

Karma & Rebirth 2:

Historical Context



Religion & History

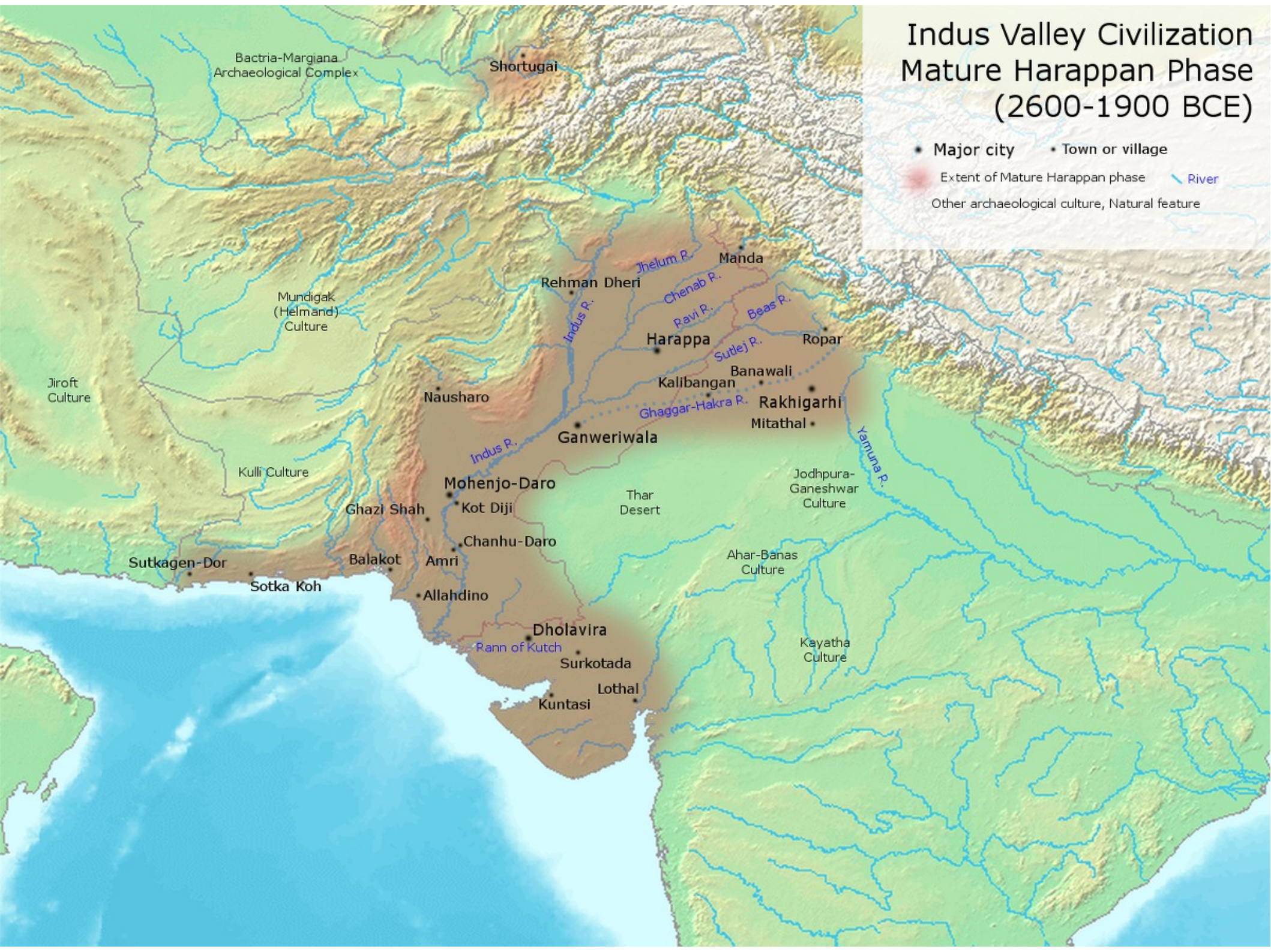
- Religions are often anti-historical
- We should not fear facts
- History gives context
- It gives us a framework to question assumptions

Indian History

- Ancient India was not “Hindu”
- Two streams: śramaṇas and brāhmaṇas
- Indus valley: extensive civilization with Indian roots (3300–1300 BCE)

Indus Valley Civilization Mature Harappan Phase (2600-1900 BCE)

- Major city
- Town or village
- Extent of Mature Harappan phase
- River
- Other archaeological culture, Natural feature

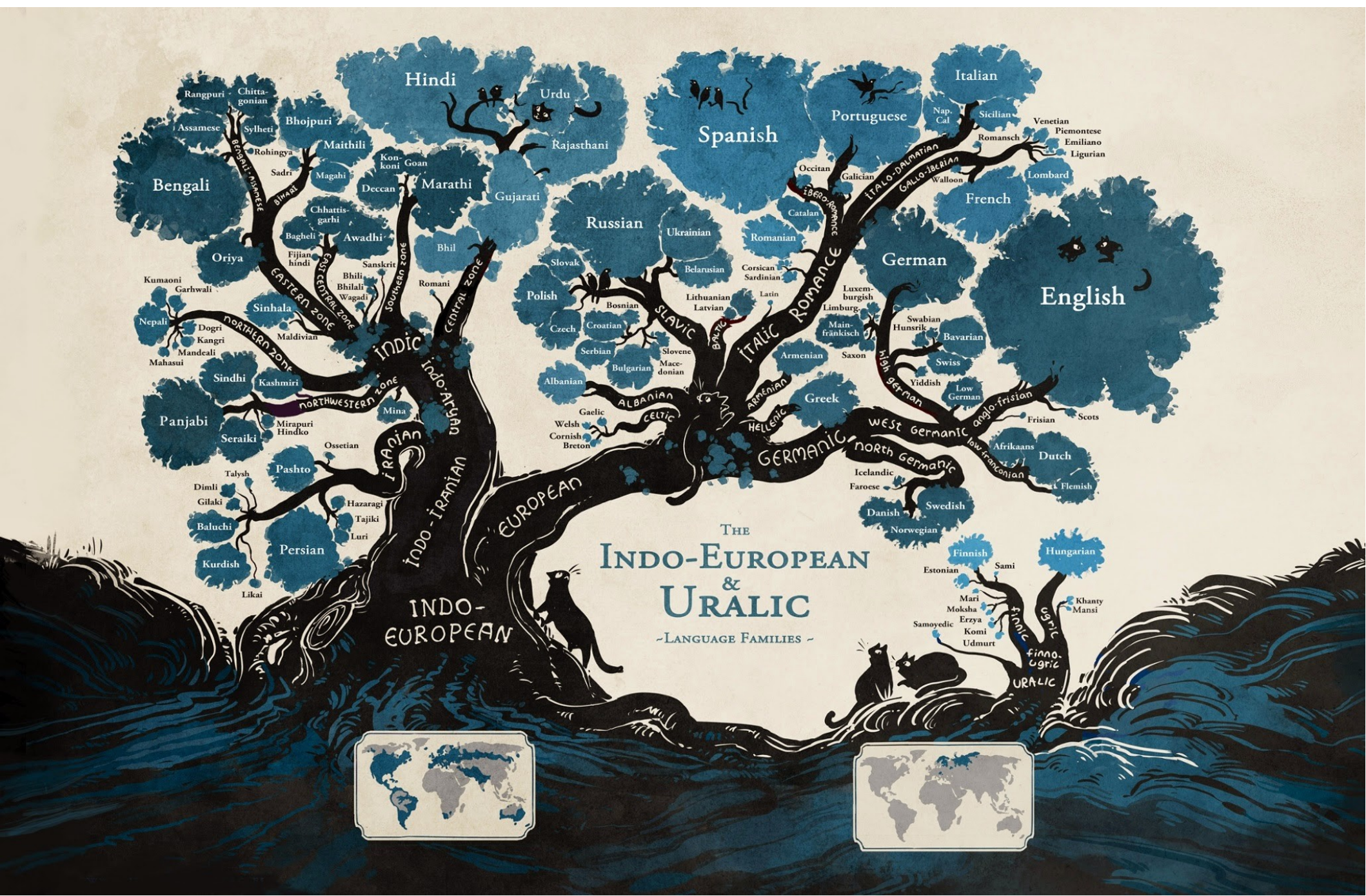


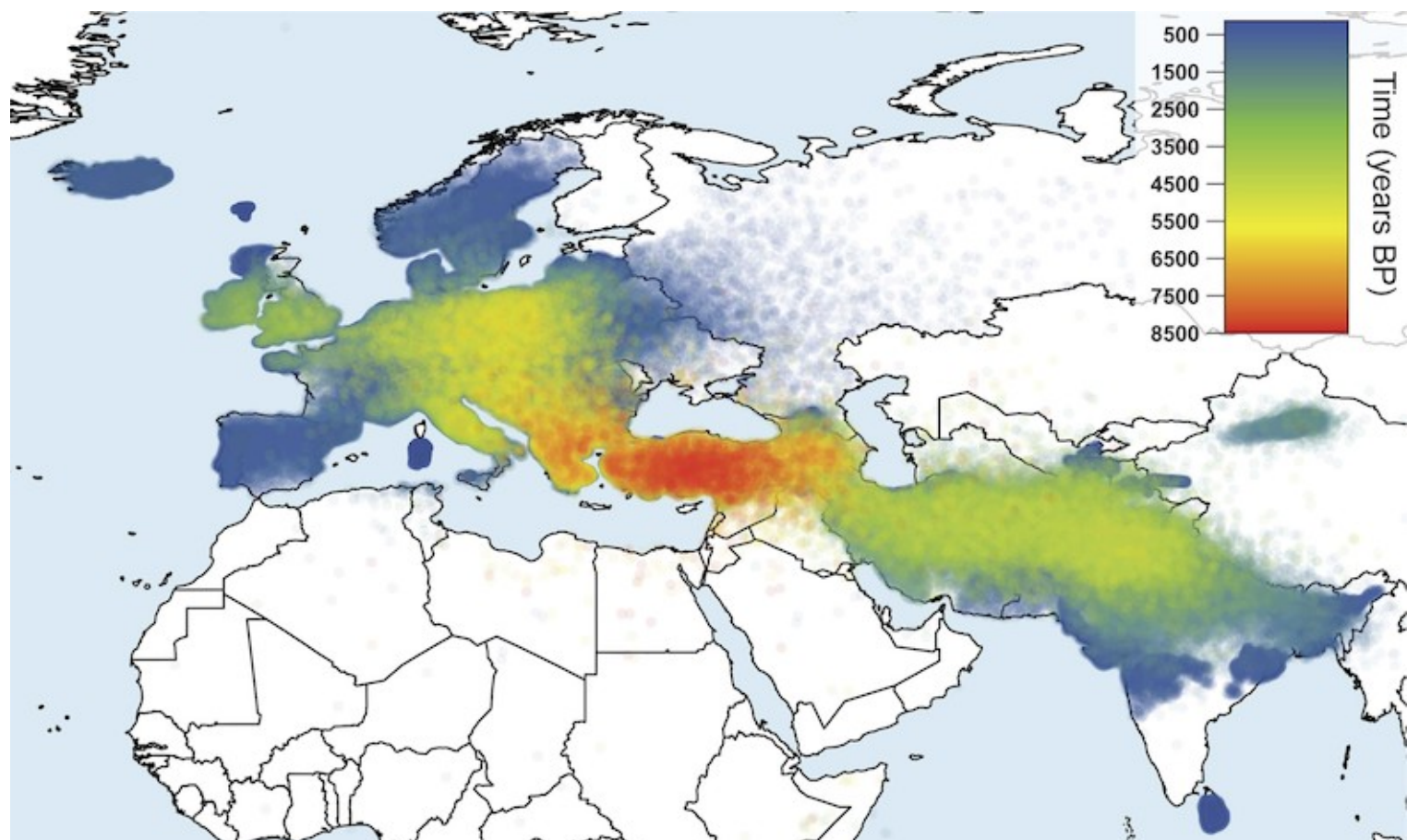




After the Indus

- Aryan peoples arrive from circa 1500 BCE?
- Horses
- A gradual movement of disparate but culturally linked tribes.





Classical Vedic civilization:

Kuru

- Vedic verses composed from c. 1500 BCE?
- Maintained in jealously guarded “family” lineages.
- Kuru kingdom formed c. 1200 – c. 850 BCE

Late Vedic Period (1100-500 BCE)

MAJOR KINGDOM

OTHER KINGDOM/TRIBE

Approximate extent of major kingdom

Approximate extent of Late Vedic culture

Śākṃhā (theological school: approximate location)

River (Sanskrit name)
Natural feature, etc.

★ Capital (royal settlement)



Kuru culture: a unified veda

- The Kuru kings collected the “family” texts and wrapped them in “unity” chapters (1, 9, and 10), creating the first large-scale literary work of India.
- Ṛg Veda was maintained in oral tradition for 3,000 years.
- Ṛg Veda is mainly hymns of praise for gods, etc., with some philosophy in later books.

Action in the Veda

- The Vedas consist of effective supplications: God is subject to the ritual.
- Frazer's distinction between magic and religion.
- The ritual is a *karma*.
- **Connection** between self and cosmos, and **control** over both.

After the Veda: Upaniṣads

- Later Vedic literature expanded on ritual and symbolic significance of Vedas.
- The Upanishads signify a shift from ritual to contemplation and metaphysics, with a profoundly questioning and explorative spirit.
- The Self is the same as the cosmic brahman: *tad tvam asi*.



Ya evam veda: one who knows this

- Upanishads emphasize correct understanding.
- Innovations often introduced by non-brahmans.
- Ascetic ideal.
- Samsara and liberation.