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ISSN: 0305-9219
Printed by Short Run Press Limited, Exeter
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TWO MAJOR GROUPS IN THE OLDER MANUSCRIPT TRADITION OF NÍTÍÐA SAGA

By SHERLYL McDONALD WERRONEN
Independent Scholar

NÍTÍÐA SAGA IS A LATE MEDIEVAL Icelandic romance almost certainly composed in Iceland sometime in the fourteenth century. Its anonymous but probably clerical author drew on the bridal-quest romance Clári saga for inspiration, and in its turn Nítíða saga seems to have inspired writers of other late medieval Icelandic romances such as Nikulás saga leikara (McDonald Werronen 2013, 83–118). While Nítíða saga’s early readership is difficult to ascertain, its rich manuscript tradition suggests that it was a well-known, frequently copied and arguably very popular romance among the laity of early modern (and later) Iceland. Kalinke and Mitchell’s Bibliography of Old Norse–Icelandic Romances lists sixty-five manuscripts and fragments in which the saga survives (1985, 85–86), ranging in date from the late fifteenth century to the early twentieth century. ¹ Despite this significant manuscript tradition, Nítíða saga has only ever been published

¹ In my study I have considered there to be sixty-one manuscripts preserving Nítíða saga, as I have found Kalinke and Mitchell’s list to be not quite accurate. The two-leaf fragment in AM 582 4to was not accounted for, and some manuscripts that are listed contain, rather than full texts, only summaries (AM 576c 4to, AM 226a 8vo, Lbs 3128 4to, and Nks 1144 fol.); further, one manuscript actually contains a set of verse rímur (Add. 24,973 8vo), instead of a prose version of the saga. It is unfortunate that I have not yet been able to study Nítíða rímur: there are at least twenty-four additional manuscript witnesses of verse Nítíða rímur cycles. Of these, there are no fewer than eight independent versions (Driscoll 1997, 11; Finnur Sigmundsson 1966, I 356–60). These sets of rímur are just as important to Nítíða saga’s transmission history as its prose versions, and it is probable that at least one of the saga versions I have identified (Group E) derives from a rímur cycle (McDonald Werronen 2013, 49–53, 75–81; cf. also Jorgensen 1990), though more research into this is still needed. Studies of rímur in general, especially in English, remain relatively few (e.g. Driscoll 1997; Finnur Sigmundsson 1966; Hughes 2002; Hughes 2005; Jorgensen 1993), and there has not yet been any work done on Nítíða rímur specifically. Combining the known saga and rímur manuscripts, then, there are today at least ninety separate witnesses of the Nítíða story in verse and prose, spanning over five hundred years. Clearly this is an important area for future research.
One day, Nítíða asks him to look into her magical stones, where they see unexpectedly. He defeats Soldán, then heals the wounded Hléskjöldur in Nítíða's household, to become better acquainted. Taking this advice, Alduria, who suggests he return to France in disguise and stay the winter in Nítíða's household, to become better acquainted. Taking this advice, he gains Nítíða's confidence, disguised as a prince named Eskilvarður. One day, Nítíða asks him to look into her magical stones, where they see

2 While I have classified most of the extant manuscripts, and listed them all in Table 1 for reference, this article has as its focus the two oldest groups (A and B) because more research is needed to determine the precise nature of the relationships among the younger versions. Further preliminary discussion of the entire manuscript tradition is in McDonald Werronen 2013, 24–54.
throughout the world, which is depicted in three parts. Nítíða then reveals that she had seen through Livorius’s disguise as soon as he arrived. He proposes to Nítíða, she accepts, and their wedding is set for autumn. Ingi hears the news, and, still angry and humiliated, gathers an army against France. Livorius and Ingi fight, Livorius spares Ingi’s life, and has his sister Sýjalín heal Ingi. Sýjalín and Ingi fall in love, and Nítíða’s foster brother Hléskjöldur is matched with Ingi’s sister Listalín. The saga ends with a triple wedding, and Nítíða and Livorius’s son succeeds them as ruler of France.

**Manuscript Groups**

Although this is the version of *Nítíða saga* commonly known today, during and after the Middle Ages other versions differing slightly in plot, tone and emphasis were known across Iceland. In terms of recognising such variation in this and other Icelandic romances, two studies from the 1980s consider parts of the manuscript traditions of certain romances: Astrid van Nahl (1981, 197–200) and Jürg Glauser (1983, 78–100) discuss manuscript evidence and variety, and while both occasionally mention the case of *Nítíða saga*, only Glauser discusses its variation in manuscript specifically, albeit briefly (82–84). Additionally, there has been some work on post-medieval saga popularity and reception in Iceland and abroad (Driscoll 1997, Glauser 1994, Jón Karl Helgason 2005, Malm 2004, O’Donoghue 2004, Springborg 1977, Wawn 2005, Hast 1960), but neither the reception of *Nítíða saga* nor its variations has been studied in detail. Until now, a stemma has not been attempted, nor even a rough grouping of the manuscripts or an account of the different recensions of the saga. Because ‘medieval writing does not produce variants; it is variance’ (Cerquiglini 1993, 77–78), it is certainly worthwhile to consider *Nítíða saga* within its complex manuscript context even if it cannot be fully understood at present, and so to interrogate the very notion of texts and their (in)stability.

The manuscripts in which *Nítíða saga* survives can be categorised in different ways, each highlighting different aspects of plot, characterisation, structure, scribes, location of origin or physical attributes. So far, I have been able to analyse fifty-three manuscripts and fragments containing *Nítíða saga* (87% of the surviving prose copies). I did so by transcribing selected passages (the beginning, the end and a section showcasing geography) and noting the variants. I relied on samples instead of the entire text mainly in order to attain results most efficiently from an unwieldy amount of data. Alaric Hall has recently constructed a stemma of the romance *Konráðs saga keisarasonar* by comparing small text samples instead of recording all variants; he has, furthermore, found that this stemma is not necessarily
substantially different from previously published stemmata constructed through traditional methods of textual criticism, in terms of the resulting manuscript filiations (Hall and Parsons 2013). My methods were similar, though of course it was not possible to test my results against an existing stemma, except in only minor degrees where Nítíða saga’s manuscript tradition overlaps with those of other sagas (these are noted below). The work discussed here should accordingly be understood as an essential starting point for understanding the saga’s manuscript filiation, rather than a complete account. In addition to examining selected passages, I also recorded all variants of personal and place-names because of their great diagnostic potential. A variation on a name, for example, seems to provide evidence of the relatedness (or unrelatedness) of the manuscripts that do or do not include that variation. Whereas with common nouns scribes can rely on both their exemplars and context clues to establish their readings, for proper nouns, and especially for unfamiliar non-Icelandic names, scribes would need to rely most heavily on their exemplars, therefore increasing their chances of misunderstanding these names. I found that this combination of names and small text samples produced a manageable data set that was still diverse enough to yield meaningful results.

My analyses led me to identify six different manuscript groups, which I called simply A, B, C, D, E and F (McDonald Werronen 2013, 24–54; McDonald 2012a). As a secondary (and even broader) means of comparison, I was also able to divide all manuscripts into two groups according to the way the saga is structured: those that introduce all of the most important characters successively and then jump back and forth among them to present their adventures (what I call Structure 1), and those that introduce the main characters as the story progresses, so that, for example, King Livorius, although he is a crucial character, is not mentioned at all until the major adventures concerning King Ingi and the sons of King Soldán have already taken place (what I call Structure 2). Based on the dates of the manuscripts, Structure 1 is the older of the two, with Structure 2 appearing first in the eighteenth century. Additionally, the frequency of structures favours Structure 1, which appears in the manuscripts I studied 62% of the time, while Structure 2 appears only 38% of the time; it is not just older manuscripts that favour Structure 1, the youngest dating from the latter half of the nineteenth century. Groups A, C, F and part of Group B use Structure 1, while Groups D, E and the other part of Group B use Structure 2. Considering also the physical size of the manuscripts, only four are folio, while thirty-three are quarto, and eighteen octavo (the sizes of six, which I have yet to study, are unknown). The folio manuscripts
are all from the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, while the quartos span the sixteenth century to the twentieth, and the octavos range from the fifteenth century to the twentieth, but, not surprisingly, more of the octavos are later. The folios are relatively early, from a time when Icelandic sagas were being rediscovered and appreciated in Scandinavia, and copied accordingly as high-status texts, which, while not very portable, are very legible since their size allowed a large, clear script to be used (Springborg 1977, 53–89; Hall and Parsons 2013, fig. 15).

Scribes and locations of origin can be difficult to pin down with certainty, as many scribes did not leave colophons; even when they did it is not always possible to match names, dates and locations with precision, especially place names from earlier times. Of the manuscripts I have studied, scribal and/or geographical information has been obtainable for thirty-three manuscripts (about 53% of my sample). More manuscripts might be localised through further study, particularly of codicology, palaeography, and marginalia. While such an exhaustive analysis was outside the scope of the research resulting in this article, it will be a productive area for future, more detailed research in light of the present work’s significant findings. That said, some patterns have emerged from plotting known locations on a map, and these correspond to the textual groupings my other methods have established. The most striking patterns show Group A manuscripts being produced in the west, and Group E manuscripts in eastern Iceland (see Map 1). Group B’s distribution is concentrated, though not exclusively, in north-central Iceland.
In Table 1, I list all known manuscripts of the prose *Nítíða saga*, including, as a preliminary reference tool, the groups into which I have classified them. The oldest is a single-leaf vellum fragment from the end of the fifteenth century (Perg. 8vo 10 vii). There are two more vellums, both from the sixteenth century: AM 529 4to, which ends defective but is the primary manuscript used by Loth in her diplomatic edition of *Nítíða saga*; and AM 567 4to xviii, which only consists of two leaves and Loth uses to note variants in her edition. Loth also uses Papp. 4to 31 and AM 568 4to to note variants, and AM 537 4to as the edition’s secondary manuscript to continue the text where AM 529 4to ends. In the ‘Notes’ column of Table 1, I have indicated which manuscripts Loth has previously examined as stated in her preface to the fifth volume of *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances* (vii). It is generally among the later (post-1700) manuscripts that Groups C, D, E and F emerge, with more later manuscripts falling into these groups than the earlier Groups A and B. By far the greatest number of prose *Nítíða saga* manuscripts has survived from the nineteenth century. Twenty-four of the total sixty-one were written sometime in the 1800s, which is not surprising considering, for example, the proximity of that century to our own (fewer manuscripts may have been lost), along with rising rates of literacy, falling costs of materials (in some cases), and population growth, to name only a handful of factors. Additionally, the composing and reciting of sagas had not yet begun to decline as rapidly as happened in the twentieth century, from which only six manuscripts survive, all dating from the first decade or so of the 1900s. From the eighteenth century, fifteen manuscripts survive, which, again, is not to say that *Nítíða saga* was less popular then than in the nineteenth century, but that more eighteenth-century manuscripts may have been lost.

**Table 1. *Nítíða saga* Manuscripts by Date**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manuscript</th>
<th><em>Nítíða saga</em> date</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Current location</th>
<th><em>Nítíða saga</em> scribe</th>
<th>Location of origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perg. 8vo 10 vii</td>
<td>1475–1499</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>vellum; 1 leaf</td>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 529 4to</td>
<td>1500s</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>vellum; defective; Loth</td>
<td>Reykjavík</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 567 4to xviii</td>
<td>1500s</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>vellum; 2 leaves; Loth</td>
<td>Reykjavík</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papp. fol. 1</td>
<td>1600–1625</td>
<td>C?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td>Guðmundur</td>
<td>Guðmundsson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 537 4to</td>
<td>1600–1650</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Loth</td>
<td>Reykjavík</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 568 i–ii 6–7 4to</td>
<td>1600–1650</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Loth</td>
<td>Páll Jónsson</td>
<td>Snauífsstaður</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Table 1, I list all known manuscripts dating from the first decade or so of the 1900s. From the eighteenth century, composing and reciting of sagas had not yet begun to decline as rapidly as had happened in the twentieth century, from which only six manuscripts survive, which, again, is not to say that all dating from the first decade or so of the 1900s. From the eighteenth century, twenty-four of the total sixty-one were written sometime in the 1800s, which is not surprising considering, for example, the proximity of that century to our own (fewer manuscripts may have been lost), along with rising rates of literacy, falling costs of materials (in some cases), and population growth, to name only a handful of factors. Additionally, the volume of manuscripts Loth has previously examined as stated in her preface to the fifth edition. Loth also uses Papp. 4to 31 and AM 568 4to to note variants, and used by Loth in her diplomatic edition of Nítíða saga was AM 529 4to, which ends defective but is the primary manuscript by scribe Guðmundur Þorsteinsson (1640–86). I have brought to Sweden by scribe Jón Eggertsson (1643–89), which only consists of two leaves and Loth uses to note variants in her edition. It is not to say that more eighteenth-century manuscripts survive, which, again, is not to say that more eighteenth-century manuscripts may have been lost.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manuscript</th>
<th>Nítíða saga date</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Current location</th>
<th>Location of origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Papp. 4to 31</td>
<td>1650–89</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Loth; brought to Sweden by scribe</td>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td>Jón Eggertsson (1643–89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IB 201 8vo</td>
<td>c. 1661</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>1 leaf</td>
<td>Reykjavík</td>
<td>Halldór Hallsson</td>
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<tr>
<td>JS 27 fol.</td>
<td>1670</td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reykjavík</td>
<td>Hannes Gunnlaugsson (1640–86)</td>
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<td>Lbs 715 4to</td>
<td>1670–80</td>
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<td>defective</td>
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<td>Þórir Jónsson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Papp. 8vo 6 u</td>
<td>1674</td>
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<td>[not yet seen]</td>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td>Teitur Arngrímsson</td>
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<tr>
<td>JS 166 fol.</td>
<td>1679</td>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reykjavík</td>
<td>Þórir Jónsson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nks 1804 4to</td>
<td>1681</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>1 leaf</td>
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<tr>
<td>AM 582 4to</td>
<td>1692</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>2 leaves</td>
<td>Reykjavík</td>
<td>Grímur Árnason (1674–1704)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lbs 1172 4to</td>
<td>1700s</td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reykjavík</td>
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<tr>
<td>JS 625 4to</td>
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<td>IB 312 4to</td>
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<td>Benedikt lögmaðr Þorsteinsson (1688–1733)</td>
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<td>Suðurnes</td>
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<td>IB 132 8vo</td>
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<td>Reykjavík</td>
<td>Sigurður Magnússon (1720–1805?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Add. 4860 fol.</td>
<td>1750–81 (pre-1781)</td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Holt í Hornafirði</td>
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<td>IB 138 4to</td>
<td>1750–1799</td>
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<td>Reykjavík</td>
<td>Hólar í Hjaltadal</td>
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<td>Rask 32 [4to]</td>
<td>1756–67</td>
<td>A</td>
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<td>Copenhagen</td>
<td>Ólafur Gíslason (1727–1801)</td>
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<td>JS 56 4to</td>
<td>1760</td>
<td>D</td>
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<td>Vellir, Skagafjörður</td>
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The Older Manuscript Tradition of Nítíða saga

Table: Manuscript Details

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manuscript</th>
<th>Nítíða saga date</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<td>D</td>
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<td>1799–1800</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Reykjavík</td>
<td>Ölaflur Jónsson (1722–1800)</td>
<td>Reykjavík</td>
<td>Arney, Dalasýsla</td>
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<tr>
<td>IBR 47 4to</td>
<td>1800s</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Reykjavík</td>
<td>Jón Sigurðsson</td>
<td>Reykjavík</td>
<td>Háihóll, Mýrasýsla</td>
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<td>Lbs 1137 8vo</td>
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<td>A</td>
<td>Reykjavík</td>
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<td>Reykjavík</td>
<td>Húíkonarstað í Jökudali</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lbs 1305 8vo</td>
<td>1820</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Reykjavík</td>
<td>Porstein Gíslason</td>
<td>Reykjavík</td>
<td>Stokkahlaðir, Eyjafjarðarsýsla</td>
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<td>Fiske Ic F75 A125</td>
<td>1824</td>
<td></td>
<td>defective</td>
<td>Reykjavík</td>
<td>Ithaca, NY</td>
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<td>ÍB 277 4to</td>
<td>1833–34</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Reykjavík</td>
<td>Gunnlaugur Jónsson</td>
<td>Reykjavík</td>
<td>Skuggabjörg, Skagafjardarsýsla</td>
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<td>Lbs 1711 8vo</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Reykjavík</td>
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<td>Háíkonarstað í Jökudali</td>
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3 Wick (1996, 275) names Álöf Magnúsdóttir of Skarð, Austrahreppur as this manuscript’s scribe. However, this does not seem certain, as Álöf’s name appears in the manuscript, but not as a colophon.
<table>
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<th>Manuscript</th>
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**Group A**

The first of the two groups I will now discuss in detail is Group A, which comprises twelve manuscripts: AM 567 4to xviii (1500s), *AM 568 i–ii

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4 The version of the saga in this manuscript is unclassifiable, as large parts of it bear no resemblance to any of the other manuscripts. For example, Nítíða is said to be the daughter of Vilhjálmr of France and Elidá of Hungary, and the saga includes a lengthy back-story to the more familiar plot. The manuscript’s scribe, Magnús Jónsson í Tjaldanesi, is known to have rewritten sagas from memory, often changing them deliberately in the process. This seems to be the case for Nítíða saga in Lbs 1510 4to (Driscoll 2012; Driscoll 1997, 55–64).

5 Localisable manuscripts here and later in the article are preceded by an asterisk at first mention.
6–7 4to (1600–1650), Lbs 715 4to (1670–80), *JS 166 fol. (1679), *Lbs 644 4to (1730–31), *Rask 32 (1756–67), ÍB 116 4to (1786–94), *JS 632 4to (1799–1800), *Lbs 1137 8vo (1819/20), *Lbs 998 4to (c. 1860), *Lbs 3966 4to (1870–71), *Lbs 3165 4to (1870–71). In each of these manuscripts the saga is written according to Structure 1 mentioned above, and, most significantly, all of them make explicit reference to the late medieval Icelandic romance Nikulás saga leikara (edited and translated in Wick 1996) as the saga is drawn to a close. In Lbs 715 the ending has not survived, but based on other similarities to this group (e.g. opening passages and names) it is very likely that had the ending survived, there would be a reference to Nikulás saga leikara there as well. The ending as it is in JS 166 can be seen as representative of the ending in almost all of the Group A manuscripts:

Livoriús kongrur & meykongrur stýrdu Franns vel & lengri, þau áttu sier ágíet born 4. sonu & 2. dætur. Ryggarður hét þeirra ellste son, eppter mödur födur sýnum, er sýðann stýrde Fracklande med allann heidur og sæmd, enn hann son hét Haustus, er vann Ungaria med her skyllde & seigát fornar näkur ad hám hafe vered fadir Niculausar leykara, er vann sýdir eignadest böttir kongsinnz af Grycklande Walldemarz, huor ed hiet Dormá huorum kvennkoste hann näde medur med brógðummr, þö hun være em viliug, sem seigir j sógu hann. Hann annarra barna Livoriús kongz & Niteda frægu er eit giefed. Og liúkkumm vier hier med þessa sögu, af Niteda frægu & hennar bróytelegummr brógðummr. (JS 166, f. 190r)

King Livorius and the maiden-king ruled France long and well. They had excellent children: four sons and two daughters. Their eldest son was called Rígarður, after his mother’s father, and he ruled France with all honour. And his son was called Faustus, who won Hungary by harrying, and old books say that he had been the father of Nikulás leikari (‘trickster’), who at last married the daughter of Valdemar king of Greece, who is called Dorma, whom he got as a match through tricks—although she had been willing—as it says in his story. And about the names of the other children of King Livorius and Nítídá the Famous nothing is related. And here we end this saga of Nítídá the Famous and her various tricks.

Making Nítídá and Livorius the great-grandparents of Nikulás leikari sets a firm connection between the two texts. From this evidence one can suggest that these two sagas were considered related in certain aspects of theme, style or characterisation, or a combination of these, by those who heard or read them, or at least by those who copied them (cf. McDonald 2012b; McDonald Werronen 2013, 64–65, 102–16). This very detailed reference must be an established part of this group of manuscripts: in JS 166 it was not included in order to provide a smooth transition to the following text. Nikulás saga leikara does not appear in this particular manuscript at all, though it does occur in manuscript with Nítídá saga in other Group A manuscripts (AM 568, JS 632, Lbs 3966, Lbs 998 and Rask 32). Further, within Group A
manuscripts, when both sagas do occur together, Nikulás saga leikara is often adjacent to Nítíða saga, suggesting the two were transmitted together.

The ending of Nítíða saga, however, does not contain as many details in AM 568 and ÍB 116, which seem to form their own branch apart from the others. Textual differences that separate these two manuscripts include the fact that while at the end Faustus is named as a son of Nítíða and Livorius and the father of Nikulás leikari, no further mention of Nikulás saga leikara is made, leaving out reference to other characters seen in the example above (Dorma and Valdemar):

Livorius kongur & meýkongur styrdu Fracklandi átta þau gu ser ágiæt 4a syne & 2 dætur Rýgardur hiet hans elsti son eftir modur fodur sýnum er sydan stýrd Fracklandi med heidre & soma, einn sonur hans hiet Faustus hann vann Ungaria med herskilldi, seigia bækar hann vered hafa fódur Niculasar leikra, og endum wier so þessa sögu. (ÍB 116, f. 103r)

King Livorius and the maiden-king ruled France. They had excellent children, four sons and two daughters. Their eldest son was called Rígarður after his mother’s father, and later ruled France with honour. His one son was called Faustus; he took Hungary through battle, and books say he had been father of Nikulás leikari. And thus we finish this saga.

AM 568 and ÍB 116 are also united by naming Nítíða’s smith and introducing him near the beginning (which other manuscripts do not do), by calling the island that Nítíða travels to Visia instead of Visio, and by making Livorius’ disguised identity Eskilvardur of Numidia (in ÍB 116; AM 568 is badly tattered here) rather than Mundia.

All of the other Group A manuscripts can be placed together in another branch, showing a similar beginning and ending naming not only Nikulás leikari as a grandson of Nítíða and Livorius, but also detailing his bridal-quest exploits. Other demonstrable relationships in this main subgroup include Lbs 715 and JS 166, which, both being copied by Þórdur Jónsson (fl. 1667–93) and almost identical copies at that, are clearly closely related. The text in Rask 32 is also related to that in JS 166 owing to a number of shared variants, the latter possibly being copied from the former, or perhaps with an intermediary manuscript between them. JS 632, Lbs 1137 and Lbs 998 form a further subgroup, and Lbs 3966 and Lbs 3165 make another rather late pair, both having the same scribe and containing virtually identical texts. It is not clear at present whether one is copied from the other, or whether, instead, they both share an exemplar.

Considering the beginning, the texts in Group A all open with the phrase

Hier mega unger menn heyra hystoriu og fagra frásögu af eimre fegurstre könö döttur er hiet Nitedä hin fræga, & var hin allra kurteýslegasta, hún stýrde
Here young people can hear a history and beautiful tale of the most beautiful princess, who is called Nítíða the Famous, and was the most courteous of all. She ruled her kingdom, France, with honour after her father Emperor Rígarður died.

Minor variations occur in some manuscripts, such as the addition of an adjective or switching of the word order, as in *agiæt fräsøgu & fagra historiu* ‘excellent tale and beautiful history’ (ÍB 116, f. 93r), but the most distinctive aspects of this opening are the words *hér* ‘here’ and *historia* ‘history’, which only ever appear in *Nítíða saga*’s opening in Group A texts.

Figure 1 provides a possible rough stemma for the whole group. Where Lbs 644 and Rask 32 fit in relation to JS 632 and the later manuscripts is also uncertain, and it would require further detailed collation of larger text samples to unravel the intricacies of these relationships. Overall, the groupings I have arrived at through comparison of small samples are generally consistent with previous considerations of certain manuscript relationships, which focused on different romances such as *Dínus saga Drambláta* (Jónas Kristjánsson 1960, vii–xlvi), *Sigurðar saga turnara* (Spaulding 1982, 93–110), and *Konráðs saga keisarasonar* (Hall and Parsons 2013; Zitzelsberger 1981).
The Older Manuscript Tradition of Nítíða saga

The location of origin is known for nine of the Group A manuscripts (see Map 1); nearly all of these come from the north-western region of Iceland, and in particular the Westfjords and Dales areas. There is a strong cluster of manuscripts along the coast of Dalasýsla and Austur-Dalasýsla. Considering that this group is one of the oldest Nítíða saga manuscript groups, it is not surprising that Stefán Einarsson hypothesised that Nítíða saga, along with three other romances and more legendary sagas, originated in Reykhólar in Breiðafjörður in the Westfjords (1966, 272).

Group B

Group B includes thirteen manuscripts: Perg. 8vo 10 vii (1450×1499), AM 529 4to (1500s), AM 537 4to (1600×1650), Papp. 4to 31 (1650×1689), *ÍB 201 8vo (c. 1661), *JS 27 fol. (1670), *AM 582 4to (1692), *Add. 4860 fol. (1750×1781), Lbs 1172 4to (1700s), *ÍB 312 4to (1726), *ÍB 138 4to (1750×1799), ÍBR 47 4to (1800s). None makes any connection to Nikulás saga leikara, but the opening phrases are somewhat similar to those of Group A:

Eyr et vnger menn eitt æfintyr & fagra frasaugn fr hinum frægasta meykongi er verit hefur j nordur haalfu veralldarinar er hiet Nitida hin fræga er styrdi sinu riki medur heidur og soma epter sinn fedur Rikon keisara andadan (AM 529, f. 30v).

Hear, young people, an adventure and beautiful tale, about the most beautiful maiden-king who has been in the northern part of the world, who is called Nítíða the Famous, and who ruled her kingdom with honour after her father Emperor Ríkon died.

The word marking out this group’s beginning is æfintyr ‘adventure’, which only appears in Group B. The group can, however, be divided into two main subgroups (see Figure 2).

The oldest manuscripts (except Papp. 4to 31) comprise one subgroup. While Perg. 8vo 10 vii, the very oldest, is unfortunately only fragmentary, comparison with other Group B manuscripts indicates that it could be the parent of this subgroup, which can be further divided. AM 537 and AM 582 end briefly, mentioning Nítíða and Livorius’s son only:

Liv(orius) og m(ey)k(ongur) styrdú Fracklande, attú þaú agiæt børn, son er Rikon hiet epter sinum möður fðður er sidann stírð Fracklande med heidur og soma efer þeirra dag. og lykur so þessú æfentyre af hinne frægú Nitida og Livorio konge (AM 537, f. 8v).

Livorius and the maiden-king ruled France. They had excellent children, [including] a son who was called Rikon after his mother’s father, [and] who
afterward ruled France with honour after their day. And thus ends this adventure of the famous Nítíða and king Livorius.

AM 529 and ÍB 201, while lacking endings, show enough other similarities to AM 537 and AM 582 to warrant them a place in this subgroup as well. The texts employ Structure 1 and include names that distinguish them from others such as Hippolitus, Egidia, Hugon of Miklagarður, and Nítíða’s servant-woman Íversa (who is not named in any of the other manuscripts). Alternatively, JS 27 and Add. 4860 comprise another pair (cf. Jónas Kristjánsson 1960, xxxii), with a slightly different ending that places more emphasis on Livorius than on Nítíða:

Livorjús kongur ok Nit<eda> hin fræga únntúst leinge ok vel, þötti Livorjús kongr hinu mesti hofdinge, ok var vinsæll huar sem hann kom fram, ok lükúmm vier þar söu saúghúnnís af Nitedu frægú (JS 27, f. 314r).

King Livorius and Nítíða the famous loved each other long and well. King Livorius was thought the best chieftain, and was victorious wherever he went. And so there we end the saga of Nítíða the Famous.

Further, this pair lists the various countries seen in Nítíða’s magic stones, and the places listed are a bit different from those in Group A, including, for example, Egypt.

**Figure 2. Group B Manuscripts**

In another subgroup of Group B, possibly deriving from the late seventeenth-century Papp. 4to 31, the texts are composed with Structure 2, and, significantly, none of them names any countries when looking in Nítíða’s magic stones. Instead of the more common *three stones–three looks* pattern exhibited in Group A (and some other younger groups),
there are four separate looks into four separate stones, covering all four cardinal directions:

\[
\text{M(ey)K(ongur) teckur þá upp eirn steinn, } \& \text{ lýta þau i haun, } \& \text{ siá þaug þa alla nördur álfa heimsen} \text{u } \ldots \text{ hun tok þá upp annan steinn } \& \text{ sau þaug um alla vestur álfa heimsen} \text{n } \ldots \text{ hun tok þá upp 3a steinen, } \& \text{ sau þaug nu um sudur alfuna alla } \ldots \text{ hun tekr } \text{ þa fiórd steinen } \& \text{ sau þaug þa um alla austur álfa heimsen} \text{n (IB 312, pp. 23–24)}
\]

The maiden-king then took up one stone, and they looked in it, and they then saw all the northern region of the world . . . she then took up a second stone and they saw throughout all the western region of the world . . . she then took up a third stone, and they saw now throughout all the southern region . . . she then took a fourth stone and they then saw throughout all the eastern region of the world.

Where Group A and the other Group B subgroup actually list the countries seen in each region of the world,\(^6\) here we see only the regions in general. Additionally, the majority of manuscripts in this subgroup include other significant differences in names, such as the absence of a named smith, no father named for Livorius or Ingi (who is here from Miklagarður í Grikklandi), Idia (instead of Egidia), Aldryfa (instead of Alduria), and Eskilvardur of Mundialand. This subgroup also has a much more abrupt ending, which eliminates any mention of children:

\[
\text{enn ad veitslunne endadré [voru] aller burt leister med godum Giófum og feingú gott heimfarar leífe, og ender so þessa sógu af Nitida hinne frægu (Lbs 1172, f. 144v).}
\]

and when the feast ended everyone was sent away with good gifts and parted well for home; and so ends this saga of Nítíða the Famous.\(^7\)

It still begins in the same way as the rest of Group B, however. As seen in Figure 2, I have posited a lost \(^8\)B from which both subgroups descend (as I have also for Group A in Figure 1), instead of considering the fragmentary Perg. 8vo 10 vii as the group’s original text because it seems impossible

\(^6\) For example, in Group A, JS 166 lists the following countries: Frackland, Gasconia, Hispania, Galicia, Flandren, Noreg, Danmørk, Eingland, Indiáland, Falstina [‘Palestine’, cf. AM 568, Lbs 1137, and Group A MSS], Asia, Serkland (f. 188r). In Group B, AM 537 lists Frackland, Provintiam, Ravenam, Spaniam, Hallitiam [‘Galicia’, see McDonald 2012b, 313–14], Friisland, Flandren, Nordmandiam, Skottland, Grickland, Noreg, Ysland, Färeýar, Sudureýar, Orkneyar, Svíþiod, Danmork, Eingland, Ýrland, Indialand, Palestinam, Asi- am, Serkland (f. 6v).

\(^7\) The verb voru is here supplied from ÍB 138, f. 115v.
to demonstrate it to be the original without a much closer examination of the Group B manuscripts.

While ÍBR 47 seems to be related to the other manuscripts in this subgroup, considering its structure and the form of certain passages of text like the magic stones scene, there are also a number of significant differences, which both separate it from Group B as a whole and also connect it to at least one of the later groups, Group D. ÍBR 47 shares with the oldest Group D manuscript, JS 56 (see Table 1), a variation on the name Livorius—it becomes Liprius/Lifrius. The two texts also share an unusual variation on the saga’s ending, where Nítíða’s son is sent to rule India and so manage his parents’ two separate kingdoms in that way, instead of from France as in other versions: *son er Rigardur het, hann sendi hann til Indialands ogvard þar kongur yfir síðann* ‘a son who was called Rigardur; he sent him to India and there became king afterwards’ (ÍBR 47, p. 223). The *four regions* structure of the magic stones scene is also shared, though this is of course common to the wider Group B as well. These similarities suggest that at least part of Group B is related to Group D. Unfortunately it is outside the scope of this article to discuss these connections further.

Seven Group B manuscripts are localisable, but no especially significant patterns or clusters are evident from the geographical distribution (see Map 1). The seven locations cover four separate areas (including both the Westfjords and the north of Iceland relatively near to the episcopal seat of Hólar), and this appears to be more or less typical of early modern Icelandic manuscript distribution (cf. Springborg 1977, 57–81; Hall and Parsons 2013, fig. 14.2). Further research is needed, however, to make more conclusive arguments about the geographical distribution and origins of Group B.⁸

**Conclusions**

As a means of summarising visually what I have described in this article, Figure 3 shows a full, though tentative, stemma of the two groups I have discussed in this article. The stemma, I should emphasise, is only meant to be a rough approximation of various relationships among the manuscripts. In addition to mapping out possible relationships between and among manuscripts, the stemma also shows that both Groups A and B can be understood to descend from a lost medieval ‘original’ *Nítíða*

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⁸ For a brief case study that touches on aspects of the Group B manuscript Add. 4860’s history and provenance see McDonald Werronen 2013, 69–76.
saga represented in the diagram by X, and that were someone to attempt to reconstruct this (which is not something I aim to do), both branches of the stemma would be valuable in representing that medieval ‘original’ *Nítíða saga.*

Overall, this article has demonstrated the existence of two early versions of the romance Nítíða saga. One version, whose manuscripts I label Group A, probably originated in north-western Iceland. I have shown how the saga’s transmission and reception was far more complicated than simply repeated copying of a single text. The fuller manuscript tradition of Nítíða saga remains complex, with up to six different groups of manuscripts, which are laid out in Table 1. The story of Nítíða not only survived, but thrived throughout Iceland in a variety of milieux and a variety of versions, for hundreds of years after its late medieval composition, its popularity and success reflected in its diverse manuscript context, the whole of which can only be fully understood after further research. Considering some of the variation evident in just part of Nítíða saga’s manuscript tradition has, it is hoped, facilitated a better understanding of the romance’s reception and transmission history; I also hope that this case provokes further curiosity and questions about the reception and transmission of the various other late medieval Icelandic romances that also survive in large numbers of manuscripts. We ought not take for granted that romances are preserved in single textual versions—and especially those surviving in excess of fifty, sixty or even seventy manuscripts. While some work in this area is under way (including my own more detailed investigation of the wider manuscript tradition of Nítíða saga, touched upon only briefly here), the textual criticism of other romance sagas and a more general consideration of late medieval and early modern scribal networks remain significant and fruitful areas for future research.

Note: This research was possible thanks to a grant from the Viking Society’s Support Fund awarded in 2011, allowing me to travel to Iceland to study the majority of the manuscripts discussed in this article. I must also thank Alaric Hall, Matthew Driscoll, Alexandra Petrulevich, David Baker and Nicola Lugosch-Baker for their help in various capacities during the course of this research.
Figure 3. The Two Earliest Groups of Nítíða saga Manuscripts
Bibliography


