Currency Themes of the Arab World

Currency is an important part of national identity. On every piece of paper money printed, there are images that reflect a country’s cultural, historical and natural heritage. This graphic shows a sample of one banknote from each country in the Arab world, grouped by common themes.

**Animals**

Animals form a central part of a country’s historical and cultural heritage, often serving as markers of identity. The Algerian 500 dinars shows the Numidian army atop war elephants, which were a common combat tool before the creation of gunpowder. The Djiboutian 40 francs displays a whale shark, a protected species since 2004. The Somali 20 shillings displays cattle, as the livestock sector accounts for one of Somalia’s largest sources of income.

**Mosques**

Mosques hold great significance as both current and historic centers of learning, culture and heritage throughout the Arab world. Here, the Egyptian 50 pounds features the 15th century Amir Qijmas al Ishaqi mosque in Cairo. The Iraqi 250 dinars shows the Great Mosque of Samarra. Completed in 851, this mosque has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage site. The Mauritanian 50 ougiyas shows the Great Mosque Ibn Abbas in the capital city of Nouakchott. The Emirati 500 dirhams depicts the Jumeirah Mosque in Dubai, a contemporary mosque completed in 1979 but inspired by 10th century Fatimid architecture.

**Current Leaders**

Some countries of the Arab world celebrate their current leaders by featuring them as a prominent part of their currencies. The Omani 10 rials displayed here depicts Sultan Qaboos bin Said, while the Moroccan 50 dirhams shows King Mohammed VI, and the Jordanian 50 dinars shows King Abdullah II.

**Past Leaders**

Eight countries have chosen to honor their previous leaders by incorporating them onto their banknotes. Here, the Libyan 10 dinars shows Omar Almukhtar, the leader of the Libyan resistance against Italy in the region of Cyrenaica. An image of King Adul Aziz, founder of Saudi Arabia, is printed on the Saudi 500 riyals. The Comoran 5,000 francs features its past president Said Mohamed Cheikh. Finally, the Tunisian 20 dinars portrays Kheireddine Ettounsi, an important chief minister and reformer of the Tunisian government during the late 19th century.

**Oil**

Five countries in the Arab world incorporate images related to the oil industry on their banknotes. Oil is not only an important part of these countries’ economies, but has also significantly shaped the trajectory of national history and development. Here, the Kuwaiti five dinars shows an oil tanker refinery. The Bahraini five dinars shows the first oil well near Jebel Dukhan, while the Sudanese 20 pounds displays an oil drilling platform.

**Natural Landscape & Flora**

Natural landscape and flora appear on nine countries’ banknotes. The Qatari 50 riyals displays the Oyster and Pearl monument, symbolizing the country’s history of pearl diving, one of the central forms of livelihood prior to the discovery of petroleum in the 1940s. The Lebanese 100,000 pounds displays a cedar tree which is the national symbol of Lebanon. The Yemeni 100 rials features the dragon blood tree, a species native to the Socotra archipelago off the coast of Yemen. The tree is named after the red sap it produces. Finally, the Syrian 1,000 pounds features an image of olive branches and a mosaic of a grape harvest.