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Well-Defined Dinuclear Gold Complexes for Preorganization-Induced Selective Dual Gold Catalysis

Vincent Vreeken, Daniël L. J. Broere, Anne C. H. Jans, Marianne Lankelma, Joost N. H. Reek, Maxime A. Siegler, and Jarl Ivar van der Vlugt*

Abstract: The synthesis, reactivity, and potential of well-defined dinuclear gold complexes as precursors for dual gold catalysis are explored. Using the preorganizing abilities of the ditopic PN$_3$P$_{11}$ ligand, dinuclear Au$^{I}$–Au$^{III}$ complex 1 and mixed-valent Au$^{I}$–Au$^{III}$ complex 2 provide access to structurally characterized chlorido-bridged cationic species 3 and 4 upon halide abstraction. For 2, this transformation involves unprecedented two-electron oxidation of the redox-active ligand, generating a highly rigidified environment for the Au$_{2}$ core. Facile reaction with phenylacetylene affords the α,π-activated phenylacetylide complex 5. When applied in the dual gold heterocycleaddition of a urea-functionalized alkyne, well-defined precatalyst 3 provides high regioselectivities for the anti-Markovnikov product, even at low catalyst loadings, and outperforms common mononuclear Au$^{I}$ systems. This proof-of-concept demonstrates the benefit of preorganization of two gold centers to enforce selective non-classical α,π-activation with bifunctional substrates.

Gold catalysis has flourished over the past 15 years, enabling a wide range of transformations.\[1\] More recently, dual gold catalysis has been developed successfully.\[2\] Whereas “traditional” mono-gold catalysis relies on π-activation of a substrate by a cationic Au$^{I}$ center, dual gold catalysis typically involves both σ- and π-activation (of one or two functionalities, such as C=C bonds) by two gold centers. The prevailing strategy utilizes mononuclear Au$^{I}$ complexes to induce π-activation (Scheme 1).\[3\] However, this strategy offers no handles to induce preorganization of both gold centers to specifically target well-defined σ,π-activation of, for example, unsaturated hydrocarbon C=C multiple bonds whilst avoiding π- or σ+π-coordination. Furthermore, no control over the selective binding of bifunctional substrates (such as heterocyclizations) can be achieved in this manner.

The synthesis, coordination chemistry and catalytic applications of dinuclear Au$^{I}$ complexes are well-developed.\[4,5\] The proximity of both gold centers has occasionally been credited to enhance reactivity.\[6\] However, to the best of our knowledge the competence of well-defined dinuclear σ,π-alkyne complexes in dual gold catalysis has never been reported, despite the potential benefits of two preorganized gold centers with respect to chemoselectivity and activity for this type of reaction. Additionally, facile access to dinuclear mixed-valent gold complexes might be an interesting target in the context of cascade and Au$^{I}$/Au$^{III}$ cooperative catalysis.\[7\]

The ditopic tridentate ligand PN$_3$P$_{11}$ (L$^{11}$; Scheme 1) displays versatile coordination chemistry with respect to a wide range of transition metals,\[8\] including Cu\[9\] and Ag.\[10\] Strikingly, no single complex of gold with this type of ditopic framework is known to date. Furthermore, chemistry related to the redox-active nature\[11\] of L$^{11}$ has been well-established in nickel, manganese, and thienium complexes,\[12\] but ligand redox-activity with Group 11 metals is limited to one example with Cu$^{I}$, leading to dimerization on one of the ω-positions of the L backbone.\[13\] New avenues for gold coordination chemistry and catalysis may become accessible by developing strategies to preorganize and stabilize multiple gold centers on suitable ligand platforms and to selectively bind and activate bifunctional substrates. To address these challenges, we herein 1) uncover the versatile coordination chemistry of gold using the redox-active ditopic PN$_3$P$_{11}$ ligand, 2) disclose the interesting ligand and metal-based reactivity of (mixed-valent) dinuclear species, and 3) establish well-defined pre-catalyst systems ideally suited for σ,π-activation of alkynes and demonstrate their use in highly selective dual gold catalysis.
The straightforward reaction of \( \text{PN}^{31}\text{P} \) with \( \text{AuCl(SMe}_2) \) in a 1:2 ratio provides white solid 1 (\(^{31}\text{P} \) NMR: \( \delta \) 40.9 ppm) with a \(^1\text{H} \) NMR spectrum suggestive of a \( \text{C}_2 \) symmetric species (Scheme 2). Single crystal X-ray diffraction analysis reveals an intramolecular \( \text{Au}–\text{Au} \) distance of 3.23791(17) Å, which suggests an aurophilic d\(^{8}\)-d\(^{10}\) interaction\(^{[13]} \) in the solid state (Figure 1). Reaction of 1 with one equivalent of dichloro-\( \lambda^{5}\)-iodophenylbenzene (PhICl)\(_2 \) in CH\(_2\)Cl\(_2 \) instantaneously generates a dark purple solution that shows two signals in the \(^{31}\text{P} \) NMR spectrum at \( \delta \) 44.3 (P2) and 105.3 ppm (P1). The strongly downfield shifted signal for P1 supports coordination to a \( \text{Au}^{III} \) center by site-selective two-electron \( \text{Au} \) oxidation with formation of \( \text{Au}^{II} \) derivative 2. Mass spectrometry supports an overall \( \text{Au}_2\text{Cl}_2(L) \) configuration. The \(^1\text{H} \) NMR spectrum contains one strongly upfield shifted aromatic signal at \( \delta \) 5.90 ppm but no \(-\text{NH} \) signal could be identified. X-ray structure determination confirms the sole formation of species 2, with the central deprotonated amido nitrogen coordinating to the square-planar \( \text{Au}^{III} \) center (Figure 1).

The \( \text{PN} \)-ligand backbone in 2 is severely twisted, with a C6-C1-C7-C8 torsion angle of 76.4(8)\(^o \). This distortion relates to the upfield shifted aromatic signal in the \(^1\text{H} \) NMR spectrum, which corresponds to the shielded C(6)-H hydrogen that is positioned on top of the second phenyl ring. The intramolecular \( \text{Au}–\text{Au} \) distance of 4.641 Å excludes an aurophilic d\(^{8}\)-d\(^{10}\) interaction. Cyclic voltammetry does not indicate reversible oxidation of the potentially redox-active ligand scaffold in 2.

A prerequisite for catalysis with a \( \text{AuX}(L) \) precursor (X is a halide) is the generation of a vacant coordination site by halide abstraction, for example, Ag\(^+ \) salts or a suitable Lewis acid. Addition of one equivalent of AgNTf\(_2 \) (or related silver salts or GaCl\(_3 \); see the Supporting Information) to 2, which bears multiple chlorido fragments, leads to a mixture of species according to \(^{31}\text{P} \) NMR spectroscopy. However, addition of two equivalents results in rapid decoloration of the reaction solution and generation of a single symmetric product (\(^{31}\text{P} \) NMR: \( \delta \) 40.4 ppm), suggestive of the presence of only \( \text{Au}^{III} \)-phosphine fragments. The \(^1\text{H} \) NMR spectrum shows only one methyl signal for the ditolylamine backbone and chemically identical isopropyl groups at phosphorus. Most notably, only two instead of the anticipated three aromatic hydrogen signals are observed, together with a downfield signal at \( \delta \) 10.53 ppm. This signal integrates for one hydrogen and is attributed to an \(-\text{NH} \) fragment. ESI-MS data suggest that the dinuclear complex, bearing only one chlorido ligand, remains intact during this transformation. The structure of complex 3 could be elucidated by X-ray structure determination of single crystals grown from CH\(_2\)Cl\(_2\)-pentane (Figure 2).

Clearly, halide abstraction by AgNTf\(_2 \), related silver salts, or GaCl\(_3 \) induces a highly unusual metal-based reduction of mixed-valent species 2 to yield \( \text{Au}^{II}–\text{Au} \) species 3.
(concomitant with oxidative C–C coupling of the two C–H
groups ortho to the nitrogen in the ligand backbone), to
generate a carbazole framework wherein the nitrogen is
reprotonated. The gold centers are bridged by a single
chlorido ligand, leading to an acute \( \angle \text{Au}_1-\text{Cl}_1-\text{Au}_2 \) of
81.74(4)°. Relative to “open” complex 1, the intramolecular
Au–Au distance decreased by approximately 0.16 Å in this
“closed” derivative, as a result of increased directional
positioning of the phosphine lone pairs, despite the larger
natural bite angle. To the best of our knowledge, this is the
first report of redox-chemistry occurring at the ortho C–H
positions of the PNP framework within the coordination
sphere of any transition metal. The existence of a single
chlorido bridgehead between two Au centers is relatively
rare. Notably, no single example exists of an intramolecular
Au-Cl-Au bridge stabilized by a single dinucleating ligand.
Reaction of 1 (featuring the “open” ligand) with one
equivalent of AgNTf₂ generates tetranuclear bis(chlorido)-
bridged complex 4 as a crystalline solid (\( \text{C}_{15}-\text{Au}_1-\text{Cl}_1-\text{Au}_2
96.78(4)° \)). This species is likely in equilibrium with the
dinuclear monomer in solution (see the Supporting Informa-
tion for details about complex 4).

Substitution of the chlorido bridge in these dinuclear gold
species might release a masked Au⁺-cation. Reaction of 3 with
excess phenylacetylene leads to broadening of the \(^{31}\text{P}\) NMR
signal and appearance of an additional singlet at \( \delta 43.3 \) ppm,
which converts to a single product 5 (with complete conversion
upon addition of one equivalent of AgNTf₂) in k₂CO₃. No signal corresponding to the terminal CH of the
alkyne was observed for this species by \(^{1}H\) NMR spectro-
scopy, suggesting formation of a gold(acetylide) fragment.
The overall symmetry of the complex appears to be retained
during this transformation, which points to rapid exchange of the
phenylacetylide between the two gold centers. Single
crystal X-ray structure determination corroborates the dual
interaction of the -C≡CPh ligand with the Au⁺-Au⁺ complex,
that is, \( \sigma\)-coordination of the terminal phenylacetylide carbon
C(15) to Au(1) and \( \pi\)-coordination of the triple bond system
to Au(2) (Figure 3). This is the first crystallographically
characterized intramolecular Au₃(o,\( \pi\)-acetylide) complex
with a diphosphine ligand, and serves to illustrate that
reorganization of two gold centers may lead to selective
substrate coordination. Complex 4 reacts in a similar fashion,
leading to the well-defined species 8 that was characterized
by NMR spectroscopy and mass spectrometry (see the
Supporting Information).

Having established that dinuclear complex 3 engages in
well-defined \( \sigma,\pi\)-activation of C–C triple bond systems, the
heterocyclization (intramolecular hydroamination) of urea-
functionalized alkyne 6 was selected as a proof-of-concept
reaction to probe the catalytic competence of this well-
defined Au₃ species. Markovnikov addition to generate a
di-, tri-, and tetra-membered ring (Scheme 3) involves \( \pi\)-activation by a single gold
species, whereas dinuclear \( \sigma,\pi\)-activation results in
anti-Markovnikov addition to give a five-membered ring (7; Scheme 3).[13] Using 2.5 mol % of 3 in DMF at 60°C for five
hours leads to full conversion and high regioselectivity for the
five-membered indole 7 (85 %), in accordance with a selective
\( \sigma,\pi\)-acetylide mechanism. External base (such as k₂CO₃)
inhibits the reactivity, while addition of one equivalent of AgNTf₂
with respect to the catalyst provides slightly higher
regioselectivity for 7 (90 %); presumably this is due to faster
generation of the \( \sigma,\pi\)-acetylide species. In the absence of additives (Ag⁺ or base), bis(chlorido)-bridged tetranuclear
complex 4 displays a similar preference for formation of 7.
The high regioselectivity achieved with dinuclear catalysts 3
and 4 is attributed to the ligand-enforced proximity of both
Au⁺ centers. Stoichiometric reaction of 3 and 6 shows sole
formation of the \( \sigma,\pi\)-activated substrate by ESI-MS (Supporting
Information, Figure S27).

Dilution studies were performed to investigate the effect
of decreased catalyst loading on the level of regiocontrol for the
conversion of 6 to 7 and 8. The findings clearly validate
our hypothesis, as the high regioselectivity for 7 obtained with
catalyst 3 is independent of the catalyst concentration
(Figure 4). In contrast, dilution experiments with mono-
nuclear AuCl(PBu₃)—reported as the best catalyst to form
7 by \( \sigma,\pi\)-activation[17]—result in a sharp drop in selectivity.[18]
These results demonstrate the benefits of well-defined pre-
organization of two gold centers to enforce selective
\( \sigma,\pi\)-activation and to mediate regioselective dual gold catal-
ysis with functionalized alkynes, even at low catalyst loadings.

In summary, we have demonstrated that the redox-active
PNP²⁻ ligand is a suitable framework to preorganize two
gold centers for selective \( \sigma,\pi\)-activation of functionalized
alkynes. Halide abstraction from mixed-valent Au⁺–Au⁺
complex 2 using AgNTf₂ results in highly unusual reactivity

Figure 3. Displacement ellipsoid plot (50% probability level) for the
cationic part of 5. The NTf₂⁻ counterion, lattice solvent molecules, and
hydrogen atoms are omitted for clarity. Selected bond lengths (Å) and
angles (°) : Au1–P1 2.2899(10), Au2–P2 2.2676(11), Au1–C15 2.019(5),
Au2–Ct(C15-C16) 2.201, C15-C16 1.227(6), Au1–Au2 3.1110(2), P1–
Au1-C15 176.81(13), Au1-C15-C16 147.24(4), P2-Au2-Ct(C15-C16)
174.99, C15-Ct(C16-C17) 170.0(5).

Scheme 3. Heterocyclization of 1-(ethynylphenyl)urea (6) into either
anti-Markovnikov product 7 or Markovnikov addition product 8.

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involving two-electron ligand oxidation, generating chlorido-bridged Au(I)-Au(I) species 3 bearing a highly rigidified carbazolyl backbone. Reaction with phenylacetylene enabled the first crystallographically characterized intramolecular dual gold σ,π-acetylide complex (5) supported by a single diphosphine ligand. The well-defined dinuclear Au(I) complexes are excellent precatalysts for dual gold catalysis involving selective σ,π-activation, inducing high regioselectivity in the gold-catalyzed heterocyclization of urea 6, without the need to add base or silver salts. Dilution experiments show that dinuclear catalyst 3 retains high selectivity at decreased catalyst loadings, unlike mononuclear Au(I) catalysts typically employed for this reaction. These results illustrate the benefits of preorganization of gold centers to invoke selective substrate activation in dual gold catalysis. The detailed mechanism behind the surprising conversion of 2 into 3 is currently under investigation. This ligand-to-dual two-electron transformation appears to involve several digold intermediates, including the dinuclear “monomer” of complex 4, as well as a unique Au(II)–Au(II) species supported by one PNP ligand.[19]

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[19] Because of the anticipated complexity associated with this multi-step “cascade” process, which converts 2 into 3, a detailed mechanistic investigation of this transformation is deemed beyond the scope of this study and will be reported elsewhere.

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