

RÍMUR-DERIVED PROSE: JÓNATAS SAGA (summary)

One of the neglected areas of Icelandic literature encompasses the post medieval saga retreads, prose narratives derived from rímur. The existence of similar tales indebted to Krossrímur, Hemings rímur and Óedraunir indicates that it may be meaningful to talk about these tales in terms of a literary genre.

The importance of such reworkings may lie in what they can tell us about seventeenth- and eighteenth-century prose compositions, since the poetic sources can supply the storyline, but not the prose style to any great degree.

Jónatas saga provides a good example of how such works can be examined with respect to their sources. There are numerous instances of information being omitted by the saga (including one passage of 13 stanzas in the first ríma). To a lesser degree the saga may add information, but such additions are usually confined to minor embellishments. While the order of events in the poetic version is generally preserved in the prose version, there are a small number of minor transpositions. It should also be noted that of the three rímur in the source, the prose rendering of the last is as long as the other two combined.

Although the saga avoids the kennings of the rímur, there are several instances of rather close verbal parallels and a few examples of apparent attempts to circumlocute. Of especial stylistic interest are those passages where the younger saga employs alliteration not present in the source or when the prose rendering replaces a common Icelandic word with a borrowed one.

When such criteria are applied to other rímur-derived sagas, it should be possible to compare different members of the group, showing the proclivities of individual authors in following and/or deserting their poetic sources.

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