Fulvenes and Thermochromic Ethylenes. Part LXVIII. The Stereochemistry of the Wittig–Horner Reaction with Fulvenic and Related Ketones

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The Wittig–Horner reaction with asymmetrically substituted derivatives of 5H-dibenzo[a,d]cyclohepten-5-one, 10,11-dihydro-5H-dibenzo[a,d]cyclohepten-5-one, and thioxanthen-9-one has been shown to yield mixtures of two geometrical isomers. The isomers have not been isolated, but their presence has been proven by t.l.c., electric dipole moment measurements, and n.m.r. spectroscopy; the cis–trans ratios determined by these methods are 1:1 in the first and third cases, and 1:2 in the second.

The exocyclic double bond in fulvenes and heptafulvenes is usually not considered a 'normal' double bond because of its dipolar character in the ground state. Nevertheless, the existence of cis- and trans-isomers with respect to this bond has been established. In some cases [e.g. 2-nitro-9-(4-nitrobenzylidene)fluorene and 2-bromo-9-(4-nitrobenzylidene)fluorene] stereoisomers have been isolated; but, as in these substances the para-nitro-group affects the polarity of the exocyclic bond, conclusions drawn from these cases cannot necessarily be generalized.

In the recently reported syntheses of 3-chloro-5-(4-cyanobenzylidene)-5H-dibenzo[a,d]cycloheptene (I), 3-chloro-5-(4-cyanobenzylidene)-10,11-dihydro-5H-dibenzo[a,d]cycloheptene (II), and 2-chloro-9-(4-cyanobenzylidene)thioxanthen (III) by the Wittig–Horner reaction, only one product was isolated; although these substances could in principle exist as two stereoisomers (cis and trans), there was no indication that more than one product was obtained. The Wittig–Horner reaction sometimes favours the formation of only one of the two possible geometrical isomers; in the cases under discussion it was therefore not clear whether the Wittig–Horner reaction was stereospecific (yielding either the cis- or the trans-isomer) or whether the exocyclic 'fulvenic' double bond had so low an energetic barrier to rotation as to make cis–trans isomerism impossible. However, further investigations have now shown that the Wittig–Horner reaction gives not a single compound, but a mixture of two well defined geometrical isomers. These isomers have not been isolated; their existence and nature have been established by a study of their physical properties.

Thin-layer Chromatography.—T.l.c. on silica gel did not reveal the presence of two isomers in the Wittig–


Horner reaction products. However, when silica gel impregnated with silver nitrate was used, two spots of similar intensity were easily detected in u.v. light.

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\begin{align*}
&cis \quad \begin{array}{c}
\text{X} = CH_2CH_2, \quad \text{Y} = Cl \\
\text{trans} \quad \begin{array}{c}
\text{X} = CH_2CH_2, \quad \text{Y} = Cl \\
\text{X} = S, \quad \text{Y} = Cl \\
\text{X} = CH_2CH_2, \quad \text{Y} = Me
\end{array}
\end{array}
\end{align*}
\]

This established the non-homogeneous nature of the products (I)—(III). The fact that the separation is effected by silver nitrate further suggests that the two species may be geometrical isomers.

### TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substance</th>
<th>Isomer</th>
<th>Angle (°) between the moments of the two polar groups</th>
<th>Calculated moment (D)</th>
<th>Experimental moment (D)</th>
<th>Percentage of isomer present</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(I)</td>
<td>cis</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>5.26</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>trans</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td></td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(II)</td>
<td>cis</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>trans</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td></td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(III)</td>
<td>cis</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>trans</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td></td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substance</th>
<th>(a')</th>
<th>(b')</th>
<th>(P/\text{cm}^2)</th>
<th>(R/\text{cm}^3)</th>
<th>(\mu/\text{D})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(I)</td>
<td>25.99</td>
<td>-1.35</td>
<td>459.1</td>
<td>104.6</td>
<td>4.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30.12</td>
<td>-1.77</td>
<td>521.7</td>
<td>166.1</td>
<td>4.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(II)</td>
<td>29.52</td>
<td>-1.25</td>
<td>514.6</td>
<td>100.9</td>
<td>4.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30.42</td>
<td>-0.52</td>
<td>526.2</td>
<td>118.9</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(III)</td>
<td>23.31</td>
<td>-1.39</td>
<td>420.4</td>
<td>107.1</td>
<td>3.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25.78</td>
<td>-1.69</td>
<td>461.7</td>
<td>116.6</td>
<td>4.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dipole Moment Measurements.—As each of the compounds (I)—(III) contains two well defined polar groups (CN and Cl) electric dipole measurements were used for the study of their conformation. The dipole moment of each isomer can be calculated by vector addition of known group moments (Table 1). There is some uncertainty with regard to the geometry of the molecules investigated, which are known to be non-planar. A previous study of the conformation of 5H-dibenz[a,d]cyclohepten-5-one and of 10,11-dihydro-5H-dibenz[a,d]cycloheptene-5-one has shown the Dreiding models to represent such compounds accurately. The same procedure was applied here, and Dreiding models of the three compounds were used for the measurement of intramolecular angles. For the vector calculations the moments of the unchlorinated compounds, 5-(4-cyanobenzylidene)-5H-dibenz[a,d]cycloheptene, 5-(4-cyanobenzylidene)-10,11-dihydro-5H-dibenz[a,d]cycloheptene, and 9-(4-cyanobenzylidene)thioxanthen (Table 2), were taken as being directed along the C≡N bond (although, because of a small contribution of the polycyclic system to the moment, this is only an approximation). The group moment of C–Cl (taken as 1.58 D) was then added at the angle determined on the model (given in Table 1). This yields for each compound two calculated values of the moment (one for the cis- and one for the trans-isomer), differing by as much as 1.5 D. Comparison of these calculated moments with the measured values (Table 2) not only confirms that the reaction products are mixtures of isomers, but permits a rough evaluation of the proportion of each isomer present, about 1 : 1 in the cases of the 5H-dibenz[a,d]cycloheptene and thioxanthen derivatives (I) and (III) and about 1 : 2 (cis to trans) in the case of the 10,11-dihydro-5H-dibenz[a,d]cycloheptene derivative (II) (Table 1).

Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Study.—The presence of the two geometrical isomers was unequivocally proven by a detailed n.m.r. study. Comparison of the spectra of 9-(4-cyanobenzylidene)thioxanthen and of its 2-chloro-derivative (III) showed only one \(\alpha\)-proton absorption (at 6.85 p.p.m.) for the parent compound, but two distinct signals (6.81 and 6.85 p.p.m.) for the chlorinated one; these were assigned to the two isomeric forms in a 1 : 1 ratio. However, no similar double signals were observed in the spectra of 3-chloro-5-(4-cyanobenzylidene)-5H-dibenz[a,d]cycloheptene (I) and its 10,11-dihydro-analogue (II). This fact was attributed to insufficient nonequivalence of the \(\alpha\)-protons in the two isomers. In

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order to increase the sensitivity of the method the corresponding 3-methyl derivatives, (IV) and (V), were prepared. The 3-methyl signal proved to be a sensitive probe for the detection of the two possible stereoisosomers. In the methyl absorption region two clearly distinct signals could be seen, at 2.18 and 2.42 p.p.m. for (IV) and at 2.14 and 2.35 p.p.m. for its 10,11-dihydro-analogue (V). From a comparison with the spectra of the parent ketones, the high-field absorption was assigned to the cis- and the low-field one to the trans-isomer. The relative intensities of the two methyl bands showed the cis–trans ratios to be 1:1 in the case of (IV) and 1:2 for (V).

The exocyclic α-proton in the 3-methyl compounds also gave rise to two clear signals [at 6.46 and 6.49 p.p.m. for (IV) and at 6.75 and 6.78 p.p.m. for (V)]. The isomer ratios found by this method agree with those estimated from the dipole moment studies.

A temperature-dependence study of both the methyl and the exocyclic α-proton absorptions showed no change up to 180 °C. The barrier to rotation about the exocyclic double bond is apparently high enough not to allow a significant exchange of the sites of the substituents below 180 °C.

An additional effect was observed in the temperature variation study of compounds (II) and (V). The methylene protons at positions 10 and 11 in both the 3-chloro- and the 3-methyl derivative resonate at 3.18 p.p.m. The signal is a well resolved AAB′B′ multiplet at −55 °C, coalescing at room temperature and becoming a very sharp singlet at 112 °C. This allows an estimate of the inversion energy of the bridge carbon atoms: $\Delta G^\ddagger = 15$ kcal mol$^{-1}$.

Thus, in the cases studied, the Wittig–Horner reaction yields a mixture of two geometrical isomers. As the double bonds do not show a low energy barrier to rotation, the geometrical isomers must be distinct chemical species in solution.

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**Experimental**

The synthesis of compounds (I)—(III) has been previously described.  
5-(4-Cyanobenzylidine)-3-methyl-5H-dibenzo[a,d]cycloheptene (IV).—A mixture of diethyl 4-cyanobenzylphosphonate (5.06 g, 0.02 mol), 3-methyl-5H-dibenzo[a,d]cycloheptene-5-one 9 (2.2 g, 0.01 mol) and 50% sodium hydride (0.96 g, 0.02 mol) in dimethyl sulfoxide (50 ml) was heated at 100° for 24 h. The product was chromatographed on neutral alumina with benzene as eluant and recrystallized from cyclohexane; yield 80%, m.p. 179–180° (Found: C, 89.9; H, 5.5; N, 4.4; $C_{26}H_{25}N$ requires C, 90.3; H, 5.3; N, 4.4%). $\delta_{\text{max}}$ (KBr) 2230, 1600, 1450, 1180, 910, 830, and 765 cm$^{-1}$; $\lambda_{\text{max}}$ (EtOH) 206 nm (log $e$ 4.41); $\delta$ (CDCl$_3$) 7.50–6.90 (11H, m), 6.91 (2H, s), 6.49 and 6.48 (each s, total 1H), and 2.42 and 2.18 p.p.m. (each s, total 3H).

5-(4-Cyanobenzylidine)-10,11-dihydro-3-methyl-5H-dibenzo[a,d]cycloheptene (V).—This was prepared analogously from 3-methyl-10,11-dihydro-5H-dibenzo[a,d]cyclohepten-5-one.  
The product was recrystallized from cyclohexane; yield 28%, m.p. 156–159° (Found: C, 90.1; H, 6.1; N, 4.4%). $C_{26}H_{25}N$ requires C, 89.7; H, 5.9; N, 4.4%). $\delta_{\text{max}}$ (KBr) 2235, 1560, 1450, 1180, 920, 820, and 760 cm$^{-1}$; $\lambda_{\text{max}}$ (EtOH) 305 nm (log $e$ 4.32); $\delta$ (CDCl$_3$) 7.50–6.90 (11H, m), 6.78 and 6.65 (each s, total 1H), 3.18 (4H, s), and 2.35 and 2.14 p.p.m. (each s, total 3H).

Thin-layer Chromatography.—The reaction products were chromatographed on plates coated with silver nitrate–silica gel (1:3), with light petroleum–ether (3:2) as developer. U.v. light revealed two spots of comparable magnitude in each case studied; $R_f$ values: (I) 0.35, 0.47; (II) 0.37, 0.40; (III) 0.22, 0.34.

Dipole Moments.—The moments were measured by the heterodyne beat method and calculated according to the procedure of Halverstadt and Kumler, as previously described. The data are summarized in Table 2.

Nuclear Magnetic Resonance.—The n.m.r. studies were carried out on a Varian HA 100D spectrometer at 100 MHz with probe temperature 31.5 °C. [5H]Chloroform was used as solvent at room and at lower temperatures, and perchlorobutadiene at elevated temperatures. In all measurements tetramethylsilane or hexamethyldisiloxane was used as internal standard.

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