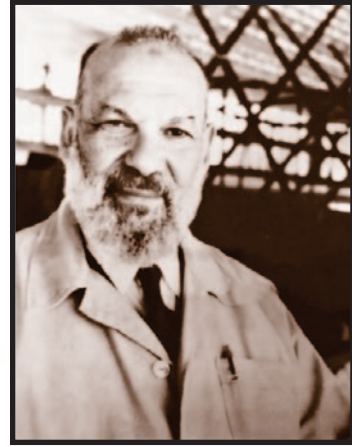


PHARAOH'S BOAT

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY
DAVID WEITZMAN



PURPLE HOUSE PRESS
CYNTHIANA, KENTUCKY

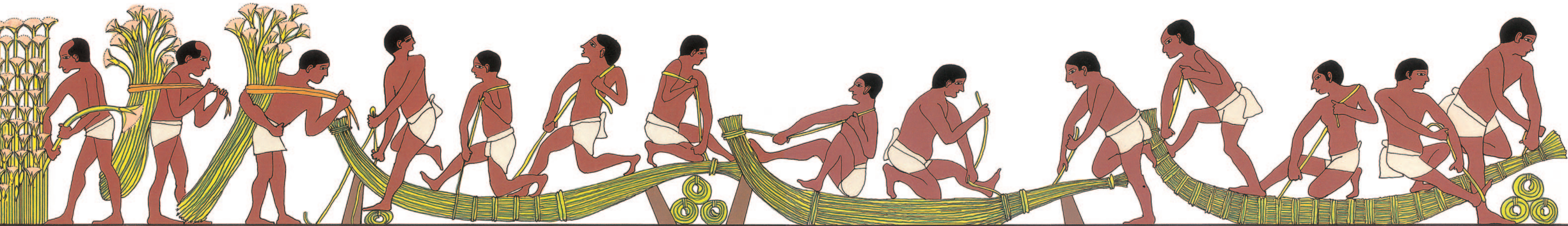


For Hag Ahmed Youssef Moustafa

Prologue

IN 1954, WORKERS BEGAN CLEARING AWAY TONS OF WINDBLOWN SAND AND RUBBLE that had piled up against the south face of the Great Pyramid at Giza. As they dug, there suddenly appeared an old stone boundary wall. Strange. They weren't expecting to find a wall here. It was closer to the pyramid's base than the boundary walls on the northern, eastern and western sides.

Kamel el Mallakh, the Egyptologist supervising the work, was puzzled. The ancient Egyptian builders were always so precise about placing structures, he was certain this was not a mistake. Had the wall been deliberately built there to hide something?



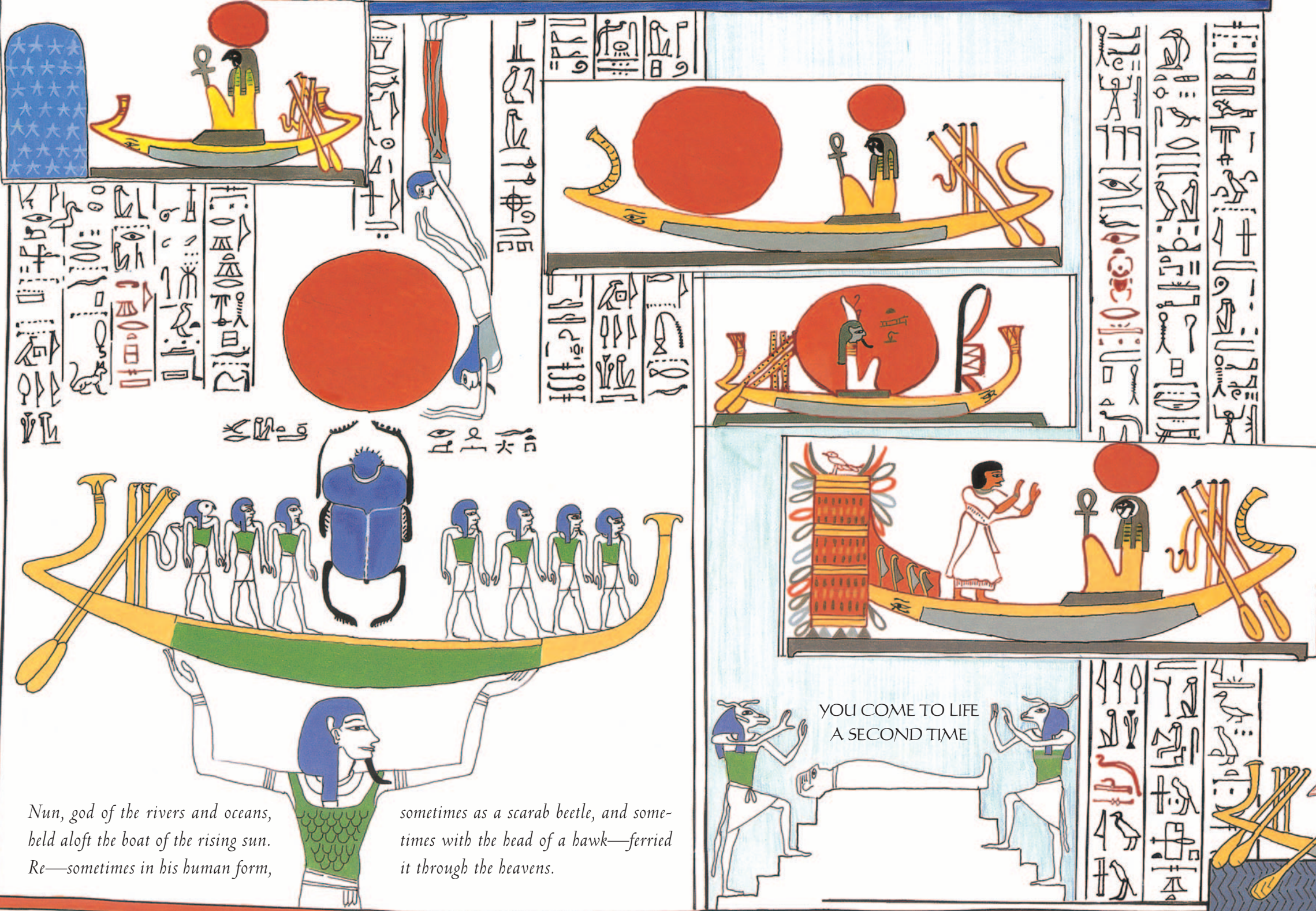


*The pharaoh, Cheops, is dead, the people lament.
Now we are like a ship adrift without oars.
There will be only chaos, and the sun
will not appear in the sky tomorrow.*

Pharaoh, the Egyptians believed, was divine: all knowing, all powerful, in word and deed perfect in every way. The moment Cheops became pharaoh he also became a deity, a son of Re, the sun god. “Thou art like Re in all thou doest,” his subjects would say upon entering the royal presence, foreheads to the ground. “Everything happens according to the wish of thy heart.”

And everything did. In preparation for his own death, Cheops, like his father before him, ordered an enormous pyramid built to shelter everything he would need in the afterlife. But his pyramid would be even grander. Over the next twenty years, a hundred thousand workers cut, finished, and transported some 2,300,000 stone blocks weighing as much as fifteen tons, and raised them up to create a pyramid almost five hundred feet high.

On the day Cheops died, 4,600 years ago, it was ready for him. But there was one more task to be done.



Nun, god of the rivers and oceans, held aloft the boat of the rising sun. Re—sometimes in his human form,

sometimes as a scarab beetle, and sometimes with the head of a hawk—ferried it through the heavens.

YOU COME TO LIFE
A SECOND TIME

Djedefre, Cheops's son, succeeded his father as pharaoh, and his first concerns were the rituals that would assure his father's safe passage into the afterlife. He ordered the construction of two magnificent ships: one to guide Cheops safely through the dark, perilous underworld of night, and the other to carry him up across the sky to embark on his eternal journey with the sun.

Travel by boat was so intrinsic to the Egyptian way of life that it shaped the people's beliefs about this world—and the next. When the Egyptians looked up into the sky, they saw a vast sea, a heavenly river. During the day, the sun sailed across this sea on a ship guided by Re. At night they imagined millions of little boats floating across the black waters with bright lanterns—the moon and stars—at their bows.

Re's sun boat was crewed by pharaohs who upon their death were judged by the gods to be worthy of eternal life. Inscribed on the inside of their coffins were texts from the Book of the Dead, which protected them on their perilous journey to the afterworld and explained their service to Re. The pharaoh might help row the sun westward, chanting, "I take my oar; I row Re," or as captain, navigate the solar boat by the stars, saying, "I command the god's bark for him; steer his bark; I will fare upstream at the bow; I will guide the voyages."

Like many cultures, the ancient Egyptians believed the dead had to journey across a body of water, a "winding waterway," to arrive at the afterlife. And so, to reach the sun god there on the other side, Cheops, like other pharaohs before him, would need boats of his own.

Djedefre could be sure that his father's boats would be built with time-proven craftsmanship. The Egyptians were expert builders of all kinds of boats, from little skiffs made of bundled papyrus reeds to huge wooden ships that were powered by woven cotton sails and leaf-shaped oars.

Instead of a rudder, two large steering oars at the stern controlled the direction of travel. The boats fairly skimmed over the surface of the water, with the rowers at their oars, or the crew clambering aloft to work

the lines and the billowing papyrus sails, and the captain at the helm.

Few trees big enough for ships' timbers grow in Egypt. But the Nile River served as a great highway, connecting cities along its banks with other peoples and goods on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Trading fleets sailed far and wide to bring back cedar, sycamore, and acacia trunks for shipbuilding, and the very finest were selected for Pharaoh's boat.

