

A New Cycloheptapeptide from *Zanthoxylum mezoneurispinosum* Aké Assi (Rutaceae)

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Abstract: A new cycloheptapeptide named akeassimezorine **1** and twelve known compounds: methoxy-chelerythrine **2**, chelerythrine **3**, nitidine **4**, methoxyfagaridine **5**, jatrorrhizine **6**, tembetarine **7**, *N*-methylatanine **8**, magnoflorine **9**, skimmianine **10**, sesamine **11**, hesperidine **12**, and lupeol **13** were isolated from the roots of *Zanthoxylum mezoneurispinosum* Aké Assi (Rutaceae). The structures of those compounds were elucidated on the basis of one- and two-dimensional NMR and HR-ESI-MS analyses. Antibacterial activity of compound **1** was evaluated against pathogenic agents. This study constituted the first phytochemical investigation of the roots of *Zanthoxylum mezoneurispinosum*.

Keywords: *Zanthoxylum mezoneurispinosum*; Rutaceae; Alkaloids; Cycloheptapeptide.

Introduction

The genus *Zanthoxylum* belongs to the family of Rutaceae, with more than 250 species in the World and widely distributed throughout tropical and subtropical regions¹. There are 9 species in Ivory Coast. *Z. mezoneurispinosum* is an endemic straggling shrub found in the South along the coast. It is well known that the species of this genus produced a significant variety of molecules such alkaloids, terpenes, coumarins, amides, lignans and flavonoids². The important presence of secondary metabolites in this genus explained its extensively used in traditional medicine and numerous studies. Also, *Zanthoxylum* has been used traditionally in ethno medicines to treat different troubles such as: headache, cough, rheumatism, hemorrhoids, stomachache, boils, tooth-ache, gonorrhoea, diarrhoea³; the stern bark of the roots is used as an anti-sickling agent⁴. Modern pharmacological and biological studies have demonstrated that the extracts or isolated compounds from genus *Zanthoxylum* had antibacterial, anti-cancer, antiparasitary, anti-inflammatory, antileishmanial and antioxidant, activities⁵⁻¹³.

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The purpose of this work is to study the phytochemical composition of *Z. mezoneurispinosum*. Herein, we report the isolation and structural elucidation of a new 21-membered cyclopeptide **1**, along with twelve known compounds (**2-13**). The antibacterial test of compound **1** was evaluated against *Enterococcus faecalis*, *Escherichia Coli*, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* and *Staphylococcus aureus*. To our best knowledge, this is the first phytochemical report of *Z. mezoneurispinosum*. The cyclopeptides of *Zanthoxylum* genus holds our attention because rarely described or almost inexistent in this genus. The cyclopeptides were reported from the marine cyanobacteria or from some higher seed plants¹⁴⁻¹⁷. Recently cyclopeptides have been described in the leaves of *Zanthoxylum rigidum*¹⁸ and in fungus of *Zanthoxylum leprieurii*¹⁹. The new molecule did not exhibit significant antibacterial activity against *S. aureus*, *P. aeruginosa*, *E. Coli* and *E. faecalis*.

Experimental Section

General

Optical rotation was measured with an electronic Polarimeter Perkin Elmer 241. IR spectra measures were taken with a spectrometer Nicolet Avatar 320 FT-IR. UV spectra were obtained by using a Philips PU 8720 UV/VIS spectrophotometer. ¹H and ¹³C-NMR spectra were recorded with Bruker Avance DRX-500 spectrometer operating at 500 MHz for ¹H, and 125 MHz for ¹³C. Coupling constants were expressed in Hz. The high resolution mass (HRESIMS) and ESIMS (positive-ion mode) were recorded using Micromass ESI-Q-TOF micro-instrument (Manchester, UK). Column chromatography (CC) was performed on silica gel (SiO₂) 60 (63-200 μm, Merck), or on Sephadex LH-20 gel (Amersham Pharmacia, Sweden). Vacuum Liquid Chromatography (VLC) was carried out on silica gel (63-200 μm, Merck). Analytical and preparative TLC were performed on precoated kieselgel 60 F₂₅₄ plates 250 μm (Merck) using as eluents CHCl₃/CH₃OH or CH₃OH/NH₄NO₃ and detected by spraying with Dragendorff or 5% ethanolic H₂SO₄ reagent followed by heating. HPLC data were obtained on a Dionex apparatus, RP-18 column Dionex (4.6 x 50 mm, 5 μm).

Materials

The roots of *Zanthoxylum mezoneurispinosum* were collected in Ivory Coast (near Irobo region of Grand-Lahou) in July 2005 by Prof. L. Aké Assi. A voucher specimen (AA21009) is deposited in the Herbarium of CNF of University FHB Cocody-Abidjan.

Extraction and Isolation

The air-dried powdered roots of *Z. mezoneurispinosum* (980 g) were successively macerated (15L, 48 h) and extracted with petroleum ether and methanol at room temperature and evaporated under reduced pressure. The methanol extract (18 g) was subjected to vacuum liquid chromatography (VLC) eluting with a gradient system of CHCl₃/MeOH (100/0, 95/5, 90/10, 80/20, 50/50) to give seventeen fractions 1-17 (96 mL each). Fraction 1, (275 mg, 100% CHCl₃), gave **13** (198 mg). Fractions 2-3, (324 mg, CHCl₃/MeOH, 95/5), gave **11** (56.5 mg) and **10** (25 mg). Fraction 5, (1.8 g, CHCl₃/MeOH, 95/5), gave **2** (502.8 mg). Fractions 8-9, (52 mg, CHCl₃/MeOH, 90/10), were purified by preparative TLC using CH₃OH/NH₄NO₃ (90/10) as eluent to give **3** (8 mg) and **5** (5.4 mg).

Fractions 11-12, (84 mg, CHCl₃/MeOH, 90/10), were purified by preparative TLC using CH₃OH/NH₄NO₃ (90/10) as eluent to afford compounds **6** (8.6 mg) and **7** (6.7 mg).

Fraction 13, (225 mg, CHCl₃/MeOH, 80/20), yielded compound **4** (68.7 mg).

Fraction 14, (610.2 mg, CHCl₃/MeOH, 80/20), was further subjected to silica gel column chromatography (CC) eluted with a gradient of CHCl₃/MeOH to afford thirty subfractions 1-30, subfractions 19-22 (175 mg, CHCl₃/MeOH, 80/20) gave **12** (119.3 mg) and **8** (10 mg).

Fraction 15, (303 mg, CHCl₃/MeOH, 80/20), was applied on silica gel on Sephadex LH-20 CC (CHCl₃/MeOH 20:80) to yield compounds **1** (48 mg) and **9** (73.7 mg).

Hydrolysis and amino acid derivatization

A sample of compound **1** (2 mg) was hydrolyzed with 6 N HCl (2 mL) at 110°C for 12 h. The acidic solution was evaporated to dryness under reduced pressure and redissolved in 100 µL of H₂O. The hydrolysed mixture was treated with 1% of 1-fluoro-2,4-dinitrophenyl-5-L-alaninamide FDAA²⁰ in acetone (200 µL) and 1M NaHCO₃ (40 µL), at 35° for 1h. HCl (2M, 20µL) was added and concentration to dryness. The residue of amino acids was dissolved in MeOH and analyzed by reversed-phase HPLC (column: Dionex 4.6 x 50 mm C18, 5µm) eluted with a binary gradient of H₂O with 0.025% TFA (A) and MeCN (B) from 25 to 80% B in A in 30 min, at a flow-rate 1 mL/min at 25°C and detection by UV (340 nm). Comparison of t_R values to those of the standard derivative amino acids established that all amino acids in **1** were L-configuration. Standards t_R[(L-Asp (8.0 min), D-Asp (11.1 min), L-Arg (9.1 min), D-Arg (11.9 min), Gly (12.5 min), L-Pro (14.5 min), D-Pro (18.4 min), L-Phe (20.0 min), D-Phe (23 min)]; amino acids in **1** t_R[(L-Asp (8.0 min), L-Arg (9.1 min), Gly (12.5 min), L-Pro (14.5 min), L-Phe (20.0 min)].

Akeassimezorine 1 Cyclo(L-phenylalanyl-L-asparagyl-L-prolyl-L-arginyl-L-phenylalanyl-glycylglycyl): pale yellow powder, [α]²⁵_D -59,6 (c 0.50, MeOH); HR-ESIMS 776.3853 ([M+H]⁺, C₃₇H₄₉N₁₁O₈, calcd. 776.3844); IR (KBr): 3340, 1225, 1663, 1544 and 772 cm⁻¹; UV(MeOH) λ_{max}: 281, 323 nm; NMR ¹H and ¹³C-NMR: see the Table 1.

Antibacterial Assays

The antibacterial activity of **1** against four enteric pathogenic microorganism: *Escherichia coli* ATCC 25922, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* ATCC 27853, *Staphylococcus aureus* ATCC 25923, *Enterococcus faecalis* ATCC 29212 was evaluated by using the liquid microdilution growth inhibition method²¹. The MIC of test compound was determined as described before by Yao-Kouassiet al.²². The assays were performed three times. Compound **1** did not exhibit inhibition activity against the four tested microorganisms at a concentration of 128µg/mL.

Results and Discussion

Column chromatography of the MeOH extract from dried roots of *Z. mezoneurispinosum* led to the isolation and structure elucidation of a new heptacyclopeptide, which we gave the trivial name akeassimezorine **1**. Compound **1**, as well as secondary metabolites **2-10**, gave a very faint positive coloration with Dragendorff's reagent. The known compounds **2-13** were readily identified, from their spectral data and by comparison with reported corresponding compounds in the literature²³⁻²⁷ as methoxychelerythrine **2**, chelerythrine **3**, nitidine **4**, methoxyfagaridine **5**, jatrorrhizine **6**, N-methylatanine **7**, (+)-tembetarine **8**, (+)-magnoflorine **9**, skimmianine **10**, sesamine **11**, hesperidine **12**, and lupeol **13**.

Compounds **2-4**, and **10-13** were previously isolated from the methanolic extract of *Z. psammophilum*²⁸. The structure of **1** was elucidated based on the combination of various NMR (¹H and ¹³C NMR, COSY, HSQC, HMBC, and ROESY) spectroscopic and mass spectrometric (HR-EI-MS) techniques.

Compound **1** was isolated as pale yellow powder, optically active [α]_D²⁵-59.6 (*c* 0.50, MeOH) and exhibited a quasi-molecular ion peak in positive HRESIMS at *m/z* 776.3853 [M+H]⁺ (calcd. for 776.3844) which was consistent with the molecular formula C₃₇H₄₉N₁₁O₈.

The IR spectrum of **1** displayed the absorptions characteristic of NH or OH (3340 cm⁻¹), amide carbonyl (1663 cm⁻¹) and imine (1544 cm⁻¹) groups. The ¹³C- and ¹H-NMR spectra (table 1), combined with HSQC data showed 37 C-atom signals, which were ascribed to eleven methylenes, fifteen methines and eleven quaternary C-atoms. Quaternary C-atoms were assigned to eight CO (δ_C 173.4, 171.7, 171.4, 171.3, 170.8, 170.6, 170.1 and 170.0 ppm), one CN (δ_C 157.5 ppm) and two aromatics C (138.3, 137.4 ppm). The ¹H-NMR spectrum (in DMSO) showed ten NH (9.29, 9.20, 8.58, 8.44, 8.24, 8.18, 8.00, 7.91, 7.87 and 7.48 ppm) groups suggesting that **1** might be a peptide. Seven spin systems on the TOCSY spectrum were showed from H α and six from NH of each amino acid suggesting the presence of one unit of proline. One isolated spin system (NH) was assigned to NH₂ at 8.18 and 8.44 ppm.

The amino acid residues were identified by COSY, TOCSY and HMBC spectra as two glycines (Gly), two phenylalanines (Phe), one proline (Pro), one arginine (Arg) and one asparagine (Asn) (table 1). The sequence of these amino acid residues was assigned by HMBC and ROESY spectra fig. 1 and 2). The connectivity of the carbonyl residue (i) and the NH proton residue (i+1) on the HMBC spectrum was established as follows (figure 1): δ (ppm) 170.6 (Phe¹) with 8.24NH (Asn²); 171.3 (Pro³) with 7.91 NH (Arg⁴); 171.7 (Arg⁴) with 7.48 NH (Phe⁵); 170.8 (Phe⁵) with 7.87 NH (Gly⁶); 170.1 (Gly⁶) with 8.58 NH (Gly⁷) and 170 (Gly⁷) with 9.29 NH (Phe¹), which gave a sequence of linear heptapeptide: [-Pro³-Arg⁴-Phe⁵-Gly⁶-Gly⁷-Phe¹-Asn²-].

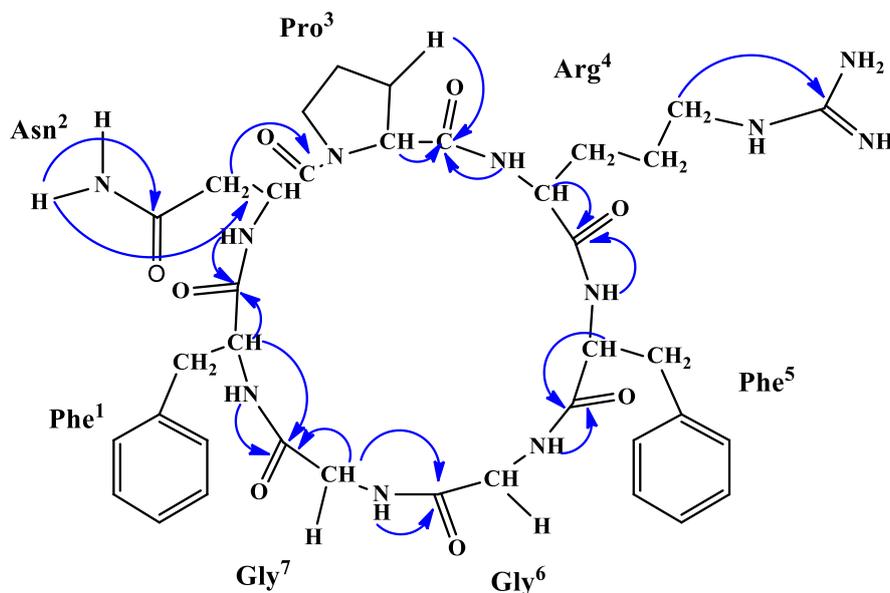


Figure 1. Important HMBC correlations of **1**

Table 1: NMR data for akeassimezorine (1) (in DMSO-d₆, ¹H: 500 MHz, ¹³C: 125 MHz)

Position	δ_C (ppm)	δ_H (ppm) mult. (<i>J</i> in Hz)	HMBC (¹³ C- ¹ H)	ROESY (¹ H- ¹ H)	
Phe ¹	C=O	170.6			
	NH		9.29 d (8.4)	170 Gly ⁷	3.76 H α Gly ⁷
	CH(α)	55.9	4.23 ddd (11.6, 8.4, 3.6)	170.6	
	CH ₂ (β)	36.2	3.19 m, 2.83 dd (14, 11.6)	55.9, 138.3	
	1'	138.3			
	2' 6'	128.9	7.16-7.19 d (9)	36.2	4.23, 3.19, 2.83
	3' 5'	128.3	7.27 m		
4'	126.4	7.27 m			
Asn ²	C=O	173.4			
	C=O	171.4			
	NH		8.24 d (9)	170.6 phe ¹	3.15
	NH ₂		8.18 br s, 8.44 br s	173.4	2.72 (NH 8.44)
	CH(α)	47.2	5.00 ddd (12.5, 9, 4)	38.5	
	CH ₂ (β)	38.5	3.15 m, 2.72 dd (12.5, 4)	173.4, 171.4	
Pro ³	C=O	171.3			
	CH(α)	61.6	4.12 dd (8.7, 6.2)	171.3	
	CH ₂ (β)	29.5	2.20 m, 1.85 dd (12, 6.2)	171.3	
	CH ₂ (γ)	24.4	1.97 m	61.6	
	CH ₂ (δ)	47.8	3.99 dd (8.9, 6), 3.73 m	24.4	5.00 H α Asn ²
Arg ⁴	C=O	171.7		4.47 Phe ⁵	
	C=N	157.5			
	NH-C α		7.91 d (8.9)	171.3 Pro ³	4.12 H α Pro ³
	NH		9.20 br s		
	NH		8.00 br s		
	NH ₂		-		
	CH(α)	53.9	4.01 td (8.9, 6)		
	CH ₂ (β)	28.1	1.45 td (10.3, 6), 1.3 m	171.7	
CH ₂ (γ)	25.1	1.20 m, 1.10 m			
H ₂ (δ)	40.1	2.95 m, 2.88 m	157.5		
Phe ⁵	C=O	170.8		3.47, 4.28 Gly ⁶	
	NH		7.48 d (9.3)	171.7 Arg ⁴	7.91 NH Arg ⁴
	CH(α)	54.9	4.47 ddd (11, 9.3, 4)	170.8	
	CH ₂ (β)	38.8	3.22 br t (4), 2.57 dd (14, 11)	54.9, 137.4	
	1'	137.4			
	2' 6'	128.9	7.16-7.19 d (9)	38.8	4.47, 3.22, 2.57
	3' 5'	128.3	7.27 m		
	4'	126.4	7.27 m		
Gly ⁶	C=O	170.1		3.76, 3.44 Gly ⁷	
	NH		7.87 t (8.5)	170.8 Phe ⁵	3.47 H α Gly ⁶
	CH ₂	41.3	4.28 dd (16.6, 8.5) 3.47 dd (16.6, 2.2)	170.1 170.1	
Gly ⁷	C=O	170		4.23 H α Phe ¹	
	NH		8.58 t (8.5)	170.1 Gly ⁶	3.47 H α Gly ⁶
	CH ₂	43.3	3.76 m, 3.44 m	170	

The amide protons NH_2 of Asn^2 located on the TOCSY spectrum, showed a cross-peak between the carbonyl group at δ_{C} 173.4 ppm and $\text{C}\beta$ at δ_{H} 2.72 ppm of Asn^2 in the HMBC spectrum. Finally the carbonyl group at 171.4 ppm involved in the peptide ring was identified by its correlations with $\text{H}\beta$ and $\text{H}\alpha$ respectively at 2.72 and 5.00 ppm of Asn^2 . Furthermore this carbonyl group was not correlated to an amide proton, suggesting its connection with Pro^3 .

The ROESY correlations (figure 2) between the amide proton $\text{NH}_{(i+1)}$ and each adjacent amino acid residue $\text{H}\alpha_{(i)}$ supported the proposed sequence and the ROESY cross-peak between $\text{H}\delta$ of Pro^3 and $\text{H}\alpha$ of Asn^2 , allowed us to propose for **1**, the following cyclic sequence of cyclo (-Phe¹-Asn²-Pro³-Arg⁴-Phe⁵-Gly⁶-Gly⁷-). In addition the difference of ^{13}C NMR chemical shifts between $\text{C}\beta$ and $\text{C}\gamma$ of Pro^3 showed that the amide bond in the proline residue was *trans*^{29,30}.

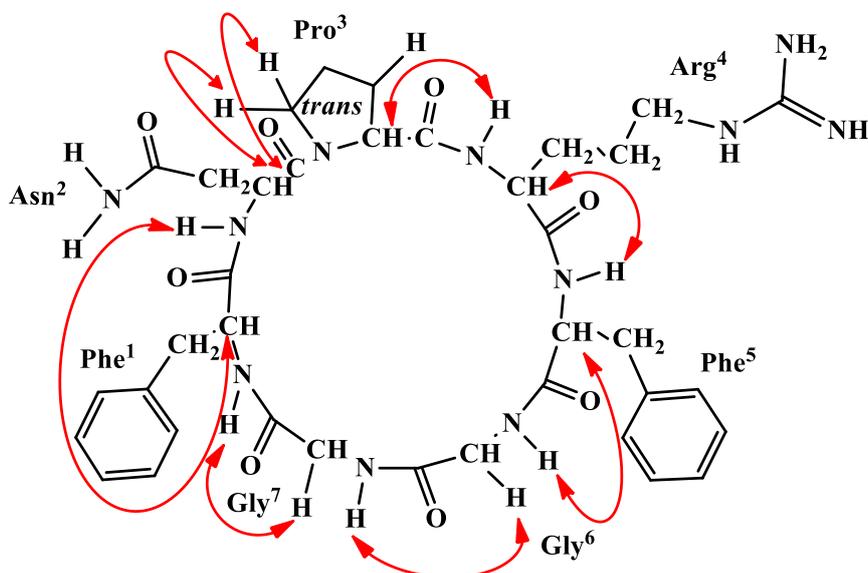


Figure 2. Selected ROESY ^1H - ^1H correlations of **1**

The structure of **1** was further confirmed by ESI-MS/MS experiments of a pseudo-molecular ion at m/z 776 $[\text{M}+\text{H}]^+$. Important ion peaks at m/z 205, 212, 262, 289, 376, 523 and 662 were observed and were respectively assigned to (Phe¹-Gly⁷), (Asn²-Pro³), (Phe¹-Gly⁷-Gly⁶), (Arg⁴-Phe⁵), (Asn²-Phe¹-Gly⁷-Gly⁶), (Asn²-Phe¹-Gly⁷-Gly⁶-Phe⁵) and (Phe¹-Asn²-Pro³-Arg⁴-Phe⁵). The two main sequential cleavages at m/z 523 and 662 confirmed the cyclic structure of **1** as showed in figure 3.

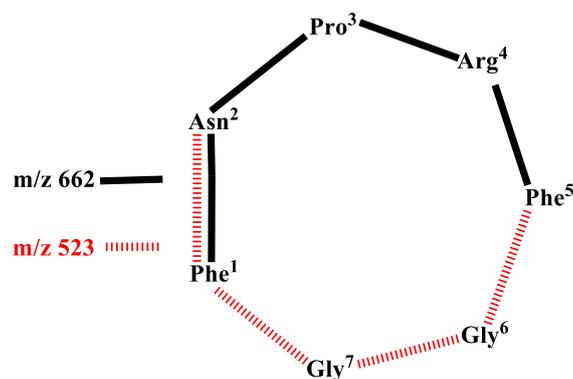


Figure 3. ESI-MS-MS fragment analysis of **1**

The absolute configuration of chiral amino acids in akeassimezorine (**1**) was determined by HPLC analysis of the acid hydrolysate derivatized with Marfey's reagent, and comparison to appropriate amino acid standards confirmed the L-configuration of Arg, Asn, Phe and Pro. Therefore, the structure of **1** was *cyclo(L-phenylalanyl-L-asparagyl-L-prolyl-L-arginyl-L-phenylalanylglycylglycine)*. The new compound **1** was evaluated for its antibacterial activity against four enteric pathogenic microorganisms, *Escherichia coli*, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Enterococcus faecalis*. Cyclopeptide alkaloids have been reported to have various and interesting biologic activities³¹. However this compound was inactive against the four tested microorganisms at the concentration of 128 µg/mL. The assessment of the toxicity of compound **1** on *Artemiasalina* showed total mortality (100%) at the concentration of 100 µg/mL. Anti-cancer activity of compound **1** will be examined in the near future.

Conclusion

This was the first report on the phytochemical study of *Zanthoxylum mezoneurispinosum*. The methanolic extract of the roots of *Z. mezoneurispinosum* was thus carried out and led to isolation of a new heptacyclopeptide alkaloid akeassimezorine **1** along with twelve known compounds including alkaloid, lignan, flavonoid and triterpenoid secondary metabolites. Compound **1** did not show inhibition at a concentration of 128 µg/mL against *Enterococcus faecalis*, *Escherichia Coli*, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* and *Staphylococcus aureus*.

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