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Reshaping Urban Landscapes: Insight from Aeso (Isona i Conca Dellà, Catalonia, Spain)

Reconfiguración de los paisajes urbanos: el caso de Aeso (Isona i Conca Dellà, Cataluña, España)

This study examines the archaeological evidence from the Roman city of *Aeso* in northeastern *Hispania Citerior* where Republican-era public infrastructures, including multiple sections of the city wall, a tower, and a gate, were replaced by private buildings during the Imperial period. Such large-scale urban transformations were exceptional, as they involved substantial changes to the urban landscape. Parallels with other cities where earlier fortifications came to be occupied by private buildings serve to contextualise the phenomenon. This interdisciplinary analysis combining archaeological data with literary and legal sources intends to clarify the circumstances that governed these urban transformations. Its ultimate aim is to explore the potential sociopolitical, legal, and administrative contexts that enabled such changes, a subject that has to date received little attention.

Keywords: Roman archaeology, Roman law, Roman Republic, Early Roman Empire.

Este trabajo analiza evidencias arqueológicas de la ciudad romana de *Aeso*, ubicada en el noreste de *Hispania Citerior*, donde infraestructuras públicas de época republicana —incluyendo varios tramos de la muralla, una torre y una puerta— fueron sustituidas por construcciones privadas durante el período altoimperial. Transformaciones urbanas de esta magnitud resultaban excepcionales, ya que implicaban un cambio substancial en el paisaje urbano. Para contextualizar este fenómeno, establecemos paralelismos con otras ciudades donde las antiguas fortificaciones también fueron ocupadas por edificaciones privadas. Mediante la integración de datos arqueológicos con fuentes literarias y jurídicas, este análisis interdisciplinar busca esclarecer las circunstancias que regulaban estas alteraciones urbanísticas. En última instancia, nuestro objetivo es explorar los posibles escenarios sociopolíticos, jurídicos o administrativos que permitieron dichos cambios, un tema que hasta ahora ha recibido escasa atención.

Palabras clave: arqueología romana, legislación romana, República romana, Alto Imperio romano.

A case study on the occupation of public space: the Roman city of Aeso

The Roman city of *Aeso* is today partially overlain by the modern town of Isona, situated in a continental Mediterranean agricultural landscape that marks a transitional zone between the Ebro valley plain and the foothills of the Pyrenees (fig. 1). The city was established at the top of a natural terrace, a location that offered strategic defensive advantages and access to abundant water sources. The city's name derives from the earlier Iberian settlement of *eśo*, attested through coinage bearing epicoric inscriptions (Amela 2020), and was preceded by an indigenous Late Iron Age settlement that remains largely unexplored. Recent roadworks near the city uncovered evidence suggesting the presence of a possible Roman military camp (Padrós *et al.* 2016). Within the Roman city itself, several sections of the defensive wall, which was constructed between 100 and 80 BC, have been documented (Payà *et al.* 1994; Payà 2000; Garcés *et al.* 2023), and the urban perimeter has been estimated at 3.6 hectares. During the Imperial period, *Aeso* became part of the juridical *conventus* of *Tarraco*, a phase marked by urban expansion that has yet to be fully assessed (Garcés *et al.* 2022).

The city was identified in the late 18th century, thanks to substantial epigraphic evidence. However, archaeological investigations were limited to a brief period between 1986 and 1994, followed by various preventive and rescue excavations up to 2018. In that year, the University of Barcelona launched the Archaeological Research Project, which has formed part of the university's Institute of Archaeology since 2020. To date, seven areas showing Roman Republican occupation have been identified within the city and its suburban surroundings (fig. 2), in addition to several known sections of the city wall and a defensive tower (Garcés *et al.* 2023). Of these, three sites are particularly significant for this study, as they reveal a shift in land use between the Republican and Imperial periods: *Hort del Fideuer*, *Camí de la Torreta* and *Hort del Cavaller* (in Catalan, *hort* means 'orchard' and *camí* means 'road').

Hort del Fideuer is a plot located at the southeastern edge of *Aeso*, where a systematic excavation project was conducted in 1989 to assess the state of preservation of archaeological remains and the continuity of the city wall previously identified in an adjacent property (Reyes 2014a). Two test trenches were opened. Trench 1, located near the centre of the area, revealed part of a substantial building featuring a ceramic mortar

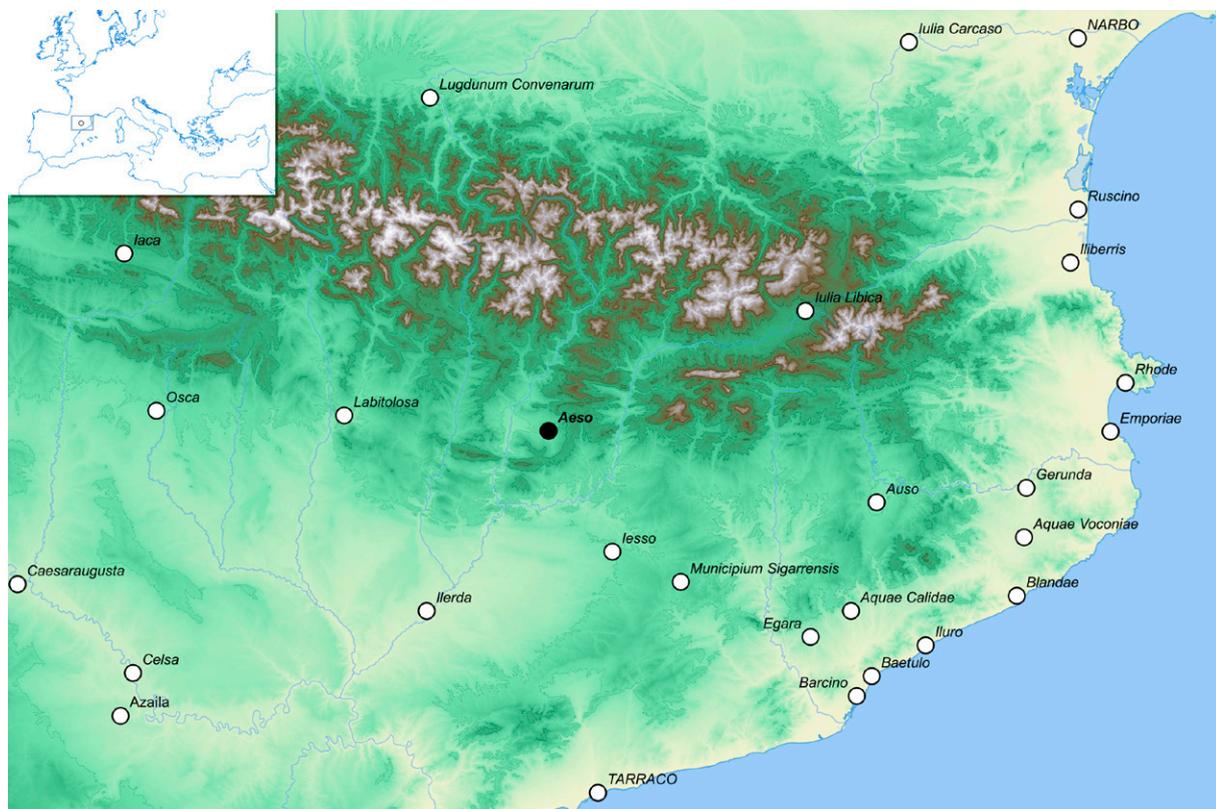


Figure 1. Location of the city of *Aeso* in relation to other Roman cities in the northeastern Iberian Peninsula. (Source: Aeso Project).

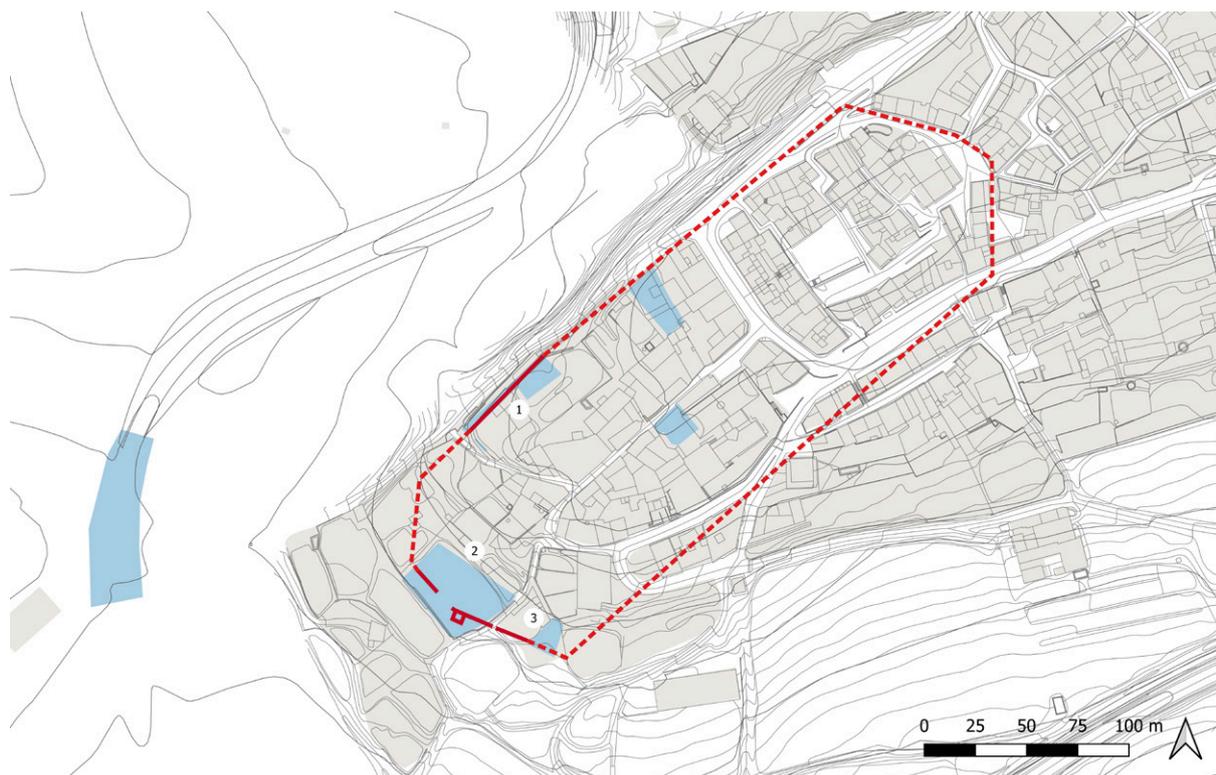


Figure 2. Areas with attested Republican-period activity, known sections of the city wall and a theoretical urban plan. Key: 1. *Camí de la Torreta*; 2. *Hort del Cavaller*; 3. *Hort del Fideuer*. (Source: Aeso Project).

floor and walls incorporating a stone curb that opened onto a paved street. The presence of construction materials such as *bipedales* (large bricks), T-shaped nails and fired clay pipes suggests that the building may have been part of a bath complex, although whether it served a public or a private function remains unclear. Importantly for the present study, this structure, which was dated between the late first century and the second third of the third century AD (Reyes 2014a), was built directly over the demolished Republican city wall (fig. 3). This clear superposition signals a decisive transformation of the urban landscape, with monumental public defenses giving way to private and/or public architecture.

Camí de la Torreta takes its name from a path adjacent to a well-known Roman structure associated with the Imperial crisis period, located at the southwestern edge of the city. An extensive archaeological excavation was carried out in this area between 1992 and 1994, which documented a stretch of approximately 50 metres of city wall, 1.5 metres wide, built with a double facing of large blocks of fossiliferous rock and limestone. The dig revealed several phases of construction and use (Payà *et al.* 1994). Phase 1 corresponds to the foundation of the wall, dated to 100–80 BC, as previously noted. After the wall was constructed, intramural terracing was carried out (Phase

2), dated to the second quarter of the first century BC. This was then overlain by a series of occupation surfaces that were not associated with any built structures (Phase 3), possibly corresponding to a road that ran along the inner side of the wall and remained in use between the final third of the first century BC and the first third of the following century. A radical transformation occurred during Phase 4, between the late first century and the early second century AD, when spaces that had previously been public were occupied by new constructions. Two walls perpendicular to the city wall were built directly on top of it, while a third wall, running parallel to the fortification, closed off the newly defined spaces from within. The resulting area, which was approximately 20 metres long, was levelled and subdivided into four regular compartments, using the city wall as the rear boundary (fig. 4). About 2.5 metres south of these compartments, three equidistant rectangular stone blocks likely served as column bases for a peristyle. Latterly, a private house was built, identified as the House of the *Antonii* based on an inscription found on site (Reyes 2014b). Although the city wall was not demolished here, as at *Hort del Fideuer* and *Hort del Cavaller* (as described below), the defensive function of the wall enclosure had apparently been compromised. At the very least, however, this section of the wall retained suf-



Figure 3. Section of the dismantled Republican-era city wall and superimposed Imperial-period building at *Hort del Fideuer*. (Source: Teresa Reyes).



Figure 4. *Casa dels Antonii* during excavation. The rear section rests atop the Republican-era wall at *Camí de la Torreta*. (Source: Teresa Reyes).

ficient strength and height to serve as a structural boundary for the *domus*.

The third and final case study concerns *Hort del Cavaller*, an extensive, municipally owned plot (fig. 5). In the earliest phase identified to date, excavations uncovered the upper section of a city wall measuring 1.8 metres in width, constructed using techniques and dimensions comparable to those documented along *Camí de la Torreta*. In this section, the wall follows two distinct orientations: northwest–southeast in its western portion and southwest–northeast in the east. At the southernmost point, a square tower (5.42 × 3.98 metres) projects outward from the wall. This tower appears to have protected the eastern side of the city’s southern gate, although the gate itself has yet to be excavated. An excavation of the

tower’s interior revealed ceramic material at its base, which was dated to the first half of the first century BC. During the Imperial period—at an as yet undetermined time—the area encompassing the gate, tower and adjacent wall underwent a radical transformation. These defensive structures were intentionally dismantled, covered with soil for levelling, and replaced by a large *domus* with a peristyle, which extended across the former fortifications. In the eastern section, a drainage channel for a small ornamental pond in the courtyard of the house was documented, its foundations resting directly atop the surviving elevation of the Republican wall. The lack of evidence for fire damage suggests a deliberate and controlled dismantling of the earlier defences, rather than their destruction through violent means.



Figure 5. Aerial view of the dismantled Republican-period wall and tower, with an overlaid Early Imperial peristyle house at *Hort del Cavaller*. (Source: Aeso Project, 2024).

Other cases of urban boundary transformation in *Hispania*

The need to determine whether spatial transformations similar to those documented at *Aeso* occurred elsewhere prompted a broad, though unavoidably non-exhaustive, survey of comparable cases where defensive walls were subsequently reoccupied.

The first case to consider is that of *Baetulo* (modern Badalona), a Mediterranean coastal city in the same province as *Aeso*, also founded in the early first century BC. Excavations conducted between 1934 and 1937 in the current Plaça de l'Assemblea de Catalunya uncovered the city's southeastern boundary (Guitart Duran 1976: 50-52). There, a 24-metre stretch of the city wall and a square tower, built with the same technique used for the wall, were documented. The tower measured 7.1 × 7.8 metres externally and 4.6 × 4.6 metres internally. It flanked a 3.35-metre wide gate, which still retained the bronze pivots on which its doors once swung, among other features. Although the excavation methods employed at the time prevent precise stratigraphic reconstruction, a later reassessment in 1976 identified three main extramural phases (Guitart Duran 1976: 136-139, 243). The first corresponds to the original Republican fortifications, while the intermediate phase, whose chronology remains unclear, indicates that the wall had lost its military function. In the third phase, a large *domus* with a peristyle—that of *Quintus Licinius*—was constructed at the end of the first century AD and partially extended over the former line of the wall.

Intensive reuse of defensive spaces is also evident at the Augustan colony of *Barcino* (modern Barcelona). Originally surrounded by a wall preceded by a *pomerium* measuring 25 *pedes*, this area began to be occupied by private buildings during the second half of the first century AD, with expansion continuing into the second century (Beltrán de Heredia 2013: 17). Various structures, including rooms adorned with wall paintings and mosaics, were found abutting the outer face of the wall in the northeastern and northwestern sections (Beltrán de Heredia 2013: 18, note 6). As discovered at *Baetulo*, the city gates appear to have been unaffected by this process.

Further south, in *Lucentum* (modern Alicante), a fortified urban nucleus of Carthaginian origin, founded in the late third century BC, was later abandoned and reoccupied. During the early or middle part of the first century BC, the old defences were repaired. This ultimately resulted in a substantial defensive circuit that constrained the layout of the new urban settlement, which received municipal status at the beginning of Augustus'

reign. Although the excavations were carried out in 1931, the data obtained demonstrated that the so-called 'House of the Peristyle' had been built across the former city wall, with evidence suggesting that the dismantling of the wall was already under way at the eastern edge of the site around the turn of the era. The *domus* remained in use at least into the second quarter of the first century AD (Olcina *et al.* 2015: 256-258).

In *Baetica, Corduba* (modern Córdoba) offers a well-documented example where the Republican city proved to be inadequate under Augustus, thus prompting major expansion work (León 1999). The southern section of the Roman wall was demolished to accommodate this expansion under imperial auspices. Relevant here, however, is the transformation of the eastern wall, where the need to reinforce the upper terrace supporting the Temple of Calle Claudio Marcelo resulted in the demolition of a portion of the defensive circuit, an operation linked to the construction of the nearby *circus* (Márquez 2005: 51).

Outside the Iberian Peninsula, there are numerous examples of defensive structures being replaced with new, primarily private, constructions. In *Pompeii*, the so-called *case a terrazza* were already being constructed over the western and southern walls by the end of the second century BC, a phenomenon that intensified during the Imperial period. In *Herculaneum*, the neighbourhood encompassing *insulae* III and IV was encroaching on the southern section of the wall and its embankment by the late first century BC. Similarly, in *Aquileia*, a *domus* was built atop the wall at the end of the first century BC or the beginning of the first century AD (Borlenghi 2016: 303). In *Mauretania Tingitana*, sections of the walls of *Volubilis* were dismantled in the middle of the second century AD (Rebuffat 1974: 510-512), while Timgad offers another parallel in *Africa*, where the destruction of the defensive circuit has been interpreted as part of a real estate development project at the end of the second century BC (Lassus 1966).

Rome itself provides the most striking examples of the occupation of defensive structures, due to the city's explosive urban growth. From the late Republic onwards, the *intervallum* of the Servian Wall was progressively encroached upon, with the *Horti Maecenatis* on the Esquiline Hill being the most notable example. Archaeological and philological evidence reveals that this vast estate incorporated a section of the Servian Wall, together with expropriated private properties and areas of land that had been used as burial sites, thus illustrating the complex legal processes involved in land reallocation (Chillet 2016: 251-253).

As these examples show, the timing of transformations affecting city walls varies considerably

from site to site; while some interventions began as early as the late second century BC, others occurred well into the second century AD. Nevertheless, most documented activity was concentrated between the final decades of the first century BC and the first half of the first century AD, a period that broadly corresponds to the transformations observed at *Aeso*.

The legality of modifying public space

The urban transformation of the city of *Aeso* may also be examined from a legal perspective, with the aim of complementing the archaeological research undertaken thus far. The recent excavations at *Hort del Cavaller* provided a clearer understanding of the chronological sequence of public and private constructions than other archaeological digs in Isona. Accordingly, this area will constitute the primary focus of this section. Two key issues merit particular attention: first, the dismantling or destruction of the Republican wall, tower and gate; and, second, the construction of a new Early Imperial *domus* on top of the area previously occupied by these defensive structures.

The first aspect of this analysis concerns the circumstances and reasons behind the removal of the defensive structures at the southwestern end of *Aeso*. One hypothesis worth considering is that both the wall and the tower had naturally deteriorated over time, and eventually fell into such disrepair that its dismantling became necessary during the Early Imperial period. However, two major objections can be raised against this interpretation. First, the robust construction of both the wall and the tower suggests that its condition should not have deteriorated to the point of requiring removal scarcely a century after they were erected. Second, as discussed below, a substantial corpus of legislation, preserved from the Late Republic period to Late Antiquity, attests to the ongoing concern of public authorities with the maintenance of both public and private buildings.

Various documents from the first centuries BC and AD, relating to municipal and colonial communities in both Italy and the provinces, such as the *lex Tarentina* ch. 4-5 (*CIL* I, 590)¹, *lex Ursonen-*

sis ch. 75; 77 (*CIL* II, 5439), *lex Malacitana* ch. 62 (*CIL* II, 1964) and *lex Irnitana* ch. 42; 82 (*CIL* II-IV, 1201), attest to the existence of legislative measures designed to regulate or guide the forms and models of intervention in urban construction. As noted by Zaccaria Ruggiu (1995: 202), this legislation was concerned primarily with ensuring that private buildings were properly maintained and enabling action to be taken against owners who neglected their properties or demolished them without any intention of rebuilding them. According to this author, the lack of distinction between different building types or between the reasons for demolition, except when reconstruction was involved, reflects the city's interest in preserving the overall integrity of its appearance.

This local legislation is consistent with various *senatus consulta* (decrees of the state) and rescripts from the first and second centuries AD that explicitly aimed to protect cities from the deterioration of buildings. This objective is evidenced in the *senatus consultum* of *Hosidianus*, under Claudius, and the *Volusianus*, under Nero (*CIL* X, 1401), which prohibited the demolition of buildings solely to profit from construction materials. It also appears in a little-known edict of Vespasian (Murga 1977), which prohibited the demolition and extraction of *marmora* for resale (*C.I.* 8,10,2). Under Hadrian, the *senatus consultum* of *Acilianus* prohibited the bequeathing of building materials contained within a structure (*HA.*, *Hadr.* 18,2; *Dig.* 30,41,1), while a later rescript from *Marcus Aurelius* and *Lucius Verus* denied a petition seeking permission to remove elements attached to a building to settle a tax debt (*Dig.* 30,41,7). In another rescript, dating to the reign of *Septimius Severus* and *Caracalla*, the removal of *marmora* from buildings was permitted only if the material was to be reused to construct a public building within the same city (*Dig.* 30,41,5; 39,2,48). Finally, an edict under *Severus Alexander* reinforced the prohibition originally issued in Vespasian's edict (*C.I.* 8,10,2).

As noted by Zaccaria Ruggiu (1995: 187-188), although no general law on urban property and its relationship to public building activity has survived, the repetition of similar legal *formulae* and the shared objectives attested in municipal legis-

1. As an example, see the *lex Tarentina* 4-5; auth. trans. based on Caballos and Colubi (2006): [4] 'No one in this city shall unroof a building belonging to this *municipium*, nor demolish or ruin it, unless it is to restore it to a condition no worse than before, except by decree of the senate. Should anyone act contrary to these provisions, for whatever value the building holds, they shall be condemned to pay that sum to the *municipium*, and any citizen who wishes shall have the right to claim said money. The magistrate who en-

forces this penalty shall allocate half to the public treasury and expend the other half on public games held during his magistracy. If he prefers to use it for a public monument, he may do so lawfully, and he shall incur no penalty for this decision. [5] If a *quattuorvir*, *duumvir*, or *aedile* wishes—for the benefit of this *municipium*—to construct, pave, enclose, alter, build, or repair public roads, ditches, or sewers within the boundaries of this *municipium*, provided it causes no harm to the community, he shall be permitted to do so.'

lation suggest the existence of a broadly applicable normative framework during certain periods. Such a general text might have been drafted by the Senate and later adopted and adapted to the specific circumstances of individual municipal statutes. In this regard, Mollá Nebot (2019: 26) has argued that the legal provisions issued under the founding charters of municipalities and colonies shared a common aim: to ensure that the buildings that made up the urban fabric were maintained, even in locations whose prominence might have made such regulations unnecessary. This, in turn, may be taken as evidence of the existence of a general principle governing urban maintenance. From a broader perspective, it suggests that allowing a constituent element of the city, such as a building, to fall into disrepair was viewed as compromising the image of the city as a whole (Zaccaria Ruggiu 1995: 216).

Given the established legislative frameworks governing the maintenance of public and private buildings, it is highly unlikely that the destruction of the fortifications in *Aeso* were the result of mere deterioration, especially since city walls were no ordinary structures. As *Gaius* (*Inst.*, 2,1,9²; *Dig.* 1,8,1) noted, a city's walls and gates were, by their very legal nature, considered *res sanctae*. The meaning of the term *sancta* has been the subject of debate, with some arguing that the sanctity of walls and gates stemmed from imperial protection³ (de Souza 2004) and others linking it to the safeguarding conferred by Etruscan-derived foundation rites (Tassi Scandone 2013; Smith and Tassi Scandone 2013; Cibotto 2005). Beyond this debate, however, several sources besides *Gaius* (*Cic. Nat. Deor.* 3,94; *Dig.* 1,8,2; 1,8,11; 43,6,2) have confirmed the sacred character of city walls. Particularly relevant, given its chronological proximity to the presumed decommissioning of the *Aeso* wall between the late first century BC and the early first century AD, is a statement by Tiberian jurist *Masurius Sabinus* (*Dig.* 1,8,8,2⁴), who asserted that the walls of *municipia* were *sanctae* and that placing anything against them was prohibited. According to Chillet (2016: 258), the *quoque* in the text refers to an original provision concerning the walls of Rome or its colonies that has not been preserved in the *Digest*. Thus,

2. *Gai.*, *Inst.* 2,8: *sanctae quoque res, velut muri et portae quodammodo divini juris sunt.*

3. Based on *Dig.* 1,8,9,4, Chillet (2016: 258) argues that, during the Imperial era, this protection would not have been limited to the walls of Rome, but extended to those of all cities.

4. *Dig.* 1,8,8,2: *In municipiis quoque muros esse sanctos, Sabinum recte respondisse Cassius refert: prohoberique oportere, ne quis in his immitteretur.*

walls were considered *sanctae*, and it was forbidden to place anything against them, let alone demolish them to make way for private structures.

It would be naïve to assume that such legislation was uniformly or rigorously applied, either in Rome itself or across the cities of the Empire. In Rome, for example, Livy (1,44,4) observed that various structures were propped up against the inner face of the Servian Wall, while a few decades later Dionysius of Halicarnassus (4,13,5) noted the difficulty of tracing the layout of the ancient fortifications due to the later addition of attached buildings. Yet the profound transformation that affected the southern section of *Aeso* went far beyond the occasional construction of buildings against the city's defences and must therefore be understood as a fundamentally different phenomenon.

Since the dismantling of the city wall does not appear to have been the result of violent actions or gradual deterioration over time, its disappearance must have been a deliberate decision taken by the Roman administration. At this point, it is important to clarify which administrative level had the authority to make such significant decisions. Epigraphic documentation from municipal contexts, attested in communities such as *Tarentum* (ch. 5), *Urso* (ch. 77; 98) and *Irni* (ch. 82⁵; 83), explicitly states that the magistrates responsible for constructing and renovating public works were local *duumviri* and *aediles*, whose actions had to be authorized by decree from *decuriones*. However, the *Digest* (50,10,6⁶) specifies that the construction, modification and demolition of city walls and gates required additional authorization from the emperor. This special provision was undoubtedly due to the importance of these defensive structures for community life and the security of the territory, but was also related to their classification as *res sanctae*, as previously mentioned. For these reasons, the possibility that the dismantling of the wall, tower and southwestern gate in *Aeso* was approved autonomously by

5. *Lex Imitana*, ch. 82: 'The duumvirs, both jointly or each individually, shall have the right and authority to construct or improve the roads, pathways, watercourses, canals, and sewers of that municipium which the duumvirs, either jointly or individually, may wish to undertake—provided it is by decree of the decurions and conscripts, within the boundaries of that municipium, and without prejudice to private interests. Whatever shall have been so constructed or improved shall be legally held and maintained in that condition.'

6. *Dig.* 50.10.6.; trans. Watson (1985): 'The deified Marcus (Aurelius) issued a rescript to the effect that if a governor was approached about public works which related to walls or gates or public harbors or if walls were being built, he must consult the emperor.'

the municipal *ordo* can be ruled out, since such an action would have required the imperial administration's approval and supervision.

The second key point of this analysis concerns the construction of the *domus* during the Early Imperial period. Such a transformation involved not only radically altering the existing structures, but also changing ownership or granting *possessio* to a private individual, as the land previously occupied by the defensive structures and city gate, once public, became the site of a private *domus*. As revealed by the archaeological excavations conducted so far, the defensive structures had already been decommissioned before the *domus* was constructed. This observation is consistent with the prohibitions set out in the *Digest* (1,8,8,2; 43,6,2–3) concerning the occupation of city walls and gates, as well as any activities that might harm or impede their use.

However, the decommissioning of defensive structures did not necessarily entail a change in land ownership. As established in the *Digest* (43,7–8), the *praetor's* interdict served to safeguard the general use of public spaces by prohibiting construction on public land (*Dig.* 43,8,1⁷) and any actions that might cause harm; specifically, those that limited the rights or benefits of private individuals in relation to the public use of space (*Dig.* 43,8,2,2; 5; 10; 11). It could be speculated that the plot left vacant after the city wall was dismantled could have been appropriated by a private individual for the construction of a dwelling. The *praetor's* interdict itself has been defined as prohibitory rather than restitutory (*Dig.* 43,8,2,17). Thus, if a building had been erected on public land without opposition, its demolition would not have been strictly necessary. In such cases, the legal text presents two alternatives: removal if the structure was impeding public use or the imposition of a tax on the plot if it was not.

The legal framework applicable to this case is determined by the location of the Early Imperial *domus*, which was built over the southern access road of the Republican-era city enclosure. As archaeological findings have confirmed, the new residence was constructed on top of the city gate and a section of the road, both inside and outside the city perimeter. This is significant, as roads enjoyed specific legal protection: rural roads (*viae rusticae*) were protected by the *praetor's* interdict, while urban roads (*viae urbanae*) fell under the jurisdiction of local magistrates (*Dig.* 43,8,2,24).

7. *Dig.* 43,8,1; trans. Watson (1985): 'The praetor forbids building in public places and makes an interdict available.'

With respect to the rural section, the *praetor's* interdict aimed to ensure 'the general use of what is public' (*Dig.* 43,7,1) by prohibiting 'any action or construction on a public road or path that might damage or eventually impair it' (*Dig.* 43,8,2,20). The text explicitly states that 'harm is understood to occur when passage is rendered impossible' (*Dig.* 43,8,2,32), as would have been the case in the area under study.

Regarding the urban section, this fell under the authority of local magistrates, who were responsible for ensuring that the integrity of urban roads was maintained by prohibiting construction and ordering demolition if necessary (*Dig.* 43,10,1–2). Crucially, the legal text specifies that 'the people cannot lose their right to a public road through disuse' (*Dig.* 43,11,2). Thus, even the abandonment of this site following the dismantling of the city wall would not have legitimized the construction of the *domus*.

The road, classified as public land (*Dig.* 43,8,2,21) along with the rest of the terrain occupied by the walls and one city gate, remained under the supervision of the provincial governor, who was responsible for ensuring that private individuals did not encroach on public space (*Dig.* 50,10,5,1).

It seems evident that constructing the Early Imperial *domus* on land previously occupied by the Republican-era city wall, tower and gate would have been at odds with the aforementioned legislation, which makes its legal justification difficult to discern. At present, the available research findings permit only tentative hypotheses.

Regarding the city wall, it is possible that its decommissioning was the result of a decision approved by the provincial and imperial administration at some point, likely during the Augustan period. As for the Early Imperial *domus*, its construction on public land would have violated urban legislation unless the status of this space had shifted from public to private or authorization had been granted through a *lex*, *senatus consultum*, imperial edict or decree (*Dig.* 43,8,2).

Conclusion

Given the complex legislative framework governing the urban transformation of *Aeso* between the Republican and Early Imperial periods, there are currently two main hypotheses.

First, it is possible that the local administration of *Aeso*, with the approval and authorization of the provincial and imperial authorities, undertook a project to redesign the southernmost urban layout during the final third of the first century BC or the first century AD. The Republican city of *Aeso* was notably compact, and its growth and legal elevation in the first century AD may have required urban

expansion beyond its original Republican boundaries. In this scenario, the partial demolition of the city's defensive structures and a change in the legal status of the public land, with imperial approval, could have made it possible to construct private buildings. Examples include the Early Imperial *domus* unearthed at *Hort del Cavaller*, which clearly encroached on public space, the *Casa dels Antonii*, whose rear section rested on top of the Republican wall, and a possible bath complex at *Hort del Fideuer*.

Alternatively, the transformation of this site might have stemmed from the community's involvement in one of the Roman civil conflicts of the first century BC. In this case, the dismantling of defensive structures might suggest Roman reprisals against *Aeso*. A comparable precedent in *Hispania* can be found in the actions of Cato the Censor in 195 BC, who allegedly imposed the demolition of fortifications as a condition of surrender (*Liv.* 34.17.11–12; *Plut., Cat. Ma.* 10.3; *App., Iber.* 41; *Polyb.* 19.1), although this event lacks archaeological corroboration. Similarly, Livy (45.34.6) recorded that *L. Aemilius Paullus* applied this practice in Epirus, though Plutarch (*Aem.* 29.4) described the destruction in broader terms, involving widespread plundering and devastation of settlements rather than the selective targeting of fortifications. It must be noted, however, that there is no direct evidence, either literary or archaeological, to confirm that *Aeso* participated in these conflicts. Nevertheless, this hypothesis gains traction when one considers that *Aeso* was the only community in northeastern *Hispania Citerior* emerging from the urban refoundation process (late second to early first century BC) that lacked privileged status, before receiving the *ius Latii* under the Flavians. This is corroborated by Augustan-era administrative documents used by Pliny the Elder (*NH* 3.23), who classified the *Aesonenses* as *stipendiarii* (for the Augustan-era provenance of Pliny's data, see Espinosa 2014: 10–14). Thus, it is plausible that support for a defeated faction led to the imposition of a non-privileged, tributary status. Such legal retaliation might have included the partial destruction of defensive infrastructure, thereby creating an open urban space that was later exploited by emerging local elites, especially after *Aeso's* elevation to a *municipium* under the Flavians, for the construction of *domus* and other buildings.

Further archaeological investigation may help determine which hypothesis carries more weight, though both must remain open at this stage.

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