

Total Synthesis of Phytotoxic Radulanin A Facilitated by the Photochemical Ring Expansion of a 2,2-Dimethylchromene in Flow

Bruce Lockett-Walters, Simon Thuillier, Emmanuel Baudouin, Bastien Nay

▶ To cite this version:

Bruce Lockett-Walters, Simon Thuillier, Emmanuel Baudouin, Bastien Nay. Total Synthesis of Phytotoxic Radulanin A Facilitated by the Photochemical Ring Expansion of a 2,2-Dimethylchromene in Flow. Organic Letters, 2022, 24 (22), pp.4029 - 4033. 10.1021/acs.orglett.2c01462 . hal-03781949

HAL Id: hal-03781949 https://hal.science/hal-03781949

Submitted on 20 Sep 2022

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

A total synthesis of phytotoxic radulanin A facilitated by the photochemical ring expansion of a 2,2-dimethylchromene in flow

Bruce Lockett-Walters,¹ Simon Thuillier,^{1,2} Emmanuel Baudouin² and Bastien Nay^{*,1}

¹ Laboratoire de Synthèse Organique, Ecole Polytechnique, CNRS, Institut Polytechnique de Paris, 91128 Palaiseau, France.

² Sorbonne Université, CNRS, Institut de Biologie Paris-Seine (IBPS), Laboratoire de Biologie du Développement, UMR7622, F-75005, Paris, France



ABSTRACT: The radulanins are biologically active bibenzyl natural products featuring a synthetically challenging 2,5-dihydro-1-benzoxepine core. In contrast with previous reports exhibiting lengthy strategies, we demonstrate the shortest synthesis of radulanin A to date, featuring a largely unexplored photochemical ring expansion reaction of a 2,2-dimethylchromene precursor. This work was adapted to a continuous flow setup for larger scale preparation, in view of biological investigations into the herbicidal properties of this natural product.

The radulanins are plant-derived natural products extracted from the leafy Radula genus of liverworts - a taxonomic subdivision of bryophytes.^{1–7} They constitute a large group of bibenzyl compounds (e.g. 1-3) involving fused oxacycles, which might be biosynthetically formed from the oxidative cyclization of *o*-prenylphenols like **4** (Figure 1a). Recently, based on structural similarities, we postulated that radulanin A (1) may exhibit similar biological properties to lunularic acid,⁸ a bibenzyl phenolic bearing plantgrowth inhibition and allelopathic properties.9,10 This theory was later corroborated when an active dose of radulanin A (50 µM) was shown to cause wilting of Arabidopsis thaliana seedlings (a plant commonly considered as a weed in agriculture). As a number of current agrochemical products face scrutiny,¹¹⁻¹³ we believe radulanin A may constitute a promising phytopharmaceutical alternative.

It is clear from all reported syntheses that the greatest challenge associated with the synthesis of the radulanins is the formation of the 3-methyl-2,5-dihydro-1-benzoxepin ring (Figure 1b). In the first reported synthesis of **1**, Stefinovic and Snieckus¹⁴ installed the heterocycle *via* a key ring closing olefin metathesis step on diene **5**. This approach was later adopted by Yoshida and co-workers¹⁵ for the synthesis of radulanin H. Yamaguchi and co-workers¹⁶ were able to form the dihydrobenzoxepine ring of radulanin A *via* an intramolecular Mitsunobu reaction of a 2-prenylphenol intermediate (**6**). In 2019, we reported the synthesis of bicyclic 3,5-dihydrooxepines *via* retro-Claisen rearrangements of 2-vinylcyclopropane-1-carbonyl intermediates (**7**), and applied this methodology to the synthesis of **1**.^{8,17} This rearrangement competed with a Cloke-Wilson rearrangement,

(a) Liverwort prenylated bibenzyls ΟН όн perrottetin D (2) radulanin A (1) OH OH natural chromene 3 natural prenylbibenzyl 4 (putative biosynthetic precursor) (b) Previous synthetic approaches to 1 and analogues OH юн 6 5 **Ring-closing metathesis** Mitsunobu reaction Retro-Claisen Snieckus (1998) Yamaguchi (2000) rearrangement Yoshida (2009) Our previous work (2019) (c) This work photochemica ring expansion e.g. 3 e.g. 1

possibly furnishing benzofuran side-products related to the

structure of perrottetin D (2).

Figure 1. Structure of liverwort bibenzyl natural products (a) and comparison of past synthetic strategies for 2,5-hydrobenzoxepines (b) and this work (c).

Despite their merit, all these strategies suffer from long reaction sequences, and involve sensitive steps which are not easily adaptable to larger scale synthesis. In 1988, Chakrabarti and Chakraborty reported a photochemical ring-expansion of the chromene moiety of a carbazole alkaloid (girinimbine) and other derivatives to afford a 2,5-dihydrobenzoxepine in moderate to good yields.¹⁸ This reaction was however never exploited for synthetic purpose. Inspired by this work, we envisaged a deployment of this methodology as a late-stage molecular edit to afford radulanin A (1) from readily accessible 2,2-dimethylchromenes (3) and in flow (Figure 1c), which has resulted in the shortest and highest yielding total synthesis of **1** to date.¹⁹ Since radulanin A and the analogous 2,2-dimethylchromene are both natural products present in the liverworts, we suspect that this rearrangement may be of some biosynthetic significance.5,6 Furthermore, this work allowed a larger scale preparation of **1** for extended biological assays.

To investigate the feasibility of the photochemical ring expansion of 2,2-dimethylchromenes, preliminary studies were carried out on the model substrate 8, which revealed a major UV/Vis absorption band at 278 nm, much similar to the analogous chromene 9, our expected precursor to radulanin A. The chromene substrates were synthesized by the condensation of a 1,3-diphenol with prenal, catalyzed by ethylenediamine diacetate (EDDA) according to Lee et al.20 To perform the ring expansion, several light sources, including sunlight, with various emission spectra were tested, with and without added photosensitizer, and in various solvents (supporting information, Table S1). In particular, we deemed a light source emitting in the UV wavelength range near the absorption band of the substrate. In their previous study, Chakrabarti and Chakraborty described the chromene rearrangement of carbazole-chromene alkaloids at 254 nm (16 W) or at 365 nm (400 W) in benzene, with improved yields at 365 nm.¹⁸ Gratifyingly in our case, the irradiation of **8** by a 150 W medium pressure Hg lamp (λ = 200-600 nm) in a pyrex immersion well apparatus afforded 2,5-benzoxepine 9 in 47% yield after 5 hours (Scheme 1). Attempts to better the yield (prolonged degassing, increased irradiation time) were not possible due to the irreproducibility of this method. Despite nearly quantitative conversions, most of the reaction mixture was seen to have decomposed.

Scheme 1. Batch photochemical ring expansion of 8 in an immersion well, characterized by poor reproducibilitv.



In order to improve this reaction and develop a reliable preparative method for radulanin A, foreseeing extensive biological testing, a photochemical flow process was next investigated.²¹⁻²³ Utilizing a flow chemistry system fitted with a 10 mL photochemical reactor equipped with a pyrex filter (Vapourtec E-series UV-150, Filter #3), we first sought to determine whether our preliminary batch conditions could be translated to a flow setup by retaining all possible reaction parameters: solvent, concentration, temperature and lamp power (the light source was also tested by coiling a PFA tubing around the cooling system of our previous 150 W medium pressure mercury lamp, but with no improvement). Promisingly, at a flow rate of 1 mL·min⁻¹ in benzene at a concentration of 0.002 M, a small aliquot of collected reaction mixture at steady state output revealed only 10% remaining starting material by ¹H NMR, and afforded dihydrobenzoxepine 9 and its inseparable 5-membered isomer 10 in 24% yield in a respective 88:12 ratio (Table 1, entry 1). Prior to further optimization of this process, various wavelength filters were screened (supporting information, Table S2), which ultimately showed the pyrex filter (Vapourtec #3 cuts at 260 nm) to render superior selectivity for 9 at the highest conversion. Despite the apparent cleanliness of crude ¹H NMR spectrum (supporting information, Figure S1), the final yield suggested extensive decomposition must have occurred.





Entry	R	Solvent	Concentration (mM)	Lamp power (%) ^a	Flow rate (mL·min ⁻¹)	Conversion ^b	Yield A (%) ^b	Yield B (%) ^b	Ratio A:B
1	Ме	PhH	2	50	1.0	90	21	3	88:12
2	Ме	PhH	10	100	1.0	67	11	0	100:0
3	Ме	PhH	1	100	2.0	98	28	7	80:20
4	Ме	PhH	1	50	2.0	94	18	2	90:10
5	Ме	PhMe	10	100	1.0	77	9	0	100:0
6	Ме	PhMe	1	100	4.0	90	17	2	89:11
7	Ме	EtOAc	1	100	1.0	100	21	12	64:36
8	Ме	MeCN	10	100	0.2	92	22	7	76:24
9	Ме	MeCN	5	100	0.5	96	18	4	82:18
10	Ме	MeCN	1	100	1.4	95	36	11	77:23

11	Me	MeCN	1	100	1.2	100	21	11	66:34
12	Н	MeCN	1	100	1.4	100	55	5	92:8

^{*a*} Power refers to electrical power output of lamp, 100% being 150 W. ^{*b*} Conversion and yields determined by ¹H NMR with respect to 1,3,5-trimethoxybenzene as internal standard.

Further optimization of this process began by examining a more practical reaction concentration of 10 mM (entry 2). Although the reaction had not reached full conversion at this flow rate, several unknown signals appeared in the aromatic region of the crude NMR spectra alongside the product, likely formed from intermolecular reactions between reactive intermediates. Reducing the concentration to 1 mM proved favourable, rendering a combined yield of 35% at a flow rate of 2 mL·min⁻¹ (entry 3). Reducing the lamp power by 50% (entry 4) led to improved selectivity but a lower yield of rearranged products. In an effort to improve safety, other solvents were screened. Toluene (entries 5-6) was shown to facilitate a higher conversion rate, but with inferior yields. Ethyl acetate was briefly trialed (entry 6), but resulted in poor selectivity. We last examined acetonitrile (entries 8-11), and observed a marked decrease in rates of conversion compared to benzene. However a slight improvement in yield (entry 10) was observed by working at 1 mM at a higher flow rate. It is noteworthy that when increasing residence time in the reactor (lower flow rates) in order to achieve full conversion, selectivity worsened and simultaneously impacted yield (entry 11). To test the influence of the methyl substituent on this difficult rearrangement, we applied the best conditions (entry 10) to chromene 11 (entry 12). We were pleased to observe that dihydrobenzoxepine 12 was obtained in a 55% yield at 100% conversion, with only 5% of isomer **13** (92:8 ratio). This result shows the crucial influence of substituents in this photochemical rearrangement. To complete this study, we explored the scope of this rearrangement to more complex 2,2-dimethylchromenes with various substitutions, possibly applicable to the synthesis of other natural products (see supporting information, Figure S2).²⁴ These attempts resulted in degradation (or no reaction when an extended chromophores was present), showing a limited scope for this reaction. However, owing to the structural similarity between radulanin chromene 3 and compound 8, we were confident we could apply this method to a preparation of radulanin A.

Chromene intermediate **3**, a natural product first isolated from another *Radula* moss,^{2,6} was synthesized in four steps from 3,5-dimethoxybenzaldehyde **14**. The Horner-Wadsworth-Emmons reaction of **14** with diethyl benzylphosphonate **15** first afforded pinosylvin dimethyl ether **16** in 93% yield. Subsequent hydrogenation of the olefin moiety and deprotection of the phenols in presence of HBr gave dihydropinosylvin **17** in 94% yield. This nucleophilic diphenol was engaged in the formation of chromene **3** in the presence of prenal and the Brønsted acid catalyst EDDA (Scheme 2).^{20,25} On a practical point of view, adding EDDA in three portions of 5 mol% over three hours furnished the best yields of **3** (82%), which was accompanied by a small amount of regioisomer **18** (3%). Compound **18** is also a natural product found in *Radula* species.⁵





Chromene **3** was submitted to the same photochemical flow conditions as **8** (Table 1, entries 9 and 10). Gratifyingly, it was converted into radulanin A (**1**) in a higher NMR yield of 41% (Table 2, entry 1), accompanied by 15% of fivemembered isomer **19** (73:27 ratio). Despite the good conversion of 92% and after exhaustive efforts, compound **1** was found to be inseparable from the chromene substrate **3**. As a result, we were compelled to reduce the flow rate to achieve full consumption of the chromene, which inevitably impacted selectivity and yield (entry 2). These new conditions allowed to isolate **1** in 26% yield (with 17% yield of benzofuran **19**, also a natural product). With a productivity of 127 mg/24 h, we were able to afford more than 300 mg of **1** for biological investigations.

Despite the simplicity of this transformation, no obvious rearrangement mechanism can be drawn at first sight. A key intermediate could be quinone methide isomer 20 (Scheme 3, see also Scheme S1 in the supporting information). Under UV excitation, we supposed that it could generate a reactive oxy radical species (21), substrate of a 1,7-hydrogen atom transfer (1,7-HAT) leading to intermediate 22. From this symmetrical diphenol, the benzylic radical would be reduced through 1,5-HAT leading to 23, which could evolve through several routes. First, the new 1,3-diradical could recombine into 2-vinylcyclopropanecarbonyl intermediate 24 (route a), a good substrate for spontaneous but reversible retro-Claisen rearrangement according to our previous study,8 leading to kinetically favoured 2,5-dihydrobenzoxepine **1**. Second, resonance and radical recombination could also directly lead to 1 (route b). Finally, resonance form 25 could be an intermediate toward benzofuran product 19 (route c), which tends to be the thermodynamic endproduct when increasing irradiation times.

Table 2. Photochemical rearrangement of chromene 3 into radulanin A (1)



Entry	Flow rate (mL min ^{.1})	Conversion (%) ^a	1 (%)	19 (%)	Ratio 1:19
1	1.4	92	41 ^a	15ª	73:27
2	1.2	100	26 ^b	17 ^b	60:40

^a Conversions and yields determined by ¹H NMR with respect to trimethoxybenzene as internal standard. ^b Isolated yield.

Scheme 3. Proposed mechanism for 2,2-dimethylchromene reorganization.



In conclusion, the photochemical ring extension of 2,2-dimethylchromene substrates has been studied, showing the advantage of using a flow process to improve the reproducibility and scale up the reaction. It was applied to the total synthesis of radulanin A, obtained in 19% yield over five steps from aldehyde 14. As far as we know it is the shortest preparation reported to date. Although it would need additional improvements to scale up the process, the method allowed us to prepare substantial amounts (320 mg) of radulanin A for extended biological studies as a weedkiller. Finally, to explain this rearrangement, we supposed that a quinone methide intermediate would lead to highly reactive radical species, involving a key 1,7-hydrogen atom transfer and a possible retro-Claisen rearrangement. Considering that both the chromene substrate (3) and radulanin A (1) are natural products present in the same liverwort genus,^{2,6} it is questionable whether this rearrangement could occur in Nature.

ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge on the ACS Publications website.

Supplementary tables, figures, and schemes experimental procedures and copies of spectra (PDF)

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Corresponding Author

* Email: bastien.nay@polytechnique.edu

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We acknowledge financial supports from CNRS, Institut Polytechnique de Paris (IP Paris), Ecole Polytechnique and Sorbonne Université (SU). BLW¹ thanks CNRS and IP Paris for funding his postdoc fellowship. ST^{1,2} thanks SU for providing a PhD fellowship. BN¹ gratefully thanks Professor Samir Zard¹ for fruitful discussions on the reaction mechanism. We thank Reviewer 2 for suggesting an alternative mechanism that is presented in the supporting information for further discussion.

REFERENCES

- Asakawa, Y. Biologically Active Compounds from Bryophytes. *Pure Appl. Chem.* 2007, 79, 557–580. https://doi.org/10.1351/pac200779040557.
- (2) Asakawa, Y.; Toyota, M.; Takemoto, T. Seven New Bibenzyls and a Dihydrochalcone from Radula Variabilis. *Phytochemistry* **1978**, *17*, 2005–2010. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0031-9422(00)88752-X.
- (3) Asakawa, Y.; Kusube, E.; Takemoto, T.; Suire, C. New Bibenzyls from Radula Complanata. *Phytochemistry* 1978, 17, 2115–2117. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0031-9422(00)89292-4.
- (4) Asakawa, Y.; Takeda, R.; Toyota, M.; Takemoto, T. Bibenzyls from Radula Tokiensis and R. Japonica. *Phytochemistry* **1981**, *20*, 858–859. https://doi.org/10.1016/0031-9422(81)85201-6.
- (5) Asakawa, Y.; Hashimoto, T.; Takikawa, K.; Tori, M.; Ogawa, S. Prenyl Bibenzyls from the Liverworts Radula Perrottetii and Radula Complanata. *Phytochemistry* **1991**, *30*, 235– 251. https://doi.org/10.1016/0031-9422(91)84130-K.
- (6) Asakawa, Y.; Kondo, K.; Takikawa, N. K.; Tori, M.; Hashimoto, T.; Ogawa, S. Prenyl Bibenzyls from the Liverwort Radula Kojana. *Phytochemistry* **1991**, *30*, 219–234. https://doi.org/10.1016/0031-9422(91)84129-G.
- Asakawa, Y.; Kondo, K.; Tori, M. Cyclopropanochroman Derivatives from the Liverwort Radula Javanica. *Phytochemistry* 1991, 30, 325–328. https://doi.org/10.1016/0031-9422(91)84147-K.
- (8) Zhang, W.; Baudouin, E.; Cordier, M.; Frison, G.; Nay, B. One-Pot Synthesis of Metastable 2,5-Dihydrooxepines through Retro-Claisen Rearrangements: Method and Applications. *Chem. Eur. J.* **2019**, *25*, 8643–8648. https://doi.org/10.1002/chem.201901675.
- (9) Valio, I. F. M.; Schwabe, W. W. Growth and Dormancy in Lunularia Cruciata (L.) Dum: VII. The Isolation and Bioassay of Lunularic Acid. J. Exp. Bot. 1970, 21, 138–150. https://doi.org/10.1093/jxb/21.1.138.
- (10) Whitehead, J.; Wittemann, M.; Cronberg, N. Allelopathy in Bryophytes - a Review. *Lindbergia* **2018**, *41*. https://doi.org/10.25227/linbg.01097.
- (11) Guyton, K. Z.; Loomis, D.; Grosse, Y.; El Ghissassi, F.; Benbrahim-Tallaa, L.; Guha, N.; Scoccianti, C.; Mattock, H.; Straif, K. Carcinogenicity of Tetrachlorvinphos, Parathion, Malathion, Diazinon, and Glyphosate. *Lancet Oncol.* 2015, 16, 490–491. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1470-2045(15)70134-8.
- (12) Foucart, S.; Horel, S. Risks Associated with Glyphosate Weedkiller Resurface. *Nature* 2018, 555, 443. https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-018-03394-z.
- Andreotti, G.; Koutros, S.; Hofmann, J. N.; Sandler, D. P.; Lubin, J. H.; Lynch, C. F.; Lerro, C. C.; De Roos, A. J.; Parks, C. G.; Alavanja, M. C.; Silverman, D. T.; Beane Freeman, L. E. Glyphosate Use and Cancer Incidence in the Agricultural Health Study. *J. Natl. Cancer Inst.* **2018**, *110*, 509–516. https://doi.org/10.1093/jnci/djx233.
- (14) Stefinovic, M.; Snieckus, V. Connecting Directed Ortho Metalation and Olefin Metathesis Strategies. Benzene-Fused Multiring-Sized Oxygen Heterocycles. First Syntheses of Radulanin A and Helianane. J. Org. Chem. 1998, 63, 2808–2809. https://doi.org/10.1021/jo980299s.

- (15) Yoshida, M.; Nakatani, K.; Shishido, K. Total Synthesis of Radulanin H and Proposed Structure of Radulanin E. *Tetrahedron* **2009**, *65*, 5702–5708. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tet.2009.05.027.
- (16) Yamaguchi, S.; Furihata, K.; Miyazawa, M.; Yokoyama, H.; Hirai, Y. A New Preparation of 2,5-Dihydro-1-Benzoxepins Using Mitsunobu Cyclization, and the Synthesis of Natural Radulanins. *Tetrahedron Lett.* **2000**, *41*, 4787-4790. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0040-4039(00)00676-6.
- (17) Zhang, W.; Nay, B. The Retro-Claisen Rearrangement of 2-Vinylcyclopropylcarbonyl Substrates and the Question of Its Synthetic Potential. *Eur. J. Org. Chem.* **2020**, 3517– 3525. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejoc.202000136.
- (18) Chakrabarti, A.; Chakraborty, D. P. Photochemical Rearrangements of Pyranocarbazole Alkaloids: Part-I. *Tetrahedron Lett.* **1988**, *29*, 6625–6627. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0040-4039(00)82414-4.
- (19) A preprint of this article is available: Lockett-Walters, B.; Thuillier, S.; Baudouin, E.; Nay, B. A Concise Total Synthesis of Phytotoxic Radulanin A Facilitated by the Photochemical Ring Expansion of a 2,2-Dimethylchromene in Flow. **2022**. https://doi.org/10.26434/chemrxiv-2022-68n6r-v2.
- (20) Lee, Y. R.; Choi, J. H.; Yoon, S. H. Efficient and General Method for the Synthesis of Benzopyrans by Ethylenediamine Diacetate-Catalyzed Reactions of Resorcinols with α , β -Unsaturated Aldehydes. One Step Synthesis of

Biologically Active (±)-Confluentin and (±)-Daurichromenic Acid. *Tetrahedron Lett.* **2005**, *46*, 7539–7543. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tetlet.2005.08.159.

- (21) Rehm, T. H. Flow Photochemistry as a Tool in Organic Synthesis. *Chem. Eur. J.* **2020**, *26*, 16952–16974. https://doi.org/10.1002/chem.202000381.
- (22) Knowles, J. P.; Elliott, L. D.; Booker-Milburn, K. I. Flow Photochemistry: Old Light through New Windows. *Beilstein J. Org. Chem.* **2012**, *8*, 2025–2052. https://doi.org/10.3762/bjoc.8.229.
- (23) Elliott, L. D.; Knowles, J. P.; Koovits, P. J.; Maskill, K. G.; Ralph, M. J.; Lejeune, G.; Edwards, L. J.; Robinson, R. I.; Clemens, I. R.; Cox, B.; Pascoe, D. D.; Koch, G.; Eberle, M.; Berry, M. B.; Booker-Milburn, K. I. Batch versus Flow Photochemistry: A Revealing Comparison of Yield and Productivity. *Chem. Eur. J.* **2014**, *20*, 15226–15232. https://doi.org/10.1002/chem.201404347.
- Sokol, K. R.; Magauer, T. Total Synthesis of Oxepin and Dihydrooxepin Containing Natural Products. *Synthesis* 2021, *53*, 4187–4202. https://doi.org/10.1055/s-0037-1610776.
- (25) Park, B.-H.; Lee, Y.-R.; Kim, S.-H. Efficient Synthesis of Bibenzyl Derivatives Bearing Pyranyl Moieties: First Total Synthesis of Bauhinol D. *Bull. Korean Chem. Soc.* 2011, *32*, 566–570. https://doi.org/10.5012/bkcs.2011.32.2.566.