

ERNST AUGUST ANSEL

Professor for Applied Mathematics
at the University of Freiburg & Sailor



1874 – 1952

Ernst August Ansel was born in Ulm on November 10, 1874. After graduating from school in 1891, he became a sailor and earned a helmsman's and captain's certificate at the navigation school in Hamburg. From 1900 he went to sea as an officer of North German Lloyd, studying atmospheric phenomena and recording meteorological measurements during his voyages. In order to better pursue his scientific interests, Ernst Ansel decided in 1905, despite his age of now over 30, to begin studying mathematics and natural sciences at the Royal Technical University in Stuttgart, which he continued in Göttingen from 1907.

In Göttingen, Ansel worked as an assistant of Emil Wiechert in the Geophysical Institute from 1908. In 1913 he completed his doctorate, which was entitled "Beiträge zur Dynamik und Thermodynamik der Atmosphäre." In the same year he obtained a teaching license in astronomy and applied mathematics at the University of Freiburg i. Br. and subsequently habilitated with a paper on the reflection and refraction of plane waves in elastic-solid bodies. Ernst Ansel continued his work during his military service in the 1st World War, by writing papers on atmospheric motions, earthquakes in the Sofia area, and gravity acceleration in the Balkans. After the end of the war he was appointed associate professor at the University of Freiburg. He lectured on applied mathematics and did research on gravity and mountain building. He also wrote numerous chapters for geophysical textbooks, e.g., he wrote the chapters "Geophysikalische Aufschlussverfahren", „Schwerkraft“, and „Isostasie“ in Beno Gutenberg's textbook "Lehrbuch der Geophysik" and the chapters "Theorie der gravimetrischen Aufschlussverfahren" and "Theorie des irdischen Schwerfeldes" in Gutenberg's textbook "Handbuch der Geophysik".

In 1938, Ernst Ansel participated in an Iceland expedition led by Oskar Niemczyk, making gravity measurements with pendulums and gravimeters. He was able to detect temporal regional gravity changes, which provided clues about the connection between horizontal and vertical tectonics, and the structure of the subsurface.

During the 2nd World War, Ernst Ansel was subjected to constant harassment and interrogation by the National Socialist regime due to his liberal views. In 1942, prompted by a denunciation and the threat of prosecution consequences, he was regrettably forcibly demerited from the University of Freiburg.

On February 11, 1952, Ernst August Ansel died in Freiburg i. Br. at the age of 77.

DGG PRO – Public Relations & Outreach, Hannover

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