

ON THE LITERARY FATE OF WORKS BY SULTAN VELED

Shaykh Mehmed Bahaeddin Sultan Veled (1226—1312), the son of the famous Şūfī and poet, Jelaleddin Rumi [1], was the author of works in Persian, Anatolian Turkic, and Greek, and one of the first Asia Minor poets who wrote his verses in Turkic. Thanks to the latter, he is considered the “patriarch of Turkish literature” [2]. The first European Orientalist to research Sultan Veled's literary legacy was J. von Hammer (1774—1856), whose verdict was that there was no demand for works by this poet and, consequently, they lacked popularity. Hammer wrote that “the *Mathnawī* of Sultan Veled, by virtue of its poetic insignificance, remained as unknown in the lands of the East as the *Mathnawī* of Jelaleddin Rumi was famed” [3]. The basis for this comment was the small number of copies of Sultan Veled's works known to Hammer at the time and their rarity in European repositories, which lead to the Austrian Orientalist's final judgment: “The rarity of manuscripts by Sultan Veled must be explained by a lack of demand for them” [4]. Both of these conclusions — that Sultan Veled's works were unpopular and that they lack aesthetic or artistic value — were applied by Hammer to both the Persian and Turkic works of the poet from Konya.

Since Hammer's time the question of whether there was demand for works by Sultan Veled, in other words, the question of how popular his Persian and Turkic poetry was in medieval Turkey, has not been treated by Orientalists. In effect, Hammer's opinion was not refuted and — in essence — accepted. The bulk of researchers joined Hammer in his negative evaluation of the literary worth of Sultan Veled's works and his Turkish verses in particular. Among Western scholars, M. Wickerhauser stressed that these “verses are of philological, but not poetic, value” [5]; among Russian scholars, A. E. Krymsky held that Sultan Veled “only had enough ability for a bit more than 150 distichs” [6], while among Turkish scholars Ahmed Kabaklı called the poet a “limited didact” [7] and M. Mansuroğlu stated that Sultan Veled's Turkic verses “lack artistic value” [8].

Among these conclusions E. Gibb's seems to be more objective and accurate. In his “History of Ottoman Poetry”, he wrote that in Turkic verses by Veled there is “no attempt at literary grace of any kind. They are written in correct enough meter in the Turkish fashion, and the lines rhyme with sufficient accuracy, and that is all” [9]. More recent W. Björkman's view is more constructive: “Although the Turkic verses of Sultan Veled are not highly poetic, they are perfect”. “His art created a school”, he adds [10].

Thus, Hammer's evaluation has not been shaken to this day. Obscurity, insufficient demand, and a lack of popularity must indicate that this literary work did not play any sort of noticeable role in the literary process, which stems from the above-mentioned assertions and the description of his legacy as “poetically void”. But a closer glance at the poet's legacy in the Persian and Turkic languages shows that such judgments should be reconsidered.

The present article attempts to reconstruct in general terms the literary fate of Sultan Veled's works and the particular features of their reception by readers in medieval Turkey. Our aim is to determine how popular and widely distributed Sultan Veled's poetry was in the Muslim East and to examine the attitude of medieval readers toward his work. This task also led us to consider certain methodological questions.

Readers' attitudes toward a literary work in the medieval Muslim East are revealed in a number of factors. Taken together, they provide fairly objective criteria for evaluating the popularity of a work — how intensively it functioned at the time in the given social and literary setting to which it was addressed. The most important of these factors is the distribution of copies of the work. As the great expert in Muslim manuscripts remarks: “The extent of a work's distribution and its interaction with readers are related phenomena: the number of copies depends directly on how readers assessed the work's significance and virtues” [11]. But when interpreting this factor, two instances need to be distinguished. The first is when an indisputably significant number of copies (dozens or more) is attested within broad chronological borders, which is sufficient to make a firm conclusion. But if one finds isolated copies, additional information and more cautious conclusions are needed. For example, the poem *Kutadġu bilig* (“Beneficial Knowledge”) by Yusuf Balasaġuni (11th century) has come down to us in only three copies. Nonetheless, we have every reason to believe that this masterpiece of Turkic poetry, which “reflected in a clear and highly artistic form those universal ideas, ideals, and thoughts that have concerned all peoples at all times” [12], was very popular in its time. Evidence of this is both the existence of these three copies in three different places in the Muslim world (Herat, Cairo, Namangan) and the continuation of the traditions of “Beneficial Knowledge” by subsequent Turkic authors [13].

Further, one must take into account that the popularity and broad distribution reflected by a large number of copies