

Francis Ian Andersen, Singular Scholar
28 July 1925 – 13 May 2020

An appreciation of Francis Ian Andersen might emphasize his achievements, such as his early publication in the preeminent scientific journal *Nature*. Or, an appreciation might capture his career anecdotally, for example, how he finally convinced David Noel Freedman to accept an emendation for their Hosea commentary. Instead, after introducing him to readers who never had the pleasure of working with him, I focus on Frank's approach to biblical research, a topic that I know well from the half-century partnership that we shared.¹

Working with Frank Andersen

During his multi-week stays in Palo Alto, our mornings would typically begin with Frank announcing the number of days he and Lois had been married (a sum I once confirmed by financial calculator) and preparing the first of his day's many cuppas. We would discuss our current goals and, if the HP Labs' rudimentary computer was available, would go in for an all-day session exploiting its lavish eight kilobytes of core memory.

Back at home, we would often take a working walk in the neighborhood and, too often, end up at the corner bakery for a beloved bear-claw treat. When my wife was away flying internationally for Pan Am, I would prepare "dinners" typically unburdened by either aroma or taste, about which—amazingly, I now realize—Frank never uttered a word of complaint. There usually followed further discussions of our work, typically intense and wide ranging but never aggressive. On some points we never reached agreement, agreeing to disagree. (The handling of *suspension and resumption* comes to mind.) Evening shutdown typically found Frank munching a bedtime orange and heading off to read a pulp mystery, anything by PG Wodehouse, or some such.

Frank Andersen's Approach to Biblical Research

Not only did Frank know the scholarly literature in great depth, he also had worked out the relationships among its parts.

In addressing any problem, Frank was dissatisfied until he had mastered all its associated data and had accounted for corner cases ("pathological cases," that is, ones that did not fit gracefully into any paradigm). In the book manuscript that he was working on near the time of his death, he wrote (*italics added*):

"I have carried out my research in the belief that every difference in language use makes a difference, that every detail, however seemingly slight, *might* well be significant. I accept the reproach that I have a pedantic obsession with minutiae."

¹ On Frank's career, etc., see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Andersen. For an informal history of the Andersen-Forbes collaboration, see A. D. Forbes, "A Tale of Two Sitters and a Crazy Blue Jay." In R. A. Taylor and C. E. Morrison (eds.), *Reflections on Lexicography: Explorations in Ancient Syriac, Hebrew, and Greek Sources*, (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2014), 235-56.

What I, Dean, brought to the table was my abiding conviction that any difference *might* instead bespeak inadvertent or intentional alteration of the text (“noise”).

Fortunately, the advent of the computer brought access, display, and management of vast amounts of data into reach. It did not, however, make mastery of the data easy. That was made possible both by Frank’s legendary powers of concentration and by his ability somehow to catalog the data *en masse*, contradictory interpretations and all.

The computer also simplified rabbit chasing, a practice Frank happily indulged in. It was his way of building and testing his intuitions, frequent launchers of important new directions in our work.

Whether due to his nature or due to his extensive training in science, Frank was suspicious of the facile theory, the welcome result. He distrusted the fashionable. He struggled to identify central issues while avoiding the dangers of over-simplification. He delighted in new ideas and new problems.

In our decades of collaboration, not once did Frank suggest that a result be suppressed. Very occasionally, he did wryly observe that publication of a result likely would attract uncomfortable flak, but so be it.

In his final months, mercifully Frank retained recall of fundamentals as well as his ability to critique incomplete work and to recognize and appreciate excellent work. He ever sought to identify and encourage up-and-coming scholars. He began many a conversation by asking: “Have you seen the latest paper by [insert name of up-and-comer]? He/she is doing some important work.”

Francis Ian Andersen was a remarkable enlarger of our field. For me, he will always evoke these memorable words:

And those of us who trust themselves the least,
Who doubt and question most...
These it may be will make their mark upon eternity.
—Herman Hesse

—Dean Forbes (University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa)