

== GOLDEN FLEECE—ROMAN EAGLE ==

A frequent Masonic question is "What is the legend of the Golden Fleece and what is its relation to the lambskin apron and Roman Eagle?"

The legend of the Golden Fleece has been handed down from time immemorial. Mythology tells us that the Golden Fleece was supposed by the Greeks to be hidden in a remote land far across the trackless sea. This precious fleece grew upon the back of a ram, the gift of one of their gods. The ram was constantly guarded by bulls that breathed fire and by a dragon that never slept. The promise to the Greeks was (so the fable went) that if they could find and recover the Golden Fleece and bring it to Greece, wealth and prosperity would abound in that country. The hope of redeeming that promise led to the formation of an order which embraced in its membership many of the most illustrious men of that period, who were called Argonauts from the name of the ship, Argo, on which they sailed. Tradition is replete with the daring deeds and suffering of those men in the cause in which they enlisted. The badge of the order was the symbol of a Golden Fleece.

At a later, though still ancient, period, there was formed among the Romans an order that embraced only those renowned in war. Its symbol was the Roman Eagle. Of these two orders, the object of one was worldly wealth; the object of the other was military glory. Both orders have faded from the face of the earth, as surely will perish all orders founded on sordid or vain desires.

But allegedly more ancient than the order of the Golden Fleece or that of the Roman Eagle is the order whose badge is a lambskin or white leather apron, whose aim is innocence and purity of life, and whose object is charity. That this order, Freemasonry, has survived, while all others have perished, teaches us that if we live in accordance with its tenets, we, too, shall persevere.

There is a much more practical explanation of the legend of the Golden Fleece. From the earliest days, it was known that a sheepskin placed in the bed of a stream where there was alluvial gold would catch and entangle the fine particles of gold and small nuggets as they rolled down the streambed. The fleece was then carefully removed from the stream, dried, and the gold dust shaken out into a suitable container.

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