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Structure and activity relationships of tartrate-based TACE inhibitors

Dansu Li [a,*], Janeta Popovici-Muller [a], David B. Belanger [a], John Caldwell [b], Chaoyang Dai [a], Maria David [b], Vinay M. Girijavallabhan [b], Brian J. Lavey [b], Joe F. Lee [b], Zhidan Liu [b], Rob Mazzola [b], Razia Rizvi [b], Kristin E. Rosner [a], Bandarpalle Shankar [b], Jim Spitler [b], Pauline C. Ting [b], Henry Vaccaro [b], Wensheng Yu [b], Guowei Zhou [b], Zhaoning Zhu [b], Xiaoda Niu [c], Jing Sun [c], Zhuyan Guo [b], Peter Orth [b], Shiying Chen [c], Joseph A. Kozlowski [b], Daniel J. Lundell [c], Vincent Madison [b], Brian McKittrick [b], John J. Piwinski [a], Neng-Yang Shih [a], Gerald W. Shipps Jr. [a], M. Arshad Siddiqui [a], Corey O. Strickland [b]

[a] Department of Medicinal Chemistry, Merck Research Laboratories, Cambridge, 320 Bent Street, Cambridge, MA 02141, United States
[b] Department of Medicinal Chemistry, Merck Research Laboratories, 2015 Galloping Hill Road, Kenilworth, NJ 07033, United States
[c] Department of Inflammation, Merck Research Laboratories, 2015 Galloping Hill Road, Kenilworth, NJ 07033, United States

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ABSTRACT

The syntheses and structure–activity relationships of the tartrate-based TACE inhibitors are discussed. The optimization of both the prime and non-prime sites led to compounds with picomolar activity. Several analogs demonstrated good rat pharmacokinetics.

Tumor necrosis factor-α (TNF-α) is a proinflammatory cytokine that plays a central role in several autoimmune disorders such as rheumatoid arthritis (RA), Crohn's disease, and psoriasis.[1] The current success of anti-TNF-α biologics such as Enbrel®, Remicade®, and Humira® in the treatment of RA has increased interest in discovering an orally active small molecule inhibitor to modulate the level of TNF-α.

One target of interest is TACE (TNF-α converting enzyme), the metalloprotease that releases the soluble 17-kDa form of TNF-α from membrane-bound pro-TNF-α. A TACE inhibitor would have the potential to treat RA by reducing the level of soluble TNF-α.[2] Our focus was to identify an orally active and highly selective TACE inhibitor.[3]

Recently, we disclosed a novel series of tartrate diamide TACE inhibitors[4] such as **1** (Fig. 1). A unique tridentate zinc binding mode was revealed with the tartrate scaffold. Non-prime site amine exploration identified 2-arylpyrrolidines as preferred moieties. Addition of a benzyl group (compound **2**) provided a substantial potency gain compared to **1** by extending into the S3′ region. Herein, we report our structure–activity relationship (SAR) investigation of the prime and non-prime sites. Our goal was to improve potency as well as to achieve acceptable bioavailability.

Our initial efforts focused on the design of the optimal group in the S3′ region, a binding site on the protein which has been found to confer both selectivity and potency in other reported series.[5] It was discovered that switching the 2,4-disubstituted thiophene ring (compound **2**) to a 2,5-analog afforded similar activity (compound **3**). We decided to focus on compound **3** to further explore the S3′ region with modifications of the phenyl ring and the results are depicted in Table 1. Addition of an *ortho*-chloro substituent (**3a**) improved the potency, while either *meta*- or *para*-chloro substituents (**3b** and **3c**) were not beneficial. Changing to an *ortho*-methoxy group further improved the potency to 3 nM (**3d**). Heterocycles were also tolerated, since both the thiophene (**3e**) and the imidazole (**3f**) analogs maintained similar activities as compound **3**. While the naphthalene compound **3g** lost most of the activity, the fused benzimidazoles (**3h** and **3i**) had similar potencies compared to **3d**. The crystal structure of **3i** is shown in Figure 2.[6] Its binding mode is similar to what was reported[4] earlier. As expected, the methylene linker directs the benzimidazole group toward the S3′ region.

Synthesis of benzyl-linked aromatic thiophenes is exemplified in Scheme 1 for compound **3a**. Negishi[7] coupling of commercially available **4** with 2-chlorobenzylzinc chloride, followed by depro-

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 617 499 3533.
E-mail address: dansu.li@spcorp.com (D. Li).

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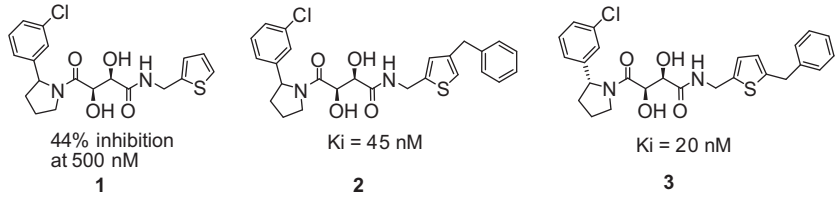
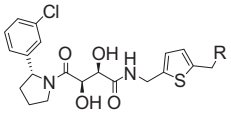
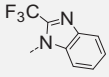


Figure 1.

Table 1
TACE K_i of thienyl-benzyl linked tartrate diamide analogs



Compound	R	TACE K_i (nM)
3		20
3a		9.3
3b		48
3c		37
3d		3
3e		11
3f		37
3g		50% at 500 nM[a]
3h		4
3i		2

[a] The data are reported as % inhibition.

tection gave amine **5**, which reacted with acid **6**[8] to afford compound **3a** after final acetonide deprotection.

The general synthesis of the amines for the nitrogen-linked compounds (**3f**, **3h**, and **3i**) is described in Scheme 2. Protection of 2-thiophenemethanamine (**7**) gave phthalimide **8**, which was converted to thienyl chloride **9** upon treatment with paraformaldehyde/HCl followed by zinc chloride.[9] Alkylation with 2-methylbenzimidazole gave compound **10**. Deprotection with hydrazine hydrate yielded amine **11**, from which **3h** was prepared following the procedures shown in Scheme 1.

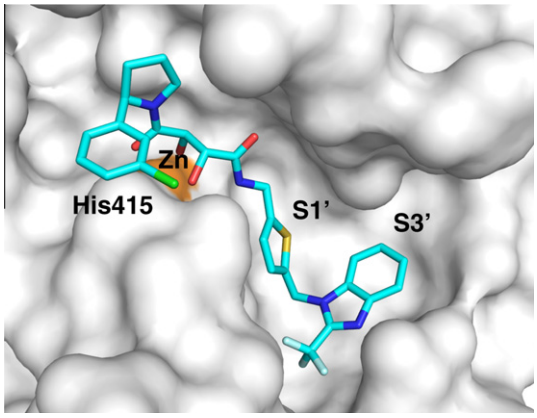
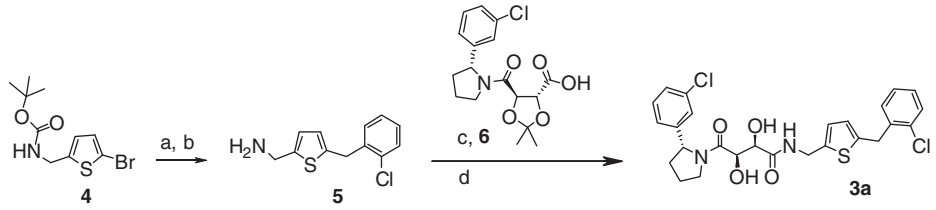


Figure 2. X-ray structure of compound **3i** (stick) bound to TACE catalytic domain (PDB code: 3LGP). The S1′/S3′ loop residues were removed in order to show the inhibitor binding.

Though several S3′ motifs with improved potency were identified (**3d**, **3h**, and **3i**), it was decided to re-examine the SAR for the non-prime amide around compound **3h**. Heterocyclic analogs of 2-phenylpyrrolidines[4] were investigated and the results are shown in Table 2. Of the pyridine compounds (**12a**–**c**), the 4-pyridine (**12b**) was the less favored. While thiophene **12d** was equipotent to **3h**, thiazole analog (**12e**) afforded a slightly less active compound. The introduction of aminothiazole (**12f**) restored the potency. Interestingly, isoindoline analogs **12g** and **12h** provided compounds with excellent enzymatic activity. Although our efforts to find an optimal group in the S3′ region had greatly improved the potency (compound **3** vs **12h**), most of the compounds from this series exhibited poor rat pharmacokinetics (PK) profiles.

In order to maintain good potency and gain oral bioavailability, our efforts were redirected to further explore the SAR of the prime site amide. A series of analogs was prepared to investigate whether the thiophene moiety could be replaced with a six-membered ring (Table 3). Compared to compound **3** (Fig. 1), the phenyl analog **13a** was less potent. To address whether this potency loss was due to a different projection in the S3′ pocket, biphenyl compounds **13b** and **13c** were synthesized and had similar activities as compound **3**. Next replacement of the benzene ring with a heterocycle was explored. Pyridine analog **13d** showed significantly better biochemi-



Scheme 1. Reagents and conditions: (a) 2-chlorobenzylzinc chloride, (t-$Bu_3P)_2Pd$, 95%; (b) 4 M HCl/dioxane, 90%; (c) acid **6**, DIEA, DMF, HATU, 64%; (d) 90:10 TFA/water, rt, 87%.