DBU-Mediated cleavage of aryl- and heteroaryl disulfides

Dubekile Nyoni,a Kevin A. Lobb,a Perry T. Kaye,a* and Mino R. Cairab

aDepartment of Chemistry, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa
bDepartment of Chemistry, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, South Africa
E-mail: P.Kaye@ru.ac.za

Abstract
The capacity of the nitrogen nucleophile, 1,8-diazabicyclo[5.4.0]undec-7-ene (DBU) to reduce aryl- and heteroaryl disulfides to the corresponding mercaptans is demonstrated. While dicarboxylated disulfide analogues afford the mono-DBU disulfide salts, as confirmed by X-ray crystallography, the corresponding methyl esters are cleaved normally.

Keywords: Disulfide cleavage, aryl disulfides, DBU, aryl mercaptans

Introduction
The synthesis of 2H-1-benzothiopyrans (thiochromenes) has typically involved the condensation of thiophenols with acrylic acid derivatives, followed by reduction and dehydration,1 and a number of approaches to these systems have been reported.2-4 As part of our ongoing research on applications of Baylis-Hillman methodology,5 we reported the convenient, one-step synthesis of the thiochromenes 3a-g via the 1,8-diazabicyclo[5.4.0]undec-7-ene (DBU)-catalyzed reaction of 2,2'-dithiodibenzaldehyde 1a with activated alkenes 2a-g (Scheme 1).6 The thiochromenes 3a-g were obtained in a single step – an observation that suggested the capacity of DBU to reduce the disulfides 4a-g (formed via the Baylis Hillman reaction), possibly via the sequence outlined in Scheme 1.6 Phosphine nucleophiles have been implicated in the direct cleavage of disulfides,7 while photo-induced cleavage via disulfide radical anions has been attributed to electron transfer from excited-state aniline8 and various amines have been used in large excess (40 eq.) to produce, in situ at elevated temperatures, benzenethiyl radicals from diphenyl disulfide via a single electron transfer process.9 DBU has been used as a base in thiazolium salt-catalyzed disulfide reduction–aldehyde oxidation processes10 but, to our knowledge, its role as a nucleophile in the direct cleavage of disulfides is unprecedented. We now report the results of further research directed at exploring the general capacity of DBU to reduce diaryl and heterodiaryl disulfides to mercaptans in the absence of an activated alkene, thus precluding involvement of a Baylis-Hillman adduct, as suggested in Scheme 1.
Scheme 1. Synthetic pathway and putative mechanism to account for the formation of the thiochromenes 3a-g.6

Results and Discussion

In order to investigate the potential of DBU to serve as a disulfide reducing agent, solutions of the nine disulfides 1a-i (Scheme 2) in chloroform were treated with DBU in the same molar ratios and under the same reaction conditions used in the previously reported Baylis-Hillman reactions,6 but without any activated alkene. [Under these conditions, accommodation of the nucleofugal sulfide by a pre-formed Baylis-Hillman adduct (as suggested in Scheme 1) would be precluded.] In most cases, the expected mercaptans (9a-f) were, in fact, isolated in low to moderate yield (13 - 53%), demonstrating the ability of DBU to effect reductive cleavage of the disulfide bonds in these compounds. The carboxylic acid derivatives 1g-i, however, afforded crystalline products, NMR analysis of which initially suggested possible trapping of the putative oxidised DBU cation 8 (Scheme 1). Single-crystal X-ray analysis (Figure 1) of the product obtained using the dicarboxylic acid 1i, however, confirmed the formation of the corresponding mono-DBU-disulfide salt 10i.11 Formation of the salts 10g-i prompted synthesis of the corresponding methyl esters 1d-f.
When the substrate 1a was dissolved in CDCl$_3$ alone, no change was observed after 14 days, confirming that DBU is, in fact, responsible for the observed disulfide cleavage. When the disulfide 1a was treated with DBU in the dark, normal disulfide cleavage was observed thus excluding a photo-induced, free-radical process.

Scheme 2. Reaction of disulfides 1a-i with DBU in chloroform.
Conclusions

DBU is clearly capable of direct reductive cleavage of the diaryl and heterodiaryl disulfides 1a-f. Optimization and extension of the methodology to aliphatic disulfides may provide an effective alternative, in certain applications, to the use of more established reagent systems. The thiophilicity of DBU 7 in these reactions may be attributable to the intramolecular delocalisation effects illustrated in structure 7 in Scheme 1.

Experimental Section

General. Reagents, as supplied by Aldrich-Sigma, and solvents were used without further purification. $^1$H and $^{13}$C NMR spectra were recorded on Bruker AMX400 or Avance II$^*$ 600 MHz spectrometers, and were calibrated using solvent signals; coupling constants are given in Hertz (Hz). Melting points were determined using a hot-stage apparatus, and are uncorrected. IR spectra were recorded on a Perkin Elmer Spectrum 100 FT-IR spectrometer. High-resolution mass spectra were recorded by the University of Stellenbosch Mass Spectrometry Unit. Flash chromatography was carried out using Merck silica gel 60 [230-240 mesh (particle size 0.040-
and preparative layer chromatography was conducted using silica gel 60 PF<sub>254</sub>. HPLC was carried out on a Partisil 10 Magnum 6 normal phase column using a Spectra-Physics P100 isocratic pump and a Waters K1410 differential refractometry detector.

General procedures and analytical data for new compounds are as follows.

**Reactions of DBU with disulfides (1a-f)**

**General procedure, exemplified by the preparation of 2-mercaptobenzaldehyde (9a)**

DBU (0.11 mL, 0.75 mmol) was added slowly to a stirred solution of 2,2'-dithiodibenzaldehyde (0.1 g) in CHCl<sub>3</sub> (0.7 mL). The mixture was further stirred in a stoppered flask for 2 weeks. Flash chromatography [elution with hexane–EtOAc (1:1)] gave the known compound, 2-mercaptobenzaldehyde 9a (0.15 g, 49%) as a yellow oil, HPLC of which afforded analytical material (Found M-H: 137.0055. C<sub>7</sub>H<sub>5</sub>OS requires: 137.0061); <sup>12</sup>v<sub>max</sub>/cm<sup>-1</sup> (neat) 2612 (S-H) and 1686 (C=O); <sup>13</sup>δ<sub>H</sub> (400 MHz; CDCl<sub>3</sub>) 5.96 (1H, d, <sup>13</sup>J = 3.49 Hz, SH), 7.41 (1H, t, <sup>13</sup>J = 7.45 Hz, 5-H), 7.58 (1H, dd, <sup>13</sup>J = 7.48 and 1.37 Hz, 6-H), 7.85 (1H, t, <sup>13</sup>J = 8.08 Hz, 4-H), 7.93 (1H, d, <sup>13</sup>J = 7.97 Hz, 3-H) and 10.14 (1H, s, CHO); <sup>14</sup>δ<sub>C</sub> (100 MHz; CDCl<sub>3</sub>) 127.4 (C-5), 128.2 (C-4), 129.3 (C-6), 130.4 (C-3), 134.1 (C-1), 134.8 (C-2) and 192.1 (CHO); <sup>15</sup>m/z 137 (M<sup>+</sup>, 100%).

Other known compounds to be isolated were:

**2-Mercapto-1,3-benzothiazole (9b)** as a yellow crystalline solid (0.08 g, 53%), m.p. 154-156 °C (Lit. 177-179 °C) (Found M<sup>+</sup>: 165.9779. C<sub>7</sub>H<sub>4</sub>NS<sub>2</sub> requires: 165.9785); <sup>16</sup>v<sub>max</sub>/cm<sup>-1</sup> (neat) 2572 (S-H) and 1464 (C=N); <sup>17</sup>δ<sub>H</sub> (400 MHz; CDCl<sub>3</sub>) 3.52 (1H, s, SH), 7.28 (1H, m, 5-H), 7.37-7.39 (2H, m, 4H and 7-H), 7.46 (1H, m, 6-H); <sup>18</sup>δ<sub>C</sub> (150 MHz; CDCl<sub>3</sub>) 112.4 (C-5), 121.8 (C-6), 125.1 (C-4), 127.6 (C-7), 130.5 (C-3a), 140.5 (C-7a), 191.2 (C-2); <sup>19</sup>m/z 166 (M<sup>+</sup>, 100%).

**Methyl 2-mercaptobenzoate (9d)** as a yellow oil (0.03 g, 20%) (Found M<sup>+</sup>: 167.0167. C<sub>8</sub>H<sub>7</sub>NO<sub>2</sub>S requires: 167.0171); <sup>20</sup>v<sub>max</sub>/cm<sup>-1</sup> (neat) 2556 (S-H) and 1704 (C=O); <sup>21</sup>δ<sub>H</sub> (400 MHz; CDCl<sub>3</sub>) 3.84 (1H, s, SH), 3.97 (3H, s, OCH<sub>3</sub>), 7.19-7.22 (1H, m, Ar-H), 7.40 (1H, t, <sup>22</sup>J = 7.73 Hz, Ar-H), 7.74 (1H, d, <sup>23</sup>J = 8.17 Hz, Ar-H) and 8.05 (1H, d, <sup>24</sup>J = 7.01 Hz, Ar-H); <sup>25</sup>δ<sub>C</sub> (100 MHz; CDCl<sub>3</sub>) 52.4 (OCH<sub>3</sub>), 125.5, 125.9, 127.3, 131.5, 133.1 and 140.4 (Ar-C) and 166.9 (C=O); <sup>26</sup>m/z 166 (M<sup>+</sup>, 100%).

**Analytical data for new compounds are as follows**

**2-Mercapto-4-Nitropyridine (9c)** as a brown solid (0.0582 g, 30%), m.p. 154-156 °C (Found M<sup>+</sup>: 154.9900. C<sub>5</sub>H<sub>3</sub>N<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>S requires: 154.9915); <sup>27</sup>v<sub>max</sub>/cm<sup>-1</sup> (neat) 2511 (S-H) and 1565 (C=N); <sup>28</sup>δ<sub>H</sub> (400 MHz; CDCl<sub>3</sub>) 3.84 (1H, s, SH), 3.97 (3H, s, OCH<sub>3</sub>), 7.19-7.22 (1H, m, Ar-H), 7.40 (1H, t, <sup>29</sup>J = 7.73 Hz, Ar-H), 7.74 (1H, d, <sup>30</sup>J = 8.17 Hz, Ar-H) and 8.05 (1H, d, <sup>31</sup>J = 7.01 Hz, Ar-H); <sup>32</sup>δ<sub>C</sub> (100 MHz; CDCl<sub>3</sub>) 119.8, 132.1, 142.7, 145.3 and 165.0 (Ar-C); <sup>33</sup>m/z 155 (M<sup>+</sup>, 100%).

**Methyl 2-mercapto-6-nitrobenzoate (9e)** as a yellow oil (0.017 g, 44%) (Found M<sup>+</sup>: 212.0018. C<sub>8</sub>H<sub>6</sub>N<sub>2</sub>O<sub>4</sub>S requires: 212.0022); <sup>34</sup>v<sub>max</sub>/cm<sup>-1</sup> (neat) 2612 (S-H) and 1732 (C=O); <sup>35</sup>δ<sub>H</sub> (400 MHz; CDCl<sub>3</sub>) 3.72 (3H, s, OCH<sub>3</sub>), 5.42 (1H, m, SH), 7.60 (2H, m, Ar-H), 7.82 (1H, m, Ar-H) and 8.19
(1H, m, Ar-H); δC (100 MHz; CDCl₃) 53.3 (OCH₃), 111.1, 124.9, 126.2, 128.3, 133.9 and 146.2 (Ar-C) and 171.1 (C=O); m/z 212 (M⁺, 52%) and 259 (100%).

**Methyl 6-mercaptopyridine-3-carboxylate (9f)** as a yellow oil (0.02 g, 13%) (Found M⁺: 170.0276. C₇H₈NO₂S requires: 170.0273); νmax/cm⁻¹ (neat) 2541 (S-H) and 1714 (C=O); δH (400 MHz; CDCl₃) 3.92 (1H, s, SH), 3.95 (1H, s, OCH₃), 7.61 (1H, d, J = 8.32 Hz, Ar-H), 8.21 (1H, dd, J = 8.31 and 2.24 Hz, Ar-H), 9.10 (1H, s, 2-H); δC (100 MHz; CDCl₃) 52.9 (OCH₃), 125.4, 138.20, 138.23, 151.58 and 151.60 (Ar-C) and 165.7 (C=O); m/z 170 (M⁺, 30%) and 182 (100%).

**Esterification of disulfide dicarboxylic acids (1g-i)**

**General procedure, exemplified by the preparation of methyl 2-(methoxycarbonyl-phenyl)disulfanylbenzoate (1d)**

H₂SO₄ (0.4 mL) was added to MeOH (30 mL), followed by 2,2'-dithiodibenzoic acid 1g (6 g, 0.02 mol), and the resulting mixture was refluxed for 5h. After cooling, H₂O (30 mL) was added and the mixture was stirred for several minutes, before adding further H₂O (30 mL) followed by satd. aq. NaHCO₃ (15 mL). The precipitated solid was filtered off and washed with a little H₂O to give methyl 2-(methoxycarbonylphenyl)disulfanylbenzoate 1d as a cream powder (13.3 g, 49%), m.p. 172-173 °C [Found (M - C₂H₇)⁺: 303.0676. C₁₄H₇O₄S₂ requires: 302.97857]; νmax/cm⁻¹ (neat) 1661 (C=O); δH (400 MHz; CDCl₃) 3.98 (6H, s, OCH₃), 7.23 (2H, t, J = 7.57 Hz, Ar-H), 7.40 (2H, m, Ar-H), 7.52 (2H, d, J = 8.07 Hz, Ar-H) and 8.05 (2H, dd, J = 7.78 and 1.22 Hz, Ar-H); δC (100 MHz; CDCl₃) 52.3 (OCH₃), 125.5, 125.9, 127.3, 131.5, 133.1 and 140.4 (Ar-C) and 166.9 (C=O); m/z 303 [(M - C₂H₇)⁺, 30%] and 325 (100%).

**Methyl 2-(2-methoxycarbonyl-3-nitrophenyl)disulfanyl-6-nitrobenzoate (1e)** as a yellow oil (0.03 g, 57%) (Found MH⁺: 425.0009. C₁₆H₁₃N₂O₈S₂ requires: 425.01077); νmax/cm⁻¹ (neat) 1724 (C=O); δH (600 MHz; CDCl₃) 1.63-1.71 (neat) 1716 (C=O); δH (400 MHz; CDCl₃) 3.92 (6H, s, OCH₃), 7.87 – 7.94 (6H, series of multiplets, Ar-H); δC (100 MHz; CDCl₃) 53.6 (OCH₃), 124.1, 125.1, 127.2, 127.8, 129.0, 142.5 (Ar-C) and 167.7 (C=O).

**Methyl 6-[(5-methoxycarbonyl-2-pyridyl)disulfanyl]pyridine-3-carboxylate (1f)** as a cream solid (1.7 g, 70% ), m.p. 149-151 °C [Found (M - C₂H₇)⁺: 305.0597. C₁₂H₅N₂O₄S₂ requires: 304.9692]; νmax/cm⁻¹ (neat) 1724 (C=O); δH (400 MHz; CDCl₃) 3.92 (6H, s, OCH₃), 7.64 (2H, d, J = 8.41 Hz, Ar-H), 8.18 (2H, d, J = 8.38 Hz, Ar-H) and 9.04 (2H, dd, J = 7.78 and 1.22 Hz, Ar-H); δC (100 MHz; CDCl₃) 52.6 (OCH₃), 124.1, 125.4, 138.1, 150.5, 164.8 (Ar-C) and 165.8 (C=O); m/z 305 [(M - C₂H₇)⁺, 100%].

**Formation of mono-DBU disulfide dicarboxylic acid salts (10g-i)**

**The mono-DBU salt (10i).** The general procedure described for the synthesis of 2-mercaptobenzaldehyde (9a) was followed using 5,5'-dithiobis-(2-nitrobenzoic acid) (0.1 g, 0.9 mmol), DBU (0.1 mL, 2 mmol) and CHCl₃ (1.0 mL). Work up afforded a yellow solid which was recrystallised from EtOH to give the mono-DBU salt 10i (0.12g, 68% ) as yellow crystals, m.p. 217-220 °C; νmax/cm⁻¹ (neat) 1689 (C=O) and 1560 (C=N); δH (600 MHz; CDCl₃) 1.63-1.71
(6H, m, DBU-CH₂), 1.89 (2H, m, DBU-CH₂), 2.65 (2H, m, DBU-CH₂), 3.22 (2H, br s, DBU-CH₂), ca. 3.5 (4H, overlapping H₂O signal, DBU-CH₂), 7.48 (1H, dd, J = 8.46 and 2.20 Hz, Ar-H), 7.69 (H, m, Ar-H), 7.73 (1H, s, Ar-H) and 10.15 (1H, s, CO₂H); δc (150 MHz; CDCl₃) 18.9, 23.4, 25.9, 28.2, 31.5, 37.5, 47.8, 53.3 (DBU-C), 99.5 (C=N), 124.0, 125.5, 126.2, 139.7, 147.0 and 165.3 (Ar-C) and 168.8 (C=O).

**The mono-DBU salt (10g).** (0.39g, 70%) as a cream solid, m.p. 213-216 °C; v_max/cm⁻¹ (neat) 1672 (C=O) and 1572 (C=N); δH (600 MHz; CDCl₃) 1.59-1.66 (6H, m, DBU-CH₂), 1.88-1.91 (2H, m, DBU-CH₂), 2.75 (2H, m, DBU-CH₂), 3.45-3.55 (6H, overlapping H₂O signal, DBU-CH₂), 7.06 (1H, t, J = 7.23 Hz, Ar-H), 7.13 (1H, t, J = 7.51 Hz, Ar-H), 7.45 (1H, d, J = 8.00 Hz, Ar-H), 7.55 (1H, d, J = 7.43 Hz, Ar-H) and 8.27 (1H, s, CO₂H); δC (150 MHz; CDCl₃) 18.9, 23.3, 25.9, 28.1, 31.3, 37.5, 47.7, 53.2 (DBU-C), 97.6 (C=N), 123.6, 123.7, 128.3, 129.9, 132.8 and 165.3 (Ar-C) and 168.3 (CO₂H).

**The mono-DBU salt (10h) (0.33g, 59%) as a brown solid, m.p. 207-209 °C; v_max/cm⁻¹ (neat) 1662 (C=O) and 1606 (C=N); δH (400 MHz; CDCl₃) 1.64-1.72 (6H, m, DBU-CH₂), 1.98 (2H, m, DBU-CH₂), 2.86 (2H, m, DBU-CH₂), ca. 3.5 (6H, overlapping H₂O signal, DBU-CH₂), 7.55 (1H, d, J = 8.31 Hz, Ar-H), 8.20 (1H, dd, J = 8.32 and 2.03 Hz, Ar-H), 8.84 (1H, s, Ar-H) and 9.04 (1H, s, CO₂H); δC (150 MHz; CDCl₃) 18.9, 23.4, 26.0, 28.3, 31.5, 37.6, 47.8, 53.3 (DBU-C), 108.6 (C=N), 118.4, 138.4, 150.5, 158.2 and 165.3 (Ar-C) and 166.3 (C=O).

Crystal data for the mono{1,8-diazabicyclo[5.4.0]undec-7-ene} salt of 5,5'-dithiobis-(2-nitrobenzoic acid)(10i). (C₁₄H₇N₂O₆S₂)⁻ (C₉H₁₇N₂)⁺, M = 548.58, 0.18 x 0.16 x 0.13 mm³, triclinic, space group P(-1) (No. 2), a = 10.1019(8), b = 10.4227(8), c = 12.3805(9) Å, α = 77.899(2), β = 74.919(2), γ = 80.698(2)°, V = 1222.73(16) Å³, Z = 2, Dc = 1.490 g/cm³, F₀₀₀ = 572, MoKα radiation, λ = 0.71073 Å, T = 173(2)K, 2θ_max = 56.7°, 48890 reflections collected, 6080 unique (R_int = 0.0435). Final GooF = 1.049, R₁ = 0.0361, wR₂ = 0.0912, R indices based on 5006 reflections with I >2σ(I) (refinement on F²), 353 parameters, 2 restraints. Lp and absorption corrections applied, μ = 0.275 mm⁻¹. Primary dihedral angles in the disulfide ion include C1-S13-S14-C15 -90.40(7)°, S13-S14-C15-C20 15.1(1)° and S14-S13-C1-C6 21.0(1)°. One of the methylene groups (C29) is statistically disordered over two positions (a, b). Crystallographic data (excluding structure factors) for the structure reported in this paper have been deposited with the Cambridge Crystallographic Data Centre as supplementary publication no. CCDC-816182. Copies of the data can be obtained free of charge on application to CCDC, 12 Union Road, Cambridge CB21EZ, UK (fax:(44) 1223-336-033; e-mail: deposit@ccdc.cam.ac.uk).

**Acknowledgements**

The authors thank the National Research Foundation (NRF: GUN 2069255) and Rhodes University for a bursary (D.N), Rhodes University, the University of Cape Town and the NRF for generous financial support. Any opinion, findings and conclusions or recommendations

---

© ARKAT-USA, Inc.
expressed in this material are those of the authors and therefore the NRF does not accept any liability in regard thereto.

References and Notes

11. The cation and anion are linked by the H-bond N27-H⋅⋅⋅O22 with N⋅⋅⋅O 2.823(2) Å; the anions are linked in infinite chains via a strong head-to-tail H-bond O8-H⋅⋅⋅O22i with O⋅⋅⋅O 2.473(2) Å (i = x,-1+y,1+z). The molecular symmetry indicated by the NMR spectra in some cases is attributed to dynamic proton transfer in solution.