Metabolic resistance of the tiger mosquito to pyrethroid

insecticides in La Réunion Island likely results from local

adaptation

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Abstract

The resistance of mosquitoes to insecticides is a valuable model system for studying the genetic bases

of xenobiotic adaptation in insects. The spread of the Asian tiger mosquito *Aedes albopictus* combined

to the massive use of pyrethroid insecticides to limit arbovirus transmission resulted in the rise of

resistance in various continents. Here, we investigated the genetic mechanisms underlying the recent

adaptation of this mosquito to deltamethrin in La Réunion island. Bioassays confirmed the presence of

resistance alleles in field populations. The resistance phenotype was further enhanced in the

laboratory following a few generations of controlled selection. Combining whole genome Pool-seq and

RNA-seq revealed no evidence of target-site resistance mutations but the over-expression and variant

selection of detoxification enzymes associated with pyrethroid metabolism including cytochrome

P450s, transferases and ABC-transporters. Among over-expressed detoxification genes, only one was

linked to a gene duplication while polymorphism data suggest most of them being trans-regulated.

Genome-wide selection signatures revealed a 9 Mb inverted superlocus responding to insecticide

selection whose phenotypical importance remains uncertain. Altogether, this study indicates that the

multigenic metabolic resistance phenotype observed in this insular territory mainly results from local

adaptation. From an applied perspective, this study provides a set of markers to track pyrethroid

resistance in the tiger mosquito in the South-West Indian Ocean. As this region is subjected to

recurrent arbovirus outbreaks, the additive resistance phenotype that may arise from the introduction
of *Kdr* mutations from other territories also calls for improving resistance surveillance at the regional
scale.

Author summary

While novel vector control strategies are being developed, chemical insecticides remain widely used to
control mosquitoes transmitting human diseases such as the Asian tiger mosquito. However, the
recurrent use of insecticides resulted in the emergence of resistance which can ultimately affect vector
control efficacy. Here, we investigate the genetic bases underlying the resistance of the Asian tiger
mosquito to the pyrethroid insecticide deltamethrin in La Réunion island. By combining two
complementary genomic approaches, we showed that resistance is mainly caused by an increased
insecticide detoxification while classical 'Knock down resistance' mutations affecting the target of the
insecticide were not detected. We also showed that resistance is underlain by multiple genetic
changes spread across the genome, supporting the local selection of resistance rather than the
introduction of resistance alleles. Furthermore, we identified a large inverted supergene responding to
insecticide selection. This study provides valuable insights into the genetic bases of insecticide
resistance, enabling the implementation of molecular makers to improve the tracking of insecticide
resistance in this major mosquito vector across the Indian Ocean.

Introduction

Natural populations experience a variety of human-driven selective pressures, leading to their
adaptation through the expression of complex phenotypes (1). Understanding the genetic mechanisms
allowing them to adapt to such rapid environmental changes provides key knowledge for populations
management (2–4). The evolution of insecticide resistance is a good example of how natural selection
can mediate the rapid adaptation of natural populations to anthropogenic pressures as it occurs in a
large number of insects (5,6). Beyond understanding the adaptative mechanisms, identifying
resistance alleles also contributes to improving management strategies (7–9). However, the frequent
co-occurrence of multiple resistance mechanisms and the diversity of genetic events underlying
resistant phenotypes often makes the characterization of resistance alleles challenging (5,10).

Among insect vectors, *Aedes* mosquitoes pose a significant threat to public health because they
transmit major arboviral diseases (11,12). Among them, the invasive Asian tiger mosquito *Aedes*
albopictus is of particular importance because its spread contributed to the worldwide re-emergence

of arboviruses such as dengue and chikungunya (13). Although significant research efforts are

dedicated to develop vaccines targeting these arboviruses (14–16), outbreak prevention still massively

relies on insecticide-based vector control (17). Pyrethroid insecticides such as deltamethrin are the

most-used insecticides against Aedes mosquitoes (18). However, the adaptation of mosquitoes to such

insecticides can ultimately reduce the efficacy of vector control preventive actions (19–22).

Pyrethroids disrupt nerve function by altering the opening kinetics of the voltage-gated sodium

channel (VGSC gene: 23,24). Pyrethroid resistance can be the consequence of point mutations

affecting the VGSC gene, known as Knock-down resistance (*Kdr*) mutations (target-site resistance); a

decreased insecticide penetration mediated by cuticle modification (cuticle resistance); and

biodegradation of the insecticide through complex detoxification pathways (metabolic resistance: 10).

Kdr mutations typically affect a few conserved amino-acid positions in the VGSC protein and are fairly

well characterized in *Aedes* mosquitoes (25–28). Conversely, the genetic bases of insecticide

detoxification are far less understood. Indeed, the diversity and redundancy of genes underlying

xenobiotic detoxification pathways often lead to various multigenic adaptive trajectories depending on

the local context (5,10,17,23). In insects, pyrethroid metabolism typically includes an initial phase

involving hydroxylation by cytochrome P450s and sometimes ester-bond hydrolysis by

carboxylesterases, followed by the conjugation of hydrophilic groups by glutathione S-transferases

(GSTs) and UDP-glycosyltransferases (UDPGTs), and the excretion of the insecticide itself or its

metabolites by ABC-transporters (29–31). Molecular changes underlying metabolic resistance to

pyrethroids frequently include the over-expression of detoxification enzymes and transporters

mediated by cis- or trans-regulation or by gene duplication although the selection of

enzyme/transporter variants showing an enhanced activity toward the insecticide has also been

described (6,32–35).

The recent spread of *Ae. albopictus* to all continents and its ecological shift to more urbanized areas

(12) led to its increased exposure to pyrethroid insecticides and ultimately to the selection of

resistance. Pyrethroid resistance was first reported in South-East Asia more than a decade ago (36–39)

followed by other Asian regions (40–42). In these regions the resistance phenotype was often related

to the presence of various *Kdr* mutation haplotypes (40,43,44), although metabolic resistance was also

detected (45–47). Resistance was then detected in Europe following the introduction of *Kdr* mutations

from Asia (48–50). Resistance was also detected in Africa in association with *Kdr* mutations and

increased detoxification though the underlying resistance alleles were not characterized (51–53).

In the Indian Ocean, *Ae. albopictus* was likely imported from Asia in La Réunion island during the 17th

and the 18th centuries though other introductions likely occurred later (54). This mosquito was

associated to the chikungunya outbreak that occurred in 2005-2006 (55,56) and is the main vector of

recurrent dengue/chikungunya outbreaks since then (57). In La Réunion island, the recurrent use of

deltamethrin for vector control since 2006 ultimately resulted in the emergence of resistance as

detected by public health authorities in 2017 (58). However, the mechanisms underlying the resistance

phenotype have not been thoroughly investigated since then. A single heterozygote for the V1016G

Kdr mutation was observed from mosquitoes collected in La Réunion in 2016 as part of a worldwide

Kdr screening study (59). However, the circulation of *Kdr* mutation in the island or neighbouring

territories was not confirmed after this observation.

In this context, the present work aims at deciphering the genetic bases of the deltamethrin resistance

phenotype observed in *Ae. albopictus* populations in La Réunion island. This was achieved by adopting

an experimental design combining field populations and field-derived lines enriched or not for

resistance alleles by controlled selection. At the molecular level, an integrated genomic approach

combining RNA-seq and whole genome Pool-seq was applied to pinpoint resistance alleles and their

underlying genomic events. The evolutionary scenario leading to the emergence of resistance in La

Réunion island is then discussed in regards of the worldwide distribution of resistance alleles and the

local demographic context. While providing a set of novel molecular markers to track insecticide

resistance in this mosquito vector, the present study contributes to anticipate the emergence of

insecticide resistance in the South-West Indian Ocean region and its consequences for vector control

strategies.

Results

Deltamethrin resistance alleles circulate in La Réunion island

In order to improve the identification of deltamethrin resistance alleles, an experimental design

combining field populations and the controlled selection of a composite line was used (**Fig. 1A,** see

methods). Comparative deltamethrin bioassays performed on three field populations confirmed the

presence of resistance alleles in La Réunion (**Fig. 1B**). The three field populations (Saint-Paul, Saint-

Louis and Sainte-Suzanne) showed a significant decreased mortality to deltamethrin compared with

the susceptible SRun reference line. As expected, the composite line maintained without deltamethrin

selection for 6 generations (NS line) showed a resistance level similar to field populations. Selecting

the composite line for 5 generations with deltamethrin (Sel line) resulted in its increased resistance as

compared to the NS line, suggesting that resistance alleles are not fixed in the field and have been

further selected by controlled-selection in the laboratory.

Fig 1. Study design and deltamethrin resistance levels. (A) Sampling sites and study design. The map shows the location of populations used to create the composite population from La Réunion island (red dots) and field populations (blue dots) used for analyses. For each line/population, the generation used is indicated. Venn diagrams illustrate the pairwise comparisons made for the identification of deltamethrin resistance markers (see methods). **(B)** Deltamethrin resistance levels. Mean mortality rates were obtained from standard WHO test tube assays using 0.03% deltamethrin impregnated papers. Error bars denote SD. Distinct letters indicate significantly distinct mortality rates (Conover-Iman test; N=9; *p* value ≤ 0.05). Sel: deltamethrin selected line; NS: non-selected line; St-Pau: Saint-Paul; St-Lou: Saint-Louis; St-Suz: Sainte-Suzanne; SRun: susceptible reference line from La Réunion.

The resistance phenotype is not associated with target-site mutations

Whole genome pool-seq data from all lines were used to screen for *Kdr* mutations affecting the VGSC gene encoding the biochemical target of deltamethrin. Among the 132 polymorphisms detected in coding regions, six were non-synonymous (**S1 file**), but none matched the position of *Kdr* mutations previously associated with pyrethroid resistance in *Ae. albopictus* (*i.e.* V410L, L982Y, S989P, I1011M, V1016G/I, I1532T, and F1534C: ,28). In addition, these six non-synonymous variants are unlikely to contribute to deltamethrin resistance as they do not show a frequency pattern consistent with deltamethrin resistance across all lines. Furthermore, they were located in cytosolic regions being distant from the protein domains carrying known *kdr* mutations. Altogether, this indicate that the detected protein variants are most likely neutral, and that *Kdr* mutation do not contribute to deltamethrin resistance in La Reunion island.

Resistance involves the over-transcription of detoxification enzymes

RNA-seq performed on adult females enabled the detection of 13,918 genes passing coverage threshold which included 697 resistance candidate genes. Differential transcription analysis identified 48 genes differentially transcribed in association with resistance when considering both lab and field comparisons (**Fig. 2A and S2 Table**). The 12 under-transcribed genes include a single candidate encoding an ABC-transporter (LOC109429564). Conversely, the 36 over-transcribed genes included 11

candidates, representing a significant enrichment compared with the global gene set (from 5% to

30.5%, X^2 test $p < 0.05$). All of them belong to three gene families classically involved in pyrethroid

metabolism (P450s, transferases and ABC-transporters), leading to a significant enrichment of

detoxification genes (from 54% to 100%, X^2 test $p < 0.05$; **Fig. 2B**). All over-transcribed candidate genes

were located on chromosomes 1 and 2, some of them being clustered together (**Fig. 2C**). Several of

them show high protein homology with genes previously involved in pyrethroid resistance in *Aedes*

aegypti or *Anopheles gambiae*. The P450s *CYP6d5* (LOC115259486) was previously found over-

transcribed in resistant *Ae. albopictus* populations from China (same gene named CYP6A8 in 47) and

shows high homology with members of the CYP6Z subfamily previously involved in pyrethroid

metabolism (60–62). The P450 *CYP6a14* (LOC109421559) shows high homology with members of the

CYP6M subfamily validated as pyrethroid metabolizers in Anopheles mosquitoes (62,63). Similarly,

GST☐-1 (LOC109412993) and *GST4*-like (LOC109413318) showed high homology with *theta*- and *delta*-

GSTs previously associated with pyrethroid in mosquitoes (45,64–67). Finally, the two ABC-

transporters (LOC109407008 and LOC109429691) showed a high homology with the ABCC subfamily

previously associated with pyrethroid resistance (68–73). Altogether, these results indicate that in

absence of *Kdr* mutations, the deltamethrin resistance phenotype observed in La Réunion island is

associated with an over-expression of detoxification enzymes likely involved in insecticide metabolism.

Fig 2. Genes identified as differentially transcribed in association with deltamethrin resistance. Only genes showing

consistent transcription level variations in both Lab and Field comparisons were considered associated with resistance (see

methods). **(A)** Venn diagrams showing the number of genes being differentially transcribed in association with resistance.

Numbers within brackets stand for candidate genes. **(B)** The left donut-chart describes all candidates genes detected by RNA-

seq and their respective gene families. The right donut-chart shows candidate genes associated with resistance. Black circular

arcs indicate gene families classically associated with detoxification. Stars indicate a significant enrichment from 'detected' to

'resistance associated' candidate genes (X^2 test, *p* value ≤ 0.05). **(C)** Candidate genes over-transcribed in association with

deltamethrin resistance. Log_2 fold changes obtained from each comparison are shown on the heatmap (scale from 0 to 3, see

S2 table for exact values). Colour squares refers to candidate gene families. Chromosomal positions are shown on the left

with the density of detected candidate genes shown as grey intensity. For each gene, NCBI accession number and description

are provided together with closest protein homologs in *Ae. aegypti* and *An. gambiae*. Genes in bold are those from which

close orthologs were previously associated with pyrethroid resistance. CYP: cytochrome P450; GST: glutathione S-transferase;

UDPGT: UDP-glycosyltransferase; ABC transp: ABC transporter; Sel: selected line; NS: non-selected line; St-Pau: Saint-Paul; St-

Lou: Saint-Louis; St-Suz: Sainte-Suzanne; SRun: susceptible reference line from La Réunion.

190 Resistance is likely not associated with alternative splicing

Using a *de novo* RNA-seq assembly strategy, we searched for alternative splicing events associated

with resistance. This analysis identified 166 events associated with resistance affecting 163 genes (**S3**

Table). This included 8 alternative splicing events, 4 large intron retention events (> 50 bp) though

none of them affected candidate genes. Such analysis also identified 161 short genomic indel events (≤

50 bp) among with two affected candidate genes: the transcription factor HR96 LOC109416347 (6 bp

indel) and the peroxiredoxin LOC109415663 (3 bp indel). Altogether, these data indicate that

resistance in la Réunion does not strongly rely on alternative splicing events.

198 An over-transcribed P450 is likely affected by a genomic duplication

As over-transcription can be caused by an increased copy number, whole genome pool-seq data were

used to identify genes affected by copy number variations (CNV) in association with resistance based

on their increased exonic read coverages (see Methods). This analysis identified 72 genes showing an

increased coverage associated with resistance. Five of them were also over-transcribed in resistant

lines including the P450 *CYP6d5* (**Fig. 3A and 3B; S4 Table**). Comparing normalized coverage profiles at

the *CYP6d5 locus* revealed an increased coverage in resistant lines, which supports the occurrence of a

~60 Kb duplication (**Fig. 3C**). The putative breakpoints were poorly covered, likely due to the presence

of transposable elements which were annotated as a LTR element on the left and a Line/R1 element

on the right.

Fig 3. Gene copy number variant analysis. (A) Genes showing an increased copy number (CNV) in association with deltamethrin resistance in regards of those identified as overtranscribed. Numbers within brackets refer to candidate genes. **(B)** Distribution of gene copy number variants along chromosomes. Diamonds show the chromosomal position of the 72 genes showing an increased CNV associated with resistance. The red diamond refers to the candidate gene *CYP6d5* (LOC115259486). Over-transcribed candidate genes are named and shown as red marks in respect to candidate genes density (grey intensity). **(C)** Normalized read coverage profiles observed at the vicinity of *CYP6d5*. Normalized coverage profiles were computed for each line from whole genome pool-seq reads and smoothed using a 5 kb sliding window. The probable range of the duplicated region is delimited by black triangles. The *CYP6d5* gene is shown in red. Repeat masker annotation is shown as grey boxes. Genomic coordinates refer to AALBF3.v2 assembly. Sel: selected line; NS: non-selected line; St-Pau: Saint-Paul; St-Lou: Saint-Louis; St-Suz: Sainte-Suzanne; SRun: susceptible reference line from La Réunion.

Resistance is related to the selection of detoxification enzyme variants

Whole genome Pool-seq data were used to look for non-synonymous variants associated with resistance based on their frequency variation across resistant and susceptible lines. This analysis detected 197,403 non-synonymous variants passing coverage threshold with 11,679 of them affecting candidate genes (**Fig. 4A**). Among the 455 non-synonymous variants associated with resistance, 36 of them affected 27 distinct candidate genes (**Fig. 4B, S5 Table**). A significant enrichment of candidate genes involved in detoxification was observed, mainly driven by a strong enrichment of P450s (from 15% to 33.3%, X^2 test $p < 0.02$). The 36 variants affecting candidate genes were spread over the three chromosomes (**Fig. 4C**). None of them affected over-transcribed genes though some were located in the same gene cluster. This was the case for the P450 *CYP6a8* variant located within a large CYP6 cluster which also include the two over-transcribed *CYP6a14* genes. Four major loci gathering multiple variants were identified in chromosome 3. The first one carried 4 variants affecting a *CYP4v2* and an ABC transporter. The second one included 9 variants affecting 6 P450s belonging to a cluster of 18 *CYP4C* genes. The last two gathered various candidate genes including a *CYP9f2* gene and an epoxide. Altogether, this analysis indicates that the deltamethrin resistance phenotype observed in La Réunion

is not only caused by the over transcription of detoxification genes but also by the selection of protein variants likely related to insecticide metabolism.

Fig 4. Protein variants associated with resistance. (A) Overview of non-synonymous variants identified. Numbers within brackets refer to variants affecting candidate genes. Variants associated with resistance were identified based on allele frequency variations across resistant and susceptible lines (see Methods) **(B)** The left donut-chart describes all candidate genes from which polymorphic non-synonymous variants were detected. The right donut-chart described those associated with resistance. Black circular arcs highlight gene families associated with detoxification. Stars indicate a significant enrichment (X^2 test, p value ≤ 0.05). **(C)** Candidate genes with non-synonymous variants associated with resistance. The heat map shows the frequency of the variant allele across all lines. The chromosomal position of each variant is shown on the left in respect to over-transcribed candidate genes (red marks) and candidate gene density (grey intensity). For each variant, gene family (colour square), gene accession number, gene description, nucleotide and amino-acid change are indicated. CYP: cytochrome P450; GST: glutathione S-transferase; UDPGT: UDP-glycosyltransferase; ABC transp: ABC transporter; Sel:

 selected line; NS: non-selected line; St-Pau: Saint-Paul; St-Lou: Saint-Louis; St-Suz: Sainte-Suzanne; SRun: susceptible
252 reference line from La Réunion.

Over-transcribed detoxification genes are not under direct selection

Exonic polymorphism data were then used to look for gene-based selection signatures across the
genome between the Sel and NS lines based from allele frequency differentiation indexes (see
Methods). Among the 11 over-transcribed candidate genes, only the P450 *CYP304c1* and the
microsomal *GST-1* showed high differentiation indexes, which supports their cis-regulation. Other
over-transcribed candidate genes were below the baseline, consistent with their trans-regulation (**Fig.**
5A). Conversely, most candidate genes carrying protein variants associated with resistance showed
high gene differentiation indexes, supporting selection acting on the same *loci*. Among candidate
genes, those showing the highest differentiation indexes included two carboxylesterases *E4-like* on
chromosome 1, two UDPGTs and the *CYP6a8* P450 on chromosome 2, and the ABC transporter *F4* and
the two *CYP4c1* P450s on chromosome 3. Overall, though genetic drift may have occurred between
the Sel and NS lines, the high differentiation indexes observed across the three chromosomes support
the hypothesis of a multigenic adaptation based on standing genetic variation in La Réunion island (**Fig.**
5B).

An inverted superlocus is under deltamethrin selection in La Réunion

This analysis also identified a hundred genes located within an intriguing region of chromosome 2
displaying very high differentiation levels (**Fig. 5C and S6 Table**). This large 9.6 Mb *locus* showed a
strong selection signal in the Sel/NS comparison but also in other 'resistant *vs* susceptible'
comparisons coherent with a low recombination rate. Indeed, a quarter of the 3141 non-synonymous
polymorphisms detected in this region are above the whole genome top centile for Sel/NS
differentiation indexes. Examining reads topology identified 'one mate swap' read pairs and split reads
supporting the presence of a large genomic inversion whose breakpoints were 120,519,062 and
130,178,023. The partial mapping of these reads at the breakpoints together with the unmapped
fragments matching to multiple genomic locations supported the flanking of this inversion by two
transposable elements. The presence of this inversion at low frequency in the susceptible reference
strain SRun also suggests its pre-existence prior to its selection by deltamethrin in La Réunion. Among
the 107 genes located within the inverted region, only four belong to candidate genes including two
ABC-transporters, a cytochrome b5-like and a cuticle protein. However, none of them were
differentially transcribed, affected by CNV, or carried non-synonymous variants associated with
deltamethrin resistance. Among other genes located within the inversion, none showed a clear
association with a known resistance mechanism. Fifteen genes encoded known or putative (*i.e.* zing

finger proteins) transcription factors although none were previously associated with detoxification enzymes regulation. Several polymorphisms showing the highest Sel/NS differentiation affected the uncharacterized gene LOC115268503. Protein homology suggest that this gene encodes a S/T protein phosphatase with ankyrin motifs. As the voltage-gated sodium channel targeted by pyrethroids can be regulated by phosphorylation and interact with ankyrins (74,75), this gene is an attractive candidate to explain the selection of this large inversion by deltamethrin.

Fig 5. Genome-wide allele frequency differentiation. (A) The plot shows two genetic differentiation indexes for the Sel/NS line comparison: the mean Allele Frequency Difference per gene (mean AFD, absolute value) and the proportion (%) of SNPs per gene showing an AFD within the top decile of the global distribution (% SNPs in top decile AFD). These differentiation indexes were computed for the 10,192 protein-coding genes carrying > 20 bi-allelic substitutions (see Methods). Median values are shown as grey lines. Candidate genes within top quartiles for both differentiation indexes are annotated with those differentially transcribed in association with resistance in red and those carrying protein variants associated with resistance in blue. Triangles denotes genes carried by the genomic inversion identified in chromosome 2. **(B)** Genome wide overview of the '% SNPs in top decile AFD' index for the Sel/NS comparison. The dashed line stands for the median of the differentiation index across all genes. The chromosomal position of candidate genes associated with resistance is shown together with candidate gene density (grey intensity). **(C)** Focus on the genomic region carrying the 9 Mb inversion associated with resistance. The '% SNPs in top decil AFD' index is shown for all genes. Horizontal grey lines delimit the inverted region with breakpoints at Chr2:120,519,062-130178023 in AALBF3.v2 assembly (Chr2:405,097,032-416,198,432 in AALBF5 assembly). Vertical dashed lines show the median of the '% SNPs in top decile AFD' index within and outside the inverted region. The genomic scale is in Mb respective to AALBF3v2.

Discussion

Metabolic resistance likely emerged from local adaptation in La Réunion island

Bioassays performed on field mosquito populations from La Réunion island revealed a significant

deltamethrin resistance phenotype, confirming the rise of resistance observed since 2017 (58).

Considering that resistance may have remained undetected for some times, the emergence of

resistance may have begun a few years after deltamethrin was adopted for vector control following

the 2005-2006 chikungunya outbreak. The resistance level of the non-selected composite line was

similar to those observed in the field, suggesting that the sampling design was efficient at capturing

resistance alleles circulating in the island. Indeed, the ancient colonization of this insular territory by

Ae. albopictus was linked to a high local genetic diversity with significant gene flows between

populations (76–78).

More than 30 non-synonymous polymorphisms affecting the VGSC targeted by deltamethrin have

been identified in *Ae. albopictus* worldwide but only a few were consistently associated with

pyrethroid resistance (23,26,28,79: V1016G, I1532T and F1534S/C/L). Despite the sequencing of large

mosquito pools at high coverage, none of these *Kdr* mutations was detected in La Réunion island,

either in field populations or in composite laboratory lines. Considering the recurrent usage of

deltamethrin since 2005, this supports the absence of *Kdr* mutations in La Réunion at the time of the

study. As *Kdr* mutations have already spread across multiple continents including Asia, Europe and

Africa (26,28), such result also confirm that limited gene flow occurred from these regions. Instead, a

multigenic metabolic resistance phenotype was observed, involving detoxification genes belonging to

families involved in pyrethroid metabolism such as cytochrome P450s, glutathione S-transferases,

UDP-glycosyl transferases, and ABC-transporters (31,80). Elevated detoxification enzyme activities

have been linked to deltamethrin resistance in *Ae. albopictus* populations from various regions (46,81–

84).

Transcriptomic screenings revealed the over-transcription of the same detoxification gene families in

Ae. albopictus resistant populations from Asia with some P450s being functionally validated (44,45,47).

Among the detoxification genes identified in La Réunion, only the P450 (CYP6d5) was previously

identified as contributing to deltamethrin resistance in *Ae. albopictus* (same CYP gene named CYP6A8:

47). Yet, several of them showed high protein homology with known pyrethroid resistance genes

identified in other mosquito species. This includes two P450s showing high homology with

CYP6Ms/CYP6Zs subfamilies, two GSTs likely belonging to GST-theta and -delta families and two ABC-

transporters likely belonging to the ABCC family. Although functional validation is needed to clarify

their importance in the overall phenotype, the emerging picture is the independent selection of

detoxification genes in Asia and La Réunion. Such hypothesis is also supported by the absence of *Kdr*

mutations previously detected in Asia in La Réunion island. Such parallel evolution of detoxification

genes under pyrethroid selection is probable considering the functional redundancy observed within

these gene families whose members are often organized in clusters of genes sharing a high homology

(10,85). Altogether, while the introgression of metabolic resistance alleles cannot be ruled out, the

genetic isolation of La Réunion island together with the absence of *Kdr* mutations and the specific

nature of the genes identified support their local selection from standing genetic variation.

Multiple genetic events underly the resistance phenotype

Gene duplications mediating the over-expression of detoxification genes have been frequently

associated with the rapid adaptation of mosquitoes to insecticides (32,35,86,87). Here, the over-

transcribed P450 *CYP6d5* was linked to the presence of a ~100 Kb genomic duplication. Although our

short-read Pool-seq data did not allow to fully resolve the genomic architecture of the duplicated

locus, its flanking by transposable elements (TEs) was not surprising as TE-movements are often

associated with genomic duplication events (86,88), especially in TE-rich genomes such as *Aedes*

mosquitoes (89–91). No such duplication was identified for the other over-transcribed detoxification

genes, implying that their over-transcription is rather mediated by cis- or trans-regulation. In this

regard, the nuclear receptors CncC/Maf and AhR-ARNT considered as key regulators of insect

detoxification genes (92) were not differentially transcribed nor affected by protein variants in

association with resistance. Nevertheless, a two-codons deletion variant affecting the transcription

factor HR96 showed an increased frequency in resistant lines. The contribution of this transcription

factor to the regulation of detoxification enzymes has been demonstrated in spider mites (93,94).

Although this requires further validation, this finding supports the potential role of HR96 in the

regulation of detoxification enzymes in *Ae. albopictus*.

As metabolic resistance may also be the consequence of the selection of proteins variants showing a

higher activity toward the insecticide (10), polymorphism data were screened for non-synonymous

variants associated with resistance. Such analysis identified multiple detoxification protein variants

with P450s being over-represented. Yet this gene set showed no overlap with over-transcribed genes,

suggesting that these two adaptive mechanisms contribute to the multigenic resistance phenotype

observed in La Réunion island. Indeed, in a context of local adaptation, it is expected that selection

retains any polymorphism that contribute to resistance, affecting both gene expression and protein

function. Of particular interest was the selection of multiple P450 variants belonging to a cluster of 18

CYP4C-like genes on chromosome 3. Indeed, while *CYP4s* are not considered as classical xenobiotic

metabolizers in mosquitoes as opposed to *CYP6s*, *CYP9s*, some of them have been shown to be over-

transcribed in association with pyrethroid resistance in *Ae. aegypti* (95), suggesting their possible

contribution to deltamethrin metabolism. Similarly, the identification of two carboxylesterase variants

associated with resistance may indicate that these enzymes can still be active on deltamethrin or its

metabolites, even though the cyano group of type II pyrethroids like deltamethrin is thought to protect

the ester bond from a direct hydrolysis (96).

Polymorphism data were then used to look for genes under positive selection in association with

resistance. As expected, a good proportion of detoxification protein variants associated with resistance

showed a positive selection signal at the gene level. On the other hand, apart from one P450 and one

GST, most over-transcribed detoxification genes showed poor selection signals, supporting their trans-

regulation. Unexpectedly, such analysis also identified a large ~9 Mb genomic inversion on

chromosome 2 behaving as a supergene under deltamethrin selection. Genomic inversions can play a

key role in local adaptation as demonstrated in various biological models (97–100). Whether this

genomic event is specific to the South-West Indian Ocean or more widely distributed remains to be

investigated. In that concern, the identification of the inversion breakpoints will facilitate its high-

throughput genotyping by PCR. The hundred genes carried by the inverted locus included four

candidates but none of them were directly associated with deltamethrin resistance, suggesting that

they do not drive its selection. Considering the strong genetic linkage of the inverted haplotype,

deciphering which gene(s) drive the selection of this supergene is not at reach from the current data

set and requires functional approaches.

A warning bell for the South-West Indian Ocean

The French territory of La Réunion island is a hotspot of arbovirus transmission in the South West

Indian Ocean in line with a high human density and the presence of *Ae. albopictus* (57). Such

epidemiological context led to the recurrent use of deltamethrin for vector control since the first

Chikungunya outbreak of 2005-2006. In a context of genetic isolation, this repeated insecticide

pressure resulted in the local selection of a metabolic resistance phenotype underlain by various

genetic events. Such evolutionary scenario is supported by the multigenic nature of the phenotype

together with the striking absence of *Kdr* mutations, which are already widely distributed in this

species (26,28). At the time of the study, the resistance phenotype observed in the field was moderate

and can be further increased following a few generations of deltamethrin exposure, suggesting that

the selection of resistance alleles is undergoing in La Réunion and might be counterbalanced with

fitness costs. As the selection of this multigenic resistance phenotype may affect various mosquito life

traits including vector competence (7,101), precising its impact on population dynamics and viral

transmission is of interest.

Considering that the selection process was undergoing by the time of the study, the intense vector

control activity associated with recent chikungunya and dengue outbreaks may have resulted in an

increased frequency of resistance alleles in La Réunion and their dispersal to other neighbouring

territories of the South-West Indian Ocean. In addition, although *Kdr* mutations were not detected by

the time of the study, their introduction from Europe, Asia or Africa should be considered as a major

risk for the region. Indeed, their introduction in populations already carrying metabolic alleles is

expected to lead to an additive resistance phenotype that may impact vector control efficacy, as

shown in *Ae. aegypti* (19,21). In this context, the present study calls for an improved surveillance of

pyrethroid resistance in this region. Ideally, this surveillance should combine annual bioassays on

sentinel populations and the tracking of key metabolic resistance alleles identified here together with

known *Kdr* mutations.

Methods

Mosquito lines and experimental design

All mosquito lines were maintained under standard insectary conditions (27 ± 2°C, 70 ± 10 % relative

humidity and light/dark cycle 14h:10h). Populations size were maintained over 1000 individuals to

reduce the effect of genetic drift. Larvae were reared in tap water and fed with hay pellets. Adults

were maintained in mesh cages and fed on filter papers impregnated with a 10 % honey solution.

Blood feeding was conducted on mice to generate eggs of the next generation. Three days-old non-

blood-fed adult females were used for bioassays and molecular work.

The experimental design combined different mosquito populations all originating from La Réunion

island (**Fig. 1A**). First, a composite population from la Réunion island was created by pooling >500

larvae from six field populations collected in 2018-2019 using a minimum of three ovitraps per

population. After two generations of genetic mixing (F1 to F3), the composite population was split in

two separated lines (N>1000 in each line): the first being maintained without insecticide selection (NS

line) and the other being selected with deltamethrin for five successive generations (Sel line). Selection

was conducted on males and females separately prior mating as follows. Batches of 25 non-blood-fed

3-5 days-old adults were exposed to filter papers impregnated with 0.03% deltamethrin using WHO

test tubes. Exposure times were adjusted from 30 min to 1h to reach 40-60% mortality for each sex.

Surviving males and females were then pooled in a single mesh cage and allowed to reproduce.

Females were blood fed and allowed to lay eggs to generate the next generation. Three field

populations sampled in 2021 from the localities of St-Paul, St-Louis and St-Suzanne were also used.

Finally, the laboratory susceptible strain SRun colonized from La Réunion island in the 2000s was used

as reference line. For molecular analyses, genes and polymorphisms associated with resistance were

identified based on the five pairwise comparisons: 'Sel *vs* NS'; 'Sel *vs* SRun' and 'each field population

vs SRun'. Only genes and polymorphisms showing consistent variations (in the same direction) for all

comparisons were retained.

Bioassays

Comparative deltamethrin bioassays were performed on 3-5 days-old adult females following WHO

mosquito testing guidelines (102) using test tubes equipped with home-made insecticide papers

impregnated with 0.03% deltamethrin. Each bioassay was conducted using 9 replicates of 25 females

and an exposure time of 1h. Such insecticide dose resulted in a mortality >80% in the susceptible

reference line SRun. After insecticide exposure, mosquitoes were allowed to recover for 24h with a

cotton bowl impregnated with a 10% honey solution before mortality recording.

Reference genome and candidate genes

Genomic analyses were performed using the version AALBF3 of *Ae. albopictus* reference genome,

which was the latest available assembly at the time of this study (103). As this assembly was made

from 574 ordered scaffolds, the successive scaffolds were assembled into pseudo-chromosomes with

50N spacers (hereafter referred to as AALBF3.v2 assembly). A gff3 annotation file based on AALBF3.v2

assembly was also created based on AALBF3 annotation. The genomic coordinates of each scaffold on

AALBF3.v2 assembly is provided in **S7 Table**. Among the 22,435 features annotated in AALBF3.v2, only

the 17,342 genes and pseudogenes carried by the three nuclear chromosomes were retained for

genomic analyses. A subset of 953 genes belonging to 12 different families possibly involved in

insecticide resistance was defined. These candidate genes included: insecticide targets; synaptic

proteins; detoxification enzymes *sensu lato*; known detoxification transcription factors; ABC-

transporters; insecticide binding proteins; cuticle proteins; red/ox enzymes; odorant binding proteins

(**S8 Table**).

RNA-sequencing

For each line, four RNA-seq libraries were prepared from distinct batches of 25 five days-old non-

blood-fed females. Total RNA was extracted using TRIzol® (ThermoFisher Scientific) according to

manufacturer's instructions. RNA extracts were quantified with a Nanodrop One (ThermoFisher

Scientific) and diluted to meet sequencing requirements. Sequencing was performed by the BGI

Hongkong Tech Solution NGS Lab. Sample quality control was conducted on an Agilent 2100 and

libraries were prepared from 10 ng total RNA following the DNB-seq Eukaryotic Strand-specific mRNA

library protocol. Briefly, mRNAs were enriched with poly-A tails using oligodT beads and fragmented to

an average size of 200-400 bp before being reverse transcribed using random primers. Double-

stranded cDNAs were end-repaired and 3' adenylated. Adaptors were ligated at the 3'-end of the

cDNAs. Libraries were PCR amplified using rolling circle amplification to make DNA nanoballs (DNB)

and sequenced in multiplex as 100 bp paired-end reads. Adapters were trimmed with the SOAPnuke

v2.2.1 (104) and reads were filtered on base quality to reach an average Phred+33 score of 37. Quality

control was conducted using FastQC (105) leading to an average of 60.2 M quality-filtered reads per

replicate. Reads were then mapped onto the AALBF3.v2 assembly using STAR v2.7.10a (106) with

default parameters, except a minimum intron size of 10 bp. Mapping quality was assessed with

samtools v1.6 (http://www.htslib.org/), with an average of 94 % of reads being properly mapped (**S9**

Table). Gene read counts were quantified by STAR with default parameters.

Differential transcription

Differential transcription analysis was performed using DESeq2 (Love et al., 2014) on all genes and

pseudogenes showing ≥5 read counts in each of the four replicates for at least one mosquito line.

Differentially transcribed genes were identified based on their congruent transcription fold change (FC)

and adjusted Student' t-test *p* values (False Discovery Rate for multiple testing correction, 107) across

the five 'resistant vs susceptible' comparisons (see experimental design on **Fig. 1**). Fold change

thresholds were set as follows: FC ≥ 3 in 'Sel vs NS'; FC ≥ 3 in 'Sel vs SRun' and FC ≥ 1.5 in the three

'field vs SRun' comparisons while adjusted *p* Value threshold was set to 0.001 for all comparisons. In

order to clarify the role of detoxification genes over-transcribed in association with resistance, their

closest homologs were identified in *Ae. aegypti* and *An. gambiae* using a protein blast against *Ae.*

aegypti (LVP_AGWG) and *An. gambiae* (PEST) proteomes from VeuPathDB (108,109). As P450 gene

descriptions and gene names can vary across different genome versions, blast results were backed up

with a phylogenetic analysis performed on *CYP6s* protein sequences from *Ae. albopictus, Ae. aegypti*

and *An. gambiae*. Protein sequences were retrieved from NCBI and those having a validated role in

pyrethroid resistance were identified based on the literature and sequence alignments. Phylogenetic

trees were built using the only 'NGPhylogeny.fr' pipeline using approximate likelihood-ratio test (aLRT)

as branch support, with a *CYP4* sequence as outgroup (110).

Alternative splicing

Alternative splicing events and indels were identified from RNA-seq data using KisSplice v2.6.2 (111).

This *de novo* splicing events predictor was run on each replicate of each line with default parameters,

except the parameter -b which was set to 15 to account for the higher level of polymorphism in *Ae.*

albopictus compared with mammals. Splicing variants were identified with KissDE R package v1.19.0

(112). Only variants covered by at least 20 reads, affecting known genes and showing a congruent

splicing variation across all 'resistant vs susceptible' comparisons were retained. Delta Percent Spliced

In (ΔPSI) threshold were as follows: 20% for 'Sel *vs* NS'; 20% for 'Sel *vs* SRun' and 15% for the three

'field *vs* SRun' comparisons. The adjusted *p* value threshold was set to 0.05 (Benjamini & Hochberg

FDR for multiple testing correction). The splicing events passing these filters were then mapped to

AALBF3.v2 assembly using KisSplice2RefGenome v1.2.3

(https://kissplice.prabi.fr/tools/kiss2refgenome/) and assigned into three types: alternative splicing,

indels and intron retentions. The distinction between genomic indels and intron retention was based

on an arbitrary threshold (indel if ≤ 50 bp and intron retention if > 50 bp).

Whole genome pool sequencing

For each line, three batches of 33-35 three days-old virgin non-blood-fed females were sampled for

whole genome pool-sequencing (100 individuals per line). Genomic DNA was extracted separately for

each batch using the GENTRA Puregene kit (QIAGEN) following manufacturer's instructions quantified

using Qubit (Qiagen) and then pooled in equal DNA quantity. After quality check, one sequencing

library was prepared for each line following the DNBseq plant and animal whole genome resequencing

protocol (https://en.mgi-tech.com/products/). Briefly, DNA was fragmented, size selected (insert size

~350 bp) and end-repaired. Adapters were ligated to the DNA fragments which were then size-

selected, amplified by PCR using rolling circle amplification and sequenced in multiplex as 150 bp

paired-end reads with the DNBseq Technology (MGI Tech Co). Sequencing reads were filtered based

on base quality resulting in a final average Phred score of 37 and adapters were removed with the

SOAPnuke software v2.2.1 (104) leading to an average of ~1630 M reads per line (**S9 Table**). Reads

were then mapped onto the *Ae. albopictus* AALBF3.v2 genome with BWA mem v0.7.17-r1188 (113).

SAM files were converted into BAM format, sorted by coordinates and unmapped reads were removed

using samtools v 1.6 (114). Mapped reads were trimmed and only reads showing a probability of

correct mapping of 0.999 were kept (MapQ ≥30). PCR duplicates were removed using picard

MarkDuplicates v2.27.5 ([http://broadinstitute.github.io/*picard*](http://broadinstitute.github.io/picard)), resulting in an average of 631 M

mapped reads per sample and a mean genome coverage of 64.2X.

Copy number variations

Genomic duplications were searched for by looking for genes showing a higher mean read coverage in

resistant than in susceptible mosquito lines. Though likely to generate false positives, this approach

was preferred to pipelines integrating local coverage variations and the presence of flanking non-

colinear reads (115) because the *Ae. albopictus* is genome is highly enriched with transposable

elements (>41% of the genome, 89) likely to generate false negatives. Indeed, transposable elements

are frequent at duplication breakpoints leading to the loss of non-colinear reads (*e.g.* split reads and

both mate flip reads) due to multiple mapping events. Since intronic regions are highly variable and

thus more subject to local coverage variations, mean normalized gene coverages were computed from

exonic regions only. Fold changes of normalized exonic coverage between lines were computed for all

genes. Since very low gene coverage can lead to artefactual high coverage variations, genes showing a

normalized coverage lower than the 5% global quantile were not considered. Furthermore, a global

observation of the data set indicated that the dispersion of coverage variations increased for smaller

transcripts. To take this into account, a sliding windows approach considering transcript length was

applied to identify differentially covered genes: for each pairwise line comparison, a gene was

considered as affected by a positive copy number variation (CNV) when its normalized coverage

variation was higher than the 95% quantile of the variation observed from the 1000 genes showing the

most similar transcript lengths. Following this approach, genes were considered as showing a positive

CNV associated with resistance when passing this threshold for all 'resistant vs susceptible'

comparisons ('Sel *vs* NS', 'Sel *vs* SRun' and the three 'field *vs* SRun' comparisons).

Gene polymorphisms

Gene polymorphisms associated with resistance were searched for using reads mapped to the coding

regions of protein-coding genes. For each line, polymorphisms were called using bcftools-v1.17 (116).

We then retained biallelic variants showing a read coverage between 50 and 300 reads in all lines, a

frequency ≥ 15% in at least one line and a frequency variation ≥ 15% between at least two lines. Genic

effects were annotated according to the longest reading frame using snpEff v5.2c (117). As the

reference genome *Foshan* strain is susceptible to deltamethrin (118) variants were considered

associated with resistance if the frequency of the variant allele increased in 'resistant vs susceptible'

comparisons. Frequency thresholds were as follows: frequency ≤ 15% in the susceptible SRun line,

frequency variation ≥ 25% in 'Sel *vs* SRun' and in 'Sel *vs* NS' comparisons, and frequency variation ≥

20% in the three 'Field *vs* SRun' comparisons.

We also specifically searched for non-synonymous polymorphisms affecting the gene encoding the

voltage-gated sodium channel protein targeted by deltamethrin (VGSC-para gene carrying the Kdr

mutations). However, this gene was incorrectly assembled in AALBF3 likely due to uncontrolled

heterozygosity. Indeed, the previous AALFBF2 assembly (Palatini et al., 2020) contains two annotated

gene copies, each located in a different scaffold (the 'VGSC-para' LOC109421922, and the 'VGSC para-

like' LOC109432678). In AALBF3, both genic sequences were present but the 'para' sequence was not

annotated as a gene. In the latest AALBF5 assembly, a better control of heterozygosity led to the two

contigs being merged, resulting in a single annotated 'VGSC-para' gene (LOC109421922). We therefore

assumed that the AALBF5 assembly is correct. In order to study the polymorphism of this gene, all

reads mapped to AALBF3.v2 in the *para* (Chr3:378648962-378932310) and *para-like* regions

(Chr3:377089613-377411247) were re-mapped to the AALBF5 gene LOC109421922 and SNPs were

called as described above.

Selection signatures

Polymorphisms data were also used to look for selection signatures associated with deltamethrin

resistance between the Sel and NS lines, which only diverged by 5 generations of deltamethrin

selection. This analysis was based on all exonic bi-allelic substitutions covered by 50 to 300 reads in
each line and being polymorphic between these two lines (*i.e.* showing a variant frequency from 5% to
95% in at least one line). From this dataset, two genetic differentiation indexes were computed at the
gene level: the mean Absolute Frequency Difference (mean AFD), and the percentage of SNPs in the
top decile of the overall genomic AFD distribution. These indexes were plotted against each other and
across the AALBF3.v2 genome for the 10192 protein-coding genes containing ≥ 20 substitutions.

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analyses.

Data availability

592 RNA-seq and WG Pool-seq sequencing data have been deposited at EBI short read archive (SRA) under
593 accession numbers E-MTAB-15418 and E-MTAB-15456.

Ethical aspects

Mice were kept in the animal facility of the Biology department of the University of Grenoble-Alpes,
approved by the French Ministry of Animal Welfare (agreement no. B 38 421 10 001) and used in
accordance with the laws of the European Union (directive 2010/63/EU). The use of animals for this
study was approved by the ComEth Grenoble-C2EA-12 ethics committee mandated by the French
Ministry of Higher Education and Research (MENESR). The study was conducted in accordance with
the ARRIVE guidelines.

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Supporting information

S1 File. Polymorphisms in the VGSC gene. The first xlsx sheet describes all polymorphisms detected in

the VGSC coding regions. For each polymorphism, the following information is provided: Position

relative to AALBF5 assembly; amino-acid position in respect to the longest isoform; genic effect;

variant allele frequency in each line; Variant allele frequency variations between resistant and

susceptible lines; number of reads supporting each allele for each line. The second xlsx sheet provides

a graphical overview of the position of the variant identified relative to transmembrane domains and

known Kdr mutations.

S2 Table. **Gene transcription data.** This table describes transcription data for all genes detected by

RNA-seq. For each gene the following information is provided: AALBF3 accession number;

chromosomal position relative to AALBF3.v2 assembly; coding strand; gene type; Candidate gene

family; baseMean (mean normalized read counts across all conditions); $\log_2$ fold change and adjusted P

value for each resistant/susceptible comparison.

S3 Table. Alternative splicing. For each splicing event identified, the following information is provided:

AALBF3 accession number; gene description; candidate gene family; chromosome; event start; event

end; event type and subtype; event size in bp; frameshift occurrence; mean coverage; percent spliced

in (PSI for each line); PSI variation (ΔPSI for each comparison).

S4 Table. Gene copy number variations. For each gene detected, the following information is

provided: AALBF3 accession number; chromosomal position relative to the AALBF3.v2 assembly;

coding strand; gene type; candidate gene family; gene description; mRNA length; normalized exonic
coverage (for each lines); mean normalized coverage across all lines; coverage filter; CNV status for
both lab and field comparisons.

S5 Table. Non-synonymous variants associated with resistance. For each variant, the following
information is provided: chromosomal position relative to AALBF3.v2 assembly; reference and variant
alleles; polymorphism type; AALBF3 gene accession number; gene description; candidate gene family;
longest transcript; variant exon rank; variant genic effect; amino-acid change; cDNA position relative to
cDNA length; amino-acid position relative to protein length; total coverage (for each line); variant
allele frequency (for each line).

S6 Table. Gene differentiation indexes. For each gene the following information is provided: Gene
accession number; chromosomal position relative to AALBF3.v2 assembly; coding strand; gene
description; candidate gene family; total number of polymorphic SNPs; number of synonymous SNPs;
number of non-synonymous SNPs; number of resistance-associated non-synonymous SNPs; mean
Allele Frequency Variation between Sel and NS Lines (mean AFD); the percent of SNPs showing an AFD
within the top decile of the global distribution (% top decil AFD); differential transcription associated
with resistance (Yes/No); gene being within the inversion identified on chr2 (Yes/No).

S7 Table. The AALBF3.v2 genome assembly. The genomic position of AALBF3 scaffolds on AALBF3.v2
chromosomes is provided. AALBF3 scaffolds were assembled in the same order as described in Boyle
et al. 2021 with 50N spacers inserted between them.

S8 Table. Resistance candidate genes. For each gene the following information is provided:
AALBF3accesion number; chromosomal position relative to AALBF3.v2 assembly; coding strand; gene
type; candidate gene family; gene description.

S9 File. Sequencing data overview. The first xlsx sheet provides RNA-seq sequencing and mapping
statistics. The second xlsx sheet provides whole genome Pool-seq sequencing and mapping statistics.

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