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Identification of a new natural gastric lipase inhibitor from star anise

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22

23 **Abbreviations**

24 DGL, dog gastric lipase; HPL, human pancreatic lipase; LipY, mycobacterial Rv3097c-
25 encoded lipase; SA, star anise; DMSO, dimethyl sulfoxide; M5ME, myricitrin-5-methyl ether;
26 FFA, Free fatty acid; TC4, tributyrin; NaTDC, sodium taurodeoxycholate; SAPRF, star anise
27 polyphenolic-rich fraction; MALDI-TOF-MS; matrix-assisted laser desorption ionization-
28 time of flight mass spectrometry; PMF, peptide mass fingerprinting; TLC, thin layer
29 chromatography; UPLC-HRMS, ultra-performance liquid chromatography high resolution
30 hybrid quadrupole-time of flight mass spectrometry.

Abstract

Bioactive compounds identification and isolation from natural complex samples, even though being a difficult task, is of great interest in the drug discovery field. We describe here an innovative strategy for the identification of a new gastric lipase inhibitor from star anise for the treatment of obesity. After plant screening assays for gastric lipase inhibition, star anise was selected and investigated by bioactivity guided fractionation. MALDI-TOF mass spectrometry and peptide mass fingerprinting allowed the detection of an inhibitor covalently bound to the catalytic serine of gastric lipase. Mass-directed screening approach using UPLC-HRMS and accurate mass determination searching identified the flavonoid myricitrin-5-methyl ether (M5ME) as a lipase inhibitor. The inhibitory activity was rationalized based on molecular docking, showing that M5ME is susceptible to a nucleophilic attack by gastric lipase. Overall, our data suggest that M5ME may be considered as a potential candidate for future application as a lipase inhibitor for the treatment of obesity.

Keywords

Gastric lipase, inhibition; star anise, guided fractionation; mass spectrometry, molecular docking.

48 **1. Introduction**

49 Gastric and pancreatic lipases play a key role in gastrointestinal digestion of dietary fat
50 suggesting that they may represent a drug target for the treatment of obesity [1, 2]. Gastric lipase
51 is the key enzyme for the gastrointestinal digestion of dietary triglycerides [3]. Lipid digestion is
52 initiated in the stomach by the acid stable gastric lipase and continues in the duodenum
53 through the synergistic actions of gastric lipase and colipase-dependent pancreatic lipase,
54 leading to the formation of absorbable monoglycerides and free fatty acids (FFA) [4]. Inhibiting
55 these lipases to reduce fat absorption is the main pharmacological approach adopted for the
56 treatment of obesity [5]. Orlistat, a hydrogenated derivative of lipstatin derived from
57 *Streptomyces toxitricini*, is the only FDA-approved anti-obesity drug that specifically targets
58 digestive lipases [6]. This drug is an active site-directed inhibitor that reacts with the
59 nucleophilic serine residue of the catalytic triad of digestive lipases within the gastrointestinal
60 tract [7]. However, Orlistat, which is considered relatively too expensive to afford, is also
61 known to inhibit various other enzymes and could lead to undesirable side effects, which
62 might affect its current clinical use [8]. Therefore, looking for new cost-effective digestive
63 lipase inhibitors is highly demanded nowadays.

64 Much interest has been shifted on plant polyphenols that have been reported to play a
65 significant role in the prevention of overweight and obesity [9, 10]. More precisely,
66 polyphenolic-rich extracts from plant sources have been reported to inhibit pancreatic lipase
67 *in vitro* [11-14].

68 Bioactivity guided fractionation is a useful approach for the chemical and biological
69 screening of complex plant extracts [15, 16]. Mass spectrometry (MS)-based affinity approaches
70 have emerged as effective tools in small-molecule drug discovery. In these approaches the
71 mass spectrometer can be exploited to rapidly screen drug candidates for specific interactions

72 with targets of interest [17]. Coupling bioaffinity selection to MS has been developed in the
73 screening of natural product extracts [18] and synthetic combinatorial libraries [19]. Accordingly,
74 direct and indirect bioaffinity screening approaches have been used. In the indirect screening
75 approach, the complex protein-ligand is dissociated prior the MS analysis, allowing thus the
76 identification of the target ligand. Whereas, in the direct screening approach, the MS analysis
77 can be directly performed on the whole complex [20]. With the availability of MS technologies,
78 direct bioaffinity screening approach could be a potential way to facilitate tentative
79 identification of the relevant compound within simplified natural mixtures.

80 UPLC-HRMS is a modern powerful tool to identify known and unknown compounds in
81 a complex mixture. The use of UPLC-HRMS in combination with a QTOF mass spectrometer
82 for target and non-target screening purposes has gained popularity in recent years [21]. Indeed,
83 UPLC provides fast and high-resolution separation, which increases LC-MS sensitivity and
84 minimizes matrix interference arising from minimal simple preparation. Coupling of UPLC
85 system with QTOF-MS provides thus deep analysis on sample composition [22]. Although
86 increasing applications focus on analyzing molecules present in a variety of samples, there
87 have been no reports regarding UPLC-HRMS application for identifying lipase inhibitors
88 from natural product mixture.

89 To identify a natural gastric lipase inhibitor from plants, we proposed herein a new
90 strategy based on bioactivity guided fractionation along with direct bioaffinity screening using
91 MALDI-TOF-MS and peptide mass fingerprinting (PMF), non-target screening using UPLC-
92 HRMS, and *in silico* molecular docking.

93 **2. Materials and methods**

94 **2.1. Preparation of plant crude extracts for screening study**

95 Dried plant species, purchased from local markets, were cleaned and finely powdered
96 using a grinder. All powdered samples were separately extracted by maceration technique
97 using hexane, ethyl acetate, ethanol and water (1:10 w/v ratio). The different extracts were
98 evaporated to dryness *in vacuo* yielding dried extracts. All extracts were dissolved in dimethyl
99 sulfoxide (DMSO) to obtain a final concentration of 100 mg/mL and were assayed for their
100 anti-lipase potency.

101 **2.2. Bioactivity guided fractionation**

102 Star anise crude phenolic extract (SACPE) was prepared from star anise powder *via*
103 maceration in ethanol:water (7:3 v/v) (1:10 w/v ratio) for 24 hours. The solid-liquid mixture
104 was filtered with fritted glass number 3. Then, the filtrate was evaporated to dryness *in vacuo*
105 yielding dried SACPE.

106 Star anise powder was extracted with hexane (1:10 w/v) for 48 h to remove lipoidal
107 material [23]. After filtration, the filtrate was evaporated under vacuum to yield star anise
108 hexanic extract. The residue was air-dried at room temperature overnight to get the dried
109 defatted star anise (DFSA). Thus, star anise phenolic extract (SAPE) was prepared from
110 DFSA *via* maceration in ethanol:water (7:3 v/v) (1:10 w/v ratio) for 24 h.

111 SAPE was successively fractionated using liquid-liquid partition and solid-liquid
112 extraction to obtain star anise polyphenol-rich fractions (SAPRF). In a first step, liquid-liquid
113 partitioning of SAPE with ethyl acetate gives two fractions SAPRF1 and SAPRF2. These
114 fractions were evaporated under vacuum (45 °C), lyophilized and subjected to the inhibition
115 test against DGL activity. SAPE, SAPRF1 and SAPRF2 were then analyzed by TLC on
116 aluminum sheets coated with 0.2 mm silica gel 60 to characterize their chemical profile. The
117 migration was performed with a mixture of chloroform:methanol (8:2 v/v). After that, the

118 spots were revealed with iodine vapor. In a second step, SAPRF2 was re-suspended in ethyl
119 acetate for solid-liquid extraction. After 3 hours of maceration, the mixture was filtered.
120 Similarly, this second step led to two fractions, SAPRF3 and SAPRF4, that were dried under
121 vacuum. Subsequently, SAPRF2 and the fraction produced (SAPRF3 and SAPRF4) were
122 subjected to DGL inhibition test and TLC analysis under the same experimental conditions of
123 the first step. SAPRF4 was thereby selected for further investigations. A flow chart for the
124 preparation of various fractions from star anise powder is given in **Fig. 1**.

125 **2.3. Lipase activity measurements using the pH-stat technique**

126 Recombinant DGL [24], HPL [25], and LipY [26] were produced and purified as described
127 previously. Pancreatic colipase was purified from lipid-free porcine pancreatic powder [27].
128 Lipases were stored in 150 mM NaCl buffered solutions (pH 6 for DGL, pH 7 for HPL, and
129 pH 8 for LipY).

130 Enzymatic activity was assayed at 37 °C by measuring the amount of FFA released
131 from a mechanically stirred tributyrin (TC4) emulsion, using 0.1 M NaOH with a pH-stat
132 (Metrohm 718 STAT Titrino, Switzerland) adjusted to a fixed end point [28]. TC4 emulsions
133 were formed by mixing 0.5 mL TC4 with 14.5 mL buffer solution. The activities of DGL
134 were determined using the following assay solution: 150 mM NaCl, 2 mM sodium
135 taurodeoxycholate (NaTDC), and 2 mM bovine serum albumin at pH 5.5 [24]. In the case of
136 HPL, the activities were determined using the standard assay solution for PL: 0.3 mM Tris-
137 HCl (pH 8.0), 150 mM NaCl, 2 mM $CaCl_2$, and 4 mM NaTDC, in the presence of 5 molar
138 excess of colipase [25]. With LipY, the assay solution was 2.5 mM Tris-HCl (pH 7.5), 300 mM
139 NaCl and 3 mM NaTDC [26]. Under the above assay conditions, enzymatic activities were
140 expressed as international units: 1 U = 1 μmol FFA released per minute. The specific
141 activities of DGL, HPL, and LipY, expressed in U per mg of pure enzyme, were found to be
142 340 ± 21, 8021 ± 79 and 129 ± 2 U/mg, respectively.

143 **2.4. Assay for anti-lipase activity**

144 The lipase-inhibitor pre-incubation method was used to test, in aqueous medium and in
145 the absence of substrate, the possible direct reactions between lipases and inhibitors [5]. Lipase-
146 inhibitor pre-incubations were performed at 25 °C, at different times and at various inhibitor
147 extract amounts (a_I), in presence of 4 mM NaTDC [5]. The final enzyme concentration in the
148 incubation medium was 1 µM. The residual lipase activity was measured by the pH-stat. The
149 amount of the inhibitor fraction (a_{I50}) and the half-inactivation time ($t_{½}$), corresponding to
150 50 % of residual enzyme activity, were determined.

151 In each case, control experiments were performed in the absence of inhibitor fraction
152 but with the same volume of DMSO. It is worth noting that DMSO at a final volume
153 concentration less than 10 % has no effect on the enzyme activity.

154 **2.5. UPLC-HRMS experiment**

155 The system used for UPLC-HRMS was an ultra-performance liquid chromatography
156 Ultimate 3000 (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Villebon-sur-Yvette, France) coupled to a high-
157 resolution hybrid quadrupole-time of flight mass spectrometer (Impact II, Bruker, Brême,
158 Germany) equipped with electrospray ionization source (ESI) (Bruker, Brême Germany).
159 Instrument control and data collection were performed using Data Analysis 5.0 software.

160 Chromatographic separation was performed on a polar C18 column (10 cm × 2.1 mm ×
161 1.7 µm, Luna Omega, Phenomenex, France). The column oven temperature was set at 40 °C
162 and an injection volume of 7 µL of the sample was loaded. The sample compounds were
163 separated at a flow rate of 0.4 µL/min using (A) H_2O (Milli-Q) with 0.1 % formic acid and
164 (B) acetonitrile with 0.1 % formic acid. The analytes were separated using the following
165 gradient: from 0 % to 100 % of B in 30 min and kept constant for 5 min. The column was re-
166 equilibrated for 10 min at the initial composition of the gradient before runs.

167 The ESI interface was operated on full scan mode (m/z 50-2000) in negative and
168 positive ion mode. The parameters for the ESI ion source were as follows: the capillary
169 voltage, 3.0 kV; the source temperature, 200 °C; the operating pressure of the nitrogen flow
170 for the nebulizer gas, 45 Psi. Ultraviolet (UV) detectors measured the absorption over the
171 range of 250 and 280 nm.

172 Before each acquisition batch, external calibration of high-resolution mass spectrometer
173 was performed with a sodium formate cluster solution. The calibration solution was injected
174 at the beginning of each run. MS/MS analyses were carried out with Data Dependent
175 Acquisition mode for precursor ions with an intensity superior to 2000 counts using a
176 stepping of collision energy ramp.

177 Annotation of each signal was performed by interrogation of different databases
178 (ChemSpider, MassBank, Drugbank, HMDB) using a home-made software providing
179 annotation of LC-MS data according to parent mass accuracy (< 5 ppm). After generation of a
180 short list of potential candidates for each signal, the correlation of isotope patterns according
181 to putative atomic compositions was checked to reduce the list of putative annotation
182 (mSigma < 30). The investigation of experimental MS/MS data using web-based spectral
183 database and/or *in silico* fragmentation tool as MetFrag© was necessary to obtain structural
184 information and annotate more precisely each compound.

185 **2.6. MALDI-TOF mass spectrometry analysis**

186 DGL was pre-incubated for 30 min at 25 °C with a large excess of SAPRF4 (a_I = 30 µg)
187 to abolish any residual lipolytic activity. A blank experiment was performed in the absence of
188 SAPRF4. MALDI-TOF analysis of the entire non-inhibited or inhibited DGL was carried out
189 with a Bruker Micoflex II mass spectrometer (Daltonik, Deutchland) using a saturated
190 solution of α-cyano-4-hydroxycinnamic acid in acidified water (0.1 % TFA) and acetonitrile
191 (30:70 v/v) [28]. Mass spectra were acquired in the positive ion mode, using the Flex Analysis™

192 software program (Bruker, Daltonik, Deutchland). Protein identification was performed using
193 the MASCOT™ version 2.2 search engine (Matrix Science, London, UK) and the NCBI
194 protein database. Theoretical and experimental peptide mass were obtained using the
195 BioTools™ software program (Bruker, Daltonik, Deutchland).

196 **2.7. Peptide mass fingerprinting**

197 Non-inhibited and inhibited DGL (with SAPRF4) were first separated by SDS-PAGE.
198 The protein bands were then excised from the gel and subjected to in-gel trypsin digestion
199 procedure as previously described [28]. For peptides identification, the in-gel digested peptides
200 were analyzed by a proteomic approach including MALDI-TOF/MS and electrospray
201 ionization (ESI) quadrupole time of flight (QTOF) MS/MS (Waters, Manchester) coupled
202 with a nano flow UPLC nano Acquity (Waters, Manchester). For UPLC-ESI-QTOF analysis,
203 the samples were dissolved in the loading buffer (3% acetonitrile/ 0.1 % TFA in water) and
204 desalted on a C18 nano trap (Symmerty C18, 180 µm × 2 cm, 5 µm, Waters) mounted on a 6-
205 port valve, before on line elution onto a C18 column (BEH 130 C18, 100 µm × 10 cm, 1.7
206 µm, Waters). Gradient elution was performed from 3 % to 50 % of mobile phase B (100 %
207 acetonitrile / 0.1 % formic acid) in A (0.1 % formic acid in water) for 30 min. The column
208 was rinsed for 6 min with 85 % of B and then brought back in 1 min to the initial condition.
209 Between each sample, a blank (injection of loading buffer only) was done using the same
210 chromatographic method. The peptides were detected into the mass spectrometer in a positive
211 ion mode using the MS^E mode. Data acquisitions of spectra were performed using the
212 Micromass software Protein Lynx Global Server 2.5.2 (Waters).

213 **2.8. Molecular docking**

214 *In silico* molecular docking of the M5ME inhibitor present in the active site of DGL
215 (PDB entry codes: 1K8Q - 2.70 Å resolution [24]) was performed using AutoDock Vina [29]
216 program under UCSF Chimera software [30]. The grid box size was chosen to fit the whole

217 active site cleft and to allow non-constructive binding positions. The inhibitor structure model
218 was built using the Avogadro program [31]. Binding modes were scored and ranked based on
219 the most favorable energies.

220 **3. Results**

221 **3.1. Screening for anti-lipase properties of crude medicinal plant extracts**

222 Twenty extracts, prepared from five medicinal plants with anti-obesity potential
223 (*Illicium verum*, *Glycyrrhiza glabra*, *Salvia officinalis*, *Thymus vulgaris*, and *Rosmarinus*
224 *officinalis*) [32], were screened for their inhibitory effect against DGL activity at an a_I value of 1
225 mg. The ethanolic extract of the fruits of *Illicium verum* (star anise) was found to have the
226 strongest inhibitory activity (81 %) against DGL **(Table S1)**. While the ethanolic extract of
227 *Rosmarinus officinalis* and the roots of *Glycyrrhiza glabra* showed a moderate inhibitory
228 activity (43 and 44 %, respectively) toward DGL, the remaining medicinal plant extracts
229 displayed weak inhibitory activities. Star anise was thereby selected for further processing.

230 **3.2. Effect of defatting star anise on anti-lipase activity potency**

231 Since star anise hexanic extract showed a weak inhibitory rate (18 %, **Table S1**) and a
232 marked yield (around 7 %, data not shown), we evaluated the anti-lipase activity of phenolic
233 extract from star anise before and after defatting sample. Thus, SACPE (non-defatted) and
234 SAPE (defatted) extracts were prepared as described in the experimental section. Using an a_I
235 value of 1 mg of each extract, the lipase inhibitory activity of SAPE (100 %) was higher than
236 that of SACPE (89 %).

237 **3.3. Bioactivity guided fractionation of SAPE**

238 SAPE was fractionated using the scheme shown in **Fig. 1**. Two steps were used to
239 fractionate SAPE. In the first step, the fractionation of SAPE led to SAPRF1 and SAPRF2,
240 which were analyzed on TLC **(Fig. S1A)**. One can note that spots intensities in SAPRF1 and

241 SAPRF2 have increased compared to the initial extract (SAPE). DGL activity inhibitory test
242 was conducted on each of these two fractions. At an a_I value of 500 µg of each fraction,
243 SAPRF2 totally abolished DGL residual activity, while SAPRF1 led only to 25 % residual
244 DGL activity. Subsequently, as SAPRF2 fraction was found to be more active, it was further
245 subjected to a second fractionation step. Similarly, this latter led to SAPRF3 and SAPRF4
246 **(Fig. 1)** which were subjected to lipase activity inhibitory test and TLC analysis **(Fig. S1B)**.
247 Unlike SAPRF3, SAPRF4 was found to display promising anti-lipase potency with 100 %
248 DGL inhibition rate at an a_I value of 250 µg. Regarding TLC analysis, obtained results
249 showed that SAPRF3 is moderately polar fraction, while SAPRF4 seems to have a strong
250 polar character.

251 **3.4. Evaluation of the inhibitory effect of SAPRF4 against lipases of medicinal interest**

252 The inhibitory activity of the SAPRF4 fraction was evaluated against two mammalian
253 digestive lipases (DGL and HPL) and one microbial lipase belonging to the hormone-
254 sensitive lipase (HSL) family (LipY) [26]. With each lipase, linear kinetics corresponding to the
255 FFAs (µmol) released *vs*. time (min) were obtained in the presence and absence of the
256 inhibitor fraction. A dose-dependent effect was observed upon increasing the amount of
257 SAPRF4 on DGL, HPL and LipY **(Fig. 2)**. At an a_I value of only 30 µg, DGL activity was
258 totally abolished after a 30 min incubation period **(Fig. 2A)**, while HPL was strongly
259 inactivated (96 %) at an a_I value of up to 1 mg **(Fig. 2B)**. However, LipY activity was not
260 completely abolished even at a high SAPRF4 amount, showing a residual activity of ~20 %
261 **(Fig. 2C)**. The a_{I50} values were found to be 7 µg, 82 µg and 5 µg for DGL, HPL and LipY,
262 respectively **(Table 1)**, indicating that SAPRF4 is a potent inhibitor toward both DGL and
263 LipY.

264 The influence of the incubation time on the level of inhibition of DGL, HPL and LipY
265 by the SAPRF4 fraction was further investigated **(Fig. 2D-F)**. The residual activity of these

266 lipases decreased rapidly and reached a plateau value after approximately 30 min of
267 incubation. From these inhibition curves, values of the half-inactivation times ($t_{½}$) were then
268 determined and found to be 0.4 min, 0.6 min and 0.1 min for DGL, HPL and LipY,
269 respectively **(Table 1)**. Such values reflect an extremely high rate of inhibition of these
270 lipases by SAPRF4.

271 **3.5. Analysis of the inhibitor-modified DGL complex with mass spectrometry**

272 To investigate whether the inhibitory compound within SAPRF4 forms a covalent bond
273 with the catalytic serine of DGL, MALDI-TOF-MS analysis was conducted on both non-
274 inhibited and inhibited DGL. **Fig. 3** shows typical spectral recordings of untreated and treated
275 DGL with SAPRF4. A clear shift in the molecular mass of DGL was observed reflecting a
276 covalent binding of the inhibitor to the lipase.

277 To deduce the exact molecular mass of the inhibitor contained in the SAPRF4 fraction,
278 PMF analysis of non-inhibited and inhibited DGL was performed. Results showed that the
279 peptide L^{147}-K^{168} (LHYVGHSQGTTIGFIAFSTNPK) containing the catalytic S^{153} residue
280 was detected at a molecular mass of 2376.05 Da with non-inhibited DGL **(Fig. 4A)**. This
281 catalytic peptide appeared concomitantly with a second peptide detected at a molar mass of
282 around 2414.82 Da. By contrast, when DGL was incubated with SAPRF4, a mass increase of
283 + 489.52 Da was observed in the PMF spectrum for the catalytic peptide **(Fig. 4B)**, while the
284 peptide detected at a molar mass of around 2414.82 Da remained unchanged. This mass shift
285 (489.52 Da) observed here is supposed to correspond to the molecular mass of the natural
286 inhibitor bound to DGL.

287 To tentatively identify the molecular formula and the structure of the phytochemical
288 compound that binds covalently to DGL, we analyzed the SAPRF4 fraction by UPLC-HRMS.
289 Seven major phenolic compounds have been identified **(Fig. S2A and Table S2)**. To
290 empirically calculate their potential molecular formulas, various criteria have been used

291 among them: the isotopic pattern, the fragmentation pattern and the high-resolution accurate
292 mass (with error below 0.4 ppm at the time of matching the theoretical mass with the
293 measured mass). Mass-directed identification showed that the natural DGL inhibitor
294 compound within the SAPRF4 fraction might correspond to myricitrin-5-methyl ether
295 (M5ME) with a molecular mass of 479.1184 Da and a molecular formula of $C_{22}H_{22}O_{12}$ **(Fig.**
296 **5**).

297 **3.6. Molecular docking**

298 To shed light on DGL-M5ME binding interactions, *in silico* molecular docking was
299 performed using AutoDock Vina program. The open conformation of DGL, in complex with a
300 phosphonate inhibitor covalently bound to its catalytic serine residue [24], was used as reference
301 model to improve the reliability of docking results. The lipase active site was found to be fully
302 accessible thus enabling docking experiments. Automated docking resulted in several possible
303 conformations of the M5ME inhibitor within DGL catalytic pocket, with favorable binding
304 energies ranging from -8.3 to -9.5 kcal/mol **(Fig. S3A**). For subsequent analysis, we retained
305 the best matching conformation that directly exposes the most reactive carbon atom of the
306 M5ME inhibitor towards the catalytic serine, within a calculated distance of 3.8 Å which is
307 sufficient to promote the nucleophilic attack **(Fig. S3B)**. In this configuration, we found that
308 M5ME could fit properly into DGL catalytic pocket **(Fig. 6)**, which consists of a deep canyon
309 of approximately 20 Å long, 7 Å wide, and 20 Å deep [24]. Moreover, like the phosphonate
310 inhibitor, M5ME shows a relatively flat structure, with measured lengths of around 12 Å long,
311 5.5 Å wide, and 9 Å deep **(Fig. S3C)**. For the sake of comparison, the previously reported
312 phosphonate inhibitor only measures 6 Å long, 2 Å wide and 10 Å deep, and thus requires the
313 presence of β-octyl glucoside or 1-amino-anthracene to completely fill the catalytic pocket [24].
314 Interestingly, a more detailed analysis of the environment of the M5ME compound, bond to
315 the catalytic serine, revealed a significant stabilizing effect of the DGL-M5ME tetrahedral

316 intermediate by the neighboring oxyanion hole **(Fig. 5)**. Indeed, an oxygen originating from
317 the pyran ring of M5ME points towards the backbone nitrogen atoms of Leu67 and Gln154
318 residues within hydrogen bond distances of 2.37 Å and 2.08 Å, respectively.

319 **4. Discussion**

320 Star anise (*Illicium verum*) is an important traditional Chinese medicine as well as a
321 commonly used spice. Its tree is an aromatic evergreen tree growing almost exclusively in
322 southern China and Vietnam. The fruit of star anise is used in traditional medicine to treat
323 stomachache, colic, vomiting, insomnia, skin inflammation, rheumatic pain, dyspepsia, facial
324 paralysis, asthma, and bronchitis [33]. A great deal of research effort is being devoted to testing
325 the putative beneficial effects of star anise extracts. Modern pharmacology studies
326 demonstrated that crude extracts and active compounds of star anise possess wide
327 pharmacological actions [34]. However, to the best of our knowledge, none has yet examined
328 the effect of star anise extracts on digestive lipases activities.

329 DGL provides a good model for human gastric lipases [24, 35]. A screening of a collection
330 of 20 extracts from five medicinal plants using solvents with different polarities allowed the
331 identification of ethanolic extract from star anise, which efficiently inhibited gastric lipase
332 **(Table S1)**. The inhibitory effect of star anise ethanolic extract on DGL might be caused by
333 the presence of phenolic compounds within the extract. It was reported that ethanol/water
334 extracts of star anise contained high amounts of phenolic compounds [36]. The use of water in
335 combination with ethanol contributes to the creation of a moderately polar medium that
336 ensures the extraction of phenolic compounds [37]. Plant phenolic compounds, such as flavones,
337 flavanols, tannins and chalcones, have been reported as pancreatic lipase inhibitors [14], thus
338 supporting the use of star anise polyphenolic-rich extract for further bioactivity guided
339 fractionation **(Fig. 1)**.

340 Our results showed that removal of lipoidal material from star anise before phenolic
341 extraction enhanced anti-lipase activity, which might be related to the fact that the
342 concentration of phenolics in SACPE is lower than in SAPE, suggesting thereby that the anti-
343 lipase effect is related to star anise phenolic compounds. One of the hallmarks of bioactivity
344 guided fractionation is the trend of increasing potency with increasing fractionation. Indeed,
345 the a_I value that totally abolishes gastric lipase activity moved from 1 mg SAPE to 30 µg
346 SAPRF4 after two fractionation steps. According to TLC analysis, SAPRF4 produced by this
347 fractionation approach is a less complex mixture than the initial SAPE **(Fig. S1)**. We therefore
348 sought to evaluate SAPRF4 potency and selectivity against other lipases of medicinal interest.
349 Inhibiting lipases has potential applications in the field of medicine. The digestive lipase
350 inhibitor Orlistat used for the treatment of obesity has been shown to also inhibit HSL [38] and
351 microbial lipases [8, 39]. In the sake of comparison, SAPRF4 was found to inhibit efficiently
352 DGL, HPL, and LipY (a microbial lipase belonging to the HSL family). The ability of
353 SAPRF4 to inhibit the catalytic activity of these lipases was assessed in terms of a_{I50} and $t_{½}$
354 values **(Table 1)**. The inhibition of HSL could be a potential approach to reduce levels of
355 circulating FFAs linked to insulin resistance in obese patients [40]. Consequently, SAPRF4
356 might be an effective candidate for the treatment of obesity and diabetes. Moreover, as LipY
357 contributes to the growth and pathogenicity of *M. tuberculosis* [26], it would be a therapeutic
358 target for SAPRF4 as an anti-microbial agent.
359 On the bioaffinity interaction level, inhibitors can bind either covalently or non-
360 covalently with their biological target [41]. In the cases of non-covalent inhibition, the inhibitor
361 does not bind covalently with the biological target. Thereby, non-covalent inhibitor
362 compounds are of no special interest in drug discovery projects [16]. MALDI-TOF mass
363 spectrometry is an analytical instrument tool that can measure protein-inhibitor complex mass
364 when a specific covalent binding occurs, reflecting thereby an approximate molecular mass of

365 the inhibitor [38]. Direct MALDI-TOF mass spectrometry analysis of DGL totally inhibited by
366 SAPRF4 showed the occurrence of an increase in the molecular masses of DGL, which is
367 compatible with the formation of a covalent complex with the inhibitor. PMF analysis of a
368 trypsin digest of DGL inhibited or not with SAPRF4 showed an increase in the molecular
369 mass of the catalytic serine-containing peptide **(Fig. 4)** corresponding in size to the
370 approximate molecular mass of the inhibitor. This process might involve a nucleophilic attack
371 between the enzyme's catalytic serine and the inhibitor, leading to the formation of a covalent
372 inhibitor-modified enzyme. Based on PMF analysis, it has been also shown previously that
373 synthetic inhibitors, oxadiazolones [28] and cyclophostin analogs [8, 42], form a covalent bond
374 with the catalytic serine residue of lipases. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study
375 that used covalent inhibitor-modified enzyme complex data to tentatively identify a lipase
376 inhibitor in a natural extract.

377 Achieving the approximate molecular mass of the covalent lipase inhibitor, the
378 identification of the compound of interest within SAPRF4 would be rather more
379 straightforward. Thus, using the inhibitor mass information, we applied UPLC-HRMS for
380 mass-directed screening to tentatively identify the expected lipase inhibitor in SAPRF4. Using
381 this non-target screening, it was possible to separate and detect seven chromatographic peaks
382 containing high resolution MS information **(Fig. S2)**. The tentative identification of these
383 peaks was performed according to their high-resolution accurate mass and isotopic patterns to
384 empirically determine their molecular formulas. By inspecting all mass spectra around m/z of
385 489.52 in the chromatogram of SAPRF4, one ion having m/z of 479.1187 was found to fit
386 with PMF analysis data. This ion, assigned to the molecular formula $C_{22}H_{22}O_{12}$, corresponds
387 likely to the flavonoid myricitrin-5-methyl ether **(Fig. 5)** that has not been identified
388 previously from star anise.

389 To gain insights into the lipase-inhibitor binding interactions at the molecular level,
390 M5ME was docked into the active site of DGL **(Fig. 6)**. The final selection of M5ME
391 "bioactive" conformation suggests that the inhibition mechanism involve a nucleophilic attack
392 by the hydroxy group of the catalytic Ser on a reactive carbon atom of the inhibitor pyran
393 ring, thus leading to the formation of a stoichiometric enzyme-inhibitor covalent complex
394 **(Fig. 5)**. Interestingly, the nucleophilic attack could be favored by some surrounding residues,
395 including the backbone nitrogen atoms of Leu^{67} and Gln^{154} that belong to the previously
396 described DGL oxyanion hole [24].

397 Much more interest has been shifted on plant flavonoids for their possible anti-obesity
398 effects. *In vitro* and *in vivo* studies provided evidence on the potential role that flavonoids
399 play in the management of obesity [43]. M5ME, a myricetin glycoside, was isolated from the
400 flower of *Rhododendron poukhanense* as a potent antioxidant flavonoid. Although no lipase
401 inhibiting activity was reported in the literature for M5ME, the structurally fairly similar
402 quercetin and kaemferol were reported to be potent pancreatic lipase inhibitors [44]. Moreover,
403 myricetin was found to exert *in vivo* a strong anti-obesity and anti-hyperlipidaemic activities
404 by modulating the lipid metabolism [45].

405 To our knowledge, this is the first report that tentatively identified a new natural gastric
406 lipase inhibitor from a natural product. The combination of *in silico* molecular docking results
407 with those of lipase inhibition and mass spectrometry provides a scientific evidence for the
408 potential medicinal use of the flavonoid myricitrin-5-methyl ether as a lipase inhibitor for the
409 treatment of obesity, type 2 diabetes and tuberculosis.

410 **Author contributions**

411 J.K. carried out experiments and performed analyses. R.R., M.S., P.M., R.L. and A.B.-B.
412 contributed to experiments realization and analysis. I.K., K.A., A.A. and F.C. contributed to
413 experiments design and analysis. J.K. and A.A. conceived experiments and wrote the paper.

414 **Declaration of interests**

415 There are no conflicts of interest to declare.

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420

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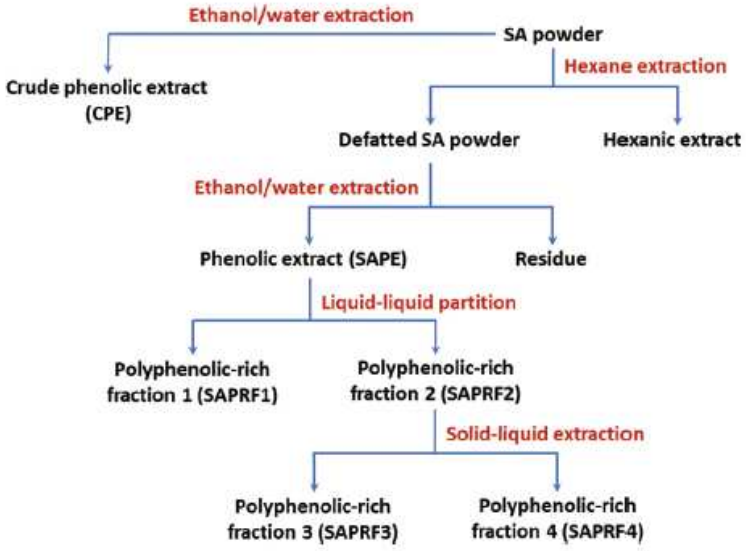
564

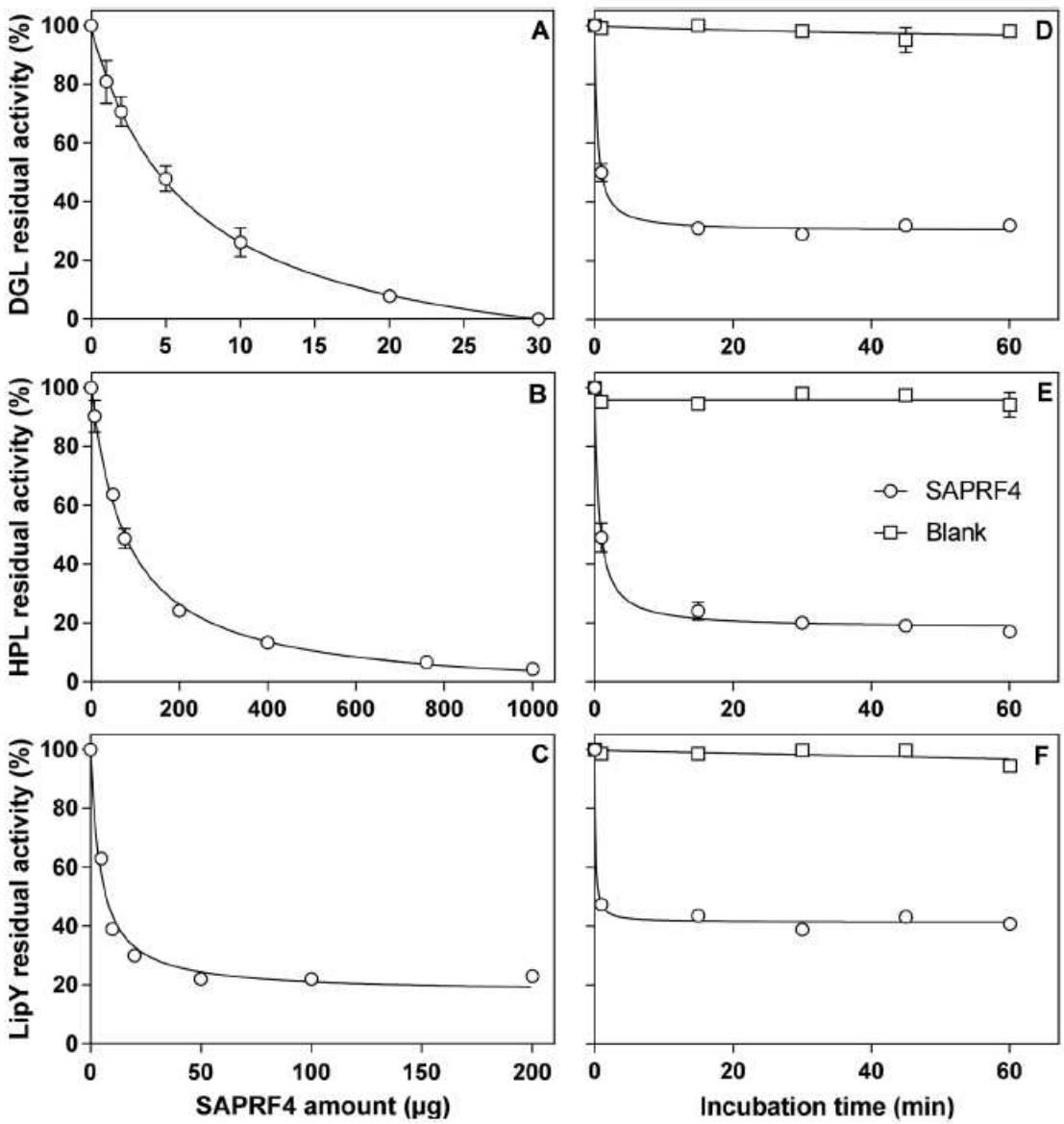
565 **FIGURE LEGENDS**

566 **Fig. 1. Bioactivity-guided fractionation scheme of star anise.**



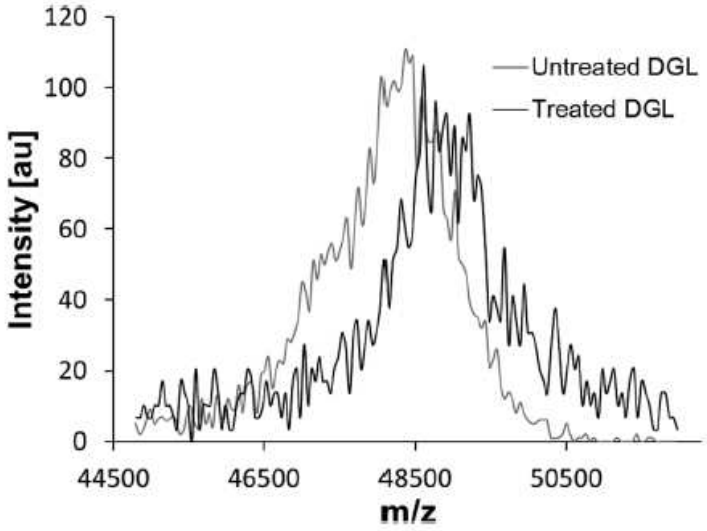
567

568 **Fig. 2. Evaluation of the inhibitory effect of the SAPRF4 fraction against DGL, HPL and**
569 **LipY lipases**. Each lipase was pre-incubated in the presence of various SAPRF4 amounts for
570 30 min at 25 °C and residual activities of DGL (A), HPL (B) and LipY (C) were measured.
571 Alternatively, residual activities of DGL (D), HPL (E) and LipY (F) were measured as a
572 function of the incubation time at a constant SAPRF4 amount. The a_I value used in these latter
573 experiments was chosen so that the average residual activities of DGL, HPL and LipY
574 obtained after 30 min of incubation were in the 15-20 % range. Results are expressed as mean
575 values of at least three independent assays.



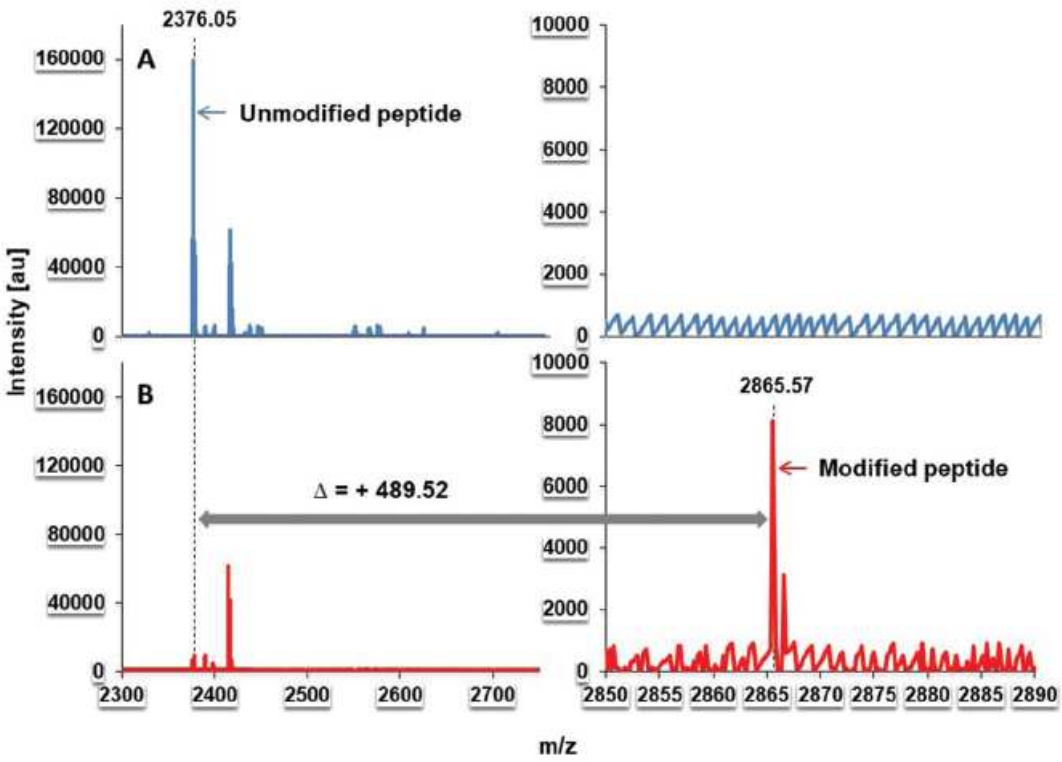
576

577 **Fig. 3. MALDI-TOF mass spectrometry analysis of untreated (grey spectrum) and**
578 **treated (black spectrum) DGL.** A 30-min incubation was performed at 25 °C in the
579 presence or absence of SAPRF4 amount of 30 µg.



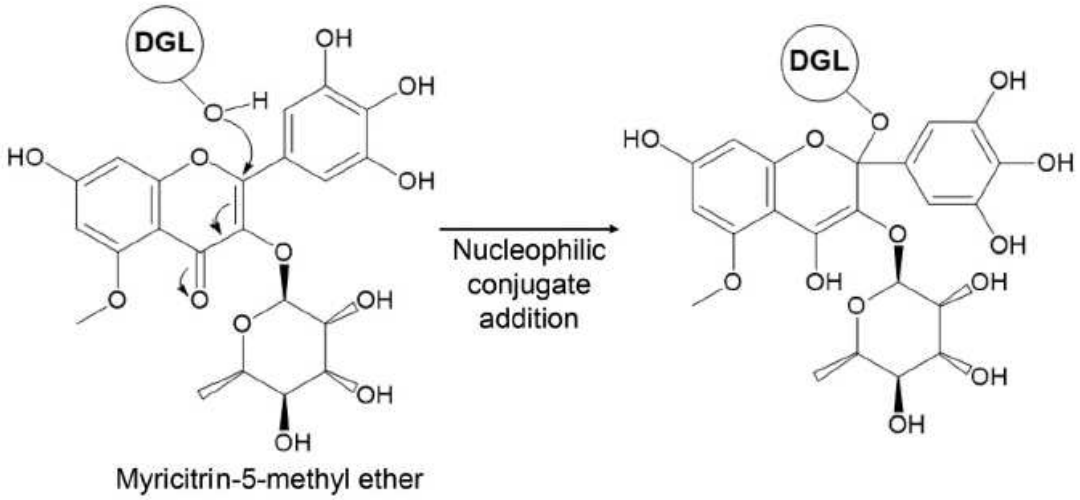
580

581 **Fig. 4. PMF spectra of untreated (A) and treated (B) DGL.** A 30-min incubation was
582 performed at 25 °C in the presence or absence of SAPRF4 amount of 30 µg. Left panels,
583 region of the unmodified isotopic peptide L^{147}-K^{168} containing the catalytic Ser^{153} and
584 detected at 2376.05 Da. This peak is overlaid with a second one corresponding to the peptide
585 detected at 2414.82 Da. Right panels, region in which a new isotopic peptide was expected to
586 occur, resulting from the covalent binding of the natural inhibitor of interest to the catalytic
587 serine. Mass shift was calculated as the difference between the experimental m/z of the
588 unmodified peptide and the theorical m/z of the unmodified peptide.



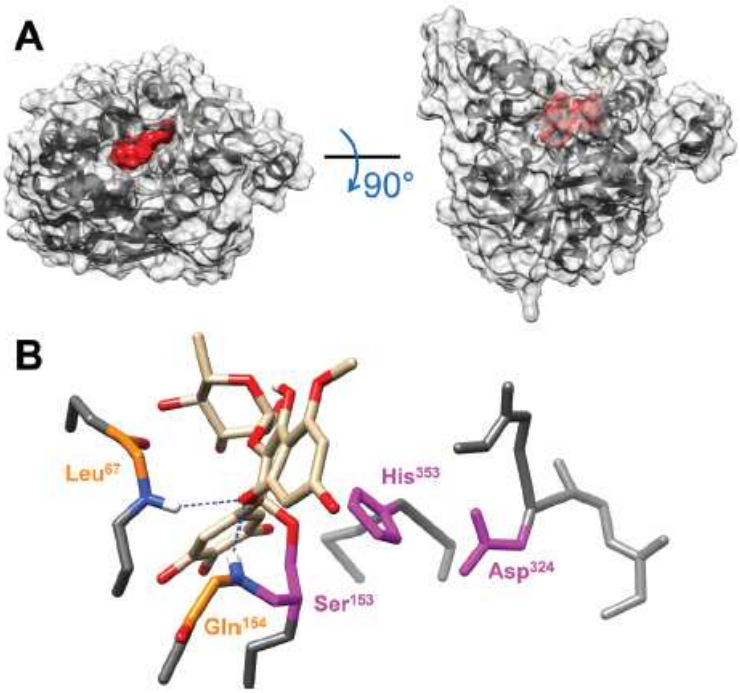
589

590 **Fig. 5. Chemical structure of the flavonoid myricitrin-5-methyl ether (M5ME) and**
591 **proposed mechanism underlying DGL inhibition by M5ME.** The nucleophilic attack by
592 the hydroxyl group of the catalytic Ser^{153} residue on the inhibitor reactive site leads to a 1,4-
593 nucleophilic addition on a double bond conjugated to a ketone and the formation of an enol
594 function.



595

596 **Fig. 6. Visualization of DGL-M5ME binding interaction by molecular docking.** A,
597 molecular surface representation of DGL active site crevice with the bound M5ME. B, view
598 of the active site of DGL with the bound M5ME. The backbone nitrogens of residues Leu^{67}
599 and Gln^{154} are at hydrogen bonding distance from an oxygen atom originating from the
600 inhibitor. The catalytic residues Ser^{153}, His^{353} and Asp^{324} are highlighted in pink and the
601 inhibitor is represented in CPK coloring (oxygen, red).



602

603

604 **Table 1.** a_{I50} and $t_{½}$ values of SAPRF4 on DGL, HPL and LipY.*

605

Lipases	a_{I50} (µg)	$t_{½}$ (min)
DGL	7	0.4
HPL	82	0.6
LipY	5	0.1

606

607 * SAPRF4 amount (a_I) used for the determination of $t_{½}$ was 10 µg, 200 µg and 10 µg for
608 DGL, HPL and LipY, respectively. Results are expressed as mean values of at least three
609 independent assays (CV % < 5.0%).

610