

### Fred M. Donner

**Fred M. Donner** had an unusually hectic year. In August, he agreed to serve as the next director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies (CMES), a position that dramatically increases his administrative responsibilities (and, incidentally, means that he spends much less time than before in his Oriental Institute office, and more in the offices of the CMES in Pick Hall — fortunately, not very far away). This was made more than usually exciting by the need to supervise writing of the federal Title VI grant application to the Department of Education, which provides the funding with which CMES helps underwrite the university's large staff of language lecturers for languages of the modern Middle East (Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Modern Hebrew, Armenian, Uzbek, etc.), as well as funding for an extensive outreach program for K–12 schools, two-year colleges, and the public at large, and support for symposia and conferences, including the annual Middle East History and Theory Conference, which this year drew several hundred people from around the country and abroad. It was also made more challenging by some unexpected staff turnover. By summer things had, thankfully, settled down, and we anticipate hearing soon about the application for the Title VI grant for the next four-year grant cycle.

Donner was engaged in his usual teaching duties; of particular note was a course in the spring, Arabic Palaeography and Epigraphy, during which a dozen students worked on Arabic papyri from the Oriental Institute's collection. Earlier generations of Arabic papyrologists, including the Oriental Institute's own famous Nabia Abbott (d. 1982), would positively be green with envy, seeing how today we can readily project a razor-sharp digital image of a papyrus document onto a large screen, so all in the classroom can study it from the comfort of their seats and call out possible readings for a troublesome passage; there is no doubt that the arduous task of reading these documents is greatly eased by having a dozen pairs of eyes, rather than merely one, gazing at the same thing and making suggestions.

Donner delivered a number of lectures during the year, including at the annual Middle East Studies Association meetings in Boston in November, another at St. Michael's College in Vermont in April, and a third to the graduating class of the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Berkeley in May. Most of these dealt with the question of Islam's beginnings and the way the

terminology for institutions and practices in early Islam underwent a transformation to solidify Islam's ideological foundations.

Donner was also engaged in the normal chores of being external reviewer for tenure or promotion decision for several universities (including Princeton and Smith College), reviewing article drafts for journals and book drafts for publishers, and of course reading many, many dissertation chapters for some of the twenty students on whose dissertation committees he serves.

Donner's book *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Harvard University Press) finally appeared in early May and has attracted a modicum of public notice, including a very favorable review in the *New York Times Book Review* (Sunday, June 27, 2010). After so many years working on this book, the positive response has been most gratifying. This year also saw the appearance of his article "Umayyad Efforts at Legitimation: The Umayyads' Silent Heritage," in *Umayyad Legacies/Heritages Omeyyades*, edited by A. Borrut and P. M. Cobb (Leiden: E. J. Brill).

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