



Pillars of Light



Compiled by the
Editorial Team of the
Grand Lodge Library

Volume 5 Issue 6(55)

June 2009

HOW FREE IS A FREEMASON?

By Rabbi Raymond Apple PGC of the UGL of NSW and the ACT

We are pleased to propose to you this month, the reading of yet another pearl of Masonic exploration into the import of a term, familiar to all but not always understood. It is short and concise but as always illuminating. It comes to us from one of the most profound contemporary researchers, we have the privilege to consider our own.

We are not certain when the term Freemason emerged, though it was certainly in use in the late 17th century. Bernard E Jones (*Freemason's Guide and Compendium*, 1950, page 114) quotes a tract of 1698 which attacks "Freed Masons" as "anti-Christ" and a "devilish sect of men" who practise "Mischiefs and Evils in the Sight of GOD". It warns, "Take care lest their Ceremonies and secret Swearings take hold of you; and be wary that none cause you to err from Godliness". True, the correct term is Freemasons, but the author probably inserted the "d" quite deliberately to express his belief that the "devilish sect" were throwing off religious restraints.

Though we reject this argument, we are still not sure why Masons are called "free". Some quote the German "*frei*", free, since the operative Mason could go wherever he wished or was needed; others posit a link with the French "*frère maçon*", Brother Mason. But since Speculative Masonry probably came from the British Isles, the term is likely to derive from English, not German or French. One possibility is an Anglo-Saxon word (with links to other languages), "*freo*", beloved, not so much because of a sense of collegiality but indicative of acting at one's own pleasure. Many scholars, (e.g. G.W Steinbrenner, *The Origin and Early History of Masonry*, page 110) point out that the medieval mason worked in "*free*", i.e. soft and not

rough stone. Steinbrenner says, "The word Freemason evidently signifies a free-stone, as distinguished from the *rough* mason, who merely built walls of rough, unhewn stone". In a statute of 1350 the wages of a master Freemason are higher than those of other masons. In an Ordinance of 1365, a plumber was denied the right to practise his trade "if he be not free of the City, and ... he knows well and lawfully how to work" (*Report of Royal Commission on the Livery Companies*, 1884, vol. 3, page 673, cited in Frank Foden, *Philip Magnus: Victorian Educational Pioneer*, 1970, page 187). Were masons also required to be "free of the City"?

Whatever the history, the term appealed to the Speculative Masons of three hundred years ago. Preferring new possibilities to ancient precedents, they believed that man was able (i.e. free) to plan his own destiny, free to use his reason wherever it might lead, free to build a Utopia and figuratively to use free stone to shape his material without merely imitating the ideas of others.

The creativity of that age waned but the movement prospered, not without making changes along the way. It called itself "ancient" as well as "free" and introduced its own precedents and symbolism. It allied its respect for man's mind with an insistence on a Mason having at least a nominal belief in God. It qualified its belief in reason by admitting that there were secrets which reason could not penetrate. It posited that a flash of light would one day pierce the "mysterious veil". Milton, obsessed with his blindness, had written of "no light, but rather darkness visible"; Freemasonry more or less espoused a belief that eventually there would be no darkness, but rather light visible, and its ideology united reason and religion in dreaming of man's eyes being opened to see the ultimate truth.



The Golden Fleece

(Extract from GOLD, ALCHEMY AND FREEMASONRY by Michael J Noakes, P.M. Lodge Kensington No. 270)

From the earliest moment in our Masonic career when, as a newly initiated Entered Apprentice Freemason, we are invested with our first apron, we are told that it is the distinguishing badge of a Mason and that it is ".....more ancient than the Golden Fleece or Roman Eagle.....". What on Earth has this got to do with Freemasonry we might ask?

Golden Fleece

Assuming that the Golden Fleece we are referring to in our EAF ritual is one and the same as that stolen by Jason and the Argonauts from Colchis on the Black Sea we can refer to one of the oldest books on mining published in 1556 by the alchemist Georgius Agricola, "*De Re Metallica*" translated from Latin by Herbert Clark Hoover and Lou Henry Hoover (yes that is the same Herbert Hoover who discovered The Sons of Gwalia (Wales) Gold Mine in Western Australia and who later became the President of the United States). Agricola says: "*The Colchians placed the skins of animals in the pools of springs and since many particles of gold had clung to them when they were removed, the poets invented the "Golden Fleece" of the Colchians.*" (see Figure 1).

Dating the adventures of Jason and his Argonauts can be traced to around the 5th century BC so we must assume that the reference to our EAF apron dates to before this since it is "more ancient" than the Golden Fleece or Roman Eagle. Colchis, the traditional land of the Golden Fleece, lies between the Caucasus on the north, Armenia on the south and the Black sea on the west. Of course the objective of Jason's raiding party was not a single Golden Fleece but rather the entire production of the "Colchis Mining Co Ltd's" operations and its theft would have fetched a tidy sum back home. Hardly an honorable association for our EAF apron but, then again, I am not sure quite how honorable the Roman Eagle is either.

Metallurgy of the Golden Fleece

The method of gold recovery using the Golden Fleece closely resembles the modern method of gold recovery generally referred to as gravity gold concentration. The gold bearing rock or

river gravel is pulverised to a size similar to beach sand and mixed with water to form a "mineral slurry". If the slurry is passed over say a sheep's fleece or in today's world a ribbed corduroy cloth, the heavier gold particles sink into the wool of the sheep's skin (or corduroy ribs) while the lighter waste particles pass over the top and are thrown away as "tailings". Periodically the cloths or skins are washed to recover a "gold concentrate". In the days of the "Colchis Mining Co Ltd" the fleeces would probably have been burned to remove the gold into a gold product.

Until recently "Corduroy Tables" were being used extensively for gold recovery in for example South Africa and South America and may well still be in use today. I personally witnessed the operation of these tables in South Africa in the 1960's and the Philippines in the 1990's.

The Order of the Golden Fleece

There is another reference to the source of the Golden Fleece. The "Order of the Golden Fleece" was modelled on the English Order of the Garter (which is also mentioned in our EAF ritual), dedicated to Saint Andrew and founded in 1430 by Duke Philip III of Burgundy. It was intended as a knightly brotherhood and a friendly alliance of noblemen. Membership was originally intended to be limited to 31 although various subsequent Dukes of Burgundy increased that number to 51 and eventually to 70. Requirements included that the nominees be noblemen "in name and arms" and 'truly devoted' to the sovereign of the Order, the respective bearer of the title Duke of Burgundy. (It is noted without comment that The Knights Templars were an offshoot of a little understood monastic brotherhood, the Cistercians, who themselves danced to the tune of an extremely powerful group of noblemen living in Burgundy and Flanders). The principal aims of the Order were to promote the glory of God and to defend the Christian faith. The order was explicitly denied to "heretics", and so became an exclusively Catholic award during the Reformation, though the choice of the pagan Golden Fleece of Colchis as the symbol of a Christian order caused some controversy.

Continued next page

May we suggest to the Brother Secretary that it would be greatly appreciated if he could include regularly our link:

www.uglnsw.freemasonry.org.au/Library/Default.htm

in the Notice Paper sent to the members of the Lodge.

Continued from previous page

Figure 1 ~ Golden Fleece at Colchis¹



A - Mineral Spring (gold source)

B - Rams Head and Fleece

C - Argonauts

Conclusion

So what has the Golden Fleece go to do with Freemasonry? In my view it is telling the newly initiated EAF that Masonry is based on very ancient legend that will later lead him via the transmutation of rough rock into gold through to (hermetic) alchemy as an allegory for the transmutation of darkness into light.

1. "De Re Metalica" by Georgius Agricola, Translated from the First Latin Addition of 1556 by Herbert Clark

Hoover and Lou Henry Hoover, Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1950.

2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Order_of_the_Golden_Fleece

3. www.templarhistory.com/revealed.html



A Question and an Answer

Proposed by RW Bro Chris Telford

Q: Is "Masonry" compatible with the fact of Evolution? There is a big picture to be pondered here! Early Masons took for granted that there was a God. It was a non issue till 200-300 years ago. Now it is a big and very relevant issue.

A: In the Evolutionist v Creationist debate, the Evolutionists often claim atheism and are scientists. Regarding a belief in 'the Supreme Being', it is not possible for one to be both a serious scientist and an atheist; for the former must always keep an open mind to new evidence which may well appear from beyond the limits of this planet. Serious scientists are the first to admit that we do not understand the Universe that well. Even Dawkins himself in the TV programme of his book '*The God Delusion*' had a (very) short out-take admitting to agnosticism rather than atheism on these grounds. His book is really about religion, not God.

Now, if one considers the first 30 or so verses of the VSL (the seven 'day' creation reference) in the light of the ancient meaning of the Hebrew word 'yom' - *a period of time*, then the argument disappears. Some in Modern day interpret 'yom' as meaning '*a day; 24 hour period, one spin of the earth*'. Period. The ancient meaning can mean that but it can also mean; '*a week, a year, a century, a millennium, or multiple millennia; ie a variable period of time with no particular limits; a period of time*'. So then when the Genesis reference refers to "*On the first day.....*" it could well mean 2000 millennia, and "*.... the last day...*" is yet to finish.

Two relevant conclusions arise. First, now, Darwin's theory fits almost perfectly in a chronological sequence sense into verses 20-28 of Genesis 1. There is only one juxtaposition, and that is within standard error, especially when one considers the number of times this ancient text has been translated. So there is no argument any longer; both the Creationists and the Evolutionists are correct; it is just that the Evolutionists use a more recent model, Darwin's. And secondly, in answer to this question, yes, "Masonry" is entirely compatible with the fact of evolution, indeed, in the light of the above understanding, the fact of evolution enhances the principle of religious tolerance.

Enlightened Pillars

Rt. Wor. Bro. J. V. Haffner answers your queries. Any Questions? Just ask!

Throwing some Light ...

- The necessity for a Freemason to believe in one Supreme Being is to ensure that, if an individual recognizes the Fatherhood of God, he can readily accept the concept of the Brotherhood of Men.
- Freemasonry is promoting the concept of the Brotherhood of Men and seeks to render practical aid to those in need. It enjoys the practice of every social and moral virtue.
- There is no world Grand Lodge or Universal Authority in Freemasonry. Each Grand Lodge is independent but must practise the true principles of Freemasonry to remain a part of the Masonic Fraternity.
- The Square & the Compasses have long been accepted as Masonic Symbols. They refer to a Mason's duty to the craft, to his fellow men and to himself. They are the symbol of brotherhood and appropriate to the ideals of Masonry.
- Freemasonry in its present form has been operating for almost three centuries. No theories about its origin prior to about the 13th Century can be proved. However its principles can be traced back to time immemorial.
- Landmarks are Stones set in the ground to enable boundaries of properties to be determined. The Ancient Landmarks of the Craft are certain principles, practices, traditions, usages and laws which cannot be changed by any Mason, Lodge or Grand Lodge. They signify what in masonry is essential to its identity.
- Freemasonry embraces the highest moral laws. Its teachings inculcate love to God, love to all men and love (or respect) for our own selves. It demands square conduct and self control from all its members, as symbolized by the Square and Compasses.
- Masons should never wait for an introduction. When Brethren meet together in a Masonic lodge, they should make themselves known to one another and talk with one another without the formality of being introduced.
- In the Lodge Room a mason is taught the Grand principles of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth; in the South he has the opportunity to put them into practice before doing so in everyday life.
- The first Lodge in Australia was formed in Sydney in 1820. It was called "Australian Social Lodge" and it is still functioning under the name of Lodge Antiquity.
- The UGL of NSW was established in 1888 by Lodges holding Charters under the United Grand Lodge of England, The Grand Lodge of Scotland, the Grand Lodge of Ireland and the Grand Lodge of NSW.
- Operative masons were the builders of castles and churches. They were given a Royal Charter, in the time when serfs were bound to stay with one Lord, to travel throughout the land. They became Freemasons. Non-(Operative)Masons were admitted into their Order as Speculative Masons.

Are you in love with our traditions and the richness of our heritage?

Are you thirsty to delve into the Hub of Knowledge, your Library?

Would you invest a few hours a week and be recognized

as a valuable member of our volunteers team?

All you need is a true love for the Craft, its literature & a Masonic heart that is ready to offer, and glean the satisfaction of serving the Order.

Contact the Librarian Ph. (02)9284 2825