

by Christopher Murphy

From Bobbio to Bologna

THIS PAST SEPTEMBER, as I walked among the ancient dry-stone buildings on the heights of Skellig Michael, a tiny island off the coast of Ireland's County Kerry, I contemplated the two sides of the intriguing history of the early monastic movement in Ireland. Skellig Michael is the definitive example of an inwardly focused Irish monasticism during Europe's Dark Ages. The island, which is little more than a tall, craggy outcrop, set in rough seas twelve kilometers from the Kerry shore, was a place of intentional isolation and introspection. Here monks separated themselves from the world and its comforts and cares and concentrated on the Divine alone.

But there was another side to the Irish monastic movement in this time when Western civilization—based for centuries upon Roman hegemony—was in ruin and much of the knowledge of the classical period was lost to the vast majority of Europeans. Ireland in this period is often referred to as the 'Island of Saints and Scholars.' Skellig Michael represents a stark example of the desire for sainthood. But many other monasteries represent the high-level scholarship of these Irish monks. Communities at Clonmacnoise, Clonard, Iona, and Glendalough, to name just a few, kept a light of knowledge burning and attracted scholars to Ireland from many parts of Europe. In the sixth and seventh centuries, the monks reached out across the European continent, establishing learned monastic settlements among the Franks, the Alemanni (modern Switzerland), and perhaps most famously at Bobbio in the Lombard kingdom—not far from the city of Bologna where the oldest continually operating university in the world would be founded in 1088.

Modern Europe's Bologna Process has some similarity to this long-ago Irish odyssey of knowledge. Although the Bologna Process was originally intended as an internally focused reform of Western European higher education, it is now having a discernable ripple effect throughout the globe as other nations have seen the potential benefits of harmonizing their own regions or coordinating their efforts with European colleagues or institutions.

In this issue of *International Educator*, Charlotte West explores how Bologna is inspiring reaction and change in higher education systems in places as disparate as Australia, Brazil, Canada, Tunisia, China, and the United States.

Also in this issue...

Our annual supplement on health and insurance includes a timely article by Julie Friend on developing effective response procedures to U.S. Department of State travel warnings and Kim Fernandez's piece on ensuring that international students on your campus have adequate insurance.

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International Educator is published bimonthly by NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 1307 New York Avenue, NW, Eighth Floor, Washington, D.C. 20005-4701 USA. Phone: 202.737.3699; Fax: 202.737.3657; inbox@nafsa.org; www.nafsa.org

Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices.

ISSN 1059-4221

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