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A city and its road

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12. A Town and its Road: Aeclanum on the *via Appia*

12.1. Introduction

Aeclanum lies in the district of ancient Hirpinia, a hilly region that still to this day constitutes a key corridor across the southern Apennines between the Tyrrhenian and Adriatic coasts of the Italian peninsula (Fig. 12.1). Hirpinia was gradually brought under Roman control following the construction of the *via Appia* through its heart in the 290s BC and the establishment of the colony at Beneventum, on its northern fringes, in 268 BC (on the *Hirpini*: Poccetti 2021). The earliest material culture recovered at Aeclanum dates to before this, perhaps as early as the 5th century BC, though we have only limited evidence for the character of the site prior to the 1st century BC. By this date, Aeclanum had certainly developed into an urban centre with a wall circuit. Following its capture by Sulla in 89 BC it became a Roman *municipium* and was later integrated into the *Regio II Apulia et Calabria*, as the westernmost town in the region. *Aeclanum* was promoted to colonial status relatively late, under Hadrian in AD 120 (as *Colonia Aelia Augusta Aeclanum*), and finally developed into an important Christian bishopric between the 4th and 7th centuries AD. [INSERT FIG. 12.1]

The site of Aeclanum covers *c.* 21 ha and the centre of this is now protected as a *parco archeologico* in Passo di Mirabella, within the territory of the Municipality of Mirabella Eclano (which preserves the name of the ancient town). Standing remains of substantial structures are still visible on site, though much of the town remains unexcavated. In 2016, new excavations and survey work at the site were initiated as a collaboration between the Apolline Project, the University of Edinburgh, the *Soprintendenza Archeologica, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per le Province di Salerno e Avellino* and the *Comune di Mirabella Eclano*, in association with the British School at Rome.

This paper will examine what the work at Aeclanum since 2016 reveals about the urban topography of the town and its development and relative prosperity over the *longue durée*. The *via Appia* has a key role to play in this story but so too does the position of the town in its wider landscape: Aeclanum owed its prominence not to its size but its location, as an interconnected road station and the centre of a thriving local territory (see Fig. 12.2). Aeclanum lay directly on the *via Appia*. Cicero stayed in the town twice while travelling along the *Appia* (*Att.* 7.3; 16.2), and it is listed on the Antonine Itinerary and shown on the *Tabula Peutingeriana*. The road brought a steady flow of people through the town, travellers' requirements providing opportunities for local businesses. The road also made *Aeclanum* a commercial hub for its wider territory and the most visible, and visited, centre in the local landscape. It attracted the attention of local elites keen to make their beneficence visible in the urban core, where everyone passing along the *via Appia* could witness it. As a result, Aeclanum has a monumentality and epigraphic record, disproportionate to its relatively small size (Evangelisti 2017; and on this point, Camodeca 2021, 90). [INSERT FIG. 12.2]

12.2. The lie of the land

The Apennine mountain range presents a longstanding challenge for travel across the Italian peninsula. From the broad *ager Campanus* and the plains around Vesuvius, two primary routes are available across the Apennines. The first of these is through the treacherous *Furculae Caudinae*, which were used by the *via Appia*. The second is a narrow mountain pass leading toward Abellinum, which is utilized by the modern motorway. Beyond the

formidable limestone peaks of Taburno, Partenio, and the Picentini mountains, the topography is characterized by the rivers Sabato, Calore, Ufita, Ofanto, which create valleys and many low hills, with a scattering of a few rocky peaks impeding efficient travelling. Located between the valleys of the rivers Calore and Ufita is Aeclanum. To the East of the town the landscape is dominated by the Daunian mountains, an irregularly shaped chain of hills and low mountains (on average *c.* 1000 m a.s.l.), and by the extinct volcano Vulture, before the land opens up to the extensive plains of Puglia.

In the Roman period an intricate system of roads developed to connect the two coasts of the Italian peninsula and facilitate travel across this difficult landscape. The town of Beneventum served as a primary transport hub in the west of the region. The town was a pivotal point on the *via Appia*, which then proceeds towards the South-East, passing through Aeclanum before reaching Venusia, on the edge of the plain (Fig. 12.1). The *via Traiana*, a later addition to the network, originated in Beneventum and was directed towards the North-East, passing through Aequum Tuticum before reaching Herdonia, again situated on the plain (Ceraudo 2012; 2015). The remaining components of the network consisted of secondary roads, which ran between the *via Appia* and the *via Traiana* and connected key settlements, such as the *via Herdonitana*, which connected Aeclanum to Herdonia, and the *via Aemilia*, linking Aequum Tuticum to Forum Aemilii.

Within this road network, Aeclanum was the largest town after Beneventum, from which it could be reached within two days by oxcart. The town was also well connected to several secondary routes, including a well-known drovers' path for sheep (Abete 2017, 31–34). Aeclanum's territory probably covered a sizeable portion of the territory South-East of Beneventum. The *Liber Coloniarum* (1.210.4-6 L; 2.261.5-8 L) reports the assignment of *centuriae* of 240 *iugera* (*c.* 60 ha), with a module of 20 × 24 *actus*, probably connected to the establishment of a colony under Hadrian. Based on aerial photographs and cartography, a sizeable centuriation grid (27° NE) of *c.* 15,200 ha between the rivers Calore and Ufita has been identified (Fig. 12.2, Ditaranto 2017). These *centuriae* probably only encompass a fraction of the territory of Aeclanum, which potentially reached as far as the river Calore to the West, or even beyond. This hypothesis is reinforced by the identification of material culture and pottery fabrics found in Taurasi, to the west, indicating close ties to Aeclanum rather than Abellinum. Under such circumstances, the territory of Aeclanum might have spanned 19,000–32,000 hectares.

The clay hills of this region, interlayered with volcanic debris and carved by the rivers, were perhaps as fertile in antiquity as they are today. Currently grain and vineyards cover most of the land, while olive groves are also present; forests in the territory continue to be exploited for timber, while oxen and sheep still play a prominent cultural role. While the archaeological evidence remains incomplete, it nevertheless aligns with this picture and suggests that the area achieved a measure of self-sufficiency in terms of agricultural output.

12.3. Archaeological and historical background

Prior to the 1st century BC, we know little about the settlement at Aeclanum, and it is unclear whether the *via Appia* was constructed to pass through a pre-existing foundation or whether the presence of the road encouraged occupation of the site. A small sanctuary of Mefitis just to the North of the town was probably active in the 2nd century BC and several Oscan inscriptions can be associated with it (Sgobbo 1930; Colucci Pescatori 1991, 113; Poccetti 2021, 39). Little has been found in the area of the town itself, however, other than some scattered pottery of the 5th century BC (Parise Badoni 1969, 100). Several architectural terracottas, found near the early Christian basilica at the site, used to be thought to date to the

Hellenistic period and so provide evidence for high-end building in this period (Sgobbo 1930), but they have recently be re-dated to the second half of the 1st century BC at the earliest and could be Augustan or later (Frese 2012). Terracing activity in the Roman period may well have removed early structures at Aeclanum. However, it is also possible that the site only developed an urban character in the late 2nd and 1st centuries BC, paralleling patterns elsewhere in Samnite regions (Tagliamonte 1996, 160). Isayev (2013, 21) notes that there is no mention of Aeclanum in Livy's account of the Hannibalic Wars, suggesting it did not exist or was unimportant.

Aeclanum is first mentioned in the historical sources by Appian, who documents Sulla's assault on the town in 89 BC (*B Civ.* 1.51). He tells us that the town had become a focal point of resistance to Sulla, who captured it by burning down its wooden walls. The fact that Aeclanum had a wall circuit, albeit a wooden one, indicates that the site had an urban character at this date. The town was also clearly influential in the region: Sulla makes an example of Aeclanum because he knows other towns in the region will pay attention.

The rest of what we know of 1st-century BC Aeclanum comes from the epigraphic record. Despite the punishment meted out by the Sullan forces, the town was immediately made a Roman *municipium* and inscribed in the Cornelia tribe (unlike most of the region of Hirpinia, which was enrolled in the Galeria tribe: Camodeca 2021, 92; Avagliano 2021, 330–332). This somewhat surprising turnaround in fortunes might be explained by the presence of prominent citizens of Aeclanum on the Sullan side, notably Minatus Magius, the great-grandfather of the historian Velleius Paterculus and a famous general who had raised a legion in Hirpinia in support of Sulla (Vell. Pat. 2.16.1; Salmon 1989, 232–233).

In the wake of its sack, Aeclanum experienced a wave of reconstruction, as outlined in four key inscriptions. A dominant player in this process was Gaius Quinctius Valgus, the notorious Sullan supporter (Salmon [1989, 230] calls him 'Sulla's greedy henchman'), who held various magistracies in towns across Campania, including Cassino and Pompeii, in the aftermath of the civil wars (CIL X 852 = ILS 5627 [Pompeii]; CIL X 5282 = ILLRP 565 [Cassino]). At Aeclanum he is recorded as *patronus municipii* (CIL IX 1140–1141 = ILLRP 523 = ILS 5318). This same text tells us that, along with two of the appointed *quattuorviri*, Valgus paid for the construction of new walls, gates and towers. These other *quattuorviri* were Aulus Patlacijs and Marcus Magius Syrus, the latter being probably the son of Minatus Magius, mentioned above. The second relevant inscription mentions two other individuals similarly paying for walls and towers as well (AE 1997, 393; Sgobbo 1931, 397–399, 402; Gregori and Nonnis 2013, 510, no. 22). To these two we can add a third inscription, re-used in the walls of Frigento cathedral but probably from Aeclanum, which connects Valgus also to a *forum*, *porticus*, *curia* and cistern (CIL I² 3191 = ILLRP 598). A final text notes that another *quattuorvir*, Marcus Palius, paid for another *porticus* and an arch (CIL I² 3192 = ILLRP 599). We will return to some of these individuals below. **[INSERT FIG. 12.3 AND 12.4]**

Of the various Late Republican structures mentioned epigraphically the only one that remains visible above ground is the wall circuit (marked on Fig. 12.3 and 12.4). This encloses an area of just over 21 ha and the construction technique of the walls, where it can be observed, is a crude form of limestone *opus reticulatum*, which is not inconsistent with a 1st-century BC date (Avagliano 2021, 332). Until recently the *forum* at Aeclanum – presumably the one mentioned in the inscription above, unless it was moved – was also unknown, but our geophysical survey at the site has now pinpointed a location, as will be discussed below.

We know more archaeologically about Aeclanum in the Imperial period. Most of the standing remains still visible at the site (indicated in black on Fig. 12.3) date to the 2nd century AD or later. The bulk of these were uncovered during the systematic and large-scale excavations carried out in the 1950-60s under the direction of Giovanni Onorato and then in

the following decades by Gabriella d’Henry (Onorato 1960; Colucci Pescatori, Di Giovanni 1999; Colucci Pescatori 2017). They include a residential area, comprising at least two large elite houses (the most complete the so-called ‘Casa con peristilio’: Fig. 12.3: 7), a *macellum* (Fig. 12.3: 9), bath complex (Fig. 12.3: 1), and the early Christian basilica (Fig. 12.3: 8). Industrial structures, including a kiln and a glass workshop, were added to the residential area in Late Antiquity (Lombardo 1977, 815–816). More recently, excavations along the *via Appia* to the South-East of the town have uncovered several suburban buildings and tombs (Di Giovanni 1996, 250–253; Colucci Pescatori 2017, 175; 2021, 185), as well as extensive Roman and Late Antique cemeteries (Lo Pilato 2005; Lambert *et al.* 2015). In 2005 significant work was carried out in and around the early Christian basilica (Lo Pilato 2010). And between 2006 and 2009, excavations at the entrance to the archaeological park also discovered various public structures (Fig. 12.3: 5), tentatively identified as part of a *porticus* and a *nymphaeum* and assumed therefore to be connected to the *forum*. Behind the façade of the presumed *nymphaeum* was found a headless imperial statue, thought originally to be Marcus Aurelius but now published as Domitian, as well as a series of marble architectural elements dating to the Julio-Claudian period (Mesisca, Lazzarini, Salvadori 2013; Avagliano 2017; De Simone, Russell 2019a, 337 fig. 1).

12.4. New work on the urban plan

Despite considerable excavation at the site up to 2009, there remained significant gaps in our knowledge of the urban topography of Aeclanum prior to the start of the current project. The exact course of the *via Appia* through the town had not been verified through archaeology (assumed course: Ditaranto 2013, 54 fig. 1; Lo Pilato 2019, 163 fig. 2). The layout of the wider street network had also not been clarified. The precise locations of the *forum*, of any temples or larger entertainment structures – such as theatre or amphitheatre – were also unknown. Of the structures partially uncovered during excavation, several were of uncertain function: the supposed *porticus* and *nymphaeum* complex uncovered in 2006–09, for example, and the series of rooms comprising the lower story of a building with apsidal wall adjacent to the baths. Other structures, while their function was apparent, had unclear layouts or chronological phasing and required further investigation.

Work at Aeclanum between 2016 and 2019 concentrated on a combination of targeted excavation and larger scale geophysical survey. The latter focused on three zones of the town, with a view to connecting areas of earlier interventions and understanding how the street system and built environment interacted with the unusual topography of the town (Strapazzon *et al.* 2017). Trenches were opened in four sectors, where it was thought stratified deposits could be uncovered and the phasing of structures revealed:

1. Sector A (Fig. 12.3: 4–5): the area of the structures previously described as a *porticus* and *nymphaeum* close to the entrance to the archaeological park, which we were able to identify as the location of the town’s theatre (Trenches 1 and 5);
2. Sector B (Fig. 12.3: 1–3): the northern area of the town, where the baths excavated by Onorato are located and which we refer to as the ‘North Baths’ of the town (Trenches 2–4 and 7), as well as the area to the West of these where the line of a major roadway was visible on the geophysics (Trench 12);
3. Sector C (Fig. 12.3: 6–8): the residential zone in the centre of the town, next to the modern site office, where the early Christian basilica has been excavated (Trenches 6, 8, 14–15);
4. Sector D (Fig. 12.3: 9–15): the central-southern district, where the *macellum* was located and the geophysics now enables the identification of both the *forum* and a

series of residential blocks stretching to the west (Trenches 9–11, 13, 16).

12.4.1. Site topography

Understanding the urban layout of Aeclanum is complicated by the site's topography. The town occupies the point at which a spur of land projects westwards from the main North-West/South-East ridge along which the *via Appia* ran in antiquity. The northeastern half of the town is constructed along the top of this North-West/South-East ridge, while the southern part of the town occupies the westward spur (Fig. 12.4). The northwest quarter of the town, in contrast, drops away sharply. A number of long terrace walls must have been constructed in the Roman period to ensure that the public structures built up on the top of the two ridges did not slide down the hill to the North-West. Substantial terracing can still be noticed on the site along the western side of the North Baths and the central residential sector, across which the early Christian basilica was constructed (marked on Plate 12.1). A series of at least seven large buttress walls were also added to the western side of the North Baths to mitigate slippage. A further terrace wall of some description must have run roughly East-West along the northern side of the westward projecting spur that dominates the southern half of the town (marked as a dashed line on Plate 12.1). Indeed a series of barrel vaults that are perhaps part of such a terrace are preserved in the farmhouse close to the westernmost tip of the town.

A terrace wall very likely also ran between the area of the North Baths and the central residential sector, but no traces of it survive. GPR survey of 890 m² of this area in 2016 identified evidence of substantial erosion, perhaps a landslide resulting from the collapse of this wall (Strapazzon *et al.* 2017, 244). The ends of walls can be seen on the geophysical results in this area but their full extent cannot be determined (Fig. 12.3). GPR transects carried out over the lower, northwestern portion of the town in 2017 also failed to identify any structures in this area of the town, which seems to have been covered by several metres of soil eroded from the upper terraces of the site. That there certainly were structures on at least part of this lower terrace is confirmed by excavations in 2005 to the West of the early Christian basilica, where the walls of a *domus* with painted wall plaster were uncovered (Lo Pilato 2010, 356). Currently, however, we can reconstruct little of the urban plan in this part of the town and it is even possible that parts of the steep hillside here were never built on.

12.4.2. The northern end of the town: the North Baths and a large public building

In the upper part of the town, especially in the northern, central and southern districts, the GPR survey was considerably more productive. In the northern area (Sector B), the GPR helped to clarify the arrangement of the structure(s) to the East and South of the North Baths (Fig. 12.3: 3). This complex was excavated by Onorato and probably dates to the 2nd century AD; it is the largest bathhouse in the town identified to date, covering an area of *c.* 1,400 m². To the East of the main rooms of the bathing complex the GPR indicated that there are no further structures, but rather an open space, perhaps a *palaestra*. The GPR also helped to make sense of the series of small rooms originally excavated by Onorato to the South of the baths, which are probably of the same date (Fig. 12.3: 2). Considering the topography of the site and the geophysical results it is now clear that these rooms comprise the basement story of a larger complex with a substantial apse at the centre of its western wall. At the level of the story above these small rooms the complex extended eastwards, like the baths, via an open space towards a pair of parallel North-South features, *c.* 5 m apart. This is evidently a second public building, with a substantial two-story building at its western end and an open *porticus*,

in total measuring 64×39 m (Fig. 12.5). We have previously proposed that this was a cultic complex or possibly a *gymnasium*, given the proximity of the baths (De Simone, Russell 2018). [INSERT FIG. 12.5]

12.4.3. The line of the *via Appia* and the location of the theatre

The parallel North-South features to the East of the two complexes described above mark the foundations of a *porticus*, a fact confirmed by the excavations in Trench 12 (Fig. 12.3: 3). This *porticus* ran alongside the western side of a major North-South road, identified by the GPR survey and excavated in Trench 12. The North Baths and the public building to the South of it presumably faced on to this road. The alignment and width of the road, and the presence of the *porticus* running along its western side, strongly suggest that this is the *via Appia*. Where exposed in Trench 12 the road had been stripped of its paving, but a substantial stone-built drain, its vaulted covering still intact, ran along its western edge, immediately in front of the portico (De Simone, Russell 2019a, 338–339 fig. 2).

The line of this road can be traced on the GPR as far as the northeast corner of the excavated residential sector. Here the GPR showed an area with a more irregular street network, which has been heavily damaged by deep ploughing (Strapazzon *et al.* 2017, 244). The carpark of the archaeological park also reduced the legibility of the results in this area, though to the North-West of the structures identified in 2006–09 as a *porticus* and *nymphaeum* (Fig. 12.3: 5), walls could be identified. A pair of parallel, curved walls with cross walls connecting them could be made out on the geophysics. Excavations in this area have since shown that the westernmost of these correspond to the outer wall of the *cavea* of a theatre, the stage building of which corresponds to the structure previously identified as a *nymphaeum* – the alternating *aediculae* and niches exposed in 2006–09 correspond to the façade of the *proscenium*. The architectural elements from this building, published already in 2013 and 2015, can be dated to the Julio-Claudian period (Mesisca, Lazzarini, Salvadori 2013; Mesisca 2015) and the complex seems to have remained in use until the 4th century AD (De Simone, Russell 2019b, 381–383). To judge from its plan and especially the area of its *cavea* (c. 784 m^2), the theatre was probably designed to accommodate at least 2,200 people. The line of the *via Appia* could be traced as far as the rear of the theatre, where it either continued to the South or turned towards the South-East.

12.4.4. The forum and the southern area of the town

The most detailed GPR results came from the southern half of the town, in the area to the West of the *macellum* (Fig. 12.3: 10). This is the highest point in the town and seems to have been its civic core. Just to the west of the *macellum*, the GPR revealed a large open space, 28×75 m long. A test trench on the western edge of this space showed that this was originally a paved area, though the paving has since been stripped, leaving just the preparation surface behind. Such a large paved area can only be the *forum* of Aeclanum.

The *macellum* opens off the eastern side of the *forum* and can be dated to the first half of the 2nd century AD. It has an interesting form, with a circular internal courtyard ringed by rooms; the closest parallels are from Herdonia and Alba Fucens and are of similar date (De Ruyt 1983; Russell, De Simone 2020).

To the South of the *macellum* the GPR results reveal a probable road, flanked by a *porticus* to the East of it, which delineates the rest of the eastern side of the *forum*; this might be where traffic left the *forum* to join back on to the *via Appia*. A corresponding road seems

to have run the full length of the western side of the *forum*. Along the southern edge of the *forum*, meanwhile, one side of a rectilinear building, at least as long (East-West) as the *forum* is wide, with an interior colonnade, is visible (Fig. 12.3: 11). This could be a further *porticus* or an enclosed public building, perhaps a *basilica*. The southern half of this complex lies under the modern access road that runs East-West through the site.

To the West of the *forum*, five evenly sized *insulae* were revealed. The first of these contained a small number of large buildings. The most northerly of these, which has two apsidal rooms, was probably a public bathhouse (Fig. 12.3: 12). If a *praefurnium* excavated in Trench 6 at the North end of this *insula* (which was originally interpreted as part of a domestic bath) was connected to these public baths, then this was a substantial complex, measuring c. 28 x 56 m. South of this is a rectangular structure broken up into smaller units by thin walls, perhaps foundation walls (Fig. 12.3: 13); the location of this structure would suggest either a civic or perhaps a commercial function (shops or a *horreum*?). One of the Late Republican inscriptions noted above mentions a *curia* and this would be a logical location for it, but no certain identification can be posited on the basis of the GPR alone.

The next *insula* to the West contains a series of smaller structures. The southern half of the *insula* contains a building comprising a series of small rooms around a courtyard; those on the east side measure 4 x 5.5 m. This might represent a *horreum* or other storage or commercial building, comparable to the *horrea* identified at Interamna Lirenas on the basis of the geophysical survey there (Chapter 11, this volume). The structures in the northern half of this *insula* appear to be smaller units, perhaps houses or commercial structures. The third *insula* to the West of the *forum* contains a series of buildings of similarly uncertain function, though their arrangement suggests they are not public buildings.

More can be said about the fourth and fifth *insulae* to the West of the *forum*. No remains were identified in the GPR in the northern parts of these *insulae*. This is probably because the terracing structures over which the early Christian basilica was built, just to the North, turned to the West in this area, to align with the barrel vaults described above, which are further West. If this is correct then a substantial change in elevation probably occurred two-thirds of the way through these *insulae*, the original ground surface dropping away in those areas where the GPR results trail off. Some of the buildings in this part of the town seem to have been large and might even have had a public function: a large building with a courtyard and apse visible in the South-East corner of the fourth block to the West of the *forum* is particularly noteworthy (Fig. 12.3: 14). In 2019, Trench 16 was opened to test the GPR results in this southern sector of the town (Fig. 12.3: 15). An inner room of a large residence, filled by multiple phases of collapse, was exposed. Fragments of painted plaster in the collapse suggest this was a high-end *domus*, while the ceramics show it was probably destroyed by the earthquake of AD 346. It was impossible to expose the full height of the walls, but at a depth of 3 m the top of an arch was exposed, suggesting the walls continued further down.

12.5. Developments in Late Antiquity

The discussion above reveals how much our understanding of the urban plan of Aeclanum has improved since 2016. Excavations across the site have also added chronological depth to this picture, in particular with regard to Late Antique developments.

The AD 346 earthquake mentioned above appears to have been keenly felt at Aeclanum and ushered in an era of redevelopment (on this earthquake more generally: Galadini, Galli 2004). Unlike other towns in the region, in fact, Aeclanum seems to have generally prospered in the 4th and 5th centuries, at least up until AD 472, when ash from the

so-called ‘Pollena eruption’ of Vesuvius blanketed the town. The bulk of our stratigraphic information from the excavation undertaken between 2016 and 2019 dates to the period AD 346–472. This evidence has been discussed in detail elsewhere (De Simone, Russell 2019b; Castaldo *et al.* in press), but some of the salient features of Late Antique Aeclanum bear repeating here.

The impact of the AD 346 was detected archaeologically in all of the sectors of Aeclanum investigated via excavation. However, the response to the devastation varied across the site. Several buildings excavated were evidently destroyed in AD 346 and never rebuilt; they lay as ruins or piles of rubble. This was the case with the building – perhaps a house or commercial structure – uncovered in Trench 8, to the East of the previously excavated residential sector (Fig. 12.3: 6). This building had collapsed suddenly, its wall caving in before the roof fell on it (De Simone, Russell 2018). The elite house explored in Trench 16, as noted above, also never seems to have been re-built after the middle of the 4th century AD and this might be connected to the earthquake of AD 346.

Two large public buildings that were not abandoned after AD 346, but which did change function, are the theatre and the *macellum*. The theatre was certainly no longer in use and was in the process of being spoliated when ash from the AD 472 eruption fell on Aeclanum (on the ash found during excavation: Colucci Pescatori 2017, 174). How long before this date it had stopped to function as a theatre, however, is indicated by the discovery of domestic occupation layers in the substructures of the *cavea* (those identified by the GPR survey, mentioned above; Fig. 12.3: 4). The ceramics in these layers indicate that at least by the first half of the 5th century AD the substructures of the *cavea* were being lived in, and it is possible that the building stopped functioning as a theatre proper before this time (De Simone, Russell 2019b, 381–383). This picture is partly replicated in the *macellum*, where most of the structure seems to have been given over to domestic units after the 4th century AD (Onorato 1960, 28; Lombardo 1977, 814; Tocco Sciarelli 1999, 251), with occupation lasting even after AD 472 to judge from the ceramics (Castaldo *et al.* in press). Just a single room in the North-West corner of the complex seems to have still acted as a commercial space, perhaps butcher’s shop (Russell, De Simone 2020, 372).

Alongside signs of abandonment and the shifting functions of buildings, there is also evidence for renewed investment and reconstruction at Aeclanum. The North Baths were a major recipient of this investment. New marble floors and mosaics were laid out in the 4th or 5th century AD and a new pool was added to one side of the *frigidarium*. Another structure that seems to have been reconfigured and restored in this period is the large ‘Casa con peristilio’ in the centre of the town (Fig. 12.3: 7). Excavations in 2019 here showed that several of the walls were rebuilt with re-used brick and tile in the Late Roman period (Russell, De Simone 2020) and this restoration work might well have been connected to the building of the new Christian basilica adjacent to the *domus* (Fig. 12.3: 8). This new church, in fact, was built over the intersection of the streets beyond the southwestern corner of the house; its walls probably abutted those of the house. As Lo Pilato has noted (2010, 352), the road to the West of the ‘Casa con peristilio’ was blocked off by a wall in this later period and she has suggested that these developments were part of the creation of a sort of ‘*insula episcopalis*’, centred on the new church in the town. If this is correct, then it is likely that the ‘Casa con peristilio’ was a key part of this new ecclesiastical core.

12.6. Three Observations on Urbanism at Aeclanum

12.6.1. Urban arrangement

New geophysical survey and excavation work at Aeclanum has helped to flesh out the urban plan of the site, even if very significant gaps remain. We now know where the *via Appia* entered and (approximately) left the town as well as much of its likely route through the site (Plate 12.1). The key Late Republican and Imperial-era public buildings were aligned along a central spine, determined both by the topography of the site and the presence of the *via Appia*. Moving from North to South, a visitor passing along the *via Appia* would have encountered the North Baths and the public complex adjacent to them (on their right) then the theatre (on their left). It is probable that heavy, wheeled traffic would have turned to the South-East at the theatre – in order to bypass the *forum* – but anyone continuing further South would have found the *macellum*, a second set of baths, and probably the usual array of other civic buildings. We know little about the southeastern corner of Aeclanum, but the line of the *via Appia* can be traced via older excavations out of the town in that direction.

Substantial terracing was required to produce level ground on which these various public structures were constructed. The result was that, while the monumental façade of Aeclanum was oriented primarily inwards, towards traffic along the *via Appia*, this string of public buildings would also have dominated the skyline when viewed from the valleys to the East and, especially, to the West of the town, where the Calore river ran (Fig. 12.2). The town and its key public monuments, therefore, would have been visible from much of its territory.

12.6.2. Size and status

Aeclanum was never a large urban centre. At just over 21 ha, it lies on the cusp between de Ligt's categories of 'small town' (<20 ha) and 'medium town' (20–40 ha) (de Ligt 2012, 201). If we consider Aeclanum within the wider context of the Augustan *Regiones* I–II and perform a rank-size analysis, the town can be grouped with Fabrateria Nova, Acerrae and Herdonia (<26 ha), while Telesia, Suessa, Minturnae (26–45 ha), Beneventum and Neapolis (46–85 ha), and the large centres of Aquinum and Teanum Sidicinum (86–150 ha) can be grouped together in larger size rankings. For context, these can be compared to Ostia (154 ha), Capua (182 ha), and Rome (1,270 ha). If we take a sub-regional perspective, however, in the 750,000 ha centred on Aeclanum, the largest towns were Beneventum (46 ha) and Venusia (44 ha), with Aeclanum, Abellinum, and Herdonia acting as mid-rank centres (Fig. 12.1). Much smaller towns (such as Aequum Tuticum and Compsa) as well as smaller settlements and *mansiones* were interspersed between these centres. From this more focused perspective, Aeclanum was an important centre for a wide, lightly urbanized territory.

Calculating the exact population of Aeclanum is complicated by the fact that we simply have no idea what proportion of the town was occupied by housing. The domestic structures identified to date are largely elite *domus* and we have little information about where ordinary citizens lived. It seems probable that many of the *insulae* to the South of the *forum* contained housing but we do not know whether the North-West area of the town was densely occupied or not; here the slope of the hillside now ranges between 13.5% and 15%. Despite uncertainties about the size of the inhabited area, we can estimate the urban population using density calculations derived from studies of Roman urban demography. Hanson shows that most studies of pre-industrial urbanism have identified typical population densities of between 100 and 500 inhabitants/ha (Hanson 2016, 55–66; also Wilson 2011, 176), with smaller towns tending to be less densely occupied. Hanson therefore proposes using a value of 100 inhabitants/ha for urban centres under 50 ha (Hanson 2016, 55–66). Millett has argued for 90–110 inhabitant/ha on the basis of the geophysical results at Falerii Novi (Millett 2013, 37–39), while a slightly higher average of 150 inhabitants/ha is used by de Ligt (2012, 233–235) in his analysis of central and southern Italy. If we take the area of

Aeclanum as 21 ha, a density of 100–150 inhabitants/ha would result in a population of *c.* 2,100–3,150. If the steeply sloping northwest part of the town was not occupied, we could reduce the overall area to 18 ha, resulting in a population of 1,800–2,700. Given the topography of the site, and the fact that some of it was probably not densely occupied, therefore, a population of *c.* 2,100 seems most plausible.

Despite its small size, Aeclanum was evidently a wealthy centre. Its public buildings were lavishly decorated with imported marble, which given the location of the town in the centre of the Italian peninsula, implies serious investment of capital. This is most apparent in the theatre (on the marble of which: Mesisca, Lazzarini and Salvadori 2013; Mesisca 2015), but the *macellum* and the North Baths also features marble revetment and flooring (Astolfi *et al.* in press). The site has also produced substantial quantities of statuary, including marble images of numerous emperors and members of the local elite (Avagliano 2021). Perhaps the most striking testament to the status of the town is its epigraphy. The number of inscriptions from the site – over 530 – is comparable to the total from much larger centres in the region and further South, such as Beneventum and Brundisium (Evangelisti 2017, 48–50). In a local context, it is particularly noteworthy that Aeclanum has produced roughly three times the number of inscriptions as Abellinum (a towns that had become a colony over 200 years earlier) and far more 2nd-3rd century AD inscriptions, in particular, are known from Aeclanum than Abellinum (Camodeca 2021, 90, 93).

Strikingly, investment in Aeclanum continued into Late Antiquity, when the town maintained the status it had enjoyed earlier. After the 3rd century AD, new investments came primarily via the *correctores*, the governors of *Apulia et Calabria*. But one final flourish of civic investment was provided, probably in the aftermath of the AD 346 earthquake, by one Umbonius Mannachus, who was honoured as *patronus* and *fabricator ex maxima parte etiam civitatis nostrae* (CIL IX 1362). New investment can be traced archaeologically on the site and fits into a wider pattern. We can compare the work carried out on the North Baths in the 4th century AD, for example, with the re-building of baths at other sites in central Italy in this period, largely funded by governors (Ward-Perkins 1984, 20–27; Soricelli 2009, 251–254; Christie 2006, 199; Underwood 2019, 39–41; De Simone and Russell 2019b, 379). At nearby Herdonia the baths underwent a similar transformation at this date (Leone *et al.* 2009; Volpe, Goffredo 2020, 66), while those at Venusia were expanded in the 4th century AD (Marchi 2010, 2). Despite these parallels, in its immediate vicinity, there are notable differences between the changes apparent at Aeclanum after AD 346 and those at Abellinum (Camodeca 2021, 90–94). At the latter, the baths never seem to have re-opened after the AD 346 earthquake, while the large *domus* close to the town walls was broken up into smaller units, themselves mostly abandoned by AD 472 (Colucci Pescatori 1986, 126, 127–132). While the new ecclesiastical centre at Aeclanum grew up in the heart of the town, not far from the old *forum*, at Abellinum – as at Nola, to give a further example (Ebanista 2003) – religious life shifted outside the town to the church at Capo La Torre (Colucci Pescatori 2017, 169–170). Where Aeclanum became an important bishopric in southern Italy – producing the controversial Julian of Aeclanum in the early 5th century AD and sending a bishop to the Council of Constantinople as late as AD 536 (Rotili, Ebanista 2018, 54) – Abellinum struggled.

12.6.3. Territory and the members of the local elite

Aeclanum was seemingly a town that punched above its weight in terms of its public architecture and epigraphy. Where did this wealth come from? The presence of the *via Appia* must explain some of this. To some extent we might view Aeclanum as a town projected

towards the passing travellers. The North Baths and those to the West of the forum, visible on the GPR, were conveniently located, close to the line of the *via Appia*, similarly to many mansiones (Medri 2016). Beyond these public buildings, travellers would have required accommodation, food and drink, entertainment and other transport-related services.

Beyond its role as a road station, most of the wealth in the town probably derived from its territory and especially its local elites. The prominence of the latter in the Late Republican period has already been noted above. Minatus Magius had the influence and capital to raise a legion for Sulla in the 1st century BC, and his son was a prominent *quattuorvir*. While Gaius Quinctius Valgus invested heavily in the urban fabric of Aeclanum in the same period, he also seems to have benefitted from Sullan land confiscations to build up substantial estates in Hirpinia. This is a key point of Cicero's *de Lege Agraria Contra Rullum* (3.2.8), in 63 BC, in which he claims (presumably with a degree of exaggeration) that Gaius Quinctius Valgus, Publius Servilius Rullus' father-in-law, owned most of Hirpinia. Aeclanum also produced prominent members of the equestrian and senatorial classes in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, as demonstrated by inscriptions from the site (Evangelisti 2014; De Carlo 2015, 175–183). Members of these families held magistracies and invested their money in the town and were rewarded for their efforts with public honours. They presumably had large estates in the area around Aeclanum, like Valgus had before them. This was a territory rich in timber, well-suited to all cultivations, and the raising of livestock. Aeclanum, while small, was a key central place in the wider region and highly visible; it was here that the members of the local elite invested their capital in order to ensure their own prominence in the monuments of the town. The size of these monuments, notably the baths but also the theatre – which seems to have been able to seat all of the likely adult urban population, while in other towns theatres generally accommodate about a third to a half (e.g. the theatre of Pompeii seats 3,100 out of a population of c. 9,600 inhabitants) – were presumably designed with the population of the territory in mind, as well as travellers along the *via Appia*.

12.7. Conclusions

There are clear parallels between Aeclanum and other 'small towns' on major roads. We can point to Oriculum in Umbria, for instance. This small town again lay at the centre of a wealthy territory containing villa estates and was noted for its brick production and timber resources (Hay *et al.* 2013, 10, 153). Oriculum was located both on the *via Flaminia* and adjacent to the river Tiber. Like Aeclanum, the urban plan of Oriculum was heavily determined by the topography of the site, with its key public structures aligned on terraces dominating the *via Flaminia* as it passed through the town (Hay *et al.* 2013, 143). The local elites of the territory invested heavily in Oriculum despite its small size, as shown by the fact that over 20% of the urban territory is devoted to public monuments and the town has produced a disproportionate quantity of high-end sculpture. A more local parallel is provided by Herdonia, a town of broadly similar size, which owed its Imperial-era prominence to another road, the *via Traiana*. Like Aeclanum the town prospered from the 2nd century AD and a degree of vitality can be traced into the 4th century AD (Volpe 2006, 562–564; Volpe and Goffredo 2020, 66). The town again suffered in AD 346 but key structures were rebuilt or repurposed, and signs of ruralization only appear after the end of the 5th century AD (Volpe 2006, 568–570; 2014, 1049).

Fruitful comparison might also be made with cities like Carsulae and Amiternum (recent work: Whitehead 2010; Heinzelmann and Buess 2022), and a range of other small towns in Italy. These small centres, like Aeclanum, prospered primarily due to their location. Despite its sack by Sulla, the construction of the *via Traiana* in the early 2nd century AD, and

the pair of natural disasters that impacted the town in AD 346 and 472 (all events that could have negatively impact the town's development), Aeclanum remained a vital urban centre at the heart of a rich territory for at least six centuries. In the wider region, only Beneventum – which found a new lease of life under Lombard rule – shows greater continuity. Aeclanum was firmly rooted in both its fertile and potentially quite large local territory, populated by wealthy elites and agriculturally self-sufficient, as well as a diverse range of transport connections, the *via Appia* key among them. The construction of the *via Traiana* might have led to more long-distance traffic (Brundisium-Rome and *vice versa*) by-passing Aeclanum, but local and regional traffic would still have relied on the *via Appia*, while roads like the *via Herdonitana* bolstered this connectivity.

For a town so reliant on its road, it is apt that, when Aeclanum does eventually succumb and cease to function as an urban centre, its ruins are named with respect to their distance along this road. A document from the papacy of Gregory II, in the 8th century AD, describes the site simply as '*civitate diruta XV miliario apud Beneventanam civitatem*' (Kehr 1962, 106). This distance is eventually immortalised in the Medieval name for the site: Quintodecimo.

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Figure captions

Plate 12.1. Plan of *Aeclanum*, showing the results of excavation and geophysical survey alongside reconstructed plans of the known public buildings and hypothesised street network (image: G.F. De Simone).

- Fig. 12. 1. Map of the territory between *Neapolis* and *Venusia*, showing known Roman roads and cities (image: G.F. De Simone).
- Fig. 12.2. Map of the territory around *Aeclanum*, showing known Roman roads, cities, smaller sites and evidence for centuriation (image: G.F. De Simone).
- Fig. 12.3. Plan of the excavated structures and walls identified in the GPR survey in the centre of *Aeclanum* (image: G.F. De Simone).
- Fig. 12.4. View of the site of *Aeclanum* from the southwest (image: J. Souček).
- Fig. 12.5. Computer reconstruction of the possible layout of the north baths and adjacent public building at *Aeclanum* (image: J. Souček).