

MELBOURNE WALKING CLUB INC.

THE ORIGIN OF THE CLUB'S SYMBOL



By Geoff Leonart

The Melbourne Walking Club symbol is based on the triskelion. Triskelion is a Greek word meaning three legged; it is a symbol incorporating three bent human legs or any similar symbol with three stylized projections and rotational symmetry. In Sicilian culture the triskelion is generally called the trinacria, which means triangle. The name trinacria is thought to have its origin in the triangular shape of the island of Sicily. The Romans named it trinacrium likening it to a three pointed star.

The treskelion is an ancient symbol; the first recorded examples were discovered in prehistoric rock carvings in what is now northern Italy. More significantly, it appears on many Greek coins as well as vases dating from at least the eighth century BC and it has spread to many cultures up to the present time. Many different forms of the triskelion exist, such as: bare - legged, armour- legged, chain mail - legged, lanky - legged, ankle - winged, Madusa - centred, ibis - beaked or stylized. Clathrin, a naturally occurring protein, has a triskelion shape. The Isle of Man, Sicily, ancient Lycia and probably the Kingdom of Olba chose the triskelion as a national symbol. Why?

The Isle of Man's symbol has been the triskelion for centuries. As long ago as 1311 its legs were clothed with chain mail, this was changed to armour - legged in 1395. The design used at present was accepted in 1966. See Figure 2a. The tips of the toes are arranged to form an equilateral triangle and when correctly positioned the legs rotate clockwise. Manx triskelions have a number of different features: most revolve clockwise, others anti- clockwise. Some have knee angles set at 60 degrees, others at 90, or 120 etc. The range of positions of the top thigh may have been set at 12 o'clock, or 11, or 10, for example. From time to time the legware has varied considerably.

The meaning of the triskelion symbol, apparently attributed to the ancient Greeks, was that it stood for *progress and competition*. In the legend of *the three legs of man*, Manannan the magician, changed himself into three legs and defeated his foes by rolling down the hill and terrifying them. Another legend connected with the triskelion has the Earth placed at the centre of the triangle, the three legs representing respectively, the waves of the sea, the wind and fire.

The three legs of the Manx triskelion or Celtic Swastika relate to their motto, in Latin, *Quocunq̄ue Jeceris Stabilis*, which translated means: *Whichever way you throw it, it will stand*. On the Isle of Man, besides its official role in government activities, the triskelion symbol finds widespread use in industry, tourism, commerce and sport. Kneeling clockwise is the correct symbol, as it is said that kneeling anti – clockwise signifies aggression in heraldry. However, many Manx churches show triskelions that represent anti – clockwise kneeling or bending.

The Isle of Man [Ellan Vennin] is a self - governing Crown dependency. Queen Elizabeth II is the Head of State and holds the title of Lord of Man. The Lieutenant Governor represents the Crown. The island is not part of the United Kingdom.



Figure 1 Manx Flag

Figure 1 shows the Manx flag – the background is red with the triskelion centrally placed. The Manx Coat of Arms is shown Figure 3.



Figure 2a Manx Triskelion



Figure 3 Manx Coat of Arms

Figures 4, 5, 6, and 7 are examples of coins, stamps, bank notes and car registration plates. All show the Manx triskelion symbol.



Figure 4 Coin



Figure 5 Stamp



Figure 6 Ten pound Note



Figure 7 Car Number Plates

The triskelion was once popular as a tattoo, especially amongst Manx seamen. Captain Bligh of Bounty fame, described his young midshipman Peter Haywood, who was involved in the mutiny, as being *“very much tatowed, on the Right leg is tatowed the Legs of Man as the impression on that coin is”* Bligh was married on the Isle of Man and would be familiar with its coinage.

In recent years the Isle of Man Government took steps to protect its longstanding use of the triskelion as the national emblem. Whilst it does not seek exclusivity in its use, it can prevent others from seeking to register the design as a trade mark exclusive to them.



Figure 2b

The Melbourne Walking Club triskelion, Figure 2b, is configured to rotate in an anti – clockwise direction; it has different leg covering and lacks winged heels, but is otherwise similar to the Manx triskelion in Figure 2a.

A.O. (Arthur) Barrett along with his brother in law, Reverend E.J.B. (Ted) White, was instrumental in establishing the Walking Club in 1894. It was officially known as the Melbourne Amateur Walking and Touring Club until incorporation in 1982, when it became the Melbourne Walking Club. The minutes of the inaugural meeting stipulate that the Club colours should be brown and gold. Presumably A.O. Barrett, who was originally from the Isle of Man, diligently fostered the adoption of the Club symbol.

The triskelion symbol chosen by the Club is characterised by its long and interesting history, use in commerce and tourism, association with ancient games and sporting competitions, as well as religious or political movements - contribute to making it an inspired and most appropriate choice.

There is a longstanding debate concerning a link between the triskelion symbols found on the Isle of Man and Sicily. Some historians have been unable to support the proposition that the similarity of the triskelion symbols on the two islands is the result of any discernable link.

A plausible explanation, takes account of the long association between the Norman Kingdoms of Sicily and the Norman Kingdoms of England. Frederick II of Sicily (1197 – 1250) married Isabella, the daughter of Henry III of England. When Henry was planning his campaign to invade Italy with a Sicilian army there is scarcely any doubt that the flags and banners designed for his forces featured the triskelion.

King Alexander III of Scotland was married to Margaret, the youngest daughter of Henry III. In 1266 Alexander took possession of the Isle of Man and a few years later a triskelion was adopted as its symbol. Presumably Alexander introduced the symbol as a family insignia, since his wife's sister had been Queen of Sicily and her brother had become King. Thus the triskelion symbol of Sicily may have become the symbol of the Isle of Man.

First adopted in 1282, the Sicilian flag is characterised by the triskelion symbol at its centre, the winged head of Medusa and three ears of wheat. The three bent bare legs are thought to portray *good fortune and prosperity*. The flag is similar to the Manx flag, and the triskelion is placed at centre of both. In modern times the triskelion is widely considered as the actual symbol of Sicily. This symbol is also known as the *trinacria*, once an older name for Sicily. It was revived during the Aragonese (Catalan) period of the Kingdom of Sicily in 1808.

The triskelion has its origin in Greek mythology. It consists of three parts: three legs joined at the centre, the head of Medusa (one of the three Gorgons) with two wings, and hair replaced by snakes. In the myth Medusa became overly proud of her magnificent hair. Because of Medusa's vanity, the goddess Athena turned her into a horrible monster whose hair was changed to hissing, striking snakes. This form of triskelion mythology is often represented in works of art, such as mosaics, coins, vases, sculptures, etc.

The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies involved the Kingdom of Sicily and the Kingdom of Naples. In 1861, the Two Sicilies were taken over by the Kingdom of Italy. Before then it was the largest of the Italian states,

encompassing island of Sicily and the most southerly region of the Italian peninsular. Sicily is now an autonomous region of Italy.

The Sicilian flag was adopted by the autonomous region of Sicily in the year 2000. This flag is shown in Figure 8. The previous Sicilian flag is shown in Figure 9.

Sicily has throughout its history, had many different flags and banners – many of which represented various political movements. During the 2nd World War the bandit Salvatore Giulianz established a guerilla army, which collaborated with the Allies in freeing the Island. The movement, represented by the flag lasted from 1942 – 1947 and is shown in Figure 10. Giuliane was murdered by the mafia in 1950, after a colourful career.

A typical Sicilian flag representing a political movement – for the autonomy of the two Sicilies is shown in Figure 11.

Regarding the Regional Flag of Sicily, one finds it flown in the front of hotels, a few shops, and city halls. The same design is worn by police as a lapel insignia.



Figure 8 Regional Sicilian Flag



Figure 9 Previous Regional Sicilian Flag



Figure 10 Sicilian Bandit's Flag



Figure 11 Flag for the Autonomy of The Two Sicilies

The Tunisian Bardo Museum displays amongst its World famous mosaics a representation of Rome as Athena. From behind her head emerge the legs of the Sicilian triskelion. See Figure 12. Medusa's head is a feature of the mosaic at Tindari in Sicily. It dates from the 3rd century BC and is shown in Figure 13 and may also be found on facades of temples or buildings.



Figure 12 Mosaic at Bardo Museum



Figure 13 Mosaic at Tindari

Figures 14 and 15 depict ancient Greek Vases with the triskelions featured on shields. Both date from the 6th century BC.



Figure 14



Figure 15



Phlacia, Phlacia circa 5th Century B.C.
AR Didrachm. Rev: six stylized winged figures.
Private collection.

Figure 16

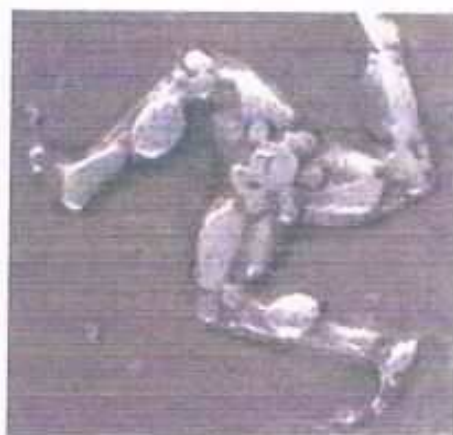


Figure 17 Aspendos 460BC



Circa 300 B.C.
Ar Nomos + Ar Drachm

Figure 18



Macedonia, Alexander II The Great 336-323 BC. Drachm. Chios,
c. 290-265 BC. 4.06g. Unpublished. Near Mint State.
By permission of Harlan J. Berk.

Figure 19



Lucania circa 350-400 B.C. Prowling lion, knote winged triatella and Greek letter Ε above. In exergue ΛΥΚΑΙΩΝ. Private collection. Obv. ΑΙΓΙΟ-ΚΑΜΑΤΕΩΣ ΑΘΗΝΑΙ.



Sicily, Lailia, ca. 1st Century B.C. AE- 8.48 gm / Obv. Herakles head. Private collection.

Figures 20 and 21



Panamoros, 254-100 B.C., AE23. Athena head (some say Ares head) r./Triquetra of legs, face at center. BMC 2.122, 11; SG1161 Private collection. / See Panamoros Bronzo in Part 1.

Figure 22



AR Denaro Roman Sicily 47 B.C. Private Collection.



Ibis - beaked

Figures 23 and 24



Figure 25



MZ 60254 Regno delle due Sicilie GIUSEPPE NAPOLEONE
 1806-1808 PIASTRA da 120 Grana - Emissione del 1808
 Zecca di Napoli Gigante 43/a, Pagani, Montenegro, 399 AR 2
 7,53 gm., 37,5 mm. mBB (R)

MX 60254 . Reign of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.
 Joseph Napoleon 1806-1808, AR Piastre of 120 grains
 1808, 27.53 gm., 37.5 mm. Naples mint,
 (Fine to Very Fine = FVF) (RARE = R)

Figure 26



Figures 27 and 28



Figure 29



Figure 30



Sicily, Syracuse. AR Tetradrachm, 17.10 gm.
 Time of Agathokles. Circa 310 B.C.
 Obv. Arethusa with dolphins. Rev. Quadriga.
 Private collection.

Figure 31



Figure 32 Aspendos 370BC

Figures 16 to 32 represent a collection of photographs of some of the more important ancient Greek, Roman and Sicilian coins featuring various forms of triskelion. For example see figure 19.

The triskelion is considered to be one of the oldest symbols recognised by mankind. In modern times it still sees considerable use on both the Isle of Man and Sicily. Its widespread historical and cultural significance may be traced through various legends, flags and banners, mosaics, coins, pottery and commerce. Regrettably, much of the history associated with the symbol is now lost or cannot be recovered.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the appeal of the triskelion may be appreciated by referring to Figure 33. The maps of Europe, Africa and Asia show the extent of the area and the people who had some association with the symbol.



Figure 33