ICOMOM’s definition of a cultural route is “A land, water, mixed or other type of route, which has its own specific and historic dynamics and functionality. In contrast to “tourist routes” cultural routes are neither invented nor designed.” The Via Egnatia is a superb but little known example of such route.

As one of Europe’s oldest land arteries, Egnatia covers a distance of 1,120 km (696 miles), linking Constantinople/Istanbul in the eastern Balkans to Dyrrachium/Durres on the Adriatic, and the Mediterranean to its rich and culturally diverse Balkan hinterland through a comprehensive system of north-south routes that make use of ambient terrain such as mountain passes, rivers and plains. Originally constructed by the Romans in the second century BC on a route partly developed by King Philip II of Macedon in the fourth century BC, the Via Egnatia became over time one of the most travelled European routes of trade, cultural exchange, warfare, diplomacy and pilgrimage, connecting western to southeastern Europe, and Europe to Asia and beyond. In the first century AD the Via Egnatia became intertwined with Silk Route in the heart of Chinese Empire. Due to this, it was not...
Saint Paul’s travels and the spread of Christianity in Europe, and from 330 AD with the political and cultural trajectory of Byzantium and its western and eastern neighbors. By 1501 the Byzantine Odos, as Egnatia was known, had come under Ottoman rule. Ancient, medieval and early modern cities, castles and villages, temples, churches, mosques and synagogues, bridges and inns dotted along the route speak of Europe’s shared culture and reflect the importance of Egnatia as a conduit of cross-cultural interaction and fertilization. The connections the route has been providing over time and space to communities, ideas, languages and religious practices have resulted in a wealth of tangible and intangible heritage shared among four stakeholders: Greece, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania and Turkey. The connecting routes, which are a key chapter of the story of route make Bulgaria and Serbia also custodians of this precious cultural resource.

The name of the ancient route resurfaced in 1994 following the early stages of construction of the Egnatia Odos, an ambitious project of civil engineering of some 670 km length that has transformed communications in Greece from Hebros/Maritsa/Meric River to Hegoumenitsa on the Ionian Sea. The recent completion of Egnatia Odos whose course runs in several instances parallel to the historic route on Greek soil has resulted in rescue excavations and important new finds. Yet, the historic route Egnatia remains an elusive cultural entity. Its omission from the list of Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe is indicative of this paradox. This phenomenon is due to a range of old problems and new challenges countries in South-Eastern Europe have been facing. The level of engagement in excavating, recording, preserving and promoting tangible heritage is different in every country-stakeholder. Moreover, tangible and intangible heritage and related educational and cultural initiatives have in many cases become soft targets in cyclical socio-economic and political crises that South-eastern Europe has been weathering.

The accreditation of Via Egnatia as an official European Cultural Route is one of the main goals towards which The Via Egnatia Marie Curie project has strived by providing the first diachronic study of the route in its entirety, now the theme of a forthcoming monograph. What the fellow had initially set up to do was to research the period 1204-1501; to get training in new technologies; and to apply aspects of these new technologies in the archaeological study of the route. As the project evolved it became clear that the inclusion of Egnatia’s ancient, medieval and early modern landscapes in the discussion was imperative to allow the project to illustrate the route’s specificities and dynamics and their impact on urban and monetary growth and cultural exchange. Writing about what is effectively the biography of a cultural route and its transformations requires a great degree of familiarization with the physical and historical landscapes Egnatia traversed, as well as the terrain and land and mineral resources that impacted on the growth and decline of communities and economic life. Archaeological journeys the fellow undertook from Turkey to Albania throughout 2013-2016 have been vital for mapping the route and visualizing its built environment. The rich resources of the Houghton Library at Harvard University and the Institute for Balkan Studies have complemented this portion of the project. Travelogues, architectural drawings, prints and drawings, and transcriptions of inscriptions found in early modern books have been compared against works of art once adorning Egnatia and now dispersed in private and public collections across the world. A picture of now vanished physical and urban landscapes has emerged. Another major theme of the fellow’s field work and research in 2015-2016 has been the rediscovery, reception, destruction and recording of the antique and medieval heritage of Egnatia in the late medieval and modern period. From the travels and collecting attitudes of the 15th-century Antiquary Cyriacus of Ancona to the military and archaeological presence of the Allied Armies in the area during WWI this aspect of the project has evolved into an
extensive and exciting piece of writing. Considering that aspects of Egnatia’s heritage have forever been lost because of warfare, spoliation, looting, urbanization and industrialization of the region, the reconstruction of its built landscape under the umbrella of the Marie Curie fellowship has been instrumental in creating the appropriate platform on which interregional collaboration towards Egnatia’s accreditation is now being built.

Conference initiatives, invited papers, publications and outreach activities to which the fellow has contributed during her outgoing (Harvard University, 2013-2015) and reintegration period (University of Birmingham, 2015-2016) have ignited interest in the USA and Europe in the archaeology of the Egnatian route and the preservation of its heritage. As invited speaker Dr Georganteli has delivered fifteen papers at national and international research fora in the USA, UK, Spain, Greece and Turkey. Three related peer-reviewed publications have appeared and two are forthcoming. The articles “Designing personalised itineraries for Europe’s cultural routes”, co-authored with Dr I. Koukouni in Stephanidis, C. and Antona, M. (Eds.), Universal Access to Human Computer Interaction. Universal Access to Information and Knowledge (Switzerland, 2014), 693–704; “Tailoring Lifelong Cultural Experiences” in Stephanidis, C. and Antona, M. (Eds.), Universal Access to Human Computer Interaction. Universal Access to Information and Knowledge (Switzerland, 2014), 681-92. With J. Floch, S. Jiang, X. Beltrán, I. Koukouni, B. Prados, L. M. Perez and S. de los Rios; and “From Trebizond to al-Andalus: Visualizing the Late Medieval Mediterranean”, Universal Access to Human-Computer Interaction vol. 9177 (Switzerland, 2015), 66-76 examine the role European cultural routes and sites can play in citizenship, European integration, and regional economic growth. The use of storytelling applications based on the cloud, social media and augmented reality is also discussed.

Workshops and conferences initiatives led by the fellow have focused on the gradual transformation of the Balkan landscapes as part of the story of the Eastern Mediterranean; the reception and archaeology of Egnatia’s ancient and medieval heritage by early modern travelers; and Egnatia in the digital era. In March 2015 Dr Georganteli co-organized the first Medieval Material Culture Lecture and Workshop at Harvard and contributed with a presentation on the role of textiles as precious items of trade and diplomatic exchange. The international symposium Trading Places. Byzantium and the Mediterranean World in the Later Middle Ages (Harvard, April 16 & 17, 2015) she subsequently convened explored South-Eastern Europe of the late Middle Ages as a "trading place" between Byzantine and Western Christians, Jews, and Moslems. This exploration took place in a variety of fora, and addressed an array of materials and issues (for the program see http://tradingplacesconference.org). Young and established scholars from diverse regional and disciplinary backgrounds addressed the economic, artistic, and material contours of medieval cultural exchange, and discussed digital humanities initiatives on modern Europe's heritage led by Birmingham University and Harvard University. In addition to scholarly papers, these interventions included a Coins and Seals workshop Dr Georganteli led and which introduced participants to coins and seals of medieval Byzantium and the Islamic world from the Harvard Art Museums. Select papers from the symposium are part of a volume the fellow is currently putting together.

Dr Georganteli participated in five Via Egnatia-related educational initiatives for children of primary and secondary schools in Cambridge, MA, and Thessaloniki. During her reintegration period she had the privilege to work with children age 8-15 and link the Marie Curie project to the EUforia Programme, a transnational EU-funded cultural partnership program between Greece, Hungary and Poland. Among the
outcomes of the fellow’s participation the documentary on the Hotunda temple/church/mosque stands out. The documentary, shot entirely by 6th-grade students of the Pinewood American International School of Thessaloniki, looks at one of Egnatia’s most emblematic landmarks through the children’s eyes. The documentary will be premiered in Thessaloniki’s International Film Festival in November 2016.

Training in spatial and visual technologies, digital platforms, strategies and innovation has been a major outcome of the Marie Curie project, providing the fellow with the necessary tools to take the historic Egnatian route into the digital era. To that end Dr Georganteli participated in three international congresses in digital humanities and heritage and in the Digital Strategies short course organized by the Cultural Skills Academy (The British Council & the British Arts Marketing Association, Athens, March 2016). The latter gave the fellow the opportunity to train in SEO (Search Engine Optimisation); use analytics to inform digital strategies; increase her confidence in using digital tools and channels effectively; engage new and existing audience; learn from UK experts and best practice case studies; and develop a peer support group. Content and visuals related to Via Egnatia and digital literacy have been invested on a digital initiative in collaboration with Egnatia Odos AE.

Last but not least, one of the Via Egnatia Marie Curie objectives has been the fellow’s professional progression and visibility. On the basis of her contribution to Byzantine Studies as IOF Dr Georganteli has been elected to the editorial board of the American Journal of Numismatics (American Numismatic Society); the Board of the Mary Jaharis Center for Byzantine Art and Culture, Hellenic College Holy Cross; and the expert panel of the UK Money and Medals Network. In 2014/15 she served on the Chairing Committee of the Harvard Medieval Studies Program and in August 2016 she joined Harvard University as Lecturer on Byzantine and Medieval Material Culture and Numismatics in the Department of History of Art and Architecture. In her new capacity Eurydice will continue her work on Via Egnatia’s accreditation, nurturing interregional collaborative projects and engaging the Harvard community with the archaeology and heritage of this precious European cultural route.

Last update: 11 January 2017
Record number: 193345