

## Abstract

São Paulo between the late 19th century and early 20th was one of the main destinations of immigrants, specially because of the needs of supplying a labor for coffee, something that didn't mean that the immigration was only restricted to rural areas. The city has hosted both migrants dissatisfied with their contracts on farms, as those who directly saw it as a final destination, as the case of Syrian-Lebanese. The article analyzes the presence of this colony and focus on the trajectory of one of his representatives, Rizkallah Jorge Tahan, this research intends to reconstruct the trajectory of this immigrant and analyze his interventions in the urban space of São Paulo.

**Keywords:** Immigration, Syrian-Lebanese, Trajectory.

### **A craftsman in the Urbanization of São Paulo: Rizkallah Jorge Tahan (1895-1949)**

One of the mains ways to study architectural history and the urbanization is to focus in the actuation of agents that funded projects. Following these concept, through textual, oral and iconographic sources, this research intends to reconstruct the trajectory of the immigrant of Armenian-Lebanese ancestry Rizkallah Jorge Tahan (1868-1949). The research seeks to compile and analyze his interventions in the urban space of São Paulo. Rizkallah landed at the port of Santos in 1895 and unlike most of the immigrants of his nationality that became peddlers when arrived in Brazil, he choose to work with the copper smelter, which was already his professional activity in his homeland.

After three years in the capital, he inaugurated the "Casa da Boia", [the Float House] that was the main place to the commercial activity linked with the sanitation in São Paulo City. The artifact "float" was a breakthrough for the paulista society that allowed its rapid proliferation and, consequently, the enrichment of Rizkallah Jorge, enabling him to carry out a series of works in the downtown area of the



Picture of Rizkallah Jorge.

**From: Acervo da Casa da Boia.**

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capital, which are the focus of this research. Many of these works are still being used nowadays.

Besides that the research intends to show that these architectural interventions had given Rizkallah Jorge Tahan a prominence in the Lebanese community and contributed to the emergence of a symbolic power, as the concept idealized by Bourdieu. Therefore, focusing the Rizkallah Jorge Tahan's initiatives in the urban space it is possible to see the social actor who became involved with a series of activities of cosmopolitanism, a remarkable characteristic of the passage of the 19th to the 20th century in Brazil. In this period both the mentality of the population, the buildings and uses of the city went through transformations.

So, to contribute for the History, besides studying the project itself, it is essential to analyse the agents that order the projects, because they directly interfere in aspects such as the local where they are going to be built, and in the artistic elements. The trajectory of Rizkallah Jorge Tahan plays an important role to the comprehension about the growth of the urban area in São Paulo, as well to the historical analysis about the action of private entrepreneurs in the conformation of the downtown São Paulo.

### **São Paulo and the urban growth**

When Rizkallah arrived in São Paulo, the city had already passed through modifications that aimed for modernization. Since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the capital was looking to become the economic and commercial center of the state of São Paulo. These modifications seek to attract the social classes linked with the economic funds, especially the ones involved with the coffee production, which were scattered through the countryside. The municipality believed that the establishment of farmers would increase the consumption in benefit of the commerce. With this population shift, a change in the order of 5x will be placed, "the number of inhabitants increased from 30.000, in 1870, to 50.000 in 1885, starting the Republic with almost 100 thousand and arriving at 1900 with 240.000" (CAMPOS, 2002:99).

The modifications occurred in response to the needs of the new society. Therefore, between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century a number of projects were designed to São Paulo's urban space. Several consider that the concerns with the urbanization took place under João Theodoro government (CAMPOS, 2002:56). Theodoro had a program to reshape public spaces making them more attractive, as was the case of Várzea do Carmo, a floodplain watercourse that was drained to become a public footpath. After his administration, the modernization processes will continue with future mayors, but it will be with Antonio Prado that the ideas of Theodoro irrefutably return to São Paulo, and the goal of both was quite similar: create prominent spaces in downtown São Paulo.



the same time, a new Code of Postures, which guided most of the buildings of Rizkallah, was proposed, regulating the maximum heights permitted for buildings in the central region, minimum conditions of hygiene and ventilation.

To facilitate the understanding it is necessary to show the location of Rizkallah Jorge's buildings. It will improve the comprehension about the São Paulo's development. All of them were located in privileged areas: the Várzea do Carmo, the Historical Center, Anhangabaú and Paulista.

### **Anhangabaú**

In the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to de 20<sup>th</sup> centuries this region, now considered the main post card of São Paulo, had rural traits: the houses were low and surrounded by gardens and plantations, and this landscape was splitted by the metal structure of the Viaduto do Chá, designed by Jules Martin. Because of its geographical position, closed to historical center, this space was seen as presenting a huge urban potential, especially because the city began to expand in the direction of the west. Exploring this potential, some projects were elaborated to increase the commercial value of this space, as the case of the creation of the Parque do Anhangabaú and the opening of Avenida Anhangabahú both projects of Alcides Martins.

All these projects focusing the region deflagrated the emergence of a privileged position and caused the raise of land property. Rizkallah took advantage of this urban scenery and started an important process of enlargement of his properties in order to increase his profits with rentals. Rizkallah financed in this space the construction of three palacetes, a solution close to those, that in English we can call big "town houses". In 1975, these buildings were listed as heritage of the city of São Paulo. These palacetes exist



Rua Anhangabahú, 1915.

**From: Biblioteca Mario de Andrade.**

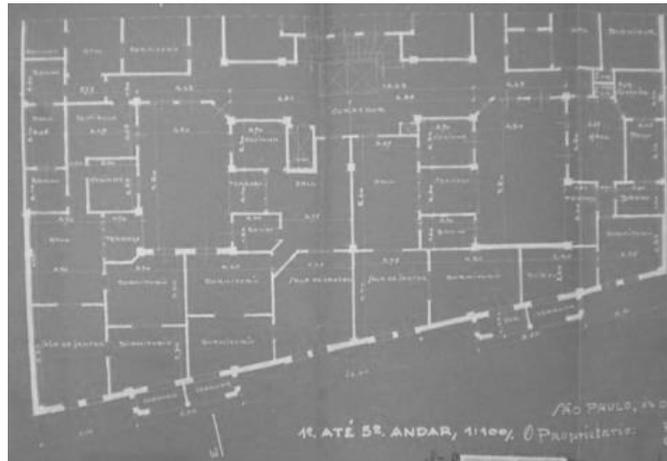


Rua Carlos de Souza Narareth, 1951. This became the new name of the Rua Anhangabahú.

**From: Biblioteca Mario de Andrade**

until today and can be seen on the street Carlos de Souza Nazareth, then called rua Anhangabahú. Besides those Rizkallah also owned other buildings at the same area.

The detailed projects of these buildings allow understanding his insertion in the housing market of the period. The lawsuit of 1932 and 1933, asks for the replacement of plants that had already been approved for the “Rua Anhangabahú, 11”. By the number of floors and the ornaments of the façade, this document seems to be referring to the Palacete Paraíso. In the project are planned the



Plants of the 1° to 5° floor.  
**From: Arquivo do Piqueri.**

the project are planned the construction of a basement, the ground floor, six floors and an elevator tower. Each floor was planned to have twelve apartments, making a total of 67 through the building. The ground would have six warehouses that serve as shops. The *Palacete* has traces of eclectic



Palacete Paraíso in 1928 e 2012.  
**From: Arquivo Casa da Boia e Flickr.**

architecture and, in addition, elements that explicit the religiosity of its owner. "The most curious detail of the mansion is the decoration of the hall: a niche with statues of Adam and Eve" and a colorful stained glass form the scene titled "The Original Sin" (Coluna Memória Paulistana de 14 de fevereiro de 1986) whose authorship is unknown.

The number 862 has a process dated of 1932, requesting approval to construction of other floors and addition of a balcony. The responsible for this request was Plácido Dallacqua. The building is Palacete São Jorge, one of the first's apartment buildings in the city and was an innovation for the middle class residence (Coluna Memória Paulistana de 21 de fevereiro de 1986). It has six floors, totaling fifty apartments, and ten shops on the ground floor. In the building are the inscriptions "RJ" and "1928", referring to its owner and the date of construction. The façade consists of brick and arches that resembles to the American buildings, its spatial configuration follows the postures of classical architecture, marked by the *tripartite* organization. Two buildings, at least, are references for this building: the Stevens

Hotel (now Hilton Chicago), in Chicago, USA, and, the other one, is located in the center of Sao Paulo, the building known as Martinelli.

All Rizkallah's palacetes were spaces built to the rental increasing, and designed to the middle classes of the city. The diffusion of these apartments amplified the process



of collectivization of the city, a process that was not seen in an

Palacete São Jorge in 2012 and 1928.  
From: Arquivo Casa da Boia e Flickr.

equal way by all the population, there were those who associate this type of construction to the unhealthy *cortices* and slums and feared the consequences that could arise from this type of housing. For instance, others celebrated this type of spatial arrangement, considering the buildings good solutions for living and working in the city (ATIQUÉ, 2004:131).

#### Várzea do Carmo e Centro Histórico



Rua Vinte e Cinco de Março in 1916.  
From: Biblioteca Mario de Andrade.



Rua Florêncio de Abreu in 1914.  
In the left side is the Casa da Boia.  
From: Biblioteca Mario de Andrade.

The Várzea do Carmo, or Floodplain of the Carmo, was, in the turn of the centuries, a very problematic area for the municipality, because it was, for centuries, the space dominated by floods of the most important streams of the city: the Tamanduateí. But, with the transformation of the city image and with the increasing

of the urban business, the municipality felt the need to make modifications in that space. This place did not expressed the desired health model in currency in the period and, since 1875, the area was subject of many transformations, as its rectification, that created the "Ilha dos Amores".

So, the space used by the washerwomen and mestizos, for centuries, was replaced by a park built from the

project of Cuchet. In the process of urbanization of the Várzea do Carmo is possible to see the discrimination and exclusion of the unwanted portions of the population and its transportation to other areas of the city (SANTOS, 2000:5). This episode shows that the urbanization of São Paulo was a process full of tensions and clashes of different social actors, and with the movements of the municipality is clear that its biggest concern was with the beautification of the central areas and rather than the construction of spaces for the working classes.

The buildings of Rizkallah inserted into these regions are mainly into four addresses: Florencio de Abreu, Senador Queiróz, Tiradentes and 25 de Março, which will be referred below.

On the street Florencio de Abreu is located the building that has the most expressive enunciation of the Rizkallah Jorge's history: the Casa da Boia. However, this wasn't his only property in the region. Casa da Boia is the store of plumbing materials founded by Rizkallah Jorge in 1898 that allowed his enrichment. The place remains until today selling the same materials. Despite keep being a commercial place the current situation is not the same as the time of its construction: the upper floor, which for decades served as the residence of Rizkallah was transformed into administration sector of the retail, and part of the lining was modified (Coluna Memória Paulistana de 19 de fevereiro de 1986).

The boundaries were also be the result of a discussion with the municipality, which owned the property number 94. Both his land as the town hall had been property of Antonio Costa Braga, who had his property split into five after his death, having four stayed with Rizkallah and one with the municipality. However, for the City, there was a problem regarding the boundaries between these parts, because the transfer term wasn't completely clear about the size of the city hall property, which in that moment was restricted to 4 x 6.50 meters, to reiterate this argument they presented the Scripture. Despite this issue, the Casa da Boia continued to maintain intact its extension, and kept as one of the largest plots in the region. Looking at Rizkallah's projects most of them appears to follow stylistic the eclecticism, a quite common architectural style of that period. Carlos Lemos suggests that we should understand:

"Eclecticism as the sum of all architectural productions appeared from the end of the first quarter of the last century [nineteenth], which came to join the historic Neoclassical emerged in turn as a reaction to the Baroque (Lemos, 1987:70).

The Casa da Boia is inserted in the second category of Eclecticism made by Carlos Lemos. This includes the neoclassical buildings, which containing mainly Renaissance ornamentation (Lemos, 1987:75). The vast majority of buildings commissioned by the immigrant followed this style, in order to approach the current taste of his rental clients.

One of the projects commissioned by Rizkallah, and that do not relate to his commercial intent is the complex of São Jorge Church and Jose Bonifácio College, located in Rua Tiradentes. Rizkallah donated his property to build a church to the Armenian Community of São Paulo. The donation made by the immigrant, ended in honors in several places of the façade and inside of the church, and college. Both of them were erected by Rizkallah, in order to keep the cultural traditions of his homeland. The whole complex has an area of more than 1500sqm; these give us an idea of the dimensions on which the constructions of Rizkallah were built.

Besides these buildings, Rizkallah also owned three buildings in other downtown area, a Rua 25 de Março one of the main shopping areas of the city. The first project dated from 1926 and refers to two warehouses, which would be expanded to have two more commercial spaces. Another modification project in the same



Front of two floor house in 25 de Março.  
**From: Arquivo do Piqueri.**

region refers to the Casa Duprat, who passes to be a property of Rizkallah. This was demolished for the construction of three houses, which would have two functions: serve as a residence at the top, and stores on the ground, featuring a hybrid building (Arquivo Piqueri). The three stores and three dwellings would be independent, having as well different entering. The three houses have the same spaces, only with different distributions. The plant contain a Dining Room, Sitting Room, Hall, Two Bedrooms, Pantry, Kitchen, Utility Room, Terrace, two bathrooms, toilet and outdoor area, a typical program for the middle classes of the capital. Something quite representative is that in all of the projects the part called “memorial” try to show compliance with the postulates of the Commission of Hygiene, probably because since 1920 the issues related to hygiene had become quite popular, given the successive epidemics that killed lot of people in many states of Brazil.

### **Paulista**

The opening of the Avenida Paulista was one of the major initiatives that marked the end of the nineteenth century. Opened on December 8, 1891, it was designed by Joaquim Eugenio de Lima, who joined João Augusto Garcia and José Borges Figueiredo. During this project they also used the drawings of Tarquínio Antônio Tarant. The avenue as well Anhangabaú in this time showed traces of rurality something mentioned by the author

Benedito Lima Toledo. But for him, despite this, was possible to realize that the location was destined to receive big constructions (TOLEDO, 1987).

Its features hitherto not very common in the city attracted a number of buyers. The straight, wide and flat promenade has become an attraction and the place began to serve as housing for the rich sectors of the capital. Campos Neto points that, at that location, the leading circles find their symbolic representation which guarantee their yearnings for domination (CAMPOS, 2002:241). The avenue



View of Avenida Paulista in 1919.

**From: Biblioteca Mario de Andrade.**

also had other characteristics that differed from the other regions; in 1913 it was the first paved road from the city of São Paulo. The asphalt, although expensive was necessary to receive the traffic and to assemble a road network. In the images recorded in 1928 in the film produced by Rizkallah, shows the aspect of the traffic as an apparent differential of the Avenue. His family poses in a take toward the paved street when a bus was passing, and it is possible to identify some



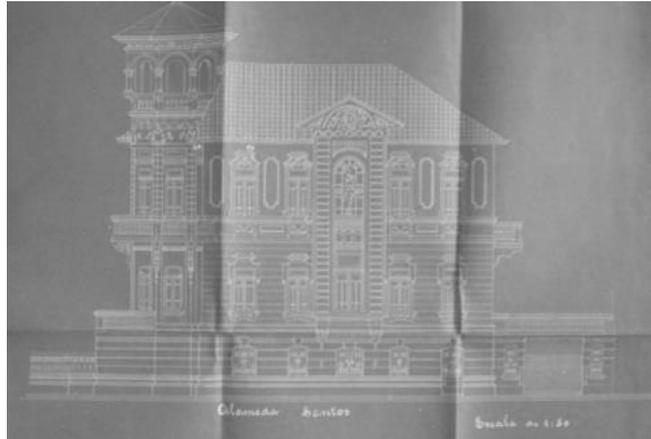
View of the Rizkallah's residence in Avenida Paulista.

**From: Acervo Casa da Boia.**

cars that are parked nearby. The car appears as very present element in this society. The movie still keeps images of his house which was demolished to make way for the building Jorge Rizkallah Jorge, named after one of Rizkallah's sons. Besides the film, the processes of Série Obras Particulares (SOP) preserve information about the projects to this location.

The first case dealing with this address is of 1919. It contains the documents presented by the *Ateliers Americano de Architectura*, requiring license for refurbishment and increasing. Later, in September, a new request was made expecting the license to modify the original plan, which had been approved. The modifications made to the project are due an extension of one floor on top for the construction of a house of two. The project envisaged that this modification would imply a reinforcing in the building structure.

In the year 1920, a new request demanded the license to make a garage, because, as stated earlier, the car became quite common in the city during this decade. But it was in 1922 that the land has undergone a major change. The builder/architect Alberto Borelli asked for permission to build three houses on the land that included the Avenida Paulista, Rua Bella Cintra and Alameda Santos. These three new houses served as a dwelling for his three sons, once again showing the core position of Rizkallah into his family. The houses were built on reinforced concrete and brickwork; these projects



Sideline of Rizkallah’s sons residence.

**From: AHMWL**

were in line with the new scenario building, which featured "other knowledge, other techniques, and other materials that broke that accommodation based on cultural tradition of the old days. Came the brick. Appeared the masonry.(Lemos, 1987:37)".

Stylistically, the residence of Rizkallah and the homes of their sons are exemplary of the large number of palacetes that were located at the Avenida Paulista. This type of housing was made to match the needs of the bourgeoisie (HOMEM, 1996:18) and will be the first luxury residential space that occupied the town. The palacetes were more a way of representing the social position of individuals, expressing financial soundness.



Residence of Rizkallah in 1928.

**Acervo Casa da Boia.**

The major issue linked to the ownership of Rizkallah Jorge on Avenida Paulista concerns to a consolidated thesis in the field of architecture, that postulate that the homes built in this location stylistically refer to the nationality of its owner. The author Benedito Lima Toledo quotes the passage in which the author Zelia Gattai enunciates this hypothesis, other authors such as Carlos Lemos, corroborate this view. Although, Rizkallah Jorge properties seems to go against this, because, rather than representing an Ottoman style, Rizkallah prefer to follow the stylistic model of the time, the eclecticism with neoclassical bases.

All Rizkallah constructions listed above contributed to his prestige, both in the Syrian-Lebanese colony, as well in the São Paulo's society. His buildings have become marks in the urban fabric and spread out his name among their peers. They showed that he, despite his initial condition in São Paulo, as a supposed poor immigrant, has achieved fortune. Therefore, his activities related to the construction industry and its financial initiatives, contributed to its goal of achieving recognition in societies that he used to attend.

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