

## **HERACLES AND HERMES IN SÃO PAULO'S URBAN ICONOGRAPHY**

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### **Abstract**

This article discusses the presence of Heracles/Hercules and Hermes/Mercury, two deities of the ancient Greek and Roman pantheons, in the city of São Paulo in the 19th and 20th centuries. Based on the concept of urban iconography, we look at São Paulo's particular appropriation of references to the ancient world that had already been developed since modern times. The reception of these gods in the city of São Paulo was based on a complex process that included a web of elements that oriented their cults and representations in antiquity, but also a sophisticated selection of cultural and political aspects from modern Europe and Brazil in the 19th and 20th centuries. This complex process included Heracles and Hermes in debates that connected the city of São Paulo to traditional themes, especially those related to the Brazilian reality, such as the concept of republicanism and of political ideology.

### **Keywords**

Heracles/Hercules; Hermes/Mercury; São Paulo urban iconography; architecture and urban landscape.

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## **Resumo**

Este texto discute a inserção de Héracles/Hércules e Hermes/Mercúrio, duas divindades antigas dos panteões grego e romano, na cidade de São Paulo entre os séculos XIX e XX. A partir da noção de iconografia urbana, observaremos as especificidades da apropriação paulistana de referências ao mundo antigo que já estavam sendo desenvolvidos no seio de representações desde a modernidade. Assim, a recepção desses deuses na cidade de São Paulo foi baseada em um processo complexo que contou com a trama de elementos que organizavam seus cultos e representações na antiguidade, mas também um sofisticado processo de seleções entre a Europa moderna e contemporânea e o Brasil dos séculos XIX e XX, instalando Héracles e Hermes em debates que conectavam a cidade de São Paulo a temas tradicionais, mas também naqueles específicos do país, como o republicanismo e a ideologia do trabalho.

## **Palavras-chave**

Héracles/Hércules; Hermes/Mercúrio; iconografia urbana paulistana; arquitetura e paisagem urbana.

The façade over the square near the pier boasts a statue of Mercury. The old Greek god of commerce seems a bit lame, with no influence around here.

(Dirce de Assis Cavalcanti, *O velho Chico, ou, A vida é amável*: 129)

In Ancient Greece, the great national hero was Heracles, or Hercules, as he was later called. He was the greatest of them all – and being the greatest of them all in Greece at that time was equivalent to being the greatest in the world. That's why Hercules lives on in our imagination to this day.

(Monteiro Lobato, *Os doze trabalhos de Hércules*, 1º tomo: 3)

This article focuses on two deities that appear frequently in São Paulo: Heracles and Hermes. We will look at their presence in this city from the point of view of “urban iconography”. To begin with, it's important to say that we understand the concept of urban itself based on its conceptual variety and complexity (Salgueiro, 2001: 10-1). It should also be said that my interest here is not urban iconography as a representation of the city (Meneses, 1996), but figurative elements available in the urban space on various supports such as billboards, walls, illuminated signs and, in this case, mainly building façades. In this way, we're not talking about figuration of the city, but in the city, that is, we're distancing ourselves from the city as a reference for some creation that records a moment (or moments) of it through photographs, videos or paintings, and we're approaching the city as an extremely complex type of panel. By this, we don't mean that the city is a museum in which works are exhibited, but that the urban space and landscape frame diverse elements, including figurative ones, as a kind of panel. We will deal with just a few of them: those that allow us to explore the debate on the presence of “Greco-Roman” characters in the city of São Paulo.<sup>2</sup>

It is evident that the Greco-Roman gods have a very different place in our time, if we think about the mythical and cultic dynamics they played in antiquity. Mythical narratives have been taken up and re-elaborated, but the same does not apply to cultic performances. With the rising of Christianity in the West and the shattering of Greco-Roman religion, which came to be characterized as pagan, Greco-Roman deities lost the prominent role they had played in the Mediterranean for millennia, and even the impact of their shrines on the landscape was gradually changed. With the triumph of Christianity, these deities ended up providing indirect references that would only be observed with interest from modernity onwards. However, even though these gods are not actively

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<sup>2</sup> Although we believe in the specificity of the experiences that we characterize as Greek and Roman, we will use the term “Greco-Roman” as a synthesis of a process based on proposals for reading the ancient world, presented above all since modernity.

involved in religious contexts today, they have not disappeared from the urban landscape. And it's not just the presence of cult sculptures of Athena, Zeus, Hera and Aphrodite, among many others, in various museums that indicates this; or the recovery, in terms of a logic of conservation, of ancient spaces of worship which, after being rejected and de-characterized by Christians, were made a heritage site - this is the case of the Acropolis of Athens, a complex which was at the center of Athenian religiosity articulated to a large extent by the cult of the goddess Athena in the past, and which is currently characterized as a "World Heritage Site" by Unesco (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). The presence of these deities is also linked to a modern reworking of their meanings. They have returned to urban landscapes, but their meanings are obviously different. The presence of these deities is also linked to a modern reworking of their meanings. They have returned to urban landscapes, but their meanings are obviously different.

The reference to the past is often evoked in some way and happens in quite different contexts. The Christian perspective is predominant, but the classical past is also present, even if not articulated in terms of a faithful recovery. In other words, the idea was not to recover the cult of these gods and, moreover, their representation could take on new meanings. It is in this sense that we will consider the presence of Hermes and Heracles in the city of São Paulo. They both had a very strong connection to the Greco-Roman religion (Hermes/Mercury and Heracles/Hercules), and this aspect was not emphasized. It was, therefore, an appropriation that conveyed an aesthetic sense connected to new symbols, especially those related to civic life. This is how, for example, certain modern secular states brought central features of their composition, such as justice and freedom, closer to Greco-Roman divinities. This example shows that the religious aspect has been largely reformulated and replaced by new elements, which indicates a clear separation from the ancient experience. If, on the one hand, there are religious symbols (such as the Christian cross) in state institutions such as the parliament, law courts, schools and public offices in Brazil, there is, on the other hand, a hot debate about the secular character of the Brazilian state. However, the presence of Athena, Demeter, Zeus or any other Greco-Roman god is not included in these discussions, since their religious meaning have been detached and reworked within civic and, it must be said, openly secular references. It's interesting to note that these gods have other functions in our time.

The new functions, of course, are quite varied. One can think of their inclusion in the field of politics, culture, economics etc., and even in these fields there is no such rigid articulated use. In other words, there are not

rules regarding the use of these references, apart from some loose notion of the fields in which certain gods could be associated. Asclepius is often related to medicine, Athena to engineering, Hermes to commerce, and such associations have been materialized in various contexts, such as coats of arms and logos, that include Greco-Roman gods or attributes that belong to them. For example, there is at the University of São Paulo's College town (a *campus* of the University of São Paulo), in an outdoor area adjacent to the Polytechnic School buildings, a large sheet metal sculpture cut out in the shape of a stylized helmet plume. The title is *Palas*, a clear reference to the goddess Athena. Also, on the same *campus*, there is a mosaic at the entrance to the Faculty of Economics with the head of Hermes wearing a winged helmet. At the São Paulo Court of Justice, the goddess Themis appears prominently on the pediment of the main façade and, at the Municipal Theater, the god Apollo appears in medallions on the main façade. The examples are many and varied. To elaborate this, let us consider the cases of Heracles and Hermes in the city of São Paulo.

An interesting starting point is the very complexity of the names of these characters: Heracles or Hercules? Hermes or Mercury? Normally, the answer is that these are different names (Greek and Latin respectively) for the same deities. But does this really solve the problem of naming? Are Heracles and Hermes Greek names for the same deities as Hercules and Mercury, their Latin names? The names Heracles and Hercules characterize the same character in Greek and Latin, but the matter is complicated. One can think of the Greek myth of Heracles as ethical model in Stoicism (Ierodiakonou, 1999: 150, n. 86) and his relationship with the Roman Hercules, the latter with the Christian Hercules, among others (Bonney & Doniger, 1992: 184). One can also think of Heracles' particularity both in Greek religion (in which he was considered hero and god at the same time) and in Roman religion as Hercules (Van Keuren, 2010: 398-411), recovering the discussion about the presence of one of the oldest "foreign" cults in the Italian peninsula (Salmon, 1967: 175; Orlin, 2010: 62). And when it comes to Hermes-Mercury, the complexity increases.

Despite the current almost complete association between Hermes and Mercury, it is important to note that these two deities were originally distinct and only later were brought closer together (Fowler, 2004: 120). Moreover, this was not the only association to which Hermes was linked. There was also a strong connection with the Egyptian god Thoth, who was worshipped in a city called Khmonou, a name later changed to Hermopolis, the "city of Hermes" (Faivre, 2000: 76). In this context, the myth records the narrative of Hermes-Thoth as the helper of Horus in the

reconquest of the Delta. We can also think of Hermes-Trismegistus (the “thrice great”) in alchemy and Neoplatonism, and the assimilation of Hermes-Thoth to Moses, according to Artapan, a Jewish historian from the 2nd century BC (*Idem*). Therefore, we can see that the association between Hermes and Mercury was just one interpretation among other possibilities, endorsed by the interest in a Greek and Roman repertoire seen as a unity, the very idea of a “Greco-Roman” heritage. In this sense, the identification between Hermes and Mercury, which was strong but partial in antiquity, was consistently expanded from the sixteenth century onwards, judging by many publications that already mentioned the situation of this god (Giorgio, 1564: 73, 119, 285; Bailey *et al.*, 1736: entries *Hermes*, *Hermes*, *Hermetical*, *Hermetick*; Danet, 1700: entry *Hermes*; Herbelot & Visdelou, 1777: 241; Ramsay, 1779: 150) – these publications provide the basis for our current understanding of Hermes and Mercury as exactly the same god.

To sum up, despite associations and similarities that oriented a process that we would call syncretism or *interpretatio* (Hornblower, Spawforth & Eidinow, 2012: 739), there were specificities, which indicates that such equivalences were not absolute. From this perspective, “Odysseus is Odysseus and not Ulysses. Zeus is Zeus and not the Roman Jupiter, Hera is not the Latin Juno, Athena is not Minerva, Dionysus is not Bacchus, Aphrodite is not Venus, Ares is not Mars, Hermes is not Mercury and Poseidon is not Neptune” (Stratte-Mcclure, 2008). The current state of this mythical repertoire shows how our understanding of classical has been largely reworked, modified, and presents itself in our time in new terms, recovering only some aspects of its old formulation.

The way we understand the Greco-Roman mythical repertoire relates much more to its characterization in modern times than to the complexity of its articulations and versions in antiquity. In this way, the very choice of one of the names for each deity analyzed in this article responds to the modern scenario of understanding about them. We have opted here to use the Greek versions Hermes and Heracles, since the original formulation of the mythical narrative and its figurative forms first appeared in ancient Greek communities. However, it would be equally possible and appropriate to use the Roman versions Mercury and Hercules, given that the Latin literary tradition had influence on the articulation of a discourse about the “classical” since the Renaissance.

## Heracles

Regarding the presence of Heracles in São Paulo, we will look at two examples in their material expression that articulate elements of the mythical narrative to which this hero belonged. As is widely known, there is a series of episodes involving Heracles called “The Twelve Labours” (Grimal, 2000: 207-13). In São Paulo’s city center, we find mentions to some of these labors, namely the episodes of the golden apples of the Hesperides and of the Nemean lion. The reference to the story of the golden apples of the Hesperides is at the Municipal Theater<sup>3</sup> in a prominent situation: on the main façade, on the first floor, there are four sculptures arranged in two groups, to the right and to the left, which form part of a colonnade probably related to the Tuscan order. These sculptures are included in the repertoire of support on the ground floor of the building, which is all characterized by the logic of rustication – an aesthetic solution that presents a more rough, rustic finish, suggesting an idea of structural support for the building, which is not always confirmed from a practical point of view (Francisco, 2015: 155). The very characterization of the columns in that part of the building as corresponding to the Tuscan order is linked to the rustication which, since the Renaissance, has been closely identified with the Tuscan order, according to the architect Vignola (Heydenreich; Lotz, 1974: 321). Thus, in this part of the building, there are elements clearly related to the idea of aesthetically organized structural support (the colonnade and the rustication indicate this). In addition, there are the aforementioned sculptures.

From an architectural point of view, their characterization is varied: this type of sculpture that performs a supporting function (practical or aesthetic) is called Telamon, Atlantean or Persian, characterizations associated mainly to male figures and, when they are women-columns, they are called Caryatids or Canephoras (Smith, 1853: 889, entry *Persae or Statuae Persicae*; Wordsworth, 1862: 180). The use of these names to characterize such human figures as columns in buildings is traditional and refers, in some cases, to ancient denomination. For example, the terms Caryatids and Persians were cited by Vitruvius and Pausanias (Shear, 1999: 66-7). In the case in question, there are some interesting elements that move between this architectural characterization and the mythical one which are expressed in the very identification of the figures: Heracles on the right, identified by the lion’s cape as armor (a situation probably related to the first of the twelve labors), an attribute that has identified the hero since antiquity. Next to it is the figure of Atlas, an ancient god – a Titan (figure

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<sup>3</sup> The theater opened in 1911, see Cenni, 2002: 18.



01) – who appears alongside Heracles in another “labor”: collecting golden apples from the Garden of the Hesperides. There are variations on the mythical record, but in Synesis, it is said that Heracles had to take golden apples from the garden guarded by the Hesperides and a dragon, and that, unable to do it himself, he asked the Titan Atlas to do it, temporarily swapping places with him to support the celestial vault (Grimal, 2000: 213).



**Figure 01:** Façade details of São Paulo's Municipal Theater. Atlantes: on the left, Atlas; on the right, Heracles (photo: Roger Sassaki).

Heracles and Atlas' sculptures on the Municipal Theater's main façade can be placed in parallel with other sculptures that make up façades of buildings in the historic center of São Paulo. For example, the Atlanteans of the York Building, the Esoteric Circle of the Communion of Thought headquarters, a building at Rua Benjamin Constante (no. 177), and the Caryatids of the Palace of Justice at Praça da Sé (figure 02). However, in the case of the Municipal Theater, there are specificities. There, reference is made to a specific moment in a specific mythological narrative, and it is even possible to determine the identity of the characters. As you can see, one Atlantean, a general term to characterize this type of figure, is Atlas himself, and the other is Heracles. There is an articulation between distinct elements related to the logic of architectural underpinning (the colonnade of the Tuscan order related to the Atlanteans, and the rustication delimited by the ground floor of the building), and the general organization of the



façade, which ratifies such elements. The logic of the building articulates more robust orders below (the Tuscan on the rusticated first floor) with more delicate orders above (an articulation of Corinthian and Ionic columns in an area of the façade with a very detailed finish, indicating a clear difference with the rusticated lower part). In other words, the architects responsible for the Municipal Theatre's façade, Claudio Rossi and Domiziano Rossi, offered a complex organization of supporting elements that move from aesthetic expression (rustication and Tuscan order) to theme (Heracles' myth). However, this subtlety was not these architects' invention.



**Figure 02.** Caryatids and Atlanteans in São Paulo: on the left, Caryatid of the Palace of Justice at Praça da Sé; in the middle, Atlantean of the building of the Esoteric Circle of the Communion of Thought; on the right, building Atlantean at Rua Benjamin Constante (no. 177) (photo: Roger Sassaki).

It is worth noting that the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo has plaster sculptures corresponding to the Atlanteans of the Municipal Theater, related to the collection of the former Liceu de Artes e Ofícios, which operated in the building between 1900 and 1994. According to an information panel at the Pinacoteca, they were cast in Italy and served as a model for the creation of the Atlanteans on the Municipal Theatre's façade. This piece of information is important because it indicates both the probable participation of craftsmen linked to the Liceu in the construction of these façade elements, and a European reference, Italian in this case. This becomes clear when one considers that this was a common solution in buildings throughout Europe. There, we find Atlanteans like these (Atlas and Heracles or simply figures of Heracles) on façades of many buildings. For example, this scheme has been used in buildings since the 15th century,

such as the Doge's Palace in Venice, where two sculptures (one of Heracles and the other of Atlas) of the upper part of the entrance door makes a similar ensemble. Specifically, as Atlantes, they were integrated into a variety of façades: at 4 Avenue Hoche and 86 Boulevard des Batignoles in Paris (France), the Municipal Library in Subotica (Serbia), the Demidov Mansion and the Beloselsky-Belozersky Palace in St. Petersburg (Russia), the Clam Gallas Palace in Prague (Czech Republic), and the Schleissheim Palace in Munich (Germany) – figure 03. Clearly, this was a European trend that was transposed to São Paulo, which became part of an international phenomenon.



**Figure 03:** Beloselsky-Belozersky Palace's façade detail, St. Petersburg (left). Municipal Library, Subotica, Serbia (right) (*Wikimedia Commons*).

It can thus be said that the façade of the Municipal Theatre, based on the specific element dealt with here, responds to multiple traditions connected to it: the presentation of classical architectural orders (the Tuscan, the Ionic, and the Corinthian), the Renaissance solution of delimited rustication, the arrangement of sculptures of human figures as columns (Atlanteans), a specific mythical narrative and, furthermore, its application in buildings since modern times. In other words, the Municipal Theater dialogs with a tradition of building and of representing certain contents in the urban landscape. Heracles represents the idea of strength, one of his main characteristics in ancient narratives - from his general strength (observed from childhood, when he strangled two snakes as a baby) to the strength applied specifically in the narrative about the apples from the Garden of

the Hesperides, in which he supports the celestial vault's weight. Likewise, the representation of his strength is connected to supporting sections of the building itself, which, together with Atlas, conveys the idea of stability: Heracles and Atlas, who supported the celestial vault in ancient mythical narratives, were set the task of supporting the Municipal Theatre.

There is another interesting example of Heracles' presence in the city of São Paulo, which is one of the buildings of the Department of Justice and Citizenship at Pátio do Colégio, originally the headquarters of the Department of Agriculture of the Province of São Paulo.<sup>4</sup> This time, the hero doesn't appear explicitly, but an indirect indication comes from one of his attributes: the lion skin, his armor, which has often been identified as coming from the Nemean Lion episode. However, the mythical record is varied: Heracles fought several lions throughout his life, including the Lion of Nemea (whose slaughter was the first of the hero's twelve labors) and the Lion of Mount Citeron (Grimal, 2000: 206). Whether from one lion or the other, he removed the skin and used it on his own body as protection. This element became one of the attributes most strongly associated with the figure of the hero, to the point where, in certain contexts, the very presentation of the lion skin was an indirect reference to Heracles. However, it's not just any lion figure, but of a bald and eyeless one – a clear indication of the use made of its carapace as protection. This is precisely how several lion skins appear articulated with the keystones that head the arches of almost all the windows on the first floor of this specific building of the Justice Department: the head with deep-set or non-existent eyes, topped by a diadem, and the slack paws reinforcing the gaunt characteristic of the slaughtered and dead lion (figure 04).



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<sup>4</sup> Inaugurated in 1896, see Carvalho, 1999: 137.

**Figure 04:** Façade details of the former Secretariat of Agriculture of the Province of São Paulo (currently the headquarters of the Secretariat of Justice and Citizenship): on the left, a keystone with a lion skin; on the right, a keystone with the Republic's protome (photo: Roger Sassaki).

The lion skin is associated with the keystones of the arches, which brings us back to the articulation between architectural (aesthetic and structural) and symbolic (mythological meanings). The keystone is an essential element of the arch's stability. It is because of keystone that the set of stones, cut at a certain angle (the voussoirs), lock, maintaining the structure. Important forces such as gravity and thrust act on it (Kovach, 2004: 54; Piotrowski, 2011: 127). Given its structural importance, in many cases the keystones are highlighted as a voussoir of a different size or material. In ancient times, they could also be associated with symbolic elements such as masks, thus fulfilling an apotropaic (protective) function. In Roman buildings, which were strongly characterized by the constitution of arcades and vaults, the keystones played an important structural role, as arches were obviously organized from stones (solid or created from concrete). Since Renaissance, this logic has changed a lot. These arches appear aesthetically organized, but not always really organized by stones, but by sculptures of them. In São Paulo's eclecticism, largely characterized by the low quality of materials, many of these arches appear with layers of stucco imitating stone. In this way, the keystone retains the aesthetic and symbolic aspect of the past, but not the structural function. This is the case of the keystones to the arches of the Justice Department building. In any case, it is important to note that, aesthetically, the idea of stability, caused by the position of the keystone, appears. Moreover, the keystone in this case is also articulated with an element of strength according to the mythical narrative: the lion skin-armor of Heracles.

This is an important first level to consider: the overlapping of meanings related to strength, protection, moving between the architectural aesthetic discourse (the very situation of the keystone in the arch), and the mythical reference condensed in Heracles' lion skin. However, this was not a new solution either. In the context of the construction of the building in question, designed by Ramos de Azevedo, there was in France a profusion of similar uses dating back to the 16th century can be attested. An example can be seen in the François I Gallery of the Chateau de Fontainebleau, where Heracles in his lion skin armor is depicted on a door and as an ornamental architectural element. Regarding keystones, the same scheme can be found in Avignon at the entrance to the Hôtel de Blanchetti and in Strasbourg at the Palais Rohan. In Paris, there are several examples featuring the lion skin or Heracles with the lion skin associated with keystones or other supporting elements such as modillions scattered



around the city: Hôtel Amelot de Bisseuil, 11 rue de l'Université, 1 avenue de l'Opéra, 2 rue d'Argenteuil, 4 rue Royer Collard, 6 rue de Braque, 12 rue de Jouy, 14 rue de l'Opéra, 24 rue Lafayette, 42 rue François Miron, rue Abel, corner with rue Parrot, among several others. There are two examples worth to be looked at in detail: the first is the Porte Saint Denis, and the other, the Musée D'Orsay (figure 05).



**Figure 05:** Detail of the Porte Saint Denis (left); Musée D'Orsay façade (right) (Wikimedia Commons).

The first is an important historical monument in Paris, whose situation helps us to understand a little more about other levels of Heracles' incorporation in the architecture of buildings, be it himself or, as we have seen, an indirect indication by means of the lion skin. At the Saint Denis Gate in Paris, the lion skin itself replaces the keystone to the arch. This is, of course, a symbol of strength associated with Heracles' myth which adds to the fact that that is a triumphal arch commemorating some of Louis XIV's military victories (Gerbino, 2012: 77-84). This portal is a reference to the hero who, as well as being characterized by strength, was also a deity who protected the entrances to houses. Since the lion skin appears at the head of arches and is associated with building keystones, this position may also indicate the aesthetic revival of an ancient function of Heracles as the protector of house entrances: in the Greco-Roman world, Heracles and Hermes were deities related to the protection of houses (Vermaseren & Van Essen, 1965: 16; Downey, 1969: 57-60, 82 and 95-6; Meneses & Sarian, 1973: 99). The relationship between the two gods is clearly seen on the façade of the Musée d'Orsay, where each arch has a keystone that articulates the caduceus (an attribute strongly linked to the god Hermes, which will be explored further in this text) with Heracles' lion skin. It is worth pointing out that the current site of the museum was formerly a train terminus (Paris-Orleans), and that the function of controlling entry and exit attributed to these two deities would make perfect sense. At the end of the

19th century, when the building was built, Hermes or Heracles were no longer worshiped. However, it is evident that the aesthetic expression of these gods recovers some aspects of their former functions.

Let's go back to the headquarters of the Justice Department. The choice of French solutions was not random, and the very situation of the building in question here indicates this. As previously noted, Heracles' lion skin appears in various contexts conveying a notion of strength in the structural support for sections of buildings. Furthermore, the function related to ancient religion has not been completely lost, in as much as aspects of it are presented in an aesthetic way. However, it should be emphasized that nothing of the ancient cult and mythological and religious beliefs remain besides this loose aesthetic reference. In this sense, the façade of the building in question presents something new. When designing the then headquarters of the Secretariat of Agriculture, Ramos de Azevedo included a sequence of 21 lions in the arches of the windows on the side and rear façades (figure 04). But there is a break on the main façade, in a tripartite entrance: the arches to the three doors do not feature the lion skin, but the effigy of the Republic (figure 04). If there is indeed an idea related to strength, support and protection in such aesthetic arrangements, in this case, it is the Republic itself that performs this function. This rupture suggests not only an engagement with classical tradition, but its appropriation by a hotly debated topic in Brazil at the end of the 19th century: the republicanism. This point is reinforced using French solutions can be observed.

The Republic's effigy was a common feature at the time. It appeared in profile on the first republican coins in Brazil, mimicking a use already popular in France, Argentina, the USA, and Portuguese republican coins (Nolte, 1882: 42; Carson, 1962: 445; Medina, 1990: 129-31; Van Wie, 1999: 18; Maness, 2010: 359; Chico, 2013: 294; Hanson, 2015: 201). In this way, the Republic was an anthropomorphized version of a young woman with cloak, shoulder-length hair, and the Phrygian cap, a popular motif in sculptures, painting etc. called in French iconography *bonnet rouge*, an element present in the clothing of the *sans-culottes* in the context of the French Revolution (Petrey, 1980: 58; Auslander, 2009: 118). Indeed, as far as we know, a Republic in human form was created in the French revolutionary context (going back to the 18th century), and Brazil appropriated the idea when the country already was a Republic. The Republic allegory was based on a deep identification between liberty and opposition to the monarchical system in the French revolutionary context, thus proposing the republican system as a solution. The personification of liberty even had a name: "Marianne", a combination of two common

feminine names: Mary and Anne (Hanson, *Op. cit.*: 211-2), who very often was represented with the red cap, as can be seen in Eugène Delacroix's emblematic painting, *Liberty Leading the People* (1830) (Kidd, 2006: 379 sqq.; Nielsen, 2013: 136-7).

Such a representation of freedom was not actually new. There was a well-established repertoire of the goddess Liberty (*Libertas*) among the Romans, which often included a type of hat, the *pileus*, as attested to by various sources (Weinstock, 1971: 138, pr. 15; Tatum, 1999: 165). At this point, the situation complicates, since this hat does not correspond to the Phrygian cap used in French revolutionary iconography and later. The "Phrygian cap" is associated with a specific type of hat that identified freedmen in ancient Rome. This is because the *pileus* was a symbolic cap that fulfilled functions in a variety of contexts, including its association with the goddess and freed slaves (Cleland, Davies & Llewellyn-Jones, 2007: 148). According to the sources, freedmen wore the *pileus* immediately after having their heads washed to make visible their new status. For example, Roman citizens who lived in captivity in Carthage, Gaul, and Greece took part in processions (as freedmen) wearing the *pileus* (*pileus libertatis*). In addition, the goddess Liberty (*Libertas*) herself wore the *pileus*, as can be seen in cult statues (for example, one of the goddess Liberty on the Aventine), and in the minting of Roman coins (Fears, 1981: 869-70). In other words, the association between this type of hat, the idea of freedom, and even its divine personification was already well developed in antiquity. In France, the ancient content was appropriated and reworked in connection with the republican ideology of the French revolution, in which the goddess Liberty became the Republic itself. But even this recovery was not originally established in the revolutionary context. The *pileus*, together with the beam and the axe, was a typically Roman composition, and was revived on 17th and 18th centuries coins from Bern, and on minted coins in Louis XVI's France. Thus, the reference is pre-revolutionary (Comite, 1992: 219).

The Latin term *pileus* comes from the Greek (*pilos*), whose original meaning is indicative of the materiality of this object. In ancient Greek, the term *pilos* means wool or felt, therefore, *pilos* could be a felt hat (compacted wool) or any object produced with this type of material (e.g. shoes, rugs or covers) – (Bailly, 1963: entry *pilos*), while the Latin term focuses on the meaning as hat, especially the cap of the freedman (Gaffiot & Flobert, 2008: entry *pileus*). However, the name *pileus* itself doesn't seem to have been used in such a strict sense, since some ancient authors mention different types of hats with different materials as *pilei* (O'Neill, 1897/2003: 924). In this way, the ancient classical repertoire also included the Phrygian cap, a type of oriental hat present in the representation of some characters in Greek



iconography, such as Mithra and Paris, both of Asian origin. The god Mithra, for instance, often portrayed with the Phrygian cap, was called in a Christian context “*deus pileatus*” (“god who wears the *pileus*”) (Dörner, 1978; Workman, 1980: 35; Foakes-Jackson, 2005: 184-5; Ruck, Hoffman & Celdrán, 2011: 30), thus the Phrygian cap could also be characterized as a type of *pileus* (see Cleland, Davies & Llewellyn-Jones, 2007: 148). Therefore, there was an association between these two types of hats (the Roman *pileus* and the Phrygian cap) since antiquity.

It is the semantic elasticity of the term *pileus*, which centuries later resulted in the sophisticated iconographic relationship between the Phrygian cap, the concept of freedom, and the French version of republicanism, that is referred to in the Republic figure on the main façade of the Justice Department in Ramos de Azevedo’s building project (figure 04). Indeed, there is broader dialogue between Brazilian and French republicanism (Barreto, 1990: 44; Leite, 2000: 305; Coelho, 2002: 43), especially when one thinks of the adoption of the Marianne in the minting of Brazilian coins or the iconography of the Brazilian Republic in general (Schwarcz, 1998: 470, 473-6, 501-2) – the figures of the Secretariat of Justice’s building also suggest such an alignment. In contrast, the North American representation of freedom, created in 1781 by the French engraver Augustin Dupré for Benjamin Franklin, the *Libertas Americana*, sought another reference: a medal with the figure of Liberty associated with the Phrygian hat, a scheme that was also appropriated in later half-cent coins (Vermeulle, 2007: 29; Heritage, 2009: 29). 29; Heritage, 2009: 26-7; Gibbs, 2008: 397-9). In the latter, however, Liberty does not wear the hat on her head but has it rather on her side supported by a staff. Here, the hat is like the Roman *pileus* (without the high part arched forward like the Phrygian barrette), an evident allusion to ancient iconography. Nevertheless, after the French solution became predominant, even US monetary iconography opted for the figure of the Republic wearing a hat (this time a Phrygian cap) directly over his head. In other words, Ramos de Azevedo appropriated an internationally renowned creation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> It is also important to note that there was an intense dispute over the figures of Hercules and Marianne when it came to choosing the symbol of republican France (see Hunt, 1983 and Duprat, 2014).



**Figure 06:** Façade details of the former Finance Department of the Province of São Paulo (currently the headquarters of the Justice and Citizenship Department) (photo: Roger Sasaki).

Based on the close relationship between Heracles, the former Finance Department of the Province of São Paulo's building, and Brazilian Republic itself, we can conclude that there is a communication framework composed of many levels and temporalities. The building was designed to house a public office. Indeed, from the outset, it was thought of as a building for the use of state administration. As in the building next to it, the former headquarters of the Treasury Department, symbolic elements of the Republic were combined with symbols related to ancient Greco-Roman repertoire. In the case of the Treasury Department, the pediment features the Coat of Arms of the Republic together with cornucopias, from which coins, fruit and flowers emerge - a clear ancient example that refers to the idea of fertility and wealth (figure 06). In the case of the Secretariat of Agriculture, which we followed in more detail above, we saw an intricate design that present the logic of the myth with the architectural logic of support, as well as a transition from a Greco-Roman repertoire to a Brazilian republican repertoire that, to a certain extent, also dialogued with a classical reference. The main question here is to understand such a framework of references. Who could interpret these elements? And by "interpreting" we mean anything, from the simple identification of one or other figure (the lion referring to Heracles, the Republic etc.) to more precise references (this figure is Heracles; this is the "Republic" on the coins...). If we think of a more comprehensive interpretation, the most apt to process all those layers of meanings were the members of the Brazilian elite, especially those from São Paulo who studied in Europe or went on

trips that “rediscovered” the ancient world in terms of a *grand tour* (Schelling, 1991: 77; Gomes Jr., 1998: 35). It seems that Ramos de Azevedo was targeting this audience when he made use of such a repertoire and establishing those connections.

## Hermes

Since the beginning of the 20th century, when you walk by Praça da República, facing Avenida Ipiranga, you can see the god Hermes. This sculpture, entitled *Mercury at rest*, was produced at the Liceu de Artes e Ofícios de São Paulo (figure 07), which remains fixed in the square since 1907. It is a bronze reproduction of a sculpture today in the Archaeological Museum of Florence. The sculpture is a Roman copy dating from around 100 BC, based on the original Greek one from the 4th century BC. The original seems to have been made by the Greek sculptor Lysippus or in the context of a “School of Lysippus”. The sculpture was discovered in Herculaneum in the 18th century, and was then sent to a museum, and it became a widely known art history reference. For example, Winckelmann said in the 18th century that it was one of the most beautiful ancient bronzes, and Monaco said at the beginning of the 19th century that it was the “most celebrated bronze of antiquity” (Mattusch, 2015). It provided a tradition of copies at the beginning of the 20th century that still manifests itself today in the figure of this and other mythical figures spread through public spaces in São Paulo – a tradition that still manifests itself today. The situation of this Hermes thus reflects a similar process that we have described here, of Greek formulation, Roman appropriation, and re-elaboration of meanings (and the creation of others) in modernity. This Hermes of Lysippus, of the School of Lysippus, of the Archaeological Museum of Florence, of the Liceu de Artes e Ofícios and of the Praça da República in São Paulo open a discussion about the complex inclusion of this god in São Paulo’s urban landscape, in which he enjoys a wide presence.<sup>6</sup>

Let us begin by considering Hermes’ characterization in Antiquity. The first thing to highlight is that Hermes was a multifaceted god. He was a god related to inventions, language skills, luck, music, theft, travel, borders, herds, and, of course, trade. In addition, he had an important function connected to transporting the dead to Hades, which was the reason that made him also known as *psychopompos* (“conductor of souls”)

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<sup>6</sup> We discuss below the existence of references to Hermes/Mercury in São Paulo specifically. For a general overview in Brazil, see Cerqueira; Torino, 2019.

(Rayor, 2004: 127). Hermes was a god of competition too and had a *kataibates* (“the one who descends”) attribution, referring to his role as communication intermediary between the world above (of the Olympian gods) and the world below (of mortals and Hades) (Padel, 1994: 8), among others. Regarding his relationship with commerce, he was referred to by various ancient authors as *diemporos*, *empolaios*, *palinkapelos*, *kerdemporos*, *agoraios*, qualifiers of which connect him to the universe of commerce and material wealth, from where he was also characterized as *ploutodotes*, given his relationship with enrichment and abundance (Forcellini, De-Vit & Furlanetto, 1854: 413, entry *Hermes*). In other words, there was a set of very broad possibilities more or less connected in the ancient repertoire that organized the performance of the god Hermes. In his contemporary appropriation, specifically in São Paulo, we notice some of them, such as the aesthetic recovery of the sense of protection, but Hermes’ attribute as a protector of commerce is his most prominent and defining characteristic.



**Figure 07:** Mercury at rest, Praça da República, SP (photo: Roger Sassaki).

São Paulo’s identity discourse for a long time has been notorious for valuing hard work, productivism, and related ideas, so much so that she has been often called either the “land” or “city of industry” (Galvão, 1981: 25; Cadernos, 1992: 32) or more generally, “city of work” (Ciscati, 2001: 81). This argument is explicit, for instance, in a speech by Juscelino Kubitschek, a former Brazilian president: “I am very honored to visit you, my friends, at this time when we are celebrating the fourth centenary of this city of

work, the standard of our country's progress and a valuable measure of what we are capable of building and accomplishing" (Kubitschek, 1959: 39). In this set of mythological representations of itself, it is a city that "dawns working/ (...) that doesn't know how to fall asleep" (according to the song *Tema de São Paulo*) (Ferreira & Mahl, 2008: 214). It is also seen as the "city of *nec-otium*", "the negation of leisure" (Bolle, 1994: 374, n. 38), the Latin expression from which the word "business" comes. Therefore, a "city of business" (Bastos, Cabral & Rezende, 2014: 260), "banks, factories, stores and administration" (Monbeig, 1957: 59), and "production" (Carlos, 1994: 66). Since São Paulo was never actually the capital, like Rio de Janeiro and then Brasília, the idea that São Paulo is the "economic and financial capital" of the country was established (Parron, 2003: 50; Luna, 2004).

The city, which has occupied an important symbolic position in Brazilian imaginary since the beginning of the 20th century, was the setting for the creation of a series of magazines related to commercial propaganda, such as *Mercúrio, órgão central de propaganda commercial* and *Mercúrio, periódico de apoio aos comerciantes e industriais paulistas* (both from 1904); *Mercúrio, periódico literário e commercial* (from 1905); and *O Mercúrio, órgão comercial de propaganda* (Martins, 2001: 195-6) – the "Mercúrio" present in all these titles is the Portuguese translation of "Mercury". About the same time, figures of Hermes were beginning to appear around the city, such as the sculpture in Praça da República shown above, on the façade of the store *Au Grand Dépôt* (inaugurated in 1908), located at 91 Rua São Bento, there was a sculpture of Hermes associated with the cornice of the building (BARBUY, 2006: 150-1). A little later, in 1944, in a criticism of the high profits that São Paulo's bakers were making, the editorial in the newspaper *Correio Paulistano* evoked "the good old days (...) when the ethics of Mercury, God of commerce, advocated that only profits of ten or twenty cents were reasonable" (Cytrynowicz, 2000: 60). Therefore, Hermes has been positioned at different levels of everyday life in São Paulo since the beginning of the 20th century, and this situation has left deep marks on the city today.

It is important to point out that, as in Heracles' case in the urban iconography of São Paulo, Hermes is not represented in terms as precise as in antiquity. In the classical past, the most recurrent attributes in representations of Hermes/Mercury were the caduceus (a staff with two serpents or, sometimes, two wings at the top), the traveler's hat, and the winged sandals. (Smith, 1859: 311-313: entry *Hermes*). Hermes is associated with the caduceus on a variety of supports and, in the case of Roman coins, the caduceus appears in isolation on many occasions. However, in this context, the caduceus is not only related to Hermes; but a group of deities



such as Peace (*Pax*), Happiness (*Felicitas*), Mars, and the Dioscuri is also related do this attribute (Mcdonnell, 2006: 144), whereas among the Greeks, it was a symbol almost exclusive to the god Hermes. But it is interesting, nonetheless, that the caduceus could appear in isolation in both contexts, thus establishing a reference to the god Hermes – an aspect that would be appropriated and emphasized centuries later.

In modern times, the caduceus' association with other deities practically disappeared, establishing an almost exclusive relationship with Hermes, but also with Asclepius, the god of medicine. This connection dates to the Renaissance, probably due to the relationship between Hermes and alchemy at the time. In addition, this appropriation appear in some editions of medical literature whose publisher's symbol was the caduceus, which was extended to the symbol of medicine itself (replacing the chalice of Asclepius with just a serpent). For example, the title page of a book on tropical diseases – *The cures of the diseased in remote regions* (London, 1598), written by George Watson, featured the caduceus, as did in a later publication (*Amsterdam pharmacopoeia*, 1736) which bore the caduceus as the mark of the publisher Prudenter. Today, although there are efforts to rehabilitate a preferential reference to Asclepius in medicine, the appropriation of the caduceus seems to be consolidated. For example, it has become the symbol of the *British Medical Association* and the *US Army Medical Corps* (Lock, Last & Dunea, 2001: 262, entry *emblems*). In any case, the caduceus in São Paulo, even in isolation, certainly refers to Hermes.

Hermes was introduced into various contexts in São Paulo in connection with the ideology of work, industrialism, commerce, and business that, and some examples clearly show this. The first example is the headquarters of the São Paulo Court of Justice in Pátio do Colégio, formerly Commodities Exchange,<sup>7</sup> where Hermes features prominently (figure 08). On the corners of the main façade, there is a sculpture of the god, easily identified by his winged helmet. There is also a stylized caduceus at various points on the building, in such a way that this theme dominates the façade. This arrangement is coherent, since the building was a place for doing business (a stock exchange). This aspect was thoughtfully developed by its architect who, considering the building's function, strongly marked the façade with a theme related to the activities that would take place there. Today, such a coherence plays only a limited role in the whole of the building, as the references to Hermes remain aesthetically in the edifice structure, but the activities carried out inside are of a different nature, being related to the universe of law rather than to the world of business.

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<sup>7</sup> Inaugurated in 1933 – see Carvalho, 1999: 150.

Another example of the relationship between Hermes and commerce in São Paulo is the Álvares Penteado School of Commerce Foundation, a building in Largo São Francisco.<sup>8</sup> There are plenty of references to Hermes on the façades, which are divided into two forms: panels with Hermes' winged helmet at the top of plain medallion frames, and the figure of the caduceus very prominently displayed (figure 09).



**Figure 08:** Façade details of the São Paulo Court of Justice in Pátio do Colégio, formerly Bolsa de Mercadorias (photo: Roger Sassaki)

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<sup>8</sup> Inaugurated in 1908 – see FUNDAÇÃO, 1952.





**Figure 09:** Façade details of Fundação Escola de Comércio Álvares Penteado - FECAP (photo: Roger Sassaki).

The two buildings, inaugurated in the first half of the 20th century, had various allusions to Hermes, making up a landscape in which the god's presence was predictable and commonplace. We mentioned above Hermes' presence on the façade of the *Au Grande Dépôt* store and FECAP, both dated to 1908, but there are several other examples in the first decades of the 20th century. On the corner of Rua Quintino Bocaiúva and Rua Direita, it is possible to find Hermes on two façades opposite to each other: that of Palacete Tereza Toledo Lara, dated to 1910 (currently under renovation), and the building of the former Cinema Eldorado (now Clovis Calçados), dating to the following decade. The strength of Hermes' presence and his constant association with commerce and business relationships offer a scenario that was easy to understand symbolically. The figure of the god or his attribute, the caduceus, was an almost directly reference to commerce, which was widely exploited in the urban iconography at the time. Another clear example is the constitution of the Commercial Association of São Paulo's coat of arms. It is like other coats of arms that allude to Hermes, such as the symbol of the Faculty of Economics and Administration of the University of São Paulo, composed of the head of Hermes wearing a winged hat. It is identical to the emblematic caduceus that also appears on the coat of arms of the Order of Economists of Brazil. However, in the case of the Commercial Association of São Paulo, the situation is more complex. The reference is present on the

façade of the institution's headquarters and is a version of the coat of arms of the city of São Paulo. There are an arm of armor holding the caduceus in place of the flag, and the cross of Portugal or the cross of the Order of Christ. Below, instead of the motto "NON DVCOR DVCO", there is an abbreviation of the associations' name A.C.S.P. (Associação Comercial de São Paulo) (figure 10). On the city's coat of arms and that of the association, the lateral supports are fruity coffee branches and, above, in place of the mural crown that makes up the city's coat of arms, there is a superimposed gear. It is interesting to note that the creation of this new coat of arms suggests important connections, the first being the parallel between the city of São Paulo and the commercial institution; the other, more specific, is the replacement of the city flag by Hermes' caduceus.



**Figure 10:** Façade details of the São Paulo Commercial Association (photo: Roger Sasaki).

In this example, there is a game of substitutions clearly enhanced by familiarity with the meanings contained therein, in which the caduceus refers directly to a known content: Hermes and commerce, a fundamental element in establishing the identity of both the association itself and the city of São Paulo. There are also some examples that show how Hermes was used as an easy-to-understand iconographic resource, around which a specific scheme was built in São Paulo. Next, we will look at an example that indicates another level of meaning, endorsing the easy-to-understand logic that this god presented in São Paulo based on his imagery. We will now consider an element of the current Secretariat of Agriculture and Supply of the State of São Paulo (former Ermírio de Moraes Building, and previously the Esplanada Hotel).<sup>9</sup> The façade has been somewhat modified, but much of the original features are still present, such as certain medallions featuring three figures (figure 11). Only one of them is a

<sup>9</sup> Inaugurated in 1923 – see Valenzuela, 2019.

specifically defined character: the god Hermes. The other two are allegories which, together with Hermes, evoke industry (a man holding a gear) and agriculture (the figure standing out in the center – a woman holding a pitchfork and a stalk of wheat). Agriculture features prominently while Trade and Industry are at the bottom.



**Figure 11:** Façade details of the Ermírio de Moraes Building (formerly Esplanada Hotel) (photo: Roger Sasaki).

A similar configuration can be observed in the Matarazzo Building, currently the headquarters of São Paulo City Hall (officially called the Anhangabaú Palace).<sup>10</sup> Between the 1930s and 1970s, it served as the headquarters of Indústrias Reunidas F. Matarazzo. On its main façade, there is a set of five panels organized in sequence, the direction of which is unclear. Starting from the left, the first panel depicts the textile industry, with relief figures of a loom, rolls of yarn, and fabric. The next depicts the steel industry, showing a furnace with pressure pipes, an anvil, and a gear. The next panel depicts agriculture, with tools for working the land, such as a shovel, a plow, some stalks of wheat below and, above, two cornucopias from which fruit and leaves come out. This, the central panel, has a plain border with associated ribbons. The next one seems to indicate technology, consisting of a microscope, laboratory condenser, and retort. Finally, the trade itself, featuring a winged railway wheel, a rope with a pulley for lifting related to warehouses, an anchor referring to displacement by water, and, arranged vertically in the center of the panel, a winged caduceus (figure 12). Here we see a composition whose logic is

<sup>10</sup> Inaugurated in 1939 – ver Tonhão, 1993: 115-39.



practically the same as that of the aforementioned building: an allegorical repertoire is created to describe sectors of industry and agriculture. In the description of commerce, although the allegorical repertoire also appears, it is Hermes, indicated by the caduceus, who condenses this activity.

There are other examples that only confirm what we have seen so far: medallions with the figure of Hermes in the Post Office Palace, referring to the god's communication attribute (a "messenger"); a stained glass window with the figure of Hermes in the Catavento Cultural and Educational Museum (former Palácio das Indústrias), a building projected to house agricultural and industrial exhibitions; as well as the profusion of allusions to Hermes in the Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil (CCBB), former headquarters of Banco do Brasil in São Paulo; among many others.



**Figure 12:** Façade detail of the Matarazzo Building (photo: Roger Sassaki).

### **Two divinities, two different paths**

The discussion here presented on the presence of Heracles and Hermes in the city of São Paulo suggest two different paths. The first example, Heracles, showed us two intricate ways of attributing meaning, and, moreover, architectural debates that went back to forms already present in European buildings. This was the case with Heracles in the Municipal Theater, and with Heracles in building of the former Secretariat of

Agriculture in the Pátio do Colégio. Here, the enjoyment of classical elements depended on a certain erudition generally achieved through some contact with foreign creations. In the case of Hermes' iconography, the dialogue with European forms can also be observed. However, in the city of São Paulo, it took on a life of its own, connected to the construction of an identity for city's citizens, which would inevitably involve an ideology of work and modernity based mainly on industry and commerce. Hermes, in this sense, became an element that synthesized this identity. Two examples that reinforce the complex inclusion of the classics in the city of São Paulo.

## Acknowledgements

I wrote this text when I was part of an editorial project entitled "Ecletismo Paulista" [São Paulo's Eclecticism], invited by Lindener Pareto Jr. and Waldir Salvadore, whom I thank for the opportunity. I would also like to thank Roger Sassaki for the photographs and Felipe Perissato for his suggestions on the English version of this text. The author of this text is solely responsible for the ideas expressed here.

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