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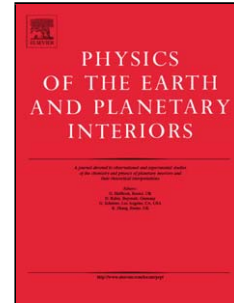
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1 **Upper plate deformation measured by GPS in the Coquimbo Gap, Chile.**

2

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9

10 **Abstract**

11 Since the M=7.3 Punitaqui earthquake in 1997, the area between 30°S and 32°S (Coquimbo-Illapel
12 section) of the Chilean subduction has been the locus of a decennial seismic swarm. A dense network
13 of 30+ benchmarks have been installed in this area and surveyed six times with high precision GPS
14 over the last three years. Surface deformation here is compatible with elastic loading due to partial
15 locking on the subduction interface at depth. Here we show that in this area, only 40% to 45% of the
16 total convergence rate between Nazca and South America plates gives way to accumulation of elastic
17 deformation in the upper plate, the remaining 60% to 55% being dissipated by free or aseismic slip, the
18 cumulative slip due to the seismic swarm explaining no more than 1/3rd to 1/4th of it. We also find that
19 the accumulation decreases northward, to reach almost zero around 30°S (La Serena –Tongoy).
20 Whether this is a steady state or only a transient pattern (a steady decrease of coupling) is not clear
21 since our measurements span only 3 years and since early measurements 10 years ago were sparse and
22 differ only marginally from ours.

23

24 **Introduction**

25 The Chilean subduction has one of the highest levels of seismic activity in the world, with a
26 large earthquake of M>8 every five to ten years. These events are the consequence of subduction of the
27 Nazca plate beneath South America at a convergence rate as high as 8 cm/yr in the N 78°E direction
28 [DeMets *et al.*, 1990, 1994]. In Chile, several studies have shown an along strike variation in the dip

29 angle of the slab, and possible segmentation of the subduction zone, well expressed in the surface
30 geology and morphology [Barazangi and Isacks, 1976]. The fast convergence is accommodated by
31 large inter- and intra-plate earthquakes, and by shallow earthquakes associated with intra-continental
32 fault systems in the Andes cordillera and the Altiplano-Puna. The study of Chilean earthquakes has a
33 long history and major seismic gaps, e.g. Central Chile (Constitución-Concepción 35°S-37°S) and
34 North Chile (Antofagasta-Arica 18°S-27°S), are reaching the end of the seismic cycle with a high
35 megathrust earthquake risk in the 21st century [Kelleher, 1972, Nishenko, 1985]. Unfortunately, the
36 identification of these gaps does not solve the medium term prediction problem due to the space and
37 time variability of the seismic activity which often occurs in swarms, whose origin remains to be
38 elucidated.

39 The Coquimbo-Illapel area (30°S-32°S) of the Coquimbo region of North central Chile was the
40 site of major earthquakes in 1730, 1880 and 1943 [Nishenko, 1985, Beck et al, 1998]. The last major
41 event in this area occurred on 15 October 1997 at a depth of 55 km under the city of Punitaqui. This
42 unusual slab-push event of Mw 7.3 was studied in detail by Lemoine et al. [2001]. Several
43 seismological studies have been devoted to delimit the structures and the geometry of the subduction
44 zone of the Coquimbo region [Pardo et al., 2002a,b]. It is presently the place of a remarkable seismic
45 activity that started in 1997 a few months earlier than the Punitaqui earthquake. As shown by Gardi et
46 al [2006] the seismicity of the interplate zone westward of the 1997 Punitaqui earthquake has been the
47 site of increased seismicity since July 1997 when a series of four shallow events of Mw>6 occurred in
48 the interplate zone near 30.5°S. The increased seismicity appears to continue uninterrupted until at
49 least last October when an earthquake of Mw 6.2 took place in the area. Simple stress transfer
50 modelling indicates that aseismic slip can explain this sequence [Gardi et al., 2006]. This puzzling
51 seismicity (which could in fact have started as early as 1992) could be either the herald of a major
52 earthquake initiation and/or the manifestation of slow aseismic transient slip on the subduction
53 interface. Finally, early (1994-1996) GPS measurements in the area clearly show at least one
54 anomalous velocity at Tongoy (TONG – 30.2°S) [Klotz et al., 2001]. Although it is on the coast, this
55 point shows less Eastward deformation than points further away from the trench. In other words, at the

56 time of the measurements, this area was moving away from the central valley and towards the trench
57 relatively speaking. It is possible that this point was responding to slow/transient motions on the
58 subduction interface.

59 In order to investigate in details the current deformation of the Coquimbo region, we established a
60 small scale GPS network of 30+ benchmarks between 30°S and 32°S with an average distance between
61 stations of less than 30 km. This mesh was designed to render the network sensitive to transient slips
62 taking place on the subduction interface and possibly at the initiation of the transition depth between
63 locked and freely slipping slab. We measure this network as frequently as possible (every six month)
64 to monitor long term variations of the coupling on the interface.

65

66 **Seismicity of Coquimbo**

67 The Coquimbo area shows signs of increased seismic activity, or accelerated moment release as
68 described, among others, by *Mignan* et al [2006]. Unfortunately, we do not have a sufficiently long
69 catalog of seismicity in order to formally test the hypotheses. We have examined three catalogs of
70 central Chile seismicity, from the *National Earthquake Information Center* (NEIC) [2006],
71 *International Seismological Center* (ISC) [2001] and the centennial catalog [*Engdahl and Villaseñor,*
72 2004]. After examining the completeness of the catalogs using standard techniques, we concluded that
73 we could only use the centennial catalog that contains earthquakes of magnitude greater than 5.5 in the
74 region, but is not enough to test for changes in seismicity rate. Finally, we decided to use the ISC
75 catalog for the period 1990-2005. This catalog is complete from magnitude 4.5, except for a period of
76 transition between 1990 and 1992 when the University of Chile started reporting local magnitudes for
77 all earthquakes in the region. Although not all events are well located, the catalog appears to be
78 uniform and therefore we can verify the observation by *Gardi* et al [2006] who used the NEIC catalog
79 to demonstrate an acceleration of seismicity that started in July 1997, when a series of 6 shallow thrust
80 events occurred on the plate interface in the region from 30.5°S and 31.5°S. After a pause of about two
81 months from July to October, seismicity moved inland and culminated in a large $M_w=7.3$ earthquake
82 on October 15, 1997. This event was a very rare slab-push (compression along the slab) event that took

83 place inside the downgoing slab near the transition zone from locked to continuous slip. *Gardi et al*
84 [2006] propose that this event was due to a tear in the slab due to the strong accumulation of stresses in
85 the transition zone from continuous slip to the seismogenic interface.

86

87 Figure 1 shows the seismicity of the region from 28°S to 32°S in the period 1992-1997 and
88 after the 1997 events. While seismicity in the region from 30-31 °S was weak in the initial period it has
89 been quite strong since 1997, with 12 events of $M_w > 6$. The zone from 30-31°S is situated very close to
90 the epicentral area of the 1946 earthquake as relocated by *Engdahl et al* in the centennial catalog. This
91 event of $M_w = 7.9$ and $M_o = 6 \cdot 10^{20}$ Nm was studied in detail by *Beck et al* [1998]. The seismicity of
92 1997 started very close to the epicentral area of 1946 and it is possible that it represents early
93 foreshocks of a future event in the area. If the interplate zone were fully locked, as proposed by
94 *Khazaradze et al* [2001], the slip deficit in the locked interface would be of the order of 4 meters (60
95 years at 6.5 cm/year) and we would be close to rupture in about 10 years if the next earthquake is
96 similar to that of 1943. It is therefore very important to study the current slip at the plate interface in
97 order to determine whether the plate interface is fully locked or not and, in the latter case whether slip
98 in the interseismic period is continuous or episodic.

99 In Figure 2 we show the rate of seismicity along the plate interface according to the ISC
100 catalog. As in most studies of accelerating moment release we plot the cumulative number of events in
101 the ISC catalog in the area as a function of time. We did also compute the cumulative magnitude to test
102 whether there are differences. If seismicity follows the Gutenberg Richter relation both curves should
103 be homothetic, as is actually the case in Figure 2. We clearly observe that after the 1997 events in the
104 plate interface and inside the slab, seismicity made a fast jump and then decreased to reach an almost
105 steady state regime after mid 1998. This initial response follows, as expected, the classical Omori law.
106 After mid 1998, the seismicity rate settles to a value that is significantly larger than that before the
107 1997 events. There is clear evidence of a change in seismic moment release rate, but we cannot resolve
108 an increase in seismicity rate near the end of the catalog at about 2005. Thus, our temporary conclusion
109 is that seismicity in Coquimbo underwent a change in regime around mid 1997 and has remained at a

110 sustained high rate. We also computed the cumulative slip on the interface since 1985, using the
111 earthquakes which clearly take place on the subduction plane (fig 2). We reach the conclusion that the
112 cumulative co-seismic slip on the whole segment over the last 10 years is equivalent to a magnitude
113 7.2 earthquake.

114

115 **GPS data analysis**

116 As part of a joint Chilean-French cooperation project, twenty new benchmarks were installed in
117 the Coquimbo gap (between 30°S and 32°S) in April 2004. Two additional benchmarks were
118 deployed in December 2004 and three more in May 2006. Our network also includes pre-existing
119 markers in this area: six from the South American Geodynamic Activities (SAGA) project [*Klotz et al.*,
120 2001; *Khazaradze and Klotz*, 2003] and two from the Central Andes Project (CAP) project [*Kendrick*
121 *et al.*, 2001], bringing the total number of repeatedly measured sites to 33. Apart from the CAP sites
122 (and one broken SAGA marker), all other sites are equipped with specially designed bolts sealed in
123 bedrock outcrops. These sites enable direct antenna centering with sub-millimeter accuracy. This
124 network has been surveyed 6 times in May and December 2004, 2005 and 2006. All sites were
125 measured using a single type of Ashtech ZX-treme dual-frequency receivers equipped with the same
126 kind of antennae (Ashtech Geodetic IV). During all campaigns, four points (LVIL and SLMC in the
127 south and OVLL and TOLO in the north) were measured continuously in 24-hour sessions. Other sites
128 were measured for 12 to 24 hours per day over 3 to 7 days.

129 We reduce these data in 24-hour sessions to daily estimates of station positions using the
130 GAMIT software [*King and Bock*, 2000], choosing the ionosphere-free combination, and fixing the
131 ambiguities to integer values. We use precise orbits from the International GNSS Service for
132 Geodynamics (IGS) [*Beutler et al.*, 1993]. We also use IGS Tables to describe the phase centers of the
133 antennae. We estimate one tropospheric vertical delay parameter per station every 3 hours. The
134 horizontal components of the calculated relative position vectors are precise to within a few
135 millimeters for pairs of stations less than 300 km apart, as measured by the root mean square (RMS)
136 scatter about the mean (so-called baseline repeatability) (Table 1).

137 In the second step, we combine the daily solutions using the GLOBK software [Herring et al.,
138 1990] in a “regional stabilization” approach. To define a consistent reference frame for all epochs, we
139 include tracking data from a selection of permanent stations (19) in South America, some of them
140 belonging to the IGS [Neilan, 1995]. 7 stations are within or very close to the deformation area, 10
141 more span the South-American craton in Brazil, Guyana and Argentina, and the remaining 2 sample
142 the Nazca plate. We combine daily solutions using Helmert-like transformations to estimate
143 translation, rotation, scale and Earth orientation parameters (polar motion and UT1 rotation). This
144 “stabilization” procedure defines a reference frame by minimizing, in the least-square sense, the
145 departure from the prior values determined in the International Terrestrial Reference Frame (ITRF)
146 2000 [Altamimi et al., 2002]. This procedure estimates the positions and velocities for a set of 8 well-
147 determined stations in and around our study area (BRAZ, FORT, KOUR, LPGS, RIOG, SANT, ISPA,
148 GLPS). The misfit to these “stabilization” stations is 1.3 mm in position and 0.7 mm/yr in velocity.

149

150 **Horizontal velocities**

151 This procedure leads to horizontal velocities with respect to ITRF2000 (Table 2). We compute
152 velocities relative to the South-American plate by using the angular velocity of this plate (25.4°S,
153 124.6°W, 0.11°/Myr) given by the NNR-Nuvel-1A model [Demets et al., 1994]. In this reference
154 frame, six sites located far from the subduction zone and supposedly on the South-American plate,
155 show velocities smaller than 1 mm/yr with no systematic trend, and especially at the latitude of our
156 network (Figure 3, Table 2). Trying to invert for a plate angular velocity using those station velocities
157 in ITRF2000, we find (23.2°S, 121.6°W, 0.127 °/Myr). In this South America plate motion determined
158 by GPS, station velocities differ by no more than 1 mm/yr with respect to those of the NNR-Nuvel-1a.
159 We consider this difference not very significant. Therefore we conclude that the South-American
160 Craton is not affected by internal deformation (at least by no more than 1 mm/yr) and that its present
161 day angular velocity determined here does not differ significantly from its long term (3 Ma) average
162 determined in the NNR-Nuvel-1A model (again at least by no more than 1 mm/yr). For this reason, we

163 decided to plot all GPS velocities relatively to the well known NNR-Nuvel-1A South America plate,
164 rather than any available geodetically determined South America (i.e. ITRF200 or ITRF2005). In any
165 case, the difference is at the 1 mm/yr level and can only be investigated with long and extremely
166 precise time series of stations well spread over the whole plate, which is not the case in this study.

167 *Far-field velocities*

168 In this South-American-fixed reference frame, the velocity at Easter Island (ISPA) is 68 mm/yr
169 (± 1 mm/yr at 3σ), oriented roughly WSW and the velocity at Galapagos Islands (GLPS) is 56 mm/yr
170 oriented West (Figure 3 and Table 2). These estimates match those of ITRF2000 within 0.5 mm/yr and
171 are significantly smaller than Nuvel-1A predictions for the Nazca plate velocity at those locations. In
172 this study, because we lack a third site near the Eastern boundary of the plate close to the trench, it is
173 not possible to determine whether these differences are due to a reduced angular velocity of the Nazca
174 plate or whether this is due to a significant amount of internal deformation of the plate. However, it is
175 difficult to imagine a mechanism that would stretch the plate and increase near-trench site velocities in
176 order to match the Nuvel-1A prediction of 80 mm/yr of convergence at the trench between the 2 plates
177 (Table 3). It is also impossible to find an angular velocity which would maintain the Nuvel-1A
178 estimate on the trench and the present day motions observed at ISPA and GLPS. Using ISPA and
179 GLPS velocities we find a pole located very close to Nuvel-1A location (55.9°N and 95.2°W , to
180 compare to 56°N and 95°W) but with a reduced angular rotation about this pole of $0.61^\circ/\text{Myr}$
181 (compared to $0.72^\circ/\text{Myr}$) (Table 3). Therefore, and in agreement with previous studies, we conclude
182 that either Nuvel-1A over-estimates Nazca angular velocity by 15% or the plate significantly slowed
183 down since 3 Ma [Norabuena et al., 1999; Angermann et al., 1999, Sella et al., 2002, Brooks et al.,
184 2003]. The Nazca/SouthAmerica angular velocities found by those previous geodetic studies predict
185 slightly different plate convergence rates at the latitude of our network, but apart from the first one
186 (Larson et al., 1997), they all reach the same order of magnitude (Table3): the average velocity
187 predicted on the trench at the latitude of our network is 67 mm/yr \pm 2 mm/yr oriented 78°N \pm 3° .

188

189 *Central Chile section and Argentina*

190 Deformation along the Chilean trench affects a very wide area including all Chile and
191 penetrating deep into Argentina on the other side of the Andes (see also [Brooks et al, 2003]). Relative
192 to the South-America plate, CFAG (Coronel Fontana), 400 km from the trench, moves 7 mm/yr inland
193 and TUCU (Tucuman), 550 km from the trench, moves 5 mm/yr also inland. CORD (Cordoba), 700
194 km from the trench, also has a non-zero residual velocity (4 mm/yr northward) but with a higher
195 uncertainty due to its determination over 2 epochs spanning a small period of time, so we consider it
196 non significant (Figure 4, Table 2). Only LHCL (Lihue Calel), 800 km away from the trench, has a
197 small and insignificant residual velocity (1 mm/yr) and can be located with certainty on the
198 undeformed South-American plate. This pattern is representative of the very far reach of the
199 deformation induced by locking on a low dipping subduction plane (see the elastic modeling section).

200 There is a clear change of trend along the 1100 km length of subduction from 37°S
201 (Concepcion) to 27°S (Copiapó). In the south (Concepción-Constitución segment 37°S-35°S),
202 velocities show a clear rotation pattern from the coast to the Andes. This rotation is accompanied by a
203 decrease of the magnitude of the velocities (37 mm/yr at CONZ and CONS to 21 mm/yr at MAUL).
204 This pattern is well explained by accumulation of elastic deformation in the upper plate due to locking
205 on a shallow dipping (15°-20°) subduction plane [Ruegg et al., 2002; Ruegg et al., this issue
206 go northward (Coquimbo segment 32°S-30°S), velocities become parallel and more East-West,
207 whether close to or distant from the trench. More surprisingly, the magnitude of the velocities of
208 coastal stations become smaller: 26 mm/yr at LosVilos (LVIL – 32°S) compared to 37 mm/yr at
209 Constitución (CONS – 35°S) even-though we are closer to the trench than in the south. This tendency
210 persists at Copiapó (COPO – 27°S) with only 24 mm/yr (Figure 4, Table 2). Here we use data prior to
211 the seismic swarm of “La Caldera” – 30 April 2006 - during which COPO was displaced ~2cm
212 westward. These changing velocities are a clear indication of along strike variation of the subduction
213 geometry and/or coupling between the upper and lower plates within the central Chile area.

214

215 *Coquimbo gap*

216 In the Coquimbo-Illapel section (30°S-32°S) the observed velocities differ very much from
217 what is expected from standard elastic modeling. First of all, and unlike in the Concepción-
218 Constitución segment, velocity arrows do not rotate as we move inland. They are aligned almost
219 parallel to each other from the coast to the Andes, striking 70°N \pm 5° (Figure 5, Table 2). Second, and
220 although the trench is only roughly 100 km away from the coast in this area, the amount of
221 compression is much less than in the south: While Andean stations in both segments have roughly the
222 same velocity of 20mm/yr inland, coastal stations move at 25-30 mm/yr inland in Coquimbo, which
223 should be compared with 40-45 mm/yr around the Arauco peninsula, immediately south of Concepcion
224 (37°S) [Ruegg et al., 2002; Ruegg et al. this issue

225

226

227 (30.9°S), and 23 mm/yr at ESAU (30.5°S). In the Andes, stations at corresponding latitudes have
228 approximately the same velocities: 20 mm/yr at LMOL (30.7°S), 20 mm/yr at TOLO (30.2°S) and 18
229 mm/yr at CHAP (29.9°S). Therefore, it is the amount of compression that is changing (decreasing)
230 with latitude. This decrease is so intense, that North of 30.3°S (Tongoy – TONG) the compression is
231 essentially zero. All stations in this area from the coast to the Andes (TONG, HERA, EMAN, ANDA,
232 TOLO, CHAP) have roughly the same velocity of 18 to 20 mm/yr. Figure 6 depicts these tendencies
233 very clearly: strain in the Coquimbo area is on average two-times lower than the average strain rate
234 corresponding to the profiles measured between 36°S and 38°S (Ruegg et al., this issue). Moreover, a
235 steady decrease of strain rates with latitude seems to emerge from the picture.

236

237 **Elastic modeling**

238 We assume the upper plate deformation is due to the locking of the subduction interface until a
239 given depth where the slab starts to slip freely. We model this deformation using a simple back-slip

240 assumption for which the inter-seismic accumulation corresponds exactly to the released co-seismic
241 deformation (with reversed sign) [Savage, 1983], and we use Okada's elastic formulation to relate the
242 surface deformation to the dislocation buried at depth [Okada, 1985]. We use a very simple geometry
243 for the dislocation: it is a genuine rectangle with strike and dip angles adjusted to fit the subduction
244 plane in the area. A strike angle of 5°N is given by the average direction of the trench between 30°S
245 and 32°S [Smith and Sandwell, 1997]. A dip angle of 10° matches well the interface seismicity
246 between 1963 and 1998 reported by [Pardo et al., 2002a]. This simple model leaves only 2 parameters
247 free to invert for a best fit on the observed surface deformation: the locking depth and the amount of
248 "slip" imposed on the locked plane. An obvious value for the slip is the convergence rate between the
249 two plates. However, and this is an important finding, it is simply impossible to fit the data with a plate
250 convergence rate of 65 to 70 mm/yr. The predicted deformation cannot match the observed one,
251 whatever are the locking depth and the dip angle. A reasonable locking depth (> 30 km) corresponds to
252 a locked plane large enough to generate twice as much deformation as observed: in that case, coastal
253 velocities cannot be in the range of 20 to 30 mm/yr. An unrealistic very shallow locking depth (< 20
254 km) can produce such small coastal velocities, but then with the wrong azimuth: The coastline being
255 far East from the longitude reached by the end tip of the (small) locked rectangle, the predicted
256 velocities there already rotated to an almost West-East trend. In summary: we need a plane long
257 enough to generate a constant azimuth (N70°) across all Chile, but then we need to reduce the imposed
258 dislocation to reduce the amount of predicted deformation. In other words, the subduction plane in the
259 area cannot be fully locked. The best fit to our data (rms of 2.6 mm/yr) is obtained with a locking depth
260 of 60 km and a dislocation corresponding to 27 mm/yr oriented N71° (Figure 7). A slightly better fit
261 (rms=2.5 mm/yr) can be achieved by adjusting the dip angle to 12°, (with locking depth 55 km and 30
262 mm/yr still oriented N72°). However, as the dip angle increases, the fit on CFAG, the only point
263 constraining the very far field deformation in Argentina, also decreases: A "flat slab" is needed to
264 explain the deformation 500 km away from the trench. A full inversion on all 4 parameters (dip angle,
265 locking depth, amplitude and orientation of the dislocation) constrains those to: dip = 10° +/- 3°,
266 locking depth = 50 +/- 10 km, and convergence = 29 +/- 2 mm/yr oriented 71° +/- 2°.

267 The latter implies that the upper plate elastic deformation (later described as “slip deficit”)
268 corresponds to only 40% to 45% of the Nazca-SouthAmerica convergence rate reported by geodesy,
269 the remaining half being dissipated by free slip. This result is in agreement with the findings of
270 (*Norabuena et al.*, 1998) who suggested a coupling of 50% in this area, and contradicts the findings of
271 (*Klotz et al.*, 2001; *Kendrick et al.*, 2001, *Khazaradze and Klotz*, 2003; *Brooks et al.*, 2003) who use
272 100% coupling and a very shallow locking depth. The small discrepancy between the plate
273 convergence orientation ($78^\circ \pm 3^\circ$) and the azimuth of the best fit dislocation ($71^\circ \pm 2^\circ$) remains
274 unexplained. However, our model clearly shows that it is possible to match the observed deformation
275 with a simple 2-plate model generating elastic deformation of the continental plate. There is no need to
276 introduce a third micro plate, located between Nazca and South America to account for deformation
277 observed in Argentina [*Brooks et al.*, 2003]. On this particular matter, we think the differential motion
278 of 4.5 mm/yr attributed by (*Brooks et al.*, 2003) to this micro plate comes from the convergence deficit
279 introduced by their Nazca-South America angular velocity, which is slower than all other recent
280 geodetic determinations by precisely 4 to 5 mm/yr (Table 3).

281 In the first paragraphs, we note the presence of an active seismic swarm over the last decade in
282 the area. In principle, the cumulative co-seismic deformation from the swarm might explain the
283 relatively low slip deficit we observe and could reconcile the difference with the earlier studies finding
284 a slip deficit of 100%. Using the earthquakes which can be attributed to the subduction interface from
285 the ISC catalog, we find that an equivalent moment of $0.8 \cdot 10^{20}$ N.m ($M_w \sim 7.2$) is reached after 15
286 years (1992-2007). Distributed on a 250 km long segment, with a dip angle of 20° and a locking depth
287 of 50 km (giving a width of 150 km), this corresponds to 5-6 cm of slip. Over 15 years this is 4 mm/yr,
288 and if we concentrate over the last 10 years, that's 5-6 mm/yr of slip deficit. Therefore, a small ($\sim 1/4^{\text{th}}$),
289 although not negligible, part of the 20 mm/yr slip deficit we infer from GPS could be attributed to
290 cumulative co-seismic slip. To get the whole 20 mm/yr, we would need to confine the slip on a smaller
291 portion of the subduction interface: only 15 km depth (i.e. 35 km width). Therefore we conclude that
292 the bulk of the slip deficit ($\sim 3/4^{\text{th}}$) comes from the modification of the friction properties of the
293 interface in one way or the other and not from co-seismic slip.

294 This value of 40% to 45% coupling we obtain is an average value for the whole network.
295 Residual velocities clearly show that locking has a tendency to be stronger in the south and much
296 weaker in the north where the model over-predicts the observations by 2 to 5 mm/yr everywhere above
297 30.5°S (Figure 7, lower box). In this area, the coupling seems to be essentially zero, all points having
298 the same velocity around 20 mm/yr. This observation may seem inconsistent: if the coupling is
299 permanently zero on the interface, then the strain rate would be low as observe, but the velocities of the
300 coastal sites relative to South America should also be zero. Any motion there would thus be related to
301 the motion of a rigid micro-plate, implying shortening further East, in or on the other side of the
302 Andes. We lack points on the other side of the Andes, in Argentina, to establish a complete profile and
303 determine if the coupling resumes further East (i.e. at greater depth, meaning along dip variations of
304 coupling) and if so at what distance from the trench. In the southern part (32°S) the deformation
305 observed at CFAG matches well the elastic model, but there is no equivalent station at this longitude at
306 30°S. However, East-West trending strike-slip faulting south of this microplate moving 20 mm/yr east
307 should also be observed, because further south the upper plate deformation corresponds to a standard
308 2-plate model, and this is not the case. Finally, if the subduction interface would slip freely, without
309 imposing any deformation on this part of the upper plate, why would there be any earthquake along
310 this interface in the first place ? For these reasons, we conclude that the apparent “zero coupling” in
311 this part of the network can only be a transient feature resulting of competition between elastic
312 deformation due to locking at depth and temporary slip on the interface. Such a feature has already
313 been observed along the Minahassa trench in Sulawesi, Indonesia (Socquet et al., 2006).

314 Finally, using our procedure, we recomputed the CAP data on 5 sites within our area of
315 interest. The advantage of doing so is to allow a rigorous mapping in the new ITRF, not available at
316 the time of the CAP campaigns, and therefore a direct comparison with our data in exactly the same
317 reference frame. The velocities we obtain at those points are very close (within $2\text{-}\sigma$) to our more recent
318 estimates (Figure 5, Table2). This is an indication that our interpretation of a reduced coupling is in
319 fact also compatible with the CAP data. If any difference, our velocities are in general slightly (but
320 marginally) smaller than those measured 10 years ago (-3 mm/yr at MORA-TOLO, -2 mm/yr at

321 COGO, -1 mm/yr at POBR). This could be an indication of a decrease of the coupling with time, but
322 should be taken with caution given the very small differences.

323

324 **Time variations**

325 Having measured the network already 6 times, we can establish time series at every benchmark.
326 To do so, we compute stations epoch position by combining daily solutions of each campaign and
327 constraining the reference frame to ITRF2000 using the a-priori positions of the stabilization stations at
328 the time of the campaigns. Every epoch position is assigned a $3\text{-}\sigma$ uncertainty, where σ is the formal a-
329 priori uncertainty. Then, we project station displacements in the South America reference frame along
330 the average direction of the convergence within the network ($N70^\circ$). Over 3 years of measurements,
331 time series look rather linear and there is no indication of any decreasing trend (Figure 8). If any
332 tendency can be extracted from those time series, it is that stations in the central valley are more
333 "noisy" than stations on the coast or in the mountain. Moreover, this "noise" seems to be correlated,
334 most stations being above or below their linear trend at the same campaigns (Figure 8, 2nd box). This
335 fact could be an indication of spatially coherent episodes of transient deformation in this area of the
336 network, related to transient slip at depth on the subduction interface. Because those stations are
337 approximately 150 km from the trench, the depth of these transient slip episodes would be around 25
338 km (using a dip angle of 10°). Such a depth could correspond to the initiation of the transition zone.
339 Obviously, seasonal variations could also be the origin of correlated noise at a subset of stations.
340 However, it can be noted that that a yearly cycle would not fit well: winter campaigns are sometimes
341 above and some times below the annual trend. Continuous time series over at least 2 or 3 years would
342 be needed to investigate this in detail, For this purpose, we installed 10 cGPS stations in the area,
343 starting in 2006.

344

345 **Conclusion**

346 In this paper we studied the strain accumulation in the Coquimbo region of North central Chile
347 as this region enters the preparation for a future interplate earthquake. The last event in the region
348 occurred 64 years ago, in April 1943 and it was preceded by another large event in 1880. Seismicity of
349 Coquimbo, as deduced from a study of the ISC catalog, clearly shows acceleration after mid 1998. We
350 can not resolve yet whether a period of accelerated moment release has started in Coquimbo, but the
351 simultaneous measurement of seismicity and GPS velocities is an obvious approach to better
352 understand the processes that lead to future earthquakes in the region. Comparing the current
353 deformation of the regions of Coquimbo-Illapel and Concepción-Constitución, we observe an apparent
354 weaker strain accumulation in the North than in the South. In general these differences might be
355 related to the geometry variations of the subduction in Central Chile, but we showed that they are
356 mostly related to space and time variations of the coupling. Since the coupling is expected to vary
357 during the seismic cycle, the characterisation of the actual coupling and of its time variations should
358 allow determine at which stage of the seismic cycle this specific segment of the Chilean subduction is.
359 However, we clearly need a longer time span to demonstrate a possible decrease of the coupling with
360 time and quantify it. Transient episodes of slip, possibly related to seismicity on the subduction
361 interface may also have been detected. We are in the process of installing a permanent network of 10 to
362 15 cGPS stations in the area to asses whether this process really occurs there and quantify and locate it
363 in the affirmative.

364

365

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 371 Chile / CNRS agreement: the International Laboratory (LIA) "Montessus de Ballore".

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1 **Figure 1.** Seismicity of the Coquimbo area from the ISC catalog for the period 1990 to 2007. On the
 2 left the map shows the seismicity from 1990 to 1997 just before the events of Coquimbo and the
 3 Punitaqui intermediate depth event. Along the trench we plot the approximate rupture area of the 1943
 4 earthquake [Beck *et al.*, 1998] . On the right we show the seismicity since the 1997 events. Events
 5 larger than Mw 6, shown in lighter color, were extracted from the Centennial catalog of [Engdahl and
 6 Villaseñor, 2004], the rest of the seismicity is from the ISC catalog. We observe that since 1997 the
 7 region around the Punitaqui earthquake has been very active.

8
 9 **Figure 2.** Seismicity rate and cumulative co-seismic moment in the Coquimbo area since 1992.
 10 Shaded curves show the cumulative number of earthquakes (black) and cumulative magnitude (grey)
 11 from ISC catalog. We observe a clear aftershock sequence from mid 1997 to mid 1998. This sequence
 12 satisfies Omori's law and then seismicity settles to a higher level than before the 1997 events. A small,
 13 but not well resolved, acceleration in seismicity rate appears to be occurring in the last couple of years
 14 before 2005, but the ISC catalog is not complete yet after October 2004. Grey circles show the
 15 cumulative co-seismic moment due to the larger earthquakes occurring on the subduction interface. An
 16 equivalent moment of $0.8 \cdot 10^{20}$ N.m (Mw ~ 7.2) is reached after 15 years. Punitaqui intraplate
 17 earthquake moment ($2.5 \cdot 10^{20}$ N.m) is shown for comparison (black circle).

18
 19 **Figure 3.** Large scale network and far field velocities. Dots show locations of GPS stations. Arrows
 20 depict their horizontal velocities with respect to a reference frame fixed on the South-America Plate.
 21 Bold numbers aside the arrows indicate the velocity in mm/yr. Ellipses depict the region of 99%
 22 confidence using the uncertainties in Table 2

23
 24 **Figure 4.** Central Chile and Argentina section. Dots show locations of GPS stations. Arrows depict
 25 their horizontal velocities with respect to a reference frame fixed on the South-America plate. Bold
 26 numbers aside the arrows indicate the velocity in mm/yr. Ellipses depict the region of 99% confidence
 27 using the uncertainties in Table 2.

28
 29 **Figure 5.** Coquimbo gap (between 30°S and 32°S). Dots show locations of GPS stations. Arrows
 30 depict their horizontal velocities with respect to a reference frame fixed on the South-America plate.
 31 Black arrows show our solution, white arrows depict CAP sites velocities of (Kendrick *et al.*, 2001),

32 recomputed in ITRF2000. Bold numbers aside the arrows indicate the velocity in mm/yr. Ellipses
 33 depict the region of 99% confidence using the uncertainties in Table 2.

34

35 **Figure 6.** Comparison of velocity profiles and strain rates at different latitudes. Symbols depict the
 36 velocity component parallel to plate convergence (78°) in our region of measurements (black circles
 37 north of 30.4°S , grey squares between 30.4°S and 31°S , light grey diamonds south of 31°S), and in the
 38 Concepcion gap ~ 1000 km south (open symbols) (*Ruegg et al, 2008*). Velocities are in mm/yr. The
 39 average strain rate at the different latitudes are indicated by the different strait lines: full, dashed,
 40 dotted, and grey for Northern part, central part, Southern part of the network, and Concepcion
 41 network. Strain rates are in nano strain (10^{-9} /yr)

42

43 **Figure 7.** Elastic modeling of the upper plate deformation in the Coquimbo gap. X and Y axis units
 44 give UTM coordinates in km. In the upper box, GPS observations (black arrows) and model
 45 predictions (white arrows) are shown. In the lower box, residual (i.e. observations-model) velocities
 46 are shown (black arrow). In both boxes, the grey shaded rectangles draw the subduction plane buried at
 47 depth and the large white arrows depict the dislocation (not to scale) applied on this plane.

48

49 **Figure 8.** Sorted time series. Stations horizontal displacements projected along the plate convergence
 50 direction ($N70^\circ$) and plotted relative to the South-American reference frame. Time is in years and
 51 displacements are in mm from an initial arbitrary position. Error bars depict the $3\text{-}\sigma$ formal error. Time
 52 series are plotted in 4 groups, depending on station distance to the trench: coastal stations (upper box),
 53 stations in the Chilean central valley (2^{nd} box), stations in the Chilean side of the Andes (3^{rd} box), and
 54 reference stations in Argentina (lower box).

1

	Apr. 2004	Dec. 2004	Apr. 2005	Dec. 2005	Apr. 2006	Nov. 2006
North rep	1.3	1.9	1.2	1.4	0.8	1.6
East rep.	2.3	2.8	2.5	2.2	1.3	2.5
Vertical rep.	4.6	5.8	4.3	5.0	3.5	4.8

2

3 **Table 1:** Average short (< 300km) baseline repeatabilities (Root Mean Square scatter about the mean)
4 for each of the six campaigns. Values are in mm.

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1

SITE	Position		Velocity / ITRF2000		Velocity / S.A.		uncertainties		Correlation
	Lon	lat	Vlon	Vlat	Vlon	Vlat	σ Vlon	σ Vlat	
AGUA ⁽¹⁾	289,193	-30,982	21,9	15,8	23,0	6,9	3,9	3,0	0,008
ANDA	288,930	-30,278	16,3	18,6	17,5	9,7	1,5	1,4	0,000
BRAZ ⁽³⁾	312,122	-15,947	-3,8	10,9	0,6	0,1	1,3	1,2	-0,011
BSJL	288,662	-30,687	18,3	16,1	19,4	7,2	1,5	1,4	-0,005
CENT	288,793	-30,962	19,2	17,9	20,3	9,0	1,5	1,4	-0,001
CFAG	291,767	-31,602	5,6	10,6	6,9	1,4	1,4	1,4	-0,001
CHAN	288,972	-30,897	20,2	17,7	21,3	8,8	1,5	1,4	-0,004
CHAP	289,500	-29,853	15,9	15,7	17,2	6,8	1,5	1,4	0,002
CHIP	288,786	-31,115	21,4	18,8	22,5	9,9	1,7	1,6	-0,002
CHPI ⁽²⁾	315,015	-22,687	-4,6	10,1	-0,5	-0,8	1,5	1,5	-0,010
CMOR ⁽¹⁾	289,204	-30,205	21,2	15,8	22,4	6,9	2,7	2,2	0,010
COGO	289,025	-31,153	20,0	16,5	21,1	7,6	1,5	1,4	0,000
CONS ⁽²⁾	287,588	-35,331	34,9	20,4	35,3	11,7	1,4	1,4	0,001
CONZ ⁽³⁾	286,975	-36,844	34,9	19,2	35,0	10,5	1,4	1,4	0,001
COPO ⁽²⁾	289,662	-27,385	12,9	19,3	14,6	10,3	1,8	1,7	0,001
CORD ⁽¹⁾	295,530	-31,528	-2,1	13,1	-0,5	3,5	2,9	2,7	0,003
CTAL	288,330	-30,929	25,0	17,4	26,1	8,6	1,5	1,4	0,000
EALM	288,570	-31,413	27,4	16,7	28,5	7,8	1,5	1,4	0,000
EMAN	288,815	-30,175	15,8	17,3	17,1	8,4	1,5	1,4	0,000
EMAT	288,337	-31,147	28,2	17,4	29,2	8,6	1,5	1,4	-0,005
ESAU	288,316	-30,511	21,0	16,6	22,1	7,8	1,4	1,4	0,000
ESPI	288,545	-31,220	23,2	17,5	24,2	8,7	1,5	1,4	0,000
FORT ⁽³⁾	321,574	-3,877	-7,0	13,4	-1,9	2,4	1,8	1,5	-0,014
FUND	289,149	-30,383	15,7	16,8	16,9	7,9	1,5	1,4	0,000
GLPS ⁽²⁾	269,696	-0,743	51,2	10,4	56,3	4,2	1,3	1,3	-0,003
HERA	288,621	-29,998	16,8	17,6	18,0	8,8	1,5	1,4	-0,001
ISPA ⁽²⁾	250,656	-27,125	67,6	-6,5	67,4	-9,4	0,4	0,3	0,007
KOUR ⁽³⁾	307,194	5,252	-6,8	13,6	-1,3	3,1	1,0	0,9	0,045
LCAN	288,560	-30,789	22,7	18,0	23,9	9,2	1,7	1,6	-0,001
LHCL ⁽²⁾	294,405	-38,003	0,3	8,9	0,9	-0,6	1,5	1,4	0,001
LMOL	289,542	-30,742	17,1	15,7	18,3	6,8	1,5	1,4	-0,001
LPER	288,749	-30,365	18,2	19,0	19,4	10,1	1,5	1,4	-0,002
LPGS ⁽³⁾	302,068	-34,907	-1,6	10,6	0,2	0,5	1,3	1,3	-0,002
LVIL	288,486	-31,909	23,5	16,8	24,5	8,0	1,4	1,4	-0,002
MAUL ⁽²⁾	289,179	-35,810	20,4	10,2	20,8	1,3	1,6	1,5	0,000
MPAT	288,987	-30,702	18,5	16,1	19,7	7,2	1,5	1,4	0,003
NIPA ⁽¹⁾	288,534	-30,469	22,8	12,5	23,9	3,6	3,8	3,0	0,008
OVEJ	288,806	-31,293	19,5	17,7	20,5	8,8	1,5	1,4	0,000
OVLL ⁽²⁾	288,796	-30,604	18,8	18,4	19,9	9,5	1,4	1,4	0,000
PACH	288,405	-30,457	21,9	14,1	23,1	5,3	1,6	1,6	0,000
PARA ⁽²⁾	310,769	-25,448	-1,7	10,6	1,8	-0,1	1,7	1,6	-0,010
PIDN	288,786	-30,815	20,5	17,6	21,6	8,8	1,5	1,4	0,002
POBR	288,496	-30,591	21,3	16,9	22,5	8,1	1,5	1,4	0,000
PTOM	288,428	-31,532	25,5	17,6	26,5	8,8	1,5	1,4	0,001
RIOG ⁽³⁾	292,249	-53,785	3,4	12,3	1,6	3,0	0,6	0,6	-0,007
SANT ⁽³⁾	289,331	-33,150	20,4	14,9	21,3	5,9	1,3	1,3	0,000
SJAV ⁽²⁾	288,267	-35,595	30,3	15,7	30,6	6,9	1,4	1,4	0,001
SLMC ⁽²⁾	289,037	-31,777	20,1	17,0	21,1	8,1	1,4	1,4	0,000

Vigny et al. Coquimbo GPS

SPED	288,606	-31,015	19,7	18,5	20,8	9,6	1,5	1,4	0,000
TAHU	288,958	-30,477	16,2	16,2	17,4	7,3	1,5	1,4	-0,003
TOLO ⁽²⁾	289,194	-30,170	17,3	16,6	18,6	7,6	1,8	1,7	-0,004
TONG	288,498	-30,249	17,5	17,1	18,7	8,3	1,5	1,4	0,000
TUCU ⁽²⁾	294,770	-26,843	2,9	9,8	5,0	0,3	1,4	1,4	-0,002
VARI ⁽¹⁾	289,250	-30,741	2,1	17,6	3,3	8,7	3,7	3,0	0,011

2

3

⁽¹⁾ New station measured only twice over a short time period

4

⁽²⁾ Permanent station

5

⁽³⁾ "Stabilization" station

6

7

8

Table 2: Site positions and velocities, in ITRF2000 and relative to South-America plate. Latitude and

9

longitude are in decimal degrees. All velocities and velocity uncertainties are in mm/yr.

Vigny et al. Coquimbo GPS

10

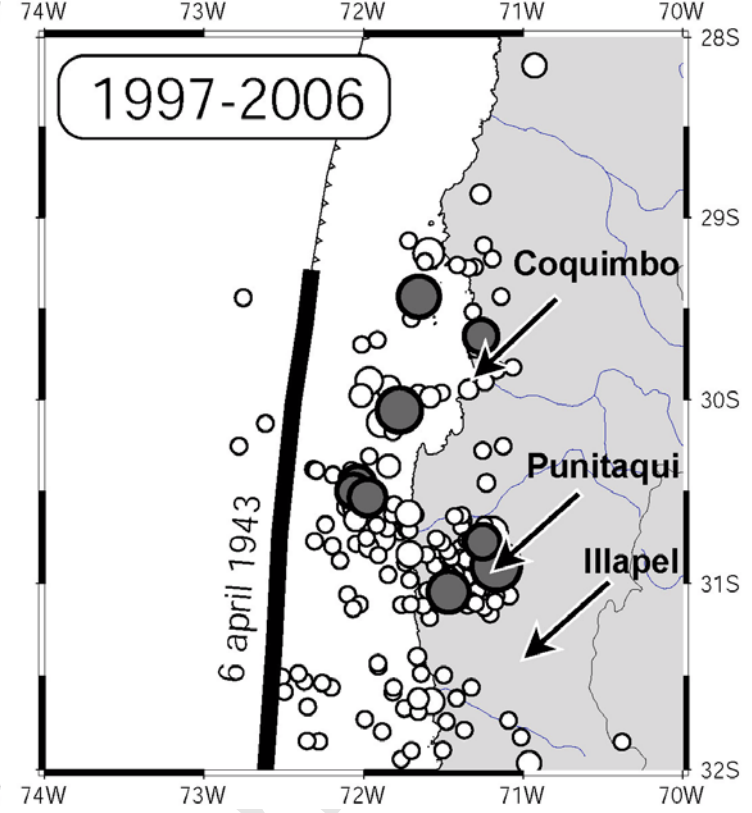
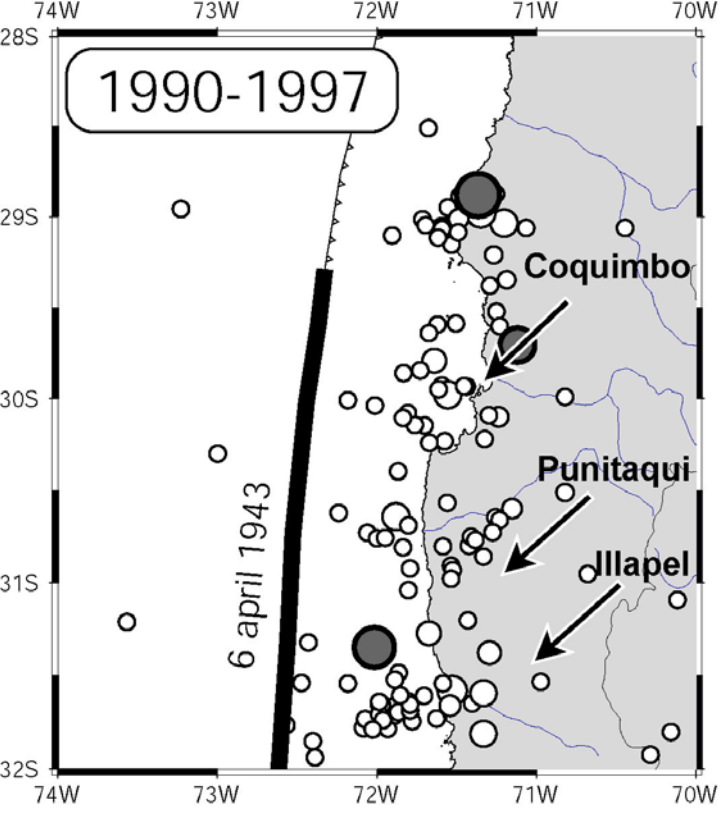
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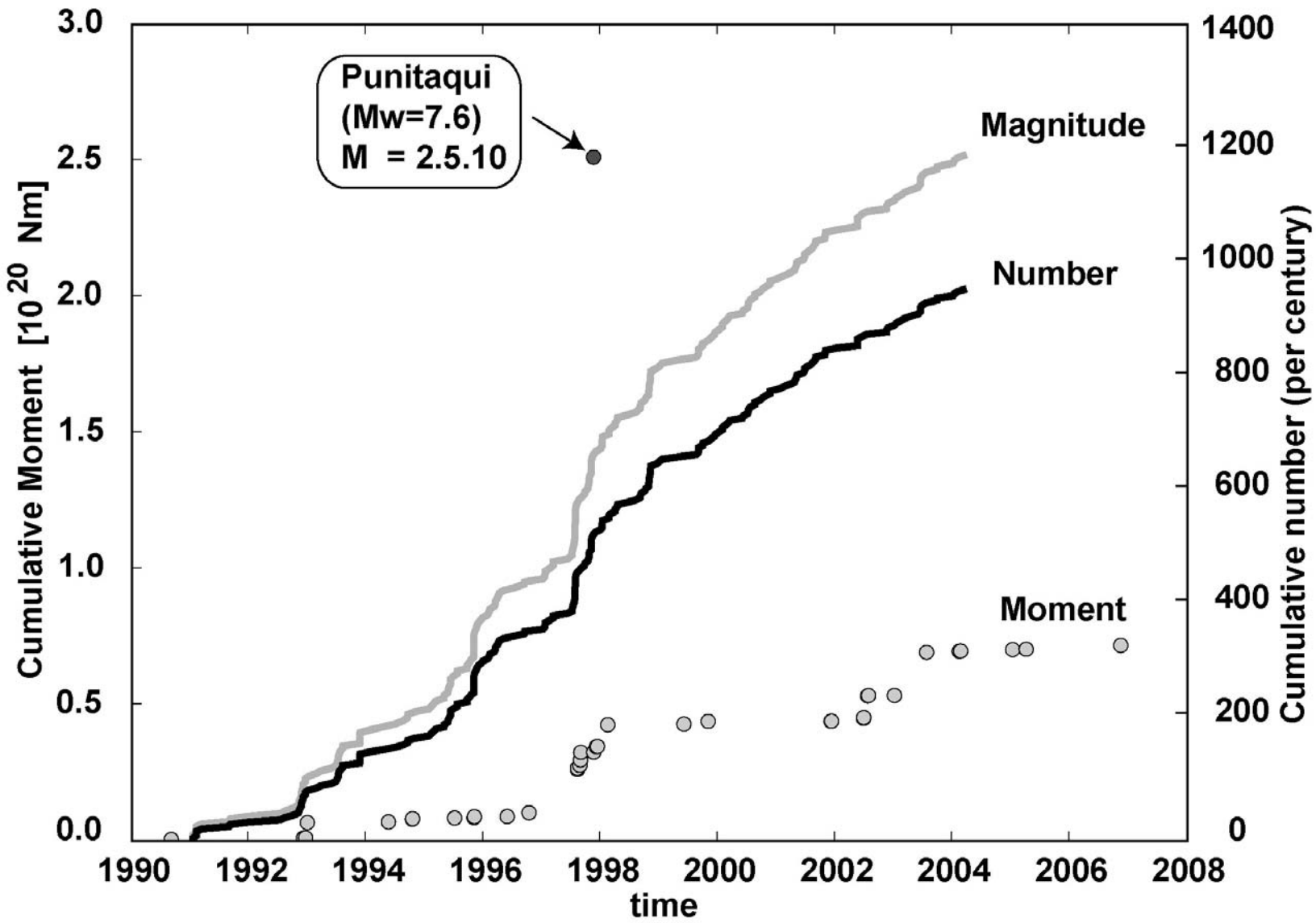
	Angular velocity			Predicted velocities	
	latitude	longitude	rotation	convergence	azimut
Nuvel1A	56,0 °N	94,0 °W	0,720 °/Ma	80 mm/yr	78°N
Larson et al, 1997	43,8 °N	84,8 °W	0,740 °/Ma	80 mm/yr	81°N
Angermann et al, 1999	48,8 °N	91,7 °W	0,590 °/Ma	65 mm/yr	77°N
Norabuena et al., 1999	47,4 °N	93,7 °W	0,624 °/Ma	68 mm/yr	76°N
Sella et al., 2002	52,1°N	91,2°W	0,633 °/Ma	70 mm/yr	79°N
Brooks et al., 2003	61,1°N	93,6°W	0,570 °/Ma	63 mm/yr	80°N
ITRF2005	53,9 °N	87,5 °W	0,605 °/Ma	67 mm/yr	81°N
Vigny et al., 2007	55,9 °N	95,2 °W	0,610 °/Ma	68 mm/yr	78°N

2

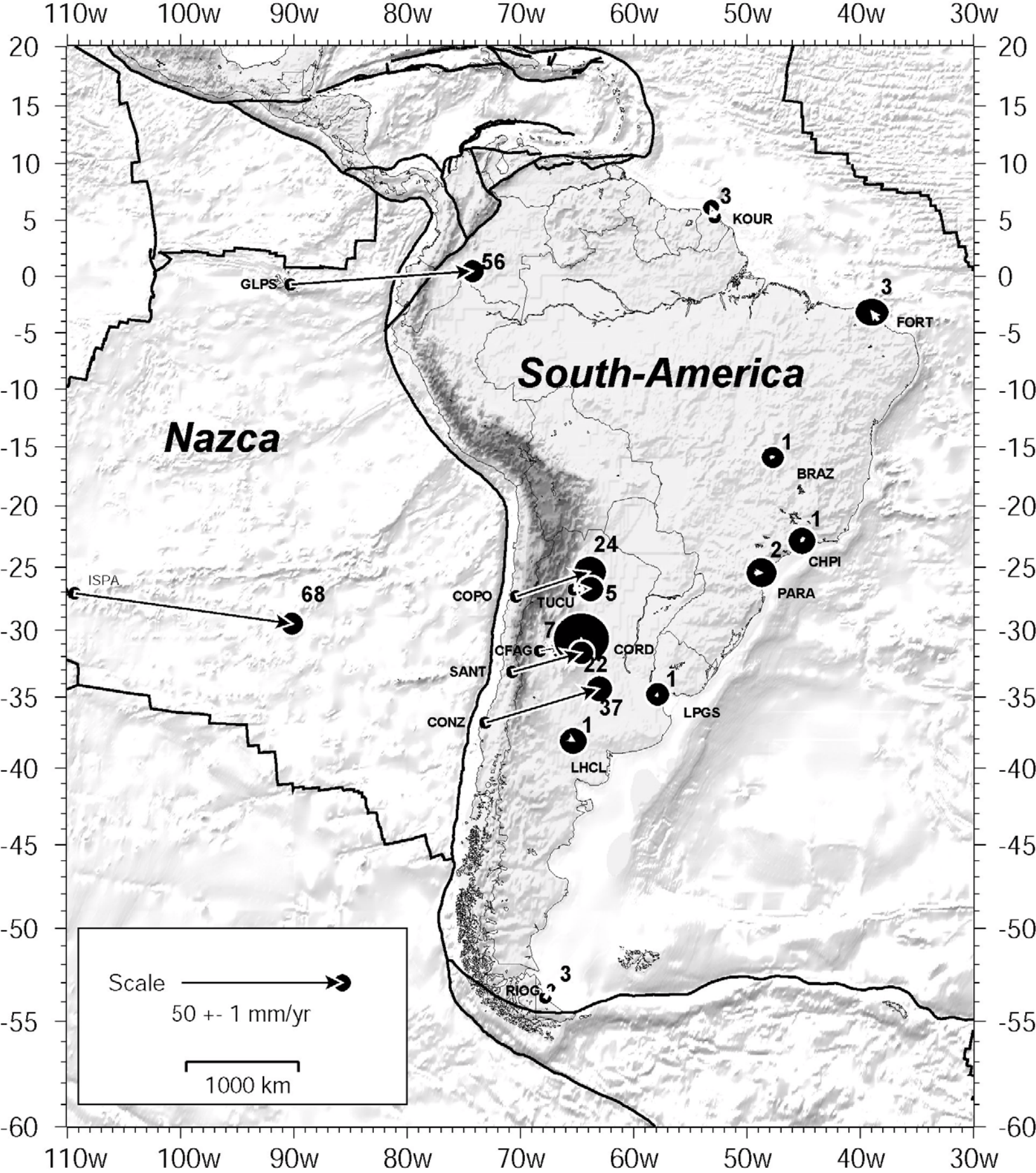
3 **Table 3:** Nazca/South America relative angular velocities and velocities predicted on the Chilean
4 trench at 31°S using these poles.

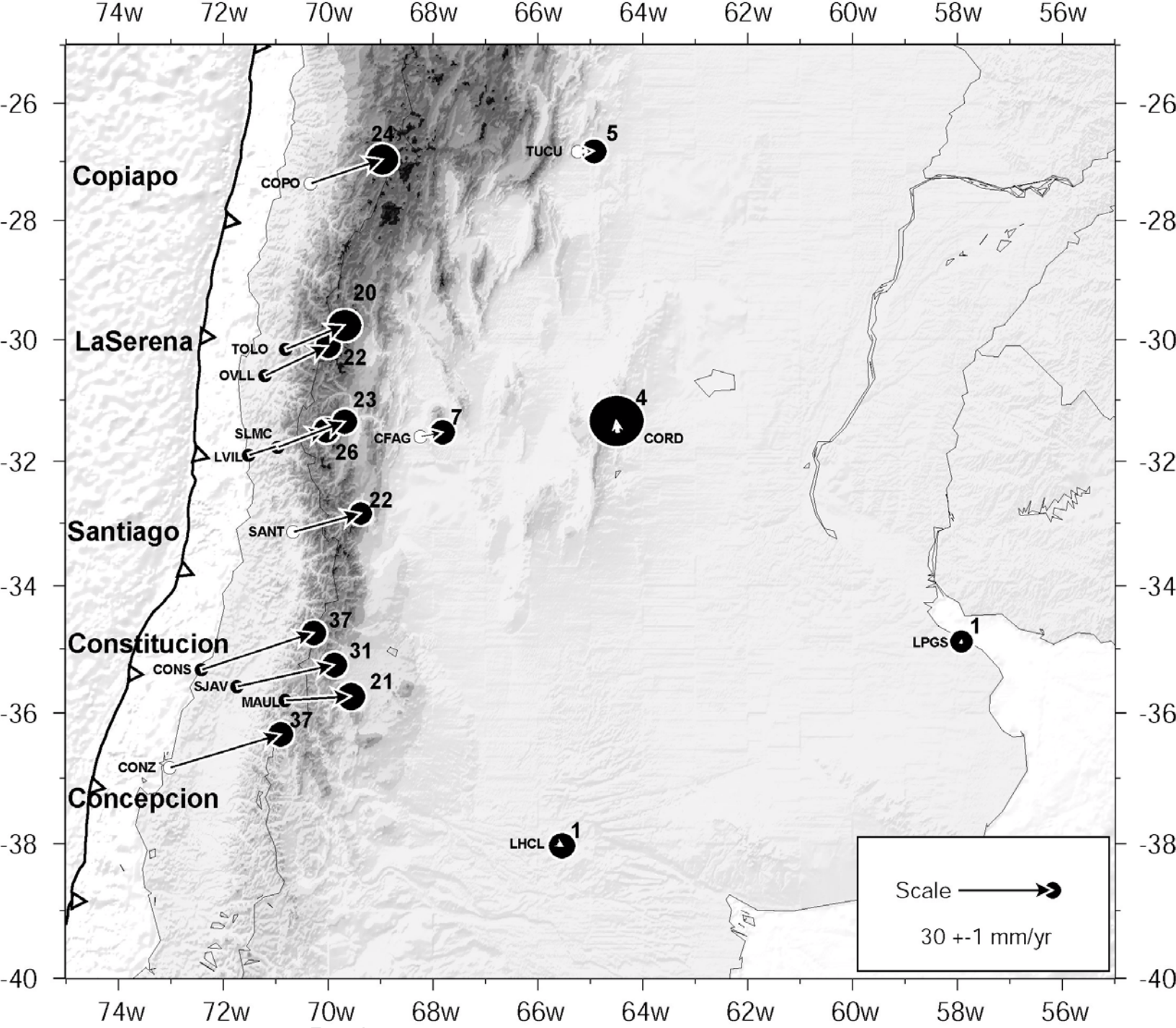


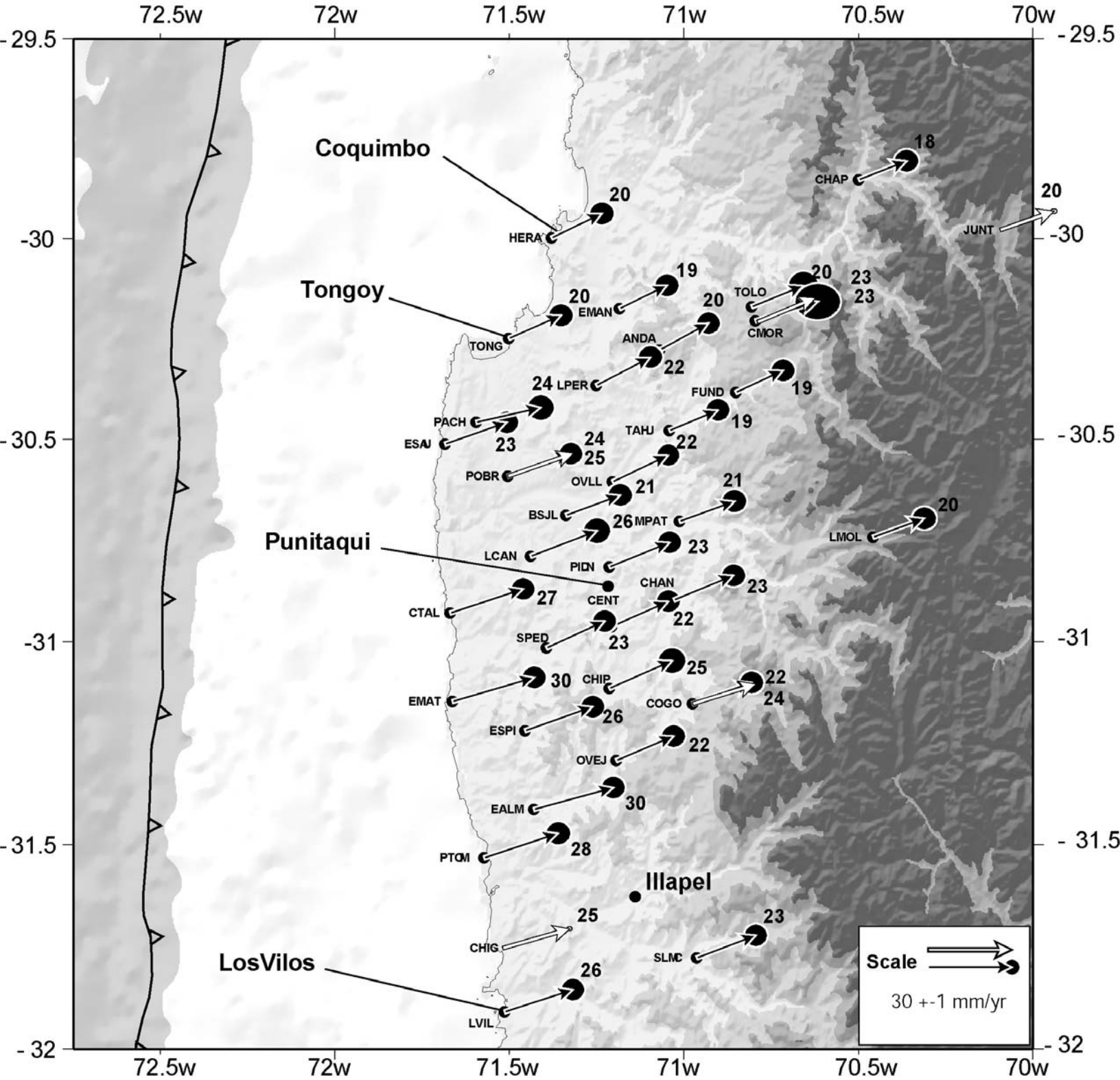
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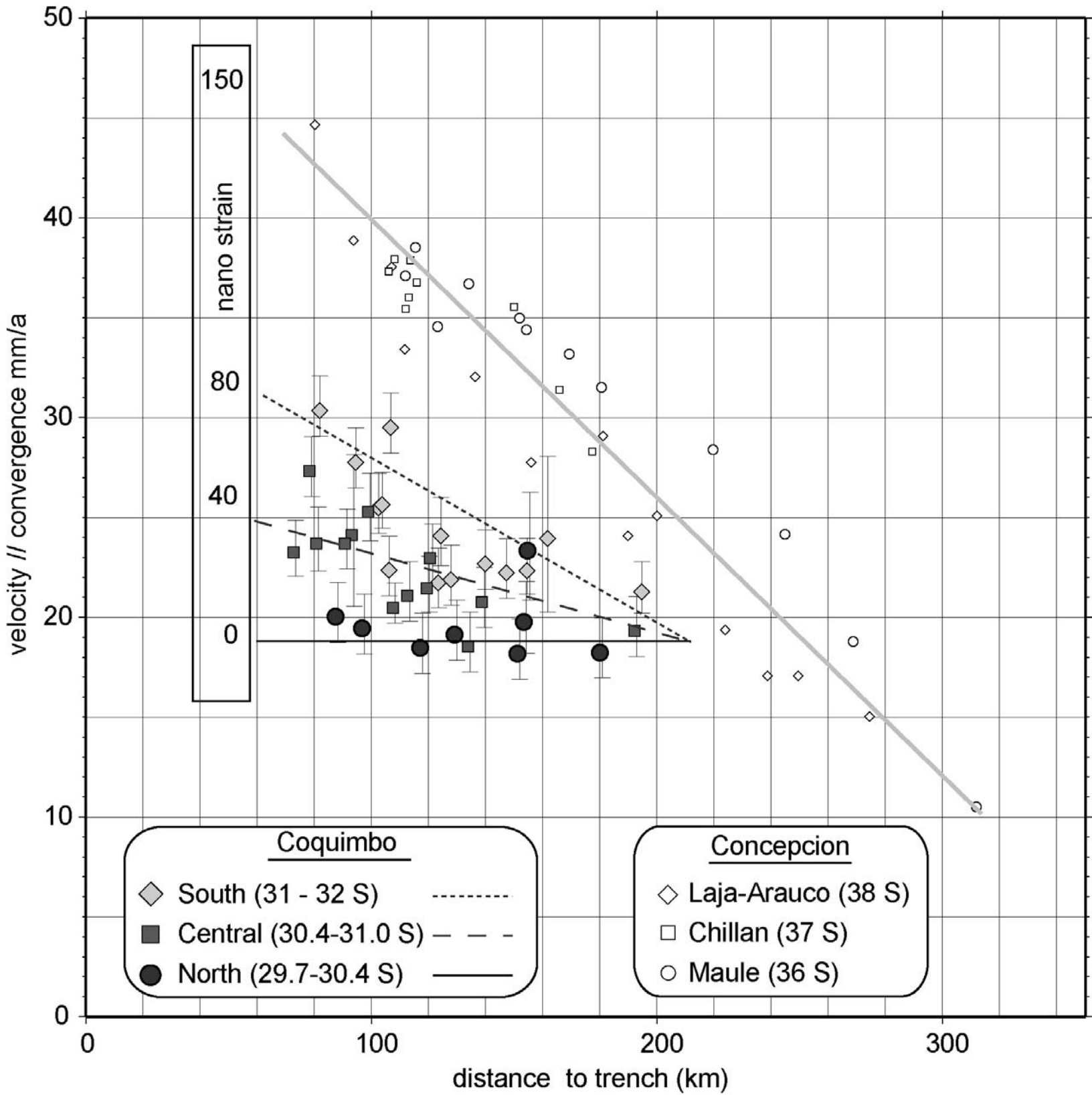


Accepte

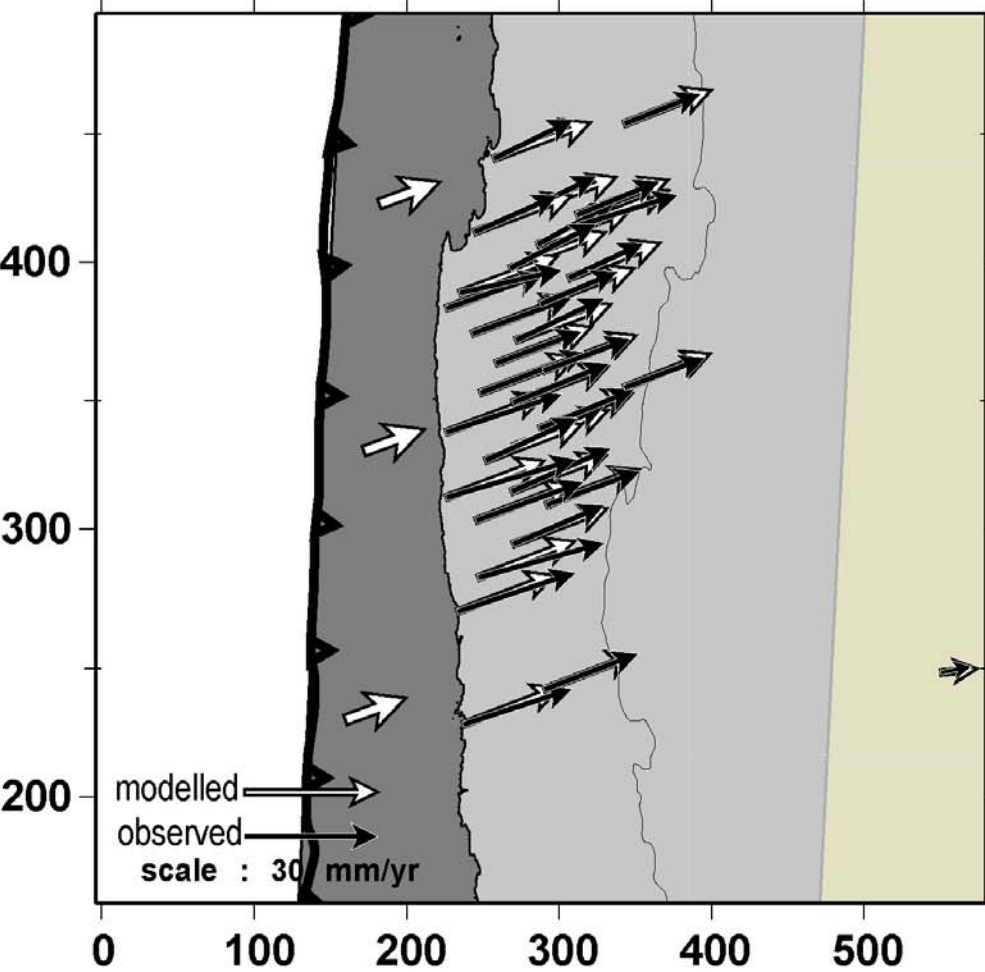








observed/modelled Velocities



model parameters

Subduction strike: 5°N
Dislocation strike: 71°N
Locking Depth: 60 km
Plane Dip: 10°
Slip: 27 mm/yr
(41% coupling)

mean residual
2.6 mm/yr
over 34 points

residual Velocities

