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Asymmetric metal free  $\beta$ -boration of  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated imines assisted by (S)-MeBoPhozEnrico La Cascia,<sup>a,b</sup> Xavier Sanz,<sup>a,c</sup> Carles Bo,<sup>c</sup> Andrew Whiting,<sup>\*b</sup> Elena Fernandez<sup>\*a</sup>

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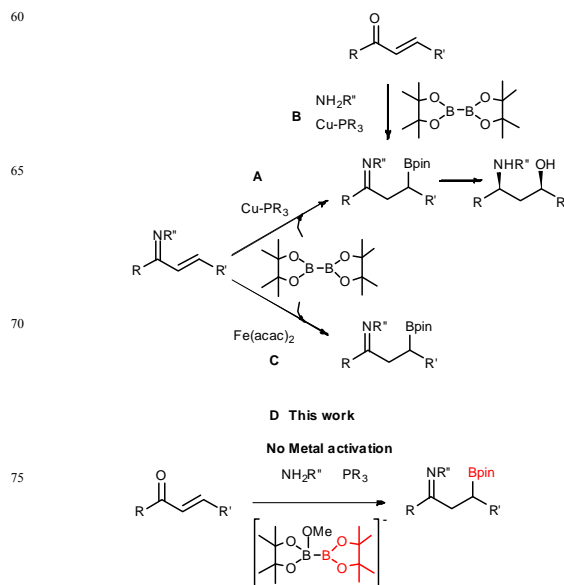
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The adduct [MeO→Bpin-Bpin]<sup>−</sup> efficiently mediates the  $\beta$ -boration of  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated imines formed *in situ*. The use of chiral phosphines as additives, and in particular the chiral phosphine (S)-MeBoPhoz, enables the catalytic asymmetric reaction to proceed with higher enantioselectivity than the analogue copper (I) mediated reaction.

Metal-free activation of diboron reagents has gained significant momentum, particularly to generate C-B bonds in an organocatalytic context.<sup>1–3</sup> However, the development of a general, highly efficient asymmetric version of this reaction is still an important goal<sup>4</sup> with only limited successful examples.<sup>2–3</sup> Therefore, Cu(I) catalysts have become the most widely used for inducing asymmetry in  $\beta$ -boration, since Yun *et al.*<sup>5</sup> discovered that copper catalysts modified with chiral phosphines can activate diboron reagents, such as bis(pinacolato)diboron (B<sub>2</sub>pin<sub>2</sub>), and catalyze the borylation of  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated carbonyl compounds with high levels of enantioselectivity, in the presence of MeOH.<sup>6</sup> In that context, we found that this approach might enable efficient access to  $\gamma$ -aminoalcohols from the corresponding  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated imines.<sup>7</sup> The optimal combination amine (for imine formation) then copper source and chiral ligand, followed by careful selection of reducing reagent, has provided a convenient methodology to obtain  $\gamma$ -aminoalcohols in a highly diastereo- and enantioselective manner (Scheme 1, pathways A and B).<sup>7</sup> The unique attempt to perform the  $\beta$ -boration of (E)-1-phenyl-N-(4-phenylbutan-2-ylidene)-methanamine, in the absence of Cu(I) salts as precatalysts, required the substrate preactivation by Lewis acidic Fe(II) and Fe(III) salts (Scheme 1, pathway C).<sup>8</sup>

Here, we develop an asymmetric organocatalytic approach to generate C-B bonds in the  $\beta$ -position of an unsaturated imine, *i.e.* Scheme 1, pathway D, as an alternative strategy to synthesize  $\gamma$ -aminoalcohols. Towards this end, we focus our efforts on the *in situ* generation of a model  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated imine, *i.e.* (E)-1-phenyl-N-(4-phenylbutan-2-ylidene)methanamine, from 4-phenyl-3-buten-2-one (1) and benzylamine in THF with the dehydrating reagent, MK10.<sup>7a,d</sup> After 6 hours, the boron reagent bis(pinacolato)diboron (B<sub>2</sub>pin<sub>2</sub>), is added to the intermediate  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated imine, however, even when the reaction was performed at 70 °C, no  $\beta$ -borated product 2a was observed (Table 1, entry 1). The addition of base and MeOH to activate the diboron, *via* quaternization, was also insufficient at promoting the  $\beta$ -boration (Table 1, entry 2), *unless* a small amount of phosphine

(10 mol% PCy<sub>3</sub>) was added to the reaction (see Table 1, entry 3). However, the replacement of the base by the phosphine alone was not enough to activate the diboron (Table 1, entry 4). It seems, therefore, that the base/MeOH combination is essential for the diboron activation and that the role of the phosphine could be related to a similar pre-activation of the substrate as we have previously observed in the analogue metal-free  $\beta$ -boration of  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated carbonyl compounds, which is also assisted by phosphines.<sup>9</sup> Isolated yields were given on the corresponding  $\gamma$ -amino alcohols by reduction with NaBH<sub>4</sub> in methanol and oxidation with H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> in NaOH.


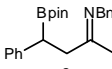
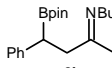
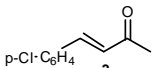
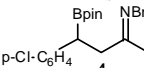
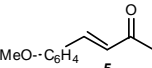
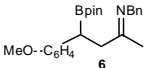
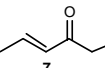
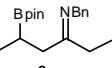
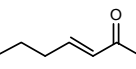
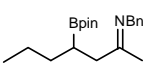
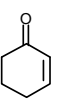
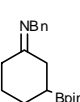


**Scheme 1.** A) Cu catalyzed  $\beta$ -boration of  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated imines (*ref* 7a,b,c); B) Cu catalyzed  $\beta$ -boration of *in situ* formed  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated imines (*ref* 7d,e,f); C) Fe(II) activation of  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated imines towards the  $\beta$ -boration reaction (*ref* 8); D) Organocatalytic  $\beta$ -boration reaction (*this work*).

With these preliminary results in hand, we extended this observation to other ketone and amine combinations, to develop a general organocatalytic methodology for the  $\beta$ -boration of  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated imines. Interestingly, *n*BuNH<sub>2</sub> was also a versatile amine for the imine formation with 1, and was compatible with the organocatalytic  $\beta$ -boration to produce quantitatively the  $\beta$ -

borated imine **2b** (Table 1, entry 5). Electron accepting and electron releasing substituents on the *para*-position of the phenyl group of the ketone substrates **3** and **5**, respectively, did not change the reaction outcome (Table 1, entries 6 and 7). Even  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated ketones with alkyl moieties in the  $\beta$ -position were equally susceptible to quantitative  $\beta$ -boration, whether cyclic or acyclic (Table 1, entries 8-10). Hence, it can be seen that the organocatalytic  $\beta$ -boration of *in situ* formed  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated imines is a general, and indeed new methodology, for the formation of  $\beta$ -borylated imines, in a one-pot reaction.

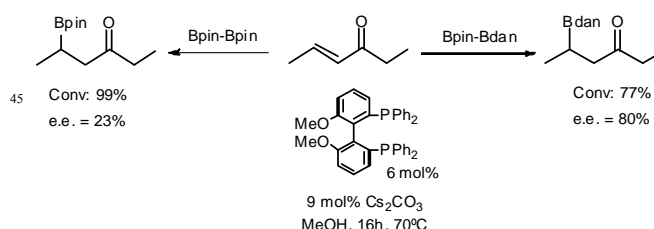
**Table 1.** *In situ*  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated imines formation followed by organocatalytic  $\beta$ -boration with  $B_2pin_2$ <sup>a</sup>

<p>15</p> <p>20</p> <p>1) <math>NH_2R''</math> / MK-10 25°C, (6h)</p> <p>2) <math>[MeO \rightarrow Bpin-Bpin]</math> 70°C, (12h) No metal</p> <p>1) <math>NaBH_4</math> 2) <math>H_2O_2</math> NaOH</p> <p>R' OH NHR''</p>				
Entry	Substrate	Additives	Product	%Conv <sup>b</sup> [ $\gamma$ ] <sup>c</sup>
1		-----		-----
2	"	$CS_2CO_3/MeOH$	"	-----
3	"	$PCy_3/CS_2CO_3/MeOH$	"	99 [56]
4	"	$PCy_3$	"	-----
5 <sup>d</sup>	"	$PCy_3/CS_2CO_3/MeOH$		90 [66]
6		$PCy_3/CS_2CO_3/MeOH$		99 [47]
7		$PCy_3/CS_2CO_3/MeOH$		96 [37]
8		$PCy_3/CS_2CO_3/MeOH$		95 [51]
9		$PCy_3/CS_2CO_3/MeOH$		99 [68]
10		$PCy_3/CS_2CO_3/MeOH$		97 [30]

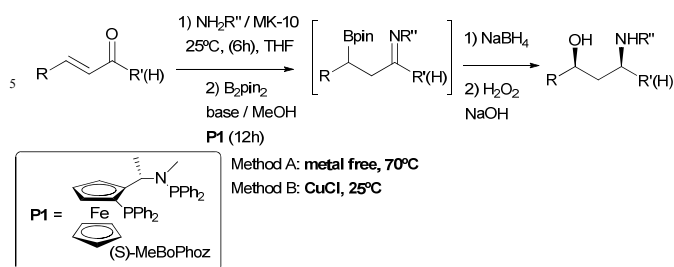
<sup>a</sup>Standard conditions: ketone (0.5 mmol),  $NH_2Bn$  (0.5 mmol), THF (2mL), MK-10 (140 mg),  $B_2pin_2$  (1.1eq),  $CS_2CO_3$  (15 mol%), MeOH (2.5 eq),  $PCy_3$  (10 mol%). <sup>b</sup>Conversion determined by  $^1H$  NMR spectroscopy.

<sup>c</sup>Isolated Yield calculated as *syn*- $\gamma$ -amino alcohol (see SI for reaction conditions). <sup>d</sup> $NH_2Bu$  (0.5 mmol).

Our next step considered the possibility of inducing asymmetry into the formation of the new C-B bond using this organocatalytic approach. Hence, we proposed that chiral phosphine additives might interact with the substrate and provide an asymmetric environment for the  $\beta$ -boration with the Lewis acid-base adduct [*i.e.*  $MeO^- \rightarrow Bpin-Bpin$ ]. This concept had already been successfully demonstrated in the  $\beta$ -boration of  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated ketones with  $B_2pin_2$ <sup>2a,d</sup> or  $BpinBdan$  ( $dan=1,8$ -diaminonaphthalene) (Scheme 2),<sup>2e</sup> and the hypothesis of the role of the phosphine in the asymmetric induction has also been postulated from both an experimental and theoretical point of view.<sup>9</sup>



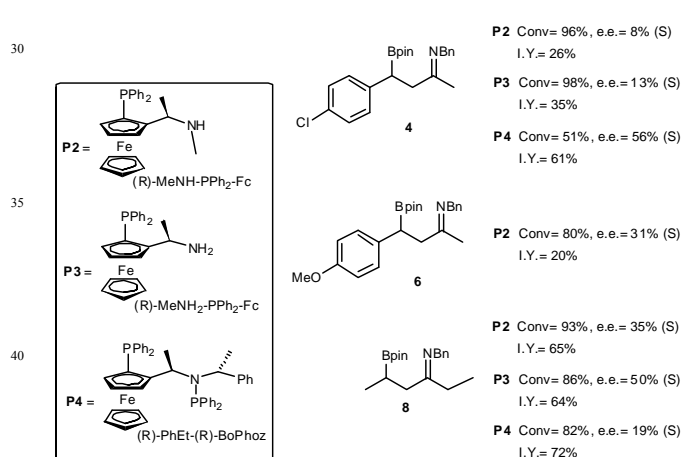
**Table 2.** Asymmetric organocatalytic versus asymmetric Cu(I) catalyzed  $\beta$ -boration of *in situ* formed  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated imines with (S)-MeBoPhoz.<sup>a</sup>



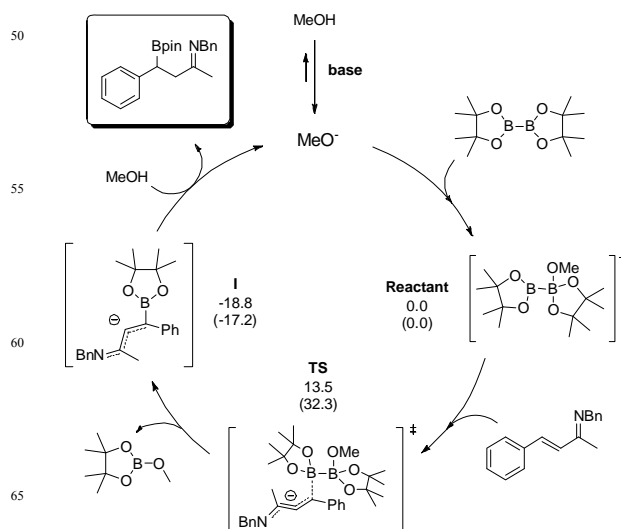
Entry	$\beta$ -boration imine	Method	%Conv <sup>b</sup>	% e.e. <sup>c</sup>	% I.Y. <sup>d</sup>
1		A	90	54	59
2	<b>2a</b>	B	99	32	40
3		A	94	53	47
4	<b>2b</b>	B	80	32	40
5		A	98	50	49
6	<b>4</b>	B	95	45	43
7		A	96	70	61
8	<b>6</b>	B	88	61	57
9		A	99	51	48
10	<b>8</b>	B	92	33	57
11		A	99	57 <sup>e</sup>	73
12	<b>14</b>	B	95	29 <sup>e</sup>	52

<sup>a</sup>Conditions for method A: ketone or aldehyde (0.5 mmol), amine (0.5 mmol), THF (2mL), MK-10 (140 mg),  $\text{B}_2\text{pin}_2$  (1.1eq),  $\text{Cs}_2\text{CO}_3$  (15 mol%), MeOH (2.5 eq), (S)-MeBoPhoz (10 mol%), 70°C; for method B: same as method A + CuCl (3mol%), 25°C. <sup>b</sup>Conversion determined by  $^1\text{H}$  NMR spectroscopy. <sup>c</sup>Enantioselectivity determined from HPLC-MS. <sup>d</sup>Isolated Yield as the corresponding *syn*  $\gamma$ -aminoalcohol (see SI for reaction conditions). <sup>e</sup>e.e. calculated on the 4-(*N*-benzhydrylacetamido)butan-2-yl acetate derivative.

To get a deeper insight into the reaction mechanism and compare with other substrates that we reported previously,<sup>[1b]</sup> we conducted DFT-based theoretical studies (Scheme 3).



**Figure 1.** Comparison of the chiral phosphine additives **P2**-**P4** for asymmetric  $\beta$ -boration of  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated imines **4**, **6** and **8**

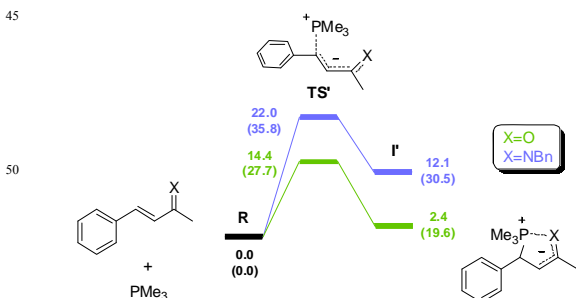


**Scheme 3.** Mechanistic proposal on the organocatalytic  $\beta$ -boration of imines. Electronic Energies and Gibbs Free Energies (in parentheses) of the involved species in relation to the [MeO→Bpin-Bpin]<sup>-</sup> adduct are shown. All energies are in kcal·mol<sup>-1</sup>.

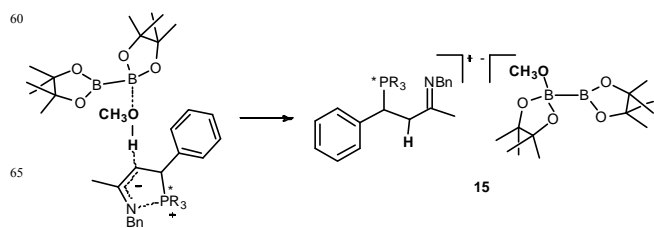
Initially, we postulated that the methoxide ion can quaternize a boron atom of the  $\text{B}_2\text{pin}_2$  molecule forming the activated adduct [MeO→Bpin-Bpin]<sup>-</sup> (chosen as the origin of the energies). This adduct can then react with the model  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated imine through a transition state **TS**, which corresponds to the nucleophilic attack of the  $\text{sp}^2$  boron atom to the  $\beta$ -carbon of the  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated imine. The structural features of the **TS** show the cleavage of the B-B bond ( $\Delta d_{\text{B-B}} = 0.257 \text{ \AA}$ ) and the formation of the new B-C bond ( $d_{\text{B-C}} = 2.078 \text{ \AA}$ ). After this transition state (**TS**) a negatively charged intermediate **I** is formed. Also in this step, a

molecule of (pin)B-OMe is released as the by-product. The anionic intermediate **I** is then protonated in the presence of the excess of B<sub>2</sub>pin<sub>2</sub> and MeOH, regenerating again the active species [MeO→Bpin-Bpin]<sup>−</sup> and hence the β-borated product. At this point, it is interesting to compare energy values computed herein, with those obtained for the metal-free β-boration of ketones, esters and aldehydes.<sup>[1b]</sup> For the model imine (*E*)-1-phenyl-*N*-(4-phenylbutan-2-ylidene)methanamine, (**2a**) the transition state **TS** is higher ( $\Delta G^\ddagger=32.3$  kcal·mol<sup>−1</sup>) than that found for acrolein ( $\Delta G^\ddagger=16.7$  kcal·mol<sup>−1</sup>), 3-buten-2-one ( $\Delta G^\ddagger=18.7$  kcal·mol<sup>−1</sup>), methyl acrylate ( $\Delta G^\ddagger=21.5$  kcal·mol<sup>−1</sup>) and styrene ( $\Delta G^\ddagger=25.1$  kcal·mol<sup>−1</sup>), but lower in energy than propylene ( $\Delta G^\ddagger=35.9$  kcal·mol<sup>−1</sup>). This fact can be explained by the lower electrophilicity of the C<sub>β</sub> of the α,β-unsaturated imine which makes it less reactive towards nucleophilic attack. Moreover, the intermediate **I** for the imine ( $\Delta G=-17.2$  kcal·mol<sup>−1</sup>) is energetically more stable than the reactants, as expected, but less stable than the corresponding analogues for the activated alkenes.<sup>[1b]</sup> This can be also rationalized by the fact that the negative charge that is generated is more stabilized by the oxygen atom than the nitrogen due to their different electronegative characters. It is worth mentioning that the reaction energies computed for this model α,β-unsaturated imine substrate are in a similar range to those previously computed for ketones, aldehydes and esters, thus justifying the similarity in the reaction conditions (T=70°C) as described above.

Finally, we addressed the role of the chiral phosphine in, not only mediating the catalytic reaction but importantly, guiding the asymmetric C-B bond formation. A possible interaction between a model phosphine of reduced steric congestion PMe<sub>3</sub>, and the α,β-unsaturated imine **2a**, is to form a phosphonium enolate intermediate (Figure 2).<sup>10–12</sup> We compared this with the corresponding α,β-unsaturated ketone-derived enolate species (Figure 2). Interestingly, the imine-derived phosphonium enamide formed from PMe<sub>3</sub> and **2a** is higher in energy than the corresponding ketone-derived phosphonium enolate intermediate, which explains why that reaction has to be carried out at 70 °C, and does not proceed readily at lower temperature. Hence, the origin of the asymmetric induction when using (*S*)-MeBoPhoz may result from protonation of the zwitterionic phosphonium enamide with MeOH, and formation of a tight ion-pair between the resulting [B<sub>2</sub>pin<sub>2</sub>·MeO]<sup>−</sup> adduct and the chiral phosphonium imine, i.e. as in **15** (Scheme 4), as we have postulated before.<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 2.** Reaction energy profile for the formation of phosphonium enolates. Electronic and Gibbs free energies (in parentheses) are given in kcal mol<sup>−1</sup>.



**Scheme 4.** Suggested formation of the ion pair ([α-H,β-PR<sub>3</sub>-4-phenylbutylaldimine]<sup>+</sup>[B<sub>2</sub>pin<sub>2</sub>·MeO]<sup>−</sup>).

## Conclusions

In conclusion, we have developed the first example of metal-free β-boration of *in situ* formed α,β-unsaturated imines, highlighting the compatibility of the organocatalytic Bpin addition with the imine formation in the presence of both ketone and amine. The reaction shows little dependence upon substrate electronics and shows consistently high conversion. Importantly, the use of chiral phosphines, such as the diphosphine (*S*)-MeBoPhoz, enables the catalytic asymmetric version to be realized with moderate asymmetric induction. Interestingly, the enantioselectivity is higher than that induced by the same chiral phosphines when modified using the corresponding Cu(I)-based catalytic system. The mechanism of the organocatalytic β-boration of these α,β-unsaturated imines, has been postulated from a theoretical point of view, and seems to necessarily involve quarternerization of the diboron reagent with methoxide. The role of the phosphine has been regarded to the ion pair formation and current work to disclose this issue will be reported in due course.

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## Notes and references

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