

Kazal-type serine proteinase inhibitors in the midgut of *Phlebotomus papatasi*

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Sandflies (Diptera: Psychodidae) are important disease vectors of parasites of the genus Leishmania, as well as bacteria and viruses. Following studies of the midgut transcriptome of Phlebotomus papatasi, the principal vector of Leishmania major, two non-classical Kazal-type serine proteinase inhibitors were identified (PpKz1 and PpKz2). Analyses of expression profiles indicated that PpKz1 and PpKz2 transcripts are both regulated by blood-feeding in the midgut of P. papatasi and are also expressed in males, larva and pupa. We expressed a recombinant PpKz2 in a mammalian expression system (CHO-S free style cells) that was applied to in vitro studies to assess serine proteinase inhibition. Recombinant PpKz2 inhibited α -chymotrypsin to 9.4% residual activity and also inhibited α -thrombin and trypsin to 33.5% and 63.9% residual activity, suggesting that native PpKz2 is an active serine proteinase inhibitor and likely involved in regulating digestive enzymes in the midgut. Early stages of Leishmania are susceptible to killing by digestive proteinases in the sandfly midgut. Thus, characterising serine proteinase inhibitors may provide new targets and strategies to prevent transmission of Leishmania.

Key words: Diptera - sandflies - *Phlebotomus* - Kazal-type inhibitors - midgut - blood meal digestion

In arthropods, serine proteinases are involved in digestion, coagulation, phenoloxidase activation and other immune responses. Regulation of these enzymes by serine proteinase inhibitors is critical for maintaining homeostasis (Kanost 1999, Jiang & Kanost 2000, di Cera 2009). Several serine proteinase inhibitors have been identified in blood-feeding arthropods and linked to inhibition of thrombin and other components of the coagulation cascade to facilitate fluidity in the mouth parts and midgut following blood-feeding on a host [reviewed by Tanaka-Azevedo et al. (2010)]. Many of these thrombin inhibitors belong to the family of Kazal-type serine proteinase inhibitors.

The first Kazal-type thrombin inhibitor identified in a haematophagous insect was from *Rhodnius prolixus* (Friedrich et al. 1993). Since then, proteins containing Kazal-type domains have been identified in other triatomines as well as in many other blood-feeding arthropods including flies, mosquitoes and ticks (Mende et al. 1999, Campos et al. 2002, Takáč et al. 2006, Zhou et al. 2006, Araujo et al. 2007, Mulenga et al. 2007, Ribeiro et al. 2007, Meiser et al. 2010). Kazal-type inhibitors are known to inhibit a range of serine proteinases. Native Kazals from blood-feeding arthropods inhibit thrombin, trypsin, factor XIIa, subtilisin A, elastase, chymotrypsin and plasmin (Friedrich et al. 1993, Campos et al. 2002, 2004, Lovato et al. 2006, Meiser et al. 2010).

Kazal-type domains are characteristically 40-60 amino acids long and inhibitors may contain single or multiple active domains. Six cysteine residues forming three disulfide bridges, C₁:C₅, C₂:C₄, C₃:C₆, distinguish the conserved structure within classical and non-classical Kazal-type domains. The predicted reactive site, P1 amino acid residue, is located at position C₇-X-P1 and determines specificity within Kazal-type inhibitors (Kanost 1999). Within the domain, outside of the conserved cysteine residues, there are high amounts of variability in other amino acid residues (Rimphanitchayakit & Tassanakajon 2010).

Phlebotomine sandflies (Diptera: Psychodidae) are vectors of viruses, bacteria and parasites of the genus *Leishmania*. Transmission of *Leishmania* to suitable vertebrate hosts generally occurs during blood-feeding through the bite site of an infected sandfly vector [reviewed by Ramalho-Ortigão et al. (2010)].

Midgut transcriptome analyses of *Phlebotomus papatasi*, the principal vector of *Leishmania major*, revealed two Kazal-type serine proteinase inhibitors, *PpKz1* and *PpKz2* (Ramalho-Ortigão et al. 2007). These were the first Kazal-type serine proteinase inhibitors identified from sandflies. The mature *PpKz1* cDNA is 231 base pairs (bp) encoding a 77 amino acid protein containing a single Kazal-type domain (GenBank ID: EU045342). The mature *PpKz2* cDNA is 267 bp encoding an 89 amino acid protein (GenBank ID: JX171681). *PpKz1* and *PpKz2* have only 28% identity and 42% similarity in amino acid sequences (Ramalho-Ortigão et al. 2007). Both *PpKz1* and *PpKz2* have predicted signal peptides, suggesting that they are secreted in the midgut.

We are interested in the role of these proteins in *P. papatasi* as inhibitors of serine proteinases and their potential effects on blood digestion. We have analysed deduced sequences of the *PpKz1* and *PpKz2* for predicted activity and similarity, evaluated the expression

doi: 10.1590/0074-0276108062013001

Financial support: NIAID (R01AI074691)

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Received 27 February 2013

Accepted 2 July 2013

of *PpKz11* and *PpKz12* in developmental stages, adult female midguts and whole adult males and conducted in vitro analysis of inhibition activity of a recombinant *PpKz12* protein.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sandflies - *P. papatasi* Israel strain was reared in the Biology of Disease Vectors laboratory at the Department of Entomology, Kansas State University. Flies were maintained on 30% sucrose solution at 27°C and 70% humidity with 12 h light and dark cycles. For blood feeding, sandflies were allowed to feed approximately 30 min on a BALB/c mouse anesthetised with 3 mg ketamine (Ketaset, Fort Dodge Animal Health, Fort Dodge, IA, USA) and 0.12 mg xylazine (AnaSed, Acorn Inc, Decatur, IL, USA) per mouse (100 mg/kg of ketamine and 4 mg/kg of xylazine). Use of animals was preapproved by the Kansas State University Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee under protocols 2747, 2748 and 2749. Infectious blood meals contained *L. major* amastigotes and were offered artificially, while simultaneously a control set of sandflies were fed on uninfected blood as previously described (Coutinho-Abreu et al. 2010a).

At 20 h post-blood meal (PBM) all blood-fed flies were briefly anesthetised with CO₂ and examined under a dissecting microscope. Fully fed flies (i.e., abdomen fully distended) of similar size were selected for dissection. Midguts were dissected in 30 µL 1X phosphate buffered saline RNase free with ELIMINase (Fisher, Scientific, Pittsburgh, PA, USA) treated tools and equipment. Dissected midguts were then transferred to 50 µL of RNA later (Qiagen, Valencia, CA, USA), homogenised with a hand-held homogeniser for approximately 20 s and placed at -80°C.

Sequence analysis - *PpKz11* and *PpKz12* were previously identified from *P. papatasi* cDNA midgut libraries (Ramalho-Ortigão et al. 2007). Molecular weights and isoelectric points (pI) were predicted using the Swiss Institute of Bioinformatics ExPASy tools (Gasteiger et al. 2003). Sequences similar to *PpKz11* and *PpKz12* were identified in National Center for Biotechnology Information using BLASTP for the non-redundant protein database (Altschul et al. 1997). The conserved six cysteine

domain in *PpKz11* and *PpKz12* was used for multiple sequence alignments (MSA) with selected sequences from blast results. Protein sequence alignments were performed using CLUSTALW2 (Larkin et al. 2007) and manual edits were performed in Jalview version 2 (Waterhouse et al. 2009). A *Lutzomyia longipalpis* Kazal2 contig (69116) was identified using BLAST searching for homologs of *PpKz12* in the *L. longipalpis* Llon 0.1 preliminary Genome Assembly on the Baylor College of Medicine Human Genome Sequencing Center website (hgsc.bcm.tmc.edu/project-species-i-Lutzomyia_longipalpis.hgsc). The sequence was translated with Swiss Institute of Bioinformatics ExPASy (Gasteiger et al. 2003).

RNA extraction and cDNA synthesis - Total RNA was extracted from whole sample pools or individual dissected midguts using the RNeasy Mini Kit (Qiagen) and eluted in 40 µL of RNase-free water. Three RNAs were obtained for each developmental stage from pools of 20 eggs, 10 L₁ larvae and five each for stages L₂, L₃, L₄ and pupae. Extracted RNA was treated with TURBO DNase (Ambion, Austin, TX, USA) to eliminate any residual genomic DNA. Up to 100 ng of each RNA was used for first strand cDNA synthesis and was added to 3.3 µM oligo-dT₂₀ primer, 0.67 mM deoxynucleotide triphosphates and RNase-free water to total volume of 15 µL. Samples were incubated at 65°C for 5 min and then placed on ice for 1 min. Addition of 4 µL of 5X SuperScript III Reverse Transcriptase First-Strand Buffer, 5 mM DTT, 0.5 µL RNaseOUT (40 units/µL) and 1 µL of SuperScript III Reverse Transcriptase (200 units/µL) (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA, USA) was followed with 1 h incubation at 50°C. All cDNA was stored at -20°C.

Real-time polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) - *PpKz11* and *PpKz12* relative expression was analysed in non-blood-fed and blood-fed adult female sandflies. Individual midguts were dissected from non-blood-fed flies (0 h) and blood-fed flies at 24 h, 48 h and 72 h PBM. Total RNA was extracted from individual midguts and used for first-strand cDNA synthesis. RT-PCR was carried out on an Eppendorf Mastercycler ep Realplex⁴ in 8 µL reactions. Forward and reverse 0.3 µM primers (Table) were mixed with 4 µL iQ SYBR green Super-

TABLE
Complete list of primers

Primer	Primer sequence 5'-3' forward	Primer sequence 5'-3' reverse	Annealing (°C)	PCR
PpKz1859	GCACCAGCCCAAAGACC	TCACTGCAATCTGATGGCGC	56.5	PCR
VR1020	ACAGGAGTCCAGGGCTGGAGAGAA	AGTGGCACCTTCCAGGGTCAAGGA	49	PCR
PpKz12-R-His	GCACCAGCCCAAAGACC	His tag ^a -CTGCAATCTGATGGCGC	60	PCR ^b
PpKz11_137	AGAGCGTTACCTGTCTTCTG	CCAGCGAATACTGAGGTTTC	58	RT-PCR
PpKz12_152	AATGAATGTCTGAAGGCCTG	CCTTGGGATTTACCTCCC	58	RT-PCR
Pp40S_S3_136	GGACAGAAATCATCATCATG	CCTTTTCAGCGTACAGCTC	58	RT-PCR

^a: His tag-TCAGTGGTGTGATGGTGTGATGATG; ^b: touchdown polymerase chain reaction (PCR); RT: real-time.

mix (BioRad, Hercules, CA, USA) and added to 0.2 μ L cDNA and 3.32 μ L molecular grade water (Invitrogen). All cDNA samples were run in duplicate for *PpKz11* and *PpKz12* and in parallel for 40S ribosomal protein S3 (GenBank accession FG113203). Reactions were carried out 40 cycles of 95°C/30 s, 58°C/1 min and 72°C/30 s, followed by 95°C/15 s, 60°C/15 s and a melt curve up to 95°C/20 min. C_T values from the Realplex Software were used for expression analysis.

Expression levels of mRNA were calculated with the comparative C_T method as previously described (Coutinho-Abreu et al. 2010b). Briefly, C_T values were normalised to the expression of a non-regulated internal control gene, 40S ribosomal protein S3 and then normalised to a calibrator. Calibrators for analysis of temporal, developmental and infected expression were mean averages of expression in 0 h, eggs and non-infected blood-fed samples respectively. Comparative C_T method: $\Delta\Delta C_T = [\Delta C_T \text{ Variant X Sample}] - [\text{average}(\Delta C_T \text{ Calibrator Samples})]$, where variant X equals time points or tissue type. Fold change was calculated by $2^{-\Delta\Delta C_T}$ (Livak & Schmittgen 2001). Mean fold change of at least five individual samples or three pools were graphed for each time point or tissue. Distribution of the data was tested with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for normality and Levene's test for equality of variance. Nonparametric data was logarithmically transformed for statistical analysis. Data was evaluated with one-way analysis of variance and a parametric t test with the Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. For temporal expression profiles of *L. major* infected sandflies, statistical analysis used two-tailed unpaired t tests for parametric analysis and the two-tailed Mann-Whitney U test for nonparametric statistical comparisons. Prism 5 Software (GraphPad, La Jolla, CA, USA) was used for all graphing and statistical analysis.

Recombinant protein expression and purification - The mature (minus signal peptide) *PpKz12* cDNA was amplified using the forward primer PpKz1859 and the reverse primer PpKz12-R-His containing a 6X-His tag on its 3' end (Table), touchdown reverse transcriptase PCR was performed as follows, 95°C/3 min, three cycles of 94°C/1 min, 72°C/1 min, three cycles of 94°C/1 min, 68°C/1 min, 72°C/1 min, five cycles of 94°C/1 min, 62°C/1 min, 72°C/1 min, 25 cycles of 94°C/1 min, 60°C 1 min, 72°C 1 min, finished with 72°C 5 min. Two microlitres of the PCR product was separated on an agarose gel for analysis and to assess concentration. The mature *PpKz12* was cloned into VR1020-TOPO vector as described previously (Ramalho-Ortigão et al. 2005, Oliveira et al. 2006). Insert-containing clones were screened by PCR (Table) and orientation was confirmed by sequencing. Plasmid purification was as described by Oliveira et al. (2006). Final concentration was 2.5 mg/mL and plasmid sequence was confirmed by sequencing.

The recombinant rPpKz12 was expressed in CHO-S free style cells, following transfection using 37.5 μ g of purified plasmid following the manufacturer's protocol (Invitrogen). Transfected CHO supernatant was collected after 72 h of culture, concentrated using a 3 kDa cut-off Centricon filter (Milipore, Billerica, MA, USA) and purified by nickel-nitrilotriacetic acid chromatography with

a gravity flow column. The column was washed with 15 mL of 20 mM sodium phosphate buffer-300 mM sodium chloride-20 mM imidazole, eluted with 5 mL 20 mM sodium phosphate buffer-300 mM sodium chloride-300 mM imidazole and the eluted rPpKz12 was concentrated to 1.5 μ g/ μ L. Two hundred and fifty nanograms of protein were analysed by sodium dodecyl sulfate polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis using 4-12% reducing Bis-Tris NuPAGE pre-cast gel purchased from Invitrogen. The protein was transferred to nitrocellulose and incubated with anti-His antibody (Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz, CA, USA) overnight at 4°C and followed by three washes of 10 min each in tris buffered saline buffer with 0.1% Tween-20 (TBS-T). The blot was incubated with anti-mouse antibody conjugated to alkaline phosphatase (Promega, Madison, WI, USA) diluted 1:10,000 in TBS-T for 1 h at room temperature and washed in TBS-T. The protein bands were visualised using the Western Blue substrate (Promega).

Inhibition assays - The inhibition activity of rPpKz12 was tested against human α -thrombin and trypsin and bovine α -chymotrypsin. Increasing concentrations of rPpKz12 were pre-incubated with 0.05 μ M human α -thrombin (Calbiochem, EMD Chemicals Inc, Gibbstown, NJ, USA), 2 μ M trypsin (Sigma, St. Louis, MO, USA) or 0.25 μ M α -chymotrypsin (Calbiochem, EMD Chemicals Inc) in 50 mM Hepes-0.5% BSA, pH 7.3 for thrombin and in 50 mM Tris-HCl, pH 8.0 for trypsin and α -chymotrypsin. Each enzyme and rPpKz12 combination was incubated for 15 min at 37°C in a 96-well non-binding microtitre plate. Chromogenic peptide substrate H-D-Phenylalanyl-L-pipecolyl-L-Arginine-p-nitroaniline dihydrochloride (S-2238) (Chromogenix, diaPharma, West Chester Township, OH, USA), Na-Benzoyl-D,L-arginine 4-nitroanilide hydrochloride (BAPNA) (Sigma) or N-Succinyl-L-alanyl-L-alanyl-L-prolyl-L-phenylalanine 4-nitroanilide (Suc-AAPF-pNA) (Sigma) was added at increasing concentrations for α -thrombin, trypsin or α -chymotrypsin respectively for a total reaction volume of 100 μ L. Inhibition of trypsin activity was measured for 3 nM, 30 nM and 300 nM rPpKz12 at increasing concentrations of BAPNA (25 μ M, 125 μ M, 250 μ M, 500 μ M and 1000 μ M). Inhibition of α -chymotrypsin activity was measured for 0.0005 nM, 0.005 nM and 0.05 nM rPpKz12 and inhibition of α -thrombin was measured at 0.5 nM, 3 nM and 300 nM rPpKz12 at increasing concentrations 250 μ M, 500 μ M and 1000 μ M of Suc-AAPF-pNA or S-2238, respectively. The rate of proteinase hydrolysis of the chromogenic substrate was measured at 405 nm every 35 s during the reaction with a Biotek Synergy HT microplate reader (Biotek, Winooski, VT, USA). Each reaction was run in triplicate and each assay was repeated at least twice.

Graphs of initial velocity (V) vs. substrate concentration [S] were fit with the Michaelis-Menten equation to obtain the kinetic constant (K_m) and maximum velocity (V_{max}), $v = \frac{V_{max} [S]}{K_m + [S]}$ (Copeland 2000). Residual activity was calculated with apparent V_{max} values, residual activity = $\frac{V_{max}}{V_{max, 0}} \times 100$ (Copeland 2005).

Inhibition assays - Inhibition activity of rPpKz12 was tested for α -thrombin, trypsin and α -chymotrypsin enzymes. Residual activity of enzymes in the presence of rPpKz12 was reduced to 9.4% for α -chymotrypsin, 33.5% for α -thrombin and 63.9% for trypsin (Fig. 5). Both V_{max} and K_m decreased in all inhibition assays with increasing concentrations of rPpKz12 (Supplementary data). Recombinant PpKz12 inhibited α -chymotrypsin at the nanomolar level and inhibited α -thrombin and trypsin at micromolar levels.

DISCUSSION

Kazal-type inhibitors are a diverse group of serine proteinase inhibitors with a wide range of roles in invertebrates. In blood-feeding triatomines, Kazal-type inhibitors in the midgut prevent coagulation of the blood meal (Friedrich et al. 1993, Mende et al. 1999, Campos et al. 2002, 2004, Araujo et al. 2007, Meiser et al. 2010).

Here, we characterised two single domain non-classical Kazal-type inhibitors from the sandfly *P. papatasi*. *PpKz11* and *PpKz12* mRNA transcripts are expressed in non-blood-fed and blood-fed female midguts and expression is regulated by the blood meal with up-regulation at 24 h and 48 h PBM. The decrease in *PpKz11* and *PpKz12* expression detected around 72 h PBM correlates with the completion of blood meal digestion, which culminates with the midgut emptying between 72-144 h PBM.

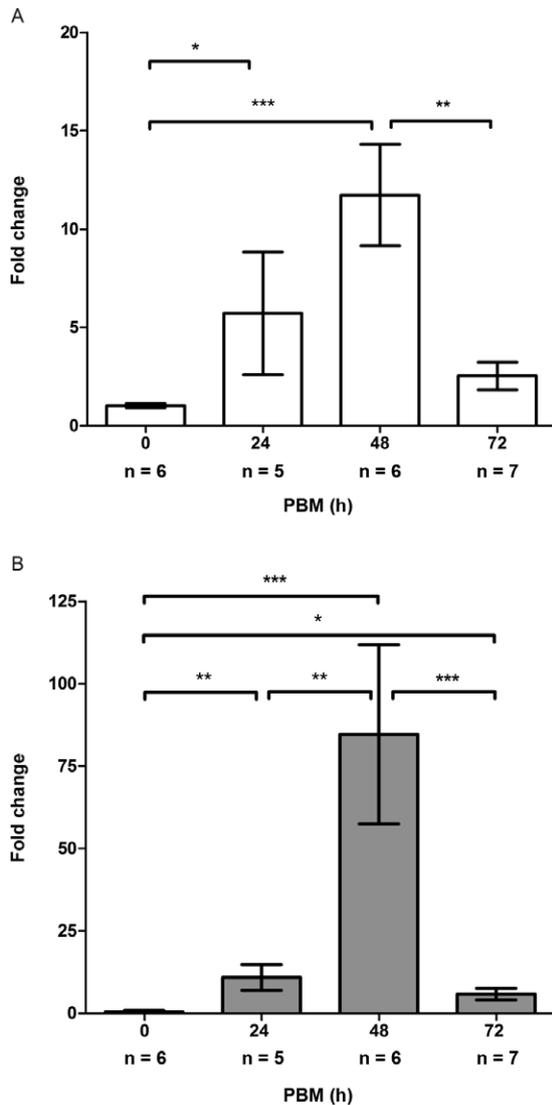


Fig. 2: *PpKz11* and *PpKz12* expression in adult females post-blood meal (PBM). *PpKz11* and *PpKz12* mRNA expression levels are regulated after a blood meal. A: *PpKz11* is up-regulated 24 h and 48 h PBM with highest expression at 48 h PBM. By 72 h expression is down-regulated to levels similar to 0 h; B: *PpKz12* is up-regulated 24 h, 48 h and 72 h PBM. Expression is highest at 48 h and decreases between 48-72 h PBM. Values are the mean fold change of five or more individual midguts with standard error of the mean. Expression was calibrated to 0 h expression levels. Analysis used ANOVA t test with the Bonferroni correction for multi-comparisons. *: $p < 0.05$; **: $p < 0.01$; ***: $p < 0.001$.

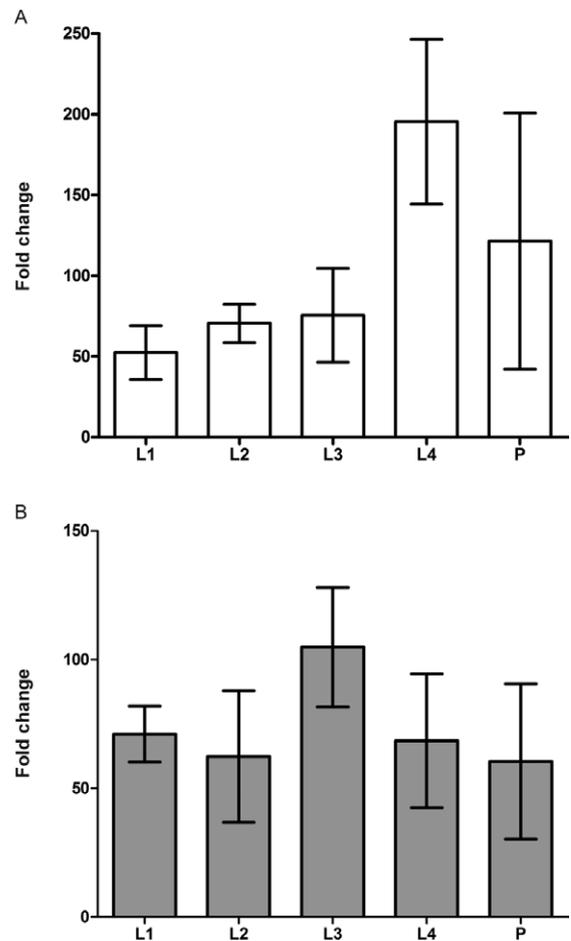


Fig. 3: *PpKz11* and *PpKz12* expression in larval stages and pupae. A: *PpKz11* was expressed in all larval stages and pupae. *PpKz11* expression was not significantly different when compared between larval stages; B: *PpKz12* was also expressed in all larval stages and pupae at similar expression levels. Five or more individuals were pooled for each developmental stage and this was repeated for a total of three replicates. Values are the mean fold change with standard error of the mean. Expression was calibrated to expression levels in eggs. ANOVA t test with the Bonferroni correction for multi-comparisons was used for statistical analysis. L: larval stage; P: pupa.

Furthermore, the expression levels of both *PpKz11* and *PpKz12* remain constant between 72-144 h PBM (Supplementary data). Such expression profiles of *PpKz11* and *PpKz12* are suggestive of a role in digestion for their respective proteins. In addition, as *PpKz11* and *PpKz12* also are expressed in all larval stages, pupae and males, inhibition during digestion is likely not specific to serine proteinases involved in the coagulation cascade, but rather serine proteinases engaged across life stages and sexes.

The predicted PpKz11 is similar to a single domain non-classical Kazal-type inhibitor from *Aedes aegypti*, AaTI (Ribeiro et al. 2007). Interestingly, a recombinant AaTI was shown to inhibit trypsin and plasmin, with weak inhibition of thrombin activity; the AaTI transcript also was shown to be expressed in larva, pupa, male and female tissues (Watanabe et al. 2010, 2011). PpKz11 is also similar to the multi-domain Kazal-type inhibitors infestin and dipetalogastin, identified in *T. infestans* (Campos et al. 2002), and *Dipetalogaster maximus* (Mende et al. 2004), respectively, but with the highest

identity to infestin's domain-4. This domain was found to strongly inhibit factor XIIa, plasmin and trypsin, with no activity for thrombin (Campos et al. 2002, 2004). Consistent with previous findings, PpKz11 as a non-classical Kazal-type domain displays a predicted active site residue that suggests it likely possess inhibitory activity for trypsin-like serine proteinases.

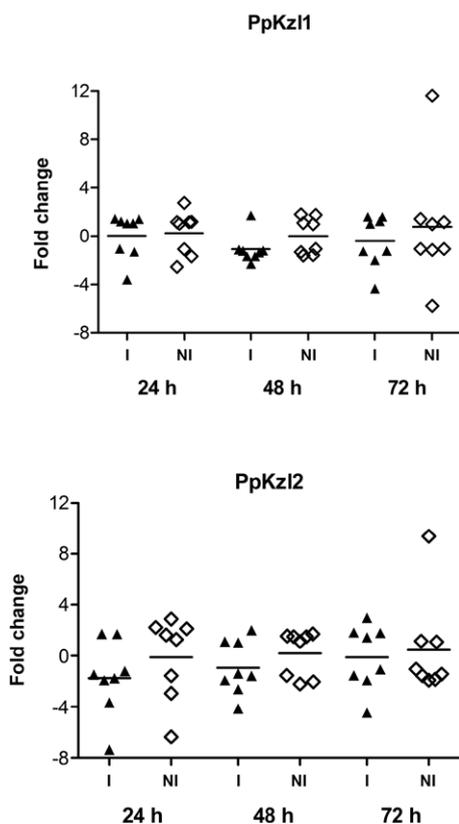


Fig. 4: *PpKz11* and *PpKz12* expression in adult females infected with *Leishmania major*. Temporal expression profiles 24 h, 48 h and 72 h post-infective blood meal (I) (\blacktriangle) and post-non-infected blood meal (NI) (\diamond). Eight individual midguts were assayed for each infected and non-infected time point. *PpKz11* and *PpKz12* expression was not significantly different 24 h, 48 h and 72 h I when compared to NI control groups. Bars are the mean fold change of eight individual midguts. Expression was calibrated to expression in NI controls. Statistical analysis used two-tailed unpaired t tests and two-tailed Mann-Whitney U tests for parametric and nonparametric comparisons respectively ($p < 0.05$).

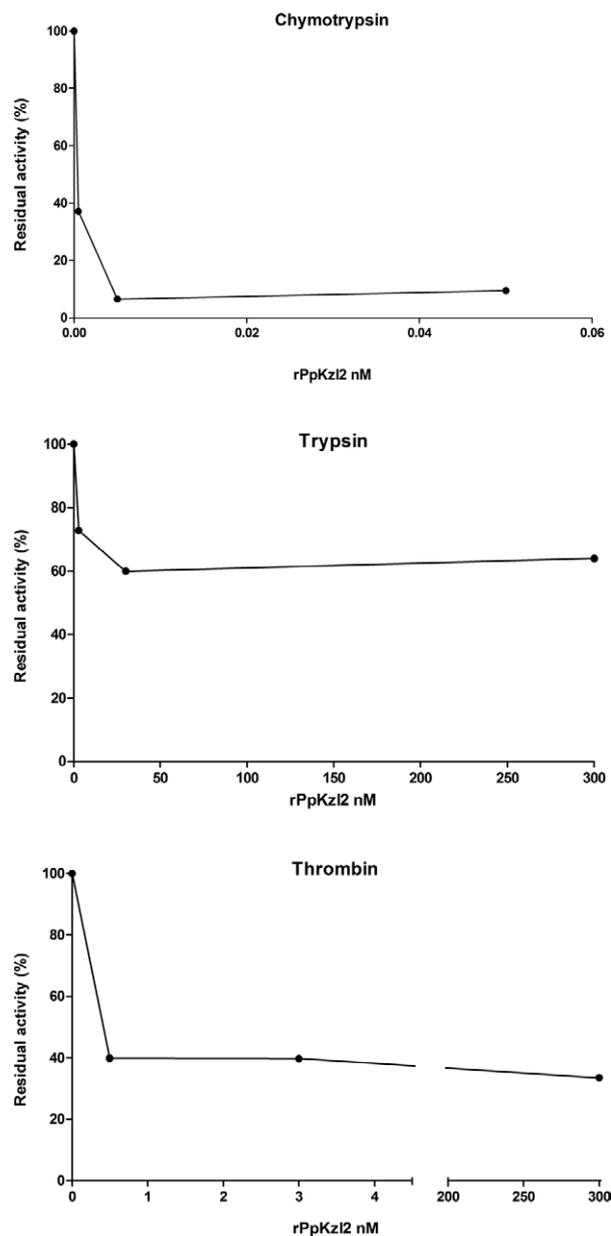


Fig. 5: rPpKz12 enzyme inhibition activity. Activity was measured at increasing concentrations of both rPpKz12 and substrate. Reactions were fit with Michaelis-Menten non-linear regression and apparent maximum velocity (V_{max}) values were used to calculate residual activity. Inhibition of α -chymotrypsin activity was observed with decreasing V_{max} . Activity of 0.25 μ M α -chymotrypsin was reduced to 9.4%. Residual activity of 2 μ M trypsin was reduced to 63.9%. Activity of 0.05 μ M α -thrombin in the presence of rPpKz12 was reduced to 33.5%. Reactions were run in triplicate and each graph represents one of two replicates of each experiment.

PpKz12 on the other hand is similar to Kazal-type domains from dipteran, lepidopteran and hymenopteran species. Though no functional characterisation for these Kazal domains have been described, putative proteins were identified in expressed sequence tag and cDNA libraries of immune-challenged insects (Bartholomay et al. 2004, Gandhe et al. 2006).

A recombinant PpKz12 was obtained and tested against various substrates. Inhibition activity of rPpKz12 was observed for α -chymotrypsin, α -thrombin and trypsin, in agreement with previous reports on single-domain Kazal-type inhibitors having activity against multiple serine proteinases (Nirmala et al. 2001, Watanabe et al. 2010). The ability of PpKz12 to inhibit serine proteinases in *P. papatasi* midgut is dependent upon the rate of inhibition and concentrations present in the midgut (Kanost & Jiang 1996) and therefore in vivo activity may be enzyme specific. Whereas rPpKz12 inhibited α -thrombin, the inhibition activity for α -chymotrypsin was the strongest. We previously characterised two chymotrypsin-like and four trypsin-like proteases from *P. papatasi* and demonstrated that chymotrypsin and trypsin activities in the midgut of this sandfly peak between 27-48 h PBM and by 72 h PBM no such activities were detected (Ramalho-Ortigão et al. 2003). Also, as our results indicate, the peak in RNA abundance for Kazals in *P. papatasi* is 48 h PBM. These data, together with the observations that rPpKz12 inhibited both chymotrypsin and trypsin and expression of the mRNA was also observed in non-blood-feeding life stages, suggest to us that PpKz12 is more likely involved in regulating digestive proteases than blood fluidity within the midgut. Knock down by injection of 127 ng of double stranded RNA produced against each target did not affect mRNA expression levels of *PpKz12* and *PpKz11* in the midgut of *P. papatasi* and therefore analysis of effects on blood meal digestion rate via haemoglobin levels in female midguts were not informative (data unpublished).

Some Kazals have been shown to have immune-like activity; however there was no response in transcript expression of *PpKz11* and *PpKz12* during *L. major* infection. No effects were observed on *PpKz11* and *PpKz12* expression during *L. major* infection in the midgut at 24 h, 48 h or 72 h post-infective-blood meal. It has been described in sandflies that infection with *Leishmania* leads to modulation of trypsin-like activity in the midgut during digestion, suggesting that modulation of trypsin activity allows the parasites to survive (Borovsky & Schlein 1987, Sant'Anna et al. 2009, Telleria et al. 2010). This has been supported with data showing that RNAi of a trypsin gene increased parasite numbers during infection (Sant'Anna et al. 2009). The dynamics of serine proteinases and serine proteinase inhibitors in the midgut are not only crucial to sandfly metabolism and digestion, but may also affect *Leishmania* development. Further characterisation of the serine proteinase cascades and their inhibitors in *P. papatasi* may provide insight into the complex interactions that constitute vector competence.

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