

Review of Past Climates

EES 3310/5310

Global Climate Change

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Class #14: Friday, February 18 2022

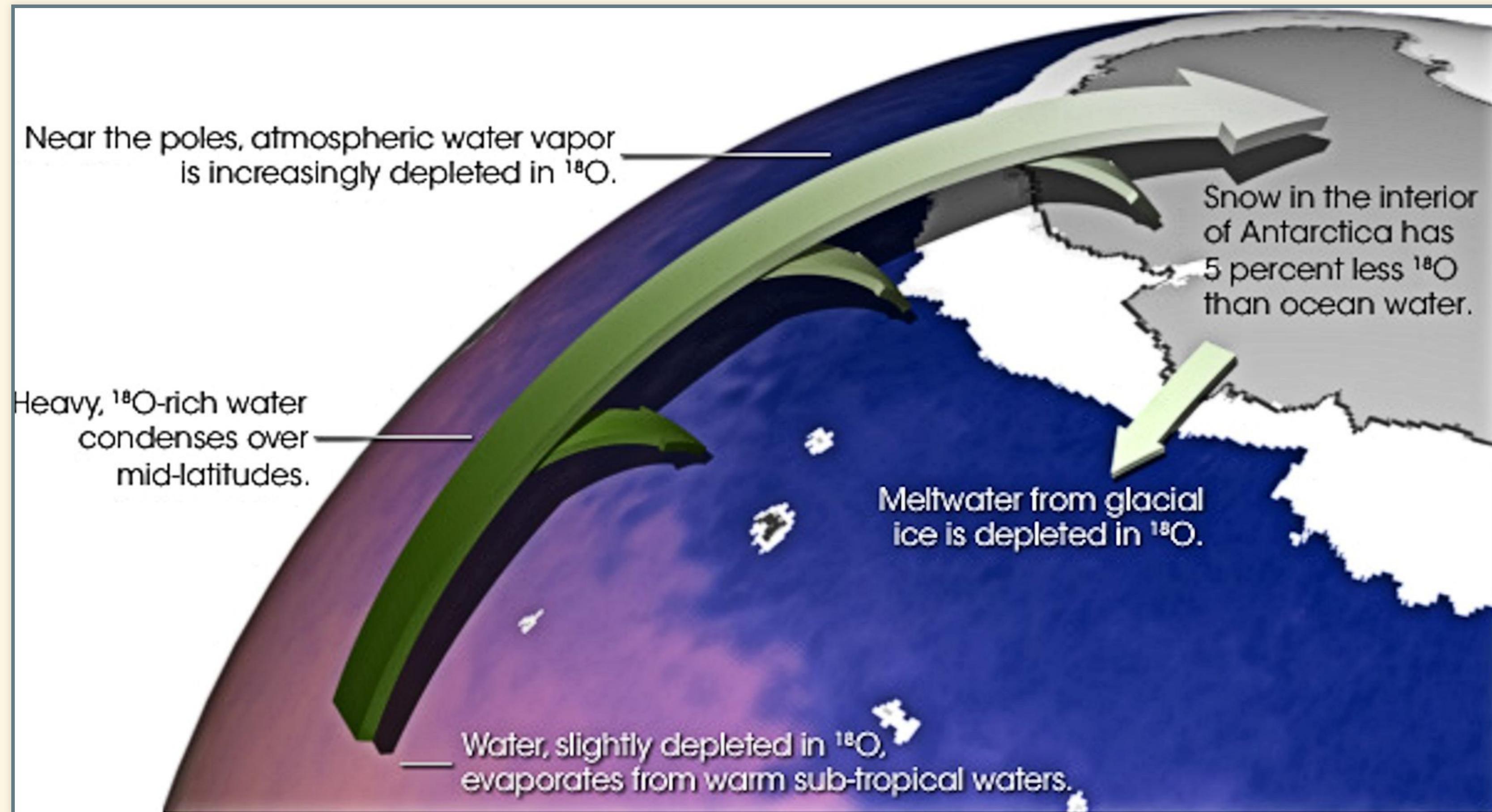
Oxygen & Hydrogen Isotopes

Oxygen & Hydrogen Isotopes

$$\delta^{18}\text{O} = \left(\frac{\left(\frac{^{18}\text{O}}{^{16}\text{O}} \right)_{\text{sample}} - \left(\frac{^{18}\text{O}}{^{16}\text{O}} \right)_{\text{ref}}}{\left(\frac{^{18}\text{O}}{^{16}\text{O}} \right)_{\text{ref}}} \right) \times 1000\text{‰}$$

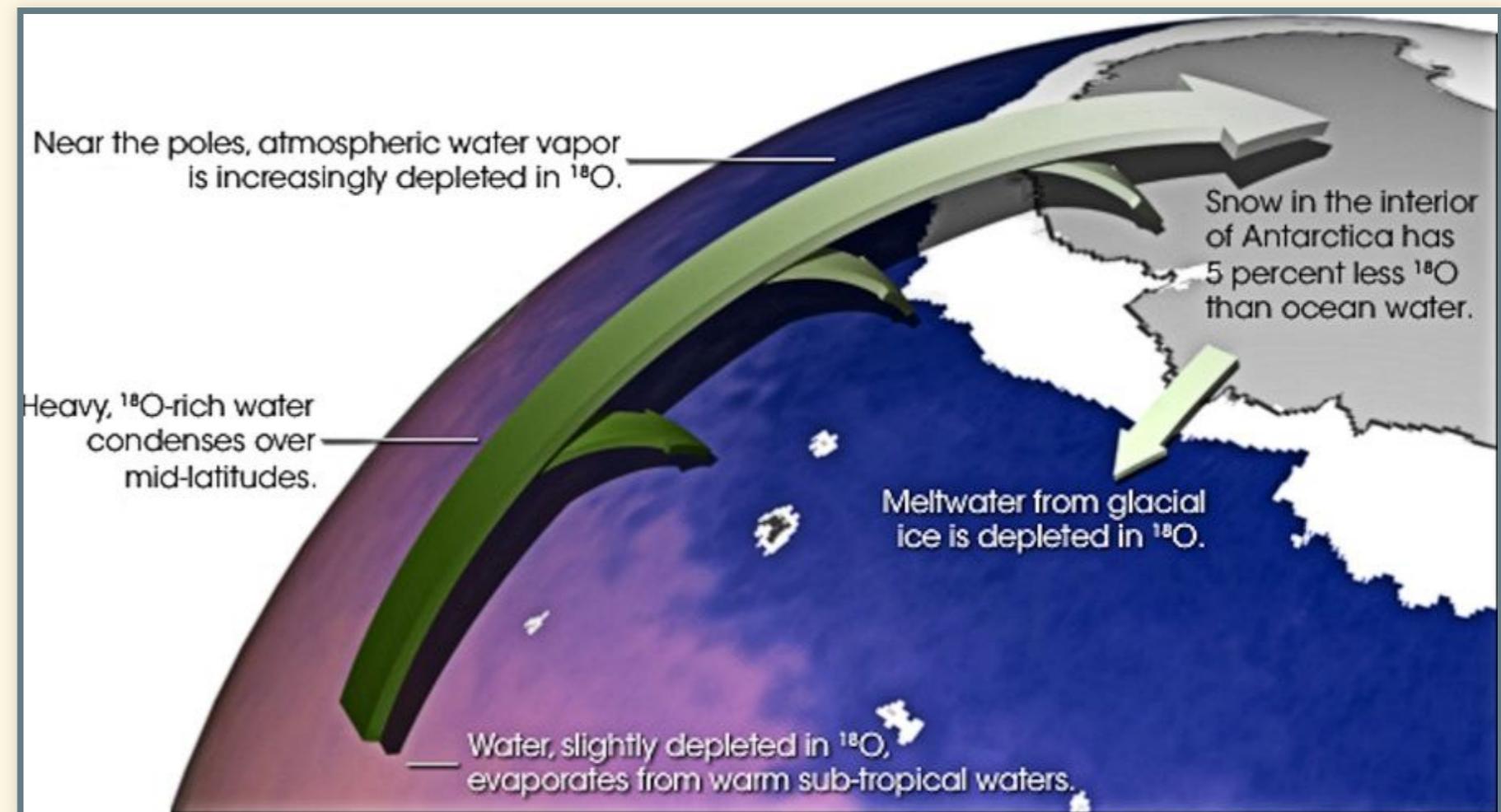
- $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ compares measured concentration of ^{18}O to the concentration in a reference sample.
- Lighter isotopes (^1H and ^{16}O) evaporate faster
 - Vapor has less of heavier isotopes (smaller $\delta^{18}\text{O}$, δD)
 - Ocean is richer in heavier isotopes (greater $\delta^{18}\text{O}$, δD)
 - Warmer → greater $\delta^{18}\text{O}$, δD in vapor

Rain, Snow, Ice

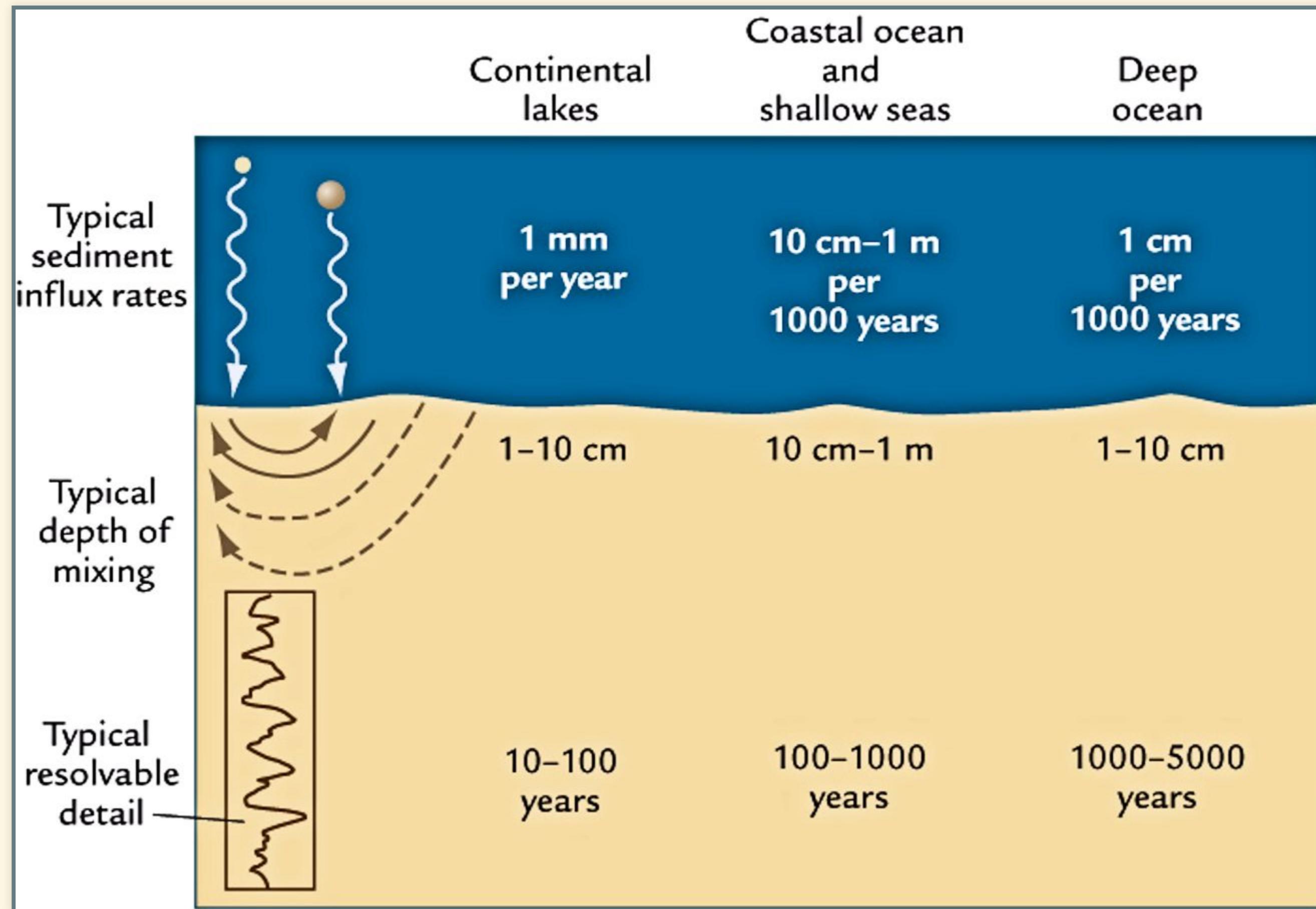


Rain, Snow, Ice

- Rain, snow are richer in heavier isotopes
 - More precipitation → less deuterium and ^{18}O left in vapor
 - Farther from source region → smaller δD and $\delta^{18}\text{O}$.
- Reduction in δD and $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ depends on air temperature.
 - Different for H and O.
- Comparing δD and $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ can tell us about both sea-surface temperature and air temperature over glaciers.
- **Higher air temperature over glacier → greater δD and $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ in glacier snow/ice.**



Sediments and History

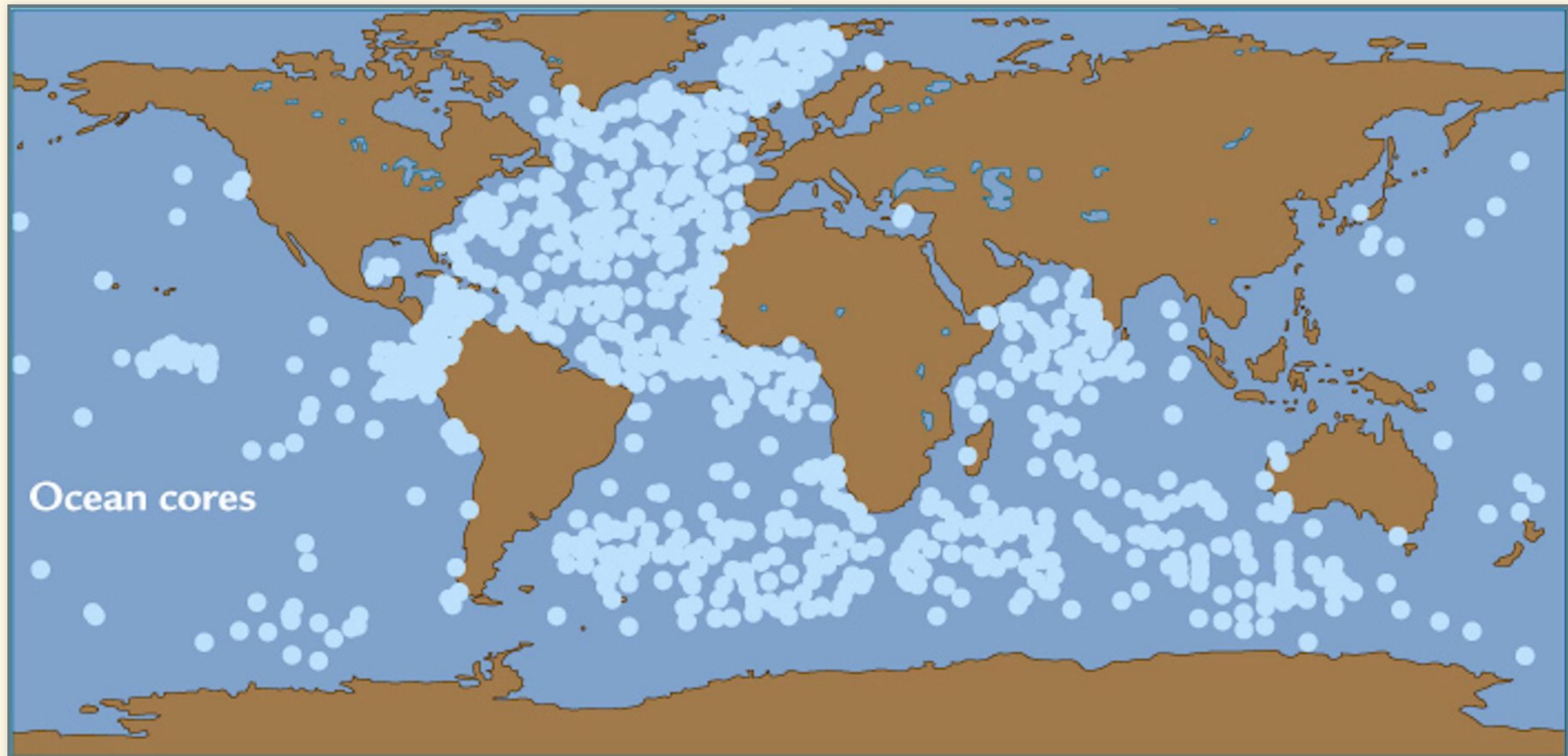


Bottom → top = oldest → youngest

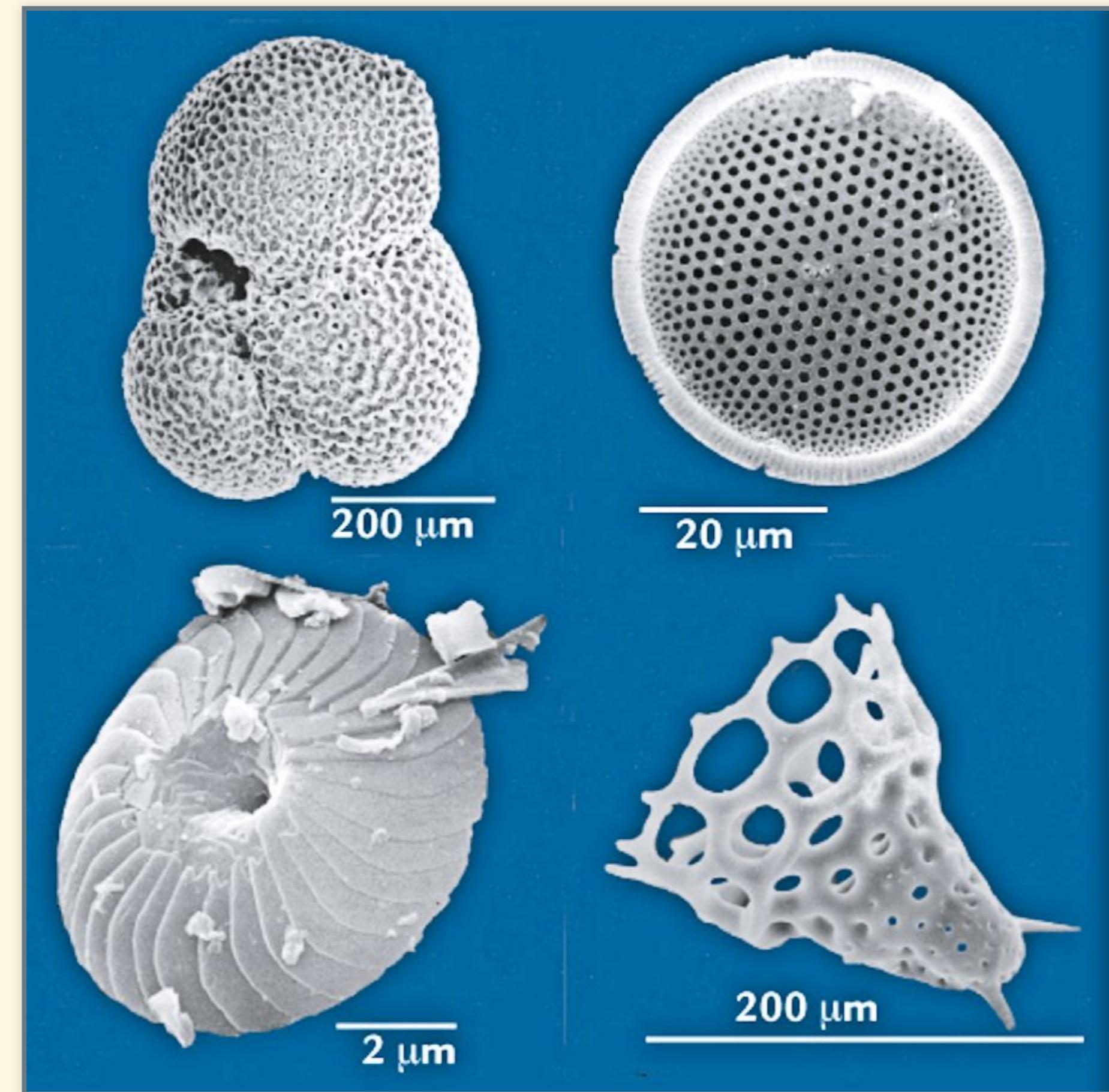




Ocean Cores for Past Climates

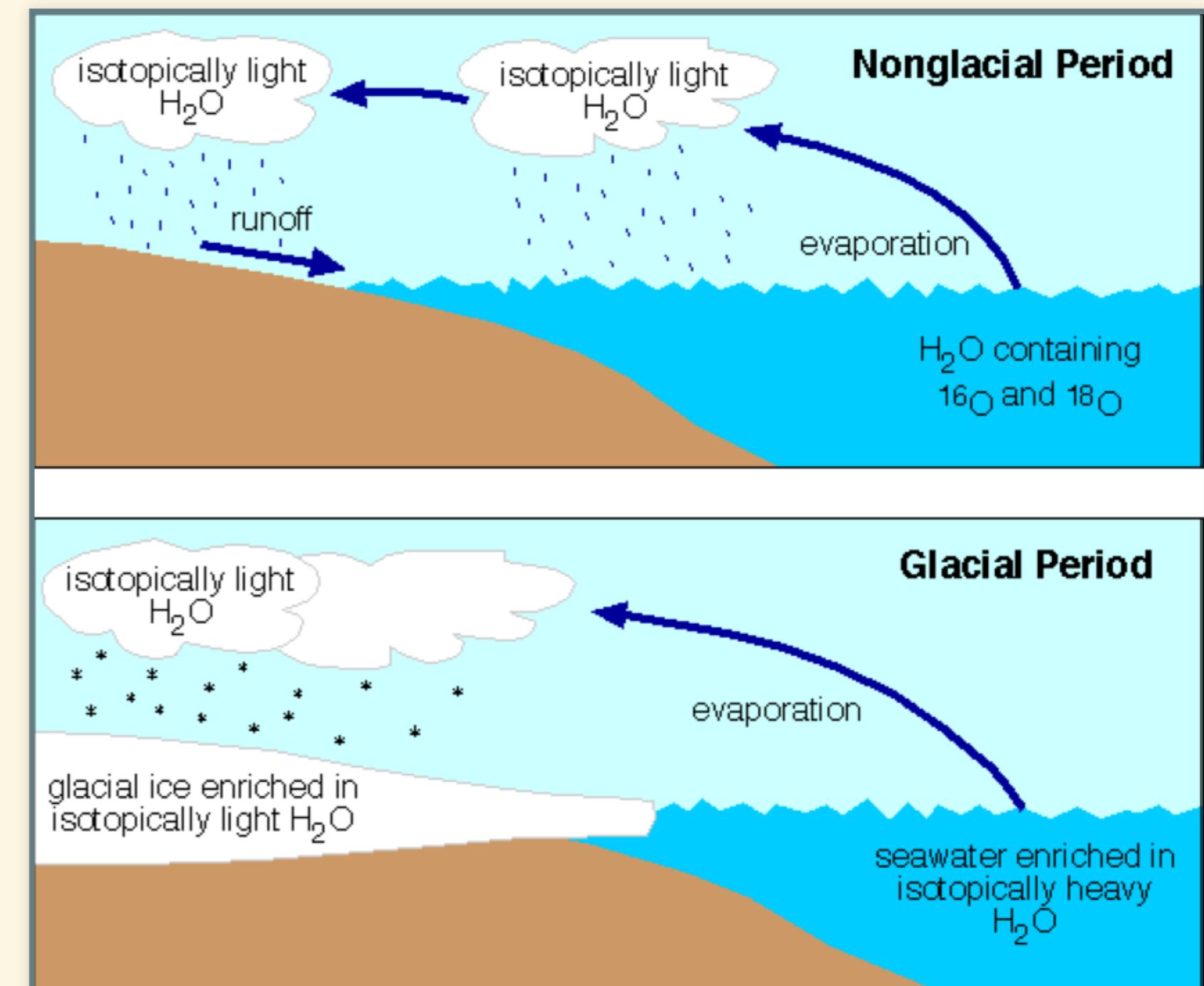


Deep-Sea Sediments

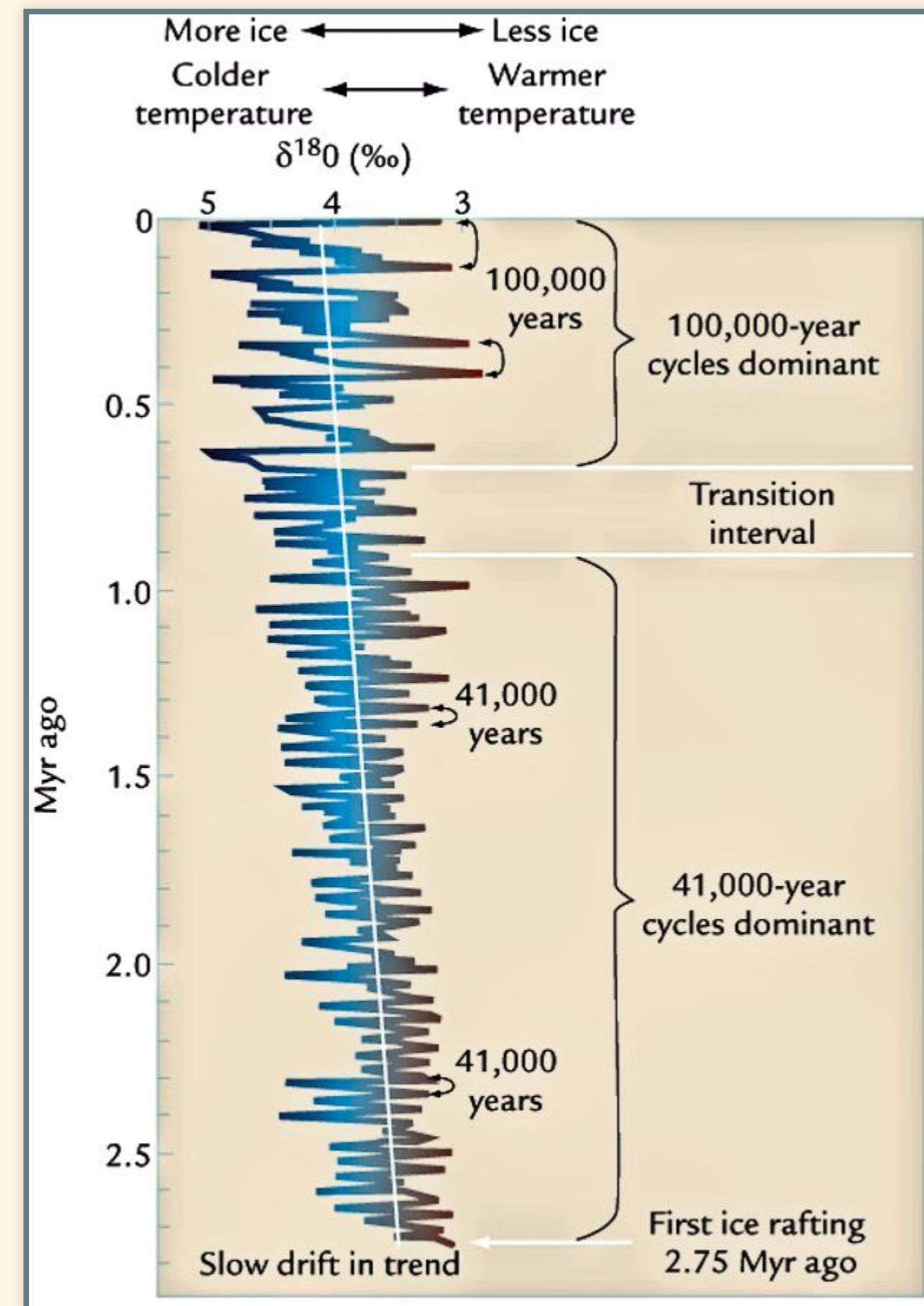


Past Sea Levels

- Water vapor, rain, snow is always isotopically lighter than sea water
- Snow, ice on land remove light isotopes from ocean
- Bigger glaciers:
 - Lower sea-level
 - Greater (positive) $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ in ocean sediments
- Smaller glaciers:
 - Higher sea-level
 - Smaller $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ in ocean sediments



Sediment Climate Record



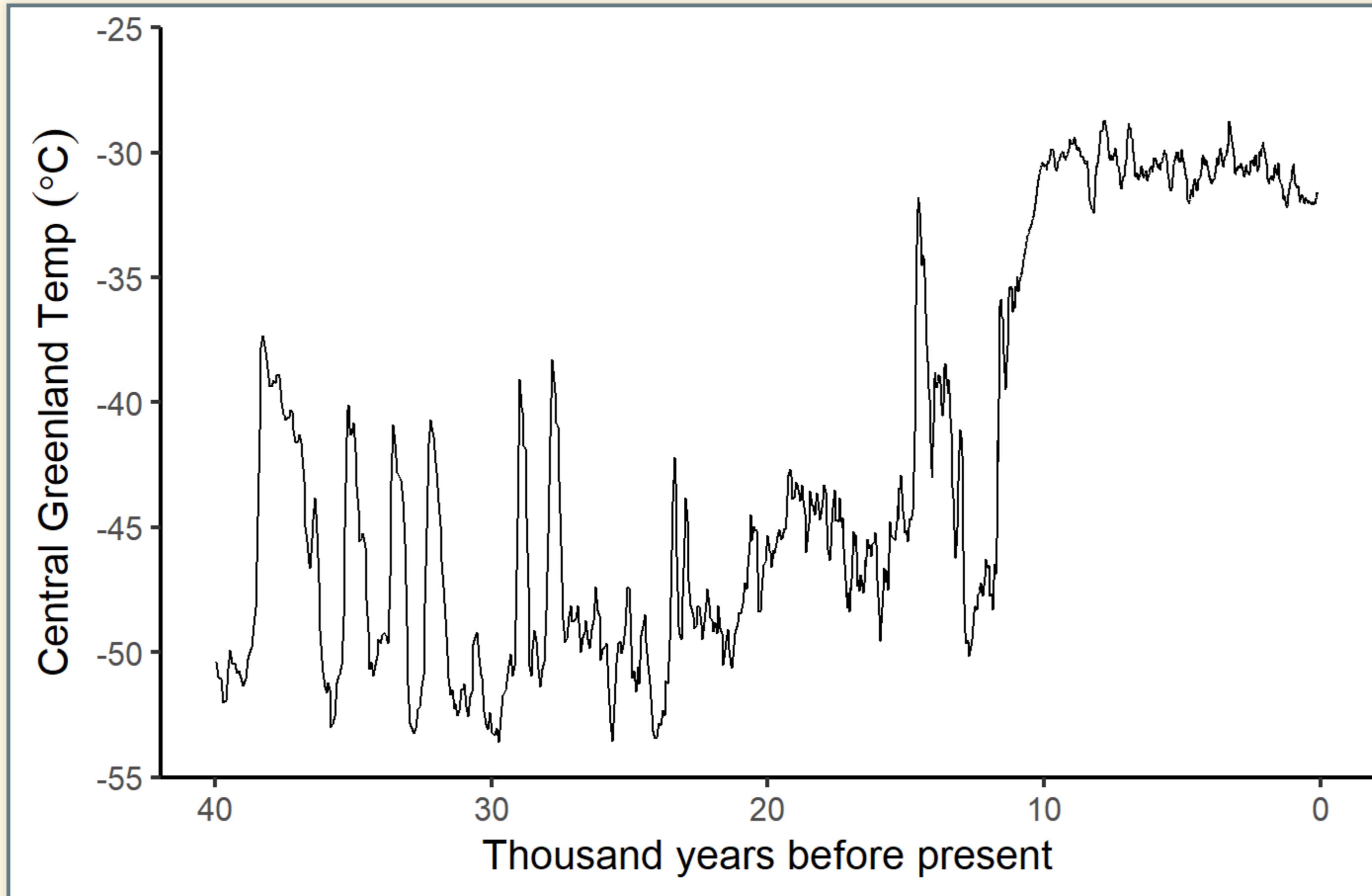
Summary of Oxygen Isotopes

- Two different uses:
 - $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ in **glacial ice** tells us about **air temperature**:
 - Greater $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ means warmer temperature.
 - $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ in **sea-floor sediments** (skeletons of deep-sea organisms) tells us about **sea level**:
 - Greater $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ means lower sea-level.
- During ice-age cycles:
 - **cold temperatures** go with **low sea-level**
 - $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ is *lower* than usual in glaciers, *greater* in sea-floor sediments.
 - **warm temperatures** go with **high sea-level**:
 - $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ is *greater* than usual in glaciers, *lower* in sea-floor sediments.
 - But sea-level changes more slowly than temperature, so changes in sediments usually lag behind changes in glaciers.

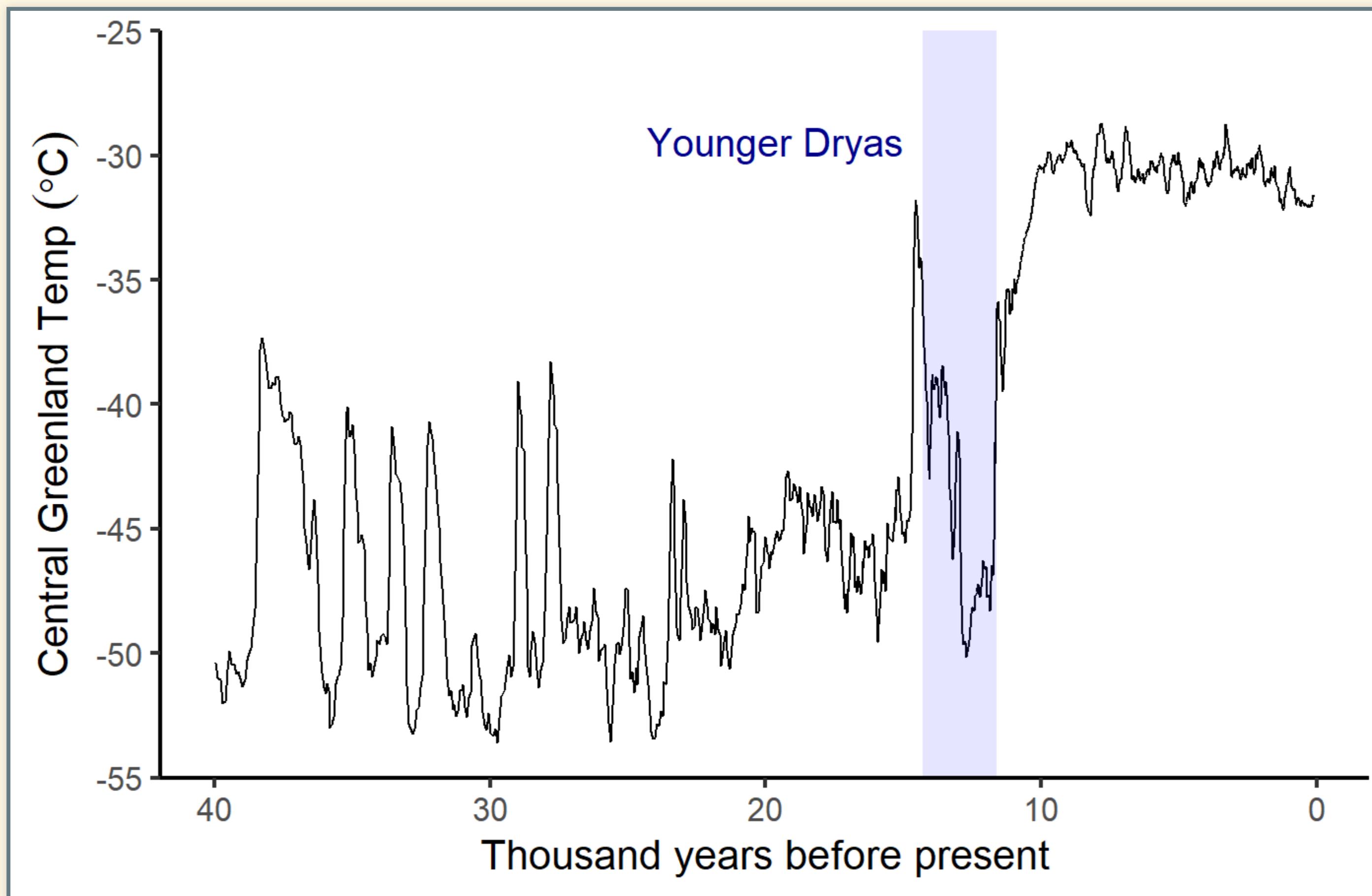
Questions about Carbon Cycle?

Abrupt Climate Change

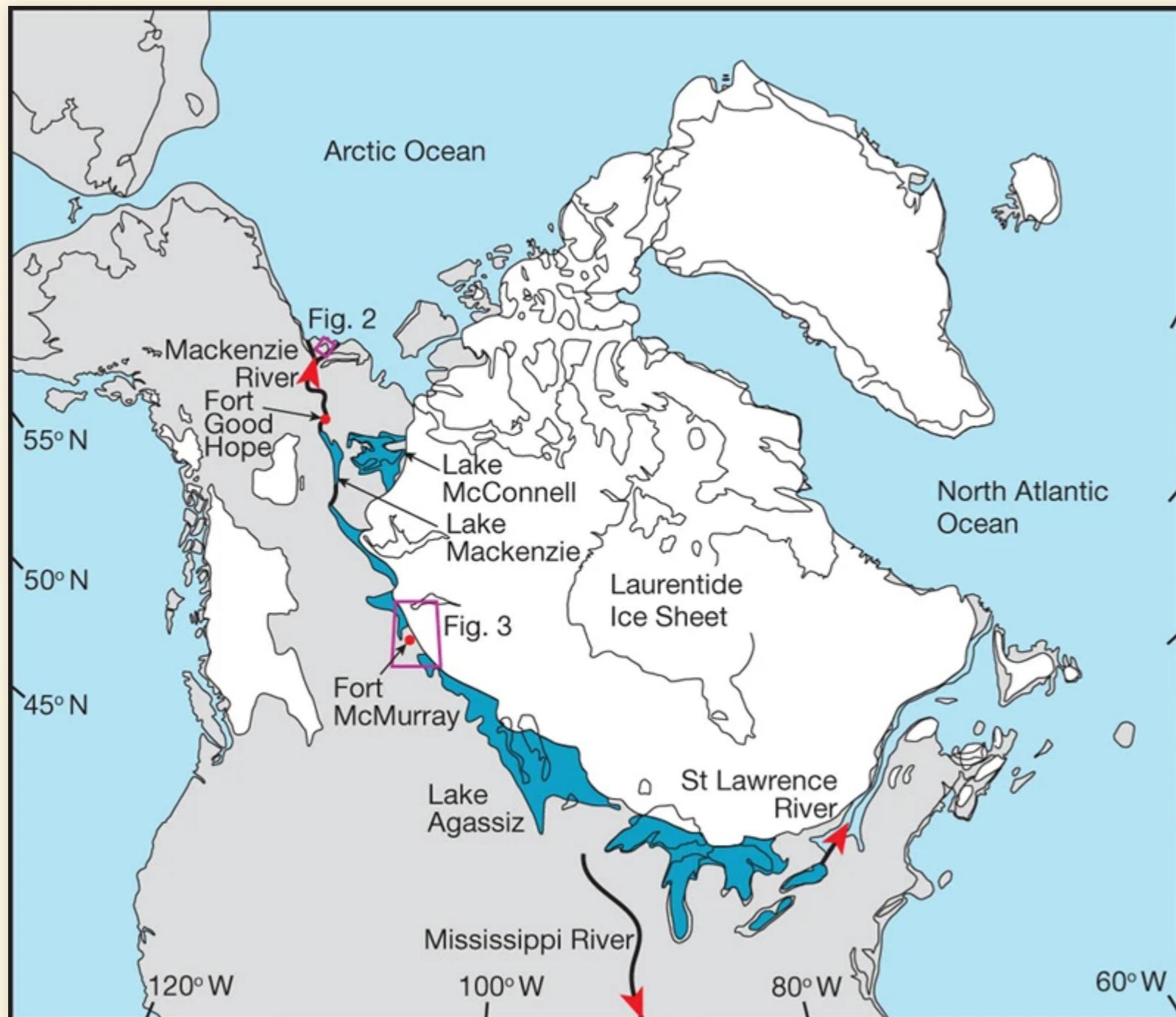
Abrupt Climate Change



Abrupt Climate Change



Younger Dryas

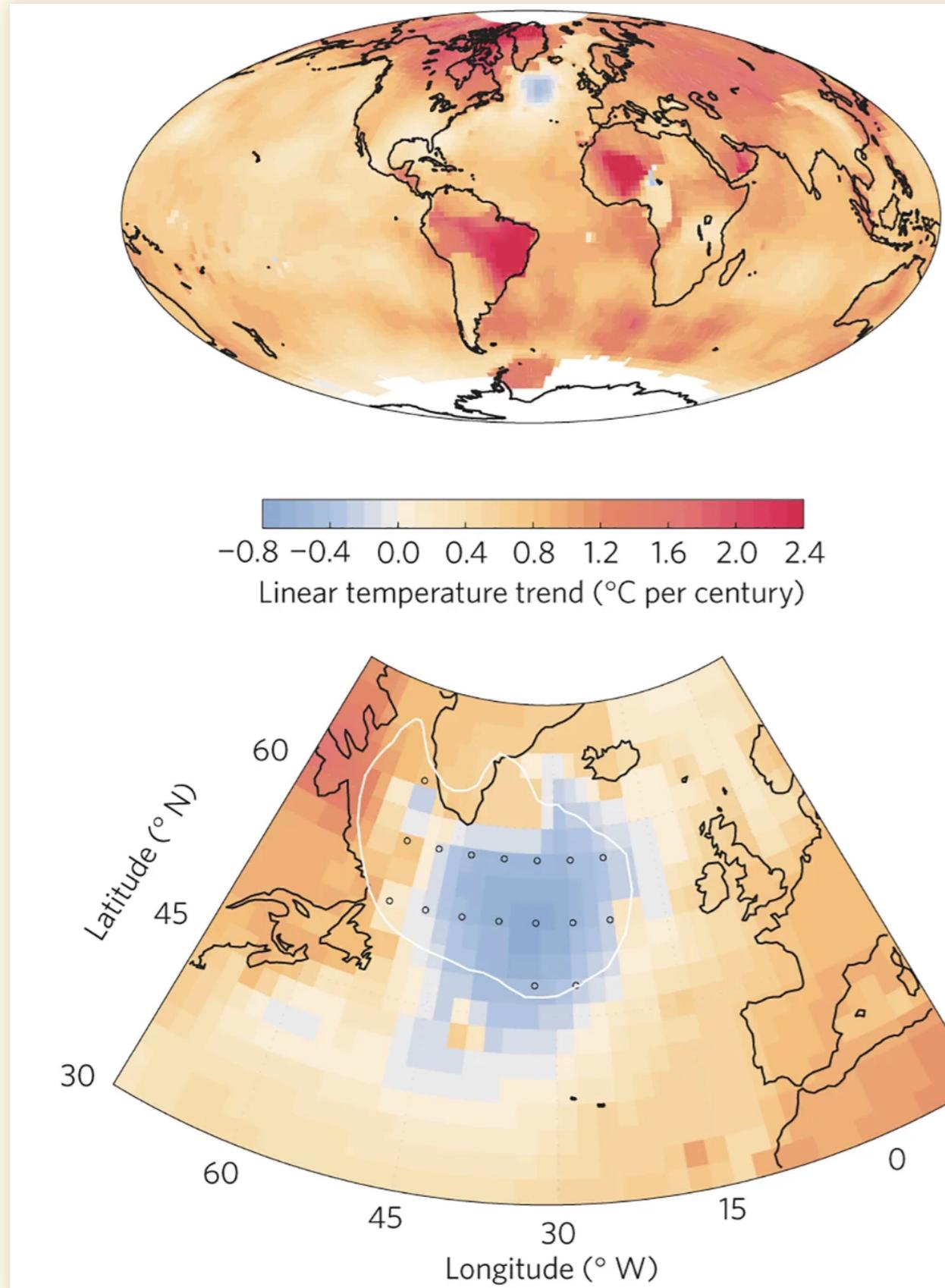


J.B. Murton *et al.*, Nature 464, 740 (2010). doi: 10.1038/nature08954

- About 14,000 years ago there was rapid warming
- Giant Glacial Lake Agassiz
 - When enough ice melted, Lake Agassiz drained into Arctic and Atlantic Oceans
 - Fresh water diluted salt water
 - Less dense, wouldn't sink
 - Stopped deep-water formation
 - Blocked conveyor belt current
 - Warm currents (Gulf stream, Mediterranean current) bring lots of heat to North Atlantic, Western Europe.
 - Without that heat, cold temperatures returned

Cold Pool in North Atlantic

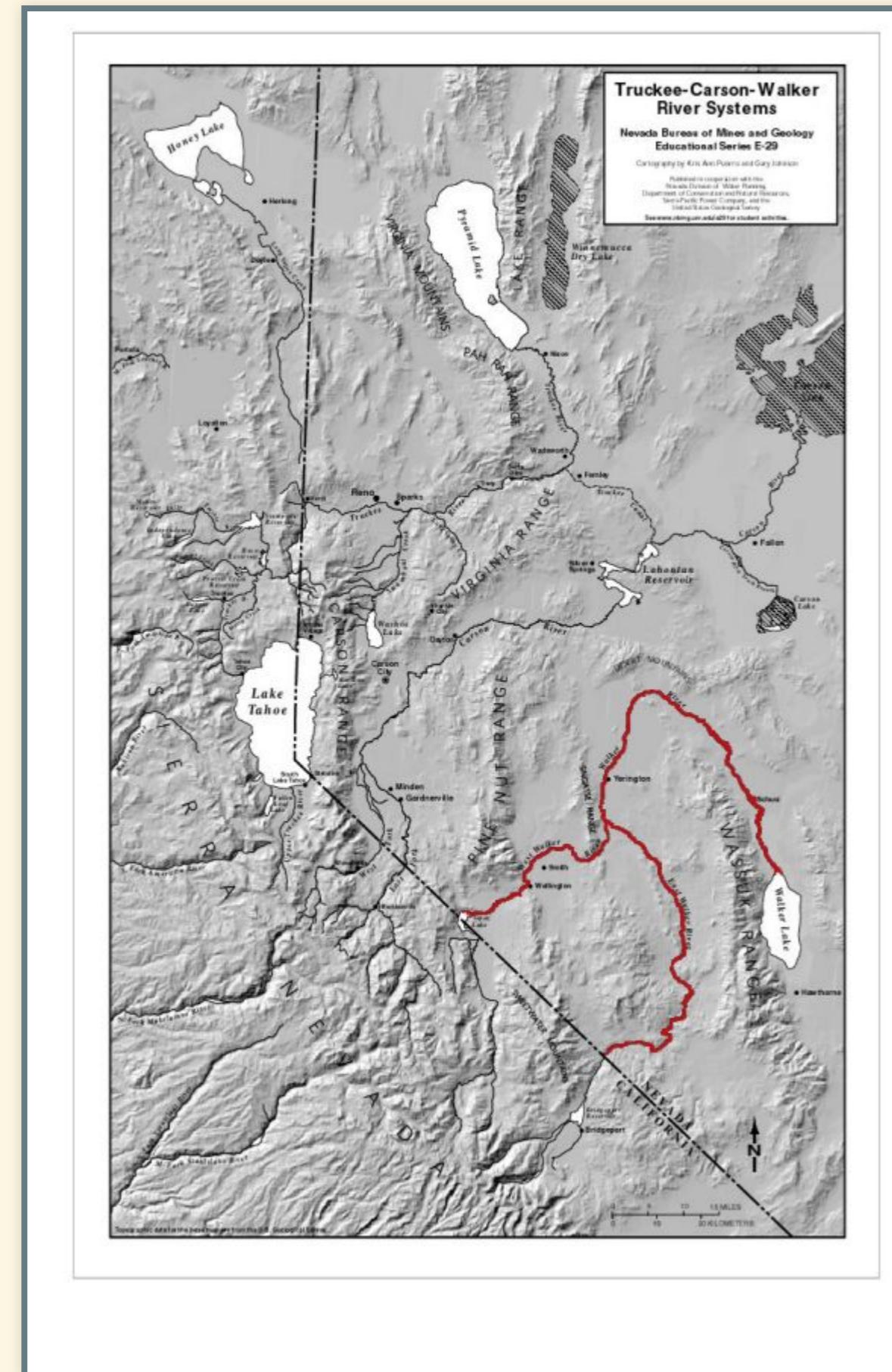
Warming Trend: 1900–2013



- Atlantic circulation (Gulf stream, etc.) has slowed down.
 - Rapid decline since mid-20th century
 - Circulation is the weakest in the last 1000 years.
- Without that heat, a pool of water in the North Atlantic is cooling.
- Fresh water from melting ice on Greenland may be partially responsible.

Climate in the Last Millennium

Walker River



Relict Tree Stumps



Relict Tree Stumps



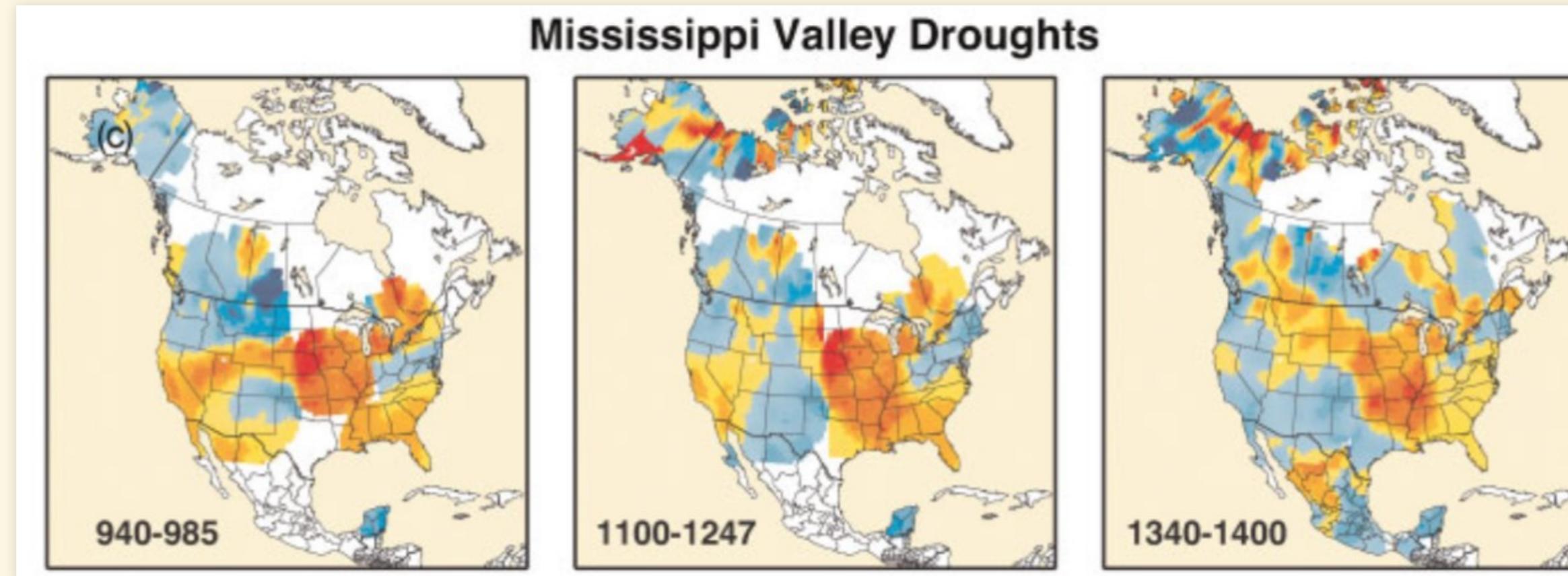
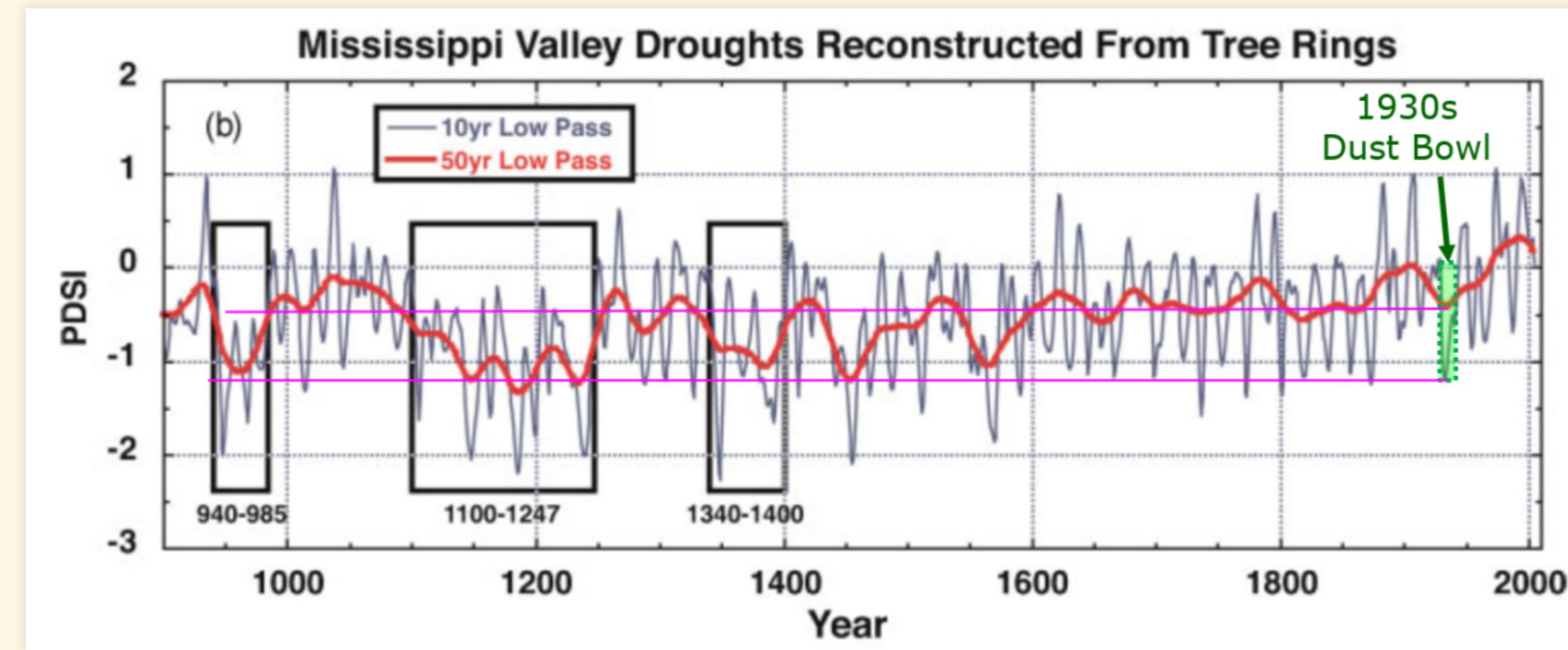
Lake Tanaya, Yosemite



Chaco Canyon



Reconstructing Megadroughts



Dust Bowl vs. Megadroughts

- 1930s “Dust Bowl”
 - 6 years
 - 25% reduction in rainfall in plains states
 - Hundreds of thousands of refugees
- Medieval Megadroughts:
 - Multiple droughts
 - 60 years or longer (up to 240)
 - 40% reduction of rainfall in plains states
- New research (2022):
 - Current drought in the Southwest is the most severe since the medieval megadroughts.