

# Preface

**I**n the winter of 2008, the Penn Museum International Research Conference series sponsored a four-day symposium, “Forces of Nature: Risk and Resilience as Factors of Long-term Cultural Change.” We gathered specialists working in at least one of four areas of the world with significant archaeological and paleoenvironmental databases: West Asia, the American Southwest, East Africa, and Andean South America. The participating scholars have made contributions to research within at least one of three broad time scales: long-term (spanning millennia), medium-term (archaeological time—centuries or a few thousand years), and recent (ethnohistoric or ethnographic—years or decades). In addition to the authors whose work appears in this volume, Richard Redding participated in the conference and presented a case study at a medium time scale in Egypt. This volume addresses forces of conservatism and innovation at work in societies dependent on the exploitation of aquatic and other wild resources, agriculture, and specialized pastoralism.

By bringing an archaeological eye to an examination of human response to unpredictable environmental conditions that is informed by an understanding of contemporary traditional peoples, the symposium participants attempted to develop a more detailed picture of how societies perceive environmental risk, how they alter their behavior in the face of

changing conditions, and under what challenges the most rapid and far-reaching changes in adaptation have taken place.

We are particularly grateful to Mike Kowalski, Chairman of the Board of Overseers of the Museum, who provided funding for the Penn Museum International Research Conference series. As co-ordinator for the series, Prof. Holly Pittman was especially enthusiastic about our proposal, and was very attentive to our needs at all stages of the conference and production. Teagan Schweitzer provided essential logistical assistance during the conference. We would also like to thank Jennifer Quick for shepherding the volume toward publication.

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