

# Karl Terzaghi on Erdbaumechanik

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In about 1947 when Karl Terzaghi was making one of his annual lecture visits to the University of Illinois, he walked into my office and asked if he could look at my copy of "**Erdbaumechanik**". He thumbed through it for a few minutes and then threw it down on the table with disgust. As best I can remember, his comment was, "I never could find anything in that book .... When I wrote it, I thought all I needed to do was to put the bill of fare before the reader and leave it to him to find the precious bits of information he might need. Even the index is terrible." He went on to comment that he had been much more careful to lead the reader by the hand through "Theoretical Soil Mechanics", that he had prepared the index himself, and that he considered it to be perfect.

This was obviously a challenge, because we were completing "Soil Mechanics in Engineering Practice" at that time. It was part of my job to correct the page proof and then to develop the index. You can be sure that I redoubled my effort to do it well.

Part of Terzaghi's change in attitude toward the reader was undoubtedly the result of his association and friendship with F. E. Schmitt, the Associate Editor of "Engineering News-Record", who had encouraged him to prepare for his magazine the series of articles, "Principles of Soil Mechanics" that appeared in 1925. Schmitt recognized the value of Terzaghi's work, was somewhat dismayed by the laborious manner in which he presented it, and was his most severe critic. That Terzaghi took his criticism to heart is evidenced by the clarity of his later writings, and that he appreciated it is indicated by his lasting friendship with Schmitt and his occasional requests for comments on later writings.

Yet, **Erdbaumechanik** was clear enough and persuasive enough to impress the well known American engineer, John R. Freeman, who had the ability to read the German text. It was Freeman who persuaded the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to bring Terzaghi to the Institute in the fall of 1925 in the hope that Terzaghi could explain the unexpected settlement of the new M.I.T. building. This was the assignment that brought Terzaghi to the attention of the world's civil engineers, that led to his appointment to the Technical University at Vienna, and that set the stage for the widespread adoption of soil mechanics.