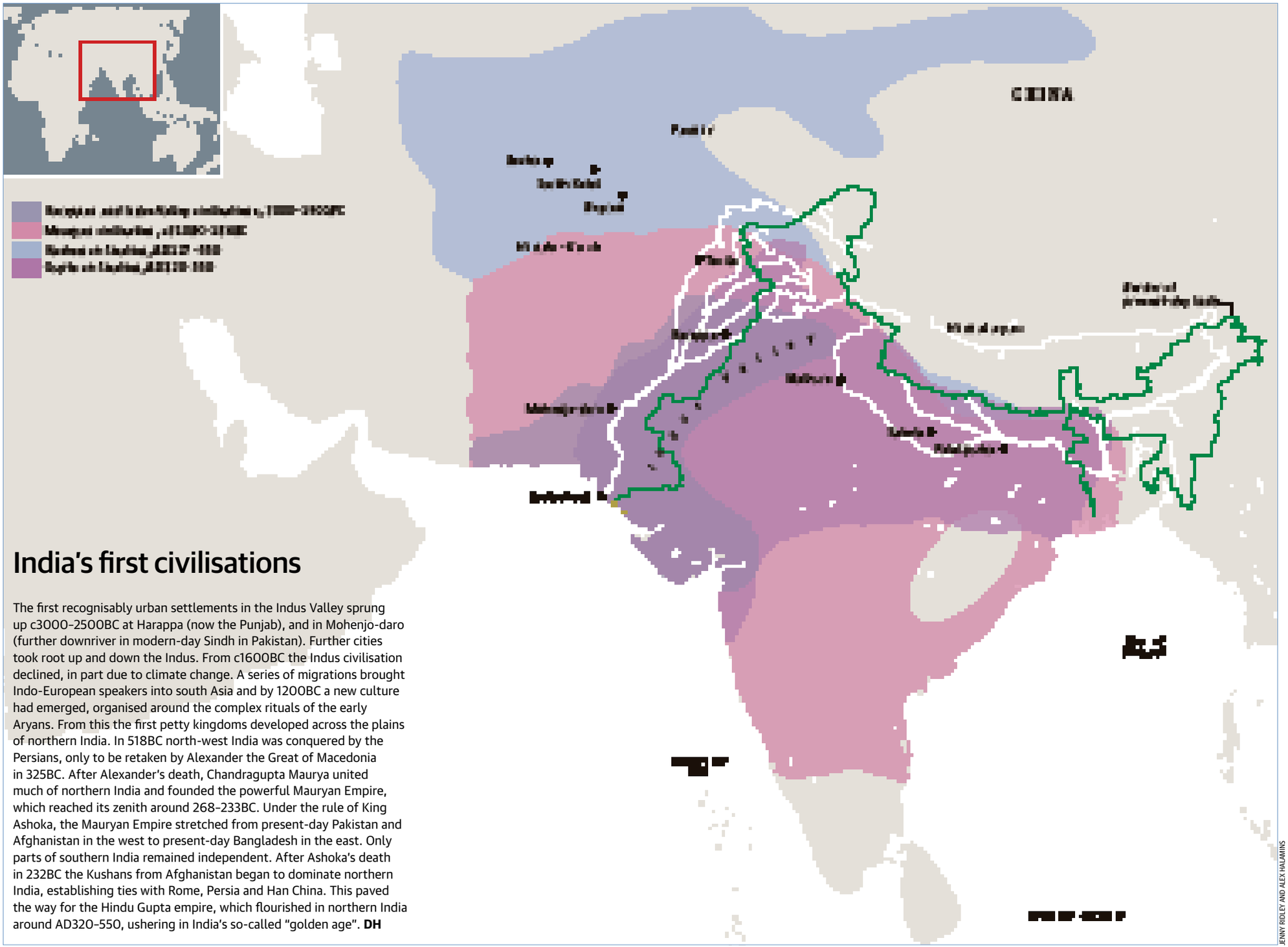

India's first civilisations

The first recognisably urban settlements in the Indus Valley sprung up c3000–2500BC at Harappa (now the Punjab), and in Mohenjo-daro (further downriver in modern-day Sindh in Pakistan). Further cities took root up and down the Indus. From c1600BC the Indus civilisation declined, in part due to climate change. A series of migrations brought Indo-European speakers into south Asia and by 1200BC a new culture had emerged, organised around the complex rituals of the early Aryans. From this the first petty kingdoms developed across the plains of northern India. In 518BC north-west India was conquered by the Persians, only to be retaken by Alexander the Great of Macedonia in 325BC. After Alexander's death, Chandragupta Maurya united much of northern India and founded the powerful Mauryan Empire, which reached its zenith around 268–233BC. Under the rule of King Ashoka, the Mauryan Empire stretched from present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan in the west to present-day Bangladesh in the east. Only parts of southern India remained independent. After Ashoka's death in 232BC the Kushans from Afghanistan began to dominate northern India, establishing ties with Rome, Persia and Han China. This paved the way for the Hindu Gupta empire, which flourished in northern India around AD320–550, ushering in India's so-called "golden age". **DH**

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