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# Aidōs between a cultural concept and a deity

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## **Abstract**

My original presentation at the Universities of Wales Institute of Classics and Ancient History (UWICAH) Second Postgraduates' meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2014 was focused on the attempt to explain how aidōs, shame, may have been considered a goddess rather than a cultural concept. However, this paper will argue how such a concept, developed in c. eighth century BC both for the regulation of Athenian and Spartan society and of private and public dispositions and institutions, may have been interconnected with its divine and holy aspect i.e. aidōs as a goddess, that seems to appear in iconographical, textual and epigraphic sources such as Hesiod, fourth century BC inscriptions and Pausanias. Analysing these primary sources I have been able to trace some fundamental elements; aidōs lived among the immortals (Hes. *WD*. 200); in Athens there was a priestess of aidōs (IG II<sup>2</sup> 5147); an amphora from c. 515 BC bearing the letters "ΑΙΔΩΣ" has been found; both at the time of Demosthenes (25.25.35) and Pausanias (1.17.1) an altar was erected in its honour and finally in Laconia there may have been a statue of shame (Paus. 3.20.10-11).

Aidōs as a cultural concept, glimpsed in every ancient society of the Near East and the West, has attracted various scholars of Classics, Psychology, Sociology, Philosophy etc. since the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>1</sup> Since aidōs is a broad and problematic concept, the main focus of these academics has been oriented towards the explanation and comprehension of what kind of effect shame attached to honour could have had on Greek people from the eighth century BC onwards. The main interpretation of aidōs as a feeling, perhaps a psychological emotion, I would say, mainly associated with fear, respect and

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Appiah 2010; Bechtel 1991, 1994; Cairns 1993; Cunningham 2013; Ferrari 1990; Stiebert 2002; Welsh 2008 and Wikan 1984.

sense of honour seems to have been generally accepted.<sup>2</sup> However, the interest that *aidōs* has always had among Greek society has to be associated with the possibility that shame may have also had a godly aspect and thus may have personified a goddess. Nevertheless from the studies of various academics we find almost no allusion to a potential interpretation of *aidōs* as a goddess.<sup>3</sup> This problem, on one hand, has been caused by the paucity of the material that has been handed down to us and, on the other, on the transmission of any archaeological finding. Exceptions are a vase, dated back to c. 515 BC and already studied by Cairns,<sup>4</sup> a seat of the Theatre of Dionysus bearing the inscription “--- Αἰδοῦς” (IG II<sup>2</sup> 5147) and a potential altar erected in honour of *Aidōs* (Dem. 25.25.35; Paus. 1.17.1) and the hypothetical existence of statue of shame in the second century AD. Thus, mostly analysing primary sources, the aim of this paper is prove and test that the concept of shame has always had great interest as it may have been connected with a godly figure, addressed towards the regulation of human behaviour both in the private and public sphere.<sup>5</sup> Firstly, in order to prove this assumption, I think it is appropriate to start from a general explanation of *aidōs*. Secondly, I will analyse the primary material that has been textually, archaeologically and epigraphically transmitted to us.

According to Boccotti, there are two main categories in which *aidōs* can fall. The first one is represented by the ‘ethical-religious sphere’<sup>6</sup> which seems to embrace all the acts of worship of the gods by mortals and, as I would say, an upright behaviour towards them to avoid the acquisition of a bad reputation, while the second category would correspond to peoples’ relationship with the community and society to which they belong.<sup>7</sup> The categories of Boccotti may

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<sup>2</sup> Massimilla 2010-2011: 233; Ferrari 1990: 191.

<sup>3</sup> Hamdorf 1964: 65; Cairns 1993, 1996 are the only academic studies that leave the interpretation of shame as a goddess open. Nonetheless, shame as a deity seems to be explicit in Rome where, according to Liv. (10.23.3), there should have been an altar dedicated to *Pudicitia Patricia* in the *Forum Boarium*.

<sup>4</sup> Cairns 1996.

<sup>5</sup> Cairns 1993: 155.

<sup>6</sup> Boccotti 1973: 219.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Aristox. Fr. Hist.* 42a, 42c in Boccotti 1973: 221-222; Barrett in Cairns 1993: 300 n. 129; Boccotti 1973: 235 n. 55.

be perceived by various passages of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The first grouping is glimpsed by the cordial gesture of hospitality of strangers in one's house. The refusal of hospitality adduced dishonour to the host and his family - we know that according to the Greek ethic code the refusal of hospitality meant the disrespect of Zeus ξένιος.<sup>8</sup> Lastly, the second category may be underlined by the heroes' behaviour; from the *Iliad* it emerges that a hero was considered worthy of dishonour if he feared to go into battle.<sup>9</sup> This is the reason why heroes were encouraged by their captains through powerful exclamations such as 'be ashamed cowards' (Hom. *Il.* 5.787, 8.228).<sup>10</sup>

Aidōs cannot be limited to that human sphere, which all the psychological feelings/emotions such as fear, sense of honour and respect glimpsed in heroes and worship of the gods belong to. On the contrary, it has to be studied in connection to another field, which I will term the 'psychophysical sphere'. This latter category embraces all the gestures, acts and words that can lead the listener or the spectator to feel a sexual shame. Sexual shame is perceived through various forms of expression from theatrical representations to iconographies. Those statues portraying women/goddesses in the act of holding their breast and covering their *pudenda* (or *aidoia* - Greek term deriving from the noun *aidōs*) seem to have been a prerogative of both the ancient Near East and Greece.<sup>11</sup> The representation of women's sexual shame put the female sex in a bad light by portraying it as unchaste from a behavioural and moral point of view. The opinion that women may have been restrictively subject to the rules of men and of the male-oriented society has been largely disputed.<sup>12</sup> I may agree with this view through a comment on *aidōs* of the *Lexicon Suda*. For it explains how *aidōs* lies in peoples' eyes.<sup>13</sup> Such assertion means that women had to cover their body with cloaks in public and arguably even wear a

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<sup>8</sup> Boccotti 1973: 228-229; Cairns 1993: 114; Reckford 1964: 10.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Cairns 1993: 80-81.

<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to notice how the same type of exclamations can be found in passages of ancient Near Eastern bellicose poems e.g., book 5 of the *Poems of Gilgamesh* where Enkidu is pervaded by fear of fighting against monsters.

<sup>11</sup> Ferrari 1990: 186; Keel and Uehlinger 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Buck Alwa 2008; Marsman 2003; Stiebert 2002; Todd 2007; Van Der Torn 1989.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Suid. 86.5; Massimilla 2010-2011: 233; Aristot. Rh. 1384a in Ferrari 1990: 188.

veil in order to not be seen by other men and not to adduce shame and dishonour to their husband and family.<sup>14</sup>

The body and face covering/veiling respectively were not only characteristics of women inside archaic Greek and Near Eastern societies but also, as attested by Hesiod, of *aidōs* from the sixth century BC. This may prove a potential connection between shame and its cultural aspect. Using the text of Evelyn-White,<sup>15</sup> I quote:

‘καὶ τότε δὴ πρὸς Ὀλυμπον ἀπὸ χθονὸς εὐρυοδείης λευκοῖσιν  
φάρεσσι καλυψαμένω χροά καλὸν ἀθανάτων μετὰ φῦλον ἴτον  
προλιπόντ’ ἀνθρώπους Αἰδῶς καὶ Νέμεσις· τὰ δὲ λείπεται ἄλγεα  
λυγρὰ θνητοῖς ἀνθρώποισι· κακοῦ δ’ οὐκ ἔσσειται ἀλκή’

(Hes. *WD*. 197-201)

This passage seems to be the first evidence among the Hesiodic corpus of how *aidōs* may have been considered an anthropomorphised goddess who chooses to abandon mankind in favour of her ascent to the world of immortals from the sixth century BC.<sup>16</sup> The abandonment of *Aidōs* makes the reader understand how with Hesiod we are no longer in the Homeric culture, governed by the heroic *ethos*, but on the contrary, we are facing a civilised society that shows the good and bad with its corruption and absence of justice.<sup>17</sup> The departure of *Aidōs* towards Olympus depicts the decline of archaic Greek society and its complete abandonment to bad manners.<sup>18</sup> For, it can be understood that *Aidōs* seemed to have been considered an element that regulated the polis and took care of people.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, shame may have been a driving force that promoted a civilised behaviour and promulgated the good governance of the

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Ferrari 1990: 186, 190; Havelock 2007: 28. On the meaning of the veil as symbol of sexual chastity see. n. 21.

<sup>15</sup> Evelyn-White 1914.

<sup>16</sup> A second reference to *aidōs* probably not as an anthropomorphised goddess can be seen at lines 317-319 of the same work.

<sup>17</sup> Cairns 1993: 155.

<sup>18</sup> Cairns 1993: 155 n. 29.

<sup>19</sup> Cairns 1993: 155.

society through peoples' good conduct.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless from the text a further aspect of the right behaviour emerges; this is evidenced in the expression 'λευκοῖσιν φάρεσσι καλυψαμένω' – 'wrapped in white cloaks'. These words would suggest that the covering of the body as a sign of shame and chastity had been a prerogative of Aidōs since the sixth century BC and of Athenian women since Homer.<sup>21</sup> In support of this assumption we have a vase, found in Vulci, which was made in a later period than Hesiod and dated back to 515 BC.<sup>22</sup> This would show Aidōs entirely covered by a cloak. We are also in possession of other vases from this period that would depict female figures wrapped in mantles.<sup>23</sup> A comparison with Hesiod's text is instinctive; the cloaks would reflect Aidōs as an anthropomorphised goddess who corrects both human conduct and female behaviour.<sup>24</sup>

The vase found in Vulci, near Rome, would seem to be our first archaeological evidence that may prove my assumption on the conception of Aidōs as more than a concept. For, at its base there would seem to be the letters 'ΑΙΔΩΣ' painted and on the surface two figures, among which one should presumably be Aidōs, wrapped in mantles and other two semi-covered.<sup>25</sup> Since the transmission of the word 'ΑΙΔΩΣ' is fragmentary, Von Effra hypothesised that the letters would have not originally stood for 'ΑΙΔΩΣ' but rather for the genitive 'ΑΡΤΕΜΙΔΟΣ' and consequently the figure, which may be associated with shame, should have been Artemis.<sup>26</sup> However despite the incongruity, I would assert that both hypotheses seem to be right and they appear to highlight the connection between the divine aspect of aidōs and its cultural sphere. This may be confirmed by the fact that a cult shared by Aidōs and Artemis could have easily existed as both goddesses represented modesty and chastity.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Aidōs/Artemis and Leto, the second figure in our general framework, are

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<sup>20</sup> Cairns 1993: 155.

<sup>21</sup> Hom. *Od.* 21.65; Buck Alwa 2008: 136; Kardalias 30 in Buck Alwa 2008: 136.

<sup>22</sup> *The Rape of Leto by Tityos*. Pinthias 515 BC. Attic Red-figure Amphora. Paris: Louvre Museum G42.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Menelaus and Helen*. Toledo: Museum of Art 67.154.

<sup>24</sup> Cairns 1993: 155.

<sup>25</sup> Cairns 1993: 319, 1996: 152.

<sup>26</sup> Von Effra 1937: 58 in Cairns 1993: 319, 1996: 152.

<sup>27</sup> Cairns 1993: 319, 1996: 152.

covering their body as a sign of modesty and purity.<sup>28</sup> To understand how the figures could have represented these two virtues, we must bear in mind that we are in a context of rape; for, rape obviously polluted the body and the representation of the female sex.<sup>29</sup> Women, already powerless by nature and submissive to the arrogance of men, through rape, appeared to be even more shameful and subject to criticism by their society.<sup>30</sup> Sometimes such emotional and physical pressure on women could have also led them to suicide. This is attested in a later period, to be precise in Rome, where Lucretia, after being raped, decided to take her own life as her body became a symbol of contamination and her personality lost all traces of modesty and consequently was rendered shameful (Liv.1.58). Therefore it is not surprising that in this context Aidōs/Artemis had been represented as purifying element of human behaviour (here embodied by the male sex).

If in Athens since the eighth century BC female good conduct was represented by the appearance of women in public, in Sparta in 360-330 BC we see another representation of the ideal morality of the female sex. The change in the depiction of shame from Athens to Sparta may reflect the greater freedom that Spartan women had enjoyed arguably since the eighth century BC.<sup>31</sup> This may be inferred from Plutarch who in *Lycurgus* (14.4) explains how at the time of the Spartan legislator (i.e. Lycurgus who lived in the eighth century BC) women were free to strip naked in public, i.e. in the thermal baths, as long as shame was always present inside themselves. The statue of Praxiteles dated back to 360-330 BC and perhaps originally placed in such location, may support what Plutarch reports.<sup>32</sup> Praxiteles decided to represent Aphrodite of Knidos in the act of covering her private parts with her right hand which takes the name that we would expect; αἰδῶ (Luc. *Am.* 13).<sup>33</sup> Surely with the Aphrodite of Knidos we

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<sup>28</sup> Cairns 1996: 156 states that 'some might be tempted to argue for a sophisticated pun in which Αἰδῶσ both refers to Leto's gesture and designates Artemis'.

<sup>29</sup> Cairns 1996: 153 notices that Leto is not veiling her head as she does not want to show that she has been subject to 'unwanted erotic attentions'.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Marsman 2003: 118; Stiebert 2002: 17.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Hughes referenced in Carioli 2011: 39.

<sup>32</sup> *Aphrodite of Knidos*. Praxiteles 360-330 BC. Roman Copy. Rome: Vatican Museums.

<sup>33</sup> See Havelock 2007: 20, 28.

are facing a bipartite example of shame; on one side we have the personification of shame through the hand and on the other the reproduction of the 'psychophysical' category of shame. The latter might be better understood if we think of how women who were about to strip naked at the thermal baths might have felt shame at the sight of the statue and may have mechanically reproduced the gesture of covering their *aidoia* with the hand. It is clear that we have no evidence of how women might have reacted at the sight of the Aphrodite of Knidos but recent psychological studies on human emotions have attested how the individual is brought to the reproduction/copy of gestures of others.<sup>34</sup> Finally, the representation of goddesses in the act of covering their private parts and a potential reproduction of this gesture in the spectator seem to have ancient roots dating back to the culture of the Near East in the Middle Bronze Age i.e. 1800-1350 BC.<sup>35</sup>

However, in Athens we can find a more explicit existence of the goddess of shame. This hypothesis is supported by the discovery of the inscription IG II<sup>2</sup> 5147 (perhaps dated back to the fourth century BC) on a seat of the Theatre of Dionysus in the Acropolis of Athens. The fragmentary condition of the inscription did not prevent Champion-Smith and D'Agostino making conjectures on it. The inscription reads:

'--- Αἰδοῦς'

The missing word that precedes the genitive 'Αἰδοῦς' cannot be anything but the Greek word for priestess; "[ε]ρε[ί]αι".<sup>36</sup> Their argument can be validated through investigation of some further factors. The first is to be sought in an inscription similar to that of *aidōs*, i.e. IG II<sup>2</sup> 5149, found exactly in the same location; the only difference is that instead of 'Αἰδοῦς' we have '--- [ε]ρ[έ]ας Ἀφρο[ο]δίτης Πανδήμου, Νύμφης' which translated would be 'the priestess of Aphrodite Pandemos Nympe'. The reconstruction of the missing letters "ερ and 'ας' makes us understand how they would have stood for the word

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<sup>34</sup> Roganti and Ricci Bitti 2012: 567.

<sup>35</sup> Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 28.

<sup>36</sup> Champion-Smith 1998: 207; D'Agostino 1969: 322.



‘[Ἰερ]ἑ[αζ]’. The second one can be glimpsed in the feasible role that aidōs should have had in the Theatre of Dionysus. Presumably its function may be seen in the spontaneous generation of sexual shame in the spectator during theatrical performances. The presence of Aidōs, through its priestess, may have had to perform the function of purification of human sexual passions and lead the spectator or listener to feel an interior and exterior sense of shame that should have distracted him from taking part in Dionysian rituals or initiations. The deterrence from various and liberating sexual passions helped people to avoid the damage of an immoral reputation.<sup>37</sup> Since the presence of Aidōs in a context of sexual acts typical of the rites of Dionysus has been mainly studied in connection with the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii where it seems that shame had made its appearance along with Dionysus, we can only speculate about its function in this context.<sup>38</sup> I strongly believe, however, that the finding of a priestess of Aidōs may be a proof of the existence of a cult during the fourth century BC and its inclination towards the maintenance of good conduct, reputation, honour and above all of a personality not contaminated by human sexual passions.<sup>39</sup>

After the fourth century BC, less relevant for my purpose, are the hints to aidōs found in various ancient authors.<sup>40</sup> Only in the second century AD, Pausanias (1.17.1) mentions the presence of an altar of Aidōs in Attica in his time. Unfortunately this has never been found. The ‘Αἰδοῦς βωμός’ mentioned by him seems to be identical, but without any concrete evidence, with the one cited by Demosthenes (25.25.35) centuries before i.e. in the fourth century BC. Through these hints it can be assumed that an altar of Aidōs must have been erected in its honour as early as the fourth century BC. Pausanias also provides another testimony that led scholars to various speculations.<sup>41</sup> In the third book, precisely

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Massimilla 2010-2011: 235-236; Ferrari 1990: 192.

<sup>38</sup> Sauron 1998: 94-95.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Cairns 1993: 155.

<sup>40</sup> My original speech at the Postgraduate Conference also included a brief digression on Xenophon who, in the Symposium (8.35), mentions how the Spartans would have worshipped the goddess of shame. In this paper I will not mention him as, according to Richer, Xenophon is just glorifying the behaviour of the Spartans.

<sup>41</sup> Richer 2009: 91-115.

in 3.20.10-11, he reports that Icarius, Penelope's father, placed a statue of Aidōs thirty stades away from Sparta as soon as Penelope was promised in marriage to Odysseus. The text says:

[10] τὸ δὲ ἄγαλμα τῆς Αἰδοῦς τριάκοντά που στάδια ἀπέχον τῆς πόλεως Ἰκαρίου μὲν ἀνάθημα εἶναι... [11]...καὶ τὴν ἀποκρίνασθαί φασιν οὐδέν· ἐγκαλυψαμένης δὲ πρὸς τὸ ἐρώτημα...'

According to Wide such a statue would have been erected near the entrance of a cave either in Triphylia as reported by Strabo (8.3.14) or in Elis as stated by Pausanias (6.25.2-3) in order to attest 'the vestige of a pre-existing cult of Hades'.<sup>42</sup> I am inclined to reject this interpretation for several reasons. The gesture of Penelope's veiling can be led back to the iconography studied above where women had to cover themselves as a sign of modesty and purity.<sup>43</sup> In this context, the covering of Penelope seems to represent not only purity and modesty but also the promise and commitment of fidelity to her husband before and after marriage.<sup>44</sup> This is proved by a passage of the Homeric *Odyssey* (21.65) where Penelope is face veiling herself before the suitors. I cannot say with certainty that the statue given by Pausanias would have definitely existed but I may confirm that shame was anthropomorphised in the role of Penelope.

In conclusion, when studying shame within ancient Greek culture and society we must always bear in mind that the bipartite operation of aidōs falls into two main categories; the first one is represented by psychological feelings of shame, honour, esteem etc. while the other by all those gestures and acts that lead the listener or spectator to feel a sense of shame which was mostly regarded as sexual.<sup>45</sup> The first category was shown through examples taken from Homer where it can be clearly understood that honour and shame were prerogatives of the heroic *ethos*.<sup>46</sup> The second one was glimpsed in the representation of Athenian women or goddesses entirely covered by cloaks,

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<sup>42</sup> Wide 1893: 242-3, 270 in Richer 2009: 94.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Cairns 1996: 153.

<sup>44</sup> Cairns 1996: 154.

<sup>45</sup> Massimilla 2010-2011: 233; Ferrari 1990: 186, 191.

<sup>46</sup> Cairns 1993: 80-81.

unlike Sparta, as a sign of chastity and purity.<sup>47</sup> Aidōs as a force that inspired to the good conduct and regulation of human behaviour has a connection with its cultural and godly aspect. This would explain why in Hesiod, shame has been represented as an anthropomorphised goddess that looked at people's right manners. Such peculiarity of aidōs has been further seen in those Athenian iconographies representing the meaning of the veil in the notion of shame. The inscription IG II<sup>2</sup> 5147 may prove a potential worship of Aidōs through its priestess. A conceivable devotion towards Aidōs is further seen in Demosthenes (25-25-35) and Pausanias (1.17.1) with the mention of the 'Αἰδοῦς βωμός'. Subsequently I think that the *floruit* of an eventual cult of shame could have taken place during the Athenian fourth century BC. Unfortunately it is difficult to prove such assumption without the discovery of major archaeological findings depicting Aidōs or altars erected in its honour.

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<sup>47</sup> Buck Alwa 2008: 136; Kardulias 30 in Buck Alwa 2008: 136.

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