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**Analysis of the ATCase catalysis within the amino acid metabolism of the human malaria parasite *Plasmodium falciparum***

Bosch, Soraya Soledad

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**Analysis of the ATCase catalysis within the  
amino acid metabolism of the human  
malaria parasite *Plasmodium falciparum***

**Soraya Soledad Bosch**



university of  
 groningen



UDD  
 Unit for Drug Discovery



Analysis of the ATCase catalysis within the amino acid metabolism of the human malaria parasite *Plasmodium falciparum*  
 Soraya Soledad Bosch

PhD Thesis  
 University of Groningen, The Netherlands  
 University of São Paulo, Brazil  
 March 2019

The research described in this thesis was carried out at the Unit for Drug Discovery, Department of Parasitology, Institute of Biomedical Sciences at the University of São Paulo, Brazil and at the Structural Biology Unit, Department of Drug Design, Groningen Research Institute of Pharmacy at the University of Groningen, The Netherlands and was financially supported by an Ubbo Emmius and a FAPESP (project number 2013/17577-9) fellowship, further by the CAPES/Nuffic MALAR-ASP network and Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant Agreement No. 675555, Accelerated Early stage drug discovery (AEGIS).

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university of  
 groningen



**Analysis of the ATCase catalysis  
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 Plasmodium falciparum**

**Phd thesis**

to obtain the degree of PhD of the  
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 on the authority of the  
 Rector Magnificus Prof. E. Sterken  
 and in accordance with  
 the decision by the College of Deans

and

to obtain the degree of PhD of the  
 University of São Paulo  
 on the authority of the  
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Esta tesis esta dedicada a mi familia, por todo el esfuerzo que hicieron desde el primer día en que decidí venir a San Pablo para construir este camino, por dejarme abrir las alas y volar lejos de casa, por todos los viajes que hicieron para visitarme alrededor del mundo, por todas las despedidas, por todo el cariño y amor que les tengo, pero sobre todo por lo mucho que los extraño todos los días.

This thesis is dedicated to my family, for all the effort they give me since day 1 when they bring me, literally, to São Paulo to start this new life, for let me open my wings, for all the trips they made to visit me, all around the world, for the goodbyes, for all the love I have for them, and most important for all I miss them every day.

# Table of Contents

Abstract (Dutch).....	3
Abstract (English) .....	4
Resumo.....	5
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	7
1.1. History of Malaria .....	8
1.1.1. Distribution .....	9
1.1.2. Control and Resistance .....	11
1.2. Comprehensive life cycle of Plasmodium .....	15
1.3. Pyrimidines Biosynthesis .....	16
1.3.1. Aspartate transcarbamoylase (ATCase).....	19
1.3.2. Phosphoribosylpyrophosphate synthetase (PRSase).....	23
CHAPTER 2: JUSTIFICATION AND OBJECTIVES.....	25
CHAPTER 3: MATERIALS AND METHODS .....	27
3.1. Methods for <i>in vitro</i> characterization .....	28
3.1.1. Cloning, expression, and purification of the plasmodial aspartate carbamoyltransferase. ....	28
3.1.2. Native Blue Polyacrylamide Gel Electrophoresis.....	30
3.1.3. Size exclusion chromatography .....	30
3.1.4. Dynamic light scattering .....	30
3.1.5. Site-Direct Mutagenesis of the constructs .....	31
3.1.6. Pull down Assay .....	32
3.1.7. Activity assay of plasmodial aspartate carbamoyltransferase (PfATCase)....	33
3.1.8. Activity assay of plasmodial Phosphoribosylpyrophosphate synthetase (PfPRSase).....	33
3.2. Methods for <i>in vivo</i> characterization .....	33
3.2.1. Culture conditions of <i>P. falciparum</i> .....	33
3.2.2. Maxi preparation.....	34



3.2.3. Transfection of <i>P. falciparum</i> .....	34
3.2.4. Fluorescence microscopy .....	35
3.2.5. Applying protein interference experiments on the cellular level using transgenic parasites.....	35
3.2.6. Drug Assay Screening .....	37
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS .....	39
4.1. Cloning, expression, and purification of plasmodial aspartate carbamoyltransferase .....	40
4.2. Biochemical characterization of the recombinant protein as well as mutagenic analysis of the trimerization process .....	45
4.3. <i>In vitro</i> analysis of inhibitors of plasmodial aspartate carbamoyltransferase .....	50
4.4. Characterization of Phosphoribosylpyrophosphate synthetase ( <i>Pf</i> PR <sub>S</sub> ase) .....	52
4.5. The localization of the protein within <i>P. falciparum</i> using GFP chimeras .....	57
4.6. Evaluation of the effect of ATCase activity on the viability of <i>P. falciparum</i> .....	60
4.6.1. Evaluation of the presence of the ATCase protein in the transgenic cell lines .....	64
4.6.2. Quantification of the ATCase transcript by quantitative real-time polymerase chain reaction .....	66
4.7. Analysis of inhibitors, <i>in vivo</i> drug assays with transgenic cell lines.....	67
4.7.1. Evaluation of the presence of PR <sub>S</sub> ase protein in the transgenic cell line .....	71
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	75
5.1. <i>In vitro</i> Experiments.....	76
5.2. <i>In vivo</i> Experiments.....	77
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION.....	81
CHAPTER 7: BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	83
APPENDIX.....	95
List of publications .....	97
Acknowledgment .....	99
About the author .....	103

## Abstract (Dutch)

BOSCH, S.S. **Analyse van de ATCase katalyse binnen het aminozuurmetabolisme van de *Plasmodium falciparum* malariaparasiet.** 2019. 103p. PhD (Parasitology) – Institute of Biomedical Sciences, University of São Paulo and University of Groningen, São Paulo, 2019.

Malaria, veroorzaakt door de Plasmodium parasiet, blijft met over 600,000 doden per jaar één van de meest verwoestende ziektes van onze tijd. Plasmodium falciparum, die de tropische variant van malaria veroorzaakt, is de meest gevaarlijke soort binnen het genus. Het doel van dit proefschrift is het evalueren van het belang van het enzym aspartaat carbamoyltransferase (ATCase) binnen het aspartaatmetabolisme van de P. falciparum parasiet. Het Open Reading Frame dat voor het eiwit codeert is geïdentificeerd en gekloneerd. Na het gecodeerde eiwit recombinant tot expressie te brengen konden we conformationeel en kinetisch inzicht verkrijgen met behulp van kristallisatie-experimenten, en konden we de kristalstructuur van het eiwit ophelderen in “T” (tense, gespannen) en “R” (relaxed, ontspannen) vorm. Daarnaast laten we het belang van PfATCase zien voor de proliferatie van de malariaparasiet aan de hand van mutagene studies en eiwit-interferentie experimenten. Zoals voorspeld door bio-informatica instrumenten heeft het eiwit een apicoplast-targeting sequence, een aantal aminozuren die ervoor zorgen dat het eiwit in de apicoplast belandt. Hiermee is de lokalisatie van het eiwit in de apicoplast bewezen.

Voorts richt dit werk zich op het onderzoeken van ATCase als geneesmiddeltarget. De resultaten van de dosis-response studies en in vivo eiwitinterferentie experimenten bewijzen dat het eiwit een goede kandidaat is als geneesmiddeltarget.

**Kernwoorden:** *Plasmodium falciparum*, Kristalstructuur, Pyrimidine, Geneesmiddeltarget-validatie.

## Abstract (English)

BOSCH, S.S. **Analysis of the ATCase catalysis within the amino acid metabolism of the human malaria parasite *Plasmodium falciparum*** 2019. 103p. Ph.D. (Parasitology) – Institute of Biomedical Sciences, University of São Paulo and University of Groningen, São Paulo, 2019.

Malaria, caused by *Plasmodium* spp., remains with more than 400.000 deaths per year one of the devastating diseases of our time. *Plasmodium falciparum*, which causes tropical malaria, is the most dangerous one leading to severe malaria. The aim of this thesis was to evaluate the necessity of the aspartate carbamoyltransferase (ATCase) within the aspartate metabolism of the human malaria parasite *Plasmodium falciparum*. The respective open reading frame has been identified and was cloned; with the encoded enzyme recombinantly expressed we could get conformational and kinetic insights by crystallization experiments, we could resolve the crystal structure of the enzyme, in “T” (tense) and “R” (relaxed) states. Moreover, in this work, we show the importance of the PfATCase for the proliferation of the malaria parasite by mutagenic studies and protein interference experiments.

As predicted by bioinformatic tools the protein bears an apicoplast-targeting sequence and therefore its localization was determined here. Furthermore, this work is focusing on the ATCase as a drug target, dose-response experiments and protein interference studies with *in vivo* parasites, proves our hypothesis and the drugability of the enzyme.

**Keywords:** *Plasmodium falciparum*, Crystal structure, Pyrimidine, Drug target validation.

## Resumo

BOSCH, S.S. **Análise da catalises da Aspartato Carbamoyltransferase dentro do metabolismo de amino ácidos do parasita efetor da malária humana *Plasmodium falciparum***. 2019. 103f. Tese (Doutorado em Parasitologia) - Instituto de Ciências Biomédicas, Universidade de São Paulo e Universidade de Groningen, São Paulo, 2019.

A malária, causada por *Plasmodium* spp., continua sendo uma das doenças mais devastadoras do nosso tempo, com mais de 600.000 mortes por ano. O *Plasmodium falciparum*, é o parasita mais perigoso que produz à malária severa. O objetivo desta tese foi avaliar a necessidade da aspartato carbamoyltransferase (ATCase) no metabolismo do aspartato do parasita da malária humana *Plasmodium falciparum*. O respectivo ORF foi identificado e clonado; com a enzima recombinante expressa, conseguiu-se obter informações conformacionais e cinéticas. Por meio de experimentos de cristalização obteve-se a estrutura tridimensional da enzima, nos estados "T" (tenso) e "R" (relaxado). Além disso, neste trabalho, mostramos a importância do PfATCase para a proliferação do parasita da malária através de estudos mutagênicos e experimentos de interferência de proteínas. Como previsto por ferramentas bioinformáticas, a proteína possui uma seqüência de direcionamento de apicoplasto e, portanto, sua localização foi determinada em este trabalho.

Os ensaios de drogas, assim como, os ensaios de proliferação dos parasitas *in vivo*, demonstrou que a ATCase é um alvo terapêutico no parasita.

**Palavras-chave:** *Plasmodium falciparum*. Pirimidinas. Sínteses de pirimidinas. Estrutura cristalográfica. Alvo terapêutico.

