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### **The Figure of Aspasia in First Generation Socratics: Aeschines, Antisthenes and Xenophon**

Marriage and procreation feature prominently among the topics addressed by various Socratic authors. The question of marriage was, for them, strictly linked to that of education and of the acquisition of virtue. Among the questions these authors addressed were the extent to which marriage could be an ethical relationship and, conversely, the extent to which it represents an obstacle to the acquisition of virtue; whether heterosexual eros should be included in the Socratic pedagogical use of eros for making people better or whether it only has a procreative function; and how procreation should be organized for the sake of producing natures with a potential for education and virtue.

The Socratics' views on the political and ethical import of marriage varied significantly. In Plato's dialogues, marriage and the private household tend to represent genuine challenges to the realization of ideal cities, and the identified solutions range from the radical abolition of the *oikos* for the guardians of the *Republic* to its careful political regulation in the *Laws*. By way of contrast, marriage plays a positive and properly ethical role in the works of Aeschines and Xenophon. This positive reconceptualization of marriage is underpinned by a revaluation of women's nature and, in the case of Xenophon, of the domestic sphere with its feminine tasks. Within this context, the figure of Aspasia plays an important role as an expert matchmaker and matrimonial educator.

In this paper I focus on the Socratic use of the figure of Aspasia, with reference to Antisthenes, Aeschines and Xenophon. What I want to investigate is, first, whether the Socratics accepted and employed the characterization of Aspasia as a hetaera; second, whether there was an apologetic intent in presenting her as a teacher of Socrates; third, whether there is an interrelation between Aeschines' deployment of the figure of Aspasia and the Socratic thesis that virtue is the same for

men and women and in what way this insight is connected to the reconceptualization of marriage as an educational and ethical relationship.

### *1. Aspasia the Hetaera?*

Let me begin with the vexed question of Aspasia's historical social status. We have two distinct ancient traditions offering two competing pictures. One depicts Aspasia as both a hetaera and a madam, while being romantically linked to Pericles. The other presents her as a teacher and a cultivated woman and does not make any mention of her status as a hetaera. These two distinct traditions from the Classical period are to be found in the Old Comedy and in Socratic writings respectively. Our main later sources about Aspasia's life – chapters 24 and 32 of Plutarch's *Life of Pericles*, Aspasia's biography in Harpocration's *Lexicon* and a scholium to Plato's *Menexenus* 235e – draw on these two traditions and at times combine them together.<sup>1</sup>

There are good reasons to think that Aspasia was not a hetaera at all. Some of these are presented by Peter Bicknell's study of evidence provided by a funeral monument discovered in the Piraeus and by the appearance of the rare names Axiochos and Aspasio in fourth-century Athens.<sup>2</sup> According to Bicknell, Aspasia was a free woman who entered Athens toward the mid 450s as part of the household of Alcibiades the Elder (the paternal grandfather of the infamous Alcibiades), who had married her sister. This means that Aspasia was closely related to the Alcmeonid family, and it is likely that she met Pericles through this family connection. Ancient sources agree that she was beloved by Pericles and spent several years living with him after he divorced his Athenian

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<sup>1</sup> The latter two sources draw significantly on Aeschines' lost dialogue *Aspasia*, a long excerpt of which has been preserved by Cicero in *De inventio*. Here and below, I provide the reference to the ancient source reporting the fragment or testimony and – between brackets – to Gabriele Giannantoni's edition, *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae*. Here: Cic. *De invent.* 1.31.51-53 (= VI A 70).

<sup>2</sup> Bicknell 1982.

wife. Crucially, they also report that Pericles legitimized the son he had with Aspasia after the death of his two legitimate sons and, moreover, that she legally married Lysicles after Pericles' death. She also bore Lysicles, himself a politician, a son.<sup>3</sup> Whether true or false, neither bit of information lends support to the story that Aspasia was a hetaera.

During and after Pericles' life, Aspasia became a favorite target of comic poets' vitriol. Cratinus was probably the first to attack her, but attacks are also to be found in Eupolis' *Demoi*, *Philo*, and *Prospaltioi* and in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Plutarch refers to a trial for impiety instigated by the comic poet Hermippus, who allegedly filed formal charges against Aspasia. Plutarch reports that Pericles defended her by shedding copious tears at the trial, a bit of information he claims to have learned from reports by Aeschines but which Athenaeus attributes to Antisthenes.<sup>5</sup> In Eupolis' *Demoi*, Aspasia is called πόρνη,<sup>6</sup> an abusive term that was reserved to low status prostitutes who were generally foreign slaves. Similarly, in the *Acharnians* Aristophanes suggests that she was a madam, *i.e.*, a procurer, and alleges that Pericles started the Peloponnesian War in retaliation for the kidnapping of two of her hetaerae by Megarian men.

Based on what we can gather from the available evidence, it seems that comic poets created a narrative according to which Pericles was enslaved to his erotic passion for Aspasia. In this narrative, Pericles' erotic enslavement had dire political consequences, notably Athens' involvement in the Samian and Peloponnesian wars – which Pericles allegedly started to please his mistress. Aspasia was associated with the seductive and deceptive Hera, with the man-destroying Deianira, with Omphale, the Lydian queen who enslaved Heracles, and, finally, with Helen who, with her accomplice Paris (corresponding in this context to Pericles), caused the Trojan

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<sup>3</sup> *Schol. in Plat. Menex.* 235e (= VI A 66.8-19).

<sup>4</sup> Cratinus Fr. 246-268 K-A; Eupolis Fr. 267, 192 and 110 K-A; Aristoph. *Acharn.* vv. 516-539.

<sup>5</sup> Plut. *Per.* 32.1; Ath. XIII 589 E (= V A 143)

<sup>6</sup> Eupolis Fr. 110 K-A.

War.<sup>7</sup> In all likelihood, the Old Comedy also preyed on Aspasia's foreign origin from Asia Minor as it rendered her suspect of pro-Persian sympathies and associated her with both the Great King and tyranny more generally. Attacks on Aspasia were, therefore, part of the comic poets' anti-war propaganda and opposition to Pericles' foreign policies. What the poets intimated was that Pericles' lack of self-control, evidenced in his excessive erotic passion for Aspasia, disqualified him as a political leader. Insofar as Aspasia tyrannized Pericles through eros, Pericles for his part imposed Persian tyranny over Athens as a whole.<sup>8</sup> Aspasia was an easy target for obvious reasons: born in Asia Minor, and therefore suspect of Persian sympathies, living a peculiarly love-based relationship with Pericles, and, according to Callias' *Pedetai*, engaging in intellectual activities from which Athenian women were traditionally excluded.

Socratic authors responded to the comedic vilification of Aspasia through different strategies. On the one hand, Antisthenes' *Aspasia* continued the comedic tradition of accusing Pericles of erotic enslavement and, thus, of questioning Pericles' fitness as a political leader, hence the figure of Aspasia is mobilized within the context of a polemic against Periclean democracy that generally characterized Antisthenes' work. Unfortunately, there is little information about his lost dialogue, although we do have a couple of testimonies reported by Athenaeus' *Wise Men at Dinner*. According to Athenaeus, Antisthenes argued that Pericles dismissed his wife for Aspasia, devoted himself to a life of pleasure, and wasted his property on her. According to this account, Pericles loved her excessively, kissing her twice a day upon entering and exiting the house.<sup>9</sup> These passages are Plutarch's source for his characterization of Aspasia's and Pericles' relationship as

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<sup>7</sup> See Cratinos fr. 259 K-A, Eupolis fr. 294 K-A and 267 K-A; and Schol. Mx. 235e. See also Pentassuglio 2017, pp. 125-126.

<sup>8</sup> On the association of tyranny, Lydia, and the Persian Empire see Giorgini 1993 and McGlew 1993. See also Arruzza 2018, ch. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Athen. XIII 589 E (= V A 143 SSR) and Athen. XII 533 C-D (= V A 144 SSR).

exceedingly erotic (μᾶλλον ἐρωτική).<sup>10</sup> Athenaeus also reports that Antisthenes' dialogue accused Pericles' two legitimate sons of immoral behavior.<sup>11</sup> This passage may indicate that Pericles and his progeny were the main target of the dialogue rather than the Milesian herself.<sup>12</sup> It is likely that, beyond the immediate political polemics, Antisthenes presented Pericles and Aspasia as a paradigmatic example of a life devoted to a low kind of pleasure (ἡδονή) and, therefore, as a negative ethical model.<sup>13</sup> However, as we do not have Antisthenes' dialogue and the few extant fragments are confined to his characterization of her relationship with Pericles, we have no evidence whatsoever that he also appropriated the comedic story of Aspasia as a hetaera.

On the other hand, Aeschines and Xenophon countered the comedic vilification of Aspasia by presenting her as an uncommonly intelligent woman, emphasizing her role as an expert in moral pedagogy, Gorgian rhetoric, and erotic and political matters. Quite significantly, neither of them – as I will show later – portrayed her as a hetaera. It is likely that Aeschines' and Xenophon's characterization of Aspasia was part of their apologetic enterprise: the pair countered the comedic vilification of Aspasia as a courtesan or common prostitute insofar as it risked tarnishing Socrates' reputation. On this interpretation, the Socratics perceived the negative representation of Aspasia as a danger to Socrates' own reputation. But why should have this been the case? An important piece of evidence in this regard is a fragment from an unidentified comic play associating Aspasia and Socrates. In this fragment, an unidentified speaker asks:

Do you think that hetaerae differ from sophists? ...

But we educate young men no less [than they do].

Compare, my good man, Aspasia and Socrates:

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<sup>10</sup> Plut. *Per.* 24.

<sup>11</sup> Athen. V 220 D (= V A 142).

<sup>12</sup> See Prince 2015, p. 417.

<sup>13</sup> See Ehlers 1966, p. 33.

you'll see that Pericles was the pupil of the first,  
Critias of the second.<sup>14</sup>

οἶει δ'εταίρας τὸν σοφιστὴν διαφέρειν;

παιδεύομεν δ' οὐ χεῖρον ἡμεῖς τοὺς νέους.

[6] σύγκρινον, ὦ' τάν, Ἀσπασίαν καὶ Σωκράτην:

[7] τῆς μὲν γὰρ ὄψει Περικλέα, Κριτίαν δὲ τοῦ

[8] ἑτέρου μαθητὴν.

Reference to Critias indicates that the comedy was staged after the restoration of democracy following the oligarchic coup of 404, but it is unclear whether the comedy is also later than the *sokratikoi logoi* portrayals of Aspasia, or whether its association of Socrates and Aspasia is independent of them. In the latter case, Socratic authors may have felt the need to justify the relationship between the two by defending, by the same token, Aspasia's reputation. Moreover, there are no compelling reasons to doubt that Socrates did frequent Aspasia's company. Barbara Ehlers suggests that even Antisthenes' dialogue may have offered some justification for their friendship. This may be shown by a reference to Socrates' conversation with Aspasia's flute girl in Athenaeus 220e, which may have been taken, like much of the rest, from Antisthenes' dialogue. On this reading, the apologetic argument could have revolved around the fact that Socrates' interactions with Aspasia and her flute girl were not driven or governed by pleasure.<sup>15</sup>

It is quite significant that neither Aeschines nor Xenophon deny that Socrates frequented Aspasia and rather choose to rescue her reputation by emphasizing her wisdom. By way of contrast, Xenophon adopts the opposite strategy in his handling of Socrates' dangerous associations with Alcibiades and Critias, as in the *Memorabilia* he denies that the latter were proper students of

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<sup>14</sup> Adesp. Com. Fr. 121.122 C.A.F. III p. 431 (= I A 16 SSR).

<sup>15</sup> Ehlers 1966, p. 31.

Socrates and downplays their intimacy.<sup>16</sup> Thus, Xenophon believed he could make a credible apology for Socrates by portraying Aspasia as a virtuous matchmaker.

In Plutarch's *Life of Pericles*, which offers the most extensive discussion we have of Aspasia's life, the two competing classical traditions discussed above are mixed together: on the one hand, we find the Aspasia depicted by the Old Comedy, a courtesan and procurer of prostitutes who, through her proxy Pericles, instigated the Samian War (24.1); on the other hand, we find the Aspasia depicted by Aeschines, Xenophon, and Plato, a σοφή who taught politics and rhetoric and with whom Socrates gladly conversed. The uneasiness of the combination of these two distinct traditions is evident at 24.3, where Plutarch writes that Socrates sometimes went to visit her and encouraged his friends to bring their wives to her *even though* (καίπερ) *she ran a disreputable business*, namely a house of young hetaerae:

Some say that Pericles' enthusiasm for Aspasia was because of her wisdom and political expertise; witness the fact that sometimes Socrates used to visit her, with his associates, and his companions brought their wives in to her to listen, even though the business she presided over wasn't decent, or respectable – grooming young girls as prostitutes (transl. Boys-Stones & Rowe).

τὴν δ' Ἀσπασίαν οἱ μὲν ὡς σοφὴν τινα καὶ πολιτικὴν ὑπὸ τοῦ Περικλέους σπουδασθῆναι λέγουσι· καὶ γὰρ Σωκράτης ἔστιν ὅτε μετὰ τῶν γνωρίμων ἐφοίτα, καὶ τὰς γυναῖκας ἀκροασομένας οἱ συνήθεις ἦγον ὡς αὐτήν, καίπερ οὐ κοσμίου προεστῶσαν ἐργασίας οὐδὲ σεμνῆς, ἀλλὰ παιδίσκας ἐταιρούσας τρέφουσιν (Plutarch, *Life of Pericles* 24.4-5 = VI A 66 SSR).

Let me now turn to an analysis of the details of Aeschines' and Xenophon's depiction of Aspasia.

## 2. *The Plot of Aeschines' Aspasia*

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<sup>16</sup> See Xenoph. *Mem.* 1.2.12-16.

Given the fragmentary state of Aeschines' dialogue, it is helpful to offer, first, a reconstruction of its structure and plot, for which I am especially indebted to Barbara Ehlers' seminal work, which remains to this date the most extensive discussion of Aeschines' dialogue.<sup>17</sup> The conversation between Callias and Socrates was occasioned by the former's request to the latter to recommend a teacher for his son Hipponicus.<sup>18</sup> Given Callias' notorious passion for the sophists (upon whom he wasted a fortune),<sup>19</sup> he likely intended to find a teacher who would educate the young Hipponicus to political ἀρετή, which included rhetorical expertise. Socrates' shocking recommendation was for Callias to send his son to Aspasia.<sup>20</sup> There are no extant fragments containing Callias' reaction to such an unconventional proposition, but from other surviving fragments we can gather that he protested that a young man could never be taught by a woman.

As for your honoring knowledge more than anything, Socrates, I hear that you frequently go out of your way to introduce young people to one teacher or another; I gather you're someone who even urges Callias to send his son to Aspasia's, the Milesian – a man, to a woman's – and that you visit her yourself, at your age, and that even she isn't a sufficient teacher for you...<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The dialogue was probably composed in the early 380s BCE. Both Ehlers (1969, p. 95) and Kahn (1994, p. 104) agree that Aeschines' dialogue was composed before Plato's *Menexenus*, which must have been written immediately after the King's Peace of 386 BCE, but Kahn also suggests that it was written after Antisthenes' *Aspasia*, probably composed around 390 BCE: this gives us the years between 390 and 386 BCE as the likely date of composition.

<sup>18</sup> See Ehlers 1966, p. 40; *contra* Natorp 1892, p. 490 and Dittmar 1912, pp. 49-50, who argued that Socrates' interlocutor was not Callias himself and that Socrates was rather reporting his conversation with Callias to another interlocutor, whose name we do not know. One of the main reasons for Natorp's and Dittmar's interpretation is the information given by Athenaeus (Athen. V220 A-B; = VI A 62), that Aeschines called Callias' father, Hipponicus, an idiot (κοῦλεμος): in their view such an insult could have not been proffered in the presence of Callias. According to Ehlers, however, given the information we have about the strained relationships between Hipponicus the Elder and Callias due to Callias' heavy spending on sophists, it is likely that the insult was proffered by Callias himself, who may have told Socrates that he wanted to have his son educated because he did not want him to become an idiot like Hipponicus the Elder.

<sup>19</sup> See Plato *Apol.* 20a-c. Plato's *Protagoras* is set in Callias' house, who is hosting Protagoras and other sophists: see *Prot.* 311a and *Prot.* 314a-316a. Plato's comedic description of this gathering had an antecedent in Eupolis' *Flatterers* (fr. 157-8 [K 146-7]), who may have staged another gathering involving Callias in the *Autolykus*. See also Nails 2002, pp. 68-74.

<sup>20</sup> Maxim. Tyr. *Philosoph.* XXXVIII 4 (= VI A 62).

<sup>21</sup> Maxim. Tyr. *Philosoph.* XXXVIII 4 (= VI A 62); translation: Boys-Stones & Rowe.



ὅτι μὲν ἐπιστήμην τιμᾶς παντὸς μᾶλλον, ὃ Σώκρατες, ἀκούω μὲν σου πολλάκις διατεινομένου, προξενουῖντος τοὺς νέους ἄλλον ἄλλω διδασκάλῳ· ὅς γε καὶ εἰς Ἀσπασίας τῆς Μιλησίας παρακελεύη Καλλία τὸν υἱὸν πέμπειν, εἰς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα, καὶ αὐτὸς τηλικούτος ὢν παρ' ἐκείνην φοιτᾶς, καὶ οὐδὲ αὕτη σοι ἀρκεῖ διδασκάλος...

The following fragments from the dialogue feature two groups of arguments. First, Socrates argues that women can be highly skilled at politics as evidenced by notable examples such as the Persian queen, Rhodogyne, and the Milesian queen of Thessaly, Thargelia. Thus, women can be teachers of political art. Secondly, Socrates demonstrates Aspasia's own pedagogical and rhetorical skills, which qualify her as an excellent teacher for the young Hipponicus.

We find information about the Rhodogyne passage in the *Anonymus de mulieribus*, which makes explicit reference to Aeschines' dialogue, and in Philostratus' *Imagines*. In the *Anonymus*, Rhodogyne is described as a courageous (ἀνδρεῖα) and formidable (φοβερά) woman, who significantly contributed to the greatness of the Persian Empire:

Rhodogyne, queen of the Persians, so Aeschines the philosopher tells us, brought the Persian kingship to the greatest of heights. So great was her courage in action, he says, and so fearsome was she, that once when she was in the middle of doing her hair, and heard that some of the nations had rebelled, she left her hair half done, and didn't finish braiding it until she had put a stop to the peoples just referred to and brought them under control. This is why a golden statue of her was put up that had half its hair braided up on the head, the other half flowing loose.

Ῥοδογύνη, ἡ Περσῶν βασιλίςσα, ὡς φησιν Αἰσχίνης ὁ φιλόσοφος, μεγίστην ἐποίησε τὴν Περσῶν βασιλείαν. οὕτως γὰρ φησιν ἀνδρείαν αὐτὴν ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις καὶ φοβεράν γενέσθαι, ὥστε ποτὲ περὶ τὴν ἄσκησιν τῶν τριχῶν οὕσαν, ἀκούσασαν ἀποστάντα τινὰ τῶν ἔθνων, ἀφιέναι μὲν ἡμιτέλεστον τὴν πλοκὴν, μὴ πρότερον δὲ ἀναπλέξασθαι πρὶν καταλαβοῦσαν ὑποτάξαι τὰ προειρημένα ἔθνη.

διὸ καὶ εἰκὼν αὐτῆς ἀνετέθη χρυσεῖα, τὰς ἡμισεῖς ἔχουσα τρίχας ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς ἀναπεπλεγμένας, τὰς δὲ ἡμισεῖς καθειμένας.<sup>22</sup>

The figure of Rhodogyne was especially inspired by the Assyrian queen, Semiramis, discussed by Ctesias in his *Persica*.<sup>23</sup> Both personified the literary type of the non-Greek warrior woman of great beauty who rejects femininity.<sup>24</sup> Two female rulers described by Herodotus – the Massagetae queen, Tomyris, and the queen of Halicarnassus, Artemisia – belonged to the same literary tradition: these antecedents may have contributed to Aeschines' invention of Rhodogyne.<sup>25</sup> Socrates' description of Rhodogyne in the dialogue must have been intended to demonstrate that at least some exceptional women are as skilled as the most valiant men at war and politics and, consequently, to refute Callias' objection that a woman could never teach a man.

However, the example of Rhodogyne had its own limitations. Rhodogyne represented an Amazon-like type of woman who rejected femininity for the sake of politics and war. In this sense, she was obviously different from Aspasia, whose unconventional erotic relationship with Pericles was common knowledge and who, as already discussed, was slandered by comedians as a hetaera or even a common prostitute. Thus, Callias may have objected that Socrates' example of the queen Rhodogyne was not relevant to the case of Aspasia. Athenaeus' report that Aeschines viewed all Ionian women as cunning (κερδαλέας) adulteresses (μοιχάδας) may refer to Callias' likely rebuttal of the Rhodogyne example in the lost sections of the dialogue.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Anon. *De mul.* 8 = VI A 63 SSR; transl. Boys-Stones & Rowe.

<sup>23</sup> Diod. 2.4-20.

<sup>24</sup> Philostrat. *Imag.* II 5 (=VI A 63) and Ehlers 1966, pp. 48-49.

<sup>25</sup> Tomyris: Hdt. 1.204-216. Artemisia: Hdt. 7.99. Atossa: Anon. *de mul.* 7.

<sup>26</sup> Athen. V220 A-B; = VI A 62. See Ehlers 1966, p. 51.

Because the figure of Aspasia was indissociable from eros, Socrates had to provide an example of a woman who used eros for political purposes and the greater good rather than pleasure or petty self-interest. The Milesian Thargelia served as such an example. It is likely that the speech about Thargelia was presented by Socrates as a speech crafted by Aspasia herself, like the funeral oration recited by Socrates in Plato's *Menexenus*. A passage from Philostratus notes that Aspasia refined Pericles' tongue in Gorgianic style and that Aeschines did not hesitate to imitate Gorgias in his speech on Thargelia. Philostratus, then, quotes the opening line of the Thargelia speech, which is filled with Gorgianic alliterations.<sup>27</sup>

Aspasia's association with Gorgianic rhetoric and the pervasive use of these devices in the Thargelia speech strongly support the notion that Socrates represented it as Aspasia's work. On such an interpretation Socrates' argumentative strategy is clear: the speech's form is an example of Aspasia's rhetorical skills in a Gorgianic style deeply admired by Callias and its content justifies the political use of eros. From what we can gather from various sources I will discuss below, Thargelia was a Milesian woman of great beauty and wit, who married the king of Thessaly Antiochos and, after his death, ruled on the region as its queen. On this account, Thargelia was a woman who rose to political influence and power through her relations to men. Her use of eros to gain political influence is, therefore, a more fitting example than Rhodogyne, for, like in the case of her fellow Milesian, Aspasia's purported political influence stemmed from her charm and her erotic relationship with Pericles.

Further fragments from Aeschines' dialogue refer to Aspasia's pedagogical skills, as exemplified by her instruction of Pericles, Lysicles, and Xenophon and his wife. We can suppose, then, that in the dialogue, after Thargelia's story Socrates proceeded to discuss Aspasia's ability as a teacher

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<sup>27</sup> Philostrat. *Epist.* LXXIII (=VI A 65); translation Benner & Foebis.

of both political rhetoric and moral virtue. The Thargelia speech's style and form demonstrated her rhetorical prowess, but it remained to be proved that, in addition to being an expert rhetorician, Aspasia could also use her expertise to make others better. This demonstration was probably effectuated through the examples of Pericles, Lysicles, and of the conversation with Xenophon and his wife.

Aeschines may have appropriated the trope of Aspasia as the teacher of Pericles from the comedy, for we have a fragment from Callias' *Pedetai* where it is claimed that Aspasia taught Pericles. In the comedy this was certainly a joke meant to ridicule Pericles, but in Aeschines' dialogue it becomes something entirely different. Pericles' political success is here presented as proof of Aspasia's capabilities as a teacher, a proof that was meant to appeal to Callias, who certainly aspired to a similar outcome for his own son. We probably must situate in this context the passage reported by Plutarch, in which Pericles sheds tears in defense of Aspasia at her trial for impiety. This episode, as noted by Ehlers, was probably meant to emphasize that Pericles cherished Aspasia's political counsel so much that he, the most self-controlled and self-composed of men, did not hesitate to resort to tears to persuade the jurors and thus save her from a conviction.<sup>28</sup> In Aeschines' dialogue, Pericles' example was followed by the story of Lysicles, whom Aspasia allegedly married after Pericles' death and who – thanks to her teachings – rose from obscurity to a role of political prominence.<sup>29</sup> It is possible that in the lost sections of the dialogue, Callias raised some doubts about Aspasia's contribution to Pericles' political success, and that Lysicles' story was meant to reinforce the point, insofar as, before marrying Aspasia, Lysicles was a mere sheep dealer, not belonging – unlike Pericles – to any illustrious Athenian political family.

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<sup>28</sup> Plut. *Per.* 32.1-5 (=VI A 67).

<sup>29</sup> Plut. *Per.* 24. 4-5 and Schol. *In Plat. Menex.* 235e (=VI A 66).

The last piece of evidence to be mentioned is the long passage from the dialogue quoted in Latin translation by Cicero in *De inventione*, where it is presented as an example of Socratic inductive method.<sup>30</sup> In this passage we find a conversation between Aspasia, Xenophon, and his wife. It is plausible that this story was intended to respond to an objection by Callias. The two examples of Pericles and Lysicles made clear that Aspasia was able to use eros in her relationship to these two men in order to make them better, perfecting their rhetorical skills and turning them into successful politicians. But the young Hipponicus could have not possibly entered this kind of relationship with a now aged Aspasia. Socrates had, therefore, to show that Aspasia was able to use eros pedagogically to improve people with whom she was not in an erotic relationship herself, hence the story of Xenophon and his wife. In this episode, indeed, Aspasia both exploits and triggers the eros between the two spouses with the aim of leading them to take care of themselves and become better people.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, while the account of Pericles and Lysicles' relation with Aspasia emphasizes her teaching skills in rhetoric and political art, - the story of Xenophon and his wife places emphasis on her role as a teacher of moral excellence.<sup>32</sup>

### *3. Is Aspasia a hetaera in Aeschines' dialogue?*

Many commentators have taken for granted that Aeschines presents Aspasia as a hetaera, but as noted by Francesca Pentassuglio, we do not have any testimony or fragment directly supporting this claim.<sup>33</sup> The only passage that may be read as a supporting piece of evidence is the one on Thargelia's story, for Plutarch presents her as a woman who had relationships with many men and

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<sup>30</sup> Cic. *Inv.* 1.51-52 (=VI A 70).

<sup>31</sup> Ehlers 1969, pp. 89-90.

<sup>32</sup> See Kahn 1994, p. 96.

<sup>33</sup> Pentassuglio 2017, p. 156.

used these relationships for political purposes. However, as I will argue now, there are good reasons to doubt that this is not the tradition about Thargelia which Aeschines uses in his dialogue. Let us examine the different sources at our disposal. The earliest writing on Thargelia about which we have any information is Hippias of Elis' *Synagoge*, of which Athenaeus gives us the only extant fragment: there, Thargelia is described as a beautiful and wise Milesian woman, who married fourteen husbands and managed to conquer cities and powerful men. The passage, however, makes no mention of her reign in Thessaly:

Thargelia of Miletus, who married as many as fourteen men, as she had a very beautiful appearance and was wise, as Hippias the sophist says in his work entitled *Collection*.<sup>34</sup>

Θαργηλία ἡ Μιλησία, ἥτις καὶ τεσσαρεσκαίδεκα ἀνδράσιν ἐγαμήθη, οὗσα καὶ τὸ εἶδος πάνυ καλὴ καὶ σοφὴ, ὥς φησιν Ἰππίας ὁ σοφιστὴς ἐν τῷ ἐπιγραφομένῳ Συναγωγῇ (Athen. Deipn. 13 608F = DK 86 B4).

Philostratus, in *Letter 73*, gives us the only direct quotation from Aeschines on Thargelia, presumably from Aspasia's speech reported by Socrates. As in the letter, Philostratus is interested in the question of Gorgianic rhetoric, we find there no further information about the queen of Thessaly:

Thargelia of Miletus came to Thessaly and was associated with Antiochus the Thessalian, king of all the Thessalians.

Θαργηλία Μιλησία ἐλθοῦσα εἰς Θετταλίαν ξυνην Ἀντιόχῳ Θετταλῷ βασιλεύοντι πάντων Θετταλῶν.

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<sup>34</sup> Hippias FGrH 6 F3= DK 86 B4; trans. Laks & Most.

The Hellenistic treatise, *Anonymus de mulieribus*, gives a report that makes no mention of Thargelia's many lovers. The entry on Thargelia is most likely dependent on Aeschines' dialogue, for the anonymous author explicitly mentions the *Aspasia* as his source for the depiction of queen Rhodogyne. According to this text, the Milesian woman married the king of Thessaly, Antiochos, and remained queen of the region for over thirty years after his death:

Thargelia of Miletus. They say that, when Antiochus was king of the Thessalians, having arrived in Thessaly she married Antiochus and, after the latter died, she reigned on Thessaly for thirty years. And the King of Persia, when he marched on Greece, received her and [then] sent her off without diminishing her.

Θαργηλία Μιλησία. Ταύτην φασὶν Ἀντιόχου βασιλεύοντος τῶν Θετταλῶν ἀφικομένην εἰς Θετταλίαν γήμασθαι Ἀντιόχῳ καὶ ἀποθανόντος ἐκείνου βασιλεῦσαι Θετταλίας ἔτη λ', καὶ τὸν Περσῶν βασιλέα, ὅτε ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἐστρατεύετο, δέξασθαι καὶ ἀποπέμψαι μηδὲν ἐλαττωθεῖσαν.<sup>35</sup>

The Anonymous' claim that Thargelia was received by Xerxes at the time of his Greek expedition indicates that the Great King considered Thargelia to be both Thessaly's legitimate ruler and powerful enough to warrant her an audience without weakening her power in any way.

Plutarch gives more details: Thargelia was a Milesian woman of great beauty and wit who became the lover of numberless powerful men. By influencing her lovers, she sowed the seeds of Persian sympathy among Greek cities and promoted allegiance to the Persian King:

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<sup>35</sup> Anon. *De mul.* 11 (= VI 64); my translation.

They say that she [Aspasia] emulated Thargelia, an Ionian woman from a previous age, by targeting the most powerful men. This Thargelia, with an attractive appearance and charm combined with cleverness, bedded a large number of Greek men, and brought all those who associated with her over to the King, sowing the seeds of Medism in their cities through them because of their power and importance.

τῶν παλαιῶν Ἰάδων ζηλώσασαν ἐπιθέσθαι τοῖς δυνατωτάτοις ἀνδράσι. καὶ γὰρ ἡ Θαρρηλία, τό τ' εἶδος εὐπρεπῆς γενομένη καὶ χάριν ἔχουσα μετὰ δεινότητος πλείστοις μὲν Ἑλλήνων συνώκησεν ἀνδράσι, πάντας δὲ προσεποίησε βασιλεῖ τοὺς πλησιάσαντας αὐτῇ, καὶ ταῖς πόλεσι μηδισμοῦ δι' ἐκείνων ὑπέσπειρεν ἀρχὰς δυνατωτάτων ὄντων καὶ μεγίστων.<sup>36</sup>

The sources' reports about Thargelia, then, present significant variations: Hippias does not mention Thargelia's reign in Thessaly and only refers to her beauty and relationships with men; both Philostratus' quote from Aeschines' dialogue and the *Anonymous de mulieribus* only mention her reign in Thessaly and marriage with Antiochos, but with no reference to her alleged relations with multiple men; Plutarch combines the two claims, about Thargelia's use of eros with men and her reign in Thessaly. Now, Plutarch's passage is often taken to be entirely based on Aeschines' dialogue, yet this is far from being clear. The section on Thargelia is part of a larger passage investigating the reasons of Aspasia's political influence, which draws on multiple sources: At 24.1 he claims that it seems (δοκεῖ) that Pericles went to war against the Samians for the sake of his mistress, but – as we have already seen – this is a claim from the Old Comedy. At 24.2, he writes that “it is agreed upon” (ὁμολογεῖται) that Aspasia was of Milesian origins and then, introducing the information about the queen of Thessaly, he writes: “they say” (φασί), which may refer to multiple traditions.<sup>37</sup> Aeschines is mentioned later, at 24.3, but only as the source of the

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<sup>36</sup> Plut. *Per.* 24.2 (= VI 64); transl. Boys-Stones & Rowe.

<sup>37</sup> See Gera 1997, p. 179-180. For the historical background of the Thargelia pro-Persian story, see Gera 1997, pp. 181-183



information about Aspasia's marriage with Lysicles after Pericles' death. If Plutarch's passage is a *pastiche* combining multiple sources, then there is no particular reason to exclude that he may have supplemented Aeschines' association between Aspasia and Thargelia with more salacious reports, probably originating from Hippias' *Synagoge*.<sup>38</sup> In this case, evidence that Thargelia was presented as a hetaera in Aeschines' dialogue is at best tenuous and the association between the two Milesian women cannot be taken as proof that Aeschines accepted the comedic misrepresentation of Aspasia as a hetaera.

Despite the impossibility of definitive proof one way or another given the dialogue's fragmentary nature, there are other reasons to believe that Aeschines' Aspasia was not a hetaera at all. First, Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* and *Memorabilia* and Plato's *Menexenus* do not mention her activity as a hetaera; second, presenting Aspasia as a hetaera would have complicated Aeschines' decision to include the episode between Aspasia, Xenophon, and his wife. As shown by Plutarch's disapproving remarks that Socrates brought his friends' wives to her even though she ran a disreputable business, associating legitimate Athenian wives with a hetaera would have been seen as scandalous. Thus, including a fictitious meeting between a hetaera and Xenophon's wife would have constituted a grave insult to Xenophon himself. Third, the dialogue's inclusion of information about Lysicles and Aspasia's son, Poristes, also seems to run against the notion that Aspasia was a hetaera in the dialogue. This problem is noted by Ehlers, who therefore tries to explain it away as a mistake in transcription: on her view, the original would likely have contained the adjective *ποριστής*, "one who provides", rather than the personal name Poristes. Accordingly, *ποριστής* probably referred to Aspasia herself but was likely misunderstood by the lexicographer as the name of her son with Lysicles. In contrast to this appeal to a transcription error, there is a more

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<sup>38</sup>According to Cataldi, Plutarch's source was probably a Hellenistic text that may have drawn on Hippias' *Synagoge*: Cataldi 2011, p. 15 and p. 17. See also Tulli 2007, p. 306.

economical solution to the problem: both the mention of Poristes and the story of Xenophon and his wife are plausible evidence that Aeschines rejected the comedic representation of Aspasia as a hetaera, and it is, moreover, quite likely that no Socratic accepted the slander. This interpretive point has some historical philosophical relevance. For example, commentators take it that Aspasia's speech in the *Menexenus* is certainly parodic, not only because of its pro-democratic content but also because of the use of a hetaera to deliver it. Others have suggested that Plato replaced Aspasia with Diotima as Socrates' teacher in erotic matters in order to avoid the attribution of his theory of philosophical eros to a hetaera.<sup>39</sup> In my view, as we have no evidence whatsoever that the Socratics shared in the comedic characterization of Aspasia as a hetaera, different reasons for the mobilization of her figure in the *Menexenus* and of that of Diotima in the *Symposium* should be explored.

#### 4. *Aspasia, the Moral Educator*

Let us now turn to the philosophical content of Aeschines' and Xenophon's discussions of Aspasia as a moral educator. Aeschines' particular choice of Aspasia may be grounded in historical facts about Aspasia's intellectual and political endowments, or it may be driven by his need to rebuke the Old Comedy's negative associations between Aspasia and Socrates. However, while apologizing for Socrates by defending Aspasia undoubtedly played a role in Aeschines' *Aspasia*, it is unlikely he decided to write a whole dialogue *merely* to defend Aspasia's reputation. Rather, other philosophical and conceptual interests were probably at stake.

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<sup>39</sup> Kahn 1994, p. 103. See also Dittmar 1912, p. 38, which makes an analogous point.

Two main interpretations of the overarching philosophical topic of the dialogue have been put forward by interpreters. On one line of interpretation, the dialogue intervened in the Socratic debate on women's nature and capabilities and, consequently, offered a discussion of the Socratic thesis that men and women have the same virtue by attributing political ἀρετή to Aspasia and by defending her capabilities as a moral educator. Aeschines' original contribution, moreover, consisted in reconceptualizing marriage, as evidenced by the story of Xenophon and his wife, and in showing that heterosexual (and not solely pederastic) eros can serve a pedagogical and moral purpose.<sup>40</sup> On the second interpretation, the examples of exceptional political women do not support the thesis that Aeschines intended to defend women's natural capabilities, for a few exceptional women's accomplishments do not demonstrate anything about the average woman.<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, the topic of the dialogue should be identified with the pedagogical function of eros: the *Aspasia* should be read in relation to the *Alcibiades*, where Socrates claims that he made the young Alcibiades better through eros.<sup>42</sup> Aeschines, therefore, appropriated comedic tropes but transfigured them to discuss the ways in which eros can lead to virtue. These comedic tropes are the depiction of Aspasia as a hetaera, her erotic influence on Pericles' politics, and, finally, the description of Aspasia as a procurer.

One of the problems with this second interpretation is that taking - Aeschines' sole or main concern to be a defense of the Socratic use of eros for pedagogical purposes fails to explain both his choice to frame this discussion as a defense of Aspasia's rhetorical, political, and pedagogic expertise as well as the great lengths Socrates takes to defend the possibility that women may excel at politics and war. Furthermore, it is not convincing that the rare examples of extraordinary women

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<sup>40</sup> Dittmar 1912.

<sup>41</sup> Ehlers 1969, pp. 46-47.

<sup>42</sup> On Aeschines' theory of eros, see also Kahn 1994 and Mársico 2017.

endowed with political and military skills do not effectuate a demonstration of the potentiality of women's nature. It seems to me that the implicit assumption of this argument is that the exceptional character of Rodogune, Thargelia and Aspasia discounts them as appropriate evidence for *universalistic* claims about women's natural capabilities or about the average woman. The problem with this take is that it is doubtful that Socratic thinkers had universalistic views about human nature, and, for example, that they believed that all human beings have an equal natural predisposition to politics, rhetoric, or philosophy. Given the Socratic tendency to think that natural endowments are unequally divided amongst individuals, showing that *some* women possess such a natural predisposition is sufficient to support the Socratic thesis that the acquisition of virtue is not based on sexual difference.

Furthermore, Aspasia is only one of several foreign women about which the Socratics write. In two passages from Xenophon's *Symposium*, Socrates takes the performances of a slave girl as evidence that women's nature is not inferior to men's and that women have the ability to learn courage.<sup>43</sup> These two passages adopt a similar procedure to Aeschines' dialogue, i.e., they use the example of a dancer's practical feats to make an inference regarding women's nature in general and their *potential* for education. Additionally, politically shrewd foreign women are prominent in Xenophon's historical writings, which often represent them as independent political actors or embodiments of ideal rulership.<sup>44</sup> In Plato's *Laws*, moreover, the Athenian Stranger refers to the example of Sauromatian warrior women in support of his policy of introducing military education for the women of Magnesia.<sup>45</sup> The Athenian context, which precluded women from political participation and from other male-exclusive activities, furnished few practical examples of

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<sup>43</sup> Xen. *Symp.* 2.9 and 2.11-12.

<sup>44</sup> See Baragwanath 2010: according to Baragwanath, equally significant is the fact that Xenophon associates these foreign women's political independence with their status as wives.

<sup>45</sup> Plato, *Laws* 804e.

women's political, rhetorical or military excellence. Hence, foreign women, especially, but not only, those placed in ruling positions offered the only concrete examples of women's capabilities for political and military leadership or for courage. Ethnographic reports about foreign queens, for example by Herodotus and Ctesias, as well as further information about foreign cultures that were probably at hand given Athens' international commercial exchanges and the presence in the city of a large community of immigrants and of a mass of barbarian slaves, must have struck the Socratics' imagination as practical evidence of the tension between nature and convention in Athenian social arrangements concerning women.

How, then, does the topic of women's natural capabilities intersect with the other two main concerns, the revaluation of marriage and the pedagogical use of eros? The key fragment in this regard is the long excerpt reported by Cicero concerning the meeting between Aspasia and Xenophon and his wife. Following a typically Socratic procedure, Aspasia asks a barrage of questions to the two spouses to push them into an *aporia* with the goal of showing to them – by means of analogy – that the best way to make sure they will have the best possible partner is to take care of themselves and become excellent (*optimi/ ἄριστοι*). The *aporia* consists in the tension between the two spouses' implicit belief that they love no one else as much as they love each other and the admission that they would prefer a superior spouse if they chanced to find one: this inconsistency is resolved through Aspasia's admonition to make themselves as virtuous as possible so as to become the best possible partner for each other:

Since both of you have failed to give me the one answer I wanted to hear, I'll say for myself what each of you is thinking. Both you, woman, want to have the best husband, and you, Xenophon, want more than anything to have the finest wife. So unless you two can bring it about that there is no better man or finer woman on earth, then plainly what you'll always lack much more than

anything is what you think best, namely that you, Xenophon, should be husband of the best woman possible, and that she be married to the best man possible.<sup>46</sup>

Contrary to the conversation between Ischomachus and his wife in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, where the husband is clearly positioned as the moral educator of the wife, this passage stresses the equal position of the two spouses. In the story of Xenophon and his wife, both spouses are asked the same questions, end in the same aporia, and are offered the same moral admonition by a woman, Aspasia, placed in a position of educational superiority. We can make better sense of the symmetry between the two spouses and their asymmetry *vis a vis* their teacher, Aspasia, if we take this passage to be both demonstrating that heterosexual eros can be positively used as an educational tool within marriage and that women's nature enables them, in principle, to be in an equal relationship with their husbands and, in the case of Aspasia, to even display superior expertise and acumen. For Aeschines, both partners must take care of their virtue through their reciprocal eros. Thus, accepting that eros is one of the main topics of the dialogue does not efface the central and constitutive role that the discussion of women's capabilities plays in both Aeschines' defense of Aspasia and his views on heterosexual eros.

Furthermore, the argument in Aeschines' dialogue strongly resembles a passage from Xenophon's *Memorabilia* featuring a conversation between Socrates and the young Critobulus. Critobulus asks Socrates how to obtain good "friends" (to be understood as the adult partners in a pederastic relationship). Socrates responds that to attract good (i.e., virtuous) friends, Critobulus must become good himself. Socrates' advice clearly parallels that given by Aspasia in Aeschines' dialogue. Moreover, Socrates explicitly mentions Aspasia as an expert of good matchmaking at 2.6.36:

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<sup>46</sup> Cicero. *Inv.* 1.52 (=VI A 70). For a reconstruction of this argument by analogy see Döring 2011, pp. 31-32.

She told me that good matchmakers (προμνηστρίδας) are skillful at leading people into marriage when they give good reports based on truth, while they refuse to give false praises: for the victims of deception hate each other and the matchmaker too. As I'm persuaded that this is correct, I think that it is not possible to me to say anything in your praise that I cannot say truthfully.<sup>47</sup>

ἔφη γὰρ τὰς ἀγαθὰς προμνηστρίδας μετὰ μὲν ἀληθείας τὰγαθὰ διαγγελλούσας δεινὰς εἶναι συνάγειν ἀνθρώπους εἰς κηδείαν, ψευδομένας δ' οὐκ ἐθέλειν ἐπαινεῖν: τοὺς γὰρ ἐξαπατηθέντας ἅμα μισεῖν ἀλλήλους τε καὶ τὴν προμνησαμένην. ἃ δὴ καὶ ἐγὼ πεισθεὶς ὀρθῶς ἔχειν ἠγοῦμαι οὐκ ἐξεῖναί μοι περὶ σοῦ λέγειν ἐπαινοῦντι οὐδὲν ὅ τι ἂν μὴ ἀληθεύω.

Socrates' definition of good matchmaking in terms of truthfulness probably derives from Aeschines' positive reinterpretation of a comedic trope: in the comedy *Aspasia* was accused of procuring sexual partners for Pericles, while Aeschines presents a very different kind of matchmaking at work, both in her conversation with Xenophon and his wife and, implicitly, in her ability to make Pericles and Lysicles attractive to the whole city. Mention of the political eros that allows a successful leader to be loved by the city is also found in Socrates and Critobulus' conversation in the *Memorabilia*. There, Socrates makes reference to Pericles' and Themistocles' ability to cast "spells on or hang "amulets" about the city.<sup>48</sup>

Further reference to Aspasia's expertise, this time concerning specifically marital relationships, is found within a conversation between Socrates and a more mature Critobulus, in the *Oeconomicus*. Here Socrates asks his friend: "Is there anyone to whom you entrust important matters more than your wife? ... And is there anyone with whom you converse (διαλέγη) the least?"<sup>49</sup> In this section of the dialogue, Socrates argues that husbands are responsible for educating their wives into becoming beneficial partners in the management of the estate. Consequently, husbands are

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<sup>47</sup> My translation.

<sup>48</sup> Xenoph. *Mem.* 2.6.13.

<sup>49</sup> Xenoph. *Oec.* 3.12.

responsible for their wives' failures in these matters just as shepherds are to be blamed for an ailing sheep and riders for a vicious horse (Xen. *Oec.* 3.11-12). He then demonstrates that Critobulus neglects this educational role in his own marriage, for he commits matters of great importance to his wife but barely speaks to her, though he married her when she was an unworldly child (3.12-13). Anticipating Ischomachus' view, Socrates argues that good wives contribute to the household's well-being just as much as husbands do because they are, after all, the ones who manage the household budget (3.15). Consequently, a wife's education is a very serious matter requiring expertise. The expert in question is Aspasia, as Socrates promises to introduce her to Critobulus, claiming that she is more knowledgeable on these matters (3.14-15).

Finally, Socrates' long speech on the art of matchmaking in Xenophon's *Symposium* depends on Aeschines' positive re-evaluation of it in the *Aspasia*. In the *Symposium*, Socrates refers to himself as an expert matchmaker and, upon explaining his claim, ascribes the same expertise to Antisthenes. In this passage Socrates identifies two different activities that bring two people together: procuring (προαγωγή), which we also find associated with Socrates in Plato's *Theaetetus* 149a, and pandering (μαστροπεία), which is to be understood as the art of ensuring the two persons' reciprocal erotic attraction.<sup>50</sup> This conversation also mentions political pandering, i.e. the art of making oneself loved by the city as a whole.<sup>51</sup>

Several interpreters have suggested that the general insight we can gather from this dossier of texts is that Aeschines, and derivatively Xenophon, intended to present Aspasia as a sort of female Socrates.<sup>52</sup> Both Socrates and Aspasia are associated through their moral and pedagogical use of

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<sup>50</sup> Xenoph. *Symp.* 4.56-64 and Pentassuglio 2017, pp. 153-153.

<sup>51</sup> Xenoph. *Symp.* 4.60.

<sup>52</sup> See Hirzel 1895; Dittmar 1912, p. 51; Kahn 1994; Döring 2011; Loraux 2021; Pentassuglio 2020.



eros and by the activity of matchmaking, which is to be understood in its political dimensions.<sup>53</sup>

The most straightforward explanation for this strategy is the Socratics' commitment to arguing for women's natural capacity for virtue and, thus, for philosophy. Aeschines and Xenophon's decision to emphasize Aspasia's moral and intellectual qualities, rather than minimizing her relationship to Socrates, suggests that the figure of Aspasia in Aeschines is mobilized, defended, and reconceptualized precisely for this purpose.

The dialogue's most original contribution to a Socratic theory of eros is its extension of eros' pedagogical function to heterosexual and matrimonial relationships. Xenophon conceptualizes marriage as a potentially ethical relationship in which the two partners improve themselves and in which the young wife finds an opportunity for moral education. However, marriage in the *Oeconomicus* is not a matter of eros, as Ischomachus makes clear to his young wife. Unlike Aeschines' dialogue, the *Oeconomicus* conceptualizes marriage as a school of moral education within the framework of a fundamentally utilitarian approach to good estate management. For Aeschines, on the contrary, pedagogical eros is precisely what is at stake in heterosexual and matrimonial relationships.<sup>54</sup> Rather than an interpretive dilemma between pedagogical eros, reevaluation of marriage, and women's nature, I argue that these three topics are inextricably bound and equally relevant to Aeschines' dialogue.

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<sup>53</sup> Nicole Loraux argued that Socrates probably wanted it to be known that he derived his theory of eros from a woman: Loraux 2021, p. 18. As noted by Pentassuglio, in none of our testimonies from Aeschines' dialogue does Socrates declare to be the pupil of Aspasia in matters of eros, yet later sources did make this inference and we can safely assume that in the dialogue Aspasia was presented as a proponent of pedagogical eros: see Pentassuglio 2020, p. 6. On Diotima and Aspasia as the two teachers of Socrates, see Theodoret, *Graec. Aff. Cur.* 1.17.

<sup>54</sup> Pentassuglio 2017, pp. 154-155.

## 5. Conclusion

To reach unassailable conclusions based on fragmentary evidence is probably an impossible task. In this paper, however, I made the case that some of the common assumptions among scholars about the Socratic fictionalization of Aspasia are not based on evidence. In particular, I argued that not only is there no evidence that Antisthenes and Aeschines presented Aspasia as a hetaera in their lost dialogues, but there are also good reasons to think they did not. This is especially the case with Aeschines' dialogue, which portrays Aspasia as an expert of political and rhetorical art and as a moral educator. Furthermore, I argued that Aspasia plays an important role in reflections about marriage, because Aeschines' and Xenophon's reframing of marriage as an educational and ethical relationship is intimately connected to the Socratic thesis that women's nature equip them to acquire the same virtues as men, and that, therefore, at least in this respect, women's nature is no different in kind from men's. Aspasia acted as an example of the skills and virtues women can acquire and of the moral educational role they can play within the context of marriage.

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