

## The Double-Headed Eagle of Lagash

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In heraldry, the **Double-Headed Eagle** has long been a symbol of power and dominion; it is associated with the concept of Empire. It originated in the Hittite Empire, modern Turkey and Syria in the 18<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> Century Before Christ and as the “Bird of the Sun” represented the “King of Heaven.” The Double-Headed Eagle was used in the Byzantine Empire art in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Century After Christ as an empirical emblem. In the Seljuk dynasty 13<sup>th</sup> Century, the Double-Headed Eagle was used to represent royal associations. The Roman Empire used the Double-Headed Eagle to represent its dominion over Constantinople in the East and Rome in the West. It was adopted by the Russians, Poles, Serbians, Prussians, Austrians, and Saxons. Today, it is used as a private seal, on flags, and on many of the coats of arm in Germany, Spain, France, Netherlands, England, and Russia.

The Double-Headed Eagle of Lagash is also a symbol for the Thirty-Second and Thirty-Third Degrees of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry. The number 32 inside the triangle represents the 32<sup>o</sup> degree of the Scottish Rite. The Latin motto, “Spes mea in Deo est,” means “My hope is in God.” As far as is known, the Double-Headed Eagle was first used in Freemasonry in 1758 by the Council of the Emperors of the East and West who controlled the “higher, or advanced, degrees at the time.



“Within the Rite, the symbol was inherited from the Order of the Royal Secret as the emblem of its highest degree, the Knight Kadosh or Knight of the White and Black Eagle. Established in 1761 by Etienne (Stephen) Morin, a French Mason, who received a patent from the Council of the Emperors of the East and the West to establish the Order. References of the inheritance are found in the 17<sup>th</sup> Degree, Knight of the East and West, and the 30<sup>th</sup> Degree, Knight Kadosh”.<sup>1</sup>

The Double-Headed Eagle is the Hermetic emblem for Scorpio and is emblematic of transformation. Alchemically, the eagle was the symbol of purified sulfur and emblematic of an ascending spirit. The double heads are often emblematic of the reconciliation of matter and spirit. The sword represents heavenly fire and the Third-Third crown represents spiritual

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory H. Peters, 32<sup>o</sup>, *Solve et Coagula: Alchemical Symbolism of the Double-Headed Eagle*, August 2008

attainment. Thus, in Hermetic term, the Double-Headed Eagle, in its whole, representing the Divine Generative Potency and Productive Capacity of Nature and begs the question: “How many times have you replaced yourself in Scottish Rite Masonry”?

The Scottish Rite Eagle is often referred to as the “Eagle of Lagash,” after one of the oldest emblems used in the ancient Sumerian City of Lagash, located midway between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in southeastern Iraq. Lagash was a one of the major capital cities in the Sumer Empire. It boasted a system of weights and measures, a banking and accounting system, a calendar of twelve lunar months and was a center of art, literature, military and political power five thousand years before Christ.

The Doubled-Headed Eagle was popularized in Europe by Charlemagne, Holy Roman Emperor (747-814), centuries before heraldry was introduced. The first use of the eagle as a heraldic charge was the Great Seal of Margrave Leopold IV of Austria in 1136 and the first mention of the Double-Headed Eagle as a coat of arms was in 1250 as Frederick II, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain.

In conclusion, the Scottish Rite Double-Headed Eagle represents the Divine Generative Potency and Productive Capacity of Nature. But, it also symbolizes the duality contained in or resolving itself in unity. It reminds us that, as man, we are composed of both body and spirit, he is both temporary and eternal; that both good and evil exist in the world and we must perpetually espouse good while opposing evil. It also reminds us that knowledge comes both from study and insight, our obligations are both to ourselves and to others, and both faith and reason are necessary.

**-- So Mote It Be --**

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