

Muhammad and the Believers at the Origins of Islam by Fred M. Donner.
Belknap Harvard 2010.

Since 9/11 a plethora of books have been written about Islam, either general studies of the religion or of the life of the prophet Muhammed, of Islamist fundamentalism or the Wahhabi faith of Saudi Arabia, of the origins of Islamist extremism and terrorism, or of different Islamist groups etc., etc.

In Muhammad and the Believers, Professor Fred Donner of the University of Chicago chooses to focus his attention on the early period of Islam, its origins and development, the role of Muhammed and his successors, the civil wars and fights over succession, the doctrinal splits between Shia and Sunni Muslims, the contents of the Qur'an and the development of supplementary textual material.

The book is divided into 5 sections entitled The Near East on the Eve of Islam, Muhammad and the Believers' Movement, The Expansion of the Community of Believers, The Struggle for Leadership of the Community and The Emergence of Islam.

Muhammad and the Believers is a succinct, approachable and meticulously researched book, providing valuable information that is intelligently written for those new to the subject of Islam and its origins. It also contains much that is of worth to those who know more, not least in its dealing with the relations between early 'Islam' and the other monotheists, Jews and Christians, that it encountered.

This is an excellent addition to a growing canon.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh