



Synthesis of sapphyrins via a ‘3+1+1’ procedure

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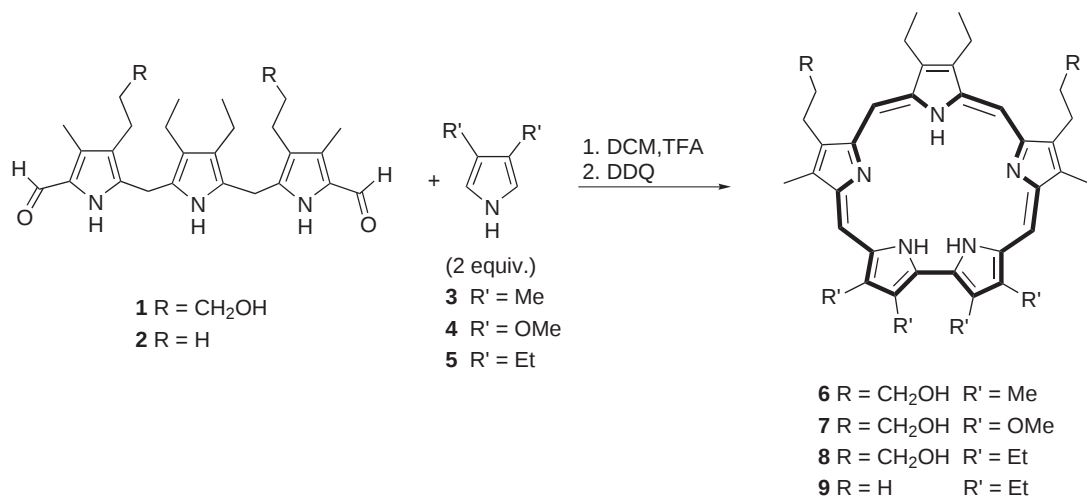
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Abstract—Sapphyrins may be obtained in ca. 30% yield via the condensation of 1 equivalent of a tripyrrane dialdehyde with 2 equivalents of a β -substituted pyrrole, followed by oxidation with DDQ. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Porphyrins, the so-called pigments of life,¹ are arguably among the most widely studied of all macrocyclic compounds. Less well studied are the so-called expanded porphyrins. The chemistry of these systems, macrocycles that, like porphyrin, are comprised of pyrrolic rings and *meso*-carbon bridges had its genesis in the early 1960s when researchers in the Woodward group, while working on the synthesis of corroles, isolated a brilliant blue–green solid by-product.² This system, called sapphyrin in light of its startling color, was found to contain a 22 π -electron aromatic periphery (highlighted in bold in Scheme 1).^{3–5} It was also found to be ‘expanded’ relative to porphyrin in that it was seen to contain one additional pyrrole, ‘inserted’ into its macrocyclic core. As a consequence, sapphyrins contain

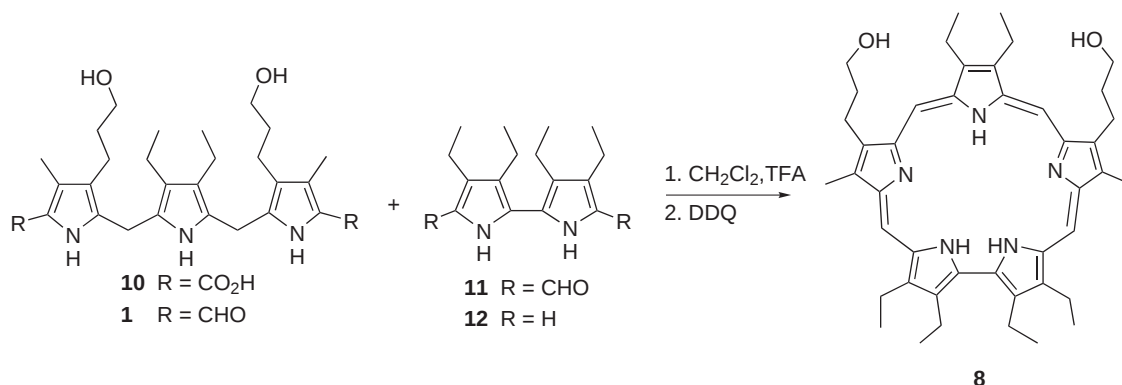
a direct α – α pyrrole link, something not seen in porphyrins. They also contain a larger central cavity than porphyrins and reduced molecular symmetry. Sapphyrins thus display properties, such as pyrrole ring inversion⁶ and anion binding,⁷ that differ dramatically from those of the porphyrins. Needless to say, therefore, the synthetic chemistry of sapphyrins has received considerable attention of late.^{6–17} Still, improved syntheses are needed. In this letter, a novel ‘3+1+1’ approach to sapphyrin is detailed. The strengths and weakness of this new method are highlighted by comparison to two other routes, one a well-known approach,^{5,7–9} and the second a seemingly obvious variation of a classic synthetic strategy that has apparently so far escaped mention in the literature.



Scheme 1.

Keywords: sapphyrins; macrocycles; 3+1+1 condensation; pyrrole–pyrrole linkage.

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Scheme 2.

The present route is predicated on the direct formation of an α - α pyrrole linkage during ring closure (Scheme 1). While it has been known for some time that direct α - α pyrrole links can be formed during the condensation/oxidation reaction used to obtain sapphyrins,⁵ the power of this approach as a general synthetic strategy has only recently begun to be appreciated. It has been used to prepare sapphyrin by '4+1'¹⁰ and '1+1+1+1+1'⁶ procedures, as well as corrole^{18,19} and new expanded porphyrins.²⁰ It has not, however, been applied to prepare sapphyrins via a '3+1+1' approach involving the condensation between bisformyl tripyrrane and two molar equivalents of a bis- α -free pyrrole. We report here the successful development of such a route.

The specific chemistry in question is summarized in Scheme 1. Briefly, acid-catalyzed condensation between a diformyl tripyrrane (e.g. **1** or **2**) and two molar equivalents of a bis- α -free, β -substituted pyrrole (e.g. **3**, **4**, or **5**), followed by oxidation with DDQ, is found to produce the corresponding sapphyrins (**6–9**) in 28–34% yield[†] (Scheme 1). As one might expect, porphyrin was also isolated from the reaction mixture ($\leq 10\%$ yield),

presumably as the result of **1** or **2** reacting with only one equivalent of pyrrole prior to ring closure.[‡]

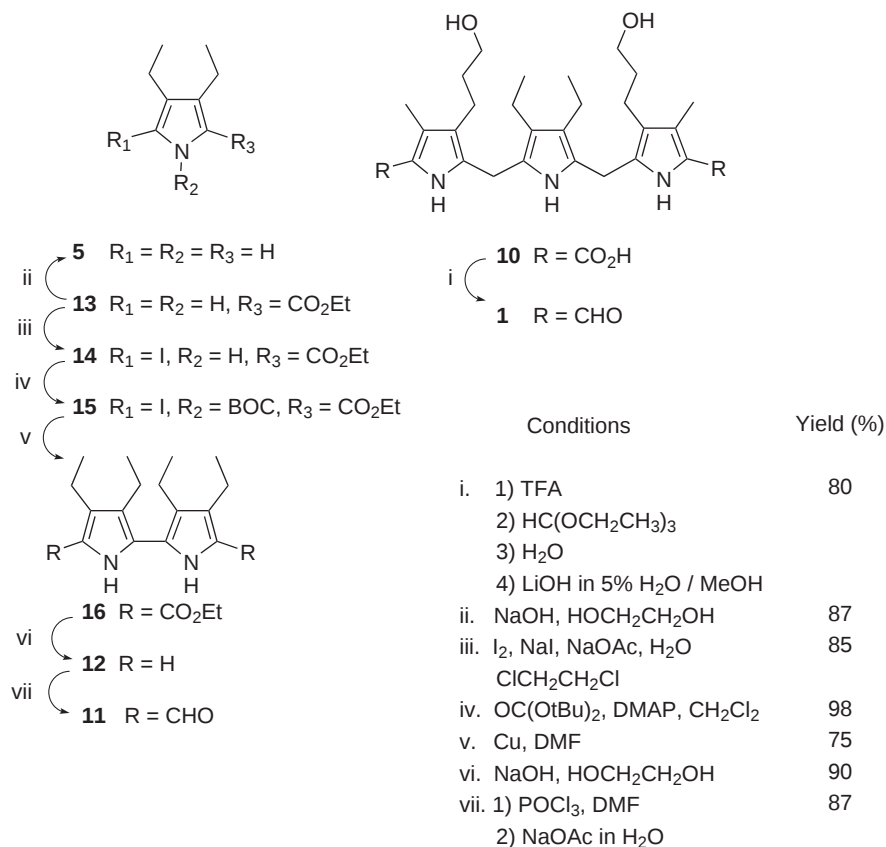
In order to assess the synthetic value of this new '3+1+1' approach, sapphyrin **8** was also prepared via two '3+2' methods (Scheme 2). The first, referred to as Method II, involved reacting bisformyl tripyrrane **1** and bis- α -free bipyrrole **12**. By contrast, the second involved the condensation of tripyrrane diacid **10** with bisformyl bipyrrole **11**. This latter alternative strategy, referred to as Method III, is the classic one first developed by the groups of Woodward⁴ and Johnson³ and then later optimized by us.⁶

Predicative transformations, required to obtain precursors **11** and **12** (as well as **1** from **10**), are shown in Scheme 3. The relative yields of sapphyrin **8** produced by Methods I, II, and III (as well as **6** and **7** produced by Method I) are summarized in Table 1. Taken in concert, Table 1 and Scheme 3 reveal that the macrocyclization step of Method I is not as efficient as that of the '3+2' condensations. On the other hand, since the need to prepare a bipyrrole precursor is obviated, the '3+1+1' method is three steps shorter and hence more efficient than the '3+2' approaches in terms of the overall yield from common precursors, namely **10** and **13**. Reversing the nucleophile/electrophile roles in the traditional '3+2' approach offers a small boost in yield in the macrocyclization step, although this gain is offset by the fact that the formylation of tripyrrane **10** is less efficient than that of bipyrrole **12**.

A further advantage of the present '3+1+1' approach is that it allows ready access to sapphyrins such as **7** for which the requisite bi- or polypyrrole precursors are not available. On the other hand, the '3+1+1' approach does require that the two β -substituents of the pyrrole (e.g. **3–5**) must be identical to avoid the statistical formation of three different regioisomers. Still, the specific hydroxypropyl sapphyrins (i.e. **6–9**) of this study can be further derivitized via their hydroxyl groups. Thus, subject to the symmetry constraints noted, the

[†] Typical procedure: A 200 ml mixture of 5% TFA in CH₂Cl₂ was added to a round bottom flask containing 96 mg (0.2 mmol) of tripyrrane dialdehyde **1** and 49 mg (0.4 mmol) of diethyl pyrrole **5**. The reaction mixture was stirred overnight at ambient temperature. The solution was neutralized with TEA, and 45 mg of DDQ (0.2 mmol) was added. The mixture was concentrated to a volume of 100 ml on the rotary evaporator and washed with a saturated aqueous solution of NaHCO₃ (2×100 ml) and H₂O (2×100 ml). The organic layer was dried over MgSO₄, filtered, and stripped of solvents using a rotary evaporator. Purification by column chromatography on silica gel, using CH₂Cl₂:MeOH (96:4) as the eluent, gave 47 mg (34%) of **8** as dark blue-green crystals. Mp >300°C; UV-vis (CH₂Cl₂): λ_{max} , nm (log ϵ) 447 (5.45), 612 (4.17), 664 (4.03), 714; CI-MS: 689 (M⁺); ¹H NMR (500 MHz, CDCl₃): δ , ppm -5.02 (1H, NH, s), -4.63 (1H, NH, s), -4.53 (1H, NH, s), 1.80 (6H, CH₂CH₃, t), 2.00 (6H, CH₂CH₃, t), 2.17 (6H, CH₂CH₃, t), 2.74 (4H, CH₂CH₂CH₂OH, m), 3.95 (4H, CH₂CH₂CH₂OH, t), 4.14 (6H, CH₃, s), 4.47 (4H, CH₂CH₃, q), 4.53 (4H, CH₂CH₃, q), 4.62 (4H, CH₂CH₃, q), 4.71 (4H, CH₂CH₂CH₂OH, t), 11.53 (4H, meso-H, s); ¹³C NMR (125 MHz, CDCl₃): 12.8, 16.9, 18.3, 18.4, 20.8, 21.7, 23.5, 35.2, 61.7, 91.6, 98.7, 128.9, 130.4, 132.7, 132.9, 135.7, 136.3, 137.6, 138.8, 140.5, 143.1; anal. calcd for C₄₄H₅₇N₅O₂·2CF₃CO₂H: C, 62.94; H, 6.49; N, 7.65; found: C, 62.95; H, 6.47; N, 7.66%.

[‡] Unfortunately, the reaction of **1** and β -unsubstituted pyrrole did not produce useful quantities of the corresponding sapphyrin (yield <2%).



Scheme 3.

Table 1. Comparison of the three synthetic pathways discussed in this letter

Method	Ring formation yield (%)	Overall yield from 10 and 13 (%)	Number of steps from 10 and 13
I (1 + 3 → 6)	28	—	—
I (1 + 4 → 7)	30	—	—
I (1 + 5 → 8)	34	24	3 (i, ii) ^a
I (2 + 5 → 9)	33	—	—
II (1 + 12 → 8)	55	20	6 (i, iii–vi) ^a
III (10 + 11 → 8)	50	20	6 (iii–vii) ^a

^a Refers to steps shown in Scheme 3.

present approach appears to be attractive as one that offers the possibility of preparing β -substituted sapphyrins with controlled regiochemistry and controlled solubility without requiring the intermediate synthesis of bipyrrrolic precursors.

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