

# Modelling of water infiltration and soil swelling in a vertisol from Guadeloupe

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5	Modelling of water infiltration and soil swelling in a vertisol from Guadeloupe			
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#### 1Abstract

2Models of water infiltration in undisturbed swelling soils rely on a dual porosity concept: 3Darcy flow in the micro (matric) porosity and by-pass flow in cracks. In vertisols a third 4component must be added: the structural porosity, excluding cracks, formed by the soil 5microfauna activity and containing water easily available for plants. A model was 6implemented to study the mechanisms of water infiltration: (i) water infiltration in the matric 7porosity is modelled by the Darcy's law, (ii) the flow in the structural porosity is a gravity-8dominated flow, (iii) water entering cracks is instantaneously added at the bottom of the 9cracks. Water movements from structural to matric porosity and from crack's wall into soil 10matrix are accounted for. Cracks' opening is a function of soil matrix moisture. Shrinkage 11curve, retention curve and hydraulic conductivity of the matrix were measured in the 12laboratory. The anisotropy ratio of soil deformation was measured in situ. Experiments were 13conducted in situ to fit some soil structure parameters and test the model. Although not 14wholly validated because of a poor modelling of infiltration in structural porosity, the model 15already shows that infiltration in this soil is a 3D process and that water infiltration in 16structural porosity is the main factor of rainfall partition between vertical infiltration in the 17soil matrix and water flow into the cracks.

#### 181- Introduction

19A model of infiltration and soil deformation in a Vertisol should account for three porosity 20compartments (Cabidoche & Ozier-Lafontaine, 1995; Ruy, 1997): macro-cracks delimiting 21continuous soil prisms, intra-prism structural porosity and matric porosity. The almost vertical 22macro-cracks, several centimetres wide and several decimetres apart, open and close as the 23clay particles reorganise in response to soil moisture changes. Water entering these cracks 24may infiltrate laterally into the walls of the soil matrix. The matric porosity is formed by the 25arrangement of clay particles. Matric pores are less than 5 µm in width. They remain saturated

1during structural and normal shrinkage and thus contain the water responsible for soil 2movement. The limit between structural and normal shrinkage is called the crack air entry 3(CAE) point. The intra-prism structural porosity has a relatively stable geometry (Cabidoche 4& Ozier-Lafontaine, 1995). Structural pores are from 10 µm to several mm in width (Ruy, 51997). Structural water does not induce any deformation of the soil. Shrinkage cracks are not 6included in structural porosity.

7In order to better understanding the processes of water infiltration in an undisturbed swelling 8clay soil, we present the physical bases of a 2D numerical model of water infiltration and soil 9movements in a Vertisol.

# 102- Physical bases and description of the model

11The model is 2D, the scale of modelling is a half prism isolated by one macro-crack. The 12experimental size of a prism can be deduced from the network of macro-cracks and is about 1370 cm.

14(i) water flow in the matric porosity

15We assume that water flow is described by Darcy's law because of the small diameter and the 16homogeneous distribution of the size of the matric pores (Ruy, 1997). 2D Richard's equation 17is used to calculate water fluxes. A source function  $S_w$  accounts for the diffusive water 18movement from structural porosity to matric porosity, as suggested by Jarvis (1994):

$$S_{w} = K_{w/s} (\psi_{\text{mat}}) \cdot S_{\text{struc}} \cdot \frac{\psi_{\text{struc}} - \psi_{\text{mat}}}{d^{2}} , \qquad (1)$$

19where  $K_{w/s}$  (cm s<sup>-1</sup>) is the matric conductivity,  $\psi_{mat}$  (cm) the potential of water in matric 20porosity,  $\psi_{struc}$  (cm) the potential of water in structural porosity,  $S_{struc}$  the saturation of 21structural porosity and d (cm) an effective "diffusion" length. We suppose that the potential of 22water in the structural porosity is a linear function of the saturation of this porosity:  $\psi_{struc}$  is 23equal to 0 cm when the structural porosity is saturated and is equal to  $\psi_{ae}$  when it is air filled, 24where  $\psi_{ae}$  is the soil water potential at the CAE point (Ruy, 1997). The water retention curve,

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1the shrinkage curve and the matric hydraulic conductivity were measured according to the 2methods described in Ruy & Cabidoche (1998).

3We used the finite element method to discretize the domain with rectangular elements. The 4boundary condition at the surface is a Neumann's condition according to (*iv*). A zero flux 5condition is imposed at the bottom of the profile and along the vertical axis of the soil prism, 6because of the symmetry of the soil prism. The boundary condition along the macro-crack 7wall is a function of the depth of ponded water in the crack and is described in subsection (*iii*). 8(*ii*) water flow in the intra-prism structural porosity

9Previous work (Ruy, 1997) showed that water flow inside the prism could not be modelled by 10Darcy's law with a bimodal hydraulic conductivity and water retention curve, and therefore 11that water flow inside the structural porosity was of "preferential flow type". Then ,we assume 12that water flow in the structural porosity is a gravity flow. Water flow is described in a 13conceptual way by using a model of reservoirs in cascade (one reservoir per layer). For each 14layer, the volume of the reservoir is the volume of the structural porosity. The output flux q of 15each reservoir (Figure 1) is a power function of the saturation of the reservoir:

$$q = c \cdot S_{\text{struc}}^{b} \quad , \tag{2}$$

16where c (cm s<sup>-1</sup>) is the unknown hydraulic conductance,  $S_{\text{struc}}$  the saturation of the reservoir 17(i.e.) the saturation of the structural porosity) and b an empirical exponent. Theoretical values 18 of b can be calculated from the laminar film flow theory in a single, smooth and vertical 19macropore. For open channel flow, a power law function similar at eq. (2) relates the flow and 20the depth of water. The value of the exponent depends on the Reynold's number (Chen & 21Wagenet, 1992). The flow is assumed to be turbulent, and we set the value of b to 1.5.

22(iii) water flow into the macro-cracks

23In the model, water infiltrating into the macro-crack instantaneously reaches the bottom of the 24crack where it accumulates. Horizontal infiltration into the soil prism during downward 25unsaturated flow along the macro-crack wall is neglected, whereas it is taken into account for

1ponded conditions at the bottom of the macro-crack. Hence, the lateral boundary condition for 2the resolution of the 2D Richard's equation is a zero flux condition above the surface of the 3ponded water, and a Dirichlet's condition below this surface (hydrostatic profile). At each 4time step, the model recalculates the volume of the macro-crack and the depth of the surface 5of the ponded water according to a mass balance and to the deformation of the soil matrix.

6(iv) partitioning of rainfall at the soil surface

7Rainfall, R, is partitioned at the soil surface according to the infiltrability of the three 8porosities: first, *R* enters the matric porosity, then excess water flows into the structural 9porosity and then into the macro-cracks. The model calculates infiltrability of the three 10porosities.

11(v) deformation of the soil matrix

12Clay particles reorganise as water infiltrates into matric porosity, and the soil prism is 13deformed in every direction according to the anisotropy ratio of soil movements. Swelling is 14supposed to be normal. We used in the model the anisotropy ratio k of Voltz & Cabidoche 15(1995): k is the elongation rate in any horizontal direction divided by the elongation rate in the 16vertical direction. The model deforms each finite element at each time step according to the 17variation of the mean matric WC of the element.

18Table 1 presents a synthesis of all the equations used in the model.

# 193- Material and methods

#### 203.1- Description of the experiments

21The model was tested on a Vertisol at the Experimental Research Station of INRA in Gardel, 22Guadeloupe (French Antilles). The soil is a chromic vertisol, with more than 80 % clay.

23Several soil prisms were isolated from the plot by a polyethylene sheet coated with a hull of 24resin and fibreglass. A side of the hull was replaced by a rigid inox steel-plate on which the 25measurement devices were fixed. Four windows were cut into the inox sheet and equipped

1with Plexiglas plates. Potentiometric sensors were fitted on the remaining Plexiglas windows 2to measure the horizontal deformation of a soil prism at different depths. All the displacement 3sensors were installed on the same soil prism. Thickness variations of prism layers were 4measured with modified THERESA® transducers (Cabidoche & Ozier-Lafontaine, 1995). 5Transducers were fitted with the same potentiometric displacement sensors. Water was 6applied at the soil surface with four full cone nozzles or with a portable sprayer for low 7intensities.

8The matric WC was calculated with the model of Voltz & Cabidoche (1995) from thickness 9variations of prism layers. The structural WC was not measured. A piezometer was fitted into 10a macro-crack: an ultrasonic probe automatically measured the level of ponded water.

# 113.2- Fitting of unknowns parameters

12Structural conductance c and diffusion length d must be fitted from experimental data. Both 13parameters are soil structure parameters: they should vary with depth because the volume and 14the shape of the structural pores vary with depth. We considered two different values for c:  $15c_{\text{surf}}$  (layers 0-10 cm and 10-30 cm) and  $c_{\text{deep}}$  (30-50 cm to 90-110 cm). c is nil at 130 cm, 16because of the impervious layer. Three different values were considered for d:  $d_{\text{surf}}$  (0-10 cm, 1710-30 cm, 30-50 cm),  $d_{\text{mid}}$  (50-70 cm, 70-90 cm) and  $d_{\text{deep}}$  (90-110 cm and 110-130 cm). 18Therefore 5 parameters must be fitted from experiments. We used the Marquardt's method 19(1963). Six experiments were conducted. The first (Exp1 to Exp5) five were used to calibrate 20the model, the last one (Exp6) was used to "validate" the model.

#### 214- Results and Discussion

#### 224.1- Submodels validation

23The model has been checked against experimental data obtained in a 1D swelling bentonite 24paste (Angulo, 1989; Figure 1). Then, we used the model in two domains (matric porosity and 25macro-cracks). A rainfall of 120 mm h<sup>-1</sup> for 6 min was simulated (frequency 0.9 year<sup>-1</sup> in the

1Grande-Terre Island of Guadeloupe). Figure 2 shows that most of the rain flows into the 2macro-crack where it accumulates and then infiltrates into the soil prism, resulting in both 3horizontal and vertical swelling of the prism. The pattern of the heterogeneity of water 4potentials inside the prism is very similar to the spatial variability of the water content 5measured in the field (Jaillard & Cabidoche, 1984). Therefore, we consider that these 6quantitative and qualitative results validate the model when run with 1 or 2 domains.

#### 74.2- Experiments results

8Macro-crack flow has never been observed, except in the last experiment. For each 9experiment, the variation in the swelling measured by transducers is quite large, which is due 10to a high spatial variability of the structural porosity. During the last experiment, the swelling 11velocity of a given soil layer increases as the level of water into the macro-crack reaches this 12layer. It shows that lateral infiltration into the prism of water running rapidly downwards 13along cracks has to be neglected and that it must be taken into account under the level of 14ponded water into the macro-crack. Figure 3 shows the relation between the horizontal 15elongation rate and the vertical one: the slope of the regression line is the anisotropy ratio k. 16The mean value of k is 0.798 in layer 10-30 cm depth and is 1.152 in layer 30-50 cm depth. It 17is in agreement with the value of 0.85 calculated by Cabidoche & Voltz (1995). We used a 18single value of 0.826 for all layers in the model.

# 194.3- Calibration

20For each experiment, the uniqueness of the parameters has been verified (Ruy, 1997). 21Measured and simulated swelling of 30-50 cm depth soil layer during Exp3 is plotted on 22Figure 4. For each experiment, a unique set of parameters can be fitted to well simulate the 23vertical swelling of all soil layers. However, the fitted parameters differ significantly from one 24experiment to the other: for instance the fitted value (with the 95 % CI) of  $d_{surf}$  was 0.28 cm 25( $\pm$  0.01) for Exp2, 0.52 cm ( $\pm$  0.03) for Exp3, 0.29 cm ( $\pm$  0.04) for Exp4 and 0.44 cm ( $\pm$ 

10.01) for Exp5. As the size of aggregates is a function of the matric WC, we tried to relate  $d_{\text{surf}}$  2to the initial matric WC of the 10-30 cm layer, but the regression was not significant. Fitted 3values of  $c_{\text{surf}}$  and  $c_{\text{deep}}$  also differ from one experiment to another. They can be explained 4neither by the initial matric WC, nor by rainfall intensity R.

# 54.4- Validation

6Finally, we tested the model with the independent data set collected during Exp6. Parameter 7values used in the simulation are the mean value that were fitted for Exp1 to Exp5: 0.440 cm 8for  $d_{surf}$ , 2.45 cm for  $d_{mid}$ , 2.62 cm for  $d_{deep}$ , 0.0434 cm s<sup>-1</sup> for  $c_{surf}$  and 0.0478 cm s<sup>-1</sup> for  $c_{deep}$ . 9Values of  $c_{surf}$  and  $c_{deep}$  are those fitted in Exp5 because rainfall intensities of Exp5 and Exp6 10are close. Results are presented in Figures 5a and 5b. Neither the range of swelling nor its rate 11are simulated in a satisfactory way. The beginning of water infiltration into the macro-crack is 12delayed by the model, because of the high infiltrability of the structural porosity (structural 13conductance of 0.0434 cm s<sup>-1</sup> at the surface). However, the upraising of the water level is well 14simulated. After rainfall has stopped, the decrease of the water level in the macro-crack is not 15well simulated. However, at least two reasons can explain this discrepancy. (i) clogging of the 16piezometer by deposit of clay particles: therefore, the level recorded inside the piezometer is 17higher than the water level in the macro-crack; (ii) artefacts of simulation: as the macro-crack 18closes up, a small variation in the amount of water in the macro-crack results in a large 19variation in the level of water.

#### 205. Discussion and conclusion

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21Germann & Di Pietro (1996) distinguished two kinds of flow in macropores, *i.e.* dispersive 22and preferential flow. They showed (see Table 3 of Germann & Di Pietro, 1996) that 23conductance is constant when water infiltration is governed by preferential flow (for large 24input rates of water), and increases with the rainfall intensity when the flow in macropores is 25dispersive (for low input rates). In our experiments, low input rates of water in Exp2, Exp3

1 and at the beginning of Exp4 could be responsible for a dispersive infiltration, whereas the 2 second part of Exp4 and Exp5 could have been governed by preferential flow. However, this 3 result cannot explain the difference between Exp2 and Exp3 where rainfall intensities are the 4 same. In fact, other factors, such as geometry and initial saturation of structural porosity, have 5 an influence upon the value of structural conductance. These authors also showed that 6 gravity-dominated flow could be either of the preferential type or of the dispersive type: in 7 their experiments, the value of b was not constant but may be used to assess the degree of 8 preferential flow. b decreased with increasing application rates of water. Its value was about 4 9 for a preferential flow (application rate of water equal to about 360 mm b-1), and increased up 10 to 8 for a more dispersive flow (application rate of about 36 mm b-1). New calibration could 11 be conducted with b as an unknown parameter. However, the total number of parameters 12 would increase and parameter b and c would probably not be independent.

13Hypothesis that structural flow is of preferential type came from the results of Ruy (1997). 14However, the experimental uncertainty in the calculation of structural and matric WC was 15quite important. It is possible that Darcy's law may apply on one part of the structural flow (in 16the smallest pores) and that a gravity-dominated flow may be used for the other part of the 17structural flow, as the range of variation of the pore diameters is quite large. We used the 18Wind's evaporation method (Tamari *et al.*, 1993) to obtain the hydraulic conductivity of the 19structural porosity ("structural conductivity") on one saturated clod sampled in the 70-80 cm 20layer. Results are only approached as the shrinkage is not accounted for in this method, but 21we see (Figure 6) a good agreement between the matric conductivity and the structural 22conductivity, showing that Darcy's law could be used at least in one part of the structural 23porosity.

24Nevertheless, the model already shows that water infiltration in a Vertisol is a 3D process and 25that the structural water flow is the main factor of the partition of rainfall between vertical

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1 infiltration in the prism and water flow in macro-cracks, as can be showed in Figures 7a and 27b.

#### **3Acknowledgements**

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### **1Tables and Figures caption**

#### 2Tables

3Table 1: equations used in the model to described water flow inside and between the three 4kinds of porosity.

#### 5Figures

6Figure 1: comparison between the model and experimental data from Angulo (1989) for the 7profiles of water content during an infiltration in a 1D-swelling bentonite paste.

8Figure 2: simulation of water potential distribution inside a prism of a Vertisol during and 9after rainfall.

10Figure 3: relation between the horizontal elongation rate and the vertical one. Only continuous 11drying periods have been considered, a different number and symbol label each period. The 12slope of each regression line is the anisotropy ratio k. Average values of k are calculated from 13a weighted mean, the weight being inversely proportional to the estimation variance of k.

14Figure 4: variation of the measured and simulated swelling of the 30-50 cm depth layer during 15Exp3. Continuous lines are for the 60 % confidence interval.

16Figure 5: simulation of Exp6 with parameters fitted from Exp1 to Exp5. (5a): variation of the 17measured and simulated swelling of the 10-30 cm depth layer; continuous lines are for the 60 18% CI. (5b): variation of the measured and simulated water level in macro-cracks.

19Figure 6: hydraulic conductivity  $K_{\text{w/s}}$  of the matric porosity and of the structural porosity of 20the 70-80 cm depth layer.  $\theta$  is the volumetric water content (m<sup>3</sup> m<sup>-3</sup>).

21Figure 7: simulation of: (7a) the cumulated water flow in the three porosities during and after 22rainfall (I=71 mm h<sup>-1</sup> for 54 min); and (7b) the cumulated flow in the matric porosity from the 23soil surface, from the macro-crack and from structural pores

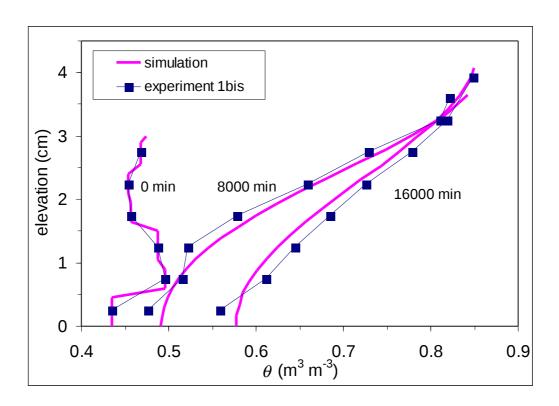
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1 Table 1

porosity	porosity Equations		
	law of motion	mass balance	water exchanges:
matric	Darcy's law: $\mathbf{q}_{\text{mat}} = -K_{\text{w/s}}(\psi) \cdot \nabla(\psi + z)$ 2D	Richards' equation: $C(\psi) \cdot \frac{\partial \psi}{\partial t} = \frac{\partial}{\partial x} \left( K_{w/s}(\psi) \cdot \frac{\partial \psi}{\partial x} \right) + \frac{\partial}{\partial z} \left( K_{w/s}(\psi) \cdot \left( \frac{\partial \psi}{\partial z} + 1 \right) \right) + S_w$	$S_{w} = K_{w/s}(\psi) \cdot S_{\text{struc}} \cdot \frac{\psi_{\text{struc}} - \psi}{d^{2}},$ $\psi_{\text{struc}} = \psi^{ae} \cdot (1 - S_{\text{struc}})$
structural	Gravity flow across 7 reservoirs: $q_{struc} = c \cdot S_{struc}^{b}, b = 1.5,$ 1D	for the <i>i</i> th reservoir: $\forall i \in [17], V_{\max,i} \frac{dS_{\text{struc},i}}{dt} = (q_{i-1} - q_i) - \int_i S_w (\theta_{mat}, S_{\text{struc},i}, z)$	
crack	instantaneously added at the bottom of the macro-crack,	variation of the depth $z^{SL}$ of the surface of the ponded water according to:  (i) the flux of water at the surface of the macro-crack,  (ii) the volume of ponded water that infiltrates horizontally	macro-crack - matric porosity: under the surface of ponded water, Dirichlet boundary condition: $\psi(z \geq z^{\text{SL}}) = z - z^{\text{SL}},$
		into the soil prism, (iii) the swelling of the soil prism,	macro-crack - structural porosity: no exchange

matric porosity	hydraulic conductivity $K_{w/s}(\psi)$ retention curve $\psi(\theta)$ shrinkage curve	measured measured measured
structural porosity	c d b ພ <sup>ae</sup>	unknown: to fit unknown: to fit 1.5 measured: -316 cm

1 Figure 1:



1 Figure 2:

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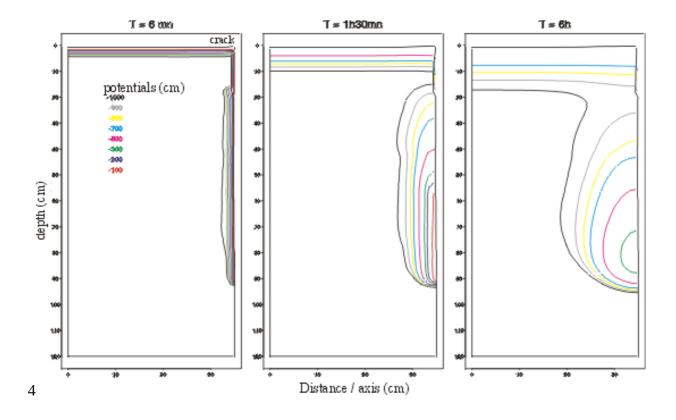
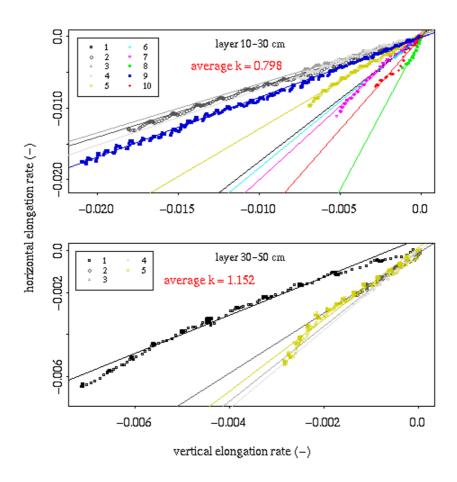


Figure 3:



1 Figure 4

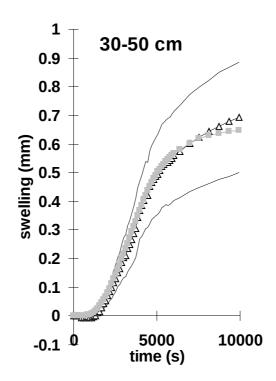
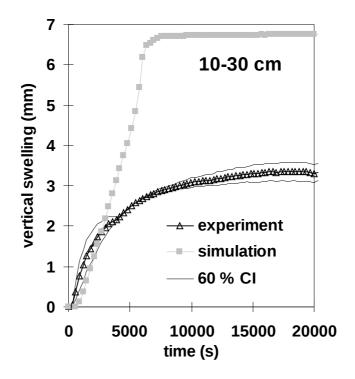
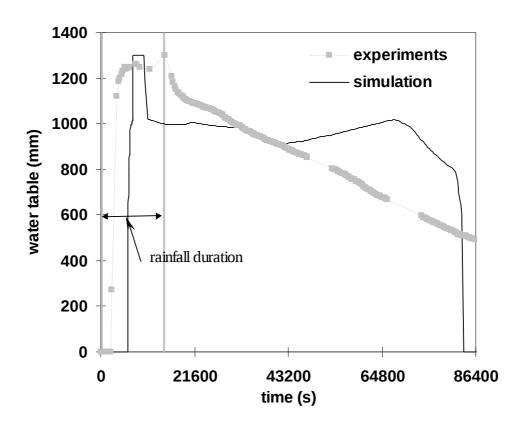


Figure 5:



3 Figure 5a



5 Figure 5b

Figure 6:

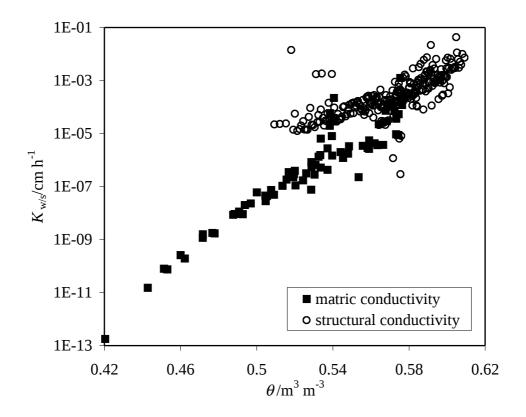


Figure 7:

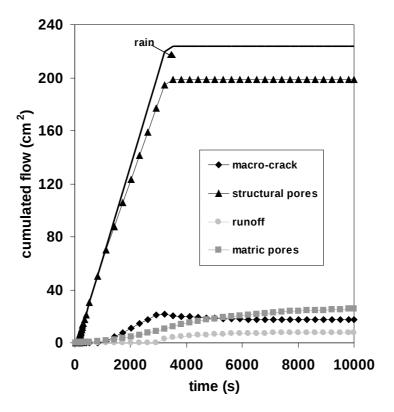


Figure 7a

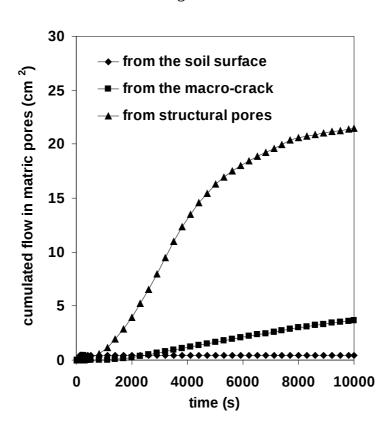


Figure 7b