Early Horse Domestication in Central Asia

Thursday, March 28
4:00 p.m., SOC 160

Horse domestication has challenged zooarchaeologists over the last few decades much more than most other domestic species. Their domestication was late and did not appear to be marked by obvious skeletal changes. Genetic studies were also confusing and raised the possibility of multiple domestication events. The question is significant because domestic horses revolutionized transportation and trade systems in the old world, as well as changing the nature of warfare and conquest. Orthodox opinion pointed to the Bronze Age in the Near East, but was this really the earliest phase of domestication? Others looked to the Eurasian Steppe for earlier evidence of horse herding. This lecture provides the background to the problem, and focuses on more than 10 years fieldwork and analysis on horse domestication in the steppes of Northern Kazakhstan, which indicate that horses were domesticated in the Eneolithic Botai Culture (c. 3,500 BC). Key findings were published in *Science* in 2009, but research continues.

Dr. Outram is an environmental archaeologist and palaeoeconomist who specialises in zooarchaeology. His most recent research traces the domestication of the horse in Central Asia, while studying the development of pastoral societies in Kazakhstan. He also leads a regular student fieldschool in South Dakota, excavating on an early agricultural village site belonging to the Initial Middle Missouri Culture. He is the Head of Archaeology at the University of Exeter and is the executive editor of the journal *World Archaeology*. 

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Refreshments provided by the Anthropology Club

*Horse tooth dated to 3,400BC from Botai with signs of bitwear*

*A modern horse in Kazakhstan being milked*