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Synthesis of a bis-azido analogue of acromelic acid for radioisotope-free photoaffinity labeling and biochemical studies

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Abstract—A novel acromelic acid analogue containing a phenyl group possessing two different types of azido functional groups, of which one is the aromatic N_3 acting as a photoaffinity group to bind to a target protein by photoirradiation and the other is alkyl N_3 group which survives photolysis acting as a detecting group through the Staudinger–Bertozzi reaction to identify the ligated product, was designed and synthesized as a radioisotope-free biochemical probe potentially for studies on kainoid receptors.

Acromelic acid (**1**) isolated from a toadstool, *citocybe acromelalga*,[1] is a potent neuroexcitatory amino acid which belongs to a class of so-called kainoids bearing a pyrrolidine dicarboxylic acid structure represented by kainic acid (**2**).[2] These compounds possess a structure similar to that of glutamic acid, a major excitatory neurotransmitter in the human central nervous system. Therefore, they can be looked as conformationally constrained glutamic acid analogues and are believed to exert their biological activities through glutamate receptors[3] that are classified as ionotropic and metabotropic receptors comprising of three and eight subtypes, respectively.[4] By binding and acting at the subclass of kainate receptor and AMPA (α-amino-3-hydroxy-5-methylisoxazole-4-propionic acid) receptor, the kainoids have been shown to display powerful neuroexcitatory activity in the mammalian central nervous system.[3] Like kainic acid (**2**), acromelic acid (**1**) can also strongly depolarize the neurons, but its in vivo behavioral and pathological effects are reportedly different from those of kainic acid,[5] suggesting the existence of distinct types of kainoid receptors. Therefore, the actual receptor for acromelic acid and its signaling pathway are yet to be determined. During our efforts to elucidate the molecular mechanism behind the neuro-toxicity of acromelic acid and associated receptor functions, we have designed and synthesized an acromelic acid analogue (GIF-0448, **3**) possessing an azido group as photoaffinity group and ^{125}I as a radioactive detecting group as a bifunctional probe for the object.[6] The compound is successfully utilized as a substitute of acromelic acid in the biochemistry study of receptor signaling analysis, but the radio property of this compound is obviously inconvenient and unhealthy for the treatment and preparation. Recently, we have developed a novel method for radioisotope-free photoaffinity labeling, in which a bifunctional ligand is connected to a target protein by activation of a photoreactive group, such as an aromatic azido group, and identification of the ligated product is achieved by anchoring of a detectable tag through the Staudinger–Bertozzi reaction with an alkyl azido moiety that survives photolysis. The chemical ground of this method was also confirmed using model compounds with the bifunctional group under photoirradiation in the presence of trapping agents for reactive intermediates and the method was demonstrated by specific labeling of the catalytic portion of human HMG-CoA reductase.[7] In this letter, we wish to adopt this idea and report the design and synthesis of an acromelic acid analogue (**4**) related to compound (**3**) possessing a phenyl group functionalized with two different azido groups as the radioisotopic-free probe for the acromelic acid receptor signaling analysis (see Fig. 1).

Retrosynthetically, compound **4** could be obtained by deprotection of *N*-Boc and mild hydrolysis of bis-methyl ester of compound **5** under mild condition without destroying the azido group.[6] The alkyl N_3-group could be introduced by the substitution of the corresponding mesylate **6**, which could be prepared from the alcohol

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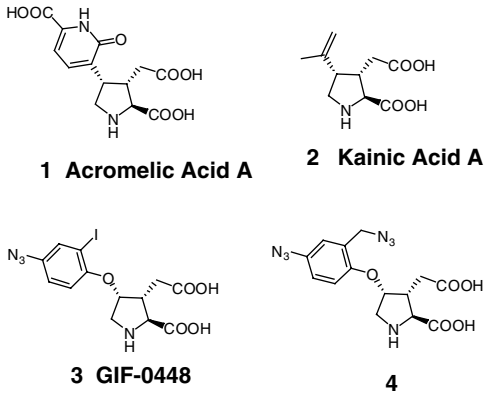


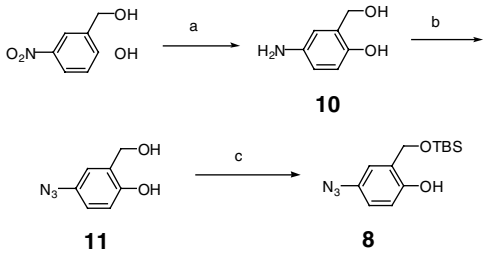
Figure 1.

7. Like the step in the preparation of compound **3**, the compound **7** could be prepared by incorporating the azidophenol **8**, prepared from 2-hydroxymethyl-4-nitrophenol, to the pyrrolidine derivatives **9** by Mitsunobu condition (see Scheme 1).

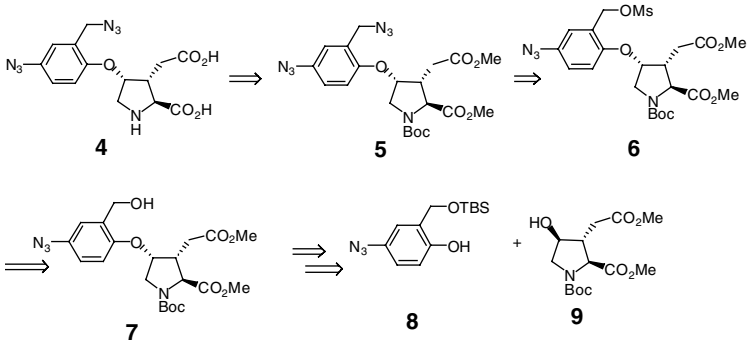
The pyrrolidine derivative **9** was synthesized from commercially available *trans*-4-hydroxyproline following the reported procedure.[6,8] The azido phenol **8** was prepared from 2-hydroxymethyl-4-nitrophenol as follows. Hydrogenation of nitro group in 2-hydroxymethyl-4-nitrophenol under the atmosphere of hydrogen catalyzed by 10% Pd/C afforded the aminophenol **10**. Without purification, compound **10** was treated with $NaNO_2$ in 2 N HCl at 0 °C and then exchanged with NaN_3 to give the azido phenol **11** in 50% yield over 3 steps. Selective protection of the primary hydroxy group as TBS ether was achieved by using TBSCl and Et_3N in DMF (Scheme 2).

With both intermediates in hand, the synthesis of compound **5** was started. Though phenol is a well-known substrate for the Mitsunobu reaction, coupling azido-containing phenol seemed to be uneasy task because the azido group could be reduced with Ph_3P. We performed this reaction by changing the addition sequence of reagents in order to avoid this reduction, but the reaction still gave a complex mixture and after removal of TBS ether using TBAF compound **7** could be obtained but only in 13% yield. Therefore, an improved procedure for preparing compound **7** starting from the beginning was envisaged (Scheme 3). TBS protection of the primary OH of 2-hydroxymethyl-4-nitrophenol afforded compound **12** smoothly. Coupling **12** with compound **9** under Mitsunobu condition gave compound **13** in 69% yield. The stereochemistry of compound **13** was deduced by the general mechanism of Mitsunobu reaction, which usually reverses the stereochemistry of hydroxy group. Also the ^1H NMR spectrum of **13** represented the characteristic pattern of 3,4-*cis*-configuration as judged by accumulated data of analogs.[6,9] The nitro group in compound **13** was then converted to the amino group by hydrogenation catalyzed by 10% Pd/C to give compound **14**. Removal of TBS group in **14** using TBAF in THF afforded compound **15** in high yield. With both amino and hydroxy groups in the body, compound **15** is much soluble in the 3 N HOAc which is beneficial to the next azidation step. Thus, dissolving compound **15** in 3 N HOAc and treatment with $NaNO_2$ and then NaN_3 provided the compound **7** in 86% combined yield.[10] Mesylation of the hydroxy group using MsCl in the presence of Et_3N gave almost quantitative yield of the mesylate **6**, which was displaced by another azido group using NaN_3 in DMSO at 40 °C to provide the bis-azido compound **5**. Removal of the *N*-Boc group of **5** with trifluoroacetic acid and hydrolysis of methyl esters by treatment with lithium hydroxide in methanol–water afforded the desired compound **4**[11] as a pale yellow amorphous solid in 94% yield, after ion-exchange chromatography and lyophilization (Scheme 3).

The complete preservation the biological property of acromelic acid A (**1**) by GIF-0448 (**3**) is quite intriguing



Scheme 2. Reagents and conditions: (a) H_2, Pd/C, EtOAc, 6 h: (b) 1—$NaNO_2$, 2 N HCl, 0 °C, 5 min; 2—NaN_3, 1 h, 50% for 3 steps; (c) TBSCI, DMF, Et_3N, rt, 5 h, 55%.



Scheme 1. Retrosynthetic analysis.