

Research Paper

## Investigating two of Al-Ghazali's Views on Architecture based on *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din'*: Form and Content; Rulings of Architecture

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### Abstract

Abu Hamed Mohammad al-Ghazālī was a mystic, jurist, and theologian who lived in the fifth century AH and significantly influenced Iranian culture. His most significant work is *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din'*, written in his seclusion period to revive religious knowledge, with the subject being applied knowledge. Therefore, it can be regarded as an architectural information reference. This research is dedicated to understanding al-Ghazālī's principles for architecture and its status in *Ihya'*. It was done by the Historical-Interpretation approach, reading and interpreting the original text of *Ihya'*, and that is why just for mentioning the evidence and having an improved perception of *Ihya'*, other al-Ghazālī's books and references were used. The outcome of this research is two architectural categories from *Ihya'*. These are form and content and the rules of architecture. In Al-Ghazali's opinion, the craftsmen, along with other people, can also make the spiritual journey based on their crafts. He has to do his crafts with the *dhekr* (God's Remembrance), Seek the real contents from the world's forms, construct as an implication to the most beloved, God, and construct the world to construct his hereafter.

**Keywords:** Al-Ghazali, Islamic architecture, Form and content, Sufi/Islamic mysticism, Architectural history.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali (c. 108-1101) is one of the most prominent Muslim scholars in history. *Ihya' 'ulm al-din* is the most important, comprehensive, loftiest, and most famous book written by Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad Al-Ghazali al-Tusi. This book was written during his travels to Shamah, Quds, Hejaz, and his many years of residence. In fact, this book is the outcome of these adventures and his Sufi care and scholarly studies [1] In the era of withdrawal of teaching in Baghdad's Nizamiyya, he wrote this book after the spiritual changes during his journey [2].

During the history of Islam, rare books have been controversial by the Muslims as much as *Ihya'* by Imam Mohammad al-Ghazālī, since this book was published during his lifetime in the East and West of the Islamic world, from Khorasan to Andalusia [3-4] Also, it was praised and criticized by its supporters and opponents [5-6]. This book has had a tremendous impact on Islam's history, as people like Rumi and Saadi have been influenced by it [7].

The subject of this book is applied science. Applied science, against the science of revelation, is a science that is learned for practice. This knowledge does not necessarily confide to ethics but consists of a set of practices and behaviors and jurisprudence, characterized by necessity. There could be different categories such as halal and forbidden knowledge, bad and good ethics, the quality of patience, grace, and asceticism. This book is filled with references to architecture and the city. However, Al-Ghazali cannot be regarded as an architectural theorist, since in this book, he refers to the architect and other architectural aspects to express law or moral decree. However, it is possible to obtain a unified idea about architecture and architect from this book [8].

The present research is devoted to the search of Al-Ghazali's architectural view in *Ihya'*. The book is full of references to architecture and the city, which provides the background for extracting Al-Ghazali's opinions about architecture and its status in this book. In this research, two related categories of *Ihya'* have been selected, which are about architecture. These are the content and rules of architecture. The sharing between these categories was the reason to choose them, among other categories found in *Ihya'*.

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## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research's method is the interpretation of the text by the text itself, leading to the identification and classification of the implicit and hidden categories in this text.

## 3. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The research on the Iḥya' book was not directly investigated the architectural aspects, and the research in the field of architecture also did not have such a view to Iḥya'. Therefore, there is no direct background for a quicker understanding of the content, which was why the research time was prolonged and included restrictions on research [8]. However, some resources in this research helped us understand how the research was carried out and identifying its origins. The ratio of the sources with the subject of this research will place them in two general categories of method and thematic background that will be introduced in the following paragraphs:

Kakhani (2020) has examined Al-Ghazali's view on architecture in Iḥya. The method used in his research is interpretive, and in this regard, it is consistent with the present research method. In particular, the researcher's focus is on finding architectural categories in Al-Ghazali's view, and this goal is also being pursued in the present study on Al-Ghazali [8]. The article investigated two entries: luxury and ornaments, materials, and components. What this article finds is that Al-Ghazali positively considers short-lasting materials in the Zuhd realm. Furthermore, while he does not mind ornamentations subject to certain conditions, they are seen as at odds with ascetic life. Ornaments in the mosque are legitimate as it is God's house, and materials are agents for judging the building and its founders.

Rajabi (2014) investigates the issue of proportions and focuses on the epistles of Ikhwan al-Safa' [9]. This epistle focuses on collecting old texts, which is the background of the present research, and the method used to understand the texts and interpret the data is similar to the method chosen for this study. The distinction between this research and the dissertation is in the thematic relation that the authors want to understand in the old texts.

Qayyoomi (2012) has examined Persian prose texts in the first centuries [10]. The method in his book is a model used in the present study. Searching for texts and finding out about architecture that has been referred directly or indirectly is something that would be investigated in this study.

Soltani (2012) investigates Iran's monastery architecture, focusing on Khorasan in the fifth century. This research is considered the background of the present study in which investigates a monument from the Sufi monuments and refers to the many Sufi customs and rituals in the fifth century [11]. The concurrence of the subject of this research with the present research on the one hand and the Sufis study with the view that the Iḥya' book is also written with a Sufi view complements these two studies. Knowing that Al-Ghazali was impressed by

the monasteries' presence and Dervishes' companionship during his isolation, it is essential to know the Sufis of that time. For example, Al-Ghazali spent some time in Rabat Abu-Saad in the monastery [12]. On the other hand, many Sufis were influenced directly by the Iḥya' Book during the lifetime of Al-Ghazali and after that. Therefore, there is the possibility of a relation between Al-Ghazali and the Sufis.

Ettinghausen's article (2006) is one of the closest sources which backgrounds the present study [13]. In this article, Ettinghausen, referring to the book *Kimiā-ye sa'adat* [3], tries to examine the beauty issue in al-Ghazālī's thought. He considers the spiritual aspect of art to Al-Ghazali beyond its material aspect, and in this regard, he investigates the beauty in his writings. The method used by Ettinghausen is an example of the method used in this study, asking for the meaning of the text, from the text of Iḥya' itself, and searching for the text and taking notes from related evidence.

Now by raising the research background, the sources of research are introduced. The most important source of this research is the English translation of Iḥya' (2008), and the Old Persian Translation of Iḥya' (1996), and *Kimiā-ye sa'adat* (2001) [3, 14-15]. Two other primary sources the authors took help from are *Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (2010) and *Nasiheye Al-Moluk* (1938) for a better understanding of Iḥya' [16-17].

## 4. ARCHITECTURAL CATEGORIES IN IḤYA'

Many scholars have written about Iḥya' and explored various aspects of Al-Ghazali's thoughts. Four volumes of Iḥya' are comprehensive and detailed poetry that includes Al-Ghazali's intellectual principles about life [18], therefore, various materials can be found about every aspect of human life. Architecture is also included, and there are also some materials about architectural aspects. In Iḥya', the architectural acting has been mentioned, from the architect and the founder, the labor and the user, as well as the architectural product, which is the building and its components. This is just a level of Al-Ghazali's speech, which could be used for architectural history scholars. There is another level in which Al-Ghazali does not refer to architecture and other aspects directly, but he indicated something in his worldview and thoughts that clarified his view of craftsmanship and architecture. This level of Al-Ghazali's speech is far more than his direct references to architecture and architect, and this leads us to his thoughts about the architect and architectural merits.

The contents can be arranged whether they refer directly or indirectly to architecture. The name of each subject is called categories and the present research is devoted to the introduction of two categories, which include form and content, and architectural rulings.

### 4.1. Form and content

The issue of form and content is one of the most important categories that can be extracted from the Iḥya'. This category has also emerged in Iranian culture and the

words of the scholars of this culture [19]. Al-Ghazali has investigated this issue with various occasions and words, such as the body and the soul [15].

In this section, in three introductions, the status of form and content in Al-Ghazali's thoughts are described. The first and second introductions are as preliminaries to the third part. The total of three introductions reaches us to the result of this section. The first is to explain the relation between the forces of human perception in its appearance and inwardness. At this level, one can understand how human percept and realize the forces available to gain knowledge. The second is devoted to the worlds of existence, in which the ratio of these worlds is examined together. In the third introduction, we are talking about the two status of obtaining the truths to determine the position of form and content and its relationship with each other.

#### *4.1.1. Introduction 1: forces of human perception*

Al-Ghazali considers mankind as the owner of two forces, which help him survive spirit and perfection. He mentions these two as "Heart Armies" [14]. From the perspective of Al-Ghazali, "Heart" is common with what is called "Wisdom". According to Al-Ghazali, man has several divisions known as "Divisions of heart", and these divisions are twofold: what can be seen with the eye and one that cannot be understood except by insight. [14] These armies are the virtues through which divine teachings can be achieved.

The heart's armies have three different classes: one includes lust and anger and will, the second is the power that is the stimulus of the organs, and the third is knowledge. Each of these classes has a place in appearance and a place in the inner man. As human perception forces, appearance is unique to the five senses, and man's inner forces include imagination, thought, reminder, and preservation. In this way, man, through his five senses, perceives an imaginable image. Then, through his inner senses, he takes it to heart, which includes reason in the expression of Al-Ghazali. Therefore, knowledge is obtained from the real world [14].

#### *4.1.2. Introduction 2: worlds of existence*

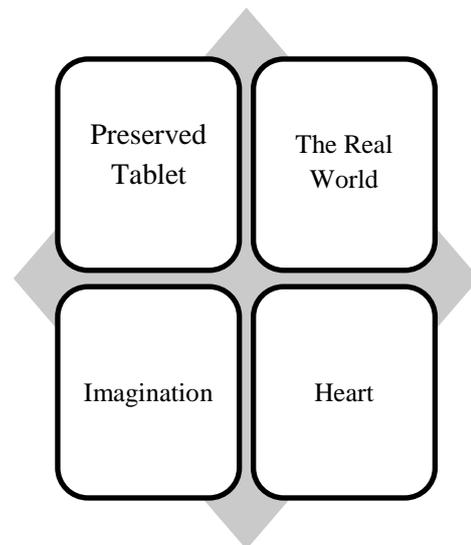
"But conception is an existence independent of the world", and without it, it is also preserved in the human heart. The proof of this is that when the person sees something, its conception will be formed in his soul, and later, he remembers it by the imagination when the thing is not visible. However, the imagination and world are not the only steps in which the form is present. Apart from these two, there are two other steps for gaining the knowledge that differs in the creation of forms in it and the honor and rank [14].

The primary and previous step of existing forms is the Lowh-e Mahfooz (Preserved Tablet). From this tablet, the real world, as it exists, arose, the heaven and earth, and other world beings were placed in it.

"Therefore, it seems that existence has four stages: one in the preserved tablet, which is prior to its physical

existence (in the real world). And the physical existence is prior to its imaginary existence, that is, the form existed in imagination, and then the rational existence in the heart" [15].

The real world is also another part of forms being in the world. After that, it is the person's imagination, which is by observing the creatures of the real world, and the fourth step is a work that is from imagination to heart. In this way, "the truths of things that are in sentiment and imagination are in the heart" [14]. Thus, the worlds of the existence of forms are four worlds, according to Al-Ghazali; the preserved tablet, the real world, the imagination, the heart. Now there are ways to understand the forms and truths of affairs.



**Fig 1.** The Worlds of Existence

#### *4.1.3. Introduction 3: ways of obtaining knowledge*

Al-Ghazali believes that the truth of knowledge and its form is obtained in two ways: Sometimes, through senses (indirect) and sometimes through preserved tablet (direct). He has a tangible example in explaining these two ways: man's heart is standing like a pool in the ground. In order to fill this pool of water, it can be filled upstream, pouring water into it, or digging at the bottom of the pool, so that the water is from the bottom to the pool, like well. So "heart is like a pool and knowledge is like water and senses are like the routes which pour water into the pool". In Al-Ghazali's view, there are two ways of acquiring knowledge which is called the way of acquisition. Acquiring truths through discovery and preserved tablet is prior to receiving it through training and acquiring [14]. By mentioning introductions, we now explain the ratio of forces with contents and determine its position in Al-Ghazali's thought.

#### *4.1.4. Result: The ratio of form and content*

Al-Ghazali's aims to seek content from forms by getting experiences. He considers the form and the content entirely consistent and does not completely separate them in the material world. In his view, one

must seek the understanding of contents through discovery or acquisition, and the ways of discovery are not easily possible, although it leads to clearer knowledge, and it is not possible except for special servants of God alone [14].

“The forms in this world dominate the contents, and contents are hidden in them. Moreover, in the hereafter, the forms would follow the contents and contents will dominate”. This is how Al-Ghazali describes the relationship between form and content. The important one is content rather than the form, but it doesn't mean that the form can be neglected. He thinks that the Medina Mosque or the city of Medina itself is sacred because the prophet walked in it and prayed there. So is the Kaaba in Mecca. Al-Ghazali believes that these buildings' forms are sacred and important because of their contents.

Al-Ghazali considers God as the creator of the world that he is single in the inventing of forms, and the craftsmen cannot portray anything but an example of the creation of God [Ibid]. Therefore, there is nothing in the world, and it will not be except what it is recorded in the Divine Presence and under God's will. So it is necessary for the architect, as a craftsman, to be aware of this issue and resorts to a world in which the forms and contents are in accordance with the truth and use it to illustrate and construct, and it is not the world except the unseen world which is the hereafter.

#### 4.2. Architectural rulings

Another advantage of *Ihya'* for architectural history is the rulings referring directly or indirectly to architecture. Al-

Ghazali's speeches on this subject include a wide range of topics, e.g., talking about various buildings, various functions of the buildings, events in the buildings and cities, jurisprudential and ethical rulings on buildings, aesthetic rules on architecture, talking about the common thoughts about some buildings and their functions, the dignity of mosques rather than other mosques.

We tried to understand Al-Ghazali's words better, and we categorize contents for that purpose. The first thing that attracts attention is the two different levels of Al-Ghazali's words, a level that investigates the form of buildings and another level that is devoted to something beyond the form, i.e., content. We can validly call this second level as "Content-related domain" against the "Form-related domain" of architecture. In the form-related domain, he talks about the names of the monuments and their functions, their structural components, ornaments, and the various parts related to each of the buildings and buildings' spatial components. However, in the content-related domain, he talks about a collection of general principles or other principles that do not necessarily focus on the form but speak of mentality. Of course, it is clear that there cannot be considered a clear line between the boundaries of these two categories, but it is necessary to adhere to the architecture for categorization and a better understanding of Al-Ghazali's words.

In the first speech, we will discuss the general principles of Al-Ghazali regarding the buildings and related formal rulings. The second speech is devoted to the content-related domain of architecture.

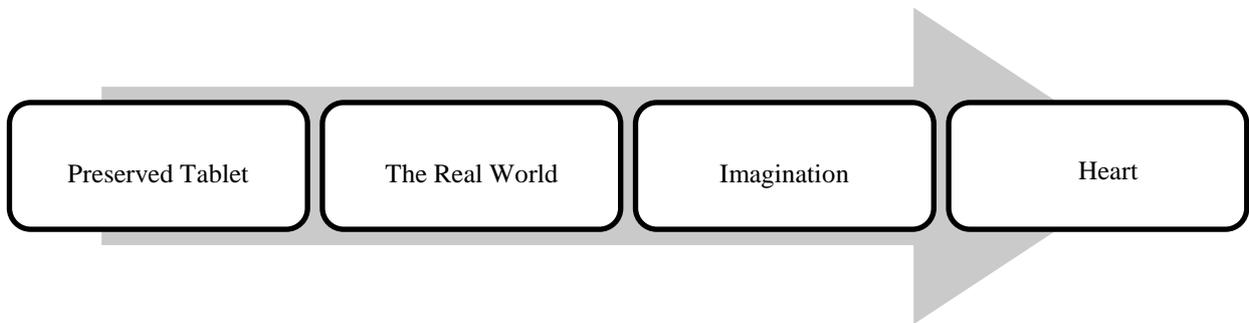


Fig 2. Indirect way of obtaining knowledge



Fig 3. Direct way of obtaining knowledge

#### 4.2.1. Rulings observing form- related domain

This speech can be considered as the general principle of Al-Ghazali in architecture. Among these principles are ornaments and luxury in architecture. Architectural ornaments are, in particular, the categories that Al-Ghazali has investigated in his book, and his general recommendation is often about avoiding them [8]. According to Al-Ghazali, the architecture has the potential of pride and deceit of man that man can commit sin through it. One of these dangers is to decorate the mosques with patterns that they are forbidden [17]. The reason for forbidding these decorations is to engage the hearts of the prayers in the mosque, which prevents the heart's presence in their prayers.

Another factor of pride in architecture is the materials of a building. The decoration of the building with carpet and silverware and wall and ceiling painted with animal drawings is forbidden. Another factor is hypocrisy in the construction of buildings. So that a group of buildings has built by charity, but they have clearly been hypocritical. Al-Ghazali considers their hypocrisy as if someone removes their name from the building, which is unpleasant for them [15].

In addition to these principles, some other rulings could be found about particular kinds of buildings such as mosques and houses. Al-Ghazali wrote about these two kinds of buildings more than any other one, and therefore, these two will be discussed.

##### 4.2.1.1. Mosque and its rulings

In this part, the mosque-related rulings are raised, which is mentioned in *Ihya'*. The most important point to the mosque is where the entertainment of companions and the followers are considered five things: reading the Qur'an, the mosques' mansion, the remembrance of God, enjoining good and forbidding evil [14].

In the words of Al-Ghazali, the mosque is a great virtue. According to the Quran, he believes that those who go to the mosque are the true believers in him. According to Al-Ghazali, God's houses are mosques on the earth, and those who come to the mosque are pilgrims. He declares the rulings for the mosques' form by suggesting to build a barrier between women and men. Also, the mosque should be built in a way that the ornaments on the walls and columns do not distract the prayer from their praying. He suggests people that if they cannot help distracting in these mosques, they had better stay at home and pray there [15].

Al-Ghazali considers Jame' mosques superior to other mosques in terms of jurisprudence. He considers trading in mosques as denied [14], and he strongly forbids them [20]. In his view, traveling to three mosques is good, and these three mosques are more prominent than other mosques: The Medina Mosque, al-Haram mosque, and al-Aqsa mosque. In this way, there is no reputation to travel to other mosques and monks [14].

##### 4.2.1.2. House and its rulings

Houses have a top and bottom, it means that the top is the best position in the house, and the bottom is the lowest. Humility also means that the person should sit where it is possible when entering the house and do not seek the house's best places [15]. There is a hierarchy in the house that desolation orders are characterized by it. As it is stated in the hadith, one should go to his house in the time of sedition, and if they come to his house, he should go to the room, and if he was not safe in the room, he should go to the prayer place and mosque [14].

The Criterion of a good house is also recognizable to Al-Ghazali's book. The good criterion for a house is its broadness, its value, and its price, and its location among the city. The materials of the house and the price are also considered. Al-Ghazali has considered the house's benedict to the greatness and goodness of the neighbors and its badness to the smallness and bad neighbors [Ibid].

A brief examination of the Al-Ghazali's rulings about mosques and houses was explained. What follows in the next chapter is another word from the decrees that Al-Ghazali proposes to architecture, one that is related to the content.

##### 4.2.2. Rulings observing content- related domain

In this study, we are discussing the opinions of Al-Ghazali, whose words and criteria for his judgments in them are not solely about the body of buildings. These criteria are very effective in Al-Ghazali's judgment about buildings and architecture and clarify an important aspect of his perception of real art and beauty. In his worldview, Al-Ghazali believes in principles that have different meanings, and one of the most important ones is the beauty [13].

The main discussion in this chapter is about the mosque and the Bazaar. In *Ihya'*, the mosque and bazaar are in contrast with each other in different situations. This contrast can be seen in almost every chapter of *Ihya'*. Al-Ghazali quotes many narratives about the confrontation between the mosque and the bazaar, some of which are mentioned. It is mentioned from Abū Hurayrah (The Prophet's companion), who went to the bazaar and called to divide the Holy Prophet's inheritance in the mosque. People left the markets and went to the mosque. Abū Hurayrah said Muhammad's inheritance is the remembrance of God and the Quran found in the mosque [3].

There is also another witness that there never was a revelation to the Prophet to be the merchants and collectors of property, but a revelation came to be from the prayers and worshiping his God until death. Salman Al-Farsi makes such a will on the mosque mansion that death is considered vice with merchants. He believes that the Earth and the buildings are not lifeless and without meaning, but there is a meaning behind the faces. Mosques are proud of themselves because of the prayers in them, and Bazaars are the evil buildings because that is the place to forget God [14].

It is clear that Al-Ghazali's advice to avoid bazaar is not just about the physical domain, but his invitation is to

separate from the neglect in the market that most of its people are involved with. Some principles in Al-Ghazali's thoughts are inferred in *Ihya'*, which has the basis for judging architectural aesthetics. He calls the Qiblah side as the most honorable side, and the right side is superior to the left. Also, in Al-Ghazali's view, the numbers have their own meaning. To him, the odd numbers are superior to the couple, and the reason for that is God, who is single. In this way, the number one is the highest numbers [15]. Al-Ghazali also judges the monuments from such a view and considers contents for them with this view.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In this research, two architectural categories of *Ihya'* were investigated. The first category expressed the relation between form and content-appearance and inner. It showed that in Al-Ghazali's thought, the main way is to transmit the forms and reach the contents. The architect and builder of the building should create good content and take a proper form. The best content is from the preserved tablet. The knowledge obtained in this way will create a consistent form and content. In the material world, the contents are hidden in forms, and the way of searching for that is taking the experience of the world's forms to the contents. In this way, hidden contents will be clear in forms.

In the second entry, Al-Ghazali's rulings about architecture were outlined. We have shown that Al-Ghazali had considered two domains of form-related and content-related from the architectural aspect. The building's body is essential to Al-Ghazali because religion observes the building's body in considering jurisprudential rulings. The form of the mosque should be proper for the prayers and does not distract them. Another domain passes from the mere form. The content-related domain of architecture consists of the mentality and the rules observing the inhabitants of the building. Thus, the mosque's content is the act of the people there that is the remembrance of God, and the bazaar's content is neglecting God. Therefore, mosques are better buildings than bazaars. Another part of this chapter was a set of Al-Ghazali's rulings on directions and numbers. In this category, Al-Ghazali refers to the implications behind the numbers and directions and then decides on them.

In summary, Al-Ghazali's way of looking at the world is taking the experience of its forms to contents. He considers content as the principle and forms indicative of that, and the duty of man is to seek for contents through the form. In his view, the form and content are inseparable from each other, and humans' dignity is to the degree of the excellence of contents from every action.

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