

2007 CUSHMAN AWARD WINNER: CITATION FOR LOUISETTE ZANINETTI

The 2007 Joseph A. Cushman Award for “Outstanding Achievement in Foraminiferal Research” is presented to a very fine lady scientist, Louissette Zaninetti, in recognition of her lifetime contribution to foraminiferal research.

Almost the entire academic career of Louissette Zaninetti is connected with Geneva. This is where she obtained a diploma in Natural Sciences in 1962 and where six years later she defended her Ph.D. thesis on the Triassic foraminifera from the Almtal (Austria), under the direction of Professor Paul Brönnimann. After a short postdoc period in Perth (Australia), she returned to Geneva and worked as Lecturer at the university. In 1974, she was appointed Assistant Professor, and then in 1983, Professeur Extraordinaire in the Departments of Animal Biology and Geology and Paleontology. In 1980, however, she took a year off and worked as micropaleontological adviser for Pacific Energy and Minerals, Golden, Colorado.

During this period, Louissette managed to publish her first major publication “*Les Foraminifères du Trias*,” largely based on her Ph.D. thesis. This was a seminal work in a field that had been largely neglected and, remarkably, “not thought to exist” by some! It was published as a monograph in the *Rivista Italiana di Paleontologia* in 1976, and in it, not only did she recognize the stratigraphic potential of these Triassic foraminifera but also, together with colleagues, laid the foundations of a workable stratigraphic zonation. On the way, she had to resolve numerous and formidable systematic problems which previously had discouraged many from using foraminifera as biostratigraphic markers during this period. Today, 30 years later, this publication remains the “Bible” of Triassic, mostly Tethyan, foraminifera.

In 1984, Louissette Zaninetti was offered the position of full Professor of Paleontology and Animal Systematics at the University of Geneva, a position she held until her retirement in 2006, subsequently with the title of Honorary Professor. During this period, she served the University, first as the chairman of the Biology Department (1984–1986) and then chairman of Department of Geology and Paleontology (1999–2001). She also contributed with passion to university administration in her role as Vice-Chairman of the Senate, member of the Council of the University, and member and Chairman of the Council of the Faculty of Sciences. In 2003, in recognition of her achievements and status, she was appointed Vice-Rector of the University of Geneva, a position she would hold until her retirement.

Despite these numerous administrative activities, Louissette has never neglected her research. She published a series of papers on the foraminifera of the Carboniferous and Permian with her colleague Demir Altiner, her former research student at the University of Geneva, and on the Cretaceous of the Geneva region with her mentor, Professor Paul Brönnimann, and her friend and colleague, Jean Charollais. Then, with Paul Brönnimann, she continued her



study of Triassic Foraminifera, becoming the recognized world authority in this field. Together, they collected material from a wide area, from the European Alps to the Middle East: Iran, Pakistan and Turkey. Also with him, she began to work on modern mangrove swamps and their distinctive foraminifera, which Paul had all but abandoned fifteen years before. This work on the shallow water tropical environment was to take them to Brazil, the United States and the Pacific Islands.

Louissette’s studies also led to a collaboration with John E. Whittaker, whom she met for the first time in Geneva in 1972. John came to seek her expertise in Triassic foraminifera, and thus began a scientific relationship and friendship, which lasts until this day. Many visits to The Natural History Museum in London followed, and, together, Louissette, John and Paul tackled many taxonomic problems, including the Permo-Triassic foraminifera of southeast Asia, but not only this. The taxonomy and ecology of Recent agglutinated foraminifera then became one of Louissette’s subsequent and most notable research activities, undertaken with Paul Brönnimann, along with colleagues and students in Brazil, the Middle East and Europe.

More recent interests include Permian larger foraminifera of the Tethyan Realm, with her French colleague Daniel Vachard, but she still retains an active scientific interest most of all in “all things Triassic.” With her closest colleague, Rossana Martini, she has spent the last twenty years working on the Permian and Triassic biostratigraphy of many parts of the world, from Italy to Japan.

Since the 1980’s, Louissette has been deeply linked with the City of Perugia (Italy), collaborating with the Department of Earth Sciences of the university there. During that period she supervised several Master theses in Triassic biostratigraphy and became the tutor of the Ph.D. thesis of Roberto Rettori. This collaboration led to the revision of

the taxonomy and systematics of mainly Lower and Middle Triassic foraminifera of the Tethyan realm, from Italy to China, and a new suprageneric classification of the main groups has subsequently been proposed by them.

However, paleontology was not the sole scientific interest of Louisette Zaninetti. For many years, she has taught Animal Systematics and Marine Biology at the University of Geneva, and was responsible for the many masters and Ph.D. projects emanating from the Department of Zoology and Animal Biology. Importantly, several projects conducted by her former students, Jan Pawlowski, Colombar De Vargas and others, opened up a completely new chapter of foraminiferal research, in the field of Molecular Systematics and Evolution. Strongly and continuously supported by Louisette, the study of foraminiferal molecular systematics was begun in Geneva and subsequently, she was able to create such a stimulating and enabling environment around this new research program, that it has grown rapidly under the expertise and direction of Professor Jan Pawlowski. It has become today one of the most active centers of Molecular Systematics of eukaryotes in Europe.

Louisette Zaninetti is equally an excellent scientist and educator. She loves to teach and is extraordinarily skilled in motivating students. She has often repeated “there is always something new to be discovered,” and every young researcher who began to work with her could be certain that she would never let him or her down. In return, the

numerous collaborators and students she has had over the years have always given her great happiness and satisfaction, both scientifically and personally. All those who know her are also greatly impressed with her intellectual, scientific and social talents. She speaks several languages and can switch from one to the other within seconds. Her willingness to interact with people is exemplary and is shown consistently in the laboratory, in the field and in the administrative office.

Louisette has been a member of numerous national and international academic committees, editorial boards, and working groups and her scientific achievements are impressively large and extremely varied. Her bibliography, broadly respected by the international community, comprises over 200 papers. These emphasize the stratigraphic and paleobiogeographic value of taxa as well as the phylogenetic relationships between Upper Paleozoic and Triassic groups of foraminifera. She has been an active participator in many congresses and symposia and has maintained an interest in various groups and topics. Her publications are noted for the quality of observation, the care of descriptions and the originality of thought.

In electing Professor Louisette Zaninetti for the 2007 Joseph A. Cushman Award, the Board of Directors of the Cushman Foundation for Foraminiferal Research has formally recognized her outstanding accomplishments as a teacher and scientist, and her distinctive and major contribution to a whole range of foraminiferal studies.

Rossana Martini¹ and Jan Pawlowski
University of Geneva
Roberto Rettori
University of Perugia (I)

¹ With assistance from John E. Whittaker, Department of Paleontology, The Natural History Museum, London, UK