The Antiquity of Dairying in Temperate Europe

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The Problem

The antiquity of dairying is a problem which has received scant archaeological attention, yet one which is crucial to the understanding of prehistoric animal husbandry in the Old World. The keeping of animals for their milk leads to an entirely different set of economic relationships from those conditioned by the exploitation of domestic stock. Hitherto it has been difficult to establish that the milk of the adults can ingest raw milk without adverse side-effects. Most of the world’s adult population does not produce sufficient amount of the enzyme lactase which is required to meta-
bolize lactose or milk sugar. As a result, they suffer from cramps, diarrhea, and vomiting when they drink milk. The development of a tolerance for lactose through the continuation of lactase production into adulthood is thought to have been a relatively late evolutionary process, occurring sometime in the last few millennia among the peoples of northwest Europe (who subsequently spread throughout the world in the past 500 years), and Asians and...