

**THE ANCIENT AND MODERN MANO CORNUTA USE**

***O USO ANTIGO E MODERNO DE MANO CORNUTA***

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## The ancient and modern mano cornuta use

Maria Mertzani\*

**Abstract:** The study analyses the iconography of 602 Attic vases where the mano cornuta appears, and parallels its themes to the meanings of 110 Y-handshape signs of three sign languages: the American Sign Language, Brazilian Sign Language, and Greek Sign Language. The examination demonstrates mano cornuta to be the etymon of cognate signs among the three sign languages.

**Resumo:** O estudo analisa a iconografia de 602 vasos áticos, onde aparece a mano cornuta, e paraleliza seus temas com os significados de 110 sinais com a configuração de mão Y, em três línguas de sinais: em Língua de Sinais Americana, em Língua de Sinais Brasileira e em Língua de Sinais Grega. O exame demonstra que a mano cornuta é o étimo dos sinais cognatos entre as três línguas de sinais.

**Keywords:**

Mano cornuta; American Sign Language; Greek Sign Language; Brazilian Sign Language; Attic vase iconography.

**Palavras-Chave:**

Mano cornuta; Língua de Sinais Americana; Língua de Sinais Grega; Língua de Sinais Brasileira; Iconografia de vasos áticos.

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## INTRODUCTION

As a work in progress, the study has analysed the iconography of 602 Attic vases<sup>1</sup> from the online *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* (CVA, 2004), from which 1,32% (n = 8) only involves the *mano cornuta* (the horned hand) (Table 1). The themes of this iconography were then paralleled to the meanings of 110 Y-handshape<sup>2</sup> signs with the scope to investigate the historic relatedness of three sign languages (SLs) with the *mano cornuta*: of the American Sign Language - ASL (n = 36); Greek Sign Language - GSL (n = 28); and Brazilian Sign Language - LIBRAS (n = 46). By examining the meanings and the iconicity of the specific handshape, the study demonstrates the derivation and formation of certain signs from the *mano cornuta*, and their cross-cultural correspondence in these SLs.

The starting point of this comparison stands the work by Shaw and Delaporte (2015), who etymologised certain ASL signs on their cognates in French Sign Language (LSF), which, subsequently, connect to the *mano cornuta*. In line with this, and considering the fact that LSF is a Mediterranean SL, the study wanted to show such association with another Mediterranean SL like GSL, which according to historic records (e.g. Plato, *Cratylus*) is older than any known SL in the specific area. In addition, the *mano cornuta* was broadly used in ancient, and is still in use in contemporary Greece.

Table 1: The *mano cornuta* in the Attic vases

CVA Vase Record Number*	H-handshape	Y-handshape	Date BCE	Museums & Collections
20 (BAPD: 211990)	x		475-425	VIENNA, Kunsthistorisches Museum i (AUSTRIA 1, pls. 1 - 50)
41 (BAPD: 12084)		x	425-375	VIENNA, Kunsthistorisches Museum i (AUSTRIA 1, pls. 1 - 50)
75 (BAPD: 340004)	x		450-400	VIENNA, Kunsthistorisches Museum ii (AUSTRIA 2, pls. 51 - 100)
131 (BAPD: 218091, 218105)	x	x	400-300	VIENNA, Kunsthistorisches Museum iii (AUSTRIA 3, pls. 101 - 150)
132 (BAPD: 568)	x		400-300	VIENNA, Kunsthistorisches Museum iii (AUSTRIA 3, pls. 101 - 150)
83 (BAPD: no matching record)		x	NA	BRUSSELS, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire ii (BELGIUM 2, pls. 49 - 96)
75 (BAPD: no matching record)	x		NA	BRUSSELS, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire ii (BELGIUM 2, pls. 49 - 96)
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>		

\* The parenthesis refers to records on Beazley Archive Pottery Database - BAPD.

The small appearance of the *mano cornuta* in Attic iconography agrees with the fact that the Y-handshape is known as a *marked* handshape as it does not occur frequently<sup>3</sup> in most SLs (cf. KOOIJ & CRASBORN, 2016). The SL sample is based on the following dictionaries: for ASL, on the *American Sign Language handshape dictionary* by Tennant and Gluszk Brown (1998), and on *The Gallaudet dictionary of American Sign Language* by Valli (2005); for GSL, on the *Online Dictionary of Concepts in GSL* by the Educational Policy Institute (2013), and the *Dictionary of Sign Language* by Magganaris

1 CVA vase photos are copyrighted. The reader can access them online using the record numbers in Table 1.

2 The naming of the handshapes follows the fingerspelled forms of SLs. Thus, the Y-handshape is the form for the Y letter, and the H-handshape for the H letter. The latter is an alternative handshape of the Y-handshape.

3 For example, n = 51 signs were met, representing a 2,6 % only out of a total N = 1927 LIBRAS signs.

(1998); and for LIBRAS, on the online *Dicionário da Língua Brasileira de Sinais V3* by Azambuja Lira and Souza (2011).

To date, there is no documented evidence that proves the connection of GSL with ASL and LSF, although due to the frequent contact among deaf people (e.g. in international conferences), there are traces of ASL sign transmission to GSL. Additionally, LIBRAS is chosen as a historically cognate SL to ASL and LSF, therefore a considerable number of cognate signing was expected to be etymologised on both SLs. Furthermore, this study records systematically and for the first time archaeological indexes of the *mano cornuta* in ancient Greece (in Attic vase), which, in turn, demonstrate etymological association with the Y-handshape signs of the three SLs.

### MANO CORNUTA IN ANTIQUITY

One of the earliest examples comes from the sixth Egyptian Dynasty in the Qar tomb (SIMPSON, 1976; ROTH, 1993), where various scenes show the performance of the *mano cornuta* by the followers and/or suppliants of the departed as a gesture of honour, and/or a worship act for the Egyptian sun Ra. In relation to the sun, its Y-handshape form is clearly performed in front of the sun disk, which, in turn, was usually depicted over the head of a cow. This solar relationship is also supported by another iconography where Ra, as a young boy, performs the *mano cornuta* in the centre of a circle that was formed by the serpent *ouroboros* (BIEDERMANN, 1989, p. 362). Elsewhere (WILKINSON, 1994, p. 259), the specific handshape is performed in front of a vase, an imagistic motif that is preserved in Greek archaic and classical times. During Bronze Age (ca. 1303 BCE), the *mano cornuta* is articulated in the battlefield, sometimes by captives in front of the king, as they are trying to protect themselves against the king's subjugation (PANAITE, 2014).

In Egyptian, Minoan and Mycenaean civilisations the cow and/or the bull symbolised the sun, with which the *mano cornuta* was associated. This relationship is demonstrated on a Greek kylix from the middle of the sixth century BCE (HARRISON, 1908, p. 407), where god Dionysus holds aloft his characteristic wine-cup (the *kantharos*), and the goddess Semele (a moon goddess) performs the *mano cornuta* in front of his face (Figure 1). Dionysus was the son of Zeus, and therefore he had solar attributes among others. Additionally, Semele was known as *Keraunia* (*Κεραυνία*) that meant *wielding the thunder* and *thunder-stricken*. In fact, her name refers to the horn (*Κεραυνία > Κέρας*) which mythology wants - especially the horns of a cow with which the *mano cornuta* is always associated (cf. KING, 1949) - to become thunderbolts (GUBERNATIS, 1872, p. 107).



**Figure 1:** Semele performing *mano cornuta* in front of Dionysus.

Since the *mano cornuta* appears next to vessels, it is most probably linked to an archetypal fertility worship, that of the Mother Goddess. In this, the vessel represented the rain season between the equinoxes, and the womb of the Mother Goddess (COHEN, 1993; MACGILLIVRAY, 2004; MAGINI, 2015; ŠPRAJC, 1993), who was usually depicted by the moon's sickle shape (as the new moon) and/or by the cow's horns (cf. MERTZANI, 2017). In particular, the moon, as the lunar sun (GRAULICH, CARRASCO, COE, DURAND-FOREST, et al., 1981; HEALEY, 1977), referred to the fertility of the earth and women during the rain period of the agricultural cycle (cf. GREEN, 2014; MILBRATH, 1999), during which the onset and end of the rains coincides with the extremes of Venus that also formed an extension to the moon's and sun's symbolism (as an evening and morning star) (MAGINI, 2015, p. 29-30; ŠPRAJC, 1993, p. 42). Due to this association, the *mano cornuta* represented Venus as well, especially its sickle appearance between the earth and the sun.

Metonymically then, as a solar and lunar symbol, the *mano cornuta* represented day and night, life and death, a relationship which explains its depiction in tombs. For example, in the Etruscan tomb of the Lionesses at Tarquinia (ca. 520 BCE), a figure dances and acts the H-handshape *mano cornuta* (with the right hand), most probably as a radiating solar energy against evil, and hence, as a benevolent act in afterlife (HOLLOWAY, 1986, p. 448-449; MORRIS, 1979, p. 128). Much later, in early Church iconography of the tenth century, the *mano cornuta* is clearly illustrated as the sun's rays with beneficial energy (ELWORTHY, 1900, p. 157).

Currently, in the Mediterranean, the *mano cornuta* under its H-handshape form only is still in use as a common gesture strictly in Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. In Malta, it is used in types of horned amulets, such as the *qrun* (the horn) (BALDACCHINO, 2010). In Greece, it is *το κέρατο* (> *κέρας*) and in Italy, *il corno*, meaning the horn, used intentionally (while uttering the specific words) for prophylactic purposes. By wearing it and/or acting it, people believe to be protected by the evil eye that is regarded to cause "dryness" under the form of barrenness and the inability to bear children (KRIPPNER, BUDDEN, GALLANTE & BOVA, 2011). It also signifies horn-related metaphors concerning betrayal or emasculated lover, leaving phallic connotations as well. These latter meanings come from medieval years, when the *mano cornuta* was associated with fools and cuckolds (SALE, 2016; SHAW & DELAPORTE, 2015). In France and the northern European countries (e.g. the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria) it is extinct and/or is extremely rare (cf. MORRIS, 1994).

### ANALOGIES TO THE MANO CORNUTA

Apart from the Mediterranean, and similar to the *mano cornuta*, the Y-handshape and H-handshape forms are recorded in Oceania, Australia, India and South America as traditional signs. Beginning with India, the specific signs appear in traditional dance hand movements (cf. CAROLL & CAROLL, 2013) denoting: female characters with a bow/arrow, female energy and love; a huntress goddess; and various animals like tortoise, deer, and antelope (Figure 2). The deer and goddess are also denoted through the Y-handshape that also expresses the female reproductive organs among other meanings (house, body, ground, etc.). This handshape used to mean wife in the union of male and female, which, in turn, is denoted by the H-handshape that also means fertility, cattle, wind and/or storm, and the instruments drum and/or flute. Under the meaning of wild animals, the H-handshape represents the lion. The majority of these meanings connect to the aforementioned symbolism of the *mano cornuta*, especially to its representation of horned animals, solar animals (the lion), femininity, female organs, and of a goddess.

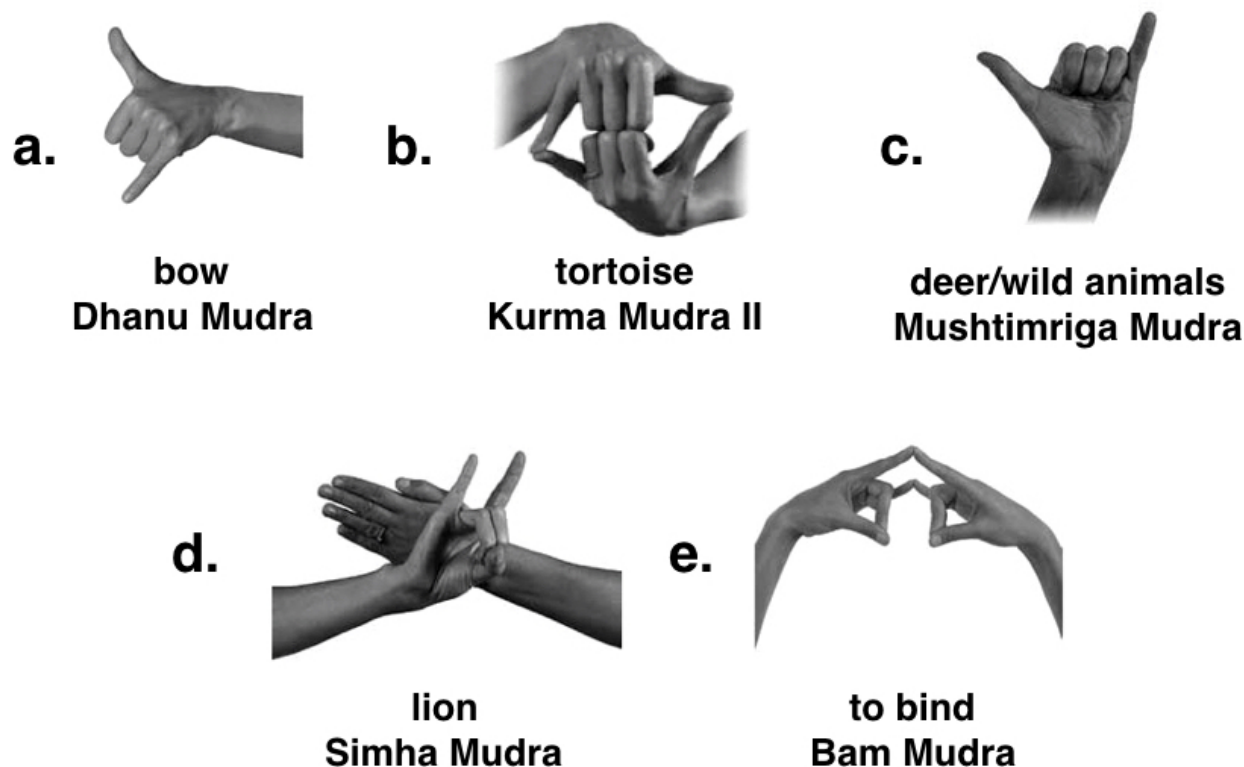


Figure 2: Examples of Indian traditional dance hand movements.

In Walmajarri peoples of Australia, the Y-handshape is used for the sign *KUNGA* that means ‘woman’ and ‘morning’ (BIEUNDURRY, 2007), hence connecting again the handshape with femininity, the day light, and a velar word, as it is shown above for the *mano cornuta* in the words *Κεραυνία, κέρασ*, *qrun*, and *corno*. Although the sign agrees with the feminine symbolism of the *mano cornuta*, it is difficult to support the pre-existence of cows in far antiquity in Australia and *kunga* to symbolise a cow. However, other signs from Australian aboriginals (e.g. *Ngada*) suggest the Y-handshape to refer to the animal *wallaby* (MOUNTFORD, 1938, p. 154), which in rituals represents the eternal man *Kugu’uthu* (WILLIAMS, 2000, p. 355), the fire generator (ROSSOTTI, 2002, p. 239).

In Brasil, the Y-handshape is broadly used as a salutation<sup>4</sup> sign, likewise the *shaka*<sup>5</sup> sign for the Hawaiian *aloha*<sup>6</sup>, which is a greeting of love, gratitude and affection. Interestingly, *aloha* derivatives (e.g. *alohi*, *alohikea*) mean ‘to shine, to sparkle, to glitter,’ ‘brightness,’ and ‘white light’ (ANDREWS, 1922, p. 52), linking again the Y-handshape to sunlight meanings.

4 In Umbanda and Candomblé rituals, the Y-handshape and H-handshape are used as worship salutation signs. To the best of my knowledge, the meanings of these signs are not yet examined in this ritualistic context.

5 Morris (1994, p. 218) supported the origin of *shaka* in a modified version of a Spanish drinking gesture. However, historic linguistics of Spanish Sign Language demonstrates that, where the specific drinking sign changes (PARKHURST & PARKHURST, 2003, p. 4), it is always articulated close to the mouth and not away from it. Additionally, in other SLs, the change always refers to the modification of the handshape and not to the location of the sign’s articulation.

6 Aloha (and *alohi*) involves words referring to the face, front, and an upper surface (*alo*); the number two (e.g. as two people making love) (*alu*); the blue or bluish colour (*ha*), and the flowing water and/or the sea (*hi*). This first compound of *aloha*, involves the word *a’a* (light, glowing) as in *a’alo* and *alo*. Cf. *ali’i* (chiefs, king queen, etc.), *alaula* (light of early dawn, sunset light), *’alua* (two, twice), and *’alima* (five, five times). In this latter, *ma* is a preposition meaning ‘at, in, on’, and ‘and other(s)’ (PUKUI, ELBERT, MOOKINI, 1992, p. 3, 10, 11, 87).

## RESULTS

*The mano cornuta in the Attic vases*

So far, the iconography of the Attic vases shows that the *mano cornuta* was more frequently depicted with masculine figures (e.g. youth, satyrs) dancing next to a vessel (e.g. vase no. 20), reminding thus the aforementioned fertility symbolism. There is one incidence only (vase no. 83) in which the *mano cornuta* is performed by a female figure on the right side of a satyr and in front of a dionysian drum, bearing thus a solar meaning that is connoted by the drum itself (cf. DI GIULIO, 1991) and the horns over it. This solar symbolism is also met in vase no. 132, where Dionysus (as a solar god) sits performing the *mano cornuta*, and his maenads are also articulating it.

Table 2: The articulation of the *mano cornuta*

CVA Vase	Mano Cornuta	Location	Comments
20	H-handshape	Upper right	Man, right hand, on the level of the eye; tongue protrudes.
41	Y-handshape	Left up	Satyr, left hand, on the level of the shoulder.
75	H-handshape	Right down	Young man, right hand, on the level of the waist.
131	H-handshape & Y-handshape	H-handshape: <i>Gaia</i> : right had - upper left; left hand-down. <i>Apollo</i> : left hand - down. <i>Hermes</i> : right hand - upper right. <i>Goddess Hera(?)</i> : left hand-upper left. Y-handshape: <i>Zeus</i> : right hand - right up. <i>Heracles</i> : right hand - centre down. <i>Two athletes</i> : left hand-left up. <i>One athlete</i> : right hand-right up.	Only Zeus's sign is directed to Gaia and the swan. Apollo's is directed downwards; Heracles's to the four horses; and of the remaining gods, the handshape is turned to the eye. Gaia does not look at her right handshape. Two athletes look at each other, and sign the <i>mano cornuta</i> over a short column; the third athlete is facing them, performing the <i>mano cornuta</i> with his right hand, over the higher column.
132	H-handshape	<i>Dionysus</i> : right hand-right up. <i>Maenad behind Dionysus</i> : right hand - right up. <i>Maenad/Priestess in front of Dionysus</i> : left hand-left up. <i>Man (suppliant?)</i> : right hand - right up.	The <i>mano cornuta</i> is performed on the level of the chest.
83	Y-handshape	Maenad (?): left hand-upper left.	The <i>mano cornuta</i> is performed over her head.
75	H-handshape	Right hand - lower right.	Young man, the <i>mano cornuta</i> downwards, on the level of the waist.

In vase no. 131, the *mano cornuta* is performed by the Greek gods Zeus, Gaia (*Γαῖα*), Apollo, and Hermes. In particular, its performance by the central goddess who holds the swan (by both hands), signifies its relation to the axis of the earth. She is *Γαῖα*, the Mother Earth, and the swan, the swan constellation that once was the polar star that defined the axis of the earth (MAGLI, 2009, p. 179). In fact, the swan and the *mano cornuta* is depicted just over the omphalus, a scene recalling the Delphic omphalus on which her name is attested. This relationship is also met in the scene with the athletes, who perform the *mano cornuta* over columns that were also symbols of the earth's axis and phallus (BUSENBARK, 1949, p. 162). Furthermore, in one of these scenes, Heracles is depicted to perform the *mano cornuta* by his right hand, while holding with his left

a sphere in front of four horses (as solar symbols too).

In vase no. 75 (BAPD: 202619), the *mano cornuta* in its H-handshape form is performed by a male youth with his right hand in front of a hare that stood for the spring equinox in the sign of Taurus (RICHER, 1994, p. 138), an association that also confirms its relation to the bull as the Taurus constellation used to represent.

As Table 2 shows, the *mano cornuta* is performed more frequently on the level of the shoulders and/or higher (on the level of the eye or over the head), an articulation that agrees with its traditional performance (MORRIS, 1979, p. 136), as well as with traditional Y-handshape signs in Australia, Brasil and Oceania.

### ***The mano cornuta in the three SLs***

Table 3 displays the number of signs that relate to the *mano cornuta*. As it was expected, GSL maintains it more than the ASL and LIBRAS, where its appearance is quite similar. Overall, it maintains its ancient symbolism denoting the cow, calf, ox, and the bull. For example, the ASL BULL is based on the H-handshape form performed on one's forehead alike the *mano cornuta* (p. 133).

**Table 3:** The *mano cornuta* in ASL, GSL and LIBRAS

	ASL	GSL	LIBRAS
<i>Mano cornuta</i>	10/36 (28%)	14/28 (50%)	14/46 (30%)

The three SLs converge in the signs PLAY, CELEBRATE, ANNIVERSARY, and WALK/ENTERTAINMENT (Figure 3). Their similar handshape and movement indicates common ancestry that can be traced in the worship of the Mother Goddess and her *sistrum* instrument. The articulation of the sign appears to imitate the holding of the *sistrum* - which also symbolised the head of a cow - in a similar fashion to the ASL CELEBRATE. Shaw and Delaporte (2015, p. 203) justify the Y-handshape as representing the letter <J> from the French verb *jouer*, which is also etymologised on the AG ἰώ (*jouer* > Latin, *iocare*, *iocus* > AG, ῥή ἰυγή: a shout of joy or pain > ἰώ, exclamation of joy or sorrow) that meant the Io cow goddess and the moon. This etymology also justifies the GSL WALK/ENTERTAINMENT and LIBRAS BIRTHDAY/ANNIVERSARY, since *jouer* also recalls the AG ἰώ (to go) due to “the procession or motion of the sun” (VALPY, 1828, p. 194), maintaining thus a solar symbolism as the *mano cornuta*.

The imitation of the cow/bull appears in the LIBRAS BOBAGEM (foolishness), which etymologically corresponds to the ASL ANTAGONISTIC that represents two horned animals fighting (Figure 4). This meaning of silliness is also shown in certain ASL and LIBRAS signs that originate from the *mano cornuta*. For example, the LIBRAS IDIOTA (idiot) is cognate to the ASL FOOLISH/SILLY (VALLI, 2005, p. 178) and hence, to the LSF IDIOT, which originates from the *mano cornuta* (SHAW & DELAPORTE, 2015, p. 247) (Figure 5).



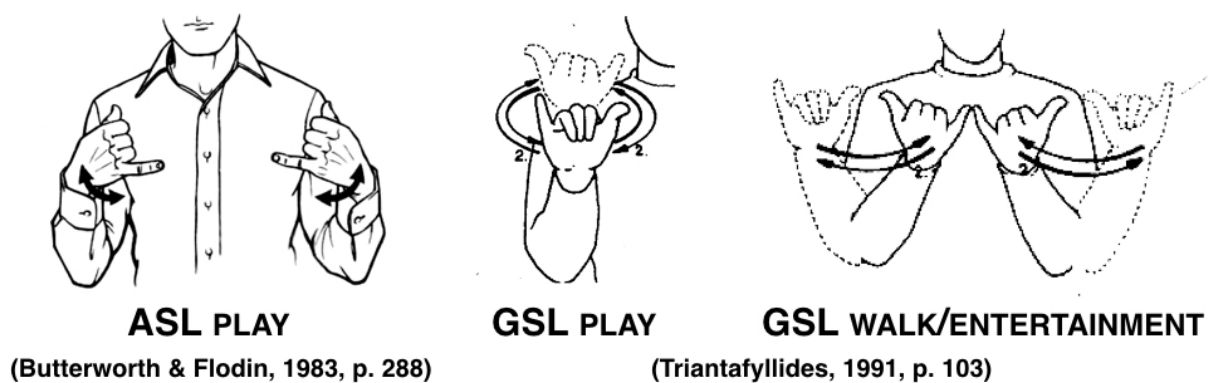
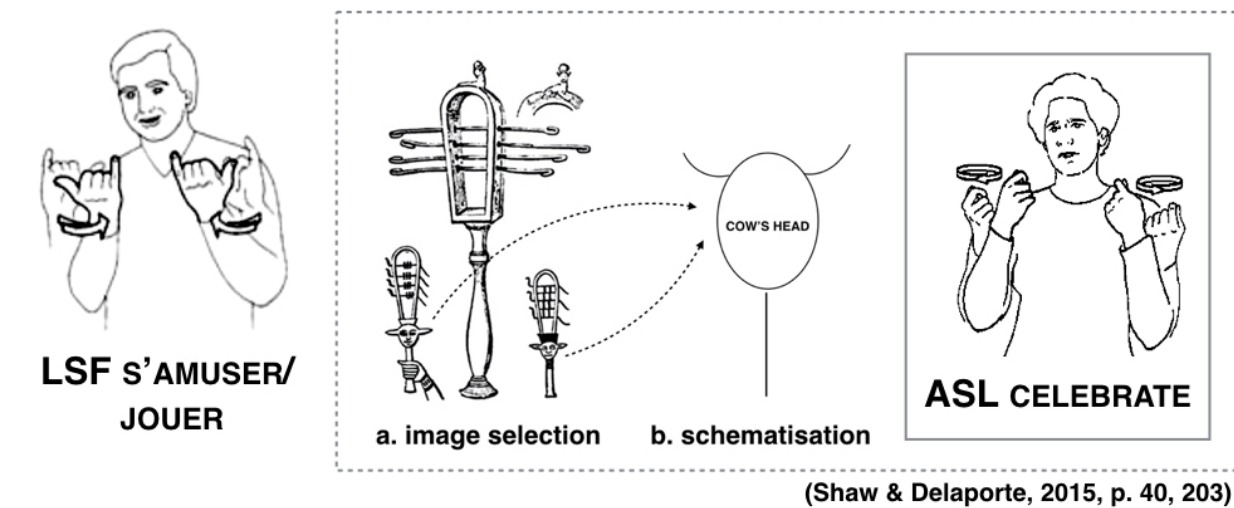


Figure 3: ASL, GSL, and LIBRAS PLAY etymology.

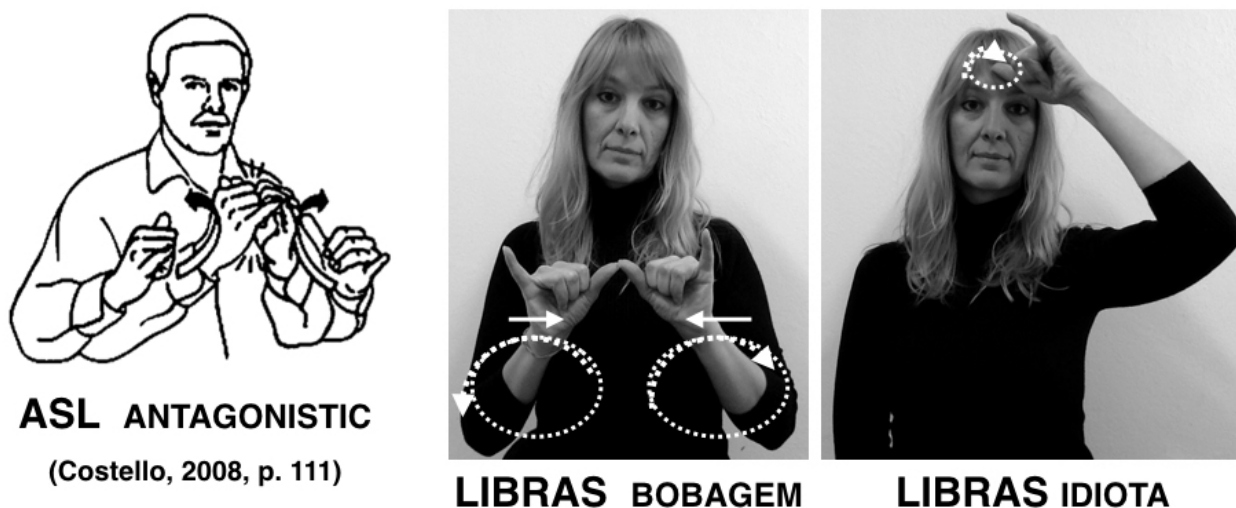


Figure 4<sup>7</sup>: The etymology of LIBRAS BOBAGEM and IDIOTA on mano cornuta.

Moreover, the LIBRAS signs AZAR (bad luck) and ENGANAR (to cheat) are also etymologically based on the mano cornuta (Figure 6). Firstly, the sign AZAR corresponds to the ASL WRONG, and the sign ENGANAR to the ASL DECEIVE<sub>2</sub> (cf. also

7 Note: The LIBRAS BOBAGEM is etymologised on the ASL ANTAGONISTIC, which also means ‘cantankerous, bullheaded’, and thus is linked to mano cornuta. The LIBRAS IDIOTA represents the horn on the forehead (see also Figure 6).

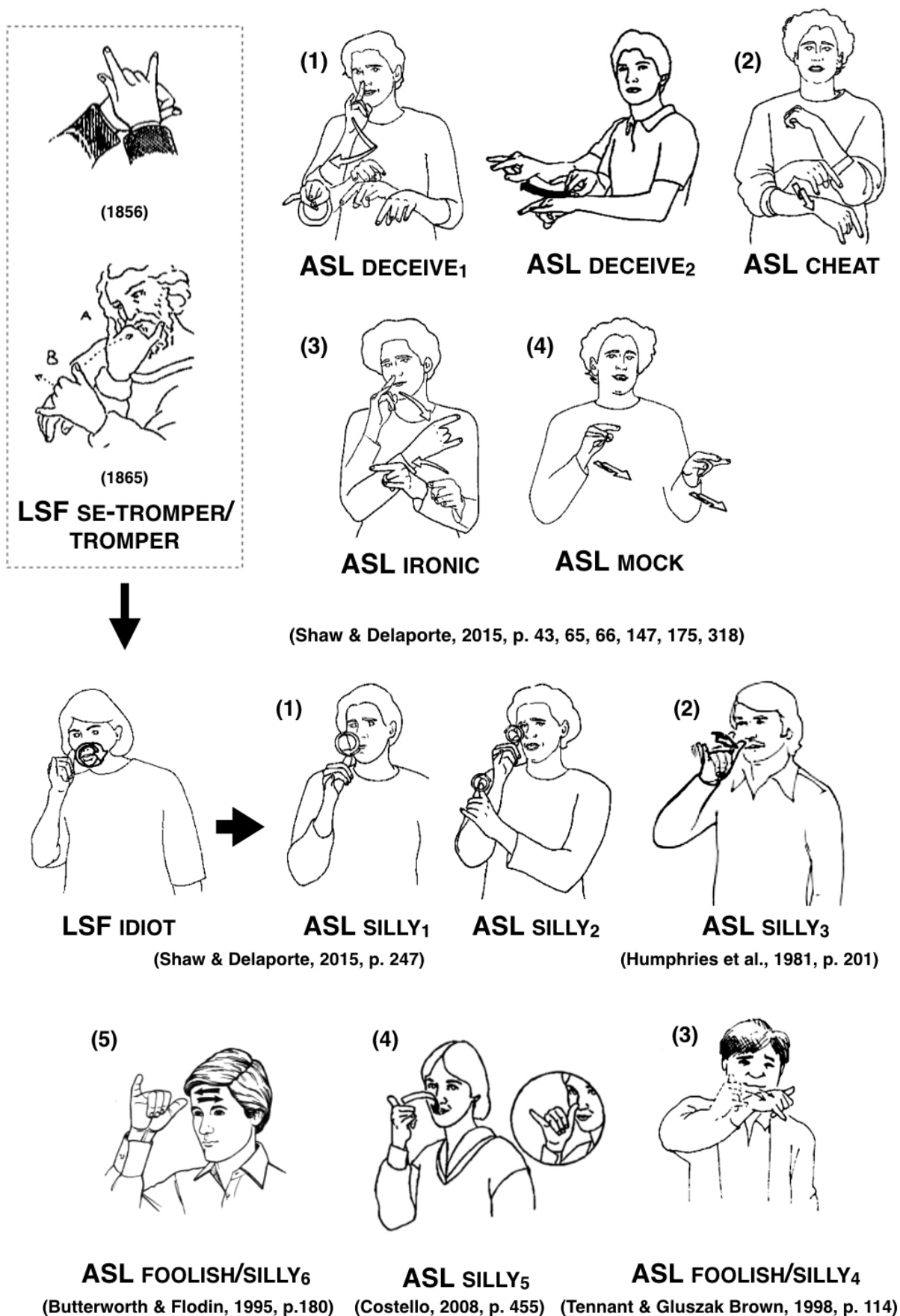


Figure 5: The etymology of ASL FOOLISH/SILLY on the LSF SE-TROMPER/TROMPER.

ASL MOCK and IRONIC) (p. 147, 175). Then, both signs (WRONG, DECEIVE<sub>2</sub>) originate from the LSF TROMPER/SE-TROMPER, which is etymologised on the mano cornuta. It appears that the original H-handshape changed to the Y-handshape (for AZAR), a modification that proves the alternate function of these two handshapes.



Figure 6: ASL WRONG and LIBRAS ENGANAR based on the LSF SE-TROMPER/TROMPER.

ASL and GSL converge in the colours YELLOW, BEIGE, BLUE, and BLOND (Figure 7). These, considering the spectrum of light, remind the sun symbolism of the mano cornuta as they refer to the colours of the daylight. Even if a lexicised etymology is accepted for the sign YELLOW where the Y-handshape represents the initial Y of the French *jaune* (yellow) (SHAW & DELAPORTE, 2015, p. 117, 319), its articulation does not explain BLUE. However, a careful look at these signs shows their correspondence to PLAY, and, following its etymology, the sun symbolism of the mano cornuta appears again, for the suggested etymon (*jaune/jalne* > εἴλη, ἔλα, ἀλέα: the sun's light; the dawn<sup>8</sup> > ἄλιος: the sun; the sea cf. ἀλῶς) refers to both colours, yellow and blue. In the ASL GOLD, the Y-handshape clearly represents a flickering gleam (Figure 8), which is repeated in the signs YELLOW and BLUE.

Although LIBRAS and GSL are not cognate SLs as LIBRAS and ASL are, they correspond to the signs CAPITAL and CENTRE/ATHENS<sub>2</sub> (Figure 9). In GSL, these signs also denote ATHENS and CITY, meanings that connect to the mano cornuta as it

8 Cf. for dawn: ἄως and γέλαν < γαλανός (blue). Also, αὐ- = ἄως = ἄα (dawn, water).

relates to the axis of the earth (see vase no. 131). Since the sign refers to Athens and hence, to the goddess Athena from whom the city is named, the *mano cornuta* refers to the *Panathenaia* celebrations on the month *ἑκᾶτομβαιών* (Hecatombaeon), during which the constellation *Ophis* (current Draco) rotated around the north pole, the axis of the earth (BOUTSIKAS, 2011, p. 307). This midpoint of the pole is represented by the Y-handshape and/or the A<sup>o</sup>-handshape in the middle of the palm. This second handshape strongly demonstrates this relationship since it is attested by the goddess Athena in front of Heracles (BOARDMAN, 1974, p. 118), who also performs the *mano cornuta* in vase no. 131. Interestingly, the Y-handshape means the ‘centre’ in the SL of Italy (SPREADTHESIGN, 2012), where the *mano cornuta* still exists.

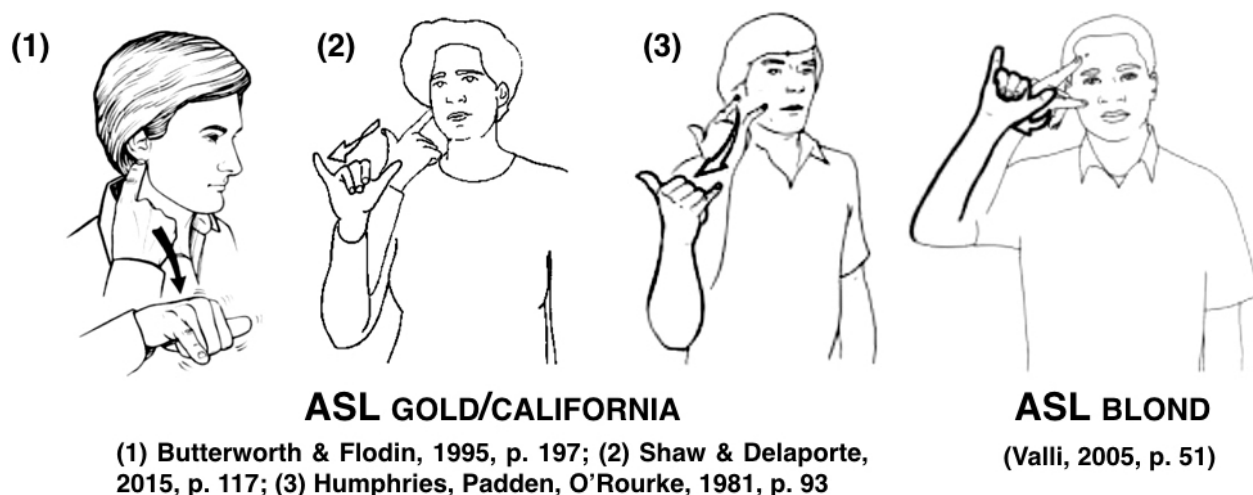


**Figure 7:** ASL and GSL colour convergence.

### DISCUSSION

The *mano cornuta* is found to associate with an ancient solar and fertility symbolism, which, subsequently, is fossilised in modern SLs, like GSL and ASL under the meanings of colours and play. This convergence can be explained by the diffusion of the ancient worship of the Mother Goddess, which, across civilisations, referred to the agricultural cycle for planting and harvesting. In this cycle, the conjunction of the sun and moon (the full moon) used to take place once every eight years during the summer solstice, during which, at least initially, the Olympics were celebrated, as well as the new year. With this specific conjunction and time of the year the *mano cornuta* appears to associate as the iconography of vase no. 131 depicts,

as well as its performance by solar gods (e.g. Zeus, Dionysus, Apollo, Heracles).



**Figure 8:** The ASL GOLD and BLOND.

The summer solstice was used to measure the shortest noon shadow that defined the north pole, and hence, the earth's and celestial axis (ISLER, 1989; 1991). In fact, the bull's horns were used as a gnomon for this measurement (ISLER, 1991). The iconography of the vase no. 131 relates the *mano cornuta* to the pole of the earth, putting the swan (as the swan constellation) over the omphalos (the axis of the earth), and to Heracles, who initiated the Olympics. The athletes in this vase also recall these games, which were honoring the Mother Goddess Γαῖα in her sanctuary in Olympia, and Zeus as her triumphant son (ROBERTSON, 2010, p. 69). Moreover, the summer solstice was fixed for the celebration of the Olympics (HANNAH, 2009, p. 48). In particular, they used to start at the full moon of the summer solstice, during which the heliacal rising of Sirius was also taking place (RICHER, 1994, p. 111, 119), marking the beginning of the year. In fact, the new year in Athens commenced on the first of Hekatombaion (the month of Panathenaia), on the first new moon, the sickle moon (BILIC, 2012, p. 514; HANNAH, 2009, p. 36) that the *mano cornuta* represented.

This north passage of the sun defined the agricultural period from May first to middle August (ca. 105 days), which involved the epagomenal<sup>9</sup> days of the ancient calendars. In particular, the fourth epagomenal day was traditionally the day of the Mother Goddess (SALEM, 1937, p. 166), which was also equated to the heliacal rising of Sirius (HOLBERG, 2007, p. 4; WELLS, 1985, p. 258-259). Initially, then, her celebrations occurred when the conjunction of the sun and the full moon aligned<sup>10</sup> perfectly with Sirius (MAGLI, 2016, p. 70-71). However, this planetary conjunction started occurring days after the summer solstice due to the precession of the equinoxes (cf. WELLS, 1985, p. 279, 291).

As a result, the mother was celebrated at the beginning of August in *λυχνοκαΐα* (the Feast of Lanterns), when the sun enters in the centre of the constellation Cancer (HANNAH, 2009, p. 17; RICHER, 1994, p. 122). This central placement represented in antiquity the impregnation of the seed (by the sun) in the womb of the Mother (BUSENBARK, 1949, p. 133),

9 The intercalation of an extra month was thrice every eight years. The first of Hekatombaion and the solstice “will have varied at different moments within the cycle of intercalation: Hekatombaion 1 could fall at different points within a span of slightly more than twenty days in the Julian solar calendar” (PARKER, 2005, p. 193).

10 Such alignment occurred in the summer solstice in 1956 BCE (WELLS, 1985, p. 288).

and the conception of a god<sup>11</sup> (ESTRADA-BELLI, 2006, p. 63), a representation that recalls the sun as Horus<sup>12</sup> performing the *mano cornuta* in the centre of ourboros. In turn, the serpent reminds of Ophis and the centre of the earth as seen during the Panathenaea on Hecatombaeon 27, a date that coincides with the Mother's day. In fact, the hundredth day of the 105-day cycle was her day, when the lower conjunction of Venus also conjoined, passing between the earth and the sun. Five days before this conjunction, Venus appears as a thin crescent, which the *mano cornuta* also represented. This relationship is reminiscent in the GSL THURSDAY, which represents an ancient form of the number five (TRIANAFYLLIDES, 1990, p. 101), her number.



**GSL ATHENS<sub>1</sub>**



**GSL ATHENS<sub>2</sub>**



**LIBRAS CAPITAL**

**Figure 9: GSL and LIBRAS sign convergence CAPITAL and CENTRE.**

Based on this planetary alignment, the *mano cornuta* etymologises the GSL ETERNITY and ASL FOREVER. As Sirius was equated to the Mother, the *mano cornuta* also referred to its return cycle (every 1461 years) on the first day of the new year (HOLBERG, 2007, p. 4) known as the *αἰών* that meant eternity and lifetime, a meaning found in Venus too (cf. *αὔωσ*,

11 The classical authors mention the calf Apis/Epaphus born of a cow that is made pregnant by a light from heaven (FAULKNER, 1968, p. 44).

12 In 432 BCE, the summer solstice fell on Skirophoriôn 13 (BILIC, 2012, p. 516; HANNAH, 2009, p. 36), in which a sacrifice to Zeus *Διὶ ὀρίωι* is attested. Cf. Lambert (2000, p. 45) for Skirophoriôn 11/12. The meaning *ὠριος* (in due season, youthful, fresh) agrees with this time, since Skirophoriôn as the last month of the Attic calendar, announced the new year on the first of Hekatombaïôn. Cf. also *ὠρος*, year.

life). Especially the ASL FOREVER is articulated by the sign ALWAYS (BUTTERWORTH, ROD & FLODIN, 1983, p. 166) and the Y-handshape extending from the middle of the forehead. Shaw and Delaporte (2015, p. 106) base its etymology on the LSF JUSQU'A (until), arguing the Y-handshape to represent the <J> letter of the word. Interestingly, its etymon (*jusqu'á* > Latin *usquē* < adv. *us-*, all the way, continuously, constantly) leads to the AG ὤς (whither, as far as) and ὤς/ὤς (mother), from which originate the epithets ὤη/ὤή for Semele, and ὤης, ὤεύς, ὤας for Zeus and Dionysus, as the gods of fertilising moisture (cf. also ὤω, to rain). Hence, the handshape again links to solar and fertility meanings. Additionally, in other European SLs 'forever' (e.g. Polish ZAWSZE; Austria FÜR-IMMER; Czech NAVŽDY) is performed by the Y-handshape and a cyclical movement alike the one of the ASL ALWAYS, which are not cognate to ASL. Additionally, the etymologies of their 'forever' words refer to the earth (*zawsze* > γᾶ, κάς: earth), the daylight (*immer* > ἄμαρ, ἡμέρα: day) and the axis as the navel of the earth (*navždy* > νᾶός, ναῦς: temple, portable shrine, ship).

Furthermore, the *mano cornuta* is found to be performed more often with the right hand, which in some cultures symbolised the rain season and the day sky, whereas the left hand, the dry season and the night (MILBRATH, 1999, p. 14). Due to its relation to the day and sun, the right hand designated masculinity, whereas the left, femininity and the moon (PALKKA, 2002, p. 422). This symbolism agrees with this present iconography of the *mano cornuta*, and with the planetary alignment of the Mother's worship. Such masculine and phallic connotations are found in the LSF etymologies (e.g. ASL DECEIVE), and in the non-cognate LIBRAS sign ADULTERY. In these signs, the *mano cornuta* was regarded to replacing the phallus that had apotropaic power (BERRY, 1968; LYKIARDOPOULOS, 1981).

Moreover, all three SLs form metonymically signs that mean countries, such as ITALY in LIBRAS due to the present use of the *mano cornuta*; SPAIN in GSL, because of the bullfighting in the country; and NETHERLANDS in ASL because of the country's large cattle farming and industry. Additionally, in LIBRAS, the sign FARM means the place for rearing animals including cattle, and in GSL, the signs MAMMAL (as animal classification) and ANIMALS.

## CONCLUSION

The study examined the symbolism of the *mano cornuta* in Attic vase iconography, which, subsequently, extended into specific/intra-cultural meanings through juxtapositions of elements and parallelisms, so as to etymologise certain signs of three modern SLs. So far, this investigation proves the *mano cornuta* to be the etymon of signs that associate with meanings of light, adultery, foolishness, centrality, and eternity. Since it is shown to be performed in the ancient summer solstice celebrations, when the Mother Goddess worship was also taking place, its fertility meaning - and by extension its phallic one - is justified by the sun's symbolic power (at its farthest point northward) to fertilise the earth under the moisture of the full moon.

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