By domesticating fire, plants and animals, humankind reshaped the world to its liking. In doing so, humans created the conditions of resource concentration that were the foundation of early sedentism and, much much later, the earliest state-making. Such domestications, in turn, domesticated us, in Norbert Elias’s sense of “the civilizing process.” Full sedentism was by no means an easy choice. Early intensive agriculture involved greater expenditure of labor for the caloric return than did foraging, and was linked to dietary stress and illness. So, though the late neolithic resettlement camp was the necessary ecological and demographic pre-condition of the early state, it was not good for one’s health and leisure.

In this lecture, Professor James C. Scott takes on the civilizational narratives that states hold dear, casting a skeptical eye on the stories we tell ourselves about the histories of agriculture and animal domestication. In the process, he explores the emergence of the state and the compromises that accompanied its ascendance as a political form.

James C. Scott is the Sterling Professor of Political Science and Professor of Anthropology at Yale University. An influential scholar, he is the author of numerous books, including The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia. A fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Professor Scott directs the Yale Program in Agrarian Studies, and is the former president of the American Association of Asian Studies.

The lecture and a reception following the event are open to the public.

Professor Scott’s lecture and visit to UHM are sponsored by the following institutions:

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