



## NUGGET

### So mote it be

**Summary:** An explanation of the phrase, 'so mote it be', in relation to both its origin and the appropriateness of its use in Freemasonry.

We use the phrase 'so mote it be' so often on Masonic occasions that most of us have long ceased to wonder what it actually means. Is it another way of saying *Amen* and, if not, what is the difference?

In Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, 'When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less.' It could well be argued that he had that word *mote* precisely in mind.

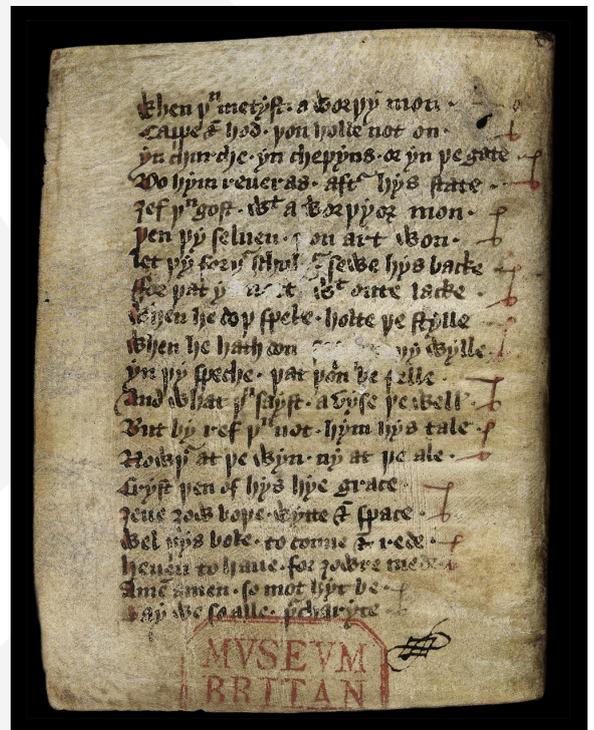
In Mediaeval Times the word *mote* could mean 'the rallying blast on a hunting horn', 'the next Order of the Day on a military bugle', 'a speck of dust in the eye' (balancing that beam?) and 'the hill on which a castle was erected'; as distinct from a moat which provided its watery barricade.

It was also employed as a useful alternative to the words, could, would, may or must. The latter meaning might finally point us in the right direction. There is good historical evidence that both *Amen* and 'so mote it be' were in use by the Guild Craft Masons as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and mediaeval practice often combined the two.

The Regius Craft manuscript, perhaps our earliest Masonic Document, quotes for example:

*Amen, amen, so mote it be,  
So say we all for sweet charity*

'So mote it be' here might mean simply 'so must it be' or 'let it be so' but then, disconcertingly, that is also the meaning of *Amen*.



Section of the Regius Poem containing the phrase 'so mote it be'.  
Courtesy of the British Library [public domain]



The word *Amen* however, has a deeply religious significance. It is Hebrew in origin and is used piously to confirm preceding statements in the liturgy, in prayer, in Blessings, Psalms etc. In Christian practice its use is stronger still. It asserts the spiritual truth of all that has preceded it. By the time of St John, Christ himself became known as the 'Great Amen'.

The Moderns and Antients came together as the United Grand Lodge in 1813 to agree a common ritual, and the decision was taken to make that ritual universal. This required the removal from the three Craft Ceremonies of all open references to specific religions, including of course any Christian symbols, prayers and phrases. That said, those Masons who are also members of the Holy Royal Arch or of the Mark Degree will recognise however that significant Christian allusions still remain in both. Because of the close connection between *Amen* and the Christian liturgy it may have seemed appropriate in 1813 to remove the first (religious) word from the old Guild Craft phrase 'Amen so mote it be' leaving just the second (secular) part of the phrase.

That great Masonic historian Harry Carr favoured the use of '*so mote it be*' in the Temple and *Amen* after Grace at the dining table. After reflecting on the above, you may well agree. It has been the custom in many Lodges to use '*so mote it be*' while dining but, as the response to Grace is a personal and not a Lodge affirmation, *Amen* would be an equally pleasing alternative for anyone who chooses to use it.



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Read by either a new or an experienced Mason with the minimum of preparation and practice; though ideally, they need to be read a few times beforehand.

Themed with the meeting or activity.

Used to initiate a discussion within a Lodge/Chapter, LOI/COI, or group.

Read at home and shared as a topic for a future discussion.

Used as a focus for an unplanned, informal discussion.

\*Note: All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized King James version and any reference to ritual will be from Emulation unless otherwise specified.

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