

# HYMN TO RA

A hymn to Ra, which is also spelled "Re," was recovered by British archaeologists in 1865 and is preserved today in the British Museum in London (Papyrus Bremner-Rhind, British Museum No. 10188). It is written in hieroglyphics on sheets of papyrus. Although the hymn originally developed during the Old Kingdom (2575–2134 BCE) at Heliopolis (Egyptian: *iw nw*) in the Cairo of today, this is a version as it was told after 400 BCE at Thebes in Luxor, which is some 300 miles south of Cairo.

Egyptians honored Ra as the creator and ruler who accompanied them, their pharaoh and their land from birth to death to rebirth. They honored pharaoh as "son of Ra." Heliopolis, Hermopolis and Edfu were the most important sanctuaries of Ra. Each day Ra sailed his boat along the clear blue body of Nut the sky toward the sunset horizon which was her mouth. At dusk, Nut consumed the sun. Throughout the night, Ra navigated his boat through the Nut's body, where the serpent Apophis waited to destroy it at the opening of her womb on the sunrise horizon. Like midwives, priests chanted a hymn to Ra as they waited for the creator to emerge. Having completed the voyage, Ra would recreate Egypt, thus allowing a new day to dawn and the pharaoh to continue to rule the land in peace. The sun, or its glyph which was a circle with a dot in the center, the cone-shaped benben stone, the pyramid, the obelisk, the sun temple and the scarab beetle (Egyptian: *khepri*) were among the artistic and architectural symbols connected with Ra. Beetles lay their eggs in balls of manure, and roll them from place to place while they gestate. Egyptians described Ra as a beetle rolling the sun from dusk to dawn. Every living thing emerged from the sun, just as the newly hatched beetles emerged from the ball of manure.

Parallels to a hymn to Ra appear in the stories of the heavens and the earth in the book of Genesis (Gen 1:1–2:4a).

*Columns xxvi:21—xxviii:5 (Gen 1:1—2:4a; Exod 3:13–4)*

As the sun dawned, Ra spoke:

I am Khepri the beetle.

When I come, the day begins,

When the almighty speaks, all else comes to life.

There were no heavens and no earth,

There was no dry land and there were no reptiles in the land.

Then, I spoke and living creatures appeared.

I put them to sleep in Nun the sea, until there was land where I could stand.

When I first began to create,

When I alone was planning and designing every creature,

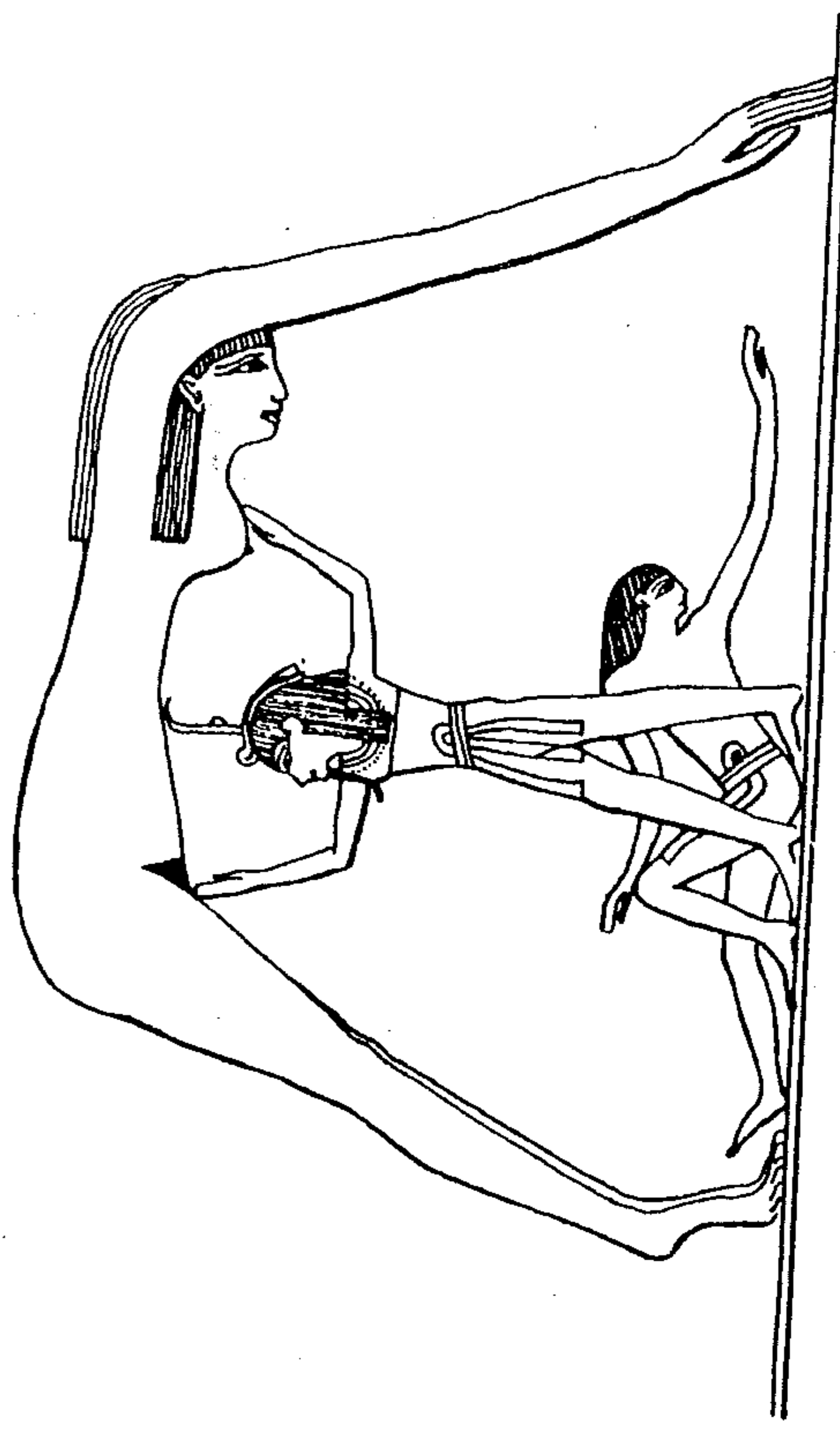
I had not exhaled Shu the wind,

I had not spat Tefnut the rain,

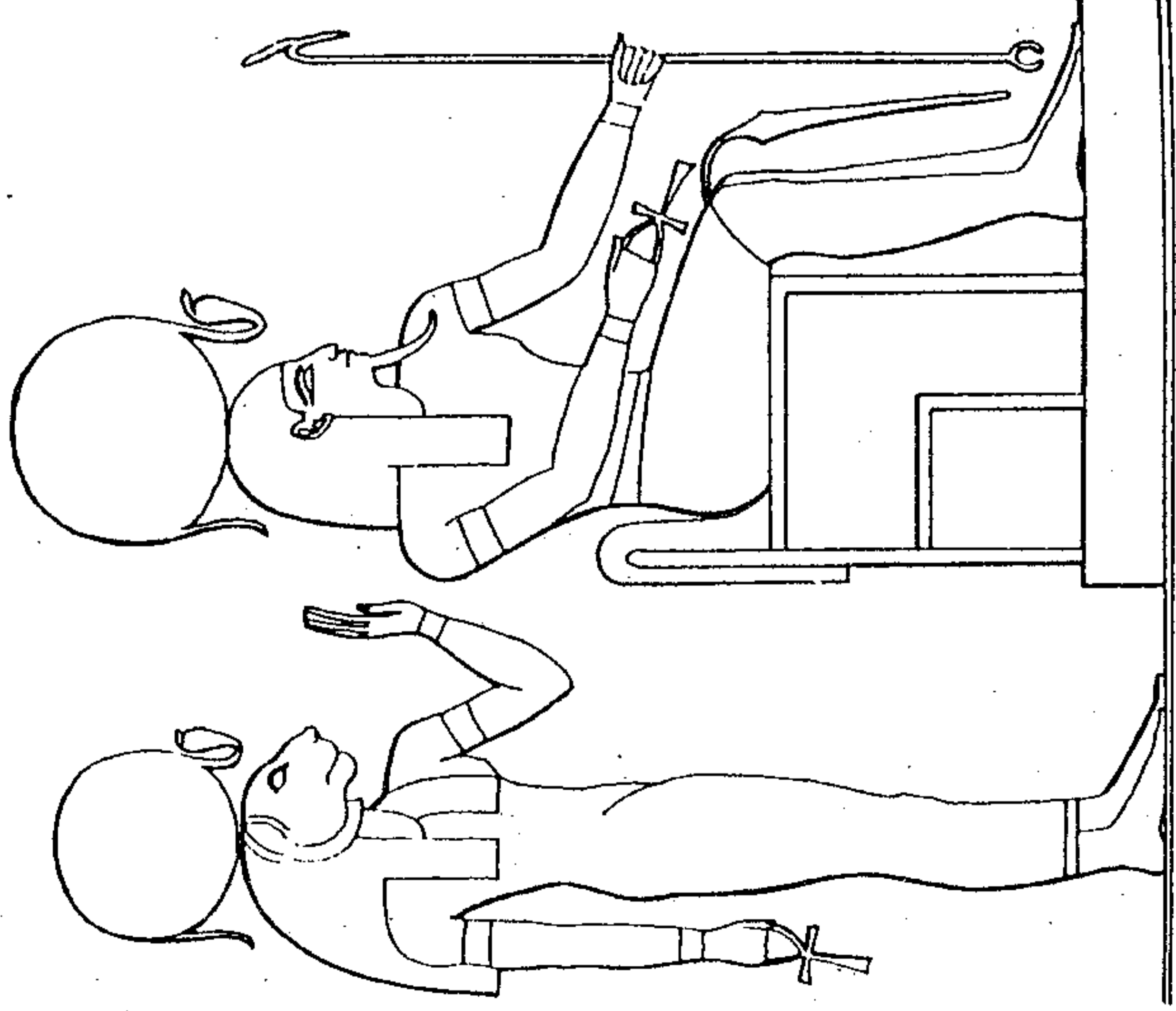
There was not a single living creature.

I planned a multitude of living creatures,

All were in my heart, and their children and their grandchildren.



*The goddess Shu supports the body of Nut over the body of Geb.*



The goddess Tefnut  
behind the throne of  
the god Atum.

xxviii:1-15 (Gen 2:6-7)

Then I copulated with my own fist.

I masturbated with my own hand.

I ejaculated into my own mouth.

I exhaled Shu the wind,

I spat Tefnut the rain.

Old Man Nun the sea reared them,

Eye the overseer looked after them. . . .

In the beginning, I was alone,

Then, there were three more.

I dawned over the land of Egypt.

Shu the wind and Tefnut the rain played on Nun the sea. . . .

I wept and human beings appeared.

With my tears, I created the reptiles and their companions.

Shu and Tefnut gave birth to Geb the earth and Nut the sky.

Geb and Nut gave birth to Osiris and Isis, to Seth and Nephthys.

Osiris and Isis gave birth to Horus.

One was born right after another.

These nine (Greek: *ennead*) gave birth to all the people of the land.

# ENUMA ELISH STORIES

☐ In 1849, Austin Henry Layard, a collector of artifacts for the British Museum, recovered a copy of the Enuma Elish stories from Ashur, the Koujunjik, Iraq of today. Ashurbanipal (668-626 BCE) had the copy made for the Assyrian imperial library. They were written on baked clay tablets about 30 inches high in the Akkadian language using cuneiform script. A duplicate copy of Tablet V was found at Sultantepe, ancient Harran, on the upper reaches of the Euphrates River in modern Syria.

Between 1792-1750 BCE, the empire-building Hammurabi made Babylon the most important city in Mesopotamia and enthroned Marduk, Babylon's divine patron, as head of the divine assembly. Thus the previously minor city state of Babylon would grow in importance in both historical and epic terms for the next 1,200 years. Somewhere around 1100 BCE the story of creation found below was compiled from disparate Sumerian and Amorite traditions to celebrate the military and political accomplishments of the city and its rulers. It may not in fact represent normative religious thought in Mesopotamia since its purpose is more political than etiological.

Parallels to the Enuma Elish stories appear in the book of Genesis as well as in the books of Exodus and Psalms (Ps 8, 19, 50, 104). Like the Enuma Elish stories, these stories and psalms may have been part of the ritual reenactment (Akkadian: *akitu*) of creation at the new year. Israel's creation stories, however, are not directly dependent on any one parallel from Mesopotamia, Syria-Palestine or Egypt. Israel's understanding of Yahweh is particularly unique. The Hebrews celebrated Yahweh as the divine warrior whose armies, commanded by Moses, armed with a staff and the east wind, confront the armies of the Red Sea commanded by pharaoh. For the Hebrews, Yahweh both "... causes all things to be" and "... commands the divine warriors." Once they understood Yahweh both as the deliverer who liberates the Hebrews from slavery and the creator who calls the cos-