

Indo-Europeans

The ultimate origin of Greek and Roman
Mythology

A Strange Start?

- Who are these people and why should we care? What does this have to do with mythology?

An unexpected discovery

- The Romans and Greeks were aware that their languages and cultures were strangely similar, but didn't know how or why
- The Romans felt that their culture was derivative of the Greek (in ways we'll learn later on); ergo, their culture was a bastardization of the higher, advanced Greek

An unexpected discovery

- Socrates and Aristotle both wrote c. 400-300BC that the Greek they spoke was different from the Greek Homer spoke around 750BC, but they didn't know why
- Marcus Terentius Varro wrote around 30BC that the Latin of the early history of Rome was completely incomprehensible to the “modern” speaker

An unexpected discovery

- After the empire fell, Latin slowly changed into the Romance languages (French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian, and hundreds of dialects)
- However, since change was slow and all written works were in classical Latin, people felt that the everyday languages were just “bad Latin”.

An unexpected discovery

- Latin was roughly understandable to most people in Europe until about 900AD; after 1300, most people realized that the new languages were actually new languages
- A longer history of writing showed that Greek, German, and other languages slowly changed as well

An unexpected discovery

- Ultimately, the politically incestuous nature of medieval society prevent people from seeing languages as being organically related
- Languages influenced each other so much people assumed that the words *padre*, *père*, *patire*, and *papa* were all borrowed

An unexpected discovery

- ... not to mention the Bible and that whole Tower of Babel thing, so of COURSE languages sounded alike, duh!

An unexpected discovery

- The butterfly's wing was a man named Sir William Jones, an English philologist who was assigned to British India in the 1780's
- He wanted to learn more about Hindu religion, so he was the first educated European to learn Sanskrit
 - An ancient Indian language, spoken around 1900BC in northern India

An unexpected discovery

- Jones noticed some weird things about Sanskrit:
 - WAY too many words were similar:
 - pater = pitar
 - regem = rajam
 - deus = devas
 - unus, duo, tres, quattuor, quinque, sex, septem, octo, novem, decem = ainas, dva, trayas, catvaras, pañca, saṣ, sapta, aṣṭa, nava, daśa

An unexpected discovery

- Their religion was weirdly similar:
 - Zeus = Dyaus, king of the gods
 - Ignis (ancient Roman god of fire) = Agnis, god of fire
 - The sun was pulled by a chariot in the sky; Dawn was “rosy-fingered”; three brother-gods ruled everything, etc.

An unexpected discovery

- Sanskrit was written a thousand years before Latin or Greek, so it couldn't have been influenced by them
- India had zero political and only marginal cultural contact with Europe in all of recorded history
- ... they must have come from an earlier, unknown language, like how Spanish came from Latin!

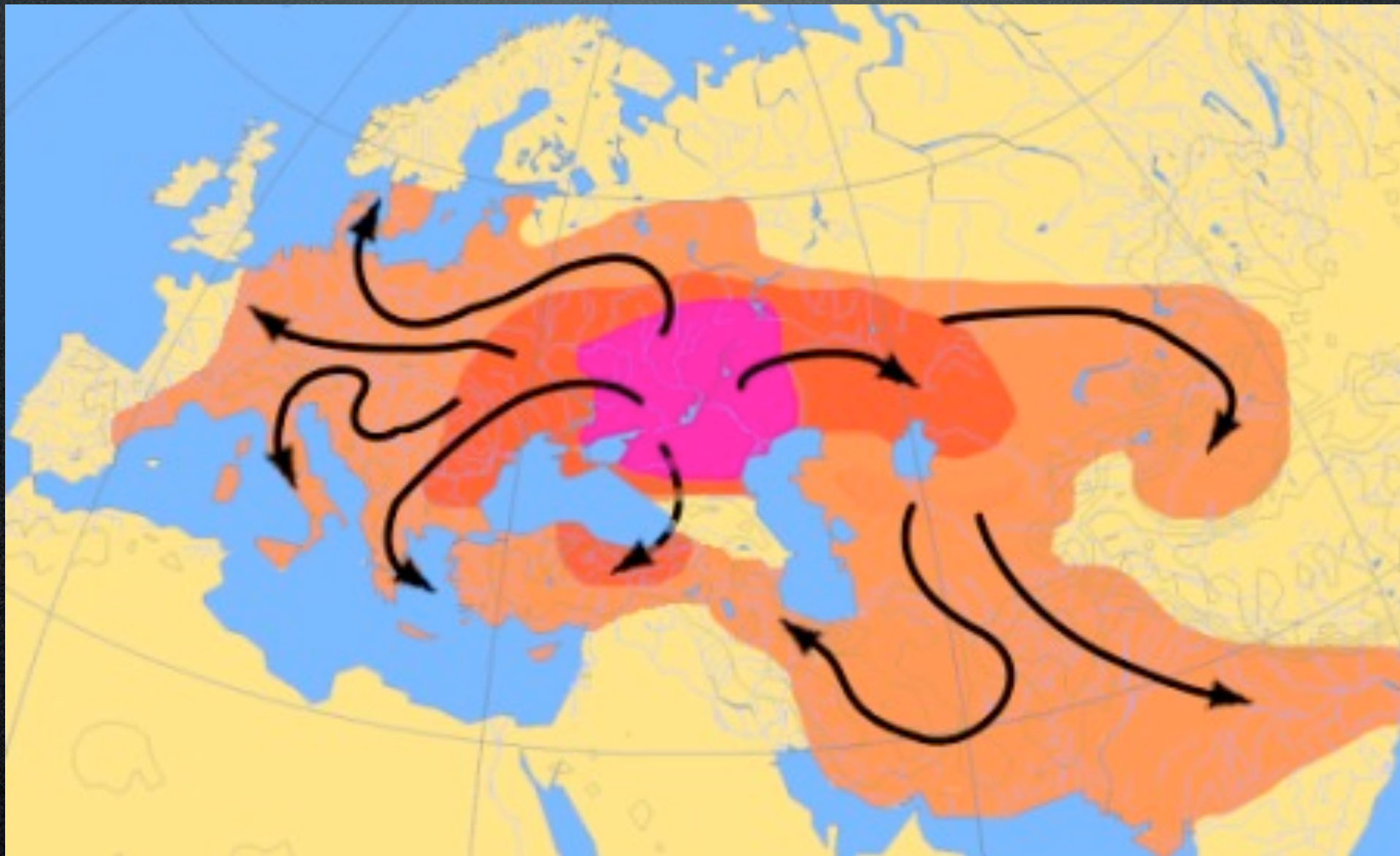
An unexpected discovery

- 1814 - Germanic is shown to be related
- 1833 - Persian languages are shown to be related*
- 1856 - Slavic and Baltic languages
- 1879 - Ferdinand de Saussure (age 22) proves conclusively that languages change systematically and also decodes the pattern of laryngeal ablaut, solving the major relational problem between all known I-E languages

Indo-Europeans

- Timeframe - Languages change at a fairly constant rate; this puts a common language in the neighborhood of 6000BC, in the late Stone Age
- Geography - combining field archaeology and language semantics, the homeland of Indo-Europeans was probably in the Pontic Steppes near the Volga River in Russia:

c. 2000BC

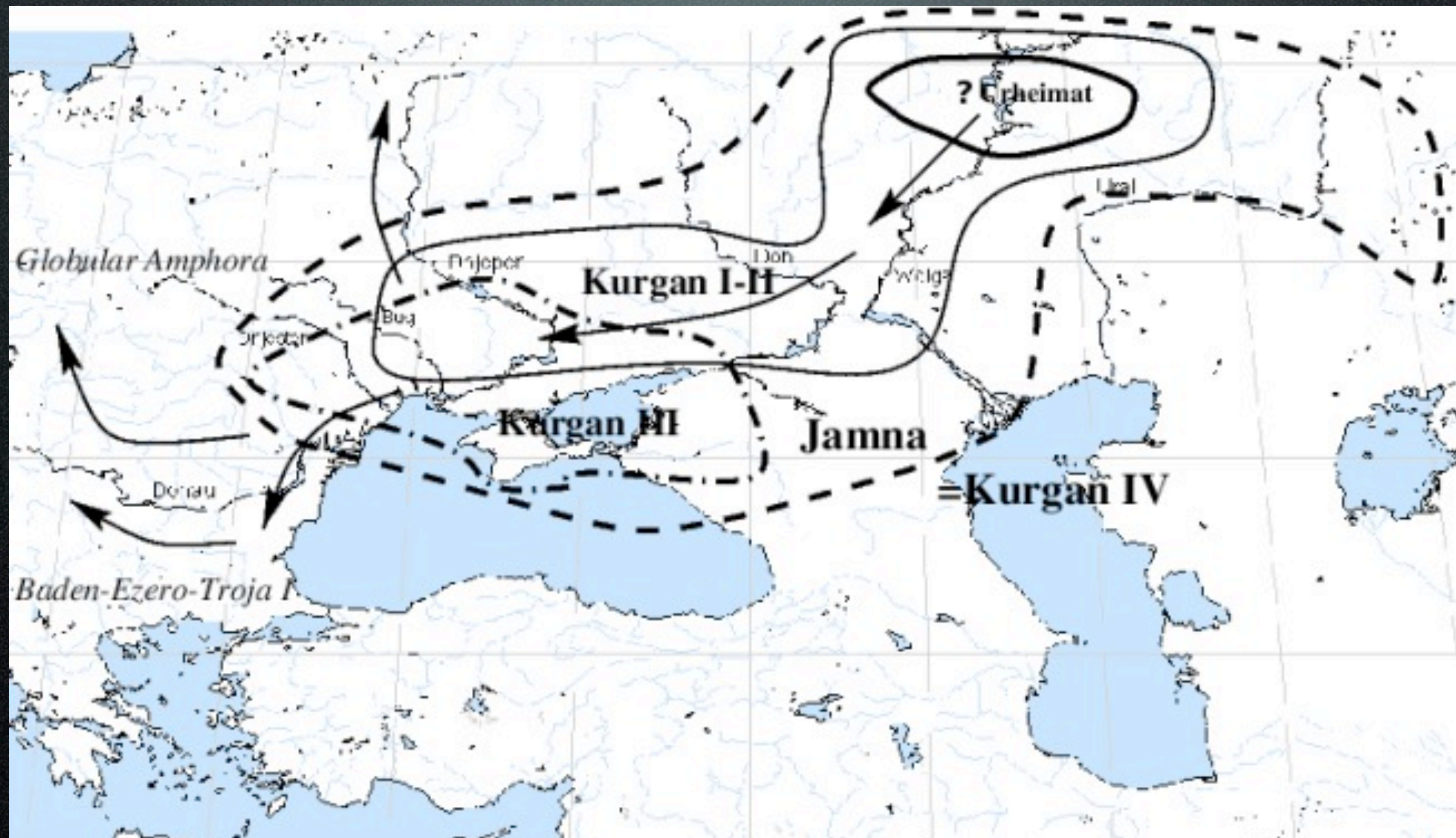


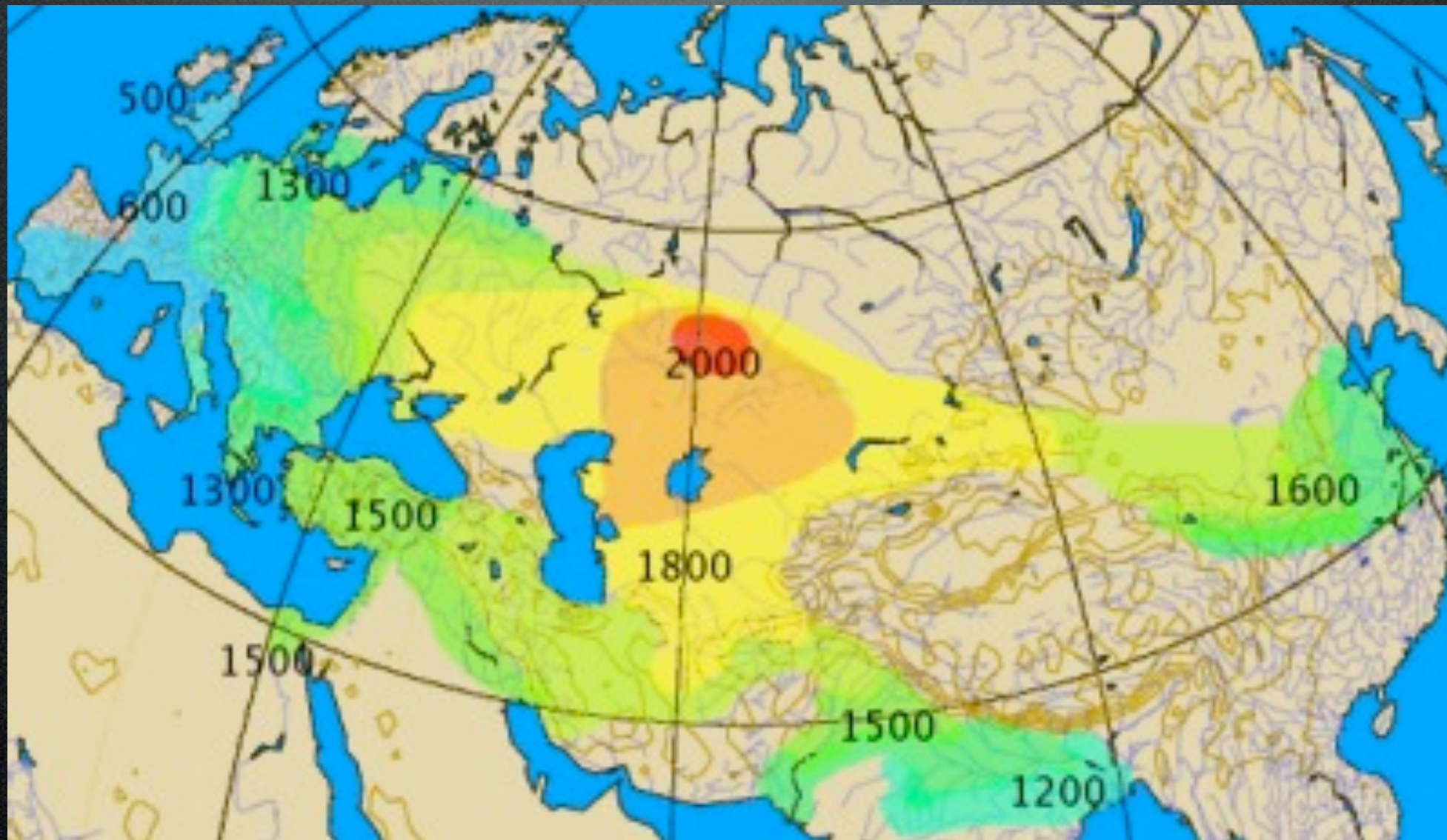
Timeline

- Three successive waves of migration out of homeland:
 - 4500BC - Anatolia and Asia Minor; forms the Hittite and Lydian cultures (mentioned in Bible and Egyptian inscriptions)

- 2500BC - The “Kurgan” wave - probably a militaristic “invasion” spread; Indo-Europeans were the people who domesticated the horse (native to their area) and invented the chariot about this time; I-E culturally dominated the peoples they encounter
- Named after the word “kurgan”, which means “burial mound”; I-E cremated their dead and then buried them in large mounds
 - Tumulus, barrow, Viking ship burials

- 2000BC - The “Aryan” wave, sometimes called “satem wave” - mostly to the southeast, created the Andronovo culture*
- We’ll come back to those guys!





Russia, 3100BC



Anatolia, 1700BC



Mycene, Greece, 1200BC

“Tomb of Agamemnon”



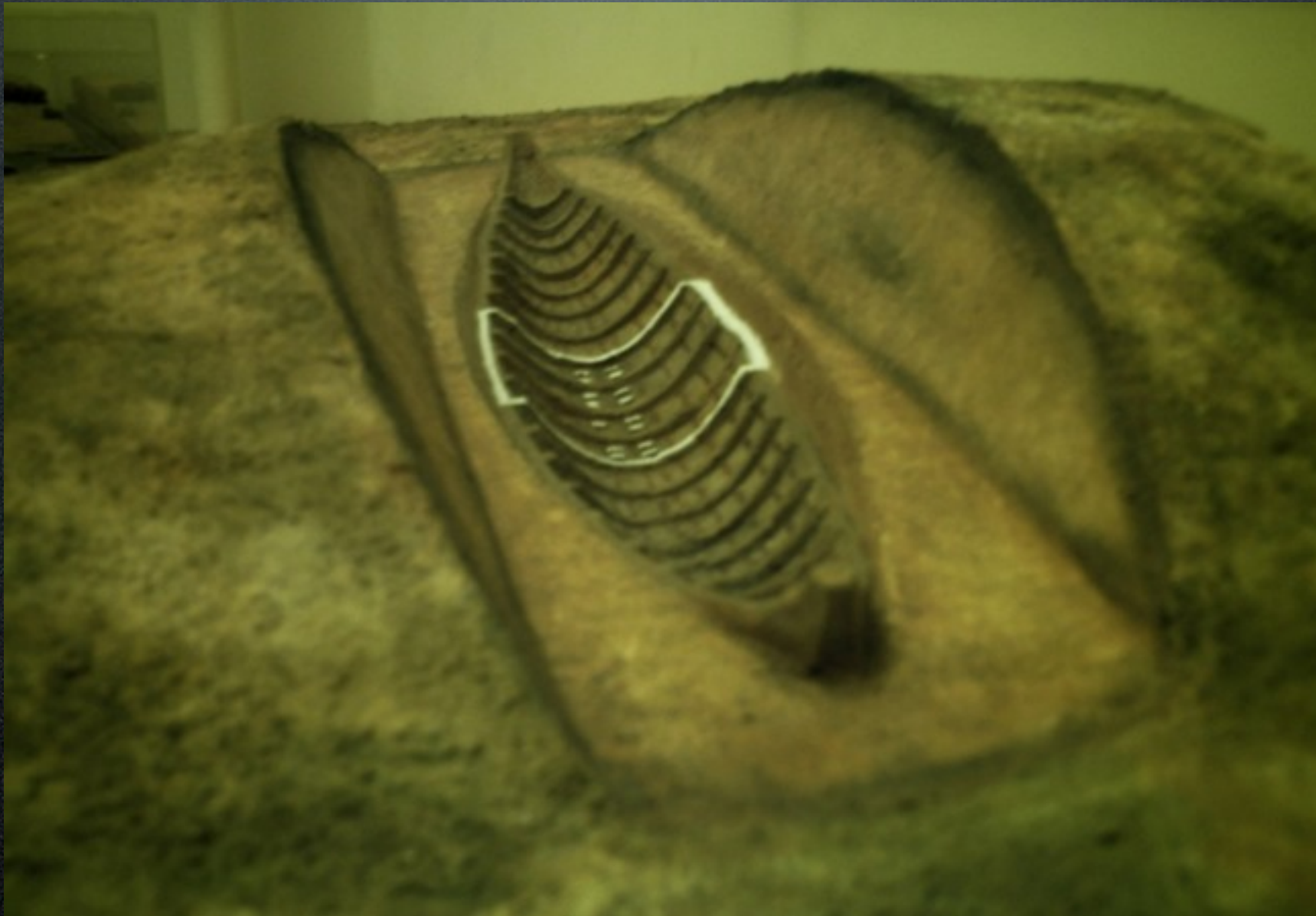
France, 900BC



Norway, 500AD

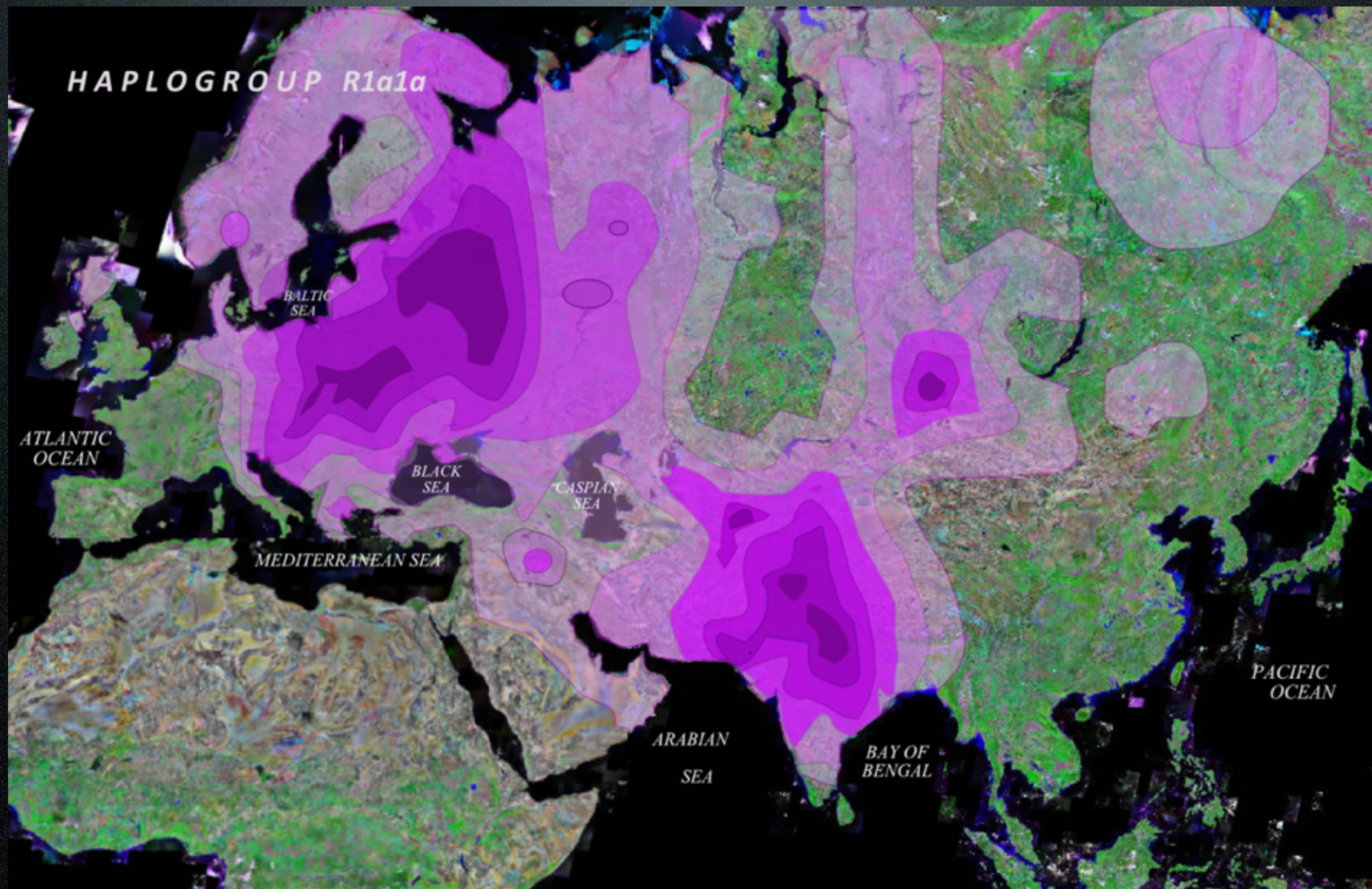


England, 700AD (Reconstruction)



Genetic Evidence

- A genetic haplogroup (R1a1a) has been associated with the Indo-Europeans [timeframe, genetic drift, associated traits]





PIE Culture

- Nomadic, horse-centered, military
 - Organized into warrior, priestly, and commoner classes
- Survived using animal husbandry; no agriculture yet (horse, ox, sheep, goats)
 - Bronze and stone tools (h2éios)
 - Wagons with solid wheels, chariots

PIE Culture

- Cold climate (snéigwhos), mountains (mōnts), and rivers/lakes (wódr/móri) but no oceans or boats
- Patriarchal, organized along family lines
- Warriors followed a separate honor code and self-identified with wolves or bears (werewolf, berserker, Roman luparii)

PIE Culture

- Religion - polytheistic mixture of animism and organized ritual
- Epic heroic poetry; etiological myths related to the natural world

PIE Religion

- Big points:
 - Two classes of gods: déiws / h2ásuros
 - Hindu - devas/asuras
 - Avestan - daiva/ahura
 - Greek - Gods & Titans (theós/títas)
 - Norse - vánir/æsir

Andronovo

- The world's oldest known religious war!
- The Andronovo culture split into eastern (proto-Indian) and western (proto-Persian) groups
 - In the west, “good” gods were called devās, and “bad” ones asurās -> Hinduism
 - In the east, “good” were ahurai and “bad” were daevai -> Zoroastrianism, Ahura Mazda (Ásr Míklr)

PIE Religion

- The dead live below the ground in an underworld
- The gods require animal sacrifices to be placated; “peace treaty” between men and gods
- Three brother gods control the universe: diéus (sky), néptom h2akwōm (waters), * * * (the dead)