Thermal rearrangement of an *N*-hydroxyimidazole thiocarbamoyl derivative as a simple entry into the 4-thioimidazole motif

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Dedicated to Professor António M. d'A. Rocha Gonsalves on the occasion of his 70th birthday

Abstract
A thermal rearrangement of a thio-ester derivative of *N*-hydroxyimidazole gives rise, in a clean reaction, to the corresponding 4- and 2-thiol ester derivatives in a 1 : 1 ratio.

Keywords: Sigmatropic rearrangements, 4-thioimidazole, thiocarbamoylation

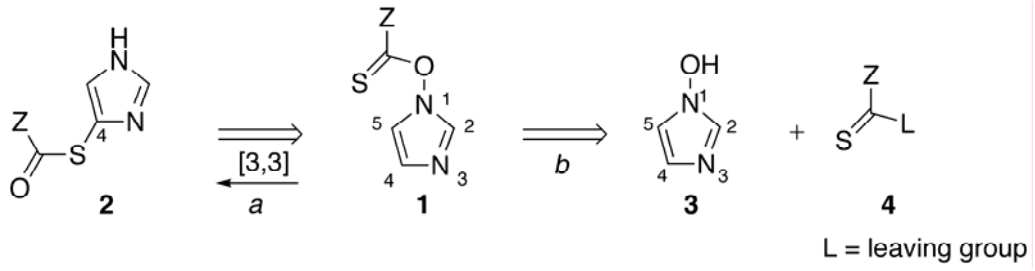
Introduction

Imidazole is a heterocycle which appears often in natural products of great importance, such as peptides, amino acids and alkaloids.[1] Its role in general acid-base catalysis has secured it an undisputed prominence among commonly encountered heterocycles, and explains its crucial action in the mechanism of enzymes.[2] Often the imidazole ring has suffered further metabolism and may appear substituted with heteroatoms, but to this date there is no simple direct way to introduce a sulfur into position 4 of such a heterocycle.[3]

In connection with the need to introduce a sulfur, we sought to use a thermally induced rearrangement as was earlier disclosed by us for ene-hydroxylamine derivatives.[4,5] The sulfur atom is, in this strategy, part of a reactive thiocarbonyl, a functional group which can modulate molecular reactivity, and has found ample use in synthesis.[6] We report here our results on a formal sigmatropic rearrangement to achieve this goal.

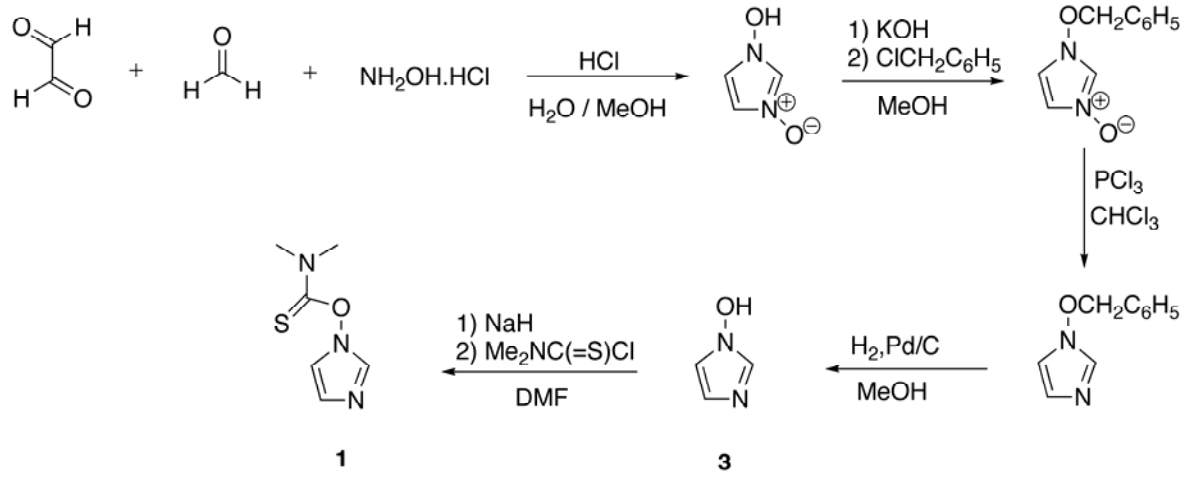
Results and Discussion

The substrate selected, the imidazole thiocarbonyl derivative **1**, could, in principle through a [3,3]-sigmatropic rearrangement, deliver the sulfur to C-4 of the heterocycle to give rise to **2** (Scheme 1, *a*). By a simple retrosynthesis access to **1** was reduced to the synthesis of *N*-hydroxyimidazole (**3**), since there are compounds of type **4** commercially available (Scheme 1, *b*).



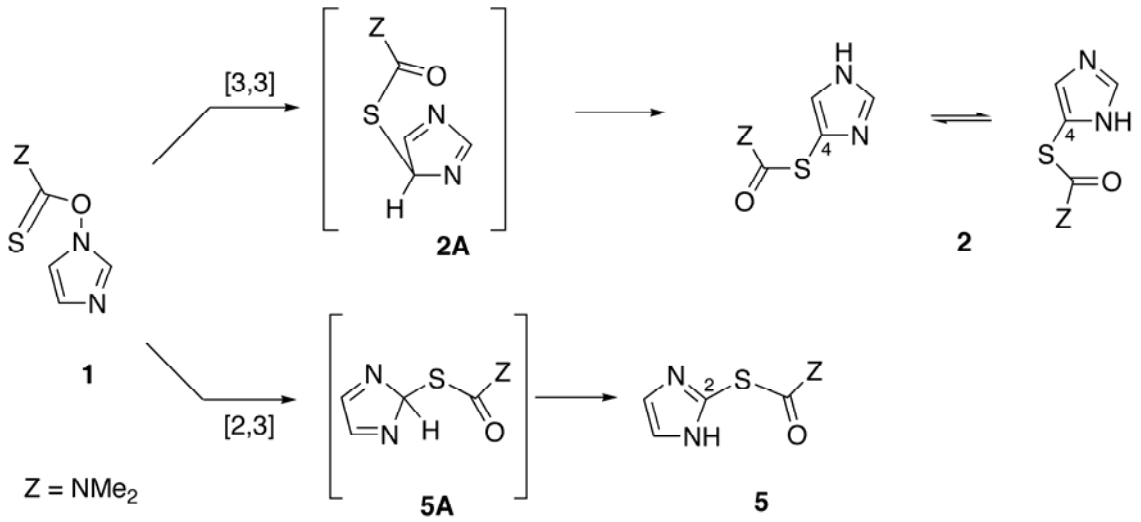
Scheme 1. Retrosynthetic analysis for **2** involving a [3,3]-sigmatropic rearrangement.

The actual synthesis of compound **1** (Z = NMe_2) is shown in Scheme 2, where for the steps leading to **3** literature procedures were used.[7,8] The appropriate thiocarbamoyl chloride was then reacted with compound **3** to afford target **1** in 88% yield as a low melting yellow solid.



Scheme 2. Synthesis of **1**.

The rearrangement of **1** was initially conducted in a 0.09 M solution in chlorobenzene at 140 °C and found by TLC and ^{1}H NMR monitoring to be completed within one hour, leading only to two products, namely the expected compound **2** and another compound **5** in ratio of 1 : 1 (Scheme 3).



Scheme 3. Thermal rearrangement of compound **1** to give the isomers **2** and **5**.

Mass spectrometry of **2** and **5** showed that both products were isomeric with the starting material, with an M^+ consistent with the molecular formula $C_6H_9N_3OS$. While the IR showed the presence in both of carbonyl stretching at 1667 (for **2**) and 1681 cm^{-1} (for **5**), the ^{1}H-NMR showed that while the thio group had moved to the expected position 4 in **2** (absence of the proton at carbon-4), in compound **5** the same group had occupied the position at carbon-2 (absence of the proton at carbon-2).

Reactions in other solvents were also assessed and the results are collected in the Table 1. The ratio of products remained close to 1:1 (Table 1, *cf.* entries 1 to 4), except for the reaction conducted in benzene where the yield of compound **5** dropped 13% in relation to that of **2** in a slow reaction over six days (entry 5).

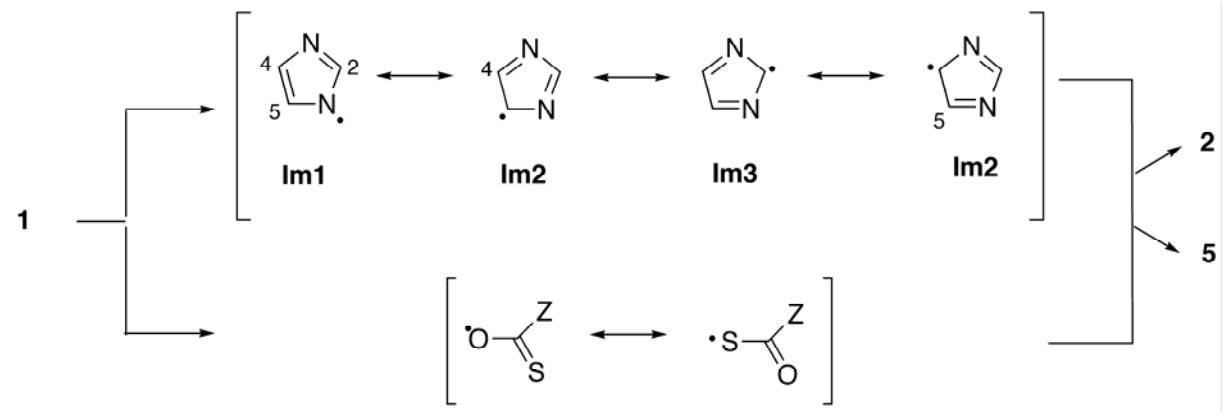
Table 1. Thermal rearrangement of compound **1** giviing compounds **2** and **5**

Entry	Solvent[a]	Temperature [°C]	Time	Yield **2** [%][b]	Yield **5** [%][b]	*Ratio* **2** : **5**
1	Diphenyl ether	265	3 min	50	50	1 : 1
2	*o*-Dichlorobenzene	180	30 min	50	50	1 : 1
3	Chlorobenzene	140	60 min	50	47	1.06 : 1
4	Toluene	110	24 h	45	43	1.05 : 1
5	Benzene	80	6 d	47	34	1.38 : 1

[a] Solutions 0.09 *M*. [b] Isolated yields.

A possible mechanism is presented in Scheme 3. While compound **2** appears to result from a straighforward [3,3]-sigmatropic rearrangement *via* **2A**, compound **5** could result from a [2,3]-sigmatropic rearrangement through an intermediate **5A**.[9] The intermediacy of a possible radical

pathway cannot be ruled out. If radicals are indeed involved, the fact that two canonical equivalent forms are possible for **Im2** (Scheme 4) would favour formation of **2**, whereas preferential formation of **5** would be expected on account of spin densities alone. The observed 1:1 ratio of products could then imply that both effects cancel each other.



Scheme 4. Possible radicals involved in the reaction pathway for compounds **2** and **5**.

The calculated spin density of the imidazoyl radical, using 6-311++G(3df,3pd), (*cf.* Experimental – General Procedures) at carbon-4 (and -5) is 0.35, while at carbon-2 this value increases to 0.50, giving a ratio of spin densities at C-4 (**Im2)**/C-2 (**Im3)** of 1.4:1. Inspection of earlier literature shows a similar trend,[10] and Solé's calculations of the spin density of a π-type imidazoyl radical at C-4 (and C-5) found a value of 0.0952, while at C-2 the value increased to 0.1607,[11] resulting in a similar ratio of 1.2:1, closer to the ratio of products found. Of course if radicals are indeed involved they would have to be associated within a tight radical pair, since no dimeric products were detected.

Experimental Section

General Procedures. Melting points were determined with a Reichert Thermovar hot-stage microscope and are uncorrected. Chromatography was performed using E. Merck silica gel 60 (70-230 mesh). Preparative thin-layer chromatography (PTLC) was performed on plates precoated with silica gel GF_{254} (0.5 mm). Infrared spectra (IR) were recorded with a Fourier Perkin-Elmer 157G and 683 infrared spectrometers and the frequencies reported in cm^{-1}. Nuclear magnetic resonance spectra (^1H NMR and ^{13}C NMR) were obtained with a Bruker ARX 400. Chemical shifts are reported in ppm downfield from tetramethylsilane. Mass spectra were obtained on a mass spectrometer GC-TOF Micromass GTC. All solvents were purified by standard methods.

Calculations were performed with the Gaussian 03 software[12] at the DFT level using the hybrid functional B3LYP[13] and the 6-311++G(3df,3pd) basis set.[14] Full geometry optimization was performed for all species in the gas phase, and the optimized geometries were used for the calculations.

Thiocarbamoylation of *N*-hydroxy-imidazole to afford thiocarbamoyl imidazole 1

To a stirred solution of *N*-hydroxyimidazole (**3**) (20 mg, 0.24 mmol) in dry DMF (2 mL) was added NaH (60% mineral oil dispersion) (10 mg, 0.24 mmol). After the liberation of H_2 ceased (10 m), *N*,*N*-dimethylthiocarbamoyl chloride (30 mg, 0.24 mmol) in DMF (0.5 mL) was added dropwise, and the reaction allowed to proceed for a further 10 min. The reaction was stopped by adding H_2O (2 mL) and extracting the mixture with AcOEt (5 x 2 mL), separating and drying the organic phase with Na_2SO_4 and evaporating the solvent under vacuum. The solid residue obtained was purified by column chromatography (SiO_2, EtOAc) to yield the *title compound* **1**, as a yellow solid, 35 mg (88%); mp 43–45 ºC (Et_2O); IR (neat) ν: 3115, 2926, 2854, 1556, 1400 1281, 1259, 1176, 1066 cm^{-1}; ^{1}H-NMR ($CDCl_3$, 400 MHz) δ_H: 7.56 (s, 1H), 7.02 (s, 2H), 3.43 (s, 3H), 3.34 (s, 3H); ^{13}C-NMR ($CDCl_3$, 100.62 MHz) δ_C: 186.7 (C=S), 132.7, 125.0, 117.2, 44.9, 38.8; MS (FI): *m/z* = 172 ($[M+H]^+$, 100), 72 (C_3H_6NO, 70). Calcd for $C_6H_9N_3OS$: C, 42.09; H, 5.30; N, 24.54; S, 18.73% Found: C, 42.09; H, 5.19; N, 24.73; S, 18.69%

Thermal rearrangement of imidazole (1). In a round bottom flask a solution of **1** (30 mg, 0.18 mmol) in chlorobenzene (2 mL) was heated to reflux until disappearance of the starting material (60 min), by ^{1}H-NMR and TLC monitoring (AcOEt/MeOH, 4:1). The solvent was then evaporated and the residue purified by preparative thin layer chromatography to yield compounds **2** and **5**. Results with other solvents followed an identical protocol (Table).

4-Thiol-imidazole derivative (**2).** Yield: 15.0 mg (50%); colourless solid; Rf 0.19 (AcOEt/MeOH, 8:1); mp 121-123 ºC (AcOEt); IR (neat) ν: 3119, 2994, 2921, 1667 (C=O), 1487, 1406, 1367, 1258, 1100 cm^{-1}; ^{1}H-NMR ($CDCl_3$) δ_H: 9.46 (s, 1H, NH), 7.52 (s, 1H), 7.12 (s, 1H), 3.08 (s, 3H, CH_3), 2.99 (s, 3H, CH_3); ^{13}C-NMR ($CDCl_3$) δ_C: 167.7 (C=O), 137.3, 125.6, 123.3, 37.0; MS (FI): *m/z* = 171 (M^+, 100), 72 (C_3H_6NO, 70); HRMS: *m/z* = 171.046998 (M^+), calcd for $C_6H_9N_3OS$ 171.046634.

2-Thiol-imidazole derivative (**5).** Yield: 14.1 mg (47%); white-brownish solid; Rf 0.33 (AcOEt/MeOH, 8:1); mp 133-135 ºC (AcOEt); IR (neat) ν: 3116, 2998, 2924, 2854, 1681 (C=O), 1550, 1425, 1366, 1257, 1092 cm^{-1}; ^{1}H-NMR ($CDCl_3$) δ_H: 9.46 (s, 1H, NH), 7.13 (s, 2H), 3.05 (s, 3H, CH_3), 3.03 (s, 3H, CH_3); ^{13}C-NMR ($CDCl_3$) δ_C: 165.0 (C=O), 134.0, 124.2, 37.0; MS (FI): *m/z* = 172 (M^++H, 100), 72 (C_3H_6NO, 70); HRMS: *m/z* = 171.046634 (M^+), calcd for $C_6H_9N_3OS$ 171.046677.

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