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First record of Megaraptora (Theropoda, Neovenatoridae) from Brazil

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ABSTRACT

An isolated caudal vertebral centrum of a theropod dinosaur was discovered in the Bauru Basin (Late Cretaceous) of Brazil, in the Maastrichtian São José do Rio Preto Formation. The vertebral centrum has pneumatic features that are similar to those in the megaraptoran theropods *Aerosteon*, *Megaraptor*, and *Orkoraptor*. For example, all these taxa share with the caudal centrum here described the presence of true pleurocoels or pneumatic foramina, immersed within a depression or fossa. Thus, the specimen is considered the first record of Megaraptora in Brazil. The present analysis provides new information on the vertebral caudal anatomy of this clade of bizarre Cretaceous theropods.

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R É S U M É

Une vertèbre caudale centrale isolée d'un dinosaure théropode a été découverte dans le bassin Bauru (Crétacé supérieur) du Brésil, dans la Formation maastrichtienne São José do Rio Preto. Le centrum vertébral a des caractéristiques pneumatiques qui sont similaires à celles des théropodes mégaraptorien *Aerosteon*, *Megaraptor* et *Orkoraptor*. Par exemple, tous ces taxa partagent avec le centrum caudal ici décrit la présence de véritables pleurocoèles ou foramens pneumatiques, immergés au sein d'une dépression ou fossette. Ainsi, l'échantillon est considéré comme le premier enregistrement de Megaraptora au Brésil. La présente analyse fournit de nouvelles informations sur l'anatomie vertébrale caudale de ces bizarres théropodes du Crétacé.

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1. Introduction

The fossil record of Upper Cretaceous theropods from Brazil is currently made up of remains of abelisaurids (Bertini, 1996; Bittencourt and Kellner, 2002; Candeiro et al., 2004, 2006a, b; Kellner and Campos, 2002; Novas et al., 2008), maniraptorans (Machado et al., 2008; Novas

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et al., 2005), and isolated teeth of deinonychosaurians (Bertini et al., 1997; Bertini and Franco-Rosas, 2001; Franco-Rosas, 2002), collected from several formations of the Bauru Group (Bittencourt and Langer, 2011). The presence of carcharodontosaurids (Candeiro et al., 2004, 2006b; Silva and Kellner, 1999) on Bauru Group was attributed based on isolated teeth, but these records are considered currently as corresponding to abelisaurids (Canale et al., 2009; Souza et al., 2011). We enlarge this list of Brazilian theropods with the description of an isolated caudal centrum belonging to the clade Megaraptora, constituting the first record of this theropod group from Brazil.

Megaraptoran theropods were originally known solely on the basis of *Megaraptor namunhuaiquii*, from Turonian beds of NW Patagonia (Novas, 1998). More recently new discoveries considerably improved the knowledge of the anatomy and taxonomic diversity of this group of bizarre theropods (Calvo et al., 2004; Hocknull et al., 2009; Novas, 2009; Novas et al., 2008; Sereno et al., 2008). In addition, Benson et al. (2010) coined the name Megaraptora for a new theropod clade composed of taxa found in Argentina (*Aerosteon*, *Megaraptor*, and *Orkoraptor*), Australia (*Australovenator*), and Japan (*Fukuiraptor*). Megaraptorans are characterized, among other features, by the presence of pneumatic caudal vertebrae (Benson et al., 2010; Calvo et al., 2004; Novas et al., 2008; Sereno et al., 2008).

We offer here new information about the caudal morphology of megaraptorans, through the description and comparisons of this new remain from the São José do Rio Preto Formation, Bauru Group, Brazil.

2. Systematic paleontology

Theropoda Marsh, 1881
Tetanurae Gauthier, 1986
Neovenatoridae Benson et al., 2010
Megaraptora Benson et al., 2010
Megaraptora gen. et sp. indet.

Material: MPMA 08-003-94, vertebral centrum, Museu de Paleontologia de Monte Alto (MPMA).

Locality, horizon and age: Municipality of Ibirá, São Paulo State, Brazil; São José do Rio Preto Formation, Maastrichtian, Upper Cretaceous (Bertini and Menegazzo, 2009).

3. Description

The theropod vertebral centrum (MPMA 08-003-94) was discovered at the Municipality of Ibirá, São Paulo State, Brazil (Fig. 1), from beds belonging to the São José do Rio Preto Formation (Maastrichtian; Bertini and Menegazzo, 2009).

The vertebra only preserves the centrum (Fig. 2). This is almost complete, except for the extreme right dorsal of the anterior articular surface, which is broken. It is long (11,8 cm), low (6,3 cm), and wide (8,5 cm), with a length to height ratio of nearly 1.9. This ratio is similar to that found in caudal vertebra 22 and more posterior vertebrae of *Allosaurus* (Madsen, 1976) and *Tyrannosaurus* (Brochu, 2003). Mid-caudals of *Aerosteon* (Sereno et al., 2008) and

Orkoraptor (Novas et al., 2008) exhibit a ratio of 1.2 and 1.3, respectively, similar to the ratio found in caudal vertebrae 14 to 18 of *Allosaurus* and *Tyrannosaurus*. Based on these ratios, the centrum here described probably corresponds to a caudal vertebra from the distal half of the tail.

The centrum is amphicoelous, with subcircular articular surfaces, slightly broader than tall. Centrum margins close to the cranial and caudal articular facets are strongly decorated by longitudinal striations (Fig. 2B, D). The ventral surface of the centrum is almost flat, but bear two slight collateral ridges that separate the ventral surface from the lateral ones (Fig. 2B). The centrum is devoid of facets for articulation with the haemal arches.

On both lateral sides, the centrum exhibits on its upper half a large and elliptical depression, which occupies two quarters of the vertebral body length, containing two air chambers or pneumatic foramina and a shallow hollow in the most posterior part of the depression (Fig. 2A). These chambers are separated by thin septa (Fig. 2C). Furthermore, posterior to the pneumatic depression, the lateral surface of the vertebral body exhibits some kind of small pneumatopores.

4. Comparison of MPMA 08-003-94

Caudal pneumaticity is rare condition in theropod dinosaurs documented only in a few clades (i.e., Megaraptora, Oviraptorosauria, Therizinosauria, and Carcharodontosauridae; Benson et al., 2011). So far, the presence of remains of therizosaurs in South America has not been documented and the oviraptorosaurs is at least doubtful (Agnolín and Martinelli, 2007). Also noteworthy is that the distal caudal vertebrae of oviraptorosaurs not bear pleurocoels, while they are present in the Brazilian centrum and *Aerosteon*. Stromer (1931), described an anterior caudal vertebra assigned to *Carcharodontosaurus*, which has pneumatic features. However, the general morphology and proportions (length to height ratio is 1,1 in *Carcharodontosaurus*) of the vertebrae of this African theropod specimen does not coincide with those observed in MPMA 08-003-94, as well as those of other members of Megaraptora (*Orkoraptor*, *Aerosteon*, *Megaraptor*).

Among theropod groups known from the Cretaceous of South America (i.e., abelisauroids, megaraptorans, maniraptorans, carcharodontosaurids, spinosaurids), only megaraptorans (e.g., *Aerosteon*, *Megaraptor*, *Orkoraptor*), exhibit pneumatic foramina on their caudal vertebrae. South American carcharodontosaurids (e.g. *Tyrannotitan*, *Giganotosaurus*) show a broad, shallow depression on the lateral surfaces of caudal vertebrae but not a pneumatic foramen as is present in megaraptorans and the Brazilian specimen. Pneumatic features present in MPMA 08-003-94 resemble the mid and posterior caudals of *Aerosteon riocolaradensis* (Sereno et al., 2008; Fig. 9B), in which the sides of the centrum bear pleurocoels (Fig. 3E) that enter the vertebral body, as well as the presence of small pneumatopores on the lateral surface of the centrum. A similar situation is also recorded in isolated caudal vertebrae of *Megaraptor namunhuaiquii* (J.D. Porfiri, pers. comm.).

Notably, a caudal vertebra with the same kind of pneumatic features was originally described by von Huene

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