

Beginners' Corner: Women on Egyptian stamps

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Stamps are far more than miniature works of art - they are symbols of national memory, cultural priorities, and collective identity. In Egypt, the representation of women on stamps offers a fascinating window into shifting narratives of gender, heritage and national pride.



*How style might evolve
– De La Rue's Cleopatra
from Dendera in 1914,
and Um Kulthum as
envisaged by the artist
designer Maha Hesham
more than a century
later*



Egypt's antiquity provides a rich cast of remarkable women, many of whom often appear in philatelic issues. Among the best known is Queen Cleopatra VII, whose image appeared on the 1914 2 millièmes definitive, (SG74), marking her for ever as an emblem of Egyptian royalty and intrigue.

Even more celebrated is Nefertiti, whose instantly recognisable profile appears on many issues, including the 1952 100m (SG 429). Another honoured in Egypt's philatelic tradition is Nefertari, her appearance on a 1964 5m (SG 754) stamp affirming her as one of the great royal women of the New Kingdom. The stamp highlighted the UNESCO campaign to save the monuments of Nubia.

Egyptian stamp designers also pay tribute to modern women who have helped to shape national arts and culture. Aziza Amir, the actress and pioneer of Egyptian cinema, appears on a 2002 30 piastres stamp (SG 2258), reflecting her Arab film legacy. She founded Isis Film and produced and starred in *Laila* (1927), seen by many as Egypt's first full-length feature film.

Similarly, Assia Dagher, another foundational figure in Egyptian film, features on a 1999 2p issue (SG 2133), emphasising the early and decisive presence of women in Middle Eastern cinema development. This Lebanese-born actress appeared first in *Laila* with Aziza Amir.



Although many stamps depict individual women, some reflect the broader struggle for women's rights.

Stars honoured for very different talents: Aziza Amir and Sameera Moussa

One example is a 1958 10m stamp marking the 50th anniversary of the death of Qasim Amin, an advocate for women's rights and modern education in the Arab world. He played a critical role in shaping Egypt's reformist movement at the turn of the 20th century.

Sameera Moussa (1917-1952) appears on a 1999 20p stamp (SG 2119). As the first female Egyptian nuclear scientist she embarked on a life mission to promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy, claiming: "My wish is that the nuclear treatment for cancer be as affordable and cheap as aspirin". She was given special permission to research in secret US atomic facilities.



More recently, the £E20 miniature sheet issued last year (*left*) to mark 25 years of the National Council for Women emphasises Egypt’s long commitment to support for women’s rights and gender equality.

The renewed public interest in Egyptian women on stamps can be seen in contemporary design work, such as the 2019 project by the graphic designer Maha Hesham, who created vibrant, modern stamps celebrating female pioneers including Um Kulthum, Doria Shafik and Huda Shaarawi.

Her project highlights the historical under-representation of women on official stamps and

seeks to restore balance by honouring female figures across arts, politics and social activism. Though not accepted for official postage, her designs have sparked public dialogue about visibility, representation and national memory.

Egyptian stamps serve as a powerful archive of women’s roles across millennia—from queens who shaped empires to artists and activists who shaped modern identity. The story of women on Egyptian stamps grows richer, reflecting Egypt’s long and ongoing journey of recognising the women who helped to define its past and continue to shape its future.