

History

The Origin of the Lambda Symbol

Lambda, the eleventh lower-case letter of the Greek alphabet and modern-day symbol of the gay community, is the fore-runner of our letter "L." Originally, the letter was a picture symbol for the scales often seen being carried by the figure of Justice. As time passed, the lambda bore less a visual resemblance to scales, and its meaning has become more abstract in that it came to represent the concept or quality of balance.

The ancient Greeks believed that balance was a reconciliation between two opposites, and as such was not a stable state but one needing continuous adjustment.

Due to the influence of Greek philosophy, the lambda symbol has emerged as it appears in its modern-day form. The small hook was added to the base of the letter for two reasons: to indicate that some form of action was necessary to bring about a state of equilibrium, and to indicate that constant action was necessary to maintain that state once it was achieved.

The ancient Spartans adopted the lambda as a symbol of their unity. It signified the special balance which they felt must exist between an individual and the State. They wore it on their shields like a logo and believed that the demands of society should never interfere with each person's right to be totally free and independent. The Spartans also thought that each individual must be bound to society only by individual choice and desire. Still, each Spartan recognized that only in a common bond could they hope to preserve

their existence as a free and equal people.

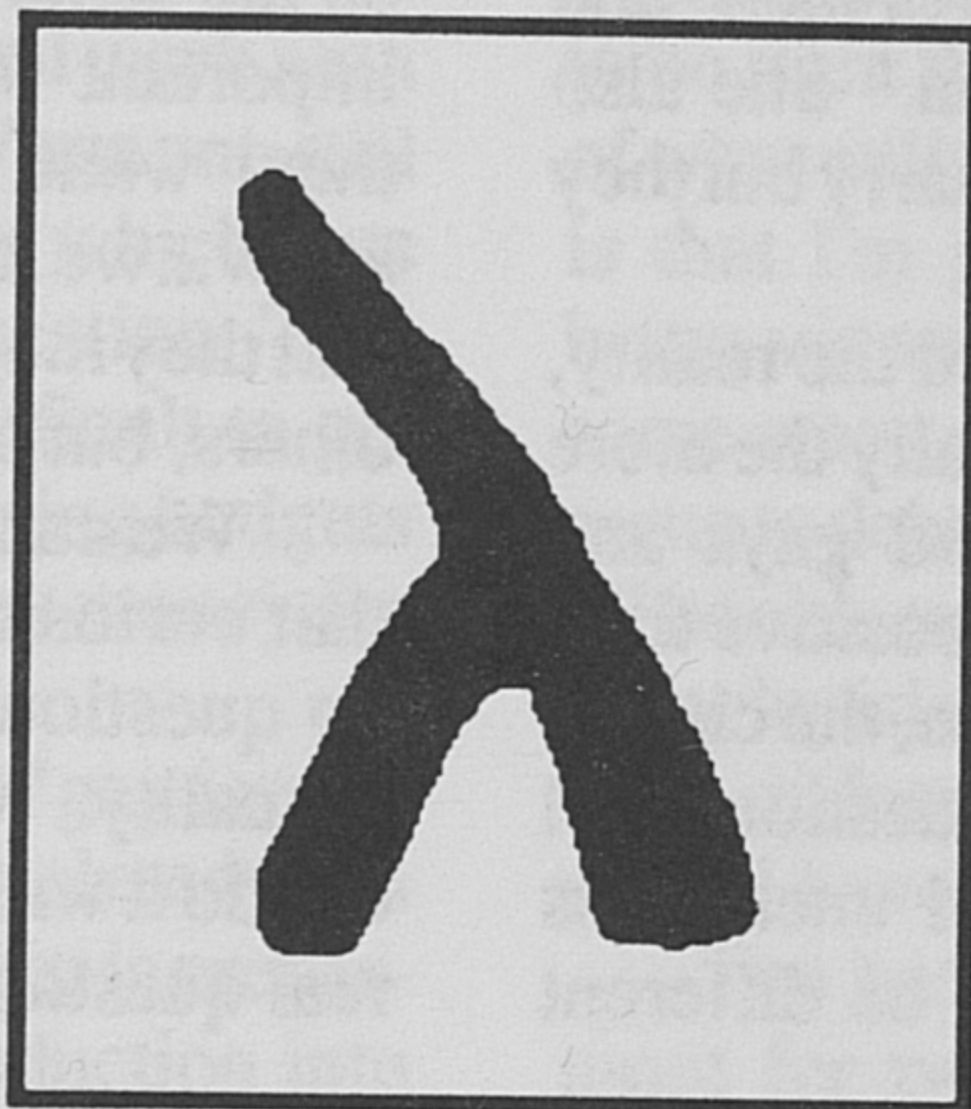
As Rome rose to power and conquered the then-known world, the Romans took many things of value from Greek culture. Among these was the lambda. Owing to the fact that the Romans saw the overall shape of the lambda as suggestive of a flame, it was used as the symbol for "lambas," the Latin word for torch.

In modern times, scientists seeking a symbol for the wavelength of light drew on the historical past. Because of its connection with the torch, the lambda was chosen.

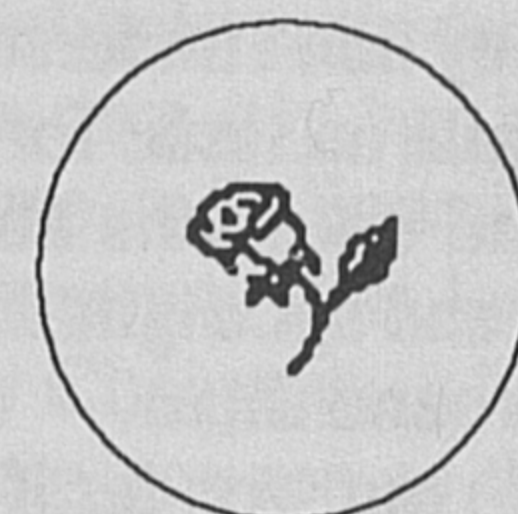
In the 1960's, when the quest for gay liberation emerged as an organized movement after the Stone-wall riots, the lambda was selected as a symbol because of its historical associations.

Previously symbolizing justice, balance and the reconciliation of opposites; unity and the relationship of the individual to society; and the light of the torch - the lambda was seen to possess those qualities which best represented the objectives of the budding gay and lesbian movement. As acceptance of the lambda became more widespread and its popularity grew, use of the symbol became commonplace across the United States.

The lambda's most recent historical association - with light - began to take on a new, more social association. As a symbol of freedom for gay men and lesbians, the lambda has come to represent the light of knowledge. It promises hope for a new future with dignity for gay men and lesbians everywhere.



Today, the lambda is recognized as a unique international symbol for gay and lesbian rights, for justice and enlightenment, as well as for a needed balance in acceptance of differences by and within all humanity.



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