

Fred M. Donner

Fred M. Donner spent the year engaged in his usual pursuits of teaching, lecturing, and research. The teaching responsibilities have mounted over the past decade for all faculty dealing with the Islamic world as the nation's interest in Islam has quickened — seminar courses, even courses like “Readings in Islamic Ritual Law,” which he offered in the spring, are now on the verge of being oversubscribed.

Much of his research time was devoted to that most important Islamic text of all, the Qur'an, on which he prepared two papers for publication. One was an overview of recent trends in Qur'anic research (delivered as a paper at a conference on the Qur'an at Notre Dame in April), the other a study of a vexing word in the text that, he thinks, has a double etymology going back to two distinct, but orthographically similar, words in Syriac (hence much of the confusion about the word's meaning). He continues to work on the draft of a monograph on the first Islamic century to be entitled *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*.

Donner also read papers at several conferences during the year. In November he attended the annual Middle East Studies Association conference, where he presented a paper on the treatment of an episode in early Islamic history by the ninth-century Muslim historian al-Ya'qubi. In February, he presented a paper at a workshop sponsored by the French Institute in Damascus on efforts at legitimation by the Umayyad caliphs (ruled A.D. 660–750). In March, he made a presentation on the beginnings of the Islamic empire at a conference at Duke University. During the year he also gave a number of other talks for non-academic audiences on subjects as diverse as the “hybrid culture” of Islamic Spain, the historical background to modern Islam, the Israel-Palestine question, and the historical problem of Muhammad.

During the summer of 2005, Donner co-directed, with Prof. Kenneth Hall of Ball State University, a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute for college teachers on “Culture and Communication in the Pre-Modern Islamic World.” This was held at the University of Chicago campus for six weeks and introduced participants broadly to the historical evolution of the Islamic world, including its manifestations in the Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Balkans, and Africa.

Donner's essay on “The Background to Islam” appeared this year in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, edited by Michael Maas (New York, 2005), pp. 510–33. Another essay, on “Expansion [of Islam]” appeared in the *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, edited by Richard C. Martin (New York, 2004), pp. 239–45.
