

Geoscience Museum SALT/FADBA

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The Geoscience Museum (MuGe) of Bahia Adventist College (FADBA) is maintained in partnership with the Latin-American Adventist Theological Seminary (SALT), based at the same institution. It is an extension of the Geoscience Research Institute (GRI), which is operated by the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and is based in Loma Linda, California, U.S.A. It has the mission to discover and share an understanding of nature in its relationship with the Biblical revelation of the Creator God.¹ GRI elaborates its perspective on scientific evidence by utilizing science and the study of biblical revelation, presenting God as the creator of all things.

Background

From October 27 to November 2, 1988, Drs. Harold G. Coffin and Jim Gibson, representatives of GRI at Loma Linda, carried out an expedition in the state of Bahia, Brazil to determine geological sites that would be visited during a seminar on creationism the following year. This visit was seen as a milestone in the development of the Geoscience Museum as GRI had an interest in supporting activities that would strengthen the creationist philosophy of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. Later, this interest resulted in the founding of the first geoscience museum of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Brazil, and the second in the South American Division.²

A year later, Dr. Coffin returned to Brazil to present the seminar on creationism, held between October 5 and 10, along with four other GRI representatives: Ben Clausen, James Gibson, David Rhys, and Clyde Webster.³ The event was held in the chapel of the girls' dormitory of FADBA, known at the time as Northeast Brazil College. During the event, a visit was made to the Institute of Geoscience of the Federal University of Bahia and to Bahian geological sites that had records of the pre-Cambrian and Cretaceous periods.

These events were the motivation that, in 1991, persuaded Dr. Carlos Gama Michel to initiate the creation of the Geoscience Museum of FABBA/SALT, of which he became its founder and first director. Besides, it is worth mentioning the incentive given by Dr. Carlos F. Steger, Argentine paleontologist, who came to Bahia as a lecturer on creationism. That same week, Dr. Michel and Dr. Steger made an excursion to the Araripe Plateau, in Ceará State, where they collected fossil artifacts that were donated to the Geoscience Museum of FABBA/SALT by Dr. Michel and were the first pieces of the museum collection.⁴ Despite all the events of previous years, the idea of

creating a Geoscience Museum at FADBA began on this occasion.⁵

At the time, aiming to encourage an interest in creationism, the GRI administrators made visits to South American countries to promote faith and learning integration and to support places that could promote research, as well as the creation of geoscience museums. In FADBA, the idea was becoming a reality, and the first artifacts were obtained.

Between the years 1992 and 1995, the first pieces that began to make up the museum collection were kept in a room in the college library. The room was just 36.75 ft. by 14.96 ft. (about 550 sq. ft.) (11.2 m x 4.56 m; about 51 m²) and 10.5 ft. high (3.21 m). After a lot of effort by Professor Carlos Michel in talks with Dr. Luiz Godinho Nunes (then director of SALT, based at FADBA) the room that became the first space to house the Geoscience Museum of FABBA/SALT was obtained.

Foundation

The Geoscience Museum of FABBA/SALT was opened on August 9, 1996. The opening ceremony was conducted by Dr. Carlos F. Steger, GRI Director for the South America Division and Professor of Science and Religion at River Plate Adventist University, Argentina, and by pastors João Antônio Rodrigues Alves, SALT Director, based at FADBA, Clóvis Ferreira Bunzen, FADBA General Director, and Carlos Gama Michel, Professor of Science and Religion. Theology professors and students as well as other teachers, students, and friends of the institution attended the ceremony. Dr. Steger congratulated those present for starting the first Geoscience Museum of the Adventist Church in Brazil and the second in the South American Division (the first such museum had been started by him at River Plate Adventist University).⁶

History

By the time of the opening ceremony, the museum space consisted of an adapted room in the José Mascarenhas Viana Library building at FADBA, provided by the seminary and library administrators⁷ with an area only slightly larger than the previous room, but it included lighting and internal temperature mechanically controlled by fluorescent lamps and air conditioning. Dr. Michel himself became the first manager/curator of the museum until 2001.

In 2002, Dr. Wellington Santos Silva, who at the time already acted as a professor at FADBA and in the Theology Seminary hosted there, became the new director. That same year, on August 22 to 26, the *I Encontro Regional de Criacionistas* [First Regional Conference of Creationists] was held with the theme “And It Was So’... Our Noble Origin.” Two hundred participants were present for this event, including professors and students from FADBA and other higher education institutions. Nearly a hundred attendees had been to the Araripe Plateau in Ceará State, and to the Sousa Formation in of Paraíba State, where fossils of varied taxa were acquired through a

donation of the National Department of Mineral Production (DNPM) of the Ministry of Mines and Energy⁸.

In 2003, from September 18 to 22, the *II Encontro Regional de Criacionistas* [Second Regional Conference of Creationists] was held at FADBA, with the theme “The Wonders of Our Creator,”⁹ which included an excursion, organized by FADBA and SALT, to Diamantina Plateau in Bahia State, where mineral collected there were eventually donated to the museum.

The documentation process of the collection pieces started in 2012 when intern Gilson Patrick Fernandes Gomes, theology student and bachelor graduate in biological sciences from Federal University of Pernambuco, arrived and ran an inventory. That same year, Denison dos Santos da Silva, also a theology student at SALT and graduating student in Museology at the Universidade Federal do Recôncavo da Bahia (UFRB), began to establish volunteer internship links at MuGe, and therefore collaborated with the technical team. That year in July, the SALT board held a meeting at which the “Plano de Desenvolvimento Institucional do Seminário” (Seminary Institutional Development Plan) was drawn up. This plan provided for the expansion of the space given to MuGe at Bahia Adventist College.

According to the terms of the “Plano de Desenvolvimento Institucional do Seminário” (Seminary Institutional Development Plan)¹⁰ and the FADBA and SALT Superior Council Minutes¹¹, in 2013 MuGe was to get a larger room adapted to the museum needs, with an area about 40% larger than the current room, housed on the first floor of the high school building, next to the children’s library of Northeast Brazil Academy on the FADBA campus. The room was outfitted with two air conditioners, LED lamps to replace the fluorescent ones, blinds, and black paint for the windows. All this was designed to better preserve the artifacts. During the same year, Dr. Henry Luydy Abraham Fernandes, professor of Museology at UFRB, made a technical visit to MuGe when the first direct contact took place between representatives of UFRB and MuGe.

This new process of institutional requalification led to a re-opening ceremony of the MuGe, on the night of May 27, 2013, with Dr. James L. Gibson, director of the Geoscience Research Institute for the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, and Dr. Wellington Silva were in attendance. The event was also attended by the administrators of the Adventist College of Bahia, namely: Juan Choque, general director; Elton Oliveira, administrative director; Edson Dias, academic director; Jolivê Chaves, Theological Seminary director; Dr. Merlin D. Burt, director of the Ellen G. White Research Center at Andrews University; and students and professors from FADBA/SALT.¹²

The reopening ceremony also saw the inauguration of the first exhibition of the museum under the theme “How It All Began,” prepared by Denison Silva and Gilson Gomes. This exposition presented the relation between natural history and the biblical account of creation through the pieces that were part of the first set acquired by MuGe.

The institutional partnership between UFRB and FADBA was strengthened even more in 2013 when from July 29 to October 17, Denison Silva carried out a curricular internship for a bachelor’s degree in museology at MuGe,

with Dr. Carlos Costa, professor at UFRB as his adviser. During this time, his activities consisted of cleaning, packaging, and classifying the collections, and marking all parts and inventory. This was the first procedure of museological documentation and preventive conservation carried out on the collections, which was successfully initiated and concluded.¹³ Later in the year, the Geoscience Museum was registered at the Brazilian Institute of Museums and had its internal regiment prepared.

In 2014, MuGe was featured for the first time in the official list of registered museums by the Brazilian Institute of Museums (IBRAM) when it received publicity materials from the 12th National Week of Museums.¹⁴ In 2015, for the second consecutive year, IBRAM published MuGe in its 13th National Week of Museums among the museological institutions participating in the event.¹⁵ In the first semester of that same year, MuGe received another seminary student, Rodrigo Vicente Silva, who graduated in history and geography from the Federal University of Juiz de Fora. Silva replaced Gilson Gomes.

As noted, with the support of all who were part of its history, including those who took direct care of the collection, MuGe grew and expanded. All artifacts in the exhibition come from the partnership between the museum and the National Department of Mineral Production (DNPM) in Brazil, and donations from students, faculty, and the community surrounding the institution, which characterizes it as a museological open collection; that is, there is a possibility of acquisition (donation, exchange and/or purchase) or lease of a new object. Today, the MuGe collection is divided into four parts that describe the nature of the Geoscience Museum as a whole: paleontology, geology, Ancient Near East archeology and osteology.

All pieces that possessed images of non-human living things—plants and animals—traces and nodules of possible fossilized species, belong to the paleontology collection. These characteristics grouped 367 pieces into the paleontology collection. The geology collection consists of 78 rocks and minerals.

Through excavations and purchases made in the Ancient Near East (Israel, Judah, Persia, Assyria, Syria, etc.) the professors of FADBA/SALT and Central Adventist University of São Paulo have collected a set of objects related to the biblical period, some of which integrate with the collection of Ancient Near East (ANE) archeology of MuGe, accounting for 63 pieces, ranging from household utensils to warlike, religious, political, and mineral artifacts that lead the observer back to the ANE *modus vivendi*.

The osteology collection is composed of bones that were not listed due to the impossibility of determining the animal, site(s) of origin, or group(s) of bones to which they belong. In general, the number of items collected in MuGe is a total of 508 pieces.

Outlook

Since its creation, MuGe has been undergoing change and expansion, both in its housing and in its collection. Modestly at first, MuGe experienced the modernization that the institution housing it, FADBA/SALT, has been

through. It has also received attention and support from the administrators of the Church and its institutions. Today, there is a project to expand MuGe along with the construction of the new theological seminary building. The active commitment of Dr. Wellington Silva has contributed to MuGe's outstanding work in the Adventist scenario in Brazil.

In 2011, the South American Division (SAD) of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church created the Adventist Creationist Consortium that joins the Geoscience Museum of FABBA/SALT, the SAD Education Department, Brazilian Creationist Society, the *Núcleo de Estudos das Origens* (Center for Origin Studies) (UNASP) and the GRI branch at SAD.

Since 2014, MuGe also became a GRI Resource Center and since then has received financial assistance for acquiring new pieces and books and for developing projects that promote the dissemination of creationism, including participation in several worldwide seminars of the Adventist Church. The aim is to help church members testify of the Creator in academic and secular environments.

List of Names and Directors

Names: Geoscience Museum SALT-IAENE; Geoscience Museum of FADBA/SALT.

Directors: Carlos Gama Michel (1996-2001); Wellington dos Santos Silva (2002-).

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NOTES

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4. “Marketing de livros no site da UAP” [Marketing of Books at UAP website], River Plate Adventist University, accessed on November 5, 2012, http://www.uap.edu.ar/es/libros_gri/.
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