



Stories of the Ancient World

Mother Goddesses

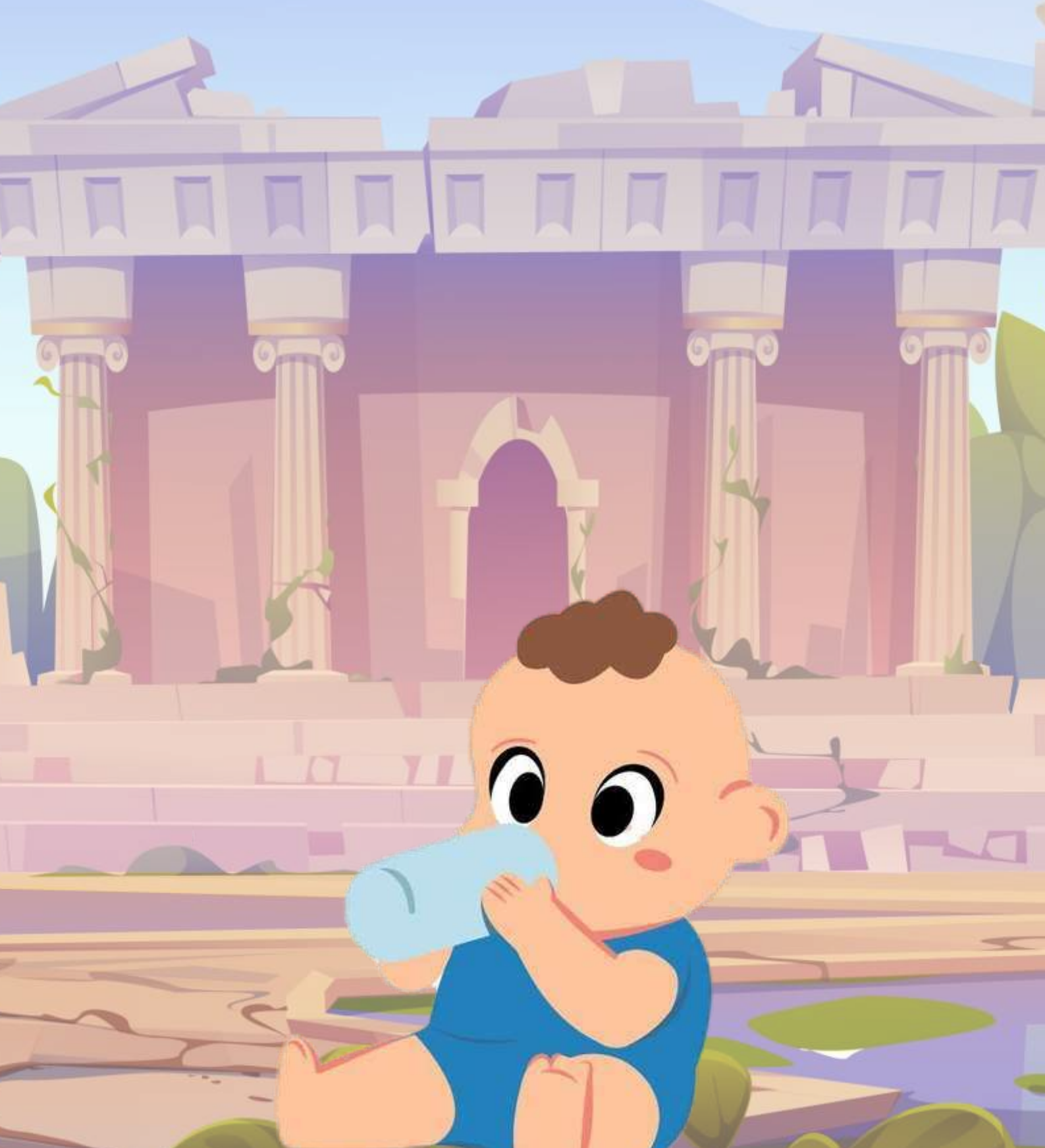


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Mother Goddesses

Across the ancient world, goddesses were celebrated for bringing new life. But for humans, pregnancy and birth was an extremely dangerous time. Many babies did not survive long after they had been born.



Even when the baby did survive, life was difficult for many ancient families, who had to provide for their child without the supermarkets, cars and medicines that we now rely on.

Families turned to the gods and goddesses to ask for protection.

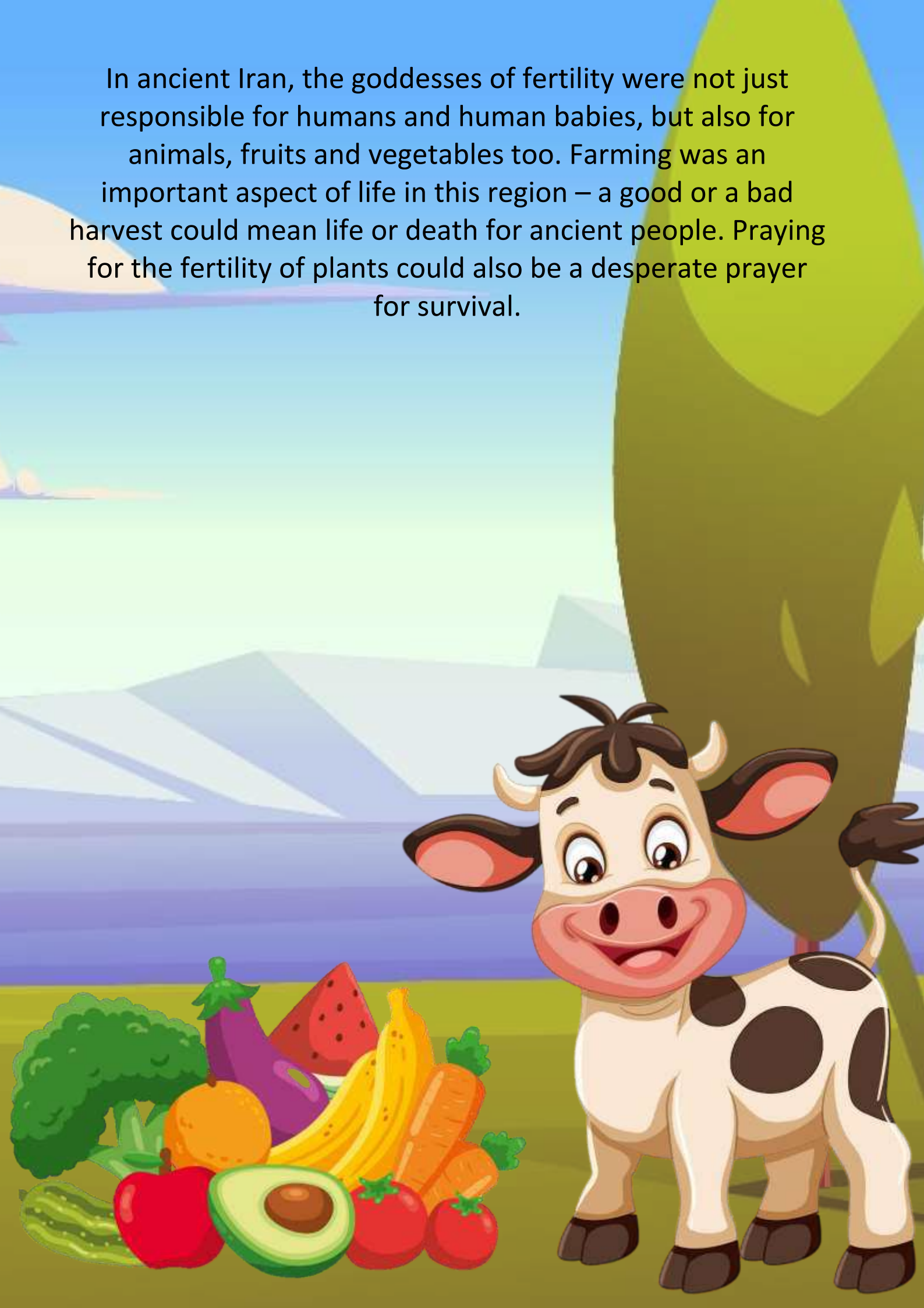


Goddess of Fertility

This statue is made of clay in ancient Iran and shows a goddess of fertility. The statue is hollow, so something could be put inside it – it might have been used to present offerings to the goddess and ask her to grant fertility to those who prayed to her.



In ancient Iran, the goddesses of fertility were not just responsible for humans and human babies, but also for animals, fruits and vegetables too. Farming was an important aspect of life in this region – a good or a bad harvest could mean life or death for ancient people. Praying for the fertility of plants could also be a desperate prayer for survival.

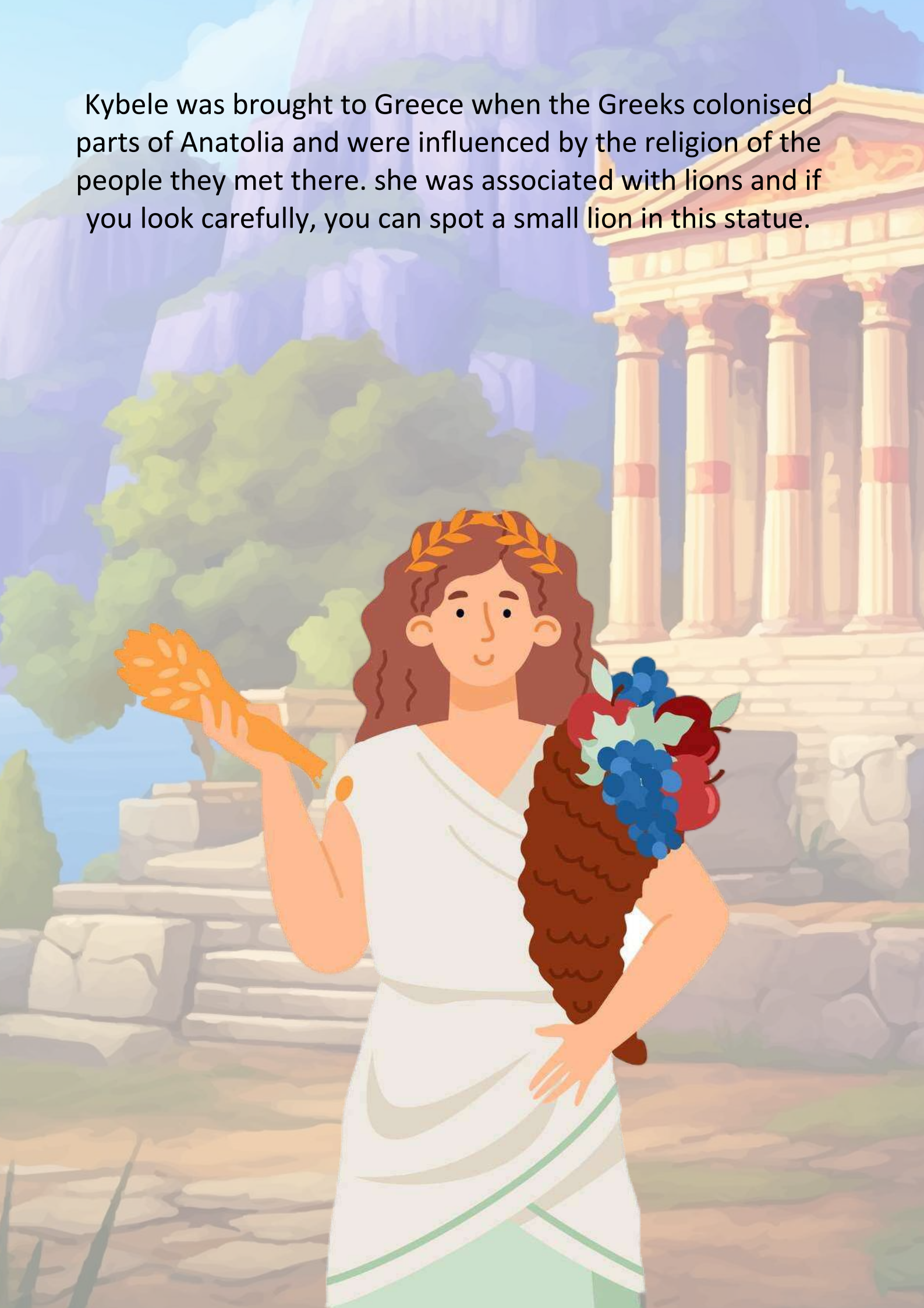


Mother of The Gods

The ancient Greek goddess, Kybele, was first worshipped in an area known in the ancient world as Anatolia, which now makes up most of Turkey.



Kybele was brought to Greece when the Greeks colonised parts of Anatolia and were influenced by the religion of the people they met there. she was associated with lions and if you look carefully, you can spot a small lion in this statue.



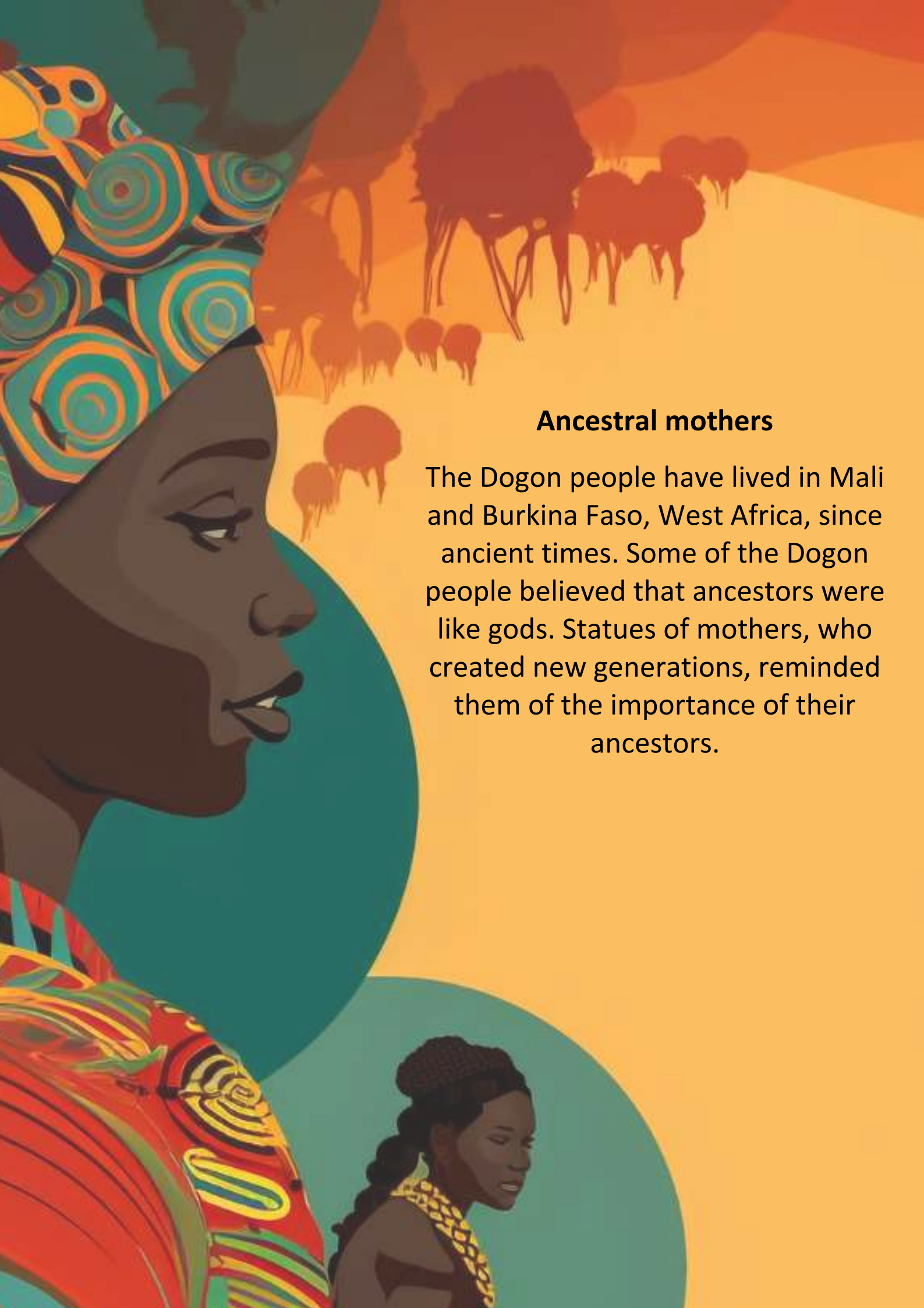
Dangerous Sisters

This statue shows the Hindu goddesses known as the Matrikas. They are always shown together in a group of seven or eight sister goddesses, and the elephant-headed god Ganesh has joined them there. The goddesses both cared for and threatened children.



If babies or children died when they were very young, people would sometimes say that it was one of the Matrikas who has eaten them. Their statues were kept in special shrines outside of the boundaries of cities and towns, so that they could not harm the families who lived inside the city walls.





Ancestral mothers

The Dogon people have lived in Mali and Burkina Faso, West Africa, since ancient times. Some of the Dogon people believed that ancestors were like gods. Statues of mothers, who created new generations, reminded them of the importance of their ancestors.

This statue shows a woman holding a very young baby. Although all babies were precious, the birth of twins was special to the Dogon people because in their creation was Nommo, a creature with the body of a fish but with legs and feet like a human. The creature split itself into four pairs of twins. These sets of twins became the first priests and leaders of the Dogon religion.



Sun Goddess

Tanit was a mother goddess of the Phoenician culture, which existed in North Africa and the Mediterranean from around 1500-300 BCE. She was the goddess of fertility but also war. Her worshippers sacrificed animals in her honour, hoping to attract her attention and get good luck from her.



Tanit is usually shown as a simple figure with raised arms, as on this stela. A stela was a stone marker, often used as a gravestone



Mysterious Mother

The Indus Valley people lived in the region that today is called Pakistan. We do not know very much about these ancient people because their language has not yet been deciphered, so we cannot read their myths and stories.



We do know that a mother goddess figure was especially important to them, though because hundreds of works of art like this one have been found by archaeologists in this region.





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