

LEIÐARVÍSAN AND THE 'SUNDAY LETTER' TRADITION IN SCANDINAVIA

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I: *Leiðarvísan* : An Introduction

Leiðarvísan, a Christian skaldic *drápa* of forty-five stanzas, is preserved in two manuscripts.¹ The text is found complete in A.M. 757a 4to, which seems to have been written in the north of Iceland in the last quarter of the fourteenth century, and the first thirty-three stanzas (all but the *slæmr*) are also found in A.M. 624 4to, which dates from the late fifteenth century. In neither case is the preservation entirely satisfactory: A.M. 757a 4to is fragmentary, the codex extremely poorly preserved and difficult to read, and *Leiðarvísan* is badly affected by wearing and lacunæ; while although the 624 4to text - which appears to have been copied from 757a 4to - is legible enough, the text is often wrongly ordered and is riddled with misunderstandings and miscopyings. It is thus only with the greatest reluctance that one uses 624 to reconstruct lacunæ and doubtful readings in the 757a text. The poem can be confidently dated to the mid to late twelfth century; apart from internal linguistic evidence, it can be clearly shown to be one of a group of inter-related Christian skaldic *drápur* from this period.² The other poems, which share a variety of dictional and structural parallels with *Leiðarvísan* and with one another, are: Einar Skulúson's *Geisli*, a *drápa* composed in honour of Óláfr inn helgi and recited at a commemorative service at his shrine in Niðaróss Cathedral sometime between the winter of 1152-53 and the summer of 1154³; the anonymous *Plácíús drápa*, a versified version of the legend of Saint Eustace, which is preserved in a manuscript copy dateable to around 1200 which can be shown to be at least two removes (maybe 40 years) from the original⁴; and *Harmsól*, a meditation on the nature and efficacy of penance, which was composed by Gamli kanóki, a canon at Þykkvabær, where the Augustinian monastery was founded in 1168.⁵

We have no reliable information as to the authorship of *Leiðarvísan*, although, in stanza 43, the poet thanks a certain *göfugr prest* called Runólfr for his help in composing the poem:

Reð með oss, at óði,
er fróðr sá er vensk góðu,
greit, hvé grundvöll settak,
göfugr prest at hlut mestum;
yðr mun allra verða
auðsætt, bragar þætti,
ramligt hús þar er reistum
Runólfr, hvé fekk snúinat.⁶

¹ *Leiðarvísan* is edited in Finnur Jónsson 1912-15, A I 618-26 and B I 622-33; in Kock 1946-49, I 302-08; and in Attwood 1996a 171-221.

² The relationship between these poems is discussed at length in Skard 1953 and in Attwood 1996b.

³ On the date of *Geisli*'s recitation, see Chase 1981, 44; Attwood 1996b, 225.

⁴ On the date of the *Plácíús drápa* manuscript (AM 673b 4to), see Finnur Jónsson 1887, 213.

⁵ *Konungsannáll*, 20.

⁶ Prose arrangement: *Göfugr prest reð greit með oss at mestum hlut, hvé settak grundvöll at óði; sá er vensk góðu er fróðr; yðr mun allra verða auðsætt þar er reistum ramligt hús, Runólfr, hvé fekk snúinat bragar þætti.*

Runólfr cannot be identified with any degree of certainty, although speculation has generally centred on the two priests of that name mentioned in a *prestatal* of 1143, which is attributed to Ari Þorgilsson: Runólfr Dálksson, nephew of Bishop Ketill Þorsteinsson of Hólar (Bishop 1122-1145) and Runólfr Ketilsson († 1186), who was the son of the same bishop.⁷ Both of these men can be shown to have some interest in skaldic poetry: Runólfr Dálksson is probably to be identified with the Runólfr Dagsson mentioned in chapter 19 of *Bjarnar saga hitdalakappa* as the source of the information that Björn was the author of a lost *drápa* about Thomas the Apostle.⁸ This Runólfr is known to have been at Helgafell around 1170, and was renowned there as 'goðfgr kennimaðr'.⁹ Runólfr Ketilsson was the author of a poem about the new church built at Skáláhoit by Klængr Þorsteinsson (bishop 1152-76), one verse of which is preserved in *Hungrvaka*¹⁰ As a known *skáld*, Runólfr Ketilsson is often considered to have the better claim, and, in support of this, the mention in *Leiðarvísan* 43/7 of a *ramligt hús* built by Runólfr and the poet has been taken to be an oblique reference to Klængr's church.¹¹ It is perhaps safer, however, to interpret it as a *heiti* referring to *Leiðarvísan*, an interpretation supported by *Katrinar drápa* 1/4, where *mæðar hús* is used as a kenning for poetry.¹² In any case, neither Runólfr would seem to have an absolute claim to being the one mentioned in *Leiðarvísan*, and the question will have, for the moment at least, to remain unsolved.

Leiðarvísan is concerned with a popular, though now somewhat obscure, medieval motif: the so-called 'Sunday Letter' or 'Epistle from Heaven', in which Christ enjoins his followers, on pain of various cruel torments, to respect the sanctity of Sunday, to observe other festivals of the church and (in some versions) to fulfil various obligations of the Christian life. After opening requests to God for inspiration and to his audience for a hearing, the poet describes the circumstances of the Letter's arrival in stanza 6:

Tek ek til orðs þar er urðu
alfregnar jartegnir,
tákn eru sýnd í slíku
sönn, Jórsala mǫnnum;
sendi salvörðr grundar
snillifimr af himni,
borgar lýð til hjargar,
bréf gullstofum sollit.¹³

The content and reception of this Letter are summarised in stanzas 7-12. Briefly, it is found in Jerusalem on a Sunday and is scrutinised by 'wise men', who find in it a message to the effect that people who work on Sunday, who fail to pay the correct tithes or who refuse to respect the feasts of the church will be punished severely. A series of torments is threatened, though none of them are described in picturesque detail: there is an obscure reference in stanza 9 to the hostility of mothers and children (*þæði þörn ok móðir bágtundask fyrir stundum*), and Christ promises to *kasta eldum í alla liðu virðvas* a punishment for failure to pay the correct tithes (10/1-4). By contrast, baptised people who respect the sanctity of Sunday are promised prosperity and peace (stanza 11).

⁷ *Diplomatarium Islandicum* I, 180-94.

⁸ *ÍF* III, 163 note 2.

⁹ *Sturlu saga* chapter 29; *Sturlunga saga* 1948 I, 165; cf. *ÍF* III, 163 note 2.

¹⁰ *Hungrvaka* chapter 9; *Byskupa sögur* 1948 I, 27-28.

¹¹ *Diplomatarium Islandicum* I, 186, 193; Finnur Jónsson 1920-24 II, 121 note 5.

¹² Cf. Paasche 1948, 141 note 1; Astås 1970, 267a.

¹³ Prose arrangement: *Ek tek til orðs þar er alfregnar jartegnir urðu Jórsala mǫnnum; sönn tákn eru sýnd í slíku; snillifimr salvörðr grundar sendi bréf; gullstofum sollit, af himni, til hjargar borgar lýð.*

The *steffabálkr* (stanzas 13-33) illustrates the significance of Sunday Observance in an enumeration of important events from biblical history and religious tradition, all of which are said to have happened on a Sunday. Thus, the angels are created on a Sunday, and the day is established at creation as a time of rest (*tíl hvíldar hárrí skepnu* 14/5-8). Christ establishes peace between heaven and earth on a Sunday,¹⁴ Noah's ark comes to rest on dry land and Noah and his family leave it. Moses leads the Israelites across the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army is drowned. Moses receives the Ten Commandments. Moses strikes a rock at Meribah, and water flows out; and the Israelites, wandering in the Sinai desert, are fed with Manna from heaven. The angel Gabriel announces Christ's birth to Mary and she is impregnated by the Holy Spirit. Christ is born and is baptised in the Jordan by John the Baptist. He turns water into wine at Cana and feeds the Five Thousand. Christ rides into Jerusalem to popular acclaim, rises from death and sends the Holy Spirit to the first disciples at Pentecost. Two refrains occurring at intervals of four stanzas divide this section of the poem neatly into sections concerned with 'Genesis events' (The creation and Noah, stanzas 14-16), 'Exodus events' (Moses and the Israelites, stanzas 18-20), 'Christ events' (The Annunciation, Birth and Baptism, stanzas 22-24), Miracles (Cana and the feeding of the Five Thousand, stanzas 26-28) and events expressing Christ's triumph and glory (Triumphal Entry, Resurrection and Pentecost, stanzas 30-32).

After the final appearance of the second refrain, the poet launches on the *slæmr* (stanzas 34-45), which balances the *upphaf*, both in length (12 stanzas) and subject-matter. Stanza 34 echoes the opening requests for inspiration, the poet reiterating that he is powerless to do anything without help from God. He then goes on to warn that the Second Coming and Day of Judgement (which will, apparently, also take place on a Sunday) are imminent, and that people should therefore respect Sundays. He promises deliverance, peace, eternal life and general happiness to those who love God and pray regularly, and exhorts all Christians to implore God to grant them a place beside Holy Cross (stanza 40). The poem ends with four stanzas (42-45) in which the poet first prays for himself in good breast-beating fashion, thanks Runólfur for his help with the composition of the poem, then names the poem *Leidarvísan* before commending it, with a final bidding-prayer, to his audience:

Nú skal drótt á lók líta
lofthjálms dögum optar
dýrkim döglinga verka
dábhress, bragar þessa;
heim láði dýr frá dómi
dags hallar gramr allan,
þjóð hjali herak um kvæði,
kristinn lýð tít vistar.¹⁵

II: The 'Sunday Letter' Tradition in Western Europe

The 'Sunday Letter' appears to have enjoyed a widespread and recurrent celebrity during the Middle Ages. Versions are extant in Latin and in several vernaculars, from Old Irish to Czech, dating from the sixth century until well into the fourteenth.¹⁶ Exactly where it

¹⁴ This is possibly a reference to the Fall of Lucifer, although this is not clear.

¹⁵ Prose arrangement: *Nú skal drótt líta á lok bragar þessa; dýrkim dögum optar verka dábhress lofthjálms döglinga; dýr gramr dags hallar láði allan kristinn lýð betan frá dómi tít vistar; þjóð hjali herak um kvæði.*

¹⁶ The most comprehensive surveys of the history and reception of the 'Sunday Letter' in western Europe are Delahaye 1899 (reprinted as Delahaye 1966) and Priebsch 1936. The eastern recensions of the Letter, including those in Syriac, Ethiopian and Arabic, are the subject of an exhaustive monograph by Maximilian Bittner (1906). Much of the eastern material seems to derive from Greek texts produced in

originated is not clear, although Priebsch suggests, from a detailed comparison of its contents with more mainstream theological writings, such as those of Caesarius of Arles, that its dubious history may have begun in Spain or the Moorish Empire.¹⁷ The widespread distribution and relative simplicity of the theme, however, suggest that versions of the Letter arose more or less independently in widely differing countries and cultures, as and when the need, or perceived need, for it arose. The first definite mention of it, in the Western tradition at least, is in an epistle from Licinianus, Bishop of Carthagenia in Spain, to his fellow bishop (possibly his Suffragan), Vincentius of Iviza (Balearic Islands). Licinianus is known to have been one of the Catholic Bishops exiled from Spain by the Visigothic King Leovigild in 584, so his epistle to Vincentius must pre-date this.¹⁸ It is a response to a now-lost letter from Vincentius, in which Licinianus was told that the Letter had fallen into Vincentius' hands (whether directly from heaven or otherwise is not clear) and that the bishop, believing it to be genuine, was using it as the basis for his preaching. Licinianus is appalled by this, and replies to Vincentius's presumably enthusiastic letter in the strongest possible terms. Briefly summarising the 'Sunday Letter', he dismisses it as a ridiculous document, *ubi nec sermo elegans, nec doctrina sana poterit reperiri*. He deplores the Letter's Judaising tendencies as irrelevant to Christian devotion, and points out the danger inherent in the document: *si quis evangelizaverit vobis prater id quod accepistis, anathema sit*.¹⁹

Although the Letter does not appear again in official documents until the eighth century, there can be little doubt that it continued to circulate in folk tradition throughout the European Dark Ages. The next written mention of it seems to be in connection with the animosity which existed between Saint Boniface (680-754) and one Aldebertus, a charismatic evangelist and faith-healer, who seems to have been preaching a heady band of antipapalism, angelology, self-worship and traditional Christianity in the southern part of the Frankish kingdom during the second quarter of the eighth century.²⁰ Aldebertus was condemned as a heretic at the Council of Soissons on March 3rd 744, and Boniface sent a detailed denunciation of his activities to Pope Zacharias (Pope 741-52), who used it as evidence to confirm Aldebert's condemnation at a Synod in Rome in October 745. Part of Boniface's submission appears to have been a copy of a letter from Christ, said to have been delivered by the Archangel Michael, giving Aldebert authority for his preaching. Although Zacharias ordered that the letter should not be burnt, as Boniface had desired, but should be kept in the Vatican archive *ad reprobationem et ad perpetuam confusionem [Aldeberti]*, only its prologue survives.²¹ Comparison of this fragmentary text with later manuscripts of the 'Sunday Letter' confirms that it does in fact represent the earliest surviving written version of the piece. Nor is there any doubt that the heretical letter on the observance of Sunday whose burning is ordered in the *Admonitio Generalis*, a capitulary of Charlemagne's dated 789, is another version of the same text.²²

Despite these condemnations, the Letter's popularity continued. Latin texts were produced throughout the Middle Ages, and the tradition appears to have been known in Ireland at least from the ninth century. The earliest surviving Irish version of the Letter circulated in conjunction with both a legalistic tract on the observance of Sunday (the *Cáin*

the twelfth century (considerably after the first Latin versions appeared) and thus falls outside the scope of this paper.

¹⁷ Priebsch 1936, 26-34.

¹⁸ Priebsch 1936, 29.

¹⁹ Licinianus' response to Vincentius is edited in Migne, *Patrologia Latina* LXXII, 699. It is quoted in full in Priebsch 1936, 1-2 and excerpted in Delahaye 1966, 152-53.

²⁰ Priebsch 1936, 3-4; Delahaye 1966, 153; Whitelock 1982, 50.

²¹ The surviving fragments of this, the oldest surviving version of the 'Sunday Letter' are printed in Delahaye 1966, 153.

²² *MGH Cap. I*, no. 22; Whitelock 1982, 51.

Domnaig) and an account of the experiences of a deacon named Niall, who is said to have witnessed Christ's writing the Letter in heaven and to have been raised from the dead in order to tell Irish people about its efficacy in saving their souls.²³

It was probably from Ireland that the 'Sunday Letter' passed into the religious consciousness of Anglo-Saxon England. In a letter of *circa* 835, Bishop Egred of Lindisfarne warns Archbishop Wulfsiige of York about a heretical book circulating in his archdiocese. The book is said to be by a certain Pehtred, possibly a monk from the English house at Mayo.²⁴ Pehtred's work was evidently concerned with Niall's vision, and described a letter which is said to have fallen from heaven onto the tomb of St. Peter in Rome. The letter warns people of God's anger at their unbelief, and of the various calamities which will befall them unless they repent and show more respect for Sunday. Egred responds to the Letter much as Licinianus had done three hundred years before him, singling out its emphasis on 'Judaising' regulations for Sunday observance for particular condemnation: *honoremque Domini dei ob gloriam resurrectionis eiusdem Filii Dei, non sabbatum cum Iudeis*.²⁵ Despite Egred's warning, however, the 'Sunday Letter' did penetrate Anglo-Saxon Christianity: six sermons on the theme, and fragments of a seventh, survive, two of them recounting the story of Niall's vision.

After this explosion of interest in the eighth and ninth centuries, the 'Sunday Letter' apparently disappeared from view again until the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. The Letter's apocalyptic tone chimes with the wave of eschatological fervour which surrounded the Crusades, and, indeed, it is in connection with attempts to popularise the Crusades that it next surfaces. Peter the Hermit is said to have claimed the authority of a letter from heaven for his disastrous campaign of 1096-97, which was the forerunner of the First Crusade proper.²⁶ Similarly, Stephen of Cloyes, who led the Children's Crusade of 1212, was said to have shown a letter from God to King Philippe Auguste of France as proof of divine sanction for his ill-fated expedition.²⁷ In England, at the turn of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, there was a welter of apocalyptic preaching, much of it geared towards the recruitment of new forces for the Fourth Crusade.²⁸ For example, Roger of Hovenden, a chronicler of the reigns of Richard I (1189-99) and John (1199-1216), gives an account of two preaching campaigns and miracle-working expeditions, centring on Kent and Yorkshire, by Eustace, a Benedictine monk from Flay in Normandy, in 1200 and 1201.²⁹ Eustace appears to have preached a heady message of righteousness, charity and the need to preserve the sanctity of Sundays and saints' festivals, and to have brandished a copy of the 'Sunday Letter', his mandate from God to do so. Part of the letter is quoted in Roger's *Chronica*.³⁰ The Letter was apparently also revered by the Flagellants, and may have had some part to play in their rituals. Reference is made to it among the profession made by several members of the sect executed by burning at Sunderhausen in the 1350s, and the beginning of the text of a 'Sunday Letter' is preserved in a fourteenth-century manuscript from Erfurt, where the colophon reads

²³ On the *Cáin Domnaig*, see Frietsch 1907; Whitelock 1982, 52-58. The text is edited in O'Keefe 1905. The legend of Niall's experience and its relationship with Anglo-Saxon accounts of the 'Sunday Letter' is examined in Whitelock 1982, 48-49.

²⁴ See Whitelock 1982, 47-50. The text of Egred's letter (preserved in MS BL Cotton Tiberius A xv, fols 61v-62v) is given on pages 48-49.

²⁵ Whitelock 1982, 48.

²⁶ Delahaye 1966, 161; Jones 1975, 172. On Peter the Hermit and his campaign, see Riley-Smith 1995, 34.

²⁷ Delahaye 1966, 161; Jones 1975, 172. See also Riley-Smith 1995, 48, 66.

²⁸ Jones 1975, 166.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 166-71; Delahaye 1966, 161-2.

³⁰ ed. Stubbs 1868-71, IV 167-69.

'Isti sunt articuli extracti ex littera quam dicunt flagellatores sibi missam a Deo per angelum.'³¹

The widespread popularity of the 'Sunday Letter' motif during this period is also evinced by the array of translations of it, or parts of it, into medieval vernaculars. Given the piece's semi-heretical, folkloristic nature, of course, many of these versions have been lost, or even destroyed, but surviving translations of the Letter are preserved in Old Irish verse and prose, Spanish, Provençal, Greek and Middle High German.³² The German texts will be considered in some detail later since, as we shall see, they may be of some significance in establishing the route by which the 'Sunday Letter' motif was transmitted to Scandinavia.

It is tempting to speculate that the arrival of the 'Sunday Letter' in Iceland and Norway might be in some way connected with this preaching surrounding the Crusades, or with the rush of pilgrim journeys it sparked off. Certainly, both of the other references to the Letter I have been able to trace in Old Norse-Icelandic literature occur in works directly concerned with pilgrimages - one real, one imaginary - to Jerusalem.

The first of these references is found in the *Leidarvísir*, an account of a pilgrimage made to the Holy Land by one Nikulás in the mid-twelfth century.³³ Nikulás is usually identified with Nikulás Bergsson († 1159/1160), who became abbot of the Benedictine house at Pverá shortly after its foundation in 1155, and is named elsewhere as the author of a *Jóansdrápa postola* and a *Kristsdrápa*.³⁴ Internal evidence suggests that Nikulás made his journey before the capture of Ascalon in August 1153.³⁵ Nikulás's description of Jerusalem itself survives in two versions, both preserved in the fourteenth-century compilation A.M. 194 8vo.³⁶ The longer version includes the following description of a side-chapel in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre:

[Þ]ar sudr fra þi vid vegginn er áltari sancti Simeonis, þar kom ofan
brefit gull-ritn[a].³⁷

There can be little doubt that it is to the 'Sunday Letter', reproductions of which (in Greek) were apparently among the souvenirs on sale to medieval pilgrims to Jerusalem, that Nikulás refers.³⁸ The similarity between the titles of his itinerary and *Leidarvísan* has led to suggestions that Nikulás Bergsson, might well be the author of the skaldic poem.³⁹ Although this attribution cannot be made for certain, it is difficult to avoid the assumption that the *Leidarvísan*-poet had his background in the same monastic circles as did Nikulás.

³¹ Paris, BN Fonds Colbert 8928, iii. This text is quoted in Delahaye 1966, 163.

³² These various versions are documented in Priebsch 1936, 13-35 and Delahaye 1966, *passim*.

³³ ed. Kälund 1908, I 12/26-23/21; Kälund 1913. See also Magoun 1940 and 1944; Kedar and Westergaard-Nielsen 1978-79; Hill 1983, 1993a and 1993b.

³⁴ See Hill 1983, 433-34 and 1993a, 176-7. Nikulás Bergsson's authorship of *Jóansdrápa postola* is attested in the shorter redaction of *Jóns saga postola*, where the three surviving verses are preserved (Unger 1874, 509-10). One stanza of a supposed *Kristsdrápa* attributed to Nikulás is quoted in the *Third Grammatical treatise* (ed. Olsen 1884, 117). For the suggestion that the author of the *Leidarvísir* is in fact Nikulás Sæmundsson, abbot of Pingeyrar († 1158), see Riant 1865, 80.

³⁵ See Hill 1983, 176-77, 1993a, 433; Kedar and Westergaard-Nielsen 1978-79, 194-95.

³⁶ The longer, or 'Variant', version is edited in Kälund 1908 I 26/17-31/6. It has not been certainly established that both accounts in fact originate with Nikulás, but there seems to be a fair likelihood that this is the case. See Hill 1993a, 448 and Kedar and Westergaard-Nielsen 1978-79, 197.

³⁷ ed. Kälund 1908, I 27/10-12.

³⁸ Delahaye 1966, 151.

³⁹ See Kedar and Westergaard-Nielsen 1978-79, 195; Astås 1993, 390.

The Letter is described in similar, though slightly more expansive, terms in the description of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in *Kirialax saga*, which is heavily dependent on the longer version of 'Nikulás's account:

Par stendr Simions kirkia, ok er þar vardveittr handleggtr hans yfir altari; þar kom ofan bref þat, er sialfr drottin ritadi sinum haundum gullstaufum um hin helga sunnudag ...⁴⁰

III: *Leiðarvísan* and the 'Sunday Letter' Tradition

My concern in this final section of my paper is to explore the question of how 'mainstream', in terms of the 'Sunday Letter' tradition, *Leiðarvísan* actually is, and to come to some understanding of how the motif might have reached medieval Scandinavia. I propose to do this by examining the principal features of the main redactions of the Letter and setting these alongside a schematic account of *Leiðarvísan* (abbreviated 'Le') itself. Since the most likely avenues of influence by which this apocryphal motif might have reached Scandinavia would seem to be from the Irish, Anglo-Saxon and Middle High German Traditions, I intend to pay particular attention to texts from these traditions, though their principal Latin analogues will also be considered.

Scholars are generally in agreement that the surviving Western European versions of the 'Sunday Letter' can be reasonably divided, on the evidence of their accounts of the Letter's arrival and reception on earth, into three main recensions. Many of the texts, of course, survive in an extremely fragmentary, often inaccessible form, and only the most significant, complete texts have been considered here.⁴¹ The principal features of these recensions, and the texts concerned, are as follows:

First recension:

The Letter falls from Heaven and lands near the Ephraim Gate in Jerusalem, whence it is taken to Saint Peter's in Rome and interpreted by scholars.

Texts:

- (i) Anglo-Saxon Pseudo-Wulfstan Homily XLV 'Sermo Angelorum Nomina' (probably late eleventh-century). Edited in Napier 1883, 226-32. (xlv on table)
- (ii) Anglo-Saxon Homily (probably late eleventh-century) preserved in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 140, 71r-72v. Edited in Priebsch 1899, 135-38. (140 on table)
- (iii) A Latin text, 'Epistola Salvatoris Domini nostri Jesu Christi' (fourteenth-century) preserved in Vienna, Austrian State Archive MS 1355. Edited in Priebsch 1899, 130-34. Priebsch demonstrates that it is from an earlier Latin text of this type that Pseudo-Wulfstan XLV derives. (V on table)
- (iv) A Latin text preserved in Paris, BN MS Latin 12270, a twelfth-century codex written at Corbie. The 'Sunday Letter' occupies fols. 31v-32v, and is edited in Delahaye 1966, 157-59. Jost suggests that the Corpus Christi College sermon derives from a Latin text similar to this one.⁴² (P on table)

Second recension:

The letter falls directly onto the altar of Saint Peter's in Rome, where scholars study and disseminate its contents. In the two Anglo-Saxon versions listed here, the Letter's

⁴⁰ ed. Kálund 1917, 65/7-10. On the probable relationship between *Kirialax saga* and Nikulás's description of Jerusalem, see Hill 1993a, 448.

⁴¹ The manuscript tradition of the 'Sunday Letter' is examined in depth in Lees 1985, 131-35.

⁴² Jost 1950, 226.

authenticity is confirmed by Deacon Niall's vision. In the *Cáin Domnaig*, it is said to have been brought to Ireland by Conall Mac Coelmine, a pilgrim of the late sixth century.

Texts:

- (i) The Old Irish *Cáin Domnaig*, a legal tract concerning the observance of Sunday, parts of which appear to date from the ninth century. The first part of the work, 'The Epistle of Jesus on the observance of Sunday', survives in several manuscripts, and is edited by O'Keefe 1905. (CD on table)
- (ii) Anglo-Saxon Pseudo-Wulfstan Homily XLIII, 'Sunnandægges Spell' (probably late eleventh-century). Edited in Napier 1883, 205-15. (xliii on table)
- (iii) Anglo-Saxon Pseudo-Wulfstan Homily XLIV (untitled; probably late eleventh-century). Edited in Napier 1883, 215-26. (xliv on table)

Third recension:

An angel, often identified with St. Michael, delivers the letter to Bishop Peter of Antioch, during the papacy of Florentius.

Texts:

- (i) Anglo-Saxon Pseudo-Wulfstan Homily LVII, 'Sermo ad Populum Dominicis Diebus' (probably late eleventh-century). Edited in Napier 1883, 291-99. (lvii on table)
- (ii) Anglo-Saxon Homily preserved in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 162 (eleventh-century). Edited in Napier 1901, 357-62. (162 on table)

Some of the extant examples of the 'Sunday Letter' also contain a 'Sunday List', an enumeration of notable scriptural events which are said to have happened on Sunday, the purpose presumably being to reinforce the necessity for veneration of that day.⁴³ As will be clear from the table below, events included in this List differ between versions, and so, in principle, a comparison of the List found in stanzas 13-33 of *Leidarvtsan* with the lists preserved in the Latin, Irish and Old English versions detailed above should enable us to form some impression as to which recension the poem belongs to, and, perhaps, to bring ideas of how the Sunday Letter may have arrived in Scandinavia into sharper focus. This latter question is, however, somewhat complicated by the existence of two Middle High German homilies which contain versions of the 'Sunday List', but make no mention of the 'Sunday Letter'. The first of these Middle High German sermons, entitled 'De die dominico' is preserved in a fifteenth-century manuscript from the Benedictine monastery of Saint Emmeram, in Regensburg. I have abbreviated it 'Em' in the table. The Emmeram manuscript has been shown to be derived from an original dating at least from the twelfth century.⁴⁴ It is closely related to the other 'Sunday List', which is preserved in a twelfth-century copy of the homily collection known as the *Speculum Ecclesiae*, preserved in the monastery at Benediktbeuern.⁴⁵ This is abbreviated 'SH'. Since both Saint Emmeram and Benediktbeuern were Irish foundations, there has been some suggestion that the 'Sunday Letter' may have reached Germany directly from Ireland, and, although this is not an unreasonable assumption, the possibility of an Anglo-Saxon intermediary must not, of course, be ruled out.⁴⁶ The sermons' significance to the question of how the 'Sunday Letter' was transmitted to Scandinavia resides in two basic facts. Firstly, it is clear that both homilies were known in Scandinavia, since they have been shown to have exerted considerable influence on the *'Norwegian' Homily Book*

⁴³ The relationship between the 'Sunday Letter' and the 'Sunday List' is examined in detail in Lees 1985.

⁴⁴ The homily, 'De die dominico' is edited in Strauch 1895, 148-50. Issues of dating are discussed on pages 201-02.

⁴⁵ This homily is edited in Mellibourn 1944, 147-8. Issues of dating and provenance are discussed on page 1-3.

⁴⁶ For a rather over-simplified suggestion as to how apocryphal material might have passed from Ireland to Germany, see Tveitane 1966, 114-15.

sermon 'In natiuitate Domini'.⁴⁷ Secondly, as will become clear from the table below, the 'Sunday List' they preserve is in many ways closer to that found in *Leidarvisan* 13-33 than any of the Irish, Anglo-Saxon or Latin versions mentioned above.

The following table represents an attempt to establish *Leidarvisan's* place in the North-Western European 'Sunday Letter' tradition by setting it alongside schematisations of the surviving relevant surviving material as outlined above. For reasons of space, I do not include complete schematisations, although this would have enabled the recording of considerable parallelism in phraseology and structure between the texts, but merely offer a breakdown of the most salient features.

	first recension				2nd recension			3rd rec.		Em	SH	Le
	xlv	140	V	P	CD	xliii	xliv	lvii	162			
Letter's Arrival												
Jerusalem	x	x	x	x								x
Taken to Rome	x	x	x	x								
Arrives in Rome					x	x	x					
Written by Angel								x	x			
To Peter of Antioch								x	x			
Golden letters	x					x	x					x
Niall the deacon						x	x					
Interpretation by scholars	x	x	x	x								x
Dropped by angel	x		x									
Injunctions to:												
observe Sundays + religious festivals		x	x	x		x	x	x	x			x
remember Judgement	x		x									x
spontaneous obligations			x									
amend ways	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x
tithe	x	x	x		x	x						x
attend church		x										
pray regularly		x										
fast regularly		x										
avoid work on Sunday		x				x		x	x			x
Corporal acts of mercy					x				x			
Punishments for failure to observe Sunday:												
Plague/sores	x	x	x						x			
Blind, deaf and lame children	x	x	x	x					x			
Pagan attack	x	x				x	x					
Sulphurous fire		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x
Tempests/hailstorms		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			
Thunderstorms					x	x	x		x			
Serpents	x			x	x							
Famine	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				

⁴⁷ ed. Indrebø 1931, 31/24-35/15. See Tveitane 1966.

	First recension				2nd recension			3rd rec.		Em	SH	Le
	xlv	140	V	P	CD	xliii	xliv	lvii	162			
Promises to virtuous people:												
Answered prayer					x	x	x	x	x			
Eternal life				x					x			
Unspecified blessings	x	x	x	x	x	x			x			x
Sunday List:												
Creation of heaven and earth	x		x		x			x		x	x	
Creation of angels	x		x		x			x		x	x	x
Noah's ark rests	x		x		x					x	x	x
Rainbow					x							
Israelites cross Red Sea	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Egyptian army drowns	x		x			x	x				x	x
Manna					x	x	x	x	x			x
Ten Commandments										x		x
Water from Rock at Meribah										x		x
Conception of Christ	x		x		x							x
Birth of Christ								x	x	x	x	x
Baptism of Christ	x		x		x	x	x				x	x
Anointing with chrism	x		x									x
Feeding of 5,000	x		x		x			x	x	x	x	x
Temptation of Christ					x							
Christ teaches in Temple					x							
Transfiguration					x							
Wedding at Cana	x		x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x
Triumphal entry					x							x
Resurrection	x		x		x		x	x	x		x	x
Pentecost	x		x		x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Last Judgement					x		x	x	x		x	x

It will, I hope, be clear from this table that, although *Leidarvísan* incorporates features of all three recensions of the 'Sunday Letter' and of the two Middle High German homilies, none of the surviving texts can be said to match it perfectly. It is therefore impossible to assert that any of the Irish, Anglo-Saxon or German texts, or their Latin sources, represent the immediate source of *Leidarvísan*. It is also clear that *Leidarvísan* shares none of the *distinct* features of either the second or third recensions of the Letter: those characteristics it has in common with these texts are also found in texts representing either the first recension or the German tradition.

On the other hand, the 'Sunday List' which occupies the *steffabálkr* (stanzas 13-33) of *Leidarvísan* does bear a remarkable similarity to that preserved in the Saint Emmeram sermon. The inclusion of the accounts of Moses' receiving the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20; *Leidarvísan* 19; Strauch 149/44-45) and his striking the rock at Meribah (Numbers 20:6-13; *Leidarvísan* 20/1-4; Strauch 149/47-48) would seem to be particularly significant here, since neither of these events is included in 'Sunday Lists' elsewhere. There is, however, a minor but telling difference between the two accounts of the Meribah miracle. The writer of the Saint Emmeram homily embroiders the Biblical account of the miracle, insisting that, instead of one stream of water, four rivers flowed from the rock:

... an dem sountag flussen auß einem stain vier brunne von öle, wein,
honig vnd milch ...⁴⁸

The intention is perhaps to recall the four rivers which are said to have flowed into the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:10-14), and to give proof of the fact that, even though the Israelites had not yet reached it, the Promised Land was indeed "flowing with milk and honey" (Joshua 5:6). The *Leidarvísan*-poet, however, remains strictly faithful to the scriptural account here, and allows only water to flow from his rock. It is perhaps also significant that *Leidarvísan* does not include an account of the Epiphany, which is included in the Saint Emmeram homily.⁴⁹ Both these changes, however, might have been made for reasons of poetic exigency.

Since neither of the German texts include an account of the 'Sunday Letter' itself, we must look elsewhere for close analogues of the story of its discovery and interpretation given in stanzas 6-12 of *Leidarvísan*. It will be clear from the table above that the *Leidarvísan*-poet was familiar with a text from the first recension of the poem, since his account of the letter's arrival and discovery accords most nearly with this version of the legend. All of the features of the first recension are present in the poem, except for the details of the Letter's being taken from Jerusalem, where it first appeared, to Rome. Although the poem does not explicitly state that Christ's Letter was delivered to earth by an angel, the description of it as *þat bréf, er geðsnjallr Guð gerði ok lét falla á græna grund* (7/1-4) surely supports this interpretation. Furthermore, close parallels may be seen to exist between the Pseudo-Wulfstan XLV text and *Leidarvísan*. Two features are shared by these three texts alone: the injunction to remember that Judgement Day is imminent and the statement that, after Christ had been baptised, he was anointed with chrism and saluted by an angel. Tveitane argues that the use of the loanword *krisma* ('chrism') in *Leidarvísan* 24/6 indicates a direct relationship between the poem and the Pseudo-Wulfstan text here.⁵⁰ As I have demonstrated elsewhere, however, the *Leidarvísan* stanza owes rather more to the skaldic tradition and to medieval Icelandic baptismal practice than to the Anglo-Saxon text, and there are considerable differences between the two accounts of the Baptism.⁵¹ Although the *Leidarvísan*-poet clearly used a text of the first 'Sunday Letter' recension, then, it is clear that he did not have access to the Pseudo-Wulfstan XLV sermon or its Latin source.

My search for the source of *Leidarvísan*, then, is not yet over. Although the poem is clearly modelled on a text from the first recension of the 'Sunday Letter' legend, none of

⁴⁸ ed. Strauch 1895, 149/47-48.

⁴⁹ ed. Strauch 1895, 149/50-51.

⁵⁰ Tveitane 1966, 131 note 2.

⁵¹ see Attwood 1996a, 206-07. In the Pseudo-Wulfstan sermon, and its Latin parallel (V), Christ is anointed with both oil and chrism, whereas *Leidarvísan* mentions only chrism. Although the Latin text includes no account of Christ's salutation as the Son of God, XLV indicates that, after John had baptised and anointed Christ, an angel came from heaven and announced 'þis is min leofa sunu, on þæm ic me wel gelicode, geherað him wel.' (ed. Napier 1883, 229/4-5). *Leidarvísan* credits John only with the baptism itself, and asserts that the Holy Spirit performed the anointing:

Lét Jóhannem fráan,
einn dýrðarmann hreinan,
ár í Jordan stýrir
alls tírar sík skífra;
dásstéttar kom drótni
dags, ok krismu lagði
líknarfúss í lesni,
lands, enn helgi andi. (stanza 24)

the surviving versions of that recension can be definitely shown to be its source. Given the similarities between the 'Sunday List' in *Leidarvísan* 13-33 and the Saint Emmeram sermon, and the fact that the German 'Sunday List' tradition has been shown to have been known to the author of the *Norwegian Homily Book* 'In nativitate Domini' sermon,⁵² it is possible that the 'Sunday Letter' may have been transmitted to Scandinavia via a German version derived from the Irish tradition, although even this is uncertain.

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⁵² Tveitane 1966.

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