AN OUTLINE OF THE IBRİZ

In so large and varied a work as the Ibrīz, even the motivated specialist may find it a challenge to familiarize himself with the full range and scope of the book. We therefore thought it would be useful to provide an overview of the book’s contents in the form of a relatively detailed outline. Attention has especially been given to noting Sufi ideas and practices that one finds expounded in abundance particularly in Chapters Three, Five, Six and Nine. Despite the oversimplification and the arbitrary choices an outline must inevitably entail, we hope it will help orient the reader and facilitate access to the multitude of subjects contained in the Ibrīz. In addition, a brief outline precedes each individual chapter.

It strikes one that al-Lamaṭi’s Introduction has a rather different character from the rest of the book. It can be considered in line with other hagiographical works that attempt to present the ideas and personality, but especially the miracles, of a Friend of God, i.e. a living saint who possesses extraordinary gifts and insights from God. Section One is in fact devoted to an earlier Friend of God, Sayyidi al-‘Arabī al-Fishtālī, who died before ‘Abd al-c-Azīz al-Dabbāgh was even born. The author is at pains to gather evidence that will establish al-Fishtālī’s reputation as a great Friend of God. Numerous miracles, especially his feats of clairvoyance, are recorded by way of underpinning his spiritual stature. The Prophet Muḥammad appears to al-Fishtālī and tells him that in the future al-Dabbāgh will be a great saint, and before al-Fishtālī dies he leaves a skullcap and a special pair of shoes with al-Dabbāgh’s mother as a ‘trust’ for him. After al-Dabbāgh is born and has reached puberty, his mother, in the year 1109/1697-8, passes on to him the trust left by al-Fishtālī. Al-Dabbāgh immediately puts the skullcap on his head. He reports: ‘Just then a great heat came over me so that my eyes filled with tears. And I perceived what Sayyidī al-‘Arabī said to me and I understood his instructions—praise be to God, Lord of the worlds!’

In Section Two the focus shifts from al-Fishtālī to al-Dabbāgh himself. An account of al-Dabbāgh’s spiritual searching is given which culminates in an interesting description of how, having
spent the night reciting the *Burda* in the shrine of ʿAlī b. Ḥirzihim, he comes out and has an encounter with the immortal al-Khaḍir. The latter consents to confer on him an unusual litany which he’s told he must recite seven thousand times a day and in which he beseeches God to cause him to meet the Prophet Muhammad in this world. Al-Khadir then entrusts him to ʿUmar al-Hawwārī, the custodian of Ibn Ḥirzihim’s shrine, and tells al-Hawwārī to look after him. At first al-Dabbāgh has difficulty reciting the new litany so many times during the day but eventually he’s able to complete the full recitation between the first light of day and sunrise. Shortly after al-Hawwārī’s death in 1125/1713, al-Dabbāgh experiences illumination (*fath*) which is described at some length and leaves him in a terrified state of mind (pp. 129-33). He then meets the black man ʿAbd Allāh al-Barnāwī who is a great Friend of God and has come to Fez especially to give him guidance at this critical moment in his development. An amusing story about their relationship depicts how al-Barnāwī changes himself into a beautiful woman, ‘wearing perfume... and clean’, who pursues al-Dabbāgh all around Fez in an attempt to seduce him. When it’s clear that al-Dabbāgh is determined not to give in to temptation, al-Barnāwī changes back to his true identity and praises al-Dabbāgh who in the meantime has sought refuge in the crowded Qarawiyyīn Mosque. Finally, after having kept company with al-Barnāwī for several months, al-Dabbāgh attains his goal and has a meeting with the Prophet Muḥammad, the lord of creation.

Several other spiritual masters are referred to who had a role in giving al-Dabbāgh spiritual guidance. It’s noted that each time one of these masters dies, al-Dabbāgh inherits all the ‘secrets’ the master had possessed. Similarly, al-Dabbāgh met Sayyidī Ṭḥam b. Ṭḥam al-Miṣrī who was the Support (*al-ghawth*) of the era, i.e. the highest ranking Friend of God in his day and age. Sayyidī Ṭḥam was then head of the Diwān al-ṣâliḥīn (the Council of the godly) who, with God’s permission, control all the events that happen in the world every day. When al-Dabbāgh himself is admitted to the Diwān, the other members, as a warning, tell him stories about the disasters that can befall someone who divulges ‘the secret’ to ordinary people. Al-Lamaṭī transmits five of the many stories they told al-Dabbāgh on that occasion (pp. 137-44). The fourth story, which is also the longest, is perhaps the most interesting.