

Egyptian Painting

Egyptian artists painted their imagery on tomb and temple walls, on sheets of paper made from the papyrus plant, on sculpture, and on ceramic wares. They made their paints by suspending ground pigments in a solution of water and plant gum, which was used as a binder. One of these gums, called **gum arabic**, was made from the sap of the acacia tree and is still used

today in the production of watercolors. Egyptians also applied very thin sheets of hammered **gold leaf** to painted objects.

Egyptian imagery included figures representing gods, pharaohs, animal and plant life, and common people, all of which were depicted in both mythical and historical settings.

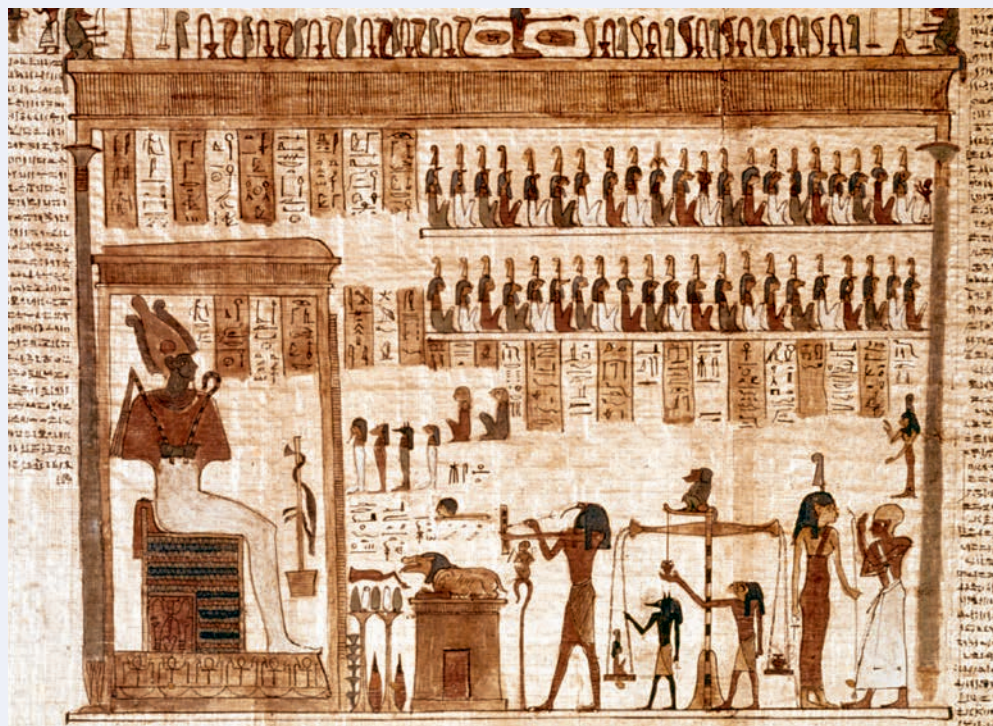


Fig. 1–21. **The size and placement of each of the figures in this painting had special meaning to Egyptian artists. What other paintings in this chapter show figures whose placement might have meaning?**

Unknown artist, Ptolemaic Dynasty, *The Deceased's Heart Weighted Before Osiris Against the Feather of Goddess Maat, Protector of Truth*, 300s BCE. Papyrus scroll. Oriental Institute, University of Chicago. Image © Davis Art Images.

Art Criticism

Have students compare the Egyptian tomb painting with Giotto di Bondone's fresco *Adoration of the Magi* (see page 20). Have students discuss the placement of figures in both works. How can artists express meaning through the position of their subjects?

Vocabulary

gum arabic A substance made from the sap of the acacia tree used in the production of watercolors and adhesives.

gold leaf Sheets of gold, hammered until they are very thin and used to decorate a variety of surfaces.