Penetration of cutting tool into cortical bone: experimental and numerical investigation of anisotropic mechanical behaviour

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Penetration of cutting tool into cortical bone: Experimental and numerical investigation of anisotropic mechanical behaviour

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ABSTRACT

An anisotropic mechanical behaviour of cortical bone and its intrinsic hierarchical microstructure act as protective mechanisms to prevent catastrophic failure due to natural loading conditions; however, they increase the extent of complexity of a penetration process in the case of orthopaedic surgery. Experimental results available in literature provide only limited information about processes in the vicinity of a tool–bone interaction zone. Also, available numerical models the bone-cutting process do not account for material anisotropy or the effect of damage mechanisms. In this study, both experimental and numerical studies were conducted to address these issues and to elucidate the effect of anisotropic mechanical behaviour of cortical bone tissue on penetration of a sharp cutting tool. First, a set of tool-penetration experiments was performed in directions parallel and perpendicular to bone axis. Also, these experiments included bone samples cut from four different cortices to evaluate the effect of spatial variability and material anisotropy on the penetration processes. Distinct deformation and damage mechanisms linked to different microstructure orientations were captured using a micro-lens high-speed camera. Then, a novel hybrid FE model employing a smoothed-particle-hydrodynamic domain embedded into a continuum FE one was developed based on the experimental configuration to characterise the anisotropic deformation and damage behaviour of cortical bone under a penetration process. The results of our study revealed a clear anisotropic material behaviour of the studied cortical bone tissue and the influence of the underlying microstructure. The proposed FE model reflected adequately the experimental results and demonstrated the need for the use of the anisotropic and damage material model to analyse cutting of the cortical-bone tissue.

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1. Introduction

Penetration of a sharp tool into bone tissue is required in many clinical procedures, such as orthopaedic surgery, bone implant and repair operations. The success of bone-cutting surgery depends largely on precision of the operation and the extent of damage it causes to the surrounding tissues. An excessive force, generated by a sharp surgical tool or an implant device, can lead to formation of micro-cracks and fracture (Ebacher et al., 2012; Launey et al., 2010), and, ultimately, cause permanent damage to the adjacent area of cortical bone tissue that, in turn, can delay postoperative recovery of patients (Wazen et al., 2013). Therefore, information on deformation behaviour of cortical bone under penetration of a sharp tool is essential to understand the interaction process at tool–bone interface; this can improve the control of a surgical instrument to minimise damage caused to surrounding bone tissues. Previous bone-cutting experiments (Giraud et al., 1991; Itoh et al., 1983; Jacobs et al., 1974; Krause, 1987; Plaskos et al., 2003; Wiggins and Malkin, 1978) focused on characterisation of cutting parameters such as cutting forces, speed and depth of cut, whereas information with regard to the full-field deformation process in bone tissue was very limited, especially for the un-cut region (the remaining bone tissue). Measurements of forces generated during bone drilling reported in (Alam et al., 2011; Jacob et al., 1976; Wiggins and Malkin, 1976) suggested that they depended greatly on the drilling direction with respect to the bone’s main axis due to high anisotropy of the cortical bone tissue. Furthermore, Sugita and co-authors (Sugita and Mitsuishi, 2009; Sugita et al., 2009) proposed a new cutting method based on the characteristics of crack propagation in cortical bone, indicating a fundamental difference between cutting of cortical bone tissue and metals.

From the modelling perspective, only a few models are available in literature to address issues related to bone penetration (Davidson and James, 2003; Sezek et al., 2012; Basiaga et al., 2011; Alam et al., 2009a, 2011; Kasiri et al., 2010). Despite these attempts, there is still no adequate model that can fully describe the material’s anisotropy and damage behaviour under conditions of the tool-penetration process. The challenges of creating such a comprehensive model can be partially associated with two reasons: the intricate mechanical

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behaviour of cortical bone and numerical difficulties linked to simulation of the penetration process due to large deformations. Although our understanding of the deformation and damage behaviours of cortical bone has progressed significantly in recent years (Abdel-Wahab et al., 2010; Li et al., 2012, 2013a), there have not yet resulted in a sophisticated bone-cutting model. Modelling techniques such as unzipping, re-meshing and element-deletion, which are employed to tackle the numerical difficulties associated with large deformation and formation of new surfaces, have all encountered various issues and criticisms in modelling of cutting. In recent years, the development of meshless FE algorithms has greatly assisted modelling of large-deformation processes, especially in machining (Limido et al., 2007).Smoothed particle hydrodynamics (SPH) is one of meshless techniques that have been implemented to simulate machining processes (Heinstein and Segalman, 1997; Limido et al., 2007). Similar to other particle-based interpretations, such as those described in Iliescu et al. (2010) and Ambati et al. (2011), SPH provides much better stability and accuracy for modelling of cutting processes thanks to its meshless nature and Lagrangian formulation (Limido et al., 2007).

Therefore, the focus of this study is on elucidating the anisotropic deformation and damage behaviours in cortical bone, which have been overlooked previously in modelling of penetration/cutting. Both experimental and numerical approaches were conducted in this study. The penetration test was chosen due to the requirement of smaller specimens, its simplicity and repeatability. It is also fundamentally similar to that of single-edge-cutting test (and with simpler kinematics). The newly developed SPH model was validated employing results of the penetration tests, and, for the first time, it provides insight into full-field deformation and fracture processes in the vicinity of the tool–bone interaction zone.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Experimental analysis

Specimens of cortical bone used in this study were excised from mid-diaphysis of a fresh bovine femur obtained from a local butchery shop. A total number of 40 rectangular specimens with dimensions of 30 mm × 3 mm × 3 mm (length × width × thickness) were prepared for two orientations: parallel and perpendicular to the bone’s main axis (Fig. 1b), using a low-speed band saw and then a diamond-coated precision blade (Isomet Low-Speed Saw, Buehler) under water irrigation. The specimens were further categorised into four groups according to their anatomic quadrants, namely, anterior, posterior, medial and lateral in order to reduce inconsistency caused by material variability across different regions (Li et al., 2013a). Penetration tests were performed using Instron MicroTester 5848 with a 2 kN load cell. The specimens were kept hydrated in saline solution prior to the experiments and then glued to the testing base. Four penetrations were made for each cutting direction: perpendicular to osteons (L–C and L–R planes, Fig. 1a) and along them (C–L and C–R planes) using a standard sharp cutting tool under quasi-static loading conditions (displacement rate of 1.8 mm/min). A high-speed camera (Fastcam SA-3, Photron) equipped with a micro-lens (AF Micro-Nikkor 105 mm f/2.8D, Nikon, 5000–7500 fps) was employed to capture the deformation process at micro-scale.

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Fig. 1. (a) Notation of penetration directions according to ASTM E399 standard (the first letter refers to normal direction, while the second letter refers to the plane of motion, i.e. C–L means penetration direction perpendicular to circumferential direction and parallel to the longitudinal axis); (b) schematic of specimen preparation and cutting configuration; (c) setup for cutting experiments mounted on Instron MicroTester 5848; (c) superimposed image of razor and cortical-bone specimen taken with high-speed camera (Fastcam SA-3, Photron).
2.2. Modelling approach

A new 3D finite-element modelling approach – encompassing both conventional and SPH elements – was developed using Abaqus/Explicit (Dassault Systèmes, 2011). For the SPH domain, the smoothing length was chosen to be 2.2 times of the characteristic length of the associated particle volume. The selected smoothing length allows for some 30 connections of particle elements for each at the beginning of the simulation providing a balanced computational efficiency and accuracy.

The developed FE model was configured in accordance with our experimental setup. A plane-strain condition was assumed throughout the thickness of the specimen, and therefore, to improve the computational efficiency; the cortical-bone specimen was modelled with the following dimensions: (6 mm × 3 mm × 0.02 mm) (length × width × thickness), with symmetric boundary conditions applied to both front and back sides in the x–y plane as shown in Fig. 2a. The bottom surface of the specimen was fully constrained, while two lateral edges were constrained in the y–z plane. Particle elements (PC3D) were implemented in the middle section of the specimen with a width of 0.4 mm in the x–y plane (Fig. 2b). The remaining two sections were modelled using continuum elements (C3D8R) with single-bias mesh transition for better efficiency and accuracy at small deformation. Tie constrains were applied at the boundaries between continuum and particle elements. The cutting tool was modelled as an analytical rigid body and its geometry detailed in Fig. 2 was measured using a 3D scanning optical microscope (OGP Smartscope Flash 200). The model ran on a PC (quad-core Intel I7 970 CPU) with a total number of 455,106 equally spaced particle elements. Prior to the main simulations, reliability tests of the model were conducted to ensure that changes due to the mesh size and geometrical features (such as the size of SPH domain) remain insignificant. A coefficient of friction of 0.3 was assumed based on previous literature (Alam et al., 2009b).

2.3. Material parameters

The bovine cortical bone specimen was modelled as transversely isotropic elastoplastic material incorporating the Hill’s anisotropic yield criteria and progressive degradation. The material properties used in the model were obtained mostly in previous experiments performed in our research group (Abdel-Wahab et al., 2010; Li et al., 2012, 2013a), see Table 1.

The six Hill’s constants in Table 2 were calculated based on the literature data in (Reilly and Burstein, 1975); Isotropic strain hardening for different directions was defined using our experimental data (Li et al., 2013a). Criteria for damage initiation and evolution were chosen based on experimental observation in Mercer et al. (2006). Damage initiation in a hard biological tissue was commonly introduced as strain-driven criteria (Nalla et al., 2003), therefore, in this study, the onset of damage was assumed when a failure strain of 2% was reached (Li et al., 2013a). Damage evolution process was governed by an energy-based criterion, which defines progressive degradation of the material in two forms: decrease in the yield stress and stiffness degradation. Based on the continuum-damage-mechanics theory, the criterion assumes that damage in the specimen increases gradually up to its complete failure when the energy dissipated at damage evolution attains the critical level of energy release. A summary of material properties used in the numerical model is given in Tables 1 and 2.

3. Results

3.1. Experimental results

Penetration of the cutting tool was implemented in different directions: perpendicular to osteons (L–C and L–R planes) and parallel to osteons (C–L and C–R planes) (osteons are considered to be parallel to the bone’s main axis), and their respective results are compared in terms of the maximum penetration force per unit thickness for the four anatomic quadrants in Table 3. The results indicated strong correlation between the penetration force and the orientation of the underlying microstructure, and varied considerably across different cortices. Generally, cortical bone exhibited a higher peak force when the tool penetrated perpendicular to osteons (L–C and L–R), and a significantly lower peak force when the penetration direction was parallel to osteons (C–L and C–R).

Among cortices, the specimens obtained from the medial cortex, with a good proportion of primary, secondary osteons and interstitial matrix (Fig. 3b), demonstrated the average peak force (Table 3) for direction perpendicular to osteons; whereas, specimens from the posterior cortex, with predominantly secondary osteons (Fig. 3c), showed the lowest peak force for direction parallel to osteons. Previous results in Li et al., (2012, 2013a, 2013b) suggested that the macroscopic mechanical behaviour of cortical bone is closely related to the type of the microstructures. However, in this study, statistical analysis using Tukey HSD tests (α=0.05) revealed that there is no significant difference between cortices in this respect, except that between posterior and lateral cortices (p=0.03) for penetration parallel to the osteons. This result indicated that the penetration resistance is affected by, but not directly related to, the variation of microstructure constituents. It is rather a combined effect of various factors such as stiffness, toughness and localised damage mechanisms which diminish the extent of generality of the statistical analysis.

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**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref.</th>
<th>Anterior</th>
<th>Posterior</th>
<th>Medial</th>
<th>Lateral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Density (kg/m²)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>$E_1$ (GPa)</td>
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<td>$E_2$ (GPa)</td>
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<tr>
<td>$\kappa_{12}$, $\kappa_{13}$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>$G_{12}$ (GPa)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>$\epsilon_1$ (%)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>$f_{C1}$ (N/m)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$j_{C1}$ (N/m)</td>
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<td></td>
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</table>

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**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref.</th>
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<th>Posterior</th>
<th>Medial</th>
<th>Lateral</th>
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<td>Martin and Boardman (1993)</td>
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<td>23.2</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>15.1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>13.2</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>11.2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pithieux et al. (2002)</td>
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<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Katz et al. (1984)</td>
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<td>6.1</td>
<td>6.1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li et al. (2012)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Li et al. (2012)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Li et al. (2012)</td>
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<td>2664</td>
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<tr>
<td>Li et al. (2012)</td>
<td>4087</td>
<td>3029</td>
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<td>4296</td>
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</table>
The orientation effect of microstructural elements with regard to the penetration direction also played an important role in terms of anisotropy of penetration forces. Higher forces were measured in L–C and L–R directions where more energy was required to cause damage; and lower forces were measured in tests performed in C–L and C–R directions due to relatively low material stiffness and fracture toughness. The anisotropic ratios of resistance to penetration defined as ratio between maximum forces for penetration perpendicular to osteons and parallel to them are demonstrated in Table 4. Apparently, the anisotropy ratio varied from one cortex to another in the range from 1.43 to 2.15, with the lowest magnitude found for the lateral quadrant and the highest ratio for the posterior one.

### Table 2
Hill’s parameters for cortical bone based on experimental data from Reilly and Burstein, (1975).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3
Averages and standard deviation of maximum penetration forces per unit thickness (N/mm) for four cortices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Anterior</th>
<th>Posterior</th>
<th>Medial</th>
<th>Lateral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perpendicular to osteons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L–C</td>
<td>188.8 (± 33.5)</td>
<td>152.1 (± 45.5)</td>
<td>208.6 (± 34.4)</td>
<td>170.4 (± 39.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L–R</td>
<td>192.1 (± 23.3)</td>
<td>159.6 (± 32.3)</td>
<td>214.7 (± 14.0)</td>
<td>175.9 (± 40.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parallel to osteons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C–L</td>
<td>108.8 (± 15.9)</td>
<td>73.6 (± 17.4)</td>
<td>104.8 (± 30.5)</td>
<td>124.6 (± 28.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C–R</td>
<td>103.1 (± 21.8)</td>
<td>71.2 (± 26.2)</td>
<td>110.3 (± 31.6)</td>
<td>117.9 (± 38.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Fig. 3
Microstructural transitions across different cortex positions: (a) anterior; (b) medial; (c) posterior; (d) lateral.

### Table 4
Anisotropic ratios of resistance to penetration defined as ratio between maximum forces for penetration perpendicular to osteons and parallel to them for respective cortices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anisotropic ratio</th>
<th>Anterior</th>
<th>Posterior</th>
<th>Medial</th>
<th>Lateral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>perpendicular /parallel</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Images taken with the high-speed camera also revealed distinct deformation and damage phenomena, which were largely affected by the underlying microstructures and their orientations. Various microstructure-related toughening mechanisms were observed for different penetration directions. Generally, for penetration along the longitudinal axis (C–L direction), damage was well ahead of the cutting tip and caused mainly by material separation and subsequent crack propagation along the osteon direction (Fig. 4a–c). Deformation and damage around the cutting tip happened in a rather brittle fashion, defined predominantly by low stiffness in the transverse direction and less effective longitudinal fracture resistance. As a result, low penetration forces were measured. Similarly, for penetration along the radial direction (C–R), damage was also ahead of the cutting tip and multiple cracks were evident.
in the experiments. There was also an increased tendency towards higher fracture resistance: several toughening mechanisms, such as uncracked-ligament bridging and crack deflection due to material imperfections at interfaces (Fig. 4d–f), were observed during the penetration process. Furthermore, the distribution of microstructural constituents also had a more direct influence on the direction of crack propagation, which caused larger standard deviations for the peak penetration forces in C–R direction than those in C–L direction (Table 3). Nevertheless, the average values of penetration forces in each cortex were still at the same level as for the C–L direction. In contrast to the previous two cases, penetrating perpendicular to osteons (L–C and L–R) required larger forces and energy due to the fact that stiffness and fracture toughness along bone’s longitudinal direction are much higher than those for the radial and circumferential directions. Damage was therefore more likely to be formed laterally to the penetration direction (Fig. 5). Additionally, there were two types of damage patterns observed during our experiments on penetration perpendicular to osteons: a more brittle damage pattern involving fragmentation and material’s peeling off was predominantly observed at the plexiform bone region (Fig. 5g–i); a more diffused ductile damage pattern was associated with large deformation of the osteonal structure (Fig. 5j–l).

3.2. Numerical results

To gain further detailed understanding on this anisotropic deformation behaviour of cortical bone in the vicinity of the cutting
tip, numerical simulations were conducted using a SPH-based
finite-element approach. Eight models were developed for two
penetration directions (perpendicular and parallel to osteons) and
four different cortices. Contour plots demonstrated in Figs. 6–8
reveal the detailed character of localised stresses and strains caused
by material anisotropy around the cutting tip for cutting perpendi-
cular to osteons. The evolution of deformation process in cortical
bone escalated as the penetration depth increased. It started in a
relatively small region localised around the cutting tip with a high
concentration of stresses (Fig. 6a). As penetration continued, defor-
mation accumulated and the material in front of the cutting tip
underwent an increased plastic deformation (Fig. 8b). Formation of
a large shear band can also be observed at the forefront of the
cutting blade as a result of combined effect of the wedge angle and
material’s anisotropy (Fig. 7b). This deformation pattern continued
to expand around the cutting blade until a saturation state was
reached, at which the cutting force attained its maximum value.
After that point, plastic deformation and damage mechanisms
became increasingly dominant, and the material started to deform
plastically towards the upper free edge with more damage brought
to the surrounding region (Fig. 8d). Material softening accompanied
with high plastic deformation caused material disintegration and
stiffness reduction (Figs. 6–8). Finally, reduction of the cutting force
was observed as a result of complete failure of the material.
It is clear that the progressive damage mechanisms strongly
affected the deformation process. It is especially true when dealing
with quasi-brittle or low-ductility materials that have no or
limited plastic deformation (Atkins, 2009), such as cortical bone
tissue. Therefore, damage should be considered when simulations
deal with large-deformation processes in such materials (Atkins,
2009). Ignoring such behaviour could lead to inadequate or
erroneous solutions. Fig. 9 illustrates a comparison between two
models – with and without account for the progressive damage
mechanism. The models are compared in terms of force-
displacement curves: the model that did not take into account
damage showed an unrealistic continuous growth of the cutting
force (indicated by the dotted line, Fig. 9); on the contrary, when
damage was accounted for, the cutting force degraded progres-
sively – after attaining the maximum – with displacement
(i.e. penetration depth D) in a way similar to that observed in
experiments.
A comparison between simulations and experimental data for
relationships between the levels of specific force (per unit width)
and displacement demonstrates that the obtained simulation
results are well within the range of experimental data (presented
by error bars in Fig. 10) for different cutting directions and cortices.
Apparently, the relationships between the cutting force and the
penetration depth were linearly correlated up to a point somewhat
below the maximum cutting force, and their initial slopes for
the both cutting directions were similar (Fig. 10). However, the
maximum force and the corresponding displacement for specimens
been cut parallel to osteons’ directions (C–L or C–R) were much
lower than those for other directions. This orientation-dependent
load-bearing capacity is directly affected by the deformation and the
damage mechanisms, demonstrating different realisations for var-
ious orientations that were observed in our experiments (Figs. 4–5).
By incorporating these orientation-dependent material formulat-
ion and damage mechanisms, the developed models were able to
reproduce the anisotropic character of failure with both forces and
displacements predicted adequately for various cutting directions
and cortices. Dissimilar damage and fracture processes captured
by the developed models reproduced our experimental observations.
Fig. 10. Force (per unit width) – displacement diagrams for cutting of cortical bone in different orientations across four cortices; \( \perp \) and \( // \) denote cutting perpendicular and parallel to osteons' direction, respectively.

Fig. 11. Comparison of simulation results (a and b) with images taken with high-speed camera (c and d) and optical microscopy (e and f) of damage induced by cutting along different directions: (a, c and e) perpendicular to bone axis, lateral damage propagation was observed; (b, d and f) parallel to bone axis, damage was in front of cutting tip. White lines designate the profile of razor blade and red dotted lines indicate crack lines and arrows point at the crack path.
character from a quasi-brittle damage pattern to a more ductile damage (Fig. 5). Additionally, thanks to a natural adaptation process, the cortical bone tissue is capable of relocating its vital material components in order to adapt the external mechanical requirements. Therefore, some cortices – anterior and medial – might have higher stiffness (Li et al., 2013a) to sustain high-stress environment, while the others are better in strain tolerance (Li et al., 2012, 2013a) to withstand larger deformations. This self-adaptation process enhances the response of particular regions to the local requirements and also creates a combined effect that influences the overall mechanical behaviour of cortical bone during the penetration process.

Our developed numerical model, for the first time, successfully manifested the non-uniformity and anisotropy of deformation and damage processes in cortical bone under penetration across varies cortices, and the obtained results agreed well with our experimental findings. The anisotropic damage criteria employed in the models were able to capture the orientation-dependent damage characteristics observed both in our experimental tests and literature (Alam et al., 2012). Still, microstructure-related toughening mechanisms observed in the experiments were not presented in the current development since the microstructural constituents were not introduced directly into the homogenised model. Characterisation of deformation behaviour linked to the local microstructure would certainly assist further understanding; however, a microstructured modelling approach for the current case would be computationally impractical; it is well beyond the scope of this study and not discussed here. The aim of our study was to demonstrate the anisotropic character of deformation and damage behaviours of cortical bone under controlled conditions of the penetration process, allowing there analysis in full detail. The developed model can be extended to incorporate other features such as strain-rate sensitivity and is in the plans. The results of this study provide a foundation for the further development of advanced models necessary for improved understanding of the complex process of tool–bone tissue interaction. Such models can be used to accelerate design and optimisation of surgical tools, diminishing the number of trials.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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Research data for this paper is available on request from Prof. Vadim V. Silberschmidt, e-mail: V.Silberschmidt@lboro.ac.uk.

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