

Dār al-Hadīth al-Ashrafiyya in Damascus

by GF Haddad – Qasyoun@ziplip.com

Imām Muhyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī – Allāh have mercy on him and benefit us with him! – took up the headmastership of Dār al-Hadīth 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 *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyya al-Kubrā* that after his father, the great Imām, Jurisprudent, and Ḥadīth Master, Qādī al-Quḍāt, Shaykh al-Islām ‘Alī ibn ‘Abd al-Kāfi Abū al-Hasan Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756) became headmaster of Dār al-Hadīth 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:

*Waft Dāri al-hadīthi latīfu ma ‘nan
‘alā busuṭin lahā asbū wa āwī:
‘Asā annī amassu bīhurri wajhī
makānan massahu qadamu al-Nawāwī*

And in Dār al-Hadīth 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-Hadīth 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*, Hadīth Master, historian, and philologist, Imām Abū Ḥafs al-Fākihānī (d. 734) visited Damascus seeking its *baraka*. The *Muhaddith* 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-waslahā
turīdu am al-dunyā wamā ftīwāyāha?
Laqāla: Ghubārun min turābi ni‘ālihā
ahabbu ilā nafṣī 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-Hadīth preparatory School (headed by Shaykh Husayn Sa‘biyya who succeeded Shaykh Mhmūd Rankūsī who succeeded the *Muhaddith* 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).