

Multicomponent Synthesis of Pyrrolo[3,4-*a*]carbazole-1,3-diones

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ABSTRACT:

Pyrrolocarbazoles are important structural motives present in many natural products and pharmaceuticals. Particularly, pyrrolo[3,4-*a*]carbazole-1,3-diones have attracted much attention as analogues of bioactive compounds, such as anticancer agent granulatinide. Surprisingly, only a few methods for the synthesis of these compounds have been reported in the literature, and they are almost limited to the Diel-Alder cycloaddition of 3-vinylindoles.

We have recently developed a multicomponent synthesis of polysubstituted anilines starting from α,β -unsaturated carbonyls, isocyanides and dienophiles. Here we report the application of this tandem [4+1]-[4+2] cycloaddition procedure for the synthesis of 4-amino-5-arylisoindoline-1,3-diones, which are then cyclized by means of a metal catalyzed intramolecular C-N coupling, affording structurally diverse, natural product-like pyrrolo[3,4-*a*]carbazole-1,3-diones with high yields and selectivities.

Introduction

Carbazole is a privileged heterocyclic structure, present in a wide range of naturally occurring alkaloids¹⁻² and pharmacologically active compounds.³⁻⁶ Carbazoles have also found important applications as photoactive organic functional materials, such as organic light-emitting diodes (OLEDs)⁷⁻⁸ and organic photovoltaic devices.⁹⁻¹⁰

Particularly, indolocarbazoles and the related pyrrolocarbazoles have attracted much interest for their biological properties.¹¹ For example, naturally occurring staurosporin (**1**), rebeccamycin (**2**) and granulatinide (**3**) are lead structures in the development of novel anticancer agents due to their potent kinase inhibitor activities.¹² Furthermore, some pyrrolo[3,4-*a*]carbazoles have been developed as checkpoint kinase 1 inhibitors structurally related to granulatinide,¹³ and topoisomerase II poisons.¹⁴

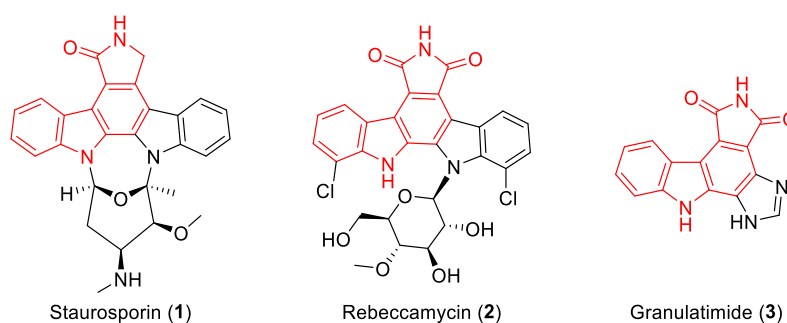


Figure 1. Bioactive isoindolopyrroles.

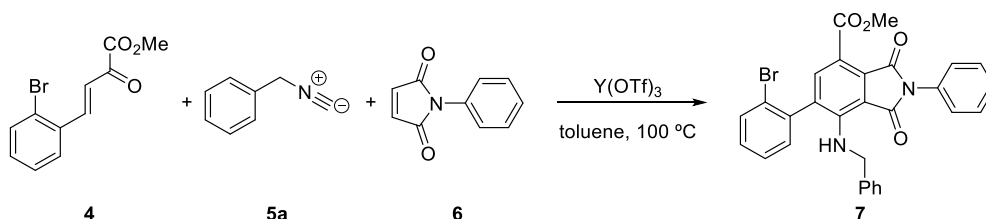
Surprisingly, little attention has been paid to the synthesis of pyrrolo[3,4-*a*]carbazoles, in spite of the many reports on the synthesis of some of their isomers, such as 3,6-dihydropyrrolo[2,3-*c*]carbazoles.¹⁵ Most of the methods to obtain [3,4-*a*]carbazoles are based on the Diels-Alder cycloaddition of 3-vinylindoles,^{13-14, 16-17} which often requires harsh reaction conditions and non-readily available starting materials.^{12-13, 15-16}

Thus, it is vital to develop new efficient and flexible syntheses of these important heterocyclic structures.

Here, we propose a two-step synthesis of pyrrolo[3,4-*a*]carbazoles by the succession of a tandem [4+1]-[4+2] cycloaddition of isocyanides, α,β -unsaturated carbonyls and maleimide dienophiles, followed by a metal catalyzed intramolecular C-N coupling of the resulting 4-amino-5-arylisoindoline-1,3-diones. Pyrrolo[3,4-*a*]carbazoles **11**¹⁸ and **17a**¹⁹ and their isoindole precursors have been previously reported by us, while pyrrolo[3,4-*a*]carbazole **17b** is a novel compound.

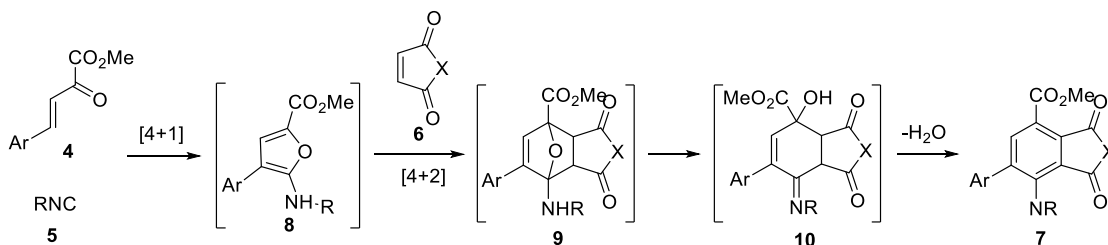
Results and Discussion

In a first approach, (*E*)-methyl 4-(2-bromophenyl)-2-oxobut-3-enoate (**4**), benzyl isocyanide (**5a**) and *N*-phenylmaleimide (**6**) were heated in toluene at 100 °C in the presence of a catalytic amount of yttrium trifluoromethanesulfonate (*Scheme 1*). In these conditions, methyl 7-(benzylamino)-6-(2-bromophenyl)-1,3-dioxo-2-phenylisoindoline-4-carboxylate (**7**) was obtained in 55% yield, as a yellow solid.¹⁸



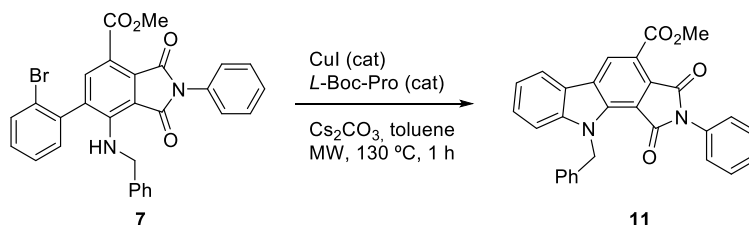
Scheme 1. Tandem [4+1]/[4+2] synthesis of isoindoline-1,3-dione (**7**).

The mechanism, outlined in *Scheme 2*, involves the [4+1] cycloaddition of α,β -unsaturated carbonyl (**4**) and isocyanide (**5**) to give unstable aminofuran (**8**). This is trapped *in situ* by maleimide (**6**) by means of a Diels-Alder reaction, leading to 7-oxabicyclo[2.2.1]heptene (**9**). Finally, oxygen ring opening and aromatization affords isoindole (**7**).



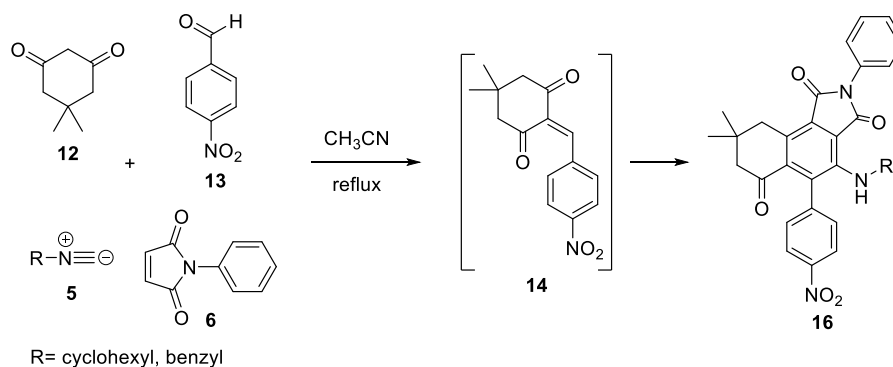
Scheme 2 Proposed mechanism for the tandem [4+1]/[4+2] cycloaddition

Copper catalyzed intramolecular N-C coupling of isoindole **7** was efficiently achieved under microwave activation in toluene, in the presence of Cs₂CO₃ and 30% mol of *L*-Boc-proline. Thus, pyrrolocarbazole **11** was obtained in an excellent yield (*Scheme 3*).¹⁸



Scheme 3. Synthesis of pyrrolo[3,4-*a*]carbazole (**11**).

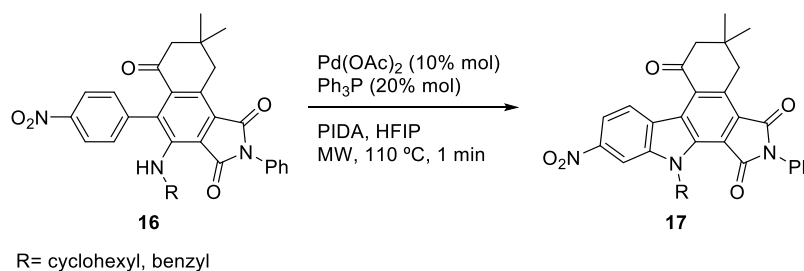
Structural diversity on final pyrrolocarbazoles could be increased by generating the starting α,β -unsaturated carbonyl compounds *in situ*. Notably, the Knoevenagel condensation of cyclic 1,3-dicarbonyls (**12**) and aldehydes (**13**) can readily generate α,β -unsaturated carbonyl compounds (**14**). Cycloaddition of these resulting heterodienes (**14**) with isocyanides (**5**) is known to afford 2-aminofuranes (**15**),²⁰⁻²¹ and subsequent Diels-Alder reaction with dienophiles (**6**) present in the reaction medium could purportedly afford tricyclic isoindoles (**16**) in the same pot (*Scheme 4*).



Scheme 4. Four-component synthesis of isoindoline-1,3-dione (**16**).

Thus, equimolar amounts of dimedone (**12**), *p*-nitrobenzaldehyde (**13**), cyclohexyl isocyanide (**5b**) and *N*-phenylmaleimide (**6**) were stirred in refluxing acetonitrile for 22 h, affording the the expected 4-(cyclohexylamino)-8,8-dimethyl-5-(4-nitrophenyl)-2-phenyl-8,9-dihydro-1*H*-benzo[*e*]isoindole-1,3,6(2*H*,7*H*)-trione (**16a**) with a 90% yield (Scheme 4).¹⁹ Interestingly, in contrast with our previous results, the addition of catalytic Y(OTf)₃¹⁸ did not improve the reaction. Analogously, the reaction with benzyl isocyanide (**5c**) affords the corresponding pentylaminoisoindole (**16b**).

In this case, dehydrogenative N-C bond forming cyclization of the cycloadducts (**16a,b**) yields straightforwardly natural product-like pyrrolocarbazoles (**17a,b**). Thus, isoindoline-1,3-dione (**16a**) was subjected to a palladium catalysed dehydrogenative cyclization, using phenyliodine(III) diacetate (PIDA) as an external oxidant.²²⁻²⁵ The reaction is completed under microwave irradiation at 110 °C in hexafluoroisopropanol (HFIP) in just one minute, affording pyrrolocarbazole **17a** in 58% yield (Scheme 5).¹⁹ Analogously, pyrrolocarbazole **17b** was obtained in similar conditions from isoindoline **16b**. Pyrrolo[3,4-*a*]carbazole-1,3-diones (**17a,b**) can be considered analogues of granulatimide (**3**) in which the position of the imidazole ring is occupied by a pyrrole-2,5-dione, while a cyclohexanone is the place of the pyrrole-2,5-dione.²⁶ Remarkably, these complex pentacyclic compounds are readily and efficiently synthesized from simple starting materials in a two-step reaction sequence.



Scheme 5. Synthesis of pyrrolo[3,4-*a*]carbazole (**17**).

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have effectively designed a straightforward and versatile synthesis of natural product-like pyrrolo[3,4-*a*]carbazole-1,3-diones. This two-step method involves a multicomponent tandem succession of [4+1] and [4+2] cycloadditions, ring opening and aromatization, followed by an intramolecular metal catalysed N-C coupling. Moreover, the first step can be combined in the same pot with a Knoevenagel condensation, substantially increasing the structural diversity attainable by this procedure.

Initially, intermediate 4-amino-5-(2-bromoaryl)isoindoline-1,3-diones were cyclized in the presence of catalytic CuI to give the corresponding pyrrolocarbazoles. Successfully, we developed a significantly improved procedure that does not require a halogen on the aryl group. Conversely, an aryl C-H is efficiently coupled with an amino N, in the presence of catalytic Pd(OAc)₂ under the oxidative action of PIDA, in just one minute under microwave irradiation.

In this way, biologically important pyrrolocarbazoles, which would otherwise require long and complex

syntheses, can be easily obtained in a high yielding, convergent and atom economic process involving readily available starting materials.

Experimental Section

Synthesis of methyl 7-(benzylamino)-6-(2-bromophenyl)-1,3-dioxo-2-phenylisoindoline-4-carboxylate (7): To a solution of (*E*)-methyl 4-(2-bromophenyl)-2-oxobut-3-enoate **4** (81 mg, 0.3 mmol) in dry toluene (1.2 mL), yttrium trifluoromethanesulfonate (8 mg, 5% mol), benzyl isocyanide **5a** (66 μ L, 0.54 mmol, 1.8 equiv) and *N*-phenylmaleimide **6** (62 mg, 0.36 mmol, 1.2 equiv) were added under a nitrogen atmosphere. The resulting mixture was heated 3 h at 100 °C. The reaction was cooled to rt, 10% HCl (5 mL) was added and the organic phase was extracted with CH₂Cl₂, dried (Na₂SO₄) and concentrated. The residue was purified by flash chromatography (silica gel, hexane–EtOAc gradient), and isoindoline **7** (55%) was obtained as a yellow solid; mp: 175–177 °C; IR (cm⁻¹) 3428, 2962, 1766, 1696, 1620; ¹H NMR (500 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 8.31 (s, NH), 7.62 (s, 1H), 6.95–6.94 (m, 2H), 6.81–6.69 (m, 5H), 3.96 (s, 3H), 3.22 (s, 3H), 2.08 (s, 3H), 2.06 (s, 3H), 2.05 (s, 3H); ¹³C{¹H} NMR (126 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 169.50 (C), 165.60 (C), 164.56 (C), 147.55 (C), 140.89 (CH), 140.03 (C), 137.97 (C), 132.69 (CH), 131.80 (CH), 131.62 (C), 131.49 (C), 130.87 (C), 130.23 (CH), 129.21 (CH), 128.86 (CH), 128.24 (CH), 127.82 (CH), 127.44 (CH), 127.39 (CH), 126.86 (CH), 124.65 (C), 117.12 (C), 113.32 (C), 52.61 (CH₂), 49.03 (CH₃); MS (EI) *m/z* (%) 542 (M⁺, 15), 540 (M⁺, 16), 461 (27), 429 (43), 383 (10), 91 (100); HRMS (EI) Calcd for C₂₉H₂₁N₂O₄Br: 540.0685. Found: 540.0681.

Synthesis of methyl 10-benzyl-1,3-dioxo-2-phenyl-1,2,3,10-tetrahydropyrrolo[3,4-a]carbazole-4-carboxylate (11): A solution of isoindoline **7** (16 mg, 0.03 mmol), CuI (2 mg, 0.010 mmol, 35% mol), Cs₂CO₃ (19 mg, 0.06 mmol, 2 equiv) and *L*-Boc-proline (2 mg, 0.009 mmol, 31% mol) in toluene (1 mL) was heated for 1 h at 130 °C in a microwave oven. The crude product was filtered through a short pad of SiO₂ and washed with CH₂Cl₂. The solvents were removed in the rotary evaporator to give pyrrolocarbazole **11** (94%), obtained as a yellow solid; mp: 226–228 °C; IR (cm⁻¹) 2923, 1762, 1702, 1493, 1269, 1170, 804; ¹H NMR (500 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 8.67 (s, 1H), 8.18 (d, *J* = 7.8 Hz, 1H), 7.59–7.53 (m, 1H), 7.51–7.46 (m, 2H), 7.45–7.41 (m, 3H), 7.41–7.36 (m, 2H), 7.25–7.17 (m, 3H), 7.05 (d, *J* = 6.7 Hz, 2H), 6.40 (s, 2H), 4.05 (s, 3H); ¹³C{¹H} NMR (101 MHz, CDCl₃) δ 167.56 (C), 166.57 (C), 165.80 (C), 143.34 (C), 137.65 (C), 137.48 (C), 131.75 (C), 130.15 (C), 129.19 (CH), 128.87 (CH), 128.29 (CH), 127.96 (C), 127.49 (CH), 127.13 (CH), 126.27 (CH), 126.22 (CH), 122.55 (C), 121.90 (CH), 121.40 (C), 121.21 (CH), 113.92 (C), 111.31 (CH), 53.17 (CH₃), 50.48 (CH₂); MS (CI) *m/z* (%) 461 (M⁺ + 1, 21), 429 (21), 339 (3), 199 (17), 91 (100); HRMS (EI) Calcd for C₂₉H₂₀N₂O₄: 460.1423. Found: 460.1423.

Synthesis of 4-(Cyclohexylamino)-8,8-dimethyl-5-(4-nitrophenyl)-2-phenyl-8,9-dihydro-1H-benzo[e]isoindole-1,3,6(2*H*,7*H*)-trione (16a): To a solution of dimedone **12** (140 mg, 1 mmol) in dry acetonitrile (2 mL), *p*-nitrobenzaldehyde **13** (151 mg, 1 mmol), *N*-phenylmaleimide **6** (173 mg, 1 mmol) and cyclohexyl isocyanide **5b** (137 μ L, 1.1 mmol) were successively added. The resulting mixture was stirred and heated to reflux under a nitrogen atmosphere until the starting materials were consumed, as judged by tlc. The precipitate was then filtered and washed with a mixture of cyclohexane and ethyl acetate. To the resulting washed mixture, a 1 N HCl solution was added and extracted with ethyl acetate. The organic layer was evaporated and then subjected to column chromatography (silica gel, gradient from cyclohexane to cyclohexane–EtOAc 70:30). The fractions obtained by filtration and chromatography were combined, giving the desired product **16a** (28 hours, 398 mg, 73%); mp: 197–206 °C; IR (cm⁻¹): 3433, 2956, 1751, 1702, 1596; ¹H NMR (500 MHz, CDCl₃): δ 8.24 (d, *J* = 8.3 Hz, 2H), 7.52 (t, *J* = 7.5 Hz, 2H), 7.43 (d, *J* = 7.6 Hz, 3H), 7.33 (t, *J* = 9.9 Hz, 2H), 7.22 (d, *J* = 6.9 Hz, 3H), 6.98 (d, *J* = 6.3 Hz, 2H), 6.85 (s, 1H), 3.81 (s, 2H), 3.37 (s, 2H), 2.46 (s, 2H), 1.11 (s, 6H) ppm; ¹³C{¹H} NMR (126 MHz, CDCl₃): 198.2 (C), 168.2 (C), 166.9 (C), 147.4 (C), 145.7 (C), 145.4 (C), 138.5 (C), 137.5 (C), 134.7 (C), 134.3 (CH), 132.5 (C), 131.5 (C), 130.4 (CH), 129.3 (CH), 129.2 (C), 128.8 (CH), 128.4 (CH), 127.8 (CH), 127.3 (CH), 126.7 (CH), 126.2 (CH), 123.7 (CH), 117.8 (C), 54.5 (CH₂), 51.0 (CH₂), 38.8 (CH₂), 33.6 (C), 28.4 (CH₃) ppm; HRMS (ESI-Q-TOF) *m/z*: [M + H]⁺ Calcd for C₃₃H₂₈N₃O₅: 546.2023; Found: 546.2031.

Synthesis of 4-(Benzylamino)-8,8-dimethyl-5-(4-nitrophenyl)-2-phenyl-8,9-dihydro-1H-benzo[e]isoindole-1,3,6(2H,7H)-trione (16b): Following the above described procedure for **16a**, the compound **16b** was obtained from dimedone (**12**), 1-benzylisocyanide (**5a**), *N*-phenylmaleimide (**6**) and 4-nitrobenzaldehyde (**13**) as an orange solid (13 hours, 226 mg, 43%); mp: 68–74 °C; IR (cm⁻¹): 3397, 2956, 1755, 1702, 1598; ¹H NMR (500 MHz, CDCl₃): δ 8.30 (d, *J* = 8.7 Hz, 2H), 7.55–7.50 (m, 2H), 7.43 (d, *J* = 7.7 Hz, 3H), 7.41–7.38 (m, 2H), 3.35 (s, 2H), 2.47 (t, *J* = 7 Hz, 2H), 2.47 (s, 2H), 1.30 (quin, 2H), 1.19–1.04 (m, 5H), 1.11 (s, 6H), 0.80 (t, *J* = 7.2 Hz, 3H) ppm; ¹³C {¹H} NMR (126 MHz, CDCl₃): 198.4 (C), 168.5 (C), 167.0 (C), 147.3 (C), 146.4 (C), 146.1 (C), 137.4 (C), 134.0 (C), 131.6 (C), 131.5 (C), 130.4 (CH), 129.3 (CH), 129.0 (C), 128.4 (CH), 126.7 (CH), 123.6 (CH), 116.8 (C), 54.5 (CH₂), 46.9 (CH₂), 38.7 (CH₂), 33.6 (C), 30.3 (CH₂), 28.7 (CH₂), 28.4 (CH₃), 22.3 (CH₂), 14.00 (CH₃) ppm; HRMS (ESI-Q-TOF) m/z: [M + H]⁺ Calcd for C₃₁H₃₂N₃O₅: 526.2336; Found: 526.2334.

Synthesis of 12-Cyclohexyl-5,5-dimethyl-10-nitro-2-phenyl-4,5,6,12-tetrahydrobenzo[c]pyrrolo[3,4-a]carbazole-1,3,7(2H)-trione (17a): A solution of isoindole **16a** (92 mg, 0.17 mmol), PIDA (203 mg, 3.7 equiv) and Pd(OAc)₂ (4 mg, 10% mol) and Ph₃P (10 mg, 22% mol) in HFIP (1 mL) was heated to 110 °C under microwave irradiation for 1 minute. The crude mixture was evaporated to dryness and then subjected to column chromatography (silica gel, gradient from cyclohexane to cyclohexane-EtOAc 70:30) to give the indolocarbazole **17a**, obtained as an orange solid (53 mg, 58% yield); mp: 287-302 °C; IR (cm⁻¹): 3449, 2939, 2858, 1760, 1708, 1523; ¹H NMR (500 MHz, CDCl₃): δ 9.16 (d, *J* = 9.2 Hz, 1H), 8.71 (d, *J* = 2.0 Hz, 1H), 8.12 (dd, *J* = 9.2, 2.1 Hz, 1H), 7.59–7.54 (m, 2H), 7.48 (m, 3H), 6.12 (tt, *J* = 12.4, 3.8 Hz, 1H), 3.62 (s, 2H), 2.83 (s, 2H), 2.44 (dq, *J* = 12.4, 3.4 Hz, 2H), 2.11–1.95 (m, 4H), 1.84 (d, *J* = 13.1 Hz, 1H), 1.67 (ddd, *J* = 16.1, 13.1, 3.3 Hz, 3H), 1.51–1.38 (m, 1H), 1.21 (s, 6H) ppm; ¹³C {¹H} NMR (126 MHz, CDCl₃): 199.8 (C), 167.6 (C), 166.1 (C), 146.8 (C), 141.8 (C), 139.3 (C), 134.9 (C), 134.4 (C), 131.6 (C), 129.4 (CH), 128.7 (CH), 128.3 (C), 128.2 (CH), 127.4 (CH), 127.3 (C), 127.0 (C), 117.8 (C), 114.8 (CH), 109.0 (CH), 59.6 (CH), 54.4 (CH₂), 39.5 (CH₂), 34.1 (C), 31.5 (CH₂), 28.6 (CH₃), 26.1 (CH₂), 25.5 (CH₂) ppm; HRMS (ESI-Q-TOF) m/z: [M + H]⁺ Calcd for C₃₂H₃₀N₃O₅: 536.2180; Found: 536.2168.

Synthesis of 12-Benzyl-5,5-dimethyl-10-nitro-2-phenyl-4,5,6,12-tetrahydrobenzo[c]pyrrolo[3,4-a]carbazole-1,3,7(2H)-trione (17b): Following the above described procedure for **17a**, the compound **17b** was obtained from **16b** as an orange solid (11 mg, 12 % yield); mp: 249-257 °C; IR (cm⁻¹): 3444, 2957, 1762, 1711, 1516; ¹H NMR (500 MHz, CDCl₃): δ 9.29 (d, *J* = 9.1 Hz, 2H), 8.19 (dd, *J* = 9.1 Hz, *J* = 2.1, 2H), 7.55 (t, *J* = 7.7 Hz, 2H), 7.47–7.44 (m, 3H), 7.26–7.24 (m, 3H), 7.04 (d, *J* = 7.7 Hz, 2H), 6.54 (s, 2H), 3.66 (s, 2H), 2.89 (s, 2H), 1.26 (s, 6H) ppm; ¹³C {¹H} NMR (126 MHz, CDCl₃): 199.5 (C), 163.7 (C), 165.8 (C), 147.8 (C), 143.4 (C), 138.5 (C), 136.7 (C), 135.2 (C), 134.1 (C), 131.3 (C), 129.2 (CH), 128.9 (CH), 128.5 (CH), 128.4 (CH), 128.2 (C), 127.7 (CH), 127.2 (C), 127.0 (CH), 126.1 (C), 125.9 (CH), 117.7 (C), 115.5 (CH), 106.0 (CH), 54.3 (CH₂), 50.5 (CH₂), 39.4 (CH₂), 33.9 (C), 28.5 (CH₃) ppm; HRMS (ESI-Q-TOF) m/z: [M + H]⁺ Calcd for C₃₃H₂₆N₃O₅: 544.1872; Found: 544.1867.

Acknowledgements

We thank the financial support from Junta de Extremadura and FEDER (IB16095).

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