

# Via “ Egnatia” a brief history

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## **Via " Egnatia" a brief history**

Via "Egnatia" was one of the most important ancient routes that passed west - east through our country. Known as the road connecting Rome with the Byzantine Empire, it began in the territory of our country from the port of Durrës and ended at the border with Macedonia.

Historically, it was built in the period between 148-120 BC, by the Roman governor of Macedonia GNAEUS EGNATIUS. It was conceived according to Aristotle's idea of connecting the Adriatic coast with today's Turkey crossing through Macedonia, Bulgaria and Greece.





Via "Egnatia"



The Romans built this road with the intent to control the territories occupied by them. Through this road, they could travel fast to the Balkan Peninsula. Via “Egnatia” was a very important communication artery, especially during the civil war between Julius Cesar and Pompey. Some of the important battles of these two figures of the time have taken place along this path. Many of the most important Roman personalities have traveled along this path. Here we mention Cicero, Mark Anthony, Brutus, Ahenobarbun, Pompeii, Roman Emperor Trajan and many others.

In the following periods, in the twelfth century AD, some preachers appeared in “Egnatia” route and began to spread Jesus’ word. The first Christians who passed on this path were the apostles Peter, Silvan, John Mark, and Timothy. Then the apostle Paul and his followers traveled along this path three times. Also, believers from Thessaloniki and Philipo used this path to spread the word of Bible.

On the other hand, we must mention the

fact that the "Egnatia" road was one of the main factors through which the barbarians carried out their attacks on the Balkans. With the collapse of the Roman Empire and the empowerment of the East Empire, known as the Byzantine Empire, the "Egnatia" street continued to play a key role as a very important communication artery for the whole of Europe.

Via Egnatia created opportunities and facilities for the penetration of Slavic tribes towards Greece and the strengthening of Slav-Bulgarian relations.



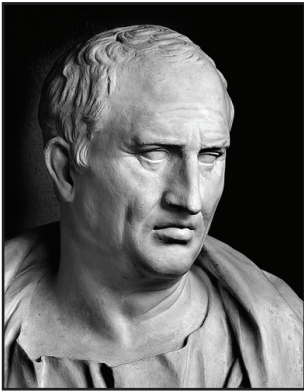
*Cobble street*

After the dark medieval period, via “Egnatia” underwent restoration and erection of fortifications.

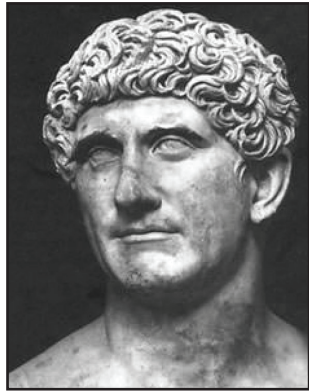
After the time when German pilgrims visited Jerusalem in 1064, via “Egnatia” was not crossed by many Christians.

Since 1095 when Pope Urban II undertook a crusade, inviting all Christians of Europe to participate in the battle against Muslims, via “Egnatia” became the main artery through which many European citizens traveled to Constantinople Empire. During this period, many famous crusaders arrived from the port of Dures among them;





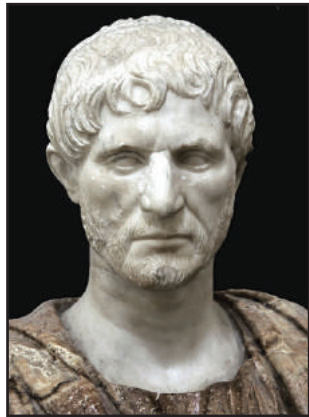
*Ciceroni*



*Mark Antoni*



*EmperorTrajan*



*Lucius Junius Brutus*



*Jul Cesari*



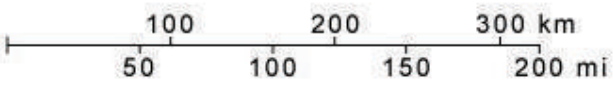
*Pompeu*





# VIA EGNATIA

-  Via Egnatia
-  Via Appia
-  secondary course or connected roads
-  sea route





...  
Lyncestis  
...  
ssa

...  
ssa

...  
lla

Thessaloniki

Pydna

Philippi

Neapolis

Amphipolis

Aenus

Traianoupolis

Adrianople

Kypsela

Aproi

Perin

Aegean  
Sea

Prince Bohemond of Antioch, Godfrey of Bouillon, Raimondi IV(Count of Toulouse) and Robert II, Count of Flanders.

This historical period is quite documented through various chronicles. An important agreement of those times was that between Prince Bohemond and Emperor Aleks Kommeni named as the Devolli's agreement. Thus, the Norman army, while traveling through via "Egnatia" met the Byzantine army in Devoll area where the agreement that was signed took the name of the place where it was conducted.

Via Egnatia was a very important route during the second, third and fourth crusades during which the armies marched through it.

With the end of the Crusades and the rise of the Ottoman Empire as the power of the time via "Egnatia" experienced not only the flood of armies but also the traders who flooded this time from the east. The Ottoman armies traveling along the "Egnatia" route arrived in the Balkans



and established their rule in its areas.

In the vicinity of Miraka, the Byzantine Emperor, Justinian attacked the Goths' king, the great Theodoric. According to Austrian scholars and archeologists Praschniker and Schober, Diana's temple was in Babje, near Librazhd. The mountain pass of the same name tells us that via "Egnatia" passed through Hani i Babës (Babje). According to them, the name of the station was AD DIANAM. On the other hand, this claim of Austrian archaeologists is rejected by Albanian scholars, Neritan Ceka and Lazer Papajani. In a 1970 edition, they claim that Diana's temple is in Spathare.

During this period via "Egnatia" was repaired and expanded by gaining artistic value, especially in Shkumbin River area. The Ottomans also rebuilt one of the largest horse-change stations - Scampa, which later was called "Ilbasan" under the command of Mehmet the Invader. Today in modern times this is the city of Elbasan.

Via “Egnatia” remained an important route for travelers of the 19th century romantic period, especially towards their trip to Asia. This was also stimulated by the re-emerged tendency to travel to Asia in that period. Many well-known travelers of the time traveled during that time along the “Egnatia” street, one of which was also the painter Edward Lear, who painted landscapes and objects that he saw during his journey along “Egnatia”

A rectangular stone marker with weathered, light-colored stone. It is set on a dark, rough ground. The stone has two lines of text: the top line in Greek characters and the bottom line in English characters. The background behind the stone is a bright yellow triangle pointing upwards.

ΕΓΝΑΤΙΑ ΟΔΟΣ  
VIA EGNATIA

street, especially in the valley of Shkumbin. During his first visit in 1848, he also painted the bridge of Kamares, near Miraka in the valley of Shkumbin. However, among the most important persons who traveled in that period were the Prince of Wales and the forthcoming King of England, Edward VII, who arrived at the port of Durres in 1862.

The first via 'Egnatia' editions were published by Jorg Von Han.

Regarding the transformation of via "Egnatia" into a valuable and frequent tourist attraction itinerary, as its opening gate in Albania it is planned the placing of an information office near the II century AD Roman amphitheater in the city of Durres.





## Places and sites across via " Egnatia " what to see and visit

**Durrës (Dyrrachium)** is the city where via "Egnatia" commences its way through the Albanian territory. Durrës is one of the most ancient cities of Albania with a history of 3.000 years. The largest harbour of the country is in Durres and it is also the second largest city after the capital considering its size.

The most significant monument is the amphitheater of Durrës, which by its size is the second in the Balkans after that of Pula in Croatia. In fact, the Pula amphitheater is completely discovered, while Durres amphitheater is not yet. It was built in the second century AD in the period of the Roman Emperor Hadrian. The amphitheater has a capacity of 15 to 20 thousand spectators and resembles the style of construction with the monuments of Pompeii and Capua in Italy. In the tenth century in its galleries

*Amphitheater of Durrës*







was built a “Hat” which is known for its mural mosaics. Today it is located within the surrounding walls built by Anastasios. Its huge axle is 136 m while from the hillside it is maintained up to 20 m of height. During the middle Ages the place was used by the inhabitants for defending. In its underground galleries it was built a Paleo Christian church decorated with the parietal mosaics representing Saint Mary in imperial dress between two angels. The composition is also accompanied by donor portraits, Alexander with his wife, and is one of the earliest evidence of Early



*Mosaic*



Christianity in the city. In the discovery of the amphitheater of Durres there is a great contribution of the Albanian archaeologist, Vangjel Toçi.

Beside these monuments in the city of Durres you can also visit the Archeological Museum which is arranged in two main pavilions, Hellenic and Roman. The archaeological museum is located along the Taulantia promenade.

**The Mosaic and Basilica of Arapaj** situated on a hill in the village of Arapaj south of



*Mosaic*





*Byzantine bazaar Durrës*



*Amphitheater of Durres*

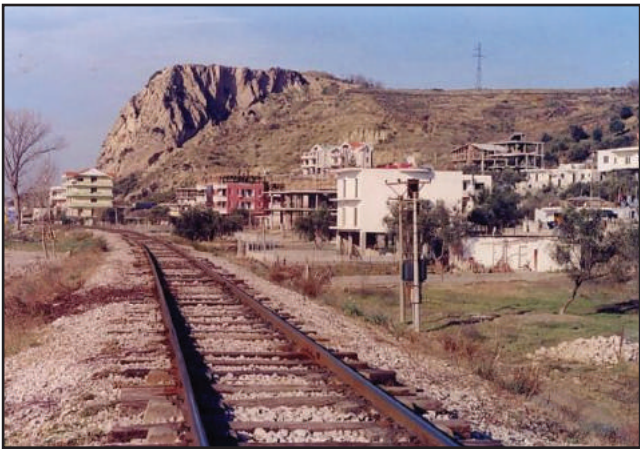




*Amphitheater of Durres*

the city of Durrës. It is a Paleo Christian basilica of the 6th century AD. The part discovered in 1974 is part of a monumental building. This basilica belonged to St. Michael's church burned by Normans. The discovered basilica consists of blocks, saloons, yard and two funeral annexes. In one of these is Arapaj's famous mosaic with a surface of 50 square meters. It is one of the largest mosaics of Albania and the Balkans. The mosaic consists of two emblems of pastoral motives. To ensure the protection of the mosaic against atmospheric agents, it is covered with plastic mesh and for visiting purposes it is required special permission from the Institute of Monuments of Culture.

In the south of the city where the beach of Durrës is located, going south there is a natural monument of historical value, "Shkëmbi i Kavajës". This sandstone rock is an "Eolic" monument created as a result of wind activity for millions of years. In the year 48 BC, there is a thought that a battle



*Shkëmbi i Kavajës*

between Julius Caesar and Pompeii took place, ending with the victory of Caesar.

**Kavaja.** The city of Kavaje is also situated 20 km south of Durrës and along via 'Egnatia'.

Here you can visit the Ethnographic Museum located in Zguraj neighborhood. The antiquities are exhibited in a traditional architecture house. Antiquities consist of embroidering objects, copper work, pottery, costumes, etc.

The Kubelie Mosque in Kavaja is located in the center of town. The mosque was built by Ottomans, by Kapllan Beu. Along with the clock tower it is almost a symbol of the city of Kavaja. Next to it there are tall cypresses and the Byzantine columns of Arabic-style arches.





*The Kubelie Mosque in Kavaja*

The journey continues towards the small town of **Peqin**, also named in the ancient times with the name Claudiana.

An interesting object to visit is the castle of Peqin. It is a medieval castle built in the 15th century. It is thought to be built on ancient foundations. The castle is distinguished by gun turrets and the polygonal shaped towers. The castle is located near the Shkumbin River and has been subject to three reconstruction periods.

**The Mosque of Peqin** built between 1822-1823. It was built above the old mosque built by Abdurraman Pasha, in the 16th century. This mosque is built of carved stones and contains mural paintings inside. The mosque's living room stands on ten pillars.

In the village of Bishqem, near the small town of Peqin, along "Egnatia" street, recently were discovered the footsteps of an early settlement, which is thought to belong to the period of Christianity beginning in our country.



*The Mosque of Peqin*



*Peqin*





*Castle of Peqin*

Following the journey to the city of Elbasan we encounter traces of the old road “Via Egnatia” which passed through this region. This road was first mentioned by Polibi in the year 120 BC.

A visiting site is the “Ad Quintum” station built in the II century AD. This monument constitutes a complex with a quadrilateral surface measuring 45 x 12 meters. Here are also found the terms by 130 square meters. The monument is located near the city of Elbasan.

Another interesting tourist site is the walls of the Scampa Castle, which surround the neighborhoods of the city. This castle was built at the time of Emperor Diolklician. With a surface area of 10 hectares, the facility was originally used for sheltering a Roman legion. This castle was important as it served as the origin of the upcoming city.



*Ad Quintum*







*Castle of Elbasan*

In the city of Elbasan you can visit the Ethnographic Museum. It is located in a characteristic 18th century house. Known as the Sejдини family house, the museum building consists of 2 floors. Among other interesting things there are old folk costumes of rich embroidery and ornaments.

In Elbasan you can visit the Hammam, the Paleo Christian basilica of Bezistan, which is located almost in the center of the city near Hotel "Skampa" and was discovered in 2007. Part of this basilica is also the paleo Christian mosaic. This basilica is thought to belong to the V-VI centuries AD. Excavations in this facility have revealed two 5 meter long marble columns that are exposed in the lobby of the Elbasan Ethnographic Museum. They also discovered a fresco on the wall and two graves of the 5th century.

Also in the Hill of Tepë near Elbasan there is another basilica, called "Koder Tëpa Basilica" discovered in 1968-1969. It is a Paleo Christian basilica of 600 square



*Ethnographic Museum*

meters. Part of the basilica is also a burial dome. The blockade orientation is from the east.

In the city of Elbasan you can also visit a variety of religious cult objects belonging to Orthodox, Muslim, and Bektashi religions. St. Mary's Church is one of the most beautiful and attractive sites. It is located within the fortress of Elbasan and was built around 600 years ago. In fact it has started to function since 1556. In 1819 it was completely burned and rebuilt in 1826-1833. It also has a main hall covered by a cupola. The cube's paintings were made in



*Skampa Castle Walls*

1859. The iconostasis of the church, among the most beautiful in the country, was mastered by nearly 40 handcraft masters from Dibra who worked for around 10 years. The iconostasis is painted of gold color varnish. Near the church it is the tomb of Konstandin Kristoforidhi named as the "father" of the Albanian language. Within the walls of the castle there is a unique church (the only one of its kind in Albania), of the Catholic rite which aimed the unification between the Catholic and Orthodox groupings.



*Basilica of Koder Tepes*





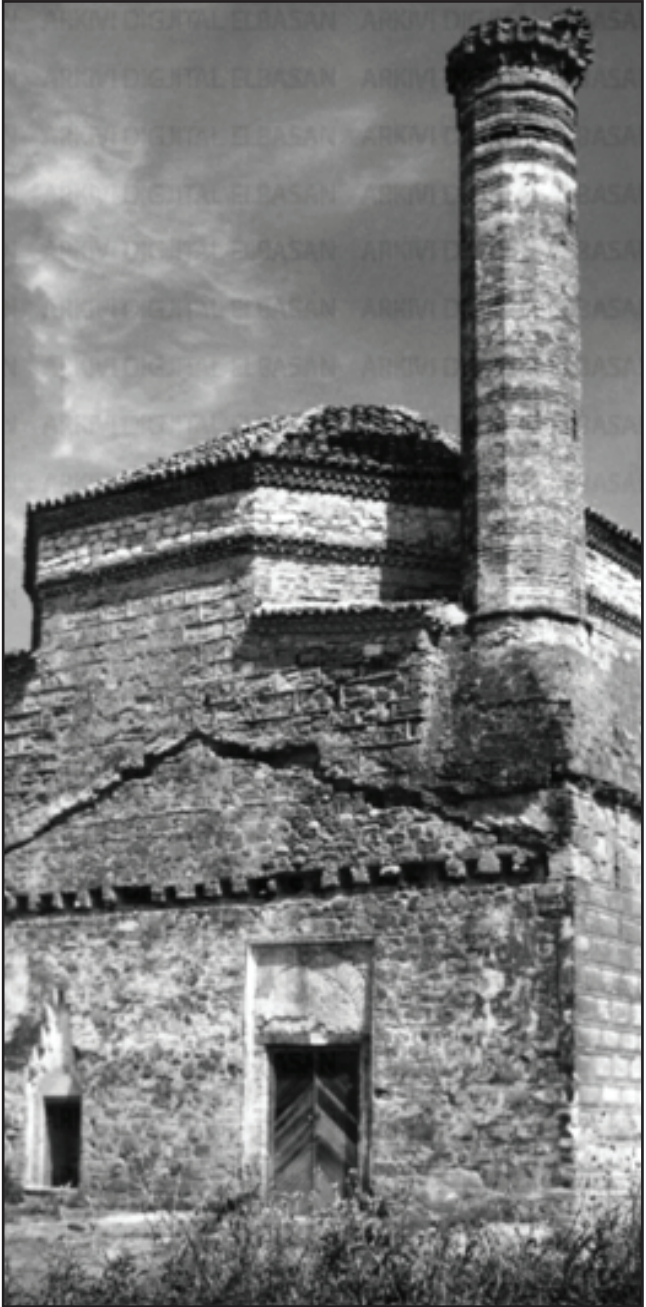




*Holy Mother church, Elbasan*

The Naziresha Mosque is located in the ring road of the city of Elbasan. It is a classic Ottoman style mosque. There is no inscription of its dating, but basing on the construction method it dates back to the last decade of the XVI-th century. The name of the mosque relates to a famous woman of the city. Nazireshaw was the wife of a famous personality of the city who built the mosque and named it after her. The prayer room has quadratic proportions and a minaret. The hall is illuminated by five windows on each side. It has the status of the Cultural Monument and in recent years has been restored with the funds of the Turkish agency TICA. It is easily visited.

King Mosque is found within the castle walls. There is no inscription of the date of construction but it belongs to the end of the XV th century. Its prayer hall is covered by a wooden roof. The mosque contains 4 windows on each side for lighting the hall. It is one of the most ancient and important mosques in Albania and the city.



*The Naziresha Mosque*





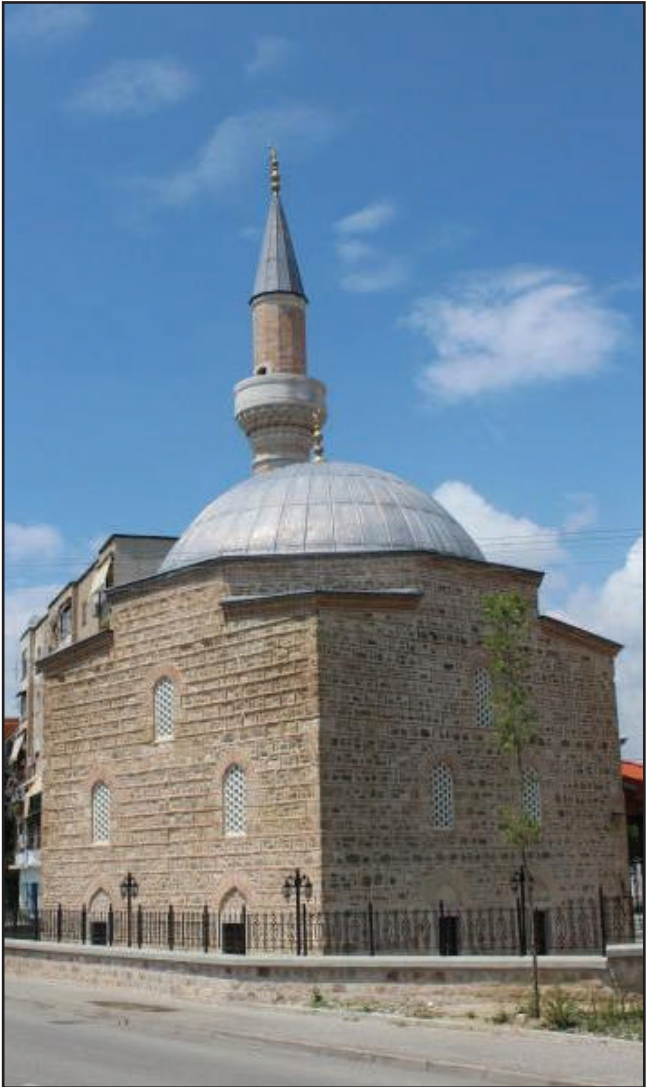
Via "Egnatia"



*Elbasan castle*



Near the city there are also Bektashi cult sites, among which we will mention Baba Xhemal's tekke, in Elbasan. It is located on the side of River Shkumbin near the city of

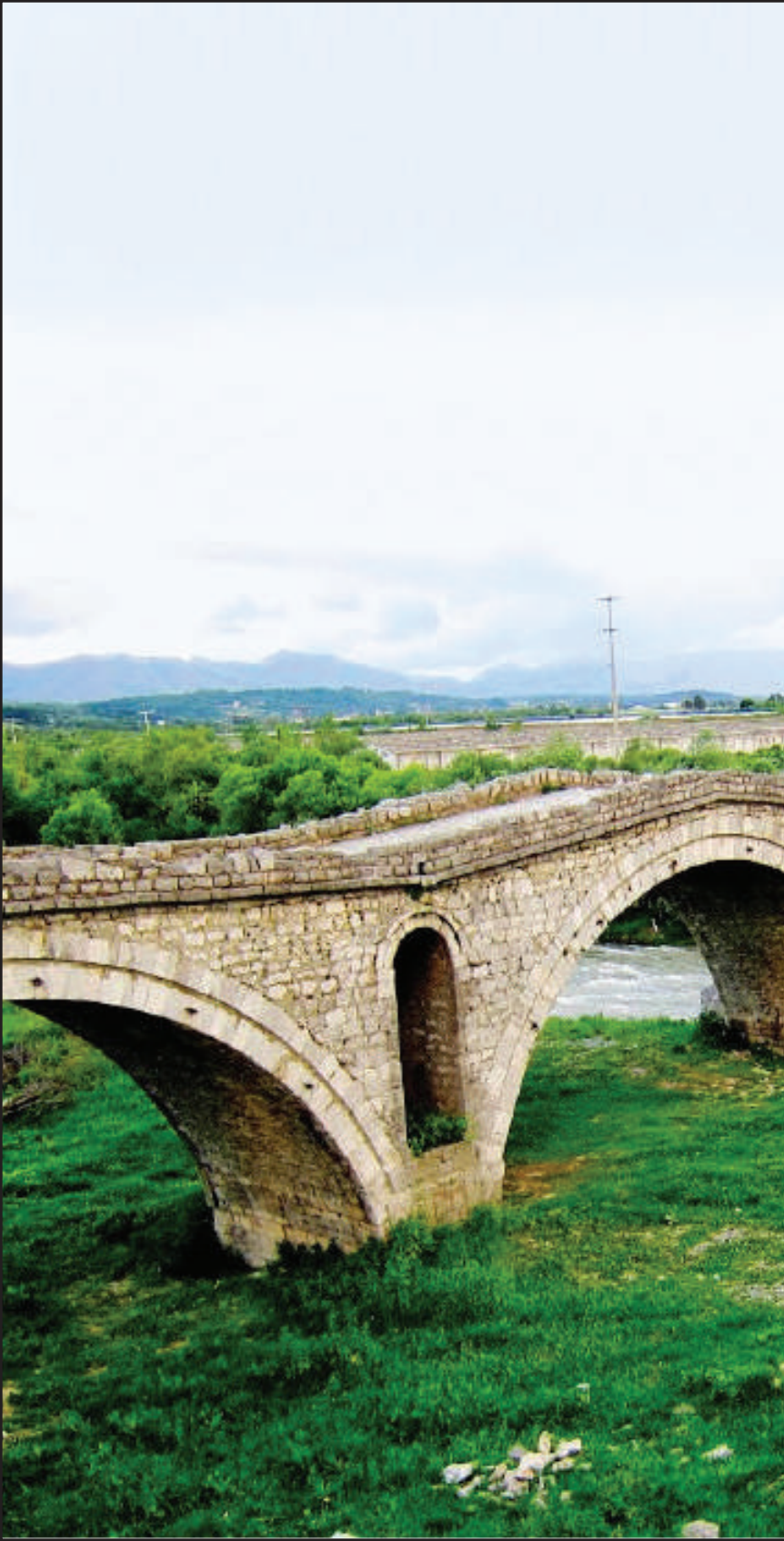


*The Naziresha Mosque*

Elbasan. This object dates back to the XVII century. The tekke building is a two-store rectangular stone wall. There is the lobby, the waiting and the conversation room, etc.

The Great Elbasan Tekke is located in the north of the city, next to Elbasan - Korça motorway, not far from Labinot Valley. It was founded by Fakri Xhafa i Babai on March 19 1803. The tekke was burned by the rebels of Haxhi Qamil. Its reopening came on June 14 1993 under the direction of Baba Sherif (1993-1994). The tekke has a magnificent and attractive environment with complex architecture, surrounded by decorative columns, large courtyard, and the necessary rooms, stairways to the east and southwest as well as trilling turbe dome and ornaments.

From Mirake to Urake there are several cultural monuments that are located by Via "Egnatia" like the bridge of Haxhi Beqari in





*The bridge of Terziu*



Mirakë, the Kamare bridge in Mirakë, the ruins of Skanderbeg's castle in Spatharë, the Proset's Inns in Dardha, the small town at Black Gurra in Xhyre, the ruins of the Illyrian castle in Qukës - Scanderbeg, Scanderbeg cave in Qukes, Stone Bridge in Qukes-Shkumbin, the town and walls in Berzeshtë, the seven fountains (wells) of Gjorgj Golemi in Berzeshtë.

Miraka's station is called TREIECTO, the Babje station named AD DIANAM, that of Qukës with the names IN KANDAVIE, MUTADIO IN TABERNAS and TRES TABERNAS, that of Urakë with the names PONS SERVILIUS and MAUCIO KLAUDAMON.

Along via "Egnatia" there were also some inns where we can mention Hani i Babesinn in Babje, Poporek's Inn (Dardhe) KopaçInn (Qukës-Skanderbeg).

Near Egnatia there are some old bridges like those of Golik, Terziu's bridge in Proptisht and the bridge of Nice.



*Mosque "Mbret"*



*Holy Mother church, Elbasan*

The Bridge of Golikis located in Mokra e Poshtme and it is 37 meters long and 3 meters wide. This bridge was built in the XVIII century and has come as a complete monument to the present day and was used during the Ottoman rule. It is a bridge with two semi-circular arches, and there is a sunken window between them. The bridge is built of carved stones where the lower part of the promontory looks great and works well, not only for aesthetics, but to make the structure solid and strong.



*Bridge of Golikut*





*Bridge of Terziu*



*Peqin castle*



*Road egnatia*



*Emblem on the Castle of Elbasan*



*Kisha e Shën Mërisë në Kalanë e Elbasanit*








*Bazilic of paleokristiane Bezistan*



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