| **Title** | Photoinduced ligand isomerisation in a pyrazine containing ruthenium polypyridyl complex |
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| **Publication date** | 2010 |
| **Publication information** | Photochemical & Photobiological Sciences, 9 (7): 985-990 |
| **Publisher** | RSC publications |
| **Link to online version** | http://dx.doi.org/10.1039/c0pp00054j |
| **Item record/more information** | http://hdl.handle.net/10197/2793 |
| **Publisher's version (DOI)** | 10.1039/c0pp00054j |
Photoinduced Ligand Isomerisation in a Pyrazine Containing Ruthenium Polypyridyl Complex

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Received (in XXX, XXX) Xth XXXXXXXXX 200X, Accepted Xth XXXXXXXXX 200X
First published on the web Xth XXXXXXXXX 200X
DOI: 10.1039/b000000x

Photochemically induced ligand rearrangements for the N2 and N4 coordination isomers of the complex [Ru(bpy)2(Hpztr)]2+ and its deprotonated analogue [Ru(bpy)2(pztr)]+, where bpy is 2,2’-bipyridyl and Hpztr is pyrazine-1,2,4-triazole ligand, are reported. 1H NMR spectroscopic and HPLC studies indicate that in acetone and acetonitrile the complexes are photostable when the triazole ring is deprotonated. Irradiation of the protonated N2 isomer in acetone results in formation of the N4 isomer, with the N4 isomer being photostable. In acetonitrile both isomers show photolability of the triazole based ligand and full dissociation to form [Ru(bpy)2(CH3CN)2]2+ is observed. The activation parameters for the population of the 3MC state from the lowest 3MLCT manifold, as obtained from temperature dependent emission lifetime studies, are reported and their relevance to the observed photochemical behaviour is considered. The results obtained are discussed in relation the analogous pyridine-triazole complexes.

Introduction.

Following the early work of Adamson1 and others,2 the investigation of photoinduced processes has developed substantially over the last 50 years. This development was further intensified with the application of ruthenium polypyridyl complexes as dyes for solar cells,3 oxygen sensors,4 and as bioprobes5 and molecular machines and devices, such as molecular wires, motors and switches.6 Recently these studies have received further interest due to the potential application of polypyridyl compounds in the development of sustainable and environmentally friendly energy such as photocatalytic hydrogen generation7 and CO2 reduction.8

Photochemically induced ligand rearrangements for the N2 and N4 coordination isomers of the complex [Ru(bpy)2(Hpztr)]2+ and its deprotonated analogue [Ru(bpy)2(pztr)]+, where bpy is 2,2’-bipyridyl and Hpztr is pyrazine-1,2,4-triazole ligand, are reported. 1H NMR spectroscopic and HPLC studies indicate that in acetone and acetonitrile the complexes are photostable when the triazole ring is deprotonated. Irradiation of the protonated N2 isomer in acetone results in formation of the N4 isomer, with the N4 isomer being photostable. In acetonitrile both isomers show photolability of the triazole based ligand and full dissociation to form [Ru(bpy)2(CH3CN)2]2+ is observed. The activation parameters for the population of the 3MC state from the lowest 3MLCT manifold, as obtained from temperature dependent emission lifetime studies, are reported and their relevance to the observed photochemical behaviour is considered. The results obtained are discussed in relation the analogous pyridine-triazole complexes.

Over the last number of years we have reported a series of studies of photoinduced ligand rearrangements of ruthenium polypyridyl complexes containing pyridine-1,2,4-triazole (Hpytr) ligands. Recently such ligands have seen widespread application in iridium(III) based OLED systems also.9 The complex [Ru(bpy)2(pytr)]+ (Fig. 1), which contains a deprotonated pyridine-1,2,4-triazolato ligand is photostable upon irradiation in basic acetone and acetonitrile. This photostability is related to the strong σ-donor capacity of the deprotonated triazole ring that provides for a considerable destabilization of the 3MC state that has been indentified as being involved in the photochemical activity of ruthenium polypyridyl complexes.10 Because of the destabilisation this excited state is not populated significant at room temperature. However, for complexes containing protonated or methylated triazole ligands the 3MC level is stabilised and photolability observed.11, 12, 13 As a result photoinduced ligand dissociation processes are observed where the triazole ligand is not anionic. For [Ru(bpy)2(Hpytr)]2+ there are two coordination isomers possible where the Hpytr ligand is bound either via the N2 or the N4 nitrogen atom of the triazole ring (Fig. 2). Irradiation in CH2Cl2 of either the N2 or N4 isomer leads to a photostationary state with a N4:N2 ratio of 4:1.

For the analogous pyrazine triazole (Hpztr) based complexes (e.g., Fig. 1.) photochemically induced ligand isomerisations have not been reported. There have however been extensive photophysical studies14, 15 that have shown that contrary to that which is observed for the Hpytr based complexes, where the emitting state is bpy based, the lowest energy triplet state
in complexes containing the protonated ligand is based on the pyrazine ring.

In this contribution we report the photochemically induced rearrangements observed for the complex \( [\text{Ru(bpy)}_2(\text{Hpztr})]^2+ \) \( \text{(1H)} \). The photochemical processes observed are discussed in terms of the structure and the electronic properties of the complex and are compared with those observed for the analogous complex \( \text{2H} \) based on the Hpytr ligand.

**Experimental part.**

**Synthesis and materials.** All solvents employed in spectroscopic measurements were of spectroscopic grade (Sigma-Aldrich). All other solvents were of HPLC grade or better. \( \text{cis-Ru(bpy)}_2\text{Cl}_2\text{.H}_2\text{O} \text{16} \) and the N2 and N4 isomers of \( [\text{Ru(bpy)}_2(\text{pztr})][\text{PF}_6] \text{1} \text{14} \) were prepared as reported before. \( [\text{Ru(bpy)}_2(\text{CH}_3\text{CN})_2][\text{PF}_6] \) was available from earlier studies. \text{13b}

\[ \text{N2/-N4-isomer } [\text{Ru(bpy)}_2(\text{pztr})][\text{PF}_6] \text{ cis-} [\text{Ru(bpy)}_2\text{Cl}_2]\text{.H}_2\text{O } (185 \text{ mg, 0.36 mmol}) \text{ and Hpztr-H } (80 \text{ mg, 0.54 mmol}) \text{ were added to a mixture of EtOH } (30 \text{ mL}) \text{ and H}_2\text{O } (30 \text{ mL}). \text{ After heating at reflux for 8 h, EtOH was removed in vacuo and the reaction mixture was left to stand overnight. The crude product was flash chromatographed on a silica column with 7:3 (v:v) } \text{CH}_3\text{CN } / \text{H}_2\text{O saturated with KNO}_3\text{. A drop of NH}_3\text{-solution and NH}_4\text{PF}_6 \text{ (30 mg, 0.18 mmol) was added in turn to each of the two fractions collected. Each solution was washed with dichloromethane } (3 \times 20 \text{ mL}) \text{ and the solvent was evaporated. The N2-isomer (second fraction of silica column) was purified further by column chromatography on an alumina column (neutral) with CH}_3\text{CN as eluant. The solvent was evaporated in vacuo and the solid was recrystallised by slow evaporation from 2:1 MeOH } / \text{H}_2\text{O. The N4-isomer (first fraction from the silica column) was chromatographed on an alumina column (neutral) with first CH}_3\text{CN, then 1:20 MeOH } / \text{CH}_3\text{CN, 1:1} \text{ MeOH } / \text{CH}_3\text{CN and 1:5 MeOH } / \text{CH}_3\text{CN. The solvent was evaporated in vacuo and the solid recrystallised by slow evaporation of 2:1 MeOH } / \text{H}_2\text{O. Yield: } 51 \text{ mg of the N2-isomer (0.09 mmol, 25%), 90 mg of N4-isomer (0.16 mmol, 45%). The } ^1\text{H NMR spectra were in accordance with literature values.} \text{15a,c} \]

\( ^1\text{H-} \text{NMR spectra were recorded on a Bruker Advance 400 MHz NMR spectrometer. Data are relative to residual solvent absorptions. UV/vis absorption spectra were recorded on a JASCO 570 UV/vis/NIR spectrophotometer using a 1 cm pathlength quartz cells. Temperature dependent luminescence lifetime studies were carried out using a Spectra Physics Q-switched Nd-YAG laser system as described elsewhere.} ^{14e} \text{ Analytical High Performance Liquid Chromatography (HPLC) experiments were carried out using an analytical HPLC system consisting of a Varian Prostar HPLC pump fitted with a 20 } \mu L \text{ injection loop, a Varian Prostar PDA detector connected to a dedicated PC, and a HiChrom Partisil P10SCX-3095 cation exchange column. Mobile phase CH}_3\text{CN: H}_2\text{O: CH}_3\text{OH with volume ratio 75:20:5 containing 0.12 M KNO}_3\text{. Flow rate: } 2.0 \text{ cm}^2 \text{ min}^{-1}; \text{ detection wavelength: } 430 \text{ nm. The photochemistry of complexes 1, 2, } \text{1H and 2H was monitored by HPLC and } ^1\text{H NMR spectroscopy. HPLC samples were irradiated in acetonitrile or acetone with an array of 60 Kingbright L-7113PBC-Gblue 470±20 nm LEDs. Photolysis studies monitored by } ^1\text{H NMR spectroscopy were carried out by irradiating the compounds in NMR tubes and placing them before a 20 W Tungsten filament light source slide projector (Kodak Carousel S-AV 2020). Sample heating was prevented using a water filter. The protonation state of the triazole ring of the complexes was controlled by addition of 100 } \mu L \text{ triethylamine or trifluoroacetic acid to the } 2 \text{ mL NMR sample.} \]

**Results and discussion**

Both isomers show strong \( ^1\text{MLCT bands in the visible part of the spectrum as expected.} ^{13c} \text{ The absorption maxima of both compounds are very similar with a } \lambda_{\text{max}} \text{ of } 440 \text{ nm for the N2 isomer and a value of } 439 \text{ nm for the N2 species. Upon protonation the absorption maxima of the N2 and N4 isomers shift to } 456 \text{ and } 457 \text{ nm respectively. Because of the similarity of these values and also in the shape of the absorption spectra can not be used to discriminate between the two isomers.} \]

**Irradiation in acetonitrile**

The photochemical properties of 1 and 1H were investigated using \( ^1\text{H NMR spectroscopy and HPLC. Irradiation of the compounds was carried out in both acetonitrile and acetone.} \]

![Fig. 3 HPLC trace of N2 and N4 isomers of 1. Mobile phase CH3CN: H2O: CH3OH with volume ratio 75:20:5, 0.12 M KNO3. Flow rate: 2.0 cm2 min–1; detection wavelength: 430 nm, @ 20 °C.]
protonated or not. The most indicative feature identifying the isomeric form is the position of the H5 proton of the triazole ring. For the protonated N2 isomer (N2H) this proton is observed at 8.91 ppm and for the deprotonated N2 isomer at 8.0 ppm. For the N4 isomer the corresponding values are at ca. 8.4 and 7.4 ppm respectively. These values were obtained in acetone however and vary substantially depending on the amount of acid added and the water content of the solvent. The rather large difference between the values observed for the H5 protons for the two isomers is related to the through space interaction between these protons and neighbouring bpy ligands especially in the case of the N4 isomer. This through space interaction results in the considerable shift to lower ppm values for the proton in the N4 isomer compared with the N2 species.

HPLC and 1H NMR spectroscopic studies indicate that both isomers of the deprotonated compound 1 are photostable in the presence of the base TEA in acetonitrile and in acetone. This is in agreement with the reported behaviour of compound 2. However, acidification of the solution prior to irradiation allows for photoinduced changes to be observed. The photoinduced changes in acetonitrile monitored by HPLC are shown in Fig. 4.

In this Figure an intermediate is observed with signals at 8.0, 8.9 pm and 9.3 pm which disappears upon further photolysis. The observed isomerisation process could suggest that in this intermediate the pyrazine ring remains attached to the metal centre, since this allows for reorientation of the triazole ring in the sterically most favoured position. However, our earlier studies have shown that an alternative intermediate species is formed upon photolysis of the related complex [Ru(bpy)2(L-L')]2+ where L-L' is 4-methyl-3-(pyridine-2-yl)-1,2,4-triazole. In this intermediate the triazole ring is bound to the N1 atom as shown in Fig. 5. Such a species can be formed starting from both 1H isomers and hence the formation of the isomer where the triazole ring is coordinated to the metal centre via the N1 atom of the triazole ligand can not be excluded.

Irradiation in acetone

The photostability of the protonated complex 1H in acetone was investigated. Surprisingly, irradiation of the N4 isomer of 1H does not result in any observed changes over at least a 2 h period. The N2 isomer, by contrast, shows photoreactivity as illustrated in Fig. 7. Initially the N2 isomer is observed at a retention time of 7.4 min. After irradiation the N4 isomer is present as the main product with a retention time of 5.6 min. As observed in the 1H NMR spectra the formation of other minor products is observed also (Fig. 8).
Figure 7 HPLC assessment of the photoisomerisation of N2 isomer of 1H in acetone in the presence of CF₃COOH.

Most indicative for the isomerisation from the N2 to the N4 isomer are the changes observed for the pzH₃ peak which changes from 9.63 ppm for the N2 isomer to 9.54 ppm. Additionally the peak of the pzH₅ shifts from 8.58 ppm to 8.61 ppm. During irradiation two peaks appear at 9.1 pm and 9.17 pm and disappear in the final spectrum, indicating (as in the HPLC traces, i.e. at 4.2 and 2.0 min) the formation of a small amount of an intermediate. The concentrations of these species are however too low to allow for definitive assignment.

**Fig. 8.** a) Irradiation of the N2 isomer of [Ru(bpy)₂(Hpztr)]²⁺ (1H) in acetone with CF₃CO₂H. (b) Irradiation of a 1:1 mixture of the N2 and N4 isomer of [Ru(bpy)₂(Hpztr)]²⁺ (1H) in acetone with CF₃CO₂H. Spectra run from bottom to top in each case.

**Activated crossing from the 3MLCT to 3MC states**

Ligand exchange via cleavage of metal–ligand bonds is a paradigm photochemical reaction and is central to results discussed here. Meyer and co-workers, in their studies of ruthenium(II) polypyridyl complexes, identified the triplet metal centred (3MC) state as being responsible for the photochemical ligand dissociation observed for these compounds. The state corresponds to population of the antibonding (e₂) orbitals which is accessed at room temperature from the lowest 3MLCT state manifold. This process is thermally activated and the difference in energy between the 3MLCT and 3MC states can be estimated indirectly from the temperature dependence of the emission lifetime. The activation parameters obtained in an ethanol/methanol (4:1) solvent system over the temperature range 150-300 K are shown in Table 1 and are compared with related data for Hpytr based compounds N22 and N42. For example values of the 3MLCT – 3MC energy gap for 1H complexes are similar to those obtained for their 2H analogues.

**Table 1. Activation parameters and kinetic data for ruthenium(II) pyrazine triazole complexes and related pyridine triazole analogues.**

| Compound | Eₐ (cm⁻¹) | A(s⁻¹) | k₇₇K(s⁻¹) |
|----------|-----------|-------|-----------|
| N4I      | 1500      | 5.1 x 10⁹ | 2.2 x 10⁹ |
| N22      | 1200      | 3.6 x 10⁹ | 2.4 x 10⁹ |
| N4I ¹    | 2950      | 1.5 x 10¹³ | 1.5 x 10⁷ |
| N2I ¹    | 2200      | 9.0 x 10¹¹ | 1.4 x 10⁹ |
| N4² ²     | 600       | 3.1 x 10⁹ | 6.4 x 10⁵ |
| N4² ²     | 550       | 4.7 x 10⁷ | 4.1 x 10⁵ |
| N4² ²     | 2850      | 9.2 x 10¹³ | 2.8 x 10⁸ |
| N2I ²     | 1700      | 6.0 x 10¹⁰ | 2.8 x 10⁵ |

¹Data obtained in ethanol/methanol (4:1) at temperatures 150-300 K. Rate constant errors + 5%, activation parameters + 10%. ²values obtained from reference 11.

The temperature dependent lifetime data in the temperature range 150-300 K were analysed by assuming that the excited state decay consists of a temperature independent intrinsic decay from the 3MLCT state and a single thermally activated non-radiative decay process according to the equation 1:

\[
\frac{1}{\tau_{obs}} = k_{77K} + A \exp\left(\frac{-E_a}{RT}\right) \quad \text{eq. 1}
\]

Where \(k_{77K} = k_{nr} + k_r\) (the sum of the temperature independent radiative and non-radiative decays from the 3MLCT direct to the ground state), A is the preexponential factor and \(E_a\) is the activation energy for crossing from the 3MLCT to the 3MC excited state. \(k_{77K}\) is obtained at 77 K, assumes that \(k_{nr}\) and \(k_r\) are temperature independent above 77 K and that population of the 3MC states is effectively prevented at 77 K.

Activation parameters obtained for ruthenium polypyridyl complexes usually fall into one of two categories: a) Small activation energies (< 800cm⁻¹) and low prefactors (<10⁹ s⁻¹). b) Large activation energies (> 2000 cm⁻¹) and large prefactors (>10¹¹ s⁻¹).

Complexes exhibiting the former behaviour are typically unreactive towards photosubstitution. This is indeed observed for the deprotonated species. The low prefactor suggests the process involves the population of an MLCT state of largely
singlet character that is weakly coupled to the \(^1\)MLCT state.\(^{19}\) Complexes exhibiting the second type of behaviour are typically photochemically active and the activation process has been ascribed as being due to population of a \(^3\)MC state. If relaxation of the \(^3\)MC state is rapid relative to crossover from the \(^3\)MC state back to the \(^1\)MLCT state, the measured \(E_a\) represents the activation energy for \(^1\)MLCT–\(^3\)MC internal conversion. For such a process the prefactor is expected to be large \((10^{13}-10^{15})\). The N4 isomers for both 1H and 2H fall in this category.

The N2 isomer of \([\text{Ru(bpy)}_2(\text{Hpztr})]^2^+\) (i.e. N21H) intermediate behaviour was observed, with an activation barrier of 2200 cm\(^{-1}\) and a prefactor of 9.0 \times 10\(^{11}\). This may indicate that the \(^1\)MLCT and \(^3\)MC states are in equilibrium. In this case the measured activation energy corresponds approximately to the energy gap between the two states.\(^{20}\) For compound N22H this intermediate behaviour was also observed.\(^{11}\)

Population of the \(^3\)MC state is a key step in the photochemistry of the protonated pyrazyltriazole complexes. \(pK_a\) data indicate that triazole is a stronger \(\sigma\)-donor when coordinating via the N2 nitrogen than via the N4 nitrogen.\(^{11,14a}\) Hence for the N2 isomers of 1H and 2H the \(^3\)MC state would be expected to lie higher in energy than the for the corresponding N4 isomers. Consequently the larger activation energy for population of the \(^3\)MC state from the \(^3\)MLCT state is expected to be higher for the N2 isomers compared with the N4 isomers. However, this is not found to be the case, suggesting that population of the \(^3\)MC excited state is not the rate determining step in the photochemistry of the protonated pyrazoletriazole complexes. Instead, the rate-determining step may be governed by the formation of the monodentate species during the photoisomerisation and the subsequent ground state thermal self-annealing process. This may be related to the difference observed between the N4 and N2 isomers in the deactivation mechanism for the \(^3\)MC state. While the prefactors for the N2 isomers suggest the existence of an equilibrium with the \(^3\)MCLT state, fast deactivation of the \(^3\)MC state is taking place via other pathways.

Conclusions

The aim of this study is to compare the photochemical properties of the [Ru(bpy)_2((pztr))]\(^+\), and [Ru(bpy)_2((pytr))]\(^2^+\) and their protonated analogues 1H and 2H. Earlier studies have shown that for 1, 2 and 2H the LUMO and lowest emissive \(^1\)MLCT state is based on the bpy ligands\(^{11}\), while for 1H the LUMO and lowest emissive \(^1\)MLCT state is pyrazine based.\(^{14d,e}\) The purpose of this study is therefore to investigate whether the difference in the location of the LUMO\(^3\)/MLCT state affects the photolability of the complexes. The deprotonated complexes 1 and 2 are both photostable in acetonitrile and acetone. This is not unexpected since the activation parameters (Table 1) for these compounds indicate the population of the \(^3\)MC excited state is not significant. The photochemical behaviour of 1H and 2H in CH\(_2\)CN is again the same, with ligand loss occurring with the formation of [Ru(bpy)_2(CH\(_3\)CN)]\(^2^+\) as the final product. Differences are however observed upon photolysis in acetone. As reported earlier photoinduced interconversion of the N2 and N4 isomers of 2H is observed in CH\(_2\)Cl\(_2\) with a steady-state equilibrium of N4:N2 of 4:1. Upon irradiation of 1H however, it was found that the N4 isomer is photostable while the N2 species isomerises to the N4 species via an intermediate. The results obtained therefore indicate that for these compounds the location of the LUMO in 1H and 2H does not affect the photolytic behaviour fundamentally. The photostability of the N4 isomer of 1H is however an important point but is likely to be associated with the thermal stability of the primary photoprodut, i.e the species that contains a monodentate coordinated ligand.

Acknowledgements.

SS and JGV thank the Environmental Protection Agency for financial support under grant Nr 2008-ET-MS-3-S2. HMYA thanks the Libyan Government for Financial support. Science Foundation Ireland has contributed to this research under Grant No. 07/SRC/B1160 Advanced Biomimetic Materials for Solar Energy Conversion.

Notes and references

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