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THE GOLDEN GATES OF THE VIA EGNATIA IN THE BALKANS

Via Egnatia is an ancient traversary that crossed a number of countries in the Balkans region and connected a number of highly civilized centers of the antique world, such as: Dyrrachium, Scampa, Lychnid, Heraclea, Edessa, Pella, Thessaloniki, Neapolis, and Constantinople, thus aiding the spread of culture and tradition from one centre to the other. Via Egnatia was a field (plain) road that passes through important cities of four different countries: Albania, Macedonia, Greece and Turkey. It is precisely for these advantages that this antique road has been at the center of many debates and discussions lately. The path, the construction choices, and the objects erected along this ancient road, could be very helpful today as all our countries are attempting to establish a better and integrated economic, historical and cultural future.

This paper, while providing general information about Via Egnatia, focuses on the identification and details related to the Gates of Via Egnatia across the Balkans. Thorough the Gates, Via Egnatia made its entrance into the fortified systems of the cities o the time. The gates of the antique cities were located along the fortified surrounding walls and they were called the Golden Gates. Golden Gates of Via Egnatia in the Balkans region can be found in a number of cities such as: Dyrrachion (Durres), Scampis (Elbasan), Thessaloniki and Constantinople (Istanbul). In the paper, there are provided details about the technical construction of these Gates, construction and reconstruction dates for each, names of the famous officials or kings who contributed to the erection of these gates and named them after a special historical event. Among these, there were Emperor Augustus,` Galerio, and Emperor Theodosius, both of whom erected the Golden gates, or

Arches of Triumph, along Via Egnatia to celebrate their names and victories.

There is abundant literature and work concerning the history of Via Egnatia, especially owing to the existence and activity of numerous national and international cultural organizations. This ancient road has been awarded special status such as World Culture Heritage, or Balkans Cultural Itinerary. Highlighting the elements of this antique road including the monumental centers and objects that can be found along it, is very important since this would provide not only historical and documentary values, but also a basis for the cultural tourism which, for the moment, is not being exploited to the extent it should be.