



Fahir İz

(20.07.2002)

(This encyclopaedia article is quoted from, The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition, Edited by: H. A. R. Gibb, J. H. Kramers, E. Levi-Provençal, J. Schacht, Volume I, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1986, pp. 298-299)

Turkish Sufi shaykh of Central Asia. His life story is shrouded in legend like those of many popular saints. Son of a certain Shaykh Ibrahim, he was born at Sayram (Isfidjab) in Turkistan during the second half of the 11th century. He lost his father at the age of seven and the family settled at Yasi. There he began his education (it is said as a disciple of Arslan Baba), later moving to Bukhara where he became a disciple of the great shaykh Yusuf Hamadhan, and eventually succeeded him in 555/1160. He returned to and remained in Yasi until his death in 562/1166.

Ahmad Yasawi's tomb became a place of pilgrimage for kings and princes and was especially venerated by the Turks at Central Asia and Volga region. A sumptuous mausoleum was erected in Yasi (later known as Turkistan) by Timur (see Yasi) and the cult of Yasawi has never decreased. Among the Turkish nomads Yasawi's doctrine was adapted to local trends and was strongly influenced by pre-islamic Turkish creeds and rituals. The shaykh's first khalifa was Arslan Baba's son, Mansur Ata (d. 594/1197) great grandfather of Zengi Ata (q.v.); the second Said Ata (d. 615/1218), the third Hakim Ata (q.v) (d. 582/1188). His other successors also bore the title of Ata. Yasawism established itself in Eastern Turkistan, later spread to Mawara al-nahr, Kharizm, as far as Bulghar, Khurasan, and Persia, and penetrated into Anatolia with the migration of Yasawi shaykhs, among whom Hadjdi Bektash and Sari Saltuk (qq. v) are

outstanding.

We know that Ahmad Yasawi wrote vernacular Turkish verse in the old syllabic metre in order to popularize and spread his mystic doctrine. But the poems to be found in the extant collection called Diwan-i Hikmet attributed to him (hikmet= religious poem), can hardly be genuine. The original work of Ahmad Yasawi has not come down to us and the oldest MSS belong to the 17th century. But we can safely assert that these poems reproduce the true spirit and style of Ahmad Yasawi, since we know that the verses of many a mystic leader were often faithfully imitated, for centuries, by later disciples (cf. Yunus Emre and his followers). The poems in the Diwan-i Hikmet are of didactic character and express, in popular language Islamic and mystic precepts. They gave rise to a new genre in Turkish literature: mystic folk literature which, in the following centuries, flourished side by side with secular folk literature and classical literature.