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How to quote this text: Soares, E., 2017. The narrative of the City Museum: Brasília inscribed on stone V!RUS, 15. [e-journal] [online] Available at: <[http://www.nomads.usp.br/virus/\\_virus15/?sec=4&item=7&lang=en](http://www.nomads.usp.br/virus/_virus15/?sec=4&item=7&lang=en)>. [Accessed: 12 December 2017].

### Abstract

The Three Powers Square, in Brasília, houses the City Museum, a building that is listed monument both locally and nationally. The monument-museum was designed by Oscar Niemeyer in 1958 and inaugurated in 1960 with the purpose of being a Place of Memory. Its collection is composed of cuneiform texts that present a narrative about the process that originated the city and the persons who made it viable. In visiting the museum, one accesses a narrative that influences the evaluation of one's own experience as an individual and participant of the society. Thus, this record of the past also contributes to the construction of an individual and collective memory. In order to evaluating the museum's collection - which is inseparable from its architecture - the article is structured in three parts: rescuing the trajectory of the building's design, reflecting on concepts of narratives and, finally, reading and analyzing the texts recorded on the walls. The Museum's panels favor the identification of President Juscelino Kubitschek as the main person responsible for changing the Capital and the insertion of Brasília in a long chronology that presents its construction as resulting from a yearning of the nation.

**Keywords:** Brasília, Narrative, Heritage

### 1 Introduction

The inauguration of a planned city marks the end of a cycle of idealization, planning, design and construction. In Brasília, a new capital inaugurated in 1960, there was extensive records of its conception, through reports, books, photographs and filming. Some discourses highlight the development and entrepreneurship of that moment, others the precarious working and housing conditions of the labor force that built the city or the impacts of the cost of construction for the country. These stories contextualize, under different approaches, the creation of this city that was able to materialize the architecture and urbanism thinking of that time.

*Relatório do Plano Piloto* by Lucio Costa (1957, p.18, our translation) begins with ellipses, and then elegantly synthesizes the antecedents of the city: "[...] José Bonifácio proposes in 1823 to transfer the Capital to Goiás and suggests the name of BRASÍLIA". Juscelino Kubitschek's (2000) publication, *Why I built Brasília*, records the history, construction, inauguration and unfolding of the city's implantation process in a massive work of almost 500 pages. They are singular visions, since the former authored the urban plan of the city and the latter was the President of the Republic in whose mandate the city was built. However, all records are ways of perceiving, experiencing and reporting become unique, giving rise to the various narratives.

When it comes to the narrative of an event or historical fact, the content will never be obvious or unique. For each version presented there are other infinite possibilities, including one hiding certain passages. Similar to Lucio Costa's short phrase mentioned above, there is in Brasília a small museum-monument (Fig. 1) inaugurated by Juscelino Kubitschek on the same day the Capital was transferred (Fig. 2). The administration's desire to communicate and record their achievements and deeds commonly produces artifacts that survive time. Jacques Le Goff (1990, p.535, our translation) understands that

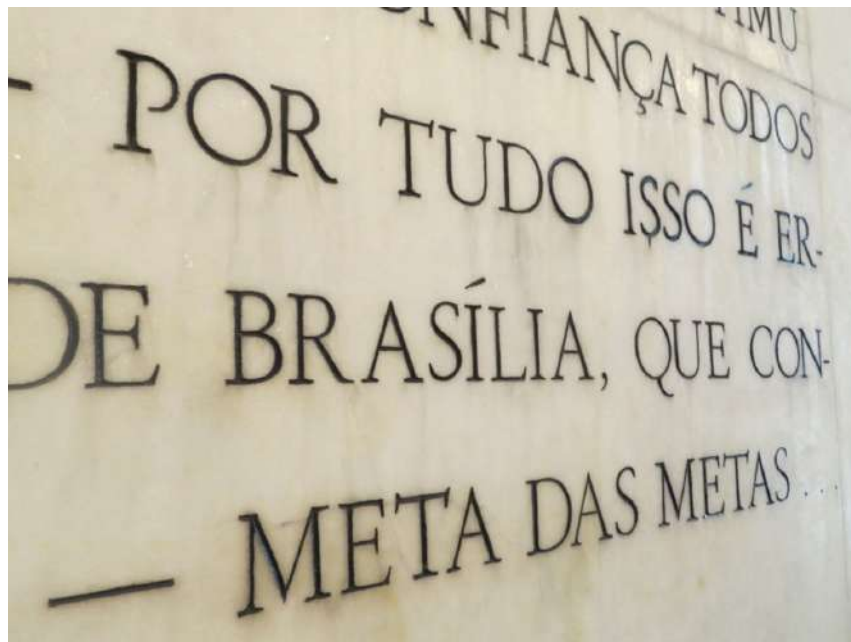
*'[...] what survives is not the whole of what has existed in the past, but a choice made either by the forces operating in the temporal development of the world and humanity, or by those who devote themselves to the science of the past and the time that passes, historians.*

*These materials of memory can present themselves in two main forms: monuments, heritage of the past, and documents, historian's choice'.*

Located in the the Three Powers Square, the City Museum designed by Oscar Niemeyer serves as reliquary of a narrative of those responsible for the materialization of the city which was inscribed, in 1987, in the List of World Heritage of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in 1987. On its external and internal walls are carved 19 texts related Brasilia´s creation.



**Fig. 1:** City Museum. Source: Eduardo Oliveira Soares, 2017.



**Fig. 2:** City Museum, detail of inscription in the internal area. Source: Eduardo Oliveira Soares, 2017.

The City Museum has singular architecture: a small monument that contains a penetrable environment in which walls are recorded texts. The building, registered by the Government of the Federal District (GDF) in 1982 and by the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute (IPHAN) in 2007, supports a narrative that intertwines historical, cultural and urban information. The motto of this research is the evaluation of its museological collection: the texts inscribed on its walls, which are inseparable from the museum-monument architecture. Recording and evaluating this narrative can broaden the set of reflections on the period of construction of this city that incorporates the guidelines of modern architecture and urbanism. Identifying new sources and reflecting on them subsidizes the patrimonial education process, records the memory of an era, and contributes to the preservation of its cultural assets. After all, in visiting the Museum one has access to a narrative about the city that influences the evaluation of its experience as an individual and member of of society. This record of the past contributes to the constitution of an individual and collective memory. And "memory, as the property of preserving certain information, refers us first to a set of psychic functions, by which man can actualize past impressions or information, or whatever he represents as past" (Le Goff, 1990, p.423, our translation).

The methodology used to analyze the narratives was the search for messages and names of recurring persons in the various texts in order to identify the logic of the narrative in the panels. The research<sup>1</sup> is subdivided into topics that address (1) the

architecture of the Museum, (2) the concept of narratives and (3) the narratives present in the City Museum.

## 2 Some words about the city museum

Architectural Monuments intends to perpetuate a narrative about deeds considered relevant by their builders. Through the materialization - or creation - of a Place of Memory, the achievements, victories or sacrifices are inscribed in the city and, consequently, in the social memory. According to José Guilherme Abreu a Place of Memory can crystallize itself in objects, instruments or institutions, and it begins "where the mere record ends. Therefore a place of memory is the register, plus whatever transcends it: the symbolic or emblematic meaning inscribed in the register itself" (Abreu, 2005, p.219, our translation). From ancient times, obelisks, sculptures, triumphal arches and monuments fulfill this role.

The cultural equipment that assumes the role of guardian of the Place of Memory is the museum. Law 11,904, dated 01/14/1998, which establishes the Statute of Museums, in its Article 1 defines museums as

*'non-profit institutions that preserve, investigate, communicate, interpret and display, for the purpose of preservation, study, research, education, contemplation and tourism, settings and collections of historical, artistic, scientific, technical or other cultural, open to the public, at the service of society and its development' (BRASIL, 1998, art. 1, our translation).*

In order to register the construction of Brasília, Oscar Niemeyer created a museum-monument located in the main square of the city. The City Museum project dates back to 1958, the same year as the Planalto Palace, National Congress, Federal Supreme Court, Ministries (standard project), Our Lady of Fatima Chapel, Twin Houses, Catholic Cathedral and National Theater. The Museum project already in that initial moment of proposals for the New Capital indicates the relevance that was given to the existence of a place that would house collection on the construction of the city. In the great speed of construction of new buildings in Brasília, not all of them had complete executive projects. According to a publication of the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute,

*[...] many projects of buildings constructed at the time of the inauguration of Brasília no longer exist, were lost; many buildings were not built exactly as designed, given the short time they were built; some buildings, the smaller ones, do not have projects, but only drawings (such as the City Museum) (IPHAN, 2009, p.14, our translation).*

Texts in periodicals and photographic images of the time of the construction make possible to rescue the process of construction of the Museum. An article in the magazine *Módulo 12* presented sketches, text, and image of the model of the then called *Museum of Brasília*. It is reported that the construction was intended to preserve works relating to the transfer of the New Capital. Niemeyer states that "the plastic form of this monument, expressing by its boldness the possibilities of reinforced concrete, also responds to the characteristics sought for sobriety and beauty" (Niemeyer, 1959, p.36, our translation).

The building consists of a pair of beams that forms a longitudinal block of reinforced concrete with 5.00 m x 35.00 m of dimensions supported on a cube that houses the staircase. Internally the span, set between two beams supported on wall-columns, would receive adequate lighting due to the opening in the ceiling. In the magazine *Brasília 17* (1958) presented photographs of the model, with the facade of the museum covered by sketches inspired by the architecture of the city. These images (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4) are also found in the archives of the Public Archive of the Federal District (ArPDF).

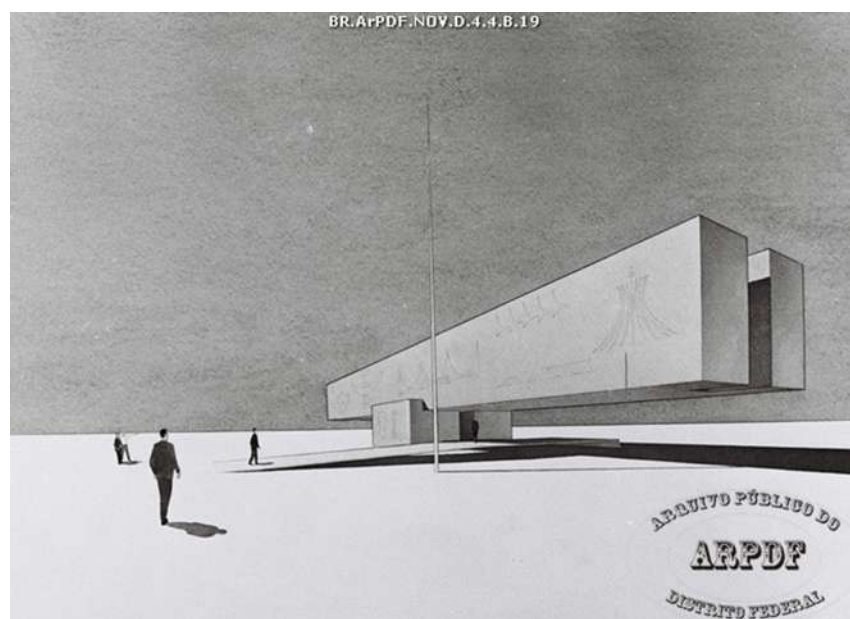
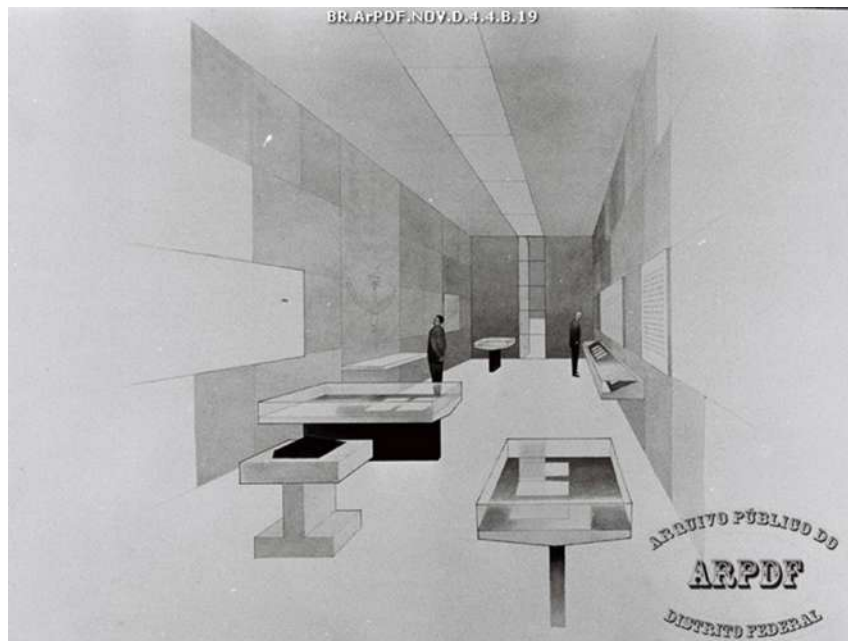


Fig. 3: City Museum External Perspective, 1958. Source: ArPDF.



**Fig. 4:** City Museum Internal Perspective. Source: ArPDF.

The construction of the City Museum of Brasília (Fig. 5 and Fig. 6), under the responsibility of Construtora Rabello SA, were carried out from August 1959 to April 1960. On the inauguration of the building, on April 21, 1960, Kubitschek states:

*'At one o'clock in the afternoon, I closed the program of the solemnities of that historic morning, inaugurating the landmark that marked the birth of Brasília as the capital of the Republic. It was a concrete block, dressed in marble, with a model of the city, as well as a repository of opinions, emitted by the most diverse personalities, about Brasília. To the monument, on the initiative of the generosity of my friends, a granite sculpture was added to my head and, next to it, an inscription was engraved' (KUBITSCHKEK, 2000:383, our translation).*

The City Museum was reformed in 1986, when, according to the newspaper *Correio Braziliense* (07/09/86, p.9, our translation), "it has been totally reformed, especially with regard to infiltration". In 1991 and 1997 renovations were carried out in the building.



**Fig. 5:** Three Powers Square, circa 1959. Source: ArPDF.





**Fig. 6:** City Museum, circa 1959. Source: ArPDF.

The Museum houses in its base small deposit and restroom to which only employees have access. Narrow staircase leads to the living room on the upper floor where the collection is. Unlike the original proposal, the exhibition room no longer has zenith lighting. The Decree 6.718 of April 28, 1982 of the Government of the Federal District (1982) listed the building as a preserved monument in 2007, on the occasion of the centenary of Niemeyer, the IPHAN initiated proceedings (Process 155-T-07) to include the whole architect work as national preserved monument, which was completed in 2017, including in it the City Museum.

The elegant monument-museum features reinforced concrete structure and white marble from Cachoeiro do Itapemerim. The effigy of Juscelino Kubitschek sculpted in soapstone by Jose Alves Pedrosa, the three texts carved in the facades and the 16 sculpted in the inner room are its main collection. There is no record of the authorship of the selection of texts that compose the narrative of the museum. It is noted that, unlike preliminary versions (Fig. 3), no sketches were executed on the walls of the building. In the East Facade, visible from the center of the Square and directed towards the dawn, there is the celebrated phrase:

*'From this central plateau, of this solitude that soon will become the brain of the high national decisions, I cast my eyes once again upon the tomorrow of my country and I foresee this dawn with unbreakable faith in its great destiny'.*

About the phrase, Kubitschek reports that it occurred to him on his first visit to the construction site of the New Capital. At the time, in the midst of the Gama forest and next to a watercourse, "[...] someone brought me a notebook, pompously called the *Golden Book of Brasilia*, and asked me to leave it on the front page my impression of the region" (Kubitschek, 2000, p.53, our translation). The phrase is also recorded in the entrance hall of the Alvorada Palace, inaugurated on June 30, 1958.

In a catalog launched by the Presidency of the Republic (*circa* 2006) after the 2006 renovation of the building, the text, also available on the Presidency website, is credited to the poet Augusto Frederico Schmidt. It would have been the high point of the speech that Juscelino Kubitschek delivered at the foundation stone of the New Capital of the Republic on October 2, 1956. The different versions of the episode reveal how difficult it can be to verify authorship - and the process of elaboration - of a work such as the City Museum.

According to a note from the *Última Hora* (03/16/1960, our translation), a Rio de Janeiro newspaper, when asked why he decided to repeat the phrase that was already in the Alvorada Palace, instead of writing a new one, Kubitschek replied that "I will repeat the phrase because the one engraved in the Alvorada Palace may be withdrawn in the future ... Here, however, in Public Square, it can not be deleted, they can not take it. Because the people will keep it on watch..." Aiming to register in a monument his version of the Brasilia construction, carved in white marble, Kubitschek reveals the reason for choosing that place - a public square - to house texts that synthesize the construction process of the city.

These reports express the official version that the Presidency of the Republic wanted to pass on to posterity. That is, they constitute narratives to be inserted in the historiography of the city and in the memory of its visitors.

### **3 Some words about narratives**

Narrating is a human being intrinsic activity. The exchange of information through reports, descriptions and reformulations, whether oral, iconographic or written, is present in all peoples and cultures. For Luiz Gonzaga Motta "we build our biography and our personal identity by narrating. Our lives are narrative events. Human happening is a temporal and casual succession. We live our relationships with ourselves and with others narrating" (Motta, 2013, p.17, our translation). This human capacity for expression through a narrative or discourse led to the need to elaborate a technique that transcended the immediacy of oral communication. According to Rita de Cássia Ribeiro de Queiroz, "writing is the graphical counterpart of discourse, it is the fixation of spoken language in a permanent or semi-permanent form [...] The cuneiform (from the Latin *cuneus* 'wedge', and *forma* 'form') is the earliest known writing system to date" (Queiroz, 2005, s.d., our translation). Around 3,500 BC this stone

writing was used by the Sumerians. Texts and drawings were embedded in elements of architecture in ancient peoples, such as the Assyrians and Egyptians.

Also dating from antiquity, from the fourth century BC, the *Poetic* work of Aristotle is considered the precursor in the record of a systematization of the narratives of the time: the epic, the tragic poem, the comedy, the dithyramb. For the development of fables, for example, he recommended a single character who must perform an action with beginning, middle and end, so that "it is not the arrangements as of historical narratives, where necessarily it is shown, not a single action, but a time, counting all that took place in it to one or more persons, connected each fact to the others by a fortuitous nexus" (Aristóteles, 1996 [330b.C.], p.54, our translation). Elaborating a nexus between a simultaneity of facts and events with open endings is, to this day, characteristic of whoever writes a historical narrative. For Paul Veyne (1998, p.18, our translation)

*history is a narrative of events: everything else comes out of it. Since it is, in fact, a narrative, it does not revive these events, nor does the novel; the lived, as it survives from the hands of the historian, is not that of the actors; is the narration, which allows to avoid some false problems. Like romance, history selects, simplifies, organizes, makes a century fit on a page, and this synthesis of the narrative is as spontaneous as that of our memory, as we recall the last ten years we live.*

Veyne complements that the narration can be realized in first or third person and that it brings about different perceptions of value. Success or failures, relevant or irrelevant facts, are choices of the narrator. Hence there are spaces for various narratives of the same fact - like the explosion of a volcano - or event - as a battle. It is the historian's job to shed light on some past events, to interpret them and present them to present and future society. It is part of his office to highlight some facts considered significant and to silence about so many others, relegating them to oblivion. And also explore facts and events that, for some reason, have not received attention from researchers of other generations. However, the manner of writing may resemble works of fiction.

Paul Ricoeur devoted himself to a philosophical course on narrative function and human experience in both history and fiction, analyzing them separately. But it also sees convergences in these two strands. For him, "the fragile offspring from the union of history and fiction is the attribution to an Individual or a community of a specific identity that we can call the narrative Identity" (Ricoeur, 1997, p.424, our translation). As we narrate, elements of personal experience, culture, history and fiction naturally blend. With this the affinity of people, groups or society can generate similar narratives.

In historical research, interesting facts and events are discovered and reinterpreted permanently. However, around these findings, there is often a lack of information that, in order to construct a coherent narrative, requires the creation of a hypothetical contextualization whose proof is not always possible. Was it then the creation of a fiction? Advancing this logic a little Ricoeur (1997, p.24, our translation) says:

*[...] one could say that in the exchange of roles between history and fiction the historical component of the narrative about itself pulls the latter to the side of a chronicle subjected to the same documentary checks as any other narration historical, while the fictional component pulls it sideways from the imaginative variations that destabilize narrative identity. In this sense, narrative identity does not cease to be done and discarded [...].*

Immersed in fictional narratives, humanity in narrating its events assumes roles that in fiction fit characters from different strands. Fiction influences the way one sees and expresses himself in the world. On the trivial narratives of literature, which involve genres such as dramas, tragedies and novels, Flávio René Kothe understands that "in the appearance of millions of variants at the level of structure and surface, the trivial narrative enacts, in its deep structure, the ritual of eternal victory of good over evil, defined a priori, maniqueistically, without further discussion" (Kothe, 1994, p.7, our translation). In the communication between interlocutors - where each one is based on an identity built on own narratives - the narrative is a constant creation and reinterpretation of the reality. Often the perception of what is based on fact or fiction is not a consensus, as this distinction may not be so obvious. As for the construction of a new city in the then little-inhabited Central West of Brazil, the number of versions on the achievements and misfortunes of the transfer was great.

Brasília was built under the excitement and strenuous work of its supporters, but also under the criticism of those who suspected its feasibility. At the end of the 1950s there was curiosity about the savannah's exploration and the materialization of an innovative urbanism and architecture. The construction was largely recorded by reports, books, photographs and filming. Oscar Niemeyer, an employee of the Urbanization Company of the New Capital of Brazil (NOVACAP) and principal architect, besides designing and monitoring the works, also responded to the questions, mainly coming from the then capital, Rio de Janeiro, about the approach adopted in the buildings. In an architect's account published 03/11/1960 in the *Última Hora*, a Rio de Janeiro periodical, titled *Niemeyer responds to the criticisms about architecture of Brasília*, there is the following testimony of the architect:

*For one thing some criticisms are helpful. We built in the Three Powers Square a monument that will document all the obstacles and misunderstandings that arose during the construction of Brasília. These obstacles and misunderstandings help us better understand, to the extent necessary, the value of the work carried out by President Juscelino Kubitschek. There, in the monument-museum, these criticisms will be preserved. And time will tell us later whether they are fair or whether they are what I think of them (ÚLTIMA HORA, 1960, s.p., our translation).*

In recalling the intense agenda of events on the day of the inauguration of the city, Kubitschek cites that the City Museum "was intended to keep all documents referring to the epic of Brasília. All that had been written for or against the new capital was already deposited there, awaiting the cold judgment of history" (Kubitschek, 2000, p.388, our translation). Targets of doubts

about the pertinence and operational capacity of the capital's change, those responsible for the creation of the city considered, from the moment of its inauguration, to record a historical narrative about the events - and supposed misunderstandings - that surrounded it. These accounts are engraved in stone at the City Museum.

#### 4 The words inscribed on stone

The texts that compose the narrative of the City Museum are carved in upper case letters on the white marble of the facades and the internal walls of the building. The name of the person responsible for selecting the collection was not found in the historiographical documentation. The analysis of these narratives was based on the search for recurrences in the messages of the various texts, the identification of the repetition of names of some characters, and the verification if they contain the record of oppositions and resistance to the construction of the city, as Kubitschek and Niemeyer had pointed out. Thus, it was possible to evaluate the message that the museological set conveys. The collection is divided into two groups: that of the external area (Fig. 7) and that of the internal area to the building.



**Fig. 7:** City Museum, detail of the East Facade. Source: Eduardo Oliveira Soares, 2017.

In the external area, the East Facade is directed to the Three Powers Square, and can be considered the main face, since in it is inserted the effigy of Juscelino Kubitschek. In this façade, next to the sculpture, there is text, credited to the pioneers, that honors the president. Next to it is the repetition of the phrase inscribed in the entrance hall of the Alvorada Palace. In the West Facade, there is a chronology indicating six dates. The first refers to 1789, citing the Inconfidentes, and the last one is about the inauguration day of Brasília and the Museum itself.

The phrase in honor of Kubitschek, next to the sculpture, is of dubious message, because it does not clarify if it is related to the effigy or to the building as a whole. It can be interpreted that the effigy is a homage of the pioneers to the President, or to the museum itself. This set of three texts highlights the importance of the then President, whose name is repeated five times. In addition, Representative Israel Pinheiro da Silva is the only other name mentioned. The mention of the Inconfidência Mineira places Brasília as an extension of the thought of interiorization of the capital registered in the 18th century. In the exterior façades there is no reference to opponents of the capital's change project, nor to the difficulties faced for the construction of Brasília. The three messages are distinct: homage to Kubitschek, President's phrase and chronology.

In the inner area (Fig. 8) of the building there are 16 numbered texts, which constitute the permanent museological collection. Since the reform of 1986 they have been translated also into Braille. Besides them, there is only a small window used for the temporary exhibition of objects.



**Fig. 8:** City Museum, internal area. Source: Eduardo Oliveira Soares, 2017.

*Text I* begins with "FACING OUTWARD HAZARD AND IN ORDER TO PRESERVE THE INTEGRITY OF THE CAPITANIA IN THE COUNTRY UNIT [...]". The first mentioned date is 1761, year in which Marquês de Pombal idealizes to built a new capital. *Text II* is related to the Inconfidência Mineira and evokes phrase attributed to Tiradentes, whom wished that there should be a change of capital in which there should be places for study, as in Coimbra. In *Text III* there is a recollection of the notes of José Bonifácio de Andrada e Silva on the interiorization of the Capital, and his primacy to suggesting the name "Brasília". *Text IV* records the Imperial Government's desire for change to a place far from the seaports. In *Text V* there is a continuation of the chronology of the defense of the internalization of the Capital, which ends with the Federal Constitution of 1946, which "AFFIRMS IN DEFINITIVE THE DECISION THAT WILL WAIT ITS EXECUTOR."

The election campaign for the 1955 presidency, when then-candidate Kubitschek holds "LIVE DIALOGUE WITH THE PEOPLE" is the theme of *Text VI*. It contains the record of the candidate's intention to comply fully with the Constitution, including its purpose of changing the Capital. *Text VII* records the message of President Kubitschek to the National Congress initiating the legal procedures for the construction of the New Capital. The formation of NOVACAP and the Call for Bid for the Pilot Plan of the city is the theme of *Text VIII*.

In *Text IX* there are excerpts from the plan by Lucio Costa, who conceived a city "NOT ONLY AS URBS, BUT AS CIVITAS". *Text X* reproduces a message to the Brazilian people sent by Pope Pius XII. *Text XI* highlights the law that sets the date of change of the Capital. In *Text XII* there is Niemeyer's account that cites the struggle "AGAINST OBSTINATED OPPOSITION". *Text XIII* presents an exaltation of Kubitschek to the candangos - the immigrant workers who built the capital. The *Text XIV*, also with the signature of the President, records an excerpt from the speech of inauguration of Brasília. In *Texts XV* and *XVI*, finally, there is a message extolling Kubitschek "BECAUSE IT EXCEEDED WITH INDOMABLE VIGOR ALL ICONOCLASTAS CRITICS". The whole of the texts ends with the appeal that explains to the children the reason for the existence of this "[...] CITY SYNTHESIS, PRONUNCIATION OF A REVOLUTION FOUND IN PROSPERITY. THEY THAT ARE US TO JUDGE TOMORROW".

The set of 16 texts from the inner part of the City Museum repeats the name of Kubitschek five times. Besides him, 19 more characters are named, and among them only Niemeyer's is repeated twice. Classifying the texts by content, it is verified that six cites achievements and speeches of the President, five report the antecedents of the New Capital, and two are tributes to the Kubitschek. Complete the set the presentation of excerpt from the pilot plan of Lucio Costa, the synthesis of experience in Brasília by Oscar Niemeyer and the message from Pope Pius XII.

Considering the whole set of 19 texts, located on the facades and walls of the interior of the Museum, it can be seen that the category that brings together the greatest number of texts is the one that praises and records the successes of President Juscelino Kubitschek. The second category, in quantitative terms, is the one that gathers the history record of Brasília. Only in two passages are there any references to the difficulties imposed by the political opposition to the Capital's moving.

As it is characteristic in historical accounts, the texts - both internal and external - inscribed in the City Museum summarize a long passage in the history of Brasília, and of Brazil, in a narrative created from the one who conceived it: in this case, the Presidency of the Republic. The texts of the Museum privilege the identification of Kubitschek as the main name responsible for the change of the Capital and the insertion of Brasília in a long chronology, backed by several Constitutions, which treats its construction as the fruit of a yearning of the nation.

After the inauguration of the city several presidents occupied the Palace of the Planalto, some with more, others with less complicity with the town. The descendants of the generation that witnessed the emergence of the city count on innumerable versions, in different formats, for the construction of Brasília. But the narrative that remains accessible to those who visit the Three Powers Square is that of the City Museum. After all, as Aleida Assmann asserts, such sites can "become subjects, bearers of memory and possibly endowed with a memory that goes far beyond the memory of human beings" (Assman, 2011, p.317, our translation). With this, as Kubitschek intended, this narrative survives oblivion.



## 5 Final Considerations

The Museum of the City has the peculiar characteristic of being a museum-monument - type of building scarce in the contemporaneity. The articles in periodicals and the iconographic registers generated at the time of its design and construction were essential for the creation of a documentation that allows the rescue of its creation process and contributes to the transmission of memory about the beginnings of the city.

The elaboration of the Museum project in the same year as other key buildings in the city reveals the concern of the builders of Brasília in creating a Place of Memory that registers the process of change of the Capital. It is interesting to note that the option for the presentation mode of its museum collection follows the oldest mode of writing: the cuneiform. The texts carved on its walls, as in the monuments and millennial obelisks, record the great saga that was the construction of Brasília in the square that is a meeting point and manifestations of the metropolis and also place of greater political symbolism of the country. Narrative - in the sight of the people - about the creation of a city that is *Urbs*, *Civitas* and World Heritage.

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