

Fritz Kretschmer and his lost Sidonius Index

Text

Joop van Waarden

Fritz Kretschmer and His Lost Sidonius Index



Fritz Kretschmer c. 1946

Joop van Waarden, Radboud University Nijmegen

2022

This is the story of an ephemeral Sidonius scholar and his manuscript which got lost. My quest for Fritz Kretschmer began back in July 2015 with a couple of emails which I received from Daniel Abosso, then a PhD student in classical philology at the University of Illinois under Professors Danuta Shanzer and Ralph Mathisen. They ran as follows:

I write to ask you if you have heard of, and know the fate of, a Sidonius concordance that was prepared by a certain F. Kretschmer.

From what I gather, William Abbott Oldfather, a prominent Illinois classicist, had purchased or was trying to purchase a Sidonius concordance from Kretschmer in 1939-40. Kretschmer was living in exile in Shanghai at the time. In a report to the American Philological Association, Oldfather lists it as "On deposit" here at Illinois. Since it never seems to have been published either he never received it or perhaps it got lost in the mail from China to the US during WWII.

I am sitting in the university archives right now with the Oldfather-Kretschmer correspondence, which extends from 1937-1940. Oldfather and others here at Illinois did a number of concordances (Apuleius, Cicero, Seneca) and he wrote an article on how he thought concordances ought to be prepared. Here is what I can tell you:

Oldfather indeed had the University of Illinois library purchase the manuscript from Kretschmer for \$300. This was in 1940. Kretschmer, upon sending it, wrote:

"I send direct to you a registered parcel containing:

- 1) the *praefatio* = 3 pages, and two pages-specimen
- 2) the *additamentum criticum* = 10 pages,
- 3) the manuscript of the Index = 619 pages."

Oldfather after looking it over. He writes to Kretschmer, "I am much impressed by the care with which you have done your work and the fine shape in which it is. I hope to start soon the effort to get your work published, so that you can enjoy the credit for so much scholarly labor." This was the last piece of correspondence in the archive between the two men.

A little digging around turns out the man's name was Fritz Kretschmer, and that he was born in 1893, went into exile in China for a time in WWII, and died in 1967 in the US. He does not seem to have been a professional classicist (indeed, in one letter to Oldfather he asks for secretarial or library work).

Now if Oldfather had the university purchase it, then it ought to have become the property of Illinois (i.e. Kretschmer no longer retained any right to it), but there is no trace of it here (Oldfather probably sent it to someone). Right now I am going through all Oldfather's correspondence, so I will be sure to look for references to the concordance. I suspect I will find a few. Oldfather died suddenly in 1945 and left many unfinished projects. It's possible after his death it was passed on to someone else.

I shared this query and information in the circle of Sidonians—without result. I then more or less forgot about the matter, until recently when it occurred to me to ask Daniel—nowadays a librarian in Dartmouth—if *he* had got any closer to the documents. The answer was negative:

I'm afraid I never found a trace of them -- and I've gone through all of Oldfather's materials and even acquired more material for the archives since our correspondence. Looks like it vanished without a trace!

I decided to venture some further investigation myself and hit on the story told below. As I shared my findings with Daniel and we corresponded about Oldfather's legacy entrusted to his son-in-law, Prof. Kenneth Morgan Abbott of Ohio State University, and the possibility of finding something there, this is what he wrote to me lately:

I have been in touch with the Abbott family. Prof. Abbott's daughter died a few months ago. She had lived in her father's house and upon her death, her niece went through the remaining papers there, and by her own account, she was more interested in the family papers and not the academic papers. So it's probable that if the Sidonius concordance was still among Prof. Abbott's papers, it's gone now.

There may well be some Abbott correspondence in the Ohio State University archives. Another possible place to look would be the archives of University of Illinois Press.

Never waste a good spoiler: I am afraid this is currently the state of play for the manuscript—unless the archives of Ohio State or Illinois Press should come up with some pleasant surprise on further investigation. However that may be, the story that emerges behind this apparently lost piece of scholarship is as fascinating as it is tragic, and stands out as a remarkable chapter of Sidonius reception.

Investigating further

In order to widen the investigation, I had decided to make a fresh haul through the Internet. I found an important lead there in Richard Brook's '[The Bruck Family Genealogy Blog](#)'. In [post 107](#) (dated 25.9.2021), Fritz Kretschmer figures together with his wife Elisabeth 'Lily' Kretschmer née Pauly. They 'escaped [from Berlin] to the Shanghai Ghetto, living in the Jewish community there ... survived and wound up in San Francisco after the war'. I contacted Mr. Brook and he kindly engaged Mrs. Kathy York who is the actual source of information for this part of the family history, being a granddaughter of Elisabeth Kretschmer's sister Maria Wundsch née Pauly. In addition to the photos and documents in the blog, Mrs. York came up, among other things, with a curriculum vitae (not dated, last entry concerns 1948; fig. 1) written by Fritz himself (it appeared that he studied classical languages and French and got a doctorate in 1921) and a statement from 1984 (fig. 14) about the books in Elisabeth's inheritance ('650 books in Greek and Latin literature'). She adds:

Strangely, now that I have looked, I seem to have full documentation of Uncle Fritz's life including his birth certificate, first WW records and letters from his brother, Walter. He kept everything and Aunt Lily passed it on to my Uncle and it has been sitting in my cousin's loft for the last 30 years. Interestingly he was born a Jew, went through a stage of being 'without religion' and then became Catholic. There is a silk scarf with the names of the Chinese students he taught in Shanghai amongst the papers. There is also a record of where he and Aunt Lily were buried in San Francisco. One day I will have to sit down and catalogue all these items!

And recently, having gone through the papers once more and coming up with some other documents, including the couple's marriage certificate (figs 3a and 3b), Fritz' foreigners' resident certificate in Shanghai (fig. 12) and a recommendation from the French embassy in Shanghai as of March 1948 (fig. 13):

The documents have been languishing in my cousin's loft for the past 30 years and he recently passed them on to me as he has 'downsized' to a smaller house with very little storage space! Uncle Fritz was always quite a shadowy figure to my generation. He and Aunt Lily opted to move to San Francisco after Shanghai. My grandfather did try to persuade them to move back to Germany but by that time their house (which survived the war) was in East Berlin and I can imagine the prospect of returning there was not too great. My grandmother corresponded regularly with Lily and Fritz but I am not sure they ever actually met again. Travel was severely restricted for my grandparents.

[Judging from the recommendation by the embassy] it would seem that Fritz had every intention of working once he had settled in his new country.

Everything put together, here is the story of Fritz Kretschmer's life.¹

Berlin – Shanghai – San Francisco

Fritz Kretschmer was born in Berlin on 29 January 1893 into a Jewish family and later turned Roman-Catholic (fig. 1). He studied classical languages and French in Berlin and Dijon, obtaining a doctoral degree cum laude at the University of Berlin in 1921.² Having absolved a year of military service as early as 1917–8, he got his teacher's license in 1919/20 (fig. 2)³ and was active as a private teacher of Greek, Latin and French, later—in 1932—acquiring a qualification as a French interpreter.

1 I would like to express my profound gratitude to Kathy York and Richard Brook for generously sharing their family history as well as to Daniel Abosso for his expert documentation, and to all of them for giving their publishing consent in the present form.

2 The dissertation is titled 'De apostrophae apud poetas Graecos vetustiores usu' and was supervised by Eduard Norden and Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, defended on 13 August 1921 (source *Jahrbuch der Dissertationen der Philosophischen Fakultät der Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin 1921–1927*, 253; item in [catalogue FU Berlin](#)).

3 See also the file in Archivdatenbank der BBF, no [143311](#).

On 27 September 1919, Fritz married Elisabeth Pauly, daughter of the late Berlin banker Karl Pauly (figs 3a and 3b⁴). The *Berliner Handels-Register* 1928 (fig. 4) mentions Fritz as proxy ('Prokurist') of the family business Carl Pauly Erben Banking and Exchange at the Anhalter Railway Station for the female owners, Karl's widow Leocadie and her daughters Elisabeth (not indicated as Fritz' wife) and Maria.⁵ The address is in the *Berliner Adreßbuch* 1928 (fig. 5) and 1929: Askanischer Platz 6–7, Anhalter Bahnhof, SW 11.⁶

In the 1930s, Kretschmer compiled the Sidonius index—in his own words (fig. 1):

During the years 1933 until 1939 I wrote a word index of the letters and poems of Sidonius Apollinaris (Index Sidonianus, see the recommendation published by Professor J. Marouzeau, Paris, Sorbonne, in the 'Revue des Etudes Latines', t. XV, p. 264). The manuscript was given to Professor W.A. Oldfather, University of Illinois, who prepared it for publication. Since the death of Prof. Oldfather, the manuscript is in the hands of Professor Kenneth M. Abbott (The Ohio State University).

Marouzeau, in the *Revue des études latines* 15 (1937) 264 (fig. 6), stresses the importance of the index and is looking for funding as the work cannot be published in Germany due to Kretschmer's 'non-Arian origin'. Kretschmer has been recommended to Marouzeau by his supervisor Eduard Norden who—himself a Jew and ousted from Berlin University—helped his students where he could.⁷ The index, Marouzeau says, is composed according to the method of Ludwig Traube as applied by Oldfather for the work of Apuleius.

The correspondence between Oldfather and Kretschmer from March to July 1940 confirms dispatch, safe arrival and payment of the index (figs 7a-d). In 1940, the index is on deposit in Illinois, as appears from the *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 71 (1940), which, on pp. xix-xx, lists a series of indexes in what is apparently a concerted effort to create research materials. Kretschmer is mentioned twice, first under 'New indexes announced':

Anthologia Latina (Riese-Buecheler-Lommatzsch). F. Kretschmer (Shanghai),
then under 'Not yet published':

Sidonius. F. Kretschmer. On deposit, Department of Classics, University of Illinois.

The year 1939 had been a major watershed in the life of Kretschmer and his wife. Pressured by the Jewish persecution, they grasped the chance to emigrate. Leaving their home at Wolfwerder 9a (before that Jägerstieg 52), Kleinmachnow (Berlin) (figs

4 I suppose that the 1939 certificate was issued in connection with the couple's imminent emigration.

5 On p. 360: 'Carl Pauly Erben (Bank u. Wechsel) Leocadie Pauly geb. v. Reppert. Elisabeth Pauly. Maria Wundsch geb. Pauly, in Erbengem. P Dr. Fritz Kretschmer. Anhalter Bahnhof 16107'.

6 Years 1928, p. 2639, and 1929.

7 For Norden's life, see Wilt A. Schröder, *Der Altertumswissenschaftler Eduard Norden (1868–1941). Das Schicksal eines deutschen Gelehrten jüdischer Abkunft*, Spudasmata 73, Hildesheim, 1999.

8 and 9),⁸ they moved to Shanghai. The financial centre of the Far East and an open city, Shanghai welcomed some 20,000 Jewish refugees among others. The driving force for this to happen were the local Jewish tycoons Sassoon and Kadoorie.⁹ Forced by the occupying Japanese authorities, the Jews were confined in a cramped and squalid, but relatively safe ghetto.¹⁰ That is where the Kretschmers lived on 304/7 Pingliang Road (figs 10 and 11). Kretschmer taught Latin, Greek, French and German at the Collège Français. Shanghai ghetto was liberated on 3 September 1945. In 1946, he got a post as professor of French, Latin and German at the Jesuit Aurora University (fig. 1).

As the ghetto gradually emptied, its inhabitants making their way to the United States, Australia, Palestine and elsewhere, the couple, provided with a certificate of the French embassy for Fritz (fig. 13), left for San Francisco, where they arrived on 12 May 1948 (fig. 1).

There is currently no information as to how they coped and how Kretschmer was occupied professionally in the United States—if at all. He died 9 February 1967. When Elisabeth died 10 June 1984, the inheritance included ‘650 books in Greek and Latin literature (which Stanford University will be asked if they would like)’ (fig. 14).¹¹ The couple was buried in Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery at Colma, CA (fig. 15).

The Index

Professor William Oldfather died in a canoe accident in 1945. An untiring worker and a perfectionist, he left many projects incomplete.¹² Unfinished manuscripts, including the Sidonius concordance, probably passed on to his son-in-law and literary executor Prof. Kenneth Abbott of Ohio State University (1906–1988).¹³ This is where further investigations should begin. It is strange that no publication of the index should have

8 ‘Kretschmer, Dr. Fritz, Privatgelehrter, Jägerstieg 52’ in *Adreßbuch für die Gemeinde Kleinmachnow, Kreis Teltow*, 1938, 52 (<https://d-nb.info/1232835390>).

9 For their history, see Jonathan Kaufman, *The Last Kings of Shanghai: The Rival Jewish Dynasties That Helped Create Modern China*, London-New York, 2020.

10 For orientation, a good starting point, with further reading, is Wikipedia ‘Shanghai Ghetto’ (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shanghai_Ghetto/).

11 Richard Brook explains by email: ‘Joseph Powell, born Joseph Wundsche, was Fritz and Elisabeth Kretschmer’s nephew. Ms. Hirst, born Renate Wundsche and married to Archie Hirst, was Fritz and Elisabeth’s niece. Elisabeth Kretschmer and her sister Maria Wundsche were both born Pauly’s. Otto Guttentag was the son of Adolf Guttentag and Helene Pauly. If I have this figured out properly from my ancestry tree, Elisabeth Kretschmer born Pauly and Helene Pauly were second cousins. Like Fritz Kretschmer, Otto Guttentag, lived in San Francisco; Otto Guttentag was medical doctor, so this may explain why he was disinterested in Fritz Kretschmer’s collection of books’.

12 Obituary by C.A.F. in *The Classical Journal* 41 (1945) 8–11 (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3292121>). Appraisal by Michael Armstrong in *The Classical Journal* 88 (1993) 235–53, ‘A German Scholar and Socialist in Illinois: The Career of William Abbott Oldfather’.

13 Armstrong, ‘A German Scholar’, p. 241 n. 30. Abbott was a specialist of word indexes himself (Cicero, Seneca); see <https://dbcs.rutgers.edu/all-scholars/8494-abbott-kenneth-morgan>.

taken place despite the fact that both scholars were specialists of the genre and keen to publish as many research tools as possible. On the other hand, Abbott's explanations about the process of making word indexes prove how laborious this was prior to the use of computers (see 'Kenneth Abbott on composing indices verborum', <https://sidonapol.org/scholars/fritz-kretschmer-and-his-lost-index/>).¹⁴ Another lacuna in our knowledge — probably never to be filled — is the question whether Kretschmer ever followed up on publishing, once in the United States. Were it not for the brutalities of the war and a tragic accident, classical scholarship could have possessed a groundbreaking Sidonius index half a century before Peder Christiansen, James Holland and Bill Dominik published their indispensable concordances.¹⁵ The least we can do is honouring the memory of its author, Fritz Kretschmer.

Version 5, 26 June 2025

14 Kindly made available by Daniel Abosso from his own files. In an email to me, dated 22 September 2022, he explained: 'I looked through my own files and found a typescript talk that Kenneth Abbott gave in 1964 at Ohio State about word indexes. It must've been for a general audience, so I've omitted part of it where he describes the nature of manuscripts, how little survives, and consequently how important word indexes are for classicists who want to know what an author "really" wrote. I also found a single typescript page (he uses lowercase on this page) where he describes his work on a Seneca index (never published); this I placed at the beginning'.

15 P.G. Christiansen and J.E. Holland, *Concordantia in Sidonii Apollinaris carmina*, Hildesheim: Olms-Weidmann, 1993; P.G. Christiansen, J.E. Holland and W.J. Dominik, *Concordantia in Sidonii Apollinaris epistulas*, Hildesheim, 1997.