

FRED M. DONNER For the past several years, Fred M. Donner's research has centered on two large issues: the role of nomadic groups in Near Eastern society, especially in the Middle Ages, and the development of early Arabic historiography. On the first front, he completed an article entitled "Xenophon's Arabia," which examines that author's use of the term Arabia and discusses its implications for the history of nomadism in Mesopotamia in the fifth century B.C.

On the historiographical front, he continued his efforts to develop methods for evaluating the reliability of early Arabic sources about the rise of Islam. The difficulty with these sources is that they are not truly documentary sources, but rather narrative compositions that only acquired their definitive form some centuries after the events they describe. Because of this, it is frequently not clear how to separate earlier, more reliable traditions from later ones introduced as political, social, or religious polemic. A paper he read at the Fourth International Conference on the History of Bilâd al-Shâm (Syria), held in March in Amman, Jordan, related to this theme. The paper, on the subject of "The Problem of Early Arabic Historiography in Syria," will be published as part of the proceedings of the conference.