

Central Eurasian Studies  
The Yasavi Sufi Tradition  
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This course will survey the history and legacy of the Yasavi Sufi tradition in Central Asia. This tradition represents one of the most important religious currents in Central Asia over the past eight centuries, and provides a convenient vantage point from which to explore more general tendencies and problems in the religious history of Islamic Central Asia. The Yasavi tradition is generally known as the major mystical tradition among the Turks of Central Asia, and is best known in connection with the magnificent shrine complex built by Timur, at the end of the 14th century, in honor of its "founder," Khoja Ahmad Yasavi, and with the "Divan-i hikmat," the collection of Turkic mystical poetry ascribed to Ahmad Yasavi; there is much more to the Yasavi tradition, however, and exploring its history provides an unparalleled window on the religious history of Islamic Central Asia. Following introductory lectures on the state of Yasavi studies and on the background to the emergence of the Yasavi tradition, we will look more closely at the body of sources at our disposal for Yasavi history; we will then turn to the "founder" himself, Khoja Ahmad Yasavi, exploring his chronology, traditions about his life and Sufi training, and issues surrounding his followers and literary legacy. Special attention will be devoted to tracing the development of natural and spiritual descent lines linked to Yasavi from the 13th to the 15th century, the pivotal era for the formation of Sufi orders in Central Asia. Next we will follow the major Yasavi transmission lines (silsilahs) from the 16th century on, with an emphasis upon the emergence of a Yasavi hagiographical tradition. Following a brief look at evocations of the Yasavi legacy outside Central Asia--especially Anatolia--we will evaluate the impact of the Yasavi tradition in Central Asian literature, in political and economic affairs, and in popular religious lore and practice; and finally, we will consider the contemporary revival of Ahmad Yasavi's image in post-Soviet Central Asia.