

BAO Conference, University of Cambridge

Mrs. Irene Lorring, representing IWSAW, attended the annual Conference of the British Association of Orientalists which took place between the 2nd and 5th of April 1978 in Jesus College, University of Cambridge. The following is a brief report she gave about this conference.

The chairperson was Dr. Partha Mitter of the University of Sussex, School of African and Asian Studies. The general theme of the conference was women in the Orient. Several papers were presented, mostly by young women scholars in social anthropology and history.

Professor Richard F. Gombrich of Balliol College, Oxford, presented a paper on "Buddhist nuns in today's Sinhalese society." He exposed the revival of Buddhist nunneries in contemporary Sri-Lanka and their active participation and influence in the social and educational spheres of society.

Dr. Judith Herrin of the Warburg Institute, of London, studied the status of women and their position in the church in Byzantium, stressing the fact that the status and position of women in the church and society declined gradually with the growth of the Empire.

Mrs. Rosemary Seton of the India office library, presented available sources in the India office records for the study of women in British India. She pointed out that British officials and administrators had little to say about women in their reports, except when talking

about girls' infanticide, sati, and prostitution.

A paper on women in politics in the state of Andhra Pradesh in contemporary India was presented by Dr. C. Wolkewitz of the University of Sussex. She explained that the political nomination and function of women in politics is a family affair where women are elected because in certain political circumstances their fathers, brothers or husbands cannot be nominated.

Dr. Martha Mundy of Clare Hall, Cambridge, talked about woman's inheritance of land in Highland Yemen. She indicated that although women do inherit land, their properties are the concern of the men in their families where their names do not appear on official land registries. Ownership of land is a status guarantee for the woman in her husband's family.

Dr. Nancy Tapper of the University of London studied two neighbouring tribes, the Shashevan of Azerbaijan and the Durrani of Afghanistan. The position of women in the two tribes was compared and differences were singled out.

Finally, Dr. Joanna de Groot of the university of York, studied women in the economy and society of Nineteenth Century Iran, basing her presentation on intensive documentation in England and Iran.

The conference was a good opportunity for Ms. Lorring to introduce our Institute to those women scholars in the West who are interested in Middle Eastern and Oriental women.

Preschool Education

in Tunis

The topic "Preschool Education in Tunis" was discussed at a panel held by the "Tunisian Educational Organization" in November, 1976.

Mr. Mohamed Mzali, Minister of National Education, pointed out the shortage in number of nurseries and kindergartens which take care of children between 3 and 6 of age. "With the coming of independence," he said, "we were overwhelmed with many urgent problems which required immediate handling. The problem of creating schools for children of school age had to be treated before that of pre-school education."

"One problem we have to face in schools is the frequent absence of women teachers on maternity leave or sick leave. Women who have to work outside the home while burdened with a family often suffer from overwork or exhaustion. On the other hand, they are apt to deprive their children of the necessary care and affection. The creation of adequate nurseries and kindergartens that could partly relieve working mothers and help in solving their problem is now of prime importance.

It is hoped that by raising the budget of the Ministry of Education and obtaining the financial cooperation of local and international educational organizations, we shall be able to contribute to the development of pre-school education in Tunisia."

The cat, the maid and the wife (cont.)
leaving."

"Leaving, why?"

"My dignity, Ma'am, is most important."

She did not understand.

"But who has hurt your dignity?"

"Your husband. He asked for his telephone book. When I said I did not know where it was, he shouted at me, insisting that I should bring it to him. He called me a thief. Am I his wife, so that he has the right to insult me?"

"But where will you go now that it is nearly 10 o'clock. You are a stranger in this town."

"The world is full of hotels. I shall contact my children. I have men who can protect me."

She wanted to ask her why she did the work of a maid though she had reached old age and had sons who could

take care of her. But she did not. The events of the day were so confused in her mind that she did not know where to begin.

The packages and bags of clothes were taken away, and the maid closed the door behind her with a bang. The woman stood there, wondering whether she should admire the maid, or be angry at her; run after her, or respect her attitude.

When she went down the steps and reached the street, the maid had already disappeared. A thin dirty cat, evidently starving, passed by. She called her "Pussy, pussy," but the cat darted into the other sidewalk, and jumped over the crumbling fence which surrounded the empty space.

The empty space surrounded by the crumbling fence did not echo the sound of a mewling cat. The starving, solitary, dirty cat did not utter any mewling sound.