

= Aspasia =

Aspasia (/ æˈspeɪziː , æˈspeɪziː , æˈspeɪziː , æˈspeɪziː / ; Greek : Ἀσπασία ; c . 470 BC ? c . 400 BC) was an influential immigrant to Classical @-@ era Athens who was the lover and partner of the statesman Pericles . The couple had a son , Pericles the Younger , but the full details of the couple 's marital status are unknown . According to Plutarch , her house became an intellectual centre in Athens , attracting the most prominent writers and thinkers , including the philosopher Socrates . It has also been suggested that the teachings of Aspasia influenced Socrates . Aspasia was mentioned in the writing of philosophers Plato , Aristophanes , Xenophon , and other authors of the day . Though she spent most of her adult life in Greece , few details of her life are fully known . Some scholars suggest that Aspasia was a brother keeper and a prostitute . Aspasia 's role in history provides crucial insight to the understanding of the women of ancient Greece . Very little is known about women from her time period . One scholar stated that , " To ask questions about Aspasia 's life is to ask questions about half of humanity . "

= = Origin and early years = =

Aspasia was born in the Ionian Greek city of Miletus (in the modern province of Aydın , Turkey) . Little is known about her family except that her father 's name was Axiochus , although it is evident that she must have belonged to a wealthy family , for only the well @-@ to @-@ do could have afforded the excellent education that she received . Some ancient sources claim that she was a Carian prisoner @-@ of @-@ war turned slave ; these statements are generally regarded as false .

It is not known under what circumstances she first traveled to Athens . The discovery of a 4th @-@ century grave inscription that mentions the names of Axiochus and Aspasius has led historian Peter K. Bicknell to attempt a reconstruction of Aspasia 's family background and Athenian connections . His theory connects her to Alcibiades II of Scambonidae (grandfather of the famous Alcibiades) , who was ostracized from Athens in 460 BC and may have spent his exile in Miletus . Bicknell conjectures that , following his exile , the elder Alcibiades went to Miletus , where he married the daughter of a certain Axiochus . Alcibiades apparently returned to Athens with his new wife and her younger sister , Aspasia . Bicknell argues that the first child of this marriage was named Axiochus (uncle of the famous Alcibiades) and the second Aspasius . He also maintains that Pericles met Aspasia through his close connections with Alcibiades 's household .

= = Life in Athens = =

According to the disputed statements of the ancient writers and some modern scholars , in Athens Aspasia became a hetaera and probably ran a brothel . Hetaerae were professional high @-@ class entertainers , as well as courtesans . Besides displaying physical beauty , they differed from most Athenian women in being educated (often to a high standard , as in Aspasia 's case) , having independence , and paying taxes . They were the nearest thing perhaps to liberated women ; and Aspasia , who became a vivid figure in Athenian society , was probably an obvious example . According to Plutarch , Aspasia was compared to the famous Thargelia , another renowned Ionian hetaera of ancient times .

Being a foreigner and possibly a hetaera , Aspasia was free of the legal restraints that traditionally confined married women to their homes , and thereby was allowed to participate in the public life of the city . She became the mistress of the statesman Pericles in the early 440s . After he divorced his first wife (c . 445 BC) , Aspasia began to live with him , although her marital status remains disputed . Their son , Pericles the Younger , must have been born by 440 BC . Aspasia would have to have been quite young , if she were able to bear a child to Lysicles c . 428 BC .

In social circles , Aspasia was noted for her ability as a conversationalist and adviser rather than merely an object of physical beauty . Plutarch writes that despite her immoral life , friends of Socrates brought their wives to hear her converse .

= = Personal and judicial attacks = =

Though they were influential , Pericles , Aspasia and their friends were not immune from attack , as preeminence in democratic Athens was not equivalent to absolute rule . Her relationship with Pericles and her subsequent political influence aroused many reactions . Donald Kagan , a Yale historian , believes that Aspasia was particularly unpopular in the years immediately following the Samian War . In 440 BC , Samos was at war with Miletus over Priene , an ancient city of Ionia in the foot @-@ hills of Mycale . Worsted in the war , the Milesians came to Athens to plead their case against the Samians . When the Athenians ordered the two sides to stop fighting and submit the case to arbitration at Athens , the Samians refused . In response , Pericles passed a decree dispatching an expedition to Samos . The campaign proved to be difficult and the Athenians had to endure heavy casualties before Samos was defeated . According to Plutarch , it was thought that Aspasia , who came from Miletus , was responsible for the Samian War , and that Pericles had decided against and attacked Samos to gratify her .

According to some later accounts , before the eruption of the Peloponnesian War (431 BC ? 404 BC) , Pericles , some of his closest associates (including the philosopher Anaxagoras and sculptor Phidias) and Aspasia faced a series of personal and legal attacks . Aspasia , in particular , was reportedly accused of corrupting the women of Athens in order to satisfy Pericles ' perversions . According to Plutarch , she was put on trial for impiety , with the comic poet Hermippus as prosecutor . The historical nature of the accounts about these events is disputed , and apparently no harm came to her as a result .

In The Acharnians , Aristophanes blames Aspasia for the Peloponnesian War . He claims that the Megarian decree of Pericles , which excluded Megara from trade with Athens or its allies , was retaliation for prostitutes being kidnapped from the house of Aspasia by Megarians . Aristophanes ' portrayal of Aspasia as responsible , from personal motives , for the outbreak of the war with Sparta may reflect memory of the earlier episode involving Miletus and Samos . Plutarch reports also the taunting comments of other comic poets , such as Eupolis and Cratinus . According to Podlecki , Douris appears to have propounded the view that Aspasia instigated both the Samian and Peloponnesian Wars .

Aspasia was labeled the " New Omphale " , " Deianira " , " Hera " and " Helen " . Further attacks on Pericles ' relationship with Aspasia are reported by Athenaeus . Even Pericles ' own son , Xanthippus , who had political ambitions , did not hesitate to slander his father about his domestic affairs .

= = Later years and death = =

In 429 BC during the Plague of Athens , Pericles witnessed the death of his sister and of both his legitimate sons , Paralus and Xanthippus , from his first wife . With his morale undermined , he burst into tears , and not even Aspasia 's companionship could console him . Just before his death , the Athenians allowed a change in the citizenship law of 451 BC that made his half @-@ Athenian son with Aspasia , Pericles the Younger , a citizen and legitimate heir , a decision all the more striking in considering that Pericles himself had proposed the law confining citizenship to those of Athenian parentage on both sides . Pericles died of the plague in the autumn of 429 BC .

Plutarch cites Aeschines Socraticus , who wrote a dialogue on Aspasia (now lost) , to the effect that after Pericles 's death , Aspasia lived with Lysicles , an Athenian strategos (general) and democratic leader , with whom she had another son ; and that she made him the first man at Athens . Lysicles was killed on expedition to levy subsidies from allies in action in 428 BC With Lysicles ' death the contemporaneous record ends . It is unknown , if she was alive when her son , Pericles , was elected general or when he was executed after the Battle of Arginusae . The time of her death that most historians give (c . 401 BC @-@ 400 BC) is based on the assessment that Aspasia died before the execution of Socrates in 399 BC , a chronology which is implied in the structure of Aeschines ' Aspasia .

= = = Ancient philosophical works = = =

Aspasia appears in the philosophical writings of Plato , Xenophon , Aeschines Socraticus and Antisthenes . Some scholars argue that Plato was impressed by her intelligence and wit and based his character Diotima in the Symposium on her , while others suggest that Diotima was in fact a historical figure . According to Charles Kahn , Professor of Philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania , Diotima is in many respects Plato 's response to Aeschines ' Aspasia .

In Menexenus , Plato satirizes Aspasia 's relationship with Pericles , and quotes Socrates as claiming ironically that she was a trainer of many orators and that since Pericles was educated by Aspasia , he would be superior in rhetoric to someone educated by Antiphon . He also attributes authorship of the Funeral Oration to Aspasia and attacks his contemporaries ' veneration of Pericles . Kahn maintains that Plato has taken from Aeschines the motif of Aspasia as teacher of rhetoric for Pericles and Socrates . Plato 's Aspasia and Aristophanes ' Lysistrata are two apparent exceptions to the rule of women 's incapacity as orators , though these fictional characters tell us nothing about the actual status of women in Athens . As Martha L. Rose , Professor of History at Truman State University , explains , " only in comedy do dogs litigate , birds govern , or women declaim " .

Xenophon mentions Aspasia twice in his Socratic writings : in Memorabilia and in Oeconomicus . In both cases her advice is recommended to Critobulus by Socrates . In Memorabilia Socrates quotes Aspasia as saying that the matchmaker should report truthfully on the good characteristics of the man . In Oeconomicus Socrates defers to Aspasia as more knowledgeable about household management and the economic partnership between husband and wife .

Aeschines Socraticus and Antisthenes each named a Socratic dialogue after Aspasia (though neither survives except in fragments) . Our major sources for Aeschines Socraticus ' Aspasia are Athenaeus , Plutarch , and Cicero . In the dialogue , Socrates recommends that Callias send his son Hipponicus to Aspasia for instructions . When Callias recoils at the notion of a female teacher , Socrates notes that Aspasia had favorably influenced Pericles and , after his death , Lysicles . In a section of the dialogue , preserved in Latin by Cicero , Aspasia figures as a " female Socrates " , counseling first Xenophon 's wife and then Xenophon himself (the Xenophon in question is not the famous historian) about acquiring virtue through self @-@ knowledge . Aeschines presents Aspasia as a teacher and inspirer of excellence , connecting these virtues with her status as hetaira . According to Kahn , every single episode in Aeschines ' Aspasia is not only fictitious but incredible .

Of Antisthenes ' Aspasia only two or three quotations are extant . This dialogue contains much slander , but also anecdotes pertaining to Pericles ' biography . Antisthenes appears to have attacked not only Aspasia , but the entire family of Pericles , including his sons . The philosopher believes that the great statesman chose the life of pleasure over virtue . Thus , Aspasia is presented as the personification of the life of sexual indulgence .

= = = Modern literature = = =

Aspasia appears in several significant works of modern literature . Her romantic attachment with Pericles has inspired some of the most famous novelists and poets of the last centuries . In particular the romanticists of the 19th century and the historical novelists of the 20th century found in their story an inexhaustible source of inspiration . In 1835 Lydia Maria Child , an American abolitionist , novelist , and journalist , published Philothea , a classical romance set in the days of Pericles and Aspasia . This book is regarded as the most successful and elaborate of the author 's productions , because the female characters , especially Aspasia , are portrayed with great beauty and delicacy .

In 1836 , Walter Savage Landor , an English writer and poet , published Pericles and Aspasia , one of his most famous books . Pericles and Aspasia is a rendering of classical Athens through a series of imaginary letters , which contain numerous poems . The letters are frequently unfaithful to actual history but attempt to capture the spirit of the Age of Pericles . Robert Hamerling is another novelist and poet who was inspired by Aspasia 's personality . In 1876 he published his novel Aspasia , a book about the manners and morals of the Age of Pericles and a work of cultural and historical

interest . Giacomo Leopardi , an Italian poet influenced by the movement of romanticism , published a group of five poems known as the circle of Aspasia . These Leopardi poems were inspired by his painful experience of desperate and unrequited love for a woman named Fanny Targioni Tozzetti . Leopardi called this person Aspasia , after the companion of Pericles .

In 1918 , novelist and playwright George Cram Cook produced his first full @-@ length play , The Athenian Women (an adaption of Lysistrata) , which portrays Aspasia leading a strike for peace . Cook combined an anti @-@ war theme with a Greek setting . American writer Gertrude Atherton in The Immortal Marriage (1927) treats the story of Pericles and Aspasia and illustrates the period of the Samian War , the Peloponnesian War and the Plague of Athens . Taylor Caldwell 's Glory and the Lightning (1974) is another novel that portrays the historical relationship of Aspasia and Pericles .

= = Fame and assessments = =

Aspasia 's name is closely connected with Pericles ' glory and fame . Plutarch accepts her as a significant figure both politically and intellectually and expresses his admiration for a woman who " managed as she pleased the foremost men of the state , and afforded the philosophers occasion to discuss her in exalted terms and at great length " . The biographer says that Aspasia became so renowned that even Cyrus the Younger , who went to war with the King Artaxerxes II of Persia , gave her name to one of his concubines , who before was called Milto . After Cyrus had fallen in battle , this woman was carried captive to the King and acquired a great influence with him . Lucian calls Aspasia a " model of wisdom " , " the admired of the admirable Olympian " and lauds " her political knowledge and insight , her shrewdness and penetration " . A Syriac text , according to which Aspasia composed a speech and instructed a man to read it for her in the courts , confirms Aspasia 's rhetorical fame . Aspasia is said by the Suda , a 10th @-@ century Byzantine encyclopedia , to have been " clever with regards to words , " a sophist , and to have taught rhetoric .

On the basis of such assessments , researchers such as Cheryl Glenn , Professor at the Pennsylvania State University , argue that Aspasia seems to have been the only woman in classical Greece to have distinguished herself in the public sphere and must have influenced Pericles in the composition of his speeches . Some scholars believe that Aspasia opened an academy for young women of good families or even invented the Socratic method . However , Robert W. Wallace , Professor of classics at Northwestern University , underscores that " we cannot accept as historical the joke that Aspasia taught Pericles how to speak and hence was a master rhetorician or philosopher " . According to Wallace , the intellectual role Aspasia was given by Plato may have derived from comedy . Kagan describes Aspasia as " a beautiful , independent , brilliantly witty young woman capable of holding her own in conversation with the best minds in Greece and of discussing and illuminating any kind of question with her husband " . Roger Just , a classicist and Professor of social anthropology at the University of Kent , believes that Aspasia was an exceptional figure , but her example alone is enough to underline the fact that any woman who was to become the intellectual and social equal of a man would have to be a hetaera . According to Sr. Prudence Allen , a philosopher and seminary professor , Aspasia moved the potential of women to become philosophers one step forward from the poetic inspirations of Sappho .

= = In art = =

The 1979 installation artwork The Dinner Party by feminist Judy Chicago has a place setting for Aspasia among the 39 figured .

= = Historicity of her life = =

The main problem remains , as Jona Lendering points out , that most of the things we know about Aspasia are based on mere hypothesis . Thucydides does not mention her ; our only sources are

the untrustworthy representations and speculations recorded by men in literature and philosophy , who did not care at all about Aspasia as a historical character . Therefore , in the figure of Aspasia , we get a range of contradictory portrayals ; she is either a good wife like Theano or some combination of courtesan and prostitute like Thargelia . This is the reason modern scholars express their scepticism about the historicity of Aspasia 's life .

According to Wallace , " for us Aspasia herself possesses and can possess almost no historical reality " . Hence , Madeleine M. Henry , Professor of Classics at Iowa State University , maintains that " biographical anecdotes that arose in antiquity about Aspasia are wildly colorful , almost completely unverifiable , and still alive and well in the twentieth century " . She finally concludes that " it is possible to map only the barest possibilities for [Aspasia 's] life " . According to Charles W. Fornara and Loren J. Samons II , Professors of Classics and history , " it may well be , for all we know , that the real Aspasia was more than a match for her fictional counterpart " .