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The *ʿIqd al-farīd* by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih—The Birth of a Classic

Isabel Toral

هذه بضاعتنا ردت إلينا! ظننت أن هذا الكتاب يشتمل على شيء من أخبار بلادهم وإنما هو مشتمل على أخبار بلادنا
لا حاجة لنا فيه فردّه.

This is our merchandise returned to us! I thought this book would contain some notice from their lands, but it just contains notices about our lands that we do not need. Return it!

This saying, put in the mouth of the famous Būyid vizier and man of letters Ṣāḥib b. ʿAbbād (326–385/938–995), is part of an anecdote that tells how Ibn ʿAbbād, having heard of the famous anthology *al-ʿIqd [al-farīd]*¹ by the Andalusian Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, took great pains to obtain a copy. After reading it, he reacted in disappointment with the absence of authentic Andalusian material. The story, recorded by the polygraph Yāqūt² (d. 626/1229), is commonly quoted to illustrate the lacklustre reception this Andalusian collection met in the Mashriq (alluding to Q 12:65).³ Another testimony, preserved in a letter by a scholar of the fifth/eleventh century⁴, points to a comparably critical reception in the Maghrib: “This work [the *ʿIqd*] provoked some criticism here (Ifriqiya), for [the author] did not describe the merits of his country in his book, nor did the nobleness of its kings constitute one of the pearls of this collar ... Finally, the work was put aside because it neglected what was of interest to the readers.”⁵ Both statements coincide in saying that the *ʿIqd* disappointed the readers since they expected an anthology produced in Andalusia to contain local material. Those in the Mashriq were eager and expected to learn new things from this distant place, while readers in the Maghrib considered that an Andalusian anthology should be the vehicle of local pride.

However, both testimonies do not do justice to the enormous success this encyclopaedic anthology⁶ gained in the long run. The *ʿIqd* is not only preserved in numerous manuscripts and excerpts, in which it has been frequently quoted and used, but it is also one of the earliest *adab* works printed and reissued since 1876 in an amazing number of editions. The enthusiastic *exordium* by ʿUmar Tudmīrī in the 1990 Beirut reprint of the standard Cairo edition of 1940–1953, for instance, clearly expresses the high esteem of this book in Arabic culture to date: “We do not exaggerate if we say that every chapter and notice of the *Collar* merits to be called a book of its own ... in sum,

¹ The work was first entitled just *al-ʿIqd* (The Collar), the adjective *al-farīd* (unique) is a later addition. Werkmeister, *Quellenuntersuchungen zum Kitāb* 27.

² Yāqūt al-Rūmī, *Irshād al-arīb* ii, 67–82. For al-Yāqūt, cf. Gilliot, Yāqūt al-Rūmī.

³ Q 12:65 “And when they opened their baggage, they found their merchandise returned to them. They said, ‘O our father, what [more] could we desire? *This is our merchandise returned to us.* And we will obtain supplies for our family and protect our brother and obtain an increase of a camel’s load; that is an easy measurement.’” In the following, I will use the geographical term of “Mashriq” as shortcut for the East of the Islamic world, i.e., Egypt, Iraq, Greater Syria, and Iraq; and put it in contrast to “Maghrib,” i.e., al-Andalus and North Africa. This division corresponds roughly with the spatial order reflected by the sources themselves. The Maghribīs were particularly aware of this difference.

⁴ A Qayrawānī scribe of the beginning fifth/eleventh century named Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Tamīmī, commonly known as Ibn al-Rabīb. For a discussion of this letter, v.i. Reception: The Maghrib.

⁵ Wilk, *In Praise of Al-Andalus* 143–145.

⁶ A very convenient category proposed by Bilal Orfali to denominate anthologies that share elements of both an encyclopaedia and an anthology, “the former because it attempts to cover all subjects of conversation, and the latter because it selects the best examples of their treatment in prose and poetry” (Orfali, *A Sketch Map* 40–41). The *ʿIqd*, in fact, is a hybrid between both textual forms since it has an all-encompassing thematic scope on the one hand – it also contains extensive historical passages (cf. Toral-Niehoff, *History in Adab Context* 61–85) – and, on the other, it still has a very strong focus on poetry (around 10.000 verses quoted).

the Unique collar is a treasure of books ... the product of an impressive author.”⁷ The *ʿIqd* is also one of the few *adab* works that has been translated into English within the *Great Books of Islamic Civilisation* collection published under the patronage of H.H. Sheikh Muhammad bin Hamad al-Thani,⁸ a series that includes Islamic works that are supposed to have had a “genuinely significant impact on the development of human culture.”⁹ In other words, it can rightly be qualified as a “classic” in Arabic literature.

How did this happen? To answer this question, the following study sketches a tentative “biography” of this work. The reconstruction of its trajectory and varying impact will show how this encyclopaedic anthology, originally composed in Umayyad Andalusia, a region then located at the margins of Arabic culture, first underwent phases of ambivalent evaluation, but ended up becoming a paramount example of metropolitan Abbasid belles-lettres,¹⁰ and one of the most successful anthologies of Arabic literature in history.

Origins: The Maghrib

The *ʿIqd* began as a provincial composition: it was written in Umayyad Cordoba by a local man of letters, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (246–328/860–940), who had never left al-Andalus.¹¹ From the perspective of the cultural and political metropole Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid caliphate, this region was peripheral, and Mashriqī universal historians like al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 284/897) barely mentioned the region in their histories.

Abū ʿUmar Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih b. Ḥabīb b. Ḥudayr b. Sālim was born in Cordoba on the 10th of Ramaḍān 246/ 28 November 860, and died in the same city on the 18th of Jumādā 328/3 March 940. He was a cultivated member of the ruling elite at the Umayyad court in Cordoba and came from a local family whose members had been clients (*mawālī*) of the Umayyads since the reign of emir Hishām I (r. 172–180/788–796).¹²

He started his career as a panegyric court poet during the turbulent times of emir Muḥammad (r. 238–273/852–886), then al-Mundhir (r. 273–275/886–888), and ʿAbdallāh (r. 275–300/888–912), but we are unaware if he ever held an official position at the court administration as a *kātib*, for example. After a short period outside Cordoba, during the late *fitna* at the end of the third/ninth century, he came back to the Umayyad court around 300/912, which coincided with the rise to power of the young emir ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad (r. 300–350/912–961, since 316/929 caliph under the name ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Nāṣir). There, he spent the last decades of his life as a celebrated court poet of the caliph, whom he praised in numerous poems, notably in a long *urjūza* celebrating the military campaigns at the beginning of his rule and preserved in the *ʿIqd*.¹³ Probably, the cumbersome collection and composition of the *ʿIqd*, his main oeuvre, took place during this last tranquil period of his life. Although it does not contain a formal

⁷ Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *Kitāb al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, p. ٢ .

⁸ Three volumes have appeared so far (translation from books 1–10), see Ibn ʿAbd-Rabbih, *The Unique Necklace: al-ʿIqd Al-farīd / Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih*, translated by Professor Issa J. Boullata; reviewed by Professor Roger M.A. Allen. Reading: Garnet 2007 (vol. 1), 2010 (vol. 2), and 2011 (vol. 3). According to Roger M.A. Allen (orally, to the author of this paper, London 2015), the Sheikh insisted personally to have the *ʿIqd* included in the series.

⁹ Ibn ʿAbd-Rabbih, *The Unique Necklace* (translation), vol. 1, ix (“About this Series”).

¹⁰ There are no previous studies on the reception history of the *ʿIqd* so far except some pages (quite superficial, though with interesting points) in Veglisson, *El collar único* 77–84.

¹¹ Hamori, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih; Haremska, Ibn Abd Rabbih; Werkmeister, *Quellenuntersuchungen zum Kitāb* 16–43.

¹² For biographical information and a list of sources, cf. Werkmeister, *Quellenuntersuchungen zum Kitāb* 16–26; Haremska, Ibn Abd Rabbih; Averbuch, Ibn Abd Rabbih; Veglisson, *El collar único* 13–18; Hamori, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih.

¹³ For a detailed analysis of the *urjūza*, cf. Monroe, *The Historical Arjuza of Ibn Abd Rabbih*.

dedication to the caliph, a caliphal protection/endorsement to this time-consuming composition and collection is more than probable.¹⁴

Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih got an excellent education as a *faqīh* and *adīb* in the emirate of Cordoba. According to his first known biographer Ibn al-Faraḍī (d. 403/1013),¹⁵ he learned with the most prestigious scholars of his day, namely with Baqī b. Makhlad (d. 201–276/81 6–889), who had travelled twice to the Mashriq, staying there in total 34 years, to study with the main Iraqi jurists of the period, Ibn Abī Shayba and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal.¹⁶ Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih’s second famous teacher, Muḥammad b. al-Waḍḍāḥ (199–287/814–900), also visited Iraq and is said to have studied with nearly the same teachers as Baqī. Both are considered as having introduced the *‘ilm al-ḥadīth* (the discipline of prophetic traditions) in al-Andalus, a cultural technique that until then was rather unknown and much contested among the Malikī *fuqahā’* (sg. *faqīh*, law scholar) in the Peninsula.¹⁷ This educational background might explain why Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih appears occasionally as a *faqīh* in the reception history—cf. e.g., in the anthology by Faṭḥ ibn Khāqān,¹⁸ where he figures in the second section among the *fuqahā’* but not in the third, dedicated to the *udabā’*, litterateurs¹⁹—although, as far as we know, he never worked in this field.

Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih’s third teacher, a scholar named Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Salām al-Khushanī (d. 286/899), was probably much more important for his career as a litterateur.²⁰ Al-Khushanī had also travelled to the Mashriq for some time before 240/854, where he spent more than 25 years, mainly in Iraq. There, he studied with some *ḥadīth* scholars, but was especially interested in all the philological disciplines—language and poetry. He studied in Basra with several students of the famous scholar al-Aṣmā’ī,²¹ like Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī²² and al-Riyāshī.²³ In Baghdad, he copied works written by Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d. 224/838), the famous collector of *amthāl* (proverbs).²⁴ Al-Khushanī had an immense impact on the development of Andalusian letters. Following the model of his Iraqi masters, he taught in the Great Mosque and became the teacher of most Andalusian litterateurs of the period. Many traditions we find in the *‘Iqd* go back to the dictations of al-Khushanī.

In sum, the main teachers of Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, in addition to other scholars whose material enriched the *‘Iqd*,²⁵ were locals whose commonality was that they had travelled to the main cultural centres in Iraq and had spent a long time there learning with principal intellectuals,

¹⁴ For the caliphal dimension of the *‘Iqd*, cf. Toral-Niehoff, *Writing for the Caliphate*.

¹⁵ Ibn al-Faraḍī, *Kitāb Ta’rīkh ‘ulamā’ al-Andalus*, 8:37 fn. 118.

¹⁶ Marín, Baqī b. Majlad y la introducción; Werkmeister, *Quellenuntersuchungen zum Kitāb* 267–270; Fierro, *La heterodoxia en al-Andalus* 80–88; Fierro, *The Introduction of Ḥadīth in al-Andalus*; Ávila, Baqī b. Makhlad.

¹⁷ Fierro, *The introduction of Ḥadīth in al-Andalus*; Werkmeister, *Quellenuntersuchungen zum Kitāb* 263–266.

¹⁸ D. 529/1134. For this scholar, cf. Bencheneb and Pellat, al-Faṭḥ b. Muḥammad b. ‘Ubayd.

¹⁹ Faṭḥ ibn Khāqān, *Maṭmaḥ al-Anfus* 270. The anthology is divided into three sections, one dedicated to *wuzarā’*, a second one to *‘ulamā’*, *quḍāt* and *fuqahā’*, and a last one dedicated to *udabā’*.

²⁰ For Abū ‘Abdallah Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Salām al-Khushanī (218–286/833–899), cf. Werkmeister, *Quellenuntersuchungen zum Kitāb* 254–262; Molina, *Un Árabe entre Muladíes*. He spent almost 25 years in the Mashriq and studied mostly among the philologists in Iraq.

²¹ Abū Sa’īd ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Qurayb al-Aṣmā’ī (123–213/740–828), the famous philologist from Basra, is the most quoted authority in the *‘Iqd*, either directly, via his students, or anonymously. Cf. Werkmeister, *Quellenuntersuchungen zum Kitāb* 304–321.

²² Abū Ḥātim Sahl b. Muḥammad al-Sijistānī (d. around 250/864), pupil of al-Aṣmā’ī, cf. Werkmeister, *Quellenuntersuchungen zum Kitāb* 291–303. The majority of the traditions from al-Aṣmā’ī reached al-Andalus via this scholar, Werkmeister, 308.

²³ Abū al-Faḍl al-‘Abbās ibn al-Faraj al-Riyāshī (ca. 177/793–257/871) from Basra. Cf. Werkmeister, *Quellenuntersuchungen zum Kitāb* 283–291.

²⁴ Weipert, Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām.

²⁵ For a list of informants, “Die direkten Informanten,” cf. Werkmeister, *Quellenuntersuchungen zum Kitāb* 200–270.

particularly of Basra and Baghdad. A few were immigrants from the Mashriq, like Abū Ja‘far al-Baghdādī (d. 322/934).²⁶

These circumstances explain why the *‘Iqd*, though produced in the periphery, was, in fact, neither local nor provincial. As expressed in the quotations at the outset of this paper, there is scarcely any information about al-Andalus in the *‘Iqd*. Equally, there are no citations that can be attributed to Andalusian poets and litterateurs. The *‘Iqd* rather provides the reader with a well-ordered encyclopaedic sample of the best metropolitan Arabic literature, poetry, wisdom, and ethics that circulated in late third/ninth century Abbasid Iraq, and which formed the corpus of texts that would become part of the classic canon of Arabic literature. The result is such a perfect mimicry of Iraqi *adab* that it is easy to forget that the *‘Iqd* was not composed in Baghdad, but rather in the remote occidental periphery of the Islamic world. The only materials that can be unmistakably identified as Andalusian are the poetic fragments composed by the author himself, which are spread across the entire collection. As we will see in the following, this lack of regional colour and local traditions in an Andalusian work would be key for its failure and for its success at the same time.

Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih was less known as an anthologist than as a poet: he was one of the most celebrated Andalusian poets of his time and was considered a master in the sophisticated *maṣnū‘* (artificial) style, thus following the model of the Abbasid poetry of the third/ninth century.²⁷ His biographer Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Humaydī (d. 488/1095) states that Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih was famed as “the poet of al-Andalus” (*shā‘ir al-balad*) of his time. He describes in the biography of the poet Yaḥyā b. Hudhayl, a famous poet from ‘Āmirid times, how Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih’s funeral procession became a huge event in Cordoba and motivated the young man to become a poet as well.²⁸ There is also a famous anecdote in the anthology *Maṭmaḥ al-anfus* by the Andalusian Faṭḥ b. Khāqān (d. 581/1134) that reports that the great poet al-Mutanabbī himself (d. 354/965) was a great admirer of Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih.²⁹

From his poetical oeuvre, around 1350 verses were preserved in the *‘Iqd*,³⁰ and around 400 other verses were scattered in various anthologies and biographical notices. Unfortunately, his vast poetic collection, allegedly assembled at the request of the caliph al-Ḥakam II (r. 350–365/961–976) and known to have included some 20 *juz*³¹ (volumes), has since been lost. Being a proud poet, Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih’s aim when composing the *‘Iqd* seems to have been to spread his fame as a poet beyond the boundaries of al-Andalus, and to put his own oeuvre in relation to that of his predecessors in the Mashriq. In this regard, he explains himself in his programmatic introduction:

I have adorned each book of the “Necklace” with examples of poetry similar in idea to the prose passages it contains and parallel to them in meaning. I have added, in addition to these examples, the most unusual of my own poems; so that he who studies this book of ours may

²⁶ Cf. Werkmeister, *Quellenuntersuchungen zum Kitāb* 200–204. He was secretary of the Fatimids and probably a spy. He is said to have brought texts from al-Jāhiz and Ibn Qutayba to al-Andalus.

²⁷ Cowell, Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih; Contente, *Notas sobre la poesía amorosa*.

²⁸ Al-Ḥumaidī, *Jadhwat al-muqtabis* 94–97.

²⁹ Faṭḥ Ibn Khāqān, *Maṭmaḥ al-anfus* 270–275. The anecdote referring to al-Mutanabbī is to be found on page 273 and is attributed to the authority of “certain people of the upper classes.” According to the notice, a certain Abū al-Walīd b. ‘Abbād (otherwise unknown) went to the Mashriq for pilgrimage and met the great poet in the mosque of ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ in Fustāt. Al-Mutanabbī is known to have spent some time in Egypt, which makes the meeting plausible. There, ‘Abbād asked him for some verses from the “*malīḥ al-Andalus*” (genius of al-Andalus, referring to Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih), whose fame seems to have reached him. Abū al-Walīd recited four verses, which urged al-Mutanabbī to declare that Iraq should love him. The story is also found in al-Rūmī, *Irshād al-arīb* 81.

³⁰ Teres, *Algunos aspectos* 449.

³¹ Al-Ḥumaidī, *Jadhwat al-muqtabis* 94.

know that our Maghrib, despite its remoteness, and our land, despite its isolation, has its own share of poetry and prose.³²

His own verses are, in fact, the only ones that are of local Andalusian production in the *ʿIqd*, which contains altogether around 10,000 verses. There were illustrious Andalusian poets that had preceded him—he could have quoted, for instance, poetry from al-Ghazāl or ʿAbbās b. Firnās, the famous poets from the courts of emirs al-Ḥakam I (r. 180–206/796–822) and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān II (r. 206–238/822–852). Almost all chapters quote some of his verses, but Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih’s presence is particularly palpable in his book chapter on poetry, book no. 18, *al-Zumurruda al-thāniya fī faḍāʾil al-shiʿr wa makhārijihī* (The Book of the Second Emerald on the Merits of Poetry, its Meters, and Scansion).³³ Normally, he abstains from commenting and restricts himself to place his production in close vicinity to great names. Sometimes, however, he even praises himself as comparable and even superior to the Mashriqī poets: “Whosoever considers the smoothness of this poetry [of mine] with the novelty of its content and the delicacy of its fashioning [will note that] the poetry of Sarīʿ al-Ghawānī³⁴ does not surpass it in eminence except by virtue of precedence.”³⁵ He is thus following a technique that resembles one used later by Ibn Shuhayd (d. 426/1035) in his *Rasāʾil al-Tawābiʿ*, where the latter added his poetical oeuvre to that of the “greats” to participate in their prestige.³⁶

Most of the preserved poetry by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih belongs to the *ghazal* genre (love-poetry) and consists of delicate and sophisticated elaborations of familiar themes and topoi—e.g., love is a sickness, the beloved is a tyrant and blamer, she/he is a gazelle, the teeth are arranged pearls. His style is characterized by an abundant use of *tajnīs* (rhetorical figure to be translated as “paronomasia, pun, homonymy, and alliteration”), repetition of words, balancing of phrases, antithetical parallelism, and rhetorical questions, and thus corresponds to a sophisticated *maṣnūʿ* (artificial) style well known from the “modernist” *badīʿ* poetry.³⁷ He also composed elegies, *khamriyyāt* (wine-poetry), *ghulāmiyyāt* (homoerotic poetry), *munahḥisāt* (ascetic verses “which efface sins”), and panegyric verses to the emirs Muḥammad, al-Mundhir, ʿAbdallāh, and the caliph ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Nāṣir, as well as other political leaders.³⁸ In addition, he also composed two *urjūzas*, long poems of couplets in the *rajaz* meter, transmitted in the *ʿIqd*, a didactical one on poetical meter³⁹ and a historical one, praising the deeds and battles of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Nāṣir.⁴⁰ According to the meticulous study of James Monroe, the poem was inspired by Mashriqī models; it emulates the earlier *urjūza* written by the Abbasid poet and caliph al-Muʿtazz (d. 296/908).⁴¹

According to the Andalusian anthologist and poet Ibn Bassām al-Shantarīnī (d. 543/1147), some traditions indicate that he was also the first poet to compose *muwashshahāt* (strophe poetry), but they are not preserved.⁴²

³² Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *Kitāb al-ʿIqd al-farīd* i, 18.

³³ Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *Dīwān Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih* 253–417.

³⁴ Nickname of the poet al-Quṭamī, a Bedouin poet from the first/seventh century.

³⁵ Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *Kitāb al-ʿIqd al-farīd* v, 391.

³⁶ For this technique in anthologies, cf. Gründler, Motiv vs. Genre 81. For the general importance of emulation in Andalusī letters, cf. Teres, Algunos aspectos.

³⁷ For an analysis of his *ghazal* poetry, cf. Continente, Notas sobre la poesía amorosa; Cowell, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih.

³⁸ Veglisson, *El collar único* 71–75; Haremska, Ibn Abd Rabbih 623–625; Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *Dīwān Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih*.

³⁹ Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *Kitāb al-ʿIqd al-farīd* v, 422–433.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, iv, 454–479. Cf. the detailed study by Monroe, The Historical Arjuza and Averbuch, Ibn Abd Rabbih, 91–93.

⁴¹ Monroe, The Historical Arjuza 70. The Abbasid prince Ibn al-Muʿtazz praised the achievements of his royal cousin al-Muʿtaḍid in a historical poem containing, in its present form, 417 *rajaz* couplets celebrating his life and work; cf. Lewin, Ibn al-Muʿtazz.

⁴² Ibn Bassām al-Shantarīnī, *al-Dhakhīra* i, 469.

Reception: The Maghrib

Surprisingly, the *ʿIqd* seems not to have had a palpable impact in al-Andalus at first. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih’s composition seems not to have served as inspiration for similar collections of *adab* in Andalusia, nor was it reused or quoted, as the case would be later in the Mashriq. To briefly mention its closest parallel in al-Andalus, the large *adab* encyclopaedia *Bahjat al-Majālis* (Splendour of Sessions), by the Andalusian polygraph Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (d. 463/1071), neither quotes the *ʿIqd* nor has any explicit reference to it. It only mentions Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih once as a poet and quotes some verses of an astrological poem.⁴³ Furthermore, the thematic organization of the *Bahjat* seems to follow a different pattern than the *ʿIqd*. A meticulous comparison of both works and their organization, however, is essential to clarify their relationship.⁴⁴

This does not mean that the *ʿIqd* was unknown in al-Andalus. In fact, when Maghribī and Andalusian authors mention Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, they always qualify him as the famous “*sāhib* of the *ʿIqd*.” Al-Faraḍī, his first biographer, though not explicitly noting the *ʿIqd* by name, already describes how the people appreciated ʿAbd Rabbih’s *taṣnīfihi* (composition, probably the *ʿIqd*), poetry, and *akhbār* (notices).⁴⁵ Faṭḥ b. al-Khaqān tells, “he has a famous composition (*taʿlīf*) that he called *al-ʿiqd* that was subdivided into chapters.”⁴⁶ Al-Humaydī also mentions as his main oeuvre a “large book called the book of the *ʿIqd* about *akhbār*, which he divided into sections according to their content (*ʿalā maʿānin*), naming the sections with the names of the [pearls] of a necklace.”⁴⁷

Nevertheless, we find quotations of Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih verses in Andalusian anthologies. Some poetical fragments are preserved in the anthology of the Andalusian scholar Muḥammad b. al-Kattānī (d. 420/1029);⁴⁸ others are to be found in his biographies as previously mentioned, namely in al-Humaydī, Yāqūt with reference to Humaydī, and in the *Maṭmaḥ* by Faṭḥ b. Khāqān.⁴⁹ They only overlap partly with those verses found in the *ʿIqd*, so that they cannot be considered as evidence for the reception of the *ʿIqd*, but rather of his poetical oeuvre.

Furthermore, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih appears in Andalusian sources as a protagonist of several anecdotes. For instance, he is said to have fallen in love with the voice of a famous slave who was a singer. He harassed her to the extent that her owner threw water on him to drive him away. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih composed a famous *qaṣīda*, blaming him for his stinginess.⁵⁰ Another one narrates his dispute with his friend and contemporary poet ʿAbd Allāh al-Qalfāt (d. 300/912), who consequently called his *ʿIqd* a “garlic string,” *ḥabl al-thawm*.⁵¹

Finally, the *ʿIqd* appears in the context of the discussions about the comparative prestige of Andalusian letters and culture. This became a central concern among the Andalusī litterateurs of the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries, who condemned the uncritical imitation of Mashriqī

⁴³ Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Bahjat al-majālis* ii, 118; Pinilla, *Una obra Andalusí de Adab*.

⁴⁴ According to Veglison, *El collar único* 81, Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr was inspired by the *ʿIqd*; cf. also Pinilla, *Una obra Andalusí de Adab* 91. However, both authors do not elaborate on their argument. The *Bahjat* has 124 chapters (6 *bābs*) and other categories; furthermore, religious literature plays an important role. Like Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr draws almost exclusively on Mashriqī material, and it is to be expected that both collections share some common traditions; however, just to mention another crucial difference at first sight, Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr always adds the *asānīd* in contrast to the *ʿIqd*.

⁴⁵ Ibn al-Faraḍī, *Kitāb Taʾrīkh ʿulamāʾ al-Andalus*, 8:37, N. 118.

⁴⁶ Faṭḥ ibn Khāqān, *Maṭmaḥ al-anfus*.

⁴⁷ Al-Ḥumaidī, *Jadhwat al-muqtabis* 94.

⁴⁸ For further information, refer to introduction by Hoenerbach (XIII-XVI) and index (239) for the quotations. Ibn al-Kattānī was the teacher of logic of Ibn Hazm.

⁴⁹ Faṭḥ ibn Khāqān, *Maṭmaḥ al-anfus* 270–275.

⁵⁰ Al-Ḥumaidī, *Jadhwat al-muqtabis* 94.

⁵¹ Terés, *Anecdotario de al-Qalfāt* 230–231. Another indication that it was considered his most famous and important oeuvre.

models common in earlier centuries, emphasizing instead the excellence of local production. A famous polemical statement in this regard is that of the Andalusian anthologist Ibn Bassām al-Shantarīnī in the introduction of the *Dhakhīra*, an exclusively Andalusī anthology that mocks Andalusians who venerated the Mashriq to ridiculous excess, so that “if a crow croaked [in the East] or a fly buzzed in the far reaches of Syria or Iraq they would kneel in reverence before such a remarkable achievement.”⁵²

Within this debate, the *ʿIqd* seems to have become a typical representative of this outdated, “orientalising” approach, which would explain why it did not have much impact among litterateurs in the Maghrib. We are in possession of a precious statement in this regard, in a letter to Abū al-Mughīra b. Ḥazm—cousin of the famous poet, historian, jurist, philosopher, and theologian Abū Muḥammad Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064).⁵³ The author of the letter was a Qayrawānī scribe of the beginning fifth/eleventh century named Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Tamīmī, commonly known as Ibn al-Rabīb. In his letter, he reproached the Andalusians for not perpetuating the memory of their eminent scholars and letting them fall into oblivion.⁵⁴ This letter was the trigger for the famous *Risāla fī faḍl al-Andalus* (Epistle on the Praise of al-Andalus) by Abū Muḥammad Ibn Ḥazm—who did not mention Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih in this epistle. In his letter, Ibn Rabīb refers to:

[T]he compilation of Aḥmad Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, which he named “the Collar.” This work provoked some criticism here (*ifrīqiya*), for he did not describe the merits of his country in his book, nor did the nobleness of its kings constitute one of the pearls of this collar. The occasion was favourable, yet the eloquence proved erroneous and the whole affair turned out to be just a sword without a cutting edge. Finally, the work was put aside because of abandoning what interested the readers and neglecting what they had been concerned with.⁵⁵

Later, the appreciation of the *ʿIqd* in al-Andalus seems to have become more benevolent. Ibn Shaqundī (d. after 627/1231), for example, praised Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih’s excellence as composer of the *ʿIqd* in his own *Risāla fī faḍl al-Andalus*, where he addresses the Berbers of North Africa and expresses his pride as an Andalusian for having produced a classic.⁵⁶

Reception: The Mashriq

Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih is first mentioned in the Mashriq in the *Yatīmat al-Dahr* by al-Thaʿālibī (350–429/961–1038), a famous anthology composed in Nishapur.⁵⁷ In fact, one fourth of Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih’s preserved verses are to be found in the ninth section of the first chapter of the *Yatīma*, which is dedicated to Andalusians and Maghribī poets. Al-Thaʿālibī preferred to quote contemporary poets he knew personally, but here he had to resort to second-hand, probably written material. He admits that the Andalusian material came to him via his friend Abū Saʿd b. Dūst, who had received them from a certain al-Walīd b. Bakr al-Faqīh al-Andalusī (d. 392/1002), a travelling scholar that had visited Syria, Iraq, Khorasan, and Transoxania and transmitted a lot of

⁵² Ibn-Bassām al-Shantarīnī, *al-Dhakhīra* 2.

⁵³ As transmitted to us by Ibn Bassām al-Shantarīnī (who quotes it in the chapter dedicated to Abū al-Mughīra: vol. I, 133–136) and also quoted by al-Maqqarī (directly preceding Ibn Ḥazm’s *Risāla fī faḍl al-Andalus*); the two versions differ very slightly: al-Maqqarī. *Nafh al-tīb* III, 156–158.

⁵⁴ Wilk, *In Praise of al-Andalus* 143–145.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 168. The addressees of this epistle are not the Mashriqīs as in the case of Ibn Ḥazm’s *Risāla*, but the Berbers.

⁵⁷ For the *Yatīma*, which would become a much-imitated model for anthologies, cf. the recent excellent study by Bilal Orfali, *The Anthologist’s Art*.

knowledge from the Maghrib.⁵⁸ Al-Tha‘ālibī quotes poetry by Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, but has no biographical notices and does not mention the *‘Iqd*. Since he includes some verses that are not quoted in the *‘Iqd*, we must suppose he had access to his poetical collection rather than to the *‘Iqd* itself, and that he mentions Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih since his Andalusians informants regarded him as the most famous representative of Andalusian poetry.

The next mention of the *‘Iqd* is to be found in the *Jadhwat al-muqtabis fī dhikr wulāt al-Andalus* by Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad al-Ḥumaydī (d. 488/1095), an Andalusian scholar from Cordoba and student of Abū Muḥammad Ibn Hazm, who moved to the East in the late fifth/eleventh century and settled in Baghdad.⁵⁹ There, he composed the above-mentioned work, a biographical dictionary that for a while became the main reference about al-Andalus for Mashriqīs. In the *Jadhwat*, al-Ḥumaydī transmits a short biography of Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih and some poetry, and mentions the *‘Iqd* as a huge “collection of *akhbār* (historical reports/notices)” that is thematically ordered; however, this short reference does not suffice to validate a reception of the *‘Iqd* in the Mashriq.

This scarcity of information changes at the beginning of the seventh/thirteenth century, and it is Yāqūt al-Rūmī (d. 626/1229) who would play a key role in the dissemination of the *‘Iqd*. In the *Irshād*, his huge biographical dictionary, Yāqūt has an entry on Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, in which he quotes the standard biography by al-Ḥumaydī and enriches it with additional material.⁶⁰ Here we find for the first time the anecdote about the Būyid vizier Šāhib ibn ‘Abbād quoted at the beginning of this study. More important, however, is that Yāqūt states that he personally held the *ijāza* (authorization for the transmission) of the *‘Iqd* via Ibn Diḥya (d. 633/1235), a famous Andalusian scholar from Valencia who ended his days in Syria and Egypt after migrating to the Mashriq.⁶¹ Ibn Diḥya was himself the author of an anthology of Maghribī poets called *al-Muṭrib fī ash‘ār ahl al-Maghrib*, a vast anthology compiled in Egypt and dedicated to his royal patron the Ayyubid al-Malik al-‘Ādil (r. 589–615/1196–1218).⁶² Yāqūt quotes the *ijāza* in detail—the chain of seven transmitters ends with Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih himself⁶³—and then proceeds to quote verbatim the table of contents of the *‘Iqd*, thus demonstrating that he probably had the book at hand. Yāqūt is also known to have met many Andalusian scholars who had migrated to Syria in huge numbers in the early seventh/thirteenth century due to the escalating *Reconquista* expansion of the Christian kingdoms on the Iberian Peninsula,⁶⁴ a dramatic development that motivated him to gather documentary evidence on the geography and culture of al-Andalus. Yāqūt, himself a librarian and book-entrepreneur, contributed decisively to the *‘Iqd*’s dissemination in the Mashriq.

In the following decades, we can first attest the use of the *‘Iqd* in Syria and Iraq, which supports the hypothesis that it had now arrived via Yāqūt–Ibn Diḥya and not earlier. The most important evidence is provided in the universal history *al-Kāmil* by ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1231). The whole section on the *ayyām al-‘Arab* (“Battle-days of the Arabs” in Pre-Islamic

⁵⁸ Orfali, 126, *ibid*.

⁵⁹ Huici Miranda, al-Ḥumaydī. Ḥumaidī, *Jadhwat al-muqtabis*.

⁶⁰ Yāqūt al-Rūmī, *Irshād al-arīb* 67–83.

⁶¹ De la Granja, Ibn Diḥya.

⁶² *Ibid*.

⁶³ The chain of transmitters quoted is the following: Ibn Diḥya < Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq b. ‘Abd al-Malik b. Thawba al-‘Abdī < Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Ma‘mar < Abū Bakr b. Hishām al-Muṣṣḥafī < his father < Zakariyā b. Bakr b. al-Ashbaḥ < Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih.

⁶⁴ Cf. Pouzet, *Maghrébiens à Damas* 171. Pouzet also mentions Ibn Diḥya among the important Maghribī scholars that came to the Mashriq, in this case specifically to Cairo.

Arabia) in the *al-Kāmil*, for instance, is based on the corresponding section of the *ʿIqd*.⁶⁵ It is probable that he quoted from a copy of the *ʿIqd* that he had received via Yāqūt.⁶⁶

In the catalogue of the Ashrafiyya Library, a Damascene library from ca. 670/1270, we also find four mentions of the *ʿIqd*—⁶⁷ apparently all entries refer to excerpts or selections, since they are all introduced by *min* (from). In this library “books from the western Islamic world, [a]l-Andalus and the Maghrib constitute a noteworthy group,” as the Maghribīs played a salient role in Damascene cultural life.⁶⁸

From the seventh/thirteenth century onwards, the *ʿIqd* is quoted, reused, and abridged frequently.⁶⁹ Inter alia we will find a *mukhtaṣar* (abridgment) by Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311), and quotations of the *ʿIqd* in the encyclopaedia by al-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333)⁷⁰ and in al-Qalqashandī’s (d. 821/1418) chancellery handbook *Ṣubh*. Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) used the *ʿIqd* as a source and mentioned the work as an example for the high esteem an Andalusian work enjoyed in Arabic letters; al-Ibshīhī (d. after 850/1466) mentioned explicitly the *ʿIqd* in his introduction as a model for his *Mustaṭraf fī kull fann mustaṭraf*, one of the most successful encyclopaedias in Arabic literature to date.⁷¹ The *ʿIqd*’s popularity is also evident in the rich manuscript tradition; Walter Werkmeister found around 100 mss (more or less complete).⁷²

The history of the *ʿIqd* in the eighteenth and nineteenth century still needs to be investigated, based on the rich manuscript evidence from this time and the numerous first prints, which shows that it continued to be very popular. For example, the high number of precious copies from late Ottoman times, some only one-volume copies that stem from Pasha libraries in the Süleymaniyyeh Library, suggests that it was perceived as a handy compendium of Arabic *adab* by the Ottoman elites.⁷³

The *ʿIqd* seems also to have experienced a renaissance in the context of the *Nahḍa*, probably as a stylistic reference for classic Abbasid prose. Rifāʿa al-Tahtāwī (1801–1873 CE), for example, included a lengthy quotation of the *ʿIqd* in his famous *Talkhīs Ibrīz*, his travel report about his stay in Paris, first published in 1834 CE and probably based on an Egyptian manuscript.⁷⁴ The *ʿIqd* became also one of the earliest books on *adab* printed in the Būlāq House, namely in 1876 CE, which was followed by eight reprints or more.⁷⁵ Later, it was even used as teaching material: cf. the *Mukhtār al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, compiled by a group of teachers of the *Madrasat al-qaḍāʾ al-sharʿī* in Cairo and printed in 1913.⁷⁶

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⁶⁵ Cf. Toral-Niehoff, Talking about Arab Origins 63–64.

⁶⁶ After the death of Yāqūt, ʿIzz al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr is said to have been in charge of transferring Yāqūt’s library to an endowment library in Baghdad, a task that he accomplished ineptly. Ibn al-Athīr was able to include lengthy passages on Andalusian history in his *Chronicle* without virtually moving from Mosul and Baghdad, thus amending al-Ṭabarī, who ignores/omits completely what happened beyond Egypt. Rosenthal, Ibn al-Athīr.

⁶⁷ Hirschler, *Medieval Damascus* 730, 1549, 1555, 1590.

⁶⁸ Hirschler, 38. Cf. Pouzet, Maghrébiens à Damas.

⁶⁹ Werkmeister, *Quellenuntersuchungen zum Kitāb* 38–43.

⁷⁰ Like Ibn al-Athīr, he copied the section on the *Ayyām al-ʿArab* completely from the *ʿIqd*. Cf. Toral-Niehoff, Talking about Arab Origins 63–64.

⁷¹ Tuttle, al-Ibshīhī 238; Marzolph, *Medieval Knowledge*.

⁷² Werkmeister, *Quellenuntersuchungen Zum Kitāb* 38.

⁷³ Cf. the one-volume expensive manuscript copies found in the Süleymaniyye Library: HEKIMOGLU 649 (dated 1152/1739); NUROSMANIYYE 4119; NURUOSMANIYYE 4120; ATIFEFENDI 1796; SÜLEYMANIYYE 871 (dated: 1135/1739).

⁷⁴ Tahtāwī, *Kitāb Talkhīs al-ibrīz* 203–206.

⁷⁵ Werkmeister, *Quellenuntersuchungen zum Kitāb* 41–42.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

As this paper has aimed to show, in his lifetime, Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih was less known and perceived as a compiler and anthologist, but rather as a consummate Andalusian poet and as an author of elegant *ghazals*, *muwashshahāt* and panegyrics, who perfectly followed Iraqi poetical models. This probably was also his pride: Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih wanted to be perceived as a poet on par with the Abbasid poets of the Golden Age of Baghdad and the luminaries of previous ages.

The *‘Iqd* was probably collected on commission of the caliph ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Nāṣir to promote *adab* in Cordoba and to introduce the local elites to Abbasid cultural models and attitudes, which were perceived as caliphal and metropolitan. The content was almost exclusively drawn from the traditions circulating in Iraq that had been imported previously to al-Andalus by Andalusian scholars who had travelled to the Mashriq in the pursuit of knowledge. Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, for his part, seems also to have used the *‘Iqd* to promote his own poetical oeuvre beyond the boundaries of al-Andalus, hoping it would find readership in the whole Arab world. Altogether, the *‘Iqd* showed that Cordoba could compete on all levels with Baghdad.

After the fall of the Umayyad caliphate in 421/1030, however, the *‘Iqd*, almost exclusively based on Iraqi material, seems to have lost its appeal in al-Andalus, a region that started a process of regionalisation and became much more focussed on local production. Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih was still known as the most eminent poet of the caliphal period, and so was his main work, the *‘Iqd*, but it seems not to have had a palpable impact. It was rather discarded as too “Mashriqī” and perceived as an example of an outdated cultural vision, literary taste, and self-perception. Only part of Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih’s poetry survived as quotation in anthologies, together with scarce biographical information on the author. An anthologist like Ibn Bassām al-Shantarīnī, only focussed on local production, almost omitted him; Ibn Ḥazm did not mention him at all in his *Risāla fī faḍl al-Andalus*; and Ibn Rabīb tells about the disappointment Maghribī elites felt when they realized that almost nothing of the *‘Iqd* was of local production.

However, Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih’s strategy of promoting his fame as a poet was successful in the Mashriq. By the end of the fourth/tenth century, notices about famed poets from caliphal Cordoba had already reached as far as Nishapur, so that al-Tha‘ālibī felt the need to include some of them in his trans-regional anthology of contemporary poetry for the sake of completeness, even if he had to rely on written material. He was lucky to know a person in contact with an Andalusian who had travelled to the Mashriq and had probably brought some books, maybe Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih’s poetical collection. Therefore, he would be able to quote some of Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih’s verses in his own anthology *Yatīma*, an anthology that would become very popular in the Mashriq and so contributed to disseminate the fame of Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih beyond al-Andalus. However, al-Tha‘ālibī had no notice about the *‘Iqd* and no reliable biographical information about his author.

Later, in the fifth/eleventh century, al-Ḥumaydī from Cordoba made his career as an authority on al-Andalus in Baghdad, where he composed the *Jadhwat al-muqtabis*, as an authority on al-Andalusian anthology of Andalusian *adab* and poetry that would remain for decades the central source of information about al-Andalus in the Mashriq. The *‘Iqd* appears in the biographical entry of Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih as his most celebrated work; however, we cannot ascertain if al-Ḥumaydī really had it at hand. Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih is mainly introduced as an *adīb*, a protagonist of witty anecdotes and as a poet, and so some of his verses are quoted.

This changed with the arrival of Ibn Diḥya in the eighth/fourteenth century in the Mashriq, a famous Andalusian scholar who ended his days in Syria and Egypt. Among other Andalusian material, he introduced the *‘Iqd* in the Mashriq, and so it came into the hands of al-Yāqūt, who got from him the *ijāza* for this work. It is now that we can ascertain that the *‘Iqd* had actually arrived in the Mashriq. Shortly after this, we find the *‘Iqd* quoted in Ibn al-Athīr, and it appears in the Ashrafiyya catalogue in various abridgements. Now we find *mukhtasars*, quotations, and references in many works, and as far as we can tell, it is now valued as a useful encyclopaedia, and

less as an anthology. In the Mamluk apogee of encyclopaedias, the multi-themed *'Iqd* now fits perfectly in the cultural panorama.

This success as a handy encyclopaedia of classical *adab* continued in Ottoman times, and several precious one-volume copies attest to its ongoing popularity among the Ottoman elites who probably liked to adorn their shelves with this compendium of Arabic *adab*. In *Nahḍa* Egypt, the *'Iqd* seems to have begun a new career as a handy reading book of classical Arabic and as compendium of literature of the Golden Age of Baghdad, and so it became a schoolbook and was selected as one of the early *adab* books printed in Būlāq, whose numerous reprints attest to its success.

This brief reconstruction of the *'Iqd's* textual history gives a short insight into the long journey of a text whose textual basis originated in Iraq, then travelled to al-Andalus, where it was organized and integrated into an encyclopaedic anthology, and then came “back” to the Mashriq, where it would become a celebrated classic. It also demonstrates the potential of reconstructing the details of a book's biography to understand better the complexities that accompany processes of canonization. By showing the up and downs in its perception, we learn how the success of this text and its location in the literary system changed in the course of time, depending on the regional and historical context.

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