A concise and efficient total synthetic route of active stilbene dimer $\pm\e$-viniferin†

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A concise and efficient procedure for the total synthesis of natural stilbene dimer $\pm\e$-viniferin was accomplished with high overall yield. Demethylation of the key intermediate methyl 3-arylbenezofuran-4-carboxylate was achieved successfully through bromination followed by BBr$_3$ or BCl$_3$/TBAI-mediated ether cleavage reaction. Pd/C and bromobenzene-catalyzed MOM ether cleavage was successfully carried out to acquire $\pm\e$-viniferin.

Oligostilbenes are highly oxygenated natural products possessing more than two stilbene monomers and complex structures. The total synthesis of several oligostilbenes isolated from natural sources has been investigated in the past three decades due to their interesting structures and different biological activities. $\pm\e$-Viniferin (1), a natural resveratrol dimer containing the 2,3-diaryl-4-styryldihydrobenzofuran skeleton (Fig. 1), has been isolated from Vitaceaeous plants and determined to have potent activities, such as anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antifungal, and anticancer. $\pm\e$-Viniferin is incompatible with the structure of 2,3-diaryl-4-substitution patterns. We also failed in our investigation on the total synthesis of $\pm\e$-viniferin due to the unsuccessful demethylation of pentamethylated $\pm\e$-viniferin in the last step.

Considering the importance of $\pm\e$-viniferin as an active lead compound and existing synthesis challenges, we continuously focused our attention on the total synthesis of $\pm\e$-viniferin and its analogues. In this study, we report a practical total synthetic route of $\pm\e$-viniferin on the basis of the exploration of the demethylation of methylated methyl 3-arylbenezofuran-4-carboxylate mediated by BBr$_3$ or BCl$_3$ under the assistance of bromination.

In 2016, Elofsson and our group described two approaches to the synthesis of $\pm\e$-viniferin with phenols protected as methyl or cyclopropylmethyl (cPrMe) ethers. $\pm\e$-Viniferin was treated with well-established techniques for ether cleavage, it was unexpectedly directly converted into $\pm\e$-viniferin as an active dimer. Then, direct arylation of 4 (or 4a) produced the key intermediate 5 (or 5a), which was converted to methyl or cyclopropylmethyl ethers of $\pm\e$-viniferin 6 (or 6a) through further elaboration. However, when 6 (or 6a) was treated with well-established techniques for ether cleavage, it was unexpectedly directly converted into $\pm\e$-viniferin 7 (or $\pm\e$-viniferin 8) rather than into the desired target $\pm\e$-viniferin 1. This result indicates that the conditions for removing the alkyl ether-protecting group were incompatible with the structure of 2,3-diaryl-4-
styrldihydrobenzofuran. Hence, we realized that a different protecting group was necessary for the synthesis. Recently, we found that MOM as protecting group is easy to remove under the presence of Pd/C, bromobenzene, and hydrogen, but it has no effect on the 2,3-diaryl-4-styrldihydrobenzofuran skeleton. Comparison with acetyl group, MOM is able to tolerate the strong alkali conditions in the Horner–Wadsworth–Emmons-type olefination reaction. Its removal conditions is compatible with the 2,3-diaryl-4-styrldihydrobenzofuran skeleton. So, we envisioned that the MOM protecting group is suitable in the total synthesis of (±)-α-viniferin.

Hence, we commenced our synthesis with the preparation of 2,3-diarylbenzofuran (5), which was prepared from the etherification of α-bromoketone 3 and phenol 9 with 98% yield in the presence of K$_2$CO$_3$, followed by Bi(OTf)$_3$-catalyzed dehydrative cyclization to produce 2-arylbenezofuran intermediate 4 with 81% yield, which was then converted to 5 via direct alylation with 10 at the C2 position in 87% yield (Scheme 2). 22–23

Next, we focused our effort on the demethylation of the key intermediate 2,3-diarylbenzofuran 5. When 5 was treated with BBr$_3$ in dichloromethane at –45 °C, followed by slow warming to room temperature overnight under nitrogen atmosphere, it was unexpectedly converted into Friedel–Crafts acylation product 11 rather than into the desired demethylation target molecule 15. Most well-established techniques for ether cleavage have been investigated, but none has been found to remove methyl groups with acceptable yield without Friedel–Crafts cyclization. 24–26 Even with the more stable tert-butyl ester 5b instead of methyl ester 5, the same results were obtained. In line with literature, 27 the acylation reaction occurred easily at the ortho-positions of 3,5-dimethoxyphenyl, which were prone to bromination. Moreover, the addition of halogen electrophile to alkenes was reversible. Initially, we envisaged that demethylation of 5 could be realized from bromide 12 through global demethylation and dehalogenation reactions. Exposure of 5 to 10 equivalent of Br$_2$ in CH$_2$Cl$_2$ at 0 °C provided 12 with three extra halogen attached in 80% yield, and subsequent demethylation of 12 with BBr$_3$ in CH$_2$Cl$_2$ under nitrogen atmosphere was achieved successfully to provide 13 in 39% yield. To our surprise, debronymation of 13 in the presence of Pd/C under hydrogen atmosphere for 16 h produced only the monobrominated product 14 in 79% yield, but not the desired global dehalogenation product 15. The large steric hindrance at ortho-positions of 3,5-dimethoxyphenyl caused by the aromatic ring at C2 in 14 could be responsible for the results (Scheme 3).

Afterward, we turned our attention to another intermediate 3-arylbenezofuran 4, which is theoretically the most likely to generate demethylated product 15. Exposure of 4 to 10 equivalent of bromine source in dichloromethane at 0 °C for 6 h afforded the desired bromide 16 with four extra halogen attached in 86% yield. From this bromide, BBr$_3$-catalyzed demethylation in CH$_2$Cl$_2$ at –45 to 0 °C and subsequent Pd/C-catalyzed hydrogenative debromination in methanol under hydrogen atmosphere were achieved smoothly to provide 17 and 18 with yields of 42% and 67%, respectively, as expected.
When 18 was exposed to the conditions [Pd(OAc)\(_2\), PCy\(_3\)·HBF\(_4\), Cs\(_2\)CO\(_3\), pivalic acid, 19, DMA, 140 °C, 20 h] as reported by Zhang et al.,\(^{22}\) followed by Pd/C-catalyzed debenzylation reaction in ethanol under hydrogen atmosphere, the key intermediate 15 was obtained successfully with an overall yield of 44% in two steps (Scheme 4). Obviously, C2 arylation reaction of 18 also proceeded smoothly in the absence of protecting group for phenolic hydroxyls, although the yield is lower.

However, the overall yield of 11% for 15 from 4 in four steps was too low to be acceptable. Through a series of investigations, combined with the methods reported in literature,\(^{25,26}\) we found that under high-purity argon atmosphere, direct demethylation of 4 mediated by BBr\(_3\) in CH\(_2\)Cl\(_2\) at −20 °C to 0 °C produced the target 18 successfully with 57% yield (Scheme 4). Similarly, direct demethylation of 5 mediated by BCl\(_3\)/TBAI in CH\(_2\)Cl\(_2\) at 0 °C under argon atmosphere produced the target 15 with 65% yield (Scheme 3). Evidently, both global demethylation reactions were implemented at high yields, and high-purity argon played an important role in the two reactions.

With the key intermediate diarylbenzofuran 15 on hand, we explored the total synthesis of (±)-\(\varepsilon\)-viniferin. As mentioned above, identifying an applicable protecting group for phenolic hydroxyls is the critical issue in this synthesis. The group should be able to tolerate the strong alkali conditions in the Horner–Wadsworth–Emmons-type olefination reaction, and its removal conditions should be compatible with the 2,3-diyaryl-4-styryldihydrobenzofuran skeleton. The protecting group MOM, which we found recently and proved to be easy to remove under mild conditions using Pd/C and bromobenzene under hydrogen atmosphere, should be suitable for this procedure. More importantly, its removing conditions has no effect on the reducible group (double bond) in (±)-\(\varepsilon\)-viniferin 1.

Similar to literature,\(^{6,22}\) when 15 was treated with triethylsilane in trifluoroacetic acid at 0 °C to room temperature overnight, dihydrobenzofuran 20 was obtained with 65% yield. Product 20 was then treated with MOMCl in the presence of Cs\(_2\)CO\(_3\) in dry acetone at room temperature for 20 h to achieve MOM ether 21 with 97% yield. The methyl ester in 21 was subsequently reduced using LiAlH\(_4\) in THF at room temperature, then reoxidized with Dess–Martin periodinane in dichloromethane overnight to produce aldehyde 22 with an overall yield of 66% in two steps. As expected, Horner–Wadsworth–Emmons-type olefination of 22 with diethyl 4-methoxybenzylphosphonate 23 in the presence of t-BuOK in THF at room temperature for 24 h successfully generated MOM ether 24 with 93% yield. Final deprotection of MOM ether 24 catalyzed by Pd/C and bromobenzene in MeOH under hydrogen atmosphere led to the production of (±)-\(\varepsilon\)-viniferin 1 in quantitative yield (97%, Scheme 5).

In conclusion, we accomplished the total synthesis of resveratrol dimer (±)-\(\varepsilon\)-viniferin in 14 steps with an overall yield of 6.8%, through which a series of natural viniferin analogues could be prepared conveniently. Demethylation of the key intermediate methyl 3-arylbenzofuran-4-carboxylate was achieved through consecutive bromination, BBr\(_3\)-mediated direct demethylation, and dehalogenation catalyzed by Pd/C and hydrogen or BBr\(_3\) and BCl\(_3\)/TBAI-mediated direct demethylation under argon atmosphere. Pd/C and bromobenzene-catalyzed MOM ether cleavage was successfully carried out to acquire (±)-\(\varepsilon\)-viniferin for the first time. The efficient procedure for the removal of the MOM group in the presence of reducible and acid-sensitive groups was meaningful, and it will be reported in due course.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

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