

ATTICA – THE ALCMAEONID CLAN
(THE CLAN OF CLEISTHENES, PERICLES AND ALCIBIADES)

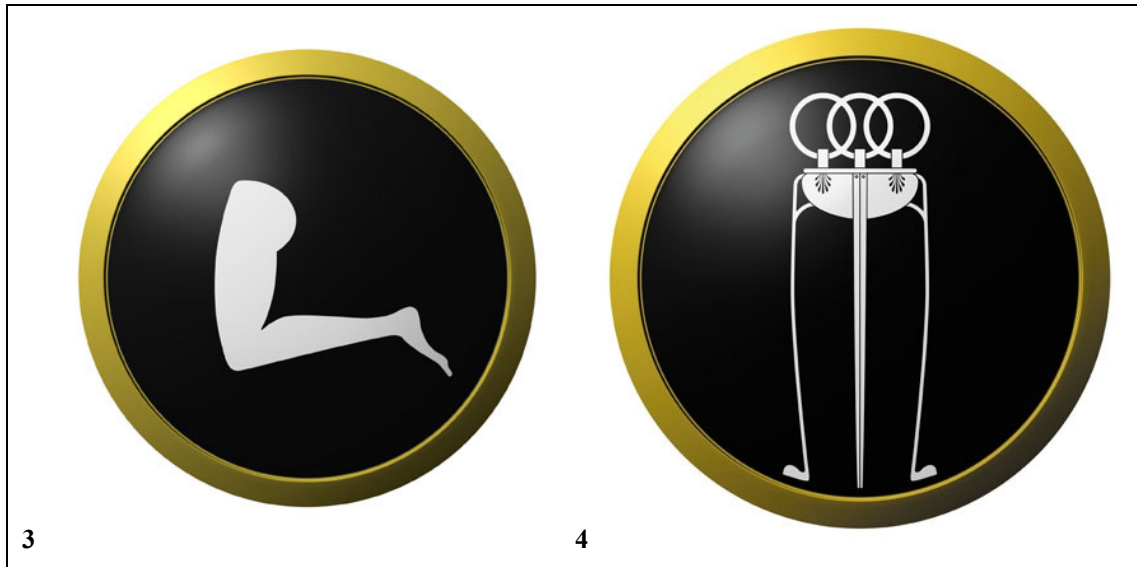


1

The Triskeles, dominant symbol of the Alcmaeonid clan, and emblem of its members, as it appears on various vases and coins issued by the clan during the VI century BCE. The Alcmaeonids also claim their ancestry from Homeric Pylos and the family of Nestor and the symbol appears quite frequently as the clan is one of the more numerous in Attica, including more than 700 families during the end of the VI century BCE according to Herodotus (*1523, National Archaeological Museum Athens, 63.473, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts, USA, 37-19, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, USA / Berlin B.T. II i, Plate XXXIII 11, The Hague, Six Collection, N.C. 1888 97, Plate V 2 & London, N.C. 1888 97, Plate V 3 & Berlin, Plate XVII 526*).

2

The Tetraskeles, symbol of the Alcmaeonid clan, during the First Sacred War (595 BCE – 585 BCE), is a rather simple version of the dominant symbol, which directly declares the connection with Apollo and his sacred ground at Delphi. The emblem is obviously used by members of the clan that served under Alcmaeon II, who was also the Athenian polemarch during the war, and the scarlet ribbon in the rim represents the head-band worn by those who visit Delphi with offerings for Apollo. About a century later the symbol appears simplified in Lycia, representing Apollo Lycios, the principal divinity of the population (*George Henry Chase, SHIELD DEVICES OF THE GREEKS IN ART AND LITERATURE, Harvard Studies in Classical Philology, Boston, 1902, Numismatic Chronicle, ii, British Museum, 1897*).



3

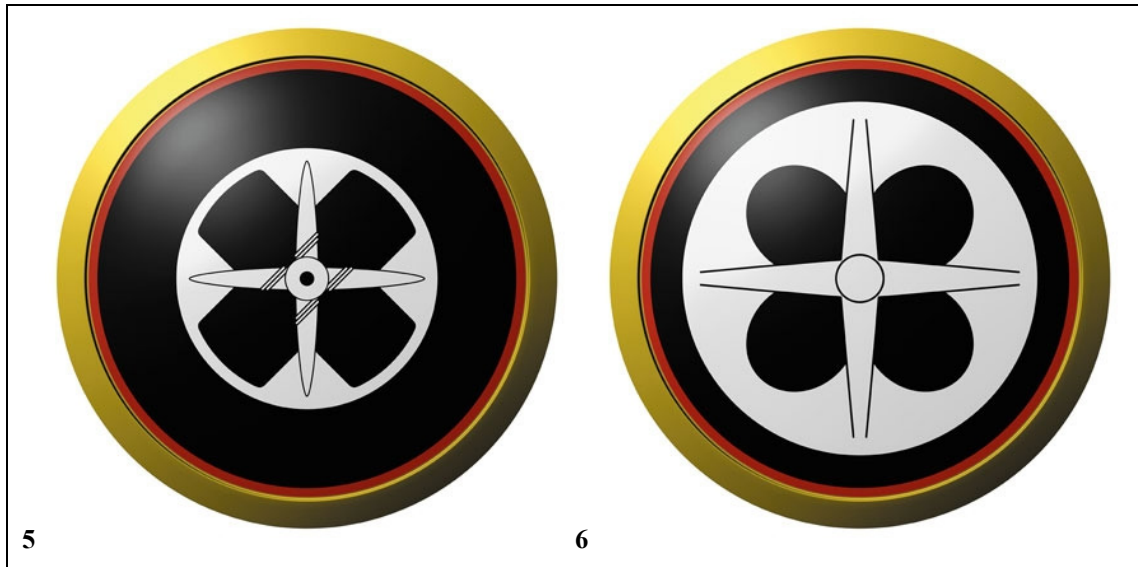
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3

The Leg, symbol of the Alcmaeonid clan, during their exile in Phokis after 550 BCE, where its members and other leading Athenians, politically affiliated with the clan, organise the expulsion of Peisistratus, under the auspices of the oracle at Delphi. Though they will succeed their cause in 510 BCE by expelling Hippias from Attica, with strong Spartan support, the Leg remains the emblem of its members for a long time, probably as an allusion to their exile, and it is attested in their coins (issued by the Delphic mint), and in numerous vases (1700, *Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek, München, F 1851, Antikensammlungen, Berlin, Royal Athena Galleries, London-New York, HAL 02, ex Kröber Collection, Berlin, 1964, Seltman, Cambridge & Warren, Boston, Catalogue Plate XXXVII 1748, London, N.C. 1890, Plate XIX 21*).

4

The Tripod, symbol of the priestly house of Kynnidae (priests of Apollo), which supports the Alcmaeonid cause against Peisistratus and his family, and it is probably related through marriages with the powerful clan (more than 700 families according to Herodotus). It appears as an emblem of its members mainly in the period of the long and bitter fighting against Peisistratus and his allies (priests are never excluded from military service), but in the following century (V century BCE) it spreads to other followers of Apollo, who also serve as priests in various temples (*F 55, Musée du Louvre*).



5 & 6

The archaic Chariot Wheel of the early VI century BCE (left), and the subsequent, more developed and lighter Chariot Wheel (right), which appears after the middle of the VI century BCE. Furthermore, the second appears in coins issued by various powerful clans of Attica and in paintings, as one by the painter Diosphos, on a lekythos, around 500 BCE. Both denote as symbols, victory in the chariot races, one of the most spectacular, dangerous and costly sports of antiquity and are being used as emblems by the winners. For Attica the chariot races in Olympia, Delphi or Corinth, are the most popular sport events, although (in terms of participation) they remain limited to the privileged rich clans because of the enormous costs procured by the necessity of acquiring and training teams of race horses, the construction of specially made light chariots and the provision of other expensive accessories. From 592 BCE to 492 BCE, the Athenians claim at least 14 first victories out of 25 in the Olympic Games, and 5 of them belong to members of the Alcmaeonid clan. The winners are Alcmaeon II (592 BCE), Megacles II (568 BCE, 556 BCE, 552 BCE), Megacles III (512 BCE) and the symbols are used as emblems that denote directly their victories, combined with the scarlet outer ring in the rim, which alludes the scarlet ribbons that are being awarded to the first winners in the sports (*British Museum Catalogue of Vases, ii, Plate III, No B.134, London, 1893 & MNB 511, Musée du Louvre*).



7 & 8

Variation of Triskeles from a cooling jar (psycter), made by the painter Oltos in 510 BCE, which pictures hoplites on dolphins. The year coincides with the expulsion of Hippias from Athens, and the symbol is used probably during the Panathenaean procession in the same summer, as a festive emblem of the Alcmaeonid clan, while the three winged mythical creatures represent their firm allies during their struggle against Peisistratus and his descendants, with the griffon alluding Delphi, the Pegasus Corinth and the Chimaera Sikyon, where the leading member of the clan (Megacles II) is connected through marriage with the ruling family of that city (*281.69.1969, Norbert Schimmel Trust, Metropolitan Museum, New York, USA*).



9

Seilinos, a mythical beloved companion of Dionysus, and dominant symbol for his followers. The symbol is connected with the Alcmaeonid clan through Megacles III, and it appears between 525 BCE and 520 BCE, in a kylix (cup), painted by the painter Oltos who works at that time with the potters Ischylos and Nicosthenes, on the shield of an enemy of Peisistratus. Also the painter Euergides, pictures the symbol on the shield of an hoplitodromos, on a kylix around 515 BCE, which means that the symbol is adopted before the murder of Hipparchus. Furthermore, in a painting in the Acropolis, the symbol appears on the shield of Megacles III, although it was partially brushed away, when he was ostracized in 486 BCE, and replaced with the name of Glaukytos, another member of the clan. It seems that Megacles III abandoned the Triskeles, opting for Dionysus, in order to limit the abominable blame for the murder of Cylon (612 BCE) inside his family, and thus freeing the clan from its collective guilt (*BH 0630C, Royal Athena Galleries, London-New York, CA.3662, Musée du Louvre, 1037, Acropolis Museum*).

10

Eros, the symbol of creation, according to mythology, adopted by Alcibiades as his personal emblem in a peculiar form, as he is pictured unleashing thunderbolts. The case of personal emblems is very rare in ancient Greece, as it presupposes an act of valor and bravery that is officially recognized by the state, which in the case of Alcibiades are his deeds in Potidaea (432 BCE) and Delium (424 BCE). The symbol appears after his election as general (419 BCE) and is quoted by the philosopher Satyrus and Plutarchus in his biography of Alcibiades (*66.114, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, USA*).

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