

Home as Homeland

The works most centrally occupied with crafting home as a category of belonging in the discourse of place were Arabic literary anthologies dedicated to the theme of homesickness, or *al-ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān* (“longing for homelands”). In order to associate the idea of home with land, these anthologies adopt the term *waṭan* (plural: *awṭān*), or “homeland,” as their organizing principle and elaborate on it with a lexicon of other terms designating some form of territoriality. The literary materials anthologized within these works feature images of landscapes, soil and sand, mountains and rivers, stone and wood. These images appear at times to be symbols for relationships, states of mind, and times past, but this does not render the choice of a plot of land—often described, and named, in detail—insignificant. Home had to do with location, with being in, or imagining oneself in, a place in the world, even if it also had to do with feeling a certain way or interacting with certain people. Home was not, however, necessarily fixed in one location. The anthologies make it clear that the idea of home, and the attachment to a plot of land it entailed, was geographically transferable over a lifetime. The important thing was that identifying home had to do with identifying a particular plot of land, not that it always had to be the same plot of land.

This chapter argues that the distinguishing feature of early Arabic literary anthologies on the topic of homesickness was their construction of a universally compelling, yet multivalent and complex, concept of *waṭan*, of home as homeland. The material collected in the anthologies tends to imagine home as a plot of land that provided physical, social, material, political, or spiritual nurture, but that need not be coterminous with the site of birth or fixed in one location or at one scale. Although this material often likens the homeland to the body of a mother, it expresses attachment to the homeland in universal terms, establishing it as a category of belonging that crossed divides of gender and culture. Desire for this kind of belonging frequently manifests itself in terms of longing for a past home or hopes for a future home. The prominence of temporal distance, sometimes, but not always, linked to physical distance—home is frequently past, sometimes future, and rarely present—in these anthologies highlights their

concern with nostalgia (*ḥanīn*). However, what sets them apart from anthologies on related topics, such as travel, longing, or alienation (*safar*, *shawq*, or *ghurba*), is their emphasis on the centrality of land to ideas about physical, social, material, political, or spiritual belonging. This construction of home as tightly bound up with the geographical imagination, but flexible enough to encompass a wide range of territories and experiences, made it a broadly resonant category of belonging in the early Islamic world.

The Territoriality of the *Waṭan*

Home was the category in the discourse of place shaped most distinctively by the world of *adab*, often restrictively translated as “belles-lettres.” This translation privileges the written word in its most style-conscious form, while missing the broader sensibility cultivated by the *udabāʾ*, or practitioners of *adab*. The *udabāʾ* were concerned not only with composing eloquent works, but also with acquiring oral agility and mastering “correct” behavior in both social/cultural and moral/religious terms. They exchanged hospitality, attended court or dinner parties at the homes of notables, sang or played a musical instrument (especially in the case of women), and engaged in impromptu poetry recitations, debates, and other kinds of verbal sparring. The world of *adab* is most closely associated with urban areas, especially Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate, in the ninth and tenth centuries, and was peopled by courtiers, caliphs, and concubines; soldiers, scholars, and scribes; in short, anyone who hoped to use their wits and *savoir faire* to accumulate cultural and political clout.¹

Underpinning the *adab* sensibility was an omnivorous intellectual appetite, encompassing fields of study from philology to history to geography to poetry to philosophy to religion to etiquette. The *udabāʾ* were polymaths whose interests were as wide-ranging as their words and conduct were consciously refined and collectively scrutinized. Composing anthologies was one way of showcasing the breadth and flexibility of their erudition, as well as their deference to established authorities. These works might bring together a selection of the writings of an individual author or quotations from a variety of sources on a particular topic. While anthologies on a particular topic sometimes stood alone, they more often appeared as chapters of larger works dedicated to a wide range of topics or areas of debate, from those that might seem mundane or frivolous, such as insects or drinking vessels, to those of more obvious political or religious import, such as justice or prayer. These larger works were sometimes arranged explicitly in terms of debate, as in the pros and cons of leaving home or the advantages and disadvantages of pride. In addition to recognizing authorities in the selection of source material, such anthologies reproduced the culture

of *adab* by acting as textbooks for fledgling *udabā'*, who would be expected to produce an apt quotation for every occasion or to debate any topic presented at the frequent literary salons (*mujālasāt*), both formal and informal, held in cities across the Islamic world.²

The world of *adab* was also a political world, most obviously in terms of competition for access and patronage. Access to the caliph's inner circle was the best opportunity to win over the ultimate patron, the caliph himself, the titular head of the Islamic world. Moreover, the family and friends of the caliphs, as well as other administrative, military, or religious authorities, were all potential practitioners or patrons of *adab*. However, the practice of *adab* was political in a more subtle way in that it involved interaction with the heritage of the Arabic language, a heritage closely tied up with the scriptural authority of Islam and its political and legal representatives, most prominently the caliph, who claimed to be God's deputy on earth, and a loosely knit body of '*ulamā'*, or religious scholars. Central to this linguistic and literary heritage were the two most important guides to living a righteous life as a Muslim: the Qur'ān, believed by Muslims to be a direct transcript of God's revelation to the Prophet Muḥammad in the early seventh century, and the Ḥadīth, or corpus of traditions about the words and deeds of Muḥammad transmitted orally over the generations and assembled in authoritative written compendia in the ninth and tenth centuries by the '*ulamā'*. This heritage also included a body of early Arabic poetry, celebrated despite its testimony to what was known as the *Jāhiliyya*, or era of "ignorance" before the coming of Islam, as a key to the sometimes obscure or archaic language of the Qur'ān, and a variety of historical, para-Biblical, and legendary narratives, which were used to contextualize stories and allusions in the Qur'ān or to buttress the authority of the caliph or the '*ulamā'*. Although knowledge of the literatures and areas of inquiry opened up through contact with the Greek, Syriac, Hebrew, Persian, and Sanskrit heritages was also prized among *udabā'*, there was simply no way to succeed in the world of *adab* without a firm command of this Arabic heritage.³

These political dynamics were probably the reason that the concepts of home and homesickness emerged as topics of interest between the ninth and eleventh centuries. The peripatetic life led by most members of the political, military, and religious elite in an era of territorial expansion and decentralization made the experience of leaving home or establishing a new home a preoccupation for the most frequent patrons of the *udabā'*. The mobility of potential patrons often resulted in the mobility of the *udabā'* themselves, who might harbor similar preoccupations. Finally, the Arabic literary heritage was itself rich in images of prophets, caliphs, warriors, and desert nomads whose mobility caused them to miss or replace homes. Thus, *adab* anthologies on the topic of *al-ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān* often portray home as a point of departure or a point of arrival. Home was somewhere one left, or contemplated leaving; or home was somewhere one

found, or hoped to find. In either case, mobility or anticipated mobility was involved in locating home. As the author of the earliest surviving anthology put it in his introduction:

Truly, the reason for gathering together bits from the reports of the bedouin on the topic of their longing for their homelands (*awṭān*), and their yearning for their grounds (*turāb*) and their countries (*bulḍān*), and their description in their poetry of the kindling of fire in their hearts—is that I had a discussion with one of those kings who has moved around on the topic of abodes (*diyār*) and attachment to homelands (*awṭān*).⁴

This passage functions as a textual reenactment of an encounter with a king, a figure of political authority, whose mobility inspires the author to collect material featuring Arabian nomads (the bedouin), figures of authority in the Arabic literary heritage, and the homesickness prompted by their mobility. Whether or not this encounter actually took place, the author uses it, and the authoritative experiences it invokes, to justify his decision to dedicate an *adab* anthology to the ideas of home and homesickness.

The frequent images of mobility in these anthologies have caused scholars to see them primarily as expressions of alienation and nostalgia caused by the rapid change and widespread displacement of the first two centuries after the coming of Islam, as well as continuing pressures to travel to fulfill religious and political obligations or to search for patronage.⁵ However, they must also be seen as expressions of the centrality of land to ideas about physical, social, material, political, or spiritual belonging. This preoccupation with land might come from the experience of displacement, but it need not. One might collect literary material that expresses the feelings of homesickness as a way of emphasizing the importance of attachment to land, regardless of personal experience. Since other anthologies were dedicated to the themes of nostalgia, alienation, and longing, using the Arabic terms *shawq*, *ghurba*, or even *ḥanīn* itself, it is the idea of home and the territorial connotations of the *waṭan*, or “homeland,” that set the anthologies on *al-ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān* apart.⁶

To be sure, the term *waṭan* had extraterritorial connotations in the Arabic written record by this period, especially in the fields of philosophy and mysticism.⁷ Thus, another way of interpreting its role in these *adab* anthologies is as a reference to other sources of physical, social, material, political, or spiritual nurture, such as relationships with kin, patrons, lovers, or the divine. In this interpretation, homeland becomes a metaphor for a “real” home in other people, or in God. While this could certainly be true of much of the anthologized material if taken out of the context of the anthology, the concentration of material in these anthologies featuring a lexicon of terms relating specifically to land makes it clear that the concern with territory is not merely symbolic or figurative. This “lexicon

of territoriality” consists of such terms as *dār* (plural: *diyār*), “abode”; *turba* (plural: *turab*), “soil, ground”; *manzil* (plural: *manāzil*), “encampment, dwelling”; *balad/bilād* (plural: *buldān*), “country”; *maḥall*, “site, residence”; *arḍ*, “land”; and *masqaṭ al-ra’s*, “birthplace.” Although these words all connote some form of territoriality, they do not necessarily imply immobility or a settled life; a *manzil* might be a moveable tentlike dwelling, but for the duration of its use it is rooted in the earth. Especially when combined with urban or regional toponyms and descriptions of topography, this lexicon is highly suggestive of a literal preoccupation with territory in the literary quotations that make up the anthologies. The implicit association of the term *waṭan* and its variants, deployed primarily in the titles and subheadings of the anthologies and in periodic insertions of authorial commentary, with the more varied lexicon of territoriality, deployed throughout the anthologized material, produces the idea of home as homeland and justifies the inclusion of these works in the discourse of place.

These anthologies were not, therefore, random or neutral compilations of Arabic literary fragments from the pre-Islamic and early Islamic period that can be used straightforwardly to reconstruct the experience of displacement in this era. Rather, they were carefully crafted products of a series of authorial acts, or “strategies of compilation,” such as the choice of a theme or title for the anthology and the selection, organization, and framing of the anthologized material.⁸ They bring together three levels of textual performance: first, the performance of the author of the anthology, which employs strategies of compilation that emphasize the term *waṭan*; second, the earlier performances of the authors of the anthologized material, which feature the lexicon of territoriality; and third, the performances of those *udabā’* who revised, composed, or recited from anthologies on the same topic. Evidence for this third level of performance can be found in the introduction to Ibn al-Marzubān’s tenth-century anthology on *al-ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān* in which he makes explicit the relationship between his work and an earlier anthology on homesickness by his teacher Mūsā b. ‘Īsā al-Kisrawī: “I have taken from his book what I deemed appropriate, added to it what I have heard, and divided it into chapters so that it will not deviate from the path of my goal for my book.”⁹ This acknowledgment of a conscious intertextuality at work in the compilation of *adab* anthologies is an example of the active and often collaborative performances that produced and reproduced the discourse of place.

Of the extant anthologies on the topic of homesickness, two have been attributed to one of the most famous prose stylists in the Arabic literary tradition, Abū ‘Uthmān ‘Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868), often referred to as the “grandfather of *adab*.”¹⁰ Other anthologies on this topic that are no longer extant, but that appear in tenth- through twelfth-century bibliographical and biographical citations, are attributed to some of the leading intellectuals of the age, among them Abū Ḥayyān ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Tawḥīdī (d. 414/1023), a great admirer

of al-Jāhiz.¹¹ The rest of the anthologies were compiled by well-known *udabā'* and experts in a variety of fields from the Iberian Peninsula to Central Asia. This star-studded and far-flung cast of authors suggests that the idea of home as a land-based category of belonging enjoyed as broad a currency in the world outside the text as it did in the discourse of place. The perception that the concept of homeland was widely compelling made anthologies on the topic of *al-ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān* popular and powerful vehicles for expressing loyalty to land.

The Universalism of the *Waṭan*

These anthologies portray the *waṭan* as a universal source of physical and social nurture through material that anthropomorphizes landscape and emphasizes an inextricable link between land and body.¹² The two are joined in images of the intake of food, drink, and air native to the homeland, the sheltering of the body in the contours of its landscape, and the eventual burial of the body in its soil, dust, or sand. The anthologies compare attachment to land to attachments between humans, generally the kind that spring from some bond perceived as physical or natural, such as parent-child relationships or those between lovers. Moreover, rites of passage or stages of life are often invoked when remembering the homeland from a temporal distance. These memories embed the human life cycle in a landscape and render the two inseparable. Despite the fact that social relationships and life cycle rituals are frequently understood as gender- and culture-specific, the anthologists stage performances within the anthology in which both men and women from a variety of walks of life act as reciters or narrators for the literary fragments, regardless of the identity of their original authors or the nature of their content. This range of performers means that entitlement to the physical and social belonging provided by the homeland is not restricted, at least in the context of the anthology, to men or to nomads, nor is the bond with homeland imagined as necessarily forged between a male subject and a female object, even when the homeland is likened to a mother or female lover. Textual performances in which, for instance, women recite poetry about coming-of-age rituals generally associated with Arabian boys or men narrate anecdotes about the homesickness felt by women after leaving their families for marriage reinforce the message that such belonging transcended sexual and cultural difference.

The anthologies forge a strong link between body and homeland by comparing the homeland to an animal's natural habitat, and attachment to the homeland to an animal's instincts for survival. Although the term *waṭan* appeared infrequently in early Arabic poetry, when it did occur it connoted the relationship between camels and the water sources so vital to surviving the harsh desert conditions of the Arabian Peninsula.¹³ One tenth-century anthology on the topic of *al-ḥanīn*

ilā l-awṭān uses such subheadings as “Description of the homeland (*waṭan*) in terms of sweetness and pleasure,” “What has been said about trees, mountains, lightning, etc.,” and “What has been said about the longing of camels,” to bring together fragments of poetry that detail the landscape of the Arabian Peninsula, especially its flora, fauna, and water sources, but do not necessarily include the term *waṭan*.¹⁴ Indeed, the introduction to the earliest surviving anthology on *al-ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān* asserts that kings long for their homelands in the same way that camels long for their watering holes (*a’ṭān*, a term that has the poetic virtue of rhyming with *awṭān*).¹⁵ Many scholars have noted the recurring images in these anthologies of the animals of the Arabian Peninsula, such as camels, doves, bulls, lions, and lizards, closely associated with or dependent upon their homelands or habitats.¹⁶ Just as animals are weakened or endangered by straying too far from the nourishment provided by their habitats, so too humans who have fallen sick abroad yearn for the salutary effects of the food of their homelands, often literally the meat of those animals, as in roasted lizard, an Arabian delicacy.¹⁷ A variety of interlocutors in these anthologies, from Hippocrates to the Abbasids, identify the healing powers of the scents, air, water, or soil of their homelands, as in the verses: “A stranger in Marj weeps, longing for/ loved ones who are absent. // When a caravan approaches from the direction of his land (*arḍ*),/ he inhales its scent seeking a cure.”¹⁸ Several anthologies even list a series of anecdotes about historical figures, such as Alexander the Great, Joseph, and Moses, who advocate burial in one’s homeland, the final intermingling of body and *waṭan*.¹⁹

One of the most clearly gendered ways in which these anthologies “embody” the homeland is by portraying it as a mother or wet nurse. The homeland gives up its milk, or its water, and physically nourishes those born on (to) it: “the country (*balad*) that suckled you with its water”; “the birthplace (*masqaṭ al-ra’s*) and site (*maḥall*) of suckling”; “the country (*balad*) that gave you the milk you suckled.”²⁰ Sometimes the contours of the landscape are likened to those of a pregnant or nursing woman’s body, as in “I was an embryo in its dunes and a suckling infant in its clouds; its river valleys nursed me and its water catches suckled me” or “its ground gave birth to me and its air nourished me.”²¹ At other times the equation between homeland and wet nurse is made explicit, as in “a man’s land (*arḍ*) is his wet nurse” and “just as your wet nurse has the right of milk over you, so your land (*arḍ*) has the right of homeland (*waṭan*) over you.”²² This last saying implies not only that people receive nourishment from their homelands, but also that they are legally bound by such a relationship. Indeed, given the acceptance of the use of wet nurses in the Qur’an (2:233), early Muslim jurists went to some lengths to establish the legal ramifications of “milk” relationships as parallel to those of “blood” relationships, especially in terms of marriage prohibitions.²³ While such prohibitions against marriage between people who shared a breast were not applicable to those who shared a homeland, it does suggest both a physical and a social link between a person and the *waṭan*.

Although homeland is portrayed vividly as a maternal figure in its capacity to physically nourish its offspring, it is also portrayed in relation to both mother and father, or to an extended kinship network, in the context of nurturing and protecting its sons and daughters. One saying attributes the physical sustenance of the embryo to both parents, who are in turn sustained by the homeland: “According to the Indians, you owe your country (*balad*) the same respect you owe your parents; when you were an embryo your nourishment came from them both, just as their nourishment came from it.”²⁴ This may have resonated with beliefs among Muslims about the father’s seminal fluid joining the mother’s milk at conception to nourish the young, as well as expectations about the social and legal relationships among those who have shared such fluids.²⁵ Moreover, present in both fluids is the nourishment the parents have received from the homeland, either through their own parents’ milk and semen or through the water and foods they have consumed throughout their lives. This accentuates the physical, even genealogical, nature of the attachment between humans and their homelands.

The experience of leaving a homeland and becoming a stranger in a foreign land is likened to that of becoming an orphan, “bereaved of both parents, with no mother to caress him and no father to care for him.”²⁶ This sentiment often emerges from the mouth of a woman who has left her homeland as well as her parents and kin for marriage, as in a verse composed by Nā’ila bint al-Farāfiṣa after having been taken to Medina to wed ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān (d. 35/656): “God willed that I be a stranger/ in Yathrib, neither mother nor father beside me.”²⁷ This suggests that women were considered as likely as men to become physically separated from the shelter of the homeland and the social network associated with it, especially because of the virilocal nature of most marriages among early Muslims.²⁸ In Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr’s eleventh-century anthology, ‘Abd Allāh b. Muṣ‘ab al-Zubayrī (d. 184/800), governor of Medina under Abbasid Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd, narrates an anecdote in which he encounters a woman living in a palace in Syria who recites to him the following verses penned by al-Ḥārith b. Khālid al-Makhzūmī (d. 85/704): “How could I get used to living in Syria (*al-Shām*)/ when I lived elsewhere only yesterday?// Truly, even life in a palace is no substitute for my homeland (*waṭan*);/ rather in Mecca, just yesterday, were my family and my homeland (*waṭan*).”²⁹ Pairing the word for family (*ahl*) with *waṭan* and contrasting it with the life of luxury implied by the image of a palace suggests that homeland and kin are more important to both men (as in the original author of the poem) and women (as in the reciter of the verses) than wealth. While the relative importance of wealth and homeland was debated in these anthologies, the key issue here is that the social nurture of kinship networks was closely linked to land, and physical separation from that land often meant physical separation from that source of belonging for both men and women.³⁰

Memories of childhood among family and friends and rites of passage are also closely related to the homeland in these anthologies. The following saying likens physical separation from homeland and family to temporal separation from the time of youth: “Among the signs of the dignity of man and the nobility of his disposition is his longing for his homelands (*awṭān*), his love for his brothers before him, and his mourning for what has passed of his time.”³¹ A set of verses by ninth-century poet Ibn al-Rūmī quoted in many of the anthologies emphasizes the close connection between childhood, memory, and homeland. For example, “The homelands (*awṭān*) of men are dear to them/ because of the goals they achieved there in youth.// When they remember their homelands (*awṭān*) they are reminded/ of the time of childhood spent there, and for that they yearn.”³² In other poetic renditions of such memories, the human life cycle is portrayed as inseparable from the landscape. Just as the embryo or infant receives sustenance, so too do children and adolescents receive protection and a sense of belonging from the landscape of the *waṭan*. One of the most quoted pair of verses sets the bestowal of amulets, a well-known practice among the bedouin intended to protect an infant or child from the evil eye, against the backdrop of a specific landscape: “The most beloved of God’s countries (*bilād*) lies between Ṣāra/ and Ghaṭafān during a cloudburst,// a country (*bilād*) in which my amulets were fastened on,/ and the first land (*arḍ*) whose soil (*turāb*) touched my body.”³³ This rite of passage involves not only the bestowal of amulets, which would have been performed by a family member, but also physical contact between the body and the soil, dust, or sand of the land itself. Thus, the homeland is both setting for and actor in the rites of passage associated with childhood.

Despite the specificity of the Arabian toponymy and the image of amulets often associated with the bedouin in these anonymously authored verses, the anthologists put them in the mouths of a variety of reciters, including the ninth-century litterateur Ḥammād b. Iṣḥāq al-Mawṣilī, a prototypical male bedouin (*a’rābī*), a young girl from the Arabian region of the Ṭayyi’, and a slave-girl leading a goat.³⁴ In this way, the author of the anthology stages a textual performance of the anthologized material in which the identity of the reciter is as important as the content of the performance itself. Moreover, by virtue of being included in an *adab* anthology, these verses were made available for extratextual performance by the *udabā’* of cities from Isfahan to Kairouan.³⁵ Any number of men and women who had never been anywhere near the Arabian Peninsula may have recited the verses and thus laid claim to the kind of attachment to land expressed therein. This possibility suggests that the significance of the connection between land, body, and the social network invested in the protection of a child—the physical and social nurture of the homeland—extended to both boys and girls, both on the Arabian Peninsula and beyond, whether or not the places and practices described in the verses were literally meaningful to their reciters.³⁶ The

tendency among *udabā'* in the ninth through eleventh centuries to embrace the bedouin as the personification of the Arabic literary heritage to which they were dedicated meant that the homesickness of the bedouin could be seen as the most authentic and authoritative expression of that noble sentiment.³⁷

Highlighting the applicability of such sentiments to people far removed from the Arabian Peninsula and the desert-bound life of the bedouin, al-Ḥuṣrī al-Qayrawānī, the eleventh-century North African author of the *adab* compendium *Zahr al-ādāb wa-thamar al-albāb* (The flower of culture and the fruit of insight), introduces a subsection of an anthology on *al-ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān* entitled “words of the people of [our] age on remembering the homeland (*waṭan*)” with the following commentary: “One country (*balad*) cannot be substituted for another, and you cannot renounce it ever. It is the nest in which you grew and from which you departed. It is the place where your kin gather and the place where your umbilical cord was severed, the country (*balad*) whose soil (*turba*) gave birth to you, whose air nourished you, whose breezes reared you, and in which your amulets were unfastened.”³⁸ Such an intervention on the part of the anthologist, incorporating imagery from centuries-old poetry about the desert, communicates a perception of the universality of the physical and social link between body and homeland by representing acts of nurture and rites of passage, whether literal or figurative, as performed by or on the land.

In these anthologies, erotic love, with its obvious physical and social dimensions, also served as a human metaphor for attachment to land. Much scholarly attention has been paid to the conventional opening of the traditional Arabic ode, known as the *nasīb*, in which the narrator remembers a past love affair while gazing on the ruins of a former dwelling.³⁹ When fragments of poetry of this type are anthologized under the heading of *al-ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān*, land is not merely symbolic of memories of times or loves past but is a concrete, even corporeal link to the idea of homeland. Just as the body and its physical and social connection with parents and kin makes land into a homeland, the body of the beloved possesses transformative power in the following examples: “I was delighted to see one whose place (*makān*) / is tall dunes, black and white sand as far as the eye can see, // and to reach the water that Sulaymā / drank, when night travel had tired every long-striding camel. // I pressed my guts to its cold soil (*turāb*) / even if it was mixed with snake venom.”⁴⁰ Although Sulaymā is not identified explicitly as a former paramour, the narrator is moved to make a physical connection with the same landscape that had once nourished her by lying belly down on the ground in what could be seen as a sexual gesture. The name Sulaymā, among others, recurred in early Arabic poetry, conjuring images of timeless bedouin female beauty.⁴¹ Such physical presence had the power to make even the harshest desert landscape beloved: “I love the land (*arḍ*) where Sulaymā dwells / even if it is surrounded by barrenness. // It is not my fate to love the soil (*turāb*) of a land (*arḍ*), / but rather the beloved who resides on

it.”⁴² In this example the association of land (*arḍ*) with the physical and social nurture of erotic love acts as *waṭan*, rather than soil (*turāb*) as an attribute of the land itself. Indeed, the presence of a beautiful female body makes barren soil fertile and poisonous soil worth risking one’s life to touch.

Sometimes temporal distance from the time of youth overlaps with physical distance from the beloved to associate the homeland with both childhood and first love, as in these verses attributed to the ninth-century poet Abū Tammām: “Let your heart wander wherever you wish out of desire,/ but love was only for the first beloved.// How many dwellings (*manzil*) on the earth (*arḍ*) has the youth become familiar with,/ but his longing is only for the first.”⁴³ In verses attributed to eighth-century poet Bashshār b. Burd, the narrator remembers the territory of his youth and a woman who once lived there: “When were you acquainted with the abode (*dār*) whose people departed/ with Su‘dā? Indeed, it was very recently.// The breezes remind you of when you were an adolescent/ there, and her villa (*maghnā*) remains to you a beloved.”⁴⁴ Here the dwelling place (*maghnā*) rather than Su‘dā herself is identified as the beloved. The implication is that the overlap between temporal distance from the time of adolescence and physical distance from Su‘dā renders the land itself and the dwellings upon it the only remaining object for the narrator’s affection and attachment.

In most of the material invoking erotic love, the homeland is associated with a female beloved, and the authors, reciters, and narrators are either explicitly male or anonymous in the context of the anthologies. These examples suggest that it was men who were considered the agents of *al-ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān* and women the *awṭān* themselves—passive, often absent, recipients of love and devotion—which would resonate with modern Middle Eastern nationalist discourses that tend to gender citizenship male and make loyalty to a female *waṭan* a matter of heteronormative desire or duty.⁴⁵ However, in the far more numerous examples from these anthologies in which the homeland is embodied as a mother or parent, it commands the loyalty of its sons and daughters equally. While there may be enough material to make the case that *waṭan* was constructed in the early discourse of place as a kind of motherland, attachment to homeland was not the prerogative, or burden, solely of men. The primary argument of these anthologies is that attachment to a *waṭan* was universal and natural, associated frequently with the place of birth or family and with the importance of physical and social nurture.

The Transferability of the *Waṭan*

Waṭan in these anthologies is also characterized as a source of material, political, and spiritual nurture and, as such, might take a person far from his or her birthplace and family. Although attachment to homeland might coincide, or conflict,

with social or legal norms about filial loyalty or marriage, it was in its capacity as a source of material, political, and spiritual nurture that homeland most directly coincided, or conflicted, with obligations to patrons or the divine. And it is in this capacity that *waṭan* should be seen as territorial attachment that was transferable over the course of a lifetime. Thus, the category of home in the discourse of place might entail more than one plot of land, each of which might be called a *waṭan*, and a person might owe loyalty to any of them depending on the circumstances. The fact that the term *waṭan* appeared most often in early Arabic poetry in the plural form suggests that the concept of territory as a source of nurture necessitated familiarity with a plurality of plots of land or, more precisely, water sources, given the arid conditions of the Arabian Peninsula. In short, a person had to have more than one *waṭan*, because no single site in the desert could sustain human, or animal, life for long.⁴⁶ This poetic tendency is borne out in *adab* anthologies, as images of the *waṭan* as the place of birth, implicitly singular, are juxtaposed with images of the *waṭan* as the place of family or the beloved, potentially movable, and of *waṭan* as a place of wealth, livelihood, prestige, or piety, often movable. The reality that people moved away from their families and their beloveds inspired the longing or nostalgia (*ḥanīn*) that figures so prominently in the anthologies.⁴⁷ However, the reasons for moving away are not always portrayed as bad; the moving away is often related to the gaining of a new homeland, a new source of social and material nurture or political and spiritual belonging, even if an old one is lost along the way.

Most of these anthologies present a tension between the virtue of loyalty to one's place of birth or family and the possibility that one's place of birth or family might not provide sufficient material resources to enable one to live a life of dignity. Thus, Ibn 'Abd al-Barr includes a second anthology containing a variant plural form of *waṭan* in its title, "A chapter on renouncing homelands (*mawāṭin*) of baseness," which directly follows "A chapter on travel (*safar*) and displacement (*ightirāb*)."⁴⁸ Ibn al-Marzubān includes subsections entitled "Those who choose wealth over *waṭan*" and "Those who choose *waṭan* over wealth" in his anthology on *al-ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān*, and al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī includes subsections in his anthology on displacement entitled "Preference for ease abroad (*fi l-ghurba*) over hardship in the *waṭan*" and "Preference for hardship in the *waṭan* over ease abroad (*fi l-ghurba*)."⁴⁹ Part of this tension stems from the fact that much of the material associating *waṭan* with place of birth or family portrays images from the bedouin life on the Arabian Peninsula, a life idealized, if also mocked, in urban *adab* circles as one of hardship and simplicity.⁵⁰ The following saying highlights this association: "One cannot be familiar with the homeland (*waṭan*) without also being familiar with scarcity of water (*īṭan*)."⁵¹ Some of the anthologized material maintains that attachment to the *waṭan* is so natural, even divinely foreordained, that it does not depend on the quality

of life provided by the *waṭan*, as in the saying variously attributed to ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644) and the Prophet Muḥammad: “If not for love of homeland (*waṭan*), then bad countries (*balad*) would fall to ruin.”⁵² Thus, attachment to the *waṭan* naturally maintains equilibrium among all the lands that God created, both the “good” or fertile and prosperous ones and the “bad” or arid and destitute ones.

Nevertheless, people could and often did trade in a “bad” country for a “good” one. Other examples from the anthologies suggest that if the homeland does not provide sufficient material, political, or spiritual nurture, then leaving it is justified.⁵³ Most of the anthologies on *al-ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān* include material representing the homeland as flexible and transferable, such as: “Ease abroad (*ghurba*) is like being in the homeland (*waṭan*), and hardship in the homeland (*waṭan*) is like being abroad (*ghurba*).”⁵⁴ Similarly, the following verses indicate that possibilities for material nurture make lands into homelands, not their status as place of birth or family: “Poverty in our homelands (*awṭān*) is like being abroad (*ghurba*)/ and wealth abroad (*ghurba*) is like being in the homelands (*awṭān*).// The land (*arḍ*) is something indivisible,/ and one group of neighbors follows another.”⁵⁵ According to these verses, what constitutes homeland is a land (*arḍ*) that provides opportunities for material nurture, while social nurture in the form of neighbors can be found anywhere. A set of verses attributed to Abū Tammām implies that it is possible to combine love of family and homeland with the search for a life of ease: “The inclination of the soul toward family and homeland (*awṭān*)/ should not prevent the life of ease you seek!// In every country (*balad*), if you settle there, you will meet/ family to replace family and neighbors to replace neighbors.”⁵⁶ Here the linked concepts of homeland and social belonging are portrayed as geographically transferable in the service of material nurture.

Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī inserts himself into his anthology on displacement, which immediately precedes his anthology on *al-ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān*, by describing an encounter with a prince in which he recites the following verses and is rewarded with “a large sum of money”: “When you are powerful in a land (*arḍ*), even if it is far away,/ do not let it increase your attachment to the homeland (*waṭan*)!// For it is nothing but a place (*balda*), like any other place (*balda*),/ and the best of them is that which buttresses you against the vicissitudes of time.”⁵⁷ While these verses fix the *waṭan* in space and urge movement away from it, they also suggest that when another plot of land provides better opportunities for social, material, or political nurture, it should command the same kind of attachment as a homeland. Moreover, by staging an autobiographical performance within the anthology in which the anthologist’s own recitation of poetry acts as a kind of “mirror for a prince,” al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī draws attention to the realities of mobility for both the *udabā’* and the political elite. The extratextual

performance of such literary material featuring the widely resonant concept of *waṭan* might also bridge the two experiences and, as in al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī's textual performance, act as a successful bid for patronage.

Ibn 'Abd al-Barr was a scholar from an old Cordoban family who had every reason to embrace mobility and a more flexible concept of homeland. Forced to leave his family's seat in the wake of the Berber uprising of 399/1008–1009, he composed his *adab* compendium late in life for one of the “party kings” (*mulūk al-ṭawā'if*) under whose rule the Muslim-controlled territories of the Iberian Peninsula, otherwise known as Andalusia or al-Andalus, were fragmented in the eleventh century. His anthology on renouncing “homelands (*mawāṭin*) of baseness” is unique among the anthologies for containing only material that urges Muslims to leave any land in which they are humiliated or debased or, in the words of the Prophet, in which “they are subjected to unbearable trials.”⁵⁸ The overall message is not, however, that certain homelands, such as those in impoverished or arid territories, are inherently humiliating or debasing, but that lands in which one's condition is humiliating or debased for a variety of reasons are not true homelands, as in the following verses by ninth-century poet 'Abd al-Ṣamad b. al-Mu'adhhal: “If a homeland (*waṭan*) makes me uneasy,/ then every country (*bilād*) is a homeland (*waṭan*).”⁵⁹ Verses attributed to seventh-century poet Mālik b. al-Rayb express the desire to adopt a new homeland: “If the family of Marwān treats us justly, we will come close/ to you, even if they urge us to stay away, // leaving an abode (*dār*) of humiliation on the earth (*arḍ*)./ Every country (*bilād*) can become a homeland (*ūṭinat*) like my country (*bilād*).”⁶⁰ By setting as a condition for immigration the justice of the Umayyad dynasty (“the family of Marwān”), the poet associates political power with possibilities for mobility, although the phrase “even if they urge us to stay away” suggests either an undertone of rebelliousness, which would not be out of place given that Ibn al-Rayb was considered one of the “brigand poets,” or desperation due to circumstances in the old homeland, which would fit the theme of the anthology.⁶¹ In either case, the overall message, that “every country can become a homeland,” highlights the transferability of the *waṭan* in the search for a life of dignity and plenty. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr himself experienced the kind of reversal of fortune that makes a homeland intolerable and, like al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, inserts himself into the anthology by quoting a set of verses he composed upon leaving Seville: “He whom we were delighted to be near changed beyond recognition,/ turning into poison when he had been cool fresh water. // A neighbor recognizes when a neighbor no longer agrees with him/ and when an abode (*dār*) is no longer suitable for him, so he goes roaming.”⁶² While he is not explicit about what went wrong in Seville, the implication from these verses (and from Ibn 'Abd al-Barr's personal history of mobility in a decentralized political environment) is that opportunities for political favor and patronage

made a land into a homeland and that a lack of such resources justified leaving in search of a new homeland.

On the other hand, some of the anthologized material suggests that political favor and patronage might conflict with attachment to homeland. Just as mobility in the search for livelihood or wealth might justify leaving home, so does mobility in the service of the caliph, though much of the anthologized material implies that a just ruler recognizes the pain that such mobility might cause. Al-Bayhaqī includes two anecdotes in his anthology set during the time of the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mūn that feature the sensitivity of the regime toward attachment to homeland. In the first, while Abū Dulaf (d. 226/840–841) is serving as al-Ma'mūn's governor in Syria, he writes a poem expressing his homesickness and sends it to a friend. Somehow the poem reaches the caliph, and when he hears it he declares: "Al-Qāsim b. 'Īsā is longing for his homeland (*waṭan*)!" At that, al-Ma'mūn orders him to leave.⁶³ Although the poem never mentions the word *waṭan*, the Caliph recognizes the poem as an example of *al-ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān* and immediately acts to reconcile his servant with his homeland by imperial dictate. In the second anecdote, the poet Sa'īd b. Ḍamḍam approaches his patron, al-Ma'mūn's vizier al-Ḥasan b. Sahl (d. 236/850–851), and recites a poem in which he longs for the hardship of the desert and asks the vizier for a favor. Moved by the poem, Ibn Sahl offers to give him whatever he wants. Sa'īd says: "Buy me some sheep, and return me to the desert." Ibn Sahl exclaims: "You are longing for the place you described in the poem! The homeland (*waṭan*)! The homeland (*waṭan*)!" With that realization, the vizier buys him a thousand sheep, gives him a large sum of money, and returns him to the desert.⁶⁴ Although the term *waṭan* does not occur in the poem, al-Ma'mūn's vizier realizes that the territory evoked so poetically is none other than the poet's homeland and that the poet should be reunited with that territory.

Similarly, in an anecdote taken from Ibn 'Abd al-Barr's anthology the chief jurist of Mecca, 'Abd al-Malik b. 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Jurayj (d. 150/767–768), travels to collect a debt from the governor of Yemen, Ma'n b. Zā'ida (d. 152/769–770), appointed by the Abbasid Caliph al-Manṣūr. During his sojourn in Yemen, the jurist sees a caravan preparing to leave for the pilgrimage to Mecca, and his eyes fill with tears. When the governor of Yemen asks him what is wrong, he replies by reciting some verses by the turn-of-the-eighth-century poet 'Umar b. Abī Rabi'a. Although the verses do not mention the term *waṭan*, the governor responds: "Are you determined to travel and return to your homeland (*waṭan*)?" When the jurist replies in the affirmative, the governor gives him gifts, pays his debt, and wishes him well on his return trip to Mecca.⁶⁵ In all of these examples, service to the caliph, or to one of his appointees, causes separation from the homeland, and the caliph or a member of his regime is the one who makes possible a return.⁶⁶ Thus, the wisdom and justice of a ruler may ease the tension

between attachment to homeland and the political and religious obligation of serving the caliph. These anecdotes each feature a textual performance, the recitation of poetry, which is represented as a strikingly effective way of making a demand of a political or religious authority. This likely reflected the uses—and usefulness—of *adab* anthologies in the competition for patronage and resources in the world outside the text.⁶⁷ The fact that the political or religious authority always recognizes the concept of *waṭan* in the performance, even though it is not uttered explicitly, reinforces the dominant message that *waṭan* was a widely comprehensible and compelling territorial category of belonging.

Another way in which traveling abroad might outweigh clinging to the homeland, or might actually act as a substitute homeland, is if it offered opportunities for the fulfillment of religious obligations or the attainment of wisdom or piety. One saying attributed to “the philosophers” urges people to seek their livelihoods abroad, for “even if you do not gain wealth, you will come away with much insight.”⁶⁸ Ibn al-Marzubān’s inclusion of the Qur’ānic verse 67:15, enjoining people to roam throughout the world enjoying God’s bounty, in his chapter on “Those who choose wealth over *waṭan*” suggests that such a divine injunction is more important than homeland, or might be a substitute for homeland.⁶⁹ Similarly, the inclusion of Qur’ānic verses 2:246 and 4:66 in several of these anthologies, illustrating people’s reluctance to leave their abodes (*diyār*), even if ordered by God to do so, suggests that though attachment to homeland is natural, it is less important or virtuous than mobility in the service of God.⁷⁰ While these verses set homeland and service to God in tension with one another, they can also be seen as justifying mobility as a form of spiritual nurture.

To a limited extent, the later anthologies suggest easing this tension by the adoption of Mecca as a universal homeland of spiritual nurture. Composed in the far western reaches of the Islamic world, Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr’s collection on the topic of *al-ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān* is dominated by material in which Mecca or the Ḥijāz, a regional toponym referring to the western part of the Arabian Peninsula, features as the *waṭan*.⁷¹ Other anthologies include a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet longs for Mecca after being forced to leave for Medina in what became known as the *hijra* (migration, flight) of 622.⁷² Although the Prophet’s own longing might be interpreted as a justification for characterizing the *waṭan* as the place of birth and family, since Mecca was certainly that to him, it could also be interpreted as an exemplary longing for an ideal *waṭan*, Mecca, which all pious Muslims should adopt as their own.

Just as one might ask whether a place of birth and family, a place of wealth and patronage, or a place of piety and ritual like Mecca is the true homeland, so too do the anthologies exhibit a tension between the bedouin longing for the homelands of the Arabian Peninsula and the longing of a variety of other figures for the settled centers of the Islamic world. Some have seen this tension as a

reflection of the battle lines drawn by the movement known as the *Shu'ūbiyya*, which questioned the privileged place of the Arabic linguistic and literary heritage, and its iconic images of Arabian life, in Islamic civilization.⁷³ The earliest extant anthology, a freestanding work attributed to al-Jāhīz, is the most explicit in its construction of the nomadic bedouin lifestyle as the archetypal experience of *al-ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān*. In his introduction, the anthologist compares the longing of the king whose homesickness inspired him to compose the work to the longing of a camel.⁷⁴ Other authorial commentary reinforces the sense that the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula, both animal and human, demonstrate a kind of primordial attachment to territory, as in the following statement: “If we were to collect all the anecdotes and poetry of the bedouin on this topic, it would take forever.”⁷⁵ With the exception of a handful of pre-Islamic kings and prophets and a brief reference to the Abbasid-era Iranian family of viziers the Barmakids, the vast majority of the material in this anthology features images from the Arabian Peninsula. The bedouin emerges from the anthology as the hero of *al-ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān*, even if that heroism could be mocked in some of the anecdotes that emphasize the coarseness of desert life.⁷⁶

While material featuring the bedouin and Arabia never disappears from the anthologies, there is a marked trend in the later anthologies toward the inclusion of material featuring contemporary city folk and, in particular, itinerant members of the *udabā'* like the anthologists themselves.⁷⁷ Some anthologies create this effect by privileging material from ninth- through eleventh-century sources and urban and regional toponyms from outside of the Arabian Peninsula. Al-Bayhaqī's anthology includes a number of examples of what have been called graffiti, verses of poetry etched upon doors or walls of caravanserais, in cities like Baghdad and al-Ahwāz.⁷⁸ These graffiti testify to the longing inspired by mobility in an urban world, a longing that was inscribed literally in the built environment. Ibn al-Marzubān quotes a set of verses in which the following line represents not a city but a region as a *waṭan*: “He left Iraq (*al-ʿIrāq*), which had been to him a homeland (*waṭan*),/ and there is nothing good in life having moved away from the homeland (*waṭan*).”⁷⁹ Regional toponyms, like those of cities or descriptions of landscapes, were another way of associating the *waṭan* with territoriality. Ibn al-Marzubān uses the subheading “those for whom displacement (*ghurba*) is a perpetual cycle” to introduce a set of oft-quoted verses by Abū Tammām in which he compares himself to the ever-wandering pre-Islamic prophet and legendary figure al-Khiḍr: “I am the successor to al-Khiḍr. Others fix their homeland (*waṭan*)/ in a place (*balda*), but my homelands (*awṭān*) are the backs of camels.// My people are in Syria (*al-Shām*), my desire is in Baghdad, and I/ am in al-Raqqatayn, while my brothers are in al-Fuṣṭāṭ.”⁸⁰ Even though this is one of the few examples in which the *waṭan* is specifically defined extraterritorially (“the backs of camels”), the toponyms in these verses celebrate the cities and

regions of the Abbasid empire, each plot of land taking on one of the attributes of homeland, so that only by moving between them all can the poet truly be at home.

In certain cases, the anthologists stage encounters between bedouin and urban literati in which the composition or recitation of poetry on the topic of homeland acts as a test or a competition for the audience's approval. In al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī's anthology, one anecdote has litterateur Abū Dulaf, a noted patron of *adab*-style gatherings, criticizing a bedouin for indifference toward loved ones after hearing him recite the following verse: "In every country (*bilād*), if I settle there, I meet/ people to replace people and brothers to replace brothers."⁸¹ Here, the bedouin's recitation, and its celebration of a nomadic life, is portrayed as an unsuccessful performance, both within the text and, it is implied, without, in that it fails to win over its urban and urbane audience. Al-Ḥuṣrī al-Qayrawānī presents an anecdote in which the well-known Baghdad-born poet Ibn al-Rūmī brings a friend one of his odes that includes lines likening longing for the homeland to nostalgia for the time of youth and asks him to judge between it and the verses recited by a bedouin describing "a country (*bilād*) in which my amulets were fastened on,/ and the first land (*arḍ*) whose soil (*turāb*) touched my body." His friend explains that Ibn al-Rūmī's verses are better because "they mention the homeland (*waṭan*) and love for it and the pain that affirms it."⁸² The conclusion of this anecdote suggests that one of the ways in which city folk like Ibn al-Rūmī had improved upon the expressions of attachment to homeland attributed to the archetypal bedouin is by consciously using the word *waṭan*. This word allows Ibn al-Rūmī to express in more universal terms what the bedouin could only accomplish by describing a specific desert landscape. Thus, the text contains a performance validating the project of the text itself, the construction of a concept of *waṭan* as a territorial category of belonging that was comprehensible and compelling across divides of class, culture, and gender, just as it was transferable across space and scale—from desert to city to region—in a highly mobile world.

The signal contribution of *adab* anthologies on the topic of *ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān* to the discourse of place was their construction and deployment of the universal, yet flexible, concept of *waṭan*, or homeland. The very flexibility of this concept had political resonance in the ninth to eleventh centuries, as it justified the mobility of the *udabā'* themselves and their patrons in the political elite. If loyalty to a *waṭan* was transferable, so too was loyalty to a patron. Conversely, if a client's loyalty to a *waṭan* conflicted with loyalty to a patron, it might be the duty of the patron to reconcile the client with his or her *waṭan*; or, if a believer's loyalty to a *waṭan* conflicted with loyalty to God, it might be the believer's duty to adopt a new *waṭan*. In any of these cases, the mobility justified by the flexibility of the concept of *waṭan* was always *to* or *from* a plot of land that was either explicitly

styled a *waṭan* or had the characteristics of a *waṭan* in terms of providing physical, social, material, political, or spiritual nurture. Even if the *waṭan* was, as Abū Tammām claimed, the back of a camel, it was only so that it could move the rider between plots of land that provided different kinds of belonging.

This emphasis on geographically locating belonging makes these anthologies eloquent testimony to land as an object of desire among Muslims in this period. Although *adab* anthologies on the topic of *al-ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān* mount the most focused and textured representations of home as homeland, echoes of these representations reverberate throughout the discourse of place, facilitated by the capacity of the *waṭan* to encompass plots of land of very different sizes and locations and by the ability of the individual to choose and change the *waṭan* depending on circumstance.⁸³ For instance, when al-Khaṭīb al-Baghḏādī, author of the eleventh-century city-based biographical dictionary *Taʾriḫ Baghdād* (History of Baghdad), quotes the religious scholar al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820) saying, “I never entered a country without counting it a place of sojourn, except for Baghdad, for when I entered it I counted it a homeland (*waṭan*),” he is making a gesture to the authoritative corpus of material on *al-ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān* assembled and performed in these anthologies.⁸⁴ Moreover, he is emphasizing the flexibility of the *waṭan*, enabling someone like al-Shāfiʿī, likely born in Syria or Yemen, to adopt Baghdad as a homeland and, conversely, enabling Baghdad to lay claim to al-Shāfiʿī, as well as other illuminati, which was, after all, the goal of such a biographical dictionary. Similarly, when Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih in his tenth-century *adab* anthology on “comparing the merits of countries” (*tafāḏul al-buldān*) describes Kufa as “the homeland (*waṭan*) of ʿAlī, may God be pleased with him, and his abode (*dār*),” he is anticipating an audience that understands the *waṭan* as a transferable territorial allegiance, in this case from ʿAlī’s place of birth and residence in Mecca and Medina, where his claim to leadership of the Islamic community was contested, to Kufa, where he found social and political belonging among the supporters of his claim.⁸⁵ The geographical transferability of this idea of home and the universalism of its gravitational pull made it a powerfully flexible vehicle for associating land and belonging and for expressing diverse and changing loyalties, both in *adab* anthologies and elsewhere in the discourse of place.