



A Philosophical Poetics of Rationality in Andalusian Architecture: A Study on the Relationship between Ibn Rushd's Thought and Almohad Art

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Abstract

Al-Andalus, as a prominent locus of artistic creativity within the Islamic world, brought forth continual transformations in the spatial and aesthetic concepts of Islamic art under the influence of Greek philosophy and rationalism. Focusing on Ibn Rushd's rationalist system and his commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*, this study raises the question of whether a conceptual horizon of correspondence can be established between the foundational aesthetic notions in Ibn Rushd's thought and the spatial transformations occurring in Andalusian architecture during his lifetime. More precisely, it asks whether the developments that emerged in the spatial organization, formal coherence, and aesthetic valorizations of Andalusian architecture can be understood as a reflection of the same epistemic and rational horizon articulated in Ibn Rushd's works. The research methodology rests upon comparative content analysis and historical study, proceeding in three stages: first, the extraction of aesthetic concepts in Ibn Rushd's thought with reference to his commentary on the *Poetics*; second, the analysis of the historical and epistemic context underlying the aesthetic transformations in Andalusian architecture during Ibn Rushd's era; and third, a comparative analysis of Ibn Rushd's aesthetic structures as manifested in architectural form. The findings indicate that the fundamental principles of Ibn Rushd's aesthetics realism, guided imagination, structural coherence, purposiveness, and ethical-social functionality implicitly share epistemic and cultural affinities with the architectural fabric of al-Andalus. Although these affinities do not imply his direct involvement in architectural design, a discernible consonance exists between his rationality and teleological outlook and the emergence of contemporary architectural forms and spaces. Such consonance strengthens the hypothesis that Ibn Rushd's intellectual framework influenced architecture not through explicit transmission, but rather through a shared conceptual, cultural, and political horizon.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Andalusian Architecture, Ibn Rushd, Islamic Philosophy, Islamic Architecture.

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Introduction

Al-Andalus, as a vast frontier and civilizational corridor between the eastern and western Mediterranean worlds, emerged under Muslim rule as one of the most significant centers of cultural, scientific, artistic, and philosophical exchange. Prior to the advent of Islam, the region had already absorbed diverse architectural traditions, including Visigothic, Byzantine, Romano-Iberian, and Romano-Syrian forms. With the consolidation of Islamic governance, however, Andalusian architecture underwent a profound transformation in its aesthetic logic—one that extended beyond ornamental embellishment to encompass spatial organization, structural reasoning, formal composition, and semantic articulation. The crystallization of the *Mudéjar* style exemplifies this transformation: an eclectic architectural language that synthesized Islamic elements with pre-existing Iberian traditions, thereby generating renewed vitality in geometric articulation and spatial configuration (Barrucand, 1994: 25).

These aesthetic developments were rooted in a broader epistemic and discursive matrix nourished by three foundational domains: *bayān* (rhetoric and Arabic-Islamic linguistic sciences), *burhān* (philosophy and rational inquiry shaped by Greek thought), and *ʿirfān* (esoteric and mystical reflection). This intellectual configuration resonated across a wide spectrum of cultural production—from poetry and literature to philosophy, theology, jurisprudence, and even the natural sciences (Vílchez, 2017: 22–29). Any analysis of Andalusian art and architecture that neglects these discursive foundations risks remaining descriptively superficial and theoretically incomplete.

Among the figures who played a decisive role in consolidating and deepening this intellectual climate was Ibn Rushd (Averroes), whose philosophical outlook exerted far-reaching influence not only on Islamic intellectual history but also on European Renaissance philosophy and literature (Arkoun, 1994: 75). A substantial portion of Ibn Rushd's corpus is devoted to interpretive engagements with Aristotle, through which he articulated a robust defense of rational inquiry. As Dinani observes, Ibn Rushd maintained that sound and untainted reason possesses such intrinsic acuity and power that it can comprehend all aspects of reality, overcoming any apparent obstacle or veil; for reason, by its very essence, is an act of cognition, and what is defined essentially as cognition cannot ultimately be constrained by contingent impediments (Dinani, 1384/2005: 354). This uncompromising commitment to rationality forms the backbone of his philosophical enterprise.

Although Ibn Rushd did not formulate an independent and systematic treatise on aesthetics, nor a comprehensive theory of art, his philosophical system accords a central role to imagination (*khayāl*), sensory perception, and the cognitive faculties of the human subject. From these elements, one may extract

theoretical foundations for understanding art and aesthetic experience within his thought. Ibn Rushd sought to relocate the understanding of beauty from the domain of purely poetic intuition or mystical experience to the sphere of rational analysis. In doing so, he elevated art beyond mere imaginative fabrication, conceiving it as a medium capable of representing truth. Many scholars of Andalusian philosophy and art identify his *Talkhīṣ Kitāb al-Shi'r* (Middle Commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*) as the most significant locus of his aesthetic contribution. There, beauty is articulated in close conjunction with teleology, truth, and ethics, and is integrated into a broader rational project oriented toward human perfection (Vílchez, 2017: 658–659).

This philosophical framework unfolded within the historical and cultural context of the Almohad Caliphate. Architecture during this period, like other domains of intellectual life, was shaped by both epistemic transformations and political dynamics. In its formative phase, the ascetic teachings of Ibn Tūmart—the founder of the Almohad movement—emphasized simplicity and the rejection of ostentation, finding architectural expression in forms characterized by austerity, clarity, and functional restraint (Bloom, 2020: 123). Over time, however, particularly under caliphs such as Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf—who maintained close ties with circles of scholars and literati—architectural production displayed increasing geometric complexity and artistic refinement (Bowering, 2013: 34).

The simultaneity of these architectural developments with the intellectual flourishing of Ibn Rushd invites a critical inquiry: can the rational and teleological orientation of his philosophical system be discerned within the architectural expressions of the Almohad era? More precisely, is there a traceable conceptual convergence between Ibn Rushd's rational framework and the aesthetic, structural, and functional dimensions of Almohad architecture?

According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the thought of philosophers such as Ibn Rushd transcended the confines of Islamic philosophical tradition and exercised enduring, transhistorical influence upon Western culture—manifest in medieval literary figures such as Guido Cavalcanti and Dante Alighieri, and extending into twentieth-century literary interpretations by thinkers such as Adonis and Jean-Pierre Faye (Nasr & Leaman, 1996: 1837). Similarly, Henri Stierlin, in the introduction to *Isfahan: Image of Paradise*, underscores the intimate relationship between Safavid architecture and the philosophical and mystical schools of that period, arguing that one may trace the imprint of *ḥikmat al-muta'āliyah* and the thought of Mullā Ṣadrā in the spatial structure, corporeal order, and aesthetic language of Safavid architecture (Stierlin, 1377/1998: 5). Taken together, these perspectives reveal an important theoretical premise: philosophical thought—whether within Islamic or Western horizons—can

transcend the boundaries of abstract speculation and assume concrete, spatialized, and aesthetic form in literature, poetry, and architecture.

Several doctoral dissertations have explored the relationship between Islamic philosophy and architecture. Nik (2015), in his dissertation on the reflection of Iranian-Islamic wisdom in Safavid aesthetics, demonstrates how the convergence of Peripatetic, Illuminationist, and mystical strands within the Isfahan school produced a balanced and teleologically oriented aesthetic language in Safavid architecture. Rahmani (2016), adopting an ontological approach in his study of form and meaning in architecture through the lens of Ibn ‘Arabī, conceptualizes Islamic architecture as a multi-layered phenomenon in which the relation between sensible form and inner meaning is existential and hierarchical. Rahimi (2024), focusing on Avicennian wisdom, extracts principles that provide a conceptual foundation for understanding Iranian-Islamic architecture and rethinking contemporary design. Likewise, Chagini (2025), in his dissertation on the principles of design in Ibn al-Haytham’s theory of visual perception, argues that the qualitative dimensions articulated in optical theory furnish a comprehensive framework for analyzing the aesthetics of Islamic architectural ornamentation, particularly luster tiles.

In addition to these dissertations, several scholarly articles have addressed the nexus between Islamic philosophy and architecture. Aghaei-Mehr (2018), in her study of the correspondence between manifestations of light in Suhrawardī’s thought and Safavid architecture, elucidates how the metaphysics of illumination is embodied in spatial hierarchies and decorative schemes. Rahmani (2017) examines the ontological status of quality in Islamic architecture based on Ibn ‘Arabī’s ideas, highlighting the inner layers and spiritual gradations of space. Avazpour (2014) interprets architectural elements such as domes and *muqarnas* as tangible manifestations of abstract Sadrian concepts, particularly the faculty of imagination. Collectively, these studies confirm that the relationship between Islamic wisdom and architecture—whether through foundational theoretical inquiry or historical case analysis—constitutes a well-established and fertile field of research. Nevertheless, the dominant focus of this scholarship has been on Iranian and eastern philosophical traditions. The role of the rational and teleological dimensions of Islamic philosophy in the western Islamic world has received comparatively limited attention. It is this lacuna that the present study seeks to address by examining Ibn Rushd’s aesthetic concepts and their possible correspondence with Andalusian architecture.

Accordingly, the ultimate aim of this research is to analyze the foundational concepts of aesthetics in Ibn Rushd’s thought and to correlate them with the architectural and spatial characteristics of the Almohad period, thereby proposing a framework for understanding the relationship between his

philosophical rationalism and the aesthetic and corporeal manifestations of that architecture. By enabling the tracing of philosophical and juridical discourses within architectural structures and spatial formations, this study aspires to open a new analytical horizon in the historiography of Islamic art and architecture.

Methodology

The present study employs a qualitative thematic analysis within the framework of interpretive content analysis. This methodological approach is designed to extract aesthetic concepts from Ibn Rushd's philosophical texts and to correlate them with historical and architectural data. Through this method, it becomes possible to examine Ibn Rushd's exposition of abstract aesthetic notions—particularly in his commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*—alongside the spatial, formal, and ornamental characteristics of architecture during his historical milieu. In doing so, the study constructs an indirect yet analytically grounded dialogue between philosophy and architecture.

The research process was conducted in three principal stages.

In the first stage, Ibn Rushd's aesthetic conceptualizations—primarily as articulated in his commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*—were identified and systematized through philosophical content analysis, supplemented by engagement with contemporary scholarly interpretations. This phase aimed at isolating key theoretical constructs related to beauty, mimesis, teleology, imagination, and the cognitive function of art within his rational framework.

In the second stage, the broader epistemic and cultural context of aesthetics in the Islamic world—particularly within the Arabic-Andalusian milieu—was examined. Architectural periods in al-Andalus were analyzed across three temporal phases: prior to Ibn Rushd's association with the court, during his involvement within the political-intellectual structure of the Almohad state, and after his death. Each phase was subjected to descriptive-comparative analysis. The aesthetic characteristics of each period were first identified independently and subsequently compared in order to trace patterns of continuity, transformation, and conceptual alignment.

In the third stage, a final comparative synthesis was undertaken. The aesthetic principles derived from Ibn Rushd's philosophy of poetry were systematically correlated with the identified architectural structures and aesthetic features of Andalusian architecture. These correspondences were organized into analytical tables to facilitate a clearer articulation of conceptual convergence between theoretical aesthetics and the spatial language of architecture. Through this structured comparison, the study seeks to demonstrate the possibility of tracing philosophical discourse within material and spatial formations.

Ibn Rushd's Aesthetics

Ibn Rushd (Averroes), the eminent twelfth-century Andalusian philosopher, physician, and jurist, was raised in a distinguished family of judges in Córdoba and received a thorough grounding in the religious sciences from an early age. His subsequent turn toward philosophy and logic coincided with the Almohad period, during which—through the mediation of Ibn Ṭufayl—he was introduced to the court and appointed as judge, physician, and scientific adviser to the caliph Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf. His penetrating commentaries on Aristotle played a decisive role in shaping the philosophical and juridical system of al-Andalus (Nasr & Leaman, 1996: 601–608).

With regard to art and aesthetics, Ibn Rushd's most significant contribution is his commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*. The term *poetics* derives from the Greek *poiein*, meaning “to make” or “to produce”—to make poetry, to construct space, to compose music, to build architecture. The frequent reduction of *poetics* to the domain of verse alone reflects a narrowing of its original semantic range. As Heidegger argues, all the arts are fundamentally poetic insofar as they disclose truth through a mode of revealing; poetry represents not merely a literary genre but a privileged way of thinking, one that also bears relevance for architectural theorization (Heidegger, 1971). Within this expanded horizon, Ibn Rushd's engagement with the *Poetics* assumes broader philosophical significance.

In his commentary, Ibn Rushd maintains that the essence of poetry lies in its orientation toward the discovery and representation of truth. Poetry, therefore, becomes an instrument for the cultivation and formation of the human being, guiding the soul toward perfection and harmony with the divine order (Nasr & Leaman, 1996: 1742). Artistic production must avoid excessive exaggeration and baseless fantasy; rather, through mimesis and truthful representation, it ought to reinforce moral virtues in its audience (Vílchez, 2017: 358–359). Within this framework, imagination (*khayāl*), sensory perception, and cognitive processes assume an active role in the production of meaning and aesthetic effect. Poetry and literature thus function as epistemic tools for representing ontological realities and achieving ethical and pedagogical ends. By integrating imaginative representation with moral principles, poetry renders abstract concepts intelligible and affectively persuasive, thereby endowing artistic creativity with an educational and formative dimension.

The philosophical orientation articulated in Ibn Rushd's aesthetics exercised a broad and enduring influence on European intellectual history. Its impact may be traced from medieval poets such as Guido Cavalcanti and Dante Alighieri to twentieth-century literary interpretations by figures including Adonis and Jean-Pierre Faye (Nasr & Leaman, 1996: 1837). Such continuity underscores the

transhistorical reach of his thought and its capacity to mediate between philosophical reflection and artistic production.

Contemporary scholarship on Ibn Rushd has reached a substantial consensus that the *Talkhīṣ Kitāb al-Shi‘r* (Middle Commentary on Aristotle’s *Poetics*) constitutes the principal locus for reconstructing his aesthetic theory. Contrary to the widespread assumption that this work is merely a literary gloss on Aristotle, it is in fact a philosophical-analytical text in which Ibn Rushd reconsiders the relationship between poetry, truth, imagination, pleasure, and ethical purpose. Scholars therefore emphasize that any attempt to reconstruct his aesthetic system must begin with a close examination of this work. Francesca Forte explicitly identifies the *Talkhīṣ* as the primary site of Ibn Rushd’s aesthetic reflections and regards it as the indispensable point of departure for research in this field. Salim Kemal and Charles E. Butterworth, despite methodological differences, converge on a similar conclusion: Kemal highlights the logical structure of poetic syllogism and the integration of poetry within demonstrative reasoning, whereas Butterworth foregrounds the ethical and political function of poetry. Both demonstrate that Ibn Rushd conceives beauty not as an autonomous aesthetic category but as intrinsically linked to knowledge and moral guidance.

This interpretive consensus is further reinforced by the analyses of Fouad Ben Ahmed and Deborah Black. Ben Ahmed shows that concepts such as metaphor, transformation, and analogy play a central role in explaining aesthetic pleasure within the *Talkhīṣ*, where poetry facilitates the movement of the intellect from the known to the unknown. Deborah Black, emphasizing the interrelation of poetics, rhetoric, and logic, interprets the text as one in which imagination operates as an instrument of persuasion and the generation of aesthetic delight. Collectively, these readings confirm that reference to the *Talkhīṣ Kitāb al-Shi‘r* is not a discretionary choice but a methodological necessity for understanding Ibn Rushd’s aesthetics.

Accordingly, the present study begins with a close examination of the Arabic text and the authoritative Latin translation of the *Talkhīṣ Kitāb al-Shi‘r*, edited and translated by Charles E. Butterworth in the *Corpus Commentariorum Averrois in Aristotelem*. This edition is widely regarded as a reference text in contemporary Averroes studies due to its fidelity to the logical structure of the original and its critical apparatus. In this reading, key terms that appear recurrently and meaningfully in discussions of poetry—such as imagination, truth, mimesis, teleology, unity, and ethical effect—were extracted as primary codes. The criteria for selection included conceptual recurrence, argumentative centrality, and direct relevance to aesthetic inquiry.

In order to avoid subjective interpretation and to enhance hermeneutical

reliability, the extracted codes were subsequently cross-examined against analytical readings by three contemporary scholars of Ibn Rushd: Puerta Vílchez, Rebecca Gould, and Nasr & Leaman. These works were not employed as substitutes for the primary text but as interpretive controls, allowing for verification of whether the identified concepts are likewise recognized in authoritative contemporary scholarship as core components of Ibn Rushd's aesthetics.

Thus, three analytical sources were incorporated as complementary references in the interpretive process. First, the work of José Miguel Puerta Vílchez, a major authority in Arabic and Andalusian aesthetics, who offers an intertextual reconstruction of Ibn Rushd's conceptual structure in relation to the broader Islamic philosophical tradition. Second, the research of Rebecca Gould, produced under the auspices of Yale University, which engages Butterworth's edition and reconstructs the conceptual constellation of poetry and imagination in Ibn Rushd's thought through comparative analysis. Third, the reference volume *History of Islamic Philosophy* (Nasr & Leaman, 1996), which situates Ibn Rushd's aesthetic theory within the broader architecture of his philosophy and clarifies its relationship to both Aristotelian and Islamic traditions.

On the basis of integrating these sources and employing qualitative thematic analysis, recurrent concepts and semantic structures pertaining to Ibn Rushd's aesthetics of poetry were extracted and organized through conceptual coding into thematic clusters. Table 1 presents the outcome of this analytical process and seeks to provide a systematic representation of Ibn Rushd's aesthetic framework as it relates to poetry and virtue-oriented formation. While additional components may certainly be identified, the selected elements have been prioritized due to their conceptual coherence, textual recurrence, and applicability to comparative analysis with the domain of Islamic architecture.

The following table systematizes the aesthetic principles derived from Ibn Rushd's *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Poetics*. The left column synthesizes interpretive conclusions drawn by major contemporary scholars, while the right column presents the corresponding conceptual distillations derived from the present author's direct analysis of the primary text. Paragraph references correspond to the internal divisions of the *Talkhīṣ* as used in the Butterworth edition.

Table 1- Aesthetic Principles Extracted from Ibn Rushd's *Talkhīṣ Kitāb al-Shi'r* (Interpretively Corroborated by Secondary Sources)

Interpretive Conclusions in Secondary Scholarship	Author's Conceptual Extraction from <i>Talkhīṣ Kitāb al-Shi'r</i>
Poetry serves as an instrument for the articulation of truth; it is essential for maintaining equilibrium between intellect and emotion (Nasr & Leaman, 1996: 1723–1735). Poets, unlike myth-makers, do not speak of non-existent things but of what in some manner exists (Vílchez, 2017: 336). Poetry does not merely reflect truth; it actively produces new meanings and realities (Gould, 2014: 19).	Truth-orientation in poetry (paras. 31, 38, 39, 63, 64, 71, 75, 77, 105, 106)
Ibn Rushd refers to revelatory narratives—such as the story of Joseph and his brothers—as exemplary “admonitory” accounts intended to generate compassion and moral refinement through the depiction of undeserved suffering (Vílchez, 2017: 338). He praises polysemy in poetry, insofar as multiple layers of meaning approach truth (Gould, 2014: 19).	Polysemy and multilayered meaning (paras. 5, 41, 83, 84, 86, 89, 91, 96, 97, 102, 107)
Mimesis constitutes a foundational element in Ibn Rushd's aesthetics. Imitation produces images proximate to experiential and sensible reality and functions as a vehicle of moral instruction (Vílchez, 2017: 324, 338, 675).	Mimesis / Imitation (paras. 4, 7, 8, 13, 20, 21, 39, 101)
Ibn Rushd emphasizes structural unity: all parts of a poem must cohere in order to convey a unified and meaningful message (Vílchez, 2017: 667).	Unity (paras. 23, 32, 37, 41, 42, 47, 52, 53, 92, 108)
A poem must exhibit proportional length—neither too brief to obscure meaning nor excessively long so as to dissipate impact (Vílchez, 2017: 667).	Moderation and proportion (paras. 3, 22, 23, 36, 46, 53, 56, 58, 64, 75, 76, 78, 93, 103)
Poetry functions as a vehicle for transmitting ethical values and shaping public conduct; its ultimate purpose is moral instruction (Vílchez, 2017: 325, 670).	Ethical and social effect (paras. 8, 10, 11, 20, 51, 59, 62, 67, 70, 71)
The aim of poetry is to generate pleasure through the representation of virtue and through balancing contrasting emotions such as sorrow and joy (Vílchez, 2017: 668). It produces conviction without necessarily compelling action (Gould, 2014: 24).	Pleasure and affective response (paras. 13, 14, 20, 26, 57, 58)
Following Aristotle, Ibn Rushd underscores harmonious composition and logical order; poetic structure must conform to rational principles (Vílchez, 2017: 668).	Harmonious composition and order (paras. 4, 6, 13, 30, 34, 40, 51, 60, 67, 79, 80, 95)
The primary objective of poetry is the transformation of behavior through the activation of imagination and emotion, rather than purely logical persuasion (Vílchez, 2017: 325).	Teleological orientation (purpose) (paras. 8, 17, 18, 29, 33, 34, 37, 55, 59, 61)
Imaginative representation must serve mimesis and remain connected to intelligible and sensible realities (Vílchez, 2017: 342). The most powerful poetry employs imaginative fabrication to generate new artistic realities (Gould, 2014: 12, 15).	Imagination in relation to mimesis (paras. 3, 9, 13, 19, 21, 25, 41, 42, 44, 45, 62, 63, 66, 68, 98, 101, 104, 109)
Poetic creation requires adherence to specific artistic techniques and formal principles (Vílchez, 2017: 327).	Structure and formal coherence (paras. 2, 14, 15, 20, 22, 24, 34, 35, 43, 49, 51, 73)
Poetry encompasses praise (<i>madh</i>) and satire (<i>hijā'</i>), which form the central axes of Ibn Rushd's literary classification (Gould, 2014: 16).	

This table synthesizes the conceptual architecture of Ibn Rushd's aesthetics as it emerges from his *Talkhīṣ*, particularly in relation to poetry as a medium of truth, moral formation, and rationally ordered imaginative production. While additional dimensions may be identified, the selected principles are prioritized due to their textual recurrence, argumentative centrality, and analytical applicability to the subsequent architectural comparison.

Through a qualitative analysis of Ibn Rushd's commentaries and exegetical writings on Aristotle, it becomes evident that his aesthetic system is not a scattered collection of isolated judgments but a coherent and structured framework grounded in the interaction and overlap of a cluster of conceptually related notions. When these concepts are understood in relation to one another, they coalesce into five foundational principles that elucidate both the structural foundations of poetry and its substantive functions in Ibn Rushd's thought.

Principle One: Realism and the Avoidance of Exaggeration

This principle emerges from the conjunction of two key components: "truthfulness in poetry" and "imitation/mimesis." In continuity with the Aristotelian legacy, Ibn Rushd regards poetry as valid only insofar as it remains committed to the representation of truth and distances itself from excess, fantastical fabrication, and unfounded constructions. Imitation, in this context, does not signify a superficial replication of reality; rather, it denotes a disciplined and rational re-creation of human experience. The ideal poem, therefore, is one in which the reflection of reality is harmonized with criteria of truth, narrative plausibility, and ethical capacity.

Principle Two: Guided Imagination and Creative Representation

The second principle arises from the interrelation of "the role of imagination and mimesis" and "polysemy in poetry." Within Ibn Rushd's framework, imagination is not an unrestrained or arbitrary force; it is a guided faculty that, through mimesis, enables the production of imagery and meaning. Polysemy further enhances the capacity for layered interpretation and actively engages the reader in the process of understanding. The result of this synthesis is a form of creative yet disciplined imagination—one that remains faithful to truth while simultaneously opening new perceptual horizons for its audience.

Principle Three: Structural Coherence and Harmony

The third principle is formed through the interaction of three elements: "harmonious composition and order," "structure and coordination," and "unity." Ibn Rushd considers the internal coherence of a poetic work to be a fundamental condition of its efficacy. Every element—whether linguistic form, theme, rhythm, or affective and cognitive function—must stand in an organic

relationship with the others. Structural unity does not entail the elimination of diversity; rather, it signifies the integration of multiple elements within a unified framework. Such integration elevates the work beyond fragmented expression, transforming it into an aesthetically and rhetorically persuasive structure.

Principle Four: Teleology (Purposefulness)

This principle derives from the combination of “moderation and balance” with “purpose.” Ibn Rushd understands poetry as a teleological phenomenon—one that, through moderation in expression and equilibrium in structure, must culminate in an educational, ethical, or cognitive end. Form and content are thus subordinated to a consciously pursued aim. Moderation in this sense is not merely an aesthetic quality but a mechanism that enables effective communication and the intended impact upon the audience.

Principle Five: The Ethical–Social Function of Poetry

The final principle is constructed from the convergence of three components: “ethical and social effects,” “pleasure and emotions,” and “praise and satire.” For Ibn Rushd, poetry is not merely an expression of beauty; it functions as an instrument of moral refinement and the regulation of emotional and social order. The ethical efficacy of poetry is realized when it is accompanied by artistic pleasure and emotional stimulation, since without affective engagement, moral meaning fails to reach its audience. The functions of praise and satire must be understood within this framework: they serve as aesthetic tools for directing social behavior, criticizing vice, and reinforcing virtue in a persuasive artistic form.

The Arabs and the Aesthetics of Andalusian Architecture

Within the broader sphere of Arab civilization, aesthetics—both before and after the advent of Islam—has consistently manifested as a multidimensional phenomenon. In the pre-Islamic (Jāhili) period, whose most significant surviving written legacy is its poetic corpus, aesthetic foundations were articulated through metaphors, myths, and similes; poetry constituted the primary medium through which beauty and harmony were perceived among the Arabs (Godard, 1388/2009: 243–244). Consequently, an understanding of beauty in applied arts and architecture during this period is also accessible through pre-Islamic poetry, where descriptions of reliefs and sculptures reveal an elementary yet meaningful perception of aesthetic value. Such accounts indicate that art and architecture were largely ornamental or religious in character and grounded in simplicity and functionalism (Vílchez, 2017: 40–44). Pre-Islamic architecture was at times narrated in mythopoetic terms, with the architect portrayed as a figure possessing supernatural power—such as in

legendary accounts of Sinimmār or Farhād—where the ambition to construct monumental buildings was interpreted as a rivalry with creation itself and often culminated in tragic endings (*Ibid.*, 34–35).

With the emergence of Islam, Arab society underwent profound transformation. The simple and rudimentary architecture of the pre-Islamic era evolved as Islamic expansion brought Arabs into contact with the civilizations of Iran and Byzantium. Muslims absorbed artistic and structural elements from these cultures, a process that ultimately generated a new architectural synthesis within Islamic civilization (Godard, 1384/2005: 327–328). The conquest of al-Andalus introduced a new layer to the aesthetic experience of the Islamic world. Prior to Islam, the Iberian Peninsula had been shaped by Visigothic, Roman, Syrian, Byzantine, and Persian influences (Dodds, 1992: 3). The Visigoths, combining Roman and Byzantine traditions, developed a distinctive religious art whose influence persisted in Mozarabic and Romanesque forms (Pardo, 2024). Pre-Islamic Andalusian architecture was generally simple and functional, characterized by limited ornamentation, basilican layouts, horseshoe arches, and vegetal and geometric motifs derived from Roman art (Barrucand & Bednorz, 2007: 21–22).

The arrival of Muslims transformed the visual language of al-Andalus. Innovations in the horseshoe arch, the systematic use of geometric ornament, Qur'ānic inscriptions, vegetal motifs, polychrome tilework, and precious materials such as ivory and ceramics became defining features. The Great Mosque of Córdoba stands as a paradigmatic example of this transformation, with its forest of columns and intricate ornamentation reflecting a synthesis of Islamic technical knowledge and local heritage (Hitti, 1970: 591–598). This transformation rendered Andalusian architecture a site of interaction among philosophy, art, and religion, while simultaneously complicating the delineation of a distinct Andalusian aesthetic, given its entanglement with historical, political, and intellectual contexts (Vílchez, 2017: 851–853).

The eight-century Muslim rule in al-Andalus is typically divided into five periods: Umayyad, Taifa, Almoravid, Almohad, and Nasrid. Ibn Rushd lived during the transitional span between the Almoravid and Almohad periods, each marked by distinctive architectural and aesthetic characteristics. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the Almoravids established a polity grounded in religious austerity and tribal authority. Under Yūsuf ibn Tāshfīn, Berber tribal power expanded from North Africa into al-Andalus. Early Almoravid austerity was reflected architecturally in structures such as the Great Mosque of Tlemcen, whose horseshoe arches and relatively restrained ornamentation embodied this ethos (Bloom, 2020: 109–115). As Almoravid territories expanded, eastern Islamic artistic influences intensified, introducing more elaborate geometric

ornamentation, semicircular arches, and abstract motifs, trends that reached their apex toward the end of the dynasty (Dodds, 1992: 45). Almoravid art thus represented a synthesis of religious asceticism and geometric aesthetics, with eastern traditions entering al-Andalus through North Africa (Hitti, 1970: 593).

The Almohad period marked a decisive aesthetic turning point. In its early phase, the mystical and theological doctrines of Ibn Tūmart—emphasizing rational monotheism and simplicity—left a clear imprint on architecture. The mosques of Tinmal and Taza exemplify this approach through their geometric clarity and limited ornamentation (Nasr & Leaman, 1996: 603–605; Dodds, 1992: 92–93). With the accession of Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf—renowned for his patronage of philosophy and science and his association with scholars such as Ibn Rushd—a profound architectural transformation occurred. This shift is evident in the enlarged scale and increased decorative richness of structures such as the Kasbah Mosque in Marrakesh and the Hassan Mosque in Rabat (Bloom, 2020: 110–115). Northern Christian threats also stimulated the development of fortified architecture; examples include the Torre del Oro in Seville and Bab Agnaou in Marrakesh, where defensive functionality was integrated with Qur’anic ornamentation. During this period, architecture achieved a synthesis of form, power, and spirituality, while the royal palaces of Seville—with their expansive courtyards and sumptuous decoration—symbolized the maturity of this style (Dodds, 1992: 80–82).

Following Ibn Rushd’s death, the Nasrid dynasty established a fragile yet enduring polity in Granada. Muḥammad I consolidated his rule through diplomatic strategy and employed art and architecture as instruments of identity formation. The Almohad aesthetic legacy reached its zenith during this period (Dodds, 1992: 101–102). The transition from simplicity to complexity attained full expression in the Alhambra complex, where muqarnas vaulting, intricate stucco work, and refined tile decoration embodied the ultimate articulation of Islamic aesthetic ideals. The Court of the Lions, with its multilayered arches and precise geometric articulation, exemplifies the maturity of this style. Cultural interactions with North Africa and Christian polities further diversified techniques and materials, while military pressures prompted the construction of symbolic fortifications (Bloom, 2020: 148–154).

In order to analyze systematically the architectural evolution of the Almoravid, Almohad, and Nasrid periods—corresponding to three temporal levels (before Ibn Rushd’s entry into courtly life, during his presence within structures of power, and after his death)—and to interpret the continuity of architectural transformation across these phases, the development of an analytical framework was necessary. Table 2 is the result of research grounded

in authoritative sources, comparative studies, and historical analysis. The works of Antonio González, Puerta Vílchez, and Montequin were selected as primary references, as each author, through documented evidence, field studies, and aesthetic analysis, has clarified the trajectory of Andalusian architectural transformation. González adopts a historiographical–conceptual approach to royal and religious structures; Montequin emphasizes spatial organization and ornamental elements; and Vílchez reconstructs semantic and formal layers through a combination of textual analysis and comparative archaeology. The characteristics presented in the table are derived from the conceptual extraction and reorganization of data from these three sources and are structured according to six axes—“overall architecture,” “construction style,” “ornamentation,” “decorative techniques,” “external influences,” and “distinctive features”—in order to provide a systematic representation of the evolution of Andalusian spatial aesthetics.

Table 2- Architectural Characteristics Across Three Dynastic Periods of al-Andalus

Architectural Category	Almoravid	Almohad	Nasrid
Architecture (General)	Almoravid architecture was characterized by structural simplicity and functional clarity, relying primarily on local materials such as stone and brick. A representative monument is the Qubbat al-Barūdiyyīn in Marrakesh, whose horseshoe arches—drawing from Umayyad precedents—express dignity through restrained ornamentation. Hydraulic structures and garden layouts were also integrated into palace design (Vílchez, 2017: 76–79). The period favored effective yet technically modest construction methods, including ashlar masonry and lime-bonded brickwork (González, 2001: 77; Vílchez, 2017: 449).	Almohad architecture projected strength, austerity, and ideological clarity. Monumental structures such as the Kutubiyya Mosque in Marrakesh exemplify its emphasis on scale, pointed arches, and tall minarets defined by sharp, linear profiles. The style conveyed both religious rigor and political authority (Vílchez, 2017: 83–86). Characterized as militaristic yet disciplined, it privileged clarity of form and structural solidity (González, 2001: 83; Vílchez, 2017: 428–433).	Nasrid architecture marked the apogee of Andalusian aesthetic refinement. Masterpieces such as the Alhambra in Granada display an intricate spatial composition centered on courtyards, gardens, fountains, domes, and decorative arches constructed with diverse materials and elaborate surface articulation. Interior spaces achieve a heightened synthesis of geometry, water, and vegetal ornament (Vílchez, 2017: 123–130; González, 2001: 123). Epigraphic programs integrated poetic inscriptions into architectural surfaces, producing a unified aesthetic vision (Vílchez, 2017: 829–831).
Overall Style	Anti-classical baroque tendencies with elaborate detailing; rooted in Taifa anti-classical standards (Montequin, 1987).	Classical reorientation marked by clarity, restraint, and structural purification; influenced by Umayyad classicism (Montequin, 1987).	Anti-classical aesthetic with highly refined and intricate ornamentation; emerging from late Almohad and earlier anti-classical currents (Montequin, 1987).

Architectural Category	Almoravid	Almohad	Nasrid
Decorative Program	Ornament remained relatively limited compared to later periods, emphasizing vegetal and geometric motifs, modest stucco carving, and restrained muqarnas. Decoration appeared primarily in religious and select public structures (Vílchez, 2017: 76–79; González, 2001: 77).	Ornamentation included refined stucco carving, restrained muqarnas, Kufic inscriptions, and geometric systems such as <i>sebka</i> . Figurative imagery was avoided in favor of vegetal and geometric abstraction (Vílchez, 2017: 83–86; González, 2001: 83).	Decoration reached exceptional intricacy: muqarnas vaulting, polychrome tilework, arabesque compositions, vegetal scrolls, geometric interlace, and extensive poetic inscriptions. Stucco surfaces were densely articulated, especially in palatial complexes such as the Alhambra (Vílchez, 2017: 123–130; Montequin, 1987).
Decorative Techniques	Complex anti-classical vegetal compositions with baroque repetition; widespread use of carved stucco and geometric articulation (Montequin, 1987; Vílchez, 2017: 499).	Simplification and purification of vegetal forms; emphasis on classical proportional clarity and reduction of excessive motifs (Montequin, 1987).	Highly elaborate vegetal and geometric systems with strong visual rhythm and ornamental density (Montequin, 1987).
External Influences	Direct continuation of Andalusí traditions blended with local Maghribi elements (Montequin, 1987).	Conscious revival and reinterpretation of classical Andalusí precedents (Montequin, 1987).	Enrichment and transformation of earlier Andalusí traditions into a highly synthesized aesthetic language (Montequin, 1987).
Distinctive Features	Structural continuity with earlier Andalusí forms combined with controlled decorative experimentation (Montequin, 1987).	Ideological austerity combined with monumentality; fusion of defense, spirituality, and architectural clarity (Montequin, 1987).	Culmination of Andalusí aesthetic maturity; integration of space, poetry, geometry, water, and ornament into a unified architectural poetics (Montequin, 1987).

The analytical table of architectural characteristics across the three historical dynasties of the Almoravids, Almohads, and Nasrids demonstrates that the transformation of Andalusian architecture was not merely a shift in style or ornamentation, but rather the progressive development of an aesthetic–semantic logic. Within this logic, the relationship between simplicity and richness, piety and ornament, and meaning and form unfolds through a dynamic dialectic.

The Almoravids, emerging from the Sufi-inflected traditions of North Africa, understood architecture as a form of spatial asceticism. Their emphasis on local materials, restrained forms, and the avoidance of excessive ornamentation reflected an ideology grounded in austerity and functionalism. In later phases, however, under the influence of eastern Islamic artistic currents, geometric complexity and decorative elaboration increased. Early Almohad architecture, shaped by the teachings of Ibn Tūmart, initially returned to the simplicity and austerity of early Almoravid forms. Yet during the reign of Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf,

architecture underwent a transformation: space became a language for expressing political authority and rational order. Structures such as the Koutoubia Mosque, the Hassan Mosque, and the Torre del Oro, with their solid geometry, pointed arches, and measured ornamentation, may be interpreted as spatial manifestations of a “philosophical tawhīd” articulated through disciplined form.

In the Nasrid period, the tension between simplicity and richness gave way to a synthesis of meaning and ornament. Architecture in this era may be understood as an artistic response to the consciousness of political decline. Nasrid monuments embody a form of “defensive beauty,” seeking to stabilize cultural and civilizational presence in the face of existential threat.

The Correspondence Between Ibn Rushd’s Intellectual Structures and Architectural Form

In this section, through a qualitative comparative method, a systematic effort is undertaken to explore the possibility of conceptual convergence between the foundational principles of aesthetics in Ibn Rushd’s thought—primarily articulated in his commentary on Aristotle’s *Poetics* and his philosophical analysis of poetry—and the defining characteristics of Andalusian architecture across the Almoravid, Almohad, and Nasrid periods. Within this methodological framework, textual-aesthetic data derived from Ibn Rushd’s philosophical works and analytical data concerning the aesthetic structures of Andalusian architecture have been extracted, conceptualized, and organized into commensurable categories for comparison.

This comparison centers on key concepts such as realism and the avoidance of excess, guided imagination and creative representation, structural coherence and unity, purposiveness, and the ethical–social function of art. These principles occupy a central position in Ibn Rushd’s intellectual system and lend themselves to extension into the spatial language of architecture. The qualitative comparative method employed here does not seek quantitative measurement or the demonstration of direct causal relationships. Rather, it aims at conceptual analysis and the identification of cognitive correspondences between two distinct domains. Accordingly, the purpose of this section is not to establish a direct historical causality between Ibn Rushd’s philosophy and architectural developments in al-Andalus, but to articulate conceptual horizons within which analogous rational and perceptual patterns may be discerned across the fields of poetry and architecture.

Realism and the Avoidance of Exaggeration

In the *Poetics*, Ibn Rushd considers poetry valid insofar as its representation

is grounded in truth and avoids excess, illusionism, and undisciplined fantasy. In Almohad architecture, this principle is reflected in structural clarity, pointed arches, assertive lines, and monumental minarets. Reacting against the increased ornamentation of late Almoravid architecture, the Almohads moved toward a form of calculated simplicity and formal rationality that resonates with Ibn Rushd's commitment to truthfulness in representation. Although Nasrid architecture displays far greater decorative richness, its underlying geometric structure—axial symmetry, proportional precision, regulated water features, and the concealed geometry of muqarnas—remains anchored in rational clarity. Thus, while Nasrid architecture exhibits greater poetic refinement, structurally it continues the same non-excessive rationality characteristic of Almohad architecture, aligning with Ibn Rushd's principle of realism.

Guided Imagination and Creative Representation

For Ibn Rushd, imagination is a necessary faculty, yet it must be guided. Imagination must serve mimesis rather than dissolve into uncontrolled image-making. Polysemy extends this principle: imagination should deepen meaning, not produce incoherence.

In Almohad architecture, imagination operates through disciplined geometry—gridded compositions, rhythmic stucco work, and controlled geometric repetition. Ornament exists, but it remains subordinate to order. In the Nasrid period, this guided imagination evolves into spatial polysemy. Layered muqarnas, inscriptions that simultaneously generate meaning and structure space, and the integration of geometry, light, and water create networks of layered significance. If Almohad architecture restrains imagination, Nasrid architecture transforms that restraint into poetic complexity—an evolution that parallels Ibn Rushd's ideal of disciplined yet meaning-generative imagination.

Structural Coherence and Unity

Ibn Rushd maintains that a work of art is beautiful only when its elements form a coherent whole; unity and harmonious composition are essential. Disordered poetry lacks efficacy, just as arbitrary composition lacks beauty.

In Almohad architecture, structural coherence manifests in mathematically proportioned minarets, carefully aligned prayer halls, and a unified architectural language more internally consistent than that of the Almoravids. In the Nasrid period, this principle reaches its apex. The Alhambra exemplifies a total synthesis in which water, light, poetry, geometry, stucco, color, and rhythm converge into a unified composition. This spatial integration embodies Ibn Rushd's principle of harmonized parts serving a single whole. Almohad unity may be described as rational; Nasrid unity as poetic-architectural. Both, however, remain committed to structural coherence.

Purposiveness

Ibn Rushd argues that poetry must achieve moderation, balance, and purposiveness; artistic production without ethical, educational, or cognitive aim lacks value.

In Almohad architecture, moderation appears in the balanced integration of power, function, and beauty—neither excessive luxury nor stark austerity. Structures such as the Torre del Oro and the Koutoubia Mosque exhibit intentional design aimed at manifesting divine unity, political authority, and religious identity.

In the Nasrid era, purposiveness assumed a different inflection: architecture became an instrument of cultural preservation amid political fragmentation. Beauty was no longer ornament for its own sake, but a means of sustaining identity and ensuring symbolic survival. This transition from Almohad moderation to Nasrid identity-driven purposiveness echoes Ibn Rushd's insistence that art ultimately serves meaningful ends.

The Ethical–Social Function

For Ibn Rushd, poetry is inseparable from ethical and social function; art must move the emotions to shape moral disposition and collective life.

In Almohad architecture, this ethical–social role is expressed through monumental forms conveying *tawhīd*, legitimate authority, and collective discipline. Massive minarets, city gates adorned with Kufic inscriptions, and structures embodying dignity and solemnity functioned as spatial ethical statements, guiding communal consciousness.

In the Nasrid period, this function evolved into a subtler, more affective register. The poetic spatiality of the Alhambra, gardens evoking serenity and dignity, inscriptions articulating virtue, and an aesthetic language of refinement collectively constructed cultural resilience. If the Almohads transmitted ethical meaning through monumentality and power, the Nasrids articulated it through delicacy, emotional order, and cultivated beauty. Both modes reflect Ibn Rushd's conviction that art is an instrument of ethical and social formation.

The cumulative result of these conceptual comparisons suggests that meaningful correspondences may be traced between the aesthetic structures of Ibn Rushd's thought and the spatial language of Andalusian architecture—not as a direct historical or causal relationship, but as a form of cognitive and conceptual parallelism. To avoid analytical dispersion and to enable simultaneous visualization of these correspondences, the synthesized findings are systematically organized in the following analytical table (Table 3), presenting in condensed and comparative form the relationship between Ibn Rushd's intellectual framework and its spatial resonances in Almoravid, Almohad, and Nasrid architecture.

Table 3- A Comparative Analysis of Ibn Rushd's Aesthetic Principles in Poetry and Their Reflection in Almohad–Nasrid Architecture

No.	Aesthetic Principle in Ibn Rushd	Elaboration in Poetry	Reflection in Almohad Architecture	Continuation in Nasrid Architecture
1	Realism and Avoidance of Exaggeration	Representation of truth rather than exaggerated fantasy	Simple design, pointed arches, clear and explicit forms	Rich ornamentation combined with stronger emphasis on clarity of proportion, symmetry, and geometry
2	Guided Imagination and Creative Representation	Visualization of abstract concepts through meaningful imagination	Use of controlled, rhythmic, and repetitive geometric patterns	Use of muqarnas, tilework, and the integration of complex symbolic compositions
3	Structural Unity and Harmony	Harmonization of poetic elements to produce meaning	Mathematical composition, rhythmic repetition of arches and spaces, coordination of structure and ornament	Formal unity in the Alhambra palace and balanced spatial organization
4	Purposefulness (Teleology)	Goal-oriented moderation	Architectural design aimed at integrating power and function	Ornamentation and structural design employed to reinforce identity and ensure cultural survival
5	Ethical–Social Function	Poetry serving moral and cultural guidance	Architecture conveying religious and political messages	Poetic spatial environments (such as gardens) symbolizing political authority and the preservation of Islamic identity

Conclusion

Although no historical document attests to Ibn Rushd's direct involvement in architectural design processes, the historical simultaneity and conceptual convergence between his aesthetic principles—articulated in his commentary on the *Poetics*—and the architectural characteristics of the Almoravid, Almohad, and Nasrid periods point to a profound shared epistemic, rational, and cultural substratum within the Islamic civilization of al-Andalus. This convergence arises from Ibn Rushd's definition of beauty within the framework of poetic theory, wherein poetry functions as a vehicle for the reflection of truth through rational mimesis (*muḥākāt*). Accordingly, foundational aesthetic principles such as realism and the avoidance of exaggeration, guided imagination, structural coherence, purposiveness, and ethical–social function—central to his analysis of poetry—constitute a conceptual system that can likewise inform architectural interpretation. Both domains ultimately seek to objectify truth within a sensorial–rational order.

The comparative analysis conducted between Ibn Rushd's aesthetic principles and the architectural features of the Almohad and Nasrid periods demonstrates that the architecture of these two eras not only aligns with Averroean principles through its structural rationality, formal clarity, and aesthetic moderation, but

also reaches a heightened level of complexity in the Nasrid period. In Nasrid architecture, this alignment manifests through spatial polysemy, geometric networks, the interplay of light and water, and the poetic integration of architectural elements. The findings of this study suggest that Ibn Rushd's influence on architecture—though not necessarily direct or historically demonstrable—may be analytically understood as the product of a shared political, intellectual, and cultural horizon. Within this horizon, the language of poetry and the language of space operate upon a common foundation of aesthetic rationality and ethical purposiveness. This hypothesis is further reinforced by Ibn Rushd's position as the official philosopher and scientific advisor at the Almohad court, a role that may have enabled him to exert an indirect influence on the spatial sensibilities and formal values of his time. Such a comparative analytical approach may serve as a productive model for future studies in Islamic philosophy, art, and architecture, illustrating how an intellectual system can extend beyond its theoretical domain and find resonance within the spatial and geometric structures of a historical epoch.

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