

History and the configuration of the architectural repertoire from Brazilian architects travelling to Europe in the early XX century*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the interpretations and repercussions of the traveling notes made by the Brazilian architect Alexandre Albuquerque about several city professional fields in the beginning of the XX century. Awarded by the Polytechnic School of S.Paul-Brazil [Escola Politécnica de São Paulo] with a period of time studying in Europe in 1906, the just-graduated Albuquerque prepares records and reflections about the urban transformations and architectural shapes he observed visiting countries like France, Belgium, Austria, Germany, England, Italy, and, returning to Brazil, publishes several studies about the travel - studies he dialogues with for many years in his professional life and in other papers. Largely discussed in São Paulo at the time, this kind of studies was considered fundamental to complement the architects formal education, and end up interfering, directly or not, in the art projects for buildings and urban planning, in the formal teaching of Architecture and Arts History, and also, specifically on theoretical notes about architecture. Therefore, this investigation's objective is to contribute to understanding the importance of the journey of studies and the role of European Architecture History in the choice and composing of the architectural repertoire in urban spaces in the early XX century.

INTRODUCTION

The installation of the Polytechnic School of S. Paul-Brazil [Escola Politécnica de São Paulo] (1893) enabled an expressive governmental investment to improve the urban professionals to work on buildings and infrastructure projects, especially in São Paulo city and state. It was the second polytechnic school installed in Brazil, beside its homonymous in Rio de Janeiro (from 1874), and it soon took over an important role in educating the professionals of the country, many of them closely linked to planning and executing projects in the urban space. Focused on the several forms on engineering teaching, it stood out traditionally in the graduation of civil engineers, even though the architectural field has been encouraged by the Escola Politécnica de São Paulo since the early years by means of the engineer-architect course and by the presence of some renowned architects in its faculty¹. Since the School establishment until the 1940s there was the "Travel Abroad Award", in which, every year, the student Who had passed with distinction in every step of the course was offered a travel to Europe, which would last around ten months, sponsored by the São Paulo state government.

Besides the merit acknowledgement by the Congregation, the travel had the objective to complement these young engineers graduation, allowing them to follow up, as interns and visitors, a series of construction works - mostly public buildings and urban infrastructure - in several places of the old continent, as well as to make long ways through many cities, in the condition of specially licensed

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¹ The first Politécnica graduation courses at the time of the settlement were: civil engineering, mechanical engineering, industrial engineering, geography engineering, agricultural engineering and architectural engineering.

observers². In their baggage, they would take their itinerary and the professors' guidance, because they were still considered Politécnica students during their stay abroad. The variation of this prior plan depended on the engineering field chosen by the student, and usually good as an initial guide, modified by the opportunities and circumstances of each trip. Even the changes made out of the student's personal choices were reported to the Congregation by periodic mailing - a procedure that reassures the idea of a study trip, of an improvement in the engineers's formal education.

Up to the 1940s, period in which the architectural engineering course made around 70 professionals, four students of this course had received the "Travel Award". The second architect engineer to receive this award was Alexandre Albuquerque (1880-1940), graduated in 1905 and was a professor at Politécnica on the following decade, becoming, then, the first alumni who got to be part of their faculty, he was hired for the Art Section, Chair for the Architecture History³. On his trip to Europe in 1906, Albuquerque registers the urban transformations and the architectural shapes observed visiting countries like France, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Austria, Germany, England and Italy, using this as a ground for the dissertation he presents and defends before his teachers, indicated by the School Congregation⁴. The travel still fomented the publication of some studies and notes: the text *Impressions of Europe* (conferences held at the Escola Politécnica de São Paulo Guild, published in the *Revista Politécnica* in three parts in 1907), the thesis *Study of the Italian Renaissance and its Development* (two editions in 1909), and the same study about Renaissance published in 1929 and 1930 in the form of articles, with some important punctual changes. Besides this material, nowadays it is possible to have access to the mail has sent Politécnica during his travel and to many of the books mentioned in his studies, apparently acquired in this European journey. The analysis of this material allows an approach regarding some important subjects for the professionals Who projected interventions in the cities, among them: the importance of the study travel for the "architectural viewpoint" over the urban culture (as well as the circulation of knowledge about the urban); the role of the erudite knowledge in the readings and actions on the city; the tensions between cultural tradition and technical evolution; the aesthetic issue in the urban space.

KNOWING, LOOKING, (RE)COGNIZING

Two characteristics stand out in Albuquerque experience and justify, in my point of view, the relevance of a study about this architect's travel to Europe. First of all, for the detailed registry organized and debated by him, apparently the only one Who presents a thesis to the Politécnica teachers after the award-trip; moreover, such registries have been published and discussed by the architects in the School for many years, and supplied material for other reflections about architecture at the time, becoming a reference in a sense. Another aspect refers to the professional path, for the approval in the public contest and later effectuation in the job as a professor at Politécnica, precisely in the Architecture History and Civil Constructions, encouraged Albuquerque to revisit several times the travel repertoire, by means of notes, reflections and the bibliography gathered by him; the long permanence of the architect in the institution and his broad career enabled the resumption of this repertoire in many moments, constituting it as a foundation for more general formulations about relations between architecture, history and city. Even though no systematic effort of theorization about such

² Up to 1937, 19 professional received the award: 13 civil engineers, two electrical engineers and four architect engineers: João Moreira Maciel (1899), Alexandre Albuquerque (1905), Alberto Monteiro de Carvalho e Silva (1909), Carlos Lodi (1933).

³ Actually, Hipollyto Gustavo Pujol Júnior graduated civil and architect engineer in 1905 and was the first alumni to become a part of the faculty at Politécnica de São Paulo, but in the civil engineering course, specializing in materials resistance.

⁴ Examining Committee formed by the professors: F. P. Ramos de Azevedo, José Brant de Carvalho e Maximilian Hehl.

relation is notorious, it is possible to conceive it as a theoretically reasoned and articulated reflection, staying away from the shapes of just a travelers narrative.

The existence of another registry of a journey to Europe published around the same period also allows an initial approximation, comparing the notes. The German engineer and architect Maximilian Emil Hehl (1861-1916), rooted in Brazil since 1888 and a professor at Politécnica since 1898, also publishes in the Albuquerque tour year, 1906, a report about his own study travel to Italy “to accompany the artistic development at the renaissance time” in the “birthplace of the renaissance style” (Hehl, 1906). According to him, it is about a study regarding the Chair of Architecture History, justified for being “of maximum importance to know *de visu* the monuments of different times, which construction laws and stylistic shapes rule our architecture, our aesthetic feeling and constructive”. He goes through the Italian cities of Verona, Vicenza, Padua, Venice, Florence and makes considerations about them from historic data, art pieces, besides aesthetic and constructive elements. For that he approaches different buildings, usually of grand proportions, analyzing the distribution of spaces, the characteristics of the architectural styles, the value and the effect of the composition elements, the ornamental aspects and the situation of buildings in the cities space. The narrative is short and the considerations are objective, maintaining the didact profile as an unshakeable conducting wire and the conviction in the objectivity of the description, even when he highlights what he calls “aesthetic and constructive feeling”. He highlights, for example, about Florence, the remarkable development of the Renaissance style in Brunelleschi (1377-1446) work, pointing it as peerless in palatial construction, due to monumental proportions and mass distribution which, as he evaluates, allow an unique “noble and serious effect” (Hehl, 1906: 18). It justifies, therefore, with elements of rational analysis, the admiration and enthusiasm before the visited pieces.

Surely Professor Hehl’s travel was much shorter and spatially more restricted than Albuquerque’s. Even their objectives are different - punctual study for one, complement of a formal education for the other - and that becomes clear in the uneven extension and density of the narratives. Despite this distances, in order to punctuate certain relevant elements of this kind of initiative, it is interesting to accompany some aspects and principles that seem to guide the two registries of the traveling architects. The fundamental premise for both is in the sensitive and cognitive importance of the look to understand the conception of the visited works: “only by the look we can appreciate the impression and make it effective and permanent”, says Hehl (1906: 24); and in a conference right after his return, Albuquerque regrets the difficult to expose “in pale paint” the impressions of the journey, of what “we feel when we see the erudite Europe” (Albuquerque, 1907a: 183). Another approximation is in the role of previous knowledge as safe observation guides. They often refer to a certain historical chronology as a reference to explain the conceptions that rule the described spaces, almost mandatorily supporting itself in a linearity to justify the changes in artistic styles and the emphasis of different compositions. It prevails in both the idea of an uninterrupted process of styles improvement, linked to a political and social evolution. That guides the explanations and qualifies the perception of both. In the cities they visit, they get to know a new impression reached by the visual contact with the buildings and spaces, but without the sense initially modifying the information from formal education, because they classify the new impression precisely according to their previous knowledge. It is as if the eye confirmed the learned concept: the cognize and recognize in an only gesture.

It is possible to see some similarities between these architects journeys and the traditional *grand tour* propagated by English artists and intellectuals, since the XVII century, at the same time we can think about some elements that interfere in this gesture, in this cognize/recognize of the “cultural tourist”. These travels planned to complement and crown the education of privileged young, mainly from England and Germany, enabling the direct contact with monuments of Greco-roman art, end up turned, for many critics, into less of a discovery travel, revealing something new, and more in (re)cognition of the already known, because the travelers would see exactly what they were expecting to find in the journey. According to the critics, all the previous preparation and reading that came with these youngsters education would anticipate the views and interpretation about the art and culture they “searched for” making the itinerary, mostly about Italy, due to the strong presence of elements considered part of the classical heritage. The itinerary traditionally involved Paris, Florence, Naples, Venice and Rome (or even Dresden, Vienna), and

little by little they could also count with preconceived scripts and specialized guides (Salgueiro, 2003).

The repertoire of readings that prepared the journey was also important to model the *grand tour*, and slowly incorporating the reports of other travelers. Even renowned travelers, such as Goethe (1749-1832), respected a certain Canon considered essential to prepare “the view itinerary”. He took with him to Italy, for example, the then well known guide *Historisch-kritische Nachrichten von Italien* (1777), by J.J.Volkman, the important *The History of Ancient Art* (1764), by J.J. Winckelmann, and in Padua, he acquired the work of the architect Andrea Palladio (1508-1580) to become as much familiar as possible to the architecture and the monuments. It is the German writer who narrates, in his *Italian Journey*, the Italians attention when they noticed his interest for Palladio, among so many masters, because for them “he had more to offer in terms of utility and application of his ideas than Vitruvio himself, because he had deeply studied the ancients and the Antiquity” (Goethe, 1999: 70). One may say that a worshipping the antique was consolidated throughout the XVIII century, encouraged in part by the archeological discoveries, such as the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, but moreover for the traveling narratives that visit and revisit these places, turned into kinds of paradigms to discuss Antiquity.

The purposes and results of the *grand tour* keep singularities when compared to the travels of the young architects, but there sure is a closeness, especially under the prism of respect to a classical cultural heritage. It is important to consider that the own organization of the studies about architecture history and aesthetic notions in the graduation courses for architects predominantly accentuated a linear reading of transformations in the construction techniques and in notions of constructive and decorative composition - and even in city conception -, incisively underlining the importance of the Greco-roman Antiquity cultural heritage as constitutive of the Western culture. It is meaningful to notice the naturalness aura that follows great part of the studies and compendiums used in these courses when they indicate how indispensable the (re)cognition of Roman or Greek ruins in Europe in order to understand architecture and culture in the XX century. The same aura, mixed with the linear reading of the so-called architectural “evolution”, is noticeable in architect’s narratives about the subject, including those of the Brazilian architects explored here. The study of architectural styles was prevailing in the architecture treatises and courses, often supported in a historical culture strongly marked by the notion of evolution.

This set - tradition and progress - emphatically redoubled the attention given to the “cultural evolution” knowledge in the Italian peninsula, mainly from the XIX century. One of the most commented builders and writers is the same Palladio in this case, due to his rereading of classical tradition. About the Renaissance architecture, for example, Albuquerque claims there is no invention: “inspired in the past and knew how to harmonize the lines in a way to obtain a set monumental only by its proportion.” (1907b: 196-197). For him and other contemporary architects, a visit to Italy would mean “a walk through the elevated areas of art”, abandoning the mundane for the ideal regions of the beautiful. The justification to prioritize this specific artistic wandering is repeated in several architects:

[...] extraordinary country that received the inheritance of ancient civilizations and knew how to create a new one over it; that witnessed its greatness extinguish covered by a thick veil that was slowly raising until one Day came the brilliant movement of the science, letters and arts Renaissance [...] (Albuquerque, 1907b: 194).

The chosen destinations change, but just a few in the motivation and the look on these towns. Venice, Florence and Rome are almost mandatory. By them, for example, traveled the then young American architect Cass Gilbert in the XIX century⁵. Besides these cities, he left registries of his stays in Siena, Pisa, Genoa and Milan (same places visited by Albuquerque, except for Siena, and also adding to the Italian script Vicenza, Turin, Naples, Bologna and Ravenna). When crossing some of these architects registries, the similarity in notes and judgments draws attention, as if they could see with the same viewpoint, selecting really close

⁵ Cass Gilbert (1859-1934) was president of the *American Institute of Architects* and responsible for many public and private buildings in New York, Minnesota etc., among them the Supreme Court building in Washington-DC.

aspects, leaving from likewise similar criteria. Florence and especially Venice are unique in this sense. Any one of them will hardly let go of registering their impressions of some buildings and Venetian spaces, like St. Mark Church. Gilbert is emphatic to highlight the conception of the temple as brighter than Trinity Church in Boston, by H.H. Richardson (1838-1886) (Blodgett, 2001: 26); Hehl is admired by its interior: “it is of a gorgeous effect, serious by the simplicity in shapes, majestic by its proportions and of a magical effect by its mosaics” (1906: 12); Albuquerque takes his time describing the “fantastic aspect” given by the set of the church “of a kind of gothic, kind of byzantine style”, without however existing there any “servile copy” (1907c: 321). The impressions registries are repeated before what is seen and recognized, commonly highlighting the convenience, the solidity, and the expression of the buildings - features that describe by means of detailing the proportion and ornamentation effects, by the reading off the harmony between shape and function, by an erudite appreciation of the effects of the beautiful. It is Albuquerque who more clearly expresses what this observer’s viewpoint tells us: “the architecture is mainly rational” (1909: 36).

Furthermore, unlike the *grand tour*, it is not mainly the narratives by literates, poets and artists, Stendhal or Byron, neither the traveling journals or guides from the XVIII century that prepares these architects’ way, but mostly philosophers, scholars of culture and treatises of architecture and art. Albuquerque uses treatises by the architects Giorgio Vasari, Louis Cloquet, Etienne Barberot, Henry Guédy, Daniel Ramée, among others, and thinkers like Voltaire, Hippolyte Taine, Jacob Burckhardt, or even Tolstoi, in the Russian writer’s reflections about aesthetics⁶. The Brazilian architect is broadly supported in Cloquet, for example, to specify in his thesis what the three goals of architecture that should be always evaluated on observed space. According to the Belgium treatiser, the building should be appropriate to its destination, physically and morally, to feature structural and moral solidity, and still express itself completely as an artistic monument; in the apprehension of this set, however, he understands as necessary the cultivation of the observer, that is, he conceives the feeling of the beautiful as cultivable, not absolute (1909: 24-31). It is still interesting to notice that the *Traité d’Architecture* (published between 1898-1901 in five volumes) by Cloquet was the textbook in the architecture course at the Politécnica de São Paulo, and the book’s conceptions were debated by Albuquerque’s professors, like Ramos de Azevedo (CARVALHO, 2000), besides being a part of the School’s library collection since its establishment.

ERUDITE KNOWLEDGE AND THE “URBAN ISSUE”

Slowly, a general idea of this town is arising in my soul (Goethe, 1999: 153).

The hues - the tones - are different in the registries: more literary with the travelers in general, more philosophical and predominantly analytical or “technical” with the traveling architects; but with no excessive contrasts. It seems to me that broader cultural apparatus that guides such tones would allow different approaches, considering most of all the historic circumstances of the composition. The readings become entwined, understood strictly and figuratively. Especially when they turn the attention to the city, widening the observation horizon, literates, poets, intellectuals of several lines end up approximating their readings from the XIX century on. By times, the arrangement of the streets and the townsmen movement steal the attention to the tradition monuments. On this horizon widening, specifically with the architect engineers, the “study travel” would get a singular importance due to this field’s characteristics from the XIX to the XX century. The architecture teaching would oscillate between structural issues, linked to buildings, the conceptual ones, linked to the notion of urban project and salubrity, and the artistic ones, regarding the so-called fine arts, the aesthetic etc.

⁶ Albuquerque largely uses the French edition by Tolstoi, *Qu’est-ce que l’art?* (1903) (volume found in the architect’s personal library).

Apparently, there is a look displacement at this moment, perhaps motivated by the new and unexpected that are glimpsed. The descriptions are invaded by the streets, by the nonstop gathering and movement of people, by the urban equipment and means of transportation. Railroads, omnibus, bonds, subways are mixed with lyric narratives and aesthetic notes, underlining, even shyly, the place these spaces function - unknown spaces. Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893), for instance, an author frequently followed by Albuquerque in his *Philosophie de l'art* (1880) and on the three volumes of *Voyage en Italie* (1866) closely registers the unpleasant interacts on his travel to Italy, initiated in 1865. He goes through Rome, Perugia, Sienna, Florence, Pisa, Padua and Venice, pointing out the cultural expressions he witnesses in these places - theatres, squares, palaces, churches, art pieces - and also underlining the smell of the streets, the landscape and buildings contrasts etc. Coming into Rome, he talks about "infected lanes", any one of them "five feet wide", in when "no sunshine ever finds its way into them" and "the mud is like glue", in contrast with the admiration in the Piazza del Popolo "with its churches, obelisks, fountains, and the monumental steps of Pincio, is both peculiar and beautiful" (1990: v.1,12-13; 190). Notes like this, lined b contrasts, are recurrent and do not go unnoticed when the observation angle is widened.

After going through "16611 km of railroads throughout eleven countries", says Albuquerque, "our spirit has felt all kinds of sensations" (1907a: 182). Like Cass Gilbert, Albuquerque also reveals an open disappointment when he lands at old Europe. The American architect did not like London city when he first saw in 1880 (Blodgett, 2001: 27-29), neither did Albuquerque, when describing his first passage on the Thames shore, on Regent Street, on Piccadilly Circus: "How much illusion undone! Everywhere, selfishness conducted by hypocrisy. It is the country of extremes: virtue and vice; altruism and selfishness; rich and poor; abundance and starvation... all in a macabre dance" (1907a: 186). The impact of the streets cause certain impressions that in a given moment replace the pacificatory (re)cognition of artistic monuments in the old continent. For the architects, this new impression is fundamental in the setting of a more complex urban sensibility, mediated by and erudite knowledge that will slowly become really specific, besides being required in the field.

So, I come back to Albuquerque's notes in Italy, now in Naples, "latin race metropolis", according to him. Right away, he mentions *Voyage* by Taine to agree with the impact of the place's vivacity that "pleases all the men, hearts and feelings" (1907a: 187), but soon opposes his readings of the city's old streets, such as via Toledo: "then we will have a sad show to watch". The observations essentially concern insolation: lanes with three to four meters wide with tall houses and windows with balconies result in this worrisome picture for the architect: "no sunshine comes warm up the sidewalk's slab" (190). The issue of sunshine incidence would earn, on the following decade, several studies from the architect about hygiene and salubrity in the urban space. The sanitary precepts that guided his perception and worried him in Naples are similar to those that converted, years later, in the technical regulation of the buildings in the city of São Paulo, by means of legal instruments, such as the Constructions Code. The young architect's observations about width of the streets and position of the windows in European cities are very meaningful, due to the imminence of the sanitary precepts mobilized in this look.

No doubt it is the same Goethe's Naples, joyful, free, lively, also revisited by Taine, but on the architect's notes it appears pervaded by the sanitary concern: "There is public hygiene only where His Majesty the King's car passes by, and on the big sidewalks made for the foreigners. Besides, there is the full denial of human comfort." Next to this issue, Albuquerque is still surprised with the intense occupation of the street by the Neapolitans, describing the variety of activities made on the street by carpenters, blacksmiths, laundresses etc. "The street is the Neapolitan's home" (190). At this point, no positive aesthetic appreciation is noticed, no evaluation of proportion usage and composition effects. One may say that the engineer's sensibility overlapped the architect's before this Picture or, in another way, maybe of a very risky generalization, one may say that the architecture apprehension over the city is altered under this circumstance. However it is, the presence of a tensioner element is notorious, even more evidenced when Albuquerque opposes this latin metropolis to the organization of northern cities, where the engineer is, in his opinion, "a constant friend of the populations, working to improve life conditions in big cities, eliminating the focus of diseases and avoiding their spreading" (191).

He explores in this picture several elements regarding space organization and urban life, putting aside for a while his strictly aesthetic concerns. Actually, the incorporation of sanitary, comfort and hygiene precepts with the functionality and efficiency principles is really noticeable, making up and expanding the aesthetic concerns of the architect engineer. In other cities, he also analyzes the issue of the means of transportation, and in Naples, he worries again about that: “the common transportation is the *omnibus*, a big two-story wagon that, over the paving, joltily takes the passenger’s body”. On the other hand, he compliments the subways, “really one of the finest enterprises of human engineering, but that does not yet feature all the safety conditions for the passenger” (192), he warns. Two years later, showing his dissertations to the Politécnica Congregation, Albuquerque still points out the widening of the architect’s field when it comes to new usage of iron and cement, besides new possibilities for improving the urban infrastructure. In his opinion, that can widen the space for a new profile of professional, one who can blend artistic taste and scientific knowledge, the architect engineer, prepared to fulfill the contemporary demands - exhibition palaces, railroad stations, bridges with a large interspace etc. (1909: 44).

These kinds of reflections reverberated in many of this professional’s fields, besides their writing about architectural and urban shapes, elaborated throughout his career, and his work as a faculty member of the Architecture and Arts History⁷. A few years after returning from his travel, in 1911, he projects and defends improvements for the downtown area of São Paulo city, redrawing aesthetic composition and functionality elements in order to solve problems that already made harder for people and goods to move around in the *paulista* capital. Even though it has not been executed, the projected helped to stimulate discussion about the “urban issue” in São Paulo, as much as in Naples, Rome or Venice, visited by the architect’s erudite feeling. Also in his first writings about architecture, he resumes the interpretations about the privileged place of Renaissance style in European buildings. He understands that the constant tribute to the Renaissance in the XXI century - a time with very different goals from that - contributed to the eclectic architecture formation he observed in Europe. For the young architect, the Renaissance was no longer satisfactory, and assures, in 1909: “a new era of universal Architecture will come, in which iron and reinforced concrete will have a winning preference.” More than an interesting anticipation of the future architecture picture in the beginning of the XX century, Albuquerque reassures, on this conclusive evaluation, the principles that have followed him throughout his path, underlining the “evolutionary” interpretation of arts and architecture history, “always guided by the same progress Law” (1909: 65), as well as the necessary harmony between technique and beauty, art and science. These are not singular or personal principles, but conceptions that were broadly discussed by architects in their reflections, most of all on the great debates encouraged by modern vanguards - certainly another chapter to visit as an outspread imagined for this study about the role of erudite knowledge in the readings and actions over the city.

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⁷ It is worth pointing out that great part of the principles used in the texts explored here were resumed by Albuquerque in the end of his career, when He summarized many years of work as a professor at Politécnica in the compendium: *Construções Civis*, published in 1942 and used, in Brazil, as a reference for architecture and engineering students until recent times

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