Each Age Gets the Great Powers it Needs:

Twenty Thousand Years of International Relations

Ian Morris

2015/16 Roman Lectures, London School of Economics

December 8, 2015

Two Questions:

1. Can we identify really long-term patterns in the system of great powers?

2. If so, can we (a) identify the forces underlying these patterns, (b) explain them, and (c) forecast where the trends will take us next?

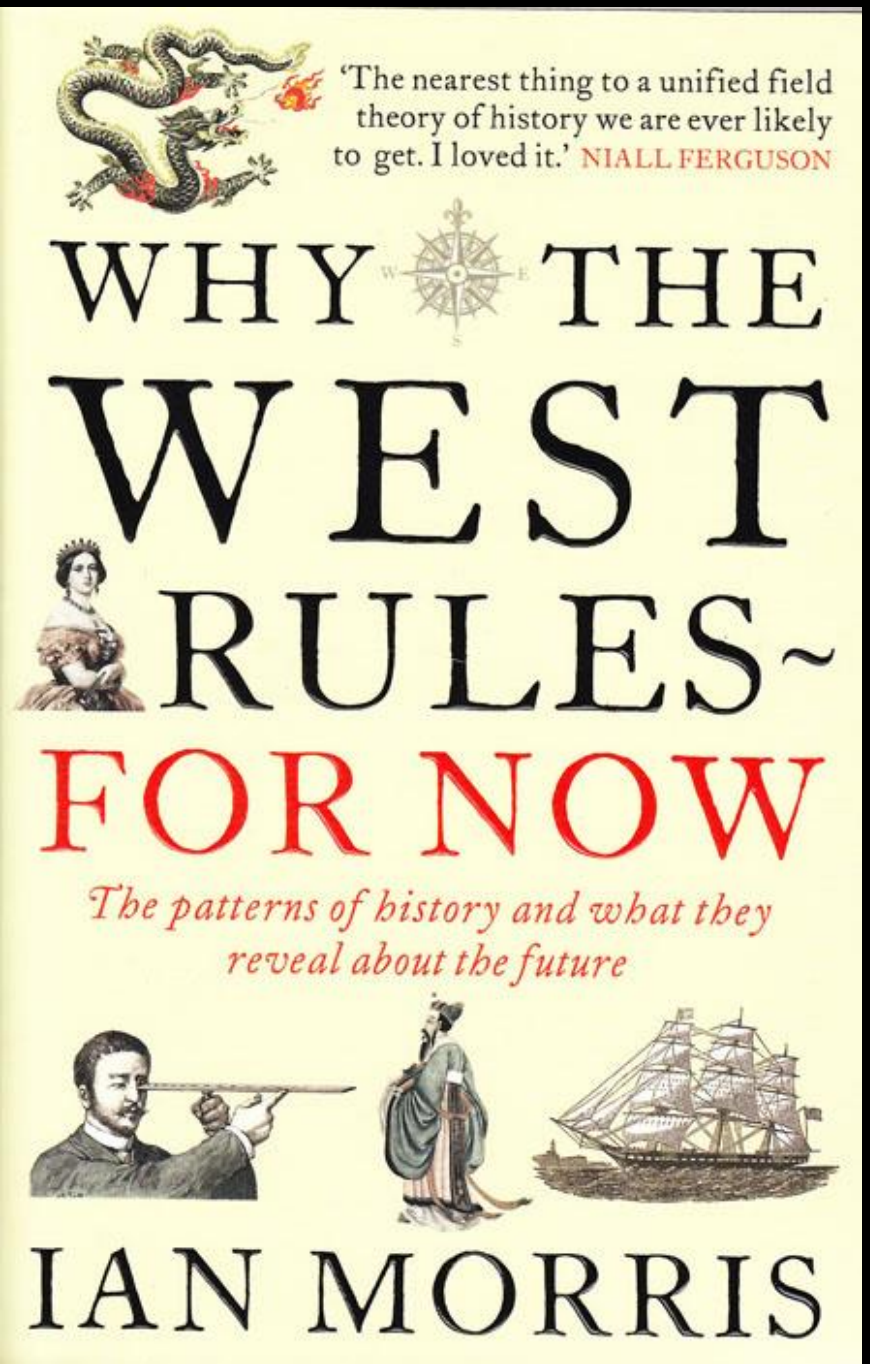
Two Questions:

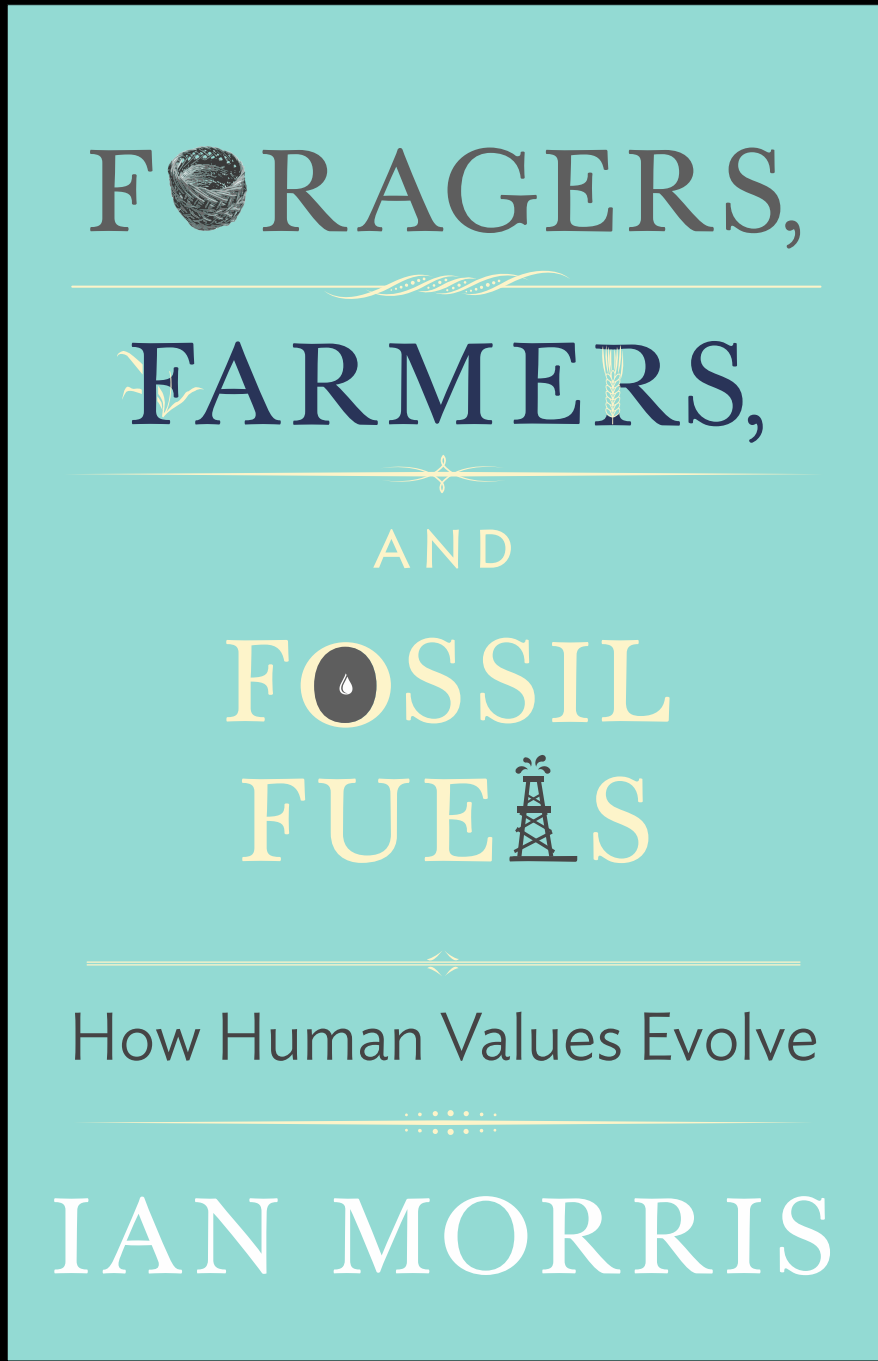
1. Can we identify really long-term patterns in the system of great powers?

   Yes

2. If so, can we (a) identify the forces underlying these patterns, (b) explain them, and (c) forecast where the trends will take us next?

   Yes


'The nearest thing to a unified field theory of history we are ever likely to get. I loved it.' NIALL FERGUSON
WHY THE WEST RULES~ FOR NOW
The patterns of history and what they reveal about the future
IAN MORRIS


FORAGERS,
FARMERS,
AND
FOSSIL FUELS
How Human Values Evolve
IAN MORRIS

Four phases:

1. The world of foragers (tiny)
2. The age of agriculture (small)
3. Inner rim and heartland (big)
4. Inner rim and outer rim (huge)

The Plan:

1. Talk about each phase
2. Draw some conclusions

Four phases:

1. The world of foragers (tiny)
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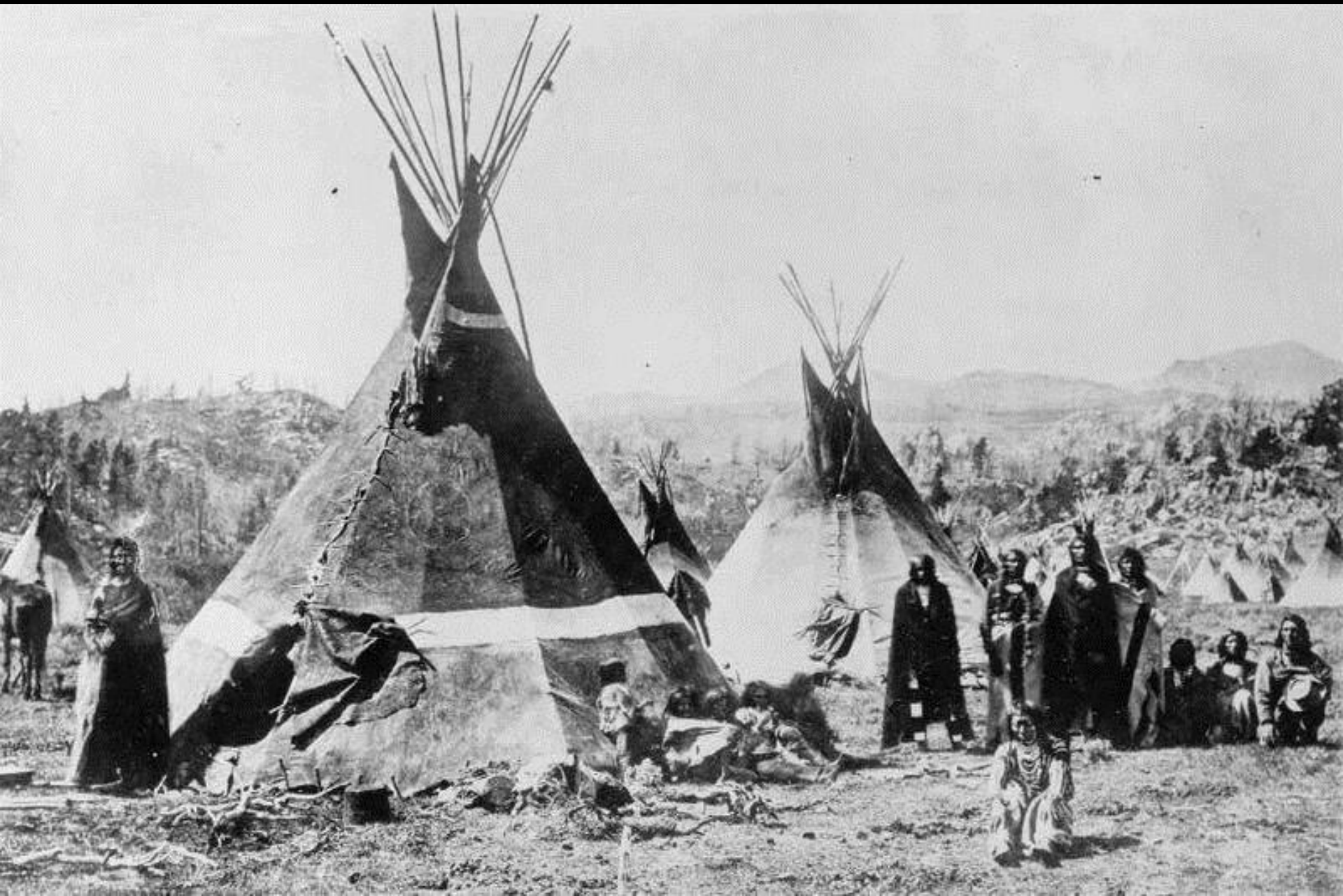
Small-scale, highly mobile societies

Shoshone camp, 1930s (US Southwest)



Feasting, Amazon basin, 1970s

Kwakiutl village, British Columbia, 1890s

Four phases:

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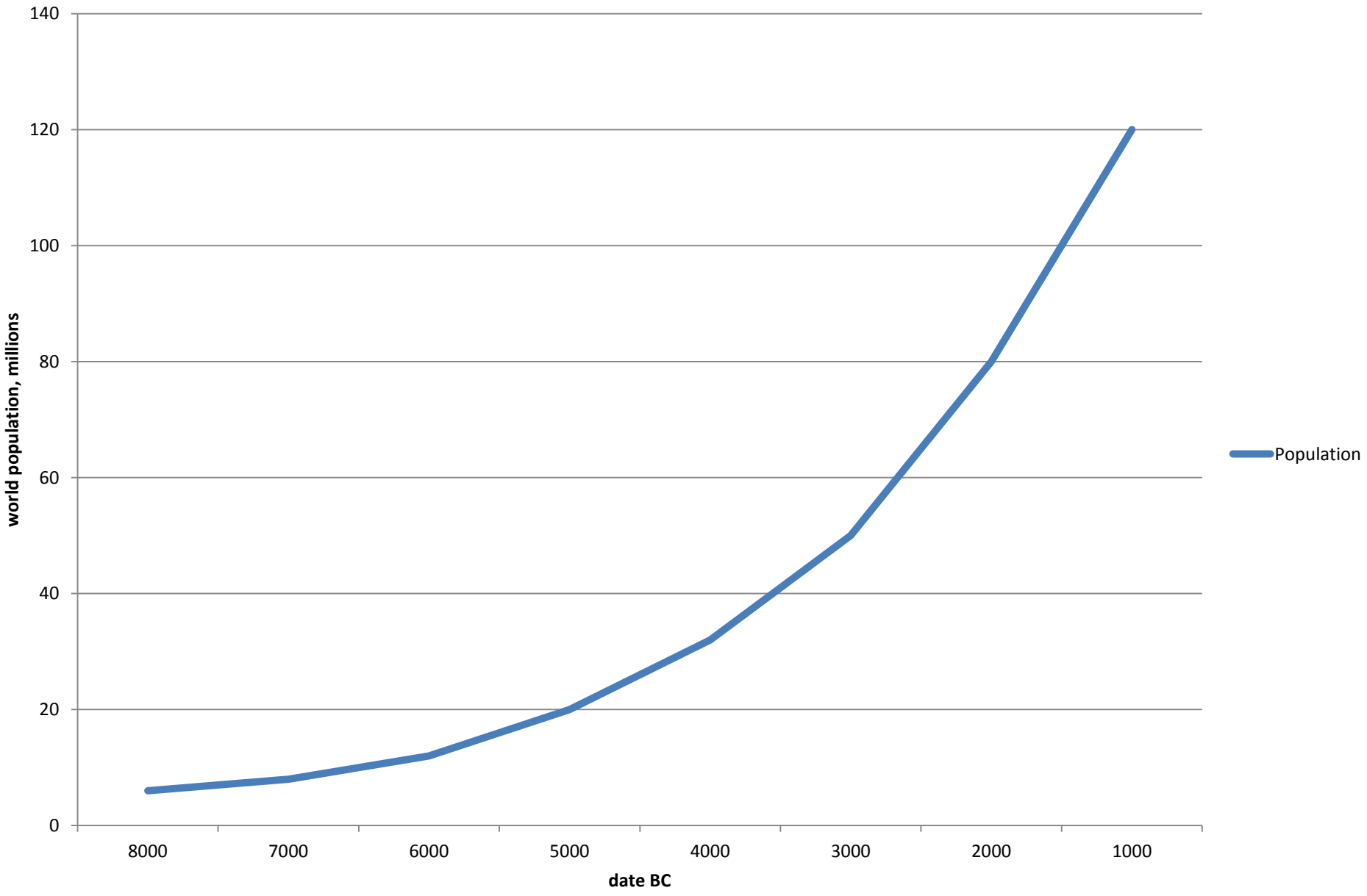
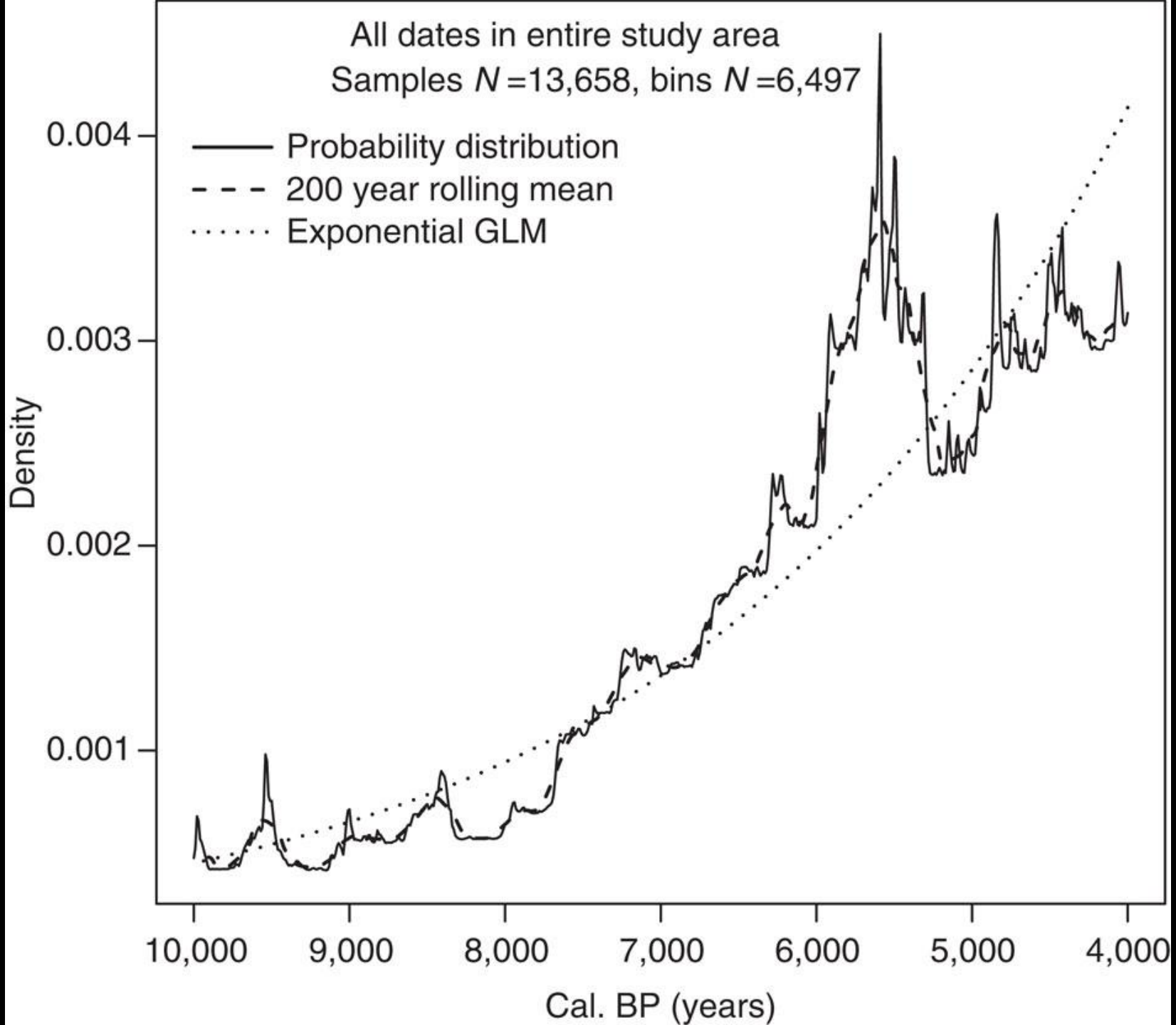
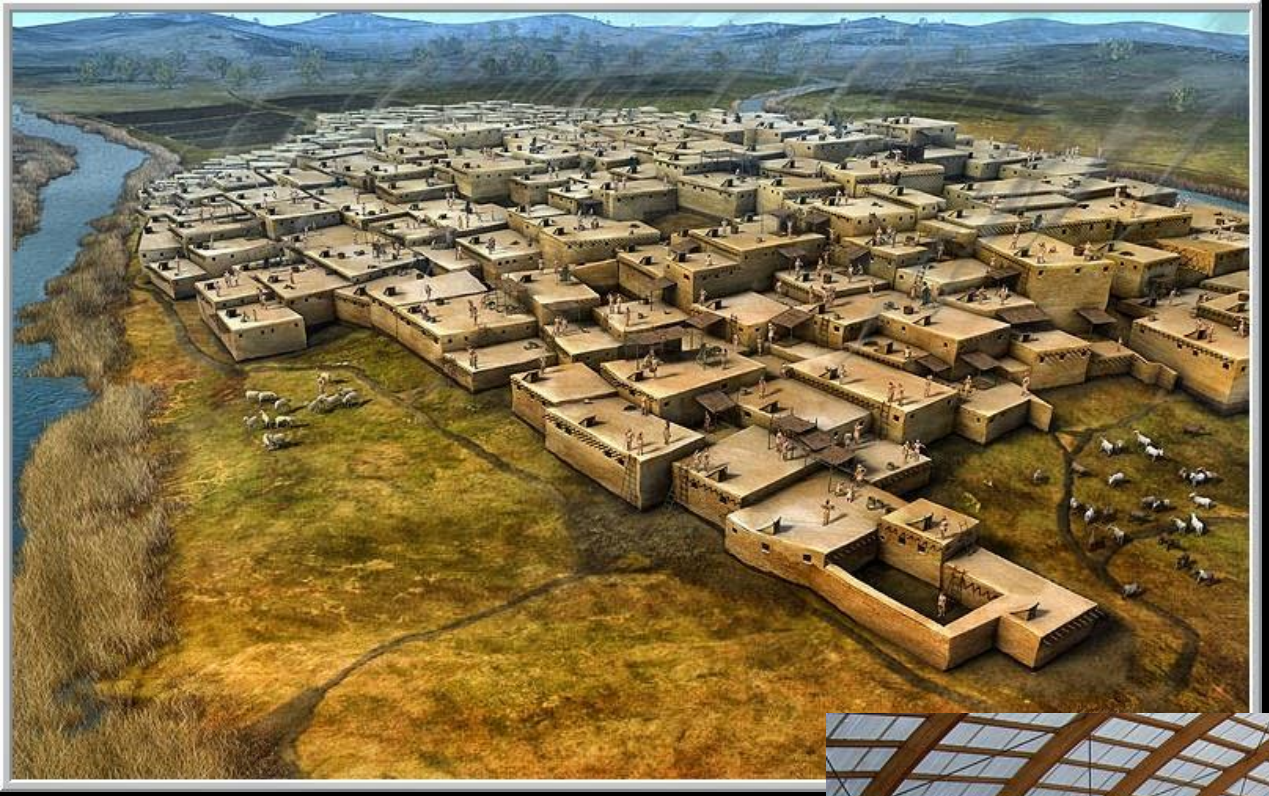
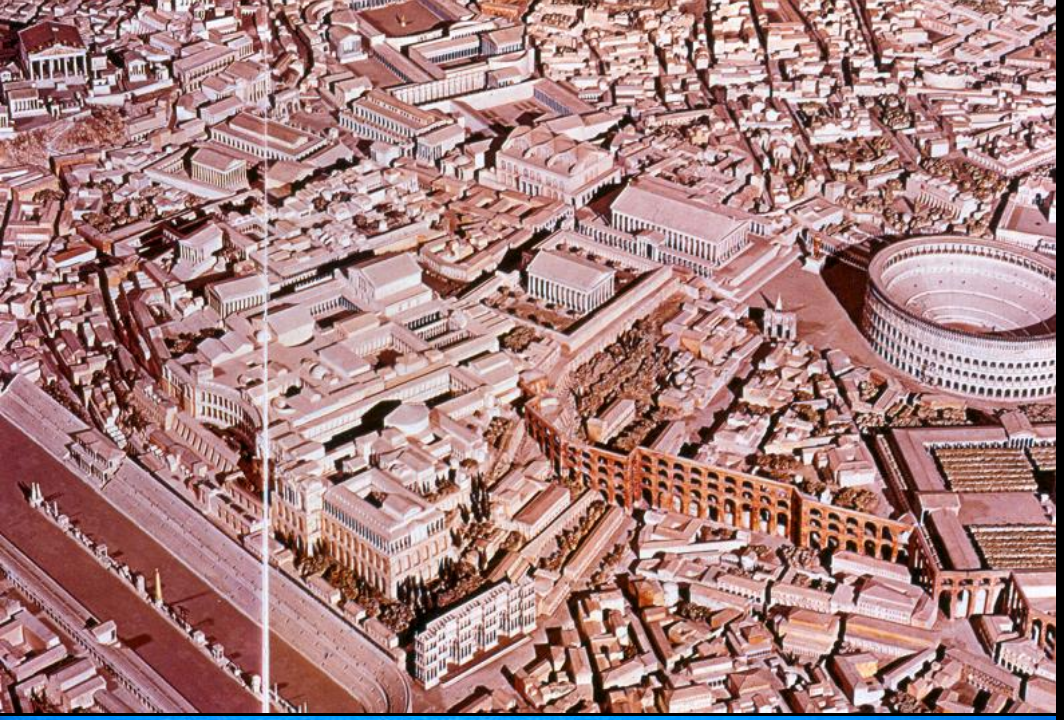
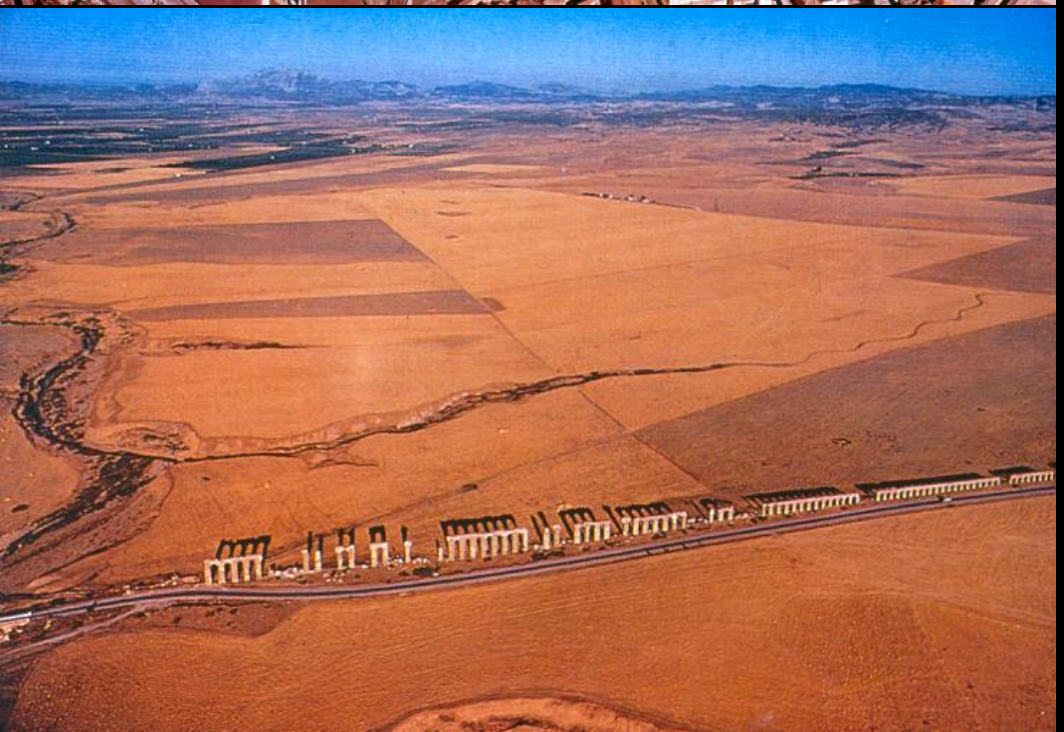

140
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
world population, millions
8000
7000
6000
5000
4000
3000
2000
1000
date BC
Population


All dates in entire study area
Samples N =13,658, bins N =6,497
Probability distribution
200 year rolling mean
Exponential GLM
Density
0.004
0.003
0.002
0.001
10,000
9,000
8,000
7,000
6,000
5,000
4,000
Cal. BP (years)

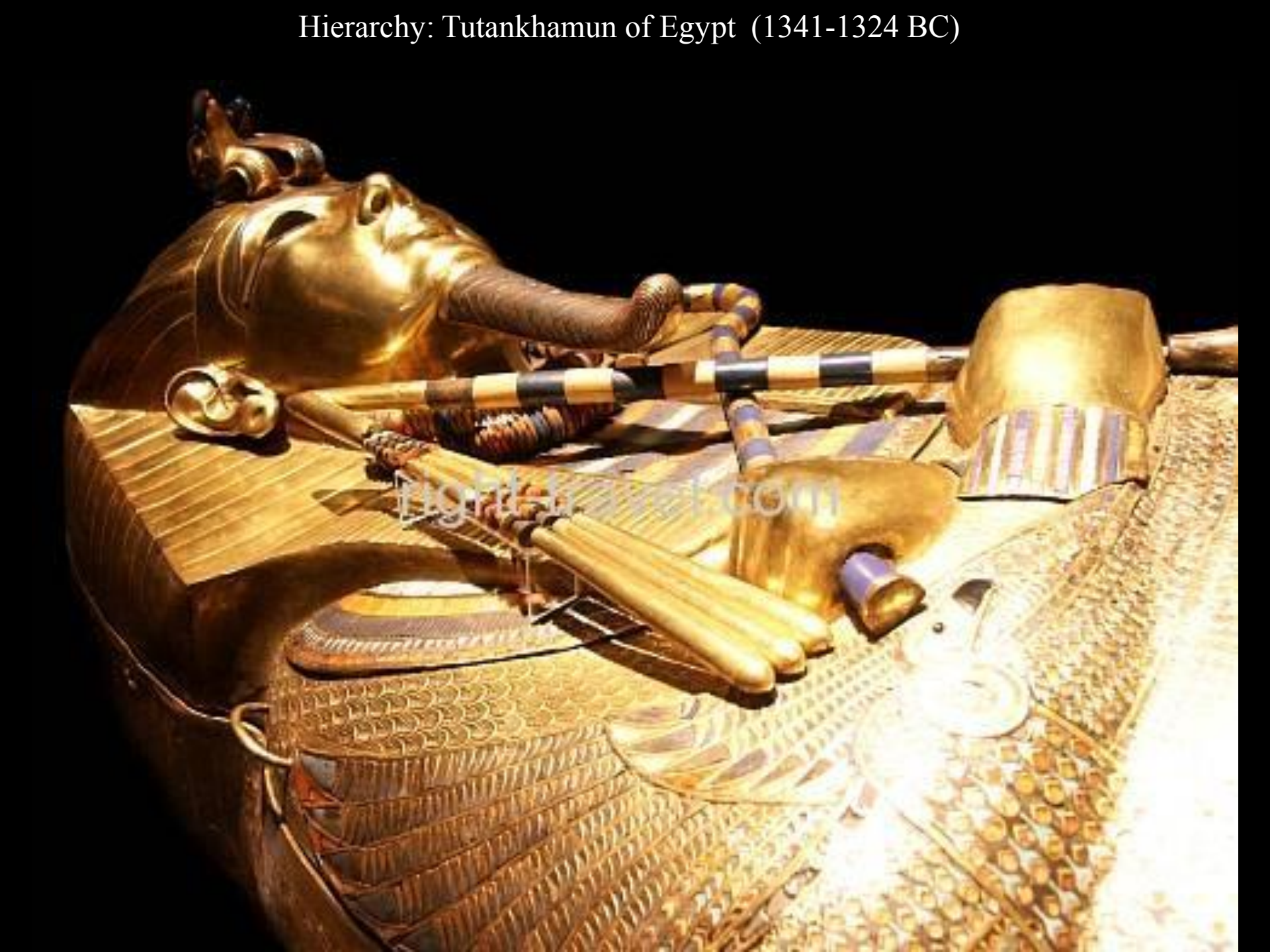


Çatalhöyük,
Turkey,
c. 6500 BC

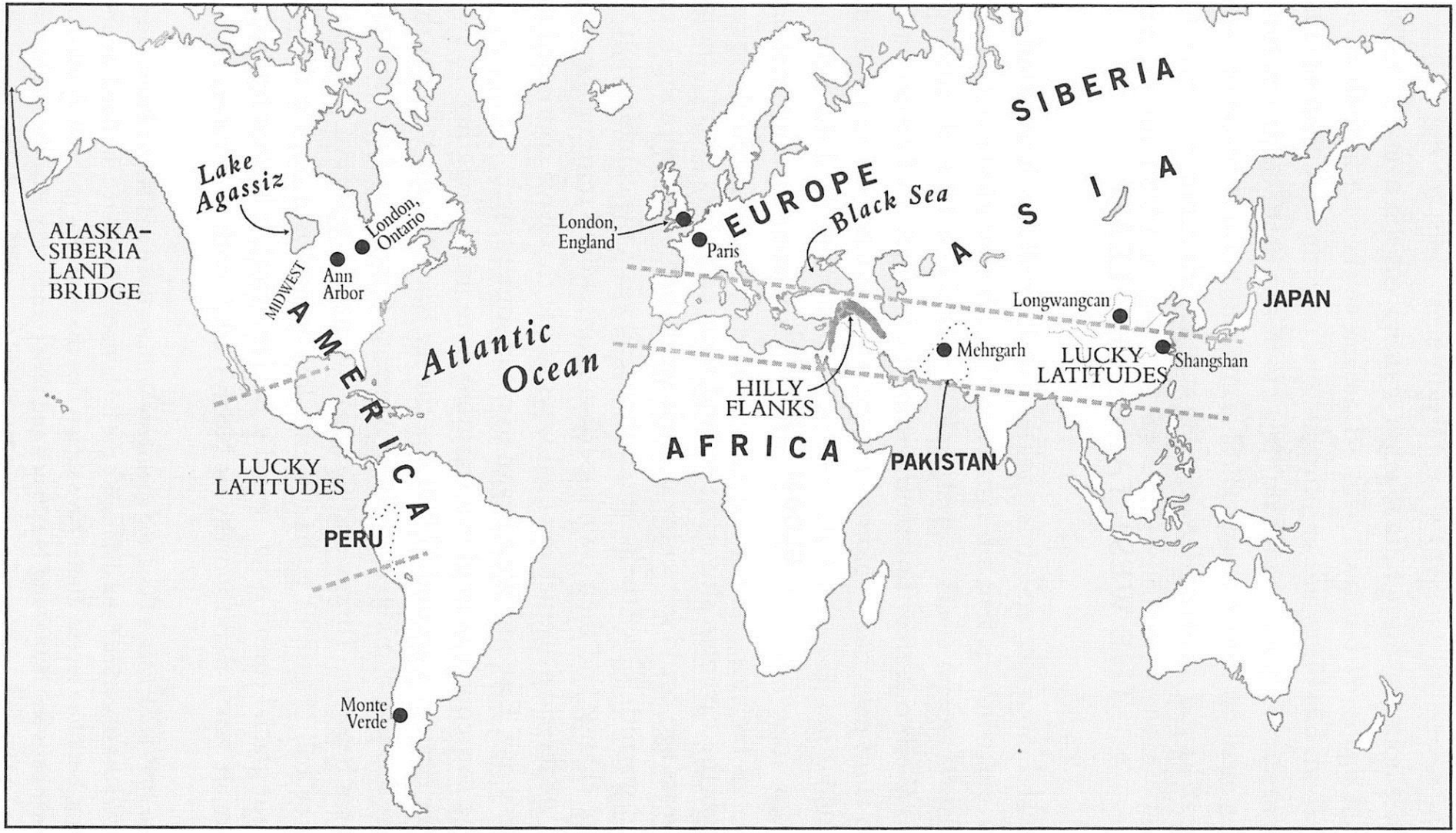




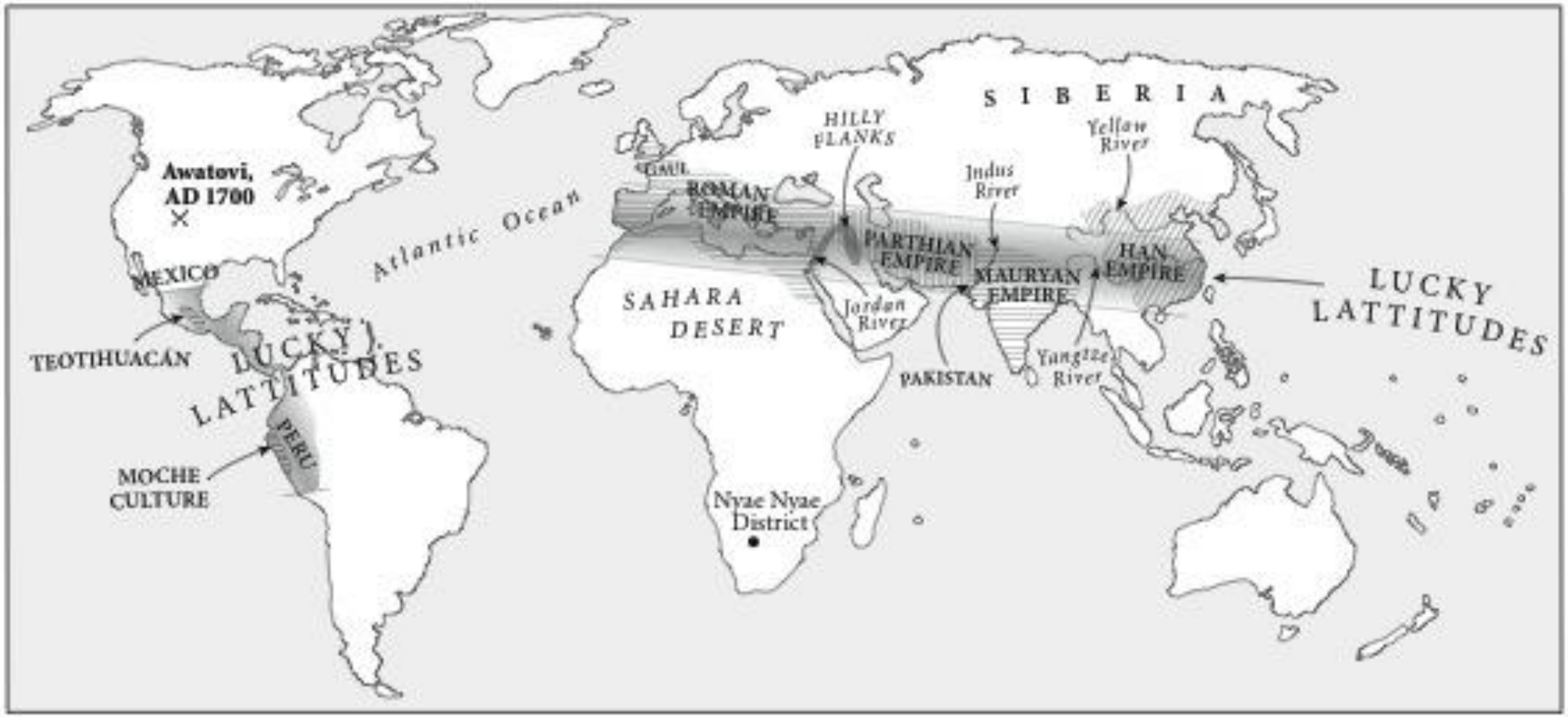
Hierarchy: Tutankhamun of Egypt (1341-1324 BC)

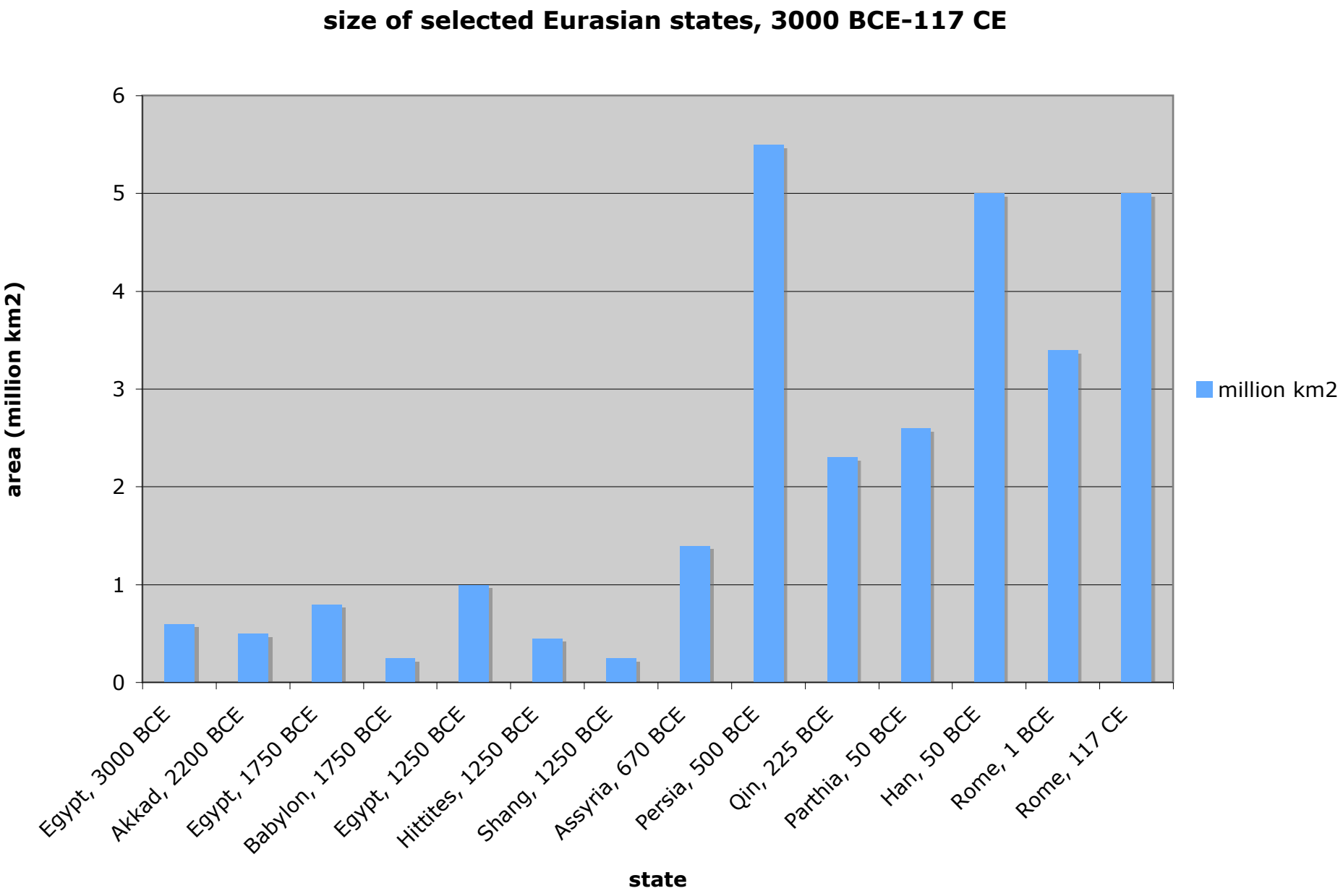


The lucky latitudes



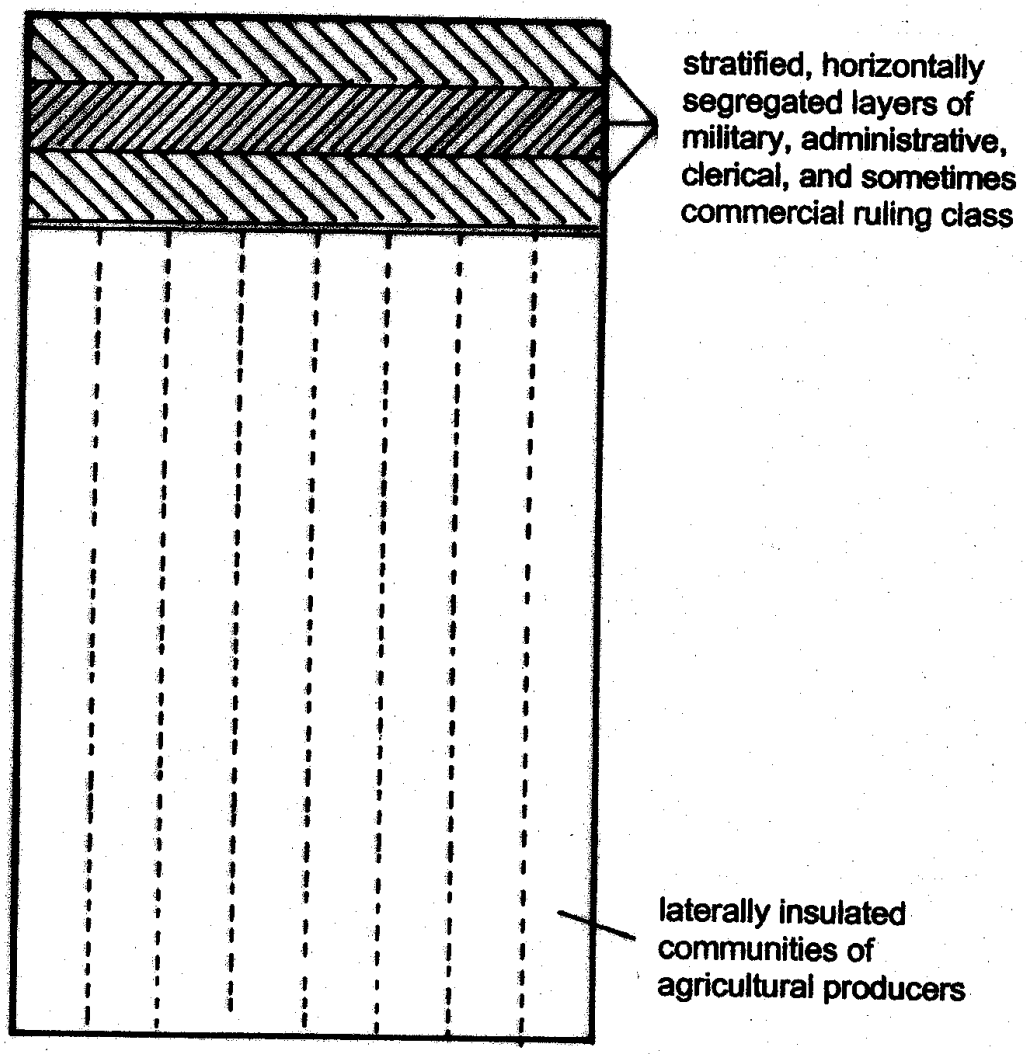
Morris War Fig. 02-03 Full turnpage (REV 1)



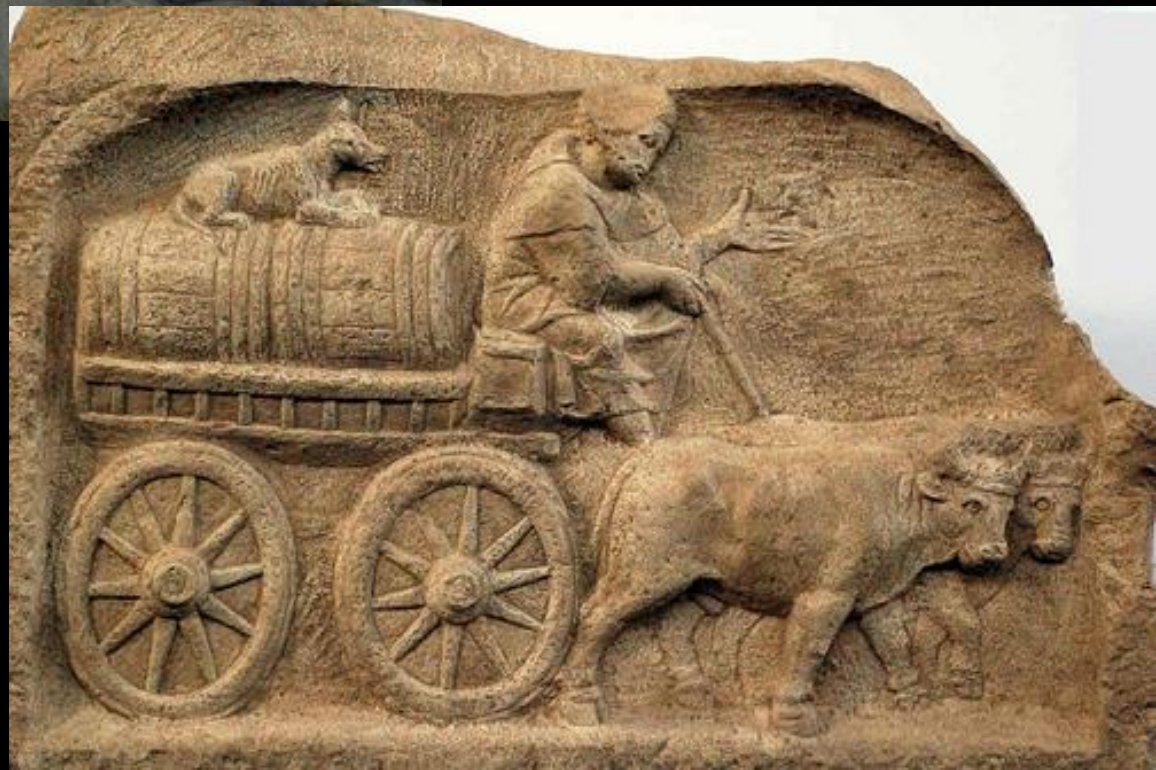

size of selected Eurasian states, 3000 BCE-117 CE
area (million km2)
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
Egypt, 3000 BCE
Akkad, 2200 BCE
Egypt, 1750 BCE
Babylon, 1750 BCE
Egypt, 1250 BCE
Hittites, 1250 BCE
Shang, 1250 BCE
Assyria, 670 BCE
Persia, 500 BCE
Qin, 225 BCE
Parthia, 50 BCE
Han, 50 BCE
Rome, 1 BCE
Rome, 117 CE
state
million km2

Ernest Gellner (1925-95)

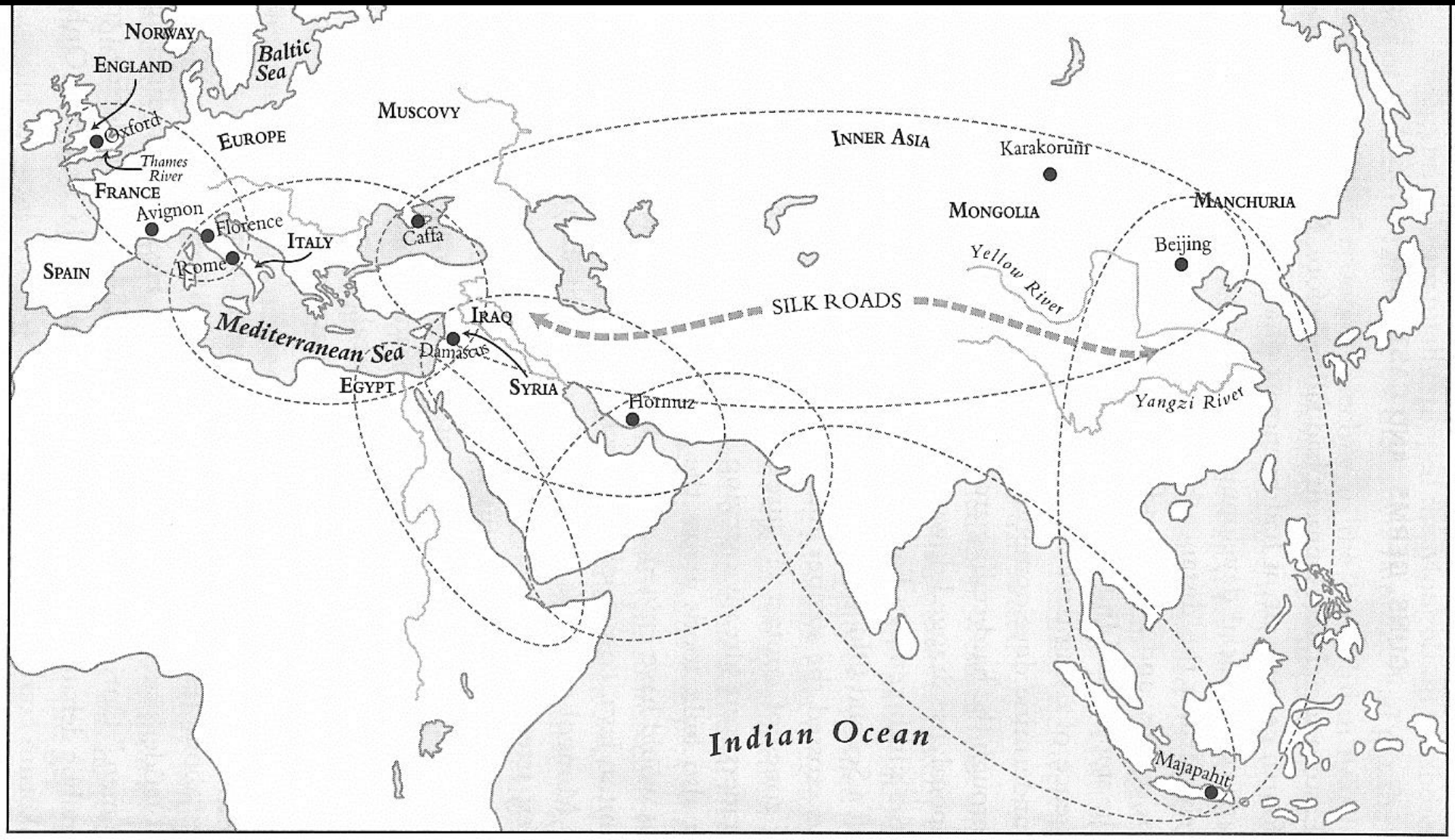
The structure of agrarian society (after Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 1983)

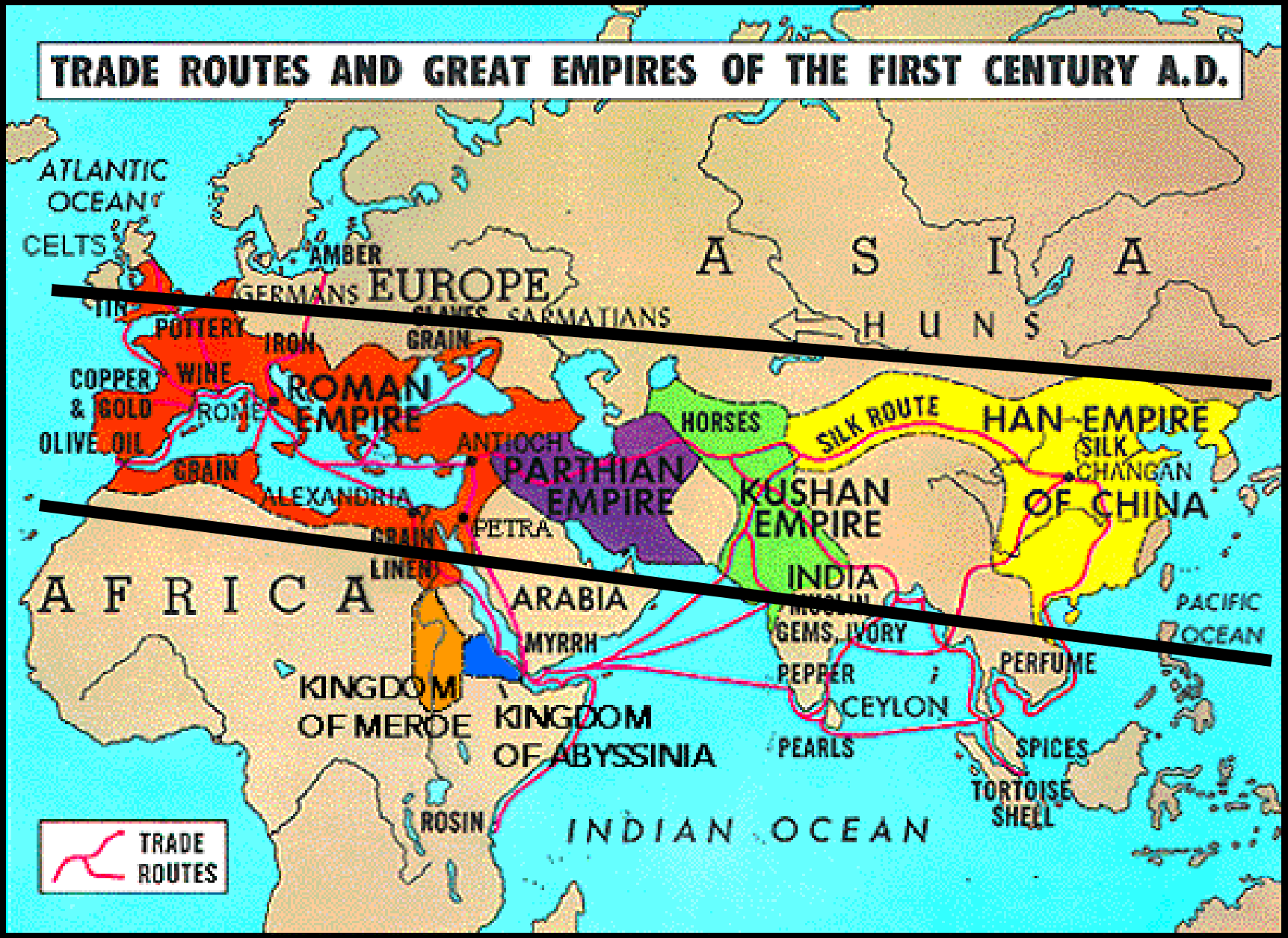


The conquest of distance



Eurasia reconnected, 13th-14th centuries AD




TRADE ROUTES AND GREAT EMPIRES OF THE FIRST CENTURY A.D.
ATLANTIC OCEAN
CELTS
AMBER
GERMANS
EUROPE
SARMATIANS
A S I A
H U N S
POTTERY
IRON
GRAIN
COPPER & GOLD
WINE
ROME
ROMAN EMPIRE
OLIVE OIL
GRAIN
ANTIOCH
PARTHIAN EMPIRE
HORSES
SILK ROUTE
HAN EMPIRE OF CHINA
SILK
CHANGAN
ALEXANDRIA
PETRA
GRAIN
LINEN
KUSHAN EMPIRE
INDIA
A F R I C A
ARABIA
MYRRH
GEMS, IVORY
PEPPER
CEYLON
PEARLS
PERFUME
SPICES
TORTOISE SHELL
PACIFIC OCEAN
KINGDOM OF MEROE
KINGDOM OF ABYSSINIA
ROSIN
INDIAN OCEAN
TRADE ROUTES

Four phases:

1. The world of foragers (tiny)
2. The age of agriculture (small)
3. Inner rim and heartland (big)
4. Inner rim and outer rim (huge)

Halford Mackinder,
1861-1947

Mackinder's map (1904)

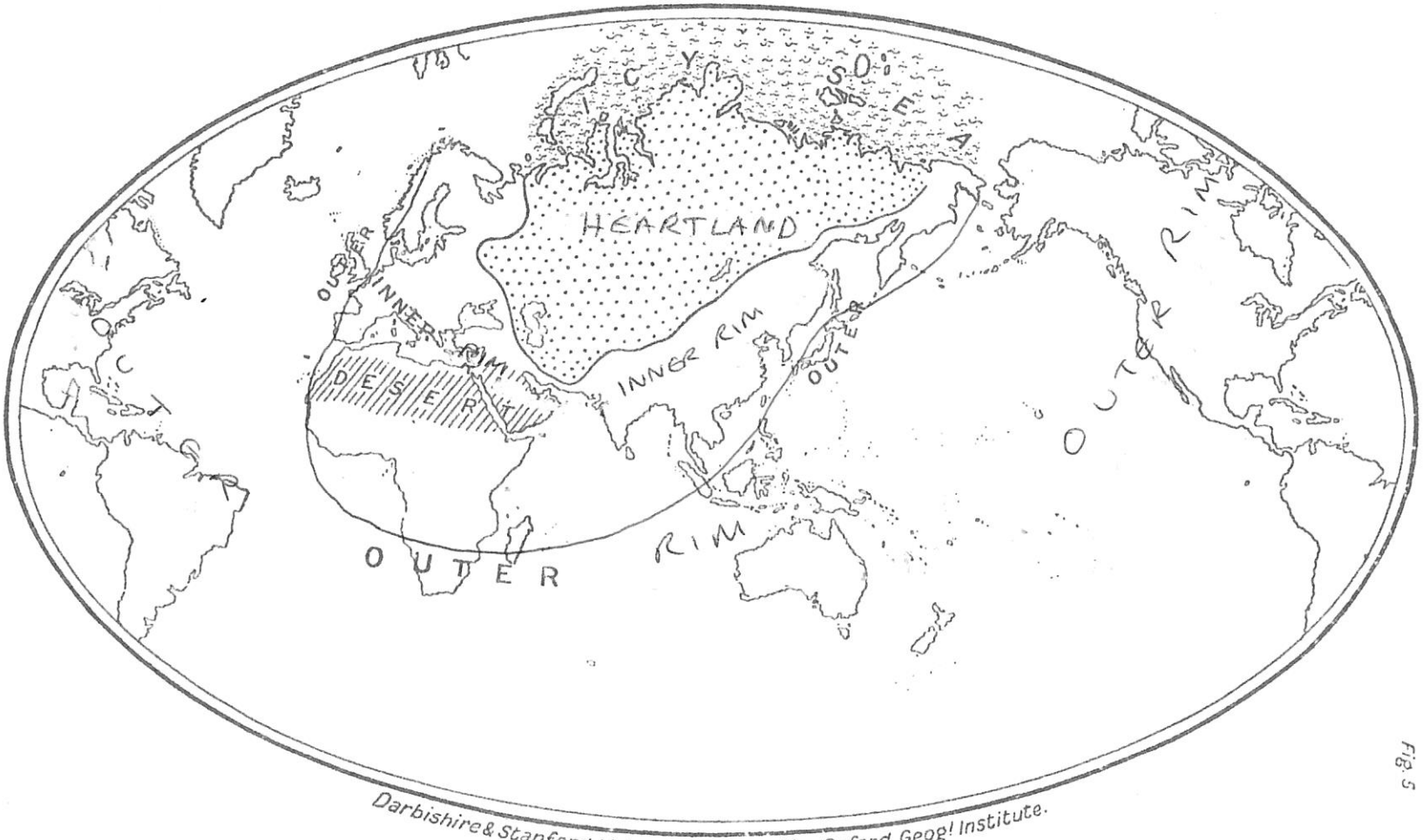
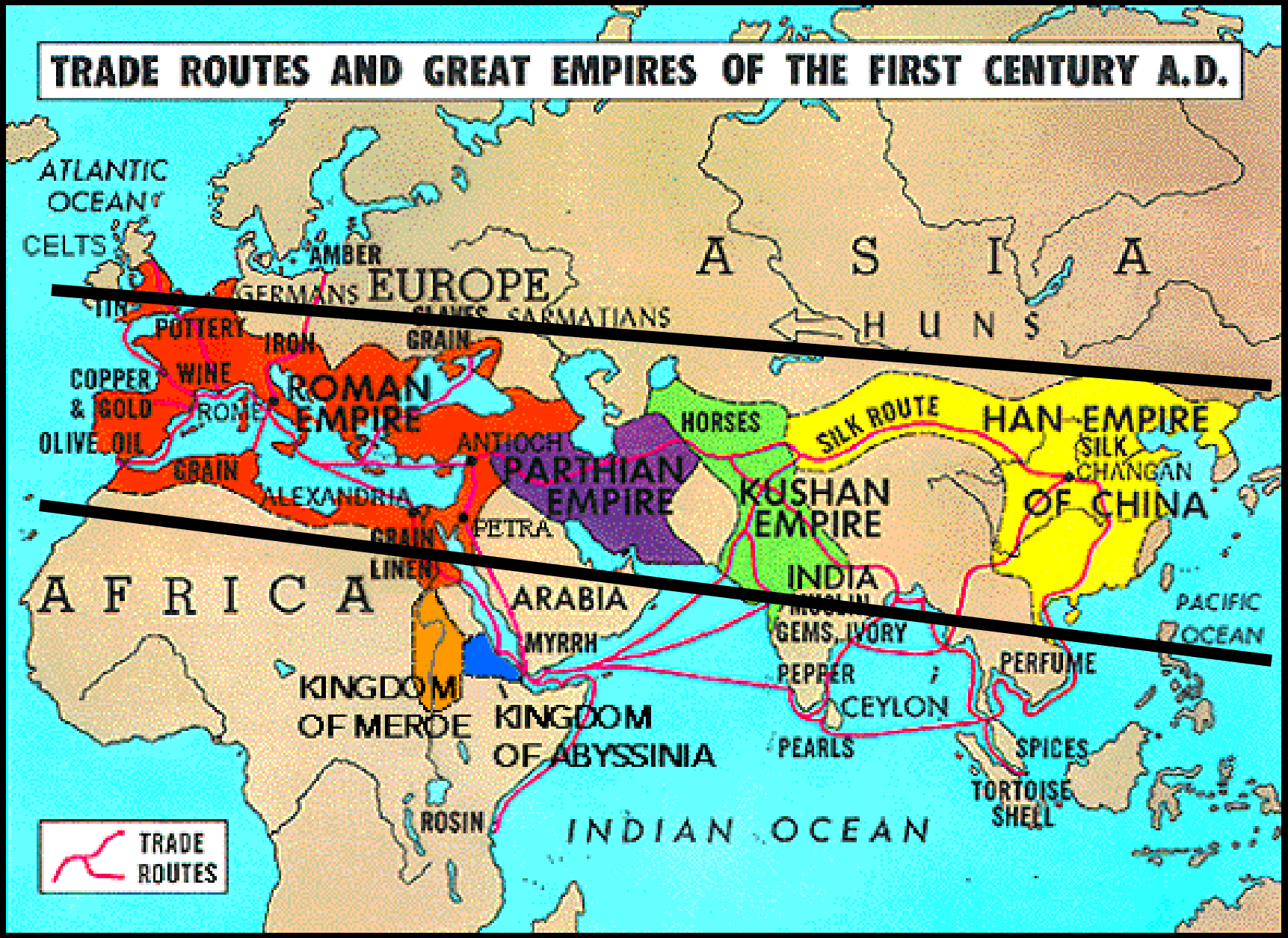


Fig. 5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ATLANTIC OCEAN
CELTS
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PEARLS
PERFUME
SPICES
TORTOISE SHELL
PACIFIC OCEAN
KINGDOM OF MEROE
KINGDOM OF ABYSSINIA
ROSIN
INDIAN OCEAN
TRADE ROUTES

The steppes

0 1000 mi
0 1500 km
SWEDEN
Baltic Sea
Moscow
Volga
Dnepr
Don
Ural
URAL MOUNTAINS
Western Steppe
KAZAKSTAN
Aral Sea
Lake Balkhash
Ob
Irtysh
Yenisey
SIBERIA
Vilyuy
Lena
Angara
Lake Baikal
Aldan
Sea of Okhotsk
Amur
ALTAI MOUNTAINS
Dzungarian Gate
Eastern Steppe
GREATER KHINGAN RANGE
Karakorum
MANCHURIA
MONGOLIA
GOBI
Ili
KYZYLKUM
TIEN SHAN
SINKIANG
TARIM BASIN
TAKLA MAKAN
Syrdarya
Huang Ho
Peking
Yellow Sea
JAPAN
East China Sea
CHINA
TIBET
HIMALAYAS
Ganges
Indus
Yangtze
YUNNAN
BURMA
INDIA
Bay of Bengal
VIETNAM
South China Sea
Arabian Sea
AFGHAN-ISTAN
HINDU KUSH
IRAN
Tigris
Euphrates
SYRIA
ARABIA
Red Sea
Nile
AFRICA
Mediterranean Sea
TURKEY
Malazgirt
Amu Darya
KARA-KUM
Caspian Sea
CAUCASUS MTS.
Black Sea
Danube
ROMANIA
HUNGARY
UKRAINE
CARPATHIAN MOUNTAINS
Rhine
Steppes
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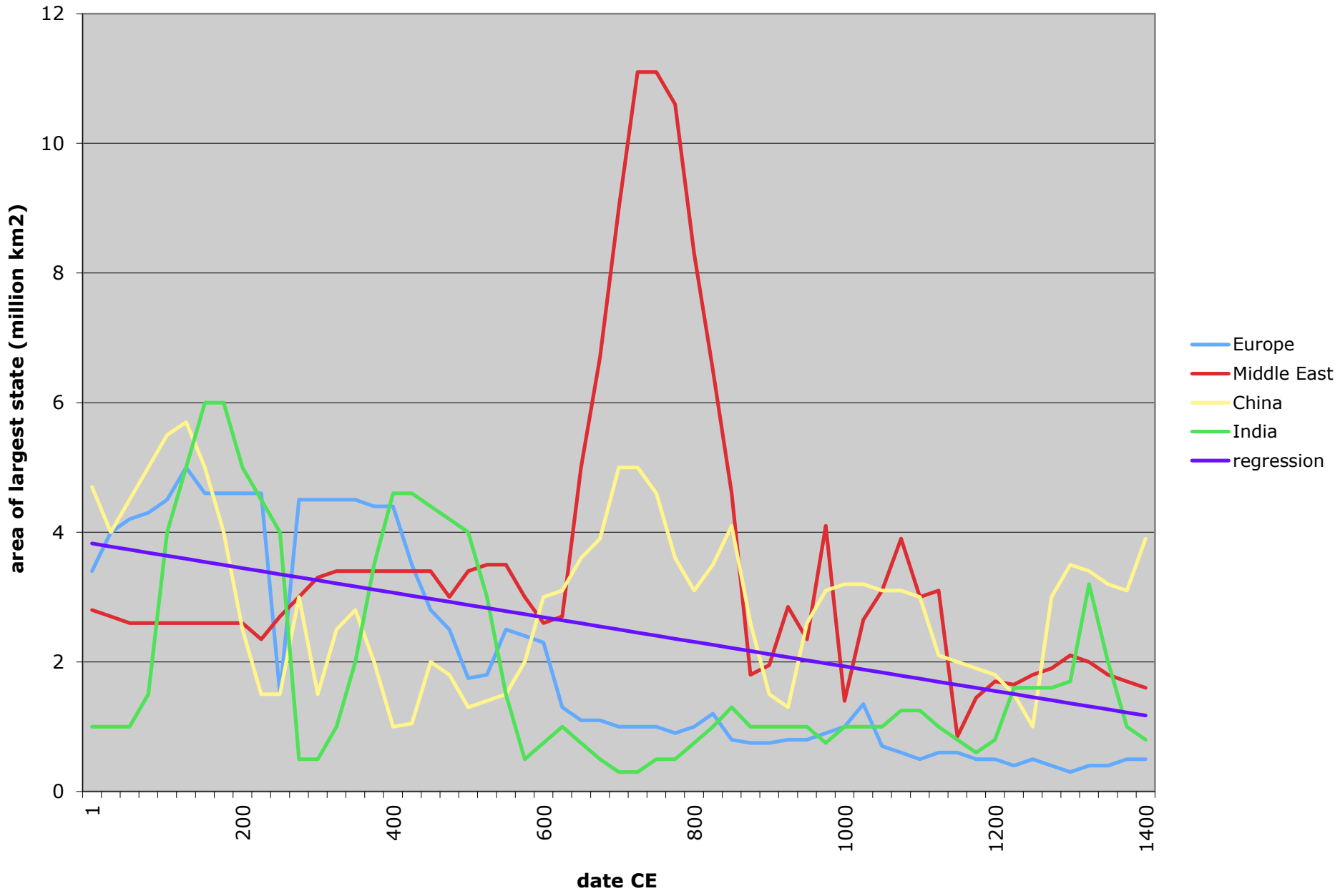
Genghis Khan and Mongol cavalry, thirteenth century AD


area of largest state (million km2)
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
1
200
400
600
800
1000
1200
1400
date CE
Europe
Middle East
China
India
regression

Catching up: top, Great Zimbabwe; bottom, Saksaywaman (Cusco)

Four phases:

1. The world of foragers (tiny)
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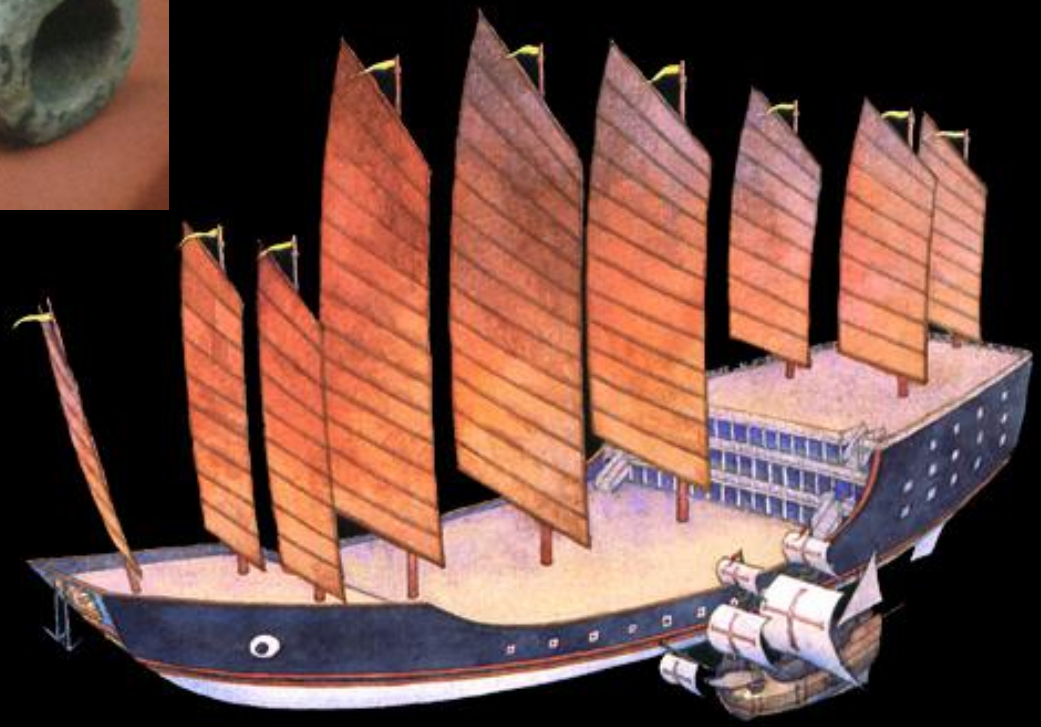
Guns and ships: left, the oldest known true gun (probably 1288, from Manchuria); right, the flagships of Zheng He (1405) and Vasco da Gama (1497)



A MING TREASURE SHIP
Perhaps 400 ft (122 m) long,
170 ft (52 m) wide

VASCO DA GAMA'S
SÃO GABRIEL
About 74 ft (23 m) long,
18 ft (5 m) wide

Mackinder's map (1904)

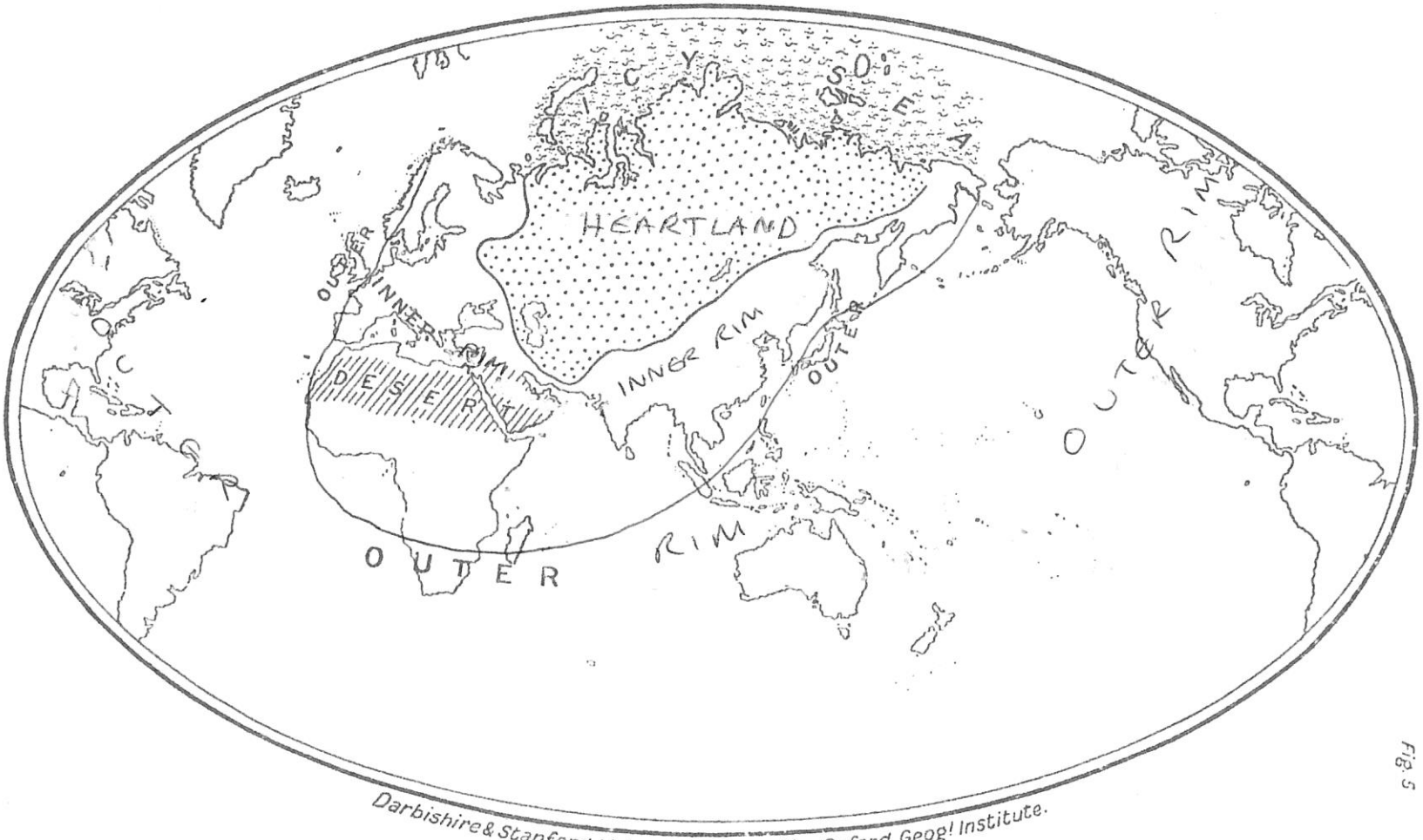
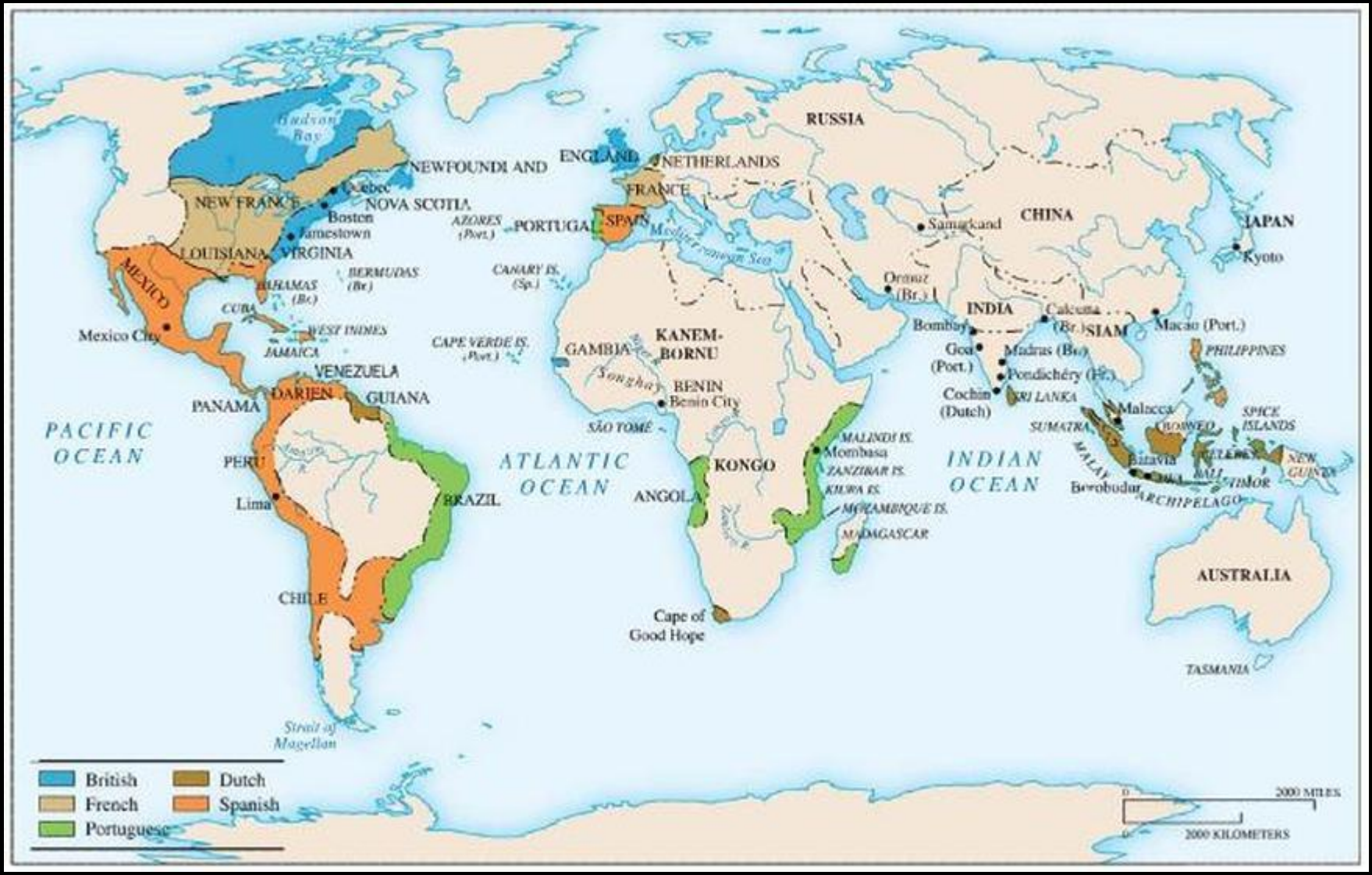


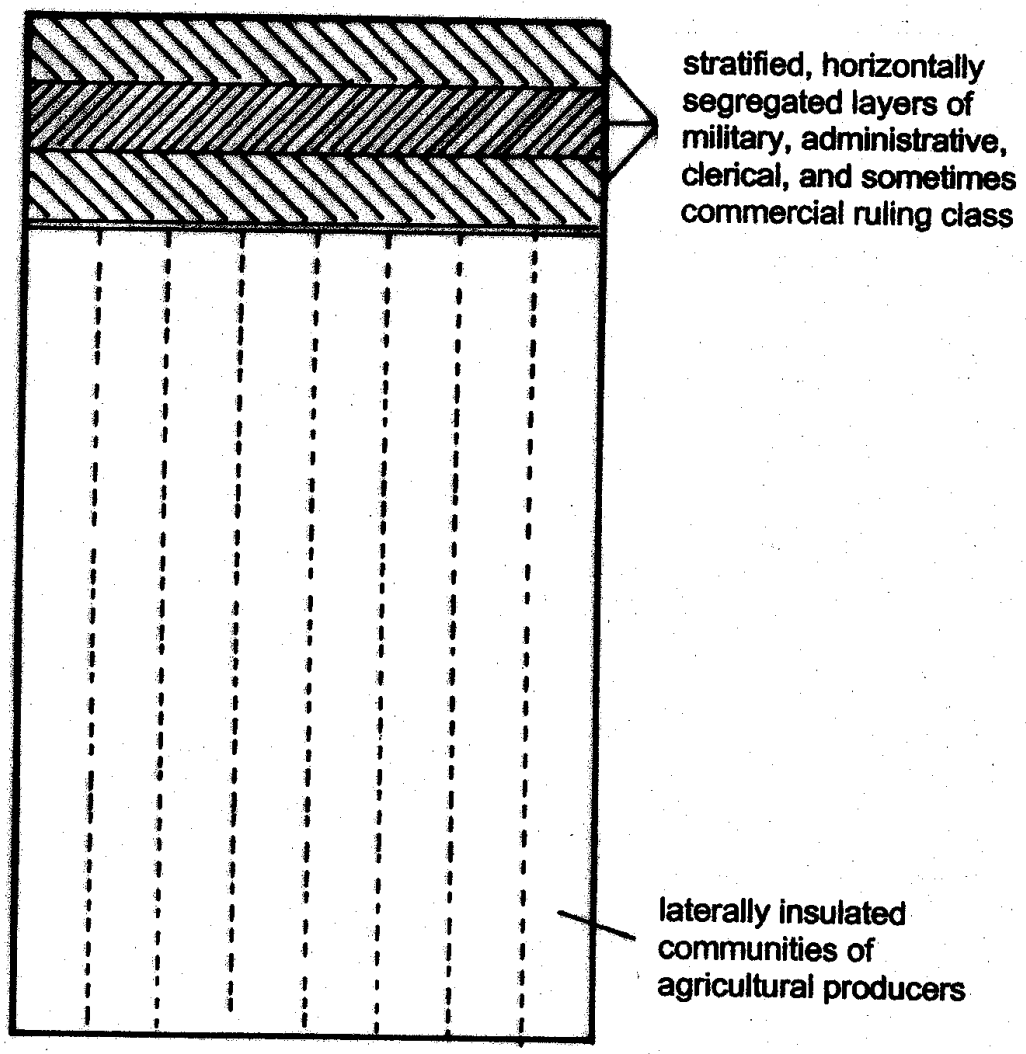
Fig. 5

European empires in 1750

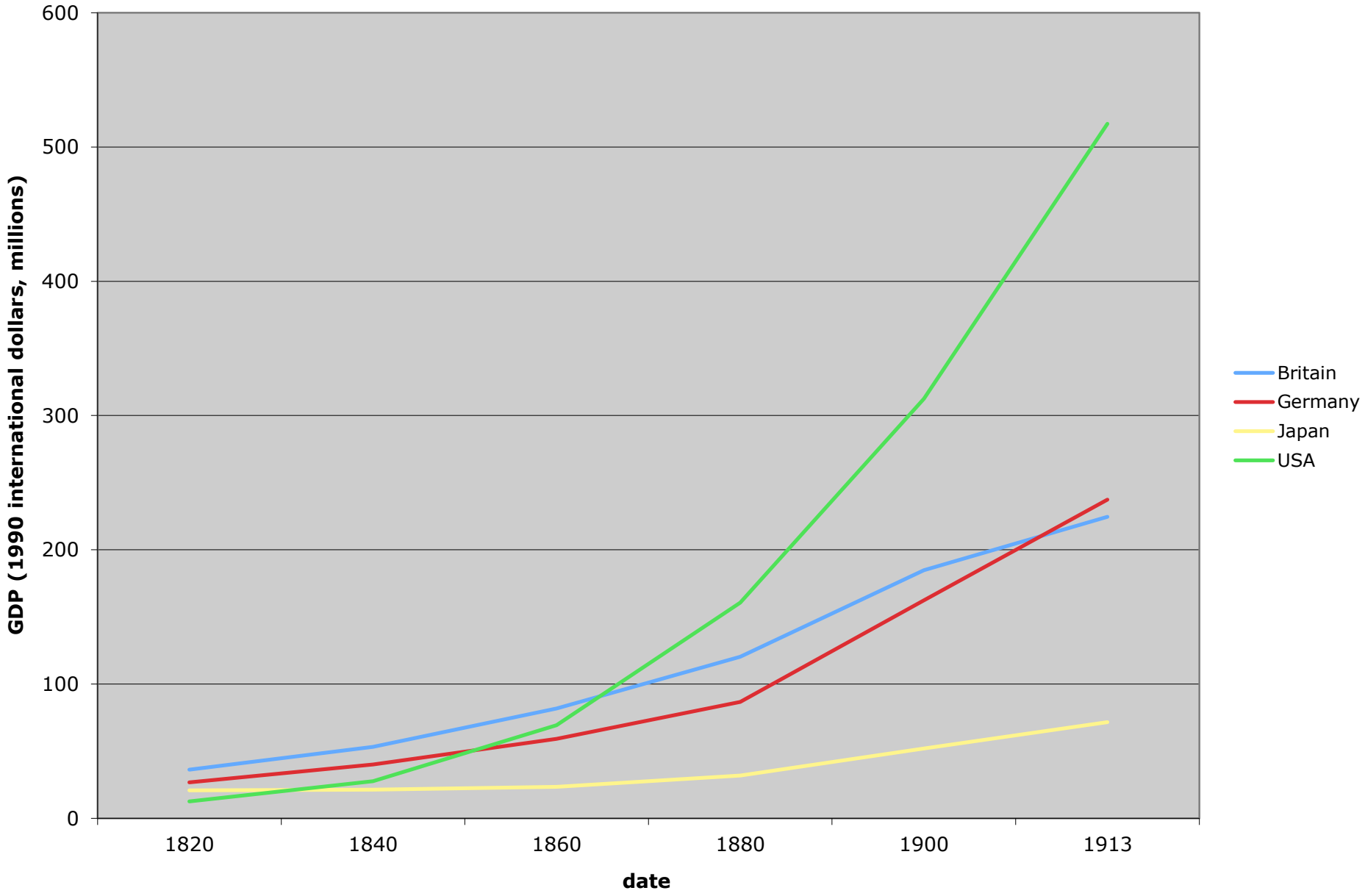


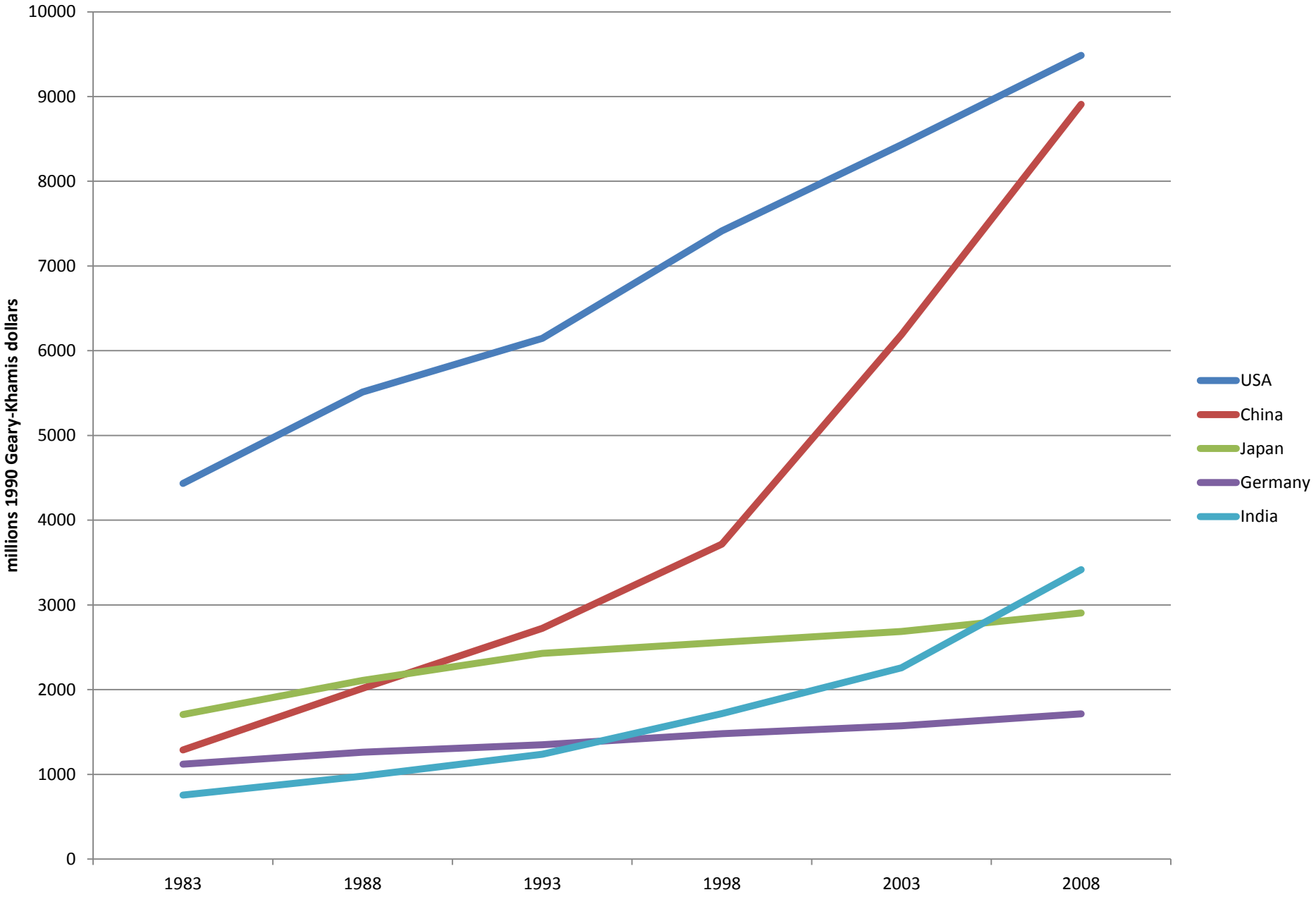
Sikhs from the British army in Tibet, 1904

The structure of agrarian society (after Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 1983)

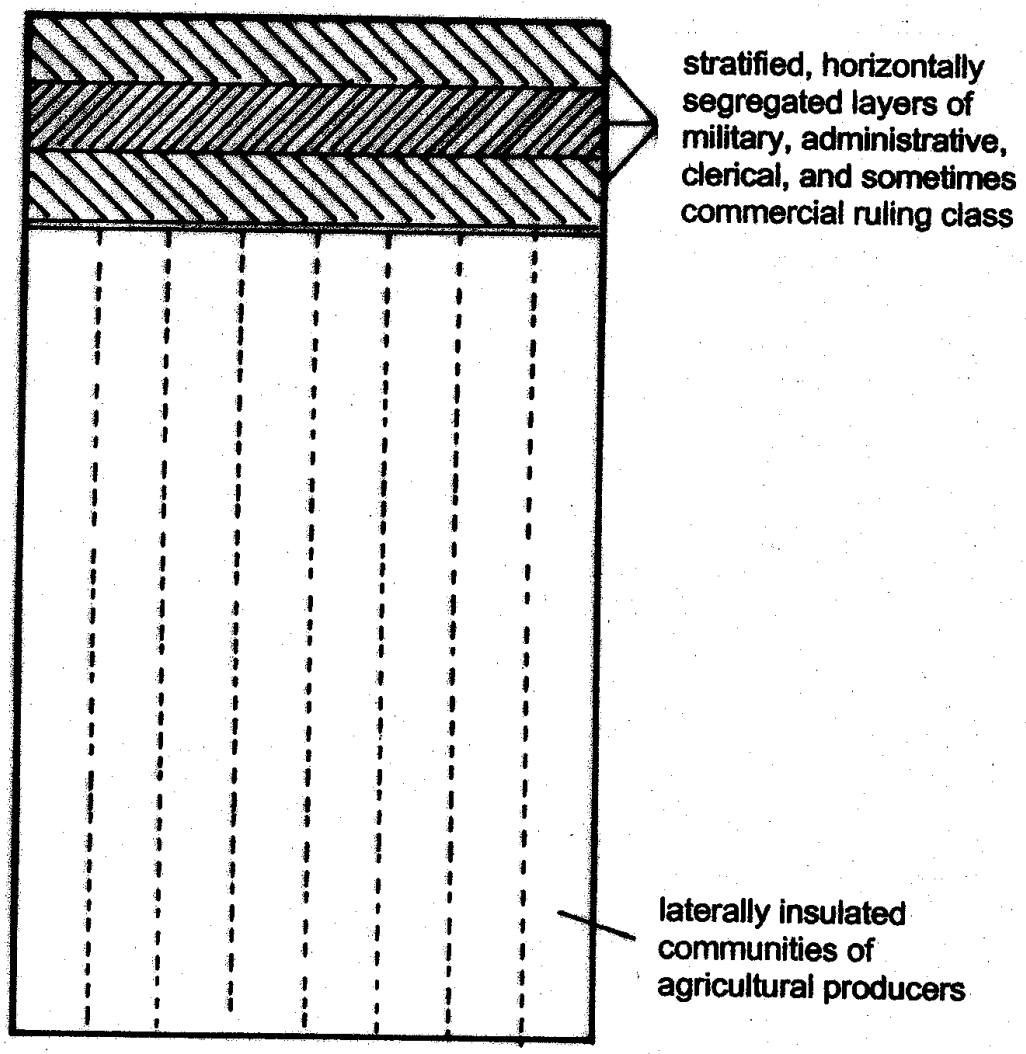


Arctic Ocean
Canada
(Dominion)
North America
Newfoundland
UK
Europe
Asia
Wolhaiwei
Pacific Ocean
Pacific Ocean
Gibraltar
Malta
Cyprus
Bermuda
Bahamas
Atlantic Ocean
Kuwait
Bahrein
Egypt
Aden
Somaliland
India
Hong Kong
Br. Honduras
Br. West Indies
Gambia
Sierra Leone
Nigeria
Gold Coast
Africa
Uganda
E. Africa
Br. Guiana
Tokelau Is.
Maldives
Ceylon
Brunei
Br. N. Borneo
Sarawak
Malaya
Singapore
Seychelles
Gilbert & Ellice Is.
Oceania
Oceania
South America
Zanzibar
Nyasaland
Chagos Arch.
N. Rhodesia
S. Rhodesia
St. Helena
Bechuanaland
Mauritius
Cook Is.
Tonga
Pitcairn
Swaziland
Basutoland
Cape Colony
Indian Ocean
Papua
Solomon Is.
Fiji Is.
Australian Colonies
Falkland Is.
New Zealand
Antarctica
British Empire in 1898
British Territory


600
500
400
300
200
100
0
GDP (1990 international dollars, millions)
1820
1840
1860
1880
1900
1913
date
Britain
Germany
Japan
USA


10000
9000
8000
7000
6000
5000
4000
3000
2000
1000
0
millions 1990 Geary-Khamis dollars
1983
1988
1993
1998
2003
2008
USA
China
Japan
Germany
India

The structure of agrarian society (after Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 1983)



Mackinder's map (1904)

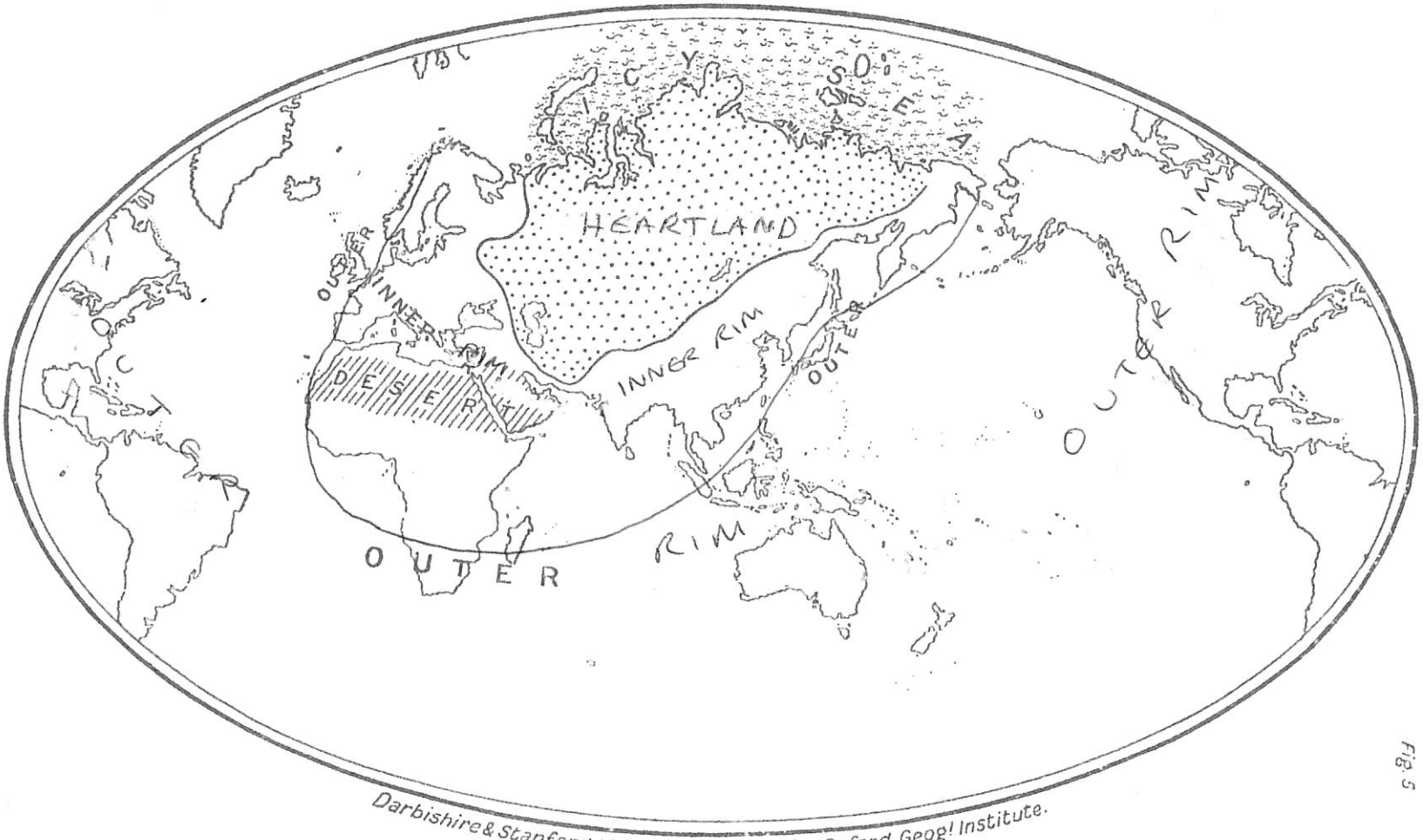


Fig. 5

Two Questions:

1. Can we identify really long-term patterns in the system of great powers?

   Yes

2. If so, can we (a) identify the forces underlying these patterns, (b) explain them, and (c) forecast where the trends will take us next?

   Yes

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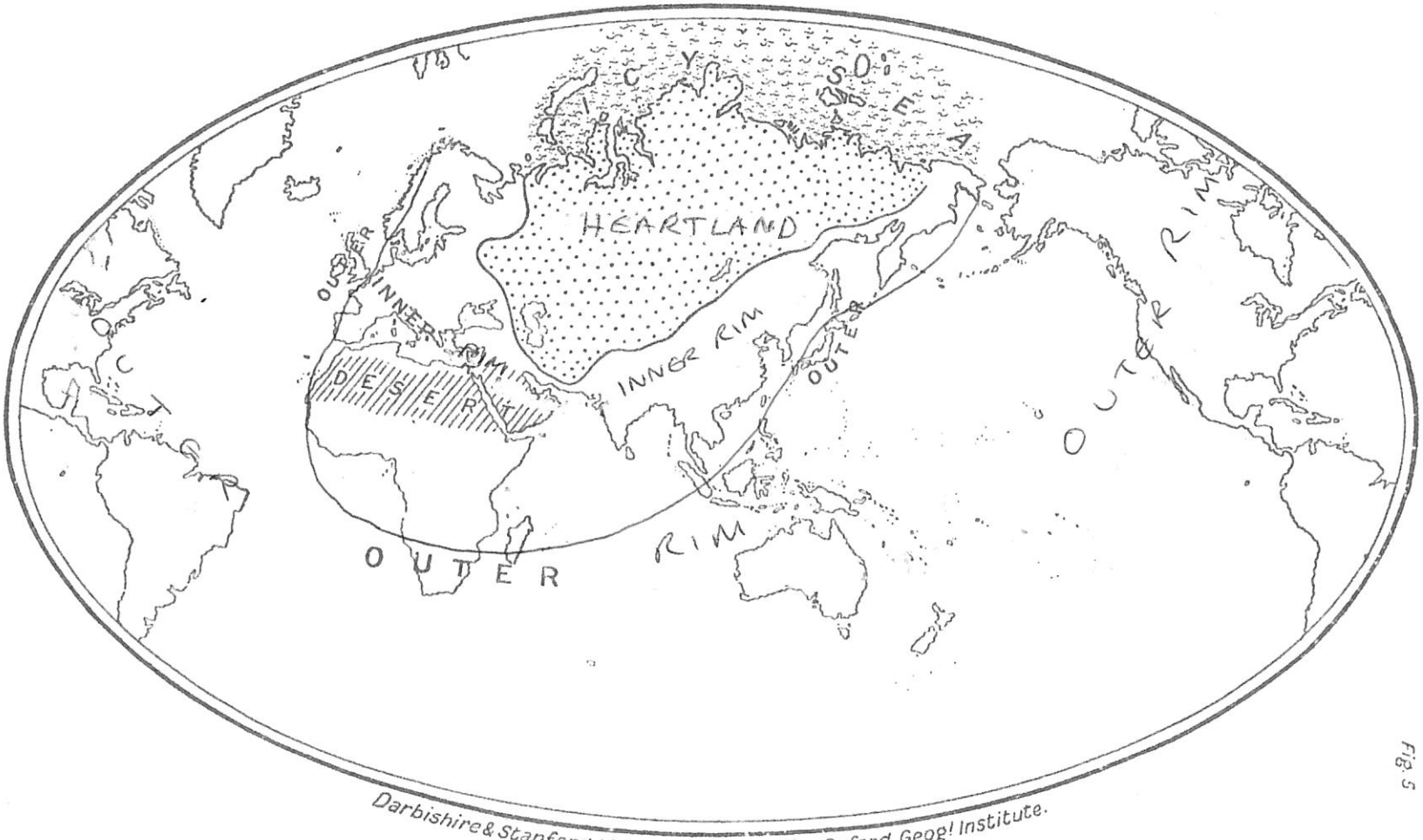

Fig. 5