

From Rio to Brasília Itamaraty Palace, transference and buildings

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Abstract

The Itamaraty Palace in Rio de Janeiro and Brasília belong to the group of buildings that make it possible to analyze the history of Brazil on the architecture-city-policy tripod. As this article argues, the two buildings were able to appropriate a certain domesticity characteristic of the first, originally a home of an affluent family of the imperial court, and to use it for institutional functions typical of a chancellery. When the federal capital was transferred to the Brazilian Central Plateau, that same domesticity was transferred to the new Palace as a defining element of part of the architectural project. This institution's transit, its spatial relations until the construction of the chancellery in the new capital are the objectives of this analysis.

New Headquarters, new capital

Like a monumental yet austere volume in the landscape of Brasília, Itamaraty Palace¹ was designed to be a symbol of Brazil overseas for its role as headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRE, in Portuguese), but also for materializing, through its edification and spatiality, the construction and projection of the national identity of modern Brazil.

Itamaraty is part of Oscar Niemeyer's² second moment¹ of designs for official buildings in the new federal capital³. Built with structural calculations of engineer Joaquim Cardozo and

architect Luiz Bustamante, and with the contribution of architects Milton Ramos (construction) and Olavo Redig (interiors), it was conceived, designed and built between 1959 and 1970.

The capital was inaugurated incomplete on April 21, 1960: only a few infrastructures and some of the main buildings (like the Presidency of the Republic and the Congress) had been built. Works continued for many years, during which political activity was split with former capital⁴ Rio de Janeiro. Before 1970, none of the ministries fully operated in Brasília.

In fact, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which transfer was completed in 1970, was the first one to establish there. That endeavor is thanks to a leading character: diplomat Wladimir Murinho⁵. In 1959, he was appointed head of MRE's Working Group on the Transfer to Brasília. In such position he conducted the required political actions, dialogues with professionals involved in the construction of the new Palace and the selection of art that turn it into a *palace-museum*. He, neither an artist nor an architect, selected works of art and helped to construct the national identity and image to be expressed through the building and projected overseas.

When considering the construction of the new MRE headquarters, it is important to note that the change was not restricted to the physical and concrete world. In reality, the building was changed, but, concomitantly and above all, the institution itself was modernized.

It is enough to bear in mind that the move to the new capital coincides with an institutional reform of the chancellery, which had already started in the post-war period, due to aspects

such as “the creation of the UN, the development of its multiple activities and the beginning of called parliamentary diplomacy”. (Castro, 2009, p.446). Thus, it is necessary to understand not only the context of the new capital, but also the perspective of the MRE institution when it was transferred to Brasília.

The change in the performance of Brazilian diplomacy is related to a new conjuncture of international politics after the end of the Second World War (1939-1945), as described by Flávio Castro:

In all the kaleidoscopic transformations that took place in the post-war period until 1960, Diplomacy had a fundamental role highlighted as an active factor in the policy of each country for the achievement, or safeguard, of its permanent national objectives.

In order to monitor the evolution of the international situation, the nations had to expand their organs of security and international cooperation and restructure the organization of their respective Ministries in charge of foreign relations. So it happened with the US State Department, with the British Foreign Office, with the French Quai D'Orsay, with the Japanese Gaimuchô, with the Italian Farnesina and with so many others. (CASTRO, op. cit, p. 446).

The structural and functional change of the chancellery can be inserted in the broader context of analysis of the process of design, construction and transfer of the Itamaray Palace in Brasília. As Rossetti argues, Oscar Niemeyer is the author of the project, but it is necessary to give light and credit to several other professionals, involved from the development of the building project in its various areas (building, gardens and interiors) to political and financial viability. transfer of the organ from Rio de Janeiro to Brasília.

The Itamaraty building is a symbol of what was intended as a nation image for international projection, due to the duties of Foreign Affairs, and one of the most symbolic palaces in the capital, in the view of Murtinho himself: “[...] see that the position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is all peculiar, it is right at the entrance to Praça dos Três Poderes, that is, it is almost a gatehouse. It is an international ordinance, if we can say so, from the Praça dos Três Poderes [...]” (MURTINHO, 1990, p. 2)

From Home to Ministry

The Itamaraty Palace in Rio de Janeiro, the same name as its successor in Brasília, is part of the small number of examples of urban residential architecture in Rio de Janeiro, belonging to the manor class of the Imperial period in Brazil (1822-1889), which later became public buildings. Similar processes took place with the Palácio do Catete (1862) and the Casa da Marquesa de Santos (1827).

The construction of the palace took place between 1851 and 1855⁶, on the large plot of the first Baron of Itamaraty⁷ located at Rua Larga de S. Joaquim, now Marechal Floriano, where there was already a house, where the family lived. According to Leão Filho (1942, p. 6), there is no record in the municipal archives of the project or its author, with some hypotheses about authorship: (i) a plant from France, according to the Travel Guide in Rio de Janeiro, written by Vale Cabral and published in 1882; (ii) authored by the Brazilian architect José Maria Jacinto Rebelo (1821-1871), whose master was Auguste Henri Victor Grandjean de Montigny (1776-1850), professor at the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts, who arrived in the country as a member of the French Artistic Mission ; (iii) authorship by the Portuguese construction master José Luiz, with execution according to the guidelines of the second Baron, the son.⁸

The layout of the palace, “symmetrical and harmonious, with its halls arranged around the main staircase, was ideal for sumptuous parties” (LEÃO FILHO, op. cit., p. 6). Even with all these attributes - in addition to luxurious decor - there is no record of large parties during the period when the family inhabited it. The only exception is the large ball offered on July 19, 1870 to Conde d'Eu by the official of the National Guard of the Court, of whom the second Baron of Itamaraty was Colonel Commander. This festivity, which marked the Carioca society of its time, celebrated the end of the Paraguayan War (LEÃO FILHO, op. cit., p. 7).

The purchase of the property by the government occurs on December 23, 1889, shortly after the Proclamation of the Republic, so that it would be the seat of the Provisional Government Presidency. Reports at the time describe that the building was “rich and elegantly adorned and furnished, with the necessary accommodation

for a Palace of the Head of State” (Jornal do Comércio, 12/30/1889, apud. LEÃO FILHO, op. cit., p. 8).

In 1897, the seat of the Presidency of the Republic was transferred to the then Nova Friburgo Palace, in Largo do Valdetaro, in the neighborhood of Catete in Rio. Thus, between the purchase, in 1889, and 1897, the Itamaraty hosted the governments of Manuel Deodoro da Fonseca (1889-1891), Floriano Vieira Peixoto (1891-1894) and Prudente José de Moraes Barros (1894-1898). (BARROSO, op. cit., P. 67). With the change of presidency, Itamaraty is assigned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on July 8 of the same year. The transfer, however, was only completed two years later, in March 1899.

The changes to government buildings were not isolated actions. At the beginning of the 20th century, Rio de Janeiro was going through a period of great socioeconomic transformations and spatial reorganization of the city, then the federal capital of Brazil and “the largest manufacturing center in the country, with an industrial production twice that of São Paulo”. (ABREU, 2011, p. 80). The major urban reforms were “motivated, above all, by the need to adapt the urban form to the real needs of capital creation, concentration and accumulation.” (ABREU, 2011, p. 59)

During the period, the city went through several state interferences in the urban fabric, such as the so-called Reformation, promoted by the then mayor Francisco Pereira, between 1902 and 1906, “Haussmann à la carioca period”, which contemplated the socio-spatial reorganization of the city, the enlargement of roads and the creation of new ones, such as Avenida Central, now Rio Branco.

New spaces for the chancellery *Reforms and the contest to Brasília*

The first demand of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs - at the time Secretariat - for new spaces, at the beginning of the republican period, appears already on May 10, 1890, still in the provisional government, when in the ministerial session Quintino Bocaiuva requested the acquisition of a convenient building to the organ. Before settling in the Itamaraty Palace, in

1899, the chancellery occupied three distinct places: a house on Rua do Passeio, then Palacete Bahia, in the Glória neighborhood, and finally a townhouse in Campo de Sant’Ana. (BARROSO, op. cit., pp. 54-67).

Between the 1930s and the construction of Brasília, this research considers the March 1942 tender for the expansion of the Palace in Rio de Janeiro, as the main milestone among the renovation and expansion actions. This is because the contest represented the need for spatial remodeling of the Ministry as a whole. In addition, the contest took place in the 1940s, a period of Getúlio Vargas (Estado Novo), in which several ministries were reformulated and many of them won or completed new symbolic buildings in Rio de Janeiro, such as the Ministry of Education and Health⁹ and the Ministry of Finance .

In the 1942 MRE Report, the promotion of the tender for the expansion of the Itamaraty is justified by the increasing number of activities of the chancellery. The judging committee was attended by Ambassadors Maurício Nabuco and Luiz Faro Júnior, in addition to architects Alberto Monteiro de Carvalho, Fernando Nereu Sampaio and Marcelo Roberto. The first place was given to the proposal of the architect Henrique Mindlin, followed by those of the engineer-architect Paulo Camargo de Almeida and the firm Cesar Melo Cunha & Cia. Ltda.

It is possible to establish a close relationship between, on the one hand, the spatial issues of the MRE and, on the other, reforms and changes in the duties of the chancellery, the composition of its staff, its political activities, its administrative and bureaucratic organizations.

In 1899, for example, the change of headquarters of the Itamaraty was one of the three milestones of the administration of Olyntho de Magalhães (1898-1902) at the head of the chancellery during the government of Campos Salles.¹⁰

Years later, during the administration of Oswaldo Aranha (1938-1944), the architectural competition (1942) was held and at the same period the important Decree-Law 791 (1938) was signed. That was an important mark for the MRE organization (CASTRO, 2009, p. 373).

The events above are some examples that attest how the spatial issues of Itamaraty are directly related to the political and structural reforms of the institution.

During the construction period of Brasília it will be no different. In addition to the issues of transferring the federal capital, there was an increasing vector in the MRE for the expansion, renovation and modernization of organizational, spatial and infrastructure. Thus, understanding what the transfer to Brasília represented for a long-lived institution like the MRE sheds light on new possibilities for analyzing the Itamaraty-Brasília relationship.

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Endnotes

1. This essay is related to author's thesis research with the Master Program on History and Fundamentals of Architecture and Urbanism of the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the University of São Paulo (FAU USP), under the supervision of Prof. PhD Ana Lanna, with financial support from the São Paulo State Research Foundation (Fapesp)
2. It is worth mentioning Niemeyer's self-exile during part of the civil-military dictatorship and, therefore, his absence in the development of the project. According to reports, even in this context, he followed his projects in Brazil at distance
3. Julio Katinsky organizes Niemeyer's works in Brasília in three phases: 1) "Juscelino Period, times for hope" (1956-1963); 2) "Dictatorship Period" (1964-1984); 3) "José Aparecido Period" (1985 onwards). Alongside Itamaraty, Katinsky lists as second period works: University of Brasília, Palace of Ministry of Justice, Ministry of the Army and Juscelino Kubitscheck's Memorial (1991, p. 16). Guilherme Wisnik also lists Itamaraty under Niemeyer's second period in Brasília (2013, p. 37).
4. Itamaraty Palace and its Annexes, including gardens, works of art and objects contained therein, were listed as federal heritage in 2016 by the National Historic and Artistic Heritage Institute (IPHAN). The proceeding lists 25 of Niemeyer's works in Brasília, like the National Congress and National Theater
5. Refer to Leão 2019.
6. Authors differ as to the date of completion of the work: Leão Filho (1942, op. Cit, p. 5) says it is 1855; Conduru

(2013, p. 190) points to the year 1854, Barroso (op. Cit, p. 26), in turn, only contextualizes that in 1953 the work should already be nearing completion, without specifying a year precisely. The specific literature on the history of the Itamaraty Palace in Rio de Janeiro raised by this research included the books: Historical review and descriptive guide, organized by the MRE in 1942, with texts by J. Sousa Leão Filho and Ronald de Carvalho, and the book Gustavo Barroso of 1956, the second edition of 1968 being used in this research. In addition to these titles, there are others whose focus is not on this building, but which is attributed a chapter of a historiographical character: Amado Luiz Cervo and Carlos Ernesto Cabral de Mello (2010), Guilherme Frazão Conduru (2013).

7. Francisco José da Rocha (1774-1853), Portuguese immigrant, militar and comercial business entrepreneur.
8. Barroso (op. cit., P. 26) clarifies that Vale Cabral harvested his sources in an oral and familiar way. However, the hypothesis points out that after the beginning of the works, initiated by the back of the land, difficulties arose to follow the project and with that the conclusion of the work was given to José Maria Jacinto Rebelo. The author reaffirms the probability of this hypothesis when reporting the family relationship of Rebelo, married to a niece of the second Baron, D. Clara Margarida Mayrink, but also because Rebelo is the author of the palatial residence of the Itamaraty family in Alto da Boa Vista. (op. cit., pp. 26-28)
9. The Ministry of Education and Health, MES, now Capanema Palace, is one of the landmarks of modern Brazilian architecture, both for its work and for its design process under the advice of Le Corbusier.
10. In addition, there are: (i) the dispute with Great Britain over the Guyana border and (ii) the regulation of a New Regiment for the Legations and two Consolidations, the Consular Service and the Diplomatic Service, a landmark of the diplomacy at the time (CASTRO, 2009, pp. 187-88). For regulations, see details at: CASTRO, 2009, pp. 187-212.