

resilience & archaeology



*Edited by Sergio G. Russo
and Leah M. Brainerd*



Archaeological Review from Cambridge

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Preface

It has been just over a year since we found ourselves clueless while facing the unforeseen outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. It represented a deep traumatic change in our daily lives: we saw friends and colleagues suddenly leaving to return to their homes; we had to limit our social interactions; we had our research activities voided. What remains impressed in our memory is Cambridge emptying, thus leaving us with a sense of oppressive silence and uncertainty.

Amidst that situation, we approached the selection of the theme of this special issue last Spring. Which subject was both contemporary and, at the same time, applicable to the past? While intaking the news and social media, one recurring word drew our attention: resilience. We then started thinking about how this notion could have been used within archaeological research; how its mainstream meaning of ‘strength and ability to overcome stressing events’ has been interpreted.

During this process, we also realised that our journal was coming upon its 40th anniversary since its founding issue (Crawford and Moore 1981). It is hard to find a voluntary-based student-led journal like ours that has *survived* through time. Our ephemeral presence at the university, the variable transmission of accumulated know-how between generations of students, and the concerns with maintaining economic independence are all factors that may have jeopardised the continuity of such a project. And yet, here we are, at the publication of our 69th special issue in forty years of activity.

With resilience chosen as our ship, we began our journey with only the basic idea of what it meant. But soon, we discovered that not only is resilience a fashionable concept within academia, it is also one of the most controversial. The notion has various meanings and interpretations cross-disciplinarily, an ontological conundrum that generates confusion and tireless debates among scholars across fields. Only contemplating its small use in archaeology, there is still a wide diversity in the analytical techniques used and in the definition of proxies that may account for resilience. Certainly, this feeling of disorientation caused by the multitude of theoretical and methodological approaches

has hit us as well, so that since then, we have considered resilience studies as a disordered world, a chaotic research area characterised by multiple identities representing this concept.

It is with this sentiment of disorder and our willingness to tidy up such studies that we approached the making of this volume. Hence, this special issue aims at providing a broader, pluralist perspective on resilience. It does so by including human agency—therefore, with a focus on agent-based models and computational analyses—into discourses on past disturbances and post-stressor events. Moreover, it offers case studies that not only explore the effects of environmental hazards on past societies but also those of cultural change, for instance, through language and social practices. Thus, this volume wishes to move beyond determinist accounts of resilience and provide supplementary interdisciplinary perspectives for the investigation of past resilience.

We must acknowledge many people for their support in the publication of this volume. First, we would like to thank all our contributors for making this volume possible as well as the anonymous reviewers whose comments improved the quality of each paper. Considering the circumstances brought by COVID-19 during the time this volume was produced, we exceedingly appreciate the additional effort that all authors put in during their writing processes. We also thank all members of the ARC who contributed to the proofreading process as well as members who contribute with their efforts towards its continuity. Specifically, we would like to emphasise our gratitude to Victoria Pham, the Book Reviews Editor, for her commitment during the production of this ARC volume. In addition, we are very grateful to Dr Erik Gjesfeld for the support given throughout the editing process and to Glynnis Maynard for her comments on our introduction. Their insights were extremely valuable, and any inaccuracies remain our own. Finally, we thank Benjamin Mercier for his design of the cover and Simone Russo for his help in formatting the volume.

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