

Histoire des rois de Norvège, par Snorri Sturluson. Deuxième partie. Traduit du vieil islandais, introduit et annoté par François-Xavier Dillmann. Paris: Gallimard (L'aube des peuples) 2022. ISBN 978-2-07-075876-0 + 15 ill. 1245 pp.

Good things are worth waiting for. The first volume of François-Xavier Dillmann's French translation of *Heimskringla*, Snorri Sturluson's collection of sagas about the rulers of Norway from pre-historic times to the late twelfth century, was published in the year 2000. It contained the first sagas of the compendium, from *Ynglinga saga* to *Ólaf's saga Tryggvasonar*. Now, more than two decades later, the second volume is available to franco-phone readers all over the world. It contains the longest and most celebrated of the sagas that form *Heimskringla*: *Ólaf's saga helga*, or the Saga of Saint Ólafr Haraldsson. Ólafr's reign started ca. 995 and ended on July 29th 1030 when he was killed in the battle of Stiklestad in the region of Trøndelag. A missionary king, Ólafr has been credited with the conversion of Norway to Christianity. Soon after his death, claims of sanctity were made on his behalf, leading to his becoming the patron saint of Norway, which he still is.

As is true of the first volume of Dillmann's translation of *Heimskringla*, this one is much more than just that. Indeed, less than 400 of its more than 1200 pages are devoted to his rendering in French of Snorri's great work. The rest is composed of a useful introduction (64 pages), extensive notes (650 pages), as well as a detailed bibliography, maps, indices, and illustrations. One could therefore say that, in addition to his translation, the author is offering to his readers a compendium of most of what there is to know about Snorri's *Ólaf's saga helga*. I am not aware of any such undertaking in other languages and wish that more scholars and aficionados of Old Norse-Icelandic literature could read French to be able to profit from this admirable and valuable piece of work.

The introduction contains a complete presentation of *Ólaf's saga helga*, transmitted in the manuscripts in two versions, a *Separate Saga of Saint Ólafr* and the one incorporated into *Heimskringla*. Snorri seems to have composed the former one first, the latter having been shortened with minor changes

Tulinius, Torfi H. 2023. Rev. of François-Xavier Dillmann (ed.). *Histoire des rois de Norvège, par Snorri Sturluson. Deuxième partie.* *Scripta Islandica* 73: 101–104.

© Torfi H. Tulinius (CC BY)
DOI: 10.33063/diva-499573

being made to it. Dillmann describes the antecedents of the two versions in the development of saga writing as well as the use the author makes of his different sources: written, poetic and oral. This is followed by a chapter on the historical value of Snorri's account of Ólafr's reign, in which the author expresses a greater belief in the authenticity of many of the events of the saga, than members of the hypercritical school of the last century were prepared to accept. Though not mentioned in Dillmann's introduction, nor included in his bibliography, the recent development of memory studies in Old Norse studies has provided much nuance on the issue of the historicity of the sagas, especially those who are written two to three centuries after the events they portray are said to have taken place. This approach, pioneered in Old Norse studies by Pernille Hermann, Jürg Glauser and Stephen A. Mitchell, but inspired by the works of Maurice Halbwachs as well as Jan and Aleida Assmann, has allowed a better understanding of the function of memory in societies, especially those with limited literacy. Dillmann's position is therefore more in line with general thinking on the relationship between the sagas and historical fact now than it was twenty years ago, when the first volume of his translation of *Heimskringla* was published.

The chapter on historical value is followed by a well-written analysis of Snorri's work as a master of narrative. As in the previous sections of the introduction, its strength lies not so much in the novelty of the author's views as in the quality of his presentation. One of the ways in which he proceeds is by comparing how Snorri uses episodes recounted in previous writings but dramatizes them with more psychological acuity and a greater dramatic effect than the authors he relies upon. Other scenes are unique to Snorri, for example the famous game of chess between the Danish King Knútr and Úlfr, the earl of Scania. Úlfr refuses to allow Knútr to take back a terrible move he has just made and upends the chessboard before storming out of the hall. He is subsequently killed by order of the king. Dillmann discusses possible literary models for the episode but concludes that its artistry is due to the story-telling talent of Snorri. Overall, he gives a complete and convincing presentation of Snorri's qualities as an author.

The final section of the introduction is a presentation of the translation. It is mostly based on Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson's edition for Íslenzk fornrit, though he also uses readings from other manuscripts, if they seem better. In some cases, he chooses readings that allow a more fluid translation into French. He also simplifies names of places and people. More often than not, he prefers modern Norwegian toponyms to the Old Icelandic forms, saying rightly that it gives the reader an opportunity to follow the

movements of the saga characters on a map. Names of persons are usually rendered without the Old Icelandic inflectional endings and by replacing the special letters with French ones. In one respect, Dillmann's approach differs from other translators of Old Norse-Icelandic texts into French. As in the previous volume, he chooses to render the patronyms of the original by translating them rather than reproducing them. Where another translator would, for example, write Olaf Haraldsson, Dillmann prefers Olaf Fils Harald, which means "son of Harald". In modern French, one would rather say "fils de Harald", the omission of the article "de" being warranted by usage in medieval French, where sons of noblemen are named in this way. Dillmann's method has its advantages, though it does take some getting used to, as one is accustomed to the Old Norse forms of the names of characters such as Erlingr Skjálgsson who becomes Erling Fils Skjalg. It does however clarify the filial relations implied in the patronyms, which are less obvious to a French reader than to readers of English or Germanic languages. The disadvantage is that it might confuse readers of Old Icelandic texts translated by others, who do not use Dillmann's method, and for that matter also readers of translated modern works.

Dillmann's translation itself reads very well. It is clear, precise and does justice to the elegance of Snorri's style. The present reviewer has not found any example of mistakes or inconsistencies. This is not surprising given the care with which he works.

Readers with a scholarly bent will find that the extensive notes are the most valuable part of the work. As said earlier, they exceed by far in volume the size of the text itself. Such a huge amount of information needs organizing and Dillmann's way of doing that is methodical and easily understandable. Each chapter has its body of endnotes introduced by a short presentation of its contents and major philological issues concerning the text and its interpretation, such as differences between major text-witnesses or the relationship of the chapter with older versions of *Ólafs saga*. This is followed by the endnotes themselves, which usually serve to clarify what is being told in the main text, for example with information on topography, or on the relationship with other parts. In order not to overburden the notes, bibliographical information is given in footnotes to the endnotes. This way of proceeding might seem complex but is in fact quite limpid when one begins using it. Though some scholars might miss references to the most recent contributions to king's sagas studies, there is no doubt that, as a whole, the endnotes with their introduction and footnotes form a reservoir of knowledge that is unequalled.

In addition to providing his readers with a new and excellent translation of Snorri Sturluson's great biography of Saint Ólafr Haraldsson, one could therefore also say that François-Xavier Dillmann has given them the best possible guide to the work, alas only available to the happy few who are able to read French.

Torfi H. Tulinius

University of Iceland

Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies

ORCID iD: 0009-0005-4659-4478