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Competition between slow slip and damage on and off faults revealed in 4D synchrotron imaging experiments

François Renard^{1,2}, Jessica McBeck¹, Benoît Cordonnier¹

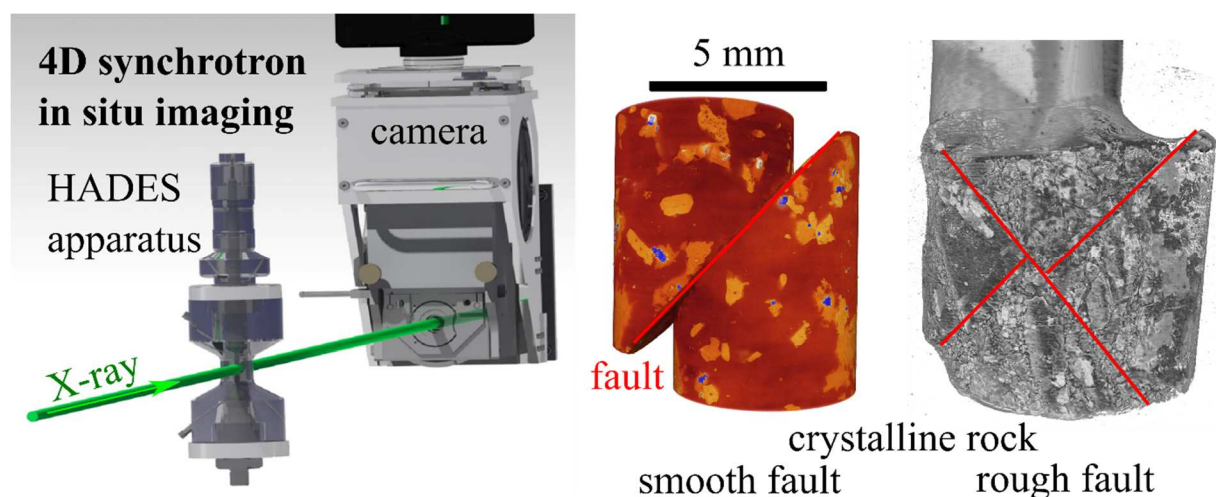
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Key points

- Dynamic synchrotron imaging characterizes slow slip along pre-existing faults
- Initial fault roughness controls damage production in the volume during slow slip
- Slip on a rough preexisting fault and increasing differential stress induce failure of new faults oriented at high angles

Graphical abstract



1 **Abstract**

2 In the continental crust, faults may accommodate deformation through aseismic creep, slow
3 slip events, or seismic slips that produce dynamic damage, or a combination of these
4 endmembers. A variety of parameters controls the occurrence of these mechanical behaviors.
5 In a series of laboratory experiments, we image centimeter-scale faults during sliding under *in*
6 *situ* conditions. We perform four experiments of slip on centimeter-scale crystalline rock
7 samples prepared with a saw-cut interface at 45° from the direction to the maximum
8 compressive stress and at stress conditions of 2-3 km depth. We image fault slip and off-fault
9 fracture development using 4D synchrotron X-ray microtomography. Three faults have an
10 initial rough interface, and deformation occurs with increasing differential stress by a
11 combination of slow slip events and off-fault damage, until catastrophic failure and the
12 formation of new faults. Conversely, the pre-cut fault with a smooth initial surface deforms
13 mainly by slow slip, develops numerous striations along its slip plane, and no microfractures
14 are detected in the wall rock. Our experiments reproduce aseismic and seismic faulting
15 behavior, and demonstrate that the roughness of the fault plane is one of the parameters that
16 control the transition between these two behaviors. A fault with a rougher interface may tend
17 to develop more off-fault damage and seismic behavior. For the rough fault experiments, the
18 secondary faulting occurs along a network of faults oriented at high angles from the pre-
19 existing saw-cut plane, a behavior similar to several earthquake sequences that occurred along
20 orthogonal faults.

21 **1. Introduction**

22 Two endmember modes of slip occur on continental faults depending on whether a
23 rupture propagates at a velocity close to that of the elastic waves in the crust, in the case of
24 earthquakes, or at slower velocities, without producing dynamic elastic effects. In the second
25 case, the ruptures are described as slow slip events, when the slip occurs episodically and
26 slower than seismic slip, and creep when the slip is continuous and slow (e.g., Bürgmann,
27 2018). These slow deformations are recorded by geodetic and field measurements such as
28 creepmeters. They may be accompanied by tremor signals recorded by seismometers. Several
29 parameters could explain the transition between these two behaviors, including the tectonic
30 loading rate, rock material properties, initial stress on the fault, or fluid pressure (Bürgmann,
31 2018).

32 The energy budget of tectonic systems includes on- and off-fault energy dissipation.
33 Natural observations show that damage and secondary faults develop in the volume near
34 active faults and evolve with slip (e.g. Ben-Zion and Sammis, 2003; Griffith et al., 2010; Choi
35 et al., 2016). Field observations show that dynamic ruptures during earthquakes produce
36 damage. However, only laboratory experiments have thus far shown the existence of damage
37 formation and secondary faulting during slow slip (French and Zhu, 2016). Seismological
38 observations indicate the presence of microseismicity in a large volume around the main
39 faults in southern California (Ross et al., 2017). In addition, complex strain partitioning has
40 occurred in a few earthquake sequences in the past decades, where two successive major
41 earthquakes nucleated on two faults with orthogonal orientations (Hudnut et al., 1989; Yue et
42 al., 2012; Ross et al., 2019). These observations suggest the existence of strain partitioning
43 between the main faults and the surrounding volume during fast or slow slip. However, how
44 precursory strain partitioning may control earthquake nucleation remains unconstrained.

45 Field observations show that fault surfaces are rough at all scales (Power et al., 1987;
46 Renard et al., 2006; Sagy et al., 2007; Renard et al., 2013). This roughness promotes the
47 concentration of local stresses during slip, which then increases the shear strain in a volume
48 surrounding the principal slip zone (Sagy and Lyakhovsky, 2019), leading to off-fault damage
49 development. A damage zone develops progressively with cumulated slip by a combination of
50 dynamic fracturing during earthquake propagation, creation of surface area by
51 microseismicity, and slow slip. This process leads to an evolving energy budget between
52 energy dissipation on the fault and dissipation in the volume. In a previous study (McBeck et
53 al., 2019), we calculated that the energy dissipated on pre-cut fault planes in X-ray
54 tomography experiments dominates the other work components, and may reach nearly 100%
55 of the external work imposed on the samples. Conversely, between 5 and 20% of the external
56 work dissipates as off-fault deformation when fractures develop in the volume around the
57 fault. Moreover, we document that with cumulated slip, the partitioning of the energy budget
58 evolves as off-fault damage propagates.

59 In the present study, we perform a series of laboratory experiments on crystalline rock
60 samples that contain a preexisting saw-cut fault plane with an imposed initial roughness. We
61 deform the samples under *in-situ* conditions of 2-3 km depth and reproduce slow slip
62 deformation along the faults while imaging the sample using dynamic synchrotron X-ray
63 microtomography. By varying the initial fault roughness and keeping all other experimental
64 parameters constant, we reproduce two mechanical behaviors: reactivation of the preexisting
65 fault with no detected off-fault damage, or reactivation with detected off-fault damage and
66 secondary faulting. Here, our main goal is to demonstrate that slow slip on a fault may
67 produce damage in the surrounding volume, and that the accumulation of this damage may
68 lead to the nucleation of a laboratory earthquake that forms on a fault oriented at a high angle
69 from the preexisting saw-cut fault. Under similar experimental conditions, and for a similar

70 amount of total slip in the range 1-2.5 mm, a smooth fault does not develop detected off-fault
71 damage, in contrast to a rougher fault.

72

73 **2. Methods**

74 **2.1 Material and sample preparation**

75 The rock samples are made of monzonite, a crystalline rock with grain size of 450
76 micrometers described in Aben et al. (2016), and used in Renard et al., (2018) and McBeck et
77 al. (2019). From a single monzonite block, we cored four cylinders, with 5 mm diameter and
78 10 mm height. Then, a plane was cut with a diamond string saw at 45° from the flat surfaces
79 of the cores, to represent an initial fault oriented at 45° from the direction of the main
80 compressive stress, σ_1 . The angle of 45° is within the range 30-50° where experiments have
81 shown fault reactivation (Giorgetti et al., 2019). Moreover, the orientation of 45° allowed
82 greater total slip than 30° in our experimental apparatus. The four fault surfaces were polished
83 with sandpapers from P800 to P4000 grit, producing a smooth mirror-like surface. The initial
84 topography of the fault was measured using a white light interferometer (ContourGT, Bruker)
85 over a 1.7 x 1.3 mm² surface area. Here, we define the roughness, S_q , by the root mean square

86 of the height $z(x, y)$ over the surface area A , $S_q = \sqrt{\frac{1}{A} \iint_A z^2(x, y) dx dy}$ and, before slip, S_q

87 = 0.6 μm . The value falls in the range of wavelengths of white light (0.4-0.7 μm), which

88 explains why the initial surface was shiny and mirror-like because of the specular reflection.

89 One of such smooth samples, representative of a smooth fault surface, was kept for

90 experimental deformation. For the three other samples representative of a rough fault surface,

91 the fault surface was roughened with ten passes of P400 sandpaper, and three passes of P80

92 sandpaper. Passes were applied perpendicularly to the slip direction such that slip would

93 enhance interlocking of the fault. This procedure produces feature analogous to natural

94 situations that are not parallel to the present slip direction due to a background stress rotation,

95 for example. This procedure also creates roughness anisotropy, which is observed on most
96 fault surfaces (e.g., Renard et al., 2006). The root-mean-square roughness for the three
97 samples with a rough fault was $S_q=4.9\ \mu\text{m}$, about eight times higher than that of the smooth
98 fault ($0.6\ \mu\text{m}$). We prepared all samples at once to ensure a good reproducibility.

99

100 **2.2 Experimental conditions**

101 The experimental procedure is described in McBeck et al. (2019) and summarized here.
102 The samples called M6 and M8 in McBeck et al. (2019) are the same as the samples
103 MONZ6C and MONZ8C in the present study, which contains data of two additional
104 experiments, MONZ9C and MONZ10C. Table 1 indicates the experimental conditions for the
105 four samples. Figures 1 and S1 show the time evolution of the control parameters and fault
106 slip calculated from the loading displacement. Time-lapse images of fault slip and damage are
107 provided as Supplementary Information (Movies S1, S2, S3, and S4).

108 Each sample was encased in a Viton jacket that was placed between two stainless steel
109 pistons. The sample assembly was inserted in the triaxial deformation apparatus HADES
110 installed on the microtomography beamline ID19 at the European Synchrotron Radiation
111 Facility. This apparatus was described in detail in previous studies (Renard et al., 2016;
112 2017). In short, the axial and confining pressures are controlled by two separate pumps which
113 have a pressure resolution of 0.1 MPa. The confining medium is oil. The axial stress on the
114 sample is controlled by increasing the oil pressure in the axial load chamber of the apparatus.
115 The interfaces between the sample and the pistons were not lubricated; however, some slip
116 occurred along these interfaces during experiments, as seen in supplementary movies (Movies
117 S1 and S4).

118 We performed all experiments at room temperature, with no fluid inside the sample. First,
119 equal confining and axial stresses were applied on the sample assembly before the first X-ray

120 tomography scan was acquired. Then, the axial stress was increased slowly and by successive
121 steps until an increment of slip of 50 to 100 micrometers was measured. This vertical distance
122 was measured from the Linear Variable Differential Transformer (LVDT) displacement
123 sensor located outside of the rig, corrected from the elasticity of the rig, and then was
124 projected along the fault slip direction. Using the 3D images, we measured the shortening of
125 the sample and obtained the same displacement values as those of the LVDT. In all
126 experiments, the slip increments occurred with a slow velocity, similar to slow slip events
127 (see insets in Figure 1a, c, d). After each stress step increase and slip increment, one 3D X-ray
128 tomogram was acquired. For samples MONZ6C and MONZ10C, the axial stress was reduced
129 before each scan (red curves in Figures 1a, e) as we anticipated that some small creep could
130 occur on the fault if the stress was maintained constant, potentially producing blurry
131 tomograms. For samples MONZ8C and MONZ9C, we did not follow this procedure and had
132 to remove several tomograms that were blurred. For sample MONZ8C, the initial confining
133 pressure was 50 MPa and the axial stress was increased to 200 MPa, the upper limit of the
134 HADES rig, without significant slip on the fault. Consequently, we had to reduce the
135 confining pressure to first 30 MPa and then 10 MPa to allow more slip (Figure 1c). For the
136 other three samples, the confining stress remained constant over the experiments.

137 For all the samples, as slip accumulated on the fault, a space formed between the jacket
138 surrounding the sample and the offset fault plane. This space has the shape of an annulus
139 around the fault zone with a thickness close to 1 mm. Consequently, the confined pressure
140 applied near the fault was smaller than on the rest of the core sample. Another consequence of
141 our experimental set-up is that, as the fault slips, torque develops on the upper and lower
142 pistons and the sample rotates in the rig along a horizontal axis, with an angle smaller than 3°.
143 We consider these effects to have a similar impact in all experiments in terms of boundary

144 conditions applied to the sample, such that the differences measured between experiments are
145 influenced by these boundary conditions to the same degree.

146 Between 5 and 42 tomograms were acquired in each experiment, with a voxel size of 6.5
147 μm and a spatial resolution close to the voxel size. The exposure time was 0.05 s, the beam
148 energy reaching the sample was 85 keV, and 1600 projections were taken over 180° , resulting
149 in a total scan time per acquired volume of about 2 min. Each experiment lasted between one
150 and six hours. Tomographic reconstruction was performed using the program PyHST2
151 (Mirone et al., 2014). The tomograms map the three-dimensional X-ray attenuation in the
152 samples, with more dense minerals having a stronger attenuation than lighter minerals or air
153 filling voids.

154 For sample MONZ9C, only five tomograms could be acquired because a secondary fault
155 formed after a displacement of 890 μm , a total displacement only 50% of the two other rough
156 fault samples, for which the total slip was around 2 mm before secondary faulting (Table 1).

157 At the end of each experiment, the sample was removed from the rig. Sample MONZ6C
158 was intact, and so the fault surface was coated with 10 nm gold and imaged using scanning
159 electron microscopy (Hitachi SU5000 FE-SEM, Department of Geosciences, University of
160 Oslo). Its topography was measured using white light interferometry. The other samples were
161 destroyed when removed from the rig and so could not be characterized further.

162 The experiment MONZ6C, with a smooth fault, was performed to verify that a fault
163 would produce only slow slip events under the imposed stress conditions. The three other
164 experiments were performed to demonstrate that, under increasing differential stress
165 conditions, slow slip could produce damage in the volume and lead to secondary seismic
166 faulting. Despite the different confining pressures, these three experiments show reproducible
167 results.

168

169 **3. Results**

170 **3.1 Stress and strain versus displacement**

171 For all experiments, the macroscopic shear strength increased with cumulated
172 displacement because it became necessary to apply larger axial stress to trigger slip (Figure 1
173 b, d, f, S1). Two main deformation behaviors occurred (Figure 2): either continuous slip along
174 the saw-cut fault (MONZ6C), or synchronous slip along the saw-cut fault and damage
175 development in the volume, leading to secondary faulting in the three other experiments. We
176 quantified these two deformation modes using Digital Volume Correlation analysis on pairs
177 of tomograms of samples MONZ6C and MONZ8C in a previous study (McBeck et al., 2019).
178 Here, we focus on the porosity evolution and fracture development in the samples during slip
179 on the preexisting fault.

180 For the smooth fault (MONZ6C), slow slip events occurred at each stress increase and no
181 detected damage developed in the volume (Figures 1b, 2a, Movie S1). Some porosity was
182 initially present in the fault plane. These small pores could be tracked throughout the
183 experiment, as well as off-fault pores. The pores in the lower part of the sample did not
184 change location; and the pores in the upper part of the sample moved with slip (Movie S1, left
185 panel).

186 For sample MONZ8C, the confining pressure was changed twice in order to increase the
187 differential stress after the apparatus reached its axial stress limit. During slip, some minerals
188 were sheared along the fault plane and material was dragged into this plane (2D views, top
189 right in Movie S2). Microfractures nucleated and grew in the volume around the fault
190 (Movies S2, S3) and tomography data allow detecting the opening (tensile component) of
191 these microfractures because of the change in density contrast between air in open voids
192 (pores) and minerals. The first microfracture opened as a tensile crack that nucleated from the
193 fault surface and at an angle almost perpendicular to the fault, and then propagated away from

194 it (Movie S3). Damage development was highly asymmetric. Tensile microfractures grew
195 mainly in the rock block in contact with the upper piston, which was moving down to apply
196 the load (Movie S3). Microfractures nucleated either from the fault surface or in the rock
197 volume and then generally propagated until reaching the fault surface. After significant
198 damage accumulation, several microfractures became connected in three dimensions. The
199 sample failed along secondary faults (Figure 2b). This failure produced a significant stress
200 drop, within less than one second, which the servo-control of the triaxial apparatus could not
201 equilibrate. Because of the short duration of this event, we suggest it was seismic. The
202 HADES triaxial apparatus is not equipped with acoustic emission recording that could verify
203 this seismic behavior.

204 Samples MONZ9C (Figure S2) and MONZ10 C (Movie S4) behaved similarly to sample
205 MONZ8C, including the production of damage and secondary faulting on a fault oriented at a
206 high angle to the preexisting fault and a sudden stress drop at macroscopic failure, potentially
207 indicative of seismic behavior. For sample MONZ9C, we acquired too few tomograms to
208 allow characterizing damage development with sufficient detail. For sample MONZ10C, the
209 first damage occurred as a tensile microfracture that nucleated from the fault surface, with a
210 similar behavior to sample MONZ8C. Then this microfracture propagated away from the
211 saw-cut fault and rotated toward the direction of σ_1 (dashed arrow in Figure 2).

212 Microfractures developed in the volume on both sides of the fault, until the sample failed
213 along a newly created fault (Movie S4, Figure 2b), with a measurable stress drop that
214 occurred within less than one second.

215 To summarize, the results show that the smooth fault slipped without creating measurable
216 damage in the volume, whereas, for the three rough fault samples, tensile microfractures
217 nucleated from the fault surface or directly in the volume, grew and became interconnected,
218 until the sample failed catastrophically along a newly created fault.

219

220 **3.2 Striation development on the smooth fault**

221 We imaged the fault surface of sample MONZ6C (the smoother initial fault) using
222 scanning electron microscopy and white light interferometry (Figure 3). Initially, the fault
223 surface was smooth and mirror-like. After the experiment, the fault surface was still shiny and
224 no damage could be detected by eye. However, high-resolution imaging and topography
225 measurements demonstrate that striations developed in the direction of slip, with sub-
226 micrometer to micrometer amplitude (Figure 3). The striations cross several minerals over the
227 entire fault surface. At the tip of some striations, small particles appear concentrated (Figure
228 3c), likely through a mechanical ploughing process. Many of these particles also accumulated
229 in the lower topography (e.g., valleys) of the surface (Figure 3d), creating a discontinuous
230 gouge layer (white rectangle in Figure 3d). The development of striations with slip reduced
231 the initial roughness from $S_q = 0.6 \mu\text{m}$ before slip to $S_q = 0.3 \mu\text{m}$ at the end of experiment.

232

233 **3.3 Porosity, damage and secondary faulting on rough faults**

234 In the three samples with a rough fault, slow slip along the preexisting saw-cut fault
235 produced damage in the surrounding volume. In two samples (MONZ8C, MONZ10C), the
236 first microfracture nucleated from the initial saw-cut fault and then propagated in the volume.
237 Its main plane rotated in the direction of σ_1 (Movies S3, S4). Other microfractures developed
238 in the volume and nucleated at some distance from the saw-cut fault (Figures 4). Most
239 microfractures were transgranular.

240 The development of damage in the wall rock was heterogeneous in space and time (Figure
241 5). It occurred by the nucleation and growth of microfractures, detected as voids in the
242 tomograms. Because of the specificity of the experimental setup, an annulus of voids formed
243 around the fault zone due to the fault off-set at the core boundaries and resulting detachment

244 of the jacket (Movies S3 and S4). Therefore, the number of void voxels detected near the fault
245 plane does not reflect the true porosity on the fault plane (blue rectangles in Figure 5). Here,
246 we focus on off-fault damage, and do not consider the number of voxels detected near the
247 plane. Outside of this zone, damage developed in the wall rock as microfractures initiated,
248 grew and merged. Damage development was highly heterogeneous and developed only on
249 one side of the saw-cut fault for sample MONZ8C (Figure 5 a, c), whereas it developed on
250 both sides for sample MONZ10C with an asymmetric distribution (Figure 5 b, d).

251 In the smooth fault experiment, microporosity initially present in the sample corresponded
252 either to pores in feldspar minerals or pores initially present along the fault plane. We
253 extracted the pores in the fault plane by cropping a subvolume around the fault in the
254 tomogram that excluded the sides of the fault where some artefact porosity arises from the
255 separation between the jacket and the sample. With cumulated slip, the total volume of these
256 pores remained constant, close to a value of $2 \cdot 10^{-12} \text{ m}^3$, corresponding to a volume fraction of
257 $3 \cdot 10^{-6}$ when dividing by the sample volume (Figure 6a). Conversely, for the rough faults,
258 damage developed with slip and, for sample MONZ10C, the total volume of voids before the
259 sudden stress drop that led to failure was $4 \cdot 10^{-10} \text{ m}^3$, corresponding to a volume fraction of
260 $5 \cdot 10^{-4}$. This volume fraction increased with cumulated slip because of the growth of
261 microfractures and, just before macroscopic failure, it was more than two orders of magnitude
262 larger than for the smooth sample (Figure 6b).

263 Microfractures detected in the tomograms must have hosted a tensile component because
264 only fractures with apertures larger than the spatial resolution of the tomograms may be
265 observed. Some microfractures may have hosted a shear component due to local rotations
266 when nearby microfractures opened simultaneously or when a microfracture was not planar,
267 and contained kinks. Before the sudden stress drop that led to the final failure of the samples
268 with rough faults, several microfractures became interconnected and formed clusters

269 connected in three-dimensions. This secondary fault network formed with a sudden stress
270 drop and was presumably seismic. In the three samples where it occurred, this network had an
271 angle to the original surface in the range 75-85° (e.g., Figures 2b, S2, and last image in Movie
272 S4).

273

274 **4. Discussion**

275 **4.1 Deformation on the fault plane**

276 During slip, asperities may flatten, leading to an increase in actual contact area and a
277 strengthening of the interface (Scholz and Engelder, 1976). The drag of these asperities along
278 the surface produces mechanical wear and striations (Power and Tullis, 1987), revealed in
279 shear experiments on salt (Renard et al., 2012). The saw-cut fault interface strengthens in our
280 experiments, as the shear stress necessary to trigger slow slip increases with displacement
281 (Figure 1, a, c, e). Deformation along the interface occurs through the formation of striations,
282 the ploughing of asperities, and grain comminution (Figure 3). The first two processes could
283 explain the increasing strength, as they overcome the weakening effect of gouge formation
284 (Reches and Lockner, 2010). For the rough faults, damage first nucleates from the fault
285 surface for two samples (MONZ8C and MONZ10C). We infer that these microfractures could
286 open because of local tensile stress near an asperity on the fault surface, from which
287 microfractures could nucleate and propagate in the volume around the fault.

288

289 **4.2 Damage development and secondary faulting**

290 In a previous study, we performed Digital Volume Correlation to calculate the evolution
291 of incremental strain during slip on the preexisting fault (McBeck et al., 2019). For the
292 smooth fault (sample MONZ6C), almost 100% of the external work was dissipated by
293 frictional slip along the pre-cut interface, and the fault zone width did not broaden with

294 cumulated slip. For the rough fault (sample MONZ8C), damage zone development lead to
295 higher values of strain energy density. This strain energy was consumed in the formation of
296 off-fault damage, and the energy dissipated in frictional slip decreased relative to the smooth
297 fault experiment. A low amount of energy dissipated by off-fault damage was also identified
298 in a series of *in situ* rotary shear X-ray microtomography experiments performed on cement
299 mortar (Zhao et al., 2020). This study imaged the development of off-fault damage and found
300 that the fracture energy produced by this damage was less than 0.3% of the total energy
301 budget, in agreement with experiments where a fault propagated subcritically and created
302 damage at its tip (Aben et al., 2019).

303 In our experiments with rough faults, the secondary shear faults develop due to the
304 increasing number of tensile transgranular microfractures, and the coalescence of these
305 microfractures, with dilatancy preceding observed shear displacement (Figures 4, 5, Movies
306 S3, S4). This behavior is similar to the rupture of rock samples that do not include a pre-
307 existing saw-cut fault (Brace et al., 1966; Peng and Johnson, 1972; Reches and Lockner,
308 1994; Lei et al., 2000; Renard et al. 2018; Aben et al., 2019), and the faulting of rock samples
309 in which a pre-existing fault is not optimally oriented (Jackson and Dune, 1974; Giorgetti et
310 al., 2019) or is deformed in a rotary shear apparatus (Zhao et al., 2018; 2020). Analytical
311 calculations and experiments indicate that for pre-existing faults oriented at 45° from σ_1 , fault
312 reactivation may occur (Sibson, 1985) and that this angle is located near a transition where
313 one could observe either reactivation or off-fault fracture (Giorgetti et al., 2019).

314 Numerical simulations of dynamic rupture indicate that the distribution of off-fault
315 damage depends on the angle between the preexisting fault and the loading direction
316 (Poliakov et al., 2002; Xu and Ben-Zion, 2013). In these simulations, off-fault damage occurs
317 because the stress in the volume around the fault reaches the plastic limit of the material
318 during the propagation of a dynamic rupture. Secondary shear faulting at a high angle to the

319 main fault may form during rupture deceleration (Xu and Ben-Zion, 2013) or because fault
320 topography is rough and leads to the concentration of elastic and plastic strain in the volume
321 (Dunham et al., 2011; Sagy and Lyakhovskii, 2019). In contrast, in our experiments slip on the
322 saw-cut fault occurs as slow slip (insets in Figures 1 a, c, e) and off-fault damage is therefore
323 produced during quasi-static (slow) slip along the main fault. Secondary faulting in our
324 experiments could be reminiscent of antithetic Riedel R' shear bands (Riedel, 1929) that form
325 at an angle of 75° from the main displacement surface (e.g., Figure 2 in Davis et al., 1999).
326 However, Riedel patterns nucleate and grow from the tip of a fault during its propagation,
327 whereas in our experiments, microfractures nucleate from the fault surface or in the
328 surrounding volume. The interlocking of asperities on the fault plane creates stress
329 perturbations, which generate the microfractures.

330 Laboratory experiments on serpentines produced off-fault damage during slow slip
331 (French and Zhu, 2017). These experiments used fluid pressure to control the development of
332 slow ruptures. They produced secondary shear fractures at a high angle to the main fault
333 surface, with a final fast dynamic rupture triggered by the strain-weakening of microfracture
334 development. We also observe such a process. However, as there was no fluid in our
335 experiments, we so conclude that slow slip, damage formation, and secondary faulting may
336 also occur under dry conditions.

337 Fault roughness may control damage development in the surrounding volume for both
338 quasi-static and dynamic slip. The state of stress around a fault varies with the amplitude and
339 scaling of wavelengths of fault roughness (Dietrich and Smith, 2009; Dunham et al., 2011;
340 Sagy and Lyakhovskii, 2019). Tensile microfractures oriented at a high angle from a rough
341 fault segment have also been observed in the field (Griffith et al., 2010), and in the damage
342 zone of non-planar faults (e.g. Choi et al., 2016). In our experiments, fault roughness
343 amplitude controls a transition from slow slip events to secondary faulting. The fault with an

344 initial smooth surface with 0.6 μm roughness slipped without off-fault damage whereas slip
345 on the faults with an initial roughness of 4.9 μm produced off-fault damage and secondary
346 faulting. The presence of asperities (i.e. rougher parts of the surface) concentrates stress
347 during slip, allowing nucleating tensile microfractures that initiate directly from the saw-cut
348 fault or in the volume around it. Figure 7 shows an evolution of such a process where damage,
349 in the form of tensile microfractures, grow until the sample fails along a secondary fault
350 network oriented at a high angle ($> 75^\circ$) from the saw-cut fault.

351 We interpret this high angle as the result of two processes. First, some damage nucleated
352 at a high angle from the initial fault surface, probably near asperities where higher tensile
353 stress was concentrated (e.g., Zhao et al., 2018). However, because the initial roughness of the
354 rough fault was 4.9 μm , below the 6.5 μm spatial resolution of the X-ray tomography data, we
355 cannot identify which asperity led to the formation of these tensile microfractures. Second,
356 the boundary conditions in the experiments, with friction between the pistons and the sample,
357 could produce locally mode III loading, leading to stress rotation in the sample and local
358 tensile stress conditions.

359

360 **4.3 Secondary faulting in natural environments**

361 Laboratory experiments have shown that strain accommodation zones located between
362 parallel faults may explain the rotation of faults and, in some cases, the formation of
363 secondary faults with angles of 30-90° from the pre-existing fault (e.g., Figure 1 in McClay
364 and White, 1995; Bonini et al., 1997). In these two studies, a direction of extension was an
365 imposed boundary condition and varied during opening of laboratory rifts. In the experiments
366 of the present study, the main direction of deformation remained constant. Therefore, stress
367 rotation that induced secondary faulting results from local effects in the sample, and not from
368 a change in external boundary conditions.

369 Investigations of fault growth using the shear crack model usually assume propagation
370 from the tip of an existing fault (Segall and Pollard, 1980; Cowie and Scholz, 1992), with the
371 coalescence of tensile microfractures at various orientations at the fault tip (Vermilye and
372 Scholz, 1999). Secondary faulting at various angles from a main principle displacement
373 surface is often described as Riedel structures (Riedel, 1929; Davis et al., 1999). In the field,
374 active faults may show strain partitioning along orthogonal shear planes. For example, the
375 seismicity recorded near the San Jacinto Fault zone, California, shows a distribution along
376 orthogonal faults (Ross et al., 2017). Most earthquakes with a magnitude $M > 4$ occur along
377 pre-existing faults trending the NW-SE, quasi-parallel to the plate boundary. Conversely,
378 abundant microseismicity that contains $M < 2$ earthquakes occurs off-fault or on almost
379 vertical faults trending orthogonally to the plate boundary. These observations show that off-
380 fault damage occurs in the volume around main faults, and could align along almost
381 perpendicular directions in secondary faults, as in our experiments.

382 Dynamic rupturing along faults oriented perpendicularly to a pre-existing fault has been
383 observed in several cases where, during an earthquake sequence, slip on one fault triggers
384 earthquakes on almost orthogonal faults. During the Superstition Hill sequence in California
385 in 1987, two earthquakes (M_s 6.2 and M_s 6.6) occurred 11.4 hours apart on two faults that
386 were oriented almost perpendicularly. Hudnut et al., (1989) proposed two explanations: 1)
387 slip on one fault could decrease the normal stress on another fault, triggering an earthquake,
388 and 2) a stress diffusion process, presumably mediated by fluids, could explain the delay
389 between the two earthquakes. Strike-slip earthquakes along orthogonal faults has also been
390 observed during the 2012 Wharton Basin earthquake sequence in the Indo-Australian plate
391 (Yue et al., 2012) and the 2019 Ridgecrest sequence in California (Ross et al., 2019). In both
392 cases, two successive large earthquakes occurred on two orthogonal faults with a delay of 40
393 seconds for the Wharton Basin sequence and 34 hours for the Ridgecrest sequence. These

394 observations, supported by our experimental results, indicate that damage and stress transfer
395 in the volume around a slipping fault can induce localization and slip on secondary faults
396 oriented at a high angle to the main fault.

397

398 **5. Conclusions**

399 Using dynamic synchrotron microtomography imaging of crystalline rocks containing a
400 preexisting fault, under *in situ* stress conditions of of 2-3 km depth, we quantify on- and off-
401 fault damage produced during slow slip. Preexisting faults were oriented at 45° to the
402 maximum compressive stress, and were reactivated during loading. For an initially smooth
403 fault ($S_q = 0.6 \mu\text{m}$), slip occurred as slow slip events, with the development of mechanical
404 striations on the fault plane and likely rotation of the principal stress directions. Although the
405 interface strengthened with slip, no observed off-fault damage formed. For an initially rough
406 fault ($S_q = 4.9 \mu\text{m}$), slip occurred as slow slip events and damage developed in the
407 surrounding volume, perhaps due to the locking of asperities on the fault plane. This damage
408 occurred as tensile microfractures whose density and volume increased with slip on the main
409 fault, until a fault network propagated and slipped dynamically at a high angle to the
410 preexisting fault. Our results demonstrate that off-fault damage forms during slow slip, and
411 that its distribution may be asymmetric, even in rocks of the same stiffness. This damage can
412 allow dynamic rupture along secondary faults, as observed in several earthquake sequences
413 that activated dynamic ruptures on orthogonal sets of faults.

414

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419 272217). A dataset with all X-ray tomography data is available (Renard, 2020).

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541

542 **Table and Figures**

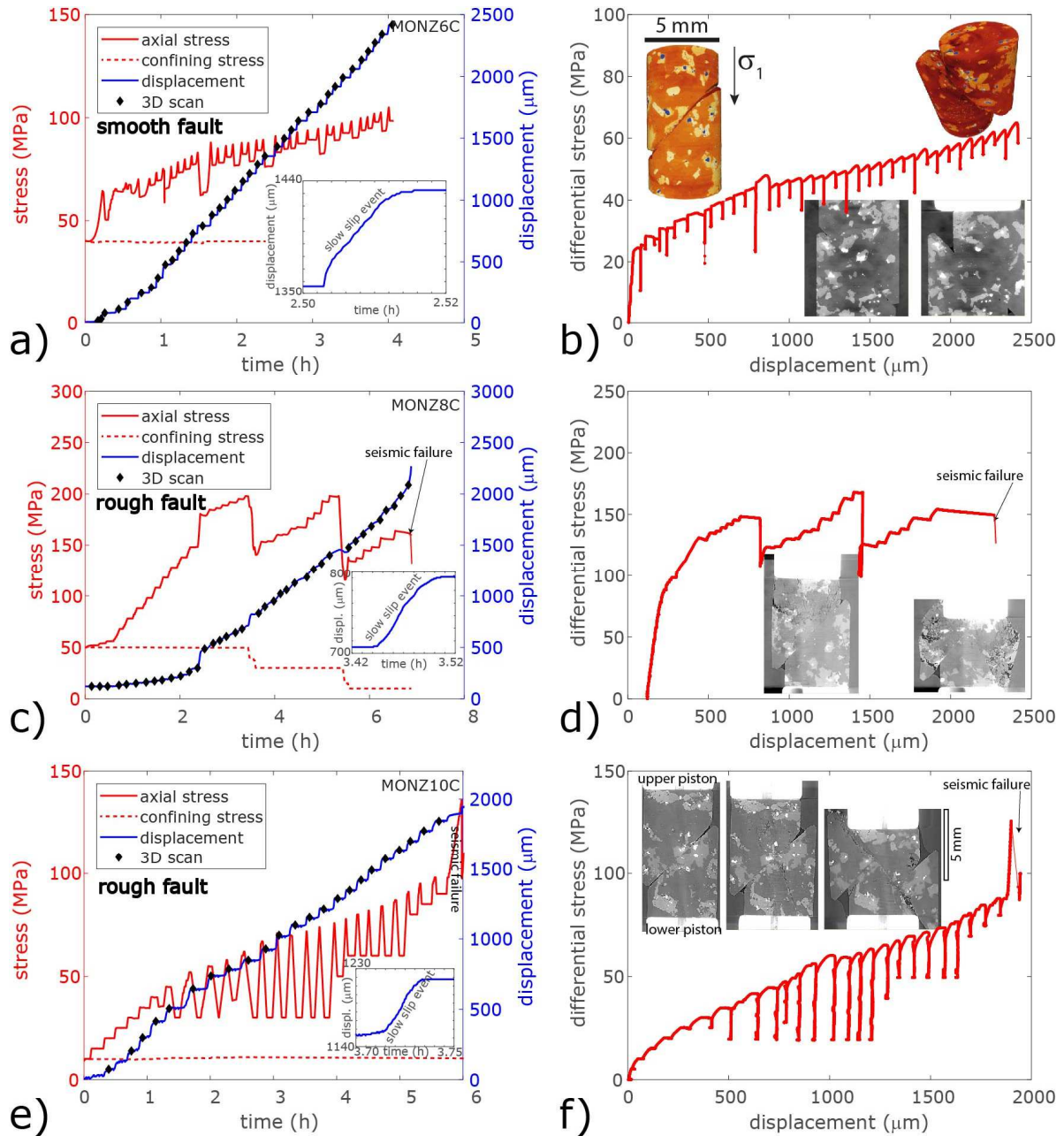
543

544 Table 1: Experimental conditions. All experiments were performed at a temperature of 25°C,
 545 room humidity and no fluid pressure. The maximum axial stress was reached either when the
 546 experiment was stopped (sample MONZ6C) or when a secondary fault formed, leading to
 547 sample failure (other three samples). For sample MONZ8C, the confining pressure was
 548 reduced twice during the experiment because the axial loading reached the maximum
 549 capability of 200 MPa of the deformation apparatus. Initial surface roughness is 0.6 μm and
 550 4.9 μm for smooth and rough faults, respectively.

551

sample name	confining pressure	maximum axial stress	total slip	# of 3D scans	fault roughness	secondary faulting
MONZ6C	40 MPa	110 MPa	2420 μm	41	smooth	No
MONZ8C	50-30-10 MPa	163 MPa	1960 μm	42	rough	Yes
MONZ9C	10 MPa	70 MPa	890 μm	5	rough	Yes
MONZ10C	10 MPa	120 MPa	1950 μm	31	rough	Yes

552



553

554 Figure 1: Experimental conditions for samples MONZ6C (a, b, see Movie S1), MONZ8C (c,

555 d, see Movies S2, S3) and MONZ10C (e, f, see Movie S4). a, c, e) Stress conditions (left axis,

556 red color) and displacement along the fault (right-axis, blue color) as a function of time. Each

557 black diamond indicates the acquisition of one X-ray microtomography 3D image. Inset

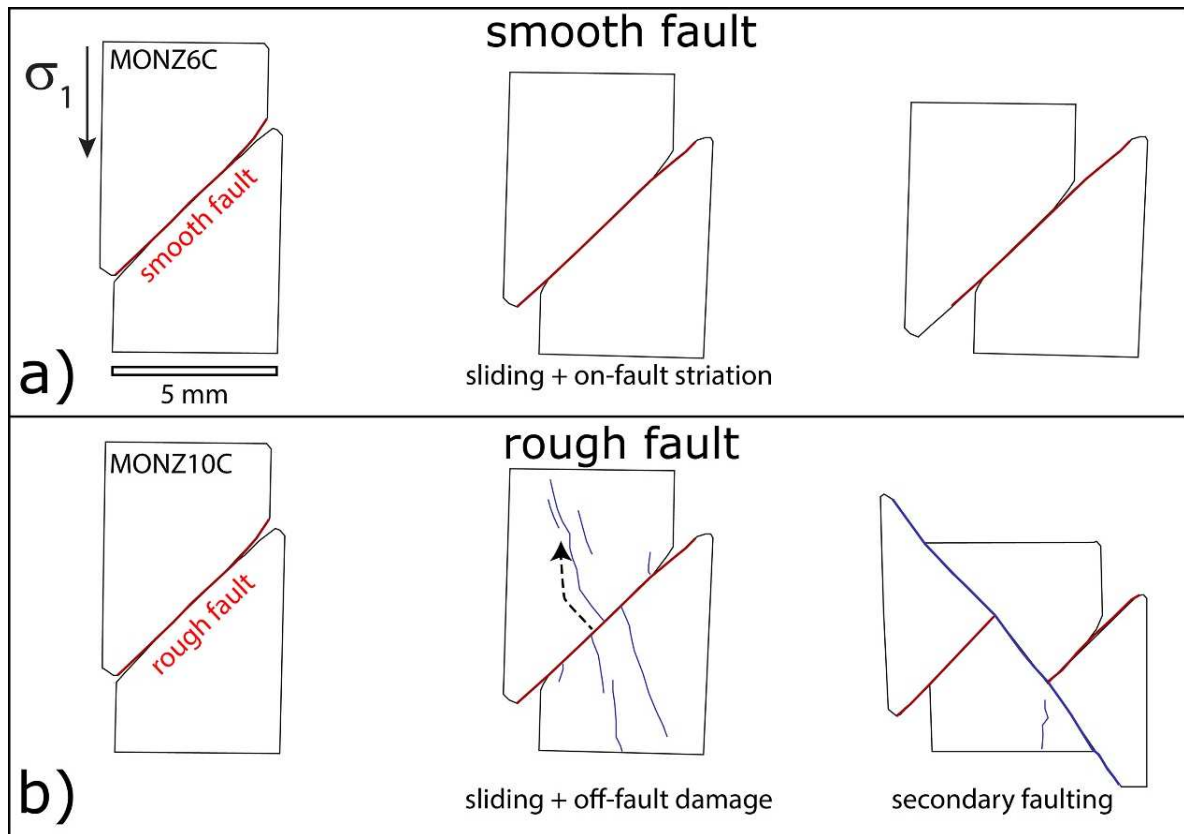
558 shows that at each stress increase, fault sliding occurred with a slow slip event. For the faults

559 with larger roughness (c, e), the stress drop at the end of each experiment (black arrows)

560 occurred suddenly and corresponds to a fast, presumably seismic, failure of the sample along

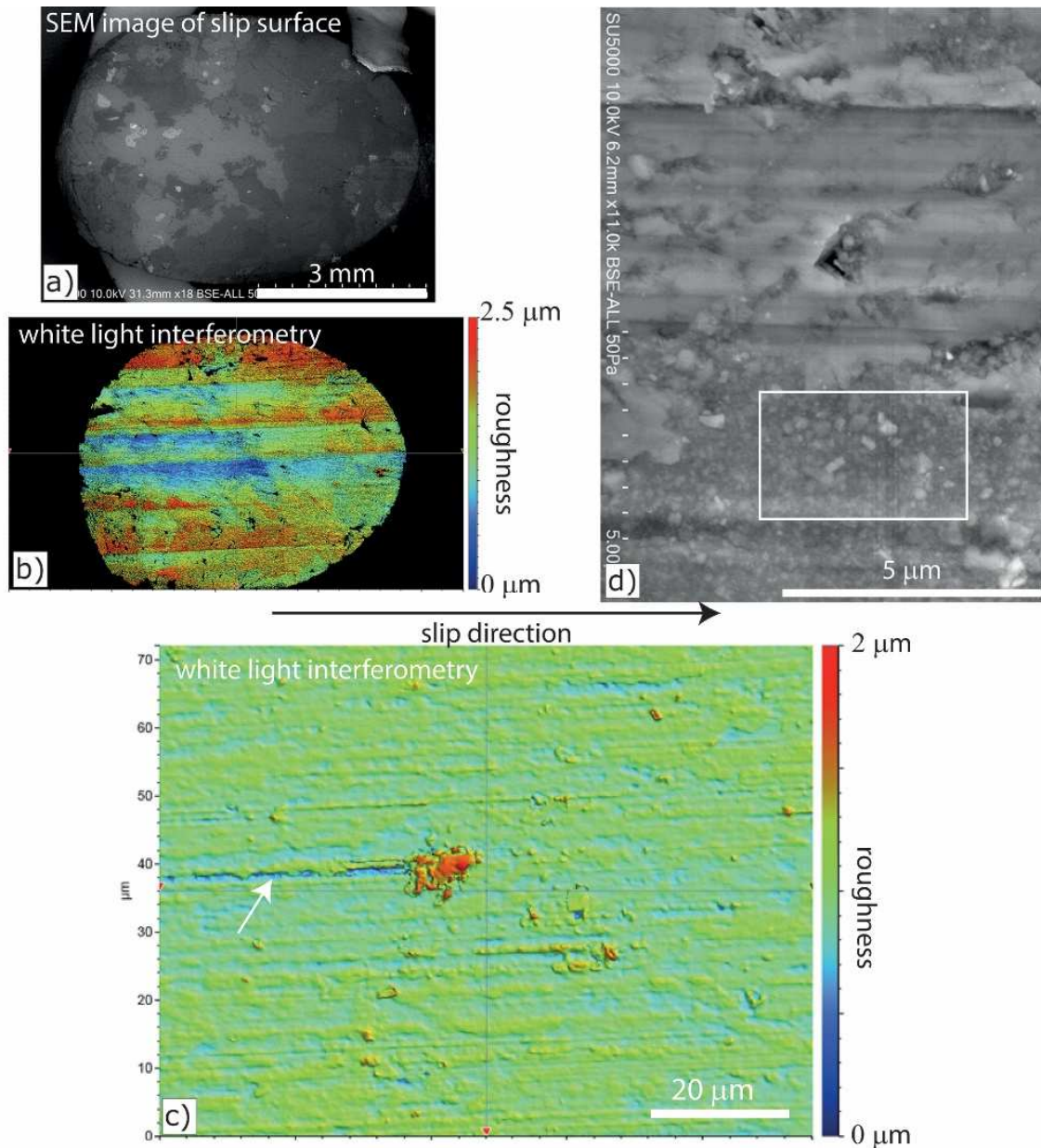
561 new faults. b, d, f) Differential stress as a function of displacement along the fault. Insets

562 show either 3D views (c) or 2D views (d, f) of the saw-cut samples at different stages of slip.
563 Sample diameter is 5 mm and the saw-cut fault is oriented at 45° to σ_1 . For all samples, the
564 upper and lower pistons appear as white rectangles on the 2D slices. Experiment MONZ6C
565 was performed with a smooth preexisting fault, whereas the other experiments were
566 performed on rough initial faults.



567

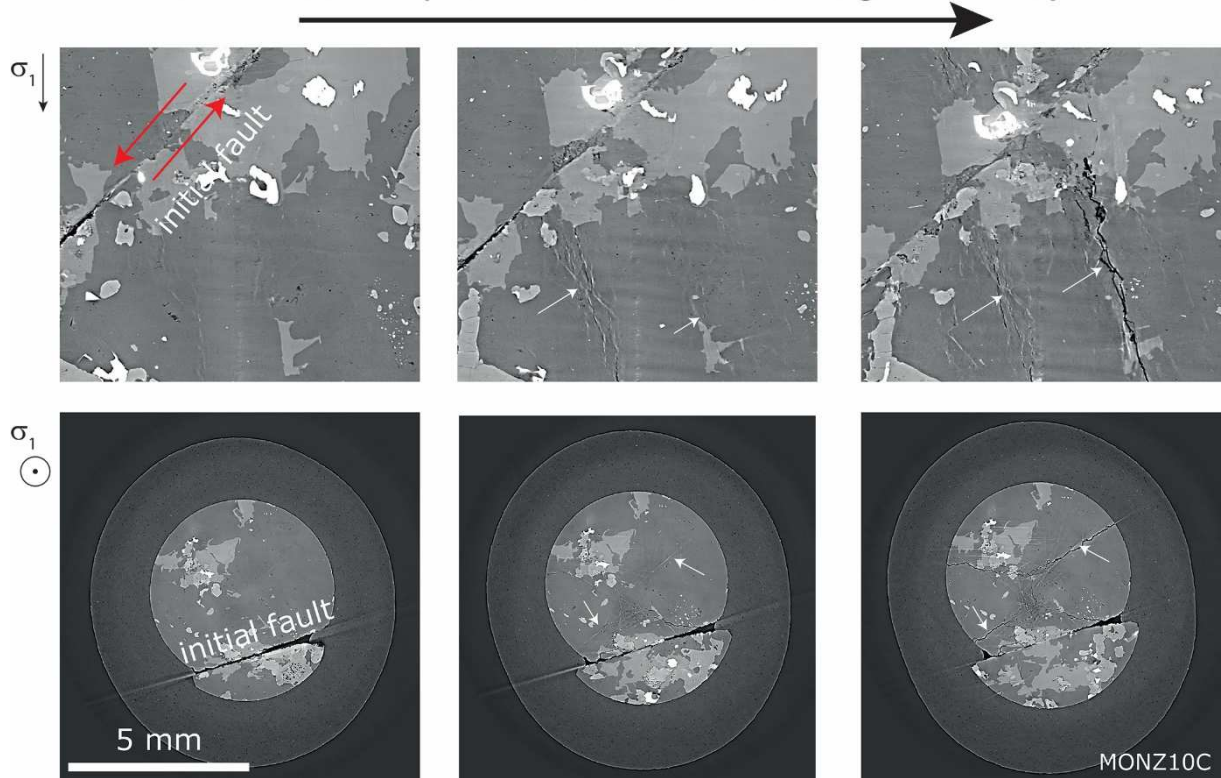
568 Figure 2: Cumulated slip evolution of two samples with preexisting saw-cut fault and loaded
 569 with axial stress σ_1 . a) Sample MONZ6C (see Movie S1) had an initial lower fault roughness,
 570 and slipped smoothly over the full experiment, producing striations and discontinuous gouge
 571 on the fault plane. b) Sample MONZ10C (see Movie S4) had an initial larger fault roughness
 572 and slipped while damage developed in the volume surrounding the initial fault, leading to the
 573 formation of a secondary fault oriented at a high angle. Some microfractures nucleated almost
 574 perpendicularly from the fault and then their direction rotated toward the direction of the main
 575 compressive stress σ_1 (dashed arrow). Samples MONZ8C and MONZ9C, with initial rough
 576 fault, had a similar evolution as in b).



577

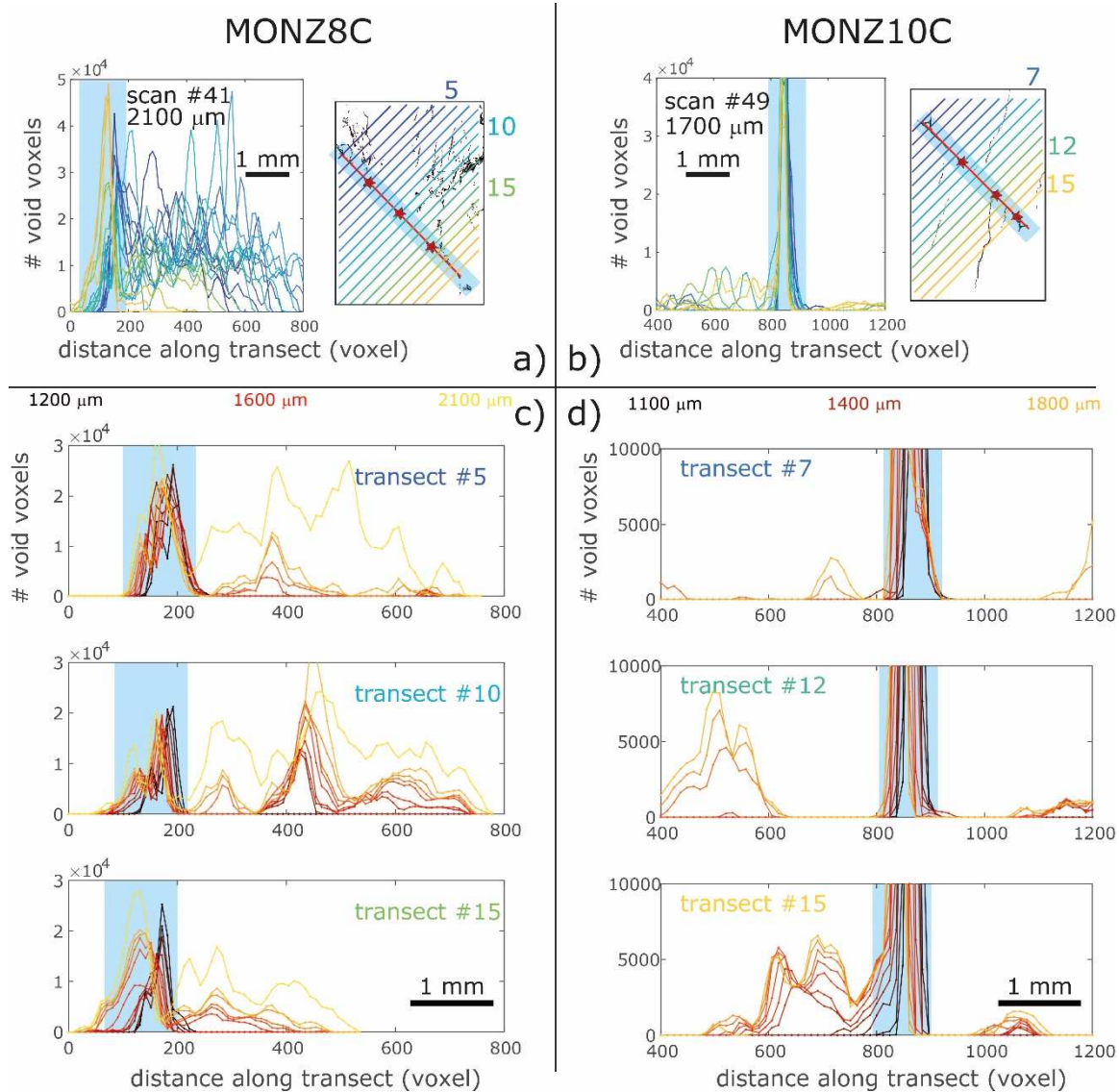
578 Figure 3: Slip surface of sample MONZ6C after the experiment. a) Scanning electron
 579 microscope image of the entire fault surface. b, c) White light interferometry measurement of
 580 surface topography and ploughing of material at the tip of striations. A white arrow marks one
 581 of these striations. d) Scanning electron microscope image of the slip surface with striations
 582 parallel to slip direction. Inside the white rectangle, small particles produced by wear and
 583 grain comminution have accumulated in the low topography parts of the surface, forming a
 584 discontinuous gouge.

simultaneous slip and wall-rock damage development



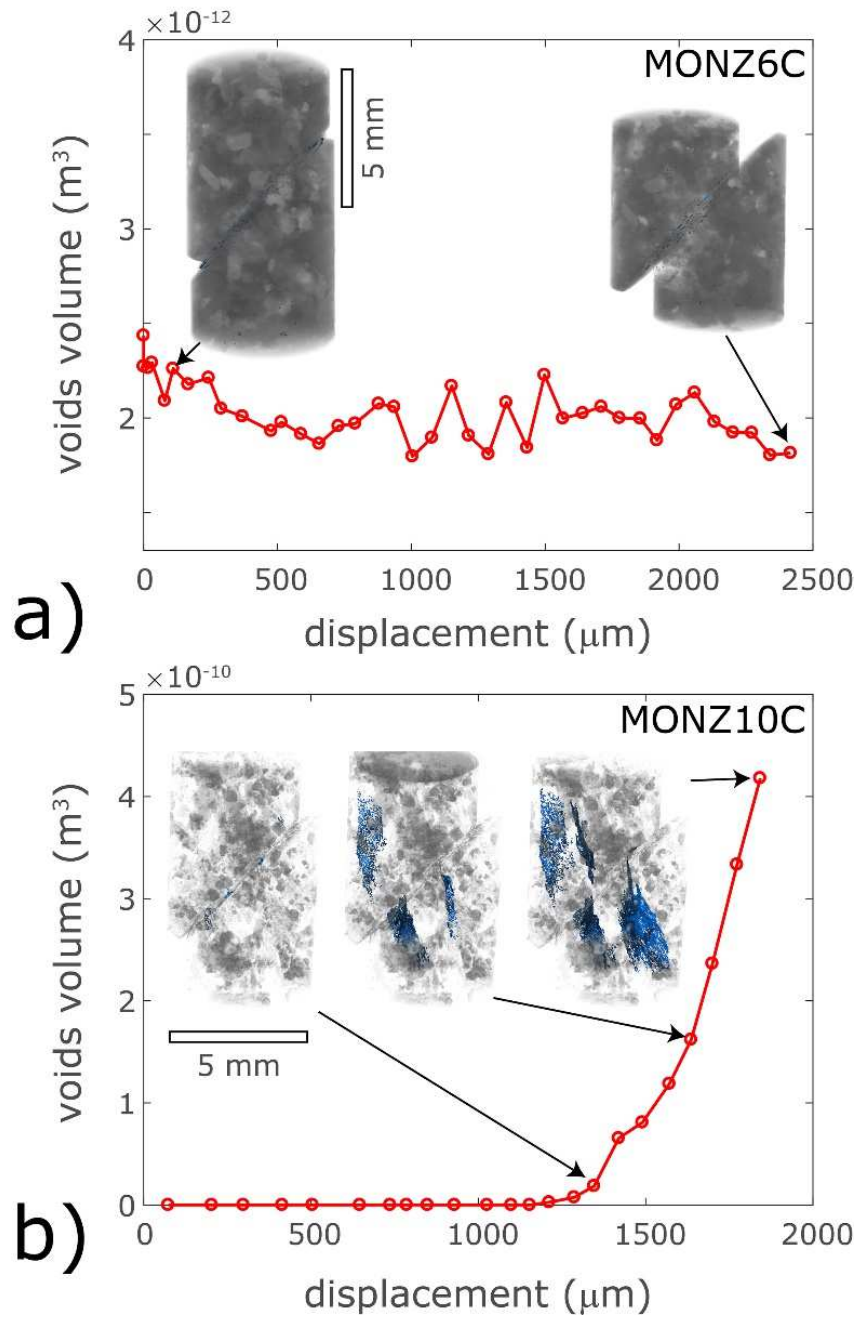
585

586 Figure 4: Two-dimensional sections in the middle of sample MONZ10C at three stages of
587 deformation showing slip along the saw-cut fault and damage development in the surrounding
588 volume. Top row: vertical sections parallel to the main compressive stress. Red arrows
589 indicate slip direction on the saw-cut fault. Bottom row: horizontal sections perpendicular to
590 the main compressive stress. Damage (white arrows) appears as cracks filled with air.



591
 592 Figure 5: Distribution and evolution of wall-rock damage with slip. a, b) Number of void
 593 voxels along transects perpendicular to the fault plane in a tomogram close to failure for
 594 samples MONZ8C (after 2100 μm of slip) and MONZ10C (after 1700 μm of slip),
 595 respectively. The insets on the right side show the location of the sampling transects over two-
 596 dimensional vertical section in the sample, with the saw-cut fault in red and secondary
 597 microfractures in black. The numbers indicate transects shown in c) and d). The blue
 598 transparent rectangles highlight the region for which the number of void voxel is not
 599 representative of off-fault damage (see Section 3.3). c, d) Evolution of the number of void
 600 voxels with cumulated slip along three transects indicated in a) and b) for samples MONZ8C

601 and MONZ10C, respectively. The increasing number of void voxels located outside of the
602 saw-cut fault (blue rectangles) track the development of wall-rock damage with cumulated
603 slip.



604

605 Figure 6: Evolution of voids volume, indicative of damage development, with slip. a) Smooth

606 fault (sample MONZ6C). Voids correspond to microporosity along the fault plane and in

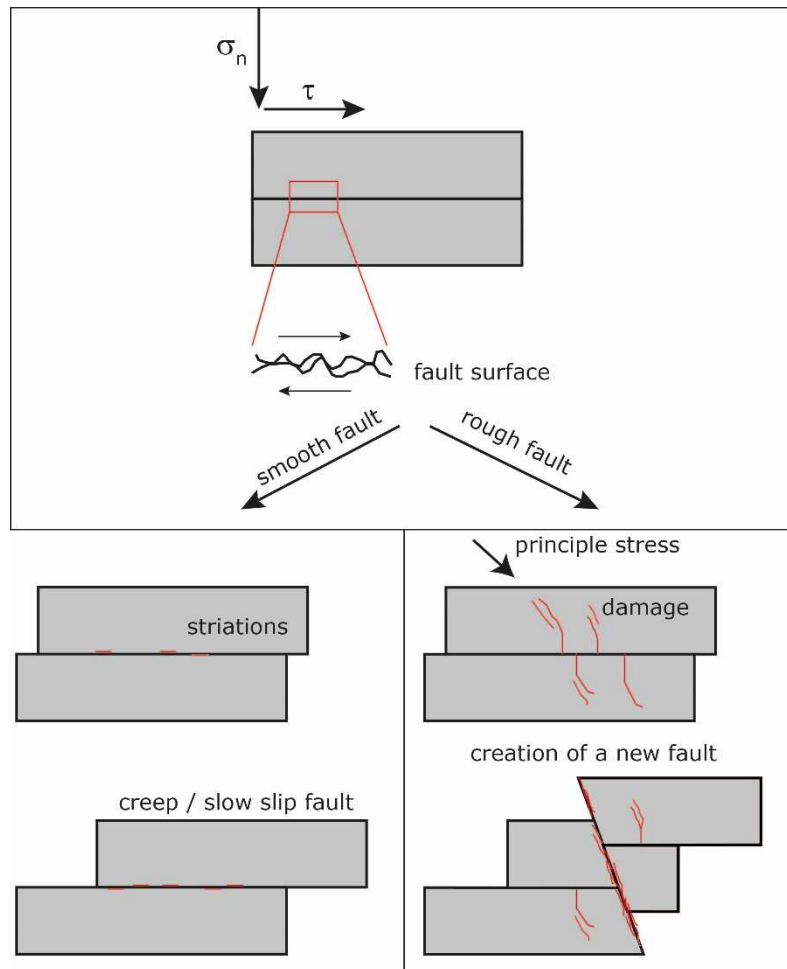
607 feldspar minerals. Their volume does not vary significantly with cumulated slip. Insets: Three

608 3D renderings of the sample with porosity shown in blue. b) Rough fault (sample

609 MONZ10C). Voids correspond to microfractures that open around the saw-cut fault, as well

610 as preexisting porosity. Insets: Three 3D renderings of the sample with microfractures shown

611 in blue and minerals in transparent gray shades.



612

613 Figure 7: Dynamic X-ray microtomography experiments enable the identification of two
 614 modes of slow slip and deformation along a pre-existing fault with different initial roughness.

615 A smooth fault may slide by continuous creep or slow slip events, producing striations and
 616 gouge along the plane (bottom left), whereas slow slip events along a rougher fault induce

617 additional damage (red) in the surrounding volume, leading to the sudden nucleation of a
 618 secondary fault oriented at a high angle (bottom right).

619