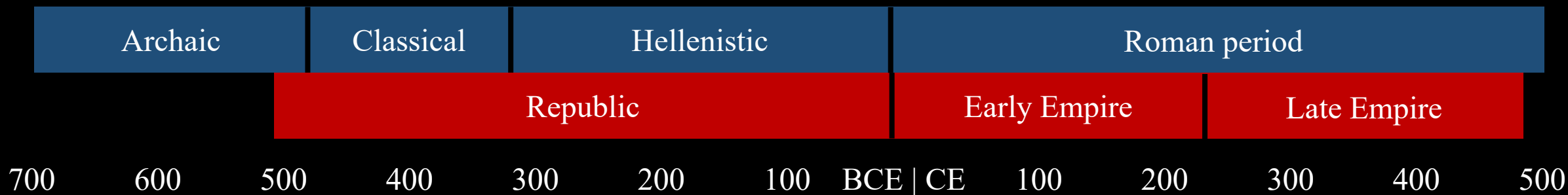


Roman Epic

Inheriting and Interpreting Traditions

Catullus 64

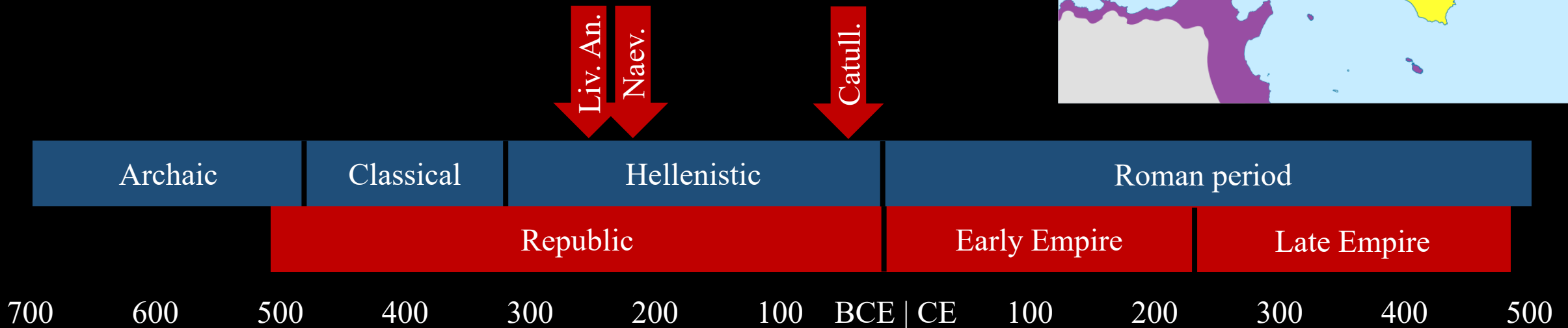


Discussion

- “The term ‘epic’ in modern usage connotes heroism on a large scale, and the notion of a short epic suggests a forced or unnatural compression, like a bonzai tree or a miniature Shetland... Catullus 64 has a dense, abbreviated quality, as though it contained too much in too small a space; it is nervous, like a diminutive breed of dog.”
- David Konstan in ch. 4 (p. 59) of *Roman Epic*
- What do you think about Catullus’ epyllion? Is it the epic version of a chihuahua trying to act like a guard dog, or does it have a deeper thematic unity?

Roman Epic

- Oddly, this is the earliest complete Roman epic that's preserved
- Livius Andronicus, *Odussia* (3rd c. BCE)
- Naevius, *Bellum Punicum* (3rd c. BCE)



Old Latin Epic

- Livius Andronicus, *Odussia*
 - Adaptation of the *Odyssey*, but in single book
- Naevius, *Bellum Punicum*
 - History of Rome from the fall of Troy through the First Punic War (241 BCE)
 - Divided into 7 books only after his death
 - Interspersed mythological scenes with historical characters and events

Old Latin Epic—Saturnian Meter

- virum mihi, Camena, in sece versutum

Tell me, Camena, of the clever man

- Livius Andronicus, *Odussia* fr. 1

- dein pollens sagittis inclutus arquitenens
sanctus Iove prognatus Pythius Apollo.

Then mighty with arrows, the famous bow-holder,
blessed son of Jupiter, Pythian Apollo

- Naevius, *Bellum Punicum* fr. 32

Roman Epic

- Oddly, this is the earliest complete Roman epic that's preserved
- Livius Andronicus, *Odussia* (3rd c. BCE)
- Naevius, *Bellum Punicum* (3rd c. BCE)
- Ennius, *Annales* (early 2nd c. BCE)



Liv. An.

Naev.

Ennius

Catull.

Archaic

Classical

Hellenistic

Roman period

Republic

Early Empire

Late Empire

700 600 500 400 300 200 100 BCE | CE 100 200 300 400 500

Old Latin Epic—Ennius

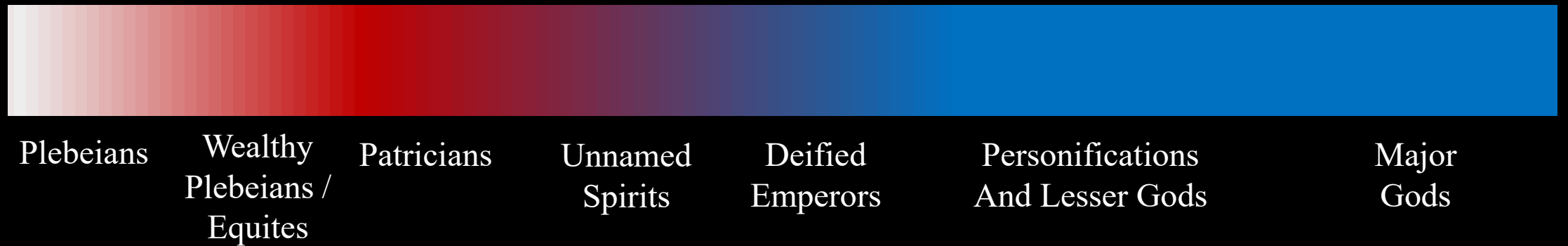
- Said he had three hearts (or “minds” in Latin): Greek, Oscan, Latin
- His *Annales* recounted the history of Rome from the fall of the Troy to 189 BCE in 15 books (excluding the 1st Punic War)
 - Later added 3 more books to include the 3rd Macedonian War to 171 BCE

Old Latin Epic—Ennius

- Claims personal authority directly:
 - Latos <per> populos res atque poemata nostra / <clara> cluebant
Among peoples far flung my subject and poem / shall win renown
- Rejects earlier authors:
 - “Others have written of the war / in verses which once the Fauns and bards used to sing. / [when] neither... the rocks of the Muses... / Nor [anyone] before this man [referring to himself] [was] conscious of style.”

Old Latin Epic

- Glorifies humans as if they were heroes to be apotheosized
 - Reflects an idea of a divine continuum in Roman society:



- “On ancient customs and men the Roman state stands firm.”
 - Ennius, *Annales* 5, fr. 1

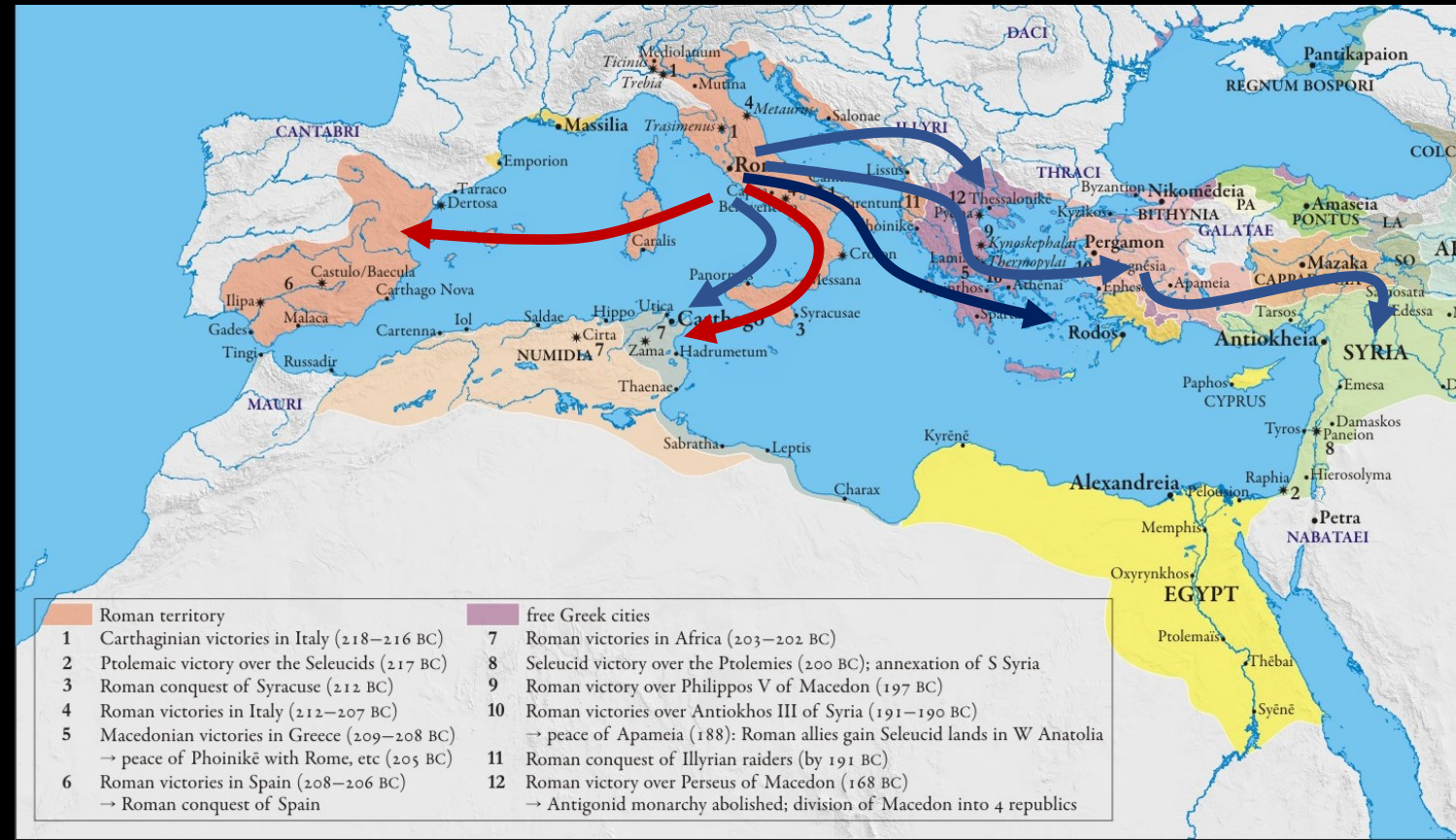
Old Latin Epic

- Each author explains the expansion of Roman power

■ Liv. Andronicus

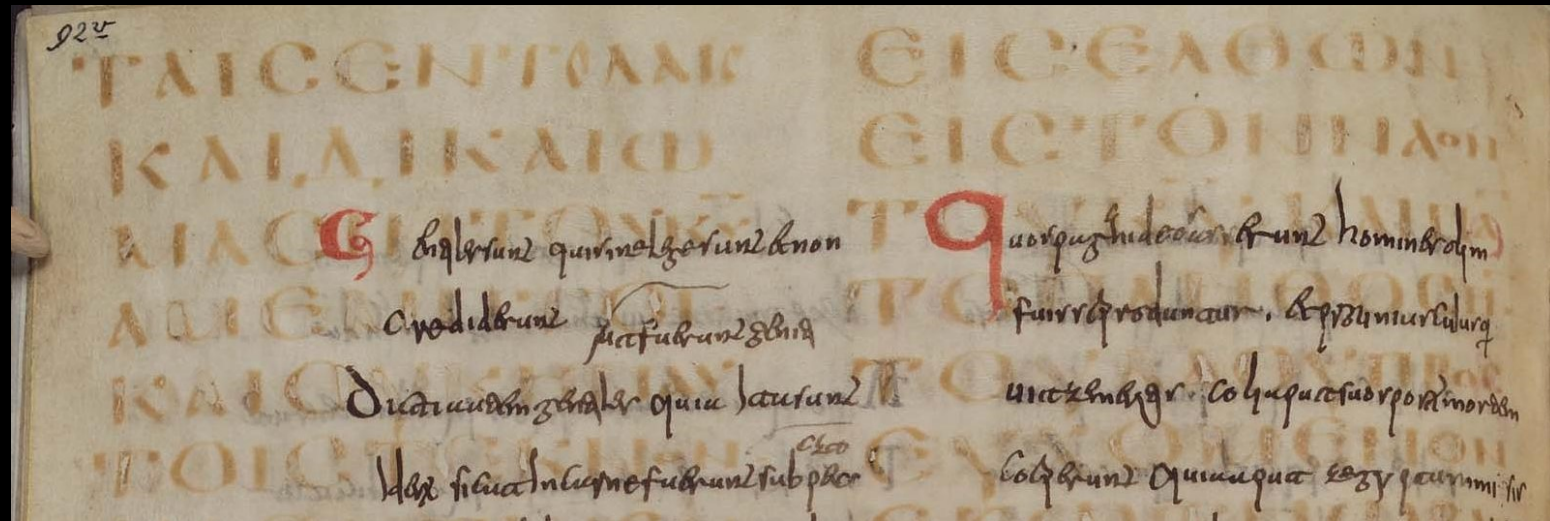
■ Naevius

■ Ennius



Roman Epic

- Each author explains the expansion of Roman power
- Can't separate Roman epic from politics and history
 - Says something about Romans' perceptions of themselves
- Intended to be referential, like a palimpsest
 - Supposed to say one thing and mean something else



Catullus 64: The Narrative

- Starts with the voyage of the Argo
- Jumps to the Marriage of Peleus and Thetis
 - Inserts story about the abandonment of Ariadne beginning with madness
 - Then recounts how Theseus lured her from Crete (in medias res)
 - Exploits of Theseus on Crete
 - Inserts the story of Aegeus' instructions to Theseus
 - Ariadne rescued by Bacchus (Dionysos)
- Wedding guests arrive
- Fates sing
 - Inserts song about Achilles' future and Polyxena
- Epilogue

The Analysis

- The Literary Background
 - Type Scenes?
 - Catalogue of Allies (sort of) in the wedding guests (278 ff.)
 - Formulas or epithets?
 - Epic similes
 - Changing traditions
 - Peleus Thetis here meet during the voyage of the Argo (19-21)
 - Thetis marries for love, not because Jupiter is afraid of the prophesy
 - Theseus only succeeds because of Ariadne's help (like Jason and Medea) (149 ff.)
 - Folk Songs

The Analysis

- Language and Performance
 - What do you think: orally composed or written?
 - Invocation, but different
 - Delayed
 - Not asking for the gods' help to tell the tale
 - Lots of nuance in the language (like with heroes...)

The Analysis

- The Idea of the Hero
 - Is there a main hero?
 - So of the heroes we have, what are their qualities?
 - Theseus is absent minded with destructive results
 - Achilles asks for a human sacrifice
 - heroum mira virtutes **indicat** arte – line 51
 - “...[it] **displays** heroic virtues with wonderful art”
 - David Konstan (71): heroes show a “callous indifference... towards outsiders that accompanies a dedication to great deeds...”

The Analysis

- The Idea of the Hero
 - “No woman should place her trust in a masculine vow or think the speeches she hears from a man are sincere. When the spirit is yearning for something they long to possess, no oath is too awesome, no promise too costly to make. But quell the lust of their questing minds, at once their words are forgotten and perjury ceases to matter.” (143-8)
- This is not a Greek social concept...

The Analysis

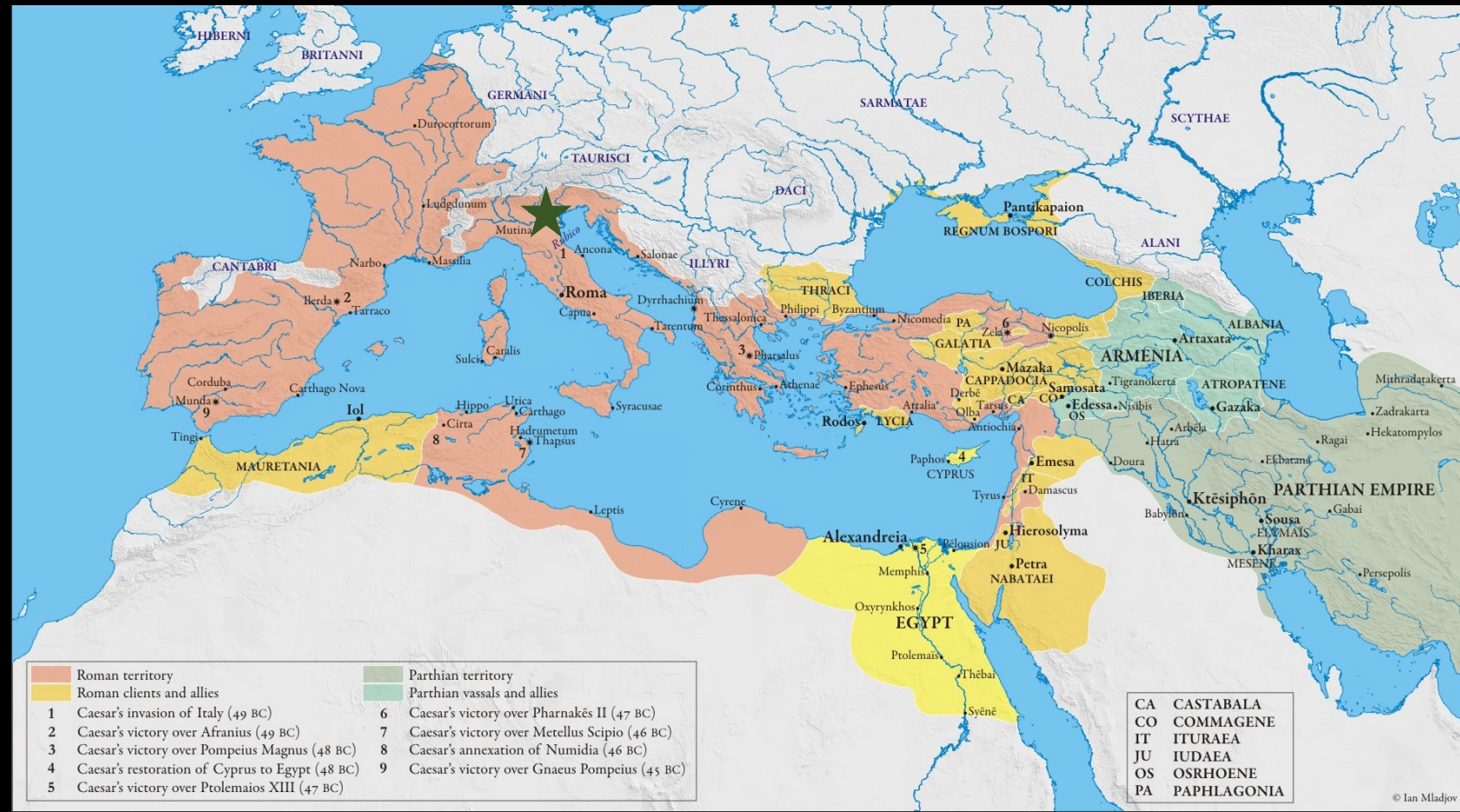
- The Social Background
 - So what of Roman society do we see?
 - Ariadne's curse of her "husband" Theseus to the Furies (198-201)
 - Epilogue...

The Analysis

- The Narrator's Voice
 - Invocation
 - Epilogue

Catullus and the End of the Late Republic

- Born in Verona in Cisalpine Gaul (c. 84 BCE), moved to Rome
- This was a period of 3 successive civil wars, lots of instability and uncertainty
- Pervasive idea that Roman society was in decline



A Society Continuously in Decline?

- “On ancient customs and men the Roman state stands firm.”
 - Ennius, *Annales* 5, fr. 1 (early 3rd c. BCE)
- “the mad confusion of everything right and wrong
has driven away the righteous minds of the gods.
Wherefore, they neither attend such mortal assemblies
nor let themselves be touched by the light of day.”
 - Catullus 64.405-9 (mid 1st c. BCE)