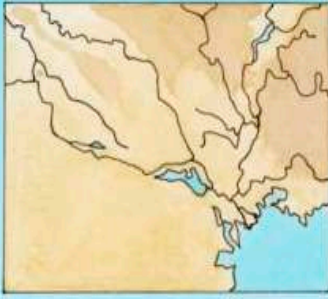




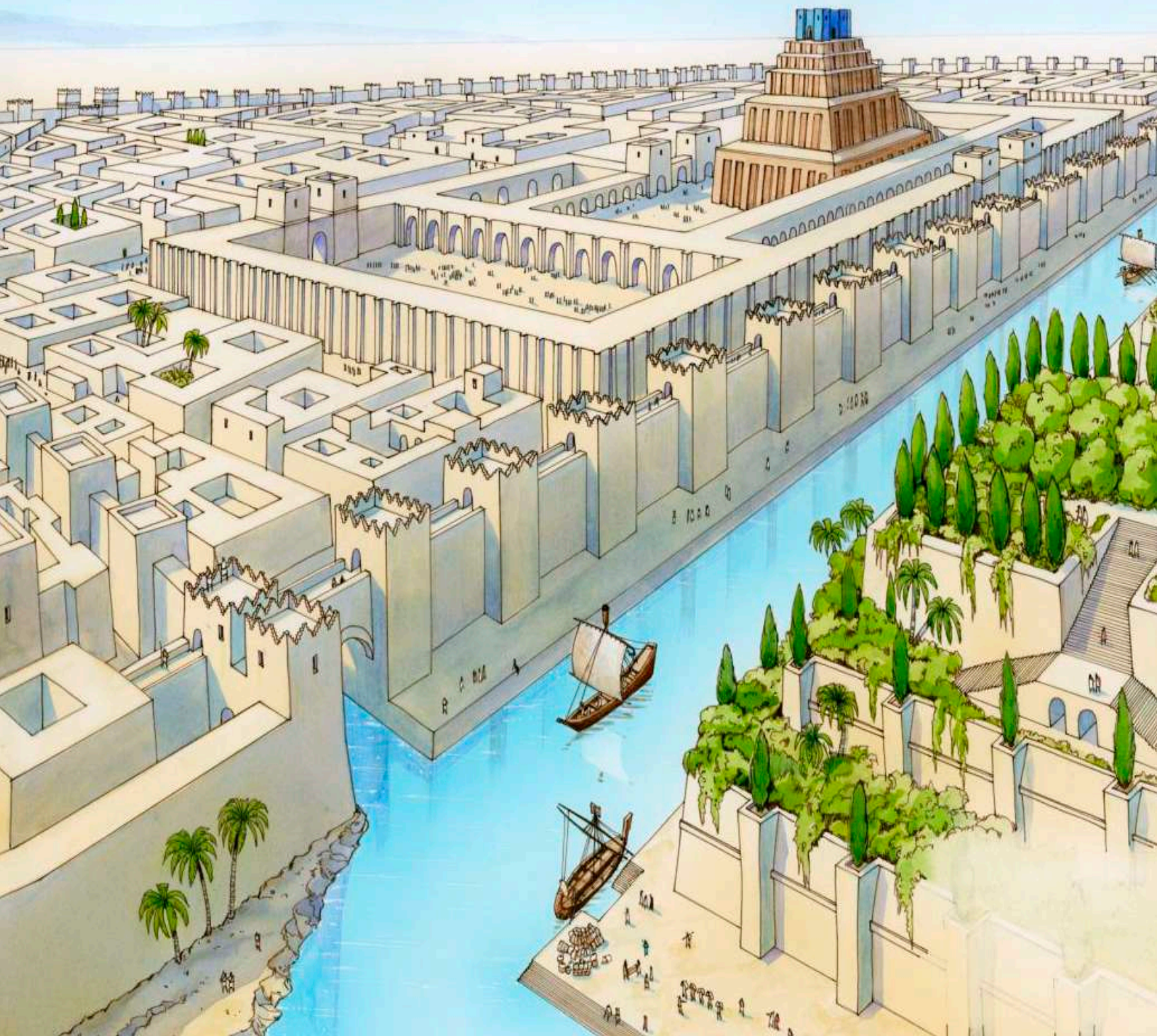
Tales of Ancient Worlds

The First Cities of Mesopotamia





In the Bronze Age the first true cities emerged in the Middle East, in a region called Mesopotamia.



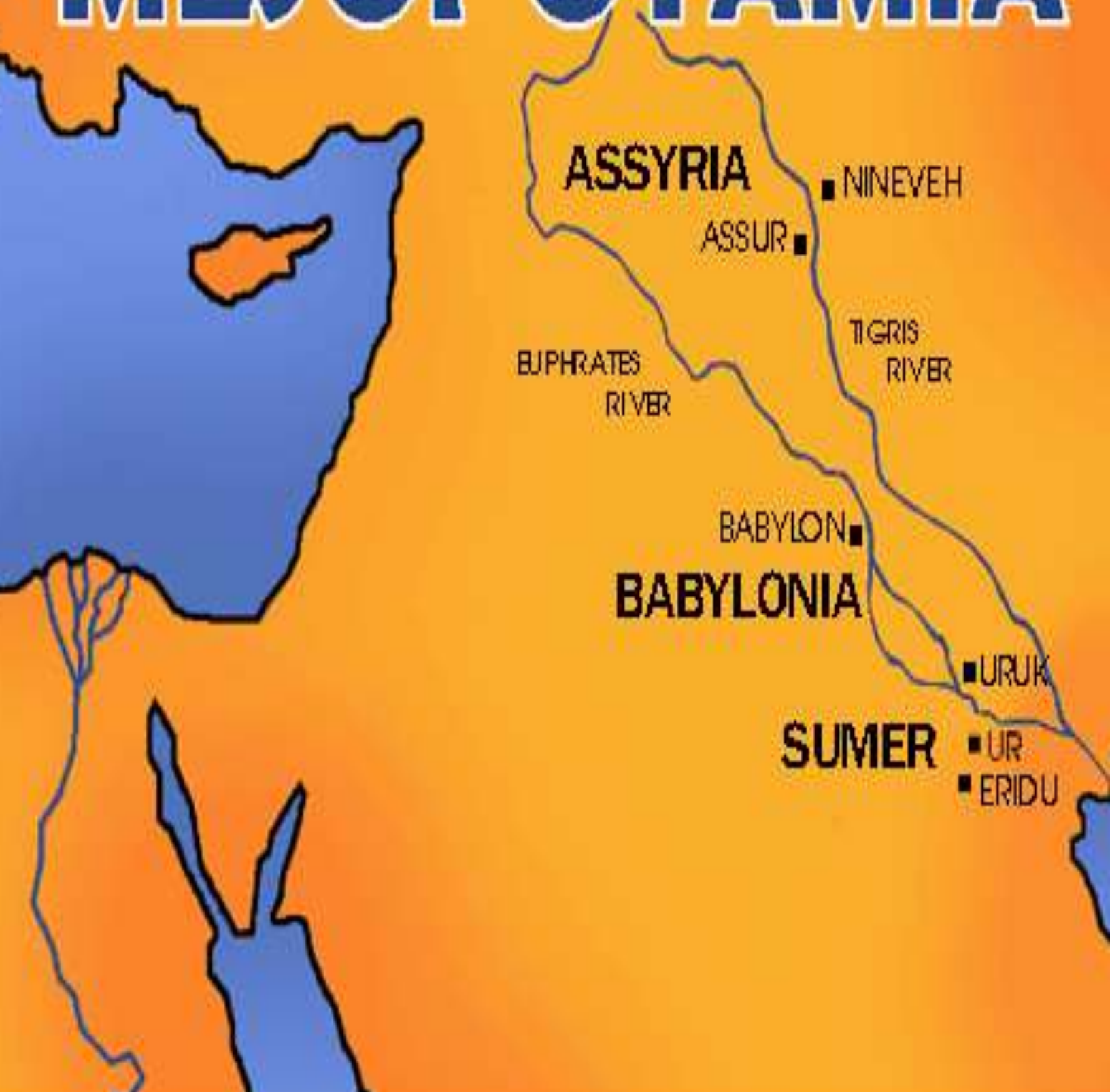
Ur, Nineveh, Babylon, Uruk and Assur were centres of trade and empires, vibrant cities full people, exotica goods and fearsome rulers.



These cities had lots in common, but that doesn't mean they were friendly. They frequently fought wars and competed against each other. Each city had its own rulers and different gods. Let's take a look at Ur, founded in 3800 BCE. It might just be the oldest city in the world!



Ancient MESOPOTAMIA



ASSYRIA

■ NINEVEH

■ ASSUR

EUPHRATES
RIVER

TIGRIS
RIVER

■ BABYLON

BABYLONIA

■ URUK

SUMER

■ UR

■ ERIDU

The Ziggurat of Ur

At the centre of Ur was a huge ziggurat. Ziggurats were enormous temples made up of different levels. As you went up, each level was a little smaller than the last, making the ziggurat slightly resemble a pyramid. At Ur the outside bricks may have been glazed and brightly coloured. At the top was a shrine where the priests of the city performed the most important rituals.



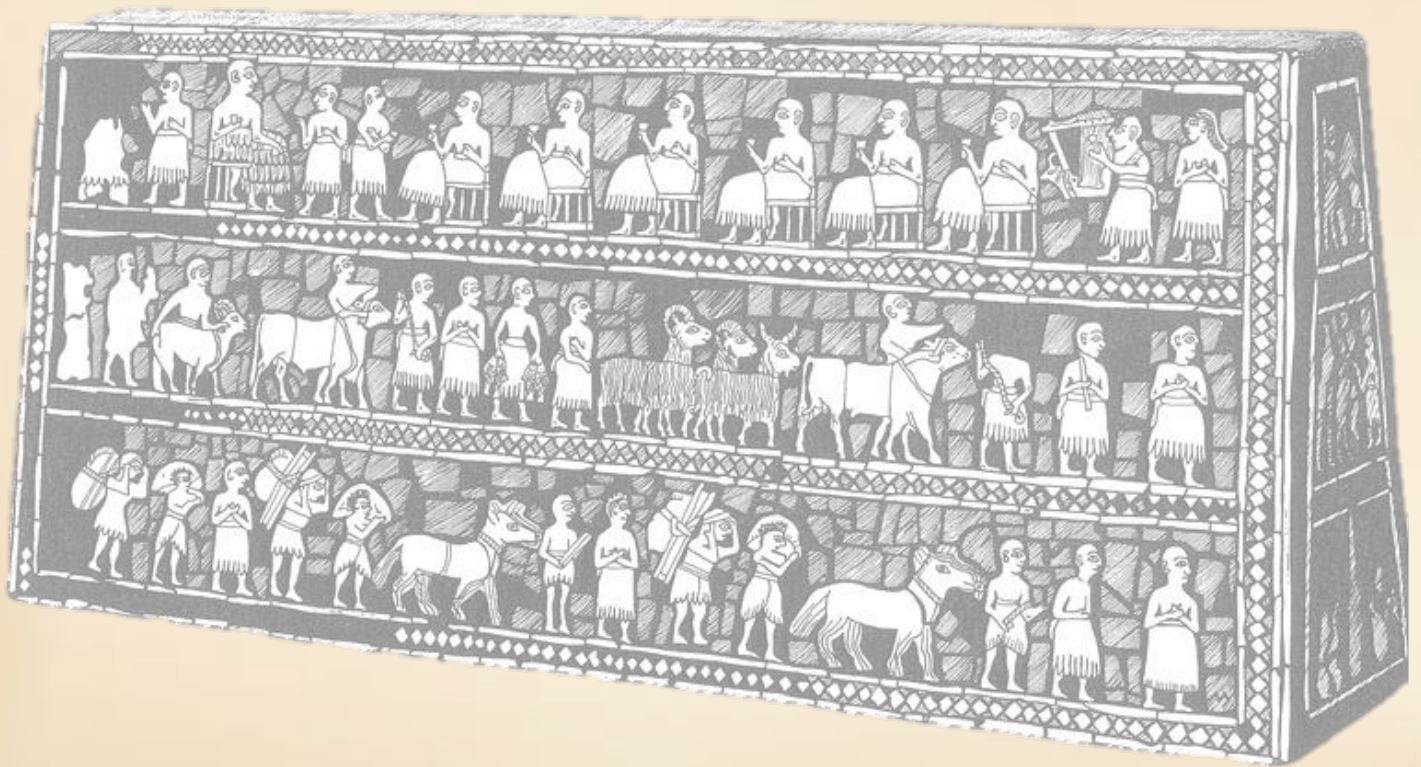
Between Two Rivers

Mesopotamia is Greek for “land between rivers”. The Tigris and Euphrates rivers flow through the region on their way to the Persian Gulf, a sea to the south, providing the perfect conditions for farming and trade.



The Standard of Ur

The Standard of Ur is one of the greatest treasures ever uncovered by archaeologists. Incredibly it's a mosaic about 4,600 years old and shows different scenes from the royal palace at Ur. It has two sides: peace and war. On the peace side you can see farmers and traders bringing fish and animals to the king. On the wayside, soldiers hold their swords in preparation for battle.



Early Writing

The people of Mesopotamia wrote in a language we call cuneiform. They would use a small stick to draw symbols in clay. The tablet was then dried or baked and the message preserved (luckily for us). Cuneiform eventually evolved into an alphabet of letters made up of small triangles.



The Burial of Queen Puabi



In 1922 British archaeologists Leonard and Katherine Woolley and their team of Iraqi excavators started digging in the ancient Mesopotamian city of Ur. Little did they realise how much sand they would have to remove. Shovel after shovel, bucket after bucket, deeper and deeper they went. As deep as three or four houses – so deep they had to build stairs just to get out!

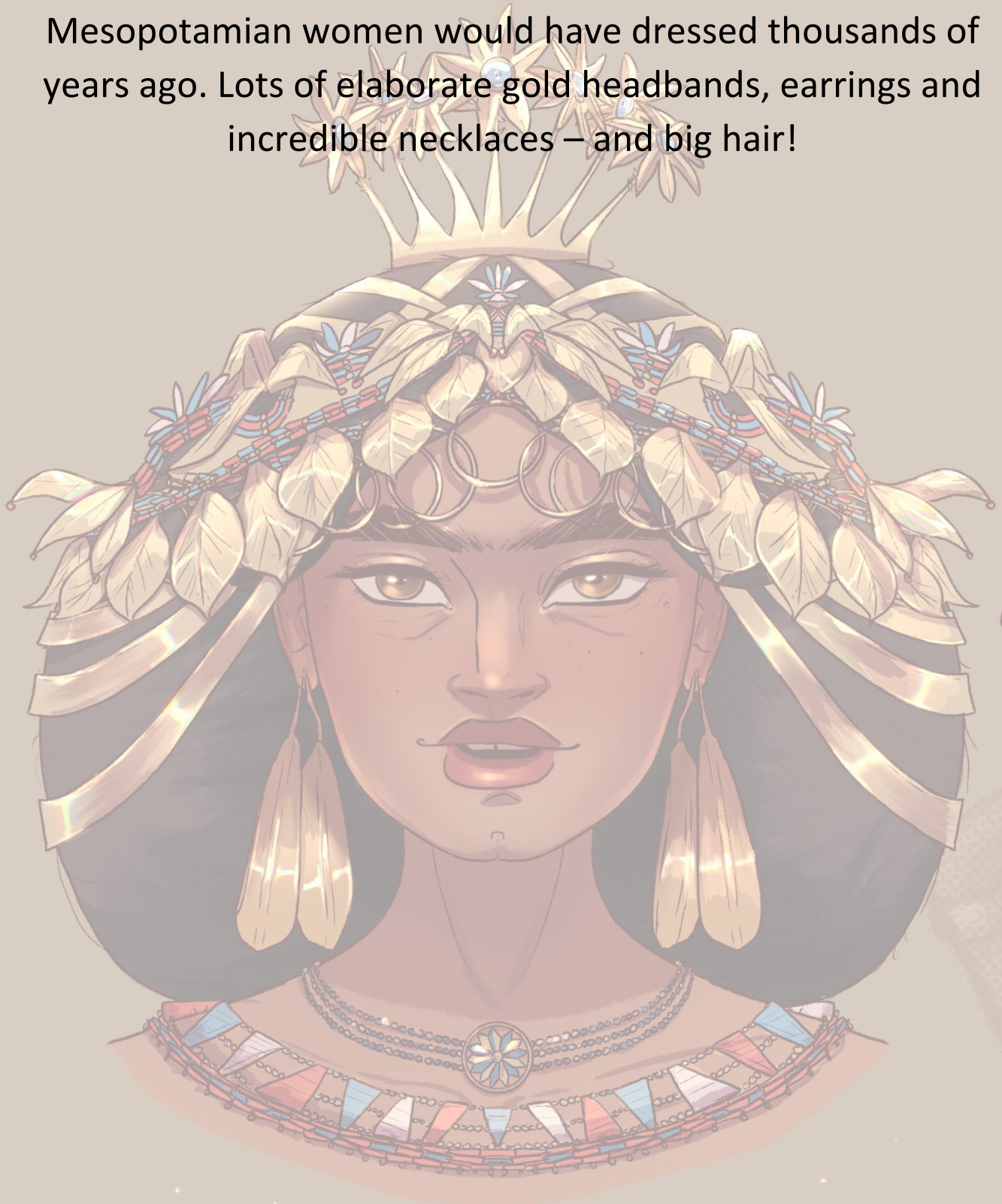


Eventually they hit something. There, buried for thousands of years under the hot desert sand, was the tomb of Queen Puabi, a super-rich ruler who lived around 4.600 years ago.

Queen Puabi's tomb was full of incredible treasures, including golden cups for drinking beer (which Mesopotamians adored and wrote songs about) and wooden lyres, a type of ancient instrument. The people of Ur loved music and poetry. Some of their poems, such as the epic of Gilgamesh, are still know today.



After over 4000 years underneath all that sand, Queen Puabi and her servants were as flat as a pancake. Fortunately, after many hours of careful work, Katherine Woolley was able to reconstruct them. This gives us a brilliant idea of how rich Mesopotamian women would have dressed thousands of years ago. Lots of elaborate gold headbands, earrings and incredible necklaces – and big hair!



“Servants?” I hear you ask. That’s right. As Leonard and his team were digging around the tomb, they uncovered a grisly sight. Queen Puabi was buried with 52 servants. Guards, horsemen, female attendants – everyone the queen needed to help her in the afterlife.



How did all these people die, everyone wondered? Next to each body excavators found a small cup. Katherine mused whether they'd all been poisoned after following the queen into the tomb. Recent examinations of the skulls of the servants have shown they had also been hit on their heads. Who knows, maybe it was both? And all in service of their queen.



The World's Oldest Letter

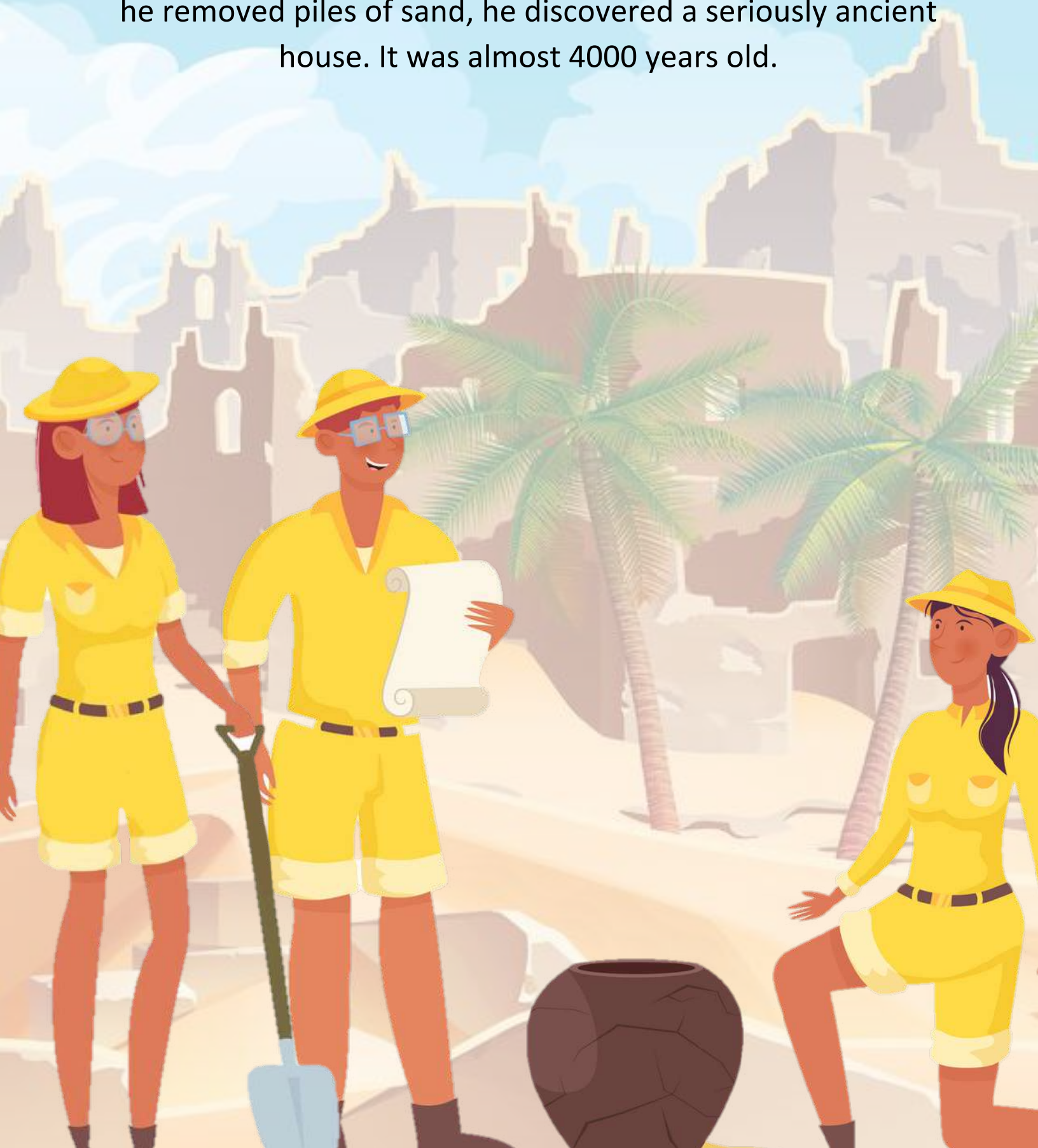


Have you ever bought anything you weren't happy with? Cold French fries at a fast-food restaurant, a new computer game that doesn't work properly, or a pencil that just keeps breaking no matter how many times you sharpen it?

It's frustrating, isn't it? I'm sure you've complained, or at least thought about it. Well, dear reader, you are in good company. Humans have been complaining about poor customer service since the early days of writing!



Leonard Woolley (yes, the same chap who discovered Queen Puabi), was digging at a different location in the city of Ur. As he removed piles of sand, he discovered a seriously ancient house. It was almost 4000 years old.

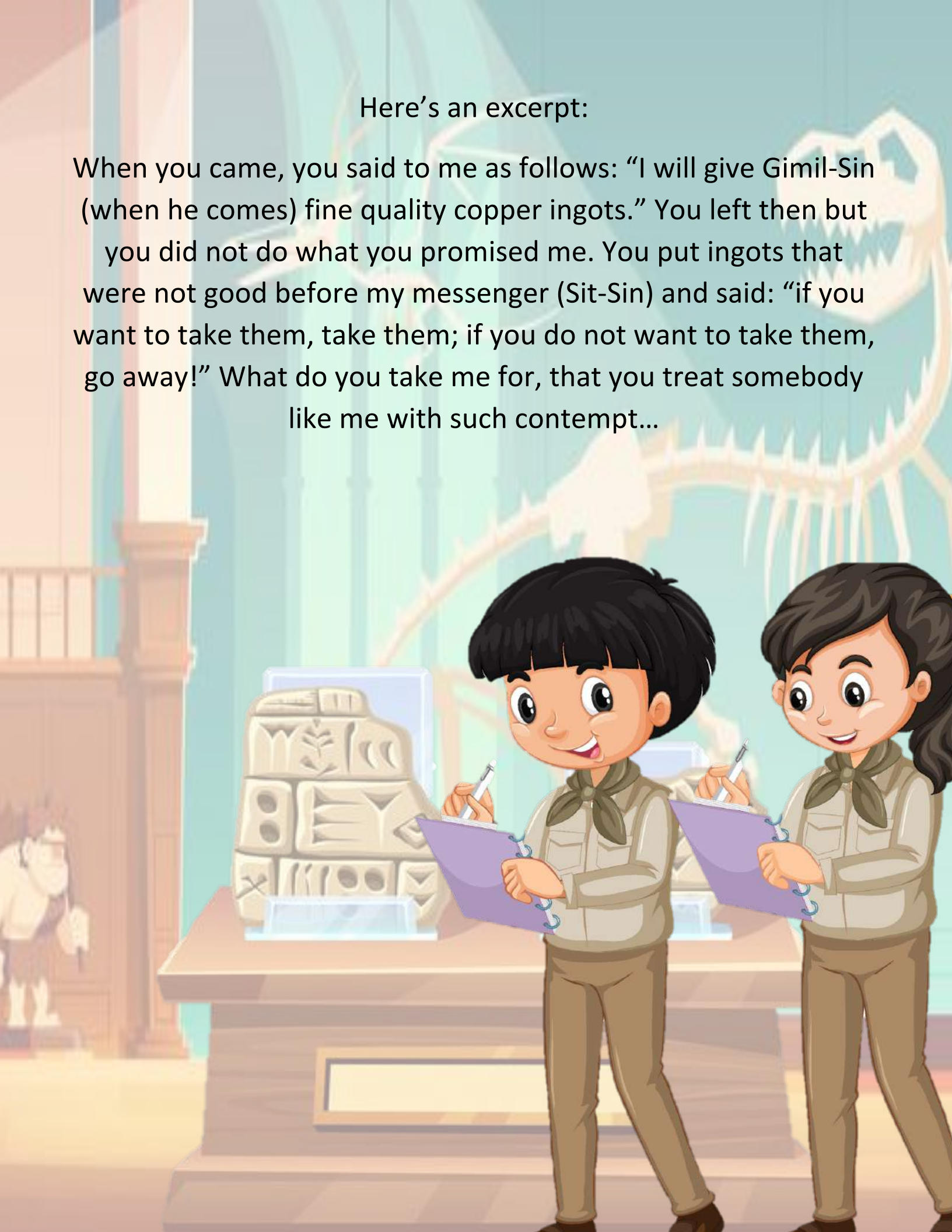


Hidden in the corner of his building was a very peculiar letter. It wasn't from a king or queen and it didn't tell of heroic deeds and glorious battles – it was a letter of complaint written by a man called Nanni to a copper dealer called Ea-nasir!



Here's an excerpt:

When you came, you said to me as follows: "I will give Gimil-Sin (when he comes) fine quality copper ingots." You left then but you did not do what you promised me. You put ingots that were not good before my messenger (Sit-Sin) and said: "if you want to take them, take them; if you do not want to take them, go away!" What do you take me for, that you treat somebody like me with such contempt...



Basically, what it's saying is: the copper you sold me is rubbish, you treated my servant like an idiot, and if you want to sell me copper again, you'll have to come to my house!



Trade in the Mediterranean

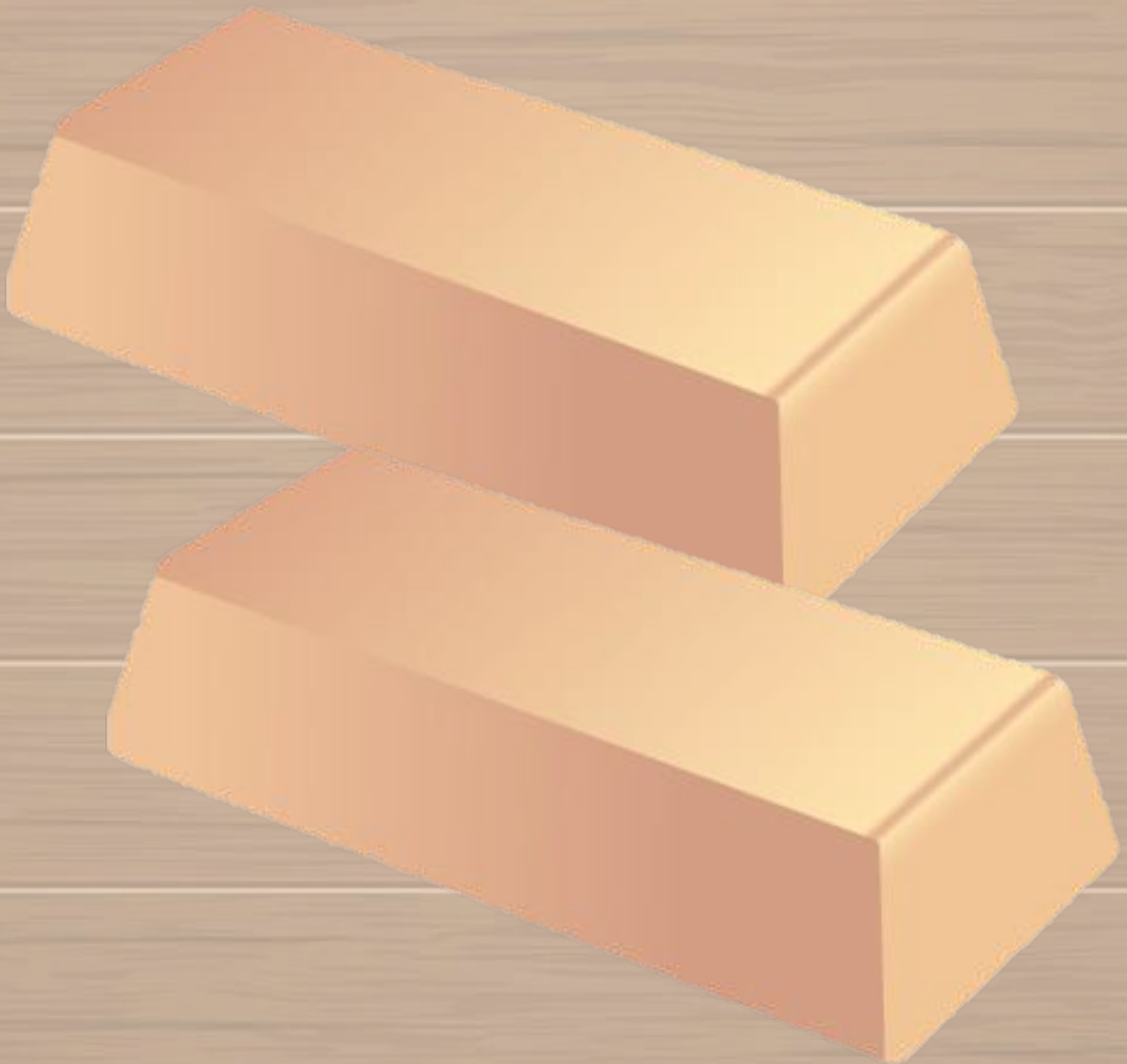


Today, we tend to think of seas as things that get in the way. In the Bronze Age, however, travelling over land was incredibly hard. There were very few roads and horses, and carts were slow. There were also no police or mobile phones – you could very easily be robbed as soon as you left your village! As a result, most trade was done over water, especially around the Mediterranean Sea.



Copper Ingots

Copper and tin were metals essential for the production of bronze. But annoyingly they were never found in the same place! Spain, which had natural copper, traded it in blocks called ingots.



Sea Snails

Three thousand years ago, if your clothes were covered in crushed snails, you were extremely fashionable. One sea snail in particular, created a very bright purple colour when it was crushed. Merchants in North Africa grew rich trading this purple dye to Bronze Age royalty.



Amber

People loved making jewellery out of amber, but it only comes from northern Europe. Merchants would travel south to Italy and exchange it for goods they couldn't get in the north, like wine.



Greek Pottery

All around the Mediterranean you can find ancient Greek pottery. Merchants would fill pots of olive oil, wine and fish to be enjoyed at fancy banquets.



Lebanese Cedar

All of this trade wouldn't be possible without ships from Lebanese cedar. It was the best wood for making boats and was very expensive.



Glass Rods

Ancient Egyptians were particularly skilled at making glass, but not everyone wanted to wear Egyptian-style jewellery. Craftspeople would buy rods of coloured Egyptian glass and turn them into something more to their taste.



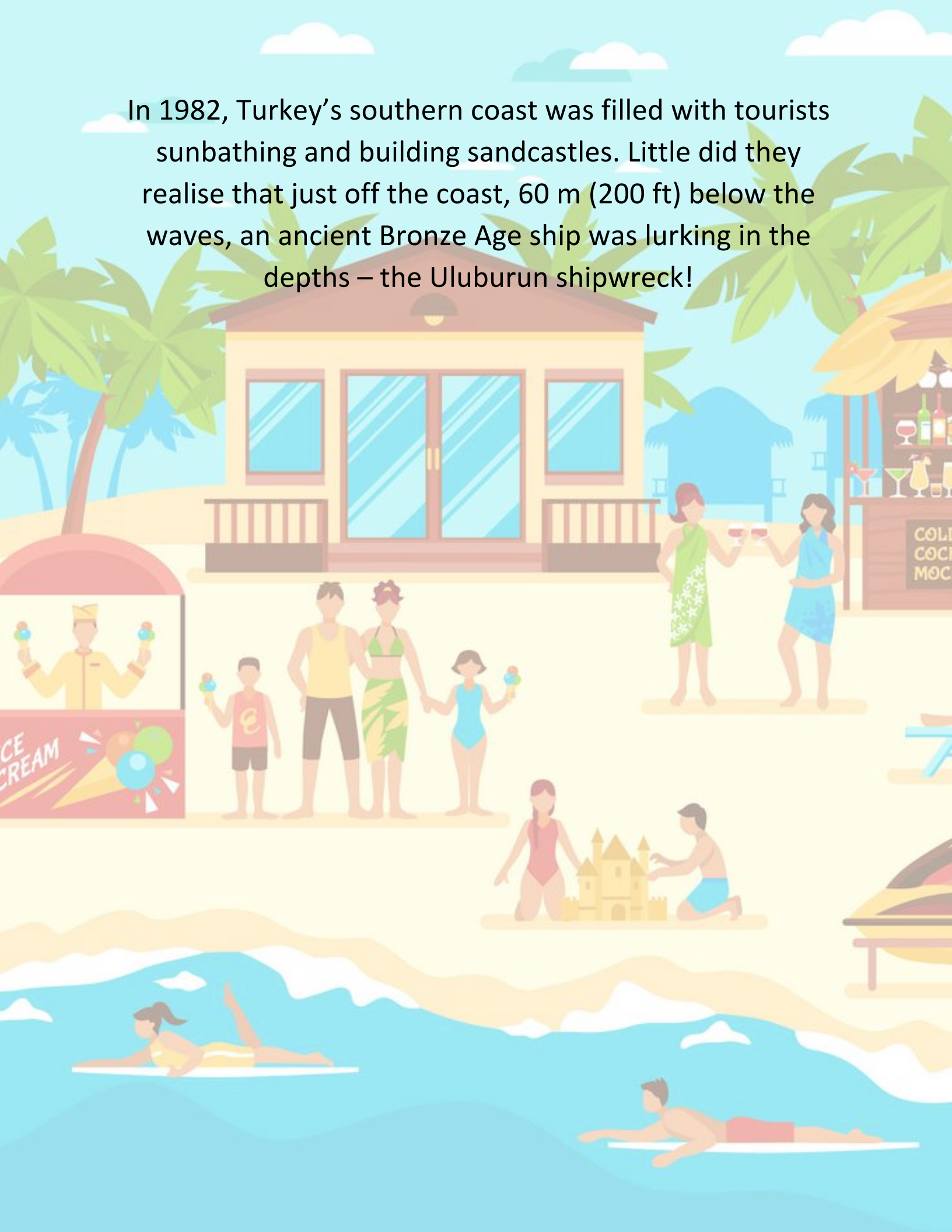
Archaeologists often use Greek pottery to help them date sites.



The Shipwreck of Riches



In 1982, Turkey's southern coast was filled with tourists sunbathing and building sandcastles. Little did they realise that just off the coast, 60 m (200 ft) below the waves, an ancient Bronze Age ship was lurking in the depths – the Uluburun shipwreck!



A Turkish diver named Mehmed Cakir was swimming in the sea near a small town called Bodrum. He was looking for sea sponges (they're a bit like coral). Instead of finding a nice natural way to clean, he found what he described as "metal biscuits with ears". These weren't biscuits though, but ancient blocks of tin called ingots. The local archaeologists were notified and an expedition to recover the wreck began.



As the wreck was so deep below the waves, nobody had seen it since 1300 BCE – that's over 3000 years ago! Fortunately, this meant the contents of the ship were in incredible condition.



The team found 175 pieces of glass in four different colours: blue, turquoise, purple and yellow. There were 70,000 beads, destined to be turned into fine jewellery, not to mention 24 elephant tusks and 14 hippopotamus teeth. Still preserved were razor-sharp bronze swords from Italy, spices, herbs, snail shells for dyes, gold, amber ... everything a Bronze Age trading vessel could carry.



Such an incredible haul presented serious challenges to the archaeologists. The wreck was so deep they could only dive for short periods of time, meaning they couldn't excavate much in one go.

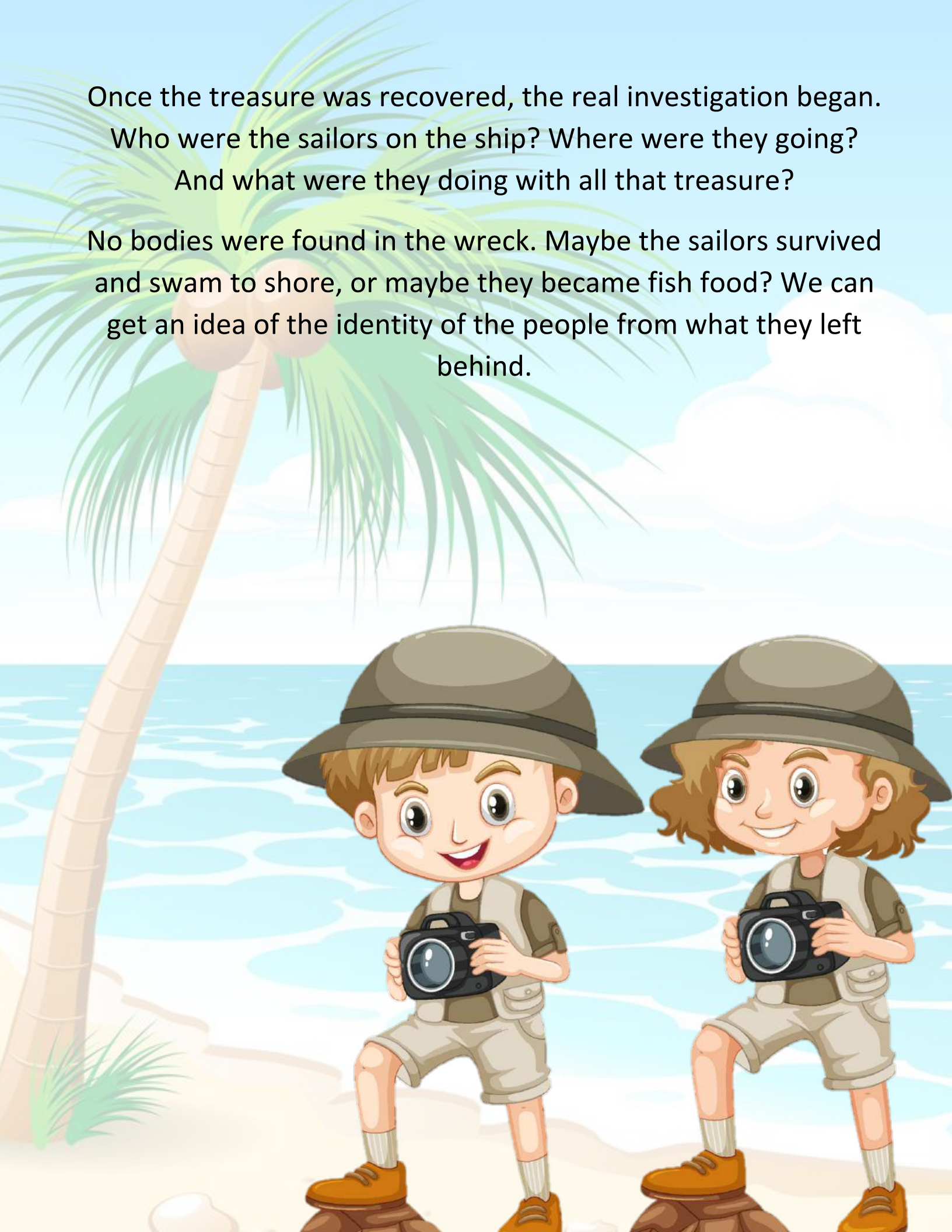


In the end, the divers had to dive 22400 times to recover everything! It took them 11 years to recover the treasure.
Can you imagine working on one thing for so long?



Once the treasure was recovered, the real investigation began.
Who were the sailors on the ship? Where were they going?
And what were they doing with all that treasure?

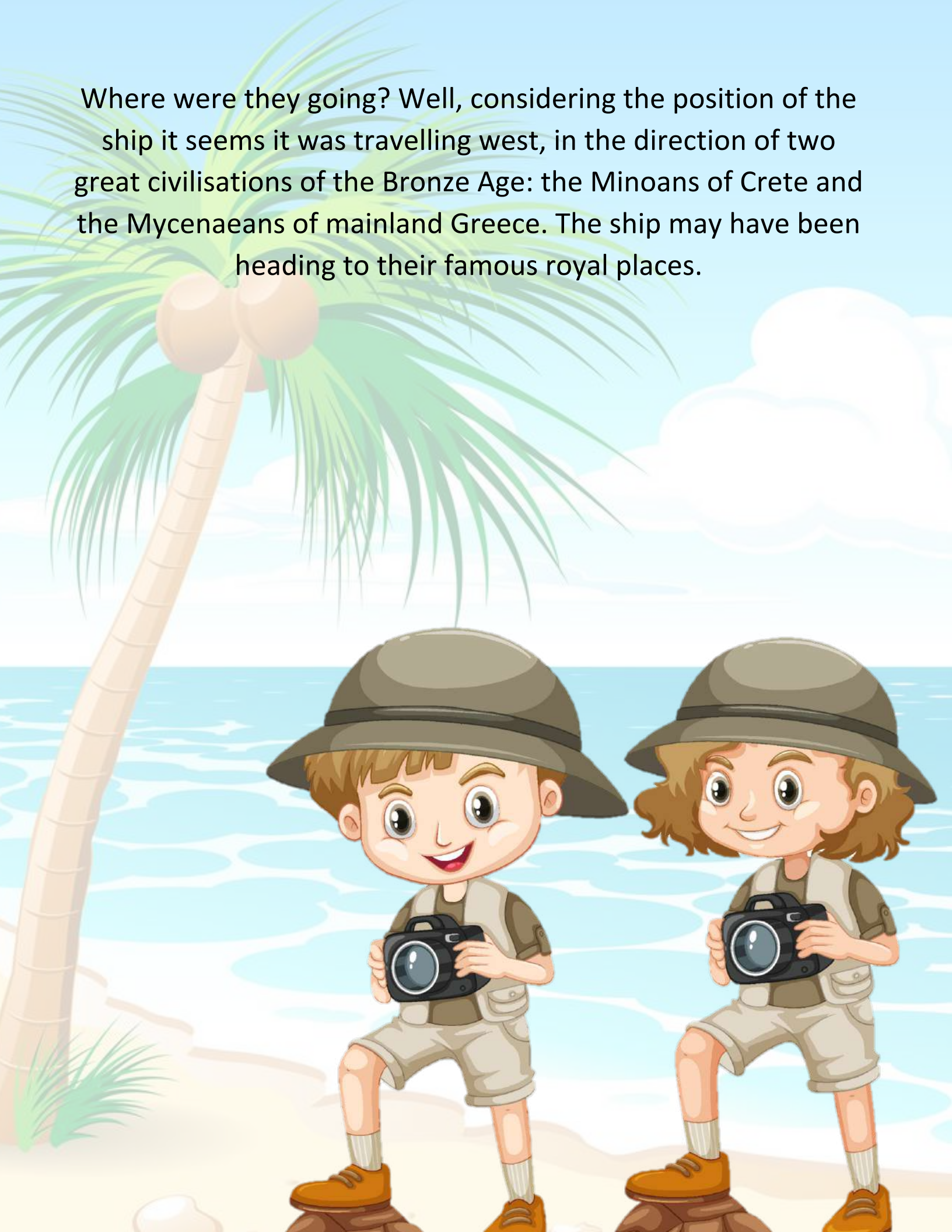
No bodies were found in the wreck. Maybe the sailors survived
and swam to shore, or maybe they became fish food? We can
get an idea of the identity of the people from what they left
behind.



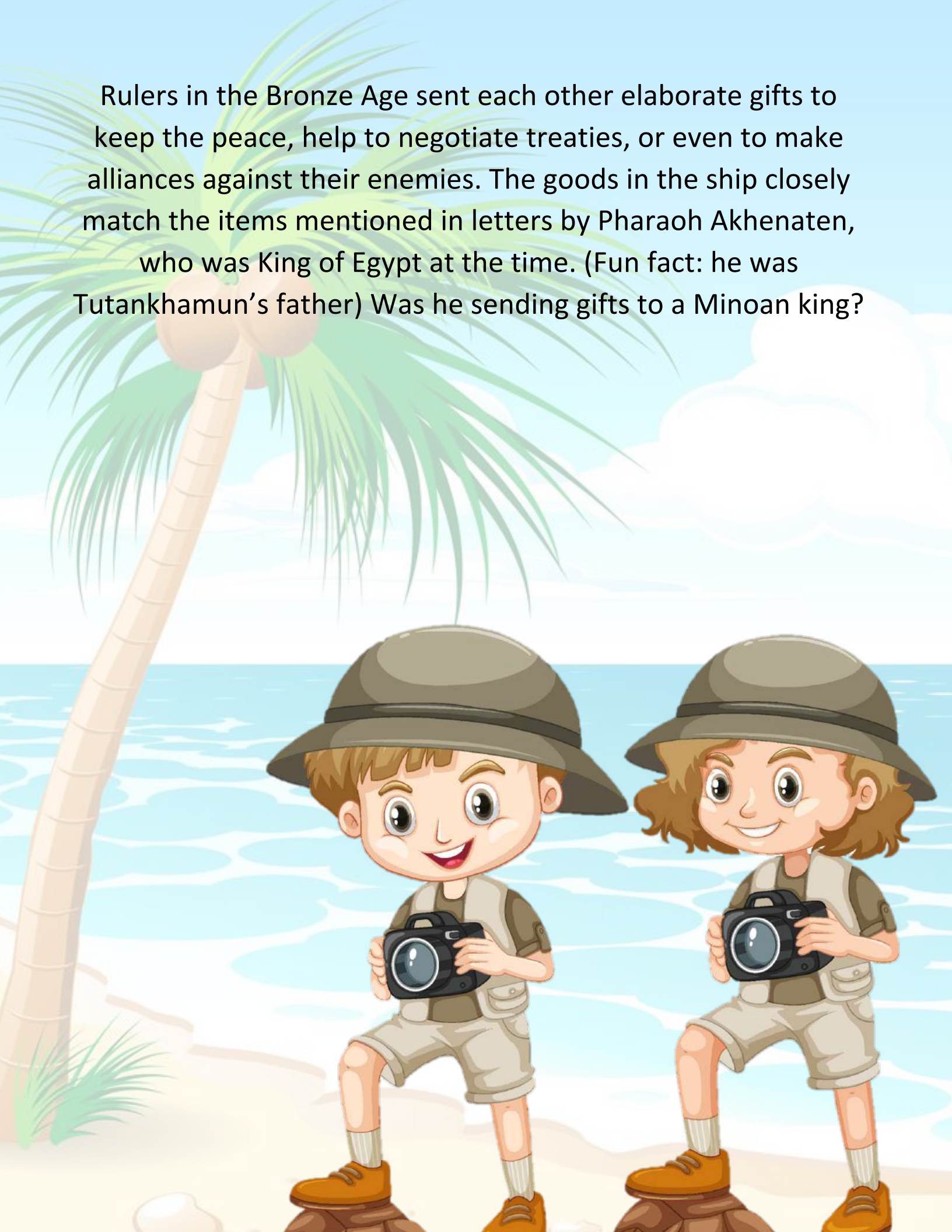
Archaeologists found four sets of weights similar to those found in modern Israel and Lebanon. These were used to measure quantities of goods, just like the scales at a grocer. In ancient times the people from this region were called Canaanites and Phoenicians. We don't know if all the crew came from that region, but it seems as though at least four of them did.



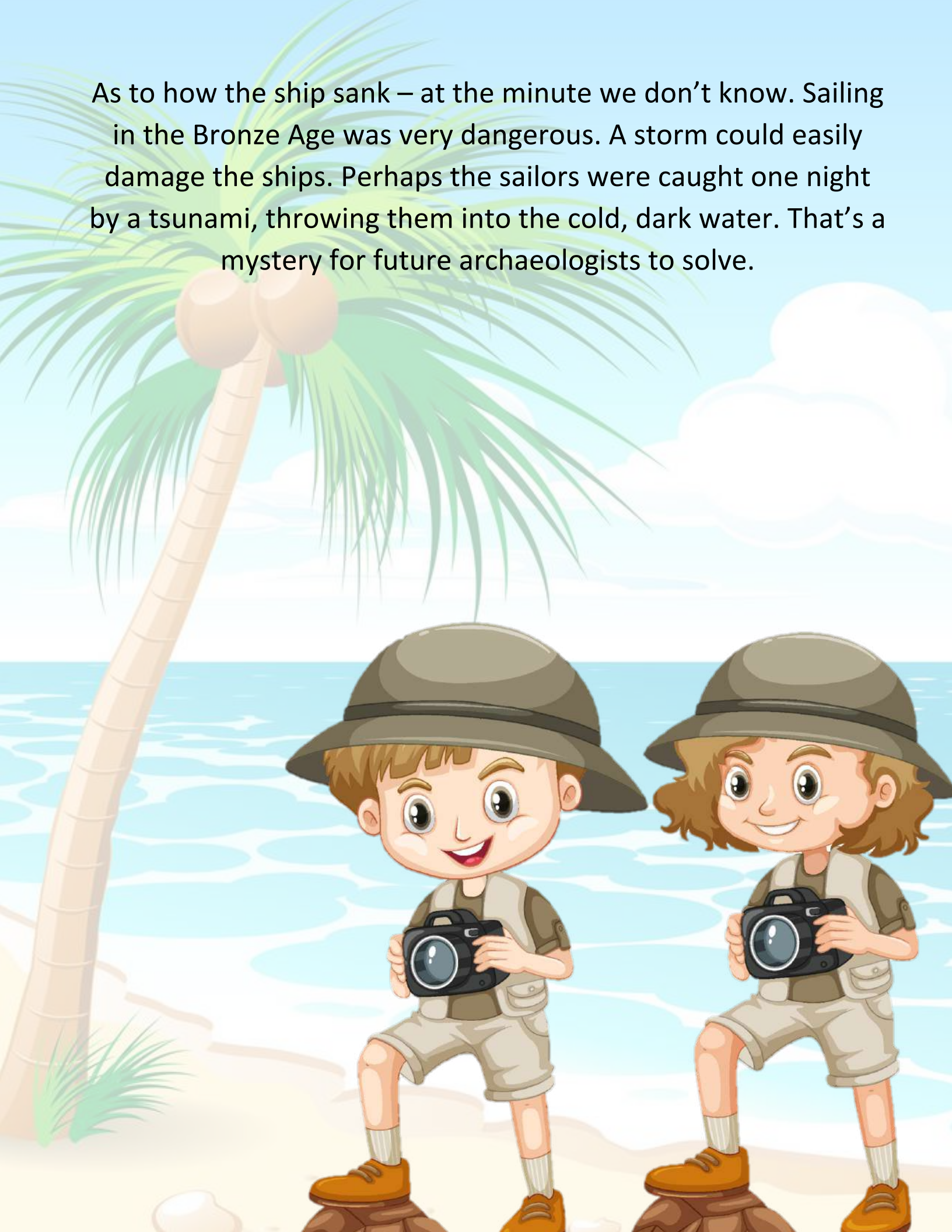
Where were they going? Well, considering the position of the ship it seems it was travelling west, in the direction of two great civilisations of the Bronze Age: the Minoans of Crete and the Mycenaeans of mainland Greece. The ship may have been heading to their famous royal places.



Rulers in the Bronze Age sent each other elaborate gifts to keep the peace, help to negotiate treaties, or even to make alliances against their enemies. The goods in the ship closely match the items mentioned in letters by Pharaoh Akhenaten, who was King of Egypt at the time. (Fun fact: he was Tutankhamun's father) Was he sending gifts to a Minoan king?



As to how the ship sank – at the minute we don't know. Sailing in the Bronze Age was very dangerous. A storm could easily damage the ships. Perhaps the sailors were caught one night by a tsunami, throwing them into the cold, dark water. That's a mystery for future archaeologists to solve.





THINK

DIGITAL ACADEMY