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Synthesis of 6-aryl-2'-deoxyuridine nucleosides *via* a Liebeskind cross-coupling methodology

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ABSTRACT

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Hitherto, the synthesis of 6-substituted 2'-deoxyuridine nucleoside analogues *via* Pd-catalyzed Suzuki cross-coupling reaction was hampered by the instability of the TIPDS-protected precursor 6-iodo-2'-deoxyuridine **1** in alkaline media due to cleavage of the glycosidic bond. Herein, the successful application of the Liebeskind reaction under base-free conditions is reported. This method comprises of the stoichiometric use of copper thiophene carboxylate (CuTC) as co-reagent at slightly elevated temperatures. Fluoride-mediated desilylation and Yoshikawa-phosphorylation afforded the nucleotide analogues **4b-c**, **4e**, and **4i**.

Nucleoside analogues constitute an important class of organic molecules with interesting biological profiles.¹ In the past decades, substitution at position 5 of the uracil moiety in 2'-deoxyuridine nucleosides has been proven a validated strategy for the development of drugs used for the treatment of cancer and viral infections.² Aryl and heteroaryl groups are usually introduced *via* a Suzuki-Miyaura cross-coupling reaction³ using arylboronic acids or *via* a Stille coupling using arylstannanes.⁴ The Suzuki-Miyaura cross-coupling reaction has become the method of choice as a large number of non-toxic, structurally diverse (hetero)arylboronic acids is commercially available. It also allows carrying out the reaction in the presence of H₂O, which is favourable in terms of environmental impact. On the other hand, position 6 of the uracil base in nucleosides remained largely unexplored in medicinal chemistry programs and relatively few derivatives have been reported in the literature. This might partly be due to difficulties encountered during the preparation of these compounds. Hitherto, gaining entry to these derivatives required multistep reaction sequences and their further development was hampered by low overall yields and the reduced chemical stability compared with their C-5 congeners. Two recent papers elaborate on new synthetic methodologies for the preparation of 6-aryl-uridines. Shih *et al.* prepared a series of 6-aryl uridines using palladium(II)acetate as catalyst, triphenylphosphine as ligand and sodium carbonate as a base.⁵ On the other hand, Nencka *et al.* reported the synthesis of 6-aryl-5'-O-TBDMS-2',3'-O-isopropylideneuridine nucleosides under standard, as well as ligand-free, Suzuki-Miyaura conditions.⁶ Recently, a number of cross-coupling reactions with protected and unprotected uracil derivatives at position 6 have been reported in the literature.^{7,8} In detail, Čerňová *et al.* described the regioselective C-H arylation at C-6 of protected uracils in the

presence of a Pd-catalyst and CuI.⁸ However, the reported yields were frequently low to moderate and mixtures of the two regioisomers (C-5 and C-6-substituted products) were obtained. Furthermore, this approach would require the inclusion of additional steps (deprotection, silylation, glycosylation) which makes it less attractive in medicinal chemistry programs. To the best of our knowledge, 6-(hetero)aryl-2'-deoxy-uridines are not known in literature. As part of an ongoing drug discovery program towards the identification of novel mycobacterial thymidylate synthase inhibitors,⁹ we were in need of an efficient process to get access to 6-aryl-2'-deoxy-uridines. In this letter, we describe their synthesis *via* a base-free Liebeskind methodology.

In order to get access to 6-aryl-2'-deoxyuridine derivatives, 6-iodo-2'-deoxyuridine derivative **1** was considered as an ideal key intermediate. It was prepared according to a literature protocol from 2'-deoxyuridine by protection of both hydroxyls as an 1,1,3,3-tetraisopropoxydisiloxanylidene (TIPS) group, followed by iodination at position 6.¹⁰ Classical Suzuki-Miyaura coupling of **1** with a number of substituted phenylboronic acids was envisioned. However, for the synthesis of the corresponding 2'-deoxyuridine congeners, all attempts in which classical conditions (various Pd-catalysts, such as Pd(PPh₃)₄, PdCl₂(PPh₃)₂, or PdCl₂(dppf), boronic acids or their pinacol esters, and aqueous base) were employed, failed. These results highlight a particular instability of compound **1** in alkaline media, which predominantly led to deglycosylation. It is noteworthy that the attempted fluoride-mediated desilylation of compound **1** (TBAF/THF or NH₄F/MeOH) resulted in the formation of 6-iodouracil along with other degradation products and that no unprotected 6-iodo-2'-deoxyuridine could be obtained.

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Consequently, alternative Suzuki conditions were sought. Using a suspension of a base (e.g. K_2CO_3 or K_3PO_4) in an organic solvent, such as toluene or DMF, was equally unsuccessful. Furthermore, temperatures above 70 °C and long reaction times (> 24 h) also appeared to have a detrimental effect on the stability of **1**.

This major stumbling block has been overcome by switching to an alternative base-free Suzuki coupling methodology developed by Liebeskind and co-workers.¹¹ This method comprises the stoichiometric use of copper thiophene carboxylate (CuTC), acting as a Cu(I)-cocatalyst, and allows to run reactions under nonbasic conditions even at room temperature. Although the original Liebeskind methodology¹² uses thioalkyl groups as leaving groups, we applied the methodology on aryl iodide **1** as substrate. Using standard Liebeskind reaction conditions (1.2 eq. of boronic acid or ester, 1.2 eq. of CuTC and 7 mol % of $Pd(PPh_3)_4$ in dry THF at 50 °C) the TIPDS-protected 6-substituted nucleoside derivatives were obtained in moderate to good yields (60-80%).

Table 1. Liebeskind cross-coupling reaction of **1** with various boronic acids or their esters.

Entry	compound	R	yield (%)
1	2a		79
2	2b		84
3	2c		64
4	2d		72
5	2e		66
6	2f		0
7	2g		0
8	2h		33 ^a
9	2i		76
10 ^b	2j		0 ^c

^aan inseparable 5:1 mixture of **2h**:**1** was obtained

^bboronic acid pinacol ester used, ^ccomplex reaction mixture

This method works well with substituted phenylboronic acids (compounds **2a-e**), as well as with (*E*)-(2-phenylvinyl)-boronic acid (compound **2i**). Fluoride-mediated desilylation¹⁰ (TBAF/THF) of compounds **2b-e** and **2i** furnished the desired nucleosides **3a-e** and **3i** (Scheme 1).¹³

Scheme 1. Reagents and conditions: (a) TBAF, THF, rt; (b) $POCl_3$, proton sponge, $PO(OMe)_3$, 0 °C.

This is the first time a series of 6-aryl-2'-deoxy-nucleosides have been prepared in an efficient way. In order to broaden the applicability of this method, it was envisioned to introduce also a number of heteroaryl groups at position 6 of the uracil base. It turned out, however, that heterocyclic boronic acids are much less reactive under these reaction conditions. In the case of 3-pyridylboronic acid **2f** and 2-furylboronic acid **2g**, no conversion was observed after 48 h at 50 °C. When 2-thiophenylboronic acid was employed, an inseparable 5:1 mixture (as determined by ¹H-NMR) of the desired 2-thienyl derivative **2h** and unreacted **1** was obtained after 24 h, albeit in low yield. Prolonged reaction times (up to 3 days at 50 °C) had no measurable improvement on this ratio. Similarly, performing the reaction with the pinacol ester of (*E*)-2-cyclopropylvinylboronic acid gave only a low yield of the desired derivative **2j** containing substantial amounts of impurities. The results are summarized in Table 1. These 6-aryl nucleoside analogues were made as part of a project towards the identification of inhibitors of a novel flavin-dependent thymidylate synthase from *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, called ThyX. It has been shown that the presence of a 5'-phosphate moiety is required for ThyX-inhibition.⁹ Therefore, nucleosides **3b-c**, **3e**, and **3i** have been selected for phosphorylation of the primary hydroxyl group under standard Yoshikawa-conditions¹⁴ ($POCl_3$ /proton sponge/ $PO(OMe)_3$ /0°C) and evaluated in a biochemical assay as potential inhibitors of mycobacterial ThyX. At a concentration of 50 μM, none of the tested nucleotides showed significant ThyX-inhibition.

Herein, the application of the base-free Liebeskind cross-coupling methodology for the synthesis of 6-substituted 2'-deoxyuridine nucleosides is described. Position 6 of the uracil moiety has been largely unexplored in medicinal chemistry programs and 6-aryl-2'-deoxyuridine analogues are not known in literature. Therefore, the Liebeskind methodology, as presented here, shows great promise to introduce structural variation at position 6 of different nucleosides and to study its effect on the biological activity. This methodology works well with simple substituted phenylboronic acids. Unfortunately, the corresponding heteroaryl derivatives could not be obtained and further optimization is required in order to find a versatile method for the synthesis of this class of organic molecules.

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13. **Representative example: Synthesis of 6-(4-fluorophenyl)-2'-deoxyuridine 3b:** Compound **1** (419 mg, 0.7 mmol), Pd(PPh₃)₄ (49 mg, 0.042 mmol), CuTC (147 mg, 0.77 mmol), and 4-fluorophenylboronic acid (118 mg, 0.84 mmol) were flushed with Ar and subsequently suspended in dry THF (8 ml) under an Ar atmosphere. The reaction mixture was stirred at 50 °C for 24 h and then allowed to cool to room temperature. The solvent was evaporated, and the residue was taken up in EtOAc (30 ml), and the organic layer was washed with satd NaHCO₃ (2 x 20 ml) and brine (1 x 20 ml), dried over MgSO₄, and evaporated. The residue was purified by silica gel column chromatography (0.5% EtOH in CH₂Cl₂) to yield the TIPDS-protected intermediate **2b** (332 mg, 84%). ¹H NMR (300 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 8.56 (br s, 1H, NH), 7.43 (br s, 2H, ArH), 7.18 (t, 2H, *J* = 8.6 Hz, ArH), 5.55 (s, 1H, H-5), 5.51 (dd, 1H, *J* = 9.5, 3.1 Hz, H-1'), 4.97 (m, 1H, H-3'), 4.08-3.92 (m, 2H, H-5'), 3.67 (m, 1H, H-4'), 2.94-2.83 (m, 1H, H-2'), 2.24-2.10 (m, 1H, H-2'), 1.15-0.96 (m, 28H, 4 x *i*-propyl). ¹³C NMR (75 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 163.98 (d, *J*_{CF} = 251 Hz), 162.19, 155.93, 149.76, 130.24 (d, *J*_{CF} = 8.3 Hz), 129.33 (d, *J*_{CF} = 3.8 Hz), 116.47 (d, *J*_{CF} = 22.5 Hz), 104.08, 86.50, 86.24, 73.76, 64.23, 39.79, (17.69, 17.57, 17.50, 17.47, 17.29, 17.12: 8 C), 13.42, 13.36, 12.83, 12.71. MS (ESI) calcd for C₂₇H₄₁FN₂O₆Si₂ 587.24 (M+Na⁺), 1151.49 (2M+Na⁺); found 587.12, 1151.62.
To a solution of intermediate **2b** (332 mg, 0.588 mmol) in dry THF (12 ml) was added TBAF (1M in THF, 1.18 ml, 1.18 mmol), and the reaction mixture was stirred at room temperature for 45 minutes. The solvent was evaporated, and the residue was purified by silica gel column chromatography (7 to 8% EtOH in CH₂Cl₂), which yielded compound **3b** (171 mg, 90%) as a white solid. ¹H NMR (300 MHz, CDCl₃:MeOD = 5:2) δ 7.48 (s, 2H, ArH), 7.22 (t, 2H, *J* = 8.1 Hz, ArH), 5.65 (t, 1H, *J* = 7.2 Hz, H-1'), 5.60 (s, 1H, H-5), 4.57 (m, 1H, H-3'), 3.87-3.70 (m, 3H, H-4' and H-5'), 3.06-2.93 (m, 1H, H-2'), 2.03-1.92 (m, 1H, H-2'). ¹³C NMR (75 MHz, CDCl₃:MeOD = 5:2) δ 163.77 (d, *J*_{CF} = 252 Hz), 163.12, 155.95, 151.04, 129.81 (d, *J*_{CF} = 9.1 Hz), 128.91 (d, *J*_{CF} = 3.8 Hz), 116.20 (d, *J*_{CF} = 21.9 Hz), 104.20, 88.23, 87.56, 70.99, 62.31, 37.59. MS (ESI) calcd for C₁₅H₁₅FN₂O₅ 345.09 (M+Na⁺), 667.18 (2M+Na⁺); found 345.0, 666.85. HRMS (ESI) calcd for C₁₅H₁₅FN₂O₅ 345.0857 (M+Na⁺); found 345.0867.
- Synthesis of 6-(4-fluorophenyl)-2'-deoxyuridine-5'-monophosphate 4b:** To a solution of compound **3b** (127.6 mg, 0.396 mmol) and proton sponge (132 mg, 0.61 mmol) in 2.1 ml of (MeO)₃P=O was added POCl₃ (56 µl, 0.61 mmol) in one portion at 0 °C, and the reaction mixture was stirred at 0 °C for 3 h. The reaction mixture was poured into ice/H₂O and brought to pH 8-9 with 1M NaOH, then the volatiles were removed *in vacuo*. The residue was purified by silica gel column chromatography (2-propanol/NH₄OH/H₂O = 85:10:5→75:15:10) followed by RP-HPLC (30mM aq TEAB/CH₃CN = 90:10→85:15, 16 ml/min). Next, the phosphates were subjected to ion exchange (Dowex 50 WX-8, Na⁺) and lyophilized, yielding title compound **4b** (32 mg, 18%) as a white solid. ¹H NMR (500 MHz, D₂O) δ 7.52 (br s, 2H, ArH), 7.29 (m, 2H, ArH), 5.75 (dd, 1H, *J* = 8.8, 4.4 Hz, H-1'), 5.74 (s, 1H, H-5), 4.53 (m, 1H, H-3'), 4.01-3.95 (m, 1H, H-5'), 3.92-3.86 (m, 1H, H-5'), 3.85-3.78 (m, 1H, H-4'), 2.96-2.89 (m, 1H, H-2'), 2.10-2.01 (m, 1H, H-2'). ¹³C NMR (125 MHz, D₂O) δ 165.17, 163.34 (d, 1C *J*_{CF} = 247.5 Hz), 156.92, 151.13 129.93 (d, 2C, *J*_{CF} = 8.8 Hz), 128.19, 115.73 (d, 2C, *J*_{CF} = 22.5 Hz), 103.36, 86.80, 84.87 (d, 1C, *J*_{CF} = 7.5 Hz), 70.65, 63.60 (d, 1C, *J*_{CF} = 3.8 Hz), 35.99. ³¹P NMR (121 MHz, D₂O) δ 3.91. HRMS (ESI) calcd for C₁₅H₁₆FN₂O₈P 401.0555 (M-H⁺); found 401.0543.
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2b R=4-F-Ph
2c R=4-OMe-Ph
2e R=3-CN-Ph
2i R=styryl

3b R=4-F-Ph (90 %)
3c R=4-OMe-Ph (98 %)
3e R=3-CN-Ph (65 %)
3i R=styryl (89 %)

4b R=4-F-Ph (18 %)
4c R=4-OMe-Ph (33 %)
4e R=3-CN-Ph (19 %)
4i R=styryl (24 %)

Table 1

Table 1. Liebeskind cross-coupling reaction of **1** with various boronic acids or their esters.

Entry	compound	R	yield (%)
1	2a		79
2	2b		84
3	2c		64
4	2d		72
5	2e		66
6	2f		0
7	2g		0
8	2h		33 ^a
9	2i		76
10 ^b	2j		0 ^c

^aan unseparable 5:1 mixture of **2h:1** was obtained^bboronic acid pinacol ester used, ^ccomplex reaction mixture