CLEAVAGE OF CYCLIC ETHERS WITH BORON BROMIDE. A CONVENIENT ROUTE TO THE BROMOSUBSTITUTED ALCOHOLS, ALDEHYDES AND KETONES

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Abstract - Cyclic ethers are readily cleaved by BBr₃ under mild conditions, providing the corresponding α-bromoalkylborates (1). Redistribution of 1 with methanol affords α-bromoalcohols (2). Oxidation of 1 with pyridinium chlorochromate forms the corresponding α-bromoaldehydes (3). Under these conditions, epoxides yield first the borates of the corresponding bromohydrins, with subsequent oxidation of the intermediate (without isolation), giving the α-bromoketones in high purity and satisfactory yield.

Heterobifunctional alkanes play an important role in organic synthesis. In the preparation of unsaturated straight-chain compounds via the Wittig reaction, α-haloaldehydes or alcohols serve as useful intermediates. For example, α-bromoalcohols are valuable starting materials in the synthesis of some insect pheromones¹,² and prostaglandins.³ However, a systematic study of the preparation of such compounds from simple precursors has not been reported in the literature. We wish to report a convenient and general approach for the preparation of such derivatives from the readily available cyclic ethers.

The use of boron halides as ether cleavage reagents is well-documented in the literature.⁴ Lately, boron bromide (BBr₃) has become the reagent of choice for such reactions.⁵ It is more effective than boron chloride (BCl₃) and reacts cleanly and quantitatively under mild conditions. Consequently, we undertook to examine the cleavage of cyclic ethers with BBr₃ as a potential synthetic route to α-bromoalcohols, α-bromoaldehydes, and α-bromoketones.

Representative cyclic ethers react smoothly with BBr₃. The ether was added to a solution of BBr₃ in CH₂Cl₂ at 0°C in order to avoid any possible polymerization of the cyclic ether. After the initial exothermic reaction subsided, the mixture was heated for 1 h under reflux (40°C), forming the α-bromoalkylborate (1) quantitatively (¹¹B nmr: δ 18 ppm, typical of borate esters) (Eq'1).

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* Dedicated to Professor Herbert C. Brown in recognition of his fascinating contributions to chemistry.
Redistribution of 1 with excess of methanol provides the corresponding \( \omega \)-bromoalcohol (2), which can be distilled following removal of methanol and methyl borate under aspirator vacuum (Eq 2).

\[
1 + 3 \text{CH}_3\text{OH} \xrightarrow{\Delta} \text{BrCH}_2\text{CH} = \text{CH}_2 \text{CH}_2\text{Br} + 3\text{CH}_3\text{OH}
\]

In view of our recent findings that borate esters, like alcohols, can be directly oxidized to aldehydes and ketones,\(^6\) we undertook to prepare \( \omega \)-bromoaldehydes from 1. Indeed, the oxidation of 1 with pyridinium chlorochromate (Pyr.HCl.CrO\(_3\), PCC)\(^7\) does provide the desired aldehydes (3) in satisfactory yields (Eq 3).

\[
1 + \text{Pyr.HCl.CrO}_3 \xrightarrow{\text{CH}_2\text{Cl}_2} \text{BrCH}_2\text{CH} = \text{CH}_2 \text{CH}_2\text{Br}
\]

The oxidation reaction is operationally simple, involving the addition of 1 to a suspension of PCC in CH\(_2\)Cl\(_2\), followed by heating the mixture under reflux for 1 h. The usual workup\(^6,7\) provides the desired \( \omega \)-bromoaldehydes (3) in good yields (Table I).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ether</th>
<th>Product*</th>
<th>Yield(^c)</th>
<th>bp °C/mm</th>
<th>n(^{20})D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tetrahydrofuran</td>
<td>4-Bromo-1-butanol</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>68-72/0.2</td>
<td>1.5035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4-Bromobutanol</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>66-68/18</td>
<td>1.4763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tetrahydropyran</td>
<td>5-Bromo-1-pentanol</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>72-74/0.2</td>
<td>1.4875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5-Bromopentanal</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>87-89/12</td>
<td>1.4762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxepane</td>
<td>6-Bromo-1-hexanol</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>74-76/0.25</td>
<td>1.4852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6-Bromohexanal</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>72-75/1.5</td>
<td>1.4753</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* \(^{1}\)H nmr spectra were consistent with the structures.

* Most of the products are unstable and tend to turn into dark viscous materials after some time; therefore, nmr spectra and n\(^{20}\)D are recorded immediately following distillation.

* Yields of isolated products.

The success with simple symmetrical ethers encouraged us to examine the cleavage of unsymmetrically substituted cyclic ethers. Unfortunately, 2-methyltetrahydrofuran and 2-methyltetrahydropyran form an approximately 1:1 mixture of the two possible cleaved products. These can be
estimated by $^1$H nmr spectral methods upon oxidation with PCC (Eq 4).

\[
\text{BBr}_3 \rightarrow \text{PCC} \rightarrow \begin{array}{c}
\text{OHC} \\
\text{Br}
\end{array} + \begin{array}{c}
\text{BrH}_2C \\
\text{O}
\end{array}
\]  \quad (4)

Lowering the temperature of reaction with BBr$_3$ had no significant effect upon the isomer distribution.

Unsaturated cyclic ethers, such as 2,3-dihydrofuran and 2,3-dihydropyran, undergo polymerization in the presence of BBr$_3$ (Eq 5).

\[
\text{BBr}_3 \rightarrow \text{Polymer}
\]  \quad (5)

Such polymerization was rapid, even at lower temperatures.

$\alpha$-Haloketones are highly useful synthetic intermediates. They have been prepared via a variety of methods.\(^8\) We investigated the cleavage of representative epoxides by boron bromide, followed by PCC oxidation of the product (without isolation) as a new approach to $\alpha$-bromoketones (Eq 6) (Table II).

\[
\text{BBr}_3 \rightarrow \begin{array}{c}
\text{Br} \\
\text{O}^{-}\text{O}^{-}\text{O}^{-}\text{O}^{-}\text{B}
\end{array} \rightarrow \text{PCC} \rightarrow \begin{array}{c}
\text{O} \\
\text{Br}
\end{array} \quad \text{Br}
\]  \quad (6)

Indeed, 7-oxabicyclo[2.2.1]heptane afforded 4-bromocyclohexanone in 80% yield. Other epoxides reacted similarly.
TABLE II. Preparation of Bromoketones From Epoxides

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Epoxide</th>
<th>Bromoketone</th>
<th>Yield&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>bp  &quot;C/mm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cyclopentene oxide</td>
<td>2-Bromocyclopentanone</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>50-51/1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyclohexene oxide</td>
<td>2-Bromocyclohexanone</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>60-61/2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyclooctene oxide</td>
<td>2-Bromocyclooctanone</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>81-83/1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-Oxabicyclo[2.2.1]heptane</td>
<td>4-Bromocyclohexanone</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>65-68/3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> H nmr spectra are consistent with the assigned structure.

<sup>b</sup> Isolated yields.

The following procedure for the preparation of 5-bromo-1-pentanol is representative: To a well-stirred solution of BBr<sub>3</sub> (1.92 ml, 20 mM) in CH<sub>2</sub>C<sub>Cl</sub><sub>2</sub> (25 ml) taken in a 100-ml reaction flask equipped with a reflux condensor, was added tetrahydropyran (5.87 ml, 60 mM) dropwise at 0°C, under nitrogen. Following completion of the addition, the reaction mixture was heated under reflux for 1 h; 1 formed completely (1<sup>1</sup>H nmr: δ 18). The solvent was removed and the residue was heated with 10 ml of methanol under reflux for 1 h. The volatile materials, methanol and methyl borate, were removed under reduced pressure and 8.7 g (86% yield) of 5-bromo-1-pentanol was obtained by distillation: bp 72-74º/0.2 mm, n<sub>20</sub>D 1.4875.

For the preparation of 5-bromopentanal, the CH<sub>2</sub>C<sub>Cl</sub><sub>2</sub> solution of 1 was added to PCC (17.3 g, 80 mM) in CH<sub>2</sub>C<sub>Cl</sub><sub>2</sub> (150 ml) and heated under reflux for 1 h. Dilution with Et<sub>2</sub>O (150 ml), filtration through Florisil, followed by distillation, provided 7.1 g (72% yield) of 5-bromopentanal (Table I). The bromoketones were prepared from the borates of the bromohydrins by similar procedures.

In conclusion, cleavage of cyclic ethers with BBr<sub>3</sub> is an efficient method for the preparation of ω-bromoalcohols. Oxidation of the intermediate borate ester with pyridinium chlorochromate provides the corresponding ω-bromoaldehydes. Epoxides, when treated likewise, provide ω-bromoketones in high yields. This represents an operationally simple, one-pot synthesis of such heterobifunctional organic compounds from readily available cyclic ethers.

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REFERENCES


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