.t., 0.5 h	85% (>95%)
10	AgSbF ₆	r.t., 0.5 h	80% (>95%)
11	AgNTf ₂	r.t., 0.5 h	83% (>95%)

^a In CH₂Cl₂ (0.1 M) with 5 mol% of catalyst unless otherwise noted. ^b Time required for full consumption of **1a** was indicated; reactions at 70 °C were conducted in a sealed tube.

^c Isolated yield after chromatography.

^d Conversions are based on the crude ¹H NMR spectra.

^e No reaction; an unidentified side product was observed.

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we envisaged a direct formation of isoquinoline *N*-oxides from *o*-alkynylbenzaldoximes would be possible via an appropriate electrophilic metal-catalyzed cyclization (Scheme 1).^{9,10} Herein, we report examination of various conditions using electrophilic metals and development of a direct silver(I)-catalyzed route to isoquinoline-*N*-oxides. The current protocol is significantly more efficient than conventional basic or thermal condition in terms of the yield and mildness of reaction conditions.¹¹ It is of note that the current protocol is highly regio- (6-endo-dig) and chemoselective (N- vs. O-nucleophile) so that its scope nicely complements Pictet–Spengler or Bischler– Napieralski reactions for the synthesis of related heterocycles.

We set out our study by examination of various catalysts for the current reaction using **1a** (R = Ph) as substrate (Table 1). We first looked at various cationic Au(I) complexes. Use of Au(PPh₃)Cl (5 mol%) in combination with equimolar AgOTf resulted in a sluggish reaction at room temperature and it took 12 hours at 70 °C for a complete conversion into 2a (entry 1). There was a strong ligand dependency in Au(I)-catalyzed cyclization (entries 1-6, Table 1) and Au(IMes)Cl/AgOTf turned out to be the most efficient, delivering 2a in 30 minutes at room temperature in a quantitative conversion (entry 6). We also looked at other electrophilic metals and group 11 metals. With In(OTf)₃ and Zn(OTf)₂, the reaction was much slower than Au(I) complexes, requiring higher temperature (entries 7 and 8). The Cu(II) and Cu(I) salts did not turn out effective at room temperature, producing byproducts (entries 9 and 10). Among Ag(I) salts (entries 11-13) examined, AgOTf (5 mol%)⁹¹ turned out to be as effective as Au(IMes)Cl/AgOTf under similar conditions: The cyclization was slightly faster than Au(I), although the isolated yield was somewhat lower (entry 9). Considering the benefit of cost effectiveness, we took AgOTf (entry 9) along with Au(IMes)OTf (entry 6) as our optimized condition.12

 Table 2
 Scope of the Cyclization into Isoquinoline-N-oxides¹⁴

Entry	Substrate (<i>R</i>)	Product	Conditions ^a (temp, time)	Yield (%) ^b
1	Ph 1a		A (r.t., 0.5 h) B (r.t., 0.5 h)	96 85
2	3-MeO ₂ CC ₆ H ₄ 1b	$2a$ MeO_2C $2b$	A (r.t., 1 h) B (r.t., 2 h)	95 95
3	3-MeO ₂ C ₆ H ₄ 1c		A (r.t., 1.5 h) B (r.t., 0.5 h)	83 84
4	$3-O_2NC_6H_4$ 1d	2c	A (70 °C, 72 h) B (70 °C, 16 h)	21 80
5	Biphen-4-yl 1e	2c	B (r.t., 2.5 h)	85
6	Thien-2-yl 1f	$\frac{2d}{\sqrt{s}}$	A (r.t., 5 h) B (r.t., 1 h)	64 75

Table 2	Scope of the C	yclization into	Isoquinoline-N-oxides ¹⁴	(continued)
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Entry	Substrate (R)	Product	Conditions ^a (temp, time)	Yield (%) ^b
7	Cyclohexen-1-yl 1g		A (70 °C, 5 h) B (r.t., 0.5 h)	91 89
8	<i>п-</i> Ви 1h	2g $n-Bu$ $2h$	A (r.t., 0.5 h) B (r.t., 0.5 h)	92 97
9	H 1i		A (r.t., 1 h) B (r.t., 0.5 h)	94 97
10	CH ₂ OPiv 1j		A (70 °C, 12 h) B (r.t., 1 h)	83 86
11	CH ₂ OTHP 1k	2j	A (70 °C, 12 h) B (r.t., 0.5 h)	53° 70

^a Method A: Au(IMes)OTf (5 mol%) in CH₂Cl₂, Method B: AgOTf (5 mol%) in CH₂Cl₂.

^b Isolated yield (%) after chromatography.

^c THP-Deprotected alcohol (26%) was obtained along with 2k.

With the optimization conditions above, a variety of substrates having aryl and alkyl R substituents were converted into the respective isoquinoline N-oxides in an efficient manner (Table 2). For example, 1b-d, with different ortho-substituted aryl groups, underwent smooth conversion into isoquinoline-N-oxides 2b-d (entries 2-4). Biphenyl, heteroaryl, and alkyl R groups were also well accommodated in the current reaction (entries 5–11). For substrate 1j, a potentially competing [3,3]- or [2,3]-sigmatropic rearrangement of propargyl pivalate was effectively suppressed, delivering 2j uneventfully. In general, both Au(I)- and Ag(I)-based catalysts performed similarly and Ag(I) catalyst shows better catalytic activity than Au(I)system when functional group compatibility becomes an issue (entry 4, 6, and 11). One problem of electrophilic metal catalysis could be functional group compatibility with acid-labile protecting group. A substrate with an acid-sensitive THP protecting group (1k, entry 11) under Au(I) catalysis (method A) led to 53% of 2k with the formation of 26% of the corresponding alcohol. In contrast, the same substrate under Ag(I) catalysis (method B) led to 70% isolated yield of 2k with only a trace amount of hydrolyzed byproduct, indicating a better functional-group compatibility of Ag(I) catalyst as compared to the Au(I)based catalyst.

The thus-prepared isoquinoline-N-oxides allow for various subsequent transformations and one such opportunity is demonstrated in Scheme 2.^{4,13} Isoquinoline-*N*-oxides **2a**, **2c**, and **2h** underwent smooth conversion into the respective 1-cyanoisoquinolines in generally good yields by treatment with TMSCN and DBU as base.



Scheme 2

In summary, we report herein direct formation of isoquinoline-*N*-oxides from *o*-alkynylarylaldoximes under Au(I) and Ag(I) catalysis. The advantage of an Ag(I)-based system is demonstrated in substrates where coordinating atoms or acid-labile groups are involved. Future study in this laboratory will focus on the generation of chiral ligands based on the isoquinoline-*N*-oxides utilizing the current approach.

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 - To a solution of **2h** (19 mg, 0.094 mmol) in THF (1 mL) at

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r.t. was added DBU (21 μ L, 0.142 mmol) and TMSCN (14 μ L, 0.104 mmol), and the mixture was stirred at r.t. overnight. The mixture was directly loaded onto a silica gel column and eluted with EtOAc–hexane (1:10) to give 16.7 mg (84%) of 1-cyano-3-*n*-butyl-isoquinoline (**3h**) as a yellow solid.

Compound **3h**: ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃): δ = 8.38 (d,

 $J = 8.0 \text{ Hz}, 1 \text{ H}), 7.94-7.82 \text{ (d, } J = 8.0 \text{ Hz}, 1 \text{ H}), 7.82-7.65 \text{ (m, 3 H)}, 2.98 \text{ (t, } J = 7.3 \text{ Hz}, 2 \text{ H}), 1.80 \text{ (quin, } J = 7.3 \text{ Hz}, 2 \text{ H}), 1.42 \text{ (sext, } J = 7.3 \text{ Hz}, 2 \text{ H}), 0.97 \text{ (t, } J = 7.3 \text{ Hz}, 3 \text{ H}).^{13}\text{C} \text{NMR (100 MHz, CDCl}_3): \delta = 157.6, 137.3, 134.8, 132.1, 129.4, 128.5, 127.5, 125.8, 122.9, 116.7, 38.1, 32.6, 23.0, 14.5.$