Response from Dr. Claudine Cohen

2023 Mary C. Rabbitt Award Recipient

I thank warmly André Wakefield for his generous and touching words. Our edition and translation from Latin into English of Leibniz's Protogaea is perhaps, among my publications, the one of which I am most proud, and I am grateful to him for our collaboration and long friendship. Till today I keep a deep interest in Early Modern Theories of the Earth (my annotated edition of Benoît de Maillet's Telliamed just came out in France last week!). I am convinced that, far from being outdated and inconsistent beginnings, these early Earth Theories can be fruitfully reread by historians, philosophers of science and scientists in the light of today’s Earth system science, which constitute Geosciences as a unitary domain.

I want to address my deepest thanks to the Award Committee of the Geological Society of America, and to its History and Philosophy of Geology Division, for awarding me the Mary C. Rabbitt prize, which I am honored and happy to accept today. This American award, named after a woman scientist, is a special gift for a French woman scholar who has long and strong ties with the United States. My stays as a visiting scholar and professor in a number of American institutions enabled me to explore my favorite research themes, the history of paleontology, geology, prehistoric archaeology and related disciplines, with novel methods. French history of science mostly cultivates internal, epistemological inquiries: to me, the discovery of sociological perspectives carried out by English and American scholars have been particularly enriching. The 1994 Penrose conference entitled History of Geology : From the Inside or the Outside? was seminal in this respect: it opened up large horizons, and helped me draw new perspectives in my teachings at the Paris Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, as well as in my books, such as The Fate of the Mammoth (2003) or La Méthode de Zadig (2011). More recently as I focused on the history of palaeoanthropology and human evolution, American perspectives in Prehistoric archaeology inspired to me a whole range of questions about the place of women in Prehistory. This subject, which was a Terra incognita in France before my book, La Femme des origines, was published in 2003, has now flourished there into a large and consistent field of research.

I want to thank, finally, my colleagues of the International Commission on the History of Geological Sciences. Year after year, INHIGEO international meetings have been, and still are, a wonderful source of exchanges and discoveries, through intellectual debates and field explorations. I had the honor of meeting there such wonderful colleagues as Martin Rudwick, Steven Jay Gould, Ken Taylor, Sandra Herbert, Sally Newcombe, Marianne Klemun, Jim Secord and many others, who became my friends and privileged interlocutors. The first INHIGEO symposium in which I participated in 1995, on Volcanoes and History, was magnificently organized by our Italian colleague Nicoletta Morello, great historian and dear friend who left us too soon, and to whose memory I would like to dedicate this award.