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ABSTRACT

Despite its fame as the pre-eminent medieval Icelandic saga, Njáls saga lacks a stemma comprehending all the saga’s manuscripts: only the vellum manuscripts have been surveyed in detail. As part of the Variance of Njáls saga (Breytileki Njáls sögu) project, we produced a stemma of all witnesses to chapter 86 (forty-nine out of the total sixty or so surviving manuscripts and fragments), supplemented with targeted samples from chapter 142 (32 manuscripts). This affords the first systematic insight into the post-medieval manuscript transmission of the saga. The present article focuses on two aspects of the post-medieval transmission which turn out to be of particular interest: the huge popularity of the lost medieval manuscript *Gullskinna in the post-medieval scribal tradition, and a revision of the branch of the Njáls saga stemma labelled as *Y by Einar Ólafur (noted for being represented by Oddabók, AM 466 4to).

1. Introduction

In his introduction to what has become the standard work on the manuscript transmission of Njáls saga, and a landmark in Old Norse stemmatology, Einar Ólafur Sveinsson wrote:

in the present work I intend to examine the text of the parchment manuscripts of the Saga. Besides these, there are many paper copies, which have been studied only in part. Most of them will presumably not contribute much to the understanding of the problems, though there is always the possibility that some of them might fill gaps in the textual history of the Saga, but that task awaits another investigator.

A large number of the paper manuscripts of Njáls saga were surveyed by Jón Þorkelsson in his contribution to the monumental 1875–89 edition of the saga by Konráð Gíslason and Eiríkur Jónsson, and Jón made some suggestions as to possible filiations, but other manuscripts have since come to light and Jón’s filiations were not systematic. Although there has been some progress on manuscripts not addressed by Einar Ólafur, the paper manuscripts of Njáls saga have still not received a systematic survey. Einar Ólafur wrote rather dismissively of them, assuming that they could not help him much in his project of reconstructing the lost archetype of our Njáls saga manuscripts. Our findings show that he was largely right: although a good number seem to be independent witnesses to the archetype of Njáls saga, they will seldom provide insights into its wording that earlier manuscripts do not. But in recent years interest in the transmission of sagas, both during the Middle Ages and beyond, has been growing, and it is increasingly recognised that understanding manuscript transmission is an important route into understanding the history of Icelandic literary culture, the Icelandic language, early modern Scandinavian humanism, and a range of other issues besides. Our findings are summarised as the stemma in Figure 1.

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3 See for example Hall and Parsons, “Making Stemmas with Small Samples,” section 1.1 and, on Njáls saga
The medium of print has always struggled to accommodate dendrograms, despite their manifest usefulness in efficiently visualising complex data: even today, when the reproduction of images is simple, stemmas of any size or complexity tend to defy the constraints of the monochrome, quarto pages of academic books. For the results of stemmatic research to be replicable and expandable, moreover, it is now important to publish not only the findings of the research, but also any electronic data gathered in arriving at those findings. Accordingly, we have published our data, full visualisations of both Einar Ólafur’s 1953 stemma and our own, a discussion of our methods, and a fuller justification of our findings as a companion article to this one in the free-access online journal *Digital Medievalist*. This includes stemmas not only visualised as dendrograms, but also as nested HTML lists, in which an annotated version of the sample text can be consulted by the user. Readers may find it useful to refer to these visualisations when reading the present article. Occasionally in this article, we also make reference by column number to the spreadsheet of variant readings published there. Here, we summarise key elements of the methodology, but focus on providing a deeper investigation into two themes which arise from our research: (1) emphasising the finding that most post-medieval manuscripts of *Njáls saga* are (at least for chapter 86), descended from a lost medieval manuscript known as *Gullskinna*, which therefore has special importance for understanding *Njáls saga*’s reception; and (2) reassessing Einar Ólafur’s stemma of the *Y* branch of the *Njáls saga* tradition. By focusing in this way, we are able to sketch a more vibrant and complex culture of scribal transmission of *Njáls saga* in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Iceland than has hitherto been recognised.
2. Methods

Einar Ólafur assumed that the examination of the paper manuscripts of *Njáls saga* would be the work of one investigator. We have, however, made this a collaborative endeavour as part of the Variance of *Njáls saga* (Breytileki Njáls sögu) project, and the tenth and eleventh International Arnamagnæan Summer Schools in Manuscript Studies, partly inspired by recent work on crowdsourcing manuscript transcriptions and stemmatic data. While eventually we might hope to make stemmas for *Njáls saga* by analysing complete digital transcriptions of all *Njáls saga* manuscripts, as is steadily being done for, for example, the *Canterbury Tales* and the New Testament, this is still a far distant hope. To begin to assemble a stemma of all *Njáls saga* manuscripts, a series of rigorous and targeted studies are needed, in which many hands make light work, and which gather, preserve, and share data in a way that enables later researchers to build on them.

Despite the fact that sampling is normal practice in making stemmas, there has been too little study of how it should be used. In practice, few researchers consider all kinds of variants, all variants of their chosen kind, or even all manuscripts of their chosen text—but they also seldom offer transparent accounts of these processes of selection. We chose chapter 86 as our sample for two key reasons. Firstly, it is witnessed by the early fourteenth-century fragment AM 162 B fol θ, a fragment which is important because of its close relationship with the lost but (as past research led us to suspect) widely copied medieval manuscript *Gullskinna.* Secondly, it was of a length similar to a sample that had produced promising results in the study of the stemma of *Konráðs saga keisarasonar* by Hall and Parsons—392 words in the Íslenzk fornrit edition, somewhat longer than the 317-word sample used by Hall and Parsons. This length also proved manageable for the crowdsourcing-inspired approach we took to making the transcriptions: the transcriptions which provided the initial basis for our findings were made by students and staff at the Tenth International Arnamagnæan Summer School in Manuscript Studies. Aiming for transcriptions normalised into modern Icelandic spelling, we sought to capture all lexical, morphological, and syntactic variation, but no orthographic variation.

One advantage of sampling is that it is liable to provide some results which are fairly straightforward, while also making apparent areas of particular doubt or interest, which can then be addressed by more targeted follow-up research. Accordingly, at the next year’s summerschool, we addressed problems raised by the previous research by sampling specific manuscripts of a four-hundred word section of chapter 142, which we believed would help us understand better questions about the circulation of the *Y* branch of *Njáls saga* raised by both our own research on chapter 86 and by past scholarship. Satisfied that key questions were answered by the sample chosen, we have not at this stage attempted a complete set of transcriptions of chapter 142, but completing this work would be a useful future step.

As Einar Ólafur emphasised, the stemma of *Njáls saga* involves an unusually large number of manuscripts with multiple exemplars, no doubt partly because of the saga’s great length and the consequent difficulty of borrowing a manuscript for long enough to copy it in its entirety, and partly...
because it was perceived as a historical text, encouraging early scholars to collate different witnesses in search of the most truthful account.\textsuperscript{13} Drawing a stemma is also complicated by the fact that none of our unusually numerous medieval manuscripts is complete, and many are short fragments: obviously fragments can only be filiated on the basis of sections of the saga to which they are witnesses, and there is no section of the saga to which all witnesses attest.

This article is, then, necessarily only one of what needs to be a series of studies. At times the confidence we have in its findings is limited because some manuscripts are too similar to one another for precise filiation, and future research extending the samples is necessary to resolve this. A case in point is the three copies of Reykjabók (AM 468 4to) made by Árni Magnússon’s brother Jón Magnússon—KB Add 565 4to, AM 467 4to, and ÍB 421 4to—along with the copy of Reykjabók known as Landakotsbók. The text of Reykjabók, KB Add 565 4to, and AM 467 4to is identical; ÍB 421 40 has a scattering of innovations; and Landakotsbók has one small omission. Jón Helgason assumed that only KB Add 565 4to was copied directly from Reykjabók, but since in chapter 86 Jón’s copies are so similar, there is no way rationally to filiate them through textual criticism.\textsuperscript{14} Meanwhile, many of the manuscripts analysed will have multiple exemplars, but only draw on one exemplar for chapter 86 or 142. Thus while our stemma of \textit{Njáls saga} will not be wrong on this account, it will be incomplete.

A central plank of the Variance of \textit{Njáls saga} project has been Susanne M. Arthur’s doctoral thesis on the codicology of \textit{Njáls saga}-manuscripts. Amongst other things, this affords the most up-to-date survey of the manuscripts of \textit{Njáls saga}, which we have taken as our guide in the present research.\textsuperscript{15} We also included the first printed edition of the saga, published by Ólafur Ólafsson in Copenhagen in 1772, as well as the 1776 reprint, on the expectation (which proved correct) that these would be necessary to understand the manuscript tradition.\textsuperscript{16} The following manuscripts and fragments include neither chapters 86 nor 142 so are excluded from this article:

AM 162 B fol β and AM 162 B fol δ (c. 1300), likely from the same manuscript\textsuperscript{17}
AM 162 B fol ζ (c. 1325)
AM 162 B fol γ (c. 1325)
AM 162 B fol κ (c. 1350)
AM 162 B fol t (1400×1425)
AM 162 B fol α (1400×1500)
Pjóðminjasafn II (c. 1600)
SÁM 33 (1700×1800)
AM 576 a 4to (1660×1695)

Lbs fragment 2, JS fragment 4, AM 921 I 4to, and Pjóðminjasafn I, all thought to derive from the same manuscript, which Arthur has dubbed the “Lost Codex” (c. 1600×1650), do not include chapter 86, but were represented through the inclusion of AM 921 I 4to in our sample of chapter 142.\textsuperscript{18}

We also omitted two manuscripts held outside Iceland for which we did not have access to facsimiles: Stockholm papp. fol 9 and Oslo, Universitets Bibliotek 372 4to. Past scholarship, however, gives us a good idea of where they must belong in the stemma and we were able to include them accordingly.

Fundamentally, our stemma is constructed through the human implementation of Lachmannian method, with the important conceptual difference that we are not seeking to identify “errors” but

\textsuperscript{15} Arthur, “Writing, Reading, and Utilizing \textit{Njáls saga},” 40–96.
\textsuperscript{16} Ólafur Olavius, \textit{Sagan af Niáli Þórgeirssyni}.
\textsuperscript{17} Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir and Zeevaert, “Við upptök Njálu,” 164.
rather “variants,” and not seeking to reconstruct a putative lost archetype of *Njálssaga*, but rather to map its transmission as a historical process. ¹⁹ We reduced our burden by first using software analysis with the programs Pars and Drawgram in the Phylip suite of phylogenetic analytical software to make a digital stemma; we then analysed the relationships of all the manuscripts ourselves, checking Pars’s analysis. For heuristic purposes, inferable lost common ancestors of chapter 86 were reconstructed, with recursive human checking as more reconstructions were completed. We checked the filiations of chapter 142 more cursorily, applying this detailed human analysis to the *Y* branch of Einar Ólafur’s stemma, which we had identified as being of particular interest. For the manuscripts surveyed by Einar Ólafur, our stemma largely agrees with his, verifying his work and emphasising that small samples are not necessarily any worse than whatever (unstated) sample Einar Ólafur used, the results from which scholars have relied on since. Since chapter 86 is short, and the number of variants distinguishing different manuscripts sometimes small, it was not self-evident that it would be possible reliably to create a stemma from chapter 86 alone. At the same time, however, our research has allowed us not only dramatically to extend Einar Ólafur’s work, but in a few respects also to correct it.

3. Manuscripts descended from *Gullskinna*

The most striking finding of our research on chapter 86 was a large group of manuscripts which form a distinct branch of their own with no surviving medieval manuscript source. External evidence shows that these must be related to a lost medieval manuscript, *Gullskinna*, most closely studied prior to the publication of this volume by Jón Þorkelsson and Már Jónsson. ²⁰ By contrast with most of the parchment manuscripts of *Njálssaga*, then, *Gullskinna* went viral: our sample found twenty-seven manuscripts descended in whole or in part from *Gullskinna*; our stemma demands the reconstruction of perhaps ten lost copies besides; and it is further believed that the fragment Þjóðminjasafn II, which does not contain chapter 86, also descends from *Gullskinna*. ²¹ Understanding how *Gullskinna* circulated, and why (at least for chapter 86) this manuscript’s version of *Njálssaga* became the dominant one in Iceland from the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, therefore emerges as an important new question for understanding Icelandic scribal networks and literary culture in this period. We cannot address this in detail in this article: what we do here is situate our findings in relation to past work on *Njálssaga*’s stemma, discuss questions and problems that arise from the stemmatic analysis, and make some preliminary observations that can underpin future investigations.

*Gullskinna* must have been closely related to the fragment AM 162 b fol θ, which was copied in the first half of the fourteenth century and is of unknown provenance, and of which no copies survive. ²² The fact that this fragment witnesses Chapter 86 is what led us to choose that chapter as our sample. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson tentatively filiated θ as a descendant of *X*, in which case the parent of *Gullskinna* would also be from *X*. Jón Helgason went further, and found that *Gullskinna* must be the niece of Reykjabók (AM 468 4to) at this point, making it an independent (if innovative) witness to the lost archetype of *Njálssaga*, and our findings independently confirm this. ²³ On the evidence of chapter 86 alone, it is difficult filiate this version, as its innovative character leaves few clear bases for comparison with other manuscripts—a problem which Einar Ólafur also had with the relatively short fragment θ. For now we have tentatively followed Einar Ólafur in making the shared ancestor of θ and *Gullskinna* a descendant of *X* (thus labelling it *X*); our data for chapter 142 is also consistent with this. More work is required here to be sure of

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¹⁹ For the method, see Trovato, *Everything you Always Wanted to Know about Lachmann’s Method*; on thinking in terms of “variants” rather than “errors” see Hall and Parsons, “Making Stemmas with Small Samples,” section 1.1.
*Gullskinna’s filiation.

Jón Þorkelsson identified four manuscripts as deriving directly from *Gullskinna: AM 136 fol, AM 137 fol (Vigfúsarbók), AM 470 4to (Hvammsbók, subsequently corrected by the scribe with the addition of readings from Kálfalækjarbók), and AM 134 fol (Hofsbók). In chapter 86, Hofsbók is (as Jón knew) copied from AM 309 4to (Bæjarbók); the manuscript does contain eight marginal references to *Gullskinna; one does occur in chapter 86 but is not informative for the present discussion. Still, if Jón was right, then the agreement of any two of AM 470 4to, AM 136 fol and AM 137 fol should be enough to confirm the reading of *Gullskinna. However, Már Jónsson provided clear evidence that AM 137 fol is a direct copy of AM 136 fol, and not an independent witness to *Gullskinna. Our findings for chapter 86 are in line with Már’s. There are seventeen occasions where AM 470 4to, AM 136 fol and AM 137 fol offer divergent readings. Whenever AM 136 fol differs from AM 470 4to, AM 137 fol agrees with AM 136 fol (12 occasions). AM 136 fol and AM 470 4to agree with each other over AM 137 fol 5 times. But AM 470 4to and AM 137 fol never agree with each other against AM 136 fol. Thus rather than being an independent copy of *Gullskinna, AM 137 fol is indeed a somewhat innovative copy of AM 136 fol. The one or two minor occasions where AM 137 fol offers a more conservative looking reading than AM 136 fol could clearly arise from the scribe of 137 inferring a more likely reading. Rather than being an independent copy of *Gullskinna, AM 137 fol is indeed on present evidence a somewhat innovative copy of AM 136 fol.

On almost all of the seventeen occasions when there is a disagreement between AM 136 fol and AM 470 4to, AM 470 4to agrees with the much older fragment AM 162 b fol 0, suggesting that it is the more conservative representative of *Gullskinna. The exceptions to this are presented as Table 1, which refers to the spreadsheet of variant readings published in the companion article to this one. [INSERT TABLE 1. CAPTION: Table 1: innovative looking readings in Hvammsbók (AM 470 4to).]

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25 Már Jónsson, “Var það mokað af miklum usla.”
26 In the spreadsheet accompanying Zeevaert et al., “A New Stemma of Njáls saga,” columns N, S, T, U, AD, AH, AL, AP, AQ, BB, BJ, CB, CD, CY, CZ, DD, and DL.
In the case of column T, no manuscript agrees with θ, so the column is not diagnostic (*Gullskinna was perhaps unclearly written here). In the case of AL and BJ, AM 470 4to does appear to be innovative (and in the case of giving jarl for hann could well show a misreading of an abbreviation, as the abbreviations for hann and jarl can look similar). It is thus clear that of the manuscripts on Jón Pörkelsson’s list we have only two substantial witnesses to *Gullskinna for chapter 86, of which AM 470 4to is extremely faithful, but AM 136 fol occasionally offers a more conservative reading. AM 136 fol has no descendants apart from AM 137 fol. Since AM 470 4to is so similar to *Gullskinna, however, it is hard to judge whether other similar manuscripts are copies of *Gullskinna itself and or whether they are copies of AM 470 4to. Of the other *Gullskinna-type manuscripts, there is great variation in column T, with all the readings listed in Table 1 and more appearing. It seems clear that scribes often introduced new readings here, whether from misreadings, other manuscripts, memories of hearing other versions, their own geographical knowledge, or invention. The agreement of AM 162 b fol θ and AM 136 fol on sem in column AL would suggest that this was the reading of *Gullskinna. Almost all the other *Gullskinna descendants have er so this could suggest that they were copied from AM 470 4to. On the other hand, the other X-class manuscripts have er, so it is just as likely that AM 126 b fol and AM 136 fol independently innovated sem here and that *Gullskinna read er. This leaves only column BJ as a basis for choosing between AM 470 4to and *Gullskinna as an exemplar of other manuscripts. Both variants in this column are found. As mentioned above, the abbreviated forms of hann and jarl look quite similar, but AM 470 4to writes the word out in full, clearly, so a copyist of that manuscript should not have had difficulty; and this manuscript was at some point not too long after its copying thoroughly corrected with reference to Kálfalækjarbók (AM 133 fol), to the extent that it would take an effort to copy it without incorporating Kálfalækjarbók readings; but none of the other *Gullskinna-type manuscripts exhibit these. This suggests that at least some of our other *Gullskinna-type manuscripts are indeed direct copies of *Gullskinna, but only a larger sample will reveal this. Unfortunately, the additional data afforded by Chapter 142, is not clearly diagnostic either: this is a more formulaic passage and lacks a corresponding passage in AM 162 b fol θ.

Már Jónsson had the same problem, the main difference between his quandry and ours being that he discussed only five manuscripts which might be direct copies of *Gullskinna (AM 136 fol, AM 469 4to, AM 470 4to, AM 555a 4to and AM 555c 4to), whereas, including reconstructed lost manuscripts, we have identified twelve (the additions being AM 465 4to, AM 134 fol, AM Acc 50, and the reconstructed manuscripts *g1, *g2, *g3, and *g4). For example, Jón Pörkelsson found that the text in AM 555a 4to “synes i alt væsentlig at stemme overens med den i Hvammsbók” (“seems in all significant respects to match that in Hvammsbók”) noting moreover that it was copied by the son of Ketill Jörundarson, who also copied Hvammsbók (AM 470 4to). Már Jónsson was inclined to agree, while admitting that “frávik eru hverfandi” (“variation is negligible”). Our sample does not resolve this certainly, but in column BJ, AM 555a 4to has the more conservative hann instead of AM 470 4to’s Jarl; a similar hint, again suggesting an incorrectly expanded abbreviation in AM 470 4to, occurs in chapter 142 (column HU), where AM 470 40 has “og skal nú fram að finna” for AM 555a 4to’s more conservative “og skal nú fara að finna.” This hints that AM 555a 4to is an

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independent witness to *Gullskinna. Likewise, Jón Þorkelsson found that the text of AM 469 4to “er af Gullskinna-klassen og ligner snarest Hvammsbók” (“is of the Gullskinna-class, and is most similar to Hvammsbók”), but our data suggests that while AM 469 4to has numerous unique readings, it does not share AM 470 4to’s divergences from *Gullskinna. Our small samples and concomitant attention to detail, then, have helped us to refine our understanding of possible *Gullskinna copies, but at the same time the limitations to our conclusions emphasise the constraints of small samples when handling very conservative copies. Further research into the manuscripts which we have identified as witnesses to *Gullskinna, particularly expanding the sample from passages corresponding to AM 162 b fol 0, would resolve these questions, assuming they can indeed be resolved. For now, we have assumed that AM 470 4to has no descendants and that *Gullskinna had many, many of which seem to be direct descendants (but might, given a larger sample, resolve into parent-child or sibling relationships).

Despite their limitations, these findings already give us a valuable basis for insights into post-medieval Icelandic saga-transmission. This is made more interesting again by the fact that the *Gullskinna text was subject to a high rate of correction and conflation with other manuscript versions. This suggests that seventeenth-century copyists tended to find its version deficient.

- As we mentioned above, the *Gullskinna text of Hvammsbók (AM 470 4to) was carefully corrected by Hvammsbók’s scribe Ketill Jörundarson with reference to Kálfalækjarbók (AM 133 fol), which Ketill seems clearly to have viewed as higher-status.
- AM 465 4to silently conflates *Gullskinna’s text with Móðruvallabók’s in chapter 86, and seemed to be descended directly from Móðruvallabók in chapter 142.
- As discussed in section 4 below, NKS 1220 fol and Lbs 3505 4to both derive in chapter 86 from a manuscript which conflated a *Gullskinna text with the text in AM 396 fol (or a close relative).
- The Handrit úr safni Jóns Samsonarsonar is of the *Gullskinna class for chapter 86, but we found it particularly awkward to filiate. There must be some other link between the Jón Samsonarson MS and Lbs 437 4to (also a *Gullskinna class manuscript), but we have as yet been unable to puzzle out the relationships. For chapter 142, its affiliations, while still of the *Gullskinna class, seem to be different again. What is clear is that some conflation is at work.

Meanwhile, even in our limited sample of nearly all manuscripts of chapter 86 and around half the manuscripts of chapter 142, many manuscripts, while not conflating exemplars, switch exemplar part way through. Those that we have identified from our samples are:

- Hofsbók (AM 134 fol) is reckoned in its entry at the website handrit.is to be a copy of a vellum manuscript, “mógulega Gráskinnu, GKS 2870 4to” (“possibly Gráskinna”). Meanwhile, Jón Þorkelsson thought Hofsbók was an indirect copy of *Gullskinna, with marginal corrections from *Gullskinna itself and from Gráskinna. Neither claim can be true for chapter 86, which is a copy of AM 309 4to (Bæjarbók), with just one marginal collation with *Gullskinna. Our sample from ch. 142, however, is from *Gullskinna, and shows that Hofsbók is potentially a direct copy, with just a few minor innovations. This manuscript, then, was copied from at least two exemplars, one of them of the *Gullskinna class.
- Lbs 1415 4to is of the *Gullskinna class for chapter 86 but changes exemplar to AM 465 4to (here drawing on Móðruvallabók) for chapter 142.
- Handrit úr safni Jóns samsonarsons, ÍB 322 4to, ÍB 261 4to and ÍB 270 4to (Urðabók), are of the *Gullskinna class for chapter 86 (though, as mentioned above, Handrit úr safni Jóns

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Samsonarsonar is particularly tricky to filiate). For chapter 142, however, they switch from *Gullskinna to another exemplar or exemplars, clearly of the X tradition. While they are clearly a group, their precise relationships seem once more to be complex, suggesting further conflations.

Needless to say, the list of manuscripts with multiple exemplars would grow with fuller sampling: for example, Jón Þorkelsson thought that Thott 984 fol III was a direct copy of Oddabók (AM 466 4to).31 This cannot be true for chapter 86, which is of the *Gullskinna class, but it is perfectly possible that Jón’s conclusion holds true for other parts of the manuscript. AM 464 4to was mostly copied from Kálfalækjarbók by the scholar, poet, and churchman Jón Halldórsson, but fills in lacunae in that manuscript by using the *Gullskinna-class manuscript AM 137 fol (and contains marginal references to other manuscripts again; both ÍB 421 4to and KB Add 565 4to had gaps left by the scribe, Jón Magnússon, when faced with lacunae in his exemplar (Reykjabók, AM 468 4to), which were later filled in from other sources.32 Indeed, a large number of manuscripts have marginal annotations containing variant readings or verses from other manuscripts.33 It is clear, then, that a fuller survey of the stemma of the post-medieval manuscripts of Njáls saga would reveal in yet more detail a complex culture in which scribes regularly got access to multiple copies of Njáls saga, either concurrently or at different times, and in which it was not unusual for them to conflate different versions. A fuller survey would also help to tease out how far these scribes were scholars working in the nascent philological tradition of renaissance humanism (like Jón Magnússon and Jón Halldórsson) and how far the use of multiple exemplars was also characteristic of the production of more entertainment-orientated reading copies.

Reconstructing *Gullskinna proves important in two ways: for understanding the early transmission of Njáls saga and for understanding its post-medieval circulation. *Gullskinna and θ emerge as witnesses to a lost, relatively innovative, but early version of Njáls saga, which on the evidence of chapter 86 tended to shorten the saga, making for a slightly brisker and less detailed narrative. This offers a counterweight to Einar Ólafur Sveinsson’s conclusion that “the author of Njáls saga is no doubt one of the greatest masters of Icelandic prose style, of all ages, and certainly the scribes felt his excellence. Their way of treating the text seems to show more respect for it than is generally the case with our scribes in those times.”34 True though this may generally have been, someone begged to differ. This lost parent of θ and *Gullskinna seems also to have been a witness to the lost archetype of our Njáls saga manuscripts independent of any surviving. It is not yet known whether the manuscript *Gullskinna was complete when it was copied, and whether it, like so many medieval manuscripts of Njáls saga, drew on multiple exemplars. But it is possible that further research would establish that *Gullskinna was a complete, single-reduction manuscript, which would if so have its own unique interest for understanding the medieval circulation of Njáls saga.

Whatever the precise filiation of *Gullskinna, there is no question that, directly or indirectly, the manuscript is at least one of the ancestors of most of the surviving Njáls saga manuscripts which were copied and circulated in the seventeenth and, even more so, the eighteenth centuries. Far from being dominated by the Reykjabók and Móðruvallabók versions which tend to define the Njáls saga familiar to us from modern editions, the Njáls saga known to early modern Icelanders was overwhelmingly the rather innovative *Gullskinna version. When we study the vibrant literary responses to the saga in the poetry of eighteenth-century Icelandic literati like the Svarfaðardalur coterie of Magnús Einarsson (1734–94), who according to Andrew Wawn copied Urðabók (ÍB 270 4to) for his friend Jón bóndi Sigurðsson of Urðir; Magnús’s friend Sveinn Sölvinson (1722–82); or séra Gunnar Pálsson (1714–91), we are probably studying, at least in part, responses to the

34 Einar Ol. Sveinsson, Studies in the Manuscript Tradition, 16.
4. Revising the *Y branch of the *Njáls saga* stemma

Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, studying only vellum manuscripts, reconstructed an important branch of the *Njáls saga* tradition descending from the lost manuscript which he labelled *Y*. This branch is also one of the few whose post-medieval transmission has received any detailed attention. Despite notionally surveying all the vellum manuscripts of *Njáls saga*, Einar Ólafur demurred to analyse the late vellum manuscript GKS 1003 fol, simply saying that it must “belong to the paper manuscripts of the Saga and ought to be studied with these.”

This manuscript attracted the interest of Desmond Slay and Ólafur Halldórsson, who reported on their stemmatic work relating to it without explaining their methods or giving examples. They suggested that GKS 1003 fol and two other manuscripts are descended from Oddabók. Arthur agreed that AM 396 fol and Ferjubók (AM 163 d fol) were in a parent-child relationship, but equivocated as to which was actually the parent. Meanwhile, AM 135 fol, a manuscript made by Ásgeir Jónsson between 1690 and 1697 in Norway for the eminent saga-scholar Þormóður Torfason (1636–1719), was viewed by Árni Magnússon as a copy of Gráskinna (GKS 2870 4to). Jón Þorkelsson agreed but added that parts were from another manuscript, which he did not identify.

Appending Slay and Ólafur Halldórsson’s stemma to Einar Ólafur’s, and integrating these other observations, we get figure 1. 

We were able to refine these past findings, with interesting results, visualised in Figure 3, which may conveniently be compared with Figure 2. 

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The specific problems that inspired the investigation into chapter 142 arose from Einar Ólafur’s equivocation about the place of the parchment fragments of *Njáls saga* in this part of the stemma. He described the fragment Þjóðminjasafn I as almost identical to Oddabók (AM 466 4to), but noted that a few features in the fragment actually looked more conservative than the corresponding parts of Oddabók and asked “do these differences preclude the possibility of ÞjI being a copy of O?”

This implies that Einar Ólafur was tending to think of Þjóðminjasafn I as a child of Oddabók, so in Figure 2 we represent as a child of Oddabók, indicating Einar Ólafur’s vaguess using a dotted line. Meanwhile, he positioned the fragment AM 921 I 4to as a sister of Oddabók. Susanne Arthur has since shown that the parchment fragments Lbs fragment 2, JS fragment 4, AM 921 I 4to and Þjóðminjasafn I are actually almost certainly fragments of the same “Lost Codex.” While this by no means necessitates that all the fragments have the same exemplum, it suggests that Einar Ólafur might indeed have been wrong to place AM 921 I 4to and Þjóðminjasafn I at different points in the stemma. Meanwhile, our data from chapter 86, while generally consistent with Slay and Ólafur Halldórsson’s interpretation, presented a few conservative features in the supposed descendants of Oddabók (see columns J, CQ, and cf. BH) which, though conceivably caused by convergent evolution, provoked the suspicion that Slay and Ólafur Halldórsson had not been quite right. We set out to test this by sampling a passage which falls in AM 921 I 4to, focusing on manuscripts which our earlier survey of chapter 86 (and other past work) had identified as being descendants of *y1.

It emerges that Einar Ólafur was right that AM 921 I 4to is a sister manuscript of Oddabók, but that Melanesbók (AM 396 fol), Ferjubók (AM 163 d fol), and GKS 1003 fol are all clearly more closely related to AM 921 I 4to than to Oddabók. None, however, can be a copy of the other. Moreover, Melanesbók (AM 396 fol) and Ferjubók (AM 163 d fol) share some innovations, but

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each manuscript also contains both unique innovations and conservative features. Without gathering more data corresponding to the fragments AM 921 I 4to and Þjóðminjasafn I it is hard to be sure precisely how the manuscripts relate (and Þjóðminjasafn I has gone missing; Arthur 2015, 39 n. 53). Figure 3 offers a revised version of the *Y branch of the *Njáls saga* stemma, including the most parsimonious version of the *y1 branch we can countenance. It also includes some key information about the provenance of the *y1 manuscripts to illustrate the discussion that follows.

Meanwhile, Einar Ólafur filiated Bæjarbók chapters 49–54 and 62–89 (Bb2) as descendants of *y1. But he filiated chapters 38–42 and 118–20 of Bæjarbók (Bb1 and Bb3 in his system of sigla) as descendants of *x3 (and he did notice “some correspondences” with *x3 in chapter 82). It is clear from our data that chapter 86 was copied from *x3 rather than *y1. We must reckon on a slightly more complex relationship between Bæjarbók and its two exemplars than Einar Ólafur realised. This could be the subject of future targeted research (unfortunately, Bæjarbók does not include chapter 142).

Examining AM 135 fol, we found the second half of chapter 86 and the sample of chapter 142 indeed to be from Gráskinnna (or rather, in the case of chapter 142, the post-medieval additions made to Gráskinna to fill in lacunae, known as Gráskinnuauki). But we were also able to identify the exemplar for the first half of chapter 86 as Skafinskinna (GKS 2868 4to).

We can add, finally, that it seems that a further copy of AM 396 fol was made, and that this copy conflated the AM 396 fol text with a descendant of *Gullskinna, to create a now lost manuscript which we have called *g1a1, sometime before 1698, when our two surviving copies (NKS 1220 fol and Lbs 3505 4to) were made.

These conclusions, then, afford a good demonstration of the axiom that the larger the dataset used in making a stemma, the more likely the research is to discover that manuscripts which a small dataset suggests are in a parent-child relationship must in fact be siblings, descended from a lost parent. Slay and Ólafur Halldóðsson, drawing a highly parsimonious stemma on the basis, one guesses, of limited data, implicitly thought they were seeing a very limited number of *Njáls saga* manuscripts circulating in seventeenth-century Iceland. But our analysis suggests a markedly more dynamic, if less easily comprehended, scribal culture. Needless to say, fuller sampling would refine and possibly complicate the picture further, but hopefully we have demonstrated that even small, targeted samples can produce significant advances on past work.

It is possible to combine these findings with the meticulous research into the history of these manuscripts by Arthur to produce a case-study of the late- and post-medieval transmission of *Njáls saga*.

Several of the descendants of *y1 have links with the region where *Njáls saga* itself is set. We do not know where Oddabók was originally copied, but in 1645 Þorleifur Jónsson (1619–90), a member of the powerful Svalbarð family, brought it southwards with him when he became schoolmaster at one of the pre-eminent churches in Iceland, Oddi (63.777205,-20.386548), in the midst of the region where most of *Njáls saga* is set. Þorleifur later became priest at Oddi from 1651 to his death. He must have passed the manuscript on to his son, Björn Þorleifsson (1663–1710), who was himself priest at Oddi, at first as assistant to his father, from 1687 until he became bishop of Hólar in 1697. This puts it in the same place as the likely place of copying of several of the other descendants of *y1, and it was once readily assumed that Oddabók had been their exemplar:

- In 1667–70 the wealthy if rather obscure farmer Jón Eyjólfssson of Eyvindarmúli (63.717989,-19.84354), thirty kilometres west of Oddi, had one Páll Sveinsson copy him two huge, beautiful, vellum folio volumes—among the very last parchments to be made in

44 There were a few details on which AM 135 fol was more conservative than Gráskinnuauki (columns FI, FR, HC and HJ in the spreadsheet published by Zeevaert et al., “A New Stemma of *Njáls saga*”), but these seemed trivial enough to be explained as obvious corrections, or caused by the highly formulaic language.
Iceland—containing, amongst other things, *Njáls saga*. Páll is no better known a figure than Jón Eyjólfsson but was certainly a prolific scribe of prestigious manuscripts, associated with Geldingalækjur, about fifteen kilometres north of Oddi (63.883546,-20.261343). By 1692, GKS 1002–3 had come into the hands of Björn Þorleifsson, the owner of Oddabók. Björn rebound GKS 1002–3 fol and gave the two volumes to King Christian V of Denmark in 1692, and at some point gave the less imposing Oddabók to Árni Magnússon.

- Meanwhile, AM 163 d fol, now known as Ferjubók, can also be linked to the area around Oddi. It is another enormous saga-collection, now dismembered and surviving as AM 110 fol, AM 163 d fol, AM 125 fol, AM 163 c fol, AM 163 a fol, AM 163 b fol, and AM 202 g fol II, produced between around 1650 and 1683. We do not know where this copy was made, but Árni Magnússon acquired it in 1711 from “Sigurði á Ferju,” aka Sigurður Magnússon of Sandhólaferja (63.827289,-20.673738), about twenty kilometres west of Oddi.

- Oddabók even has a marginal annotation in the hand of the scribe who copied the Lost Codex (AM 921 I 4to etc.) and AM 396 fol, making it easy to assume that both these sagas were copied from Oddabók. (Slay even argued that this scribe was Páll Sveinsson, the scribe of GKS 1003 fol, but Arthur has shown this to be mistaken.)

It now seems that a sibling of Oddabók was available and that this was the exemplar (or at any rate one exemplar) of GKS 1003 fol, the Lost Codex, and a further lost manuscript. This second lost manuscript was then itself copied by the same scribe as the Lost Codex, as AM 396 fol. The history of AM 396 fol itself is unclear. It has been known as Melanesbók/Lambavatnsbók because it contains two sagas whose colophons place their copying at Melanes (65.446743,-23.950152) and the nearby Lambavatn (65.49378,-24.092503) in the Westfjords. The name is unhelpful for our purposes, however, as the manuscript in its present form is a 1731 compilation of earlier manuscripts of disparate origins. The *Njáls saga* portion of AM 396 fol seems to be from the early or mid-seventeenth century. Whether AM 396 fol was produced in the Westfjords or came there later is unclear, but a marginal annotation suggests that it was available to Jón Ólafsson when he was copying other sagas at Melanes and Lambavatn in 1676–77. This, the fact that the fragments of the Lost Codex have turned up in contexts associated with northern Iceland, and other contextual hints led Arthur to venture that “it seems probable” that both the Lost Codex and AM 396 fol were copied in north or north-west Iceland. Certainly it seems that a further copy of AM 396 fol was made, and that this copy conflated the AM 396 fol text with a descendant of *Gullskinna, to create a new lost manuscript which we have called *g1a1, sometime before 1698, when our two surviving copies (NKS 1220 fol and Lbs 3505 4to) were made. Of these two surviving copies, we only have a clear provenance for NKS 1220 fol, which was once part of AM 426 fol, copied in and around Vigur for the magnate and manuscript collector Magnús Jónsson í Vigur (1637–1702). AM 426 fol was copied around 1670–82 and the *Njáls saga* section of that manuscript, which is now in NKS 1220 fol, was copied in 1698. AM 426 fol famously contains three full-page illustrations by Hjalti Þorsteinsson (1665–1754); none is present in the NKS 1220 fol *Njáls saga*. However, a corresponding illustration is preserved in Lbs 3505 4to, where it was folded to fit into the smaller manuscript. Hjalti lived and worked at various ecclesiastical institutions in Iceland as well as in Copenhagen, but from 1692 to his death lived within five kilometres of Vigur in Vatnsfjörður (65.960811,-22.469444). Given that a picture evidently intended for AM 426 fol–NKS 1220 fol ended up in Lbs 3505 4to; the fact that Lbs 3505 4to has the same exemplar as NKS 1220 fol; and the fact that the manuscripts were both copied in 1698, the two must arise from a closely connected
context, presumably both produced around Vigur, perhaps while *g1a1 was on loan there. The closest localisable relatives of *g1a1 on the Gullskinna side are from the Westfjords (Kall 612 4to, 66.008911, -22.923832) and Flatey (Handrit úr safni Jóns Samssonarsonar, 65.37391, -22.919583) so it is fairly likely that the *g1a1 conflation was itself made in the north-west.

Reassessing the descendants of Einar Ólafur’s *y1, then, the main conclusion must be that Njáls saga scribes were markedly busier in the seventeenth century than has been realised, and that while Oddabók went uncopied, a close relative seems to have been circulating, its descendants appearing both in Njáls saga country—the Rangárvellir—and in the Westfjords. It may be characteristic, moreover, that Oddabók, which survived to come into the hands of Árni Magnússon, was seldom, if ever, copied, whereas the medieval ancestor of our seventeenth-century *y1 Njáls saga manuscripts—a manuscript that must have been circulating for copying—is lost.

5. Evaluation and conclusion

This study, in conjunction with the companion piece, represents a major step forward in our understanding of the manuscript transmission of Njáls saga: it largely confirms the findings of past scholarship, while making a few small corrections; but it filiates for the first time all but six of the saga’s post-medieval manuscripts. It shows that whereas current editions of Njáls saga are usually based primarily on Reykjabók and Möðruvallabók, the recension of the saga known to most Icelanders in the seventeenth and, overwhelmingly, in the eighteenth centuries derived from the lost medieval manuscript *Gullskinna. It also reveals a more complex and lively textual tradition lying behind the descendants of the lost manuscript *y1. These findings were made possible by a collaborative approach to constructing a stemma through sampling, followed up by targeted research inspired by work on the initial sample. Our c. 400-word sample of chapter 86 mostly proved an adequate basis for establishing a stemma, except insofar as many Njáls saga manuscripts switch exemplar part way through, meaning that fuller sampling necessary to capture more such switches. Because the copying of Njáls saga has been very conservative, unlike with the romance-saga studied by Hall and Parsons, the 400-word sample did not give us as fine-grained resolution as we might have wished. It is too seldom emphasised that all stemmas are contingent: stemmatology is inherently a probabilistic undertaking, and our stemma is no exception. Our small sample will also have increased the likelihood of mistakenly finding manuscripts to be in a parent-child relationship where fuller sampling could reveal variants showing that they are both descended from a lost common ancestor. However, the study has still taken our understanding of the transmission of Njáls saga to a new level and provided a sound basis for targeted future research.

Further research on the *Gullskinna branch of Njáls saga would therefore be worthwhile. At the moment we have had to filiate a large number of very similar manuscripts as direct descendants of *Gullskinna. However, larger samples would presumably reveal shared innovations which would enable us to identify some of these manuscripts as exemplars of the others. Even so, with at least three and probably more direct copies (AM 136 fol, AM 470 4to, and AM 134 fol), *Gullskinna itself clearly has a special prominence in the early modern copying of Icelandic manuscripts. We do not yet know whether it was a complete or single-exemplar manuscript, but this possibility is worth exploring for the insights it may give into the medieval circulation of Njáls saga. Further research could also help us to guess why *Gullskinna was so popular and how long the manuscript itself remained in circulation. Particular areas for future research that we have identified are:

- Studying the fragments and manuscripts not covered here.
- Working out more precisely the relationships of the *Gullskinna-class manuscripts, with the internal filiations of the possible immediate descendants of *Gullskinna as a priority.
- Establishing whether *Gullskinna was a complete manuscript when copied, and whether the

version it contains combined multiple versions.

- Checking the sources of other chapters of the possible *Gullskinna-class manuscript Thott 984 fol III.
- Exploring the precise relationship of Bæjarbók (AM 309 4to) to its two exemplars.
- Establishing the precise relationship of Reykjabók (AM 468 4to) to its (near-)identical copies.
- Checking the sources of other chapters of Hofsbók (AM 134 fol).

Perhaps the most noteworthy general observation arising from the stemmatic research in this paper is how little copied were medieval manuscripts which survive to the present: we owe the copies of Reykjabók largely to Árni Magnússon’s antiquarianism; Móðruvallabók and Bæjarbók were each copied only once (in conflation and collation with *Gullskinna), and Gráskinna and Skafinskinna only in an antiquarian copy made in Norway. It is perhaps characteristic that Oddabók itself, contrary to earlier beliefs, does not seem to have been copied. By contrast, the lost sibling of Oddabók *y1a looks to have been copied three times, and *Gullskinna certainly more. One starts to get the impression that medieval manuscripts that circulated for copying (and presumably reading) have not tended to survive into the present. All told, our stemma contains only sixteen manuscripts (and one reconstructed one) descended, directly or indirectly, in whole or in part, from surviving medieval manuscripts. Fuller sampling of the manuscripts will doubtless complicate this picture, but it remains striking. It is hard to know how far these patterns reflect patterns of manuscript production and how far they reflect patterns of manuscript collection and survival; either way, the opportunities, choices, and social networks of a fairly small number of powerful and mostly closely related seventeenth-century literati will have been important in determining which medieval manuscripts were mediated into wider circulation.\(^{54}\)

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