



# Prof. Maria Bianca Cita

## Elisabetta Erba and Rodolfo Carosi



Prof. September 12, 1924 – August 12, 2024 - The "very long story" of Maria Bianca Cita has come to an end. There are many memories of Maria Bianca and it is difficult to summarize her exceptional figure as a rigorous, curious and passionate scientist. Geology attracted and involved her from a very young age. Maria Bianca was undoubtedly a "PRIMA DONNA", the undisputed protagonist of geological adventures, often at the forefront: she was a true pioneer, a forerunner and a teacher of Geology in Italy. She was the first student to enroll in 1942 in the Degree Course in Geological Sciences, newly established at the University of Milan, obtaining (the first graduate) the degree in July 1946 with the highest score. She began her career as a field geologist, earning a teaching qualification in Geology in 1955. As a graduate, she discovered Micropaleontology and became the first to apply and spread the use of planktonic foraminifera for biostratigraphic purposes in Italy, allowing for vast academic and industrial applications. Maria Bianca Cita quickly became an internationally renowned stratigrapher. She was the first in Italy to address the issues of the

Cretaceous/Paleogene boundary in the mid-1950s and her studies confirmed the applicability of planktonic foraminifera zoning, which became the stratigraphic "standard" with worldwide validity for the Lower Cretaceous - Current interval. She published the first Italian textbook of Micropaleontology. Maria Bianca was the first foreigner (and one of the first two women) to participate as a Paleontologist in the second oceanographic cruise (Leg 2, September 1968) of the Glomar Challenger drilling vessel within the US Deep Sea Drilling Project (DSDP). She participated in other DSDP cruises in 1970 and 1975 in the Mediterranean and in 1976 in the North Atlantic. The 1970 expedition led to the fundamental and unexpected discovery of the Messinian evaporites buried under the bottom of the Balearic, Tyrrhenian, Ionian and Levantine basins. Maria Bianca contributed to the formulation of the theory of the desiccation of the Mediterranean in the Messinian. She organized seven cruises with the ship Bannock in the Eastern Mediterranean in the years 80-89. The expeditions she directed were attended by international teams and numerous students who would later become internationally renowned marine geologists. In the 80s, Maria Bianca promoted Italy's participation in the Ocean Drilling Program (ODP), contributing to the establishment of a European Consortium for the ODP composed of 12 "small" countries, under the aegis of the European Science Foundation. At the same time, she founded ODP-Italy. Member of the Italian Geological Society since 1945, Maria Bianca was the first female President in 1989-1990. At the University of Milan, in 1982 she was elected the first Director of the newly established Department of Earth Sciences. Maria Bianca is one of the

most internationally renowned Italian personalities in the field of Earth Sciences: she has been a leading scientist as documented by over 300 publications of great importance on cutting-edge topics of geological research in almost seventy years (1947-2014). For her research she has received numerous national and international awards: the Feltrinelli Prize (Accademia dei Lincei), Honorary Member of the American Geological Society and the F.P. Shepard Medal of the Society for Sedimentary Geology for her "Excellence in Marine Geology". Honorary Member of the Geological Society of America (since 1987), of the International Union for Quaternary Research (since 2000) and of the Italian Paleontological Society. She was a National Member of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei and an Effective Member of the Istituto Lombardo - Academy of Sciences and Letters. Maria Bianca was appointed Professor Emeritus of Geology at the University of Milan in 1998, after having been Lecturer (1955) and Full Professor (since 1973). She had the ability to stimulate and transmitting great enthusiasm. Thanks to Maria Bianca, the students who have developed their scientific interests in the fields of Geology, Stratigraphy, Micropaleontology and Marine Geology, are numerous, and many have prominent positions in Italian and international universities as well as in research institutions. Maria Bianca has been an example and a source of inspiration for generations of students to whom she has given incredible opportunities for professional growth. It is difficult to face the void of her passing.