

**The impact of religious dimensions on nomenclature of streets in  
Saudi Arabia with special reference to Shaqrā Province  
A toponomastic approach**

by

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Symbols used in the phonemic transcription of Arabic words

<b>Short Vowels</b>		
i	Front unrounded vowel between close and half-close	‘ilm
u	Back rounded vowel between close and half close	kutub
a	Front open unrounded vowel	kataba
<b>Long vowels</b>		
ā	Front open unrounded vowel	kātib
ū	Back rounded vowel between close and half close	rasūl
ī	Front close unrounded vowel	Fīl (elephant)
<b>Semi-vowels</b>		
w	Voiced labio-velar	law
j	Voiced Palatal	bayt
<b>Consonants</b>		
b	Voiced bilabial plosive	bāb
t	Voiceless denti-alveolar plosive	tamr
th	Voiceless inter-dental fricative	thamar
j	Voiced palate-alveolar affricate	yajtami’
ḥ	Voiceless pharyngeal fricative	yaḥsun
kh	Semi-Voiced uvular fricative	khafa
d	Voiced denti-alveolar plosive	ḥamada
ḍ	Voiced inter-dental fricative	ḍahab
r	Voiced alveolar trill	‘umar
z	Voiced alveolar fricative	Zaynab
s	Voiceless alveolar fricative	siḥr
sh	Voiceless palate-alveolar fricative	‘isha’
ṣ	Voiceless velarised alveolar fricative	‘anāṣir
ṭ	Voiceless velarised denti alveolar plosive	baṭal
ẓ	Voiced velarised alveolar fricative	nazara
ḍh	Voiced velarised denti-alveolar plosive	ḍammah
‘	Voiced pharyngeal frictionless continuant	‘āmil
gh	Voiced uvular fricative	lughah
f	Voiceless labio-dental fricative	nafs

q	Voiceless uvular plosive	qulna
k	Voiceless velar plosive	kana
l	Voiced alveolar lateral	'amal
m	Voiced bilabial nasal	'antum
n	Voiced alveolar nasal	mana'a
h	Voiceless glottal fricative	minhah
'	Voiceless epiglottal plosive	'inna

#### ملخص البحث

هدفت الدراسة إلى اثبات العلاقة بين الأسماء والمدلولات وان الأسماء ليست مجرد رموز بلا معنى لمسميات موجودة في الواقع بل انها بمثابة مرآة تعكس الأطر الفكرية والثقافية والاجتماعية السائدة في المجتمع. وقد استخدمت الدراسة المنهج الكمي لتوضيح أثر المجالات الدلالية ذات البعد الديني على تسمية الشوارع في المملكة العربية السعودية متمثلة في محافظة شقراء والمحافظات المجاورة لها وهي محافظة مرات وساجر وأشيقر. وقد تضمنت الدراسة عينات عشوائية من أسماء الشوارع بالمحافظات المذكورة حيث شملت أسماء 86 شارعاً. وقد أظهرت الدراسة أن تسمية الشوارع في المحافظات المذكورة اعتمدت على 7 مجالات دلالية ذات طابع ديني مندرجة من الأعلى تأثيراً إلى الأدنى على النحو التالي: الدول والمدن والقرى في عهد الخلافة الإسلامية وكان لها نسبة 37% من التأثير على تسمية الشوارع. جاء بعدها تأثير أسماء صحابة النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم بنسبة 28%. ثم الخلفاء وقادة الدولة الإسلامية بنسبة 14% ثم آل بيت النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم بنسبة 13% ثم التابعين بنسبة 6% ثم جاء في المرحلة الأخيرة الشعراء بنسبة 2%. وبتطبيق المنهج الكيفي على الدراسة يتضح أن السبب وراء ارتفاع نسبة تأثير أسماء الدول والمدن الإسلامية على تسمية الشوارع بالمملكة يؤكد ويعزز الدور الحيوي الذي تقوم به المملكة نحو العالم الإسلامي حيث يظهر ذلك أن دول العالم الإسلامي كما تقع باطننا بقلب المملكة فإنها أيضاً تنعكس على الظاهر واتضح ذلك بإطلاق أسماء تلك الدول والمدن الإسلامية على شوارع مدن ومحافظات المملكة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** المجالات الدلالية، علم الأسماء، علم اللغة الاجتماعي

#### Objectives of the Study

The study investigates the impact of semantic domains related to religious theme on the process of naming streets in Saudi Arabia as represented in Riyadh City, Shaqra' Province, as well as the provinces and provincial villages around it, namely, Mirāt, Ushaiqir and Sājir. Based on 86 randomly selected street names, the study attempts to validate the reliability of the premise that the patterns of street names in Saudi Arabia reveal the major characteristics and ideologies prevailing in the milieu in which these names are used. A visitor to Saudi Arabia can hardly avoid being curious about the patterns of street names, such as the highly frequent occurrence of religious theme in almost every district. Nevertheless, when people in Saudi Arabia, whether citizens or expatriates, are asked if they had discussed such patterns of street names, they admitted that they had not, yet they might get interested in them.

The linguistic branch which studies names is called “onomastics” derived from the Greek word “onoma” meaning names. The branch of onomastics which studies place names is called “toponomastics”. This word is derived from the Greek word “tópos” which means place, and “ónoma” which means name.

### **The significance of the Study**

The importance of the study emerges from the crucial role proper names themselves play in people’s lives. People may spend a long time to determine the names of their babies. Some people may change their names at important points in their lives. People identify addresses by streets and towns which have their own names. Place names can have political and cultural implications, since “place names are generated by humans as language-users in response to their environment” (Hough, 2016, p. 70). Gooden (2006) stresses the importance of studying the implications of names, when he states that “a name is not an arbitrary collection of syllables but reflects some inner quality or attribute of that which it names” (p. V). Mills (2011) emphasizes the importance of studying place names for their capacity for survival (p.1).

However, name studies are still progressing. Harder (1967) admits that onomastics, in general, and place names, in particular, have been largely ignored by American philologists and teachers. He attributes this ignorance to the fact that teachers lack onomastics sophistication, which is not necessarily the fault of the teacher who has not been made aware of the importance of such study. Ashley’s (2000) comment on onomastic studies in doctoral dissertations is applied to onomastic studies in general, since he states that “only doctoral dissertations regularly and with great care take into account previous scholarship, and in the field of name studies such dissertations are woefully few” (p.118).

### **Literature Review**

As for English studies on Arabic names, the researcher observes the lack of systematic study on the onomastic sophistication in the Arab societies. The researcher seeks out the relevance of street names to the study of language, history and culture; since names studies, in Ashley’s (2000) words, “connect linguistics and literature to psychology, sociology, geography and history” (p.15).

Naming in Arabic is influenced by the advent of Islam. Muhammad, the prophet of Islam (PBUH), repeatedly recommends that the best names in the sight of Allah [God] are abd ‘abdu’llah [the servant of God], ‘abdu ar-Rahman [the servant of the Merciful One]. Another prominent feature in naming in Islam is giving the prophet’s names, Muhammad, to children. Moreover, parents name their sons after some Islamic rituals, e.g., Ramadan, after the month of fasting, or

Jumu‘ah, after the day of week when Muslims hold together for congregational prayer just after noon.

Investigating the process of naming takes us on a fascinating journey to the Arabic culture. Auda (2003) introduces one of the seminal studies on Arabic names entitled “Arabic names and naming practices” in which he enlists some Arabic names in the period before 1600 A.D. Most importantly, he provides some insight into the process of naming in Arab societies. Firstly, he notes that the list of names given females is shorter than the list of men’s given names (p. 1). Secondly, he observes the recurrence of titular names, such as Sayf ad-din, (The Sword of the Faith), Ala al-Din" (Light of Faith) which indicate the status or rank. Then, he provides five categories of Arabic names:

1- An ’ism [personal name] is a proper name given to a person shortly after birth; e.g., Muhammad.

2- A kunya [nickname] is an honorific prefix meaning the father or mother of someone as an indication to the close relation between the addresser and the addressee; e.g., ’abu ’affan (Othman). i.e. the father of ’affan. Kunya precedes the personal name or ’ism.

3- A nasab [ancestral name] means the son or daughter of someone; e.g., Ibn ’Umar [the son of Umar]. The nasab follows the ’ism in usage, e.g., Ḥasan Ibn Faraj. Nasab may be extended for several generations. It is noteworthy that when the parent in a nasab is referred to by his kunya, the word ’abu becomes ’abi, e.g., ’ali Ibn ’abi Ṭalib.

4- Laqab [title] is a combination of words into a byname or epithet, usually religious, relating to nature, a description, or of some admirable quality the person has (or would like to have); e.g., ’Harun ar-Rashid’. One particular form of laqab is formed on the pattern of ’abd [servant of] plus one of the 99 names of Allah, e.g., ’abd al-Aziz [servant of the Almighty]. The prefix ’al- differentiates between the ’ism and the laqab.

5- A nisba [family name] follows the ’ism. Three types of nisba are recognized:

-Occupational: derived from a person’s career; e.g., Muahmmad al-Hallaj [the dresser of cotton].

- Of descent: derived from the family of the person; e.g., Yusuf al-Ayyubi from the family line of Ayyub.

- Geographical: derived from the place of residence or birth; e.g., Yaqub ad-Dimashqi, dervived from Damascus city.

Al-Ahdal, (as cited in Ḥuseini’s (n.d.) article) conducts a study on the use of kunya in Arabic. He attributes this use of kunya to many reasons:

- 1- To express optimism and hope, e.g., 'abu al-Faḍl [father of courtesy].
- 2- To imply opposition, e.g., 'abu Yḥyah [Father of life]
- 3- If someone is famous for something or a certain attribute, then kunya is used to emphasize it, e.g., 'abu al-Wafā' [father of accomplishment].

In contrast to the lack of English studies on such field of research, Europe name studies, as Kelsie Harder (1967) notes, has long been linguistically conducted with numerous publications such as *Onoma*, *BetMe zur Namenforschung*, *DeutscheNamenkunde*, and other magazines as publication outlets (p.2). However, as Hough (2016) illustrates in his book *The Oxford Handbook of Names and Naming* "the investigation of name origins, on the other hand, is more recent, not developing until the twentieth century in some areas, and being still today at a formative stage in others" (p. 1). In his study entitled "Names: The Mirror of Society", Liu (2001) considers names as a marker of an age. He says, "Names bear the marker of, or can be regarded as the marker of the social era" (p. 5).

Liu (2001) provides the criteria English speaking people and Chinese would choose for selecting personal names. English speaking people select names by going through a dictionary of names and picking out a name from the stock. They may choose the names of their dear ones for their babies to show their respect and affection for them. Some would choose their names from the Bible characters.

Chinese do not have such a special dictionary for names to choose from. Instead, they would use any large comprehensive dictionary and go through characters one by one until they find the word or phrase that they feel pleased with. Another alternative for naming their babies is by going to scholars and asking them to suggest names for them. In addition, they may use the name of each object or creature around them to name their babies, such as tigers, dogs, oxen, or plants, such as trees, grass, or flowers. They may depend on semantic sense or the structure of words or phrases instead. For example, they choose a tiger for connotation of power. They choose words that rhyme with surnames such as Fang Fang, Yang Yang, or Chen Chen. The criteria that depend on choosing names arbitrarily from a dictionary or anything around them or sense of structure of words and phrases that appeal to them may reveal that the names of both Chinese and English people do not reflect their ideologies and beliefs.

In his study entitled *Name dropping: A no nonsense guide to the use of names in everyday language*, Gooden (2006) studies hundreds of terms derived from names of famous people and places. He uses examples from the media to show how these terms are employed,

sometimes casually, sometimes with care. For example, the term adonis-like which means youthful and beautiful is derived from the figure of Adonis in Greek mythology.

In his PhD dissertation entitled *Name, place, and emotional space: Themed semantics in literary onomastic research*, Butler (2012) studies place names within literature and admits the lack of such onomastic study of names. He states that “there has been very little research into the array of semantic effects that may be expressed through onomastic form, with such linguistic creativity bearing a functional purpose through the capacity to convey symbolic association, whether directly or not” (p. 1). Butler was inspired by Nicolaisen’s suggestions (1978; 1986; 1996; 2005 as cited in Butler) asserting the needs of the field of literary onomastics, especially the requirement of the distinct analytical methodologies, rather than simply taking the techniques found within other onomastic areas, and attempting to apply them as they stand. Butler proves that onomastics is a powerful tool of literary analysis. He concludes that names have a functional value in the construction of locations and settings in literary works. He asserts that no symbolic creation is made in isolation, free from associative qualities. Writing is rather constitutive than simply reflective; new worlds are made out of old texts, and old worlds are the basis of new texts (p. 204).

## Methodology

The first challenge the research faced is the inconsistency of the spelling of Arabic names because they are transliterated into various forms. T.E. Lawrence refers to this challenge of Romanizing Arabic names in his answer to some queries from his publisher about the inconsistent spellings of Arabic names in his manuscript *Revolt in the Desert*.

Arabic names won't go into English, exactly, for their consonants are not the same as ours, and their words, like ours, vary from district to district. There are some scientific systems of transliteration, helpful to people who know enough Arabic not to need helping, but a wash-out for the world. I spell my names anyhow, to show what rot the systems are. (as cited in Auda, 2003, para 8)

Investigation into the cause of this consistency reveals that it results from the use of two different methods in Romanizing Arabic words. The first one is based on transliteration, the direct representation of foreign letters using Latin symbols. The second is based on



transcription, the representation of sounds of a language. To overcome such inconsistency the researcher adopts one method, namely, transcription, since most systems for Romanizing Arabic are transcription systems (Wikipedia, Romanization of Arabic).

Yet, there is still another challenge in using the transcription method. Some researchers use IPA sophisticated symbols which are sometimes difficult for recognizing because it contains a great number of diacritics, marks of points added to the letter. Others use very simplified conventional method that depends on using letters. The researcher adopts a blending method that uses IPA symbols, as well as conventional symbols used in the field of Academia. It mainly derives from Ditters' and Motzki's (2007) book *Approaches to Arabic Linguistics*. The rationale for adopting this method is to avoid distraction that may occur as a result of the use sophisticated symbols in IPA or the mess resulting from the use of the simplified conventional method such as doubling the letter to refer to the length of a vowel.

Names also are not translated into English because, as Auda rightly said, "since a word enters the name 'pool', it quickly loses its putative "meaning" and becomes simply a name in and of itself". (2003, para. 5). For example, the name Ahmed is not translated into "I praise".

It is noteworthy that the list of street names is not designed to be exhaustive, but only large enough to reflect reasonably the influence of Islamic cultural heritage on nomenclature of streets in Saudi Arabia.

The researcher uses the quantitative approach to investigate the content and the form of street names. As for the content, the study classifies streets names into seven key semantic domains related to religious categories. As for the form, the study classifies street names into 26 structures. After that, the study uses the qualitative approach to explain statistical results.

Some streets could have been classified under more than one religious category. However, they are mentioned only once under the main category it belongs to, e.g., prophet's companions were really warriors and leaders in wars, some of them were poets as well, however, their main criterion is being companions of prophet, so they are mentioned only once under the element of prophet's companions.

### **Data analysis**

#### **1- Countries, cities and villages in Islamic Caliphate**

The study investigates 18 streets named after countries, cities and villages in Islamic Caliphate. It shows that the dominant structure for this category is 'ism: 17 'ism and one kunya. For example, al-Qādisiyyah is a city in Iraq. It gets its fame since the battle between Arab Muslims and

Sasanian Empire during the first period of Muslim conquests. This reveals that names of countries and cities are stable. The reason may be that in Islamic history, names of countries are not affected by persons who govern them. The only one that contains kunya here is a district in Riyadh. It is Um al-Ḥamam. It is named after a village in the eastern part in Saudi Arabia. Other names include capital cities of Islamic countries such as al-Qāhirah (Cairo), capital of Egypt; al-Khartūm (Khartoum), capital of Sudan; Baghdād (Baghdad), Capital of Iraq

The structures of the names are illustrated in the following figure:

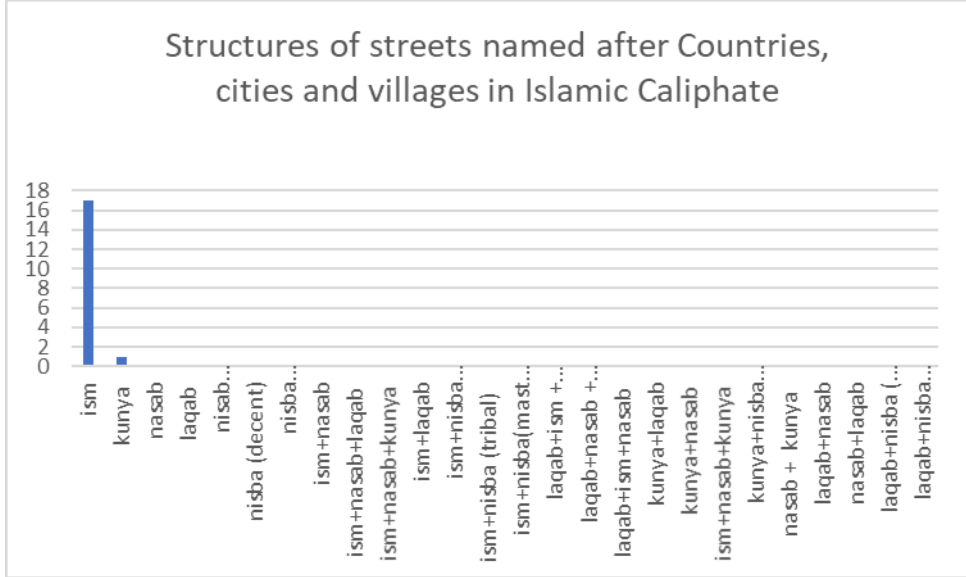


Figure 4 structures of streets named after Countries, cities and villages in Islamic Caliphate

**2- Scholars**

Analysis of the population of the study reveals that of 17 streets named after Islamic scholars in Saudi Arabia, 12 of them are prominent scholars in Islamic Jurisprudence and prophet’s traditions. Others are more interested in medicine, astronomy and language. It is noteworthy that those scholars are from different countries in the Islamic world. The structures of the names are illustrated in the following chart:



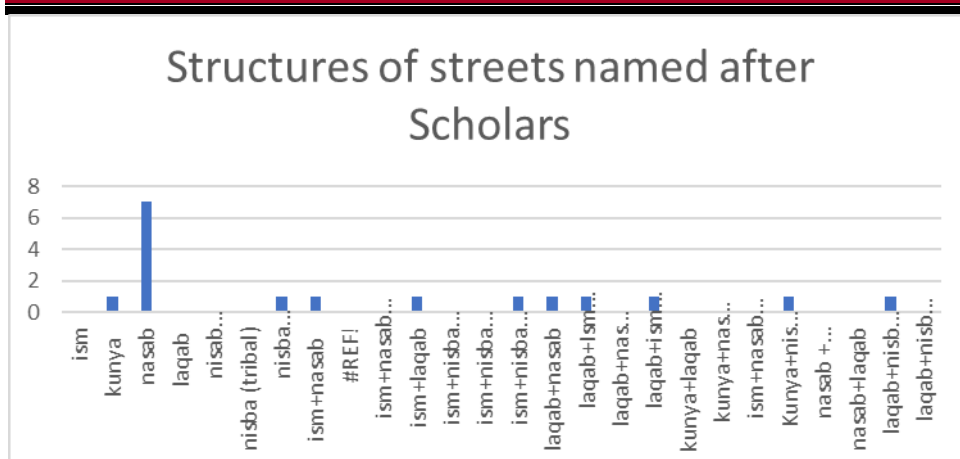


Figure 5 Structures of streets named after Scholars

This chart shows that the most dominant structure is nasab. The name containing most items is “Imām Muhammad Ibn Abdel-Wahāb”. It consists of four items; two of them are titles. This implies Saudis’ great respect and gratitude to this scholar, since they consider him responsible for the revival of Islamic heritage in the recent era. Two nisbas are geographical and one is occupational. This reflects Arabs’ interest in person’s place of birth or in his career. The study adds fourth type of nisba: of master. This is in the name Yaqūt al-Ḥamawī, a man of letters. His nisba, al-Hamawī, is derived from the name of his master who bought him when he was captured and sold in Baghdād. Ten names consist of nasab in contrast to two names consisting of kunya.

### 3- Prophet's companions

The study analyzes 25 prophet’s companions. This constitutes the largest number of streets names. It implies Saudis’ gratitude to prophet’s companions without whom Islam would not have been spread. The following chart illustrates the structures of the names of prophet’s companions used to label streets in Saudi Arabia:

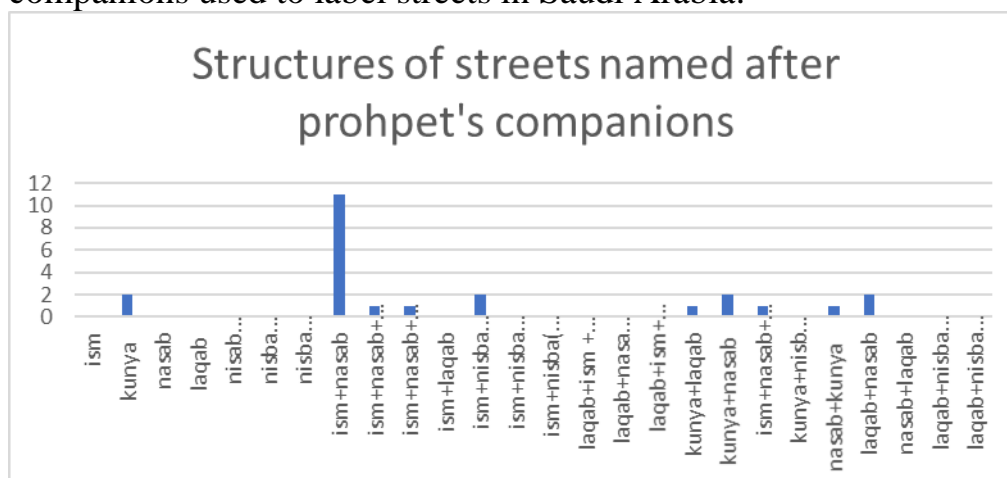


Figure Structures of streets named after prohpets companions

This chart shows that the most prevailing structure is 'ism+nasab: ten examples consist of this structure. This indicates that prophets' companions are so great that they do not need laqab to honour them. It is enough for them to mention their names and the families whom they are proud of. The analysis of the form of street names in Saudi Arabia manifests the principle of equality in Islam. Umar Ibn al-Khattāb, the second caliph in Islam, and Khalid Ibn al-Walīd, the greatest knight in Islam, have the same name structure as Bilal Ibn Rabāh, a black slave from Abyssinia, i.e. all of them contain 'ism+nasab.

#### 4- Islamic caliphs and leaders

The prevailing structure in this category is 'ism+nasab. Then, there are kunya, laqab, 'ism+nasab+laqab, 'ism + laqab, 'ism+nisba, kunya+laqab, nasab+laqab, and finally laqab+nisba. It is noteworthy that most names of Islamic caliphs and readers are patronymic; related to paternal names, without matronymic element; related to maternal nasab.

Kunya is used to acknowledge the birth of a child. Moreover, it can be part of a name to signify possession of quality or feature. Abu al-Faḍl (Father of merit). Laqab [title] indicates respect or religious significance (A guide to names and naming practices, 2006, p. 35). The distribution of this category to the structures of names is illustrated in the following chart:

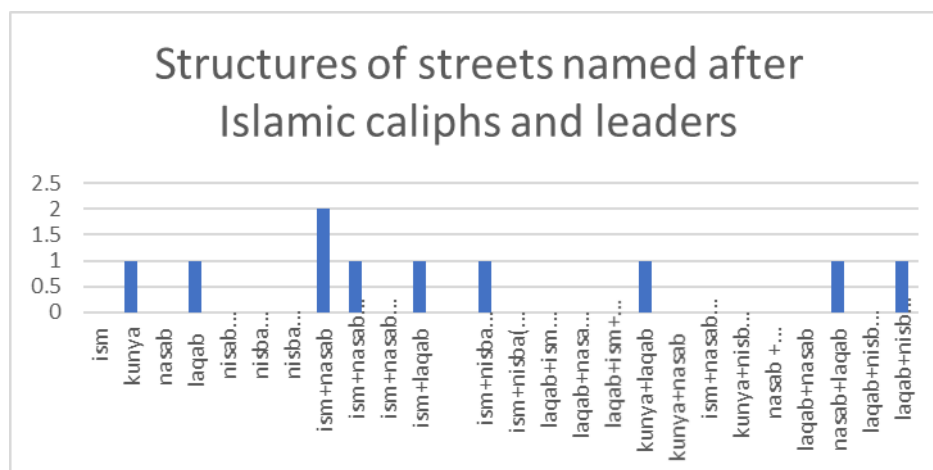


Figure 7 Structures of streets named after Islamic caliphs and leaders

#### 5- Prophet's family members

The study includes nine names of prophet's family members. They are distributed to the forms kunya (1), 'ism+nasab (2), 'ism+nasab+laqab (1), 'ism+nasab+kunya (3), 'ism+laqab (1), 'ism+tribal nisba (1). As mentioned in the category of Islamic scholars, the most frequently occurred item is nasab (6). The distribution of this category to the structures of street names is illustrated in the following chart:

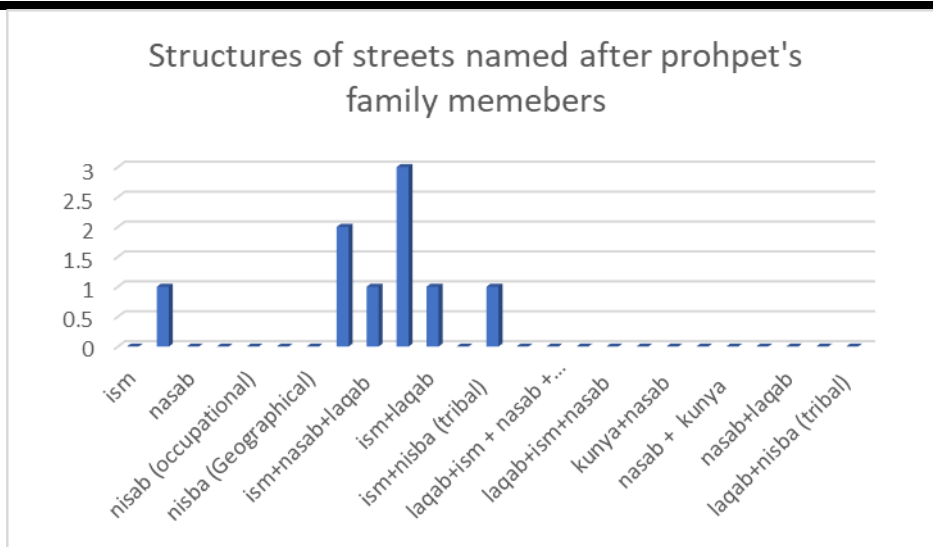


Figure 8 Structures of streets named after prohpets family memebers

**6- Prophet’s followers**

The study includes ten streets named after prophet’s followers. They are distributed to the forms: kunya (1), 'ism+nasab (3), 'ism+nasab+laqab (2), 'ism+nasab+kunya (2), 'ism+tribal nisba (1), laqab+nasab+'ism (1). This distribution shows that the most prominent item is nasab (8). This distribution of this category to the structures of names is illustrated in the following chart:

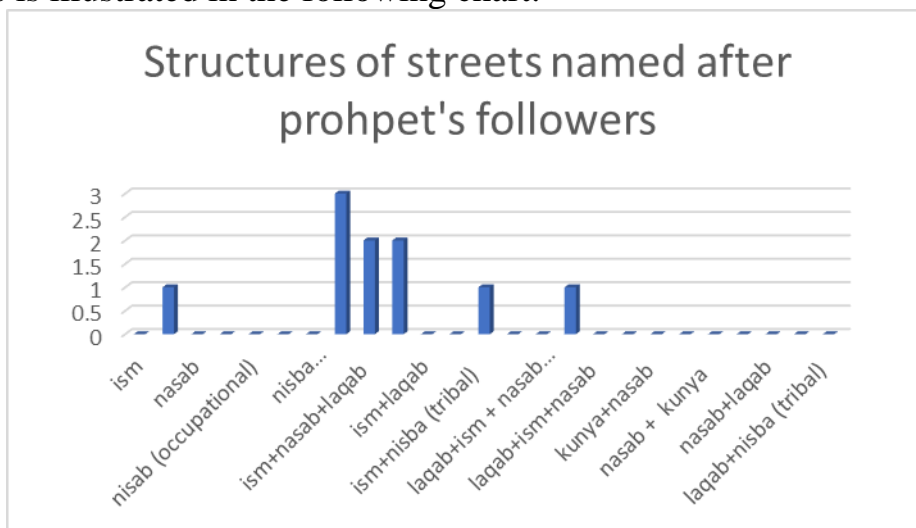


Figure 9 Structures of streets named after prohpets followers

**7- Poets**

The study includes only two streets named after two poets. One of them is in the structure of 'ism. The other is in the structure of laqab+nasab. This category of poets has a little contribution to naming streets compared to other categories. This shows Saudis are more interested in other categories rather than poets. The distribution of this category to the structures of names is illustrated in the following chart:

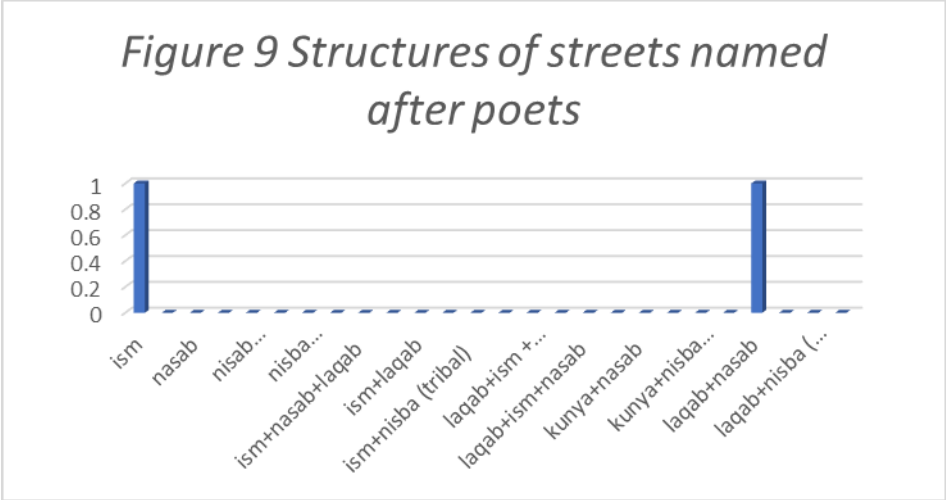


Figure 10 Structures of streets named after poets

The following pie chart summarizes the whole seven religious categories of street names.

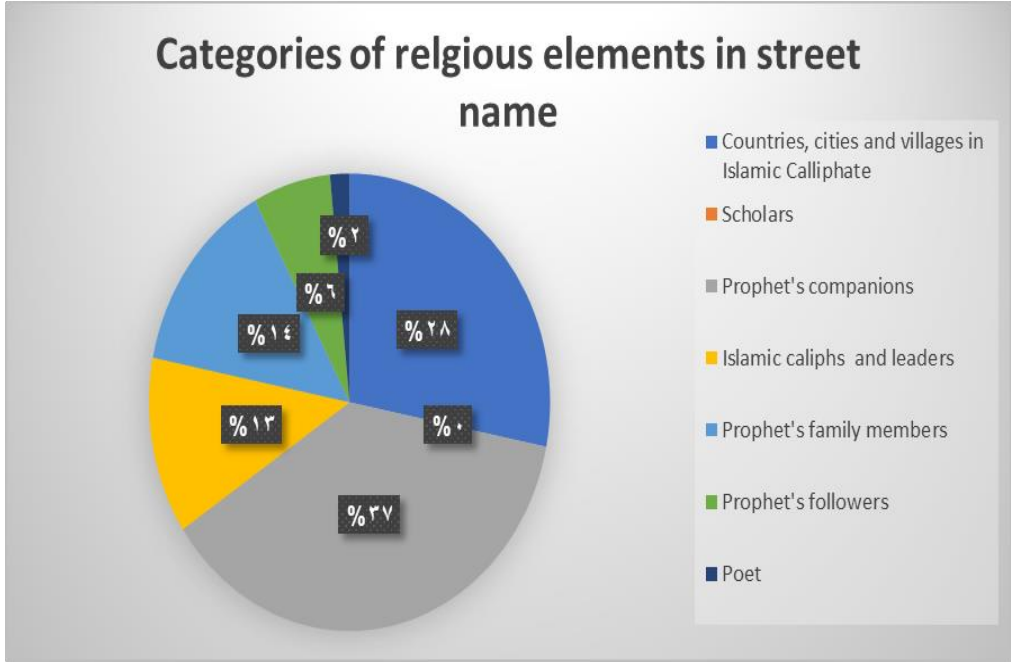


Figure 12 classifying street names into seven religious categories

The following bar chart summarizes the whole 26 structures used in the analysis of street names:

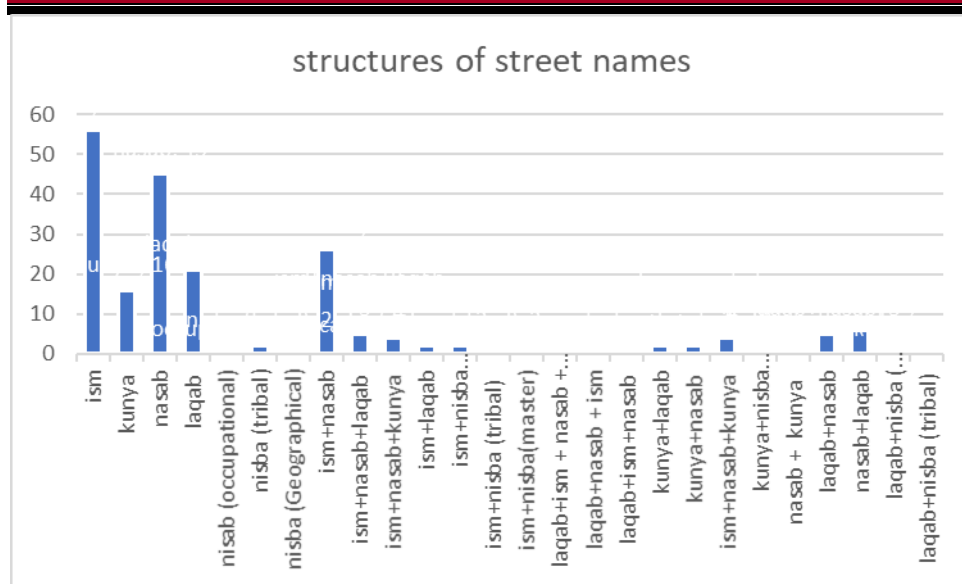


Figure 13 classifying street names into 26 structures

## Conclusion

Streets names in Saudi Arabia are considered as a witness to an age characterized by the spread of religious impact on every field of life, in addition to being a mirror to the local history of the country. Moreover, street names reflect explicitly and implicitly the prevalent culture at the time. The study validates the assumption that most names in Arabic are patronymic; related to paternal names, matronymics are not often used in Arabic; (Notzon & Nesom, 2005, p. 2).

The study reveals that the titular names such as “Sayf addīn”, the sword of the Faith, and Sayf addawla, (Auda, D. (2003), the sword of the state, which were generally an indication of status or rank, are not used prolifically in Saudi Arabia.

The process of naming streets after countries and cities in the Islamic Caliphate reflects Saudis’ concern with the Islamic world and loyalty to Muslims all over the world. Street names in Saudi Arabia give the visitor a panoramic view of the whole Islamic world. This theme is manifested by naming streets after scholars all over the Islamic world.

The researcher’s approach to nomenclature of street names in Saudi Arabia not only helps to identify the processes used in assigning names to the streets, but also as an evidence against the argument claiming that names are potentially semantically meaningless entities. It validates the assumption that street names can help to conceptualize the prevailing type of life, and consolidates what Hough (2016) says about onomastic study “research within name studies is vigorous, vibrant, and innovative” (p. 13). The discipline is continuing to expand and develop into new areas.

The study adds a fourth type of nisaba, namely master nisba. Since one Islamic scholar, Yaqūt al-Ḥamawī, was named after his master. The use of nasab is far more than the use of kunya. This implies that Arabs' pride of their heritage and their ancestors exceeds their pride in their children. This goes in accordance with what al-Mutanabi said lamenting his grandmother's death:

wa-law lam takūni bint Akramu wālidin ... fa-'inna 'abaki adhdhakhmu kawnaḳi lī umma.

(If you are not the daughter of the most honoured father ...then your great honour comes from being my mother.



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