

# editorial

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The evenings are drawing in and remind us of impending winter. It is a season for maps. In the novel *Don Quixote*, Cervantes has his deluded hero, whose trail across the heart of the Spanish interior we followed in the last *hidden europe*, remark on the merits of maps, commending them as offering all the advantages of real travel without the risk of fatigue or great expense. And a good map is indeed a marvellous thing. There is a certain cartographic theme to this *hidden europe* as we ponder some historical European maps and celebrate the evocative appeal of blank spaces on maps. Places that give free reign to the imagination.

We hope that our essays herein add a little texture to the places that you might know only from maps — a little literary cartography, if you will, to tide you over the months when the comforts of the hearth offer every incentive not to venture too far abroad. We take in some quite exotic spots, from a Swedish island that was once devoted to astronomy to a railway in the Russian Arctic that crosses the Ural mountains. Closer to home, we look at some very political architecture in Berlin and visit eastern Belgium. It is a country much in the news of late as French-speaking Belgians try to come to terms with their Flemish counterparts' growing demands for independence. But did you know that eastern Belgium has a sizeable German-speaking population?

We much rely on very gifted outside contributors to *hidden europe*. The work of three guest writers features in this issue. We especially welcome Michelle Lovric, an accomplished novelist, as a first-time contributor. Michelle has written an essay on the parts of Venice where few tourists ever venture: the former madhouses on the islands in the lagoon. Laurence Mitchell, a regular contributor, took time out from finalising his upcoming book on Kyrgyzstan to pen a piece on the Vía de la Plata in Spain. And Karlos Zurutuza, another *hidden europe* old hand, just back from a spell travelling in northern Iraq, has sent us a despatch on one of Armenia's most extraordinary churches.

Enjoy what follows! From the enigmatic tale of two statues (one in Poland and the other in England) to our palindromic tour of Europe: Eye (England) to Eze (France) and Assamassa (Portugal) to Ellemelle (Belgium).

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EDITORS

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front cover: hill near Machynlleth, Wales (photo by Harvey Hudson)

top left: the face of Europe (photo by Stefan Hermans)

middle left: cattle country, Castile-Léon, Spain (photo by Laurence Mitchell)

bottom left: bridge over Mawddach estuary, Wales (photo by Peter Rees)

above right: the island of Ven, Sweden (photo by Marie-Louise Valsted)

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