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The *Laodicean Epistle*: Some Possible Sources

The literature of Muscovite Russia is vast and uneven in quality. In spite of the efforts of scholars, many literary works have not been sufficiently studied to permit one to assign them their proper place in Russian literature. One such work is the *Laodicean Epistle* (*Laodikiiskoe poslanie*). A number of articles have recently been written on it,¹ and it has figured prominently in the books of two of the leading specialists in Muscovite history and literature.² Discussion has centered on questions of the extent of the work, the original text, its interpretation, and possible sources. None of these points has been decided to the satisfaction of scholars concerned with the intellectual and literary developments of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. This article is an attempt to provide other explanations for some of the questions raised by the text.

The title, the *Laodicean Epistle*, derives from the work itself, although its significance remains obscure. Laodicea was the name of several cities in Asia Minor. One of them, Laodicea ad Lycum, was an early center of Christianity. There exists an apocryphal "Laodicean Epistle," which is a response to the statement of Saint Paul in Colossians: "And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea" (Col. 4:16). Marcion identified the book of Ephesus as "Laodiceans," and it was to the city of Laodicea (among others) that Saint John addressed the book of Revelation. It is by no means certain

1. See, among others, John V. A. Fine, Jr., "Fedor Kuritsyn's 'Laodikijskoe Poslanie' and the Heresy of the Judaisers," *Speculum*, 41, no. 3 (July 1966): 500-504; D. Freydank, "Der 'Laodicenserbrief' (Laodikiiskoe poslanie): Ein Beitrag zur Interpretation eines altrussischen humanistischen Textes," *Zeitschrift für Slawistik*, 11 (1966): 355-70; D. Freydank, "Zu Wesen und Begriffsbestimmung des russischen Humanismus," *Zeitschrift für Slawistik*, 13 (1968): 98-108; Frank Kämpfer, "Zur Interpretation des 'Laodicenschen Sendschreibens,'" *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, n.s., 16 (1968): 53-69; J. Luria (Ia. S. Lur'e), "Problems of Source Criticism (with Reference to Medieval Russian Documents)," *Slavic Review*, 27, no. 1 (March 1968): 1-22; J. Luria (Lur'e), "L'hérésie dite des judaisants et ses sources historiques," *Revue des études slaves*, 45 (1966): 49-67; J. Luria, "Zur Zusammensetzung des 'Laodicenschen Sendschreibens,'" *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, n.s., 17 (1969): 161-69; Johann Maier, "Zum jüdischen Hintergrund des sogenannten Laodicenschen Sendschreibens," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, n.s., 17 (1969): 1-12.

2. A. I. Klivanov, *Reformatsionnye dvizheniia v Rossii v XIV-pervoi polovine XVI v.* (Moscow, 1960), pp. 63-82; and Ia. S. Lur'e, *Ideologicheskaia bor'ba v russkoi publitistike kontsa XV-nachala XVI veka* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1960), pp. 172-77.

that any of these traditions had anything to do with the *Laodicean Epistle* ascribed to Fedor Kuritsyn, a *d'iak*, or secretary, to Ivan III, who served the latter as ambassador to Matthias Corvinus in Buda and who was one of the leading Muscovite officials in the last decades of the fifteenth century.³

Near the end of the *Laodicean Epistle* there is a statement, "if anyone wishes to know the name of the one who translated the Laodicean Epistle . . .," and it is followed by a code that gives the name Fedor Kuritsyn.⁴ It is not clear whether one is indeed to take Kuritsyn literally when he writes *prevedshago* (of the one who translated), or whether the word ought to be interpreted more widely, as "compiled" or "edited." Certainly no original, from which the Russian work might have been translated, is known to exist.

Another problem is the relation between the genre form "epistle" and the extant texts. The work bears little resemblance to an epistle in any ordinary sense. It seems likely that the *Laodicean Epistle* originally consisted of three distinct parts.⁵ It began with an introductory poetic and philosophical statement ("Dusha samovlastna, zagrada ei vera"). This was followed by a few lines of introduction and the "Table in Squares" ("Litoreia v kvadratakh"), which represented a compendium of grammatical knowledge, and a code. The *Laodicean Epistle* concluded with a passage employing this code and containing the information that Fedor Kuritsyn translated the work.

A. I. Klibanov has pointed out that the key to the "Table in Squares" is contained in yet another work, which he terms a "Guide to the Table" ("Tolkovanie na litoreiu").⁶ He establishes that Kuritsyn most probably was the author of this second work as well. Klibanov argues that the "Guide to the Table" was in fact an essential part of the *Laodicean Epistle*. There is no proof that the two works were ever part of a larger whole, but it is indisputable that they are closely linked and in some sense dependent upon each other.

The textological problems surrounding the *Laodicean Epistle* are by no means solved. Ia. S. Lurie was able to identify three redactions of the *Laodicean Epistle* from among the thirty-four manuscripts known to him at the time of his writing.⁷ Since then other manuscripts have been discovered, although the new texts do not alter Lurie's original division. The oldest of the surviving manuscripts, containing only the introductory ("Dusha samovlastna") portion of the *Laodicean Epistle*, has been dated by Lurie ca. 1506 (p. 257). Lurie

3. See in particular Klibanov, *Reformatsionnye dvizheniia*, pp. 63–82.

4. N. A. Kazakova and Ia. S. Lur'e, *Antifeodal'nye ereticheskie dvizheniia na Rusi XIV–nachala XVI veka* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1955), p. 276.

5. The texts were published by Lur'e, *Antifeodal'nye ereticheskie dvizheniia*, pp. 256–77.

6. Klibanov, *Reformatsionnye dvizheniia*, p. 78. The text is published in Vatroslav Jagić, *Codex Slovenicus Rerum Grammaticarum* (reprint; Munich, 1968), pp. 413–15.

7. Kazakova and Lur'e, *Antifeodal'nye ereticheskie dvizheniia*, pp. 257–64.

refers to this redaction as the *drevneishii tip* (most ancient version). The second redaction (Lurie terms it the *paskhal'nyi tip*, or Easter version) contains the three parts of the *Laodicean Epistle* mentioned above. The oldest manuscript in which the complete text has been found is dated by Lurie "second half of the sixteenth century." Several variants of this second redaction exist. The third redaction (*grammaticheskii tip*, the grammar version) differs from the second largely in the manner of presenting the code in the second part, the "Table in Squares" (p. 258). The oldest extant example of this redaction has been dated 1592–94.

The interpretation of the text is still a matter of general dispute. The introductory portion has been a particular problem for scholars. The task is made even more difficult by the lack of agreement on the text itself. It has been argued that the first redaction, which in existing manuscripts lacks the second and third parts of the *Laodicean Epistle*, is in part corrupt. None of the three redactions is free from this charge, however. I have used the first redaction as my basic text for the introduction, with proposed emendations in brackets. The text is BAN 4. 3. 15. (Library of the Academy of Sciences):

Душа самовластна, заграда ей вера.
 Вера ставится пророк наказанием.
 Пророк наказание исправляется чудотворением.
 Чудотворения дар усиляет мудростию.
 Мудрости сила житие фарисейску.
 Пророк ему наука.
 Наука преблагена есть.
 Сею приходим в страх божий.
 [Страх божий]—начало добродетел[и].
 Сим съоружается душа.⁸

The general structure of the ten lines is strikingly apparent.⁹ Each line tends to begin with the final phrase or word from the preceding line, and the passage itself begins and ends with the same word. With the exception of those lines in which demonstrative adjectives slightly disrupt the system, lines 8 and 10, the only deviation from this pattern occurs midway through the text, in lines 5 and 6. It is on these lines that the reader's attention is necessarily focused, and as D. Freydank has argued,¹⁰ one is led to conclude that *nauka* is at the center of the passage's significance.

The following translation into English is necessarily tentative, as is the commentary which accompanies it.

8. Ibid., p. 265.

9. On the poetic elements as such see the articles by Kämpfer, "Zur Interpretation," pp. 54–55, and Freydank, "Der 'Laodicenerbrief,'" pp. 365–66.

10. Freydank, "Der 'Laodicenerbrief,'" p. 368.

Line 1: *The soul is free. Its defense is truth.* In its natural state the soul exists as an independent, autonomous entity. The purity of the soul is guaranteed by truth. Russian *vera* is usually taken to mean “faith,” but “truth” (Latin *veritas*) is a distinct possibility.¹¹

Line 2: *Truth is established by the teaching of the prophets.* The phrase “the teaching of the prophets” has usually been taken to mean the prophets of the Old Testament. There is, however, no obvious reason why this must be so. The passage need not be interpreted as having any direct connection with the Judeo-Christian tradition. The word “prophet” might thus refer also to the oracle of antiquity.

Line 3: *The teaching of the prophets is justified (substantiated) by the miraculous.*

Line 4: *The gift of the miraculous is strengthened by wisdom.* The meaning of the Russian is not clear unless one assumes that the form is parallel to the preceding two sentences. I have therefore given the sentence a passive meaning, which would require that the verb be reflexive in form.

Line 5: *The strength of [their] wisdom is the pharisees' livelihood.* This line is even more obscure than the previous one. No grammatical sense can be made of the text in the first redaction. Unfortunately the equivalent line in the second and third redactions does little to clarify the matter. There one finds “*mudrosti sila fariseistvo zhitel'stvo,*” which is equally incomprehensible. My reading of the line requires one to treat “pharisees’” as an adjective. The sense of the passage is then that certain wise men, here termed pharisees, make a living by trading on their wisdom. It is implied that this is indeed a positive trait of the class.

Line 6: *Knowledge is his prophet.* Following Freydank, it is possible to speculate that *nauka* is here *ars grammatica*.¹² That this is indeed the meaning may be assumed from the remainder of the work. The sense of the line seems to be that the wise man's prophet is in fact knowledge.

Line 7: *Knowledge is blessed.* As I shall try to show below, it is in fact grammatical knowledge which is here shown to be most desirable.

Line 8: *With it [knowledge] do we enter into the fear of God.*

Line 9: *[The fear of God] is the beginning of virtue.*

Line 10: *With this (the fear of God / the beginning of virtue) is the soul armed.*

The circular direction of the ten lines is now brought to a completion with the linking of lines 10 and 1 by the word “soul.” It is not clear whether “this”

11. See I. I. Sreznevsky, *Materialy dlia slovaria drevnerusskago iazyka*, 3 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1893–1912), 1:490.

12. Freydank, “Der ‘Laodicenerbrief,’” p. 368.

in line 10 refers to “the beginning of virtue” in line 9, or to “the fear of God,” which is the beginning of virtue. The idea, however, is clear: whether with the fear of God or the virtue which that concept represents, the soul is armed against its enemies.

One can compress these eleven statements into the following: the soul is free; its freedom is protected by truth; truth is established by the teaching of the prophets, whose teaching is substantiated by the miraculous. The miraculous, however, is strengthened by wisdom, which is the source of the wise man’s livelihood. The key element in this search for truth is knowledge, by which is meant *ars grammatica*. This knowledge is highly desirable. With it one can come to fear God, which is a primary virtue. This fear of God is an armament for the soul, which is protected by truth.

The *raison d’être* for the ten lines that begin the *Laodicean Epistle* is the “Table in Squares,” an integral part of the work in its second and third redactions. It is in this part of the work that the meaning of *nauka*, or knowledge, in lines 6 and 7 of the introductory statement is made clear. The “Table in Squares” operates on two levels. On the one hand it is a code, or *tainopis’*, similar to others in use at the time.¹³ It is, however, more than that; it is a manual of grammatical knowledge, some of it applicable, some of it irrelevant to the Russian language.

The “Table in Squares” makes use of a specialized terminology in its explication of grammar. In particular, we are told that the classes of letters (presumably sounds) that constitute the basic elements of the Russian language are soul, force, flesh or body, and pillar (*dusha*, *sila*, *plot’*, and *stolp*). The explanation of these terms is given in the so-called “Guide to the Table.” The “souls” or “forces” represent vowels, the “bodies” and “pillars” consonants. In the “Guide” there is additional terminology. Thus the vowels are also termed *priklady* (supports), and a subclass of vowels is called *tsarie* for those letters that also function as independent words: *a*, *i*, *o*, *ia*. At first glance the terminology bears a close resemblance to that employed in architecture. Besides pillars and supports there is also the *sklad*, or scaffolding. In fact the author’s concept is that words are constructed very much like a building, with certain elements providing strength, others providing the actual structure, and still others the support for the structure. Yet it is clearly not so simple. The author of the “Guide” states that

буква самовластие ума, звательство душа и жителство ея, полузвательство плоть и мертвость ея. складъ оживление, приклад сила. яко ж бо душа невѣдома без тѣла, сице и тѣло нечувствено без души.

13. M. N. Speransky, *Tainopis’ v iugo-slavianskikh i russkikh pamiatnikakh pis’ma*, vyp. 4.3 of *Entsiklopediia slavianskoi filologii* (Leningrad, 1929), passim.

тѣло приуготовление а душа совершение, и обоими обрѣтается разум. . . . плоти убо и столпи нарицаются сего ради, понеже без одушевленных прикладовъ не могут никоегож гласа ниже вѣщания составити о себѣ. якож бо тѣло без души ниж движется ни же живет, душа же бо и без тѣла и движется и живет, но ничтож содѣйствует кромѣ телеси. . . .¹⁴

Besides the architectural terminology, then, there is another: the vowels and consonants are likened to the soul and body.

The connection between the introductory ten lines of the *Laodicean Epistle* and the “Table in Squares” is both thematic and philosophical. As Freydank has convincingly argued, the theme of the former is not the *vera* of lines 1 and 2, but *nauka*, knowledge. This knowledge is the *ars grammatica*, which is so obviously the theme of the “Table in Squares.” The “Guide to the Table” points to the connection between the two parts of the *Laodicean Epistle* with the statement that “the alphabet is [represents] the independence of the mind.” If the first part of the work is in praise of knowledge as the key to the freedom of the soul, then the “Table in Squares” is an explication of that knowledge.

The sources that Kuritsyn may have used to compose his works have been the subject of considerable recent research. Scholars such as Fine, Maier, and, in part, Kämpfer have sought to explain the *Laodicean Epistle* in terms of the Judaic tradition, without, however, establishing that Kuritsyn had anything to do with the so-called Judaizers. These attempts cannot be said to have solved any of the problems raised by Kuritsyn’s writings.

Freydank’s article is of particular interest. He argues that the grammatical terminology whereby the juxtaposition of vowel with soul and consonant with body (flesh) is established can be found in the works of Dionysius Thrax, a second century B.C. scholar from Alexandria.¹⁵ Freydank also puts forward the theory that Kuritsyn’s notion that “the soul moves, but the body without the soul has no motion” is from the works of Priscian, a fifth-century A.D. Latin grammarian. He also mentions that a similar formulation can be found in the works of Saints Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor.

14. Jagić, *Codex Slovenicus Rerum Grammaticarum*, p. 414. Translation: “the alphabet is (represents) the independence of the mind. Vowels are the soul and its life-force, the consonants are flesh and its corruptibility. Scaffolding is animation, the crossbeams strength. For just as the soul is unknown (cannot be known) without the body, so also is the body insensitive without the soul. The body is the ready structure, the soul its completion. [Only] with both is wisdom discovered. . . . For fleshes and pillars are so-called because without animated beams there can be no sound, nor substance constructed about them. For the body neither moves nor lives without a soul, but the soul both moves and lives without the body, yet it achieves nothing outside the body.”

15. Freydank, “Der ‘Laodicenserbrief,’” p. 359.

Freydank's interesting theories require further evidence, however, that Fedor Kuritsyn had access to the writings of Dionysius Thrax and Priscian. Neither of these writers is known to have been available in Muscovy in the fifteenth century. Nor is either writer mentioned in the catalogue of the Matthias Corvinus Library.¹⁶

It is possible, however, that Kuritsyn's sources were made available to him at the court of Matthias Corvinus. Matthias Corvinus possessed one of the largest and best libraries in Europe. Many of the leading humanists of that era enjoyed the patronage of the Hungarian king. Buda was considered nothing less than "a colony of Florentine neo-Platonism" at the time.¹⁷ Classical literature was very much in vogue in Buda, and it is possible that this interest in Greek and Latin literature had an influence on Kuritsyn's writings. The manuscript tradition of the *Laodicean Epistle* itself draws attention to Plato and Aristotle. One manuscript described by Vatroslav Jagić contains the third redaction of the *Laodicean Epistle* and has a curious passage appended:

Словесница аристотелева, богословия платонова, питикии многих слова. тѣми книгами может кождо философ свою книгу составить. глава еѣ Омиро. Господь Богъ создалъ человека посреди двои животну, посредѣ аггел и скота, ниже аггела гнѣвомъ и плотию, а выше скота словомъ и смысломъ. имя слово часть загадка прозвище присловие случение сладка.¹⁸

The definitions of Aristotle, the theology of Plato, the poetics of many—are words. With these books any philosopher may compile his own book. Its head is Homer's. The Lord God created man midway between two animates, between the angels and the beasts, lower than the angels because of his wrath and [desires of] the flesh, but higher than the beasts because of his words and thought. Name, word, part, puzzle, nickname, introduction, occurrence, sweet.

This passage, the significance of which is not fully clear, has not attracted the attention of scholars dealing with the *Laodicean Epistle*. Indeed, it may have nothing to do with Kuritsyn's work as such. The statement appears in slightly different form elsewhere—in a manuscript attributed to Maxim the Greek that also deals with questions of grammar.¹⁹ The relation of the writings of Plato and Aristotle to the sources of the *Laodicean Epistle* which the obscure quotation raises is worthy of some further comment, regardless of the connection between the *Laodicean Epistle* and the quotation cited by Jagić.

Certainly questions of grammar occupy a prominent place in Plato's

16. Klára Zolnai, *Bibliographia Bibliothecae Regis Mathiae Corvini (Mátyás Király Könyvtárának Irodalma)* (Budapest, 1942), passim.

17. J. Dąbrowski, "Początek i rozwój Odrodzenia w Krakowie i na Węgrzech," *Krakowskie Odrodzenie* (Kraków, 1954), p. 148.

18. Jagić, *Codex Slovenicus Rerum Grammaticarum*, p. 721.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 313.

writings, as they do in those of Aristotle. One finds frequent discussion of the *ars grammatica* in Aristotle's *Organon*, *Rhetorica*, and *De poetica*, for instance, as well as in several of his other works, while Plato dealt with questions of language in a number of his dialogues (including the *Thaetatus*, the *Timaeus*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Gorgias*), and in the *Cratylus* made language the principal topic of investigation.

Now if the quotation cited above is related to the *Laodicean Epistle*, then one might reasonably expect to find Aristotle's "definitions," which I take to be the meaning of *slovesnitsa aristoteleva*, or some indication that Kuritsyn was aware of them, in the terminology employed by Fedor Kuritsyn. In particular, one would like to know whether the formula equating vowel with soul and consonant with body is to be found in Aristotle's work, or whether it derives from Dionysius Thrax as suggested by Freydanck.

One of the problems with the text of the *Laodicean Epistle* is the interpretation of the terminology. In fact the English "vowel" is not the literal equivalent of Kuritsyn's original term *zvateľ'stvo*. This word might be better translated "vocality" or "voice-possessing." It is to be contrasted with *poluzvateľ'stvo*, or mute—that is, *nechuvstveni sout bes prikladu*, "[those sounds which] are inaudible without support." The notion is that the voice-possessing elements in language are, or possess, souls. Those elements that consist of sound but are not yet "audible" are the consonants. The consonants are flesh and its corruptibility (see note 14).

Aristotle's comments relevant to this subject are to be found in *De poetica*, the *Historia animalium*, and *De anima*. In *De poetica* (chap. 20) he defined the sounds: "A vowel is a letter having an audible sound without the addition of another letter. . . . A mute, one having no sound at all by itself, but becoming audible by an addition, that of one of the letters which have a sound of some sort of their own."²⁰ In the *Historia animalium* he wrote that "the voice and larynx can emit vocal or vowel sounds; non-vocal or consonantal sounds are made by the tongue and the lips" (4. 9). It remains to link vocal with soul. This is done in *De anima*, where we read that "voice is a kind of sound characteristic of what has soul in it; nothing that is without soul utters voice" (2. 8).

The connection between Kuritsyn's definitions in the *Laodicean Epistle* and the "Guide to the Table" and those found in the writings of Aristotle is sufficiently clear to assume that the Russian was familiar with Aristotle in some form or other. It is equally clear, however, that the philosophical conception of the soul, expressed so clearly in the "Guide to the Table," has its origins in the thought of Plato, not Aristotle.

As an explanation to his definitions of terminology Kuritsyn states that "the body without the soul neither moves nor lives, but the soul without the

20. Quotations are from *The Works of Aristotle* edited by W. D. Ross.

body both moves and lives, yet it achieves nothing without the body.”²¹ One is immediately struck by the similarity of Kuritsyn’s formulation to that of Plato in the *Phaedrus*, where he writes: “The Soul through all her being is immortal, for that which is ever in motion is immortal; but that which moves another and is moved by another, in ceasing to move ceases also to live. . . . For the body which is moved from without is soulless, but that which is moved from within has a soul, for such is the nature of the soul” (245).²²

The soul is the Alpha and Omega of the introductory poem of the *Laodicean Epistle*. But it is not just Kuritsyn’s notion of the nature of the soul which he has borrowed and adapted from Plato. Nearly every line of the introductory poem expresses an idea or concept that is either borrowed directly from Plato or is at least completely consistent with Platonic thought. Nor can these correspondences be dismissed as pure accident, for they are taken from the two dialogues most directly concerned with the *ars grammatica*. I refer to the *Cratylus* and the *Phaedrus*. A line-by-line discussion of the introduction will show the relevance of the Platonic dialogues for the interpretation of the *Laodicean Epistle*.

Line 1: *The soul is free. Its defense is truth.* The notion is that the soul is independent, unimpeded by nature. That the soul is the source of life and the ordering or containing principle was established by Plato in the *Cratylus* (399). In the same dialogue he noted that “the stream of the good soul is unimpeded, and has therefore the attribute of ever flowing without let or hindrance” (415). The characterization of the soul in the *Phaedrus* quoted above is equally apt.

The soul is unbegotten, and therefore indestructible. Self-motion is the idea and the essence of the soul. Plato goes on to say, “of the heaven which is above the heavens,” that “there abides the very being with which true knowledge is concerned; the colourless, formless, intangible essence, visible only to the mind, the pilot of the soul. The divine intelligence, being nurtured upon mind and pure knowledge, and the intelligence of every soul which is capable of receiving the food proper to it, rejoices at beholding reality, and once more gazing upon truth, is replenished and made glad” (*Phaedrus* 247).

The defense of this free soul is truth. According to Plato the only salvation which is available to man lies in the attainment of knowledge. From the *Phaedrus* we learn that the good soul strives ever upward, toward a knowledge of beauty so that it may “gaze upon truth” (246–49). “And there is a law of Destiny, that the soul which attains any vision of truth in company with a god is preserved from harm until the next period, and if attaining always is always unharmed. But when she [the soul] is unable to follow, and fails to behold the truth, and through some ill-hap sinks beneath the double load of forgetfulness and vice, and her wings fall from her and she drops to the ground . . .” (248).

21. Jagić, *Codex Slovenicus Rerum Grammaticarum*, p. 414.

22. *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, 3rd ed.

Thus the soul is an independent entity, whose aim is to behold the truth and whose purity is guarded by the truth.

Line 2: *Truth is established by the teaching of the prophets.* In the *Cratylus* Hermogenes says to Socrates that he (Socrates) seems “to be quite like a prophet newly inspired, and to be uttering oracles” (396). These words are directed at Socrates’s discussion with Hermogenes and Cratylus about the difficulty of ascertaining the truth about names. Socrates expects to arrive at some truth—here about names—by this method of instruction.

Line 3: *The teaching of the prophets is justified (substantiated) by the miraculous.* Socrates answers Hermogenes’s statement: “Yes, Hermogenes, and I believe that I caught the inspiration from the great Euthyphro of the Prospaltian deme, who gave me a long lecture which commenced at dawn: he talked and I listened, and his wisdom and enchanting ravishment has not only filled my ears but taken possession of my soul, and today I shall let his superhuman power work and finish the investigation of names” (396). In other words, the superhuman power will substantiate Socrates’s own thoughts.

Line 4: *The gift of the miraculous is strengthened by wisdom.* This is precisely what Socrates has just said in the passage quoted above (no. 3).

Line 5: *The strength of [their] wisdom is the pharisees’ livelihood.* The sense of this line would seem to be that certain wise men, here distinguished from the prophets of lines 2 and 3, earn their living by trading on their knowledge. If I am correct in my assumption that the inspiration for the *Laodicean Epistle* is, in part at least, Plato, and particularly the *Cratylus*, then the formula that corresponds to the biblical “prophet equals pharisee” is “prophet (philosopher, oracle—Socrates) equals Sophist.” In the *Cratylus* this is the distinction which is indeed made. Hermogenes is made to query, “How shall I reflect?” Socrates answers, “The true way is to have the assistance of those who know, and you must pay them well both in money and in thanks; these are the Sophists, of whom your brother, Callias, has—rather dearly—bought the reputation of wisdom” (391).²³

Line 6: *Knowledge is his prophet.* Freydank speculates that knowledge here means *ars grammatica*, the γραμματικὴ τέχνη of Dionysius Thrax.²⁴ Following my line of inquiry into the dialogues of Plato as a source for the work, I should like to suggest that *ars grammatica* may well be understood here in the sense in which it is implied in the *Cratylus*. In no. 5 above I quoted Socrates’s speech about the Sophists. That speech continues: “But you [Hermogenes] have not yet come into your inheritance, and therefore you had better go to him [Callias], and beg and entreat him to tell you what he has learnt from Protagoras about the fitness of names” (391).

23. I have found no examples of the use of the word *sofist* in Old Russian before its usage by Maxim the Greek.

24. Freydank, “Der ‘Laodicenerbrief,’” p. 368,

... Line 7: *Knowledge is blessed*. Once again, the *Cratylus* points out that knowledge and wisdom are desirable (386, 398). This line may perhaps be a continuation of the previous line, for in a very real sense it is to the notion that knowledge is good in itself, and “the knowledge of names is a great part of knowledge,” that the *Cratylus* is dedicated (384).

Lines 8–9: *With it [knowledge] do we enter into the fear of God. The fear of God is the beginning of virtue*. Lurie has noted that “the fear of God is the beginning of virtue” may be a quotation from Saint Isaac of Antioch.²⁵ Although this is very likely, there is a sense in which these lines form the conclusion to the statement as a whole. The phrase to “enter into the fear of God” can be taken figuratively or literally. If it does mean “to enter into the awesome presence of God,” then this is consistent with the notion expressed under no. 1 above. Knowledge is the key to salvation, which in the Christian sense is to come into the presence of God.

Line 10: *With this is the soul armed*. The “poem” returns now to the beginning. The good soul is unimpeded, and is thus armed with virtue and protected by truth.

The works of both Plato and Aristotle have apparently influenced the *Laodicean Epistle*. It is unfortunately not possible to state whether Kuritsyn had read either of them in their original form, or whether he knew them only from secondary sources.

The *Laodicean Epistle* unquestionably occupies an important place in the history of the development of Russian letters. Not only does the introductory part represent one of the earliest Muscovite attempts at what might be called poetry; the “Table in Squares” is certainly the first native Russian effort to describe the Russian language. If I am correct in my notion that Plato and Aristotle both influenced the author, Fedor Kuritsyn, then the *Laodicean Epistle* also represents one of the earliest attempts by a Russian to use these two classical sources for purely secular literature. It does seem clear that the *Laodicean Epistle* is not a translation in any ordinary sense of the word. It is rather a distillation of the knowledge and sources which its author had acquired, perhaps in Hungary, perhaps elsewhere. Kuritsyn possessed a fertile and, for his time, imaginative mind. The blend of fact and fantasy which produced his *Tale of Dracula* is ample demonstration of his talent.

As this paper attempts to indicate, the *Laodicean Epistle* need not be linked to the Judaic tradition. Indeed, the idea that Kuritsyn was connected with any “judaizing” movement must be viewed with suspicion. He may well have been a representative of the budding humanist movement in Russia—a movement of short duration which suffered a sudden and irreversible decline with the disappearance of Fedor Kuritsyn from the historical scene in 1500.

25. Lur'e, *Ideologicheskaiia bor'ba*, p. 176.