

EARLY FAÇADE AZULEJO FRAMES BY FÁBRICA ROSEIRA OF LISBON

João Manuel Mimoso

Laboratório Nacional de Engenharia Civil (LNEC)
jmimoso@lnec.pt

ABSTRACT

The paper reviews the importance and distinguishing character of façade azulejo frames as used in the region of Lisbon and presents and discusses the early frame patterns designed and produced by Fábrica Roseira in the mid-19th century.

KEYWORDS

Façade tiles | Azulejo frames | Fábrica Roseira | Lisbon azulejos

RESUMO

Este trabalho refere a importância e características distintivas das molduras em azulejaria de fachada, em particular das produzidas durante as primeiras décadas de actividade da Fábrica Roseira de Lisboa.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Azulejos de fachada | Molduras na azulejaria urbana de Lisboa | Fábrica Roseira

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The matter of *azulejo* frames when it comes to façade tiling is particularly relevant for several reasons: firstly, their balanced use imparts to façades an unmatched decorative harmony and beauty; then they are characteristic of the region of Lisbon and of a few more towns supplied by its factories – in Oporto, façade tiling is more often than not devoid of frames which suggests that the lining of urban façades with *azulejos* may have originated independently in both towns. Finally, and maybe most importantly, it is in its application that the fundamental role of the tile layer is properly appreciated. The need to frame windows and other architectonic interruptions of the flat surface, often with curved contours, brings to light the art of the tiler and the results tell of the quality of the professionals engaged [fig.6].

The use of *azulejos* on outer walls, eventually lining the whole area, was not unknown in Portugal before

the 19th century but they were invariably used on those faces of buildings turned to gardens and never on the street façade. The earliest lined street façade in Lisbon that we know of and to which a date may be attributed through documental or local evidence is that of the building in Rua Nova da Trindade where Cervejaria Trindade is located [fig.1]. The history of this building has been reviewed by Ana Margarida Portela Domingues (Domingues, 2009: 43, 324) and although there is no documentary evidence as to the date of the tiling, the many archaic features strongly suggest its contemporaneity with the date inscribed on a tablet in the balcony ironwork: “1838”. The façade was not lined with the characteristic semi-industrial *azulejos* with stencil decorations but rather with 18th century pattern tiles and small figurative panels likely recycled from the interior of the extinct Convento da Trindade. Since the owner was a particularly rich immigrant from Galicia (Domingues, 2009; op.cit.)



Fig.1 · The earliest dated façade tiling in Lisbon known to us. Left: detail of the first floor showing the inconspicuous single *azulejo* frames used around the central windows. Right: Double-row *azulejo* frieze under the cornice and tablet bearing the date (photos by J-M Mimoso, 2012)

it was certainly not the cost of new façade tiles that motivated this option. Tiles specifically for façade use were simply not yet available at that early time. His reasons for the tiling may have been those that motivated later cases (avoiding the cost of periodically re-lining the façade with render and re-painting it) but more likely it was just an instance of ostentation – a nouveau riche flaunting to all passer-byes his wealth.

The building in Rua Nova da Trindade is particularly important because through its prime location and early date it may have been influential in the development of façade tilings in Lisbon (Pais et al, 2012). And in this respect it is worth noting that not only does it display frames rounding some windows, but also that the lining includes a frieze under the cornice [fig. 1].

Fábrica Roseira was established in Lisbon by an immigrant (from Bohemia) whose name in Portuguese would be registered as “Victor Roseira”¹ (Pais and Monteiro, 1997: 96, 97; Arruda, 1998:34, 35). In 1899 Charles Lepierre who had visited it and likely had known well João Roseira, son of the founder, wrote that it was the oldest factory of faïence still in existence and that originally it had manufactured only tin-glazed ware but had started producing *azulejos* and other architectural ceramics in 1840 (Lepierre, 1899: 134). This statement confirms it as one of the first – maybe even the very first – factories of Lisbon to specialize in decorative building faïence, particularly façade tiles.

A façade in Calçada do Cardeal, in front of where Fábrica Roseira was once located (Arruda, 1998:29) shows a typical early application of their *azulejos*, depicting the lining, the frame and the frieze under the cornice [fig.2]. This example should be compared to figure 1 and the similarities noted, namely the fact that the frame is made up of *azulejos* with the same dimensions as the lining, as was in all early examples of tiled façades in Lisbon, and that the frieze was made up of a double row of tiles.

From the patterns used inside and out in the buildings of Calçada do Cardeal/ Rua dos Caminhos de Ferro 18 and Beco do Belo 6, both once owned by João Roseira (Arruda, 1998: 29) a catalogue of patterns used before 1870 may be tentatively built up (Mimoso

et al, 2015: 81-90). Buildings in Lisbon where *azulejos* of those patterns are still found may now be used to widen the “catalogue” on the basis that since three patterns are usually employed (one for the lining of the façade, one for the frame and one for the frieze), if one is by Roseira, the others may be assumed to have the same provenance as well, particularly whenever a number of such cases confirm each other mutually. The date of construction of such buildings, when available (e.g. inscribed in tablets in the ironwork or the *azulejo* panels themselves) may also be used to assess the succession of designs and trends. As respects the frames (and subsidiarily the friezes) by Fábrica Roseira, the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. All early façade linings used frames and often also friezes under the cornice. When friezes are found on an intermediate floor, that floor was the top at the time when the façade was originally lined, but the building was subsequently heightened. All frames in early façade linings (i.e. dating from the 1840s up to the last years of the 1850s) were painted in cobalt blue on the white faïence and were made up from square tiles of the same size as the *azulejos* lining the façades (wide frames);
2. The prevailing Roseira pattern used for the wide sized frames during the 1840s and 1850s was the twining band design seen in the façade illustrated in [fig.2], of which there were a number of variations. It was inspired by a pattern already used in 18th century Portuguese *azulejo* frames;
3. The second most common Roseira frame designs were a Greek pattern, also copied directly from 18th century Portuguese *azulejos* [fig.3a] and a simpler twining leaf design [fig.3b] of which there were also many variants;
4. There are many other Roseira early designs (e.g. that in [fig.3c]) but they are quite rare and many seem to have been used on a single instance. Often such patterns are relatable to other patterns of the same factory – for instance, the medallion in the pattern seen in [fig.3c] is clearly inspired by the medallion of the frieze in [fig.2]. Although painted with stencils, most of these early patterns involved a considerable amount of brushwork;

1. According to Luisa Arruda (1998: 29) his true family name was “Rosinska”. It was originally transliterated to Portuguese as “Vicente Roseira” and later as “Victor Roseira”.



Fig.2 · Early façade lining with *azulejos* by Fábrica Roseira at Calçada do Cardeal 15. Besides the use of full-sized *azulejo* frames and double row frieze, all characteristic of the early decades of façade lining in Lisbon, another archaic feature is noteworthy: the left side make-believe stone corner made of white *azulejos*. Notice that the *azulejo* pattern is inspired by the checkered “*enxaquetado*” patterns used in Portugal in the 17th century and seen e.g. in the church of the former Pena Convent in Sintra (photo by Maria de Lurdes Esteves, 2012)

5. Friezes are often decisive to identify façades tiled with *azulejos* by Fábrica Roseira. The most characteristic early pattern used is again that seen in [fig.2]. Its origin is unknown but the inspiration is clearly neo-classical and there are curious resemblances with the 17th century frieze applied on the 1838 tiling at Rua Nova da Trindade (right side of [fig.1]) but these may well be merely coincidental. Roseira used other friezes but they are all relatively rare compared to the previously mentioned which, starting in the early 1860s, was also produced in green or more often in combinations of two or three colours;
6. Many early façade patterns by Fábrica Roseira are “constructed” by rotating the same tile at 90° steps and need a width of two and sometimes four *azulejos* to be wholly perceived and appreciated (see for instance that in [fig.4]). The coming into use of the narrow frames probably stems from the fact that often the wall width between windows and other architectural elements did not leave enough room for that many tiles, because the early frames were so wide. A corner building at Praça de São Paulo in Lisbon depicts what is likely one of the earliest tilings with *azulejos* by Fábrica Roseira using the narrow frame and clearly demonstrates how it enhances the main façade pattern



Fig.3a



Fig.3b



Fig.3c

Fig.3 · Roseira wide frame patterns of the mid-19th century (photos by J-M Mimoso, 2012)

by allowing vertical and horizontal rows to be at least two tiles wide [fig.4]. The frame made up of a single colour is aesthetically unsatisfactory but may derive from the early use of strips cut from full one-colour tiles.

The most common early narrow frames manufactured by Fábrica Roseira are of the white and blue striped design [fig.5a] which was much more satisfactory than the monochromatic solution, as well as narrow versions of the earliest twining patterns and two entirely new floral patterns [fig.5a, 5b] widely used for decades after their introduction. The pattern in [fig.5c] was also produced by Roseira in 3-dimensional raised form, usually with the pattern in white protruding from

a blue background – one of the few instances of such contoured tiles being produced by the factories of Lisbon.

The introduction of the narrow frames (possibly during the late 1850s – but the exact date still remains uncertain) marks the coming of age of *façade azulejo* tilings in Lisbon. By around the same time a wider colour palette also started being used. The narrow frames often called for strikingly darker or lighter shades, so that the boundaries would be clearly marked, reaching an aesthetic summit during the 1870s and 1880s that, in the opinion of this author, was never surpassed as far as *façade linings* are concerned.

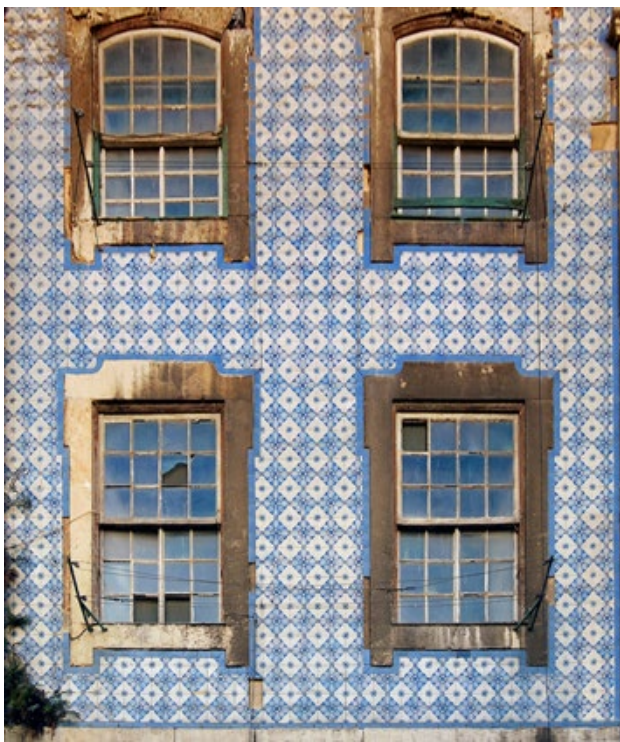


Fig.4 · An early tiling with *azulejos* by Fábrica Roseira using the narrow frame (photo by J- M Mimoso, 2012)



Fig.5a



Fig.5b



Fig.5c

Fig.5 · Some early narrow frame patterns by Fábrica Roseira (photos by J-M Mimoso, 2012)



Fig.6 · The simple beauty of the frame enhanced by the tile layer's fine work (photo by J-M Mimoso, 2012)

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