

# WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH

BOOK REVIEW - JUNE 2021

## *Shibboleth: A Primer on the Middle Chamber*

By Charles Matulewicz, Published 2021

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Reviewing Charles Matulewicz's *Shibboleth: A Primer on the Middle Chamber* is simultaneously rewarding and exasperating. It is rewarding because it is a thoughtful and thought-provoking treatment of the Fellow Craft Degree. It is exasperating because it is so poorly presented and edited.

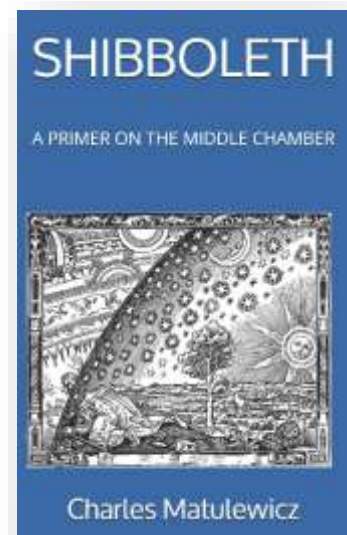
Let us dispose of the negatives first: released in 2021, *Shibboleth* appears to be self-published. Although an editor is identified, the number of misspellings, grammatical errors, and misused words serves to detract from the otherwise well thought out ideas expressed by Worshipful Brother Matulewicz. Annoyingly, there are no page numbers, nor are there separately identified chapters (although there are distinct topic headings). There appear to be roughly 106 pages, from the title page to the bibliography.

Assuming that the reader can get past the grammatical and spelling challenges, the substance of the book is worth the effort required to read it. One of the first sections, "What a Fellowcraft Should Know," is an insightful reminder of how Freemasonry unites men across time and distance. It also illustrates the importance of mentorship, and that the teaching found within Freemasonry is as valuable to the teacher as to the student.

Of particular interest is a brief paragraph titled, "Nullius in Verba," or, "take nobody's word for it." It is an admonition to verify all statements by examining available facts. This simple phrase could have been the motto of the Enlightenment Era, and counsels the Fellow Craft to look beyond the superficial and the obvious in his quest for knowledge.

Worshipful Bro. Matulewicz devotes several headings to the physical construction of King Solomon's Temple, reviewing the Old Testament story of its construction, providing some contemporary explanation of archaic measurement terms, and furnishing explanation of artisanal terms whose meanings have changed over the course of three millennia.

Several further headings are devoted to the story of Demeter and Persephone. While this at first may seem a curiosity, Worshipful Bro. Matulewicz points out that the significance of the pomegranate on the columns through which the Fellow Craft passes would, to the classically educated man of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, immediately call to mind the Eleusinian Mysteries. Bro. Matulewicz's point is that, like the



ancient mysteries, the Fellow Craft Degree seeks to understand and explain the secrets of the universe, but in the context of reason, rather than in terms of the supernatural.

In the heading, “Memories from the Future,” Worshipful Bro. Matulewicz posits that “learning is remembering.” Citing Plato, and other ancient philosophers, he writes that people are born with certain innate knowledge and throughout life are challenged to remember that knowledge. In the realm of Freemasonry, he argues that moving through the degrees is a similar experience. Matulewicz states, “by socializing with your older Brethren you are being invested with life lessons and ideas that normally take a lifetime to develop.” This also relates back to his previous assertion that Freemasonry unites men across time and space.

After a review of the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences, and after hearing the story of Jephthah and the Ephraimites, Bro. Matulewicz brings his reader to the Middle Chamber, where there is a discourse on the lecture related to geometry and the divine reason found in nature.

Worshipful Bro. Matulewicz draws heavily on Duncan’s Monitor, an early expose of Freemasonry. The back cover of the book contains a suggestion to read Duncan’s along with *Shibboleth*.

Its poor editing notwithstanding, *Shibboleth: A Primer on the Middle Chamber* contains many ideas worthy of contemplation and further exploration. Perhaps future editions will be more reader friendly.

Worshipful Brother Charles Matulewicz is a Past Master of Palestine Lodge No. 189 in Catonsville, Maryland, and is a Past Master of Maryland Masonic Lodge of Research No. 239.

*Shibboleth: A Primer on the Middle Chamber* is available from online booksellers.

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