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The Via Egnatia (Albania) Project and the bridge at Topçias

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The Via Egnatia has attracted limited attention over the last half-century.¹ The ancient road, crossing Albania between Durrës (*Dyrrachium*) and Qafe Thanë, was one of the major thoroughfares of antiquity, and it remained in use until modern times. This brief report describes the work of the new Albanian Rescue Archaeology Unit, working in collaboration with the Institute of Archaeology of Albania, in an attempt to document parts of the road which may be threatened by infrastructure development.

The survey was organised during April and May 2000 and involved both systematically walking the line followed by the Via Egnatia and visiting sites of different periods that developed along it. During the first season, our survey concentrated upon the area between Bradashesh (identified as the *mutatio Ad Quintum* of the Roman itineraries), near Elbasan, and Qukës (*mutatio In Tabernas* of the *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, or *Tres Tabernae* of the Antonine Itinerary) (fig. 1).² We investigated this particular area for the following reasons:

1. Intensive work is being carried out on the construction of the new Corridor Eight (motorway) in this part of Albania;
2. Many known monuments connected to Via Egnatia are found in this area,³ and it was important to check their state of preservation on the ground;
3. This area corresponds with the tract of Via Egnatia where the two branches (one coming from Dyrrachium, the other from Apollonia) joined just west of Elbasan, and where two branches began again at Qukës (one towards Qafe Thanë and the Albanian-Macedonian border, and the other towards Mokra-Korça and the Albanian-Greek border);
4. From Mirakë to Qukës, where the Via Egnatia climbed high above the left bank of the Shkumbin river and ran along the mountainside, away from the main modern road, there was greater potential for preservation of the ancient pavement and associated monuments.

Preliminary results of the survey

From Bradashesh (*mutatio Ad Quintum*) to Mirakë, the branch of the Via Egnatia coming from Durrës follows almost exactly the modern route, which runs parallel to the Shkumbin on the right bank.⁴ No traces of the Roman road itself have yet been found here, but a great number of monuments and sites built as a result of it can be seen, including the *mutatio Ad Quintum*, the basilica at Tepe, the *castrum* of Elbasan, and the bridges at Topçias, Mansi, Mengel, Shkambi Mbret, and Guri i Borës (fig. 1).

The *mutatio Ad Quintum* has been thoroughly excavated and published.⁵ It is one of the best preserved sites that our team visited along the Via Egnatia.

Recent excavations in *Castrum* have produced new data on the site's stratigraphy, plan, and architecture, and also identified a new cultural layer dating to the first centuries A.D., before the foundation of the *Castrum* itself.⁶

1 Pecha and Vidman 1959; Vidman 1962; N. Ceka and Papajani 1971; H. Ceka 1971; Hammond 1972 and 1974; Adami 1983; Shtylla 1997.

2 Miller 1916; Cuntz 1929.

3 Ceka and Papajani 1971 and 1972; N. Ceka 1972.

4 See also Hammond 1974, 188-89.

5 Ceka and Papajani 1972, 29-57; N. Ceka 1976, 287-312.

6 Cerova 1987, 265-66; id. 1988, 273-74.