The Analysis of Nizami's Negative Judgments about Women

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Abstract
The present paper seeks to analyze Nizami’s negative judgments about women in Khosrow and Shirin Collection from a different point of view. Those investigating this issue have considered Nizami a poet proponent of women and have tried to either ignore his words in this regard or justify these words in any way possible for their own benefit. In the current paper, it is attempted to, away from any prejudice, firstly, prove such phenomenon in religious and literary texts and Nizami's language. This is done through presentation of many examples and samples. Then, to analyze this phenomenon, it is tried to account for women's historical and real visage. After that, it is demonstrated how our religious and literary texts, specially Khosrow and Shirin Collection, are the full mirrors of negative real women and this issue never contradicts with religious and literary texts.

Key Words: Nizami, Khosrow and Shirin, Audience, Women, Shirin.

1A great Persian Romantic Poet who was born in Ganja in 1141 and died there in 1209. Nezāmi is considered the greatest romantic epic poet in Persian literature, who brought a colloquial and realistic style to the Persian epic. For more information, please see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nizami_Ganjavi.
2"Khosrow and Shirin" is the title of a famous Persian tragic romance. The essential narrative is a love story of Persian origin, which is found in the great epico-historical poems of Shahnaneh and which is based on historical figures that were elaborated and romanticized by later Persian poets. For more information, please visit: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khosrow_and_Shirin.
Introduction

Let us begin our discussion straightly from this fundamental question:

In spite of the fact that Islam values women so much, what is the wisdom or logic behind the Qur'anic verses (Ayas) or religious narrations (Rivayat) that create the doubt of negative look at women? Why have women been depicted as considerably negative characters in our literature and even in Gnostic literature for centuries and even great Gnostics such as Rumi could not avoid considering such negative role for these great actresses of creation?

Whatever done or said in this regard has attempted to either refute this fact and purge religious texts and classic literature from the blame of giving negative visage to women or abuse this fact for humiliating and denying religious and literary scholars.

The paper presented here attempts at looking at this issue from the third angle mentioned above. Firstly, the presence of this phenomenon-negative role of women- will be proved in religious texts and Old Persian literature. Then, Nizami's position in this regard will be investigated and the reasons for this position will be analyzed. Dear readers are urged not to jump on conclusions before reading the discussions completely.

1. Visage of "Negative Women" in the Qur'an and Religious Narrations:

Most of us (Muslims) have seen Qur'anic verses or religious narrations against today accepted logics about women. However, because of our heartfelt respect to holy nature of Qur'an and infallible nature of twelve Imams in the belief of Shiite Muslims, those verses have been quarantined in our minds and those narrations have been either denied or justified according to our inclinations most of the times. In contrast, we have not been content with these justifications in our own beliefs and we have not made our doubtful conscience comfortable through removing the
problem itself not solving it. Examples of such verses and narrations are presented here:

- "Surely, it is a plot of you women! Certainly mighty is your plot! " (Qur'an, 12:28)
- "As to those women on whose part you see ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly, if it is useful)" (Qur'an, 4:34).
- "Consult with women, but act inversely against their sayings. Verily who does not disagree with them, destroys himself" (Molana Rumi, 2006, p.132).
- "Avoid consulting with women because their mind is imperfect and their decisions are not stable" (Nahj Al-Balaghah, Letter 31).
- "Good for people whose minds are masculine and souls are feminine and bad for people whose minds are feminine and souls are masculine" (Angheravi, 1984, p.775).

2. Visage of "Negative Women" in Persian Literature:
Without any further explanation, some instances of negative women in the works of great authors in Persian Literature are presented as follow:

2.1. Ferdowsi
Although Ferdowsi believes his great work, Shahnaneh, indebted to his wife and mentions some of great women in this book, poems like these are sometimes seen in his work:
"Esfandiar told his mother: "Wise people have said a good proverb. They said that "never tell your secrets to women because they will reveal your secrets everywhere. Never consult with women because basically there is no woman you could consult with" (Ferdowsi, 1984, p.218).
2.2 Beyhaghi

In his history book, Beyhaghi writes for the commemoration of Zahir Al-DolehGhaznavis' reign as follows:

"… When Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) heard the news of KhosrowParviz’s death, he said: "Who did come to the throne after him?" It was answered: "His daughter, PooranDokht". He said: "A nation who entrusts their works to a woman will never be prosperous". This narration is the greatest reason for the fact that governing is the responsibility of a powerful and resourceful man, otherwise men and women are the same and there is no difference between them" (Musavian, 1997, p.417).

2.3 NasirKhosrow

In the verse below, NasirKhosrow categorized advantages and disadvantages and he believed that advantages (such as knowledge and wisdom) belonged to men and disadvantages (such as loving jewelry and expensive clothes) belong to women:

"Women are adorned by silk clothes, gold and silver whereas men are trimmed by knowledge and wisdom" (NasirKhosrow, 1978, p.42).

2.4 Sanayi

He sometimes considers women in the same level as children and scattered soldiers:

"Children, women and scattered soldiers disturb the heart of troops and lead the troops to defeat" (Sanayi, 1979, 576).

In order to taunt "men", he sometimes uses famous insult of "lower than women":

"O silent man! Do not be lazy. A man who is lower than women is miserable" (Sanayi, 1979, pp. 118-119).

2.5 Fakhr Al-Din Asa'adGorgani

In his "Veis and Ramin" Collection, the viewpoint of classic men about women is revealed:
"Women are imperfect from the viewpoint of creation because they are cruel and notorious" (Gorgani, 1960, p. 136).

2.6 Khaghani
He was always taunting his female relative, even his sister, wife and master. Therefore, it is not unlikely that he writes such a verse:
"Women are all full of imperfection and defect, but men always see these disadvantages as advantages" (Khaghani, 1997, p.876).

2.7 NasrollahMonshi
Kelileh and Demneh, his great work, is full of misogyny clear for all readers. As you know, this book includes stories told by animals. Most of the animals in this book have talked about reproaching women's lies, tricks, shortcomings and low-mindedness.

2.8 IbnYamin
Like Jami and other Arab poets such as Abol-alaMoayeri, he not only does not have positive point of view about women, but also encourages remaining single and being away from marriage:
"I am famous for being single in my homeland. Even my homeland has become famous because of this feature of mine. Even if the costs of marriage with a woman are so low, I will not marry like Jesus Christ" (IbnYamin, 1974, p.110).

9.2 Anwari
He is inclined to mundane living and clung to the rich and aristocrats. It is not impossible that when he finds his pockets empty and costs of keeping household makes life difficult for him, he abhors women. He believes that worst men are better than best women:
"Women are like clouds and men are like moon. The darkness of moon is in the effect of clouds. Worst men are better than best women. Whoever loves women really deserves guillotine" (Anwari, 1983, p.630).
2.10 Sa'adi

Satire and gibe present in the poems of Sa'adi is sometimes bitter for women:
"It is in vain to consult with women and it is sinful to be generous with the corrupted" (Sa'adi, 1995, p.153).

In the following verse, he considers "woman" as an insult and refers it to an unjust man:
"An unjust man is a woman and a greedy pious is a rubber" (Sa'adi, 1995, p.153).

2.11 Attar:

In the following verses, Attar explains an evolutionary course in which "women" are located in the end of creation line. After evolution, they transform into men and men transform into sea:
"Everyone who loves Allah will find the key of both worlds soon. Then, that person, even if she were a woman, would transform to a man and if that person is a man, he will transform into a deep sea" (Attar, 1996, p.395).

2.12 Sa'ad Al-Din Varavini

MarzbanNameh, his great work, is like "Kelileh and Demneh" from the view point of looking toward women. In this work, there are many cases of these words:
"Whenever feminine characteristics dominate a man and his masculinity falls to those characteristics, that man will leave manly tasks aside and will always live with feminine characteristics" (Varavini, 1991, p.620).

2.13 Najm-e-Razi

Mersad Al-Ebad is a Gnostic work, but it has a masculine tone like most of the literary and Gnostic works as if the audience of the writer were only men. In this great valuable work, several instances of negative women are visible, for example:
"Mind is like a boy as same as his father, soul. Ego is like a daughter as same as her mother, body. All high and good characteristics are in mind and all evil and menial characteristics are in ego" (Najm-e-Razi, 1997, p.175).

2.14 Sheikh Mahmud Shabestari
His work is Gnostic, but such a poem catches eye in his Gnostic poems:
"Women are imperfect in wisdom and religion. So why should men imitate them?" (Shabestari, 1982, p.120).
Or he says elsewhere in his book:
"Wealth and Women create sadness and grief. So, leave them like Jesus Christ" (Shabestari, 1982, p.99).

2.15 Jami
This great Gnostic of the Ninth Century (A.H) has an especial idea about women. He disagrees with marriage and invites men to remain single in several cases. In "Haft Awrang (Seven Thrones)", he has a chapter named as "Admonishing Singles". Following verses are instances of his poems about women:
"Women are imperfect in wisdom and religion. There are not such imperfections as women. No one is ungrateful like women in the world. Who has seen loyalty from women in this world? What have you seen from them other than trickery and treason? (Jami, 1977, p.330).

2.16 MollaHadiSabzevari
In "sharheAsfar (travels explanation"), he writes as follow about women:
"That women are among animals points subtly to the fact that because of their looseness in mind and inclination toward valueless and mundane matters of this world, women are near to become animals. Character and behavior of most of the women are like animals. However, Allah has covered them with human faces in order for men to marry them and not to avoid marrying with them" (Sabzevari, 1986, p.137).
2.17 Molana Rumi

In his great work "Masnavi", he presents topics about women or tells stories about them in approximately 30 positions. Nearly in all of these cases-except for two instances in which he talks about the value and position of women-, negative points of view about classic women are visibly seen. Two examples are presented as follows:

"Do you hope for women and their wisdom? You could never trust to their imperfect wisdom" (MolanaRoomi, 1996, p.304).

"Animal characteristics are near to women characters because they love surfaces of affairs like animals" (MolanaRoomi, 1996, p.931).

2.18 Nizami:

Among poets, Nizami is famous for commemorating and describing the value of women. Now, it is time to attend to his ideas about women. Of course, it is worthy to note that all poems in which he has negatively written about women are not included here because it is here aimed at analyzing this kind of looks at women not presenting many examples.

"Women are like flowers within a vase. Their outer part is beautiful, but their inner part is ugly and malodorous. Three things are not loyal: horses, swords and women. Gender of loyalty is masculinity, so it could not be attributed to women who are feminine. Everywhere the name of women is mentioned you should lose all your hope. Men struggled a great deal, but they could not see any loyalty and veracity in women. Never love any woman because she brings you nothing other than calamity" (Nizami, 1987, p.197).

"Women are not veracious. They beguile any man. Their outside is peace and inside is war. They do enmity and are the plague of world. Whenever become friends, they will be calamity of your lives. Whatever I said are among
characteristics of good women. Therefore, compare yourselves and see how bad women are" (Nizami, 2010, p.144).

"Even if women were warriors, they would be out of value because they are still women. Imagine that women are as powerful as lions, it is still valueless because they could not leave their gender aside" (Nizami, 2010, p.144).

Like classic storytellers, Nizami talks about boys not girls whenever there is news of a birthday of a lucky and promising child:
"He gave me the news that his auspicious child was born. That child was surely a boy. Verily boys are the crowns on the heads of their fathers" (Nizami, 1987, p.80).

Two points should be mentioned here:

- Some scholars have tried to say that Nizami depicted a pious woman in Khosrow and Shirin Collection. Those believe that Shirin is the symbol of Nizami's positive judgments about women. This belief is really wrong. Shirin could never be a symbol of virtuous women and the proof for this is her behavior in the Nizami's Collection. Firstly, she is a girl eloping with a boy, an action which was not accepted at that era. Secondly, she elopes for the love of whomNizami himself believes in his negative personage. He is a fourteen-year-old boy who is not mature. At the same time, according to Nizami's descriptions, he is a capricious and free boy. When he is in love with Shirin, he is making love with two other women: ShekarEsfahani, Mary daughter of Roman King. After all, before getting married, Shirin is making love with Khosrow as much as possible. The writer of this paper could not understand how such a woman could be a symbol of piousness and veracity in the works of Nizami.

- Although generally speaking women were negative in that historical era, there were exceptions. All religious, Gnostic and literary scholars have respected to these exceptions and have shown that if a woman could come
out of her negative temporal and spatial atmosphere surrounded her, he would be so much admirable for men. These exceptions are Asieh, Egypt Pharaoh’s wife, Fatima, daughter of holy prophet (P.B.U.H) and Marry, mother of Jesus Christ (P.B.U.H) in the Holy Qur’an. In Attar language, there are four examples. In Nizam’s Khamsah (Five Jewels), there are some exceptions such as Afagh. In Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh, the exception is the wife of Ferdowsi himself.

Nizami has mentioned positive characteristics for women too. For our judgments become completely fair, some instances of this positive looks are presented here:

“She was beautiful woman like swans and ghazals. Powerful wisdom, clear mind, beautiful words, angel-like behavior, scholar-like character she had” (Nizami, 1987, p.277).

“It was told to him that a rich woman was ruling this region. She is faster than men and purer than seas. She is wise and graceful and has clear mind. She has kind behavior with people in hardships. Her descent is noble. Although she has many troops, she is so pious and she never show himself to strangers” (Nizami, 1987, p.278).

“Piety of Women is an adornment for their husband. Women are like moon. They are able to make dark night bright and beautiful” (Nizami, 1987, p.192).

3. The Analysis of Negative look to Women

Now, after bringing real examples of negative looks to “women” and proving the statement of problem for those who deny this phenomenon basically, it is time to analyze these looks.

To begin with, a great paradox should be mentioned:

In spite of the superficial pessimism reflected in the works of most of the Gnostics and scholars including Nizami, why did they respect so much to women? Did not our Holy Prophet and Imams behave respectfully with women? Did not
Nizami commemorate his wife, Afagh? Did not Ferdowsi revere his wife in creating Shahnameh? And, did not Molana honor women deeply?

In fact, to figure out the real intent behind someone's ideas about a matter, the best criterion is the practical occurrence of those ideas in one's life. If Nizami's attitude toward women had been according to his ideas in his works, his behavior with women should have been negative and inhuman. However, this is not the case.

Therefore, how does this paradox happen and what is the logic behind this paradox in actions and words?

Here, the researcher wants to state his most important analysis and idea for explaining this phenomenon briefly and after that its argumentations will be presented:

Completely confirming statement of the problem-negative look at women- in religious references, classic works, Gnostic writings and Nizami's works, I believe that although this look is obvious and accentuated, it is never absolute. This is only a realistic and rational look at a woman who lives in a specific "time" and "place". This typical woman contemporary to the Qur'an, Nahj Al-Balagheh or Nizami's works and the audience of these great works is a woman who is truly imperfect, shallow-minded and deceitful and etc. Therefore, naturally speaking, this woman may not have a positive face [if some exceptions are ignored] in the mirror of these works.

4.1 Women at That Historical Era:
In this section, an outlook of classic women is depicted to readers in order that their minds become free from the historical beliefs of women with lofty characters. That outlook from women in our Gnostic, religious and literary is as follows:

1. She is illiterate. Illiterate and housekeeper person is not aware of realities outside the world. Therefore, she is not perfect in analyzing issues.
2. She wants fun because she is always at home. Home tasks are few. Preparing bread and milk and washing dishes do not take much time. Children do not have homework from their school classes, language and computer classes. They play in backstreets with their peers. This much time in home gathers women together. They raise talkative and away from good conduct. They sit with each other and talk behind others and make plots for others.

3. Literacy belongs to men. Therefore, philosophy and different kinds of science (even religious one) are for men. All of our Gnostic texts have masculine tone. Illiterate women may not take advantage of these sciences. She gets inclined to outer parts of affairs and is dependent to precious metals, makeup and expensive clothes. So, she is called shallow-minded.

4. Sitting at home makes her low-minded. So, she is made example of low-mindedness.

5. Society is poverty-stricken. Time passes by difficultly. People just make the ends meet. Woman is mistress of home and servant at dining table. Uninvited quests make her stressful. She is running out of foods in her home. She sees her reputation in danger. So, she becomes bad before quests.

6. She is unsatisfied with her celestial matters. Her man does not supply these properly. She resorts to heavens, but she cannot get her ethereal demands too. So, she has no alternative except for magic. She imitates palm readers and magicians. Then, she herself learns those skills. After that, she herself becomes the symbol of magic in the stories and poems.

7. Being poor, unsafe and unrespectable together with being illiterate and sitting at home make her cautious and profit seeker. In order to keep herself and her children, she goes through fire and water. Therefore, it is not true to consult with such a woman. Apparently, this woman is not forethoughtful and she cannot be universal.
8. Whenever her husband consults with her for going to war, it is obvious that such a woman never agree with him. This decision entails widowhood, poverty and adversity. So, such a woman is not good choice for consultation.

9. For condition of that era or any other reason, her husband has several wives. Polygamy is common at that time. Emotions bring jealousy. She resorts to that magic she has just learnt in order to take the love of co-wife out of her husband’s heart.

10. As it was said, this woman is housekeeper. She gets tired of sitting at home. She is sitting with neighbor women. Talking with them is the only fun for him. Talking a lot, they reveal many secrets unexpectedly. So, such a woman does not deserve keeping secrets.

11. This woman belongs to primary time. She has primary life. In primary life, there is no room for mutual understanding, equal rights and such elite today phenomenon. Family system is completely under the control of man. It needs violence to manage this primary family. So, it is possible to hit woman sometimes. Woman herself accepts this. She believes that it is his right to hit her. Everything fits one another. In this specific but real atmosphere, life is going as usual and no one object to anything. There is no news about feministic movements to protest against this condition.

12. Yes, such a woman with such imperfect visage deserves the insult of "lower than women".

A problem should be stated here: It may be said that the presence of this negative woman in our past history is accepted by all, but men are responsible for this inauspicious event. This problem may be solved by this respond: This discussion is different. If this negative woman has been naturally reflected in our religious and literary works, it has nothing to do with men's fault. Great people
supporting religion did their due duty to improve and promote position of women in the society.

4.2 Real Text, Real Audience:
Now, it is time to discuss about an important topic, that is, “audience analysis” of successful texts in a detail. This section is a key to this enigma: Why do religious and literary texts have a negative look at women?

Audience analysis in the Holy Qur’an is in the zenith of being rational and realistic. The Holy Qur’an not only is an open text and beyond time and place, but also was revealed for desert-residing Arabs at that time. This is really is its majesty. Some instances could be mentioned:

In the Holy Qur’an, there are many animal parables and it roots in the life style of its audience. In the Book, to describe paradise, one may see "In the Gardens of Eternity wherein Streams flow they shall dwell forever" (Qur’an, 20:76) several times and this means audience analysis because it is obvious that water and trees are the most valuable and most dreamy things for desert-residing people. In the Book, one may not see anything about flowers because they are not pleasing in the region of the audience. The Holy Qur’an describes women as black-eyed. This description is not absolute and it is based on Arab’s aesthetics because they love these kinds of women. If aesthetics criterion of a European Muslim is blue-eyed lady, his heavenly nymph will have blue eyes as it is the promise of God that "In the Paradise for you is prepared all you wish" (Qur’an, 41:31). Paradise is replete with different and numerous desirables.

Numerous verses in the Qur’an about punishment refer to this Book’s audience analysis. From socio-psychological point of view, classic Arab society as special audience of the Qur’an is an aristocratic and feudalistic community. Society is ruled by force and democracy has no meaning. Management of such a
chaotic community is only possible through “Do not touch”, “This is dangerous”, “You will be punished”, “Punishment is better than rewards” rules. The audience is adapted to that management and this kind of management is proper for that kind of community. The holy Qur’an is negotiating with that society. The tone prevalent in the Book should follow common dialogue in the society, that is, punishment verses are frequent. In today world, the converse case is true. Today society does not have anything to do with aristocratic, feudalistic system and it is moving toward democracy. Today audience does not accept punishment verses. Demonstration of God’s boundless bounty and revelation of login in dialogues may appeal today audience.

The holy Qur’an’s style in those verses in which there is any doubt of prejudice toward women is exactly for the purpose of audience analysis. The Book has two kinds of verses about women. Firstly, there are those verses talking about typical women, that is, absolute cases. These verses apparently refer to women’s majesty, their equality with men in creation and their faith. Secondly, there are verses whose addressee is “temporal” and “spatial” women limited to specific time and place, that is, women living 1400 years ago. Of those verses mentioned for the second type is the second verse mentioned in the Introduction section (Qur'an, 4:34). In this verse, three phases are suggested for behaving with wrongdoer women:

1. Admonish women in order not to do specific bad deed.
2. If phase 1 is not useful, do not talk and sleep with them and
3. If two phase mentioned above are not useful, bit them and punish them physically.

However, which women are addressed by this verse? The answer is clear: women in aristocratic, primary societies, women who do not understand language of democracy and mutual relationship for any justified and unjustified reason.
Now, if these women reach to social maturity and understand the situation in the phase 1, is there any need to this verse? Do not we have any obsolete verses? If all nations found their way to real spiritual growth and became faithful, so would not punishment verses become obsolete? If man resided in another planet some day, would not earthly verses become obsolete? Does obsoleteness of these verses humiliate the Qur’an or indicate high and real evolution of The Book with respect to real world?

All great works all over the world consider audience analysis. All of them are created in such a way that as if they had audience beside or in front of them. And, just in a real encounter, people’s words become natural and acceptable.

Through this reasoning and logic, women have a negative face in classic works such as Nizami’s. Of course, bearing in mind the abovementioned explanations, any deficit could not be attributed to those great people regarding the issue.

4.2.1 Narrations and Music

A different discussion useful for explaining the doubt of negative look at women in Islam and Persian literature will be presented here.

One may not find a narration from Shiite Imams (P.B.U.T) in confirming music. What is the reason behind this? While musicians in that era were all evil-doers and music basically did not have outer positive color, how would it be expected that Imams and any other person talk positively about music? Fundamentally, confirmation of something without any external real example (positive music) is irrational and even ridiculous? If Imams had wanted to declare positive examples of music, it would have not been meaningful for the audience of that time. Therefore, they never talked about that issue. However, if Imams were alive now, they would talk about music with differentiating between positive and negative music. Imam Khomeini (RA) had done so for chess. At that time, there was not even one positive narration said by holy Imams about playing chess. All of
narrations were reproaching playing chess because playing chess was merely gambling at that time. However, Imam Khomeini (RA) declared playing chess legitimate in the case that it was not for gambling. Generally speaking, Imams’ narrations always paid attention to audience. They address real audience of their time and this is the symbol of their clear logic.

This discussion was presented in order to assert that real women were relatively negative in the time of Qur’an revelation or time of Imams or time of our classic Gnostic and literary scholars. Therefore, if these real negative women are really reflected in the mirror of words of religious scholars, whether poetry or prose, it will be completely natural and will not be their view about nature of “women”. If one considers “time” and “audience” as two important factors, one could not analyze this simple phenomenon that why our Holy Prophet marries with a girl fifty year younger than him.³

4.2.3 Why is not Visage of “Women” negative in Contemporary Literature?
The reason for this question comes back to our discussion and analysis presented before. It may exactly be said that the reason behind this should be looked for in changing real and outer visage of women in the today society. Today, women are different from classic women. Iranian today women are educated, socialized, positive and high. Nowadays, women enter to universities twice men. With these positive and high characters, should it be expected that women have negative visage in contemporary literature? Is not literature the mirror of time being? It should be said that if today women had been living in past centuries, our religious and literary texts would have had such positive color as they are so now. Our classic religious and literary texts were the full mirror of their time. Mirrors never lie and always show the truth.

³This is the secret of this verse in the Qur’an: “I am a human like you” (It refers to Ayesha, wife of Holy Prophet).
Concluding Remarks

It is the statement of the problem: In Persian past religious, literary and Gnostic texts, “women” had a highly negative character and this could not be denied. Nizam’s works are not an exception too. However, as mentioned in the paper, this negative “woman” is a temporal and spatial woman surrounded in that era of history. Apparently, words of great people about a negative real woman would completely be negative and real and if they would not be so, it would be astonishing. In explaining “consult with women, but act against what they said”, AllamehJa’afari (1993, pp.292-4) writes: “This narration retells the atmosphere of that era where ignorance was lately disappeared and all mental phenomena had a cover of low emotional color”.

However, it is worthy to note that whenever these great people have talked about absolute typical “woman”, a “woman” free from temporal and spatial limits, they have admired and commemorated her and respected to her. Furthermore, it should be said that these great people have behaved with “women” such respectably and generously that there left no room for doubt in the truth of these words and reasoning. Among these people, one may undoubtedly see Nizami.
References


