



First record of Crocodyliformes Osteoderm from the Upper Cretaceous Bauru Group, State of Goiás , Brazil.

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ABSTRACT

The Crocodyliformes from the Late Cretaceous of South America were one of the main components of the tetrapod faunas found in rocks of the Bauru Group at Goiás, Minas Gerais and São Paulo states, Brazil. The presence of osteoderms has been reported in articulated specimens or found isolated in the palaeontological record. In the present work, we describe the first osteoderm of Mesoeucrocodylia from the Campanian-Maastrichtian of the Marília Formation (Bauru Group) of the state of Goiás. Paleo-UFG-114 has a quadrilateral shape, a rough external texture with radially oriented corrosion, an internal facet with the presence of intersecting grooves, foramina in the internal and external region and the presence of a poorly developed keel. These features differentiate them from the osteoderms of titanosaur dinosaurs found in the rocks of this geological unit. The presence of Paleo-UFG-114 in the state of Goiás reaffirms that mesoeucrocodylians were important components of the reptile fauna, and contributes to increasing knowledge about the group's geographic distribution in this poorly-explored region of Central Brazil.

Keywords: Osteoderm, Mesoeucrocodylia, Late Cretaceous, Bauru Group, Central Brazil.

Primer registro de un osteodermo Crocodyliformes del Cretácico Superior del Grupo Bauru, estado de Goiás

RESUMEN

Los Crocodyliformes del Cretácico Tardío de América del Sur fueron uno de los componentes principales de las faunas de tetrápodos halladas en rocas del Grupo Bauru en los estados de Goiás, Minas Gerais y São Paulo, Brasil. La presencia de osteodermos ha sido reportada en especímenes articulados o encontrados aislados en el registro paleontológico. En el presente trabajo describimos el primer osteodermo de Mesoeucrocodylia del Campaniano-Maastrichtiano de la Formación Marília (Grupo Bauru) del estado de Goiás. El espécimen Paleo-UFG-114 tiene una forma cuadrilátera, una textura externa rugosa con corrosión orientada radialmente, una faceta interna con presencia de surcos intersectados, forámenes en las regiones interna y externa y una quilla poco desarrollada. Estas características los diferencian de los osteodermos de dinosaurios titanosaurios encontrados en las rocas de esta unidad geológica. La presencia de Paleo-UFG-114 en el estado de Goiás reafirma que los mesoeucrocodilios fueron componentes importantes de la fauna de reptiles y contribuye a aumentar el conocimiento sobre la distribución geográfica del grupo en esta región poco explorada del centro de Brasil.

Palabras clave: Osteodermo; Mesoeucrocodylia; Cretácico tardío; Grupo Bauru; Brasil central.

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Introduction

The Bauru Group outcrops at areas of the states of Goiás, Mato Grosso do Sul, Minas Gerais and São Paulo (Fernandes & Coimbra, 1996; Batezelli *et al.*, 2019). Recently studies have proposed a new lithostratigraphic arrangement for this geological unit composed of the Adamantina, Uberaba, Marília and Serra da Galga formations (Batezelli *et al.*, 2019; Soares *et al.*, 2020). These layers have a rich fossil content regarding by plants, invertebrates and vertebrate remains found mainly in the Adamantina, Marília and Serra da Galga formations at the Minas Gerais and São Paulo states (Ihering, 1911; Pacheco, 1913; von Huene, 1931, 1933; Candeiro *et al.*, 2006; Martinelli & Teixeira, 2015; Santos-Pereira *et al.* 2016; Candeiro & Figueirôa, 2017; see review in Brusatte *et al.*, 2017; Candeiro *et al.*, 2018; Candeiro *et al.*, 2020). Records of crocodyliforms have been reported since the beginning of the last century for these states (Price, 1945; Buffetaut, 1980; Brandt Neto *et al.*, 1991, 1992; Carvalho and Bertini, 1998, 1999, 2000).

Crocodyliforms from the Bauru Group are known from complete skeletons and isolated teeth (Carvalho *et al.*, 2004; Candeiro *et al.*, 2018). Records of osteoderms have been described and are important elements found of this group (Marinho *et al.*, 2006), being present on Baurusuchidae, conforme table 1. These osteoderms, along with associated cranial and postcranial remains, are often preserved with structural integrity. Several baurusuchid specimens, for instance, exhibit well-preserved anatomical features and low degrees of weathering and transport, suggesting favorable taphonomic conditions within the depositional environments of the Bauru Group (Bandeira *et al.*, 2018).

Table 1. Crocodyliformes groups of Bauru Group with osteoderms used as comparisons.

TAXA	SELECTED AUTHORS
Peirosauridae such as <i>Montealtosuchus arrudacamposi</i>	Carvalho, Vasconcellos, Tavares, 2007
<i>Peirosaurus torminni</i>	Price, 1955
<i>Uberabasuchus terrificus</i>	Carvalho, Ribeiro, Avilla, 2004
Itasuchidae as <i>Itasuchus jesuinoi</i>	Price, 1955
Isolated osteoderms	e.g., Torres <i>et al.</i> , 2001
Baurusuchidae	Marinho <i>et al.</i> , 2006

The south of the state of Goiás presents outcrops of sedimentary rocks belonging to the Adamantina and Marília formations, with great fossiliferous potential with records of invertebrates (Mezzalira, 1974), plants (Basilici & Dal’Bo, 2010; Candeiro *et al.*, 2022), fish, turtles, crocodyliforms, sauropods and theropods (Candeiro *et al.*, 2018, 2020, 2024). This region has a great fossiliferous potential for crocodyliforms material findings, which could increase the knowledge about de diversity and distribution of this group at Central Brazil. In 2022, unpublished materials of crocodyliforms and dinosaurs were collected from Marília Formation in the municipality of Quirinópolis, state of Goiás by Laboratório de Paleontologia e Evolução (Curso de Geologia, Universidade Federal de Goiás) researching team. This article aims to describe the first crocodyliform osteoderm for the state of Goiás and thus contribute to records of this taxon on the region.

Geological setting

The municipality of Quirinópolis is located in the south of the state of Goiás (Brazil), where rocks from the Adamantina and Marília formations of the Bauru Group are exposed (Fig. 1; Soares *et al.*, 1980). Ages are estimated to vary between Campanian-Maastrichtian to Adamantina Formation and aged as Maastrichtian to Marília Formation (*sensu* Batezelli *et al.*, 2019). The Marília Formation in the state of Goiás is the most prolific in terms of Cretaceous vertebrate remains in the state, but with records concentrated in the neighboring municipality of Rio Verde (see review in Candeiro *et al.*, 2020).

Institutional abbreviation

Paleo-UFG: Coleção de Paleontologia, Laboratório de Paleontologia e Evolução, Universidade Federal de Goiás, Aparecida de Goiânia, state of Goiás, Brazil.

UFG: Universidade Federal de Goiás

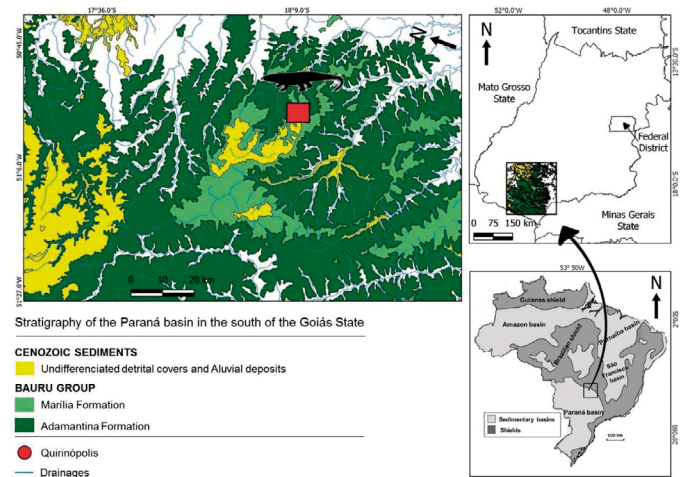


Figure 1. Lithostratigraphic map of the Bauru Group and the study area in the municipality of Quirinópolis, Goiás, Brazil (adapted from SIGAS, 2003).

Morro da Antena rural outcrop in Quirinópolis municipality (Marília Formation)

Fine-grained deposits, mainly claystones, siltstones and fine sandstones, form tabular to cuneiform bodies up to 8 m thick and are laterally extensive and intercalated between dune units (fine-grained sandstones with cross bedding) (Fig. 2). Internally, these units are characterized by massive to laminated claystones from 4 to 22 cm thick and siltstones where does the osteoderm studied here come from, this level presents abundant rootlets and desiccation cracks. In addition, there are beds from 2 to 17 cm thick, composed of laminated claystones interspersed with fine sandstones, mainly massive or with asymmetrical subcritical climbing ripples. A very striking feature of these deposits is that both the upper and lower contacts are non-erosive abrupt.



Figure 2. (A) stratigraphical profile of Morro da Antena outcrop of the Marília Formation; (B) locality of Morro da Antena in rural area of the municipality of Quirinópolis, southern Goiás State, indicating the level at which the osteoderm Paleo-UFG/114 was found (black silhouette).

Materials and methods

Paleo-UFG/114 consists of an osteoderm in a good state of preservation from Morro da Antena, municipality of Quirinópolis, state of Goiás, Brazil. The material is housed at Laboratório de Paleontologia e Evolução, Universidade Federal de Goiás of city Aparecida de Goiânia, state of Goiás, Brazil. The morphological description followed the criteria outlined by Marinho *et al.* 2006, considering the overall shape, external and internal ornamentation patterns, and the orientation and position of the keel. Identification of the specimen as pertaining to Mesoeucrocodylia was based on comparisons with published descriptions and figures of similar osteoderms from the Bauru Group and other Upper Cretaceous crocodyliforms. These comparisons were conducted using images and diagnostic features available in the literature. This approach allowed the recognition of shared morphological traits consistent with Mesoeucrocodylian taxa.

Paleo-UFG/114 was collected manually in the field in 2023 and prepared in 2023 and 2024 at the Laboratório de Paleontologia e Evolução, Curso de Geologia, Universidade Federal de Goiás. Measurements were recorded using

a Mitutoyo caliper from the 500 series, ABSOLUTE AOS Digital model with Absolute technology, with a capacity of 150mm/6. The views were taken using a Leica model EZ4 binocular stereomicroscope and the photographs were taken using a Canon EOS Rebel T4i camera with a Canon 18-55 lens. The measurement accuracy is on average $\pm 0.02\text{mm}$. Samples and reference and comparison figures came from publications.

Results

Systematic palaeontology

Crocodylomorpha Walker, 1970

Crocodyliformes Hay, 1930 (*sensu* Clark, in Benton & Clark, 1988)

Mesoeucrocodylia Whetstone & Whybrow, 1983

Notosuchia Gasparini, 1971

Material o specimen and provenance: The material consists of an isolated osteoderm of Crocodyliformes found in the Maastrichtian Marília Formation, Bauru Group and is listed in the Laboratório de Paleontologia e Evolução of the Universidade Federal de Goiás under number Paleo-UFG/114.

Description

The fossil is well preserved and has signs of breakage on the sides. The preservation and slight abrasion of the material indicate that it was rolled from a previous location until the collection site. Paleo-UFG/114 has a nearly flat internal face and a slightly convex external face, measuring 3 cm in length, 0.62 cm in depth and 2.15 cm in width. It has a quadrilateral shape and is compressed dorsoventrally (Fig. 3).

The external surface has a rough texture, with grooves of different sizes well distributed throughout the region and a slightly centralized keel (Fig. 3A and B), not extending beyond the edge of the specimen. The internal face exhibits a range from smooth to finely pitted bone, pierced by numerous vascular foramina and intersecting grooves consistent with the condition described for Mesoeucrocodylia (Marinho *et al.*, 2006). Lateral margins bear semi-rounded, polished breakage surfaces, indicating transport abrasion prior to final burial or by other biostratinomic interactions such as predation or necrophagy, although we believe this is less likely due to the aspects of wear seen throughout the osteoderm.

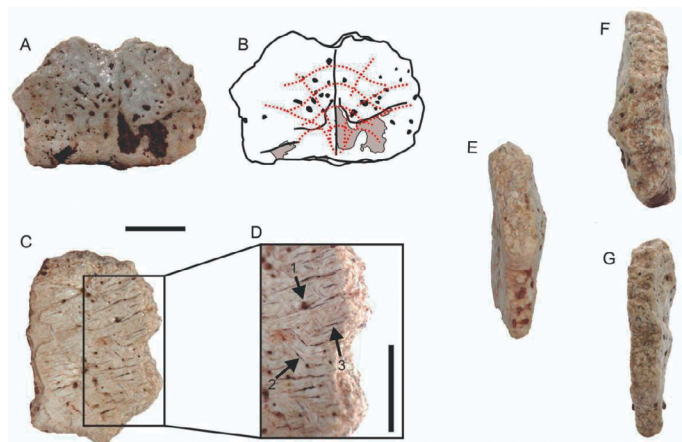


Figure 3. - Paleo-UFG/114, A: view of the external region; B: line drawing of the external region. The red line indicates the reconstructed keel. The gray shapes indicate abrasion on the surface; C: view of the internal region; D: detail of the internal region showing foramina [arrow 1] and intersecting grooves [arrows 2 and 3]; E, F and G: side view showing the slightly arched keel. Scale A, B = 2cm.

When compared to osteoderms of *Baurusuchus albertoi* Nascimento & Zaher, 2010, which are arranged in two parasagittal rows and show progressive enlargement from small cervical plates (~1 cm long) to large, imbricating caudal shields with pronounced midline crests and reticulate microtexturing (Nascimento & Zaher, 2010), Paleo-UFG/114 differs in keel development (more subdued and centrally confined) and lacks true imbrication. Relative to *Mariliasuchus amarali* Carvalho & Bertini, 1999, whose dorsal osteoderms are quadrangular with a continuous, prominent principal crest flanked by

secondary crests and irregular grooves fading toward the border (Nobre & Carvalho, 2013), Paleo-UFG/114 presents a more irregular network of sulci, a weaker crest, and a dorsolateral plate geometry rather than the broad, tile-like arrangement seen in *Mariliasuchus*. Finally, the pattern of internal vascular canals and secondary remodeling in *Paleo-UFG/114* most closely matches that of *Montealtosuchus arrudacamposi* Carvalho, Vasconcellos & Tavares, 2007, whose osteoderms (13–53 mm long) bear an elevated median keel, shallow grooves, and punctate vascular canals within a predominantly woven-parallel-fibered bone matrix (Tavares *et al.*, 2015)

Discussion and conclusions

Osteoderms are not exclusive for Crocodylomorphs, being present also in titanosaur sauropods (e.g., D’Emic *et al.* 2009). Comparing with other groups that have titanosaurian osteoderms, Paleo-UFG/114 differ from those due to the lack of a rough internal surface, with an interlaced bone pattern, the presence of a bulb and root separated by a cingulum, according to morphology regarded by D’Emic *et al.* (2009). The identification of Paleo-UFG/114 as a crocodyliforms osteoderm is based on: (1) its rough external texture with radially oriented pitting; (2) an internal facet, with the presence of intersecting grooves that may have been caused by contact with underlying tissue, with the presence of foramina in this region; (3) presence of a keel whose elevation differs according to the region to which the osteoderms belongs (Marinho *et al.*, 2006).

When dealing with crocodyliforms, osteoderms are separated into nuchal (cervical), dorsal (thoracic), caudal, gastral (ventral/abdominal) and appendicular parts of the body (Ross and Mayer, 1983; Frey, 1988; Salisbury and Frey, 2001). Hill (2010) subdivided the dorsal osteoderms into paravertebral and dorsal accessory regions, the latter of which may be the region belonging to the osteoderm described here in this work because they are quadrilateral, dorsoventrally compressed, similar to plates in general structure and with the presence of a slight keel that does not exceed the margin of the osteoderm. Also according to Hill (2010), this type of osteoderm can vary in its dimensions depending on the region in which it is found, being the closest to the dorsal accessory wide than longer and those located more laterally can be the equal or longer and the keel also presents variations in its development, especially as it is positioned more laterally on the dorsal dermal shield (Filippi *et al.* 2013). On the inner surface of Paleo-UFG/114, there are intersecting grooves reported for other osteoderms of *Notosuchia*, Mesoeucrocodylia, such as *Itasuchus* (Marinho *et al.*, 2006) and *Montealtosuchus* (Tavares *et al.*, 2015).

The Notosuchians form a clade of crocodyliforms of varying sizes and habits known, mainly from the Upper Cretaceous strata of South America (Carvalho, *et al.* 2004; Tavares *et al.*, 2015; Candeiro *et al.*, 2018). Recently, postcranial remains belonging to mesoeucrocodylians were reported from the strata of the Marília Formation at Rio Verde municipality (Candeiro *et al.*, 2018) and the first skeleton of *Caipirasuchus* from the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil, described by Martinelli *et al.* (2018). Paleo-UFG/114 is the first osteoderm occurrence of this type of material in the state of Goiás. Therefore, the discovery presented reinforces the morphological diversity of these elements and their importance for the paleoecological and paleobiogeographic interpretation for the region. Additionally, it contributes to the group’s knowledge in the state of Goiás, indicating the fossiliferous potential of the location and increasing the understanding of the Cretaceous paleofauna in Central Brazil.

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