

GLORIA PASSERI 1950–2017

Gloria was born in Umbertide, a small town in central Italy, on the 10th March 1950.

When she was a teenager she started travelling daily to Perugia to attend the city's scientific high school. By coincidence, many years later she moved into a home directly overlooking her high school building, and she used to point out from her bedroom window "that was my class!". Gloria's passion for science was cultivated during her university years. She graduated in Natural Science at the University of Perugia in July 1974 and was awarded a 2-year research and teaching fellowship in Perugia that same year.

Gloria's first research projects involved studying and comparing evaporites of Triassic (Anidriti di Burano Formation) and Miocene age (Gessoso-Solfifera Formation). From the beginning of her scientific career Gloria felt the need to interact and exchange views with the international community. She participated to several national and international conferences dedicated to evaporites and in 1985 she organized an international short course on evaporites in Perugia, held by a colleague, C.B. Schreiber from the Department of Geology, Queens College New York. Experience gathered over many years of thin-section analyses on evaporites allowed Gloria and her co-authors to publish in 1985 a paper which is still today used as a manual for sulphate evaporites classification.

In parallel with the study of evaporites, Gloria started working on sedimentology and carbonate environments, a traditional focus of Perugia University's Geology department. Her first papers concerned sedimentary analyses of Triassic carbonate platforms outcropping in the Apuan Alps Metamorphic Complex (the Grezzoni Formation). This platform represented the margin of the evaporitic basin she was studying.

In subsequent years Gloria developed an even a stronger interest in Triassic carbonate platforms. A study of Triassic carbonate build ups in Tuscany (the Rhaeticum contorta Formation), characterized by encrusting organisms typical of low energy, poorly oxygenated, shallow water, widened Gloria's interest to include palaeoecology. Following this research project Gloria became a visiting professor in Erlangen Nurnberg University, Germany in 1983.

In the early 1980s Gloria encountered a stratigraphic dilemma while working in the Northern Apennines. The successions she was studying were barren of ammonites and conodonts but yielded undifferentiated Triassic foraminifers. Gloria was determined to gather as much information as possible and therefore contacted colleagues in Geneva University, Prof. P. Brönnimann and Prof. L. Zaninetti. That was the beginning of a long cooperation regarding Triassic Foraminifera, and also the start of a regular collaboration between geoscientists in Perugia and Geneva which benefitted many others.

During the 1980s Gloria studied and compared Triassic



carbonate platform sedimentary systems in the Alps and Apennines. Gloria and her husband and co-author Leonsevero Passeri (Lelo) studied sections in the Northern, Central and Southern Apennines. Gloria was an avid field geologist and spent a tremendous amount of time in the field throughout her career. She was renowned for her formidable memory of field sections, e.g. recalling the precise location of sedimentary structures 20–30 years later.

Gloria became Associate Professor in 1985. From 1990 onwards Gloria's research was enriched by the fascinating world of modern carbonate platforms. Between 1990 and 1999 Gloria and Lelo spent at least one month per year in the Maldives, Bahamas, Turks & Caicos and Florida. That was a pivotal period in her life. In the Maldives Gloria and Lelo were guests of a resort for a couple of months a year. In exchange for the hospitality they gave scientific talks to guests about marine life and geology of the Maldivian archipelago. Their interest in the Bahamas and Turks & Caicos developed as they compared tidal carbonate platform environments (Bahamas, Turks & Caicos, and Florida) with non-tidal systems (Maldives). This detailed experience studying modern carbonate platform environments transformed Gloria's approach to the fossil record forever. During her "Maldivian period" Gloria published several scientific papers describing living foraminiferal assemblages and a monograph illustrating Maldivian Coral Reefs.

Gloria's research projects in sedimentology, stratigraphy, and biostratigraphy were rooted in the wider context of palaeogeographic reconstruction. Resolution of the Triassic palaeogeography of the Italian peninsula was a strong driving element throughout her career. Initially she published papers



on the palaeogeographic evolution of the Central and Northern Apennines during the Triassic. She later developed a passionate interest in the puzzling but significant geology of the Lagonegro area. We cannot speak of Gloria without remembering the time and effort she spent deciphering the geology and paleogeography of that part of Southern Italy. Lagonegro is a relatively small area in which the Triassic stratigraphy reflects the opening of a Permo-Triassic ocean. The Lagonegro successions have been affected by both the Alpine and later Apennine orogeneses. Gloria worked tirelessly mapping and studying the Lagonegro sections, and also invested lots of effort guiding other Italian and international scientists who worked in this area. She shared her knowledge and uncertainties, organised conferences, and welcomed specialists of all disciplines to contribute. The results of these years of research are presented in papers published between 1998 to 2011.

Besides research, Gloria was also very active in teaching. She taught a variety of subjects including Geography, Sedimentology, Marine Geology, and Regional Geology. Her Regional Geology course was a challenging one for students. She expected detailed understanding of the geological evolution of the whole of Italy, from the Alps to Sicily, and spanning the Permian to Pleistocene. She was a demanding professor but her course was immensely rewarding.

Gloria was a member of the Italian Geological Society (IGS) since 1976. From 2006 she held several active roles, as Coordinator of the “Carbonates Group”, a member of the Italian Commission of Stratigraphy, a member of the IGS council, and in the editorial board of the Italian Journal of Geoscience. From 2009 Gloria was Editor in Chief of “Geological Field Trips”, an international journal she strongly believed in.

Gloria retired in 2010 but in fact she never stopped working. She joined her husband in Cervinia, a ski-resort at the foot of the Cervino/Matterhorn, the most iconic Alpine peak. They both became fascinated with the geology of the Western Alps. Gloria and Lelo joined a group of geologists guided by Prof. G.V. Dal Piaz who were working on the Geological Map of Italy – Matterhorn area. She contributed to their research,

discovering Upper Triassic benthic foraminifers within the Roisan metamorphic dolostones.

Gloria was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in March 2015. She still maintained her concentration on geology, which became a welcome distraction during treatment. She even maintained her role of Editor in Chief of the “Geological Field Trips” journal and also started collaborating on a new area of the Geological Map of Italy, until she became too weak. She spent the last weeks of her life hand-writing her ideas about the difference between Bahamian carbonate systems dominated by trade winds and Maldivian carbonate systems dominated by monsoons.

Gloria’s wide research contributions spanned the disciplines of Sedimentology, Stratigraphy, Biostratigraphy, and Paleogeography. She had studied diverse topics including modern Coral Reefs, evaporites, and metamorphism of the Western Alps, however, she never forgot her “Triassic origin”. On the wall of her University office she had a slab of Ladinian limestone mounted on a plaque, with a quote from her friend and colleague Prof. P. Mietto: “Good things in life are immoral, illegal...or Triassic!”.

Besides being an accomplished geologist, Gloria was a very generous woman and an outstanding cook. She enjoyed combining friends (many of them geologists) and good food. She was grateful to have spent her life studying the natural world. She selected this quote (from Charles Darwin, 1836) to summarise her view of life:

“We feel surprise when travellers tell us of the vast dimensions of the Pyramids and other great ruins, but how utterly insignificant are the greatest of these, when compared to these mountains of stone accumulated by the agency of various minute and tender animals! This is a wonder which does not at first strike the eye of the body, but, after reflection, the eye of reason.”



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