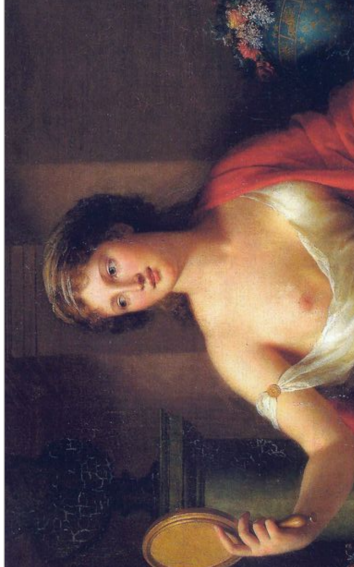


Aspasia Beyond Her Ideology: Grounding Her Historical Existence

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Marie-Genevieve Boullar 1763-1825, *Aspasia*, 1975

01. Introduction

- Aspasia of Miletus was recorded as both a sex worker and a rhetorician.
 - She was recorded as a sex worker in the comedic plays of classical Athens.
- She was recorded as a rhetorician in many Socratic texts.
- Beginning in the 1990's, there has been a resurgence in scholarship on Aspasia attempting to understand her role in antiquity.
- This scholarship emphasizes Aspasia as a rhetorician while dismissing claims of her being sex worker.
- I aim to continue the discourse of recovering Aspasia of Miletus, employing the methodology of **New Historicism**. This approach allows me to give **agency back to Aspasia** as I rely and emphasize her ability to **navigate the liminal spaces of a changing Classical Athens** and become arguably one of the most influential rhetoricians of her time.

02. Literature Review

- Madeleine Henry's** *Prisoner of History: Aspasia of Miletus and Her Biographical Tradition*
- Cheryl Glenn's** "Sex, Lies, and Manuscript: Refiguring Aspasia in the History of Rhetoric" and "Rereading Aspasia: The Palimpsest of her Thoughts"
- Susan C. Jarratt and Rory Ong's** "Aspasia: Rhetoric, Gender, and Colonial Ideology"
- Xin Liu Gale's** "Historical Studies and Postmodernism: Rereading Aspasia of Miletus"



Henry Holiday (1839-1927), *Aspasia on the Pnyx*, 1888

03. Emphasis of Previous Scholarship

- In trying to defend Aspasia against the claims that have been made against her, scholars unintentionally corroborate said claims.
- "Otherness"**
 - They emphasize Aspasia as an "Other" by being a foreigner and an "Authorized Other" by being the only woman in the Polls.
 - This raises the question of how Aspasia moved from one category to the next.
 - They emphasize Aspasia as an "Other" in relation to the men of ancient Athens and the need to look at her independently.
 - She is accomplished/known *because* of her ability to enter a sphere dominated by and made for men: the polls.
- Aspasia as a Sex Worker**
 - These scholars often feel the need to defend Aspasia against the claims of her being a sex worker.
 - This reinforces the idea that there can not be a conversation about Aspasia and her contributions to academia without addressing the issue of her being a sex worker.
 - These scholars focus on the question of whether Aspasia was a sex worker rather than how Aspasia's reputation as a sex worker influenced her rhetorical and philosophical beliefs.
 - They tie Aspasia's identity as a rhetorician and philosopher to her reputation as a sex worker rather than being *influenced* by her reputation as a sex worker.

04. A "New" Methodology: New Historicism

- New Historicism: no universal truths; you have to look at the contexts in which texts were written
- New Historicism allows scholars to move the question from "who is speaking," a question that confuses the subjects of history with the agents for history, to the question 'what play of forces made it possible for a particular speaking subject to emerge'" (Eileen E. Schell 13).
- New Historicism allows me to look at other sources such as archaeological findings and mores of ancient Athens to understand how Aspasia existed in Athens.
 - We can understand Aspasia through the relationships she had with cultural norms, laws, and customs.
- New Historicism allows for nuance to remain about who Aspasia was/how she got to that point.



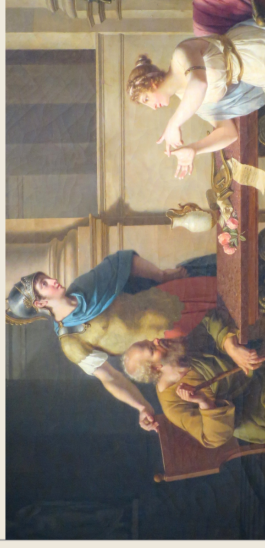
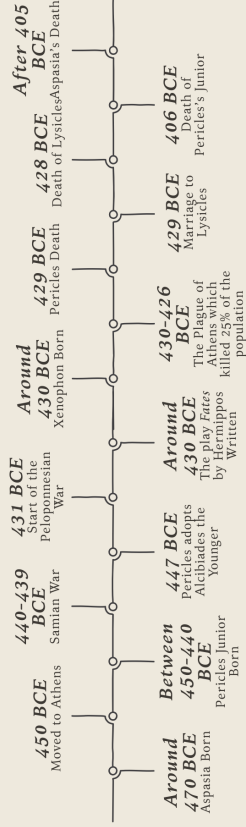
Marble Portrait Herm, Aspasia, Vatican Museums inv. 272.

06. Significance

- The connection of Aspasia as a sex worker and Aspasia as a rhetorician is only significant in so far her rhetoric was influenced by her role as a sex worker.
- Through New Historicism, Aspasia is removed from the pedestal historians place her on and emphasizes the challenges she faced.
- Ultimately, Aspasia was more than just a woman who existed to confront the patriarchal society of the past and of the present—she was a woman who took advantage of opportunities presented to her to become one of the most influential rhetoricians within the polls.

05. Aspasia through New Historicism

- With the dates that we know are relatively accurate—what are the simplest ways given the customs of ancient Athens for Aspasia to have become the woman in the polls that she became?
- Aspasia was probably educated in Miletus, thus she could have been a hetaera (because of her education) to meet Pericles, and used her knowledge and education to teach Socrates and Pericles.



Nicolas-Audre Monsiau (1754-1837), *Aspasia et Pericle*, 1801