



# Asymmetric metal-free synthesis of fluoroquinolones by organocatalytic hydrogenation

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 1 March 2010

Received in revised form 12 April 2010

Accepted 22 April 2010

Available online 29 April 2010

### Keywords:

Flumequine

Levofloxacin

Brønsted acid

Asymmetric reduction

Organocatalysis

## ABSTRACT

A highly enantioselective organocatalytic transfer hydrogenation enabling the synthesis of both 6-fluoro-2-methyltetrahydroquinoline and 7,8-difluoro-3-methyl-benzoxazine has been developed. These key building blocks can for the first time be synthesized using the same methodology allowing fast and efficient, metal-free access to the antibiotic fluoroquinolones flumequine and levofloxacin.

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## 1. Introduction

The development of new asymmetric methods for the general and efficient synthesis of optically pure, key pharmaceutical building blocks is of ongoing interest. Using readily available starting materials and employing the optimal reaction conditions, the aim is to obtain these valuable products with enhanced selectivity, greater potency or fewer side effects.

Tricyclic fluoroquinolones, including flumequine and levofloxacin, are well known antibacterial agents with broad spectrum activity against Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacteria.<sup>1</sup> Today flumequine is primarily used as a pesticide.<sup>2</sup> Levofloxacin on the other hand is one of the most potent antibacterial agents on the market and the most prescribed quinolone class antibiotic worldwide. The major challenge for the synthesis and straightforward variation of these compounds is the development of the efficient catalytic synthesis of their chiral key building blocks, 6-fluoro-2-methyl-1,2,3,4-tetrahydro-quinoline **3** and 7,8-difluoro-3-methyl-3,4-dihydro-2H-benzo[b]-[1,4]oxazine **4**. Several synthetic methods for the synthesis of these key intermediates have been reported.<sup>3</sup> However, despite these advances, alternative and cost effective procedures are still needed.

Within this context, we report here a practical and straightforward procedure for the asymmetric, metal-free synthesis of two fluoroquinolones, flumequine **1** and levofloxacin **2**. Based on our previous successes in the development of chiral Brønsted acid<sup>4</sup> catalyzed transfer hydrogenations,<sup>5–7</sup> and in continuation of the ongoing research efforts in the synthesis of natural products and biologically active compounds,<sup>8</sup> we decided to examine this organocatalytic process for the asymmetric hydrogenation of quinoline **5** and benzoxazine **6** (Fig. 1).

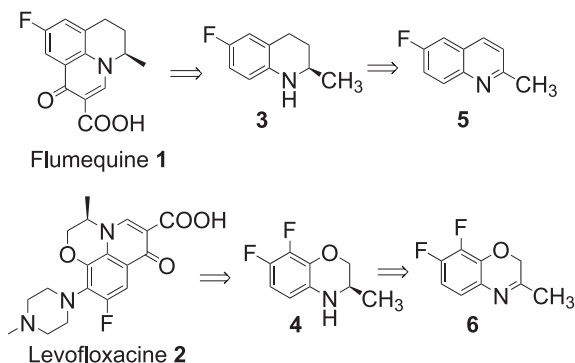


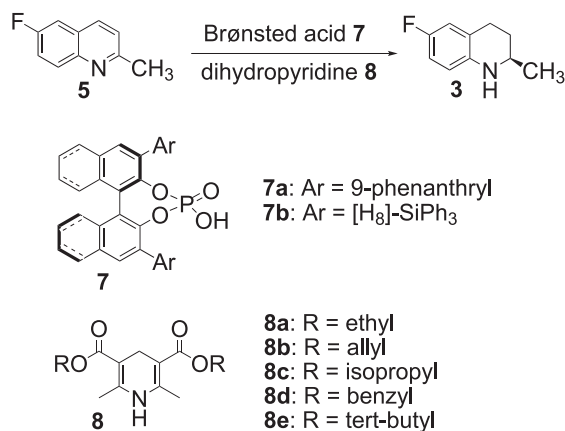
Figure 1.

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## 2. Results and discussion

Our initial studies focused on the metal-free transfer hydrogenation of 6-fluoro-2-methylquinoline **5** by employing several chiral Brønsted acid catalysts **7** in combination with dihydropyridines **8** as the hydride source. While almost all of the 3,3-aryl-substituted BINOL-phosphoric acids<sup>9</sup> provided the product in good yields, the best results with regard to enantioselectivity were obtained with catalyst **7a**. This is in agreement with our earlier developed Brønsted acid catalyzed reactions, in which **7a** was typically a privileged catalyst. However, here we only obtained a disappointingly low enantiomeric excess of 84% ee (Table 1, entry 1). To further improve the enantioselectivity, we decided to prepare the sterically more demanding triphenylsilyl-substituted Brønsted acid **7b** and apply it in the asymmetric reduction. To our delight we obtained a higher enantioselectivity (Table 1, entry 2). Next we varied the catalyst loading and the ester moiety of dihydropyridine **8**. While the change in catalyst loading had no considerable impact (Table 1, entries 2–4), the variation of the dihydropyridine (Table 1, entries 5–9) resulted in the formation of **3** with better enantiomeric excess (Table 1, entry 8). Thus, with just 1 mol % of Brønsted acid catalyst **7b**, we obtained the desired 6-fluoro-2-methyl-1,2,3,4-tetrahydroquinoline **3** in good yield and with an enantiomeric excess of 96% ee.

Table 1



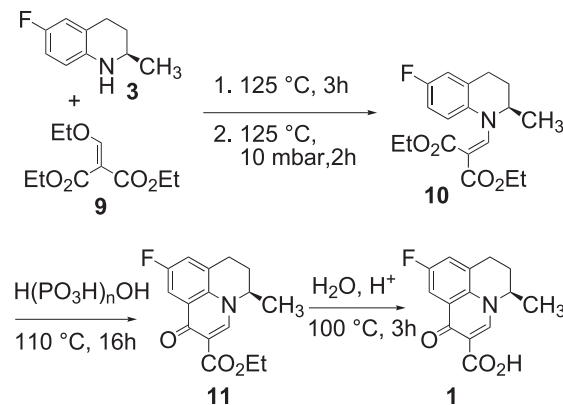
Entry <sup>a</sup>	<b>7</b>	mol % <b>7</b>	HEH <b>8</b>	Yield <sup>b</sup> [%]	ee[%] <sup>c</sup>
1	<b>7a</b>	2	<b>8e</b>	77	84
2	<b>7b</b>	1	<b>8a</b>	81	92
3	<b>7b</b>	2	<b>8a</b>	79	94
4	<b>7b</b>	5	<b>8a</b>	83	95
5	<b>7b</b>	1	<b>8b</b>	79	94
6	<b>7b</b>	1	<b>8c</b>	82	87
7	<b>7b</b>	1	<b>8d</b>	81	89
8	<b>7b</b>	1	<b>8e</b>	79	96
9	<b>7b</b>	5	<b>8e</b>	76	97

<sup>a</sup> Reactions were performed with quinoline **5** (1.0 equiv), HEH **8** (2.4 equiv), and catalyst **7** in benzene at 60 °C.

<sup>b</sup> Yield of isolated product after column chromatography.

<sup>c</sup> The ee values were determined by chiral HPLC.

With the enantiomerically enriched key building block **3** in hand we started with the synthesis of flumequine **1** according to a recently reported one pot reaction sequence (Scheme 1).<sup>3h</sup> The alkylation of **3** with diethylethoxymethylene malonate **9** resulted in the formation of **10**, which was directly cyclized to the flumequine ester **11** by employing polyphosphoric acid. The final hydrolysis step afforded the desired product (*R*)-flumequine **1** in 61% overall yield (Scheme 1). Thus, a short and efficient metal-free enantioselective protocol for the synthesis of flumequine has been established in which an asymmetric organocatalytic quinoline reduction represents the key step.

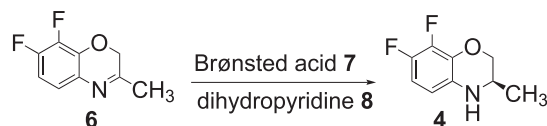


Scheme 1. The synthesis of (*R*)-flumequine.

Following this success we turned our attention to the synthesis of the antibacterial agent levofloxacin **2**. The core of levofloxacin consists of a 3,4-dihydro-2*H*-1,4-benzoxazine **4** and could be obtained by an asymmetric hydrogenation of **6**, which is easily prepared from nitrophenoxy propanone. Thus, our initial experiments concentrated on finding the best catalyst and reaction conditions for the reduction of **6**. Similar to the quinoline reduction, better results were obtained with Brønsted acid **7b** resulting in the product **4** with 89% ee (Table 2, entry 2).

Table 2

Evaluation of the hydride source **8**<sup>a</sup>



Entry	Catalyst <b>7</b>	HEH <b>8</b>	Yield [%] <sup>b</sup>	ee[%] <sup>c</sup>
1	<b>7a</b>	<b>8a</b>	75	66
2	<b>7b</b>	<b>8a</b>	75	89
3	<b>7b</b>	<b>8b</b>	78	87
4	<b>7b</b>	<b>8c</b>	75	80
5	<b>7b</b>	<b>8d</b>	76	85
6	<b>7b</b>	<b>8e</b>	74	88

<sup>a</sup> Reactions were performed with benzoxazine **6** (1.0 equiv), HEH **8** (1.2 equiv), and catalyst **7** (5 mol %) in benzene at 60 °C.

<sup>b</sup> Yield of isolated product after column chromatography.

<sup>c</sup> Enantiomeric excess was determined by HPLC.

For further reaction optimization we evaluated the different Hantzsch dihydropyridines **8** and solvents as they often have a significant impact on the enantioselectivity.<sup>7</sup> Although, no further improvement was observed if different dihydropyridines **8a–e** (Table 2, entries 2–6) were applied, the use of dichloromethane as the solvent gave the product with an acceptable enantiomeric excess of 93% ee (Table 3, entry 6).

With the key building block **4** in hand we began with our synthesis of (*R*)-levofloxacin in analogy to the protocol described for the synthesis of (*R*)-flumequine (Scheme 2). Thus the one pot condensation with **9** followed by a phosphoric acid catalyzed cyclization resulted in tricyclic ester **12**. The subsequent saponification was followed by a nucleophilic aromatic substitution to give the antibacterial agent levofloxacin **2** in short and efficient reaction sequence.

## 3. Conclusion

In summary, we describe here the development of an asymmetric organocatalytic transfer hydrogenation as a simple and

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