An Easy Access to 2-Substituted Azulenes from Azulene-2-boronic Acid Pinacol Ester

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Abstract: Azulene-2-boronic acid pinacol ester was conveniently transformed into 2-substituted azulenes bearing carboxyl, formyl, ester, or amino groups, which are difficult to access by conventional methods. Furthermore, the azulene-2-carboxylic acid thus synthesized was subjected to the Ugi four-component condensation to obtain a dipeptide-type product containing an azulene skeleton.

Key words: azulene, borylation, boronic acid ester, cross-coupling, Ugi four-component reaction

Owing to the π-electron polarization, azulene is prone to electrophilic substitution at the 1- and 3-positions and nucleophilic addition at the 4-, 6- and 8-positions.1 Therefore, the synthesis of azulene derivatives bearing substituents at the 2-, 5- or 7-positions is not trivial, and has traditionally required a multi-step transformation including the construction of the azulene skeleton.2 As part of our recent efforts to overcome this problem, we reported a new simple method for introducing a boryl group into the 2-position of azulene. In this method, azulene undergoes direct borylation preferentially at this position via the C–H activation with an iridium-based catalyst, giving 1 together with a small quantity of 2 (Scheme 1).3a The 4,4,5,5-tetramethyl-1,3,2-dioxaborolanyl group (Bpin) of 1 is converted into a hydroxyl group by oxidation to give 3. This ensures the easy access to 2-bromoazulene (4a)3b and 2-iodoazulene (4b),3b which are key synthetic intermediates in the production of 2-substituted azulenes, such as 2,2′-biazulene,4a 2-dialkylaminooazulene,4b and 2-diphenylphosphinylazulene,5 via the organometallic routes involving coupling or halogen–metal exchange. Furthermore, the Miyaura–Suzuki cross-coupling of 1 with aryl halides is an efficient route to 2-arylated azulenes.6 These successful transformations of 1 based on the transition metal catalyzed reaction prompted us to explore further their synthetic utility. In particular, there is still a need for the development of general and simple methods for the introduction of basic functional groups, such as carboxyl, formyl, ester, or amino substituents, into the 2-position of azulene. In this paper, we report a convenient method for the synthesis of 2-substituted azulenes bearing these functional groups based on the cross-coupling reaction of 1, as well as the preliminary results of the Ugi four-component reaction using these derivatives.

Recently, Lysén and co-workers reported a new synthetic route to aromatic amides by Pd-catalyzed coupling of arylboronic acid esters with carbamoyl chlorides.7 When we applied this reaction to 1, the desired amides 5 were obtained in moderate yields and unreacted 1 (ca. 10%) was recovered (Scheme 2). The subsequent hydrolysis of 5a gave azulene-2-carboxylic acid (6) in 60% yield.

Furthermore, morpholine amides are known to be efficient precursors of aldehydes. The reduction of 5b with DIBAL-H produced the desired 7a only in low yield, owing to the concomitant formation of the amine 7b. However, this reaction was proved to be sensitive to the solvent effect. Thus, the use of THF in the place of toluene improved the yield of 7a while suppressing the formation of 7b, indicating that its coordination with the aluminum center decreases the reducing capacity.

Next, we examined the conversion of 1 into ester 10 (Scheme 3). When 1 was subjected to a coupling reaction

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Thus, the treatment of chloric acid resulted in the formation of a complex reaction mixture. In the presence of Cu(OAc)$_2$, satisfactory, few side products are found (by TLC) in the thus obtained afforded catalyzed coupling reaction of ethyl chloroformate with was subsequently hydrolyzed to of azulene, 90 °C; d) Cu(OAc)$_2$, phthalimide, pyridine, H$_2$O, DMF, r.t.; e) NH$_2$NH$_2$, THF, r.t.

Reagents and conditions: a) PdCl$_2$(PPh$_3$)$_2$, CICONR$_2$, CsF, THF, reflux; b) KOH (excess), 5a, EtOH–H$_2$O, reflux; c) DIBAL-H, 5b, –78 °C.

Scheme 2

With ethyl chloroformate under the conditions for the synthesis of 5, no reaction occurred. Duan has reported the Pd-catalyzed coupling reaction of arylboronic acids with ethyl chloroformate, yielding the corresponding ethyl esters. In order to examine the applicability of this reaction to azulene systems, we attempted to perform the conversion of 1 into 9. Initially, the attempt to treat 1 with an aqueous solution of sodium periodate containing hydrochloric acid resulted in the formation of a complex reaction mixture. On the other hand, when 1 was allowed to react with phenylboronic acid in the presence of hydrochloric acid, transesterification occurred smoothly, giving the desired 9 in 58% yield. The most prominent yield of 9 was obtained by an alternative route via the borate 8. Thus, the treatment of 1 with KHF$_2$, produced 8, which was subsequently hydrolyzed to 9. Furthermore, the Pd-catalyzed coupling reaction of ethyl chloroformate with 9 thus obtained afforded 10. Although the yield of 10 is not satisfactory, few side products are found (by TLC) in the reaction mixture. In the presence of Cu(OAc)$_2$, 9 reacted with phthalimide to give 11, whose phthaloyl group was deprotected by the addition of hydrazine to form 12. In the Cu-catalyzed amination reaction, insoluble substances due to the decomposition of 9 were formed. The attempt to transform 1 into 11 directly was unsuccessful.

The Ugi four-component condensation between an aldehyde, an amine, carboxylic acid, and an isocyanide allows the rapid preparation of $\alpha$-aminoacyl amide derivatives. The products of the Ugi reaction can participate in a wide variety of substitution patterns, and constitute peptidomimetics, which have potential pharmaceutical applications. Taking into account the versatile biological activities and medicinal applications of azulene derivatives, we decided to utilize the Ugi reaction using substituted azulenes. Thus, the condensation of 6, 6-formylazulene, benzylamine, and tert-butyl isocyanide proceeded smoothly to give the corresponding Ugi product in good yield (Scheme 4). The attempt to perform a similar condensation using 12 in the place of benzylamine was unsuccessful, which is attributed to the presence of the less nucleophilic amino group of 12.

In summary, we have found that the azuleneboronic acid ester 1 can be converted into useful 2-substituted azulenes bearing carboxyl, formyl, ester, or amino groups, whose syntheses by conventional methods are difficult. We believe that these azulene derivatives can be conveniently utilized for the construction of new electronic systems based on the unique electronic and pharmaceutical properties of azulene.

All reactions were carried out under air, unless otherwise noted. THF was distilled from sodium benzenophenone ketyl under argon before use. $^1$H and $^{13}$C NMR spectra were recorded in CDCl$_3$ or DMSO-$d_6$ on a Bruker Avance 400S spectrometer with TMS as an internal standard. IR spectra were obtained as KBr pellets on a Nicolet Avatar 370 DTGS spectrophotometer.

\[\text{2-Azulenecarboxamides 5a,b; General Procedure}\]

To a flask charged with (PPh$_3$)$_2$PdCl$_2$ (12.6 mg, 0.018 mmol), CsF (182 mg, 1.2 mmol), carbamoyl chloride (1.2 mmol), and 1 (152 mg, 0.6 mmol) was added THF (5 mL) under argon. The mixture was heated at 80 °C for 23 h. The reaction was quenched with H$_2$O (20 mL), and the resulting mixture was extracted with EtOAc (3 × 10 mL). The combined extracts were dried (Na$_2$SO$_4$) and concentrated to leave a residue, which was chromatographed (silica gel; hexane–EtOAc, 5:1) to give the corresponding amide.

\[\text{N,N-Dimethyl-2-azulene carboxamide (5a)}\]

Yield: 75 mg (63%); blue powder; mp 164–165 °C.
IR (KBr): 2925, 1620, 1388, 1170 cm⁻¹.

H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃): δ = 3.14 (3 H, s), 3.18 (3 H, s), 7.21 (2 H, t, J = 9.8 Hz), 7.46 (2 H, s), 7.64 (1 H, t, J = 9.9 Hz), 8.37 (2 H, d, J = 9.9 Hz).

C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl₃): δ = 35.2, 39.3, 116.9, 123.8, 138.4, 138.5, 139.8, 143.6, 169.3.


Morpholino-2-azulenecarboxamide (5b)

Yield: 96 mg (66%); blue powder; mp 141–142 °C.

IR (KBr): 3442, 2965, 2856, 1634, 1431 cm⁻¹.

H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃): δ = 3.64 (4 H, s), 3.81 (2 H, s), 3.87 (2 H, s), 7.23 (2 H, t, J = 9.9 Hz), 7.42 (2 H, s), 7.66 (1 H, t, J = 9.9 Hz), 8.38 (2 H, d, J = 9.6 Hz).

C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl₃): δ = 42.4, 48.0, 67.0, 116.6, 124.0, 138.6, 138.8, 139.9, 142.4, 168.1.

Anal. Calcd for C₁₇H₁₉NO: C, 78.36; H, 6.58; N, 7.03. Found: C, 78.99; H, 7.58; N, 6.25.

Azulene-2-carboxylic Acid (6)

Amide 5a (99 mg, 0.5 mmol) was dissolved in EtOH–H₂O (4:1) (5 mL), and after addition of KOH (70 mg, 0.9 mmol), the mixture was heated at 80 °C for 23 h. The resulting solution was cooled to r.t. and the reaction was quenched with H₂O (10 mL). The resulting mixture was washed with Et₂O (3 × 10 mL). The aqueous layer was acidified with 10% aq HCl to give a green precipitate of 6. The precipitate was extracted with Et₂O (3 × 10 mL) and the extracts were dried (Na₂SO₄) and concentrated to leave a residue, which was chromatographed (silica gel; hexane–EtOAc, 2:1) to give the desired product; yield: 52 mg (60%); green powder; mp 202–203 °C, dec.

IR (KBr): 3442, 2965, 2856, 1634, 1431 cm⁻¹.

H NMR (400 MHz, DMSO-d₆): δ = 7.34 (2 H, t, J = 9.9 Hz), 7.72 (2 H, s), 7.80 (1 H, t, J = 9.9 Hz), 8.35 (2 H, d, J = 10.0 Hz), 12.76 (1 H, br s).

Potassium 2-Azulenyltrifluoroborate (8)

To a solution of 1 (254 mg, 1.0 mmol) in MeOH (7 mL) was added aq KHF₂ (2.0 mL, 2.8 M, 5.6 mmol). The solution was stirred at r.t. for 15 min and concentrated in vacuo to leave a residue, which was dissolved in hot acetone (7 mL). The resulting mixture was filtered off and the filtrate was concentrated in vacuo to give a crude product, which was recrystallized from a minimum amount of hot acetone–Et₂O to afford 8 as a pure product; yield: 192 mg (82%); blue powder; mp 260–265 °C (dec.).

IR (KBr): 3449, 2955, 2924, 2854, 1302 cm⁻¹.

H NMR (400 MHz, DMSO-d₆-d₅): δ = 6.99 (2 H, t, J = 9.7 Hz), 7.30 (2 H, s), 7.40 (1 H, t, J = 9.8 Hz), 8.12 (2 H, d, J = 9.3 Hz).

C NMR (100 MHz, DMSO-d₆-d₅): δ = 121.2, 123.2, 133.3, 134.6, 140.4. One azulene skeleton carbon signal was not observed.


Azulene-2-boronic Acid (9)

(a) By Hydrolysis of 8: To a mixture of 8 (234 mg, 1.0 mmol) and Na₂CO₃ (159 mg, 1.5 mmol) in H₂O (5 mL) was added MeCN (10 mL). The resulting solution was stirred at r.t. for 4 h, acidified with aq 1 M HCl (2 mL) followed by aq sat. NH₄Cl (5 mL), and then extracted with Et₂O (3 × 10 mL). The extracts were dried (Na₂SO₄) and concentrated to leave a residue, which was recrystallized from hexane–EtOAc (30:1) to afford 9 as a pure product; yield: 147 mg (85%); blue powder; mp 256–259 °C (dec.).

IR (KBr): 3404, 2924, 1499, 1458, 1359 cm⁻¹.

H NMR (400 MHz, DMSO-d₆-d₅): δ = 7.13 (2 H, t, J = 9.7 Hz), 7.61 (1 H, t, J = 9.9 Hz), 7.72 (2 H, s), 8.24 (2H, s), 8.35 (2H, d, J = 9.5 Hz).

C NMR (100 MHz, DMSO-d₆-d₅): δ = 122.9, 125.2, 137.8, 138.7, 140.5, 146.1.


(b) By Transesterification of 1: To a solution of 1 (254 mg, 1.0 mmol) in EtOH (5 mL) was added phenylboronic acid (146 mg, 1.2 mmol) followed by a diluted aq solution of HCl (5 mL, pH 3) at r.t., and the mixture was stirred for 5 h. After concentration of the mixture, 10% aq KOH (10 mL) was added and the resulting mixture was washed with Et₂O (3 × 10 mL). The aqueous layer was acidified with a diluted aq solution of HCl (10 mL, pH 3) and extracted with Et₂O (3 × 10 mL). The organic layer was dried (Na₂SO₄) and the solvent was evaporated to give the crude product. Purification by recrystallization from hexane–EtOAc (5:1) afforded the pure product 9; yield: 100 mg (58%).

Potassium 2-Azulenyltrifluoroborate (10)

To a flask charged with Pd(PPh₃)₄ (10 mg, 0.009 mmol), K₂PtCl₆·nH₂O (170 mg, 0.8 mmol), ethyl chloroformate (0.028 mmol, 0.3 mmol), and 9 (52 mg, 0.3 mmol) was added toluene (5 mL) under argon. The mixture was heated at 90 °C for 2 h. The reaction was quenched with H₂O (20 mL), and the resulting mixture was extracted with hexane (3 × 10 mL). The combined extracts were dried (Na₂SO₄) and concentrated to leave a residue, which was chromatographed (silica gel; hexane–EtOAc, 10:1) to give 10 as a pure product; yield: 30 mg (50%); blue powder; mp 72–73 °C.

IR (KBr): 2977, 1697, 1320, 1272, 1202 cm⁻¹.

H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃-d₅): δ = 1.44 (3 H, t, J = 7.1 Hz), 4.44 (2 H, q, J = 7.1 Hz), 7.18 (2 H, t, J = 9.8 Hz), 7.65 (1 H, t, J = 9.9 Hz), 7.80 (2 H, s), 8.41 (2 H, d, J = 9.3 Hz).

C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl₃-d₅): δ = 14.4, 60.7, 117.8, 123.8, 138.6, 139.9, 140.2, 140.5, 165.7.

2-Azulenophthalamide (11)

To a flask charged with phthalamide (147 mg, 1.0 mmol), 9 (172 mg, 1.0 mmol), Cu(OAc)₂ (9 mg, 0.02 mmol), DMF (7 mL), and H₂O (0.018 mL) was added pyridine (0.08 mL, 1.0 mmol). After stirring the mixture at r.t. for 10 min, the resulting solution at r.t. for 10 min, and the resulting solution was stirred for 24 h at this temperature. After the addition of H₂O (5 mL), the mixture was extracted with Et₂O (20 mL). The combined extracts were dried (Na₂SO₄) and concentrated to leave a residue, which was recrystallized from hot THF–hexane (1:10) to give 11 as a pure product; yield: 140 mg (51%); purple powder; mp 256–258 °C.

IR (KBr): 1721, 1491, 1474, 1377, 1282 cm⁻¹.

1H NMR (400 MHz, DMSO-d₆): δ = 3.8 Hz), 8.26 (2 H, d, J = 10.1 Hz), 8.44 (2 H, d, J = 9.5 Hz).

1H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl₃): δ = 8.54 (2 H, s), 6.68 (2 H, s), 7.19 (2 H, t, J = 9.8 Hz), 7.32 (1 H, t, J = 9.6 Hz), 7.95 (2 H, t, J = 9.2 Hz).

N-(tert-Butyl)-2-[N-(benzyl)azulene-2-carboxamido]-2-(6-azulenyl)acetamide (13)

To a flask charged with 6-formylazulene (78 mg, 0.5 mmol) and benzylamine (0.068 mL, 0.625 mmol) was added MeOH (3 mL). After stirring the resulting solution at r.t. for 10 min, 6 (86 mg, 0.5 mmol) was added and the mixture was stirred at r.t. for 5 min. Then, tert-butyl isocyanide (0.056 mL, 0.5 mmol) was added and the mixture was stirred at 60 °C for 24 h. The solvent was concentrated to leave a residue, which was recrystallized from THF–hexane (1:2) to give 13 as a pure product; yield: 208 mg (83%); blue powder; mp 236–238 °C.

The 1H NMR spectra of 13 suffered extreme peak broadening due to rotational isomerism. This compound was characterized by variable-temperature 1H NMR spectrum. Only one set of the signals was observed at 60 °C.

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