The Binding of the Circumsporozoite Protein to Cell Surface Heparan Sulfate Proteoglycans is Required for Plasmodium Sporozoite Attachment to Target Cells.

Consuelo Pinzon-Ortiz§, Jennifer Friedman§+, Jeffrey Esko‡ and Photini Sinnis§*

§ Department of Medical and Molecular Parasitology, New York University School of Medicine, 341 E. 25th St., NY, NY 10010
‡ Department of Cellular and Molecular Medicine, 9500 Gilman Drive, CMM-East 1055, University of California San Diego, La Jolla, CA 92093
+ current address: Department of Pediatrics, Boston Children's Hospital, 333 Longwood Ave-Second Floor, Health Services Research, Boston, MA 02115

* corresponding author
tel: 212 263-6818
fax: 212 263-8116
e-mail: photini.sinnis@med.nyu.edu

running title: Plasmodium sporozoite attachment to cells
Abstract

The major surface protein of malaria sporozoites, the circumsporozoite protein, binds to heparan sulfate proteoglycans on the surface of hepatocytes. It has been proposed that this binding event is responsible for the rapid and specific localization of sporozoites to the liver after their injection into the skin by an infected Anopheline mosquito. Previous in vitro studies performed under static conditions have failed to demonstrate a significant role for heparan sulfate proteoglycans during sporozoite invasion of cells. We performed sporozoite attachment and invasion assays under more dynamic conditions and found a dramatic decrease in sporozoite attachment to cells in the presence of heparin. In contrast to its effect on attachment, heparin does not appear to have an effect on sporozoite invasion of cells. When substituted heparins were used as competitive inhibitors of sporozoite attachment, we found that sulfation of the glycosaminoglycan chains at both the N- and O- positions was important for sporozoite adhesion to cells. We conclude that the binding of the circumsporozoite protein to hepatic heparan sulfate proteoglycans is likely to function during sporozoite attachment in the liver and that this adhesion event depends on the sulfated glycosaminoglycan chains of the proteoglycans.
Introduction

Protozoans of the genus *Plasmodium* are the causative agents of malaria. Malaria infection is initiated when an infected Anopheline mosquito injects sporozoites during a bloodmeal. The injected sporozoites travel to the liver and invade hepatocytes where they develop into exoerythrocytic forms. The speed and specificity of sporozoite localization to hepatocytes, suggests a receptor-mediated event. Previous studies have shown that the major sporozoite surface protein, the circumsporozoite protein (CS)*, binds to heparan sulfate proteoglycans (HSPGs) on the hepatocyte surface and in the space of Disse [reviewed in (1)]. Despite the wealth of *in vitro* and *in vivo* data demonstrating CS binding to HSPGs, the function of this binding event in the life of the sporozoite remains unknown.

*In vivo* experiments with recombinant CS have shown that intravenously injected protein is rapidly cleared from the circulation by HSPGs of hepatocytes (2,3). These results suggest that CS may mediate the rapid clearance of the sporozoites by hepatocytes. *In vivo* experiments with sporozoites that could prove this point, however, have been difficult to perform. To date, remnant lipoproteins (ligands for hepatic HSPGs) and sulfated glycoconjugates such as

*Abbreviations used: CS, circumsporozoite protein; HSPGs, heparan sulfate proteoglycans; GAGs, glycosaminoglycan chains; TRAP, thrombospondin related anonymous protein; mAb, monoclonal antibody; DMEM/FCS, Dulbecco’s modified Eagle’s medium with 10% fetal calf serum; TBS/BSA, tris-buffered saline with 1% bovine serum albumin; PBS, phosphate buffered saline.*
fucoidan and dextran sulfate, have been shown to decrease sporozoite infectivity in vivo (3,4). However, the inhibitory effect on sporozoite infectivity, while demonstrating that the CS-HSPG interaction is important, does not indicate if the glycan is required for sporozoite attachment, invasion, or subsequent development in hepatocytes.

In vitro assays (5,6) have been used to determine whether the CS-HSPG interaction is critical for cell invasion. Frevert et al. (6) found that removal of the majority of cell surface HSPGs had a minimal inhibitory effect on sporozoite invasion of cells. One interpretation of these data is that the binding of CS to HSPGs does not function during sporozoite invasion. Another possibility, however, is that CS binding to HSPGs functions in the more dynamic conditions found in the blood circulation and leads to arrest of sporozoites in the liver sinusoids. In this paper we modify the standard sporozoite invasion assay and provide evidence that the interaction between CS and cell surface HSPGs functions during the initial attachment of sporozoites to cells under conditions that mimic flow. In addition, we show that the sulfate moieties of the HSPG glycosaminoglycan chains (GAGs) are important for attachment of sporozoites to cells.

**Materials and Methods**

*Sporozoites and Cell Lines.* Plasmodium berghei and Plasmodium yoelii, two species of rodent malaria, were maintained in the laboratory using Anopheles stephensi mosquitoes and mice (7). Sporozoites were obtained from salivary
glands of infected mosquitoes on the day of the experiment. All invasion assays were performed with *P. berghei* which invades cells *in vitro* with higher efficiency than *P. yoelii*. Both *P. berghei* and *P. yoelii* were used in attachment assays as indicated in the figure legends. We used HepG2 cells (ATCC HB8065; American Type Culture Collection, Rockville, MD), a hepatoma cell line permissive for *P. berghei* sporozoite development *in vitro*, for all CS protein binding assays and for sporozoite invasion and attachment assays. Cells were maintained as previously described (3).

**Antibodies and Recombinant Protein.** Monoclonal antibodies (mAb) used were directed against the repetitive region of the respective CS protein: mAb 3D11, *P. berghei* CS (8); mAb NYS1, *P. yoelii* CS [(9), kindly provided by Dr. Yupin Charoenvit, Naval Medical Research Center, Bethesda MD]; and mAb 2A10, *P. falciparum* CS (10). The *Escherichia coli*-derived CS27IVC represents the complete *P. falciparum* CS sequence from the T4 isolate, except that the hydrophobic NH$_2$- and COOH- terminal amino acids 1-26 and 412-424 have been deleted and 5 histidine residues have been added to the COOH-terminus to facilitate purification (11). The recombinant protein used in these studies was kindly provided by Dr. Bela Takacs (F. Hoffmann-La Roche Ltd., Basel, Switzerland).

**Modified Heparins.** Intact and modified forms of hog mucosal heparin were obtained from Glycomed, Inc. (Alameda, CA). N-desulfation of heparin was achieved by mild solvolysis (12,13); 2-O,3-O desulfated heparin was prepared
according to the method of Jaseja et al. (14); and carboxyl reduced heparin was made by borohydride reduction in the presence of carbodiimide (15).

_Sporozoite Attachment Assay._ HepG2 cells (3x10^5 cells/ml) were plated (0.4 mls/well) in labtek chamber slides (model 177445, Nalgene Nunc Corp., Naperville, IL) and allowed to grow until subconfluent (36 to 48 hours). On the day of the experiment, the medium was removed and an equal number of sporozoites in Dulbecco’s modified Eagle’s medium with 10% fetal calf serum (DMEM/FCS) were added to each well. Because sporozoites are obtained from mosquito salivary glands and the efficiency of salivary gland infection varies on a weekly basis, different numbers of sporozoites were used for each experiment. The number of sporozoites added per well varied between 20,000 and 80,000 although within a given experiment identical numbers of sporozoites were added to each well. The slides were incubated at 37°C under static or rotating conditions. Rotating conditions were created by taping the labtek chamber slide to a clinical rotator (Fisher Scientific, Pittsburgh PA) set at 200 rpm. After 1 hour, unattached sporozoites were removed, the slides were washed twice with Tris-buffered saline (TBS; 130 mM NaCl, 50 mM Tris, pH 7.4), and fixed with 4% paraformaldehyde. The cells were then permeabilized with cold methanol for 10 minutes, washed twice with TBS and blocked for 1 hour with TBS containing 1% bovine serum albumin (TBS/BSA). Sporozoites were visualized with the appropriate monoclonal antibody (10 µg/ml in TBS/BSA) and goat anti-mouse immunoglobulin (Ig) conjugated to FITC (Amersham-Pharmacia, Piscataway NJ). Slides were mounted in Citifluor mounting medium (Ted Pella, Redding CA) and
counted on a fluorescence microscope using a 40X objective lens and 15X eyepieces. Each point was plated in triplicate wells and 50 to 60 fields per well were counted. When heparin was used as an inhibitor, sporozoites were preincubated in DMEM/FCS ± heparin for 15 minutes on ice and then plated on cells in the presence of heparin. For experiments with chlorate-treated cells, HepG2 cells were plated in DMEM/FCS and 48 hours later the medium was changed to low sulfate medium (see below) with the indicated concentrations of chlorate. In wells with 20 mM chlorate, and 20 mM chlorate + 20 mM magnesium sulfate, an appropriate amount of medium was replaced with water in order to maintain normal osmolarity. After 24 hours, the chlorate-containing medium was removed, sporozoites in DMEM/FCS were added and the assay was carried out as outlined above.

Flow Chamber Assay. Sporozoite attachment under laminar flow was studied using a parallel plate flow chamber. HepG2 cells were cultured until confluent on tissue culture treated petri dishes and a customized flow chamber was assembled on the well of the dish forming a 3.18 mm wide and 25 μm high flow channel on the cell monolayer. The wall shear stress was calculated as a function of flow rate. Medium (Hanks balanced salt solution with 2% BSA and 10 mM Hepes pH=7.4) ± sporozoites was drawn through the chamber at controlled flow rates with a syringe pump (model 22; Harvard Apparatus, Holliston, MA) attached to the outlet. The assay consisted of 4 steps: 1) 5 minute prerinse with medium at 0.4 ml/min. 2) Infusion of $5 \times 10^5$ sporozoites (in 750 μls) into the inlet tubing (0.4 ml/min) followed by sporozoite perfusion of the cells at the indicated
flow rate. The time of the perfusion was inversely proportional to the flow rate so that for each point an equal number of sporozoites were allowed to perfuse over the cell monolayer. 3) 6 minute rinse with medium at 0.05 ml/min to remove nonadherent sporozoites. 4) A variable period of stasis so that for each point the sporozoites had a total of 20 minutes of cell contact before fixation. After each assay the flow chamber was removed, the cells were fixed with 4% paraformaldehyde and sporozoites were stained as outlined above. The flow chamber, cells and medium were kept on a slide warmer at 38°C and the room in which the assay was performed was maintained at 30°C since sporozoites do not attach to cells at temperatures below 25°C.

**Sporozoite Invasion Assay.** This assay is identical to the sporozoite attachment assay except that cells were stained with a double-staining procedure that allows differentiation of intracellular and extracellular sporozoites (5,6). Briefly, cells were fixed with 4% paraformaldehyde and stained with mAb 3D11 (directed against the repeat region of *P. berghei* CS) followed by goat anti-mouse Ig conjugated to colloidal gold 10 nm (Amersham-Pharmacia). Cells were then permeabilized with methanol and stained again with mAb 3D11 followed by goat anti-mouse Ig conjugated to FITC. The colloidal gold label was revealed with a silver enhancement kit (Amersham-Pharmacia). Each field was counted under simultaneous fluorescence and low-light bright field microscopy. All sporozoites were FITC positive whereas only extracellular sporozoites appeared black. The

* P. Sinnis, unpublished data.
percentage of sporozoites which invaded the cells was calculated using the following equation:

\[
\frac{\text{total parasites} - \text{extracellular parasites}}{\text{total parasites}} \times 100 = \% \text{ Invasion}
\]

For the experiments with cytochalasin D (Sigma Chemical Co., St. Louis, MO), the sporozoites were preincubated in DMEM/FCS ± 1 µM cytochalasin (± heparin) for 15 minutes at room temperature and then plated on cells in the presence of cytochalasin. For the cytochalasin recovery experiments, sporozoites were preincubated in DMEM/FCS with 1 µM cytochalasin and added to cells in the presence of cytochalasin for 30 minutes at 37°C. Following this, the medium was removed and replaced with DMEM/FCS, without cytochalasin, containing different concentrations of heparin. Controls included sporozoites treated exactly as the outlined above except that all incubations (preincubation, incubation with cells with initial medium, and incubation of cells with replacement medium), were performed in either: a) DMEM/FCS with no cytochalasin or heparin, or b) DMEM/FCS with cytochalasin but no heparin. After 1 hour at 37°C, all cells were fixed and stained with the double-staining procedure outlined above.

**Chlorate Treatment of HepG2 Cells.** 2x10^5 cells/well were plated into 6 well plates (Corning, Corning NY) and grown for 12 h in DMEM/FCS with various concentrations of chlorate (sodium salt; Aldrich Chemical Co., Milwaukee WI). In wells with 10 and 20 mM chlorate, an appropriate amount of medium was replaced with water in order to maintain normal osmolarity. After 12 hours, cells
were washed twice with phosphate buffered saline (PBS) and resuspended in 2 ml/well of low sulfate medium [Hams F-12 (Life Technologies), 1 mM glutamine, and 2% FCS which had been dialyzed extensively vs 150 mM NaCl, 10 mM Hepes pH 7.3] with the indicated amount of chlorate and 100 µCi of carrier-free Na$_2^{35}$SO$_4$ (Amersham-Pharmacia). After 12 hours, the cells were transferred to 4°C, washed twice with cold PBS and then incubated with lysis buffer (130 mM NaCl, 50 mM Tris-HCl pH 7.0, 1% Triton X-100, 0.1% SDS, 1 mM PMSF and 5 µg/ml each of pepstatin and leupeptin) for 5 minutes. The lysate was transferred to eppendorf tubes, the wells were washed once and the wash was added to the lysate which was spun at 16,000xg for 30 minutes at 4°C. Both pellet and supernatant were counted in a Beckman LS 7500 scintillation counter. Over 95% of the cpm were found in the supernatant. Protein concentrations were measured using the BCA protein assay (Pierce, Rockford IL) using BSA as a standard. Lysates from chlorate-treated cells were loaded onto 5% polyacrylamide slab gels. Equivalent amounts of protein were loaded onto each lane. The gels were fixed with 10% glacial acetic acid and 30% methanol, impregnated for 30 min in 1 M salicylic acid, dried and exposed to Kodak X-Omat AR film at -70°C.

**HepG2 Cell Binding Assay.** 10$^5$ cells per well were plated in 96-well plates (Removawell tissue culture plates; Dynatech Laboratories, Chantilly VA) and allowed to grow for 18 hours. In the experiments investigating CS binding to chlorate treated cells, the cells were grown in low sulfate medium with the indicated concentrations of chlorate. In the experiments with the substituted heparins, the cells were grown in DMEM/FCS. The cells were then fixed with 4%
paraformaldehyde for 10 minutes, rinsed three times with TBS and blocked with TBS/BSA for 1 hour at 37°C. In the binding experiments with chlorate-treated cells, varying concentrations of CS in TBS/BSA were added to the cells for 1 h at 37°C. After washing, cells were incubated with mAb 2A10 (10 µg/ml) followed by anti-mouse Ig conjugated to horseradish peroxidase (1:5000; Amersham-Pharmacia). Bound enzyme was revealed by the addition of substrate [2,2'-azino-di-3-ethylbenzthiazoline-6-sulfonate (ABTS), Kirkegaard & Perry Labs, Gaithersburg, MD] following the manufacturer’s instructions. After 1 hour, absorbance at 405 nm was read in an ELISA plate reader. In the experiments using the substituted heparins as inhibitors of CS binding, 5 µg/ml CS was preincubated with the indicated concentrations of heparin for 30 min at 37°C. These solutions were then added to the cells for 1 h at 37°C, the cells were washed and 200,000 cpm/well of iodinated mAb 2A10 was added for 30 min at 37°C. The plates were washed 3 times and wells were counted in a gamma counter.

Results

Heparin is a better inhibitor of sporozoite attachment to cells under conditions that mimic flow.

Previous studies have failed to demonstrate a significant role for HSPGs during sporozoite invasion of cells (6). Since sporozoites are in the blood circulation when they contact HSPGs in the liver, we reasoned that heparin might
be a better inhibitor of sporozoite invasion of cells under conditions that mimic flow. We created shear force between sporozoites in liquid medium and immobilized target cells by placing the experimental chamber on a rotator. We then compared sporozoite attachment to cells in the presence and absence of heparin, under static and rotating conditions. As shown in Figure 1A, heparin is a much more potent inhibitor of sporozoite attachment under rotating conditions compared to static conditions. Inhibition of attachment under rotating conditions is dose-dependent and reaches a maximum of 85% with 25 to 50 µg/ml of heparin (Fig. 1B). Under static conditions, increasing the concentration of heparin does not increase its inhibitory activity beyond 15 to 25% (Fig. 1B).

Importantly, sporozoite attachment to cells is not significantly altered under rotating conditions in the absence of inhibitor (Fig. 1A).

When the cells with the sporozoites are rotated, the medium moves with respect to the cells which are adherent to the bottom of the wells and a shear force is generated. In a rotating system, however, the shear force is not readily measurable. To circumvent this problem, we performed a sporozoite attachment assay in a parallel plate flow chamber. As shown in Figure 2, at physiologic shear forces (0.75 to 2 dynes/cm²) heparin is a better inhibitor of sporozoite attachment compared to a very low shear force of 0.25 dynes/cm². Thus, similar results were obtained in both systems.

* we used a very low shear force instead of static conditions because it was technically not feasible to perform a static assay in our flow chamber.
In the experiments shown in Figures 1 and 2, we did not distinguish between intracellular and extracellular parasites because the cells were permeabilized before the sporozoites were stained. Since sporozoites must attach to cells before entry, we reasoned that attachment occurs by the same mechanism regardless of whether sporozoites have entered the cells. In order to confirm this, we performed the assay in the presence of cytochalasin D, an inhibitor of sporozoite invasion but not attachment (16,17). Using a double-staining procedure that enables us to distinguish intracellular from extracellular sporozoites, we found no intracellular sporozoites in the presence of cytochalasin whereas without cytochalasin, the invasion rate was approximately 40% (data not shown). As shown in Figure 3, cytochalasin-treated sporozoites attached with approximately the same frequency as untreated sporozoites. In addition, the inhibitory effect of heparin on sporozoite attachment was more dramatic under rotating conditions, regardless of whether cytochalasin was present in the medium. It appears, therefore, that sporozoite attachment to cells is a separate, distinguishable phase of cell invasion and that heparin acts on the attachment phase of sporozoite entry into cells.

The CS-HSPG interaction functions during sporozoite attachment to cells.

We then went on to determine the effect of heparin on sporozoite invasion of HepG2 cells under both rotating and static conditions. Results from three experiments indicate that heparin does not have a significant effect on sporozoite invasion of cells (Fig. 4A). These experiments were performed using a double-staining procedure that distinguishes between intracellular and extracellular
sporozoites and invasion efficiency is expressed as a percentage of total sporozoites bound. Since, as one would expect, the total number of sporozoites bound to cells in the presence of heparin under rotating conditions is low, the absolute number of intracellular sporozoites in these wells is also low. However, the percentage of total sporozoites that are found intracellularly is the same as in the other groups, suggesting that once the sporozoite has attached to the cell, heparin does not affect its ability to enter.

In order to confirm our findings that heparin does not inhibit sporozoite invasion of cells, we used cytochalasin D to separate attachment from invasion of cells. Sporozoites were allowed to attach to cells in the presence of cytochalasin and then the drug was removed. We have found that sporozoites incubated with cytochalasin can, upon its removal, recover from its effects and invade cells (P. Sinnis unpublished data and Fig. 4C). Recovery appears to be a stochastic process that begins immediately upon cytochalasin removal and reaches a maximum after approximately 30 minutes. However, only 30 to 50% of the sporozoites recover and are able to invade cells (Fig. 4C). This is likely because incubation of sporozoites with cytochalasin is performed at 37°C and it has been shown that sporozoites lose between 60 and 100% of their infectivity after 1 to 2 hours at 37°C (18).

We performed the cytochalasin recovery experiment under static conditions because our previous data indicated that rotation had no effect on invasion efficiency (Fig. 4A). As shown in Figure 4C, when heparin was added to the medium after sporozoite attachment to cells, it did not significantly inhibit
sporozoite invasion. As expected, sporozoite attachment was the same in all groups because cytochalasin does not inhibit sporozoites from attaching to cells and heparin was added after sporozoite attachment had occurred (Fig. 4B). When sporozoites were added to the cells in medium without cytochalasin, the invasion rate was two to three fold higher compared to sporozoites that were initially incubated with the cells in the presence of cytochalasin (Fig. 4C). As stated above, this is likely due to a loss of sporozoite infectivity during the time in which the sporozoites were allowed to attach to but not invade the cells.

The sulfate moieties of HSPGs are critical for CS protein binding to HSPGs.

Previous studies have shown that CS binds to the glycosaminoglycan chains (GAGs) and not the protein core of HSPGs (19). In addition, CS binds to regions of the GAGs that are more highly sulfated (20,21). In order to more precisely determine if CS binds to the sulfated domains of the GAGs, we performed CS binding assays with HepG2 cells in which the sulfation of the HSPGs was decreased by treating cells with sodium chlorate. Chlorate inhibits ATP-sulfurylase, the first enzyme in the synthesis of the high energy donor of sulfate, PAPS. Previous studies have shown that chlorate inhibits sulfation of cellular proteins and carbohydrates without affecting cell growth or protein synthesis (22-24). Here we show that the effect of chlorate on HepG2 cells is similar to what has been previously reported for other cell lines. As shown in Figure 5, chlorate causes a dose-dependent decrease in [\(^{35}\text{S}\)]sulfate incorporation into cellular macromolecules of HepG2 cells. Although many proteins and carbohydrates can be sulfated, previous studies have shown that most free sulfate is incorporated
into proteoglycans (25). This is likely also true for HepG2 cells since we found that the sulfate labeled material ran as a high molecular weight smear on SDS-PAGE gel electrophoresis (inset Figure 5), consistent with its being predominantly composed of proteoglycans. We found no differences in cell growth or protein synthesis in cells incubated in chlorate (data not shown).

We investigated CS binding to chlorate treated cells and found a dose-dependent decrease in CS binding (Fig. 6A). When cells were incubated in medium containing chlorate and an equimolar amount of sulfate, there was no effect on CS binding (inset, Fig. 6A), suggesting that chlorate is not toxic to the cells and its effect on CS binding is due to its inhibition of sulfation. These studies, taken together with previous results showing that CS binds to HSPGs on the surface of HepG2 cells (6,19), suggest that CS binding is correlated with the degree of sulfation of the HSPG GAGs.

In order to determine whether specific sulfate moieties were important for CS binding, we used modified heparins as inhibitors of CS binding to HepG2 cells. These heparins are selectively desulfated in either the N- or O- positions. As shown in Figure 6B, both 2-O, 3-O desulfated heparin and N-desulfated heparin inhibited CS binding to HepG2 cells less well than the parent compound. In addition, the more fully desulfated compound (2-O, 3-O desulfated and N-desulfated heparin) had very little inhibitory activity. These results suggest that both N- and O- sulfate moieties participate in CS binding. Results using carboxy-reduced heparin as an inhibitor were somewhat surprising. As shown in Figure 6B, this was a weak inhibitor of CS binding to HSPGs. At physiologic pH the
carboxyl groups of the GAGs are negatively charged and our results suggest that they participate, along with the sulfate moieties, in binding to CS.

The sulfate moieties of HSPGs are critical for sporozoite attachment to cells.

To extend these findings and determine whether the requirements for CS binding to cells parallels the requirements for sporozoite attachment, we tested the ability of sporozoites to attach to chlorate-treated HepG2 cells under static and rotating conditions. As shown in Figure 7, chlorate treatment of HepG2 cells results in a dose dependent decrease in sporozoite attachment and as expected, the effect is much more dramatic under rotating conditions compared to static conditions. Cells incubated with chlorate and an equimolar amount of sulfate showed no inhibition of sporozoite attachment under static or rotating conditions (inset, Fig. 7).

We then used the modified heparins as inhibitors of sporozoite attachment to HepG2 cells under rotating conditions. As shown in Figure 8, heparin that is selectively desulfated in the 2-O and 3-O positions, inhibited sporozoite attachment by only 40% whereas the parent compound inhibited sporozoite attachment by 80%. N-desulfated heparin had similar inhibitory activity to the 2-O, 3-O desulfated compound. When we used heparin that was both N-desulfated and 2-O, 3-O desulfated, the effect was additive and sporozoite adhesion was inhibited by only 20%. The lack of inhibitory activity of the more fully desulfated heparin shows that, similar to CS, sporozoites utilize both types of sulfate groups to bind to HSPGs. Interestingly, the carboxy-reduced heparin inhibited sporozoite
attachment by over 50%. This is in contrast to its very low inhibitory activity in the CS protein binding assay. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that recombinant CS may have sites not exposed on the native protein and these sites may bind to the negatively-charged carboxyl groups of the uronic acids.

**Discussion**

Previous studies have shown that CS binds to HSPGs [reviewed in (1)]. Although investigators have speculated that this binding event functions in sporozoite attachment to target cells, there is little experimental data to support this hypothesis. Previous *in vitro* studies failed to demonstrate a significant decrease in sporozoite attachment or invasion using cell lines deficient in HSPGs or cells in which surface HSPGs were removed with heparinase (6). In the present study, using an inhibitor of the CS-HSPG interaction (heparin), or modifying cell surface HSPGs using chlorate, we significantly inhibit sporozoite attachment to cells under conditions that mimic flow.

Why do the more dynamic conditions of our rotating assay (or the assay performed with a flow chamber) result in a more dramatic inhibition of sporozoite attachment in the presence of heparin compared to the same assay under static conditions? We know from previous studies that only multimers of CS bind with high affinity to HSPGs (26,27). Since CS forms a coat on the surface of the sporozoite we can consider the sporozoite to be a very large CS multimer. When heparin is added to the sporozoites, it will bind to many of these CS molecules. It is likely that under static conditions, a low affinity interaction between the
sporozoite and the cell is sufficient for parasite attachment so that even in the presence of heparin enough CS will be unoccupied to enable the parasite to attach to the cell. However, the number of unoccupied CS molecules on the sporozoite’s surface in the presence of heparin may not be sufficient for the sporozoite to attach to the cell under more dynamic conditions. These results suggest that the multimeric binding between sporozoite CS and hepatic HSPGs may function to arrest the sporozoite in the liver under conditions of flow.

One important consideration, however, is that neither the rotating assay nor the flow chamber is likely to precisely mimic blood flow in the liver. Given the architecture of the liver sinusoids, this is a challenge for any experimental set-up. However, in both assays, a shear force is created between the medium containing the sporozoites and the immobilized cells. Our experiments therefore allow us to conclude that when shear forces are present, heparin is a more potent inhibitor of sporozoite attachment. The difference between our rotating assay and the parallel plate flow chamber is that in the latter case the flow is more uniform and can be measured. The conclusions we draw from both assays, however, are the same. Although we cannot measure the shear forces in our rotation assay, we think they are in the physiologic range since sporozoites attach well to the cells in this assay and they do not attach to cells when subjected to high shear forces in the flow chamber (data not shown).

HSPGs are ubiquitous molecules found on the surface of most mammalian cells. How then do we account for the specificity of sporozoites for hepatic HSPGs? Previous studies showing that intravenously injected CS is cleared by
hepatic HSPGs (2,3), suggest that CS binds to either a unique GAG chain structure or to a subset of GAGs found only in the liver. HSPG GAG chains are based on repeating disaccharide units of N-acetyl-glucosamine (GlcNAc) and glucuronic acid which undergo a series of modification reactions. GlcNAc residues can be N-deacetlyated and N-sulfated, as well as 3-O and 6-O sulfated; and glucuronic acid can undergo epimerization to iduronic acid and 2-O sulfation. These modification reactions are not evenly distributed throughout the chain but tend to occur in blocks, giving rise to highly modified, sulfated stretches of saccharides. In addition, within the modified blocks, these reactions do not occur uniformly so that heparan sulfate GAGs contain a large amount of structural heterogeneity. These modifications can provide specific binding sites for a variety of proteins [reviewed in (28)]. In the case of CS, previous work by Ying et al. (20) found that CS binds preferentially to more highly sulfated regions of HSPG GAGs. We have extended these studies and found that both CS binding and sporozoite attachment to cells decreases as the degree of GAG chain sulfation decreases. The role of sulfation in CS and sporozoite adhesion to cells is also supported by our experiments using modified heparins as inhibitors. These studies show that both N- and O- sulfation are important for CS and sporozoite adhesion to cells and that binding is not dependent on a single class of sulfate moieties. Although these results do not rule out the possibility that a specific sequence of sulfated sugar residues mediates sporozoite adhesion, they suggest that the interaction between sporozoite CS and hepatic HSPGs may be based
largely on the anionic properties of HSPG GAGs. Could this account for the selective binding of CS and sporozoites to hepatic HSPGs?

In vivo the HSPGs on most cells are not exposed to the circulation since most organs are behind an endothelial cell barrier that does not permit direct contact with the blood circulation. The sinusoidal lining of the liver, however, is highly fenestrated and these fenestrations are permanently open, allowing for direct contact between the blood circulation and the underlying hepatocytes and space of Disse, (the loose basement membrane between hepatocytes and endothelia). However, endothelial cells themselves express HSPGs on their surface and these could directly compete with hepatic HSPGs for sporozoite binding. Previous work on the structure of rat liver heparan sulfate has shown that compared to heparan sulfate of other organs, it is more extensively modified and highly sulfated (29). This is in contrast to endothelial cell heparan sulfate, which is among the most undersulfated heparan sulfate in the body (30). These findings together with the work presented here, suggest that the degree of GAG chain sulfation, and the architecture of the liver sinusoids, may account for the selective targeting of CS and sporozoites to the liver.

We also present data suggesting that the binding of CS to HSPGs is involved in sporozoite attachment to but not invasion of cells. It is generally recognized that attachment and invasion of cells by intracellular pathogens are separate steps requiring different molecular interactions. Parasites in the phylum Apicomplexa, of which Plasmodium is a member, are no exception. Previous studies have shown that another sporozoite protein, TRAP [thrombospondin
related anonymous protein (31,32)], is required for invasion (33). Although a small amount of TRAP is found on the sporozoite surface, it is found most abundantly in secretory vesicles called micronemes (34). Upon contact with cells, sporozoites release TRAP onto the apical end of the parasite (35). The cell surface receptors for TRAP have still not been determined, however, several reports have shown that recombinant TRAP binds to heparin and HSPGs (36,37). Our finding that heparin has only a minimal effect on sporozoite invasion of cells contradict these data since one would expect that if TRAP is also binding to HSPGs, the soluble heparin we used in our experiments would have also inhibited this interaction and therefore inhibited invasion. One possible explanation for the lack of inhibitory activity of heparin on sporozoite invasion could be due to the timing and location of microneme release. If microneme contents are released only after sporozoite attachment to cells, then the high local concentration of TRAP in close proximity to its binding sites may make it difficult for heparin to compete with the binding of TRAP to its receptor. In fact it has recently been shown that antibodies to TRAP do not inhibit *Plasmodium* sporozoite infectivity either *in vivo* or *in vitro* and the likely reason is that these antibodies do not have access to TRAP (35).

In summary, the work we present here is the first demonstration that the binding of CS on the sporozoite surface to HSPGs functions during initial attachment of the sporozoites to their target cell. Our hypothesis is that the multimeric interaction between sporozoite CS and hepatic HSPGs functions to arrest circulating sporozoites in the liver. Our demonstration that sulfation of
HSPG GAGs is required for sporozoite attachment to cells provides a theoretical basis for the selectivity of sporozoites for hepatic HSPGs *in vivo*. In addition, the data also indicate that initial attachment of sporozoites to hepatic HSPGs is a distinct step in target cell invasion and is likely followed by other molecular interactions that then lead to invasion. The precise nature of these other molecular interactions awaits further investigation.

**References**


**Acknowledgements**

This work was supported by a grant from the Irma T. Hirschl Charitable Trust (to P.S.), by N.I.H. grant AI44470-02 (to P.S.) and N.I.H. grant GM33063 (to J.D.E.). The authors would like to thank Jean Noonan and Ivette Caro for superb technical assistance with the rearing and dissection of mosquitoes, Mauricio Calvo-Calle for his helpful advice, Drs. Victor Nussenzweig, Soren Gantt and Jayne Raper for their critical reading of the manuscript, Dr. Azucena Salas for all of her time and help with flow chamber assay and Dr. Shuqi Chen for building the flow chamber.
Figure Legends

Figure 1. Heparin is a better inhibitor of sporozoite attachment under conditions which mimic flow. Sporozoites were preincubated ± 25 µg/ml of heparin (Panel A) or the indicated concentration of heparin (Panel B) for 15 minutes on ice and then plated on cells in the continued presence of heparin. After 1 hour at 37°C under static or rotating conditions, unattached sporozoites were removed by washing and the attached sporozoites were visualized with the appropriate monoclonal antibody (mAb 3D11 for *P. berghei* and mAb NYS1 for *P. yoelii*) and goat anti-mouse Ig conjugated to FITC. Each point was plated in triplicate and shown are the means with standard deviations. Panel A: Attachment of *P. berghei* and *P. yoelii* sporozoites to cells under static and rotating conditions. Panel B: Dose dependent inhibition of *P. berghei* sporozoite attachment. Percent inhibition was calculated using the mean number of sporozoites attached in the absence of heparin under static or rotating conditions.

Figure 2. Heparin inhibition of sporozoite attachment to HepG2 cells in a parallel plate flow chamber. Sporozoites were preincubated ± 25 µg/ml of heparin for 15 minutes on ice, infused into the inlet tubing of the flow chamber and then perfused over the cells at controlled flow rates. The wall shear stress was calculated as a function of flow rate. The perfusion time was inversely proportional to the flow rate so that for each point an equal number of
sporozoites were allowed to perfuse over the cell monolayer. Nonadherent sporozoites were washed off with medium infused at 0.05 ml/min (resulting in a shear force of 0.25 dynes/cm²) for 6 minutes. The cells were fixed and sporozoites were stained as outlined previously. For each point, the entire area covered by the flow chamber was divided into two and $\geq 100$ fields per region were counted. Percent inhibition was calculated using the mean number of sporozoites attached in the absence of heparin with the same flow rate.

Figure 3. Sporozoite attachment to HepG2 cells in the presence of heparin and cytochalasin D. *P. berghei* sporozoites were preincubated with or without 1 $\mu$M cytochalasin D $\pm$ 25 $\mu$g/ml heparin and then plated on cells (in the continued presence of these compounds). After 1 hour at 37°C under static (Panel A) or rotating conditions (Panel B), unattached sporozoites were removed, and the cells were stained with a double-staining procedure that allows the differentiation of intracellular from extracellular sporozoites. Each point was plated in triplicate and shown are the means with standard deviations of the total number of sporozoites attached to the cells. Invasion data for this experiment is not shown, however in the presence of cytochalasin D there was no invasion and in the absence of cytochalasin D, approximately 40% of attached sporozoites were found intracellularly regardless of whether heparin was present or not.

Figure 4. Heparin does not inhibit sporozoite invasion of HepG2 cells.
Panel A: Sporozoite invasion in the presence of heparin under static and rotating conditions. *P. berghei* sporozoites were preincubated in medium ± heparin (25 µg/ml) and then plated on cells in the presence of heparin. After 1 hour at 37°C under static or rotating conditions, unattached sporozoites were removed and the cells were stained with a double-staining procedure that allows the differentiation of intracellular from extracellular sporozoites. The percentage of sporozoites which invaded the cells was calculated using the following equation: 

\[
\frac{\text{total parasites} - \text{extracellular parasites}}{\text{total parasites}} \times 100
\]

Each point was plated in triplicate and shown are the means with standard deviations. Because of the variation in invasion efficiency among different batches of sporozoites, we show results from three separate experiments.

Panels B & C: Sporozoite invasion after recovery from cytochalasin treatment. *P. berghei* sporozoites were preincubated in medium with 1 µM cytochalasin, added to cells and allowed to adhere under static conditions in the continued presence of cytochalasin. After 30 minutes, the cytochalasin-containing medium and any unattached sporozoites were removed, medium containing the indicated concentrations of heparin was added and sporozoites were allowed to invade cells in the presence of heparin. White bars, no heparin; grey bars, 25 µg/ml heparin; black bars, 100 µg/ml heparin. Controls included sporozoites preincubated and added to cells in medium without cytochalasin or heparin (slanted line bars) and sporozoites preincubated and maintained in medium with cytochalasin for the entire experiment (cross-hatched bar). Sporozoites were allowed to invade cells for 1 hour and then the cells were double-stained so that intracellular and extracellular
sporozoites could be distinguished. Shown are the total number of sporozoite attached for each experimental condition (Panel B) and the percentage of attached sporozoites which were found intracellularly (Panel C). None of the sporozoites which were in the continuous presence of cytochalasin were found intracellularly (the asterisk in the graph indicates that the data were collected but the bar cannot be seen since its zero). Each point was plated in triplicate and shown are the means with standard deviations.

Figure 5. Chlorate inhibits sulfate incorporation into proteoglycans of HepG2 cells. HepG2 cells were plated in 6-well plates in medium with the indicated concentration of chlorate. After 12 hours, the medium was changed to low sulfate medium with the indicated concentrations of chlorate and $^{35}$S-sodium sulfate. 12 hours later the cells were washed, lysed and total cell associated cpm was measured in a beta counter. Each point was performed in triplicate and shown are the means with standard deviations. Inset: lysates from chlorate-treated cells were loaded onto a 5% SDS-PAGE gel which was then subject to autoradiography. Equivalent amounts of protein were loaded onto each lane. Most of the labeled material migrated as a broad high molecular weight smear, typical of proteoglycans.

Figure 6. Panel A: CS binding to chlorate treated HepG2 cells. Cells were plated in 96-well plates and grown in low-sulfate medium with the indicated concentrations of chlorate. After 18 to 24 hours, they were fixed, blocked and
incubated with increasing amounts of CS protein. CS binding was revealed with 
mAb 2A10 specific for the CS repeats, followed by anti-mouse Ig conjugated to 
horseradish peroxidase and peroxidase substrate. Shown are the CS binding 
curves for cells grown in 20 mM chlorate (squares), 10 mM chlorate (diamonds), 
5 mM chlorate (triangles), and no added chlorate (circles). Each point was 
assayed in triplicate and the means with standard deviations are shown. Inset 
shows CS binding curves for a control experiment in which cells were grown in 
low sulfate medium with 20 mM chlorate (squares), 20 mM chlorate plus 20 mM 
magnesium sulfate (open diamonds) or no chlorate (circles).

Panel B: Inhibition of CS binding to HepG2 cells with modified heparins. 5 µg/ml 
of CS was preincubated with the indicated concentrations of each heparin for 30 
min at 37°C. These solutions were then added to paraformaldehyde-fixed 
HepG2 cells for 1 h at 37°C, the cells were washed and bound CS was 
determined using iodinated mAb 2A10, specific for the CS repeats. Shown is the 
percent inhibition of binding of CS to HepG2 cells in the presence of inhibitor 
compared with results obtained in the absence of inhibitor. Inhibitors were 
heparin (circles), 2-O,3-O desulfated heparin (squares), N-desulfated heparin 
(triangles), 2-O, 3-O & N-desulfated heparin (inverted triangles) and carboxy- 
reduced heparin (diamonds). Each inhibitor concentration was assayed in 
triplicate and the means with standard deviations are shown.

**Figure 7.** Inhibition of sporozoite attachment to chlorate treated HepG2 cells. 
HepG2 cells were plated in labtek chamber slides and two days later the medium
was replaced with low sulfate medium containing the indicated concentrations of chlorate. After 24 hours, the chlorate-containing medium was removed and *P. berghei* sporozoites in DMEM/FCS were added to each well. After 1 hour at 37°C under static (gray bars) or rotating conditions (white bars), unattached sporozoites were removed, the cells were fixed and the attached sporozoites were stained. Shown is the percent inhibition of sporozoite attachment to cells in the presence of chlorate compared with the mean number of sporozoites attached in the absence of chlorate (under static or rotating conditions). Each point was plated in triplicate and shown are the means with standard deviations. Inset shows sporozoite attachment, under static and rotating conditions, to cells which had been incubated (as above) in medium with no chlorate, 20 mM chlorate, and 20 mM chlorate plus 20 mM magnesium sulfate. There was no inhibition of sporozoite attachment to cells in 20 mM chlorate plus 20 mM magnesium sulfate under both static and rotating conditions (asterisks indicate that the data were collected but the bar cannot be seen since its zero). Each point was plated in triplicate and shown are the means with standard deviations.

Figure 8. Sporozoite attachment to HepG2 cells under rotating conditions in the presence of modified heparins. *P. berghei* sporozoites were preincubated for 15 minutes on ice in medium alone or with 25 μg/ml of heparin (white bar), 2-O,3-O desulfated heparin (gray bar), N-desulfated heparin (black bar), 2-O,3-O & N-desulfated heparin (cross-hatched bar), and carboxy-reduced heparin (diagonallined bar) and then added to HepG2 cells in labtek chamber slides. Sporozoite
incubation with cells was under rotating conditions and in the continued presence of the inhibitor. After 1 hour, unattached sporozoites were removed, the cells were fixed and the attached sporozoites were stained and counted. Each point was plated in triplicate wells. Percent inhibition of sporozoite attachment was calculated using the mean number of sporozoites attached in the absence of heparin. This experiment was performed three times and shown are the pooled results from all three experiments.
Figure 1

A.

![Bar chart showing the inhibition of attachment of P. berghei and P. yoelii sporozoites per 20 fields with and without heparin.](image)

B.

![Bar chart showing the percent inhibition of attachment with heparin concentrations ranging from 6.25 to 200 µg/ml.](image)
Figure 2

The graph shows the percent inhibition of attachment for two different species, *P. berghei* and *P. yoelii*, at different dynes/cm² forces. The data indicates a significant increase in inhibition with increasing force for both species. For *P. berghei*, the inhibition at 0.25 dynes/cm² is lower compared to 0.75 and 1.5 dynes/cm². Similarly, *P. yoelii* shows a marked increase in inhibition at 1.5 dynes/cm² compared to 0.25 dynes/cm².
Figure 3

A. Static

B. Rotating
Figure 4

A. 

![Graph A: Experiment 1, Experiment 2, Experiment 3](attachment://graph4a.png)

- Percent invasion vs. heparin µg/ml
- Static and rotating conditions

B. 

![Graph B: Sporozoites attached per 4 fields](attachment://graph4b.png)

- Sporozoites attached per 4 fields vs. heparin µg/ml
- Cytochalasin +-

C. 

![Graph C: Percent invasion](attachment://graph4c.png)

- Percent invasion vs. heparin µg/ml
- Cytochalasin +-
Figure 5

[Graph showing the relationship between mM chlorate and cpm/µg protein]
Figure 7

![Bar chart showing percent inhibition of attachment for different chlorate concentrations and conditions.](http://www.jbc.org/)

- Chlorate concentration (%): 0, 20, 40, 60, 80
- Conditions: Static, Rotating
- Data points for 20 mM chlorate alone and combined with 20 mM sulfate
- Error bars indicating variability
The binding of the circumsporozoite protein to cell surface proteoglycans is required for plasmodium sporozoite attachment to target cells
Consuelo Pinzon-Ortiz, Jennifer Friedman, Jeffrey Esko and Photini Sinnis

J. Biol. Chem. published online May 14, 2001

Access the most updated version of this article at doi: 10.1074/jbc.M104038200

Alerts:
- When this article is cited
- When a correction for this article is posted

Click here to choose from all of JBC’s e-mail alerts

This article cites 0 references, 0 of which can be accessed free at http://www.jbc.org/content/early/2001/05/14/jbc.M104038200.citation.full.html#ref-list-1