J|A|C|S COMMUNICATIONS

Published on Web 01/20/2010

A Bis-exTTF Macrocyclic Receptor That Associates C_{60} with Micromolar Affinity

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The search for molecular receptors for fullerenes is a very active area of research.[1−3] Various receptors based on concave recognition motifs such as cyclotriveratrylenes,[4,5] corannulenes,[6,7] cyclic paraphenyleneacetylenes,[3,8−10] and π-extended tetrathiafulvalene derivatives[11−14] have been reported, but to date, hosts that exploit porphyrins as recognizing motifs have dominated the literature both in quantity and binding strength.[2] The highest binding constants among porphyrin-based receptors correspond to Aida's bisporphyrin macrocyclic receptors. For example, a Zn(II) metalloporphyrin derivative shows a binding constant toward C_{60} of log $K_a = 5.8$, while the free base shows log $K_a = 5.9$, both in benzene at room temperature.[15] The world record for complex stability toward C_{60}, achieved by an Ir(III) metalloporphyrin, shows log $K_a = 8.1$ in 1,2-dichlorobenzene (oDCB) at room temperature.[16] It is noteworthy that in the latter case, Ir was found to bind a 6,6 junction of the fullerene in an η^2 fashion.

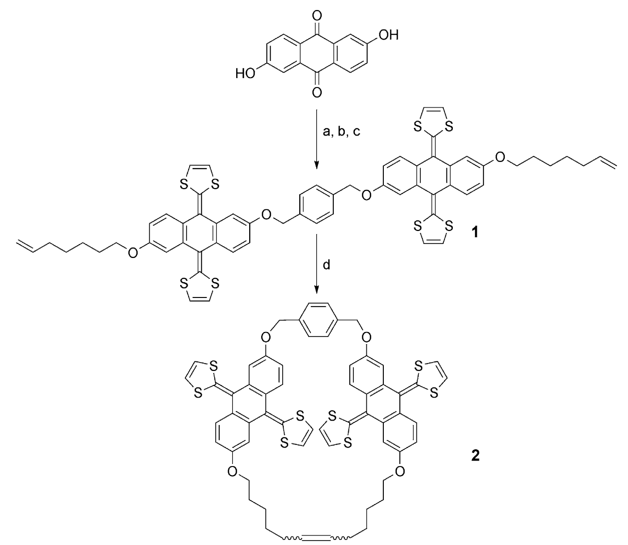
Making use of the perfect match between the concave aromatic surface of 2-[9-(1,3-dithiol-2-ylidene)anthracen-10(9*H*)-ylidene]-1,3-dithiole (exTTF) and the convex surface of the fullerenes, we reported the first exTTF-based receptor for fullerene, which was based on a very simple tweezers-like design.[11,12,14] This receptor was shown to form complexes with C_{60} of considerable stability considering its lack of preorganization (log $K_a = 3.5$ in PhCl at room temperature).[14] We now report the design, synthesis, and fullerene binding abilities of macrocycle **2**.

The design of the macrocyclic receptor conserves the basic features of the tweezers receptor but includes an alkyl linker with terminal alkenes to achieve macrocyclization through ring-closing metathesis. Molecular mechanics showed that the most suitable spacer would be heptene, which afforded flexible macrocyclic cavities of 11−13 Å. Macrocycle **2** was synthesized in just four steps (Scheme 1) and obtained as a chromatographically inseparable mixture of *E* and *Z* isomers that was used as such. The identity and purity of **2** and all of the synthetic intermediates were unambiguously established by standard spectroscopic and analytical techniques (see the Supporting Information).

The binding constants of macrocycle **2** toward C_{60} and C_{70} were estimated through three independent UV−vis titrations at room temperature. In a typical experiment, to a solution of **2** (1.0×10^{-5} M in PhCl) were added aliquots of a solution of C_{60} or C_{70} ($3-4 \times 10^{-5}$ M in PhCl) up to a total of 2−3 molar equiv, working at constant host concentration (see the Supporting Information).

The results of a titration experiment involving **2** and C_{60} are shown in Figure 1a. The spectral features are similar to what we had previously observed for exTTF tweezers.[11,14] With an increase in the concentration of C_{60}, a significant decrease in the absorption

Scheme 1. Synthesis of Macrocycle **2**[a]



[a] Conditions: (a) 7-bromo-1-heptene, K_2CO_3, NaI (cat), DMF, reflux, 2 h; (b) α,α'-*p*-dibromoxylene, K_2CO_3, NaI (cat), DMF, 60 °C, 4 h; (c) dimethyl 1,3-dithiol-2-ylphosphonate, BuLi, THF, −78 °C to rt, 2 h; (d) Grubb's first-generation catalyst, CH_2Cl_2, rt, 2 h.

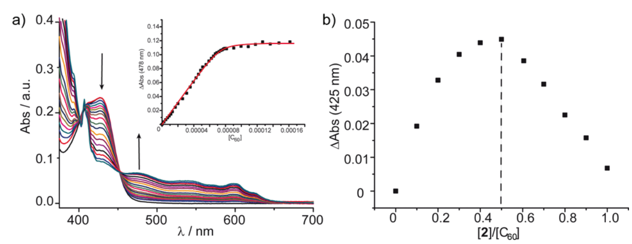


Figure 1. (a) Spectral changes in a UV−vis titration experiment for **2** vs C_{60} in PhCl at room temperature; the inset shows the binding isotherm (K_a = 1 087 200 M^{-1}, $R^2 = 0.996$). (b) Job's plot demonstrating the 1:1 stoichiometry.

at $\lambda = 425$ nm was observed, together with the appearance of a charge-transfer band centered at 478 nm with an isosbestic point at 450 nm. The expected 1:1 stoichiometry, suggested by the presence of the isosbestic point, was confirmed through continuous variation plots (Figure 1b). In the case of C_{70}, the spectral changes were less obvious because of spectral overlap (see the Supporting Information). The binding constant of **2** toward C_{60} in PhCl at room temperature was found to be log $K_a = 6.5 \pm 0.5$ (Specfit) or 6.1 ± 0.2 (Origin). This represents an increase of 3 orders of magnitude with respect to our previously reported receptors[11,14] and is one of the highest binding constants toward C_{60} reported in the literature,[1−3] illustrating the dramatic effect of preorganization.[17] In regard to

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10.1021/ja910107m

C_{70}, the binding constant was too large to be calculated precisely through UV−vis titrations.[18] With the aim of lowering the binding constant to a more reliable quantity, we changed to oDCB as the solvent. However, despite the fact that both **2** and the fullerenes are soluble in oDCB, when we approached 1:1 stoichiometry during the addition process, the solution immediately turned turbid, precluding UV−vis measurements. The mixture of *E* and *Z* isomers and the flexibility of **2** prevented the formation of single crystals suitable for X-ray diffraction, so we investigated the geometry of the complexes through density functional theory (DFT) calculations using the Becke "half-and-half" (BH&H) functional (see the Supporting Information for full computational details). Figure 2 shows the structure of the complex of (*Z*)-**2** with C_{60} calculated at the BH&H/6-31G** level.[19]

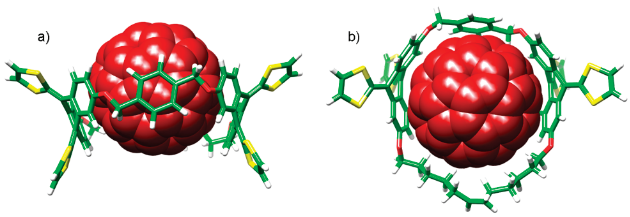

Figure 2. (a) Side view and (b) top view of the energy-minimized structure (BH&H/6-31G** level) of the (*Z*)-**2**−C_{60} complex.

The DFT calculations confirmed that **2** is a close to perfect fit for C_{60}, with both exTTFs, the aromatic xylylene linker, and the alkyl spacer closely wrapping around the fullerene unit. BH&H/6-31+G** calculations including corrections for the basis-set superposition error predicted a binding energy of -24.1 kcal mol^{-1}, which is significantly higher than that calculated for the exTTF tweezers under the same computational conditions,[11,12] in agreement with the experimental results.

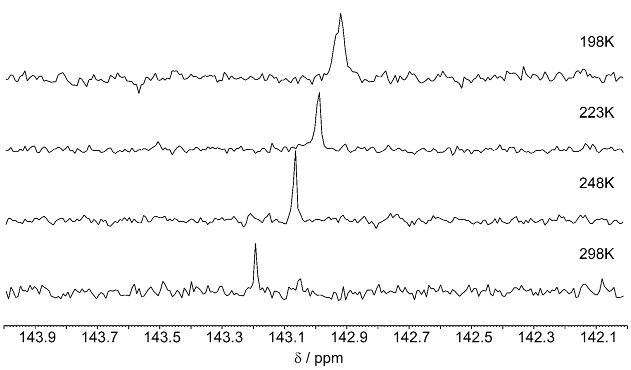

Figure 3. ^{13}C NMR spectra (75 MHz) of a mixture of C_{60} and **2** (1.5:1) in toluene-d_8 at several temperatures.

The binding event was also investigated by ^{13}C NMR spectroscopy, which confirmed the association of **2** with C_{60}. Figure 3 shows variable-temperature ^{13}C NMR spectra (75 MHz) for a mixture of C_{60} and **2** (1.5:1) in toluene-d_8. The spectra were run with a sufficient number of scans to detect the signal of C_{60} only. The signal shifted upfield and broadened upon cooling, as would be expected for the formation of the complex.[20] The association equilibrium remained rapid even at 198 K, although the significant broadening indicates that we were close to the temperature of coalescence.

In conclusion, we have described an exTTF-based macrocyclic receptor that associates C_{60} with a binding constant that is 3 orders of magnitude higher than the previous examples of exTTF-based receptors,[11,12,14] nearly 2 orders of magnitude higher than those reported for metalloporphyrin tweezers,[21,22] and even superior to most of Aida's porphyrin macrocycles, with the exception of the Rh(III)[15] and Ir(III)[16] congeners. These results definitely consolidate exTTF as one of the most suitable fragments for the molecular recognition of fullerenes. The simplicity of the synthetic route to obtain **2** augurs well for its utilization in the construction of electroactive nanostructures.[23−25] This, together with the full structural optimization of the aromatic linker and the alkyl spacer, is the main objective of our future investigations.

Acknowledgment. Financial support by the MICINN of Spain (CTQ2008-00795/BQU, CTQ2006-14987-C02-02/BQU, and CSD2007-00010), the ESF (SOHYD MAT2006-28170-E), the CAM (MADRISOLAR-2 S2009/PPQ-1533), the Generalitat Valenciana (ACOMP/2009/269), and the European FEDER funds is acknowledged. H.I. and E.M.P. thank the MICINN for an FPU Studentship and a Ramón y Cajal Fellowship, cofinanced by the European Social Fund, respectively.

Supporting Information Available: Supporting figures and experimental and computational details. This material is available free of charge via the Internet at http://pubs.acs.org.

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(17) For comparison, the linear precursor **1** showed log $K_a = 3.01$ in PhCl at room temperature.
(18) Utilizing Specfit, we were able to approximate it as log $K_a = 8.4 \pm 2.5$.
(19) The BH&H functional has been shown to provide good performance for supramolecular systems dominated by dispersion interactions (see: Zhao, Y.; Truhlar, D. G. *J. Chem. Theory Comput.* **2007**, *3*, 289). The *Z* and *E* isomers define cavities of similar size.
(20) As might be expected, the magnitude of the shielding effect is significantly smaller than that observed for porphyrin-based receptors (see ref 2) since in our case (as opposed to the strong ring currents of porphyrins) the shielding capacity of **2** is comparable to that of the aromatic solvent.
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JA910107M