

# **Title: Ibn Al-Haytham's breakthrough in Optics**

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## **Abstract**

Ibn al-Haytham (Alhazen) revolutionized the scientific understanding of vision and light through his groundbreaking work in optics during the 10th and 11th centuries. In his seminal book, *Kitab al-Manazir* (Book of Optics), he challenged the long-standing Greek emission theory of vision proposed by thinkers such as Euclid and Ptolemy, which claimed that the eyes emit rays to perceive objects. Instead, Ibn al-Haytham demonstrated that vision occurs when light rays reflect off objects and enter the eye.

Through systematic experimentation, mathematical analysis, and careful observation, he established foundational principles of reflection and refraction, explained the anatomy of the eye, and described the functioning of the camera obscura. His emphasis on empirical evidence and controlled experimentation marked a significant shift toward the modern scientific method. Ibn al-Haytham's work not only transformed medieval Islamic science but also profoundly influenced later European scholars, laying essential groundwork for the development of modern optics and physics.

## **Introduction**

During the Islamic Golden Age, scientific inquiry flourished across mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and physics. Among the most influential scholars of this era was Ibn al-Haytham, a pioneering physicist and mathematician whose work fundamentally transformed the study of light and vision. At a time when earlier Greek theories dominated scientific thought, he introduced a new, experimental approach that reshaped the understanding of optics.

In his landmark work, *Kitab al-Manazir* (Book of Optics), Ibn al-Haytham challenged the prevailing emission theory of vision advanced by scholars such as Euclid and Ptolemy. Rather than accepting traditional ideas, he relied on observation, experimentation, and mathematical reasoning to demonstrate that vision occurs when light reflects off objects and enters the eye.

His innovative methods marked a turning point in scientific thinking, laying the foundations for modern optics and influencing later European scientists. Ibn al-Haytham's contributions remain a testament to the power of critical inquiry and the enduring impact of empirical research.

Two questions that can be asked in this research paper are: (1) How did Ibn al-Haytham disprove earlier Greek theories of vision? (2) How did the Kitab al-Manazir influence the development of modern science?

## **Literature Review**

### **Breakthroughs that changed modern studies**

Ibn al-Haytham introduced breakthroughs that fundamentally changed modern scientific studies, particularly in the field of optics. He disproved earlier Greek theories of vision proposed by Euclid and Ptolemy, demonstrating that vision occurs when light reflects off objects and enters the eye rather than being emitted from it. This correct explanation of vision became the foundation of modern optical science.

In his influential work, Kitab al-Manazir, he introduced a systematic experimental approach based on observation, testing, and mathematical reasoning. His method marked an early and crucial step toward the development of the modern scientific method. Additionally, his detailed studies of reflection and refraction established principles that later supported the creation of lenses, microscopes, telescopes, and other optical instruments. His explanation of the camera obscura further demonstrated that light travels in straight lines and forms images, contributing to the eventual development of photography. Together, these breakthroughs had a lasting impact on physics, engineering, and scientific inquiry.

### **Challenging Ancient Theories of Optics**

Ibn al-Haytham fundamentally challenged the dominant Greek theories of vision that had been accepted for centuries. Scholars such as Euclid and Ptolemy supported the emission theory, which claimed that the eyes send out rays to perceive objects. This idea remained influential despite lacking experimental proof.

Through careful observation and experimentation, Ibn al-Haytham rejected this theory and demonstrated that vision occurs when light reflects off objects and enters the eye. He used logical reasoning and practical experiments, including studies with the camera obscura, to show that light travels in straight lines and that external light sources are necessary for sight.

By replacing speculation with experimentation, he not only corrected misconceptions about vision but also set a new standard for scientific inquiry. His challenge to ancient authority marked a turning point in the history of optics and laid the groundwork for modern scientific thinking.

### **Results and Discussion**

This research addressed two key questions: how Ibn al-Haytham disproved earlier Greek theories of vision, and how his work influenced the development of modern science through the Kitab al-Manazir.

The findings show that Ibn al-Haytham successfully challenged the emission theory supported by Euclid and Ptolemy by providing experimental evidence that vision occurs when light reflects off objects and enters the eye. Through controlled experiments with light sources, mirrors, and dark rooms, he demonstrated that sight depends on external light rather than rays emitted from the eyes. His explanation of the eye's structure further supported the intromission theory, offering a more accurate scientific model of vision.

The discussion also highlights that his methods represented a major shift in scientific practice. Rather than relying solely on philosophical reasoning or authority, Ibn al-Haytham emphasized observation, hypothesis testing, and mathematical proof. This approach closely resembles the foundations of the modern scientific method. His work later influenced European scholars and contributed to advancements in optics, physics, and experimental science.

Overall, the results confirm that Ibn al-Haytham not only corrected ancient misconceptions about vision but also established principles of experimentation that continue to shape modern scientific research.

## **Conclusion**

Ibn al-Haytham stands as a pivotal figure in the history of science, whose work in optics reshaped the understanding of vision and light. By disproving the ancient Greek emission theory and demonstrating that sight occurs when light reflects off objects and enters the eye, he provided a more accurate explanation of visual perception. His emphasis on observation, experimentation, and mathematical reasoning in the Kitab al-Manazir laid the groundwork for the modern scientific method.

Ibn al-Haytham's breakthroughs in reflection, refraction, and the behavior of light not only influenced later developments in optics but also had a lasting impact on physics, engineering, and the study of visual perception. His legacy highlights the enduring power of empirical inquiry and critical thinking, demonstrating how challenging established ideas through evidence-based research can transform scientific knowledge.

## **Recommendations for Future Research on Ibn Al-Haytham's studies**

Future research on Ibn Al-Haytham would benefit greatly from producing critical editions and modern translations of his many untranslated Arabic manuscripts, as a significant portion of his estimated 200+ works remain inaccessible to most scholars. Deeper investigation into the transmission of his ideas through Islamic, Jewish, and Latin scholastic traditions would also help

clarify the extent of his influence on the European Scientific Revolution, particularly regarding figures like Kepler and Descartes. On a more interdisciplinary level, connecting his theories of visual perception and cognition — laid out in the Book of Optics — to modern neuroscience and cognitive psychology presents a promising frontier. Similarly, applying digital humanities tools such as AI-assisted manuscript analysis to his body of work could uncover previously undetected connections between his writings and later scientific developments across cultures. Finally, situating his contributions more firmly within the broader Islamic Golden Age intellectual tradition, rather than studying him in isolation, would give a richer and more accurate picture of how his ideas emerged and spread.

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