

Al-Iqd al-Farid (The Unique Necklace) is one of the classics of Arabic literature. Compiled in several volumes by an Andalusian scholar and poet named Ibn Abd Rabbih (246-328 A.H. / 860-940 C.E.), it remains a wealth of information about various elements of Arab culture and letters during the four centuries before Ibn Abd Rabbih's death. Essentially, it is a book of adab, a term understood in modern times to specifically mean literature, but in earlier times its meaning included all that a well-informed person had to know in order to pass in society as a cultured and refined individual. This meaning later evolved and included belles lettres, in the form of elegant prose and verse that were as entertaining as they were morally educational, such as poetry, pleasant anecdotes, proverbs, historical accounts, general knowledge, wise maxims, and even practical philosophy. Ibn Abd Rabbih's imagination and organization saved his encyclopedic compendium from becoming a chaotic jumble of materials by conceiving of it as a necklace composed of 25 books, each of which carried the name of a jewel. Each of the 25 books was organized around a major theme and had an introduction written by Ibn Abd Rabbih, followed by his relevant adab selections of verse and prose on the theme of the book. He drew on a vast repertoire of sources including the Bible, the Quran, and the Hadith, and the works of al-Jahiz, Ibn Qutayba, al-Mubarrad, Abu Ubayda ibn al-Muthanna, and several others, as well as the diwans of many Arab poets, including his own poetry. Volume I of this translation of al-Iqd al-Farid contained four of its 25 books. This Volume II - now in paperback - contains two more.

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