

Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Ashrafiyya in Damascus

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Imām Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī – Allāh have mercy on him and benefit us with him! – took up the headmastership of Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Ashrafiyya in Damascus after the death of his Shaykh Abū Shāma in 665 and held it until his own death eleven years later, never accepting any compensation for his needs.

Ibn al-Subkī reports in his masterpiece *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyya al-Kubrā* that after his father, the great Imām, Jurisprudent, and Ḥadīth Master, Qāḍī al-Quḍāt, Shaykh al-Islām ‘Alī ibn ‘Abd al-Kāfī Abū al-Ḥasan Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756) became headmaster of Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Ashrafiyya in 742 he used to come out to the mosque to pray late night prayers (*tahajjud*) and he would weep and rub his face against the rugs on which al-Nawawī had sat, reciting:

*Waḥfī Dāri al-ḥadīthi laṭīfu ma‘nan
‘alā busuṭin lahā aṣbū wa āwī:
‘Asā annī amassu biḥurri wajhī
makānan massahu qadamu al-Nawāwī*

And in Dār al-Ḥadīth there is a subtle meaning
On carpets where I incline and take refuge:
Perhaps I might touch with my very face
A spot touched by al-Nawawī’s foot.

In the time of al-Nawawī, Dār al-Ḥadīth had the Noble Sandal of the Prophet ﷺ in its possession. This Sandal was kept in a wooden box above the *Mihrāb* in its mosque. The Mālikī *Faqīh*, Ḥadīth Master, historian, and philologist, Imām Abū Ḥafṣ al-Fākihānī (d. 734) visited Damascus seeking its *baraka*. The *Muḥaddith* Jamāl al-Dīn Ibn Ḥadīda al-Anṣārī narrates: “I was with him. When he saw the most honored Sandal, he bared his head and began to kiss it and rub his face over it. His tears flowed. He recited:

*Falaw qīla lil-Majnūni: Laylā wa-waṣlahā
turīdu am al-dunyā wamā fī ṭawāyāhā?
Laqāla: Ghubārun min turābi ni‘ālihā
aḥabbu ilā nafsī wa-ashfā li-balwāhā*

If it were said to Laylā’s Madman: ‘Is it Laylā and her relation
you wish, or the world and all it contains?’
He would reply: ‘Grime from the dust of her sandals
is dearer to my soul and more healing for its ills!’”¹

The mosque was burnt by the Tatars and the relic disappeared but the *Mihrāb* remains to our time and is inside the mosque of Dār al-Ḥadīth preparatory School (headed by Shaykh Ḥusayn Ṣa‘biyya who succeeded Shaykh Mḥmūd Rankūsī who succeeded the *Muḥaddith* Shaykh Abū al-Khayr al-Mīdānī), ‘Aṣrūniyya Souk, near the Umawī Mosque in Damascus, where the writer of these lines was privileged to visit and pray.

¹Narrated by Ibn Farḥūn in *al-Dībāj al-Mudhahhab* (p. 286).