Please note: This response was developed against the 2017 Classical Studies subject outline and has been remarked against the criteria for 2018.

Stage 2 Ancient Studies

Assessment Type 3: Inquiry

'Aspasia was the most influential and controversial woman of the 5th Century.'

To what extent is this true?

As a woman living in Athens during the 5th Century BC (Blundell, 1999), Aspasia built her public image, earning the respect and admiration of many great male figures, aradical feat for this era. More commonly known as Aspasia of Miletus (Lewis and Yearby, 2000), she resided in Athens as a metic, achieving many successes such as training *hetairai,* women hired as male companions (Pomeroy, 1975). Well renowned for not only her beauty (Whiting, 2005) but also her intelligence and ability to entertain men (Garland, 1998), Aspasia caught the attention of the popular statesman, Pericles, and is said to have had a great influence on his political endeavours. Due to the traditional expectations of the women of her time to remain in the home (Pope, 1976) and to never be the topic of male conversation (Thucydides, Translated by Warner, 1977), her popularity and highly public profile caused a large amount of outrage in the Greek capital. Through her accomplishments and powers of persuasion over men, Aspasia defied the social expectation of women during her time, causing much scandal and controversy.

Aspasia resided in Athens as a metic, originally born in Miletus, Asia Minor, approximately 465BC (Burn, 1972), as the daughter of a citizen named Axiochus (Plutarch, Translated by Scott-Kilvert, 1960). Born female in a male-dominated society, it is assumed that her devoted parents offered her to the temple of Aphrodite for training as a devotee of the goddess — in short, a temple prostitute, (Frost, 1971, pg 113). In doing so, this eased their expenses in raising a daughter and paying her marriage dowry. Offering up their daughter to the goddess also brought their family a great deal of honour, and in exchange she received a higher education than her family could provide. It is assumed that, in approximately 450BC, Aspasia attained her freedom, by buying it herself or as a favour from a client, and moved to the rapidly growing city of Athens (Frost, 1971).

As one of the few educated free women in Athens, it is apparent that a number of opportunities lay before Aspasia. She opened a meeting house, training young girls to become courtesans (Nardo, 2000). These were quite common, and in contrast to popular opinion, the house ran a service for ‘*companionship rather then sexual favours’* (Garland, 1998, pg 56), yet these women were not well respected in society and were quite largely considered prostitutes. It is said that *hetairai,* in particular, Aspasia's women, were of *high-class* (Nardo, 2005, pg 89), and oftentimes were better educated than the average Athenian man. Aspasia trained her courtesans in the areas of philosophy, history, politics, science, art and literature(Brainard, 2008), and thus it comes as no surprise that these women could hold conversation better than the wives of their guests (Nardo, 2000 pg 58). In addition, their work had the ability to bring entertainment to ‘*social activities [and] meetings among friends’* and it is evident that courtesans were the most economically independent women in 5th Century Athens. Frost (1971, pg 113) states that Aspasia's house was ‘*known all over the Greek world, not only for the beauty of her girls, but for the fame of her customers and the high level of the conversation that went on.’* Her girls were renowned for being ‘*[gifted], charming and intellectually accomplished’* (Garland, 1998, pg 56), demonstrating Aspasia's great skill not only as a courtesan herself, but in instructing others to follow her footsteps.

Over time, Aspasia's popularity grew and was regularly invited to attend symposiums hosted by famous men, in particular, Socrates. The two formed a long and lasting friendship (Nardo, 2000), and in many of his works he regards of her highly. It is to Aspasia that Socrates attributes his rhetorical skills (Fant and Lefkoqitz, 1995), and he would even refer other men to her as she could ‘*explain the whole matter better than he could’* (Fant, and Lefkoqitz, 1995, pg 170). Others claim that she taught Socrates the 'Socratic Method' (Cantarella, 1989). It is found that he was interested in Aspasia's broad sense of intellectuality, and many assume that she played a part in shaping his views on the role of women (Nardo, 2000). Not only would Socrates engage in intelligent conversation with Aspasia, but he would also take his pupils and other men, who in turn brought their wives, to listen to her express her opinions and broad sense of knowledge (Nardo, 2000). Plutarch describes her to be an important part of conversation amongst philosophers, given high regard as both a philosopher and politician (Fant, and Lefkoqitz, 1995). She was renowned for her ability to ‘*hold her own in conversation with intelligent men’* (Burn, 1972, pg 130), and as such, was well respected for her speaking skills (Day, 2001).

Aspasia's status in society rose even more in 450BC, when she met and began a ‘passionate affair’ (Plutarch, Translated by Scott-Kilvert, 1960, pg 190) with the favourable statesman Pericles. Burn (1972, pg 128), claims that ‘the Olympian general was captivated by the beauty, charm and wit of Aspasia, as well as her rare political wisdom’ (Plutarch, Translated by Scott-Kilvert, 1960, pg 190). Samsons, (2007) noted that Pericles was ‘visibly devoted’ to Aspasia, kissing her passionately in public on numerous occasions (Whiting, 2005). Their relationship grew with ‘genuine love and *respect’ (*Nardo, 2000, pg 58), which was quite uncommon in society, as a large percentage of marriages were arranged (Nardo, 2000). Although barred by law to marry since she was a metic, the two lived together and treated one another as husband and wife(Whiting, 2005) until his death in approximately 429BC (Frost, 1971). In approximately 440BC Aspasia bore him a son, also named Pericles.

In addition to being Pericles' consort, it is said that Aspasia had quite a significant influence on his political life, and in doing so, she herself etched a space in the male-dominated political system(Blundell, 1999, pg 148). It issaid that the two would often ‘*discuss important matters’* and that Pericles ‘*treated her opinions with great* *respect’* (Whiting, 2005, pg 32). She is rumoured to have written his famous funeral oration, and Plutarch (Translated by Scott-Kilvert, 1990) suggests that Aspasia convinced him to proclaim war on the island of Samos, as this would advantage her birthplace of Miletus (Blundell, 1999). In her own political life, Aspasia questioned societal ideals on the role of females and relations between the sexes (Cantarella, 1989). Sphettus, a disciple of Socrates, recounts Aspasia challenging Xenophon and his wife on the topic of achieving perfection in marriage (Cantarella, 1989). As such, Aspasia ‘*dared to talk philosophy with men as an equal’* (Frost, 1971, pg 106) which was a radical and outrageous feat for a woman of her era.

As is to be expected when a woman begins to voice her opinions in a male-dominated society, Aspasia was publicly ridiculed and eventually trialed for her actions. She was slandered by society (Cantarella, 1989, pg 75),attacked on many levels by comedian Hermippos on sinfulness (Burn, 1972, pg 176). Comic poet Cratinus also named her ‘*Pericles' Hera, born of buggery, the dog-eyed whore’* (Frost, 1971, pg 114). Aspasia openly disputed values which were common in society; those relating to marriage and the role of women, and as a result, was harshly criticised. As Pericles too, was commonly disliked in society, others made remarks towards Aspasia as a means to attack the statesman (Bum, 1972), naming her an atheist, accusing her of being a spy and taunting her status as a foreigner (Macdonald, 1999). For these accusations, like Socrates, Aspasia was put on trial, yet being both a woman and a metic, she could not appear in court, and was thus represented by Pericles (Bum, 1971), who ‘*wept’* in her defence (Bum, 1972, pg 176).

It is evident that Aspasia most certainly went against the norm for a woman of her day, as their expectation was to remain in the home. Xenophon states that it was a woman's ‘*duty to remain indoors’* and that ‘*the gods made women for indoor work’* (Haward. 1990, pg 22). As a result, it was the only requirements of a woman to ‘t*ake care of the home [and] to produce children’* (Whiting, 2005, pg. 31), a task which Aspasia most certainly did not fulfil. It was her decision to disregard the responsibility of a conventional woman to ‘*remain at home contemptuous because of the law’* (Fant, and Lefkoqitz, 1995, pg 30), running the household and assigning tasks to the slaves, female relatives and her children, which set her apart as an individual (Pope, 1976. pg 95). Aspasia, unlike other citizen's wives, would not spend her days attending to domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning and weaving with the help of slaves and relatives (Pope, 1976). It is also likely that she largely refrained from supervising the young Pericles.

In addition to remaining within the home, it was the requirement of a woman to be submissive to her husband, unmistakably an aspect which Aspasia chose to ignore, pursuing an atypically equal relationship with Pericles. This is further supported as in 5th Century Athens it is said that women were the ‘*second-class inhabitants of Athens’,* who were at all times ‘*under the legal control of a man’* (Macdonald, 1999, pg 11). Plutarch states that’ *domesticity and silence [were] right for married women’* (Haward, 1990, pg 17) and that at all times they were to stay out of trouble(Whiting, 2005, pg 31), evidently an almost foreign concept for Aspasia. It was expected of women to be monogamous, to ‘*see and hear as little as possible and ask the fewest questions’* (Haward, 1990, pg 18). This is most prevalent when her husband would hold a symposium, as it was her task to arrange the particulars of the andron. On the night however, the woman of the home would stay in her the gynacaeum for the duration of the evening, yet Aspasia chose to join the men, and on presumably all occasions was invited. This was because it was considered ‘*the greatest glory of a woman...to be least talked about by men’* (Thucydides, Translated by Warner, 1977, pg 122), and therefore the woman was expected to seldom leave the home, only doing so if accompanied by a female slave or a male relative (Pope, 1976, pg 99).

Very rarely did a woman publicise her image in Athenian society, and Aspasia remains one of the few who did exactly that. Still known today as the only ‘*female intellectual’* linked with Ancient Athens (Cantarella, 1989, pg 75), Aspasia etched a place in history for herself, a feat accomplished by an elite few. Those who are still known today include Helen of Troy, who after supposedly leaving her husband, Menelaus, King of Sparta, for Paris, a prince of Troy, was blamed by many for the beginning of the Trojan War. Another woman still known today is Sappho, who lived in approximately 600BC, a poet who wrote about women's thoughts and feelings (Macdonald, 1999, pg 45). It is thought that she inspired some of the best male writers in Greece and Rothe (Macdonald, 1999, pg 45).

Thus it is evident that Aspasia most certainly was the most controversial and influential woman of her time. From her humble beginnings as a temple prostitute in Miletus, to migrating to Athens and opening a meeting house, Aspasia's accomplishments began to proliferate. Her immense intelligence and beauty brought many men to her table, as she shared views on common societal ideals, as well as becoming a teacher to a large number of her followers. Once commencing a romance with the statesman Pericles, her political opinions were voiced, thus attracting careful scrutiny for her persona. Surviving numerous torments and being put on trial, Aspasia most definitely chose to live out a different and most outrageous lifestyle to that of the common wealthy citizen's wife of her time. As a result, she etched a name in history for herself, and remains a model for all to not be afraid to stand out from the crowd.

Word count 2000

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| *Assessment Design Criteria* | *Grade* | *Comment* |
| KU1 | A+ | Outstanding level of depth of both knowledge and understanding of the ideas surrounding the role of women and the depth of detail surrounding Aspasia’s life |
| KU2 | A | Discerning, well informed insightful reflection on the diversity of attitudes to women, the experiences of women and the difference between the lives of men and women.  |
| KU3 | A | The student has been careful to identify distinguish between the attitudes inherent in ancient sources and modern attitudes which would affect contemporary sources. The effect is a balanced account. The student draws a causation between Aspasia’s defiance of social convention and her trial for atheism and indecency. |
| RA1 | A+ | Comprehensive research and critical analysis of primary and secondary sources and perspectives.  |
| RA2 | A+ | This paper was not written against this criteria as it was written pre 2018, however, it is evident that the student has identified an idea in the ancient world – is it possible to defy social convention and exert influence as a woman? This is the focus throughout the paper and addressed with insight. The student demonstrates that Aspasia was able to, through careful exploitation of the resources and relationships available to her, influence the men around her and thus influence society. The student argues that Aspasia’s place in history also shows the extent of her influence to contemporary western society. |
| A1 | A+ | Comprehensive synthesis of evidence. The student has handled multiple sources with sophistication and fluency. |
| A2 | A | Idea driven. A few of the early paragraph initially seem more recount in their structure however the central premise of how Aspasia gained atypical influence through her training, education and relationships is persuasively threaded through each paragraph in a logical build. The conclusion is clear and precise but lacking a driving insight.The student uses technical vocabulary precisely throughout the paper.  |
| A3 | A | Again, this paper wasn’t written against this criteria therefore this evidence is implicit rather than explicitly constructed. I would argue that the student has demonstrated an understanding of the worth of contemporary evidence in evaluating the influence of Aspasia and has made an effort to locate primary source evidence that supports and speaks against Aspasia. The student has demonstrated an awareness of the need to find a variety of sources. The student has accessed overview and subject specific sources, some of which are distinguished academic works. In the inter-text referencing the student has used cross referencing to authenticate sources and been able to distinguish where a source says something unique.  |
| **Overall grade** | **A+** | **29/30** |

**Reference List**

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Performance Standards for Stage 2 Ancient Studies

| - | Knowledge and Understanding | Research and Analysis | Application |
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| A | In-depth knowledge and critical understanding of texts, artefacts, ideas, events, and/or people of the ancient world.Discerning and well-informed recognition of, and insightful reflection on, the political, social, cultural, and/or economic diversity within the ancient world. Insightful knowledge and understanding of historical and/or archaeological concepts. | Comprehensive research and critical analysis of appropriate primary and secondary sources and perspectives.Insightful research into and understanding of ideas and innovations that emerged from the ancient world, and in-depth consideration of their influence. | Comprehensive synthesis of evidence and appropriate and consistent acknowledgment of sources. Clear, precise, and highly persuasive communication of ideas and arguments, using subject-specific language. Perceptive, consistent, and accurate evaluation of the nature of sources and evidence. |
| B | Some depth of knowledge and understanding of texts, artefacts, ideas, events, and/or people of the ancient world.Well-informed recognition of, and thoughtful reflection on, the political, social, cultural, and/or economic diversity within the ancient world.Some depth of knowledge and understanding of historical and/or archaeological concepts. | Well-considered research and critical analysis of appropriate primary and secondary sources and perspectives.Thoughtful research into and understanding of ideas and innovations that emerged from the ancient world, and some depth in consideration of their influence. | Well-considered synthesis of evidence and appropriate acknowledgment of sources. Clear and persuasive communication of ideas and arguments, using subject-specific language.Consistent and accurate evaluation of the nature of sources and evidence. |
| C | Knowledge and understanding of texts, artefacts, ideas, events, and/or people of the ancient world.Generally informed recognition of, and considered reflection on, the political, social, cultural, and/or economic diversity within the ancient world.Knowledge and understanding of historical and/or archaeological concepts. | Competent research and analysis of appropriate primary and secondary sources and perspectives.Research into and understanding of ideas and innovations that emerged from the ancient world, and consideration of their influence. | Description with some synthesis of evidence and acknowledgment of sources. Informed communication of ideas and arguments, using some subject-specific language. Consideration and some evaluation of the nature of sources and evidence. |
| D | Recognition and basic understanding of texts, artefacts, ideas, events, and/or people of the ancient world.Recognition and superficial consideration or description of the political, social, cultural, and/or economic diversity within the ancient world.Recognition of one or more historical and/or archaeological concepts. | Identification and basic consideration of primary and secondary sources and/or perspectives, mainly using description.Recognition and superficial consideration of ideas and innovations that emerged from the ancient world. | Description of evidence with acknowledgment of sources. Superficial communication of ideas and arguments.Superficial consideration of the nature of sources and evidence. |
| E | Limited awareness of an aspect of the ancient world.Attempted description and emerging awareness of the political, social, cultural, and/or economic diversity within the ancient world.Some awareness of a historical or archaeological concept. | Limited identification or use of sources.Some awareness of an idea or innovation that emerged from the ancient world. | Attempted description of evidence.Attempted communication of an idea or one or more points towards an argument.Limited consideration of a source. |