

Symbols of Islam

The Crescent and Star

The crescent moon and star is the internationally-recognised symbol of Islam. It is famous for being part of the official emblem for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. But is it really a symbol of Islam?

Historically the crescent moon and star pre-dates Islam by thousands of years. These symbols were used in the worship of the sun, moon, and sky gods. There are reports of the crescent moon being used to represent the Carthaginian goddess Tanit and the Greek goddess Diana. Some Christians have even accused Muslims of adopting the moon god whose name is *Allah*. This is something that Muslims vehemently deny.ⁱ



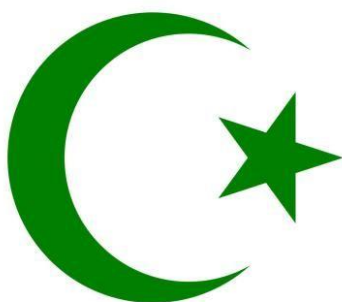
The only function the moon has in Islam is that it determines the Islamic calendar. This is confirmed in the Qur'an. 'Do you not see how Allah causes the night to pass into the day and the day into night? He has forced the sun and the moon into His service, each running for an appointed term' (Surah 31:29).

Any suggestion that Muslims worship a 'moon god' is highly repugnant to Muslims, for Allah is the creator of all the celestial bodies. The Qur'an forbids moon worship, and there is only one reference to the moon crescent (*hilal*). 'They question you about the phases of the moon. Say: 'They are seasons fixed for mankind and for the pilgrimage' (Surah 2:189).

Some Muslim historians trace the use of the crescent in Islam back to the building of the Dome of the Rock (Qubbat al-Sakhrah) in Jerusalem around AD 675, when crescents were used as decorative symbols. The majority refer to the Ottoman Turks using it some 800 years after the birth of Islam. In the Dictionary of Islam, T.P. Hughes stating that the crescent 'was a symbol of sovereignty in the city of Byzantium [i.e. Constantinople, the capital city of eastern Christianity, now Istanbul.]' It appears that the Ottomans adopted the symbol from the Byzantines after the fall of Constantinople in AD 1453. It was the Ottomans who made it a symbol of Islam across the Muslim world.

It is used on the dome of mosques. It is positioned to indicate the direction of Mecca, towards which Muslims must pray. Some Muslims see it as symbolic of the beginning of Islamic months,

It is difficult to claim that there is any true symbol of Islam other than this. Many Muslims actually reject the use of the crescent to indicate Islam, as they are very wary of any symbol having a religious meaning attached to it. Such things are forbidden by the Qur'an.



So there is a difference in concept between 'symbols of the Islamic faith' and 'symbols adopted by Muslims.' Officially, the symbols of the Islamic faith are only those that have been declared as symbols by the Qur'an or the *sunnah*. These include the Ka'aba, the five daily prayers, the *hajj*, and the animal sacrifice at *Eid ul-Azha*.

Thus the crescent and star are merely symbols adopted by Muslims. They hold no special significance in Islam. They do not represent Islam as Christians might use the cross to represent the Christian faith. Yet it is clear that Muslims associate the crescent moon with Islam, and use it to represent their way of life. There is tension between the moon being used

as a religious symbol, which is denied, and the moon being used as a popular symbol of Islam.

With respect to the star, research has drawn nothing of particular note about its use, except there are many legends about it. It has been said by some Muslims that the five points of the star represent the Five Pillars of Islam, but that is probably a fanciful suggestion. Perhaps the star is only significant together with the crescent moon, as representative of all God has created.

The Colour Green

Green (*akhdar*) is the symbolic colour of Islam. Mohammed is believed to have worn a green turban (his favourite colour). Green was the colour of the banners used on the battlefield and said to be the colour of the first Islamic flag. In the Qur'an and the *hadith*, paradise is described as being filled with green. It states that the people of paradise 'will wear green garments of fine silk' (Surah 18:31)

Islam also considers green significant because it is the colour of nature. The Arabs treasured the colour green as it was in direct contrast the relentless yellow of the desert. The desert oasis was green, and therefore symbolised life, comfort and peace. So, for the Arabs green is the symbol of good luck, natural fertility, vegetation, and youth. In the Qur'an green becomes a very attractive colour. In heaven, '[Believers] shall recline on green cushions and rich carpets' (Surah 55:76). Green is also symbolic of God's rich blessing.

The *hadith* witness to the importance and pleasantness of the colour green: 'The sight of green is agreeable to the eyes as is the sight of a beautiful woman.' One commentator writes, 'green is always connected with Paradise and positive, spiritual things, and those who are clad in green, the *sabzpush* of Persian writings, are angels or saints.'ⁱⁱ In Egypt Muslims put green material around tombstones: this is said to foreshadow paradise. Therefore in Muslim thought the colour green and Islam are synonymous. Muslims often use the colour green to represent themselves.

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- ⁱ See Sura 41:37 and **Juferi, Mohd Elfie Nieshaem**. [Article](#): *What is the Significance of the Crescent Moon in Islam?* See also **Juferi, Mohd Elfie Nieshaem**. [Article](#): *Do Muslims Worship the Moon God?*
- ⁱⁱ [First Ismaili Electronic Library and Database](#): citing **Schimmel, Annemarie**: *Deciphering the Signs of God*, Cambridge, 1994. p.16.