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A Crystalline B_{12}-Dimer from β-Cyano-Neocobyrate†

Shahzad Murtaza,[a,c] Philipp Butler,[a] Christoph Kratky,[b] Karl Gruber,[*b] and Bernhard Kräutler[*a]

Nature's selection of the B_{12}-coenzymes as ubiquitous organometallic cofactors is an intriguing and unsolved question.[1] Several biosynthetic pathways in aerobic and anaerobic micro-organisms converge to provide B_{12}-cofactors as uniquely structured natural cobalt-complexes.[2-4] X-ray crystallography helped to elucidate not only the organometallic nature of coenzyme B_{12} (**1**), but first of all, the structure of the cyano-corrin vitamin B_{12} (**2**).[5,6] We report here the structure of β-cyano-neocobyrate (**3**) and the discovery of a new B_{12}-structural motif in the crystal. The dimeric nature of **3** provides insight in a remarkable structural feature of the natural corrinoids.

Neovitamin B_{12} (**4**) was described in the early 1970's as isomerization product of vitamin B_{12} (**2**),[7] and it was identified by X-ray crystallography as the 13-epimer of **2** (see Figure 1 for formulae).[8] Most of the 'neocorrinoids' were only characterized by UV/Vis- and CD-spectra and by their chemical correlation with 'normal' corrinoids. Acid catalyzed epimerization inter-converts 'neocorrinoids' and 'normal' corrinoids selectively, and neocorrinoids typically predominate slightly in such equilibrations.[9, 10] 'Neo-corrinoids' were also side-products in the total synthesis of cobyric acid (**5**),[9, 11] but they appear not to be formed naturally by B_{12}-biosynthesis.[2-4]

[a] Prof. Dr. B. Kräutler, Dr. S. Murtaza[c], Dr. P. Butler
Institute of Organic Chemistry & Centre of Molecular Biosciences
University of Innsbruck, Innsbruck, Austria
Fax: +43 512 507 2892; E-mail: bernhard.kraeutler@uibk.ac.at.

[b] Prof. Dr. K. Gruber, Prof. Dr. C. Kratky
Institute of Molecular Biosciences
University of Graz, Graz, Austria
Fax: +43 316 380 9850; E-mail: karl.gruber@uni-graz.at

[c] present address: Dr. S. Murtaza
Islamabad College for Boys, ICB-G 6/3
Islamabad, Pakistan, H.No.1078, Gali 67, Street 41, Sector G-10/4

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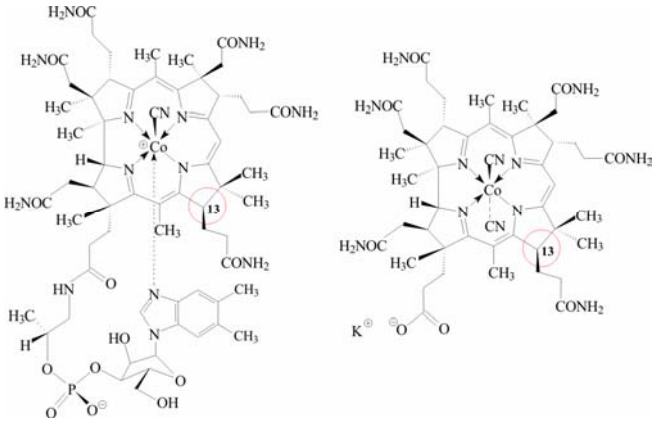

Fig. 1 Structural formulae: left: neovitamin B_{12} (**4**), right: potassium dicyano-neocobyrate (**K-3a**); in vitamin B_{12} (**2**) and dicyano-cobyrate (**K-5a**) the configuration at C-13 is inverted (i.e. α and not β, see red circle).

The dicyano-form **3a** of neocobyric acid (**3**) was obtained in 18% yield from vitamin B_{12}, along with cobyric acid (20%).[12, 13] Treatment of an aqueous solution of **3a** with acetic acid gave aquo-cyano-neocobyrate. Dimeric β-cyano-neocobyrate (**3-3**) crystallized in about 80% yield upon addition of acetone. The crystal structure of **3** was determined using synchrotron radiation and diffraction data extending to a resolution of 0.95 Å. The asymmetric unit of the rhombohedral crystal contained four independent neocobyrate molecules, which were arranged as (two) very similarly structured (C_2-symmetric) dimers **3-3** (Figure 2). Dimerization was effected by coordination of the carboxylate function of the *f*-propionate of one corrin moiety to the Co-centre (α-face) of the other.

This is the first structure of a corrinoid-dimer in which the α-faces of the corrin moieties interact. In other corrinoid dimers, tetramethylene-bis-cobalamin[14] and iodo-Co(II)-cobester (see[6]), the corrinoids form dimers *via* cobalt-coordinated ligands at the less encumbered β-faces. In the crystal structure of **3**, the distance between the almost parallel corrin rings is approximately 7 Å. The regions with greatest vertical overlap are ring D and the C15 meso-bridge (Figure 2). In a projection perpendicular

to the corrin planes, the two Co-atoms are displaced by roughly 4 Å. Close intra-dimer contacts exist between C1A...C1A' (3.8 Å), O183...C1A' (3.5 Å) and C12A...C12A' (3.7 Å). The only polar contact between the corrin moieties in a dimer is an H-bond between N84 and O175' of the *d*- and *f*-side chains, respectively (for atom numbering see Supporting Information).

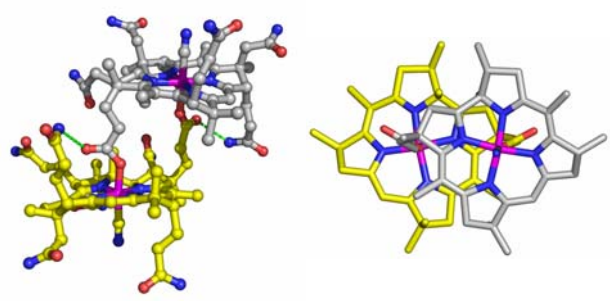

Fig. 2 Models of the structure of the β-cyano-neocobyrate dimer (**3-3**). Left: ball-and-stick representation. Carbon atoms are shown in white and yellow, nitrogen in blue, oxygen in red and cobalt in magenta. Major components only are shown of the disordered side chains. The H-bond between the carboxylate of the *f*-side chain and the *d*-propionamide is indicated by green dashes. Right. Stick-representation of the dimer **3-3** viewed along an axis perpendicular to the dimer generating two-fold axis (acet- and propionamide side chains have been omitted for clarity).

The geometry of the inner coordination sphere of the cobalt centre in **3** is comparable to that of β-aquo-α-cyano-cobyric acid (**5**):[6, 15] The structure of the corrin ring in **3** is remarkably similar to that of the corrin moiety of neovitamin B_{12} (**4**) (Figure 3) and only the pucker of rings D differs significantly in **4** and **3**. Thus the fold angle of 22.5(5)° in **3** is only slightly smaller than the one in **4** (23.7°).[8, 16] In contrast, the related comparison between α-cyano-β-aquo-cobyric acid (**5**) and vitamin B_{12} (**2**) revealed an increase of the fold angle from 4.3° (in **5**)[6, 15] to 18.0° (in **2**), which was suggested to reflect steric strain excerted by the coordinated dimethylbenzimidazole (DMB) base in **2**.[17] The fold angle is characteristically larger in **3** than in **5** and in related 'normal' corrinoids (average fold angle 7.5(5)°).[5,6]

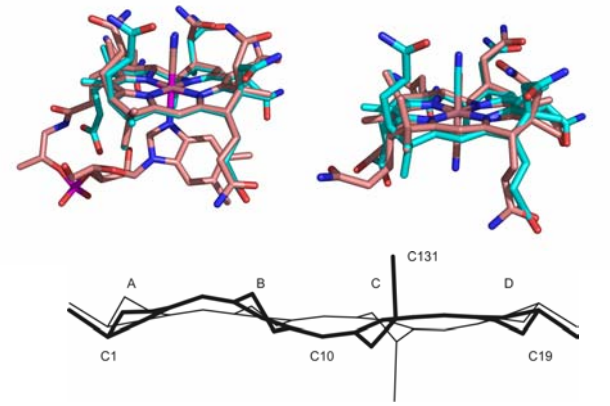

Fig. 3 Top. Superposition of crystal structures (on the four corrin nitrogen atoms). Left: of β-cyano-neocobyric acid (**3**, cyan) and neovitamin B_{12} (**4**, pink). Right: of **3** (cyan) and α-cyano-β-aquo-cobyric acid (**5**, pink). In the structures of **3**, only the major components of the disordered sidechains *b*, *d*, and *e* are shown for clarity. Bottom. Cylinder projection of β-cyano-neocobyric acid (thick lines) and α-cyano-β-aquo-cobyric acid (thin lines) based on a mean plane through the four corrin nitrogen atoms (for atom numbering, see Supporting Information).

As observed in neovitamin B_{12} (**4**),[8] epimerization at C13 also effects a switch in the pucker of ring C of **3**, and the propionamide side chain on the β-face is bound in a pseudoaxial orientation. As another consequence of the conformational switch of ring C, the geminal methyl groups C12A and C12B change their orientation from equatorial to axial and *vice versa* (Figure 3).[8] The other hydro-pyrrole rings show smaller differences in their pucker, when compared to 'normal' cobyrinic acid derivatives.[8, 16]

The conformational switch in ring C of **3** breaks the pseudo-C_2-symmetry of the corrin ligand, observed in 'normal' cobyrinic acid derivatives.[15] Concomitant with 'inverting' the conformation of ring C, the corrin ligand of **3** locally adopts a 'wave-shaped' (W)-conformation[1] and exhibits an increased folding angle (see Figure 3). Indeed, a similar conformational coupling between the macrocycle and (one of) the 5-membered hydropyrrolic rings has been analyzed in crystal structures of the hydroporphyrinoid nickel-complex F430 and its C–12/C–13 epimer.[1, 18]

The *f*-propionic acid substituent of corrinoids typically displays less conformational disorder than the other propionic acid side chains.[19] In the structure of **3-3** the (C-171/C-172)-bond and the carboxylate function of the *f*-substituent are nearly eclipsed (see Figure 2). This conformation appears to be required for proper co-ordination of the *f*-carboxylate at the cobalt-ion's α-face. In aqueous solution water is the α-ligand, and β-cyano-neocobyric acid was not revealed by NMR to form dimers.

The formation, in the crystal, of an α-bridged dimer provides a new structural motif for B_{12}-derivatives. While this motif is present in the neocobyrate **3**, the structure of **3** also indicates that its particular type of dimerization would be unlikely for the 'normal' cobyric acid. A crude model of such an *f*-carboxylate bridged dimer (obtained by superimposing the structure of cobyric acid[15] onto each component of the neocobyric acid dimer) indicates dimerization to be obstructed by clashes of the *e*-propionamide side chains of each subunit (see Figure 4).

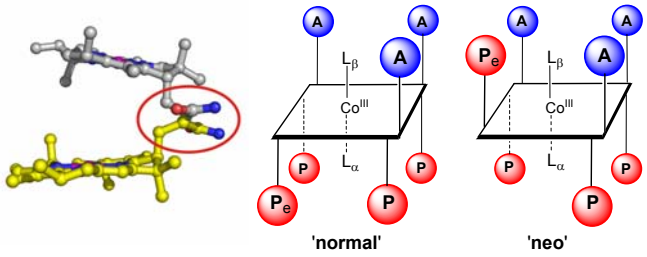

Fig. 4 Left. Model of a cobyric acid dimer generated by superimposing the structure of cobyric acid on each component of the neocobyric acid dimer. All side chains except for the e-propionamide group were omitted. Carbon atoms are shown in white and yellow. Right: Symbolic stereo-models of 'normal' and 'neo'-corrinoids (A = acetamide group, P = propionamide (propionate) group, P_e = e-propionamide group).

The α-configuration of the *e*-side chain in 'normal' corrinoids and the absence of an acetamide group at ring C have been suggested to be important, first of all, for the proper function of coenzyme B_{12}.[1, 20] A crystal structure of neocoenzyme B_{12} (**6**) is not available and **6** still functions as cofactor in some B_{12}-dependent enzymes, e.g. diol dehydratase.[21] However, the crystal structures of coenzyme B_{12} (**1**)[5, 6] and of neovitamin B_{12} (**4**)[8] indicated

the *e*-propionamide side chain in **6** and the organometallic 5'-deoxyadenosyl-functionality to compete for the same region of space.[20]

In **5** and other 'normal' corrinoids all four propionamide (propionate) groups are oriented to the α-face of the corrin ligand, including the e-side chain at C-13. The latter is reoriented to the β-face in the neo-corrinoids (see Figure 4).[22] As shown here, the altered substituent pattern of the 'neo'-corrinoid **3** sets the stage for dimer formation. Natural B_{12}-derivatives, in contrast, are 'notoriously' monomeric,[5] and typically differ also in this respect from other natural porphyrinoids. These have often been observed in (ligand bridged) dimeric states (e.g. in Fe(III)-porphyrins[23]) or as higher aggregates (e.g. with chlorophylls[24]).

Carboxylate-bridging, as observed in **3-3**, is the basis of aggregation of Fe(III)-heme in β-haematin, which was identified to have carboxylate-bonded heme dimers as building blocks. The latter also provide a structural model for hemozoin, the 'detoxified' disposal form of heme in *Plasmodium malaria*.[25, 26] The crystal structure of **3-3** reminds of features of the proposed (dimer) structure of hemozoin. Recently, vitamin B_{12}-derivatives were indicated to act as remarkable inhibitors of hemozoin formation,[27] opening a possible alternative for the treatment of strains of *Pl. malaria*, which have become resistant to 'chloroquine' and other relevant anti-malarials.[28] The structural motif of a carboxylate bridged B_{12}-dimer **3-3** may add a new facet to this subject also.

Experimental Section

Preparation of β-cyano-neocobyric acid (3). The title compound was prepared in its dicyano-form (**3a**) from vitamin B_{12} (**2**, Hoffmann-La Roche)[12] and was identified by 500 MHz ^{1}H-NMR- UV/Vis- and CD-spectra (see Supporting Information): UV/Vis (Hitachi-U3000, in H_2O, c = 5.25 x 10^{-5} M, λ_{max}(log ε): 279.0 (3.87), 310.5 (3.95), 368.5 (4.33), 581.5 (3.84). **CD** (JASCO-J715, in H_2O, c = 5.25 x 10^{-5} M, λ_{max} and λ_{min}(Δε): 223.0 (2.8), 237.0 (–2.3), 281.0 (13.1) 309.0 (18.6), 341 (–11.5), 377.0 (–5.8), 406.0 (9.3), 436.0 (12.1), 530.0 (–12.7), 575 (–12.2).

Crystallization & crystal-structure determination of β-cyano-neocobyric acid (3). Cyano-neocobyric acid was obtained by treatment of **3a** with dilute aqueous acetic acid and precipitation with acetone. The dark red powder of **3** was dissolved in water and crystals of β-cyano-neocobyric acid (**3**) grew upon addition of acetone. Diffraction data were collected at the EMBL beam line BW7b at DESY in Hamburg (Germany). Details of the data collection and structure refinement are given in the Supporting Information. CCDC 641650 contains the supplementary crystallographic data for this paper. These data can be obtained free of charge via www.ccdc.cam.ac.uk/data_request/cif or by contacting The Cambridge Crystallographic Data Centre, 12, Union Road, Cambridge CB2 1EZ, UK; fax: +44 1223 336033; data_request@ccdc.cam.ac.uk.

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Keywords: cobalt complex, crystal structure, dimerization, stereo-chemistry, vitamin B_{12}

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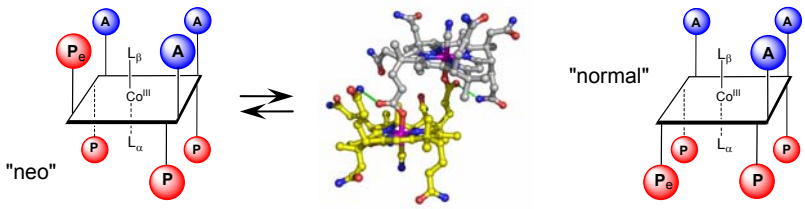
To Dimerize or not to Dimerize—

S. Murtaza, P. Butler, C. Kratky, K. Gruber, B. Kräutler* Page – P.*

A Crystalline B_{12}-Dimer from β-Cyano-Neocobyrate



The crystal structure of β-cyano-neocobyric acid reveals a novel B_{12}-dimerization motif which involves α–face interactions and Co-coordinated *f*-propionate side chains. This motif is reminiscent of the carboxylate bonded heme dimer in β-haematin and hemozoin, the disposal form of heme in *Plasmodium malaria*.