



MOX-Report No. 51/2017

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A monolithic algorithm for the simulation of cardiac electromechanics in the human left ventricle

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Abstract

In this paper, we propose a monolithic algorithm for the numerical solution of an electromechanics model of the left ventricle in the human heart. We consider the monodomain equation together with the Bueno–Orovio minimal ionic model for the description of the electrophysiology and the Holzapfel–Ogden strain energy function within the active strain framework for the mechanics of the myocardium. For the latter, we use for the first time in the context of electromechanics a transmurally variable active strain formulation. The Finite Element Method is used for the space discretization, while Backward Differentiation Formulas are used for the time discretization. Both implicit and semi-implicit schemes are addressed in this paper: the Newton method is used to solve the nonlinear system arising in the implicit scheme, while the semi-implicit scheme (corresponding to extrapolation of nonlinear terms from previous timesteps) yields a linear problem at each timestep. In the latter case, stability constraints may pose limitations in the timestep size. Much emphasis is laid into on the preconditioning strategy, which is based on the factorization of a block Gauss–Seidel preconditioner combined with the use of parallel preconditioners for each of the single core models composing the full electromechanics model. This monolithic preconditioner can be easily extended to cases where other ionic models are adopted and, besides heart models, to other integrated problems arising in different multiphysics applications in engineering and applied sciences. Several numerical simulations are carried out in a high performance computing framework for both idealized and patient-specific left ventricle geometries. The latter are obtained from medical MRI images through suitable segmentation procedures to generate the computational mesh. Personalized pressure–volume loops are produced by means of the computational procedure and used to synthetically interpret and analyze the outputs of the electromechanics model.

Keywords: heart modeling; coupled problem; electromechanics; monolithic algorithm; finite element method; preconditioner.

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1 Introduction

The heart plays the crucial role of pushing the blood to flow through the circulatory system to provide all sort of vital substances to the cells. Moreover, cardiovascular related diseases represent the leading causes of death in the whole world [59]. While advancements in medical practice are continuously improving patients conditions and diseases outcomes, recent progresses in mathematical modeling and computational mechanics allow to perform realistic cardiovascular numerical simulations [37, 64, 75, 76, 83, 96, 104, 106], thus potentially providing medical doctors and clinicians with valuable diagnostic and predictive tools. Moreover, clinical data and the application of image segmentation techniques to Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and Computed Tomography (CT) scans feed, as inputs, the mathematical models, thus allowing numerical simulations in a *patient-specific* framework [23, 54]; in addition, uncertainty quantification techniques allow to estimate the models parameters and data, and to cope with their variability [30, 58].

The mathematical modeling of the heart involves several challenges intrinsically related to the complexity of its function [17, 20, 33]. A satisfactory model must be able to describe a wide range of different processes, such as the evolution of the transmembrane potential in the myocardium, the deformation caused by the muscles contraction, and the dynamics of the blood inside the heart chambers and flowing through the valves [31, 70, 75, 76, 95, 97, 98]. All these processes feature different temporal and spatial scales, yielding the so-called *tyranny of scales* [8]. A satisfactory knowledge of the models for isolated processes (the electrophysiology, the active and the passive mechanics), which we refer to as “single core models”, is nowadays quite established; however, further theoretical and numerical studies are necessary to better understand their mutual interactions [18, 22, 30, 81]. In this work, we use state-of-the-art models in passive myocardial tissue modeling (the Holzapfel–Ogden model [45]) together with the active strain approach [2, 3] in combination with a recently proposed model for the transmurally heterogeneous thickening of the myocardium [7]; the latter is for the first time used in the integrated electromechanics context for the left ventricle (LV). Once established, the active mechanics is coupled with the electrophysiology through a model describing the shortening of the myocardial fibers [87], which is in turn triggered by a change in the ionic concentrations in the cardiac cells.

From the numerical viewpoint, we discretize in space the continuous models by means of the Finite Element Method (FEM) with both linear and quadratic elements, while the time discretization is carried on using Backward Differentiation Formulas (BDFs) of order 1 and 2 [77]. BDFs are used both within an implicit and a semi-implicit approach, the latter consisting in the partial evaluation of the nonlinear terms with an approximation of the unknowns of the same order of the BDF scheme [16, 36]. However, the semi-implicit approach poses strong limitations on the choice of the timestep size with respect to the implicit approach. We then formulate a monolithic algebraic coupled problem to enforce the coupling and interface conditions among the single core cardiac models, contrarily to several works where the electrophysiology and the mechanics problems are solved with

a staggered approach [4, 5, 18, 37, 53, 83, 106]. It is however known that, in general, staggered approaches do not guarantee unconditional stability, similarly to the case of segregated algorithms [15]. Monolithic schemes for the electromechanics of the heart were proposed and analyzed first in [24, 25], where only the contraction phase is simulated and the blood pressure at the endocardium (the LV inner wall) is neglected. In a more recent work [43], a monolithic scheme including a reduced-order 0D closed-loop vascular system, heart valve, and atrial chamber model is proposed. However, in these works the active stress approach is used instead of the active strain one and only simplified ventricle geometries are considered. In this paper, on the other hand, we successfully use a monolithic scheme for the simulation of a full heartbeat by realizing pressure-volume loops, for both idealized and patient-specific geometries. The FSI at the endocardium is addressed through a basic 0D (spatially independent) model for the pressure variable tailored for the different phases of the heartbeat [30, 83, 106]; a prestress technique is also applied to the patient-specific LV in order to estimate the internal stresses of the myocardium at the initial time [46, 99]. We solve the large, sparse block monolithic linear system arising from the approximation of the continuous model by means of the GMRES method [88] and, in order to speed-up the convergence of the linear solver, we employ a novel right preconditioner [88] based on the one proposed in [27] for FSI problems. Our preconditioning strategy is based on the factorization of a block Gauss-Seidel preconditioner which exposes the multiphysics nature of the integrated problem, thus allowing to adapt its action on each single factor of the preconditioner. As we show, this strategy can be easily extended to a wide range of integrated multiphysics problems: the factors are indeed independently preconditioned by using algebraic multigrid [11] or domain decomposition [14, 103] preconditioners tailored by exploiting physics-specific information (such as the number of equations) for each block. We remark that this local information would be lost if a global monolithic preconditioner were to be used instead.

The paper is organized as follows: in Section 2 we introduce the mathematical models for the electrophysiology, the mechanics and the activation of the myocardium; we then integrate them thus obtaining a continuous integrated model. In Section 3 we carry on the space and time numerical approximations of the single core models; in Section 4 we introduce the preconditioner used to solve the monolithic linear system arising after the time and space discretizations. In Section 5 we report and discuss the numerical results obtained with the proposed methods, and we finally draw our conclusions in Section 7.

2 Mathematical models

The myocardium is a complex tissue composed of cardiomyocytes, organized in fibers and laminar collagen sheets [93], characterising the LV orthotropic internal structure. Therefore, the material properties of the LV are strongly dependent on the direction of fibers and sheets. First, the electrical conductivity of the cardiomyocytes is much larger in the longi-

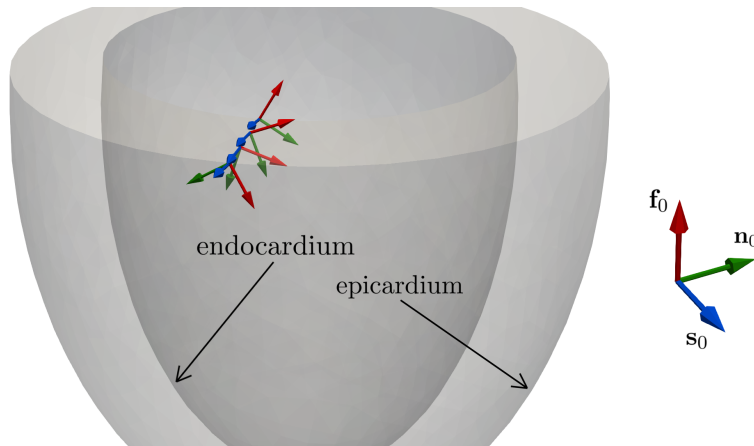


Figure 1: Fibers and sheets in the myocardium. The fiber orientation \mathbf{f}_0 varies transmurally, while the sheets direction \mathbf{s}_0 direction (which is oriented as the normal to the collagen sheets) is orthogonal to the LV walls. The \mathbf{n}_0 direction is orthogonal to both \mathbf{f}_0 and \mathbf{s}_0 .

tudinal direction than transversally [51, 74]; hence, at the macroscopic level, the transmembrane electric potential travels faster along the fibers. Secondly, it has been experimentally observed in [45] that the response of internal stresses to an external load significantly varies when measured among different directions since the myocardium is stiffer along the fibers. Finally, the contraction of the LV is made possible thanks to an active force stretching the cardiomyocytes lined up along the fibers direction [85]. In order to mathematically define fibers and sheets, we identify a local frame of reference by defining the mutually orthonormal vector fields \mathbf{f}_0 (fibers), \mathbf{s}_0 (sheets) and \mathbf{n}_0 (aka normals), where \mathbf{n}_0 is such that \mathbf{n}_0 , \mathbf{f}_0 , and \mathbf{s}_0 are mutually orthogonal, as depicted in Fig. 1.

2.1 Electrophysiology

Electrophysiology models take into account the electrochemical reactions occurring in the myocardium [21] triggered by an electric impulse originated at the sino-atrial node and then conveyed through the Purkinje fibers [20]. Such signal causes a quick depolarization of the LV cardiomyocytes, meaning that the *transmembrane potential* (i.e. the difference in electric potential between the interior and the exterior of a cell) changes sign in few microseconds. The potential drives a change in the concentration of different ionic species flowing through the so-called ionic gates located on the cellular membrane; the concentration of these ionic species, in turn, influences the potential thus slowly repolarizing the cells. The continuous interaction between the ions concentration and the potential causes a cascade effect for which a fast traveling wave known as *action potential* propagates in the whole myocardium [56].

In this work, we consider the *monodomain equation* for the description of the evolution

of the cellular transmembrane potential V , a nonlinear diffusion-reaction equation obtained by homogenization of the *bidomain equations* [20, 47, 74, 91]. The latter is indeed a richer, but more complicated model than the monodomain equation which is required for pathological conditions. In physiological conditions, the monodomain model is adequate and reads:

$$\begin{cases} \chi \left(C_m \frac{\partial V}{\partial t} + I^{ion}(V, \mathbf{w}) \right) = \nabla \cdot (J \mathbf{F}^{-1} \mathbf{D}_m \mathbf{F}^{-T} \nabla V) + I^{app}(t) & \text{in } \Omega_0 \times (0, T), \\ (J \mathbf{F}^{-1} \mathbf{D}_m \mathbf{F}^{-T} \nabla V) \cdot \mathbf{N} = 0 & \text{on } \partial\Omega_0 \times (0, T), \\ V = V_0 & \text{in } \Omega_0 \times \{0\}. \end{cases} \quad (1)$$

Here, Ω_0 is the reference computational domain (represented e.g. by the configuration of the LV at the end of the diastolic phase) and $T > 0$ is the final time. The parameters χ and $C_m \in \mathbb{R}^+$ are the ratio of membrane surface with respect to the volume and the membrane capacitance, respectively. In order to take into account the anisotropic electrical conductance [89], we define the diffusion tensor as

$$\mathbf{D}_m = \sigma_t \mathbf{I} + (\sigma_l - \sigma_t) \mathbf{f}_0 \otimes \mathbf{f}_0,$$

where $\sigma_t, \sigma_l \in \mathbb{R}^+$ are the electric conductivities in the directions transversal and longitudinal with respect to the fibers, respectively. The current geometry displacement $\mathbf{d} = \mathbf{X} - \mathbf{x}$ also influences the diffusive term, since $\mathbf{F} = \mathbf{I} + \frac{\partial \mathbf{d}}{\partial \mathbf{X}}$ and $J = \det(\mathbf{F})$, where \mathbf{X} and \mathbf{x} are the reference and deformed coordinates, respectively. The function $I^{app}(t)$ represents an externally applied current, which stands for the electric stimulus injected at the endocardium by the terminal fibers of the Purkinje network; for our purposes, we consider it as a source term which triggers the electrophysiological activity. The nonlinear term $I^{ion}(V, \mathbf{w})$ is peculiar of the *ionic model* which, in the Hodgkin-Huxley formalism [44], takes the form:

$$\begin{cases} \frac{dw_i}{dt} = \alpha_i(V)(w_i^\infty(V) - w_i) + \beta_i(V)w_i & \text{in } (0, T), \\ w_i(0) = w_{i,0}, & \text{at } t = 0, \end{cases} \quad \text{for } i = 1, \dots, N_I, \quad (2)$$

where the unknowns $w_i \in [0, 1]$ represent the ions concentration and/or the fraction of open ionic channels on the cellular membrane. Among the many choices proposed in literature – see e.g. [1, 56, 57, 63, 101] – we use the Bueno-Orovio minimal model [12] for its simplicity (for which $N_I = 3$); nonetheless, this model is capable of capturing the main features of the electrophysiology in healthy myocardial tissues. The system of differential equations

modeling the electrophysiology hence reads:

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{ll} \frac{\partial V}{\partial t} + \sum_{q \in \{fi, so, si\}} I^q(V, \mathbf{w}) = \nabla \cdot (J\mathbf{F}^{-1}\mathbf{D}_m\mathbf{F}^{-T}\nabla V) + I^{app}(t) & \text{in } \Omega_0 \times (0, T), \\ (J\mathbf{F}^{-1}\mathbf{D}_m\mathbf{F}^{-T}\nabla V) \cdot \mathbf{N} = 0 & \text{on } \partial\Omega_0 \times (0, T), \\ \frac{\partial \mathbf{w}}{\partial t} = \alpha(V)(\mathbf{w}^\infty(V) - \mathbf{w}) + \beta(V)\mathbf{w} & \text{in } \Omega_0 \times (0, T), \\ V = V_0, \quad \mathbf{w} = (1, 1, 0)^T & \text{in } \Omega_0 \times \{0\}, \end{array} \right. \quad (3)$$

since $\chi = C_m = 1$ as prescribed in [12], where the monodomain equation is presented in dimensionless form; moreover, $I^{ion}(V, \mathbf{w}) = \sum_{q \in \{fi, so, si\}} I^q(V, \mathbf{w})$. Albeit a system of ODEs, the

ionic model is defined in $\Omega_0 \times (0, T)$ since the dependence on V indirectly introduces a dependence on the space independent variable. The terms of the chosen ionic model are defined as:

$$\alpha(V) = \text{diag} \left(\frac{1 - H_{V_1}(V)}{\tau_1^-(V)}, \frac{1 - H_{V_2}(V)}{\tau_2^-(V)}, \frac{1}{\tau_3(V)} \right), \quad \beta(V) = \text{diag} \left(-\frac{H_{V_1}(V)}{\tau_1^+(V)}, -\frac{H_{V_2}(V)}{\tau_2^+(V)}, 0 \right),$$

$$\mathbf{w}^\infty(V) = \left(1 - H_{V_1^-}(V), H_{V_o}(V) \left(w_*^\infty - 1 + \frac{V}{\tau_2^\infty} \right) + 1 - \frac{V}{\tau_2^\infty}, H_{V_3}^{k_3}(V) \right)^T,$$

$$I^{fi}(V, w_1) = -\frac{H_{V_1}(V)(V - V_1)(\widehat{V} - V)}{\tau_{fi}} w_1, \quad I^{so}(V) = \frac{(1 - H_{V_2}(V))(V - V_o)}{\tau_o(V)} + \frac{H_{V_2}(V)}{\tau_{so}(V)},$$

$$I^{si}(V, w_2, w_3) = -\frac{H_{V_2}(V)}{\tau_{si}} w_2 w_3,$$

while the characteristic time functions read:

$$\tau_1^-(V) = H_{V_1^-}(V)(\tau_1'' - \tau_1') + \tau_1', \quad \tau_2^-(V) = H_{V_2^-}^{k_2}(V)(\tau_2'' - \tau_2') + \tau_2',$$

$$\tau_3(V) = H_{V_2}(V)(\tau_3'' - \tau_3') + \tau_3', \quad \tau_o(V) = H_{V_o}(V)(\tau_o'' - \tau_o') + \tau_o',$$

$$\tau_{so}(V) = H_{V_{so}}^{k_{so}}(V)(\tau_{so}'' - \tau_{so}') + \tau_{so}'.$$

Here $H_a(z)$ is the Heaviside function centered in $a \in \mathbb{R}$, while $H_a^\varepsilon(z) = \frac{(1 + \tanh(\varepsilon(z - a)))}{2}$ stands for its smooth approximation depending on a constant parameter $\varepsilon \in \mathbb{R}^+$.

2.2 Tissue passive mechanics

An adequate mechanical model for the description of the myocardium's displacement must account for the tissue's complex behavior. Firstly, the internal stresses induced by a pre-

scribed deformation are highly anisotropic [40] and in our formulation depend on the directions \mathbf{f}_0 , \mathbf{s}_0 , and \mathbf{n}_0 . We model the compressibility of the tissue through a nearly-incompressible formulation by weakly penalizing large volumetric variations [94] since with this approach small volumetric changes are allowed. Finally, the contraction of the muscle due to the electrophysiological activity must be taken into account: with this aim, we introduce the auxiliary dimensionless variable γ_f , which represents the relative stretching (or elongation) of the fibers. The model that we use to describe the evolution of γ_f will be detailed in Sec. 2.3 as it constitutes the link between the electrophysiology and the mechanics.

We recall the momentum conservation equation in the reference configuration Ω_0 , endowed with boundary and initial conditions, in the unknown displacement variable \mathbf{d} [65]:

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{ll} \rho \frac{\partial^2 \mathbf{d}}{\partial t^2} - \nabla_0 \cdot \mathbf{P}(\mathbf{d}, \gamma_f) = \mathbf{0} & \text{in } \Omega_0 \times (0, T), \\ (\mathbf{N} \otimes \mathbf{N}) \left(K_{\perp}^{\eta} \mathbf{d} + C_{\perp}^{\eta} \frac{\partial \mathbf{d}}{\partial t} \right) + (\mathbf{I} - \mathbf{N} \otimes \mathbf{N}) \left(K_{\parallel}^{\eta} \mathbf{d} + C_{\parallel}^{\eta} \frac{\partial \mathbf{d}}{\partial t} \right) \\ \quad + \mathbf{P}(\mathbf{d}, \gamma_f) \mathbf{N} = 0 & \text{on } \Gamma_0^{\eta} \times (0, T), \\ \mathbf{P}(\mathbf{d}, \gamma_f) \mathbf{N} = p^{endo}(t) \mathbf{N} & \text{on } \Gamma_0^{endo} \times (0, T), \\ \mathbf{d} = \mathbf{d}_0, \quad \frac{\partial \mathbf{d}}{\partial t} = \dot{\mathbf{d}}_0 & \text{in } \Omega_0 \times \{0\}. \end{array} \right. \quad (4)$$

Here, Γ_0^{η} with $\eta = \{epi, base\}$ represent the subsets of the boundary corresponding to the epicardium and the base of the myocardium as depicted in Fig. 2. We denote by $K_{\perp}^{\eta}, K_{\parallel}^{\eta}, C_{\perp}^{\eta}, C_{\parallel}^{\eta} \in \mathbb{R}^+$ the parameters of generalized Robin conditions on each of these boundary subsets: the symbols \perp and \parallel identify either a parameter relative to the normal or the tangential direction, respectively. $p^{endo}(t)$ is the external load applied by the fluid at the endocardium wall which, at this stage of the model description only, we assume to be prescribed. \mathbf{N} is the outward directed unit vector normal to the boundary; \mathbf{d}_0 and $\dot{\mathbf{d}}_0$ are the initial data. The information related to the mechanical behaviour is embedded in the nonlinear Piola–Kirchhoff strain tensor $\mathbf{P} = \mathbf{P}(\mathbf{d}, \gamma_f)$, which also must incorporate the active properties of the muscle. In order to characterize \mathbf{P} , we first define the right Cauchy–Green tensor as $\mathbf{C} = \mathbf{F}^T \mathbf{F}$, where $\mathbf{F} = \mathbf{I} + \nabla_0 \mathbf{d}$ is the strain tensor, and we introduce the strain energy function $\mathcal{W}(\mathbf{C}) : \mathbb{R}^{3 \times 3} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ which relates the strain energy of the material to the strain tensor. The tissue mechanical properties are taken into account through the strain energy function: under the hyperelasticity assumption, the latter is differentiated with respect to the deformation tensor in order to obtain the Piola–Kirchhoff strain tensor, i.e.:

$$\mathbf{P}(\mathbf{d}) = \frac{\partial \mathcal{W}(\mathbf{C})}{\partial \mathbf{F}}.$$

A very popular model for the myocardial tissue is the Holzapfel–Ogden [45] one. This is obtained by considering different contributions and by taking into account the anisotropic

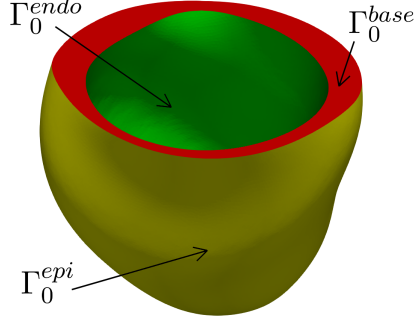


Figure 2: A patient-specific LV geometry with the Γ_0^{epi} , Γ_0^{endo} , and Γ_0^{base} boundary subsets highlighted.

nature of the muscle:

$$\begin{aligned}\widetilde{\mathcal{W}}(\mathbf{C}) &= \mathcal{W}_1(\mathcal{I}_1) + \mathcal{W}_{4f}(\mathcal{I}_{4f}) + \mathcal{W}_{4s}(\mathcal{I}_{4s}) + \mathcal{W}_{8fs}(\mathcal{I}_{8fs}) \\ &= \frac{a}{2b} e^{b(\mathcal{I}_1-3)} + \sum_{i \in \{f,s\}} \frac{a_i}{2b_i} \left[e^{b(\mathcal{I}_{4i}-1)^2} - 1 \right] + \frac{a_{fs}}{2b_{fs}} \left[e^{b\mathcal{I}_{8fs}^2} - 1 \right],\end{aligned}$$

where

$$\begin{aligned}\mathcal{I}_1 &= \text{tr } \mathbf{C}, & \mathcal{I}_{4f} &= \mathbf{C} : \mathbf{f}_0 \otimes \mathbf{f}_0 = \mathbf{f} \cdot \mathbf{f}, \\ \mathcal{I}_{4s} &= \mathbf{C} : \mathbf{s}_0 \otimes \mathbf{s}_0 = \mathbf{s} \cdot \mathbf{s}, & \mathcal{I}_{8fs} &= \mathbf{C} : \mathbf{f}_0 \otimes \mathbf{s}_0 = \mathbf{f} \cdot \mathbf{s}\end{aligned}$$

are the invariants of the tensor \mathbf{C} and the parameters a_k, b_k are fitted from experimental data [45]. The function $\langle y \rangle = y H_0(y)$ indicates the positive part of y and its role consists in switching off the contributions to the stresses of the fibers and sheets when the material is under compression along their directions.

The mechanical model should also account for the volumetric change to which the myocardium undergoes during the cardiac cycle. It has been observed in [19, 112] that albeit this change is moderate, still it significantly ranges from 2% to 15%. For these reasons we use a *nearly-incompressible* formulation, which allows for small volume variations [28]. We multiplicatively decompose the deformation gradient \mathbf{F} into the isochoric and the volumetric parts as:

$$\mathbf{F} = \mathbf{F}_v \overline{\mathbf{F}}, \quad \mathbf{F}_v = J^{\frac{1}{3}} \mathbf{I}, \quad (5)$$

where $J = \det(\mathbf{F}_v) = \det(\mathbf{F})$, being $\det(\overline{\mathbf{F}}) = 1$, and we weakly enforce the incompressibility constraint by adding to the strain energy function $\widetilde{\mathcal{W}}$ a convex term $\mathcal{W}_{vol}(J)$ such that $J = 1$ is its global minimum; in this manner, large variations in volume are penalized. We choose:

$$\mathcal{W}_{vol}(J) = \frac{B}{2} (J + J \log J - 1), \quad (6)$$

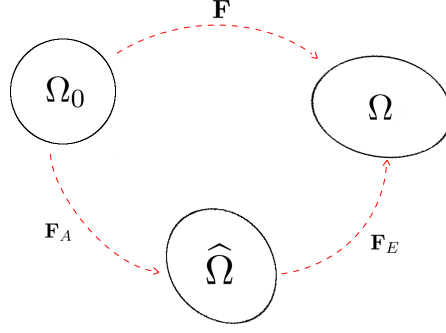


Figure 3: The active strain decomposition of the strain tensor \mathbf{F} .

such that the larger is the bulk modulus $B \in \mathbb{R}^+$, the “stronger” is the enforcement of the incompressibility constraint. Following [92], we evaluate the isotropic term \mathcal{W}_1 in $\bar{\mathcal{I}}_1 = \text{tr}(\bar{\mathbf{F}}^T \bar{\mathbf{F}}) = J^{-\frac{2}{3}} \mathcal{I}_1$ (instead of \mathcal{I}_1). The energy function hence reads:

$$\mathcal{W} = \widetilde{\mathcal{W}} + \mathcal{W}_{vol} = \mathcal{W}_1(J^{-\frac{2}{3}} \mathcal{I}_1) + \mathcal{W}_{4f}(\mathcal{I}_{4f}) + \mathcal{W}_{4s}(\mathcal{I}_{4s}) + \mathcal{W}_{8fs}(\mathcal{I}_{8fs}) + \mathcal{W}_{vol}(J).$$

We now proceed by modeling the active behavior of the myocardium driven by the stretching of the fibers. By means of the *active strain* approach [2, 3, 62, 85]. A virtual intermediate state $\hat{\Omega}$, representing the active part of the deformation, between the reference domain Ω_0 and the deformed one Ω (see Fig. 3) is introduced. The domain $\hat{\Omega}$ is reached from Ω_0 by applying a prescribed active transformation (which we will specify later) represented by the tensor \mathbf{F}_A . On the other hand, the material’s elastic response to the prescribed active transformation is embedded in the tensor \mathbf{F}_E and finally transforms $\hat{\Omega}$ into Ω . Mathematically, this approach requires a decomposition in the form

$$\mathbf{F} = \mathbf{F}_E \mathbf{F}_A = \mathbf{F}_v \bar{\mathbf{F}}_E \mathbf{F}_A = J^{\frac{1}{3}} \bar{\mathbf{F}}_E \mathbf{F}_A, \quad (7)$$

where we also take into account the factorization (5) for the term \mathbf{F}_E . Finally, we define \mathbf{P} in Ω_0 with respect to the total displacement \mathbf{d} of the tissue by applying a pull-back to the stress computed in the intermediate state $\hat{\Omega}$, i.e.:

$$\mathbf{P} = \det(\mathbf{F}_A) \mathbf{P}_E \mathbf{F}_A^{-T}, \quad \mathbf{P}_E = \frac{\partial \mathcal{W}(\mathbf{C}_E, J)}{\partial \mathbf{F}_E}.$$

In Section 2.3, we will provide the explicit form of the tensor \mathbf{F}_A under the requirement of symmetry and identity of its determinant. Under these assumptions, the final form of the

tensor \mathbf{P} reads:

$$\begin{aligned}
\mathbf{P}(\mathbf{d}, \mathbf{F}_A) &= ae^{b(J^{-\frac{2}{3}}I_1^E-3)}J^{-\frac{2}{3}}\left(\mathbf{F}_E\mathbf{F}_A^{-1}-\frac{I_1^E}{3}(\mathbf{F}_E\mathbf{F}_A)^{-T}\right) \\
&\quad + 2a_f e^{b_f \langle I_{4f}^E - 1 \rangle^2} \langle I_{4f}^E - 1 \rangle (\mathbf{f}_E \otimes \mathbf{f}_A) \\
&\quad + 2a_s e^{b_s \langle I_{4s}^E - 1 \rangle^2} \langle I_{4s}^E - 1 \rangle (\mathbf{s}_E \otimes \mathbf{s}_A) \\
&\quad + a_{fs} e^{b_{fs} (I_{8fs}^E)^2} I_{8fs}^E (\mathbf{f}_E \otimes \mathbf{s}_A + \mathbf{s}_E \otimes \mathbf{f}_A) \\
&\quad + \frac{B}{2} J \left(1 + \log(J) - \frac{1}{J} \right) (\mathbf{F}_E \mathbf{F}_A)^{-T},
\end{aligned} \tag{8}$$

where $\mathbf{f}_E = \mathbf{F}_E \mathbf{f}_0$, $\mathbf{f}_A = \mathbf{F}_A^{-1} \mathbf{f}_0$ and analogously $\mathbf{s}_E = \mathbf{F}_E \mathbf{s}_0$, $\mathbf{s}_A = \mathbf{F}_A^{-1} \mathbf{s}_0$.

2.3 Mechanical activation

The activation model of the myocardium represents the link between the electrophysiology and the tissue (passive) mechanics. Instead of cellular models describing the complex dynamic taking place inside the sarcomeres [80], we exploit a phenomenological model for the local shortening of the fibers γ_f at the macroscopic level. This model has been proposed in [87] and further developed in [83], and assumes that the evolution of γ_f is due to the concentration of calcium ions $[Ca^{2+}]$ and by a feedback from the mechanics (through the variable \mathbf{d}):

$$\begin{cases} g(c) \frac{\partial \gamma_f}{\partial t} - \varepsilon \Delta \gamma_f = \Phi(c, \gamma_f, \mathbf{d}) & \text{in } \Omega_0 \times (0, T), \\ \nabla \gamma_f \cdot \mathbf{N} = 0 & \text{on } \partial \Omega_0 \times (0, T), \\ \gamma_f = 0 & \text{in } \Omega_0 \times \{0\}. \end{cases} \tag{9}$$

Here, $g(c) = \hat{\mu}_A c^2$, while the active force $\Phi(c, \gamma_f, \mathbf{d})$ is defined as follows:

$$\Phi(c, \gamma_f, \mathbf{d}) = H_{c_0}(c) \alpha (c - c_0)^2 R_{FL}(I_{4f}) + \sum_{j=1}^5 (-1)^j (j+1)(j+2) I_{4f} \gamma_f^j.$$

With respect to the formulation [83] we added the diffusive term $\varepsilon \Delta \gamma_f$ in (9) to yield a model in the form of a PDE. While this is not strictly motivated by physical considerations, it can be interpreted as the upscaling of the microscopic activation at the macroscopic continuum level of the tissue. Moreover, this choice yields a more regular solution γ_f in terms of the space variable \mathbf{X} , from which the numerical approximation will also benefit.

The contraction of the tissue is triggered by the calcium concentration exceeding a threshold value c_0 . The parameters α and $\hat{\mu}_A$ represent quantities to be properly tuned for the case under consideration, while R_{FL} is the sarcomere force-length relationship [38] of

cardiac cells which we represent as truncated Fourier series:

$$R_{FL}(z) = \left(\frac{d_0}{2} + \sum_{n=1}^3 \left[d_n \sin(nl_0 z^{1/2}) + e_n \cos(nl_0 z^{1/2}) \right] \right) \chi_{[SL_{min}, SL_{max}]}(z^{1/2}).$$

The calcium concentration is not explicitly represented in the set of variables \mathbf{w} in the Bueno-Orovio model; however, the variable w_3 acts as a generic ion concentration, for which it can be interpreted as $c = [Ca^{2+}]$; this choice has been already made in literature e.g. in [83, 84].

Being γ_f the solution of (9), we choose the following orthotropic form for the tensor \mathbf{F}_A [3, 6, 72, 83, 84]:

$$\mathbf{F}_A = \mathbf{I} + \gamma_f \mathbf{f}_0 \otimes \mathbf{f}_0 + \gamma_s \mathbf{s}_0 \otimes \mathbf{s}_0 + \gamma_n \mathbf{n}_0 \otimes \mathbf{n}_0,$$

which is symmetric and we set $\gamma_n = \gamma_n(\gamma_f)$, $\gamma_s = \gamma_s(\gamma_f, \gamma_n)$. In analogy with γ_f , these functions represent the local shortening (or elongation) of the tissue in the directions \mathbf{s}_0 and \mathbf{n}_0 , respectively. Following [7], we define γ_n such that, according to experimental observations [66], the thickening of the ventricle's walls is transversely non-homogeneous:

$$\gamma_n = k'(\lambda) \left(\frac{1}{\sqrt{1 + \gamma_f}} - 1 \right).$$

Indeed, the latter depends on an independent variable λ which represents the transmural coordinate, taking the value λ_{endo} at the endocardium and the value λ_{epi} at the epicardium. As detailed in [7] - where the results of numerical simulations are compared and validated against experimental data for strains in the canine LV provided in [66] - this model is able to capture the transmural heterogeneity of the thickening of the LV. The function $k'(\lambda)$ is defined as:

$$k'(\lambda) = \bar{k}' \left(\bar{k}_{endo} \frac{\lambda - \lambda_{epi}}{\lambda_{endo} - \lambda_{epi}} + \bar{k}_{epi} \frac{\lambda - \lambda_{endo}}{\lambda_{epi} - \lambda_{endo}} \right). \quad (10)$$

Finally, as anticipated, we set:

$$\gamma_s = \frac{1}{(1 + \gamma_f)(1 + \gamma_n)} - 1.$$

In this way the condition $\det(\mathbf{F}_A) = 1$ is fulfilled.

2.4 The coupled model: electromechanics

Writing together Eqs.(3), (4), and (9), the coupled electromechanics problem finally reads:

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{ll}
\frac{\partial V}{\partial t} + \sum_{q \in \{fi, so, si\}} I^q(V, \mathbf{w}) = \nabla \cdot (J\mathbf{F}^{-1}\mathbf{D}_m\mathbf{F}^{-T}\nabla V) - I^{app}(t) & \text{in } \Omega_0 \times (0, T), \\
\frac{\partial \mathbf{w}}{\partial t} = \alpha(V)(\mathbf{w}^\infty(V) - \mathbf{w}) + \beta(V)\mathbf{w} & \text{in } \Omega_0 \times (0, T), \\
\rho \frac{\partial^2 \mathbf{d}}{\partial t^2} - \nabla_0 \cdot \mathbf{P}(\mathbf{d}, \gamma_f) = \mathbf{0} & \text{in } \Omega_0 \times (0, T), \\
g(w_3) \frac{\partial \gamma_f}{\partial t} - \varepsilon \Delta \gamma_f = \Phi(w_3, \gamma_f, \mathbf{d}) & \text{in } \Omega_0 \times (0, T), \\
(J\mathbf{F}^{-1}\mathbf{D}_m\mathbf{F}^{-T}\nabla V) \cdot \mathbf{N} = 0 & \text{on } \partial\Omega_0 \times (0, T), \\
(\mathbf{N} \otimes \mathbf{N}) \left(K_\perp^\eta \mathbf{d} + C_\perp^\eta \frac{\partial \mathbf{d}}{\partial t} \right) + (\mathbf{I} - \mathbf{N} \otimes \mathbf{N}) \left(K_\parallel^\eta \mathbf{d} + C_\parallel^\eta \frac{\partial \mathbf{d}}{\partial t} \right) \\
+ \mathbf{P}(\mathbf{d}) \mathbf{N} = \mathbf{0} & \text{on } \Gamma_0^\eta \times (0, T), \\
\mathbf{P}(\mathbf{d}) \mathbf{N} = p^{endo}(t) \mathbf{N} & \text{on } \Gamma_0^{endo} \times (0, T), \\
\nabla \gamma_f \cdot \mathbf{N} = 0 & \text{on } \partial\Omega_0 \times (0, T), \\
V = V_0, \quad \mathbf{w} = (1, 1, 0)^T, \quad \gamma_f = 0 & \text{in } \Omega_0 \times \{0\}, \\
\mathbf{d} = \mathbf{d}_0, \quad \frac{\partial \mathbf{d}}{\partial t} = \dot{\mathbf{d}}_0 & \text{in } \Omega_0 \times \{0\}.
\end{array} \right. \quad (11)$$

We remark that at this stage the pressure $p^{endo}(t)$ is still prescribed: however, later in Section 4.1, we will consider $p^{endo}(t)$ as an additional unknown of the coupled problem, being the solution of 0D problems (that is, ordinary differential equations) at each of the phases of the cardiac cycle.

2.5 Prestress

A common problem which has to be considered in biological modeling involving a fluid–structure interface is that the reference geometry Ω_0 , acquired from medical images at the telediastole (the phase immediately before the systole), does not necessarily correspond to a stress–free configuration. This because the blood exerts a pressure on the endocardium walls $p^{endo}(t)$ which, at each time instant of the heartbeat, is larger than zero, taking values ranging approximately from a minimum of 5 mmHg to a maximum of 120 mmHg in healthy individuals. In turn, this implies that solving problem (4) with a physiological endocardial pressure $p^{endo} > 0$ would give rise to non-physiological displacements as the internal stresses are not in equilibrium with the intraventricular blood’s pressure of LV. This issue is particularly evident in the case of patient–specific settings since, unlike the case of idealized geometries, the actual computational geometry is obtained from medical

images and hence the reference domain Ω_0 cannot be arbitrarily chosen. Typically, the LV geometry is acquired at the so-called telediastole and the electromechanics (or mechanics) model initiated at this stage. The corresponding pressure is indicated with \bar{p}^{endo} and the stressed LV configuration is determined in these conditions. To our knowledge, two strategies have been proposed in literature to address this issue.

Pressure preload [30, 83, 100, 102]: the reference geometry Ω_0 is loaded with the prescribed pressure \bar{p}^{endo} . This is done by solving the steady variant of the mechanics problem (4) while gradually incrementing the pressure until the desired value \bar{p}^{endo} . The displacement field so obtained is then used as an initial datum \mathbf{d}_0 for the unsteady problem.

Pressure prestress [46, 99]: we compute an internal stresses distribution such that the reference geometry is in equilibrium with the blood pressure \bar{p}^{endo} . An additive decomposition of the strain tensor $\tilde{\mathbf{P}} = \mathbf{P}(\mathbf{d}) + \mathbf{P}_0$ is operated, where the prestress tensor \mathbf{P}_0 is determined to ensure a null displacement \mathbf{d}_0 in correspondance of the assigned pressure \bar{p}^{endo} .

We adopt the pressure prestress approach since in the preload one the procedure returns a configuration which might be significantly different with respect to the initial geometry as shown in [46]. Indeed, we already know the loaded configuration from medical images. In order to compute \mathbf{P}_0 according to this approach, we proceed by adapting the method proposed in [46] to our model by first defining the following mechanical problem:

$$\begin{cases} \nabla_0 \cdot \mathbf{P}(\mathbf{d}) = -\nabla_0 \cdot \mathbf{P}_0 & \text{in } \Omega_0, \\ (\mathbf{N} \otimes \mathbf{N})K_{\perp}^{\eta} \mathbf{d} + (\mathbf{I} - \mathbf{N} \otimes \mathbf{N})K_{\parallel}^{\eta} \mathbf{d} + \mathbf{P}(\mathbf{d}) \mathbf{N} = 0 & \text{on } \Gamma_0^{\eta}, \\ \mathbf{P}(\mathbf{d}) \mathbf{N} = p^{endo}(t)\mathbf{N} & \text{on } \Gamma_0^{endo}. \end{cases} \quad (12)$$

Eq. (12) is the steady, passive version of problem (4) with the additive decomposition of the strain tensor. Moreover, we set

$$p_k = \frac{k}{S} \bar{p}^{endo}, \quad k = 1, \dots, S,$$

where $S \in \mathbb{N}$ is the number of steps of the continuation method that we exploit to gradually increase the pressure value. Then, the fixed point Algorithm 1 is applied to compute \mathbf{P}_0 . First, we compute the approximation $\tilde{\mathbf{P}}_0 = \text{PRESTRESS}(100, 10^{-2}, \bar{p}^{endo}, \mathbf{0})$ and finally we set $\mathbf{P}_0 = \text{PRESTRESS}(1, 10^{-5}, \bar{p}^{endo}, \tilde{\mathbf{P}}_0)$. The additional step is performed to require a smaller tolerance when the pressure has already reached a closer value of the tensor $\tilde{\mathbf{P}}_0$ to the target. We observe that, while $\frac{\|\mathbf{P}(\mathbf{d}_k^m, \mathbf{I})\|_{\infty}}{\|\mathbf{P}_{0,k}^m\|_{\infty}} \rightarrow 0$ for $m \rightarrow +\infty$ in Algorithm 1, the displacement \mathbf{d}_k^{m+1} does not converge to $\mathbf{0}$ but to a vector which we denote by $\hat{\mathbf{d}}$. However, we observe that the quantity $\|\hat{\mathbf{d}}\|_{\infty}$ is negligible with respect to the endocardial walls

thickness, and that this initial displacement ensures that the prestress is in equilibrium with the pressure at the epicardium. Therefore, we decide to set $\mathbf{d}_0 = \widehat{\mathbf{d}}$ in (11).

Algorithm 1 Prestress computation

```

function PRESTRESS( $S, tol, \bar{p}, \mathbf{P}_{0,0}$ )
  for  $k = 1, \dots, S$  do
    set  $m = 1, \mathbf{P}_{0,k}^m = \mathbf{P}_{0,k-1}$ ;
    repeat
      obtain  $\mathbf{d}_k^{m+1}$  by solving problem (12) with  $p = p_k = \frac{k}{S}\bar{p}$  and  $\mathbf{P}_0 = \mathbf{P}_{0,k}^m$ ;
      update  $\mathbf{P}_{0,k}^{m+1} = \mathbf{P}_{0,k}^m + \mathbf{P}(\mathbf{d}_k^{m+1}, \mathbf{I})$  by means of Eq. (8);
      set  $m = m + 1$ ;
    until  $\frac{\|\mathbf{P}(\mathbf{d}_k^m, \mathbf{I})\|_\infty}{\|\mathbf{P}_{0,k}^m\|_\infty} < tol$ 
    set  $\mathbf{P}_{0,k} = \mathbf{P}_{0,k}^m$ ;
  end for
return  $\mathbf{P}_{0,S}$ 
end function

```

3 Numerical discretization

In this section we describe the numerical approximation of the electromechanics problem (11). The FEM [77] is used for the space discretization of the PDEs, while BDF [77] are used for the time discretization.

3.1 Space discretization

We consider a mesh composed of tetrahedrons \mathcal{T}_h , with h representing the maximum size of the elements $K \in \mathcal{T}_h$, such that $\cup_{K \in \mathcal{T}_h} K = \Omega_0$; the mesh elements are pairwise disjoint and their union $\Omega_0 \subset \mathbb{R}^3$ is the region of the space identified by the myocardium in the telediastolic phase of the heartbeat. In this work, we consider two LV geometries, that is an idealized prolate ellipsoid (as is often done in literature [30, 39, 83]) and a patient-specific geometry extracted through a segmentation procedure from 3D MRI images¹, as

¹The MRI images are provided by Prof. J. Schwitter (Chief physician at the Centre Hospitalier Universitaire Vaudois CHUV, Lausanne) and Dr. P. Masci in the framework of the collaboration CMCS@EPFL-CHUV hospital.

we will describe in Sec. 5.1. We will approximate each of the single core models in the computational domain with a space discretization based on the FEM. We will denote by $N_V^{\text{dof}}, N_{\mathbf{w}}^{\text{dof}}, N_{\mathbf{d}}^{\text{dof}}$, and $N_{\gamma_f}^{\text{dof}}$ the number of Degrees of Freedom (DoF) (i.e. the size of the discretized single core model) for the potential, ionic variables, displacement, and fiber shortening, respectively. The underlying number of nodes determined by the mesh \mathcal{T}_h and the degree r is indicated as N_h . Hence, we have that, for scalar PDEs as the electrophysiology, $N_V^{\text{dof}} = N_h$.

3.1.1 Monodomain equation

We use the FEM for the spatial approximation of the monodomain equation (1). We first introduce the finite dimensional space $\mathcal{X}_h^r = \{v \in C^0(\bar{\Omega}_0) : v|_K \in \mathbb{P}^r(K) \forall K \in \mathcal{T}_h\}$, where $\mathbb{P}^r(K)$ is the set of polynomials of degree smaller than or equal to r in the element K . Moreover, we denote by $\{\psi_i\}_{i=1}^{N_V^{\text{dof}}}$ a basis of \mathcal{X}_h^r with $N_V^{\text{dof}} = \dim(\mathcal{X}_h^r)$. The projection of the solution $V(t)$ on \mathcal{X}_h^r can hence be written as $V_h(t) = \sum_{j=1}^{N_V^{\text{dof}}} V_j(t) \psi_j$ and the weak semidiscrete formulation of the problem reads: given $\mathbf{w}_h(t)$ and $\mathbf{d}_h(t)$, find, for all $t \in (0, T)$, $V_h(t) \in \mathcal{X}_h^r$ such that

$$\begin{aligned} & \int_{\Omega_0} \dot{V}_h \psi_i \, d\Omega_0 + \int_{\Omega_0} (J\mathbf{F}_h^{-1} \mathbf{D}_m \mathbf{F}_h^{-T} \nabla V_h) \cdot \nabla \psi_i \, d\Omega_0 \\ & + \sum_{q \in \{fi, so, si\}} \int_{\Omega_0} I^q(V_h, \mathbf{w}_h) \psi_i \, d\Omega_0 = \int_{\Omega_0} I^{app}(t) \psi_i \, d\Omega_0, \quad \forall i = 1, \dots, N_V^{\text{dof}}, \end{aligned} \quad (13)$$

with $V_h(0) = \sum_{j=1}^{N_V^{\text{dof}}} (V_0, \psi_j)_{L^2(\Omega_0)} \psi_j$.

By setting $\mathbf{V}_h(t) = \{V_j(t)\}_{j=1}^{N_V^{\text{dof}}}$ and $\mathbf{V}_{0,h} = \{(V_0, \psi_j)_{\mathcal{H}}\}_{j=1}^{N_V^{\text{dof}}}$, we rewrite Eq. (13) as a system of nonlinear ODEs:

$$\begin{cases} \mathbf{M} \dot{\mathbf{V}}_h(t) + \mathbb{K}(\mathbf{d}_h(t)) \mathbf{V}_h(t) + \mathbf{I}_{ion}(\mathbf{V}_h(t), \mathbf{w}_h(t)) = \mathbf{I}_{app}(t) & t \in (0, T), \\ \mathbf{V}_h(0) = \mathbf{V}_{0,h}, \end{cases} \quad (14)$$

where:

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbb{M}_{ij} &= \int_{\Omega_0} \psi_j \psi_i \, d\Omega_0, \quad \mathbb{K}_{ij}(\mathbf{d}_h) = \int_{\Omega_0} (J\mathbf{F}_h^{-1} \mathbf{D}_m \mathbf{F}_h^{-T} \nabla \psi_j) \cdot \nabla \psi_i \, d\Omega_0 \\ (\mathbf{I}_{ion}(\mathbf{V}_h, \mathbf{w}_h))_i &= \sum_{q \in \{fi, so, si\}} \int_{\Omega_0} I^q(V_h, \mathbf{w}_h) \psi_i \, d\Omega_0, \quad (\mathbf{I}_{app}(t))_i = \int_{\Omega_0} I^{app}(t) \psi_i \, d\Omega_0. \end{aligned} \quad (15)$$

We will discuss in Sec. 3.1.3 two different strategies for the approximation of the nonlinear term $\mathbf{I}_{ion}(\mathbf{V}_h, \mathbf{w}_h)$. Moreover, we will use a lumped mass matrix \mathbb{M}^L in place of \mathbb{M} in Eq. (14) in order to avoid numerical instabilities, a known numerical issue that may occur in the case of problems with “traveling waves” due to the dominance of zero order terms over the second order ones [13].

3.1.2 Ionic model

The ionic model (2) is a system of ODEs that indirectly depends on the space variable through the transmembrane potential V . By denoting with $\{\mathbf{x}_j\}_{j=1}^{N_{\mathbf{w}}^{\text{dof}}}$ the set of the degrees of freedom, we write the equations of the model evaluated at each of these points and we denote the value of the l -th ionic variable in \mathbf{x}_j by $w_j^l(t)$. Similarly, we write $V_j(t) = V_h(\mathbf{x}_j, t)$, and finally rearrange the unknowns in the vector $\mathbf{w}_h(t)$ in the following fashion:

$$\mathbf{w}_h(t) = \left\{ \mathbf{w}_h^l(t) \right\}_{l=1}^{N_I} \quad \text{and} \quad \mathbf{w}_h^l(t) = \left\{ w_j^l(t) \right\}_{j=1}^{N_{\mathbf{w}}^{\text{dof}}}. \quad (16)$$

The problem thus obtained reads: given $V_h(t)$, find, for all $t \in (0, T)$, $\mathbf{w}_h(t)$ such that

$$\dot{w}_j^l + (\alpha_l(V_j) - \beta_l(V_j))w_j^l = \alpha_l(V_j)w_l^\infty(V_j), \quad (17)$$

with $w_j^l(0) = w_0^l$, for $l = 1, \dots, N_I$, $j = 1, \dots, N_{\mathbf{w}}^{\text{dof}}$.

Following the conventions of Eq. (16), system (17) can be conveniently rewritten in algebraic form as

$$\begin{cases} \dot{\mathbf{w}}_h(t) + \mathbb{U}(V_h(t))\mathbf{w}_h(t) = \mathbf{Q}(V_h(t)), & t \in (0, T], \\ \mathbf{w}_h(0) = \mathbf{w}_{0,h}, \end{cases}$$

where the block matrix \mathbb{U} and the block vector \mathbf{Q} are defined as

$$\begin{aligned} (\mathbf{Q}(V_h))_m &= \alpha_l(V_j)w_l^\infty(V_j), \\ (\mathbb{U}(V_h))_{mm} &= \alpha_l(V_j) - \beta_l(V_j), \end{aligned}$$

where $m = lN_{\mathbf{w}}^{\text{dof}} + j$, for $l = 1, \dots, N_I$, $j = 1, \dots, N_{\mathbf{w}}^{\text{dof}}$.

3.1.3 Ionic currents

As anticipated in Section 3.1.1, different choices can be made for the approximation of the term $\mathbf{I}_{ion}(\mathbf{V}_h, \mathbf{w}_h)$ in Eq. (13). By denoting with $\{\mathbf{x}_s^K\}_{s=1}^{N_q}$ and $\{\omega_s^K\}_{s=1}^{N_q}$ the quadrature nodes and the corresponding weights in a generic mesh element $K \in \mathcal{T}_h$, we consider two approaches which are investigated, for instance, in [52, 67, 68, 69].

State Variable Interpolation (SVI): the variables V_h and \mathbf{w}_h in Eq. (15) are evaluated at the quadrature nodes

$$\int_{\Omega_0} I^q(V_h, \mathbf{w}_h)\psi_i d\Omega_0 = \sum_{K \in \mathcal{T}_h} \left(\sum_{s=1}^{N_q} I^q \left(\sum_{j=1}^{N_V^{\text{dof}}} V_j(t)\psi_j(\mathbf{x}_s^K), \sum_{j=1}^{N_{\mathbf{w}}^{\text{dof}}} \mathbf{w}_j(t)\psi_j(\mathbf{x}_s^K) \right) \psi_i(\mathbf{x}_s^K) \omega_s^K \right).$$

This approach corresponds to the standard FEM approximation.

Ionic Currents Interpolation (ICI): for each element, I^q is evaluated at the degrees of freedom of V and its value at the quadrature nodes is obtained by interpolation through the same Lagrangian polynomial basis of degree r used for the FE space.

$$\int_{\Omega_0} I^q(V_h, \mathbf{w}_h) \psi_i d\Omega_0 \approx \sum_{K \in \mathcal{T}_h} \left(\sum_{s=1}^{N_q} \sum_{j=1}^{N_V^{dof}} I^q(V_j(t), \mathbf{w}_j(t)) \psi_j(\mathbf{x}_s^K) \psi_i(\mathbf{x}_s^K) \omega_s^K \right).$$

The two approaches are equivalent if I^q is linear in V_h and \mathbf{w}_h . Both the approaches tend to overestimate the conduction velocities if the computational mesh is not “sufficiently” fine [61], but yield convergent results under h-refinement. The SVI approach corresponds to a standard FE approximation, while the ICI one yields a faster assembly of the ionic currents term [52, 67, 83] but introduces an error in the evaluation of $\mathbf{I}_{ion}(\mathbf{V}_h, \mathbf{w}_h)$. In our case, as we will describe in Section 5, the overall time required for the assembly of the terms of the system arising from the full discretization of Eq. (11) is mostly determined by the construction of the mechanics terms, while the assembly of the ionic currents term does not represent a computational bottleneck; we hence use the SVI method since the advantage of using ICI here is negligible.

3.1.4 Active and passive mechanics

As previously done for the monodomain equation, we use the FEM to approximate the momentum equation (4). We denote by $[\mathcal{X}_h^r]^3$ the finite dimensional subspace of vector valued functions and by $\{\psi_i\}_{i=1}^{N_d^{dof}}$ its basis. The Galerkin formulation of Eq. (4) reads: given $\gamma_{f,h}(t)$, find, for all $t \in (0, T)$, $\mathbf{d}_h(t) \in [\mathcal{X}_h^r]^3$ such that

$$\begin{aligned} & \int_{\Omega_0} \rho_s \frac{\partial^2 \mathbf{d}_h}{\partial t^2} \cdot \psi_i d\Omega_0 + \int_{\Omega_0} \mathbf{P}(\mathbf{d}_h, \gamma_{f,h}) : \nabla_0 \psi_i d\Omega_0 \\ & + \sum_{\eta \in \{epi, base\}} \int_{\Gamma_0^\eta} \left((\mathbf{N} \otimes \mathbf{N}) \left(K_\perp^\eta \mathbf{d}_h + C_\perp^\eta \frac{\partial \mathbf{d}_h}{\partial t} \right) + (\mathbf{I} - \mathbf{N} \otimes \mathbf{N}) \left(K_\parallel^\eta \mathbf{d}_h + C_\parallel^\eta \frac{\partial \mathbf{d}_h}{\partial t} \right) \right) \cdot \psi_i d\Gamma_0 \\ & = \int_{\Gamma_0^{endo}} p^{endo}(t) \mathbf{N} \cdot \psi_i d\Gamma_0, \quad \forall i = 1, \dots, N_d^{dof}, \end{aligned}$$

with $\mathbf{d}_h(0) = \sum_{\eta=1}^{N_d^{dof}} (\mathbf{d}_0, \psi_j)_{[L^2(\Omega_0)]^3} \psi_j$ and $\dot{\mathbf{d}}_h(0) = \sum_{\eta=1}^{N_d^{dof}} (\dot{\mathbf{d}}_0, \psi_j)_{[L^2(\Omega_0)]^3} \psi_j$.

We rewrite it in algebraic form as:

$$\begin{cases} \rho_s \mathbb{M} \ddot{\mathbf{d}}_h(t) + \mathbb{F} \dot{\mathbf{d}}_h(t) + \mathbb{G} \mathbf{d}_h(t) + \mathbf{S}(\mathbf{d}_h(t), \gamma_{f,h}(t)) = \mathbf{p}^{endo}(t) & t \in (0, T], \\ \mathbf{d}_h(0) = \mathbf{d}_{0,h}, \quad \dot{\mathbf{d}}_h(0) = \dot{\mathbf{d}}_{0,h}, \end{cases}$$

where, in particular,

$$\begin{aligned}\mathbb{F}_{ij} &= \sum_{\eta \in \{\text{epi}, \text{base}\}} \int_{\Gamma_0^\eta} \left(C_{\perp}^\eta(\mathbf{N} \otimes \mathbf{N}) + C_{\parallel}^\eta(\mathbf{I} - \mathbf{N} \otimes \mathbf{N}) \right) \boldsymbol{\psi}_j \cdot \boldsymbol{\psi}_i \, d\Gamma_0, \\ \mathbb{G}_{ij} &= \sum_{\eta \in \{\text{epi}, \text{base}\}} \int_{\Gamma_0^\eta} \left(K_{\perp}^\eta(\mathbf{N} \otimes \mathbf{N}) + K_{\parallel}^\eta(\mathbf{I} - \mathbf{N} \otimes \mathbf{N}) \right) \boldsymbol{\psi}_j \cdot \boldsymbol{\psi}_i \, d\Gamma_0,\end{aligned}$$

and

$$\mathbf{S}_i(\mathbf{d}_h(t), \gamma_{f,h}(t)) = \int_{\Omega_0} \mathbf{P}(\mathbf{d}_h, \gamma_{f,h}) : \nabla_0 \boldsymbol{\psi}_i \, d\Omega_0.$$

Finally, we once again use the FEM to discretize in space the equation for the unknown γ_f : given $c_h(t)$ and $\mathbf{d}_h(t)$, find, for all $t \in (0, T)$, $\gamma_{f,h}(t) \in \mathcal{X}_h$ such that

$$\begin{aligned}& \int_{\Omega_0} \frac{\partial \gamma_{f,h}}{\partial t} \boldsymbol{\psi}_i \, d\Omega_0 + \varepsilon \int_{\Omega_0} \frac{1}{g(c_h)} \nabla \gamma_{f,h} \cdot \nabla \boldsymbol{\psi}_i \, d\Omega_0 \\ & - \int_{\Omega_0} \frac{1}{g(c_h)} \boldsymbol{\Phi}(c_h, \gamma_{f,h}, \mathbf{d}_h) \boldsymbol{\psi}_i \, d\Omega_0 = 0, \quad \forall i = 1, \dots, N_{\gamma_f}^{\text{dof}},\end{aligned}$$

with $\gamma_{f,h}(0) = 0$. We highlight that, with respect to Eq. (9), we divided each term by $g(c_h)$ to avoid the nonlinearity in the time derivative term.

Thus, we obtain the following system of ODEs:

$$\begin{cases} \mathbb{M} \dot{\boldsymbol{\gamma}}_{f,h}(t) + \varepsilon \mathbb{K}(c(t)) \boldsymbol{\gamma}_{f,h}(t) + \boldsymbol{\Phi}(c(t), \boldsymbol{\gamma}_{f,h}(t), \mathbf{d}(t)) = \mathbf{0} & t \in (0, T], \\ \boldsymbol{\gamma}_{f,h}(0) = \mathbf{0}. \end{cases}$$

3.2 Time discretization

After having applied the space discretization to the single core models, we obtain the semi-discretized formulation of problem (11) in the form of a nonlinear system of ODEs. We denote by $\mathbf{z} = (\mathbf{z}_w, \mathbf{z}_V, \mathbf{z}_{\gamma_f}, \mathbf{z}_d)^T$ the block vector containing the unknowns of each semi-discrete single core problem, where the ordering of the unknowns will be motivated in Section 3.2.2, and we write:

$$\begin{cases} \mathcal{M} \mathbf{z}(t) + \mathbf{T}(\mathbf{z}(t)) = \mathbf{h}(t) & t \in (0, T], \\ \mathbf{z}(0) = \mathbf{z}_0, \\ \dot{\mathbf{z}}_d(0) = \dot{\mathbf{d}}_{0,h}, \end{cases} \quad (18)$$

where

$$\mathcal{M} = \text{diag} \left(\frac{d}{dt}, \frac{d}{dt}, \frac{d}{dt}, \frac{d^2}{dt^2} \right),$$

is a differential operator which applies a first order time derivative to the ionic variables, the transmembrane potential and the fibers shortening (motivating the division by $g(c_h)$ of the corresponding equation), while a second order time derivative to the displacement. In order to obtain a fully discretized formulation, we use the BDF for the time approximation of Eq. (18). Hence, we write:

$$\begin{aligned} \dot{z}_i(t^{n+1}) &\approx \frac{1}{\Delta t} \left(\vartheta_0^{(I)} z_i^{n+1} - z_i^{RHS} \right), & z_i^{RHS} &= \sum_{k=1}^{\sigma} \vartheta_k^{(I)} z_i^{n-k+1}, \\ \ddot{z}_i(t^{n+1}) &\approx \frac{1}{(\Delta t)^2} \left(\vartheta_0^{(II)} z_i^{n+1} - z_i^{RHS} \right), & z_i^{RHS} &= \sum_{k=1}^{\sigma+1} \vartheta_k^{(II)} z_i^{n-k+1}, \end{aligned}$$

where $\Delta t = \frac{T}{N_T}$ is the timestep, N_T being the number of timesteps, while the parameters $\vartheta_k^{(I)}, \vartheta_k^{(II)}, k = 0, \dots, \sigma$ depend on the order σ of the BDF scheme. We will in particular use BDF of order $\sigma = 1$ and 2, and will consider two schemes for the time discretization of the monolithic problem: a fully implicit and a semi-implicit one.

In the implicit case, we obtain the following nonlinear system:

$$\mathbf{A}(\mathbf{z}^{n+1}) = \mathbf{b}^{n+1} \quad n = \sigma, \dots, N_T - 1, \quad (19)$$

with \mathbf{z}^k assigned for $k = 0, \dots, \sigma$ and we set for simplicity $\dot{\mathbf{d}}_{0,h} = \mathbf{0}$. Problem (19) is solved by exploiting the Newton method [77] at each timestep.

In the semi-implicit case, on the other hand, we extrapolate the variables in the nonlinear term $\mathbf{A}(\mathbf{z}^{n+1})$ by means of the Newton–Gregory backward polynomials [16] – as is done, e.g., for the Navier–Stokes equations in [36] – thus yielding a linear system at each timestep. The extrapolated variables are evaluated as a linear combination of the variables at previous timesteps, with an approximation of the same order σ of the BDF scheme:

$$z_i(t^{n+1}) \approx z_i^* = \sum_{k=1}^{\sigma} \beta_k z_i^{n-k+1}.$$

We then avoid the nonlinear terms by partially evaluating \mathbf{A} in the extrapolated variable \mathbf{z}^* , i.e. we approximate the nonlinear term as

$$\mathbf{A}(\mathbf{z}^{n+1}) \approx \mathbb{A}(\mathbf{z}^*)\mathbf{z}^{n+1} + \mathbf{g}^{n+1} \quad \text{for } n = \sigma, \dots, N_T - 1.$$

By recalling Eq.(19), we hence obtain a system in the form:

$$\mathbb{A}(\mathbf{z}^*)\mathbf{z}^{n+1} = \tilde{\mathbf{b}}^{n+1} \quad n = \sigma, \dots, N_T - 1, \quad (20)$$

with \mathbf{z}^k assigned for $k = 0, \dots, \sigma$ and $\tilde{\mathbf{b}}^{n+1} = \mathbf{h}^{n+1} - \mathbf{g}^{n+1}$.

3.2.1 The implicit scheme

By applying the Newton method [77] to (19), we iteratively solve for $n = \sigma, \dots, N_T - 1$ the linear problem

$$\begin{cases} \mathbb{J}_k^{n+1} \delta \mathbf{z}_{k+1}^{n+1} = -\mathbf{r}_k^{n+1}, \\ \mathbf{z}_{k+1}^{n+1} = \mathbf{z}_k^{n+1} + \delta \mathbf{z}_{k+1}^{n+1}, \end{cases} \quad (21)$$

for $k = 0, \dots$, until some convergence criterion is met. \mathbb{J}_k^{n+1} is the Jacobian matrix of \mathbf{A} evaluated in the \mathbf{z}_k^{n+1} and is endowed with the following block structure:

$$\mathbb{J}_k^{n+1} = \begin{bmatrix} \mathbb{J}_{\mathbf{w}}(\mathbf{V}_k^{n+1}) & \mathbb{J}_{\mathbf{wV}}(\mathbf{w}_k^{n+1}, \mathbf{V}_k^{n+1}) & 0 & 0 \\ \mathbb{J}_{\mathbf{Vw}}(\mathbf{w}_k^{n+1}, \mathbf{V}_k^{n+1}) & \mathbb{J}_{\mathbf{V}}(\mathbf{d}_k^{n+1}) & 0 & \mathbb{J}_{\mathbf{Vd}}(\mathbf{V}_k^{n+1}, \mathbf{d}_k^{n+1}) \\ \mathbb{J}_{\gamma_f \mathbf{w}}(\mathbf{w}_k^{n+1}, \gamma_{f_k}^{n+1}, \mathbf{d}_k^{n+1}) & 0 & \mathbb{J}_{\gamma_f}(\mathbf{w}_k^{n+1}, \gamma_{f_k}^{n+1}, \mathbf{d}_k^{n+1}) & \mathbb{J}_{\gamma_f \mathbf{d}}(\mathbf{w}_k^{n+1}, \gamma_{f_k}^{n+1}, \mathbf{d}_k^{n+1}) \\ 0 & 0 & \mathbb{J}_{\mathbf{d}\gamma_f}(\gamma_{f_k}^{n+1}, \mathbf{d}_k^{n+1}) & \mathbb{J}_{\mathbf{d}}(\gamma_{f_k}^{n+1}, \mathbf{d}_k^{n+1}) \end{bmatrix},$$

while the residual is defined as $\mathbf{r}_k^{n+1} = \mathbf{b}^{n+1} - \mathbf{A}(\mathbf{z}_k^{n+1})$.

3.2.2 The semi-implicit scheme

In this case, the block structure of the matrix associated to linear system (20) to be solved is sparser with respect to the implicit one, as \mathbb{A} is a block lower triangular matrix endowed with only one extra diagonal block for each $n = \sigma, \dots, N_T - 1$:

$$\mathbb{A}(\mathbf{z}^*) = \begin{bmatrix} \mathbb{A}_{\mathbf{w}}(\mathbf{V}^*) & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ \mathbb{A}_{\mathbf{Vw}}(\mathbf{w}^*, \mathbf{V}^*) & \mathbb{A}_{\mathbf{V}}(\mathbf{d}^*) & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & \mathbb{A}_{\gamma_f}(\mathbf{w}^*, \gamma_{f^*}, \mathbf{d}^*) & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & \mathbb{A}_{\mathbf{d}}(\gamma_{f^*}, \mathbf{d}^*) \end{bmatrix}. \quad (22)$$

The matrix (22) is block lower triangular thanks to the ordering of the variables in the electrophysiology model (18): indeed, by swapping the ionic and the electric blocks we would have obtained a block upper triangular matrix. The semi-implicit scheme has the clear advantage of avoiding, at each timestep, the solution of a nonlinear problem. Moreover, both the assembly of the system matrix $\mathbb{A}(\mathbf{z}^*)$ and the solution of the linear system (20) require smaller computational time than in the implicit case.

On the other hand, semi-implicit schemes may impose strong limitations on the timestep size Δt to ensure stability. This is indeed what we observe from our numerical tests: the maximum timestep size that we used in order to ensure stability for the semi-implicit

scheme is at least one order of magnitude smaller than the one that used for the implicit one, for which accuracy is the main factor driving the choice of Δt . This, in turn, makes the computational cost of the semi-implicit scheme much larger than the implicit one, especially when considering the simulation of a full heartbeat. By analyzing the behavior of the linear solver (which we will detail in Section 4) and the residual of the system (20), we observe that numerical instabilities are driven by the mechanics block: we conclude that the strong nonlinearity of the Piola–Kirchhoff tensor (8) and the presence of the exponential terms in particular yield evaluations of the stress tensor $\mathbf{P}(\mathbf{d}_h^*, \gamma_{f,h}^*)$ in the extrapolated variables that are not “sufficiently” close to $\mathbf{P}(\mathbf{d}_h^{n+1}, \gamma_{f,h}^{n+1})$, unless the timestep is significantly “small”. Indeed, instability does not appear in numerical simulations of the isolated electrophysiology problem, even using a larger timestep with respect to the one used for the monolithic problem, thus confirming that the bottleneck in the choice of Δt is due to the mechanics core model.

We will further investigate this issue in the future; however, for the next numerical simulations of this paper we will consider only the implicit scheme.

4 Linear solver: the preconditioning strategy

We rewrite, for the sake of simplicity, the linear system associated to a single Newton iteration for the implicit scheme (21) in the following form:

$$\mathbb{J} \delta \mathbf{z} = -\mathbf{r}, \quad (23)$$

where

$$\mathbb{J} = \left[\begin{array}{cc|cc} J_{11} & J_{12} & 0 & 0 \\ J_{21} & J_{22} & 0 & J_{24} \\ \hline J_{31} & 0 & J_{33} & J_{34} \\ 0 & 0 & J_{43} & J_{44} \end{array} \right].$$

We use the GMRES method [88] for the solution of the linear problem (23) as \mathbb{J} is non-symmetric and the distribution of the eigenvalues of its spectrum is not known a priori.

The choice of the preconditioner is critical in order to ensure the convergence of the linear solver; while this is true in general, it is even more relevant in the case of monolithic multiphysics problems [50]. Indeed, using a black-box algebraic preconditioner for problem (23) the information related to each differential problem associated to a single core model would be neglected; we instead consider a strategy exploiting such information at the block level, that is we create a preconditioner that exploits the “physics” of the coupled problem at the level of the block structure. Following [26, 27, 34] for FSI problems, we propose a block Gauss-Seidel preconditioner \mathcal{P} obtained by dropping the upper triangular

blocks of matrix \mathbb{J} , i.e. the off-diagonal blocks, thus obtaining:

$$\mathcal{P} = \begin{bmatrix} J_{11} & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ J_{21} & J_{22} & 0 & 0 \\ J_{31} & 0 & J_{33} & 0 \\ J & 0 & J_{43} & J_{44} \end{bmatrix}.$$

\mathcal{P} can then be factorized into four model-specific nonsingular matrices, namely \mathcal{P}_{ion} , \mathcal{P}_{pot} , \mathcal{P}_{act} , and \mathcal{P}_{mec} corresponding to the ionic, the potential, the activation, and the mechanics single core models, respectively:

$$\mathcal{P} = \underbrace{\begin{bmatrix} J_{11} & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & I & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & I & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & I \end{bmatrix}}_{\mathcal{P}_1 = \mathcal{P}_{ion}} \underbrace{\begin{bmatrix} I & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ J_{21} & J_{22} & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & I & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & I \end{bmatrix}}_{\mathcal{P}_2 = \mathcal{P}_{pot}} \underbrace{\begin{bmatrix} I & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & I & 0 & 0 \\ J_{31} & 0 & J_{33} & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & I \end{bmatrix}}_{\mathcal{P}_3 = \mathcal{P}_{act}} \underbrace{\begin{bmatrix} I & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & I & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & I & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & J_{43} & J_{44} \end{bmatrix}}_{\mathcal{P}_4 = \mathcal{P}_{mec}}.$$

This decomposition can also be interpreted as an inexact factorization of matrix \mathbb{J} . The preconditioned version of problem (23) then reads:

$$\begin{cases} \mathbb{J}\mathcal{P}^{-1}\mathbf{y} = -\mathbf{r} \\ \mathcal{P}\delta\mathbf{z} = \mathbf{y}. \end{cases} \quad (24)$$

Since each diagonal block J_{ii} appears in a distinct factor \mathcal{P}_i , for $i = 1, \dots, 4$, then physics-specific ad-hoc preconditioners can be efficiently used to approximate its inverse. Indeed, we define the symbolic operation $\delta\mathbf{z} = \mathcal{P}^{-1}\mathbf{y}$ in (24) as the application of the following sequential steps

$$\begin{cases} \delta\mathbf{z}_w & = J_{11}^{-1}\mathbf{y}_w, \\ \delta\mathbf{z}_V & = J_{22}^{-1}(\mathbf{y}_V - J_{21}\delta\mathbf{z}_w), \\ \delta\mathbf{z}_d & = J_{33}^{-1}(\mathbf{y}_d - J_{31}\delta\mathbf{z}_w), \\ \delta\mathbf{z}_{\gamma_f} & = J_{44}^{-1}(\mathbf{y}_{\gamma_f} - J_{43}\delta\mathbf{z}_d); \end{cases} \quad (25)$$

the solution of each linear system in (25) is carried out by using again the GMRES method and by exploiting Algebraic Multigrid (AMG) preconditioners [11]. This new preconditioner \mathcal{P} can be regarded as a generalization of the FaCSI preconditioner for FSI problems proposed in [27] (see also [26, 34]).

4.1 Cardiac cycle

For our simulations we will consider a full heartbeat, by taking the conventional duration of $T = 0.8$ s. With this aim, we take into account for the interaction of the endocardium with the blood by modeling the pressure p^{endo} as in Eq. (11). Before introducing the models used to describe such pressure, we first recall that the heartbeat is conventionally split into four phases (see Fig. 4):

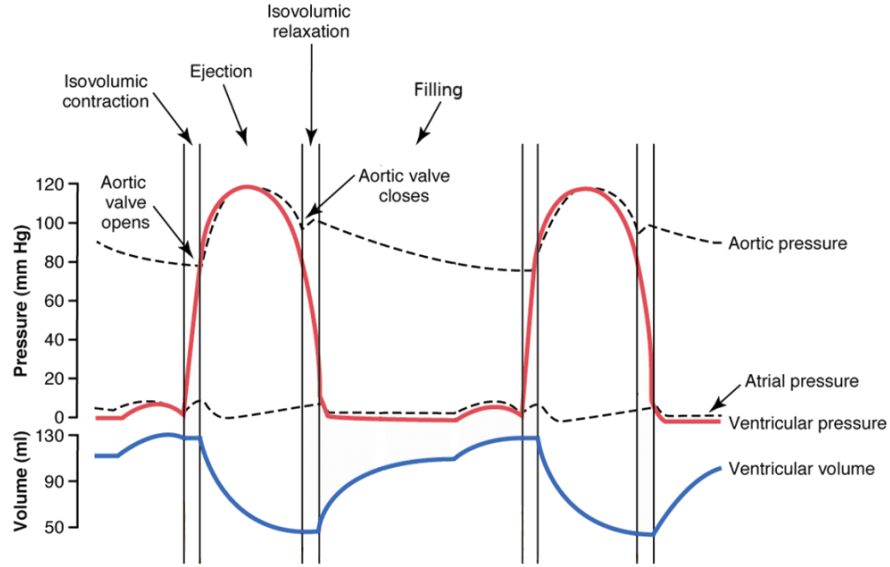


Figure 4: The Wiggers diagram [49] of the left heart depicting the aortic, ventricular, and atrial pressures and the ventricular volume, as well as the four phases of the cardiac cycle.

1. an isovolumic contraction phase in which the endocardial pressure $p^{endo}(t)$ increases from the End Diastolic Pressure (EDP) to the value measured in the aorta (about 95 mmHg). This increment is driven by the early stages of the LV contraction;
2. an ejection phase characterized by a decrement in the ventricular volume $V^{endo}(t)$ due to the contraction of the LV forcing the blood to flow through the aortic valve;
3. an isovolumic relaxation phase during which $p^{endo}(t)$ decreases as a consequence of the LV early relaxation;
4. a filling phase starting with the opening of the mitral valve causing an increment of $V^{endo}(t)$ until $p^{endo}(t)$ reaches the EDP value.

We compute the volume $V^{endo}(t)$ at time n by exploiting the formula

$$V^{endo,n} = \int_{\Gamma_0^{endo}} J(\mathbf{d}_h^n) \boldsymbol{\xi} \cdot \mathbf{F}^{-T}(\mathbf{d}_h^n) \mathbf{N} d\Gamma_0, \quad (26)$$

which is rigorously derived in [83] and where $\boldsymbol{\xi}$ is a vector directed as the centerline of the LV. We then model the endocardial pressure $p^{endo}(t)$ with different 0D models, following [30, 83, 106], for each of the aforementioned phases (in the following, we drop the “endo” superscript for simplicity):

1. *Isovolumic phase I*: At each timestep, we iteratively solve problem (11) by updating at each subiteration the pressure in the following manner:

$$p_{k+1}^{n+1} = p_k^{n+1} + \frac{V_k^{n+1} - V^n}{C_p} \quad k = 0, \dots \quad (27)$$

with $p_0^{n+1} = p^n$, $V_0^{n+1} = V^n$, until the condition $\frac{|V_k^{n+1} - V^n|}{V^n} < \varepsilon$ is satisfied. The parameter $C_p < 0$ has to be “sufficiently” large in order for the fixed point algorithm to converge. This phase ends when the pressure p_{k+1}^{n+1} reaches the value $\bar{p} = 95$ mmHg.

2. *Ejection phase*: A two-element Windkessel model [109] of the form:

$$\begin{cases} C \frac{dp}{dt} = -\frac{p}{R} - \frac{dV}{dt} & t \in (T', T''] \\ p(T') = \bar{p} \end{cases} \quad (28)$$

is solved in the pressure variable with a BDF scheme of order $\sigma = 1$ while the term $\frac{dV}{dt}$ is approximated at time $n + 1$ as $\frac{V^n - V^{n-1}}{\Delta t}$, for simplicity. T' and T'' are the initial and final time of this phase, respectively, while the parameters $C, R > 0$ represent the capacitance and resistance of the equivalent electric circuit. This phase ends when the (initially negative) term $\frac{dV}{dt}$ changes sign.

3. *Isovolumic phase II*: Modeled as the first isovolumic phase. This phase ends when the pressure reaches the minimal value of $\bar{p} = 5$ mmHg.
4. *Filling phase*: The pressure is linearly increased at each timestep so that it reaches the EDP value at the final time T . We are aware that this is not fully coherent with the real behavior of the diastolic phase, but a model for the muscle and the function of the left atrium are not taken into account in this work. Future work should better address this points to represent the full heartbeat in a detailed fashion.

Even if (28) is strongly coupled with (11) during the ejection phase, we solve the two problems with a staggered approach, for simplicity.

5 Numerical simulations

We now describe the geometries used for the numerical simulation of the integrated electromechanics problem. As anticipated in Section 3, we use both an idealized prolate geometry and a patient-specific geometry segmented from MRI images as detailed in Section 5.1. Moreover, in Section 5.2, we outline the procedure that is exploited to define the fibers and the sheets fields on the different meshes. We conclude this Section by showing and analyzing the results of the simulations.

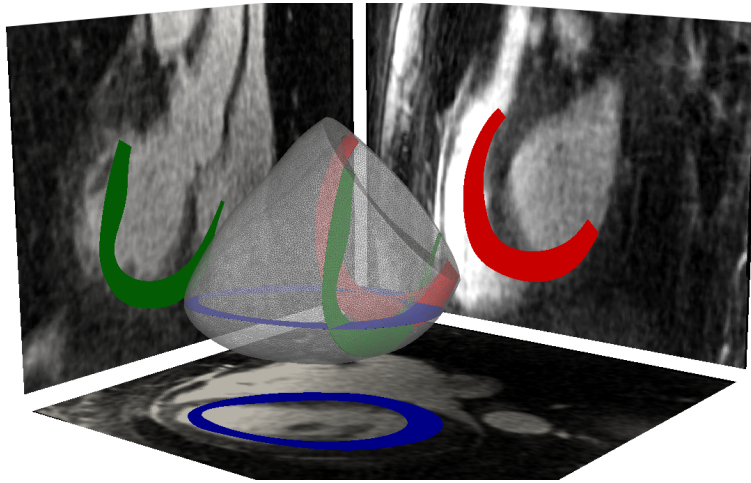


Figure 5: The patient-specific mesh and its projection on three slices of the 3D MRI image from which it was segmented.

5.1 Patient-specific geometry segmentation

Image segmentation is the process of locating regions of interest (ROI) in the form of a subset of pixels [41]. In biomedical applications, this accounts to assign different flags to regions containing different types of tissues and/or fluids. This result, depending on the properties of the biological material which is to be segmented, can often be achieved through semi-automatic or automatic procedures (see e.g. [32, 48, 105] for arteries and blood vessels and [10, 108] for the Purkinje network), exploiting a large set of different techniques. However, since the development of algorithms for the segmentation of the chambers of the heart [71, 113, 114] is beyond the scope of this work, we used a manual procedure based on the brightness of the pixels of the aforementioned 3D MRI images. We first apply a threshold filter to select the smallest set of pixels containing the whole myocardium; then, we manually remove artifacts and features that we decide to neglect such as the papillary muscles and the upper part of the LV. Finally, a Gaussian smoothing procedure [110] was performed to improve the quality of the mesh. The result is shown in Figure 5.

The image was taken at the end of the diastolic phase, that is when the LV reaches its maximum enlargement. The internal volume of the patient-specific myocardium at this stage of the heartbeat measures approximately 95 ml.

5.2 Fibers and sheets distribution

Unlike the geometry, the fibers and sheets field distribution in the myocardium may not be extracted from medical images such as MRIs unless special procedures are applied [79].

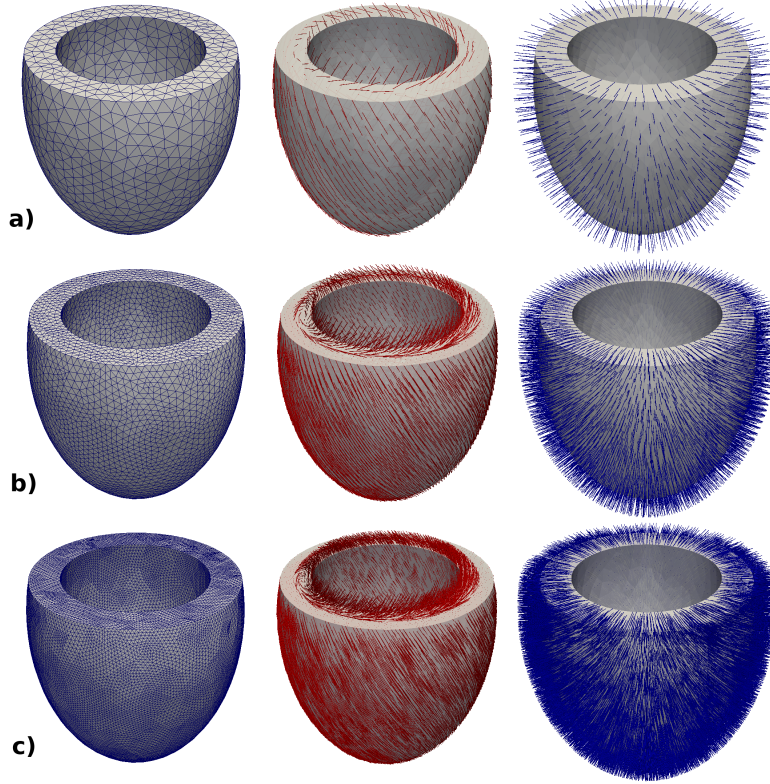


Figure 6: Meshes of the ideal prolate LV geometry (left), together with the fibers (center) and the sheets (right) fields. The finer meshes (b) and (c) are obtained by hierarchical refinement of the coarsest mesh (a).

For this reason, several mathematically rule-based definition of the fields have been used in literature [37, 55, 60, 85], which try to approximate their orientation. At the epicardium and at the endocardium, the fiber direction is tangential to the boundary, while the sheet direction belongs to the plane identified by the normal and the ventricle centerline. Then, in the most general case, angles α_{endo} , α_{epi} , β_{endo} , and β_{epi} , representing the inclination of the fibers and the sheets with respect to the base plane, are assigned. Finally, the direction of fibers and sheets inside the myocardium is determined by a transmurally linear mapping. A first study of the influence of the angles on both the conductivity and the deformation was carried out in [30]. Since this kind of analysis goes beyond the scope of this work, we will consider for both the idealized and the patient-specific geometries the algorithm proposed in [111] and further developed in [83], therefore setting $\alpha_{endo} = -60^\circ$, $\alpha_{epi} = +60^\circ$, $\beta_{endo} = \beta_{epi} = 0^\circ$. In Figure 6, we show the fields obtained by applying the algorithm to a set of subsequently refined ideal meshes, while in Figure 7 the same is done

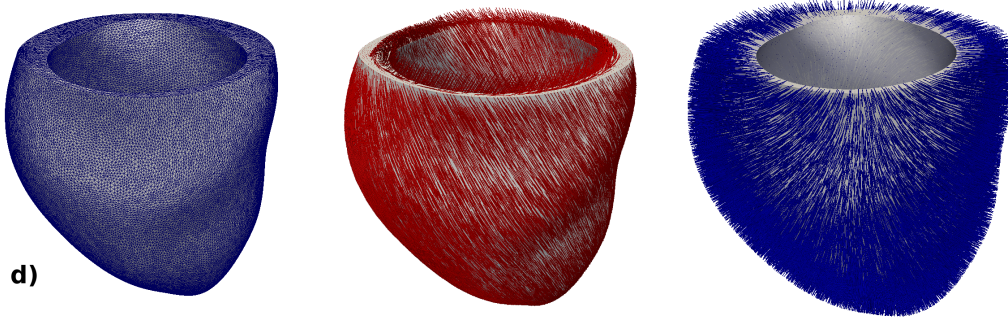


Figure 7: Mesh of the patient-specific mesh (left), together with the fibers (center) and the sheets (right) fields.

for the patient-specific mesh.

5.3 Numerical results

We setup a total of five numerical simulations, each for a single heartbeat, using the four meshes shown in Figures 6-7. The monodomain, the activation, and the mechanics equations are approximated with \mathbb{P}^r elements; the ionic model equations, on the other hand, are solved in the degrees of freedom determined by the discretization of the monodomain equations (e.g. the vertices of the tetrahedrons if $r = 1$). We set $r = 1$ for each mesh in order to limit the size of the monolithic system and, additionally, $r = 2$ for the coarse mesh only. This yields a linear system of size $M = 8 \times N_h$. A second order BDF scheme ($\sigma = 2$) is considered for the time discretization in all cases to ensure A-stability while maximizing the convergence order [77]. The information on the meshes and on the simulations is summarized in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

Geometry	Mesh	h	# Vertices	# Elements
Idealized (Fig. 6)	(a)	4.6 mm	1'827	3'010
	(b)	2.3 mm	11'658	12'040
	(c)	1.2 mm	81'335	416'000
Patient-specific (Fig. 7)	(d)	0.8 mm	126'031	637'379

Table 1: Information about the three idealized meshes and the patient-specific mesh: average edge length h , number of vertices and number of elements for each mesh.

Geometry	Mesh	r	M	# CPUs
Idealized	(a)	1	14'616	1
	(b)	1	93'264	6
	(c)	1	650'680	45
	(a)	2	93'264	6
Patient-specific	(d)	1	1'008'248	72

Table 2: The meshes, the polynomial degree r of the FEM approximation, the size M of the monolithic linear system, and the number of threads used for each simulation.

We use LifeV², an open-source finite element library for the solution of problems described by PDEs in a High Performance Computing framework, to implement the numerical methods. All the computations were carried out using Piz Daint, a Cray XC50/XC40 supercomputer installed at the Swiss National Supercomputing Center (CSCS)³.

As detailed in Section 4 we exploit the Newton method for the solution of the nonlinear system (19) by setting a maximum number of 5 iterations per timestep. Moreover we use the relative residual as stopping criterion, with a tolerance equal to 10^{-7} . At each Newton iteration (21), as detailed in Section 4, we use the GMRES method for the inversion of the blocks J_{ii} , $i = 1, \dots, 4$ together with AMG preconditioners by taking into account the number of underlying PDEs of each block; we exploit the ML package [35] of the Trilinos library [42] by performing three sweeps of the Gauss-Seidel algorithm for pre- and post-smoothing, while the solution on the coarsest level is obtained through an LU factorization. We consider the relative residual as stopping criterion for the GMRES method, with a tolerance equal to 10^{-8} .

For simplicity, we initiate the electric signal propagation by applying at the same time 2-milliseconds long stimuli at three distinct points on the endocardium; we remark that, even if this pacing strategy is not fully realistic since the electrical signal delivered by the Purkinje network activates asynchronously hundreds of cells [82, 107], it provides physically meaningful results. The other parameters used for the simulations are reported in Table 3.

We compare in Figure 8 the transmembrane potential obtained using $r = 1$ elements on the three idealized meshes at different times. As expected, the conduction velocities are overestimated when the mesh size is not sufficiently fine [9, 29]. The same conclusion can be drawn by observing the plots in Figure 9, where the transmembrane potential sampled at the apex is represented against time: the delay of the action potential (the quick depolarization of the tissue followed by a slow repolarization [21]) in the finer meshes is due to the longer time needed for the wave to reach the apex. We display in Figure 10

²<https://cmcsforge.epfl.ch>

³<http://www.cscs.ch>

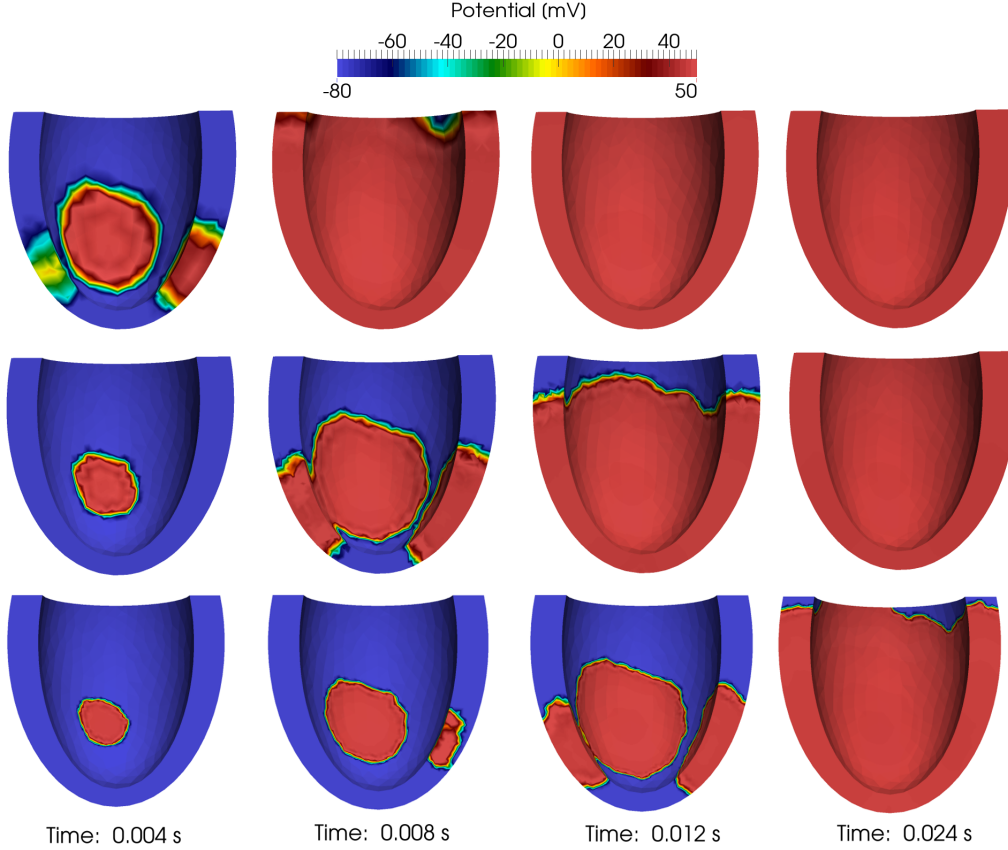


Figure 8: The transmembrane potential at different times for the idealized geometry with $r = 1$. First row: mesh (a); second row: mesh (b); third row: mesh (c).

the transmembrane potential for the patient-specific case at the same instants.

We observe from Figure 9 a difference of several milliseconds in the complete activation of the myocardium, which is significant in the electrophysiology characteristic time scales. However, because of the multiscale nature of the integrated problem, the mechanics is not affected by such delay as can be observed in Figure 11. Here, the only remarkable difference between the three results is the underestimation of the displacement magnitude in the simulation with the coarsest mesh (a). In this case, the number of degrees of freedom is not sufficient to either fulfill the nearly-incompressible constraint nor to represent the large deformations observable in the other two cases. The deformation of the patient-specific mesh (d) at the same times is shown in Figure 12. In both the idealized and the patient-specific cases, a significant thickening of the myocardium walls takes place, which is in accordance with experimental observations [78]. The model, with the set of

σ_t	σ_l	λ_{epi}	λ_{endo}	\bar{k}_{epi}	\bar{k}_{endo}	\bar{k}'	α	c_0	$\hat{\mu}_A^1$	$\hat{\mu}_A^2$	$\hat{\mu}_A^3$	$\hat{\mu}_A^4$	ρ
17.61	120.4	0.8	0.5	0.75	1.0	-7.0	-6.0	0.05	2.1	7.0	12	500	10^{-3}
B	K_{\perp}^{epi}	K_{\perp}^{base}	K_{\parallel}^{epi}	K_{\parallel}^{base}	C_{\perp}^{epi}	C_{\perp}^{base}	C_{\parallel}^{epi}	C_{\parallel}^{base}	C_p^I	C_p^{II}	C	R	
50	10	1500	0	10^{-4}	5	1	0	0	-0.5	-0.09	4.5	0.035	

Table 3: Parameters used in the electromechanical model: transversal and longitudinal conductivities ($\frac{mm^2}{s}$) in Eq. (1); transmurally heterogeneous wall thickening model parameters in Eq. (10); activation model coefficients α (μM^{-2}), c_0 , and $\hat{\mu}_A$ ($\mu M^2 \cdot s$) in the four cardiac phases in Eq. (9); density ρ ($\frac{g}{mm^3}$), bulk modulus B (kPa), Robin boundary condition coefficients ($\frac{kPa}{mm}$ and $\frac{kPa \cdot s}{mm}$) in Eqs. (4) - (6); relaxation parameter for the two isochoric phases C_p^I and C_p^{II} ($\frac{kPa}{mm^3}$) in Eq. (27); Windkessel model parameters C and R ($\frac{mm^3}{kPa}$ and $\frac{kPa \cdot s}{mm}$) in Eq. (28).

parameters in Table 3, produces however a significant rotation of the LV: a recent work [73] suggests that this behavior is related to the choice of the incompressibility constraint, the bulk modulus B magnitude, and the boundary conditions. As a first step towards the investigation of this aspect, we report in Figure 13 the muscle obtained with different values of the bulk modulus B , while all the other parameters are kept unchanged with respect to Table 3. Larger values of B correspond to a larger torsion, more accentuated and uniform along the ventricle’s walls; moreover, the thickening of the myocardium is larger when the bulk modulus is smaller as expected, since the incompressibility condition becomes weaker. However, the imposition of a stronger volumetric constraint through B negatively affects the conditioning of the system matrix \mathbb{J} in (23), and forces the linear solver to perform more iterations in order to reach convergence. We will further focus on this issue in future works.

In order to better evaluate the ability to describe the LV activity of the integrated numerical model for a full cardiac cycle, pressure–volume (pV) loops are also represented. A comparison with in–vivo measurements would be pointless in the case of the ideal geometry, however we stress the fact that the pV–loops reported in Figure 14 are in both qualitative and quantitative agreement with those observed experimentally as e.g. in [86]; moreover, the maximal endocardial pressure, which is reached during the ejection phase, is approximately 110 mmHg and hence lays well within the physiological range of average individuals [90]. The difference between the four cases in Figure 14 accounts to a maximum variation of about 2 % in the minimal ventricle volume during the second isochoric phase.

The pV–loop for the patient–specific case is reported in Figure 15. Experimental measurements of the pressure and of the volume for the patient under study were not available, therefore we did not carry on a quantitative comparison of our results against patient–specific data. However, we once again observe that the values of the pV–loop are in line

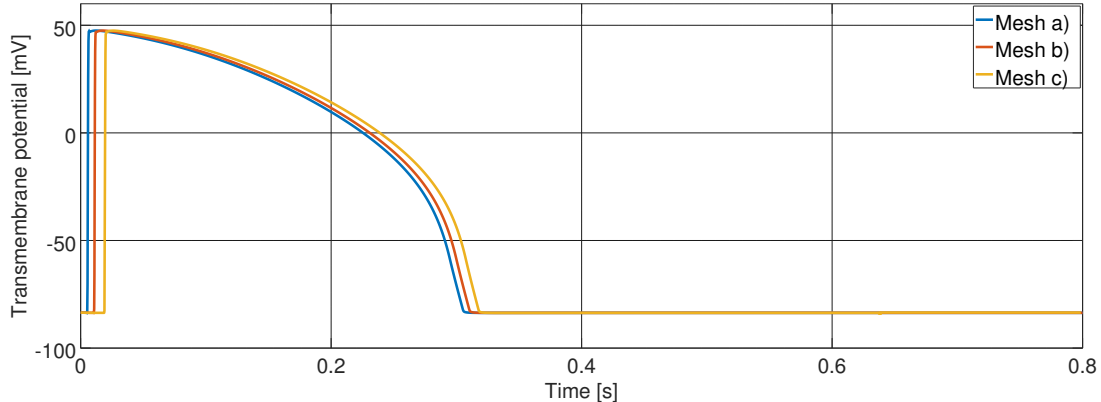


Figure 9: The transmembrane potential at the apex of the myocardium over time for the three ideal meshes, using \mathbb{P}^1 elements.

with real data [86]. We conclude this section by reporting in Table 4, the timestep used for each simulation, the average number of Newton iterations, the average number of fixed point iterations for each of the two isochoric phases, and the average time spent for different operations during a single timestep. The overall time required for the complete simulations is also reported. Table 4 clearly shows that finer meshes require larger computational resources for a full heartbeat simulation (T^{tot}), and this is mostly due to the longer time required for the solution of a single linear system. On the other hand, we notice that the proposed preconditioner ensures that the convergence of the GMRES method is obtained with a relatively small number of iterations \bar{N}^G even with large linear system sizes.

6 Conclusions

In this work, we proposed a novel monolithic solver for the simulation of the integrated electromechanics problem for the LV of the human heart. We coupled the monodomain equation, the ionic minimal model, the activation model for the fibers contraction, and the myocardial mechanics in the active strain framework; then, we approximated the coupled problem in a monolithic fashion. The interaction of the myocardium with the blood inside the ventricle was taken into account by prestressing and by solving additional 0D problems for the fluid.

We considered both implicit and semi-implicit BDF schemes, however the strong limitations on the timestep size in the semi-implicit case are such that the implicit scheme is by far more efficient when considering one or multiple heartbeat simulations.

The results obtained by simulating a complete heartbeat with both ideal and patient-specific geometries are qualitatively in agreement with physiological values measured in

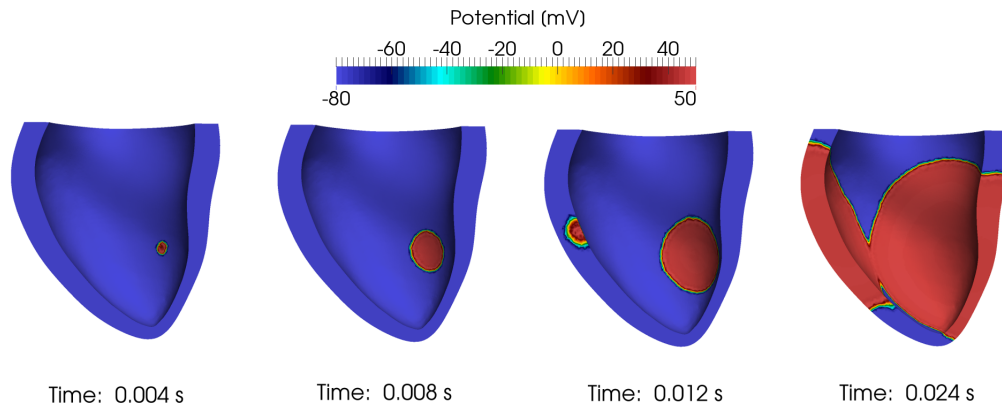


Figure 10: The transmembrane potential at different times for the patient-specific geometry.

healthy patients. Moreover, the comparison of the simulations on the idealized geometry with different mesh sizes shows that the proposed numerical model is able to capture the physical solution with satisfactory accuracy even in the case of relatively coarse meshes. From our simulations we observe that choosing a mesh with maximum size h of about 2 mm is sufficient to correctly reproduce the contraction of the LV, while negligible differences to the corresponding pV-loops are observable when using finer meshes.

7 Acknowledgements

This research was partially supported by the Swiss Platform for Advanced Scientific Computing (PASC, project “Integrative HPC Framework for Coupled Cardiac Simulations”). We also gratefully acknowledge the Swiss National Supercomputing Center (CSCS) for providing the CPU resources for the numerical simulations under project ID s635.

We acknowledge Prof. J. Schwitter and Dr. P. Masci (CHUV) for providing the MRI images used in this work and for the constructive discussions on the topic from a physician’s perspective. We also thank Prof. P. Tozzi (CHUV) for the invaluable insights in the functioning of the human heart.

Finally, we acknowledge both Dr. D. Forti and MER S. Deparis (EPFL) for the useful discussions and their precious help with the LifeV library.

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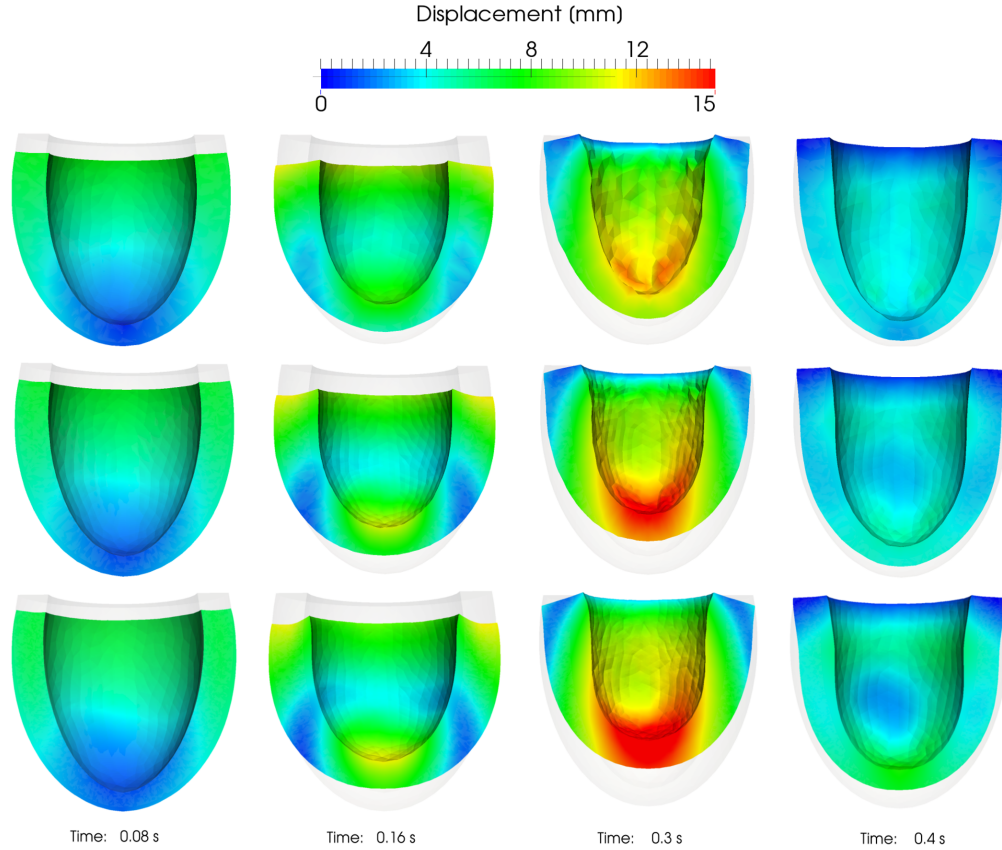


Figure 11: Myocardium displacement magnitude at different times for the simulations with the idealized geometry and \mathbb{P}^1 elements. First row: mesh (a); second row: mesh (b); third row: mesh (c).

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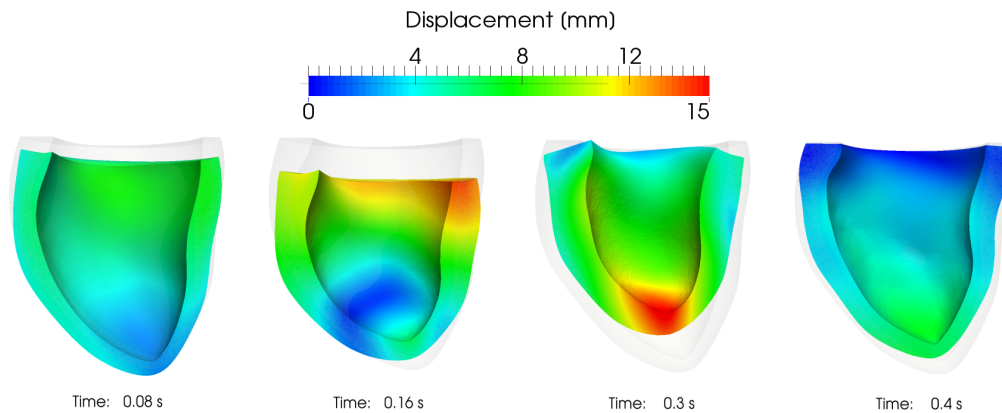


Figure 12: Myocardium displacement at different times for the patient-specific mesh.

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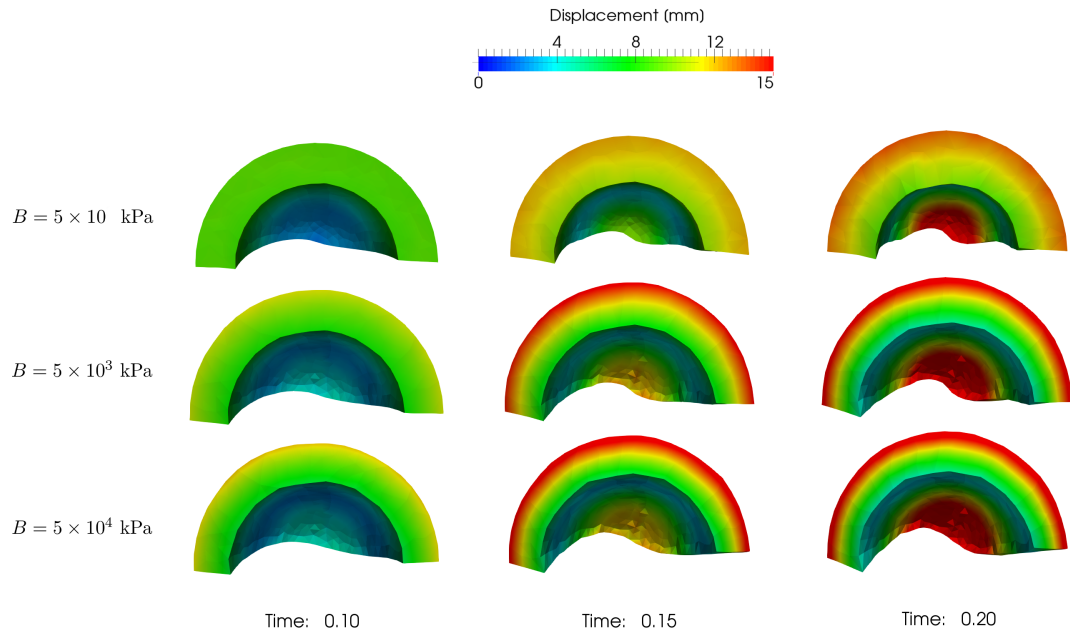


Figure 13: The deformed idealized geometry (mesh (a)) at different times, for increasing values of the bulk modulus B . Larger values of B correspond to a more accentuated torsion. First row: $B = 5 \times 10$ kPa; second row: $B = 5 \times 10^3$ kPa; third row: $B = 5 \times 10^4$ kPa.

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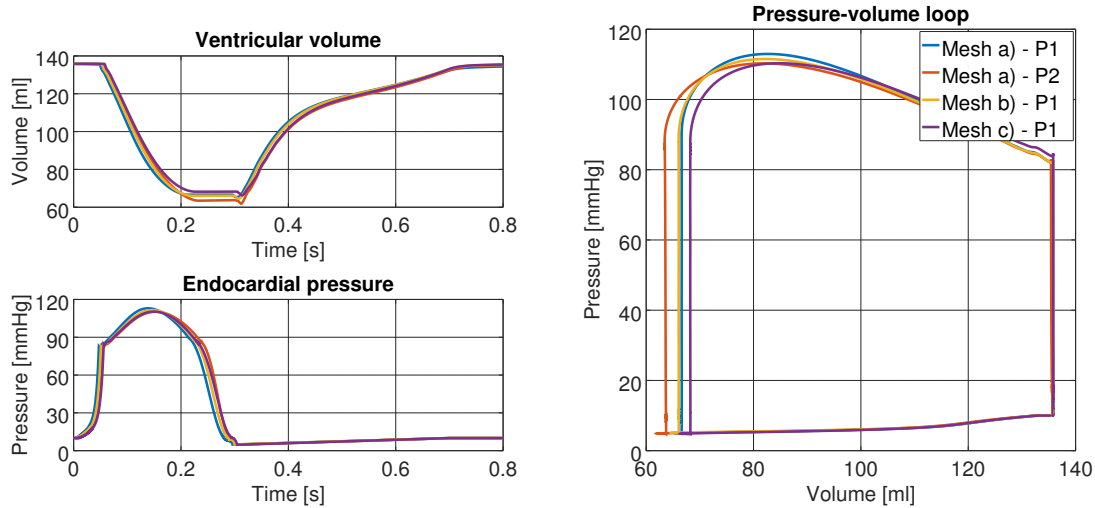


Figure 14: Ventricular volume and endocardial pressure over time and combined in pV-loops for the simulations with the prolate meshes.

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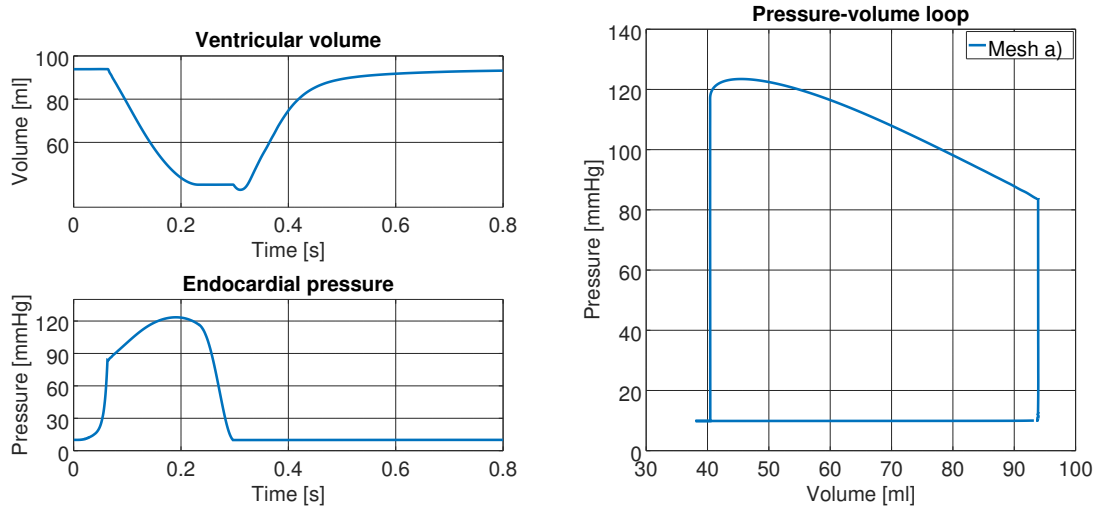


Figure 15: Ventricular volume and endocardial pressure over time and combined in a pV-loop for the simulation with the patient-specific mesh.

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Geometry	Mesh	r	Δt	\overline{N}^N	\overline{N}_I^{iso}	\overline{N}_{II}^{iso}	\overline{N}^G	\overline{T}^{sol}	\overline{T}^{prec}	T^{tot}
Idealized	(a)	1	2.5×10^{-4}	3.02	2.31	2.55	2.15	0.023	0.006	5h 41m
	(b)	1	2.0×10^{-4}	3.37	2.14	3.44	6.67	0.163	0.019	18h 21m
	(c)	1	2.0×10^{-4}	4.23	2.49	3.26	9.19	0.632	0.040	46h 42m
	(a)	2	1.0×10^{-4}	3.29	1.68	2.11	6.47	0.178	0.025	30h 18m
Patient-specific	(d)	1	2.5×10^{-4}	4.44	1.96	4.51	22.33	1.692	0.076	68h 37m

Table 4: Computational setting: i) polynomial degree of the FEM approximation; ii) timestep (in seconds); iii) average number of Newton iterations per timestep; iv-v) average number of subiterations for each of the two isochoric phases; vi) average number of GMRES iterations; vii-viii) average time spent (in seconds) for the resolution of the linear system, and for the application of the preconditioner, respectively; ix) wall time for the simulation of one heartbeat.

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