



WALDSCHMIDT, ERNST I. LIFE

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i. Life

Ernst Waldschmidt ([Figure 1](#)) was the only child of Ernst and Elise Waldschmidt. His parents married in 1896, and his father, a bookbinder and merchant, died shortly before his birth. Waldschmidt spent his childhood and youth in Lünen, a small town in northwest Germany, near Dortmund. In order to obtain his university entry exam (*Abitur*), Waldschmidt left his hometown in 1913. During the last years of high school (*Gymnasium*), Waldschmidt became interested in philosophy and started to read Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Kant. In the summer of 1915, immediately after high school graduation in Bielefeld, Westphalia, Waldschmidt moved to Kiel and joined the Navy to serve in World War I. Since in high school Waldschmidt had studied English, instead of Classical Greek, he was eventually employed on reconnaissance missions of the Naval Air Unit.

While in the Navy, Waldschmidt was stationed in Kiel from 1915 until 1917, and he used the opportunity to enroll as student at the Christian-Albrecht Universität, where he met the renowned philosopher and Indologist Paul Deussen (1845-1919). In November 1918, Waldschmidt was honorably discharged with the rank of ensign (*Leutnant der Reserve*), and, following the advice of Deussen, he immediately returned to Kiel to continue his studies. As a full-time student, Waldschmidt took classes with Deussen and Emil Sieg (1866-1951), one of the pioneers of [Tocharian](#) studies. After the sudden death



of Deussen and Sieg's appointment to the chair of Hermann Oldenberg (1854-1920) at the Georg-August Universität Göttingen in 1920, Sieg advised Waldschmidt to continue his studies in Berlin, where the Indologist Hermann Lüders (1869-1943) would become Waldschmidt's mentor.

In 1924, Waldschmidt was awarded a Ph.D. and joined the curatorial staff of the Museum of Ethnography (*Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin*) as assistant to Albert von Le Coq (1860-1930), who had participated in the German [Turfan Expeditions](#) between 1903 and 1914. Waldschmidt was promoted to curator in 1929. Thanks to private funding from the Arthur Baessler Stiftung, the Museum sent Waldschmidt from October 1932 until June 1934 on a research trip to Sri Lanka and [India](#) so that he could acquire artifacts complementing the museum's extant South Asian holdings. Parallel to this curatorial and administrative work, Waldschmidt pursued his philological research. In 1930 he submitted his *Habilitationsschrift* on a Buddhist text in [Central Asia](#), drawing on Sanskrit manuscripts in the Turfan collection, and began to teach as *Privatdozent* at the University.

Waldschmidt left Berlin in 1936 to succeed his teacher Emil Sieg as the chair of Indian Studies in Göttingen. Already the following year Waldschmidt was elected to the Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities (*Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*). As reserve officer with experience in the Naval Air Unit, he was immediately called up to active duty in the Air Force in September 1939, at the beginning of World War II. He worked as staff officer and in intelligence gathering, rising through the ranks to be promoted to major (*Major*) in 1944. As far as possible, Waldschmidt continued to teach and publish despite the war, but for most of the six years his courses were taught by Sieg. In May 1945, Waldschmidt surrendered to American forces, was taken prisoner of war, and released at the end of July 1945.

In September 1945 Waldschmidt returned to his academic duties of teaching and research at the University of Göttingen. Soon thereafter he resumed his work on the Sanskrit manuscripts in the Turfan collection in close cooperation with the Institute of Oriental Studies (*Institut für Orientforschung*) at the German Academy of Sciences in East Berlin (*Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*). The construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 put an end to this cooperation, and subsequently Waldschmidt established Göttingen as the German center for research on the Sanskrit manuscripts in the Turfan collection. In 1965 he became professor emeritus.



As a student in Berlin, Waldschmidt met Rose-Leonore Orlich (1895-1988) at the university, where the professional textile designer was auditing art history courses. The couple (Figure 2) married in 1927; their only child, Ulrich (1925-45), died in World War II, serving in a submarine unit. Rose Leonore Waldschmidt accompanied her husband on his extended field trip to South Asia between 1932 and 1934, and the couple co-authored several books.

Waldschmidt was an active member of the German Oriental Society (*DMG: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft*; cf. Härtel, p. 5), serving as vice-president (1948-52) and president (1952-59), and a veritable Maecenas of Indian Studies. It was highly gratifying that he lived to see the opening of the new building of the Museum of Indian Art (*Museum für Indische Kunst*) in West Berlin in 1971, since its establishment in 1963 was largely due to his personal engagement. In 1971 the DMG made him a **honorary member**. Already during his lifetime Waldschmidt bequeathed his research library and his house to the Indian and Tibetan Studies Institute (*Seminar für Indologie und Tibetologie*) at the University of Göttingen, whereas in Berlin he set up the Ernst Waldschmidt Foundation (see <http://www.stiftung-ernst-waldschmidt.de/>), which supports Indian Studies and publishes the book series *Monographien zur indischen Archäologie, Kunst und Philologie*. Ernst Waldschmidt died in Göttingen on 25 February 1985.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Portraits:

For two black/white photographs of Waldschmidt, see: “Ernst Waldschmidt,” *Thesaurus Indogermanischer Text- und Sprachmaterialien*, available at:

<http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/personal/galeria/waldschm.htm>.

Archival holdings:

Waldschmidt himself arranged that his papers were given to the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen: Cod. Ms. Waldschmidt.



It is not known whether Rose Leonore Waldschmidt left any instructions regarding the preservation of her own papers.

The [Universitätsarchiv Göttingen](#) holds Waldschmidt's personal file (*Personalakte*) of the Universitätskuratorium with the shelfmark "Kur Pers Waldschmidt, Ernst."

It is not known whether the [Central Archive](#) of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (SMB) holds Waldschmidt's personal file (*Personalakte*).

Some documents related to the 1930s field trip to Sri Lanka and India are kept in the archives of the [Ethnologisches Museum](#), SMB, under the shelf mark: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ethnologisches Museum, I B 116 Reise Dr. Waldschmidt nach Vorderindien.

The photographs, together with artifacts acquired during this field trip, have been transferred to the [Museum für Asiatische Kunst](#), SMB, but neither the photographs nor the archival holdings related to Waldschmidt's research are cataloged (email, Caren Dreyer, 2 August 2012).

During their field trip to Sri Lanka and India the Waldschmidts kept a diary. The archives of the Museum für Asiatische Kunst own the official copy (typescript) that covers 26 October 1932 until 2 June 1934. An incomplete transcript was posthumously published, without any critical apparatus, under his wife's name: Rose Leonore Waldschmidt, *Im Lande des Krischna: Auf Forscherfahrt in Indien*, ed. Helmhart Kanus-Credé, 4 vols., Allendorf, Eder, 1999-2002. These two versions have not yet been collated (email, Uta Schröder, 23 September 2016). Nor has it been possible to determine whether other copies of the Waldschmidt's field diary have been preserved.

Like most civil servants, Waldschmidt joined the NSDAP in 1937. After the German surrender in May 1945, the Allies screened the entire adult population, and Waldschmidt's denazification (*Entnazifizierung*) was closed with the official notification of 16 April 1948, in which he was exonerated (*unbelastet*). Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv – Hauptstaatsarchiv Hannover under the shelfmark: Nds. 171 Hildesheim Nr. 15193.

Documents related to Waldschmidt's work in military intelligence gathering are cited in Stefan Geck, *Dulag Luft, Auswertestelle West: Vernehmungslager der Luftwaffe für westalliierte Kriegsgefangene im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Frankfurt, Main, 2008, pp. 227 notes 51-52, and 432, notes 33-35.



The American psychology professor George R. Klare (1922-2008) published towards the end of his life an essay about his POW experience as a young U.S. Air Force officer during the last months of World War II: “Questions,” in *Interrogations, Confessions, and Entrapment*, ed. G. Daniel Lassiter, New York, 2004, pp. 9-35; Klare’s encounter with Waldschmidt is described on pp. 20-25.

Biographical Texts:

Waldschmidt had a lifelong interest in genealogical research, and contributed actively to his family’s chronicle: *Die Waldeckische Familie Waldschmidt und die Vorfahren Waldschmidtscher Ehefrauen*, 2 vols., Bad Wildungen, 1926; 2 vols., Göttingen, 1970-75; for Ernst Waldschmidt, see: *Waldeckische Familie Waldschmidt*, 1970, pp. 167-80, pars. 110-14; the text is available on the website of the Ernst Waldschmidt Stiftung at: <http://www.stiftung-ernst-waldschmidt.de/dateien/>.

For biographical sketches by his student Lore Sander, see: “Ernst Waldschmidt 15.7.1897-25.2.1985: Ein Leben für die indische Philologie und Kunstgeschichte – Eine Gedächtnisausstellung zum 100. Geburtstag,” *Studio 22*, 1997; flyer (*Führungsblatt*) accompanying the exhibition in Museum für Indische Kunst, SMB, 1997; and “Ernst Waldschmidt’s Contribution to the Study of the ‘Turfan Find’,” in *Turfan Revisited: The First Century of Research into the Arts and Cultures of the Silk Road*, ed. Desmond Durkin, Berlin, 2004, pp. 303-9.