



OUR NEAREST NEIGHBOR, III

By Walt Robinson

Over the course of history, nations, states and organizations have used the moon as a symbol on their flags. The moon represents attributes of concentration, openness, victory, sovereignty and divinity. It should be noted that those who have designed flags with lunar crescent images have many times used artistic license and the representations are not necessarily astronomically correct.

The flags most often seen with a crescent moon in the design are flags of Islamic Nations. Was the configuration of the crescent moon and a star a conjunction seen by Mohammed? According to Gerald S. Hawkins, author of *Stonehenge Decoded*, this event took place in the dawn sky of July 23, 610 A.D. Whether or not this happened, it is believed that the conjunction coincides with the night the Prophet Muhammad received his initial revelation from God.

Another version of why the crescent moon is on these flags says that in 339 B.C. Macedonian troops were spotted trying to tunnel into Byzantium at night by the light of the crescent moon. Because the citizens saw this happening in the moonlight, the city (now Istanbul) was saved from the attack of Philip of Macedonia. To mark their gratitude, the citizens adopted the Crescent of Diana as the city's emblem and erected a giant statue in her honor. When the city became Christian Constantinople, the crescent assumed significance as an attribute of the Virgin Mary. This remained so until Constantinople fell to Muhammad II in 1453, at which time the crescent moon came to represent both Islam and the Turkish Empire. The star was added by Sultan Selim III in 1793, with its five points being established in 1844. These five points are called the "Pillars of Islam" — Creed, Prayer, Fasting, Charity and Pilgrimage).



Crescent of Diana portrayed on a Roman coin.

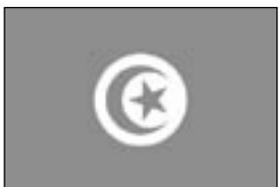
These stories, though, have been debunked over the years. According to the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, the crescent moon and star was first recorded on coins dating to 695 A.D. The Turks were using these devices as tribal totems before they ever left Central Asia. They were used to decorate mosques and other buildings and appeared on military flags no later than the 15th century A.D. It was their use as an ornament atop mosques, possibly to replace the clearly non-Islamic crosses on the domes of converted churches, which led Westerners to consider the crescent the characteristic symbol of Islam.



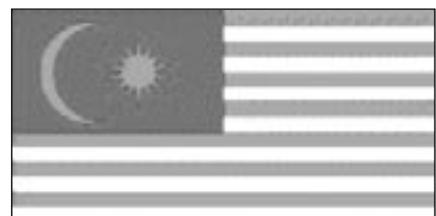
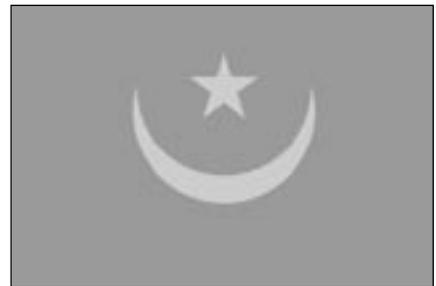
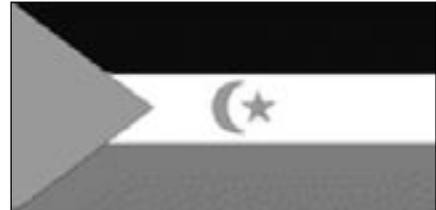
Flag of Turkey

Most other flags of the world that display the crescent moon, do so primarily to show they are Islamic nations. These include countries such as Malaysia, Algeria, Turkey, Pakistan and Tunisia.

The flag of Singapore has some interesting history behind why the crescent moon is still used as a predominant feature. The colors of the Singapore flag are red for brotherhood and equality and white for purity and virtue. The crescent moon originally served as a symbol of assurance to the Malays in 1959 — the year the flag



Flag of Tunisia



Many countries of the world display crescent moon images on their flags. Flags represented above (from top to bottom): Western Sahara (unofficial flag of Africa), Mauritania, The United Arab Emirates, Algeria and Malaysia.



Flag of Singapore

was designed — that Singapore was not a Chinese state. Singapore, which is 80 percent Chinese, is aware of its association with the 15 million Muslims of Malaysia. Therefore, the

crescent moon remained on the flag. But also, it struck a nerve with the elder Chinese. They have always emphasized that it was not to represent them as Islamic, or favoring the Islamic religion, but as a country on the rise. Therefore, the because of the sensitivities of the past, can be more honestly said that it was politically correct to leave the crescent moon there as a way to placate the Malays.

If one closely examines the flags of the individual states in the USA, they will find that the Missouri flag has a crescent moon. The shield of the Missouri Coat of Arms, which is displayed in the center of the flag, has a multitude of symbolism. On the left side of the shield — the state side — is a grizzly bear and a crescent moon. The grizzly bear symbolizes the strength and bravery of the citizens of the state. The crescent moon symbolizes the state of Missouri at the time of its induction into the union; a state with a small population and wealth and huge potential. The crescent moon also



symbolizes the “second son.” Missouri was the second state to be carved from the territory acquired with the Louisiana Purchase.



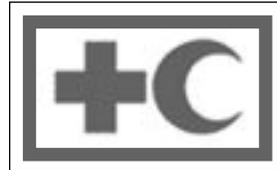
A crescent moon is shown on the state flag of Missouri (above). Detail (left) shows the crescent moon in the upper left quadrant of the center circle.

The crescent moon is also used on the state flag of South Carolina. The crescent moon was actually first seen in 1765 on a banner carried by South Carolina protesters of the Stamp Act. Ten years later, during the Revolutionary war, the troops wore a silver crescent moon on the front of their caps. So the blue background (the color of their uniform) and the silver crescent became the symbols for the unofficial flag. It was officially adopted in 1861 (with the palmetto tree) when South Carolina proclaimed its independence.



State flag of South Carolina

And finally, an organization which uses the crescent moon is the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Its two logos are two globally recognized emblems — the



Flag representing the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

red cross and the red crescent on a white background. The Federation’s member National Societies use or one or the other of these emblems — either the cross or the crescent. The emblems go back a long way. The red cross on a white background was formally adopted in the first Geneva Convention of 1864. The red crescent was adopted by the Ottoman empire in 1876 during the war with Russia.

The moon has always played an important part in human culture. There are many stories about the moon from all over the world.

Some of the more famous myths, legends and weird tales about the

moon appear in literature and films. So until next month, keep watch on the nocturnal orb that throughout history has struck terror and fear into the hearts of men.



Flag of Comoros 1996–2000 (left) and the current flag of Comoros



Walt Robinson has been a member of the Astronomical Society of Kansas City since 1987. His present duties include Webmaster for the society’s Web site. He has presented many programs at the public nights at Powell Observatory and in Bonner Springs, Kan. where he lives.

Walt also runs the “Robinson Lunar Observatory” to spur interest in the moon among amateur astronomers. His recent “lunar light ray” program brought many amateurs together from across the United States and abroad to study and observe these events. An article written in the Astronomical League’s Reflector explained the program, and as a result recruited many more interested amateurs into studying the moon.