



**Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires 1908-1918.** By Michael A. Reynolds. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. 324 pp. \$90 (\$31.99, paper).

*Shattering Empires* traces the course of foreign relations between the Ottoman and Russian empires from the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 to the end of World War I. Reynolds of Princeton University examines Russia's policies toward eastern Anatolia and highlights the way interstate competition shaped local identities and politics through the introduction of the concept of the national state.

Reynolds aims to show how the confrontation between the Ottoman and Russian states contributed to the collapse of both empires and to the birth of a new kind of politics in the region. He recounts the rivalry between the two empires and their downfall between 1908-18. The book is thematically rather than chronologically arranged; about one-third concerns the prewar years, and the rest is evenly divided between the period of 1914-16 and the remaining war years.

The author argues that "geopolitical compe-

tion and emergence of a new global interstate order provide the key to understanding the course of history in the Ottoman-Russian borderlands in the twentieth century." He illustrates the influence of nationalism on interstate politics in the Middle East and Eurasia and explores the ways in which states create and impose ethno-nationalist categories and identities.

However, the study has one significant problem. Although Reynolds does not categorize the Armenian events of 1915 as genocide, he mentions "the whole destruction of Ottoman Armenians during the First World War" and refers to "the effective eradication of the presence in Anatolia of [Armenians]." In fact, 1,295,000 Armenians lived in the Ottoman empire in 1914; 702,900 of these were subject to relocations in 1915-16, and very large numbers of the displaced persons survived their displacement, according to official documents of the Ottoman court.

Still the book remains highly original and insightful, and the author manifests not only a command of the subject matter but a profound understanding of the Ottoman and Russian positions. His objectivity and balanced judgment in most matters places this book at the top among works on Ottoman-Russian relations during the first two decades of the twentieth century.

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**Undercover Muslim: A Journey into Yemen.** By Theo Padnos. London: Bodley Head, 2011. 293 pp. £12.99.

Every year, hundreds of Westerners abandon life in affluent societies in favor of a sojourn in austere piety in Yemen. *Undercover Muslim* examines those who journey to the country in search of a lifestyle deemed as a better way to fulfill Islamic orthodoxy.

Padnos travelled to Yemen to learn Arabic, and after a stint working as a journalist, converted to Islam. He assumed an Arabic name, pursued Qur'anic study, and immersed himself among those who came to do the same. The chronicle of his experiences in *Undercover Muslim* prompts far more questions than it answers. Did he, as the "undercover" in the title suggests, assume this