

The lives and portraits of Rome's imperial women are well documented, yet their architectural benefactions and the politics of their patronage deserve closer scrutiny. The first decades of Augustan rule saw imperial women like Octavia and Livia working alongside their male counterparts to craft a new urban image of Rome. The rich material and literary records left by their grand commissions reveal the impact of their civic lives on the cityscape and demonstrate a shared public prominence rarely seen in the Republic. In particular Livia's architectural benefactions outnumber all other imperial women's efforts of the early empire and include a range of types: small shrines, grand temples, a portico, and even a market. Rising along the slopes of the Esquiline hill, her *aedes Concordia* and its associated *Porticus Liviae* are the best known of these monuments. A close study of this colonnaded complex raises important questions regarding women's agency, the erection of large-scale public buildings, and the place of gender in Augustan urban planning. To explore these issues, this paper focuses a gendered lens on the monument, its topographical siting, and the practices of architectural benefaction at the onset to empire.

Dedicated in 7 BCE, Livia's marble colonnade enclosed a lush, park-like setting embellished with artworks, fountains, and the shrine to Concordia. In its day, the grand complex drew special attention. Strabo, for example, placed it among the wonders of Augustus' Rome in the company of the new Julian and Augustan fora and the emperor's works on the Palatine (Strabo 5.3.8). Scholars have long acknowledged the gendered symbolism of Livia's Concordia shrine celebrating the empress's harmonious marriage with Augustus; however, gender and the monument's site along the edge of the Esquiline hill, among the narrow, maze-like streets of the working-class Subura have yet to be considered. Typically, the location is understood in terms of its transition from a site of Republican *luxuria* (as the private villa of Vedius Pollio) to one laden with Augustan values of *publica magnificentia*. Most ancient and modern accounts tell us that Augustus inherited the lands from Vedius and built the portico but put Livia's name on it. Yet nothing about this particular narrative accounts for why a woman's hand was important here (indeed, it effectively undercuts the empress's agency in a project that bore her name). What about this location attracted Livia's patronage? Drawing on archaeological and literary evidence, I demonstrate the strategic and gendered significance of this location, arguing that it places the Livian complex in relation to a ritual space and structure sacred to women by its proximity to the nearby shrine to Juno Lucina. In gendered terms, then, the Esquiline lands demanded a woman's benefaction and a gendered reading of them strongly argues for restoring to Livia an active agency that narratives of Augustus' patronage here take away.

Seen in this light, Livia's Portico, with its shrine celebrating familial harmony and marriage, can be understood to imbue this region with feminine values that complemented masculinizing themes of other Augustan monuments and their spaces, such as the emperor's forum set squarely in the civic center, a short distance away, celebrating *virtus* and war in its dedication to Mars Ultor. Through this contextual reinterpretation, the portico becomes more than an isolated example of Livia's benefaction; rather it reveals how her monument participates in a broader imperial initiative to embed the civic landscape with built symbols that reinforced a growing discourse concerning gender and its socio-political function for a government whose legitimacy drew on dynastic rather than republican ideals.