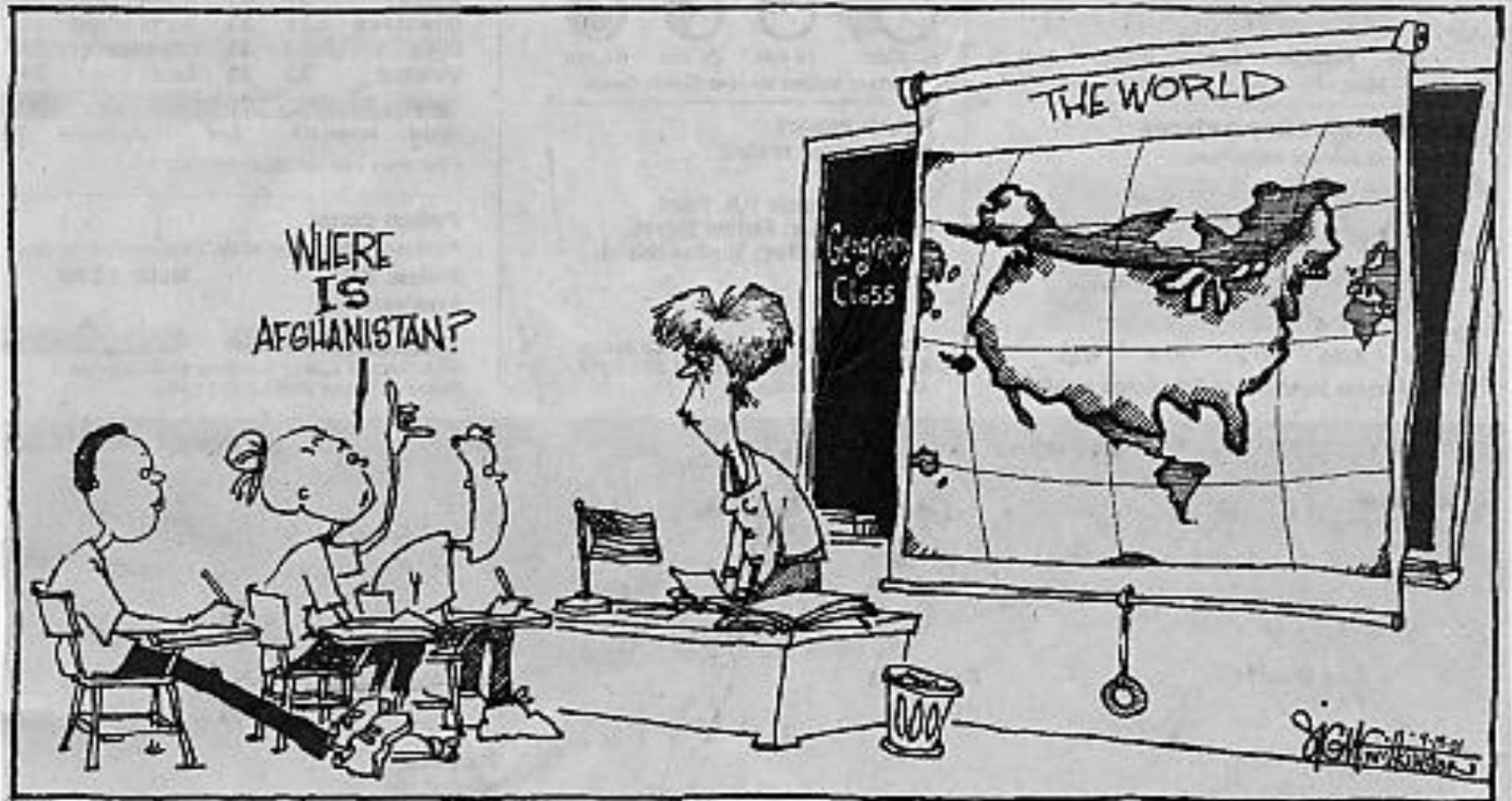


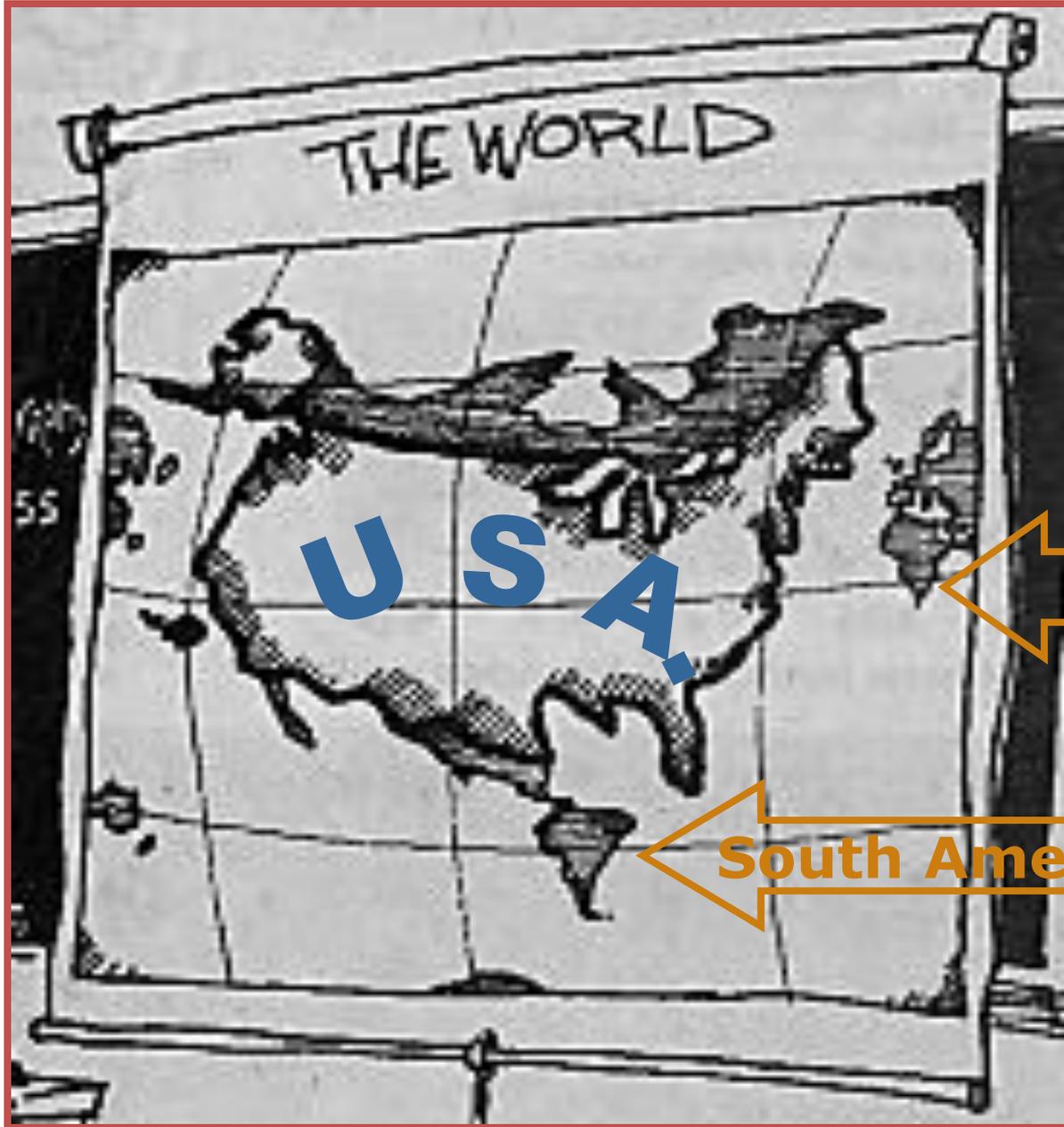
# **Big Geography**

## **The Geography of Global History**



We need a mental picture of the whole world, not just certain parts of it. This is “big geography.”





**U S A.**

**Africa**

**South America**

The largest context of human history is the entire planet.

70.9 % of the surface of the earth is water.

Human beings, however, are a land-dwelling species.

We call the biggest land areas continents.

**How many continents  
are there?**

**Nine?**

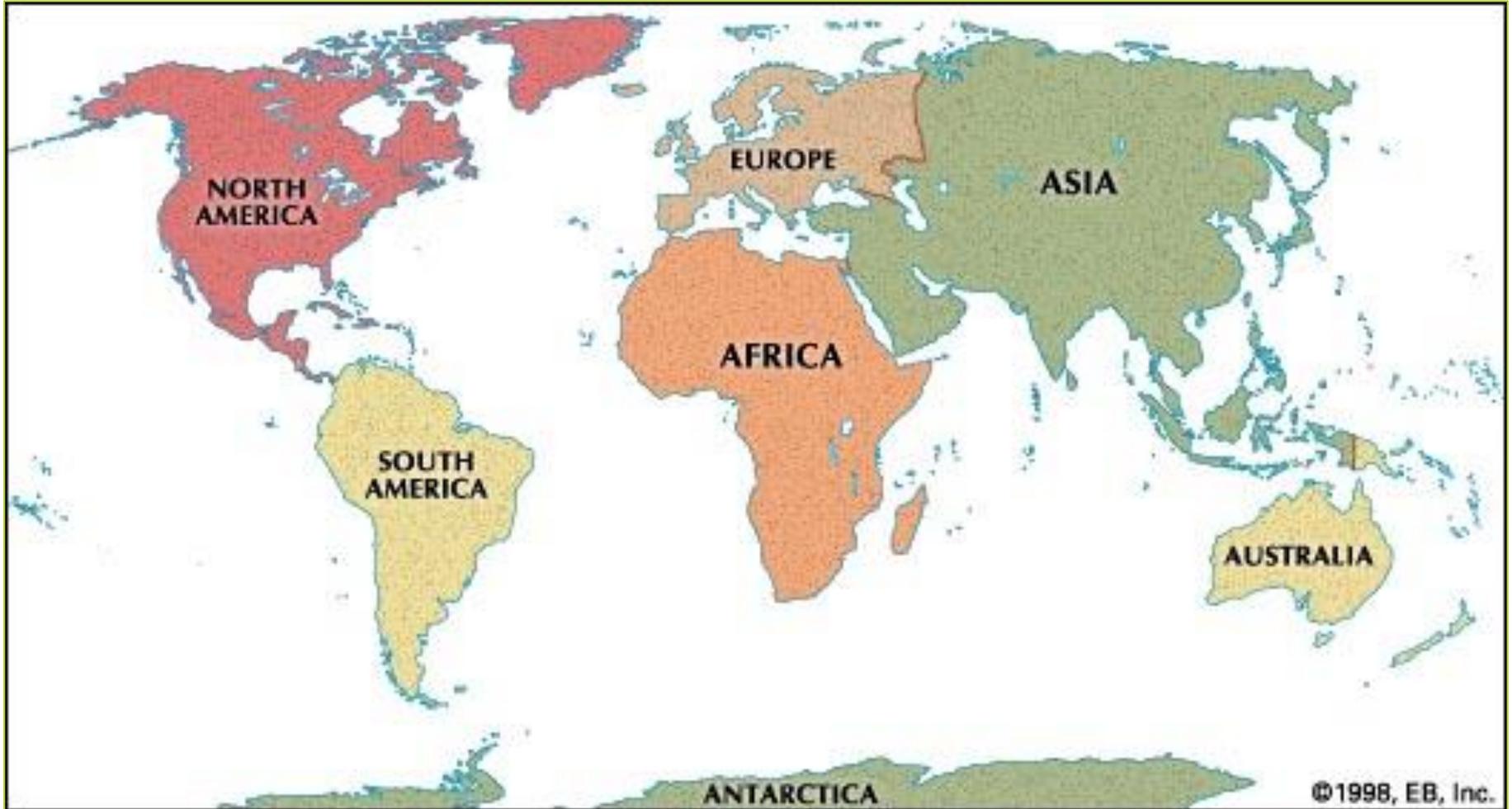
**One?**

**Seven?**

**Five?**

**Four?**

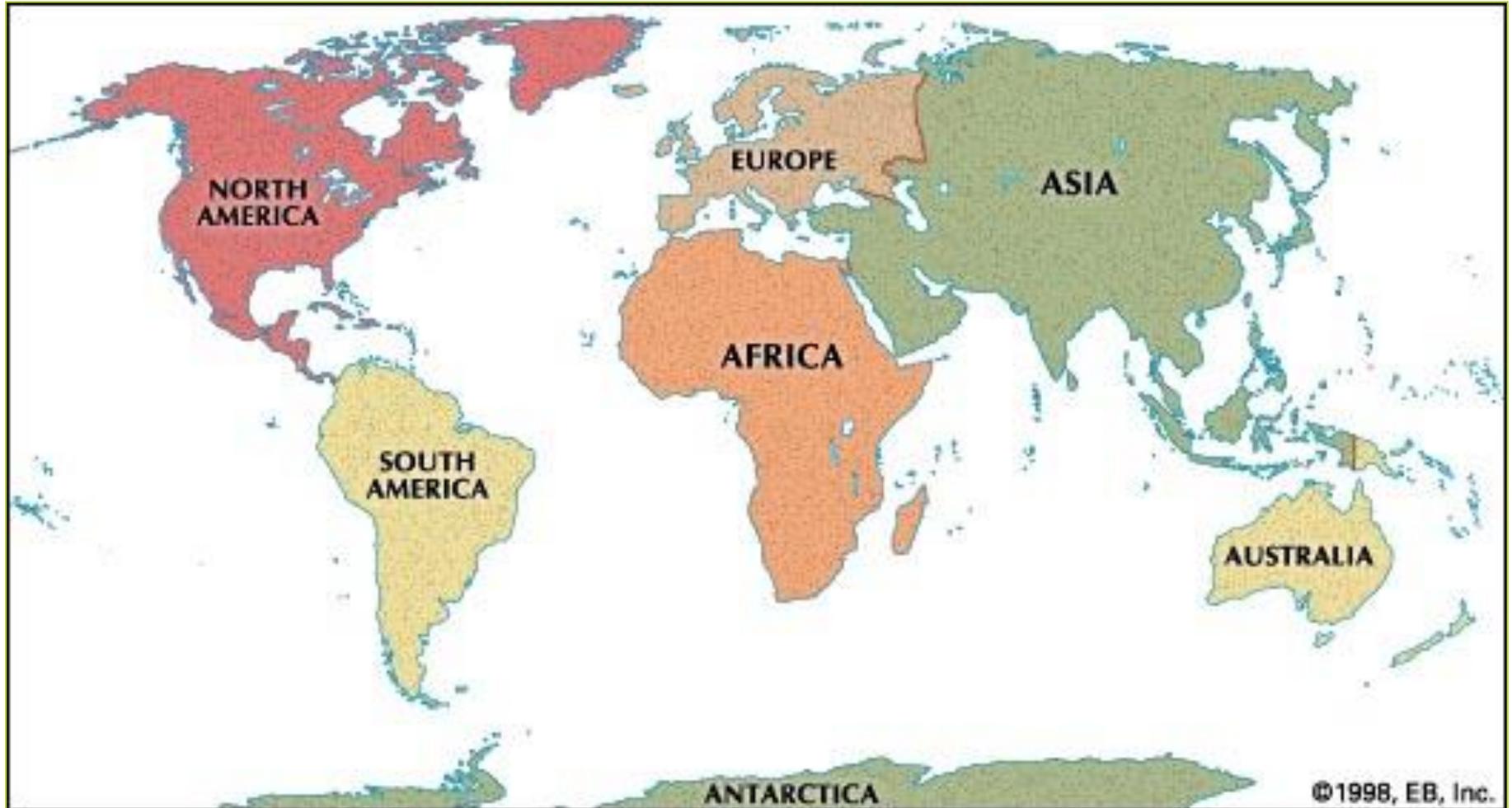
But what IS a  
continent?



**The conventional map of seven continents**

# Conventional definition of a continent

A large mass of land surrounded, or nearly surrounded, by water.



**If that is the conventional definition, why are Europe and Asia separate continents?**

Since the nineteenth century, most scholars have accepted the Ural Mountains as part of the dividing Line between “Europe” and “Asia” as continents.



**The Urals as a border between continents?  
They are not that impressive.**



Ural Mts.

EUROPE

ASIA

Another part of the  
dividing line:  
Bosphorus and  
Dardanelles  
(Straits)



**Istanbul**

**Bosphorus**

**Dardanelles**

**What significance have the Bosphorus and Dardanelles had as a line dividing peoples from one another in history?**



**Almost  
none!**



**The Ottoman Turkish Empire about 1550.  
Its territory cut straight across the  
Bosporus and Dardanelles.**



**Here's a highway bridge across the Bosphorus.  
Today, you can drive from "Asia" to "Europe" in a  
few minutes.**



# So, why is Europe a continent?



**European scholars of the nineteenth century decided that it should be one.**

**One of the benefits of having power in the world is that you get to name things!**

The dividing line between “Europe” and “Asia” is not something that is “natural.” That is, it does not exist as a fact of the natural world.

Many geographers have therefore been willing to unite the two regions as a single continent called “Eurasia.”

# Asia + Europe = Eurasia



**But is Africa  
separated from  
Eurasia by a wide  
ocean?**

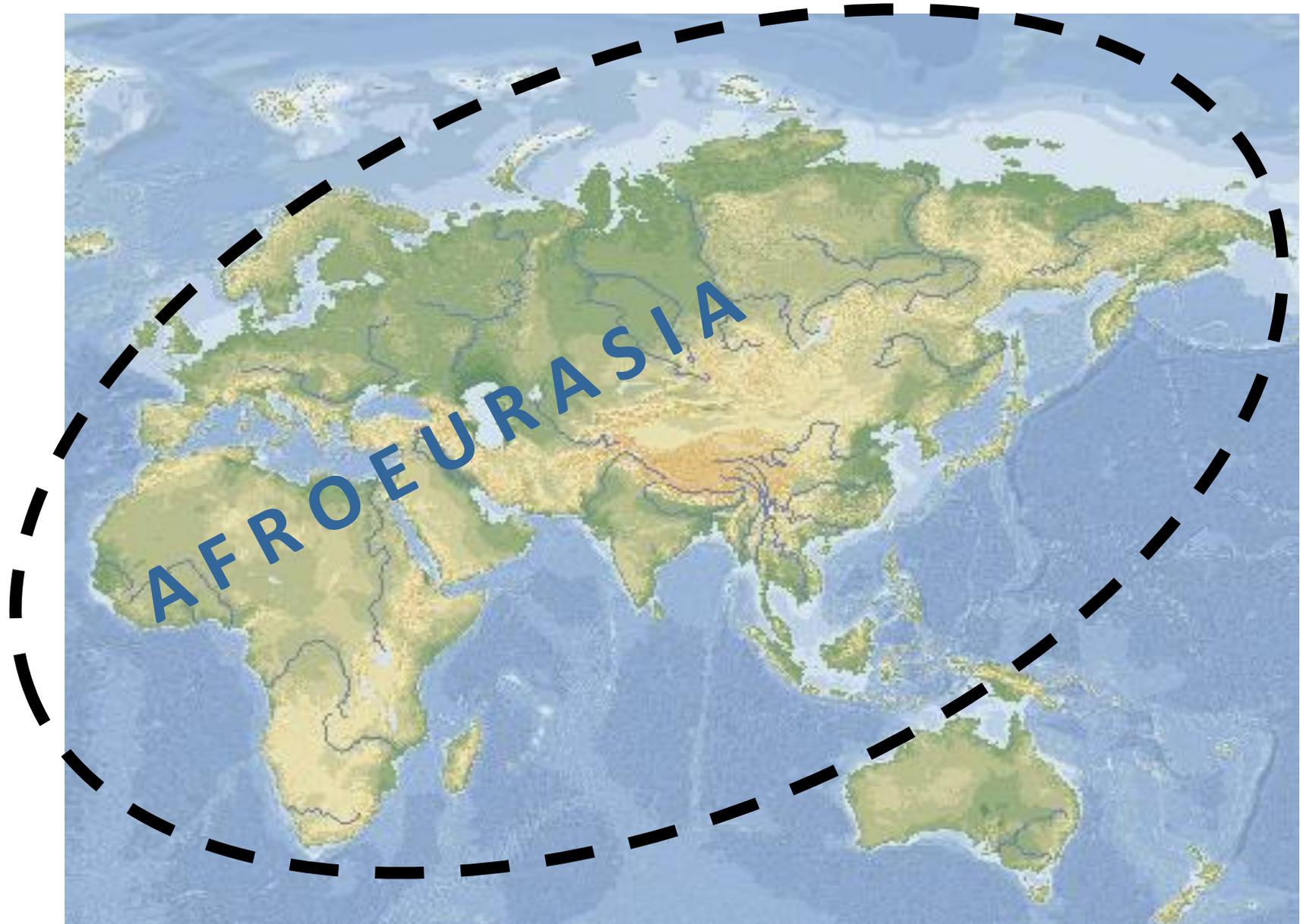
**No!**

**Why not think of  
Eurasia and Africa  
together as a single  
“supercontinent?”**

**Let’s call it  
“Afroeurasia.”**



# Africa + Asia + Europe = Afroeurasia



Think of Afroeurasia as having some seas “inside” it.



**Black Sea**  
**Caspian Sea**  
**Mediterranean Sea**  
**Persian Gulf**  
**Red Sea**

**You figure out  
which is which?**

**But is it possible  
to think of North  
and South  
America as ONE  
continent?**





**North and South America can also be seen as one continent. Try to think of the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea as bodies of water “inside” the Americas.**

# So, how many continents?

## **Traditional Continents = 7:**

- **Africa**
- **Asia**
- **Europe**
- **Australia**
- **North America**
- **South America**
- **Antarctica**

## **Alternative Continents = 4:**

- **Afroeurasia**
- **Americas**
- **Antarctica**
- **Australia**

One of the big geographical features of Afroeurasia is the Great Arid Zone. This is the belt of arid or semi-arid land that extends nearly across Afroeurasia.



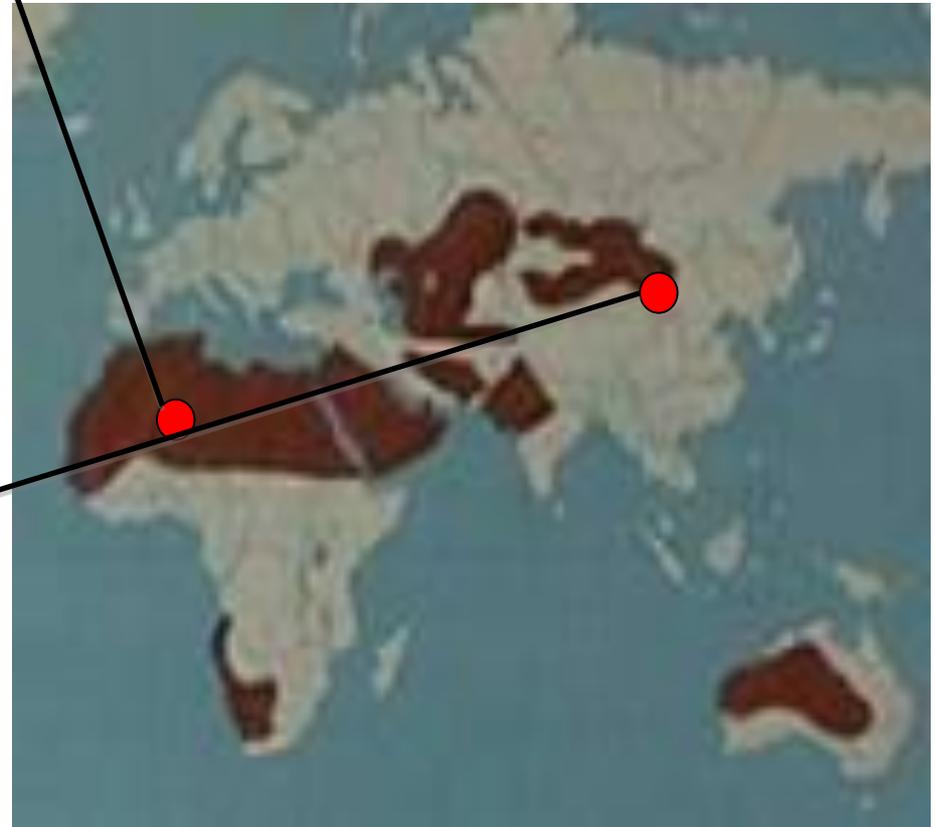


**Extreme dryness**  
**Ahaggar Mts., Sahara Desert**



**Semi-aridity**  
**Grassy steppes of Mongolia**

Scenes in the  
Great Arid  
Zone of  
Afroeurasia



Historically, peoples who herd animals as a way of life have inhabited many parts of the Great Arid Zone. These herders are pastoral nomads, that is, they move with their herds or flocks from pasture to pasture.

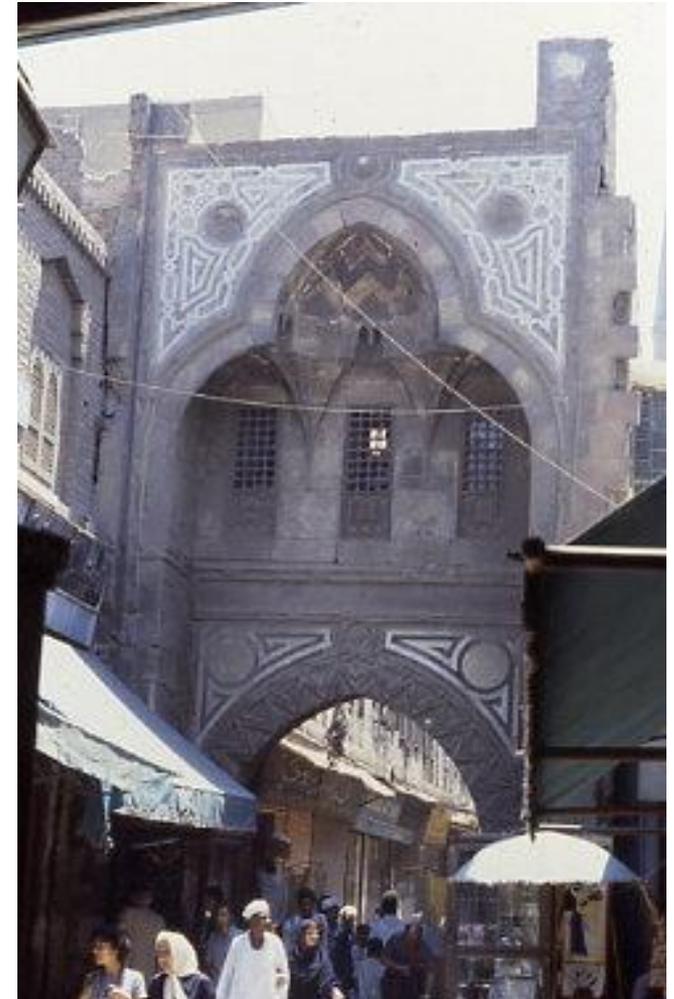


**Herders in Mongolia**

**A major theme in world history has been the dynamic relations between pastoral nomadic peoples of the Great Arid Zone...**



**...and peoples who have been farmers or city-dwellers.**



**Nomadic peoples of the Great Arid Zone both traded and clashed with farming and city-dwelling peoples who lived adjacent to the Great Arid Zone.**

**One of the greatest clashes was the attacks of Mongol nomads on cities of Eurasia in the 13th century.**



# The Eleven Seas of Afroeurasia

They made it easier for people to communicate by water across Afroeurasia.

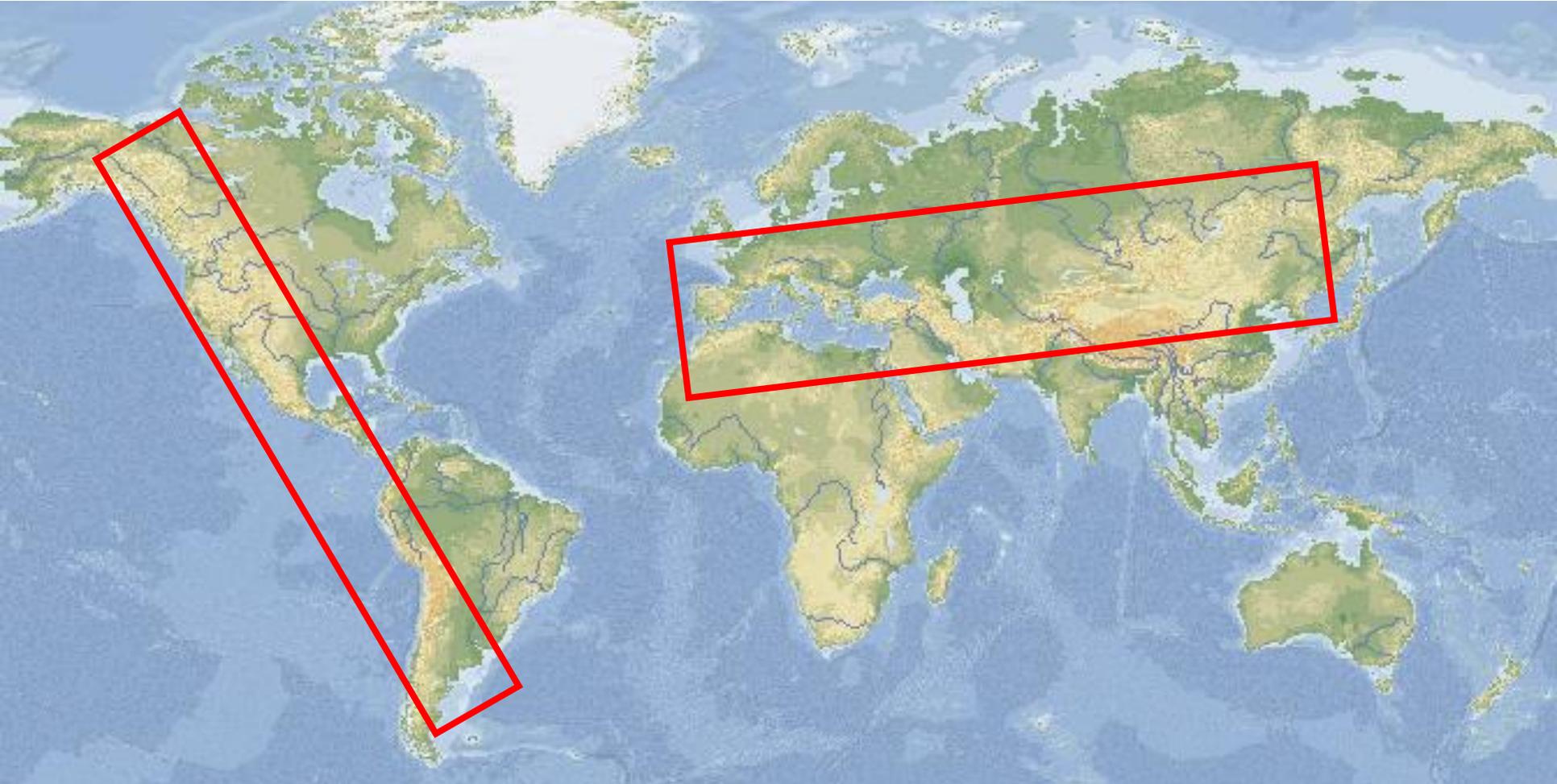


Name these seas!



Before modern times, merchants relayed goods from one link in the “chain of seas” to another. That is, a single merchant did not make the trip from one end of the chain to the other, though it was theoretically possible.

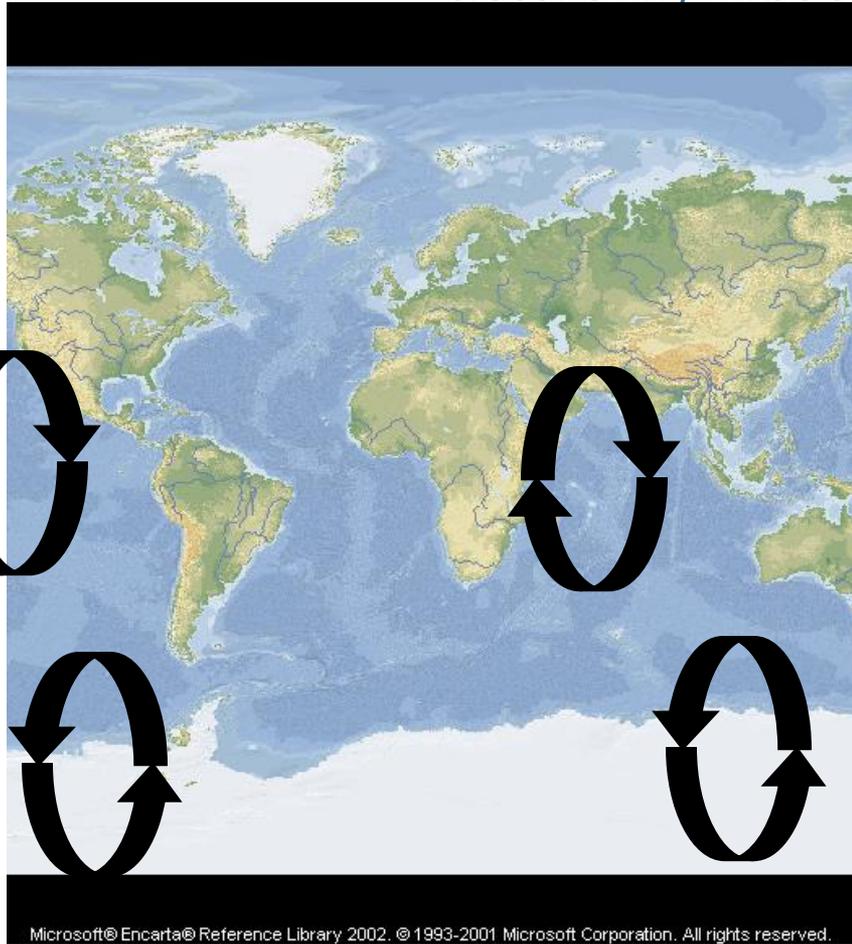
Another feature of big geography is the earth's great mountain chains



**Mountains have been barriers to human communication.  
But passes across them have also served as  
“valves” of communication.**

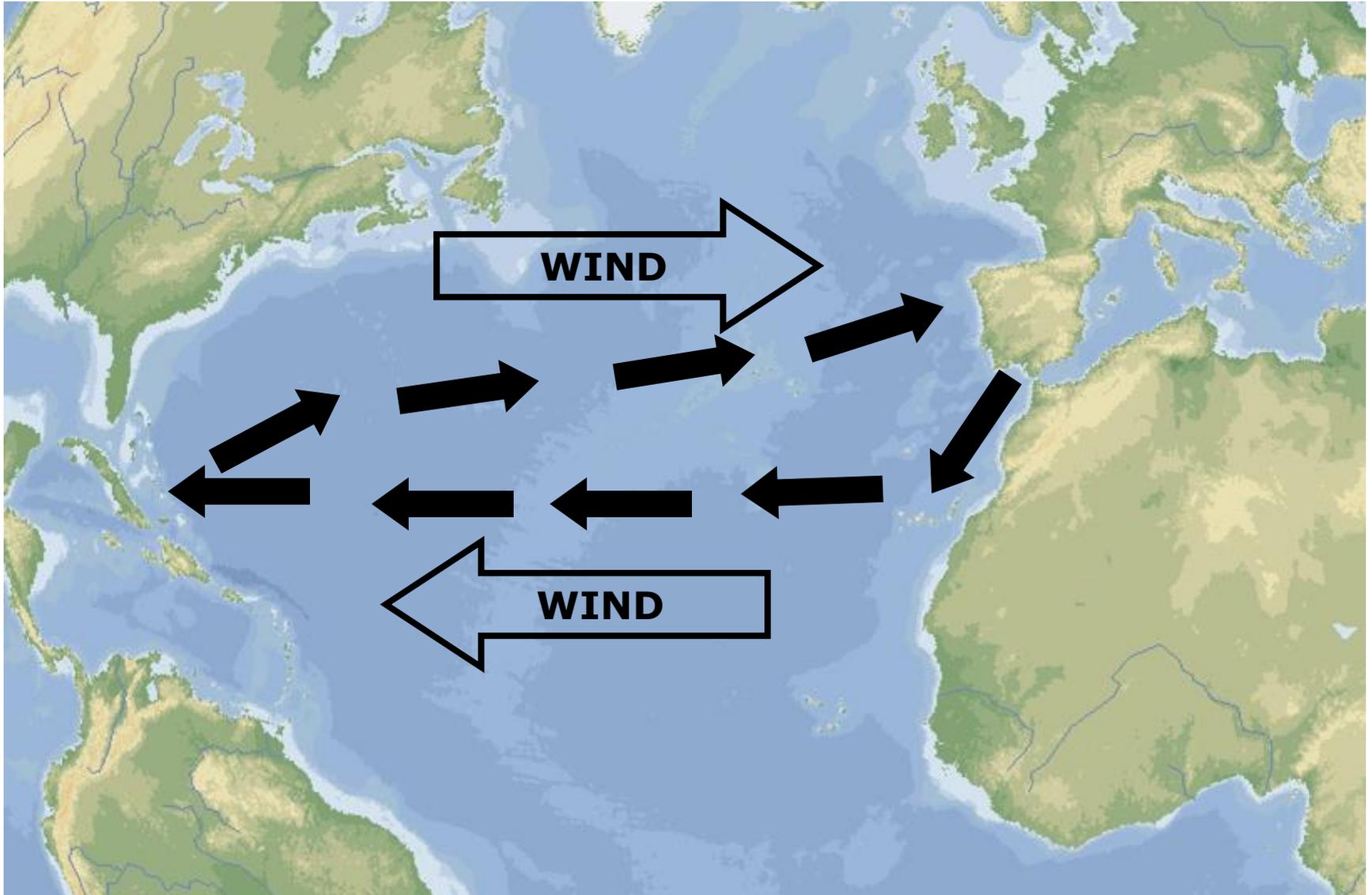
# The major winds and currents of the oceans

Until the coming of steamships in the 19th century, sailors had to know winds and currents to have confidence that they could sail from one place to another in an approximate amount of time. These winds and currents follow large global patterns. It was a matter of discovering what those patterns were.



**Indian Ocean  
Monsoon Winds**

The wind cycle in the North Atlantic helped Christopher Columbus sail both ways across the ocean.



Finally, let's not forget great rivers. They have served as channels of communication between seas and deep interior lands.

