

History through flags: Flag of Turkey

An Imperial Flag repurposed for the Turkish Republic



Adopted: 1844 (from an earlier design dating back to the 18th century)

- The flag is often called *al bayrak* (the red flag), and is referred to as *al sancak* (the red banner) in the Turkish national anthem.
- The crescent moon symbol's usage predates Islam, but it became associated with the Muslim world following the conquest of Constantinople, when the Turkic people added the crescent moon and star symbol to their flag in 1453. The flag was originally green, but this was changed to red by decree in 1793 and an eight-pointed star was added.¹



The Ottoman flag with an eight pointed star, used 1793-1844

¹ Publishing, D. K. (2009-01-06). Complete Flags of the World. Penguin. ISBN 978-0-7566-5486-3. May 2019

- For the Ottomans, red was to be the flag of secular institutions and green of religious ones.

The origins of the Crescent Moon as a symbol is Islam:

The Moon in its first quarter was a religious symbol from earliest times and figured, for example, in the worship of the Near Eastern goddess Astarte. Later it became the symbol of the Byzantine Empire, supposedly because the sudden appearance of the Moon saved the city of Byzantium (Constantinople) from a surprise attack. It once was thought that the Ottoman Turks adopted the crescent for their own flags after capturing Constantinople in 1453, but in fact they had been using the symbol for at least a century before that, for it appeared on the standards of their infantry under Sultan Orhan (c. 1324–c. 1360). In that case, however, the crescent may have been of different origin, formed by the base-to-base conjunction of two claws or horns. Whatever its origin, the crescent became closely associated with the Ottoman Empire (appearing on military and naval standards and on the tops of minarets), its successor states, and the world of Islām in general. It may be seen today on the national flags of many countries in which Islām is predominant, including Algeria, Azerbaijan, Comoros, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritania, Pakistan, Tunisia, and Turkey; and it is also in the symbol of the Red Crescent, the Muslim equivalent of the Red Cross organization.²

² Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Crescent." Encyclopædia Britannica. February 05, 2018. Accessed May 21, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/crescent-symbol>.
May 2019