

Via Egnatia (Albania) Project: results of fieldwork 2002

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The second intensive season of fieldwork on the Via Egnatia Project, promoted and supported by the Packard Humanities Institute, took place in the summer of 2002 along the Shkumbin valley. Building on the results of the first season,¹ one of its main goals was the development of a GIS platform on which to integrate spatially all sites, monuments and finds. From the GPS survey, which was an important component of the work, locations were established for archaeological features which were then placed with high precision on the digitized map, creating the basis for an interactive archive. There are still plenty of unresolved issues relating to the Via Egnatia, especially to its construction, development and maintenance over time, as well as its cultural, social and economic impact on local communities. Investigating some of these aspects of the route was a second important goal of the 2002 season.

The first volume on the Via Egnatia by M. Fasolo (2003) makes a substantial contribution to the study of this important trans-Balkan route.² After the generalized works of Hammond³ and O'Sullivan,⁴ Fasolo's study offers a fine reconstruction of the historical context in which the route was planned, built, and developed, based on a systematic survey of the historical sources as well as of discoveries reported so far. One of Fasolo's most important contributions is his hypothetical reconstruction of the route followed, using an invaluable collection of air photographs taken by the Italian army before, during, and after World War II. In concert with predictive modelling, the aerial photographs have proven to be very effective in identifying the route, even for stretches where no evidence remains on the ground.

Study of the distribution of sites and monuments along the road, however, remains an important complementary goal. They are an integral part of the overall history of the road in its wider geopolitical context, and for this reason our study devoted considerable time and resources to the identification, description, and reconstruction of their history and development. We also started to gather data on the construction techniques used on the road itself during different periods of its development, by identifying the most suitable points for test excavations where complete sections of the road might be recorded. Lastly, we carried out a more thorough study of the remains of several bridges in the Mirakë area, especially that at Keçit.

GIS project, GPS survey, and the regional approach

The section of the Via Egnatia located in the modern territory of Albania extends across a sizeable area, and spatial references are important for the organization and analysis of data. Since the interpretation of any component of the road cannot be separated from its particular topographic setting, GIS is the most appropriate platform on which to organize the data. The development of a GIS archive has already begun, using as a base digitized versions of a series of 1 : 25,000 topographic maps produced by the Albanian Institute of Military Topography (fig. 1). At the time of writing, digitization has been completed for the area from Elbasan in the west to Lake Ohrid on the border with Macedonia. Once complete, the GIS system can assist the monitoring, protection, management and future evaluation of the archaeological heritage in this central region of the country.

The exact route of the via Egnatia and the location of bridges, sites, individual structures, and other visible features were drawn from the detailed GPS survey, carried out using a back-pack Trimble Pro XRS unit. The data were collected using differential GPS. The correction signal was supplied by Netherlands-based OmniStar. The method of survey was relatively simple. Data acquisition followed different time-intervals according to the nature of the feature being surveyed: every 20 seconds for the road, every 5 seconds

1 Amore *et al.* 2001, 381-89.

2 Fasolo 2003.

3 Hammond 1967; 1972, 19-37; 1974, 185-94.

4 O'Sullivan 1972.