Fred M. Donner continues to await the appearance of his segment of the translation of the Arab historian al-Tabari's extensive universal history, still in press; for details on this project, readers can consult the Annual Reports for the preceding two years. While taking care of proofreading and indexing this volume in spare moments, he proceeded with several case studies that form part of his continuing work on the origins and early development of historical writing in the Islamic community. In particular, he has collected material for studies dealing with the Islamic conquest of Egypt and with the treaty terms for
the town of Khaybar, in western Arabia, at the time of the Prophet 
Muhammad. His general approach is to view the historical narratives not 
simply as collections of "facts," but as reflections of the self-conception of the 
early Islamic community as it evolved between the seventh and tenth centuries 
C.E. That is, the modern reader must first ask of these historical narratives 
what kind of image of the Islamic community they strive to represent, before 
he or she can assess the accuracy of what the narratives say about a particular 
set of events.

In November 1991, Mr. Donner presented a draft paper on "The Origins of 
the Conceptual Dichotomy 'Abode of Islam'/'Abode of War' (Dâr al-Islâm / 
Dâr al-Harb) in Islamic Law" at the Middle East Studies Association annual 
meeting in Washington, D.C. He looks forward to developing the tentative 
conclusions of this paper in fuller form after some of his other projects have 
been submitted for publication.

During the winter, he drafted the article on "Arabs" for the next edition of 
the World Book Encyclopedia. This proved to be a challenging task because 
the entry was expected to provide not only a summary of all major aspects of 
life in the Arab world today, from food and clothing to patterns of family life 
and aspects of high culture, but also a summary of the history of the Arabs, 
which reaches back about three thousand years—and to do all of this in a very 
brief article. Writing such a piece forces one to leave behind the scholarly 
minutiae on which most of us spend much of our time, and to try to present a 
general picture in bold strokes that is comprehensible to those with little or no 
background in the subject. Because such publications shape the basic attitudes 
of people learning about a subject for the very first time, they have a much 
more direct impact on the knowledge of the Near East among the general 
public than most of the technical scholarship we at the Oriental Institute 
produce. Yet, we recall that writing for a general audience is also an old 
tradition here; after all, the founder of the Oriental Institute, James Henry 
Breasted, authored a textbook and produced films designed to communicate 
the importance of the Institute's work to a broad public.

During the year, Mr. Donner was engaged in his usual teaching and 
administrative duties for the Oriental Institute, the Department of Near Eastern 
Languages and Civilizations, The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, and the 
Humanities Division. He was gratified to receive at the spring convocation the 
Quantrell Award in Humanities for excellence in undergraduate teaching. He 
continued to serve as coordinator of the University of Chicago-University of 
Damascus Affiliation program, which arranges research visits to Chicago by 
scholars from the University of Damascus, Syria, and sponsors Chicago 
scholars in Syria. During the winter of 1990–91 the Oriental Institute benefited 
from the presence here of Dr. Najda al-Khammash, an early Islamic historian
from the University of Damascus' Department of History, who proved to be a lively participant in several classes and in a workshop on Middle Eastern urbanism organized by Donald Whitcomb.

In November, Mr. Donner was elected president of Middle East Medievalists, an international organization that serves as a network for those who have a special interest in the Near East and North Africa between roughly 500 and 1500 C.E. Part of this job involves editing Al-‘Usûr al-Wustâ, the Bulletin of Middle East Medievalists, which Donner enlarged so that it could include more material of scholarly interest and could better serve the organizations’ members as a vehicle for the exchange of information, opinions, and opportunities. John Sanders of the Oriental Institute Computer Laboratory, and Tom Holland, Tom Urban, and Richard Schoen of the Publications Office, all helped provide technical assistance in producing an improved version of Al-‘Usûr al-Wustâ.

In the autumn, Mr. Donner was elected to serve a three-year term on the board of directors of the Middle East Studies Association of North America, the main scholarly organization serving the needs of those concentrating on the study of the modern and medieval Islamic Middle East.