

## THE “FLYING MERCURY” STATUES IN PELOTAS AND IN BRAZIL<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This article has as its central theme a symbol of the cultural heritage of Pelotas, which had been out of sight for a long time. And even while gone missing, it was present in the imagery of the city and was the object of heritage claims by some sectors of society. It is the metal sculpture which represents the Greco-Roman god Hermes/Mercury. It was fixed at the top of the tower of the Central Market probably in 1914, disappearing between the decades of 1950 and 1960 and reappearing a few years ago. The text, as it appreciates the context of the arrival of Mercury in Pelotas, approaches this fact as a phenomenon of Reception of Antiquity, connected to a process of construction of an urban identity, an idea of civilization. The text considers the statue as a product of a modern appropriation that occurred not only at a geographical scale, but also at a global one. This appropriation can be seen in some Brazilian cities that lived an analogous moment of economical and cultural prosperity like the one experienced by Pelotas.

### Keywords

Sculpture; Mercury; Urban identity; Pelotas.

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## **Resumo**

Este artigo tem como tema central um símbolo do patrimônio cultural pelotense que esteve desaparecido por longo tempo, embora tenha permanecido no imaginário pelotense, tendo sido objeto de reivindicações patrimoniais por alguns setores da sociedade: trata-se da escultura em metal que do deus greco-romano Hermes/Mercúrio. Esteve fixada no alto da torre do Mercado Central de Pelotas desde aproximadamente 1914, vindo a desaparecer entre a década de 1950 e 1960 e reaparecendo há poucos anos. O texto, ao apreciar o contexto cultural da chegada do Mercúrio em Pelotas, aborda-o como um fenômeno de Recepção da Antiguidade, ligado à formação de uma identidade urbana e a uma ideia de civilização; considera-o como produto de uma apropriação moderna, ocorrida não somente em escala local, mas também global, e que pode ser percebida em algumas cidades brasileiras que tiveram momento de prosperidade econômico-cultural coevo e análogo ao de Pelotas.

## **Palavras-chave**

Escultura; Mercúrio; Identidade urbana; Pelotas.

## Mercury in Pelotas.

The central theme of this article is a sculpture in metal support, which represents the god Hermes/Mercury. The statue was placed at the tower of the Central Market of Pelotas after a major renovation<sup>4</sup> that the building went through from 1911 to 1914. It followed a tendency that occurred at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century of construction of public markets using iron, which was increasingly widespread throughout the world. At the time, four adorned turrets, a pavilion and a metallic tower over 37 meters high were added to the old building. This tower was manufactured in the city of Lüneburg in northern Germany and exported in 1912 to Brazil from the Port of Hamburg. The sculpture that was placed at the top of this tower alluded to commerce, to the values attributed to the god Mercury (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Photograph of the Central Market of Pelotas (approximately 1920). Source: Nelson Nobre Collection. *Laboratório de Acervo Digital UCPel* (UCPel Digital Collection Laboratory).

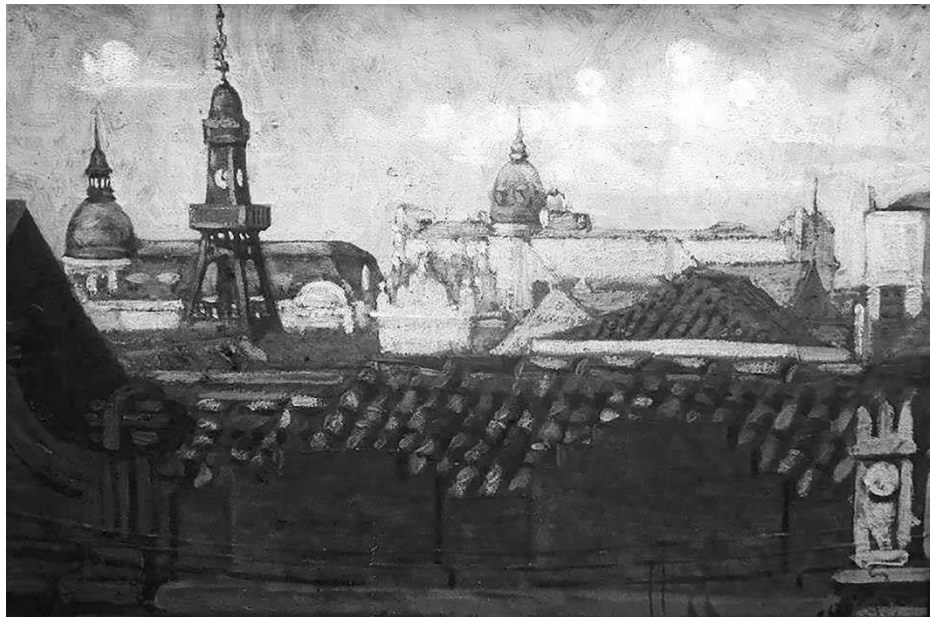
The sculpture was installed at the tower probably in 1914 and disappeared between the 1950s and 1960s. Visual evidence from the middle of the last century shows the presence of the statue still at the tower, as shown on the painting by Francisco de Paula Faria Rosa Sobrinho (Figures 2 and 3)<sup>5</sup> and

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<sup>4</sup> The Central Market of Pelotas was built between 1849 and 1856 (BRUNO 2010:22).

<sup>5</sup> Painting. Title: Public Market of Pelotas, 1948. Painter: Francisco de Paula Faria Rosa Sobrinho. Public Market of Pelotas - oil on canvas, 33 X 45 cm. The painter shows a view of the Tower of the Central Market of Pelotas, over the rooftops.

on the drawing by his great-nephew, Roberto Bonini (Figure 4)<sup>6</sup>. But when did the statue go missing? Some report that the statue was knocked down by a storm followed by strong winds that devastated the city in the 1950s; others believe that this occurred in the fire that destroyed the Central Market of Pelotas in 1969. However, photographs from the mid-1960s no longer show Mercury at the tower. Thus, for more than thirty years, the exact circumstances of the vanishing of the sculpture were unknown, as was where it was kept until it reappeared, after a few decades, partially destroyed (Figure 5).



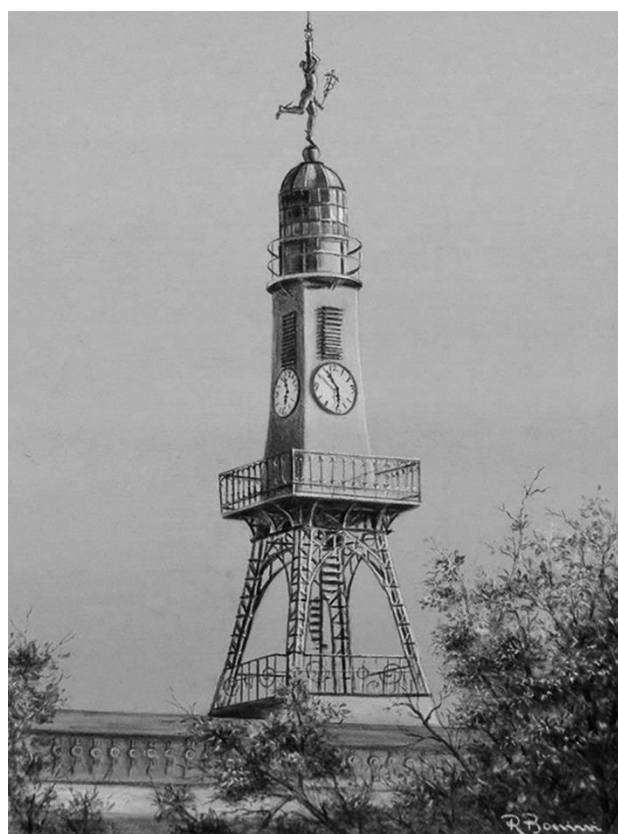
**Figure 2:** Oil painting on canvas, 33 X 45 cm. Source: Roberto Moura Bonini.

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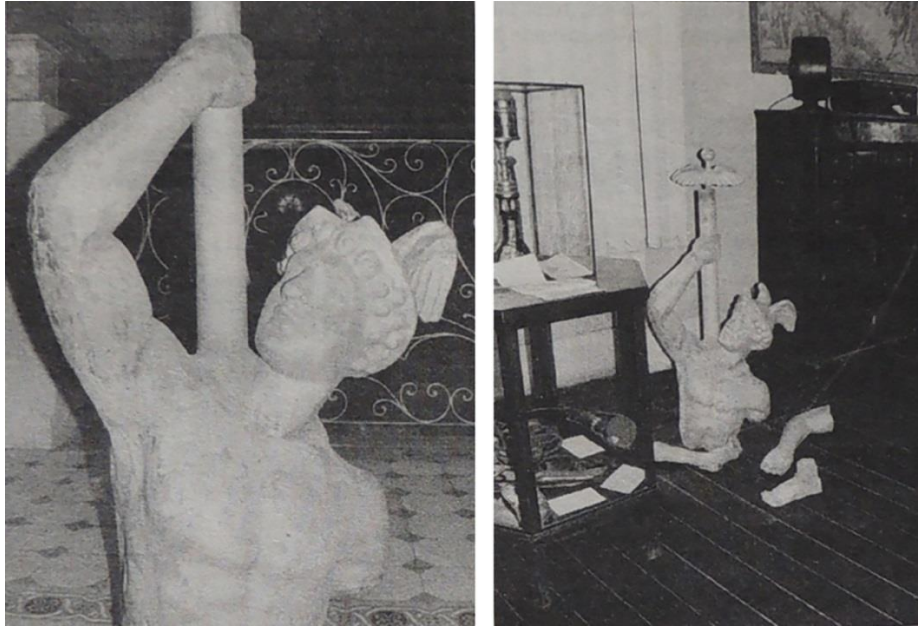
<sup>6</sup> The black and white crayon pencil drawing by Roberto Moura Bonini, grand-nephew of painter Francisco de Paula Faria Rosa Sobrinho, shows the hypothetical location of the statue of Mercury at the tower of the Central Market between 1915 and 1960, after a study made by him comparing several paintings, photographs and analyses of the angle and the proportions.



**Figure 3:** Oil painting on canvas, 33 X 45 cm (detail). Source: Roberto Moura Bonini.



**Figure 4:** Black and white pencil crayon drawing, 50x70cm. Source: Roberto Moura Bonini.



**Figure 5:** Sculpture in pieces, at the Museum of the *Bibliotheca Pública Pelotense* (Public Library of Pelotas). Source: *Bibliotheca Pública Pelotense* Collection.

With just over two meters of height, the Mercury<sup>7</sup> of Pelotas (Figure 6) is modelled according to the sculpture of the Mannerist sculptor Giambologna (1529-1608), which is currently displayed at the National Museum of Bargello in Florence, Italy (Figure 7). It is an artwork that has been multiplied, with numerous reproductions, in varying sizes, in different parts of the world. Mercury is represented according to traditional iconography, with a winged helmet (*petasus alatus*) and winged sandals (*endromides*), holding a caduceus (*kerykeion*) on his left arm. In some places, it is called "Flying Mercury".

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<sup>7</sup> This photograph, in the building of the *Secretaria Municipal de Cultura*, in 2013, shows the state of the sculpture of the god Mercury after having gone through two restoration interventions.



**Figure 6:** Photograph of the sculpture of Mercury. Source: Author's photograph, 2013.





**Figure 7:** "Flying Mercury" (1589), bronze sculpture, by Giambologna, h 1.70 cm. Florence, Bargello National Museum, inv. 449 Bronzi.. Source: Bargello Museum. Available at: <<http://www.polomuseale.firenze.it/musei/?m=bargello>>. Accessed on: jan 2015.

Since it was placed at the tower of the Market around 1914, besides the lack of documentation to prove its origin, the sculpture has followed an unusual path: disappearances and reappearances, recovery attempts, and unsuccessful restoration interventions. In the first step of this trajectory, even though it was part of the collection of the *Bibliotheca Pública Pelotense*, it was removed from this institution by a family that intended to restore it. The statue remained in the care of this family for decades, but did not go through any intervention, and was taken back to the Museum of the *Bibliotheca Pública Pelotense*. After a few years, it was placed in a small



room in the building of the *Secretaria Municipal de Cultura* (Department of Culture of Pelotas). More recently, it was transferred to a room at the Central Market. There, however, it remained in a room that was little known, little publicized and paradoxically "distant" from the population's gaze. This piece was initially fixed at the top of the Market tower, precisely because of the allusion to commerce that the allegory represents and the place incorporates. Therefore, it only makes sense in this context, in the space of the Central Market of Pelotas. Outside this place, and for a long time, Mercury has undergone a long process of decontextualization. Today - more than a century after its arrival in Pelotas and after undergoing a new intervention<sup>8</sup> - the statue is fixed on a pedestal in one of the four entrances of the building, inside the building of the Market, closer to its place of origin and to the people who circulate there.

Despite the gaps in the history of this figure in Pelotas, there were however numerous mobilizations in favor of its patrimonialization. These social actors somehow perceived it to be out of context and they continued mobilizing, even intermittently, to reverse this situation, becoming evident the desire for it to return to the tower of the Market. On several occasions, preservationists engaged in this direction, but the interventions Mercury had suffered made its structure too fragile and heavy, making it impossible for it to be returned to the top of the tower (Figure 8).



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<sup>8</sup> The statue was restored during the first half of 2019 by the conservators-restorers Flavia Silva Faro and Isabel Halfen Torino. Mercury cannot return to the market tower because of the structural fragility of the sculpture.

**Figure 8:** Current sculpture location. Source: Author's photograph, 2019.

### **Origin and economic and cultural development in the city of Pelotas**

The city of Pelotas, located in the southern part of the State of Rio Grande do Sul, had its origin and development linked to the production of *charque* – salt-cured cuts of meat laid out in the sun to dry for conservation and far reaching trade. In 1780, the first *charqueada* installed on the banks of the so-called Arroio Pelotas began its activities, stimulating the creation of other establishments and originating the village that would later demarcate the beginning of the city. In 1812, the new urban nucleus was officially recognized as *freguesia* (parish) São Francisco de Paula. In 1832, it was elevated to the category of *vila* (village) and, in 1835, it received the title of city and was renamed as Pelotas.

In a short time, the parish that originated the city, created to “serve the saltwater meat industry” (Gutierrez, 2004: 175), was characterized as a commercial and support services center to the production of the *charque* and other activities that stemmed from it. Already in the first decades of the 19th century, this industry was settling in the city, attracting a significant number of inhabitants. It gave rise to the so-called “cycle of *charque*”, a decisive point for the growth and development of the city, by creating a regional market for the cattle, increasing a more consistent economic activity, and ensuring “the circulation and the build-up of an enriched manorial strata” (Schlee, 1993: 71).

In the economic and cultural apex of the city, which took place between 1860 and 1890, the wealth from industry and commerce was invested in the construction of buildings in Pelotas and in its urbanization and sanitation. In this period, the “elevation of social standards resulted in an increase in cultural standards”, when the prevailing values were related to the Arts, Letters and Sciences (Magalhães, 1993: 53). This cultural atmosphere fostered changes and innovations that were taking place around the world. Pelotas, from the very beginning, formed a society with an urban profile, an unusual fact if compared to other cities of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, of a more rural nature, in the opinion of Magalhães (1993, p. 233).

When the Mercury statue arrived in Pelotas around 1914, the city had been going through an accentuated process of modernization and urbanization for some decades. This process began in Europe in the 19th century and reached Brazil, having a more intense impact in some regions and cities, Pelotas among them. In this context, the urban population increased, as well as the demand for labor. Measures were then imposed for sanitation,

lighting, housing for workers and construction of roads and railways to drain the production.

The socio-economic and technological changes that took place in Brazil in the second half of the 19th century implied deep changes in the way of living and building. Some of the cities and regions of Brazil, such as Porto Alegre, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Recife, Fortaleza, Salvador, Belém, and Manaus grew faster, a result of the production and exportation of agricultural products such as sugar, coffee, cotton, and rubber, among others. The rapid development of these places required more buildings - those made faster than normally -, adapting the cities to these changes (Kühl, 1998: 83).

Witnesses of an effervescent moment, the people, enchanted, accompanied the innovations brought by modernization and progress, admiring the symbols of modernity, although sometimes touched very indirectly by them. A "will to be modern" is born (Fabris, 1993: 137). In this atmosphere, "contaminated" by the effervescence of modernity and progress - which started in Europe but reached other countries still in the 19th century - Pelotas grew, absorbed these changes, and developed.

Iron, used since antiquity for utilitarian purposes, became, with the industrial development, a raw material for artistic casting. It became an expressive component of 19th century urban landscapes. In this scenario, it played an important role. Initially, cast iron pipes and steam engines appear. Next, railways, railway stations and the "iron architecture" complete the picture of modernity and progress, providing mobility and speed, so desired at the time. During the "civilization of iron" (Silva, 1986), an expressive metallic heritage, consisting of reservoirs of water and fountains, some imported from Germany, others from France, docked in Pelotas. Iron constructive structures have been incorporated into the Central Market, like the roof and the tower, which was crowned with the sculpture of the Flying Mercury.

### **The classical legacy in Pelotas**

Brazil, in the last decades of the 19th century, recorded a significant number of immigrants and, among them, architects and builders. Besides the expressive presence of these immigrants, who brought with them their own conceptions, "the taste criterion of the ruling elite, who wants to reproduce in Brazil the types and models admired in Europe" is an

important factor to consider in the consolidation of eclecticism<sup>9</sup> in the country. However, it is not just a question of imitation of works or ideas in vogue in Europe; the “cultural importation” was deeper and, in order to understand it, according to Fabris (1993: 136), one must seek “how this importation took place, what elements were chosen and adopted and what was the resulting product of this operation”.

Here we see an important aspect concerning the reception of Antiquity: the idea of modernity of the last decades of the 19th century in Pelotas percolated an ideal of Antiquity outlined in Europe, but also in Brazil. At that time, the houses of the local elite, built in colonial style until approximately 1860, were shaped in a new style – eclecticism – with elements of classical Antiquity and the Italian Renaissance, mainly in the ornamentation of the facades.

Marshall (2005: 21) refers to an empire of classical imagery over the mind of modern man, lived intensely in the 15th and 16th centuries. This domain, according to the author, “extends until the First Great War, fueling various historical projects in successive neoclassicisms and revalidating, to each generation, the creative power of ancient intelligence, as well as the spectacular persuasive effect of its cultural products”.

In the process of construction of the city, the architecture of Pelotas appropriated elements of classical culture, materialized in the allegories of our urban iconography. A significant number of goods classified as movable and immovable heritage shapes its urban landscape. We can still see classical elements in the facades of some buildings – mainly the buildings of the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian columns, Roman arches, and Greek pediments, as well as a set of images referring to Greco-Roman art and culture (statues of porcelain, marble, bronze or iron, fountains, ornamental or figurative facades, stucco ceilings, stucco reliefs).

The way in which the city of Pelotas dialogues with the past, manifested in the feeling of appreciation and protection of its heritage – part of it still well preserved – reveals how the population, or at least part of it, receives this classical heritage and identifies with it. The present inhabitants – at least some of them – respond positively to this “contemporary appropriation”

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<sup>9</sup> As a cultural expression of this unique moment of development, modernity, and cultural effervescence in Pelotas, eclecticism began in the city in 1870, extending up to about 1931. In this transition, the colonial models present in the city were replaced by those of eclectic architecture, being incorporated in the facades of the buildings various composite elements, many of them expressing a link with some period of the past.

of Greco-Roman culture, which would allude to a prosperous time that Pelotas experienced alongside some Brazilian cities in this period. Such monuments, even if valued in different ways by the local population, are a testimony to the role of the reception of Antiquity in the formation of our cultural identity and our national cultural heritage.

In this sense, the presence of Mercury at the top of tower of the Central Market was not an isolated phenomenon, as it was accompanied by other Mercury figures in Brazil and in Pelotas. Therefore, there was a visual context in which our Mercury from Giambologna was inserted, a context that integrated the "modern" urban identity.

### **Representations of Mercury in Pelotas**

Due to the transformation of the urban landscape of Pelotas since the beginning of the 20th century, important traces of Mercury's presence have vanished from the scene. In the historic center, where the presence of Apollo prevails, accompanied by the muses and their attributes, the scarcity of images of Mercury can provoke a false impression. Today, regarding the representations alluding to Mercury in the city of Pelotas, few testimonials remain besides the sculpture of the Central Market: the Mercury on the facade of the *Clube Caixeiral* (Caixeiral Club), alongside Vulcan; on the top of Viscount of Jaguari building<sup>10</sup> (Figures 9 and 10), a symbol of commerce that is recognizable by the caduceus, almost imperceptible on its right hand, is linked to the symbolism of Hermes; and finally, the head of Mercury as a column capital on the façade of the former *Banco Nacional do Comércio* (National Bank of Commerce) (see Figure 11). At the turn of the century, the figure of Mercury would probably be much more familiar to the passersby's eyes, since there were still other Mercuries, today missing in their sculptural materiality, but preserved on old black and white photographs.

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<sup>10</sup> Currently, *Cartório Lorenzi* office.



**Figure 9:** Cement statue: allegory to commerce with attributes of Mercury. Platband of the building of the current *Cartório Lorenzi* (Lorenzi Registry). Source: Author's photograph, 2016.



**Figure 10:** Detail of the previous figure. Caduceus on the right arm of the statue. Source: Author's photograph, 2016.



**Figure 11:** Capital in volutes with head of Mercury, with winged helmet. Source: Author's photograph, 2014.

Carlos Alberto d'Ávila Santos (2007: 318) states that representations of Hermes/Mercury stood out during the eclectic period, among main stucco



or cement adornments of commercial buildings, associated with the functions of the establishment. The author also emphasizes that sculptures of Greek deities such as Hephaestus, Hermes, Apollo, Athena, and Demeter were incorporated into the decoration of the facade of banking houses and thus “identified with the origins of the capital invested and managed by these companies, which come from industry, commerce, and agriculture”.

In club facades, they also added “masks, musical instruments, and statues of classical appreciation, representing nymphs, muses, and the mythological gods Apollo, Vulcan, and Mercury, linked to the economic origins of the club members and to cultural or recreational activities” (Santos, 2007: 75).

The facade of *Clube Caixeiral*, built in 1904 by the Italo-Brazilian architect Caetano Casaretto, is full of eclectic references. Its decoration is rich in references from Antiquity, such as pilasters, columns, oculus, hollow and blind platbands, curved pediments, and Greek mythological figures. On the main facade, we see four mythological references. In the lower plane, closer to the sight of passersby, a muse with an open book and Apollo Citharoedus, thus symbolizing Letters and Music. With these deities, it is assumed that education and culture are at the base of wealth, which is indicated by the two figures arranged in the upper plane: to the left, Hephaestus or Vulcan with his attributes (the helmet, the anvil, and the hammer); to the right, Hermes or Mercury, with an anchor, a barrel, and a canasta (Figure 12).



**Figure 12:** Sculptures of Vulcan (left) and Mercury (right). Source: Author's photograph, 2016.

Two significant presences of Mercury in the architecture of the Belle Époque of Pelotas can be contemplated today only in photographs, which are evidence of a time when the city was leading the publishing market of Rio Grande do Sul. We are alluding to *Livraria Americana* and *Livraria Universal* (Americana Bookstore and Universal Bookstore), whose buildings bore, incorporated into their facades, sculptures of Vulcan and Mercury. Unfortunately, these buildings have not been preserved.

*Livraria Americana*, the oldest, founded in 1875, was the pioneer in the state. Initially on Andrade Neves Street, in 1891 it moved to its own building on XV de Novembro Street, 195 (Figure 15). It featured, in its facade, a complex iconographic program, with the platband surmounted by the figures of Hephaestus/Vulcan and Hermes/Mercury<sup>11</sup>.

*Livraria Universal*, founded twelve years after *Livraria Americana*, in 1887, was installed in a building on XV de Novembro Street, between General Neto and Sete de Setembro Streets. In 1893, it moved to its new store, built for this purpose, at one of the most popular points in the city, the “Esquina 22” (“Corner 22”), between XV de Novembro and Sete de Setembro Streets (where today the headquarters of *Caixa Econômica Federal* – a federal bank – in Pelotas are located). Prominent, flanking the entrances of the establishment were the statues of Vulcan and Mercury (Figures 13 and 14), probably made of cement. Very close to the passersby, they maintained a close relationship with the daily life of the city center.

<sup>11</sup> *Livraria Americana* closed its doors in 1916, when it was acquired by the competitor, *Livraria Universal Echenique* (Arriada; Tambara, 2014: 243).

As Mario Osório Magalhães (2003) points out, the presence of the Greco-Roman gods on the facade of *Livraria Americana* was used in the company's marketing in the newspapers of the time: "new house of columns adorned with large statues above" – as the owners announced in 1891, which was disdained by the competitor. Despite this, two years later, the same *Livraria Univesal*, when it opened its new store, emulated the older competitor. In the new building, the figures of Vulcan and Mercury were placed on the facade. But it did not only copy. It innovated in the location of the images. More explicitly, believing in the advantage of the exposure of the images, *Livraria Universal* inserted them near the base of the building, next to the entrance, in direct visual contact with the public. This indicates how, for the perception of the time, the representation of these ancient deities strongly symbolized the social function of this type of establishment, considered also efficient from the point of view of marketing.

It is also interesting to note that the figures of Mercury and Vulcan of the two bookstores follow the same model as the statues of the facade of *Clube Caixeiral* (Figure 12), although separated for almost twenty years. This model defines an *aggionata* conception of such ancient gods, incorporating elements of the modern times into their classical attributes.



**Figure 13:** Postcard with the facade of *Livraria Universal*. Source: Collection of *Instituto Histórico e Geográfico do Capão do Leão* (Historical and Geographical Institute of Capão do Leão).



**Figure 14:** Detail of a postcard with the facade of *Livraria Universal* Source: Collection of *Instituto Histórico e Geográfico do Capão do Leão* (Historical and Geographical Institute of Capão do Leão).



**Figure 15:** Facade of *Livraria Americana*, with pediment surmounted by Vulcan and Mercury. Source: Eduardo Arriada.

## Mercuries in Brazil

Brazilian cities such as Manaus, Rio de Janeiro, and Recife, among others, had in common with Pelotas an important “cycle of prosperity” in the so-called Brazilian Belle Époque<sup>12</sup>. The period of economic and cultural apogee in which, combined with urban and architectural decoration, the ornamental elements contributed to the materialization of symbols of power, wealth, and civilization.

While it is recognised that there were levels of classical appropriation in different places, and that these differences can be recognized in the relation between architectural forms and ornamental elements, there is a synchrony between the "Flying Mercuries" of Pelotas, Manaus, Rio de Janeiro, and Recife. The Mercury statue from Londrina, even though following the same Giambologna model, is more recent, linked to another historical moment.

Although other sculptures representing Mercury can be found in Brazil, the ones that follow the Giambologna's model will be highlighted here, because we believe that there is a dialogue between them, as a cultural characteristic of this period.

In Brazil, from the point of view of heritage recognition, the examples of Giambologna's Flying Mercury in Rio de Janeiro and Manaus stand out. Coincidence or not, they were produced by the Val d'Osne Foundry<sup>13</sup> (Figure 16), contemporary and competitor of the Durenne Foundry, responsible for the fountains of Pelotas.

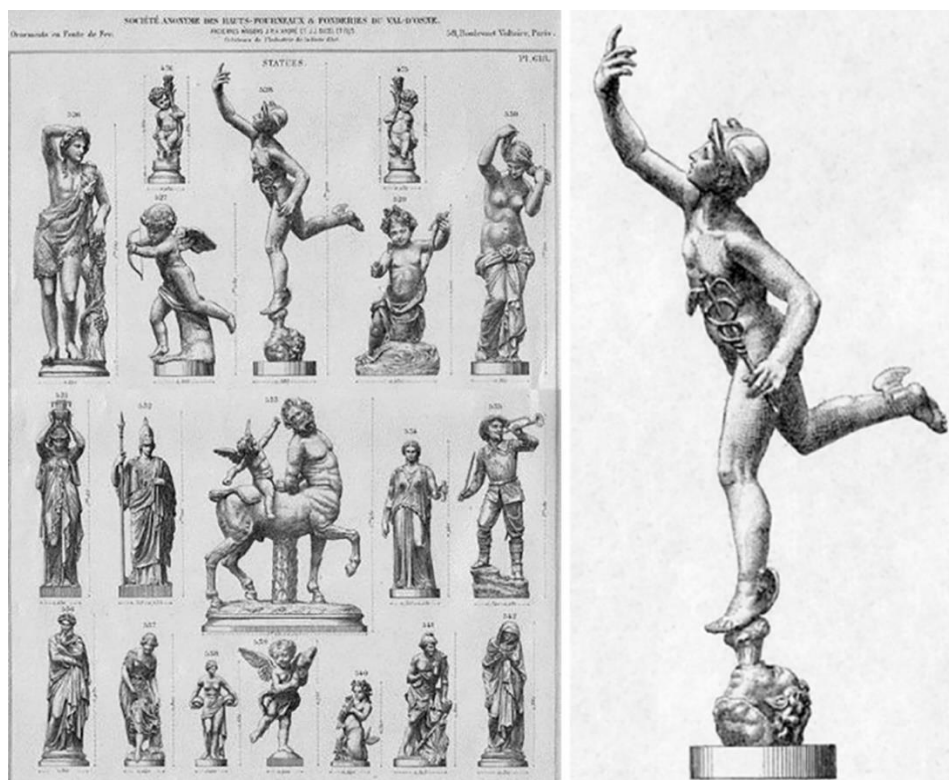
The installation of these statues took place very close to the Mercury statue of Pelotas, as well as that of Recife, of unidentified manufacturing, placed in 1915 at the top of the *Associação Comercial* (Commercial Association) building, at its inauguration.

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<sup>12</sup> Manaus had the "cycle of rubber", which took place in the Amazon region; Rio de Janeiro and Londrina, the “cycle of coffee”; and Recife, the “cycle of sugar cane”.

<sup>13</sup> The production from French Foundries is well known through the catalogues published by the casters in the 1840s. In the catalogues of Val d'Osne, together with the pieces, is the identification of the authors and the origin of the works.





**Figure 16:** Catalogue of The Foundry Val d'Osne, album No. 2, plate 618-528 (left). The Giambologna Mercury model in detail (right). Source: Available at: <[https://e-monumen.net/patrimoine-monumental/vo2\\_pl618-statues/](https://e-monumen.net/patrimoine-monumental/vo2_pl618-statues/)>. Accessed on: Oct 2019.

## Mercury in Manaus

*Praça Heliodoro Balbi*<sup>14</sup>, which houses the Mercury statue in Manaus, in the State of Amazonas, originated in the 1870s, but began to receive improvements almost twenty years later. The statue was placed there in 1906 or 1907, along with a gazebo and a cast iron fountain, as well as other sculptures.

The website *E-Monumen.net* provides, through a geolocalized database, a "map of French heritage in the world". It states that the Giambologna iron model placed on *Praça Heliodoro Balbi* in 1906 (Figure 17) was produced by Val d'Osne (Figure 18)<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Also known as *Praça da Polícia* (Duarte, 2009: 40).

<sup>15</sup> *Catalogue Val d'Osne - album No 2*, plate no 618, 528 and corresponding to Figure 15.



**Figures 17:** Iron sculpture (1.90 cm) of Mercury in *Praça Heliodoro Balbi*, Manaus. In the background, the cast iron gazebo. Source: Available at: <<http://e-monumen.net/patrimoine-monumental/mercure-praca-balbi-manaus/#priceblock2>>. Accessed on: Oct 2019.



**Figure 18:** Plate of the Val d'Osne Foundry, which made the sculpture of the Mercury of Manaus. Source: Available at: <<http://e-monumen.net/patrimoine-monumental/mercure-praca-balbi-manaus/#priceblock2>>. Accessed on: Oct 2019.

The difference of the sculpture of Manaus regarding the catalogue model is the lamp in Mercury's right hand (Figure 16) and the absence of the caduceus. There are two hypotheses: either the caduceus was lost when the square, its sculptures, and ornamental elements went through a period of abandonment, or this may have been the result of some intervention.



According to Duarte (2009: 40), the square underwent major reform and "improvements" in 1922. More recently, cast iron pieces have been restored<sup>16</sup>. The intervention was completed in 2009, as well as the restoration of *Palacete Presidencial*, a complex that houses six museums, an archaeology laboratory, and a restoration workshop.

## Mercury in Rio de Janeiro

The *Palácio das Laranjeiras* (Figure 19), in Rio de Janeiro, was built between 1909 and 1913 by the architect Armando Carlos da Silva Telles, to serve as residence for Guinle family, concessionaire of the port of Rio de Janeiro. In 1947, it was purchased by the Federal Government and used as a presidential residence until the opening of the *Palácio da Alvorada* in 1960, in Brasília. It is currently the official residence of the governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro.

A cast iron sculpture of the god Mercury, identical to that of Manaus, points to the sky in front of the palace staircase. The identification plate of the Val d'Osne Foundry, according to the site *E-Monumen.net*, dates it from 1913. In line with the Mercury by Giambologna, the sculpture of Rio de Janeiro (Figure 20) preserves the original attribute, the caduceus, instead of the lamp present in the statue from Manaus.



**Figure 19:** Flying Mercury in *Palácio das Laranjeiras* gardens. Source: Available at: <<http://oglobo.globo.com/rio/rio-450/mobiliario-historico-acervo-de-obras-de-arte-do-palacio-das-laranjeiras-serao-recuperados-14065506>>. Accessed on: Oct 2019.

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<sup>16</sup> The restoration was assisted by Nicola Salvione, an Italian metal expert.



**Figure 20:** Flying Mercury in *Palácio das Laranjeiras*, Rio de Janeiro. Val d'Osne Foundry. Source: Available at: <<http://e-monumen.net/patrimoine-monumental/statue-le-mercure-palais-de-laranjeiras-estatua-o-mercurio-palacio-de-laranjeiras-rio-de-janeiro>>. Accessed on: Oct 2019.

## Mercury in Recife

The building of the *Associação Comercial do estado de Pernambuco* (Commercial Association of the State of Pernambuco) was inaugurated in 1915 (Figure 21). In eclectic style, it presents, among other elements, an English iron staircase, wall and ceiling paintings, a set of 20 stained glass and chandeliers. Nominated for the National Heritage List by *IPHAN* (Institute of National Historic and Artistic Heritage), the building reopened in 2008 after restoration.

On the pediment over the facade, there was originally a sculptural set formed by three elements: at the center and above, Mercury, holding an anchor, in reference to the maritime market of Recife, between two seated female figures, maybe muses (Figures 21 and 22). Those pieces are missing.



**Figure 21:** Associação Comercial de Pernambuco in 1915 (right). Source: Scanning Division of Fundação Joaquim Nabuco.



**Figure 22:** Sculptural ensemble at the top of the *Associação Comercial de Pernambuco*. Source: Scanning Division of *Fundação Joaquim Nabuco*.

The restoration of the outside part came under the responsibility of architect Ronaldo Câmara<sup>17</sup>, who informs that a replica of the statue of Mercury was commissioned to be installed in its old place. The restitution to the site of the other two pieces (the female figures) depended, if they were found, on the consent of *IPHAN*, which had already not approved the installation of a medaillon, present in the original version of the building. After the restoration of the building, only the figure of Mercury returned to the top of the building (Figures 23 and 24 - detail).

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<sup>17</sup> *Jornal do Commercio*, 30 Dec 2008. Available at: <[http://jc.uol.com.br/jornal/2008/12/30/not\\_313414.php](http://jc.uol.com.br/jornal/2008/12/30/not_313414.php)>. Accessed on: 29, Jan 2015.



**Figure 23:** Current situation of the building of the *Associação Comercial de Pernambuco* with only one sculpture at on the top. Source: Available at: <<http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=1145917>>. Accessed on: Oct 2019.



**Figure 23:** Image of Mercury at the top of the *Associação Comercial de Pernambuco*. Source: Photography by Renato Pinto, 2016.

## Mercury in Londrina

Another Flying Mercury was identified on a building belonging to a trade association. This time, although it is a Giambologna, it is more “modern”. Instead of being associated with eclecticism, its architectural context is Art Déco. It is the statue that stood at the top of the three-story building of the *Associação Comercial de Londrina - ACL* (Commercial Association of Londrina), in Paraná, inaugurated in 1942 (Figure 25)<sup>18</sup>.

Unlike the early 20th century statues of Rio de Janeiro, Manaus, and Pelotas, imported from Europe, the Mercury from Londrina was produced in Brazil. The sculpture, measuring 4 meters high, completed in 1941, was commissioned in the previous year by the president of the *ACL*, David Dequech, to an artist from São Paulo, Lélío Coluccini (1910-1983), an Italian immigrant who participated in Brazilian modernism, and was part of Vitor Brecheret’s friendship circle. Mercury was not the only classical reference introduced into the building: there were also two statues of the goddess Ceres, linked to agriculture – in this case, reference to coffee, the basis of the wealth of the city newly founded by immigrants in the north of Paraná! (Cavazotti, 2017: 34-36).

The presence of this Flying Mercury reinforced the sense of prosperity of this emerging city, the sense of rapid growth. It was an imposing sight, as can testify Gladys Silva Lessa, who arrived in Londrina in 1937 as a child: "To us, children in a still small city, the statue was a huge attraction. We had never seen that, not even in photographs. When it arrived, we were fascinated. A God, and a winged one, on top of that. It was fascinating". The impression of another child of the same time, Nelson Dequech, reinforces the importance of the sculpture: "that was the city's postcard for a long time" (Cavazotti, 2017: 36).

A photograph of the time records when the statue was raised to the top of the building (Figure 26) in 1942, months before the inauguration of the *ACL* (today *ACIL*). It remained there for some decades, above the clock at top of the facade, until the demolition of the original building in 1970, giving way to the 20-story “Palace of Commerce”, where *ACIL* (Commercial and Industrial Association of Londrina) continues to this day, on the first floor.

Due to the efforts of the *ACIL* presidency, the preservation of Mercury was guaranteed over time. With Brazilian participation in World War II, the

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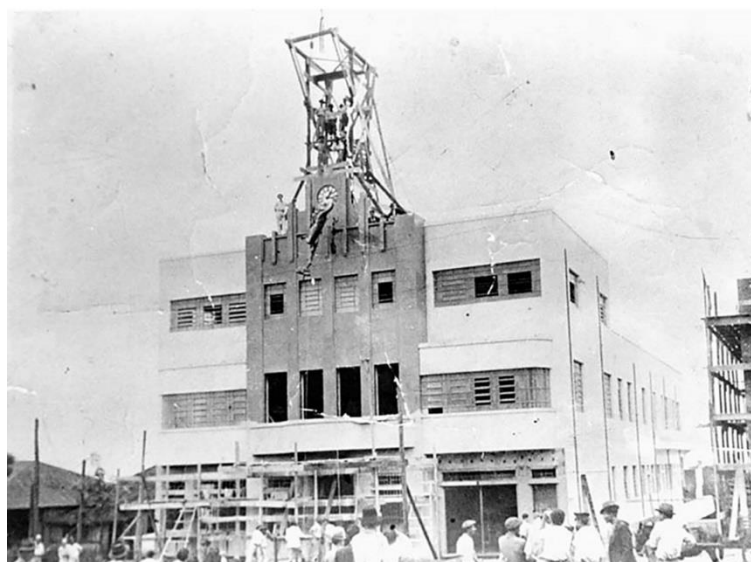
<sup>18</sup> In the 1990s, it became the commercial and Industrial Association of Londrina -*ACIL*.



bronze statue was required by the army to be fused and turned into cannonball. When the construction of the new building began, the statue was removed and placed in the Rectory of the State University of Londrina - UEL, where it "took part" in many student protests<sup>19</sup>, until it was permanently installed in the entrance hall of the Palace of Commerce, in 1990, over a pedestal erected in the access garden (see Figure 27).



**Figure 25:** The building of the *Associação Comercial* in Londrina, PR. 1942. Source: ACIL.



**Figure 26:** Mercury in Londrina, raised to the top of the building of the *Associação Comercial* in Londrina. 1942. Source: ACIL.

<sup>19</sup> Revista da Associação Comercial e Industrial de Londrina, ano 1, nº 1, 2012, p. 25. Available at: <<http://www.acil.com.br/upload/revistas/mercado-em-foco-01-julho-a-setembro-2012-20120706-095701-20121207-102701.pdf>>. Access on: Oct 2019.





**Figure 27:** Sculpture in the lobby of the Palace of Commerce, in Londrina. Source: ACIL.

### **Final considerations**

The presence of Mercury in Pelotas permeates the history of the city. It is inserted in a scenario in which the city, already urbanized and modern, emerged from a prosperous period of economic growth and cultural development, which began with the *charque* industry, still in late 18th century, and was consolidated by the activities of commerce, livestock, and industries that arose as a result of this main activity, mainly after the peace that ended the *Farroupilha* conflict in 1845.

Mercury's presence is also a part of historicist eclecticism in Pelotas, approximately between 1870 and 1930, a period marked by an architecture that linked neoclassical allegories and ornamental elements to the functions of buildings and the idiosyncrasies of their inhabitants. The link with the past – the expression of historicist eclecticism – has in its essence the search for origins, to find a root for the national identity. In the case of Pelotas, this was done through references to the Italian Renaissance and/or classical tradition. The “modern and civilized” society of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, mirrored itself in an ideal of Antiquity, in which Mercury functioned as emblem of an ideal of civilization.

In this sense, the Mercury of Pelotas does not constitute in itself an isolated phenomenon. It was part of a “Brazil of Mercuries”, in a context of cities that lived cycles of prosperity in the Belle Époque, such as Manaus, Recife, and Rio de Janeiro. As such, these Mercuries played a role in the urban social imaginary. At that time, the Classical Reception was a component of national identity formation. Antiquity was one of the parameters of civilization for urban culture.

The presence of Mercury bears witness, above all, to a past of Pelotas immersed in a cosmopolitan scenario, a reflection of the strong presence of foreigners, and a mentality resulting from industrialism and commercial activity.

In addition to the Mercury statues as shown above, many other Mercury figures “inhabit” the top of buildings, pediments, squares, facades of clubs, banks, museums, and art galleries around the world. Such images feed the imaginary and cultural identity of societies that find in the Mercury figure the symbols of the values they seek: power, strength, wealth, intelligence, humanity, development, progress; in other words, civilization.

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