Citation for Dr. Claudine Cohen
2023 Mary C. Rabbitt Award

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It gives me the greatest pleasure to recognize Dr. Claudine Cohen, recipient of the 2023 Mary C. Rabbitt Award. I can think of nobody more deserving. Born in Tunisia, Dr. Cohen taught at the University of Paris before being elected and serving as full professor at both the École des Hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS) and the École pratique des hautes études (EPHE). Paris long served as her home base for teaching and research, even as she traveled the world, from natural history museums to libraries to the permafrost of Siberia.

The sheer volume of Dr. Cohen’s work, both articles and books, makes any kind of systemic overview impossible here, nor is that the most important thing. It is the range, depth, creativity and unexpectedness of her work that matter. She is, on the one hand, a scholar’s scholar, immersing herself in archives and manuscripts, in translating and editing; she is, on the other hand, adept at engaging a wide public in seemingly arcane issues by dint of unusual gifts. Her friend and colleague Stephen J. Gould, who wrote the Foreword to her Fate of the Mammoth (2002), concluded that Dr. Cohen had that rare ability to weave together the strands of the past—technical, historical, mythical—all the while producing deeper insights into the history of paleontology itself.

Since we first met in 1999, I have watched Dr. Cohen harness that ability to slide into different registers, whether scholarly or popular or artistic, with increasing impact and success. Her work on prehistoric women, especially her La femme des origines (2003) and Femmes de la Préhistoire (2016), have had a major impact in France and beyond, stoking media discussions and even inspiring choreography and cabaret. It has been gratifying to see public consciousness come around to her way of thinking.

I am delighted that my friend and colleague, Claudine Cohen, is getting recognition for many decades of original and pathbreaking work. It is richly deserved; there is more to come.