Augusta Praetoria (Aosta)

ANSELMO BARONI

Augusta Praetoria (modern Aosta) was founded in 25 BCE in the middle of a plain “cleaned up” of the Alpine tribe of the Salassi, after a campaign led by Aulus Terentius Varro Murena. The emperor Augustus (Imperator Caesar Augustus) founded the town as a colony of veterans from the praetorian troops, hence the name (colonia Augusta Praetoria), and it has retained this strategic role ever since. The town was included in the Augustan eleventh region. Three thousand veterans with their families were settled on the territory, but a group of defeated Salassi (the surviving majority had been deported to nearby Eporedia and sold there as slaves) soon joined the civic body as incolae. The plan of the town was typically Roman and modelled on the scheme of a legionary camp. The impressive ancient remains include a main gateway (the porta praetoria), fortification walls, a theater, and an arch of Augustus. The amphitheater, unusually located within the town walls, had been erected at the colony’s foundation when defense was a prime consideration. The road to Gaul entered the town through the porta praetoria, and then split into two main branches, both of which climbed along the Alps: the former left the town from the porta principalis sinistra and ran to the Great St. Bernard Pass (summus Peninus, or Alpis Penina); the latter ran from the porta principalis dextra up to the Little St. Bernard Pass (Alpis Graia), as stated by Pliny the Elder: “Augusta Praetoria is next to the twin gateways of the Alps, the Graia and the Penina” (HN 3.17.123).

SEE ALSO: Camps, military; Colonies, Roman Empire (west).

REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

