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► To cite this version:

Thibaud Reyser, Lucie Paloque, Manel Ouji, Michel Nguyen, Sandie Ménard, et al.. Identification of compounds active against quiescent artemisinin-resistant *Plasmodium falciparum* parasites via the quiescent-stage survival assay (QSA). *Journal of Antimicrobial Chemotherapy*, 2020, 75 (10), pp.2826-2834. 10.1093/jac/dkaa250 . hal-02948398

HAL Id: hal-02948398

<https://hal.science/hal-02948398>

Submitted on 6 Oct 2021

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**Identification of compounds active against quiescent artemisinin-resistant
Plasmodium falciparum parasites via the Quiescent-stage Survival Assay**

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Running title: Compounds active against quiescent artemisinin-resistant malaria parasites

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ABSTRACT

Background: Quiescence is an unconventional mechanism of *Plasmodium* survival mediating artemisinin resistance. This phenomenon increases the risks of clinical failures following Artemisinin-based Combination Therapies (ACTs) by slowing parasite clearance and allowing the selection of parasites resistant to partner drugs.

Objectives: To thwart this multi-resistance, the quiescent state of artemisinin-resistant parasites must be taken into consideration from the very early stages of the drug discovery process.

Methods: We designed a novel phenotypic assay named Quiescent-stage Survival Assay (QSA) to assess the antiplasmodial activity of drugs on quiescent parasites. This assay was first validated on quiescent forms from different artemisinin-resistant parasite lines (laboratory strain and field isolates), using two reference drugs with different mechanisms of action: chloroquine and atovaquone. Furthermore, the efficacies of different partner drugs of artemisinins used in ACTs were investigated against both laboratory strains and field isolates from Cambodia.

Results: Our results highlight that because of quiescence-based mechanism and the respective pharmacological targets of drugs, their efficacies on artemisinin-resistant parasites may be different between quiescent parasites and their proliferating forms.

Conclusions: These data confirm the high relevance of adding the chemosensitivity evaluation of quiescent parasites by the specific *in vitro* QSA to the antiplasmodial drug development process in the current worrisome context of artemisinin resistance.

47 **INTRODUCTION**

48 Artemisinin-based combination therapies (ACTs), using artemisinin or its derivatives (ARTs)
49 combined with other antiparasmodial drugs, are recommended for the treatment of *Plasmodium*
50 *falciparum* malaria. ARTs produce a fast reduction in the parasite numbers, leaving the
51 remaining parasites exposed to the long-lasting partner drug.¹ The widespread use of ACTs has
52 significantly contributed to the historical decrease of malaria mortality observed over the last
53 15 years in all endemic countries.² However, *Plasmodium* resistance to ARTs emerged in 2006
54 and could now jeopardize malaria elimination programs.^{3–7} ARTs-resistance is linked to a
55 mutation on the *kelch13* gene,⁸ which encodes for a protein involved in different mechanisms,
56 among which hemoglobin uptake.⁹ ARTs-resistance is mediated by a quiescent state upon
57 ARTs exposure,¹⁰ in a mechanism that dramatically differs from other antimalarial drug
58 resistance mechanisms. This parasite cell cycle arrest is characterized by a drastic down-
59 regulation of the overall metabolism to allow parasites to face ARTs-induced cellular
60 damage,^{11,12} and subsequent up-regulation to enable parasite recrudescence after drug
61 elimination.^{10,13} In the field, ACT-resistance is always associated with ARTs-resistance. Either
62 ARTs-resistance facilitates emergence of ACT-resistance by allowing partner drug resistance
63 selection in artemisinin resistant parasites or ACT-resistance is acquired after recombination
64 between ARTs-resistant and partner drug-resistant parasite lineages.^{7,14–19} Long-term
65 artemisinin drug pressure also triggers *in vitro* acquisition of a multidrug tolerance phenotype
66 based on the extended capacity of ARTs-resistant parasites to survive other antiparasmodial
67 drugs through a quiescence mechanism.²⁰ Extending ACT treatment from 2 to 3 days in order
68 to improve clinical efficacy thus increases artemisinin drug pressure, leading to a higher
69 frequency of *P. falciparum* ARTs-resistance cases.^{21,22} During ACT treatment, due to the
70 respective pharmacokinetics properties of both drugs, parasites are first exposed to ARTs. That

is why, in an ARTs-resistance scenario, ring-stage parasites first enter a quiescent state and are then exposed to partner drugs. Therefore, a partner drug that is active against quiescent parasites should be the gold standard for malaria eradication policies and programs. Because standard chemo-sensitivity assays have shown their inability to study artemisinin resistance,^{8,10,20} we propose a novel *in vitro* assay named Quiescent-stage Survival Assay (QSA) to assess the efficacy of compounds against ARTs-induced quiescent parasites.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Parasite culture

F32-ART5 (artemisinin-resistant), F32-TEM (artemisinin-sensitive) *Plasmodium falciparum* laboratory strains were cultivated at 37°C in RPMI-1640 medium (Biowest) at 2 % hematocrit in human red blood cells and 5 % AB human serum (EFS, French Blood Bank) under 5 % CO₂ in a humid atmosphere at 37°C.^{10,20,23,24} Artemisinin-resistant field isolates (from Pasteur Institute of Cambodia) IPC8262, IPC8317, IPC6388 and IPC6938 were cultivated under 5 % O₂, 5 % CO₂, and 90 % N₂ (FIVAL, Air Liquide) at 2 % hematocrit in RMPI-1640 medium supplemented with 5 % human serum (EFS, French Blood Bank) and 0.55 % (w/w) albumax II (Thermo Fisher).²⁵ The characteristics of the different strains used in this study are reported in Table 1. Genotyping of field isolates were given by Pasteur Institute of Cambodia.

Drugs

Chloroquine diphosphate, lumefantrine and mefloquine hydrochloride were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (France), artemisinin from TCI Europe, atovaquone from GlaxoSmithKline, dihydroartemisinin, *N*-desethyl amodiaquine and piperaquine tetraphosphate tetrahydrate were provided by the WWARN. Drugs were used *in vitro* in combination assays at pharmacologically relevant concentrations (700 nM dihydroartemisinin, 3 µM artemisinin,

200 nM chloroquine, 7 μ M atovaquone, 200 nM piperaquine, 964 nM mefloquine, 800 nM *N*-desethyl amodiaquine, 5 μ M lumefantrine), equal or close to their plasma peak concentrations in patients.²⁶ Stock solutions were obtained by dissolving piperaquine in 0.5 % lactic acid (Sigma-Aldrich), *N*-desethyl amodiaquine and chloroquine in RPMI-1640, while the other compounds were dissolved in DMSO (Sigma-Aldrich).

Standard chemosensitivity assay

The chemosensitivity assay was carried out in 96-well culture plates on D-sorbitol (Sigma-Aldrich) ring-stage synchronized parasites.²⁷ The antiparasmodial activities were evaluated using the SYBR Green I method.²⁸ Each drug concentration was tested in triplicates. The parasites were incubated with the drugs for 48 h. Parasite pellets were then washed in 1X PBS prior to lysing red blood cells at -20 °C overnight. Then, the plates were thawed and 100 μ L of each well were transferred into a black 96-well plate. 100 μ L of SYBR Green I (Thermo Fisher), diluted at a final concentration of 2X in lysis buffer, were added to each well and incubated for 1 h at room temperature prior to reading the plates on BioTek FLx800 Microplate Fluorescence Reader ($\lambda_{\text{excitation}}$ = 485 nm, $\lambda_{\text{emission}}$ = 528 nm). IC₅₀ values were determined using GraphPad Prism software.

Quiescent-stage Survival Assay (QSA)

To evaluate drug activity in quiescent artemisinin-resistant parasites, the Quiescent-stage Survival Assay (QSA) was first developed using the F32-ART5 strain. D-sorbitol synchronized ring-form cultures at 3 % parasitemia and 2 % hematocrit (5 mL of culture per well in 6-well plate) were first exposed to dihydroartemisinin at 700 nM for 6 h to induce quiescence of artemisinin-resistant parasites. Then parasite cultures were exposed to the combination, dihydroartemisinin + compound to be tested, for 48 h (Fig. 1A, condition a). Keeping parasites

under dihydroartemisinin treatment during exposure to the compound to be tested ensured quiescence maintenance. In parallel, other combinations were tested as control conditions (Fig. 1A, conditions b-d). The compounds were also evaluated on proliferating artemisinin-resistant parasites i.e. without any pre-treatment (Fig. 1A, condition e). Between each drug treatment, parasite cultures were washed with 40 mL of RPMI-1640 medium and put back in culture in new wells for the next treatment. After drug exposure, parasite cultures were washed with 40 mL of RPMI-1640 medium and cultured in drug-free conditions supplemented with 10 % human serum in new wells. The parasitemia for each condition was then microscopically monitored every 2 days to determine the time required to reach the initial parasitemia (3 %), this time point being referred to as recrudescence day. Culture media were renewed twice a week and 25 μ L of fresh red blood cells were added once a week. If no recrudescence occurred after 30 days, the experiment was stopped.^{10,20} Delay in recrudescence time is the difference between the median recrudescence time from different independent experiments obtained with the drug combination (dihydroartemisinin 6 h / (dihydroartemisinin + drug) 48 h) (Fig. 1A, condition a) and the median recrudescence time obtained with dihydroartemisinin alone (dihydroartemisinin 6 h / dihydroartemisinin 48 h) (Fig. 1A, condition b). This delay is representative of the capacity of the tested compound to be active against quiescent parasites. Concentrations and treatment durations were chosen for their pharmacological relevance. During the QSA development, several conditions were tested to optimize the assay: i) 24-h or 48-h incubation of the compounds, ii) use of a physiological dose of 3 μ M of ART or 700 nM of DHA to induce quiescence, iii) repetition of the drug combination treatments to mimic ACT pharmacology, and iv) 2 sorbitol treatments, at 30 h and 54 h during drug exposure to be sure that parasites were in a quiescent state.

Recrudescence assay

Recrudescence assay was carried out as previously reported to evaluate the ability of the F32-ART5 parasite line to survive drug exposure comparatively to the artemisinin-sensitive F32-TEM parasite line.^{10,20} After 48-h drug exposure, synchronized ring-stage parasites were washed with RPMI-1640 medium and placed in normal drug-free culture conditions. The time to parasite recrudescence was determined as the time required to reach initial parasitemia. The experiment was stopped if no recrudescence was microscopically observed within 30 days.^{10,20}

Ring-stage Survival Assay (RSA)

The Ring-stage Survival Assay (RSA) was carried out as previously reported.²⁹ Briefly, 0-3 hours old ring-stage parasites (obtained after a Percoll® (Sigma-Aldrich)-sorbitol treatment) were exposed to 700 nM DHA or 0.1 % DMSO (control) for 6 hours in duplicate, then washed in RPMI-1640 and replaced in normal culture conditions for the next 72 h. Survival rates were measured microscopically on Diff-Quick® (RAL Diagnostics)-stained thin blood smears. The parasitemia was calculated by counting 10,000 red blood cells per assay by two independent microscopists. A parasite growth rate ≥ 2 in non-exposed culture was deemed necessary to validate the assay. The strains with a survival rate of dihydroartemisinin-treated parasites relative to control above 1 % in RSA were referred to as artemisinin-resistant.²⁹

Piperaquine survival assay (PSA)

The piperaquine survival assay (PSA) was performed as previously described to evaluate the ability of ring-stage parasites to survive piperaquine exposure.³⁰ Briefly, 0-3 h old ring-stage parasites (obtained after a percoll-sorbitol treatment) were exposed to 200 nM of piperaquine or culture medium alone (control) for 48 h in duplicate. After drug exposure, parasites were washed with RPMI-1640 medium and then cultivated for the next 24 h without drug. Survival rates were measured similarly to the RSA (ratio of viable parasites in piperaquine-exposed

relative to DMSO-exposed samples). The strains with a survival rate above 10 % in PSA were referred to as piperazine-resistant.³⁰

Data Analysis

Where relevant, a statistical analysis (log-rank test) was carried out on data from recrudescence assay and QSA by performing Kaplan-Meier survival analyses considering censored data. The outcome was defined as the time necessary for cultures to reach initial parasitemia. Observations were considered as censored if no recrudescence was observed within the experiment timeframe (30 days).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The QSA (quiescent-stage survival assay), a relevant method to specifically evaluate chemosensitivity of quiescent parasites

Quiescence-based artemisinin resistance is a new challenge to consider when proposing relevant antiparasitic treatments. In this context, we designed a novel assay, the QSA, to evaluate drug activity against artemisinin-resistant parasites in a quiescence state. The QSA interpretation is based on a delay in recrudescence time between cultures exposed to (dihydroartemisinin 6 h / (dihydroartemisinin + molecule) 48 h) and cultures exposed to (dihydroartemisinin 6 h / dihydroartemisinin 48 h) (Fig. 1A). A delayed recrudescence (Fig. 1B) or a lack thereof indicates that most or all quiescent parasites are killed by the partner drug tested. Therefore, it is suggested that the more potent the drug against quiescent parasites, the longer the delay because the fewer quiescent parasites, the slower the culture will grow back to initial parasitemia. According to the different results obtained and in order to select relevant compounds, we considered a molecule to be active against quiescent parasites if its recrudescence delay was above a 6-day threshold (Fig. 1B). Below this threshold, the difference

could be statistically significant but not necessarily biologically relevant since this could be due to variations in culture parameters independent of the number of surviving parasites. Therefore, from one experiment to the other, there can be a two to three-day variation in recrudescence days, which is why, by setting a 6-day confidence interval, we made sure that the differences were meaningful. To develop the QSA model, chloroquine and atovaquone were used because of their different and well-documented mechanisms of action. The highly artemisinin-resistant *P. falciparum* strain F32-ART5 harboring none of the genotypic markers associated with chloroquine, mefloquine or atovaquone resistance was used (Table 1).^{10,20} Results were then confirmed on artemisinin-resistant isolates from the field.

Chloroquine cannot kill quiescent parasites

In the absence of dihydroartemisinin pre-treatment, F32-ART5 proliferative parasites appeared sensitive to a single dose of 200 nM chloroquine for 48 h leading to parasite elimination with no recrudescence at day 30 (Fig. 2, Table S1). This chloroquine sensitivity of F32-ART5 is in accordance with the obtained IC₅₀ values below the chloroquine-resistance cut-off of 100 nM (Table S2). The combination dihydroartemisinin 6 h / chloroquine 48 h delays recrudescence time of resistant parasites by 7 days compared to dihydroartemisinin 6 h (Table S1). This delayed recrudescence time could be interpreted as the ability of chloroquine to either be active against quiescent parasites or to repress cell cycle recovery of quiescent parasites. To ensure the targeting of quiescent parasites, the quiescent state was maintained with dihydroartemisinin all over the chloroquine treatment. Surprisingly, the 2 conditions (dihydroartemisinin 6 h / (dihydroartemisinin + chloroquine) 48 h) and (dihydroartemisinin 6 h / dihydroartemisinin 48 h) showed similar recrudescence profiles (8 and 6 days, respectively) (Fig. 2, Table S1), which is interpreted as a lack of chloroquine activity against quiescent parasites. The mechanism of action of chloroquine, through the inhibition of hemozoin formation, could

explain this result since such a mechanism is absent at the quiescent ring-stage.³¹ A recent study showed that chloroquine is active against both early ring stages and trophozoites, suggesting that hemoglobin digestion starts early on in the asexual cycle.³² Hence, this showcases that the efficacy of a drug against quiescent parasites cannot be deduced from its efficacy against proliferating parasites. The QSA condition (dihydroartemisinin 6 h / (dihydroartemisinin + drug to be tested) 48 h) appears thus highly selective for identification of compounds genuinely active against quiescent forms. These results evidenced that drug activity differs according to the proliferating or quiescent state of parasites. Therefore, QSA appears as a global chemosensitivity assay that is able to evaluate drug activity against both artemisinin-resistant proliferating and quiescent parasites.

In order to better mimic the antimalarial drug regimens, the impact of repetitive chloroquine treatments was tested on quiescent parasites. Because a repeated (dihydroartemisinin 6 h / dihydroartemisinin 48 h) treatment did not yield any recrudescence (data not shown), the 48 h-exposure was thus reduced to 24 h in each cycle. In these conditions, two successive treatments (dihydroartemisinin 6 h / (dihydroartemisinin + chloroquine) 24 h / dihydroartemisinin 6 h / (dihydroartemisinin + chloroquine) 24 h) led to the same recrudescence time of 12 days as a single 60 h exposure to dihydroartemisinin alone (Table S3). This result was consistent with the total absence of chloroquine activity against quiescent parasites, independent of the treatment duration.

Atovaquone targets both quiescent and proliferating parasites

The delayed parasite recrudescence time of 12 days for the combination (dihydroartemisinin 6 h / (dihydroartemisinin + atovaquone) 48 h) compared to dihydroartemisinin alone (Fig. 2, Table 2 and Table S4) evidenced that atovaquone is not only highly active against quiescent parasites but also against proliferating artemisinin-resistant parasites (Fig. 1, control condition

e). This is in accordance with previously published atovaquone activity towards the mitochondrial electron transport chain,^{33,34} whose activity seems maintained during quiescence.^{10,12,35}

The newly-designed QSA specifically targets quiescent parasites

The induction of quiescence by ARTs had already been demonstrated.¹⁰ Here, two sorbitol treatments were performed during the QSA to eliminate any potential non ring-stage and thus non-quiescent parasites or awaking parasites (Fig. 3A). Regardless of the treatment conditions and the drugs used, sorbitol treatment did not lead to any delay in the recrudescence times compared to the no-sorbitol condition (Fig. 3B, Table S5). These data confirm that the QSA allows the specifically evaluation of the activities of drugs on *P. falciparum* quiescent parasites.

QSA applied to artemisinin-resistant field isolates confirms its stage specificity

The QSA was also performed on artemisinin-resistant isolates from the field to confirm its potential as a new screening tool for antimalarial development. Chloroquine and atovaquone were tested on four *P. falciparum* Cambodian isolates all harboring the C580Y mutation on the *kelch13* gene and having survival rates above 1 % in RSA, confirming their artemisinin resistance (Table 1). Notably, all the isolates used harbored a chloroquine-resistant phenotype with IC₅₀ values superior to 100 nM (Table S2). This phenotype was confirmed by the fast parasite recrudescence after 48-h chloroquine treatment (2-day recrudescence time for IPC8262, IPC6938, IPC6388, and 6-day recrudescence time for IPC8317, compared to no recrudescence of the chloroquine-sensitive F32-ART strain) (Fig. 2, Table S1). Independent of the isolate used, the QSA confirmed the lack of chloroquine activity towards quiescent parasites with no significant delay between drug combination and the dihydroartemisinin control (Table 2, Table S1).

The efficacy of atovaquone was confirmed regardless of the field isolate and the combination tested, with delays in recrudescence times all superior (at least 6 days) to the control condition (dihydroartemisinin 54 h) supporting atovaquone activity against both quiescent (conditions a-b) and artemisinin-resistant proliferating parasites (condition e) from the field (Fig. 2, Table 2, Table S4).

By validating the QSA protocol on both laboratory and field-isolated artemisinin-resistant strains, we evidenced that this newly designed protocol was able to evaluate the activity of compounds against artemisinin-resistant parasites both in the specific artemisinin-induced quiescent state and in proliferating forms.

ACT partner drugs display different activities against artemisinin-resistant quiescent parasites

After standardizing the QSA protocol, the activity of WHO-recommended ACT partner drugs, namely *N*-desethyl amodiaquine (the active metabolite of amodiaquine), piperaquine, lumefantrine, and mefloquine were evaluated on quiescent parasites.

Although active towards proliferative parasites (Table S6, Fig. 1A condition e), *N*-desethyl amodiaquine showed a very weak activity against quiescent parasites from the laboratory strain F32-ART5 and the field isolate IPC8317 with a delay of 3-4 days (Fig. 2, Table S6), which is below the 6-day delay threshold. This lack of efficacy towards quiescent parasites could be explained by the mode of action of the molecule which, like chloroquine,^{36,37} targets the polymerization of heme into hemozoin, a mechanism absent during quiescence. This is further corroborated by the stage specificity of *N*-desethyl amodiaquine, which is mostly active against trophozoites.³⁸

In a similar fashion, a weak piperaquine activity was observed in QSA against quiescent parasites with a delay in recrudescence time below the 6-day threshold for F32-ART5,

IPC8317, IPC8262 and IPC6388, (Fig. 2, Table 2, Table S7). These strains harbor a single copy of the *pm2* gene (except for IPC8262 with 1.58 *pm2* copies) and a PSA survival rate below 10 % (Table 1). Firstly, the absence of delay between F32-ART and F32-TEM in piperazine recrudesence assay and PSA data confirm that the partial lack of piperazine activity against quiescent parasites is not linked with any piperazine resistance or cross-resistance with artemisinin (Table S8). Secondly, these results are in accordance with the purported mode of action of piperazine which is thought to interfere with heme detoxification in a similar fashion and with similar stage specificity than chloroquine.^{32,39}

The field isolate IPC6938 showed no recrudesence after treatment with piperazine alone whereas this line harbors a PSA survival rate of 10.7 % and 3 copies of the *pm2* gene consistent with piperazine resistance (Table 1). These conflicting results could be explained by the age of ring-stage parasites during drug exposure in the different assays. Indeed, when PSA was performed on ring-stage parasites older than 6 hours (condition similar to the QSA), the survival rate dropped to 0.16 %. Unlike the other parasite lines, preliminary data obtained with this isolate showed a delayed recrudesence with piperazine above 6 days in QSA (Table 2, Table S7). Further experiments should be conducted in order to clarify the impact of piperazine resistance on quiescent parasites.

In contrast, lumefantrine appeared active against quiescent parasites both on the laboratory strain F32-ART5 and on the parasite isolate from the field IPC8317 with a recrudesence time delay above 9 days (Fig. 2, Table 2, Table S9). Recently, lumefantrine has been shown to be active against all but the schizont stage.³² These data, in addition to our results which also showed its activity against quiescent parasites, seem to indicate that lumefantrine targets other pathway(s) apart from the inhibition of hemozoin formation.⁴⁰

Mefloquine also showed an activity against quiescent parasites on all the tested strains with very high recrudesence delays (Fig. 2, Table 2, Table S10). One field isolate, IPC6388, showed

a faster recrudescence after treatment with mefloquine alone compared to the other strains, correlating with a higher IC₅₀ value. Consistently, this isolate harbors 3 copies of the *mdr1* gene which is associated with mefloquine resistance (Table 1). Interestingly, its recrudescence delay was of 6 days in QSA. Therefore, these results suggest that although mefloquine-resistant parasites in quiescent state are less sensitive to the drug than mefloquine-sensitive parasites, they can still be killed by mefloquine treatment. Its activity against quiescent parasites is surprising considering its specificity towards trophozoites.³² It cannot be explained by its ability to impair hemoglobin uptake,⁴¹ hemozoin biosynthesis,⁴² or even inhibit protein synthesis by targeting the 80S ribosome,⁴³ since these different pathways are supposed to be inactive during quiescence. Although the effect of dihydroartemisinin treatment on metacaspase transcripts remains to be determined,⁴⁴ the mefloquine activity against quiescent parasites could be due to its capacity to trigger an apoptotic process by *Plasmodium* metacaspase activation leading to parasite death.^{45,46}

Targeting quiescent parasites can be achieved with different treatment schedules

In order to optimize the QSA protocol, different quiescence-inducing drugs and different drug schedules were tested against F32-ART5 in combination with 4 antimalarials namely chloroquine, atovaquone, piperaquine and mefloquine. Similar activities were obtained regardless of the artemisinin derivative used (3 µM of artemisinin or 700 nM of dihydroartemisinin) or the treatment duration (24 h or 48 h; Table S11) except when treating quiescent parasites with piperaquine. Indeed, a 24-h exposure to piperaquine has no effect on quiescent parasites as shown by the lack of delay between the combination and the control regardless of the drug used to induce quiescence (Table S11), whereas a 48-h exposure to piperaquine led to a 5-day delay (Table 2). Because ACT partner drugs have half-lives of several days, we reasoned that lengthening drug exposure to 48 hours (corresponding to a

hypothetical complete erythrocytic cycle) allowed better approximation of physiological conditions.

Tests of molecules against quiescent parasites had already been reported.^{11,47–49} However, our results underlined the importance of i) pre-treatment by ARTs to induce quiescence, ii) maintaining quiescence throughout the whole drug evaluation, and iii) comparing the combination dihydroartemisinin / (dihydroartemisinin + drug to be tested) to dihydroartemisinin / dihydroartemisinin in order to be able to conclude on the genuine efficacy of the drug towards quiescent parasites.

Utility and limitations of the QSA

Standard chemosensitivity assays are proliferation-based and hence, cannot allow the evaluation of the missing variable of partner drug activity against quiescent parasites. Because of its experimental design, the QSA presented herein can overcome these limitations. This assay appears as a highly relevant tool to study artemisinin-induced quiescence in *P. falciparum* parasites. It also constitutes an *in vitro* model that tries to grasp the pharmacological complexity of ACTs by triggering quiescence before exposing parasites to the partner drug. Compounds tested were used at high concentrations over 48 hours to approximate their physiological conditions since ACT partner drugs have half-lives of several days and high plasma peak concentrations.²⁶ Therefore, these parameters could be fine-tuned when evaluating the activity of other compounds. The assay was not designed to compare the activity of different drugs on quiescent parasites but rather to determine whether a drug efficiently kills quiescent parasites. Moreover, it does not allow direct assessment of parasite death for obvious quantitation limitations. The outcome of the assay is thereby indirect as it relies on a delayed parasite recrudescence, correlated with the ability of a drug to kill quiescent parasites.

In conclusion, thanks to the QSA, we highlighted that i) drug activity against quiescent parasites depends on the metabolic status of its target throughout quiescence, regardless of the drug's stage specificity in asexual replication, ii) because of quiescence-based mechanism, drug efficacy against artemisinin-induced quiescent forms of the *falciparum* malaria parasite is unrelated to its activity against proliferating parasites, and iii) some molecules active against ARTs-induced quiescent parasites can be identified and can shed light on pathways that remain active within this dormant state, potentially guiding the search for new antimalarials. Custom ACTs through the addition of a third compound are already evaluated in clinical trials.⁵⁰ However the added value of QSA-based drug design would be to enable the design of novel ACTs that effectively target dormant parasites. This strategy could greatly enhance ACT clinical efficacy and drastically limit the emergence of resistant parasites. Ultimately, this approach could also confer an extended lifespan to ACTs even in a drug resistance context.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Chinedu O. Egwu for proofreading the article and we would also like to acknowledge the WorldWide Antimalarial Resistance Network (WWARN) Reference Standards Program for reference drug providing.

Funding

This study was supported in part by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique and the French Agence Nationale de la Recherche (ANR-13-BSV3-0018 & ANR-13-CE35-0003). T. R. was funded by a Graduate Fellowship Program from the University Paul Sabatier of Toulouse. The funding sources of the study had no role in the study design, data collection, data analysis, data interpretation or writing of the report.

395

396 **Transparency declarations**

397 None to declare.

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518

Figures & Tables

Figure 1. QSA (Quiescent-stage Survival Assay) design and interpretation. **A:** Treatment schedule of the different drug combinations studied (DHA: dihydroartemisinin); a-b) conditions to assess activity of the molecule on quiescent parasites; c-e) control conditions. **B:** Schematic curves of recrudescence profiles of artemisinin-resistant parasites to reach the initial 3 % parasitemia obtained *via* the QSA after 54-h treatment with DHA 700 nM alone or in combination with different compounds tested (C1, C2 and C3). C1 appears inactive, C2 is active with a 6-day delay (corresponding to the designated threshold) between **a** and **b** conditions and C3 is highly active against quiescent parasites with a delay largely higher than the 6-day threshold. Double-headed arrows highlight delay in recrudescence times between combination treatments (DHA / DHA + C1, C2 or C3) and DHA (54 h) alone.

Figure 2. QSA (Quiescent-stage Survival Assay) results represented by Kaplan-Meier survival curves showing recrudescence days of synchronous ring-stage parasites of the laboratory artemisinin-resistant strain F32-ART5 and two artemisinin-resistant Cambodian isolates after

538 different treatments. D0 corresponds to the day when all drugs were removed. Raw data are
539 presented in supplementary tables. These 3 strains are artemisinin-resistant (RSA survival
540 rates $> 1\%$), piperaquine-sensitive (PSA survival rates $< 10\%$) and mefloquine-sensitive.

Figure 3. Quiescence specificity of the Quiescent-stage Survival Assay. **A:** Sorbitol treatments schedule applied on parasites submitted to QSA conditions. In this experiment, two consecutive sorbitol treatments were conducted at 24-h interval to make sure that dihydroartemisinin-treatment maintained parasites in a quiescent state, i.e. that parasites did not proceed with their cell cycle. Treating parasite cultures with a 5 % sorbitol solution selectively eliminates all possible forms older than 24 h post-invasion preventing any recrudescence. Comparing the effect of sorbitol treatment for a given treatment schedule will thus reveal if the QSA protocol is indeed adequate to target quiescent forms of the parasite.

B: Kaplan-Meier survival curves on F32-ART5 showing days needed for cultures to reach initial parasitemia with or without sorbitol treatment in different conditions. Raw data are presented in supplementary Table S5.

w/ S (with sorbitol), w/o S (without sorbitol).

556 **Table 1.** Phenotypic and genotypic traits of the *P. falciparum* strains used in this study

Strain	Description	Genotype				RSA survival rate (%)	PSA survival rate (%) ^b
		<i>pfkelch13</i>	<i>pfprt</i>	<i>pfpm2</i> copy number	<i>pfmdr1</i> copy number		
F32-ART5	Laboratory	M476I	WT	1 copy	1 copy	10.7 ^a	0.4
F32-TEM	Laboratory	WT	WT	1 copy	1 copy	0.09 ^a	ND
IPC8262	Field	C580Y	ND	1.58 copy	1 copy	13 ^b	2.7
IPC8317	Field	C580Y	ND	1 copy	1 copy	8.8 ^c	0
IPC6388	Field	C580Y	ND	1 copy	3 copies	6.8 ^c	1.9
IPC6938	Field	C580Y	ND	3 copies	1 copy	6.6 ^c	10.7

557

558 ND: Not Determined; WT: Wild Type

559 ^a n=3

560 ^b n=2

561 ^c n=1

562

563

564

Table 2. Difference in median recrudescence times from independent experiments obtained for the artemisinin-resistant strain F32-ART5 and 4 Cambodian ART-resistant isolates following exposure to different antimalarial drugs in QSA conditions (DHA 6 h / (DHA + compound 48 h)) compared to DHA alone (DHA 6 h / DHA 48 h). Raw data are presented in supplementary tables.

	Delay in recrudescence time (post-treatment days)					
	CQ	ATQ	AQm	PPQ	LUM	MQ
F32-ART5	2	12	4	5	10	> 24
IPC8262	0	> 6		5		> 6
IPC8317	0	> 10	3	3	> 9	> 12
IPC6938	3	> 6		> 6		> 6
IPC6388	0	14		3		6

CQ (chloroquine), ATQ (atovaquone), AQm (*N*-desethyl amodiaquine), PPQ (piperaquine), LUM (lumefantrine), MQ (mefloquine).

> means that for at least one of the three replicates, no recrudescence was observed up to 30 days, in which case, the value was censored.