

Different EI-MS Fragmentations of the (*E*)- and (*Z*)-Enol Lactones Derived from α -Narcotine

Unterschiedliche EI-MS-Fragmentierungen von (*E*)- und (*Z*)-Enol-Lactonen aus α -Narkotin

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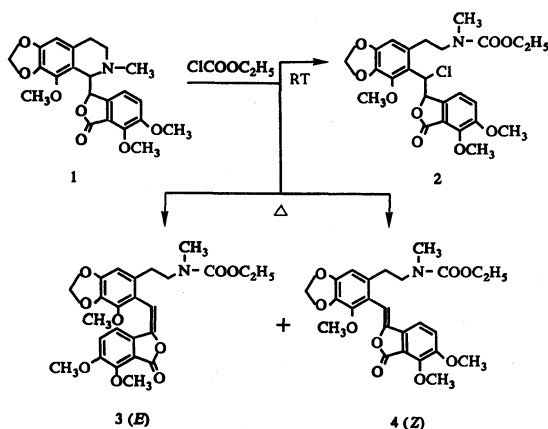
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Molecular ions of geometrical isomers can retain their ground state geometry during electron impact ionization^{1,2}. This explains different intensities of common peaks and also individual fragmentation patterns. Nevertheless, many (*E/Z*)-isomers provide virtually identical mass spectra.

As recently reported³, the phthalideisoquinoline alkaloid (*-*)- α -narcotine (**1**) reacts with ethyl chloroformate to yield the benzyl chloride **2** at room temp. or the enol lactones **3** and **4** in refluxing CH_2Cl_2 (Scheme 1).

The EI-MS (70/20 eV) of the (*E*)- and (*Z*)-isomers **3** and **4** are remarkably different (Fig. 1). While the fragmentation sequences of the $\text{M}^{+\bullet}$ of **4** are in perfect accord to those of pertinent stilbenes derived from laudanosine (e.g. formal fragmentation of the stilbene double bond after two [1,5-H] shifts of the ethylamine side chain)^{4,5}, the ionized (*E*)-isomer **3** shows an additional fragmentation pathway giving rise to fragment ions at m/z 279, 278, 250, and 206 with a rel. intensity (%) of <0.5/<0.5, 60/47, 8/3, and 4/<0.5 (70/20 eV), respectively (the intensity of the ion at m/z 279 was calculated by subtraction of the ¹³C isotope satellite).

By analysis of metastable ions of $3^{+\bullet}$ in the first field free region of a double focussing mass spectrometer (B/E- and B²/E-linked scans) it was corroborated that the ion at m/z 279 originates exclusively from the molecular ion, and that it is the sole precursor of the characteristic ion at m/z 278 which successively ejects C_2H_4 (m/z 250) and CO_2 (m/z 206).



Scheme 1

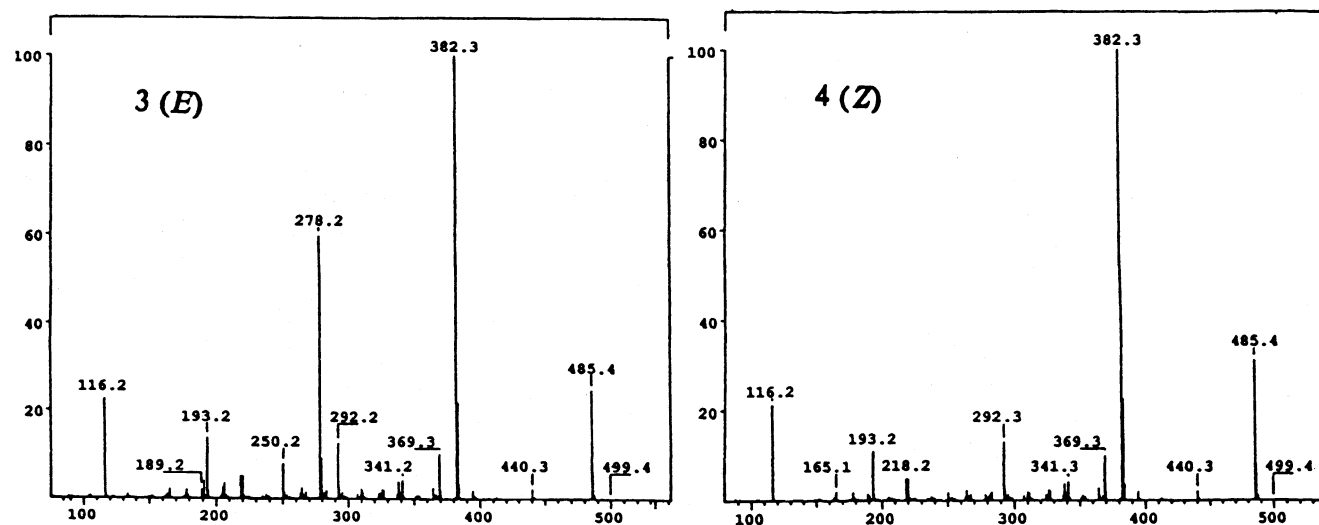
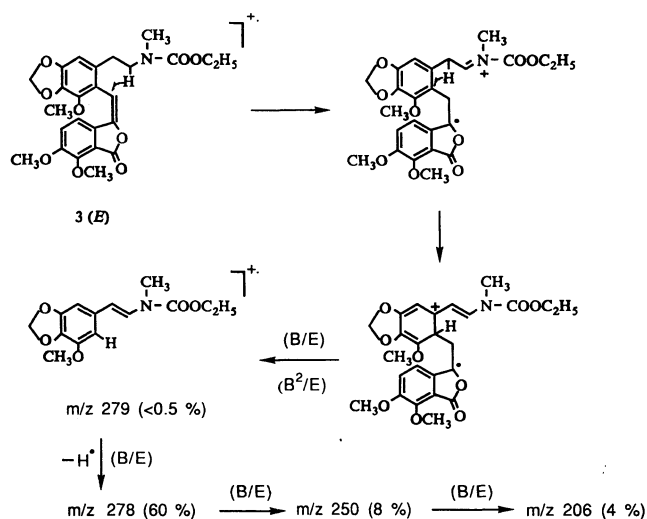


Fig. 1: EI-MS (70 eV) of (*E*)-(left) and (*Z*)-(right) enol lactones **3** and **4**

The mass spectra of *cis*- and *trans*-stilbenes from laudanosine⁵) and of (*E*)- and (*Z*)-enol lactones⁶) derived from β -hydrastine (absence of C-8-OCH₃ group in **1**) are nearly indistinguishable. Differences in the fragmentation of (*E*/*Z*)-isomers are usually induced by formation of a cyclic intermediate by one of the isomers²). In our case, however, the mass spectrometric fragmentation is obviously influenced by steric hindrance.

So, the C-8-methoxy group in **3**⁺ (*E*) seems to be the cause of the additional fragmentation pathway as compared to **4**⁺ (*Z*). This OCH₃-group, which is lacking in the stilbene-enol lactone obtained by Hofmann degradation of β -hydrastine methiodide⁶), may induce the direct bond cleavage at the aromatic ring of the molecular ion to give rise to the ion at *m/z* 279 which loses a H-atom to yield *m/z* 278.

We propose a fragmentation mechanism including H-shifts⁵) as depicted in Scheme 2.



Scheme 2

[KPh 594]

Acknowledgement

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Experimental Part

Mass spectra were measured on a Varian MAT 95 spectrometer.

(*E*)-3-[2-(β -*N*-Ethoxycarbonyl-*N*-methylaminoethyl)-6-methoxy-4,5-methylenedioxy-benzylidenyl]-6,7-dimethoxy-1(3*H*)-isobenzofuranone (**3**) and (*Z*)- (**4**)

3 and **4** were prepared and separated by prep. TLC as reported³).- **3**: MS *m/z* (rel. intensity, % at 70 eV): 485 (M⁺, 25), 383 (22), 382 (100), 369 (10), 341 (4), 292 (13), 279 (9), 278 (60), 250 (8), 220 (5), 218 (5), 206 (4), 193 (14), 116 (22). HR-MS: C₁₄H₁₆NO₅: Calcd. 278.10284. Found 278.10295.- **4**: MS *m/z* (rel. intensity, % at 70 eV): 485 (M⁺, 31), 383 (22), 382 (100), 369 (10), 341 (4), 292 (13), 220 (5), 218 (5), 193 (11), 116 (21). Other instrumental data of **3** and **4**: ref.³).

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