Bioorganic & Medicinal Chemistry Letters 18 (2008) 4628–4632

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Bioorganic & Medicinal Chemistry Letters

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/bmcl

4-(1,1-Dioxo-1,4-dihydro-1λ^6-benzo[1,4]thiazin-3-yl)-5-hydroxy-2*H*-pyridazin-3-ones as potent inhibitors of HCV NS5B polymerase

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 2 May 2008
Revised 2 July 2008
Accepted 7 July 2008
Available online 10 July 2008

Keywords:
Hepatitis C virus (HCV)
NS5B polymerase
Non-nucleoside NS5B inhibitor
Structure-based design
4-(1,1-Dioxo-1,4-dihydro-1λ^6-benzo[1,4]thiazin-3-yl)-5-hydroxy-2*H*-pyridazin-3-one

ABSTRACT

4-(1,1-Dioxo-1,4-dihydro-1λ^6-benzo[1,4]thiazin-3-yl)-5-hydroxy-2*H*-pyridazin-3-one analogs were discovered as a novel class of inhibitors of HCV NS5B polymerase. Structure-based design led to the identification of compound **3a** that displayed potent inhibitory activities in biochemical and replicon assays (1b IC_{50} < 10 nM; 1b EC_{50} = 1.1 nM) as well as good stability toward human liver microsomes (HLM $t_{1/2}$ > 60 min).

Hepatitis C virus (HCV) is a major cause of acute hepatitis and chronic liver disease, including cirrhosis and liver cancer. Globally, an estimated 170 million individuals, 3% of the world's population, are chronically infected with HCV and 3 to 4 million people are newly infected each year.[1] Currently, there is no vaccine available to prevent hepatitis C, nor a HCV-specific antiviral agent approved for treatment of chronic hepatitis C. The current standard of care is a combination of pegylated interferon (IFN) with ribavirin.[2] Inadequate response rates in patients infected with genotype 1 HCV along with adverse side-effects result in a continuing medical need for improved therapy.[3]

Our research has been focused on identifying novel inhibitors of the HCV NS5B protein, a virally encoded RNA-dependent RNA polymerase (RdRp), the activity of which is critical for the replication of the virus.[4] Most small molecule, non-nucleoside inhibitors of NS5B bind to one of three binding pockets, distinct from the active site.[5] Among these, we focused our attention on the palm binding site, which is well conserved across various HCV genotype 1 sequences.

Several series of NS5B inhibitors have been reported to bind at the palm binding site.[6] In particular, compounds **1a** and **1b** (Fig. 1),[7] containing the pyridazinone motif, were reported to exhibit potent inhibitory activity against genotype 1b NS5B.[8a] However, these compounds possess high polar surface areas (PSA), which are outside the range expected to impart favorable gut permeability properties.[9] Accordingly, they displayed poor permeabilities in Caco-2 assays and, as a likely result, exhibited poor bioavailabilities following oral administration to cynomolgus monkeys.[8a]

We hypothesized that by lowering the PSA and/or increasing the *clog P* of the pyridazinone-containing compounds under study, we would improve their Caco-2 permeabilities and thereby increase the corresponding bioavailability values.[8b] One strategy we pursued to accomplish this objective involved the synthesis of compounds containing a fused pyrrolo-pyridazinone motif (**2**) in lieu of the pyridazinone moiety present in **1a** and **1b**.[10] In this report, we describe an alternative approach to reducing the PSA of the NS5B inhibitors under study which entails replacing the benzothiadiazine fragment contained in them with a benzothiazine moiety (e.g., structures **3** and **4**).[11]

We began our exploration of the new NS5B inhibitor series by combining the benzothiazine moiety with other fragments that had been previously determined to interact favorably with NS5B during our exploration of the benzothiadiazine-containing

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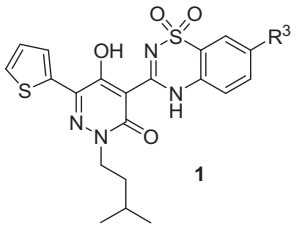
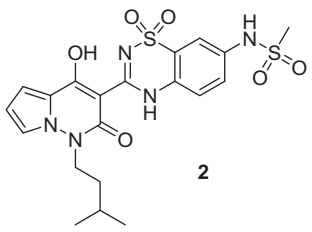
doi:10.1016/j.bmcl.2008.07.014



1

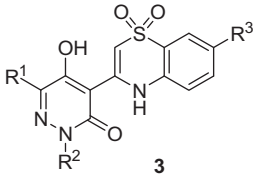
1a R^3 = $NHSO_2Me$
IC_{50} 1b <10 nM
EC_{50} 1b = 5 nM
PSA = 203 Å^2
P_{app} = 0.02 x 10^{-6}(cm/sec)
F = 2 %

1b R^3 = $NMeSO_2Me$
IC_{50} 1b = 23 nM
EC_{50} 1b = 130 nM
PSA = 194 Å^2
P_{app} = 0.20 x 10^{-6}(cm/sec)
F = 12 %



2

IC_{50} 1b = <10 nM
EC_{50} 1b = 8.5 nM
PSA = 167 Å^2
P_{app} = 0.2 x 10^{-6}(cm/sec)
F = 0 %



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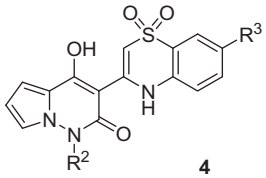


4

Figure 1. HCV NS5B polymerase inhibitors.

compounds (Table 1).[8a–c] Thus, pyridazinone-benzothiazine hybrids bearing an R^1 thiophene, a branched or cyclic C_4–C_7 alkyl group at the R^2 position, and a $–NHSO_2CH_3$ R^3 moiety displayed potent NS5B inhibition properties along with excellent anti-HCV activity in cell culture (**3a**–**3d**). As was observed in our earlier studies,[8a–c] introduction of an R^2 benzyl group or a R^1 phenyl moiety into the inhibitor design reduced the NS5B inhibitory properties of the corresponding molecules (compare **3e** and **3f**, respectively, with **3a**). Similarly, substitution of the R^1 thiophene present in **3e** with a methyl group in the 5-position resulted in further loss of NS5B inhibitory potency (compound **3g**). Somewhat surprisingly, N-methylation of the R^3 sulfonamide moiety contained in **3a** drastically reduced NS5B inhibition activity (compound **3h**) in a manner that was not suggested by our previous study of benzothiadiazine-containing compounds (e.g., compare **1a** with **1b**). This unexpected result could be explained by analysis of the co-crystal structure of **3a** complexed with the NS5B protein (see below). Incorporation of optimal R^2 fragments into the fused pyrrolopyridazinone benzothiazine hybrids containing R^3 $–NHSO_2CH_3$ groups also afforded potent NS5B inhibitors which displayed excellent antiviral properties in cell culture (**4a** and **4b**). However, as was noted for the benzothiazine-containing compounds **3**, methylation of the R^3 sulfonamide moiety present in **4b** resulted in significant loss of NS5B inhibition properties (**4c**).

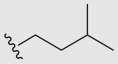
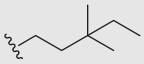
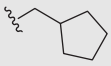
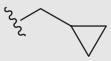
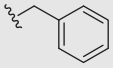
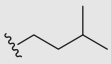
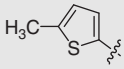
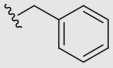
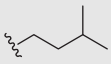
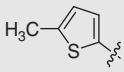
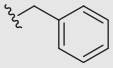
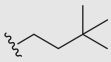
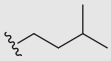
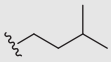
Collectively, the benzothiazine-containing compounds described in this work displayed NS5B inhibition properties and replicon activities that were similar to those exhibited by the corresponding benzothiadiazines (e.g., compare **1a** with **3a** and **2** with **4b**).[8a,10] These observations suggested that the N-2 atom present in the benzothiadiazine moiety was not critical for effective recognition by the NS5B protein. As was previously noted for benzothiadiazine inhibitors containing a R^3 sulfonamide moiety,[8a,10] the ratios of EC_{50} and IC_{50} values of the benzothiazines under study were typically small (<5-fold). The stability of the benzothiazines toward human liver microsomes was also assessed, and all compounds tested displayed moderate to long half-lives (30 to >60 min, Table 1).

To better understand the interactions of the benzothiazine inhibitors with the NS5B protein, a crystal structure of compound **3a** complexed with the enzyme was obtained.[12] As shown in Figure 2, the benzothiazine-containing compound occupied the NS5B palm binding site in a manner that was similar to that observed previously for the corresponding benzothiadiazine (**1a**).[8a] However, the benzothiazine ring system of **3a** adopted a more planar conformation than that noted for the benzothiadiazine moiety present in **1a**. This alteration resulted in a significantly different binding orientation for the R^3 $–NHSO_2CH_3$ groups contained in the two molecules. In particular, the sulfonamide NH vector of **1a** pointed out of the binding cavity toward solvent while the corresponding NH vector of **3a** was oriented toward the protein. This subtle but important difference is likely responsible for the significantly different reductions in NS5B inhibition activity observed when a methyl group is appended to the N-atom of the R^3 sulfonamide moiety of benzothiadiazine and benzothiazine inhibitors. As can be seen in Figure 2, the binding geometry of the former compounds appears to accommodate the additional methyl group more easily than the orientation of the latter inhibitors.

Table 2 details results from in vitro and in vivo DMPK assessments of a selected number of benzothiazine-containing compounds.

Compound **3a** displayed poor Caco-2 permeability properties that were very similar to those exhibited by the corresponding benzothiadiazine-containing molecule (**1a**). Not surprisingly, **3a** displayed low bioavailability after oral administration to cynomolgus monkeys. Most of the other benzothiazines examined exhibited similarly poor Caco-2 and bioavailability properties. One exception was compound **4a** which displayed the highest Caco-2 fluxes of all tested benzothiazines containing a R^3 sulfonamide moiety. Unfortunately, this compound was quite unstable toward monkey liver microsomes and did not show improved oral bioavailability relative to the other compounds in Table 2. While some trend between lower PSA values and improved Caco-2 fluxes was noted for the compounds in Table 2, the absolute permeabilities of all molecules tested were still low (compared to the control

Table 1
SAR of benzothiazine-containing analogs **3** and **4**

Compound	Route	R^1	R^2	R^3	IC_{50} (**1b**)[a] (μM)	EC_{50} (**1b**)[a] (μM)	CC_{50} (GAPDH)[a] (μM)	HLM $t_{1/2}$[a] (min)
3a	A			$NHSO_2Me$	<0.01	0.0011	>1	>60
3b	A			$NHSO_2Me$	<0.01	0.0027	>1	30
3c	A			$NHSO_2Me$	0.039	0.015	>1	43
3d	A			$NHSO_2Me$	0.015	0.0035	>1	>60
3e	A			$NHSO_2Me$	0.018	0.036	>1	>60
3f	A			$NHSO_2Me$	0.25	0.19	>33	36
3g	A			$NHSO_2Me$	1.6	ND[b]	ND	>60
3h	A			$NMeSO_2Me$	1.6	ND	ND	ND
3i	A			$NMeSO_2Me$	9	ND	ND	>60
4a	B	—		$NHSO_2Me$	<0.01	0.0015	>1	30
4b	B	—		$NHSO_2Me$	0.027	0.013	>1	>60
4c	B	—		$NMeSO_2Me$	0.44	0.94	>33	>60

[a] See Ref. 8c for assay conditions.
[b] ND, not determined.

compounds used in the Caco-2 assays). This fact, coupled with the poor to moderate stability toward monkey liver microsomes, is the likely cause of the low oral bioavailabilities exhibited by all compounds in Table 2.

Because the bioavailabilities and Caco-fluxes of the compounds in Table 2 were low, it was difficult to accurately determine the effect that the benzothiazine moiety had on DMPK properties. Accordingly, we prepared a benzothiazine analog which lacked a polar R^3 substituent (**5b**) and compared its in vitro and in vivo DMPK properties to the corresponding benzothiadiazine-containing molecule (**5a**).[8b] As shown in Table 3, compounds **5a** and **5b** displayed similar (relatively weak) NS5B inhibitory properties. More importantly, **5b** exhibited significantly reduced Caco-2 permeability relative to **5a** and, as a likely result, displayed reduced bioavailability after oral administration to cynomolgus monkeys.[13] While we do not completely understand why **5b** exhibited inferior DMPK properties as compared with **5a**, the above results suggest that a strategy other than benzothiazine exploration should be

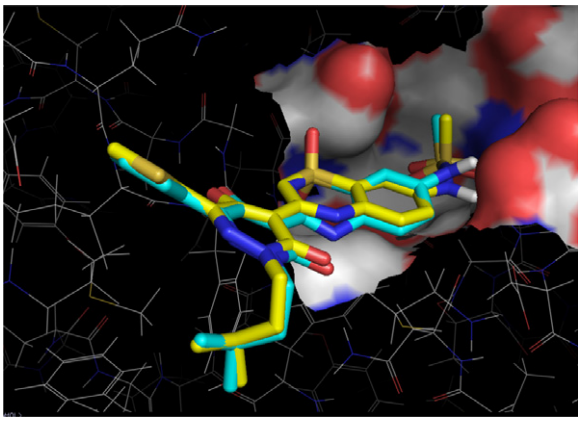


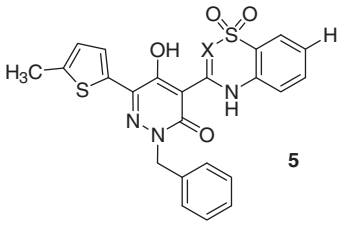
Figure 2. Co-crystal structure of compound **3a** in yellow with the R^3 sulfonamide proton in grey bound to the NS5B protein.[12] A portion of the NS5B surface near the inhibitor R^3 substituent is shown. The structure of compound **1a** as observed when bound to NS5B[8a] is superimposed in blue with the R^3 sulfonamide proton shown in grey.

Table 2
Correlation of calculated physicochemical parameters, in vitro DMPK data, and oral bioavailabilities of selected benzothiazine pyridazinone analogs **3** and **4**

Compound	PSA[a]	clog P[a]	MLM $t_{1/2}$[b] (min)	Solubility limit[c] (μM)	P_{app}[b,d] ((cm/s) × 10^{-6})	F[e] (%)
3a	190	−1.13	20	>100	0.012	4
3f	162	−0.73	34	>100	0.019	1
4a	155	0.8	4.7	>100	0.300	1
4b	162	−1.82	ND	>100	0.027	ND
4c	146	0.05	41	>100	0.120	2

[a] Calculated using ACD/Labs, version 10.0, Advanced Chemistry Development, Inc., Toronto, ON, Canada, http://www.acdlabs.com, 2006.
[b] See Ref. 8a for assay conditions.
[c] Determined by UV absorption (2% DMSO in 20 mM Tris–HCl, pH 7.5, 20 mM NaCl, 5 mM $MgCl_2$, 5 mM dithiothreitol, 0.1 g/L bovine serum albumin, and 100 U/mL RNAse inhibitor).
[d] Controls: P_{app} Atenolol (low) = 0.4×10^{-6} (cm/s), P_{app} Propranolol (high) = 10×10^{-6} (cm/s).
[e] Cynomolgus monkeys; 1 mg/kg IV and PO; 1% DMSO, 9.9% Cremophor EL in 50 mM PBS, pH 7.4.

pursued to lower the PSA values of the pyridazinone and pyrrolo-pyridazinone-containing NS5B inhibitors under study.



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The benzothiazine-containing compounds described in this work (**3** and **4**) were synthesized using two general methods (Route A and Route B) as shown in Scheme 1. In the former method, intermediates **7** or **8**[11] were treated with NaH in THF followed by addition of various cyclic anhydrides **6**[10] and refluxed to afford the desired products **3**. In the latter method, amino esters **9**[10] were coupled with acids **10** or **11**[11] in the presence of EDC to form the corresponding amide intermediates. Treatment of these entities with NaOEt then afforded the desired compounds **4**.

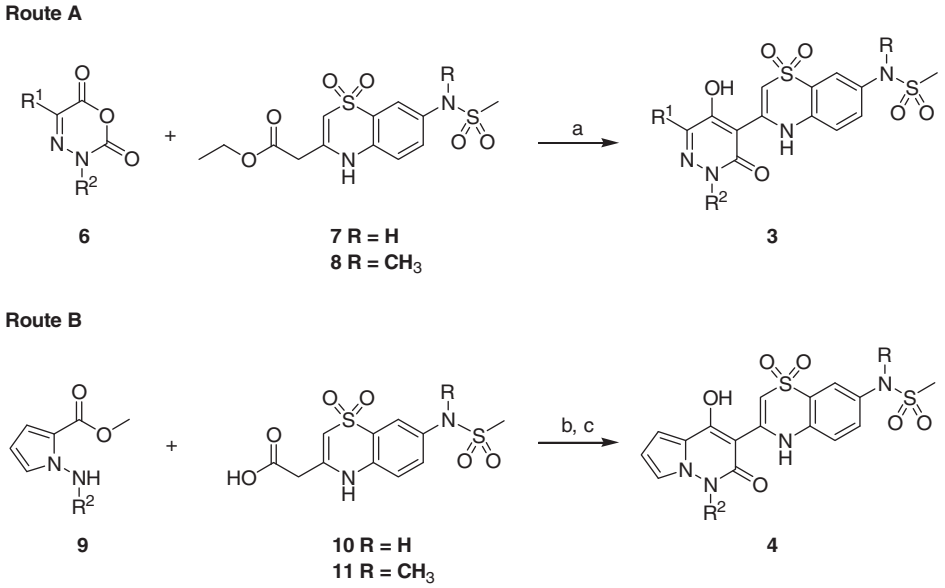
Intermediates **8** and **11** were synthesized as described in Scheme 2. In this method, compound **12**[11] was sequentially treated with NaH and excess iodomethane to afford intermediate **13**. Derivatization of **13** according to previously described procedures[11] then provided the desired intermediates **8** and **11**.

In summary, we identified a new class of 4-(1,1-dioxo-1,4-dihydro-1λ^6-benzo[1,4] thiazin-3-yl) containing compounds (**3** and **4**) as potent inhibitors of the HCV RNA-dependent RNA polymerase (NS5B). These molecules displayed low nanomolar inhibitory activity against the NS5B 1b enzyme as well as potent antiviral properties in cell culture. They were also reasonably stable toward the presence of human liver microsomes. However, introduction of the benzothiazine moiety into our inhibitor design did not significantly improve either Caco-2 permeabilities or oral bioavailabilities in cynomolgus monkeys. Further attempts to improve these parameters will be reported elsewhere.

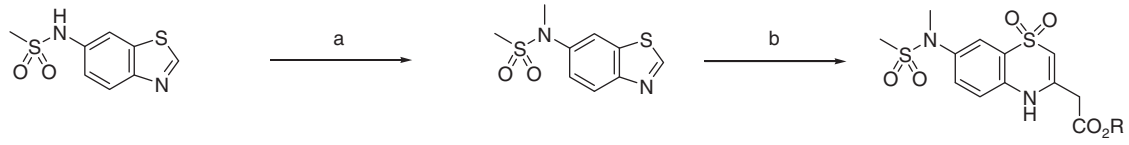
Table 3
Correlation of calculated physicochemical parameters, in vitro DMPK data, and oral bioavailabilities of non-sulfonamide R^3 pyridazinones

Compound	Route	X	IC_{50} (1b)[a] (μM)	PSA[b]	clog P[b]	MLM $t_{1/2}$[c] (min)	Solubility limit[d] (μM)	P_{app}[c,e] ((cm/s) × 10^{-6})	F[f] (%)
5a	A	N	4.9	148	−1.15	>60	>80	1.3	33
5b	A	CH	12	136	1.09	37	>100	0.3	13

[a] See Ref. 8c for assay conditions.
[b] Calculated using ACD/Labs, version 10.0, Advanced Chemistry Development, Inc., Toronto ON, Canada, http://www.acdlabs.com, 2006.
[c] See Ref. 8a for assay conditions.
[d] Determined by UV absorption (2% DMSO in 20 mM Tris–HCl, pH 7.5, 20 mM NaCl, 5 mM $MgCl_2$, 5 mM dithiothreitol, 0.1 g/L bovine serum albumin, and 100 U/mL RNAse inhibitor).
[e] Controls: P_{app} Atenolol (low) = 0.4×10^{-6} (cm/s), P_{app} Propranolol (high) = 10×10^{-6} (cm/s).
[f] Cynomolgus monkeys; 1 mg/kg IV and PO; 1% DMSO, 9.9% Cremophor EL in 50 mM PBS, pH 7.4.



Scheme 1. Reagents and conditions: (a) NaH, THF, reflux, 0.5 h (12–56%); (b) EDC, DMAP, DMF, rt, 12 h; (c) NaOEt, EtOH, 60–80 °C, 8–12 h (39–82% over two steps).



Scheme 2. Reagents and conditions: (a) NaH, THF, CH3I, 0 °C → rt, 4 h (86%), (b) Ref. 11.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank Drs. Alberto Gobbi, Devron Averett, and Steve Worland for their support and helpful discussions during the course of this work.

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11. Related benzothiazine-containing NS5B inhibitors have been reported by others as well. Intermediates **7**, **8**, **10**, **11**, and **12** were prepared as described in: Blake, F. J. et al. U.S. Patent Application US20060040972, 2006.
12. Crystals of HCV NS5B polymerase (genotype 1b, strain BK, Δ21) were grown by the hanging drop method at room temperature, using a well buffer of 20% PEG 4K, 50 mM ammonium sulfate, 100 mM sodium acetate, pH 4.7, with 5 mM DTT. The crystals formed in space group $P2_1\ 2_1\ 2_1$ with approximate cell dimensions, a = 85 Å, b = 106 Å, c = 127 Å, and two protein molecules in the asymmetric unit. Protein/inhibitor complexes were prepared by soaking these crystals for 3–24 h in solutions containing 15–20% DMSO, 20% glycerol, 20% PEG 4K, 0.1 M HEPES, and 10 mM $MgCl_2$ at pH 7.6, and an inhibitor concentration of 2–10 mM. Diffraction data were collected to a resolution of 2.1 Å for compound **3a**. The crystal structure discussed in this Letter has been deposited in the Protein Databank (http://www.rcsb.org) with entry code: 3CWJ. Full structure determination details are given in the PDB entry.
13. The reduced stability of **5b** toward monkey liver microsomes relative to **5a** may also have contributed to the lower bioavailability of the former compound.