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Irene Puliti, Alberto Pizzi, Lucilla Benedetti, Alessandra Di Domenica, Jules Fleury. Comparing Slip Distribution of an Active Fault System at Various Timescales: Insights for the Evolution of the Mt. Vettore-Mt. Bove Fault System in Central Apennines. *Tectonics*, 2020, 39 (9), 10.1029/2020TC006200 . hal-03004675

HAL Id: hal-03004675

<https://hal.science/hal-03004675>

Submitted on 30 Nov 2020

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**Comparing slip distribution of an active fault system at various timescales:
insights for the evolution of the Mt. Vettore- Mt. Bove fault system in Central
Apennines**

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Key Points:

- 2016 coseismic ruptures along the Mt. Vettore fault system are compared with Holocene offsets on fault scarps and Quaternary geological throws.
- Maximum fault throw has been localized at the system southern tip over the last 18 kyr
- Pre-existing thrust acts as a transversal barrier for the southward fault system’s evolution
- .

Abstract

In 2016, the Mt. Vettore-Mt. Bove normal fault system (VBFS) broke during three earthquakes (Mw 6.0, Mw 5.9, and Mw 6.5), associated with clear coseismic ruptures. Based on high-resolution topography and geological field data, we determined the displacements of the VBFS. The distributions of the coseismic and post-glacial displacements exhibit similar asymmetric shapes, suggesting self-similar slip profiles over the last 18 kyr. The highest displacement during the 2016 events is localized on the southern Mt. Vettore segments, the southern tip of the VBFS, which also showed the maximum throw of 32 m over the last 18 kyr yielding to a very fast throw rate of 1.6 ±0.5 mm/yr. Assuming a constant throw rate, the geological displacement we determined suggests an inception age of 200-250 kyr for the surface rupturing faults that ruptured in 2016 on the Mt.

25 Vettore sector. This value can be interpreted as the minimum age for the onset of those faults in the
26 Mt.Vettore and might result from a southward shift of VBFS activity with a change of the fault
27 system pattern. We infer that the observed slip distribution, maximum at Mt. Vettore and tapering-
28 off southward, might be due to the VBFS lengthening processes toward the Laga Fault and its
29 interaction with pre-existing structure such as OAS thrust that might play a key role in controlling
30 the VBFS's evolution.

31 **1 Introduction**

32 Long-term fault escarpments are built by the addition of incremental earthquakes and thus contain
33 key information on earthquake rupture processes, where the rupture stopped and where it has
34 propagated during those past events. Several studies have proposed that earthquake ruptures may be
35 arrested by structural and/or geometrical complexities, such as fault intersections and step-overs,
36 (Wesnousky 1988, Bejar-Pizarro et al. 2013; Klinger 2000). Constraining the spatial extent of a
37 coseismic rupture (e.g., where it may be arrested during an earthquake), is fundamental for deriving
38 the expected earthquake magnitude, essential for seismic design and population preparedness.
39 However, few datasets exist to unravel whether the segmentation seen in coseismic ruptures is
40 characteristic through time and, if yes, over which time scales. The seismic sequence that occurred
41 in 2016 in Central Italy represents a great chance to observe and understand how a normal fault
42 system evolves because the detailed pattern of the 2016 coseismic throw can be compared to the
43 cumulative displacements that can be constrained from geological and geomorphological analysis.
44 This sequence has been characterized by three spatially and temporally clustered mainshocks that
45 are localized within a 25 km-long area that is oriented NNW-SSE (the active Mt. Vettore-Mt. Bove
46 fault system, VBFS): 24 August, Mw 6.0; 26 October, Mw 5.9; and 30 October, Mw 6.5 (Civico et
47 al., 2018, Villani et al., 2018a). The surface faulting that is associated with the 30 October
48 earthquake (maximum dip-slip displacement of ~ 2 m; Villani et al., 2018a) is one of the clearest
49 and most spectacular coseismic ruptures that have been observed after an earthquake in the

Mediterranean area in recent decades. The coseismic slip, however, is complex and is distributed within several rupturing segments. How the rupture propagated through these various segments and what role inherited structures plays in this complex pattern are still debated (see Porreca et al. 2020 for a complete discussion and references therein). In particular, several models have been proposed that emphasize the presence and the role of structural barriers at depth in the rupture propagation and arrest (e.g., Chiaraluce et al., 2017; Chiarabba et al., 2018; Falcucci et al., 2018; Lavecchia et al., 2016; Pizzi et al., 2017; Scognamiglio et al., 2018; Walters et al., 2018).

Here we provide a set of data of the surface fault displacement at different time scales allowing to discuss the temporal and spatial evolution of this active normal fault system. We investigated the entire VBFS displacement at three different time scales, hereafter referred to as: “long-term”, (~ 1 Myr); i.e. based on the geological slip accumulation during Quaternary extension; “mid-term” (~ last 18 kyr), i.e. derived from geomorphic evidence of faulting following the Last Glacial Maximum (see further explanation in section 3); “short-term”, during an instantaneous seismic event. Iezzi et al., (2018), Brozzetti et al. (2019) and Porreca et al. (2020) have also compared the geological and the co-seismic displacement but focusing on the Mt Vettore fault.

We compared the 2016 coseismic slip distribution along the entire VBFS system with morphological and geological throws (i.e., vertical-displacement component) from topographic profiles, cross-sections, geological horizons, and field surveys. Our results can better constrain how a normal fault system evolves in the short-, mid- and long-term and how its evolution is influenced by fault segmentation and structural barriers. We also investigate the link between surface observations and structures at depth.

2 Seismotectonics of the area

2.1 Regional geological framework

The Apennine chain is an NE-verging imbricate fold-and-thrust belt that developed from the Oligocene along the margin of the Adriatic microplate (Carminati & Doglioni, 2012; Patacca et al.,

2008 and reference therein). The chain is now experiencing post-orogenic ENE-oriented Quaternary extension (Barchi et al., 2000; Calamita & Pizzi, 1994; Galadini & Galli, 2000; Lavecchia et al., 1994; Pizzi et al., 2002) with regional extension rates of 3-4 mm/yr (D'Agostino et al., 2008; Faure Walker et al., 2009) related to the relative motion between the Adriatic microplate and the Tyrrhenian coastal region (D'Agostino et al., 2011; D'Agostino, 2014; Devoti et al., 2017). In the study area, the main structure of the chain is represented by the Olevano-Antrodoco-Sibillini (OAS) thrust, an arc-shaped thrust front that strikes NW to the north and NNE to the south with respect to the Mt. Vettore pivot, or obliquely to the NNW-SSE-trending Quaternary normal fault systems (Figure 1). The OAS thrust affects Mesozoic-Tertiary sedimentary successions that are characterized by platform-to-basinal limestones, marly limestones, and marls and Messinian turbidite siliciclastic deposits by superposing the carbonate units over the Messinian deposits of the Laga Fm (Figure 2.a; Calamita & Deiana, 1988; Mazzoli et al., 2005; Pierantoni et al., 2013).

The location and orientation of the OAS thrust seem to have been strongly controlled by a pre-existing Early Jurassic normal-fault zone: the NNE-SSW Ancona-Anzio lineament. This lineament has been interpreted as a high-angle fault zone that is approximately one hundred kilometers long and acted during the Mesozoic–Early Tertiary as a syn-sedimentary extensional fault system (Castellarin et al., 1982; Parotto & Pratlurion, 1975). This fault separated the Umbria–Marche pelagic domains to the west from the Lazio–Abruzzi carbonate platform domain to the east (Castellarin et al., 1978). During the Neogene, this regional paleogeographic boundary experienced positive inversion through a fold-and-thrust belt contractional phase, which worked as an oblique high-angle thrust ramp (e.g., Calamita et al., 2011; 2012; Lavecchia, 1985; Tavarnelli et al., 2004).

On the other hand, the shallower portion of the OAS thrust surface, i.e., the first 2-3 km, shows low-angle geometry and is locally folded by NW-SE-/NNW-SSE-trending anticlines that developed in its footwall (Alberti et al., 1996; Di Domenica et al., 2012; Porreca et al., 2018).

In recent decades, several authors suggested that the OAS thrust could represent an oblique structural barrier to the growth and associated seismicity of active Quaternary seismogenic

101 extensional faults (Pizzi & Galadini, 2009; Di Domenica et al., 2012). Evidence consistent with this
102 idea was presented by the spatial and temporal evolution of the 2016 seismic sequence, where the
103 OAS played a major role in the slip propagation rupture halting, or in fault slip accommodating
104 extension (e.g. Chiaraluce et al., 2017; Pizzi et al., 2017, Walters et al., 2018).
105 Additionally, the structural setting of the area is complicated by the presence of other pre-, syn- and
106 post-thrusting normal faults from different extensional phases that are widely recognized in the
107 Apennines, such as the Neogene normal faulting occurred alongside crustal and lithospheric
108 foreland flexural processes, influencing the deposition of foredeep sequences (Tavani et al., 2015;
109 Tavarnelli & Peacock, 1999). Those faults experienced a Neogene positive inversion with the
110 compressional phase and, then, a negative inversion during the Quaternary (e.g. Di Domenica et al.,
111 2012 and reference therein). The Quaternary normal faults overprinted the Neogene contractional
112 structures (e.g., Calamita and Pizzi, 1994; Lavecchia et al., 1994; Galadini & Galli, 2000), since at
113 least the Early Pleistocene (1.1-1.2 Ma according to Blumetti and Dramis, 1992; Coltorti et al.,
114 1998; Calamita et al., 1999).

115 **2.2 Monte Vettore –Monte Bove fault system**

116 The Mt. Vettore-Mt. Bove normal fault system (VBFS), which was responsible for the 2016 Central
117 Italy seismic sequence, represents one of the easternmost active fault systems that affect the
118 Central-North Apennines at the Sibillini Mt. Range (Figure 1). The VBFS is located in the hanging
119 wall of the OAS thrust and consists of a ~26 km-long, N150°-striking, SW-dipping normal-fault
120 system with prevailing Quaternary activity, alongside dozens of 1-4 km-long en echelon segments
121 that are accompanied by synthetic and antithetic splays in the main fault's hanging wall (Figure 2).
122 The VBFS's activity strongly controls both the Quaternary deposition and present-day
123 physiography in the Sibillini Mts., which are characterized by two different morphologies in their
124 eastern and western flanks (Figure 2.b). The uplifting footwall block coincides with the eastern
125 flank of the mountain range, while the hanging wall hosts a gentle planation surface westward. The
126 eastern portion consists of several valleys, of which many are narrow canyons that are oriented E-W

127 and flow eastward into the Adriatic Sea. The drainage divide is located at the ridge crest of the
128 Sibillini Mts. Close to the range's top, moraines deposits in glacial valleys and cirque morphologies
129 testify the presence of local glaciers above 1750 m at around 28 kyr, contemporaneous to those on
130 the Gran Sasso Massif, with a minor final expansion at 18 kyr (Giraudi, 2003). The western flank
131 has a smoother morphology characterized by large valleys mainly oriented N-S (Coltorti &
132 Farabollini 1995; Pizzi et al., 2002). Several authors (Blumetti et al., 1993; Calamita & Pizzi, 1994;
133 Coltorti & Pieruccini, 2000; Pizzi & Scisciani, 2000) described this smooth topography as a major
134 and unique planation surface from the late lower Pliocene. The VBFS's trace is visible in the
135 morphology and is associated with an abrupt change in the mountain slope that underlined well-
136 preserved fault scarps throughout the system except in areas where erosional/depositional processes
137 are strong like in the Ussita valley.

138 This system was mapped and described in detail for the first time by Calamita & Pizzi (1992).
139 These authors recognized a main NNW-SSE fault trend that was marked by the presence of several
140 kilometer-long sub-parallel primary and secondary faults (both synthetic and antithetic) with
141 oblique transfer-fault segments, en echelon patterns, and relay zones. In the southernmost sector,
142 two distinct en echelon segments can be recognized at high elevations along Mt. Vettore's western
143 slope, while N160° basal faults with large geologic throws (i.e., >1000 m) border a large endorheic
144 basin: the Piano Grande (Castelluccio Basin), a 12 km-long and 8 km-wide intermountain basin at
145 ~1300 m a.s.l. (Figure 2). The faults high on the flanks of the Mt. Vettore and the one bounding the
146 Piano Grande may sole into a major structure at depth. The development of this basin is also
147 controlled by other differently oriented normal faults around the marginal depression, showing
148 conjugated faults that trend N20° as recognized by tomography (e.g., Villani et al., 2018). The SW-
149 dipping fault bounding the Piano Grande exhibits a great geological displacement of 1000 m (e.g.,
150 Calamita et al., 1992; Pierantoni et al., 2013), but there is no morphological evidence of recent
151 activity with alluvial fans and debris-slope deposits that appears undisturbed since the Middle
152 Pleistocene (Coltorti and Farabollini, 1995). Galadini and Galli (2003) revealed a recent activity

153 (i.e. at least 3 events before the 2016 event) on a secondary fault (i.e., total morphological throw ≤ 3
 154 m and 960 m-long, Figure 2) running 900 m west far from the basin-bounding fault, in the Piano
 155 Grande (Pierantoni et al. 2013). The most recent paleoseismological investigations on the antithetic
 156 and synthetic splays of the VBFS that ruptured in 2016 suggest that those splays have also
 157 experienced earthquakes of $M_w \geq 6.5$ -6.6, over the last 9 kyr (Galli et al., 2019, Cinti et al., 2019).
 158 The 2016 seismic sequence began on 24 August with a M_w 6.0 earthquake NW of Amatrice
 159 (Chiaraluce et al., 2017). The sequence continued on 26 October with a M_w 5.9 event and epicenter
 160 close to Visso (Castelsantangelo sul Nera), and then the major Norcia event (M_w 6.5) occurred on
 161 30 October, one of the strongest historical events in Central Italy (Figure 1). The focal-mechanism
 162 solutions of these major events are fully consistent with the normal-fault kinematics of the NNW-
 163 striking VBFS and, generally, the Central Apennines extension, indicating an ENE-stretching axis.
 164 The first earthquake produced surface faulting for a length of ~ 5 -6 km along the southernmost
 165 portion of the VBFS, with an average vertical offset of ~ 0.10 -0.15 m and local peaks over 0.30 m
 166 (Lavecchia et al., 2016; Pucci et al., 2017). The 26 October event caused surface faulting in the
 167 northernmost portion of the VBFS (Pizzi et al., 2017; Civico et al., 2018; Brozzetti et al., 2019).
 168 Surface faulting from the last event involved almost the entire length of the VBFS, overprinting the
 169 ruptures from the Amatrice earthquake (e.g. Villani et al., 2018b), and some of the 26 October event
 170 (Wedmore et al., 2019). All the faults that ruptured during the 2016 seismic sequence, according to
 171 Villani et al. (2018b) database, are reported in Figure 2 as red solid lines.
 172 As observed through detailed geological mapping (e.g., Livio et al., 2016; Pucci et al., 2017 and
 173 references therein) and analysis of seismological slip data (e.g., Chiaraluce et al., 2017;
 174 Scognamiglio et al., 2018; Improta et al., 2019), the rupture process and surface-deformation
 175 patterns that characterized the 2016 seismic sequence were very complex. The sequence involved
 176 the VBFS alongside the Laga Fault (LF in Figure 1) and OAS thrust (Lavecchia et al., 2016; Pizzi
 177 et al., 2017; Villani et al., 2018b; Falcucci et al., 2018). The complex surface-deformation patterns
 178 that were reconstructed by GPS and DInSAR data inversion (e.g. Cheloni et al., 2017;

179 Scognamiglio et al., 2018) revealed interesting information regarding fault linkages and interactions
 180 and the role of structural barriers between the VBFS and the Laga Faults. Some authors highlighted
 181 how the OAS thrust appears to modulate the evolution of the sequence interfering with coseismic
 182 slip distribution and the fault segments interaction (Chiaraluce et al., 2017; Scognamiglio et al.,
 183 2018; Ragon et al., 2019). This interference in the slip propagation is also supported by the rupture
 184 interruption for each earthquake in the sequence that determined their respective magnitudes and
 185 prevented cascading rupture in a single earthquake of Mw 6.7 or larger (Walters et al., 2018).

186 **3 Materials and Methods**

187 To analyze the VBFS in detail, we subdivided the fault system into four main fault sectors that
 188 show continuous fault traces and homogeneous structural and geomorphological characteristics.
 189 From south to north, these sectors are the Mt. Vettore, Mt. Porche, Mt. Bove, and Cupi-Ussita
 190 synthetic faults and the San Lorenzo antithetic fault, alongside 13 smaller associated fault segments
 191 (0.9-2.5 km long) (Figure 2). We define “MV” as the Mt. Vettore-related fault sector, “MP” as the
 192 Mt. Porche (and San Lorenzo)-related fault sector, “MB” as the Mt. Bove-related fault sector and
 193 “CU” as the Cupi-Ussita-related fault sector.

194 The MV sector consists of synthetic faults that dip SW and strike between N140° and N175° on the
 195 mountain flank that borders the Piano Grande. Although the 30 October earthquake caused surface
 196 faulting of a fault in the SW portion of the basin, this antithetic fault has not been analyzed because
 197 limited data were available and coseismic ruptures were evident only in a tunnel that remained
 198 closed after the earthquakes (Galli et al., 2017). The antithetic and synthetic segments of the MP
 199 sector define a graben morphology, while two N150° main parallel synthetic segments comprise the
 200 MB and CU sectors. We distinguished the latter two into two sectors because no continuity between
 201 fault traces was observed across the Ussita valley (Figure 2).

202 *3.1 Short-term co-seismic displacement*

203 The short-term displacement of the VBFS has been determined through original field measurements
204 of the coseismic ruptures and integrated with the available database of Villani et al., (2018a).
205 Because of the high variability of the throws along the fault strike, we identified 84 points and we
206 determined the arithmetic mean of the all throw measurements in the range of 25 meters around
207 each point.

208 *3.2 Mid-term cumulative displacements*

209 We refer to mid-term displacements to characterize well-preserved geomorphic evidence of faulting
210 following the Last Glacial Maximum. The Last Glacial Maximum corresponds to a period where
211 changes in the modes of erosion are likely to have controlled the preservation of tectonic offsets
212 (e.g., Peltzer et al., 1988). Due to the presence of the former neighboring ice sheets (e.g., Giraudi et
213 al., 2003), the study area, at elevations between 1300 and 2400 m asl on average, was likely
214 subjected to periglacial conditions during the last glacial phase. In this context, earlier cumulative
215 offsets and fault scarps were potentially erased due to erosional processes (e.g., Peltzer et al., 1988).
216 This assumption is also supported by ^{36}Cl exposure dating of bedrock fault scarps in the Apennines
217 that yields ages not older than 12-18 kyr (e.g. Palumbo et al., 2004, Benedetti et al. 2013, Cowie et
218 al. 2017). In particular, the preservation of bedrock fault scarps along active normal faults is related
219 to a strong reduction in rates of rock weathering and erosion, associated with the transition from
220 glacial to interglacial climate (Tucker et al., 2011). Although bedrock fault scarps are more resistant
221 to diffusional processes, they are still subjected to geomorphic processes that shape their surface
222 expression such as channel incisions or landsliding. We thus carefully chose portions of the scarps
223 that did not undergo through erosion or debris flow processes (i.e. no gullies), avoided areas with
224 colluvial sediments or scree deposits (Bubeck et al., 2015).

225 To evaluate mid-term cumulative displacements, we used a high-resolution DEM from Pleiades
226 images that were acquired after the 2016 earthquakes with a resolution of 2 m (courtesy of A.
227 Delorme from IPGP); numerical computations were performed on the S-CAPAD platform, IPGP,
228 France by using MicMac (Rosu et al., 2015; Pleiades image from 2017-01-12). Specifically, we

229 extracted 66 topographic profiles from the DEM along the VBFS. Pleiades images were not
230 available for the area north of the Ussita River (CU sector), so we performed the same analysis by
231 using the available 10-m DEM from Tarquini et al. (2012), although this approach implied
232 considering a larger confidence interval when evaluating possible measurement errors.

233 The profiles were densely spaced (every ~ 200 m) in areas where the fault scarp is well preserved,
234 while we traced fewer profiles in areas where the cumulative offset is not adequately detectable, and
235 only where measurements were possible (e.g.; Mt. Biccio fault profile, average spacing ~ 300 m).

236 These profiles exhibited fault scarps with common characteristic features such as a displaced
237 reference surface, a degraded scarp, a free face, and a colluvial wedge (Figure 3.a). The reference
238 surface constituted a marker topographic horizon that could be distinguished in both the footwall
239 (upper surface) and the hanging-wall (lower surface) of the fault and that was displaced following
240 repeated faulting events affecting a regular topography that was previously leveled by a glacial
241 phase. The free face is the approximation of the fault plane that began to be eroded after
242 exhumation (by earthquakes), accumulating in the colluvial wedge at the base above the lower
243 surface.

244 In general, fault-related scarps are generally strongly affected by degradation and aggradation
245 processes (diffusion) that modify their original shape (Civico et al., 2015), especially in slowly
246 deforming tectonic environments such as Italy, Greece or Spain (Caputo et al., 2013; Galli et al.,
247 2008; Perez et al., 2006). As the footwall of a normal fault undergoes continuous uplift by repeated
248 earthquakes, the upper surface goes through erosional processes, which modify the original slope
249 angle. To distinguish these characteristic features, all the profiles were drawn with a length of 300
250 m to better identify the displaced upper and lower surfaces, reducing the uncertainty from erosional
251 processes. Because of the low steepness ($\sim 3^\circ$) in correspondence with the Piano Grande, we traced
252 four profiles with a length of 1000 m to ensure the morphological detection of the fault (MV5).

253 We measured the vertical displacement that was recorded by the upper and lower reference surfaces
254 for each profile. For each topographic profile, we manually identified two reference surfaces (red
255 line in figure S4) in the upper and the lower part having the same slope.

256 In some cases, the footwall slope is steeper than the one on the hanging wall and the identification
257 of the reference surface is not easy. In that case, thanks to the high density of the performed
258 topographic profiles (every ~200 m) we use as reference surface the one of a well-constrained
259 proximal profile. In addition, when it was possible (e.g. Profiles MV 4.3, MV 4.5, MV 4.7), we
260 defined more than one reference surface and we determined an average value of sloping surface
261 with the associated error (see supplementary). The manual analysis was associated, for some
262 profiles, to the semi-automated algorithm SPARTA (Scarp PARameteTer Algorithm) analysis,
263 developed by Hodge et al. (2019). Specifically, this algorithm calculates the parameters of the fault
264 scarp (i.e. height, width, and slope) from a scarp topographic profile by performing a best-fit
265 calculation to a scarp-like template. Moreover, it enhances the clarity of the elevation profiles by
266 filtering a range of non-tectonic features, such as vegetation peaks in DEMs from Pleiades images,
267 through four digital filters (see details in Hodge et al. 2019 and references therein).

268 The vertical offsets determined by SPARTA and by manual measurements were very similar (see
269 the supplementary material for details). Among the analyzed 66 profiles, 40 were qualified as
270 poorly constrained and could not be analyzed by SPARTA. This is related to the badly preserved
271 topographic fault scarp, such as in the Mt. Porche sector, or the poorly constrained upper and lower
272 surfaces for example in the Mt. Vettore and Mt. Bove sectors mainly because of the presence of a
273 great amount of scree deposits in the hanging-wall block. Those profiles were thus associated with a
274 higher uncertainty (see the supplementary).

275 Where a topographic slope dips in the same direction as the fault dip, the topographic offset is less
276 than the true vertical displacement; wherever the two dips have opposite directions, the topographic
277 offset is larger than the real throw (Bull, 2009). Thus, we corrected the topographic offsets (T_o) to

obtain true vertical displacements (Tr) by using the equation of Bull (2009), who considered the dip angle of the fault (α) and steepness (β) of the displaced topographic surface (Figure 3.a):

$$Tr = (To [\sin\alpha * \sin(90^\circ + \beta)]) / \sin(\alpha - \beta) \quad (1)$$

The dip angles of the faults (α) are from field measurements and the database of Villani et al. (2018a). The dip angles vary between 56° and 90° with the most frequent values being between 70° and 73° (19%), and between 76° and 77° (17%) (Fig. S2 in supplementary) and a mean value of $73 \pm 6.7^\circ$. Where the bedrock fault plane is not outcropping (e.g. MP-sector) and the fault dip angle is unknown we use this mean dip angle value. Considering the most frequent values of the dip angles are 70° - 77° , the uncertainty on the down-throw is $\pm 5\%$. Whereas, considering the two end-member values of 56° and 90° , the related uncertainty would be $\pm 8\%$.

3.3 Long term Geological displacements

We constructed seven geological cross-sections (traces in Figure 2.a) to determine the long-term geological down-throw of the VBFS with particular focus on the faults that were active in 2016. Starting from the available geological maps by Calamita et al. (1992) and Pierantoni et al. (2013), original field mapping was conducted to integrate and update the geological structural map of the area (Figure 2.a). Field surveys were conducted in some key areas (e.g., Mt. Bicco, Mt. Porche and Mt. Lieto in Figure 2) to better constrain the fault throw.

Given the complexity of the structural evolution of the study area (see section 2), we used the Marne a Fucoidi Fm. (Lower Cretaceous) as a reference marker to determine the vertical offset along the cross-sections. We made this choice because this formation is present throughout the region, has a constant thickness between 50 and 80 m, and records the total extension across the structures as a pre-Quaternary horizon. However, distinguishing pre-Quaternary displacements from the total down-throw is sometimes difficult, and the Quaternary fault displacements and slip rate can be overestimated (see section 2). Therefore, we analyzed only normal faults that showed morphological evidence of activity (i.e., after 18 kyr). Finally, we estimated the accuracy for around 30 m of the geological throw measurements both in the field and on the geological maps.

304 **4 Results**

305 This section is divided into three sub-sections: (1) a presentation of long- and mid-term throw data
306 plotted along a transect line that approximates the average strike of N150° for the VBFS (see the
307 location in Figure 2), (2) a comparison with the 2016 coseismic throws plotted over the same
308 transect line, and (3) an interpretation of the three databases and the determination of the throw
309 rates.

310 **4.1 Geological throw (long-term)**

311 The throw values that are obtained from geological cross-sections define the long-term history of
312 the VBFS and are useful for understanding the relative age of the fault segments, helping us define
313 a constant long-term throw rate for Quaternary active normal faults. Figure 4.a displays the
314 geological throw distribution along the entire fault system. To compare the throw values among the
315 long-, mid- and short-term datasets, we plotted the throw values that were measured on active faults
316 (in this study, those with evidence of post-LGM activity). The lowest geological throws for faults
317 having geomorphological evidence of activity (red faults in Figure 2.a) were in the southern portion
318 of the VBFS (100-150 m for faults in the Mt. Vettore sector), whereas the central-northern sector
319 of the VBFS showed higher values of 200-400 m at Mt. Porche and Mt. Bove. The maximum was
320 at Mt. Bove, where the geological throw reached 400 m for a single fault and 800 m for the
321 cumulative throw.

322 **4.2 Morphological throws (mid-term)**

323 The morphological throw that was related to the post-LGM activity of the VBFS was evaluated
324 through fault-scarp recognition and measurements on high-resolution topographic profiles
325 following the method in section 3.

326 Measured throws depend on the slip vectors (net slip) and their direction. When fault planes are
327 exposed at the base of a fault scarp, striae provide measurements of the net-slip vector (see Figure
328 3.b). Depending on the variability of the strike of the fault, i.e., some faults that deviate from pure

ENE extension, the slip vector may show a slight strike-slip component (Perouse et al., 2018). The throw corresponds to the vertical component of the slip, which we assume represents the dip-slip component (Figure 3.b). In the hypothesis of an oblique vector, the net slip is distributed on the vertical (dip slip) and horizontal components (strike slip). Therefore, before analyzing the throw variation, we first question how much the strike-slip component, which is mostly present where the fault plane produces strike-bending, can influence the measured topographic offset along the VBFS.

Figure 5 shows the bedrock fault-plane measurements (the site's location is indicated in the supplementary materials) with strong strike-slip (left- or right-lateral) components; each measurement has three components, all shown in meters to facilitate comparison with the measured topographic offset (i.e., the down-throw), namely, the net slip (total slip vector), dip slip, and strike slip.

The field structural data showed that the strike of the bedrock fault planes ranged between N120° and N190°, with kinematic indicators showing rake values between 70° and 96°. We determined the net-slip vector of each site by considering the slip-vector geometry from these data and the down-throw from the measured topographic offset. When considering a 70° rake angle, the net slip comprised at most 34% of strike slip component. This only occurs in the MV sector, where there is a quite strong strike slip component (Perouse et al., 2018) but still it is not affecting the results since it is within the uncertainties that we get for the down throw in this area. As shown in Figure 5, the lateral component is lower than 20% and still within the uncertainties of the down throw. Thus, we can assume that the topographic offset is within uncertainty similar to the net slip in most areas along the VBFS.

To show the contribution from each fault segment to the VBFS's mid-term growth, we plotted the throw value for each post-glacial fault scarp along the transect line in Figure 4.b, where the fault segments are color-coded. Figure 4.b shows the maximum throw at around 4-6 km on the transect line (MV sector), with an offset displacement of 24 m for a single segment that decreases towards

the tip of the system to the south and reaches 5 m of throw 2-3 km northward. In the MP sector (7-13 km on the transect line), the vertical-slip distribution rises at a constant average value of 15-20 m for both synthetic and antithetic faults. In the MB sector (13-20 km on the transect line), a ~20-m peak sharply decreases to zero. Northward, the Ussita valley has no evidence of cumulative fault activity, whereas the CU sector (20-26 km on the transect line) has 10 m of maximum vertical displacement.

The total cumulative mid-term throws (i.e. the summed throws at each point) along the transect line showed a slip distribution that matched the throws of each segment for the same sector. In particular, the maximum/minimum total cumulative throws correspond to the location of the maximum/minimum throws at the same position along strike; this pattern suggests sites of preferred surface slip along the VBFS.

4.3 Comparison with the 2016 coseismic throw (short-term)

The short-term throw, which was measured in the field after the 2016 seismic events, varied along the VBFS. The coseismic ruptures showed maximum throws in the southern portion of the fault system, reaching almost 2 m and lower values north of the MV sector, where the throws did not exceed 1 m (Villani et al. 2018a).

The comparison of the profile shapes from the analysis of the three different time scales for the active faults denoted an agreement between the mid- and short-term throw profiles. The maxima of the two throw profiles are located in the same positions along the strike. The coseismic throw profiles and mid-term cumulative-throw profiles from the addition of several earthquakes developed asymmetric patterns, with the highest throw in the southern area (MV sector, between 4 and 6 km on the transect line). The profiles both showed a decrease in the throw, which reached zero within 2 km, at the southern tip of the VBFS.

In addition to the good match between post-LGM (mid-term) and short-term throws in the southern sector, the coseismic rupture pattern throughout the fault system sometimes deviated from what was recorded on the morphology. For instance, the coseismic ruptures in the MP sector (9 km along the

381 transect line, Figure 4.c) reached a value of 95 cm above the mountain crest. However, we did not
 382 observe any morphological evidence of a fault scarp in this area. Between 16 and 18 km, two
 383 different throws were found in the Mt. Bove sector for the mid- and long-term scales (i.e.,
 384 geological throw = 800 m and post-LGM throw = 30 m), which were not observed in the short-term
 385 profile (i.e., 50 cm of coseismic rupture).

386 Common elements at all time scales for the active faults at the surface were observed between 18
 387 and 20 km on the transect line in the Ussita valley. No evidence of geological fault traces
 388 characterized the area (Pierantoni et al., 2013; Pizzi et al., 2017; Brozzetti et al., 2019; Porreca et
 389 al., 2020), suggesting that this region was not affected by faulting over the last 18 kyr. This lack of
 390 faulted areas matches the evidence that the Ussita River is the only westward-flowing river that
 391 bypasses the drainage divide of the Central Apennines range. In addition, no clear coseismic
 392 ruptures occurred in this area during the 2016 seismic sequence. The occurrence of the coseismic
 393 ruptures north of this valley (at the Cupi-Ussita segments) suggests that the northernmost tip of the
 394 system is on the other side of the Ussita valley. Thus, rather than an area not interested by the faults,
 395 we observed a zone of minimum surface slip, persistent in time.

396 According to a quantitative analysis of the matching shape profiles, the mid- and short-term throw
 397 distributions in the Mt. Vettore sector showed a very good relationship. In particular, the cumulative
 398 profiles at mid- and short-term are very similar: both have the maximum throw between 4 and 6 km
 399 along the transect line and decrease rapidly within 2 km (Figure 4.b and c). The highest and lowest
 400 values are constantly recorded on the fault segments MV2 and MV5, respectively. Moreover, the
 401 ratio between the short- and mid-term throw values is shown for each segment in the MV sector and
 402 at each measured point, having a good correlation factor ($r = 0.7$, Figure 6).

403 **4.4 Throw rates and fault-system evolution**

404 Based on the above data, we could reconstruct the VBFS's evolution from its onset in the Early
 405 Quaternary to the present. The evolution through time of VBFS has been determined from the
 406 vertical slip rates. We traced cross-sections that were orthogonal to the reference transect line, along

407 which we summed the maximum cumulative displacement of all the fault segments belonging to
 408 each fault sector (MV, MP, MB, and CU). To avoid overestimation, we choose the cumulative
 409 displacement from the best-constrained topographic profile, having low errors in the offset
 410 measurements. In addition, we calculated the slip rate along the fault considering that the
 411 cumulative offset is bracketed between the total cumulative offset and the total cumulative offset
 412 minus the measured 2016 coseismic offset, assuming a periodic behavior. We implied the highest
 413 throws for each sector, so the obtained values are to be considered the maximum throw rates for
 414 each sector. Significant variations in the throw distribution and throw rates appeared in both time
 415 and space.

416 For the mid-term maximum throw rate, thus the rate calculated over 18 kyr, we found a
 417 heterogeneous pattern of the VBFS. The MV sector's throw rate is 1.65 ± 0.05 mm/yr (total
 418 cumulative offset 31.8 m and coseismic offset of 2.8 m). The throw rates for the MP sector is 0.95
 419 ± 0.5 mm/yr (total cumulative offset 18 m and coseismic offset of 0.9m), for the MB sector $1.25 \pm$
 420 0.5 mm/yr (total cumulative offset 24 m and coseismic offset of 0.7 m); and for the CU sector the
 421 velocity is 0.5 mm/yr (total cumulative offset 9.1 m and coseismic offset of 0.1 m). The throw rate
 422 determined on the fault with the highest throw (MV2) is 1.3 ± 0.1 mm/yr and it matches the value
 423 of 1.31 ± 0.27 mm/yr determined by Brozzetti et al. (2019) over the last 15 kyr.

424 The long-term slip history of the VBFS is affected by uncertainties that are related to the absence of
 425 accurate chronology on the onset of the segments and the duration of activity along these faults
 426 without evidence of activity after the LGM. To determine the long-term throw rates, we considered
 427 only active faults (all faults with morphological evidence) and calculated their velocities since the
 428 beginning of extension (1.1-1.2 Ma, Blumetti and Dramis, 1992; Coltorti et al., 1998; Calamita et
 429 al., 1999). The Mt. Bove and Mt. Porche sectors hosted the active segments with the highest throws
 430 (800 m of cumulated displacement and 500 m as the highest throw for single fault segment),
 431 suggesting major activity along these faults over long time scales. We found a maximum throw rate
 432 of 0.8 mm/yr when considering the highest vertical geological displacements of the entire VBFS.

433 The obtained value was within the range of slip rates that were estimated by Pizzi et al. (2002) for
434 the VBFS (0.6-0.9 mm/yr). The throw rates of the Central Apennines' fault systems range between
435 <0.2 and 1-2 mm/yr (Barchi et al., 2000; Benedetti et al., 2013; Roberts & Michetti, 2004;
436 Papanikolaou et al., 2005; Civico et al., 2015b; Cowie et al., 2017). The high values of the VBFS
437 are reached by the Fucino fault: from 0.55 (at the tips) to 2 mm/yr (in the center of the system). The
438 variation in the throw rate along the Fucino fault system was interpreted to be an increase in the
439 growth rate over the last 700 kyr (Cowie & Roberts, 2001; Roberts & Michetti, 2004).

440 Throw rates for the VBFS are higher than some faults in the Northern Apennines, such as the
441 Colfiorito fault that is suggested to have a rate of 0.3 mm/yr by Barchi et al.(2000), and Mirabella
442 (2016) and 0.67 ± 0.13 mm/yr by Mildon et al. (2016).

443 From our results, it appears that the segments with high geological displacement but without post-
444 LGM activity are mainly located at a low elevation close to the Quaternary basin's boundaries (e.g.,
445 MV8 fault bounds the Piano Grande). Whereas fault associated with the highest mid- and short-
446 term throws are generally located at a higher elevation close to the ridges (e.g., MV2 fault at Mt.
447 Vettore), or even on the ridge close to the drainage divide (e.g., MP2 fault at Mt. Porche). This
448 observation suggests that the most recently activated segments are located on the footwall of the
449 faults that were formerly active probably during an earlier stage of the extension, suggesting there
450 might be a shift of the activity at least for about 18 kyr.

451 Moreover, the maximum activity (in terms of throws pattern) at mid- and short-term scales were
452 concentrated in the southern sector of Mt. Vettore with high throw rates. The good linear correlation
453 between the short- and mid-term scales (Figure 6) might suggest that the fault system evolved with
454 a similar pattern over time since at least the last 18 kyr. Figure 7 shows the evolution of the throw
455 both in time and space of the VBFS. The maximum throw is localized on the MV- sector since the
456 last 18-kyr associated with a higher rate of slip increment compared to the other sectors of MP, MB,
457 and CU.

Thus, assuming a constant maximum throw rate of 1.65 ± 0.5 mm/yr, calculated from the mid-term, and considering 380 m of cumulative geological displacements, evaluated by the sum of the maximum displacement of each segment in the cross-sections, we could infer an origin of the active faults at the surface at Mt. Vettore at about ~ 200 -250 kyr ago. Considering the general onset of the VBFS was 1.1-1.2 Myr (Blumetti and Dramis, 1992; Coltorti et al., 1998; Calamita et al., 1999; see section 2), and the uncertainties about the age and throw of the basin boundary fault (see section 2), the MV sector would be characterized by younger faults. The resolution of the available sub-surface data (Porreca et al., 2018) does not allowed determining how the active faults and the basin boundary fault are related at depth. But from our surface data the presence of these young faults might be interpreted or as a consequence of the southward propagation of the fault system (i.e. from the MB-MP- sectors to the MV- sector) or due to an activity “replacement” of the older basin boundary fault at the surface, probably at ~ 200 -250 kyr.

This southern tip of the system hosts high-density, widespread, short unlinked and newly formed faults, marking a relatively more distributed deformed volume than a single master fault that accommodated seismic slip in a narrower zone, such as in the northern VBFS (Figure 7).

5 Discussion

The detailed mapping of the 2016 coseismic ruptures clearly showed that a well-defined peak at its southern tip in the MV sector characterized the throw-distribution pattern along the VBFS. In particular, in agreement with many authors (Lavecchia et al., 2016; Livio et al., 2016; Pucci et al., 2017; Civico et al., 2018; Villani et al., 2018b), the coseismic throws at Mt. Vettore were ~ 0.10 -0.15 m (with a local maximum of 0.30 m), and ~ 1.5 m (locally reaching 2 m) for the 24 August event (M_w 6.0), and the 30 October event (M_w 6.5), respectively. These high values went beyond the expected values from the empirical relationships between the magnitude vs surface displacement (Wells & Coppersmith, 1994). In particular, the recorded slip at Mt. Vettore after the

30 October event exceeded the power-law and exponential scaling by two orders of magnitude (Villani et al., 2018b).

According to the slip models obtained from strong motions, GPS, and DInSAR for 24 August and 30 October 2016 events (e.g. Chiaraluce et al., 2017; Cheloni et al., 2017; Scognamiglio et al., 2018; Walter et al., 2018; Ragon et al., 2019), the rupture propagated to the surface mainly in the MV sector. In this sector, the rupture propagated to the surface producing in 6–8 seconds the highest observed coseismic slip of the entire system (Wilkinson et al., 2017), along with significant off-fault deformation that occurred close to those faults with spectacular surface offsets (Delorme et al., 2020).

Furthermore, some authors (e.g. Scognamiglio et al., 2018; Walters et al., 2018) suggested that the ruptures did propagate at depth, in the first ~5-6 km, at the fault intersections between the VFBS and the LF, where also slip occurred.

The earthquakes on both 24 August and 30 October with epicenters located to the south and north of the trace of the OAS thrust ramp, respectively, produced the maximum surface displacement along the same fault segments in the MV sector (e.g., Brozzetti et al., 2019; Gori et al., 2018). The throw distribution pattern of the 2016 coseismic rupture has been defined by many authors (e.g., Villani et al., 2018b; Brozzetti et al., 2019) as an anomaly in the slip concentration at the MV sector (both 24 August and 30 October).

5.1 Slip profiles and fault throw at various time scales

One of the main results from our study noted that the anomalous slip concentration in the MV sector is not a phenomenon that only refers to the 2016 seismic sequence, but rather constitutes the characteristic method through which the Mt. Vettore fault has broken during at least the last 18 kyr.

The similarity between the along strike displacement recorded in the short-term and mid-term profiles in the MV-sector can be interpreted either as the faults have experienced a similar rupturing pattern over the last 18 kyr; or as individual successive earthquakes with variable slip distributions

507 produce an overall cumulative pattern over the last 18 kyr similar, to the one observed for the 2016
 508 short-term one.

509 Paleoseismological trench studies (Galadini and Galli, 2003; Galli et al., 2019; Cinti et al., 2019),
 510 suggest that not only the MV sector but the entire system experienced at least seven events of $M_w \approx$
 511 6.5, thus similar to the 2016 Norcia-type (or larger) surface-faulting event, over the last 22 kyr.

512 Comparing the vertical displacements of the penultimate event found in the trenches (E2 occurred
 513 $\sim 4^{\text{th}}\text{-}5^{\text{th}}$ century CE) for segments MV, MP4, and MP5, we found a pattern that seems to agree quite
 514 well with the constant growth pattern of the mid- and short-time scale (Figure 8). Those results also
 515 infer that the rupturing pattern is similar to the one observed in 2016, with multiple fault segments
 516 rupturing during a single individual event. This evidence strengthens the first hypothesis of the
 517 repeating self-similar rupturing pattern, where different seismic events produce the analogous slip
 518 distribution, with maxima throws always on the same fault segments. Thus, the asymmetric,
 519 triangular throw profiles of the VBFS that were created in tens of seconds (2016 coseismic
 520 ruptures) and over tens of thousands of years (cumulative fault scarp) resemble each other (see Figs.
 521 4 and 9).

522 This similarity has also been observed by Brozzetti et al. (2019), Iezzi et al., (2018) in some faults
 523 of the Mt. Vettore (specifically, MV1, MV2, MV3, MV4 and MV5 in our study), whether at
 524 morphological, geological scale or in terms of the largest topographic relief. A different
 525 interpretation, however, has been hypothesized for this evidence. In particular, Iezzi et al. (2018)
 526 interpreted this highest slip concentration in the Mt. Vettore faults as a consequence of the
 527 particular local structural fault geometry suggesting that throw increased because of a slip vector
 528 accommodation due to a bending of the fault strike of $\sim 28^\circ$ and to the related fault dip angle
 529 increase. Brozzetti et al. (2018) suggested that this anomaly might be due to irregularities of the
 530 fault at depth due to local tectonic factors, such as the suggested back tilting that amplified the
 531 coseismic displacement in this area (Testa et al., 2019).

532 Our results also suggest that the segment MV2 in the Mt.Vettore is not the only one to exhibit such
 533 high throw since all the other segments in this sector displayed relatively high throw compared to
 534 the other segments of the VBFS. If we consider the ratio between the height of the post-LGM fault
 535 scarp and the value of the 2016 coseismic ruptures along the main fault at Mt. Vettore and its sub-
 536 parallel segments, we obtain a constant value. Thus, we interpret the MV sector of the VBFS as
 537 having homothetic growth behavior, with an anomalous high displacement on all the segments,
 538 suggesting that those are interacting (Gupta and Scholz, 2000; Mirabella et al., 2016).

539 As observed by Duross et al. (2016) in the Wasatch Fault Zone (Basin and Range Province) from
 540 paleoseismological studies, the possibility of interaction between segments in areas of structural
 541 complexity seems to permit more complex fault ruptures, such as the multi or partial rupturing of
 542 segments observed in the 2016 seismic sequence (Villani et al., 2018b). In addition, as we observed
 543 for the MV sector in the VBFS, the Wasatch Fault Zone corresponds to the fault tip of a wider fault
 544 system. Studies on vertical displacements performed on this latter showed how the Wasatch Fault
 545 Zone is characterized by the highest fault throws, ~20 m of throw versus ~10 m in the other
 546 “zones” (Friedrich et al., 2003 and reference therein). This exceeding throw at the Wasatch Fault
 547 Zone has been interpreted as an acceleration in the throw rates during the Holocene (Friedrich et al.;
 548 2003).

549 Furthermore, according to the classification of fault structural maturity described by Dolan et al.
 550 (2014) and Nicol et al. (2010), the frequent fault-strike variation associated with the VBFS’s
 551 southern sector would suggest that it is structurally immature compared to the northern area (MP-
 552 MB-CU sectors), where the deformation is concentrated on the main fault structures. Moreover, the
 553 overall low velocities of slip propagation at depth were 3.1 km/s for the Mw 6.0 event, 2.7 km/s for
 554 the Mw 5.9 event and 2.7 km/s for the Mw 6.5 event, as obtained by finite-fault analysis (Tinti et
 555 al., 2016 and Chiaraluce et al., 2017). These values, as well the fault parameters that define the
 556 structural maturity in Perrin et al. (2016) and references therein, indicate that the entire system

557 VFBS system is actually classified as immature (e.g. rupture velocities of <3 km/s, fault length $<$
558 300 km, initiation age $<$ few Ma).

559 **5.2 Role of inherited structures**

560 In an evolving extensional active system such as the VBFS, what can cause such preferred slip
561 zones towards a tip of the fault system, thus an activity concentration and a slip gradient increasing?
562 Two possibilities have been previously suggested for such observation: (1) a fault-linkage zone,
563 where the slip is concentrated at the tips of two overlapping faults (e.g., Peacock and Sanderson,
564 1991), and (2) a fault-barrier zone, where the fault slip increases as a response to the inhibition of
565 lateral fault propagation because of interference with a major “barrier” at depth (e.g., Madariaga,
566 1979; Lay & Kanamori, 1981; Das & Kostrov, 1983; Mendoza, 1993; Ruff & Miller, 1994;
567 Somerville et al., 1999; Das, 2003; Manighetti et al., 2001; 2005).

568 In the hypothesis of a “fault-linkage zone”, the asymmetric maximum displacement in the VBFS
569 would be the result of the natural evolution of the fault system that starts to interact with another
570 fault system, in agreement with the evolutionary model of a fault system as observed in Gawthorpe
571 and Leeder (2000). The southern tip of the VBFS would be propagating toward the Laga Fault (LF),
572 which in turn has an asymmetric geological displacement profile with a maximum in its northern
573 part (Boncio et al., 2004), through a zone with no evidence of faulting at the surface. The
574 interaction at depth between the VBFS and the LF, however, seems supported by the occurrence of
575 the location of the Mw 6.0 event on 24 August (Chiaraluce et al., 2017) in the relay zone of the
576 two systems, away ~ 9 km and ~ 7 km from the VBFS and LF, respectively (see Figures 1 and 9).

577 The second broad class of studies suggest the presence of a “fault-barrier zone”. Although the
578 concept of a “barrier” is still debated by many authors, this terminology can describe a zone that
579 prevents slip propagation and allows high-throw gradients to be maintained (Manighetti et al.,
580 2005). Whatever the process, these areas are affected by specific mechanical or rheological
581 properties and a resistance to the coseismic rupture. In the context of the VBFS, the geometrical

relationship with a potential barrier at depth is still debated and difficult to reconstruct due to the lack of robust subsurface data.

But the occurrence of the 2016 seismic event provided new insights in understanding the interaction (both at the surface and depth), of the VBFS with the crustal pre-existing oblique OAS thrust ramp, which previous authors assumed as a structural barrier (Pizzi and Galadini, 2009). At the surface (Figure 9), the coseismic ruptures of the VBFS crosscut the trace of the OAS thrust (e.g., Bonini et al., 2016; Livio et al., 2016; Civico et al., 2017; Pizzi et al., 2017; Iezzi et al., 2018; Villani et al., 2018a,b; Brozzetti et al., 2019; Porreca et al., 2020). While at depth, slip models from different datasets showed how the mainshocks- rupturing process interacted with the deep high-angle part of the OAS thrust (Tinti et al., 2016; Chiaraluce et al., 2017; Cheloni et al., 2017; Scognamiglio et al., 2018; Ragon et al., 2019; Gallovič et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the slip model of Ragon et al. (2019), which was derived from GPS analysis, suggested that the rupture on 24 August had a bi-lateral propagation direction. The slip, which was plotted on a 45°-dipping fault plane, was confined to the south in a narrow zone 2-5 km deep (Walters et al., 2018), and to the north was more distributed , propagating both downdip (until 8-9 km depth) and climbing up towards the surface (above 3 km depth in the MV sector). In agreement with Ragon et al. (2019, and references therein), we suggest that the modalities of the northward slip transfer could have been controlled by the presence of the high-angle OAS thrust ramp, which prevented the lateral northward propagation of the rupture. On the other hand, the hypocenter of the 24 August event was located on the footwall of the OAS thrust, while the rupture reached the surface only on its hanging-wall. This observation suggests that the rupture bypassed the OAS thrust only in its shallowest and low angle portion, producing coseismic surface rupturing in the MV sector. In other words, this vertical propagation might have been confined in an area where the OAS thrust halted northward lateral propagation (Figure 10.a). Despite the lithology that might control the slip propagation to the surface, minor surface ruptures can occur in the Laga Fm., as Vignaroli et al. (2020) suggested over the late Quaternary.

608 The event on 30 October was modeled by Scognamiglio et al. (2018) through strong-motion data
 609 (Figure 10.b). The slip model was plotted on a 47°-dipping fault plane, highlighting rupturing that
 610 was confined above ~7 km depth. The slip propagated to both the north, where the rupture reached
 611 the surface at Mt. Bove and only affected the first 2 km, and the south, reaching the surface at Mt.
 612 Vettore-Mt. Porche. The hypocenter was at 9.5 km depth, where the rupture nucleated and mainly
 613 expanded towards the surface. In correspondence with the OAS thrust at depth, this rupturing only
 614 crossed it between 5 and 7 km depth, triggering a small patch of around 50-100 cm of slip south of
 615 the OAS thrust. All the patches with slip above 100 cm were located north of the OAS thrust,
 616 defining a rupture area whose southward limit seemed to follow the OAS thrust. On the other hand,
 617 Scognamiglio et al. (2018) and Improta et al. (2019) modeled the rupture distribution with the OAS
 618 thrust as a source in their kinematic inversion. Although we agree that some slip could have
 619 occurred on the OAS thrust ramp, we believe the VBFS was the major source of this event
 620 according to our results and the focal mechanism, which corresponds to an NNW-SSE dip-slip
 621 fault.

622 Therefore, these two slip models for the 24 August and the 30 October suggest a major slip
 623 interference at depth (below ~ 5 km), that may be interpreted as a barrier producing an interruption
 624 in the lateral slip propagation (northward and southward, respectively), in favor of a transferring
 625 rupture toward the surface, at the MV sector.

626 In this hypothesis, the presence of a deep barrier is observed at the surface from a major fault slip
 627 accumulation and other features such as fault interactions, and fault fragmentation associated with
 628 bends (Manighetti et al., 2005).

629 Based on our long- mid- and short-term surface data and the 2016 rupturing scenario from the after-
 630 mentioned inversion slip models, we interpret the maximum throw in the southern tip at the MV
 631 sector, as the result of southward increase in the rate of fault system activity (occurred between 1.2
 632 Ma and 18 kyr, see Figure 7). The suggested southward growth in fault activity (see section 4.4)
 633 could indicate an ongoing linkage process with the Laga Fault and an incipient development of a

634 secondary fault in the relay zone (where the 24 August hypocenter is located) without surface
635 evidence (see point 4 in Figure 9).

636 On the other hand, this evidence along with the observed segment interactions and the more
637 widespread deformed area in the MV sector (see section 4.4) suggest that the maximum throw could
638 be related to the presence of a main structural barrier at depth. The barrier may likely coincide with
639 the high-angle OAS thrust (below 5 km of depth) that prevents the natural free southward
640 propagation and the fault linkage, enhancing the deformation through increment vertical
641 displacement.

642 **5 Conclusions**

643 The multi-temporal analysis that we performed on the vertical displacements of the active faults
644 (i.e., with post LGM activity) of the Mt. Vettore-Mt. Bove fault system (VBFS) characterized its
645 spatial and temporal evolution. The 2016 seismic events ruptured the entire VBFS producing a
646 maximum displacement in the southern sector of the Mt. Vettore sector. Our results, in agreement
647 with Brozzetti et al. (2019), showed that these maximum values of displacements localized in the
648 south, are persistent at least over the last 18 kyr (post-LGM), and are mainly located on the faults on
649 the western flank of the Mt. Vettore. While the basin boundary fault associated with the highest
650 geological displacement has no evidence of recent (Post-LGM) activity.

651 On the contrary, the active faults display the highest geological displacement related to the onset of
652 extension (i.e. 1.1-1.2 Myr) in the central northern sectors of the VBFS, at the Mt. Bove sector.

653 The throw distributions pattern along the VBFS length of the coseismic (short-term) and post LGM
654 (mid-term) displacements exhibited a similar, asymmetric shape. Thus, the Mt. Vettore sector
655 experienced homothetic growth, with all the segments maintaining the same throw profile through
656 time. This suggests a similar growth pattern over the last 18 kyr in the VBFS system
657 notwithstanding with a different amount of displacement depending on the magnitude of the
658 earthquake, as occurred for the 24 August and the 30 October 2016 events, as also observed in

659 paleoseismological studies (Galadini and Galli, 2003; Galli et al., 2019; Cinti et al., 2019). In the
660 Mt. Vettore sector, the rates at which this evolution occurred from the last 18 kyr were 1.65 ± 0.5
661 mm/yr. If we assume this throw rate constant over time, and we consider the cumulated geological
662 displacement, we can determine an age for this sector of around 200-250 kyr. This age can be
663 interpreted as the onset of the faults in the Mt. Vettore western flank due to a southward shift of
664 activity that produces the highest throws.

665 We interpreted the maximum displacements at mid and short-term at the southern tip of the system,
666 as related to an ongoing linkage process with the Laga Fault. Several observations, including the
667 sharp decrease in throw at the intersection between the Mt. Vettore sector and oblique structure of
668 the OAS thrust, suggest that this inherited structure may also act as a barrier in this scenario. In this
669 perspective also the origin of the Mt. Vettore fault and its very high slip rate could indicate that
670 starting from ~200-250 kyr, the VBFS is trying to overcome the barrier. In this way, the barrier
671 concentrates the stresses within the Mt. Vettore sector and prevents the southward lengthening of
672 the system, which instead accommodates deformation through high throws. However, a small
673 portion of the OAS thrust between 5 and 7 km depth appears to have been offset by the Mt. Vettore-
674 Mt. Bove fault system. This phenomenon could be the first step to link the VBFS with the LF.

675 Furthermore, The good-to-perfect match between the short- and mid-term throw profiles showed
676 that faults with post 18 kyr morphological evidence of activity are more prone to break in a future
677 seismic event and should be considered as having a higher risk of rupturing in the seismic-hazard
678 assessment. This suggests that an upper limit of fault activity of 18 kyr could be reasonable to
679 discriminate active and capable faults, at least for similar morphological and seismotectonic
680 contexts.

681 **Acknowledgments**

682 This work has been funded by the Italian Ministry for Education, University and Research (MIUR)
683 (ex 60% grants to A. Pizzi), by the LABEX OT MED and by INSU. CNES is warmly
684 acknowledged for providing us with the Pleiades satellite images immediately after the events and

in particular ISIS and CEOS seismic pilot (ESA) programs. This work was supported by public funds received in the framework of GEOSUD, a project (ANR-10-EQPX-20) of the program "Investissements d'Avenir" managed by the French National Research Agency". P.P Pierantoni, B. Pace, P. Boncio, L. Pousse, M. Rizza, A. Pasculli, and F. Mendez are greatly acknowledged for their help and support in the field and with the data treatment. We also thank Laura Gregory and Giancarlo Molli for their useful and perceptive comments that helped to improve the clarity and quality of the paper. Our new unpublished data used in this work are available in the Supporting Information, while all the other data are contained in the repository: doi.pangaea.de/10.1594/PANGAEA.920893. It contains information © CNES (2016), Distribution Airbus DS, all rights reserved.

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Figure 1. The neotectonic framework of the Central Apennines and location of the Central Italy 2016 seismic sequence. In black are the active fault systems from Benedetti (1999), Tesson et al.

(2016), and references therein. The study area (blue rectangle) is the Mt. Vettore-Mt. Bove fault system (VBFS). The other faults are the Laga Fault (LF) and Gorzano Fault (GF). The main Neogene thrusts are shown in grey: Valnerina Line (VL), Olevano-Antrodoco-Sibillini (OAS), and Gran Sasso (GS) (Calamita et al., 2011; Di Domenica et al., 2014). The focal mechanism of the 1997 Colfiorito earthquake is from the CMT catalog (Dziewonski et al., 1981; Ekström et al., 2012). The focal mechanisms of the 2009 to 2017 events are from the INGV web page (<http://cnt.rm.ingv.it>). Historical events (white circles) with their dates (AD) are from the CPTI15 catalog (Rovida et al., 2016) Inset: study area at a large scale. Modified after Perouse et al. (2018).

Figure 2. a) Geological map of the VBFS in the Central Apennines; see Figure 1 for the location. Modified after Pierantoni et al. (2013): Calcare massiccio Fm. (MAS), Bugarone Fm. (BU), Corniola Fm. (COI), Rosso Ammonitico Fm. (RSA), Calcari a Posidonia Fm. (POD), Marne del Serrone Fm. (MSE), Calcari Diasprigni Fm. (CDU), Maiolica Fm. (MAI), Marne a Furoidi Fm. (FUC), Scaglia Bianca Fm. (SBI), Scaglia Rossa Fm. (SAA), Scaglia Variegata Fm. (VAS), Scaglia Cinerea Fm. (SCC), and Laga Fm. (LAG). The dashed lines are the cross-section traces (in the supplementary Figure S5). The structural symbols are the same as those in Figure 2.b. b) Shaded relief map of the VBFS from a 10 m-resolution DEM. The red stars indicate the locations of the three 2016 mainshocks with their focal mechanisms. The blue transect line indicates the fault system's average strike of N150° and the main sectors of the system: Mt. Vettore (MV), Mt. Porche (MP), Mt. Bove (MB) and Cupi-Ussita (CU). The active normal faults (solid red lines) are faults that ruptured during the 2016 earthquakes and showed morphological evidence on the topography. The inferred active normal faults (red dashed lines) are faults with morphological evidence that did not rupture in 2016.

Figure 3. a) Characteristic features of fault scarps that were used for measurements on high-resolution topographic profiles. The topographic offset (T_o) for each profile is the vertical separation between two portions of a unique marker surface (with slope β) that was displaced by a fault (with dip angle α). b) Components of a net-slip vector on the fault plane. The fault down-throw (Tr) is the projection on a vertical plane of the net-slip vector. See the text for an explanation of the Tr evaluation. The degraded scarp and colluvial wedge are the results of erosion processes that smooth the fault scarp over time.

Figure 4. Throw along-strike at three timescales for VBFS. Location of measurements indicated by red squares placed on the projected position along the Transect line. Dashed faults indicate faults with no available data but with throws (at long/mid/short term) > 0 . A grey area defines cumulative total displacement for each position along the Transect line (both east and west-dipping faults). a)

1108 Long-term geological displacements b) Mid-term morphological throws, c) Short-term coseismic
1109 throws.

1110 **Figure 5.** Downthrow and slip components values (net, dip and strike-slip components) in Mt
1111 Vettore area for each segment. The measured rake at each site is also displayed. The strike-slip
1112 component is always small with respect to dip-slip portion, and downthrow is not affected by the
1113 strike-slip component (see the supplementary for the data locations).

1114 **Figure 6.** Cumulative throw vs coseismic throw diagram. The thick red line defines the proportional
1115 envelope between the two datasets. The thinner lines are related to the trends of each fault segment
1116 and are color-coded according to the corresponding segments. The colored data indicate orange
1117 MV1 fault, light-blue MV2 fault, purple MV4 fault, and grey MV5 fault.

1118 **Figure 7.** Map of the throw evolution through time: a) short-term throw, b) mid-term throw, c)
1119 long-term throw. The color scales show the range of vertical displacement at each time frame. d)
1120 Cumulative displacement profile at each time scale (synthetic plus antithetic faults). The red point
1121 indicates the maximum throw position: in the mid-term, there is a southward migration of this point.

1122 **Figure 8.** Correlation among a) short-term throw, b) mid-term throw, and c) throw of the
1123 penultimate event found in the trenches excavated in segments MV5 (Galadini e Galli, 2003), MP4
1124 (Cinti et al., 2019) and MP5 (Galli et al., 2019); d) summary of the timing events, modified from
1125 Cinti et al., (2019). The values shown in panels a) and b) are related to the data where the trench has
1126 been dug (i.e. MP5.1, MP 4.1, MV 5.3).

1127 **Figure 9.** Block diagram that shows the relationships between the VBFS and OAS and the locations
1128 of the 2016 mainshock hypocenters at depth (from Chiaraluce et al., 2017) along the fault plane
1129 (simplified as a single and long plane). (1) Southernmost MV sector, which recorded the highest
1130 throw of the system during the last 18 kyr. This feature reflects the prominent southward evolution
1131 of the system, which is inhibited by the presence of a major barrier at depth: the OAS thrust ramp.
1132 Thus, the fault system accumulates higher displacement. (2) To the south, the VBFS intersects the
1133 OAS thrust ramp at depth, which is cross-cut in its shallowest portion (first 2 km from Porreca et
1134 al., 2018 and 2020; see T1). (3) To the north, the VBFS intersects, and it is rooted on the OAS
1135 thrust ramp. (4) South of the VBFS, no evidence of clear surface faulting is observed, even though
1136 the 24 August event revealed the presence of a fault at depth. We interpret this zone as a relay
1137 between the VBFS to the north and LF to the south. (5) The throw deficit at all time scales in the
1138 Ussita valley to the south of the CU sector. (6) Complex fault zone of barrier (see text).

1139 **Figure 10.** Distribution of the 24 August and 30 October coseismic ruptures at depth. The slip
1140 models are plotted on fault planes (24 August event: Ragon et al., 2019; 30 October event:
1141 Scognamiglio et al., 2018). The trace of the low-angle OAS thrust is reported. The red stars indicate
1142 hypocenters, and the red arrows are the main slip propagation directions. The solid red lines
1143 indicate the surface patterns of the coseismic throws that were produced by the two mainshocks.
1144 The black dashed line is the morphological throw of the VBFS.