

Origin of the Islamic Crescent and Star

The crescent moon and star symbol actually pre-dates Islam by several thousand years. Information on the origins of the symbol are difficult to ascertain, but most sources agree that these ancient celestial symbols were in use by the peoples of Central Asia and Siberia in their worship of sun, moon, and sky gods. There are also reports that the crescent moon and star were used to represent the Carthaginian goddess Tanit or the Greek goddess Diana.

The city of Byzantium (later known as Constantinople and Istanbul) adopted the crescent moon symbol. According to some reports, they chose it in honor of the goddess Diana. Others indicate that it dates back to a battle in which the Romans defeated the Goths on the first day of a lunar month. In any event, the crescent moon was featured on the city's flag even before the birth of Christ.

It wasn't until the Ottoman Empire that the crescent moon and star became affiliated with the Muslim world. When the Turks conquered Constantinople (Istanbul) in 1453, they adopted the city's existing flag and symbol. Legend holds that the founder of the Ottoman Empire, Othman, had a dream in which the crescent moon stretched from one end of the earth to the other. Taking this as a good omen, he chose to keep the crescent and make it the symbol of his dynasty. There is speculation that the five points on the star represent the five daily prayers, but this is pure conjecture. The five points were not standard on the Ottoman flags, and it is also not standard on flags used in the Muslim world today.

Actually, the crescent and star was the **symbol of the Ottoman Empire**, which was in existence before Islam began. It was used because it was a relatively "universal" symbol of authority in the East, since it was the originally the symbol of the Sassanian Empire of Persia. I do not believe that early Islam used any sort of symbol, such a thing would have been considered antithetical since Mohammed was very much against images of any kind. So, **contrasted to the Cross, which was a Christian symbol that became the symbol of empires, the crescent was the symbol of a conquering empire** that became a symbol of Islam.