In the end, these three case studies clearly show the wide diversity of potential approaches to the use of spolia in late antiquity, not simply within the limited category of defensive walls, but by extension, among all structures erected by later Roman architects and builders as a whole. For in each of the examples presented above, a careful and intensive examination of the extant evidence has revealed subtle, yet unmistakable signs of both the locally determined plan of each project and at times, even the minute day to day decisions and adaptations that the process of construction inevitably entails. Together, these often overlooked details suggest that, at least in the century that followed the widespread turn to pre-existing architecture as a building material, spolia use did not follow a clear set of rules and guidelines analogous to the classical orders of earlier antiquity. Rather, the use of spolia in such great quantities was a development that required a markedly different approach to building and at this early stage in the process, it was not entirely clear what that approach should be. In many ways, the slate had been wiped clean and late antique builders faced the exciting and daunting task of developing an entirely new set of practices and procedures for dealing with stones cut for a different project altogether. The ways in which they met this challenge with a mix of traditional techniques and creative innovations stands as clear testimony to the continued strength and vitality of an era too often associated with decline.

In this context, because they are heir to building techniques extending well into pre-historic times, fortification walls built from spolia serve as a particularly good example of the ways in which each project is characterized by a unique mix of tradition and innovation. Thus, it is worthwhile to summarize the evidence of these walls before discussing the relevance of their study to that of spolia use in late antiquity in general. A quick look at the similarities among these three monuments is followed by a discussion of the walls’ important differences in terms of their use of materials and construction techniques. These regional and site-specific distinctions serve as an important corrective to the tendency to develop Mediterranean-wide typologies of spolia use in late antiquity. Even more importantly though, a consideration of these defenses as architectural works on par with all other secular and religious monuments
of the later Roman period stands as an important demonstration that the selection of structures for consideration in studies of *spolia* plays an essential role in our understanding of this interesting phenomenon. For if we accept the argument that the built environment not only reflects, but also shapes the society responsible for its creation, then it must be the case that the appearance of these civic and regional defenses was as significant, if not more so, than the churches and arches that are more commonly the subject of *spolia* studies.

**Similarities**

To begin, it is important to point out that the walls examined in these three case studies all have a number of defensive features in common. It is these shared characteristics that help to demonstrate that the late Roman fortifications at Aegina, Sparta, and Isthmia are not only part of a general response to the increasing threat of invasion in the first decades of the fifth century A.D., but also that this response was carried out in a calculated fashion that followed long-standing traditions in defensive architecture. Most importantly though, the characteristics that these three walls share in common form an important background against which to analyze the far more significant differences in construction techniques utilizing *spolia*.

First and foremost, the defenses in each example have been carefully located so as to extract the greatest advantage from the surrounding environment. This is certainly most evident in terms of the local terrain. At Isthmia and Sparta, where a defensive circuit was an entirely new creation, planners and architects were careful to position the walls at the top of any nearby incline in order to increase the height of the fortification through the natural topography. In addition, even though a relatively small section of the defensive works at Aegina are extant today, it is clear that this stretch of wall followed the northern edge of the rocky promontory overlooking the north harbor, effectively increasing its height through natural means as well. More significantly though, the placement of the defenses at Aegina directly atop pre-existing structures represents another striking similarity among the three case studies. In each example above, for those who planned the course of these walls, the built environment had become as much a strategic consideration as the natural, and in many ways it was an entirely logical step to move from one to the other. For unlike the classical and earlier periods where civic defenses were enormous circuits stretching many kilometers well outside the more densely populated urban core, the much more constricted and easily manned defenses of the later Roman era most often passed through the immediate center of a settlement.