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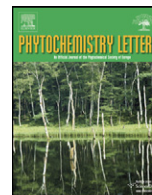

The first record of neolignans from the marine phanerogam *Posidonia oceanica*

Fatma Bitam [1], Maria Letizia Ciavatta *, Emiliano Manzo, Guido Villani, Margherita Gavagnin

Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Istituto di Chimica Biomolecolare, Via Campi Flegrei 34, I-80078 Pozzuoli, Napoli, Italy

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ABSTRACT

Chemical analysis of the secondary metabolites of *Posidonia oceanica* rhizomes led to the identification of several compounds. In particular, two neolignans, co-occurring with related metabolites previously described from the plant kingdom, have been isolated and characterised by spectroscopic methods. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first report of neolignans from a marine phanerogam.

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1. Introduction

Posidonia oceanica is a seagrass species only present in the Mediterranean basin whose importance in the marine ecosystem is well ascertained (Dawes, 1998; Gobert et al., 2006; Gillanders, 2006; Ruiz et al., 2009). *P. oceanica* is an important primary producer in the coastal waters, providing shelter and food to marine fauna, and habitat for epiphytes. Most papers dealing with this phanerogam are focused on the impact of human activities on *Posidonia* population whereas chemical studies investigating the secondary metabolism are in limited number. Very recently, Zidorn has published a comprehensive review on secondary metabolites of *P. oceanica* describing lipids (as sterols and fatty acids), phenols as simple derivatives, phenyl-methane, -ethane and -propane compounds as well as phenylpropanoic acid esters, flavonols and chalcones (Heglmeier and Zidorn, 2010). He also stated the importance of further studies on the secondary metabolites from *P. oceanica* and other seagrasses with special regard to classes of compounds never detected.

As part of our ongoing investigation on marine phanerogams (Bitam et al., 2010) and since the chemical data reported in the literature so far involve the aerial part of *P. oceanica* (Agostini et al., 1998; Cuny et al., 1995), we have examined the lipophilic extract of rhizomes of this marine plant collected off the Bay of Naples. Previous studies (Viso et al., 1993) on the rhizomes revealed lipid components as fatty acids and alkanes in few amount with respect to the aerial part and in diverse distribution depending on the geographical sampling. Among phenolic compounds, *p*-hydroxybenzoic acid and vanillic acid are the only molecules reported from the rhizomes (Cariello et al., 1979).

Our chemical investigation has resulted in the identification of two new neolignans (compounds **1** and **2**) isolated along with known related neolignans, quiquesetinerviusin A (**3**) (Chang et al., 2010) and 4,9-dihydroxy-9-(*p*-hydroxybenzoyloxy)-3,5′-dimethoxy-4,7′-epoxy-8,5′-neolignan-7-en-9′-al (**4**) (Hashimoto et al., 1994), a polar sterol fraction (Kontiza et al., 2006) and 3-indole-aldehyde (Evidente and Surico, 1986). All known compounds were identified by comparing the spectroscopic data with those reported in the literature. The new neolignans **1** and **2**, structurally related to co-occurring quiquesetinerviusin A (**3**) and to quiquesetinerviusin C (**5**) (Chang et al., 2010), respectively, were characterised by an extensive NMR analysis (see Fig. 1).

2. Results and discussion

The $CHCl_3$ soluble portion of the Me_2CO extract of *P. oceanica* rhizomes was analysed by TLC chromatography ($CHCl_3$/MeOH in different ratio) revealing the presence mainly of triglycerides and sterols along with a series of UV absorbing spots at R*f* 0.4 ($CHCl_3$/MeOH, 9:1). The extract was then purified on a Sephadex LH-20 column ($CHCl_3$/MeOH, 1:1 as eluent) to obtain three main fractions I–III containing compounds evidenced by TLC analysis. The ^1H

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +39 0818675243; fax: +39 0818041770.
E-mail address: lciavatta@icb.cnr.it (M.L. Ciavatta).
[1] On leave from Faculté des Sciences, Département de Chimie, Université de Batna, Batna 05000, Algeria.

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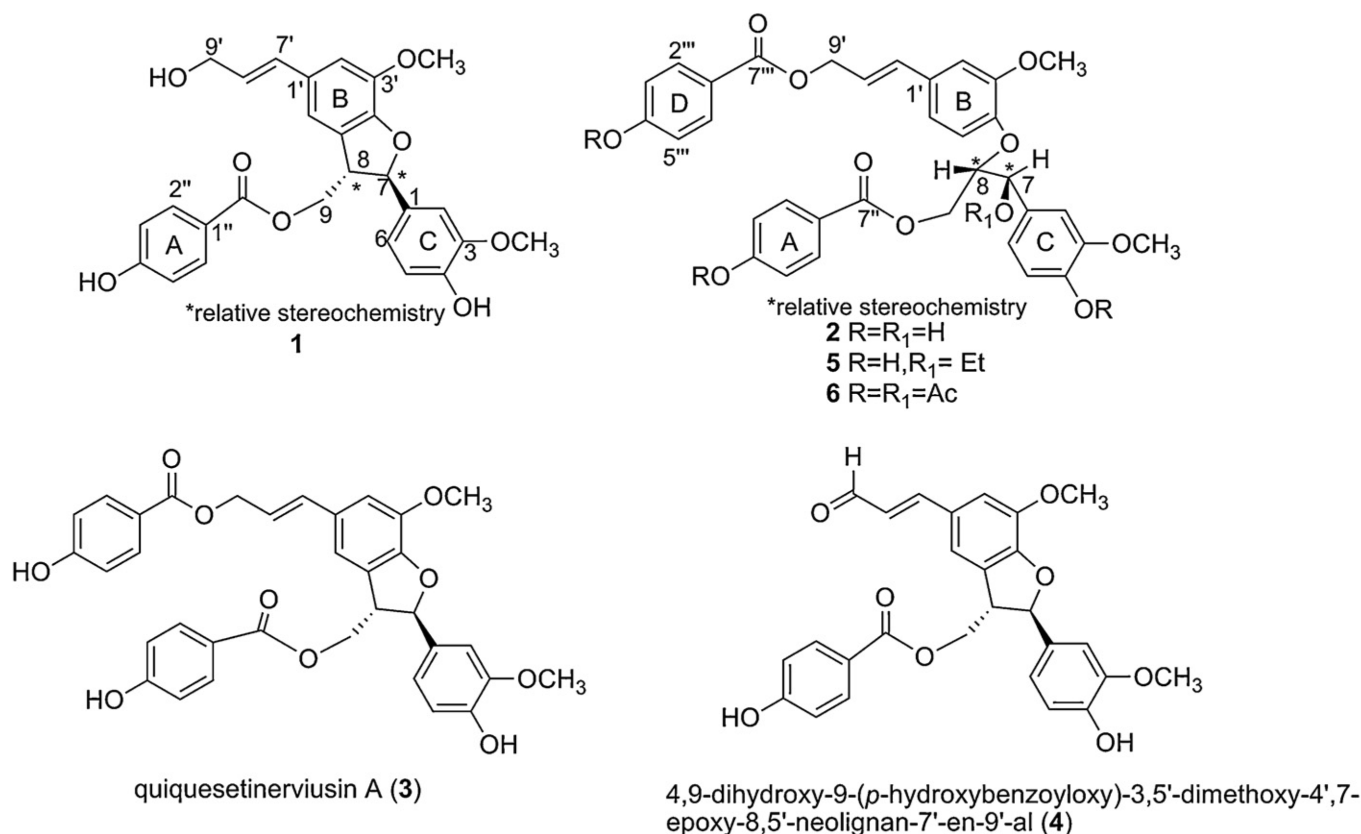

Fig. 1. Structures of new (**1–2**) and known neolignans (**3–4**) isolated from *Posidonia oceanica*.

NMR spectrum of fraction II contained a series of signals attributable to sterols and aromatic compounds. Thus, the fraction was subjected to reverse-phase HPLC ($MeOH/H_2O$ gradient) purification to afford four neolignans, compounds **1–4**, and a mixture of polar sterols. This mixture were constituted by 3-keto-6-hydroxysterols identified as those previously reported from *Cymodocea nodosa* (Kontiza et al., 2006). Compounds **3** and **4** were identified as quiquesetinerviusin A (Chang et al., 2010) and 4,9-dihydroxy-9-(*p*-hydroxybenzoyloxy)-3,5′-dimethoxy-4,7′-epoxy-8,5′-neolignan-7-en-9′-al (Hashimoto et al., 1994), respectively, by comparison of their spectroscopic data with the literature.

Compound **1** showed a molecular formula $C_{27}H_{26}O_8$ as deduced from the sodiated ion peak in the HRESIMS at *m*/*z* 501.1521 implying 15 unsaturation degrees. ^1H NMR spectrum of **1** (recorded in MeOD) was almost reminiscent with that of known quiquesetinerviusin A (**3**) suggesting close structural analogies. However, due to the best resolution observed in the spectra recorded in $CDCl_3$ with 10% of MeOD, the NMR characterisation of compound **1** was conducted in this solvent. The ^1H NMR spectrum showed three sets of signals attributable to aromatic, olefinic and aliphatic protons. The multiplets at δ_H 6.66, (2H, d, J = 8.8 Hz, H-3″ and H-5″) and δ_H 7.64 (2H, d, J = 8.8 Hz, H-2″ and H-6″) were consistent with the presence of a *p*-hydroxybenzoyloxy unit (ring A) whereas two broad 1H singlets at δ_H 6.76 (H-2′) and δ_H 6.81 (H-6′) were assigned to the protons of a 1,3,4,5-tetrasubstituted benzene ring (ring B). The presence of an additional 1,3,4-trisubstituted benzene moiety (ring C) was suggested by the signals at δ 6.75 (1H, br s, H-2), δ_H 6.74 (1H, br d, J = 8.2, H-6) and δ_H 6.68 (1H, d, J = 8.2, H-5). Two olefinic signals observed at δ_H 6.06 (1H, dt, J = 15.7, 5.5 Hz, H-8′) and δ_H 6.40 (1H, d, J = 15.7 Hz, H-7′) were attributed to the protons of an *E*-double bond. In addition, the spectrum contained resonances due to oxygenated protons: a methine [δ_H 5.42 (d, J = 7.3 Hz, H-7)], two methylenes [δ_H 4.52 (1H, dd, J = 11.0, 5.2 Hz, H-9a), δ_H 4.34 (1H, dd, J = 11.0, 8.1 Hz, H-9b), and δ_H 4.10 (2H, br d, J = 5.5 Hz, H_2-9′)], and two –OMe groups [δ_H 3.78 (s, MeO-3′) and 3.64 (s, MeO-3)]. An overlapped signal at δ_H 3.78, which was attributed to the angular methine H-8, was also present in the spectrum (Table 1). Analysis of the ^1H–^1H COSY experiment showed mutual couplings among protons H-7, H-8, and H_2-9 as well as H-7′, H-8′, and H_2-9′ thus defining two C_3 sequences in the molecule. By comparing these data with those of co-occurring **3**, the structure of compound **1** was proposed to be tetracyclic, with two phenylpropanoid moieties forming a dihydrobenzo[*b*]furan neolignan further esterified with a *p*-hydroxybenzoic acid unit. Diagnostic correlations observed in the HMBC spectrum secured the connection of two C_6–C_3 moieties in the molecule and the location of the *p*-hydroxybenzoic acid residue at 9-OH. In fact, C-1′ (δ_C 131.8) showed cross-peaks with H-8′, whereas C-7′ showed correlations with H-2′ and H-6′ connecting the ring B to the propenyl portion C7′–C9′; on the other hand, both carbons C-4 and C-6 were correlated to the oxygenated methine H-7 linking the ring C to the propyl chain C7–C9. Diagnostic cross-peaks between C-5′ (δ_C 127.5) with both H-8 and H_2-9 aided us to link ring B to ring C through the C_3 chain. Finally, the carboxyl C-7″ (δ 166.7) showed HMBC correlations with H_2-9 along with the expected correlations with H-2″/H-6″. According to the literature, the relative configuration of the chiral centres C-7 and C-8 in compound **1** was suggested to be *trans* by coupling constant analysis (J_{H7-H8} = 7.3 Hz), the same as compound **3**. Thus, **1** was 9′-*O*-*de*-*p*-hydroxybenzoyl derivative of **3**. The small amount of pure isolated compound **1** prevented any further chemical study focused on the determination of the absolute configuration.

Compound **2** was isolated as an oil and showed the molecular formula $C_{34}H_{32}O_{11}Na$ as deduced by the sodiated ion peak at *m*/*z* 639.1853 in the HRESIMS spectrum. The ^1H NMR

Table 1
^{1}H and ^{13}C NMR data[a,b] of compounds **1** and **2**.

Position	1		2	
	δ_C, mult	δ_H, J in Hz	δ_C, mult	δ_H, J in Hz
1	130.4, qC	–	130.5, qC	–
2	109.2, CH	6.75, br s	109.8, CH	6.87, br s
3	147.0, qC	–	147.0, qC	–
4	148.0, qC	–	145.5, qC	–
5	114.7, CH	6.68, d (8.2)	114.6, CH	6.77, d (8.2)
6	119.1, CH	6.74, br d (8.2)	119.6, CH	6.82, br d (8.2)
7	89.0, CH	5.42, d (7.3)	74.0, CH	4.86, d (6.0)
8	50.3, CH	3.78, m	84.5, CH	4.38, m
9a	65.4, CH_2	4.52, dd (11.0, 5.2)	63.4, CH_2	4.32, dd (12.3, 3.5)
9b		4.34, dd (11.0, 8.1)		4.16, dd (12.3, 5.3)
1′	131.8, qC	–	132.2, qC	–
2′	110.5, CH	6.76, br s	109.8, CH	6.88, br s
3′	144.0, qC	–	150.5, qC	–
4′	147.6, qC	–	149.9, qC	–
5′	127.5, qC	–	118.9, CH	6.99, d (8.2)
6′	115.1, CH	6.81, br s	120.0, CH	6.85, d (8.2)
7′	130.5, CH	6.40, d (15.7)	133.3, CH	6.57, d (15.7)
8′	126.5, CH	6.06, dt (15.7, 5.5)	122.6, CH	6.20, dt (15.7, 6.5)
9′	62.7, CH_2	4.10, br d (5.5)	65.1, CH_2	4.84, br d (6.5)
1″	120.4, qC	–	120.4, qC	–
2″	131.6, CH	7.64, d (8.8)	131.6, CH	7.63, d (8.8)
3″	115.1, CH	6.66, d (8.8)	114.6, CH	6.70, d (8.8)
4″	161.8, qC	–	161.7, qC	–
5″	115.1, CH	6.66, d (8.8)	114.6, CH	6.70, d (8.8)
6″	131.6, CH	7.64, d (8.8)	131.6, CH	7.63, d (8.8)
7″	166.7, qC	–	166.8, qC	–
1‴			120.9, qC	–
2‴			131.7, CH	7.86, d (8.8)
3‴			114.7, CH	6.77, d (8.8)
4‴			161.7, qC	–
5‴			114.7, CH	6.77, d (8.8)
6‴			131.7, CH	7.86, d (8.8)
7‴			166.5, qC	–
OMe-3	55.9, CH_3	3.64, s	55.7, CH_3	3.72, s
OMe-3′	55.7, CH_3	3.78, s	55.6, CH_3	3.77, s

[a] Experiments carried out in $CDCl_3$ + 10% CD_3OD.
[b] 600 MHz for ^{1}H, 150 MHz for ^{13}C; assignments established by COSY, HSQC and HMBC (J optimised for 8 Hz).

spectrum-recorded in $CDCl_3$ with 10% of MeOD as for compound **1**-displayed aromatic signals belonging to two units of *p*-hydroxybenzoyloxy rings [ring A (δ_H 7.63, 2H, d, J = 8.8 Hz, H-2″ and H-6″; δ_H 6.70, 2H, d, J = 8.8 Hz, H-3″ and H-5″) and ring D (δ_H 7.86, 2H, d, J = 8.8 Hz, H-2‴ and H-6‴; δ_H 6.77, 2H, d, J = 8.8 Hz, H-3‴ and H-5‴)], and to two 1,3,4-trisubstituted benzene moieties [ring B (δ_H 6.88, 1H, br s, H-2′; δ_H 6.85, 1H, br d, J = 8.2 Hz, H-6′, and δ_H 6.99, 1H, d, J = 8.2, H-5′) and ring C (δ_H 6.87, 1H, br s, H-2, δ_H 6.77, 1H, d, J = 8.2 Hz, H-5, and δ_H 6.82, 1H, br d, J = 8.2 Hz, H-6)]. The spectrum also contained signals due to two olefinic protons [δ_H 6.57 (d, J = 15.7 Hz, H-7′) and δ_H 6.20 (dt, J = 15.7 and 6.5 Hz, H-8′)], two methine and two methylene groups linked to oxygen [δ_H 4.86 (1H, d, J = 6.0 Hz, H-7), δ_H 4.84 (1H, d, J = 6.5 Hz, H_2-9′), δ_H 4.38 (1H, m, H-8), δ_H 4.32 (1H, dd, J = 12.3 and 3.5 Hz, H-9a), δ_H 4.16 (1H, dd, J = 12.3 and 5.3 Hz, H-9b)] and, finally, two methoxy 3H singlets [δ_H 3.77 (s, OCH_3-3′) and δ_H 3.72 (s, OCH_3-3)] (Table 1).

The ^{1}H–^{1}H COSY experiment showed correlations between the two olefinic protons and the signal at δ_H 4.84 (H_2-9′) verifying the presence of a propenol moiety. The signal at δ_H 4.86 (H-7) had cross-peaks with the methine at δ_H 4.38 (H-8), which was in turn coupled to the methylene protons at δ_H 4.32 and δ_H 4.16 consistent with a 1,2,3-propanetriol chain. This residue was suggested to connect both aromatic rings B and C by diagnostic HMBC correlations: in fact, H-8 (δ_H 4.38) had cross-peaks with C-4′ (δ_C 149.9) in ring B and C-1 (δ_C 130.5) in ring C, whereas H-7 (δ_H 4.86) showed correlations to C-2 and to C-6 of ring C. To further confirm this structural hypothesis, an aliquot of compound **2** was acetylated affording the tetracetate derivative **6**, which was analysed by ^{1}H NMR (see Experimental). The downfield shift value of proton at C-7 (δ 6.20, d, J = 7.0 Hz, H-7) confirmed the proposed assignments. Finally, the two *p*-hydroxybenzoic acid units (rings A and D) were suggested to esterify the residues 9-OH and 9′-OH by HMBC correlations of C-7″ (δ 166.8) and C-7‴ (δ 166.5) with H_2-9 and H_2-9′, respectively.

All NMR data evidenced that compound **2** had a structure containing two phenylpropanoid units, including a guaiacylglicerol moiety linked β-*O*-4′ to *trans*-coniferyl alcohol, strongly resembling that of quiquesetinerviusin C (**5**) (Chang et al., 2010) and similar to those of carolignans (Rudiyansyah et al., 2010; Seca et al., 2001; Paula et al., 1995). As the proton H-7 (δ_H 4.86) was partially overlapped by the 2H signal attributed to methylene at C-9′ (δ_H 4.84, d, J = 6.5 Hz), we recorded the ^{1}H NMR spectrum of **2** in $CDCl_3$ that disclosed for these signals two distinct resonances (see Section 3). The measured coupling constant J_{H7-H8} was 8.2 Hz, thus supporting a *threo*-configuration between C-7 and C-8 in agreement with data reported for similar compounds (Braga et al., 1984; Wu et al., 2004; Seca et al., 2001). Comparison of ^{1}H NMR spectrum of **2** with that of known **5** – recorded in the same literature solvent –supported the structural assignment thus indicating that **2** was 7-*O*-*de*-ethyl-quiquesetinerviusin C.

The finding of neolignans in the plant kingdom is very common and it has been suggested that these molecules are involved in the formation of lignin (Higuchi, 1985). The detection of lignin in the rhizomes rather than in the leaves of *P. oceanica* has been reported by Klap et al. (2000). According to this, it is not surprising that this marine seagrass contains neolignans as terrestrial phanerogams.

3. Experimental

3.1. General experimental procedures

Optical rotations were measured on a Jasco DIP 370 digital polarimeter; IR spectra were measured on a Biorad FTS 155 FTIR spectrophotometer. UV spectra were recorded on a spectrophotometer Analytik Jena Spekol 1500. 1D and 2D NMR spectra were recorded on a Bruker Avance-400 and on a Bruker DRX-600 equipped with TXI CryoProbe™ in $CDCl_3$ (with 10% CD_3OD) (δ values are reported referred to $C\underline{H}Cl_3$ at 7.26 ppm) and ^{13}C NMR were recorded on a Bruker DPX-300 (75.0 MHz) and Bruker DRX-600 (150 MHz) (δ_C values are reported to $C\underline{H}Cl_3$, 77.0 ppm). HRESIMS were carried out on a Micromass Q-TOF micro. HPLC separation was performed using a Shimadzu liquid chromatograph LC-10AD equipped with an UV SPD-10A wavelength detector, with a semipreparative column RP-Amide (Supelco, 250 mm × 10 mm, 5 μm). TLC plates (KieselGel 60 F254) were from Merck (Darmstadt, Germany), silica gel powder (KieselGel 60 0.063–0.200 mm) was from Merck (Darmstadt, Germany). Sephadex LH-20 was from Amersham Pharmacia Biotech (Uppsala, Sweden).

3.2. Biological material

The seagrass *Poseidonia oceanica* was collected off the Gulf of Naples in April 2008 by scuba. This material was carefully separated in leaves and rhizomes. A voucher specimen is stored at ICB with the code PO.

3.3. Extraction and isolation

The fresh rhizomes of *P. oceanica* were carefully separated from the leaves, chopped and extracted with acetone three times using ultrasounds. After filtration and evaporation *in vacuo* of the organic solvent, the aqueous residue was partitioned with chloroform and subsequently with BuOH to obtain two extracts of 1.0 g and 1.2 g, respectively. The chloroformic extract was subjected to a Sephadex

LH-20 column, using as eluent $CHCl_3/CH_3OH$ 1:1, to give three main fractions I–III. TLC chromatography and NMR analysis revealed that fraction I (150 mg) contained mainly triglycerides, fraction II (300 mg) sterols and several UV absorbing compounds, whereas fraction III (100 mg) contained a polar UV compound that was recognised as 3-indole-3-aldehyde by NMR data present in literature. Fraction II was further purified on silicagel column (eluent light petroleum ether with increasing amount of ethyl acetate) to give two main subfractions A and B; subfraction A was subjected to HPLC chromatography ($MeOH/H_2O$ from 50:50 to 100% MeOH in 50 min, flow rate 1 ml/min) to yield neolignans **2** (0.5 mg), **4** (0.8 mg), **1** (0.8 mg), and **3** (2 mg) in order of decreasing polarity; subfraction B was purified on RP-HPLC ($MeOH/H_2O$, 90:10 to 100% MeOH, flow rate 1 ml/min) to yield 3-keto-6-hydroxysterols identified with those reported in literature.

3.4. Chemical characterisation

Compound **1**: oil; $[\alpha]_D = -8.2$ (c 0.08, MeOH); IR (liquid film) ν_{max}: 3366, 2928, 1710, 1610, 1529, 1456, 1270, 1167, 1105, 970, 850, 769 cm^{-1}; ^1H and ^{13}C NMR see Table 1; ESIMS *m*/*z* 501 [M+Na]; HRESIMS *m*/*z* 501.1521 (calc. for $C_{27}H_{26}O_8Na$ 501.1525).

Compound **2**: pale yellow oil; $[\alpha]_D = +15.7$ (c 0.05, MeOH); IR (liquid film) ν_{max}: 3350, 2928, 1710, 1608, 1520, 1450, 1276, 1162, 1105 cm^{-1}; ^1H and ^{13}C NMR see Table 1; ESIMS *m*/*z* 639 [M+Na]; HRESIMS *m*/*z* 639.1853 (calc. for $C_{34}H_{32}O_{11}Na$ 639.1842). Selected ^1H NMR signals for **2** recorded in $CDCl_3$: δ 6.63 (d, *J* = 15.9 Hz, H-7′), δ 6.27 (dt, *J* = 15.9, 6.1 Hz, H-8′), δ 4.99 (d, *J* = 6.1 Hz, H_2-9′), δ 4.89 (d, *J* = 8.2 Hz, H-7), δ 4.49 (m, H-8).

Compound **6**: an aliquot of compound **2** (0.3 mg) was acetylated with acetic anhydride in pyridine (overnight, r.t.); the organic solvent was then removed to afford pure compound **7**; selected ^1H NMR signals for compound **6** recorded in $CDCl_3$: δ 6.63 (d, *J* = 15.9 Hz, H-7′), δ 6.27 (dt, *J* = 15.9, 6.1 Hz, H-8′), δ 6.20 (d, *J* = 7.0 Hz, H-7), δ 4.98 (d, *J* = 6.5 Hz, H_2-9′), δ 4.48 (m, H-8).

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