Clusiaxanthone and Tocotrienol Series from *Clusia pernambucensis* and their Antileishmanial Activity

Everton M. Silva, Renata M. Araújo, Lindomar G. Freire-Filha, Edilberto R. Silveira, Norberto P. Lopes, José Elias de Paula, Raimundo Braz-Filho and Laila S. Espindola*

*Laboratório de Farmacognosia, Universidade de Brasília, 70910-900 Brasília-DF Brazil

°Instituto de Química, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte, 59072-970 Natal-RN, Brazil

Departamento de Química Orgânica, Universidade Federal do Ceará, 60451-970 Fortaleza-CE, Brazil

Faculdade de Ciências Farmacêuticas de Ribeirão Preto, Universidade de São Paulo, 14040-903 Ribeirão Preto-SP, Brazil

Laboratório de Anatomia Vegetal, Universidade de Brasília, 70910-900 Brasília-DF, Brazil

Laboratório de Ciências Químicas, Universidade Estadual do Norte Fluminense, 28013-602 Campos dos Goytacazes-RJ and Departamento de Química, Universidade Rural do Rio de Janeiro, 23890-000 Seropédica-RJ, Brazil

A análise fitoquímica do extrato acetato de etila da casca do caule de *Clusia pernambucensis* G. Mariz, Clusiaceae, uma espécie do Cerrado brasileiro, conduziu ao isolamento e caracterização completa de uma nova xantona, 1,7-dihidróxi-2-(3-metil-2-butenil)-6',6'-dimetilpirano(2',3':3,4)xantona, denominada clusiaxantona. Quatro tocotrienóis ainda não relatados nesta espécie também foram isolados. Um derivado foi obtido a partir da clusiaxantona, 1-hidróxi,7-metóxi-2-(3-metil-2-butenil)-6',6'-dimetilpirano(2',3':3,4)xantona (7-O-metilclusiaxantona), e um segundo derivado foi obtido a partir do ácido Z-δ-tocotrienolóico. As estruturas foram estabelecidas com base em dados de ressonância magnética nuclear de H e C (NMR 1D e 2D), espectrometria de massa com ionização por electrospray de alta resolução (HRESIMS) e espectroscopia no infravermelho. No controle da infecção de macrófagos com amastigotas de *Leishmania* (*Leishmania*) *amazonensis*, os compostos ativos foram clusiaxantona e seu derivado (CI\(_{50}\) = 66.9 e 57.4 µM, respectivamente). A citotoxicidade dos compostos foi determinada em macrófagos peritoneais de camundongos BALB/c.

Phytochemical analysis of the ethyl acetate extract from the stem bark of *Clusia pernambucensis* G. Mariz, Clusiaceae, a Brazilian Cerrado species, led to the isolation and full characterization of a new xanthone, 1,7-dihydroxy-2-(3-methyl-2-butenyl)-6',6'-dimethylpyran(2',3':3,4)xanthone, namely clusiaxanthone. Four previously unreported tocotrienols from this species were also isolated. A derivative was obtained from clusiaxanthone, 1-hydroxy,7-methoxy-2-(3-methyl-2-butenyl)-6',6'-dimethylpyran(2',3':3,4)xanthone (7-O-methylclusiaxanthone), and an additional derivative was obtained from Z-δ-tocotrienolic acid. The structures of these compounds were established based on data from H and C nuclear magnetic resonance (1D and 2D NMR), high resolution electrospray ionization mass spectrometry (HRESIMS) and infrared spectroscopy. The clusiaxanthone and its derivative were able to control macrophage infection by *Leishmania (Leishmania)* *amazonensis* amastigotes (IC\(_{50}\) = 66.9 and 57.4 µM, respectively). The cytotoxicity of the compounds was assessed in BALB/c mouse peritoneal macrophages.

**Keywords:** *Clusia pernambucensis*, Clusiaceae, xanthone, tocotrienol series, *Leishmania (Leishmania)* *amazonensis*
Introduction

Cutaneous leishmaniasis is a worldwide endemic disease that causes skin lesions usually persisting for several months or years. Patients also suffer because of the toxicity induced by prolonged use of antileishmanial drugs. The clinical symptoms of leishmaniasis are determined by the involved species of *Leishmania*, the parasite virulence and host immune response. On account of the limited treatment options, new therapeutic solutions have been proposed, such as the use of miltefosine and paromomycin for the past twenty years.

Despite these efforts, the need for new drugs remains. However, progress in the development of new treatments has been slow. As previously reported, the screening for compounds from natural product libraries is a key strategy because many plants contain chemical compounds with powerful leishmanicidal activity. In addition, approximately 80% of the population in the Americas use plants to treat various diseases, including leishmaniasis.

Benzenophones, triterpenes and several flavonoids have been isolated from *Clusia pernambucensis*, *C. columnaris*, *C. grandiflora* and *C. spirictu-sanctensis*. These compounds have presented anti-inflammatory, antifungal, antibacterial, anti-HIV, antioxidant and antitumor activities. Peraza-Sanchez et al. demonstrated the activity of the methanol extract of *C. flav a* leaves, popularly used for treating wounds and syphilis, in promastigotes of *Leishmania major*. A Peru based research team supported the use of traditional medicine for the treatment of cutaneous leishmaniasis. The group observed the activity of *C. amazonica* extracts in *L. amazonensis* axenic amastigotes.

In this study, we evaluated the potential antileishmanial effects of compounds and derivatives from *Clusia pernambucensis* G. Mariz, Clusiaceae against *Leishmania* (*Leishmania*) *amazonensis*, a parasite species that causes cutaneous leishmaniasis.

Results and Discussion

The fractionation of the ethyl acetate extract from the stem bark of *Clusia pernambucensis* led to the isolation of a previously unreported compound, clusiaxanthone (1), and six known compounds (2-7), δ-tocotrienol (2), δ-tocotrienolic alcohol (3), Z-δ-tocotrienolic acid (4) and δ-tocotrienol methyl ester (5), betulinic acid (6), and β-sitosterol (7) (Figure 1). Compounds 2 and 5 were isolated from a natural source for the first time. For Z-δ-tocotrienolic acid (4), the chemical shift of the methyl 12a carbon (δ 12.21 ppm) under the protective effect of the γ-methylenic carbon 10' (δ 27.78 ppm) contributed to the stereochemical identification of the carboxyl group. The structures of compounds 2-7 were determined by comparing the experimental data from the 1H and 13C nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) spectra and high resolution electrospray ionization mass spectrometric (HRESIMS) analyses with previously reported data. This was the first time compounds 2 to 5 were isolated from *C. pernambucensis*.

The methylation of clusiaxanthone and Z-δ-tocotrienolic acid resulted in the derivatives 1a, 1-hydroxy,7-methoxy-2-(3-methyl-2-butenyl)-6',6'-dimethylpyrano(2',3':3,4) xanthone (7-O-methylclusiaxanthone), and 4a, (2E,6E,10E)-methyl 13-(3,4-dihydro-6-methoxy-2,8-dimethyl-2H-chromen-2-yl)-2,6,10-trimethyltrideca-2,6,10-trienoate, respectively.

*Clusiaxanthone* (1) was isolated as a yellow solid with [α]D20 = -57.4 (MeOH, c 0.11). The molecular formula for clusiaxanthone was determined as C23H32O3 based on the quasi-molecular ion at m/z 379.1540 [M + H]+ (1 ppm error) in the HRESIMS spectrum. The vibrational bands at 3325 and 1647 cm⁻¹ in the IR spectrum were consistent with hydroxyl and carbonyl groups, respectively.

The 1H NMR spectrum of clusiaxanthone (500 MHz, C₆D₅N) showed signals at δH 1.74 (s, 3H-4'), 1.96 (s, 3H-5'), 3.62 (d, J 7.5 Hz, 2H-1') and 5.49 (t', J 7.5 Hz, H-2), and correlations with the carbon signals (JCH) at δC 18.5 (CH-5'), 26.2 (CH-4'), 22.3 (CH-1') and 123.4 (CH-2') in the HSQC spectrum, respectively, used to characterize the presence of a prenyl moiety. The presence of a 2,2-dimethyl-3,4-dehydrodpyran was also identified by the signals at δH 1.49 (s, 6H-3H4'/'3H5''), 5.65 (d, H-2'', 10.0 Hz) and 6.97 (d, H-1'', 10.0 Hz), which showed correlations (JCH) with the signals corresponding to carbons C-4''/C-5'' (δ 28.6), C-2'' (δ 116.5) and C-1'' (δ 128.2) in the HSQC spectrum, respectively. The signal at δH 13.86 (s) in the 1H NMR spectrum suggested the presence of a chelatogenic hydroxyl group (HO-1) (Table 1).

The 13C NMR spectrum (125 MHz, C₆D₅N) of compound 1, which was supported by the data from the 13C DEPT (distortionless enhancement by polarization)
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Table 1. $^1$H and $^{13}$C NMR data of compounds 1 and 1a, including the results of the HSQC and HMBC analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1, C,D,N</th>
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<th>1a, CDCl$_3$ + CD$_3$OD</th>
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<tr>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>156.0</td>
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<td>1”</td>
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<td>4”</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>1.49 (s)</td>
<td>28.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>5”</td>
<td>28.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>MeO</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
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<td>HO-1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>13.86 (s)</td>
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The number of hydrogens bound to carbon atoms was determined by the comparative analysis of $^1$H and DEPT $^{13}$C NMR spectra. The chemical shifts and coupling constants ($J$) were obtained from the 1D $^1$H NMR spectrum. A $^1$H-$^1$H-COSY experiment was also used to make the molecular assignments.

The last four carbons represent oxygenated carbons. It was also possible to observe the presence of two olefin carbons at $\delta_c$ 123.4 (C-2’) and 131.8 (C-3’) associated with a trisubstituted double bond in the prenyl side chain, and two additional carbons at $\delta_c$ 116.5 (C-1”) and 128.2 (C-2”) of the pyran substituent. The location of the carbons in the xanthone skeleton and all the unequivocal chemical shift assignments were based on the heteronuclear long-range coupling ($^3J_{CH}$ and $^3J_{CH}$) between the hydrogen and carbon atoms as determined by the 2D HMBC spectrum. The location of the prenyl moiety at C-2 was indicated by the HMBC correlations between the methylene protons 2H-1’ ($\delta_c$ 3.62) with both C-2’ ($\delta_c$ 123.4, $^3J_{CH}$) and C-2 ($\delta_c$ 107.9, $^3J_{CH}$) carbons. The location of the prenyl moiety was also confirmed with the both C-1 ($\delta_c$ 155.2,
3\(^1\)J\(_{CH}\) and C-3 (\(\delta_{\text{C}} 158.7, 3\(^1\)J\(_{CH}\)) carbons. The doublet at \(\delta 6.97\) (H-1") showed an HMBC cross-peak to the aromatic C-4 (\(\delta_{\text{C}} 104.9, 3\(^1\)J\(_{CH}\)), C-4a (\(\delta_{\text{C}} 156.6, 3\(^1\)J\(_{CH}\)) and C-3 (\(\delta_{\text{C}} 158.7, 3\(^1\)J\(_{CH}\)) carbons, thus establishing the connectivity of C-1" with C-4. Other similar interactions are summarized in Table 1.

The methylation of compound 1 with an ethereal solution of diazomethane yielded the mono methyl ether 1a and confirmed the presence of a hydroxyl group at C-7, which formed the methyl ether 7-O-Me derivative only. This was determined by its corresponding signal at \(\delta_{\text{H}} 13.86\) (vide supra) in the \(^1\)H NMR spectrum of 1 (Table 1) indicated the presence of another hydroxyl group at C-1 that chelated the carbonyl carbon at C-9 and interfered with the methylation by diazomethane. Derivative 1a had a molecular formula of \(C_{32}H_{52}O\) determined by the protonated peak at \(m/z\) 393.1702 (calculated \(m/z\) 393.1702) in the HRESIMS spectrum.

Therefore, the structure of the new xanthone isolated from Clusia pernambucensis was determined as 1,7-hydroxy-2-(3-methyl-2-buteryl)-6',6'-dimethylpyrano(2',3':3,4) xanthone. This compound was named clusiaxanthone (1). Unlike other reported related xanthones bearing two hydroxyl groups in the aromatic ring, this compound has one OH group less, similar to that identified in Garcinia nigrolineata.27-30

The basic core of this chemical class is a tricycle with a symmetrical skeleton. Ring A is formed from the acetate pathway, involving 1-4 carbon atoms, whereas ring B is composed of the 5-8 carbon atoms and is derived from the shikimic acid pathway.31

The EtOAc extract from the stem bark of C. pernambucensis exhibited an IC\(_{50}\) = 65.0 \(\mu\)g mL\(^{-1}\) against L. (L.) amazonensis promastigotes. The antileishmanial activity of compounds 1-6 in peritoneal macrophages infected with amastigotes was also determined and indicated that clusiaxanthone (1) displayed the most significant antileishmanial activity with an IC\(_{50}\) = 66.9 \(\mu\)M (Table 2). The antileishmanial activity of derivative 1a was similar to that of 1 with an IC\(_{50}\) = 57.4 \(\mu\)M.

Azebaze et al.,32 showed that the activity of synthetic xanthones against axenic L. amazonensis amastigotes was increased in the presence of prenyl groups at positions 2 and 4, similar to the activity of the 2-substituted xanthone observed in this study. Hydroxylated and methoxylated xanthones (with structures similar to compound 1a), which were isolated from Andrographis paniculata (Acanthaceae), showed activity against L. infantum amastigotes inside peritoneal macrophages.33 Lipophilic groups play an important role in facilitating the compound internalization by macrophages, thereby increasing its availability.34,35

According to the literature, the hydroxy-substituted xanthone nucleus shows potential for the development of active derivatives against Leishmania sp., which was observed for the 3,6-bis-\(\alpha\)-diethy laminoaalkoxyxanthones tested in L. mexicana.36 The results of this study confirm the data obtained in our study.

Monzote et al.37 suggested that in Leishmania sp. amastigotes, mitochondrial complex III can be a target for compounds, such as tocotrienols, that contain chromanol groups. Among the tocotrienols studied here, only \(\delta\)-tocotrienolic acid (4) showed an IC\(_{50}\) = 181.0 \(\mu\)M against L. (L.) amazonensis amastigotes. The derivative compound 4a did not show increased antileishmanial activity. Therefore, it is possible that the presence of the carboxylic group is beneficial to the antileishmanial activity because the change in substituent groups at C12' in compounds 2, 3 and 5 failed to improve the antileishmanial activity of tocotrienol.

### Conclusions

We isolated and extensively characterized one unreported xanthone (1) and a series of four known tocotrienols, \(\delta\)-tocotrienol (2), \(\delta\)-tocotrienolic alcohol (3), \(\delta\)-tocotrienoloic acid (4) and \(\delta\)-tocotrienol methyl ester (5), which were previously undescribed in C. pernambucensis. Compounds 2 and 5 were isolated from natural sources for the first time, and two compounds, betulinic acid (6) and \(\beta\)-sitosterol (7), are ubiquitous in plants. Clusiaxanthone (1) showed moderate activity against Leishmania (Leishmania) amazonensis.
Chemical studies to identify derivatives and analogs with lower cytotoxicity and improved antileishmanial activity are desirable. These compounds can be evaluated using an amastigote intramacrophage system. This system is advantageous since it takes into account the pharmacokinetic barriers that all compounds must overcome to reach the target parasite. 

Our laboratory is focused on the development of antileishmanial candidates and is currently developing new xanthone derivatives that contain the original hydroxylated xanthone nucleus.

Experimental

General experimental procedures

Optical rotation data were collected on a DIP-370 polarimeter. For infrared analysis, the samples were embedded in KBr pellets under 10,000 kgf, and the experiment was performed with an infrared spectrophotometer (Perkin-Elmer RX-1). Fractionation was performed by column chromatography (7 x 100 cm) on silica gel (0.04-0.063 mm or 230-400 mesh). Thin layer chromatography (TLC) was performed in silica gel plates (60 F 254, aluminum, Merck).

1H and 13C NMR spectra were recorded at room temperature on a Bruker Avance DRX 500 (500.13 and 125.77 MHz) spectrometer using an inverse detection probe. The chemical shifts are expressed in parts per million (ppm) relative to tetramethylsilane (TMS), and the coupling constants (J values) are shown in hertz (Hz).

HRESIMS spectra were recorded on Bruker UltroTOF and MicrOTOF spectrometers. Electrospray ionization was performed using a time of flight analyzer (ESI-TOF-MS) in both the positive and negative modes.

Analytical high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) of the samples was performed on a Waters model 1525 coupled to a UV photodiode array detector (190-800 nm), series 2996, thermostatic oven and Phenomenex silica column (4.6 x 250 mm, 5 µm). The mobile phase consisted of hexane-ethyl acetate pre-filtered through 0.45 µm nylon membranes, vacuum degassed and sonicated for 15 min. Reversed phase-HPLC was performed on a Shimadzu SL6Vp equipment coupled to a UV photodiode array detector (190-800 nm) equipped with a degasser. A Shimadzu octadecysilane column (4.6 x 250 mm, 5 µm) with an injection volume of 20 µL (2 mg mL⁻¹) and flow rate of 1 mL min⁻¹ was used in the analytical mode. The separation was achieved on a Shimadzu preparative octadecysilane (20 x 250 mm, 10 µm) column with an injection volume of 1 mL (20 mg mL⁻¹) and a flow rate of 9 mL min⁻¹. The compound detection was monitored at 254 nm.

Plant material

The stem bark of Clusia pernambucensis G. Mariz, Clusiaceae, was collected from the gallery forest of the Cerrado biome, Santo Antônio do Descoberto, Goiás State, at an altitude of 1055 metres; south latitude 15º48'35.0"; south longitude 48º20'12.0". The identification of the plant was confirmed by Professor Dr. José Elias de Paula, and a voucher specimen was deposited in the Herbarium of the University of Brasília under the accession number (UB) 3771.

Extraction and isolation

C. pernambucensis extract (22 g) was obtained by macerating 197.11 g of C. pernambucensis stem bark with ethyl acetate. From this extract, 14.15 g were fractionated into 312 fractions of 100 mL by column chromatography with a cyclohexane-EtOAc polarity gradient (100:0; 99:1; 98:2; 97:3; 95:5; 93:7; 90:10; 85:15; 80:20; 75:25; 70:30; 60:40; 50:50; 0:100), and sequentially with an EtOAc-MeOH gradient (100:0; 90:10; 85:15; 80:20; 75:25; 70:30; 60:40; 50:50; 0:100). Based on the TLC profile, the fractions were assembled in 21 fractions (CP1-CP21). Fraction CP15 was purified on a silica column to obtain compound 1 (36.2 mg, 0.2 %). The compound detection was monitored at 254 nm. The purification of fraction CP19 was performed using an HPLC Shimadzu, model SL6Vp equipped with an octadecysilane-C₂₃(20 x 250 mm, 10 µm) preparative column. The eluent consisted of an isocratic ternary mixture of H₂O:MeOH:MeCN (8:32:60). The samples were injected in a volume of 1 mL (20 mg mL⁻¹) with a flow rate of 9 mL min⁻¹, and the compound detection was monitored at 190, 209 and 254 nm. At the end of this process, four compounds were isolated, δ-tocotrienol (2, 1.4 mg, 0.009 %), δ-tocotrienolic alcohol (3, 10.2 mg, 0.07%), Z-δ-tocotrienolic acid (4, 85.3 mg, 0.6%) and δ-tocotrienol-methyl ester (5, 0.6 mg, 0.004%). Betulinic acid (6, 100 mg, 0.7%) and β-sitosterol (7, 20.2 mg, 0.1%) were also isolated.

A methyl ether derivative (1a) of clusiaxanthone (1) was produced by methylation of 1 with diazomethane. Compound 4a was obtained by the methylation of a hydroxyl and terminal carboxyl of Z-δ-tocotrienolic acid (4).

1,7-Dihydroxy-2-(3-methyl-2-butenyl)-6',6'-dimethyl-pyrano[2',3':3,4]xanthone (1): yellow solid; [α]Dl −57.4 (MeOH, c 0.11); IR ν/cm⁻¹ 3324, 2983, 2962, 2909, 2857, 1700, 1647, 1480, 1357; 1H and 13C NMR (500.13 and 125.77 MHz, CDCl₃, δ/ppm) see Table 1; HRESIMS (positive mode) m/z found: 379.1540 [M + H]⁺; calc m/z for [C₂₀H₂₀O₄]⁺ = 379.1545.
Leishmania (Leishmania) amazonensis promastigote culture

C57BL/6 mice were infected with Leishmania (Leishmania) amazonensis (strain L(L)a)-MHOM/BR/PH8) and maintained in the bioterium at the Faculty of Health Science/Medicine (University of Brasilia, Brazil). Blood was collected by puncture of the hind paw of infected animals. The parasites were incubated in McNeal, Novy and Nicolle (NNN) culture medium pH 7.2 at 22 °C for seven days, and subsequently in Schneider’s medium supplemented with 20% fetal bovine serum and 0.25% gentamicin pH 7.2 at 22 °C.

Evaluation of compound cytotoxicity in murine macrophages

After the peritoneal macrophages were isolated from BALB/c mice, 10^6 cells were placed in each well of a 96 well microplate. The cells were incubated for 12 h at 37 °C in a 5% CO\text{2} atmosphere. The culture medium was then replaced with the diluted compounds in new culture medium, and the cells were then incubated at 37 °C in a 5% CO\text{2} atmosphere. A solution of 0.1% DMSO was used as the negative control. After 24 h, cell viability was determined by adding 100 µg per well MTT in PBS (5 mg mL \textsuperscript{-1}) for 4 h. The culture medium was removed and 100 µL DMSO was added. The formazan was quantified in a spectrophotometer at 570 nm. The experiments were performed in triplicate.

Supplementary Information

\textsuperscript{1}H and \textsuperscript{13}C NMR, HSQC, HMBC and \textsuperscript{1}H-\textsuperscript{1}H COSY spectra and HRESIMS spectra of clusiaxanthone and derivative \textit{1a} are available free of charge at http://jbcn.sbq.org.br as PDF file.

Acknowledgments

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