

Joseph-Antoine Bouvard in São Paulo, 1911: Antecedent Events and Repercussions

Roseli D'Elboux

Abstract— This research aims at highlighting the real purposes behind Bouvard visit to São Paulo, Brazil, in 1911. By studying Bouvard's academic formation, his professional life and his practical experience translated by how he committed to his clients, we intend to elaborate a profile of this man. Once Bouvard's profile is established we can go on to elucidate his 'modus operandi' at São Paulo and the way execution of Bouvard's plan was guaranteed, he ensured the execution of his plan in spite of the fact that architect returned to France. We shall be trying to find out if there is a correspondence between theory and practice and also how deeply the Haussmannian model weighed on the conception of his ideas and plans. The main hypothesis is based upon the premise that Bouvard had a previous knowledge about the city of São Paulo due to his local contacts, which made it possible for Victor da Silva Freire to make use of the French architect's experience and prestige by inviting Bouvard in order to have his support for the approval of Freire's ideas. The chronological period of the research corresponds to Bouvard's professional life. In geographic terms, it focuses the city of São Paulo, but mainly the 1911 Bouvard Plan boundaries.

Index Terms— Joseph Bouvard, São Paulo, Urbanism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Many landscape architects worked in São Paulo at the very beginning of twentieth century, when the city grow up vertiginously. Among those professionals rises the figure of Joseph-Antoine Bouvard, studied by our research. Although he only stayed there for two months, the repercussions of his short *séjour* proved indelible in the city's memory and landscape.

In the first days of 1911 a deep debate involved all the council members attention because three improvement plans for the central area of the city were presented at the same time. São Paulo had grown up very fast becoming a trade city with national importance and many improvements were made necessary [1].

Since 1907 council member Augusto Carlos da Silva Telles claimed for improvements at Anhangabau Valley. His insistence led Municipality to propose the Freire-Guilhem Plan in 1910. At the same time, state government proposed another plan, elaborated by architect Samuel das Neves. That situation went through to a crisis between state and municipal administration. Architect Alexandre de Albuquerque presented a third proposal, representing private interests [2].

The situation became difficult to deal with. However, Alexandre de Albuquerque's plan was soon discarded

especially regarding the many difficulties to deal with expropriation solutions moreover for the superficially way technical issues were faced.

Then, it happened to council members the idea of consulting Bouvard, hoping that he could give an opinion regarding the two plans, which represented, ultimately, the different interests and point of views for the future development of São Paulo's central area and, obviously, the various possibilities for making profits through real estate transactions.

Bouvard's proposal consisted in a wide park system linking Anhangabau Valley, Carmo and Chácara da Floresta areas [3], [4], and [2] contemplating old neighborhoods as Bom Retiro and new settlements as Higienópolis and Paulista Avenue. That plan emerged as a conciliatory solution than was accepted by both sides, which only common point was presume that São Paulo, the 'Metropolis of the Coffee' could be at the same level as Paris, '*La cité lumière*'.

First, by comparing Bouvard's performance in many cities he was called to work our study seeks clues that might lead us to answer our main questions. Figuring out common points, we shall get closer to his 'modus operandi'. For this presentation we decided to review, though in a quite superficial way, Bouvard's Plan for Istanbul, his very first international work, through Zeynep Çelik's paper, *Bouvard's Boulevards: Beaux-Arts planning in Istanbul* [5].

Second, that proposal will be compared with Bouvard's plan for São Paulo. Despite their cultural contrasts, we intend to look for similarities between them in order to achieve some continuous lines of action in Bouvard's work. Naturally, divergences will appear due to the peculiarities of each city, but we guess that by exposing them, it will be possible to find evidences about his previous knowledge about São Paulo, his last commitment abroad.

II. THE CAREER CONSOLIDATION IN THE HUGE PARISIAN CONSTRUCTION SITE

In July, 1900, René de Cuers writes for Architectural Record [6] a retrospective article about Bouvard professional career due to his success as director of 1899 Paris Universal Exposition, when he was honored as Official of the Légion d'Honneur de France.

Born in Saint-Jean de Bourney, in 1840, he studied at École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. In 1864 he started to work at Paris Public Service when he was charged with the works of the Church of Saint Laurent [6].

In 1873 Bouvard became Adolph Alphand's assistant and engaged in the project for the French pavilion for Vienna Exposition. In the same year, he joined up with Société

Centrale des Architectes. In the following years he took part the preparations for French pavilions in the London Fair (1874), Brussels Fair (1876) and Amsterdam Fair (1883).

For the 1878 Universal Exposition, Alphand charged him with projecting the City of Paris pavilion. The following year, Bouvard became Architect of the City of Paris.

In 1880 he was invited to become member of the School Building Committee in the Ministère de l'Instruction Public. From 1882 on, due to the demand for new classrooms, Bouvard designed 52 temporary schools in six months and a few others, permanent [6] and the gates for Carnavalet Museum.

In 1886, Alphand, then General Director of Paris Universal Exposition, appointed Bouvard as responsible for the project of the Palais des Industries Diverses. The success was enormous and he took the third prize of Exposition, after Dutert and his Galerie des Machines and Eiffel and his metallic tower. For his performance in coordinating the works for the Exposition, Bouvard was nominated, in 1889, as Official de la Légion d'Honneur. Later that year, he designed the Bourse du Travail and the Fours de Désinfection Municipales (Municipal Disinfection Ovens).

Bouvard naturally succeeded Alphand after his death, in 1891, as Directeur Administratif des Services d'Architecture et Plantations de la Ville de Paris (Administrative Director of Architectural Services and Plantations of the city of Paris), position he held until his retirement in 1911. Since 1893 he was responsible for Paris ephemeral embellishments, that is, create festive ambiances, preparing interiors and exteriors areas to receive distinguished visitors as, for example, the Czar Alexander III (1896) [6], [7].

By 1900 Bouvard was honored as Grand Official de la Légion d'Honneur, a signal of absolute prestige. At that moment he had achieved the highest point of his career in the Paris Public Service. He was also appointed to be Chief of the 1900 Universal Exposition Architecture Department.

At that moment the doors for his international career were widely opened: Bouvard was called to propose interventions in Istanbul (1902), Brussels (1903), Buenos Aires (1907, 1909), Rosario (1910-1911), São Paulo (1911) [7] and Montevideo, where he was invited to participate of an international projects competition [8].

III. BOUVARD AND ISTANBUL

The plan for Istanbul was conceived in 1902, when the Sultan Abdulhamit II, by his ambassador in Paris, invited Bouvard to develop a master plan for the city. The sultan, bothered with comments and criticisms that were made about the state of disrepair of the city and about the lack of care with its major landmarks [9]¹, desired Istanbul became like the major European cities, which 'set the unique criteria for beauty and progress' [5].

Bouvard proposal was not the first attempt to give Istanbul some European appearance. Since eighteenth century, Ottoman Empire had decided for an approximation with

Occident, promoting cultural and social transformations.

Visible marks of that process are some isolated interventions in the city, attempting at regularize some avenues in according with *Beaux-Arts* planning principles [5].

At the end of nineteenth century, Istanbul was familiarized with *Beaux-Arts* architecture due to the European immigrants that came to work there. The Galata area, 'which become a lively locus of international trade', concentrated the 'European inspired' buildings.

Çelik stresses that this meeting occurred in both directions so that one could observe in town some 'European looking office buildings' [5] and, on the other hand, some eastern or Islamic features could be seen in the buildings of the European area.

Nevertheless, western accent prevailed as the Republican regime also adopted it as an option since the beginning of twentieth century. The most relevant fact that exemplifies that process was the implementation of western alphabet in substitution of Arabic characters.

Just like São Paulo, where the vestiges of colonial past needed to be eradicated, those efforts also shown their effects in Istanbul architecture, as observes Orham Pamuk [10], when he refers to the '*yalis* - splendid seashore houses built by old ottoman families in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries - that became symbols of an obsolete identity and architecture.'

Despite to be overloaded with his responsibilities in Paris, and without time to travel to Istanbul, Bouvard did not decline. 'He ordered large-sized photographs of the city according to which he prepared his avant-project. Even though Bouvard was directly hired by the Ottoman Sultan, the French government paid the expenses and presented the project as an official gift' [5].

Due to the limitation imposed by the images sent to him, it seems obvious that Bouvard focused in the most known places of Istanbul, the Hippodrome, Beyazit Square, Galata Bridge and Valide Sultan Square, preparing 'wide watercolor drawings, bird's-eye views and long-range perspectives' [5].

Çelik doubts that Bouvard was enough 'acquainted with the Turkish-Islamic fabric of the city' [5] and even informed about the Europeanizing transformations of the second half of the nineteenth century.

Bouvard's proposal basically follows the 'classical *Beaux-Arts* principles of regularization, symmetry, isolation of monuments and creation of vistas with prodigious terminal points.' He simply 'disregarded some vital issues that make urban design meaningful' [5]. The author shows three key-points to understand the lack of relation between Bouvard's propositions and the fabric of the city and, beyond, to understand why his proposals were impossible to be done.

First, she points out, 'there was no master plan' and 'the drawings did not surpass the stage of impressionistic sketches' [5] of isolated nodes with no connection, a topic never considered.

Second, the site topography was completely ignored. And third, the plan had no relation with the particularities of Istanbul inhabitants and culture, sharing with the commissioners the idea that what really mattered was 'the

¹ Apud [5] Z. ÇELİK, 'Bouvard's Boulevards: Beaux-Arts Planning in Istanbul', *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 43 (1984), 341-355.

creation of a modern, 'clean', and 'embellished' city' [5].

Thus, Çelik [5] points out the inconsistencies in the Bouvard's proposals for the nodes chosen to receive 'urban treatment': the excessive use of geometric lines in tracing the main lines for squares and parks, reinforcing perspectives, creating well delimited axes in which assigning symmetries put in evidence isolated monuments; the use of classical landscape resources as planting trees along sidewalks or delimitating squares and open spaces. Excluding or ignoring the importance of mosques to the landscape of Islamic cities, Bouvard subverted the order proposing the dominance of the Hotel de Ville's tower over the minarets of the Beyazit Mosque.

As the Golden Horn was wider than River Seine and Bouvard adopted Alexander III Bridge as a model, he proposed a kind of amplified copy for Istanbul, repeating the arches four times and introducing Islamic motifs to decorate the top of the pylons.

For Çelik [5], Bouvard's proposals for Istanbul are merely formal exercises, uncommitted with local culture and existing fabric, full of History, which had been developed throughout centuries, clearly set up as cultural heritage. Evidently there was neither program to follow nor, according the author, evidences that the plan was accompanied by a report.

Thus, Bouvard dismissed any connection among the nodes he elected to work on, choosing them from his personal criteria searching for dramatically visual effects rather than their meaning. He also ignored aspects of local topography and 'no attention was paid to the urban texture that connected the monuments — a theme which by then had found some popularity in Europe', since the publication of Camillo Sitte's 'The art of building cities according to their artistic principles', first published in 1889' [5].

IV. BOUVARD IN SÃO PAULO

Comparing Bouvard's proposals for Istanbul and São Paulo, similarities can be noticed but also expressive differences. First, we cannot forget that Bouvard has never been in Istanbul and only known the city through the information the Ottoman ambassador gave him, therefore, information filtered by the commissioner.

On the contrary, he spent between thirty and forty five days at São Paulo, accompanied with Belgian banker Edouard Fontaine de Laveleye, who represented English interests in the city [7], [11], which leads us to believe that if in Istanbul Bouvard was not personally involved with city's questions, in São Paulo things were completely different. This becomes more significant when because he joined up the group of founders of *City of San Paulo Improvements and Freehold Land Company Limited* [7], [11].

Considering the contracting character, in Istanbul Bouvard was hired for the sultan and for him, he projected, totally uncommitted with popular aspirations, while in São Paulo he was hired by City Council which, despite being controlled by the elite, had its decisions always taken under a certain public control and this was one of the reasons for Bouvard been hired - mediate a dispute between rival groups that had dragged on since 1907.

Cultural differences are also relevant. In Istanbul Bouvard had to deal with a completely different culture which geographic distance could only increase. A city that was created and recreate on itself for centuries. In São Paulo, in spite of the huge distance, there was a great cultural similarity. It was a Frenchman in a young town, which was passing by fast and deep transformations, due to the enormous contingents of European immigrants that came in recently to work and support the economic growth.

Therefore, the cultural proximity to Europe occurred in both the top and the base of social pyramid, which would facilitate the assimilation of new urban standards. If it is true that the São Paulo elite frequented the salons of Europe, and especially Paris, is also true that the city had materially transformed by the hands of European immigrants, represented by workers, merchants, industrialists and businessmen.

It is impossible to neglect the remarkable influence of French culture at that moment. Arturo Almandoz's [12] notes for Buenos Aires are also valid to São Paulo. As stated by him, 'that trend in urban planning and design was stimulated for the predominance of French cultural ambience which led the ruling elite to copy, imitate the taste and costumes and French way of life.' According to the author, Georges Clemenceau had even stated that 'by the grace of spreading of French', the spirit of France have reached lands beyond the ocean [12].

Anyway, at both opportunities Bouvard answered to what commissioners have requested. He drafted the 'Paris of the Orient' [5], according to the Sultan Abdulhamit II wills and brought to São Paulo a conciliatory solution to the dispute of interests regarding the destination of the downtown area.

With respect with projecting questions it seems reasonable to be not so critic with Bouvard's choices. After all, what kind of project could be designed without recognition of the site? Then, it would be fair to relieve some project inconsistencies because what matters is, in fact, to understand why if he could not go to Istanbul even though he accepted to conceive a plan for the city. Would it be a demonstration of self-pride, wondering he was able to understand any city from his Parisian experience, a kind of certainty that Paris was really the center of civilized world? And, on the contrary, that Istanbul was not culturally rich? Not doubtless.

Flaubert has already been in Istanbul, the landscapes of Melling were already known to the Europeans, Edmundo de Amicis had edited his *Constantinople*, chronicles of travelers had already hit among the European elite and related subjects in the east has always aroused curiosity [13].

A simple detail can be the key to achieve a more consistent answer: O. N. Ergin [9] states that French government had paid Bouvard's expenses and offered the project as a official gift to the Sultan. Bouvard would not be serving the greater interest of the French government concerning the Ottoman Empire? This seems a more plausible hypothesis, since it is known that the European powers competed for control of the Middle East since the eighteenth century.

On the other hand, what made him cross the Atlantic in 1911, with 71 years of age, when he cannot (or would not) cross the Mediterranean years before? Money? An

inexhaustible curiosity and undoubted professional vitality? Both? These are questions that deserve to be answered.

The fact is that his proposal for São Paulo did not begin from zero because, as already attested, his proposal for Anhangabau Valley is a conciliatory solution for contemplate various interests in a harmonious way [1], [11]. The main reason of his coming to São Paulo was really acting as a judge in that question, but he accomplished much more when he proposed a general plan for the future development of the city, having answered other questions as, for example, the creation of a park system or an interconnected traffic system which considered link tram lines and railway stations. These questions were not considered in Istanbul, as Çelik shows.

It matters to know that there was already a previous draft for Anhangabau Valley, which illustrates the Plan for ameliorations proposed by Municipality in 1910 [11].

This is so far the first record obtained of any intent for projects in the area. In that draft there are boulevards lined by rows of trees and sinuous paths that frame the main avenue, which splits the park from North to South (Fig. 1).

The intention was to solving the circulation problem of the central area as well as adjust the ‘city’s physiognomy to its condition of flourishing commercial capital’ [11]. The landscape draft was bolstered by a speech lined up with the precepts of Camillo Sitte [11].

One can assume therefore that Vitor Freire was more updated in this debate than Bouvard, but obviously, the French architect, in his professional career, was an authority whose ideas should be taken into high consideration. This supports the hypothesis that Freire brought Bouvard to São Paulo to endorse his plan. According to Simões Junior [11], Bouvard met in São Paulo the echoes of the new paradigms of urban design that have been evolving in Europe, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries as German and England and their repercussions in United States.

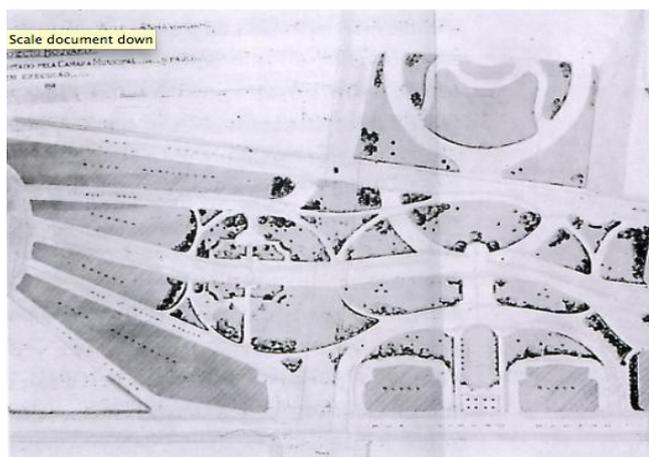


Fig. 1: The proposal for Anhangabau Valley, 1911. On the top, the Municipal Theater square, facing the two buildings conceived for Mr. Prates. They are identical and stress, with the Theater, the transversal axe over the valley. The sinuous avenue splits the valley from north (right) to south (left) [14].

Victor da Silva Freire, who sought to be updated for the more modern urban thinking, advocated these ideas. Freire was present at the International Congress in London in 1910 and earlier, in 1893, in Chicago, and uses the ideas of Sitte,

Vierendel, Robinson and Hénard to support his arguments in defense of preservation of the naturally picturesque valley and historical aspects of downtown area.

Bouvard’s project incorporates the discourse of Freire and, most likely, the architect, due the short time available to prepare his proposal, uses the draft conceived by Municipality as a starting point, an outline that translated the clients’ wishes. His design is obviously much more sophisticated, elegant and well thought-out with respect to the connection of the valley gardens with the urban texture around them.

In this project there is no search for rigorous geometric symmetry. Compared with those spaces designed for Istanbul, Anhangabau Valley is a much more free and fluid design, which operates the picturesque visuals and the possibility of uncompromising promenade.

The symmetry can be observed, however, in another way: the axes of the paths do not coincide with the visual axes. It is established among the architectural events - the newly opened Municipal Theater and the Prates buildings, which are also submitted to a symmetric rule, but softened by the level difference relative to the longitudinal axis of the valley (Fig. 2).

The *Beaux-Arts* arrangement is almost nonexistent. It only resembles, vaguely, the convergence of longitudinal pathways toward the southern end, converted to a crumpled rond-point. Anyway, it is also mitigated by the presence of the Chá Viaduct.

One can assume, due to his proximity to Alphand, that Bouvard had considered the valley not as a part of traffic system that should receive landscaped treatment, but conversely, as a park that receives some circulation lanes. A possible reference could be the Buttes-Chaumont Park, designed by Alphand in a mining area and cut off by a railway line, which at that time valued the park by the connotation of modernity that the railroad was carrying.



Fig. 2: The Prates buildings facing Anhangabau Valley in a photograph of 1930 [16].

Unlike what happened in Istanbul, Bouvard’s plan to São Paulo considers the whole city. However, this comprehensive overview must also be credit to the efforts of proponents of Samuel das Neves and Freire-Guilhem plans, since the street

traffic issue was an existing problem prior to Bouvard visit, due mainly to the fast population growing and the emergence of the automobile. The wider issues that the plan contains cannot be credit only to the French architect.

Anne Marie Chatelet² identifies some constant features, particularly his way to work with addition of a small punctual interventions rather than an overall plan. These interventions are the diagonal path, the creation of green spaces, the highlight of monuments, all formulas from the Haussmann breviary,³ which found echoes everywhere, especially among the elites from peripheral countries.

V. CONCLUSION

Comparing the plans for Istanbul and São Paulo, it is possible to verify, with certainty, that Bouvard was much more involved with the second, especially considering that Bouvard never visited Istanbul. However, consider him insensitive to the historical heritage issues of the Turkish capital would be a bit exaggerated, since he followed in its plan, the 'breviary of Haussmann'; as described above. But we must remember the wonderful and most wanted image of Paris was achieved at the cost of demolition of much of the existing medieval urban fabric in the mid-nineteenth century. And at the very beginning of twentieth century this debate was still incipient.

São Paulo had neither medieval urban texture nor a millenary history. There was the colonial poverty to eradicate. Nor was there any kind of conscience on the heritage issue. Nobody took into account, as instance, that the first neoclassical mansions built in the city should be preserved. That was just a discussion that was taking shape in that period. It is not coherent to charge that kind of consciousness to those professionals.

Camillo Sitte's work was published in 1889. However, Bouvard, trained from the experience of Alphand, should not yet been touched by this discussion. Maybe he, as an experienced architect, did not give credit to these new theories that went against everything that until then, he had practiced and from what he gained broad public recognition.

Anyway, at the turning of the century, much was discussed about cities, their transformation or their many new configurations and we believe Bouvard did not reject them. Instead, his path from 1902's Istanbul towards 1911's Sao Paulo, demonstrates that even in an age when many professionals have their performances based on concepts accepted over decades, the French architect found himself stimulated by the debate and, while continuing to use diagonals, the nodal arrangements, the baroque treatment to monuments, isolating them from the surroundings, he proposed himself to work with curved lines, exploring the picturesque aspects of sites and movement of topography, abandoning the 'absolute chess', as also comment Almandoz:

'...Bouvard proposals for the then second largest city in Brazil, which already was making its rivalry with the capital Rio de Janeiro, appealed to the same monumental baroque conception of space, while it was evidenced his belated

admiration by Camillo Sitte.'⁴ [15]

Those issues were not totally unknown to him. Having being Alphand's assistant for so many years, certainly joined in the completion and maintenance of the parks of Paris, designed in what is conventionally called *jardin anglais* or *jardin paysager*, in which the symmetry and axial articulation of space was abandoned and instead the *genius loci* was sought, when the picturesque aspects of the site were explored, imparting a bucolic character to these places.

Maybe because of this it was relatively easy to Bouvard to assimilate and expand what Freire advocated for São Paulo and, it seems, has been able to him to establish a dialogue with the new theories from Germany, England and the United States, gradually freeing himself from the 'Haussmannian breviary' and gradually embracing the new experiences offered by Sitte, Hénard, Stübben, Howard, and others.

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Roseli D'Elboux Faculty member at Mackenzie Presbyterian University, São Paulo, Brazil. Degree in Architecture and Urban Planning (USP, 1985),



Master in Architecture and Urban Planning (USP, 2005) and Doctor of Science (concentration in Urban Planning, USP, 2015). Faculty member at Mackenzie Presbyterian University. Awarded with Eugenia Sereno Cultural Prize, Regional History modality (2009) for the book 'Manifestações neoclássicas no Vale do Paraíba: Lorena e as palmeiras-imperiais' (Annablume/Fapesp, 2008). Her doctoral thesis has been selected for the final shortlist at X Bienal Iberoamericana de Arquitectura (XBIAU, 2016). Latin American Studies Association Member. Her interests include Urban History, Architecture and Landscape Architectural History, History of early 20th Century Urban Planning.

² Apud [7] M. C. d. S. Leme, *Urbanismo no Brasil: 1895-1965* (São Paulo, 1999).