

The Turkish Writer Sâmiha Ayverdi (1905–1993) and Her Dream of the Ottoman Past*

Annemarie Schimmel,¹ as in so many fields, was also an expert on Ottoman-Turkish literature and an excellent translator of Ottoman-Turkish poetry into German,² and she published an essay in 1967 under the title *Sâmiha Ayverdi – Eine Istanbuler Schriftstellerin* (Sâmiha Ayverdi – an Istanbulite Writer),³ in which she recommended her friend, the at that time little-known woman prose-writer, to the German experts on Turkish literature. In her article she critically noticed that the literary circles of Republican Turkey hushed up with concealment the existence of the conservative mystical Ayverdi because she seemed to be an untimely writer. Her name was not to be found in the biographical dictionaries like B. Necatigil's *Edebiyatımızda İsimler Sözlüğü*. After Schimmel's article this situation changed step by step and nowadays Sâmiha Ayverdi's name can be found in all of the literary encyclopedias.⁴ But this is also due to Sâmiha Ayverdi's career. After a productive period, in which she wrote novels and stories (1938-1948) she concentrated more and more on ethical-moral and historical writing. Ayverdi became since 1950 the centre of a circle of admirers and adepts and got also known to a wider audience. To understand this phenomenon we have to throw a glance on her biography.

Sâmiha Ayverdi, born in 1905 in Istanbul-Şehzadebaşı, belonged to the upper strata of Ottoman society. Her father İsmail Hakkı Bey was an officer (infantry lieutenant colonel) whose family claimed descent from the Ramazanoğulları. One of the ancestors of her mother, Fatma Meliha Hanım, was the Dervish Gülbaba, whose holy tomb is still to be visited in Budapest. Sâmiha, the Ottoman historian and mystic, was later on very proud of this origin from Anatolian and Balkanese roots. The young girl enjoyed mostly private education in the *konak* (residence of the members of the upper classes) and *yalı* (seaside mansion) of her family. Her brother was the well-known architect and writer Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi. As a

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¹ Annemarie Schimmel (died on 26 January 2003) was a good friend of Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu. I remember her capacity for love and friendship.

² Annemarie Schimmel: *Türkische Gedichte vom 13. Jahrhundert bis in unsere Zeit*, Veröffentlichungen des Kultusministeriums: 491, Ankara 1981. Annemarie Schimmel: *Aus dem goldenem Becher. Türkische Gedichte aus sieben Jahrhunderten*. Önel Verlag, Köln 1993.

³ Annemarie Schimmel, in: W. Hoenerbach (ed.): *Der Orient in der Forschung*, Festschrift für Otto Spies, Wiesbaden 1967, 569-585.

⁴ See for instance *Tanzimat'tan Bugüne Edebiyatçılar Ansiklopedisi (TBEA) I*, Yapı Kredi Yay., İstanbul 2001, 135-136.

young woman she joined the circle of her mother's *mürşit* (spiritual guide), Şeyh Ken'an Rifâî (1867-1950), who after World War I played a certain role in the religious life of Istanbul. He had graduated at the famous Galatasaray Lisesi. As a civil servant of the education administration in the last decade of Ottoman reign, he was sent to different towns and regions of the Empire. In Medina he got the authorization from the Rifâî Şeyh, Hamza Rifâî. In 1908 Ken'an founded the "Hırka-ı Şerif Altay Ümm-i Ken'an Dergâhı" in the Fâtih-quarter of Istanbul. This dervish convent became an assembly point for intellectuals and artists. When in the Republican period (1925) the dervish convents were closed by the government, Ken'an Rifâî accepted this order without opposition. He gathered his adepts, men and women, around himself in his private house in Fâtih. Their discussions ("sohbetler") were focused on mystical and worldly love (*aşk*). A comprehensive selection of these discussions was posthumously published in two volumes with a foreword by Sâmiha Ayverdi⁵.

After the death of Ken'an Rifâî in 1950 Sâmiha Ayverdi assumed a leading role in the Rifâî circle. But the membership in this circle and sympathizing with the mystic-moral concept of Ken'an Rifâî seem to have merged into one another with other activities and institutions, which became more and more important for Sâmiha and her surroundings. In preparation for the 500th anniversary of the conquest of Constantinople (1953) by the Ottoman sultan Mehmet Fâtih her brother Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi founded in 1950 together with Aydın Yüksel the Fetih Cemiyeti and the İstanbul Enstitüsü. At this time the enthusiasm for the Ottoman past and the old capital Istanbul became the main preoccupation of the writer Sâmiha Ayverdi. In 1952 she published her book *İstanbul Geceleri* and 1953 *Edebî ve Mânevî Dünyası İçinde Fâtih*, a portrait of the conqueror Mehmet Fâtih.⁶ The culmination of these public activities was the founding of the Kubbealtı Derneği in 1971, which was transformed into a cultural foundation in 1978, namely the Kubbealtı Akademisi – Kültür ve San'at Vakfı. One should mention, that the atmosphere in the Turkish Republic had changed since 1950 and in the course of the revival of Islamic religiousness in public life the mystic-moral writing of Sâmiha Ayverdi was no longer "untimely" (*unzeitgemäß*) as Annemarie Schimmel had called it in her article, but became a specific trend in the whole spectrum of Islamic movements.

In my contribution I am not going to emphasize the public activities of Sâmiha Ayverdi's later years, but I will try to find out the main components of

⁵ Ken'an Rifâî, *Sohbetler*, 2nd vol., Hülbe Basım, İstanbul 1991, 1992. See also the homage of their mystic leader by four of his female adepts: Sâmiha Ayverdi, Nezihe Araz, Safiye Erol and Sofi Huri: *Kenan Rifâî ve Yirminci Asrın Işığında Müslümanlık*, İnkılap ve Aka Kitabevleri, İstanbul 1965.

⁶ For the full bibliography of Ayverdi's books see: İ. Binark: *Sâmiha Ayverdi Bibliyografyası*, İstanbul 1999. See also the above mentioned article in TBEA. In German: Nazlı Kaner: *Sâmiha Ayverdi (1905–1993) und die osmanische Gesellschaft. Zur Soziogenese eines ideologischen Begriffs: osmanlı, Arbeitsmaterialien zum Orient 1*, Ergon Verlag, Würzburg 1998.

her world view, which form the background of her distinctive Islamic religiousness. The Ayverdian identity is based on two pillars: 1. Sâmiha got her mystic initiation from her *mürşit* Ken'an Rifâî and that means she is imbued with a deep feeling of worldly and mystic love (*aşk*), and 2. she found her family's roots in Ottoman history. Both together, the Islamic mysticism (*tasavvuf*) and her individual understanding of the Ottoman past created in her mind the vision of an ideal human society, in which the different elements lived in harmony.

As I noticed before Sâmiha Ayverdi started to write historical essays since 1950 in connection with the 500th anniversary of the conquest of Constantinople by Mehmet Fâtih. Ayverdi is not an academic historian who is eager to utilize all the different sources to reconstruct as accurately as possible the historical reality, but she uses her mystical vision to find her own historical truth. Sâmiha is a storyteller and she has her heroes⁷. One of her heroes – and perhaps the most important – is Mehmet Fâtih, who was deeply influenced by *tasavvuf* as adept of the Sufi Ak Şemseddin. While conquering territories as a fighter for Islam (*gazi*) Mehmet always had the goal of building an ideal Islamic society. He wanted to establish a new world order (“yeni bir dünya nizamı”)⁸ based on freedom of conscience and faith (“vicdan ve iman hürriyeti”).⁹ In Ayverdi's definition in Fâtih's period “Islamic mysticism (*tasavvuf*) was not at all a dry theory but a manner of action and a mode of living. Divine love and human love were tightly melted together and transformed into an activating energy”.¹⁰ She answers her own question: “What meant *tasavvuf* for Fâtih? A synthesis of the first producing cause of religious feeling, moral standards, stimulation for art and mental curiosity, the sublimation of the worldly plan, a philosophy, which penetrates the whole life and becomes an all-embracing habit and rule”.¹¹

Sâmiha Ayverdi was an ardent Turkish patriot, but her historical awareness was opposed to the official doctrine of Republican Turkish nationalism, her nationalism implied always “Ottomanism” and that means also a special Ottoman-Turkish Islamic religiousness, which is deeply rooted in Anatolian sufism (Yunus Emre, Mevlana Celaleddin Rûmi). When Mehmet Fâtih founded the Ottoman Empire on the ruins of Byzantium in Istanbul, he transformed this Anatolian sufism into his ideology. Ayverdi very often repeats the formula: Real Islam is *tasavvuf* not *taassup* (bigotry, fanaticism). The Ottoman conquest in the name of this ideology was beneficial for the conquered people, because they were integrated into a tolerant cultural system. In Sâmiha Ayverdi's opinion this system was working well as long as all the different subjects were content with their special role in the

⁷ See her book: Sâmiha Ayverdi: *Abide Şahsiyetler* (Memorial Personalities), Milli Eğitim Basımevi, İstanbul 1976.

⁸ *Abide Şahsiyetler*, 93.

⁹ *Abide Şahsiyetler*, 76.

¹⁰ *Abide Şahsiyetler*, 98.

¹¹ *Abide Şahsiyetler*, 100.

complicated organism of the Ottoman society. Ayverdi's "Ottomanism" was not a refined abstract conception but emanated from her capacity for empathy. She was totally convinced that she was one of the last eyewitnesses of the decadence period of the Ottoman cultural system and still could see in the symptoms of decline the signs of its perfection. Traces of the decaying cultural system were to be found in the rich material culture of the *konak*, the religious feasts and entertainments and the humane tolerant factor in everyday social life.

As an eyewitness Sâmiha Ayverdi felt responsible to write down her knowledge, her experiences and observations. She was gifted with a phenomenal memory. Her powerful memory was working exactly since she was one and a half year old. She even remembers two long black hair near the nipple on the left breast of her mother. Thus as a baby she always preferred to suckle from the right breast.¹² This story sounds like a saint's legend and one should take it as a miracle. She was very proud of her strong memory. The then well-known journalist Kandemir interviewed Sâmiha Ayverdi for the magazine *Edebiyat Alemi* (14 Temmuz 1949) when she just had published her last novel *Mesihpaşa İmami*¹³. She told Kandemir: "I remember my life in all aspects step by step since I was one and a half year old and when I became self-aware I started to think about the secrets of life". In this interview she also noticed that the *Mesnevi* of Mevlanâ Rûmi was the most influential textbook for herself in the past and the present. It seems to me, she learned from the *Mesnevi* how to convey moral messages by stories. She practiced her special kind of story-telling until her last days. Nearly every week or at least every month she published longer or shorter articles in newspapers or magazines, which were collected afterwards in books.

It was very important for Sâmiha Ayverdi to stress that she did not invent but remember the Ottoman past. That means, that she wrote down her own memories. Especially two books are worth mentioning in this connection: *İstanbul Geceleri* (1952), a vivid picture of the life in the old Ottoman capital, which was neglected by the Republican government at the expense of the new Anatolian capital Ankara, and *İbrahim Efendi Konağı* (1964), a kind of family story giving an impression of the old Ottoman society centered in and around a *konak*. In the introduction to the last book she characterizes her writing as neither being a story (*bikâye*) nor a fairytale (*masal*) or a novel (*roman*), but with 90 per cent an authentic description of the details of a self-experienced reality. She feels responsible to tell about the eminent people of the last period of the Ottoman Empire

¹² See her autobiography: Sâmiha Ayverdi: *Bir Dünyâdan Bir Dünyâya*, Hülbe Yayınları, Ankara 1974, 3. – About Ayverdi's autobiographical writing, see: Erika Glassen "Die Töchter der letzten Osmanen. Zur Sozialisation und Identitätsfindung türkischer Frauen nach Autobiographien" In: S. Prator und Ch. K. Neumann (eds): *Frauen, Bilder und Gelehrte. Studien zu Gesellschaft und Künsten im Osmanischen Reich. (Arts, Women and Scholars. Studies in Ottoman Society and Culture)*. Festschrift Hans Georg Majer, Volume I, Simurg, İstanbul 2002, 347-386.

¹³ Sâmiha Ayverdi: *Mesihpaşa İmami*, Damla Yayınevi, İstanbul 1974. First edition: Gayret, 1948.

she met or heard about and to write about all the things which she tasted and smelled, saw and heard, to give the younger generation, who were confronted with a totally changed reality, an idea of the magnificent and luxurious Ottoman past. She admits, that while remembering those days she sometimes asked herself: "I wonder if it was a dream!"¹⁴

To write down history is only a concession to the period of decline of the old cultural system. Sâmiha Ayverdi's excellent memory seems to be the heritage of her Ottoman ancestors. She attributes to the Ottoman civilization an oral character ("Osmanlı medeniyeti şifâhî bir medeniyetti"). The oral culture flew abundantly from generation to generation and removed ignorance (*cehâlet*). The teacher (*boca*) put on his pupil (*talebe*) his dress of knowledge (*ilim*), the master craftsman (*usta*) taught his skills (*büner*) to his qualified workman (*kalfa*) and the qualified workman to his apprentice (*çırak*). The Eastern people were not used to write down their knowledge, because they were brought up to become modest personalities, who should not be proud of their own work. The teacher's work consisted in the number of his pupils. So his teaching profession prevented him from becoming a scribe. Sâmiha Ayverdi considers this oral culture superior (more refined and sensitive) to the culture of scripture, but she admits that finally this oral system brought much damage to the East. It was functioning only as long as the students listened vivaciously and full of eagerness to their teacher. When the tradition of oral transmission died out, the written evidence of the Eastern culture was only meager, much of the cultural heritage got lost. As examples she mentions the Ottoman music, especially the religious music which was very popular in the Dervish convents (*tekke*) and was totally dependent on the personal relations between the master and his adept and on oral transmission. All the skilled craftsmanship of the famous Eastern material culture, such as tile-making, wood-carving, metal-engraving, and calligraphy gradually fell into oblivion.¹⁵ Annemarie Schimmel tells us in her article,¹⁶ that she had in 1953 the opportunity to admire in the house of Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi, Sâmiha's brother, one of the most beautiful collections of Turkish art: calligraphies and tiles, mother of pearl-work, gilded miniature-pages, cloth from Bursa and ceramics from İznik. But this was only a pale reflection of the cultural atmosphere of the Ottoman golden age.

This fate of oblivion and decay affected as well the popular arts of the stage and the shadow theatre, which were typical products of the Ottoman society: *Meddab* (public, mimic story-teller), Karagöz (the Turkish shadow play named after the main hero), Orta Oyunu (theatrical presentation with a central stage) and *tulûat* (popular theater, where the actors improvise). All these skills and arts which were developed in the Ottoman Empire have a common characteristic:

¹⁴ Sâmiha Ayverdi: *İbrahim Efendi Konağı*, Baha Matbaası, İstanbul, 1973, 1. First edition: İstanbul Fetih Cemiyeti, 1964.

¹⁵ *İbrahim Efendi Konağı*, 96f.

¹⁶ Schimmel, *Der Orient in der Forschung*, 569.

they were transmitted from the master to the apprentice by cooperation, personal relations and oral tradition. The craftsmen, artisans and artists very often remained anonymous, but became very popular in the neighbourhood of their quarter and they held close contact to their customers and audience. They were organized in guilds.

The Ottoman society – beginning on the level of the family and neighbourhood as the core, in spatial terms: the *konak* (the mansion and household of a rich man belonging to the elite) and the *mahalle* (a quarter of the city around a mosque), lived in a kind of symbiosis. Sâmiha Ayverdi saw the Ottoman society as a vivid organism, in which each member needed all the others and the illness of one of them affected the whole body. Mehmet Fâtih's ideology based on love and freedom of conscience and faith only worked when social tensions could be dissolved as soon as possible. The entertainments mentioned above were enjoyed by all sections of the population, in the Saray of the Sultan-*Padişah*, the *konak* of the elite and the coffeehouse of the *mahalle*. The artists cultivated a close intimacy with their audience. Above all the shadow-play with its hero Karagöz and his friend Hacivat as main figures was extremely popular. This is due to the fact, that the shadow-stage was a mirror of the ethnic, religious and linguistic plurality of the Empire. All the various types of the different regions of the Empire, who gathered in the city of Istanbul were represented as stock characters in the ensemble. The figures – cut and carved in leather and beautifully dyed with natural colours – were dressed in their special “national” costumes. The performer of the shadow play (*karagözcü*) had to be a skilled imitator of dialects and a master of improvisation and extemporization. Because he had close contact with his audience, he knew their problems and could allude to actual incidents in the *mahalle*. So his performance which was a mixture of fiction and reality and the well-known plot and an unexpected funny deviation was a constant source of humour. The figures on the screen confronted the audience, consisting of men, women and children, with themselves and their own problems and misunderstandings. As they were able to laugh about themselves the shadow play functioned as outlet for social tensions and conflicts. Sâmiha Ayverdi devoted much attention to these popular entertainments, which she had enjoyed in her childhood and she appreciated the talents of the artists, who had to perform a one-man-show hiding behind the screen and knew so much about the psyche of the crowd.¹⁷

She liked the story about the *Karagözcü* Kasımpaşalı Hâfız, who played in the palace in the presence of the Sultan Selim III and made a great mistake during the performance. In the play “Karagöz’ün Ağalığı” (Karagöz as rich landowner) Hacivat as the majordomo (*kahya*) brought to his master Karagöz two slaves just bought at the slave market. Karagöz had learned that one of the slaves was called Selim, and shouted spontaneously at the top of his voice: “Selim!” The *Karagöz-*

¹⁷ About the popular entertainments and the artists see: *İbrahim Efendi Konağı*, 95-106.

cü had forgotten in this moment that the name of the present Sultan was Selim. The *Padişah*, who appreciated and loved Kasımpaşalı, answered in order to make a joke with him: “At your service (*lebbeyk!*)” The palace people who followed the play together with the Sultan wanted to laugh, but they could not do it. Kasımpaşalı understood immediately his mistake and was dripping with sweat from shame. Instead of the slave Selim he sent Hacivat on the screen, who admonished his “master” Karagöz: “O Karagöz, in the presence of the *Padişah* you produced such a lapsus linguae (*sürç-i lisan*), now there is no excuse and repair possible. Our majestic *Padişah* gives you the permission to leave and to repent your mistake by performing the holy pilgrimage.” And – “puf” – he extinguished the candle behind the screen. The *Padişah* tried to comfort him and hold him back, but Kasımpaşalı felt so deeply ashamed because he had failed to act according to his professional ethics that he immediately gave up his art and fame for good and went on a pilgrimage to Mecca.¹⁸

It seems to be obvious, why this story fascinated Sâmiha Ayverdi. One sees the familiarity between the *Karagözçü* and his audience even when he played in the palace in the presence of the ruler, but in the same time he had to keep to the tradition of the professional ethics he had learned from his master. One of the greatest mistakes was to be careless and absentminded (*gafil*) during the performance. This story gives also a good impression of the complex nature of this popular art and its social dimensions. The artist behind the screen had to be a composite, multiple personality. At the same time he was Karagöz who made the mistake and Hacivat who seriously admonished him. He represented the whole society (with the exception of the *Padişah*, who was taboo). In his mind and soul and with his voice all the characters were communicating, quarrelling and harmonizing. Because the Karagöz-shadow-play was closely attached to the multi-religious, multiethnic cultural system of the Ottoman Empire it was not able to survive the cultural change. All well-meant attempts at revival in the nationalistic Turkish Republic failed. Until nowadays Karagöz is held in high regard as he belongs to the cultural heritage of folklore. There are quite good performances of the shadow-theatre to be seen in Turkish TV and given for children and tourists during the month of Ramadan.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 103f.

¹⁹ About the Ottoman-Turkish shadow-theatre, see: Metin And: *Karagöz Turkish Shadow Theatre*, a Dost publication, İstanbul 1979. Metin And is a specialist in this field and has published many books in Turkish. Erika Glassen: “Das Türkische Schattentheater: Ein Spiegel der spätosmanischen Gesellschaft”, in: J. C. Bürgel und S. Guth (eds.), *Gesellschaftlicher Umbruch und Historie im zeitgenössischen Drama der Islamischen Welt*, Beirut Texte und Studien (BTS 60), Beirut 1995, 121-138. Erika Glassen: “Das Schattentheater Karagöz als Spiegel der multikulturellen spätosmanischen Gesellschaft”, in: J. Kalter und I. Schönberger (eds): *Der lange Weg der Türken. 1500 Jahre türkische Kultur*, Ausstellungskatalog Linden-Museum Stuttgart 2003, 222-237. Daryo Mizrahi: *Diversity and Comedy in Ottoman Istanbul: The Shadow Puppet Performances*, Doctoral Thesis Columbia University 1991, UMI Dissertation Services, Ann Arbor 1996.

The Karagöz-theatre was not only a product and a mirror of Ottoman society, but it belonged to the indispensable methods to keep this complex and heterogeneous society in balance helping to restore social harmony. A key term of Sâmiha Ayverdi's conception of "Ottomanism" is "*huzur*".²⁰ *Huzur*, a loanword from Arabic (*huzur*-presence) got in Ottoman Turkish usage an extension of meaning and a special connotation missing in Arabic: Social harmony, ease, peace of mind, sense of calm, quiet. In the Turkish-German dictionary (by Steuerwald) we find as the only example to demonstrate the meaning of *huzur* the informative sentence: "Bu komşular mahallenin huzurunu kaçırdı: These neighbours drove away the ease and harmony of the whole quarter". Sâmiha Ayverdi remembers in her article: "Doğduğum ev"²¹ (The house where I am born) the *konak* of her family in Şehzadebaşı and on this occasion she thinks about the way of the children's socialization in the old Istanbulite mahalle: In old days every quarter was a school (*mektep*). The old people, the influential, high-ranking persons and even the scoundrels (*küilbaniler*) of the neighbourhood held themselves responsible for the children and youngsters acting as their guards (*muhafız*) and watchmen (*korucu, kolcu*), while the children conducted themselves always polite, respectful and modest towards the old people. This was due to the behaviour of the adults of the family, who didn't confuse naughtiness and wild prank of the children with unruly disrespect and excessive familiarity. Instead of irritating the children by permanent harsh advices and a know-it-all manner they gave a good example in their way of life as a model of virtue. When the early life was built on such a strong foundation and the child in school time got the intellectual training and education based on the oral and written tradition, it was able to grow up as a free personality ("hür adam"). In the mind's eye of Sâmiha Ayverdi the majority of her Ottoman ancestors were free men enjoying mental independence, harmony and freedom (*huzur, hürriyet*) and felt comfortable, because they were not bothered by inner or outer vices and disorder. Thus there was nothing in their mind to feel ashamed of neither before God nor their fellow beings.

In her article "Mahalle"²² beginning with the sentence: "Eskiden mahalle demek, âdetâ bir minyatür devlet demektir" (In the past the term "mahalle" almost meant a miniature state) she describes the organization of the quarter in an extremely simple and plausible way. The *imam* (the prayer leader of the mosque) was the head of the state (*devlet reisi*), the *muhtar* (headman of the quarter) was the chief of the government (*hükümet başkam*) and the *bekçi* (watchman), who inspired confidence by his uprightness and honesty, was the executive power. The

²⁰ See: Erika Glassen: "*Huzur*: Trägheit, Seelenruhe, soziale Harmonie. Zur osmanischen Mentalitätsgeschichte" In: J. L. Bacqué-Grammont, B. Flemming u. a. (eds.): *Türkische Miscellen*. Robert Anhegger Festschrift, Varia Turcica IX, Istanbul 1987, 145-166.

²¹ Sâmiha Ayverdi: *Hâtıralar: Rahmet Kapısı*, Hülbe Yay., Ankara 1985, 124-128.

²² Sâmiha Ayverdi: *Hey Gidi Günler Hey*, Hülbe Yay., Ankara 1988, 227-230; see also *İbrahim Efendi Konağı*, 27f.

imam was not only the idle representative of this little state, but he was a kind of unofficial justice of the peace. Mostly he was able to mediate the quarrels of the inhabitants of his quarter before they had to go to the police station or the ordinary court of justice. The *muhtar* was chosen according to the seniority of his service and because he was of high renown for his good qualities. He always paid attention to keep the harmony of the mahalle in balance by giving good advice, showing the right way and raising the difficulties of the people who asked him to do so. You would think the whole mahalle belonged more or less to one family and different voices were unified in a harmonious melody.

The *bekçi* (watchman) of the mahalle was as firm as a castle and belonged to the courageous heroes who were ready to sacrifice their life. He never closed his eyes and was vigilant to protect the honour and good name (*şeref, namus*) of the quarter. Everybody respected him. Where he saw a tiny spark he extinguished it before it caused fire and even the thief with a weapon was scared by the thick stick of *bekçi baba*. At the end of springtime when the well-to-do families of the quarter moved to live in their summer-residence (*yazlık*) they entrusted the key of their konak to the watchman of the mahalle. He felt responsible for everything and in autumn, when the konak people came back, not a single needle in their house was touched. The duty of the *bekçi* was a highly respected one. He was appointed and registered by his guild, and he could be trusted by the mahalle people without any doubt. When he went home in his native village or was absent from the mahalle by an urgent reason, his place was substituted by the guild with a colleague, who had the same qualities and the continuity could be preserved.

To live in a mahalle meant to live under the same roof with the hearts of relatives and friends, being always together during illness and health, poverty and abundance and to celebrate together all feasts and never to refuse help which was needed by a neighbour. Ayverdi regrets the dissolution of the mahalle organization at the beginning of the 20th century. A centre of traditional social life collapsed step by step. The inhabitants of modern apartment-houses usually live separate, they do not get known to their neighbours and sometimes they even do not greet each other.

Thus the mahalle was a healthy cell in the organism (*uzviyet*) of the Ottoman society. One of the smaller centres of social life situated in the old quarters of Istanbul was the konak, the urban mansion of well-to-do people of the upper classes (members of the military or civil services, ministers or diplomats). The rich konaks were indispensable for the welfare of the whole mahalle, because their doors were always open for the indigents, the poor people, the widows and orphans in the neighbourhood. The rich owners of a konak spent their income and wealth on patronage in their crowded households and in solidarity with their servants and neighbours. Sâmiha Ayverdi's description of the life in the konak of her relative Ibrahim Efendi confirms Şerif Mardin's observations:

“Conspicuous consumption among Ottoman grandees consists mostly of largesse, i. e. generosity to employees, followers, slaves, retinue, domestic and armed guards. The Ottoman style of the wealthy was a comfortable life with a large retinue for protection but no, or few, personal excesses.”²³

The altruistic tendency of the Ottoman dervish orders certainly was an ethical quality of outstanding value, and since *tasavvuf*-traditions belonged to the moral code of Mehmet Fâtih’s ideology – as Ayverdi believed – it affected the social ethics of the whole Ottoman society. As an adept of Ken’an Rifâî she got deeply influenced by the dervish traditions and sees her mission in writing articles and books to motivate her readers to become aware of the old values of the Ottoman past. But *İbrahim Efendi Konağı* is not only written with a moralistic impetus, it is really a treasury of knowledge and information about the social history of the last period of the Ottoman Empire. In this book Sâmîha Ayverdi turns her excellent memory to profit and gives a detailed description of a konak and its organization. The mansion of her mother’s uncle İbrahim Efendi was located at the broad place of the quarter Şehzadebaşı facing the Kalenderhâne mosque with the inalienable estate of the *imam (imam meşrutası)* and the houses of the *muezzin* and the *muhtar*, on the other corner was situated the medrese near the fountain. From the garden of the medrese plane trees stretched their branches over the fountain, which was murmuring a harmonious melody day and night.²⁴

İbrahim Efendi’s konak was a three storied building with twenty-five rooms and three gardens, two belonging to the *harem* (women’s apartments) and one to the *selamlık* (part of the house reserved for men). In the ground floor were two paved courtyards (*taşlık*), one outside and one inside, with all the stables, the kitchens, the storerooms (*kiler*) for the foodstuff, the laundry rooms and the bath. On the first floor in the space between the women’s quarter and the men’s quarter (*mabeyn*) were eleven guest rooms (*misafir salonu*). On the upper store were located the bedrooms and the store-rooms (*sandık*). This part of the house was forbidden to enter by any foreigner. The upper storerooms contained the treasures of the family consisting of material and objects coming from all directions of the Empire being worthy of a museum: clothes, fine taffeta, brocade, silk carpets, silver sets, etc.²⁵

Still in Sâmîha’s childhood her uncle had a large retinue of male and female servants, who all had their special duties and were organized in a hierarchy. They used to belong to different ethnic groups of the Empire. She even remembers the names of many of them, because as a little girl she had access to all the parts of the building – including the *selamlık* – and learned the secrets from the do-

²³ Şerif Mardin: “Super Westernization in Urban Life in the Ottoman Empire in the Last Quarter of the Nineteenth Century”. In: Benedict/Tümertekin/Mansur (eds.): *Turkey. Geographic and Social Perspectives*. Leiden 1974 (403-446), 418f.

²⁴ *İbrahim Efendi Konağı*, 32.

²⁵ *İbrahim Efendi Konağı*, 33f.

mestics. The supervisors or stewardesses of the female domestic servants (*çırak, cariye, balayık, odalık*) were called “*kalfa*”. The *kalfa odası* (room of the *kalfa*) was a kind of meeting-place for the whole staff and even the frequent female visitors. There were also the coffee-stove and the cupboards, where the cups and glasses reserved for the relatives and friends of the family were put up in order.

In the *selamlık* a number of male domestics took care for the patron, the male members and the friends of the family: the *dış ağası* (responsible for the matters outside the mansion), the *gidiş ağası* (responsible for the keeping of right behaviour and good manners), the *haremağası* (the black eunuch responsible for the relations with the harem), the *seyis* (groom, horsekeeper), the *uşak* (male servant) the *abçı* (cook) and the *bahçıvan* (gardener). One of the most important figures was *ayvaz* (gatekeeper and steward). He always watched the street, as soon as he saw the guests coming, he opened the gate and received them with respect. The female guests he transferred to the *haremağası*, who opened the door to the harem quarter and left them to the *kalfa*.

There came not only friends and colleagues of the patron or members of the family, but Sâmiha Ayverdi remembers many frequent visitors who used to benefit from the generosity of the patron and his servants. In the connection with the visitors the ceremony of serving coffee was important. When the patron was outside or staying in the harem, the coffee was served to the waiting guests, sometimes staying in different rooms in accordance with their social position. The contact to the watchman (*bekçi*) and other people of the mahalle was kept in the *ağalar odası* (the room of the *ağas*) near the kitchen, where also coffee was served.²⁶

As the room of the *ağas* was an important point for communication with the surrounding neighbourhood of the mahalle, on the other side a frequent female visitor, the Jewish dressmaker Raşel, living in Beyoğlu, who worked for the harem ladies, opened from outside a back-door of the konak to the Levantine and Western world. She had stayed a long time in Paris and used to call her creations “haute couture”.²⁷ That means the konak was not at all an isolated organ but was duly connected with the whole organism of the society. The patron used to marry the older marriageable female servants (*kalfa*) to outside friends of the konak, imams or artisans, and gave to them a dowry. All these former konak people and their children always stayed in close contact with their former patron and colleagues. Sâmiha Ayverdi tells in her book the individual stories of many of the konak people, and she pursues the dramatic fate of İbrahim Efendi’s konak through the years of war, military defeat, revolution and social change to the bitter end in 1930. The decline of the old konak-style of life was in her eyes a symbolic sign for the decline of the whole Ottoman civilization.

²⁶ *İbrahim Efendi Konağı*, 54-60.

²⁷ *İbrahim Efendi Konağı*, 51-52.

In her novel *Mesihpaşa İmamı* (1948) Sâmiha Ayverdi succeeded in arranging a vivid configuration of characters living in a quarter near the Mesihpaşa (Bodrum) mosque at the beginning of the twentieth century. The subject of the novel is the everyday-life of the ordinary people in a poor Istanbulite mahalle in the time of rapid social change caused by outward circumstances as war, immigration of the Balkanese Turks and economics, the penetration of Western ideas and the decline of traditional customs and values. The hero mentioned in the title of the novel, the imam of the Mesihpaşa mosque, Hâlis Efendi, keeps to his duty paid by the office of pious foundations (*Evkaf*) and conducts the ritual prayer five times a day, in spite of the fact, that not a single member of his religious community prays behind him. This deserted and damaged mosque²⁸ becomes a symbol of the society on the eve of destruction. Hâlis Efendi – whose mother Dilbercihan Kalfa was married by the patron of a konak, Namık Paşa, to his father, the imam Rakım Efendi –, represents the class of Muslim intellectuals educated in the scholastic system of the medrese. He is an expert in Islamic law and earns additional money at the court of justice and by attesting and sealing private documents in the afternoon in the coffeehouse of the mahalle. He is able to pay the study at a secular university for his sons Abdullah and Zâhid (*hukuk* /law and *tıbbiye*/medicine). In the eyes of Hâlis Efendi, who in the age of forty is still a handsome-looking man and feels disgusted by dirt and ugliness, his wife Gülsüm is an ugly and coarse woman. He never really loved her. Gülsüm quietly adores her husband and always tries to clean her fingers with lemon to get rid of the bad smell of onions. While doing this she is reflecting her own and her children's situation in a kind of inner monolog: She is not young and pretty, if she only were a thoughtless, flirtatious or coquettish woman as some of her neighbours, who are able to twist their husband round their fingers. In her eyes her husband is a blessed (“mübarek”) man and always shows a good, correct and kind behavior in her present. She knows he doesn't love her, therefore she is grateful, that he didn't take a second younger wife. But she prays always he might find a woman he really loves. Later on in the story when she feels, that her husband loves the young refugee girl Hediye, who lost her father, Gülsüm takes her and her mother into the house. In Gülsüm's deep unselfish love the writer Sâmiha Ayverdi shows an example of the moving energy of worldly love. Gülsüm always stands up for her children, her sons, who are rebellious against the traditional customs of the generation of their father and gather around themselves a noisy crowd of their fellow students discussing ardently the different Eastern and Western ideologies, and her crippled daughter Zehra, who secretly learns to play the violin from their neighbour, *kemençeci* Rıza Bey.

²⁸ See: Wolfgang Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls*, Tübingen 1977, 103-107. The church/mosque was destroyed by fire 1784 and 1911.

Hâlis Efendi avoids more and more to stay at home being afraid to meet the friends of his sons. He realizes that he in spite of his religious studies at the medrese is not able to understand the sense of the Holy Qur'an he knows by heart. He is disturbed about the discussions and questions of the young generation. When he is sitting in his desolated mosque, which becomes more and more ruined and inhabited by crows and doves, immersed in thoughts he remembers the admonitions of his teachers: "Be quiet, unless you will become an unbeliever!" or later on in the medrese: "The Qur'an can never be a subject of questions and inquiry. Be cautious, protect yourselves for fear of blasphemy and misbelief!" But the discussions about religion and ideological questions and the competition between the Eastern and Western ideas are going on everywhere. Even in the coffeehouse of the mahalle, where Hâlis Efendi in the afternoon used to sit quietly in a corner to seal the private documents of the neighbours, the people of the mahalle involve each other and their guests in meditations and speculations with philosophical dimensions.

When Sâmîha Ayverdi wrote and published her novel, her spiritual leader Ken'an Rifâî was still alive and a focal point of the circle of his adepts, who were discussing frequently the religious problems of the time. Therefore it seems not amazing to me, when in her novel discussions about religious and ideological subjects are predominant. In this way she was able to show the mental confusion of the time and the obvious corruption and decline of the old Ottoman system of values and customs. But *Mesibpaşa İmamı* is not a thesis novel in which she treats her conception only with didactic and radical purpose. In many aspects her fictional representation is based on psychological realism of the characters and their self-revelation by means of an inner monolog. The fictional people of the mahalle are portrayals of individuals with all their virtues and vices. Ayverdi as the creator of the characters and the narrator of the story relates the story to a large degree in terms of Hâlis Efendi, the hero mentioned in the title. As representative of the ossified medrese-Islam he is chosen by the author to become a medium to demonstrate the possible deliverance of rigid *taassup*-Islam and the conversion to the tolerant *tassavuf*-Islam. The vital power in this spiritual process is the worldly and divine love (*aşk*). But a spiritual leader is needed to show the right way and to inspire and finally initiate the adept. In Ayverdi's novel the spiritual leader is not the Şeyh of a Sufi-convent as usual in traditional Ottoman *tassavuf*-Islam, but a mysterious friend "dost", who stays invisible and is contacted only by letters and through his adept and messenger, the carpenter of the mahalle, Tâhir.

The carpenter Tâhir, who has his workshop near the mosque, is a friend of all sick, lame and blind animals of the mahalle, he has transformed his workshop to an animal's hospital and he was a drunkard, who used to tease the imam. One day he had even taken the imam's turban to fetch water for a thirsty dog. The imam didn't like the drunkard, hated the sick animals around the mosque and

was disgusted by the bad smell of the carpenter's workshop. But suddenly everything changed. After a longer period of absence the carpenter came back, opened his workshop again and was approaching everybody with his overwhelming love. On the first day he embraced and kissed the imam and told him, that he met the "dost" (friend), who cured him from alcoholism and initiated him on the way of love. He became a lover (*aşık*) drunken from divine love. Hâlis now becomes good friends with Tâhir and is curious to know all about the mysterious "dost". He begins to write letters to him and learns to love for the first time in his life. The young blond girl, the daughter of a sick teacher belonging to the refugees from the Balkans camping in the hall of the mosque, stirs in his heart a human pity and the tender feeling of love. Ayverdi shows in her novel, how love in any pure form is a driving force able to change a human being and to influence the social environment. Her message seems to be: The ideology of Fâtih founded on love is still alive and can always be reactivated as human and social power. Love is the only remedy to cure the irritated and sick society.

Sâmiha Ayverdi was convinced, that in the heyday of the Ottoman Empire Mehmet Fâtih's ideology based on dervish traditions had been carried out in the reality of social life, and that the society was a healthy organism, where all members were working together in a natural and harmonious way organized in and around canters like the mahalle and the konak for the welfare of the individual and the community. As a little girl she became one of the last eyewitnesses of this perfect society in decay. While telling the detailed story of the magnificent organization of İbrahim Efendi's konak she asks herself: "Was it all only a dream?" We may finally ask ourselves: Was Sâmiha Ayverdi's perception of the Ottoman Empire as an ideal Commonwealth and her vision of a perfect society only "a place where all is well", a literary Utopia?

It is however an indisputable historical fact, that the Islamic mystic (*tasavvuf*) with the altruistic tendencies played a beneficial role in Ottoman society and developed specific Turkish qualities as a widespread Islamic movement. Nevertheless the dichotomy of medrese-Islam more prone to *taassup* (harsh fanaticism) and tolerant *tasavvuf*-Islam was always latent in the Ottoman Empire. While the medrese-Islam was responsible for the official career of the civil servants of the state and the religious men, the ordinary believers gathered around the dervish-convents and the spiritual leaders. In her last years Sâmiha Ayverdi was worried about the growing of militant Islamic movements. During a visit in her house she told me, this perception of Islam is alien to the nature of the religiousness of the Turks, it is imported from outside. Real Islam is not *taassup* but *tasavvuf*.