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## Climate and agricultural productivity in southern Roman Gaul: the contribution of agent-based and agrosystemic modelling

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Marie-Jeanne Ouriachi

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Nicolas Bernigaud, Alberte Bondeau, Joel Guiot, Frédérique Bertoncello, Marie-Jeanne Ouriachi. Climate and agricultural productivity in southern Roman Gaul: the contribution of agent-based and agrosystemic modelling. EAA 2020, Virtual Meeting 27 August, Session #415: From Abacus to Calculus. Computational Approaches to Roman Economy, Philipp Verhagen; Iza Romanowska, Aug 2020, Budapest (HO), Hungary. hal-04342118

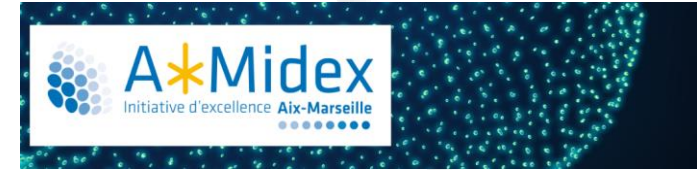
**HAL Id: hal-04342118**

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Submitted on 13 Dec 2023

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# Climate and agricultural productivity in southern Roman Gaul: the contribution of agent-based and agrosystemic modelling<sup>1</sup>

N. Bernigaud\*, A. Bondeau\*\*, J. Guiot\*, F. Bertoucello\*\*\*, M.-J. Ouriachi\*\*\*

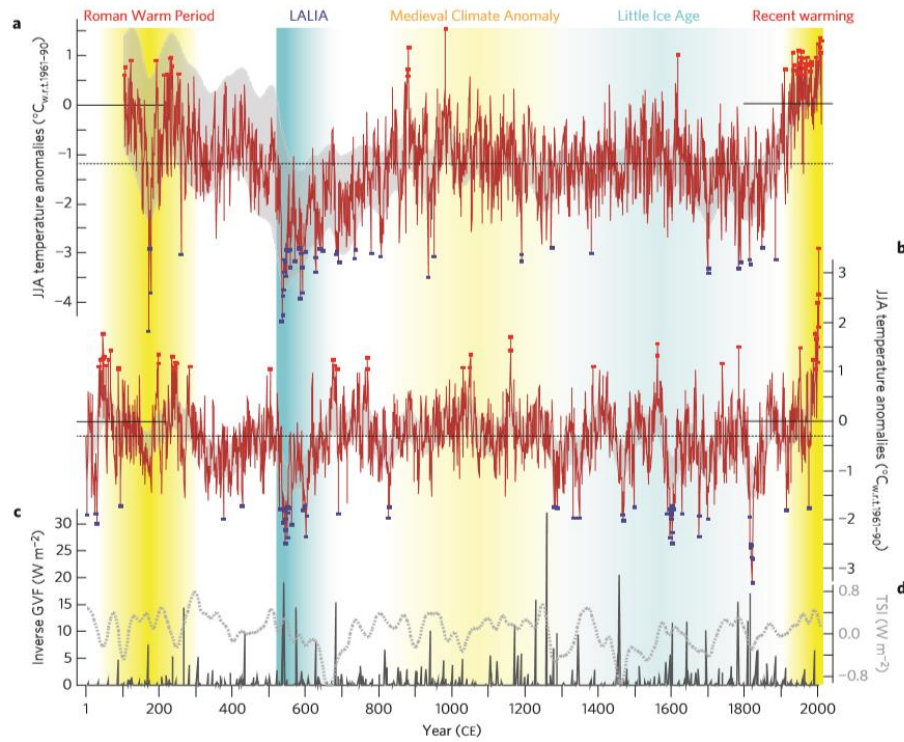
<sup>1</sup> RDMed project

# Goals and Objectives Presentation

What was the impact of climate change on agriculture and agricultural yields in the south of France between the Iron Age and the Late Roman antiquity ?

- Contribution of Agrosystemic and Agent-Based models to this question.

# Roman Climate Optimum (RCO) or Roman Warm Period (RWP)



**Figure 2 | Eurasian summer temperature variability.** **a,b**, Reconstructed temperatures from the Russian Altai (**a**) and the European Alps<sup>5</sup> (**b**), with blue and red squares indicating (51/47) positive and (53/57) negative annual extremes ( $>2$  standard deviations), respectively. Grey background shadings denote reconstruction uncertainty after 80-year low-pass filtering (Supplementary Fig. 9). **c,d**, Ice-core-derived global estimates of volcanic<sup>14</sup> (GVF; dark grey; **c**) and total solar irradiance<sup>17</sup> (TSI; light dashed grey; **d**) forcing. Black dashed lines refer to the long-term reconstruction mean of the Common Era.

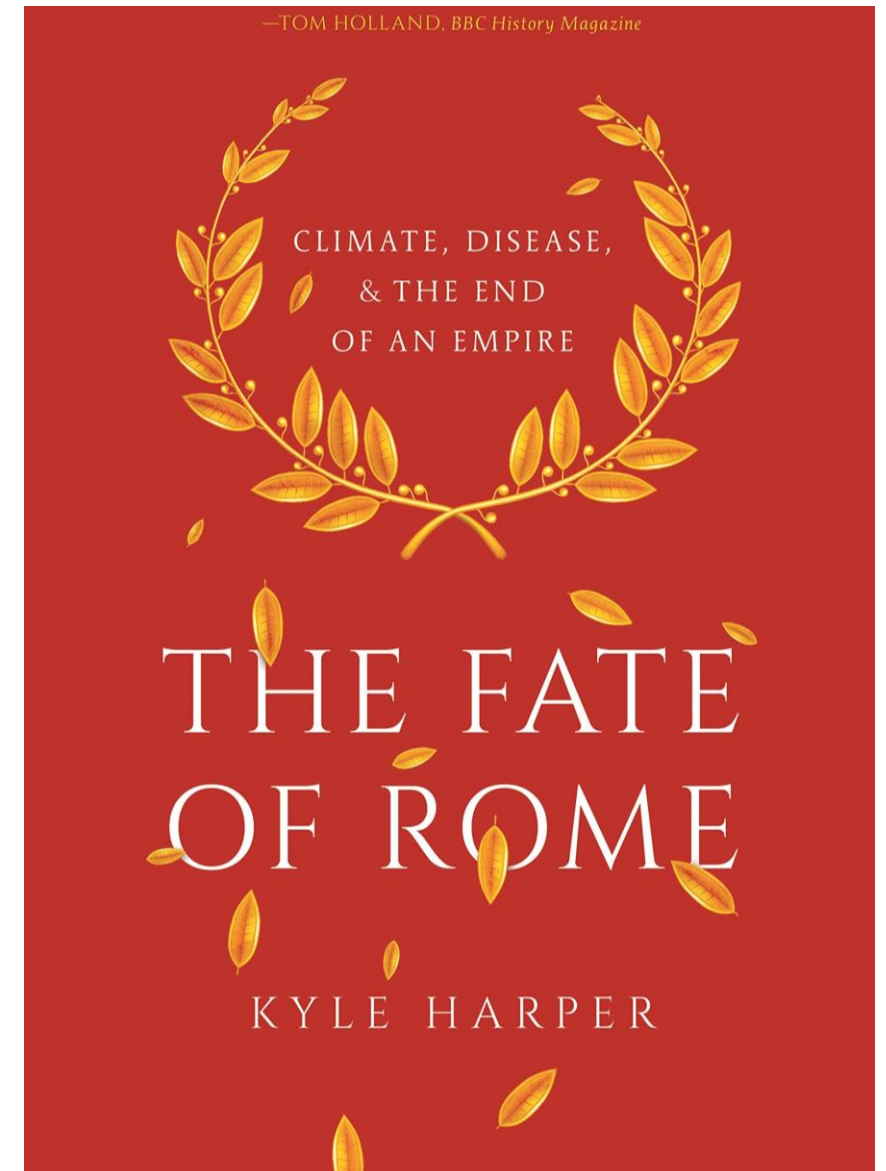
- III c. BC – II c. AD
- High summer temperatures
- High precipitations

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“THE CLIMATE WAS THE ENABLING BACKGROUND OF THE ROMAN MIRACLE.  
THE RCO TURNED THE LANDS RULED BY ROME INTO A GIANT GREENHOUSE”

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- “The RCO was a boon to the fecundity of Mediterranean wheat farming”
- The RCO “fueled the agricultural engine of the economy” (Harper 2017, 52; Cf. McCormick et al. 2012; Manning 2013, 169).



Did really the  
RCO makes  
the  
prosperity of  
the Roman  
Empire ?

*Climate change and the productive landscape in the Mediterranean region in the Roman Period* (draft paper by P. Erdkamp, Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

- “Many recent studies claim that climate change and its impact on agriculture determined the fate of past societies. The prosperity of the Roman Empire at its height is attributed to the *Roman Climatic Optimum*, which “fueled the agricultural engine of the economy” (Harper 2017, 52; Cf. McCormick et al. 2012; Manning 2013, 169)”
- « It seems very unlikely that the impact on agriculture in the Roman world was as dramatic as often assumed »
- “However, a thorough analysis of **the causal links between climate change and agricultural productivity is generally missing**”

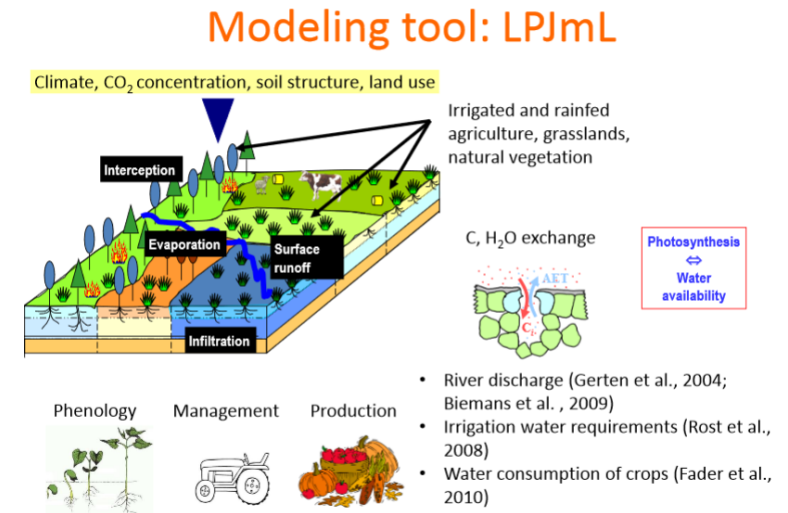
How to link climate and  
agricultural productivity ?

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# Lund-Potsdam-Jena managed Land (LPJmL) *Process-based agriculture, vegetation and hydrology model*

- **MODEL INPUTS**
- Monthly climate : temperatures, precipitations, rainy days, cloud cover
- Global atm. CO<sub>2</sub>-concentrations
- Soil structure
- Land use dataset

- **MODEL OUTPUTS**
- Yields (t/ha), production (t), growing period
- Carbon cycle
- Soils evaporation, plant transpiration,...





# Modeling ancient yields with paleoclimatic data

Pollen sites in the Mediterranean region (EPD)

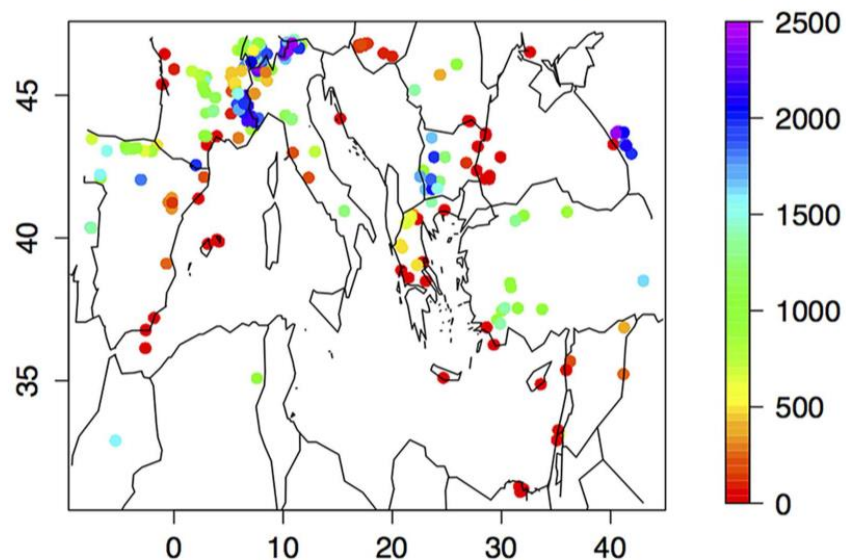
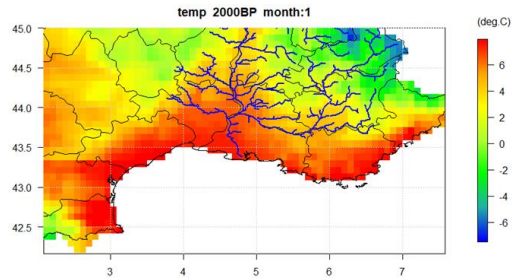


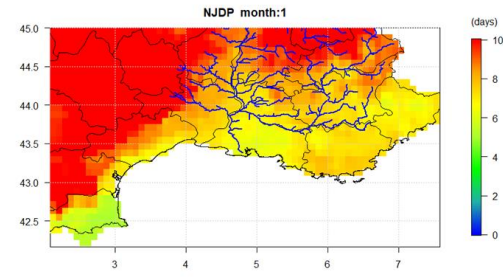
FIGURE 1 | Map of the 295 sites used for the reconstruction; the color indicates the elevation of the site.

- Joël Guiot, David Kaniewski. The Mediterranean Basin and Southern Europe in a warmer world: what can we learn from the past ?. *Frontiers in Earth Science*, Frontiers Media, 2015, 3

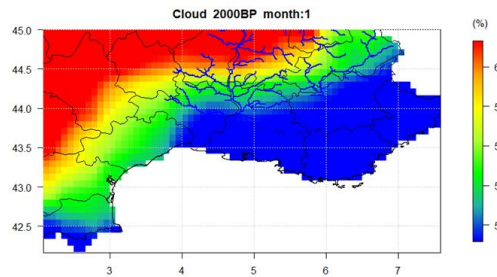
# Using LPJmL for reconstructing agricultural yields of the past



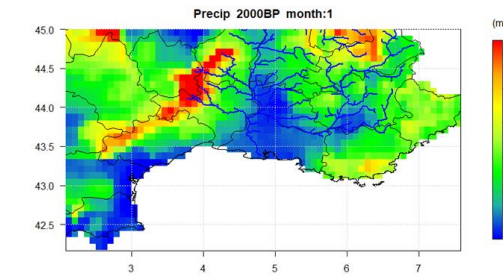
Temperatures



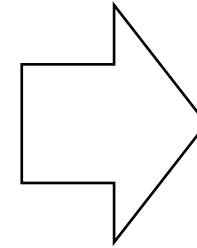
Number rainy days



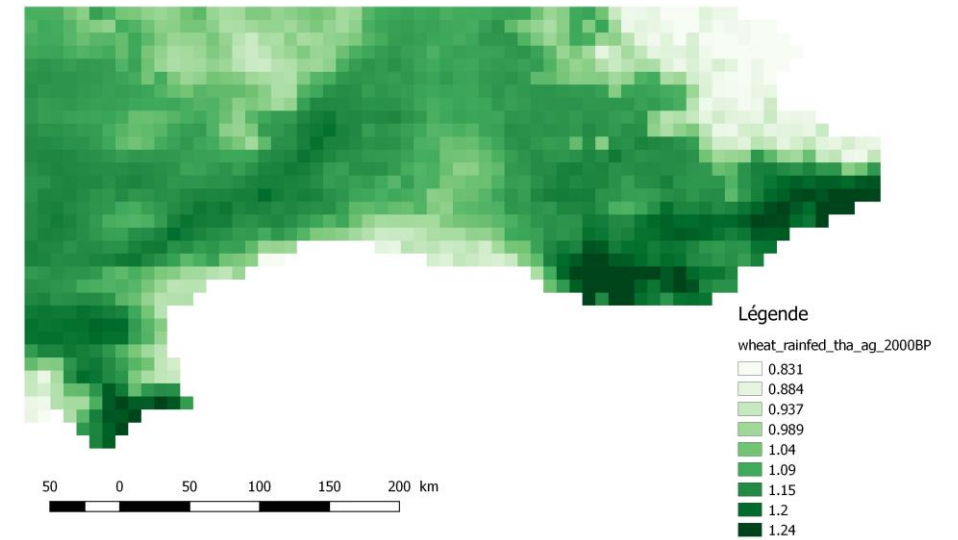
Cloud cover



Precipitations



## Reconstruction of potential yields in 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC

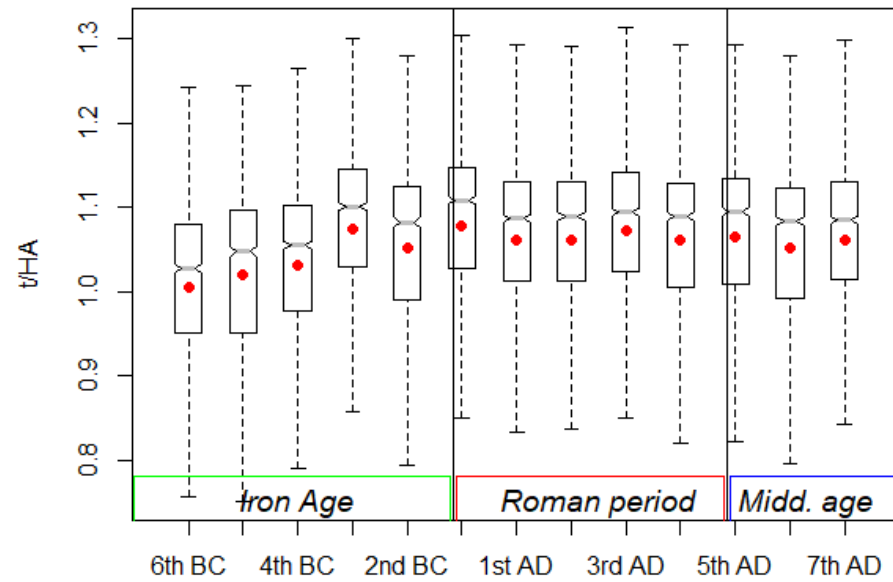


Wheat yield per T/ha (2000 BP)

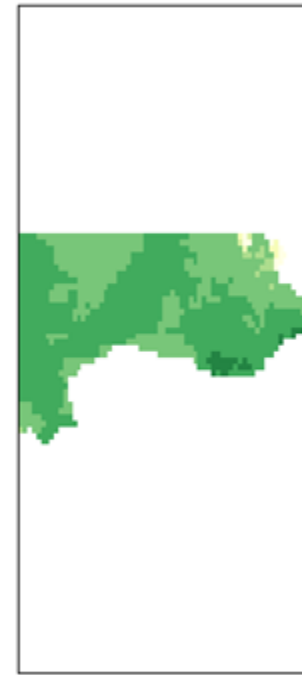
# LPJmL results

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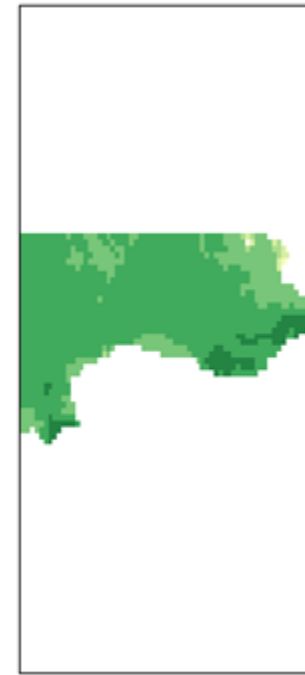
# Centennial variations of WHEAT 's potential yields in t/HA 6<sup>th</sup> c. BC - 7<sup>th</sup> c. AD



6th c. BC (2500BP)



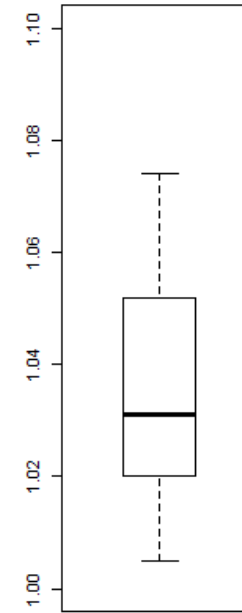
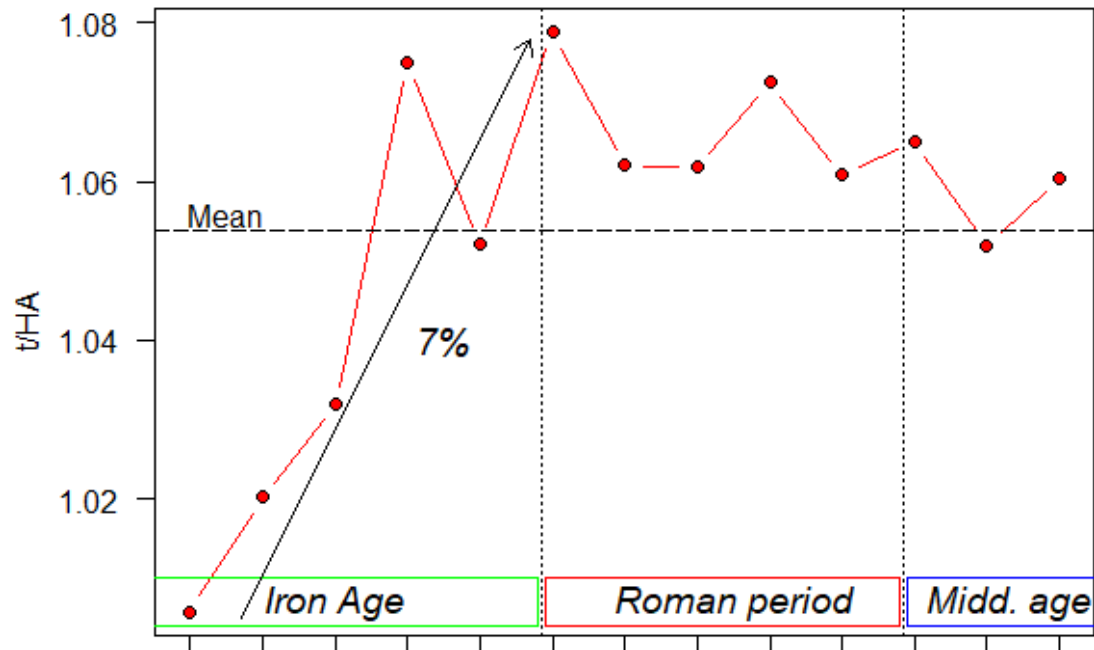
1st c. BC (2000BP)



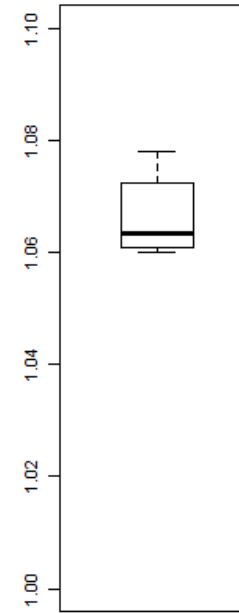
# Centennial variations of WHEAT 's potential yields in t/HA 6<sup>th</sup> c. BC - 7<sup>th</sup> c. AD

- Increase of yields during Iron Age
- Noticeable peak in 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC
- High yields during Roman period
- Decrease during early Middle age

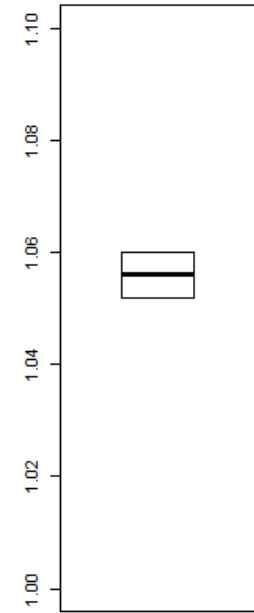
Centennial average of potential yields of WHEAT in tons/HA



Iron Age

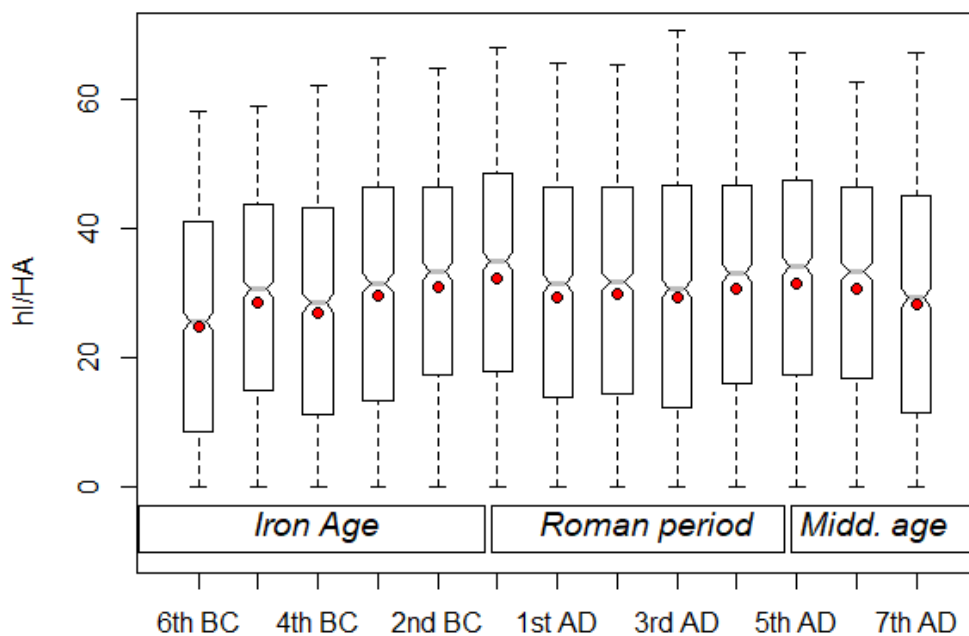


Roman period



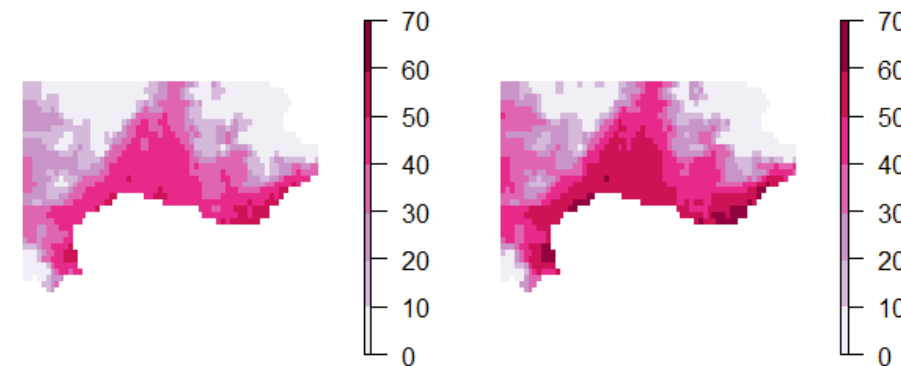
Early Middle Age

# Centennial variations of GRAPES's potential yields in hl/HA 6<sup>th</sup> c. BC - 7<sup>th</sup> c. AD



6th c. BC (Minimum)

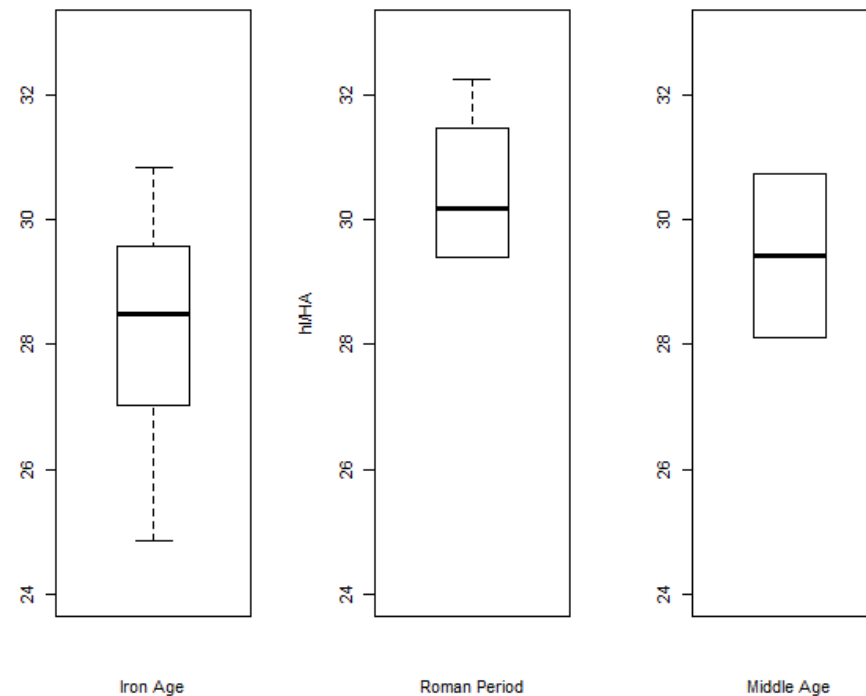
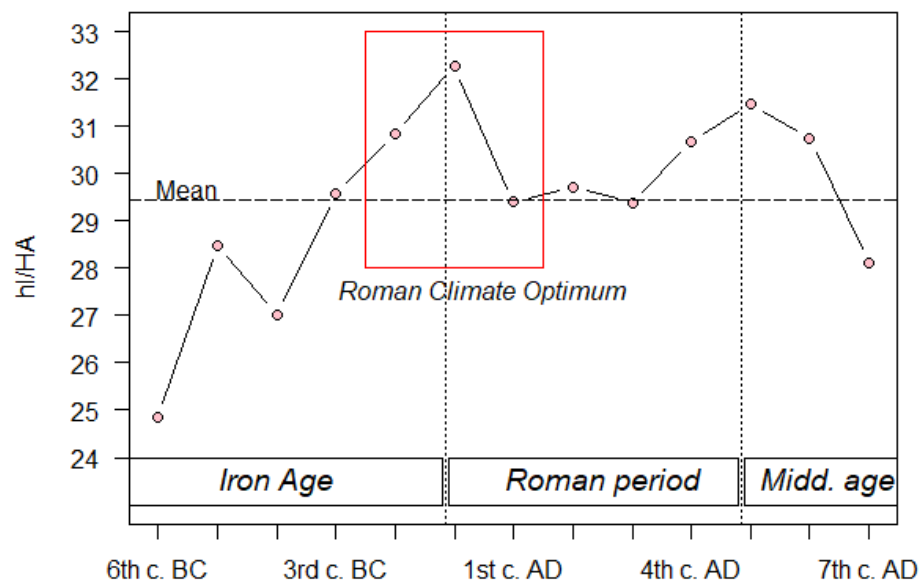
1st c. BC (Maximum)



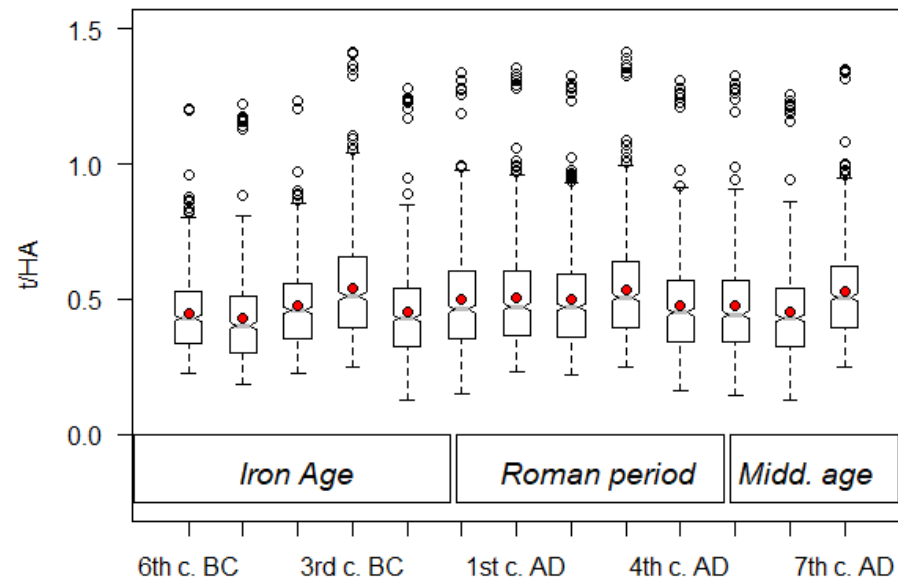
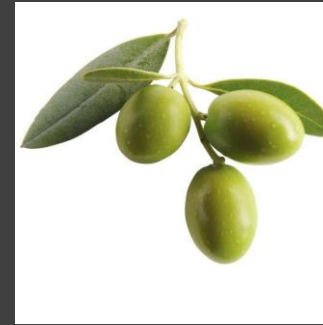
# Centennial variations of GRAPES's potential yields in hl/HA 6<sup>th</sup> c. BC - 7<sup>th</sup> c. AD

- 1<sup>st</sup> peak : 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC – 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC
- 2<sup>nd</sup> peak : 4<sup>th</sup> c. AD – 6<sup>th</sup> c. AD
- Highest value : 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC = 32 hl/HA
- Lowest value : 6<sup>th</sup> c. BC = 24 hl/HA
- Yields of Roman period more stable than others

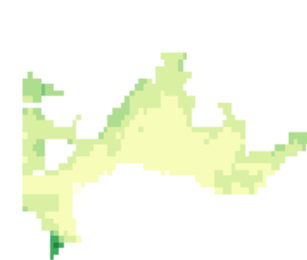
potential yields of irrigated GRAPES in hl/HA



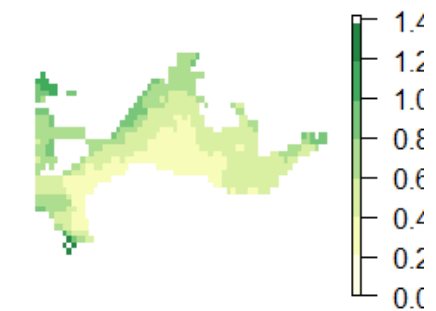
Centennial average of  
potential yields of rainfed  
**OLIVES** in t/HA  
6<sup>th</sup> c. BC - 7<sup>th</sup> c. AD



5th c. BC (Min)



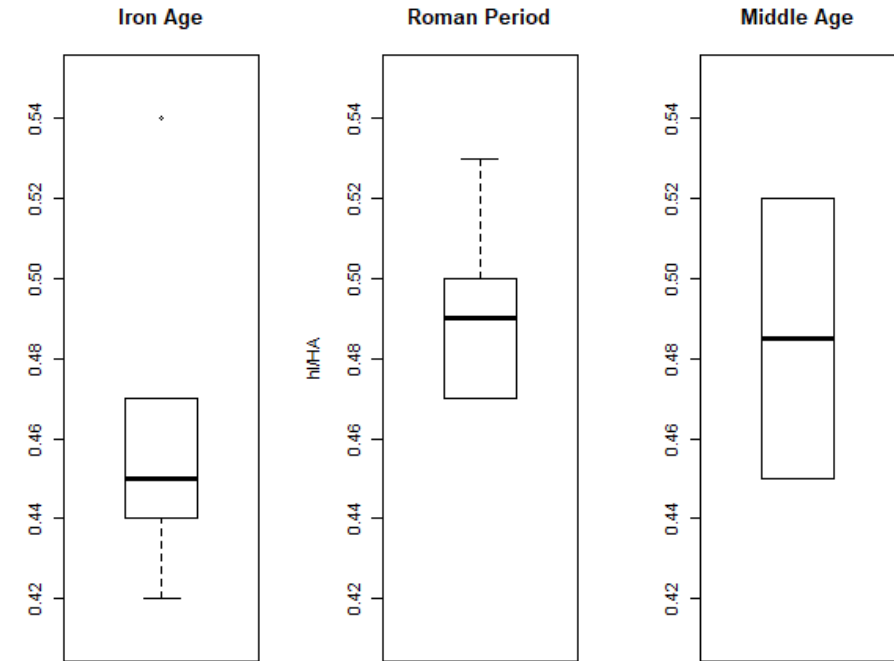
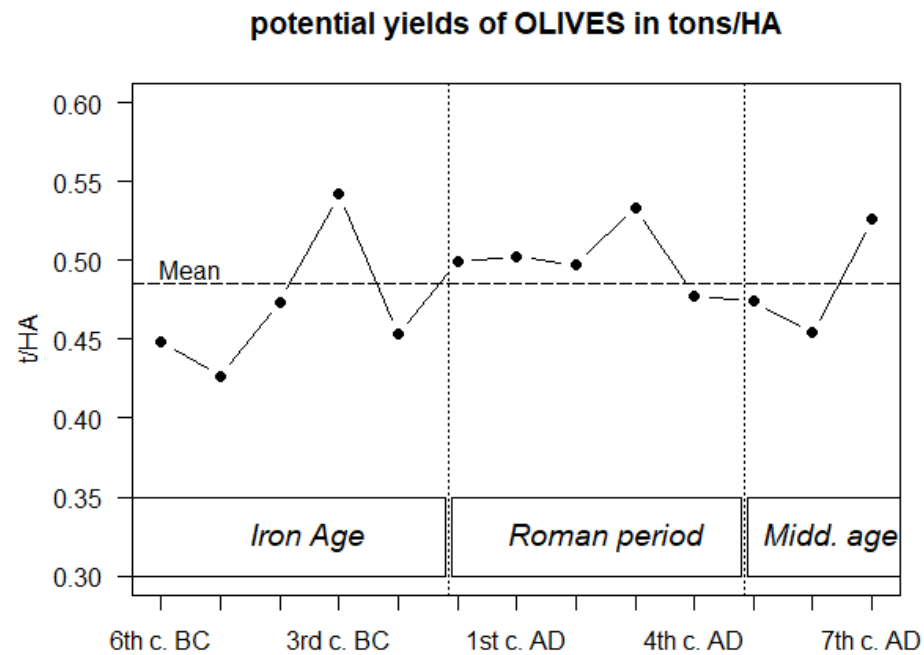
3rd c. BC (Max)





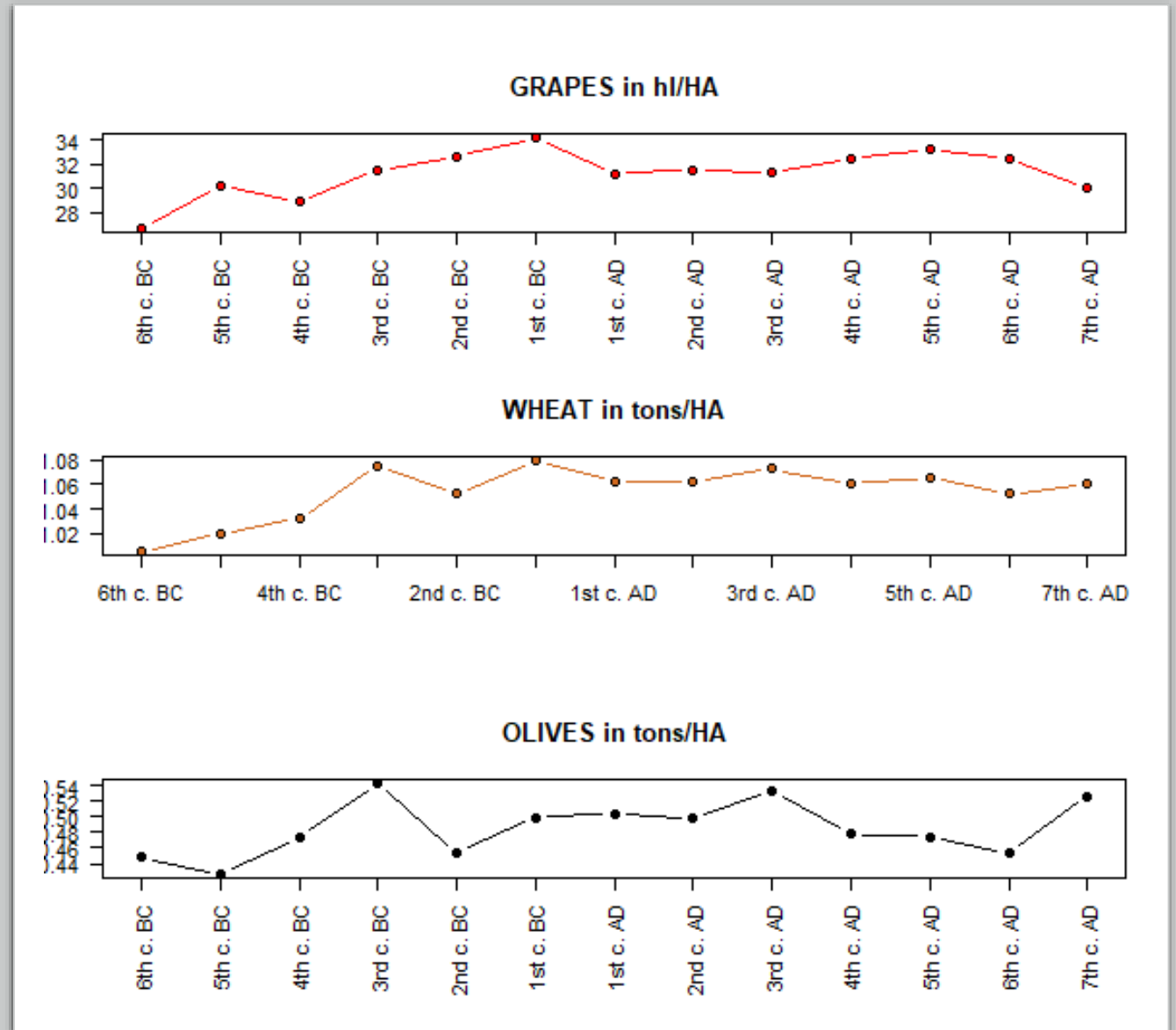
Centennial average of potential yields of rainfed OLIVES in t/HA  
6<sup>th</sup> c. BC - 7<sup>th</sup> c. AD

- Irregular yields during Iron Age with noticeable peak in 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC
- Relative high yields during Roman period
- Irregular yields during early Middle age



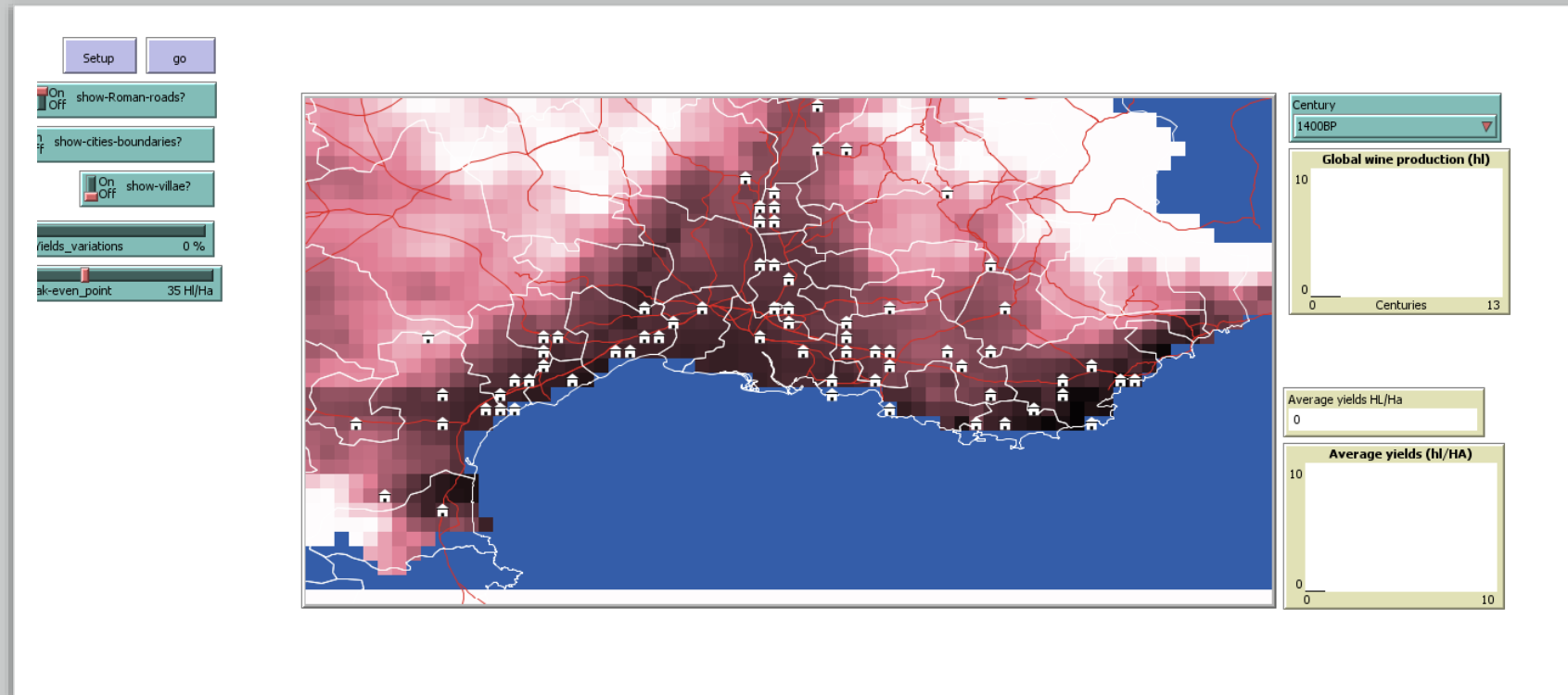
# Comparison of centennial averages of POTENTIAL yields

*Climate change does not have the same effect on the yields of different plant species*



From POTENTIAL YIELDS to  
POTENTIAL PRODUCTION : working  
with agent-based modeling

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## Agent-based Model “LPJmL- vine” (NETLOGO)

- Integrate LPJmL results + archeological data (sites, roads, towns,...)
- Agents are wineries attested by archaeological data
- Allows to calculate a global wine production according to centennial potential yields

# 6th c. BC

# 2500BP

Setup go

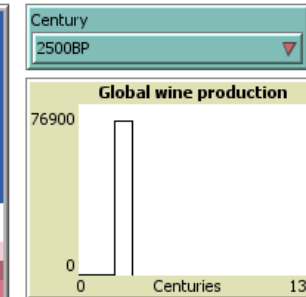
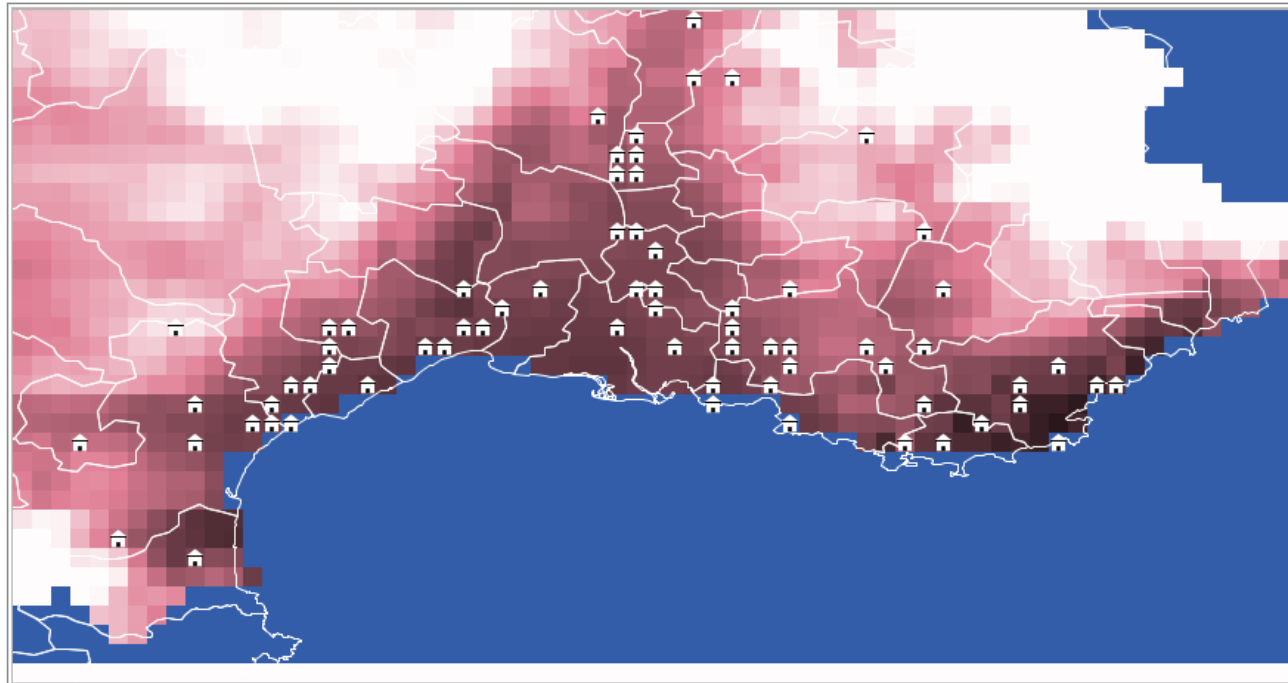
On show-Roman-roads?  
 Off

On show-cities-boundaries?  
 Off

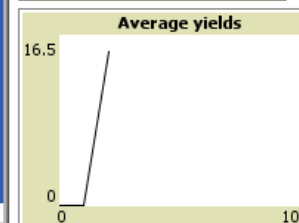
On show-villae?  
 Off

Var\_Rendements 0 %

Break-even\_point 35 Hl/Ha



Average yields Hl/Ha  
14.97



# 5th c. BC

# 2400 BP

Setup go

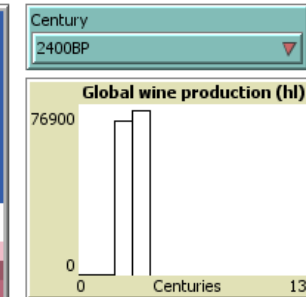
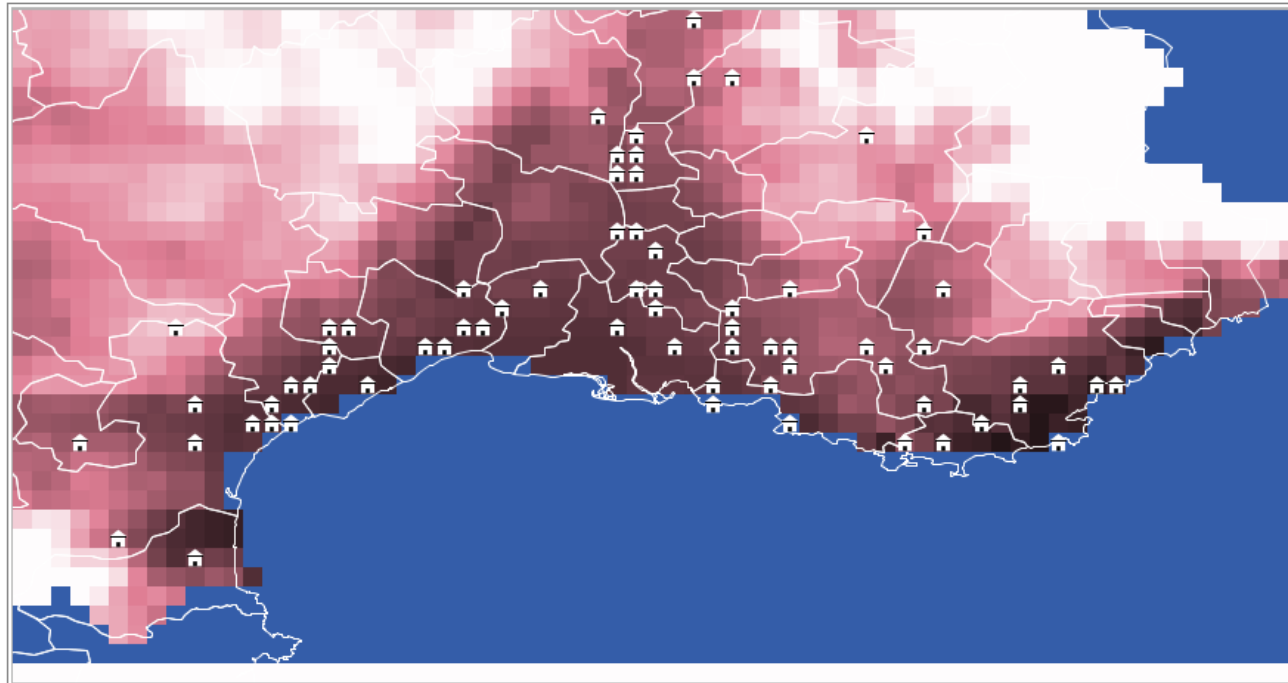
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On  Off show-cities-boundaries?

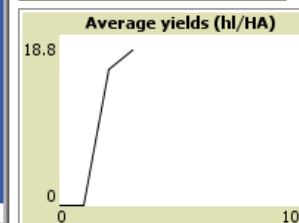
On  Off show-villae?

Var\_Rendements 0 %

Break-even\_point 35 Hl/Ha



Average yields Hl/Ha  
17.12



# 4th c. BC

# 2300BP

Setup go

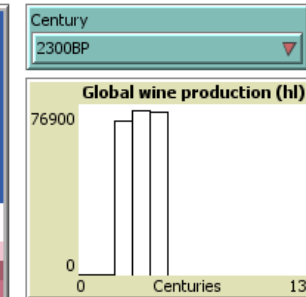
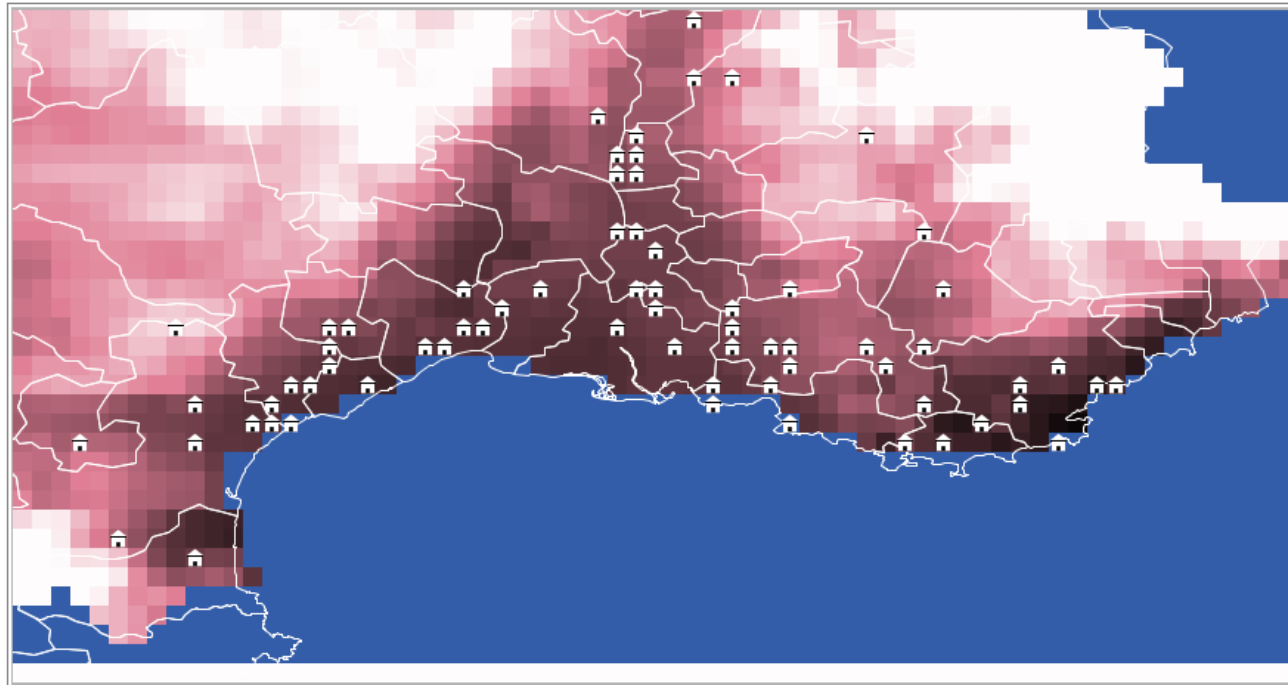
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On  Off show-cities-boundaries?

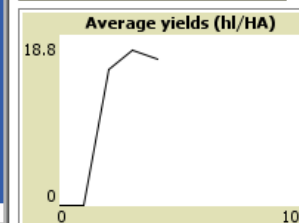
On  Off show-villae?

Var\_Rendements 0 %

Break-even\_point 35 Hl/Ha



Average yields Hl/Ha  
16.26



# 3rd c. BC

# 2200BP

Setup go

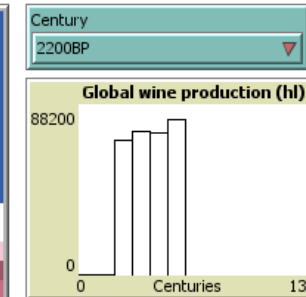
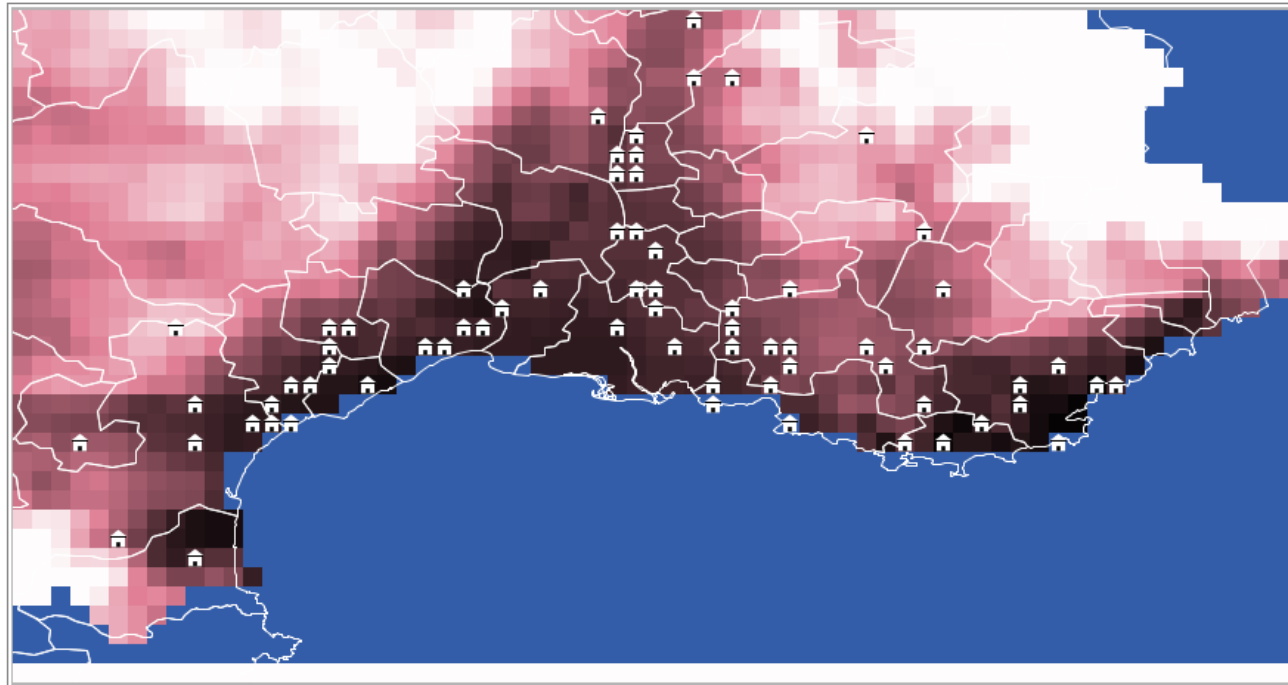
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On  Off show-cities-boundaries?

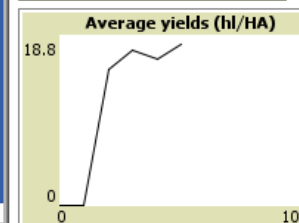
On  Off show-villae?

Var\_Rendements 0 %

Break-even\_point 35 Hl/Ha



Average yields HL/Ha  
17.79





# 2nd c. BC

# 2100BP

Setup go

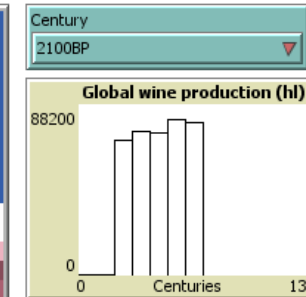
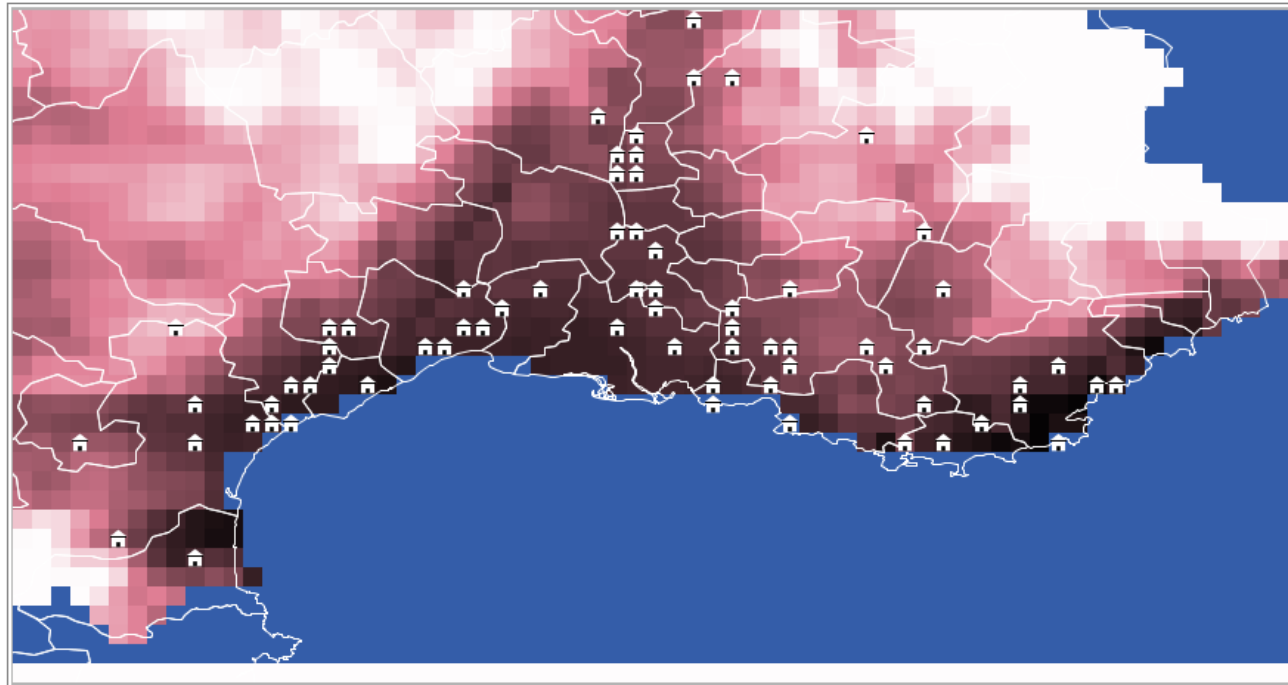
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On  Off show-cities-boundaries?

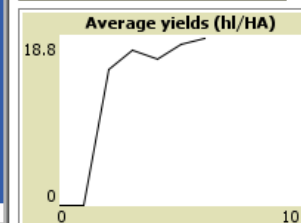
On  Off show-villae?

Var\_Rendements 0 %

Break-even\_point 35 Hl/Ha



Average yields HL/Ha  
18.53



# 1st c. BC

# 2000BP

Setup go

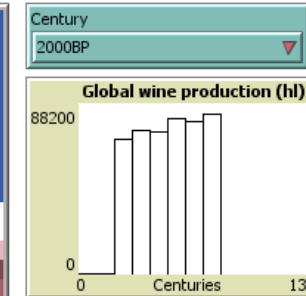
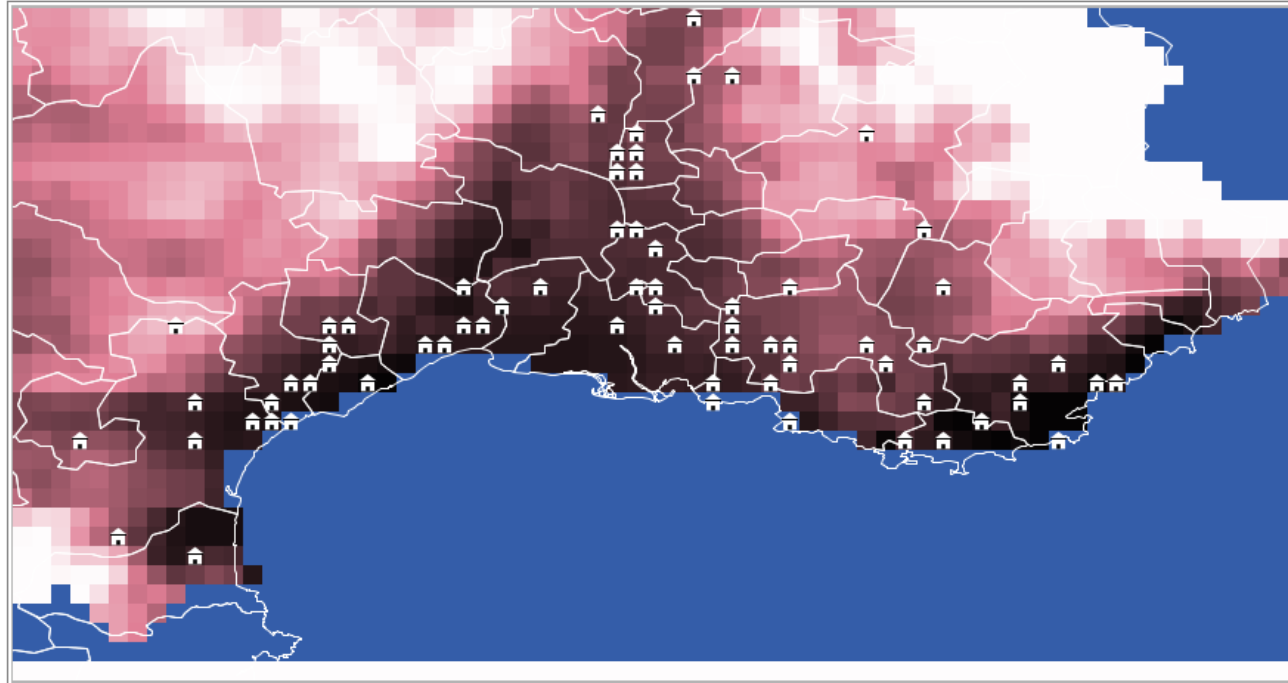
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On  
 Off show-cities-boundaries?

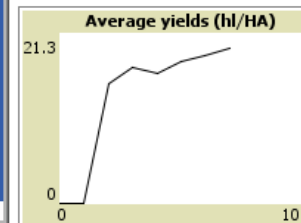
On  
 Off show-villae?

Var\_Rendements 0 %

Break-even\_point 35 Hl/Ha



Average yields Hl/Ha  
19.4



# 1st c. AD

# 1900BP

Setup go

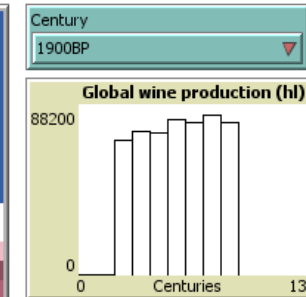
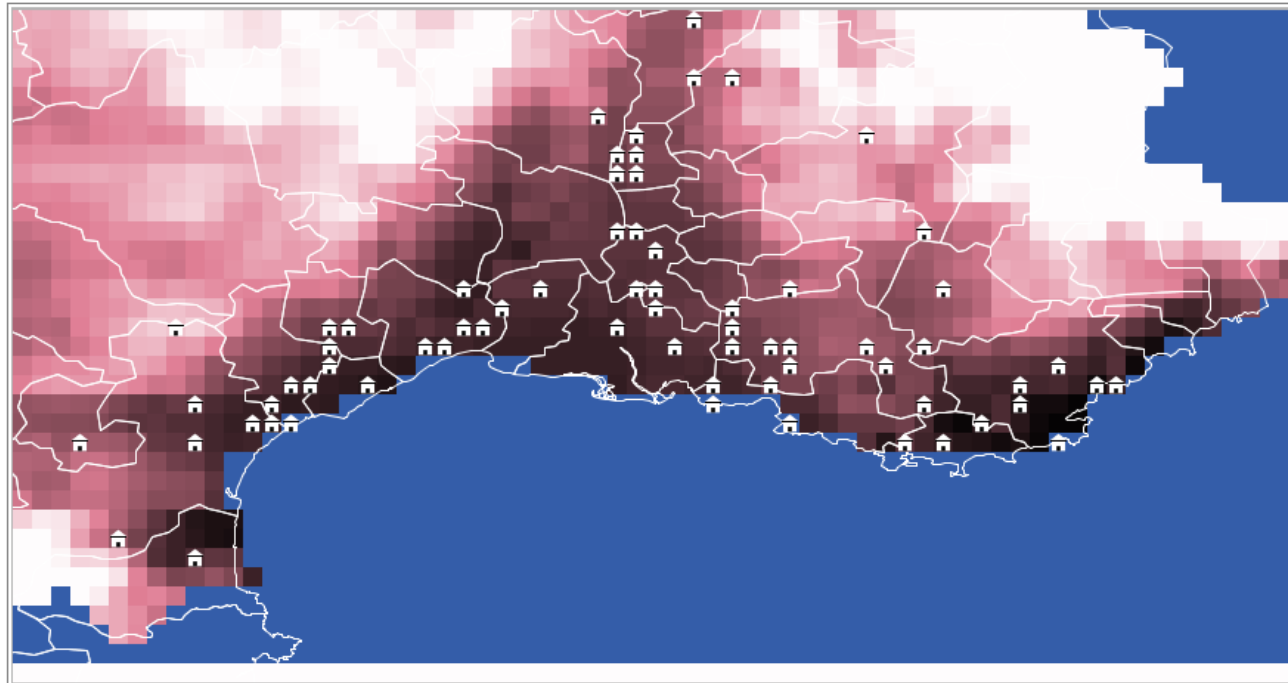
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On  
 Off show-cities-boundaries?

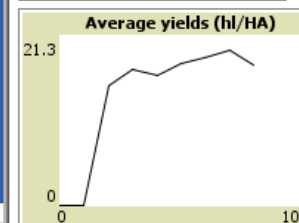
On  
 Off show-villae?

Var\_Rendements 0 %

Break-even\_point 35 Hl/Ha



Average yields Hl/Ha  
17.68



# 2nd c. AD

# 1800BP

Setup go

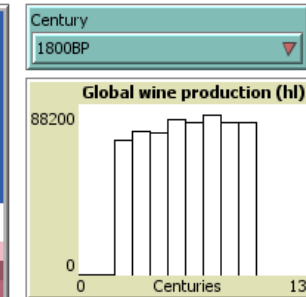
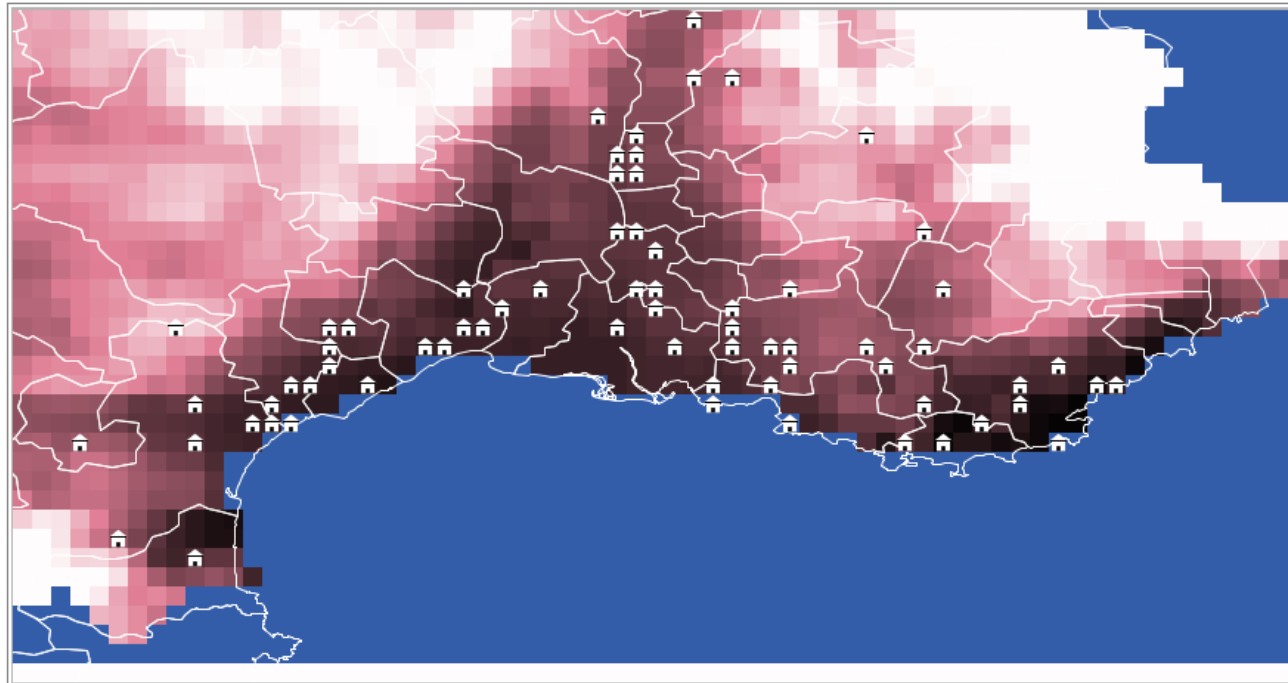
On  
 Off show-Roman-roads?

On  
 Off show-cities-boundaries?

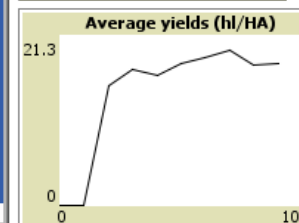
On  
 Off show-villae?

Var\_Rendements 0 %

Break-even\_point 35 Hl/Ha



Average yields Hl/Ha  
17.87



# 3rd c. AD

# 1700BP

Setup go

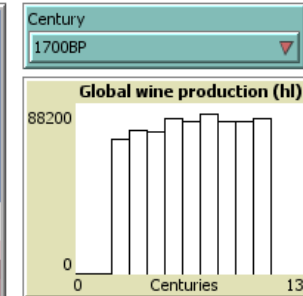
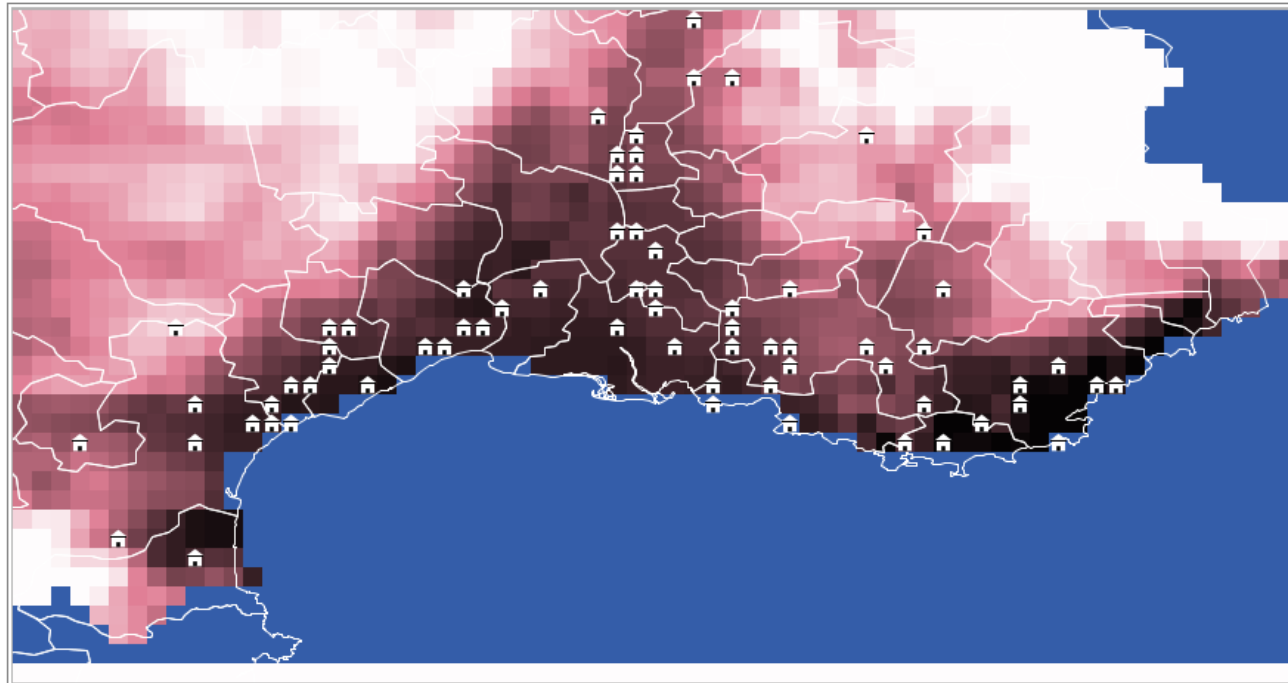
On  Off show-Roman-roads?

On  Off show-cities-boundaries?

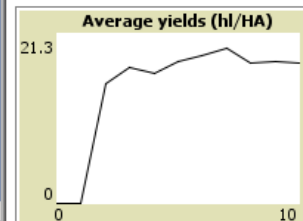
On  Off show-villae?

Var\_Rendements 0 %

Break-even\_point 35 Hl/Ha



Average yields Hl/Ha  
17.68



# 4th c. AD

# 1600BP

Setup go

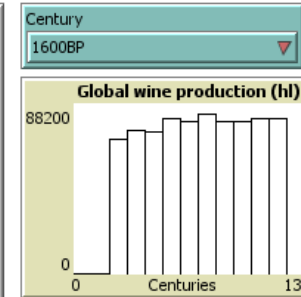
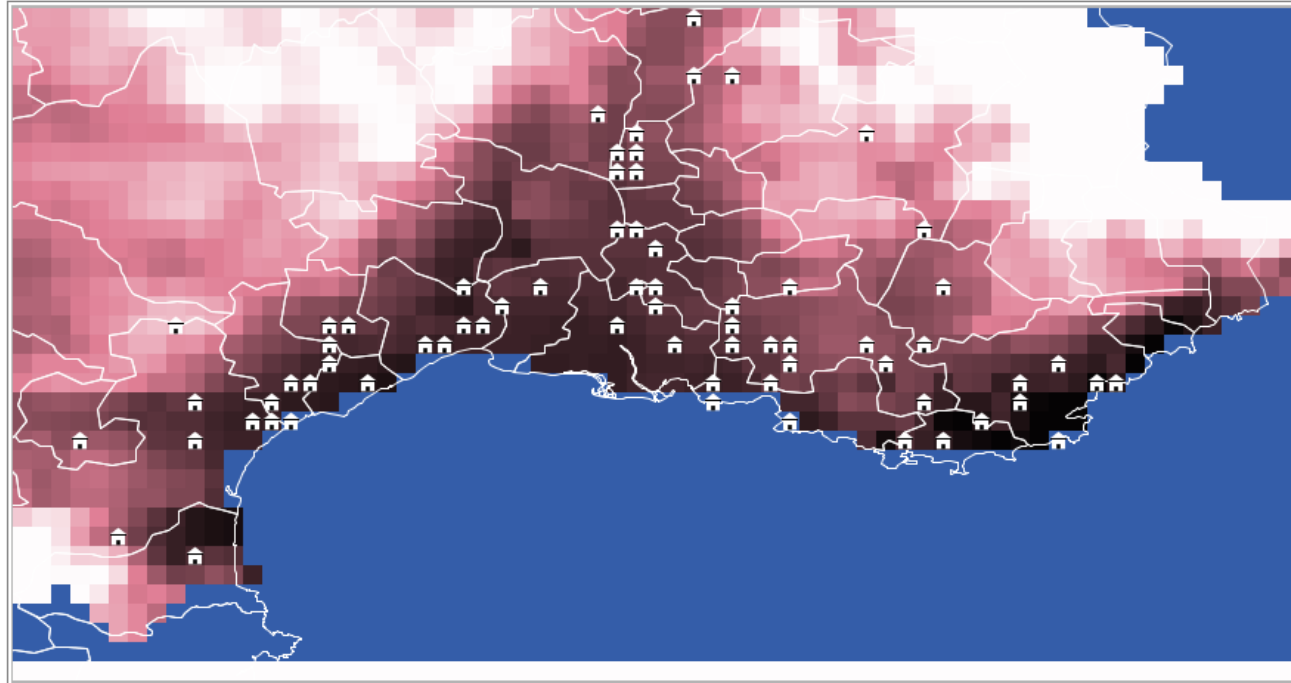
On  Off show-Roman-roads?

On  Off show-cities-boundaries?

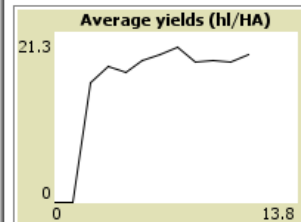
On  Off show-villae?

Var\_Rendements 0 %

Break-even\_point 35 Hl/Ha



Average yields Hl/Ha  
18.44



# 5th c. AD

# 1500BP

Setup go

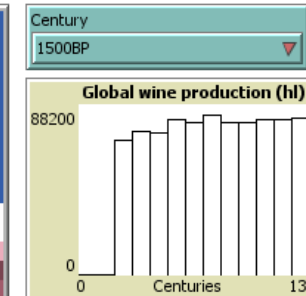
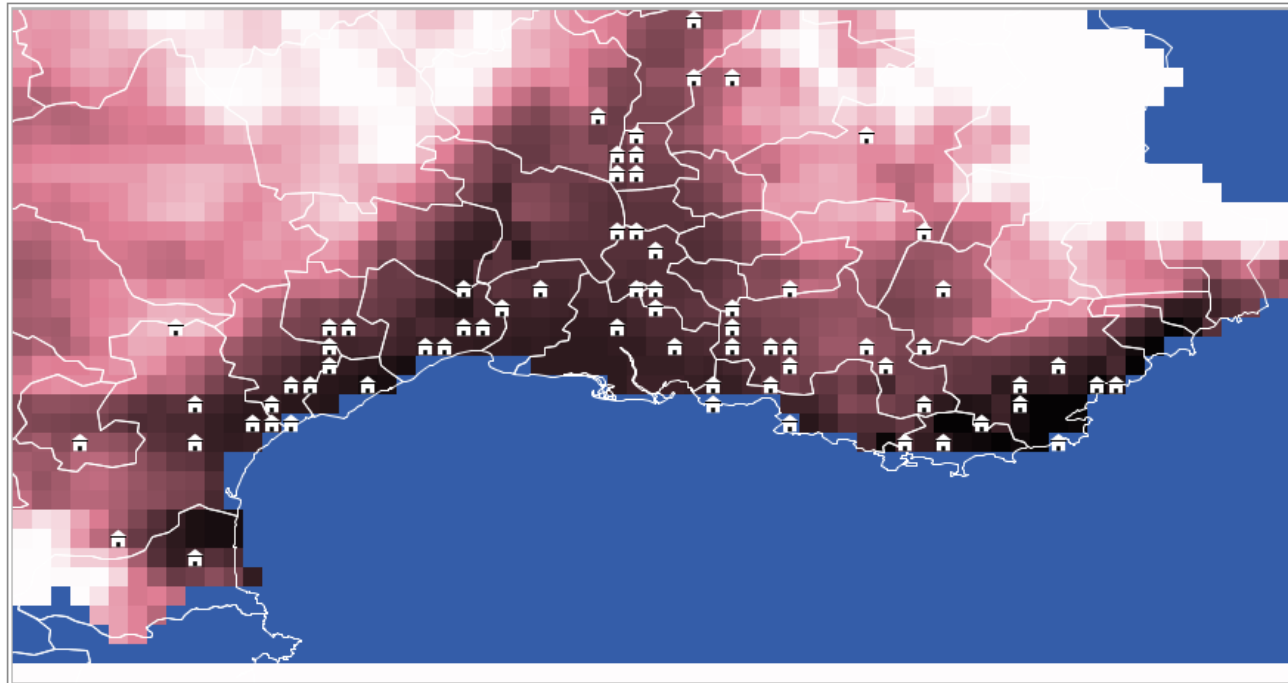
On  
 Off show-Roman-roads?

On  
 Off show-cities-boundaries?

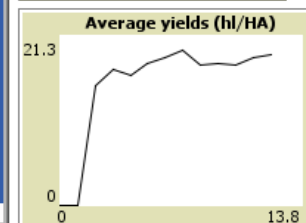
On  
 Off show-villae?

Var\_Rendements 0 %

Break-even\_point 35 Hl/Ha



Average yields Hl/Ha  
18.93



# 6th c. AD

# 1400BP

Setup go

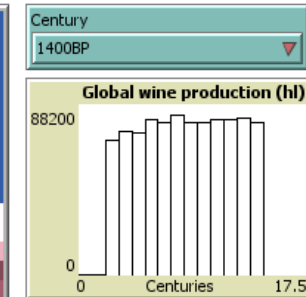
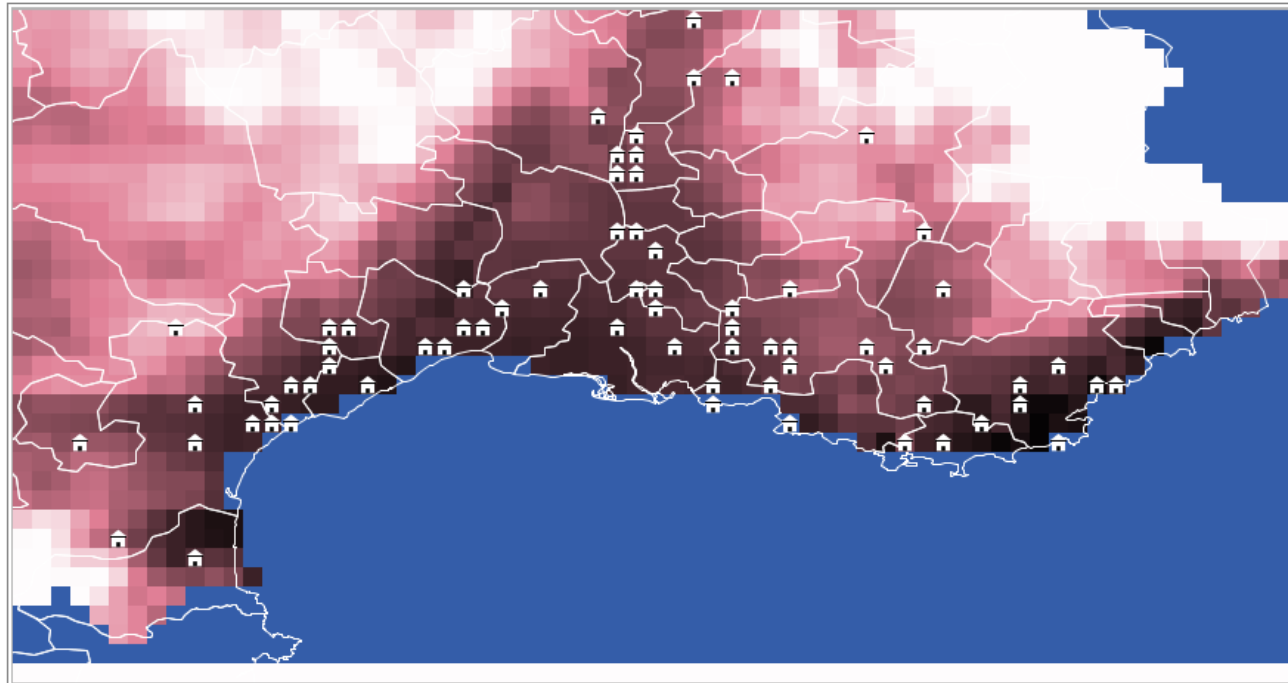
On  
 Off show-Roman-roads?

On  
 Off show-cities-boundaries?

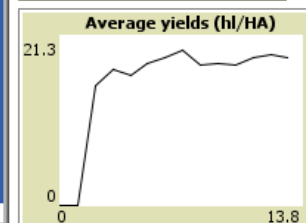
On  
 Off show-villae?

Var\_Rendements 0 %

Break-even\_point 35 Hl/Ha



Average yields HL/Ha  
18.47





# 7th c. AD

# 1300BP

Setup go

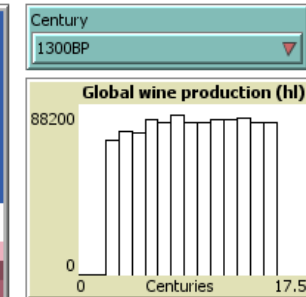
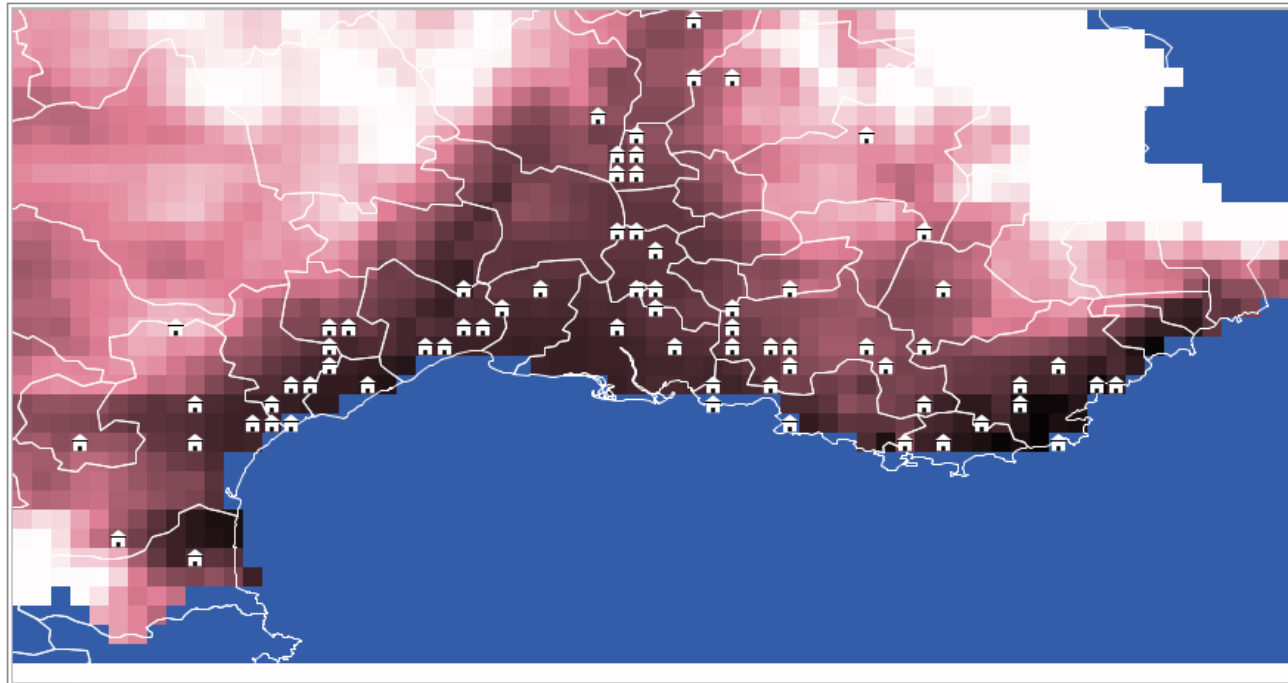
On  Off show-Roman-roads?

On  Off show-cities-boundaries?

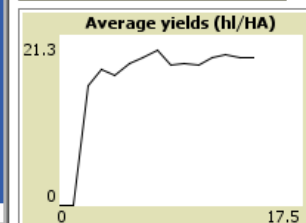
On  Off show-villae?

Var\_Rendements 0 %

Break-even\_point 35 Hl/Ha



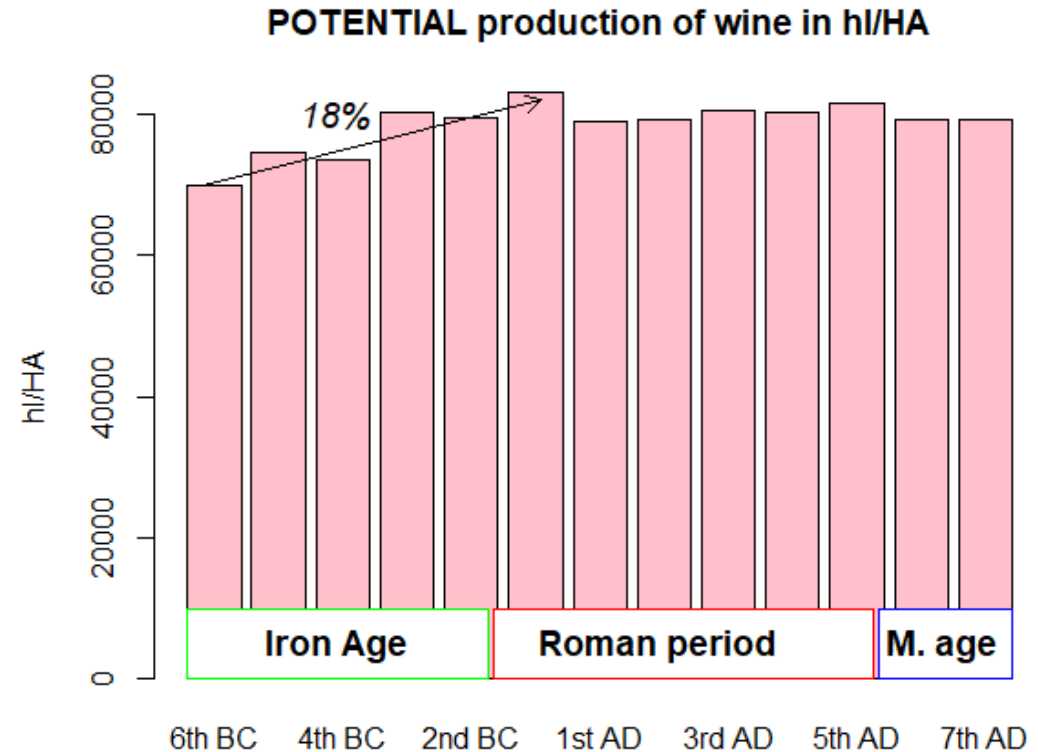
Average yields HL/Ha  
18.47



## POTENTIAL wine production (according to NETLOGO model)

6<sup>th</sup> c. BC – 7<sup>th</sup> c. AD

- Progressive increase of 18 % during Iron Age until the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC
- Decrease after the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC but stabilization of production level during Roman period, with a new increase in the Late Antiquity (5<sup>th</sup> c. AD)
- Slight decrease during early Middle Age, but no collapse of the production



# Conclusion

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- *Did the Roman Climate Optimum have had a significant effect on agricultural production ?*

According to the results of our models, the potential yields and production was indeed higher in the Roman period than Iron Age and early Middle Age.

- Increase of 7% of wheat potential yields
- Increase of 18 % of potential wine production