

The Neolithic Revolution and the Environment in Ancient Sumer

ENV288 – Environmental History I
Department of Environmental Studies
Masaryk University
Spring 2016

Neolithic revolution



Was Agriculture the Greatest Mistake in Human History?



1. Decline in available wild food

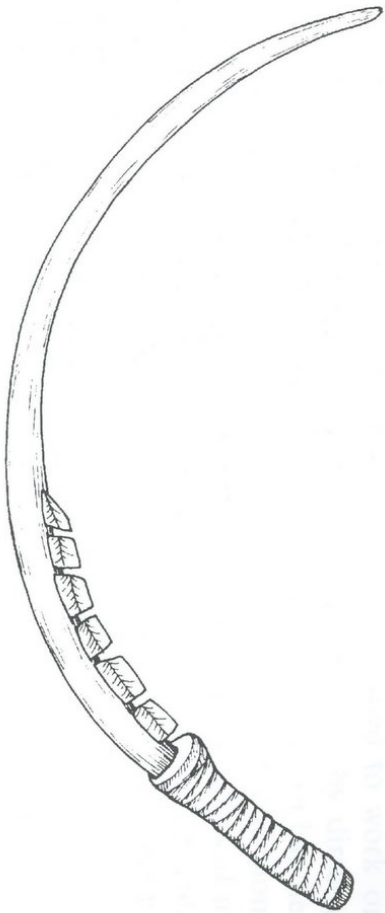


2. Climate change – expansion of wild plants



Wild barley, Jordan Valley, Israel

3. New technologies

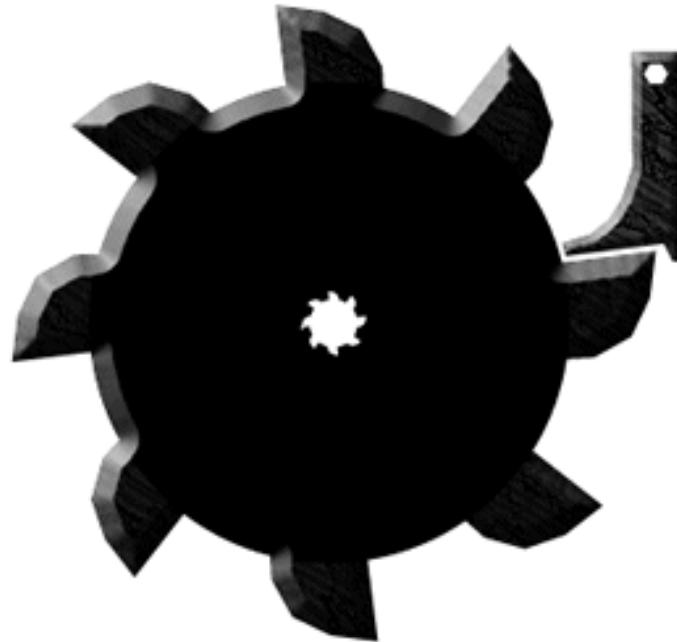


Sickle

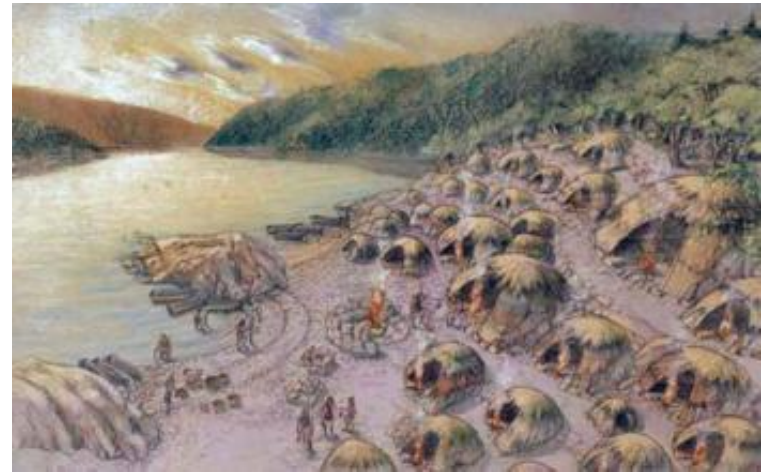


Reed basket – Fayum, Egypt, 5,000 BC

4. Rising population densities – ratchet effect

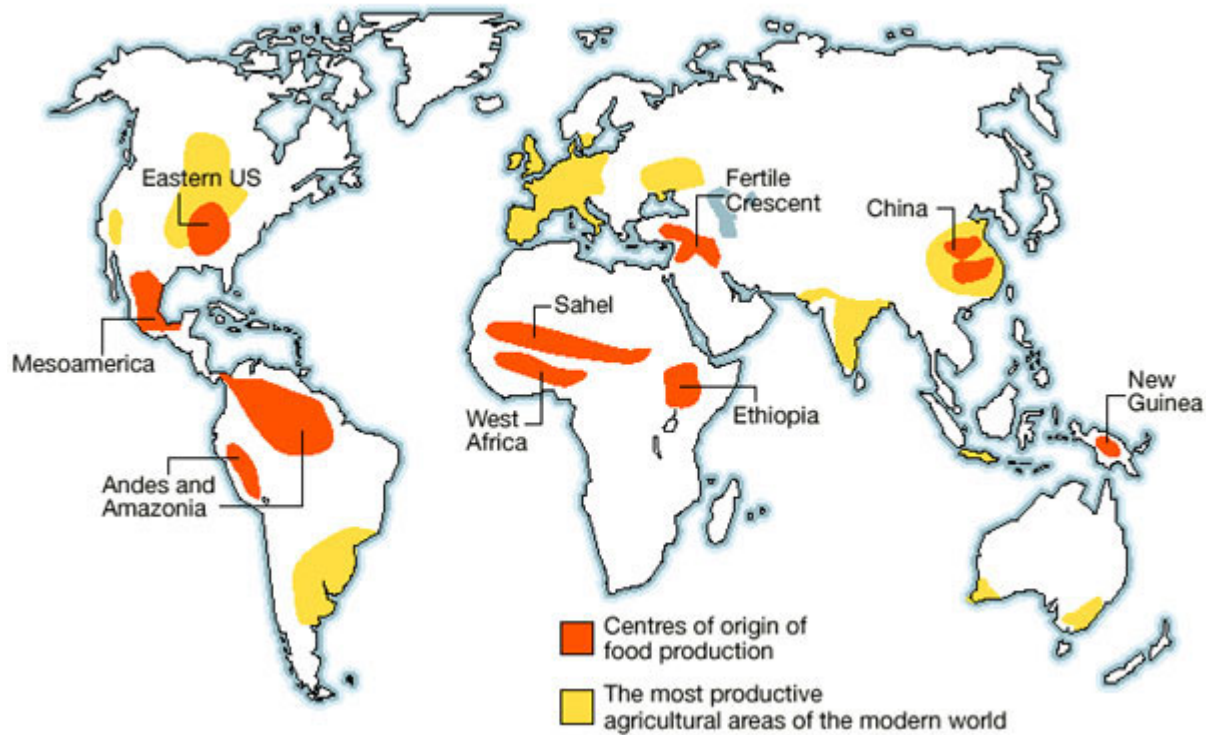


Lepensky vir, Serbia

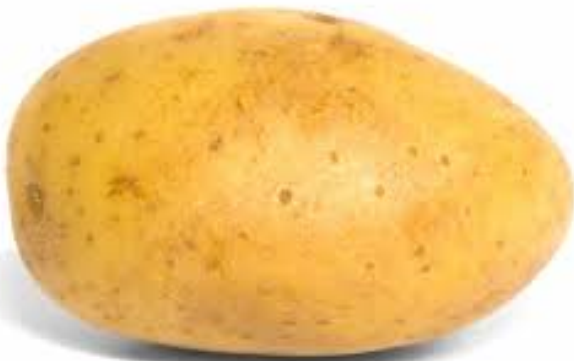


9,000-7,000 B.C.

The geographic origins of agriculture



Americas



Fertile crescent



The Fertile Crescent “Package”

Grains: two kinds of wheat, barley



Pulses: chickpeas, peas, lentils

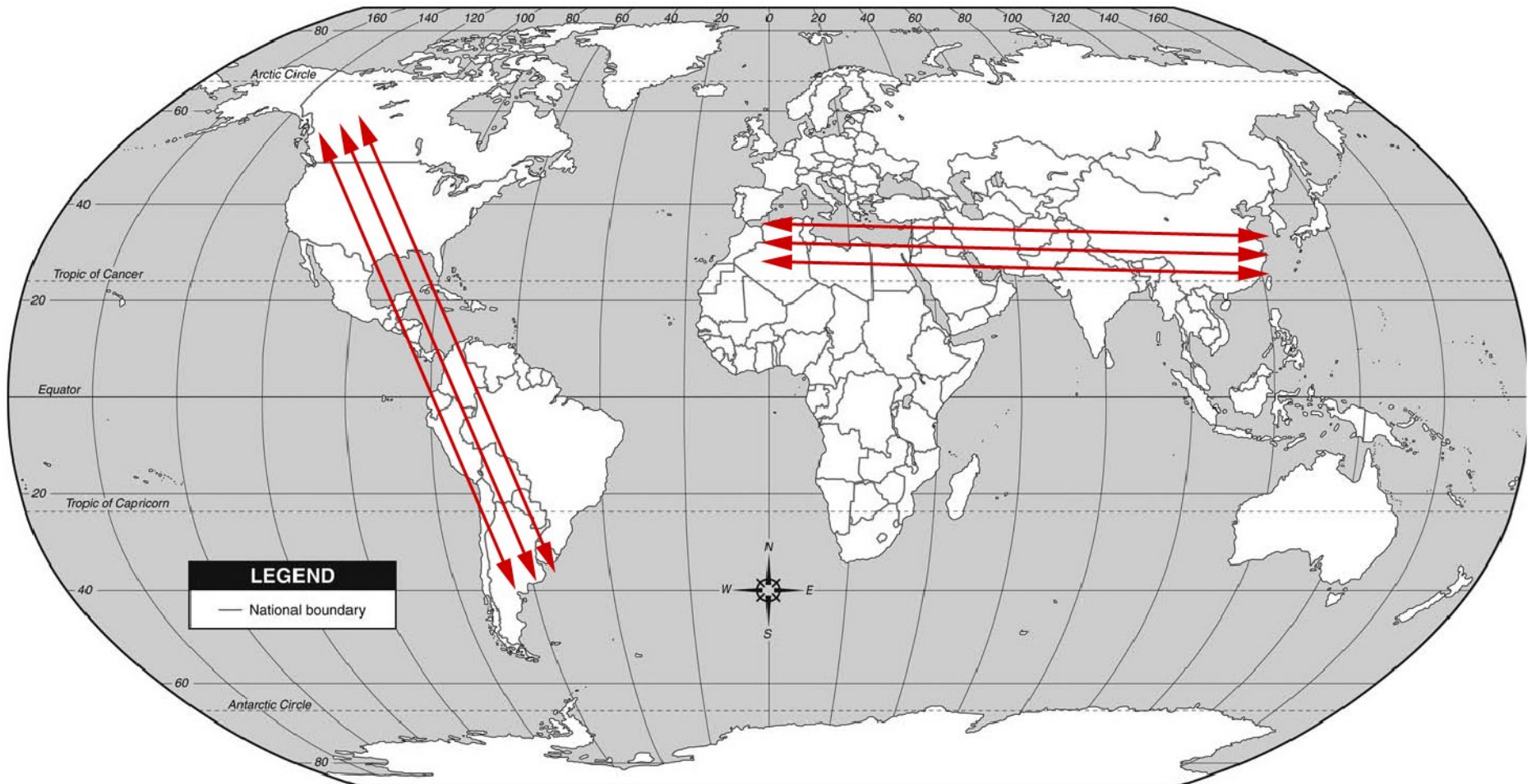


Flax

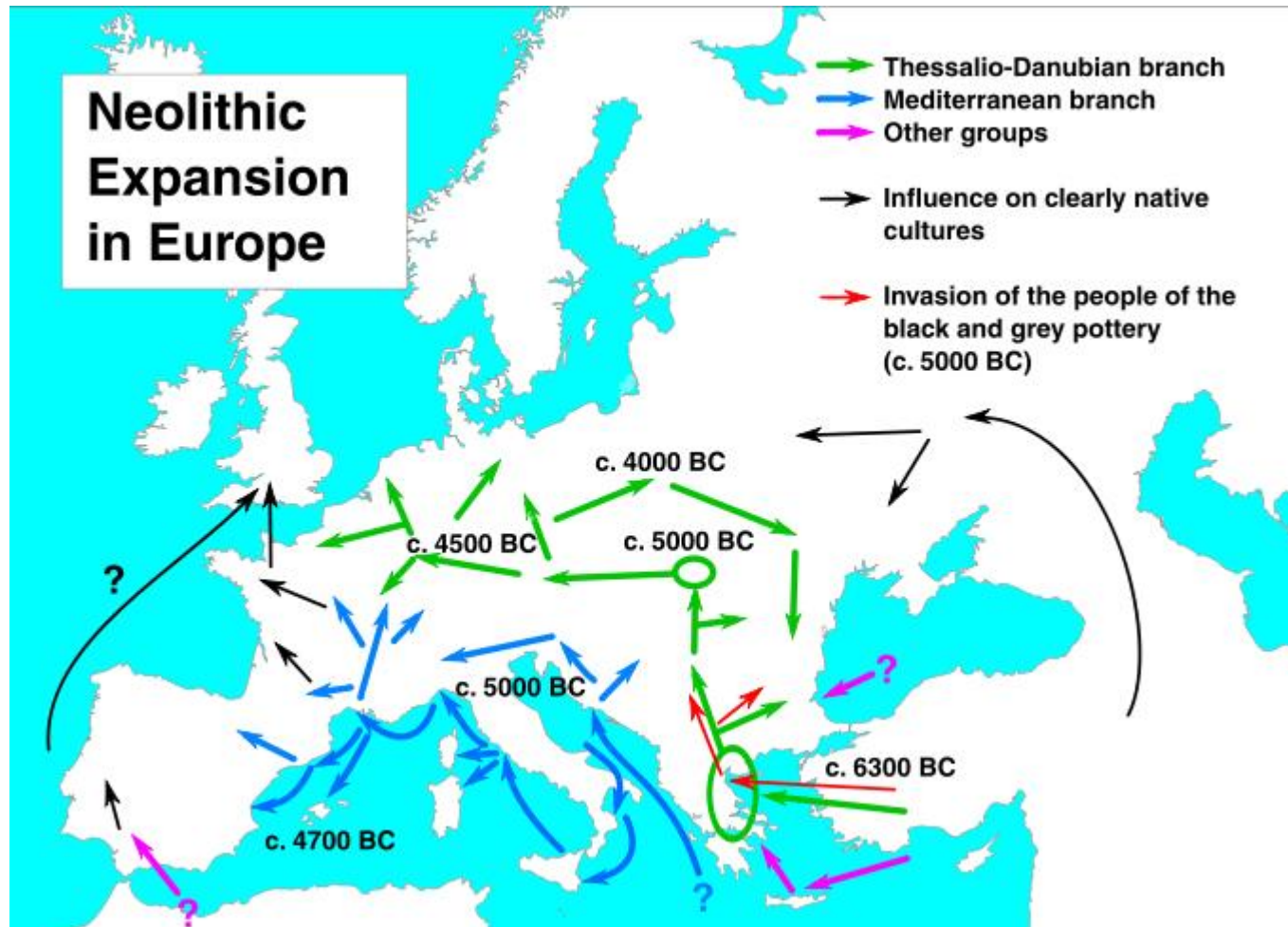


Plus sheep, goats, cattle

Spread of agriculture



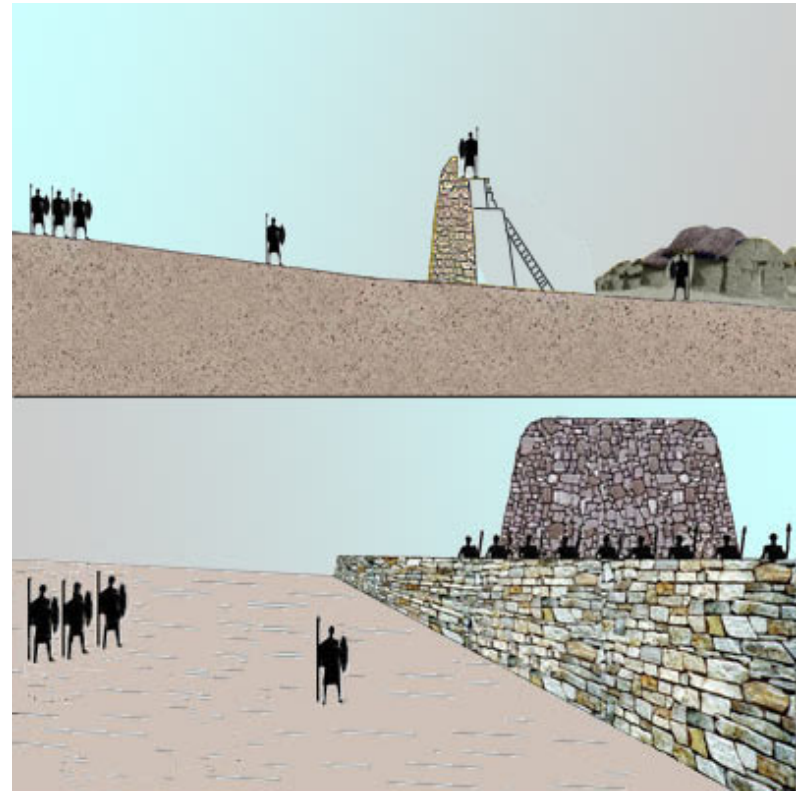
Spread of agriculture in Europe





Steppe vegetation, South Moravia

The dawn of civilization in the Near East



Jericho – 7,500 B.C.

Mesopotamia





Uruk



Ur

Ur



The Changing Environment in Writing



Wheat vs. Barley

For more on environmental collapses see

- Butzer, Karl W. "Collapse, environment, and society." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 109.10 (2012): 3632-3639.
- Diamond, Jared M. 2005. *Collapse: how societies choose to fail or succeed*. New York: Viking.