

Elizabeth Rankin and Rolf Michael Schneider  
**From Memory to Marble**



Aerial view of Voortrekker Monument in 1949: building site with ramps for transporting the completed marble panels into the Hall of Heroes (photo courtesy of Unisa Archives, Van Schaik album)

Elizabeth Rankin and Rolf Michael Schneider

# From Memory to Marble

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The historical frieze of the Voortrekker Monument

**Part I: The Frieze**

DE GRUYTER



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(courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

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For Angela and Peter

*From Memory to Marble* is an open access monograph in the true sense of the word. Both volumes of the digital version of the book are available in full and free of charge from the date of publication. This approach to publishing democratises access to the latest scholarly publications across the globe. At the same time, a book such as *From Memory to Marble*, with its unique and exquisite photographs of the frieze as well as its wealth of reproduced archival materials, demands reception of a more traditional kind, that is, on the printed page. For this reason, the book is likewise available in print as two separate volumes. The printed and digital books should not be seen as separate incarnations; each brings its own advantages, working together to extend the reach and utility of *From Memory to Marble* to a range of interested readers.

François van Schalkwyk  
African Minds

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# Acknowledgements

To undertake the complex research required to investigate the history and making of the Voortrekker Monument frieze, and the events and memories of the nineteenth century that underpinned it, would not have been possible without the help of numerous individuals, too many to name here. Our sincere thanks for individual assistance is recorded in our footnotes at the relevant places, and here we hope only to record our gratitude to those whose assistance was exceptional and ongoing.

Of paramount importance has been the support of the staff of the Voortrekker Monument and the Heritage Foundation, particularly Managing Director Cecilia Kruger and VTM Museum curator Etta Judson, who have been with us from the very beginning, sharing their remarkable knowledge and giving us access to material and the Monument itself; archivists Riette Zaaiman (now at the University of Johannesburg) and Zabeth Botha, who has tirelessly tracked down our needs; researcher Estelle Pretorius; librarian Malene Schulze; educationist Christo Rabie; and recently Riana Mulder, Petra Luus, Annie Antonites, Charlotte Drotsky, Geraldine Paulsen, Lizette Jansen and yet others. We could not have written this book without them.

In our research we have read the memories of Voortrekkers from which their history was shaped, but also tapped the memories of living witnesses of the Voortrekker Monument programme. Werner Kirchhoff in Johannesburg recounted his boyhood experiences of the making of the frieze and gave access to the material and photographs related to the work of his father, Peter Kirchhoff, assembled by himself and his wife Anna-Maria. Martso Strydom in Centurion Park shared her recollections of modelling for the frieze, and the late Danie de Jager in Meyerton vividly recalled his own and his stepfather's work as a builder at the Monument and in the installation of the frieze. The Romanelli family, the sculptor Raffaello and his sister Rubina Romanelli, welcomed us to their studio in Florence where the frieze had been carved, and later to the family home. In Florence we also enjoyed contact with Rossella Campana and Paolo de Anna who have undertaken research on sculpture studios there and in South Africa. Family of Gerard Moerdyk were also helpful, especially Dorette and Gerhard Vermeulen in Pretoria, and Elke Vermeulen in New Zealand.

Another key source for us has been archives, libraries, collections and heritage sites the length and breadth of South Africa. Our thanks go in particular to, in Bloemfontein, the staff at the Archive for Contemporary Affairs, University of the Free State (ARCA), especially Ernene Verster who has continued to assist even after her retirement; in Johannesburg, initially Linda Chernis and then Diana Wall at Museum Africa; in Pietermaritzburg, Elrica Henning who generously assisted us at the uMsunduzi Museum and the Voortrekker Complex and shared with us her own research, as well as Peter Nel at the Archives Repository and Elize de Villiers and Dirk van Velden of the Dutch Reformed Church of Natal (NG Kerk Natal): Synodal Archives; in the Cape, Ronel Rogers at the National Library, and Zmelanie Ismail, Susanne Noll, Lidia Swart and the staff at the Special Collections of the University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch libraries; Quarta Pretorius at the Vegkop Heritage Site, and the staff at the uMgungundlovu Heritage Park, the Blood River Heritage Site and the Ncome Museum. The list of grateful acknowledgements for Pretoria is particularly long: Gerrit Wagener at the National Archives and Records Services of South Africa (NARRSA); Trevor Moses at the National Film Archive; Nandor Sarkady at the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk in Afrika Argief (Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa Archive; NHKA) Marie Cotzee, Annette le Roux and Ammi Ryke at Unisa; Gerard de Kamper and Chris de Klerk at the University of Pretoria Collections and Archives; the staff at Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History, notably Linda Raath and Malene Schulze (later at the VTM Library) and recently Jaco Schoonraad; and Dirk Oegema of City of Tshwane Museum Services. In addition, beyond South Africa, we were fortunate to receive assistance from the University of California Library, Berkeley; the Getty Center Library, Los Angeles; the Bayer-

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Our research travels have had support from a number of sources, which we wish to acknowledge. A Visiting Research Fellowship for Elizabeth Rankin from the Center for Advanced Studies at Ludwig Maximilians University, Munich, provided an opportunity to initiate our research face-to-face in 2012, most recently facilitated by a grant of the Gerda Henkel Foundation and accommodation as Summer Scholars at the Getty Scholar Housing complex for us to work together in the Getty Villa at Malibu for a month in 2017. Here we thank especially Alexa Sekyra and Jeffrey Spier for their kind assistance. On behalf of the Classical Association of South Africa, Koos Kritzing and Roman Roth invited Rolf Schneider to Pretoria in 2009, a momentous visit as it was then that he saw the Voortrekker Monument for the first time. He was subsequently supported by the Johann Gottfried Herder Programme in connection with his Honorary Professorship in the School of Languages and Literatures at the University of Cape Town, another fortunate opportunity for our work in South Africa. Other research trips over the last seven years, singly and jointly, have been liberally funded by Research Grants from the University of Auckland, the University of California Berkeley, the Gerda Henkel Foundation, the German Research Foundation (DFG), and Ludwig-Maximilians-University, all providing opportunities to visit sites, libraries and archives, and for writing sessions together, which have otherwise had to rely on a proliferation of phone calls, Skype, emails and a shared Dropbox. The discussions of invited papers in Auckland, Berkeley, Berlin, Cambridge (UK), Cape Town, Copenhagen, Freiburg im Breisgau, Leiden, Los Angeles, Munich, Nijmegen, Pretoria, Stanford and Stellenbosch contributed further to our book – as did valuable comments from John Laband, Christopher Saunders and our peer reviewers. We also acknowledge the many helpful discussions we have had with colleagues regarding the publishing and funding of our book, particularly Thomas Gaegtgens, Michael Sharp and Martin Zimmermann.

As acknowledged in the Introduction, we owe a great debt to Grant Parker who inadvertently initiated the project by asking us to write for his edited book *South Africa, Greece, Rome: Classical confrontations*, which led to us collaborating on an essay, and to our first discovery of the wealth of untapped research material that is the basis of this book. He also paved the way to make hundreds of our own copyright illustrations available in the open access database *South Africa, Greece, Rome: a digital museum*, hosted by Stanford University Libraries (<https://exhibits.stanford.edu/SAGR>) and supported by the Stanford University Center for Spatial and Text Technologies (CESTA). We are very grateful for his continuing enthusiasm for our project and that of François van Schalkwyk of African Minds who has been far more than a publisher in the gestation of this book. Alongside him at the publication stage with the South African proof-reader Lee Smith and designer Janet Alexander, we have also greatly appreciated the support and

professionalism of De Gruyter editors Mirko Vonderstein, Marco Michele Acquafredda and Rabea Rittgerodt and production managers Sabina Dabrowski and André Horn. We owe the fine finish of our book to them.

The production and publishing of such an unusual study of a monumental frieze, illustrated with many hundreds of photographs, is a costly undertaking, especially when it is also made accessible online, free of charge. We wish to express our profound gratitude for a publishing grant from the Gerda Henkel Foundation, Düsseldorf. Without its outstanding support, this publication would not have been possible.

And last, but certainly not least, we thank our families for their patience and unwavering support on our long research journey.



# Abbreviations of key archives, documents, names

Akademie	Zuid-Afrikaanse Akademie voor Taal, Letteren en Kunst (South African Academy for Language, Literature and Art)
ANC	African National Congress
ARCA	Archive for Contemporary Affairs, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein
ATKV	Afrikaanse Taal en Kultuurvereniging (Afrikaans Language and Culture Association)
AWB	Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (Afrikaner resistance movement)
Broederbond	Afrikaner Broederbond (Afrikaner Brotherhood)
Dagbestuur	Dagbestuurkomitee (Executive or Management Committee), SVK. Minutes and documents cited are from NARSSA, A141 vols 1–2, unless otherwise referenced
DNMCH	Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History, Pretoria
FAK	Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings (Federation of Afrikaner Cultural Organisations)
Foldout	Foldout at the end of the book showing the entire frieze as installed in the Hall of Heroes
HF Archives ATP	Heritage Foundation Archives at VTM, Pretoria: Plans and Drawings Collection
HF Archives F	Heritage Foundation Archives at VTM, Pretoria: Photographic Collection
HF Archives HF	Heritage Foundation Archives at VTM, Pretoria: Heritage Foundation Collection
HF Archives VTM	Heritage Foundation Archives at VTM, Pretoria: Voortrekker Monument Collection (subsections include SVK for Sentrale Volksmonumente Komitee papers; BHR for Beheerraad, Board of Control)
Jansen Memorandum	Memorandum from SVK chair Jansen to Minister of Interior about the site and the design of the Voortrekker Monument including a list of twenty-four scenes for the frieze. NARSSA, BNS 146/73/2, 19.1.1937
Kirchhoff files	Kirchhoff family files, Johannesburg
Moerdyk Layout	Gerard Moerdyk's first layout of the frieze with thirty-one panels. ARCA, PV94 1/75/1/8 (Jansen). Undated, but datable between SVK 5.10.1936 and SVK 15.1.1937
uMsunduzi Museum Collection	uMsunduzi Museum Collection (incorporating the Voortrekker Complex), Pietermaritzburg
Museum Africa	Museum Africa (1933–94 'Africana Museum'), Johannesburg
NA Den Haag	Nationaal Archief, The Hague
NA Kew	The National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew
NARSSA	National Archives and Records Services of South Africa, Pretoria
NARSSA Cape Town	National Archives and Records Services of South Africa, Cape Town
NHKA	Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk in Afrika Argief (Dutch Reformed Church in Africa Archive), Pretoria
<i>Official Guide</i>	<i>The Voortrekker Monument, Official Guide, 1955–76</i> (see Bibliography)
OVS/OFS	Oranje-Vrijstaat (Orange Free State)
Panele	Panels. ARCA PV94 1/75/1/9 (Jansen). Undated proposal of fourteen themes for historical reliefs, c. 1934–36
Romanelli files	Romanelli family files, Florence (Italy)
SUN Africana	Stellenbosch University, Special Collections, Africana
SVK	Sentrale Volksmonumentekomitee (Central People's Monuments Committee). Minutes and documents cited for the SVK and its sub-committees (listed below) are from NARSSA, A141, vols 1–2, unless otherwise referenced
Boukomitee	Building Committee, SVK
Dagbestuur	Dagbestuurkomitee (Executive/Management Committee), SVK
Historiese Komitee	Historical Committee, SVK
Paneelkomitee	Panel Committee, SVK
Vormkomitee	Form Committee, SVK

UCT	University of Cape Town
UCT Thompson	UCT Libraries, Special Collections, BC 643 Joyce Newton Thompson Collection ( <a href="http://atom.lib.uct.ac.za/index.php/joyce-newton-thompson-collection">http://atom.lib.uct.ac.za/index.php/joyce-newton-thompson-collection</a> )
Unisa Archives	University of South Africa, Department of Library Services, Pretoria
UP Archives	University of Pretoria Archives, Art Archives and Gerard Moerdyk Collection
Van Schaik album	Unisa, J.L. van Schaik Publishers, Photographic album 1949, Voortrekker Monument inauguration
Voorstelle	Voorstelle van tonele uit die tyd van die Voortrek wat geskik geag word vir half- en hoogverhewe beeldwerk op the Voortrekkermonument (Suggestions of scenes from the time of the Trek considered appropriate for bas and high relief work on the Voortrekker Monument). NARSSA, 140/3/14 (Engelenburg), pp. 112–13; ARCA PV94 1/75/1/9 (Jansen). Undated, probably attachment of SVK 5.12.1934
VTM	Voortrekker Monument Heritage Site, Pretoria
VTM Museum	Voortrekker Monument Heritage Site, Pretoria: Voortrekker Monument Museum collection
Wenke	Wenke i.v.m. historiewe [sic] tonele vir die Voortrekkermonument (Suggestions in relation to historical scenes for the Voortrekker Monument). ARCA, PV94 1/75/1/9 (Jansen). Undated list of suggestions from individuals for historical reliefs, c. 1934–36
ZAR	Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (South African Republic; nineteenth century)





Part I: **The Frieze**



This book deals with political myth and political mythology.

By a political myth I mean a tale told about the past to legitimize or discredit a regime; and by a political mythology, a cluster of such myths that reinforce one another and jointly constitute the historical element in the ideology of the regime or its rival.

(Thompson 1985, 1)

What is the difference between images and words? ... What is at stake in marking off or erasing the differences between images and words? What are the systems of power and canons of value – that is, the ideologies – that inform the answers to these questions and make them matters of polemical dispute rather than purely theoretical questions? ... As it happens, the notion of ideology is rooted in the concept of imagery, and reenacts the ancient struggles of iconoclasm, idolatry, and fetishism.

(Mitchell 1986, 1, 4)



**Figure 1:** Gerard Moerdyk. Voortrekker Monument, north façade (photo Russell Scott)

# Introduction

On a hill site overlooking the south entrance to Pretoria stands the Voortrekker Monument (fig. 1). The impressive 62-metre-high edifice, built of steel and concrete, is of block-like symmetry, each face dominated by a high arched window densely filled with stone tracery, and each corner guarded by a colossal granite figure of a Voortrekker leader.<sup>1</sup> Further elevated on a podium some forty metres square, the building is reached up many flights of steps on the north side, past a monumental bronze figure of a Voortrekker mother with her children in the forecourt. The slow steep route is calculated to increase awareness of the goal ahead, as the Monument gradually fills one's visual field. The overpowering height and mass of the looming façade is given further weightiness by the rusticated granite facing, reminiscent of ancient monuments. Under a vast double dome and occupying the full extent of the ground floor, the marble-lined Hall of Heroes is entered through the single doorway. Its floor is pierced by a circular central opening providing a view of the cenotaph below, which lies at the heart of the Monument, commemorating the trekkers who died in the cause of opening the southern African hinterland to white occupation. Every year at noon on 16 December, the anniversary of the Voortrekker victory over the Zulu at Blood River, a shaft of sunlight falls through an aperture in the dome to light the inscription 'Ons vir jou Suid Afrika' (We for thee South Africa) (fig. 2). Unfolding the chronicle of the Voortrekkers' 'Great Trek' to the interior, the narrative that explains the meaning of this symbolic memorial is told in the 92-metre frieze of marble that surrounds the Hall of Heroes, which is the subject of our book (fig. 3). We have prepared a plan (fig. 4) that shows the final position of the scenes that make up the narrative to orient the reader, who is also referred to the foldout depicting the full extent of the frieze as a guide to our discussion, and to keep track of scenes in the frieze without paging backward and forward to find individual figures.

Neither of us had ever dreamed that we would write a book about the Monument's frieze with its commemorative story of South Africa's Voortrekker pioneers. It was only because we were in our different ways so intrigued with the massive edifice which continues to dominate the entrance to Pretoria that we each proposed it – entirely independently – as a topic for the book, *South Africa, Greece, Rome: Classical confrontations*, when editor Grant Parker approached us individually for contributions in 2009. Meeting one another, and deciding to collaborate to write our essay – “Copy nothing”: Classical ideals and Afrikaner ideologies at the Voortrekker Monument’ – was the start of a long research journey that came to centre on the Monument's historical frieze and took us well beyond the constraints of a single essay. During our decennial teamwork we have realised that this book could not have been written by one of us: it is in every aspect based on unconditional collaboration.

We had both, one as an art historian in Johannesburg then Auckland, one as a classical archaeologist in Cambridge then Munich, previously studied Greek and Roman friezes, where invariably all one has is the evidence of the relief sculptures themselves, and we were exhilarated to find the range and richness of material available on the Monument's frieze in its Hall of Heroes. To name only the most prominent resources, there were the initial sketches prepared by Willem Hermanus Coetzer in two different sets held in the Jansen files of the Archive for Contemporary Affairs (ARCA) at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein and Museum Africa in Johannesburg (which also has copious Coetzer correspondence in its archive); the one-third-size plaster maquettes for the panels of the frieze, then shrouded in dusty bubble wrap and almost forgotten in a store room under the Voortrekker Monument; the records of the Sentrale Volksmonumentekomitee (SVK) that initiated and guided the execution of the building and the sculpture, never published but to be found (incompletely) in various archives, chiefly the National Archives and Records Service

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<sup>1</sup> A comprehensive study of the Monument's design and architecture is missing (a short summary can be found in Rankin and Schneider 2017, 147–166). High-resolution images of architectural drawings by Gerard Moerdyk in the Department of Architecture, University of Pretoria, were kindly given to us by Nicholas Clarke and provided the blue-print for our ground plan.



**Figure 2:** Voortrekker Monument, cenotaph lit by sunray, 16 December 2013 ([https://gdb.voanews.com/E7B533D7-1CFE-49C7-A838-0CB16AB50460\\_w1597\\_n\\_st.jpg](https://gdb.voanews.com/E7B533D7-1CFE-49C7-A838-0CB16AB50460_w1597_n_st.jpg))

(NARSSA), the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk in Africa Argief (Dutch Reformed Church in Africa Archive; NHKA) in Pretoria, and ARCA in Bloemfontein; an abundance of newspaper clippings and other records in the Moerdyk collection in the University of Pretoria Archives (UP Archives); comparative documentation about Steynberg and the Blood River Monument in the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History (DNMCH) files; material in the uMsunduzi Museum in Pietermaritzburg (uMzundusi Museum Collection), the National Archives in the Hague (NA Den Haag) and the National Archives (Colonial Office) of the United Kingdom in Kew (NA Kew); the correspondence and photographs kept by the Kirchhoff family in Johannesburg (Kirchhoff files) and the Romanelli family in Florence (Romanelli files); and of course the information in the archives of the Voortrekker Monument itself (HF Archives), where the outstanding commitment of the staff to our project has been another invaluable resource.

The individuals and institutions who assisted us to access and study this wealth of primary material are too many to list here, but are recorded in the Acknowledgements with our profound thanks. The myriad records we found with their help all provided insights into how the Monument and particularly its frieze were conceived, and into the processes of their making. Although there is a body of literature on the Monument, the rich mine of data about the frieze had not been thoroughly excavated and we felt it fully warranted a monographic study.<sup>2</sup>

Equally intriguing was the multitude of conflicting histories around the frieze. The Voortrekker stories represented in the scenes of the frieze led us back to the historical records on which they were based – diaries of trekkers and those who came in contact with them during their journeys, such as the reverends Erasmus Smit (1837–39) and Francis Owen (1837–38), and the French naturalist Adulphe Delegorgue (1838–40); documents of the nineteenth century, particularly the minutes of the first Natal Volksraad in Pietermaritzburg (1837–45) and early published compilations by William Boyce (1839), John Centlivres Chase (1843), James Backhouse (1844) and John Bird (1888);

<sup>2</sup> While we have indeed attempted to ‘mine’ the extensive archives of the SVK, sometimes difficult to access, our book, with its focus on the Monument’s frieze, does not provide the appropriate place to write this up systematically. It is a task that cries out to be done to bring together scattered records, particularly as their preservation seems at risk.



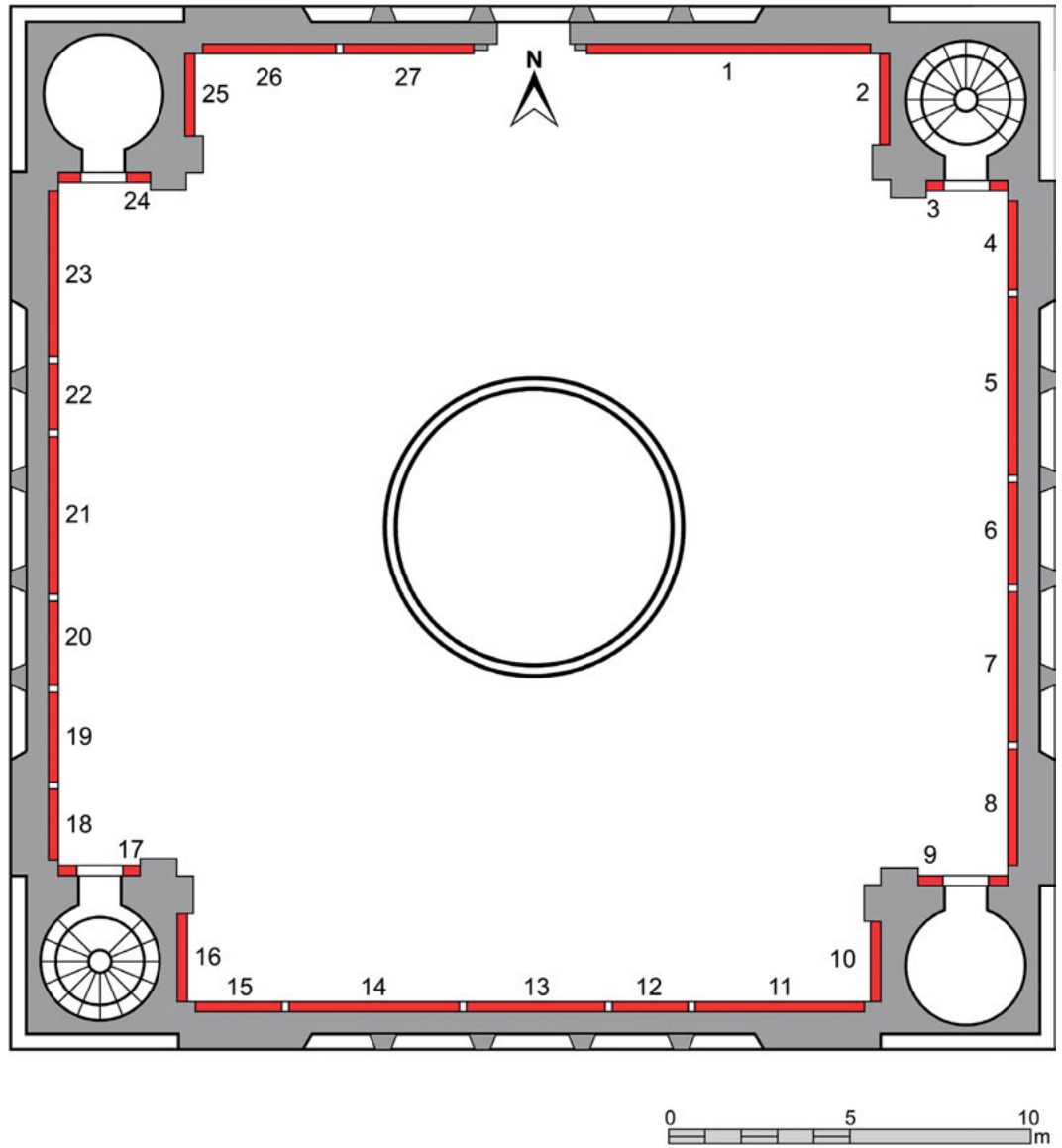
**Figure 3:** Gerard Moerdyk. Voortrekker Monument, Hall of Heroes (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

oral histories, such as those collected by James Stuart (1868–1942) from Zulu people in Natal around 1900 and Gustav Preller from South Africa’s Dutch-speaking Voortrekkers and their descendants who pioneered the white settlement of South Africa’s interior (1918–38); accounts related to the 1938 centenary celebrations of the Battle of Blood River and the inauguration of the Monument in 1949, commemorative publications at the time, and the long line of editions of *The Voortrekker Monument, Official Guide* (hereafter *Official Guide*) published in English and Afrikaans from 1955 until 1976, and its successors; and finally, more recent biographies of individual figures and revisionist histories written in a post-apartheid era. Here our dependence was on a range of libraries, initially in South Africa, particularly the University of South Africa (Unisa) and the library of the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria, the National Library in Cape Town, and the special collections of the universities of Cape Town and Stellenbosch; and in the United States at the University of California in Berkeley in 2014, and subsequently in 2016 and 2017 at the Getty Scholars Programme in Los Angeles, which generously hosted us for intensive research. We have also been indebted to the libraries of our own institutions, the University of Auckland and the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich with the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, and their unceasing interloan assistance.

It might be asked why two scholars who make no claim to be historians should have delved into the history of the Voortrekkers, but as historians of art we needed to understand as far as was possible the accounts that underpinned the choices that were made for the Monument’s frieze and that framed the way they were represented.<sup>3</sup> The authoritative cast of the Monument’s *Official Guide* and later related publications provided a selective and all too often misleading account of the episodes that were depicted,<sup>4</sup> which we needed to recontextualise in the received history of the day. In this quest we found ourselves trying to reconcile the divergent accounts of eye witnesses, who were present at the same events but perceived varying aspects, or recounted them from varying perspectives. Likewise, the interpretation of these events by later writers focused on different elements to

<sup>3</sup> Of great benefit was Christopher Saunders’ critical inquiry *The making of the South African past: Major historians on race and class*, published in 1988.

<sup>4</sup> We discuss this comprehensively in ‘The Scenes’, Part II.



- |                     |                         |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Departure         | 15 Teresa Viglione      |
| 2 Presentation      | 16 Dirkie Uys           |
| 3 Soutpansberg      | 17 Marthinus Oosthuizen |
| 4 Delagoa Bay       | 18 Women spur men on    |
| 5 Vegkop            | 19 Arrival              |
| 6 Inauguration      | 20 The Vow              |
| 7 Kapain            | 21 Blood River          |
| 8 Negotiation       | 22 Church of the Vow    |
| 9 Blydevooruitsig   | 23 Saailaer             |
| 10 Debora Retief    | 24 Mpande               |
| 11 Descent          | 25 Death of Dingane     |
| 12 Treaty           | 26 Return               |
| 13 Murder of Retief | 27 Convention           |
| 14 Bloukrans        |                         |

**Figure 4:** Plan with layout of scenes of the frieze in Hall of Heroes (drawing Tobias Bitterer)



develop different viewpoints. But in contrast to written narratives, pictorial representations could not encompass a range of conflicting views; rather, they had to select what seemed most apposite to both patrons and artists and their agendas, and it is crucial for our understanding to be aware of those conceptual choices. Nor can a series of twenty-seven scenes create a seamless narrative such as one might expect to achieve with a day-by-day diary or chapters in a book. The order of the scenes is not always sequential either, and the links between them may not easily be understood. Yet it was very much the intention of those who conceived the frieze that it should create a story with a beginning, a middle and an end, and the scenes do create an episodic narrative for viewers who circumvent the Hall of Heroes, following the intended clockwise progression.<sup>5</sup>

It has been a goal in excavating this wide-ranging material to reveal the layers of meaning that lie within the unusual artefact that is the subject of our study – a marble frieze 92 metres long and 2.3 metres high with over three-hundred figures and partial figures, many of them life size, conceived and modelled in South Africa but carved in Florence. To isolate a few of the most notable elements, the first layer is defined by the intentions of the SVK members who selected the topics that would represent the Voortrekkers and how they should be portrayed. The second lies with the architect Gerard Moerdyk who designed a building to house a sculptured frieze at eye-level that would tell its commemorative story. Then there was the artist H.W. Coetzer whose task it was to visualise scenes which existed up to this time almost entirely in verbal and written records. Thereafter the four sculptors – Peter Kirchhoff, Frikkie Kruger, Laurika Postma and Hennie Potgieter – gave sculptural form in clay to those scenes and more, and enlarged them to inhabit the monumental scale of the frieze. Finally, in Florence there were the skilled carvers who transferred these designs into marble. And constantly there was a cacophony of proposals, suggestions, criticism and control, from public and press, architect and committee members, politicians and statesmen, not to mention the artists themselves – usually Afrikaner, occasionally English, never African – all in a period when Afrikaner nationalism was in ascendancy. The intentions of these different parties fundamentally influenced the form the frieze finally took.

In an attempt to create a ‘volks’ (people’s) monument, the process of conceptualising the Monument included a fair amount of consultation, although not to the degree implied when it was said in 1937 that ‘attention must assuredly be paid to the vox populi’ in the endeavour ‘to discover the vox dei’.<sup>6</sup> Yet that grand claim did embody the realisation that, while the Monument had to attempt to represent the exploits and achievements of the Voortrekkers, it ‘must at the same time be an expression of ourselves, we of the present generation who are erecting the monument to show to the world what we think of the Voortrekkers and their deeds’.<sup>7</sup> We will argue that it was indeed an expression of Afrikaners themselves in the 1930s and 1940s during a period of ever-growing Afrikaner nationalism, and that the sculptured story of the Great Trek was formed through their social and political values and their pictorial imaginations.

While we are ‘outsiders’ to Afrikaner history, writing in a post-apartheid context, it has not been our intention to write some sort of exposé of Afrikaner history. We have garnered a certain affection and not a little respect for those determined and doughty Voortrekker men and women. But neither are we blind to their shortcomings, or to the inconsistencies and controversies of the chronicles of the Trek and how they are recounted in the frieze. To echo the words of Sir George Cory during the debacle over the validity of Retief’s treaty with Dingane, our ‘object in working at this question has been to elicit the truth’. In a post modern world, when the idea that ‘the truth’

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<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to consider what understanding uninformed viewers might have should they read the scenes in an anti-clockwise direction.

<sup>6</sup> Quote from ‘Die Voortrekkermonument’, probably written by the architect, Gerard Moerdyk, an attachment to the memorandum from Ernest George Jansen, chairman of the SVK, to the Minister of Internal Affairs, 19.1.1937 (NARSSA, BNS 146/73/2). Ironically, in using this debated aphorism, the Afrikaner architect refers to English political thought, in which the ecclesiastical Latin claim ‘the voice of the people is the voice of god’ has been popular since the Middle Ages; see, for example, Green 2014, 141–167.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Die Voortrekkermonument’, 3, emphasis in the original.

is discoverable is ever more dubious, we would have preferred another word to describe our goal, but we are entirely at one with his subsequent statement: 'I do not see how one can work impartially at historical matters without, at times, running the risk of going counter to some sentiment or other.'<sup>8</sup> It is impossible not to take sides in contentious histories. Our aim, however, has been to engage even-handedly but critically with the available material, in itself often contradictory, to better understand the narrative of the frieze. The history of Afrikaners around the time of the centenary of Blood River and the building of the Monument seems as important as the history of the Voortrekkers themselves – and the way their history has been written.

The invention of national identity depends on shared histories, shaped by what a people chooses to remember about the past, and by whom and for what (political) purpose it is recalled. Invariably it is histories of heroism and valour, often coupled with suffering and sacrifice, that figure large in these selective memories, which may be recounted verbally from older to younger generations, or given more permanent form in texts and monuments. As John Gillis has written, 'The core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely, a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity.'<sup>9</sup> Scholars as diverse as Dunbar Moodie, Dan O'Meara, Leonard Thompson and Herman Giliomee have written about the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and the implications, as the latter phrases it, of the 'upsurge in the interest in Afrikaner history that would ultimately lead to the development of a distinctive Afrikaner nationalist school of South African history'. In this 'the Great Trek received much attention from both popular and academic historians, especially as the commemoration of the event in 1938 approached',<sup>10</sup> a heightened attention which continued during the next decade when the Monument was being built, the period that also saw the political rise of the National Party. The speakers at the Monument's 1949 inauguration provide telling examples of how differently history can be deployed.

On this occasion, both the new and the old prime ministers, D.F. Malan and Jan Smuts, had high praise for the Voortrekkers and, at least by implication, the Monument that represented them. Malan, the uncompromising leader of the new Nationalist government, celebrated the Voortrekkers for their 'maintenance of their own white paramountcy and of their white race purity'.<sup>11</sup> He took advantage of the inauguration to ask the question, 'Whither South Africa?'<sup>12</sup> and to outline the concerns underlying the apartheid policies that would soon be legislated, by asserting that Afrikaners were on a new trek, 'with difficulties and dangers ... no less great and threatening than those which confronted the Voortrekkers ... nothing less than modern and outwardly civilised heathendom as well as absorption into semi-barbarism through miscegenation and the disintegration of the white race'.<sup>13</sup> Smuts also celebrated the impact of the past, but in different terms: '... what a colourful history! What young nation can pride itself on a more romantic history, a history of more intense human interest!'<sup>14</sup> He used the occasion to appeal for co-operation between Afrikaans- and English-speaking South Africans, which had been a goal of his ousted United Party, and to warn of the dangers of divisiveness in 'raving about our past and romancing about our past'. But he also urged that a solution be sought 'for the greatest problem which we have inherited from our

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<sup>8</sup> Cory in *Ooreenkoms* 1924, 12.

<sup>9</sup> Gillis 1994, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Giliomee 2003, 432. Although the Anglo-Boer War was a key factor in the formation of Afrikaner identity, he points out that less attention was given to this painful episode in the decades immediately following the war.

<sup>11</sup> Opening speech by D.F. Malan. Inauguration Festival, 16 December 1949, 5, in 'Speeches at the inaugural ceremony of the Voortrekker Monument,' typescript, UCT Special Collections.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Speech by General J.C. Smuts at inauguration of the Voortrekker Monument, 16 December 1949, 1, in 'Speeches at the Inaugural Ceremony of the Voortrekker Monument,' typescript, UCT Special Collections.

forefathers – the question of our relations with the native peoples ... this most difficult of all our problems and the final test of our Western Christian Civilisation'.<sup>15</sup>

Just as the diverse interests of the time, like those of Malan and Smuts, coloured the making and the reception of the Monument and the role it played in shaping Afrikanerdom, so our views are inevitably shaped by our awareness of those interests. We are almost painfully conscious that our readings of the frieze will not be those of others, but we put them forward in the certain knowledge that the frieze is itself a primary visual source worth studying in depth, which not only provides unique insights into the processes of making such a complex artwork, but also offers important clues to the ideas and ideologies which informed it. Again and again we have found that *visual* representation initiates new questions that go beyond the framework of *written* sources. The sequence of verbalisation and visualisation that led to the ultimate metamorphosis of memory into marble for the Monument is an absorbing one, open to diverse interpretations that are triggered by the final form of the sculpture, which will no doubt continue to multiply as further viewers from different backgrounds and beliefs visit the Monument and engage with its frieze. Indeed, we hope that our investigations will prompt others that will no doubt develop readings different from our own.

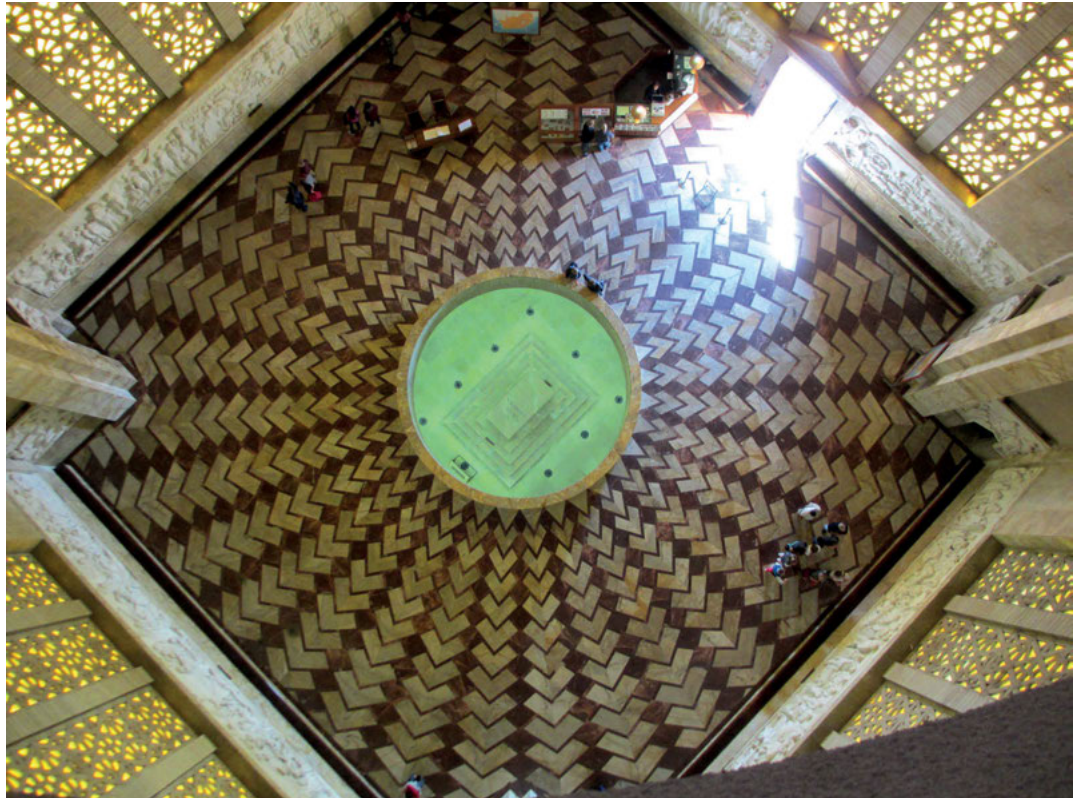
The one constant in this project is the marble frieze itself – a syncretic part of the Voortrekker Monument as architecture, but also an independently developed narrative composed of discrete scenes. Many visits to the Monument notwithstanding, we required images of the frieze that were constantly available, even when we were far away in New Zealand and Germany, images that would permit a close reading of the reliefs in all their detail. This need was met by the production of a series of outstanding photographs, made in 2012, 2015 and 2016 by the South African artist and photographer Russell Scott. The changing light as the sun moves across the sky and alters position with the different seasons does not only achieve the special effect of illuminating the inscription 'Ons vir jou Suid-Afrika' (We for thee South Africa) on the cenotaph of the lower hall every 16 December for the anniversary of the Battle of Blood River. The light conditions also affect the entire interior, including the Hall of Heroes and its sculptures, which are bathed in golden light through the huge arched windows with their 1 072 pieces of yellow Belgian glass, and reflected off the polished surfaces of the marble-clad walls and floor (fig. 5a). Different again is the natural light flooding through the entrance door into the Hall, and the artificial lighting on the walls above the eight corner panels. Such a mix of light, both stationary and changing as the sun moves across the sky, is very much a part of the living experience of the frieze in situ, but it can hinder a detailed examination of the relief sculptures. In this, the Voortrekker Monument and the Heritage Foundation were exceptionally supportive, particularly in making possible an additional shoot in March 2015 which was carried out at night while the Monument was closed, when Russell Scott was able to devise a system of controlled artificial lighting in order to eliminate ephemeral effects – apart from the brownish discolouring of parts of the marble reliefs caused by grime and dust over time. Russell Scott explained

Having taken shots of the frieze during the day, I realised that it would be impossible to achieve an even tonality, shadow pattern and light-colour balance ... The diverse lighting and reflections in the Hall of Heroes produced images that varied in colour, with shadows that varied in hardness and direction (fig. 5b).

It was decided to photograph the friezes under controlled lighting conditions at night. White light-reflecting panels were suspended from above, higher than the top of the frieze, running the length of the frieze and about ten metres away. Flashes were aimed at the reflectors and the light bounced back towards the frieze, in order to create an even distribution of light from above, with a soft shadow (fig. 5c).

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 6.



**Figure 5a:** Conflicting light conditions in Hall of Heroes. 21.7.2012 (courtesy of VTM; photo the authors)



**Figure 5b:** Russell Scott. Photographs taken of the east frieze during the day showing changing light. 2015 (courtesy of VTM)

To retain the required detail, the long panels were shot in eleven sections and the images stitched on a computer. The camera was kept in one position so as not to create errors of parallax when joining. This created a perspective ‘bowing’ which was corrected in computer (fig. 5d).<sup>16</sup>

These photographs, a constant resource during our research, are now available to our readers.

Another major challenge for us lay in the wealth of material to be sifted – paradoxically both hugely helpful and dauntingly difficult. And how to present our discoveries and our interpretations was almost as challenging as the research material itself. Like the creators of the frieze, we wanted to create a story with a beginning, a middle and an end, but the complexity of our findings seemed to defeat this goal. We finally decided to divide our text into two complementary parts. The first is a series of broadly based chapters that are roughly chronological to write the story of the frieze as a whole, considering in turn context, concept, process, image and heritage. It has been our aim in the first chapter, ‘Context’, to provide a brief history of both the Voortrekkers in the nineteenth century

<sup>16</sup> Email 11.6.2019. Scott’s camera was a Canon EOS 1dsMk3 with a Canon EF 70-200 f2.8L lens.



**Figure 5c:** Russell Scott. Photographs taken of the north frieze at night using suspended white light reflecting panels and flashes aiming at them. 19.3.2015 (courtesy of VTM)



**Figure 5d:** Russell Scott. Photographs of the east frieze taken in eleven sections, each in parallax. 2015 (courtesy of VTM)

and the social and political background in the first half of the twentieth century, two histories that contextualised the Monument in distinctive ways. This survey gradually focuses on the development of the initial idea of building a monument to celebrate the centenary of the Voortrekker victory over the Zulu at Blood River on 16 December 1838, with the challenging questions of how this monument was to be funded and where it was to be situated. The next chapter, ‘Concept’, studies the conceptualisation of the Monument and its frieze, from the earliest ideas in 1931, to the selection of an architectural design by Moerdyk in 1936, and the development of the idea of a narrative frieze and the topics it should represent – together with its first visualisation in Coetzer’s drawings in 1937 and 1938. The third chapter, ‘Process’, reconstructs the making of the frieze during the 1940s, from the first sculptural representation in clay in one-third-size maquettes, through the realisation of the relief panels at full scale by the South African sculptors, to the completion in Italy where they were carved in Querceta marble in the Romanelli workshops in Florence. Chapter 4, ‘Image’, considers the completed frieze, as installed in 1949 and 1950, questioning design decisions, analysing composition and style and their relationship to content, and investigating how and why the 92-metre-long narrative in marble established the ultimate (visual) manifestation of eighteen years

of Voortrekker history – the foundation myth of Afrikanerdom. Finally the fifth chapter, ‘Heritage’, which forms a conclusion to our book, looks at the impact of the Monument and its Voortrekker frieze on Afrikaner culture more broadly, and its later reception in a post-apartheid South Africa.

The second part of the book, entitled ‘The Scenes’, is a detailed study of the twenty-seven individual events represented where each is analysed in its own right. For every scene we have processed documentary material to provide tabular information about the stages of production for the particular panel, early archival references, together with photographs of the material related to that scene that has survived. The next section, ‘Description’, is intended to hone our looking at both the composition and the details of the depiction, to provide the reader with initial orientation and to try to overcome the erratic perception of the eye which may pick out only focal points or random particulars. This is followed by an analysis, ‘Development of the design’, through its different stages for each scene, from sketch, to maquette, to full-scale clay and plaster, and ultimately to marble. In the last and most complex section, ‘Reading the Narrative’, the historical background of individual scenes is investigated, to try to understand how records were made and chronicled, finally tying the often conflicting micro-histories back to the choices that formed the images in the frieze. The attention given to each individual scene has resulted in what often are very long texts but, since an in-depth analysis had not previously been tackled, it was necessary to consider relevant aspects in full in each case. This approach has helped us to crystallise crucial facets of the inherent authority of visual narrative, and to tackle the iconographic strategies and ideologies of the scenes both within and beyond the contingency of written history.

In pursuing the complex story of the conceptualisation and making of the Monument’s marble reliefs, we became increasingly aware of how the images of the frieze quickly took on an iconic status. If they had depended for their initiation on oral and written histories, they in turn became the visual verification of that history – or of the version of it that was chosen for portrayal. In serving as illustrations in schoolbooks, historical accounts and films, scenes from the frieze have been used to provide visual evidence of the events they depict.<sup>17</sup> And these new roles in turn further authenticate the images. In our attempt to intervene in this circularity of corroboration, we recognise the perpetual power of the image, particularly, we would argue, when it is carved in marble. While the agency of images lies in their immediacy and ability to challenge the viewer visually with countless explicit and implicit references, marble endows images by tradition with a permanence and gravitas which validates the forms it represents, and creates a timeless record for posterity. Because of its impervious physical existence and its evocation of revered monuments from ancient times to the present day, a marble narrative can appear more compelling than a written text, and seemingly defy deconstruction. While visual history complements the written in complex ways, it stands out by its unique physical, symbolic and aesthetic presence. In these terms, the frieze of the Voortrekker Monument has given status and authority to the foundation narrative of Afrikanerdom, even as subsequent history has cast major doubts on the values it represents. At the same time, the range of primary material, conceptual changes and political dynamics related to the making and reading of the Voortrekker frieze means that it can, unexpectedly, take on a role beyond its own parameters and provide a new point of reference for (art) historical inquiry, especially for large-scale commissions of narratives in marble – thus making our subject of interest not only for South African readers, but a much wider audience.

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<sup>17</sup> Thompson (1985, 276 n 119) lists a number of such textbooks published between 1969 and 1981. Voortrekker movies are discussed in Chapter 5, Heritage.



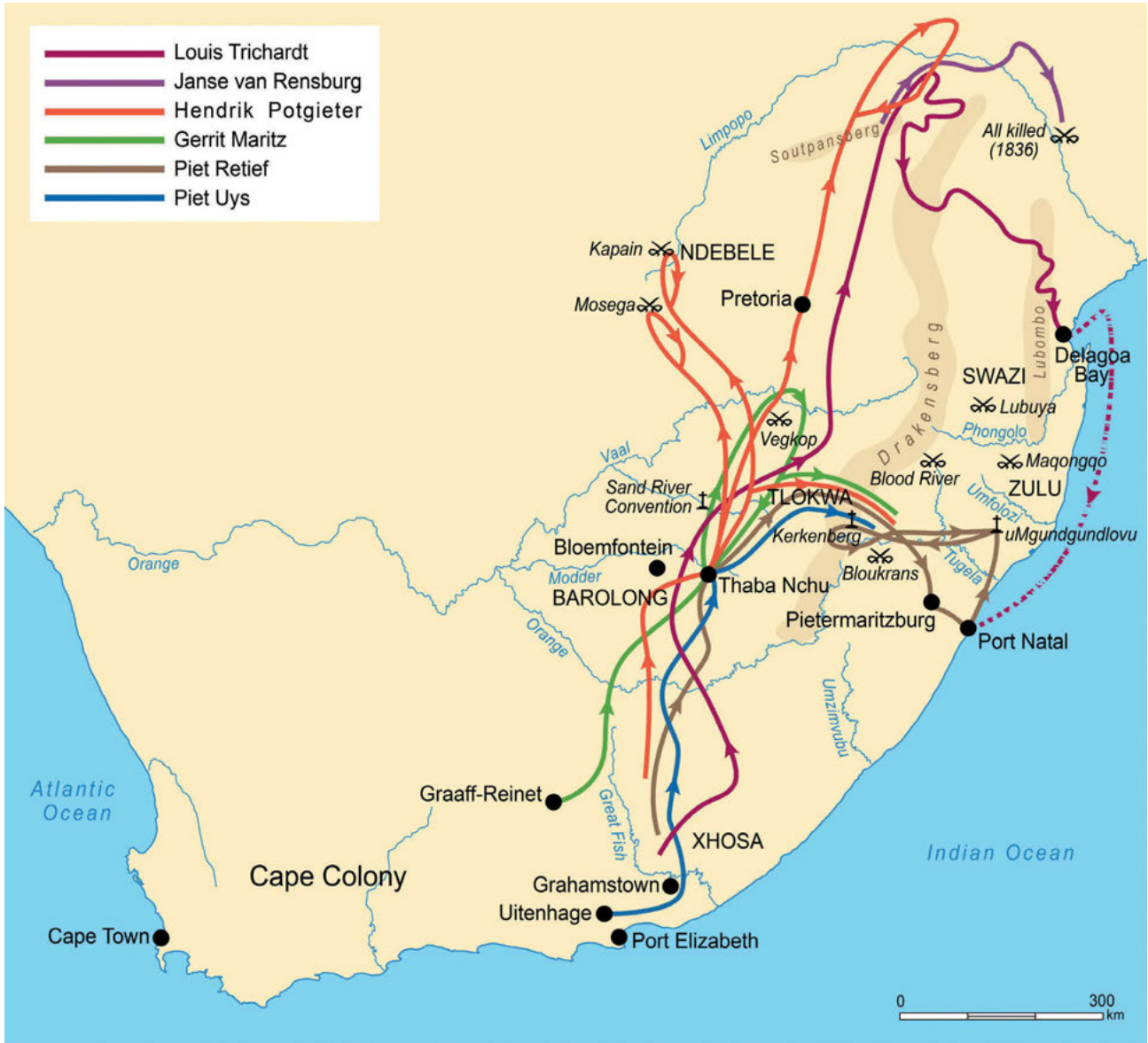


Figure 6: Routes of the main treks. 1835–38 (the authors; drawing Janet Alexander)



# 1 Context

*This 'Great Trek' came to be seen in the twentieth century as the seminal event in South African history when it provided the symbolic images crucial to the ethos of Afrikaner nationalism. (Worden 2000, 13)*

For generations of white South Africans schooled in the twentieth century, the endless reiteration of a simplistic 'Great Trek' narrative was a poor substitute for a nuanced understanding of the complexities of South African history. To them, the idea that its story needs retelling here may seem farcical. Yet it is a necessary preamble to an understanding of the Voortrekker Monument as a project, not least because the way those lessons were taught probably owed much to the manner in which that history was portrayed at the Monument, and to the decisions and events that led up to it. So there is a need to revisit Voortrekker history to contextualise the undertaking, not least for readers beyond South Africa.

Voortrekker history had already been revisited at the time when the Voortrekker Monument was conceived, as Afrikanerdom sought to recover a sense of identity through renewing and reifying its Voortrekker past, giving visual form to its narrative, recorded or remembered. As Grundlingh and Huigen remark,

Within the confines of three or four generations, the past still remains 'warm' – it maintains a link with the living. The past predating this period cools down and becomes part of the domain of historical memory, the terrain that is kept alive artificially by specialist historians.<sup>18</sup>

We would argue that the visual narrative provided by the Voortrekker Monument frieze played a similar role. And, to draw further on the quote, as with the work of historians, 'the influence of the present is not absent, because only certain aspects of the vast area encompassed by the part are researched ...' and, in this case, represented.

Therefore a summary outline of the Great Trek is provided here to reveal something of the selectivity of episodes that make up the narrative portrayed in the Voortrekker Monument's historical frieze:<sup>19</sup> detailed examination will be reserved for discussion of the individual scenes in the second part of the book, to which we refer our readers.

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<sup>18</sup> Grundlingh and Huigen 2011, 2.

<sup>19</sup> For further orientation, see Muller 1978; Du Toit and Giliomee 1983; Thompson 1985, 144–188; Van der Merwe 1986; Etherington 2001; Giliomee 2003, 161–184; and Visagie 2011. Amongst earlier accounts, Boyce 1839, 141–164; Chase 1843, *Natal* 1 and 2; Bird 1888, *Annals* 1 and 2; Cloete 1899; Walker 1934; Nathan 1937 and Breytenbach c. 1958. The literature on the Trek is extensive and will be referenced in the context of individual scenes in Part II, with a special focus on primary accounts. For South Africa and the Netherlands from 1600, see the exhibition catalogue edited by Gosselink, Holtrop and Ross 2017. For place names, see Raper, Möller and Du Plessis 2014.

## A Great Trek?

It is fortunate that the cause of the movement into the South African interior of white Dutch-speaking pioneers (fig. 6) – later called Voortrekkers<sup>20</sup> – to escape British rule in the Cape is not pivotal to our telling. Much ink has been spilt discussing possible reasons. For our purposes, it is best summed up as a mix of factors based on the ever-growing need for land amongst the Boers, as the Dutch-speaking stock farmers were known, coupled with a general resentment of Britain since it had taken over the Cape in 1806. The Boers felt aggrieved by what they perceived to be the British authorities' poor understanding of the needs of colonists, particularly their lack of support in the wars with Xhosa in the eastern Cape when severe losses were suffered, and their imposition of humanitarian concepts such as equal rights under the law for all, which was seen as undermining master–servant relationships that were defined by a strong sense of racial hierarchy.<sup>21</sup> Colonists, especially farmers, depended on a subservient non-European labour force, which included many slaves, a supply undercut when the British Slavery Abolition Act came into force in 1834.<sup>22</sup> It is notable that some 6 000 servants of colour accompanied the 17 000 Voortrekkers when they left the Cape Colony, chiefly from its less prosperous eastern districts.<sup>23</sup> All these factors promoted a growing sense of alienation and difference from the British, although many of the problems had also been present under Dutch rule, first established when Jan van Riebeeck founded a settlement in the Cape in 1652 to supply ships of the Dutch East India Company.

While most would agree that there was no strong sense of Afrikaner identity amongst the Voortrekkers,<sup>24</sup> it is surely significant that people of Dutch descent (and some Huguenots) left the Colony, not the English settlers who shared many of their grievances. So aspects of language, culture and religion unquestionably played a part, even if, as Giliomee has it, 'most Voortrekkers and their children knew better what they were not – they were not British subjects – rather than who they were'.<sup>25</sup> And just as there was no single reason for their departure from the Colony, so the journeys themselves were diverse in their form and their objectives.

From 1835 a series of Voortrekker groups, families travelling together for support, left the Cape in their ox wagons, each departure probably encouraging others, with increasing numbers moving north. But there was no unified movement, conventionally referred to as the 'Great Trek' (fig. 6). While it is almost impossible to avoid using the term when referring broadly to this undertaking, the concept of a coherent Great Trek was a later invention.<sup>26</sup> Unlike earlier semi-nomadic 'trekboers'

<sup>20</sup> Although it only came into common use considerably later, the term was already used in the minutes of the Natal Volksraad, 5.5.1840; see Breytenbach 1958, 33, item 4(b).

<sup>21</sup> Anna Steenkamp (1797–1891), daughter of Piet Retief, who took part in the Trek, claimed in the 1870s in her *Dagboek* (1939, 11) that it was not so much the freeing of the slaves that made the Boers leave the Cape Colony, but British law giving the blacks 'equivalence with whites which contradicts both the laws of God and the natural descent of heritage and belief' (die gelykstelling met die blankes wat teenstrydig is sowel met die wette van God as met die natuurlike onderskeid van afkoms en geloof).

<sup>22</sup> Hamilton, Mbenga and Ross 2010, 279–281. There was a compulsory apprenticeship period until 1838, when slaves were still bound to work for their masters. Scholars cite the fact that the difficulty of claiming the compensation owing for freed slaves was another grievance, as this had to be done in London, and hence through agents, although the full effect of this only emerged once the treks were underway, so may not have been a primary cause. Further, many Voortrekkers, especially those from the northern and eastern areas of the Colony, were not slave owners; but nonetheless it seems that a considerable number of slaves as well as other servants accompanied the Voortrekkers on their journeys.

<sup>23</sup> Visagie (2011, 14–21) concludes, after studying Boer genealogy and biography in twelve Cape districts, that there were about 2 540 families between 1835 and 1845, each estimated to have an average of six to seven members and a minimum of two servants, amounting to the overall number of at least 23 000 emigrants.

<sup>24</sup> The term 'Afrikaner' was initially applied to all people living in South Africa (although often limited to whites), and only later applied specifically to Afrikaans-speaking whites. Hertzog, for example, differentiated between English-speaking Afrikaners and Dutch-speaking Afrikaners (Moodie 1975, 85).

<sup>25</sup> Giliomee 2003, 179.

<sup>26</sup> Norman Etherington (2001) argues this persuasively, rejecting the notion of a monolithic trek supported by Afrikaner historians, such as Gustav Preller. At the time leading up to the 1938 centenary when the Voortrekker Monument

who had moved well outside the Colony in search of grazing for their herds, however, these travelers were not transient wanderers but deliberate emigrants, and were often described by that term in writings at the time.<sup>27</sup> With no intention of returning, they took their families and their possessions with them, and sold up what they could not carry, sometimes at considerable personal loss, before setting out in their tented wagons, which acted as dwellings as well as transport, while they sought land where they could prosper beyond British control. Two early maps of southern Africa, based on Dutch and British sources and produced in London, highlight at a glance the profound impact of conquest and knowledge on the representation of this vast territory. While the 1815 map *South Africa* confines cartographic detail to the early Cape Colony (fig. 7), the 1836 map *Cape of Good Hope* extends that detail right up to Delagoa Bay in Mozambique and provides numerous new rivers, mountains, names and borders (fig. 8).

Although there had been some reports from earlier ventures into the interior, which supported the idea that the Highveld over the Vaal River and Natal beyond the Drakensberg Mountains<sup>28</sup> were attractive options, the different treks had no specific goal in terms of where they might settle, other than that it should be beyond the reach of the Cape Colony and its laws. Paramount was land that would provide for their needs in terms of grazing, wood and water. Some also felt the need to have access to the sea in order to be able to trade without dependence on the Colony – in part to sell goods, but most importantly to acquire items which they could not produce themselves, including staples like coffee and fabric for clothing, and above all arms and ammunition, needed for hunting, protection and combat. Their travels and acquisition of land have often been presented as though the country to the north was largely unpopulated and hence theirs for the taking.<sup>29</sup> But this is a false premise as there were many different African peoples spread across the area. Some of them were also transient, scattered by conflict in the Zululand region, more recently by the armies of the powerful Zulu king, Shaka kaSenzangakhona (c. 1787–1828), and in turn beyond the borders of the Zulu kingdom by the breakaway chief Mzilikazi kaMashobane (c. 1770–1868).<sup>30</sup> There were in fact many encounters with these peoples, both amicable and antagonistic, which are key episodes in the stories of the treks, and which contradict any idea of an empty terra nullius. Etherington makes the point that the Voortrekkers were only one of many ethnic groups on the move in nineteenth-century southern Africa, but that they ‘left a more enduring mark on the land. This was mainly because the new wave of invaders came heavily armed. By mid-1837 they counted some 1 600 armed and mounted men in their ranks – a fighting force of unprecedented destructive power’.<sup>31</sup>

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frieze was being conceptualised, Preller wrote a popular history translated into English as *Day-dawn in South Africa*, which claimed ‘this migration, far from being the haphazard movement described by some, was the outcome of deliberate and careful planning’ (1938, 180). Confusion on the topic is found in texts directly related to the Voortrekker Monument. Although there is constant reference to the ‘Great Trek’, Moerdyk acknowledges that there was more than one, and talks of ‘four separate treks’ in the first *Official Guide* (1955, 40), but five (Retief, Maritz, Potgieter, Trichardt and Van Rensburg) are indicated on the map of the treks (1955, 16). The text remains unchanged in later editions, but a further trek (for Uys) is added to the map, which then records six (1970, 16). In fact, there were many more treks and many more leaders; Visagie (2011, 15) lists twenty-six Voortrekker leaders.

**27** For the distinction between Voortrekker and trekboer, see Visagie 1996.

**28** A more direct route up the east coast was not feasible, given the ongoing conflicts on the north-eastern borders of the Colony.

**29** In his introductory historical essay in the *Official Guide* for the Voortrekker Monument (1950, 18–19), A.N. Pelzer, Professor of History at the University of Pretoria, stated that no ‘civilized power’ had laid claim to the hinterland, and ‘... it can be stated with justification that the whole area north of the recognised colonial boundary was no-man’s land’. While acknowledging that there were some ‘native communities’, he considered that for them ‘the arrival of the white man meant salvation’ and protection from larger tribes, and claimed that ‘no native tribe was ever deprived arbitrarily of its possession’.

**30** Worden (2000, 14–17) provides a succinct resumé of recent academic arguments related to the dispersal of African peoples across the subcontinent in the nineteenth century. For Shaka, see Hamilton 1998; Wright 2009; Wylie 2009; Laband 2017.

**31** Etherington 2001, 243.



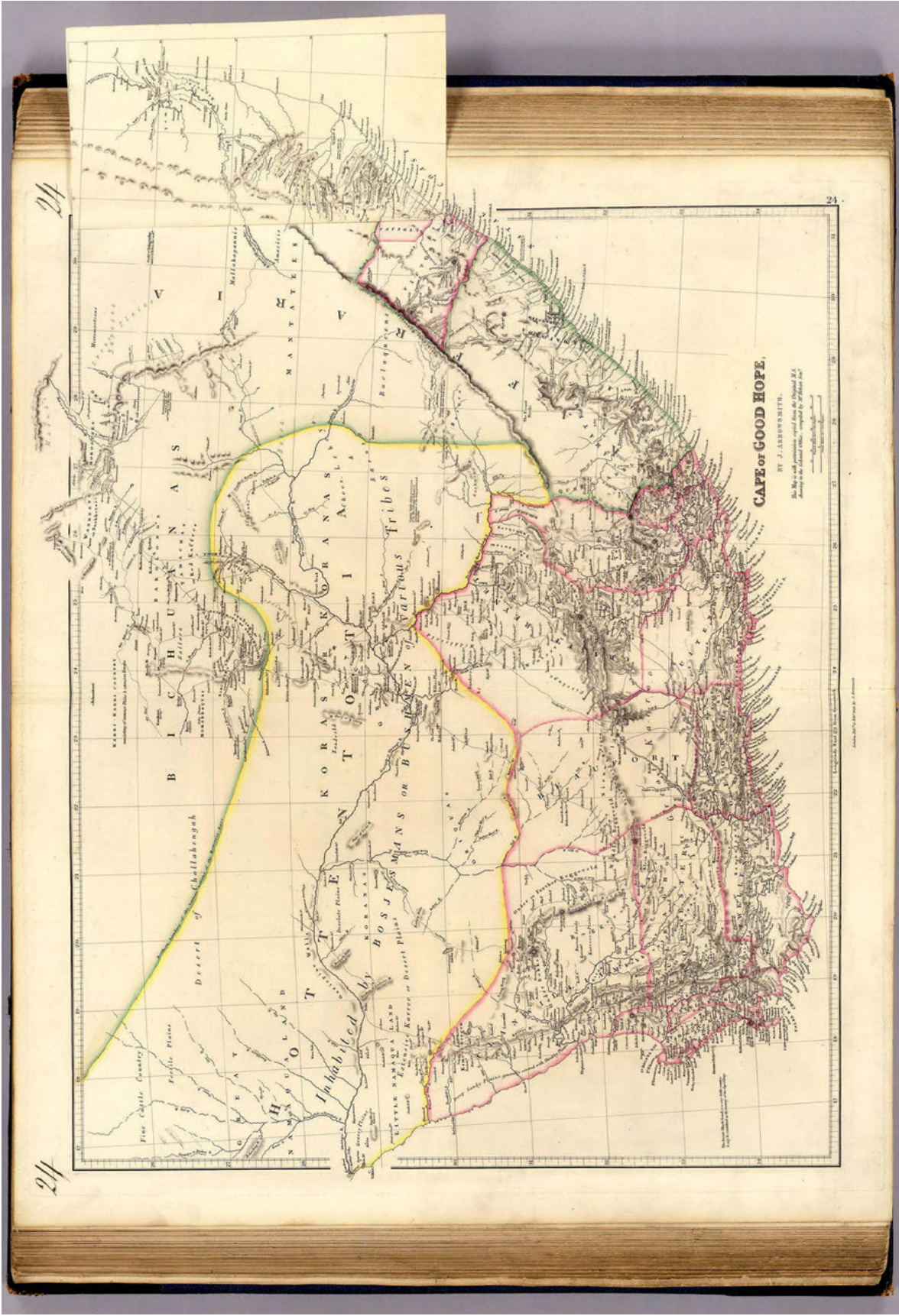


Figure 8: John Arrowsmith. *Cape of Good Hope*, London, 1836. h. 51 x w. 72 cm, scale 2 350 000 ([https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~33872~1170024:Cape-of-Good-Hope?sort=Pub\\_List\\_No\\_InitialSort%2CPub\\_Date%2CPub\\_List\\_No%2CSeries\\_No&qvq=q:south%20africa%201836;sort=Pub\\_List\\_No\\_InitialSort%2CPub\\_Date%2CPub\\_List\\_No%2CSeries\\_No;ic:RUMSEY~8~1&mi=0&trs=60](https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~33872~1170024:Cape-of-Good-Hope?sort=Pub_List_No_InitialSort%2CPub_Date%2CPub_List_No%2CSeries_No&qvq=q:south%20africa%201836;sort=Pub_List_No_InitialSort%2CPub_Date%2CPub_List_No%2CSeries_No;ic:RUMSEY~8~1&mi=0&trs=60))

The first emigrant group to leave the Colony in late 1835 under the leader Louis Trichardt (1783–1838)<sup>32</sup> made its way to the far north, crossing the Orange River, which roughly marked the northern boundary of the Colony, and carrying on over its major tributaries, the Modder and the Vaal.<sup>33</sup> They were joined from time to time by others, including the ill-fated Van Rensburg trek,<sup>34</sup> all of whose members were to perish at the hands of a local chiefdom after the two groups parted company. Another trek leader, Andries Hendrik (Hendrik) Potgieter (1792–1852),<sup>35</sup> visited Trichardt's party in the Soutpansberg, evidently promising to bring his people to join them. When he failed to arrive by August 1837, Trichardt and his followers set out to find a route to the sea, but struggled to find passage for their wagons over the precipitous Drakensberg; they finally succeeded in reaching the Portuguese trading post at Delagoa Bay (present-day Maputo Bay) in April 1838. But they suffered from the devastating effect of the tsetse fly on their cattle on their protracted journey, and from the malaria to which the majority of the party, including Trichardt himself, would ultimately succumb. Only a handful of these trekkers survived to be picked up by a ship, the *Mazeppa*, and taken to Durban some months later.

A major group of Voortrekkers assembled closer to the Orange River boundary near Thaba Nchu, where they had reached an agreement about occupying land with the local chief of the Rolong, Moroka (1795–1880).<sup>36</sup> At that time leaders for the whole group were nominated – Gerhardus Marthinus (Gerrit or Gert) Maritz (1797–1838) as civic leader,<sup>37</sup> Hendrik Potgieter as military commandant. Potgieter made a name for himself against the hostile chief Mzilikazi, whose migratory kingdom was a dominant power on the northern Highveld, and whose Ndebele followers had attacked and slain a small camp of Voortrekkers near the Vaal River. The Voortrekkers had their revenge in the first significant military victory of the Trek when the Ndebele, suffering many losses, were successfully driven off from a defensive laager at Vegkop in October 1836.<sup>38</sup> As R. Kent Rasmussen writes, this first victory against a large African force had ‘... subtle effects. It gave all Voortrekkers greater confidence in their fighting abilities against Northern Nguni [and other African] forces, and it contributed to their belief that they were divinely protected’. And in Hendrik Potgieter they had ‘an implacable and vigorously aggressive anti-Ndebele leader’.<sup>39</sup>

However, Vegkop was something of a Pyrrhic victory as almost all the livestock was taken. The Voortrekkers were left destitute, not even able to move their wagons without oxen, until they were assisted, by the English missionary Archbell and chief Moroka, as well as some of their fellow trekkers. After definitive defeats of the Ndebele at Mosega and Kapain in 1837, which decimated their numbers and drove them north over the Limpopo River, Potgieter, who continued to favour settling land between the Vaal and Limpopo rivers, believed that the Voortrekkers had conclusively won the right to live there.

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**32** According to *DSAB* 1, 1968, 802, Trichardt's family name has been variously spelt as Tregard (closest to the original Swedish), Treegaardt, Tregart, Trigard, Trigaardt, Triegaard, Triegaart and Trichardt. The first trek leader usually referred to himself as Tregardt (see also Visagie 2011, 500), and this is the form used by Preller in the seminal publication of his diary. But the later variant Trichardt became best known because it was the one proposed by his eldest son, Carolus (Karel) for the northern town named after the leader in 1899. This is the form used in most of the documents related to the building of the Voortrekker Monument, which is why we have preferred it here. Trichardt's name is a good indicator of the volatility of many of the names of those involved in the Voortrekker story, no doubt in part because of the shift from Dutch to Afrikaans. The spelling of African names too has been modified as contemporary scholarship has addressed the inadequacies of past research. While we will attempt to use the most acceptable spelling in current use in all cases, and will indicate variants for particularly significant names for our research, we obviously cannot go into the etymology of each name.

**33** See map in *Soutpansberg*.

**34** *DSAB* 1, 1968, 834–836 (Johannes Jacobus Janse van Rensburg).

**35** *DSAB* 1, 1968, 634–641.

**36** *DSAB* 1, 1968, 559–560 (Moroka II).

**37** *DSAB* 1, 1968, 509–513.

**38** There are contesting accounts of who was in charge at the battle – Hendrik Potgieter or Sarel Cilliers; see *Vegkop*.

**39** Rasmussen 1978, 123.

Pieter (Piet) Retief (1780–1838),<sup>40</sup> who had arrived with his party in the area of Thaba Nchu in 1937, had been sworn in as the Governor and Commander General of all the Voortrekkers near Winburg in June. At this time the Dutch-born missionary, Erasmus Smit (1778–1863),<sup>41</sup> who had trekked with his brother-in-law Gerrit Maritz,<sup>42</sup> and whose diaries are an important account of the Trek, was named as minister for the trekkers, although there is no evidence that he had been formally ordained by the Dutch Reformed Church. The lack of someone who could officiate at baptisms, marriages and funerals was a matter of grave concern to many of the Christian Voortrekkers, whose generally devout religious beliefs would later lead to their being dubbed the Children of Israel, in search of a Promised Land. Another figure who fulfilled a religious role was Sarel Arnoldus Cilliers (1801–71),<sup>43</sup> unofficial minister of the Potgieter trek, although he was also active as a fighting man at Vegkop, Mosega, Kapain and Italeni with Potgieter, and at Blood River with Andries Pretorius. Cilliers is also often credited with having authored the Vow made by the commando that was victorious over the Zulu at Blood River.<sup>44</sup> His recollections of the Vow are recounted in his memoirs, recorded many years later, whose highly coloured drama leads one to suspect that his memories were embroidered over time to create more compelling narratives. But this is not a unique case: the task of unravelling the history of the treks is everywhere hampered by the frailty of memory and the inevitable inconsistency of contemporary eye-witness accounts.

It was primarily Retief and his party who planned to settle in the fertile region east of the Drakensberg Mountains and south of the Tugela River, which had been christened Natal centuries before by Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama when he sighted this coast en route to India on Christmas Day 1497. Natal, the domain of the Zulu kingdom, ruled over by Shaka and since 1828 by one of his step-brothers and assassins, Dingane kaSenzangakhona (c. 1795–1840),<sup>45</sup> had remained little known to Europeans, although some had reported favourably on its potential. And the British had set up a small trading post at Port Natal (later called Durban) in 1824, with the agreement of Shaka, who had granted them the port and surrounding territory, ratified by Dingane in 1837. Crossing the Drakensberg and entering the Zulu kingdom in their tented wagons from the opposite direction over a decade later, and in considerable numbers – something in the region of a thousand wagons – the trekkers were more intent on finding land for farming than on trading, and Retief began negotiations for land with Dingane at his royal military base and chief residence uMgungundlovu.<sup>46</sup> After he had fulfilled the Zulu king's request to retrieve stolen cattle from Sekonyela (c. 1804–56),<sup>47</sup> chief of the Mokotleng Tlokwa, Retief returned to uMgungundlovu in early February 1838 with a considerable number of men, expecting Dingane to sign a deed granting the trekkers land, usually referred to as a treaty.<sup>48</sup> But instead he and his men were put to death, and no document reached the trekkers who had followed Retief into Natal.<sup>49</sup> The promise of a treaty

<sup>40</sup> DSAB 2, 1972, 585–589.

<sup>41</sup> DSAB 1, 1968, 728–730.

<sup>42</sup> Erasmus was married to the feisty Susanna Maritz (1799–1863), who took a memorable stand against staying in Natal under British rule in 1843, although, ironically, the couple remained there until their deaths.

<sup>43</sup> See DSAB 4, 1981, 83–85. There are varied spellings of Cillier's name, Charl Celliers being the most popular alternative to the form we prefer, Sarel Cilliers, which is used by his biographer, Gerdener (1925), and in the Voortrekker Monument's *Official Guide*.

<sup>44</sup> For the complex debates about it, see *The Vow*.

<sup>45</sup> DSAB 2, 1972, 194–196.

<sup>46</sup> The popular spelling 'Dingaan' has been amended to Dingane in most scholarly writing, which we follow here, but is more correctly 'Dingana'.

<sup>47</sup> DSAB 3, 1977, 647–649.

<sup>48</sup> It is an indication of the ongoing lack of unanimity amongst the trekkers that, while Retief felt an obligation to move rapidly to obtain a land grant from Dingane when so many were already crossing the Drakensberg, and thought that a show of strength would ensure success, Maritz – who had on 1.2.1838 objected to Retief's exercising 'excessive powers' (see Muller 1978, 56) – disagreed and urged him to send only a small delegation, in part fearing for Retief's safety, but in part because he felt that the trekker camps would be poorly defended with so many men absent.

<sup>49</sup> For the varied accounts of the treaty and Retief's interaction with Dingane, see *Treaty* and *Murder of Retief*.

was a ruse: Dingane had obviously perceived the Voortrekkers as a serious threat, and decided to take action against the encroaching treks. The Voortrekkers had not followed Retief's instructions to wait before setting up camps in Natal until he had confirmed their occupation with Dingane, nor did they heed Maritz' warnings to protect themselves in laagers. Subsequently, many of them, chiefly women, children and servants, perished in a surprise night attack by the Zulus on their encampments around Bloukrans and Weenen only eleven days after Retief and his party were slain.

Other Voortrekkers came to their aid, but ensuing sorties failed to avenge these deaths, including the so-called Vlugkommando, led by Potgieter and Petrus Lafras (Piet) Uys (1797–1838),<sup>50</sup> when Uys was killed with his son Dirkie (1823–38) in a clever Zulu ambush at Italeni.<sup>51</sup> Although Dingane never personally led his regiments into combat, he was proving himself a resourceful opponent.<sup>52</sup> Late in 1838 a commando assembled by a new leader, Andries Wilhelmus Jacobus Pretorius (1798–1853),<sup>53</sup> set up a defensive laager of wagons at the Ncome River to challenge a 10 000-strong Zulu army in a decisive battle. Superior Boer defence overcame the vastly superior Zulu numbers: as Thompson writes, the battle 'was a classic example of the superiority of controlled fire, by resolute men from a defensive position, over Africans armed with spears, however numerous and however brave'.<sup>54</sup> The victorious Voortrekkers renamed the Ncome Blood River (Bloedrivier) because it was reputed to have run red from the blood of thousands of slain Zulu warriors when Dingane's army was defeated there on 16 December 1838.

Tradition has it that, prior to confronting the Zulu, Pretorius' commando took a Vow to keep the day sacred if God granted them victory:<sup>55</sup> there were other successful battles, but it was this holy covenant that made Blood River a particularly significant event for the survival of the Voortrekkers in Natal, and for their descendants who chose this day to remember and celebrate the achievements of the Voortrekkers in general. The victory had marked a turning point, and it fostered a concept of the Voortrekkers as a chosen people ordained to bring Christian civilisation to the barbaric hinterland.<sup>56</sup> Yet Pretorius' commando failed to capture Dingane, and the king, his army and his great herds survived for a further year. He was finally defeated by his half-brother Mpande,<sup>57</sup> who had thrown in his lot with the Boers and was to be declared king of the Zulu by them. Only after that battle in early 1840 did Dingane surrender his kingdom and flee north, to be killed by Zulu, Swazi or Nyawo.<sup>58</sup>

Immediately after Blood River Dingane had withdrawn strategically, and deserted uMgungundlovu, so that when Pretorius' men advanced there, they found only the burned ruins of the royal residence. Nearby they discovered the remains of Retief's slaughtered party. It was claimed that they also discovered the signed land treaty miraculously preserved in Retief's leather

<sup>50</sup> DSAB 3, 1977, 794–795.

<sup>51</sup> The rather disparaging name, Vlugkommando, literally the commando that took flight, was given to the unsuccessful attempt of Potgieter and Uys to avenge Dingane's slaughter of so many Voortrekkers in Natal. Potgieter, who survived, was despised for his strategic retreat, resulting in his leaving Natal.

<sup>52</sup> See Etherington 2001, 267, 275.

<sup>53</sup> DSAB 2, 1972, 559–567.

<sup>54</sup> Thompson 1995, 91. Although the Zulu had acquired some firearms – notably from Retief's slain party – and employed them at Blood River, they were not yet proficient in their use.

<sup>55</sup> Etherington (2001, 273) rather cynically writes, 'On the morning of 9 December they [the Boers] attempted to summon supernatural assistance'; for a full discussion see *The Vow*.

<sup>56</sup> That this concept was readily understood by an Afrikaans audience is confirmed by the allusion in the film *Die verhaal van die Voortrekker Monument met tonele uit die bou van 'n nasie* (The story of the Voortrekker Monument with scenes from the building of a nation), made c. 1950 after the Monument's inauguration. Immediately after Piet Retief's swearing in as leader of the Voortrekkers, the film shows a Bible opened at *Exodus*. Implying that Retief is a new Moses guiding a Voortrekker exodus, the narrator intones: 'Many went before him; many more would follow' (Baie het hom voorgestaan; baie meer sou volg), and later explicitly states that the trekking Boers were 'like the children of Israel' (soos die kinders van Israel).

<sup>57</sup> DSAB 2, 1972, 496–498.

<sup>58</sup> See *Death of Dingane*.



satchel, supporting their right to settle the territory. But the ensuing Boer republic Natalia, with its centre in Pietermaritzburg, was short-lived and, after it was annexed by the British in 1843, many Voortrekkers left Natal to again join those who had gathered in the land west of the Drakensberg. Back across the mountains, together with other trekkers in the area, they finally succeeded in achieving independence. Borders were fluid and new republics numerous, and often at odds with each other, but the foremost were the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR) north of the Vaal River, and the Oranje-Vrijstaat (OVS) further south between the Orange and the Vaal rivers, formally recognised by the British in 1852 and 1854 respectively. Both republics spoke a Dutch that was gradually evolving into Afrikaans, and both staunchly upheld the ideal of white superiority.

There is another story that is often obscured by the 'grand narrative' of the Great Trek, which focuses on male-dominated contestation in warfare and political negotiation: the story of the Voortrekker women. Although much lip-service – no doubt in many cases genuine enough – was paid to their significance in the Trek, especially by those involved in the Voortrekker Monument project,<sup>59</sup> in histories their role usually only warranted a mention as victims, or in support of male activities. But while little enough is written about them in Voortrekker accounts, women were a constant presence, and shared in all the hardships of the treks – travelling and travail, fighting and farming, and tackling domestic chores in far from ideal circumstances. And all this was in tandem with rearing children, mourning the many that died in infancy, and bearing more to replace those lost. Men's life spans too were often cut short, particularly when at war, but women who outlived them were rarely left unpartnered. This was to some extent for their protection, but also for procreation. Married very young and remarried when widowed, their fertility was key to the survival of the Voortrekker community.

While few would agree with Minister Havenga, who claimed in his speech at the inauguration of the Monument that the Dutch-speaking colonists who constituted this community already had a sense of being 'Die Boerenasie' (Boer nation),<sup>60</sup> it is generally accepted that 'Afrikaner Nationalism, republicanism and country-wide *apartheid* (segregation) were all sequels ... of the Great Trek'.<sup>61</sup> The impact of the treks on the emergence of Afrikaner identity was fundamental, and not only in the obvious physical and spatial sense. André du Toit and Hermann Giliomee point out that the dispersal of a relatively small group of people across a very large area led to 'social and political fragmentation'. The trekkers also 'became involved in a more intensive process of interaction with the indigenous peoples ... in which, at least initially, white hegemony was not ensured'. And their travels 'removed them from the institutional controls of colonial society ... [so that] for a considerable period the Trekker community hardly knew any organized religion, education or trade'.<sup>62</sup> These factors all had a profound effect on the structure of the society that would emerge once the trekkers had left the Cape Colony permanently, consequences that can hardly have been apparent to those who first sought new opportunities beyond its boundaries. But they are threads which run through the fabric of the events that are customarily recounted to tell the story of the Great Trek.

The weaving of the story is also threaded with moral issues. While the trekkers resented the imposition of the emerging humanist principles that had begun to shape British colonial policy, which they saw as disrupting 'normal' master-servant relationships, these new ideas resulted in 'full consciousness that violent conquest of the indigenous peoples of the interior and disposes-

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<sup>59</sup> The determination and courageousness of Afrikaner women is widely remarked upon in more recent scholarship (see, for example, Giliomee and Mbenga 2007, 147) and in accounts at the time of the centenary and inauguration of the Monument. A particularly sympathetic contemporary article in the English press, 'Women of the Great Trek', appeared in the special centenary supplement of the *Cape Times* (3.12.1938, 39, 47).

<sup>60</sup> Address delivered by N.C. Havenga, Minister of Finance, on the occasion of the inauguration of the Voortrekker Monument, 16 December 1949, in 'Speeches at the inaugural ceremony of the Voortrekker Monument', typescript, UCT Special Collections, p.2.

<sup>61</sup> Guest 2012, 5.

<sup>62</sup> Du Toit and Giliomee 1983, 20–21.

sion of their land would no longer go unchallenged'.<sup>63</sup> From the outset then there was an awareness of the need to vindicate their actions.<sup>64</sup> As controversial frontier figure Andries Stockenström (1792–1864)<sup>65</sup> wrote, 'It never entered the imagination of the simplest of the Boers to deny the oppression, knowing that he could not take a step without crossing ground of which those he holds in bondage were once the free and contented owners.'<sup>66</sup> The justifications offered by the trekkers for their possession of new lands placed an emphasis on peaceful negotiation with the African people they encountered, and conquest only when met by aggression. But to this they added, after so many deaths at the hands of Dingane in 1938, their right by blood and sacrifice, as Du Toit and Giliomee point out,

it is almost an inversion of the customary idea of a right obtained by conquest: it is the sacrifices that were made and the losses that were suffered rather than the military successes which were gained that gave them a right to the land. ... With their own blood the Trekkers had earned the moral right to the land. Henceforth there would be a 'sacred tie' binding them to the soil of the new settlement.<sup>67</sup>

This complex web of justification underlies the representation of the treks at the Voortrekker Monument, which of necessity depicted episodes that could readily be given visual form in a narrative, but were also a channel for moral and political imperatives. While we cannot accommodate these subtleties in this brief outline of the Voortrekker story, they remain a crucial subtext that will be explored more fully in Part II in the discussion of the individual scenes of the frieze.

## The Afrikaner cause

Commemorating the centenary of the Battle of Blood River on 16 December 1938, and thus honouring the achievement of the Voortrekkers, was the paramount objective of the Voortrekker Monument and its historical frieze. But there were other more complex motives behind the decision to create a memorial that must be taken into account in considering the circumstances of its creation. Since the 1830s when the Voortrekkers had left the Cape to escape British rule, their Afrikaner descendants had experienced both highs and lows. The hard-won Afrikaner goal of independence achieved in the 1850s was challenged by British imperial power on a number of occasions, and ultimately shattered by defeat in the Anglo-Boer War in 1902.<sup>68</sup> The Afrikaners' sense of independent identity and deep attachment to the land were also undermined by socio-economic difficulties. To look back at the achievements of their forebears, symbolised by the Voortrekker victory over the Zulu at Blood River, would remind them of a more positive past when they had been in the ascendancy, and shore up aspirations for an autonomous future. The actions of the Voortrekkers could also be used to construct a distinctive Afrikaner-ness, when they were presented as having 'laid the foundations of a new national unfolding in South Africa'.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>64</sup> An early example is Piet Retief's manifesto published on 2 February 1837 in the *Graham's Town Journal* (see *Inauguration*).

<sup>65</sup> DSAB 1, 1968, 774–778.

<sup>66</sup> From *The Autobiography of Sir Andries Stockenström*, excerpt published in Du Toit and Giliomee 1983, 225.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>68</sup> The war has been variously referred to as the 'Tweede Vryheidsoorlog' (second freedom war) or 'Boer War', depending on the affiliations of the writer, Afrikaners in the first case, British in the second. We have preferred 'Anglo-Boer War' in this context as defining the responsible parties on both sides, although we fully acknowledge the participation of black people, which has led to the cognomen 'South African War' preferred by scholars today. For the wider context of this war, see Giliomee 2003, 228–278.

<sup>69</sup> This is again Havenga at the inauguration of the Voortrekker Monument, 16 December 1949, in 'Speeches at the Inaugural Ceremony of the Voortrekker Monument', typescript, UCT Special Collections, p.2.

The first South African republics were a direct outcome of the treks. The British had seemed willing enough to accept Voortrekker independence in their predominantly rural republics in the mid-nineteenth century, but tried to claw back control in subsequent decades, when they objected to Boer policies, particularly towards the ‘natives’ and later non-Afrikaner immigrants. The Transvaal was annexed by Britain in 1877, aiming to strengthen its hold on the subcontinent and stabilise it by creating a confederation which would bring strategic and economic advantages.<sup>70</sup> However, the ZAR Boers declared war in 1880 to regain their independence, achieved in 1881 after a scant year of conflict.<sup>71</sup> British efforts to annex the republics were redoubled once the mineral wealth of the area became apparent; there was awareness of gold deposits in the interior from as early as the 1860s, with the discovery of diamonds in 1867 and the rich gold reefs of the Witwatersrand in 1886.

The diamond fields were in an area centred around Kimberley in the Northern Cape whose jurisdiction was unclear, and the British took control, paying out the OVS, which had a strong claim to the territory. The main gold fields, however, were clearly in the ZAR, headed in its early years by the son of Andries Pretorius, Marthinus Wessel Pretorius (1819–1901),<sup>72</sup> and later by Stephanus Johannes Paulus (Paul) Kruger (1825–1904), president from 1883.<sup>73</sup> The huge influx of foreign prospectors, known as ‘uitlanders’, with no political rights,<sup>74</sup> provided reasons – or pretexts – for British interference. ZAR autonomy was constantly challenged by the British, which led to a second confrontation from 1899–1902, when the independence of the ZAR and OVS was decisively lost. The manner in which the Anglo-Boer War was won redoubled resentment against the British, who had resorted to a scorched earth policy to overcome the successful guerilla tactics of the Boers. They destroyed farms and incarcerated Boer and black civilians in over one hundred concentration camps, under such appalling conditions that there were innumerable deaths. ‘All in all, it is likely that more than 40 000 people lost their lives,’ among them over 4 000 Boer women, some 22 000 Boer children and an estimated 15 000 to 20 000 black people, again mostly children.<sup>75</sup> The suffering of their families was a major factor in the Boers’ final surrender. The postwar situation was dire, and Smuts wrote of the great danger for the survival of Afrikanerdom, ‘partly because people have fallen so deep, so fathomlessly deep, into poverty and misery, partly because everything will be done by the other side, through their education system and otherwise, to anglicize the generation now growing up’.<sup>76</sup>

The tragic losses and the humiliation of their defeat made it all the more necessary to think back on past victories, such as Blood River. There is little evidence that a memorial day was honoured initially,<sup>77</sup> but there were some public commemorations of the Vow and the victory from the 1860s, with a large gathering at Blood River itself on 16 December 1867,<sup>78</sup> when participants laid stones to form a cairn. In the ZAR the date acquired official status as a public holiday from

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**70** Laband 2005, 18–32. That the ZAR was seeking economic independence from British South Africa by building a railway link to the port of Lourenço Marques was a fiscal threat. Also significant was the fear that Afrikaners in the Cape Colony, who outnumbered English speakers three to one (Giliomee 2003, 201), might be drawn into alliance with the two republics against British rule.

**71** Laband 2005, 86–106.

**72** *DSAB* 1, 1968, 648–654.

**73** *Ibid.*, 1968, 444–455.

**74** Fourteen years’ residence was required for ‘uitlanders’ to qualify for the vote under Kruger.

**75** Grundlingh, ‘Why concentration camps?’ 2013, 25 (quote and numbers). For the terrible suffering of women and families in the Anglo-Boer War, see *The war at home* edited by Nasson and Grundlingh. The shocking number of deaths would probably have been even higher had it not been for the intervention of English campaigner Emily Hobhouse (1860–1926) and the subsequent Fawcett Commission of 1901, although that brought no improvement to the separate camps for blacks. In recognition of her work, Emily Hobhouse’s ashes were buried at the Vrouemonument in Bloemfontein.

**76** *Smuts Papers*, vol. 2, 38, quoted in Giliomee 2003, 264.

**77** Thompson (1985, 144–188) challenges the belief that the Vow was continuously honoured. For further discussion, see *The Vow and Church of the Vow*.

**78** Ferreira (1975, 187) records an earlier meeting at Blood River on 16 December 1864.

1865, and in the OVS from 1894. And the day came to hold profound meaning for Afrikaners, not least because it had acquired connotations of resistance to British rule. A major rally was held at Paardekraal on 16 December 1880, just prior to the first war of independence, when the Boers successfully routed the British. Future president Paul Kruger ‘stressed the historic links between the heroic acts of the Voortrekkers and the triumphant rebellion of 1880–81’; he ‘turned the movement of the frontier farmers into the deeper interior, now called the Great Trek, into a heroic myth’, and considered ‘the Battle of Blood River of 1838 and the Vow made before the battle ... the symbol of the will of the Transvaal burghers to survive as an independent people against overwhelming odds’.<sup>79</sup> And in this context, André du Toit argues, ‘articulations of an Afrikaner Chosen People ideology’ emerged.<sup>80</sup> Was it in the wake of the new military glorification of the Voortrekkers that the first public name for 16 December – Dingaan’s Day, used from 1875 to 1952 – was surprisingly linked not to their Christian Vow but to the Boers’ arch enemy, the Zulu king, an adversary so powerful that his defeat enhanced their victory?<sup>81</sup> A photograph of a scene from the celebrations of 16 December 1938, ‘Dingaan hears Voortrekkers’ request for land’, endorses the inadvertent prominence that the name of the day gave to Dingane.<sup>82</sup> The re-enactment of Retief’s obtaining a land treaty in Natal shows a group of Afrikaners dressed as Zulu with shields and assegais upholding the status of the centrally placed figure of the enthroned King Dingane (fig. 9).

After the ZAR defeat of the British, it was planned to hold five-yearly celebrations recalling the Vow; the first took place at Paardekraal in 1881, and was attended by 12 000 to 15 000 people.<sup>83</sup> Nor was the holiday discontinued after the loss of Afrikaner independence in 1902; rather, it played a role in the continuing assertion of Afrikaner identity.<sup>84</sup> It was not suppressed by the British, who took a conciliatory line in governing their extended territories, although in tandem with determined efforts to Anglicise their new subjects. Afrikaners played an active political role after the war despite British victory, first in the self-government granted to the new crown colonies that had been republics, then in the country’s government when the Union of South Africa was established in 1910, uniting the Cape and Natal with the erstwhile ZAR and OVS in order to standardise policies and overcome economic difficulties that had emerged between the different colonies.<sup>85</sup> It is particularly noteworthy that all the initial Union prime ministers were Boer generals: Botha from 1910 to 1919, Smuts from 1919 to 1924 and 1939 to 1948, and Hertzog from 1924 to 1939. As Giliomee puts it, ‘the Afrikaners inherited the political kingdom a mere eight years after the Boer leaders had signed the Peace of Vereeniging’.<sup>86</sup>

Strong Afrikaner influence had been evident in the decision to formally recognise 16 December as a public holiday for the Union, even though it was not an inclusive celebration. Once the National Party had been voted into power in 1948, ‘Dingaan’s Day’ was given even greater status when it was declared a religious holiday in the Public Holidays Act passed in 1952, honouring the promise to treat the day like a Sabbath that had been made in the Vow before the Battle of Blood

<sup>79</sup> Giliomee 2003, 234.

<sup>80</sup> Du Toit 1983, 951. The French Adolphe Delegorgue (*Travels* 2, 1997, 54), who lived with the Boers for some time, recognised the early seeds of this ideology: ‘Together they read the Bible and their strength was reinforced, because they believed that they were God’s chosen people, before whom lay the promised land far beyond the deserts ...’

<sup>81</sup> See *The Vow*.

<sup>82</sup> Dated 16 December 1938 and published by the Johannesburg *Star*, the photograph is in Museum Africa with a newspaper clipping providing a summary of the enactment pasted on the back.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> For the evolution of the commemorative day, see Kluppels 2009.

<sup>85</sup> Marks and Trapido (1987, 2) cogently remark, ‘That this unification did not lead to a single pan-South African, pan-ethnic nationalism was the outcome of a history of regional divisions, the racism and social Darwinism of the late nineteenth century and the specific political-cum-class struggles which were being legitimated by the discourse of nationalism.’

<sup>86</sup> Giliomee 2003, 277. While Botha and Smuts pursued a conciliatory policy with English-speaking South Africans, Hertzog remained strongly opposed to British rule, founding an opposition party, as will be discussed below.



**Figure 9:** Re-enactment of Retief's visit to Dingane. Centenary celebrations, 1938 (courtesy of Museum Africa; photo the authors)

River. The holiday became known as *Geloftesdag* (Day of the Covenant or Day of the Vow<sup>87</sup>), a name with greater gravitas that matched its added status, and which shifted the emphasis away from its former namesake Dingane. Although its historical meaning was really only celebrated by Afrikaners, the religious holiday remained in place until the Act was repealed after the African National Congress (ANC) was elected to government in 1994. But it was still retained as a public holiday, with the new name of the Day of Reconciliation, which made it possible for Afrikaners to continue to honour the day, even while the new rulers deployed it for very different ends. The holiday had special significance for black South Africans: *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (The Spear of the Nation), the military arm of the ANC, had been established on 16 December 1961, launching the armed struggle against apartheid after the banning of the organisation.<sup>88</sup> Strategically, however, the new public holiday upheld the concept of racial reconciliation, a shrewd inversion of the original Afrikaner meaning of the day, neutralising its close association with white domination in South Africa.

Prior to the first democratic elections of 1994, the continued honouring of the Blood River anniversary was embedded with meanings of black–white confrontation and white supremacy, and closely associated with Afrikaner nationalism. It was the chosen day for significant events promoting associated cultural and political agendas – not least of which would be the laying of the foundation stone of the Voortrekker Monument in 1938 and its inauguration in 1949. As well as Kruger deploying Dingaan's Day to rally the Boers against the British at Paardekraal, and then to celebrate their 1881 victory, the day was also purposefully used to recover Afrikaner solidarity after their defeat by Britain in the second Anglo-Boer confrontation. When Marthinus Theunis Steyn (1857–1916),<sup>89</sup> erstwhile president of the OVS, initiated the creation of the *Vrouemonument* (Women's

<sup>87</sup> The second name change to the 'Day of the Vow' was legislated in 1980 (Thompson 1985, 144 and n 1).

<sup>88</sup> The date seems no coincidence (Kluppels 2009, 70–71). South African History Online ([www.sahistory.org.za](http://www.sahistory.org.za)) records protests being held on that day, and the ANC held conferences on or around the date, until the organisation was banned in 1960, so that many of its resolutions were passed on 16 December, including the ANC constitution in 1943, and the decision to launch the armed struggle in 1961. While the choice of day may have related to it being a public holiday, facilitating gatherings, its association with black oppression also gave it symbolic significance.

<sup>89</sup> *DSAB* 2, 1972, 707–716.



**Figure 10:** Franz Soff and Anton van Wouw. Vrouemonument, Bloemfontein. 1913 (photo the authors)

monument) in Bloemfontein (fig. 10) in memory of the women and children who had died in British concentration camps in the Anglo-Boer War,<sup>90</sup> 16 December was chosen for its inauguration in 1913, although Blood River and the Vow had nothing to do with that conflict. It suggested a nationalist agenda rather than a purely commemorative one – indeed, ‘the English-language press expressed regret that this day had been chosen and it was argued that the ceremony could have been held on any other day without lessening the solemnity of the event’.<sup>91</sup> The date would have renewed Afrikaner memories of past victory, in support of Steyn’s intention that the Vrouemonument would restore self-respect, which had been so undermined by the bereavement of so many Afrikaner families, their defeat and loss of independence. A similar agenda was undoubtedly part of the drive to build the Voortrekker Monument.<sup>92</sup> There, a sense of achievement would replace that of mourning at the Vrouemonument, to even more potently regenerate a sense of the value of identifying as an Afrikaner, and to focus again on the possibility of an independent future.

Not only the war had taken a toll on Afrikaner’s sense of pride and self-worth.<sup>93</sup> Despite British willingness to share the governance of the land with their former enemies – though not with Africans<sup>94</sup> – life for many Afrikaners after the Anglo-Boer War was deeply debilitating, not only psychologically, but in practical terms too. Their well-being, so much invested in the land and already severely weakened by rinderpest outbreaks in the 1890s which decimated livestock, was devastatingly undermined by the war and the scorched earth tactics of the British troops,<sup>95</sup> and further compromised by severe droughts from 1903 and economic depression from 1905. It would be exacerbated even more by the worldwide Great Depression from the end of the 1920s, with crippling droughts in South Africa at the time further aggravating the situation. Rural poverty was not new, with many penurious share-croppers eking out a living on the land in the nineteenth century,<sup>96</sup> but intensifying economic hardship drove an increasing number off their farms into the towns in search of work. Ill-qualified for anything other than farming, and facing competition from both skilled white immigrants and unskilled black labourers who were prepared to work for very low wages, impoverished Afrikaners constituted a growing class. A Carnegie Commission investigation of the late 1920s, even before the Great Depression, found that a large proportion of Afrikaners were in dire economic straits: ‘about 17.5% of the 49 434 families were “very poor”,’ some 300 000 of the total white population.<sup>97</sup> “‘Poor whites”, always present, now became acutely

<sup>90</sup> See Grundlingh, ‘Why concentration camps?’ 2013; Van Zyl 2013; Labuschagne 2014.

<sup>91</sup> Grundlingh, ‘The meaning of the Women’s Monument: Then and now’ 2013, 233. The potential for this monument to be divisive and used for Afrikaner political purposes was well understood by Prime Minister Louis Botha, who tried ‘to derail Steyn’s proposal by suggesting a national monument for the Voortrekkers instead’ (ibid., 232). Grundlingh points out that the monument’s ‘political message was muted in 1913 but became strident in the 1930s and 1940s’ (ibid., 238).

<sup>92</sup> This shared agenda is highlighted in the ‘Gedenkboek’ of the ossewatrek (ox wagon trek) of 1938, which at its opening grouped a drawing of the Women’s Monument with one of the Voortrekker Monument, as well as Steynberg’s Blood River Monument (Mostert 1940, 5, 12, 15).

<sup>93</sup> For the social, economic and political foundations of Afrikaner nationalism, see Marx 2008.

<sup>94</sup> It is notable, however, that under British rule in the old colonies of the Cape and Natal there was suffrage for persons of colour who fulfilled certain criteria, initially maintained in the Union. See, for example, Thompson 1995, 150–151. But the terms of the Peace of Vereeniging specified that the question of black franchise would only be addressed after self-rule.

<sup>95</sup> Under the terms of the Peace of Vereeniging, the British promised to assist in restoring the farms, and according to Giliomee (2003, 265) invested £16 million, but it proved insufficient in the face of drought and the Depression.

<sup>96</sup> Dutch law had required land to be divided amongst heirs, and could result in unworkably small farms.

<sup>97</sup> O’Meara 1983, 54–55, 82–85; Fourie 2006. While tainted by its avoidance of issues of black poverty, and an underlying intention to uplift poor whites to shore up notions of white superiority, the Carnegie report, ‘The Poor White Problem in South Africa’ (1932), highlighted a problem which had long been causing concern in Afrikaner circles (see also Marx 2008, 125–136). The Dutch Reformed Church had held previous enquiries on the matter, and organised the first national conference to address it in Bloemfontein on 2 October 1934.

visible.<sup>98</sup> At the time of the 1938 centenary the Rev. John Daniel Kestell (1854–1941)<sup>99</sup> called for a concerted rescue effort to save Voortrekker descendants who were ‘living in hopeless poverty, sunken materially, morally and spiritually’.<sup>100</sup> Daniel François (D.F.) Malan (1874–1959),<sup>101</sup> leader of the Purified National Party, also recognised the new challenges for Afrikaners when he described a second Great Trek – from the country to the city – at the centenary gathering at Blood River: ‘Your Blood River is not here. Your Blood River lies in the city.’<sup>102</sup>

But despite the difficulties in the decades that followed the Anglo-Boer War, in some ways it had reinforced a sense of Afrikaner identity, as had previous hardship. As Tobie Malan wrote in *Die geloofsbelydenis van ’n nasionalis* (A nationalist’s confession of faith) of 1913: ‘Having learned in the school of suffering that we are neither Hottentots, nor Kaffirs, nor Englishmen, we finally discovered that we are *ourselves*.’<sup>103</sup> Afrikaner self-esteem was by no means stamped out. Apart from the active role Afrikaners played in politics,<sup>104</sup> there were many initiatives to foster the sense of an independent culture in which all could take pride, whether labourers or part of the Afrikaner elite. It was the latter, including successful Afrikaner businessmen and a number of academics who had taken degrees in the Netherlands, who were the most proactive in advancing the status of their history and beliefs, taking initiatives aimed at improving the lot of Afrikaans-speaking people, some practical and some cultural. While themselves relatively prosperous, they were concerned with the plight of the working-class poor, although they gave little attention to the many people of colour who considered Afrikaans their native tongue. Concern for the poor had strong racist undertones in South Africa, informed as much by the need to uphold white supremacy as by philanthropic motives.<sup>105</sup> But initially the drive was against the English, as Charles Bloomberg stresses:

... industrialisation turned the Boers into an urban proletariat in the employ of a foreign, capitalist class. The fact that English speakers monopolised finance, commerce and mining persuaded Afrikaners that their national and class enemy was one and the same. Consequently the Afrikaner’s struggle for a redistribution of power, for cultural autonomy and economic liberation, was fused with a struggle to overthrow the influence of English speakers.<sup>106</sup>

**98** Worden 2000, 66.

**99** DSAB 1, 1968, 421–424.

**100** Quoted in Giliomee 2003, 352.

**101** DSAB 3, 1977, 562–570.

**102** S.W. Pienaar, *Glo in u volk* (1964, 122–123), quoted in Moodie 1975, 199. Giliomee (2003, 353) expands the quotation to demonstrate the racist underpinnings of Malan’s claim, as he said that these Afrikaners ‘were meeting the non-white at his Blood River, partly or totally unarmed, without a ditch or even a river to separate them, defenceless on the open plains of economic levelling’. Although the acute poor white problem was decreasing, urban Afrikaners were largely working class; by 1948 Afrikaners had only a 29% share of the country’s total personal income although they constituted 57% of the white population, while English had 46%. On the other hand, Africans, who were 68% of the total population, had only 20% of the income (Giliomee 2003, 489). It was a far more startling discrepancy but one that attracted little attention at the time compared to Afrikaner–English competition.

**103** Muller 1913, 9, quoted in Moodie 1975, 79. We acknowledge that, as Dan O’Meara argues (1983, 4–11), it is problematic to speak of ‘an undifferentiated Afrikanerdom’, but for our understanding of the context of the Voortrekker Monument frieze we aim to achieve a general grasp of the key elements underlying a sense of a shared identity amongst Afrikaners.

**104** Afrikaners continued to play an active role in government in South Africa both before and after Union. Their strong position is clearly demonstrated by the fact that all prime ministers and presidents prior to South Africa’s first free elections of 1994 were Afrikaners.

**105** Giliomee devotes a chapter, ‘Wretched folk, ready for any mischief’ (2003, 315–354), to the poor white question and the various strategies employed by successive governments to alleviate the problem, notably improved education and training.

**106** Bloomberg 1989, xxi. In a discussion of the treatment of the Great Trek in the popular weekly *Die Huisgenoot* during the 1930s, Martjie Bosman (1990, 105) notes that in terms of historical articles just as many appeared on the Anglo-Boer War, suggesting that the issue of Afrikaner–English opposition was as strong as that of black–white.



A number of Afrikaner initiatives were aimed at setting up strong financial institutions independent of British capital. The Santam/Sanlam insurance and financial houses were founded in 1918, for example, and the Volkskas Bank in 1934.<sup>107</sup> Also significant, although not exclusively Afrikaner, was the founding of South Africa's YSCOR/ISCOR (Iron and Steel Corporation) under Hertzog's government in 1927, producing steel at its Pretoria mill from 1934, and providing jobs as well as economic benefits. There was an increasing drive to create white employment from the mid-1920s, and many blacks were replaced in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs in government departments, such as the railways, although the private sector continued to favour less costly black labour. By introducing legislation setting minimum wages for skilled jobs at a level suited to white standards, the government effectively excluded blacks from these positions and relegated them to low-wage manual labour. The policy of job reservation proved a double-edged sword, however: as Frank Welsh writes, 'By making manual jobs effectively unavailable to whites, those who were not fitted for more skilled or responsible jobs – increasingly Afrikaners – were thereby deprived of any sort of employment.'<sup>108</sup>

Underpinning such moves was a network supporting Afrikaners in a society perceived to be dominated by affluent English-speaking South Africans. The promotion of the Afrikaans language was a key part of this. As Benedict Anderson has remarked, languages are perceived as 'the personal property of quite specific groups – their daily speakers and readers – and moreover ... these groups, imagined as communities, were entitled to their autonomous place in a fraternity of equals'.<sup>109</sup> The growing perception of the importance of the language for the development of Afrikaners and their sense of national identity was defined by D.F. Malan in his 1908 call: 'Raise the Afrikaans language to a written language, let it become the vehicle for our culture, our history, our national ideals and you will also raise the people who speak it.'<sup>110</sup> To this end, publications in Afrikaans were encouraged, both literary and historical, and the setting up of newspapers and magazines to reach a popular readership was also a hallmark of the early years.<sup>111</sup> As Marks and Trapido write, Afrikaans was 'the language of daily communication' yet designated 'a *Hotnotstaal* ('Hottentot' language) and a *kombuistaal* (a kitchen language). It was the achievement of the lower-middle-class intelligentsia that they ... manipulated the language and its literature to suit their cultural-cum-political tasks. In so doing, they not only transformed the language but also attempted to shape the entire cultural identity of the Dutch-Afrikaans population'.<sup>112</sup>

The year 1909 saw the founding of the Zuid-Afrikaanse Akademie voor Taal, Letteren en Kunst (South African Academy for Language, Literature and Art, hereafter Akademie).<sup>113</sup> Its inaugural

<sup>107</sup> O'Meara 1983, 98–99 (Santam/Sanlam), 102–103 (Volkskas).

<sup>108</sup> Welsh 1998, 401.

<sup>109</sup> Anderson 1991, 84.

<sup>110</sup> Giliomee 2003, 366. Giliomee identifies this call as Malan's first step in his public career. Anti-English implications are also clear in the message (borrowed from Cicero) from Marthinus Steyn (past president of the OVS) to a festival celebrating language equality at Stellenbosch in 1913: 'The language of the conqueror in the mouth of the conquered is the language of slaves' (ibid., 370).

<sup>111</sup> *Die Huisgenoot*, initiated in 1916, is a good example of popular but educational writing aimed at this audience. Amongst its early issues, related to the history of the Great Trek, for instance, it included a series of 'Levenschets' (life sketches) on Trek leaders, such as Piet Retief (June 1916, 29–30) and Andries Pretorius (March 1917, 267–268), as well as more general articles, such as 'Die tragiese loopbaan van 'n Voortrekkervrouw' (The tragic life of a Voortrekker woman), which records the oral account of Klasina Maria Johanna van Dale (born 1830, nee Le Roux), who survived seventeen assegai wounds as a child in the Bloukrans massacre (August 1916, 94–95). It is in a similar vein to Preller's accounts in *Voortrekkermense*, though author Eric Stockenström's chief goal was to raise support for the elderly woman, who was destitute.

<sup>112</sup> Marks and Trapido 1987, 12. For a nuanced discussion of the role of language in the development of Afrikaner nationalism, see Hofmeyr in the same volume, 95–123. Moodie makes the point that, as well as the Anglo-Boer War drawing together the very different ZAR and Cape Afrikaner groups, 'what proved to be perhaps the major unifying factor was the Afrikaans language itself' (1975, 39).

<sup>113</sup> Later the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns (South African Academy for Science and Art). A number of people who played significant roles on committees developing the Voortrekker Monument (discussed

goal was ‘To maintain and to promote the Dutch Language and Literature and South African History, Antiquities and Art. The term “Hollands” (Dutch) is understood to include both forms in use in South Africa’.<sup>114</sup> It thus recognised Afrikaans from the outset and did much to develop and promote the language. Important markers along the way were the recognition of Afrikaans as the second language of the country (initially alongside Dutch) in 1925, and the establishment of Afrikaans-medium schools.<sup>115</sup> A publishing house, Nasionale Pers, was set up, with the newspaper *De Burger* initiated in 1915 to promote an Afrikaner nationalist viewpoint,<sup>116</sup> under the editorship of D.F. Malan, who was to lead the National Party to victory in 1948. To reach a wide audience, Nasionale Pers also established *De Huisgenoot* in 1916 as a journal of Afrikaner culture, so popular that it changed from a monthly to a weekly in 1923. Dutch gradually shifted to Afrikaans; both these publications, for example, soon changed the article in their titles from the Dutch ‘de’ (the) to the Afrikaans ‘die’. An important milestone in the development and wide acceptance of the language, even by conservatives who had rigidly held that only Dutch was acceptable, was the Afrikaans translation of the Bible which appeared in 1933.

The founding of many different associations, both large and small, was also important in supporting the language and other aspects of Afrikaner culture; among these the Afrikaner Broederbond (Afrikaner Brotherhood) was a powerful player.<sup>117</sup> In June 1918, after a clash between Empire Loyalists and Afrikaner Republicans at a Nationalist meeting in the Johannesburg City Hall,<sup>118</sup> a group of young disaffected Afrikaners met, and a month later formed a new organisation called Jong Suid-Afrika (Young South Africa), soon to be renamed the Afrikaner Broederbond; the first chairman was a junior railway clerk, Henning Johannes Klopper (fig. 11).<sup>119</sup> Bloomberg sums up the main objectives: ‘to unite all Afrikaners who have the welfare of their people at heart; to foster national awareness; to implant a love of language, religion, tradition and fatherland; and to promote all of Afrikanerdom’s interests’.<sup>120</sup> These goals are echoed in numerous Afrikaner associations, many of them originating in Broederbond initiatives, including the committee that later undertook the planning of a monument to the Voortrekkers. The Broederbond was, ‘increasingly after 1930, the founder of the struggle for Afrikaner separatism, the spearhead of the Afrikaner Republican struggle and creator of the community’s corporate apparatus’.<sup>121</sup>

The extent of Broederbond influence was not always clearly apparent, however, for, after the general strike of 1922, it went underground as a secret society, with membership by invitation only,<sup>122</sup> that created an exclusive body of ‘Super-Afrikaners’, as Ivor Wilkins and Hans Strydom were

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more fully below) were chairmen of the Akademie, namely F.V. Engelenburg (1923–25, 1930–32), F.S. Malan (1927–29, 1934–36) and E.G. Jansen (1937–38). Jansen and Mabel Jansen were made honorary life members, as were Malan (1941), Preller (1942), Lombard (1947), and the architect of the Monument, Gerard Moerdyk (1957). For a brief outline of the Akademie, see Berman 1983, 371–372.

**114** [www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/style\\_det.php?styleid=810](http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/style_det.php?styleid=810)

**115** Dutch, then Afrikaans, was taught in South African schools, but initially only as a language subject, while all other teaching was in English.

**116** O’Meara 1983, 97.

**117** *Ibid.*, 59–116. That the Broederbond archive found a home in the Heritage Foundation Archives in 2005 underlines its close links with those who conceived and shaped the Monument.

**118** Bloomberg 1989, 65.

**119** That Klopper (1895–1985) was only twenty-three at the time of its founding underlines the fact that the Broederbond began its existence under the name of ‘Young South Africa’. The first president of the Bond was the Rev. Jozua Naudé, however, ‘one of the six bittereinders who had refused to sign the peace treaty in the Anglo-Boer War’ (Giliomee 2003, 400). A significant figure in the rise of Afrikaner nationalism, Klopper was to be founder-chairman of the Afrikaans Language and Culture Association (ATKV) in 1933, leader of the re-enactment of the Trek in 1938, and ultimately Speaker of Parliament from 1961–74. It seems extraordinary that he was not awarded an entry in the *Dictionary of South African biography (DSAB)*.

**120** Bloomberg 1989, 32.

**121** *Ibid.*, 62.

**122** According to Moodie (1975, 50), ‘Membership was restricted to “Afrikaans-speaking Protestants who accept South Africa as their fatherland, are of sound moral character and stand firm in the defence of their Afrikaner identity”.’ After



**Figure 11:** Founding members of the Afrikaner Broederbond with H.J. Klopper seated second from left. 1918 (<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Broederbond.jpg>)

to call them in the title of their 1978 book. In his exposé of the same year, J.H.P. Serfontein stresses how the society reached into every quarter of Afrikaner life. Its members were ‘the self-chosen elite of “Afrikanerdom”’,<sup>123</sup> including the most influential people in politics, industry, education and the church – political leaders, businessmen, Dutch Reformed clergy, the rectors of Afrikaans universities and training colleges – all in a strong position to advance the society’s goals. Its pervading influence was well understood by Prime Minister Smuts,<sup>124</sup> when he ruled in 1944 that all civil servants had to resign membership of the Bond.<sup>125</sup> In response, some unprecedented public statements were made, including one from its founder secretary, I.M. Lombard (also treasurer of the SVK, the committee managing the Voortrekker Monument<sup>126</sup>), which underlines the society’s Christian National ideology:

The Afrikaner Broederbond is born out of the deep conviction that the Afrikaner nation was planned by God’s hand in this country and is destined to continue existing as a nation with its own character and calling. Of every member is expected that he will live and behave in the firm belief that the fortunes of nations are determined by a divine hand.<sup>127</sup>

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a complex selection procedure, an approved member took an oath ‘to keep Broederbond secrets until his death, whether he resigns or not’ (Serfontein 1978, 133). Serfontein provides the full induction ceremony as Annexure I, 226–229.  
**123** O’Meara 1983, 63.

**124** Prime Minister Hertzog had previously exposed the Broederbond in 1935, accusing it of political aims aligned with the Purified National Party intended to undermine the United Party, but had been reassured in this regard and not taken action.

**125** Serfontein (1978, 74) states that 1 090 members resigned, with 870 rejoining after the National Party victory in 1948. Bloomberg (1989) devotes his Chapter 8 to the banning, pointing out that the Broederbond’s civil servants, railway officials and teachers were given an ‘honourable’ discharge so that they could be reinstated later (*ibid.*, 195–196). But a number refused to resign their membership (*ibid.*, 197).

**126** For this committee, abbreviated SVK, see our discussion below.

**127** Bloomberg 1989, 41–42.

Smuts' ban was a serious setback, but the work of the Broederbond continued and, after the National Party victory of 1948, its position was consolidated; from that point all South Africa's prime ministers and state presidents were to be Broeders, and 'by 1962 every branch of the state apparatus – the Civil Service, judiciary, police and army – was controlled and staffed by Afrikaners'.<sup>128</sup> Perhaps most influential of all at grassroots level from the earliest years were the many school teachers who belonged and took up the task of educating the country's youth in Christian National principles, gradually creating a white majority supporting Afrikaner nationalism.<sup>129</sup>

Serfontein outlines the seven-point plan of the Broederbond to clarify the political and economic thrust of their goals:

1. The independence of South Africa;
2. The abolition of Afrikaner 'inferiority' and that of the Afrikaans language;
3. Strict segregation of all non-Europeans;
4. An end to exploitation of South Africa and its people by 'aliens';
5. Rehabilitation of the farming community and the creation of social security through work and more intensive industrialisation;
6. Nationalisation of credit, and a planned economy;
7. The Afrikanerisation of public life and education in a Christian National sense, leaving the internal development of all sectors free as long as this did not militate against the safety of the State.<sup>130</sup>

Hermann Giliomee cautions against an overstated view of the Broederbond's influence on government and the rise of Afrikaner nationalism. He points out that it was a relatively small body, and that it was based in the Transvaal, where republicanism was intense, with limited representation in the Cape where the National Party developed most strongly. While political leaders after 1948 were all members of the Broederbond, and it was a powerful force in the heyday of apartheid in the 1960s, it is unlikely that Hertzog was ever a member and D.F. Malan only joined in 1933.<sup>131</sup>

The role of the Broederbond in economic and cultural advancement was undoubtedly very important, however. It was the Bond's treasurer and sixty Broeders who established the Volkskas Bank in the 1930s and, in alliance with Sanlam, built up investment in enterprises that would create jobs for Afrikaners.<sup>132</sup> And it was the Broederbond that took the initiative in 1929 to establish the Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings (Federation of Afrikaner Cultural Organisations, FAK), to unite all Afrikaner cultural bodies in a single association.<sup>133</sup> At the initiating conference, a call was made to confirm 'national consciousness, national pride, national calling, and national destiny' through the promotion of Afrikaner language and culture; in the words of Eduard Christiaan Pienaar, Professor of Nederlands and Afrikaans at Stellenbosch,<sup>134</sup> 'Providence would not have given us a language if we ought not to have had one, otherwise the whole world would have been populated with Britons.'<sup>135</sup> The next year, the Afrikaanse Taal en Kultuurvereniging (Afrikaans Language and Culture Association, ATKV) was founded by members of the South African Railways

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, xxi.

<sup>129</sup> Serfontein (*ibid.*, 67) reports that there were 500 teachers constituting nearly 25% of the Bond in 1943, growing to 1 691 in 1968, where he lists them with other categories of membership (136); he also provides a lengthy list of some 1 800 names of members in an appendix (257–275). Afrikaans teachers were also involved in various capacities in the development of the Voortrekker Monument and its frieze, notably SVK secretary Scheepers.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 74–75.

<sup>131</sup> See Giliomee 2003, 420–422.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 435–437.

<sup>133</sup> O'Meara 1983, 61–62, 74–75.

<sup>134</sup> *DSAB* 2, 1972, 548–549.

<sup>135</sup> In *Die Burger* 19.12.1929, quoted in Moodie 1975, 109. Moodie also quotes Scholtz (*Dr. Nicolaas Johannes van der Merwe, 1888–1941*, 1944, 123–124), who credited the FAK with achievements such as equality for Afrikaans on the radio; the promotion of Afrikaans folk songs, art and books; conceptualising the centenary festivals; and the push for an Afrikaans national anthem.

and Harbours. Open only to white Christian Afrikaners,<sup>136</sup> the association shored up Afrikaans language and culture in the face of what was perceived to be English urban domination, and fostered a sense of self-worth among workers, opening a holiday resort for railway employees at Hartenbos in the Cape, for example. The ATKV was to play a key role in the 1938 centenary celebrations.

Politically, the Afrikaner position was first represented by the establishment in 1914 of a National Party under James Barry Munnik Hertzog (1866–1942),<sup>137</sup> upholding Afrikaner rights. Not that Afrikaners had been omitted from government earlier. The South African Party, incorporating political groups from the previously Boer republics, won the first elections for the new Union of South Africa in 1910, when the erstwhile Boer generals, Louis Botha (1862–1919)<sup>138</sup> and Jan Christiaan Smuts (1870–1950)<sup>139</sup> were appointed prime minister and deputy prime minister respectively. But Hertzog, also a previous Boer general and initially Minister of Justice, felt they were too conciliatory in their efforts to reconcile Afrikaans- and English-speaking South Africans. Clashes led to Hertzog leaving the Cabinet, and in 1913 he broke away altogether to form the National Party. It fought the 1915 and 1920 elections and in 1924, in a surprising Pact coalition with Labour, won against the South African Party, led by Smuts after Botha's death. Hertzog was to hold the office of prime minister for fifteen years, strengthening the Afrikaner position with the ratification of Afrikaans as the second official language and labour legislation supporting white workers, aimed particularly at assisting poor white Afrikaners. A telling mark of the shift away from British influence was the introduction of a new national flag ratified by Parliament in 1927. Three broad bands of orange, white and blue recalled the Prinsevlag of the Netherlands and were hence associated with the pre-British Dutch settlement of the Colony. Against this background was a central triple-flag motif, with the Union Jack outnumbered by the two flags of the Boer republics, thus symbolically relegating South Africa's British affiliations to a subsidiary role.

Other than the Nationalist's single-minded promotion of Afrikaner interests, however, the South African Party and the National Party had much in common: both upheld white hegemony, even if the South African party had somewhat more liberal policies;<sup>140</sup> and whatever the differences between English and Afrikaans speakers, both increasingly saw a need for white solidarity against the 'swart gevaar' (black peril). In the early 1930s in the wake of the Depression and in an attempt at 'fusion' between the two white groups, Hertzog entered an alliance with Smuts, and their coalition won the 1933 elections and formed the United Party the following year. But, just as Hertzog had rejected Botha's objective of bringing together Afrikaans- and English-speaking South Africans, so now Hertzog's willingness to compromise with English speakers was perceived as a weakness by hard line Afrikaners. It was a case of history repeating itself. A breakaway Gesuiwerde Nasionale Party (Purified National Party) was formed in 1934 under D.F. Malan, set on reducing affiliations with Britain. After the resignation of Hertzog when he failed to ensure South Africa's neutrality in World War II in 1939, and his replacement as prime minister by Smuts, Malan and Hertzog came together to form a Herstigte Nasionale Party (Reconstituted National Party). It was heralded as overcoming any previous dissent in the Afrikaner ranks at a large gathering in September 1939 called by the Broederbond, on the site where the Voortrekker Monument was being built.<sup>141</sup> The party was greatly strengthened by many who had previously supported Hertzog in the

<sup>136</sup> Since 1994 the ATKV has been open to all Afrikaans-speaking people regardless of colour, but still has Christianity as a requirement.

<sup>137</sup> DSAB 1, 1968, 366–379. For the 'Hertzog Nationalist Party', see O'Meara 1983, 31–35 (ibid., xv, for the translations of the Afrikaans *Nasionale Party* as either 'National' or 'Nationalist').

<sup>138</sup> DSAB 4, 1981, 41–51.

<sup>139</sup> DSAB 1, 1968, 737–758.

<sup>140</sup> For example, under the South African Party, blacks maintained voting rights in the Cape, although the requirements to qualify as voters, based on land ownership and income, excluded most. But undertakings to extend these rights to other provinces were never met, and black voting rights in the Cape were withdrawn in 1936. For discussion of these and other policy changes related to the rise of Afrikaner nationalism, see Moodie 1975 and Giliomee 2003.

<sup>141</sup> *Die Transvaler* estimated that 70 000 attended (Moodie 1975, 194).

United Party, but Hertzog's continuing inclusion of English-speaking South Africans in his definition of Afrikaner unity was inimical to most and he soon dropped out of politics altogether.

Under Smuts as prime minister, South African loyalty to Britain was guaranteed, and the country declared war on Germany, although many Afrikaners felt greater affinity with the Germans.<sup>142</sup> Nationalist feelings ran high, especially after the re-enactment of the Trek as part of the centenary celebrations associated with the Voortrekker Monument in 1938, which stirred up anti-British sentiments, despite the United Party's efforts to reconcile the English- and Afrikaans-speaking groups during the 1930s. In 1939 dissident Afrikaners formed the Ossewabrandwag (ox wagon sentinel, OB), a pro-Nazi extremist paramilitary group with a Republican agenda; they banked on a British defeat, and were responsible for acts of sabotage during World War II.<sup>143</sup>

While Smuts' international reputation grew,<sup>144</sup> his position at home was weakened, as was that of the United Party. Many Afrikaners resented South Africa's entry into World War II that emphasised the country's ties – some might say subservience – to the British Empire. Malan's party had won only twenty-seven of the one hundred and fifty-two seats in Parliament in 1938, but the strengthened Reconstituted National Party increased this to forty-three in 1943, becoming the official opposition. In the 1948 elections, under Malan's manifesto 'which committed the Party to "the ultimate ideal of total apartheid"',<sup>145</sup> it won outright with seventy seats,<sup>146</sup> and Malan became prime minister.<sup>147</sup> It was clearly understood as an Afrikaner victory. Arriving in Pretoria on 1 June 1948, Malan said, 'In the past ... we felt like strangers in our own country, but today South Africa belongs to us once more. For the first time since Union, South Africa is our own.'<sup>148</sup>

Apartheid policy, still being formulated at the time, was to prove an impossible balancing act: in theoretical terms it proclaimed that it provided justice for all by promoting separate development. But this was never backed up by equal opportunity for black homelands, small, scattered and economically unviable, and real separation was in any event impossible without economic collapse in a country dependent on black labour. Understandably then, alongside Afrikaner progress emergent African resistance gradually grew in strength, in bodies such as the South African Native National Congress founded in 1912, and renamed as the ANC in 1923; it was banned by the National Party government in 1960.

**142** This had also been the case during World War I, coming so soon after the defeat of the Anglo-Boer War, which was seen by some as an opportunity to re-win Afrikaner independence, both in an abortive rebellion at the outset of the war, and by a pro-Republican delegation under Hertzog that went to the Paris peace talks in 1919, who 'saw hope in Woodrow Wilson's promise that ethnic minorities would be given national self-determination' (Moodie 1975, 38). Reporting about the centenary celebrations in Germany, Oskar Hintertrager emphasised the close ties between Afrikaners and Germans, stating in the *Koloniale Rundschau* (1938, 277) that in the ossewatrek, South Africa commemorated the heroic deeds of its Boer forefathers, of whom many were descended from German emigrants.

**143** See Marx 2008. As Germany lost ground, so too did the OB, and many of its Stormjaers (stormtroopers) were interned by Smuts, including Balthazar Johannes (John) Vorster (1915–83), who would become prime minister when Verwoerd was assassinated in 1966, and serve briefly as state president in 1978–79.

**144** As a highly respected military leader and statesman, Smuts served on the Imperial War Cabinet and was a signatory to the peace agreements of both world wars; he was also an advocate of the founding of the League of Nations after the first war, and the United Nations after the second.

**145** Bloomberg 1989, 203–204; he points out (*ibid.*, 218) that 'Malan's concept of apartheid was not a well worked-out one. It was an uneasy balance of two apparently conflicting principles: separate national self-determined homelands for Africans, and white *baaskap*' (supremacy).

**146** Because of the allocation of voting districts, the Reconstituted National Party was able to gain seventy seats in Parliament as opposed to the United Party's sixty-five, even though the latter won more votes (524 230 as opposed to 401 834). In 1953 the National Party succeeded in winning a majority and ninety-four seats, while the United Party fell further and further behind. For election details, see South African History Online, [www.sahistory.org.za/article/south-african-general-elections-1948](http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/south-african-general-elections-1948), and for comparative Afrikaans- and English-speaking population numbers, see Giliomee 2003, 485.

**147** Malan was the first prime minister of South Africa who had not been a Boer general; during the Anglo-Boer War he had studied theology in the Netherlands. He resigned as a minister of religion in 1915 to take up the editorship of *De Burger*, established to give voice to Hertzog's National Party, of which Malan was then an active member.

**148** Quoted in Thompson 1995, 186.

Whatever principles were mooted to justify apartheid, ultimately its goal was the survival of white supremacy and particularly the small Afrikaner volk in the face of an ever-increasing black majority. With this mandate, the National Party (as it was known again from the 1950s) entrenched apartheid policies in a barrage of legislation as it increased its support over the ensuing decades, and under subsequent prime ministers, Johannes Gerhardus Strijdom (1893–1958),<sup>149</sup> and particularly Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd (1901–66),<sup>150</sup> so that apartheid became embedded in South African culture.<sup>151</sup> After a referendum in 1960, in which the white electorate returned a small majority in favour of independence from Britain, South Africa became a republic the following year, and Verwoerd also withdrew from the Commonwealth in the face of the condemnation of apartheid, severing the final ties with Britain.<sup>152</sup> The Voortrekker Monument's *Official Guide* would reflect this change with brio, a reminder that the desire for freedom from British rule had been an underlying factor in its conception: 'Since 31st May, 1961, this city is again the capital of a republic – the administrative capital of the Republic of South Africa with a State President and a Parliament at the head of affairs.'<sup>153</sup> It seemed Afrikaner paramourcy had been assured.

The victory of the National Party in 1948 and its forty-six years in power were brought about not only by policy, but also by social changes of the kind discussed earlier. Poor whites in particular were drawn to ideologies that provided them with the possibility of an improved lifestyle, and Afrikanerdom in general was strengthened by economic advancement and cultural developments. It provided fertile soil for the growth of Afrikaner nationalism. Isabel Hofmeyr discusses how 'as good middle-class citizens, educated Afrikaners involved themselves actively and often humanely in this welfare work of administering to the poor. But this educated class had an overriding interest to create *Afrikaner* workers who would refill Afrikaner churches, attend Afrikaner schools and buy Afrikaner books'.<sup>154</sup>

Amongst these developments, the Voortrekker Monument project and its steering committee, the Sentrale Volksmonumentekomitee (Central National Monuments Committee, hereafter SVK),<sup>155</sup> played no small part. As M.C. Botha, secretary to the committee at the time of the Monument's inauguration, was later to write, 'The SVK immeasurably enriched Afrikaans culture and history with its programme of monument building.' He defined the time of the committee's endeavours as 'the energising period in Afrikaans cultural deployment'.<sup>156</sup> He could have added political deployment as well.

<sup>149</sup> DSAB 3, 1977, 765–773.

<sup>150</sup> DSAB 4, 1981, 730–740; Marx 2016.

<sup>151</sup> South African History Online lists the most prominent initial legislation as the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act No. 55 of 1949, the Population Registration Act No. 30 of 1950, the Group Areas Act No. 41 of 1950, the Suppression of Communism Act No. 44 of 1950, the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act No. 52 of 1951, the Bantu Authorities Act No. 68 of 1951, the Native Laws Amendment Act No. 54 of 1952, the Abolition of Passes Act No. 67 of 1952, the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act No. 49 of 1953, and the Bantu Education Act of 1953 ([www.sahistory.org.za/article/south-african-general-elections-1953](http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/south-african-general-elections-1953)).

<sup>152</sup> South Africa was readmitted to the Commonwealth in 1994, following the first democratic elections which voted the ANC into power with Nelson Mandela as president.

<sup>153</sup> *Official Guide* 1969, 10. This is the earliest version of the *Guide* where the reference to the Republic can be firmly dated, although the lack of dates or edition numbers on other versions does not preclude an earlier date. However, an undated version with the price '6/6 or 65c', which was presumably issued soon after the declaration of the Republic and the change to decimal coinage at the beginning of the 1960s, does not yet have this modification.

<sup>154</sup> Hofmeyr 1987, 103.

<sup>155</sup> Although given as 'Central National Monuments Committee' (C.N.M.C.) in the English editions of the *Official Guide* (first ed. 1955, 25), we have preferred to retain Afrikaans Sentrale Volksmonumentekomitee (SVK). There is some difficulty in translating 'volks' with its focus on the identity of a particular group, in this case Afrikaners. The translation Central People's Monuments Committee inappropriately conjures up socialist movements, while 'folk' suggests folksy cultural traditions. 'National', on the other hand, may perhaps have too much of a political connotation, yet it captures the Afrikaners' quest for identity and nationhood at the time.

<sup>156</sup> M.C. Botha, 'Voorwoord' (foreword) in Ferreria 1975, unpaginated.

For the programme at the time of the inauguration of the Voortrekker Monument in 1949, architect and Broederbond Gerard Moerdyk wrote:

The Voortrekkers paid a terrific price for this country. To their descendants the Monument is akin to a deed of transfer, proving their lawful ownership, acquired through blood and tears.

The Monument thus answers the question as to whom South Africa really belongs. The historical frieze will reveal to the uninitiated the great deeds of the Voortrekkers and the price that had to be paid in blood and tears. Filled with gratitude, and justifiable pride, the Afrikaner will add: 'This is my country. I am the heir, spiritually and physically, of the Voortrekkers who paid that price.' The Monument thus stands as the symbol of the Afrikaner's lawful ownership of this country.<sup>157</sup>

That the intended role of the Monument and its historical frieze was political as well as symbolic could hardly be clearer. And this was not merely a statement in hindsight. In his foreword to Gustav Preller's *Day-dawn in South Africa* in 1937, at the very time that the frieze was being conceptualised, the chairman of the SVK, E.G. Jansen, spoke of the importance of an understanding of South African history to clarify 'the story of the conflicts between the two dominant elements of its white population' and 'understand the differences' between them: defining difference from English-speaking South Africans was a critical element in establishing a concept of Afrikaner identity. Yet there was another group from whom they differentiated themselves even more strongly, as Jansen continues:

The reader of this volume will also understand that the Voortrekker's attitude towards the native was not a wilful desire to suppress the latter, or to deprive him of his rights, but that that attitude must be attributed to a view of life which made an axiom of the preservation of the purity of the white race, so that for the sake of self-preservation, the essential difference between the white man and the black man must be rigidly maintained, and no equality tolerated.<sup>158</sup>

It reads like a blueprint not only for the Monument but for the apartheid policy of the National Party.

## The Monument committee

In *'n Volk se hulde* (A nation's tribute), his book on the work of the SVK and their management of the Voortrekker Monument project, O.J.O. Ferreira points out how few monuments were erected during the first century of the emergence of the Afrikaner nation, putting it down to the succession of challenges and conflicts that the people faced.<sup>159</sup> In this he echoes the opening address of the chairman, E.G. Jansen, at the conference called by the FAK to discuss Afrikaner monuments in April 1931:

Our people have always been in a state of storm and stress, and therefore we have not had enough time to devote our attention to monuments. The English in the Union have some or other memorial in almost every little town. We have no memorials for the Voortrekkers ...<sup>160</sup>

While it is true that there was no major monument to the Voortrekkers, there were nonetheless a number of memorial projects associated with them, although most were located in the remote

<sup>157</sup> *Official Programme* 1949, 48.

<sup>158</sup> Jansen in Preller 1938, n.p.

<sup>159</sup> Ferreira 1970, 1.

<sup>160</sup> 'Ons volk het nog altyd in 'n toestand van storm en drang verkeer en daarom het ons nog nie genoeg kans gehad om ons aandag aan monumente te skenk nie. Die Engelssprekendes in die Unie het byna op elke dorpie een of ander gedenkteken. Ons het nog geen gedenkteken vir die Voortrekkers nie...' (Conference minutes 4.4.1931, p.1; NARSSA, Engelenburg 140/3/14/VM1930-37).





**Figure 12:** Bloukrans monument, Chieveley. 1897 (photo the authors)

countryside and little known.<sup>161</sup> An early example is the one to memorialise the victims of the 1838 massacres of Bloukrans, inaugurated on 17 February 1897 and situated near Chieveley in Natal. It takes the conventional form of a memorial obelisk with two scenes of the massacre sculpted on marble relief panels on either side of the base (fig. 12), with the inscription ‘Zij kochten ons land met hun bloed’ (They bought our land with their blood).<sup>162</sup> Also of obelisk form, but without figurative elements, was a memorial recording the names of Piet Retief and his (white) men who died at uMgungundlovu, which was erected there in 1922 (fig. 13).<sup>163</sup> A different initiative, in 1909, was the purchase of the mid-nineteenth-century building in Pietermaritzburg that was (mistakenly) identified as the church erected by the Voortrekkers to honour their Vow taken before the Blood River victory in 1838, which was turned into a museum (fig. 14).<sup>164</sup> But, although President Kruger had advocated for a memorial to the Voortrekkers when he visited the Blood River battle site on its fiftieth anniversary on 16 December 1888,<sup>165</sup> no major monument had eventuated, and the centenary was the ideal time to remedy this. As 1938 approached, however, there were many incipient moves to found monuments for individual trekker heroes, which led to anxiety that attempts to erect a suitably splendid monument to all the Voortrekkers would not come to fruition, because there were too many schemes scattered across various sites associated with the treks.<sup>166</sup>

<sup>161</sup> See Smail 1968; Oberholster 1972, 353 (index, see ‘Voortrekker[s]’).

<sup>162</sup> See *Bloukrans*.

<sup>163</sup> Coincidentally, the stonework was carried out by Sinclair & Co. that later supplied assistance for the carving of the corner figures at the Voortrekker Monument. A later plaque mentions the loss of more than thirty ‘agterryers’ – Retief’s black servants – but does not name them.

<sup>164</sup> Henning 2014. The complex history of this building is discussed in *Church of the Vow*.

<sup>165</sup> Steytler 1958, 6. Ferreira (1975, 190) states that Kruger’s proposal was for a national monument in Pretoria to record the names of all those Afrikaners who fell in battle up to the time of the ‘Vryheidsoorlog’ – the ZAR–British war of 1880–81.

<sup>166</sup> See Ferreira 1975, 2–3.





**Figure 14:** Voortrekker Museum, uMsunduzi Museum incorporating the Voortrekker Complex, Pietermaritzburg. 2015 (photo the authors)

In late 1929, when the Broederbond took the initiative to call many diverse associations together at a congress in Bloemfontein to consolidate the promotion of Afrikaner culture and language, the ongoing question of a monument was not overlooked. While the FAK was founded on this occasion to unify efforts to foster Afrikaner concerns in general, the opportunity was also taken to create a special Voortrekker monument committee. This small group gathered in Pretoria on 5 December 1930,<sup>167</sup> and proposed a meeting to bring together representatives of all the different bodies that had been raising funds for local monuments. As mentioned above, the FAK undertook to call a conference on 4 April 1931 in Bloemfontein with this goal. The minutes record the agreement that local efforts should not be compromised: groups already engaged with projects would retain their autonomy, although it was hoped that all would cooperate with the national enterprise.<sup>168</sup> A permanent committee, to be known as the Sentrale Volksmonumentekomitee (fig. 15), was formally established to centralise and coordinate efforts regarding the erection of monuments related to the Trek, and to initiate and oversee a national Voortrekker Monument to mark the centenary of the Battle of Blood River in 1938. At the conference some overlap with the function of the FAK was perceived, and, while the monument project was considered important enough to have an independent committee, it was proposed that it work closely with the FAK: five of the SVK's fourteen members were ex officio from the FAK executive.

A number of people who had been on the first small committee and were to serve on the SVK, founded soon after, became very familiar figures in our research, as they were to play a significant

<sup>167</sup> A letter in NARSSA (Engelenburg 140/3/14/VM1930-37) dated 18.8.1930 from M.L. du Toit, inviting Engelenburg to a meeting at his home, suggests that there might have been informal preliminary discussions.

<sup>168</sup> The goal of not alienating other groups was reflected at the very first meeting of the SVK, which recorded that local groups working on other projects should continue if they so wished (SVK 1.8.1931: 2).



**Figure 15:** Participants at first meeting of Voortrekker Monument committee, later called SVK (*Volksblad* 4.4.1931; courtesy of NARSSA, Engelenburg 140/3/14)

part in guiding the Monument project.<sup>169</sup> The chairman of the first group set up by the FAK, advocate Ernest George Jansen (1881–1959), was to chair the SVK also, as well as its Dagbestuurkomitee (management or executive committee, hereafter Dagbestuur) (fig. 16).<sup>170</sup> As a founder member of the Akademie in 1909, and of the FAK in 1929, and a staunch member of the Broederbond (and one of those who refused to resign when Smuts made it mandatory for civil servants to do so),<sup>171</sup> Jansen had long been involved with the promotion of Afrikaner culture. Based in Pietermaritzburg, he had, for example, been involved in the initiative to restore the building believed to be the Church of the Vow. His dedication to the Afrikaner cause is underlined by his membership in the Independence Deputation that attempted to win the restoration of the Boer republics at the Paris negotiations of 1919 in the wake of World War I.<sup>172</sup> A member of the National Party from 1915, Jansen was elected MP for Vryheid in 1921, and held key portfolios in government, including Minister of Native Affairs from 1929–34 under Hertzog and 1948–50 under Malan.<sup>173</sup> He was particularly respected as Speaker of the House of Assembly in Cape Town, a position he held from 1924–29 and again from 1934–43. Jansen was appointed governor-general of South Africa in 1950, but nonetheless continued to chair the SVK and its Dagbestuur until his death in 1959, although he had to be absent from a number of meetings because of his many duties. Having been chair of the inauguration committee for the 1949 celebrations, he was subsequently appointed chair of the Monument’s Board of Control, although he resigned from that position after he became governor-general.<sup>174</sup> Jansen’s abilities and reputation – and convictions – were undoubtedly very important in driving the Voortrekker Monument project.<sup>175</sup>

<sup>169</sup> Ferreira (1975, 4) lists ‘adv. E.G. Jansen, mev. (genl.) J. Kemp, mev. M.M. Jansen, dr. N.J. van der Merwe, prof. dr. T.J. Hugo, dr. Gustav Preller, prof. dr. S.P. Engelbrecht en mnre. H. Pierneef, M.L. du Toit, A.K. Bot, J.H. Greybe en I.M. Lombard’.

<sup>170</sup> Portraits of the same committee members appeared in *The Friend* 23.7.1936. Revealingly, in Moerdyk’s files, *The Friend* portraits have been individually cut out and arranged around the architect’s own photo placed centrally on the page (UP Archives, Moerdyk MDK 0347T).

<sup>171</sup> Serfontein 1978, 197.

<sup>172</sup> [www.archontology.org/nations/south\\_africa/sa\\_gg/jansen.php](http://www.archontology.org/nations/south_africa/sa_gg/jansen.php)

<sup>173</sup> For Jansen, see *DSAB* 5, 1987, 378–382. While Jansen was seen by Afrikaner extremists as a conciliatory figure, it is nonetheless recounted that so staunch were his Afrikaner loyalties that he refused to take the oath of allegiance to the British monarch as governor-general, or wear the ceremonial dress, even though he was the crown’s representative. See <http://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/first-state-president-south-africa-charles-robberts-blackie-swart-dies>

<sup>174</sup> Report of the Board of Control, 5.7.1952 (HF Archives BHR).

<sup>175</sup> He also published on the Great Trek, for example, Jansen 1938 and 1939.



**Figure 16:** Jansen with members of the SVK. c. 1936 From left to right. Front: Senator F.S. Malan (government representative), Ernest George Jansen (chair), J.J. Scheepers (secretary until 1946). Back: Ivanhoe Makepeace Lombard (treasurer), B.H.J. van Rensburg (director of War Museum of Boer Republics), M.C. Booysen (school inspector), Gerard Moerdyk (architect) (photo courtesy of Kirchhoff files)

Another member of the initiating committee was his wife, Martha Mabel (Mabel) Jansen, née Pellisier (1889–1979), who was independently active in Afrikaner circles and evidently more radical in her views than her husband. Trained as a teacher, ‘from 1917 to 1929 she did pioneer work in Afrikaans cultural life in Natal and emerged as a champion of the Afrikaans language’.<sup>176</sup> As well as promoting Afrikaans in schools in general, she was involved in the establishment of the first fully Afrikaans-medium school in Pietermaritzburg, the introduction of Afrikaans Taalbond examinations, and the production of an early Afrikaans grammar book in 1918. Later, in 1930, she and her husband also founded the Voortrekkers, the Afrikaner equivalent of the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, including both boys and girls. She was the first woman member of the Akademie in 1920, campaigned for the vote for women, and founded the Vroue Nasionale Party (Women’s National Party) in 1922. Appointed deputy leader of the National Party in Natal in 1933, Mabel Jansen was to disapprove of the fusion government when Hertzog’s party joined Smuts to create the United Party, and she became a founder member of the Purified National Party. The only woman on the first executive of the FAK in 1929, she was awarded its medal of honour for service to the nation in 1974 (fig. 17). Although she resigned from the Monument’s Board of Control at the same time as her husband, she continued to be recorded as a member of the SVK throughout its existence from 1931 to 1968. It is hardly surprising that she and her husband figure prominently in the first edition of the *Official Guide*, which has a photograph of them both as its frontispiece.<sup>177</sup> However, while she punctiliously sent her apologies each time, Mabel Jansen was absent from most meetings of the SVK and the Dagbestuur from the later 1940s, possibly due to serious illness recorded in the minutes.<sup>178</sup> The last that she actually attended seem to have been the full SVK meetings on 21.11.1952 and 13.11.1953.

Ivanhoe Makepeace (Ivan) Lombard (1880–1971), who acted as secretary for the initial meeting of the monuments committee, was another founder member of the FAK, who was also awarded its

<sup>176</sup> DSAB 5, 1987, 382–383 (quote 382).

<sup>177</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 3.

<sup>178</sup> SVK 15/16.1.1942: 2.

**Figure 17:** Mrs Martha Mabel Jansen with other members of first executive committee of Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Association (FAK), including I.M. Lombard behind her. 1929 ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federasie\\_van\\_Afrikaanse\\_Kultuurvereniginge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federasie_van_Afrikaanse_Kultuurvereniginge))



medal of honour, in 1966 (figs 16, 17). Like Mabel Jansen he had trained as a teacher. ‘The cultural upliftment and economic independence of the Afrikaner became his life’s work, and he eventually resigned his teaching post to devote all his time and energy to the organisation of this struggle.’<sup>179</sup> He was secretary to the Broederbond from 1922 to 1952, and also served the FAK in this capacity from 1929 to 1937, and was on its executive from 1937 to 1966. In addition, he was secretary for the Akademie from 1939 to 1947, and its treasurer from 1947 to 1957. Given his many commitments, it is understandable that he declared himself unable to continue as secretary of the SVK after its initial meetings. Nonetheless, he took on the important role of treasurer from 1933 to 1968, and from 1948 was the SVK’s vice chair, deputising for Jansen when the latter’s state duties kept him away, and serving again under Dr William Nicol, who was elected to the chair after Jansen’s death in 1959. Lombard’s long-standing contribution was recognised in his being elected to the chair in his own right after Nicol’s death for the SVK’s final meeting in 1968.<sup>180</sup>

Two further members of the initial committee were to play an important part on the SVK, particularly as key members of its *Historiese Komitee* (historical committee), which guided decisions about the content of the Voortrekker Monument’s narrative frieze: Prof. Stephanus Petrus Engelbrecht and Dr Gustav Schoeman Preller (fig. 18). Preller (1875–1943) was a journalist who, after his return from internment in India during the Anglo-Boer War, became assistant editor and editor to a number of newspapers, including *De Volksstem* (1903–25) and *Ons Vaderland* (1925–36).<sup>181</sup> Involved in the founding of the Afrikaanse Taalgenootskap (Afrikaans Language Association) in 1905, and in 1910 *Die Brandwag*, a magazine that did much to promote Afrikaans literature and history, Preller campaigned tirelessly for the recognition of Afrikaans.<sup>182</sup> Like the Jansens, he was a founder member of the Akademie, and like them was honoured with life membership. Preller was also active as a historian who recorded oral and personal written accounts of the Voortrekkers in six volumes titled *Voortrekkermense* (Voortrekker people; 1918–25, 1938), and published the biographies of prominent Voortrekker leaders, as well as many other historical books and articles, and the screenplay for a film about the Voortrekkers made in 1916. He began writing articles on Piet Retief in *De Volksstem* in 1905, and published them as a book in 1906, which ‘ran through ten printings and

<sup>179</sup> DSAB 5, 1987, 458–459.

<sup>180</sup> For membership and positions in the SVK across its existence, see Ferreira 1975, 8–16.

<sup>181</sup> The newspapers went through a number of title changes. *De Volksstem* was later *De Volkstem*, then *Die Volkstem*, and *Ons Vaderland* became *Die Vaderland*.

<sup>182</sup> Although his own written Afrikaans was idiosyncratic, and still owed a great deal to Dutch. For Preller, see DSAB 1, 1968, 644–647.



sold more than 25,000 copies by 1930’;<sup>183</sup> it was followed by the extensively annotated diary of Louis Trichardt (1917), and a biography of Andries Pretorius (1937). Isabel Hofmeyr writes of Preller, ‘it was largely his work that popularized the movement that we know today as the Great Trek’.<sup>184</sup> Although Preller lacked an academic training in history, and was open to criticism for his approach – which he maintained was ‘as objective as was consistent with his duty as an Afrikaner’<sup>185</sup> – he enjoyed a high reputation as a historian who made Afrikaners aware of their historical past. When he retired as an editor in 1936, he was appointed state historian of South Africa.

An equally significant historian, although very different in his far more academic approach, was Dr Stephanus Petrus (Fanie) Engelbrecht (1891–1977), another committee member (fig. 18). Engelbrecht had taken his PhD in the Netherlands, with a thesis on the Nederlandse Herformde Kerk, but chose a career at the University of Pretoria over one in the church.<sup>186</sup> He was made Professor of the History of Christianity in 1924 (also lecturing in Transvaal history), and appointed Dean of Theology in 1930 until his retirement in 1956, after which he worked as keeper in the archives of the Nederlandse Herformde Kerk. Although obviously not a founding member of the Akademie like Jansen and Preller, being considerably younger, he was secretary of its Transvaal circle from 1930–35, a member of council from 1937–42, and was awarded a medal of honour by the Akademie for his contribution to cultural history in 1937.

**Figure 18:** G.S. Preller (left) and S.P. Engelbrecht (right), members of Historiese Komitee, SVK (Left: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gustav\\_Preller.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gustav_Preller.jpg) – Right: photo courtesy of Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk archives photo collection)

<sup>183</sup> Thompson 1985, 180.

<sup>184</sup> Hofmeyr 2014, 522. In her excellent account of Preller’s success in ‘Popularizing History’, she writes that the Trek ‘has become the key myth of Afrikaner nationalism, thanks largely to Preller’s written, and more importantly his visual, version of the Trek, an interpretation that since the 1910s has been widely received as the dominant one’ (ibid.). She is here referring to his silent film, *De Voortrekker* (1916), which was widely cited in SVK discussions.

<sup>185</sup> DSAB 1, 1968, 647.

<sup>186</sup> For Engelbrecht, see DSAB 5, 1987, 242–243.



**Figure 19:** Frans Vredenrijk Engelenburg, senior SVK member (by Frans Oerder – Fees-album 1909–59, PD-SA; <https://af.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=62858>)

Also very active in the initial stages of the SVK was Frans Vredenrijk Engelenburg (1863–1938), whose intellect and experience made him a wise counsellor to the committee (fig. 19). When he attempted to resign on the grounds of ill health in 1932, the committee asked Jansen to beg the ‘old gentleman’ (ou heer) to stay on as an honorary member,<sup>187</sup> and he agreed to continue to serve. His contributions ranged from being one of the select small group that drew up the first SVK Manifesto in 1931, to practical proposals such as the need for a small executive committee to move the project forward,<sup>188</sup> although this was only implemented as the Dagbestuur in 1935. There are many letters with valuable suggestions from him in the Engelenburg file in the South African National Archives, which is an important source of SVK documents in the 1930s. Trained as a lawyer at the University of Leiden, Engelenburg soon followed a career as a journalist, and immigrated to South Africa in answer to Paul Kruger’s call for young Dutch men to come to the ZAR after the defeat of the British in 1881. There he took up the editorship of *De Volksstem* in Pretoria, where he was soon ‘a leader in every social and cultural sphere, in addition to his influence as a journalist ...’<sup>189</sup> Influential in politics, although largely behind the scenes,

Engelenburg was a supporter of Kruger and in 1925 published *’n Onbekende Paul Kruger* (An unknown Paul Kruger); equally close to Louis Botha, he published his biography in 1929. Despite being Dutch by birth, he was active in promoting Afrikaans as a language, both through the press, and as a 1909 founder of the Akademie and a long-serving member.<sup>190</sup> After Engelenburg’s death, his home, said by some to have been designed by architect Sir Herbert Baker, was turned into a museum and became the Akademie headquarters.

Two further names crop up frequently in the SVK papers. Thomas Johannes (T.J.) Hugo (1886–1963) was a founder member of the FAK, served on its first executive and, like so many SVK members, also belonged to the Akademie.<sup>191</sup> He was an academic who took his doctorate in Philosophy and Psychology at Groningen in the Netherlands. After lecturing at the University of Cape Town, he was from 1925–51 Professor of Philosophy at the Transvaal University College, which became the University of Pretoria in 1930.<sup>192</sup> Not an academic, but contributing the chapter ‘South Africa after the Union’ to the *Cambridge history of the British Empire*,<sup>193</sup> was François Stephanus (F.S.) Malan (1871–1941), who studied for an LL.B. degree at Cambridge, and spent his early years as a journalist and editor of the Cape newspaper *Ons Land* (fig. 16). He entered politics when elected an MP in 1900. Known for his relatively liberal views (he supported the Cape franchise, which allowed limited voting rights for blacks, for example), he held various ministerial positions until losing his seat in 1924. He was elected to Senate in 1927 and served on it until his death, and was its president in 1940–41. He too was a supporter of the Afrikaans language, and a founder member of the Akademie.<sup>194</sup>

Mention must also be made of the two honorary secretaries of the SVK, who were crucial to the running of the committee and must have spent extraordinary amounts of time on the project,

<sup>187</sup> SVK 6.10.1932: p.1.

<sup>188</sup> SVK 1.8.1931: 11.

<sup>189</sup> DSAB 1, 1968, 277.

<sup>190</sup> Linda Brink, ‘Biografie van die taalstryder F.V. Engelenburg tot met die stigting van die S.A. Akademie in 1909’, MA thesis, North-West University, 2010 (<http://dspace.nwu.ac.za/handle/10394/6488>).

<sup>191</sup> DSAB 3, 1977, 422–423.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Vol. 8, 1936, 641–661.

<sup>194</sup> DSAB 1, 1968, 495–499.



attending and writing up all the meetings of the SVK and its many subcommittees, and handling the vast correspondence. The first, Johannes Jacobus (J.J.) Scheepers (1893–1989), was a school-teacher who said he would do it ‘for love of the task’ (uit liefde vir die saak) when he was chosen as secretary at the first meeting (fig. 16).<sup>195</sup> He had already shown an interest in Afrikaner memorialising when he had campaigned for a monument to those who died in the first battle of the Anglo-Boer War at Talanakop near Dundee, where his father had been killed when Scheepers was only six years old.<sup>196</sup> The resulting memorial plaque (towards which he personally donated over £50) was installed in 1929 on the Nederduitse Gereformeerde (Dutch Reformed) Church in Dundee that had been designed by Gerard Moerdyk in the early 1920s; the architect was also involved in the memorial with its flanking caryatid figures of mourning Boer women by Anton van Wouw.<sup>197</sup> Scheepers thus had early contact with these two men who would figure so prominently in the Voortrekker Monument project, and also with Gustav Preller who assisted in the Talanakop monument campaign. Scheepers apparently attended the initial Voortrekker Monument conference as a representative of the Handhawersbond, an association set up on the Reef in 1930 to vigorously ‘insist on equal language rights to which we are legally entitled but of which we see precious little in practice’.<sup>198</sup> In the run up to the centenary, he would be given eighteen months leave with pay by the Transvaal Education Department so that he could devote himself to the organisation of the 1938 celebrations.<sup>199</sup> Little else is recorded about this important player in the Monument project,<sup>200</sup> although he continued to hold the position of honorary secretary until his resignation for personal reasons in 1946, when M.C. Botha, secretary of the ATKV, was nominated in his place (fig. 20).<sup>201</sup> A member of the National Party, Michiel Coenraad Botha (1913–93)<sup>202</sup> would be elected MP for Roodepoort in 1953 and was later Deputy Minister, then Minister, of Bantu Administration between 1960 and 1977,<sup>203</sup> serving under prime ministers Hendrik Verwoerd and John Vorster. He too gave the SVK long service, through the period of the inauguration until the committee’s disbandment in November 1968. That the work of the secretaries was highly appreciated by the SVK is suggested not only by the honorarium voted for each at the end of his term,<sup>204</sup> but also by the invitation to Scheepers to attend the final meeting of the committee on 21 November 1968 as a guest.

There are many others who made valuable contributions to the SVK and its numerous committees, and it is obviously not possible in the context of this book to give individual consideration to each of them. But these few brief biographical outlines may serve to demonstrate the stature of those who devoted so much time to serving on the SVK, and the overlap with many other key Afrikaner cultural and political bodies. They also reveal the remarkable fact that three of the early figures, Mabel Jansen, S.P. Engelbrecht and Ivan Lombard, were still members of the committee at



**Figure 20:** M.C. Botha, secretary of SVK, 1946–68 (photo *Dagbreek se Speciale Monument Uitgawe*, undated; courtesy of UP Archives, Moerdyk files)

**195** SVK 1.8.1931: 2.

**196** For details of the campaign, which was based in the Transvaal as well as Dundee, and for which Scheepers acted as secretary and treasurer on different occasions, see his 1983 book, *Die geskiedenis van die Dundee-monument*, which includes transcripts of many of the articles that he wrote for the press, apt preparation for his later contribution to publicity for the Voortrekker Monument. The contention around this memorial would no doubt also have readied him for controversial issues at the later Monument.

**197** See Fisher and Clarke 2010, 152–153.

**198** Quoted in Moodie 1975, 147.

**199** *Dagbestuur* 28.9.1937: 4a.

**200** Scheepers’ continuing support for the Afrikaner cause may be surmised from the fact that he published his book about the Talanakop memorial at the age of ninety. We are grateful to Malene Schulze and assistants at the Voortrekker Monument and to Pam McFadden of the Talana Museum, who uncovered information about Scheepers.

**201** *Dagbestuur* 26.4.1946: 2 and 3.

**202** Little detail to identify Botha is provided in texts related to the SVK, but Ferreira (1975) identifies him as a minister ‘Sy Edele M.C. Botha’ (ibid., 10) and gives some biographical details (ibid., 15–16). See also <http://remembered.co.za/obituary/view/16288> and [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michiel\\_Coenraad\\_Botha](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michiel_Coenraad_Botha)

**203** Botha’s promotion of Afrikaans, introducing a decree in 1974 that it be a language of instruction in black schools, was to lead directly to the Soweto uprising amongst schoolchildren in 1976; for them, Afrikaans was a language of oppression. The many ensuing deaths are memorialised each year on 16 June, Youth Day.

**204** *Dagbestuur* 26.6.1946: 2 and SVK 21.11.1968: 11.

the time the SVK was disestablished in 1968; they had been members since the very first meeting of the SVK on 1 August 1931 – no less than thirty-seven years! But the laurels must go to Lombard, who not only continued to attend with great regularity, including the frequent meetings of the Dagbestuur (of which Engelbrecht was not a member), but often deputised for the chairman from the late 1940s. Such dedication – also from other committee members who joined the SVK later – indicates something of the importance of the Voortrekker Monument to Afrikanerdom, and of the goals it embodied, as would later be expressed in the Monument's *Official Guide*.

May it strengthen your love for a country for which so hard a struggle has been fought – that struggle of which the ox-wagon in the basement of the Monument bears token. Pause a moment at the cenotaph to pay homage to a people which endured so much suffering; and renew your faith in God Who has led us thus far – The flame of that faith will never perish.<sup>205</sup>

Ultimately the work of the SVK spread across a myriad committees with numerous participants, which we can track through the recorded minutes and other documents that have been conserved in archives listed in our Introduction, and no doubt extended to many informal and unrecorded meetings as well, drawing in the participation of a wide cross-section of Afrikaners.<sup>206</sup> Initially the main SVK committee met regularly to debate important issues such as the nature of the Monument and the specific events it would memorialise. However, the size of the committee and the fact that its members were scattered across South Africa, particularly once it included government representatives after 1936, made it difficult to assemble: it became increasingly a forum for reporting and ratifying the recommendations of smaller committees. Nonetheless, it met twenty-seven times between its founding on 1 August 1931 and 26 June 1937, when the secretary stopped numbering the meetings in the minutes, and it continued to play an important role, carrying on its work until 1968, by which time it had assisted in the creation of not only the Voortrekker Monument itself, but also the associated monuments at Blood River, Pietermaritzburg and Winburg.

Increasingly, the work of the SVK was delegated to the Dagbestuur, the management committee, which held its first meeting on 29 May 1935. It became the key decision-making body, chaired by Jansen and serviced by Secretary Scheepers and Treasurer Lombard, with varying additional members,<sup>207</sup> and the architect Moerdyk in attendance from the time of his appointment in 1936. Also important was the Vormkomitee or Form Committee, set up in January 1936 to consolidate SVK ideas on the form of the Monument and the choice of historical panels, when the government became a player in the project. With members such as professors Hugo, Pienaar and Engelbrecht, Senator Malan, J.J. Jordaan and Scheepers, it served its purpose well although it apparently operated only until the decision had been reached to award the Monument commission to Gerard Moerdyk, recommended to the SVK on 7 April 1936. And on that occasion a Boukomitee (Building Committee) was established, comprising Hugo, Engelbrecht, Hoogenhout, Jansen, Scheepers and Lombard, to work with the architect and urgently draw up a contract, with an immediate grant of £1 000 so that work could begin at once. Another crucial committee was the one that visited pos-

<sup>205</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 10.

<sup>206</sup> Prolific correspondence in the HF Archives (see HF Archives SVK vol. 19 file 13.5.1) bears witness to the breadth of interest that the Monument project attracted, ranging from letters drawing attention to the existence of still living relatives of Voortrekkers – even one from Mrs E.M. Coleman, 21.10.1938 (HF Archives [old numbering] VTM vol. B5) alluding to a niece of the English translator Thomas Halstead, who died with Retief, and the correct spelling of his name – to others making suggestions about the form of the Monument and items that it might house and display, and yet others with fundraising ideas.

<sup>207</sup> Those named as present in the Dagbestuur minutes vary enough to suggest that members were co-opted for different agendas, although a printed letterhead of 23.11.1936 listing Dagbestuur membership adds Mrs M. Jansen, Mrs S. Boers and Prof. T.J. Hugo to the ex officio members, with P.I. Hoogenhout's name typed in on 22.4.1937 (NHKA, Engelbrecht P1/2/3/8/10). More than a decade later, at the time of the inauguration of the Monument, Dagbestuur members were listed in the *Official Programme* (1949, 58) as E.G. Jansen, I.M. Lombard, M.C. Botha, J.E. Holloway, T.J. Hugo, M.M. Jansen, E.C. van der Lingen and G. Moerdyk (advisory).

sible sites for the Monument and took its findings to a conference in October 1936, to be discussed later in this chapter. There were also committees formed to oversee arrangements for the centenary and the inauguration of the Monument, and a Board of Management set up to manage it once it was complete.

Of key importance for the historical frieze was the *Historiese Komitee*, the historical committee set up by the SVK on 7 April 1936, but first meeting on 4 September 1937, for which Preller and Engelbrecht had been nominated from the outset. Also at the first meeting were the Rev. P. Nel, selected as chair, I.D. Bosman and M. Basson,<sup>208</sup> as well as Moerdyk and Scheepers, and L.S. Steenkamp<sup>209</sup> travelling from Natal, who sent apologies for lateness. Additional members were the Afrikaner historian Hendrik Bernardus Thom, professor at Stellenbosch University, and two experts on Voortrekker dress, Kotie Roodt-Coetzee and Gertruida (Trudie) Anna Kestell.<sup>210</sup> In the *Historiese Komitee*'s focus on the accuracy of the representations of the treks, it had a more precise purpose than other subcommittees.<sup>211</sup> However, it should be noted that there is some confusion in the naming of the early, relatively informal subcommittees similar to this one. The very first SVK subcommittee seemed to have no title at all, but transactions were later recorded for 'Historiese', 'Vorm-', 'Paneel-' and 'Boukomitees' (Historical, Form, Panel and Building committees), and even a *Historiese Paneelkomitee* (Historical Panel Committee), all addressing aspects of the Monument, and all reporting to the SVK. As they drew on a fairly limited number of participants, the memberships overlap, making it uncertain whether they were separate committees or variant names of the same committee or committees.<sup>212</sup>

## Funding

The specific form that the Monument and its frieze were to take will be discussed in detail in the next chapters, but it is the aim of the remaining sections here to outline the broader issues around the Monument that provided a context for architectural and sculptural decisions. It is worth noting right away that there was a groundswell of opinion that a practical commemorative project, such as a hospital, school or museum, would not serve.<sup>213</sup> Only a dedicated monument would suitably honour the Voortrekkers' achievements and show proper respect. In a newspaper report in

<sup>208</sup> See Basson 1935, 10–13, 16–28.

<sup>209</sup> *DSAB* 5, 1987, 731–732.

<sup>210</sup> Grobler (2001, 56) omits Bosman although he lists H.B. Thom, Trudie Kestell and Kotie Roodt-Coetzee, who were added at the SVK meeting of 15/16.1.1942 when the work on the reliefs was about to begin. Rather confusingly, those minutes state that L. Steenkamp of Ladysmith should also be added, although he already had membership status at the 1937 meeting. Trudie Kestell (1891–1974), daughter of the influential Dutch Reformed minister from Pietermaritzburg, John Daniel Kestell (see *Church of the Vow*), was an expert on Voortrekker clothing (Kestell 1962) (see *DSAB* 5, 1987, 405–406). In her biography of Laurika Postma, Pillman (1984, 44–45) records that Trudie Kestell visited the studio regularly to check on the sculptors' accuracy in this regard. She also mentions that Kotie Roodt-Coetzee of the National Cultural History Open-air Museum lent them clothing so that they could study it (see also Grobler and Pretorius 2008, 118–119). It is recorded too that Annie Neethling assisted with her knowledge of history (Pillman 1984, 44–45). Such details provide further confirmation of the concern to ensure historical accuracy in the details of the frieze.

<sup>211</sup> The importance placed on accurate detail at the time when the frieze was conceptualised is also reflected in the two volumes on the Voortrekkers' lifestyle and material culture published by G.H. van Rooyen in 1938 and 1940.

<sup>212</sup> This issue and the membership of the various committees are discussed in Schwenke and Grobler 2013. It is beyond the scope of our book, with its focus on a more art historical approach to the frieze, to pursue the identities and influence of individual committee members in detail, which Astrid Schwenke's doctoral thesis on the Voortrekker Monument frieze (Cultural History, University of Pretoria, not yet available on the university's repository) may elucidate (see Schwenke and Grobler 2013, 138 n 86).

<sup>213</sup> See Chapter 2 n 127.

*Die Volkstem* in August 1931, where Secretary Scheepers named the SVK committee members and reported on the first meeting on 1 August 1931, the concept was spelt out:

It must be a memorial that will inspire white South Africa through all the ages. To unite history and art requires money and we, who enjoyed the civilization brought by those men, must again show our patriotism by our actions.<sup>214</sup>

Already the article draws attention to the fact that, although they were inspired by their Afrikaner ideals, the SVK and its members were initially preoccupied with a very practical issue – raising funds to erect the Monument. At the first formal meeting of the SVK after the Bloemfontein conference, it was estimated that a monument would cost between £15 000 and £30 000,<sup>215</sup> a modest enough sum when considered in relation to the actual cost by the time of the inauguration in 1949 (more than £350 000), but an enormous amount for the Depression years. In a letter to the SVK secretary dated 22 February 1932, Engelenburg expressed his disquiet, writing that ‘the people are caught up in a severe economic depression, of which the deepest point has not yet been reached. The people cannot or will not give money for idealistic interests’ (his emphasis).<sup>216</sup> The same concern is reflected in the SVK records, where it was even debated whether fundraising was ethical in a context of dire poverty.<sup>217</sup> Nonetheless, it was felt that the initiation of such an important task could not be delayed.

The SVK’s Manifesto, dated November 1931, affirmed that

While our central committee is aware how there are circumstances today which could possibly get in the way of a shared and successful result, no one doubts the firm will of the people to overcome every difficulty to fulfil their uniform wish, namely to erect an impressive monument for present and future generations which through the ages will bear witness to the staunch and spiritually uplifting virtues of the Voortrekkers.

The committee is aware that the present is a difficult time to ask the people for contributions, yet feels that the matter is of such a nature that it cannot delay in taking up its task.<sup>218</sup>

There was also the difficulty that, as already mentioned, fundraising had been under way for various other projects associated with the upcoming centenary, usually focused on a single Voortrekker figure with local connections, as well as some related to the Anglo-Boer War, and the SVK did not want to undermine these efforts. Nevertheless, a plea was made that there should be a country-wide focus on a major monument to honour all the Voortrekkers. The project was framed

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**214** ‘Dit moet ’n gedenkteken wees wat deur al die eeue heen blank S.A. sal inspireer. / Om geskiedenis en kuns to verenig vereis geld en weer sal ons, wat die beskawing geniet wat deur daardie manne gebring is, ons vaderlandsliefde deur dade moet openbaar’ (*Die Volkstem* 13.8.1931).

**215** SVK 1.8.1931: 3.

**216** ‘Tegelyk is die volk geraak in ’n zwaar ekonomiese depressie, waarvan die diepste punt nog nie bereik is nie. Die mense kan nie of wil nie geld uitgee vir ideale belange nie’ (NARSSA, Engelenburg 140/3/14/VM1930–37).

**217** See, for example, SVK 14.4.1932: unnumbered p.1, where it was suggested that expenditure on a monument could be considered wasteful ‘when sections of the people were facing starvation’ (terwyl gedeeltes van die volk broodsgreke ly). It is noteworthy in this regard that SVK members served without compensation other than occasional expenses; the small honorarium paid to each honorary secretary at the end of his term was exceptional. Nonetheless, a considerable portion of the funds raised were used to cover administrative expenses, and it should not be overlooked that members may well have benefited by enhancing their public profiles in Afrikaner circles and may even have advanced their careers by serving on the SVK.

**218** ‘Terwyl ons Sentrale Komitee voel hoe daar vandag omstandighede is wat moontlik ’n gesamenlike en suksesvolle optrede sou kan hinder, durf niemand agter twyfel aan die vaste volkswil om elke moeilikheid te oorwin ter bereiking van die uniforme wens, n.l. om vir die huidige en latere geslagte ’n indrukwekkende monument op te rig wat in lengte van dae sal getuig van die stoere en sieleverheffende deugde van die Voortrekkers. ... Die Komitee besef dat dit nou ’n moeilike tyd is om die volk vir bydraes to vra, dog voel tewens dat die saak van so ’n aard is dat hy nie met die aanvang van sy taak kan wag nie.’ Engelenburg sent Scheepers a draft of the Manifesto, drawn up by himself, Jansen and Engelbrecht, on 9.9.1931, and a corrected final copy was circulated on 26.10.1931, for publication the next month (NARSSA, Engelenburg 140-3/14/VM1930-37).

as a national quest from the outset, with the rhetorical question: ‘Is gratitude towards ancestors a redundant characteristic for a nation?’<sup>219</sup> The challenge then was to find viable ways of raising funds under unfavourable circumstances.

The call went out to churches, associations and Dingaan’s Day committees for contributions and ideas. The very first donation of £1 had already been received on 19 May 1931 from a well-wisher in Lüderitz in South West Africa (present-day Namibia, an area which would be included in fundraising for the Monument and the celebrations in 1938 and 1949), and other support from individuals followed.<sup>220</sup> But, despite much publicity in the press,<sup>221</sup> only a trickle of donations was forthcoming, and efforts to rally support from particular associations were largely unsuccessful. For example, a call for all members of the Akademie in its *Bulletin* of June 1931 to pledge £1 a year failed.<sup>222</sup> A plea at precisely the same time in the *Cape Times* (20.6.1931) for support for the Mayor’s Soup Kitchen Fund to aid the desperate plight of the unemployed gives some idea of the grim economic context. Thus, although requests for special collections made at various Dingaan’s Day festivals across the country during the 1930s produced some results, the actual sums were very low.<sup>223</sup> The sum raised from special collections on Dingaan’s Day in 1932, for example, only amounted to £20.10.11d.<sup>224</sup>

In September 1932 it was proposed that commemorative stamps should be produced, both for publicity and to raise funds, an idea suggested in a letter from M.A. Oberholzer of Ladybrand.<sup>225</sup> By the following meeting, the postal regulations had been investigated and it was decided to put the proposal to the Postmaster General.<sup>226</sup> In November there were lengthy discussions on the topic, during which it was agreed that the SVK should seek suitable designs, which it would ask the Postmaster to adjudicate.<sup>227</sup> Scheepers proposed that images of a Boer woman, a Voortrekker and an ox wagon would be appropriate: ‘purely historical, they would deprive detractors of the opportunity to complain that Boer ideals were being thrust down their throats’,<sup>228</sup> a comment that implies that SVK efforts were not universally appreciated. The committee wanted high-quality designs: there were suggestions that Jansen get in touch with the painter Jacob Hendrik Pierneef, and that one design should be based on the sculptor Van Wouw’s ‘Boerevrou’.<sup>229</sup>

The Afrikaner Broederbond had promised a loan of £100, and Lombard was sure that the FAK would assist with the additional £150 required to initiate the scheme with the printing of stamps, with the hope of a yield of about £4 000 per year.<sup>230</sup> At the following meeting it was announced that 900 000 1d stamps with an ox wagon, 900 000 2d with a Voortrekker, and 600 000 3d with a Boer

**219** ‘Is erkentlikheid jeens voorvaders ’n oorbodige eienskap by ’n nasie?’ (ibid.).

**220** There were significant donations from figures such as wealthy philanthropist Sir Abe Bailey. Moerdyk took a 1.5% reduction in his architect’s fee. The Minister of Transport made arrangements for a 1/- deduction per month for railway staff who wished to do so as a contribution, and later state employees could also do this. Personal contributions were the royalties from Ethel Campbell’s poetry collection, *The Voortrekkers*, A. Dreyer’s *Die Voortrekkers en hul kerk*, and S.P. Engelbrecht’s *Schetsen van de Transvaal*.

**221** SVK members, particularly Scheepers, were very active in sending letters and articles about the Monument project to newspapers, and encouraging others to do so.

**222** See letter from Engelenburg to Scheepers (22.2.1932), saying that even the ‘aristocrats’ of the Akademie were unwilling to pay an extra £1 per year for the Monument (NARSSA, Engelenburg 140/3/14/VM1930, 37).

**223** Provincial committees were also delegated to raise funds locally and went about it in different ways, such as appeals to mayors in the OFS, and functions and bazaars in Natal.

**224** SVK 30.3.1933: p.1.

**225** SVK 10.9.1932: p.1.

**226** SVK 6.10.1932: pp.1–2.

**227** SVK 24.11.1932: pp.1–2.

**228** ‘Dis suiwer histories en ontnem teenstanders die kans om te kan kla dat Boere-ideale hulle die keel afgedruk word’ (SVK 24.11.1932: p.2).

**229** This would have been a reference to Van Wouw’s *Noitjie van die onderveld*, which is clearly the source for the stamp design. The male Voortrekker seems to have been based on one of his Boer figures at the base of the monument for Paul Kruger.

**230** SVK 24.11.1932: pp.1–2.



**Figure 21:** Complete bilingual set of Voortrekker Monument stamps, overprinted S.W.A. (South West Africa), 1933–36 (photo courtesy of roydinsdaleebay@aol.com)

maiden would go on sale from 15 April 1933,<sup>231</sup> and a further ½d stamp depicting the so-called Church of the Vow was issued in 1936 (fig. 21). There was a concerted effort to publicise the stamps through affiliated associations and in the press, both Afrikaans and English, and by bringing them to the attention of philatelists; a special Saturday for the sale of stamps was planned,<sup>232</sup> and Scheepers even wrote to the Teachers' Association asking teachers to encourage their pupils to urge their parents to buy them.<sup>233</sup> The General Manager of the African Broadcasting Company also offered to assist 'by the broadcast of appropriate announcements from all our Stations'.<sup>234</sup> Engelenburg personally donated £50 to support publicity.<sup>235</sup> While the stamps were not quite as lucrative as had been expected,<sup>236</sup> they provided steady income, and further stamps were issued for the 1938 centenary (fig. 22), and for the 1949 inauguration of the Monument (fig. 23), both sets also illustrating Voortrekker themes. For these occasions, they were designed by the artist Willem Hermanus Coetzer, who also made the sketches for the Monument's historical frieze, discussed in Chapter 2.<sup>237</sup> It is noteworthy that much the same careful attention was paid to the stamp designs as to the frieze sketches, an indication of how serious a matter the representation of Voortrekker history was to the SVK. The designs of souvenirs for the

<sup>231</sup> SVK 30.3.1933: p.2.

<sup>232</sup> SVK 5.8.1933: p.1.

<sup>233</sup> Letter dated 14.7.1933 (NHKA, Engelbrecht P1/2/3/8/10).

<sup>234</sup> Letter dated 7.4.1934 (HF Archives [old numbering] VTM vol. B9).

<sup>235</sup> See letter of acknowledgement from Scheepers to Engelenburg, 5.12.1933 (NARSSA, Engelenburg 140/3/14/VM1930, 37).

<sup>236</sup> See 'Coetzer and the frieze'. It was reported in 1935 that just over £3 000 had been raised; while 1d stamps had sold well, there were still enough 2d stamps for ten years, and 3d stamps for eighteen (Dagbestuur 20.6.1935). The SVK did not receive the basic cost of the stamps, which went to the government for postal services, but an additional amount, usually 50% of the face value, which was added to the cost of each. The designs of the stamps are discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>237</sup> While a draughtsman had asked fifty guineas per design, Coetzer, who was deeply committed to the Afrikaner cause, offered to undertake them for five apiece (Dagbestuur 22.11.1937: 5). It is recorded that he was paid £150 for his sketches, stamps and possibly also his souvenir designs (SVK 25.11.1938: 15), many of which are in the collection of the Museum Africa, Johannesburg.



Figure 22: W.H. Coetzer. Voortrekker centenary stamp and souvenir cover brochure, 17.12.1938, sent to SVK chairman Jansen (courtesy of ARCA PV94 1/75/1/9; photo the authors)



Figure 23: W.H. Coetzer. Inauguration stamps on a Robstampco souvenir envelope sent to Australia. 16.12.1949 (<http://pictures.auktionen-gaertner.de/auction/2144/622144-000002.jpg>)

**MALMESBURY.**

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**'N JOLIGE BOEREMUSIEK-AAND**

DEUR



**DIE STELLENBOSSE BOER-ORKES.**

**STADSAAL,**

**Saterdag, 5 September, 1936,**

om 8 uur n.m.

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**TOEGANG 2/4.**

*Plekbespreking by die Savoy Kafee.*

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Ten Behoeve van  
**DIE VOORTREKKER-MONUMENTFONDS.**

Sien Agterblad vir Middag-Uitvoering.

**Figure 24:** Advertisement for a fundraising performance by the Stellenbosch Boer-orkes (courtesy of HF Archives VTM [old numbering] B10; photo the authors)

Afrikaans culture associations, initiated as we have seen by the Broederbond). A letter from the FAK to Scheepers dated 13 May 1935 outlined a suggestion, evidently from Mabel Jansen, that the FAK take responsibility for one panel (around £1 000).<sup>242</sup> Ultimately, nothing was to come of these ideas, however, not least because far more substantial funding was forthcoming.

But real efforts were still made and should not be overlooked, even if they did not achieve their intended goals. For example, a letter on behalf of a group of youngsters who had the 'lovely idea' (pragtige gedagte) of raising £100 to finance a scene representing Dirkie Uys enquired whether this was possible, but they had to be told that this was not nearly enough to pay for a panel in the

centenary and the inauguration, which provided another source of funding, many also by Coetzer, were likewise carefully vetted.<sup>238</sup>

Another idea that was proposed for fundraising was to approach different groups and associations to sponsor individual panels of the historical frieze for the Monument. Around the time that Jansen finalised a list of proposed topics, sent on 19 January 1937 to the Minister of Internal Affairs (fig. 92),<sup>239</sup> another list was annotated with possible donors, which provides some insight into the kind of support the SVK expected, and which topics were thought appropriate for which groups.<sup>240</sup> They obviously hoped to appeal to the youth, possibly relying on school teachers to encourage their pupils. So a scene with the first Voortrekker school at Soutpansberg was suggested for Transvaal schools, and young Dirkie Uys' heroic deed for those in the Orange Free State (OFS). Some scenes were clearly considered special-interest topics, so that the farming at Saailaer was allocated to the Landbou-Unie (Agriculture union), the Vow before Blood River to the Calvinistiese Bond (Calvinist Association) and the representation of the Voortrekker women rallying their downhearted men to the NCVV, Natalse Christelike Vrouevereniging (Natal Christian Women's Association). Other scenes were evidently allocated according to area interest, thus Louis Trichardt's trek to Delagoa Bay would go to the Transvaal province and the Vegkop battle to the OFS. Further potential sponsors included various Afrikaans teachers' associations, the ATKV, Spoorbond (Railway union, the 'only Christian national trade union of any consequence'),<sup>241</sup> Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie (South African Women's Federation), and the FAK (Federation of

<sup>238</sup> In an agreement with Uniewinkels (17.12.1937), the SVK received 10% of sales.

<sup>239</sup> This position, known as Minister van Binnelandse Sake in Afrikaans, in English is alternatively known as Minister of Internal Affairs or Minister of the Interior; for the sake of consistency we have used the former.

<sup>240</sup> 'Panele in Voortrekkermonument. Hieronder volg 'n lys van die panele, sowel die name van sekere liggame wat genader kan word met die oog op 'n moontlike skenking' (Panels in the Voortrekker Monument. Below is a list of the panels as well as the names of some bodies that can be approached for a possible donation); ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7.

<sup>241</sup> O'Meara 1983, 89 (quote)–91.

<sup>242</sup> HF Archives (old numbering) VTM vol. A3.



frieze.<sup>243</sup> The Transvaal Teachers Association raised a substantial amount also initially intended for a panel but ultimately, when that funding plan was abandoned, it was apparently combined with funds from the Afrikaner youth group, the Voortrekkers, to create the niche for the eternal flame in the cenotaph hall of the Monument.<sup>244</sup> Particularly successful in its fundraising – and possibly also in contributing to the upsurge of interest in Afrikaner popular culture – was the Stellenbosch Boer-orke (Boer orchestra), founded in 1933, which arranged concerts throughout the country, raising R12 478.63 (fig. 24). Although their initial intention had also been to fund a panel of the frieze,<sup>245</sup> it was finally agreed that they would pay for Van Wouw's colossal bronze *Voortrekker mother and children* (fig. 49), which would stand in the forecourt of the Monument.<sup>246</sup> There were also numerous donations without a specified purpose, some considerable, but many very modest amounts recorded in shillings rather than pounds, that came in from a variety of institutions and individuals.<sup>247</sup> The wide range of individual engagement and collective effort in these fundraising campaigns underlines how much the Monument project had penetrated Afrikaner communities and how significant it was to them.

Although the concept of sponsorship focused solely on Afrikaner groups, at a committee meeting in September 1934, when Treasurer Lombard was to announce that £2 108.13.9d had been raised to date,<sup>248</sup> he and Engelenburg expressed the opinion that it was time to approach the government for assistance.<sup>249</sup> It was decided that Jansen and Engelenburg would raise the matter with Prime Minister Hertzog the following month,<sup>250</sup> although this was delayed for almost a year. In August 1935, before a meeting had taken place, Jansen reported that he had had some discussion with Hertzog, who had expressed willingness to assist, and said that honouring the Voortrekkers should be on a grander scale.<sup>251</sup> The chain of events is far from clear, but within a matter of weeks the SVK's project had become an official national undertaking.

In a letter to Scheepers of 11 September 1935 calling for an urgent meeting of the SVK,<sup>252</sup> Jansen wrote that, before the group deputised by the SVK could arrange for an appointment, Hertzog had asked Jansen to see him and had indicated that the government planned to celebrate the 1938 centenary on a national scale and to erect a memorial. He wanted to know whether the SVK would be prepared to work with the government. On 28 August, the SVK representatives, Jansen, Engelenburg and Lombard,<sup>253</sup> had then met with Hertzog and the Minister of Finance, Nicolaas Christiaan Havenga (1882–1957), when government plans were further explained. They were referred to the Minister of Internal Affairs, Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr (1894–1948),<sup>254</sup> who would continue to be involved in the Monument project when he held the Finance portfolio under Smuts from 1939, and frequently deputised for the prime minister during the war years. Jansen saw Hofmeyr on 3 and 8 September,<sup>255</sup> and was given a memorandum outlining government conditions for their involvement on a £-for-£ basis.

**243** Letter to Jansen from H.A. du Toit 20.7.1936 and reply 30.7.1936 (HF Archives [old numbering] VTM vol. A2).

**244** Dagbestuur 20.9.1949: 4b.

**245** Dagbestuur 5.3.1937: 9. See Van der Merwe 2017, 50–51.

**246** SVK 15/16.1.1942: 9d.

**247** There are numerous letters regarding donations scattered throughout the Heritage Foundation Archives, notably HF Archives (old numbering) VTM vol. B10.

**248** SVK 9.9.1934: 15.

**249** This was not without precedent; for example, the Dundee memorial fund received £100 from the government (Scheepers 1983, 43).

**250** SVK 9.9.1934: 4.

**251** Dagbestuur 23.8.1935: 4.

**252** ARCA PV125 2/2/1/1/4.

**253** Mrs Broers had originally been named as a member, then Mrs Horak in her place, but she was unwell at the time of the meeting and unable to attend.

**254** DSAB 4, 1981, 215–222.

**255** Ferreira (1975, 127) misread the date of the second meeting in Jansen's letter as 8 December 1935, when in fact Jansen referred to '8 deser', meaning 8 ultimo, that is, the same month. This leads to confusion in Ferreira's account,

In a letter to Hofmeyr on 9 October 1935, Jansen wrote that he believed that the SVK would welcome the government proposal in general terms, including the proposed seven government representatives for the main SVK committee, two of whom would serve on the Dagbestuur also. But he outlined certain concerns, and sought Hofmeyr's agreement on the following SVK decisions: that the Monument would be an artwork rather than a utility building; that it would include twelve bronze panels depicting scenes of Voortrekker history, selected from twenty-five topics which had already been approved; that the Monument should be erected in a place associated with Voortrekker history; and that the site should be selected by a conference at which all the provincial committees would be represented, as the SVK had already promised. Hofmeyr's response of 12 October was conciliatory in tone, but neatly avoided firm commitment on a number of issues. He readily agreed with the first two items, although pointing out, with some foresight, that the precise number of historical scenes might require input from the artist. Regarding the site, he said that the government would have to take responsibility, but assured Jansen that it would be guided by the advice of the SVK conference. On a further matter raised by Jansen concerning the SVK's control of the centenary celebrations, he stated that, while it was too far ahead to finalise the detail, it would be the wish of the government that the SVK would constitute the festival committee. He closed by agreeing that the government would be responsible for the upkeep of the completed Monument.

Jansen stressed in his subsequent letter to Scheepers that it was important to gather the full SVK together as soon as possible to get their response, and a meeting was arranged for 2 November 1935. While general agreement was reached, the SVK was assertive in claiming a definitive role in the further development of the Monument, stating:

In relation to the proposals of the government, the SVK wants to make it clearly understood that the current members of the committee at any time, if there is, unfortunately, a demand made on them regarding the monument with which they cannot agree, will have the right to withdraw from the cooperation, to reconstitute themselves as a committee, and to take renewed possession again from the State treasury of the sum of money otherwise contributed.<sup>256</sup>

The almost defiant insistence on the independence of the SVK can probably be explained by the suspicion that many Afrikaners felt towards the 'fusion' government of Hertzog with Smuts that was more conciliatory towards English speakers than they would have liked. However, the need for funding was vital, and Senator Spies and Preller were nominated to have final discussions with Prime Minister Hertzog, who then spoke again of his ambitions for a worthy monument. He called in Minister Havenga and instructed him to draw up the necessary arrangements for contributions on a £-for-£ basis right away. Unexpectedly, Hertzog added that, if the funds were still insufficient, the state would pay the shortfall – meaning the amount was not capped. He could hardly have guessed what that would ultimately entail.<sup>257</sup>

Whether the government's apparently independent decision to fund a monument was purely coincidental, or whether, in the time it took for the SVK group to seek an audience with Hertzog, their intentions had been 'leaked', or whether he had been canvassed for support, is uncertain. It might even be that the government felt that progress towards a monument had been slow and needed energising. If that was the case, then the strategy was highly successful. Eager to show that

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since he speaks of a memorandum presented on 8 December being taken to the SVK at their next meeting, when it was actually discussed on 2 November 1935 (SVK 2.11.1935: 6).

**256** 'By die aanvaarding van die voorstelle van die regering, wil die S.V.K. dit duidelik laat verstaan dat die huidige lede van die Komitee te enige tyd, as daar, onverhoop, 'n eis aan hulle so opgelê word, of stappe in verband met die monument geneem word, waarmee hulle hul nie kan versoen nie, die reg sal hê om hulle te onttrek aan die samewerking, hulself opnuut te konstitueer as 'n Komitee, en die som geld wat anders dan uit die Staatskas bygedra word, uit die totale fonds opnuut in besit te neem' (SVK 2.11.1935: 6).

**257** 'Tref asseblief dadelik die nodige reëlins vir 'n bydrae op die £-vir-£-basis. As die fondse dan nog nie voldoende sal wees nie, betaal die staat alles wat kortkom' (Ferreira 1975, 128).

it had in fact made considerable progress in conceptualising the Monument, the SVK was galvanised into action, setting up the special Vormkomitee already mentioned that, from January 1936, acted decisively to implement earlier discussion, and recommended the appointment of Moerdyk as architect. A Boukomitee was set up as well to work with the architect and immediately draw up a contract.

But there was also an unexpected negative outcome to the agreement. Although Lombard had been able to report at the meeting of 2 November 1935 that SVK funds had swelled to £5 265.00, donations dwindled after it became known that the state was prepared to carry the costs. That this might happen was recognised by the SVK, although it was felt to be important that the public remained involved financially if it was to be a ‘volksmonument’.<sup>258</sup> And the SVK did not halt its efforts. For example, it was decided to display a replica of Moerdyk’s Monument at the Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg (September 1936 to January 1937)<sup>259</sup> for publicity, despite the cost involved,<sup>260</sup> an initiative that was also used to gather feedback on the design (fig. 74). But donations did decrease. As a corollary, the knowledge that the government would meet any shortfall encouraged the expansion of the committee’s initial vision for the Monument, accelerating the costs. Expenditure, which had recently been estimated at about £120 000,<sup>261</sup> escalated enormously once the government stepped in. The increased costs were in part the result of inflation and unexpected contingencies such as the bankruptcy of the initial builder who had to be replaced and, in the case of the frieze, by postwar delays, strike action in Italy and the volatility of currencies after the war. But the increases were also the result of grander concepts, with larger scale and more expensive materials, and in this the government certainly colluded. Hertzog, for example, agreed to the use of granite in place of sandstone for the building (persuaded by the fact that Herbert Baker’s sandstone Union Buildings were already in need of restoration). Smuts too played his part when he was prime minister, agreeing that the interior of the Hall of Heroes should not simply be plastered but clad in marble, which was expected to cost an additional £15 000.<sup>262</sup>

That the final cost of the Monument was £359 601.5<sup>263</sup> undoubtedly went beyond even the wildest dreams of the initial committee, and was an ongoing matter of concern both for the SVK and government representatives.<sup>264</sup> Even more extraordinary, and quite unforeseen by those who had initiated the project, was that the state ultimately paid 94% of the costs, £338 054.4.5.<sup>265</sup>

**258** SVK 21.9.1935: 9d.

**259** For the exhibition, see Berman 1983, 144–145.

**260** Payment to Lupini Bros. of £180 for this purpose is recorded in the audit for the Monument dated 15.6.1943 (ARCA PV125 2/2/1/1/3)

**261** Moerdyk had estimated the cost of the Monument with an envisaged span of forty feet at £50 000, but a larger building at £120 000 (SVK 7.4.1936: 5). A letter and memorandum from Jansen to the Minister of Internal Affairs, dated 19.1.1937, laying out the ‘final’ plans for the Monument, included an estimate of £125 000 (item 10) (NARSSA, BNS 146/73/2). We can track the increasing costs in SVK records. For example, by mid-1938 it was noted that the Treasury was ready to pay half of £217 000 (Dagbestuur 12.5.1938: 4). By 1945 the estimate had risen to £300 000 (SVK 26.10.1945: 13); by 1949 to £340 000 (Dagbestuur 25.10.1949: 7); the final cost of £359 601.5.5 was reported in 1952 (SVK 21.11.1952: 4). These figures excluded the not inconsiderable costs associated with the celebrations of 1938 and 1949.

**262** According to reports from the Chief Quantity Surveyor of 30.9.1946 and 4.10.1946 (NARSSA, BNS 146/73/4), the actual cost as tendered by Marble Lime was £22 000, although this included the floor cladding also.

**263** SVK 21.11.1952: 4.

**264** There are numerous SVK minutes and reports that reflect concern about escalating costs, and Moerdyk was constantly called on to justify expenditure.

**265** Ferreira (1975, 126) records (in rands) that the SVK paid R43 094.10 of the costs; he estimates that from 1932–52 it had raised R75 817.85, but many expenses other than the Monument itself had to be met.

## The site

As already noted, the site for the Voortrekker Monument was one of the key issues that Jansen raised at the time the government first expressed interest in becoming involved in the project: the SVK wanted to ensure that the locality was related to the Trek and that the final choice was made with full input from the committees representing all the provinces of the Union. There is some irony then that, although the SVK was in charge of the process, neither of these issues was without its problems.

There had been discussion regarding the best site for the Monument from the outset. Engelenburg had already drawn attention to the fact that the chosen site would affect the way the Monument was designed.<sup>266</sup> By the time of the ninth SVK meeting in September 1933, it had been decided that a group comprising Hugo, Engelbrecht, Lombard, Scheepers and both the Jansens would visit possible places in the Transvaal, OFS and Natal and report back by March 1934 at the latest.<sup>267</sup> They were to consult with prominent people at the different places and keep detailed notes.<sup>268</sup> A further trip was mooted, but at the next meeting in April 1934, Scheepers, seconded by Preller, proposed that a definitive selection be postponed to the following year because the announcement of a site was likely to prove contentious.<sup>269</sup> This might have been linked to fund-raising as, at a meeting a year later when there was further discussion on the issue, Lombard pragmatically said that they should not be thinking about a site until they had collected at least £10 000.<sup>270</sup> Thus it eventuated that the question had not been settled by the time the government stepped in, when their promise of funding more than met Lombard's concern and put the question of a site back on the table. When Moerdyk was appointed as architect soon after, it was proposed that he accompany the committee that was to visit possible sites.<sup>271</sup> And a date was set for the conference, including the provinces, on 6 October 1936, to receive the findings and reach a decision.<sup>272</sup>

It is intriguing to consider that Moerdyk was making his drawings for the Monument before a decision had been reached regarding its site, and to speculate on what impact he might have had on the ultimate decision. At the very least, he must have had in mind that the Monument designed in an 'African' Art Deco style should stand on an eminence of some sort to set it off to advantage, and he would no doubt have wanted a site that would be in the public eye, not in some secluded spot – the final choice of an outcrop at the entrance to Pretoria perfectly matched both these desiderata. It is also likely that the site across the city from the Union Buildings was perceived as an opportunity to outdo Herbert Baker's more classical architecture that was so much a product of imperial concepts and which had intended, in its matching domes and wings, to symbolise the coming together of Afrikaans and English South Africans. On a more practical level, one might even wonder whether a site in the direct vicinity of Moerdyk's home and office (not to mention Harmony Hall, which would be rented from him as the sculpture workshop for the frieze) might not have encouraged him to favour Pretoria. But there is no hint of any particular influence from him in the records regarding the different sites and the final decision making, although the likelihood of some impact of his persuasive presence on the group visiting the sites, even of some lobbying behind the scenes, from a man as authoritative and determined as Moerdyk is not beyond the realms of possibility.

<sup>266</sup> SVK 5.9.1931: 13.

<sup>267</sup> SVK 16.9.1933: p.2.

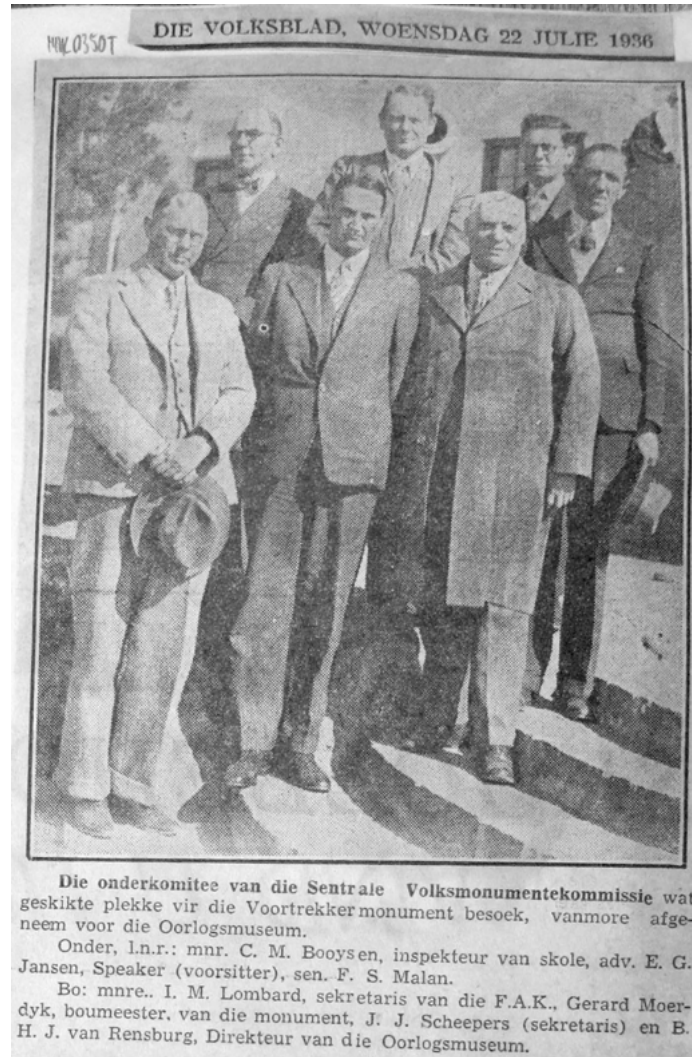
<sup>268</sup> SVK 11.11.1933: p.1.

<sup>269</sup> SVK 4.4.1934: p.2.

<sup>270</sup> SVK 10.5.1935: 13. Two interesting proposals were made about who should select the site: that the three 'volksleiers' Hertzog, Smuts and Malan should choose it, or that every Afrikaner who had donated a pound or more should have a vote, but they were reminded of the promise to the provinces to have a small conference about the site.

<sup>271</sup> SVK 7.4.1936: 8

<sup>272</sup> Dagbestuur 8.8.1936: 8.



**Figure 25:** The special subcommittee of SVK that visited possible sites for the Monument (*Volksblad* 22.7.1936; courtesy of UP Archives, Moerdyk files MDK 0350T)

The committee that diligently travelled around South Africa between 13 and 26 July 1936 comprised Jansen, Malan, Booysen, Van Rensburg, Lombard and Scheepers, as well as Moerdyk (fig. 25). They visited all the places which had put themselves forward as ideal sites – Pietermaritzburg, Blood River, Danskraal and Weenen in Natal; Winburg, Thaba Nchu, Blydevooruitsig at Kerkenberg, Vegkop and Bloemfontein in the OFS; and Pretoria, Potchefstroom and Ohrigstad in the Transvaal, with the last visited on 13 August by Jansen, Moerdyk and Scheepers only. The proposals were then considered at the October conference by SVK members and two representatives from each provincial committee.<sup>273</sup>

Reading through the related documents underlines a number of issues that have a broader significance for understanding the project as a whole and the values the Monument was intended to embody. Selecting a site on the basis of which place and its associated events was considered most significant raised fundamental questions: should it be a site of military victory, of suffering, of settlement, or of importance to the establishment of Afrikaner principles and ideals? It was a debate that was not unrelated to the choice of subjects for the frieze, which had been under way since 1934, and was reaching finality at much the same time as the decisions about the site – although it did not share the burden of selecting only one possibility. Jansen reported on both matters in the same

<sup>273</sup> For a full discussion of the proposals and the decision process, see Ferreira 1975, 27–49.

letter to the Minister of Internal Affairs on 19 January 1937, where he communicated that Pretoria had been selected as the site and set out a definitive list of topics for the frieze for the first time.<sup>274</sup>

It is tempting to speculate then about the possibility of a reciprocal relationship between the two sets of choices for site on the one hand and frieze on the other, as well as the requirements of the Monument itself. The close coincidence of proposals for the site to places that were deemed appropriate for inclusion in the Monument's frieze could be explained simply by the belief that these were the places where the most prominent events of the Trek happened, and that these were bound to be repeated in different contexts. But the arguments put forward regarding the different sites might have tipped the balance for some of the choices for the panels of the frieze. Vegkop, Winburg, Thaba Nchu, Blydevooruitsig, Weenen/Bloukrans, Danskraal, Blood River and Pietermaritzburg, which were all to be eliminated in the choosing of the Monument site, would be included in the telling of the Voortrekker story for the frieze, their prominence acknowledging their significance – and perhaps providing some solace to the unsuccessful proposers. Pretoria, on the other hand, which would have been the setting for the early suggestion that Kruger's inauguration should provide the final topic for the narrative,<sup>275</sup> was not included in the frieze.

While the historical importance put forward in each of the lengthy submissions from the different possible sites chimes with the arguments set out in relation to the different scenes for the frieze, however, other issues affecting suitability were also raised. The Danskraal submission, for example, which recommended the site where (allegedly) the Vow had been made before the victory of Blood River as the one that best represented the Christian spirit of the Voortrekkers, also went into considerable detail about transport and accommodation in the nearest town, Ladysmith.<sup>276</sup> Clearly it was felt that being chosen as the location of the Monument would not only be prestigious, but was also likely to attract tourists, an added economic incentive.

The site committee even-handedly summarised the historical evidence for each place in its report, and also considered the qualities of the surrounding landscape and practical issues such as the suitability of the site for strong foundations, the availability of services such as electricity, water and sanitation, and the accessibility of the location. Although rural sites often had the most potent memories attached to them, they were invariably less suitable in terms of these practicalities. Larger towns and cities were better equipped from this point of view and often added the inducement of offering land without cost, and of promising to provide services free of charge. For example, the lengthy five-page submission from Pietermaritzburg not only put forward detailed historical, cultural and geographical arguments for selecting this location, but also spelt out the city's offer of fiscal support:

That the City Council of Pietermaritzburg offers, free of charge, a site in the Alexandra Park or in such other position in Pietermaritzburg as may be agreed upon with the Council, for the purpose of the erection thereon of the National Voortrekker Monument.

Further, that electric light shall be supplied, free of charge for the purpose of the monument. (10th March, 1935.)<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Discussed in detail in the next chapter.

<sup>275</sup> See Wenke list of topics, Chapter 2.

<sup>276</sup> See pp.3–4 of the submission drawn up by L. Steenkamp on behalf of the Ladysmith Voortrekkermonumentekomitee for Danskraal (NARSSA, Engelenburg 140/3/14/VM1930, 37).

<sup>277</sup> Pietermaritzburg Plaaslike Voortrekkermonumentekomitee Memorandum (Pietermaritzburg local Voortrekker Monument committee), 23.6.1936, pp.4–5 (NARSSA, Engelenburg 140/3/14/VM1930, 37). Although they were not on the provincial committee, it is tempting to speculate that the Jansens might have assisted in developing the document, which is the most comprehensive of all the submissions. They had been involved in fundraising for the purchase of the 'Church of the Vow' in Pietermaritzburg in 1909/10, which became a Voortrekker museum; the extension built in the 1950s would be named for E.G. Jansen. During the outcry after Pretoria was announced as the chosen site, Natal-born Jansen said that he would have voted for Pietermaritzburg.

Incentives aside, practical factors, together with the advantage of towns being on rail and road networks, no doubt encouraged representatives at the conference to set aside the more out-of-the-way places. They also came round to the view that it would be a mistake to select a site associated with a specific individual or incident, when it was the intention to memorialise the Voortrekkers at large, an argument promoted by Pretoria which obviously had the most to gain from this principle.<sup>278</sup> The conference first excluded sites that were hard to access, leaving Pretoria, Pietermaritzburg, Winburg, Danskraal (Ladysmith), Bloemfontein and Potchefstroom. The list was further whittled down in a series of elimination votes: the first three had the most support; then Pietermaritzburg and finally Winburg was eliminated, with Pretoria the final choice. On 9 October 1936 *The Star* published an aerial photomontage of the 'Voortrekker Memorial on Its Site near Pretoria', which shows Moerdyk's Empire Exhibition model in its finally determined location (fig. 26), a meagre prefiguration of how the site would ultimately appear (fig. 27).

The outrage about the decision expressed by Natal (and to a lesser degree the OFS), which is entirely understandable when one considers how many key events took place there, was directed at both the choice and the committee process. While reiterating that Natal was a key location historically, the province's representatives also argued that it was because there were so many Transvaal members on the SVK that Pretoria was chosen. It might have been even closer to the mark if they had said that the decision related to the number of politically active committee members. A grand Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria would be an asset to those in government: it would provide an appropriate destination for visitors,<sup>279</sup> and centre commemorative events in the capital. An unspoken motive for turning down Natal no doubt related to the very reason that so many Voortrekkers had left the area in the 1840s: it was a site considered to be under British influence.

A page amongst Engelbrecht's papers with scribbled annotations, clearly made during the voting process, gives us some insight into the procedures. There are jottings recording the process of elimination and the final (remarkably close) vote of Pretoria 14, Winburg 12.<sup>280</sup> The writing is hard to decipher, but random words suggest possible factors in the decision making, such as 'distances' (afstandjies) and 'impact on people' (invloed op mense), and seem to link the 'Transvaal' with 'national values' (naskap Transvaal). Significantly, one phrase implies that other sites had 'greater value than Natal because it was considered predominantly English' (Vergroot waarde omdat Natal oorwegend Engels is) – hence Natal was no site for the proposed monument to Afrikanerdom. Pretoria, on the other hand, offered several advantages. SVK members may have realised early that each place which was to be portrayed in the frieze had a legitimate claim to make, so that it was impossible to prefer one party without causing bad blood among the others. Pretoria was beyond this competition as it had neither existed during the Trek nor would be referred to in the frieze. The main objective of the SVK was to design a memorial for all Afrikaners, unconditional of a specific site with a specific trekker narrative; Pretoria, not a part but a direct outcome of the treks, was in this respect an ideal choice. It was also firmly associated with Afrikaners as the capital of the independent ZAR, founded in 1855 after the Voortrekkers had won their independence from British rule, and became the centre of later resistance to British hegemony. And perhaps it was even remembered that, at Blood River in 1888, Kruger had proposed a national monument in Pretoria. As the capital of the old republic, it embodied aspirations for a renewed republican state, free of bonds to the British. In many ways then, despite its lack of a direct connection to the Trek, it could be said

<sup>278</sup> The Pretoria City Council argued, with some sleight of hand, that because Winburg, Potchefstroom, Pietermaritzburg and Blood River all had 'a very strong case', this 'makes Pretoria's claim all the stronger for the first Trekkers' settlement, Winburg, the heroic deeds and tragic events in Natal and the first settlement north of the Vaal (Potchefstroom) deserve rather to be commemorated by means of special monuments' ('Pretoria and the Voortrekker Monument', NARSSA, Engelenburg 140/3/14/VM1930, 37).

<sup>279</sup> It is interesting to note how often those preparing submissions on proposed sites talk of accessibility for international tourists – an aspect that would become of great importance for the Monument's survival in the post-apartheid era.

<sup>280</sup> NHKA, Engelbrecht P1/2/3/8/10.



**Figure 26:** Photo-montage of the Voortrekker Monument on the chosen Pretoria site (*The Star* 9.10.1936; courtesy of UP Archives, Moerdyk files)



**Figure 27:** Aerial view from north-east of Voortrekker Monument on Monumentkoppie with amphitheatre in foreground. December 1949 (courtesy of HF Archives F 39.6.6 k)



to encapsulate all the political goals of the Voortrekkers anew, and selecting Pretoria acknowledged its role in the contemporary development of Afrikaner nationalism.<sup>281</sup>

Although there were many objections, no change was made to the recommendation that Pretoria house the Monument. Regarding the specific site, the choice fell on a relatively small koppie – an outcrop south of the city, commanding its main entrance from the prosperous Reef towns (figs 26, 27).<sup>282</sup> While it was high enough to be visible from various places in the city, the scale of the koppie was appropriate for the architect’s vision of the Monument, elevating but not dwarfing it. The area had been known as Roberts Heights, named after General Lord Roberts, commander of the British forces in the Anglo-Boer War, which must have rankled: a name change to Voortrekkerhoogte (Voortrekker Heights) was announced,<sup>283</sup> causing consternation amongst English speakers. But the Afrikaans name prevailed,<sup>284</sup> appropriately related to the Monument that would be built there, with the outcrop on which it was built referred to as Monumentkoppie.

## The centenary

That the architect was only appointed in April 1936,<sup>285</sup> and the decision on the site taken later that year on 6 October, made it clear to even the most optimistic that the Monument would not be completed in time for the 1938 centenary – even though Moerdyk presented his design of the Monument remarkably rapidly after his official appointment, as discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.<sup>286</sup> At its first meeting in 1937, the SVK confirmed that the centenary would instead be marked by the laying of the foundation stone of the Monument, and Moerdyk provided an estimate of the funding that would be needed to reach that stage.<sup>287</sup> And soon SVK attention became focused on that event.<sup>288</sup>

Moerdyk’s planning and the laying of the foundations proceeded apace after the acceptance of the lowest tender for the building and the government agreeing to pay half the initial costs.<sup>289</sup> But the effort required to conceptualise and organise the upcoming commemoration deflected the

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**281** The *Official Guide* initially stated that ‘The site was chosen only after careful consideration of the claims submitted by other centres. The Great Trek reached its logical termination in Pretoria, founded in 1855: this city was the capital of the most important Boer republic and is the administrative capital of the Union’ (1955, 10). As discussed earlier, this was amended in the 1960s to affirm the new republican status of the country (1969, 10).

**282** The transfer of land rights was to prove problematic; the extensive site of 35 270 hectares comprised different sections belonging to different parties, including the state, the city council and others, and the transfer was only finalised on 20 September 1949, just prior to the inauguration.

**283** This was a surprise announcement during the centenary celebrations by the Acting Minister of Defence, J.C.G. Kemp, according to the *Rand Daily Mail* 17.12.1938.

**284** The area, which now houses the South African Army College, was renamed Thaba Tshwane in 1998.

**285** Moerdyk presented his designs to the SVK on 7.4.1936 on the recommendation of the Vormkomitee, and, after viewing them, the meeting ruled that a contract for Moerdyk be written immediately; this was the same meeting that invited him to accompany the site committee on its visits.

**286** Drawings of the proposed monument were first made public when published in *Die Volkstem* on 11.9.1936. The first sod was turned by E.G. Jansen as chairman of the SVK in July 1937, watched by Lombard, Scheepers and Moerdyk in a photograph of the event in a newspaper clipping of 13.7.1937 (UP Archives, Moerdyk files MDK 0341T? [number indecipherable]).

**287** SVK 15.1.1937: 15, 16. Interestingly, Moerdyk included the laager of wagons as well as certain artworks in his plans for the centenary; by the latter he presumably meant Van Wouw’s large bronze of the *Voortrekker mother and children*, but it was only cast in August 1939, and the laager would be one of the last elements of the Monument to be completed for the inauguration in 1949.

**288** Although the SVK would host the premier event on Monumentkoppie, there were many other centenary celebrations planned: *Die Vaderland* 10.12.1938 lists announcements of over 150 venues across the country. Particularly important was Blood River, where *Die Transvaler* 18.12.1938 reported 40 000 (the *Rand Daily Mail* 17.12.1938 said 15 000) at the laying of the foundation stone for that memorial (designed by Coert Steynberg), which was undertaken by the ‘eerste trekkerseun wat predikant geword het’ (first trekker boy who became a minister [Rev Paul Nel]).

**289** Dagbestuur 12.5.1938: 4.



**Figure 28:**  
Descendants of  
Voortrekker leaders,  
Mesdames  
D.P. Ackerman,  
J.C. Muller and  
G.S. Preller, who  
laid the Monument's  
foundation stone.  
16 December 1938  
(photo courtesy of  
Unisa Archives)

attention of the committee from the development of the Monument itself, not least because the centenary would prove to be a contentious affair. The main dispute revolved around official state involvement. Since the government had agreed to pay for at least half the costs of the Monument (although ultimately it would be far more), it had become a national project in the fullest sense.<sup>290</sup> The expectation was that not only Prime Minister Hertzog, who had been so supportive in agreeing to funding, but also the governor-general would be part of the formalities.<sup>291</sup> With the latter in attendance as representative of the British crown, it would be standard practice to include the national anthem, 'God Save the King',<sup>292</sup> and to fly the Union Jack. Not only did this seem inappropriate when the Voortrekkers had after all set out on their journeys since the 1830s in order to escape British rule, it was an insufferable insult to Afrikaners who had not forgotten that Great Britain had been their enemy in intense conflict less than forty years before, and had been the cause of much loss of life and land.<sup>293</sup>

<sup>290</sup> This is reflected in the composition of the committee to oversee the centenary event, with five members nominated by the minister supplementing the seven members of the Dagbestuur. See letter to Engelbrecht from Scheepers, dated 22.12.1937 (NHKA, Engelbrecht P1/2/3/8/10).

<sup>291</sup> The governor-general at the time, appointed in 1937, was British-born Sir Patrick Duncan (1870–1943), who had served as an MP in South Africa for many years, but was also a member of the British Privy Council to George VI. Duncan had been one of 'Milner's Kindergarten', a group that initially governed (and aimed to Anglicise) the Transvaal after the Anglo-Boer War; see *DSAB* 1, 1968, 258–260.

<sup>292</sup> The Afrikaner preference was Langenhoven's anthem, 'Die Stem van Suid Afrika' (The Voice of South Africa), sung at the centenary celebrations in 1938 in place of 'God Save the King'; Jansen took the opportunity to call for a general acceptance of 'Die Stem' as an anthem for the whole of South Africa (*Rand Daily Mail* 17.12.1938). At Blood River celebrations, Malan went further, saying that it had been sung by the crowd because 'you love it and avow it to be your only national anthem' (*Rand Daily Mail* 17.12.1938). It was an early indication that this would become South Africa's sole national anthem under a Nationalist government.

<sup>293</sup> Not all Afrikaners shared this view, however, to judge by a letter of 6.8.1938 addressed to His Majesty King George

The dispute was fiercely waged in private correspondence and in the committee as well as in the public press, where it became something of a cause célèbre. The dilemma was eventually resolved by making the event a wholly Afrikaner one, conducted solely in Afrikaans.<sup>294</sup> Prime Minister Hertzog absented himself from the centenary celebrations to facilitate the avoidance of it being a formal national event, which would have had to include aspects associated with British rule. But the thorny question then arose of who would lay the foundation stone. At a time when it was men who occupied public positions – which invariably had political links – the inventive solution was to invite three women who were descendants of prominent Trek leaders to undertake the task:<sup>295</sup> Mrs G.S. (Johanna Christina) Preller of Pretoria, great-granddaughter of Piet Retief (and wife of Gustav Preller, who was on the selection committee); Mrs D.P. (Katharina Fredrika) Ackerman of Bethlehem, great-granddaughter of Andries Hendrik Potgieter; and Mrs J.C. Muller of Winterton, granddaughter of Andries Pretorius, were chosen,<sup>296</sup> and duly played their part, wearing full Voortrekker attire (fig. 28).<sup>297</sup> While this was an imaginative solution to a political problem, it was also in many ways a fitting tribute to women who had played such a vital role in the Trek. Two conflicting representations of the stone-laying ceremony evidence the complex relationship of reality and ideology. A fictitious drawing published by the *Express Daily* two days prior to the event (fig. 29) and a photograph taken at the actual event on 16 December 1938 (fig. 30) could hardly have been more different in setting, interaction and tone, yet both served the Afrikaner cause.

After the delays in progress caused by the centenary celebrations, by the time that event was over, Europe was poised on the brink of another world war, in which South Africa would again take part as a British ally, despite opposition from many Afrikaners. One direct outcome was that the appointed building contractor Cosani, who relied on his Italian connections, became bankrupt and had to break his contract after completion of the foundations.<sup>298</sup> New tenders had to be called

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VI by the Rev. L.M. Kriel of Utrecht, Natal, who signed himself as chairman of the Blood River Centenary Committee, inviting the king to send a deputy to attend the celebrations, or to send a message of good wishes to be read out, saying, 'It would, I am sure, do S. Africa a world of good and enhance your Majesty's popularity to no mean degree.' (NARSSA, GG3/5542-5586/247/5562L).

**294** Bloomberg (1989, 117) argues that the 'conception and organisation of the Voortrekker centenary celebrations was one of the Broederbond's greatest successes', but it alienated many English South Africans. The sense of exclusion and its effect on previously pro-Afrikaner English speakers is potently described by Alan Paton in Chapter 24 of his 1980 autobiography, *Towards the Mountain*, 206–212.

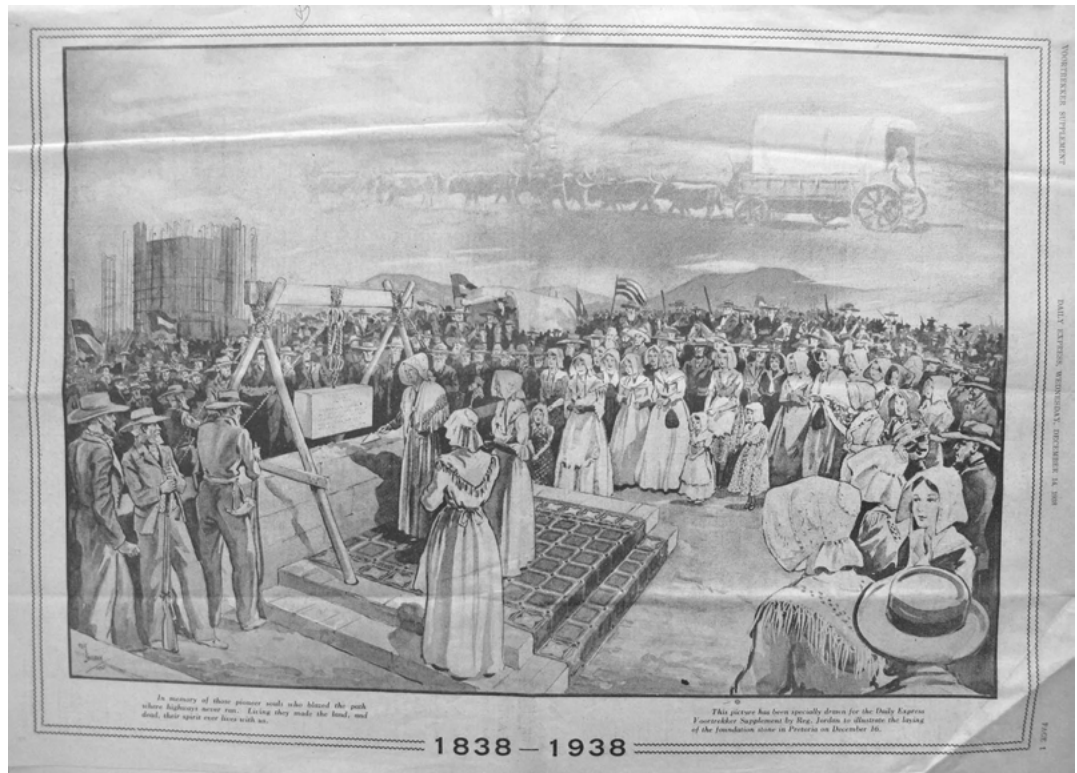
**295** The germ of the idea may lie in an undated document in the HF Archives (old numbering) VTM vol. B17, sent out by the women of Heidelberg, Transvaal, and signed by dozens of women, which urged the organisers of the centenary to halt the disputes about which man should lay the foundation stone at the Monument, which had become political and were disrupting the hallowed event, and instead choose a woman to do it. They proposed the widow of President Steyn as a fine example of an Afrikaner woman and mother, and called on women to support them. An article in *Die Burger* 1.12.1938 reveals that it was Mrs Steyn who was given the honour, at the foot of the Jan van Riebeeck statue in Cape Town, of lighting the torch to be carried by runners to the Monument.

**296** Notices were placed in the press asking women descendants to identify themselves; a lengthy list of names and addresses, with their links to the Voortrekkers, was submitted by the Railway Board with a covering letter dated 28.10.1938 (Englebrect files, NHKA). As this does not seem to mention those finally selected, it can be surmised that it was one of many equivalent submissions. Perhaps it was some of these nominations which formed a special 'guard-of-honour' of twenty women descendants of Voortrekker and Republic leaders who accompanied the three chosen women, as reported in the *Rand Daily Mail* 16.12.1938.

**297** There are many interviews with the three women who were both proud and anxious about the honour accorded them. See, for example, the articles in the *Daily Express* 14.12.1938, 'Most honoured women in S.A.' and 'South Africa's three proudest women are nervous and shy'. Interest in the women's role led to their photographs being widely reproduced; the *Rand Daily Mail* 16.12.1938 even reported on their Voortrekker dresses: 'mauve shot taffeta, flowered print and blue satin'.

**298** Grobler (2001, 18–24) provides further information of the construction process and technical details.

**Figure 29:** Fictitious representation of laying the Voortrekker Monument foundation stone, published two days ahead of the event (*Daily Express* 14.12.1938, p.1; courtesy of UP Archives, Moerdyk files)



**Figure 30:** Laying of the Voortrekker Monument foundation stone on 16 December 1938 (photo courtesy of Unisa Archives)



for and a new appointment was made, W.F. du Plessis (Du Plessis Broers), who would complete the task.<sup>299</sup> The war also affected the manpower available for the building, and led to a softening of the initial determination to employ only white labour even though it raised costs.<sup>300</sup> While a request from Du Plessis in 1940 that he be allowed to use black labourers had been turned down,<sup>301</sup> he appealed again, saying he would be unable to complete his contract without this assistance because so many white workers were on military service. By the end of 1942, it was noted that he was using black labour for subsidiary tasks such as mixing concrete and cleaning the site,<sup>302</sup> an arrangement that was tacitly approved.

As far as the historical frieze was concerned, the thrust of the discussions about topics and the associated drawings commissioned from W.H. Coetzer had come to a halt during the centenary year when the SVK was preoccupied with the celebrations. Although building continued and the Dagbestuur met from time to time, we found no record of a full SVK meeting between October 1939 and January 1942, at which point a long two-day meeting was held to get things back on track after the initial disruption of the war: it was on this occasion that Moerdyk announced who the sculptors would be for the frieze.<sup>303</sup> By then the sculptural project had had to be rethought. It had been intended that local artists would make only small models for the frieze panels and that they would go to Italy to carry out the enlargement into marble in collaboration with professional carvers in sculpture workshops there,<sup>304</sup> discussed in Chapter 3. But with South Africa at war with Italy, the plan had to be changed to have full-scale clay models created at home and their plaster replicas directly copied into their final carved form in workshops in Italy, where suitable marble could be sourced. While the wider implications of this decision, particularly the escalation of costs, would hardly have been realised at the outset, the inevitability of the frieze requiring more time for completion – and not being possible until the war was over – would have been obvious. When it had first been realised that it would not be feasible to inaugurate the Monument in 1938, it had been planned to do so five years later in 1943, but all the delays caused by the war made the 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1948 an appropriate choice. Early in 1947 a further postponement until 1949 was proposed,<sup>305</sup> and even then not everything was complete for the inauguration that year, including a number of missing marble panels for the frieze which had not been finished in time to make the journey from Italy to South Africa for the occasion.

But while these delays were unfortunate, there were positive Afrikaner spin-offs as well. Not least was that by the time of the Monument's inauguration Malan's reconstituted National Party had been voted into power in 1948, defeating the United Party that had held sway under Hertzog from 1933, then under Smuts since 1939. The growing belief in a 'purified' Nationalist agenda –

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**299** At a special meeting of the Boukomitee (12.12.1939), it was agreed to pay Cosani any outstanding amounts, and to call for new tenders. A further meeting early the next year confirmed a recommendation from Jansen that Du Plessis would be appointed (Boukomitee 16.3.1940). Cosani received £22 000, while Du Plessis tendered for £184 000 to complete the work.

**300** A letter to the SVK from the Secretary of Labour dated 7.6.1938 set out details of their agreement to pay a supplement of four shillings per worker per hour for white workers. As well as ensuring the racial 'purity' of the project, the decision to restrict builders to whites may have been intended to provide work in the context of serious unemployment, particularly amongst unskilled Afrikaners. Yet caution should be applied in attributing the decision to purely nationalist Afrikaner intentions, for the choice of white builders is found at other sites too, such as the Johannesburg Public Library (see [http://able.wiki.up.ac.za/index.php/Johannesburg\\_Public\\_Library](http://able.wiki.up.ac.za/index.php/Johannesburg_Public_Library)). Moreover, in an interview in January 2013, Daniel de Jager, who worked at the Monument as an apprentice to his stepfather, the chief mason for the building, recounted that many of the white builders employed were foreigners, so that the work was by no means restricted to Afrikaners.

**301** Boukomitee 11.12.1940.

**302** Dagbestuur 8.12.1942.

**303** SVK 15/16.1.1942: 11. That this important decision was simply announced to the SVK indicates how far executive power had passed into the hands of the Dagbestuur and the architect.

**304** Dagbestuur 28.11.1941.

**305** It was during discussion about delays with the frieze at the SVK that committee member J.J. Coetzer proposed that it would be better to postpone the inauguration again until 1949, rather than rush the work (SVK 20.1.1947: 14).

## DIE ROETES VAN DIE GEDENKTREK 1938

- Kaaplandse hooftrek: Kaapstad tot Graaff-Reinet
- Noordweste-trek: Mooresburg tot Klerksdorp
- Hoeko-trek: Hoeko (Ladismith) tot Klerksdorp
- \* \* \* Oos-Kaaplandse hooftrek: Graaff-Reinet tot Aliwal-Noord
- Grensboere se trek: Grahamstad tot Aliwal-Noord
- ..... Dirkie Uys-trek: Bellville tot Kaapstad
- Langklooftrek: Hartenbos tot Graaff-Reinet
- ||||| Vrystaatse hooftrek: Aliwal-Noord tot Parys
- ◆◆◆ Vrystaters se trek: Graaff-Reinet tot Bloemfontein
- Oos-Vrystaatse trek: Thaba Nchu tot Winburg
- o-o-o-o Natal-trek: Winburg tot Bloedrivier
- Sarel Cilliers-trek: Vegkop tot Pretoria
- ←←← Louis Trichardt-trek: Carolina tot Pretoria
- Transvaalse hooftrek: Parys tot Pretoria

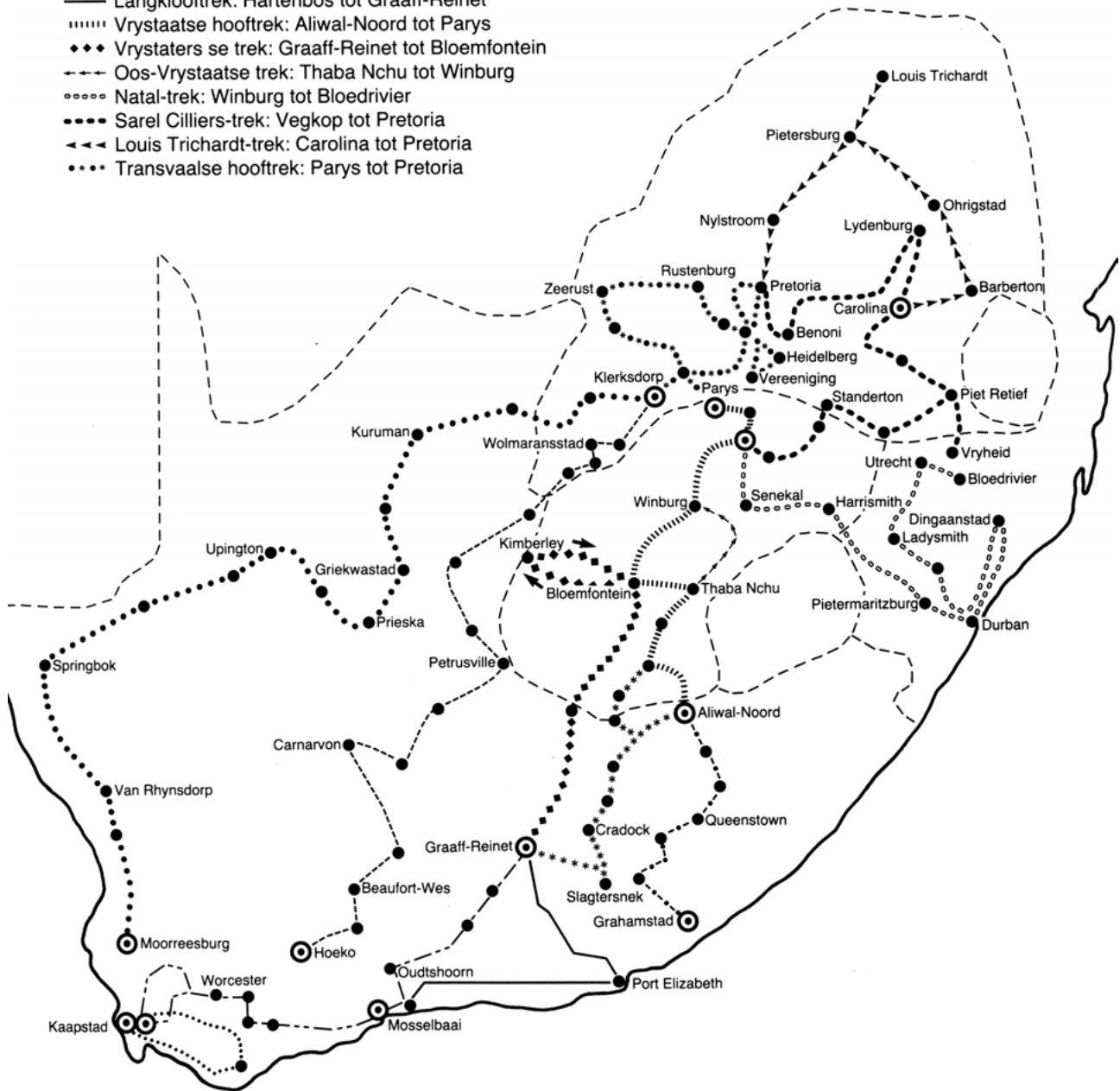


Figure 31: Routes of ossewatrek for the centenary celebrations. 1938 (Duvenage 1988, opp. title page)



Figure 32: Six 'Hoof trek' wagons at Winburg. 1938 (photo Fray; Mostert 1940, 45)

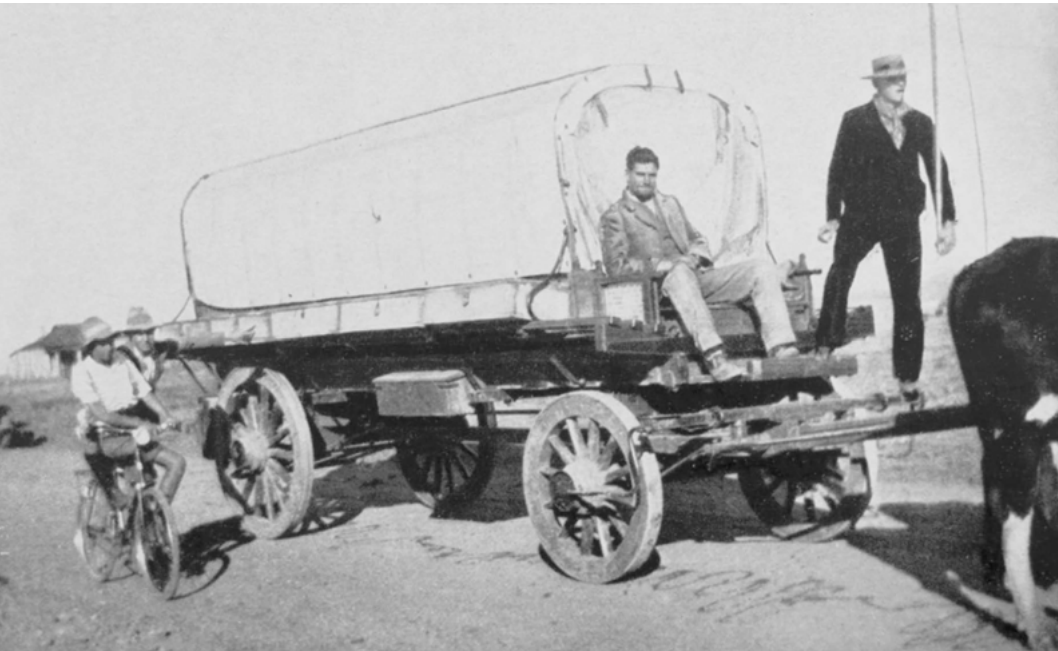


Figure 33: The over-size post wagon Hendrik Potgieter. 1938 (Mostert 1940, 43)

which ultimately produced an Afrikaner government that could officiate at the inauguration in a way that had not been possible at the centenary – was very likely expedited by the interest excited by the ongoing work on the Voortrekker Monument across more than a decade, and the feeling of pride in Afrikaner history that it engendered. A sense of Afrikaner identity was bolstered above all by the imaginative events that were planned for the centenary in 1938 in lieu of the opening of the Monument.

To understand the impact of the centenary, the depressed situation of the Afrikaner 'volk' outlined at the beginning of the chapter needs to be remembered: Ferreira, for example, describes Afrikaner people in the 1930s as 'impoverished, disrupted, dazed, humiliated, beaten and rudderless'.<sup>306</sup> From the outset, as already discussed, an important motive behind the Monument

<sup>306</sup> 'verarm, ontwrig, verdwaas, verneder, verslaan en koersloos' (Ferreira 1975, 100). To counter this, as Grundlingh and Sapire (1989, 22) have it, middle-class Afrikaner leadership, frustrated economically and politically, 'adopted a strategy of aggressive cultural assertion'.



**Figure 34:** Traces of the hooves of oxen and wheels of *Andries Pretorius* wagon recorded in cement on University of Pretoria campus, signed by Gerard Moerdyk, 1938. See footnote 569 (photo the authors)

have already mentioned as a founder member of the Broederbond (fig. 11).<sup>308</sup> At the ATKV conference in April 1937, then forty-one years old, he proposed building a replica stinkwood wagon and re-enacting the Trek, departing from Hartenbos near Mossel Bay in the Cape, where the ATKV head office was situated (fig. 31). The idea was taken up enthusiastically, with Klopper the designated leader, and the SVK offered to assist, Scheepers suggesting a more ambitious route that began in Cape Town at the statue of Jan van Riebeeck, the first Dutch commander who had arrived in 1652.<sup>309</sup> Ministers and mayors along the intended route were contacted to organise receptions for the wagons when they arrived at their respective towns, and to arrange with local farmers for teams of oxen to undertake the next leg of the journey. Gradually news of the intended trek spread, and such was the clamour of small towns entreating that they be included in the itinerary that eventually eight replica wagons were built (fig. 32), and three wagons that had survived from the nineteenth century were also pressed into service.<sup>310</sup> Named after Boer leaders, distinguished women, the ‘volksmoeder’ (*Vrou en Moeder* – wife and mother), or a place of significance for the Afrikaner narrative of the Great Trek, the wagons travelled across the country to ensure that the entire ‘volk’ could be involved in the centenary.

The complicated routes are discussed in full in the richly illustrated 800-page *Gedenkboek van die ossewaens op die pad van Suid-Afrika* (Commemorative book of the ox wagons on the path of South Africa), compiled by Dirk Mostert and published by the ATKV in 1940.<sup>311</sup> The treks set out from as early as 8 August 1938 from different destinations and along multiple routes over a time span of more than four months.<sup>312</sup> The ‘Hoof trek’ (principal trek) covered four main sectors (fig. 31), two in the Cape from Cape Town to Graaff-Reinet (8 August to 20 September), and from Graaff-Reinet to Aliwal North (21 September to 13 October);<sup>313</sup> one in the OFS, from Aliwal North to Parys (14 October to 5 November);<sup>314</sup> and one in the Transvaal from Parys to Pretoria

<sup>307</sup> Mostert 1940; Moodie 1975, 175–185; Duvenage, *Gedenktrek* 1988; Marx 2008, 267–275.

<sup>308</sup> Serfontein 1978, 31–32; Bloomberg 1989, 120.

<sup>309</sup> Ferreira 1975, 73.

<sup>310</sup> The nineteenth-century wagons were *Johanna van der Merwe* (Mostert 1940, 46), *P.U.K Bloedrivier* (ibid., 47–48) and apparently also *Dirkie Uys*, which took part in the Cape Town festivities (ibid., 679). It is confusing that Mostert (41–48) discusses the replica wagons in relation to their makers and the first two historical ones according to their origin, but hardly ever clarifies details of their individual routes on the treks. For a typical Voortrekker wagon and its equipment, see Rooyen 1938, 18–51.

<sup>311</sup> Unfortunately, maps are not provided by Mostert. For a general map, see Duvenage 1988, frontispiece.

<sup>312</sup> Afrikaner leaders were appointed for each route, with Henning Klopper as the overall leader of all the treks, and Tienie van Schoor, who was also the official postmaster, presiding over the Hoof trek. As with the original Boer treks, at least some of the wagons were guided by black servants; see, for example, Mostert 1940, 210, 265.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 109–260 (‘Kaapslandse Hoof trek’), 313–350 (‘Hoof trek: Oos-Kapland’).

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 419–468 (‘Vrystaat se Hoof trek’).

project in general had been to restore self-respect in Afrikaners and endow them with a proud sense of identity. But for many this might have remained a rather vague ideal, distant from their real lives and only glimpsed in occasional newspaper reports, were it not for the ‘ossewatrek’ (ox wagon trek) that took place in the last four months leading up to the centenary.<sup>307</sup> This symbolic re-enactment of the historical treks in ox wagons that retraced those journeys, and in so doing visited many rural ‘dorps’ or small towns as well as cities, attracting crowds everywhere, drew Afrikaners far and wide into the spirit of the celebrations.

The idea was the brainchild of Henning Klopper, a railway employee since 1911 and chair of the ATKV, the cultural association of white railway workers, whom we





**Figure 35:** Women in Voortrekker dress. Centenary ossewatrek. 1938 ([https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/44/Voortrekker-1938\\_%282%29.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/44/Voortrekker-1938_%282%29.jpg))



**Figure 36:** Bearded Boer on *Piet Retief* wagon at Mooimeisiefontein. Centenary ossewatrek. 24 September 1938 (<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=urn:gvn:ZAH01:100000132>)

(5 November to 14 December).<sup>315</sup> Such was the interest in the event that the state-owned South African Broadcasting Company, which had intended to report only on the initiation and conclusion of the ossewatrek, provided daily coverage, an unprecedented event in the radio's history.<sup>316</sup>

The first two replica wagons were built, chiefly of stinkwood, by Jonkers cabinet-makers in Knysna (fig. 32). Named *Andries Pretorius* and *Piet Retief*, they initiated the Hoof trek from Cape Town,<sup>317</sup> although they were soon joined in Riversdal by the larger *Hendrik Potgieter*, built to carry mail consigned to the special Ox Wagon Post (fig. 33).<sup>318</sup> It was evidently the only wagon that strictly followed the Hoof trek route, as others made 'side treks' in order to include more towns and historical sites. For instance, *Andries Pretorius* travelled from Hartenbos to Port Elizabeth on its way to Graaff-Reinet,<sup>319</sup> then set off again across the Free State, visiting Bloemfontein and Kimberley together with *Vrou en Moeder*,<sup>320</sup> before rejoining the main route. *Vrou en Moeder* only began its trek in September, as was the case with other newly built wagons. *Sarel Cilliers*, railed from Knysna to Grahamstown, began its trek there;<sup>321</sup> it joined the Hoof trek in Aliwal North and travelled with it to Vegkop, but then diverted to take in a number of eastern Transvaal towns.<sup>322</sup> *Louis Trichardt* was sent by rail from Hartenbos to meet up with the Hoof trek in Graaff-Reinet, and it too visited Transvaal towns, in this case as far north as Pietersburg and Louis Trichardt.<sup>323</sup> Two wagons, both named for girls who survived the Bloukrans massacre,<sup>324</sup> followed entirely independent routes – *Johanna van der Merwe*, a nineteenth-century wagon railed to Moorreesburg to cover a route through the drought-stricken north-western Cape, and *Magrieta Prinsloo*, which set out from Hoeko in the Swartberg Mountains, where the author of 'Die Stem', C.J. Langenhoven was born, and then journeyed north through Beaufort West and the Karoo.<sup>325</sup> Another wagon, *Magdalena de Wet* (named for Retief's wife), apparently only joined the Hoof trek on the Rand.<sup>326</sup> All these wagons reached Pretoria in time to take part in the celebrations of 16 December. A significant alternative route was the one taken by *Piet Retief* and *Vrou en Moeder*, which left the Hoof trek at Winburg to travel through Natal, stopping at Kerkenberg with the Retiefklip, Bloukrans, Wasbank and Pietermaritzburg.<sup>327</sup> Their final destination was Blood River, where they participated in the centenary festivities at that site, joined by the historical *P.U.K. Bloedrivierwa* (Potchefstroom University College Blood River Wagon).<sup>328</sup> In late November, an additional wagon, *Dirkie Uys*, claimed to be more than a century old, began a short trek from Bellville to Cape Town for the celebrations there.<sup>329</sup>

Apart from the speeches, sermons and songs of civic celebrations that greeted the ossewatrek at each town on the route, the modern-day trekkers laid wreaths on the graves of Voortrekkers and also of those who died in the Anglo-Boer War. Gedenktekens (memorials) were often erected,

**315** *Ibid.*, 715–789 ('Transvaalse Hoof trek').

**316** Marx 2008, 271. An unidentified newspaper clipping (HF Archives [old numbering] VTM vol. B5) claimed an even wider audience. Headed 'Romatiek van die tweede Groot Trek gryp die wêreld aan' (the romance of the second Great Trek grabs the world's attention), the article cited interviews with representatives of Twentieth Century Fox Films who reported that film footage of the ossewatrek was being sent abroad weekly for Movietone News.

**317** Mostert 1940, 41–43.

**318** *Ibid.*, 43–44, 179–183. See also Chapter 5 for the Ox Wagon Post.

**319** *Ibid.*, 261–291 ('Langkloof-Trek').

**320** *Ibid.*, 351–418 ('Vrystater se Trek').

**321** *Ibid.*, 293–312 ('Grensboere se Trek').

**322** *Ibid.*, 633–660 ('Sarel Cilliers-Trek').

**323** *Ibid.*, 47, 661–675 ('Louis Trichardt-Trek').

**324** Moodie 1975, 178.

**325** Mostert 1940, 43–44, 479–527 (*Van der Merwe*: 'Noordweste-Trek'), 528–563 (*Prinsloo*: 'Hoeko-Trek').

**326** *Ibid.*, 46.

**327** *Ibid.*, 565–632 ('Natal-Trek'). These important historical sites are discussed in Part II: see *Debora Retief*, *Bloukrans*, *The Vow* and *Church of the Vow* respectively.

**328** *Ibid.*, 42, 47–48. For the wagons arriving at Blood River, see Du Toit and Steenkamp 1938, 19–24.

**329** Mostert 1940, 677–714 ('Bolandse Trek'; for the wagon, see *ibid.*, 679).

frequently in the form of a cairn or simple monument using gathered stones, and the people of Middelburg in the Eastern Cape even made a model of the Moerdyk Monument, which was drawn on its own wagon by schoolboys with the Vierkleur flag of the ZAR over their shoulders.<sup>330</sup> Weddings and baptisms were arranged to coincide with the wagons' arrival at each town, streets were renamed, and oxen guided to pull the wagons through wet cement to leave a permanent reminder of their passing (fig. 34). Another manifestation in which everyone could take part was the women's adoption of Voortrekker dress (fig. 35),<sup>331</sup> and men growing beards (fig. 36). And if the treks of the nineteenth century were barely recorded in visual form, the photographic records of the 1938 ossewa-trek were copious. Many are to be found in Mostert's mammoth *Gedenkboek*.<sup>332</sup>

The sense of participation that spread across the country was reinforced by yet another symbolic event, which provided a spectacular finale to the arrival of celebrants in Pretoria. Over the fortnight before 16 December, young people from the Voortrekker movement formed a relay of torch-bearing runners carrying 'the light of both freedom and "white civilization"'<sup>333</sup> to the South African interior as they believed their forebears had done. Like the wagons, they traversed South Africa from Cape Town to Blood River and Pretoria with acclaim. At the capital, 3 000 young Voortrekkers, each with a torch, joined the final runners in a march to the Monument, creating a river of flame culminating in huge bonfires on the eve of the centenary, for which more than 100 000 people had gathered at the Monument site.<sup>334</sup>

Afrikanerdom was roused, reinforced and unified.<sup>335</sup> In his welcome when the wagons arrived in Pretoria, Jansen proclaimed that God 'used the ox wagons as a way of calling our people back to Him'.<sup>336</sup> As Grundlingh and Sapire write, the centenary celebrations 'had all the rhetoric of populist movements: "struggle", "survival" and "salvation"'.<sup>337</sup> As the first Trek 'represented a pre-eminently successful period in Afrikaner history ... the "second Trek" launched in the uncertainties and vagaries of the present and aspiring to a better and more prosperous future, harked back to that "golden age"'.<sup>338</sup>

**330** Ibid., 354.

**331** Dress patterns were published, and there were reports on the high demand for Voortrekker costume, including men's clothing, that stores were struggling to meet, as in *The Friend*, Bloemfontein, 7.10.1938.

**332** Mostert 1940. Something of the scope of the re-enactment of the treks can be gleaned from texts and photographs of the events at the countless towns visited on the various trek routes and the extraordinary reception the ox wagons enjoyed everywhere. The book also includes uplifting statements, motivating Afrikaner patriotism, such as the caption for the very last photograph of a laager of wagons on page 813: 'MY VEGLAER: Kom, ons trek 'n laer en hou die Afrikanernasie bymekaar!' (MY FIGHTING LAAGER: Come, let us make a laager and hold the Afrikaner nation together!) There are also many references to the Anglo-Boer War, making overt the intertwined roles played by the Trek and the war in the formation of Afrikaner identity. More explicitly, the text on the same page reads 'Die ossewa op die Pad van Suid-Afrika is 'n bittereinder. Hy hendsop nooit. Hy draai nooit om nie. Hy veraai nooit. Hy beur dwarsdeur vorentoe' (The trek continues. The ox wagon on the path of South Africa is a diehard. He does not give up. ['bittereinder' referred specifically to Boers in the Anglo-Boer War who fought to the bitter end, while 'hendsop' referred to those who joined the British.] He does not turn back. He never betrays. He pushes forward.)

**333** Ibid., 183.

**334** The flame of the relay torch was safeguarded at the University of Pretoria until the Monument was completed, when it was transferred into a special niche in the cenotaph hall as an eternal flame of remembrance.

**335** A significant factor in this increased awareness must have been the numerous special supplements that seem to have appeared in every national newspaper, chiefly during December 1938, not only about the celebration of the centenary and the Monument, but telling and retelling stories about the treks and the Voortrekker way of life. There was even a special 'Eeupees-Kalendar' (centenary calendar) published for the year 1938, with photographs of Voortrekker memorabilia as well as of the presidents of the two Afrikaner republics.

**336** '... Hy het die ossewaens gebruik as 'n middel om ons volk ... na Hom terug te roep' (Ferreira 1975, 75). Among others, Jansen saw the centenary as an opportunity for Afrikaners to come together in reconciliation and peace, turning back to the values that had made their forefathers great, as reported in *Die Vaderland* 7.12.1938.

**337** Grundlingh and Sapire 1989, 27.

**338** Ibid., 25.

Historians agree that the centenary, and particularly the symbolic trek, had enormous impact, reaching out to Afrikaners in every corner of South Africa.<sup>339</sup> T. Dunbar Moodie, for example, devotes a whole chapter to ‘The centenary of Geloftedag: highpoint of the civil faith’ and another to ‘The ossewatrek and the Afrikaner economic movement’ in his book *The rise of Afrikanerdom*, and writes in his Preface:

With the centenary of her covenant vow with God ... civil-religious enthusiasm seized Afrikanerdom. Ordinary Afrikaners were swept wholesale into the mainstream of Christian-National myth and ritual. The civil faith now became a guaranteed effective ideological agency of social, political, and economic mobilisation.<sup>340</sup>

According to Bloomberg, these events rescued Afrikanerdom ‘from the dust and ashes of its defeat in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902’, and ‘generated a spectacular country-wide resurgence which swept Dr Malan’s N[atational] P[arty] to power a decade later’.<sup>341</sup> In showing the strength of unified Afrikaners, the centenary and its celebrations rekindled the belief that Afrikanerdom could prevail and a republic be achieved again. The realisation of these ideals still lay some way ahead, however, and it was during the years that Malan’s National Party was slowly increasing its support until it won the election of 1948 that the making of the historical frieze was taken up again, to give permanent and heroic form to the story of the Voortrekkers. In doing so, it contributed to the renewed belief in the Afrikaner’s right to rule in South Africa.

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**339** Mostert 1940; Heuns 2008; Marx 2008. Martjie Bosman (1990) points out how much coverage there was in the 1930s on the Monument and the centenary, particularly the re-enactment of the Trek, in the popular magazine *Die Huisgenoot*.

**340** Moodie 1975, x.

**341** Bloomberg 1989, xix, 122.



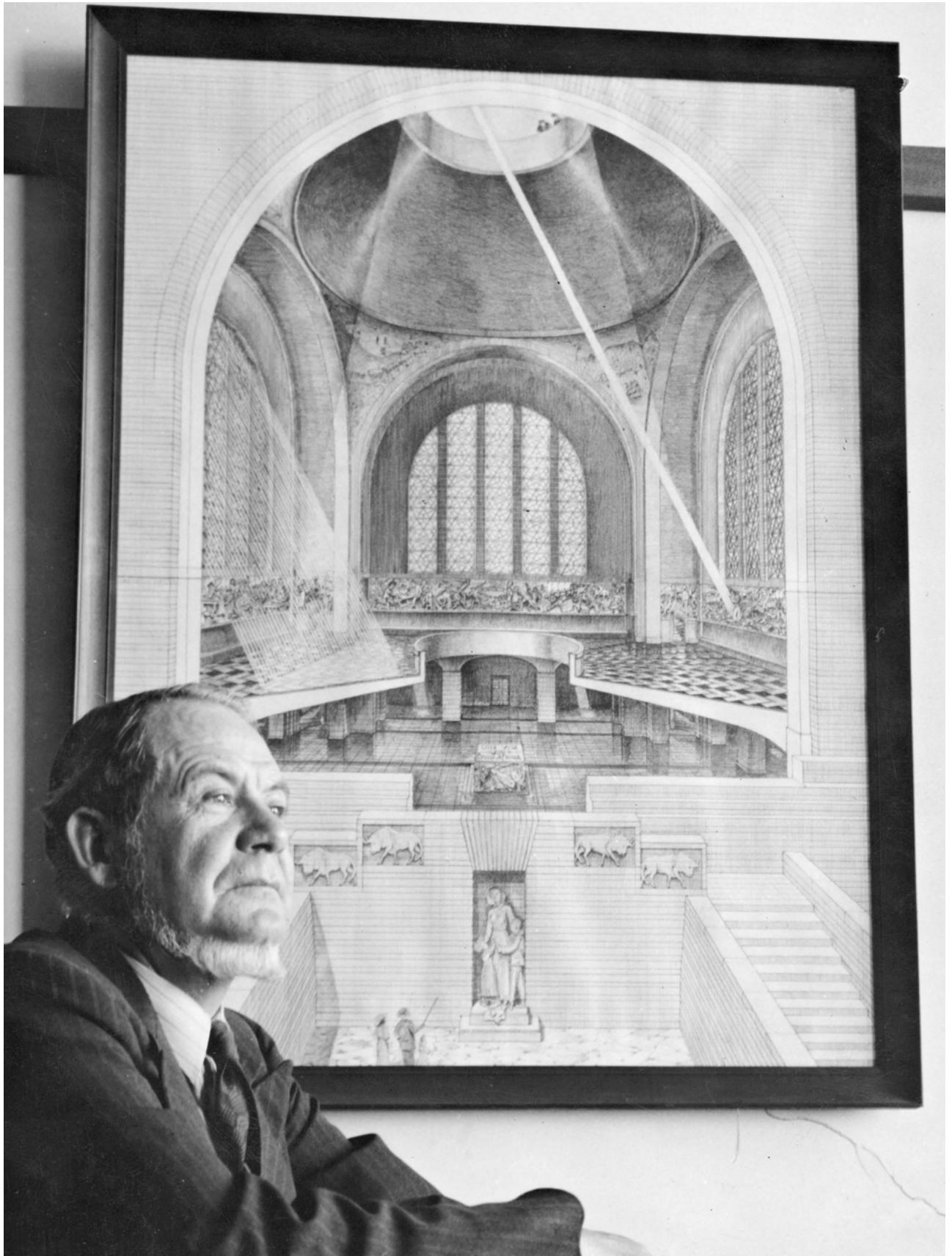


Figure 37: Gerard Moerdyk with Drawing 3. Cross-section of Voortrekker Monument (photo courtesy of HF Archives F 39.1.54 k)

## 2 Concept

*Nationalists believe profoundly in the uniqueness of their cultural identity. They also believe that the boundaries they construct to define that identity are naturally given and not a symbolic construction of their own devising.*<sup>342</sup>

The marble frieze of the Voortrekker Monument was intended to define the history that shaped Afrikanerdom: as such it dominates statements and publications about the edifice issued by the SVK and the Board of Control even before the first edition of the *Official Guide* appeared in 1955,<sup>343</sup> and continued to do so through the *Guide*'s many reprintings, up to the most recent publications.<sup>344</sup> The extensive coverage the frieze is given in comparison with other aspects of the Monument stresses its central role in conceptualising and memorialising the Great Trek, almost implying that the building was erected primarily to house it, and it featured in Moerdyk's drawings of the Monument from early in the design process (fig. 37). A close reading of the documents of the SVK shows that the subject matter of the frieze was to occupy a disproportionate amount of the time spent discussing the form of the memorial after the very early stages. It underlines the importance in the agenda of the SVK to create a permanent visual record of the story of the Great Trek, with the claim of historical accuracy and authenticity that would guarantee it as the 'official' narrative. The frieze would fittingly commemorate and celebrate the Voortrekkers' achievements, confirm the fundamental principles of Afrikaner belief, and act as a didactic tool and an inspiration for generations to come.<sup>345</sup> While it was aimed particularly at an Afrikaans audience, it also aimed to enlighten others, with a visual interpretation of the Trek considered a 'universal language' that would explain the Trek 'graphically and clearly even to strangers who know nothing of our history'.<sup>346</sup>

It would be tedious to recount every detail of contemporary records, and particularly the documents of the SVK, but it is the aim of this chapter to deploy them to reconstruct how the frieze and the ideas it would represent came into being, to contextualise this process in the thinking of the time, and demonstrate something of the complexity of its conceptual underpinning.

While the SVK seemed willing to accept almost without question an explanation of architectural symbolism for the Monument from the architect, Gerard Moerdyk, the narrative of the frieze was subject to the closest scrutiny.<sup>347</sup> Perhaps this was because descriptive representation was a more familiar concept to committee members than the symbolism of architecture. But it was no doubt also because they realised that it would be the most accessible aspect of the meaning of the Monument to its intended audiences, and the Afrikaner cause it embodied. While the monumentality of the architecture would communicate the importance of the Voortrekkers, it was the immense frieze that would tell their story. The records of the countless discussions about it make it possible to track the convoluted evolution of the narrative in some detail. Yet despite this and the key role of the frieze, it is difficult to pin down exactly when the idea of narrative relief sculpture as a seminal part of the Monument was first clearly articulated by the SVK. As already recounted, more practical

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<sup>342</sup> Handler 1994, 30.

<sup>343</sup> Although later editions of the *Official Guide* cite 1954 as its first issue, we have not discovered any actual publications with a date earlier than 1955. Unless otherwise indicated, we have worked with the 1955 English edition.

<sup>344</sup> For example, Riana Heymans and Salomé Theart-Peddle's *The Voortrekker Monument, visitor's guide and souvenir*, first published by Heymans in 1986, revised by Theart-Peddle in 2009; Jackie Grobler's 2001 *Ontdek die Voortrekkermonument – Discover the Voortrekker Monument*.

<sup>345</sup> These goals are expressed many times in various forms in the *Official Guide* 1955; see, for example, 10, 12, 31–32.

<sup>346</sup> *Official Programme* 1949, 48, and *Official Guide* 1955, 40.

<sup>347</sup> Moerdyk discusses the Monument's symbolism in the *Official Guide* 1955, 31–39. See Rankin and Schneider 2017, 157–166.

concerns such as raising funds initially dominated committee business; there was little enough attention given at first to how exactly the Monument might fulfil its function to honour the Voortrekkers by telling their story.

## Early ideas

If a narrative frieze was not fully embraced by the committee from the outset, however, the inclusion of images of some sort was implicit in discussions as early as the second SVK meeting on 5 September 1931, when the minutes already mentioned a proposal for the Monument from Anton van Wouw.<sup>348</sup> The minutes do not make clear whether it involved representational forms but it is almost a certainty, given Van Wouw's well-established reputation as a figurative sculptor.

Anton van Wouw (1862–1945)<sup>349</sup> was born and trained as a sculptor in the Netherlands, no doubt with a traditional training that encompassed an admiration and study of ancient art, to judge by the casts in old photographs of his South African studio (fig. 38).<sup>350</sup> He immigrated to South Africa in 1890, so had by the 1930s already spent more than forty years in the country (fig. 65). Although initially he had to support himself as a gunsmith, Van Wouw fairly soon succeeded in developing a successful career as an artist, including many designs for architectural decoration. The award of important commissions, such as the Kruger Monument in Pretoria (completed 1899) and the Vrouemonument in Bloemfontein (unveiled 1913), earned him a reputation as the leading sculptor in the country, particularly in Afrikaner circles.

The earliest idea for a monument to the Voortrekkers might well have been a purely sculptural concept. It is noteworthy that the Manifesto drawn up by the SVK in later 1931 makes reference to a memorial of granite, sandstone or bronze, the latter in particular implying that the Monument might be in the form of a sculpture.<sup>351</sup> That this was part of the committee's thinking in early discussions is also suggested by a reference to the colossal heads of the American presidents that were being fashioned from the granite face of Mount Rushmore in the 1930s.<sup>352</sup> And the design for the Monument submitted by Coert Lourens Steynberg (1905–82),<sup>353</sup> probably around 1935, was a single gigantic figure of a Voortrekker at least seven or eight times life-size, standing on a very high plinth, with relief panels on the base (fig. 39).<sup>354</sup> But the earliest designs of the Monument we know of, presented by Moerdyk in 1932 and described by Van Wouw in 1933, were architectural in form.

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**348** The relevant item 13 of SVK 5.9.1931 is partially missing in the NARSSA archive which houses the minutes (A141 'Die Sentrale Volksmonumente-Komitee', vs 1 and 2), where some of the flimsy carbon copy pages are in very poor condition, but no reference to sculpture is apparent. Predictably, the point is made that it was not possible to give attention to Van Wouw's proposal until the financial situation had been organised.

**349** It is notable when considering Van Wouw's reputation that he was the subject of many articles in the popular journal *Die Huisgenoot*, such as an article in August 1916 (82–84), a substantial essay with illustrations by F.J. du Toit on 6.2.1925 (8–20), and another by 'E.A.' on 19.11.1937 (53, 55), focusing on the colossal *Voortrekker mother and children* that he was to make for the Monument. For Van Wouw, see Cohen 1938; *DSAB* 1, 1968, 841–844; Duffey 1981; Berman 1983, 472–473 (figs on pp.139, 413, 463); Duffey 2006; Duffey, *Van Wouw* 2008; Duffey, Kamper and Mosako 2010.

**350** A photograph of his studio other than the one illustrated shows a bust of each of Hadrian and Trajan, and the bearded head of Menelaos(?) of the so-called Pasquino Group (UP Archives, Van Wouw files, 1).

**351** The likelihood of the use of bronze is again mentioned in SVK 14.4.1932: p.1, in consideration of the length of time it would take an artist to carry out work in bronze, and is often present by implication in discussions. Jansen specifically cited bronze, now in the form of panels, in a letter to Minister Hofmeyr on 9 October 1935, when government involvement in the Monument was being negotiated.

**352** SVK 14.4.1932: p.1. Moerdyk, present to speak to his own proposal and always ready to have his say in SVK debates, spurned that idea, saying it would cost millions.

**353** *DSAB* 5, 1987, 738–740; Ogilvie 1988, 639–640; Hagg 1989.

**354** This design was published together with one by Moerdyk in *Die Vaderland* 10.1.1936. There were to be four historical panels on the base representing milestones of South African Trek history: departure, negotiation, betrayal,





**Figure 38:** Anton van Wouw's studio, Doornfontein. Small-size copy of Borghese Warrior (far right), photograph of 'Runner' from Herculaneum (on the wall). c. 1933 (photo courtesy of UP Archives, Van Wouw files)

The architect Gerard Leendert Pieter Moerdyk (1890–1958), like Van Wouw, was of Dutch heritage.<sup>355</sup> His parents, Jan Leendert Moerdijk, a Dutch teacher from Ierseke, and Cornelia Dorst of Brouwerhaven, had emigrated in the later 1880s from the Netherlands to South Africa. The first of nine children, Gerard was born after they had first settled at Nylstroom (Nile River) near the Waterberg Massif in present-day Limpopo province.<sup>356</sup> The family identified with the Boer cause in the Anglo-Boer War, and it is notable that they changed their surname from Moerdijk to the more Afrikaans Moerdyk, although the family later reverted to the Dutch spelling.<sup>357</sup> Jan Moerdyk's service in the war resulted in the incarceration of his wife and children in the Standerton concentration camp. This would have been an influential part of his boyhood in South Africa, and his identification with the Afrikaner cause, although he had an English schooling at Pretoria College.<sup>358</sup> When he won a design competition he left school without matriculating, as the patron of the contest, the Public Works Department in Pretoria, employed him straightaway as a junior draughtsman from 1906 to 1910. In September that year he began his training at the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London, choosing training in England rather than in the Netherlands. There he excelled particularly in his historical studies, Classical Architecture.<sup>359</sup> After successfully completing his Intermediate examinations at the end of 1911, he made the first of many trips to Europe, where he spent time at the British School at Rome, coincidentally when Van Wouw was modelling

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victory (uittog, onderhandeling, verraad, oorwinning). The long panel Steynberg depicted on the front of the base in his sketch would readily have provided a format for some sort of narrative.

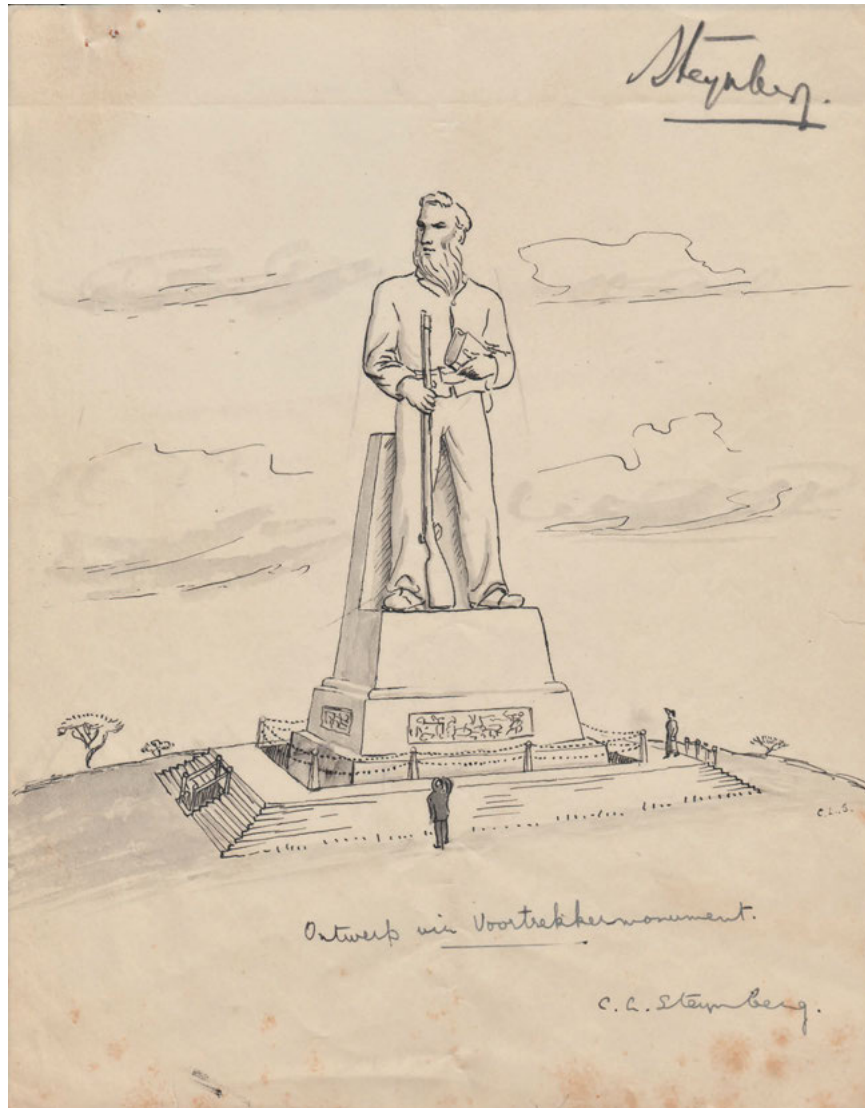
**355** For an account of Moerdyk's life, see *DSAB* 3, 1977, 622–624; Vermeulen 1999; and the entry on the informative Artefacts website <http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/archframes.php?archid=1102>

**356** For Christian-Egyptian associations of Nylstroom (Raper, Möller and Du Plessis 2014, 385), founded by trekkers in 1866, see Merrington 2001, 329.

**357** We have preferred the Afrikaans spelling because it is used in all the documentation and publications referring to the Voortrekker Monument at the time it was being built.

**358** Founded by the British during the Anglo-Boer War, it changed its name to 'Pretoria Boys High School' in 1910; see <http://boyshigh.com/history/>

**359** For further detail on the significance of his studies, see Rankin and Schneider 2017, 155–166.



**Figure 39:** Coert Steynberg. Design for Voortrekker Monument. 1935. Pencil, 22.8 × 17.7 cm (photo courtesy of HF Archives SVK vol. 18 file 13.3.1)

his sculptures for the Vrouemonument at Canova's studio there and preparing them for casting (fig. 67).

Moerdyk completed his Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) qualification in London in 1913,<sup>360</sup> before he returned to South Africa. Here he was again employed by the Public Works Department in Pretoria, and then at the Robinson Deep Gold Mine in Johannesburg. But he began to work independently as an architect around the time of his marriage to Sylva Pirow in 1918. Her influence on him as an ardent Afrikaner nationalist was significant.<sup>361</sup> Becoming a member of the Broederbond in 1920,<sup>362</sup> and the Akademie in 1923, Moerdyk decided to focus on the Afrikaner community, and established his practice in Pretoria in 1924.<sup>363</sup> As Roger Fisher writes: 'At the age of

<sup>360</sup> Moerdyk is often cited as the first South African architect to be a member of the RIBA, but he did not take this up right away, only applying in 1920 ([www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/archframes.php?archid=1102&source=0](http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/archframes.php?archid=1102&source=0)).

<sup>361</sup> See Coetzee 1995, 19.

<sup>362</sup> Although participation in the Broederbond was shrouded in secrecy, Vermeulen (1999, 49) records Moerdyk's membership of this powerful secret society representing the inner circles of Afrikanerdom, discussed in Chapter 1. Bloomberg (1989, 196) called him a 'prominent brethren'.

<sup>363</sup> Vermeulen 1999, 49. N. Pillman notes: 'he was not an Afrikaner, he was brought up in a Dutch home, where the children went to English schools ... then something disappointed him in Johannesburg where they spoke

thirty the events of his personal history and political associations through his wife, Sylva, were beginning to fuse and prepare him as the central figure in creating an architecture that embodied and symbolized Afrikaner Nationalist ideologies and aspirations.<sup>364</sup>

Moerdyk worked with various architects, such as Wynand Hendrik Louw (1883–1967),<sup>365</sup> George Esselmont Gordon (Gordon) Leith (1886–1965),<sup>366</sup> and later Henry Arthur Ingress Watson (1904–82).<sup>367</sup> Watson, who was an assistant in Moerdyk's office from 1926, became his partner in 1938 when the building of the Voortrekker Monument had begun, and probably played a larger role in the project than is usually acknowledged, especially as Moerdyk travelled a great deal at the time. Moerdyk was highly productive, a prolific architect with numerous domestic and church designs as well as important public commissions, a number of which will be discussed below, and he built a reputation as an architect amongst Afrikaners equivalent to Van Wouw's as a sculptor.<sup>368</sup> Also contributing to Moerdyk's standing were his writings on architectural topics, which, in particular, promoted the concept of a national style.<sup>369</sup>

The very early designs for the Monument by Moerdyk and Van Wouw require detailed consideration as they mark the beginning of numerous proposals and contain crucial elements of the final building and its sculpture. At the SVK of 14 April 1932, Moerdyk was invited to speak to 'his monument sketch'. The minutes recorded that Moerdyk explained how, when he made his drawing, he was involuntarily thinking of the Blood River site, which influenced the form and size of the design. He went on to describe it as follows:

The monument has aspects of the pyramid and the Zimbabwe ruins. It is thus typically Afrikaans [meant as a synonym for African]. It is huge and straightforward like the Voortrekkers themselves. There are two spacious halls. One can serve as a museum, while the other can contain the bones of the Voortrekkers. The bas-reliefs will be placed at human height, and will show scenes from the Trek.

The passageway through the middle is a symbolic representation of the advance of white civilisation that opened a path through the native peoples. During festivals the pot with pitch and oil will be alight. Around there will be an amphitheatre with a rostrum from which the speakers can address those present.<sup>370</sup>

An unusual aspect of the proposal was the idea of combining a museum and memorial. This concept was most prominently developed in the Imperial War Museum in London, after the British War Cabinet had decided on 21 August 1917 on 'the adoption of the National War Museum as the

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English in their home, and they came to Pretoria and became Afrikaans'. Moerdyk research papers, AA1:15 (cited at [www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/archframes.php?archid=1102&countadd=1](http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/archframes.php?archid=1102&countadd=1)).

**364** Fisher 2003, 33.

**365** See *DSAB* 4, 1981, 324–325; <http://artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/archframes.php?archid=1001&countadd=1>. We are grateful to Roger Fisher for bringing this partnership with Moerdyk to our attention.

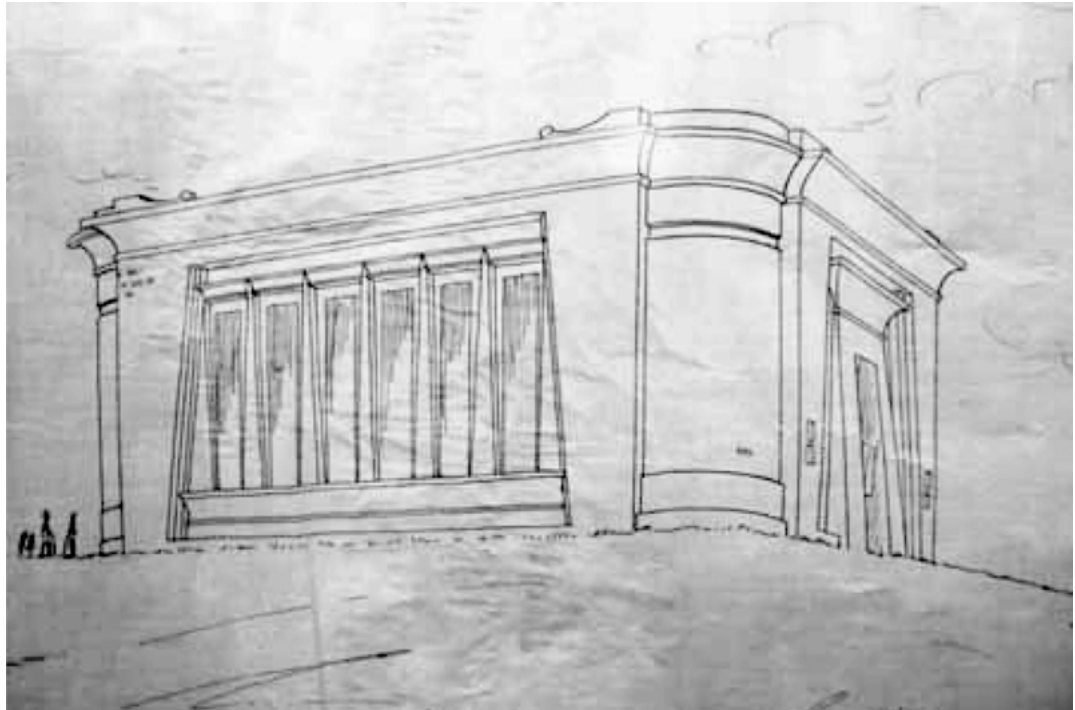
**366** *DSAB* 3, 1977, 506–507.

**367** <http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/archframes.php?archid=1845>

**368** Moerdyk's status by the time of the centenary may be judged by the fact that the popular painter Tretchikoff made a portrait of the architect for the cover of the Voortrekker issue of the Cape Town weekly *Spotlight*: the artist commented that Moerdyk (by then sporting a beard) 'looks just like a Voortrekker' (Moerdyk files, University of Pretoria, <http://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/350>).

**369** Moerdyk was a prolific writer of articles, a number of them on architectural history; see Rankin and Schneider 2017, 155, 157.

**370** 'Die monument bevat bestanddele van die piramied en die Simbabwe ruines. Hy is dus tipies Afrikaans. Hy is massief en eenvoudig soos die Voortrekkers self was. Daar is twee ruim sale. Die een kan as 'n museum dien, terwyl die ander die beenders van die Voortrekkers kan bevat. Die bas-reliefs sal menshoogte geplaas word, en sal taferele uit die Voortrek weergee. / Die gang deur did middel is 'n simbolies voorstelling van die weg wat die wit beskawing deur die kafferbevolking gebaan het. Gedurende feesdae sal die pot met pik en olie aan die brand wees. Rondom sal daar 'n amfiteater wees met 'n rostrum vanwaar die sprekers die gehoor kan toespreek' (SVK 14.4.1932: 'Mnr Moerdyk verduidelik', p.2).



**Figure 40:** Gerard Moerdyk. Early design for Voortrekker Monument. Undated (Fisher and Clarke 2010, 156 fig. 8)

National War Memorial'.<sup>371</sup> While it was initially set up at the Crystal Palace and never had a purpose-built edifice, it is likely that Moerdyk was aware of the dual role of 'the most important war museum in the western world'.<sup>372</sup>

Although not clarified in the minutes, his design must have been presented as a joint proposal with Van Wouw, as this is recorded in a subsequent letter to Moerdyk from the SVK secretary, Scheepers, in later 1932. Referring to how the architect 'in collaboration with Mr van Wouw gave us an idea of how you would build such a monument',<sup>373</sup> he asked whether Moerdyk and Van Wouw would assist by writing an article to plant a seed in the mind of the public about the architectural form of a memorial.<sup>374</sup> Scheepers wrote that he recalled that their notion of the Monument symbolised the 'character and deeds of the forefathers as you imagined them',<sup>375</sup> which again implied the presence of imagery, explicitly referred to by Moerdyk, albeit in generalised terms, in his mention of bas-reliefs of the Trek.

Sixteen months later Anton van Wouw suggested a similar if not identical proposal when he was interviewed by *Die Vaderland* (26.8.1933):

'I imagine', he said, 'a majestic memorial on top of a hill where it would capture and hold the visitor's attention immediately. It must be something grand, heavy and massive, an interpretation of the steadfastness of the Voortrekkers, and with an affinity to its environment.

My idea would be two massive needles [obelisks?], truncated and about 85 feet high, linked by a middle section above steps like seats in a theatre. The large faces of the square needles must recall the endless open veld. They must remain unadorned except for a panel on each, one side of Retief, the other of Andries Pretorius. Each [obelisk] must have a room of about 40 by 60 feet. Inside must

<sup>371</sup> Kavanagh 1988, 87.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid., 77. The Imperial War Museum was ultimately housed in the Bethlem Royal Hospital in 1936.

<sup>373</sup> '... het in samewerking met Mnr. Van Wouw vir ons 'n denkbeeld gegee van hoe u so 'n monument sal bou' (letter from Scheepers to Moerdyk, 25.8.1932, HF Archives SVK vol. 20 file 16.1).

<sup>374</sup> Moerdyk had by this date become well-known for his publications on architecture, many in architectural journals, but he published in more general journals also, as with an article in *Die Banier* in February 1921, 'Die nasionale waarde van 'n gedenkteken' (The national value of a monument).

<sup>375</sup> '... eienskappe en dade van die voorouers soos u geestesoog dit gesien het' (letter, 25.8.1932).



**Figure 41:** Great Zimbabwe ruins, tower. 11th–15th century (<https://i.pinimg.com/originals/9a/e4/c5/9ae4c5da9884422a826fd886faa3db6b.jpg>)



**Figure 42:** Columns of the Karnak temple at Luxor. Photograph in Moerdyk's possession (photo courtesy of UP Archives, Moerdyk files MDK 0015V)



**Figure 43:** Gerard Moerdyk. Early design for Voortrekker Monument. 1936 (*Die Vaderland* 10.1.1936, 7; courtesy of ARCA and Free State Provincial Archives Repository Bloemfontein)



**Figure 44:** A.B. Hangartner. Transformer building, Kakamas. 1914 (photo courtesy of ID 160520746 © dpreezg, deposit-photos.com)



**Figure 45:** Gordon Leith. Voortrekker Gedenksaal (Memorial Hall), Visagie Street, Pretoria. c. 1927. Not extant (Tully 1932)

be a sarcophagus containing the bones of Voortrekkers, and, around the walls, in bas-relief, incidents from history. ...<sup>376</sup>

Van Wouw's description may not have referred to an actual sketch, as he prefixed his explanations with 'I imagine' and 'my idea'. Crucial to his monument were two massive rectangular structures, each about 85 feet high, which we can interpret as truncated obelisks, set up on either side of a central structure on a large stepped foundation. They were to be unembellished except for a single relief panel on each, no doubt symmetrically placed and marking the monument's façade. Although Van Wouw's description is too brief to be clear, the buildings were to provide the space for two equal halls of about forty by sixty feet, housing a sarcophagus for Voortrekker remains, and a bas-relief with historical scenes around it. These elements proposed by Moerdyk and Van Wouw were destined to become key parts of the final Monument, though the forms evolved over the years leading up to the inauguration, and the intention to reinter the remains of Retief and his men gave way to the idea of an empty tomb or cenotaph.<sup>377</sup>

An undated drawing for a monumental building in the Moerdyk family papers has been identified by Roger Fisher and Nicholas Clarke as the architect's first design for an 'ossuary for the reinterment of the mortal remains of Piet Retief' (fig. 40).<sup>378</sup> The building has a rectangular layout and symmetry, its sheer bulk and the sloping profile of the door frame suggesting an Egyptian affinity, while attached round 'towers' at each corner may allude to the curving forms of African architecture, such as the tapering convex tower of Great Zimbabwe (fig. 41), or the colossal columns of the Karnak temple at Luxor (fig. 42). However, it does not correspond closely to Moerdyk's general description to the SVK in 1932 or his known architectural work. On the other hand, a design by

<sup>376</sup> "Ek stel my voor", het hy gesê, "'n majestueuse gedenkteken bo-op 'n koppie, waar dit die besoeker se aandag dadelik sal vang en hou. Dit moet iets groots wees, swaar en massief, 'n vertolking van die rotsvastheid van die Voortrekker en 'n aansluiting by die omgewing. / My idee sou wees twee massiewe naalde, kortgekap en sê 85 voet hoog, verbind deur 'n middelstuk bokant trappe soos sitplekke in 'n teater. Die groot vlakke van die vierkantige naalde moet laat dink aan die oneindige vlakke. Hulle moet onversierd bly behalwe vir 'n paneel elk, eenkant van Retief en anderkant van Andries Pretorius. Elkeen moet bevat 'n kamer van sê 40 by 60 voet. Daarbinne moet staan 'n sarkofaag met die bene van Voortrekkers en om die mure, in bas-relief, voorvalle uit die geskiedenis. ...'" (*Die Vaderland* 26.8.1933).

<sup>377</sup> Although the idea was finally dropped, there were precedents for reinterment: the dead of the Bloukrans massacre were exhumed in 1895 and buried in a mass grave at Chieveley, where a monument was erected in 1897 (see *Bloukrans*); and, closer in time to the Voortrekker Monument, at the 1929 Dundee Talana memorial, with which Secretary Scheepers had been involved, the first Afrikaner casualties of the Anglo-Boer War were reinterred (Fisher and Clarke 2010, 152–153 fig. 2).

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, 155–156 fig. 8.

Moerdyk reproduced a few years later in *Die Vaderland* of 10 January 1936 (fig. 43), at the time of the open call for proposals for the Monument, matches both Moerdyk's and Van Wouw's accounts, and confirms that the two men had been collaborating on designs. It is described in the press as having been developed for the SVK 'in the style of an Egyptian temple, as found at Luxor and along the Nile'.<sup>379</sup>

A surprising forerunner is the building housing the transformer in Kakamas, a remote town on the Orange River in the Northern Cape (fig. 44),<sup>380</sup> designed in 1914 by the Swiss artisan, A.B. Hangartner, in the form of an Egyptian pylon temple 'for the Labour Colony Commission of the N.G.K.'.<sup>381</sup> Two inscriptions in raised bronze letters above the building's central entrance provide the construction date in Latin, ANNO DOM[ini] MCMXIV, and above it the name of the town in Phoenician. With the ancient references in the design and the inscriptions, the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk apparently intended to link the 'transformer' to Christian faith. Both would remind the inhabitants of Kakamas that they were blessed as God's chosen people, as were the Israelites when Moses led them from Egypt to Canaan. As the transformer supplied a new abundance of light it might have been associated with the light of salvation. It perhaps even reminded people of the plague of total darkness, which God ordered Moses to spread over Egypt, recounted in *Exodus* 10.21–23. While the Egyptians could not 'see anyone else or move about for three days, ... all the Israelites had light in all places where they lived'. The Egyptian features of Moerdyk's designs for the Monument served to stimulate similar biblical connotations.

It is not without interest that Gordon Leith had designed a Voortrekker Memorial Hall (Gedenksaal) in Pretoria as early as 1927 with a weighty symmetrical façade dominated by two tower-like wings, not unlike an Egyptian temple, although without battered walls (fig. 45). It was described by L. Cumming-George as an 'unconventional concept ... with a view to expressing the fortitude and simplicity of those whom it was designed to commemorate'.<sup>382</sup> The wording is remarkably close to Moerdyk's description of his design quoted above: 'It is huge and straightforward like the Voortrekkers themselves.'<sup>383</sup> And Leith's building had on its façade a 'modelled cantilever frieze representing incidents from the Great Trek'.<sup>384</sup>

Moerdyk's drawing in *Die Vaderland* presents the silhouette of a pylon temple in a form close to the Egyptian prototype, although the pylons were not only a feature of the façade flanking the lower entrance, as was the case in Egypt, but extended back to encompass two tall rectangular structures, standing on a high, slightly inward-sloping socle. The design corresponds to Van Wouw's description of two rectangular halls, and those talked of by Moerdyk as long ago as 1932. The central passageway of Moerdyk's 1932 account is clearly demarcated, and there are three large platforms, each of them recessed to serve as consecutive flights of steps that lead to the elevated entrance: together with the building's plinth they form a high base for the edifice and provide a speaker's rostrum. There is also an elongated relief panel on either side of the doorway that corresponds to the description of bas-reliefs by Van Wouw (although his first design, discussed below, was in high relief). The newspaper states that these sculptures on the façade were only part of the reliefs: there were to be sixteen in all to represent Voortrekker episodes, including these on the

<sup>379</sup> 'in die aard van 'n Egiptiese temple, soos dié by Luxor en langs die Nyl' (*Die Vaderland* 10.1.1936). It is of interest that amongst Moerdyk's papers in the UP Archives there are a number of A4-size photographs of Egyptian architecture, perhaps from the time he first visited Egypt in 1936, such as the one illustrated in fig. 42; see Vermeulen 1999, 105–106.

<sup>380</sup> Raper, Möller and Du Plessis 2014, 218.

<sup>381</sup> Cornelius 2001, 80–81 fig. 6; Merrington 2001, 329; <https://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/bldgframes.php?bldgid=8581> (quote).

<sup>382</sup> Cumming-George (1933) who also mentions 'a painted frieze suggesting the Great Trek in the court'; for quotes see [www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/bldgframes.php?bldgid=5116](https://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/bldgframes.php?bldgid=5116).

<sup>383</sup> SVK 14.4.1932: 'Mnr Moerdyk verduidelik', p.2.

<sup>384</sup> Henry Cowing Tully's (1932, 6–7) description accompanying a plan and a watercolour view of the Voortrekker Memorial Hall by Leith.



front pylons and others on the ‘side and behind’.<sup>385</sup> Evidently there was thought of exterior sculptures at this stage, although the reporter may have misunderstood as both Moerdyk and Van Wouw had previously mentioned interior bas-reliefs.<sup>386</sup> As we will argue below, essential elements of this early monument figured prominently in Moerdyk’s final design.

Apart from providing insights into early design concepts for the Voortrekker Monument, the amount of press coverage that they attracted is an indication of the level of public interest in the Monument, and the likelihood that it was being talked about widely, spurred by the SVK commitment to memorialise the 1938 centenary in an appropriate way. And it may well have been a topic for debate even earlier. Alex Duffey describes how Van Wouw and Moerdyk had for many years discussed ideas about a future monument to honour the Voortrekkers, and speculates that they had made sketches, even as early as 1916, and already had designs prepared when the SVK first met.<sup>387</sup> The Van Wouw proposal mentioned at the SVK of 1931, Moerdyk’s description minuted by the SVK in 1932, the description reported from Van Wouw in *Die Vaderland* in 1933, and Moerdyk’s sketch illustrated in *Die Vaderland* of 1936 were presumably based on such discussions, including sculptures that would provide scope for Van Wouw’s talents, just as the architecture would Moerdyk’s.

The prospect that the imagery would take the form of relief sculpture was made manifest in August 1933 when Van Wouw invited the committee to view a relief he had been making on his own initiative, which depicted the Trek leader Piet Retief (fig. 59).<sup>388</sup> The sculptor was interviewed at the time by *Die Vaderland* (26.8.1933), giving his description of the Monument discussed above, and he stated that this panel was the first of a series of fifteen planned to depict major events of the Trek.<sup>389</sup> Not surprisingly, although there is some discrepancy in the number of panels proposed (sixteen was the number mentioned in 1936), the sculptor was more precise than the architect about the inclusion of sculpture, and he assigned the reliefs more specific locations: two sculptured panels on the exterior (the one of Retief, one might surmise, like the one he had already modelled), and, within the building, ‘in bas-relief’ on the surrounding walls, thus placing the narrative sculptures inside the Monument, as would ultimately be the case.

It hardly seems coincidental that the SVK at its meeting in September 1933, just over a month after Van Wouw’s invitation to view his relief, proposed a large panel memorialising an early event from the Trek.<sup>390</sup> Prompted by submissions to the committee for a monument for Louis Trichardt, the first Voortrekker leader to leave the Cape, this was the earliest mention of historical panels recorded by the SVK itself. But probably there had been considerable informal talk about such matters. The same minutes later take the idea of reliefs for granted, as they record discussion

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**385** ‘Op die voorste gewels, en ook langsaan en agter, kom ’n sestientalbasreliefs, wat verskillende tonele uit die Voortrek moet voorstel’ (*Die Vaderland* 10.1.1936).

**386** At a meeting between a subcommittee of the Boukomitee and the Akademie on 11.12.1936 (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/8), the minutes record Moerdyk persuading committee members that exterior sculptures would detract from the overall effect of the Monument, and that works that formed part of the architecture were preferable; he also agreed to consider the use of murals.

**387** Duffey 2006, 26. He traces the relationship of the two men in detail, and their collaboration on designs for the Monument. As previously recounted, they also collaborated on the Dundee Talana memorial in 1920, which incorporated Voortrekker caryatids; see Scheepers 1983 and Fisher and Clarke 2010, 153.

**388** SVK 5.8.1933: p.1. A handwritten invoice of 1.8.1934 from Vignali to Van Wouw includes ‘one plaster of Paris casting being Piet Retief £12’, dated 16.7.1934 (Du Plessis 1996, 200), presumably referring to the same work. It is puzzling why the casting occurred so long after Van Wouw’s invitation to the SVK to view it in August 1933. Perhaps Van Wouw intended them to view the panel in clay and decided to have a professional cast made to preserve the relief when the SVK took so long to come to see it. It also suggests his confidence that his model would be used. This cast appears later in photographs next to the armature of the full-size model of the *Voortrekker mother and children* in Van Wouw’s studio (UP Archives, Anton van Wouw Photos, 1).

**389** Whether Van Wouw ever made designs for another fourteen panels, perhaps in the form of sketches, is unknown, as his wife destroyed all his drawings and correspondence soon after his death (Duffey 2008, 185).

**390** SVK 16.9.1933: Die Vredesmonument (Vereeniging) 1: ‘Dr Hugo meen dat die voorste Voortrek deur ’n groot paneel in die Voortrekkermonument herdink behoort te word’ (Dr Hugo thinks that the first trek should be commemorated with a large panel in the Voortrekker Monument).

about how the topics should not be left to individual choice when artists were approached to make panels representing Voortrekker scenes. But the SVK felt that it needed advice on the topics, and a small committee of Drs Engelbrecht and Preller with Secretary Scheepers was set up to consider the matter.<sup>391</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, the two doctors were both highly regarded historians, albeit of very different backgrounds, whose knowledge of Afrikaner history made them obvious choices for the committee.

The decision to set up this small advisory group was the germ of the idea for the SVK's Histories Komitee (Historical Committee), formally constituted in 1936 to define and control the subject matter of the frieze, which would come to be understood as requiring a coherent programme rather than being independent creations from individual artists. From the SVK meeting of September 1933 onwards, there were regular references to the use of sculptured panels in one form or another in the committee's deliberations. For example, the intention to put out a call to artists for designs was discussed again at the SVK meeting of 10 May 1935, and reiterated on 29 May by the Dagbestuur, although there is no clarity on whether this was actually done at the time.

## Van Wouw and Moerdyk

Despite the stated intention to draw on a wider field of sculptors,<sup>392</sup> and the fact that committee members were in no hurry to take up Van Wouw's 1933 invitation,<sup>393</sup> a perusal of the SVK minutes of the 1930s demonstrates that Van Wouw's involvement, even if not his sole involvement, seemed a foregone conclusion through much of the decade.<sup>394</sup> His position as the leading sculptor of Afrikaner subjects was frequently referred to, and his suitability for the task went unchallenged in the early years. When, for example, Engelenburg argued that they should have confidence in South African artists, he picked out Van Wouw as one who shared in Afrikaner ideals, and asked rhetorically, 'Whose past would make him better qualified to do this work than the sculptor Mr. van Wouw?'<sup>395</sup> Moerdyk would go even further, writing in his obituary for Van Wouw in 1945, 'I was of the opinion that this monument could not be truly representative of our people without Van Wouw providing a piece of work for it.'<sup>396</sup> At a meeting of the SVK in August 1935, with only three years remaining until the centenary, when there was discussion of the urgent need to initiate the historical panel commission, it was decided to approach Van Wouw for an estimate.<sup>397</sup> Secretary Scheepers visited the sculptor and reported that Van Wouw thought that the two largest panels would require eighteen to twenty-four months to complete, and that expenses for himself and an assistant would be in the region of £140 per month.<sup>398</sup> On Van Wouw's invitation, the committee went to visit him after it had adjourned that day. Time was pressing if they were to avoid all the effort

<sup>391</sup> SVK 16.9.1933: Die Vredesmonument 3. The group did not meet right away. Engelbrecht reported (SVK 11.11.1933) that the delay was the result of his illness, and proposed that Mrs Jansen take his place.

<sup>392</sup> The involvement of a number of different artists was also recommended at a joint meeting of the Akademie with the Boukomitee on 11.12.1936 (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/8).

<sup>393</sup> SVK 25.10.1934: 12 records that the committee was still planning to see his relief.

<sup>394</sup> This was implicit in earlier discussions about calls to other artists, and was explicitly acknowledged by the SVK on 5.10.1936: 9, when the minutes stated that Van Wouw would not be the only artist for the Monument, although he was the only one who had been appointed at that time. The implication was that Van Wouw would have an ongoing role, although on that occasion it was agreed that he was to be encouraged to devote his attention to the bronze *Voortrekker mother and children*, and the nature of any other projects was left unresolved.

<sup>395</sup> 'Wie se verlede het hom beter aangedui om hierdie werk te doen as die beeldhouer mnr. van Wouw?' (SVK 21.9.1935: 9h).

<sup>396</sup> 'Ek was van mening dat hierdie monument nie werklik verteenwoordigend van ons volk kon wees sonder dat Van Wouw 'n stuk werk daarop gelewer het nie' (*Die Huisgenoot* 7.9.1945).

<sup>397</sup> SVK 5.8.1935: 13.

<sup>398</sup> Dagbestuur 23.8.1935: 5.

they had already put into the project being commandeered, once the government had announced on 9 October 1935 that the Voortrekker Monument should be a national project, and asserted the right to nominate seven representatives to the SVK and two to its Dagbestuur.

When the SVK was galvanised into action by this government announcement, it claimed to have already made considerable progress, including having decided on twenty-four historical topics, of which a chosen twelve would be made as bronze panels,<sup>399</sup> and it was Van Wouw who was named as the most suitable sculptor. There was even a contract the following year. Correspondence with SVK secretary Scheepers records an invitation for the committee to visit Van Wouw on 13 May 1936, but later that year, in September, it was Moerdyk alone who signed the contract with the sculptor. On 14 September 1936, the written agreement they signed spelled out that Van Wouw would be responsible for making certain sculptures for the Monument, ‘namely a Voortrekker mother ... and a historical bas-relief inside the monument’.<sup>400</sup> The contract specified that Van Wouw was to produce sketch models and carry them out after final approval, as and when the architect and the committee required, for a payment of £100 per month.<sup>401</sup> There was no clarity as to whether ‘a historical bas-relief’ meant a single panel or a continuous frieze, and there was no mention of how the final form of the works would be produced. There was a long-standing practice, followed for Van Wouw’s Kruger- and Vrouemonument, of having monumental bronze sculpture cast in European studios to the sculptor’s designs. Even for a rare marble sculpture by Van Wouw, his 1929 *Andrew Murray*, he sent his model, made in South Africa, to Italy to be professionally carved – the same production pattern that would ultimately be followed for the Monument frieze in the 1940s.<sup>402</sup> In the case of the *Voortrekker mother and children* (fig. 49), however, the bronze would be cast in Pretoria by Renzo Vignali, whose foundry, established in Pretoria in the 1930s,<sup>403</sup> offered the first viable alternative to the earlier practice of sending works to Europe for casting.<sup>404</sup>

To track Van Wouw’s relationship to the Monument project is complex, but something of its permutations can be traced through various references in the SVK documents, which show that his initial involvement was to include historical panels, although ultimately only what was generally referred to as the ‘Vrou’ (*Voortrekker mother and children*) was made. The month after the signing of the contract with him in September 1936, the SVK called for models of the Vrou and panels from Van Wouw, but suggested he concentrate on the Vrou,<sup>405</sup> and Duffey dates the sculptor’s 62 cm high model in plaster and bronze to that year.<sup>406</sup> During 1937, however, it was noted that he needed an

**399** SVK 21.9.1935: 4b. That there would be twelve bronze panels depicting the Trek was repeated in Jansen’s letter to Minister Hofmeyr regarding government involvement in the Monument (9.10.1935), although Hofmeyr’s reply (12.10.1936) recommended caution about the number, saying that the views of the artist should be taken into account; it is notable that he uses artist in the singular, possibly with Van Wouw in mind (NHKA P1/2/3/8/10). Bronze is also cited as the material for the historical panels in a number of documents, such as the undated ‘What will the form of the Monument be?’ (Wat gaan die vorm van die Monument wees?) (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/8).

**400** ‘Naamlik ’n Voortrekker Moeder ... en ’n Geskiedkundige basrelief binne die monument’ (HF Archives [old numbering] VTM vol. A3).

**401** It also specified that, should his work cease for any reason, sketches and models would be the property of the SVK.

**402** Duffey 2008, 171–172; Duffey, De Kamper and Mosako 2010, 49. We were unable to identify the workshop that undertook the carving, but an inscription by Van Wouw on a photograph of the sculpture, which Gerard de Kamper kindly retrieved for us, locates it in Rome (Andrew Murray file, UP Archives).

**403** Vignali moved to Pretoria in late 1938 to undertake this work, because the cast needed to stay motionless during the cooling period – some two weeks for such a large piece – and earth tremors in Johannesburg could have disrupted this. He also probably had in his sights further commissions, such as Coert Steynberg’s *Louis Botha* (Du Plessis 1996, 107–108).

**404** See *ibid.*; Anna 2013, 183–197. When Van Wouw’s monumental figures were cast in Italy, chiefly in Rome, he generally went to Europe to make the models there too. In the case of *Onze Jan Hofmeyr*, Van Wouw, unable to travel to Europe because of World War I, made the full-scale model in his Johannesburg studio in 1916, but nonetheless sent the plaster to Europe for casting (Duffey 1981, 12).

**405** SVK 5.10.1936: 9.

**406** In the Liebenberg-Boshoff collection, dated 1936 in Duffey 2008, 178, 181–182. Van Wouw chose as the Vrou



**Figure 46:** Anton van Wouw. Kruger Monument, Church Square, Pretoria. 1899 (photo the authors)

assistant for the development of the full-scale figure if it was to be completed for the ‘forthcoming event’ (aanstaande onthulling), presumably the centenary, and an appointment was made by June.<sup>407</sup> There were occasional reports in the press about progress,<sup>408</sup> but the final sculpture was only completed in 1939,<sup>409</sup> and cast at the Vignali foundry in August of that year.<sup>410</sup> This casting of a large-scale bronze for the first time in South Africa attracted much attention, and was recorded in various newspapers, such as *Die Brandwag* of 7.8.1939, which also reports that the elderly sculptor was present at the event.

The contract of September 1936 and contemporary SVK records are incontrovertible evidence that there was at this stage the intention to employ Van Wouw for more than the monumental bronze figure at the entrance, which was finally his only contribution.<sup>411</sup> This is also clear from many newspaper reports, such as one in *The Star* of 11.7.1936, which claimed that ‘Mr. Van Wouw has already started work on the bas-reliefs’, although it added that many South African artists would be given the opportunity to participate. Why the nature of Van Wouw’s involvement was to change is for later discussion, but his authoritative standing and likely impact merits consideration as a significant part of the conceptualisation of the historical frieze.

The important sculptural projects that Anton van Wouw had undertaken earlier in his career are key to understanding his status and influence at the time. The Kruger Monument in Pretoria,<sup>412</sup> in its portrayal of the most prominent president of the ZAR, the four larger-than-life Boer ‘types’ and the four historical reliefs in bronze at its base, demonstrated his strong identification with the establishment of Afrikaner independence in the South African interior (fig. 46).<sup>413</sup> Although the monument was commissioned in 1896 and cast in Rome by 1899, the setting up of the Kruger figure in Prince’s Park was delayed until 1913, and it was installed in front of Pretoria Railway Station

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model Isabel Snyman, at the time a student at the Johannesburg Art School, later a nurse. Her maternal grandfather was the Voortrekker Pieter Johannes Hendrik Botha (Visagie 2011, 82). An anonymous magazine article published in January 1939 described her: ‘Almost six feet tall, she is blonde and extremely graceful.’ *The Pretoria News* (undated) added that her ‘beauty and splendid physique made her the ideal figure’ (both in UP Archives, Van Wouw files).

**407** See SVK 15.1.1937: 13 and SVK 26.6.1937: 6b; the assistant was Peter Kirchhoff. The SVK continued to track progress, with the Historiese Komitee keeping an eye on the work and a studio visit planned (Historiese Komitee 4.9.1937: 5).

**408** *Die Huisgenoot* of 19.11.1937 stated that Van Wouw, who was hoping to finish that year, was busy making the figures in clay, affirmed by *Die Brandwag* 17.12.1937, which included a photograph of him with a model of the group.

**409** Once the Vrou model was complete, the SVK hired a building near Van Wouw’s studio in Doornfontein to store it (Dagbestuur 12.8.1939: p.2), prior to its casting in August 1939. The transport of the bronze Vrou to the Monument is mentioned in minutes (Dagbestuur 21.11.1939: p.1), and photographs of the time show the figure standing isolated and unprotected alongside the building under construction.

**410** Items in the files of the Vignali foundry recorded in Antoinette du Plessis’ MA thesis (1996) fill in some of the gaps in the chronology: a letter of 16.5.1936 with preliminary quotations for the Vrou (£700), and a fuller quotation for Vrou (£725) on 6.11.1937 (see Du Plessis appendices 7 and 8); a letter from Moerdyk urging the foundry to begin work on 21.12.1938 (ibid., 113 n 44); a quote from Vignali of 3.4.1939 for cutting and transporting the model (ibid., 113); a 29.8.1938 letter to Moerdyk with details of payments to be made and a starting date of November (ibid., Appendix 9); a 19.10.1938 letter from Vignali to Jansen asking for his help in getting a permit for his father Gusmano to come to South Africa for a year to assist with the casting (ibid., Appendix 10).

**411** That Van Wouw still had expectations regarding the reliefs is suggested by a note recording that he was to be notified that no decision had yet been reached regarding the appointment of an artist for the historical panels (Dagbestuur 21.11.1939: p.1).

**412** Duffey 2008, 152–161.

**413** The fact that the SVK minutes of 25.10.1934: 12 refer to the intention to enquire about copyright on Van Wouw’s four Boer figures from the Kruger Monument indicates not only the committee’s intention to include sculptural aspects in the Voortrekker Monument, but their acknowledgement of Van Wouw’s leading position as an artist of Afrikaner history and culture. It is interesting to speculate whether these four figures were in some way connected in their minds to the four granite corner figures that formed part of the final structure, although the public call to add these figures to Moerdyk’s proposed building came only in 1936 after the model of the Monument was displayed at the Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg. The possibility that bronze figures like the Kruger Monument Boers might even be included on the building was evidently still prevalent, if only in Van Wouw’s mind, as late as 1938, when his wish to make them was recorded in *The Star* (20.7.1938).



**Figure 47:** Anton van Wouw. Figures and reliefs, detail of Vrouemonument, Bloemfontein. 1912. Bronze (photo the authors)

with its full panoply of supporting Boers only on 10 October 1925 (the centenary of Kruger's birth); its various iterations ensured that it remained prominent in public consciousness.<sup>414</sup> Possibly even more significant in relation to an Afrikaner agenda was Van Wouw's sculpture for the Vrouemonument in Bloemfontein, which commemorated the more than 26 000 women and children who had died in British concentration camps during the Anglo-Boer War (fig. 47).<sup>415</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 1, this initiative of past president Steyn was a memorial intended to indicate that Afrikaners were 'regaining their self-respect and pride after the Peace of Vereeniging' in 1902, and it was the result of a series of meetings, consultations and fundraising – a goal and a process not unlike that instituted for the Voortrekker Monument in the 1930s.<sup>416</sup> The form of an obelisk of sandstone

<sup>414</sup> The Boer figures had fallen into the possession of Lord Kitchener, British general in the Anglo-Boer War, and two had ironically been incorporated into a memorial arch monument to the British fallen of the war at the Chatham Military College in England. They were eventually retrieved through the efforts of Jan Smuts. The installation of the Kruger Monument in Church Square, Pretoria, the site originally intended for the monument, only occurred in 1954, once the Afrikaner Nationalist government under Malan had come to power.

<sup>415</sup> See Grundlingh, 'Why concentration camps?' 2013; Van Zyl 2013; Labuschagne 2014.

<sup>416</sup> Van Zyl 2013, 213. His article 'The Women's Monument: Planning, design and inauguration' traces a history remarkably similar to that of the Voortrekker Monument, although funds were raised 'not only by the wealth of the



**Figure 48:** Superimposed Vrouemonument on Voortrekker Monument (*Die Volksblad* 12.12.1948; courtesy of UP Archives, Moerdyk files)

symbolised the monument’s memorialising purpose, and Van Wouw’s bronze group at its base of two women and a dead child, together with flanking narrative reliefs again in bronze, represented the subject of commemoration. It recalled a recent and traumatic phase of Afrikaner history and their humiliating defeat in the Anglo-Boer War, a war whose ongoing effects on their sense of self-worth the later Voortrekker Monument was intended to counter by recalling their heroic and victorious past.

Just as the Vrouemonument had been linked back to the Battle of Blood River in its unveiling on the anniversary of that Boer victory in 1913, so reciprocal memories of the sufferings of the Anglo-Boer War were to be present in the Voortrekker Monument, where they provided an invisible but potent subtext.<sup>417</sup> One image of the Monument in *Die Volksblad* of 12.12.1948 actually incorporated a superimposed image of the Vrouemonument (fig. 48), which overtly linked the Monument not

wealthy, but especially by the poverty of the poor’ (Steyn, quoted in Van Zyl, 214), and without financial support from the government.

<sup>417</sup> Vermeulen (1999, 136) suggests that the narrow windows of the corner towers were reminiscent of the gun slits in Anglo-Boer War blockhouses.



Figure 49: Anton van Wouw. *Voortrekker mother and children*. 1939. Bronze, 4.1 m (photo the authors)



only to memories of the Anglo-Boer War, but to a monument which was increasingly being associated with ‘the ethnic mobilisation of Afrikaans-speakers’ and ‘increasing numbers of nationalist political rallies’.<sup>418</sup> It is no coincidence that Van Wouw’s contribution to the new venture would again be a monumental bronze of a Voortrekker mother and children (fig. 49), 4.1 m in height, a counterpoint with a more affirmative message than his earlier representation of a woman mourning her dead child at the Vrouemonument. The later bronze, which is the first image to confront the visitor to the Voortrekker Monument, is an indomitable maternal figure protecting her young son and daughter, who represent the future of Afrikanerdom. The role of the Voortrekker woman, not only as the steadfast partner of her male counterpart, but as the progenitor of white civilisation in South Africa, was a theme at the forefront of the minds of those who planned the Monument. In Moerdyk’s words, repeated in many Dingaan’s Day speeches, according to his daughter:

If you want to know to whom the honour goes, look at numerous other lands. At South America, for example. There too the whites tried to establish themselves. Cortez took the land and tried to keep it, and what remained? Only a slightly lighter colour on the cheeks of the native ... And here where the Afrikaner came? He brought his gun and his Bible, yes, but alongside him was his wife, and his children with her, and we became a nation.<sup>419</sup>

O.J.O. Ferreira goes so far as to say that the sculpture symbolised white South Africa.<sup>420</sup>

Pertinently, both the Kruger Monument and the Vrouemonument had included relief panels (figs 46, 47), which established their value in augmenting the narrative aspect of monuments, and demonstrated Van Wouw’s proficiency in this regard, although they were in bronze, not the marble that would ultimately be the choice for the Voortrekker Monument frieze.<sup>421</sup> The reliefs on these well-known monuments and Van Wouw’s prominence in the early thinking of the SVK no doubt explain why the initial focus was on bronze sculptures for the Monument. An article in *The Star* (20.7.1938) reported that Van Wouw hoped to create four Voortrekker figures in bronze for the four corners of the monument, as well as bas-reliefs of the Great Trek for the interior, which he also wanted to make in bronze. However, it was suggested that bronze might be too costly and that granite would be used. In Van Wouw’s opinion, quoted in *The Star*, ‘The whole effect would be ruined. ... Only in bronze would the panels stand out, and I hope for the sake of South Africa and all who visit the memorial that [the] imposing impression of the interior will not be reduced for want of a few pounds.’<sup>422</sup> But once appointed architect for the Monument, Moerdyk was to conceptualise the bas-reliefs in his monumental architecture on an ambitious scale in the form of a continuous frieze, which made the use of bronze untenable.

To understand the role that sculpture would play in the Monument, it is necessary to leap ahead in our narrative to see how it developed in relation to the architectural form. In early 1936 when he was preparing his submission for the SVK, Moerdyk’s conception of the Monument, published in January 1936 and discussed above (fig. 43), had significantly changed. In the drawings he released in late 1936 to disseminate his new design (figs 50, 51, 52), the low entranceway between the two pylon-like flanking towers is gone, while the towers are compacted into a massive

<sup>418</sup> Grundlingh, ‘The meaning of the Women’s Monument: Then and now’ 2014, 238–239.

<sup>419</sup> ‘As julle will weet aan wie die eer toekom, kyk dan na talle ander lande. Na Suid-Amerika, byvoorbeeld. Daar ook het die blanke probeer om hom te vestig. Cortez het die land ingeneem, dit probeer behou, en wat het oorgebly? Slegs ’n effens ligter kleur op die wange van die inboorling ... En hier waar die Afrikaner gekom het? Hy het sy roer en sy Bybel gebring, ja, maar langs hom was sy vrou, en sy kinders by haar, en ons het ’n volk geword ...’ (quoted in Vermeulen 1999, 130).

<sup>420</sup> Ferreira 1975, 66.

<sup>421</sup> It is worth noting that the early stages of the production process were much the same, as sculptors rarely worked directly in stone for large projects, but used clay and plaster models for their sculptures, whether they were to be translated into bronze or marble.

<sup>422</sup> Quoted in Du Plessis 1996, 111.

single cube of concrete and steel faced with narrow rustica granite blocks, with the addition of a distinctive continuous zigzag band encircling the masonry of the upper walls. We will consider the architecture in more detail later, but basic features of Moerdyk's earlier design persisted, namely the monument's general silhouette with traces of the pylons in the corner tower structures; the high, slightly inward-sloping socle with consecutive flights of steps, albeit in a different arrangement (fig. 54a); the single elevated entrance in the middle; symmetrically arranged reliefs, which would be installed in the final design at the height of the entrance door, even if then placed high up on the front socle; two halls – though in a vertical relationship – the lower hall to house a sarcophagus with the bones of the Voortrekkers and the upper hall to provide a venue for bas-reliefs with scenes of the treks running at human height around the interior walls (figs 53, 54). The concept of a museum was also retained although its position was not clarified in Moerdyk's design drawings.

The change to a single volume was decisive. Now, below a set-back superstructure, on all four sides huge arched windows with an elaborate tracery of stonework lit the grand Hall of Heroes on the entrance level. And a circular opening in the centre of its floor provided a view of the sarcophagus in the basement hall below, originally intended to house the remains of Piet Retief. A huge double dome covered the whole structure, with an aperture to allow a single shaft of sunlight into the Monument, and particularly to shine through the opening in the Hall of Heroes onto the sarcophagus on 16 December each year, the anniversary of the Battle of Blood River. At other times the beam of light was also envisioned as playing on the continuous historical frieze that would be featured around the walls of the Hall of Heroes.

The development of Moerdyk's ideas about the frieze can best be explained through an analysis of four sectional drawings we know of (hereafter Drawings 1–4), which provide a lucid visual explanation of the interior of his design, particularly 3 and 4.<sup>423</sup> They are undated, but must have been made relatively soon after Moerdyk was given the Monument commission. The drawings were no doubt intended to show the SVK – and the public, since they were published in the press – the relationship of the lower hall, the upper Hall of Heroes and the dome, and included the sun's ray falling through the oculus in two of the drawings.

Drawing 1 (fig. 51), the first and simplest of the four, in pure line, and labelled 'section' (deursny), was published in *Die Volkstem*, together with a drawing of the elevation, on 11 September 1936.<sup>424</sup> Although only an outline drawing with no interior detail, the accompanying text states clearly that the large hall would have historical topics in bas-relief, as well as painted murals. A few months later, on 10 December 1936, when *Die Vaderland* published a modified version, Drawing 2 (fig. 52), which was treated tonally and with more detail, it included the first very sketchy representation of figurative reliefs for the frieze, as well as small figures next to the sarcophagus in the basement hall to give a sense of scale.<sup>425</sup>

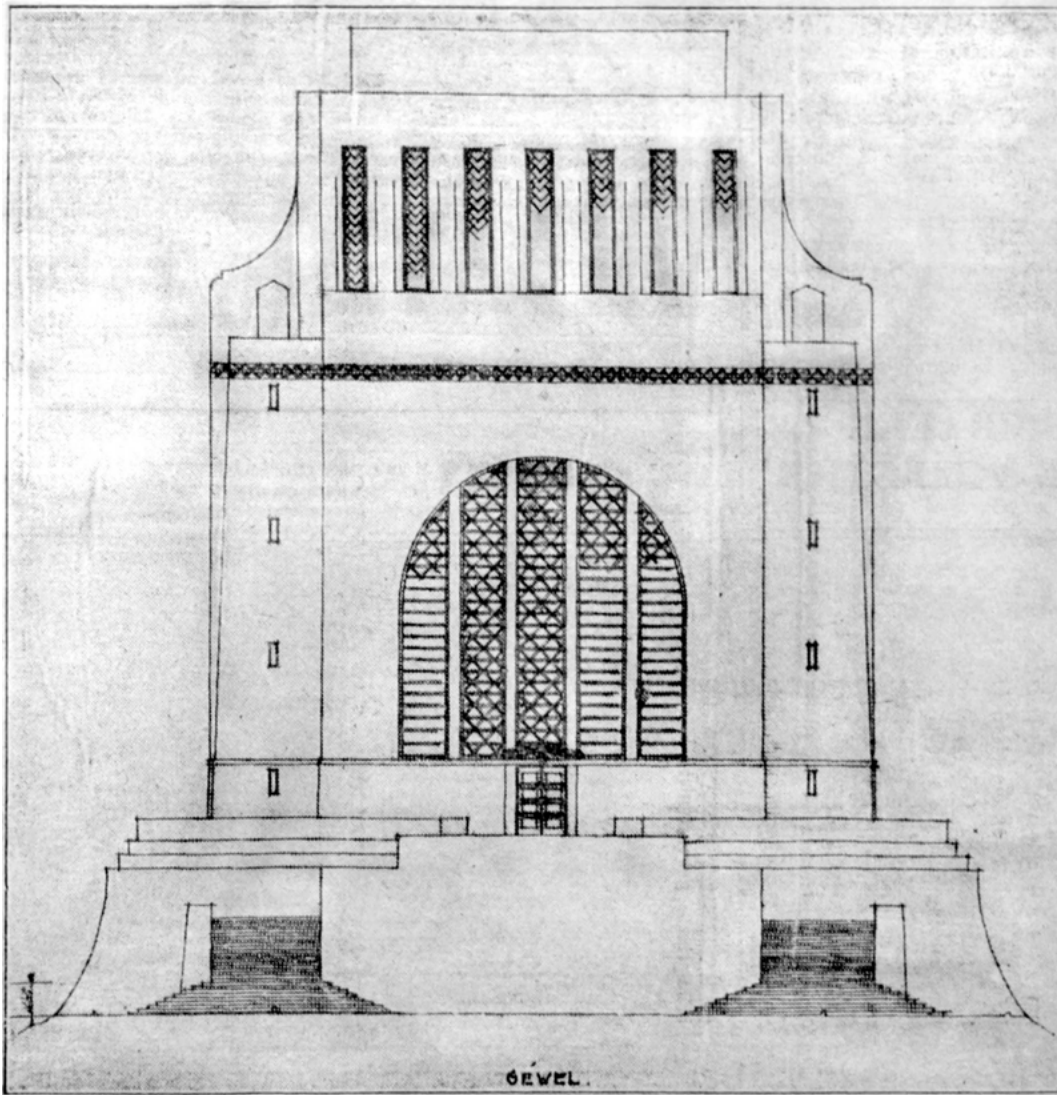
While the first two drawings seem to have been drawn in ink, Drawing 3 is more complex (fig. 53), possibly made with a fine pencil, although without access to the original drawings we cannot verify this.<sup>426</sup> It appears later than the simpler versions of 1936, in that it offers a worked-up view of the interior, framed as though seen through the arch of the north window with its stone tracery removed. But even more significantly, it includes a developed impression of the figurative frieze, now modelled with shading. However, the fact that the schematic profile of the building that frames the opening gives no indication of monumental corner figures might provide evidence that Drawing 3 was made in a similar timeframe to 1 and 2: the introduction of those figures can

<sup>423</sup> These drawings are not part of the architectural drawings by Moerdyk that we know of, of which high-resolution images are in the Department of Architecture, University of Pretoria, and paper copies in the HF Archives ATP.

<sup>424</sup> The drawings appear side-by-side on p.7, while a photograph of the model of the Monument is reproduced on p.5. The two clippings are available in the UP Archives, Moerdyk files, MDK 0505T.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., MDK 0900T.

<sup>426</sup> The original is said to be in the possession of the Moerdyk family. We thank Dorette and Gerard Vermeulen for their efforts to trace the drawing, though the search was not successful.



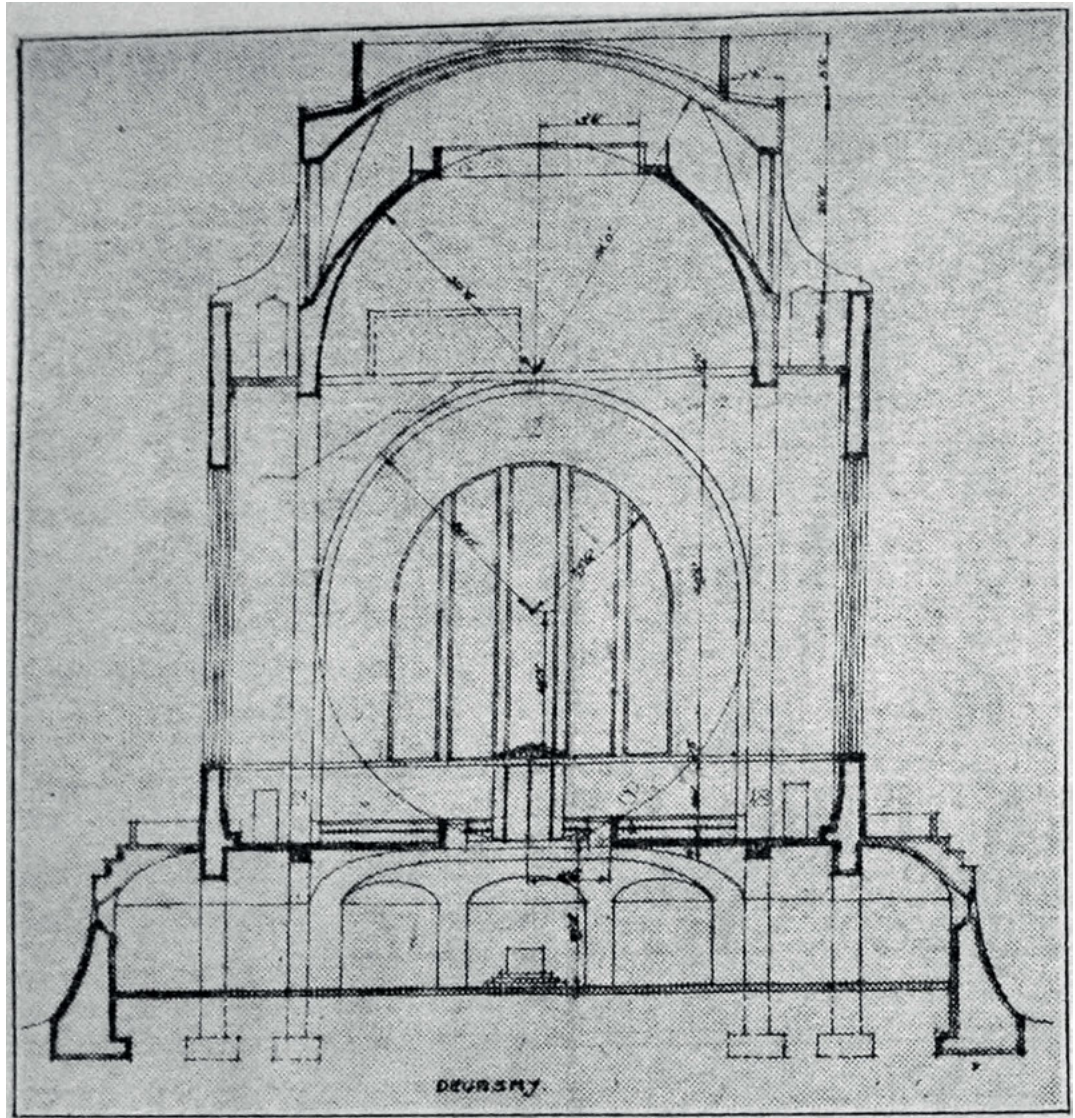
**Figure 50:** Gerard Moerdyk. Elevation of Voortrekker Monument. 1936 (*Die Volkstem* 11.9.1936; courtesy of UP Archives, Moerdyk files MDK 0505T)

be dated to January 1937, when the SVK minutes recorded the decision to incorporate four colossal Voortrekker sculptures into the Monument.<sup>427</sup> On the other hand, the figures depicted in the frieze of the Hall of Heroes are recognisably based on Coetzer's sketches made for the Monument,<sup>428</sup> so it is improbable that Drawing 3 predates the artist's presentation of them half a year later to the SVK on 26 June 1937. In addition, this drawing shows doors with reliefs placed above them in the corners of the interior, which had not initially been visualised as part of the frieze, so that Coetzer was not asked to make drawings for them, which suggests an even later chronology. Although these anomalies make Drawing 3 hard to date, its inclusion of later features excludes its being made before late 1937, despite its lack of corner figures. Perhaps an older drawing without them was worked up with more detail for publication. Or more likely the lack of the corner figures was the result of a simplification of the building's profile,<sup>429</sup> in order to focus attention on the interior which takes

<sup>427</sup> SVK 15.1.1937: 6.

<sup>428</sup> See 'Coetzer and the frieze'.

<sup>429</sup> It is also noteworthy that, although there is quite a detailed indication of its stone courses and the base exhibits a concave taper, the profile of the Monument is rendered as a neat vertical, without showing the slightly sloping profile of the recessed staircase towers (evident in the elevation published together with Drawing 1 in *Die Volkstem* 11.9.1936), which still paid distant homage to pylon temples, as it is in actuality. Other early drawings of the Monument also



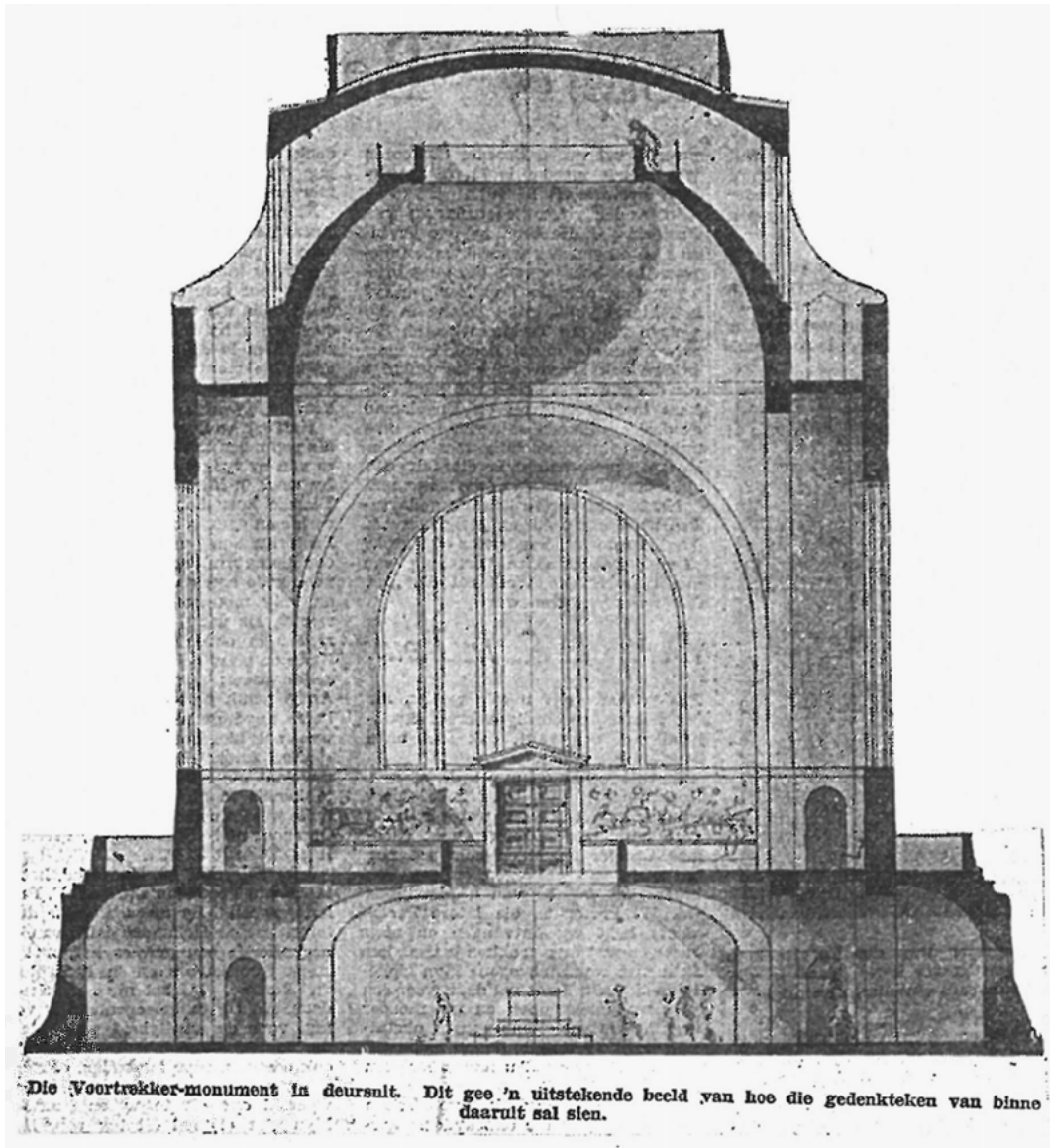
**Figure 51:** Gerard Moerdyk. Drawing 1, cross-section of Voortrekker Monument. 1936 (*Die Volkstem* 11.9.1936; courtesy of UP Archives, Moerdyk files MDK 0505T)

centre stage in this drawing. The Hall of Heroes is flooded with sunlight that spills through the east window, falling beyond the east frieze but radiating it as if to give it special attention, while the single sun's ray penetrating the oculus of the dome falls on the scene of the Vow before the Battle of Blood River on the west frieze, highlighting the sacred pledge that was remembered and celebrated on 16 December each year. And the cut-away depiction of the floor and the front wall, allowing a view of the lower hall, means that the cenotaph memorialising the Voortrekkers at the heart of the building can also be seen.

Drawing 4 (fig. 54), on the other hand, is a complex cut-away section (probably in ink) with a bird's-eye view of the entire building from the north-west, which shows the Monument's structure, including the double dome, and a single ray of sun falling on the sarcophagus in the lower hall, as was planned for 16 December each year. In terms of the detail of the interior, it shares many features with Drawing 3. But it does depict the colossal corner figures on the Monument, although, due to the sectional nature of the drawing, the figure at the north-west, which would eventually portray

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omitted the corner figures, for example, one used for 'Die Voortrekker-Universiteit Pretoria' yearbook, reproduced in the centenary edition of *Die Huisgenoot* (December 1938, opp. p.33), and one in Jansen 1939, fig. after p.11.

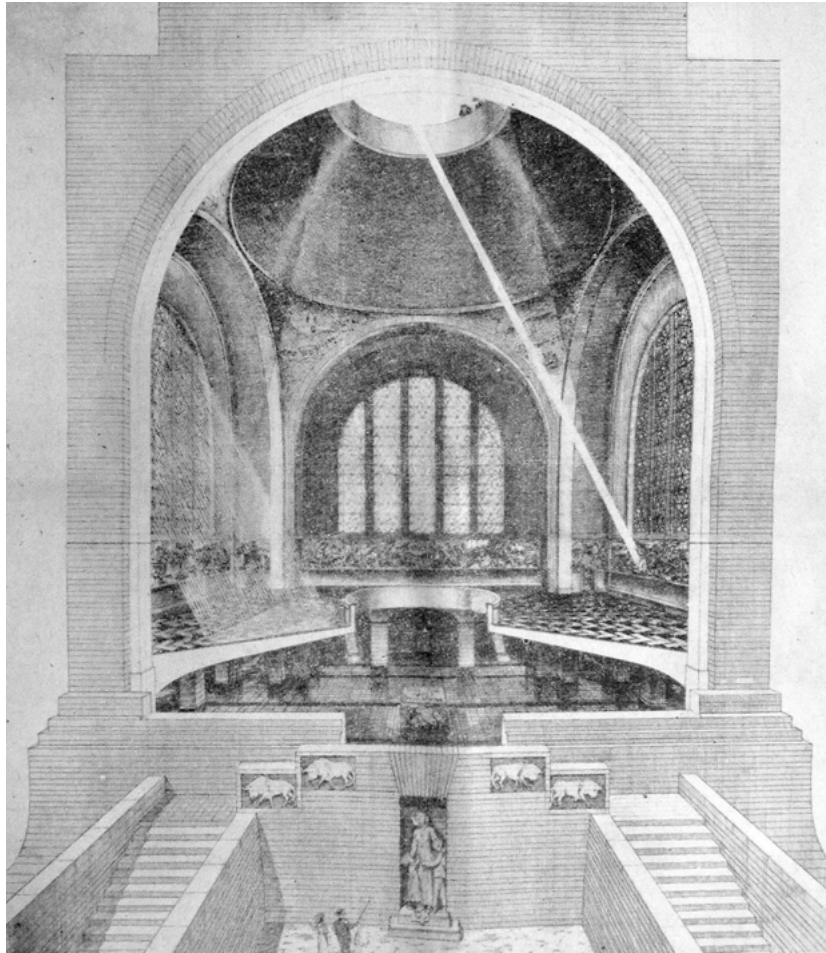


**Figure 52:** Gerard Moerdyk. Drawing 2, cross-section of Voortrekker Monument. 1936 (*Die Vaderland* 10.12.1936; courtesy of Aletta Steenkamp)

Andries Pretorius, is cut off just above his feet. Moerdyk bonded the Voortrekker giants into the walls as part of the very fabric of the building in this drawing, indicating that the architect planned to have them carved in granite from the outset. The inclusion of the corner figures gives us a firm date *post quem* of 15 January 1937, when the SVK recorded the decision to incorporate them, so it cannot have preceded that date. As with Drawing 3, however, we find the inclusion of a number of later design decisions, such as the reliefs being related to Coetzer's sketches for the frieze, which is more nuanced and perhaps in pencil too. It is also extended to run across the short walls of the corner structures. Again, then, it is unlikely that Drawing 4 could have been made before 1937.

When one seeks a clear date *ante quem* for Drawings 3 and 4 (figs 53, 54), it emerges that they both appeared in many different publications related to the centenary in December 1938.<sup>430</sup> In that

<sup>430</sup> As well as appearing in a number of unidentified newspaper clippings in the Moerdyk files, UP Archives, the following examples can be given, many of them in special supplements: Drawing 3 was published in *Die Transvaaler* 2.12.1938, *Cape Times* 7.12.1938, *Pretoria News* 13.12.1938, on the cover of *Die Kerkblad Eeufeesuitgawe* 7.12.1938, and *Koers* IV (3), December 1938; Drawing 4 was published in *Daily Express* 14.12.1938; *Gedenkuitgawe, Die Huisgenoot*, December 1938; and *Die Kultuurskaker* III (3/4) December 1938.

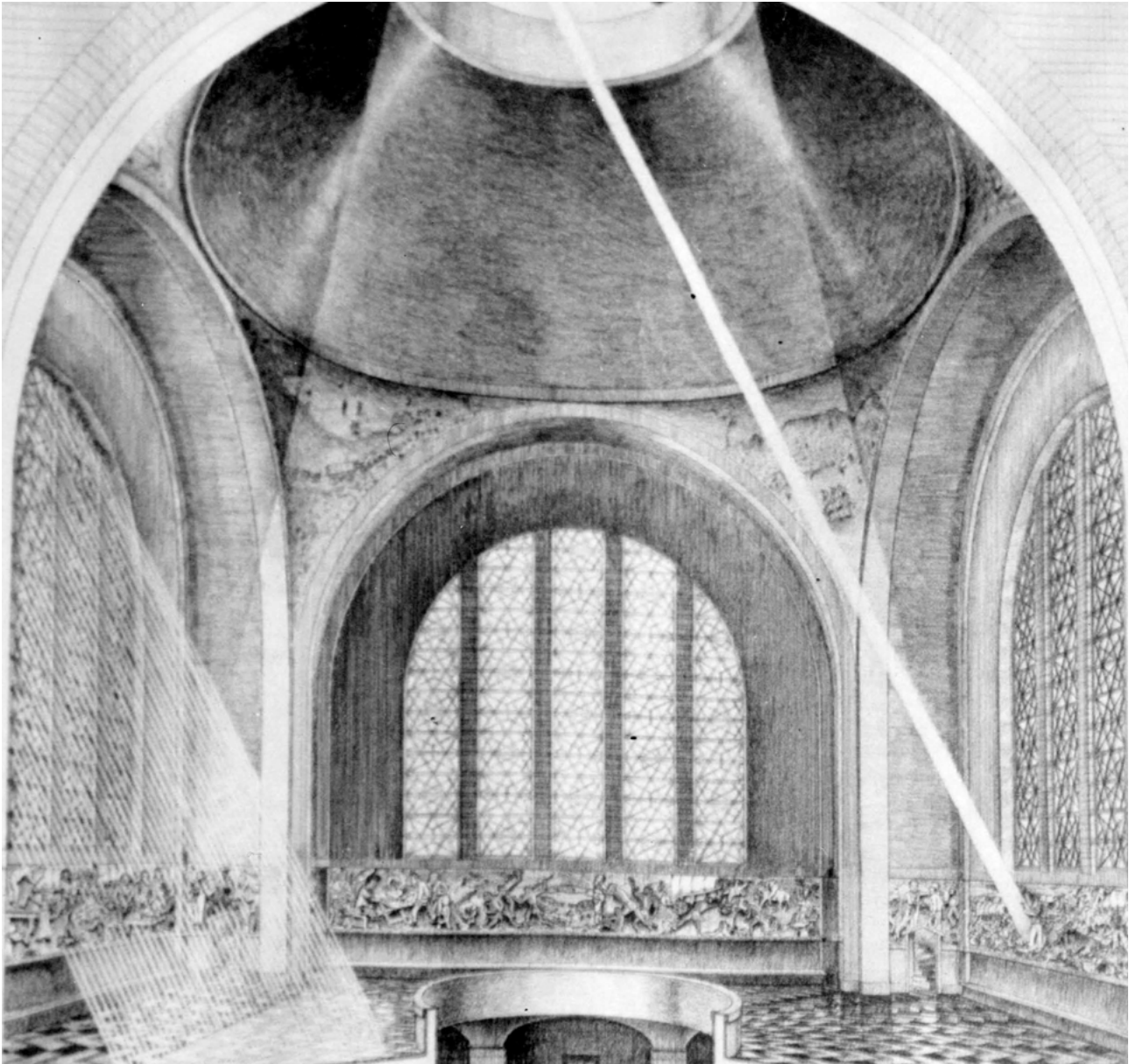


**Figure 53a:** Gerard Moerdyk. Drawing 3, cross-section of Voortrekker Monument. 1938 (*Pretoria News* 13.12.1938; courtesy of UP Archives, Moerdyk files)

each has the quality of a ‘presentation’ drawing, it is quite likely that they were produced that year to show in greater detail than the 1936 drawings (1 and 2) what was planned for the Monument, especially since only the foundations of the building were to be complete for the centenary celebrations.<sup>431</sup> It proves impossible to determine which might have been made first: 3 or 4. However, Drawing 3 has one feature that is closer to the final Monument than Drawing 4: the dedication ‘Ons vir jou Suid-Afrika’ on the sarcophagus in the lower hall faces the right way, visible to viewers looking down on it from the direction of the entrance to the Hall of Heroes (and those looking at this depiction) – an inscription which is wrongly placed, laterally, in Drawing 4, perhaps due to lack of space. But both drawings (incorrectly) show reliefs from the frieze on the sides of the sarcophagus, which would be plain polished granite in its final form: Dirkie Uys, the young Voortrekker hero, on the short side, and possibly *Bloukrans* with the Zulu dashing a Voortrekker baby to death on the long side visible in Drawing 4. If both signal to us in hindsight that many of the details of the Monument had yet to be finalised, they provided entirely satisfying graphic illustrations for the public of a monument still to be built, a purpose that did not require each detail to be correct.

Drawings 3 and 4 were widely reproduced in order to show South Africans what to expect. Drawing 3 with its fine toning and sense of drama attracted particularly grandiose titles in the press, such as ‘The Great Altar of Remembrance’ (*Pretoria News* 13.12.1938) and ‘A “Sursum Corda” [Lifting the heart] in Stone’ (*Cape Times* 7.12.1938). And this was the drawing used to illustrate the Monument,

<sup>431</sup> This is further corroborated by one of Moerdyk’s architectural drawings showing the Monument’s main façade with Van Wouw’s *Voortrekker mother and children* and the four Wildebeest panels that flank it, dated 30.9.1938 (Department of Architecture, University of Pretoria).



both for the brochure published for the centenary celebrations in 1938,<sup>432</sup> and more than ten years later for the *Official Programme* for the inauguration in 1949.<sup>433</sup> But it was Drawing 4, showing the sun's ray falling directly on the sarcophagus in the lower hall, that was reproduced for a commemorative postcard in 1949;<sup>434</sup> and it was the one that was ultimately used in the *Official Guide*, published in 1955 (without acknowledgement that it had been created much earlier). It was repeated throughout all the editions, as well as Heymans' new guide published by the Monument's Board of Control

**Figure 53b:** Gerard Moerdyk. Close-up of frieze in Drawing 3, cross-section of Voortrekker Monument. 1938. Detail of fig. 37 (photo courtesy of HF Archives F 39.1.54 k)

<sup>432</sup> *Sentrale Voortrekker-Eeufees 1838–1938*, Pretoria, 14–16.12.1938, 30. This illustration has been trimmed so that it is not evident that the corner figures on the Monument have not been included.

<sup>433</sup> *Official Programme* 1949, opposite p.43. It also includes an aerial photograph of the Monument (opposite p.37), which still shows the ramps up the steps and over the niche with Van Wouw's *Voortrekker mother and children*, used to move the panels of the frieze into the Monument for installation.

<sup>434</sup> Museum Africa. The drawing on the postcard is inscribed in bold capitals 'Nasionale Voortrekker Monument' and 'Gerard Moerdyk Argitek' as in fig. 54a.

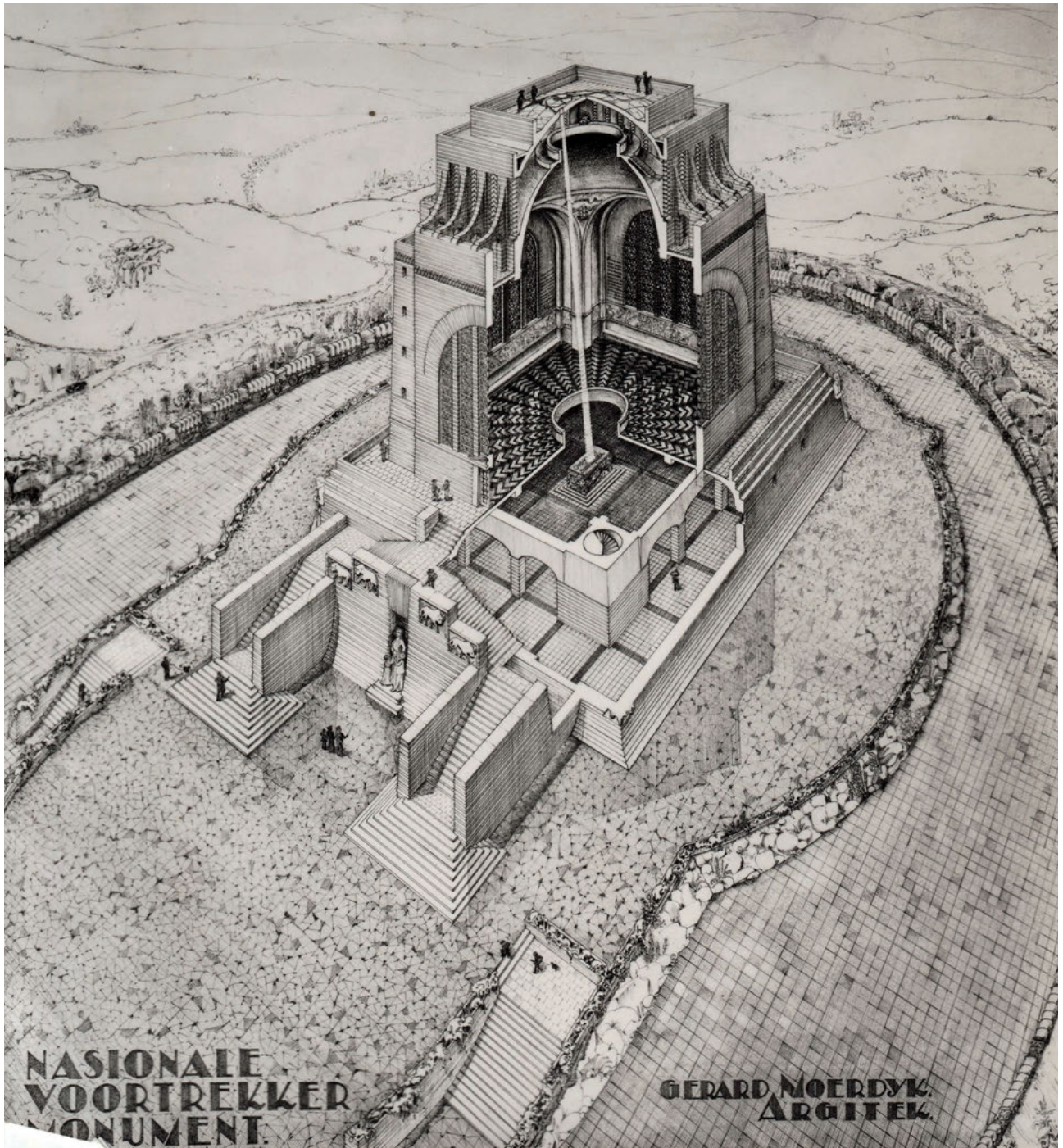
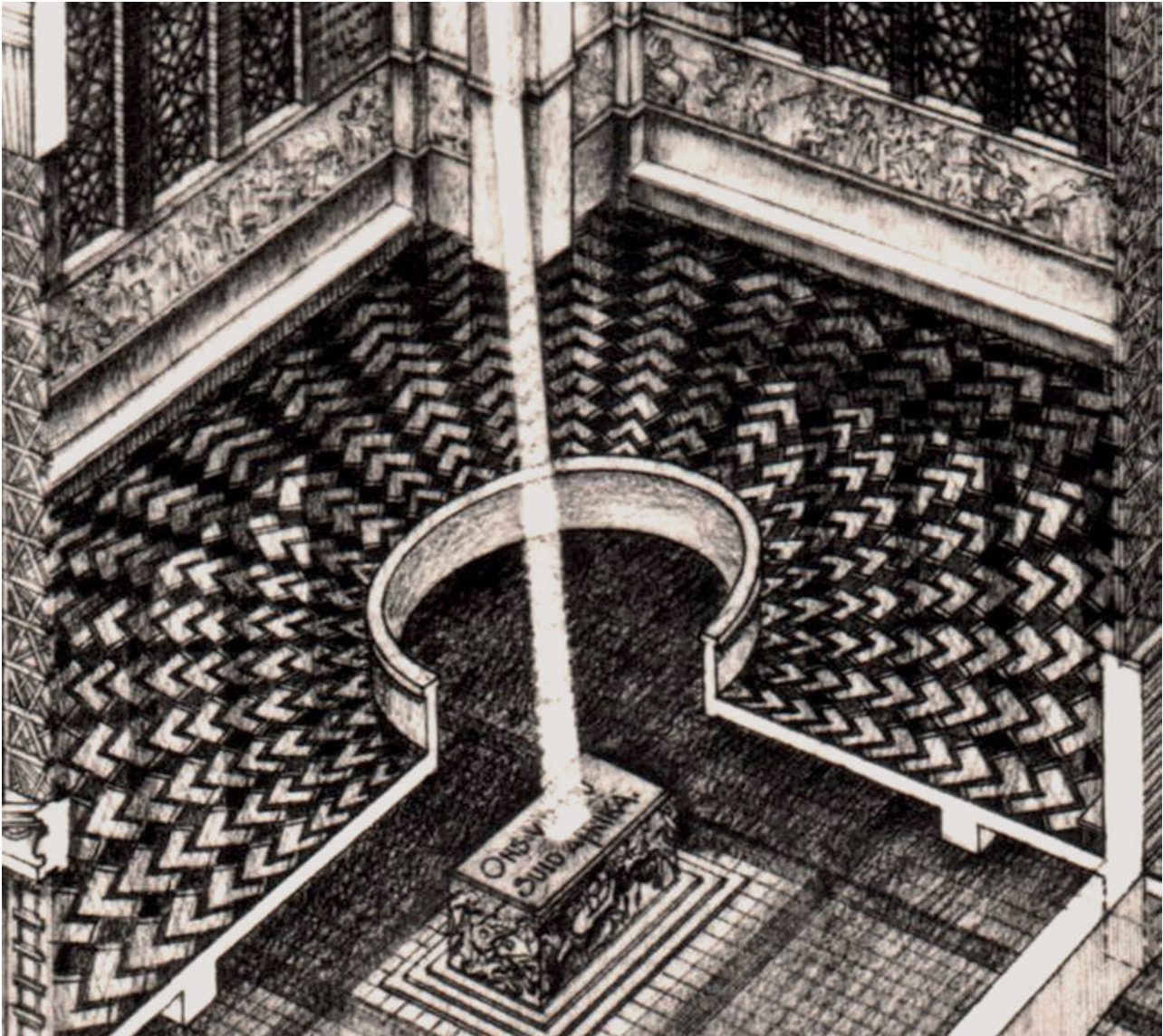


Figure 54a: Gerard Moerdyk. Drawing 4, cross-section of Voortrekker Monument. 1938 (courtesy of HF Archives F 39.1.35 k; photo Alan Yates)



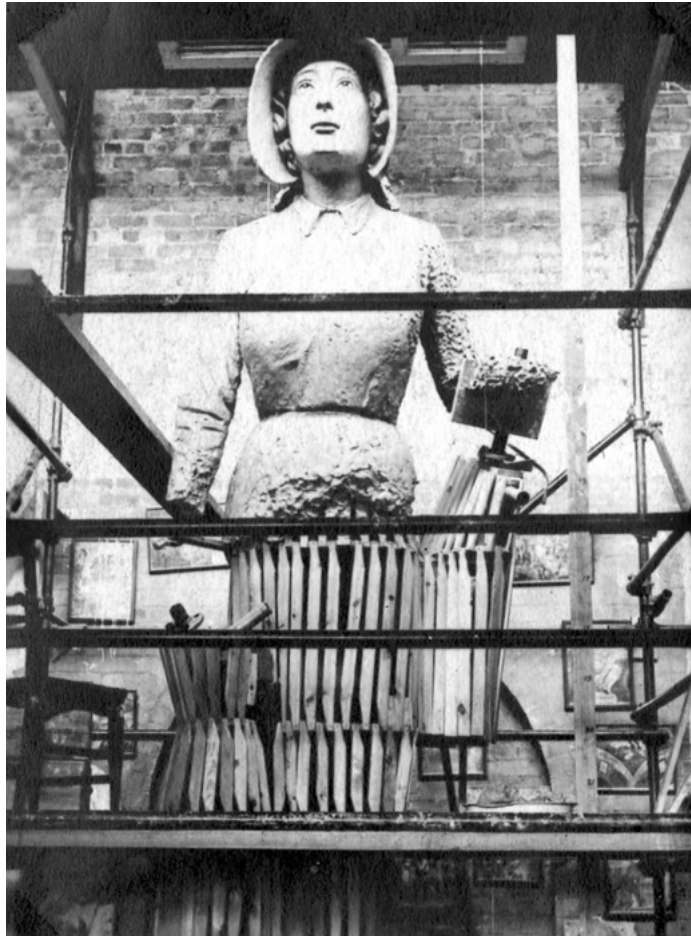


in 1986, the following edition by the privatised Voortrekker Monument and Nature Reserve in 2007, and also Grobler's copiously illustrated book, *Discover the Voortrekker Monument*, printed in 2001.<sup>435</sup> While Drawing 4 was a good choice in that it so clearly shows the structure of the Monument and all its parts, including the corner colossi, it is astonishing that the drawing was not adjusted for these authoritative publications. It reveals an extraordinary disregard for the final form of the centrepiece of the Voortrekker Monument that the guide book shows a carved sarcophagus with its patriotic text facing the wrong way, instead of the unadorned cenotaph where the admiring crowds first saw the inscription lit by the sun's ray at the inauguration on 16 December 1949.

That these drawings were probably produced in 1938 for the centenary year is also borne out by the fact that both Drawings 3 and 4 portrayed Van Wouw's huge *Voortrekker mother and children* in a niche in the forecourt, which suggests that they were made at a date in later 1937 or 1938 when the full-size clay for the bronze was being produced (fig. 55), although the drawing might feasibly

**Figure 54b:** Gerard Moerdyk. Close-up of frieze in Drawing 4, cross-section of Voortrekker Monument, 1938? Detail of fig. 54a

<sup>435</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 32; in the *Official Guide* 1970, 30, the image is reversed left to right. Hennie Potgieter reproduces both Drawings 3 and 4 in his 1987 publication on the Monument.



**Figure 55:** Anton van Wouw. Armature for full-size clay *Voortrekker mother and children*. 1938 (photo courtesy of UP Archives, Van Wouw files)

have been based on an earlier model.<sup>436</sup> As it turned out, Van Wouw did not succeed in completing the sculpture for the centenary as had originally been hoped, so the drawings provided a glimpse into the future in this regard also.

In the end, *Voortrekker mother and children*, completed a year later in 1939, was fated to be Van Wouw's only work for the Monument and the only bronze element there (fig. 49). It is not entirely clear at what point the original plan to make bas-reliefs in bronze was seen to be unsuitable, as not only Van Wouw clung onto the idea that they should be in that medium, and quotations including both the large figure of the *Voortrekker mother and children* and bas-relief panels were sent by the Vignali foundry at his request on 19 May 1934 (£340 for four panels of 5 × 2.5 feet), and on 16 May 1936 (£3 360 for twelve bas-relief panels of 7 × 5 feet).<sup>437</sup> However, as early as January 1936 there had been a recommendation from a subcommittee of the Vormkomitee that the idea of bronze panels be relinquished in favour of stone, perhaps for financial reasons, as it was also recommended that the number of panels be reduced to six.<sup>438</sup> But the possibility of using bronze continued to be raised, even once the first models for the frieze had been completed. After a visit to Harmony Hall by

<sup>436</sup> As Van Wouw's contract for the sculpture was signed on 14.9.1936, there would surely have been some indication of his design by that date, and the SVK noted that Van Wouw had been asked for models on 5.10.1936. There is a small bronze maquette illustrated in Duffey (2008, 178, 181–182), which he dates 1936.

<sup>437</sup> See Du Plessis 1996, Appendix 3, Appendix 7.

<sup>438</sup> Subcommittee of the Vormkomitee 6.4.1936: 6d (NHKA). Amongst an undated compilation of comments received on the Monument's design, one critic, identified as 'J.A.S.', recommended marble rather than bronze for the frieze, arguing that too many materials were being combined and that bronze did not complement stone (NHKA P1/2/3/8/10). It seems likely that these undated responses (inscribed 8.1.1937?) came after the Empire Exhibition.

members of the Akademie, letters from both T.J. Hugo and G. Dekker in January 1943 clearly still supported the use of bronze, as they dismissed the idea that it would be vulnerable to wartime commandeering (evidently offered as a reason to avoid its use); and Hugo argued that the metal would more suitably complement the grey stone of the Monument.<sup>439</sup>

Moerdyk, however, would have known from the outset that in the history of art and architecture bronze was never a material chosen to portray historical narratives on the very large scale of the Voortrekker frieze. Consulting the SVK minutes, we see that the material is not clearly defined initially, although in 1941 Moerdyk implied that it would be marble, when he said that after the models were complete the artists would go to Italy to work under the guidance of one or another ‘great master’.<sup>440</sup> But only in the SVK meeting of January 1942, after Jansen had noted that originally the plan was to have the panels cast in bronze,<sup>441</sup> then handed over to Moerdyk to speak, did the architect state incontrovertibly to the committee that the frieze would be created in marble.<sup>442</sup> This intention was in his mind much earlier, however, for he asserted in the brochure for the 1938 centenary that the history of the Great Trek would be told in a ‘wit marmer fries’ (white marble frieze).<sup>443</sup> The use of marble matched his concept of the Monument, especially as he had ancient examples in mind, such as the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus (fig. 56) and the Great Altar of Pergamon (fig. 57), with their monumental marble friezes, as well as those of the Parthenon which he would have seen in the British Museum while he was a student in London (fig. 80).<sup>444</sup> Yet unlike these structures his Monument unites two conflicting styles: the architecture is designed in a virtually anti-classical Art Deco style whereas the marble frieze strongly connotes the classical tradition.<sup>445</sup> The use of stone throughout, however, ensured that the frieze would be thought of as an integral part of the fabric of the Monument, and it was undoubtedly Moerdyk’s aim to unite architecture and art. As he was to write in the *Official Guide*: ‘The historical frieze is inseparably bound up with the monument.’<sup>446</sup> As mentioned above, Moerdyk had even wanted Van Wouw’s *Voortrekker mother and children* to be carved in marble or granite, but reported to the SVK on 12 February 1938 that the sculptor had ‘set his heart’ on bronze.<sup>447</sup>

Van Wouw’s experience in making reliefs, evidenced by the bronze panels on the Kruger and the Vrouemonument (figs 46, 47), had also been demonstrated in a more recent project for a long band of sculpture on the façade of the new Railway Station building in Johannesburg in 1932 (fig. 58), closer in form to the Monument frieze although considerably smaller in size.<sup>448</sup> Cast in concrete rather than bronze because of the financial exigencies of the Depression years,<sup>449</sup> the Johannesburg frieze represented the history of transport in South Africa, its narrative unfolding quixotically from right to left, from early transport to the modern train. Prominently portrayed in pride of place at the centre was an ox wagon of the type used in the Trek (figs 32, 33), again demonstrating Van Wouw’s

**439** Hugo to Jansen 19.1.1943; Dekker to Bosman 27.1.1943 (both ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7). Although today the granite has taken on a reddish hue, it was originally grey, as we see in the coloured drawing of the Monument ‘Die altaar van die Afrikanerdom’, made by Moerdyk in 1938 (Mostert 1940, 815).

**440** ‘As alles klaar is, kan die kunstenaars na Italië gaan om daar onder leiding van een of ander groot meester die werk voort te sit’ (SVK 28.11.1941: 3). Since Vignali’s artistic foundry, which had cast Van Wouw’s *Voortrekker mother and children*, was well established in Pretoria, it would not have been necessary to have bronze panels produced in Italy.

**441** ‘Oorspronklik het die plan bestaan om die panele in brons te giet’ (SVK 15/16.1.1942: 11).

**442** *Ibid.*: 11b.

**443** *Sentrale Voortrekker-Eeufees 1838–1938*, Pretoria 14–16.12.1938, 32.

**444** *Official Guide* 1955, 37, 41.

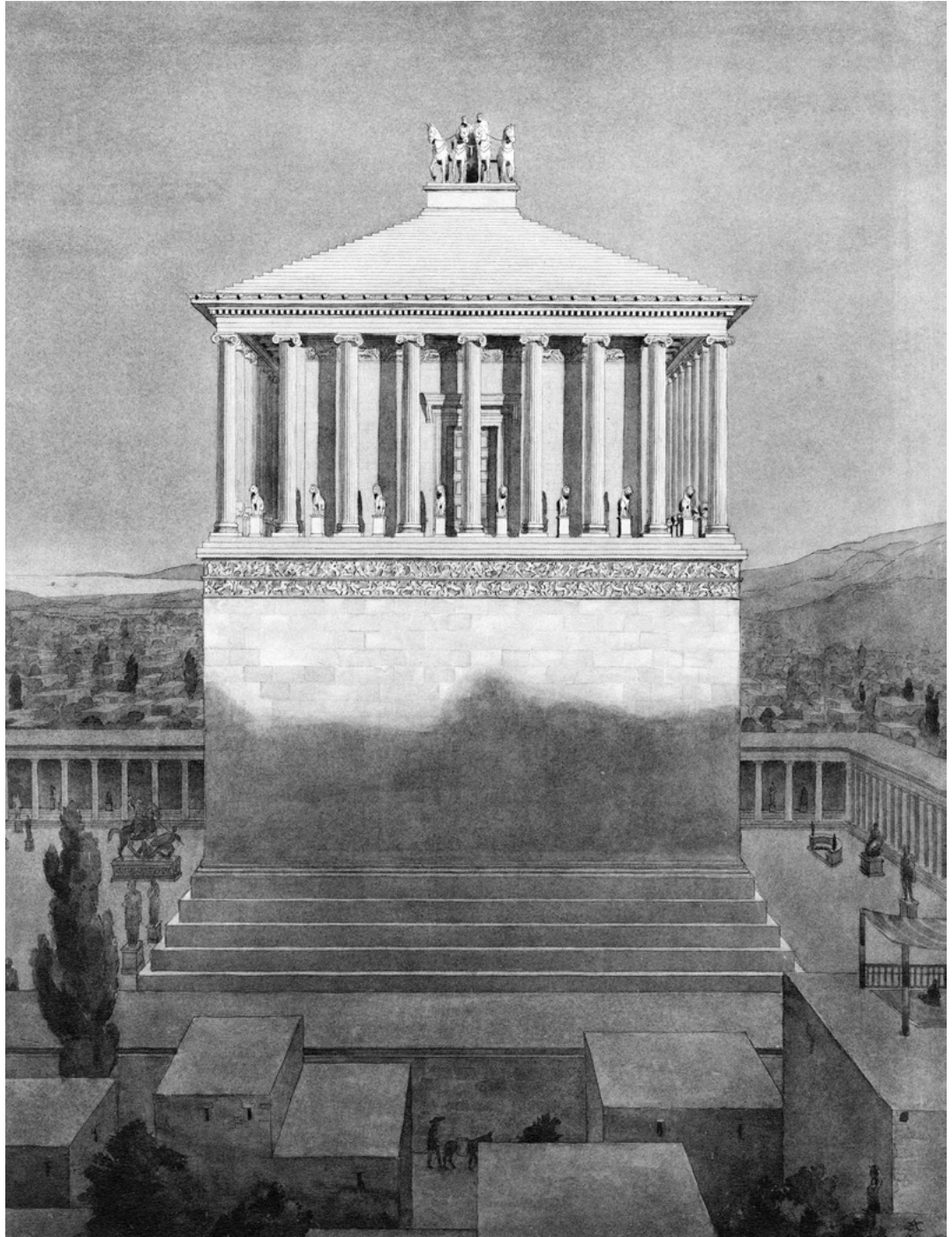
**445** See Rankin and Schneider 2017, 157–168.

**446** *Official Guide* 1955, 40.

**447** That the committee resolved that the Dagbestuur should consult Van Wouw as to his wishes in this regard is an indication of the esteem in which the sculptor was held.

**448** Chipkin 1993, 80–82; Duffey 2008, 187; Duffey, Kamper and Mosako 2010, 69. Small-scale reliefs on the same topic, posthumously cast in bronze, housed in the University of Pretoria sculpture collection, share motifs with the Johannesburg frieze, but employ a decorative treatment for the background to the figures.

**449** Duffey 1981, 16.



**Figure 56:**  
Reconstruction of  
Mausoleum of  
Halicarnassus.  
c. 350 BC (Krischen  
1938, pl. 37)

confidence in the pivotal role of Afrikaners in the development of the country. More directly pertinent to the planning of the Voortrekker Monument, though not in the form of a frieze, is the large Piet Retief relief of 1933 already mentioned (fig. 59), which is known only from photographs, and a commission Van Wouw received to create commemorative panels for the 1938 centenary, gifted by the Johannesburg City Council to white schools in the city to mark the event.<sup>450</sup> The scene created for this project exists in two versions in the Van Wouw collection at the University of Pretoria, one

<sup>450</sup> A handwritten annotation on the back of a photograph of this panel in ceramic dated '22.2.39', kept in the UP Archives (Van Wouw files), states 'Paneel deur Jburgse Stadsraad aan al die blanke skole Jburg geskenk – as gedagtenis



plaster, the other ceramic (fig. 60).<sup>451</sup> Their subject matter is related to the much larger 1933 relief in plaster, as in all three the Voortrekker leader is shown on horseback, arm raised in salutation, and his foreshortened horse is particularly distinctive.

The Retief panel was a vertical composition, with a compression of the figures in the format that created a sense of high drama, enhanced by the depth of the relief with the horse viewed from the front and the figure of Retief modelled almost in the round. It is quite different from the relief compositions of quiet, sombre mood that Van Wouw had created two decades before for the Vrouemonument in Bloemfontein, and has a drama in its virtuoso foreshortening, possibly perceived by him as more appropriate for a heroic Voortrekker Monument. Despite the fact that Van Wouw consulted Preller to ensure accuracy in his portrayal of Retief,<sup>452</sup> his plaster panel had little of the particularised antiquarianism that would characterise the Voortrekker narratives finally installed in the Monument. The horizontal format and shallower relief of Van Wouw's small 1938 panels for schools, however, allowed for more expansive scenes with spacious settings accommodating tents, ox wagons and details of Voortrekker life, which was much closer to the final frieze, although they lacked its more monumental gravitas.

It almost goes without saying that all these projects were carried out in a straightforward naturalistic style. The continued use of descriptive naturalism in Afrikaner monuments may have been an ongoing heritage of Van Wouw's approach to visualising their history, but there were few

**Figure 57:** Great Altar from Pergamon, 2nd century BC. Marble, w. 36,8 × l. 34,2 × h. c. 10 m. Pergamonmuseum, Berlin, early 1930s (photo courtesy of Museum für Abgüsse Klassischer Bildwerke Munich, photo archive 44734)

aan Vtrekkers' (Panel gifted by the Johannesburg City Council to all the white schools Johannesburg – as memorial to the Voortrekkers).

<sup>451</sup> See Duffey 2008, 201. Duffey states that this is the departure of Retief en route to visit Dingane (199), and *Die Vaderland* (28.1.1936) similarly describes it as his departure for Natal, but there is little in the relief itself to give it a specific place in the narrative of the treks.

<sup>452</sup> *Die Vaderland* (28.1.1936) reported this, saying that, in the absence of any extant portraits, Preller had investigated Retief's appearance by consulting accounts by people who had known him (a task doomed to fail) while making his film on the Voortrekkers; see a photograph of the actor in Preller, *Retief* 1930, frontispiece. This was evidently the source of Frikkie Kruger's representation of Retief in the Monument frieze also.



**Figure 58:** Anton van Wouw. Central and right section of frieze on Johannesburg Railway Station building. 1932. Cement (photo courtesy of UP Archives, Van Wouw files)

enough sculptors in South Africa in the first half of the twentieth century who were investigating the innovations of modernism,<sup>453</sup> and few commissions that would have allowed for anything but naturalistic images. In the case of the Monument, the choice of a straightforward accessible style would have been not so much an aversion to modernism, as a reflection of the purpose of the frieze. Tom Nairn's conviction about the use of vernacular language could equally be applied to the visual arts: 'the new middle-class intelligentsia of nationalism had to invite the masses into history; and the invitation card had to be written in a language they understood ...'<sup>454</sup>

Something of an exception amidst public sculpture of the time, and certainly an interesting comparison with the Voortrekker Monument frieze, is a narrative frieze designed by Ivan Graham Mitford-Barberton (1896–1976)<sup>455</sup> in the second half of the 1930s for the new Old Mutual building in Cape Town, inaugurated in 1940 (fig. 61).<sup>456</sup> Made of granite, the relief frieze is staged some four metres above ground, 112.8 metres long and 1.6 metres high. It suggests the company's commitment to the development of southern Africa, as it recounts selected episodes from the country's history,

<sup>453</sup> Three South African sculptors who all trained in the 1920s at the Royal College, London, were qualified to undertake sculptures in stone, and certainly aware of modernist experiments, which they generally explored in private works. One was Mary Stainbank (1899–1996), who was no doubt disqualified from possible participation at the Monument by her English background as much as by her innovative approach to sculpture. The second, Coert Steynberg, who turned down opportunities to work at the Monument, consistently worked in a naturalistic style for his Afrikaner projects. His modernist experiment for the Peace of Vereeniging monument was made only in 1962, and its abstracted steel figure as the spirit of survival rising from a more conventional fallen Boer fighter in granite met with a very mixed reception. The work of the third, Ivan Mitford-Barberton, is briefly considered below. Another possibility would have been Moses Kottler (1892–1977), an immigrant sculptor from Lithuania, whose Jewish background might have been considered unsuitable, although he had undertaken a number of naturalistic portrait busts of Afrikaner leaders, and featured like Van Wouw in *Die Huisgenoot* (April 1918, 337–339, and 11.1.1934, 13). A modernist sculptor who would become prominent later, Edoardo Villa (1920–2011) was not yet in South Africa, where he would be interned in a World War II concentration camp at Zonderwater from 1942 to 1945, taking up a sculptural career thereafter.

<sup>454</sup> Quoted in Anderson 1991, 80.

<sup>455</sup> For Mitford-Barberton, see *DSAB* 5, 1987, 511–513; Ogilvie 1988, 450–451.

<sup>456</sup> For details of the almost unpublished frieze, see Brooke Simons 1995, 121–122; Freschi 2004, 42–47. In distinction to other 'mutual' assurance groups founded later, the company, founded in 1845, began 'referring to itself as the "old" Mutual from the 1880s, emphasizing its status as the colony's first mutual society' (Brooke Simons 1995, 65, 94). The name caught on, and the group eventually formally adopted the corporate name of Old Mutual.



**Figure 59:** Anton van Wouw. Relief depicting departure of Piet Retief. 1933. Plaster (*Die Vaderland* 26.8.1933; courtesy of UP Archives, Van Wouw files)

the majority of them labelled for easy identification (fig. 62). Running across the building's three façades, the historical reliefs comprise three sets of scenes, not a single sequential narrative, but each set is for the most part chronologically arranged and the individual narratives framed with ornamental plant and animal motifs. The frieze for the building's primary entrance in Darling Street is distinguished by the arrival of the two main colonial parties in the Cape, the Dutch under Jan van Riebeeck in 1652 and the 1820 English settlers. The frieze of the Longmarket Street façade begins in 1488 with the Portuguese Bartolomeu Diaz's discovery of the Cape, when he raised a large stone cross, and further colonial incidents in southern Africa, among them the emancipation of slaves in 1835. The longest section of the frieze in Parliament Street, connecting the two shorter ones, ranges from the establishment of the Post Office Stones in Mossel Bay (1622) and the planning of the Castle of Good Hope (1666) to more recent industrial progress in Kimberley (1871) and on the Witwatersrand (1886) – and includes a section entitled '1837 Voortrekkers' (fig. 63).

Trained first at the art school in Grahamstown and later at the Royal College of Art in London in the 1920s, Mitford-Barberton would have been aware of new trends in sculpture in the figural stylisation of artists working in England, such as Eric Gill, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska and Jacob Epstein, and certainly Henry Moore, who was one of his tutors. For the Old Mutual frieze he employed a somewhat stylised approach, well suited to the hard granite from which it was carved, with

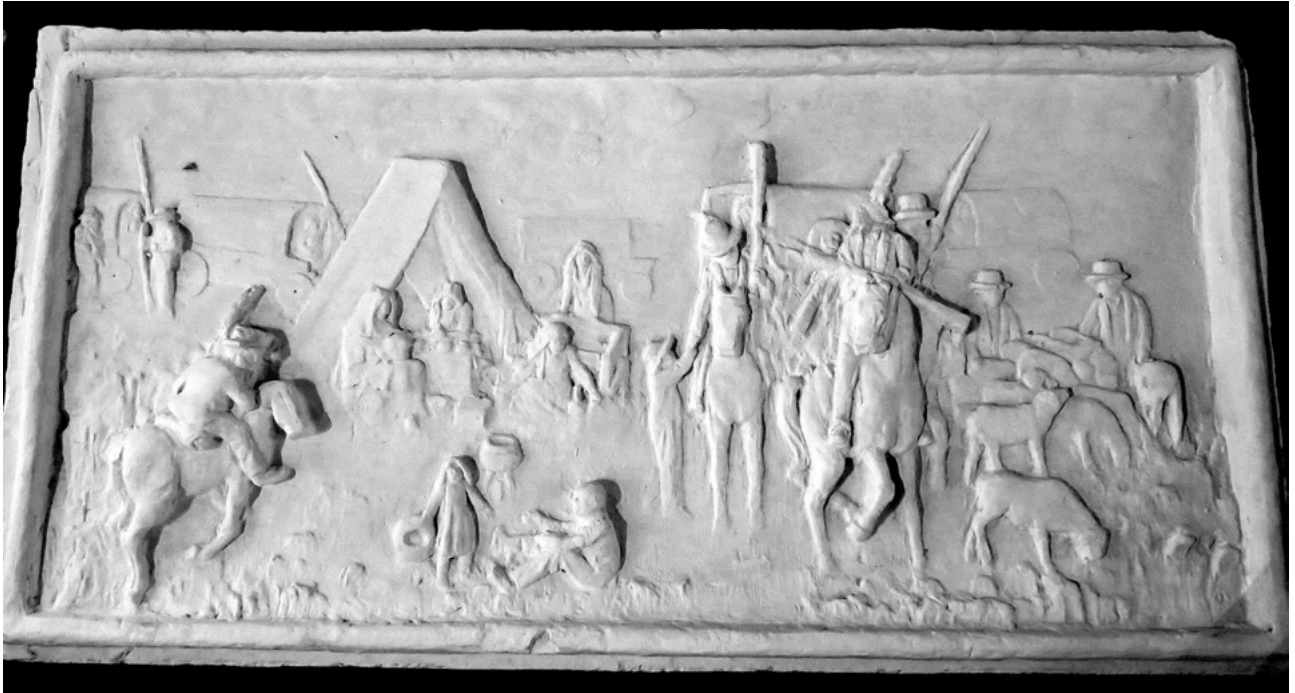


Figure 60: Anton van Wouw. Centenary relief plaques presented to schools. 1938. Plaster (top) and ceramic (bottom) (courtesy of UP museum; photos the authors)



flattened surfaces, simplified shapes and sharp cutting, so that it remained visible although well above street level. He would no doubt have been encouraged to take a ‘modernist’ approach by the Old Mutual building itself, which was proudly presented as the most up-to-date structure in South Africa.<sup>457</sup> Mitford-Barberton’s style complements the Art Deco architecture, creating both an ornamental and historical narrative; the long horizontal of the frieze counters the verticality of the building, and echoes the overall contrasts of light and dark in the strong chiaroscuro effects of the angular cutting of the granite. In style and material, Mitford-Barberton’s narrative provides a foil for our understanding of the studied naturalism and graduated modelling of the Voortrekker Monument frieze with its life-size figures in marble, viewed just above eye level in the Monument’s interior.

It seems a remarkable coincidence that two ambitious historical friezes of such large scale should have been undertaken so close in time in South Africa, and it may not have been entirely by chance. The architect of the Old Mutual building was Wynand Louw, who had been in partnership with Moerdyk in the 1920s, when they shared out commissions for Dutch Reformed churches between them. Although they evidently parted by mutual consent, each no doubt kept a watchful eye on the work of the other. The commission for the new partnership of Louw and Louw, in association with Frederick McIntosh Glennie, to design the Old Mutual building in Cape Town was undertaken from 1934–36, just prior to Moerdyk’s Voortrekker Monument. The Cape Town ‘building was opened as the head office of the SA Mutual Life Assurance Society in 1940 to rapturous acclaim by the local and architectural press. At 95 metres in height it was the tallest building in Africa’,<sup>458</sup> and no expense was spared: it was to be equipped with the latest in electric lifts, air-conditioning, etc., and adorned with lavish artwork, including the sculptural frieze by Ivan Mitford-Barberton. Moerdyk can scarcely have overlooked this project by his old partner, and neither did those planning the Voortrekker Monument: in early 1936 Senator Malan was asked to contact Wynand Louw to learn whether he wished to submit sketches and designs for the Monument to the Vormkomitee.<sup>459</sup> Although nothing apparently came of this, it is intriguing that, even though very different, both the Old Mutual building and Moerdyk’s Monument were to be of Art Deco style and that each was provided with a sculptural frieze of very large scale, exceptional at the time. And, coincidentally, both friezes were carried out by Italian carvers, although in Cape Town for the granite frieze of Louw’s building,<sup>460</sup> and at the Romanelli studio in Florence for Moerdyk’s, since South Africa could neither supply marble of a suitable quality nor the number of qualified sculptors needed to copy such an extensive narrative in that stone. As was the case with the Voortrekker Monument, it was repeatedly and misleadingly stated for the Old Mutual building that ‘the whole of the design, construction of the building, and the decorations have been carried out by South Africans, with South African materials, with the exception of machinery and such items as could not be procured locally’.<sup>461</sup> An advertisement designed around 1950, which shows the Old Mutual building with a statue of Jan van Riebeeck against the backdrop of Table Mountain, asserts the company’s claim to national importance: ‘The history of the OLD MUTUAL is the history of South Africa’ (fig. 64). It was a pretentious claim, but one whose white national subtext could also have been applied to the Voortrekker frieze.

<sup>457</sup> See the discussion in *The South African Architect*, January 1940, 382–388? plus illustrations (pagination obscured: [www.mutualheights.net/Documents/SAArchitectArticle\\_Jan1940.pdf](http://www.mutualheights.net/Documents/SAArchitectArticle_Jan1940.pdf)); a more recent appraisal is Freschi 1994.

<sup>458</sup> [www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/bldgframes.php?bldgid=1836](http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/bldgframes.php?bldgid=1836), where a number of articles predating the opening are noted.

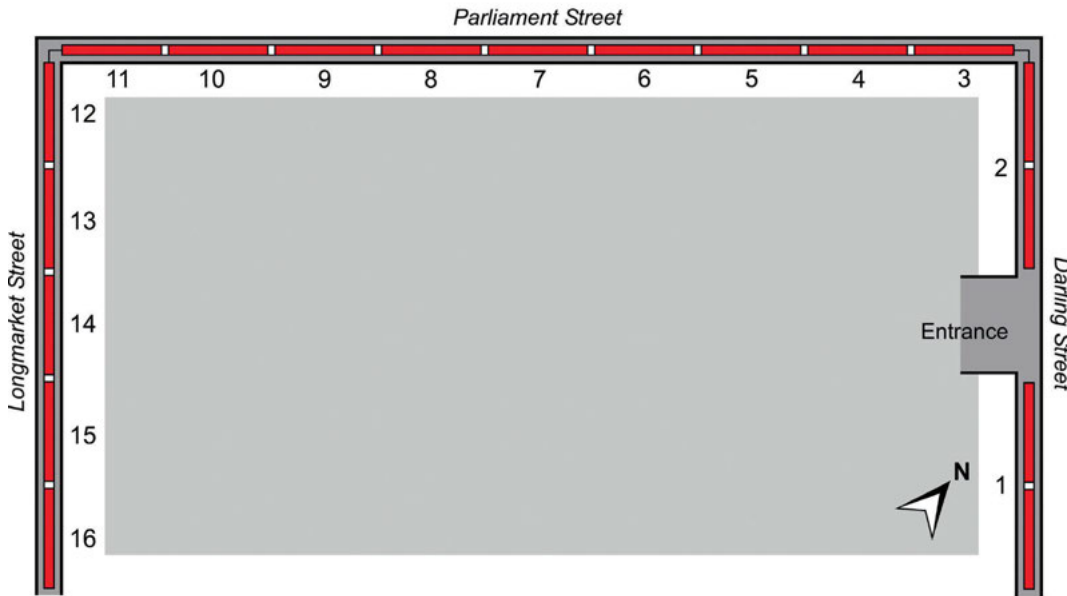
<sup>459</sup> Vormkomitee 26.1.1936: 6. ‘Sen. Malan sal met mnr. W. Louw in verbinding kom, ten einde van hom te verneem of hy sketse en ontwerpe van ’n moontlike monument aan die komitee wil voorlê.’ This may relate to an earlier design submitted by Louw and Louw mentioned in SVK 16.9.1933: Briefwisseling 3.

<sup>460</sup> The frieze was carried out to Mitford-Barberton’s designs by Italian sculptors resident in South Africa – latterly under armed guard as they were incarcerated during World War II. For a more nuanced view of the creative work of the Italian sculptors (Adolfo Lorenzi and his four brothers) in the making of the frieze, see the account of his grandson, Giovanni Adolfo Camerada, [www.mutualheights.net/pag-mh-99.htm](http://www.mutualheights.net/pag-mh-99.htm)

<sup>461</sup> *The Cape Times* (Special Supplement), 30.1.1940; Freschi 1994, 42.



**Figure 61:** Louw & Louw with F.M. Glennie. Old Mutual building, Cape Town. 1940 (*South African Architect* January 1940)



- |                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <i>Darling Street</i>              |  |
| 1 Van Riebeeck arrives (1652)      | 9 Dream of Nonqawuse (1857)              |
| 2 1820 Settlers                    | 10 Diamonds in Kimberley (1871)          |
| <i>Parliament Street</i>           |  |
| 3 Post Office Stone (1622)         | 11 Gold in Witwatersrand (1886)          |
| <i>Longmarket Street</i>           |  |
| 4 Building Cape Town Castle (1666) | 12 Diaz erects cross (1488)              |
| 5 Emancipations of slaves (1834)   | 13 Rhodes negotiates with Ndebele (1896) |
| 6 Negotiations with Shaka (1835)   | 14 Livingstone frees slaves (1835)       |
| 7 Voortrekkers I (1837)            | 15 'Opening up' Tanganyika (1857)        |
| 8 Voortrekkers II (1837)           | 16 Defence of Fort Jesus, Mombasa (1886) |

**Figure 62:** Ivan Mitford-Barberton. Order of scenes in frieze of Old Mutual building, Cape Town. 1935–40. Granite, 112.8 × 1.6 m (the authors, drawing Janet Alexander)

In contrast to the Voortrekker Monument, however, the history represented in the Old Mutual frieze studiously avoids any form of conflict, whether between white and black or between Afrikaner and English, and is very careful to give equal prominence to both language groups. Indeed, Freschi has convincingly argued that the frieze complements the policy of the Fusion government of the United Party, where Hertzog and Smuts were intent on achieving greater cooperation between English and Afrikaans groups.<sup>462</sup> The pronounced differences between the friezes of the Old Mutual building and the Voortrekker Monument highlight the diverse purposes of the sculptures. The former presents the image of an innovative (and wealthy) corporate client that was anxious to promote itself to all white South Africans; the latter represents the nationalist SVK agenda that motivated the Voortrekker Monument, aimed at an arguably more conservative audience that was distinctively Afrikaans. Interestingly, however, Moerdyk thought that Mitford-Barberton’s sculptural style would be well suited to the carving of one of the granite corner figures of Voortrekkers for the Monument and wrote to him about the possibility,<sup>463</sup> although this never eventuated.<sup>464</sup>

<sup>462</sup> Freschi 1994, 521–522, 537–542.

<sup>463</sup> See Moerdyk’s letter to Jansen of 23.3.1943 (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7).

<sup>464</sup> There is, however, note of a payment of £200 to Mitford-Barberton for the architect’s certificate of authorisation of 25.4.1944, which has been annotated ‘G. Pretorius’. It suggests that he might have been involved in an early design for the corner figure of General Pretorius.



**Figure 63:** Ivan Mitford-Barberton. *1837 Voortrekkers* on the Great Trek. Old Mutual building, Cape Town. 1935–40 (photos the authors)

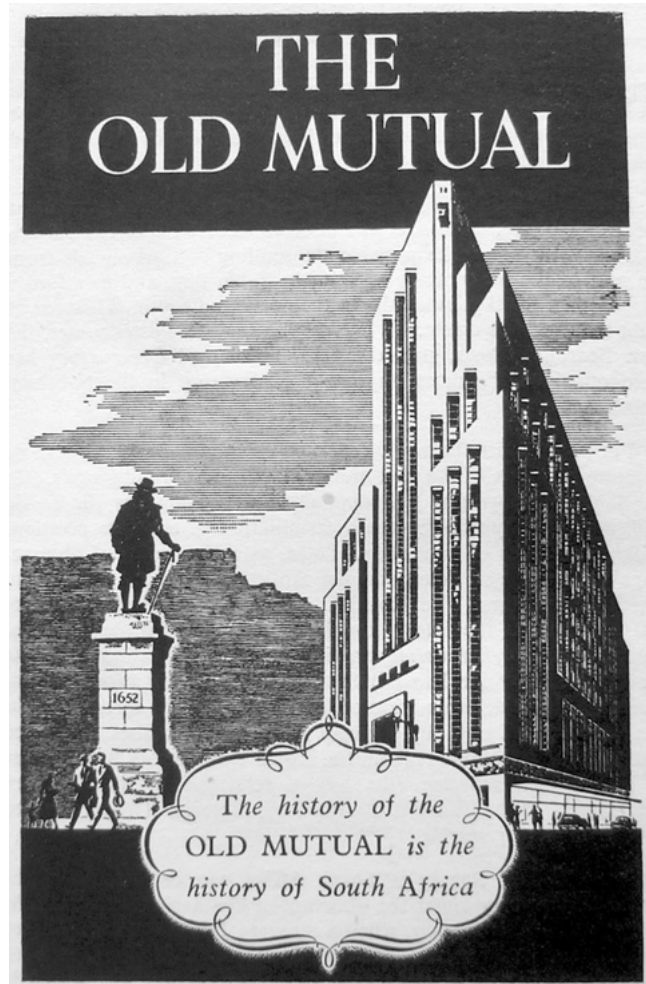
Returning to Van Wouw, while his artistic reputation was undoubtedly important in the development of the Monument, his significance in the plans of the 1930s also depended on the complex network of relationships that lay behind its conceptualisation, and the prominence in them of the architect Gerard Moerdyk. Despite the twenty-eight-year difference in their ages, Van Wouw and Moerdyk (figs 65, 66) had formed a close relationship. It was probably initiated as early as 1909, when they were both associated with the Public Works Department in Pretoria, but dated particularly from the period when Van Wouw was in Rome and busy with the production of his bronzes for the Vrouemonument (fig. 47). Moerdyk recounted in his 1945 obituary for Van Wouw that he stayed at the same lodgings in Rome as the sculptor in 1912, and saw him almost daily.<sup>465</sup> Moerdyk clearly came to know the sculptor very well indeed, for he subsequently lived with Van Wouw for three years at his Johannesburg address in Sivewright Avenue, Doornfontein, from 1915 until Moerdyk's marriage on 3 May 1918 – he even made sculpture under Van Wouw's guidance.<sup>466</sup>

<sup>465</sup> See Moerdyk, 'Van Wouw as Mens en Vriend', *Die Huisgenoot* 7.9.1945. In this essay, Moerdyk claims that he spent a year in Italy, but, based on Moerdyk's letters at the time, Vermeulen (1999, 31, 34) states that he left London in July 1912 and returned in February 1913, making a stay of about six months more likely.

<sup>466</sup> See *ibid.*, and Duffey (2006) for details of their relationship. For the date of marriage, erroneously given by Vermeulen (1999, 42) as 3 May 1917, see *DSAB* 3, 1977, 624 (Moerdijk, Gerard Leendert Pieter); *DSAB* 5, 1987, 514 (Moerdyk, Sylva Henriette).

A further point of contact would have been Moerdyk's friendship with the young architect Gordon Leith,<sup>467</sup> who had studied art with Van Wouw early in the century before training as an architect in Britain, as Moerdyk would do. Leith was in Europe as a Baker scholar and was apparently involved in the making of the huge bronze for the Vrouemonument, to judge by contemporary photographs (fig. 67), at the same time that Moerdyk was visiting Rome. The sculpture's affective treatment of the suffering of Afrikaner women and children in the British concentration camps during the Anglo-Boer War in a monumental bronze group (fig. 68) and two flanking reliefs must have struck a chord with Moerdyk, who had experienced the camps at first hand as a child, when interned with his mother and siblings at Standerton in 1901.<sup>468</sup> Moerdyk's daughter, Irma Vermeulen, goes so far as to suggest that Moerdyk may have been of assistance to the sculptor in giving him insights into the anguish endured during the war years.<sup>469</sup>

Van Wouw was not new to the opportunities that could come from a sculptor working closely with an architect. The successful proposal for the Vrouemonument had been a joint submission with the architect Frans Soff (1867–1936), and the later Johannesburg Railway Station frieze was for a building designed by none other than Gerard Moerdyk and Gordon Leith.<sup>470</sup> Moerdyk's growing prominence would have made him a particularly desirable colleague. Apart from Moerdyk's professional status as an architect who had won important commissions such as the Reserve Bank in Bloemfontein and Libertas, the Pretoria residence of the prime minister, he had established himself as an influential figure in Afrikaner circles, and had been invited to belong to important organisations, such as those already mentioned: the Broederbond in 1920, not long after its 1918 inauguration, and the Akademie in 1923. Additionally, he 'served on the council of the University of Pretoria, another bastion of Afrikaner values, for many years and was chairman for seven'.<sup>471</sup> He was also a prominent public voice in talks and publications addressing the need for a South African or, more expressly, an Afrikaner style in architecture.<sup>472</sup> That he was already present at the SVK meeting



**Figure 64:** Advertisement for Old Mutual. c. 1950? (unknown origin)

<sup>467</sup> See Vermeulen 1999, 19.

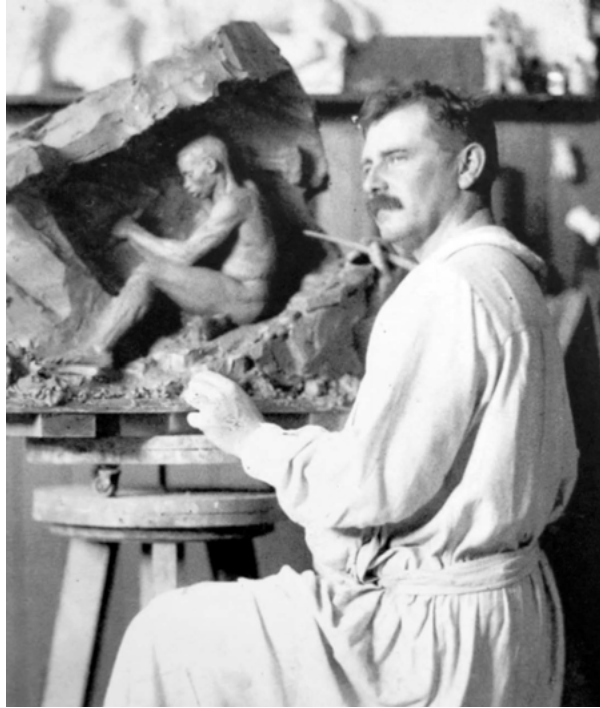
<sup>468</sup> For an account of some of his experiences, see 'Oorlog en Konsentrasiekamp' in Vermeulen 1999, 12–16.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid., 32. Harmsen (1988, 117–118) quotes a description by Emily Hobhouse that provided a source for Van Wouw's group for the Vrouemonument; Van Zyl (2013, 216–218) discusses Hobhouse's significance in the conceptualisation and oversight of the sculpture more fully.

<sup>470</sup> It is notable that the suite of paintings of South African landscapes for the entrance court of the railway station was commissioned from another Afrikaner artist, Pierneef, who was well known to Moerdyk and Leith. See Coetzee 1992.

<sup>471</sup> DSAB 3, 1977, 623. While Vermeulen (1999, 119) dates his appointment as chairman from 1930 to 1937, the university website gives the dates 1935 to 1942 (<http://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/87>). The university had been bilingual, but in 1932 it was decided to hold all classes in Afrikaans.

<sup>472</sup> See, for example, 'The tragedy of Cape Town: Missed opportunities', *The Cape Argus* 25.5.1929; 'The capital's history as told by its buildings', *The Star* 28.5.1929; 'Afrikaans argitektuur', *The Heidelberg News* 7.6.1929; 'Typical of the soil – S.A. architecture – Looking to London for plans', *Library Dispute* 9.12.1929; 'Eie boustyl vir S.A. nodig' (Own building style necessary for S.A.), *Die Volksblad* 2.10.1930; 'Die ontwikkeling van ons eie kuns' (The development of our own art), *Die Burger* 11.10.1930, as well as arguments for a national style that formed a subtheme in his books, *Kerkgeboue vir Suidafrika* (Church buildings for South Africa) (1919) and *Die geskiedenis van boukuns* (The history of



**Figure 65:** Anton van Wouw working on clay model for *The hammer worker*. 1911 (photo courtesy of Van Wouw House Collection)



**Figure 66:** Gerard Moerdyk. 1913 (Vermeulen 1999, 56)

of 14 April 1932 suggests how quickly he became involved with the Monument project. Although it is recorded that he advocated an open competition to the committee on that occasion, we have seen that he had already put forward a design proposal, developed with Van Wouw (fig. 43). On another occasion, when Moerdyk was invited in an advisory capacity to a meeting of the SVK Vormkomitee on 29 February 1936, recorded as ‘Thoughts expressed’ (Gedagtes uitgespreek), he shifted ground, and maintained that a competition with an independent assessor was not the best way forward, as it would commit the SVK to considerable expense and to working with the selected winner, whether the committee liked the design or not. Presumably by that date he was aware that he was a likely candidate for the task. And he would certainly have been aware that bas-reliefs, like those that he and Van Wouw had suggested in 1932 and 1933, had become part of the SVK conception of the Monument, and that there was ongoing debate about how they should represent the Voortrekker story.

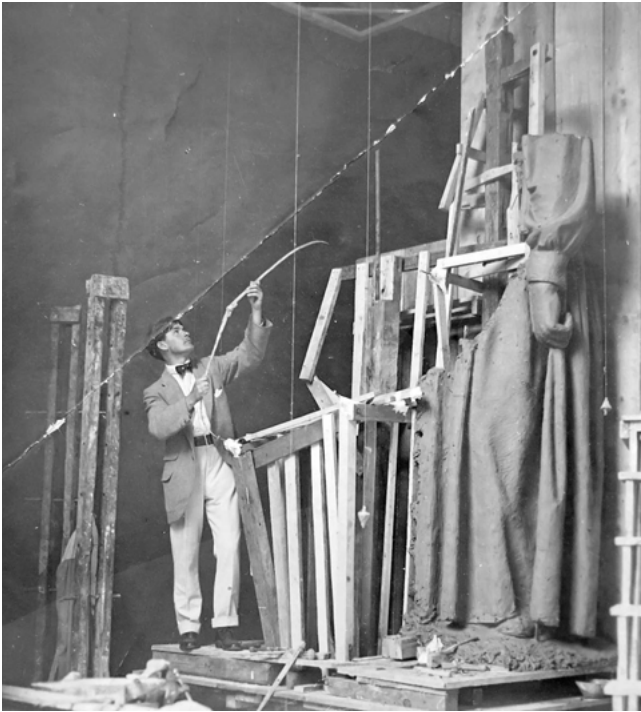
## Topics for the Great Trek

As previously discussed, at a number of their early meetings SVK members had raised the problem of fundraising for the Voortrekker Monument when so many South Africans were still badly affected by the Depression. Yet they firmly rejected the idea of a utilitarian project, such as a hospital, feeling that a dedicated memorial was needed to appropriately honour the Voortrekkers and to be a source of inspiration and pride for Afrikaners.<sup>473</sup> As time passed and the project became

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architecture) (1935). Moerdyk also wrote a number of practical articles about homes addressed to Afrikaner women in *Die Boervrou*.

<sup>473</sup> These principles are set out very clearly in an undated handwritten document (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/8), perhaps by Jansen: ‘Wat gaan die vorm van die Monument wees?’ (What will the form of the Monument be?) The point was still being made as late as 1952, when C.M. van den Heever argued, in an article titled ‘Gedagtes by [thoughts at] die Voortrekkermonument’ (*Die Taalgenoot*, December 1952, 5), that a utilitarian memorial would rapidly have lost its special meaning, and would not have acted as a potent reminder of the Voortrekker example, to spur Afrikaners to maintain the same moral values in the present. However, it is noteworthy that a museum function was incorporated



**Figure 67:** Gordon Leith helps to build armature in Rome for Van Wouw's *Women with dead child* for Vrouemonument, Bloemfontein. c. 1912 (photo courtesy of UP Archives, Van Wouw files)

**Figure 68:** Anton van Wouw. *Women with dead child*, Vrouemonument, Bloemfontein. 1913. Bronze, h. c. 4 m (photo the authors)

more ambitious, with more expensive materials and increasingly lavish artworks, the question of funding paradoxically became less pressing, no doubt because the government had committed itself not only to match SVK funds but also to make up any shortfall. Nonetheless, it was obvious that erecting many different monuments to commemorate the numerous leaders and events that different constituencies were proposing for the 1938 centenary was out of the question, for all that the SVK's very name reflected its original brief to plan for monuments in the plural (Volksmonumentekomitee).<sup>474</sup> The programme that was to be devised for the narrative frieze might therefore be said to also have a pragmatic goal: to be seen to incorporate the different figures and events that were being proposed for independent monuments as the centenary of Blood River approached, and thus to encourage different groups to support the national Monument. Providing an inclusive view of the treks no doubt contributed to the intention to recount the history of selected events drawn from the different treks in bas-reliefs in the Monument, even before the architectural form had been conceived, let alone the form the sculpture would take. The pressing question for the members of the SVK was which aspects of Voortrekker history would best tell their story. A number of proposals had been submitted which we have summarised in a table (fig. 69).

At the final meeting of 1934 on 5 December, the SVK received a report from the committee working on the scenes. We deduce that this can be identified as an undated list from Mrs Jansen, Dr Preller and Mr Scheepers, housed in a number of South African archives in designated files for individual SVK members. It was the first document to define in any detail what the historical sculptures might be.<sup>475</sup> This 'Voorstelle van tonele' (proposals for scenes), spoke of twelve topics

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into the Monument, in part because so many items of Afrikaner heritage were donated to the project during the 1938 ossewatrek and the travels of the rapportryers (despatch riders) in 1949.

**474** The SVK did give some financial support to the Blood River Monument, designed for an independent committee by Coert Steynberg, which also celebrated the laying of the foundation stone on 16 December 1938 (see *Blood River*). After the completion of the Voortrekker Monument, the SVK also assisted with the development of monuments at Pietermaritzburg (a bronze of Piet Retief by Steynberg, unveiled in April 1962) and Winburg (a modernist structure, inaugurated in October 1968).

**475** It is not certain whether this document from the Engelenburg file (NARSSA, BNS 298/146/73, pp.112–113), headed 'Suggestions of scenes from the time of the Great Trek considered appropriate for bas- and high-relief work on the

Topic proposals for the Voortrekker monument frieze			
Title	Author/s	Date	Reference
<i>Voorstelle</i> van tonele uit die tyd van die Voortrek (see fig. 70)	Possibly Mrs M. Jansen, Dr G. Preller and J.J. Scheepers	c December 1939	ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7 NARSSA BNS 298/146/73
<i>Panele</i>	unknown	c 1934–36	ARCA PV94 1/75/1/9
<i>Wenke</i> i.v.m. historiewe [sic] tonele vir die Voortrekkermonument (compilation of proposals, numbered as per the document)	i) F.A. Steytler ii) Dr. L Steenkamp, mnrs. A.J. du Plessis en M. Basson iii) Die Spoorbond iv) Mevr. Van Reenen v) I. v.d. Wath vi) Senator Malan	c 1936	ARCA PV94 1/75/1/9
<i>Moerdyk Layout</i> Annotated layout of the panels of the frieze (see fig. 90)	Dr E. Jansen / G. Moerdyk	c January 1937	ARCA PV94 1/75/1/9
<i>Jansen Memorandum</i> Letter to Minister of the Interior (see fig. 92)	Dr E. Jansen	19 January 1937	NARSSA BNS 146/73/2

**Figure 69:** Table of proposals (the authors)

being required, but listed twenty-four to give the committee choice (fig. 70). ‘Voorstelle’ defined the relevant period as 1836–52, framed by the departure of Louis Trichardt in 1835, and the deaths of the two Trek leaders Potgieter and Pretorius, who died in 1852 and 1853 respectively. Four groups of scenes were proposed: one set related to the Trichardt trek, and three sets for the geographical areas of the Free State, Natal and the Transvaal that encompassed various treks and leaders. There seems to have been no attempt at any kind of overall sequential narrative, such as a chronological arrangement that would produce a more or less comprehensible set of images. For example, the Trichardt set, six scenes in all, was quite disparate in its range: apart from three topics concerning the Trichardt trek itself – the settlement at Soutpansberg, the crossing of the Drakensberg, and the return of the survivors to Port Natal – it included the fatal end of the trek of Van Rensburg who had earlier travelled with Louis Trichardt; the sighting of the Zambezi’s Victoria Falls by Trichardt’s son, Carolus Johannes Trichardt (1811–1901);<sup>476</sup> and his account of the death of Dingane, which he was said to have witnessed.

Three scenes for the Free State were proposed: two of battles – the attack on the Liebenberg encampment near Parys and the subsequent Boer reprisal at Vegkop – and the third a scene with the inauguration of Piet Retief near Winburg. The last was intended to represent the Voortrekkers’ respect for the law, which also encompassed a protective attitude towards indigenous people. The area of Natal dominated the list, with eleven suggested scenes: signing the treaty with Dingane; the murder of Retief and his men; two depicting the subsequent Zulu attacks on Voortrekker laagers around Bloukrans, one including the young hero Marthinus Oosthuizen; Dirkie Uys dying with his father; the English commando against Dingane; the women calling for revenge at the Maritz laager;

Voortrekker Monument’ (Voorstelle van tonele uit die tyd van die Voortrek wat geskik geag word vir half- en hoogverhewe beeldwerk op the Voortrekkermonument), is the appendix mentioned in the minutes of 5.12.1934: 7, but it seems highly probable, since the members of the group are identical. The document is to be found in the files for Jansen (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7) and Engelbrecht (NHKA P1/2/3/8/10).

<sup>476</sup> DSAB 1, 1968, 799–802; Visagie 2011, 498–499.



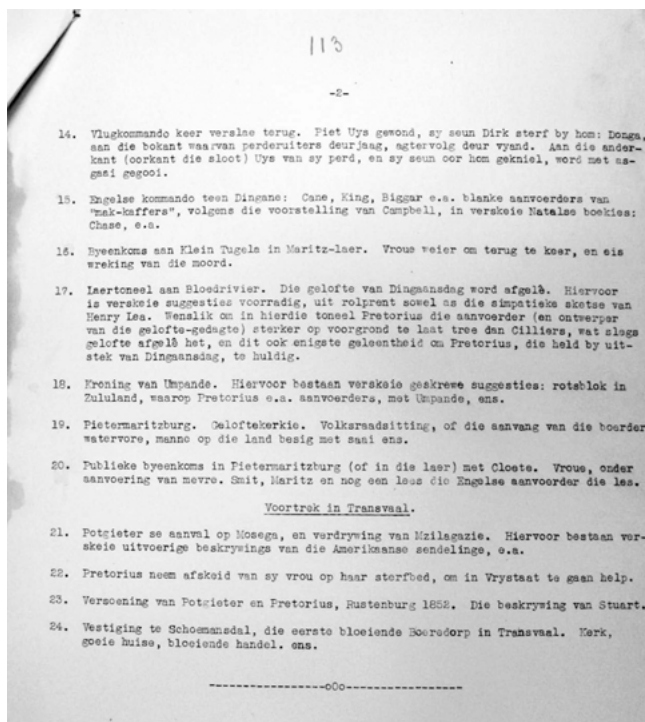
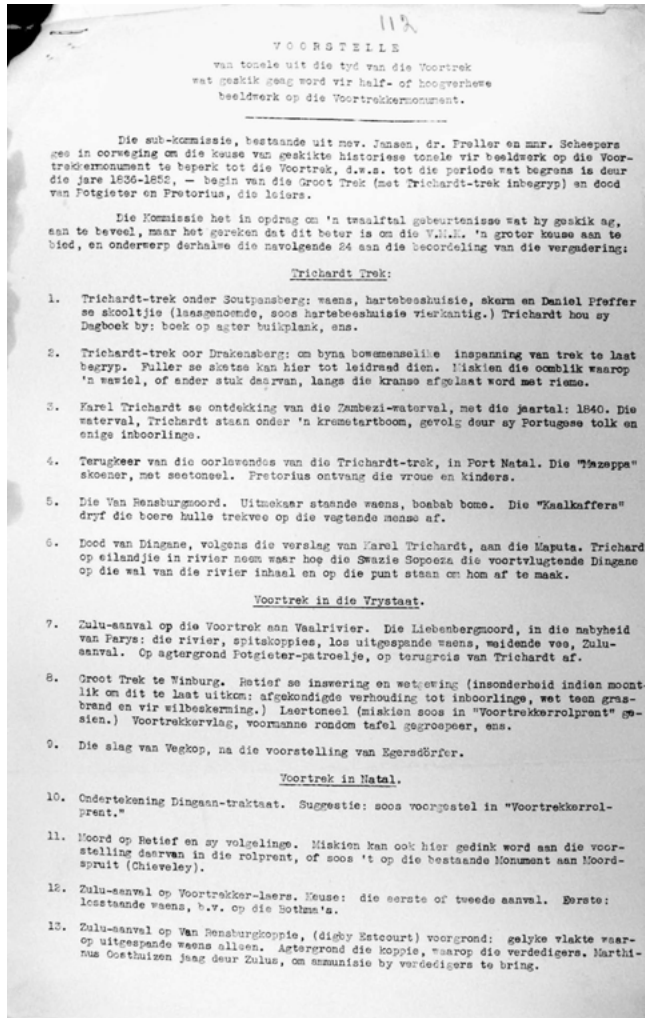


Figure 70: 'Voort-  
stelle', first of the  
proposal documents  
outlining topics for  
the historical frieze.  
1934? (courtesy of  
NARSSA, Engelen-  
burg 140/3/14,  
pp.112-113)

the Battle of Blood River and the Vow; the crowning of Mpande; Pietermaritzburg with the Church of the Vow and the Volksraad; and the Voortrekker meeting with the English when the women refused to surrender to their rule. The final four scenes were situated in the Transvaal: Potgieter's expulsion of Mzilikazi from Mosega; Pretorius taking leave of his wife on her deathbed; the reconciliation of Potgieter and Pretorius; and the establishment of Schoemansdal as the first flourishing Boer town. There were calls for SVK committee members to respond to the suggestions but we could find no systematic report of this in the archival records.<sup>477</sup>

An annotated copy of the 'Voorstelle' in the Jansen files already makes a tentative selection, by ticking many of the topics that would ultimately be represented, and scoring out some of the others that would not, such as Carolus Trichardt's discovery of the Zambezi, the Van Rensburg and Liebenberg murders, and the English commando against Dingane.<sup>478</sup> But it also rejects the death of Dingane, and the Zulu attack in the Bloukrans area with Marthinus Oosthuizen's heroic deed, which would both be included in the final frieze. Some annotations, possibly in Jansen's hand, also suggest that the return of the survivors of the Trichardt trek to Port Natal aboard the *Mazepa* should be shown on one of the pendentives supporting the Monument's dome: the proposal that some of the Voortrekker story be told in paintings was frequently raised during the 1930s, although it gradually faded as the frieze became the focus of attention, and it became evident that it would include far more than the twelve scenes originally proposed.

While the 'Voorstelle' predictably included major conflicts and victories of the Voortrekkers, it is notable that there was also an attempt to represent their lives and values, and to acknowledge the role of women and children. It aimed to present a concept of the Voortrekkers as people who upheld a civilised and law-abiding way of life. This established an important principle for the historical frieze. The trauma that Voortrekkers suffered during the treks was not underplayed, because it showed their fortitude and was felt to justify their conflicts with indigenous peoples, as well as their ultimate victories and occupation of the land. But the idea that they were carrying civilisation to the hinterland was considered vital. Despite the importance of battle scenes in the historical narrative, it was an objective to show 'the peaceful intentions of the Voortrekkers', claimed by Moerdyk much later in the *Official Guide*:

They consistently tried to obtain land from the natives by means of negotiation and not by force of arms. There were no conquerors among the Voortrekkers, no Cortez nor Napoleon, no Genghis Khan nor Tamburlaine.<sup>479</sup>

One might counter Moerdyk's claim with W.J.T. Mitchell's comment that 'From Ozymandias to Caesar to Napoleon to Hitler, public art has served as a kind of monumentalizing of violence, and never more powerfully than when it presents the conqueror as a man of peace'.<sup>480</sup> In the celebration of the Great Trek, it was constantly emphasised that only when compelled to do so by the aggression of others did the righteous and peace-loving Voortrekkers take up arms. In 1938, Henning Klopper, the leader of the centenary re-enactment of the Trek, acted out this concept by giving Bibles to participants from different African groups after the ox wagons' arrival in Pretoria, to show that the Afrikaners 'brought freedom and not enmity'.<sup>481</sup> Yet, in a patently contradictory twist of the

<sup>477</sup> A call of this kind would seem to have been made on different occasions: a letter from Scheepers of 13.9.1935 enclosed a list of twenty-four scenes, asking that the recipients (unnamed, but presumably committee members) urgently list them in order of preference (NHKA Engelbrecht files P1/2/3/8/10).

<sup>478</sup> ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7.

<sup>479</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 48. Moerdyk constantly made conflicting statements on this issue, which confuse different ideologies. For example (ibid., 33), he specified that the Voortrekker 'had to tame nature, conquer the savages and establish his state', but claimed only a few lines further down that the 'Voortrekker did not come as an adventurer, still less as a conqueror'.

<sup>480</sup> Mitchell 1990, 886.

<sup>481</sup> 'dat ons vrede bring en geen vyandskap nie' (Mostert 1940, 771). The photograph shows that this took place outside the Voortrekker Gedenksaal, which appears to be the one designed by Leith, discussed in Chapter 1.

argument, it was also claimed that it was through conflict and the Voortrekkers' ultimate victory that their right to the country was affirmed. It was an objective of the frieze – and Moerdyk's discussion of it – to validate this duality of reasoning.

The frieze ... is not only a representation of historic events. It also serves as a symbolic document showing the Afrikaner's proprietary right to South Africa. Here are portrayed the Trekker's ways of life, his work, his battles, his political activities – in short, evidence of the price the Afrikaner paid for the right to call South Africa his fatherland. A people that have sacrificed so much in blood and tears, have left their mark on such a country, and therefore spiritually and physically that country belongs to them and their descendants.<sup>482</sup>

Ubiquitous in the extensive publicity that appeared around the time of the inauguration of the Monument, interpretations of this kind were made with hindsight once the frieze was completed, but it is clear that such ideas were formulated while it was being conceptualised.

Another undated document from the Jansen archive, simply headed 'Panele' (Panels), which must also belong to the period when the historical scenes were being debated between 1934 and 1936, gives further insight into the way thinking developed (fig. 69).<sup>483</sup> It proposed fourteen themes, which attempted to unite historical events with underlying purpose, to thus show the symbolic significance of the selected topics, an indication that the intention was not merely to tell a story. For example, the departure from the Cape, the opening scene that is common to most early lists, was to be 'characterised by determination' (vasberadenheid moet die kenmerk wees), while the inauguration of Piet Retief as governor would show that the Boers 'were people who believed in law and order' (was ordeliwende [sic] mense).<sup>484</sup> A third point sums up the difficulties the Voortrekkers faced as '(a) natuur' and '(b) die inboorling' (nature and the native), the former to be represented by one of the Drakensberg crossings, the latter by a battle such as Vegkop or Blood River. That it was recommended that the chosen battle should also depict the defence system, and if possible the involvement of the women (which would only have been historically achievable for Vegkop, not Blood River), demonstrates how the proposals were attempting to condense many aspects of the treks into single scenes. The fourth theme put forward was how the Voortrekkers brought civilisation, which could be represented by Pfeffer's school at Soutpansberg, established for the Trichardt trek, or the women learning needlework from Mrs Erasmus (Susanna) Smit. The fifth point listed was a murder scene. Interestingly, at that stage either the death of Retief or the Bloukrans massacre was suggested; as with the battles, only one example was felt necessary to represent the topic, which demonstrates that the conceptualisation of the panels at that stage was more notional than narrative.

The sixth scene, the signing of the treaty, required no annotation. As the basis of Voortrekker claims to Natal and the trigger for many of the subsequent events, its inclusion was a *sine qua non*.<sup>485</sup> It also served to underline the peaceful and fair-minded intentions of the Voortrekkers, as did the eighth proposed theme to represent the occupation of the new land with a scene of Potgieter achieving that goal by exchange with the natives, rather than by conquest. Such ideas serve to reinforce the concept of the character of the Afrikaner nation that was being asserted, one conceived as having been developed on the treks and sustained for the subsequent hundred years. This was to be most demonstrably evinced in their maintaining to the present day the Vow to God, said to have been made at Danskraal, listed as point eleven, a Vow which the Monument would celebrate.

The seventh and ninth themes focused on the families of the trekkers: the role played by women, through their unremitting resistance to British rule, famously expressed by Susanna Smit in her statement that they would 'rather go barefoot over the Drakensberg' (liever kaalvoet oor D'berge) than submit to it, or Pretorius' dying wife who selflessly sent her husband to assist his

<sup>482</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 34.

<sup>483</sup> ARCA PV94 1/75/1/9.

<sup>484</sup> The name 'Erasmus Smit' is added to this entry, but it does not specify his role.

<sup>485</sup> Despite the centrality of the treaty to the Voortrekker story, its authenticity is contested; see *Treaty*.

fellow countrymen; and the individual heroic deeds of young Voortrekkers, such as Dirkie Uys or Marthinus Oosthuizen. Although it is not overtly stated, one senses an echo of the heroism of families incarcerated during the Anglo-Boer War, and the indestructible determination of women in the concentration camps, a sentiment also reflected in Van Wouw's *Voortrekker mother and children* (fig. 49). An interesting point listed as number ten that perhaps also linked to more recent history was the importance of the sea to freedom. This subject evoked the need for a port that had remained a key goal throughout the nineteenth century, to be fulfilled by Kruger's railway line to Lourenço Marques. Here the link with the sea was to be represented by the ship *Brasile*, which the Natal trekkers had misguidedly believed was bringing them support from the Netherlands. As also annotated in 'Voorstelle', there was the intention to depict sea themes like this, including the Trichardt survivors on the *Mazeppa*, in the unrealised decoration of the Monument's pendentives, shown in Moerdyk's later sectional Drawings 3 and 4 of the Monument (figs 53, 54). It could be argued that it was in a sense represented in the final marble frieze by Trichardt's journey to Delagoa Bay, which alone of all the scenes shows a ship and the sea.

The last three points on the 'Panele' list emphasised the underlying qualities that it was believed characterised the treks and ultimately the Afrikaner nation: the sense of 'fellowship and unity' (saamhorigheidsgevoel) amongst the trekkers, possibly to be represented by the reconciliation of Pretorius and Potgieter; the 'longing for freedom' (erlanging v. d. Vryheid), to be depicted by the 1852 and 1854 conventions that confirmed the independence of the Transvaal and Free State respectively; and the establishment of 'permanent civilisation' (permanente beskawing), which added the idea of permanence to the first mention of that concept as number four, this time to be shown by the laying out of a farm or a town, such as Pietermaritzburg or Potchefstroom. The emphasis on concepts rather than simply historical events is characteristic of this early phase in planning, although it was clearly still at a very fluid stage, confirmed by pencil annotations on the 'Panele' list, written in a hand that can be identified as Jansen's. One of his additional points, the presentation of a Bible to Voortrekker patriarch Jacobus Uys on behalf of the residents of Grahamstown, would have served to emphasise both the Voortrekkers' godliness and their empathy with English settlers – although not with the British authorities.<sup>486</sup> It might be surmised that the decision to include this scene was encouraged by a number of suggestions amongst responses to the design of the Monument that the Bible should be given prominence.

This, and a second scrawled point on the 'Panele' list relating to the occupation of Port Natal by the British, may have been added from an appended document which follows this one in the Jansen archive files in Bloemfontein. It is headed 'Suggestions in relation to historical scenes for the Voortrekker Monument' (Wenke i.v.m. historiewe [sic] tonele vir die Voortrekkermonument).<sup>487</sup> The 'Wenke' document (fig. 69) listed suggestions from individuals, which may have been responses to a call for ideas from the public.<sup>488</sup> That would suggest that it dated from 1936, as the proposal came from the Vormkomitee at the beginning of the year,<sup>489</sup> when Hugo was tasked with drawing up a short press statement to call for ideas of both form and content for the Monument. In addition, Senator Malan undertook to seek the aid of the Secretary of Foreign Affairs to solicit images of historical monuments abroad through South African embassies. The 'Wenke' document included ideas from committee member Malan, but others are attributed to individuals who were not part of the SVK, such as F.A. Steytler, an Orange Free State teacher and historian,<sup>490</sup> a Mrs van Reenen and a certain I. v.d. Wath. The specific scenes suggested are largely rehearsed elsewhere, already demonstrating that some scenes would be obvious choices, but there are a few additional

<sup>486</sup> A page in Engelbrecht's files (NHKA P1/2/3/8/10) also has a handwritten note of the presentation of the Bible.

<sup>487</sup> ARCA PV94 1/75/1/9.

<sup>488</sup> A general letter asking for topics for the frieze from Scheepers, addressed to an unspecified Heer/Mevrouw (Mr/Mrs), is dated 14.9.1936.

<sup>489</sup> Vormkomitee 26.1.1936: 7.

<sup>490</sup> DSAB 4, 1981, 619. Described in the SVK minutes as school inspector of the northern Free State (5.12.1934: 5f).

suggestions, including a self-interested one from the Spoorbond (Railway union) that urges that attention should be given to the development of transport.<sup>491</sup>

A group submission from Dr L. Steenkamp,<sup>492</sup> M. Basson,<sup>493</sup> and A.J. du Plessis in the ‘Wenke’ document used themes that again showed a conceptual approach not dissimilar to that in ‘Panele’. Their first heading was ‘Social’ (Maatskaplik), with subheadings for ‘Religious’ (Godsdienstig), ‘Teaching’ (Onderwys) and ‘Attitude to other ethnic groups’ (Verhouding met ander volksgroepe); the second was ‘Constitutional’ (Konstitusioneel), and the third ‘Economic’ (Ekonomies). These categories resulted in rather different groupings from the earlier ‘Voorstelle’ list with its predominantly geographic classification. Here the heading ‘Religious’, for example, led to the bracketing of the Bible presentation, a religious gathering on the Trek, the Vow at Danskraal, and the building of the first church. Similarly, ‘Attitude to other ethnic groups’ incorporated many scenes, seventeen in all, from peaceful negotiations with Moroka and Dingane, through the full panoply of events around the deaths and conflicts that followed. This submission also extended the timeframe by including not only the inauguration of the first president of the Orange Free State in 1854, but also that of President Kruger, which took place only in 1883, thus placing a stronger emphasis on the republics.

A further submission in the ‘Wenke’ document from Senator Malan emphasised that cultural and religious aspects of the treks must be included, not only battles and politics. He also made a different suggestion for the overall organisation, saying ‘it must be a chronological representation of outstanding events’, particularly significant because he was a member of the proactive Vormkomitee.<sup>494</sup> He thus predicted the main principle that would at the end of the day underpin the organisation of the frieze, without abandoning the concepts behind earlier listings that would continue to have a strong presence. This double purpose is evident when we compare Moerdyk’s explanations of the frieze panels for the *Official Programme* of 1949 with those of the *Official Guide* of 1955: while the *Guide* was clearly dependent on the *Programme*, and shared its descriptive character to clarify the stories, it constantly offered interpretations of the scenes in terms of broader concepts, such as *Presentation* representing a Christian purpose, and *Inauguration* a resolve to live under the law.<sup>495</sup> Moerdyk’s essays on ‘The Historical Frieze’ in both publications, which tackle each scene separately, even using subheadings in the *Official Guide*, reflect (unintentionally) the difficulty of making a coherent narrative out of a disparate ‘chain of episodes’. Moerdyk was anxious to avoid disjunction in the reliefs, hoping rather to produce a unified ‘historic drama’.<sup>496</sup> Developing

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**491** Transport was a popular theme to show progress, often coupling the ox wagon and the railway, as seen in Van Wouw’s Johannesburg Station frieze, already discussed, and also flanking the central group in Coert Steynberg’s sculptures for the pediment of the Pretoria City Hall in the mid-1930s (Freschi 2005a, 108, 255 fig. 68).

**492** Dr L. Steenkamp was a late secondment to the Historiese Komitee from Natal. Steenkamp was a teacher who entered politics in 1943, and an expert on Natal history (see *DSAB* 5, 1987, 731–732). On 5.3.1935, as secretary of the Saamwerk-unie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge (union of ‘working together’ of Afrikaans cultural associations), he invited Jansen to a Saamwerk-unie congress, and to talk to the historical committee regarding a Natal monument (ARCA PV94 1/75/9/1). Steenkamp was also the author of a letter to Coert Steynberg of 18.10.1938 in relation to Steynberg’s relief of Danskraal (in fact Wasbank; see *The Vow*) for the Blood River Monument, specifying that, on the basis of old letters, it could be deduced that Cilliers would have raised only one hand, his right, for the swearing of the Vow. He sent further comments to the sculptor on 24.4.1939, including how the Church of the Vow should be represented (both letters in the Coert Steynberg archive, DNMCH Archives, Pretoria). Steenkamp no doubt conveyed the same information to the SVK’s Historiese Komitee. They provide further evidence of widespread interest in the ‘authentic’ representation of the Trek at the time, probably largely invisible to us today.

**493** Basson was another late secondment to the Historiese Komitee who had considerable knowledge of the Voortrekkers (see Basson 1935); letters to M. Basson amongst SVK papers address him as the honorary secretary of the Voortrekker Museum in Pietermaritzburg.

**494** ‘Dit moet ’n kronologiese voorstelling van uitstaande gebeurtenisse wees.’

**495** See *Official Programme* 1949, 48–57 and *Official Guide* 1955, 40–53. The relevant entry for *Presentation* reads: ‘The presentation of the Bible is inserted at the beginning of the frieze because the Bible was to the Voortrekkers a shining light on their path’ (ibid., 46); and for *Inauguration*: ‘That the Voortrekkers were resolved to live under an established government is clearly shown by the fact that they formed a government whenever the opportunity arose’ (ibid., 47).

**496** *Official Guide* 1955, 40.

a chronology that would make sense in a continuous frieze, which seemed an effective principle, was very hard to achieve in practice and frequently breached in the frieze, even though Moerdyk would claim that ‘the chronological order of events was not unduly disturbed’.<sup>497</sup> It is notable that Engelenburg had pointed out the difficulty of putting together a continuous history for the treks in the form of images during a discussion about a commemorative publication,<sup>498</sup> and it would prove no easy task for the sculptors either.

While acknowledging the traditional heroes who led the treks, an undated document entitled ‘Volkshulde aan die Voortrekkers’ (People’s tribute to the Voortrekkers) by Rikie Postma, an author of children’s stories, took a different approach, which placed great emphasis on the role of women and children, and urged that they be appropriately represented at the Monument. She also proposed a garden of remembrance that would contain soil taken from all the places that were significant for the treks, marked with inscribed plaques. She suggested that the plants too could have meaning – the flowers that Voortrekker women had to leave behind in their carefully tended gardens when they departed the Cape, for example, and the ‘mimosa-doringtakke’ used for the branches that filled gaps in the defensive laagers on the treks.<sup>499</sup>

These records, copious and complex enough in themselves, are undoubtedly only the tip of the iceberg for the intensely debated topic of what the Monument should represent. The ‘Wenke’ document provides an invaluable indication of the range of input that the SVK must have been grappling with, which we can only surmise today. Probably dozens of interested parties were involved, and possibly much of the discussion was verbal and never recorded. Or suggestions may have come in the form of personal communications,<sup>500</sup> perhaps preserved scattered through private collections that may yet be uncovered by later research.

There were also other representations of South African history with scenes of the Voortrekkers created in the 1930s, including the reliefs of Gordon Leith’s Voortrekker Memorial Hall in Pretoria (c. 1927), mentioned earlier, of which little is known (fig. 45). Murals were commissioned for the then newly built South Africa House in London (1934) and the City Hall in Pretoria (1938),<sup>501</sup> which may very likely have been taken into account, as well as those for the Old Mutual building frieze already discussed (figs 61, 62, 63). But, as these were made in a period where the notion of a partnership between Afrikaans- and English-speaking South Africans was being promoted by Hertzog and Smuts and their United Party, their emphasis was inevitably different from the Monument frieze, which was planned in the later 1930s and only carried out during the following decade: it had a defiantly Afrikaner agenda. Nonetheless, we find familiar tropes in the murals, such as the challenges facing the trekkers crossing the Drakensberg in their tented wagons. At South Africa House in London, one of the 1934 murals by Jan Juta<sup>502</sup> depicts a trek that traverses impossibly narrow paths along dizzying precipices (fig. 71), the pictorial medium encouraging deep landscape vistas. But here the scene was paired with another of the 1820 settlers, to establish parallels between the forebears of both Afrikaans and English speakers, echoing United Party policies.

Bar the scene of the English settlers gifting a Bible to the departing Voortrekkers in *Presentation*, Afrikaner–English unity is not promoted in the frieze. Yet it is telling that, although the desire to escape British rule is implicit in the entire programme at the Voortrekker Monument, there are no representations of the British as adversaries. Instead, it is the black inhabitants of the interior that are the Boers’ opponents, perhaps an indication of a hardening of racial attitudes – but in

<sup>497</sup> Ibid.

<sup>498</sup> SVK 25.1.1936: 3d.

<sup>499</sup> This lengthy five-page document, responding to the SVK’s call for ideas in the press, is in the Engelbrecht files (NHKA P1/2/3/8/10).

<sup>500</sup> This is demonstrated by the volume of correspondence about the Monument and its frieze in the HF Archives SVK vol. 20 file 16.1.

<sup>501</sup> Freschi 2004 (Pretoria City Hall; see *Inauguration*); *ibid.* 2005 (South Africa House; see *Presentation* and *Death of Dingane*).

<sup>502</sup> For Jan Carel Juta (1897–1990), see Berman 1983, 158; Ogilvie 1988, 324. Some sources give his birth date as 1895.



**Figure 71:** Jan Juta. *The Great Trek*. 1934. Oil on canvas. South Africa House, London (Freschi 2005, 26 fig. 11).

a sense also reflecting a reluctant acknowledgement that they were the real owners of the land who had to be cajoled or conquered before the Boers could settle permanently. The British, on the other hand, meet up with the Voortrekkers in the frieze only in civil engagements – signing the Convention at Sand River at the end of the cycle, as well as *Presentation* near the beginning. The latter subject may have made its first appearance in 1937 in Juta's two Voortrekker murals for the Council Chamber in the Pretoria City Hall,<sup>503</sup> where the exchange that unites the two groups takes centre stage between scenes from British and Boer settler life (fig. 72).<sup>504</sup> It may not be a coincidence that this topic was not included in the earliest 'Voorstelle' list of topics, and only added in pencil to the 'Panele' list, perhaps once Juta's paintings were being made. The two Pretoria murals were well known as they were reproduced in the centenary issues of several newspapers, for example, in the *Cape Times* (3.12.1938) and the *Daily Express* (14.1.1938), the latter with the headline 'The final stages of the Great Trek'.

The SVK records do not mention these paintings, however, although they were being undertaken at the time that topics for the Monument's frieze were being debated and could be considered to prefigure the frieze. They would surely have been known and were very likely discussed informally, and perhaps taken into account in ideas about how the Monument should embody Voortrekker history in an appropriate way. For example, at a special joint meeting with the art committee of the Akademie, the point was made that the central idea of freedom should be fully

<sup>503</sup> The other mural shows the development of the Transvaal from the arrival of the Boers to the present day. Muller (1978, 47) reproduces a print, probably a linocut, of the *Presentation* by a Mrs Hope Beck, providing a strong contrast between the Boer trekkers and the urbane English in their top hats, but Muller does not date it or supply any further information.

<sup>504</sup> See Freschi, 'Unity in diversity' 2011. While the South Africa House murals were early enough to be known (in reproduction) to the committee, the Pretoria City Hall murals were completed late in relation to the SVK discussions; however, since they were being made in Pretoria, it seems likely that they would have been a subject of interest at the time. For a fuller discussion of the Pretoria murals, see *Presentation*.



**Figure 72:** Jan Juta. *Settlers presenting a Bible to Jacobus Uys*. 1938. Oil on canvas, c. 3.35 × 9.14 m. Pretoria City Hall (courtesy of City of Tshwane; photo Helenus Kruger)

expressed.<sup>505</sup> It is a concept captured in the dramatic 1937 mural of the Voortrekkers, *Voorwaarts* (Onward) for Pretoria's City Hall, painted by J.H. Amsheiwitz (fig. 73),<sup>506</sup> both in the fact that the heroic male figure carries the Vierkleur flag of the independent ZAR, and in the marked resemblance to Delacroix's 1930 painting, *Liberty leading the people*.<sup>507</sup> The importance of freedom to the Voortrekkers was further stressed by Dr M.L. du Toit, who had been an Akademie representative in the discussion with the Boukomitee; he paid a visit the following month to Jansen, who made notes on their conversation dated 26.1.1937. Du Toit suggested that the words 'They sacrificed for freedom' (Hul offer vir vryheid) should be inscribed on the sarcophagus at the Monument, and that a personification of freedom should be placed near Van Wouw's *Voortrekker mother and children*.<sup>508</sup> He also proposed four giant figures on the corners of the Monument representing 'war, death, victory, and peace' (oorlog, dood, oorwinning, en vrede).<sup>509</sup> They were concepts broad enough to be applicable to many aspects of the Voortrekker story, and ultimately overtaken by the more specific images of Voortrekker leaders on the corners of the Monument. These ideas were probably jotted down during their meeting, and do not appear to have been formally noted in committee, or taken any further.<sup>510</sup> There were undoubtedly many such discussions, occasionally given tantalisingly brief mentions in committee minutes, as when the SVK recorded the point, already made in other submissions, that cultural scenes should be included as well as battles.<sup>511</sup>

On this occasion the idea was also put forward that different leaders in the Trek should not overshadow each other.<sup>512</sup> This was to be an important principle for the frieze, which endeavoured

**505** Boukomitee 11.12.1936: 1. This concept would also be stressed by A.N. Pelzer in 'The historical background to the Voortrekker Monument' when he reiterated that 'the urge for freedom must be regarded as the most important cause of the Great Trek' (*Official Guide* 1955, 14).

**506** For John Henry Amsheiwitz (1882–1942), see Berman 1983, 34–36; Ogilvie 1988, 12. The painting figured prominently in Afrikaner newspapers at the time of the centenary celebrations, for example, in *Die Vaderland* (special supplement 'Die voortrek', 3.9.1938, 24; 'Program van eeufees', 7.12.1938). For further discussion of this mural, see *Inauguration*.

**507** See Freschi 2006, 95 and fig. 47.

**508** An article about the proposed Voortrekker Monument in *Die Huisgenoot* 3.4.1937, 21, was entitled 'Vryheidsheuvel' (Freedom Hill).

**509** Du Toit's points are in both handwritten and typed-up form in the Jansen archive (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/1). A page of rough ideas elsewhere in the archive has the same four themes inscribed on the corners of a rough sketch of the plan (PV94 1/75/1/8).

**510** It is remotely possible that the figures were intended to capture these concepts – Potgieter/war; Retief/death; Pretorius/victory; the Unknown Voortrekker/peace.

**511** SVK 5.10.1936: 11.

**512** *Ibid.*





**Figure 73:** J.H. Amschwitz. *Voorwaarts* (Onward). 1937. Oil, 3.5 × 3 m. Pretoria City Hall. (courtesy of City of Tshwane; photo Helenus Kruger)

to represent scenes associated with a number of the leaders, assigning a panel each to the patriarch Jacobus Uys (*Presentation*), his son Piet with son Dirkie (*Dirkie Uys*), and Sarel Cilliers (*The Vow*), even if it picked out Trichardt, Potgieter, Retief and Pretorius for more sustained attention. These figures were obviously chosen for the iconic events associated with them: it is notable that Gerrit Maritz, who led a trek and played an important part, but more as wise councillor than intrepid hero,<sup>513</sup> has no specific scene dedicated to him, although we identify his presence at Retief's *Inauguration*. However, a number of scenes were treated in a way that could have applied to any trekker party, especially those that represented journeys, such as *Departure*, *Descent* and *Return*.

<sup>513</sup> Maritz took part in Potgieter's first commando against the Ndebele at Mosega, but was unable to participate in the second, or in later commandos in Natal, because of ill health.



**Figure 74:** Gerard Moerdyk. Model of Voortrekker Monument for Empire Exhibition, Johannesburg, 15 September 1936 to 15 January 1937 (<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=urn:gvn:ZAH01:100002179>)

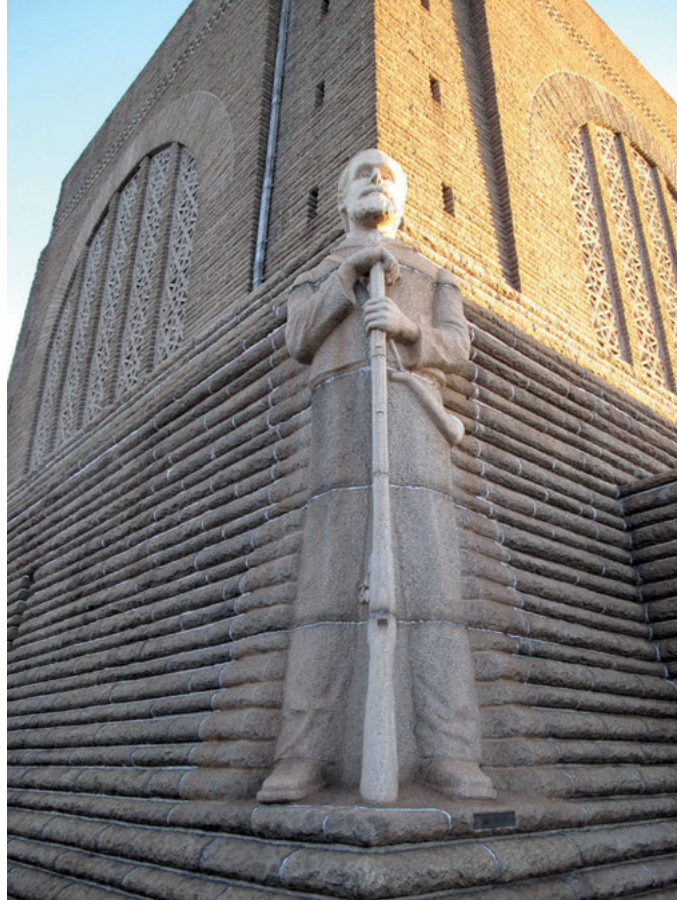
The idea of parity also surfaced in the response to the suggestion of corner figures that apparently came from the public after calls in the press asking for input at the time of the display of the Monument model at the Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg, from 15 September 1936 to 15 January 1937 (fig. 74).<sup>514</sup> As we have seen, it was decided to incorporate four massive representations of Trek leaders on the corners of the building, each to be hewn from five blocks of the same granite (fig. 75).<sup>515</sup> The leaders chosen were three whose stories would be told in the frieze also – Piet Retief, Andries Pretorius and Hendrik Potgieter – but not Louis Trichardt, the other leader given prominence in the frieze. Instead the fourth corner figure would represent the ‘Unknown Voortrekker’ (Onbekende Voortrekker), thus paying homage not only to other Boer leaders such as Trichardt, Uys, Cilliers and Maritz but to all Voortrekkers.<sup>516</sup> Ferreira makes the point that the four corner figures were conceptualised as a guard of honour for the Afrikaner sanctuary.<sup>517</sup> One wonders whether the idea of monumental Boer figures owed something to Coert Steynberg’s original proposal for the Monument of a Voortrekker colossus some forty-five feet high (fig. 39), which had

<sup>514</sup> See Berman 1983, 144–145. Duffey (2006, 33) quotes from *The Star* 9.9.1936: ‘Mr E.G. Jansen, Speaker of the House of Assembly and chairman of the Voortrekker memorial committee [SVK] inspected the model at Milner Park today with Mr. J.J. Scheepers, secretary of the committee and Mr. Gerard Moerdyk.’

<sup>515</sup> SVK 15.1.1937: 6a. Following the call for public comment, Jansen reported on a number of valuable suggestions that would be incorporated in the design, including the corner figures, and the positioning of the laager of wagons to provide a good perspective of the Monument (see, for example, *The Star* 4.2.1937; UP Archives, Moerdyk files, MDK 03831).

<sup>516</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 56 (quote). It may be considered ironic, in view of the strong antipathy to all things British, that the idea of the Unknown Voortrekker is similar to that of the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Cathedral that paid homage to all those who died in World War I, a war in which many Afrikaners refused to participate. Similarly the use of the cenotaph at the Monument may owe something to another concept for memorialising the fallen of the British Empire in that war, the empty tomb of Lutyen’s Cenotaph memorial at Whitehall. In these cases, as at the Monument, the protagonists were all envisaged as male; even though the Voortrekker Monument found ways of acknowledging women’s roles, it was usually in a generalised way, rather than with reference to individuals.

<sup>517</sup> Ferreira 1975, 68.



**Figure 75:** Frikkie Kruger. Piet Retief, one of the corner figures at Voortrekker Monument. 1951. Granite, h. 5.5 m (photo the authors)

been a design recommended by the subcommittee of the Vormkomitee;<sup>518</sup> there are also echoes of the concept of Van Wouw's Boers on the corners of the Kruger Monument (fig. 46). And there are other precedents beyond South Africa, such as the sentinel figures at the top of the four corners of Sydney's ANZAC memorial (fig. 78),<sup>519</sup> and the giant warriors crowning the Völkerschlachtdenkmal at Leipzig (fig. 76).

Gathering ideas from monuments internationally in the form of images, implemented by the Vormkomitee on 26 January 1936, added yet another layer to the material being assembled by the SVK, and underlines the aspiration to build a world-class monument. Evidently the request to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for assistance<sup>520</sup> was viewed with some urgency, as the correspondence from South African embassies in Europe indicates that they had received the request by telegram from the prime minister's office. From the letters and photographs from various countries passed on to the SVK that are housed in the Heritage Foundation Archives it can be deduced that a substantial number of responses was received. They range from a very considered reply from the embassy in Berlin, dated 25 February 1936, which offered cogent advice about the possible relationship between a monument and its site, to a list of English publications on sculpture and monuments, presumably from the United Kingdom, forwarded to the SVK from the prime minister's office on 9 March 1936. There was even a letter offering his services from Professor Antonio Sciortino, a Maltese sculptor and honorary director of the British Academy of Arts in Rome, dated 25 February 1936.<sup>521</sup> Approached by the South African legation there, he not only selected some examples he

<sup>518</sup> Vormkomitee 6.4.1936: 6.

<sup>519</sup> Kenneth Inglis (2005, 308) identifies these figures as representing the army, navy, airforce and nursing service.

<sup>520</sup> Vormkomitee 26.1.1936: 1.

<sup>521</sup> This and other correspondence giving information about monuments from various international sources is

considered appropriate for the committee to look at but also pointed out that he himself was an experienced sculptor and architect of monuments, and would prepare ‘an original sketch without any obligation on the part of the Committee’.<sup>522</sup>

Relatively few photographs and postcards in response to the committee’s request seem to have survived, however, and it is hard to judge what significance they had in the conceptualisation of the monument. Yet they were clearly considered, as the subcommittee of the Vormkomitee picked out two deemed of interest, the Lincoln Memorial in Washington and the Brighton War Memorial;<sup>523</sup> it is difficult to see what relevance they had for the final design. It may, however, have been in this context that Moerdyk first learned of the Völkerschlachtdenkmal in Leipzig,<sup>524</sup> which is much more closely related to the Monument, although it is more than likely that such a prominent building would already have been known to him, particularly as there was an article on it with a small photograph in the popular weekly *Die Huisgenoot* as early as 1925.<sup>525</sup>

Duffey suggests that it was this edifice that triggered the change to Moerdyk’s first proposal for a more Egyptian-style building that he had conceived with Van Wouw, discussed earlier. The later proposal and the final form of the Voortrekker Monument has a similar silhouette and domed internal configuration to the one at Leipzig (fig. 76), erected to commemorate the victory of the coalition armies of Prussia, Russia, Austria and Sweden over Napoleon there in 1813, and completed for its centenary. It is also built in granite and has four great arched windows, features shared with the Monument (fig. 77), as is the interior concept of different levels interconnected by a large circular opening. This configuration is also found at other buildings, such as the ANZAC Memorial, Sydney (fig. 78), with its circular opening onto an image of sacrifice below. But at Leipzig the opening provides a view from every level to the lower hall with its attendant sculptures of warriors that stand watch in honour of the valiant dead.<sup>526</sup> The massive figures carved in granite both inside and on the exterior of the Leipzig building, the largest twelve metres high, are echoed in the oversize sculptures on the corners of the Monument. Yet there are also key features familiar from earlier Moerdyk buildings. The huge arched windows of the Monument are reminiscent of the large blind arches filled with trellis-like stonework at Johannesburg’s Railway Station and the similar lattice arches around the central area of the Merensky Library at the University of Pretoria; the latter also had

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housed in HF Archives (old numbering) VTM vol. A3. Sciortino represented the Academy from 1911 to 1936 and sent his letter at a time, when, because of growing Fascist hostilities, the institution had suspended its activities ‘indefinitely’ in January that year; see Munro 1953, 50–54 (quote p.53).

**522** He also requested photographs of Voortrekker types and of the site in order to prepare his sketch. No designs from him have been found in files on the Monument. In ‘Maak begin met die Monument’ (Making a beginning with the Monument) (*Volksblad* 8.4.1937), Moerdyk is quoted as having received a relief from an artist in Italy, interested in participating, which may well have related to this.

**523** Vormkomitee 6.4.1936: 1. Photographs of the Lincoln Memorial and Brighton Monument, as well as Melbourne’s Shrine of Remembrance, are in the Jansen files (ARCA PV94 1/75/10/1).

**524** There is an unused postcard of the Leipzig monument in the Moerdyk files, UP Archives, which may have been sent with other material from Germany. In an interview with Werner Kirchhoff, in December 2013, he recalled that Moerdyk had attended the Olympic Games in Germany in August 1936, when he might have visited Leipzig, although he could not verify his recollection and we have not been able to confirm it. In any event, the German visit would have taken place after Moerdyk’s new proposal had been accepted, although an increased interest might have prompted him to visit Leipzig if he was indeed in Germany in 1936, when the drawings for the Monument were being developed. It seems telling that Moerdyk mentioned the Leipzig monument when discussing the scale of the Voortrekker Monument in the *Official Guide* (1955, 37). The HF Archives still possess a set of three volumes of *Drei Kaiserdenkmäler* by the architect of the Völkerschlachtdenkmal, Bruno Schmitz (Schmitz 1900; HF Archives SVK vol. 19B file 13.7.2), sent from the embassy in Berlin at the time of requests for international exemplars; they do not, however, include the Völkerschlachtdenkmal as it is not a ‘Kaiserdenkmal’.

**525** This appeared on 11.12.1925, 39, as one item in a series ‘Daar ver oor die see: Ons eie reis na Europa’ (There far over the sea: Our own journey to Europe).

**526** For a recent comparison of the Voortrekker Monument and the Völkerschlachtdenkmal, see Rankin and Schneider 2017, 159–162, fig. 5.8. The earlier precedent of Napoleon’s tomb at Les Invalides, Paris, commissioned in the 1840s, may well have been the source for these buildings.

multiple floor levels linked by a circular central opening.<sup>527</sup> The Voortrekker Monument's weighty building structure and its towers recessed into the corners, which are distinctive features at Leipzig, relate back to the characteristics of the 1936 Moerdyk drawing for the Monument (fig. 43), which shared design ideas with some little-known contemporary South African buildings echoing Egyptian pylon temples, discussed at the beginning of this chapter (figs 44, 45).

A reference in the response from the Rijksbureau Voor de Monumentenzorg, dated 14 March 1936, mentions 'a dozen panels with representations of events from the lives of the Voortrekkers',<sup>528</sup> which suggests that the official request for examples had especially focused on memorial reliefs and specified twelve panels. While the Leipzig monument did not include a narrative frieze in the interior, it had reliefs on the façade. Many others among the monument images from abroad also made use of panels or friezes to represent the people and events they memorialised, such as the Monument de la Réformation in Geneva, and the shrine of the Scottish War Memorial in Edinburgh (fig. 79), both represented in a number of photographs still to be found in the Heritage Foundation Archives. Narrative friezes, though considerably smaller in scale than the one in the Voortrekker Monument, were also to be found in recent Australian war memorials that would have been known from current publications. Melbourne had a carved stone frieze on the entablature of its internal Ionic peristyle, with twelve panels representing servicemen and women, and Sydney included long bronze panels over the doors into the building, as well as carved reliefs inside between the windows below the dome.<sup>529</sup>

However, any borrowing from these was probably more general than particular: the role of the frieze as a 'continuous' narrative at the Voortrekker Monument seems indebted more to ancient than modern friezes. It may not be coincidental that a postcard of the Hellenistic Great Altar of Pergamon, housed in Berlin, was amongst the batch of images sent from Germany. It was an example that Moerdyk was to cite when he wanted to underline the scale of the Voortrekker Monument carvings, claiming that Pergamon was the only frieze in the world that had been larger.<sup>530</sup> Some of the battle scenes on the Monument's frieze, as referred to in the *Official Guide*, could even be understood as an allusion to the narrative 'depicting the battle of the Giants and the Gods at the altar of Zeus at Pergamos' (fig. 57),<sup>531</sup> a battle traditionally read as a metaphor of the victory of order over chaos. Probably Kirchhoff as a German would have known the altar, and Laurika Postma certainly did: in her biography it is recorded that her lodgings in Berlin in 1935 were opposite the Pergamon Museum and that she frequently visited it.<sup>532</sup> Duffey too assumes she knew it, and suggests that her portrayal of Dirkie Uys' prostrate father in the frieze was influenced by that source.<sup>533</sup> Postma's design may indeed have been inspired by the giant dying in front of Apollon in the east frieze, though her figure is less dramatic and more slumped to the ground (fig. 271). While the style of the final frieze was to be quite different from the Pergamon Altar, Moerdyk's rendering of the frieze in his sectional Drawing 3 of the Monument (fig. 53) with modelling and sunlight creating

<sup>527</sup> The central opening on the ground floor level was covered over at a later date.

<sup>528</sup> '... een twaalftal paneelen met de afbeelding van voorvallen uit het leven van de Voortrekkers ...' (HF Archives [old numbering] VTM vol. A3).

<sup>529</sup> Although the friezes are barely visible in it, a drawing of Sydney's ANZAC memorial was reproduced in the *Architect, Builder and Engineer* (March 1935, 9), as noted in the Moerdyk entry for the Artefacts website (<http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/archframes.php?archid=1102>). Regarding the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance, it was specifically mentioned in the Vormkomitee minutes (26.1.1936: 4; 6.4.1936: 4), when Mr Jordaan was enjoined to look for it in the *Geographical Magazine* or other publications. A torn-out page 679 from an unidentified publication headed 'The capital cities of Australia', which illustrates the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance, is in the Jansen files (ARCA PV94 1/75/10/1); it describes how on 11 November a ray of sunshine falls on a marble slab set into its floor, inscribed 'Greater Love Hath No Man'. Both these memorials are extensively discussed in Inglis 2005, 303–329.

<sup>530</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 41.

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>532</sup> She commented in a letter home that she could not describe all that she saw at the museum without using an entire notepad (Pillman 1984, 17, 23).

<sup>533</sup> Duffey 1993, 53.



**Figure 76:** Bruno Schmitz et al. Völkerschlachtdenkmal, Leipzig. 1913. Steel and concrete with granite facing, h. 91 m, plinth 70 × 80 m (photo courtesy of Alamy GGD80)



**Figure 77:** Gerard Moerdyk. Voortrekker Monument. Late 1949 (photo courtesy of Unisa, Van Schaik album)



**Figure 78:** Charles Bruce Dellit. ANZAC War Memorial, Sydney. 1934 (photo courtesy of Alamy R58TNH)



**Figure 79:** Shrine of Scottish War Memorial, Edinburgh Castle, with reliefs at eye level. Sculptor Gertrude Alice Meredith Williams, 1920s ([https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0090/8453/4899/products/1-Scottish\\_War\\_Memorial\\_Edinburgh\\_Castle\\_RPPC\\_2048x.jpg?v=1547148996](https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0090/8453/4899/products/1-Scottish_War_Memorial_Edinburgh_Castle_RPPC_2048x.jpg?v=1547148996))



**Figure 80:** Parthenon frieze in the Elgin Room, British Museum, London (photo courtesy of ID 17172158 © Peter Lovás, dreamstime.com)



a sense of chiaroscuro suggests something of the drama of the Hellenistic work. But the form of representation of the Trek as a predominantly continuous historical narrative driven by ideological agendas more strongly recalls ancient Roman examples, such as the ribbon of relief on the column of Trajan, depicting selected incidents of his two Dacian campaigns, which embodied key Roman virtues (fig. 314).<sup>534</sup> And the decision to stage the frieze inside the building *and*, quite unconventionally, at human height (the lower edge is only 1.35 metres above the floor) may have owed a debt to the presentation of ancient reliefs in museums – most prominently the friezes of the Parthenon (fig. 80) and the temple of Apollo at Bassae in the British Museum,<sup>535</sup> positioned to be easily visible, as opposed to their placement in the classical buildings of antiquity, elevated high above the viewer as part of the entablature.

The idea of a narrative approach would also have been supported by a modern production, a film made at the time of the centenary. There was mention of making a film about the Great Trek by the SVK as early as 1936,<sup>536</sup> although *Die bou van 'n nasie / They built a nation* was ultimately released in May 1939 in both English and Afrikaans by the Travel and Publicity Department of the South Africa Railways and Harbours Administration, with no expense spared.<sup>537</sup> The 120-minute black-and-white film was directed by Joseph Albers and A.A. Pienaar, with Pienaar and S.P. Engelbrecht as historical advisors and responsible for the story line; Engelbrecht's position as a member of the SVK Historiese Komitee is the only overt link with the Monument project. The film had an ambitious scope that extended beyond the Trek. It opened with Bartolomeu Dias rounding the Cape in 1488, then the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck in 1652, and covered South Africa's history up to Union in 1910 – not dissimilar to Mitford-Barberton's frieze of the Old Mutual building in Cape Town discussed earlier. However, the film devoted much attention to the story of the Voortrekkers: the first two centuries of South African history are covered in a mere thirty minutes, and narrated in the manner of a documentary, while the five years or so of the Trek occupy much of the remaining footage. In it characters suddenly acquire the ability to speak, and the dialogue gives this part of the film greater drama and immediacy (fig. 81).

*Die bou van 'n nasie* shares many aspects with the portrayal of the Trek as it would be developed at the Monument. It includes scenes of trekker life, with details such as candle and bullet making, just as was done in the frieze to provide authentic detail, and it focuses on many of the same episodes, such as its extensive treatment of Retief's dealings with Dingane (although the deaths on kwaMatiwane are not directly shown), the massacres at Bloukrans, Italeni with the deaths of Piet Uys and his son Dirkie, and the victory at Blood River, followed by the discovery of the treaty. Given the narrative medium, the treatment is more discursive than the iconic moments portrayed in the frieze, although there is some collapsing of time to create dramatic cohesion. The coverage of the Trek is extensive, but post-trekker history, like that of the earlier centuries, is extremely condensed. While some attention is paid to Paul Kruger, the Anglo-Boer War is handled very briefly, visualised in evocative overlays of horsemen, soldiers and smoke-filled landscapes rather than narrative, and no mention is made of the horrendous losses of Boer women and children in British concentration

<sup>534</sup> It was an example that Moerdyk would have seen in plaster replica in the sculpture court at the Victoria and Albert Museum as early as his study years in London. See Rankin and Schneider 2017, 168, 176 fig. 5.18, 204–206.

<sup>535</sup> Parthenon: Jenkins 1992, 75–101 (Elgin Room), 226–228 (Duveen Gallery). Bassae: Beard and Henderson 1995, 1–6. Moerdyk's very early reference to bas-reliefs at eye level (SVK 14.4.1932: p.2) could be related to his knowledge of the two friezes in the British Museum. However, there were also modern examples of internal relief panels, such as the Scottish National Memorial in Edinburgh that was included in the photographs received by the SVK from abroad.

<sup>536</sup> SVK 25.1.1936: 6c.

<sup>537</sup> Despite its large budget the film was not a financial success, and it was decided to utilise it as short film clips for schools. Much later these were reassembled (in the Afrikaans version), with the assistance of director Albers, for the National Film Archive. We are grateful to Trevor Moses of the National Film Archive for his assistance. For *Die bou van 'n nasie* in the context of other Voortrekker films, see Tomaselli (1985) and Hees (1996), who record that the film was initially produced in English and intended for publicity/propaganda purposes, although it was positively received by Afrikaans critics, and strongly criticised by the English press. They point out that it does not avoid the conflict between Boers and Britons, as Preller's *De Voortrekkers* of 1916 had done.



**Figure 81:** *They built a nation*. Scenes from the film, the largest being the Battle of Blood River. 1938 (*Daily Express* 13.12.1938; courtesy of National Library, Cape Town)

camp. Possibly this aspect of the war was underplayed because the English version was intended as a promotional film for overseas audiences.

In that it focuses on the story of the Trek, and presents it as pivotal in the development of South Africa, it could be suggested that the film acted as a surrogate for the Monument and its frieze, whose completion still lay many years ahead, although there is no mention of the intended Monument or indeed the centenary. But the film shares many of the attitudes and principles that would be embodied in the Monument’s frieze, especially in the character it attributes to the Voortrekkers and their forebears in contrast to the indigenous people of the subcontinent who, with very rare exceptions, are entirely absent from the portrayal of the Trek itself. Whites are shown as hard-working and self-sufficient, bringing the niceties of European culture together with Christian beliefs and morality to Africans, while the latter are brutal and bloodthirsty opponents blocking the path of civilisation. The attitude of the film makers is summed up in the opening banner: ‘The following is a story of tough perseverance and high ideals; a saga of the reclamation of a wild land, the conquest of barbaric peoples, and the building of a nation.’<sup>538</sup>

Conceived at the time that the scenes for the frieze were being discussed, *Die bou van ’n nasie* may have been influenced by discussions about their subject matter, and may well in turn have

<sup>538</sup> Opening banner text from *Die bou van ’n nasie*, 1938: ‘Die volgende is ’n verhaal van taai volharding en hoë ideale; ’n saga van die ontginning van ’n woeste land, die verowering van barbaarse volke, en die bou van ’n nasie.’



been influential in the shaping of the frieze, certainly in the final stages which were delayed until well after the centenary celebrations. The general composition of the film's scene of the Vow to God, for example, taken by a group of Voortrekkers before the Battle of Blood River, is not dissimilar to *The Vow* in marble (fig. 82). Apart from the fact that the film was apparently first conceived by the SVK, it would have been particularly familiar to one of the members, since Prof. Engelbrecht was one of those responsible for the storyline and the historical research. The NHKA archives include an invitation to Engelbrecht to attend the first, private viewing on 12 December 1938, although the film was only released in May the next year.<sup>539</sup>

Alongside such influences and the myriad suggestions for what might be represented at the Monument, assembled by committees and sent in by interested members of the public, ideas surely came from artists as well. As already discussed, Van Wouw took it upon himself to create a model relief panel for the Monument, and sculptor Fanie Eloff was apparently invited to a meeting on 8 February 1936, when, it was suggested, he would be able to contribute ideas.<sup>540</sup> There was also record of two others, L. Teitge and Badenhorst, referred to as 'young artists' (jong kunstenaars) in the minutes, who asked the SVK secretary to come to see their work, apparently unsolicited, which Scheepers said he would do.<sup>541</sup> Although there is no further mention of this in SVK documents, it alerts us to the possibility of more cases of that kind, as planning for the Monument was receiving a great deal of publicity in the press, and not only Van Wouw would have seen it as a rare opportunity for a sculptor. In addition, the intention to approach artists for sketches or models was spelled out a number of times in the SVK transactions and, while records of communications with individual

**Figure 82:** Scene of the Vow to God taken by a group of trekkers in the 1938 film, *They built a nation* (right) compared to the 1949 *The Vow* in the marble frieze (photo left Russell Scott; right [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cilliers-gelofte,\\_1938-film,\\_Die\\_bou\\_van\\_%27n\\_nasie.jpg](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cilliers-gelofte,_1938-film,_Die_bou_van_%27n_nasie.jpg))

<sup>539</sup> Notes of the Voortrekker Monument Inwydingskomitee (Inauguration Committee) of 22.9.1949 suggest that the film was shown as part of the celebrations at the time of the Monument's inauguration. Details of the film production are available on the IMDb movie site, which comments on the production being very expensive, and points out that this was the first film with an English soundtrack made in South Africa ([http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0221840/?ref\\_=ttspec\\_spec\\_tt](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0221840/?ref_=ttspec_spec_tt)). The reconstituted film is available for viewing at the National Film Archive in Pretoria. Clips of various key episodes are to be found on YouTube, and some can also be viewed in the film made at the time of the Monument's inauguration, *Die verhaal van die Voortrekker Monument met tonele uit die bou van 'n nasie*, discussed in the following chapter, which made use of scenes from the earlier film.

<sup>540</sup> Letter from Scheepers to Engelbrecht, 4.2.1936 (NHKA P1/2/3/8/10). For the sculptor, see De Kamper and De Klerk 2011.

<sup>541</sup> SVK 5.8.1935: 11.

artists other than Van Wouw are not to be found in SVK archives of the 1930s, there is evidence that requests for submissions had been sent out.

Much later, on 1 January 1943, Teitge wrote to Chairman Jansen, and referred to a letter from Scheepers of February 1938, in which Scheepers had asked for models in plaster or clay for panels for the Monument, giving artists free choice of topic, but stating that rough sketches were available from Moerdyk. Teitge had understood there would be a competition, but said he had now read in *Die Brandwag* that Postma and others had been appointed.<sup>542</sup> His letter drew attention to the fact that he had contacted the SVK eight years previously (no doubt the point referred to in the 1935 minutes). Teitge recounted that, in response to Scheepers' 1938 letter, he had made scenes of Dirkie Uys and the murder of Retief and his men, and that Dr and Mrs Jansen, Mr and Mrs Scheepers and Mr Lombard had seen his work and appeared to be interested, although he had heard nothing subsequently.<sup>543</sup> One can only guess at how many interactions of this nature may have taken place and contributed to ideas about the frieze.

## The role of the architect

Another very significant factor had injected itself into the discussions by 1936 – the official appointment of an architect. As previously discussed, the decision by the government to involve itself had speeded up progress, and the SVK had set up a Vormkomitee at its meeting of 25 January 1936 to report by April on 'the form of the Monument and consideration of the decision about the installation of panels'.<sup>544</sup> The committee met the very next day – most unusually a Sunday – to discuss a plan of action, although not every member could be present at such short notice. The meeting concerned itself broadly with seeking ideas for the form of the Monument, locally and abroad, and the minutes do not mention a call to architects and artists to submit designs. This must have been decided soon after, to judge by a letter dated 14 February 1936 addressed to Moerdyk that asks for submissions of 'drawings of a proposed Voortrekker Monument, with consideration of the decision about the installation of panels' by the end of March, presumably also sent to others.<sup>545</sup> At a subcommittee meeting of Malan, Pienaar and Jordaan, with notes dated 6 April 1936, the sketches received were considered – only four were named, by Bouman, Steynberg, Mitford-Barberton and Hugo Naude. They recommended that Bouman's design of a laager be accepted, with the column in the centre that he had proposed replaced by Steynberg's colossal Voortrekker figure (fig. 39).<sup>546</sup> It is possible that the date is incorrect because there was a full Vormkomitee meeting at 10 am on the same date, at which Jansen, Engelbrecht and Scheepers were also present, to finalise recommendations for the SVK meeting scheduled the following day, and by then they had a proposal from

<sup>542</sup> It is not clear what article in *Die Brandwag* Teitge is referring to, but Postma's appointment was mentioned in *Die Vaderland* of 7.3.1942.

<sup>543</sup> ARCA PV94 1/57/1/15. Jansen drafted a polite reply on 4 February, explaining that, in the cause of unity, they had decided to appoint a small group of sculptors to work together, but that that did not mean that they did not value the work of other artists. The import of Teitge's letter for the complexities of the early stages in the planning of the frieze and the possibility that there may have been a number of models made by various artists is discussed in Schwenke and Grobler 2013, 136–137.

<sup>544</sup> SVK 25.1.1936: 3g(i): '... die vorm van die Monument met inagneming van die besluit omtrent die aanbring van panele ...'

<sup>545</sup> '... sketse van 'n voorgestelde Voortrekkermonument, en panele wat daarin aangebring moet word ...' (HF Archives SVK vol. 20 file 16.1).

<sup>546</sup> "Aanbevelings" (recommendations) a. Dat die ontwerp van prof. Bouman as grondplan aanvaar word. b. Dat die suil in the bogenoemde ontwerp vervang word deur die simboliese Voortrekker-figuur van mnr. Steynberg.' Subcommittee of the Vormkomitee 26.1.1936: 6a/b (NHKA); a further important recommendation (6d) was to abandon the idea of panels in bronze, discussed above. It seems curious that Van Wouw's and Moerdyk's earlier submissions of 1932/33, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, were not apparently considered, nor a design from Louw and Louw that was offered for submission in 1933 (SVK 16.9.1933: 'Briefwisseling' [correspondence] 3).

Moerdyk as well. Here it was recommended that the idea of a laager (now attributed to Pienaar as well as Bourman [sic]) be combined with a building by Moerdyk; this should be done in such a way that the Voortrekker-vrou formed the entrance, with the building behind it within the laager.<sup>547</sup> It was then proposed that a Boukomsmissie be formed to work with the architect, and that Moerdyk be appointed.<sup>548</sup>

It is intriguing to speculate how his proposal became available to the full committee so rapidly, unless the date of the subcommittee notes is incorrect, particularly as Moerdyk was in Cape Town the very next day to take up an invitation to present his designs to a full SVK meeting. But even if the subcommittee had met at an earlier date, some preferential treatment is implied, especially as Moerdyk had been invited to give advice at a Vormkomitee meeting on 29 February 1936, and was sent a reminder to submit his designs in a personal letter from Scheepers on 20 March 1936.<sup>549</sup> After Moerdyk's presentation to them on 7 April,<sup>550</sup> the SVK ratified the recommendation of the Vormkomitee and appointed him as architect; moreover, it was immediately proposed that he be appointed to the committee tasked with selecting the site for the Monument, discussed in Chapter 1.<sup>551</sup>

Duffey argues that it was a foregone conclusion that Moerdyk would be appointed architect for the Monument, even though there was an open call for designs, a committee appointed to select the winner,<sup>552</sup> and 'between fifty and sixty designs' submitted when the project was thrown open to competition, according to a later report in *The Star* (11.7.1936).<sup>553</sup> Although the Vormkomitee had tempered its recommendation for the acceptance of Moerdyk's design to the SVK by also naming the one submitted by professors E.C. Pienaar and A.C. Bouman of Stellenbosch, Moerdyk (possibly forewarned) acceded to this with aplomb. He explained in his presentation to the SVK meeting how readily the Bouman–Pienaar concept could be combined with his, proposing that their laager of ox wagons encircle his monumental building. Surprisingly, there is no mention of the frieze in the report of Moerdyk's presentation in the minutes of the meeting. However, the SVK accepted the Vormkomitee's recommendation that the architect and the newly established Boukomsmissie (also referred to as the Boukomitee) consult with suitable artists for the Monument.<sup>554</sup> And it also appointed Preller and Engelbrecht (with the power of co-option) to advise on historical accuracy for the 'historical panels' (historiese panele), which were still clearly on the agenda.<sup>555</sup>

The formal contract with the architect in both Afrikaans and English followed soon after.<sup>556</sup> It outlined the customary requirements for an architectural commission, such as finalisation of the design (2); production of working drawings (3), which were to remain the property of the architect for copyright purposes (12a); overseeing the erection of the Monument (7); regular reporting to the committee (8); and preparation of certificates of payment for the contractor and sub-contractors (9). Of particular interest for our purposes are two clauses: the first defines

**547** Vormkomitee 6.4.1936: 1 '... en meen dat die twee gekombineer behoort te word, sodat die VOORTREKKER-VROU die ingang vorm van die laer met die gebou op die agtergrond binne die laer' (NKHA).

**548** Ibid., 2 and 3.

**549** HF Archives SVK vol. 20 file 16.1.

**550** SVK 7.4.1936: 5.

**551** Ibid.: 6 (3) and 8.

**552** Duffey 2006, 32.

**553** In the absence of records of such a wealth of designs, either in the form of drawings or references in the SVK records, it might be guessed that this number was inflated by the inclusion of the photographs and drawings of monuments that had been collected from abroad – perhaps to deliberately suggest a wider submission of designs than the few recorded in the Vormkomitee minutes.

**554** SVK 7.4.1936: 6 (4).

**555** Ibid.: 15.

**556** A number of copies of the contract survive in various files; the quotations below come from the English version in Jansen's file (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/2). The date on which the contract was finally signed off is unclear, but was presumably soon after a letter from Moerdyk to Scheepers on 28.4.1936, when the architect sent a copy of the contract, as presented by him and approved by Scheepers the previous day, for the latter to make copies 'as he deems fit' (na u goeddinke) for signing (HF Archives SVK vol. 20 file 16.1).

Moerdyk's role in relation to the sculptors of the frieze (10), and the second his relationship to the SVK (13), both facilitating his exceptionally powerful position in the conceptualisation and creation of the Monument and its frieze:

10. Artists. The Architect shall in consultation and with the written approval of the Committee nominate such Sculptors, Artists and Craftsmen as may be decided upon by the Committee. *Their work shall be executed in such a manner as may be approved of by the Architect.* (our italics)

13. Meetings. The Architect shall attend meetings of the Committee whenever required to do so for the purpose of supplying any desirable information and advice in connection with the erection of the Monument.

As will become apparent in the next chapter, Moerdyk was to take full advantage of Clause 10 regarding the nomination of artists and the requirement that their work be approved by him. And he more than met the obligation to attend meetings to provide information and advice in Clause 13, becoming a key figure in SVK decision making. From the next meeting of the SVK on 5 October 1936 and thereafter, he was listed as though a full member of the committee, although Ferreira, who wrote the history of the SVK, states that he was there in an advisory capacity only.<sup>557</sup> If so, he was a very influential advisor. As well as working with the committee selecting the Monument site, Moerdyk was also present at meetings of the Historiese Komitee and the Boukomitee. And from 3 May 1937 he was a constant presence at the regular meetings of the Dagbestuur,<sup>558</sup> and thus in a position to contribute directly to decision making, including resolutions about the artworks that were to form part of the Monument. Perusal of the minutes of the various committees makes it clear that he was given more and more independent control over decisions in that regard.

After April 1936, once the contract was in place, Moerdyk produced his architectural drawings and an eight-foot-high model of the Monument remarkably quickly,<sup>559</sup> all the more extraordinary when one considers that his design was significantly different from the one published in *Die Vaderland* earlier that year (10.1.1936), discussed above, even though there are many conceptual similarities. The proposed design soon took on symbolic significance. In the centenary year, for example, the architect had developed a sketch in colour of the Monument on top of Pretoria's Monumentkop with an arresting headline that called the building 'Die altaar van die Afrikanerdom' (The altar of Afrikanerdom) (fig. 83).<sup>560</sup> Such claims and the Monument's symbolic meaning were explained on many occasions, and given final form in the essay on the architecture that Moerdyk wrote for the *Official Guide*. He described the building as an altar centred on the cenotaph in the lower hall, with the huge dome suggesting 'the magnitude of the "heroic deed"'<sup>561</sup> and said the monument was 'intended to last a thousand years'.<sup>562</sup> He also wrote about how he conceived an Afrikaner approach:

The Voortrekkers had no characteristic monumental architecture ... [and] erected no monuments. Assuming, however, that the Voortrekker wished to erect a monument, where would he have sought inspiration? As with all his other problems, he would have consulted The Book. Like Abraham, when he left Ur of the Chaldees to found a new state, he would have made his monument a religious one. In reading of Abraham's experiences, he would time and again have come across the words:

<sup>557</sup> Ferreira 1975, 10. He makes the same point regarding the Dagbestuur (13), and this is confirmed in the listed membership in the *Official Programme* for the Monument's inauguration in 1949. However, Scheepers did not seem to distinguish different types of members in the minutes, other than sometimes referring to himself as 'The Secretary'.

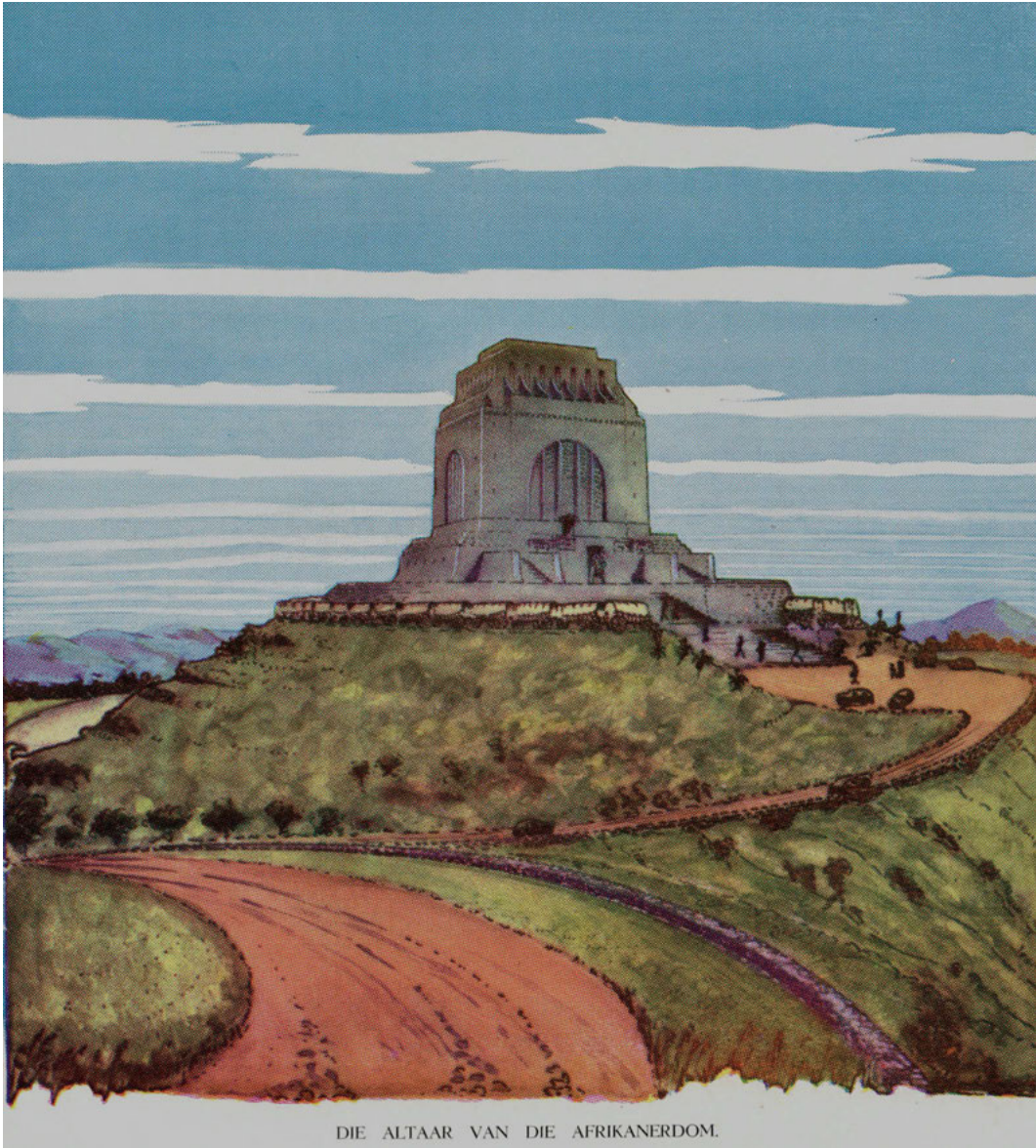
<sup>558</sup> When Moerdyk was not able to attend himself, his partner Henry Watson would quite often stand in for him.

<sup>559</sup> See Duffey 2006, 32 (photographs of the model were published in September 1936). The speed with which the designs were produced supports Duffey's contention that Moerdyk had been thinking about the Monument for some time, and that he may have been preparing drawings earlier because he felt confident that he would win the commission. Perhaps he was even encouraged by SVK members to do so.

<sup>560</sup> Mostert 1940, 815 (in colour).

<sup>561</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 36.

<sup>562</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.



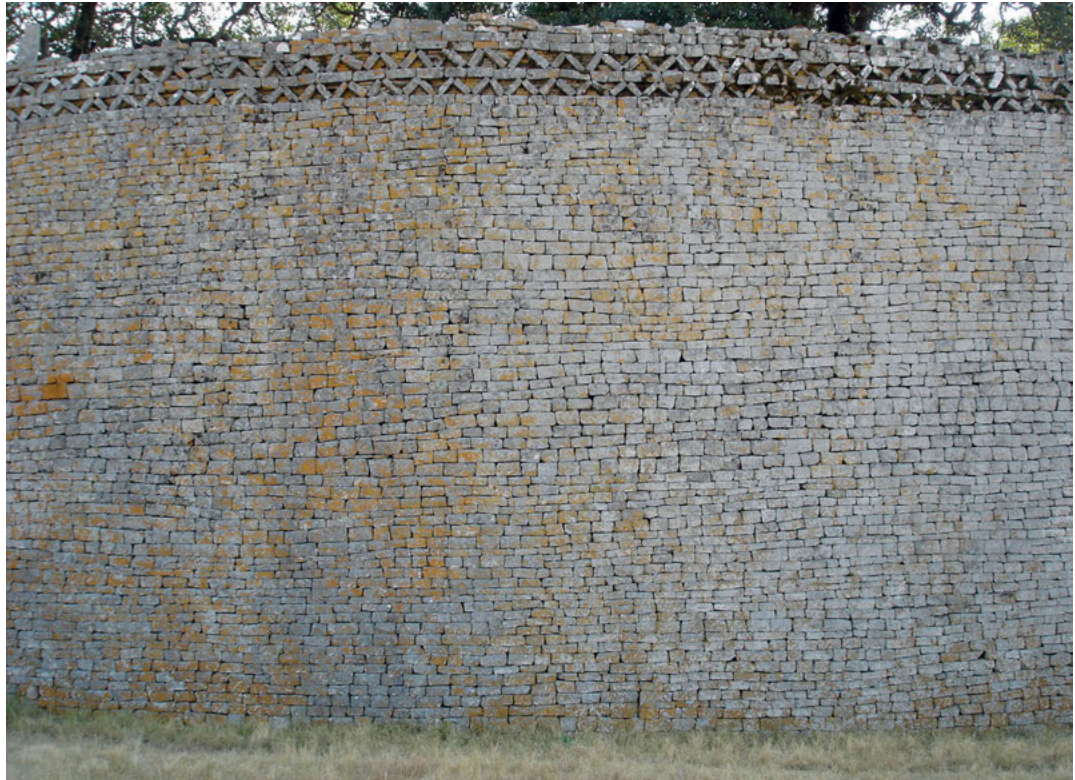
**Figure 83:** Gerard Moerdyk. 'The Altar of Afrikanerdom'. 1938 (Mostert 1940, colour plate following p.813)

'... and there he builded an altar ...' This then was the motive in designing a plan for the Voortrekker Monument.<sup>563</sup>

It was Moerdyk's aim to give this altar an African form. For him, a building of granite represented the enduring vastness of Africa, drawing on the architectural precedents of Egypt (fig. 42) and Great Zimbabwe (fig. 41).<sup>564</sup> The effective use of granite at the Monument and decorative zig-zag bands acting as a symbol of fertility were particularly related to Great Zimbabwe (fig. 84). But at the same time he pointed out a fundamental difference. Wanting to symbolise the idea that 'the Voortrekker brought civilisation' to the subcontinent, Moerdyk claimed that his building embodied the precept

<sup>563</sup> Ibid., 34. In an article in the *Sunday Express* of 21.3.1937, Moerdyk underlined the design's originality by saying that it did not 'resemble a Church of England, or a Dutch Reformed Church or a synagogue', although he added mendaciously, 'It is intended to represent them all, and the altar represents a common denominator for every race that helped to make South Africa what it is to-day' (newspaper clipping, UP Archives, Moerdyk files, MDK 0378T? [number indecipherable]).

<sup>564</sup> For the use of granite in (royal) Egyptian architecture, see Klemm and Klemm 2008, 233–267. For the granite of Great Zimbabwe, see <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/364>



**Figure 84:** Great Zimbabwe, section of outside wall with zig-zag band. 11th–15th century (photo courtesy of I.E. Grady)

that ‘civilisation in architecture means order and geometry’. Thus for him it was quite unlike the work of ‘the savage [who] had an architecture, but without geometry. The largest old building in South Africa, namely at Zimbabwe, was without any geometry’.<sup>565</sup> The Monument’s uniqueness, Moerdyk emphasised, lay in its civilised order, with ‘right angles, cubes, circles and levels, all in harmony with the table-shaped landscape’.<sup>566</sup> Further, the buffalo head over the entrance door (fig. 125) and surrounding laager of wagons (fig. 85) were to symbolically defend Afrikanerdom from inimical elements, ‘defence against any and everything wishing to clash with the ideals of the Voortrekkers so that it may be kept away from this national shrine of the Afrikaner’.<sup>567</sup>

Clearly these concepts were very broad, and Moerdyk needed an additional strategy to make specific reference to the Voortrekkers – a visual narrative in the form of the sculptured frieze which would be an integral part of the architecture in the Hall of Heroes. As we have seen, the SVK had long decided that historical panels were a *sine qua non* although they had never discussed the way they would be incorporated in the Monument. For Moerdyk, this concept was included from the outset, and, as discussed earlier in this chapter, was present in all but the simplest of the sectional drawings of the Monument that showed its interior. Although possible topics had already been chosen, as architect and as a participant in SVK committees, Moerdyk would be pivotal in the next stage of the development of the historical frieze.

Incorporating art of some form was not uncommon in Moerdyk’s architectural designs, although it would have been anathema for the more than eighty Dutch Reformed churches he built, given their strict Calvinist rejection of imagery. The Johannesburg Railway Station frieze

<sup>565</sup> ‘Monument moet verlede sowel as volkskarakter weerspieel [sic]: Mnr. Moerdyk verduidelik idee van sy ontwerp’ (Monument must reflect the past as well as the [Afrikaans] national character: Mr Moerdyk explains the idea of his design), *Die Vaderland*, 10.12.1936. This view is also found in Moerdyk’s *Geskiedenis*, 27, where he comments on a total absence of geometric knowledge at Great Zimbabwe.

<sup>566</sup> ‘Die Voortrekkermonument’, probably written by Moerdyk, an attachment to the Jansen Memorandum, sent by the chairman of the SVK to the Minister of Internal Affairs, 19.1.1937 (NARSSA, BNS 146/73/2).

<sup>567</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 39.





**Figure 85:** Section of laager of 64 Boer wagons surrounding Voortrekker Monument. 1949 (photo courtesy of HF Archives F 39.1.50 k)



**Figure 86:** René Shapshak. Frieze of Monument High School, Krugersdorp (*Die Vaderland* 2.7.1935; courtesy of UP Archives, Moerdyk files MDK 02307)

has already been cited (fig. 58). Moerdyk's Monument High School in Krugersdorp (1935) included murals in the hall by painter Erich Mayer and a relief on the façade of the Trek that showed a wagon pulled over stony ground by four pairs of oxen, by French-born sculptor René Shapshak (fig. 86).<sup>568</sup> And the Merensky Library at the University of Pretoria, which is often proposed as an architectural forerunner of the Voortrekker Monument and was inaugurated at the time of the 1938 centenary,<sup>569</sup> incorporated in its façade terrazzo bas-reliefs of African motifs (fig. 87). These were made by the Italian firm Lupini Brothers, which had also undertaken the making of the model of the Monument for the Empire Exhibition in 1936 (fig. 74), and would cast the Monument's encircling laager of ox wagons in 1948–49 (fig. 85). In addition, many little-known small monuments that Moerdyk designed incorporated sculpture in their rugged stonework, usually in the form of bronze reliefs suited to outdoor structures, some by Coert Steynberg, some by the sculptors associated with the Voortrekker Monument.<sup>570</sup> While the possible use of painted murals or mosaics at the Monument was raised in the early years of discussion, the main focus seems always to have been on sculptural elements. It was probably as much a response to historical conventions for monuments and their associated gravitas, as to the practical requirement of durable form, since the frieze was to be located inside the building. It might also be inferred that the prominence of Van Wouw in the early SVK transactions, and as a close associate of the architect of the Monument, may have played a part in the decision that the historical narrative of the Trek would take the form of relief sculpture, and both he and Moerdyk had mentioned bas-reliefs in very early discussions of the Monument.

But it was undoubtedly Moerdyk and his concept of the architectural design of the Monument that brought about the way the historical frieze was conceptualised. When we look back at the many suggestions for topics to represent the story of the Voortrekkers, there is little if any sense of the form that these would take. Indeed, the number of scenes suggested that have been discussed in this chapter – from fifteen or sixteen in Van Wouw's descriptions, to twelve in the 'Voorstelle' and in the letters sent abroad for information on monuments, to the six recommended by the subcommittee of the Vormkomitee – makes it clear that the episodes were thought of as discrete elements. There was evidently no thought as to how they might be put together, apart from Senator Malan's cogent advice that they should follow a chronological order. Even that does not suggest how they should be arranged although it does imply that they should be sequential. It is notable that Moerdyk's own early references to bas-reliefs in 1932 do not speak of a frieze as such, although his description of reliefs to be placed at human height to show scenes from the Trek in a spacious hall certainly conjures up that possibility, as does Van Wouw's description of the same monument in 1933 with reliefs 'around the walls'. And Moerdyk's reference to reliefs 'at human height' chimes, as already suggested, with the arrangement of the Parthenon frieze (fig. 80) and that of the temple of Apollo at Bassae in the British Museum. Perhaps Moerdyk, who as previously mentioned would have known these famous Greek sculptures from his student days in London, even deliberately avoided using the word 'frieze' because he did not want his ideas to be seen as derivative, least of all of classical works associated with imperial Britain.

<sup>568</sup> Examining this relief highlights the care taken over this kind of detail for the Monument frieze; Shapshak's oxen are not very convincing and the wagon does not have the correct number of spokes in its wheels, as Coetzer had clarified in his drawings from his knowledge as a wainwright. See Potgieter 1987, 22: 'Note the number of spokes in the wheels – ten in front and fourteen at the back' (Let weer eens op die getal speke in die wiele – voor tien an agter veertien).

<sup>569</sup> Nicholas Clarke brought to our attention the tracks of one of the ox wagons from the commemorative re-enactment of the Trek preserved in a concrete slab in front of the library (fig. 34); Moerdyk's signature, presumably both as chairman of the University Council and architect of the library, is also recorded in the cement. For a similar impression (one of many others) at Ventersdorp, see Goldblatt 1998, 150.

<sup>570</sup> See Fisher and Clarke 2010; they record monuments with sculptures by Van Wouw, Laurika Postma and Frikkie Kruger. An unusual monument was the Karel Landman Memorial between Alexandria and Port Elizabeth, commissioned by the National Party and the Dutch Reformed Church in 1938 and inaugurated on 16 December 1939. For it, Moerdyk used a globe of the world with the image of an ox wagon rolling over South Africa, similar to the one he intended for one of the pendentives at the Voortrekker Monument. It was erected by Lupini Brothers (Goldblatt 1998, 147; Delmont 1993; Beningfield 2006, 64).



**Figure 87:** Gerard Moerdyk. Merensky Library, University of Pretoria. 1938 (photo the authors)

Whatever the case, Moerdyk did not initially speak of the reliefs as a frieze, and it seems that not only the members of the SVK but even sculptor Van Wouw, to judge by his independent 1933 Relief panel, had not really considered the physical relationship of the Voortrekker scenes to each other, beyond their being ‘around the wall, in bas-relief’. The form of a continuous frieze encircling the Hall of Heroes that Moerdyk and the SVK finalised during 1936 was the concept that would draw all the ideas together, although how they would be carried out and by whom had yet to be considered. In October 1936 we find Moerdyk explaining to the SVK that the design of the Monument required a continuous chronological sequence, not individual panels.<sup>571</sup> And an undated architect’s drawing establishing the layout of the intended panels in diagrammatic form, probably

<sup>571</sup> SVK 5.10.1936: 11.

produced around that time, demonstrates precisely how Moerdyk was planning the arrangement of the reliefs to surround the Hall of Heroes.

His design was based on thirty-one units making up the frieze of 260 feet, consisting of twenty-eight panels of eight feet in length with three panels each twelve feet long for the central scene of the east, south and west wall (fig. 88).<sup>572</sup> His conceptualisation of the frieze would have focused the committee on just how many scenes were required from the multitude of suggestions that had been proposed.<sup>573</sup> There is no evidence that any final selection had been made prior to this point. Although there is a request from the Vormkomitee of January 1936 that Engelbrecht should ‘work out’ the historical incidents for the panels and present them in the form of a short memorandum,<sup>574</sup> no such document seems to have survived and we have seen that the meeting of the subcommittee of April that year even suggested that the number of panels be reduced to six.<sup>575</sup>

Moerdyk’s diagram of the frieze layout for the Hall of Heroes envisaged the double door on the north side and the three larger twelve-foot panels in the centre of each of the unbroken long walls flanked by three eight-foot panels on either side. The standard unit of eight feet may have been dictated by the width of the four additional panels in the diagram of the frieze that were labelled ‘corner’ (hoek) and assigned to the short uninterrupted walls of each of the structures obtruding into the corners of the Hall of Heroes. It was also a unit which provided a manageable size when it came to quarrying marble blocks for the frieze, though that was not the case for the three larger central scenes. There was apparently no intention at that stage of having reliefs on the adjacent corner walls which accommodated the doorways that gave access to these corner structures, two of which housed the stairwells, and two of which would later act as lift shafts.<sup>576</sup> The four corner reliefs brought the total number of marble panels to thirty-one, more than double the twelve originally proposed in ‘Voorstelle’ (fig. 70), if each panel was meant to be used for a single scene – an issue we discuss below. While the distribution of topics was yet to be decided, the general arrangement around a central feature for each wall would be maintained, although the dimensions and the layout of the flanking scenes were ultimately considerably less systematic and symmetrical.

Intriguingly, the diagram is annotated with handwritten notes that appear to be in Jansen’s hand,<sup>577</sup> assigning topics to the different panels, evidently done while they were being thought out, as there are a number of revisions. For example, Trichardt at Soutpansberg on panel 5 is moved up to replace ‘R moord’ on 6 (probably the Van Rensburg murders), and the presentation of the Bible to Uys moves up to 5 from 10, which leaves more space for Winburg and the inauguration of Retief as governor on panels 10 and 11. Further on, the Volksraad on panel 26 is replaced by the crowning of Mpande. As there is no earlier evidence in the SVK documents, we speculate that the assignment of topics was probably undertaken at the beginning of 1937 when Jansen was framing a final list, which he sent to the Minister of Internal Affairs on 19 January 1937 (Jansen Memorandum discussed below), along with his outline of SVK concepts for the Monument. On the back of the diagram is a sketch of the plan of the Hall of Heroes, very rough and not to scale, as though the author was trying to visualise how the panels would fit into the building (fig. 89). As the faint pencil annotations are

<sup>572</sup> ARCA PV94 1/75/1/9.

<sup>573</sup> Discussion about how to incorporate representations of the Trek was ongoing. At a meeting of a subcommittee of the Boukomitee with members of the Kunskomitee (art committee) of the Akademie (8.12.1936), it was felt that groups of Voortrekkers outside the Monument might upset the unity of the whole, and that the same results could be achieved by making representations part of the building. Moerdyk was to investigate this, and also undertook to look at the possibility of mural paintings.

<sup>574</sup> Vormkomitee 26.1.1936: 9.

<sup>575</sup> Subcommittee of the Vormkomitee 6.4.1936: Aanbevelings d.

<sup>576</sup> These were initially left empty, but Vermeulen recounts that Moerdyk hoped they would provide space for lifts in the future (1999, 135).

<sup>577</sup> While we can claim no expertise in identifying handwriting, we have been led to this deduction by the number of documents in the Jansen archive at the University of the Free State (ARCA PV74) that are annotated in a hand so similar that it seems likely that they are by the same author, and that this would have been the person who owned the documents in the archive.



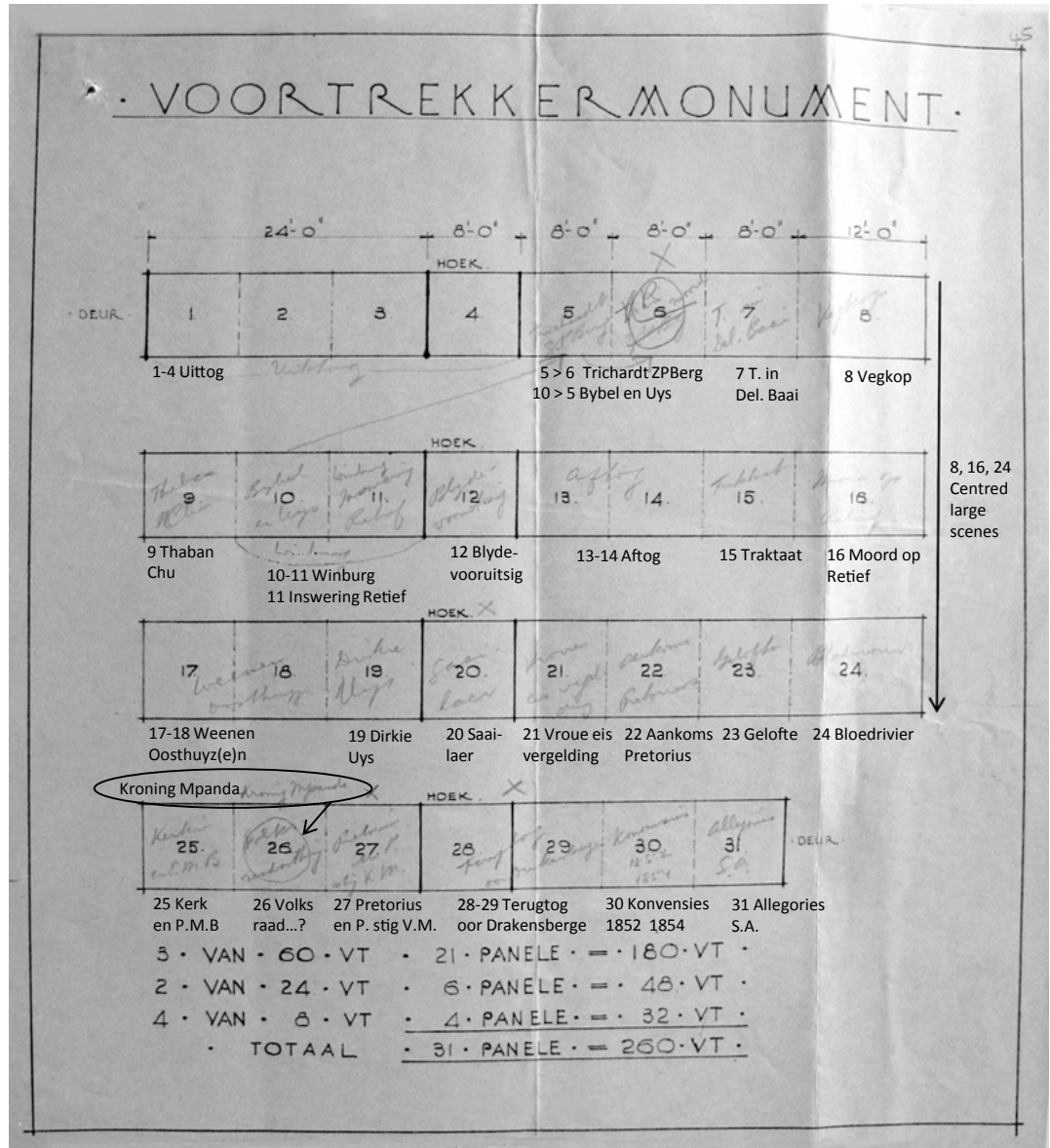
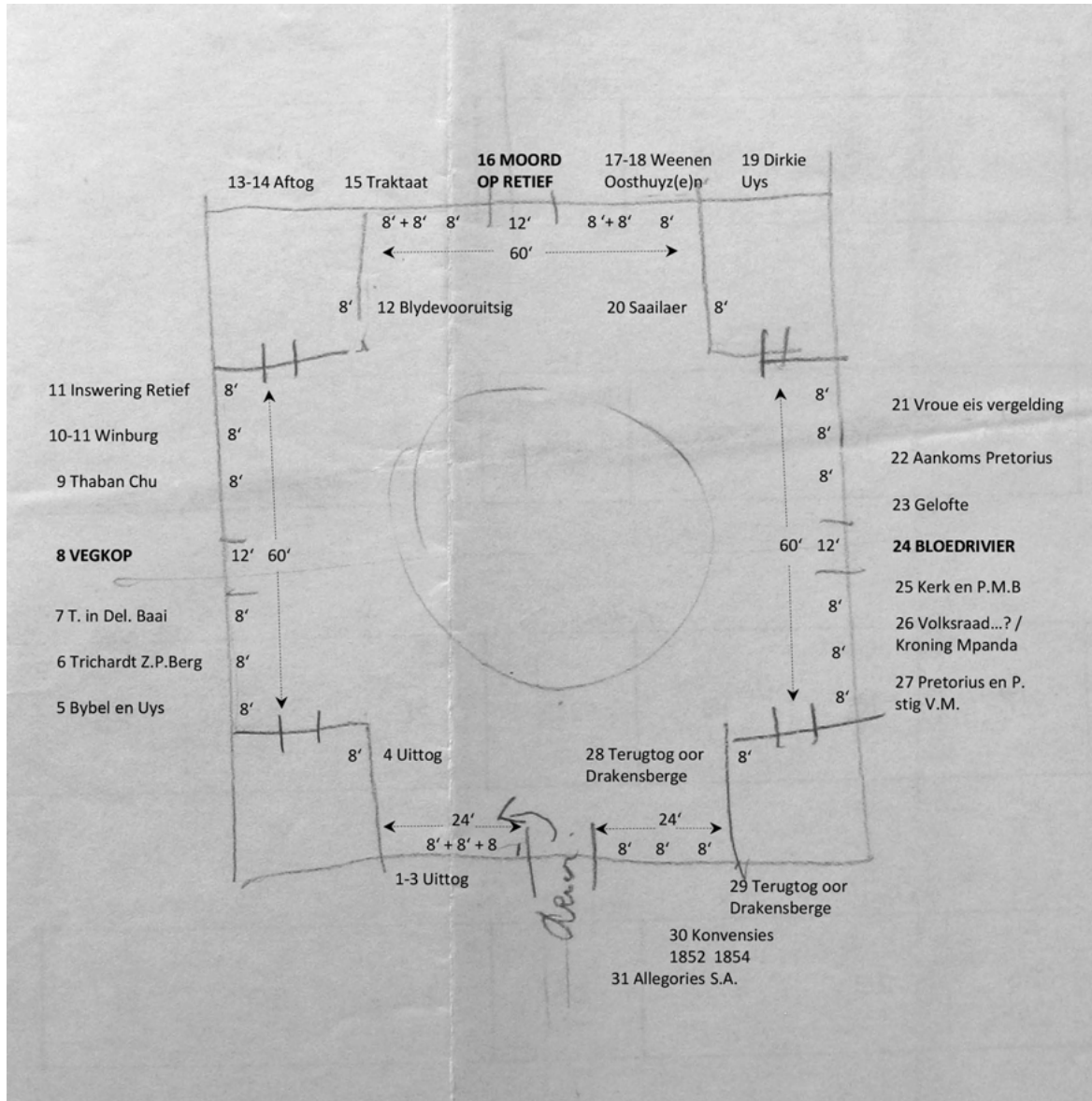


Figure 90: Authors' annotated version of Moerdyk's layout of panels (fig. 88)

not easy to decipher, we have prepared our own versions of both diagrams. We show the proposed topics in relation to the layout more clearly in the first (fig. 90). And we have applied the assigned measurements and topics to the second diagram also, in order to clarify the layout and demonstrate how the panel diagram corresponded to the proposed building (fig. 91). The topics generally corresponded to the most popular proposals on the lists presented to the SVK discussed above. What is of particular interest for the developing plans is the intention to have some scenes, such as the 'departure' from the Cape (Uittog), spread over multiple panels. Hence there were twenty-four topics named, for which thirty-one panels were needed.

As regards the layout, another key point is the broadly chronological arrangement, with the Departure marking the beginning of the story, and the Sand River Convention and Allegorical panel forming a suitable conclusion. Also notable is the choice of three topics for the larger central scenes on the uninterrupted long walls – 'Vegkop', 'Moord op Retief', 'Bloedrivier': two major victories for the Voortrekkers at the battles of Vegkop and Blood River, and the murder of Retief and his men by Dingane's warriors are thus picked out for special attention, creating a homily of heroes and



martyrs. It is interesting that Moerdyk, when challenged on the unity of the frieze by Hugo in 1943, said that he sought to unify it by having the events ascending to the moment of high suspense in the murder of Retief, then playing out again to the return across the Drakensberg.<sup>578</sup> The concept of a compelling narrative was a goal from the outset.

The details help us to place the layout diagram and its inscriptions in the sequence of the Monument's development. We know that Moerdyk was drawing up his plans in 1936, and can surmise that he had probably made the diagram before he informed the SVK in October that a continuous sequence of panels would be required.<sup>579</sup> At an SVK meeting on 15 January 1937, when

**Figure 91:** Authors' annotated version of sketch of Voortrekker Monument plan (fig. 89)

<sup>578</sup> Recounted in a letter from Hugo to Jansen, 19.1.1943 (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7).

<sup>579</sup> It is an indication of the need to bring deliberations on the panels and the architecture together that it was recommended in January 1937 that the Paneelkomitee and Boukomitee should work together on resolving the panels (SVK 15.1.1937: 11), although it seems that they had already met, as a letter of 23.11.1936 from Scheepers to Engelbrecht gives notice of a combined meeting to take place on 8.12.1936, to discuss critique of the Monument (NHKA P1/2/3/8/10).

the Paneelkomitee confirmed that a chronological order should be followed as far as possible, and advocated that dramatic tension be maintained, Moerdyk responded that there should be three high points – Vegkop, the murder of Retief, and Blood River.<sup>580</sup> These correspond precisely to the topics assigned by the handwritten annotations for the three larger panels in the layout diagram, perhaps already carried out, or perhaps only in Moerdyk's mind at this stage. As there was still ongoing discussion at that SVK meeting about which topics might be dropped and which included, we deduce that no finality was reached on that occasion.<sup>581</sup> So when Jansen was able to supply a definitive list of twenty-four topics to the Minister of Internal Affairs only four days later, we must conclude that urgent discussions were held immediately after the meeting, at least involving Jansen and Moerdyk, but very likely others. Possibly it was then that Moerdyk's layout diagram was used as a basis to plan the topics in relation to the different panels in the Monument, and the inscriptions on the layout in the Jansen file may well have been made, or at least finalised, during these deliberations. In any event, a clear plan was in place by 19 January 1937. In his letter of that date to the Minister of Internal Affairs, accompanied by his Memorandum for the government about the Monument, written in both Afrikaans and English, Jansen explained that there would be a low relief frieze of 260 × 7 feet in the Monument, and listed twenty-four topics which match those inscribed on the diagram.

The topics that were now firmly in place were set out in the English version of Jansen's letter (fig. 92).<sup>582</sup> Although further modifications lay ahead, this was a watershed moment. The SVK now felt in a position to move forward with its plans for the sculptures, even though it had been acknowledged the previous year that the Monument would not be completed in time for the centenary of 1938. By late 1936, although a contract had recently been signed with Van Wouw and there was clearly no intention of bypassing him entirely, there had been discussions about the elderly sculptor's ability to handle such a large undertaking when his health and seventy-four years of age were against it.<sup>583</sup> The need to appoint an assistant to help him to complete his *Voortrekker mother and children* (fig. 49) early in 1937 and the difficulties experienced must have seemed to confirm these anxieties,<sup>584</sup> although the sheer scale of the sculpture alone would have been a sufficient reason for his request. Yet at the same time there was concern expressed that multiple artists would produce different interpretations and disrupt a sense of unity in the frieze.<sup>585</sup> While it was finally accepted that different artists would have to be used, given the scale of the project, the need for harmony was stressed.<sup>586</sup>

**580** SVK 15.1.1937: 9. An intriguing comment in 9 (a) cites the need 'to satisfy both the sections' (albei die seksies tevrede te stel), without specifying what these sections were.

**581** It was agreed, for example, that the Van Rensburg episode should be omitted, but suggested that further thought be given to the representation of events at Winburg, and that inclusion be considered for the arrival of the ship *Brailie* (sic) in Natal; the deathbed of the courageous wife of Pretorius; and the General's deathbed too, with kneeling 'kafers' in attendance. Moerdyk's response was that paintings in the pendentives could portray scenes related to the sea, while a possible sarcophagus for Pretorius might accommodate the latter two scenes (SVK 15.1.1937: 9). Although we have found no other written reference to such a sarcophagus (discussions of this always centred on Retief), Moerdyk's Drawings 3 and 4 of the cross-section of the Monument (figs 53, 54), discussed earlier, show relief carvings on the sarcophagus in the lower hall, although their subject matter is barely decipherable.

**582** NARSSA, BNS 146/73/2 (spelling in the list is as in original). An almost identical list was published in an article 'Die Voortrekkermonument vorm finaal vasgelê' (Final form of the Voortrekker Monument decided) in *Die Huisgenoot* of 19.2.1937, showing not only the level of popular interest in these matters, but how quickly they were circulated publicly.

**583** SVK 5.10.1936: 9b.

**584** SVK 15.1.1937: 13. A nine-page hand written draft of a letter by Peter Kirchoff (without recipient) outlines some of the difficulties experienced in carrying out the *Voortrekker mother and children*, which he states were the result of Van Wouw's poor physical and mental health, and for which the elderly sculptor could not be held responsible. Evidently his efforts to intervene without causing offence were unsuccessful, and Van Wouw dismissed him (Kirchoff family files).

**585** SVK 5.10.1936: 9b.

**586** Dagbestuur 5.3.1937: 10.



### Jansen Memorandum

- 1 The exodus from the Cape, reflecting at the same time something of the conditions of life there.
- 2 The English inhabitants presenting Uys with a Bible before his departure.
- 3 Trichardt at the foot of the Zoutpansberg Mountains.
- 4 Trichardt at Delagoa Bay.
- 5 The battle of Vegkop (O.F.S.).
- 6 The Voortrekkers at Thaba Nchu with Maroko and Archbell who rendered them assistance.
- 7 The Voortrekkers at Winberg. Taking of oath by Piet Retief.
- 8 The Voortrekkers on the Drakensberg (Blydevooruitsig) near Retiefklip. Here the camp life will be portrayed as also receipt of the news of land being obtained from Dingaan.
- 9 The descent from the Drakensberg Mountains.
- 10 Signing of the Treaty with Dingaan.
- 11 Massacre of Retief and his men, including the Englishman Halstead.
- 12 Scenes of the massacre at Bloukrans and inter alia Marthinus Oosthuizen's act of heroism.
- 13 Heroic death of Dirkie Uys.
- 14 'Saailaer' and the cultivation of land, etc.
- 15 Scene portraying the dejection of the men and the refusal of the women to leave Natal before the blood of their dear ones had been avenged.
- 16 Arrival of Andries Pretorius.
- 17 The Vow.
- 18 Bloedrivier.
- 19 Erection of "Gelofteskerk": and founding of Pietermaritzburg.
- 20 Mpande, who placed himself with his followers under the protection of the Volksraad, and who assisted in ultimately conquering Dingaan, is proclaimed by Andries Pretorius as 'King of the Zulus' (14th February 1840).
- 21 Pretorius and Potgieter combine at Potchefstroom.
- 22 Retreat over the Drakensberg Mountains.
- 23 The Convention of 1852 and 1854.
- 24 Allegorical representation of the Union as ultimate result of the Trek.

**Figure 92:** List of topics proposed by Jansen to Minister of Internal Affairs, 19 January 1937 (the authors)

In January 1937, Moerdyk had proposed to the SVK that a draftsman (tekenaar) be appointed to prepare sketches of all the panels to guide the artists,<sup>587</sup> possibly also to assist in creating a unified vision. At the Dagbestuur in March it was agreed that Moerdyk would approach Erich Mayer, who had recently carried out murals for the architect's Monument High School in Krugersdorp, to make drawings for the full frieze.<sup>588</sup> According to his wife many years later, Mayer's answer to Moerdyk was: 'You haven't the vaguest idea what a historical frieze involves. I will not throw away my [good] name to scrawl a few fabrications on the wall for £200.'<sup>589</sup> When he declined, the artist

<sup>587</sup> SVK 15.1.1937: 11.

<sup>588</sup> Dagbestuur 5.3.1937: 10. For (Ernst Karl) Erich Mayer (1876–1960), see Berman 1983, 279; Ogilvie 1988, 427.

<sup>589</sup> 'Jy het nie die flouste benul wat 'n historiese fries behels nie. Ek gooi nie my naam weg om 'n paar versinsels op die mure te krabbel vir £200 nie' (De Beer 1969, 58).

W.H. Coetzer was approached. The intention to do so is not recorded in the minutes but there is notice of a meeting to be held on 26 April 1937 between Coetzer and the Historiese Komitee, although no minutes appear to have survived (and the meeting of 4 September 1937 to discuss the completed drawings is recorded as the *first* of the Historiese Komitee). Coetzer's initial sketches, of which copies are preserved in the Jansen files in ARCA at the University of the Free State, were received on 26 June 1937 by the SVK, which referred them on to the Historiese Komitee.<sup>590</sup> The secretary wrote on 28 June asking Moerdyk to instruct Coetzer to make duplicates of his sketches so that they could be distributed to committee members for consideration, although they only met to discuss them in September.<sup>591</sup> The detailed comments recorded on that occasion, which required a considerable number of modifications of particulars, although only occasionally the rethinking of a whole scene, were communicated to Coetzer.<sup>592</sup> He then revised his drawings, which are now in the collection of Museum Africa, discussed below (fig. 98). The amended drawings were presented to the SVK in February 1938,<sup>593</sup> when it was finally decided to invite sculptors to prepare models.<sup>594</sup>

## Coetzer and the frieze

Surprisingly, South African-born Willem Hermanus Coetzer (1900–83) does not discuss his commission for the Voortrekker Monument sketches in his 1980 autobiography (fig. 93). When he wrote about the 1938 centenary and the inauguration of the Monument in 1949, his focus was on the many souvenir items and stamps he had designed for these occasions.<sup>595</sup> He mentioned the sketches only in passing at a later point to compare their more masculine emphasis with the feminine orientation of the subject matter for the tapestries on the Great Trek which he designed later, and which occupied much of his attention in the autobiography.<sup>596</sup> Stitched between 1952 and 1960 by nine Afrikaner women, members of the Vrou- en Moederbeweging (Women and Mother Movement) of the ATKV, they used one-hundred-and-thirty different colours of wool to produce fifteen scenes, together measuring 25.3 metres long and 0.8 metres high (fig. 94).<sup>597</sup> However, despite the absence of the frieze drawings in his account of his life, it reveals that he was in many ways an obvious choice to visualise the historical scenes for the Monument.

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**590** SVK 26.6.1937: 6a.

**591** In a letter of 14.8.1937 (HF Archives SVK vol. 20 file 16.1), Scheepers asked Moerdyk to send the sketches to Preller, Bosman, Engelbrecht, Nel, Steenkamp, Basson and himself, presumably the members of the Historiese Komitee at the time, for a meeting planned for 4 September.

**592** In a letter to Moerdyk of 18.9.1937 (HF Archives SVK vol. 20 file 16.1) Scheepers stated that he had discussed these requirements with Coetzer personally and sent him the relevant comments about the revisions, and asked Moerdyk to communicate with Coetzer on how to proceed.

**593** Further amendments were evidently required, since Coetzer was asked in March to present his final sketches as soon as possible (Dagbestuur 2.3.1938: 4).

**594** SVK 12.2.1938: 24.

**595** Coetzer 1980. It is perhaps understandable that Coetzer focused in his book on works such as the stamps and souvenirs for the Monument, and in particular the later tapestries, where he saw his designs through to completion, as opposed to the sketches for the frieze where the designs passed out of his control and underwent often major modifications when they were transformed into sculpture. The final frieze was very different in design and style from his drawings, which may have deterred him from discussing them in his autobiography. It is also possible that he was thinking of the Monument as a group project, as the SVK seemed to do, when it resisted naming the individual sculptors on the frieze.

**596** Coetzer 1980, 61. The so-called tapestries (in fact stitched not woven) gave attention to more domestic scenes showcasing the role of women on the Trek. Coetzer devoted many years to them, not only carrying out the designs, but researching the materials that would give the best results and not fade, and also regularly visiting the women for supervision (not unlike Moerdyk with the sculptors of the frieze).

**597** Kruger 1972; Kruger 1988; Van der Watt 1998.

Growing up in an impoverished Afrikaner family and initially self-taught as an artist, Coetzer was a wagon builder by trade.<sup>598</sup> Only in 1928 did he fulfil his dream to study art and enrol at the Regent Street Polytechnic School in London, supported by the proceeds of sales of his paintings and assistance from South African well-wishers. In London, he was trained to draw and paint what he saw faithfully,<sup>599</sup> in a style typified by the painstaking verism of his oil, *The dusty shelf* (1930), which won him a medal and twenty-five guineas as first prize at the Polytechnic, and is today in the collection of the Johannesburg Art Gallery (fig. 95). His naturalism was well-suited to the descriptive purpose envisaged for the Voortrekker Monument frieze. But even more significant was the epiphany he experienced in 1933, after his return to South Africa, when he came across the early volumes of Gustav Preller's *Voortrekermense* (1918–25) in Jan Smuts' library, while staying at the Smuts family home in Irene. Enthralled by the Voortrekker stories recorded by Preller, he decided to dedicate himself to exploring the history of his people, and devoted the next thirty years of his life to the task.<sup>600</sup>

His sense of the significance of Afrikaner history endowed many of his depictions of episodes from the Great Trek with a sense of drama, also apt for its visualisation at the Monument. His ability to illustrate the Voortrekker past in images of everyday life that were easy to grasp also made him a suitable choice to create scenes for the frieze that would be readily accessible to viewers and help them to visualise the story of the Trek. Whether they were suitable for conversion into a monumental marble frieze was a matter that does not seem to have crossed the minds of the committee.

To say that Coetzer 'explored' the Voortrekkers' stories reflects how his research involved not only intensive reading and building up a fine library, but also undertaking expeditions that followed the original trek routes over terrain that was often impassable for vehicles, all the while making drawings and paintings. He describes his knowledge of historical sites in his autobiography and a book he dedicated to works about the treks, *My kwas vertel* (My brush tells) of 1947.

<sup>598</sup> For Coetzer, see Berman 1983, 102–103; Ogilvie 1988, 136–137. Coetzer's own publications of 1947 and 1980 provide autobiographical accounts.

<sup>599</sup> See De Beer (1969, Chapter 1) for details of Coetzer's early life and training.

<sup>600</sup> See Coetzer 1980, 36 and passim. Coetzer was awarded a medal by the South African Academy in 1965. The recognition of his knowledge of South African history is also demonstrated in his being invited to become a member of the advisory committee of Johannesburg's then Africana Museum by Director R.F. Kennedy, confirmed in a letter of 21.3.1956. Coetzer was a proactive committee member, as evidenced by the many letters to him regarding loans for exhibitions and acknowledging his numerous donations of art and historical artefacts, and by his encouragement of others to do the same (see W.H. Coetzer in correspondence files of Museum Africa). Yet he sold his sketches for the Monument frieze to the museum, rather than donating them, which suggests that he felt that the drawings had particular historical value.



**Figure 93:** W.H. Coetzer. 'Painter of the Voortrek' (*Dagbreek Tydskrif-bylaag*, Commemoration edition, 4.12.1949; courtesy of UP Archives, Moerdyk files)



**Figure 94:** W.H. Coetzer. *Uitspanning by Thaba 'Nchu* (Outspan at Thaba 'Nchu). Stitched by H. Rossouw; one of fifteen tapestry scenes of the Great Trek for Voortrekker Monument. 1952–60. Wool, 80 × 152 cm (courtesy of VTM Museum VTM 0001/14; photo Russell Scott)



**Figure 95:** W.H. Coetzer. *The dusty shelf*. 1930. Oil on canvas, 49.5 × 61 cm (photo courtesy of Johannesburg Art Gallery)

His intimate experience of the landscape and detailed reading on the life of the Voortrekkers that informed his prolific artworks is evident in the book's many reproductions with supporting texts describing the sites and events portrayed, such as a drawing of Vegkop, appropriately dated 16 October 1836, to commemorate the battle that had taken place a hundred years before (fig. 96), and his many paintings of the Trek crossing mountainous terrain, such as *Voortrekkers bo-op die Drakensberg* (fig. 97). Yet he omitted mention of the Monument drawings here too. He explained his project for the book in the Foreword in matter-of-fact terms: 'Our museums are dirt poor in artworks dealing with our history, especially that of the Voortrekker period; that led to the birth of this book, which I hope will help to fill the present void.'<sup>601</sup>

In the Introduction of *My kwas vertel*, N. Diederichs made higher claims, saying that Coetzer was driven 'to fulfil a national calling'. 'The artist here deals with something great – the development of a nation, the birth of a fatherland,' and 'enriches the culture of our people.'<sup>602</sup> In his thesis on the artist, André de Beer too saw Coetzer as an artist of national significance:

The Afrikaner people are indebted to Coetzer. Through his realistic representation of events from our people's history, and more particularly the history of the Great Trek, he established the facts like a true chronicler. The careful historical research that is the basis of the canvases will guarantee that the descendants see the truth. ...

He is not only a great portrayer of our history, but also of our feelings. His works cultivate pride in our land and a love for the things which he portrays with such clarity.<sup>603</sup>

Even though claims that Coetzer was 'a true chronicler' who undertook 'careful historical research' are extravagant, as a well-informed illustrator of Voortrekker stories, able to express Afrikaner sentiments, he must have seemed an apt choice to give visual form to the scenes selected by the SVK for the Monument, when the more experienced and well-established Mayer declined.<sup>604</sup>

It is fortunate that two sets of his sketches for the frieze have survived, although neither is complete (fig. 98). Twenty-one original drawings were offered by Coetzer in 1966 as part of a sale of items including Monument memorabilia to the old Africana Museum in the Johannesburg



**Figure 96:** W.H. Coetzer. *Vegkop – 16 Oktober 1836*. Pencil drawing, 25.4 × 38.1 cm (Coetzer 1947, 106)

<sup>601</sup> 'Ons museums is brandarm ten opsigte van kunswerke i.v.m. ons geskiedenis, veral oor die Voortrekker-tydperk; daarom is hierdie boek gebore, en ek hoop dat dit sal help om die leemte wat daar bestaan te vul' (Coetzer 1947, 21). In donating many paintings, drawings, prints and other items to the Africana Museum as well as a copy of this book, Coetzer was himself helping to 'fill the present void'.

<sup>602</sup> '... 'n nasionale roeping te vervul'; 'Die skilder het hier met iets groots te doen – die wordingsgang van 'n nasie, die geboorte van 'n vaderland'; and 'die kultuur van ons volk verryk' (Diederichs in Coetzer 1947, 15, 19, 20).

<sup>603</sup> 'Die Afrikanervolk is baie verskuldig aan W.H. Coetzer. Deur sy realistiese weergawe van gebeurtenisse uit ons volksgeskiedenis, en meer in besonder die geskiedenis van die Groot Trek, het hy die geskiedkundige feite soos 'n getroue kronikeur vasgelê. Die nougesette historiese navorsing wat die doeke ten grondslag lê, sal die waarborg wees dat die nageslagte die waarheid sien. / Hy is egter nie alleen die groot uitbeelders van ons geskiedenis nie, maar ook die vertolker van ons gevoelens. Sy werk kweek trots op ons land aan en laat ons 'n liefde voel vir juis dit wat hy alles so duidelik uitbeeld' (De Beer 1969, 97).

<sup>604</sup> That he was not the first choice made may be explained by the relatively recent date of his completion of his studies and his venture into paintings of Afrikaner history.

**Figure 97:** W.H. Coetzer. *Voortrekkers bo-op die Drakensberg* (Voortrekkers atop the Drakensberg). Undated. Oil, c. 120 × 180 cm (courtesy of DNCH DHK 5533; photo Helenus Kruger, City of Tshwane)



Library, founded in 1933. They are now housed in the collection of Museum Africa,<sup>605</sup> a redevelopment of the earlier Africana Museum, which opened in 1994. This set of pencil drawings for the scenes of the treks corresponds closely to the topics worked out on Moerdyk's layout diagram (fig. 90) and listed by Jansen in his letter to the minister dated 19 January 1937, recorded above. These drawings are annotated with titles that we will use in inverted commas to refer to individual scenes when discussing Coetzer's designs. Although five scenes from Jansen's list are missing, the drawings in the collection were clearly made in response to those decisions. They follow not only the subjects, but the differentiation of format that we see in the different panels of Moerdyk's diagram, with longer proportions for the centrally placed *Vegkop*, *Murder of Retief* and *Blood River*, for example, and for scenes such as *Departure* that were intended to run across more than one panel.<sup>606</sup>

The other set of images in the Jansen archive at ARCA are copies apparently made with a Gestetner duplicating machine. They are presumably of the first set of drawings (presented to the SVK on

<sup>605</sup> Kennedy 1971, 152–156 nos C1084–C1104. According to *Museum Africa, Accessions Register*, 1963, p.464 (inv. 2194 A-U / 03.11.1966), W.H. Coetzer sold the museum 'Pencil drawings. (21) Design for marble panels. Voortrekker Monument, Pretoria' for R356.00. The purchase of these and other items for a total of R1 906 was recommended by the Africana Museum's Management Committee on 17.10.1966 and ratified by Council on 25.10.1966 (Museum Africa archives, 66/2179/2210); Coetzer was notified in a letter from then Director Anna Smith of 28.10.1966 (correspondence files, Museum Africa).

<sup>606</sup> There are drawings for nineteen scenes at Museum Africa, although there are twenty-one drawings in all: two are different versions of the scene in Soutpansberg, and two are the same rendering of the Treaty with Dingane but with one reversed. In his thesis, De Beer is only aware of the drawings, not the reproductions, so mistakenly imagines that more scenes (such as *Trichardt at Delagoa Bay* and the *Arrival of Pretorius* that are among the reproductions in the Jansen archive) were independent inventions of the sculptors than was actually the case (1969, 60). The scenes missing from the Museum Africa set that are to be found in the ARCA copies are 'Trichardt at Delagoa Bay', 'Arrival of Pretorius' and the 'Allegory', which was never used for the frieze.

The Coetzer drawings

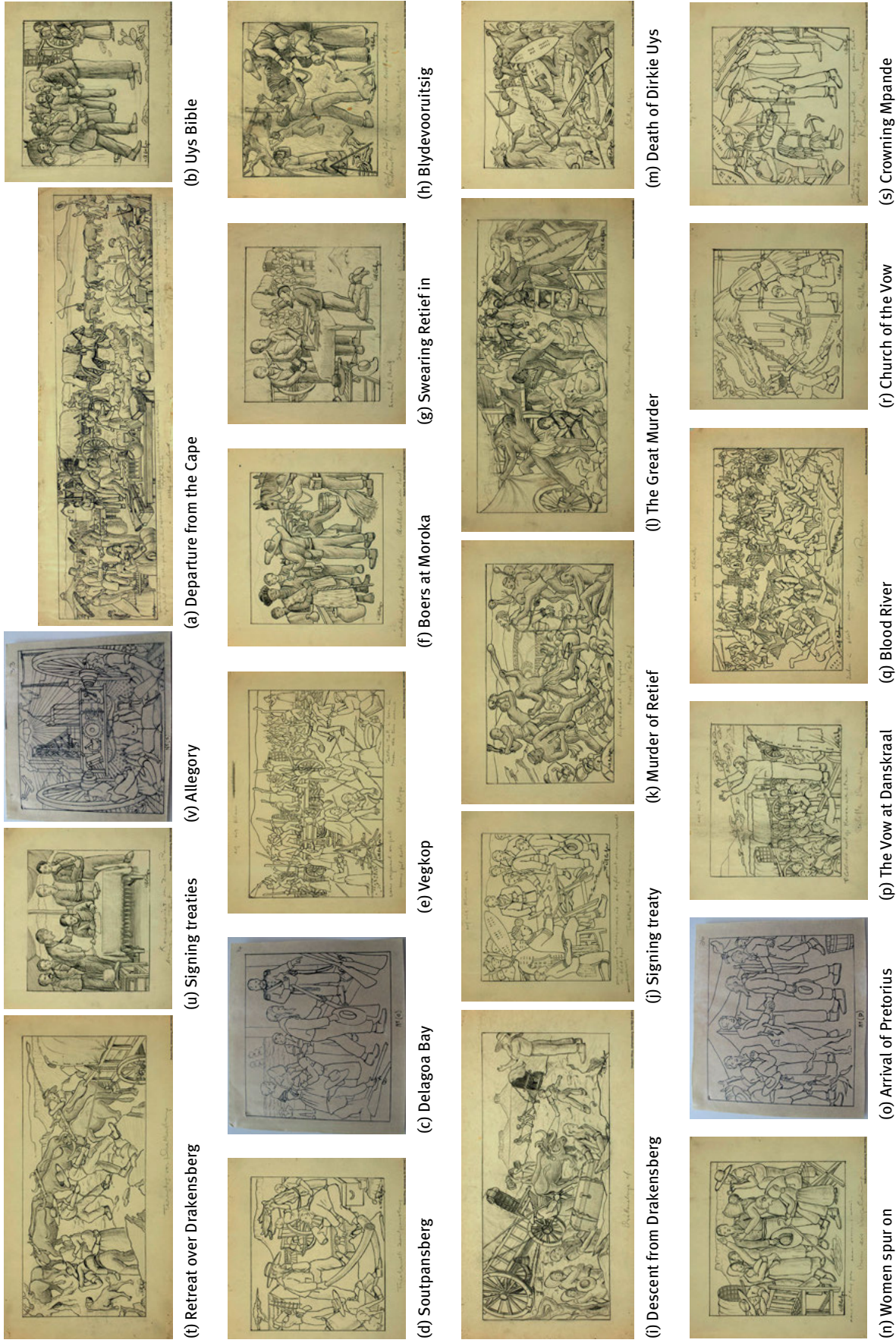


Figure 98: W.H. Coetzer. First visual narrative of the Great Trek in twenty-two drawings (three extant in Gesteiner reproductions only), 1937 (the authors)

26 June 1937<sup>607</sup>) for circulation to the Historiese Komitee, as Scheepers requested Moerdyk to do two days later.<sup>608</sup> A later letter from Scheepers dated 14 August 1937 to Engelbrecht notes that Moerdyk had indeed posted drawings to him (and no doubt to the rest of the Historiese Komitee) to study and calls a meeting to discuss them on 4 September.<sup>609</sup> Scheepers mentions that there are twenty-two of these, matching the twenty-two about which the Historiese Komitee offered comments at its meeting of 4 September 1937. They are invaluable for our research, filling three of the gaps in the Museum Africa set of drawings, although it remains a mystery why there are not twenty-four in total, corresponding to the required number of scenes. The reproductions have been given sequential letters of the alphabet from (a) to (x) that correspond to the numbers 1 to 24 in Jansen's list of topics in his 19 January 1937 letter (fig. 92); missing are reproductions for (n) which would have stood for 14 *Saailaer*, originally situated ahead of *Women spur men on*, and (u) for 21, the reconciliation of Pretorius and Potgieter listed before *Return* (fig. 99).<sup>610</sup>

These reproductions were not mechanically produced as would be the case today with a Xerox machine or photographic scanning. To duplicate an image with a Gestetner required the production of a stencil on waxed paper, customarily made by typewriter for a text, or using a sharp stylus for images; the Gestetner machine forced ink through the cuts in the wax onto paper to create multiple copies. The Gestetner reproductions are thus hand-made copies, probably tracings from the original drawings, possibly by the artist himself, so that they provide a good indication of the originals. However, a conspicuous modification is possible. The wax stencil with the image could be reversed by mistake, which possibly explains the unexpected inversion of the reproduction of 'Return over Drakensberg' (figs 100, 101). The final relief panel of *Return* follows the reversed reproduction with the ox wagon's movement from left to right, not the pencil drawing where it was the other way around, persuasive evidence that the sculptors were given the reproductions to work from, not the drawings, an issue that will be discussed shortly.

Jansen must have filed the reproductions away with his copies of SVK papers, amongst which they are still to be found at ARCA in Bloemfontein. But in the case of the pencil drawings, we are unsure where they were kept after they had been made in 1937–38, and when they came into Coetzer's possession again. Even though he did not write about them in his publications he must have felt them significant enough to want them to be permanently lodged in a collection when he offered them for sale to the Africana Museum.<sup>611</sup> Yet fortuitous as the survival of the two sets of images is, it remains a puzzle where exactly they fit in the scheme of things. It can be assumed that the Gestetner reproductions relate to the first set of drawings, presented to the SVK on 26 June, since it was for the subsequent gathering of the Historiese Komitee on 4 September 1937 that Moerdyk acquired copies

**607** SVK 26.6.1937: 6a 'Panele'.

**608** In a letter of 28.6.1937 he asked Moerdyk to arrange for Coetzer to make copies of the sketches he had already completed, suggesting that production was still under way (HF Archives SVK vol. 20 file 16.1).

**609** NHKA P1/2/3/8/1.

**610** It is of course possible that they were lost, but that the same two scenes – for *Saailaer* and the reconciliation of Pretorius and Potgieter – are missing in both the drawing collections and in the comments, suggests that for some reason they were never undertaken by Coetzer. It is also notable that, in taking minutes for the Historiese Komitee comments, Scheepers renumbered the scenes from (a) to (v), leaving out the letters that would have matched the absent sketches: this would seem to confirm that only twenty-two were made. However, it is interesting that Ferreira (1975, 65) writes that the marble panel *Saailaer* was made after a sketch of the place where the women defended the laager, which would match Coetzer's interest in portraying the correct landscape for the different Trek events.

**611** We can only speculate how the drawings came to be in Coetzer's possession. If they were not used in the sculptors' studio, as we will argue, then perhaps they never left the artist's possession. But in that they were commissioned by the SVK, one might assume that they were kept by them, whether used as guides for the sculptors of the frieze or not. If so, the originals could have been returned to the artist when the SVK was winding up. With a view to having a history of the SVK written, it was decided at that time that all the minute books and other documents on file be made available to a student for research, and that Dr A.N. Pelzer of the University of Pretoria be approached in this regard (Dagbestuur 19.11.1964: 8). It seems probable that any other items were also dispersed at this point, perhaps in this case to the artist, which would have shortly preceded Coetzer's selling the drawings to the Africana Museum.



Topics for Coetzer drawings			
Topic and reference letter on Coetzer reproductions presented to SVK	Museum Africa A1: pencil drawing April–June 1937	ARCA A2: reproduction of A1 June 1937	Museum Africa A3: revised pencil drawing A1 after 4 September 1937
(a) Departure from Cape Colony	no	yes	Yes
(b) Uys receives Bible		yes	Yes
(d) Trichardt in Soutpansberg	yes	yes	no
New version	no	no	yes
(c) Trichardt in Delagoa Bay	no	yes	no
(e) Vegkop	yes	yes	no
(f) Boers negotiate with Moroka	no	yes	yes
(g) Swearing Retief in	no	yes	yes
(h) Blydevooruitsig	no	yes	yes
(i) Descent from Drakensberg	no	yes	yes
(j) Signing treaty	yes	yes	no
Reversed version	yes	no	no
(k) Murder of Retief	no	yes	yes
(l) The Great Murder	no	yes	yes
(m) Death of Dirkie Uys	no	yes	yes
(o) Women spur on	no	yes	yes
(p) Arrival Pretorius	no	yes	no
(q) The Vow at Danskraal	yes	yes	no
(r) Blood River	yes	yes	no
(s) Church of the Vow	yes	yes	no
(t) Crowning Mpande	yes	yes	no
(v) Retreat over Drakensberg	no	no	yes
Reversed version	no	yes	no
(w) Signing treaties	no	yes	yes
(x) Allegory	no	yes	no

**Figure 99:** Concordance of Coetzer drawings and reproductions (the authors)

from Coetzer.<sup>612</sup> Our assumption is reinforced by the fact that these reproductions are kept with the minutes of that same committee meeting in the Jansen file at ARCA. Regarding the pencil drawings in the Museum Africa collection, on the other hand, it can be assumed that they belonged to the second modified set produced in late 1937 and early 1938 in response to the committee's requirements of 4 September 1937, since some show changes and have annotations that correspond to that critique, and are also worked up more fully. However, some of these pencil sketches are simple line drawings that correspond closely to the outlines in the Gestetner reproductions, and do not have

<sup>612</sup> Mentioned in a letter of 14.8.1937 (HF Archives SVK vol. 20 file 16.1).



Figure 100: W.H. Coetzer. Reproduction of first drawing for *Return*. June 1937 (courtesy of ARCA PV94 1/75/5/1; photo the authors)

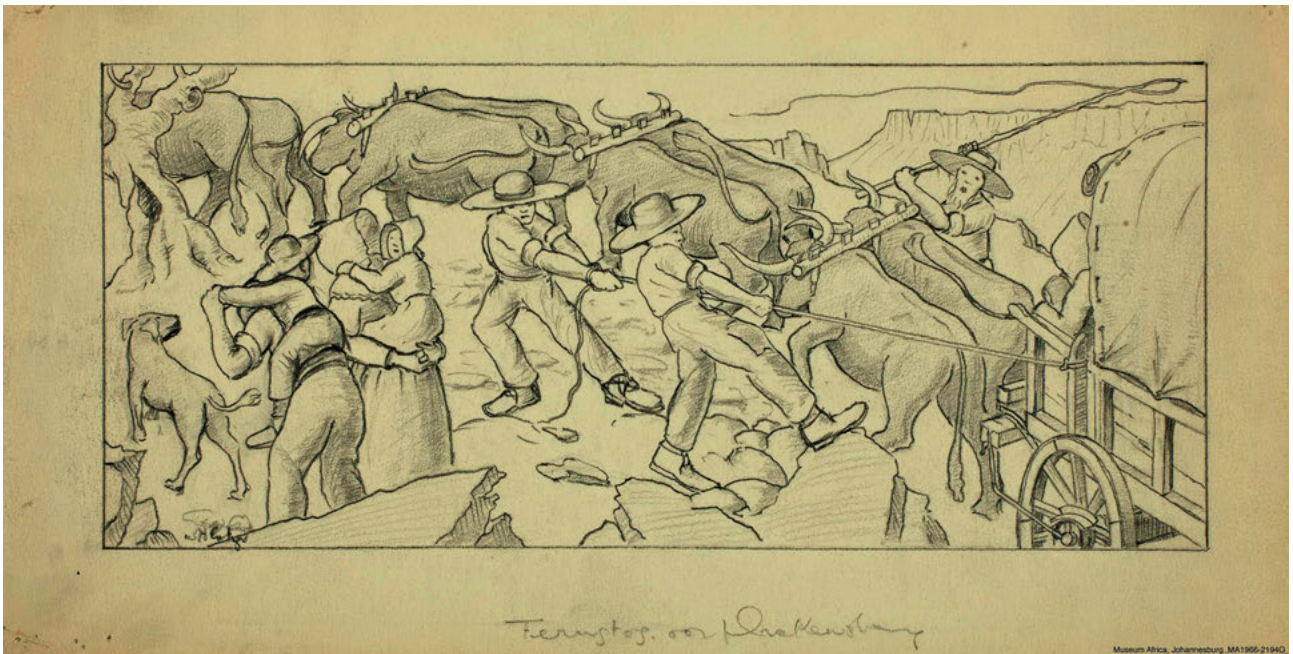


Figure 101: W.H. Coetzer. 'Terugtog oor Drakensberg'. After September 1937. Pencil, 13.3 × 30.4cm, image size. Revised first drawing (photo courtesy of Museum Africa, no. 66/2194Q)

any modifications, and a number are annotated 'nog nie klaar nie' (not yet finished), which suggests that alterations were still to be made. Thus, even where both a Gestetner reproduction and a pencil drawing survive, we are not always presented with a straightforward 'before and after' situation.

We can deduce that the Museum Africa pencil drawings in pure line like the Gestetner reproductions are examples of the first set of Coetzer's drawings (June 1937), but that others, characterised by a more developed presentation with modelling and tone, are part of the modified second set made after 4 September. Coetzer either left the first set in line untouched when no significant



**Figure 102:** W.H. Coetzer. Reproduction of first drawing for *Departure*. June 1937 (courtesy of ARCA PV94 1/75/5/1; photo the authors)



**Figure 103:** W.H. Coetzer. 'Uittog uit Kaapland'. After September 1937. Pencil, 13.3 × 61.2 cm, image size. Revised first drawing (photo courtesy of Museum Africa, no. 66/2194U)

changes were requested or worked them up more fully for the revised set. In some cases these second-set drawings have few if any changes, while others are markedly different from the reproductions, as is the case with the 'Departure from the Cape' (figs 102, 103).<sup>613</sup> In some, changes are still visible as pentimenti in the drawings, as in the 'Presentation of the Bible to Uys', which confirms that they have been revised. Coetzer almost always re used the pencil drawings of the first set unless they required considerable reworking to meet the criticisms of the committee. As mentioned, all the drawings in Museum Africa have annotations, at least the title of the subject depicted, but often also comments about the representations which correspond to the committee's criticisms on 4 September.<sup>614</sup> These comments may have been made by Coetzer on his drawings during the meeting or possibly soon after it, when he considered the reworking required as the following example clarifies.

In the case of 'Trichardt Soutpansberg' we are fortunate to have both a first and a second pencil drawing in the Museum Africa collection, a pair which supports our reconstruction of the sequence of events. At the meeting on 4 September the Historiese Komitee asked Coetzer to prepare a completely new drawing for this scene, to include, as the artist annotates, 'Teacher Pfeffer takes

<sup>613</sup> The titles used here for Coetzer's drawings are a translation of the Afrikaans titles inscribed on them in the Museum Africa collection, which we use in inverted commas to differentiate them from the titles of the maquettes and marble reliefs derived from them, for which we use italics.

<sup>614</sup> The authorship of the comments is by no means certain and the handwriting of the annotations is not entirely consistent, possibly suggesting they were made at different times, and even by different authors. However, after careful consideration and comparison with other examples of autograph writing by Coetzer, we are persuaded that the annotations are his.

**Figure 104:** W.H. Coetzer. New drawing 'Trichardt Zoutpansberg'. After September 1937. Pencil, 13.4 × 15.3 cm, image size (photo courtesy of Museum Africa, no. 66/2194A)



**Figure 105:** W.H. Coetzer. Reproduction of first drawing for Soutpansberg. June 1937 (courtesy of ARCA PV94 1/75/5/1; photo the authors)



children to school'; 'women pick mealies'; 'a man repairs a wheel' (Onderwyser Pfeffer neem Kinders skool toe; vrouens pluk mielies; 'n man herstel 'n wiel), all of which are incorporated in the more developed of the two drawings. And only on the new drawing do we find the annotations, almost as written proof that he had accurately complied with the committee's instructions (fig. 104). The other, which is purely linear, places more emphasis on trading at Soutpansberg, with ivory tusks in the foreground and men loading animal skins behind. This must have been from the first set of drawings and the one that the committee rejected at its September meeting (fig. 105) – further corroborated by the existence of a Gestetner reproduction of only the first sketch, prepared originally for the SVK meeting on 26 June.

We know from Hennie Potgieter's comments that the sculptors were given Coetzer's drawings to work from.<sup>615</sup> But, as will be discussed in detail in Part II, the relief maquettes are invariably closer to what we have argued were the first drawings – those copied for committee members – than the second drawings modified to meet their criticisms. For example, as already mentioned, the fact that the marble panel follows the reversed Gestetner reproduction of *Return* rather than the inverted direction in the revised drawing supports this.

A more complex case is the small clay maquette that Potgieter made of 'Trichardt at Soutpansberg', which also is based on the first, not the second drawing, which had been completely reworked. Both of Potgieter's small maquettes, and consequently the final marble panel, include Trichardt holding a tusk in the centre, trekker(s) busy with hides, an ox wagon without canvas cover, and a building in the background we interpret as a schoolhouse (figs 106, 107). However, only the second maquette shows a young man in the foreground with a pile of books to represent Trichardt's pioneering introduction of education at Soutpansberg, which was part of the requirements set by the committee and the subject of the revised second drawing. This suggests that the sculptors were told verbally of the committee requirements, or perhaps shown the minutes of the Historiese Komitee. It is unlikely that they were given sight of the second drawing as the maquette is quite different compositionally from it and does not include all its elements, such as the wainwright or the women picking mealies. Thus some aspects requested by the committee were included in the final panel, even though we believe that it was based on the first rejected drawing. As a result, the relief captured a fuller picture of life at Soutpansberg, both as a trading settlement and the earliest introduction of Boer 'civilisation' to the far north.

This single example demonstrates the complexity of reconstructing the relationship between Coetzer's drawings and the sculptors' reliefs. It is clear that they had at least the reproductions of the first drawings when they were making their maquettes, and using these would have been a

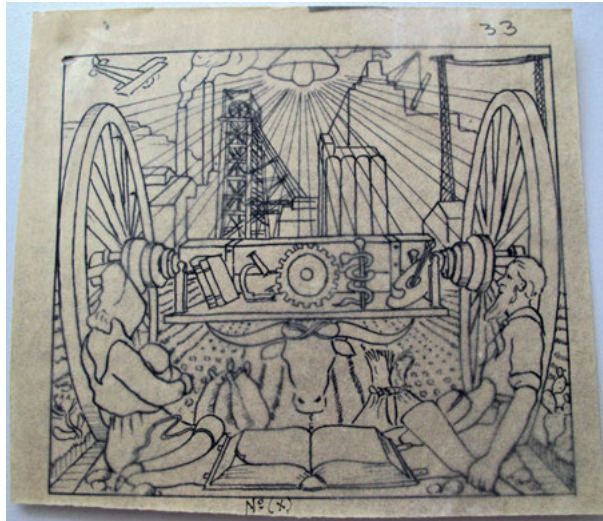
<sup>615</sup> Potgieter 1987, 41. The drawings he refers to were 'pasted on cardboard' (vasgeplak op karton) so cannot have been Jansen's set or those in Museum Africa, which show no evidence of this.



**Figure 106:** Hennie Potgieter. Rejected maquette for *Soutpansberg*. 1942–43. Plaster, 76.5 × 89.8 × 8.6 cm (courtesy of VTM Museum VTM 2884/1-28; photo Russell Scott)



**Figure 107:** Hennie Potgieter. New maquette for *Soutpansberg*. 1942–43. Plaster, 78.3 × 86.6 × 8 cm (courtesy of VTM Museum VTM 2184/1-28; photo Russell Scott)



**Figure 108:** W.H. Coetzer. Reproduction of drawing for *Allegory* (courtesy of ARCA PV94 1/75/5/1; photo the authors)

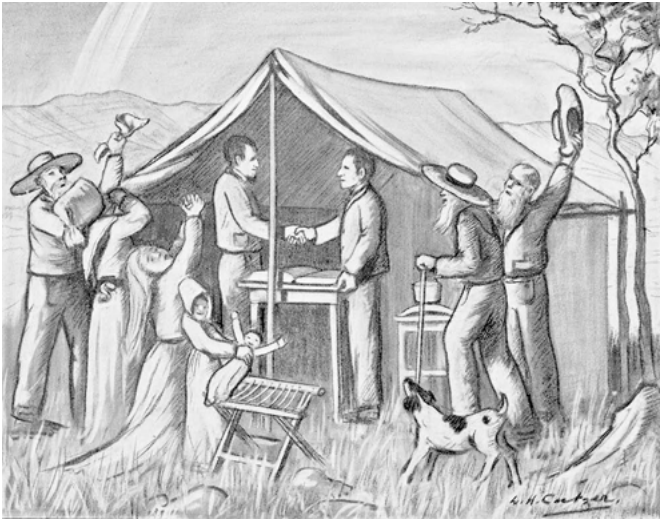
sensible choice for the undoubtedly messy environment of the studio-workshop. The reproductions were also conveniently available from all who had participated in the committee of nearly five years earlier, including Moerdyk himself. The use of the reproductions would also explain why the condition of the original drawings in Museum Africa is so pristine, when in the studio they would inevitably have become marked and dirty: perhaps they had even remained in the possession of the artist since it was he who ultimately sold them to Museum Africa. Can one then conclude that the sculptors were never shown the pencil drawings, but only the reproductions? All the visual evidence points that way. Although it does not make sense in terms of the solemn deliberations of the *Historiese Komitee* and the modifications they proposed in the cause of historical accuracy, it flags another of the numerous inconsistencies in the making of the colossal frieze. Further, there are some cases where the suggested modifications found their way into the maquettes and final panels, as we have seen with *Soutpansberg*; this suggests that the sculptors were at least told about some of the comments of the committee, even if they did not have access to the revised drawings. There are no hard and fast conclusions to be drawn.

We are also aware from Hennie Potgieter's comments that the sculptors did not slavishly follow Coetzer's designs: while his knowledge of the subject matter was deemed admirable, his designs were not considered appropriate for reliefs, and the sculptors made their own drawings,<sup>616</sup> although none of these seem to have survived. In addition, other new topics were sometimes extracted from larger events, such as Debora Retief painting her father's name on a rock at Kerkenberg that was associated with the Voortrekkers' stay at Blydevooruitsig, and the heroic ride of Marthinus Oosthuizen at the time of the Bloukrans massacre; the latter is possibly the horseman represented in the background of Coetzer's sketch of 'Bloukrans Murder'. Another scene that portrayed Dingane's death was a completely new invention, although it had been included in the very earliest 'Voorstelle' list of topics, which we have tentatively dated to December 1934 (fig. 70). But other scenes that were not later additions are missing from the sketches. *Saailaer* was on Jansen's list and included in the frieze, but we have neither pencil drawing nor Gestetner reproduction. On the other hand, we do have a reproduction of the proposed final allegorical representation (fig. 108) although it was not included in the frieze.<sup>617</sup>

A particularly interesting case relates to the topic for scene 23, the reconciliation of Pretorius and Potgieter, an important moment of understanding between the two leaders whose paths had

<sup>616</sup> Potgieter 1987, 41.

<sup>617</sup> This image was adapted by Coetzer for inclusion as a finale for the later tapestry series (Kruger 1972, 19–20; Kruger 1988, 74 colour fig.).



taken them in different directions, and a topic that was on Jansen's list but is omitted from the frieze. Neither in ARCA nor Museum Africa does a pencil drawing or Gestetner reproduction exist for it. However, a drawing of the 'Reconciliation between Potgieter and Pretorius (March 1852)' by Coetzer is reproduced among other episodes from the treks as an illustration in Manfred Nathan's 1937 *Voortrekkers of South Africa* (fig. 109),<sup>618</sup> which confirms that Coetzer had made a drawing of this subject, although for what specific purpose we do not know. Interestingly, there are a number of similar elements in Coetzer's sketch for the 'Arrival of Pretorius' (which survives only as a reproduction), where the figures are also grouped in front of a tent, as the leader shakes hands with a Boer, witnessed by jubilant bystanders and a dog (fig. 110). There are even echoes in Coetzer's design for 'Mpanda Kroning' (coronation of Mpanda), where Pretorius shakes the Zulu by the hand, again in front of a tent. Nathan's book includes other Coetzer images related to the treks, such as drawings of 'Housekeeping on the Veld' (opp. p.38), which was not a proposed topic for the frieze, but illustrates many of the 'authentic' items adopted for it. A third drawing, 'Retief sworn in as governor of the Voortrekkers' (opp. p.164) is very similar to the sketch submitted to the SVK for this topic. Since Nathan's book was published in 1937, its illustrations probably predated those made for the SVK for 26 June 1937, and the closeness in form and composition of the Retief drawings – for book and frieze – indicates that they were directly related. The presence of a drawing of the Reconciliation suggests that Coetzer recognised its significance as a topic and would not have left it out voluntarily. Perhaps there had been a decision to omit it from the frieze prior to the meeting to discuss the first set of sketches with Coetzer on 4 September 1937. A handwritten note on the copy of the 'Voorstelle' (1934–36) in Engelbrecht's file<sup>619</sup> says to 'leave out 23' (Laat 23 weg), the reconciliation scene, though no reason is given. Perhaps there was a reluctance to acknowledge that there had been a lack of accord between the two leaders; moreover, although in Moerdyk's layout (fig. 90) the topic precedes *Return*, chronologically it should come after *Convention*, which provided an appropriately triumphant moment to conclude the narrative. Yet in an article in *Die Huisgenoot* of 19.2.1937 the importance of the event for Afrikaner history was emphasised: 'Potgieter and Pretorius establish the United Company at Potchefstroom, which was actually the birth of the two republics'.<sup>620</sup> All in all, it is a bewildering scenario.

Considering sculptural decisions for the production of the reliefs in relation to the drawings at this point is to leap ahead in our narrative, but is raised here to counter the idea of Coetzer as the

**Figure 109:** W.H. Coetzer. *Reconciliation of Pretorius and Potgieter*. Pre-1937 (Nathan 1937, opp. p.340)

**Figure 110:** W.H. Coetzer. Reproduction of first drawing for *Arrival*. June 1937 (courtesy of ARCA PV94 1/75/5/1; photo the authors)

<sup>618</sup> Nathan 1937, opp. p.340.

<sup>619</sup> NHKA P1/2/3/8/10.

<sup>620</sup> 'Potgieter en Pretorius stig die Verenigde Maatskappy op Potchefstroom, wat eintlik die geboorte van die twee republieke is.' Clipping in UP Archives, Moerdyk files, MDK03957.

sole designer of the frieze, a misrepresentation in a number of art history accounts,<sup>621</sup> and to give an indication of the complex process of its development. Coetzer, however, can be credited as the first who developed an extensive *pictorial* account of the Great Trek, although in an unconnected episodic format. In other respects too his pencil drawings are very enlightening, because the minutes recording the criticism and advice of the Historiese Komitee together with the Coetzer sketches provide a unique insight into the committee's reasoning at this stage of the frieze's development. Some of the notes in the minutes are very full, but others quite terse, suggesting some lapses or weariness on the part of the secretary at what was no doubt a lengthy meeting, starting as it did at 9.30 am on a Saturday morning. There are also occasional changes in Coetzer's second drawings that were not required in the minutes, such as the belts worn by the Boers in 'Negotiations with Moroka', and the second wagon that occupies the previously empty landscape in 'Descent of the Drakensberg'. Possibly such items were discussed, either at or after the meeting, but not recorded.

It would be tedious to rehearse all the changes, particularly as they will be referred to again in the context of the individual discussions of the scenes in Part II, but studying a few examples illustrates the main thrust of thinking about the frieze and its goals. As already mentioned, in most cases the committee did not call for a complete revision but suggested modifications which would make the depictions 'true' reflections of Voortrekker life and the selected events of the Great Trek, and support the authenticity of the account with accurate detail. For example, there were many suggestions to correct particulars in the initial 'Departure from the Cape' scene.<sup>622</sup> They required that coins replace the paper money being paid to a departing Boer by an Englishman, that the weapons shown were flint guns, and that the range of tools was appropriate, as well as asking for the inclusion of a state Bible, Book of Psalms and 'v. d. Linde's statute book', which would have referred to Johannes van der Linden's 1806 *Regtsgeleerd, practicaal en koopmans handboek*.<sup>623</sup> The scene of 'The Sand River Convention' at the end of the story also required a number of changes, the committee clarifying, for example, that the agreement was signed in a tent in the field, not inside a building.<sup>624</sup> For the scene of the 'Presentation of the Bible to Uys', it was pointed out that the English settlers who brought the farewell gift had arrived on horseback and had no children with them.<sup>625</sup>

There is evidence preserved in the form of photographs in the archives of Museum Africa that Coetzer made careful use of historical items to depict details for the Voortrekker scenes in the tapestries that he designed in the 1950s, discussed above, including period costumes, for example, and it is likely that he did the same for his sketches for the frieze. He would certainly have used his existing knowledge and the many sketches he made of the landscapes of the Trek routes to draw the distinctive flat-topped mountains and 'koppies' in the background of the historical events. And he would have benefited from his own experience as a wainwright for his depictions of the ox wagons (ensuring, for example, that they had the correct number of spokes, with more in the larger rear wheels). Yet there are a number of requirements from the Historiese Komitee for modifications to the equipment of the Trek wagons, such as depicting the brakes and chains used to control them in 'Descent from the Drakensberg',<sup>626</sup> instead of the use of branches in place of the back wheels, which Coetzer had shown in his first sketch – the form which resurfaced in the frieze. While it is not mentioned in the minutes, committee members may well have supplied the artist with Voortrekker exemplars to ensure authenticity of detail, as is suggested by a communication from Scheepers

<sup>621</sup> For example, both Berman (1983, 102) and Ogilvie (1988, 136) refer to Coetzer designing the marble frieze, giving the date 1948. In his essay on Coetzer for *Our Art I*, J.J. Kruger more enigmatically says that he 'was responsible for the key of the marble frieze in the Voortrekker Monument' (1968, 98). The issue is discussed by De Beer 1969, 59.

<sup>622</sup> SVK 4.9.1937: 4a.

<sup>623</sup> Wallinga 2010, 566–574.

<sup>624</sup> SVK 4.9.1937: 4u. This scene in the frieze is a sole example where there seems to be a direct relationship to the revised drawing with a tent, rather than the reproduction of the initial drawing in an interior.

<sup>625</sup> *Ibid.*: 4b.

<sup>626</sup> *Ibid.*: 4i.



to Engelbrecht in 1937 when Coetzer returned to him the loan of a Voortrekker mould for casting bullets, possibly used for depicting one in the scenes of ‘Departure from the Cape’ and ‘Vegkop’.<sup>627</sup>

Many points of detail raised by the committee were duly corrected in the revised drawings, but more general comments seem to have been passed over. For example, it was suggested that the Boers’ clothing in the scene of the Bible presentation was too poor and that the patriarch Uys who was said to be eighty years of age should look more worthy – in 1837 he was, in reality, sixty-seven, as his dates are 1770–1838, although that was a considerable age for a trekker. This broader type of comment, more concerned with demeanour than detail, is found a number of times, with recommendations that the Voortrekkers should be shown with more propriety, the men with their jackets respectably buttoned, for example. Clearly the committee did not feel altogether comfortable with Coetzer’s representations that showed the Voortrekkers as ordinary folk. His men are drawn with sleeves rolled up for work, and clothes neat but suggesting some wear and tear as one might expect after a hard journey, and there is a patch on the canvas tent of a wagon in his drawing of ‘The Vow, Danskraal’. There is little evidence that Coetzer changed the overall tenor of his figures in the revised sketches, even though that did not accord with the political goals of the committee, which wanted the Trek to be presented in a more decorous and dignified fashion. It was a concept that would be thoroughly adhered to in the modelling of the frieze.

It is interesting to see what sources the committee recommended for the correction of details. Quite often it was a written record, such as the diary of Erasmus Smit describing how the dashing Andries Pretorius arrived in Natal arrayed with sabre and pistols, or the Zietsman diary recounting that Pretorius stood together with the Zulu king on a rock for Mpande’s coronation. Rather unexpected was the advice that a film on the Voortrekkers should be consulted, presumably *De Voortrekkers* directed by Preller in 1916, a successful silent film with bilingual text in English and Afrikaans that was seen throughout South Africa, even travelling to small rural towns (fig. 111).<sup>628</sup> No doubt Preller’s *Voortrekkermense* and his monographs on Trichardt, Retief and Pretorius would also not have been far from the minds of the committee, particularly as he was a member.

There were also suggestions to look at earlier paintings, such as Thomas Baines’ oil of *Bloukrans* in the Africana Museum, although neither the Coetzer drawing nor the final relief show much resemblance to the painting other than in a few motifs, which will be considered in *Bloukrans*. Given Coetzer’s interest in old accounts of the Voortrekkers and their history, it is likely that he would have looked at least at illustrations of them in the books he read and collected, and probably at paintings of these subjects also. In fact, there is not an abundance of pictorial records as there do not seem to have been trekkers with an artistic disposition (or the time to indulge in such pastimes),<sup>629</sup> and photography was not yet available, so the various early accounts of the treks were not usually illustrated.<sup>630</sup> But there were artists in South Africa during the nineteenth century who

<sup>627</sup> Letter of 24.11.1937 (NHKA P1/2/3/8/10).

<sup>628</sup> It is difficult to discover any links between the silent film, entitled *De Voortrekkers/Winning a continent*, and the frieze. Neil Parsons (2018, 76) remarks that the film ‘was a compromise between Preller’s vision of Afrikaner national heritage, [and] the liberal values held by [producer] Shaw ... While Preller was obsessed with authentic details of the past, Shaw played to audience taste for melodrama’. Presumably it was Shaw who promoted the idea of a romance between two young Voortrekkers, and the role of Sobuza, ‘a positive black African figure – converted by the missionaries – standing out from the mass of heathen Zulu’ (78). Authenticity is more seriously undermined by the invention of two sinister Portuguese traders as villainous collaborators with Dingane in the demise of Retief and his men. Parsons (78) points out that Preller’s use of Afrikaans rather than Dutch alongside English in ‘the inter-title captions may have been the first time that many people saw their language in print’.

<sup>629</sup> Delegorgue (*Travels* 1, 1990, 108) recounts on 23 January 1840 that Pretorius explained, when he asked the Frenchman if he would be willing to make his portrait (which Delegorgue refused to do), ‘we [Boers] have no artists among us ...’

<sup>630</sup> We cannot know what works depicting Voortrekker events from the Trek, such as those included in Muller’s important 1978 *Pictorial history of the Great Trek*, Coetzer might have known, but there do not seem to be many eyewitness images: Muller illustrates a sketch by Lieut. J.A. Harding showing Pretorius negotiating with Dingane’s



**Figure 111:**  
Advertisement  
for Preller's film  
*De Voortrekkers*.  
1916 (<http://www.villonfilms.ca/wp-content/uploads/Voortrekkers.jpg>)

recorded – or imagined – some of the Voortrekkers' exploits, such as the English Thomas Baines and Scottish Charles Bell, although there is little evidence in Coetzer's drawings that he had had access to them or studied them closely.

It is notable that all the discussions focused on content. There was no mention of how these disparate scenes would be linked into a unified continuous frieze, which Moerdyk had announced the previous year was the required form for the Monument.<sup>631</sup> To historians well versed in knowledge of the period, the narrative may have seemed self-evident. But Coetzer's autonomous treatment of the scenes was inevitably episodic, and he does not appear to have given much thought to their overall relationship. While there was some consistency in the size of the figures in Coetzer's sketches for the eight-foot-wide panels, they were nonetheless separately conceived, and those with a larger 'landscape' format generally had smaller-scale figures, deeper perspectives and different viewpoints:

all the scenes were fundamentally independent. But there was not apparently any discussion of this in the committee, or of pictorial factors in general, such as composition and narrative. This chimes with the basis of the complaint in a letter of 27.1.1943 from G. Dekker,<sup>632</sup> who, after he had viewed the small model panels, bemoaned the fact that the representations of the treks were anecdotal because controlled by historians and an architect, rather than by artists.<sup>633</sup>

Given Coetzer's acknowledged skill, the sketches are somewhat unexpected in quality, as they are rather naïve in style and somewhat clumsy in execution, although those we have identified as the second set were more fully worked than the first sketches. They have an illustrative character reminiscent of pictures designed for a children's story or a school text book, even for cartoons. Yet Coetzer had earlier returned to England to undertake further study at the Central School of Arts in Southampton in 1934 to improve his figure drawing. His landscape sketches and particularly his etchings show him to be a competent draftsman, as do his many later studies of the Monument (fig. 363), and a set of drawings of Voortrekker kappies from 'the museum in Pretoria' reveals the finest attention to detail (fig. 112).<sup>634</sup> One might therefore assume that the lack of sophistication in the sketches reflected that he was thinking of them as no more than an indicative guide for the

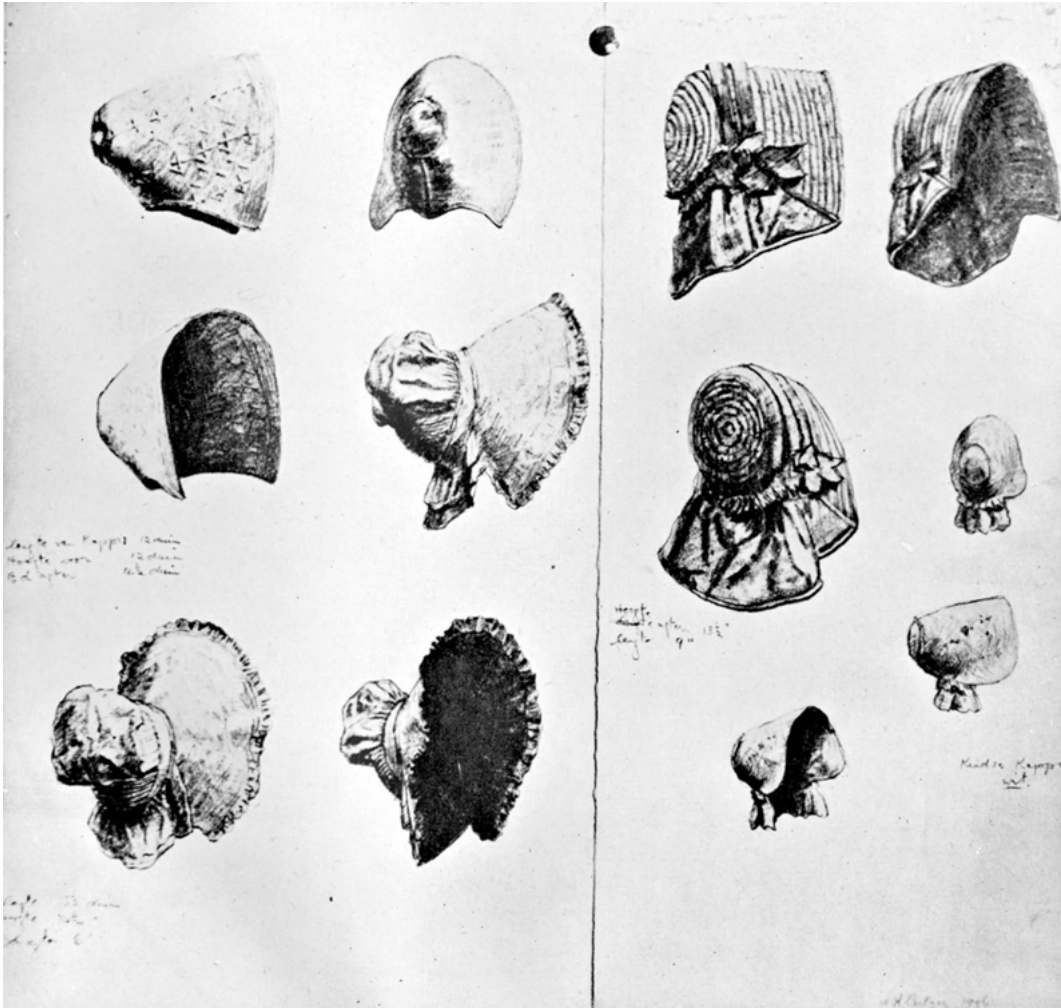
emissaries on 26.3.1939 at Port Natal (*ibid.*, 70 fig. 5), and a charmingly naïve drawing by Marthinus Oosthuizen of Bloukrans events (*ibid.*, 63 fig. 46). However, there were others who portrayed these happenings after the event. Of artist Henry Lea (1870–1941), who depicted Oosthuizen and Vegkop, Muller writes that he 'obtained much information from Voortrekker survivors themselves' (*ibid.*, 63, 65 with quote). Also of interest are paintings by Mrs Elia van Musschenbroek, whom Muller describes as obtaining 'background information from books and from an uncle, who had learned the details from a Trekker present at Blood River' (*ibid.*, 60, 62, 67 with quote). Unfortunately Muller does not detail where these works are to be found.

<sup>631</sup> SVK 5.10.1936: 11.

<sup>632</sup> This was presumably Gerrit Dekker (1897–1973), Professor of Afrikaans and Dutch at Potchefstroom University, who published extensively on South African literature and art (see *DSAB* 5, 1987, 174–176).

<sup>633</sup> ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7.

<sup>634</sup> Coetzer 1947, 26.



**Figure 112:** W.H. Coetzer. *Voortrekkerkappies*. Pre-1947. Pencil, 35.5 × 38 cm (Coetzer 1947, fig. opp. p.27; photo courtesy of Unisa Archives)

sculptors, a view which may have been encouraged by the low fee he was paid.<sup>635</sup> It is also possible that he felt limited by drawing as a medium to portray the rousing tales of the Trek. In his paintings of the Voortrekkers, colour and tone play an important part, not only to enhance the realism of a scene, but to give it atmosphere and create drama. Landscape elements could be symbolic, even if in a rather literal way: thus a rainbow could embody hope, storm clouds signify a threat, and cast shadows suggest the dangers to be faced by the Voortrekkers. But these strategies would not be possible in relief sculptures.

Coetzer engaged directly with a reduced range of pictorial possibilities when he made a set of monochrome oil paintings portraying many of the Trek scenes, such as *The Dingaan-Retief treaty* (fig. 113),<sup>636</sup> but they still deployed strong tonal contrasts to achieve their drama – an

<sup>635</sup> That may have seemed the case when the payment made to Coetzer for the set of pencil drawings was supposed to be only £100. Accounts for the SVK for the year ending September 1937 (NHKA P1/2/3/8/10) record only £50 for Coetzer, and this is the sum for ‘sketches of Retief’ dated 30.7.1937 in the consolidated list of payments up to 31.3.1950; there is, however, a further intriguing payment recorded there of £75 for modelling a bronze shield (modeleer vir brons skild) dated 24.1.1939. It seems likely though that Coetzer took on the task of the sketches for the frieze primarily because of his strong sense of commitment to the Afrikaner cause, rather than for any gain, particularly when one considers that the pencil drawings were revised and some completely re done in response to criticisms from the Historiese Komitee, apparently without any additional payment being recorded.

<sup>636</sup> Examples are in the collections of DNMCH Archives in Pretoria (it seems without records of when they entered the collection), but there is evidence of other scenes which are not held in these collections, such as *Soutpansberg* (Coetzer 1947, 73).



**Figure 113:** W.H. Coetzer. *Die Dingaan-Retief Traktaat* (The Dingane-Retief treaty). Late 1937–38? Monochrome oil on board, 27.3 × 31 cm (courtesy of DNMCH, OHG 897; photo the authors)

effect that could perhaps have been matched in bronze but hardly in marble. The status of these paintings within the history of the production of the frieze is obscure. Coetzer obviously placed value on them, as he reproduced them in *My kwas vertel* in 1947, in contrast to the omission of his sketches for the frieze. In the book he referred to the monochromes as studies for the Monument, ‘painted in bas-relief’,<sup>637</sup> and the paintings themselves are inscribed on the back ‘Skets vir Fries in Voortrekker Monument’ (sketch for frieze in Voortrekker Monument), although there is no reference in SVK minutes or other publications to them, or to their being made available to the sculptors. They are closely related to the sketches: while the compositions of some of the oil paintings are different from those of the drawings (‘Treaty’, for example), they address the same subjects, and the varied formats of the paintings correspond to those defined for the different episodes of the frieze at that stage, such as the elongated horizontal for *Departure*. Many of the details are the same, and some of them incorporate modifications suggested by the committee on 4 September 1937, which confirms that they were made after the initial sketches, and no earlier than late 1937.<sup>638</sup>

<sup>637</sup> Coetzer (1947, 29) explains: ‘This panel and a series of others of the time of the Voortrekkers are preliminary sketches intended as a guide for the sculptors who would carve the different scenes in marble for the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria’ (Hierdie paneel en ’n reeks andere uit die tydperk van die Voortrekkers, is voorlopige sketse wat bedoel was as ’n leidraad vir die beeldhouers wat die verskillende taferele in marmer vir die Voortrekker monument in Pretoria sou uitkap). This volume includes *Uittog* (ibid., 28); *Soutpansberg* (72); *Die Moord op Retief* (110); *Dirkie Uys* (130); *Terug oor die Drakensberg* (132). The oil compositions are all listed as in the collection of the artist at that time.

<sup>638</sup> For example, a farmhouse is introduced into the scene of the *Departure*; *Soutpansberg* is represented by Pfeffer and the schoolchildren, carpentry work and women harvesting mealies; and *Retief’s* murderers use knobkieries and stones, not assegais.

It might be conjectured that they were the works that Coetzer had in mind when he approached the SVK for permission to show paintings at the Monument during the celebrations in 1938; the committee did not agree, but offered to assist him to find an exhibition venue in Pretoria.<sup>639</sup>

Narrative and aesthetic value aside, Coetzer's drawings met the requirements of the SVK to tell the story of the treks through selected episodes that would represent the Afrikaner character of the Voortrekkers and their achievements, episodes which had been carefully chosen by SVK committees, and vetted by the Historiese Komitee. Minutes of that committee meeting of 13 November 1937 noted that Coetzer was to be invited to explain his response to their criticisms, and he was present to discuss his amended sketches at the Dagbestuur of 22 November (although unfortunately no details are recorded in the minutes). At the first SVK meeting of 1938, on 12 February, Moerdyk announced that 'it was time to convert the sketches to plaster models' for the frieze.<sup>640</sup> The SVK undertook to approach a number of artists, and specifically mentioned (Ivan) Mitford-Barborton, Coert Steynberg, Hendriks (possibly Willem de Sanderes Hendrikz, also named in rough notes in the Jansen file),<sup>641</sup> as well as Teitge and Bronkhorst whose names had come up previously; if any others wanted to compete they would be allowed to do so.<sup>642</sup>

We know from Teitge's letter of 1943 cited earlier that artists were offered access to sketches in 1938, presumably Coetzer's, to prepare their submissions. But his letter makes clear that there was no conclusive outcome to the invitations, or certainly not in his case, although members of the SVK visited him to see his designs. After the invitations had been sent, the committee's attention turned to the urgent matter of organising the celebrations for the centenary at the end of the year, as discussed in the previous chapter. While these matters were being debated, the pursuit of the frieze went into abeyance, a situation that was prolonged by the demands of World War II.

But plans for the sculptures were firmly in place and could be picked up as soon as circumstances allowed. And in the meantime Moerdyk had released the grand sectional drawing of the interior of the proposed Monument with the frieze in place, previously discussed as Drawing 3, that was published in the *Pretoria News* of 13.12.1938 and in the *Voortrekker Centenary Supplement of The Cape Times* 7.12.1938 (fig. 53b). Close scrutiny of the depiction of the frieze shows that the scenes correspond to those designed by Coetzer. Because of the nature of the drawing, the scenes selected for the east and west walls have been reduced, while those for the south wall in the centre have been curiously stretched to fill the space. From the five scenes finally used on the south wall only three have been chosen: *Treaty with Dingaan*, *Murder of Retief* and *Bloukrans*. The distribution of the scenes on the east and west walls does not follow the final layout exactly either, probably because of the limited foreshortened space for them in the drawing. We can identify *Vegkop* and *Inauguration* on the east wall, with *Blydevooruitsig* over the doorway in that corner, and *The Vow* with part of *Blood River* on the west wall, with the *Arrival* over the adjacent doorway. Scenes relating to Coetzer's drawings can also be seen in the friezes of Drawing 4 (fig. 54b), although the angled presentation shows only the east and south walls. It now includes *Descent* and part of *Bloukrans* on the south, scenes omitted in Drawing 3, despite apparently repeating *Bloukrans* on the long side of the sarcophagus below, which is visible in this view. These drawings corroborate that the final organisation of the frieze would only be worked out once the sculptors were involved, some four or five years later.

<sup>639</sup> Dagbestuur 13.8.1937.

<sup>640</sup> SVK 12.2.1938: 24. 'Mnr. Moerdyk wys daarop dat die tyd nou aangebreek het om die sketse in gipsmodelle te verwerk.'

<sup>641</sup> Hendrikz had been proposed by the Akademie representative M.L. du Toit in his meeting with Jansen in January 1937 (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/1). A further name handwritten on a loose sheet from the Jansen files is Florencio Cuairan, a Spanish sculptor who came to South Africa in 1938, apparently recommended by Dr Bodenstein for relief work according to the note (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/8).

<sup>642</sup> SVK 12.2.1938: 24. It was next recorded that the invitations had gone out, with the SVK undertaking to pay reasonable costs for materials and transport, but not for the artist's work as such, and Coetzer was asked to send in his corrected sketches as soon as possible (Dagbestuur 2.3.1938: 4).

The sectional drawing also indicates murals in the two visible pendentives of the dome. They were described in the centenary issue of *Koers* as representing the relationship of the Voortrekkers to the sea, to demonstrate that they wanted to preserve contact with the outer world and were not, as often presented, only concerned to get away from all civilisation.<sup>643</sup> As early as 14 February 1840, Andries Pretorius had officially declared in the Volksraad that most of Natal and its sea-coasts were considered to be the Boer society's property, as discussed in *Mpande*. The *Pretoria News* of 13.12.1938 defined the themes as the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck at the Cape of Good Hope on the right, and, on the left, Louis Trichardt's crossing of the Drakensberg Mountains to Delagoa Bay, and said they would be coloured mosaics. Moerdyk, however, had referred to them as paintings.<sup>644</sup> It is clear from all these discrepancies that final decisions about the artworks for the Monument were still to be made.

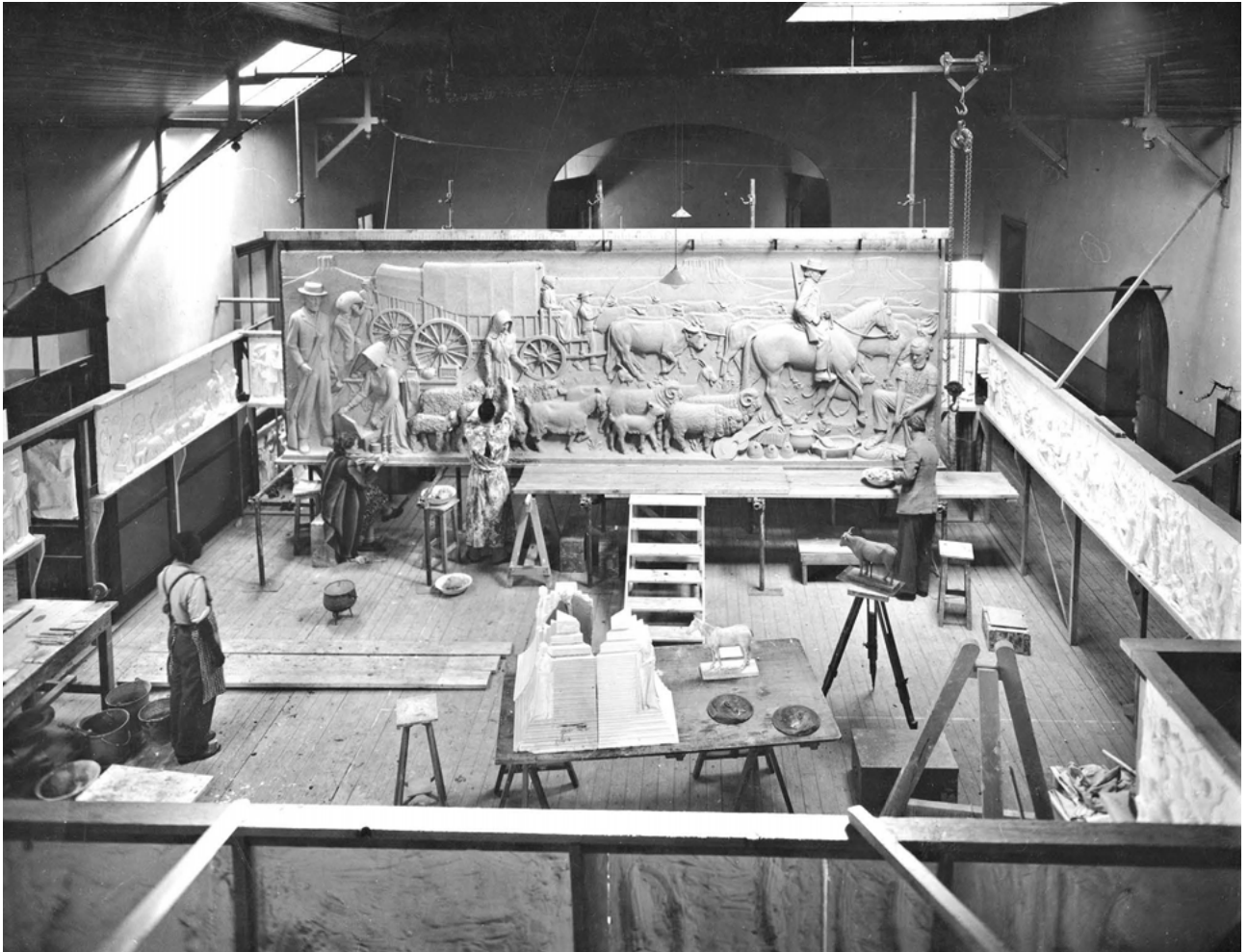
Nonetheless, even if the layout of the frieze was not yet finalised, topics for the reliefs had largely been decided and important principles established – that the scenes would avoid giving prominence to a single leader or trek, but create a unified 'Great Trek'; that the scenes would together form a continuous, probably chronological sequence, with a clear beginning and end, and some scenes treated as dramatic highlights; and that the scenes would depict Voortrekker culture and events with careful historical accuracy to underpin the authenticity of the story. With the sketches of the historical scenes in place, the stage was set for the process of making the frieze to begin.

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**643** '... wat die betrekkinge van die Voortrekkers tot die see aantoon, om uit te beeld dat die Voortrekkers kontak met die buite wêreld wou bewaar, en nie, soos hulle dikwels die verwyf gemaak is, alleen besiel was met die gedagte om van alle beskawing weg to kom nie' (*Koers* 1938, 3. UP Archives, Moerdyk files).

**644** For example, SVK 15.1.1937: 9.





**Figure 114:** Interior of Harmony Hall, Pretoria. Sculptors at work on *Departure*. 1942 (photo courtesy of HF Archives F 39.10.7 k)



## 3 Process

*The maker was central to a thing coming into being. What that thing was, and how it looked, was the result of a complex set of interactions between the desires of the customer, the time at which, and the place in which, it was made, and the individual skills and training of the maker or makers ... Giving the maker a more active, transformative role in the production of things is crucial to enhance our understanding of how and why things were made.*<sup>645</sup>

The process of creating the frieze for the Voortrekker Monument began in its earliest conceptualisation, just as its conceptualisation continued throughout the process of its making. Content cannot be disaggregated from form, and our division of the narrative of the frieze's complex creation into chapters is inevitably somewhat arbitrary. While the previous chapter concentrated on the intentions and ideas that informed the frieze and the choice of topics to meet the SVK's goals, this chapter will focus on the physical making of the frieze and its materialisation in sculptural form. But the two are intimately intertwined, and Coetzer's sketches, considered at the end of the last chapter, act as a bridge in providing the first visual manifestation of the Voortrekker story, albeit in two rather than three dimensions.

SVK reports again provide a skeleton of progress on the reliefs, although there is less detail recorded than there was for the definition of topics. Sculptor Hennie Potgieter's account of the frieze and his memories of its making, published as *Voortrekker-monument Pretoria* in 1987 from an earlier manuscript, is a useful source of information as well as amusing anecdotes. We draw on it for our account, together with the rather sparse writings about the individual sculptors and the valuable recollections of others who were present during the production of the frieze, notably Werner Kirchhoff, the son of sculptor Peter Kirchhoff, and Martso Strydom (née Terblanche), who like him was a model for some of the figures represented. Also of great importance for understanding the process of making the frieze are photographs that survive from the time, some that have been published quite widely, such as one of the sculptors at work at Harmony Hall (fig. 114), and others in private collections.<sup>646</sup>

### The sculptors

After the SVK's extensive discussion about the content of the frieze and Coetzer's sketches for it, the record of the appointment of the sculptors to carry it out seems remarkably terse. There is no discussion recorded. Moerdyk merely reported on the matter to the Dagbestuur in November 1941,<sup>647</sup> saying he had consulted with various artists.<sup>648</sup> Moerdyk explained that Coert Steynberg, by then a well-established Afrikaner sculptor, had been approached but was not interested in taking on the

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<sup>645</sup> Russell and Wootton 2017, 253.

<sup>646</sup> In this regard, photographs still owned by the Romanelli family in Florence, those in the collection of Werner Kirchhoff, and some in the UP Archives (Postma Folder 13) have been particularly valuable.

<sup>647</sup> Dagbestuur 28.11.1941: 3.

<sup>648</sup> The name of Van Wouw, raised so often previously, was not mentioned again. As it happened, he was to die on 30 July 1945, long before the frieze was completed.



**Figure 115:** The four sculptors at Harmony Hall: Peter Kirchoff, Laurika Postma, Frikkie Kruger and Hennie Potgieter in his working smock (photo courtesy of Kirchoff files)

project.<sup>649</sup> However, Peter Kirchoff and others, as yet unnamed, were prepared to assist. Moerdyk said that, if four artists were approved (the precise number suggests that he already had specific sculptors in mind), they should work together in one place, and he also mentioned using students of the local university to set up tableaux for the sculptors to work from. He surmised that, once plaster models of one-third scale had been produced, the artists would go to Italy to carry out the work under a famous master.

The four sculptors were subsequently named at the SVK meeting of the following January – Peter Kirchoff, Frikkie Kruger, Laurika Postma and Hennie Potgieter (fig. 115), the first as ‘*primus inter pares*’ with a salary of £50 per month, as opposed to £40 per month for the others.<sup>650</sup> It seems as though it had been Moerdyk who had investigated sculptors and made the choices, on what grounds is uncertain. The SVK approved Moerdyk’s recommendations and gave him the authority to appoint the four artists to begin the work, confirming at the same time that the frieze would be carried out in marble.

We do not know how many sculptors other than Steynberg might have turned down the opportunity to work at the Monument. Moerdyk claims that there were twenty-one ‘professional’ sculptors in South Africa – it would be of great interest to know which he was thinking about. Apart from those named in the 1938 SVK minutes mentioned in Chapter 2, perhaps one of them was Ernest Ullmann (1900–75), a Munich-trained German-Jewish sculptor who had emigrated to South Africa in 1936. He was to be approached late in 1941 to make the wildebeest reliefs on the walls flanking Van Wouw’s bronze in the forecourt of the Monument, at a cost of £100.<sup>651</sup> Other than those

<sup>649</sup> Gerard Haag (1989, 15) cites Steynberg’s objections that ‘the proposed panels were theatrical, and the character of the monument un-Afrikaans and Roman Catholic’ (die teatraliteit van die voorgestelde panele, en die on-Afrikaanse, Rooms-Katolieke karakter van die monument). One wonders too whether Steynberg might have harboured a sense of pique if he had heard that the subcommittee had recommended his design for the Monument, only to be overturned by the full Vormkomitee in favour of Moerdyk’s design (6.4.1936), as discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>650</sup> SVK 15/16.1.1942: 11b.

<sup>651</sup> Dagbestuur 8.12.1942: 3G. For Ullmann, see Berman 1983, 460; Ogilvie 1988, 672; Jooste 2016. A certificate of payment to him for £100 dated 21 April 1943 is in the HF Archives (old numbering) VTM vol. A2.

discussed, the identity of Moerdyk's twenty-one sculptors can only be a matter of speculation, as is the thinking that lay behind his selection of artists for the making of the Monument frieze. The names of those appointed had not been mentioned in any of the minutes recording earlier discussions about the frieze, either as artists who had approached the SVK with suggestions, or as recipients of letters from the SVK requesting input.

However, Kirchhoff was implicitly present in SVK proceedings, in that he was the unnamed assistant appointed to help Van Wouw to complete his full-scale clay model for the *Voortrekker Mother and Children* (fig. 49),<sup>652</sup> so would have been known to the committee; Kirchhoff's acceptance by the Afrikaner community is confirmed by the fact that he and his wife were invited to the centenary celebrations in 1938.<sup>653</sup> In his work on Van Wouw's sculpture, Kirchhoff had already given evidence of his skills, and his readiness to play a part in the project of memorialising the Voortrekkers. In addition, a handwritten note, probably by Jansen, on the Dagbestuur minutes of 6.9.1941 in NARSSA, recorded that Moerdyk should approach Kirchhoff as well as Steynberg about models for the corner figures at the Monument. When plans to appoint artists for the frieze were discussed at the SVK meeting of January 1942, it was reported that Kirchhoff was already busy with the figure of the unnamed Voortrekker.<sup>654</sup>

The strongly expressed opinion that a unified style was a paramount prerequisite for the frieze, and that its making would be supervised by the architect and overseen by the SVK and its Histories Komitee, may well have been unattractive to established artists, who might have deemed such constraints inhibiting on individual creativity, as Steynberg apparently did.<sup>655</sup> Moerdyk emphasised the desire for unity when he said that it was necessary to select artists with compatible styles, and this could have influenced him in his choice of the other three artists, considerably younger than Kirchhoff, who would probably not yet have developed a strong personal direction. Whether this would apply to Kruger, evidently little known although then in his thirties, is difficult to judge, but Potgieter had not long finished art school, and Postma, although of an age with Kruger, had begun her art career only relatively recently. It could be surmised that because they were not well established they were more likely to be compliant with directions from the committee or the architect.<sup>656</sup> After the work had been completed, Moerdyk felt able to write in the essay on the historical frieze in the *Official Guide* that the sculptors had been successful in adapting themselves to each other, after he had given them the (bizarre) advice to model themselves on Renaissance sculptors Donatello and Verrocchio, discussed in Chapter 4.

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**652** SVK 5.3.1937: 11. Peter Kirchhoff's son Werner remembers that it was Jansen himself who asked his father to assist Van Wouw.

**653** The invitation is in the Kirchhoff files.

**654** SVK 15.1.1942: 11. What seems to be a model for one of these figures of Voortrekker leaders can be seen on the extreme left of one of the photographs of the wooden armature for the south frieze of the Monument at Harmony Hall (fig. 178), probably around 1943 or 1944. There is an architect's certificate authorising the payment of £30 to Hendrik Potgieter dated 23 March 1943 that is inscribed 'hoekfigure' (corner figures), although there is no other record of his involvement with this aspect. There is also a note of a payment of £200 to Mitford-Barberton for 25.4.1944 annotated G[eneral] Pretorius, which may be related to this (HF Archives [old numbering] VTM vol. A2). What became of any early attempts to model these figures is unknown. Their execution was in fact delayed until after the completion of the frieze, when models were prepared by Frikkie Kruger and carved in granite in situ by Zeederberg, referred to by Potgieter (1987, 50) as a 'gifted stonecutter' who was employed by the monumental masons Sinclair.

**655** It seems likely that others too had refused, judging by comments in the letter from Dekker to Bosman referred to in Chapter 2 (27.1.1943; ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7). Dekker implies that established artists had not wanted to be part of a project that had already been defined for them by the architect and the historical committee.

**656** In the *Official Programme* for the inauguration (1949, 46–49), however, Moerdyk writes of the sculptors being 'strongly individualistic artists' although they 'successfully submerged their own personalities' for the task. Based on an interview with Hennie Potgieter (28.8.1990), Nico Coetzee proposes a different motivation, that, 'all too aware that the sculptor of the Vrouemonument was far better remembered than the architect, ... [Moerdyk] wanted to pre-empt that from happening with his Voortrekkermonument. Therefore he preferred "unknown" sculptors' (Coetzee 1995, 21).

By following those examples and constantly consulting one another, the four sculptors succeeded wonderfully well in submerging their own individuality and achieving a harmonious whole. They modelled and re-modelled with diligence, patience and a sense of dedication until the desired unity was achieved.<sup>657</sup>

There was another factor that certainly played a part in selecting the artists: their suitability for a project that lay at the heart of Afrikaner beliefs. Even more pointed than the insistence on using white builders at the Voortrekker Monument, discussed in Chapter 1, would have been an SVK intention to employ Afrikaans sculptors, such was the desire to ensure that the project had an appropriately nationalistic spirit. An early handwritten document entitled 'What will the form of the Monument be?' had said that the Monument must be designed by a South African artist or artists;<sup>658</sup> Moerdyk was more specific and stated forthrightly in the *Official Guide* that, 'The committee wished to appoint Afrikaans sculptors.'<sup>659</sup> Kirchhoff was the only one selected who did not meet that requirement. In addition to being Afrikaners, the other three sculptors represented the three main Afrikaner churches: Kruger was a member of the Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk, Postma of the Gereformeerde Kerk, and Potgieter of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk. Postma and Potgieter later told Alexander Duffey that the inclusion of a representative range of religious affinities had been taken into account in the appointments.<sup>660</sup>

Unlike his fellow sculptors, Peter Kirchhoff was neither a member of a Dutch Reformed Church nor an Afrikaner, but a professed atheist, and a German.<sup>661</sup> He had presumably shown sufficient affinity with the Afrikaner cause in the work he had already done with Van Wouw for Moerdyk to feel confident in putting his name forward.<sup>662</sup> Kirchhoff's previous work on architectural sculpture projects would also have recommended him, and made him suitably qualified to lead the relatively inexperienced group. In his case, this probably overrode other considerations, as such a large project needed someone well-versed in sculptural processes.<sup>663</sup> Yet, perhaps because he was not an Afrikaner, Moerdyk did not name him as the chief sculptor and the others as assistants, instead dubbing Kirchhoff 'primus inter pares'. It is notable that when Hugo wrote to Jansen at the beginning of 1943 to recommend that a committee of established sculptors be set up to guide the making of the frieze, he remarked that, while Kirchhoff was more experienced than the younger artists, he was not 'centred in Afrikaner life and tradition'.<sup>664</sup>

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<sup>657</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 40–41.

<sup>658</sup> '... sal ontwerp moet word deur 'n Suid-Afrikaanse kunstenaar of kunstenaars' in 'Wat gaan die vorm van die Monument wees?' (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/8). The document is undated, but clearly precedes the appointment of Moerdyk in 1936.

<sup>659</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 40.

<sup>660</sup> Duffey 2006, 38 n 40. He notes that Moerdyk had said in an interview with the *Sunday Express* of 21.4.1937 that the Monument 'would include all different kinds of religions' (alle verskillende soorte godsdienste sou insluit), although, if this was the case, Moerdyk's concept of the 'different kinds' would seem to have been prescribed in solely Afrikaner terms. Potgieter (1987, 41) mentions that the sculptors were from different Christian backgrounds in his account of the frieze, but does not specify which churches. Van der Westhuysen (1984, 6) sees this as a happy coincidence rather than a deliberate choice.

<sup>661</sup> Kirchhoff's German background might in some ways have encouraged his appointment because of Afrikaner sympathy with German national ambitions, as part of their anti-British sentiments dating back to the Anglo-Boer War. However, when asked why his father was not interned as a German alien during the war, Werner Kirchhoff cited not only the fact that he had taken South African citizenship, but that he was vocally anti-Hitler.

<sup>662</sup> Kirchhoff was apparently not even a fluent Afrikaans speaker, as Potgieter (1987, 42) mentions that he spoke German with Laurika Postma when they started their work together until he was more confident using Afrikaans. Letters by Kirchhoff from the later 1940s show him using Afrikaans comfortably.

<sup>663</sup> Van der Westhuysen (1984, 15) makes a similar point, writing in his thesis on Potgieter that Moerdyk selected Kirchhoff, despite his being German, because he had been in South Africa for ten years, had a proper training, and had experience in making large panels, and also because, apart from Van Wouw and Steynberg, there were no appropriate senior Afrikaner sculptors available.

<sup>664</sup> '... hy staan nie te midde van die Afr. lewe en tradisie nie!' (Hugo to Jansen, 19.1.1943, ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7).

Very little is published about Peter Kirchoff (1893–1978).<sup>665</sup> We have been reliant for much of our information on his son, Werner Kirchoff, born in 1931.<sup>666</sup> He is our chief source for our biographical summary, and for many details about the process of making the panels and casting them in plaster. When his father took on this major commission in 1942 he moved with his family to Harmony Hall, attended the German School in Pretoria, and Pretoria Boys High, coincidentally the school that Moerdyk had attended when it was known as Pretoria College. As a schoolboy Werner Kirchoff was witness to the making of the clay and plaster panels for the Voortrekker Monument (fig. 116). Particularly during the holidays he would often help in the studio, and clearly developed considerable skills himself, since he was also later to assist his father with the reliefs at the Anglo American building (see below).<sup>667</sup>

Peter Kirchoff was born in Magdeburg in Germany (fig. 117), but his son Werner recounts that Kirchoff spent much time in England, where his father, Werner's grandfather, had business connections in the jute trade and owned a holiday home. Kirchoff took some of his schooling there, and graduated in science at the Imperial College London in 1913. He was to return to Germany to serve as a cavalry officer on the Russian front in World War I, however.<sup>668</sup> After the war he studied at Göttingen and Berlin, and took his doctorate in physical chemistry, with a thesis on allotropic modification. His PhD was awarded in 1924 but, when there was little work in his field during the Depression years in Germany, he returned to what had been a spare-time although long-standing interest that dated back to his schooldays, modelling portraits. After his marriage to Margarete Bose, he was awarded a bursary in 1928 to undertake professional training as a sculptor at the Landeskunstschule in Hamburg. At the beginning of 1931, at the invitation of his older sister, a botanist who was studying Cape flora, Kirchoff went to Cape Town. By September 1931 he had already been elected a member of the K Club, founded in 1922 for those interested in arts and crafts, whose members included artists Ivan Mitford-Barberton, Maggie Laubser, Lippy Lipshitz, Hugo Naude and Ruth Prowse, as well as patrons Lady Phillips and Lady Michaelis.<sup>669</sup> Although his sister returned to Germany that year, Kirchoff decided to stay permanently in South Africa, where his wife, their daughter and their son, the latter born after Kirchoff had emigrated, would join him three years later in 1934.



**Figure 116:** Werner Kirchoff, son of Peter Kirchoff, at Harmony Hall, about to set out on his first day cycling to Pretoria Boys High School. 1943 (photo courtesy of Kirchoff files)

<sup>665</sup> Duffey (2008) and an entry in Ogilvie (1988, 338), where his name is misspelt 'Kirchoff', as is also often the case in the SVK records.

<sup>666</sup> He generously agreed to lengthy personal interviews in December 2013; January, February and December 2015; and further communications by telephone and email. He and his wife, Anna-Marie, also made family records available, including a typed curriculum vitae for Peter Kirchoff and other descriptions of his life, which have likewise been drawn upon for this account. An invaluable recent addition is *Peter Kirchoff: Lebenskünstler*, privately published in 2016 (referred to as Kirchoff 2016).

<sup>667</sup> As well as his knowledge about art and technique that these experiences fostered, Werner Kirchoff was influenced by his father's keen interest in astronomy, and himself specialised in astronomical surveying, working for fifteen years for the Smithsonian Institution, six of them in the USA.

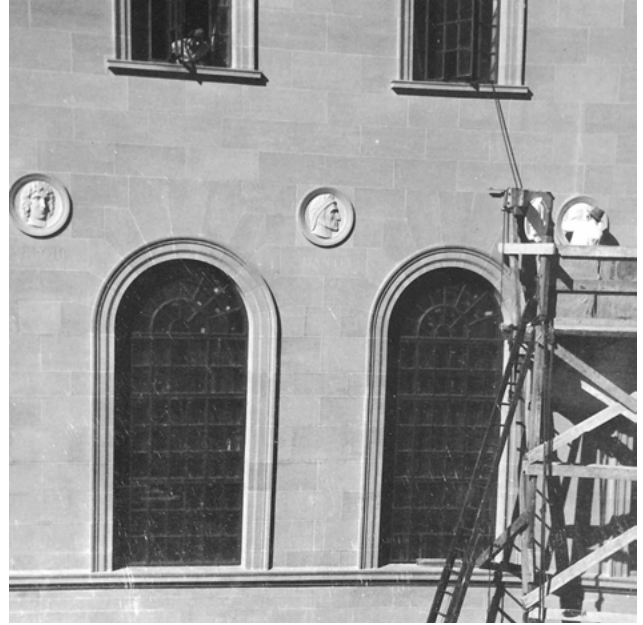
<sup>668</sup> Kirchoff's abiding interest in horses, reflected in his later interpretation of the Battle of Blood River, apparently dated from this time. Werner Kirchoff recalls that he was a dressage champion in South Africa, and a judge at the Rand Easter Show in 1961.

<sup>669</sup> Letter to Kirchoff from the Honorary Secretary of the K Club, 29.9.1931; membership list of K Club (Kirchoff files).



**Figure 117:** Peter Kirchhoff in the 1930s (photo courtesy of Kirchhoff files)

**Figure 118:** Peter Kirchhoff at work on the relief tondos at Johannesburg Library. 1934 (courtesy of Kirchhoff files; photo Anna-Maria Kirchhoff)



During 1932 he set up a studio at Martin Melk House, the old Lutheran Parsonage in Strand Street, which had reopened in 1931 after restoration by the K Club as a cultural centre and club headquarters.<sup>670</sup> Kirchhoff's confidence in his new career is suggested by the fact that he offered to create a portrait of George Bernard Shaw when the playwright and Nobel Prize winner was visiting South Africa in 1932.<sup>671</sup> Once Kirchhoff's family had arrived, they settled in Johannesburg in 1934, probably as a result of Kirchhoff's commission to carve the roundels on the side walls of the city's new Public Library, built from 1931 to 1935. While the Voortrekker Monument frieze was being made, they let their Parktown home to live in Pretoria at Harmony Hall, but returned after its completion.

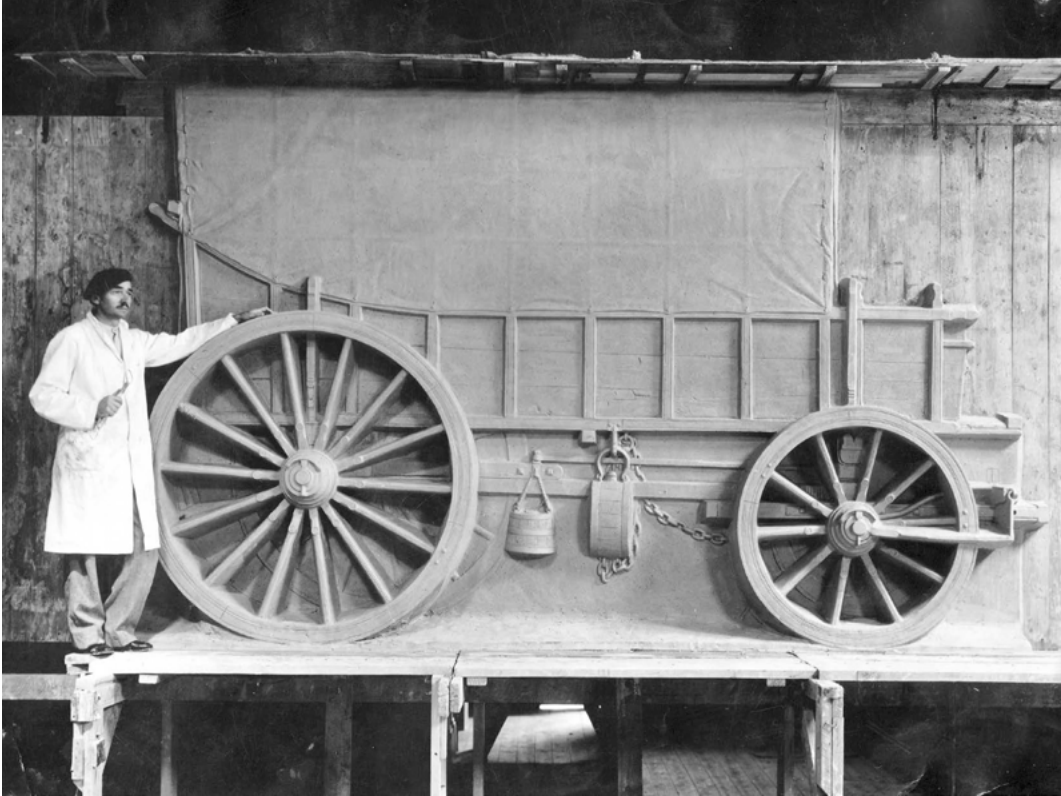
Kirchhoff was particularly active as a portraitist and as an architectural sculptor. It was the latter experience that was to be of most importance for the Monument commission, as he had developed a thorough understanding of the needs of large architectural works and the necessary processes involved. When, for example, he carried out the twelve relief roundels that alternate with arched windows on the flanking walls of the Johannesburg Library in 1934 (fig. 118), he used a pointing machine to transfer the forms of the models he had made of portrait heads of famous literary and scientific figures to the sandstone of the wall, and carved the more than twice life-size heads in situ.<sup>672</sup> In addition, he had experience in working with a team, as he supervised nine assistants to carve the designs of English artist, Donald Gilbert, for the stone sculptures of the Anglo American Corporation building at 44 Main Street, Johannesburg, in 1938. His success in this regard may be judged by his being awarded a further commission by Anglo American to carry out his own designs for a new building at 45 Main Street in the later 1940s, after the Monument panels had been completed in plaster and sent to Italy to be carved.<sup>673</sup>

<sup>670</sup> Berman 1983, 229.

<sup>671</sup> A letter from Shaw to Kirchhoff, written at the Queen's Hotel, Cape Town, on 21 January 1932, declines the offer (Kirchhoff files).

<sup>672</sup> Kirchhoff 2016, 19 The twelve portraits represented Goethe, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Dante, Virgil, Homer, Einstein, Pasteur, Darwin, Newton, Spinoza and Socrates. It had originally been intended to have the signs of the zodiac, and Werner Kirchhoff recounts that his father was upset that the original fee of 25 guineas apiece was not increased when this was changed to more demanding portrait subjects that involved considerable research on his part, and that he had to grapple with carving on a surface that was not sufficiently deep for the reliefs. For images of the library and its decoration, see [http://able.wiki.up.ac.za/index.php/Johannesburg\\_Public\\_Library](http://able.wiki.up.ac.za/index.php/Johannesburg_Public_Library)

<sup>673</sup> This commission may explain why the experienced Kirchhoff was not chosen to go to Italy, but the decision might also have related to the tensions that had built up between Kirchhoff and the younger artists, which had led to



**Figure 119:** Frikkie Kruger. The artist at Harmony Hall with full-scale model of wagon for laager around Voortrekker Monument. 1948. Clay, h. 2.7 × w. 4.6 m. (photo courtesy of HF Archives F 39.10.8 k)

There is little recorded about Frederik Johannes (Frikkie) Kruger (1907–66), the second sculptor (fig. 119).<sup>674</sup> He was next in experience to Kirchhoff, and also a family man to judge by the inclusion of portraits of his sons as the boys with Retief in *Treaty*. Kruger trained at the art school at the Witwatersrand Technical College in Johannesburg, and worked with F.W. Armstrong, who was head there from 1929–32, as well as Anton van Wouw, the latter experience possibly providing the appropriate artistic recommendation for the SVK.<sup>675</sup> There is record of his making a small mining scene, cast by Vignali, commissioned by six East Rand towns for presentation to Prince George during his visit in 1934,<sup>676</sup> which suggests that he was already quite well established in the 1930s. And, although we have not found images of them, Kruger is also said to have made Voortrekker panels for schools on the East Rand in 1938,<sup>677</sup> a similar commission to Van Wouw's for Johannesburg schools in the centenary year. Werner Kirchhoff also recalled him making multiple casts of small busts of President Kruger, which likely dated from the period when Frikkie Kruger was working with his father, as he still owns plaster casts of it (fig. 120), as well as another of M.K. Gandhi made for sale to Indians. He also made a small bronze of the Monument (fig. 349).<sup>678</sup> Kruger's standing at the time

complaints from both sides. It is also possible that it was felt preferable to have Afrikaners in charge, as part of their brief was to prevent undesirable 'un-Afrikaans elements stealing into the work' (*Official Guide* 1955, 41).

<sup>674</sup> The birth date of 1907 was supplied by Gerard de Kamper at the University of Pretoria, but it is given as 1906 in 'Geniale Beeldhouer' 1949, 15. Kruger is not included in the standard South African art reference texts by Berman and Ogilvie.

<sup>675</sup> Ibid. However, the two accounts published in *Voorslag* differ, the general article, 'Agter die skerms by die Voortrekkermonument' (5) states that Kruger trained with Armstrong then spent a further six years studying with Van Wouw, while the article devoted to Kruger reverses this, claiming that he worked with Van Wouw then spent seven years with Professor Armstrong (15). Hennie Potgieter stated in an interview that Frikkie Kruger was possibly the first sculptor who trained exclusively in South Africa (Rankin 1989, 68 n 91).

<sup>676</sup> See Du Plessis 1996, 99.

<sup>677</sup> 'Geniale Beeldhouer', 15.

<sup>678</sup> A cast was included in the exhibition *Monumentaliteit / Monumentality*, curated by Cecilia Kruger, at the Heritage Centre, Voortrekker Monument, Pretoria, 2014/15.



**Figure 120:** Frikkie Kruger. Bust of Paul Kruger. 1940s? Plaster (photo Anna-Maria Kirchhoff)



**Figure 121:** Gerard Moerdyk and Frikkie Kruger. Anglo-Boer War Memorial erected in Middelburg for the centennial, 1938 (photo Roger Fisher; [https://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/bldg\\_images.php?bldgid=13440#352088](https://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/bldg_images.php?bldgid=13440#352088))

is suggested when he was not only given coverage in the general article on the Monument in the journal *Voorslag* at the end of 1949, as were Postma and Potgieter, but also had a full-page article dedicated to him, where he is described as a painter as well as a sculptor.<sup>679</sup> Fisher and Clarke record him as the sculptor for Moerdyk's Anglo-Boer War Memorial in Middelburg, where carvings of vertical ranks of rifles are depicted at both sides of the monument's hewn granite stonework (fig. 121).<sup>680</sup> The polished memorial plaque with an image of an ox wagon tells us that it was dedicated at the time of the symbolic trek in 1938, which meant that Moerdyk had already worked with Kruger some years before proposing him as one of the sculptors for the Voortrekker Monument frieze.

In the case of Laurika Postma (1903–87),<sup>681</sup> her family background would have made her an appealing appointment to a committee seeking sound Afrikaner credentials (fig. 122). She was one of ten children of the Rev. Willem Postma (1874–1920), a pastor in the Gereformeerde church.<sup>682</sup> He was also a well-known writer under the name of Dr O'Kulis, who had long been active in the promotion of the young Afrikaans language, and resisted the imposition of English-medium teaching, founding one of the first schools for Afrikaans Christian National education in Bloemfontein.<sup>683</sup> He had encouraged his daughter's art making as a child, but his death in 1920 meant that Postma had to leave school and work, as did her older sister, to support her ailing mother and her siblings. She retained her interest in art, however, and attended classes with J.W.D. Muff-Ford and read avidly to educate herself while a typist at Grey College in Bloemfontein (later the University of the Orange Free State; today University of the Free State). Saving up enough for some art studies, she took a year's unpaid leave to go to

<sup>679</sup> 'Geniale Beeldhouer', 15. Peter Kirchhoff is incorrectly referred to as dr. Hirschhoff here, and not mentioned at all in the general article on the sculptors in the same issue, 'Agter die skerm by die Voortrekkermonument', 4–5.

<sup>680</sup> Fisher and Clarke 2010, 154. They also record that Moerdyk and his wife wore Voortrekker attire when giving talks at Middelburg at the time. It is noteworthy that, although this was a monument to the Anglo-Boer War, it was firmly associated with the Trek and the centenary of Blood River. For photographs and inscriptions, see [www.eggsa.org/library/main.php?g2\\_itemId=2358895](http://www.eggsa.org/library/main.php?g2_itemId=2358895)

<sup>681</sup> Postma is the most extensively covered of the frieze sculptors in South African art literature. See in particular Duffey 1993 and Pillman 1984; also Ogilvie 1988, 529. Hennie Potgieter wrote some articles about her at the time they were working together, such as 'Ons kunstenaars Laurika Postma', *Die Taalgenoot*, January 1948; Pillman also lists 'n Waardering', *Die Huisgenoot* 21.5.1946.

<sup>682</sup> *DSAB* 2, 1972, 554–556.

<sup>683</sup> Postma's status is suggested by the fact that after his death his portrait appeared on the cover of *Die Huisgenoot* January 1921, and a 'lewenskets' (life sketch) was devoted to him (20–21), a type of entry that had previously been devoted to Voortrekker heroes, such as Retief, Trichardt, Pretorius and Cilliers.





**Figure 122:** Laurika Postma in her studio in Bloemfontein. c. 1940 (courtesy of UP Archives, Postma Files)

Berlin in 1935, already in her thirties. There her tutor, the artist Milly Steger, encouraged her to become a sculptor, and Postma, determined to pursue an art career, made artworks to raise more funds once back in South Africa so that she could continue her training in Germany. Steger's influence and Postma's further studies at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Munich in 1938 are discussed in Chapter 4.

Postma's work abroad was cut short by the outbreak of World War II, when she had to abandon a sculpture of a young Voortrekker girl she was making there for her first sizeable commission for the Oranje Girls School in Bloemfontein (fig. 123).<sup>684</sup> She remodelled the 1.56 metre figure, entitled *Vooruit* (Forward), once she had returned to South Africa. Installed at the school in a specially designed garden of indigenous plants on 19 October 1940,<sup>685</sup> it had been cast at the Vignali foundry in Pretoria, where Van Wouw's *Voortrekker mother and children* (fig. 49) had been produced the year before.<sup>686</sup> Postma also made portraits of presidents Steyn and Reitz in 1940. So there were a number of ways that she could have come to the attention of Moerdyk and others in the SVK group. It is noteworthy that J.J. Kruger wrote a substantial article about her dated 1940, in which he admirably emphasised her Afrikaner qualities:

Laurika Postma grew up in a home that honoured real Afrikaans morals, traditions and religion; in her first work as an artist she showed a deep reverence and love for figures that symbolised the noblest in Afrikaner life. We can await her further development and mature achievement in this direction with confidence.<sup>687</sup>

<sup>684</sup> Duffey (1993, 51–52) recounts that the abandoned model was double life-size, also reported in *Die Volksblad* 27.7.1939, which would have made it an interesting parallel to Van Wouw's *Voortrekker mother and children*. However, a nude figure photographed in Pillman (1984, 35), captioned as the unfinished Voortrekker girl that had to be left in Munich, seems about life-size.

<sup>685</sup> Our thanks to Jeanine Kuntzman of Meisieskool Oranje for information about the work. See also [www.oranjemeisies.co.za/pre/geskiedenis.php](http://www.oranjemeisies.co.za/pre/geskiedenis.php)

<sup>686</sup> It seems likely that she had earlier contact with the Vignali foundry. Pillman (1984, 27) describes Postma making plaster works which were painted bronze, but mentions that her portrait of President Josias Hoffmann, made before she returned to Germany, was cast in Pretoria; although the name is not recorded, Vignali's was the only bronze foundry in Pretoria at the time.

<sup>687</sup> '... Laurika Postma [het] in 'n huis opgegroeï waar die egte Afrikaanse sedes, tradisies en godsdiens in ere gehou is; in haar eerste werk as kunstenaar het sy 'n diepe eerbied en liefde getoon vir figure wat die edelste in the



**Figure 123:** Laurika Postma. *Vooruit*. 1940. Bronze, h. 1.56 m. Christelike en Nasionale Meisieskool Oranje, Bloemfontein (photo Gerhardus Bosch)

Afrikanerlewe simboliseer. Ons gaan haar verder ontwikkeling en ryper prestasie in hierdie rigting met vertroue afwag ...' (p.55, unidentified; photocopy: UP Archives, Postma Folder 9).

**688** '... 'n kunstenaar van die volk vir die volk' (Van der Westhuysen 1984, iv; see also ii). Apart from this thesis, the most important source for Potgieter is his own writing on the Voortrekker Monument (Potgieter 1987). There is an entry for him in Ogilvie 1988, 530.

**689** Van der Westhuysen 1984, 6.

**690** Marais 1947, 21. The article also refers to a less flattering review of an exhibition of Potgieter's sculpture at the art room of *Die Transvaler* in 1945, opened by Moerdyk, who was 'honoured' by a 'dough-like' (deegagtige) portrait on the show.

**691** Van der Westhuysen 1984, 11.

**692** *Ibid.*, 9–10. Potgieter apparently advertised the 20 cm high busts in various newspapers, but received not a single order. He also made a relief of an ox wagon for a distributor who marketed 10 000 of them, although the sculptor was only paid £1.17.6d for the design.

**693** *Ibid.*, 13.

**694** Potgieter 1987, 40. He does not mention that it was carried out by a professional stone carver (Van der Westhuysen 1984, 13), as were the wildebeest reliefs by Ullmann. Builder Danie de Jager recalled that the buffalo head was carved by Barney Botha and finished by a carver called Bond, who also produced the wildebeest panels (De Jager CD transcript). There is a certificate authorising payment of £50 to A.C. Bond for 'klipkappery' (stone cutting) dated 21 April 1943, as well as further payments to him in detailed invoices of 29.6.1943, 31.8.1944 and 16.11.1944, although these records are incomplete (HF Archives [old numbering] VTM vol. A2).

The youngest sculptor of the group, Hendrik Christoffel (Hennie) Potgieter (1916–92) would also have met the requirement for an Afrikaner sculptor (fig. 124); he is called 'an artist of the people, for the people' by Pieter van der Westhuysen, who was in contact with Potgieter when researching his 1984 MA thesis on him at the University of Pretoria. He suggests that the sculptor was overlooked by critics and art historians because his art had a stronger national than individual quality.<sup>688</sup> One could argue that, if this was indeed its overriding characteristic, it was probably developed during the years that he worked on the Voortrekker Monument frieze, as this was Potgieter's first major commission and occupied him almost continuously from 1942 to 1950. He had been a sickly child who grew up in a poor farming family, and only completed Standard 8 schooling before he received a bursary in 1936 to study art at the Witwatersrand Technical College, Johannesburg, where Kruger had also trained.<sup>689</sup> His work attracted some favourable comment at the South African Academy in 1939 and 1940,<sup>690</sup> and he received his first assignment in 1940, two panels for Lichtenburg High School where he had been a pupil, during his final year at the Technical College.<sup>691</sup> He may have come to the attention of the SVK because he made small portrait busts of Paul Kruger at the time of the 1938 centenary, in an unsuccessful effort to raise funds to study abroad.<sup>692</sup> Van der Westhuysen writes that the sculptor met Moerdyk in 1941 and soon received his first commission for the Voortrekker Monument from him;<sup>693</sup> this was the buffalo head over the doorway of the Monument that Potgieter made the year before he was invited to work on the frieze (fig. 125).<sup>694</sup>

Clearly, the sculptural team was not drawn from the most established South African artists. While Moerdyk may have seen this as an advantage, allowing him to control the process more easily, not everyone was in agreement, although it seems that no

objections were recorded until some progress had been made. After members of the Akademie had viewed the small plaster maquettes at the beginning of 1943, there was a flurry of concern, and suggestions were made about bringing in more senior artists to advise the sculptors. T.J. Hugo, who had served on the Vormkomitee, wrote at length to Jansen to stress that historians were not qualified to make aesthetic judgements and ensure that the frieze was a unified composition.<sup>695</sup> Although Moerdyk had assured him that he was himself taking care of this, Hugo felt that the frieze must inevitably be perceived by the architect as secondary to his overall design – despite the fact that the frieze was a prime element of it.<sup>696</sup> Hugo urged that an art advisory committee be set up right away while it was still possible to intervene and modify the maquettes without difficult and costly consequences, adding (grudgingly) that a few of the panels had met with general approval and would not need to be changed. It seems that this advice was never taken, however, and Moerdyk continued to be the main advisor for the four sculptors. His control of the studio extended even to paying the artists. The earliest architect's certificate authorising payment of costs related to the frieze, including the sculptors' salaries, was made out to him personally, even though he was also the signatory.<sup>697</sup> And their salaries continued to be drawn monthly as a lump sum by him, together with other items required for the studio.

The letters of appointment had gone out to the sculptors in March 1942, according to Hennie Potgieter, who recorded that he received a letter dated 13.3.1942, inviting him to begin work on either 16 March or 1 April.<sup>698</sup> The tone of the letter implies that there had been a prior agreement,



**Figure 124:** Hennie Potgieter. Early 1950s (photo courtesy of HF Archives F19.1.4 k)

<sup>695</sup> Hugo to Jansen 19.1.1943. Similar suggestions were made by Dekker to Bosman on 27.1.1943 (both ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7).

<sup>696</sup> This view is encouraged by the factual errors that Moerdyk makes in his descriptions of the panels of the frieze, which suggests a somewhat off hand attitude. For example, in the *Official Programme* for the inauguration, he describes Dirkie Uys 'spurring on his horse to go to the assistance of his father', Andries Pretorius arriving with his wife, and Boers who, at the coronation of Mpande, 'joyfully fire shots into the air' – all obviously incorrect (1949, 55, 56, 57). Such careless errors were not even fully corrected in the *Official Guide*, where the Boers are still 'firing salutes from their guns' (1955, 52).

<sup>697</sup> According to the Audit of 15.6.1943, p.5, £200 was paid into Moerdyk's account every month to cover the sculptors' salaries and related costs (ARCA PV125 2/2/1/1/3). Amongst the (incomplete) set of certificates for 1942 to 1945 relating to the frieze in the HF Archives (old numbering) VTM vol. A2, there are none made out for the sculptors individually. Some are accompanied by letters to SVK treasurer Lombard that usefully detail the expenses (occasionally signed by the sculptor's daughter Irma). The recurring amount for salaries of £199.10.8d (later rounded to 0d) is puzzling, as they were set at £50 for Kirchhoff and £40 for the three other sculptors, but this probably takes account of an increase in their salaries and also cost-of-living allowances, as Potgieter (1987, 43) speaks of £45 a month plus £3.10.0d for living expenses. Ploeger's salary of £41 is itemised separately, as is a payment to photographer Alan Yates of £11.17.0 (5.8.1944). There are a few other recipients, not to our knowledge associated with the frieze, such as a number of payments to works overseer C. Seymen and stone mason A.C. Bond, and two to sculptors Ullmann and Mitford-Barberton (25.4.1944). The sums claimed also included amounts for models, clay, steel reinforcing, incidentals, and cash payments. The last certificate in the Archives of 22.5.1944 records that overall payments had reached £11 296.0.0.

<sup>698</sup> Potgieter 1987, 40. Potgieter opted for the second date, in order to complete some commitments he had, but the other three sculptors started earlier. Pillman (1984, 44) mistakenly writes that the SVK appointed the four sculptors in October 1940. However, as discussed above, Moerdyk had had earlier contact with Kirchhoff, Kruger and Potgieter, and it seems very likely that there was at least informal contact with the sculptors earlier than 1942, since Moerdyk was able to name the four to the SVK on 15.1.1942.



**Figure 125:** Hennie Potgieter. Buffalo over entrance to Voortrekker Monument. 1941. Granite (photo the authors)

and earlier mention of the appointments in the press confirms this. There was apparently some intention to keep the project confidential at that stage, however, and the sculptors were warned not to speak to journalists; the reason given was that funding might be withdrawn as money was needed for the war effort, although Potgieter stated that Prime Minister Smuts was supportive.<sup>699</sup> There was very little coverage of the frieze in the press initially. We have come across a brief mention of the appointment of the four sculptors in *Die Vaderland* on 3.3.1942, which reproduced Moerdyk's sectional Drawing 3 (fig. 53) to give some idea of what the frieze would look like inside the Hall of Heroes when completed. The same newspaper had a photograph of Postma on 7.3.1942, the caption reporting that she and three other sculptors had been appointed.<sup>700</sup> There was evidently less of a fanfare about the selection of the sculptors than there had been about the appointment of the architect, which had received wide coverage in the press at the time.

## Harmony Hall

The site for the making of the frieze was a studio where they all worked together as Moerdyk had planned. He even supplied the venue at 137 President Street, Pretoria – the Harmoniesaal (hereafter Harmony Hall), today the Breytenbach Theatre of the Faculty of Arts, Tshwane University of Technology, in the street that was later renamed after the architect.<sup>701</sup> He owned the building and was paid rent for it during the period it was used for work for the Monument from 1942, with the lease of £15 per month only terminated on 30 April 1950.<sup>702</sup>

<sup>699</sup> Potgieter 1987, 43. Under Smuts, South Africa had declared war on Germany in September 1939. However, Parliamentary support was slim, so conscription was not an option and the army had to rely on volunteers; hence there would have been no question of the sculptors becoming targets for conscription. Ongoing anti-British sentiments meant that there were many who did not volunteer.

<sup>700</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, Teitge claimed in January 1943 to have learned about the appointments through an article in *Die Brandwag*; we have not been able to locate this article.

<sup>701</sup> Now 137 Moerdyk Street. According to old photographs on site and the still extant dedication inscription, it was built as the Deutsche Turn Halle by the Deutscher Turn Verein, and inaugurated on 6 June 1903.

<sup>702</sup> Dagbestuur 13.6.1942: 6; and Dagbestuur 24.4.1950: 9.



**Figure 126:** Deutsche Turn Halle (German Gymnastic Club). c. 1910. Later Harmony Hall (Harmoniesaal), 137 Gerard Moerdyk Street, Pretoria (photo courtesy of Tshwane University of Technology, Faculty of Arts, Pretoria)

It had previously been a German sports hall, and the main area where the work took place was the former 'Deutsche Turn Halle' (fig. 126). It had a veranda down one side and an expansive yard, large enough for the Kirchhoffs to have a run for fifty chickens. All areas were used for the project. The main hall, measuring roughly 12 × 20 metres, with specially installed roof lighting, housed the supporting large wooden backboards and pulleys required for the making of the full-scale clay reliefs, with the small maquettes set up around the walls for ready reference.<sup>703</sup> It provided ample space for the four sculptors to work together (fig. 114), and for visits of models, friends and more official visitors, such as Moerdyk and members of the SVK. The veranda was used for making the initial small clay maquettes and their plaster casts (fig. 127), and then for storing the full-size ones when they had been completed and cast in plaster sections, until the building of the Monument was far enough advanced for their temporary installation there. The yard provided space for making sketches and photographs of models in different poses, some of the latter kept in the Kirchhoff files, although different models might be used for the full-scale relief when portraits were incorporated (figs 128, 129). The yard also accommodated the livestock that was borrowed from time to time to make models for the frieze.<sup>704</sup> Also available was a rest room for the younger sculptors (who resided elsewhere), and living quarters at the back of the building at its western end, which were assigned to Kirchhoff and his family (with bedrooms for the children at the front);<sup>705</sup> they lived on site for the duration of the project until later 1946. Thereafter, while the models for the ox wagons for the laager encircling the Monument and the Voortrekker figures for the four corners of the building were being made by Frikkie Kruger, he lived and worked there too.

<sup>703</sup> There are traces of the markings of a badminton court, part of the hall's previous use, in photographs of the workshop, pointed out by Werner Kirchhoff, which suggests that the hall was about 12 × 20 metres. We confirmed the estimated accuracy of these measurements on a visit in February 2015 to the Breytenbach Theatre, whose inner auditorium follows the basic layout of the 'Deutsche Turn Halle'. We gratefully acknowledge the help of Masegegeya Tjale and Wandile Mgcodo from Tshwane University of Technology, Faculty of Arts, for support on the visit.

<sup>704</sup> Potgieter (1987, 44–45) recounts a number of entertaining anecdotes about the sculptors working with live animals.

<sup>705</sup> According to notes in the Audit of 15.6.1943, p.5, Kirchhoff's occupation saved the cost of a nightwatchman. He also paid the electricity account (ARCA PV125 2/2/1/1/3).



**Figure 127:** Laurika Postma. *Arrival*. 1942–43. Plaster maquette on an easel in Harmony Hall (photo courtesy of Kirchhoff files)

Harmony Hall was to be the centre of the all-important process of shaping the frieze that would be the narrative heart of the Monument.<sup>706</sup> We do not know when and for what purpose Moerdyk had acquired this structure. However, we are tempted to speculate that he might have bought the hall in anticipation of the massive sculptural work needed to design the marble frieze and the opportunity the premises would provide him for controlling the entire process of production. Our assumption was recently endorsed by Moerdyk's grandson, Gerard Vermeulen, who also suggested that the building might have been acquired especially for the sculptural project, since it was a venue close to Moerdyk's home and office, allowing him to monitor daily progress.<sup>707</sup>

Until the full-scale plaster casts were installed at the Monument, shifting the focus, Harmony Hall was the place where all the interested parties would come to view, discuss and offer advice on the reliefs. For the sculptors, a dedicated studio was no doubt a privilege, and the shared workspace and on-site residence for the Kirchhoffs reflected their complete involvement, and the

<sup>706</sup> A rare cross-cultural study about the importance of artists' workshops is the 1993 volume edited by Peter M. Lukehart.

<sup>707</sup> In our email correspondence (18.6.2014) he further reported that his mother, Irma Vermeulen, had no clear recollection of the acquisition of Harmony Hall, and it is not mentioned in her book on the architect (Vermeulen 1999).



**Figure 128:** Models posing for *Women spur men on* in the yard at Harmony Hall. 1942? (photo courtesy of Kirchoff files)



**Figure 129:** *Women spur men on*. 1943–45. Clay. Full-scale relief (courtesy of UP Archives; photo Alan Yates)

dedication expected of them. But it also meant that they were under constant scrutiny and control over a lengthy period of time. Although the project spread over almost five years from early 1942 to late 1946, this does not seem a disproportionate length of time in relation to the extraordinary scale of the task; yet Potgieter remembered that they were always being pressed to work faster.<sup>708</sup> Van der Westhuysen reports in his thesis on Potgieter that, despite some of the frustrations of working on a joint project of this kind, it provided a valuable lesson for their art and their characters.<sup>709</sup> Potgieter, when writing about Laurika Postma in *Die Taalgenoot* of January 1948, expanded on a similar point, which is repeated by Pillman in her monograph on Postma.<sup>710</sup> In Potgieter's words:

The time was an enormous learning process for all four sculptors; a period when discipline was essential, where direct criticism had to be borne, or more, valued. It was a learning process to make life-size figures, to undertake large-scale work in plaster and to work according to set hours, in opposition to the very idealistic idea of 'work when you become inspired'.<sup>711</sup>

One wonders whether any of the artists fully realised what an all-consuming commitment this was to be, and how long it would endure, when they first agreed to take on the commission.

It was challenging to work constantly in proximity with other artists and to learn to collaborate in the very close way that was expected of them, especially when they did not even know each other at the outset. Although by all accounts they worked well together initially, tensions were felt as work progressed, and there appears to have been a rift between the younger artists and Kirchhoff, who apparently had rather different interpretations of the amount of responsibility implied by his higher salary and honorary title of 'primus inter pares'.<sup>712</sup> Hennie Potgieter generally avoided airing grievances in his 1987 account, saying diplomatically that they 'could and did constantly give each other advice and criticism, which required enormous adjustment'.<sup>713</sup> And that, when there were disagreements about the demands made by the sculptor who had designed a particular scene and was in charge of its execution on a large scale, the sparks might fly, but tension was invariably relieved by humour.<sup>714</sup> Some of the surviving records speak more candidly of what such 'adjustment' and 'disagreements' involved, such as a set of undated handwritten documents in the ARCA Jansen archive. One unsigned complaint recorded unreasonable demands to rework panels that were nearly complete, and an overall lack of respect, as when Kirchhoff did not even greet the complainant in public, spoke to him disparagingly about Potgieter's work, and claimed that the complainant understood nothing about the casting process – even though he had undertaken such work for Van Wouw (a point which identifies the writer as Frikkie Kruger).<sup>715</sup> While Laurika Postma also wrote of Kirchhoff's lack of respect for his colleagues, she expanded on the situation, and explained how, because of the importance of the task and because they did not want a scandal in the press, the younger members of the group had attempted to keep to the initial agreement among the four sculptors that they would settle any arguments amongst themselves and not run

<sup>708</sup> Potgieter 1987, 43.

<sup>709</sup> Van der Westhuysen 1984, 20.

<sup>710</sup> Pillman 1984, 45.

<sup>711</sup> 'Hierdie tydperk was 'n geweldige leerskool vir al vier beeldhouers; 'n tydperk waar dissiplinering nodig was, waar reguit kritiek verdra, of nog meer, waardeer moes word. Dit was 'n leerskool om lewensgroot figure te maak, groot gipsietwerk gedoen en volgens gereelde ure gewerk moes word, in teenstelling met die so veridealiseerde gedagte van "werk as jy geïnspireerd raak" (Potgieter 1948).

<sup>712</sup> Potgieter (1987, 41) observed that Kirchhoff did not fully understand the idea of senior among equals, but wanted at first to take the position of commanding officer, which unfortunately led to many disputes: 'Kirchhoff het dit egter nie goed begryp nie en wou aanvanklik die houding van bevelvoerder inneem – wat ongelukkig tot baie geskille gelei het.'

<sup>713</sup> 'ons kon en het mekaar voortdurend van raad en kritiek bedien, wat ontsaglike aanpassing geverg' (ibid.).

<sup>714</sup> Ibid., 44. Potgieter relishes telling of some of these light-hearted moments (44–45).

<sup>715</sup> Unsigned and undated handwritten document (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/8).



to Moerdyk with complaints. But her statement reveals that Harmony Hall did not always live up to its name:

Therefore we endured the almost impossible, but that was not appreciated by one colleague as he has shown through his actions and statements that he does not share the same sentiments about things. The circumstances were sometimes so unbearable that we often considered resigning.<sup>716</sup>

But if she felt that they were ‘contemptuously put down’ (minagtend afgejak) by Kirchhoff, he felt that the others colluded against him, with Postma the ringleader, a complicity she strongly denied. Kirchhoff’s sense that there was a conspiracy against him was also referred to by the carpenter, Hendrik Ploeger, in his account, where he records that Kirchhoff accused him of having come under the influence of the three other sculptors.<sup>717</sup> Similar accusations can also be deduced from notes in the Jansen archive that seem to record a verbal interview between Jansen and Kirchhoff on 4.11.1946, soon after the sculptors’ contracts had ended. This includes such remarks as ‘Jealousy and resentment of my really knowing better’, ‘Intrigue, stirring up bad feeling’, and ‘End of job most unpleasant experience in his life’, giving us a glimpse of Kirchhoff’s unhappy reactions.<sup>718</sup>

At least on one occasion Moerdyk had to step in, as it is on record that, when the relationship between the four artists became very tense, he assigned one panel, *Saailaer* (sowing camp or laager), to Kirchhoff to work on alone.<sup>719</sup> Even this had a rather unfortunate outcome. Kirchhoff was required to make certain changes at the end, chiefly to comply with the intended accuracy of historical details,<sup>720</sup> and apparently had his contract extended for a month to undertake them. But the matter was not resolved to Moerdyk’s satisfaction.<sup>721</sup> Once Kirchhoff had left, one of the others was brought in to carry out Moerdyk’s requirements, with rather acrimonious results, and solicitors involved.<sup>722</sup> In the end, it was in many respects an extraordinary achievement that the sculptors were able to complete what Moerdyk could call a ‘harmonious whole’.<sup>723</sup>

Occasional intriguing glimpses like these of the human interaction behind the making of the frieze allow us to guess at something of the human dynamics involved, but in general we are dependent on the formal written records, Werner Kirchhoff’s accounts, and the works themselves to reconstruct how the frieze developed. The processes behind its making had of course been initiated much earlier in the discussions around suitable topics and the sketches commissioned from Coetzer, discussed in the previous chapter. When artists were appointed in 1942 to begin the task of shaping the frieze in sculptural form, they were given reproductions of the Coetzer sketches to work from, in order to make the small clay maquettes that were to be the first stage of production. As discussed in Chapter 2, despite the trouble that had been taken by the Historiese Komitee to review Coetzer’s drawings and call for changes, it seems as though the revised original drawings were

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**716** ‘Daarom het ons verdra wat byna onmoontlik was, maar wat nie waardeer is deur een kollega nie aangesien hy deur sy optrede en uitlatings getoon het dat hy nie dieselfde sentiment omtrent dinge het nie. Die toestand was soms so onhoudbaar dat ons dikwels oorweeg het om to bedank’ (Handwritten document signed by L. Postma; ARCA PV94 1/75/1/8). That the unpleasantness engendered by these personality clashes was acute is underlined by a polite letter from Postma to Jansen, dated 16.10.1946, declining ‘under the circumstances’ an SVK invitation regarding a farewell function for the four sculptors (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7).

**717** Handwritten document in Dutch, signed by H. Ploeger (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/8). Ploeger’s role is discussed below.

**718** ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7.

**719** ‘Toe die houding tussen die vier kunstenaars baie gespanne geword het, het hy [Moerdyk] dr. Kirchoff [sic] opgedra om alleen aan die panel “Saaiplaas” te werk’ (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7).

**720** The same document states that Mrs K. Roodt-Coetzee had informed Kirchhoff about changes needed to meet historical accuracy, but had been ignored.

**721** Ibid. Evidently the changes chiefly involved replacing the plaits in the hairstyle of the kneeling woman and the portrait of the woman sower on the far left. Werner Kirchhoff recalls that the hairstyle was that of the model, one of the Pirow family, who had particularly requested that her coronet of plaits be represented.

**722** See *Saailaer*. As will be discussed later, Kirchhoff considered that his intellectual property had been violated, and took the matter to his solicitor, resulting in endless interchanges (see documents in ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7).

**723** *Official Guide* 1955, 41.

never made available to them. While some of the discussion might have been passed on to them verbally, it is unlikely that they had the minutes of the Historiese Komitee of 4.9.1937 that explained the required changes, as they are not comprehensively implemented. Although the sculptors sometimes depicted forms similar to the suggested revisions, they were chiefly dependent on the reproductions of Coetzer's unchanged first sketches.

The use of one-third scale in clay for the maquettes had been cited since 1938, the very first time models for the frieze were called for.<sup>724</sup> However, consideration of how the small maquettes that were proposed would be transformed into a full-scale frieze was not recorded, even as late as November 1941, when Moerdyk finally reported to the Dagbestuur on his progress in finding sculptors.<sup>725</sup> It was implicit on this occasion, however, that it was intended that they would be enlarged for the full-scale frieze in Italy,<sup>726</sup> as Moerdyk stated that once the small panels were completed the sculptors would go to Italy to work under the guidance of a 'one or other great master'. But Moerdyk and the Dagbestuur must soon have realised that conditions in Italy, when the country was at war, meant that this plan was not viable: in order not to delay progress indefinitely, the enlarging of the frieze would need to be undertaken in clay and plaster by the same sculptors in Pretoria.<sup>727</sup>

Although there is no record in SVK documents of exactly when this decision was made, the rental of the ample spaces of Harmony Hall, offered by Moerdyk as a studio-workshop for the sculptors, suggests that the need to enlarge the sculptures in South Africa had been realised at least from the outset of their contracts early in 1942. But it cannot be discounted that the suitability of the venue for such large-scale work might have been fortuitous. Likewise, Peter Kirchhoff moving his whole family to Pretoria suggests that he expected the production to be protracted, but his reasons cannot be verified. The change of plan regarding the enlargement of the reliefs is explicitly referred to only later, and in relation to quite different issues. For example, in September 1943 Moerdyk brought up the matter in his explanation of the increased cost of the sculptures to the Dagbestuur. He reported that, because of the war, when undertaking the making of the frieze in Italy was no longer possible, the enlargement to full scale could not be carried out with inexpensive Italian labour. Instead, the higher cost of South African sculptors making the frieze full scale in clay and plaster had to be met, and thereafter the cost of translation into marble in Italy.<sup>728</sup> The need for enlargement in South Africa was also cited in a document dated 8.10.1947, which discussed the responsibilities of the sculptors in relation to a complaint laid by Kirchhoff.<sup>729</sup> The 1987 account of the making of the frieze by Hennie Potgieter, which speaks from a sculptor's perspective, seems to take for granted the process of progressing from sketches to one-third-size maquettes, to full-scale clay, and finally to plaster casts in South Africa, which suggests that this had been the expected scenario for the sculptors from the start. In any event, the process of designing an ultimately 92-metre-long and 2.3-metre-high narrative from small maquettes so different in scale is unlikely to have been successful without the constant involvement of the four South African sculptors, and close communication with the man who could be called their chief client, namely Moerdyk.

As regards the allocation of the scenes, Potgieter recounted that when he arrived at the workshop, a little after the other three because he had chosen a later starting date, 1 April, the other

<sup>724</sup> SVK 12.2.1938: 24a.

<sup>725</sup> Dagbestuur 28.11.1941: 3.

<sup>726</sup> It was never spelled out explicitly whether it was intended that the small plaster maquettes would be enlarged directly to marble with the use of a pointing machine in Italy, or whether they would first be enlarged in clay there, as they were to be in South Africa.

<sup>727</sup> The question of cutting out Italy altogether never seems to have been considered, presumably because of the need for marble of a quality that was not available in South Africa. Those involved seem to have proceeded with the production of the full-scale frieze in plaster in the belief that, by the time it was ready, Italy would once again be accessible to them.

<sup>728</sup> Dagbestuur 30.9.1943: 6.

<sup>729</sup> This document (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7), annotated by the SVK secretary M.C. Botha with the date 8.10.1947, probably provided a supplementary record of the discussion at a non-quoted meeting of the executive the previous day, where only Jansen, Moerdyk and Botha were present (Dagbestuur 7.10.1947).

sculptors had already made their choices, and he had to take on the scenes that were left.<sup>730</sup> There would have been a few different allocations initially – such as Coetzer’s ‘Allegory’ which was later omitted – but the final distribution of the complete quota of panels is set out below. While we have devised short titles for our text for convenience, the full titles are given in fig. 130, where they are arranged in the sequence in which they appear in the Hall of Heroes.

Peter Kirchoff had selected the scenes *Departure* (1), *Blood River* (21), *Church of the Vow* (22), *Saailaer* (23) and *Convention* (27). Five is rather fewer than the others, possibly because he was the one in charge of setting up the workshop and equipment, but also, perhaps, because three of these were of larger format. And, as we shall see, there was also another that he was probably responsible for, which was later abandoned.

Frikkie Kruger undertook seven scenes: *Negotiation* (8), *Descent* (11), *Treaty* (12), *Murder of Retief* (13), *Teresa Viglione* (15), *Mpande* (24) and *Return* (26).

Laurika Postma was responsible for eight, more than any of the others, although most of them were of smaller format: *Debora Retief* (10), *Bloukrans* (14), *Dirkie Uys* (16), *Marthinus Oosthuizen* (17), *Women spur men on* (18), *Pretorius* (19), *The Vow* (20) and *Death of Dingane* (25).

Like Kruger, Potgieter undertook seven scenes: *Presentation* (2), *Soutpansberg* (3), *Delagoa Bay* (4), *Vegkop* (5), *Inauguration* (6), *Kapain* (7) and *Blydevooruitsig* (9). By chance all the panels by Potgieter were on the east side and, other than Kruger’s *Negotiation* (8), he tackled the long east wall on his own, which he considered a fortuitous advantage.

It will be realised at a glance that this inventory does not correspond exactly to Jansen’s list submitted to the government in 1937 (fig. 92), which set out the topics for Coetzer’s drawings. So while Coetzer must be credited with the first visual conceptualisation of many of the topics, and with many of the details that found their way into the final frieze, it is clear that the sculptures for the frieze were in many respects new inventions. And, apart from the fact that many of the compositions were to be drastically modified, as will be discussed in more detail when the scenes are analysed individually in Part II, some of them did not number amongst Coetzer’s drawings at all – Kirchoff’s *Saailaer*, Kruger’s *Teresa Viglione*, Postma’s *Debora Retief*, *Marthinus Oosthuizen* and *Death of Dingane*, and Potgieter’s *Kapain*. However, although the inventory of topics represented in the maquettes was not the same as the twenty-four selected for Jansen’s list, apart from *Kapain*, *Debora Retief* and *Teresa Viglione*, they had all been noted as possibilities at some point during the discussions of the 1930s. So some topics may well have been put forward by people aware of the earlier suggestions and discussions of the SVK when more scenes were needed. Committee members of the SVK would no doubt have contributed to the process, and indeed this was stipulated at the lengthy SVK meeting in early 1942, which noted in particular that the Historiese Komitee was to remain constantly in touch with the artists.<sup>731</sup> While it was also recorded that it would be left to the discretion of the chairman, Jansen, and the architect, Moerdyk, to decide when the SVK should be brought together again to view progress, it was specified that this must be early enough for changes to be easily made.<sup>732</sup> However, as was the case in all the SVK discussions, the focus was almost certainly on the choice of topics and authentic detail, while style and composition were left, almost by default, to the sculptors.

It is irresistible to try to imagine how this complex project would have been presented to the sculptors when they began work at Harmony Hall, although we can only guess at the details. Potgieter’s account describes how, when he first arrived, he was shown Coetzer’s drawings pasted on

<sup>730</sup> Potgieter 1987, 41. His statement begs the question of whether the scenes additional to those drawn by Coetzer had been thought of at this stage. It seems likely not, as he was the one who suggested *Kapain*. Ultimately each of the men had one new topic to design, with no Coetzer drawing to guide them, while Postma had three (see below).

<sup>731</sup> SVK 15/16.1.1942: 12.

<sup>732</sup> *Ibid.*: 12v.

## Titles of scenes

- 1 *Departure* (Peter Kirchoff, hereafter PK)  
*Departure from the Cape* (1835–37)
- 2 *Presentation* (Hennie Potgieter, hereafter HP)  
*Presentation of the Bible to Jacobus Uys* (April 1837)
- 3 *Soutpansberg* (HP)  
*Trichardt at Soutpansberg* (summer 1836 to autumn 1837)
- 4 *Delagoa Bay* (HP)  
*Trichardt at Delagoa Bay* (April 1838)
- 5 *Vegkop* (HP)  
*Battle of Vegkop* (October 1836)
- 6 *Inauguration* (HP)  
*Inauguration of Retief as Governor* (6 and 11 June 1837)
- 7 *Kapain* (HP) – no Coetzer drawing  
*Battle of Kapain* (28–30 November 1837)
- 8 *Negotiation* (Frikkie Kruger, hereafter FK)  
*Negotiation with Moroka* (October/November 1836)
- 9 *Blydevooruitsig* (HP)  
*Report from Retief at Blydevooruitsig* (11 November 1837)
- 10 *Debora Retief* (Laurika Postma, hereafter LP) – no Coetzer drawing  
*Debora Retief records her father's birthday* (12 November 1837)
- 11 *Descent* (FK)  
*Descent from the Drakensberg into Natal* (late 1837)
- 12 *Treaty* (FK)  
*The Treaty with Dingane* (4 or 6 February 1838)
- 13 *Murder of Retief* (FK)  
*Murder of Retief and his men* (6 February 1838)
- 14 *Bloukrans* (LP)  
*Massacre of women and children in the Bloukrans area* (17 February 1838)
- 15 *Teresa Viglione* (FK) – no Coetzer drawing  
*Teresa Viglione warns the camps in the Bloukrans area* (17 February 1838)
- 16 *Dirkie Uys* (LP)  
*Dirkie Uys defends his father* (11 April 1838)
- 17 *Marthinus Oosthuizen* (LP) – no Coetzer drawing  
*Marthinus Oosthuizen gallops through Zulus lines* (17 February 1838)
- 18 *Women spur men on* (LP)  
*Women spur men on* (after 17 February 1838)
- 19 *Pretorius* (LP)  
*Arrival of Andries Pretorius* (22 November 1838)
- 20 *The Vow* (LP)  
*The Vow* (9 December 1838)
- 21 *Blood River* (PK)  
*Battle of Blood River* (16 December 1838)
- 22 *Church of the Vow* (PK)  
*Building the Church of the Vow* (1840–43)
- 23 *Saailaer* (PK) – no Coetzer drawing  
*Women at Saailaer* (1838?)
- 24 *Mpande* (FK)  
*Mpande proclaimed King of the Zulu* (10 February 1840)
- 25 *Death of Dingane* (LP) – no Coetzer drawing  
*Death of Dingane* (February 1840)
- 26 *Return* (FK)  
*Return from Natal over the Drakensberg* (after 1843)
- 27 *Convention* (PK)  
*Sand River Convention* (17 January 1852)

**Figure 130:** Short and full titles of the scenes for the frieze, with initials of the artists who designed them

cardboard,<sup>733</sup> probably the reproductions of his first sketches, as discussed in Chapter 2, which may have been accompanied by Jansen's list of twenty-four topics. As regards other documentation, we have argued in the previous chapter that how much they were shown or told of the revisions that the *Historiese Komitee* had required of Coetzer is hard to fathom, but it does not seem to have been systematic. For the actual arrangement of the scenes, they may have been shown a copy of Moerdyk's diagram that was used to map out the architectural layout of the frieze in late 1936 or early 1937, also discussed in Chapter 2 (fig. 90), but it seems unlikely initially, as the sculptors were apparently not fully aware of the layout when they made their choice of panels.<sup>734</sup> Some updated version of the layout must soon have been discussed, however. How to adapt twenty-four scenes to the thirty-one panels in Moerdyk's architectural scheme had to be worked out, although this was modified as work progressed – both in terms of topics and their position in the frieze – with twenty-seven scenes finally. The changes would in part be driven by the need to extend the frieze across the corner walls above the doorways, as shown in Moerdyk's sectional Drawings 3 and 4 (figs 53, 54), which immediately necessitated the invention of extra scenes.

Perhaps other lists were made available to the sculptors to suggest further topics to meet this requirement, or perhaps ideas were conveyed verbally by Moerdyk or Jansen, especially as a need for even more changes emerged. For, as the sculptors gave attention to how the scenes should be presented on the walls, and in what sequence, additional modifications were mooted and further topics required. It is even possible that written material was made available, such as standard histories and Preller's records of the memories of *Voortrekermense*, or sought out by the artists themselves.<sup>735</sup> They might also have consulted texts related to the Voortrekker Monument itself, such as Jansen's own article, 'The Voortrekker Centenary', published in the *Official Yearbook* No. 20 of 1939. His short history of the Trek and of the early stages of the Monument's development and the centenary celebrations would have provided a convenient framework for their task.

There would also have been ongoing input from committee members. Although Moerdyk puts it on record on a number of occasions that the *Historiese Komitee* had not yet given assistance,<sup>736</sup> as early as June 1942 he had arranged to take the *Dagbestuur* to see progress on the panels,<sup>737</sup> and it is possible that individual committee members visited informally. According to Hennie Potgieter in an interview with Nico Coetzee (28.9.1990), the *Historiese Komitee* 'did visit the sculptors "once or twice" ... to look at the panels, but ... did not make any useful input'. There is good reason for Coetzee's claim that 'Moerdijk was the ostensible interlocutor between this "committee of experts" ... and the sculptors'.<sup>738</sup> We know from various accounts that Moerdyk dropped in to see the sculptors on a regular basis, not only to pay their salaries, but also to offer direction and advice,<sup>739</sup> and it was he who oversaw required changes, as will be discussed later. Individual committee members might well have visited: Postma's biography recounts how Voortrekker clothing experts Kotie Roodt-Coetzee and Gertruida (Trudie) Anna Kestell, new appointments to the *Historiese Komitee* in 1942, as discussed in Chapter 2, came frequently to the studio, the latter 'holding inspections' to see

**733** Potgieter 1987, 41. Werner Kirchoff also remembers the sketches on a board in the studio.

**734** See Potgieter (*ibid.*), who writes, 'The leftovers were mine, little knowing that, according to a chronological order, mine would all come on one wall. Where their panels consequently followed each other accidentally, mine were continuous ...' (*Die oorskiet was myne, min wetende dat, volgens chronologiese volgorde, myne almal op een muur sou kom. Waar hulle panele mekaar gevolglik onwillekeurig opvolg, is myne aaneenlopend ...*)

**735** We know from his own account that Potgieter discovered the story of Kapain in a book on the leader Hendrik Potgieter (1987, 42). See details below. But this was probably fortuitous and the consultation of historical texts was more the domain of SVK committees selecting topics than the artists.

**736** *Dagbestuur* 21.5.1943: 5ii and 30.9.1943: 3.

**737** *Dagbestuur* 13.6.1942: 3.

**738** Coetzee 1995, 20.

**739** Potgieter writes that 'Moerdyk ... frequently looked in to see progress and to discuss the work with us' (Moerdyk ... het dikwels ingeloer om die vordering te sien en die werk met ons te bespreek) (1987, 41); Van der Westhuysen adds that on his almost daily visits Moerdyk succeeded in never giving the impression that he was checking up on the sculptors, information he must have gleaned directly from Potgieter (1984, 20).

that everything was developing according to Afrikaner traditions.<sup>740</sup> Discussions of this kind would have taken the form of verbal interchanges with the artists at Harmony Hall, rather than being part of the more formal debates of committee meetings, which would explain why there is no substantive record of how or when they took place.

Nonetheless it needs to be acknowledged that, as the initial conceptualisation of the frieze was developed exponentially in 1942, the sculptors were of prime importance in the visualisation of ideas to give them sculptural form, even if major decisions were made in consultation with SVK representatives. Overall there seems to have been remarkably little contribution from the committee on the form the frieze should take in terms of style and composition: it was as though, having made decisions five years previously on a sequence of twenty-four topics, their work was done. At that stage, when they were first deciding on the content of the frieze, and when they were critiquing Coetzer's preliminary drawings, there was virtually no consideration of how these ideas would be represented visually. And once work on the reliefs began, there appears to have been very little guidance for the sculptors, although it could be that there are no records of advice as the frieze progressed because it took place outside formal, minuted meetings. Once the sculptors were appointed, it seems they were largely left to get on with it, with responsibility for the outcome vested in the architect. From now on the process of making the frieze was no longer dominated by the patrons, but by the daily decisions and actual work of the sculptors.

Hennie Potgieter explained in his 1987 account that Coetzer's pictorial designs were not suited to relief sculpture, which, for example, deployed different ways of representing space. Yet the actual topics of the sketches were almost identical to those used by the sculptors, and in this aspect at least the small models followed the drawings fairly closely. Potgieter fully acknowledged that the sculptors drew on Coetzer for details based on his admirable understanding of Afrikaner history, but recorded that they had to make their own working drawings:

... we four sculptors then decided to make use of only the **knowledge** of Coetzer, as certainly the greatest specialist of Africana, and **not** of his compositions. If he had a certain Voortrekker implement in his drawings, we could know that such an implement was definitely used in the time of the Voortrekkers. ...

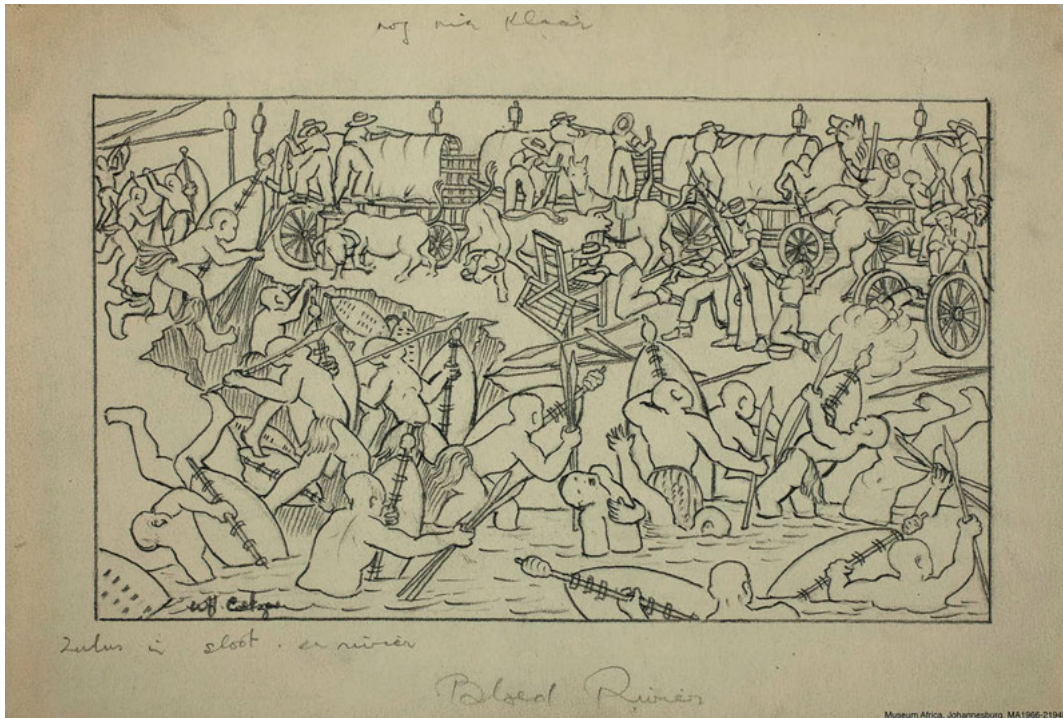
Our work method was that, after we had made our drawings, each of us modelled his panels at one-third size in clay and cast it in plaster.<sup>741</sup>

Potgieter emphasised their initial hesitancy and experimental nature in a later interview: the first drawings were carried out 'searching and groping' (soekend en tastend), and only then discussed in the group.<sup>742</sup> Unfortunately, none of their drawings seems to have survived. To judge by the clay models that followed, the new drawings must have vigorously rethought compositions and in some cases, such as Kirchhoff's interpretation of *Blood River*, completely reinvented the way that scenes had been represented by Coetzer (figs 131, 132). They would also have had to change the format of compositions to match the final layout of the frieze, since a number of Coetzer's scenes stretched across more than one panel, sometimes even crossing from one wall to another, as in Moerdyk's first proposed layout (fig. 90), a solution that would be rejected for the actual frieze. Coetzer had also not supplied sketches for the panels of the frieze over the corner doors. While the size and position of scenes were altered and new scenes developed in response to what was required for

<sup>740</sup> 'Dan het sy inspeksie gehou om toe te sien dat alles volgens volkstradisie verloop' (Pillman 1984, 44–45).

<sup>741</sup> '... ons vier beeldhouers het toe besluit om slegs van Coetzer se **kennis**, as seker die grootste kenner van Africana, gebruik te maak en **nie** van sy ontwerpe nie. As hy op sy tekeninge 'n sekere Voortrekker-implement gehad het, kon ons weet dat só 'n implement wel in die Voortrekkers se tyd in gebruik was. / Ons werkmetode was om nadat ons ons tekeninge gemaak het, elkeen sy panele op 'n eenderde-groote in klei te boetseer en in gips te giet' (Potgieter 1987, 41).

<sup>742</sup> 'Werk aan die fries in Voortrekkermonument' (Work on the frieze of the Voortrekker Monument), *Dagbreek en Sondagnuus*, undated newspaper clipping, UP Archives, Postma Folder 7.



**Figure 131:** W.H. Coetzer. 'Bloed Rivier'. After September 1937. Pencil, 13.3 × 23 cm, image size. Revised first sketch (photo courtesy of Museum Africa, no. 66/2194R)



**Figure 132:** Peter Kirchoff. *Blood River*. 1942–43. Plaster, 79 × 147 cm. Damaged maquette (courtesy of VTM Museum VTM 2184/1-28; photo Russell Scott)

the new layout, the allegorical final panel by Coetzer, which Hennie Potgieter felt was 'not at all sculptural',<sup>743</sup> was omitted altogether (fig. 108).

A rare record of a change being negotiated is provided in Hennie Potgieter's account of his proposal to include a new topic, the battle of Kapain (fig. 133), in which the Trek leader Hendrik Potgieter had defeated Mzilikazi's Ndebele forces in late 1837. The sculptor had read about this little known event in a recent book about the leader by 'Skaap' Theunissen and Carel Potgieter, Hendrik Potgieter's grandson, who had gifted it to the artist<sup>744</sup> – not entirely selflessly.

<sup>743</sup> '... hoegenaamd nie beeldhoukundig sou wees nie' (Potgieter 1987, 43).

<sup>744</sup> Potgieter and Theunissen 1938 (see Potgieter 1987, 42).



**Figure 133:** Hennie Potgieter. *Kapain*. 1942–43. Plaster, 77 × 152.7 cm. Maquette (courtesy of VTM Museum VTM 2184/1-28; photo Russell Scott)

Carel Potgieter would also become Hennie Potgieter's model for his Trek-leader grandfather, who is portrayed as the closest horseman in the new scene of *Kapain*, as well as the flanking Boer in *Vegkop*. Quite different from the Voortrekker's favoured military tactic of using a defensive laager as at the Vegkop clash, the running battle of 1837 at Kapain ended, according to the extravagant figures given by Potgieter and Theunissen, in the complete rout of Mzilikazi over nine days and the death of some 3 000 of his followers. The Boer commando with its deadly firepower, which numbered only around 330, suffered no losses.<sup>745</sup> This stirring account claimed that the victory meant that the Boers were the 'legal owners' (wettige eienaars) of the chief's lands, and marked the beginning of the history of the Transvaal.<sup>746</sup> It obviously caught the sculptor's imagination, particularly the (questionable) fact that the black forces at Kapain were mounted on oxen, and he proposed it as a fitting subject for the frieze. Potgieter's earlier victory over the Ndebele at Mosega had been included in the 'Voorstelle' list of topics, but that would have lacked the exotic use of fighting cattle.

There were probably many factors contributing to Hennie Potgieter's proposal. Design considerations would have been important to the artists, and another battle piece would act as a balancing counterpart to *Vegkop* in the composition of the east frieze, particularly apposite if there had already been a decision to centre *Inauguration* on that wall. It also balanced out the narrative, since *Vegkop* had been the Ndebele's first defeat at Hendrik Potgieter's hands and *Kapain* was the last. One might surmise too that the sculptor was drawn to an additional scene that focused on his historical namesake Potgieter (even though he stressed in his writing that his own family was not related to that of the Trek leader),<sup>747</sup> especially as Potgieter might have seemed rather under-represented in the frieze compared to three panels for Retief and four for Pretorius. On the other hand, Potgieter is given some preferential treatment in that he is shown as the heroic leader in both *Vegkop* and *Kapain*, at the cost of any role that Sarel Cilliers may have had in the first battle, as discussed in *Vegkop*, and Piet Uys as co-leader in the second. The paired battle pieces stress that Hendrik Potgieter had been a very successful military leader, a riposte perhaps to his rival

<sup>745</sup> Ibid., 93. In fact, the Boers had killed up to four hundred Ndebele, and the battle ran from 28 to 30 November; the history is fully discussed in *Kapain*.

<sup>746</sup> Potgieter and Theunissen 1938, 79–94, particularly 90–92.

<sup>747</sup> Potgieter 1987, 42.



Pretorius' triumph at Blood River directly opposite. The pair also (ironically) frames *Inauguration*, which shows Retief sworn in as commander-general, replacing Potgieter who was passed over for office on that occasion, yet went on to achieve major victories such as *Kapain*. But the sculptor could not simply introduce such a major change on his own, as is described in his publication on the frieze:

Included in the panels that I was required to do, among others, was an auction scene where the Voortrekkers sold their possessions, as well as a symbolic panel with wagon-wheels, rising sun with sunrays, a powder horn and other things that certainly do not lend themselves to sculptural depiction [fig. 108]. I then approached Mr Moerdyk for permission to use the combined space of the two panels to make a representation of the battle of Kapain. Permission was granted, but I was required to show him a drawing of the panels for the whole wall, which I did.<sup>748</sup> This consequently makes 'The Battle of Kapain' the only panel where the sculptor selected his historical incident from the history books.<sup>749</sup>

It is clear that the sculptors were not free to simply change the scenes they were portraying at will, although it is surprising that Moerdyk's agreement was apparently all that was required to make modifications. After all the discussion about topics and historical correctness, one might have expected consultation with the committee, and perhaps this was done informally, but it is clear from the SVK minutes that the architect – and the sculptors – were given more and more responsibility for conceptualising the frieze as the years passed. And one can safely assume that the same held good for how the frieze was to be conceived overall, which was in some respects more of an architectural issue.

The most obvious new demand as regards the general layout was posed by the architect's decision to make the frieze continuous, extending over the doorways, which necessitated not only additional panels but a rethinking of the sequence. One could argue that this fundamental change of layout was at the heart of the ultimately rather irregular layout of the panels of the frieze: although centrepieces were retained on each wall, the symmetry and regularity in the size of the panels that Moerdyk had initially proposed in his layout design (fig. 90) was not maintained in the final frieze. We have already suggested that the corner panels were probably the basis of the 8-foot measurement that Moerdyk proposed as a standard panel size, which at roughly 2.4 m was just slightly wider than the 2.3 m height of the frieze. For the one-third-size maquettes, which were made to a standard height whatever the width, this translated into about 32 inches or 81 cm wide, while the large central panels were one-and-a-half times the standard size, measuring 12 feet or about 3.65 m, and thus 1.33 m for the maquettes. This seems to have provided a rough guideline for the sculptors but was not followed precisely. The central panel maquettes measure just over 1.2 m, with the single-panel ones in the region of 76 to 77 cm, while those on the corner walls are a little larger, varying between 83 and 89 cm. Where scenes traversed two panels, there was further inconsistency: *Descent* was 1.65 m, *Bloukrans* was 1.56 m, and *Saailaer*, a late addition to this group, was 1.42 m. *Departure*, which was allocated three panels, had two maquettes of 1.24 and 1.25 m. That many of the panels are a little smaller than the expected measurement suggests that at this early stage there might have been some thought of a slight break between the scenes when they were assembled. When considering Moerdyk's announcement in 1936 that the Monument required a

<sup>748</sup> Moerdyk's request 'to show him a drawing of the panels for the *whole wall*' (our italics) is evidence that Moerdyk was concerned with the overall composition, and may indicate that he could imagine *Vegkop* and *Kapain* as possible candidates to frame *Inauguration* in the centre.

<sup>749</sup> 'Onder die panele wat ek moes maak, was daar, onder andere, 'n vendusietoneel waar die Voortrekkers hul besittings verkoop, asook 'n simboliese paneel met wawiele, opkomende son met sonstrale, kruithoring en dies meer, wat hoegenaamd nie beeldhoudkundig sou wees nie. Ek vra toe mnr Moerdyk se toestemming om die gesamentlike ruimte van die twee panele te gebruik om die Slag van Kapain uit te beeld. Dit is my gegun, maar ek moes 'n tekening van die panele vir die hele muur aan hom voorlê, wat ek ook gedoen het. Dit maak dus die paneel "Die Slag van Kapain" die enigste paneel waar die beeldhouer sy historiese insident uit die geskiedenisboeke gekies het' (Potgieter 1987, 43).

continuous frieze,<sup>750</sup> it is natural to picture it in its final form. But, although his sectional drawings of the Monument do suggest that form (figs 53, 54), he did not in fact spell out what the relationship of the different scenes would be, and his layout diagram (fig. 88) suggested discretely defined elements of a fixed width that would be arranged in strict symmetry. In fact the scenes abutted tightly or even overlapped in their full-scale form with no clear breaks, and there was evidently no attempt to standardise the widths at this stage.

As the scenes had no clear frames and their measurements were transferred directly to the large panels, described later in the chapter, something of the inconsistency was maintained. Even more significant in upsetting the neat symmetry of Moerdyk's scheme was the decision to shift *Vegkop* away from its central position, replaced by *Inauguration*, and to introduce *Kapain* on the other side, with a maquette that was about 10 cm wider than *Vegkop*. It is an indication of the fluidity of the process that in the full-scale clay this difference was reversed, and *Vegkop* was 4.94 m wide as against *Kapain's* 4.32 m. It would be tedious to make a comparison of all the measurements for the scenes (and they are detailed in the individual discussions), but it is clear to even the casual view that, apart from the corner panels, the final scenes vary in size. While the difficulty of upscaling the small maquettes to such large reliefs should not be underestimated, it nonetheless seems that the sculptors and those who advised them lost sight of, or deliberately avoided, any architectural goal of symmetrical balance in the frieze, perhaps preferring a freer arrangement.

The design logic of Moerdyk's layout had already been challenged to some degree when topics were assigned to his diagram (fig. 90), with some scenes traversing more than one panel and two scenes straddling adjacent walls. However, the sculptors probably quickly saw that the lengthy format of *Departure*, as drawn by Coetzer to match Moerdyk's initial configuration, which required it to extend around the corner, would be an awkward solution that prevented compositional coherence. The full extent of *Departure* was instead consolidated on the north wall to the right of the entrance doorway, with one part of Coetzer's composition consigned to a separate panel initially, as will be discussed below. *Return* too was kept on the north wall, on the other side of the door, although it could not be as expansive as *Departure*, since space had to be left to accommodate *Convention* as the final scene (see foldout at the end of the book). Kirchhoff commented on 27.8.1946, in the critique that the SVK required from the artists as their work drew to an end, that it would have been a better solution aesthetically to balance the two scenes of journeying by presenting them symmetrically.

The last two scenes of the frieze, the return from Natal, and Sand River, would have been more impressive if the *Convention* could have been [on the wall] after the corner, and the whole wall available for the return. As things now stand, the masses of the left hand side of the relief do not harmonise with those on the right hand side.<sup>751</sup>

His idea that the *Convention* could have been placed on the adjacent short wall of the north-west corner would of course have disrupted the chronological order, but that happened elsewhere in the frieze anyway.<sup>752</sup> One could also argue that the spectacle of *Return* and the static sobriety of *Convention* complement each other, visually and thematically. More significantly, however, Kirchhoff's idea was not viable because it would have prevented the narrative of the frieze ending with a scene that was an appropriate conclusion to the Voortrekker story. *Convention* in its own way also provided the perfect foil to the important opening scene of *Departure* on the other side of the entrance, the two framing the whole Trek chronicle in a comprehensible way. For the signing of the Sand River

750 SVK 5.10.1936: 11.

751 'Die twee laaste tonele van die Fries, die terugtog uit Natal, en Zandrivier, sou meer indrukwekkend kon weergegee gewees het as die Konvensie na die hoek vers uif [sic] kon gewees het, en die hele muur vir die terugtog beskikbaar gewees het. Soos sake nou staan harmoniseer die massas aan die linker-kant van die Relief nie met dié aan die regterkant nie' (Letter from Peter Kirchhoff to the SVK, Kirchhoff files).

752 There are a number of examples, which will be discussed, although it was Moerdyk's opinion that 'the chronological order of events was not unduly disturbed' (*Official Guide* 1955, 40).

Convention of 1852 marked Britain's acknowledgement of the independence of the Boer republic north of the Vaal River, an independence which had been the chief driver of the treks from the outset. It thus fulfilled the premier goal of the Voortrekkers and their reason for leaving the Cape, and provided a triumphant finale to the narrative. Moreover, as the founding moment of the first independent Afrikaner state, it matched the cherished aim of the Afrikaner National Party to transform South Africa into a republic – a goal finally achieved in 1961. The scene representing the Voortrekkers' return from Natal, on the other hand, was in actual fact a retreat, signalling that the Voortrekkers had been unable to uphold the first Boer Republic of Natalia (1839–43) when the British declared it part of the Colony, and as such was not an appropriately positive topic to close the narrative. This example of weighing up different criteria for subjects of the frieze offers some idea of the conflicting issues that had to be taken into account: in this case, history and ideology trumped aesthetics.

Although it would occupy the full extent of the north wall on the east side of the door, as we have seen, *Departure* had originally been conceived as even larger, occupying four units of the thirty-one defined in Moerdyk's early layout design (fig. 90), the longest composition in the frieze. Cutting it back led to the loss of many of the details that Coetzer had developed in compliance with the idea that this scene would incorporate numerous artefacts of Boer life, which had been further added to and modified by the Historiese Komitee. Losses included the left-hand group with an Englishman making a purchase from a departing trekker, and an auction taking place beyond it. This was initially thought of as a suitable subject on its own for the additional panel needed on the north-east corner, since *Departure* would no longer extend at right angles on to the shorter wall, for there is a small clay maquette depicting the topic that was never used for the frieze (fig. 134). And it is just visible in this position in a photograph of Harmony Hall where one can see a section of the frame holding the plaster maquettes for the north wall, set up for reference during the making of the full-scale clay panels (fig. 114).<sup>753</sup>

This maquette draws on Coetzer's first sketch of 'Departure from the Cape' which depicted the auctioneer and clients (fig. 135), not the revised second version of the drawing (fig. 103). It confirms yet again, as we argued in Chapter 2, that the sculptors used the earlier reproduced set of drawings, and so, for example, still had the Englishman paying the departing trekker with paper money, not the coins the Historiese Komitee had recommended. The auction group was rearranged to fit into the format of the almost square panel that would have been needed for the short corner wall. Included on the far left is a woman with a baby on her back, also only to be found in the earlier Coetzer drawing. She is presumably a black servant and a reference, as were the cultivated fields in the background and the sales that were taking place, to the comfortable circumstances of the Boers in the Cape, which they were prepared to give up to seek freedom on the treks (although in fact many servants travelled with them). Clearly this small maquette was what Potgieter referred to as the 'vendusie' (auction) scene, which was abandoned to make way for *Kapain*.<sup>754</sup>

If the 'Vendusie' panel (fig. 134) was positioned on the short wall in the north-east corner next to *Departure*, then the next scene *Presentation* would have been placed over the doorway on the south-west corner, which would have required a composition to accommodate the intruding doorframe. This implication might well have been another factor in deciding that 'Vendusie' should be abandoned, so that *Presentation*, which was a well-recorded episode related to the Voortrekkers' departure from the Colony, and had significant meaning for the concept of their Christian piety, could then be developed in the full-scale clay relief without the doorframe. As a result, *Soutpansberg*,

<sup>753</sup> That this photograph includes the later abandoned 'vendusie' panel in the miniature frieze, when the sculptors are busy working on the adjacent *Departure* in its large-scale clay version, demonstrates that changes must have been ongoing, instead of the overall design being resolved at the outset.

<sup>754</sup> This is also mentioned by Peter Kirchoff in his letter of 27.8.1946, quoted below, where he talks of it as *his* panel, just as Potgieter does. The panel is so close to Coetzer's drawing that it is not really possible to distinguish the hand of the sculptor who modelled it; its relative lack of refinement suggests that it might have been Potgieter's, but Kirchoff was the one undertaking *Departure*, of which this had been a part in Coetzer's drawing. As it was not developed beyond this point, there is nothing about it in the records that might identify the sculptor.



**Figure 134:** Peter Kirchhoff. Abandoned maquette 'Vendusie' (Auction), based on left-hand section of Coetzer's sketch for *Departure*. Plaster, h. 78 × w. 89.7 × d. 8.2 cm (courtesy of VTM Museum VTM 2184/1-28; photo Russell Scott)



**Figure 135:** W.H. Coetzer. Left-hand section of reproduction of first sketch for *Departure*, detail of fig. 102 (courtesy of ARCA PV94 1/75/5/1)

which may initially have been thought of as the first panel on the long east wall, would have to be moved to the position over the doorway, but could still retain its position next to *Delagoa Bay*, the other scene related to Trichardt. Now the two scenes, different in place, time and content, were linked at right angles. *Soutpansberg* then had to be conceived to allow for the interruption of the door that would ultimately dictate its composition. We have no record of the appearance of two panels that would match the presumed first positions, or any discussion about it, only the outcome in the way they are handled in the surviving small plaster maquettes. The case provides a good example of the endless juggling and re conceptualising of compositions that must have taken place, and stresses the importance of this stage in the process for the overall layout of the narrative. It was critical to reach agreement on how the scenes would be arranged to correspond with the final layout around the Hall of Heroes, ideally before the making of the small models could even begin. But ‘Vendusie’ demonstrates that this did not necessarily happen at the outset.

The rethinking we postulate also makes it more than likely that not only the sculptors’ drawings but some of their maquettes too have not survived. A close examination of the background of the photograph of the sculptors at work on the first full-scale clay relief for *Departure* reveals that there are other maquettes standing against the wall below the frame that holds the one-third-size plaster casts in place to create a miniature frieze (fig. 114). While they are difficult to make out, the nearest one, of which only half the panel can be seen, has a space for an intruding doorway, and is possibly a maquette for *Soutpansberg* or *Blydevooruitsig*. Both it and the part of a panel next to it are grey rather than white like the plaster casts in the small-scale frieze above and, just visible leaning against them, another that was presumably rejected since not installed although it appears to be white plaster. The darker tone of the other two implies that they were clay models, either waiting to be cast in plaster, or abandoned as the configuration of the frieze crystallised.

The proposal for the new scene of *Kapain* prompted a further substantial change. The decision to have *Vegkop*, *Murder of Retief* and *Blood River* as the larger centrepieces of the east, south and west, recorded at the SVK meeting of 15.1.1937, was maintained for the latter two walls. But on the east wall *Inauguration* was given pride of place in the centre instead of *Vegkop*, even though it remained a smaller panel (as can be seen in the foldout). The centring of Retief’s oath was an appropriate choice when his role at the Monument was so significant – leader, hero and martyr – and this scene would lie on an axis that intersected with the position of his cenotaph in the lower hall, as did *Murder of Retief* and *Blood River*, which avenged his death. But, as already discussed, there could have been many ideas contributing to the change, not least compositional ones. It cannot be deduced with any degree of certainty whether the centring of *Inauguration* was prompted by or itself prompted the moving of *Vegkop*, or whether these scenes were moved solely as a solution to incorporating *Kapain*. Each new decision had a knock-on effect, forcing other modifications of the original layout.

Something of the debates about the layout from a more aesthetic point of view is illustrated in Peter Kirchhoff’s critique of 27.8.1946, which provides a slightly different account from Potgieter’s explanation of the addition of *Kapain*. It draws attention to the overall compositional issues that the sculptors faced in addition to any decisions about individual panels and their topics.

When we had to put together the small scenes for the wall in their actual size, I asked Mr Potgieter, who was largely in charge of this wall, to propose to Mr Moerdyk that we change the original order of the reliefs somewhat, in order to achieve a certain measure of harmony and balance. To make this change possible, I abandoned my scene for the ‘Vendusi’ [sic] on the first short wall.<sup>755</sup>

755 ‘Toe ons destyds die klein ontwerpe vir die muur, in hulle werklike grootte as eenheid moes saamvoeg, het ek mnr. Potgieter, wat in hoofsaak vir hierdie muur verantwoordelik was, versoek om by mnr. Moerdyk die voorstel te doen, dat ons die oorspronklike volgorde van die reliëfs iewat moes verander, om sodoende ’n sekere mate van harmonie en balans te verkry. Om hierdie verandering moontlik te maak het ek van my ontwerp vir die “Vendusi” op die eerste kort muur, afgesien’ (ibid.).



**Figure 136:**  
*Marthinus Oosthuizen.*  
 1943–45. Clay. Full-scale relief (Pillman 1984, 52; photo Alan Yates)

There was yet another adjustment. With *Inauguration* centred between the two battles, the panel portraying *Negotiation* with Moroka was moved to the extreme right of the east wall frieze, thus after the battle of *Kapain* of November 1837, when it in fact had occurred considerably earlier. The subject of *Negotiation* related to the assistance the Rolong chief Moroka had provided to the Voortrekkers when they suffered devastating stock losses after their victory in the battle of *Vegkop* in October 1836, well before Piet Retief had joined the trekkers and been inaugurated as their leader in June 1837. Although ultimately Kirchhoff was critical because the balance of the rearranged east frieze seemed to him to have been disrupted by the different compositional strategies used for the battle pieces – a relatively deep arrangement of the figures inside the *Vegkop* laager as opposed to the compressed and close-up *Kapain* – it is very likely that the change in the position of *Negotiation* was made chiefly for compositional reasons: to allow the two vigorous battle scenes to flank the static central panel of the crucial *Inauguration*, even though it would displace *Negotiation* (see foldout).

In the case of the positioning of the two panels related to Trichardt's trek on the far left of the east wall, it probably seemed sensible to have them grouped together to create thematic clarity, even though Trichardt arrived in Soutpansberg around May 1836, before the event of April 1937 portrayed in *Presentation* which precedes it in the frieze, and reached Delagoa Bay in April 1938, thus after all the subsequent scenes up to the massacre in *Bloukrans*. To consider a less understandable case of chronological misplacement, one could ask why the *Marthinus Oosthuizen* panel (fig. 136), which represents a scene at the same time as *Bloukrans*, and which had been included in the background of Coetzer's 'Bloukrans Murder' sketch, is positioned after that of *Dirkie Uys* (fig. 137), which represents the killing of father and son from the later *Vlugkommando* at Italeni. Both are smaller inde-



**Figure 137:** *Dirkie Uys*. 1943–45. Clay. Full-scale relief (Pillman 1984, 48–49; photo Alan Yates)

pendent panels on the short walls of the south-west corner, so could readily have been presented in chronological order. Perhaps *Marthinus Oosthuizen* was easier to fit into the awkward shape over the doorway with its intruding pointed door frame. And, as it glorifies Oosthuizen riding unscathed through the thick of Zulu lines, it is a more obvious prelude for the trekkers' overwhelming victory in *Blood River* staged centre in the west frieze, rather than the tragic end of the Uys father and son.

Both compositional and thematic reasons probably explain the configuration of panels on the west wall, where *Saailaer* is on the far right, when it should possibly have been before the Battle of Blood River and most certainly before building the Church of the Vow in a chronological narrative; in Jansen's 1937 list of topics it was positioned before *Women spur men on*. It may be surmised that a scene representing the role of women was deemed easier to move around because it was chronologically less specific and historically more general. We will see in its detailed discussion that *Saailaer* was largely a composite invention of various recollections about the Trek. But a panel showing women who sow, plough and fight offered the opportunity to balance the frieze narratively. It offsets the scene at the other end of the west frieze that also focused on the role of Voortrekker women, *Women spur men on*, although it is strangely unconnected to the narrative sequence that precedes it and rather isolated. More importantly, however, it facilitated the centring of the all-important Blood River victory. The overriding principle must have been to have *The Vow* and the *Church of the Vow* flank the centrally positioned *Blood River*, in order to show that event's close ties to the covenant made with God before the battle, and its fulfilment thereafter in erecting the promised church. The upholding of their pledge, critical to an understanding of the Voortrekkers as dutiful and devout, is stressed by Moerdyk in his *Official Guide* essay:



**Figure 138:**  
Frikkie Kruger.  
Clay maquette of  
*Return* on an easel  
at Harmony Hall.  
1942–43 (photo  
courtesy of  
Kirchhoff files)

Vows have been taken history teaches us, and conveniently forgotten when the moment of danger has passed. Here we find a difference. A handful of people in dire need cried aloud in their extremity and made a solemn promise and their descendants a century later still felt themselves voluntarily bound by that Vow.<sup>756</sup>

This has been challenged by later historians. Leonard Thompson, for example, argues very plausibly that initially the vow was indeed forgotten – not least by Pretorius himself – but revived and given increasing prominence with the rise of Afrikaner nationalism from Paul Kruger’s time onwards.<sup>757</sup> And we argue in *Church of the Vow* that this church was in fact never built. Such issues are fully addressed in the discussion of the relevant scenes in Part II. In the composition of the frieze, however, the Afrikaner trinity with its key role in the national narrative – *The Vow*, *Blood River* and *Church of the Vow* – had to be given prime placement. This was also the case with the *Murder of Retief* in the centre of the south wall. For if, sanctioned by the help of God, the Battle of Blood River demonstrated the Voortrekkers’ right to Natal by conquest, Retief’s death showed their moral right to it by sacrifice and martyrdom.<sup>758</sup>

Apart from a few exceptions, already discussed, decisions like these about the general layout must have been made before work on the small clay maquettes began, in order to establish the choice of topics and the space allocated to each.<sup>759</sup> Yet these models seem in themselves to have been conceived as independent units. The sculptors worked on their assigned maquettes individually at this point, although Potgieter reports that they constantly shared criticism and advice, no doubt from Moerdyk, and possibly from committee members, as well as amongst themselves.<sup>760</sup> That this was the only form of compositional and aesthetic guidance for the sculptors led to some criticism once the maquettes were at a fairly advanced stage. We have already cited Hugo’s letter

<sup>756</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 51–52.

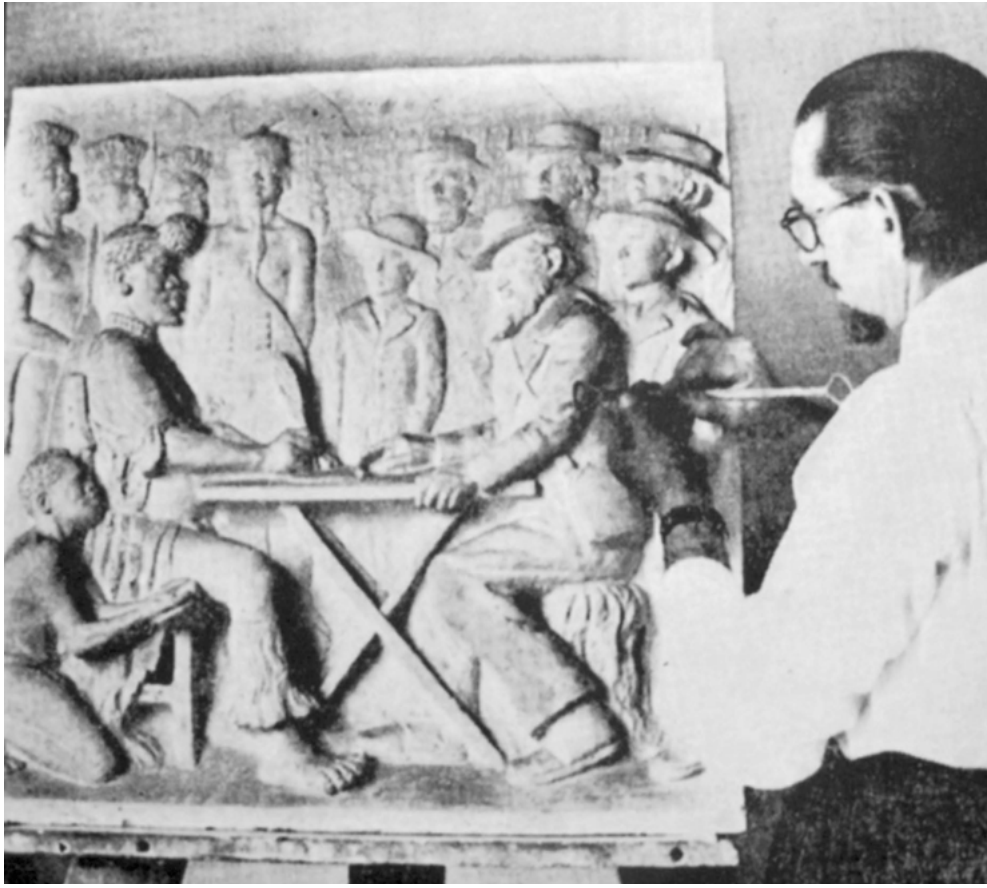
<sup>757</sup> Thompson 1985, ‘The covenant’, 144–188.

<sup>758</sup> See Du Toit and Giliomee 1983, 202, discussed in Chapter 1.

<sup>759</sup> Ultimately only one scene, *Departure*, was too long to be accommodated in a single maquette.

<sup>760</sup> Potgieter 1987, 41.





**Figure 139:** Frikkie Kruger working on first maquette for *Treaty*. 1942–43. Clay (courtesy of VTM Museum; photo the authors)



**Figure 140:** Frikkie Kruger. Second maquette for *Treaty*. 1942–43. Plaster, 77.5 × 76.7 cm (courtesy of VTM Museum VTM 2184/1-28; photo Russell Scott)

26 *Return*27 *Convention*

DOOR

1 *Departure*4 *Delagoa Bay*5 *Vegkop*6 *Inauguration*7 *Kapain*8 *Negotiation*11 *Descent*12 *Treaty*13 *Murder of Retief*14 *Bloukrans*15 *Teresa Viglione*18 *Woman spur men on*19 *Arrival*20 *The Vow*21 *Blood River*22 *Church of the Vow*23 *Saailaer*

which recommended that senior artists be brought in to assist with advice. He stressed not only the need for compositional unity but the role of creative inspiration in producing a satisfactory artwork, so that the historically correct solutions, proffered by the Historiese Komitee and the architect, might not serve the artists well.<sup>761</sup> Similar points were made by G. Dekker, who bemoaned the fact that the maquettes were so anecdotal, focusing on details of historical accuracy rather than issues of deeper meaning and compositional aspects such as line, light and shade, and plasticity of depiction, which he argued were essential for a successful and unified sculptural work.<sup>762</sup>

The four sculptors had little if any prior experience in creating narrative figure sculptures, and certainly not on this scale, so the task must have been a daunting one, and the way the scenes were conceived individually by the four sculptors made overall compositional unity problematic. It is telling that a close examination of the maquettes shows that there were no overlaps between the panels, even when the same sculptor was designing adjacent scenes. A single exception is found in *Return* and *Convention*, the final two scenes on the frieze, where part of the first scene runs over into the panel for the last, a tree acting as a divider between them. This was probably done to give more space to the wide landscape of *Return*, and also to enhance its complementary relationship to the continuous narrative and expansive landscape of *Departure*, its counterpart on the other side of the north wall. The independence of the compositions at the maquette stage had the advantage

<sup>761</sup> Hugo to Jansen, 19.1.1943 (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7).

<sup>762</sup> Dekker to Bosman, 27.1.1943 (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7).

2 *Presentation*3 *Soutpansberg*9 *Blydevooruitsig*10 *Debora Retief*16 *Dirkie Uys*17 *M. Oosthuizen*24 *Mpande*25 *Death of Dingane*

**Fig. 141:** The plaster maquettes (courtesy of VTM Museum VTM 2184/1-28; photos Russell Scott)

that different sequences could be tried out in different positions if necessary, before the order of the scenes was finally determined. However, it meant that the visual transition from one scene to the next was something that remained unresolved when the making of the full-scale reliefs began.

We have little evidence of the appearance of the maquettes in their clay form, since, as they were finished, the sculptors cast them in plaster, so that they would be more durable for the next stage in the process, and to allow for recycling of the clay. A rare photograph shows the clay maquette of *Return* on a board supported on an easel, in the way these panels would have been during their modelling (fig. 138). Another shows Frikkie Kruger at work on his first design for *Treaty* (fig. 139), which would be modified in a second composition that took account of advice about Zulu customs, with the king's head higher than those of his followers (fig. 140): only the second maquette that provided the design that would be used in the full-scale frieze would be cast in plaster. It is these plaster replicas that have survived in the collection of the Voortrekker Monument, though mainly stored away for some seventy years, first at the amphitheatre and later in a storeroom adjacent to the museum on the lowest floor of the Monument (fig. 141).<sup>763</sup> Unwrapped, they revealed a less than perfect state. They were repaired by a restorer in 2014/15, in order to mount a new exhibition,<sup>764</sup> available for all to see, with moulds made from the originals to make copies for conservation

<sup>763</sup> An exception is the plaster maquette depicting *Teresa Viglione* which was on display in the museum.

<sup>764</sup> The exhibit in the lower hall of the Monument was on view to the public in December 2016, and opened officially on 29 March 2017.

purposes.<sup>765</sup> Our photographs of the maquettes (all illustrated in the detailed discussion of each scene of the frieze in Part II) were taken before these procedures and record the surface and colour of the plaster prior to new moulds being made, although we have included some details of maquettes post-conservation, which were photographed in the direct top lighting provided for the exhibition.

While the overriding thematic control did not leave a great deal of room for individual creativity, a close examination of the small plaster panels does reveal some broad differences of style and approach, which were to some extent retained in the style of the full-scale reliefs that will be discussed in Chapter 4. Probably a reflection of their greater experience, Kirchhoff's and Kruger's small panels are more assured, revealing, for example, confidence in using different depths in the relief to signify nearness and distance, a sculptural equivalent of aerial perspective. Their depictions have more detail too, something that is especially evident in the fine particulars we see in the full-scale clay reliefs and finished marbles designed by Kruger. With Postma there appears to be less certainty compositionally, with a tendency to introduce figures in somewhat over-elaborate poses to add visual drama to the scenes. Her response to working with the tricky format of the corner panel with intruding doorframe for *Marthinus Oosthuizen* is particularly contrived, and there is a photograph from the time that shows the Zulu model supported on a precariously tilted box and stool to hold the difficult pose of the figure on the right (figs 142, 143).<sup>766</sup> The figure proportions for her *Death of Dingane* are not convincing, with very thickset legs compared with the upper body of the nude female on the left, for example. This is resolved in the full-scale clay relief, however, presumably because she then had access to an unclothed model. Postma would have had little experience in multi-figure compositions, as the examples of her early sculptures that we know of, before her work for the Monument, are single figures or busts. Her only large scene for the frieze, *Bloukrans*, was not fully resolved compositionally in her maquette, and became even more problematic in the revised version she had to undertake in the full-scale panel.

But it is Potgieter's small maquettes that are most conspicuously different, reflecting his lack of experience. They are rather crude and unresolved, and uneven in design, with representations of figures that sometimes seem almost childlike, and in this respect closer to Coetzer's figures in the sketches. There is also evidence of more rethinking in his case. While Kruger and Postma each produced second versions of one of their plaster maquettes, it was in response to a requirement to change the iconography, rather than a reconsideration of the composition. Postma's changes to *Bloukrans* will be addressed in some detail later; in Kruger's case for the *Treaty* (figs 139, 140), it was a modification to the position of Dingane's followers, who in Zulu culture would not have been permitted to stand with their heads higher than that of the seated king.<sup>767</sup> In Potgieter's case, however, three of the small panels were reworked and exist in two rather different versions: *Soutpansberg* (figs 106, 107), *Delagoa Bay* (figs 144, 145), and *Blydevooruitsig* (figs 146, 147). It may of course be purely by chance that we have multiple maquettes only for Potgieter's designs, as other aborted designs may not have survived, and there would have also been attempts that did not progress beyond the clay model and were never cast in plaster. However, the fact that there are three pairs of maquettes by Potgieter that repeat the same subject with considerable compositional

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**765** The restoration was undertaken by Elize Cilliers who first cleaned the surface of the maquettes and filled holes. The surface was then sprayed with Super Seal to protect it during the process of making silicon rubber moulds with Mold Max30, which was coated with fibre glass to keep it stable before removing it from the maquette. Cilliers noted that after demoulding, the maquettes had to be restored again as the plaster of Paris was very brittle and broke easily. This confirms that the conservation process could itself interfere with the integrity of the maquette surface – which was probably equally true of earlier conservation work undertaken by Phil Minnaar in the 1980s. Our thanks to Etta Judson for supplying Cilliers' notes on the process.

**766** Pillman 1984, 53.

**767** This provides us with another example of the intervention of experts, in this case not even someone with official SVK status. Moerdyk reported that a Mr Feye had given advice on Dingane's generals not standing when the king was seated, and also that assegais would not have been used in the murder of Retief and his men (Dagbestuur 30.9.1943). In this case no second plaster model exists, only the old photograph of Kruger working on the clay.



changes suggests that he had to make more attempts to resolve his designs than the others. Perhaps the plasters were presented in some more formal critical session to members of the SVK or the Historiese Komitee, possibly once the maquettes were in position within the small-scale frieze model in Harmony Hall. Or it might have been criticism from his colleagues which was the prompt for Potgieter to revise his designs, leading to new clay reliefs and in turn new plaster casts. One might also speculate that *Soutpansberg* and *Blydevooruitsig*, designed for the short corner walls, were modified at the behest of the architect, as the intrusion of the doorway with its pointed frame is considerably greater in what can be identified as the second maquette of each of them, which were modified to be closer to what the actual architecture required. That both versions exist in plaster for these two scenes shows that changes were undertaken after the initial small clay maquettes had been cast. Whatever the reason for the changes, there would hardly have been any point in casting an unsuccessful design that had already been rejected. And we cannot know how many clay maquettes by any of the sculptors might have been abandoned.

For all the artists' designs there were further modifications at the time the full-scale clay reliefs were made, when the small designs of the maquettes were scaled up, and the four artists worked together on modelling them in their final form. Something of the lengthy and painstaking experience was reflected in Moerdyk's later statement, already quoted, that the sculptors 'modelled and re-modelled with diligence, patience and a sense of dedication'.<sup>768</sup> Producing the full-scale clay reliefs in particular was to be an enormous task that required all the qualities that Moerdyk describes. But the maquettes were no small undertaking either and took about a year to complete.<sup>769</sup> In addition, there must have been further maquettes developed even once they were working on the large panels, as will be discussed below.

The first year must have been an extraordinarily challenging period because, not only were there many decisions to be made about the overall design and the composition of the individual panels, but the sculptors also initiated their research to establish the correct forms of the various antiquarian items and Voortrekker dress. As well as visiting museum collections and receiving

**Figure 142:** Laurika Postma. *Marthinus Oosthuizen*. 1942–43. Plaster, h. 77.2 × w. 83 × d. 10 cm. Maquette. (courtesy of VTM Museum VTM 2184/1-28; photo Russell Scott)

**Figure 143:** Model for collapsing Zulu in *Marthinus Oosthuizen*, in the grounds of Harmony Hall. 1943–45. (Pillman 1984, 53)

<sup>768</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 41.

<sup>769</sup> Potgieter estimates a year, and Werner Kirchoff recalls that work on the large reliefs began as he started high school in 1943. This also chimes with Hugo's letter of January 1943, which mentions maquettes in position (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7).



**Figure 144:** Hennie Potgieter. First maquette for *Delagoa Bay*. 1942–43. Plaster, h. 77 × w. 76.5 × d. 8 cm (courtesy of VTM Museum VTM 2184/1-28; photo Russell Scott)



**Figure 145:** Hennie Potgieter. Second maquette for *Delagoa Bay*. 1942–43. Plaster, h. 76 × w. 76.6 × d. 8 cm (courtesy of VTM Museum VTM 2184/1-28; photo Russell Scott)



**Figure 146:** Hennie Potgieter. First maquette for *Blydevooruitsig*. 1942–43. Plaster, h. 77 × w. 89.7 × d. 10.3 cm (courtesy of VTM Museum VTM 2184/1-28; photo Russell Scott)



**Figure 147:** Hennie Potgieter. Second maquette for *Blydevooruitsig*. 1942–43. Plaster, h. 76 × w. 92.2 × d. 8 cm (courtesy of VTM Museum VTM 2184/1-28; photo Russell Scott)

guidance from SVK members, they may have been consulting publications that had appeared in response to the increased interest in Afrikaner antiquities around the time of the centenary, such as G.H. van Rooyen's two-volume but small-size *Kultuurskatte uit die Voortrekker-tydperk* published in 1938 and 1940, which described Voortrekker artefacts and clothing in painstaking detail. The concern for 'authentic' detail continued to be a priority for the frieze. On 21 April 1943 Jansen was invited to speak at the opening of an exhibition planned for May to display Voortrekker objects and clothing from the store rooms of the Transvaal Museum and private collections, to be held at Harmony Hall. The author of the invitation, Kotie Roodt-Coetzee, wrote that the exhibition would make her task as advisor on Voortrekker dress to the sculptors of the frieze more effective; she 'felt that it was necessary that these people [the sculptors] had direct knowledge of authentic clothing and other items from the Voortrekker period'.<sup>770</sup> Later that year, Dr Steenkamp, whose ideas for suitable topics for the frieze were discussed in Chapter 2, submitted a list of shortcomings in the maquettes that required attention. In a comment that depends more on prevalent racist attitudes than specialist historical knowledge, he objected to the portrayal of Zulu types and said that the African warriors should be more ferocious.<sup>771</sup> But he stressed the need to depict appropriate clothing, and also correct topography, suggesting that the artists should visit the sites, and that specimens of plants from the different areas be gathered. Apart from a number of private Kirchhoff photographs of appropriate landscapes, however, there is no official record of the artists travelling to the sites. These examples demonstrate that advice and the supply of appropriate objects as models were clearly a significant and constant part of the visualisation of the episodes portrayed in the reliefs. One might even imagine that they were sometimes as much an aggravation as an aid to the sculptors, who may sometimes have longed for the seclusion of a private studio rather than being in the hub that was Harmony Hall.

This focus on historical accuracy was to be painstakingly developed in all the details of the large clay reliefs. Potgieter discussed this aspect at some length in his account, apparently responding to doubts about the correctness of such inclusions as merino sheep, a guitar and an accordion in *Departure*, for example, and Moerdyk too gave space in his *Official Guide* essay to address the same issue.<sup>772</sup> The perceived importance of these historical elements was part of the overarching goal to create an indisputably 'true' record of the Great Trek, as if authenticity in the detail somehow verified the authenticity of the narrative as a whole. Yet all the antiquarian objects were shown in pristine condition, as though new and unused (fig. 148), and so too were the wagons, which belied what must have been the realities of the long, hard treks that lasted many years.<sup>773</sup>

Apart from questioning the intentions behind the focus on detail, it might also be asked whether it was in the best interests of the overall quality of the frieze. This undoubtedly contributes to the anecdotal character of the reliefs, as Dekker remarked while the frieze was being made;<sup>774</sup> likewise, Peter Kirchhoff, when responding to the SVK's request for an assessment, remarked that parts of the frieze suffered from petty realism.<sup>775</sup> In a critique of the 1960s, W.H. Strauss, after commenting that 'it is unfortunately difficult to [know whom to] blame, the planners or the sculptors', states: 'In every panel it always appears that there is an excess of factual portrayal. Some elements

770 '... het ek gevoel dat dit nodig is dat dié mense direk kennis moet maak met outentieke kledingstukke en ander voorwerpe uit die Voortrekkertydperk' (ARCA PV94 2/1/4). Interestingly, she adds that it would also offer the opportunity for the public to view the sculptors' work.

771 Steenkamp's criticisms were conveyed in a letter from Scheepers to the SVK, 21.10.1943 (ARCA PV125 2/2/1/1/3).

772 Potgieter 1987, 46; *Official Guide* 1955, 46 and passim. Trouble was even taken regarding the type of dog pictured in *Negotiation*: 'to avert criticism of the dog depicted a special dog was bred by crossing a watchdog (Dobermann Pinscher) and a hunting dog (greyhound)' (ibid., 48).

773 It is notable that the quest for authenticity also pervaded the celebrations of the centenary and the inauguration of the Monument, in the building of replica ox wagons for the re-enactment of the treks in 1938 (see Chapter 1), and in the issuing of a standard pattern by the FAK, designed by Trudie Kestell, who had made a careful study of Voortrekker clothing, for women who wanted to make their own Voortrekker garments in 1949 (see Ferreira 1975, 159).

774 Dekker to Bosman, 27.1.1943 (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7).

775 Letter from Kirchhoff to the SVK, 27.8.1946 (Kirchhoff files).





are not at all necessary and the result sometimes borders on the laughable.<sup>776</sup> Whether the detail is comfortably subsumed in the general sense of idealisation or conflicts with the overall style remains an open question. However, it is safe to say that an unrelenting obsession with factual detail in historical narration rarely wins positive appraisal from art history.

**Figure 148:** Group of artefacts in *Departure*. Marble, detail of fig. 286 (photo Russell Scott)

## Models and portraits

Careful attention was given to the use of human models for the frieze. Evidently the artists used models even for the small maquettes, to judge by Postma's elaborate arrangement of figures in the relief of *Marthinus Oosthuizen* and the surviving photograph of the Zulu model for one of them (fig. 143): indeed, the complexity of the pose would have made the use of a model obligatory. The Kirchhoff files yield some particularly enlightening sets of small photographs related to the making of *Women spur men on* and *Saailaer* from the west frieze, the first designed by Laurika Postma, the second by Peter Kirchhoff. No doubt there were other photographs that we do not know or that have not survived. They show how the poses of the figures were trialled by models in the yard at Harmony Hall, the men wearing jackets, the women in Voortrekker attire (fig. 128). A set labelled 'Harmonie S[aal]. / Vera / 1942 / Voortrekker nooi' (Harmony Hall / Vera / 1942 / Voortrekker maiden) relates

<sup>776</sup> 'Hier is dit ongelukkig weer moeilik om óf die beplanners óf die beeldhouers te verkwalik. Dit kom egter telkens in elke paneel na vore dat daar 'n oordadigheid in die feite-uitbeelding lê. Sommige elemente is gladnie nodig nie, en die by-bring daarvan grens soms aan die lagwekkende' (W.H. Strauss, *Die historiese fries – 'n waardering*. BA [BK] thesis, University of Pretoria [1964?], unpaginated [UP Archives, Postma Folder 13]).



**Figure 149:**  
'Harmony Hall,  
Vera [Kirchhoff],  
1942, Voortrekker  
maiden'. Album  
page with model  
posing for *Saailaer*  
(photos courtesy of  
Kirchhoff files)



**Figure 150:** Peter  
Kirchhoff. *Saailaer*.  
1942–43. Plaster,  
77 × 142.7 cm.  
Maquette (courtesy  
of VTM Museum  
VTM 2184/1-28;  
photo Russell  
Scott)



**Figure 151:** Models wearing Voortrekker dresses staged like sculptures on plinths, Harmony Hall c. 1942–44 (photo courtesy of Kirchhoff files)

to the figures in *Saailaer* (figs 149, 150). The mention of ‘Vera’, the name of Kirchhoff’s daughter,<sup>777</sup> demonstrates that the Voortrekker models were often family or friends, perhaps the artists themselves (one man in the other set looks very like Hennie Potgieter). These photographs provide vivid evidence of the way the artists went about creating the maquettes, setting up poses out of doors and recording them in photographs and possibly sketches, which would provide ready reference while they were making the small reliefs indoors, and still available if they experimented with different compositions.

In the case of the full-scale clay reliefs, however, Potgieter’s descriptions and the recollections of Martso Strydom and Werner Kirchhoff confirm that the models posed adjacent to the large panels inside the hall, sometimes for lengthy periods, for individual portraits were required as well as the verification of poses. Potgieter remarks that ‘with the large panels we used models regularly’.<sup>778</sup> He describes in particular how the sculptors observed Voortrekker dress, and the way the material fell in folds, with the models dressed in costumes made especially for the project under the supervision of a specialist (fig. 151).<sup>779</sup> They also studied historical examples in the museum, where they made sketches of dress as well as implements and wagons.<sup>780</sup>

Of particular interest is the use of portrait models in the large reliefs, for many of which we have specific identifications from Potgieter in his 1987 publication on the Monument. These portraits were meant to add an overall sense of reality by endowing the figures with individuality, a strategy adopted by artists over the centuries to heighten the immediacy of historical scenes. In this case they were also, if not primarily, intended to capture the veracity of the appearance of the Voortrekker figures, thus inventing accuracy through the back door of history. The personalisation of Boer heroes may, as Isabel Hofmeyr remarks of Retief in Preller’s biography, have ‘made most readers [viewers] feel that Retief was a member of their family’.<sup>781</sup> Wherever possible, a known portrait of a historical character would be used, or a descendant of that person, with a focus on the

<sup>777</sup> Hennie Potgieter (1987, 35) records that she was the model for one of the figures in the full-scale *Saailaer*.

<sup>778</sup> ‘Met die groot panele het ons gereeld modelle gebruik’ (Potgieter 1987, 45). Although these records are incomplete, details of payments related to the frieze, authorised by architect’s certificates in the HF Archives (old numbering) VTM vol. A2, first itemise models on 22.3.1944.

<sup>779</sup> A later parallel practice is recorded for Coetzer’s designs for the Voortrekker tapestries, and he donated seven kappies, and a blue silk dress and underdress made by Trudie Kestell (one of the expert advisers on the frieze) for this project to the Africana Museum in November 1963 (see letter of thanks from A. Smith to Coetzer, 6.11.1963, Museum Africa correspondence).

<sup>780</sup> Potgieter 1987, 45.

<sup>781</sup> Hofmeyr in Marks and Trapido 1987, 110.



**Figure 152:** Werner Kirchoff (see fig. 116) posed for: young Paul Kruger (portrait Louis Jacobs) in *Vegkop* (fig. 290); young hero in *Dirkie Uys* (fig. 301); surveyor (portrait H. Ahlers) in *Church of the Vow* (fig. 307) (photos Russell Scott)

portrayal of the face only. For instance, while the facial features of the eleven-year-old Paul Kruger in the scene of *Vegkop* were based on Louis Jacobs, a great-grandson of the president,<sup>782</sup> the body model was Werner Kirchhoff (fig. 152). He was conveniently at hand for the artists, and as he grew older he modelled for different figures – both the face and body of fifteen-year-old *Dirkie Uys*, and the body again for the young surveyor in the foreground of the *Church of the Vow* – thus modelling for Potgieter, Postma and Kirchhoff in turn. Werner's mother and sister were also models on two occasions each.

The Kirchhoffs were the exception that proved the rule regarding the nationality of the participants. For studies of the poses and portraits of Voortrekker figures, Afrikaner models were customarily used, so that, when he was interviewed for *Dagbreek en Sondagnuus*,<sup>783</sup> Potgieter could claim that a number of well-known Afrikaners appeared in the completed frieze. Their participation in the development of individual scenes probably played its own part to fuel (public) interest in the frieze. The concept was an intriguing one, and one press report in December 1949 drew attention to it, relating that 'Pretoria visitors can recognise a number of their fellow citizens depicted on the walls in the scenes in which their ancestors took part'.<sup>784</sup> Moerdyk claimed an appropriate pedigree for the sitters a number of times in the *Official Guide*, as for the figures in *Inauguration* who were 'modelled on descendants of the Voortrekkers'.<sup>785</sup> Potgieter remarked that there might have been more well-known figures, except that it was not possible to advertise for models, and the sculptors were too busy to mount a search.<sup>786</sup> As a result they frequently used members of their families, or drew on their contacts, such as men from the local wrestling club, who were friends of Hennie Potgieter, and students at the nearby Pretoria Teachers' Training College.<sup>787</sup>

One of these was Martso Strydom (then Terblanche), a good friend of Bettie Roos, who was in charge of homecraft at the college, and would later become Hennie Potgieter's wife. The two friends wearing period clothes were models for the pair of women making bullets and loading a gun in the left foreground of *Vegkop*. Mrs Strydom remembers that the leaning-forward pose she had to adopt proved difficult for Potgieter to portray and required a few modelling sessions. In his publication, Potgieter names the model used for the portrait heads, and does not usually name the body models,<sup>788</sup> who were not always the same as the portrait models; in this case he lists that the woman was based on a friend of Postma's, Babette Vaandrager, which referred to the portrait only. Presumably a different portrait head was employed because the sculptors generally avoided using the same portrait twice, except of course where the same Voortrekker was portrayed.<sup>789</sup>

**782** There is evidence that on at least one occasion a portrait was 'corrected': in a later interview, Moerdyk recounted that Louis Jacob had ears that were much more prominent than Kruger's had been, so these features were not copied (Van Niekerk 1955, 35).

**783** 'Werk aan die fries in Voortrekkermonument' (Work on the frieze of the Voortrekker Monument), *Dagbreek en Sondagnuus*, undated newspaper clipping (c. 1948–49), UP Archives, Postma Folder 7.

**784** Unidentified newspaper clipping, UP Archives, Moerdyk collection.

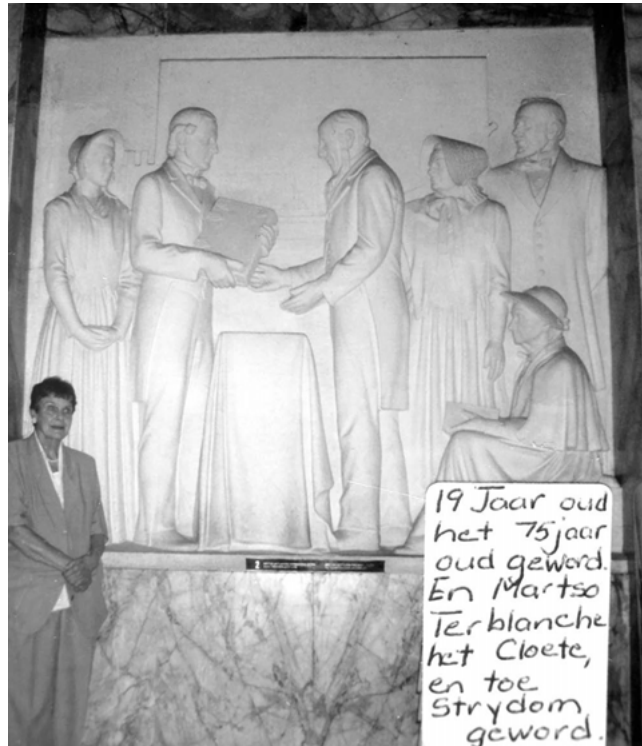
**785** *Official Guide* 1955, 47.

**786** *Die Volksblad* 12.12.1948: 'Daar sou baie meer kon gewees het, maar die tyd om modelle te soek, het ontbreek.'

**787** Barnard (1974, 81–82) illustrates a number of the models who sat for the frieze, and also the painter Gert van der Walt who was the model for the 'Unknown Voortrekker' made by Frikkie Kruger for one of the corner figures for the Monument.

**788** Unusually, Potgieter does name two models in the case of the Boer portraying Potgieter on the right of *Vegkop*, which used the trekker's grandson Dr Carel Potgieter for the portrait, while H.J.P. Duvenage posed for the body. A related case that may be considered an exception is that of Miss Stander, a student he named as the model for the woman supporting the back of the wounded man in the foreground of *Vegkop*, although a portrait was not involved as her face cannot be seen, only her elaborate kappie. Perhaps the difficult pose, suggesting a sense of anguish and intimacy between the two figures, made this case memorable. Potgieter did not name the other female model shown in back view next to her, who was in fact Martso Strydom.

**789** A few exceptions are the second appearance of Stephanus Joubert, cited by Potgieter as the model for the standing boy in both *Blydevooruitsig* and *Debora Retief*, although he appears younger in the second panel, and Kirchhoff's wife and daughter who were portrayed in both *Departure* and *Saailaer*.



**Figure 153:** Martso Strydom posed for three scenes – Above: Englishwoman on left in *Presentation* (she is photographed alongside it, 54 years later; courtesy of HF Archives F 39.10.10 k); Debora (portrait Irma Moerdyk) in *Debora Retief* (detail of fig. 295; photo Russell Scott). – Below: bending woman (portrait Babette Vaandrager) and turning woman in *Vegkop* (details of fig. 290; photos: Russell Scott)



**Figure 154:** Stephanie Joubert, model for girl with doll in *Debora Retief* (Barnard 1974, 82)

**Figure 155:** Girl with doll in *Debora Retief*. Marble, detail of fig. 295 (photo Russell Scott)

Mrs Strydom recalls how pleased she was to have this interesting way of earning pocket money, although it came to an end when she finished college and took up a teaching post in Wakkerstroom in 1946.<sup>790</sup> She posed for four figures in all (fig. 153), the woman already mentioned, and also the woman in rear view in *Vegkop* and the protagonist in *Debora Retief*, where the face portrayed was that of Irma Moerdyk, the architect's daughter. The fourth study used the aspirant teacher as a model for both the figure and the portrait head: this was for the young Englishwoman on the left in *Presentation*. She was to realise how apt this had been only some years later at the inauguration ceremony at the Monument in 1949. Descendant of the 1820 settler William Rowland Thompson of Grahamstown, Justice Cyril Newton Thompson, who presented a Bible at the 1949 inauguration in commemoration of the original presentation of April 1837, mentioned in his speech that the young woman portrayed in the scene was also related to the British settlers. It had clearly been a coincidence that she had been chosen by Potgieter for the figure, as she had not known of this relationship previously. But she later discovered that she was indeed descended from a couple who came from London to South Africa in 1820, in the company of the missionary Francis Owen, and that her great-grandfather, a tailor by the name of Kolbe, had married an Englishwoman, Margaret Downing. Martso Strydom is a telling example for the numerous, mostly fortuitous micro-histories through which the models coloured and personalised the narrative of the Great Trek.

Wherever possible, the sculptors tried to find sitters with Voortrekker heritage or at least of good Afrikaner stock, which is verified by Hennie Potgieter's 1987 publication on the Monument in the diagrams he produced of the different scenes to name the models, remembering a large number of them, which we record for each scene.<sup>791</sup> Even young children were engaged as models, such as Stephanie Joubert who posed for the little girl sitting on the ground with her doll in *Debora Retief* (figs 154, 155), and even the infant held by the elderly woman in the foreground of *Bloukrans* (fig. 299), the baby of Professor W.A. Willemse according to Potgieter. A notable example of an appropriate choice was the seated woman in *Soutpansberg*, who was modelled on Mrs Ackerman, the great-granddaughter of Trek leader Hendrik Potgieter (who had visited Trichardt in

<sup>790</sup> Interview with Martso Strydom, December 2013. Many of these memories are also recounted in a document she prepared for the Monument records, dated 25.10.2012 (HF Archives HF 9/6/27/1 M Strydom).

<sup>791</sup> The somewhat random numbering in the diagrams of panels that Potgieter made for the identification of the figures some years after the completion of the frieze suggests that he first listed those that were easiest to recall, then added others as he remembered them.



**Figure 156:** Erasmus Smit, photo. c. 1850? (photo courtesy of uMsunduzi Museum Collection)



**Figure 157:** Portrait of Erasmus Smit in *Inauguration*. Marble, detail of fig. 291 (photo Russell Scott)

Soutpansberg), and one of the three women who had laid the foundation stone of the Monument in 1938. She was evidently intended to represent Trichardt's wife here, as Hennie Potgieter identifies her in that role in *Delagoa Bay* in his notes. Another pertinent choice was the flanking man on the right of *Vegkop* and the rider nearest the viewer in *Kapain*, both modelled, as mentioned previously, on the leader's grandson, Carel Potgieter, who thus twice represents his ancestor.

This is an exception, as the usual practice for portraying the all-important Trek leaders was to employ old drawings or photographs. Sculptor Potgieter confirms this for both representations of Trichardt and of Pretorius, as well as the depiction of Erasmus Smit, where the sculptors have improved his unflattering portrait (figs 156, 157).<sup>792</sup> Presumably Hendrik Potgieter was handled differently because his grandson was in direct contact with the sculptors and because there was no available portrait of him.<sup>793</sup> However, live models were also used for the depictions of the patriarch Jacobus Uys in *Presentation* and his son, Piet Uys, shown dying in *Dirkie Uys*.<sup>794</sup> It might seem that less scrupulous historical attention was paid to the 'lesser' Trek leaders, but probably the explanation is simply that no images or close relatives were available for these leaders. The representation of Retief may have been based on the man chosen by Preller to play that part in his 1916 film *Die Voortrekkers*, as there is a pronounced likeness to photographs of the actor (figs 158, 159).<sup>795</sup> But Hennie Potgieter thought the portrait had been invented by Frikkie Kruger – 'made out of his head' (uit sy kop gemaak) – and was indignant that he had to copy the same features for his portrayal of Retief in *Inauguration*.<sup>796</sup> This confirms that the sculptors tried to maintain consistency across different representations of the same person.

Amongst the many portraits of unidentified Voortrekkers in the frieze were portraits of the sculptors themselves and others associated with the making of the reliefs, as well as various members of their families. The frieze seems unique in having a secondary narrative, invisible to most viewers, that tells of the community at Harmony Hall. In *Departure*, all the full-scale figures are part of or closely related to the sculpture team (fig. 114). It might have been that these people acted as models for this panel because the sculptors were feeling their way in their first large-scale

<sup>792</sup> Potgieter 1987, 17 (Erasmus), 13, 16 (Trichardt), 32, 36, 39 (Pretorius).

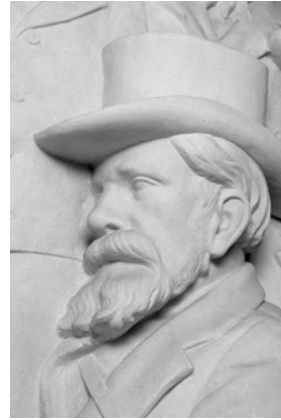
<sup>793</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>794</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 and 28.

<sup>795</sup> *Frontispiece*, Preller, *Piet Retief*, 1930.

<sup>796</sup> Potgieter 1987, 48.





**Figure 158:** Actor playing Piet Retief in Preller's film *De Voortrekkers*. 1918 (Preller, *Retief* 1930, frontispiece)

**Figure 159:** Portrait of Retief in *Treaty*. Marble, detail of fig. 297 (photo Russell Scott)

relief, and because they were so readily available. But they also suggest a proprietorial role, and establish a kind of visual signature for the artists in the first scene of the frieze. Potgieter and Kruger appear on the right, with Kirchhoff and his wife and daughter on the left. It is tempting to read something into the exclusion of Postma here when all the other sculptors are represented, particularly as this was Kirchhoff's design and we know that he and Postma did not see eye to eye. It would have been simple enough to add another female figure, or to have used Postma as a model rather than Kirchhoff's wife or daughter, especially as they were also both to be models in *Saailaer*. Postma did include herself and a number of her relatives, however, in *Women spur men on* (fig. 129), perhaps a witty choice for the sole woman in a male-dominated team. She stands background left in a rather curious twisted pose, as she points to the central group but turns her head to communicate with the man next to her. He is modelled on her brother Lenus' brother-in-law; her brother Philip leans disconsolately on the central chair; and her sister Stephanie sits at his feet.

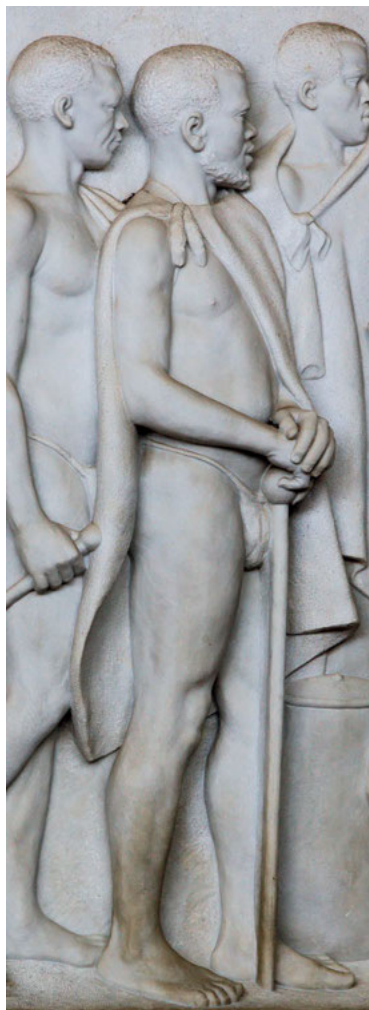
Kirchhoff's son Werner was the model for three figures, previously mentioned, while Frikkie Kruger's sons are the young boys on either side of Piet Retief in *Treaty*, and his father is the Voortrekker with his arm in a sling in *Return*. Potgieter's parents are the Voortrekker couple who witness the handing over of the Bible in *Presentation*; his brother Mathys is the rider reloading his gun in *Kapain*; his brother-in-law Dr Roos and his wife are the crouching couple flanking the foreground of *Blydevooruitsig*; and, as already mentioned, he even depicted his wife-to-be in the left foreground of *Vegkop*. This is not an exhaustive list, but serves to indicate how intimately the family life of the sculptors was woven into the reliefs, particularly as their relatives appear chiefly in the scenes for which they were responsible, almost as though they were signalling their authorship. Others present at Harmony Hall were not forgotten either. The carpenter Hendrik Ploeger is the man to the right in *Inauguration* (figs 160, 161), and the studio assistant Piet Malotho is the Rolong chief Moroka in *Negotiation* (fig. 162). Moerdyk served as a fitting model for the builder of the *Church of the Vow*, and his wife, Sylva Moerdyk, known for her strong political views, for the declamatory woman protagonist in *Woman spur men on*, while their son Michael was the model for Marthinus Oosthuizen, and their daughters for Debora Retief and the young companion who faces her. Even Moerdyk's dog Leeu, especially bred to resemble a Voortrekker dog, had a part to play in *Negotiation*.

The portraits are a distinctive aspect of the frieze, and the constant use of specific models seems to have been a decision on the part of the sculptors. There was no ruling by the Historiese Komitee laying down the use of actual portraits, or even any suggestion of the strategy as far as we can discover, other than the very general early remark by Moerdyk, already mentioned, that

**Figure 160:** Hendrik Ploeger working on *Descent*. Detail of fig. 175 (photo courtesy of Kirchhoff files)



**Figure 161:** Studio carpenter Hendrik Ploeger as bystander in *Inauguration*. Marble, detail of fig. 291 (photo Russell Scott)



**Figure 162:** Studio assistant Piet Malotho as the Rolong chief Moroka, framed by his men in *Negotiation*. Marble, detail of fig. 293 (photo Russell Scott)

university students could pose for tableaux corresponding to the different scenes.<sup>797</sup> Committee members seem to have concerned themselves only with the general impression created by figures. Yet it was an aspect that must have cost the sculptors considerable time and effort; it even had some financial implications, with Peter Kirchhoff disbursing the money for the models' fees from the cash box that was his particular responsibility. Perhaps family members posed without pay to show their interest and pride in the enterprise.<sup>798</sup> It can be argued that they and the other sitters from Pretoria's community endow the frieze with another layer of meaning. The assemblage of portraits in the reliefs might be imagined to create yet another community beyond the one comprising those directly involved in the making of the sculptures and their relatives – a more inclusive 'family' encompassing all those who were represented in the frieze, whether Voortrekker descendant, prominent Afrikaner citizen of Pretoria (from a military, business, church, political, art, literary or educational background), member of the families of the sculptors, or simply a student earning pocket money. Ultimately, as Van der Westhuysen remarks, the frieze is not only a historical

<sup>797</sup> Dagbestuur 28.11.1941: 3.

<sup>798</sup> Payments for models are regularly included in the amounts cleared by the monthly architect's certificates of authorisation, £20 for the Zulu models from 22.3.1944, and £10 for (other) models from 22.6.1944, through 1945, although the records are incomplete (HF Archives [old numbering] VTM vol. A2). Werner Kirchhoff as a family member has no memory of receiving payment specifically for posing although he was the model for three figures.



**Figure 163:** Elderly woman 'Oumatjie Stoffberg' in *Presentation*. Marble, detail of fig. 287 (photo Russell Scott)

presentation of nineteenth-century events but also a perpetuation of a section of Afrikaner culture in Pretoria in the early 1940s.<sup>799</sup>

One might even imagine the heritage of this singular community living on through succeeding generations, as the unusual experience is recalled and recounted to kinsfolk with pride (perhaps occasionally also embarrassment), and as children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren are brought in succession to see their forebears pictured in such elevated circumstances.<sup>800</sup> But even without specific relationships, as Elizabeth Delmont remarks of the portrait of Oumatjie Stoffberg in *Presentation* (fig. 163), the 'stress on intimate detail was clearly intended to encourage the viewer to identify with the characters on a personal level',<sup>801</sup> a by-product of 'volks' (art) history.

Potgieter picked out for particular mention in his text models for figures who were not Afrikaners, where the sculptors endeavoured to find sitters of appropriate nationalities. Thus, for

<sup>799</sup> 'In hierdie opsig word die fries meer as 'n historieskorrekte voorstelling van volksgebeure; dit is ook die verswiging van 'n deel van die Afrikanerkultuur van die beginveertigerjare' (Van der Westhuysen 1984, 18–19).

<sup>800</sup> See, for example, the article in *Die Beeld* 20.10.2012 where Martso Strydom discusses the role she and other models played for the frieze, and recounts how she has become the 'klipouma' (stone grandmother) at the Monument for her grandchildren.

<sup>801</sup> Delmont 1993, 93. She also points out that 'the canon of naturalism is thus an ideal political tool particularly suited to a propagandistic message'.



**Figure 164:** Lea Spanno, model for *Teresa Viglione* (Barnard 1974, 82)



**Figure 165:** Portrait of Italian trader on horseback in *Teresa Viglione*. Marble, detail of fig. 300 (photo Russell Scott)

example, the representation of the Italian heroine Teresa Viglione was modelled on an Italian woman, Lea Spanno (figs 164, 165), while Manuel da Silva Pereira, secretary at the Portuguese embassy in Pretoria, posed for the Portuguese governor in *Delagoa Bay*, and Madame Da Fonseca, the wife of the Portuguese ambassador, was the model for the governor's wife.<sup>802</sup> Hardly plausible is a newspaper report at the time of the inauguration that the Duke of Windsor 'was one of the many living people depicted ... as one of the British commissioners present at the signing of the Sand River Convention';<sup>803</sup> one cannot imagine that Potgieter would not have mentioned it if this had indeed been the case. There was not the same concern to achieve individual portraits for the black figures in the frieze, but some trouble was taken to differentiate diverse groups. Thus Piet Malotho, a Sesotho speaker, was deemed appropriate for the image in *Negotiation* of Moroka, chief of the Rolong (fig. 162), whom Potgieter explained were affiliated to the Sotho, and three Zulu models, Ngubeni, Umtetwa and Ntuli, were hired to pose for Zulu in traditional gear in various scenes.<sup>804</sup> Potgieter also named N. Ghubeni and F. Luthuli as two of Dingane's supporters in *Treaty*, leaving one uncertain whether these are two further models, or different spellings of Ngubeni and Ntuli.<sup>805</sup> This self-consciousness about 'ethnic' authenticity might be seen to prefigure the stress on ethnic difference that was to characterise the policies of the Nationalist government once it came into power in 1948.

## The full-scale frieze

At a meeting in September 1943, Moerdyk sought confirmation that the services of all four sculptors could be retained for the work at Harmony Hall, as they were collaborating well. The committee was informed that the sculptors had already completed one full-scale panel together, and another was

<sup>802</sup> Potgieter 1987, 42. Moerdyk recounts that 'her father was the Portuguese Ambassador in Pretoria in the days of President Krüger and the Republic' (*Official Programme* 1949, 49).

<sup>803</sup> *The Star* 15.12.1949. There seems to have been some interest in the Duke, who had visited South Africa as the Prince of Wales in 1928, when *Die Huisgenoot* (8.5.1928, 50) pictured him being taken to the Cape Town City Hall to receive an honorary doctorate, riding on an ox wagon.

<sup>804</sup> Potgieter's (1987, 48) description implies that the models were brought from Natal for the task, but Moerdyk mentions that 'typical Zulus' (tipiese Zoeloekaffers) were procured at the firm Kirkness, perhaps the contractors of that name in Pretoria (Dagbestuur 30.9.1943: 3). Potgieter also explains that the Zulu models were able to pose for the Matabele (Ndebele), because this was a closely related ethnic group.

<sup>805</sup> Potgieter 1987, 23.



**Figure 166:** Mother and child in *Inauguration*. Details of maquette and full-scale clay relief (photos left Russell Scott, right Alan Yates)

well advanced: Moerdyk had been taking the lead in decision making as was his wont. And the committee ratified his decision, as it invariably did, and formally agreed that the work should continue.<sup>806</sup>

The process of enlarging the frieze from the small maquettes, before the plaster casts were to be sent to Italy, was a critical phase in the process of making the frieze. Only then were the South African sculptors able to test how the narrative of the twenty-seven individual panels they had composed on a small scale would work in the much larger and continuous format of the frieze. Without this crucial step in the design of the final narrative, the marble frieze would have looked very different: the scaling-up led to countless significant changes in layout, sequence and arrangement of the scenes, as well as adjustments in pose and composition, and took the artists several additional years (1943–46). The overall style too was transformed. One might assume that the sculptors would have taken the small clay maquettes to a somewhat more resolved level at Harmony Hall before they were sent to an Italian sculpture studio if the original plan to have them enlarged in Italy had been followed. But if the direct transfer to full-scale reliefs had been attempted from the small maquettes alone, it is impossible to imagine that the Italian sculptors could have worked out the solutions reached by the South African sculptors.

In comparison with the full-scale clay reliefs, the maquettes are very lively in their interpretation of the Trek scenes, with unexpected details of observation that give them a far less formal quality than the larger versions. Compare, for example, the small boy seated on his mother's lap in the maquette and the full-size clay *Inauguration* (fig. 166). In the first he has one leg raised as he leans close to his mother, while she grasps his other leg to prevent him slipping; in the second we

<sup>806</sup> Dagbestuur 30.9.1943: 7.



**Figure 167:** Couple on the left in *Women spur men on*. Details of maquette and full-scale clay relief (photos left Russell Scott, right Alan Yates)

find an upright model child, facing front and neatly seated with knees together so that he hardly needs his mother to support him. Little wonder that, as discussed later, Laurika Postma would write that the boy was ‘not at all convincing’. Similarly, the absorbed interaction between the man and woman on the left of *Women spur men on* becomes stilted and rather meaningless in the full-size version (fig. 167). Or consider the expressive faces of Dingane and his supporters in the maquette for *Treaty* against the impassive faces of the marble relief; the former may be considered almost caricatural as opposed to the more considered physiognomies of the final panel, at least some of which were portraits, but the maquette is more compelling (fig. 168). Taken as a whole, the maquettes have a more energetic and alive quality, relinquished in the cause of a sense of gravitas aimed at monumentality in the frieze.

In part this difference is the result of the photographs of details of the maquettes having been taken at an angle, as these models are proportionally deeper than the marble sculptures, and the varying viewpoint emphasises this depth. In addition, the differences are undoubtedly heightened by the top lighting introduced in the exhibition of the maquettes at the Monument from which these photographs were taken. It is instructive to look at them against the frontal, more evenly lit images that were professionally photographed before the conservation work discussed earlier, when the colouring of the maquettes was different also. The brownish coating of the pre-2014 maquettes absorbs more light and thus tends to suppress detail and plasticity of the relief, while the new greyish and whitish colours as well as the more uneven surfaces of the post-restoration maquettes allow the light to enhance the modelling and narrative drama. In *Negotiation*, for example, details are more prominent in the exhibition shots: Moroka’s follower, the cattle in the background, the horse’s breast, the dog’s tail overlapping the margin of the maquette (fig. 169). Overall, it is the three-dimensionality of the sculpture that is more pronounced, which is also vividly illustrated in a photograph of the maquette for *Debora Retief* when it is top lit and photographed from below (fig. 170). These examples provide a forceful reminder of the volumetric character of sculpture and, most significantly, how our understanding of it is influenced by the conditions under which we view it.



**Figure 168:** Dingane and his followers in *Treaty*. Maquette and marble, detail of fig. 297 (photos above the authors, below Russell Scott)

Peter Kirchoff was undoubtedly aware of this. While he and the other sculptors were creating the maquettes, he had also been busy setting up the main hall as a large working studio and he had skylights installed to provide good top light for their task. As we know from some rare workshop photographs and Werner Kirchoff's recollections, there was room for two large wooden boards for creating the large-scale reliefs, one at either end of the space. While Peter Kirchoff could not exactly duplicate the conditions of the Hall of Heroes, he installed the boards at a similar height to

**Figure 169:** Frikkie Kruger. *Negotiation*. Maquette photographed in different light and from different angles (courtesy of VTM Museum VTM 2184/1-28; photos left the authors, right Russell Scott)



**Figure 170:** Laurika Postma. *Debora Retief*. Maquette photographed in different light and from different angles (courtesy of VTM Museum VTM 2184/1-28; photos left the authors, right Russell Scott)



the final frieze. Set up across the twelve-metre width of the hall, the boards neatly accommodated in turn each of the two sections of the north frieze on either side of the entrance, as we can see in surviving photographs of the sculptors at work on *Departure* at the hall's west end, their first full-scale panel, 7.1 metres long (fig. 171). The backboard on which they were working must have been close to nine metres in length, since it and the second matching board opposite it would also support half of the long friezes for the uninterrupted east, west and south walls, which were each about 17.3 metres long in toto.

The boards acted as the support for the development of the full-scale series of scenes, with a protruding edge at the top and bottom of the boards, about ten inches deep, to contain the depth of the relief. The boards were free-standing, and about half a metre below the position of the frieze in the Monument,<sup>807</sup> so that the lower section could easily be reached for modelling. An old photograph with Laurika Postma standing on ground level in front of *Departure* demonstrates that the bottom of the relief was about waist height as opposed to shoulder height in the Monument (fig. 172). There was also a platform scaffold with steps, supported on trestles to be moved as required, which was used by the sculptors when they worked on the upper part, as we see in the same photograph with Frikkie Kruger (out of focus) on the scaffolding in front of *Departure*. The framework that supported the working boards had pulleys installed above it for lifting plaster

<sup>807</sup> The frieze in the Monument is raised 1.35 metres above the floor whereas the large wooden boards in Harmony Hall were positioned, according to photographs of the time, c. 0.9 metres above floor level.



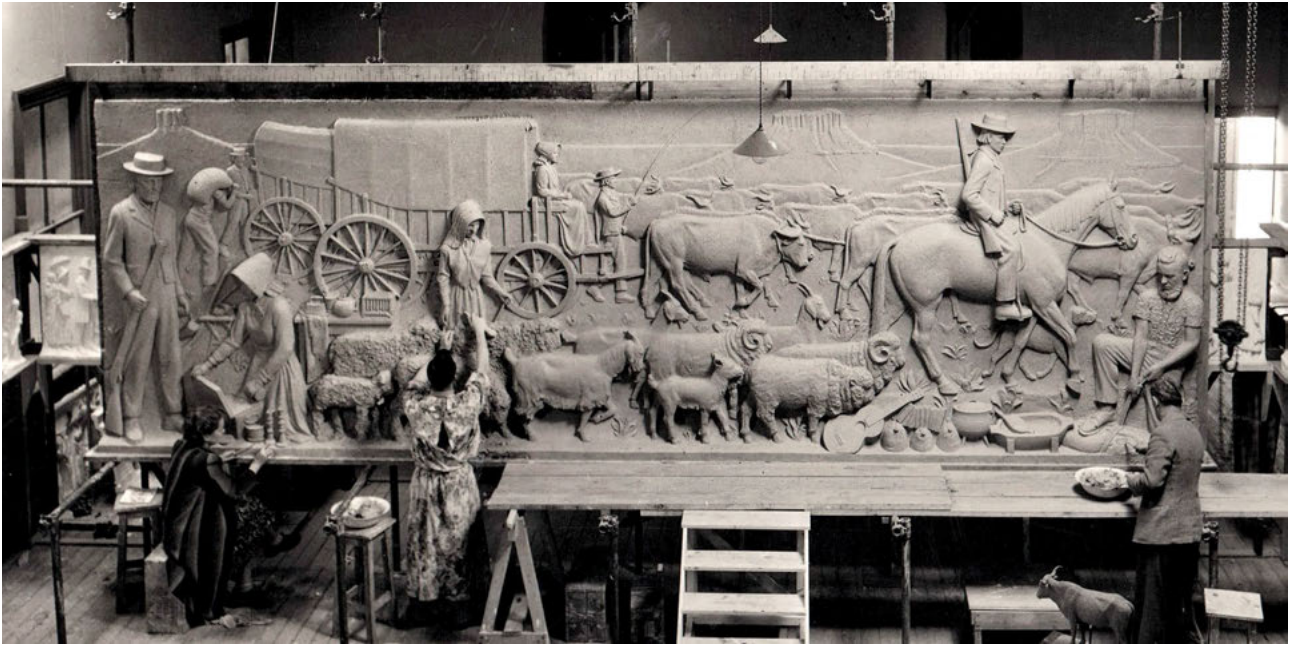


Figure 171: Harmony Hall view showing board supporting *Departure* with scaffold in front and lifting pulley above (detail of fig. 114)



Figure 172: Right side of *Departure* in progress in Harmony Hall, c. 1943, with, left to right, sculptors Frikkie Kruger (on scaffolding), Laurika Postma, Hennie Potgieter and Peter Kirchhoff (photo courtesy of Kirchhoff files)



**Figure 173:** Harmony Hall view with mock-up of the frieze made up of one-third-size maquettes (detail of fig. 114)

sections as casts were completed. Werner Kirchoff remembers his father acquiring various elements from Pretoria Iron and Steel Works to make the overhead track and pulleys, as well as the elements required for measuring coordinates, and how he experimented until he got the system right.<sup>808</sup>

As early as 1942 the four sculptors had been joined by two further people to assist them in the work at Harmony Hall, already mentioned as models. One was Piet Malotho,<sup>809</sup> appointed to ensure that the clay did not dry out, so that there could be continuous work on the maquettes.<sup>810</sup> He constantly sprayed them and covered them with wet cloths each evening, until such time as they were ready for casting, a process he would later repeat for the large clay reliefs. As discussed above, one must probably imagine too that there were many more designs being developed and kept moist than there are surviving plaster maquettes. The other person was Hendrik Ploeger, appointed to make the wooden structures needed for the process. He built a framework to support the plaster maquettes around the studio a little above eye level to mimic the layout of the ground floor of the Monument at one-third of its size, which

matched the one-third scale of the maquettes (fig. 173). This was possible in the generous space of Harmony Hall, where the length of the studio was considerably greater than what was needed, and it was also wider than a third of the width of the Monument's Hall of Heroes. It comfortably accommodated the sequence of the maquettes for each wall laid out end to end on the framework, which abutted one side of the studio, with a passageway left at the other side, as we can see in photographs. This mock-up of the frieze as though 'in situ' permitted the artists to see the maquettes set out in the correct order and, as we have seen, to consider different layouts. We know this was well developed by the end of 1942, as a letter of 19 January 1943 from T.J. Hugo to Jansen, regarding a visit of members of the Akademie to Harmony Hall, describes plaster maquettes assembled to make up a small-scale frieze.<sup>811</sup>

The decision to begin with *Departure*, as photographs record, made sense in terms of the narrative of the frieze, where it was the first scene. But there were other reasons too that made this the ideal choice. As a single scene, *Departure* was easier to conceptualise as a whole than a series of smaller scenes. Another was that the maquette for this panel had been made by Peter Kirchoff, who was by far the most experienced of the four sculptors, and who would be the overseer for the enlargement of

<sup>808</sup> Interview, December 2013. Much of this description of the working studio depends on Werner Kirchoff's recollections, as well as Potgieter 1987.

<sup>809</sup> Malotho also undertook general duties such as building the fire in winter, and making tea or coffee for the sculptors (Potgieter 1987, 41–42).

<sup>810</sup> This would have been an onerous task: it is interesting that Coert Steynberg, when working on the large equestrian monument to Louis Botha in 1939, elected to work in plaster rather than clay, because he was concerned that clay would crack in the dry hot climate of Pretoria (Duffey 1982, 289).

<sup>811</sup> ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7.



**Figure 174:** Blue and red surface markings in *Arrival*. Detail of maquette (courtesy of VTM Museum VTM 2184/1-28; photo Russell Scott)

his own design, even though all four worked on modelling it. It is probably not a coincidence that the making of this panel was more fully documented than those that followed, or that the photographs showed its setting in Harmony Hall and the equipment which Kirchhoff had developed.<sup>812</sup> As the only sculptor who was well versed in handling large-scale relief sculpture and fully understanding the complex apparatus it required, he had perhaps wanted to have it placed on record.

Before any of that took place, however, there must have been deliberations about the overall arrangement of the narrative,<sup>813</sup> although more changes would follow as we know from the photograph showing the later abandoned ‘Vendusie’ scene in place next to *Departure* (fig. 171), a position that would finally be taken by *Presentation*, as discussed in Chapter 2. Once the small plaster maquettes had been installed in the framework, the rectangular format of each was divided up evenly and the frames marked accordingly and numbered. Corresponding proportions were then marked on the front of the protruding edge at the bottom of the large boards, so that the measurements of the smaller panels could readily be transferred to the larger. Measuring instruments had been designed for the boards by Kirchhoff, and movable rules hung from a rail overhead, so that they could be lined up with the measured markings on the bottom edge of the board. The position of elements in the relief was calculated using three coordinates: top to bottom, left to right, and front to back – height, length and depth. The pointing system that was employed was not dissimilar to that used later by the Italian sculptors, although simpler and not with an infinite number of

<sup>812</sup> Interviews W. Kirchhoff 2013–14. This fuller representation in the photographs was possible because the second backboard, which would prevent such a generous view, had not yet been constructed; photographs of later panels lacked the wider context.

<sup>813</sup> See some discussion of this in Peter Kirchhoff’s letter of 27.8.1946, cited below.



**Figure 175:** Hendrik Ploeger applying clay on full-size armature for *Descent* (photo courtesy of Kirchhoff files)

measurements, for in South Africa the ‘points’ established by these measurements were only used for the broader placement of items, not details, which were developed as they went along.

A close examination of the plaster maquettes revealed surface markings presumably like those made by Ploeger to assist him in establishing key measurements for the transfer of the maquettes’ compositions to the full-scale boards for the making of the wooden armatures. Small crosses and right angles in blue or red can be seen in many of the excellent photographs of the maquettes taken by Russell Scott in 2012 (fig. 174),<sup>814</sup> and also lettering on *Saailaer*, intriguing although obscure in purpose, where three of the female shooting party are marked from left to right A (standing woman furthest left), B (next standing woman in foreground) and C (kneeling woman). No marks were found on *The Vow* and *Bloodriver* from which replicas had been made for the Blood River Museum in 2001, and it is unlikely that any will have survived the process of having moulds made in 2014/15 for further replicas during restoration work in preparation for the exhibition of the maquettes mounted at the Voortrekker Monument at the end of 2016. However, although our suggestion that the marks were possibly like those made for the scaling up of the scenes by Ploeger might seem an obvious explanation, it is not plausible. The maquettes when we first studied them before their recent conservation were coloured in a brownish tone, quite unlike their original colour of white plaster that is evident in the photograph that shows them mounted in Harmony Hall (fig. 173): this can only mean that at some point the surfaces were tinted, perhaps to imitate the clay of the original maquettes.<sup>815</sup> Since the markings are visible above that colour, it of course implies that they too were added at a later stage. While it is not possible to explain their purpose, they may have resulted from early restoration work on the maquettes, which Etta Judson recalls was undertaken in 1987 by sculptor Phil Minnaar (1946–2014), at a time when the plasters were still stored in the auditorium on the Monument site.

Once the measurements had been marked out for both the small maquettes and the full-scale clay reliefs, Ploeger set about transferring the compositions to the large boards by constructing an

<sup>814</sup> Nine maquettes were without markings: *Blydevooruitsig*, *Descent*, *Treaty*, *Bloukrans*, *Teresa Viglione*, *Dirkie Uys*, *The Vow*, *Blood River* and *Mpande*. Obviously there never were any on the few rejected maquettes that have survived since they were not used for the full-scale frieze.

<sup>815</sup> Enquiries from the staff at the Monument have elicited no suggestions as to how or when this colouration took place.



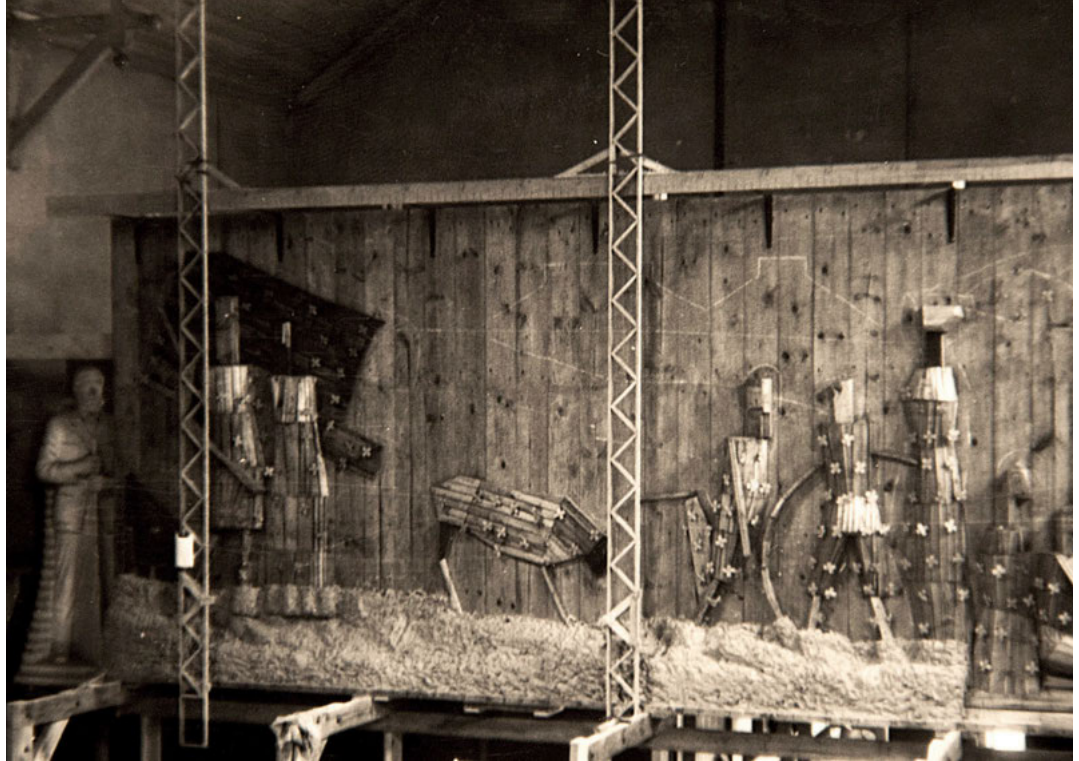
**Figure 176:** Frikkie Kruger(?) at work on *Murder of Retief*, west side of south frieze (photo courtesy of Kirchhoff files)



**Figure 177:** Hennie Potgieter(?) at work on *Bloukrans*, west side of south frieze (photo courtesy of Kirchhoff files)

elaborate armature on the wooden surface to delineate the main forms at full scale (fig. 175). As these boards were suspended inside the mock-up of the Hall of Heroes with its miniature frieze, initially they masked the west and east sides, with the maquettes of the north and south friezes visible between them for convenient consultation by Ploeger and the sculptors; those of the east and west would have been moved to this position later. While the sculptors worked on the first full-scale section, *Departure*, Ploeger was at work setting up the second armature on the second backboard. Once they had completed *Departure*, he could then dismantle its armature and proceed to build the third while the sculptors were working on the second relief, and so on. One might expect that after *Departure* from the north wall which was handled first, the other half of that wall would have

**Figure 178:** Armature for east side of the south frieze: *Descent* alongside *Treaty* (photo courtesy of Kirchhoff files)



followed.<sup>816</sup> If this was the case it is likely that the west side of the south wall was tackled next, as the Kirchhoff files have photographs of the sculptors at work on that section (figs 176, 177), and of the armature for the east half (figs 178, 179)<sup>817</sup> – if we assume those photographs were taken at the same time. Potgieter’s comment that, for *Inauguration* on the east side, he had to follow Kruger’s representations of Piet Retief,<sup>818</sup> which must have been those in *Treaty* and *Murder of Retief* on the south frieze, verifies that work on the east and west must have come later.<sup>819</sup> Additional evidence of the sequence of procedure is provided by a set of photographs in *Die Vaderland* of 26.2.1945, which illustrates the plaster casts of the full-scale clay reliefs in place in the Monument (fig. 183). Both the north and south walls are included, demonstrating that they were complete by early 1945, plus the right half of the east wall, with *Negotiation*, *Kapain* and part of *Inauguration*, which must have come next.

Because the full-scale relief was over two metres high and quite deep, as much as 30 cm,<sup>820</sup> the clay needed reinforcement to hold it in place on the surface. Small wooden crosses (referred to as ‘butterflies’) were fastened with copper wire to nails protruding from the surface of the board to correspond with the shallower sections which did not need a full three-dimensional armature to support the clay (fig. 175). Key points were calculated by scaling up the marked measurements from the one-third-size maquettes, and they were carefully noted in a book and annotated with descriptive references to provide a guide for the sculptors, who sometimes added further markers

<sup>816</sup> Werner Kirchhoff thought that the reliefs with *Vegkop* on the east side had followed *Departure* but this does not correspond with our evidence.

<sup>817</sup> The position of the backboards is clarified by photographs which also show background structures of the hall, the central arch of the stage at its west end (*Departure*; right half of the south wall), but no such opening at the opposite end (Ploeger’s armatures for the left half of that wall).

<sup>818</sup> Potgieter 1987, 48.

<sup>819</sup> Also confirmed by the *Rand Daily Mail* of 15.2.1945, which criticised the design of *Murder* and *Bloukrans*, discussed below.

<sup>820</sup> For example, *Mpande* (24) is 32 cm deep and *Marthinus Oosthuizen* (17) 28 cm.



**Figure 179:** Armature for east side of south frieze: *Treaty between Descent* and left-hand section of *Murder of Retief* (photo courtesy of Kirchhoff files)

to the board as they began working in clay. For the deeper parts of the reliefs, such as the figures, Ploeger had to build a more elaborate armature, linking forms with a thin lattice. Bodies were constructed from thick planks, cut on Kirchhoff's Delta fret saw, with lighter pieces of wood for limbs and roughly spherical forms for the heads that reminded Hennie Potgieter of a rugby ball. He remarked that they looked like the work of 'modern sculptors',<sup>821</sup> and the armatures in the old photographs do resemble experimental Cubist constructions (figs 178, 179). Such a reduction of detailed form at the outset of creating the full-scale frieze may have contributed to the broader treatment of the scenes of the final frieze, just as much as addressing the issue of scale itself would have done. It was relatively easy to make lively naturalistic figures on a small scale, but harder to retain on such a large scale.<sup>822</sup> Further formalisation probably also happened with the translation of the plaster casts into marble in the Italian stone-carving tradition of the Romanelli workshops in Florence, discussed in Chapter 4.

As the sculptors worked at Harmony Hall, they first moulded a layer of clay over the surface of the armature. Werner Kirchhoff recalls that Ploeger created the supporting structure at about two fingers depth below the intended final surface, which allowed for the addition of the clay, never more than four fingers deep. The sculptors then developed the details, such as the portraits. One of the models, Martso Strydom, remembers vividly the feeling of wet clay on her face, when Potgieter used a little wooden device like callipers to transfer the proportions of her features to the *Presentation* relief. Her remark highlights the potential of clay for intimately modelling human subjects, in both the tactile interaction of artist and model, and also the suitability of malleable clay for rendering the supple yet firm elasticity of flesh. Strydom's recollection also reminds us that the full-scale panels were large enough to accommodate life-size figures like hers in the foreground. She also remembers that the sculptors would work independently with the different models, and refers to working with Postma for her *Debora Retief* panel, as well as with Potgieter for *Presentation* and

<sup>821</sup> 'het ... soos die beeldhouwerk van teenswoordige "modern Beeldhouers" gelyk' (Potgieter 1987, 45).

<sup>822</sup> For confirmation of the measurements, see Heymans and Theart-Peddle 2007, 12.

*Vegkop*. However, the sculptors did not create the full scenes of the frieze independently as they had done for the maquettes. Instead, they all worked together, under the leadership of the sculptor who had designed the original maquette for whatever scene was being developed.

There were two reasons for this – the limitation of working on one board at a time, necessitated by the size of the studio, was a practical consideration, but there was also the desire to promote a unified style.<sup>823</sup> Potgieter even reported that they were not permitted to use their fingers for the final detailed modelling and textures, but worked with standardised sculpture tools, so that they would not leave traces of their individual styles!<sup>824</sup> However, it could become rather crowded at the boards so that they got in each other's way, and as the work progressed they more often undertook their modelling two at a time, one pair beginning the relief on a newly prepared board when Ploeger had finished the armature, while the others continued with the previous one. In addition, Peter Kirchoff recorded in a letter of 27.8.1946 that he had produced his later panels single-handedly.<sup>825</sup>

The difference between the maquettes and the full-scale clay reliefs was considerable, as surviving photographs of the latter attest. It is providential for our study of the development of the frieze that a decision had been taken to document the full-scale clay reliefs. A commercial photographer from Pretoria, Alan Yates, was called about a week ahead of the completion of each section of the frieze so that he could make arrangements to come in to photograph it, before it was destroyed in the making of the plaster moulds. Yates still used a process with glass plates which guaranteed accurate prints without distortion.<sup>826</sup> Making this record showed excellent foresight, as his photographs were to play a most important role, albeit with some shortcomings, discussed in Chapter 4, and not only for future researchers like ourselves. They were supplied to the Romanelli studio in Florence where the frieze was later carved, to facilitate early discussion of the project before the arrival of the actual reliefs, and provide a guide to both the size of the required marble blocks and the overall appearance of the frieze for piecing together the plaster casts of sections of it, prior to copying the scenes into marble (figs 185, 186, 187). Yates' photographs also had an unexpectedly extended life, being used for several decades in publications about the frieze, from special newspaper supplements for the inauguration in 1949, when the friezes were not yet complete, to the Monument's *Official Guides* themselves (1955–76), where only the *Bloukrans* panel with its major change was replaced. They were even used in the new Heymans guide of 1986, for which some photographs were adjusted or replaced where significant changes had occurred at the plaster stage, to be discussed below, such as the crenellations of the building in *Delagoa Bay*, and the baby held by the seated woman in *Inauguration*, as well as the torch-bearing Zulu in *Bloukrans*. However, some Yates photographs were still used unchanged, even when there were some modifications, as with the kneeling woman in *Saailaer* who still wears her hair in the coronet of plaits which was ultimately replaced.<sup>827</sup> It seems that only as late as 2007 was a full new set of black-and-white

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**823** Strauss (1964, unpaginated) states, without giving a source, that particular sculptors took responsibility for certain elements in the frieze: Kruger modelled the wagons and oxen, and Postma the hands of the figures – a well-attested division of specific craftsmanship practised in art since classical antiquity (UP Archives, Postma Folder 13).

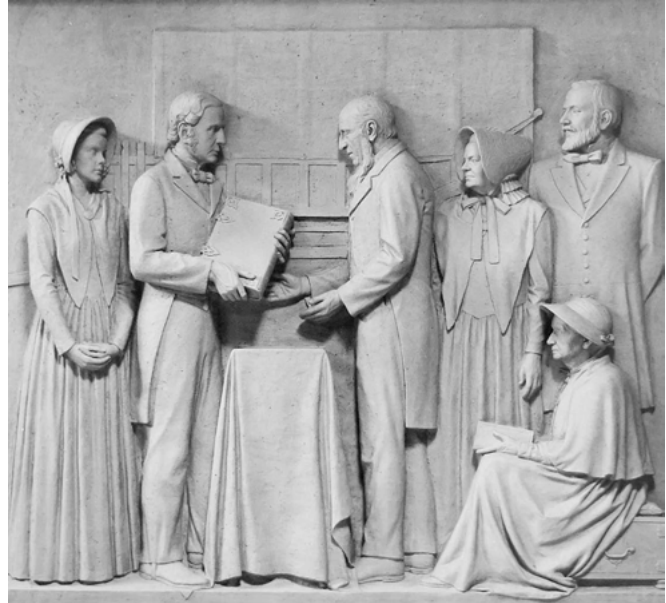
**824** 'By die finale vormgewing en tekstuurverkryging is van boetseerskrapers gebruik gemaak aangesien die blote hande en vingers van die kunstenaars die individuele stempel weer te sterk na vore sou bring' (Van der Westhuysen 1984, 19).

**825** Kirchoff files.

**826** Recounted by Werner Kirchoff (interview December 2013). While we have found Yates' photographs today chiefly in private hands, notably the Kirchoff and Romanelli collections (although four are also kept in UP Archives, Postma Folder 16), they were also the images released by the SVK in advance of the 1949 inauguration, when the frieze was still being installed and photographers and reporters could not have access. So newspaper articles too, and particularly celebratory supplements published at the time, show images of many of the full-scale clay reliefs. In some cases these photographs provide evidence, because of differences from the final marble reliefs of late changes that were made at the plaster stage after completion of the large clay reliefs.

**827** Heymans 1986, 12, 14, 33 and 35 respectively. Dotman Pretorius is credited with photographs as well as Alan Yates. It seems that Hennie Potgieter used the same photographs, also reproduced in sepia, for his publication on the





photographs available for the revised edition of *The Voortrekker Monument, Visitor's guide and souvenir* by Riana Heymans and Salomé Theart-Peddle, both affiliated to the Monument.

Examining Yates' invaluable photographs as a record of the full-scale clay reliefs made at Harmony Hall shows that, apart from the much more developed rendering of detail, there were also many changes to the figure arrangement of the small clay maquettes, and even the general composition, which were resolved as the full-scale scenes were tackled as, for example, in *Presentation* (figs 180, 181). Although a pointing system was used to enlarge the smaller to the larger reliefs, the relatively broad way this was handled gave considerable latitude in working up the large clay versions. Apart from possible discussions as the designs of the maquettes were being transferred to the armature, which might have allowed for changes at that stage, there was still a fair amount of leeway for development once they were in place, because only the general configuration of figures from the maquettes was given in Ploeger's constructions. It was possible to modify aspects like the angle of the body or the finer arrangement of the limbs, for example, as well as adding covering clothing with its details and drapery folds. Nor did an ovoid wooden head such as those used in the armature determine the precise direction of its turn or where it would direct its gaze, not to mention how the specific facial features of the models might be applied. There would have been even more freedom with the lower relief details in the background.

The modifications which were made were substantial. Perhaps because of the large scale, perhaps because of an aesthetic aspiration to produce weighty statements to embody the significance of the events, perhaps because of renewed calls from the Historiese Komitee for a sense of propriety, there was a strong tendency to tidy up the contours of forms and arrange figures in simple, broad planes. Although three-quarter views are retained, there is rarely the torsion of a complex multi-axial pose, or even of developed contrapposto. Overall, there is a formality that emphasises stability, even if there is not a preponderance of strictly frontal and profile views. Whether they intervened at this stage or not, the Historiese Komitee must have felt that their overall directives regarding the dignity of the Voortrekkers had been well understood. And Moerdyk may also have felt gratified that, although the reliefs were no match for the very shallow and subtle bas-reliefs employed by the Renaissance sculptors he had recommended, the compositions largely complemented the flat surface of the walls and did not compromise the integrity of the architecture.

**Figure 180:** Hennie Potgieter. *Presentation*. 1942–43. Plaster, h. 79 × w. 76 × d. 10.4 cm. Maquette (courtesy of VTM Museum VTM 2184/1-28; photo Russell Scott)

**Figure 181:** *Presentation*. 1943–45. Clay. Full-scale relief (courtesy of UCT Thompson A4.123–39; photo Alan Yates)

Monument in 1987, as it has the same changes and it too credits Dotman Pretorius, who was also responsible for the book's design (ontwerp).



**Figure 182:** *Vegkop* showing framing figures juxtaposed with figures from the adjacent scenes (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

As the sculptors worked side by side on the large wooden boards, the unification of different scenes depicted on different small maquettes demanded that links and overlaps between them had to be considered. Ploeger would have needed to know exactly where to transpose the forms from each small maquette to the backboard in relation to the adjacent scenes. There had clearly been a decision after the work on the reliefs had begun in 1942 not to frame each scene individually on the full frieze, and there were no enclosing borders on the maquettes or indication of a clear gap to be left between them. When dealing with a similarly extended set of historical scenes, Mitford-Barberton did not use frames but inserted emblematic groups of plants and animals to demarcate the boundaries between them in his frieze for the Old Mutual building in Cape Town (fig. 63). Unbroken continuity was not unusual in ancient friezes, however. There was often a single topic making the conception of the composition relatively straightforward, as in the battle scenes of the Temple of Apollo at Bassae or the Pergamon Altar, for example. But there were also precedents for multiple scenes in a continuous relief, such as the narrative of the Dacian wars on Trajan's column, which must have been familiar to Moerdyk in its cast form in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London where he had studied (fig. 314). Without artificial divisions, the independent coherence of different episodes of the narrative could be achieved by arranging the participants of a scene to face inwards, and this principle is frequently followed in the Voortrekker Monument maquettes. There are often 'framing' figures that conveniently bracket compositions in the rectangular format, as is the case with the female and male figures on either end of *Vegkop* (fig. 182). When the compositions of the maquettes were conjoined in the full-scale reliefs, those figures read as a residue of the previous panel edges, and perhaps offered the most convenient solution for the juxtaposition of different events. But, while the inward-looking figures give the scenes individual identity, there are some odd juxtapositions and some abrupt changes of scale. For example, although they are not related in the narrative in any way, the left arm and gun of Potgieter on the right of *Vegkop* overlap the adjacent female spectator in *Inauguration* who stands back to back with him, and is dwarfed by his gigantic figure. It is possible to see deliberate intention in the way that the Boer party, in attendance as Dingane signs the grant of land in *Treaty*, turn their backs so resolutely on the following scene of their own deaths, but it is disconcerting that they have to ignore the protruding elbow of a Zulu warrior and the leg of a collapsing Voortrekker that invade their space. And these are by no means the only examples of oddities created by the visual juxtapositions when the maquette compositions were joined to make the continuous frieze, as can be seen in the full view of the friezes in our foldout.

A crucial aspect that the sculptors do not seem to have considered when making the full-scale clay reliefs was the fact that they would have to be divided up when transposed into marble: there was no possibility of quarrying panels long enough to match the expanse of the half-wall-length reliefs that were composed on the backboards at Harmony Hall. While this working process was an advantage for the sculptors as it allowed them to focus on the continuity between scenes and the overall compositional effects of the frieze – or at least that for half of a wall – it delayed the question of the physical relationship to the ultimate marble panels. The way the frieze was developed as a continuous sequence of scenes probably meant that the sculptors did not think about the issue at all, or consider ways to allow for vertical cuts that would not mar the form of figures when the panels were carved separately. Marble blocks between 1.5 and 2.5 metres long, which would have worked well to accommodate the different lengths of the scenes, would have been relatively easy to source in the quarry, had the South African sculptors – or Moerdyk – considered the issue. However, they were apparently so intent on resolving how to put together the individual scenes developed in the small maquettes, that they forgot that the marble sculptors would have to separate them again.

When it came to dividing up the full-scale clay reliefs to make the plaster cast sections, as will be described below, the limitations of casting meant that the units were smaller than the marble panels would be, divided both horizontally and vertically, and hence rather arbitrarily. Where vertical joints corresponded roughly to the edges of the individual scenes, generally speaking these guided the choice of divisions for the final marble panels. But whereas the plaster sections could follow the contour of figures, this was not an option in marble. The edges of a number of the marble panels run across figures, ultimately causing unsightly joints in the frieze (fig. 273). It was apparently not an issue that the sculptors had been conscious of, even the experienced Peter Kirchhoff. While there were indications of where the vertical breaks should come on the Yates photographs sent to Florence, the final measurements of the individual marble panels were left to the Florentine marble workers to decide.

The photographs were significant also for showing the full expanse of each frieze when juxtaposed. It is extraordinary to realise that it would not have been possible for the artists or their advisors to see the effect of the compositions before the plasters were installed in the Monument. Because of the space available in Harmony Hall, the full expanse of the long walls could never be viewed as a continuum. Apart from the eight individual panels on the corner walls which could obviously be seen whole, the longest parts of the frieze that could be observed as a complete composition during their making were the friezes of the northern wall on either side of the entrance, *Departure* on the eastern, and *Return* and *Convention* on the western half; and even they could not be seen in juxtaposition with each other (see foldout). In all the other cases the backboards could have supported no more than half the length of the frieze – which meant that *Vegkop* and *Kapain*, for example, would not have been seen together at this stage.

This may also have led to problems with the two bisected central scenes, *Inauguration* and *Murder of Retief*. Images of these scenes in full are not to be found amongst the photographs of the large clay reliefs, and it is notable that, despite their key roles in the story of the Trek, they are absent amongst the many illustrations of the frieze in newspapers at the time of the inauguration, taken from Alan Yates' photographs of the full-scale clay panels. It confirms that a mathematical halving of the east and south friezes was used on the boards, so that the two central scenes could not be composed in full or fully photographed. This is verified by an unusual photograph on page 9 of *Die Vaderland* of 26 February 1945 (fig. 183),<sup>828</sup> taken once the first plaster casts had been installed in the Monument, which shows just half of *Inauguration* as only casts for the right side of the east frieze were ready at that stage. And in the full breadth of the south frieze a vertical join is

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<sup>828</sup> National Library collection, Cape Town. This unique photograph is almost certainly an image of the plaster casts in place in the Monument, as divisions can be seen, corresponding to those marked on the Romanelli photographs provided to the sculptors in Florence so that they could piece the plaster reliefs together correctly.

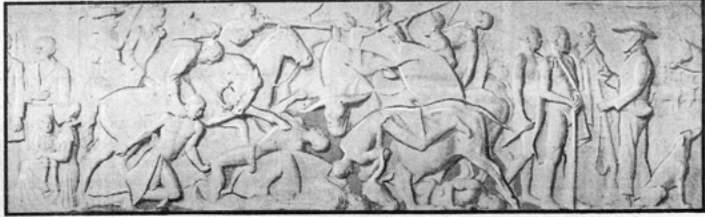
# Langste Beelde In Wêreld In Trekmonument



UIT marmor sal beelde soos hierbo gekap en aangebring word. Die broke reeks aan die binnemure van Suid-Afrika se monument. Die maak van die beeldereeks vir die Voortrekkermonument is 'n onderneming van die soort wat nog ooit in moderne tye in 'n pak is. Op die oomblik is dit nog van gips. Dit vorm 'n



die monument en is tans byna voltooi nadat drie jaar daaraan gewerk is. Die hierbo (links) is van dié gedeelte van die fries wat die begin van die trek voorstel. Daar word ingespan, huisgereedskap word ingepak, boere



Kapain voor.—Boere storm op perde, natuurlike storm op osse. Potgieter gryp 'n natuur in volle vaart aan sy nek. Die hele fries word later in Italië uit marmor gekap. Die fries is 7½ voet hoog en 292 voet lank — langste in die wêreld. Daar is 32 taferele. Die foto's is van enkele taferele.



DIE Voortrekkers daal teen die duiselhooftes van die Drakensberge. Man rol 'n wiel af. Takke dien as 'n stut. Die foto is 'n beeld van hoe die een insident wat uitgebeeld word, as 'n van die volgende waarin 'n hele reeks gebeurtenisse in volgorde



die ondertekening van die traktaat tussen Retief en Dingaan. Die gebind. Op die agtergrond is Dingaan se stat te sien asook plante en rotse wat aan die gebied eie is. Uiteindelik is daar die moord by Bloukrans. Vroue en kinders word vermoor. Een is sterwende. 'n Bloeddronk naturel hou sy atsgaai omhoog onderwyl hy 'n oorlogskreet aanhef.

## WAS ROOSEVELT ONGESTELD?

Volgens die nuusagentskap van die Vatikaan-stad het pres. Roosevelt ná die Krim-konferensie huis-toe gehaas omdat sy gesondheid nie te goed was nie." berig SAPA-United Press.

## SEUN ONBEHOORLIK GESTRAF

'n Vader wat sy sewejarige seuntjie op 17 Februarie so 'n pak gies met 'n ierlyband toegelien het dat die merke daarvan 'n week daarna nog duidelik sigbaar was, is Saterdag in die plaaslike magistratuur deur mag. P. J. Hougard drie maand lank tronk toe gestuur. Hy is Stephanus Francois Fouche.



DIE Trekkers kies weer 'n plek oor die Drakensberge liewer as om in Natal te bly. Daar is 'n onafhanklikheid deur die ondertekening van die Sandrivier-traktaat. Die sentrale saal van die Voortrekkermonument sal 'n ereaal vir die Afrikaanse volk gebring sal word.



Die Italiaanse regering sal voortaan self onbelemmerde beheer uitoefen oor sy buitelandse betrekkinge en oor die sake wat tot dusver deur die Brits-Amerikaanse kommissie beheer is. italie twee— Harold MacMillan, president van die kommissie, het gister hierdie verslaving van die wa-

## Italië Kry Heelwat Skiet

DIE Italiaanse regering sal voortaan self onbelemmerde beheer uitoefen oor sy buitelandse betrekkinge en oor die sake wat tot dusver deur die Brits-Amerikaanse kommissie beheer is. italie twee— Harold MacMillan, president van die kommissie, het gister hierdie verslaving van die wa-

## Snyplek, Kneusing, Brandplek of Seer?



GENEES DIT MET ZAM-BUK Zam-Buk wat altdo...

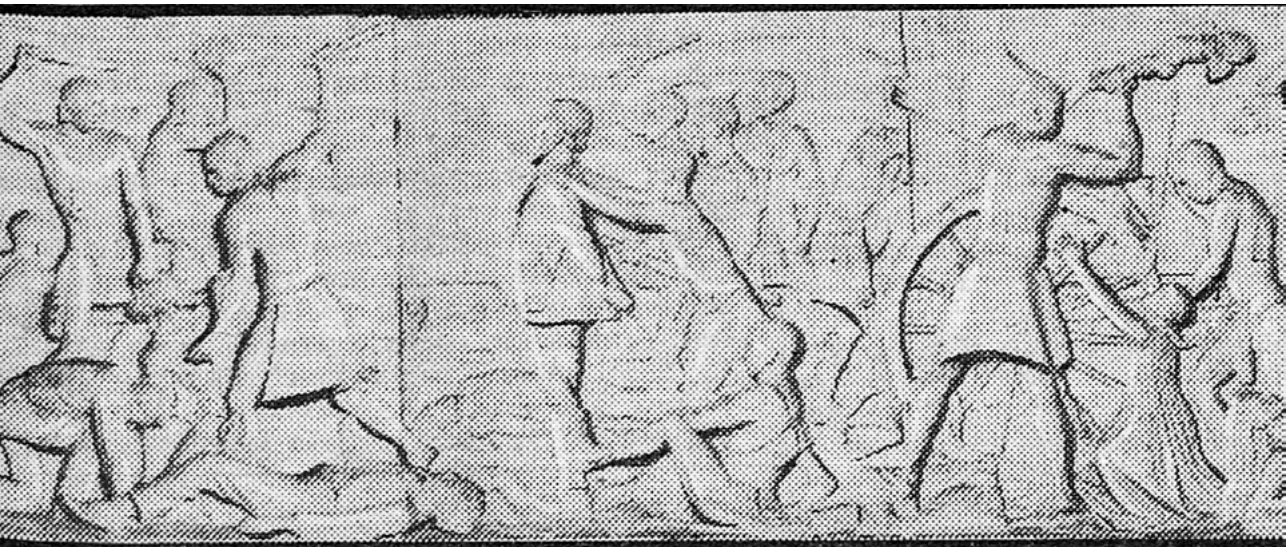


Figure 183: Photograph of completed plaster panels mounted in the Hall of Heroes, Die Vaderland 26.2.1945; with detail of Murder of Retief and Bloukrans (photo courtesy of National Library, Cape Town)

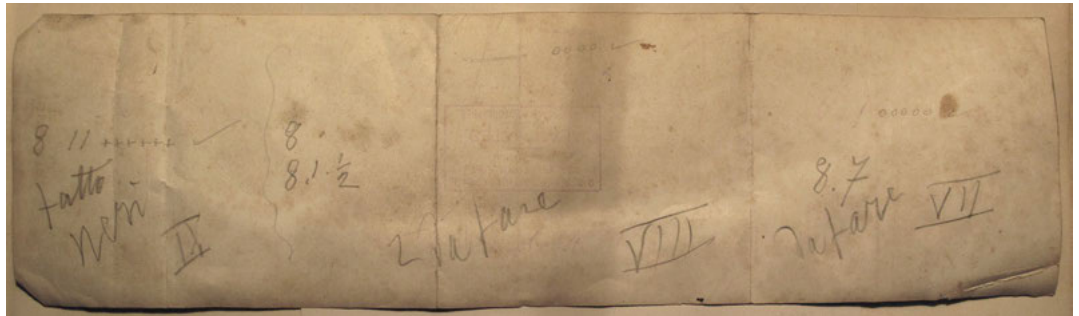


**Figure 184:** *Murder of Retief*. 1943–45. Clay, full-scale relief (Potgieter 1987, 24; photo Alan Yates, stitched)

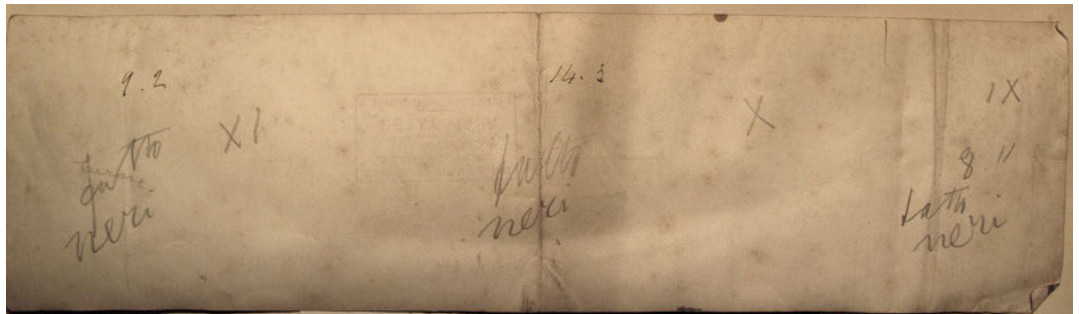
visible in the middle of *Murder of Retief*. The vertical line of the division where the two halves were brought together is even more clearly visible in the film *Die verhaal van die Voortrekker Monument met tonele uit die bou van 'n nasie*, made after the Monument's inauguration, but evidently still using the Yates photographs for its shots of the scenes. The film shows a vertical join in *Inauguration* and *Murder of Retief*. Yet it would have been logical to work on these important central scenes as a unit, and Werner Kirchhoff, who thinks he recalls Frikkie Kruger depicting Dingane's homestead in the centre background of the *Murder of Retief* as a single unit, suggests that the joint was a photographic one, rather than for the frieze itself.

But there is no obvious reason for such a decision by the photographer, and photographs of the sculptors at work on the south frieze also show a break in the *Murder of Retief*. The hiatus with a vista to Dingane's extensive capital between the figures enacting the brutal drama in *Murder of Retief* is considerably larger than that proposed in Coetzer's sketch, suggesting some adjustment. One might speculate that this was the result of needing to increase the size of this panel to match the measurement of the south wall. Yet the final scene on the right, *Teresa Viglione*, which was installed before the adjacent panel for the south wall – *Bloukrans* – had arrived from Italy, had to be trimmed. The composition of the murder scene was criticised by the writer of the critique in the Postma file in the UP Archives, who stated that Retief seemed isolated from the other half of the panel (fig. 184). It was suggested that this could be resolved by developing a figure or modelling the rocks more strongly, to bind it to the other half, but in this case no modifications were made. However, one can also argue that the central opening promotes not only an almost full aerial view of Dingane's dreaded capital uMgungundlovu but also the prominence of Retief as martyr, gazing steadfastly into the distance with raised head, unmoved by the carnage around him. In *Inauguration* of the east frieze, a central split and the trickiness of matching up the two halves vertically might have been the cause of some particular awkwardness in the final form of Retief's unconvincing kneeling pose in relation to the table (figs 190, 191). While the east and south walls were worked up in two halves, this was not the case for the west wall. Judging by the photograph of this full-scale clay relief, *Blood River* was worked in full as in the final undivided marble panel, perhaps because Kirchhoff modelled it on his own, as he claimed in his letter of 27.8.1946.<sup>829</sup> But the independent modelling of this scene in full may also have been undertaken because other completed parts of

<sup>829</sup> 'I designed this battle, the building of the Church of the Vow, as well as the two scenes at Saaiplaas, and modelled them alone' (Kirchhoff files).



**Figure 185:** Alan Yates photograph of north half of east frieze and reverse with annotations (courtesy of Romanelli files; photo the authors)



**Figure 186:** Alan Yates photograph of south half of east frieze and reverse with annotations (courtesy of Romanelli files; photo the authors)



**Figure 187:** Alan Yates photograph of west half of south frieze and reverse with annotations (courtesy of Romanelli files; photo the authors)

the frieze had been installed at the Monument by then, bringing home the importance of creating coherent central scenes.

As discussed, judgement of the overall composition would only have been possible once the plaster reliefs were reunited at the Monument, so it was not only as a storage solution that those reliefs that were finished were set up there once the building was far enough advanced for their installation, early in 1945.<sup>830</sup> This installation depended on the availability not merely of the designs completed in full scale in clay, but their conversion into more durable plaster reliefs.

## The plaster casts

It might seem logical for the casting to have been delayed until the whole frieze had been designed in clay, and then carried out as a final stage in the processes at Harmony Hall, but in fact each length of relief on the backboard was cast as soon as it was completed. There might have been advantages in the sculptors being able to return to earlier sections to make modifications as work progressed and they became increasingly familiar with their task, but the immediate finalisation of each section in plaster precluded any second thoughts at the Harmony Hall stage. Casting sections right away was necessitated by the limitation of space with only two boards for modelling clay in the hall, and by the sheer magnitude of the entire project. Keeping the clay moist and in pristine condition would have been another challenging task for such large works. Instead, there was the advantage of being able to reuse the clay, and the plaster casts provided a permanent copy right away.

Werner Kirchhoff, who was an eyewitness to the making of the plaster panels, is our main informant for the process, in which he sometimes assisted as a boy. He remembers that his father, who was a keen ceramicist, tried out various types of clay for the project. Bags of clay were acquired from different sources, and he dictated the mix to be used. The casting procedure too was dependent on his knowledge and understanding, reinforced relatively recently by his work on Van Wouw's *Voortrekker mother and children* cast in bronze but requiring the same initial steps as those being used for the frieze. As each stretch of the full-scale frieze was finished in clay, the process

<sup>830</sup> See *Rand Daily Mail* 15.2.1945 (NARSSA, BNS 146/73/3); *Die Vaderland* 26.2.1945.



**Figure 188:** Peter Kirchhoff with Gerard Moerdyk and his portrait bust at Harmony Hall. c. 1944–45. Plaster cast of section of *Vegkop* behind (photo courtesy of Kirchhoff files)

of producing its plaster replica began. Making the plaster casts right away meant that the backing board would be freed up for Ploeger to dismantle the armature of the completed panel and build a new one, while the sculptors turned their attention to the one at the other end of the room, which he had already prepared. It was a remarkably efficient system, and one that allowed no respite from the relentless rhythm of production.<sup>831</sup>

Although the fact that it was a relief rather than a sculpture in the round made it somewhat more straightforward, casting such a large work was no easy matter. It could only be done in relatively small sections.<sup>832</sup> Werner Kirchhoff has described how narrow strips of copper, three or four centimetres wide, were used to provide a lip for the plaster and they were inserted into the clay, about half a centimetre deep. The strips divided the frieze in half horizontally, then vertically into sections, but these divisions were not regular. Although the scenes were divided up more or less evenly, some effort was made not to split figures where it could be avoided, and on occasion divisions veer off at an angle to prevent this. Some of these configurations can be deduced from copies of Yates' photographs that were sent to the Romanelli studio in Florence where the marble carving would be undertaken, today in the Romanelli family files (figs 185, 186, 187). A few of the long photographs, which correspond to the full-scale clay reliefs made in one piece on the backboards, have been divided up with ink or (coloured) pencil lines, one continuous line bisecting them horizontally, and then partitioned by a series of vertical lines which sometimes meander to right or left to follow the contours of a form. For example, the eye of a horse in *Kapain* was neatly circumscribed, and in *Vegkop* the vertical cut was angled past the kneeling figure of a woman pouring bullets on the left, so that she and the half-bending woman remain together as a group in the plaster cast. This is further verified in a photograph showing Kirchhoff modelling a portrait of

<sup>831</sup> A note from Moerdyk to Lombard related to one of his certificates of authorisation in December for the payment of the sculptors' salaries, notes that they were about to go on their annual leave, so apparently there was at least some respite over Christmas (Archives [old numbering] VTM vol. A2).

<sup>832</sup> This meant that it would have been possible to start casting one end of a long section while the far end was still being finalised, and this may occasionally have been done.



Moerdyk, presumably on the veranda at Harmony Hall, where by chance in the background a part of the *Vegkop* cast is visible that shows the angled edge of the plaster (fig. 188).

For the casts, basins of plaster were prepared, half-filled with water and then plaster of Paris added to the height of the water and stirred in. To tint the initial dense plaster mix, a teaspoonful of red oxide was also added. This pink plaster was applied to the clay model in a thin layer of only a few millimetres, beginning at the bottom with the section below the horizontal copper divider. After about an hour, once that was dry, plain white plaster was scooped up onto the surface with a round-tipped trowel to build up a layer about two centimetres thick. As the thicker plaster was applied, V-shaped reinforcing bars were worked into it, leaving the corner protruding at the top to form an eye or loop for the pulley rope. When the lower section was finished, the one above it could be prepared in the same way, then another bottom section followed by another top, and so on, until the whole surface was covered. The following day, when the plaster was thoroughly dry, a hose pipe was inserted at the top and water sluiced over the relief of the first two sections to loosen the plaster from the clay. Once that mould was released, the process was repeated for the next section. It was crucial not to produce a bad mould, as the process meant that their months of work in the clay disappeared and could not be retrieved. In fact, the remaining clay was gathered and recycled for use in the following design.

Although done in sections, the casting process was a relatively straightforward one, and did not make provision for separate casts for areas with undercutting. Nor does there seem to have been reworking of the plaster casts to take account of more complex passages, an issue that will be discussed in Chapter 4. The next step was to lift the plaster panels with their negative imprint of the full-scale clay reliefs from the board with the pulley and move them to the veranda. There the moulds were placed face up and sprayed to wash away any clay that had adhered to them so that all traces were removed, the sculptors sometimes having to use their fingers to carefully clear the last remnants out of nooks and crannies in the surface. For the subsequent stage, to assist the positive cast they were making to separate from the mould, they first treated it with a solution of bicarbonate of soda. The plaster of Paris that was then scooped into the mould was an even stiffer consistency than that used before. After the first thick layer had been applied, reinforcing metal bars of finger thickness were placed around the edges and diagonally across the centre of the plaster as bracing, before the mould was filled up to the height of the original backboard. The back of the cast was also lined to prevent cracking, using fibre orange bags cut into strips as more customary sisal was difficult to obtain at the time. These strengthening measures were of special importance because the plaster sections had, at a later stage, to be reunited at the Monument, and eventually shipped to Italy.

When fully dry the completed cast and mould of each section was lifted onto an easel for detaching the mould. To do this, true to the name of the 'waste mould' process, the sculptors chopped away the plaster mould with hammer and chisel, removing it in pieces about double hand size, as Werner Kirchoff recalls. Once again the process must have felt very drastic as the mould was completely destroyed. This was where the thin pink layer came into use, as it provided a visual guide showing where to stop if the mould did not separate easily from the cast. The finished casts were kept on the veranda until they could be transferred to the Monument, where the upper sections were attached to the lower, joined with screws or tied with wire, and placed in the correct position. But initially quite a number had to be stored at Harmony Hall as they waited for the roof at the Monument to be finished, early in 1945. All the plaster casts completed at that stage could then be installed at the same time, permitting the first view of longer parts of the frieze than had been seen before. Later plaster panels would have been added at the Monument as batches of casts were completed.

Sadly but understandably, the plaster casts were not preserved at the Romanelli studio where they were sent after World War II to be carved in marble, and there are only a few old photographs in newspapers depicting them in situ at the Monument to record this stage in the production of the frieze. The unusual set of photographs in *Die Vaderland* of 26.2.1945 (fig. 183), which shows the full



**Figure 189:** Plaster casts of *Kapain* and *Negotiation* in situ in Monument. Corner panel of *Blydevooruitsig* already removed (*Die Vaderland* 10.9.1947; courtesy of UP Archives, Moerdyk files)

expanse of different sections of the frieze to reveal the unfolding narrative, were published after the earliest installation of plaster panels at the Monument.<sup>833</sup> They confirm that the reliefs for the south and north walls, and the right half of the east wall, were complete by then. But the presence of the child seated on his mother's lap in *Inauguration* and the baby being killed against a wagon wheel in *Bloukrans*, both to be altered for the final frieze, demonstrate that there were still modifications to come.

The *Vaderland* photographs also show the joints of the plaster sections and how they were pieced together across the frieze. The low-resolution photographs are not very clear, but it appears that in most cases vertical joints correspond roughly to the edges of the individual scenes, corresponding to the divisions marked on the Romanelli photographs. Easier to see is the horizontal split running, for instance, from in front of the upright body of Retief across the *Bloukrans* group. Horizontal divisions are generally also the clearest in other photographs of the plasters in situ, as in *Bloukrans* in the *Rand Daily Mail* of 15.2.1945 (fig. 192), and the east frieze with *Kapain* and *Negotiation* in *Die Vaderland* of 10.9.1947 (fig. 189). But it is difficult to discern other divisions with any precision. While mainly due to the grainy quality of the newspaper photographs, this leads us to speculate that there might have been some temporary filling of the breaks between the plaster sec-

<sup>833</sup> Their installation is confirmed by a *Rand Daily Mail* article of 15.2.1945, as well as *Die Vaderland* article of 26.2.1945.

tions when they were installed in the Monument. This would have made it easier to get a sense of the overall compositional unity and was perhaps also done to make the frieze appear more coherent when it was shown to visitors. Press photographs provide other information too: for example, in the photograph of the east frieze of September 1947 the panel over the door for *Blydevooruitsig* is empty, confirming that the small panels had already been sent to Italy.<sup>834</sup> That some plasters had already been despatched is also verified in an article about the Monument in *Die Volkstem* of 10.9.1947.

These photographs also provide evidence of the guided tours conducted by Moerdyk on request, in this case for 150 delegates attending the annual conference of the ATKV,<sup>835</sup> which had undertaken the organisation of the 1938 centenary trek, discussed in Chapter 1. As the newspaper articles attest, this was an opportunity for the architect to expound the symbolic intention underpinning the architecture and its sculptural narratives, ideas that would be reiterated on many occasions, including in the Monument's *Official Guide*.

In an earlier interview with *Die Burger* on 6 September 1946, Moerdyk had discussed the implications of seeing the frieze as a whole.<sup>836</sup> He stressed that this was the first time that he as architect could view the overall design of the frieze and its compositional rhythms, and could assess whether changes might be needed for aesthetic reasons. Although he does not mention the sculptors, this would obviously have been true for them as well. One can imagine that they must have experienced some considerable anxiety as they waited for the scenes to be installed in situ for the first time, so that they could see the composition as a continuous frieze, and how it related to the architecture. Presumably they agreed with Moerdyk (with some relief) when he stated that only minimal changes would be required and that no scene would be radically altered or omitted. Reminding readers that historians had been consulted at every point, Moerdyk reiterated that only small details might be modified at that stage to ensure absolute accuracy, citing the fact that even botanists were consulted about the correctness of plants depicted in some of the scenes. All the details of the frieze were being checked because the frieze was a very important historical record, he claimed, and would be into the future. Possibly because of the contention there had been about the representation of *Bloukrans*, discussed below, which was widely reported in the press, he apparently felt the need to reassure the public that there was no cause for anxiety that the history of the Great Trek would be misrepresented in any way.

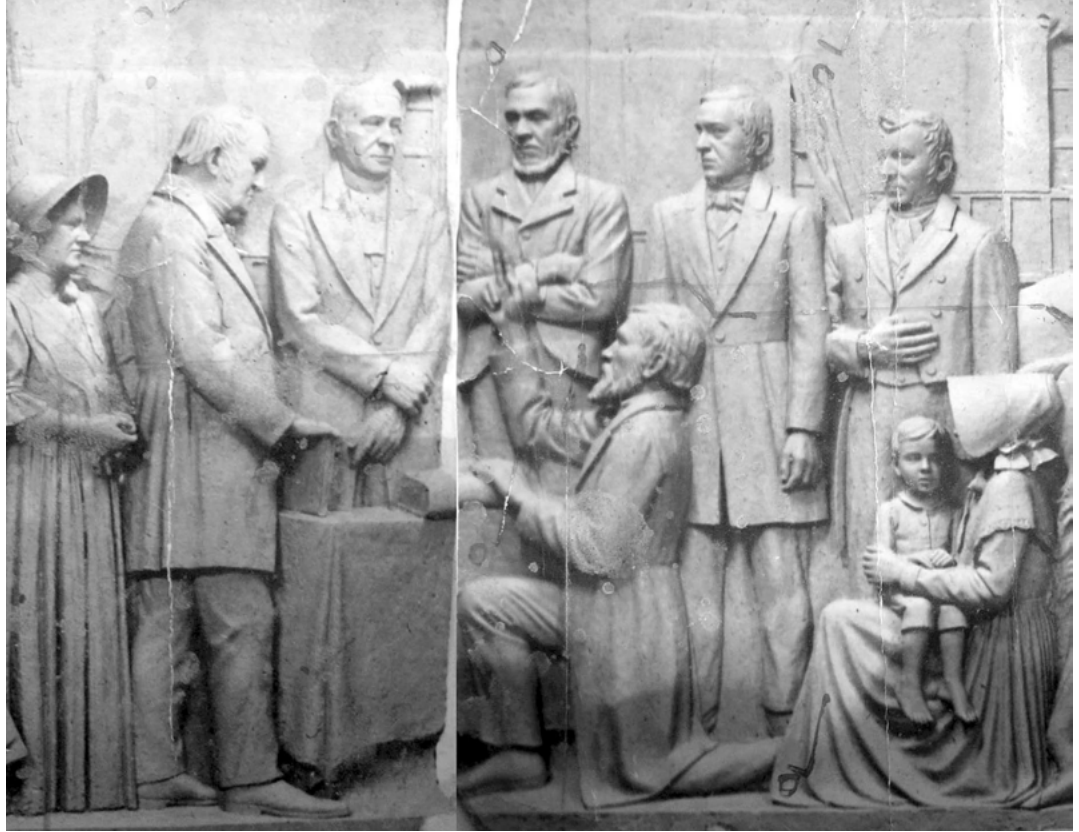
It is hard to conceive that major changes would have been undertaken at this stage, as altering the plasters would have been much more difficult than modifications when the frieze was still in malleable clay. However, as the plaster had been cast in sections, it would have been possible to replace some of those in a scene without fully reworking the whole. There are a number of noticeable differences, over and above more subtle stylistic variations, that can be detected between the photographs we have of the clay reliefs and the final marble frieze. As discussed in the individual scenes in Part II these changes demonstrate that they were definitely undertaken at some point after the completion (and consequent destruction) of the full-scale clay models as we know them from Yates' photographs. For example, we find crenellations on the governor's house in the marble *Delagoa Bay* that are absent in photographs of the large clay version, and the kneeling woman in *Saailaer* has exchanged her coronet of plaits for a hairstyle with a bun. The seated woman in the clay *Inauguration* scene had a small boy on her lap, whereas in the marble she holds a baby (figs 190, 191).

One might speculate whether such changes could have occurred after Yates took the photographs but before the clay reliefs were cast in plaster. But this is unlikely, and in the case of the last change, there is evidence that it was definitely made at the plaster stage. While the east frieze to which *Inauguration* belongs was undertaken in full-scale clay early in the sequence, probably

<sup>834</sup> Dagbestuur 5.8.1947: 10.

<sup>835</sup> Reported in *Die Volkstem* 10.9.1947; clipping in UP Archives, Moerdyk files MDK0497T.

<sup>836</sup> UP Archives, Moerdyk files MDK0503T.



**Figure 190: Inauguration.** Full-scale clay relief showing seated woman with small boy (courtesy of Romanelli files; photo Alan Yates, stitched by the authors)

in 1944, the boy is mentioned in Postma's handwritten comments that probably dated from 1946, when the SVK asked the sculptors for their critiques after the panels were installed in the Monument. The notes remark of the scene: 'Very stiff. The child also not at all convincing.'<sup>837</sup> So the change from child to baby must have been made at the plaster stage, involving the making of yet another clay model and a replacement plaster cast for that section.

This process is confirmed by an affidavit dated 5.11.1947, prepared by Postma, Potgieter and Kruger in relation to Kirchhoff's complaints about modifications made to his contributions to the frieze. There it is stated that it was easier to see certain mistakes in plaster than it had been in clay, making it clear that some modifications were made at that stage.<sup>838</sup> In relation to a change that Kruger had wanted that is mentioned, involving figures in 'his' reliefs that had been modelled by Kirchhoff, it is stated that he asked Potgieter and Postma to attend to it in Italy. This must mean that modifications were not even finalised before the plasters were sent to Florence, although neither Postma in her letters from Italy nor Potgieter in his 1987 publication mentions undertaking such changes there. It is unlikely that we will ever be able to know absolutely conclusively how or when all the various changes were undertaken.

However, there is one significant change that we can definitively state occurred after at least a considerable part of the frieze was in plaster form and installed in the Monument. This was a major alteration to the left-hand group in *Bloukrans*. The intervention there took its beginnings not in any official critique, but in a provocative article by a *Rand Daily Mail* reporter, who had managed to gain access to the Monument. The article appeared on 15 February 1945 under the startling headline 'Gruesome Friezes in Voortrekker Monument' (fig. 192).<sup>839</sup> As discussed in *Bloukrans*, where it

<sup>837</sup> 'Baie styf. Die kind ook glad nie oortuigend nie' (UP Archives, Postma Folder 14).

<sup>838</sup> ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7.

<sup>839</sup> NARSSA, BNS 146 73/3.



**Figure 191:** *Inauguration*. Showing seated woman with swaddled baby. 1949. Marble (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

is transcribed, the article focused on the Zulu warrior on the left ‘swinging an infant through the air preparatory to dashing its head against a wagon wheel’. The motif had first appeared in Coetzer’s sketch for the scene, which almost certainly drew on contemporary accounts of the massacre, and was adopted by the sculptors for their representation (fig. 193). It was described by the journalist as ‘deadly propaganda’, and launched a furore of objections. The SVK archive houses letters from an extraordinary range of protestors, from Mrs Barnett Potter of the Association of European and African Women (received 5.3.1945), to Rheinallt Jones of the South African Institute of Race Relations (8.3.1945), to Senator Edgar Brookes (12.3.1945).<sup>840</sup> The latter, raising the point that, as the government was funding the Monument it fell on it to intervene, made ominous references to the likelihood of ‘serious misunderstanding’ should the matter be raised in Parliament. By 13 March, Jansen was already responding by telegram to a wire message received from the Minister of Internal Affairs, to assure him that historians had selected the scenes, which had also been approved by the SVK. Moreover, it reminded the recipient, in the terse language of telegrams, that the government had been informed of progress throughout the process.

In public statements, Jansen explained that the idea of obscure symbolic images for the Monument had been rejected in favour of more realistic narrative scenes that would be accessible to all, and further that there had been wide consultation at every step along the way. But his attempts to calm the situation had little effect – the motif was too obnoxious, and the debates in both the public press and private correspondence continued for many months, as did a flurry of official letters between the SVK and the ministers of Internal Affairs, Finance and Public Works. It is not surprising that the SVK became rather defensive, but it is remarkable to read the tone and veiled threats of a letter dated 21.3.1945 to the Minister of Internal Affairs from Jansen:

<sup>840</sup> For this and related correspondence, see NARSSA, BNS 146/72/3.



**Figure 192:**  
 Newspaper article  
 'Gruesome friezes  
 in Voortrekker  
 Monument' with  
 illustration of *Bloukrans* (*Rand Daily Mail* 15.2.1945;  
 courtesy of NARSSA,  
 BNS 146/73/3.

If the public had the idea that the government was trying to prevent the truthful portrayal of Voortrekker history, there would undoubtedly be enormous agitation throughout the country ... it would lead to bitterness, the results of which are difficult to predict.<sup>841</sup>

The SVK was still jealous of its authority in all matters related to the Monument. The response might also suggest the growing resistance by Afrikaners to the government, after Smuts had not only ousted Hertzog from leadership in the United Party, but had as recently as 1944 forced all brethren of the nationalist Afrikaner Broederbond who were public servants and railway employees to resign from that society, with which most complied as discussed in Chapter 1. Jansen was the first civil servant to defy the directive, as he 'preferred to give up his important government post rather than abandon the Broederbond'.<sup>842</sup>

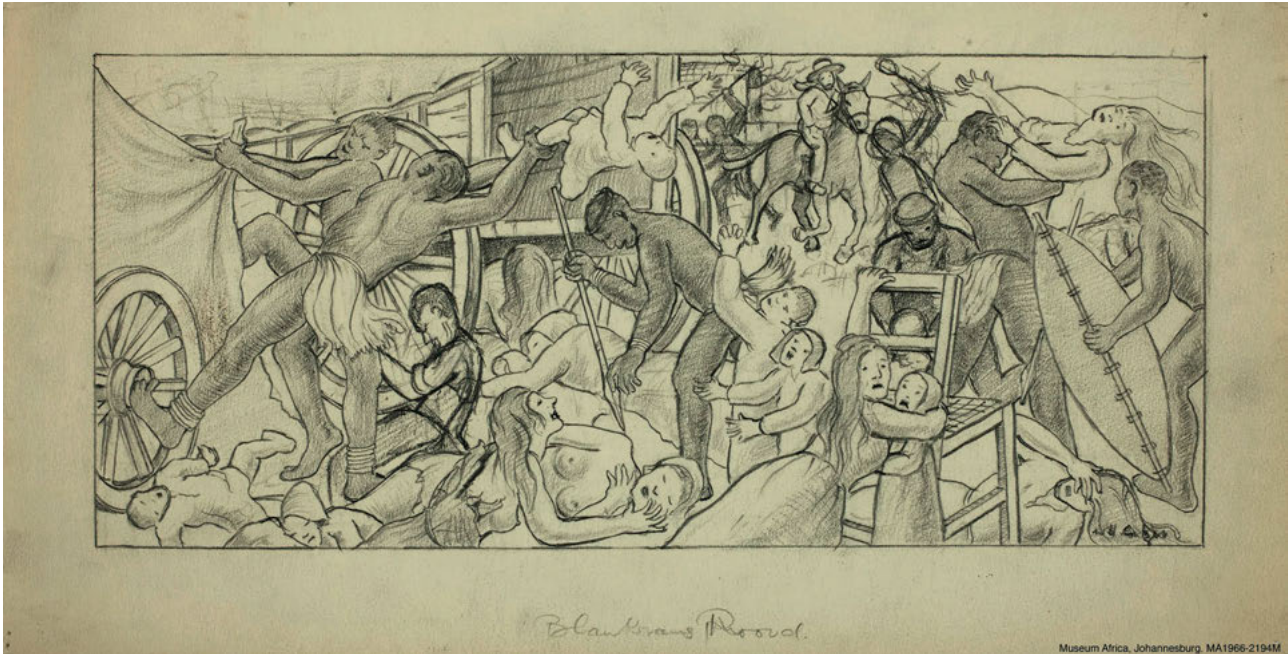
In the end, Prime Minister Smuts resolved the *Bloukrans* matter. After he had viewed the relief in person, he determined that the offensive group had to be changed, and conveyed that decision in a letter of 2.1.1946.<sup>843</sup> But the delay in the SVK response was inordinate and only in August 1947 was it reported to the Dagbestuur that Postma and Potgieter were busy with the revisions in plaster. The offensive motif was expunged (fig. 194) and a new relief developed (fig. 195), introducing a Zulu torching a wagon in place of the baby slayer.<sup>844</sup> While the committee worried about the historical accuracy of the new subject matter, possibly using its reservations as a delaying tactic, the sculptors had the problem of inventing a new figure to replace the censured one in order to fill the given

<sup>841</sup> NARSSA, BNS 146/73/3.

<sup>842</sup> Bloomberg 1989, 197.

<sup>843</sup> See the text of his letter in *Bloukrans*.

<sup>844</sup> Dagbestuur 5.8.1947: 4.



space. The changes that were made to the panel will be discussed in full in *Bloukrans*, but that it had taken well over a year to fulfil a decree that came directly from the prime minister is an indication of the deep reluctance of the SVK to compromise what it understood to be historical truth.

Most unusually, presumably because it was such a contentious scene and a major alteration, a photograph of the modified clay was made showing the reworked Zulu torching a wagon – which would be copied into the final marble relief – identifiable too because the right-hand side of the scene has only been worked in rough form (fig. 195).<sup>845</sup> It survives with the photographs in the Romanelli family files, forwarded to the studio to show how the repugnant figure was to be replaced, although a new plaster relief was presumably also sent. It is a telling illustration of the power of images that it was only the group in *Bloukrans*, to which the *Rand Daily Mail* drew attention in its

**Figure 193:** Motif of baby being dashed to death in W.H. Coetzer, 'Bloukrans Moord' sketch, 1937, and *Bloukrans* full-scale clay relief, 1943–45 (photo above courtesy of Museum Africa, below courtesy of Kirchoff files; photo Alan Yates)

<sup>845</sup> See also Pillman 1984, 50.



**Figure 194:** Section cut from the full-scale plaster relief of *Bloukrans* with baby being dashed to death. 1945–47 (VTM Museum; photo Russell Scott)



**Figure 195:** *Bloukrans*. New maquette with Zulu torching a wagon in place of dashing baby to death. 1946–47. Plaster, h. 79 × w. 83 × d. 9 cm. (courtesy of VTM Museum VTM 2184/1-28; photo Russell Scott)



photograph and caption, that was ultimately altered; although the article criticised *Murder* as well, it was not modified. This is yet another example of how the sculptors had to respond to the ongoing interventions of critics who constantly proffered advice and issued directives, from the earliest stage of Coetzer's drawings to the final frieze. The artists would seem to have had no personal voice. They were required to follow the instructions of those who, while they believed they understood the history, did not really take account of the aesthetic or practical issues involved in making a large-scale frieze. It was to be a work in which individual creativity would have little place, with the contributions of different artists homogenised into a group (read 'volks') statement.

In a letter of complaint about scenes being altered without his knowledge (August 1946), Peter Kirchoff would assert his claim to intellectual property regarding his designs and the work he had undertaken on his own, going on to make a strong claim for the importance of creative independence.

I cannot help expressing my surprise at the fact, that, quite apart from the legal aspect of the matter, such a cultural outrage can be committed wittingly or unwittingly by a body who is expected to have every claim to the highest cultural standing. If a thing like this is allowed to happen in a community it would mean the end of all true artistic and cultural life.<sup>846</sup>

The other sculptors, however, accepted the situation at the time:<sup>847</sup> Kruger, Postma and Potgieter described in an affidavit of 5.11.1947 related to Kirchoff's complaint how it had been clarified from the outset that individuality was to be suppressed and that Moerdyk had the right to ask any of the sculptors for modifications at any point. They referred to the frieze as a collective 'volkswerk':

Mr Moerdyk told us that we should not think that anyone's spirit in any part of the work should be recognisable, or should be acknowledged, because he explained that it was a work of the people and so to protect the unity it should not be possible to claim that the technique of one or the other had triumphed.<sup>848</sup>

All in all, despite Kirchoff's later objections, the sculptors seem to have been remarkably bidable, quite the opposite of the expectation that artists are independent and nonconformist, and 'have been biting the hands that feed them since antiquity'.<sup>849</sup> One can only assume that a real sense of commitment to the Afrikaner cause made them accept the idea of willingly suppressing their individual creativity in favour of achieving a homogenous style suited to a 'volks' monument. They would certainly have felt less happy with a reference in the record of a discussion on their role by members of the Dagbestuur around the same time, where the sculptors were slightly referred to as salaried employees who did no more than carry out instructions under supervision, like professional clerks.<sup>850</sup> This attitude on the part of the SVK is borne out by the denial, in relation to Peter Kirchoff's complaint, that he had any claim to copyright on the panels he had designed; by their refusal of Potgieter's request that the artists be allowed to make small replicas of the panels

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**846** Letter from Kirchoff to Jansen dated 31.8.1947 (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7). He particularly objected to the modification of *Saailaer* (referred to as *Saaiplaas* – sowing farm as opposed to sowing laager) after he was no longer working on the frieze. From this point on he communicated through his solicitors, although it seems that no lawsuit eventuated. See the series of documents that followed Kirchoff's letter in ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7.

**847** It is discussed below that Hennie Potgieter at least was to express his dissatisfaction at a later stage at being given no recognition as an individual artist (1987, 43–44), and pursued a long-term quest to have the signatures of the artists added to the panels for which they had been responsible. Here he would seem to have been *ad idem* with Kirchoff.

**848** 'Meneer Moerdyk het aan ons gesê dat ons nie moet dink dat die een of ander se gees in een of ander deel van die werk sou kan erken word nie, of herken word nie, want hy het aan ons verduidelik dat dit 'n volkswerk is en dat daar om 'n eenheid te bewaar die gehele werk nie geëis kon word dat die tegniek van die een of die ander sou seëvier nie' (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7).

**849** Mitchell 1990, 884.

**850** Dagbestuur 8.10.1947 (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7).

for sale at the inauguration, again on the basis that they did not have copyright;<sup>851</sup> and by the ruling that no signatures by the artists were to be permitted on the panels.<sup>852</sup>

The *Bloukrans* episode was a sequel that finally concluded this phase of the creation of the frieze, although Harmony Hall continued to be rented until 1950 for other work on the Monument. The modelling of the largest sections of the frieze, the eight sections that corresponded to half the length of a long wall, took roughly four to six months apiece, so, including the eight smaller panels of the corner walls, the process would have taken something close to four years. Although the records do not assist us to assign specific dates to the different sections of the frieze, we calculate that, when we include the additional time spent on the maquettes, the overall period taken to model and cast the frieze was a little under five years. This matches the time span of the sculptors' employment: their contracts which had begun early in 1942 were terminated on 31 August 1946,<sup>853</sup> although there was some sporadic further work, such as the modifications of the *Bloukrans* panel a year later. Moerdyk flew to Italy in September 1946 to make arrangements for the carving of the frieze in Italy.

## The frieze in Italy

Once Moerdyk had confirmed that the frieze would be of marble, there was every expectation that it would be given its final form in Italy, because South Africa did not have marble of a suitable quality for the undertaking. Hence the strange voyaging of the Voortrekker Monument frieze, which is all the more extraordinary in view of the sheer volume of the 92 metre expanse of the reliefs. Following their modest local trip from Harmony Hall to the Monument for viewing in situ, the plaster casts travelled from Pretoria to Durban, then all the way from South Africa to Italy by sea, probably to the port of Livorno. They then journeyed inland for their sojourn in Florence for their metamorphosis into marble, before the reliefs sailed back to South Africa and journeyed by train and lorry to the Monument once again.

According to Hennie Potgieter, Moerdyk told the press that the frieze was made of Carrara marble,<sup>854</sup> probably because that name was well known, and he boasted that it came from 'the quarry from which Michael Angelo had obtained the marble he used for his masterpieces'.<sup>855</sup> As

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<sup>851</sup> Dagbestuur 11.8.1949: 11.

<sup>852</sup> Hennie Potgieter campaigned endlessly against this decision, at first to no avail. Finally signatures were permitted, and carved onto the panels from specimens of the sculptors' signatures (the date is uncertain, but must have been between 1976 and 1987; Werner Kirchhoff recalls being asked for a copy of his father's signature for this purpose around 1980). Potgieter's publication on the Monument remarks a little bitterly that the reason they were given for accepting a low salary, that they would on completion of the frieze 'be pushed into the foreground' (op die voorgrond gestoot word), was an empty promise. The sculptors were given very brief acknowledgement at the inauguration only because of the intervention of Mrs Ellelien Malan, wife of the prime minister, who discovered that they were not going to be introduced as the sculptors to those who attended the ceremony and insisted that this should be done (Potgieter 1987, 43–44). It is also noteworthy that although photographs and short biographies were requested from the sculptors for inclusion in the official programme for the inauguration of the Monument (letter from T.J. Hugo to Kirchhoff, 12.6.1949), it was ultimately decided not to use them (letter from M.C. Botha to Kirchhoff, 11.10.1949); both documents are in the Kirchhoff files. Moerdyk did, however, acknowledge their contribution in the *Official Programme* (1949, 49), outlining something of the difficulties they faced, and saying, 'We owe them all a debt of gratitude for their sacrifice and co-operation during six difficult years. The result of their labour is surely one of the greatest works of art in the country.'

<sup>853</sup> Dagbestuur 26.6.1946: 14.

<sup>854</sup> Potgieter 1987, 50.

<sup>855</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 41. Here Moerdyk correctly states that the marble came 'from Forti di Marmi [Forte dei Marmi] in the Appenines'. Here, around 1900, Adolf Hildebrand (discussed in Chapter 4) had commissioned a villa with a studio built after his own designs; see Braunfels 1993, 492–493 with figs.

Potgieter notes, ‘it was in actuality Quercetta [sic] marble’.<sup>856</sup> a particularly hard and durable type of the stone, dense, micro-crystalline and creamy-white in colour, which was quarried about nine miles south of the city of Carrara, near Seravezza at Monte Altissimo.<sup>857</sup> Quercetta is a town situated below Seravezza, near Forte dei Marmi, the harbour from which this marble used to be shipped. One might wonder why the marble itself was not simply imported to South Africa and carved there, but shipping costs were estimated in terms of weight and volume, and as the carved marble panels had less than half the volume of the unworked blocks the reduction in transport costs was considerable.<sup>858</sup> In addition, there was no import tax on original artworks.<sup>859</sup> Issues of economy aside, there was of course also the need for a suitable workforce to carry out such a major project. Apart from any questions there may have been about the stone-cutting skills of the South African sculptors,<sup>860</sup> with only four of them the project would have taken many, many years to complete. And in any case of failure, no spare marble would have been available for months. It was necessary to find a professional establishment which had the space, the equipment and the sculptors to undertake the task, and one in the vicinity of an excellent quarry would be ideal. The choice for the transformation of the frieze into marble was the long-established studio of Romano Romanelli in Florence, discussed in Chapter 4, which specialised in carving marble, both copies of antiquities and new works, some designed by Romanelli himself, others commissions from different artists.

The changes to the way the frieze was executed and its postponement until the 1940s contributed greatly to the increased costs, some three or four times as much as originally budgeted. In part this related to the wages of the South African sculptors who, although their salaries were relatively modest, earned considerably more than workshop sculptors in Italy.<sup>861</sup> Moreover, they did not then complete their task in the year or so that it took to make the maquettes, but continued working full-time at Harmony Hall for nearly four additional years to produce the full-scale clay reliefs.<sup>862</sup> Expenses in postwar Italy too had increased considerably because the cost of marble had risen, and the labour force was beset by problems, including quarry strikes; an additional factor was the volatility of currency exchange rates after the war. Transport costs also far exceeded what had originally been estimated, and continued to increase throughout the period that the frieze was being completed. In addition, the Italian sculptors, who still had to carry out the copying even if not the enlarging of the South African designs, were no longer available at low prewar wages. Moerdyk

**856** ‘... in werklikheid Quercetta-marmer ...’ (Potgieter 1987, 50). Raffaello Romanelli, sculptor and grandson of Romano Romanelli, considers this marble from Seravezza to be the finest and hardest to carve (interview, Florence, 4 September 2013).

**857** For Michelangelo’s discovery of Monte Altissimo, see Donato 2003, 27–28; Scigliano 2005, esp. 193–194. For a short history of the marble quarries, still operative today, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see <http://www.henraux.it/uk/company/our-history.asp>

**858** Nonetheless, the costs for transport related to the frieze would be enormous. The accounting for this is not consolidated, so it is only possible to pick out entries detailed as transport-related in the ‘List of payments made per certificate’ (Lys van uitbetalings gemaak per sertifikaat) from 15.9.1936 to 31.3.1950 and 31.3.1950 to 31.3.1951: for example, £1 000 was paid to Romanelli for packing; £665 to Transvaal Transport Contractors; £1 859.13.0 to F.A. Poole for transport and hoisting, and payments amounting to £8 625.14.5d to Lissone & Lindeman and Eyre & Humbert for unspecified transport costs during 1948 to 1950, possibly shipping, as well as £1 917.75d to D. Francis & Co (the correspondence is in NARSSA, BNS 146/73/4).

**859** See Potgieter, ‘Historiese fries gee moeilikheid’ (historical frieze creates difficulties), Supplement to *Die Volksblad* 12.12.1948.

**860** The lack of South African sculptors experienced in professional copying would have been a significant factor in the decision to have the frieze carved in Italy, as suggested by Hennie Potgieter in an interview with Elizabeth Rankin in March 1989.

**861** Hennie Potgieter used the still relatively low Italian wages to point out, in the article he wrote for the supplement to the *Volksblad* (12.12.1948), that the frieze would have been far more expensive were it not that the salaries of the Italian carvers were still so much lower than they would have been in South Africa.

**862** The sculptors pursued their own interests during the following year, but some further work on the plaster casts was undertaken by Postma and Potgieter in late 1947, after which they were contracted to oversee the carving in Italy.

Scenes	Width of panel	Sections	Marked cuts on Romanelli photos
<b>NORTH WALL</b>			
1 <i>Departure</i>	7.11 m	12	None
<b>NORTH-EAST CORNER</b>			
2 <i>Presentation</i>	2.4 m	04	None
3 <i>Soutpansberg</i>	2.4 m	04	None
<b>EAST WALL</b>			
4 <i>Delagoa Bay</i>	2.52 m	04	04 (1.34 + 1.27 = 2.61 m)
5 <i>Vegkop</i>	4.56 m	08	08 (1.03 + 1.35 + 1.24 + 1.25 = 4.87 m)
6a <i>Inauguration</i>	1.41 m (1st half)	02	02
6b <i>Inauguration</i>	1.41 m (2nd half)	02	02
7 <i>Kapain</i>	4.32 m	06	06
8 <i>Negotiation</i>	2.73 m	04	04
<b>SOUTH-EAST CORNER</b>			
9 <i>Blydevooruitsig</i>	2.4 m	04	None
10 <i>Debora Retief</i>	2.4m	04	None
<b>SOUTH WALL</b>			
11 <i>Descent</i>	4.76 m	08	None
12 <i>Treaty</i>	2.14 m	04	None
13a <i>Murder of Retief</i>	1.85 m (1st half)	03?	None
13b <i>Murder of Retief</i>	1.85 m (2nd half)	03?	02?
14 <i>Bloukrans</i>	4.61 m	08	08 (1.14 + 1.14 + 1.17 + 1.10 = 4.55 m)
15 <i>Teresa Viglione</i>	2.07 m	04	04
<b>SOUTH-WEST CORNER</b>			
16 <i>Dirkie Uys</i>	2.4 m	04	None
17 <i>Marthinus Oosthuizen</i>	2,4 m	04	None
<b>WEST WALL</b>			
18 <i>Women spur men on</i>	2.25 m	04	None
19 <i>Arrival</i>	2.34 m	04	None
20 <i>The Vow</i>	2.28 m	04	None
21 <i>Blood River</i>	4.29 m	06	None
22 <i>Church of the Vow</i>	2.19 m	04	None
23 <i>Saailaer</i>	4.01 m	06	None
<b>NORTH-WEST CORNER</b>			
24 <i>Mpande</i>	2.4 m	04	None
25 <i>Death of Dingane</i>	2.4 m	04	None
<b>NORTH</b>			
26 <i>Return</i>	3.6 m	06	None
27 <i>Convention</i>	2.82 m	06	None
Section numbers		140	

**Figure 196:** Table of cuts of the plaster sections for the frieze (the authors)

pointed out in a 1946 memorandum that the Italians' previous wage of £5 per month had escalated to £1 per day, so that the carving alone would cost over £20 000, in itself twice the original budget of £10 000 for the frieze in its entirety.<sup>863</sup>

Another increase that is not specifically mentioned, but must have been a factor, was the far greater volume (and fragility) of plaster casts that needed to be sent to Italy, as opposed to the small maquettes, probably somewhere in the region of 140 separate sections of varying widths, that had to be carefully packed and transported. The precise number is not recorded, but can be calculated with a reasonable amount of certainty. We know that the relief panels were all divided horizontally, giving a height of 1.15 metres, and the photographs in the Romanelli files, which also show exactly where the vertical dissections were for parts of the east and south friezes, make it possible to understand those divisions precisely (figs 185, 186, 187). They range from the smallest width of 1.03 metres for the left section of *Vegkop* to the largest of 1.34 metres for the left section of *Delagoa Bay*. These measurements correspond well with Werner Kirchhoff's memory that the sections were in the region of a metre square. Working with the average widths it becomes possible to estimate the number of cuts on the other scenes, and arrive at an overall total of one hundred and forty (fig. 196).

In his 1946 memorandum justifying the need for additional funds, Moerdyk stressed that enlarging the small maquettes in South Africa had been advantageous in order to assure a more definite 'Afrikaans' character for the sculpture.<sup>864</sup> Indeed, setting the Afrikaner justification aside, it is impossible to contemplate what the frieze might have looked like had the small maquettes been the Italians' only guide. The composition of the reliefs and the conceptualisation of the narrative as we know them could hardly have been achieved other than by the South African sculptors, however skilled the Italian carvers might have been, because its nature was – and could only be – finalised when it was developed in the full-scale version.

As in the selection and appointment of sculptors, Moerdyk led the way in finding a suitable European studio for the carving of the frieze. He was an enthusiastic traveller, and had spent time in Italy, dating back to when he, still a student, witnessed the making of Van Wouw's bronzes for the Vrouemonument in Rome in 1912. Once involved in building the Monument, he may have explored studio possibilities in a general way when visiting Europe, but the completion of the plasters for the Monument frieze focused the need, and prompted his visit to Italy to initiate arrangements in September 1946. There were earlier links with Florentine studios that may have directed his investigations to the Romanelli studio that was chosen to carry out the carving of the frieze. One such link was that Moerdyk knew Renzo Vignali, who had undertaken the casting of Van Wouw's *Voortrekker mother and children* (fig. 49) in Pretoria in 1939.<sup>865</sup> Moerdyk was even reported in the press as acting as some kind of host to visitors who came to witness the pouring of the bronze,<sup>866</sup> the first of significant scale cast in South Africa, which was assisted by the foundryman's father, Gusmano Vignali.<sup>867</sup>

Gusmano Vignali had established his Fonderia Artistica in Bronzo ed Altri Metalli in Florence in 1901, where he had undertaken major bronze commissions in the early decades of the twentieth

<sup>863</sup> Memorandum in verband met die historiese fries Voortrekkermonument (Memorandum in connection with the historical frieze Voortrekker Monument), 8.11.1946 (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/2).

<sup>864</sup> Ibid.

<sup>865</sup> Laurika Postma too knew the Vignalis, having had works cast at the foundry in Pretoria, and visited the family in Florence (Pillman 1984, 56).

<sup>866</sup> 'Onder die beskoekers was gister die bejaarde beeldouer self. Die aanwesigers is deur mnr. Gerard Moerdyk, argitek van die monument, verwelkom' (Amongst yesterday's visitors was the elderly sculptor himself. Mr Gerard Moerdyk, architect of the monument, welcomed the guests). *Die Burger* 7.8.1939, quoted in Du Plessis 1996, 114.

<sup>867</sup> Renzo Vignali wrote to Jansen to ask for his assistance in obtaining a permit for his father to come to South Africa to assist him with the casting of the Van Wouw statue (see *ibid.*, 209–210). After he had completed casting that (and Laurika Postma's *Voortrekkermeisie*), Renzo was interned on 10 June 1940, the day Italy entered the war (but not his father who carried on work at the foundry), although he was released a few months later, in order to cast Steynberg's equestrian statue of *Louis Botha* (*ibid.*, 122–123).



**Figure 197:** Romano Romanelli. Equestrian statue of Louis Botha. 1931. Bronze, cast by Vignali foundry, Florence (photo courtesy of Alamy D47KY7)

century.<sup>868</sup> With reduced opportunities in the economically straitened times of the 1920s, however, the Vignali family began looking for opportunities to take their skills elsewhere. Renzo moved to South Africa in 1931,<sup>869</sup> while another son, Rolando, emigrated to South America. The Vignalis had a long-standing acquaintance with the Romanellis and the two families had even collaborated on a work for South Africa.<sup>870</sup> In 1927 Raffaello Romanelli had entered the international competition for an equestrian statue of General Louis Botha, first prime minister of the Union of South Africa, to be erected in Cape Town.<sup>871</sup> Romanelli's design was selected from the eighty-three entries and he was awarded the commission, although he did not live to hear the outcome of the competition. The project was taken over and completed by his son Romano, the very man who would oversee the Monument frieze, and it was the Vignali foundry in Florence that carried out its casting in bronze (fig. 197).<sup>872</sup> The award of an important sculptural commission like this must have given the Romanellis considerable publicity in South Africa, especially around the time of the unveiling of the statue in February 1931. Estelle Pretorius also states that Romano Romanelli had a great interest

<sup>868</sup> See Anna 2013, esp. 29–35.

<sup>869</sup> For information on the establishment of the Vignali foundry in Pretoria, see Du Plessis 1996, 53–56, and Anna 2013, 183–197.

<sup>870</sup> Anna 2013, 103–108.

<sup>871</sup> Crump and Van Niekerk 1988, 50–51; Ben Yosef 1989, 19. For a full discussion of the production of the work, see Du Plessis 1996, 116–135.

<sup>872</sup> Duffey 1982, 280–284; Du Plessis 1996, 65–67.

in the country's history and the Great Trek.<sup>873</sup> Even if Moerdyk had not heard of the Romanellis personally, which seems improbable, the fact that the Vignali foundry had been contracted to cast the Louis Botha statue makes it likely that Renzo Vignali would have recommended the Romanelli studio to him – at least when it was confirmed that the frieze would be of marble, and any hopes he might have had of winning the commission himself were ended.

There is some evidence that Moerdyk might have known Romano Romanelli, who is discussed more fully in Chapter 4, even before the unveiling of the *Louis Botha* sculpture in 1931. At the Romanelli studio in Florence, we found an undated document by Romano Romanelli's son, Raffaello, possibly prepared as motivation for an application seeking support for the studio. Written after 1955, the document described work that the studio had obtained since its closure during the war years. It recounted how the studio opened for a period after the war, chiefly to fulfil the Voortrekker Monument project, which it proudly noted was entrusted by Moerdyk to professional Florentine sculptors in preference to others – 'even those of Greece'. Raffaello Romanelli said that the South African architect had chosen the Romanelli studio because he had 'continuously admired the beauty of the workmanship realised by the mastery of the studio Romanelli as far back as 1930 when he visited and saw various sculptors in the process of making a relief measuring 5 × 5 metres, the work of Romano Romanelli for the Palazzo di Giustizia in Milan, *La giustizia di Traiano* (fig. 263).<sup>874</sup> Even if not quite as early as 1930, this firmly dates Moerdyk's visit before 1934, the year it was completed.<sup>875</sup>

It is intriguing to learn of Moerdyk visiting a sculpture studio at that point in his career, when the SVK had barely been established, and the Voortrekker Monument project so recently broached. Was he already thinking about sculpture in marble for the monument he hoped to design? There is also food for thought in learning that the Voortrekker Monument provided employment not only for the white builders and artists in South Africa, but also for a considerable number of Italian workshop sculptors in Florence in the later 1940s. The Romanelli document specifically stated that twenty-five men were contracted to work on the frieze for three years, while Moerdyk mentioned forty in his memorandum of 8.11.1946, and Hennie Potgieter estimated that there were fifty.<sup>876</sup> It may have been that Raffaello Romanelli was counting only professional sculptors and differentiating them from others hired to undertake such tasks as tool sharpening or rough stonecutting, who may have been included in Moerdyk's and Potgieter's estimates. But whatever the precise figure, the family premises were not nearly large enough for a commission of this size, and four additional workshops had to be hired for the period.<sup>877</sup>

The need for Moerdyk to go to Italy to set arrangements in place was mentioned as early as September 1945, when he planned to go in March of the next year, with the South African sculptors following in July to oversee the work.<sup>878</sup> On this occasion he mentioned that the work would be done 'mechanically' (*masjinaal*), as though underplaying the role that the Florentine sculptors would have, perhaps again to emphasise the Afrikaner nature of the reliefs. On 28.2.1946, the Secretary for Internal Affairs wrote to the Secretary for External Affairs about priority flights for Moerdyk, because he had to go to Italy to select suitable granite (*sic!*), but in fact the need for such

**873** Pretorius 2003, unpaginated. The source of this information is not documented.

**874** '... era rimasto in ammirazione della bellezza della lavorazione eseguita dalle maestranze dello studio Romanelli quando nel lontano 1930 lo visitò e vide vari scultori intenti all'esecuzione di un bassorilievo di M.5x5 (opera di Romano Romanelli per il Palazzo di Giustizia in Milano)' (typewritten document in the archive of the Romanelli studio, Borgo San Frediano, Florence).

**875** Maulsby 2014, 317–18 fig.3. The dates of 1933–34 given by Campana (1991, 73) for the completed marble do not clarify the starting date for the preliminary work in clay, even though she illustrates the relief in plaster as well as marble (*ibid.*, figs 75a and b); so Raffaello Romano's distinct dating 'as far back as 1930' may relate to the early stages of production.

**876** Potgieter 1987, 49. Ferreira (1975, 120) writes of forty 'beitelaars' (chisellers) and six sculptors.

**877** Potgieter 1987, 48.

**878** Dagbestuur 13.9.1945: 8.

arrangements was still on the agenda in August, when it was noted that Moerdyk would travel the following month.<sup>879</sup> By early November, he had been to Italy and was reporting back with information about his findings regarding marble availability and relaying the bad news about increased costs, particularly relating them to the unfortunate exchange rate.<sup>880</sup>

As already mentioned, Moerdyk produced a memorandum (dated 8.11.1946) for the SVK at the request of the Dagbestuur at this point.<sup>881</sup> It detailed his findings, and elaborated on the increased costs which he estimated would be another £30 000.<sup>882</sup> He reported that suitable marble was obtainable at the Querceta quarry from the firm Henraux, who had been supplied with the required measurements and had quoted £70 per cubic metre (totalling £4 211). They had also quoted for undertaking the carving at £90 per square metre (£21 500). But he had another estimate from Romano Romanelli at approximately £20 000, with a projected completion time of a year, based on forty first-class sculptors carving the frieze. There was no discussion recorded on his recommendation to go ahead with Romanelli at the Dagbestuur or at the SVK when he presented his report: the focus was on costs and deadlines.<sup>883</sup> Moerdyk stressed that it was necessary to move rapidly if the frieze was to be in place for the 1948 inauguration, and recommended that, while modifications were still needed on some reliefs, a start be made with the smaller corner panels.

Moerdyk's recommendation to work with Romanelli was accepted without question and, as was often the case, the SVK referred 'the entire matter' (die hele saak) to the Dagbestuur, who in turn passed on responsibility to the architect. He was delegated to send the plaster reliefs that were ready to Italy, arrange the purchase of marble, and discuss with the Treasury how to get best value in the Italian transactions.<sup>884</sup> A letter from the Secretary of Internal Affairs on 23.4.1947 confirmed the approval of £30 000 for the historical frieze and gave permission for the work on it to go ahead.<sup>885</sup>

Despite Moerdyk's insistence that it was urgent to make a start on the Italian work, the sending of the plaster casts was seriously delayed. Only months later in August was it reported that eight of the panels were ready to be sent,<sup>886</sup> presumably the eight scenes for the short corner walls which he had suggested could be tackled first.<sup>887</sup> Moerdyk explained that, since the enlargement of the panels had been completed in South Africa, it was only necessary for two of the sculptors to travel to Italy.<sup>888</sup> He had contracted Laurika Postma and Hennie Potgieter for the task.<sup>889</sup> Some three weeks later, there was still reference to the need to dispatch the eight plaster models at a meeting with the Departments of Finance and Internal Affairs, which discussed the requirement to set up payments through the South African Embassy in Italy to cover the costs of the marble that had been ordered. It was optimistically stated that, if a start was made in January 1948, and there were no

<sup>879</sup> Dagbestuur 22.8.1946: 3.

<sup>880</sup> Dagbestuur 6.11.1946: 6.

<sup>881</sup> ARCA PV94 1/75/1/2.

<sup>882</sup> The Chief Quantity Surveyor of the Public Works Department also produced a full report on 9.12.1946, at the recommendation of the Select Committee on Public Accounts (July 1946): 'Since the State is footing the bill, your committee considers that all proposed increases should be carefully investigated and reported on by the Public Works Department.' The surveyor pointed out that SVK funds, originally intended to meet the cost of the frieze, were unlikely to exceed the previous estimate of £10 000, so that the government would be expected to make up the shortfall. However, as well as categorising the frieze as essential whatever the cost, he also recommended that 'it would be most unfortunate after spending so much money if the Authorities were to turn down the extra few thousands of pounds for marble to the walls and floor necessary to produce a first class finish to the building'. Although he referred to rather unorthodox practices, he 'judged there is no reason to believe that the Government's finances have suffered in any way due to the procedure ...' (NARSSA, BNS/146/73/4-5).

<sup>883</sup> SVK 20.1.1947: 14.

<sup>884</sup> Dagbestuur 6.3.1947: 9.

<sup>885</sup> It had been intended that the SVK cover the expenses for the frieze, estimated at £10 000 – which the government now agreed to supplement three fold.

<sup>886</sup> Dagbestuur 5.8.1947: 10.

<sup>887</sup> See *Die Vaderland* of 10.9.1947.

<sup>888</sup> As late as January 1947, it was reported in *Voorslag* (Marais 1947) that the four sculptors would be going to Italy.

<sup>889</sup> Dagbestuur 5.8.1947: 12.





**Figure 198:** Romano Romanelli, Gerard Moerdyk, Laurika Postma, Hennie Potgieter and two Florentine sculptors at the Romanelli studio. c. 1948 (photo courtesy HF Archives F 39.10.9 k)

unexpected delays, the frieze would be completed in time for the inauguration now scheduled for 16 December 1949, a year later than previously anticipated.<sup>890</sup> However, the detailed costings from Romanelli had painted a rather different picture: he based his figures on the calculation that ‘first-class Sculptors’ would take sixty days to carve one square metre, and thus the 235 square metres of the Monument frieze would require 14 100 days (more than thirty-eight years!).<sup>891</sup> He was obviously referring to what a single skilled sculptor would achieve – meaning that it needed at least forty sculptors on the job to finish the commission within a year.

By October it was confirmed that Postma and Potgieter would be sent to Italy, with salaries of £50 per month plus travel costs.<sup>892</sup> There had been and were still ongoing delays for the transport of both goods and people because of postwar shipping disruptions.<sup>893</sup> The scarcity of passenger ships meant that Postma and Potgieter, together with his wife Bettie, and also Moerdyk’s daughter Irma who travelled with them,<sup>894</sup> set out on their voyage to Italy only in December 1947. But the Italians did not have to wait for their arrival. They had been supplied with copies of Alan Yates’ photographs of the full-scale clay reliefs, marked up to show the division of the frieze into sections for the plaster casts (figs 185, 186, 187). These photographs, still in the collection of the Villa Romanelli, provided the necessary information for assembling the plaster casts, which, as previously discussed, varied in width and did not follow methodical rectilinear divisions except on the horizontal margins of each section. The irregular contours including where possible complete figures and objects, such as the eye of a horse which was neatly circumscribed in the *Kapain* scene, meant that piecing together the casts to make up full panels was like a giant jigsaw puzzle, which could be undertaken with the photographs as a guide. So once the first cases had arrived from South Africa, the Italians could

<sup>890</sup> Dagbestuur 25.8.1947: 3.

<sup>891</sup> Romanelli’s figures are included in a letter from Moerdyk to Secretary of the Department of Internal Affairs, 26.8.1947 (NARSSA, BNS 146 73/4).

<sup>892</sup> Dagbestuur 7.10.1947: 6.

<sup>893</sup> Potgieter (1987, 48) writes that passenger ships were waiting for mines to be cleared before they sailed again.

<sup>894</sup> Irma Moerdyk’s travelling with the group is mentioned in Pillman 1984, 54. Postma made a portrait of her on the trip (ibid. 55).



**Figure 199:** The Romanelli studio in 2013. ‘Valkyrie’ plaster model showing Giorgio Castriota Scanderbeg on horseback (photo the authors)

restore any damage to the fragile casts,<sup>895</sup> assemble them and make a start right away. With all the delays in transport, the carvers had probably been on standby for some time.

We know that Postma and Potgieter were in Florence by January 1948, because Postma’s first letter home carried that date.<sup>896</sup> Their brief was to oversee the carving at the Romanelli studio and ‘guard against any un-Afrikaans elements stealing into the work’ (fig. 198).<sup>897</sup> When they arrived, they found carving already under way, and both sculptors reported very favourably on the standard of workmanship. In his later 1987 account, Potgieter recounted how easy it had been to supervise the Italians because they were such good craftsmen.<sup>898</sup> Postma described her impressions of the Romanelli studio in her letter of January 1948:

Was at the Romanelli’s – interesting house and garden with a lovely outlook over Florence; then to his workshop. The men work about three feet apart and it hums with the chisels ... they have already made considerable progress and they really know their work. Such a wonderful atmosphere – statues and then more statues. You can hardly walk between the walls of our panels, and enthroned above an immense Valkyrie on a giant horse.<sup>899</sup>

<sup>895</sup> There seem to be no reports of it, but it is likely that there was damage to the plaster casts, considering what the more durable marble panels suffered during shipping.

<sup>896</sup> Pillman 1984, 54.

<sup>897</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 41.

<sup>898</sup> ‘... om oor die voorkappers toesig te hou, was baie maklik aangesien hulle goeie vakmanne was’ (Potgieter 1987, 49). He also mentions that they had studied Italian in Pretoria before they set out, but discovered that their Italian was not easily understood by the carvers (49–50).

<sup>899</sup> ‘Was by Romanelli’s – interessante huis en tuin met ’n lieflike uitsig op Florence; toe na sy werkswinkel. Die mans werk omtrent drie voet uitmekaar en dit vrom van die beitels ... hulle het al ver gevorder en ken wraggies hulle



**Figure 200:**  
Querceta quarry  
near Forte dei  
Marmi, Italy  
(Pillman 1984, 56)



**Figure 201:** Marble  
panels ready for  
transportation.  
1948 (courtesy of  
UP Archives, Postma  
files; photo  
N. Lughetti, Forte  
dei Marmi)

The enormous ‘Valkyrie’ – in fact Romano’s full-size plaster model of the equestrian bronze sculpture of the Albanian national hero, Giorgio Castriota Scanderbeg (1405–68), set up in 1940 at Rome’s Piazza Albania – is still today in the Romanelli studio in Florence (fig. 199). Nearby, amongst the many sculptures and casts in the lofty gallery, the maquette Raffaello Romanelli made for Cape Town’s equestrian *Louis Botha*, the only obvious evidence of a South African connection, provides a counterpart in miniature to the gigantic Scanderbeg horse and rider.

During the 1948 visit, while there are ecstatic descriptions in letters by Postma, particularly of the scenery on their travels, there is little enough about the task for which she and Potgieter had been sent to Italy. But a letter written on 17 April continued to paint a positive picture of the workshop. Romanelli had arrived by then, making communication easier. Postma remarked that he looked nice, something like Kirchoff! She reiterated that the sculptors did excellent work and were friendly and hard-working. She also commented on their working method, using pointing machines, pneumatic drills and hammer and chisel, most frequently the latter, as Romanelli explained that (Querceta) marble splits extremely easily.<sup>900</sup> A number of photographs in the Postma folders in the University of Pretoria Archives attest to her keen interest in the Querceta quarries, one showing the ready cut panels loaded for transport by train (figs 200, 201).

With the Florentine sculptors progressing well, already by May 1948 it was reported to the Dagbestuur that five panels had been completed and were back in South Africa.<sup>901</sup> At the same meeting, it was mentioned that there had been setbacks with the supply of marble, but that it should become available again that month. There was also some anxiety expressed about transport costs, which were outstripping the sums budgeted for them, and a suggestion was made that South African Railways and Harbours be asked to assist. Although they later responded that they were unable to help with shipping – and reports on volatile dealings with various shippers provided a constant refrain at ongoing SVK committees – South African Railways and Harbours did promise to lend assistance in expediting the transport of the reliefs from Durban to Pretoria.<sup>902</sup>

In the meantime good progress was reported for the making of the model for the wagon replica (fig. 119) for the laager that would encircle the Monument, being prepared by Frikkie Kruger for casting in terrazzo by Lupini Brothers, a firm of Italian craftsmen based in Johannesburg. Members of the Dagbestuur who visited Harmony Hall in July 1948 to inspect the model for the wagons and check on the authenticity of detail may have privately been wishing that the marble frieze could also have been completed locally.<sup>903</sup> For, apart from the ever-spiralling costs and transport difficulties, it was reported at their meeting that day that work in Florence was at a standstill because of continuing problems with the supply of marble.<sup>904</sup> Postma and the Potgieters took advantage

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werk. So ’n wonderlike atmosfeer – beelde en nogmaals beelde. Jy kan skaars loop tussen die mure van ons panele en hoog troon ’n geweldige Walkure op ’n reusperd’ (Pillman 1984, 56).

**900** ‘Prof. Romanelli lyk mooi, raai, iets na Kirchoff [sic]. ... Die voorkappers doen pragtige werk, en is so vriendelik en hard-werkend. Hulle ... troon die marmer panele met punkteermasjien, neumatieses bytels en hamer en bytel. Die laaste word tog die meetste gebruik want Prof. R. sê marmer split vreeslik maklik’ (Postma letter to Sophie Postma, 17.4.1948, UP Archives, Postma Folder 19).

**901** Dagbestuur 4.5.1948: 6.

**902** Dagbestuur 20.10.1948: 4.

**903** It is worth noting, however, that the carving of the granite corner figures of Voortrekker leaders at the Monument was to prove equally problematic, and was completed only in 1952 – even later than the frieze. As mentioned previously, there were records of early payments for these, and photographs made around 1943 confirm that there had been early models for these figures (fig. 178, the model left of the wooden armature), but the final figures were designed by Frikkie Kruger and carved by a local company. There were perpetual frustrations with the slowness of progress, and at one stage Moerdyk even dismissed the workmen, hoping to get better, but ultimately had to rehire them. It confirms that there was a scarcity of competent stone carvers in South Africa.

**904** Dagbestuur 22.7.1948: 6. Ferreira (1975, 121) claims that Moerdyk intervened personally, visiting the marble quarries, and inspiring the Italian workers on strike to return to work when he told them that the marble was needed for a monument in honour of the Boers, a name they recognised.

of the hiatus in work to travel around Europe: in any event, they both commented that the Italian carvers required relatively little input from them.<sup>905</sup> The only instance of direct intervention that Potgieter wrote about was related to an unexpected discovery when he and Postma first visited the Romanelli studio in Florence. In the reliefs that had already been carved, the blobs signifying the hair of Zulu figures in the plaster casts had been sculpted as Roman curls by the Italians. Potgieter taught one of the men how to represent African hair – which he described as ‘peperkorrels’ or peppercorns – and it became that sculptor’s specialist task to go from studio to studio creating appropriate coiffures for the African figures.<sup>906</sup>

Although Potgieter praised the skill of the Florentine sculptors in his publication on the Voortrekker Monument frieze, he was at some pains to differentiate their role from that of the South African sculptors, probably in order to counter the misinformation about the frieze that continued to rile him, because it marginalised the role of the South Africans.<sup>907</sup> He noted that ‘it is often said that Coetzer designed the frieze which was made by Italian sculptors. It was only cut in Italy and for the following reason: the marble was there’.<sup>908</sup> He also emphasised in his book that the Italians were craftsmen, a category which seemed to be differentiated in his mind from sculptors in the creative sense.<sup>909</sup> When Potgieter wrote of Romanelli hiring four further workspaces for the making of the frieze, for example, he said that he could not call them studios because they were places where carvers made replicas of well-known sculptures in marble or alabaster for sale to tourists. The carvers, whom he refers to as ‘voorkappers’ (literally, first chisellers), were not themselves artists, Potgieter explained, but they could make exact copies of an artist’s work with the use of pointing apparatus. His account affords us some insight into the process and his rather one-sided evaluation: ‘They took, for example, as many as thirty measuring points on an eyelid so that they could carve it accurately. Thus they were able to replicate the thousands of fine wrinkles of Oumatjie Stoffberg [from *Presentation*] exactly.’<sup>910</sup> But, while Potgieter acknowledges the Florentines’ competence, he does not really credit them with their remarkable understanding of their craft, and the sensibility and extreme skill necessary to achieve translation from model to marble successfully.<sup>911</sup> And he relishes telling the tale of how he astounded them by undertaking a piece of direct carving in marble, without the use of a maquette. They said they had never seen such a thing before, he remembered, and called him ‘professor’ thereafter.<sup>912</sup>

While Potgieter and Postma were in Europe during 1948, the level of correspondence in South Africa escalated as efforts were made to speed up the work. Ministerial secretaries became involved, contacting embassy staff in Italy to apply what pressure they could; they argued that delays reflected badly on Italy’s reputation. But the disruptions continued, and it was reported in a letter to the Secretary of Internal Affairs that there were only seven panels completed by August

<sup>905</sup> Pillman 1984, 56.

<sup>906</sup> Potgieter 1987, 50.

<sup>907</sup> The undervaluing of the sculptors’ role still rankled with Potgieter when Elizabeth Rankin interviewed him in March 1989.

<sup>908</sup> ‘Daar is ook dikwels gesê dat W.H. Coetzer die fries ontwerp het en dat dit deur Italiaanse beeldhouers gemaak is. Dit is slegs in Italië uitgekap en om die volgende rede: die marmer is dáár’ (Potgieter 1987, 50).

<sup>909</sup> An interesting interpretation of the role of the stone carvers was offered by Danie de Jager, one of the builders at the Monument, perhaps with reference to the similar process that took place for the corner figures of Voortrekker leaders which he would have witnessed. In his view, the masons understood stone better than the sculptors, and were needed to rough out the shapes, but he said the sculptor added the details which made them come alive (interview with Danie de Jager, Meyerton, January 2013).

<sup>910</sup> ‘Hulle neem byvoorbeeld tot soveel as dertig maatlente op ’n ooglid om dit dan sekuur te kan nakap. So kon hulle Oumatjie Stoffberg se duisende plooitjies presies weergee’ (Potgieter 1987, 49). Potgieter is referring to the old woman by the affectionate diminutive for ‘grandmother’ (oumatjie).

<sup>911</sup> For such ‘difficillima imitatio’, see Anguissola 2012.

<sup>912</sup> *Ibid.*, 48–49. One does wonder whether the Italians’ comments might not have been ironic.

30 Via Gino Capponi  
Firenze  
19.11.1948.

Lieve Sophie,

Dit vanoggend jou brief ontvang  
en om word de nit haastig. Ek wag nog op be-  
vestiging, maar ons meen dis so goed as reker dat  
20 middel  
ons Desember met die Oranjefontein vanaf Ant-  
werpen sal vertrek. Ons hou diem vas want  
al die ander sipe is vol bespreek vir 1 tot  
2 jaar !! Maar ek dink ons kan staak maak daarop  
want die telegram se so. Dus kan julle in  
Pretoria, ek dink o.a. by Postma + Co., ontbrent  
die bewegings v. d. Holl. sipe uitvind,  
en toe wanneer Oranjefontein vertrek hier,  
en ook in Kaapstad. Sover ons wat  
sal by hier so 15-17 Des. vertrek. Ons  
moet eendelik tot einde Des. by - maar  
jy moet vertrek warmer in sipe vertrek,  
en is dit nie soos 'n ander trein wat  
jy kan haal nie !! Jammer dat Kerfmas  
op die boot is - dis iets wat mens fees wil  
vier - maar wat ek is netter daar.  
Ja man, my plan is nog altyd  
na jou in Standerton - maar, ek het jou  
nie net wees definitief gemaak, omdat al die  
ander my vra wat is my planne, en

**Figure 202:** First page of Laurika Postma's letter to her sister Sophie, Florence 19.11.1948, describing difficulty of finding a passage back to South Africa (courtesy of UP Archives, Postma Folder 19; photo the authors)

1948.<sup>913</sup> It is a reflection of increasingly low expectations that, at a meeting later that month, it was decided to go ahead with the inauguration in December 1949 even if not every aspect of the Monument was finished.<sup>914</sup> At the same time the Dagbestuur decided to entirely close the building to the public to expedite the Monument's completion.<sup>915</sup>

## Homecoming

Although the carving of the frieze was far from over, Postma and Potgieter were told to return to South Africa,<sup>916</sup> and took the first ship available in December 1948 (fig. 202). In February the next year it was reported that ten panels were at the Monument,<sup>917</sup> but even there difficulties continued to plague the work. The corner panel, *Death of Dingane*, was reported broken in a fall, badly enough to perhaps need complete replacement, although doubts about whether it could be repaired were

<sup>913</sup> Dagbestuur letter 4.8.1948.

<sup>914</sup> Dagbestuur 16.8.1948: 11b. One cannot help speculating whether the victory of the National Party in the elections of May 1948 did not add to the sense of urgency to complete the Monument which represented the ideals of Afrikanerdom.

<sup>915</sup> Ibid.: 17.

<sup>916</sup> Potgieter 1987, 50. Postma describes in a letter to her sister Sophie dated 19.11.1948 that, although they might have stayed through December, they were hoping to leave in mid-December on the *Oranjefontein* from Antwerp, and mentions the difficulty of getting a passage when all the ships were fully booked for one to two years ahead (UP Archives, Postma Folder 19).

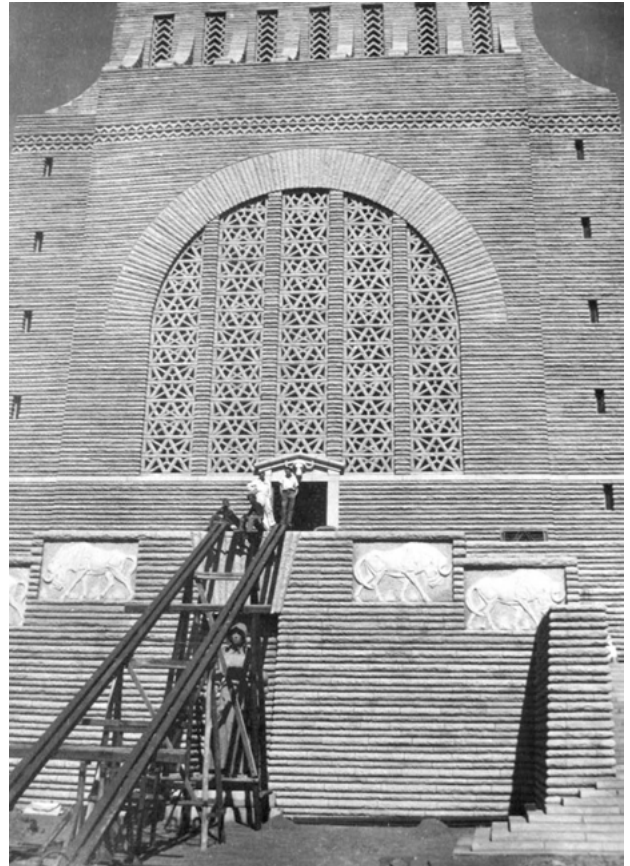
<sup>917</sup> Dagbestuur 14.2.1949: 4b.



Figure 203: Two diagonal breaks splitting the panel of *Return* in three. Marble, detail of fig. 311 (photo Russell Scott)



**Figure 204:** Panel transported up initial flight of steps at Voortrekker Monument (photo courtesy of Unisa Archives, Van Schaik album)



**Figure 205:** Ramp for transporting panels up to door of Voortrekker Monument (photo courtesy of Unisa Archives, Van Schaik album)

laid to rest the following month.<sup>918</sup> Hennie Potgieter, back in South Africa, had been re-employed to assist with adjustments needed for the time-consuming installation of the panels, which had to fit their neighbours exactly even though they often enough did not arrive in the sequence in which they were to be mounted in the Monument – installing a latecomer between two panels that were already in place must have been particularly excruciating. There was a great deal to be done, including the repair of other damage also, the result of poor handling in transit, which is mentioned though not detailed in the minutes. Potgieter states that a number of panels were broken on board ship, and even had pieces missing.<sup>919</sup> Some of the damage is still visible today, such as two irregular breaks from top to bottom in *Return*, splitting the panel in three, and there were also many small injuries to the edges (fig. 203). In the end Potgieter would be occupied not only for the rest of 1949, leading up to the inauguration in December, but for nearly a year thereafter, as five panels did not arrive in time for the celebrations.

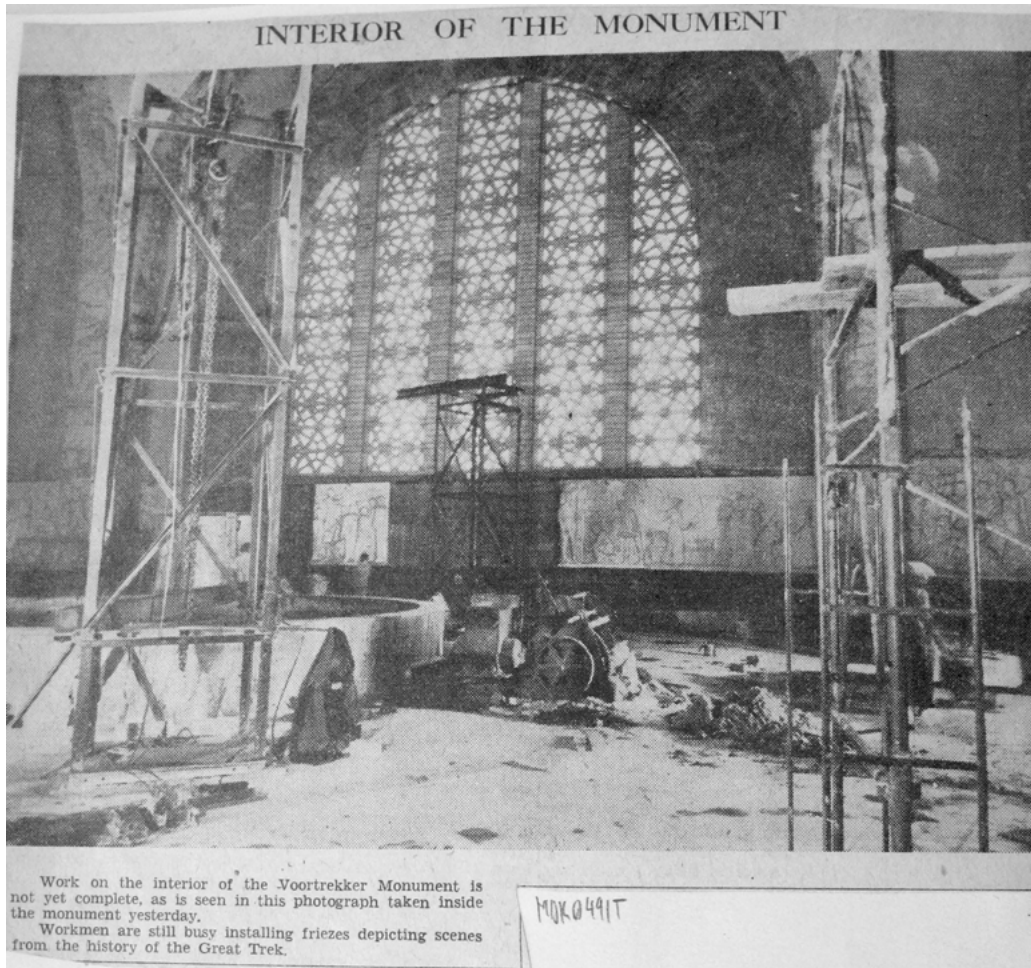
The installation of the panels was first taken up at the Dagbestuur in May 1949, when Moerdyk reported that he had employed Cornelius Pretorius, who had worked for many years at the Monument as part of the Du Plessis building team, to install them, while the firm Poole was contracted to supply equipment and cartage for thirty-six (sic) crates of panels.<sup>920</sup> Pretorius was a highly skilled stone mason, according to his stepson Danie de Jager, who assisted him with the installation of

<sup>918</sup> Dagbestuur 21.4.1949: 7, and Dagbestuur 13.5.1949: 5a.

<sup>919</sup> Potgieter 1987, 51.

<sup>920</sup> Dagbestuur 13.5.1949: 5d. How the thirty-one panels of the frieze related to thirty-six crates is unclear.





**Figure 206:** Equipment for installing frieze. West wall with *The Vow, Church of the Vow* and *Saailaer*, framing gap for *Blood River*. 1949 (unidentified newspaper clipping, courtesy of UP Archives, Moerdyk files MDK0491T)

the frieze.<sup>921</sup> De Jager recounted that Pretorius had undertaken most of the granite work for the Monument, where each stone had to be shaped with its distinctive curved profile on the surface face, and also made the cenotaph for the lower hall. Pretorius was evidently an astute man and had solved many of the technical difficulties encountered in the building process.<sup>922</sup> According to De Jager, it was he who devised a system for moving the extremely heavy marble panels of the frieze into position after they had arrived at the Monument site, transported by lorry from Pretoria Station in their cases packed with sacking and straw. Weighing between two and ten tons apiece, the panels needed a mechanical track to hoist them up the long flights of steps to the Monument (figs 204, 205),<sup>923</sup> and a special hand-cranked crane to lift them, which had to be dismantled and reassembled inside the Monument for their installation (fig. 206). To solve the problem of setting the panels in position, Pretorius devised cantilevered steel beams, inserted into cavities chopped in the concrete of the wall above the recess for each panel. The heavy panels, suspended in a harness, were, step by step, 'slid' along the soaped beam into position on the ledge at the base of the recess that would accommodate the frieze. Steel dowels with hooks had been inserted in the marble slabs,

<sup>921</sup> De Jager interview. A specific payment to C. Pretorius of £121.4.0d for installing the frieze is recorded in the List of Payments up to 15.3.1951.

<sup>922</sup> De Jager reported that his stepfather was a very clever man despite his lack of education; for example, he claimed that Pretorius was the one who calculated the correct position for the hole in the dome so that sunlight would fall on the cenotaph inscription at noon on 16 December.

<sup>923</sup> An aerial photograph that shows the tracks, and another with a crate being taken up the steps, were published in *Die Vaderland* of 22.9.1949 and 10.11.1949 respectively.



**Figure 207:** Installation of *Saailaer* and *Mpande*, the former still in need of cleaning after transportation (photo courtesy of Unisa Archives, Van Schaik album)

by drilling about 2.5 inches into the back, carefully avoiding penetrating too deeply and breaking through to the surface of the reliefs. The dowels were lined up with holes in the wall filled with soft cement and manoeuvred into place, with the alignment of each panel carefully checked with a spirit level.<sup>924</sup> It must have been an extraordinarily taxing operation as, not only did it involve raising the very heavy panels and setting them into the recess, difficult enough in itself, but at the same time it had to be ensured that contiguous parts of images matched up precisely with adjacent panels, and that the surfaces too were level.

In his publication, Potgieter described some of the problems that he had to tackle regarding the marble frieze after his return from Italy.<sup>925</sup> The most common was adjusting the heavy marble panels to fit the spaces reserved for the frieze at the Monument. A number of the panels were too deep for the recesses and so had to be chopped back, as it was not possible to cut out substantial sections of the concrete of the wall. Potgieter had the assistance of some stone masons for this task, who commented that the Querceta marble was far harder to cut than granite.<sup>926</sup> There were also cases where the edges of the panels had to be trimmed to fit the designated spaces. This resulted in some unfortunate truncations, so that the nose of the horse in *Teresa Viglione* presses hard against the adjacent wall, for example, and the woman alongside it is chopped in half (fig. 275), while the standing British commissioner on the right in *Convention* forfeits his back and one of his legs (fig. 276). These losses are all the more obvious when the sculptors had rigorously avoided cut-off figures in their reliefs, such as Coetzer had drawn, preferring closed, self-contained compositions.

Potgieter put some of the marble removed from the backs of the overly deep panels to use to plug breaks in damaged reliefs, then carving the insertions back to match the surrounding surface.

<sup>924</sup> De Jager interview.

<sup>925</sup> Potgieter 1987, 51.

<sup>926</sup> Marble is somewhat easier to carve when it is freshly cut and it may have hardened further by the time it was being prepared for installation at the Monument. There are various payments related to the installation of the frieze, including £390.1.0d to Potgieter himself for 'right cutting' (regkap) of the frieze.

De Jager recalled a different method, where they filled gaps with paste made by melting a glue he referred to as ‘Gum de Mar’ (presumably Damar resin) and mixing it with marble dust; left for a day to harden, it too could then be carved.<sup>927</sup> The result was rather unprofessional, and the effect today can be unfortunate where the resin has yellowed so that, instead of being as unobtrusive as possible, it has resulted in ugly repairs and joints, such as the ones between the panels of *Departure* and *Return* (fig. 273).

Potgieter also refers to another tricky piece of adjustment that was called for because of the warping of some of the plaster casts sent from South Africa, where the very precise reproductions made by the Italians had replicated these distortions.<sup>928</sup> Yet other panels had been stained on board ship. Their extremely soiled condition can be seen in occasional photographs of the marble reliefs during installation at the Monument, such as one of *Saailaer* in the photograph album for J.L. van Schaik publishers at the time of the inauguration in 1949, its disfigurement all the more apparent because of the pristine condition of the marble in the adjacent *Mpande* (fig. 207).<sup>929</sup> Potgieter specifically mentioned coffee stains (presumably from other cargo the ship was carrying in its hold), which could not be removed except by skimming off the discoloured surface. But possibly the key task, and the most difficult of all, was to finish the joints between the marble panels, and make them as invisible as possible. This was necessary not only for scenes which stretched across more than a single block of marble, where the joints necessarily crossed figures, even faces, but also between adjacent scenes. As discussed earlier, the sculptors did not apparently consider this issue as they composed a continuous frieze from the individual small maquettes, and even between scenes there were overlapping elements that traversed the edges of panels, where Potgieter struggled to achieve seamless joints. Only the corner panels which could be cut from a single block of marble avoided these problems. Some of these time-consuming adjustments had to be handled before the panels could be installed, but many modifications could only be attended to once the panels were actually in place.

The slow progress of installation can be tracked sporadically in reports and photographs in the press. *Die Vaderland* of 19.5.1949, for example, reported that there were twelve cases of panels waiting to be unpacked, and that the first reliefs were being placed in position; it also reproduced a photograph of *Presentation* being installed by Cornelius Pretorius (fig. 208). But, while publicity for the Monument was generally encouraged as the time of the inauguration approached, press reporters were not allowed to take photographs of the incomplete frieze because installation was still ongoing – and perhaps even more so because the state of the frieze with missing panels could have initiated negative responses. In this situation the Dagbestuur decided to make available the photographs of the full-scale clay reliefs taken by Alan Yates at Harmony Hall.<sup>930</sup> They began to appear in the press from late October,<sup>931</sup> and were used in preparing special newspaper supplements for the inauguration, which thus ironically illustrated the contentious *Bloukrans* scene in its original unrevised form.<sup>932</sup> There are still occasional glimpses of the interior in the press, as in *Dagbreek en Sondagnuus* of 30.10.1949,<sup>933</sup> which published photographs inside the Monument, claimed to be the first. They included one picturing Hennie Potgieter and Frikkie Kruger, identified as the artists installing the panels, in front of *Debora Retief*, *Descent* and *Treaty*, which are already in place (fig. 209). There is

<sup>927</sup> De Jager interview. Details of the installation of the frieze were also gleaned from a written description De Jager supplied on a CD.

<sup>928</sup> Potgieter 1987, 51. It is difficult to understand how the casts came to be warped, unless it happened during the time they were drying out.

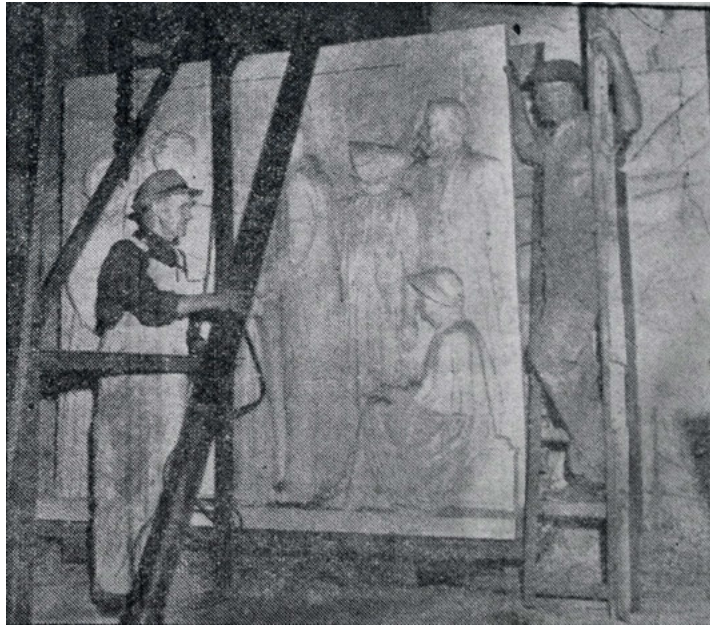
<sup>929</sup> Unisa Archives.

<sup>930</sup> Dagbestuur 25.10.1949: 12.

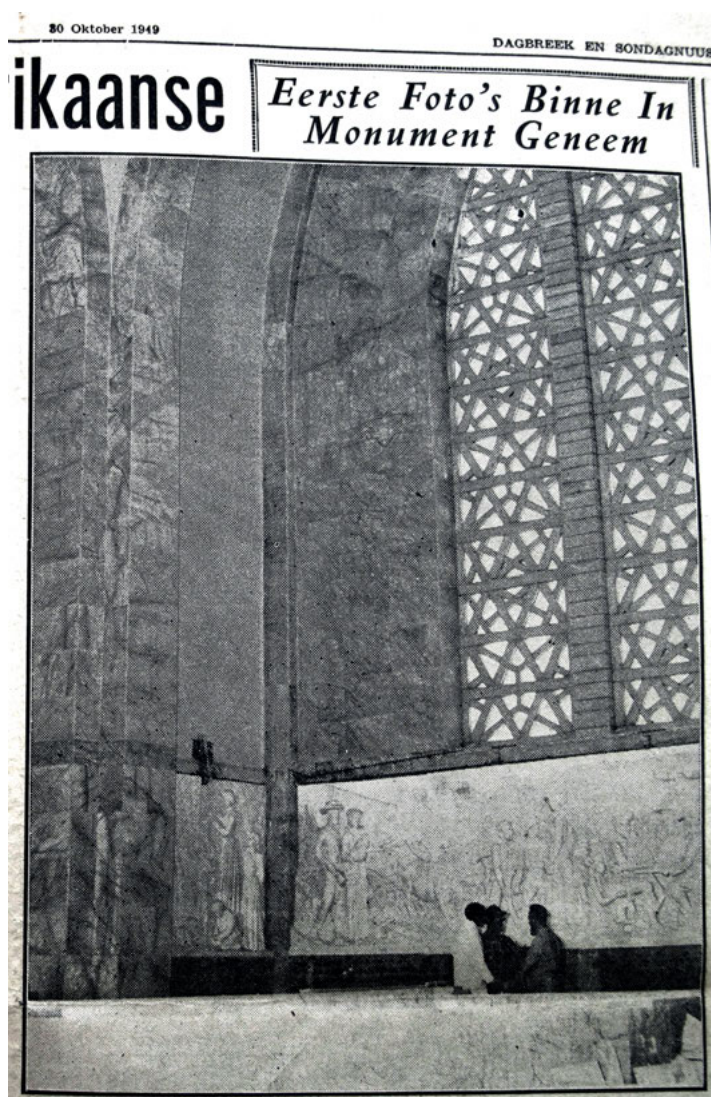
<sup>931</sup> See, for example, *Die Transvaler* 28.10.1949.

<sup>932</sup> Celebratory publications in December 1949 also included images of scenes that were not installed at the time of the inauguration, such as *Blood River*. See, for example, *Die Transvaler* 13.12.1949.

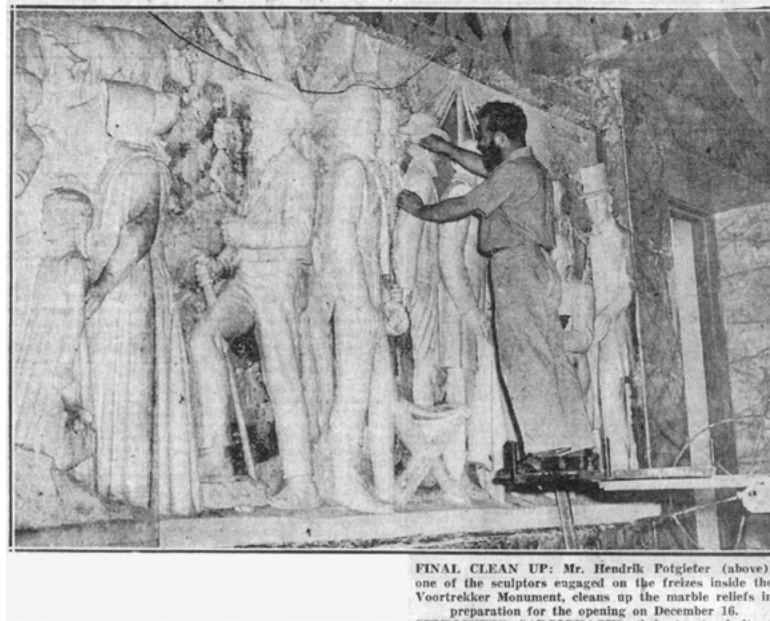
<sup>933</sup> On this occasion, *Dagbreek* reported that it was no longer expected that the installation of the frieze would be completed for the inauguration, saying three panels (composed of eight pieces) would not be ready, although some additional panels had arrived in Durban the week before. The damage to the panels is also mentioned.



**Figure 208:** Cornelius Pretorius installing *Presentation (Die Vaderland 19.5.1949*; courtesy of ARCA PV94 1/75/6/3)



**Figure 209:** Hennie Potgieter, Frikkie Kruger and unknown assistant in front of the installed panels for *Debora Retief, Descent and Treaty (Dagbreek en Sondagnuus 30.10.1949)*



**Figure 210:** Hennie Potgieter cleans *Convention* a month before inauguration (*Rand Daily Mail* 17.11.1949)



**Figure 211:** 'Voortrekkers clean the Monument the night before inauguration', in front of *Treaty and Murder of Retief* (Botha 1952, 267; photo *Die Burger*)

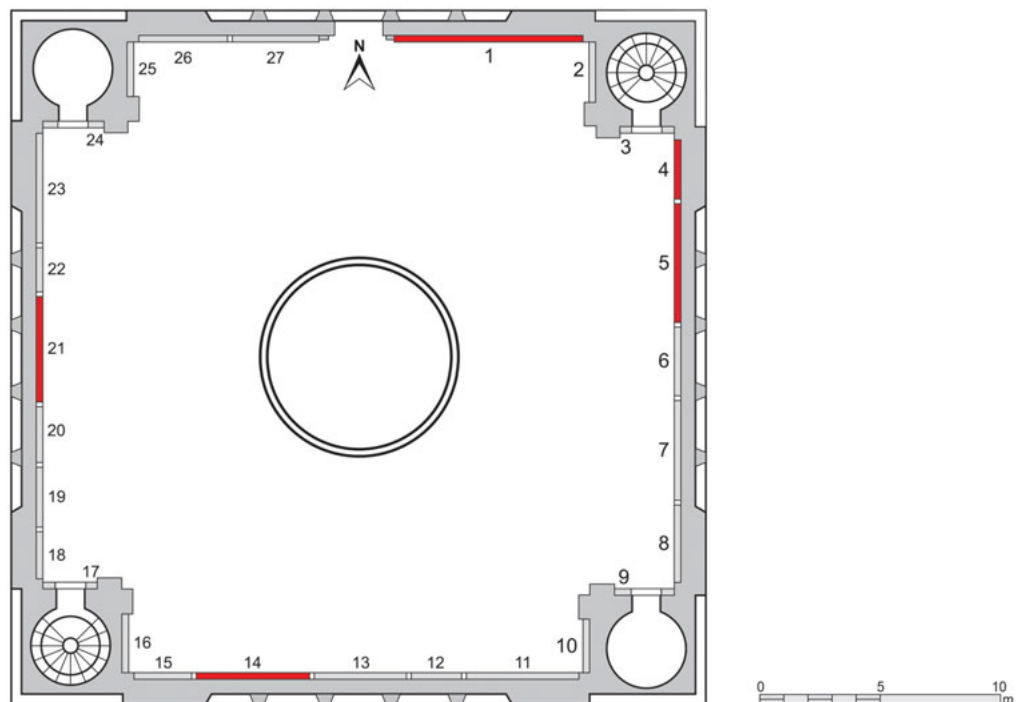
no formal record of Kruger being employed for the installation of the frieze, but perhaps it was a case of 'all hands on deck' in the countdown to the inauguration, and he would probably have been in the vicinity overseeing the carving of the granite corner figures at the Monument, for which he had made the models. They too were not complete at the time of the inauguration, but focus had probably shifted to readying the interior for the events planned for 16 December.

One can imagine the frantic last minute efforts to finish as much as was humanly possible inside the Monument and to clear the building site. The *Rand Daily Mail* of 17.11.1949, for example, shows Hennie Potgieter on his own on a scaffold engaged in what the newspaper calls a 'final clean up' of *Return* and *Convention* (fig. 210). Helpers were involved in moving out all the equipment and readying the hall, and even on the night before the inauguration 'Voortrekkers' were busy to 'maak die monument skoon' (clean the monument) (fig. 211). Yet, a number of scenes were still missing and caused distinct interruptions in the frieze; we can identify the absence of *Departure* on the north wall, *Delagoa Bay* and *Vegkop* on the east wall, *Bloukrans* on the south wall and, most unfortunately of all, *Blood River* on the west wall (figs 212, 213).<sup>934</sup>

<sup>934</sup> Dagbestuur 24.4.1950: 6, confirms that five panels were still in Italy, although they are not identified.



**Figure 212:** Interior view of Voortrekker Monument with gaps of missing panels, *Bloukrans* and *Blood River*. Late December 1949 (photo courtesy of HF Archives F 39.6.85 k)



**Figure 213:** Ground plan marking the five panels missing on 16 December 1949 (plan drawing Tobias Bitterer)



**Figure 214:** Prime Minister D.F. Malan delivers his address at inauguration of Voortrekker Monument (photo courtesy of HF Archives F 39.6.145 k)

On Friday, 16 December 1949, ‘Dingaan’s Day’ finally dawned, with a ‘Service of the Vow’ at 9 am,<sup>935</sup> after three full days of celebrations for the inauguration that included everything from speeches and religious services to massed choirs and ‘volkspele’ (folk dances), discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. It might be said that the celebrations acted as a fitting epilogue not only to the building of the Monument to the Voortrekkers but to the rather different but not unrelated achievements of the previous year.<sup>936</sup> For, one hundred and ten years after the victory of the Battle of Blood River, a victory had been won that was no less significant for Afrikaner nationalism – success for the National Party in the country’s elections. It seemed to fully vindicate the 1934 decision of Malan and his breakaway party to reject any alliance with English-speaking supporters, and to promote themselves as the Gesuiwerde (Purified) Nasionale Party, and then the Herstigte (Reunited) Nasionale Party when they joined forces with Hertzog. The goal of the nineteenth-century Boers to win freedom from British rule and to maintain the purity of white civilisation, ideals which had been at the heart of the Great Trek, had been reinvented in terms of twentieth-century political struggles, and prevailed at the election polls. The Nationalists being in power cleared the way for their ultimate fulfilment in the declaration of a republic based on the pernicious principle of apartheid just over a decade later.

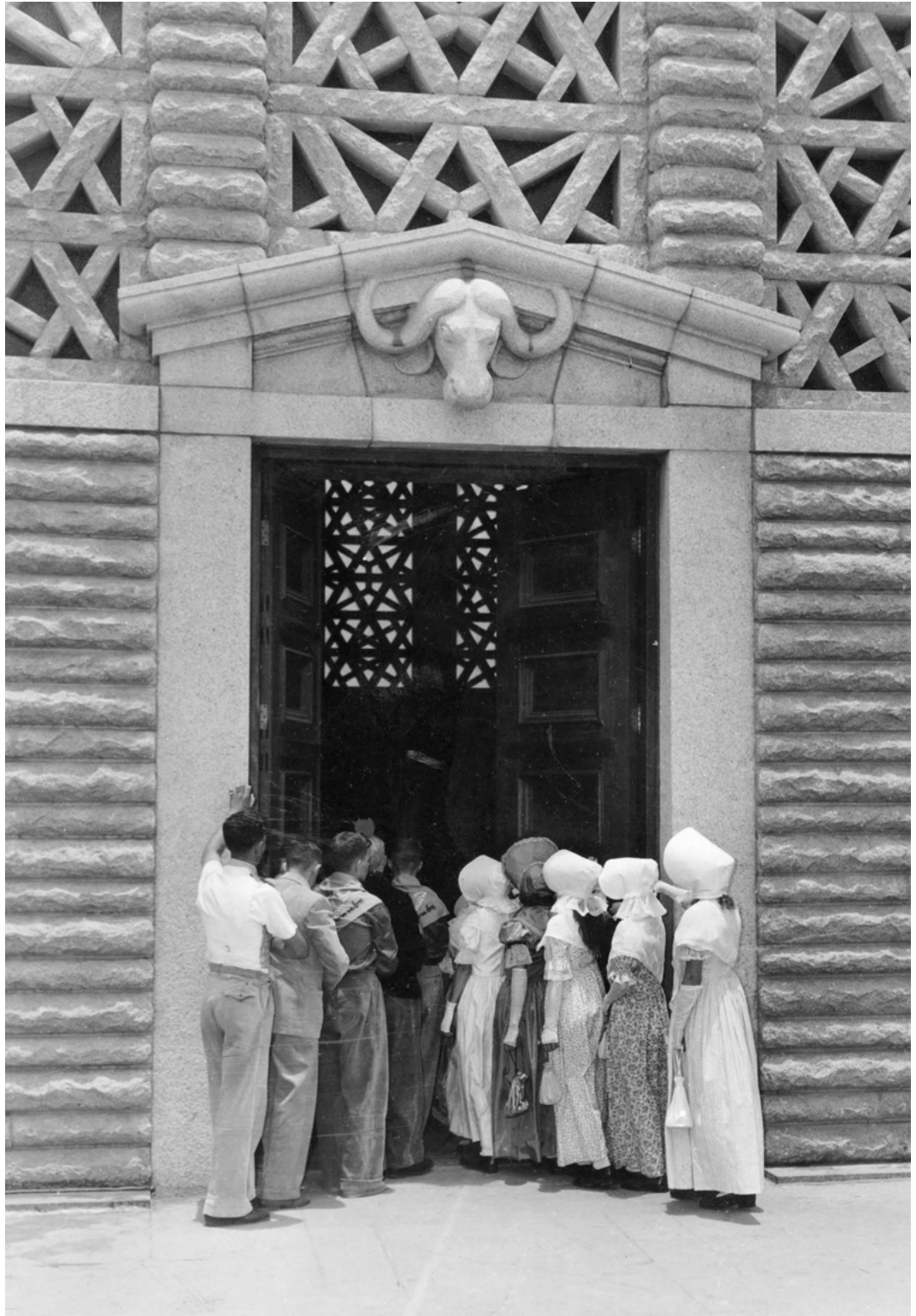
That it was D.F. Malan as prime minister who addressed the huge assembly in the auditorium, officially inaugurating the Voortrekker Monument at noon on 16 December, must have given those in attendance a sense that every Afrikaner dream had been fulfilled (fig. 214). When the great doors of the Monument swung slowly apart, twelve boys and girls in Voortrekker dress were the first to enter the Hall of Heroes, symbolising the future of Afrikanerdom (figs 215, 216). The throng of around 250 000 strong was then able to enter the Monument and see the Hall of Heroes and the cenotaph below (fig. 217),<sup>937</sup> with an almost overwhelming feeling of pride inspired by this resplendent statement of Voortrekker history redolent with Afrikaner aspirations.<sup>938</sup> The *Rand Daily Mail* (17.12.1949) reported on the ‘Stirring climax to the celebrations’ when at midday

<sup>935</sup> ‘Service of the Vow’: *Official Programme 1949*, 17. The *Official Guide* (1955, 75) calls it the ‘Day of the Covenant’, reflecting new legislation and the official introduction of this name in 1952, as discussed in Chapter 1.

<sup>936</sup> Grobler (2001, 28) provides details of the inauguration event.

<sup>937</sup> Participants at the inauguration must have been allowed to view the Monument’s interior before the official opening on 16 December, judging by photographs in the press, such as one showing people queuing to climb the staircase to the upper parts of the Monument in *Die Vaderland* 13.12.1949.

<sup>938</sup> The swell of nationalist ardour was also marked by the laying of wreaths at the graves of Afrikaner leaders



**Figure 215:** Inauguration. Twelve Afrikaner girls and boys in Voortrekker costume officially open the Monument at a signal from Prime Minister Malan in the amphitheatre at noon on 16 December 1949 (photo courtesy HF Archives F 39.6.60 k)





**Figure 216:** The same ritual as in fig. 215 but seen from the Hall of Heroes, with *Convention* in place (left) but *Departure* missing (right). 16.12.1949 (Erlank, Thom and Rousseau 1950, 15; photo State Information Office, Pretoria)



**Figure 217:** Crowd waiting to enter the Monument on 16 December 1949 (photo courtesy of HF Archives F 39.6.153 k)

a pale sun-ray ... filtered through the shrine's great dome to fall squarely across the words inscribed for posterity on the marble sarcophagus, 'Ons Vir Jou, Suid Afrika' (We for Thee South Africa).

The consecration and dedication were the climax to a pilgrimage unequalled in the history of southern Africa, the great moment for which the many thousands of inhabitants of the canvas (tent) town had been waiting for almost a week. That numbers at the inauguration were swelled by dignitar-

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including Andries Pretorius and Paul Kruger (*Die Volkstem* 15.12.1949), echoing similar ceremonies in 1938 (*Rand Daily Mail* 14.12.1938). But while the focus was on past history, there was also discussion about the future, and not only in the speeches at the inauguration. For example, the lead article in the Special Monument Edition supplement from *Dagbreek* 4.12.1949 was entitled 'The journey that lies ahead' (*Die Trek wat Voorlê*).



**Figure 218:** Gerard Moerdyk and Romano Romanelli at the Voortrekker Monument. December 1949 (photo courtesy of Kirchoff files)

ies from abroad added to the significance of the event, which was reported on internationally (fig. 321). One of the numerous overseas visitors who took part was Romano Romanelli; he had arrived in late November in Cape Town, on board the *Edinburgh Castle*.<sup>939</sup> A photograph taken at the time of the festivities shows the Florentine sculptor and the Afrikaner architect Moerdyk in front of the Monument (fig. 218).

Awed visitors could hardly have guessed at the trials and tribulations, the immense challenges and the petty problems that had beleaguered the process leading up to the triumph of that climactic moment. But there were in fact salient signs of that struggle before their eyes. On the exterior of the Monument the sentinel corner colossi representing Voortrekker leaders were not complete, and, even more critically, within the Hall of Heroes five of the large panels of the frieze were missing – disrupting the narrative unity and lacking, ironically, the seminal Battle of Blood River (fig. 212).

Ongoing difficulties continued to beset the completion of the frieze, even after the inauguration. Because of the declining exchange rate

for the pound, Romanelli had not received the reimbursement he had expected for the work in Florence. He had to borrow money to complete the job, and then await further funds before the last panels could be dispatched to South Africa.<sup>940</sup> Although it must have been difficult to refocus on the task after the euphoria of the inauguration, the Dagbestuur reaffirmed early the following year that there was an urgent need to complete the Monument, even if there was no longer a specific deadline.<sup>941</sup> But in April it was reported that Romanelli had only just received payment, which had

<sup>939</sup> *Die Volksblad* 25.11.1949.

<sup>940</sup> The question of reimbursement for Romanelli, who claimed to have been considerably underpaid because of the pound's loss of value, was a fraught question on the Dagbestuur agenda through much of 1950. Evidently, Romanelli had chosen to leave his payments in South Africa, and was disadvantaged by a fall in the rate of exchange for the pound, and had communicated that lack of funds had forced him to suspend work (recorded in a letter from Secretary for External Affairs to Secretary of Internal Affairs, 6.3.1950; NARSSA, BNS 146/73/5. The Secretary for Finance stated that Romanelli's claims had already been met in full, and could not be reconsidered unless there had been written agreement that the exchange rate would be taken into account (letter to Romanelli 4.3.1950). The subject was a topic of discussion at successive meetings of the Dagbestuur up to August 1950 when it was agreed to write to Romanelli to inform him that he would not receive any additional payment (2.8.1950: 4). Many felt that the SVK had made the promised payment in full and could not be held responsible for the vagaries of the international money market, although Moerdyk continued to defend him, maintaining that he had met his obligations and deserved recompense. Ferreira (1975, 123) reports that Romanelli made an emotional appeal to the SVK: '... morally I must be very surprised that you, belonging all to the National party of Dr. Malan will take advantage of a British law of devaluation of the pound in the singular case of a poor artist who has worked with all his "Conn-e-foi" for a patriotic exaltation of warriors who were deceived by the British.' After further representations from Moerdyk regarding the outstanding £650, the Dagbestuur decided to approach the Treasury again, requesting sympathetic treatment of Romanelli, taking account of the fact that he had had to borrow money to complete the frieze, and had shown good faith in arranging its transport to South Africa despite a lack of further payment (21.8.1950: 4). The matter was laid before Parliament (Dagbestuur 25.10.1950: 4), and it was noted in October the following year that an additional payment had finally been made (Dagbestuur 22.10.1951: 5).

<sup>941</sup> Dagbestuur 1.2.1950: 4.



**Figure 219:** Moerdyk shows frieze to transport delegates, while *Delagoa Bay* and *Vegkop* are not mounted. 30.4.1950 (courtesy of UP Archives, Moerdyk files MDK 0504T)

delayed delivery of the last five panels that were ready and packed, and would now be shipped by 26 April.<sup>942</sup> An unidentified newspaper photograph dated 30.4.1950 in the Moerdyk files shows the east wall with *Delagoa Bay* and *Vegkop* still not mounted (fig. 219). Final completion clearly still lay some way ahead. And although in October it was stressed that the frieze must definitely be completed by 1 December 1950,<sup>943</sup> other finishing off, including the corner figures, continued through 1951 and into 1952. Only in July 1952 was it reported that all work was complete, and even then there were still repairs to be made to the floor and cladding.<sup>944</sup> The final handover of the building from the SVK to the Monument's Board of Control took place on 21 November 1952, just shy of fourteen years after the centenary of Blood River.

Despite the unprecedented scale of the project and the remarkable achievement of orchestrating so many aspects, the absence of parts of the frieze at the inauguration signalled a failure on the part of the SVK to fully meet its goals – a failure that, one must acknowledge, is virtually standard for commissions of such scale and complexity. From the tenor of newspaper reports the missing panels scarcely detracted from the overall impact of the Monument on that occasion, when it seems to have been given a rapturous reception. Reporters were unanimously appreciative of the experience, even those of the English press, which might have been expected to take a critical position since this was very much an Afrikaner affair.<sup>945</sup> Although it was optimistically reported that there would be many English speakers at the celebrations, and that they would be specially welcomed by Jansen, it is hard not to see this as a grudging concession on an occasion which was conducted entirely in Afrikaans.<sup>946</sup> When the Monument had been supported as a national priority by the

<sup>942</sup> Dagbestuur 24.4.1950: 6.

<sup>943</sup> Dagbestuur 25.10.1950: 5. At the same meeting it was recorded that the floor would be repaired after the frieze had been completed, reminding us that all the heavy equipment that had to be brought into the Monument in order to install the frieze would have taken its toll on the marble flooring. It would also not have been possible to complete all the cladding on the walls until the reliefs were in place, particularly the inner surfaces of the lip where the wall met the frieze.

<sup>944</sup> Dagbestuur 7.10.1952: 4.

<sup>945</sup> That the celebrations were by no means limited to Pretoria and predominantly Afrikaner towns is demonstrated by a photograph of a float with a model of the Monument – according to the caption, ‘built by the S.A. Railways with thousands of seven-year-olds’ (deur die S.A. Spoorwee met duisende sewejaartjies gebou) – witnessed by a huge crowd in Joubert Street, Johannesburg, in December 1949 (Botha 1952, 6; later reproduced by Vermeulen 1999, 96).

<sup>946</sup> Yet journalist Piet Cillié claimed that ‘the occasion was a revelation to English journalists: “They did not realize that young Afrikaners could sing so well, that Afrikaner women could dress so well, that Afrikaners could perform



**Figure 220:** Behind the scenes. Black workers providing 40 000 bundles of firewood for the inauguration, ‘to enable persons camping out at the Monument to prepare their own food ... 50 tons of firewood will be required’ (courtesy of HF Archives F 39.6.46 k; photo City Council of Pretoria with cited text on back)

government (under the United Party, which was understood to represent English as well as Afrikaans interests), and funded with taxpayers’ money,<sup>947</sup> how then could the other official language of the time have been so utterly excluded? There is extreme if unintended irony in the congratulatory tone of reports at the time that an English-speaking South African was to make a speech, Judge C. Newton-Thompson of Grahamstown, who would be presenting a Bible, just as the English settlers had done to the Voortrekkers in April 1837, as discussed in *Presentation*. For, as the *Dagbreek en Sondagnuus* of 30.10.1949 headlined: ‘English speaker will deliver Afrikaans speech at the inauguration’ (Engelsprekende sal Afrikaanse rede by inwyding lewer) – the honour, it may be surmised, depended entirely on his being ‘fluent’ (vloeiend) in Afrikaans.<sup>948</sup> In an article at the beginning of 1950, the American magazine *Life* stated that ‘most English-bred citizens stayed away because, except for one short speech, the ceremonies were entirely in Afrikaans, the Boer tongue’.<sup>949</sup> The same article also reported that

In a land where native blacks outnumber the whites almost four to one, South Africa’s race-conscious prime minister, Dr Daniel Malan, used the occasion to warn his fellow Afrikaners against ‘absorption into semibarbarism through miscegenation and the disintegration of the white race’.<sup>950</sup>

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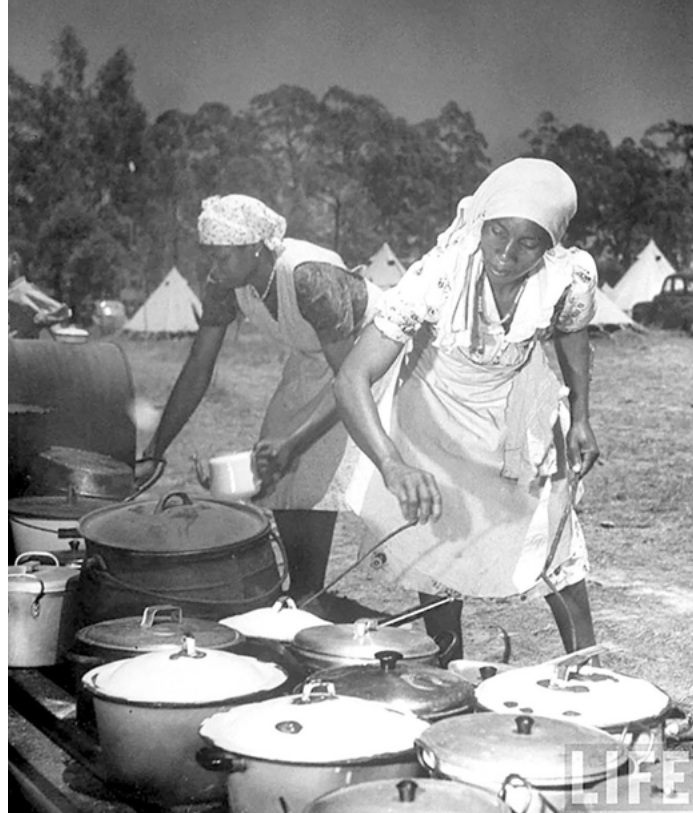
such folk dances, and that Afrikaner history could be presented so irresistibly because it was such a living reality to the presenters” (quoted in Giliomee 2003, 491).

**947** As English speakers dominated the country financially and were hence by far the largest taxpaying group, this meant that they had, strictly speaking, paid for the bulk of the costs of the Monument.

**948** Newton-Thompson had in fact been required to make his speech in Afrikaans, as recorded in the chairman’s undated draft of the letter of invitation to him to take part in the celebrations (ARCA PV94 1/75/6/12).

**949** ‘South Africa enshrines pioneer heroes’, *Life* 16.1.1950, 21.

**950** *Ibid.*



**Figure 221:** Black women cooking for visitors who camp at the inauguration site (photo Margaret Bourke-White for *Life* 16.1.1950; [https://johnedwinmason.typepad.com/john\\_edwin\\_mason\\_photogra/2012/08/margaret-bourke-white-south-africa-p1.html](https://johnedwinmason.typepad.com/john_edwin_mason_photogra/2012/08/margaret-bourke-white-south-africa-p1.html))

It is hardly surprising then, as reported in the *Life* article, that ‘Natives, except servants, shunned the occasion’.<sup>951</sup> What, if any, response there was from the black community is difficult to guess. Mendacious assurances that all races were welcome at the inauguration clearly referred to the Afrikaans and English ‘races’, and completely ignored indigenous South Africans. Although ‘apartheid’ had yet to be formally legislated, the concept was already fully operational. No doubt there were many black workers, the servants mentioned by *Life*, behind the scenes (fig. 220),<sup>952</sup> just as there had been on the Trek itself. That visitors also brought their own black servants is confirmed by Margaret Bourke-White’s photograph for *Life* of black women cooking (fig. 221), and the chance appearance in a photograph in the Museum Africa collection of a black ‘nanny’, in neat uniform with cap and apron, minding a toddler amongst the crowds on the Monument steps (fig. 222). But no black faces appear in the numerous celebratory photographs of the time, with some rare

<sup>951</sup> An article in *Die Transvaler* 13.12.1949 states that many ‘natives’ (naturelle) came, undaunted by stories claiming that ‘Communists’ were saying that they should avoid the Monument, as whites would hang them or shoot them on 16 December. That they are described as coming ‘in support of their employers’ (om hul werkgewers ... by te staan) implies that they were present as servants rather than participants.

<sup>952</sup> Generally their presence is invisible in photographs which focus on other things, although there is one that shows a black person in a group on the roof of the Monument during the carving of one of the corner figures. And the *Rand Daily Mail* of 6.8.1947 shows a photograph where ‘A native guard stands behind a wire fence surrounding the Voortrekker Monument near Pretoria’. We also know of the concession to allow the employment of black labourers to supplement the all-white building team to mix cement and clear the site. And undoubtedly other workers were drawn in as preparations were made for the inauguration. There is, for example, a photograph in the HF Archives (F 39.6.46 k) that shows black workers preparing bundles of firewood, which is inscribed on the back: ‘City Council of Pretoria. Firewood for national celebrations: 40 000 bundles of firewood will be required during the festivities in connection with the inauguration ceremonies of the Voortrekker Monument to enable persons camping out at the Monument to prepare their own food. ... at least 50 tons of firewood will be required. The photo shows one of the stacks in the municipal plantation, Pretoria West, with a small proportion of the wood required.’ It is painfully obvious that no mention is made of the workers.



**Figure 222:** Black nanny looking after toddler at inauguration (detail of photo courtesy of Museum Africa)



**Figure 223:** 'Old Jacob', former coach driver to President Kruger, age 85, at inauguration of Voortrekker Monument (Bond 1949, unpaginated)

exceptions such as the eighty-five-year-old 'Jacob', once coach driver to Paul Kruger, who is photographed in suit and tie, in front of the Monument, for the inaugural celebration booklet produced by the English newspaper, *The Star*. Clearly his inclusion was 'honorary', tolerated because of his Kruger connection (fig. 223).

It seems doubtful that the omission of either an English or an African presence even registered with most of the celebrants at the inauguration. Nor was the positive response of viewers limited to December 1949. Visitors continued to flock to the Monument in such numbers that the idea of keeping up with a visitors' book was soon abandoned as impractical.<sup>953</sup> Even when in the second half of 1950 the Monument was generally closed to allow for the costly reinstallation of equipment so that the frieze could be completed, it did not deter attendance when the Monument was open.<sup>954</sup> A steady flow of donations was reported which contributed to Monument funds.<sup>955</sup> Press reports commented that those who came to visit voluntarily lowered their voices and slowed their pace, the men removing their hats and the children hushed, as though they were in a church, a view confirmed by the Board of Control Report which testified that, with few exceptions, it proved

<sup>953</sup> Approximately 7 000 signatures were entered in the visitors' book in the first three weeks of May 1951 alone. Report of the Board of Control for the period 16 Dec 1949–31 March 1952 (5.7.1952: 5).

<sup>954</sup> The *Official Guide* of 1955 states there were 5 000 visitors each month (81). By 1970 this had increased to about 10 000 visitors per month, and 'groups of white and non-white schoolchildren' numbering over 50 000 per year (*Official Guide* 1970, 78).

<sup>955</sup> The Report of the Board of Control (5.7.1952, 3) noted that, although there was no entrance fee to the Monument, there was a donations box. Funds were also forthcoming from royalties on recordings of the inauguration and sales of souvenirs.

unnecessary to monitor behaviour.<sup>956</sup> And it can be imagined that, after they had absorbed the impact of the building as a whole, visitors would have been making their way around the Hall of Heroes, taking time to read the story unfolding clockwise scene by scene in the historical frieze.

To celebrate the Monument's inauguration a film was released, 'The story of the Voortrekker Monument with scenes from the building of a nation' (*Die verhaal van die Voortrekker Monument met tonele uit die bou van 'n nasie*),<sup>957</sup> which would have contributed to an understanding of the story of the Trek. Supported by a commentary offering a short, simplified story of the Trek, it combined re-enactments of historical events – chiefly taken, it seems, from the 1938 film *Die bou van 'n nasie* (discussed in Chapter 2) – with shots of different scenes of the historical frieze apparently taken from the Yates photographs of the full-size clay panels at Harmony Hall.<sup>958</sup> As well as identifying the subject matter of many of these scenes and showing how they fitted into a historical narrative, the film reinforced values implicit in the frieze. The bloodthirsty aggression of Africa's aboriginal peoples is cited more than once, and constantly reinforced visually by hordes of film extras as assegai-wielding warriors in traditional costume, in contrast to the Voortrekkers' military achievements, which are presented as heroic rather than cruel and ferocious. The God-fearing white trekkers are presented as bringing civilisation to an essentially primitive and barbaric land, which leads seamlessly to the founding of a united South Africa with fertile farms and modern cities a century later. That the historic events are linked to Afrikaners of the day is confirmed by the focus of the second half of the film on the 1949 inauguration itself, and the continued honouring of the Day of the Covenant – as it was to be called from 1952 – enacted anew at the Monument, and witnessed by the thousands who attended the celebrations. Close-ups of faces in the crowd, bearded men and women in kappies, show their eager anticipation and absorption in the events, presenting on an individual level a united and fulfilled Afrikanerdom.

The commentator remarks of the dramatic procession of torches to the Monument that they carried a message to the world: 'The Voortrekkers brought the flame of western civilisation into Africa' (*Die Voortrekkers het die flam van die westerse beskawing Afrika ingedaal*). A rousing soundtrack,<sup>959</sup> reminiscent of those in Hollywood adventure movies, backs the excitement of the arrival of the 'despatch riders' (rapportryers) on their horses with congratulatory messages for the inauguration from far and wide across South Africa and neighbouring states. But generally the soundtrack reinforces the solemnity of the occasion with the Afrikaans national anthem,<sup>960</sup> and hymns played on the organ and sung by choirs, who also accompany the opening and closing scenes of the presentation, where the camera scans the grand landscapes of the country that the Voortrekkers had won for their descendants. The film medium meant that it could be distributed throughout South Africa, reaching those who could not personally witness the inauguration and view the Monument and its historical frieze, and reinforcing its messages for all Afrikaners. The film presents as fact a number of historical events which are open to doubt today: that the treaty between Retief and Dingane was indeed signed (visually confirmed in this case by the sculptural representation in the frieze); that the treaty document was miraculously discovered after the death of Retief (re-enacted in a close-up shot of hands unfolding a blood stained – 'bloedbevlekte' – page inscribed with text); and that the Church of the Vow was built to honour the sacred covenant made before the Battle of Blood

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<sup>956</sup> Some problems were reported, but also that the public in general displayed sensitivity to the Monument (ibid., 6–7).

<sup>957</sup> By African Film Productions (which had also made *Die Bou van 'n Nasie* in 1938) for the State Information Office.

<sup>958</sup> This can be deduced from details that were changed from the full-scale clay reliefs to the final marble, such as the small child seated on the knee of the woman on the right of the *Inauguration* panel seen in the film, replaced by a baby in the final version, although the small section of *Bloukrans* that is visible alongside the *Murder of Retief* shows the modifications carried out after complaints about the killing of a baby (see *Bloukrans*).

<sup>959</sup> The music app Shezam identifies the track as the 'Frontier March' played by Queen's Hall Light Orchestra.

<sup>960</sup> It is worth noting that *Die Stem* was not at this stage the official anthem of South Africa; although it had been played alongside *God Save the Queen* since 1938, it only replaced the British anthem in 1957.

River (supported in this case by both a shot of the *Church of the Vow* relief, and one of the present-day Voortrekker Museum in Pietermaritzburg, both identified as the original church).<sup>961</sup>

In 1950 a keen awareness of the didactic and inspirational social role that the reliefs could play was reflected in the decision to install small metal plates with bilingual titles to identify the scenes under the frieze once it had been fully mounted.<sup>962</sup> Two years later the Board of Control recorded that they were in place.<sup>963</sup> There were also discussions about information for visitors, with the use of lectures suggested.<sup>964</sup> Already in earlier SVK meetings, members had debated a suitable publication, possibly along the lines of the *Official Programme* for the inauguration, to provide information for visitors. The Board of Control took on the responsibility of developing the *Official Guide* to the Monument, drew up an outline of appropriate chapters, and sent requests to proposed authors to invite their participation.<sup>965</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, the *Official Guide* was first printed in 1955, and ran through many editions, produced in both Afrikaans and English. It was a popular, inexpensive and illustrated account that could be understood as an authoritative guide to the Great Trek, presenting a glorified and ideologised Afrikaner past. In the first edition the visitor was explicitly directed to read the *Official Guide* before visiting the Monument in order to glean a good understanding of the building's symbolism and particularly the meaning of the historical frieze. As already mentioned, explanations of this narrative took up a large portion of the *Official Guide*, and the first edition directed visitors' attention to it, saying that it was the chapter on the frieze that 'you will wish to turn to at once'.<sup>966</sup>

The account in the *Official Guide* of the overall goals of the Monument remains the same in spirit, although slightly different in wording, from 1955 to 1970, saying of the Monument:

It wants to show the nations the origin of Afrikanerdom, what the Afrikaner has suffered and what his ideals are. It wants to remind the South African nation of its high destiny as the carriers of Christianity and civilization. It wants to give honour to the Almighty Who in His miraculous way has guided the nation so far and Who in His mercy will safeguard the future. (1955, 85)

To the nations of the world it shows what Afrikanerdom has sprung from, what its sufferings were, and what its ideals have been. It serves to remind the people of South Africa of their calling as propagators of civilisation and Christianity on the African continent. It serves to honour God who, through the miracles wrought by Him, has led and protected them and, through His grace, will make the future safe for them. (1970, 82)

The historical frieze's visualisation of the iconic moments of the Voortrekker story would have reinforced, possibly for some viewers even established, an understanding of the Trek and its heroes and martyrs as the foundation myth of Afrikanerdom. The narrative confirmed the Trek's supreme goal to establish an Afrikaner republic, memorialised in the final panel of the frieze, the *Convention* of 1852 at Sand River. While that may have been lost in the decades that followed, it was soon to be won back again. As previously noted, after 1961 the *Official Guide* added a statement exulting the fact that the Monument now stood in the administrative capital of a republic.<sup>967</sup> For the second time, the goal of an independent Afrikaner nation had been achieved.

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**961** The arguments related to these events are discussed in Part II, when dealing with the relevant scenes in the frieze.

**962** Board of Control 23.6.1950: 4b.

**963** Ibid. 5.7.1952: p.5 item 5 ('Monument en besoeke'; NARSSA, GGO3/5584/3 Jansen).

**964** Ibid. 23.6.1950: 17.

**965** This can be deduced from a letter to Jansen from the Honorary Secretary of the Board of Control, M.C. Botha, dated 18.11.1952, requesting that he contribute Chapters 3 and 10, and attaching the outline of the proposed *Guide* (ARCA PV94 1/75/2/1).

**966** *Official Guide* 1955, 11.

**967** *Official Guide* 1969, 10.



In sum, the frieze recounted past achievements while articulating present ideas and future ambitions. Only by close engagement with each scene in turn is it possible to fully understand this complexity. How each was shaped by memory and ideology, by historians and politicians, and by the artists, will form the subject of the independent discussions of each scene in Part II, while a general discussion follows in Chapter 4. The reliefs gave tangible form to a 'moral tale' of history that embodied values that were understood to be the cornerstones of Afrikanerdom, personified in the Voortrekkers. After 1948 these values were being acted out – more purposefully and systematically – under the new Afrikaner Nationalist government, a government that would remain in power, driving the country's destiny, for more than forty years. It is all the more intriguing to read the frieze today in a post-apartheid South Africa and see in what ways the visual narrative still divulges those principles, but also exposes some of their many flaws by the contradictions embedded in its depictions.



**Figure 224:** Attic grave relief of two warriors. c. 420–410 BC. Marble, h. 1.8 m (Piraeus Museum; photo Hermann Wagner; German Archaeological Institute, Athens, D-DAI-ATH-Grabrelief-0754\_47891,01.jpg)



**Figure 225:** Rolong with contrapposto in *Negotiation*. Marble, detail of fig. 293 (photo Russell Scott)

## 4 Image

*To what extent do ... allegedly authentic events represented in relief deliver reliable information? Have they been tampered with? But more importantly, even if they have not been tampered with and the scenes really do refer to real events, to what extent have they been changed by politics so that they become rather icons of ideology?<sup>968</sup>*

With the benefit of hindsight it seems a miracle that the figurative core of the Voortrekker Monument, the frieze in marble, was ever completed. Among the largest of its kind anywhere, the frieze offers a monumental narrative of twenty-seven scenes, running at human height around the Hall of Heroes, 92 metres long and 2.3 metres high (see foldout). The miracle is even more remarkable when we consider that patrons and craftsmen could not rely on local traditions to help them conceive and realise such a colossal commission in stone. This lack of experience had a significant impact on the convoluted process whereby the narrative in marble took shape over a time span of almost twenty years. Against this background it is all the more surprising that to the present day there is no *art historical* study on the four sculptors and the frieze.<sup>969</sup>

Decisions regarding the number, the topic, the size and the sequence of the individual scenes and the process of their design and making have already been discussed. In this chapter we examine the imagery and iconography of the completed frieze, in its own right and in relation to sculptural forerunners (figs 224, 225). The focus now is on the composition and style developed by the four South African sculptors when they portrayed historical content, and on how the up to fifty Florentine sculptors complemented or changed these forms when they copied the full-scale plaster sections in marble. While the individual panels are analysed fully in Part II, The Scenes, here the goal is to discuss them holistically. As well as questions of style, we will also consider the iconography of the frieze as a totality and how it established the ultimate visual narrative of the first eighteen years of Voortrekker history.

### Composition

Before we can tackle the realisation of the frieze we need to hypothesise what Moerdyk might have told the four sculptors about their task after their arrival in Harmony Hall, Pretoria, in early 1942. Apart from a few snippets in Hennie Potgieter's 1987 account discussed in the previous chapter, we know almost nothing about his instructions. The only clues we have of the architect's possible guidelines are passages in the two chapters he wrote more than a decade later for the *Official Guide* of 1955, 'Design and Symbolism of the Voortrekker Monument' and 'The Historical Frieze'.

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<sup>968</sup> Hölscher 2017, 15: 'Wie weit sind die dargestellten, angeblich authentischen Vorgänge verlässliche Informationen? Wie weit sind sie gefälscht? Und noch dringender: Auch wenn sie nicht gefälscht sind, wenn die dargestellten Szenen tatsächlich auf reale Vorgänge verweisen, wie weit sind sie unter politischen Vorgaben in einer solchen Weise gefiltert, dass sie eher zu Trägern von ideologischen Botschaften werden?' Hölscher's reference is to the Column of Trajan, but his words are pertinent for historical friezes in general, and certainly for the Voortrekker Monument.

<sup>969</sup> As Astrid Schwenke's doctoral thesis on the Voortrekker Monument frieze is not available on the University of Pretoria repository, we cannot ascertain whether it includes an art historical approach (Cultural History, University of Pretoria; see Schwenke and Grobler 2013, 138 n 86).

This frieze had to be accommodated in a structure that would be a symbolical representation of the 'great deed' and which simultaneously would depict the character of the people who made that deed possible ...<sup>970</sup>

THE HISTORICAL FRIEZE is inseparably bound up with the Voortrekker Monument and depicts all the most important phases of the Great Trek. The frieze may be said to explain that memorable migration graphically and clearly even to strangers who know nothing of our history ...

The frieze could not consist merely of a chain of episodes. It was necessary to dramatize the material available and to present a story with a beginning, a climax and a conclusion. The fact that there had been not only one trek but four separate treks was a problem that had to be faced. The historic drama which was to be depicted had therefore to be unified. This was successfully done and the chronological order of events was not unduly disturbed. It was also necessary to arrange the various episodes with an eye to the dramatic effect. The manner in which the episodes were arranged required particular attention ...

The committee wished to appoint Afrikaans sculptors. As the work was too much for one person, the task had to be entrusted to a number of persons with the consequent danger that individual artists might of necessity have some difficulty in creating a harmonious whole.

At that time there were 21 professional sculptors in South Africa, and from them four were finally chosen who succeeded in adapting themselves to one another and in working together ... They were advised to model themselves technically upon two Renaissance sculptors, Verrocchio and Donatello. By following those examples and constantly consulting one another, the four sculptors succeeded wonderfully well in submerging their own individuality and achieving a harmonious whole ...

After these preliminaries it was necessary to build full-scale models. Unity of style and finish far above expectation was obtained by having two or more sculptors at work on each scene. When the whole frieze is taken into consideration, the sense of harmony and unity is remarkable. One is conscious of the same style throughout the frieze ...<sup>971</sup>

Based on these statements, we can surmise what general recommendations Moerdyk would have conveyed to the sculptors: that the frieze was an inherent part of the Monument; that it represented 'all the most important phases of the Great Trek' and would represent it as a 'great deed'; that the story of the Voortrekkers' migration to the interior of southern Africa needed to be portrayed in a way that was clear 'even to strangers who know nothing of our history'. These points subsumed considerations that originated with the SVK, that this was to be the authoritative Afrikaner narrative of the Great Trek and that every detail in the frieze had to be historically correct.<sup>972</sup> Moerdyk may have conceded that the fact 'that there had been not only one trek but four separate treks'<sup>973</sup> caused a narrative problem, which had not yet been resolved when the sculptors commenced their work – especially as some scenes were still undecided – but he was adamant that a unified narrative must be created, ideally without unduly disturbing the chronology of events.

SVK minutes reveal that the oversight of the sculptors was largely delegated to Moerdyk, and it is clear from Hennie Potgieter's descriptions that Moerdyk was very much in control of the process. So, in instructing the sculptors how to comply with these parameters, he probably spelled out guidelines similar to the ideas proposed in SVK meetings and later the *Official Guide*. For example, it was minuted for the meeting on 5 October 1936 that 'Moerdyk explained that, since the form of the Monument is now determined, it [the frieze] will no longer be individual panels but a chronological sequence of the history of the Trek. There must be dramatic incidents portrayed and in such

<sup>970</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 33–34.

<sup>971</sup> *Ibid.*, 40–41.

<sup>972</sup> See Chapter 3. Potgieter (1987, 46) emphasised: 'For us sculptors there was considerable research work regarding historical accuracy, plausible myths, clothing, animals, and so on' (Daar was vir ons beeldhouers baie navorsingwerk oor historiese juistheid, aanneemlike mites, kleredrag, diere, en so meer).

<sup>973</sup> There were many more treks than the four acknowledged by Moerdyk; see Chapter 1.

a way that there is a climax'.<sup>974</sup> Moerdyk would have insisted that the selected individual episodes had to be dramatised in composition and style to present a story 'with a beginning, a climax and a conclusion'; that the 'historic drama' of the narrative had to be adjusted to the principles of unity and harmony;<sup>975</sup> that, to achieve this goal, the four sculptors had to adapt to one another artistically and to learn to work together; and that they should model their carving 'technically' upon two of the most famous Renaissance sculptors in relief, Donatello and Verrocchio. He would also have directed their attention to the Coetzer drawings (fig. 98), discussed in Chapter 2, which Potgieter tells us were stuck up on cardboard in Harmony Hall,<sup>976</sup> and he possibly informed them about the 'Jansen' list of twenty-four topics for the scenes and the planned layout of the frieze (fig. 92).

With this rather patchy blueprint, the four sculptors began their work at Harmony Hall, a name which seems to advocate what Moerdyk and the SVK expected from them – harmony in their teamwork and the formal development of the frieze. Here, in their workshop, all aspects of the frieze, such as technical issues, the final composition, iconography and style were negotiated, and eventually transformed into the visual narrative. It was largely Moerdyk who oversaw the progress of the sculptors on a regular basis, apart from a few members of the SVK and the *Historiese Komitee*, such as the newly appointed Voortrekker dress experts Kotie Roodt-Coetzee and Trudie Kestell, whose main concern was to ensure that the imagery of the frieze complied with Afrikaner traditions. As outlined in the previous chapter, the committee showed very little concern about the actual form of the historical frieze, its composition and its style. After the appointment of the four sculptors in 1942 the making of the frieze was driven largely by them, based on their own experience and work, and their daily appraisals and decisions. This is also manifest in the fact that the panels do not adhere to Moerdyk's proposed symmetrical layout, discussed in Chapter 2 (figs 90, 91), with its standardised dimensions for central and flanking panels. While the maquettes are proportioned in a similar way, in transposing the designs to the long sections of the full-scale frieze changes were made. In view of the architect's control this is surprising, and a reminder that he too was inexperienced in tackling a project of this kind, where he had imagined that the historical scenes, whatever their nature, could be neatly fitted into a symmetrical layout. But there seems to have been no logical compositional relationship between the length of the panels and the number of figures the historical scenes required either. Although the sculptors could hardly depict the very large numbers actually involved in many of the scenes, they were usually generous in their inclusion of participants and bystanders.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that even if the composition of the frieze did not follow Moerdyk's symmetrical layout, it was nonetheless structured by the architecture of the Hall of Heroes. The Hall provides an expansive uninterrupted space with a footprint of roughly thirty by thirty metres (figs 3, 5). The north wall is divided in two equal halves by the double door of the entrance, which separates the beginning of the narrative to the east of the door from its ending to the west. The foldout makes it easy to follow our analysis and reading of the marble frieze step by step. The 2.3 metre high frieze is placed in an exceptionally prominent position: just above eye level with its lower edge only 1.35 metres above the floor,<sup>977</sup> it runs continuously around all four walls except for the interruption of the entrance door that stretches the full height of the frieze. The walls are framed by four corner structures for stairwells and lifts, which project more than three metres into the Hall and thus disrupt the rhythm of the frieze, especially as they host eight scenes of almost square dimensions, in contrast to the continuous horizontal panels of the long walls. Four of the corner panels are further disrupted by gable-shaped doorframes that cut substantially

<sup>974</sup> SVK 5.10.1936: 11 'Mnr. Moerdyk verduidelik dat aangesien die vorm van die monument nou bepaal is, dit nie meer eintlik panele sal wees nie maar 'n kronologiese volgorde van die geskiedenis van die Voortrek. Daar moet dramatiese insidente uitgebeeld word en wel op so 'n wyse dat daar 'n hoogtepunt is.' See also Chapter 2.

<sup>975</sup> See also Potgieter 1987, 44, '... we had to strive for a unity of style' (ons 'n eenheid van styl moes nastreef).

<sup>976</sup> Potgieter 1987, 41.

<sup>977</sup> We thank Etta Judson for providing the exact measurement.

into the reliefs (*Soutpansberg*, *Blydevooruitsig*, *Marthinus Oosthuizen*, *Mpande*). Finally, the layout of the historical narrative with the three main scenes in the centre of each of the long walls, *Inauguration* on the east, *Murder of Retief* on the south and *Blood River* on the west frieze, triggered additional design challenges. The placing and size of each central scene had direct compositional repercussions on that of the other scenes on the respective wall, and vice versa.

The impact of these structural features on the composition is profound, and hence discussed here in its own right. Building on 'The full-scale frieze' in Chapter 3, our analysis begins with the north frieze that provides both the initial and final stage of the narrative of twenty-seven scenes, following a clockwise sequence (see foldout). As the visitor turns to the left after entering, the first scene of the narrative, *Departure*, transforms the beginning of several treks in the Cape area, identifiable in the distant mountains, into a single procession of well-ordered people, wagons and livestock – most of them moving in the same direction as the spectator, and establishing the left-to-right sequence of the frieze. Composed on two marble panels, together some 7.1 metres long, this scene is the largest of the frieze and as such a suitably epic opening for the Afrikaner narrative of the Great Trek, as the Voortrekkers depart in their quest for freedom and independence from the political and economic constraints of the British Colony. The ceremonial *Departure* marks a sharp contrast to the drama of the penultimate scene on the other side of the door, *Return*, a second exodus, this time from Natal, again a reaction to the British who had annexed the country. Although they follow the left-to-right direction of the initial procession, the Voortrekkers here, for a second time on the move with family and livestock, move dramatically at a sharp angle into the mountainous landscape. In contrast to *Departure* and *Return*, the scene between them, *Convention*, which is the final scene of the frieze, is stationary and acts as a compositional divide between the end and the beginning of the narrative. Ingeniously fitted onto the same panel, a Boer family stands watching the challenging passage of the wagon over the Drakensberg in *Return*, their static group preparing the eye for the stillness of *Convention*. There high-ranking British and Boer officials, flanked by their supporters, sign the Sand River Convention to finally pave the way for the founding of the ZAR, the first formally recognised independent Boer republic of the interior. Significantly, the last person of the frieze, a British commissioner in a formal top hat, closes off the composition as he looks back across the signing of the *Convention* towards the preceding scene of *Return*. He complements the first person in *Departure*, an anonymous Voortrekker in a wide-brimmed Boer hat, who looks in the opposite direction, forward to the trekkers' future. Although *Return* was modelled by Frikkie Kruger, and *Convention* and *Departure* designed by Kirchhoff, the beginning and the end of the Great Trek are strongly linked in their composition.

The configurations of the following two scenes, mounted on the north-east corner and designed by Hennie Potgieter, are rather static with shallow compositions parallel to the picture plane. In *Presentation* a volume of the Dordrecht Bible is presented by Thomas Philipps, a distinguished English settler of Grahamstown, to the departing Voortrekker patriarch, Jacobus Uys. Thus, at the beginning of the narrative, *Presentation* shows Boer accord with British settlers, and singles out the (Dutch Reformed) Christian foundation of the Great Trek. *Soutpansberg* echoes the civilising Christian mission, including trading and teaching. It portrays trek leader Louis Trichardt in the centre, holding an elephant tusk, and flanked by his family and compatriots. They have reached the far north of southern Africa, represented by a backdrop of the massive Soutpansberg, and a small school house is also shown, claimed to be the first ever structure for Christian education in the interior. The odd gable shape of the doorframe protruding into the panel cuts off Trichardt's legs, the only corner scene where this truncation happens apart from *Blydevooruitsig*, also designed by Hennie Potgieter, as opposed to the more inventive compositional solutions by Postma and Kruger for the corresponding panels on the west side of the hall. The Voortrekker in the right background of *Soutpansberg* – the only person moving away from the centre to carry a bundle of hides to a wagon – serves to lead the eye towards the east frieze.

*Soutpansberg's* immediate neighbour, *Delagoa Bay*, is seriously out of place chronologically: as discussed in Chapter 3, it represents an event of April 1838 that took place well after the scenes

which follow it on the east frieze, and those of the south frieze as well. But it made sense to place *Delagoa Bay* next to *Soutpansberg* – necessarily positioned early as the first of the treks – when both scenes celebrate the pioneering role of Trichardt, one of the great leaders in the Voortrekker frieze and the only one who left a diary. And, as we shall see, *Delagoa Bay*'s representation of the Voortrekker's willingness to negotiate with other powers could play a fitting part in the overall arrangement of the east frieze.

The east narrative is disrupted by a diversity of composition, style and chronology, although all the scenes were designed by Potgieter except for *Negotiation* on the far right, modelled by Frikkie Kruger. As far as the general composition is concerned, however, the sequence of the east frieze is meaningfully ordered. Following the same pattern as the south and west friezes, there is a key scene in the centre, although smaller in this case: *Inauguration* shows the swearing-in ceremony of Piet Retief as Governor of the Voortrekkers. Here the focal point of the composition is the kneeling Retief, who swears an oath on the Bible, with the president of the Council of Justice, Gerrit Maritz, on the left. The constitutional narrative is framed on either side by a pair of scenes that focus on two Boer strengths, battle and negotiation. The first is represented by the battle scenes flanking *Inauguration*. *Vegkop* on the left is conceived from inside a laager of covered wagons. It shows visitors to the Monument – themselves standing inside the laager protecting the Monument – the Boer defence system, and depicts twenty-two Voortrekker men and women fighting off an outside attack with their superior firepower. Amidst so much action there is no clear focal point, but the central figure, marked by his position and frontal pose, is a boy reloading a gun, identified as the young Paul Kruger. The composition, framed by Voortrekker leader Hendrik Potgieter on the right and a woman on the left, is divided into three layers receding in space: larger Boer figures in the foreground (including Kruger), smaller ones defending the laager from the wagons, and diminutive attacking Ndebele beyond, visible through the gaps between the wagons. *Kapain* on the other side of *Inauguration* portrays the superiority of a mounted Boer commando over Ndebele riding on battle oxen. Although it also lacks a focal point, the close-up, packed nature of the composition, in the thick of the battle, is the opposite of *Vegkop*'s more spacious arrangement: here the viewers are fully exposed to the slaughter in front of them. *Kapain* glorifies the Boer victory, again under the command of Potgieter, in this case by highlighting Ndebele pathos, drama and death in full scale, as part of the foreground group.

The outer two scenes which bracket the east frieze are linked to activities of negotiation. *Delagoa Bay* portrays the formal disarming of the Trichardt trek by Captain Gamitto, the Portuguese governor of Delagoa Bay, with trek leader Trichardt and schoolteacher Daniel Pfeffer centre stage. In the central position in *Negotiation* is a representative of the Voortrekker leader Potgieter negotiating with Moroka, chief of the Rolong, who is placed off-centre to the left. The Boer asks him to help the trekkers at Vegkop, where they were stranded after their victory over the Ndebele, who had carried off their entire livestock. The trekkers were left to starve in the wilderness without food and means of transport, some 200 kilometres away from the next camp of their fellow countrymen at Thaba Nchu. As discussed in Chapter 3, the placement of *Negotiation*, out of sequence chronologically, was the result of substantial changes by the sculptors, agreed to by Moerdyk, when they redefined and rearranged the topics of the narrative by inserting a second unplanned battle scene, *Kapain*, to balance *Vegkop*. *Negotiation* was possibly assigned to the end to create compositional balance for the east frieze. But, as well as complementing Trichardt's interaction with the Portuguese at the other end of the frieze, the scene could also be read as purposefully counteracting the aggressive winning of the land north of the Vaal at Kapain, presenting the Boers as peace-loving men who fight only when forced to do so.

The two subsequent scenes of the south-east corner structure reinforce the importance of Retief as a leader and governor of the Boers, the first also picking up on the concept of peaceful negotiation. The central figure of *Blydevoornutsig* is a trekker on horseback delivering a letter to a boy, whose legs, like the forelegs of the stallion, are cut off by the intruding doorframe. The letter is from Retief, communicating his negotiations with Dingane, king of the Zulu, for a contract

granting the Voortrekkers land in Natal. A black man in the background undertakes the arduous task of stretching thongs used to make the Boers' long whips. He defines the second of two roles assigned to black people in the east frieze: to be killed when opposing Boer interests or to be tolerated when following Boer instructions, be it in negotiations in the preceding scene or here as a labourer. While the Boers on the right of this scene face left, which links it back compositionally to the rest of the east frieze, the next corner relief, *Debora Retief*, seems to stand alone, interrupting the main flow of the narrative – a pause before the action scenes in Natal, and like *Blydevooruitsig* marking the geographical border to the new territory. Here the focus is on Retief's daughter, who, surrounded by children, records her father's fifty-seventh birthday in an inscription painted on the sheltered rock of Kerkenberg, a striking outcrop on the Free-State-facing highlands of the Drakensberg, near the camp of the governor's party. In some ways the scene reads as an afterthought, invented to fill the corner panel, especially as its intimate group of young trekkers is an unusual subject for a heroic frieze. But, like *Inauguration* and *Blydevooruitsig* and the scenes to come at uMgungundlovu, it underpins the unique eminence Retief is given within the narrative.

The layout of the south frieze is again distinct. A continuous mountainous backdrop unites all the scenes, while two main topics determine the rhythm of the composition, first the descent of Voortrekkers into Zulu Natal and then, in a sequence of four scenes, the (lethal) consequences of their arrival. Apart from *Bloukrans*, which was modelled by Postma, the scenes were composed by Kruger. *Descent* focuses, more than any other scene apart from *Return*, on the mountainous panorama of the Drakensberg. The framing figures that bracket an open panorama lend this image special prominence as the only representation of the Voortrekkers' goal as they progress to new land and liberty. In a second major movement of the Great Trek after *Departure* (opposite it on the north frieze), the Voortrekkers of *Descent* master all the difficulties of passage with ease, as they guide an ox wagon down the steep Drakensberg into the 'promised land' of Natal. The grave cost of their advance is portrayed in the subsequent scenes, three focusing in a dramatic compositional and historical crescendo on Boer and Zulu interactions, while the last one echoes their distress but also offers hope of rescue. *Treaty*, at 2.14 metres wide the smallest and yet one of the most crowded scenes of the frieze, follows rather abruptly on *Descent*. The focus is on the ceremonial signing of a land deed, in which Dingane was alleged to have granted Retief the right for the Boers to settle in Zulu Natal. But there are links to adjacent narratives: while Retief and his men turn their backs on the subsequent scene of their own deaths, Dingane and his many Zulu followers face towards the slaughter. Beyond the Zulu a small section of Dingane's extensive capital uMgungundlovu is seen. The following scene, *Murder of Retief*, located on top of the dreaded hill kwaMatiwane, Dingane's place of execution, provides a full aerial view of the layout of the Zulu city, which fills the compositional gap in the centre of the narrative. This conspicuous opening perversely draws attention to the fate of the Boers on either side. Facing the opening from the right, the now bound but heroically portrayed Retief, forced by several Zulu to stand upright, witnesses others slaughter his unarmed companions with sticks and stones opposite him on the other side of the gap. *Bloukrans* follows on *Murder of Retief* seamlessly. It shows Zulu coming from all directions to set a trekker wagon on fire and massacre defenceless Boer women and children. As violence is omnipresent, there is deliberately no central focus in the melee of bodies. The last scene, *Teresa Viglione*, is still full of tension but without hostility. Gesturing dramatically and sitting astride her horse male-fashion, Teresa Viglione has a sense of urgency that contrasts the more static horseman diagonally opposite her in *Departure*. In riding away from the scenes of carnage to warn the Boers, she too directs the observer towards the subsequent scenes, acting as a visual hinge connecting the narrative of the south with that of the west frieze.

The topics and iconography of the two scenes on the south-west corner, developed by Laurika Postma, are quite similar in subject, as both portray the 'heroic deed' of young Voortrekkers, namely *Dirkie Uys* and *Marthinus Oosthuizen*. Both act on their own and have Zulu at gunpoint, but they provide contrasting outcomes. Dirkie, trying to protect his wounded father at Italeni, while his horse races away in the background, faces inevitable death from the overpowering Zulu;



Marthinus, galloping with ammunition supplies through Zulu lines near Van Rensburgkoppie in the Bloukrans area, miraculously survives amidst the convoluted composition of attacking and collapsing warriors whose poses accommodate the intrusive door gable. His rearing horse faces to the right to carry the eye to the west frieze, for which his triumph also provides a fitting precursor.

This frieze is perhaps the most diverse of all as it is split in two unbalanced halves. The first three scenes, composed by Postma, are crowded with figures near the picture plane, some in poses as complex as those in *Marthinus Oosthuizen*. But they are united by the continuous flow of figures of similar scale and, like the south frieze, they share a continuous mountainous backdrop. The topics of the first three rather small scenes prepare the stage for the central panel of *Blood River*, the decisive battle against Dingane's men and the narrative climax of the entire frieze. After *Murder of Retief* and *Bloukrans*, shown in the south frieze, the trekkers were disheartened because of the heavy loss of lives, including some of their most respected leaders. The crowded first scene, *Women spur men on*, represents four stout-hearted Boer women who call for revenge for the deaths and encourage their men to fight for their right to settle in Natal. The composition emphasises the central woman's commanding position with her outstretched arm, an echo of Teresa Viglione's gesture, now directed straight towards *Blood River*. *Arrival* acts like a response: Andries Pretorius, the newly elected military leader, arrives, the focus of attention, distinguished from the other Boers in the frieze by his top hat, formal tailcoat, sabre and pistol, as well as the black servant who attends to his noble stallion – apart from the man stretching riempie strips in *Blydevooruitsig*, the only black servant in the narrative. The next scene, *The Vow*, precedes *Blood River* directly. Here one of the Boers' spiritual leaders, Sarel Cilliers, addresses the trekkers, arms gesturing heavenwards and again in the direction of *Blood River*. Mounted on top of Old Grietjie, one of the cannons responsible for the terrible carnage in that battle, he promises God that the Boers will honour the day and build a church if they are victorious over the Zulu. That scene is portrayed on the panel that counterbalances this one on the other side of the battle to show the fulfilment of the covenant.

The three scenes that follow Postma's, designed by Peter Kirchhoff, are composed as individual reliefs. They are characterised by pronounced shifts of scale and depth as well as a lack of compositional continuity, although two of them, *Blood River* and *Church of the Vow*, follow *Arrival* and *The Vow* in swift narrative sequence. Placed centrally on the west frieze and at 4.29 metres, the second longest of the thirty-one marble panels, *Blood River* is a completely self-contained scene, a strange icon of Boer supremacy and Zulu collapse. The Boers advance from the right in a perfect cavalcade of galloping horsemen, while Pretorius, incongruous in his top hat and tailcoat, flourishes a raised sabre. The Zulu come in from the left, in total disarray, with three warriors in the foreground symbolically enacting their defeat in a stylised cascade, and falling at Pretorius' feet in total submission. Kirchhoff did not portray a battle so much as a representation of Boer-Afrikaner superiority. The length and central position of *Blood River* dictated the scale and portrayal of the two following scenes. The first, *Church of the Vow*, although at 2.19 metres of similar length to the preceding scenes by Postma, is squeezed between the two large scenes of *Blood River* and *Saailaer*, both over four metres long. With the static figure of the architect-builder modelled on Moerdyk on the left, *Church of the Vow* is dominated by the cut-off façade of the gabled Voortrekker Museum in Pietermaritzburg (originally a modest parsonage used as a church). The structure fills and extends beyond the margins of the relief panel, out of step with the visual conventions of the frieze with its self-contained compositions. The second scene, *Saailaer* (sowing camp or laager), which concludes the west frieze, unites two scenes in one and is historically and compositionally isolated. In the left half two women plough and sow at their camp, while a small-scale patrol of men on horseback leaves in the background; in the right half six women fight off a Zulu attack across a river, which is part of a far-reaching mountainous panorama. Indeterminate in its chronology and unique in subject matter with eight immaculate Boer women at centre stage, it served to fill a gap in the narrative of the frieze. The scene had been on Jansen's list of topics and had a place on a corner wall earlier in the sequence in Moerdyk's layout. Here it has been extended laterally on a double-size panel

later in the narrative and takes the place of the abandoned topic of the reconciliation of Hendrik Potgieter and Andries Pretorius; it thus facilitates a central position for *Blood River*.

If we look for thematic relationships in the order of topics of the west frieze then Kirchhoff's reliefs do respond to the Postma scenes. It is the role of women which brackets the entire narrative of this wall, even if the scenes are not of similar scale, with *Women spur men on* at the beginning and the sowing, tilling and fighting women in *Saailaer* at the end. *Blood River* is appropriately framed too, with the all-important *The Vow* placed before and the building of the *Church of the Vow* after the crucial battle scene in the centre. This concept of a balanced arrangement of topics in the west frieze corresponds closely to the thematic ordering of the scenes in the east frieze opposite.

The two scenes on the north-west corner focus on events important for Boer interests in Natal. *Mpande*, composed by Kruger, portrays the crowning of Dingane's successor as the new Zulu king, by the grace of Commandant Andries Pretorius. Like Kruger's *Treaty*, the scene is densely populated, and compresses a large number of people into a small panel, whose space is further restricted by the door's gable-shaped form. This meant that the scale of the three main figures in the ceremony had to be significantly reduced if they were to be presented centrally. The problem was resolved by an ingenious spatial shift reminiscent of Raphael's *Parnassus* in the Stanza della Segnatura in the Vatican:<sup>978</sup> the higher ground level above the door is portrayed as further away, a more sophisticated strategy than that used for the other small panels disrupted by doorways. As *Mpande* is shown on one of the corner panels, rather than being part of the long frieze, one could argue that the installation of a new Zulu king by the Boers was less prominent. On the other hand, the scene was vital for the narrative of the frieze to show this event as a fitting finale to the destruction of Dingane's kingdom and the beginning of a new age of Boer overlordship in Natal. The last corner panel, *Death of Dingane* that follows, complements *Mpande*, amplifying the Boers' claim of being the proper owners of Natal, for Dingane's death finally brings an end to his treachery and vindicates Mpande's accession.

The artists were aware of the demands of the overall composition – at least in hindsight if not in advance. Kirchhoff talks of it in a letter of 27 August 1946 to the SVK chair, Jansen,<sup>979</sup> and, in an unsigned critique of the frieze in the Postma file at the University of Pretoria Archives, apparently in Postma's hand, the discussion opens with the following words:

The first requirement of a frieze like this is that, even before there is clarity about what it represents, it should immediately give satisfaction through its composition, namely rhythm, balance of shadow and light, and so forth.<sup>980</sup>

The writer concludes that unfortunately there are parts of the frieze that 'hamper' (belemmer) this. And, although both writers admire the frieze in general, Kirchhoff too points out that desirable unity was not always achieved, when he criticised shortcomings in the designs of the other sculptors (conveniently overlooking similar problems in the sequence of his own scenes). In his letter he wrote that the frieze was the 'greatest achievement' (grootste prestasie), but he was critical of some of the scenes and the overall composition, which can be illustrated by a selection of his lengthy comments:

Regarding the frieze the composition lacks unity. This applies particularly to the three long walls, and relates especially to the walls where the battles of Vegkop and Kappein [sic] are depicted. Each of the scenes is in itself an exceptionally good piece of work, but they do not fit with each other, because the handling of the reliefs follows two completely different viewpoints. ...<sup>981</sup>

<sup>978</sup> Emiliani and Scolaro 2002, 168–199 ('Il Parnasso').

<sup>979</sup> Kirchhoff family archive.

<sup>980</sup> 'Die eerste vereiste van so 'n fries is dat, nog voor daar duidelikheid is waarom dit gaan, dit dadelik deur sy komposisie, nl. Ritme, balans van skaduwee en lig ens., bevrediging moet gee' (UP Archives, Folder 14, 'Historical frieze comment').

<sup>981</sup> He could have added shifts in scale, but he evidently did not consider that variety might be a desirable quality.

The weakness of composition of the following long [south] wall lies in the connection and arrangement of, on the one hand the Trek over the Drakensberg (*Descent*) and on the other hand the depiction of the Treaty with Dingaan. ... Since the historical sequence requires that the one leads into the other, it would have been desirable to handle them as a compositional unit ...

On the third [west] wall ... the first scene, the dispirited men [*Women spur men on*], is not convincing. It creates the impression of an artificially composed group. The individual figures are well modelled but it fails in its composition to make the scene symbolically impressive. ... For the Battle of Blood River, I would like to have had a little more space at my disposal ... it is difficult to portray the full significance of this, the greatest battle of the Trek in 12 feet ... I designed this battle [*Blood River*], the building of the Church of the Vow, as well as the two scenes at Saaiplaas, and modelled them alone. In these, apart from the historically convincing depiction, I had my own ideas about how to carry out the sculptural handling of such a theme.<sup>982</sup>

That Kirchoff designed each of his scenes independently is all too evident.

Our examination of the overall composition of the frieze sheds significant light on specific compositional features present in a number of scenes. One of them is the phenomenon of framing figures which mark the boundaries of the scenes, first conceived in the rectangular panels of the maquettes, discussed in Chapter 3. The closed nature of the compositions is emphasised by the fact that almost all the figures look inwards, into the scenes, attentive to the event depicted. Even if they do face forward, like Trichardt in *Soutpansberg*, their eyes do not engage with the viewer's.<sup>983</sup> The inward attention of the great majority of the participants helps to unify the scenes and lends them some independence from each other, as do the framing figures, even when the scenes were joined together to create the frieze. In the continuous treatment of the discrete episodes in the full-scale reliefs, however, the juxtaposition of scenes sometimes led to curious consequences. Framing figures in adjacent scenes quite frequently appear back to back, sometimes closely pressed against each other, resulting in a number of strange bedfellows. For example, a Portuguese soldier with his gun in *Delagoa Bay* seems bonded to a Voortrekker woman with hers in *Vegkop*; the skirt of the woman in *Descent* who looks out from the Drakensberg intrudes on Dingane's Zulu minions in *Treaty* at uMgungundlovu; and the rumps of the Boer horses in *Blood River* seem to bump the spine of the architect-builder in *Church of the Vow*. Details in juxtapositions can also be visually confounding, as where the legs and tail of the rearmost Ndebele ox in *Kapain* almost create a little visual pun as they alternate neatly with the legs and stick of the Rolong man behind Moroka in *Negotiation*.

Although overall there is a relatively consistent use of scale for the main figures in the foreground, usually life-size or slightly over, there are disconcerting shifts in figure size at some points too, such as the conflicting proportions of the trekkers in *Church of the Vow*, both among themselves and in relation to the architecture. And the small-scale Voortrekkers who ride away from

<sup>982</sup> 'By die Fries ... ontbreek eenheid aan komposisie. Dit geld veral vir die drie lang mure, en het veral betrekking op die mure waarop die slagte by Vegkop en Kappein uitgebeeld word. Elkeen van hierdie tonele vorm op sigself 'n besonders goeie stuk werk, maar hulle pas nie by mekaar ins [sic] nie, omdat die behandeling van die reliëfs volgens twee heeltemal verskillende gesigpunte geskied het. ... / Die swakheid van komposisie van die volgende lang muur lê in die verbinding en reëling van die mate van enersyds die Trek oor die Drakensberg (afstygning) en andersyds die ondertekening van die Traktaat met Dingaan. ... aangesien die geskiedkundige volgorde verlang dat die een in die ander oorgaan, sou dit wenslik gewees het om die twee as 'n komposisionale eenheid te behandel ... / Op die derde muur ... die eerste toneel, die modellose mans, is nie oortuigend nie. Dit skep die indruk van 'n kunstigsaaamgestelde groep. Die afsonderlike figure is goed gemodilleer maar dit ontbreek aan verbinding om die toneel simbolies indrukwekkend te maak. ... / Vir die Slag van Bloedrivier sou ek graag 'n bietjie meer ruimte tot my beskikking gehad het ... is die [sic] moeilik om hierdie, die grootste geveg van die Trek, op 12 vt. in sy volle belangrikheid uit te beeld. Hierdie slag, die bou van die Gelofte Kerk, asook die twee tonele by Saayplaas, het ek ontwerp en alleen gemodilleer. Hierin het ek, naas die histories-waarskynlike uitbeelding ook my eie idees oor die beeldhoudelike behandeling van so 'n tema uit te druk' (Kirchoff family files).

<sup>983</sup> Rather endearing exceptions are the babies in *Inauguration* and *Bloukrans*, and the doll in *Debora Retief*, though whether their eyes are open and gazing at us is not altogether clear.

*Saailaer* and disappear behind the *Church of the Vow*, to re-emerge on the other side of the building on a monumental scale as the cavalcade of *Blood River*.

Another compositional eccentricity are figures 'floating' in scenes with a plain background and no obvious ground surface to support them, especially in those modelled by Kirchhoff and Postma. While figures typically stand prosaically on the base line of the panels, ungrounded figures that seem to hover are present in a number of scenes, some of the most obvious being Retief's daughter and the boy with the paint jar in *Deborah Retief*, and the ploughing Boer woman in *Saailaer*, who is even shown without feet (fig. 235). The same inadvertence can be seen in representations of flora, especially evident in *Departure*, which is dotted with floating plants to neatly fill the gaps between the legs of the animals (fig. 226), more reminiscent of the pattern-making strategies of historical tapestries than the bolder spatial compositions of reliefs.

When Hennie Potgieter reports on problems of Coetzer's drawings for the frieze, he draws a distinct line between the methods of the painter and the sculptor and how to avoid such compositional difficulties:

A painter achieves his depths with colours and lines but, if a sculptor makes a group of figures on a panel, he achieves perspective not only by making the background figures smaller, but by obscuring a part of the figures behind those in front. If it was made from a painter's drawing, the figures that are supposed to appear far away, would be only tiny figures that look as though they float like little angels above the heads of others.<sup>984</sup>

It is not without irony that, despite these protestations, the sculptors often employed the conventions of painters, particularly in the pictorial treatment of the scenic landscapes behind the events portrayed.

Despite many shortcomings in compositional detail, if we look at the layout of the historical narrative as a whole we are met with a clear concept. The frieze on the long walls is developed around a climactic scene in the middle. Although *Convention* in the north, the culmination of the whole narrative, had to be set off-centre because of the entrance door, in the east, south and west frieze the relevant scenes, *Inauguration*, *Murder of Retief* and *Blood River*, are centrally placed and linked to the Voortrekker hero Pieter Retief, his ascent to power, his death and its revenge. The centre-focused design, framed by a thematic pairing of scenes shared by the east and west friezes, creates distinct juxtapositions of reliefs on the walls facing each other, even though the subjects are quite different: *Inauguration* is framed by two pairs of scenes focusing on battles and negotiations, while the largely male-orientated frieze opposite is bracketed by a pair of scenes dominated by women, and the central *Blood River* by *The Vow* and *Church of the Vow*. Such counterpart arrangements may also have influenced some of the choices and placings of scenes in the south and north frieze, though the links here are on diagonal axes rather than directly opposite. *Treaty* on the south and *Convention* on the north are staged in the same way, off-centre to the left, both portraying the signing of a contract by different parties to grant the Voortrekkers land where they could establish their own republics. Further, the first scene on each side, diagonally opposite each other, depicts the Voortrekkers in the Drakensberg, in *Descent* approaching Natal and in *Return* leaving it, while single riders at the opposite end of each frieze, in *Teresa Viglione* and *Departure*, both move in to the far right, leading the eye to the following sequence of panels. Whether these more subtle relationships were planned by the sculptors or are fortuitous outcomes of a narrative that inevitably had links and repetitions is uncertain, but the connections exist nonetheless.

<sup>984</sup> 'n Skilder verkry sy dieptes met kleure en lyne, maar as 'n beeldhouer op 'n paneel 'n groep figure maak, verkry hy perspektief deur die agterste figure nie slegs kleiner te maak nie, maar 'n deel van die figure agter die voorstes te laat verdwyn. As dit van 'n skilder se tekening gemaak sou word, sal die figure wat veronderstel is om v er weg te vertoon, slegs klein figuurtjies wees wat lyk asof hulle soos engeltjies bo die koppe van die ander sweef' (Potgieter 1987, 41).



**Figure 226:** Plants between legs of animals in *Departure*. Marble, detail of fig. 286 (photo Russell Scott)

These compositional principles only partly comply with Moerdyk's idea of a continuous narrative in which the sculptors needed 'to dramatize the material available and to present a story with a beginning, a climax and a conclusion'.<sup>985</sup> The layout is mainly topic driven: while we have been able to discern an underpinning of central motifs, and cross-references in form and content between flanking scenes and scenes facing each other on opposite walls, there is no continuous narrative in the frieze. The sculptors were presented with a somewhat contradictory scenario: the architecturally predefined format of a continuous frieze, but also individual designs by Coetzer on which they based most of the twenty-seven scenes. When substantially developed by them to form a continuous visual history of the Great Trek on exceptional scale, they still retained some independence compositionally.

In fact, it needed the architecture and the specific configuration of the Hall of Heroes, together with the continuity of the milky white marble, to unite the variety of scenes into a single frieze visually (figs 3, 5). It is the physicality of the space and the material of the frieze, and the agency of both, that connects the episodes making up this narrative of the Great Trek. They lend unity also

<sup>985</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 40.

to the iconography which portrays a continuum of key values for contemporary Afrikanerdom, modelled on the glorified deeds of Voortrekker forefathers. At the same time, it is the variety of individual scenes which time and again captures visitors' attention and causes them to pause while walking around to follow the narrative of the frieze. In this environment the scenes offer face-to-face Afrikaner values: the historical quest for land and independence, the commitment to religion, the willingness to negotiate with other people but, if necessary, to fight and to die for the Boer cause. They demonstrate the superiority of Boer culture, whose pioneering men, strong women and capable children support each other in order to prevail.

## The problem of form

Little is recorded about the crucial matter of style at the time the frieze was conceived and the full-size clay reliefs modelled by the four sculptors. As previously discussed, Moerdyk's main concern about the frieze was unity of style. To reach this objective, the architect advised the four sculptors that they should 'model themselves technically upon two Renaissance sculptors, Verrocchio and Donatello'. He later claimed that, 'By following those examples and constantly consulting one another, the four sculptors succeeded wonderfully well in submerging their own individuality and achieving a harmonious whole ...'<sup>986</sup>

Moerdyk's advice was ludicrous. He seemed unaware that studying actual works would have been essential for any sort of understanding of Renaissance reliefs: photographs would be no substitute. But in any event, style is historically specific and it would be impossible for twentieth-century sculptors to work with integrity and conviction in the style of fifteenth-century artists, let alone match the outstanding quality and skill of Donatello (c. 1386–1466) and Andrea del Verrocchio (1435–88), regarded as amongst the greatest sculptors of their time (figs 227, 228).<sup>987</sup> Nor does it take account of the fact that the South African sculptors were modelling in clay that would be transformed into stone by other carvers. The technique, composition, perspective, style and finish of the frieze are profoundly different from the animated naturalism and spatial experimentation of the two Florentine masters. Moerdyk displays poor judgement by disclosing this recommendation, particularly when it is all too clear, as our analysis of the composition of the frieze reveals, that its historical narrative was ultimately far from a 'harmonious whole'.

However, the sculptors tried their best to satisfy Moerdyk's ambitions and Potgieter explains that,

Since we had only two boards in the studio [to model the full-scale clay reliefs] and had to strive for a unity of style, we enlarged each panel together. Consequently the actual designer was the head of the group and the other three [sculptors] had to carry out his or her instructions and requests accurately, for example, when it was Laurika's design we others had to obey her, and when it was Frikkie's design then he was the head again.<sup>988</sup>

In contrast to hard, micro-crystalline Querceta, the material for the final frieze, the clay in which the sculptors were working is characterised by its malleability and flexibility, yet capacity to achieve firm volume and crispness of contour, as well as an opaque and lifelike surface. In what specific manner the sculptors were supposed to render the historical narrative form, and to what extent

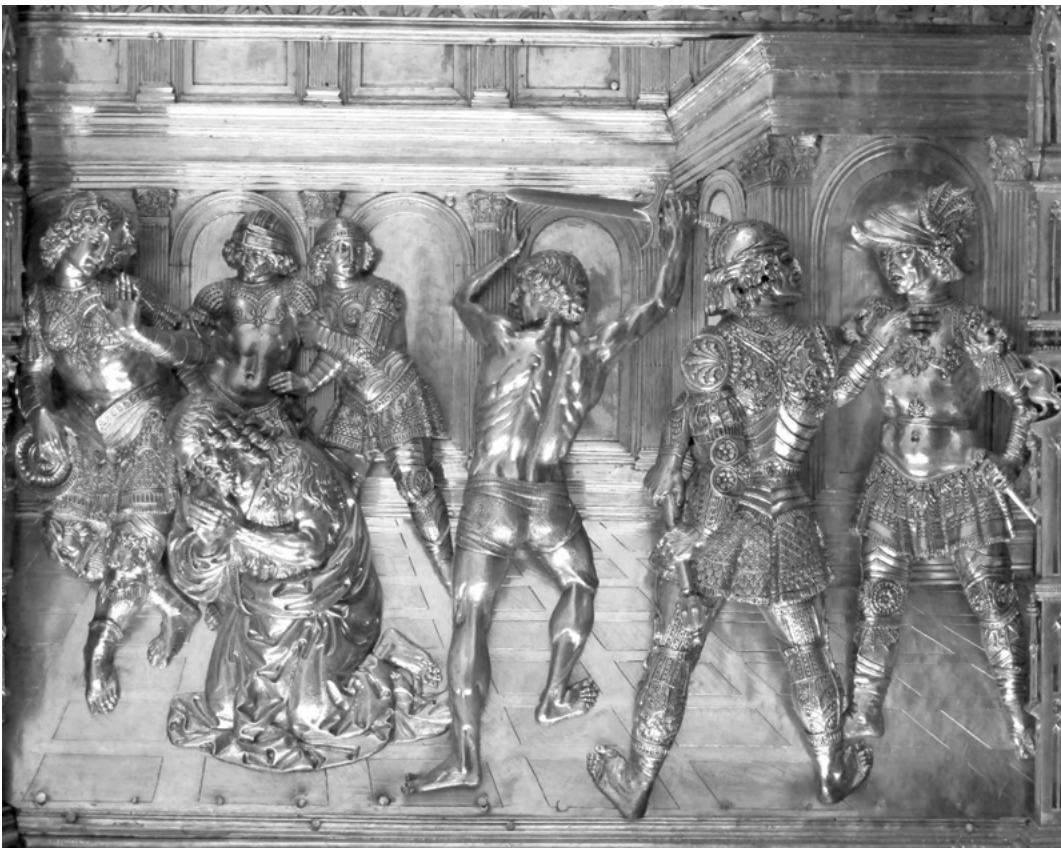
<sup>986</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 40–41.

<sup>987</sup> Donatello: Pope Hennessy 1993; Pfisterer 2002. Verrocchio: Butterfield 1997; Covi 2005.

<sup>988</sup> 'Aangesien ons net twee borde in die ateljee gehad het en ons 'n eenheid van styl moes nastreef, het ons saam die vergroting van elke paneel gedoen. Die eintelike ontwerper was derhalwe aan die hoof van die groep en die ander drie moes sy of haar instruksies en begeertes getrou uitvoer, byvoorbeeld as dit Laurika se ontwerp was, dan moes ons ander haar gehoorsaam en as dit Frikkie se ontwerp was, was hy weer die hoof' (Potgieter 1987, 44).



**Figure 227:** Donatello, *The Crucifixion of Christ*. c. 1460–90. Bronze, part of the Passion Pulpit made for San Lorenzo, Florence (photo courtesy of Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, Munich)



**Figure 228:** Andrea del Verrocchio, *The beheading of St John the Baptist* c. 1460–80. Silver, part of altar decoration made by several artists for San Giovanni, Florence (Museo dell'Opera del Duomo; photo the authors)

they reflected on this issue themselves is not recorded. Yet the matter of style is very important for a historical narrative on the scale of the Voortrekker frieze.<sup>989</sup> As the mimetic propensity of any given material is mediated by the choice of style, its impact on the beholder, and his or her perception of the produced image and the effect it creates, is profound. Style is constantly changing, not only because of the individuality of different artists, but because it is itself historical – sometimes in accord with, sometimes in opposition to the prevailing socio-political and aesthetic dynamics of a given time. Style is based on individual and collective interests, and Pierre Bourdieu has argued that the style of embodied features, such as appearance, dress, posture, action and emotion, as well as their portrayal in art, is a significant part of the social ‘habitus’ of persons, groups, societies and even nations.<sup>990</sup>

The German art historian Heinrich Wölfflin famously said that ‘Vision itself has its history’.<sup>991</sup> Developing this concept at the beginning of his 2011 book *A general theory of visual culture*, Whitney Davis emphasises a further perspective of style and its reciprocal impact on human cognition, emphasising its wide-ranging significance for the viewer:

... styles of depiction – culturally located and historically particular ways of making pictorial representations – have materially affected human visual perception. They constitute what might literally be called *ways of seeing*. If it is correct, this hypothesis implies that art history should occupy a central place in virtually any study of human forms of life.<sup>992</sup>

We cannot know what ideas about style the four sculptors in South Africa were aware of, or those who translated their forms into marble in Italy. But their training may be indicative, even though our knowledge about their art education is scant. As regards the South Africans, two of them, Peter Kirchhoff and Laurika Postma, had professional training as sculptors in Germany, Kirchhoff from 1928 to 1931 at the Landeskunstschule in Hamburg, today the Academy of Art (Hochschule für Bildende Künste),<sup>993</sup> including a summer sojourn in the well-known artistic community of Worpswede,<sup>994</sup> and Postma in Berlin (1935) and Munich (1938–39). Kirchhoff’s experiences at the Landeskunstschule remain obscure, other than that he studied under Professor Richard Luksch,<sup>995</sup> whose naturalistic works show some affinity with Art Nouveau style, and who was dismissed in 1934 for taking part in the Hamburg art festival which was critical of Nazism. Studying some years later than Kirchhoff, Postma worked with teachers who were more sympathetic to Führer ideology. She was tutored in Berlin by the sculptor Emilie Sibilla Elisabeth (Milly) Steger,<sup>996</sup> who had taught one of the sculpture courses at the private Academy of the Ladies Society of Berlin Artists (Damenakademie des Vereins Berliner Künstlerinnen) since 1929.<sup>997</sup> It was she who asserted that sculpture was the forte of the South African artist.<sup>998</sup> Steger admired sculptors as diverse as Georg Kolbe, Auguste Rodin and Aristide Maillol, and produced predominantly female figures in wood, marble and bronze, often in complex poses.<sup>999</sup> She cultivated close contacts with the Nazi regime and was invited to big official art exhibitions in the Reich – but was puzzlingly also listed as a

<sup>989</sup> For further discussion of this point, see Davis 2011, 75–119.

<sup>990</sup> Bourdieu 1990; see also Wacquant 2014.

<sup>991</sup> Wölfflin 1929, 11.

<sup>992</sup> Davis 2011, 6.

<sup>993</sup> <http://www.hfbk-hamburg.de/de/hochschule/geschichte/>

<sup>994</sup> Personal communication with Werner Kirchhoff, 5.1.2015. For Worpswede, see Arnold, Groth and Herrmann 2014.

<sup>995</sup> Recorded in Kirchhoff 2016, 13. For Luksch, see Heusinger von Waldegg 1979.

<sup>996</sup> For Steger, see Schulte 1998; Jain 2002 (biography, *ibid.*, 46–65).

<sup>997</sup> *Ibid.*, 56. For the ‘Damenakademie’, see Fuhrmann 1992.

<sup>998</sup> An undated article of the early 1930s on Steger in the German magazine *Kunst der Nation* and another by Fritz Nemitz from *Die Kunst* 71.1 (1936), 11–13, in the Laurika Postma collection, highlights Postma’s interest in the sculptor (UP Archives, Postma Folder 9).

<sup>999</sup> Schulte 1998, 106–163 with figs; Jain 2002, figs 1–123.





**Figure 229:** Professor Bleeker and Laurika Postma in front, and further students behind, pose outside Munich's Academy of Fine Arts and equestrian statue of Pollux (Pillman 1984, 32)

'degenerate' (entartete) artist, rejected by the authorities.<sup>1000</sup> On her return to Germany, Postma worked at the Academy of Fine Arts (Akademie der Bildenden Künste) in Munich with Professor Josef Bernhard Maria Bleeker (1881–1968), a leading sculptor of the Munich School (fig. 229), and since 1932 a member of the Hitler party NSDAP (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei). He created, inter alia, a popular bust of Adolf Hitler.<sup>1001</sup>

While Postma had to leave Germany suddenly at the outbreak of World War II, she took advantage of some months' delay in finding a return passage to South Africa to spend a month studying 'hammer and chisel technique' (hamer-en-betel tegniek) with Professor Ingen Hourzt in The Hague, and then to undertake further studies with Professor Oscar Jespers (1877–1970) in Brussels.<sup>1002</sup> Although her time with Jespers was very brief, it is interesting that Postma studied stone carving with this sculptor, who said of his work in 1961, 'I want to translate the human form into the immobility of stone.'<sup>1003</sup> He also produced monumental national reliefs, such as the *Relief map of Belgium* (1935; 12 × 4 metres) in polychrome limewood, and *Belgium at work* (1938; 15 × 3 metres) in terracotta.<sup>1004</sup>

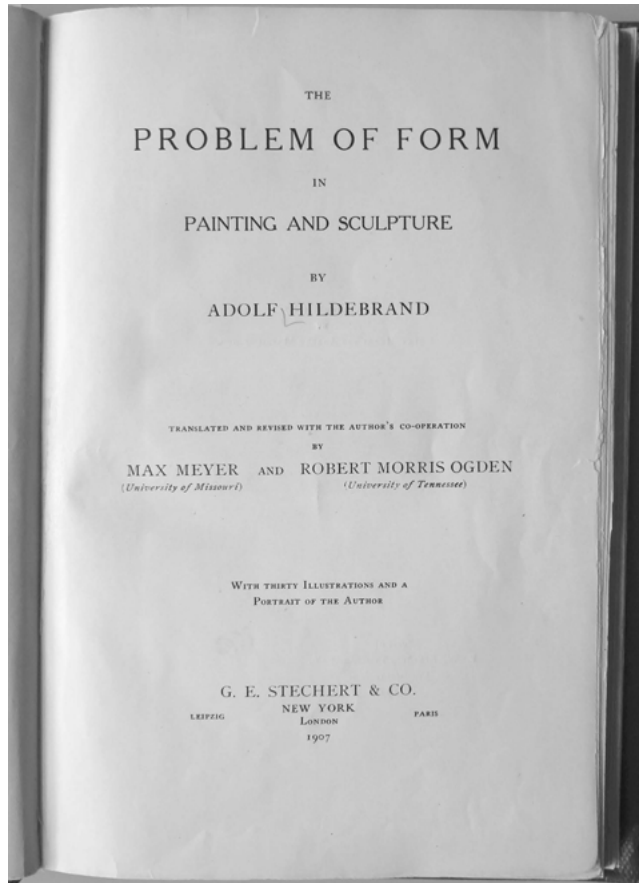
**1000** Jain 2002, 64.

**1001** For Bleeker, see Henseleit 2005.

**1002** Pillman 1984, 34.

**1003** Boyens 2013, 467 (quote from a lecture in 1961).

**1004** Ibid., 229–239 ('Die monumentale reliëfs in opdracht'), 329–393 no. 162 (Landkaart van België), 398–399 no. 183 (België aan het werk). For Jespers, see also <http://oscarjespers.com/de/>



**Figure 230:**  
Hildebrand's 1907  
monograph *The  
problem of form*  
(photo the authors)

In contrast to Postma's opportunities abroad, Frikkie Kruger and Hennie Potgieter were trained in South Africa, both at the art school at the Witwatersrand Technical College in Johannesburg, and very little is known about their education in art. An emphasis on technical proficiency in a style of rather conservative naturalism would have been the predominant approach, at a time when South African artists were little aware of innovative sculptural developments in Europe. In Kruger's case this would have been reinforced by the period he spent working with Van Wouw.

Although there is no mention of stylistic issues in the records of or by the frieze sculptors, their diverse training makes it probable that they debated national and international trends of style, including what Kirchhoff and Postma had experienced in Europe. There the German artist and art theorist, Adolf Hildebrand (1847–1921), knighted in early-twentieth-century Bavaria as 'Ritter von Hildebrand', was of importance for a whole generation of sculptors in the first half of that century. It seems likely that his ideas were familiar to Kirchhoff and Postma. Hildebrand had worked primarily in Munich since 1890,<sup>1005</sup> and was widely admired, not least by Postma's Berlin teacher, Millie Steger,<sup>1006</sup> and her Munich professor, Bernhard Bleeker. Apart from his own art, it was Hildebrand's pioneering book, *The problem of form in painting and sculpture* (*Das Problem der Form in der Bildenden Kunst*), published in 1893 and translated into English in 1907 (fig. 230), that had a lasting impact, fuelling debates on form and style to the present day.<sup>1007</sup> Even if the Monument

<sup>1005</sup> <https://www.sammlung.pinakothek.de/de/artist/adolf-von-hildebrand>

<sup>1006</sup> The regard was returned. Hildebrand, for example, called Steger's first large-scale architectural sculptures, four solemnly standing naked women, 'exceptional' (ganz großartig), although he felt they would be better suited to an Egyptian or Indian temple than the façade of the Hagen Theatre in Germany (see Jain 2002, 69 with quote, 109–111).

<sup>1007</sup> Translated by two American psychologists, Max Friedrich Meyer (a neuroscience specialist) and Robert Morris Ogden (the first proponent of Gestalt psychology in the US), the first English text is based on Hildebrand (1901), the

sculptors were unaware of Hildebrand, his precepts are valuable in reaching an understanding of relief sculpture, all the more so because his arguments are directed at a naturalistic intention that chimes with that of the Monument's frieze, and share the goal of representing in art what we see in nature as convincingly as possible. Wölfflin summarised Hildebrand's book in a single sentence: 'Nature has to be formed to do justice to the eye' (Die Natur muss augengerecht gemacht werden).<sup>1008</sup> This laconic statement captures Hildebrand's main concerns about vision and form in a nutshell, summing up his belief that form will be more compelling if not slavishly imitated from nature, but re conceptualised by the artist to create a convincing visual effect.<sup>1009</sup>

Intimately related to our previous discussion about unity, which Moerdyk claimed was the compositional and stylistic essence of the Monument's frieze, is Hildebrand's concept of 'organic unity' in relief sculpture. His chapter 'The conception of the relief' (Die Reliefauffassung) reads like an art historical touch stone for the Voortrekker frieze, although Hildebrand is never mentioned in that context. The conception of relief, he argues,

defines the relation of the two-dimensional impressions to the three-dimensional. It gives us a specific way of viewing Nature ... The thousand-fold judgments and movements of our observation [of Nature] find in this mode or representation their stability and clearness ... The harmonious effect of a picture depends on the artist's ability to represent every single value as a relative value in this general conception of relief ... This unity is, indeed, the Problem of Form in Art, and the value of a work of art is determined by the degree of such unity it attains.<sup>1010</sup>

... In order to produce a unitary judgment of depth, the effect of the whole must be that of one uniform depth measurement. This requires, therefore, a back plane running parallel to the front plane, or, at least, to do so in the impressions one gets. This back plane serves as a common background for the figures represented. ... [but] The chief plane of the relief is not this back plane, but the front plane in which the high points of the figures appear. Otherwise the figures would seem to be arbitrarily stuck on before the visual projection.

... But we have already found from our previous discussion that form relations which give the desired effects in the visual projection do not correspond exactly with the actual measurements of the object. ... Actual and visual form are not the same, and the conception of relief is attached to the visual, not to the actual form ... Thus it is clear that the relief does not represent a proportional division of Nature's thickness, but a picture independent of all this, which gains through its visual value meaning and a claim for existence.<sup>1011</sup>

Hildebrand lucidly defines elementary principles of relief sculpture, which in his view are necessary to unite all details 'in a more comprehensive form' and to bring all 'separate judgments of depth ... into a unitary, all-inclusive judgment of depth'.<sup>1012</sup> Crucial in his theory of relief is a consistent idea of three-dimensional depth with which to represent not actual measurements but visual appearance, to create clarity out of the endless dynamics and interpretations of our perception – in short, an image that gains being and meaning through visual values. As Rosalind Krauss sums it up,

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third revised edition. In 1994, architects Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftheriois Ikonomou in their volume *Empathy, form and space* (pp.227–279) provided a more nuanced translation of Hildebrand's 1893 edition, which follows the German text closely. For Hildebrand's artwork and debate on the problem of form, see Nuzzi 1980, 42–47 (art historical biography), 78–82 (in Florence), 132–148 (works); Esche-Braunfels 1993; Mallgrave and Ikonomou 1994, esp. 35–39; Nieslony 2016, 275–288; Zitko 2016, 29–42; and, forthcoming, Henrike C. Lange (UC Berkeley).

**1008** Wölfflin 1946, 84.

**1009** Hildebrand believed the distinction between 'distant view' (when the eye is at rest) and 'near view' (when the eye is required to undergo a series of movements) to be crucial for clarifying and unifying form and style, which should be – as were models from Antiquity and the Renaissance – well ordered and pure, free of additions and embellishment. See Mallgrave and Ikonomou 1994, 36–37.

**1010** Hildebrand 1907, 83–84 (German text, 66–67).

**1011** *Ibid.*, 88–89 (German text, 71–73).

**1012** *Ibid.*, 95 (German text, 78).

Even though the viewer does not actually move around the sculpture, he is given the illusion of having as much information as he would if he could circumnavigate the forms — perhaps even more, since within a single perception he sees both the development of the masses and their capacity to signify. If the sculptor's attitude to the relief is that of an omniscient narrator commenting upon the cause-and-effect relationship of forms in both historical and plastic space, the viewer's corresponding attitude is spelled out by the nature of the relief itself: he assumes a parallel omniscience in his reading of the work in all its lucidity.<sup>1013</sup>

Implicit in Hildebrand's discussion is a concept of style that depends on an idealised naturalism. It seems that the frieze sculptors tried to achieve a style not dissimilar to what Hildebrand thought about form, although without real knowledge of his principles or how to conceptualise them.<sup>1014</sup> A second- or third-hand understanding of Hildebrand's idea of 'pure art' was widely influential, and it is noteworthy that it provided the ideal breeding ground for grand narratives. It was susceptible to political misuse, especially by repressive regimes such as Stalin's communism, Mussolini's fascism and Hitler's perverse Master-race ideology of the pure Aryan, all in power when the Voortrekker frieze was conceived, and when Laurika Postma trained as a sculptor in the German Reich. However, as Hildebrand was never mentioned at the time the Voortrekker frieze was developed, we reference *The problem of form* here not as a source but a theoretical model that helps us to clarify specific formal and stylistic features of the frieze.

So what are the distinct stylistic features in the full-scale clay reliefs? As discussed in Chapter 3 and in more detail in the section 'From Plaster to Marble' below, the full-size clay reliefs were destroyed after replication in plaster and can only be examined in the photographs taken by Alan Yates from 1943 to 1946. Although a poor substitute for the originals, happily a number have survived in the Kirchhoff and Romanelli family collections as well as in the University of Pretoria Archives.<sup>1015</sup> A full set is reproduced in Riana Heymans' 1986 official guide, *The Voortrekker Monument, Pretoria*, and Hennie Potgieter's 1987 book, but unfortunately the photographs in both are trimmed and pixelated. In Yates' photographs we have identified several formal solutions that are characteristic of the narrative as a whole, irrespective of the individual designer: the contour and undercutting of the figures and objects; the relationship between body and dress; the portrayal of individuality, emotion and age; and the depiction of factual details of hairstyles, dress and objects.

The contours of the figures are in general simplified and unified, even in scenes of exceptional drama such as *Kapain*, *Murder of Retief* and *Bloukrans*. The compositions are predominantly lateral and the figures are composed in clear relation to the picture plane, whether in profile, three-quarter or frontal view, and complex multi-axial poses are rare,<sup>1016</sup> as is a developed contrapposto uniquely seen in the Rolong standing behind Moroka in *Negotiation* (fig. 225).<sup>1017</sup> The Attic grave relief of the warriors Chairedemos and Lyceas in the Piraeus Museum, sculpted in the late fifth century BC, exemplifies its Greek origin (fig. 224). In contrast, a remarkable number of figures in the frieze stand with their weight solidly, not to say stolidly, on both feet. They mark (a certainly unintended) contrast to the contrapposto habitus, which captures a balanced moment of the living body's complex coordination in relation to the 'force of gravity', and signifies that the upright being and the myriad forms of subtle control it requires is distinctly human.<sup>1018</sup> This omission is also remarkable as it

**1013** Krauss 1977, 12–13.

**1014** It is indicative of the range of Hildebrand's influence that, according to <http://www.worldcat.org/identities/lccn-n81147171/> as of 16.3.2018, *The problem of form in painting and sculpture* has appeared since 1893 in twelve other languages, printed in 162 editions and is held by 969 member libraries worldwide – including four copies of 1978(!) in South Africa.

**1015** We do not have copies of the Yates photographs showing four of the eight corner panels, other than in Heymans and Potgieter, namely scene 9 (*Blydevoortsig*), 10 (*Deborah Retief*), 17 (*Marthinus Oosthuizen*) and 24 (*Mpande*).

**1016** An exception is the woman in *Soutpansberg*, but she is static because of her seated position.

**1017** Rankin and Schneider 2017, 207.

**1018** For further discussion of the contrapposto habitus, see Fehr 1979, 25–30; Borbein 1989; Hölscher 2003, 179–182; Maderna 2007; Schneider 2010, 237–238; Davis 2018.

ignores, in fact contradicts, the conventional reception of the classical body in western imagery. In his 1997 book *Standing soldiers, kneeling slaves*, Kirk Savage emphasises that in nineteenth-century America ‘classical sculpture still served as a benchmark of the sculptural and thus defined what was not sculpture – most fundamentally the body of the “Negro”, the black antithesis of classical whiteness’,<sup>1019</sup> especially when carved in marble. In the Voortrekker Monument frieze we find the reverse. The South African sculptors, although employing a traditional enough naturalistic approach, transgressed such ‘old world’ conventions.<sup>1020</sup> The classical white body – the social and erotic as well as athletic and military contrapposto icon of ancient Greece, aesthetically beautiful and ethically good (*kalòs kai agathós*) – has been one of the most powerful concepts of the embodiment of the naked male.<sup>1021</sup> In the frieze, however, the ‘classical’ naked body is black, while its clothed white adversary, vested with the jacket-trouser suit, is reminiscent of the ‘other’ in Greek (and Roman) art, the historical and mythical people of the ancient East.<sup>1022</sup> Inadvertently, the frieze opened up possibilities for developing classical heritage beyond customary confines.<sup>1023</sup>

Overall there is a formality that emphasises stability, even if there is not a preponderance of strictly frontal and profile views. Placid scenes with a prevalence of stationary figures, standing, sitting and kneeling, as in a number of the corner panels and *Departure, Inauguration, Treaty and Convention*, counterbalance the dynamic battle and murder scenes. While it provides variety, the cohabitation of both types of scenes disturbs the visual flow of the narrative, especially in the east and west friezes. These features are reinforced by the severely limited use of undercutting to clarify the three-dimensional character of figures and objects, as well as their relation to each other and the picture plane.

Another stylistic factor crucial in the perception of the Voortrekker is how the body is represented in relation to dress. As discussed in Chapter 3, we know that models were used for the poses of figures and individual portraits, and Potgieter describes how carefully the sculptors observed the fall of the Voortrekker clothing they wore. Their desire to portray costume correctly resulted in an emphasis on it, with figures that appear to be represented by their dress, while their bodies are curiously absent. It fails to measure up to Hildebrand’s contentions about the interaction of the actual and the visual human body, in his chapter ‘Form as interpretation of life’ (Form als Funktionsausdruck):

In the resting form we can already divine its mode of functioning. The organic body we conceive as a complex of forms bearing the impress of certain functional possibilities. The feeling for organic life depends on our ability to imagine all these forms in action; the perception of organic unity depends on our ability to put our bodily feelings entirely into the body pictured before us.<sup>1024</sup>

It was a goal perfectly achieved by contrapposto, which articulated the body, not only in naked figures, but was also apparent beneath classical drapery. In most cases in the frieze, however, fabric and folds conceal rather than clarify the anatomy of the portrayed figure, like a formal shell without a body. The head often appears as a discrete element, inserted rather than organically understood as an integral part of the body as a whole. Given the typical male Voortrekker costume, comprising a short buttoned jacket with a small turn-over collar, baggy flap-trousers, cut off above

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**1019** Savage 1997, 12.

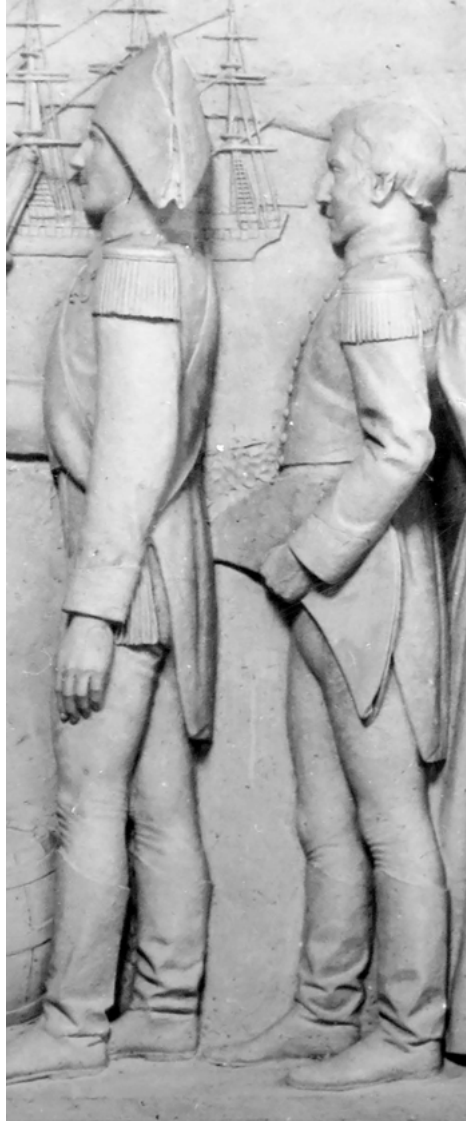
**1020** See Rankin and Schneider 2017.

**1021** Bourriot 1995; Stewart 1996.

**1022** Schneider 2012, 78 ‘From antiquity to the present day, dress codes have played a key role in underpinning ideological contrasts between the peoples of the East and the West. Yet, ironically, today’s formal Western dress, long trousers and a long-sleeved jacket with a V-neck opening, follows not the classical tradition of Greece and Rome but the Asian style.’

**1023** For further debate on this topic, see Rankin and Schneider 2017, 206–207.

**1024** Hildebrand 1907, 107 (German text, 100–101).



**Figure 231:** Captain Gamitto and Portuguese soldier in *Delagoa Bay*. Detail of full-scale clay relief (photo Alan Yates)

the ankle,<sup>1025</sup> and home-made ‘velskoen’ shoes, general anatomy and individual elements such as limbs, elbows, buttocks and knees, essential to articulate the body’s potential for movement, are rarely acknowledged visually. This is even the case for the legs of the Portuguese officers in their tight trousers in *Delagoa Bay* (fig. 231). If we compare them with the well-developed bare legs of the Rolong in *Negotiation* (fig. 225), the difficulty the sculptors had modelling fabric in a plausible relation to anatomy is evident: for the Portuguese the thigh and lower leg are too thin, and the form of the knee and transition to the pelvis is obscure. The lack of anatomical clarity is even more pronounced with the Boers’ flap-trousers, which either cover or distort the formal transition from the buttocks to the thigh. Particularly obvious examples are found on every wall – the first Voortrekker in *Departure*, the Boer with a gun in *Descent* and listening men in *The Vow* (fig. 232), for example – but it is true of most of the standing Boers, only overcome when they wear longer coats that totally conceal their buttocks.<sup>1026</sup> One could of course argue that this was a faithful rendering of the spacious trousers which obscured the lower body, but, as Hildebrand notes, the viewer needs to find a sense of ‘functional possibilities’, so artists should find ways to demonstrate the relationship between body and dress. The desire for historical accuracy evidently outweighed awareness that, in Hildebrand’s words, ‘the conception of relief is attached to the visual, not to the actual form’<sup>1027</sup> (a shortcoming already criticised by T.J. Hugo in 1943, as discussed in the previous chapter). The unintentional effect is that the naked bodies of the Ndebele, Rolong, Zulu

and Swazi are generally much better articulated than the clothed bodies of their white opponents.

Even more opaque is the relationship between body and dress of the female Voortrekker figures, normally shown in dresses with a long-sleeved bodice and full-length gathered skirt. Many representations of the bodice do not assert but suppress the female breast, even when it is half exposed in the dying woman in the centre of *Bloukrans* (fig. 233). Only for the four Zulu women in *Death of Dingane* was it felt permissible to describe their breasts, revealed by their nakedness (fig. 310). And more than the bodice, the long skirt with its steep conical shape and predominantly regular thick vertical or oblique folds disguises the female body (fig. 234). Photographs of nineteenth-century trekker women show that the folds are more subtle and diverse than those of the women in the frieze,<sup>1028</sup> although they do indeed completely hide the women’s limbs. The historical costumes worn by the contemporary female life models confirm this, except for some photographs of Vera that show her in a dress of lighter material that reveals something of her limbs beneath the

<sup>1025</sup> See Basson 1935, 18 (illustration of jacket and flap-trousers), 26–27.

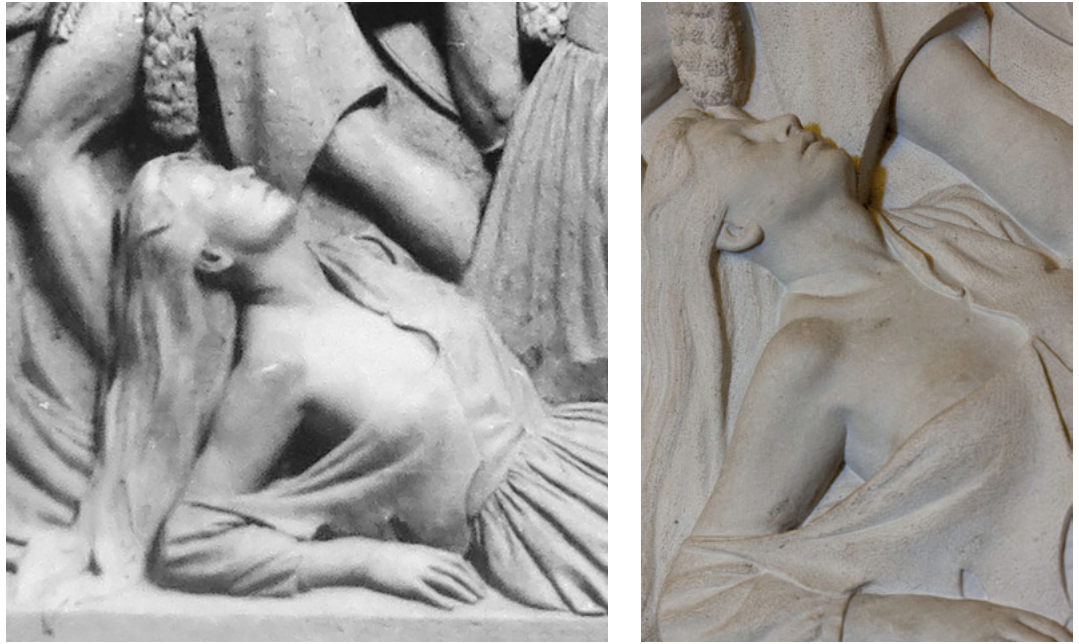
<sup>1026</sup> Exceptions are Retief in *Murder of Retief* and the Boer in rear view in *Mpande*.

<sup>1027</sup> Hildebrand 1907, 89 (German text, 72).

<sup>1028</sup> Visagie 2011. See also Basson 1935, 19 (illustration, dress no. 1), 24.



**Figure 232:** Masked bodies and limbs in *Departure*, *Descent* and *The Vow*. Details of full-scale clay reliefs (photos Alan Yates)



**Figure 233:** Dying woman with suppressed breast in *Bloukrans*. Details of full-scale clay relief and marble (photos left Alan Yates; right detail of fig. 299, Russell Scott)

skirt (fig. 149). As with the men's costumes, it could be argued that the clothing did obscure the anatomy, but, particularly when the women are represented in movement, artistic licence could have provided a sense of the body beneath; one thinks of the way this was achieved in classical female sculptures where asymmetry of the hips and the shape of a knee beneath the drapery revealed a contrapposto habitus. Instead, because of the skirt's all-encompassing form and length, the Boer women of the frieze seem to have no limbs, so that, as their feet are also often obscured, they appear to either hover or to be supported by their own dresses, for example, the central figure in *Debora Retief* (fig. 235).

A further feature of the costume of both sexes is the way folds were modelled. Sharp forms and deep recesses were avoided in favour of softly rounded folds which differ in width, depth, length and flexibility. While surface folds for the male jacket are sparse, the trousers tend to show rather repetitive groups of small folds when the fabric is stretched, though they fail to reveal a clear relationship to the stance or movement of the bodies, as in the odd array of creases on the lower legs of the seated Pfeffer or the buttocks and thighs of Trichardt in *Delagoa Bay*, or the trousers of the three Boer riders in *Kapain* (fig. 236). Throughout the frieze, the folds of fabric are often modelled in their own right, without a plausible relationship to the body and its actions, although the organised patterns of folds serve to add another layer of visual unity to the narrative of the frieze. And, similarly, the stiff portrayal of the male Zulu back aprons produces a curious contrast to their fierce movements, especially in scenes of extreme violence, such as *Murder of Retief* and *Bloukrans* (fig. 237).

Unity is also promoted by the expressionless faces of the Boers, even in very dramatic scenes such as *Murder of Retief* (fig. 238). In contrast to their black adversaries, the trekkers who are being massacred show hardly any signs of emotion. Instead, the sculptors relied on a conventionalised body language of defencelessness, which is visible from a distance, while the faces express stoic self-discipline: Boer composure counters Zulu rage (fig. 239). Although the Afrikaner narrative of the Great Trek required the presence of Boers of all ages, represented by a wide variety of life models, including some with wrinkled elderly faces, trekker faces deeply lined by emotion are generally avoided. An exception is the face of the dying father in *Dirkie Uys*, perhaps instigated by the lined likeness of the sitter, or intended to reflect his extreme situation, or both (fig. 271). The lack of emotion is possibly even more apparent in the depiction of Voortrekker figures where the dependence has been on inadequate visual records. Contemporary portrait drawings or paintings of





**Figure 234:** Women in Voortrekker dress with long-sleeved bodice and conical skirt; on right of *Descent and Return*. Marble, details of figs 296 and 311 (photos Russell Scott)



**Figure 235:** Hovering women with invisible feet in *Debora Retief and Saailaer*. Marble, details of figs 295 and 308 (photos Russell Scott)



**Figure 236:** Excessive folds. Pfeffer in *Delagoa Bay* and Boer riders in *Kapain*. Details of full-scale clay reliefs (photos Alan Yates)



**Figure 237:** Attacking Zulu with stiff apron in *Bloukrans*. Detail of full-scale clay relief (photo Alan Yates)



**Figure 238:** Stoic Boer is killed by Zulu in *Murder of Retief*. Marble, detail of fig. 298 (photo Russell Scott)



**Figure 239:** Fero- cious Zulu kills Boer in *Murder of Retief*. Marble, detail of fig. 298 (photo Russell Scott)

trekkers rarely exist. Photography was not available until somewhat later and, as Chief Commandant Andries Pretorius complained to Adulphe Delegorgue, the Boers had no artists.<sup>1029</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3, the sculptors made an effort to identify appropriate sitters in the Pretoria area for male and female Voortrekker figures, such as Boer descendants, or family members and friends, to produce ‘authentic’ portraits for the frieze, carefully listed by Potgieter in his 1987 publication – thus weaving a contemporary layer of mainly Afrikaner biographies into the historical fabric of

<sup>1029</sup> Delegorgue, *Travels* 1, 1990, 107–108, see above note 629.



**Figure 240:** Portrait of Moerdyk in *Church of the Vow*. Marble, detail of fig. 307 (photo Russell Scott)

the frieze.<sup>1030</sup> As Moerdyk was to write of *The Vow* in the *Official Guide*, ‘Almost without exception the persons depicted around the gun-carriage are Voortrekker descendants.’<sup>1031</sup>

In the end the majority of Boer men are shown with individualised faces, and more variety in their features, hair and beards, making the male likeness the predominant ‘Zeitgesicht’ (period face) in the frieze – in contrast to that of the less distinctive, mainly ‘pretty’ women. A unique case of the difference between a sitter, his finished three-dimensional portrait in clay and its final copy in the marble frieze is provided by a set of photographs of Gerard Moerdyk in the Kirchhoff family collection, made at the time his portrait was modelled by Peter Kirchhoff around 1944 for a bust and for the architect in *Church of the Vow* (figs 240, 241). While the portrait bust corresponds sufficiently well with Moerdyk in hairstyle and physiognomy, the relief representation has unduly raised eyebrows, longer sideburns and hair that is brushed forward in artificially curved locks, possibly intended to make the image both more appropriate to nineteenth-century male fashion, and

also more authoritative and formal. Given the general composure of expression, in the final frieze such portrayals, although diverse, do not overly disturb a sense of unitary design in the frieze.

The use of individual portraits was also intended to infer historical accuracy. In *Inauguration*, for example, even though only Retief, Maritz and Smit can be identified by name, not the three Justices of Peace on the right, the sculptors created personalised images using portraits in the spirit of the Afrikaner concept of the scene and all the individuals involved. Because there was no knowledge of the precise features of the historical figures, a great deal of ‘poetic licence’ was possible. Smit, for instance, was described as ‘short, stout and ruddy’,<sup>1032</sup> and the early photograph of him, which Potgieter claims was used as his model, shows a rather unfortunate physiognomy (fig. 156).<sup>1033</sup> Johannes Meintjies, who pays considerable attention to the appearance of Voortrekker personalities, goes so far as to call Smit ‘ugly and squint-eyed’.<sup>1034</sup> But, as the portrayal on the frieze was meant to lend him spiritual dignity and authority in his religious role in Retief’s swearing in as governor, such commonplace features were deliberately adjusted or ignored. Alongside this visual polishing, hairstyles here are rather generalised too, perhaps not by chance similar to those in *The Vow*, another act with Christian significance in the frieze.

A further consistent factor is the ample presence of historical objects, such as weapons, wagons, household items, furniture, books, agricultural equipment and livestock, most improbably all unblemished as though new and never used. All of them are precisely developed to confirm the veracity of the Afrikaner narrative in the frieze through historical accuracy. In some respects, however, the obsession with detail counteracts the aim of producing a sense of idealised unity. G. Dekker’s criticism at the time that the reliefs were too anecdotal, mentioned in Chapter 3, is pertinent:

<sup>1030</sup> These are detailed in the discussion of the individual scenes in Part II.

<sup>1031</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 49.

<sup>1032</sup> Walker 1933, 130.

<sup>1033</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 47; Potgieter 1987, 17. Photograph: Visagie 2011, 454 with fig.

<sup>1034</sup> Meintjies 1973, 62.



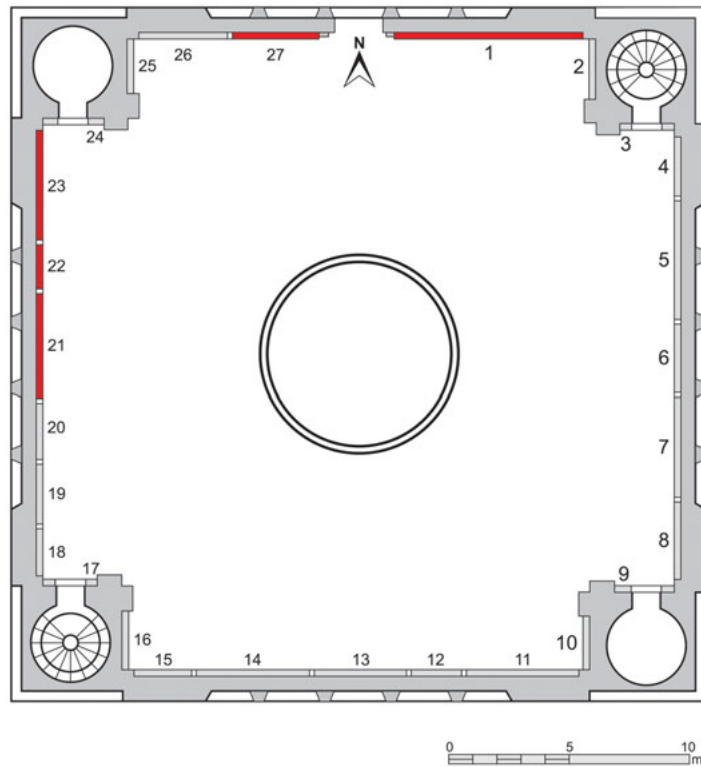
**Figure 241:** Peter Kirchoff with Gerard Moerdyk and his portrait bust at Harmony Hall. c. 1944–45 (photo courtesy of Kirchoff files)

... they give such a precise, often pettily precise, version of history as far as the facts are concerned, but present so little by the designated means of sculpture: ... telling so much, but showing so little sculpturally. Vision, the deeper realization of the meaning of the events, is lacking.<sup>1035</sup>

An exception is the often recognisable mountainous backdrops in the scenes of the north, south and west walls, which constitute a further attempt to emphasise authenticity in detail, yet do promote unity, particularly when they traverse more than one scene. Considering the stylistic phenomena we have discussed so far, a kind of pure style of contours, faces, costumes, objects and landscape – endorsed by the mainly measured poses and controlled emotions of the Boers, as well as that of other Europeans, the Rolong and the compliant Zulu in *Treaty* and *Mpande* – creates a strong visual fabric of concord in the frieze. Although the Ndebele, Zulu and Swazi are most often characterised by fierce action or wretched surrender, underpinning the constant theme of African barbarism opposed to Voortrekker civilisation, they too are part of the unity striven for in the narrative through the same stylistic finish of coherent contour and surface.

Our stylistic analysis of the full-scale narrative in clay supports a concept of calm and unity, juxtaposed against contrasting motifs of extreme behaviour on the part of Africans, particularly Zulu, who might be said to be united by their visually expressed otherness. But how does this relate to the individual styles of the four sculptors? When we looked for differences in their style, we concluded that they were suppressed by their collaborative work on the full-scale frieze. It is obvious that the goal of realising unity in the scenes, so often expressed in SVK documents, dominated the process, whether or not they worked together on all the large clay reliefs. As we saw in Chapter 3, however, differences between the sculptors are manifest in the maquettes they developed alone. With close scrutiny, we can also discover some differences in their motifs, composition and figure

<sup>1035</sup> ‘... hulle so ’n presiese, dikwels peuterig-presiese, weergawe van die geskiedenis gee wat die feite betref, maar so weinig deur die aangewese middele van die beeldhoukuns ... uitbeeld, so veel vertel, maar so weinig plasties laat sien. Siening, die dieper besef van die betekenis van die gebeure, ontbreek nie te veel.’ Dekker to Bosman, 21.1.1943 (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7).



**Figure 242:** Position of scenes developed by Peter Kirchhoff, 1 *Departure*, 21 *Blood River*, 22 *Church of the Vow*, 23 *Saailaer* and 27 *Convention* (plan drawing Tobias Bitterer)

scale, and the depths of relief of the background designs, in the full-scale clay reliefs where they each acted in turn as lead sculptor in the team's modelling of the frieze.

Looking at Kirchhoff's five panels together (fig. 242), it is striking that – with the notable exception of *Blood River* – he chose subjects that are inherently static or can be pictured in that way; even if they have the potential for movement, he shows relatively little. The figures in *Departure* are distinctly stationary, and the entire composition runs parallel to the picture plane across the full 7.11-metre width of the relief. No one is riding away haphazardly and, with minimal exceptions, people and animals stand poised to move like a procession in the same direction. This uniformity contributes to the concept of a single purposeful event, the Great Trek, further emphasised by the lack of a specific focal point and a measured evenness of treatment echoed in the coherent surface of the relief. But we should beware of categorising the scene as classical. If we compare Kirchhoff's procession of sheep (fig. 243) with a similar passage in the marble frieze *The triumphal entry of Alexander the Great into Babylon* (fig. 244), 55.5 cm high and 22.95 metres long, developed between 1812 and 1834 by the Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen,<sup>1036</sup> the colloquial character of the South African design is striking: form, proportion, space and movement are considerably more diverse and lack the measured classicistic order of the Danish composition, however much we recognise the overall impression of *Departure's* stilled movement and calm.

Similarly, the women defending their camp at *Saailaer* appear posed as though in a tableau, rather than fighting for their lives. The tall T-square held by Moerdyk in *Church of the Vow* seems entirely apt not only for his building, but for the compositional ordering of Kirchhoff's panels, and it is underlined by the rectilinear representation of the scaffolding and the door of church next to him: everything is at neat right angles. *Convention* too has a sense of stately composure. The most staged image in the frieze, however, is Kirchhoff's battle scene, *Blood River*, the symbolic climax of the narrative, in which the frozen perfection of a cavalcade of eleven Boers with only two rifles held ready to fire is crushing an entire Zulu force. How the four Zulu figures in the foreground of the panel

<sup>1036</sup> See Henderson 2005.



**Figure 243:** Procession of sheep in *Departure*. Marble, detail of fig. 286 (photo Russell Scott)



**Figure 244:** Bertel Thorvaldsen, procession of sheep in the Alexander frieze. 1822. Marble (courtesy of Thorvaldsens Museum A508, Copenhagen; photo Jakob Faurvig)

react to this theatrical attack is apt: without visible emotion, they ‘embody’ their total downfall as they unfold in slow motion from a shared fulcrum point, one kneeling, one standing, one falling, one fallen. It is noticeable too that these Zulu bodies and limbs are somewhat elongated, and less robust than others in the frieze, reducing the warriors’ volume, although this is less pronounced in the full-scale relief than in the maquette. As Kirchhoff portrays no other African figures, we cannot know whether he modified their appearance as a symbol of their defeat, or merely echoed the treatment of unclothed figures in German sculpture at the time he was training. It reminds us, for example, of Georg Kolbe’s male dancer and maiden on top of his 1913 Heinrich Heine memorial in Frankfurt am Main (fig. 245),<sup>1037</sup> and Wilhelm Lehmbruck’s *Der Gestürzte* (The Fallen) from 1915/16 in Duisburg (fig. 246),<sup>1038</sup> both employing attenuated form as an expressive device.

<sup>1037</sup> For the memorial, see Schubert 1995.

<sup>1038</sup> For the sculpture, see Čečot 1998.



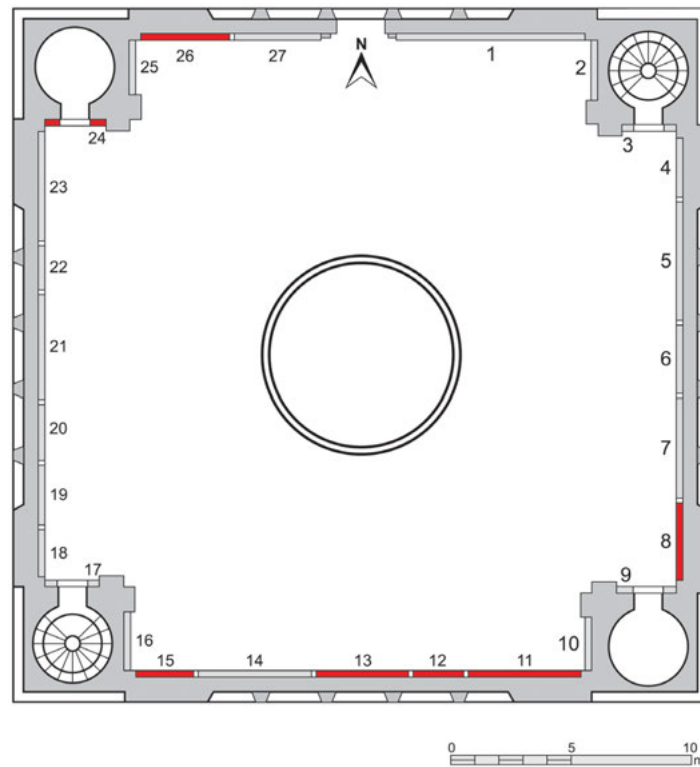
**Figure 245:** Georg Kolbe. Dancer and maiden of Heinrich Heine memorial, Frankfurt am Main, 1913. Bronze (<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tanusanlage-heine-denkmal-2011-ffm-076.jpg>)

Frikkie Kruger, of whom we know so little, was the most experienced of the three Afrikaner sculptors. He was responsible for the narratives of the south frieze (except for *Bloukrans*), and *Return* on the north (fig. 247), both developed at full scale early in the process, as argued in Chapter 3. An examination of his *Negotiation*, *Descent*, *Treaty*, *Murder of Retief*, *Teresa Viglione*, *Mpande* and *Return* indicates that he gave special attention to environmental space and was adept in handling the problem of portraying landscape or other backdrops in relation to three-dimensional depth. The striking recession in his *Return* complements Kirchhoff's equally capable but more constrained spatial treatment in *Departure*. In *Treaty* and *Murder of Retief* there is a distinct shift of perspective to provide additional visual information, with the main figures in the foreground shown parallel to the picture plane, but Dingane's city in the background from a higher vantage point, especially in *Murder*, increasing the effect of the king's imposing capital. The unusually wide gap in the centre of *Murder of Retief* may have been intended to distinguish Retief's outstanding role in the narrative, as well as emphasise the raised position of the dreadful killing ground of kwaMatiwane with its bird's-eye view of uMgungundlovu. But possibly it also served to solve the difficulty of joining the south frieze, made in two halves in its full-scale clay prototype, as described in Chapter 3, even if placing Retief's martyred body in the centre, directly on the axis of the entrance to the Hall of Heroes and the cenotaph below, might have been a stronger compositional move. Further, Kruger seems to have given thought to the sequence of *Descent*, *Treaty* and *Murder of Retief*, distinguished by a rising and falling head line and the spatial shifts of the large vistas in the centre of the two framing scenes. But its rhythmic coherence is lost in the repetitive stabbing Zulu in Postma's *Bloukrans*, the scene following *Murder of Retief*.

**Figure 246:** Wilhelm Lehmbruck, *Der Gestürzte* (The fallen). 1915/16. Bronze, l. 2.36 m (Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich; photo Oliver Kurmis; [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wilhelm\\_Lehmbruck\\_-\\_Der\\_Gest%C3%BCrzte.2.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wilhelm_Lehmbruck_-_Der_Gest%C3%BCrzte.2.jpg))







**Figure 247:** Position of scenes developed by Frikkie Kruger, 8 *Negotiation*, 11 *Descent*, 12 *Treaty*, 13 *Murder of Retief*, 15 *Teresa Viglione*, 24 *Mpande* and 27 *Return* (plan drawing Tobias Bitterer)

Kruger's clearly designed compositions set a standard for the subsequent development of the east and west walls. Moreover, because his full-scale panels were probably developed early, we attribute to him a curious detail of the frieze introduced in *Treaty*, where elements overrun the lower frame: both the long skin tassel of the left-hand Zulu and the animal skin over Retief's stool fall over the edge, which brings the relief into the viewer's space.<sup>1039</sup> The idea is also found in Postma's *Bloukrans* (dress of dying woman in the centre) and *Dirkie Uys* (hand of dying Boer), and in Potgieter's *Presentation* (dress of seated woman), *Soutpansberg* (Martha Trichardt's hand) and *Vegkop* (skirt of woman kneeling behind wounded Boer), as well as by Kirchhoff in *Saailaer* (skirt of kneeling woman with gun), although the latter two were 'tidied up' by the marble carvers in Italy, so that the skirts appear to rest on the lower edge rather than overlapping it.<sup>1040</sup> Also exceptional in the frieze is Kruger's interest in unusual details and his skill in modelling them, such as the foreground aloes and a well-stocked chicken coop tied onto the wagon's rack in *Return* (fig. 248). Fine detail is also found in the lush plants in *Teresa Viglione* and grasses in *Negotiation*, as well as the two small isolated plants on top of kwaMatiwane in *Murder of Retief* (fig. 249), symbols of life and resistance amidst the place's deadly stench. This lends his scenes a flavour and delicacy that distinguishes them from the others. The subtle sensitivity of the young dying Boer shown beyond Retief in the murder scene, for example, is also distinctive, as is the unique contrapposto pose of the Rolong behind Moroka in *Negotiation* (fig. 225). In contrast to Kirchhoff's Zulu figures mentioned above, his representations of Rolong and Zulu are more compact and closer to body types in the classical tradition.

Laurika Postma designed the scenes on the south-west corner, *Dirkie Uys* and *Marthinus Oosthuizen*; the first three of the eastern half of the west frieze, *Women spur men on*, *Arrival* and *The*

<sup>1039</sup> The extension of Pretorius' top hat over the upper frame in *Mpande* does not have the same effect and was probably a device to give the commandant increased height over the adjacent Zulu king.

<sup>1040</sup> Perhaps the carvers overlooked them initially and they could hardly be added in later in the subtractive carving process.



**Figure 248:** Aloes and chicken coop in *Return*. Marble, details of fig. 311 (photos Russell Scott)

*Vow*; *Debora Retief* on the south-east corner and *Bloukrans* in the south frieze (fig. 250). It follows gendered expectations that she chose to undertake the scenes that involved Boer women, children and youthful heroes, and *Death of Dingane* – the sole scene in the frieze requiring the portrayal of nude female figures. Only *The Vow*, an entirely male affair, is a subject that has no feminine aspect, but in its pious theme still coincides with her devout Dutch Reformed upbringing.

Postma shows a desire to give her scenes a sense of narrative drama expressed by pose and gesture, even if they do not have that inherent quality, so amply found in *Bloukrans*, *Dirkie Uys*,

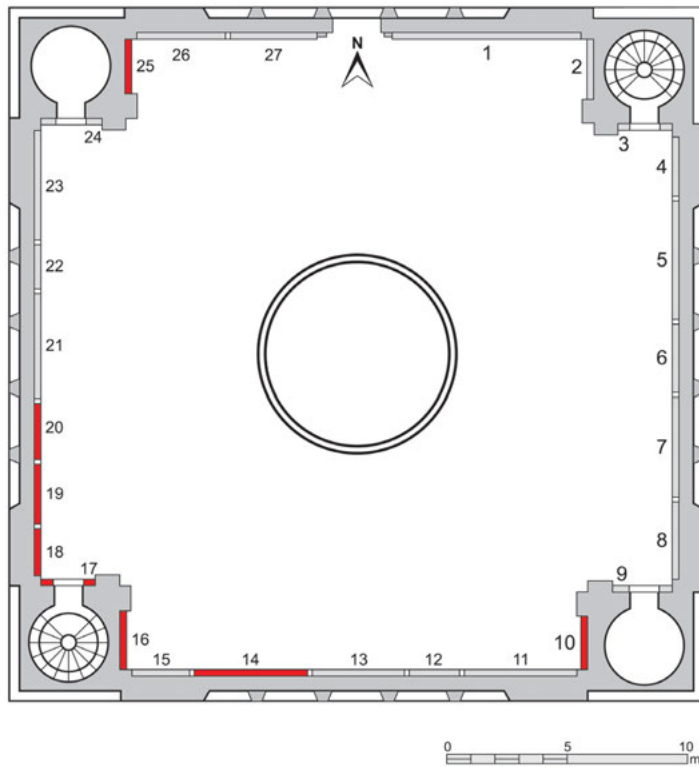


**Figure 249:** Plants amidst the slain Boers on top of kwa-Matiwane in *Murder of Retief*. Marble, detail of fig. 298 (photo Russell Scott)

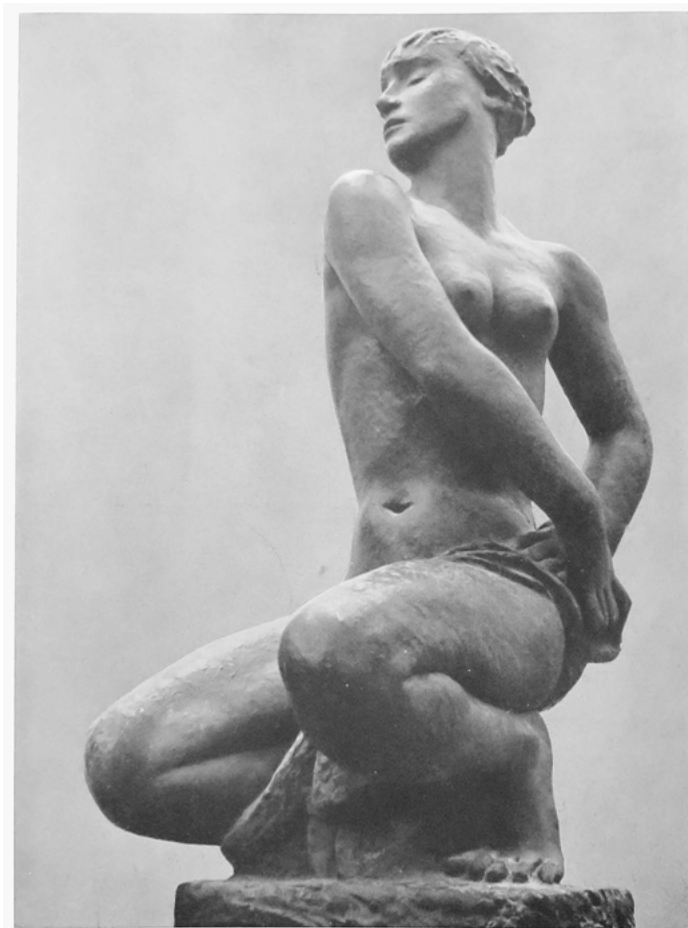
*Marthinus Oosthuizen* and *Death of Dingane*. She liked to introduce complex poses for the foreground figures, as in *Women spur men on*, probably to lend variety to the composition, although in fact they tend rather to complicate it. And the excessive poses for the two African figures in the foreground of *Marthinus Oosthuizen* are not only difficult to read but detract from the drama of young Oosthuizen's heroism behind them. Postma's fondness for elaborate figure positions may have been influenced by her Berlin teacher, Milly Steger, who favoured complex poses too, not only for sculptures in the round but also in relief. Characteristic of her compositions in the late 1920s is the bronze *Die Herbe* (The Austere), illustrated in the journal *Kunst der Nation*, of which Postma had an offprint (fig. 251).<sup>1041</sup> Postma also tried to add human emotion, as in the disconsolate men in *Women spur men on*. And in the next scene, *Arrival*, two children on the left gaze up at the new commandant in wonder, and the woman seated on the right makes a dramatic gesture, although the compressed composition means that she seems to respond not to Pretorius but to the foreleg of his horse, raised almost in her face. The compositional contiguity of *Bloukrans* with *Murder of Retief* by Kruger provides further insight into her designs for Zulu figures in motion. While we have argued that Kruger's figures echo the ease of movement in classical bodies, Postma's Zulu are somewhat elongated and strained in their actions.

Postma's figures seem immobile. Even the fierce attacking Zulu appear frozen in their poses, and, throughout these scenes, despite her interest in emotional responses, there is a limited amount of facial expression. *The Vow*, however, in portraying one of the most significant moments in the Voortrekker story, does depict Boers with distinct facial expressions, albeit muted, as they listen with closed or half-closed eyes to Cilliers' spiritual Vow (fig. 252). Although this scene is less complex, it is crowded like most of Postma's designs, and some of her figures are poorly resolved. For example, Sarel Cilliers' far (left) leg appears closer to us than the near (right) leg, which disappears behind a wagon wheel so that it appears to lack a supporting right foot. The feet of two of the listening Boers are also curiously obscured by grass. And in the *Debora Retief* panel, the governor's daughter lacks feet and any visible support (fig. 235). However, here Postma resists using a complex

<sup>1041</sup> Kept in UP Archives, Postma Folder.



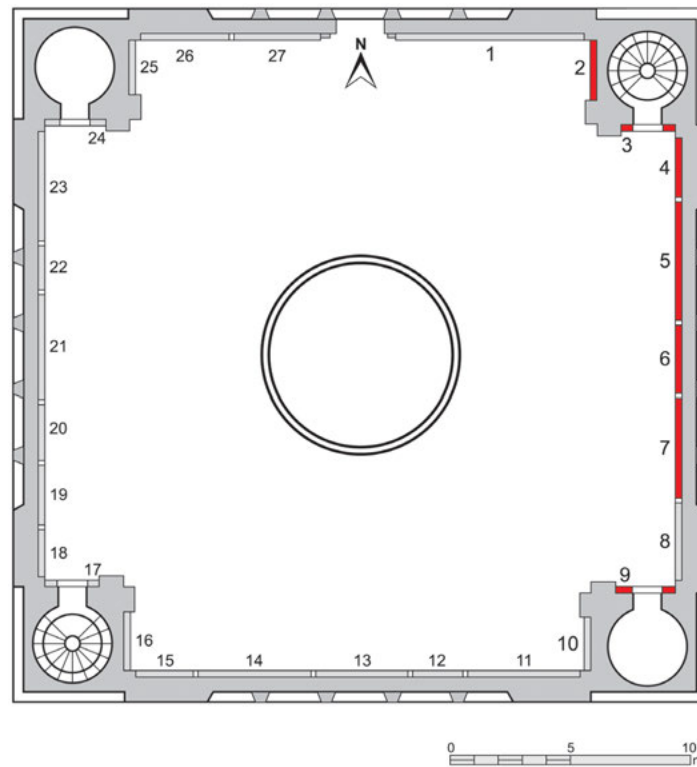
**Figure 250:** Position of scenes developed by Laurika Postma, 10 *Debora Retief*, 14 *Bloukrans*, 16 *Dirkie Uys*, 17 *Marthinus Oosthuizen*, 18 *Women spur men on*, 19 *Arrival*, 20 *The Vow* and 25 *Death of Dingane* (plan drawing Tobias Bitterer)



**Figure 251:** Milly Steger, *Die Herbe* (The austere). 1928. Bronze, 1.03 m (undated article in *Kunst der Nation* 1930s; courtesy of UP Archives, Postma Folder)



**Figure 252:** Boers listening to the covenant in *The Vow*. Marble (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)



**Figure 253:** Position of scenes developed by Hennie Potgieter, 2 *Presentation*, 3 *Soutpansberg*, 4 *Delagoa Bay*, 5 *Vegkop*, 6 *Inauguration*, 7 *Kapain* and 9 *Blydevooruitsig* (plan drawing Tobias Bitterer)



**Figure 254:** Confused limbs in *Inauguration*. Retief kneels in the foreground, his near leg disappearing behind seated woman. Detail of full-scale clay relief (photo Alan Yates)

composition in favour of a simple arrangement, creating a rare and tender scene with endearing depictions of two boys and three girls who share an intimate moment with Debora as she records the birthday of her father.

Hennie Potgieter, the youngest in the team, joined the sculptors last. He was left to develop the remaining scenes which had not yet been allocated, those on the north-east corner, all those on the east frieze apart from *Negotiation*, and also *Blydevooruitsig*, which followed *Negotiation* on the south-east stairwell (fig. 253). It deserves mention that the other three sculptors were apparently not interested in composing the early topics of the narrative, apart from Kirchhoff electing to take on *Departure*, the initiating scene and the largest, which he probably felt was appropriate for himself as the senior sculptor. We can only speculate about their reasons. But clearly no one wanted Coetzer's allegorical panel, which Potgieter too managed to avoid when it was dropped. Perhaps also, after Kirchhoff had bagged *Blood River*, no one else was interested in the less important battle of Vegkop, which was at that stage the main panel on the east. The fact that this was changed for *Inauguration* suggests a lack of certainty in the relationship of the panels at the outset.

These factors may have had an impact on Potgieter's designs, which are so diverse that it is difficult to make generalisations about his style: he was clearly finding his way, as is also suggested by the number of abandoned maquettes by him, discussed in Chapter 3. The three corner scenes, *Presentation*, *Soutpansberg* and *Blydevooruitsig*, and the larger *Inauguration* depend chiefly on a sense of symmetry, with most of the figures on the foreground plane. In *Inauguration* a second row is added, and the three central figures are taller, probably to highlight the swearing-in ceremony of Retief as governor, who kneels in the foreground. The figures reveal Potgieter's struggle with

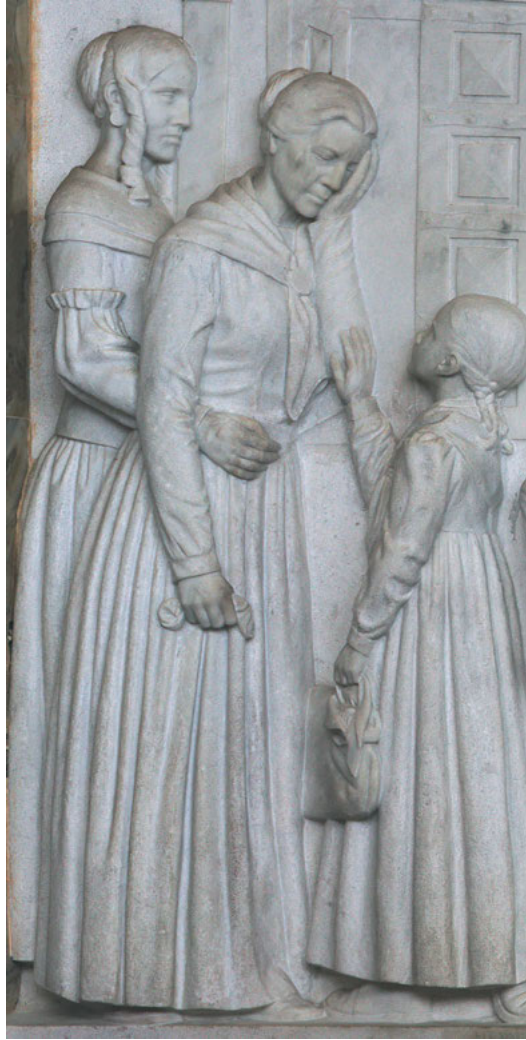


**Figure 255:** Fore-ground, middle distance and background figures in *Blydevooruitsig*. Full-scale clay relief (photo Alan Yates)

the relationship of forms in space, always challenging in relief, particularly for an inexperienced sculptor. The forced parallelism of the composition makes Retief's far leg seem to be in the foreground, and it is disconcerting how the feet of the man beyond him disappear behind Retief's near leg, while it in turn disappears behind the skirt of the seated woman (fig. 254). Although such visual infelicities are common enough in the real world, it is the role of the artist to find solutions that avoid them in art.

In these scenes landscape, wagons and architectural features that form the backdrop are described in very low relief, often of uncomfortable flatness. *Blydevooruitsig*, without a specific backdrop and despite its difficult reduction by the gable-shaped doorframe, is more interesting spatially, with two foreground figures next to the doorframe, the group around the horse in the middle distance and the black riempie-maker in the background (fig. 255). This configuration may have been encouraged by the fact that Potgieter wanted to present Voortrekker crafts. So here the additional figures are not merely spectators, as they often are in other scenes, but hunter, needle-woman and shoemaker, the latter two pragmatically making use of the awkwardly sloping surface of the doorframe as a worktop. However, the drawback is a lack of iconographic coherence. In *Soutpansberg* the occupations of the peripheral male figures – to underline the development of Voortrekker trade and education in this case – are more integrated into the overall theme.

Potgieter's larger scenes offer rather different compositions. *Delagoa Bay* presents a somewhat unbalanced line of figures on a single plane, with three females of declining height on the left, Trichardt and two Portuguese soldiers of similar height on the right, and the seated teacher Pfeffer as a kind of fulcrum in the centre. While upright posture is appropriate for Trichardt and the



**Figure 256:** Upright stance of Martha Trichardt in Delagoa Bay contradicts her collapse due to malaria. Marble, detail of fig. 289 (photo Russell Scott)

soldiers, it is illogical in the case of Mrs Trichardt, whose collapse due to malaria is hardly persuasive (fig. 256). Also unconvincing is the strange architectural pastiche in the background, which is like a flat stage set (fig. 289). The crenellated cornice of the building that coincides with the top of Trichardt's head was another unhappy decision, as was the inexplicable blank gap, framed by gun and powder barrel between Trichardt and the Portuguese governor, as though the relief had been damaged in transit.

The crowded composition of *Vegkop* also grapples with pictorial conventions, as there is no middle distance between the foreground frieze of figures and the background one on a smaller scale and higher level, although it is a convenient way to organise so many individuals inside a laager. And the two framing figures, especially the male on the right, are over-sized. Given the difficulties of viewing *Vegkop* from within the laager (fig. 257), it was a shrewd move to choose a close-up composition for *Kapain* (fig. 258), a faint echo of battle scenes with Amazons and barbarians on Roman sarcophagi.<sup>1042</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3, it was Potgieter himself who suggested this topic, and its composition, packed and dramatic in effect, is quite discrete in the frieze. Perhaps this is why Moerdyk often chose it as a backdrop for press photographs. But while the grand effect is eye-catching, in detail it is a jostling confusion, with many elements of the Ndebele, their battle

<sup>1042</sup> Zanker, Ewald and Slater 2012, 228 fig. 207. For Roman examples, see *Kapain*.





**Figure 257:** Spatial view from within the laager in *Vegkop*. Full-scale clay relief (courtesy of Kirchhoff files; photo Alan Yates)



**Figure 258:** Close-up composition in *Kapain*. Full-scale clay relief (courtesy of Kirchhoff files; photo Alan Yates)

oxen and the Boer horses remaining unclear – a long way off from Hildebrand's principles of clear outline and pure style.

Potgieter's designs lack a consistent stylistic approach as he wrestles with formal solutions for a variety of problems. Regarding the patrons' brief of unity, the east frieze is probably the most inconsistent, but considering his contributions to the thematic arrangement of this section of the narrative, Potgieter's work is ingenious. And another contribution should not be forgotten – his lively written memoirs of the sculptors at work in Harmony Hall, published some forty years after the frieze was finished, which constitute an invaluable art historical record.

Despite many shortcomings, the frieze sculptors succeeded in designing a historical narrative of the Trek for the first time, a remarkable achievement, certainly beyond anything the commissioners and the sculptors could have imagined at the time they began their task in 1942. And, despite the variations in style and strategy that we have detected, an overall impression of unity was achieved. This, however, was due in part to the Florentine sculptors, who in 1948 began to copy the plaster replicas of the full-size clay relief into marble. We do not know their precise number, let alone their names – a fate they share with most of their ancient forerunners. Like them, they do not deserve to be forgotten, for they produced the final form in marble, the only full-scale physical evidence which has survived, the actual frieze of the Voortrekker Monument.

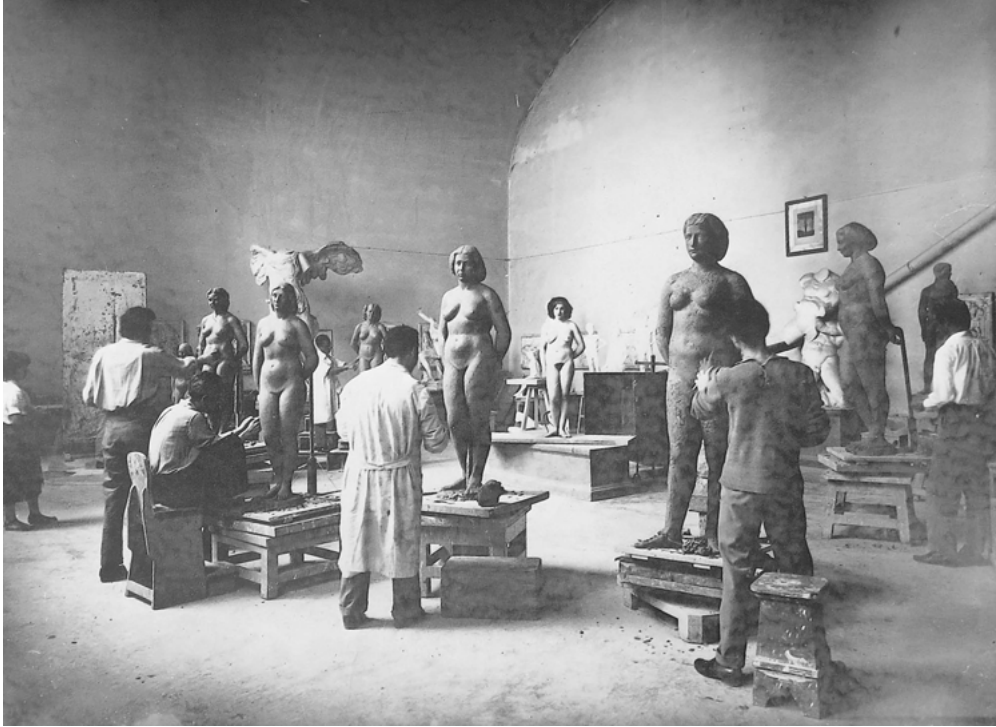


**Figure 259:** Romano Romanelli, Gerard Moerdyk, Laurika Postma, Hennie Potgieter and two Florentine sculptors at the Romanelli studio. Full-size replications in plaster of lost clay panels in the background. c. 1948 (photo courtesy HF Archives F 39.10.9 k)

## From plaster to marble

What impact did the Florentine craftsmen with their white Querceta marble have on the visual narrative of the Great Trek, when they copied it from some one-hundred-and-forty sections of plaster into thirty-one panels of marble? To answer this question we will discuss several inter-related aspects: the artistic tradition of Romano Romanelli's workshop in Florence (fig. 259); the conceptual constraints of the plaster sections; the problem of joints; the technique and accuracy of copying; and, most importantly, the differences in detail and style between the South African clay reliefs replicated in plaster and their Florentine copies carved in marble. We clarified in Chapter 3 that the full-size clay originals were irreversibly destroyed in the process of duplicating them in plaster, and that the untraceable plaster sections shared the same fate after the Romanelli studio had completed the commission of the marble frieze. The consequences of these losses are dire for research. The full-size clay reliefs can only be studied in Yates' black-and-white photographs, taken before the reliefs were duplicated in plaster. The plaster reliefs are even more difficult to study: photographs are infrequent and of very poor quality. Hence nobody, apart from Moerdyk and the sculptors in Florence, has been able to compare the replications in plaster and their copies in marble face-to-face. And the sources, patchy as they are, have been available only to specialists and never been studied in detail.

The Yates photographs themselves cause a variety of problems. Most of them were apparently taken from a more or less mid-level focus point, but even so it is impossible to analyse them in detail when it comes to three-dimensional characteristics, the degree of undercutting, or the angle of figures in relation to the picture plane. Without records of the camera settings, such as the focal length of the lens, and the distance of the camera from the reliefs, the comparison of such details in the Yates examples and present-day photographs of the marble frieze is not adequate. This leads to a situation where what may appear to be modifications between the full-scale clay and the marble, such as a shift of angle in the representation of a figure, may be no more than a variation between the viewpoints of the reliefs in Yates' photographs of the clay and Scott's photographs of the marble. If one compares, for example, the full-size clay and marble photographs which show



**Figure 260:** Romanelli's 'School of Sculpture' in Florence's Accademia with students copying life model in the background. 1951 (*Accademia di Firenze* 1984, 107)

the border figure of a British commissioner in *Convention*, their different viewpoints are obvious (fig. 276). Second, the general conditions of illumination and the modelling of light and shadow in the photographs have a crucial impact on the effect of depth and the visibility of details in the reliefs.<sup>1043</sup> And, as angled and close-up shots of the clay reliefs do not seem to exist,<sup>1044</sup> it is almost impossible to clarify the degree of undercutting and the finish of detail. Further, the materials, clay and marble, reflect light in different ways. In muting specific detail, the marble invokes an ideal quality that is further enhanced by its pearly whiteness. Often enough the precision of facial features, for instance, appears less individualised in the marble. It is also important not to discount the effect of white marble, which is so readily associated with modern concepts of classical and classicising sculpture that it probably influences the very act of seeing when we look at works in that material, without our being conscious of it.<sup>1045</sup> It is important to bear in mind that the classical tradition of copying sculpture followed distinct aesthetic, social and ethical practices developed in ancient Greece from as early as the fifth century BCE and then universalised in Hellenistic and Roman art. As Salvatore Settis has argued, Greek and Roman art had 'for generations and over centuries ... concentrated all of its energy on the creation of repeatable models capable of embodying collective values. Greek art is "original" not only because of its choral or collective nature, but also because it is supremely paradigmatic'.<sup>1046</sup>

In the ancient tradition, repeating and copying was not limited to creating faithful replicas (exact similitude in manual art is in any event impossible to achieve), but also variations of a given model according to taste, connoisseurship and the symbolic concerns of the commissioner and

<sup>1043</sup> Compare, for example, the illustrations of the full-size clay reliefs in the *Official Guide* (1955–76), Heymans (1986) and Potgieter (1987) with the illustrations of the marble frieze in Grobler (2001) and Heymans and Theart-Peddle (2007).

<sup>1044</sup> A rare exception is fig. 172, unfortunately out of focus.

<sup>1045</sup> This of course reflects the false illusion that classical sculptures were left in the natural colour of marble, as we see them in museums today. As a rule, the colouring of white marble was given equal attention to its carving in Greek and Roman sculpture; see Østergaard 2014; Brinkmann, Dreyfus and Koch-Brinkmann 2017.

<sup>1046</sup> Settis 2015, 51. For copying within and beyond the classical tradition, see the contributions in the same volume.



**Figure 261:** Studio Romanelli, Borgo San Frediano 70, Florence. 2013 (photo the authors)

the craftsman.<sup>1047</sup> Although most scholars and connoisseurs have unconditionally privileged the so-called original for its alleged uniqueness, both model and copy shared essential properties of singularity and esteem. An equivalent principle applies to the Voortrekker frieze. While its original models, the full-size clay reliefs, were destroyed in the process of producing replicas in plaster, they in turn served as models for the Florentine carvers, who produced a second ‘original’, the extant frieze in marble. Trained under the patronage of Florence’s famous Accademia di Belle Arti, founded by Cosimo I de’ Medici in 1563, with Romano Romanelli in the chair after World War II,<sup>1048</sup> these sculptors brought their own skills to bear, even as they guaranteed that the relief designs of the South African sculptors survived. A 1951 photograph of Romanelli’s ‘School of Sculpture’, Scuola di Scultura (fig. 260),<sup>1049</sup> allows a rare insight into the collective education of Florentine sculptors in the Romanelli school when they were copying a life model, and into differences to be found in their individual renditions.<sup>1050</sup>

What do we know about Romano Romanelli, commissioned to copy the Voortrekker narrative in marble, whom Moerdyk refers to as ‘one of the greatest of modern sculptors’?<sup>1051</sup> His studio in Florence had been launched in the Romanelli name in 1860, by Pasquale Romanelli (1812–1887), the first of the Romanelli sculptural line. Pasquale had taken over the studio of the famous sculptor Lorenzo Bartolini, housed in a converted church at 70 Borgo San Frediano (fig. 261), where, it is said, he had been the master’s favourite pupil. The studio was handed down to his son Raffaello (1856–

<sup>1047</sup> Anguissola 2015, 73–79.

<sup>1048</sup> *Accademia di Firenze* 1984. Romanelli as chair: Campana 1991, 75 n 406. According to Vittoria Corti (*Accademia di Firenze* 1984, 98), in 1923 three different academic chairs were established: ‘Pittura, Scultura, e Decorazione.’

<sup>1049</sup> Renzo Federici, in *Accademia di Firenze* 1984, 107.

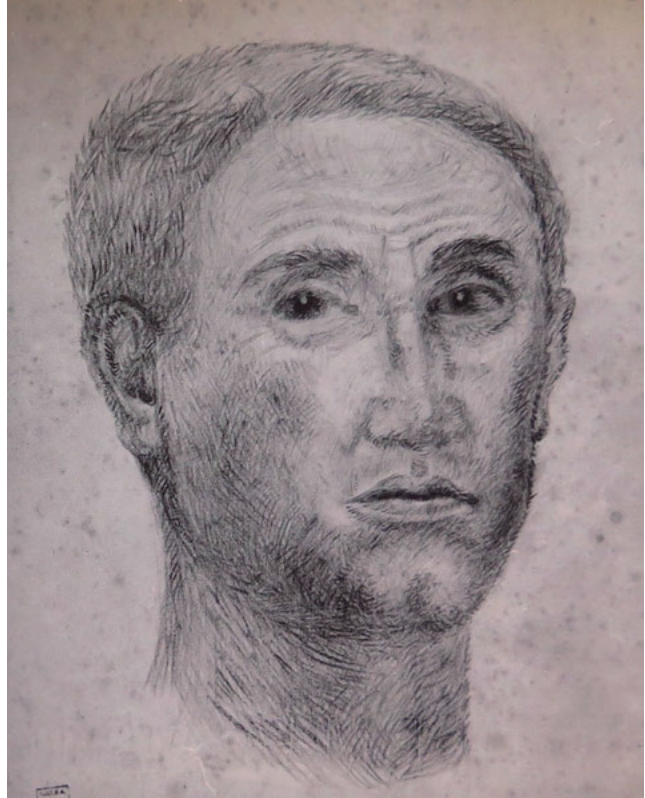
<sup>1050</sup> As we know so little about the training of sculptors in the Accademia at the time and their later careers, we cannot even be sure whether this school included those destined to workshop positions rather than individual sculptural curricula.

<sup>1051</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 41.

1928), who had established ties with South Africa at least since 1927, discussed in Chapter 3, and in turn passed to his son Romano (1882–1968), the sculptor responsible for the Voortrekker Monument frieze. His son, again named Raffaello (1926–2003), took over the studio in turn, evidently in the early 1950s when his father was in his seventies. And yet another Raffaello (born 1980), representing the fifth generation, is the sculptor in charge today at the studio, still in the same premises.<sup>1052</sup>

After Romano Romanelli's early service in the Italian Navy, he became an internationally acknowledged sculptor, medal maker and draughtsman (fig. 262). Modelling in clay as early as 1894 – initially reacting to his father's work which he claimed lacked magnitude, volume and plasticity<sup>1053</sup> – Romanelli produced numerous classical, historical, religious and genre sculptures in bronze, marble and clay, as well as portraits and medals.<sup>1054</sup> During a stay in Paris in 1911 he engaged especially with Auguste Rodin – admired and criticised by Hildebrand – and the circle of French artists who regularly visited the sculptor's studio.<sup>1055</sup> Romanelli was a dedicated nationalist, who sympathised from the outset with the fascist movement. Under the Mussolini regime, he was officially honoured with the title 'Accademico d'Italia' in 1930, because his sculpture was regarded as expressing fascist ideology particularly well.<sup>1056</sup> Before tackling the Monument frieze, Romanelli had already been commissioned to design several reliefs on a large scale, of which two clearly follow the classical tradition in subject and to some extent in style: from 1926–30 the 2.8-metre long and 2.2-metre high bronze piece 'Romulus ploughing the furrow' (*Romolo che traccia il solco*) for the Palazzo delle Corporazioni (today Piacentini) in Rome;<sup>1057</sup> and in 1933–34 the five by five metre marble panel 'The justice of Trajan' (*La giustizia di Traiano*) for the Palazzo di Giustizia in Milan (fig. 263).<sup>1058</sup> In 1938–39 he created several reliefs and sculptures in marble for the 'Monument for the Legionary' (*Monumento al Legionario*), meant for Addis Ababa but instead erected in 1952 in Syracuse, and renamed the *Monumento al Soldato e all'Operaio* (Monument for the soldier and the workman).<sup>1059</sup>

It is possible that Hildebrand's 1893 book *Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst*, discussed above and known in Florentine art circles,<sup>1060</sup> was also familiar to the Romanelli family, at the time well-established Florentine sculptors. Direct contact was also possible, as from about 1870 and for the following twenty years Hildebrand worked mainly in Florence. There, in 1874, he and his well-known fellow artists, art theorists and classicists, Hans von Marées and Konrad Fiedler,



**Figure 262:** Undated self-portrait of Romano Romanelli (*Accademia di Firenze* 1984, 122)

**1052** For the history of the Romanelli studio, see Campana 1998; *ibid.* 2002; [www.raffaelloromanelli.com/](http://www.raffaelloromanelli.com/). A stemma of the Romanelli sculptors is kept in the Romanelli family archive.

**1053** Campana 1991, 12.

**1054** For Romano Romanelli, see Romanelli 1954 (with a catalogue listing his works); and, especially, the excellent art historical study by Campana 1991.

**1055** *Ibid.*, 24.

**1056** *Ibid.*, 71.

**1057** *Ibid.*, 59–60, fig. 37c (dated in the caption '1925–1932').

**1058** *Ibid.*, 73–74, figs 75a (plaster) and 75b (marble). This is the work that Moerdyk may have seen in a visit to the studio in the early 1930s.

**1059** *Ibid.*, 75, figs 72b–74d.

**1060** *Ibid.*, 12–13, 18–19, 23–24.



**Figure 263:** Romano Romanelli, *La giustizia di Traiano* (The justice of Trajan) inside the Palazzo di Giustizia in Milan, left panel. Marble, 5 × 5 m (Maulsby 2014, 317 fig. 3)

had bought the abandoned monastery San Francesco di Paolo, situated near the Porta Romana, in the neighbourhood of the Romanelli studio.<sup>1061</sup> Considering their proximity and mutual interest in sculpture, Hildebrand and the Romanellis perhaps even knew each other personally.

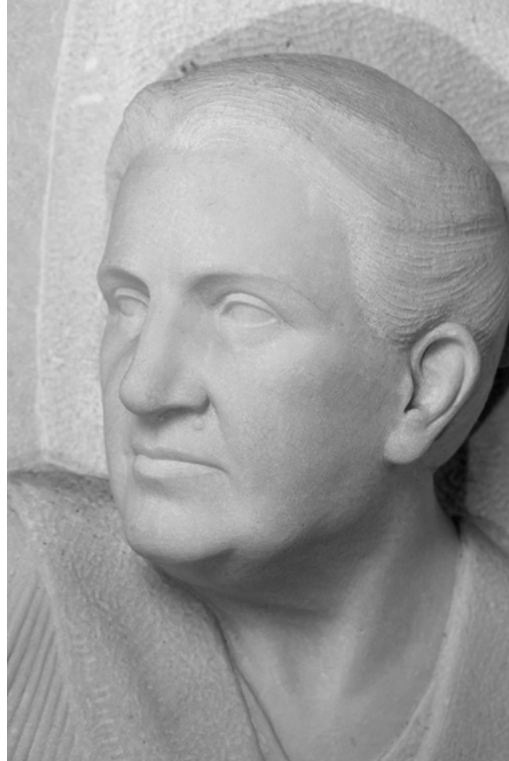
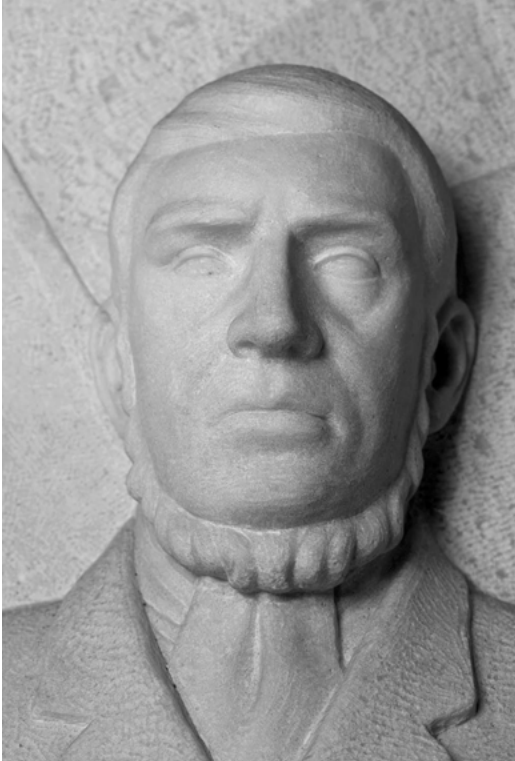
When commissioned to copy the Voortrekker friezes into marble – the actual work beginning in early 1948 – Romanelli employed most of the marble carvers still living in Florence but out of work after World War II. That employment became the basis of the argument for re-establishing the studio again, as we read in a document written sometime after 1955 by Romano Romanelli's son, Raffaello:

For this order from South Africa, 25 Florentine sculptors found work for more than three years. Afterwards the studio closed again faced by the difficulty to pay tax to the city. ... Now, still a few sculptors remain who can count themselves as proper [sculptors] in the entire city of Florence and all of them number [just] over fifty. The most able and capable of teaching may continue to work for perhaps only a few years. As a result the situation is most serious and sad.<sup>1062</sup>

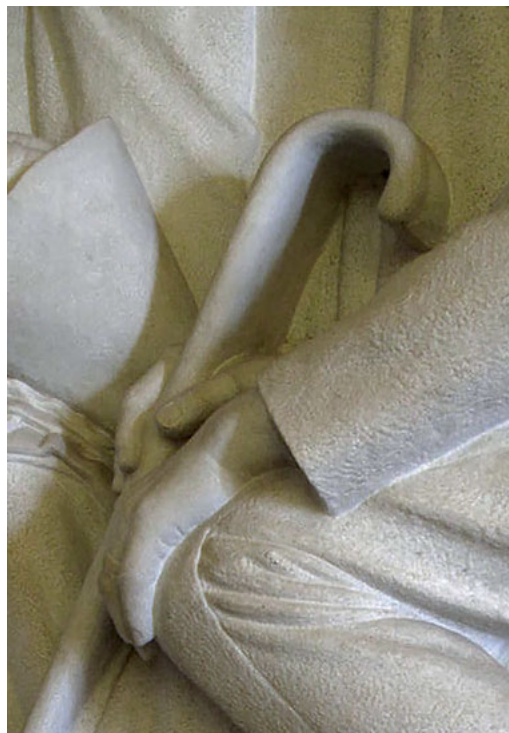
According to Romano Romanelli's own calculations, it needed at least forty first-class sculptors to finish the gigantic task of the Monument frieze within a year, and the actual number he employed is

<sup>1061</sup> Ibid., 1991, 12; Mallgrave and Ikonou 1994, 321. For the monastery, see Nuzzi 1980, 78 ('Adolf Hildebrand, schizzo del convento San Francesco di Paola'); Braunfels 1993, 13 figs 7–8.

<sup>1062</sup> 'Per questa ordinazione dal Sud Affrica [sic] trovarono lavoro 25 scultori di Firenze per più di tre anni. Dopo che lo studio richiuso per la difficoltà di far fronte alle tasse ed agli oneri sindacali. ... Ora sono rimasti ancor alcuni scultori che si possono contare sulla dita in tutta Firenze e tutti al di spora della cinquantina. I più bravi e capaci di insegnare potranno continuare a lavorare forse ancora per gli anni che si posson [sic] contare sulle dita di una mano. Dunque situazione gravissima e tristissima' (typewritten document in the archive of the Romanelli studio, 70 Borgo San Frediano, Florence).



**Figure 264:** Portraits of Louis and Martha Trichardt in *Soutpansberg*. Marble, details of fig. 288 (photo Russell Scott)



**Figure 265:** Cut-off right shoulder but extant right hand in *Women spur men on*. Marble, details of fig. 303 (photos the authors)

reported to range from twenty-five to fifty, requiring four additional studios, as discussed in Chapter 3. As also noted, both Postma and Potgieter praised their excellent work. In contrast to Italy where marble carving has had an ongoing tradition since antiquity, even if endlessly reinvented, South Africa lacked this kind of history and thus experienced carvers to carry out such an immense task. Moerdyk also pointed out that in Romanelli's 'extensive studio there was enough technical apparatus to keep a larger number of marble cutters at work at the same time'.<sup>1063</sup> Apart from traditional tools and pneumatic drills, the practice of copying needed pointing machines to transfer often hundreds of measured points from the plaster model to the final representation in marble.

Two formal conditions of the plaster models significantly affected the work of the Florentine marble specialists: the general lack of undercutting in the plaster sections and the problem of where to establish the vertical cuts of the individual marble panels in relation to the narrative. Although photographs of the full-size clay panels suggest that undercutting was used in some areas, the process used to make the plaster casts did not allow the South African sculptors to replicate any elaborate sections in additional casts, necessary to guide the Florentine craftsmen in more complex passages. This shortcoming was crucial and at least in part explains a considerable lack of undercutting in the final frieze, as the marble carvers in Florence were certainly instructed to follow as far as possible the form of the plaster prototypes.

As already raised in our discussion of Hildebrand, relief sculpture poses challenges as to how to represent forms as they merge into the background. When we look at the foreground figures in the marble copies, heads in frontal and three-quarter view are generally cut free as far as the back of the head, as, for example, in the portraits of Louis and Martha Trichardt in *Soutpansberg* (fig. 264). Heads in profile view are usually cut free up to the far eye, exemplified in the head of 'Oumatjie Stoffberg' in *Presentation* (fig. 163). More problematic are the bodies of the slightly over life-size figures depicted in profile view, which, due to the limited depth of the relief, are cut off or distorted by the background plane. Examples are the elderly seated Boer in *Women spur men on* (fig. 265), and the two surveyors in *Church of the Vow* (fig. 266), who, when viewed from an angle, lack right shoulders although they have right arms. This disjunction of limbs that are not functionally attached to bodies is another consequence of the lack of undercutting, especially for figures modelled in profile view. Such bodily elements in isolation are to be found in many examples, another being the far hands of the Boers holding guns in *Kapain* (fig. 267), brought forward in space because necessary to explain their actions, but lacking arms to connect them to the appropriate torsos, as the far sides of their bodies have merged into the stone. There is thus a disjunction not only of limbs and bodies but also of the planes of relief representation.

Less voluminous forms, such as assegais and shields, sticks and guns, hats and kappies, tables and chairs, are also not cut free and acquire an unexpected thickness, for example, in the kappies of the seated women in both *Inauguration* and *Arrival* (fig. 268). In *Women spur men on*, the chair of the elderly seated Boer and his walking stick seem to cut painfully through his right hand (fig. 265). And in *Saailaer*, the support under the right arm of the woman at the left of the group firing on their Zulu attackers is excessive (fig. 269). Although most of these oddities are not obvious in the frontal view, they contribute to the flat and static effect of the frieze, not least because of the lack of nuanced modelling of light and shade. There are, however, rare exceptions, such as the free-cut lower end of the Dordrecht Bible and the right hand of Jacobus Uys in *Presentation*, though his left still merges with the stone (fig. 270). As no plaster section could have been taken to demonstrate the required degree of undercutting and alert the Florentine sculptors to this, they may have worked on their own initiative in this case, or have been instructed accordingly, either by Romanelli or by Postma and Potgieter, when they were observing the work in Italy.

On the other hand, a number of motifs are inadequately finished by the Florentine sculptors, as is the case with the dying father in *Dirkie Uys*, especially his simplified beard and hands, the misshapen form of the left shoulder and arm, and the overall poor effect of the costume's fabric

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1063 *Official Guide* 1955, 41.



(fig. 271). On occasion the Florentines also misunderstood specific motifs, for example, the clerical collar of Erasmus Smit in *Inauguration*, which is disfigured by irregular folds (fig. 272), as though a draped cravat. And every now and then they either changed or did not finish a particular motif of the full-size clay relief, which could modify the effect. For example, when they streamlined the elevated rock over the door in *Mpande* – creating a flatter surface for Commandant Pretorius to stand on with the newly installed Zulu king Mpande and his interpreter – it took on the appearance of a designed plinth.

But if there were intermittent shortcomings on the part of the Florentines, there were also technical deficiencies on the part of the South Africans, apart from the critical lack of undercutting in the plaster casts. As discussed in the previous chapter, the latter had not thought about a realistic standard length for the marble panels when they developed their designs in the continuous clay reliefs for the half-wall-length friezes. This neglect was left to the Florentine sculptors to resolve, which resulted in the edges of a number of panels running across figures and livestock, for example, in *Departure*, across the oxen and sheep and a goat's muzzle; in *Treaty*, across the many heads of Zulu on the left and



**Figure 266:** Cut-off right shoulders but extant right hands in *Church of the Vow*. Marble, detail of fig. 307 (photo the authors)



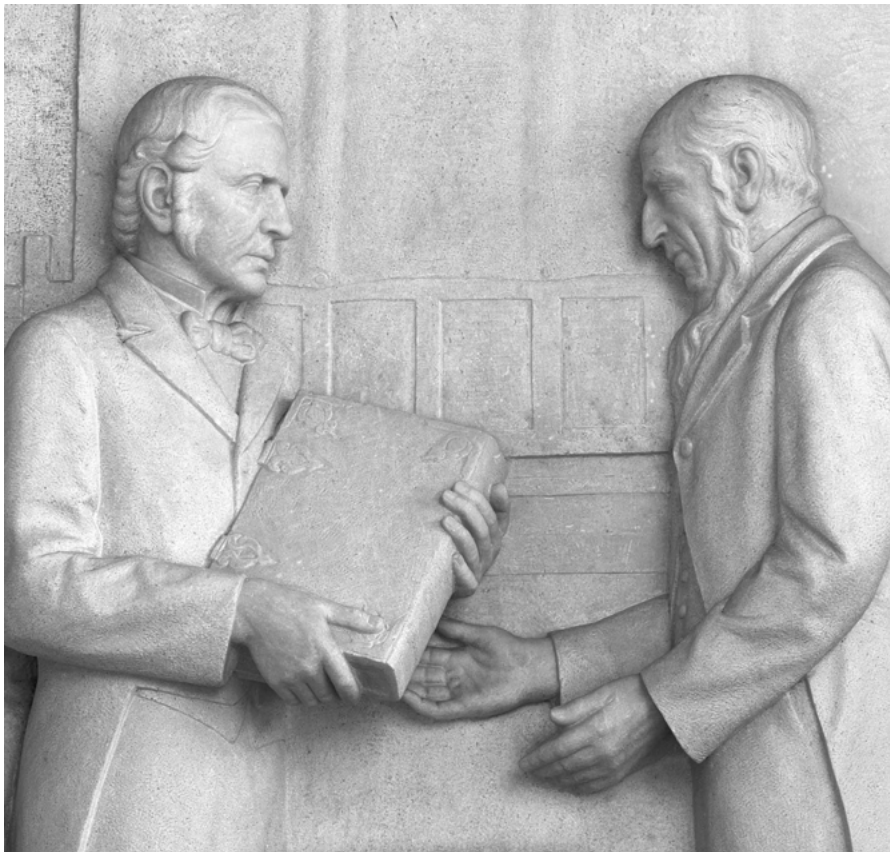
**Figure 267:** Far hands of Boers holding guns without arms in *Kapain*. Marble, detail of fig. 292 (photo Russell Scott)



**Figure 268:** Thickened brims of women's kappies in *Inauguration* and *Arrival*. Marble, details of figs 291 and 304 (photos Russell Scott)



**Figure 269:** Over-sized 'support' under right arm of shooting woman in *Saailaer*. Marble (Grobler 2001, 136)



**Figure 270:** Free-cut hand and lower end of Dordrecht Bible in *Presentation*. Details of full-scale clay relief and marble (photos above Alan Yates; below detail of fig. 287, Russell Scott)



**Figure 271:** Simplified beard, clothing folds and hands of dying father in *Dirkie Uys*. Details of full-scale clay relief and marble (photos above Alan Yates; below detail of fig. 301, Russell Scott)

a Boer on the right; and in *Return*, right across the woman in the foreground (fig. 273). The vertical joints are clearly noticeable because most of their edges were fractured and poorly restored, a flaw in the narrative's design which is unpleasant to the eye.

Our evidence of the technical apparatus used by the Florentine workers when they were copying the narrative from the plaster into the marble is scant. We know from Postma's remarks in a letter dated 17 April 1948, quoted in Chapter 3, that they were using pointing machines and pneumatic drills, and frequently hammers and chisels to avoid splitting the marble. It was the standard tool kit one would expect in a professional marble workshop at the time.<sup>1064</sup> More revealing is the only photograph of one of the marble workshops in Florence, possibly Romanelli's own studio, which shows *Presentation* in a half-finished state (fig. 274). Although Hennie Potgieter is posed in front of the scene he composed, fortunately he does not obscure it entirely. We can see the seated marble carver on the left, holding a hammer, and also the long measuring rod and large T-square with a pointed pin, crucial tools needed to transpose the measuring points from the plaster section to the marble for copying. And three projecting measuring points in the unfinished relief are just visible, one on top of the kappie of the standing Boer woman on the right, another on her body, and

<sup>1064</sup> Apart from power tools, the Florentine sculptors used basically the same tool kit as their ancient forebearers. An excellent overview about the different chisel types and their visible traces in stonework is provided in Russell and Wootton 2015.



**Figure 272:** Disfigured clerical collar of Rev. Erasmus Smit in *Inauguration*. Marble, detail of fig. 291 (photo Russell Scott)



**Figure 273:** Joints cutting through human and beast in *Departure, Treaty and Return*. Marble, details of figs 286, 297 and 311 (photos Russell Scott)



**Figure 274:** Florentine sculptor with hammer, long measuring rod and large T-square sitting next to Hennie Potgieter at the Romanelli studio to sculpt *Presentation*. The top left corner of full-size relief in plaster can be seen behind Moerdyk. c. 1948 (photo courtesy HF Archives F 39.10.9 k)

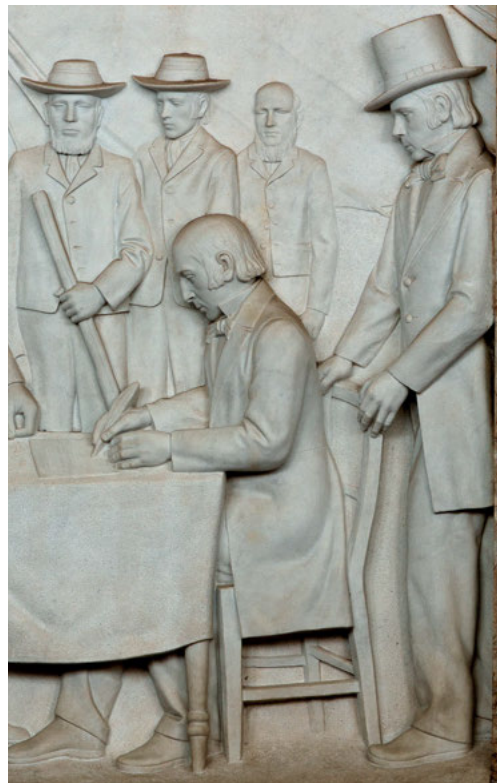
a third on the lower torso of the Boer standing behind her. These points indicated to the sculptor how much marble he could carve away without interfering with the top level of the design in that area when he was roughing out the sculpture's general shape, or when he was developing the details of the final form.

Despite careful measuring, the dimensions of a number of scenes did not precisely fit their architectural setting in the Hall of Heroes when they arrived at the Monument. This meant that parts of a figure or an object had to be cut off, often those that abutted with the end of the wall on the far right, such as the half of the woman in *Teresa Viglione* (fig. 275) and the back of the English commissioner in *Convention* (fig. 276). Several scenes required additional measures to create sufficient space when a matching section of the framing veneer in coloured marble had to be cut free (again mostly on the far right), for example, in *Saailaer* for the dress of the woman facing inwards in the group defending themselves, and in *Departure* for the kneeling Boer's left arm, but also for the trekker's gun on the far left. These differences in measurement, albeit slight in relation to the overall dimensions, highlight another of the myriad obstacles which the architect and the sculptors faced when they developed a historical narrative of such colossal scale in marble, particularly when so far from the site where it would be installed.

Although accuracy was a paramount demand of the South African commission, because of the inherent limitations of copying, the difference in materials, various conceptual lapses on the part of the frieze sculptors and occasional carelessness of the Florentines, the visual narrative could not be copied exactly one-to-one from clay and plaster into marble. One can imagine that, while thirty points may well have been measured to establish the fine lines of a wrinkled eyelid in a portrait,



**Figure 275:** Border figure and framing veneer cut because of problems with measurement in *Teresa Viglione*. Details of full-scale clay relief and marble (photo left Alan Yates; right detail of fig. 300, Russell Scott)



**Figure 276:** Border figure and framing veneer cut because of problems with measurement in *Convention*. Details of full-scale clay relief and marble (photo left Alan Yates; right detail of fig. 312, Russell Scott)



**Figure 277:** Different tool traces and texture treatments around boy representing president-to-be Paul Kruger in *Vegkop*. Marble, detail of fig. 290 (photo Russell Scott)





**Figure 278:** Aloe in *Return*. Details of full-scale clay relief and marble (photos left Alan Yates; right detail of fig. 311, Russell Scott)

as Potgieter claims,<sup>1065</sup> when it came to expressing the precise delineation and volume of other aspects – the folds and subtle movements in a piece of fabric, for example – experienced sculptors may have used considerably fewer measuring points in the process, and left room for well-established local habits in their practice to make themselves felt. Such modifications had an effect on the overall appearance of the frieze. But these forms would probably have appeared to them, and possibly to Postma and Potgieter as well (if noted at all), of less significance than aspects that were unique to the South African narrative and the way it was visualised – for example, the distinctive hair of the African figures, discussed in Chapter 3, which the Italian carvers had initially interpreted as Roman curls. Continuing time pressure, as the organisers in South Africa became increasingly anxious about delayed deadlines the nearer it was to the inauguration of the Monument on 16 December 1949, did not, however, lead to any noticeable dwindling of the high standards set by the Florentines.

A further important factor that affected style was the choice of material, Querceta marble from Monte Altissimo near Forte dei Marmi (fig. 200). While clay may be shaped with the fingers or with a variety of tools, and the material itself is characterised by its malleability and flexibility, marble retains its sense of unyielding hardness and intractability, although it is (relatively speaking) softer when freshly quarried. It is worked with chisels which, whether flat, toothed or pointed, leave distinctive traces that record the stone's resistance, and impart a graininess to the surface. While the background of the frieze still retains obvious indications of the tools, often with lightly striated, stippled or pitted surfaces, the forms represented are worked further in a variety of ways to create different textures, and the faces of the figures are taken to a fine level of matte smoothness with rasps, files and abrasives as shown, for example, for the boy who represents president-to-be Paul Kruger in *Vegkop* (fig. 277), and for the aloe in *Return* (fig. 278). Working up the frieze to a high polish was avoided. With its very dense, micro-crystalline character, unpolished Querceta marble absorbs light into its surface in a way that tends to make details diffuse. The effect is increased tenfold in the Monument because the frieze, despite being close to the 'human height' that Moerdyk had recommended as early as 1932,<sup>1066</sup> is in fact elevated slightly above eye level and also subject to the almost spiritual effect of light diffusely distributed through the more than a thousand sections of yellow Belgian glass that make up the Monument's huge arched windows (fig. 5).

The style of the Florentine carvers was conditioned by their material, their education in marble craftsmanship, taught in the city since the Renaissance, and contemporary trends in marble

<sup>1065</sup> When referring to the elderly woman in *Presentation*, Potgieter 1987, 49.

<sup>1066</sup> SVK 14.4.1932: p.2; see Chapter 2.



**Figure 279:** *Debora Retief*. Crisp rock structures in full-scale clay relief on left, muted in marble on right (photos left Alan Yates; right Russell Scott)

sculpture, in this case personified by Romanelli and his possible affinity to Hildebrand's concept of 'pure' form, discussed earlier. Marble required substantial changes in the texture of the surface as it had been formed in clay. This is evident, for example, in the rock structures in the fore- and background, especially in *Debora Retief* where Postma had developed the entire backdrop as a sheer wall of rock to depict the cliff formation at Kerkenberg. While in the photographs of the full-size clay the rocky structures were crisp, distinct and visible, in the marble frieze they appear flattened to an almost amorphous mass unless viewed under sharp raking light, even though they are comprehensively copied (fig. 279). As well as reducing the explicit character of the setting, the relationship to the figures is undermined, so that, for instance, the girl on the left no longer grasps a rocky protrusion, and her hand seems to dangle in space. But in other scenes the skills of the Florentines emerge more prominently. They made excellent copies of the botanical and mountainous features so delicately modelled by Frikkie Kruger, particularly those in *Return* (figs 248, 278), perhaps enticed by his inventive details to give of their best. Here again the distinct qualities of texture in clay and marble we discussed above are revealing. Other details show different degrees of finish but are generally well understood, such as the wooden wagon wheels that were challenging not only in their complex configuration, but in the forms seen between the spokes, especially well copied in Kirchhoff's *Departure* (fig. 280) and Kruger's *Return* (fig. 281), in the latter case even viewed from an angle, but less so, for example, in *Teresa Viglione*.

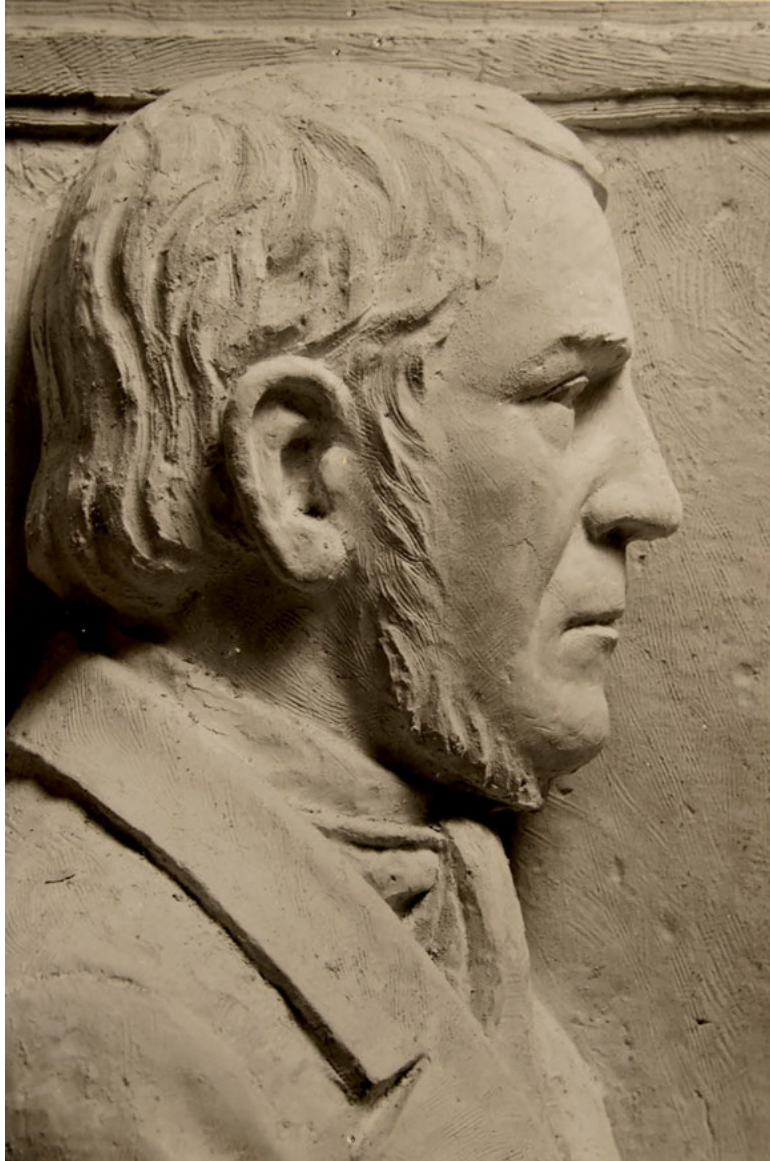
However, the specific marble style of the Florentine sculptors is most significantly expressed in their varied finishes of hair, faces and dress, which is distinctly different from the clay models. A case in point is provided by a unique photograph showing a detail developed in full-size clay, the portrait of Louis Trichardt in *Delagoa Bay* (figs 282, 283). It is the only contemporary photograph we know that focuses on a single motif of the final clay relief; it was probably not by accident that it was kept in the Kirchhoff files. The crispness of volume and contour complemented by the malleability, hatching and subtle unevenness in the clay surface is impossible to copy exactly in marble. Unlike Trichardt's sketchy clay locks, his marble hair is united to a consistently ordered whole with evenly rendered locks, structured by delicate lines incised with a fine chisel. The surface of the face is much smoother than the hair, and the lacrimal sac and nasolabial fold are less pronounced in the marble (but not the wafer-thin upper eyelid), although the expression of a now clearly furrowed forehead is enforced. The additional bulge above the left eye may indicate a mistake in the process of copying, possibly caused by an initial misplacement of that eyebrow. In the marble frieze, male eyebrows are usually chiselled as a bulging arch textured with fine incised hair as shown for



**Figure 280:** Wagon wheels in *Departure*. Details of full-scale clay relief and marble (photos above Alan Yates; below detail of fig. 286, Russell Scott)



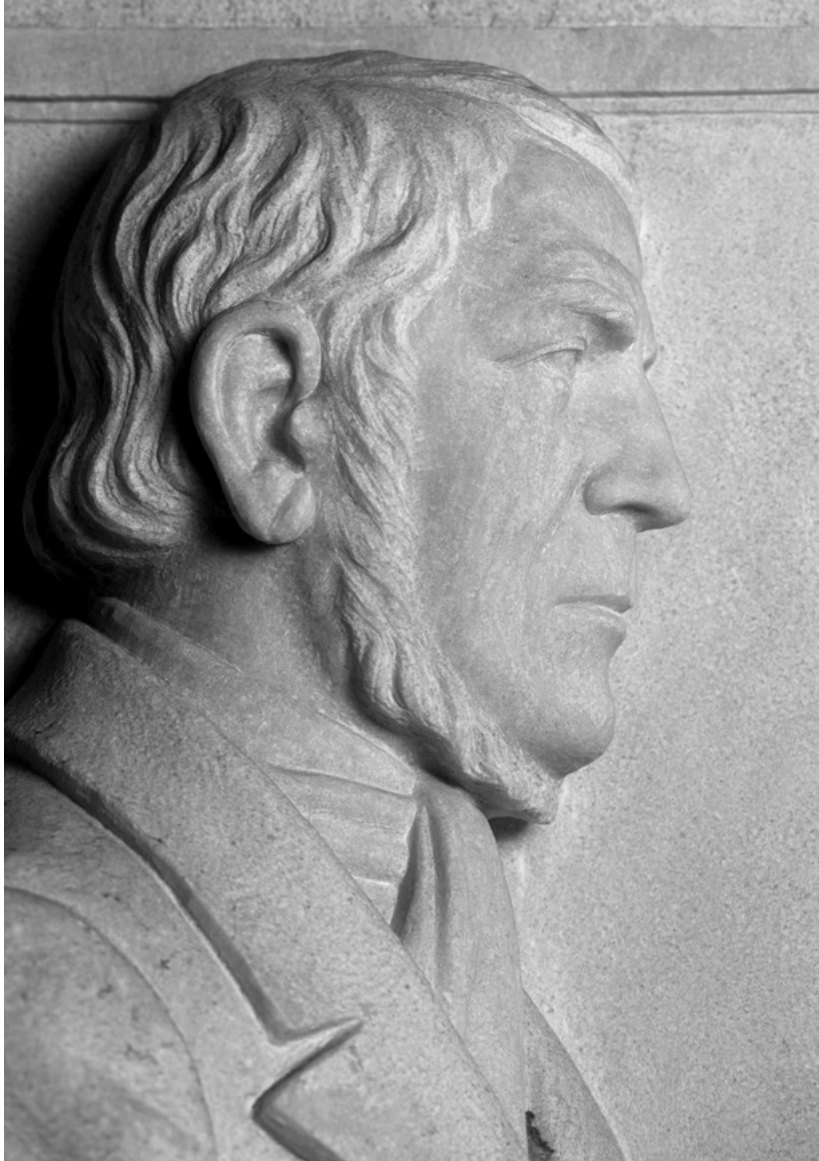
**Figure 281:** Wagon wheels seen from an angle in *Return*. Details of full-scale clay relief and marble (photos left Alan Yates; right detail of fig. 311, Russell Scott)



**Figure 282:** Louis Trichardt in *Delagoa Bay*. Detail of full-scale clay relief (courtesy of Kirchhoff files; photo Alan Yates)

Trichardt and to an almost disfiguring degree for Moerdyk in *Church of the Vow* (fig. 240). On the other hand the women, in *Departure* and *Saailaer*, for example, are rendered with more idealised features (fig. 284). Sometimes the Florentines reduced the physical essence of details too, such as the texture of hair, the nuanced rendering of flesh, and the depiction of nipples of the black women in *Death of Dingane*. In the end, the more graphic narrative in clay was transformed into a more uniform representation in marble, hence idealised rather than realistic.

In contrast to the modelling of the fabric in clay, characterised by compact but subtly uneven surfaces, in marble folds are thicker and stiffer and the contours more linear, although the different textiles were given different finishes. While the fabric of Trichardt's jacket in *Delagoa Bay*, for example, is distinguished from the smooth skin of his face by the intensive use of a bull-point chisel on the jacket, creating a dense network of points, the more even texture of the cravat shows only a few. The skills of the Florentine marble carvers to characterise different types of fabric by the use of claw and bull-point chisels are exemplarily demonstrated in *Soutpansberg*, in Martha Trichardt's dress in the collar (very fine markings), bodice (slightly more pronounced) and skirt (rougher surface), and the jacket of the Boer standing behind her, which again has a coarser surface (fig. 285). Often the smooth faces of young women and the thick, textured material of their dresses create such a sharp visual



**Figure 283:** Louis Trichardt in *Delagoa Bay*. Marble, detail of fig. 289 (photo Russell Scott)

contrast that, as in the woman carrying her baby in *Descent*, the head appears to have been inserted, which exaggerates the lack of an organic link to the largely invisible female body.

On the whole, the Florentines were excellent copyists who effectively transposed the twenty-seven scenes from the plaster models to the final marble panels. As we have argued above, it was not only the copyists that left distinct stylistic imprints on the historical narrative, but the stone itself. Since the time of ancient Rome, friezes in marble set a standard for developing visual histories that would last for protracted periods, and that could be changed only by coordinated political power and strenuous physical effort. This long-standing sculptural tradition has influenced the perception and reading of historical narratives in marble ever since. In the words of Rosalind Krauss, relief sculpture in general

makes it possible for the viewer to understand two reciprocal qualities simultaneously: the form as it evolves within the space of the relief ground and the meaning of the depicted moment in its historical context.<sup>1067</sup>

<sup>1067</sup> Krauss 1977, 12.



**Figure 284:** Boer women with idealised features in *Departure* and *Saailaer*. Marble, details of figs 286 and 308 (photos Russell Scott)

With this heritage and its own physical properties, marble has been the material par excellence to solemnise pictorial history. Having grown up with these art historical conventions, the Florentine marble sculptors formalised the stylistic handwriting of the South African designs, already regulated in the cause of unity, by the use of their 'classical' chisel work in the facial expressions, the fabric textures, creases and folds, the movement and the actual depth of the figures. In addition, the material, marble, contributed substantially to the unification of the visual representation of naked and clothed human bodies, animals, objects and scenery. In contrast to clay, the formal hardness of marble has promoted a greater sense of formal gravitas by immobilising the expression, emotion and action of the relief figures in stone. Installed in the Monument, the milky paleness of the carved marble stood out against the golden tones of the highly polished marble cladding of the walls. At the same time the rarely undercut and relatively shallow reliefs of the historical frieze complement the flat surface of the walls and the diffuse lighting of the hall, and do not create a restless visual effect of jutting protrusions and deep voids. Particularly in very low relief elements in the background, such as wagons and simple hill contours, the composition is mainly parallel to the picture plane, and the distinctive mountain ranges in the distance invariably extend horizontally rather than receding further. The end result is a rather static, tableau effect, which suppresses a sense of individual sculptors at work and of individuality in the models in favour of a monumental 'volkswerk'. Yet the rendering of surfaces and facial features is often assiduously observed, and one might detect some visual tension between the idealism of the whole and the verism of the detail. In the overall effect of the frieze, however, it is the former that prevails.



**Figure 285:** Different textures of skin and fabric in Martha Trichardt's dress in *Soutpansberg*. Marble, detail of fig. 288 (photo Russell Scott)

## The visual narrative

How does one read the Voortrekker narrative of this exceptionally large marble frieze which portrays eighteen years of histories in southern Africa from 1835 to 1852? We have undertaken detailed individual studies for each scene in Part II, in which our historical and art historical arguments are fully expounded. Here we focus on key themes that constitute the narrative and its ideology, and on the pictorial, historical and political strategies of the Afrikaner patrons and artists for presenting the authoritative portrayal of the Great Trek. As explained above, the pictorial narrative was not developed as a continuous story, but made up of twenty-seven individual scenes, although physically they are united by the marble band of the frieze running around the Hall of Heroes as its sole pictorial element. Formal features endorse the impression of unity in the frieze – the compositional and thematic juxtapositions, the planar backdrops of wagons and mountains and, above all, the consistent style (though not composition) achieved by the South African sculptors working together, and reinforced by the carvers in Florence.

When Moerdyk instructed the South African sculptors to strive for artistic unity, he claimed that this would make the Voortrekker frieze a 'volkswerk'.<sup>1068</sup> In the idea of a collective volkswerk suppressing individual style which would draw attention to a notion of creative interpretation, Moerdyk, no doubt with the backing of the SVK's Historiese Komitee, was promoting a concept of objectivity, of non-fiction as opposed to fiction. Roland Barthes' discussion of the conventions of written historical discourse provides a useful analogy when he describes it as 'uniformly assertive, constative ... one recounts what has been, not what has not been or what has been questionable'.<sup>1069</sup> To achieve this, historical narrative aims to create a 'reality effect', dependent not only on uniform style but the description of apparently useless particulars, so abundant in the Voortrekker Monument frieze. Barthes explains that

by positing the referential as real, by pretending to follow it in a submissive fashion, realistic description avoids being reduced to fantasmatic activity (a precaution which was supposed necessary to the 'objectivity' of the account). ... [Reality] becomes the essential reference in historical narrative, which is supposed to report 'what really happened': what does the non-functionality of detail matter then, once it denotes 'what took place'; 'concrete reality' becomes the sufficient justification.<sup>1070</sup>

It could be argued that the SVK obsession with accuracy and the suppression of individual creativity was intended to achieve just such a 'reality effect'.

Of course volkswerk embraces another concept where again there is no room for individuality: the notion that it expresses the very being of the people it purports to represent. The visually impressive form of the frieze endows the key Afrikaner ideologies it embodies with a lasting presence, binding together concepts such as birthright to South Africa's land; Dutch Reformed Christianity; western law codes and education; family values; agricultural and technical skills; and racial attitudes underlined by the contrasting portrayal of black people as servile or aggressive. Having examined the compositional and stylistic qualities, we will now tease out the main threads of the twenty-seven scenes that determine the iconography of the Afrikaner saga in the pictorial interplay of form, content and interpretation,<sup>1071</sup> bearing in mind Moerdyk's claim in the *Official Guide*:

The Historical Frieze ... is not only a representation of historical events. It also serves as a symbolic document showing the Afrikaner's proprietary right to South Africa. Here are portrayed the

<sup>1068</sup> Affidavit of 5.11.1947 (ARCA PV94 1/75/1/7); see Chapter 3.

<sup>1069</sup> Barthes 1986, 135 ('From history to reality').

<sup>1070</sup> *Ibid.*, 145, 146 ('The reality effect').

<sup>1071</sup> For a full discussion of each scene, see Part II: The Scenes.





Trekker's way of living, his work, his battles, his political activities – in short, the Trekker's whole life, as evidence of the price the Afrikaner paid for the right to call South Africa his fatherland.<sup>1072</sup>

**Figure 286:** *Departure*. 1950. Marble, w. 7.11 m (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

**Departure**, the first and largest scene in the frieze, sets the standard for the narrative that follows (fig. 286). It portrays a pastoral picture of a trek, beginning, as many small treks did, in the Eastern Cape, here in the vicinity of the distinctive Spandaukop near Graaff-Reinet, to move beyond the confines of the Cape Colony. It was a quest for freedom to escape British rule and, as Moerdyk states, 'to tame nature, conquer the savages and establish a state' in the vast interior of southern Africa.<sup>1073</sup> Hence, in a prototypical arrangement, Boer men and women, animals and wagons move generally in the same direction – as did the actual treks which progressed in broad terms from south to north – proclaiming the Afrikaner understanding of an integrated Great Trek. The procession, which runs parallel to the picture plane across the full width of the relief from left to right, is portrayed as a thoroughly orchestrated exodus of white people, far from the confusion typical of such mass departures. At the outset of the narrative, this scene captures a sense of Afrikaner worth, so that the viewer is made aware that their departure will be a severe loss to the Colony. We find a pictorial rendering of Afrikaner values, expressed in the controlled behaviour of the Boers, their livestock and the perfect condition of their goods, be it dress, wagons, arms or daily objects of use – all presented as though arranged in a diorama in a museum of Voortrekker cultural history. But excluded are the estimated 6 000 African and Khoisan servants, whose presence was vital for the success of the historical treks, adding roughly one-third more participants to the 17 000 Voortrekkers. It is a telling example of the partiality of history and racist attitudes that in the entire frieze with some two hundred and ninety figures, only two of them depict black trekker servants, both in inferior positions, in *Blydevooruitsig* and *Arrival*.

**Presentation**, the second scene, following *Departure* on the northern corner (fig. 287), reminds the observer of the religious aspect of the Great Trek, to bring Dutch Reformed Christianity and white civilisation to the heathen hinterland, asserted less by the Voortrekkers themselves (possibly more intent on their own well-being) than by later Afrikaner historians. When in April 1837 the party of some one hundred trekkers led by the patriarch Jacobus Uys camped outside the recently founded Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape, they were greeted by a delegation of its English settlers. Led by William Rowland Thompson, a well-established frontier merchant, and Thomas Philipps, farmer, justice of the peace and first master of the local Masonic Lodge, they presented the Boers with a stately 1756 Dordrecht Bible, inscribed to

<sup>1072</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 33.

<sup>1073</sup> *Ibid.* Moerdyk constantly made conflicting statements on this issue which confuse different ideologies. For example, on the same page, only a few lines further down, he claims that the 'Voortrekker did not come as an adventurer, still less as a conqueror'.



**Figure 287:** *Presentation*. 1949. Marble, w. 2.4 m (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

Jacobus Uys, and his expatriating Countrymen ... as a farewell token of their esteem and heartfelt regret at their departure ..., that in their wanderings in search of another land they will be guided by the precepts contained in this Holy Book, and steadfastly adhere to its solemn dictates – the stern decrees of the Creator of the Universe, The God of all Nations and Tribes!<sup>1074</sup>

Staged in front of the flat outline of a wagon positioned parallel to the picture plane, reinforcing a tableau effect, the English representative on the left of an altar-like draped table presents the grand Bible to Uys on the right. They are united by the Holy Book between them and supported by some of their compatriots. Although the relief creates a strong sense of solidarity, it is still dominated by a Boer majority, additionally characterised by their seniority, perhaps suggesting their older birthright to southern Africa.

If the first scene made a formal occasion of the usual disarray of departures, the sense of decorum and order is even more pronounced here. *Presentation* emphasises concepts that are crucial in the frieze. First, it foregrounds the strong Christian beliefs ascribed to the trekkers – and, by implication, their descendants. It also underlines the acknowledgement of the historical importance of the treks, not only by the Boers but also the British settlers, discontented too with colonial policies. They were sympathetic to Piet Retief's political 'Manifesto of the Emigrant Farmers', explaining why so many Boers were leaving the Colony, which was published in the *Graham's*

<sup>1074</sup> Handwritten dedication inside the Bible given in full in *Presentation*. The Bible is today on display in the VTM (HF Archives BY).



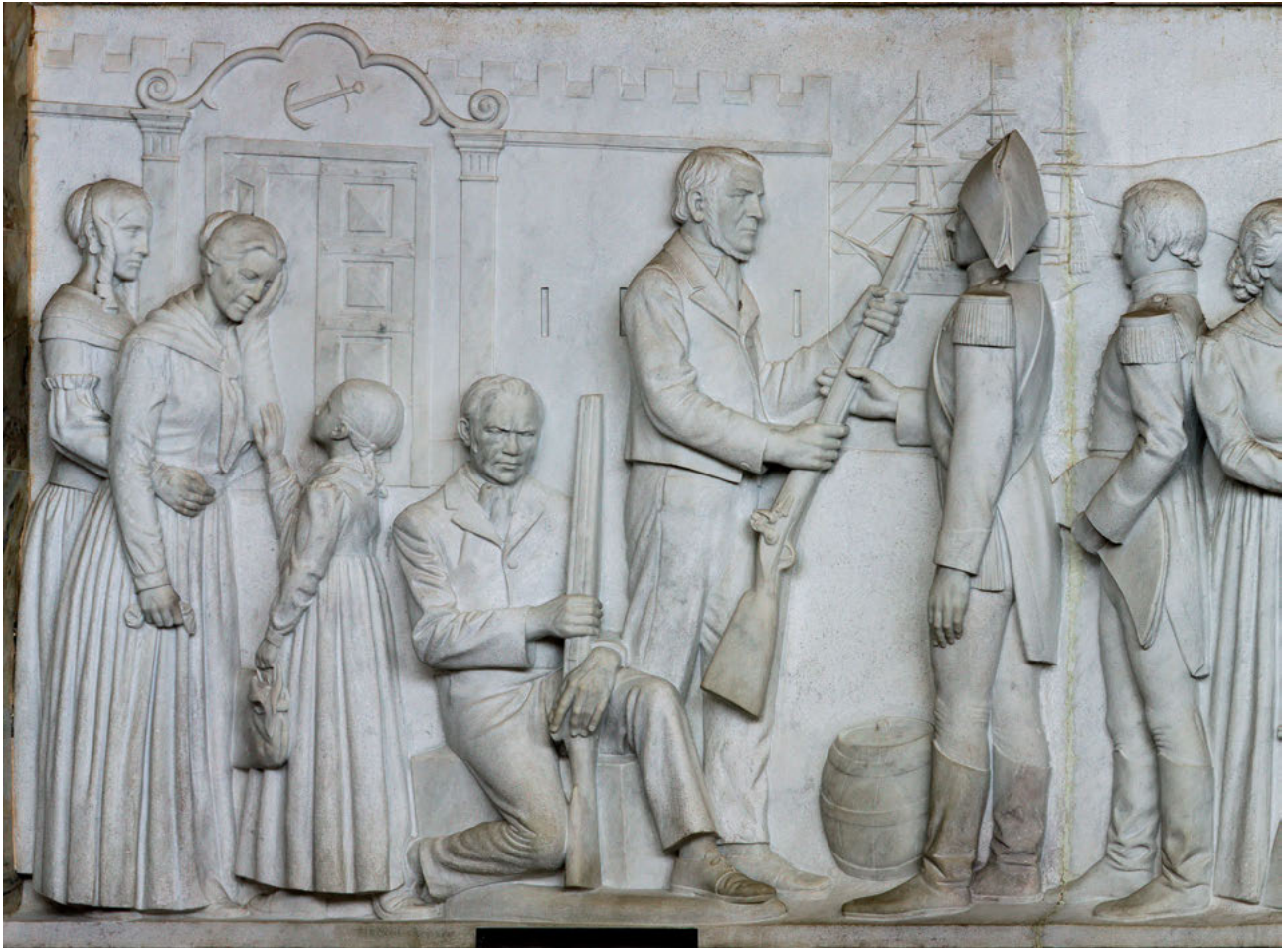
**Figure 288:**  
*Soutpansberg*.  
1949. Marble,  
w. 2.4 m (courtesy  
of VTM; photo  
Russell Scott)

*Town Journal* of 2.2.1839, two months prior to the arrival of the Uys party. Finally, this scene reveals that, despite the primary demand of historical accuracy by the SVK, repeated like a mantra in the *Official Guide*, there was not a scrutiny of available historical records to avoid factual contradiction: they wrongly identified the Grahamstown merchant, William Rowland Thompson, as the presenter of the Bible, and the likeness in the frieze was based on his portrait. It was a misrepresentation compounded by ceremonial events at the Monument. Even though it had in fact been Philipps who bestowed the Bible in 1837, it was Mr Justice Cyril Newton Thompson, great-grandson of William Rowland Thompson and well disposed to Afrikaners, who, allegedly like his forefather, presented a Bible to the Afrikaners to celebrate their earlier history. Invited by the SVK, he made this presentation at the laying of the foundation stone of the Voortrekker Monument on the centenary of the Battle of Blood River in 1938; and eleven years later at the Monument's inauguration in 1949, he delivered, supposedly on behalf of English-speaking South Africans, an address in Afrikaans.<sup>1075</sup>

***Soutpansberg***, mounted on the same corner structure as *Presentation* but next to the east frieze, facing southwards, introduces the Voortrekker leader Louis Trichardt (fig. 288). He left the Colony in September 1835 with a small group of only 'nine men capable of handling guns',<sup>1076</sup> plus their wives, thirty-four children and an unknown number of black slaves and servants. He was to lead them in a pioneering 'voortrek' as far from British rule as possible. Around May 1836, he established a small settlement in the Soutpansberg mountains near the Limpopo River, which marked the northernmost point of

<sup>1075</sup> *The Cape Argus* 24.12.1949, 'Two sections or one nation? Stirring appeal to English and Afrikaner'.

<sup>1076</sup> Ransford 1972, 38.



**Figure 289:** *Delagoa Bay*. 1950. Marble w. 2.88 m (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

Boer settlement in the narrative of the frieze. The panel represents Trichardt's importance as the leader by placing him centrally, and including a woman sitting next to him who can be identified as his wife Martha. They, the people around them and their objects are chosen to represent significant Voortrekker virtues and values. These begin with the importance of family life, represented by Trichardt and his wife. They are also evoked by the immaculate clothing of all participants, which demonstrates how they upheld the standards of white civilisation as flawlessly as if staged for a family photograph at home, not some 1 300 kilometres away in an inaccessible part of the country. A pair of tusks and a bundle of hides represent Voortrekker enterprise, supporting their community by hunting and trading, while less savoury aspects of Trichardt's community, such as likely links with slave trading, are avoided in the frieze. In Afrikaner narratives, Trichardt is a heroic figure who stood up against the British, undertook a gruelling trek, and met a tragic end.

The positive message is continued in the building in the background, which represents the first school set up by the trekkers. It is given status by being presented as far better built than the rudimentary wattle-and-daub dwellings with thatched roofs and cow dung floors which would have been typical structures in Trichardt's simple settlement. The twenty-one children under sixteen who were taught by the elderly wagonmaker Daniel Pfeffer are condensed into a single youth, engaged with books and placed purposefully in the foreground: amidst the wilderness he represents the Christian National education that was to play an important role in educating Afrikaner youth and preparing for the rise of Afrikanerdom. Like a lifestyle advertisement, *Soutpansberg* highlights the perfection of the trekkers' spiritual and educational achievements as well as their success in trading, and excludes anything which could distract from this view.



**Delagoa Bay**, the first scene of the east frieze (fig. 289), shows the end of the Trichardt trek after they had abandoned their settlement at Soutpansberg on 23 August 1837, to seek supplies and an outlet to the sea at the Portuguese harbour fort of Delagoa Bay, present-day Maputo. Their journey over the precipices of the northern Drakensberg and then across the Bombo Hills and the Nkomati River was exceptionally arduous and they only arrived on 13 April 1838. They also suffered from the devastating effect of tsetse fly on their cattle and malaria-carrying mosquitoes on themselves, eventually killing most of them. But instead of representing Trichardt's trek as a failure, the scene shows its safe arrival at the port, represented by a small party of five, including Trichardt's family and the schoolteacher Pfeffer, who is seated centrally next to the leader. Trichardt surrenders his muzzleloader to the Portuguese governor Gamitto, emphasising the peaceful intentions of the Voortrekkers and their willingness to cooperate with other people, while the governor's wife demonstrates her solidarity with the Boers by supporting Trichardt's ill wife. Staging the scene next to 'the sea which will bring freedom'<sup>1077</sup> makes it unique in the frieze, and represents the Voortrekkers' need for access to maritime trade. It ties this narrative to the agenda of the ZAR, the Voortrekker republic in the Transvaal area, where President Kruger set about building a railway line to Delagoa Bay to achieve independence from British ports, linking the scene to Afrikaner aspirations for a republic in the twentieth century, picked up also, as we shall see, in *Vegkop* and *Convention*.

While *Delagoa Bay* is misplaced chronologically, it must have been thought fitting to group the two scenes related to Trichardt, which also build on the themes of *Departure* and *Presentation*. The Boer exodus to achieve freedom and carry Christianity into the hinterland is complemented by their mission for Afrikaner education, their extensive travel to acquire land and to forge a link with a seaport, and their peaceful intent to negotiate with other powers, a common theme in the frieze.

**Vegkop** takes us back to the year 1836 (fig. 290). It marks the first victory of the Voortrekkers over African people they encountered in the interior, introduces a second Boer leader, Hendrik Potgieter, and focuses on Boer superiority in battle. It was in September 1836 under Potgieter's command that a party of up to forty men – possibly altogether some one hundred and fifty people with women, children and servants – arrived on their quest for suitable land in the area of Vegkop, the territory of the Ndebele king Mzilikazi. Provoked by the unexpected arrival of such a large party of armed Boers, who were probably also seeking revenge for an earlier Ndebele slaughter of a small

**Figure 290:** *Vegkop*. 1950. Marble, w. 4.56 m (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

<sup>1077</sup> Panele, item 10 (c. Dec. 1934–36): 'Die see wat vryheid sal aanbring'.

trekker party, the king sent out an experienced force against them, perhaps three to five thousand strong. On a day in the second half of October, the Ndebele attacked the fortified Boer encampment, set up as a laager of about fifty wagons in a circle, with thorn bushes placed under and between the wagons and interlaced between the spokes of the wheels. From this well-protected position the Voortrekkers with their superior weapons and united strategy were able to drive the attackers away, apparently in less than thirty minutes. As *Vegkop* shows the first Boer victory over an African force, it paves the way for further conquests, culminating in the frieze with *Blood River*.

The scene shows the advantage of Boer firepower, in this case with women and children assisting the men in battle, particularly in reloading their weapons, and of a fortified defence position from inside a laager. Choosing this focus allowed sculptor Hennie Potgieter to show the Voortrekkers dominating the scene, despite their far smaller numbers, while the vast army of the Ndebele is drastically diminished in visual terms as they attack the Boers from beyond the wall of towering wagons. In the unadulterated Afrikaner scenario of *Vegkop*, the Ndebele are banished to the margins in every sense, although in fact they had taken all the Voortrekkers' livestock and left them to starve, the background to *Negotiation*.

Isolated from the narrative of *Vegkop*, the two large figures at either side – the Boer woman loading a gun and the man holding a muzzleloader – act like statuesque models of Voortrekker civilisation, presented as a pair that acknowledges the roles of both men and women. The male figure represents Hendrik Potgieter, enhancing the glorious memory of this Boer leader, and his female partner may be his wife at the time, Elizabeth Helena Botha. Familial heritage is underlined by the choice of sitters, Carel and Ella Potgieter, grandchildren of Hendrik Potgieter. However, Sarel Cilliers, whom Gustav Gerdener calls the (true) 'Hero of Vegkop', is absent,<sup>1078</sup> his military prowess underplayed in favour of his later more liturgical role in *The Vow*. For the SVK and the sculptors, Potgieter, the redoubtable warhorse, was the undisputed leader at Vegkop, a choice which is also reflected in his election, with Retief, Pretorius and the Unknown Voortrekker, for the giant granite corner figures on the exterior 'guarding' the Monument's massive substructure.

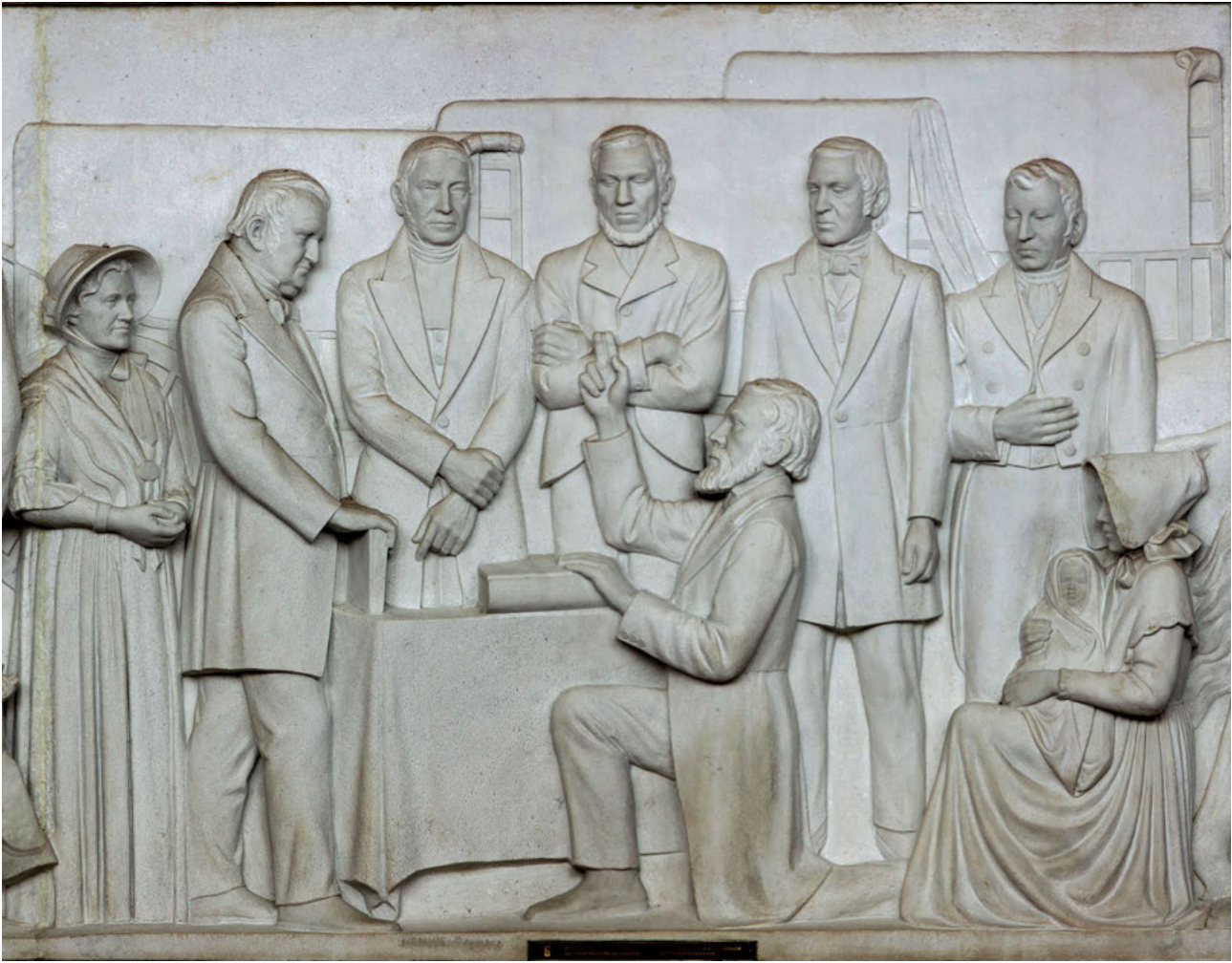
Setting Potgieter to the side made it possible to introduce a different figure in the central position, a boy representing Paul Kruger, who took part in the Battle of Vegkop when he was eleven, and whose importance in the ideology of the frieze has already been mentioned in relation to *Delagoa Bay*. The sitter for his portrait was again a family member, this time one of Paul Kruger's great-grandsons, Louis Jacobs. This inclusion made it possible for the frieze to include a later Afrikaner hero, the future president of the ZAR, a reference that also seems to look forward to the establishment of an independent Boer republic at the end of the narrative of the frieze.

**Inauguration**, which follows *Vegkop*, introduces the key figure of the Voortrekker narrative, Piet Retief, spotlighted by the scene's central position in the east frieze (fig. 291). This placement on a wall chiefly dedicated to Trichardt and Potgieter proclaims Retief's significance in the narrative of the Monument frieze, where he appears three times, and is a reference point in a number of other scenes, as well as being commemorated in the cenotaph of the lower hall. In contrast to most of the Eastern Cape trekkers, Retief was well educated, had developed connections with British and Boer authorities, and was a skilled writer who knew how to address political, legal and diplomatic matters to represent the Boers' cause. This is exemplified in his famous 'Manifesto of the emigrant farmers',<sup>1079</sup> outlining the Boers' exodus from the Cape Colony so cogently that it explains why Retief was elevated to overall leadership soon after his arrival in the main Voortrekker camp in the Highveld, as portrayed in *Inauguration*. The frieze is silent about his commercial misjudgements and financial irresponsibility, and his 'bewildering variety of occupations' in Grahamstown, as well as his neglect of indisputable court orders, which shed light on Retief's 'other' side.<sup>1080</sup>

<sup>1078</sup> Gerdener 1925 (first edition, 1919), 31–41 ('Die held van Vegkop').

<sup>1079</sup> See *Presentation* in Part II.

<sup>1080</sup> Gledhill 1980, 222.



The events that followed Retief's arrival are recorded in the Dutch diary of the Rev. Erasmus Smit, which constitutes one of the most important primary sources of Voortrekker history. In April 1837 Retief and his party joined the Voortrekkers' main camps, by then some 1 000 wagons and about 1 600 armed men, situated south of Thaba Nchu (Black Mountain), near the residence of the friendly Rolong chief Moroka II. Here a general assembly was held in the camp of the Voortrekker leader Gerrit Maritz, which decided that Retief should become governor and commander-general and Maritz remain in his established post as president of the Council of Justice. There were no clergymen amongst the trekkers and Retief's appointment required a cleric to administer the oath. On 21 May, Retief appointed Erasmus Smit as the first Dutch Reformed minister of the Boer congregation to facilitate this, although the Potgieter party disagreed because Smit was not ordained. The official inauguration of Retief took place in two sequential ceremonies, one constitutional, on Tuesday 6 June, and one ecclesiastical, on the following Sunday 11 June 1837, the latter in another camp about twenty kilometres south-west of the present town of Winburg.

According to Smit's diary, Retief was sworn into office as governor and commander-general of the trekkers' united forces on 6 June by Maritz, president of the Council of Justice, while Smit and the three justices of the peace witnessed the ceremony. As the inaugurated governor, Retief was then able to undertake the swearing in of the other candidates to their appointed offices. The following Sunday Retief took the religious oath administered by Reverend Smit. Although the new minister's description of Retief kneeling with his right hand raised to take the oath is the blueprint for *Inauguration*, the relief conflates the two events into one solemn ceremony: while Maritz, Smit

**Figure 291:**  
*Inauguration*. 1949.  
Marble, w. 2.82 m  
(courtesy of VTM;  
photo Russell Scott)



**Figure 292:** *Kapain*. 1949. Marble, w. 4.32 m (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

and the three justices of the peace refer to the constitutional inauguration, the kneeling Retief embodies the ecclesiastical. In merging the first ceremony with the second, *Inauguration* reveals how eyewitness reports could be manipulated to provide fitting topics for the frieze, and how the SVK, Moerdyk and the artists adapted historical facts to favour Afrikaner ideology. The primary theme of *Inauguration* was the rule of law upheld by the Voortrekkers and their early establishment of civic institutions, but the reference to the second ceremony carried a religious significance. It speaks volumes that among the first six scenes of the frieze are two, *Presentation* and *Inauguration*, whose 'liturgical' iconography calls attention to the crucial role of Dutch Reformed Christianity in the Afrikaner understanding of their Boer forefathers.

***Kapain*** is the second battle scene in the frieze (fig. 292) and historically related to the first, *Vegkop*. They frame *Inauguration*, which represents Retief's supreme position as newly appointed governor and commander-general, although the successful military encounters were both led by Potgieter. *Kapain* emphasises Potgieter's abilities, even though he was no longer officially the commander of the trekkers' united forces, and his goal of taking possession of the land across the Vaal River, while Retief's focus was always on Natal. The battle of *Kapain* took place some thirteen months after Potgieter's party had put Mzilikazi's Ndebele to flight at *Vegkop* in October 1836. In January 1837 Potgieter and Maritz had led a commando of one hundred and seven Boers, with Griqua, Koranna and Rolong support, which defeated Mzilikazi again. This time the Boers were the aggressors and massacred up to five hundred of the inhabitants at Mosega, a major Ndebele community in the Marico River valley, and captured about six to eight thousand cattle, more than they had lost at *Vegkop*. To gain further livestock and take full control of the northern Highveld, a new and larger Boer commando was formed later that year, the Potgieter party reinforced by the recently arrived compatriots of the Voortrekker leader Petrus Lafras (Piet) Uys. A running battle was fought against the Ndebele, as far north as the royal headquarters of Mzilikazi at *Kapain* (eGabeni). While this has been recorded as a truly epic event continuing for nine days, recent scholarship has clarified that it in fact lasted for just three, from 28–30 November.

*Kapain* was not discussed among the earlier topics for the frieze. It became part of the Monument's narrative only in 1942, when sculptor Hennie Potgieter read the 1938 biography of Hendrik Potgieter, co-authored by N.H. Theunissen and Carl Potgieter, grandson of the trek leader, who had given it to the artist. According to them, the Boers had for nine days challenged a vast army of





Ndebele, including some two thousand battle oxen with sharpened horns, an unlikely scenario, but one that captured the imagination of the sculptor. The sculptor then proposed this topic about the Boer leader who was his namesake, though he was not related. In its unexpected addition to all the topics that had been proposed earlier, *Kapain* is a good example of the unpredictable development of the final composition of the narrative of the frieze, which did not always follow the conclusions reached in the learned albeit biased debates of the SVK.

The Boers at Kapain, whether pitted against fighting oxen or not, were advantaged by their mobility on horseback, firepower and tactical moves. After three days of fierce fighting, in which the trekkers lost not a single soul but killed up to four hundred Ndebele, the Ndebele fled north. Although this battle was not part of the established Voortrekker story, the narrative played a significant role in the conceptualisation of the frieze as it addressed the Boers' right to the land: after their victory, Hendrik Potgieter considered that he had won by force of arms the territory previously occupied by Mzilikazi, territory which would form the basis of the ZAR and much of the Orange Free State. Further, in focus, style and composition, *Kapain* provided an iconic counterpart to *Vegkop*, just as the real battles did in strategic terms. While *Vegkop* offers an internal view of defensive laager tactics, where the enemy remains almost invisible, *Kapain* is an image of conflict shown close up in the heat of the battle. Hennie Potgieter's design of *Kapain* depends entirely on the exotic Potgieter and Theunissen story, which provided the racist basis of a scene in which Boers are shown to be superior to the barbaric practices of their African foes, even though it is immediately followed by a (somewhat patronising) scene which presents the civil interaction of white and black.

**Figure 293:** *Negotiation*. 1949. Marble, w. 2.73 m (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

**Negotiation**, the last scene of the east frieze (fig. 293), is by its position and diplomatic act related to the first, *Delagoa Bay*, but by its historical context to *Vegkop*, after the trekkers Pyrrhic victory over Mzilikazi's warriors, which left them in a death trap without livestock for food or transport. Moerdyk implies that it was Potgieter himself who undertook negotiations,<sup>1081</sup> to underline the Boer leader's willingness to confer and suggest that he only fought when forced to do so. We know, however, that the commander sent a member of his party, either his brother Hermanus or his son, Hermanus Jacobus, to Thaba Nchu, situated some two hundred kilometres south-west of Vegkop, to seek help for the stranded Boers. With some fifty wagons and up to one hundred and fifty people to move from Vegkop to Thaba Nchu, one would have expected substantial help from their Boer countrymen in the first place. But the accounts also tell of assistance from less expected quarters: the Wesleyan missionary, the Rev. James Archbell, offered his cattle, and Moroka, chief of the Rolong, not only supplied oxen, but also assisted with grain and milk.

Any Boer assistance and even the documented role of the missionary Archbell are omitted in the frieze, so that the Rolong are represented as the crucial point of contact. This left the focus on two parties only, three Boers from Vegkop and Moroka with two of his men, bringing the act of negotiation into the narrative's limelight. Instead of showing the Boers' humiliating helplessness, Moerdyk and the SVK were eager to affirm the oft-repeated claim that the Boers more readily negotiated with than opposed African people they came across on their treks. Their need for help is also obscured by the style and composition of *Negotiation*, as the armed Voortrekkers dominate the space of the scene, which is staged as if they are not supplicants in dire need, but Moroka's superiors. This chimes with the concept of the relationship with black people held by South African whites in power at the time the frieze was made, 'an idealized picture of paternalism, depicting the white master as caring for faithful servants, and punishing them when they erred'.<sup>1082</sup> The apparently biddable Rolong of *Negotiation* provide a converse prelude to *Murder of Retief* and *Bloukrans* in the south frieze, which show the Zulu carnage of Boer men, women and children.

**Blydevooruitsig**, mounted on the south-east corner (fig. 294), depicts a complaisant picture of manufacture and domestic life in an unidentified environment, while the historical context it refers to is explosive. On their way to Natal, the destination of the majority of the Voortrekkers, a trek of fifty-four wagons led by Retief approached the western end of today's Oliviershoek Pass in the Drakensberg. On 5 October 1837 he sent a small party of four wagons and fourteen men over the Drakensberg down to Port Natal, following them the next day. His goal was no less than to ensure the acquisition of land south of the Tugela River for the Voortrekkers in Natal. He first visited the British port for discussion with the settlers there, then travelled to uMgungundlovu, Dingane's city, to negotiate with the Zulu king. On 11 November, while the Retief party were camped on a plateau at Kerkenberg, Smit notes in his diary that they received 'encouraging news' from Retief in a letter 'written on the Tugela River, dated 2 November 1837'. Reading the letter in the 'beautiful valley' nearby, Smit named the place 'Blijde Vooruitzicht', literally 'joyful prospect'.<sup>1083</sup>

The arrival of this letter is portrayed in the centre of the panel. It may seem obvious that heartening news from Retief would relate to the prospect that Dingane would soon sign a grant of land, and that the trekkers could begin crossing the Drakensberg into Natal. But the chronology of events does not support the idea that Retief had any authorised information about this issue before he had met the Zulu king, which only happened from 5 to 8 November. As in *Inauguration*, two consecutive incidents are purposefully fused with each other, thus endowing *Blydevooruitsig* with the happiness felt in the assumed promise of the Zulu king to sign Natal over to the Boers (which, as we argue below, he never did), and in the verdant landscape that would become theirs. The backdrop of this panel, however, is ostentatiously bare, and avoids any indication of a beautiful location. Instead, it promotes a 'joyful prospect' of the kind of life the Voortrekkers hoped to lead

<sup>1081</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 48.

<sup>1082</sup> Giliomee 2003, 286.

<sup>1083</sup> Smit trans. Mears 1972, 64 (Dutch text: Smit ed. Scholtz 1988, 95).



**Figure 294:** *Blydevooruitsig*. 1949. Marble, w. 2.4 m (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

in Natal, focusing essentially on Boer culture, their industry, craftsmanship and hunting, enacted by the flanking figures, repeating themes similar to Trichardt's representation in *Soutpansberg* on the opposite corner wall. In the frieze, *Blydevooruitsig* does not need to be portrayed literally; it takes the joyful Boer future in Natal for granted in a scene dictated by Afrikaner fiction rather than historical accuracy.

The figure of a black servant who, apart from the groom in *Arrival*, is the only one in the frieze, was the necessary adjunct, inferior but indispensable, to assure a 'blydevooruitsig' from an Afrikaner perspective. Here the black servant is preordained to do the hard work, the back-breaking task of winding the 'riempie' leather thongs one way and then the other to make the Boers' long whips and to bind their yokes. Seen from behind and marginalised in the background, his half-naked body, clad only in trousers, locates him in a liminal zone between the well-dressed Voortrekkers and the unclothed African warriors who opposed them. One might surmise that it was no coincidence that the black man was engaged in stretching thongs for whips, which the Boers used to control their beasts. Such whips may even have harboured threats of violence against Africans, taking on a specific significance for later audiences who knew the stiff leather 'sjambok' as a symbol of apartheid state violence inflicted by police against protesters. Both the black man's specific labour and his marginal position anticipate the pernicious principles of apartheid. Its policy of strictly segregating different ethnic groups to ensure the 'purity' of the white race went hand in hand with job reservation, which, even though the economy depended on African labour, excluded them from more skilled and better paid employment.



**Figure 295:** *Debora Retief*. 1949. Marble, 2.4 m (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

*Debora Retief*, mounted on the south-east corner (fig. 295), connects *Blydevooruitsig* with the narrative of the south frieze. The panel portrays a very personal event recorded as having taken place in the same area one or two days after the unspecified ‘encouraging news’ of *Blydevooruitsig*. Smit reported on 13 November 1837 that, when he visited the ‘beautiful formation of rocks’ situated nearby, he saw that Debora, Retief’s daughter, had written the name of her father ‘in green oil paint’ on the rock hanging ‘over to the inside like a vault’ to mark his fifty-seventh birthday the day before.<sup>1084</sup> The distinctive rock formation refers to three individual rocks near Kerkenberg’s north-western foot; the vaulted one, later called ‘Retief rock’, still bears the inscription, restored and protected by a little glass case. This rock and the two adjoining cliffs, which provided a large sheltered space, reminded Smit of a vaulted church. The link to Christian values is also implied by the hovering Debora with the little boy holding the paint pot like an acolyte in some ritual event, which turns the charming birthday gesture into a solemn commemoration. It is almost as though Debora had foreknowledge of her father’s imminent death, and could visualise that her inscription would indeed become a memorial to him. In 1937, ahead of the centenary celebrations, it was commemorated with a plaque at Kerkenberg, fittingly unveiled by Johanna Christina (Pretorius) Preller, granddaughter of Debora and great-granddaughter of Piet Retief.

Family values are also embodied in the scene. Twenty-two-year-old Debora Retief, married in 1832 and mother of three by 1837, is surrounded by children, a reminder of their importance in the Voortrekker narrative. Here, as opposed to their often short-lived existence because of childhood

<sup>1084</sup> Smit trans. Mears 1972, 65 (Dutch text: Smit ed. Scholtz 1988, 96).



infirmities and their vulnerability in attacks such as *Bloukrans*, they look forward to taking up their roles in adult life. The young boy in the foreground drives an ox wagon made of ‘dolosse’ oxen and a ‘kakebeen’ wagon (knucklebones and jawbones from sheep or cattle), while the girl with the doll is a miniature of the idealised ‘volksmoeder’ who became the female icon of Afrikanerdom, similar to the seated mother with her baby in *Inauguration*. As discussed in Chapter 1, this concept also played a role in the centenary re-enactment of the treks when one of the replica wagons was named *Vrou en Moeder* (Wife and mother). *Debora Retief* thus weaves further Afrikaner virtues into the mythical fabric of the Great Trek, here represented by this harmonious and ordered scene of the younger generation.

*Descent*, the first scene in the south frieze (fig. 296), continues the narrative introduced in the corner panels. Following *Blydevooruitsig*’s ‘encouraging’ news, in late 1837 the Retief group and many other trekker parties began their descent from the south-eastern edge of the Drakensberg down into Natal, neglecting the governor’s order not to move before he had returned from Dingane. According to contemporary reports, some 1 500 wagons and 15 000 people relocated from the central plains into Natal.<sup>1085</sup> *Descent* does not portray the gritty and exhausting aspects of such hazardous crossings, but instead a picture-book rendering of well-dressed men and women strolling through or surveying a landscape in the foreground; even the two men with a wagon wheel seem more posed than hard at work. However, the tree branches replacing the back wheels that they had removed, and the labouring oxen in front of the wagon, remind viewers of the perils of the steep descent, and of all the difficulties the Voortrekkers faced during those treacherous crossings. Just like the pristine garments worn by the trekkers, however, the wagon is curiously unblemished as though hardly used, and the mountains in the distance suggest panoramic splendour rather than the challenges of traversing them on the treks – a panorama which gains even more momentum through the woman on the far right who is surveying it. *Descent* is presented as an untroubled exodus that would conclude the journey begun in *Departure* and lead Voortrekkers across the Drakensberg to what they believed was their God-given ‘promised land’.

*Treaty* portrays the Zulu king Dingane for the first time (fig. 297): he is signing the deed, usually called a treaty, granting large parts of Natal to Retief and his fellow countrymen. This treaty and the crucial question of whether it was a Voortrekker invention or not has been one of the most controversial topics of the Great Trek, since the historian George Cory, author of *The rise*

**Figure 296:** *Descent*. 1949. Marble, w. 4.76 m (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

<sup>1085</sup> Chase, *Natal* 1, 1843, 128.



**Figure 297:** *Treaty*. 1949. Marble, w. 2.14 m (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

*of South Africa*,<sup>1086</sup> concluded in 1923 that ‘the document believed all these years to be a Treaty was nothing more than a fake of some ten months later’, fabricated as concrete proof of the Boers’ right to settle in Natal.<sup>1087</sup> The available evidence leaves no doubt that all Dingane had offered Retief when he first visited in early November 1837 was conditional and unspecific: ‘Go and get my cattle [apparently taken by Tlôkwa chief Sekonyela], and then I will give you land *somewhere*,’<sup>1088</sup> leaving the Boer to imagine he meant Natal when, in fact, Dingane was probably thinking of the parts of Mzilikazi’s country recently taken by the Potgieter commandos at Mosega. Despite serious warnings, especially from his compatriots and later the Rev. Francis Owen – an English missionary living at that time at uMgungundlovu and entrusted by Dingane with writing letters to Retief – the Boer dismissed the idea of Dingane’s double-dealing and resolved on a second visit to the king to finalise the eagerly awaited land deed. He arrived at Dingane’s city on 3 February 1838 with a party of some seventy armed men and the English Halstead as interpreter, as well as African servants

<sup>1086</sup> Published in six volumes; Cory 1910–40.

<sup>1087</sup> Cory, ‘Ooreenkoms’ 1924, i. Cory’s argument and the controversy about this event is fully discussed in *Treaty* in Part II.

<sup>1088</sup> Owen ed. Cory 1926, 65 (italics in original).

and a large number of horses. It was a foolhardy show of strength when Dingane would no doubt already have been thinking about the actions and demands of the white arrivals.

We know very little about a possible signing of the land treaty in uMgungundlovu; even its dating on 4 or 6 February 1838 is uncertain. All we have are the contradictory notices from two witnesses who were not actually present. As recounted in full in *Treaty*, in 1840, William Wood, Owen's young interpreter, reported that a treaty was signed between Dingane and the Boers on 4 February, ceding 'a piece of land extending from the Tugela to the Umzimvubu'.<sup>1089</sup> The missionary Owen, however, wrote in his diary for 6 February 1838 that only then had two Boers told him that Dingane had promised this land to them and that a deed 'was to be signed' that day.<sup>1090</sup> But that morning the entire Retief party was put to death.

Whether a treaty was concluded or not before this massacre has remained unclear ever since. Ten months later, on 21 December, after the defeat of Dingane's army at Blood River, Andries Pretorius and his men arrived to take possession of uMgungundlovu. There, on top of the hill kwaMatiwane, the Zulu king's execution site, a small group of Boers searched for their fellow trekkers and identified the skeleton of Retief and his leather bag with a treaty inside it. The first account of this spectacular find was released by Pretorius and the Volksraad of Pietermaritzburg three weeks later, after 9 January 1839, and in English. The dispatch included a copy of a treaty dated uMgungundlovu, 4 February 1838, in which Dingane certified and declared that, when Retief had returned his cattle stolen by his enemy Sekonyela, he

thought fit to resign unto him, Retief, and his Countrymen, the place called Port Natal, together with all the Land annexed; that is to say, from the Togela to the Omsovoobo Rivers, Westward, and from the Sea to the North, as far as the Land may be useful and in my possession. – Which I did by this, and give unto them for their everlasting property.<sup>1091</sup>

The original treaty is only known through copies which are for the most part replications of each other. While the treaty copies, claimed to be exact duplications and certified by different eyewitnesses, were circulated and published in the press, the fate of the original treaty found by the Pretorius party fades from view, and was mysteriously lost some sixty years later. The history of the treaty document and its copies, which we trace in detail in *Treaty*, begs so many questions that it throws its very existence into serious doubt. But, while we argue that the irresolvable difficulties repudiate a ratified land deed, we advocate that there was very likely a draft treaty brought by Retief to his meeting with Dingane, and that it was this that was found by a small group of trekkers. Even if it was not signed before Retief met his death, it would have sustained the belief that the Voortrekkers had a right to occupy Natal. And the validity of this land claim was supported by the ultimately more than three thousand treaty copies, disseminated worldwide to replace the vanished original.

The scene of *Treaty* in the Voortrekker Monument reflects none of these uncertainties. In the narrative of the frieze it was paramount that a detailed 'reconstruction' of Dingane signing the document was created to verify the event, solemnly witnessed by representatives of both parties, including the English Halstead, and given permanent form in marble. It is an act of desperation when Moerdyk emphasises the genuineness of the 'historical' objects in the relief, such as the table, Dingane's chair and Retief's leather bag, as indisputable 'proof' that the representation was authentic,<sup>1092</sup> though the authenticity of these objects is as contestable as the treaty. The scene also provided further evidence of the Boers' peaceful intentions and readiness to negotiate to reach mutual agreements with African rulers, and in this case evidence of the converse, African duplicity. Like the frieze in general, *Treaty* thus focuses on two opposing concepts: white civilisation

**1089** Bird, *Annals* 1, 1888, 379.

**1090** Owen ed. Cory, 1926, 108.

**1091** *De Zuid-Afrikaan* 16 February 1839 (see Chase, *Natal* 2, 1843, 71–72).

**1092** *Official Guide* 1955, 49.







Complex in Pietermaritzburg. It was presumably used as yet another ‘authentic’ detail to identify Retief in the frieze, even though a glass flask could scarcely have survived the massacre. However, some of its Masonic symbols have been deliberately disfigured or omitted, probably because, at the time the frieze was conceived, the Dutch Reformed Church and the Afrikaner Broederbond opposed Freemasonry. We trace the rich history of Retief’s Masonic bottle in detail in *Treaty*, but even this summary demonstrates how historical authenticity and contemporary censorship could clash, and how patrons and artists attempted to reconcile them in the frieze.

When the Zulu first appear in the narrative of the frieze they are the victors, while the Voortrekkers are utterly overcome, first deceived in *Treaty*, then killed to a man in *Murder of Retief*. The extreme violence of their defeat triggered the headline ‘Gruesome Friezes in Voortrekker Monument’ in the *Rand Daily Mail* on 15 February 1945, after one of its reporters had seen the full-scale plasters installed at the Monument. He objected to *Murder of Retief* and the adjacent *Bloukrans* panel, because he thought they would lead to ‘passions of hatred and antagonism’ against the Zulu.<sup>1096</sup> But one might ask whether this was not in fact part of the purpose of the narrative: it was crucial for the claims of the Voortrekker story that the Zulu should be understood as dishonest and brutal.

*Bloukrans*, next on the south frieze (fig. 299), focuses on the surprise attacks of about tenthousand Zulu to eradicate the Voortrekkers in Natal, killing the Boer families and their black servants who had crossed the Drakensberg and were camping in the area of the Bloukrans River. This second massacre happened only ten days after the massacre of Retief’s party, when most of the trekker parties felt safe in the belief that they could settle permanently in Natal, not yet knowing that Dingane had murdered Retief and his men. As the Zulu forces struck around midnight, the trekkers were asleep and entirely unprepared, so that the losses were appalling: 531 people were killed, 185 children, 56 women and 40 men, as well as 250 servants including Zulu herdsmen and families. Several eyewitnesses later described the atrocities, few, however, more graphically than Jacobus Boshof, who reported to the *Graham’s Town Journal* of 2 July 1838:

As the day began the Zulus were perceived at some of the scattered wagons. They had surrounded them, and the cries of women and children were heard mingled with the reports of the few shots that were fired now and then; but the word ‘mercy’ was unknown to these miscreants. Not even

**Figure 299:**  
*Bloukrans*. 1950.  
Marble, w. 4.61 m  
(courtesy of VTM;  
photo Russell Scott)

<sup>1096</sup> NARSSA, BNS 146/73/3 has the article’s first part with a photograph of the full-scale plaster; the full article is available in the relevant copy of the *Rand Daily Mail* at the National Library, Cape Town.

satisfied with stabbing their wetted broad spears into the bosoms of unresisting women, or piercing the bodies of infants who clung to them, they cut off the breasts of some of the women, and took some of the helpless babies by the heels and dashed out their brains against the iron bands of the wagon wheels.<sup>1097</sup>

The sole focus on the carnage of women and children in *Bloukrans* relates strongly to reports such as this. No other scene shows Boer women and children facing certain death, or depicts them in such a pitiful state. This is underlined by the vivid contrast with the impeccable female demeanour and attire throughout the frieze, even in scenes of conflict such as *Vegkop* and *Saailaer*. But here young girls beg for mercy or hide their faces in horror, while a distraught old woman, desperately clutching a baby, crouches before a warrior with raised spear, and a young woman lies prostrate in the foreground, her hair in disarray and her clothing torn, revealing her legs and breast, motifs that capture her suffering and inevitable demise. *Bloukrans* is the scene which aroused fierce public debate after the *Rand Daily Mail* report of 15 February 1945 mentioned above. Opposition was particularly directed at the brutal motif of a Zulu who ‘took some of the helpless babies by the heels and dashed out their brains against the iron bands of the wagon wheels’. When, after many complaints, Prime Minister Jan Smuts himself ordered the removal of the obnoxious motif in early 1946, the SVK initially resisted its replacement because they had documented evidence of its historical authenticity, such as Jacobus Boshof’s report quoted above. The committee put off replacing it with a frenzied Zulu torching a wagon for such a long time that it delayed the timely completion of this marble scene and its delivery for the Monument’s inauguration on 16 December 1949.

As with *Murder of Retief*, we can recognise a Christian analogy in *Bloukrans*, in this case the New Testament Massacre of the Innocents by King Herod. However, the scene is not only a moral tale about good and evil but marks a racist identification of black with heathen malevolence. The omission of any male Voortrekkers attempting to defend the camp – only a young boy holding his sister is shown – intensifies the viciousness of the Zulu and presents the Boers purely as victims, hence justifying, even necessitating, Voortrekker retribution in order to survive in the face of such ruthlessness. This massacre, together with that in *Murder of Retief*, warranted the Boers taking revenge at Blood River and endorsed the narrative’s claim that the emigrant farmers only took arms when attacked.

**Teresa Viglione**, the last scene of the south frieze (fig. 300), continues by chronology and content the sequence of *Treaty*, *Murder of Retief* and *Bloukrans*, as her story is part of the traumatic massacre in the Bloukrans area. On 26 February 1838 Smit wrote about Teresa Viglione, who was part of a group of Italian traders, that she ‘went around everywhere’ forewarning the trekkers of the Zulu attack, and attended to the wounded children with ‘her medicines, salves, and ointments’, saying that she ‘has earned much praise in the camps’.<sup>1098</sup> She is portrayed as she leaves a camp, apparently not yet targeted by the Zulu attackers, to alert trekker parties that Dingane’s impi are on the warpath. Her departure is witnessed by three Boer women and children, their anxiety suggested by the way the young ones cling to their mothers, who hold them close. While they enact the role of ‘volksmoeders’ protecting their children, Teresa Viglione enacts a manly horsemanship not portrayed for any Boer women in the frieze, as she rides heroically from camp to camp, showing white solidarity in the face of the Zulu onslaught.

It is surprising that this little-known foreign woman was selected as the central figure to exemplify bravery, alacrity and community spirit, countering Zulu perfidy with white humanity, when there are records of Boer women who acted equally selflessly and courageously at Bloukrans. Setting aside a whole scene for this topic is even more unexpected when neither they nor Viglione were ever suggested as a topic for the frieze in SVK records. But on a number of occasions, notably by Moerdyk in the *Official Guide*,<sup>1099</sup> attention is drawn to the idea that the Monument and its frieze were not

<sup>1097</sup> Bird, *Annals* 1, 1888, 404.

<sup>1098</sup> Smit trans. Mears 1972, 91–92 (Dutch text: Smit ed. Scholtz 1988, 120).

<sup>1099</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 31.



**Figure 300:** Teresa Viglione. 1949. Marble, w. 2.07 m (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

creating an entirely parochial view of the treks, but acknowledging the role that others played in their story. Although omitting mention of the English who fought at Blood River, thus reserving all its glory for the Boers, the frieze included the English settlers in Grahamstown who bestowed a Bible on Jacobus Uys in *Presentation*; the Portuguese who helped the suffering Trichardt party in *Delagoa Bay*; Thomas Halstead, the English trader and translator, who died with Retief and his men in *Murder of Retief*; and the two English commissioners who concluded the Sand River Convention with Andries Pretorius – as well as Africans, the Rolong chief Moroka, who assisted the Boers in *Negotiation*, and Mpande, later crowned by the Boers as Zulu king, as an ally against Dingane. Choosing to show the support of the wife of an Italian trader endorsed the Boer cause and emphasised the range of consensus on the historical rightness and importance of the Great Trek.

**Dirkie Uys**, installed on the south-west corner (fig. 301), depicts the killing of the Voortrekker leader Piet Uys and his son Dirkie by Zulu, which happened about two months later at Italeni, situated some one hundred kilometres north-east of the Bloukrans area as the crow flies. Their deaths were the consequence of an attempt to avenge the terrible losses the Voortrekkers had recently suffered, at kwaMatiwane and then at Bloukrans. Two commandos, totalling some three hundred and fifty mounted Boers, led by Piet Uys and Hendrik Potgieter, set out against the Zulu, but ran into an ambush laid by Dingane's army, estimated at 6 000 to 7 000 strong. Sensing a trap, Potgieter



**Figure 301:** *Dirkie Uys*. 1949. Marble, w. 2.4 m (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

withdrew – leading to this sortie being remembered as the commando that took flight (Vlugkommando) – but Uys and his men were attacked from all sides, and some ten men including Uys and his son Dirkie were killed.

Conflicting reports and a desire to present the Voortrekkers in a positive light, led to the transformation of Dirkie Uys into a new hero of the Great Trek. It was variously claimed that he turned back to defend his wounded father, that he was on horseback and shot three Zulu, that he killed them with his rifle-butt, that the skirmish happened on the ground, or that it did not happen at all, because he was killed when the rest of the Uys party raced away. It was fertile ground for the creation of a legend to salvage the Italeni disaster, ignoring reports that did not match that notion. So Laurika Postma has depicted a courageous boy defending his dying father by shooting at the attacking Zulu, although it is clear that he will be overcome. Being brave under dire circumstances and showing such loyalty to his father even unto death were characteristics that upheld the fine qualities of the Voortrekkers and created suitable role models for young Afrikaners. *Dirkie Uys* is an example of how a shifting blend of later stories lent themselves to the invention of a new national hero, converting Italeni from the ignominy of the Vlugkommando into a worthy chapter of the Great Trek.

**Marthinus Oosthuizen** achieved historical recognition in the context of *Bloukrans* (fig. 302), on the morning of 17 February 1838, when a substantial Zulu force was launching an attack on the Van Rensburg party, situated on the outcrop later called ‘Rensburgkoppie’, near present-day Estcourt.<sup>1100</sup> While there are again conflicting reports of what actually happened, Marthinus easily became

<sup>1100</sup> Photograph in Visagie 2011, 347.



**Figure 302:**  
*Marthinus Oosthuizen*. 1949. Marble, w. 2.4 m (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

another heroic Afrikaner figure, his loyalty to his fellow Boers equalling Dirkie's to his father. The widely accepted story is that the youthful Marthinus, when approaching the Van Rensburgs through some 1 500 attacking Zulu, saw Johannes van Rensburg holding up a reversed gun and understood that their ammunition was spent. So he dashed back through the impi to gather powder and shot about a mile away, then raced back again to Rensburgkoppie, still miraculously unscathed, enabling its defenders to beat off the Zulu. Other Boers who were recorded as taking part in the rescue were suppressed to augment his deed so that, as Moerdyk would write in the *Official Guide*, it was Oosthuizen's 'heroism [that] saved the Van Rensburg trek from extermination'.<sup>1101</sup>

The stories of the deeds of Marthinus Oosthuizen and Dirkie Uys inevitably present them as boys, although Marthinus at twenty was undoubtedly considered a man of fighting age amongst the trekkers, and possibly even Dirkie at fifteen. Life on the treks cut childhoods short and visited adult responsibilities on young people early. Coming after the dreadful disasters of *Murder of Retief* and *Bloukrans*, their 'heroic deeds' suggest new hope, all the more so when these young men could be seen to represent future generations of Voortrekkers. While both scenes carry a similar message, it is odd that *Dirkie Uys* (April 1838) is followed by *Marthinus Oosthuizen* (February 1838). But the reversed chronology could be seen to better prepare the viewer for the events leading up to the *Battle of Blood River*, the glorious climax of the frieze. However heroic, the deaths of Uys and his son belonged more with the disasters of the south frieze, while Oosthuizen's successful rescue prefigured the victories that lay ahead in the west frieze.

<sup>1101</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 51.



**Figure 303:** *Women spur men on*. 1949. Marble, w. 2.25 m (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

***Women spur men on***, like *Saailaer* at the other end of the west frieze (fig. 303), and *Debora Retief* also, is a most unusual topic, unexpected in a frieze that focuses on the deeds of men. Moreover, it did not have a specific chronology to define its place in the narrative of the frieze. It was recorded, however, that after the setbacks of so many deaths and defeats, the men considered leaving Natal, but the women refused, demanding that Dingane's massacres be avenged. So the scene portrays a group of despondent men spurred on to new efforts by their womenfolk. Saying that 'Afrikaner women were a driving force behind the trek' and not 'mere adjuncts of their husbands', Hermann Giliomee emphasises their resolve in relation to the British annexation of Port Natal in 1838. He writes that the commander there

reported that opposition to British rule was particularly strong among Afrikaner women. They had experienced great want and insecurity, but 'they all rejected with scorn the idea of returning to the Colony.' He added: 'If any of the men began to droop or lose courage, they urged them on to fresh exertions and kept alive the spirit of resistance within them.'<sup>1102</sup>

<sup>1102</sup> Giliomee 2003, 169.

When on 8 August 1843, the British commissioner Henry Cloete urged the Boers in Pietermaritzburg to accept British rule of Natal, a group of trekker women interrupted the talks and declared that they would never live under their rule. The declamatory woman in the centre of *Women spur men on* brings to mind Susanna Smit's declaration on that occasion that they would rather walk barefoot back over the Drakensberg than submit. However, we know from 1930s documents that the intention of the SVK was to portray the earlier vengefulness of the women, which would best fit here in the sequential narrative of the frieze, and follow chronologically from the preceding scenes. In the *Official Guide* Moerdyk confuses the incident with the later event,<sup>1103</sup> and Hennie Potgieter claims that both are inferred.<sup>1104</sup> This suggests that there might have been some awareness on the part of the sculptors that the reliefs could conflate different episodes, even if contradicting historical and chronological evidence, which we have observed occurs in a number of scenes. It is also possible to read *Women spur men on* as a link between the disasters of kwaMatiwane, Bloukrans and Italeni, and the arrival in the next scene of the new commander Pretorius, who would lead the Voortrekkers to victory at Blood River. This reading is further strengthened by the low line of the hills in the background which runs from the scene of the implacable women through that of Pretorius and straight to *Blood River*. It even appears, although interrupted by *Church of the Vow*, to continue to *Saailaer*.

There may have been yet another reason for emphasising the important role given to women in the story of the Trek as presented in the frieze: as legendary forebearers they may prefigure the part played by women during the Anglo-Boer War. Giliomee reminds us that 'the indomitable resistance of the Boer women was the decisive factor in the war', as they were 'determined that their husbands and sons had to continue fighting, even to the death'.<sup>1105</sup> He continues that 'the great suffering and privation that they were prepared to endure baffled men, both Boer and British'. It was this very spirit of the Boer women that offered the Afrikaner blueprint for *Women spur men on* and gave it ongoing relevance, beyond any explicit reference to an identifiable historical event.

**Arrival** depicts the entrance of Andries Wilhelmus Pretorius to the laager of the Voortrekker leader Jacobus Christoffel Potgieter, situated on the east bank of the Little Tugela River, some eighteen kilometres west of today's Estcourt (fig. 304). After Piet Retief and Piet Uys had been killed by the Zulu, Gerrit Maritz had died of illness, and Hendrik Potgieter had left for the Transvaal under something of a cloud because of his retreat at Italeni, the Voortrekkers were sorely in need of a new leader if they were to take the revenge the women were calling for. Pretorius arrived with his large party on 22 November 1838, and was almost immediately elected commandant ('Hoofd-Officier of Kommandant') to lead a commando against Dingane, later called the 'Winning Commando' (Wenkommando) to obvert the disgrace of the Vlugkommando at Italeni. This makes the scene mandatory to pave the way for the narrative climax of the frieze, *Blood River*.

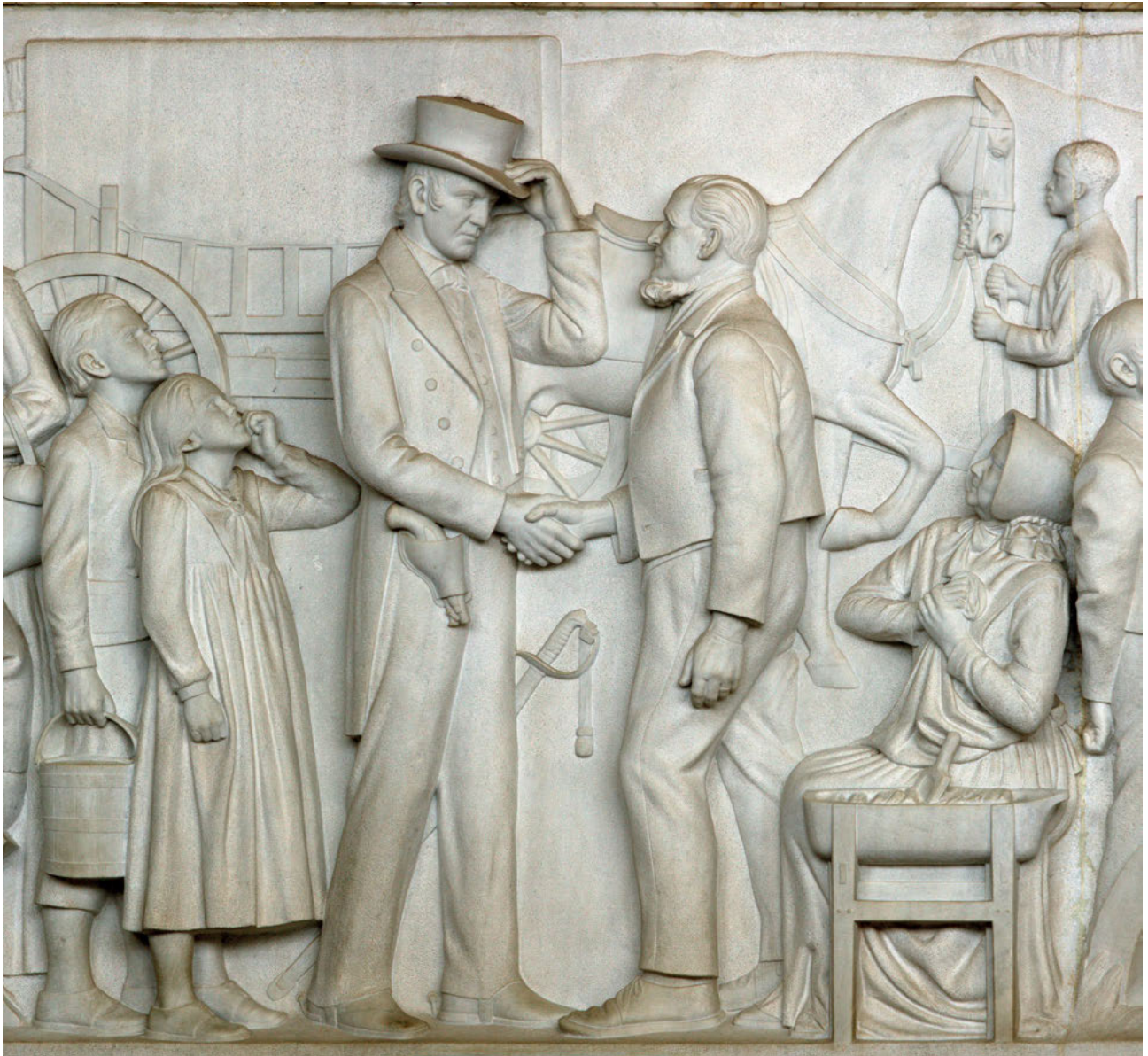
In the scene, Pretorius is picked out as a man of standing by his formal attire, including a tailcoat and a top hat which adds to his already significant height, so that he dominates the group. He also wears a sword and pistol, suggesting his military prowess, and has a fine stallion held in the background by a black servant, the only one in the frieze other than the 'breier' in *Blydevoornuisig*. The man who greets Pretorius and those who watch his arrival are in everyday Voortrekker dress and clearly busy with everyday tasks, suggested by the bucket the boy holds and the butter container next to the elderly woman, representing their hard-working existence. But they pause in their chores to respond to the new leader who was destined to change the fortunes of the hard-pressed Voortrekkers.

**The Vow**, the next scene (fig. 305), which marks the climax of Voortrekker Christianity in the frieze, represents an event that has been as much disputed as it has been revered in the Afrikaner story of the Great Trek. On 28 November 1838, a few days after Pretorius was elected commandant of the Boer parties at the Tugela River, he had the Wenkommando ready 'to march in war

1103 *Official Guide* 1955, 51.

1104 Potgieter 1987, 30.

1105 Giliomee 2003, 256.



**Figure 304:** *Arrival*. 1949. Marble, w. 2.34 m (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

against Dingaan',<sup>1106</sup> ultimately mustering '468 Afrikaner, 3 Englishmen ..., some 60 blacks who were entailed by Alexander Biggar from Port Natal, and an unknown amount of non-white servants (blacks as well as Hottentots or Coloureds)'.<sup>1107</sup> It was on Sunday, 9 December, at the Wasbank River, about one hundred kilometres north-east of the Tugela River base, that the Vow was taken. The most detailed report in *De Zuid-Afrikaan* of 14 June 1839 was by Jan Gerritse Bantjes, Pretorius' personal secretary who would later serve as the clerk of the Voortrekker Volksraad. It described how Pretorius told Cilliers, Landman and Joubert that, before they were to conduct the Sunday morning services for the men in three separate groups, they should lead them in prayer to ask God for help, and that Pretorius wanted to make a Vow to build a church and celebrate the day in God's honour if they were victorious. After the three leaders consented, Cilliers conducted his service in the limited space of Pretorius' tent and made the Vow the commandant had in mind, though there are no reports that Landman and Joubert did the same. Pretorius noted in his dispatches

<sup>1106</sup> Bird, *Annals* 1, 1888, 438.

<sup>1107</sup> Liebenberg 1977, 32.





about Blood River, released after 9 January 1839, that they had taken a Vow to consecrate the day to the Lord and build Him a church if they defeated the Zulu, ‘which vow we now also *hope* to honor’.<sup>1108</sup>

These accounts are discussed in full in *The Vow*, but neither man recorded the wording of the Vow at the time. This was only done by Cilliers on his deathbed in 1871, when his memories were written down with the help of three friends, and published five years later in Hofstede’s Dutch ‘History of the Orange Free State’.<sup>1109</sup> Here we read:

It was on 7th December. I complied to the best of my weak capacity ... I took my place on a gun carriage. The 407 men of the force were assembled around me. I made the promise in a simple manner, as solemnly as the Lord enabled me to do. As nearly as I can remember, my words were these:

<sup>1108</sup> Thompson, 1985 154 (our italics). Dutch text in Breytenbach c. 1958, 273 (welke geloften wy nu ook hopen te betalen).

<sup>1109</sup> Hofstede 1876, 50–66 ‘Journaal van Wijlen den Heer Charl Celliers, oud-ouderling der N.G. Gemeente Kroonstad, Oranje Vrijstaat’.

**Figure 305:** *The Vow*. 1949. Marble, w. 2.28 m (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

'My brethren and fellow countrymen, at this moment we stand before the Holy God of heaven and earth, to make a promise, if He will be with us and protect us, and deliver the enemy into our hands so that we may triumph over him, that we shall observe the day and the date as an anniversary in each year and a day of thanksgiving like a Sabbath, in His honour; and that we shall enjoin our children that they must take part with us in this, for a remembrance even for our posterity; and if anyone sees a difficulty in this, let him return from this place. For the honour of His name shall be joyfully exalted, and to Him the fame and the honour of the victory must be given.' Sarel Cilliers.<sup>1110</sup>

To the present day Cilliers' recollection of the Vow has been considered the authoritative edition by most. Yet it is perplexing that he claims, in contradiction of the consistent accounts of Bantjes and Pretorius, that he addressed all the men together two days earlier, not on the Sunday, but on 7 December, a Friday;<sup>1111</sup> that he made the vow not in the commandant's tent but from on top of a cannon; and that he does not even mention a church of the vow. Nevertheless, it is his version which provided the narrative for the frieze scene: with Cilliers on top of the 'Ou Grietjie' gun-carriage, his hands raised toward heaven, and seven of the said four hundred and seven Voortrekkers assembled around him. Cilliers' heroic portrayal, and the respectful demeanour of the surrounding Boers with lowered eyes or bowed heads, emphasises how the Wenkommando against Dingane was later justified: as a righteous act to avenge the Voortrekker deaths shown in *Murder of Retief, Bloukrans* and *Dirkie Uys*, and as punishment of barbaric heathens by God's chosen people. Religious zeal is linked to military supremacy. Yet, as Leonard Thompson pointed out in 1985, the first reference to the celebration of the vow comes rather late. Only in 1864 did the Dutch Reformed Church in Natal agree that 'the 16th December should be celebrated as a day of thanks'.<sup>1112</sup> It also seems significant that the first recorded name for this day in 1875, 'Dingaans Day' (Dingaans-Dag), does not refer to the all-important vow, but to the defeated Zulu king.<sup>1113</sup> It was the apartheid regime which replaced the traditional name in 1952 by inventing an Afrikaner 'Day of the Covenant' (Geloftesdag) and giving it the legal status of a Sabbath.

Another decisive shift in the reception of the vow came from the Dutch Reformed theologian Gustav Gerdener. In his 1919 biography of Cilliers, Gerdener incorporated the additional promise that a dedicated church would be built in Cilliers' vow, claiming that it 'was without doubt part of the vow, but was left out by Cilliers in his deathbed statement'.<sup>1114</sup> It is a telling example of nationalist history that the Gerdener version of the vow masqueraded as the original Cilliers' text in all the Afrikaans editions of the *Official Guide*, while the English editions reprinted a literal translation of Cilliers' vow without mention of a church. Happily, Postma's sculpture did not have to engage with such inconsistencies in the wording of the Vow, so that she could present it unhindered as the narrative prerequisite for *Blood River* and *Church of the Vow*.

**Blood River**, the iconic battle of the Great Trek, marks the high point of the narrative, centre stage in the west frieze (fig. 306). The landslide victory over Dingane's army on 16 December 1838 avenged the many Voortrekker deaths at the hands of the Zulu. Specifically taking vengeance for Retief and in his memory, *Blood River* faces the central scene in the east frieze, *Inauguration*, which portrays his swearing-in as governor and supreme commander of the Voortrekkers in June 1837. Exactly between them in the lower hall lies his cenotaph, which is also on the axis of Retief's death in the centre of the south frieze. As for *The Vow*, the story of the battle is based on the two contemporary eyewitness reports we have from 1839, a shorter one from Pretorius and a more elaborate one from his secretary Bantjes. Six days after the vow had been taken, the Wenkommando, marching in five divisions, arrived at the west bank of the Ncome (Cattle) River, situated some eighty

<sup>1110</sup> Nathan 1937, 252 (reprinted on p.5 in the English editions of the *Official Guide*, 1955–76). Dutch text: Hofstede 1876, 57–58.

<sup>1111</sup> In the 1838 calendar, Sunday was on 9 December.

<sup>1112</sup> Thompson 1985, 165–166 (quote translated from Lion Cachet 1882, 201).

<sup>1113</sup> Bailey 2002, 38.

<sup>1114</sup> Gerdener 1925 (first edition, 1919), 68 n \*.



kilometres north-west of uMgungundlovu. Partly protected by a donga and the river, later called Blood River, the Voortrekkers established a strong defensive position for their laager.

At dawn the following day, under instructions from Dingane, although he did not lead them personally, the Zulu began their assault. Bantjes recounts:

**Figure 306:** *Blood River*. 1950. Marble, w. 4.29 m (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

Sunday, the 16th, was a day as if ordained for us. The sky was open ... The enemy then approached at full speed, and in a moment they had surrounded the camp on all sides ... Their approach, although frightful on account of the great number, yet presented a beautiful appearance. ... I could not count them, but it is said that a Kafir prisoner had given the number of thirty-six regiments, which regiments may be calculated at from nine to ten thousand men [in toto]. The battle now commenced, and the cannons were discharged from every gate of the camp. The battle then became violent, even the firing from the muskets from our side as well as from theirs. After this had been kept up for full two hours by the watch, the chief commandant, as the enemy was continually bestorming the camp, and he was afraid that we should get short of ammunition, ordered that all the gates of the camp should be opened, and the fighting with the Kafirs take place on horseback. This was done, and to our regret, they took to flight so hastily that we were obliged to hunt after them ... The next day we counted the number of the slain; those who had been killed about or near the camp, of which some have not been counted, with those who had been overtaken and killed, we found amounted to (the lowest certain number) more than 3,000, besides the wounded.<sup>1115</sup>

Bantjes' report, by detailing the strength of the Zulu army at thirty-six regiments, emphasises the Boer achievement in utterly routing the Zulu, and sending them fleeing with some three thousand dead left behind.

The sculptor's approach avoided an anecdotal portrayal of the battle, preferring the high point of a cavalry charge that would match the battle's already legendary status. Eyewitness reports of Boers charging from all the open gates of the laager were abandoned in favour of an orderly formation reminiscent of some grand historical painting, all the more so as it is led by Pretorius in his top hat, brandishing his sabre. His delayed departure alone on an unruly horse when he was wounded in a heroic confrontation with a Zulu – recorded by himself and Bantjes – has been set aside so that he could lead an impressive image of galloping horses and upright riders in tight formation

<sup>1115</sup> Bird, *Annals* 1, 1888, 448–450.

to present a decisive victory over the Zulu, many of whom collapse in anticipation of their defeat or flee at the Boer onslaught. It is a more valiant and proactive engagement than shooting from the protection of the laager, as shown in *Vegkop*, but far more orderly than *Kapain*. In the *Official Guide* Moerdyk insists on the historical accuracy of the scene, and claims that the 'recognized Boer technique here symbolises the war between civilization and barbarism'.<sup>1116</sup> But Nico Coetzee clarifies that the representation 'has only the vaguest probable historical basis': the message is 'that thus did the forces of order, the white man on his horse, overcome the dark forces of chaos! It is propaganda'.<sup>1117</sup>

*Church of the Vow* follows on *The Vow* and *Blood River*, as the religious manifestation and physical memorial of both (fig. 307). Traditionally, this church – from the 1930s to the present day called 'Geloftekerk(ie)' (Church of the Vow) – has been identified as an early structure on erf 34 Longmarket Street in Pietermaritzburg, the capital of the short-lived Boer republic Natalia. This connection, however, has been questioned for a long time, even by members of the SVK in 1947.<sup>1118</sup> The 1839 accounts of Pietermaritzburg, founded the year before, are diverse, ranging from a 'large, pleasant, and well-watered village'<sup>1119</sup> to 'a stockade camp, simply a collection of crude shanties made of wood and rushes and plastered with cow dung'.<sup>1120</sup> In the same year the Volksraad had decided 'to build a Reformed Church' in Pietermaritzburg,<sup>1121</sup> a project confirmed by several overlapping and conflicting statements. We trace the complex documentation in *Church of the Vow*. In summary, while early documents of the Natal Volksraad and registers of erven in Pietermaritzburg acknowledge erf 34 Longmarket Street as property of the Dutch Reformed Church, it was not declared for a church, but for a parsonage for the minister. The structure on that erf was officially permitted to be used as a house for worship, however, until a proper church would have been built. But this did not happen before 1861 when a church was duly allowed to be erected next to it on the same erf, which was still designated for the parsonage. In short, for the first twenty years Pietermaritzburg had neither a proper church nor a proper erf for such a building, let alone a Church of the Vow.

For the time the parsonage-church was in service, it was called either 'Dutch Reformed Church' (Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk), 'Reformed Church' (Gereformeerde Kerk) or simply 'old church' (ou[de] kerk), but never 'Geloftekerk(ie)'. The recorded measurements of the parsonage-church on erf 34 correspond exactly with the building still extant on that site, which since 1912 has been a museum. In that year, following substantial restorations, the former parsonage-church was inaugurated as a museum of Voortrekker history called either (in memory of the temporary church) 'Voortrekkerskerkje Museum' or just 'Voortrekkers Museum'. It had in the meantime served as a wagon maker's shop, a mineral water factory, a tearoom, a blacksmith's workshop and a chemist's shop. An examination of the museum's guide books published since 1912 reveals an absence of the name 'Geloftekerk(ie)', which was invented later, after the museum's inaugural year and before 1935, the time when the Voortrekker frieze was conceived by Moerdyk and members of the SVK.

In *Church of the Vow* the existence of the church is affirmed by ignoring what would have been the modest parsonage used as a church soon after Pietermaritzburg's inauguration, and setting up in its place the more elaborate form of the Voortrekker Museum with its new Holbol-type Cape-Dutch gables. Thus the men in Voortrekker attire, staged to re-enact the early building site, are in fact erecting the museum, not the parsonage-church. And although the museum followed the footprint of the original building on the site, here its small scale is belied by extending the façade to fill the panel, to a degree that it cuts off the upper gable, so that the building dominates the scene.

<sup>1116</sup> *Official Guide* 1955, 51.

<sup>1117</sup> Coetzee 1988, 184–185.

<sup>1118</sup> See SVK 20.1.1947: 12, and discussion in 'Church of the Vow'.

<sup>1119</sup> Haswell in Laband and Haswell 1988, 25 (*Grahams Town Journal*, 11.4.1839).

<sup>1120</sup> Delegorgue, *Travels* 1, 1990, 96.

<sup>1121</sup> Thom 1949, 6 (Ned. Geref. Kerk, Pietermaritzburg: Léer No. 1, Lyste 1839. N.A.).



Further, by including a second event, the surveying of the settlement's first layout undertaken by two men in the foreground, *Church of the Vow* affirms that the church was built at the outset of Pietermaritzburg's existence on a pegged-out erf set aside for that purpose. Even though there is no hard evidence that a Geloftekerk was ever built in Pietermaritzburg, the representation aims to lay to rest any doubts about its existence or that the vow was not honoured in full immediately after the Voortrekker victory over the Zulu. Together with the *The Vow* on the other side, *Church of the Vow* frames *Blood River*, the three forming a trilogy symbolising the faith of the God-fearing Voortrekkers who never forgot their vows and the divine assistance they had received. And the inclusion of Gerard Moerdyk's portrait in the foreground of the scene suggests that the building of the Voortrekker Monument too could be considered another Church of the Vow, Moerdyk's 'Die altaar van die Afrikanerdom' (fig. 83), and that Afrikaners were still honouring Voortrekker promises a century later.

*Saailaer*, literally sowing camp or laager, the last scene of the west frieze (fig. 308), is portrayed on a single marble panel, 4.01 metres in length, the third largest after *Kapain* (4.32 m) and *Blood River* (4.29 m). The name was used to refer to two laagers that the vigilant Voortrekker leader, Gerrit Maritz, set up to protect his party when, in late 1837, the Voortrekkers began to move into

**Figure 307:** *Church of the Vow*. 1949. Marble, w. 2.19 m (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)



**Figure 308:** *Saailaer*. 1949. Marble, w. 4.01 m (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

Natal. The first on a bend of the Bushman's River was occupied for about half a year, and then another established on the Little Tugela River, even more fully protected with a sod wall, and sometimes named *sooilaer* (*sod laager*) to reflect that. Clearly these *laagers*, dating from the time of the Bloukrans massacre, did not belong to a sequence after Blood River and the establishment of Pietermaritzburg, so the scene represented presumably refers generically to the Voortrekkers starting to farm as soon as they had set up camps in Natal. But the Maritz *laager* might have supplied the motif of the shooting of Zulu attempting to cross a river to attack, which had indeed happened at the Bushman's River. But on that occasion, and in cultivating the land, men were normally in charge. So the transfer of the two important activities of agriculture and defence solely to women seems surprising, even if they assisted in both from time to time. It seems likely that half-remembered events and the wish of SVK members that the importance of women in the Great Trek should not be forgotten<sup>1122</sup> played a major part in deciding how to conceive *Saailaer*, even if it ignored the goal of historical accuracy, just as it did logical chronology. This is all the more likely since, as discussed previously, this was possibly the scene that replaced one showing the reconciliation of Pretorius and Potgieter, another male-dominated event, which had originally been proposed in this position. *Saailaer* ensured that the role of Boer women would be remembered in all aspects of the treks, from day-to-day tasks to more dramatic action needed for survival.

These concepts are also manifest in the sequential composition of the narrative of the frieze as a whole. While the Zulu massacres and the dreadful suffering of both Boer men and women, graphically portrayed in *Murder of Retief* and *Bloukrans*, were the focus of the south frieze, the collective revenge and the crucial achievements of male and female Voortrekkers were consecutively staged on the west frieze. *Women spur men on* and *Saailaer* (conveniently without a precise chronological determinant) aptly frame the four male-dominated topics set up between them: the arrival of Andries Pretorius, Cilliers' Vow, the Battle of Blood River and building the Church of the Vow in Pietermaritzburg. In the two framing scenes women are shown in social roles which, in addition to their maternal roles, were regarded as essential to establish white Christian civilisation in a hinterland hitherto populated by what the Voortrekkers looked upon as black 'barbarians'. It

<sup>1122</sup> See, for example, Panel 7.



**Figure 309:**  
*Mpende*. 1949.  
 Marble, w. 2.4 m  
 (courtesy of VTM;  
 photo Russell Scott)

is significant that in *Saailaer* the women are not located inside the domestic context of a house, or even a laager, but outside like their trekker husbands to farm and fight on the land. They act as a symbol that proclaimed that the African land and the Afrikaner people were inseparable. And the landscapes of the west frieze underline this message: characterised by rivers such as the Little Tugela, Wasbank, Bushman and Blood rivers, all located in the fertile Natal plains, they provide crucial conditions for agriculture as well as military strategy and settlement. But while *Saailaer* emphasises the women's hardiness and ability to provide food and military action, they remain ideal representations of womanhood, retaining impeccable style and Boer beauty.

**Mpende**, mounted on the north-west corner (fig. 309), acts as both a prelude to and outcome of *Death of Dingane*. Mpende was a descendant of the royal Zulu line, one of the many half-brothers of Shaka and Dingane, the first kings of the Zulu. Mpende became a likely target after Dingane had murdered Shaka and other possible royal heirs to occupy the Zulu throne himself. But Mpende survived, and in the year after the Battle of Blood River he decided to leave Dingane's territory and seek Voortrekker protection. He crossed the Tugela River with his followers (recorded numbers fluctuate between six to seventeen thousand), and on 15 October 1839 the Boer Volksraad granted him asylum, although they added the caveat that he would have to leave the land he currently occupied as soon as it was safe to do so. The Voortrekkers, who had themselves emigrated to escape a powerful overlord, were now treating Mpende's people like emigrants with no rights in a land that the Boers themselves had only recently occupied, and where they now considered the Volksraad to be the supreme authority. Mpende was not the main concern of the Natal Boers at the time: their overriding goal was to annihilate Dingane and the remains of the Zulu army still loyal to him.

Although shortly afterwards the Volksraad appointed Pretorius to lead a final commando against the Zulu king, it was Mpande's force alone which on 29 January 1840 crushed his half-brother's army at the Maqongqo Hills; but afterwards Dingane was nowhere to be found. In the wake of this triumph, the Boer secretary of war, Paul Hermanus Zietsman, proclaimed on 10 February that Mpande had been crowned king of the Zulu by the grace of Pretorius, the highest representative of the Boer Volksraad. We learn from Zietman's unbearably patronising rhetoric just how restricted Mpande's position as king would be, with the Boers as his overlords and his land forfeit from the Thukela to the Black Mfolozi, bounded to the west by the Drakensberg, and to the east by the ocean. According to John Laband, 'Mpande was left by the Boers in a weak position, the vassal king of an impoverished and diminished kingdom, bleeding from the unhealed wounds of civil war.'<sup>1123</sup>

The scene in the frieze, however, masks this reality. Mpande is given the central position on the great stone plinth that elevates him with his interpreter on one side and Pretorius on the other, even though Pretorius' formal attire may suggest his superior 'civilisation', and his top hat, which slightly overlaps the top edge of the panel, endows him with superior height. The group is surrounded by numerous inward-turning Zulu and Boer figures in a densely populated composition to demonstrate the wide jubilation and support from both sides. The clear implication of the scene is that the Boers dealt fairly with the Zulu, having defeated a tyrant and replaced him with a legitimate king, who in return agreed to abide by the civil law of the Volksraad and gratefully ceded to them the land that would be the republic of Natalia. In the view of the Voortrekkers and their descendants the treaty entered into with Dingane was now fulfilled.

***Death of Dingane*** is the only scene showing exclusively Africans (fig. 310). Mounted next to *Mpande* on the north-west corner, it relates closely to Mpande's crowning as king in his stead. Dingane had suffered a string of severe defeats, first at the hands of the Boers at Blood River, then the Swazi, when he tried to gain extra land to the north across the Phongolo River to compensate for the encroachment of the Boers, and finally his own half-brother Mpande in the battle of 29 January 1840. While it turned out to be the king's ultimate defeat, afterwards neither Mpande's Zulu nor the Boers could track him down as he had fled with his significantly dwindling followers towards the Lubombo Mountains. This was a fatal move as it was here, on the territory of his Swazi enemy, that he at last met his death. It has been the subject of contradictory Zulu reports suggesting that Dingane was killed either by his own people or by Swazi, while Harry Lugg and John Laband argue in favour of Nyawo. But whoever the perpetrators, Dingane's burial place was kept secret for more than a century, and discovered only in the late 1940s.<sup>1124</sup>

In the frieze it is the Swazi who put Dingane to death, and the assegai thrust into his back by the warrior behind him forces him to his knees. There are no Zulu men to come to his aid; only four of his many wives watch or turn away from his ignoble end. Although Dingane still wears the same royal regalia, this abject king is the antithesis of the imposing figure shown in *Treaty*. His collapse could not be more different from Retief's upright stance and courage as he faces his own impending death in *Murder of Retief*. Another contrast with the Voortrekkers is provided by Dingane's young wives who emphasise the polygamy of the king, and whose nakedness stresses their difference from modest and monogamous Boer wives. Voortrekker ethics are upheld by the comparison. That the Boers themselves did not actually overthrow the king, who was defeated by Mpande and killed by other Africans, can be understood in positive terms from an Afrikaner perspective. It demonstrates the urge of black people themselves to slay the Zulu king; it ensures that the Voortrekkers' hands are clean of a barbaric assassination; and it supports the belief that the Boers only fought when forced to do so. *Death of Dingane* vilifies black people by focusing on them exclusively in this panel and differentiating their behaviour from that of whites. Without involving the Boers in a murder, it provided fitting punishment of the treacherous king who had killed so many of their own, and showed unreservedly that God was on their side. In the frieze they are a chosen people.

<sup>1123</sup> Laband 1995, 124.

<sup>1124</sup> Lugg 1949, 164–168.





**Figure 310:** *Death of Dingane*. 1949. Marble, w. 2.4 m (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

**Return**, the first scene on the north wall and second last of the frieze (fig. 311), reverses *Descent* where the Boers entered Natal, to show them ascending the Drakensberg to leave again. Their first self-proclaimed republic Natalia did not survive for long, as it caused major demographic, economic and political trouble for all parties, black and white. George Napier, governor of the Cape Colony, finally decided to order troops to Natal again. After the Boers' military setbacks at Port Natal, when the British forces advanced to Pietermaritzburg in July 1842 and demanded that they submit to the crown's authority, the Volksraad surrendered unconditionally. Her Majesty's Commissioner, Henry Cloete, arrived a year later, and in May 1844 the republic was taken over by the British as an autonomous district of the Cape Colony. Many Boers did not wait to see the formal end of their republic but began leaving in 1843. They were still in disagreement with British policy on equality for all under the law, as they had been in the Cape, and they were unhappy with Cloete's settlement of land claims. Here again, as already mentioned, women took the lead, this time with Susanna Smit heading a delegation of Boer women who invaded a meeting of the Volksraad with Cloete on 8 August 1843, to confront the British commissioner. Mrs Smit emphasised 'their fixed determination never to yield to British authority'; although they acknowledged that resistance would be futile, 'they would walk out by [sic] the Drakensberg barefooted, to die in freedom as death was dearer to them than the loss of liberty'.<sup>1125</sup> As discussed in *Women spur men on*, in ironic contradiction of her own statement, Susanna Smit and her husband, the Rev. Erasmus Smit, never

<sup>1125</sup> Bird, *Annals* 2, 1888, 259.



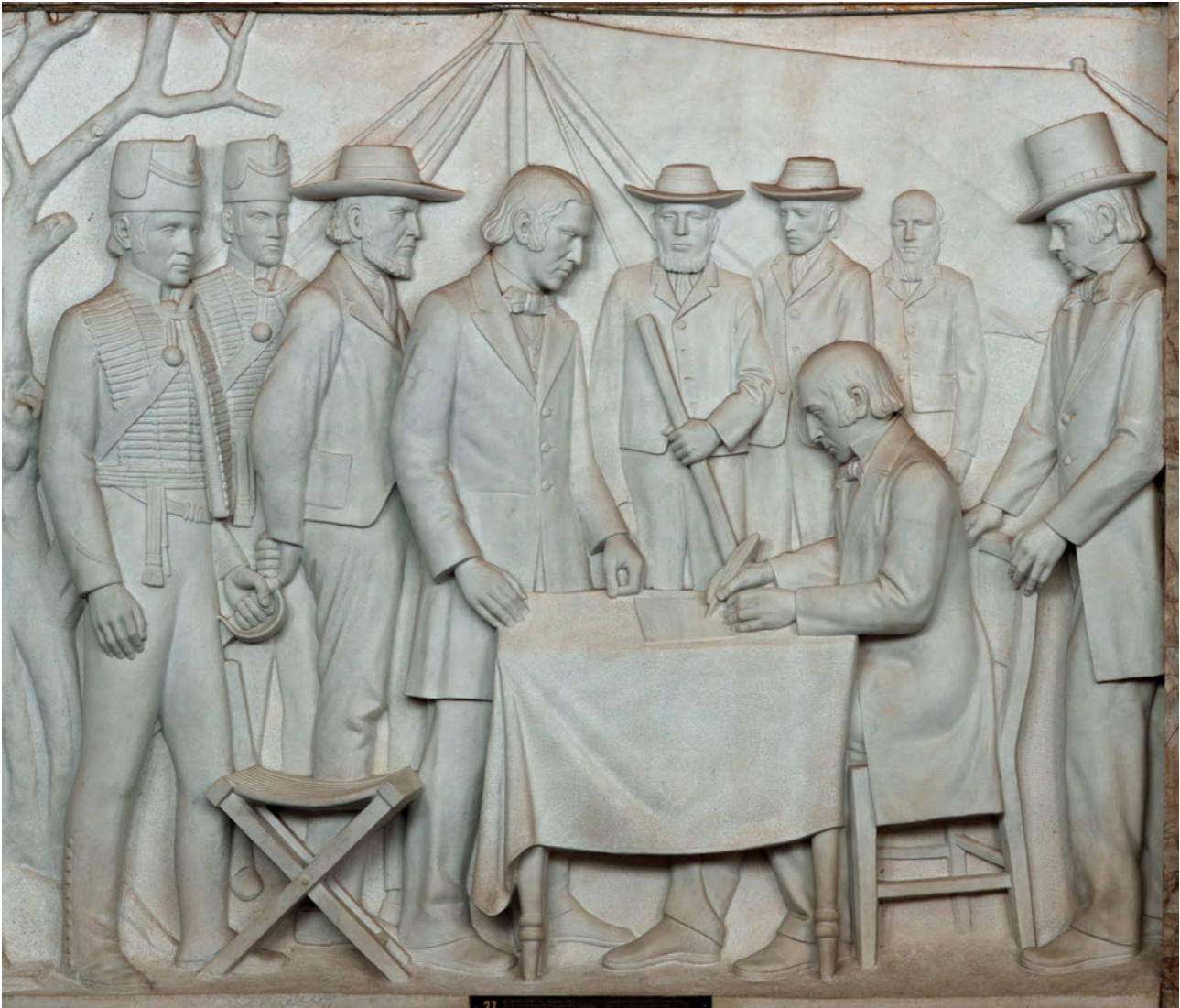
**Figure 311:** *Return*. 1949. Marble, w. 4.29 m (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

left British-governed Pietermaritzburg but spent the rest of their lives there – as did a number of Voortrekkers.

Initially Pretorius himself remained in the area. But further discontent with British labour laws led him and the majority of the trekkers to leave in early 1848, the second time that they had had to abandon their farms in a British colony. Although in fact a retreat, *Return* continues to present the positive qualities of the Voortrekkers. The challenges they faced are captured in the seemingly impossible undertaking of negotiating a heavy wagon over the Drakensberg precipices, their determination evident in the men who grapple with the task. The confidence that they will succeed is suggested by the composure of the family group that looks on, the wounded father a reminder of their sufferings but suggesting they are behind them, while the woman with her little girl might be seen to embody a new ‘joyful prospect’ of a prosperous Boer future. In the imagination, they might even be the same family represented in *Descent* some years later, still undaunted, though the father has been a casualty of war and the baby is now a little girl. The staunch Voortrekkers continue to believe in the values that had driven them to depart the Cape and British rule to strive for freedom – historical prototypes for contemporary Afrikaners.

**Convention**, the last scene in the frieze, finally brings resolution (fig. 312): it is the groundbreaking Sand River Convention signed with the British crown in early 1852, which completes the colossal saga of the Great Trek as recounted at the Monument. The arrival of Pretorius and his followers on the Highveld, Potgieter’s sphere of influence, revived old rivalries and strained the relationship between the two commanders and the Transvaal Volksraad. To resolve the situation, in 1851 the Volksraad appointed a commandant-general for each of the four districts that had been united in May 1849, so that Pretorius and Potgieter could each have an area of influence, though this did not release the tension between the two. There were also grave conflicts with the Cape governor, Sir Harry Smith, and different African peoples, about clashing land claims, border disputes and severe differences regarding the treatment of the Africans in the area. After various unsuccessful attempts to negotiate with the British, Pretorius took the initiative to promote the primary Boer concern, to conclude a lasting treaty to seal their independence.

In 1851, the British crown sent two experienced assistant commissioners, Major William Samuel Hogge and Charles Mosytn Owen, to the Colony to investigate. After their arrival in Bloemfontein a conference was organised for 16 January 1852 at the farm Kromfontein, near the Sand River. While the British were supported by militia, Pretorius and the fifteen Boer delegates arrived with some fourhundred trekkers. Within a day they came to a mutual agreement, and the convention was



signed on 17 January 1852. It affirmed the full sovereignty of the Boers; a defined border (the Vaal River, namely ‘the line from the source of that river over the Drakensberg’<sup>1126</sup>); free trade and acquisition of land; the purchase of ammunition and firearms (but with detailed regulations and restrictions on trading them); the prohibition of slavery; the annulment of all former treaties between the Colony and the ‘coloured nations’ north of the Vaal River; the validity of existing possessions of land; and the settlement of possible conflicts by commissioners of both parties. While Pretorius had not been empowered to sign the convention, either by the Volksraad or Potgieter, there was little opposition, as it was obviously in the Boers’ interest to have their republic formally recognised by the main power in the subcontinent. Two months later Potgieter and Pretorius made their peace, and on 16 March 1852 the Volksraad ratified the convention. A year later, after the deaths of both Potgieter and Pretorius, the Volksraad resolved that the name of the new Voortrekker republic should be ‘The South African Republic, north of the Vaal River’, known as the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR). And just a few months after that, on 30 January 1854, the Bloemfontein Convention was signed. By this contract the British crown transferred its rule over the land between the Orange and Vaal rivers to some fifteen-thousand burghers, who by then had made this territory their new home. Thus the

**Figure 312:** *Convention*. 1949. Marble, w. 2.82 m (courtesy of VTM; photo Russell Scott)

<sup>1126</sup> Eybers 1918, 357–359 no. 177.

second independent Boer republic was recognised, called Oranje-Vrijstaat, the 'Orange Free State', though the 'two new republics were states in little more than name'.<sup>1127</sup>

In contrast to the exoticism of *Treaty*, *Convention* is a rather dull gathering in front of a tent, with only nine participants included in a static composition, no doubt intended to emphasise the formal legality of the occasion. The Voortrekkers and the two British military officers on the far left are indication enough of the affiliations of the three dignitaries at the table who sign the agreement, although it would be difficult to know which was Pretorius if we did not have Hennie Potgieter's identification, especially as he lacks his customary headgear and one of the commissioners is wearing a top hat. Potgieter's identification clarifies that the Boer leader and his compatriots occupy the centre of the scene, stressing that they are the winners in this statutory battle, while the British commissioners, Owen and Hogge, are set to the right and their supporting soldiers to the left, thus framing the Voortrekkers.

Nonetheless, it comes as a surprise when we realise that the end of the Afrikaner story of the Great Trek is vested in two final figures who represent the British crown, the hated authority which had caused the trekkers to leave the Cape in the first place. Here they are hardly represented as the enemy, any more than they are in the other two scenes that include British figures, *Presentation* and *Treaty*. Despite continuing Afrikaner animosity towards the British, in the frieze they are shown only in a positive light: solely Africans fill the role of adversaries. Perhaps this seeming volte-face about the British is an indication of increasing anxiety about the power of the black majority in South Africa, and the need for white people to support each other, be they English- or Afrikaans-speaking, that caused those who developed the frieze to avoid expressing antagonism about their old foes. Whatever the reason, the Afrikaner narrative of the Great Trek permitted Moerdyk and the sculptors to make narrative choices that reached beyond the fervent rhetoric of Afrikanerdom. In South Africa Boer and British had more in common than the Voortrekkers may have realised when they set out on their journeys: a need to work together to uphold white supremacy.

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<sup>1127</sup> Giliomee 2003, 175.

## Iconography and ideology

The architecture of the monument itself is crucial for the overall effect of the style and iconography of the reliefs, with the grandeur of the Hall of Heroes designed for no other purpose than to accommodate the colossal frieze. The vast space with its diffuse golden light dignifies the monumentality and the heroic content of the sculptured scenes. Yet the reliefs are neither removed nor remote: the height of their placement and human size of the figures bring the viewer face-to-face with Afrikaner history and ideology.

Overall the frieze exhibits a dual rationale: in recounting a partial version of Voortrekker history of a century before, it embodies Afrikaner ideology of the 1940s in equal measure. To understand this duality it is essential to recall our analysis of form and composition earlier in the chapter, as it allows us to consider how style, iconography and ideology supported each other to exemplify both the Afrikaner narrative of the Great Trek and the contemporary values that it came to represent. Of primary importance in this was the composition and arrangement of the twenty-seven scenes within the frieze, and the clarity and unity of form, constrained by the overriding planarity of the reliefs – driving factors in the overall design and the style of carving. The development of these factors defined how the intended reading of the frieze, explained in the *Official Guide*, was presented in a way that was both accessible and authoritative.

White Voortrekkers are predominant in the frieze, performing feats of courage and steadfastness in the face of adversity, whether from the elements or the African peoples they encountered. The Voortrekkers are models of Christian conduct, the men upright, the women chaste: the formal way they are clothed and the controlled manner in which they act, invariably with calm expressions, create a sense of composure, however great the difficulties they face, endowing them with civilised equanimity. Their prototypical presence in almost every scene creates a visual history which outperforms actual social conduct. All this is in marked contrast to the representation of black peoples, a distinction which underwrites racial prejudice. Even when they are shown as unthreatening or subservient, the prevailing impression is of African otherness, conveyed by the state of semi-nudity, with their ethnic costumes portrayed in exotic detail, totally different from the simple, all-concealing dress conventions of the trekkers. While the violence of *Bloukrans* may have been reduced by government intervention, there is a predominance of brutal behaviour and exaggerated facial expressions amongst the black participants, especially on the south frieze which confronts the visitor upon entry. Yet paradoxically, Africans, particularly the Zulu, are at the same time presented, Moerdyk stresses, as ‘worthy opponents, very well developed as far as their physical characteristics are concerned’ in order to heighten Voortrekker qualities of bravery and military prowess.<sup>1128</sup>

Similar goals were met by the selection of the topics to be represented and their organisation in the frieze, although – or possibly because – they do not offer a neatly unfolding chronological narrative, well-nigh impossible when there was no single unified Trek. The scenes present high points of Voortrekker achievement in complementary arrangements within a clockwise sequence, and provide a climactic focus in the centre of the friezes on the east, south and west walls, which stress the role of the hero-martyr Retief and the retribution for his death. The significance of individual themes is accentuated by their configuration around the three central scenes, either in direct historical conjunction with them or juxtaposed as framing pairs with narratives united by symbolic accord – most clearly seen in the framing of *Blood River* by *The Vow* and *Church of the Vow*, which embody both historical and symbolic concepts. As a totality the frieze succeeds in encompassing themes embodying white pre-eminence: journeying and armed advance, civic and legislative action, religious devotion, practical matters of daily life, building and agriculture, conflict and triumph, including the roles of both male and female, old and young. These topics in their partly chronological as well as symbolic arrangement provide, with the exception of the women and chil-

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1128 *Official Guide* 1955, 53.

Trajan's Column					
75 Trajan in port with sanctuary	76 Aftermath of war	77 Trajan addresses army	78 Goddess of Roman Victory	79–155 <i>Continuing scenes, upper half</i>	
71 Attacking Dacian fortifications / Subjugation of Dacians		72 Battle	73 Trajan addresses army	74 Subjugation of Dacians	
65 Building fortifications	66–67 Battle / Subjugation of Dacians		68–69 Presenting Dacian prisoner / Fortification, forest works		70–71 Battle
57–59 Advance over mountains	60 Building a camp	61 Messenger and Trajan	62 Camp in mountains	63–64 Advance / Dacians attack Roman cavalry of Moors	
48–50 Army departs	51 Army unites	52 Forest works / Dacian legation	53 Sacrifice	54 Trajan addresses army	55–56 Road, bridge works
41 Battle at Adamklissi	42 Trajan addresses army	43 Dacian prisoners	44 Distribution of rewards	45 Torture	46–47 Return of Trajan
36 Advance of Roman army	37 Pursuit of Sarmatians	38 Attacking Dacian laager	39 Moesians beg protection	40–41 Battle at Adamklissi	
29–30 Aftermath of war	31 Dacians crossing Danube	32 Dacians attack Roman fortification	33 Trajan departs by ship	34 Trajan on Danube	35 Arrival of Trajan
23 Road works	24 Battle at Tapae	25 Trajan at Dacian ramparts	26 Crossing a river	27–28 Trajan addresses army / Dacian delegation	
13–14 Building fortifications	15 Clearing forest	16–17 Building fortifications	18 Dacian prisoner	19–20 Building works	21–22 Army departs
6–7 Army departs / Council	8 Trajan makes sacrifice	9 Messenger and Trajan	10 Trajan addresses army	11–12 Building fortifications	
			1–2 Bank of Danube		3–5 Roman army departs
EAST ← NORTH → WEST					

Voortrekker Monument Frieze								
PLACE	CORNER SCENES	LONG WALLS						CORNER SCENES
NORTH	25 <i>Death of Dingane</i>	26 <i>Return to Natal</i>	27 <i>Convention</i> Boer republic of Transvaal		DOOR	1 <i>Departure</i> from Eastern Cape		2 <i>Presentation</i> of Bible
EAST	3 Trade and Education in <i>Soutpansberg</i>	4 Arrival at <i>Delagoa Bay</i>	5 <i>Battle of Vegkop</i>		6 <i>Inauguration</i> of Retief as governor	7 <i>Battle of Kapain</i>	8 <i>Negotiations</i> with Rolong	9 <i>Blyde-vooruitsig</i> News from Retief
SOUTH	10 <i>Debora Retief</i> honours father	11 <i>Descent</i> Advance to Natal	12 <i>Land Treaty</i> signed by Dingane		13 <i>Murder of Retief</i> and his men by Zulu	14 <i>Bloukrans</i> Zulu kill women and children	15 <i>Teresa Vigiione</i> warns Boers of Zulu	16 <i>Dirkie Uys</i> defends father
WEST	17 <i>Marthinus Oosthuizen</i> saves Van Rensburgs	18 <i>Women spur men on</i>	19 <i>Arrival of Comdt. Pretorius</i>	20 <i>The Vow</i>	21 <i>Battle of Blood River</i>	22 <i>Building Church of the Vow</i>	23 <i>Saailaer</i> Women farm and fight	24 Mpande crowned Zulu king by Boers

**Figure 313:** Topics of Trajan's Column and Voortrekker Monument frieze: a comparison (the authors)



Figure 314: Section of Trajan's Column, Rome. AD 106–13 (photo the authors)

dren in the Voortrekker frieze, significant analogies to historical narratives of friezes in imperial Rome, especially Trajan's Column (figs. 313, 314).<sup>1129</sup> The Voortrekker frieze shares with its Roman 'forerunner' established images of control and power. Departure and advance (in difficult territory), or battle and victory, for example, demonstrate the natural right of the Boers to annex territories from local peoples. Through further representations of Boer civilisation, namely worship and building, or calculated engagement with foreign people (both black and white), the Voortrekkers of the frieze take the moral high ground. This holistic representation conveys the idea of a unified and highly capable people, working and suffering together according to the highest principles to gain independent rule as a republic – achieved in the founding of the ZAR in the final panel representing the signing of the Sand River Convention, and still an aspiration of twentieth-century Afrikaners.

The material chosen for the frieze, pure Querceta, emphasises the unity of the narrative, at the same time guaranteeing the historicity and prestige of the Great Trek and all that it stood for. By virtue of the classical tradition of memorial friezes, this particular kind of marble conferred status and prestige. The fine microscopic crystals and consistent milky white colour of Querceta, reinforced by the dispersive light, tends to soften the specificity of form and to mute facial expression and human action, lending monumentality to the unified style.<sup>1130</sup> The hardness of marble also promotes not only the durability of the frieze but a sense of formal gravitas. These qualities all reinforce the authority of the frieze and the narrative it portrays, as well as the status of those who had proposed a monument to the Voortrekkers and brought it to fruition. That this happened alongside the political rise of the Afrikaner National Party, further supported by the celebrations of the centenary in 1938 and the inauguration of the Monument in 1949, is no coincidence.

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**1129** Discussed in more detail in Rankin and Schneider 2017, 204–205. For Trajan's Column, see Mitthof and Schörner 2017; Hölscher 2017; Hölscher 2018, 302–308.

**1130** For Querceta marble, see above, 'From plaster to marble'.







**Figure 315:** Tour guide Godfrey Zahke explains the frieze to visitors from Rheinland-Pfalz Youth Orchestra, Germany (photo courtesy of VTM)

## 5 Heritage

*Heritage can mean many different things, whether as a legacy, in the sense of an enriching survival or bequest, or as a burden, either on the lines of inheriting a debt or of traumatic collective memory.*<sup>1131</sup>

The Voortrekker Monument was conceived to honour a construct of historical events that many Afrikaans-speaking South Africans believed had defined their identity but had not been fully acknowledged, and thus to act as a symbol of a heritage that would unite and inspire Afrikaners. In fulfilling this role, the Monument not only presented the first visual narrative of the Great Trek in monumental marble, but fostered new forms in popular culture, such as the Voortrekker dress and volkspele associated with the centenary and inauguration, special stamp designs, and artefacts that acted as souvenirs, all reinforcing the concept of a shared Afrikaner identity. As attitudes shifted in South Africa, the Monument tried to adapt, defining new roles for itself under a democratic dispensation. But the edifice with its frieze remains an iconic landmark that has invited responses, positive and negative, from visitors, both local and international (fig. 315), and a range of artists, designers and film makers, which demonstrate that the old values that it represents still have potency – and the potential to be reframed again and again.

The items that were placed in a bronze case behind the foundation stone of the Monument during the centenary celebrations of 1938 were intended to represent the history encompassed by that heritage, which it claimed began with the first occupation of the Cape, through key events of the Trek, to the celebration of the centenary of Blood River. Significant texts were selected to mark that Afrikaner chronology – Henning Klopper's State Bible and copies of Jan van Riebeeck's diary, a copy of Retief's treaty with Dingane, and the Vow before the Battle of Blood River.<sup>1132</sup> But also included was 'Die Stem', a poem by C.J. Langenhoven written in 1918, and set to music in 1921,<sup>1133</sup> which was adopted as an unofficial anthem by Afrikaners and increasingly used alongside 'God Save the King', and which would become the sole national anthem in the 1950s under the National Party government.<sup>1134</sup> The presence of this more recent item alongside the historical signalled the ongoing importance of the Monument and what it stood for. Far from being an inert edifice, erected 'after the event', as is usually the case with memorials, it was to play an active role in creating new heritage. This had been an ongoing process which began with the centenary celebrations, was reinforced at the inauguration, and continued through the decades that followed, while more recently attempting to modify its meaning in the context of post-apartheid South Africa. As Laurajane Smith has defined it:

Heritage is a multilayered performance – be this a performance of visiting, managing, interpretation or conservation – that embodies acts of remembrance and commemoration while negotiating and constructing a sense of place, belonging and understanding in the present.<sup>1135</sup>

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<sup>1131</sup> Parker 2017, 485.

<sup>1132</sup> Presumably the version revised by Gerdener (1925, 68 n\*), found in all the Afrikaans editions of the *Official Guide* (first 1955, 5); for further discussion, see *The Vow*.

<sup>1133</sup> Lys van inhoud van bronskas onder hoeksteen (list of contents of bronze case under foundation stone) in the Jansen files included a number of other suggestions, such as Hendrik Potgieter's flag and the special issue of *Die Burger* newspaper of 1.12.1938 (ARCA EG PV94 1/75/1/9). Thanks to Etta Judson for confirming what was actually placed behind the foundation stone.

<sup>1134</sup> An English translation was introduced in 1952, and the use of the British national anthem was officially discontinued in 1957.

<sup>1135</sup> Smith 2006, 3.



**Figure 316:** Scene from symbolic ossewatrek re-enactment for 1938 centenary (photo T. Hilton; <https://www.flickr.com/photos/hilton-t/3932098536/>)

We have argued that the intention behind the making of the Monument was to create a purposeful and united concept of identity for Afrikanerdom. But there were dangers in this goal: as David Lowenthal writes, ‘History co-opted by heritage exaggerates or denies accepted fact to assert a primacy, an ancestry, a continuity’ – and his telling caveat warns, ‘It underwrites a founding myth meant to exclude others.’<sup>1136</sup>

## An Afrikaner monument

The objective of the Monument was to augment a spirit of Afrikanerdom, rather than simply to commemorate a formative phase of South African history. This was made clear by the centenary events being conducted entirely in Afrikaans, and without the presence of the prime minister and the governor-general, which would have necessitated flying the Union Jack and playing ‘God Save the King’, as discussed in Chapter 1. The intention was not so much to disregard English speakers as to exclude the authority of the British crown. But the contention around this decision and the all-Afrikaans event itself undoubtedly alienated many fellow South Africans,<sup>1137</sup> and crystallised differences from English speakers, not to mention black South Africans who were not considered as possible participants at all. If the Voortrekker Monument was intended to be a national monument – Prime Minister Hertzog’s reason for agreeing to fund it – this was an extremely restricted definition of the nation.<sup>1138</sup> Associations with the National Party and its anti-British republican goals were inevitable, and, while this might have heightened the antipathy of English voters, it strengthened Afrikaner support, and set the National Party under D.F. Malan on the road to success.

<sup>1136</sup> Lowenthal 1994, 53.

<sup>1137</sup> See, for example, Paton 1980, 206–212, cited in Chapter 1.

<sup>1138</sup> While there were many mendacious statements made about the wish to include the English ‘race’, no thought at all was given to black South Africans. That the government funding of the Monument was a mixed blessing is commented upon by Anton van Vollenhoven (2017), who writes that it ‘transformed the monument to the genre of national monument art and placed ideological questions on the table. Even today the monument carries the burden of this government interference’.



**Figure 317:** W.H. Coetzer. 1938 commemorative medal with torch relay by Voortrekker boys and girls from Cape Town to Pretoria on the reverse (courtesy of VTM Museum VTM 1230/1–2; photo the authors)

This intensifying of Afrikaner consciousness reached far beyond the actual event on the Monument site for the 1938 centenary, although that in itself attracted well in excess of 100 000 people.<sup>1139</sup> Mention has already been made in Chapter 1 of the symbolic ossewatrek that took place before the laying of the Monument's foundation stone, and the fervent response it drew from the thousands who witnessed the ox wagons as they made their way through towns and cities across South Africa. In re-enacting the journeys of the trekkers a century before in an inclusive way that drew in so many small-town Afrikaners, expressly dressed as Voortrekkers for the occasion, the ossewatrek was, in the words of J.D. du Toit, 'a pilgrimage and a crusade' (fig. 316).<sup>1140</sup> It played a vital part in developing the notion that the Voortrekkers were a chosen people, a special status that could be claimed by those descended from them. The religious and nationalist overtones are marked when one considers the rhetoric that hailed the arrival of the ox wagons in Pretoria, four months and six days after their departure from the statue of Jan van Riebeeck in Cape Town. Henning Klopper, the leader of the event and a Broederbonder, proclaimed:

The Trek began in the name of God and today it ends in the name of God.

And E.G. Jansen, chairman of the SVK and another Broederbonder, responded:

Truly the Lord richly blessed the idea that originated with you, and He used the ox wagons as a means to call our people back to Him in a powerful way. God used you and the ox wagons as instruments to bring a great blessing to our people and we are very grateful to Him for that. We thank you for what you have done to shake our people awake ...<sup>1141</sup>

Similarly, in greeting the torchbearers (fig. 317) who had also journeyed from the Cape, and the torch-lit procession and the bonfires that were lit on the eve of the centenary and the laying of the foundation stone at the Monument, Jansen said:

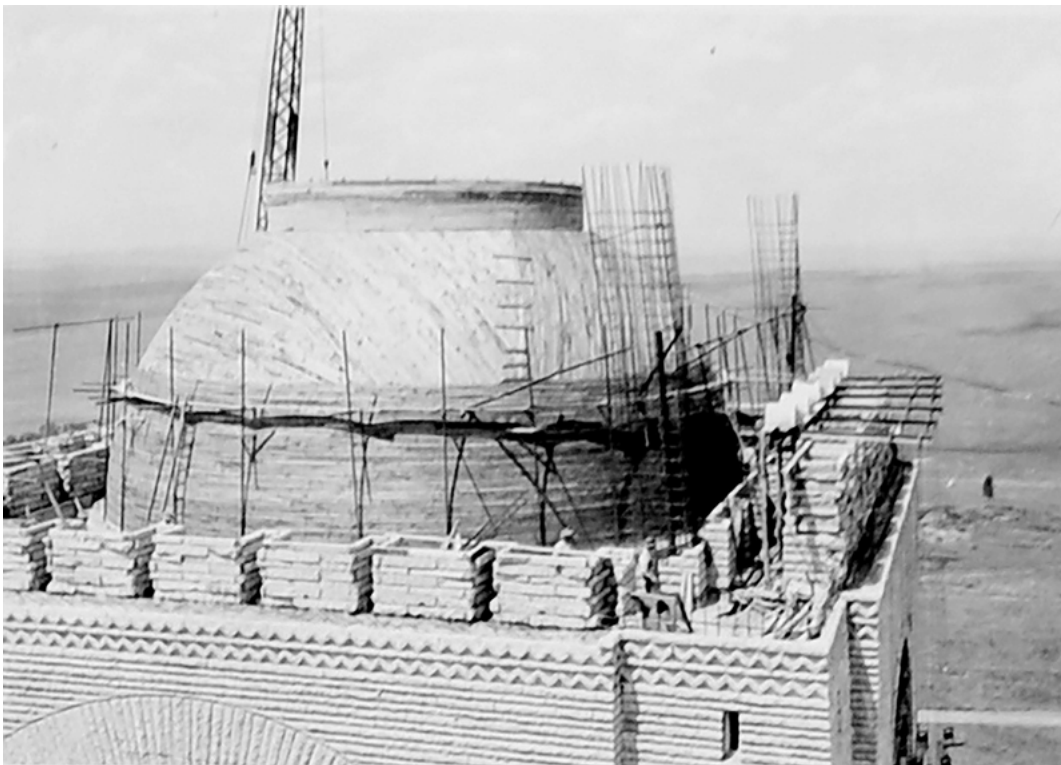
For me this torch relay is symbolic of how each Afrikaner must carry the torch of a strong and steady character, grounded in the virtues of the Voortrekkers ... This is what our country needs: characters

<sup>1139</sup> Estimates vary: the *Rand Daily Mail* of 4.12.1938 reported that between 120 000 and 150 000 attended; Grundlingh and Sapire (1989) speak of as many as 200 000.

<sup>1140</sup> 'n bedevaart en kruistog', quoted in Ferreira 1978, 88.

<sup>1141</sup> 'Die Trek het in die Naam van God begin en vandag eindig die Trek in die Naam van God'; 'Waarlik die Here het die idee wat by u ontstaan het, ryklik geseën en Hy het die ossewaens gebruik as 'n middel om ons volk op kragtige wyse na Hom terug te roep. God het u en die ossewaens as instrumente gebruik om 'n groot seën aan ons volk te bring en ons is Hom baie dankbaar daarvoor. Ons dank u vir wat u gedoen het om ons volk wakker te skud ...', *ibid.*, 75.





**Figure 318:** Building of the Voortrekker Monument (courtesy of Kirchhoff files)

like those of the Voortrekkers, who will ignite like a great fire in our land to bring light, not only to South Africa, but to the whole world.<sup>1142</sup>

While the Ossewabrandwag (ox wagon sentinel) formed in the wake of the ossewatrek was a militant pro-Nazi movement, discussed in Chapter 1,<sup>1143</sup> it should not be imagined that enthusiasm for the events of 1938 was a response of the far right alone. On the contrary, it drew in Afrikaners across a wide spectrum, attracted to take part in celebrations during the ossewatrek,<sup>1144</sup> reinforced by continuous radio broadcasts and newspaper reports, and also by the cultural events at the Monument from 13 to 16 December 1938. As well as religious services, there were pageants, choirs and speeches. The film *Die bou van 'n nasie* was shown,<sup>1145</sup> and a play was performed during the celebrations, *Die dieper reg* (The deeper right/justice), validating the Voortrekkers' historical role, which had been commissioned from N.P. van Wyk Louw.<sup>1146</sup> He also described the importance of the centenary in simple terms for young people who read the Afrikaans weekly *Die Jongspan*:

One could say that the whole nation celebrated like one man. And as never before in history, the whole nation realised that they were a nation and not just a random group of people. That is why it is such an important event in our history. You must remember that a group of people do not simply feel that they belong together by themselves; they have to learn it, and often they have to suffer greatly before they learn the lesson. But an event like this one, where the people come together and are proud of the heroes of their past and decide to move forward into the future as a nation, such an event is of priceless significance.<sup>1147</sup>

It is evident that, even before the first course of the walls of the Monument had been laid, it had acted as a catalyst to accelerate a growing sense of Afrikaner identity and pride. The vast bulk of the foundations, which we see in photographs of the centenary events with the dignitaries gathered on them high above the crowd, hinted at the scale of the building to come and the heroic concepts it would embody (fig. 30). Although there were delays during the early war years, when the Cosani building company failed and had to be replaced with a new builder, Du Plessis Broers, there were events that kept the Monument in the news. For example, the casting of the first large-scale bronze in South Africa at the Vignali foundry in late 1939, Van Wouw's *Voortrekker mother and children* for the forecourt of the Monument, caused quite a stir (fig. 49). Then as the lofty walls began to rise on Monumentkoppie, visible to anyone travelling into Pretoria from the south, so a feeling of pride rose with it. Photographs of progress were probably kept by many, as witnessed by the J.L. van Schaik album in Unisa's archive and the one in the Kirchhoff family collection (fig. 318). And the construction of the great double dome, far more ambitious in form and scale than other public buildings in South Africa, must have excited even more interest.

The development of the frieze at Harmony Hall proceeded alongside the building programme from 1942, but did not receive a great deal of publicity initially, although the many Pretoria

**1142** 'Vir my is hierdie fakkelloop ... simbolies van hoe elke Afrikaner die fakkel van 'n sterk en vaste karakter, grondves op die deugde van die Voortrekkers, moet dra ... Dit is wat ons land nodig het: karakters soos die van die Voortrekkers, wat saam sal opvlam soos 'n groot vuur in ons land om lig te gee, nie net aan Suid-Afrika nie, maar aan die hele wêreld', *ibid.*, 85.

**1143** See Marx 2008.

**1144** *Ibid.*, 275, records 100 000 people cheering the ox wagons into Johannesburg, for example.

**1145** The title of the English version is *They built a nation*.

**1146** For performances related to the centenary, see Hutchison 2013, 103 and *passim*.

**1147** 'n Mens kan sê dat die hele volk soos een man feesgevier het. En soos nooit tevore in die geskiedenis nie, het die hele volk besef dat hy 'n volk is en nie net 'n los klomp mense nie. Daarom is dit in ons geskiedenis so 'n belangrike gebeurtenis. Julle moet onthou dat 'n klomp mense nie sommer vanself voel dat hulle bymekaar hoort nie; hulle moet dit leer, en dikwels moet hulle saam baie swaargekry het voordat hulle die les leer. Maar so 'n gebeurtenis soos hierdie, waar die mense bymekaar kom en trots is op die helde van hul verlede en besluit om as volk saam voort te gaan in die toekoms, so 'n gebeurtenis is van onskatbare betekenis.' Quoted on the FAK website, 24 January 2015; <http://www.afrikanergeskiedenis.co.za/n-simboliese-ossewatrek/>.



citizens who posed as models for the Voortrekkers in the frieze must have spread the word about it. There was also an exhibition of Voortrekker dress at the hall in 1943, discussed in Chapter 3, that would have drawn attention to the project. And in early 1945, once the Monument was roofed, the full-size plaster casts of the panels of the frieze that were already complete could be installed, and were gradually added to, with all of them in place from 1946 until late 1947 when their transport to Italy began. Conducted tours of the plaster frieze by Moerdyk were quite regular events for select groups, to judge by newspaper reports (fig. 319), and the contention about the *Bloukrans* scene that was widely publicised in 1945 would also have drawn attention to the sculptures, although not all of it favourable.<sup>1148</sup> The general public, however, was prohibited to approach the Monument, which was heavily guarded ‘by a high fence and topped by barbed wire’ and a black guard, as the *Rand Daily Mail* reported on 6 August 1947 (fig. 320)<sup>1149</sup> – published only the year after Moerdyk’s daughter was allowed to celebrate her wedding in the Hall of Heroes.<sup>1150</sup> Nonetheless, during the final year of preparation for the inauguration, Pretoria citizens must have witnessed the return from Italy of the colossal marble blocks for the frieze, as they trundled their way from the station to the Monument on special lorries, further whetting their curiosity about the impressive edifice on Monumentkoppie.

The inauguration itself on 16 December 1949 raised interest in the Monument to new heights. As discussed in Chapter 3, there was again an organised event preceding the opening itself to draw in the widest possible participation, with ‘despatch riders’ (rapportryers) who gathered patriotic congratulatory messages across the country, before arriving in Pretoria for the celebrations. The attendance at the inauguration itself was unprecedented, with estimates of around 250 000 present (fig. 321). They far outnumbered those who had gathered for the centenary, and the festivities were spread across four days, culminating in the formal opening of the Monument on 16 December. This event sealed the idea that Voortrekker outfits introduced in 1938 were South Africa’s ‘national’ dress, just as the ‘volkspele’ (literally, folk games), dances and folk songs became part of the country’s heritage, learnt by primary-school children both Afrikaans- and English-speaking (fig. 322).

The greatly increased attendance at the inauguration is an indication of how widespread the interest and pride in Afrikaans culture and history had become in the decade since the centenary. It is also an indication of the new status of Afrikaners in the successful return to Parliament of the National Party, which made no pretence about the fact that its goal was a republic, free of British ties. While political victory allowed the National Party to dominate the celebrations, with Prime Minister Malan as the chief speaker, it also introduced a new emphasis in the meaning of the Monument (fig. 214). Gerard Moerdyk insisted that ‘there had been no political motive in the erection of the Monument’.<sup>1151</sup> Yet, because it had been built during the years when the National Party was gaining support, and was inaugurated the year following its winning the elections, the Monument came to be closely associated with the ruling regime and its policies, strengthened by the fact that the party remained in power for over forty years – the first forty years of the life of the Monument. The connection was further reinforced by Pretoria having been chosen as the site for the Monument, rather than one associated with the Voortrekkers, which downplayed a view of the Monument as simply a benign memorial to a distant history (romanticised with the passing of time, however questionable some aspects of that history might be), and tied it firmly to the seat of political power.

<sup>1148</sup> Discussed in Chapter 3 and *Bloukrans*.

<sup>1149</sup> ARCA EG PV94 1/75/1/1 Jansen files.

<sup>1150</sup> That Moerdyk arranged for his daughter Irma to be married in the Monument on 14 December 1946 is an indication of how he thought of it as a religious building, ‘die grootste kerk wat hy gebou het, die heiligdom van die Afrikanervolk’ (the largest church that he had built, the holy place of the Afrikaner people; Vermeulen 1999, x).

<sup>1151</sup> Unidentified newspaper clipping, UP Archives, Moerdyk files MDK0417T. At the same interview, however, he said, ‘My ideal is that everyone who leaves the Voortrekker Monument will be a better Afrikaner than when he entered’ – perhaps not political in the narrow sense of the word, but political nonetheless.

**Figure 319:** Moerdyk showing the frieze to members of the ATKV (*Volkstem* 10.9.1947; courtesy of UP Archives, Moerdyk collection MDK 497)



**Figure 320:** Black guard at high fence surrounding Voortrekker Monument (*Rand Daily Mail* 6.8.1947; courtesy of UP Archives, Moerdyk collection, 0469T)



While it was known as the Voortrekker Monument, situated in an area renamed Voortrekker Heights, ‘Voortrekker’ was for many synonymous with ‘Afrikaner’, and the edifice became strongly linked with the National government in the minds of countless South Africans, and hence with government policy. Its active role as a political symbol, rather than ‘a cultural resource establishing cultural identity’, was underlined by its being used to host ‘large folk festivals such as the fifth anniversary of the Republic of South Africa in 1966’.<sup>1152</sup> It had been the venue in 1961 for ‘the FAK-organized thanksgiving celebrations ... on the occasion of the establishment of the Republic of South Africa, a function replete with the traditional ox-wagons, scholar choruses, the national flag and the ritual glorification of past Afrikaner leaders’.<sup>1153</sup> Such events tied the Monument inextricably to the government’s republican goals and its perverse policies of so-called ‘separate development’. There is a clear parallel in the way ‘Die Stem’ and South Africa’s old flag, both established long before the National Party came to power in 1948, came to be closely linked to the government’s apartheid policies. President Cyril Ramaphosa summed up the attitude of many to the old flag and anthem, when he took the opportunity to position himself during a parliamentary debate as he neared his first one hundred days in office, remarking, ‘These are not symbols of Afrikaner identity. They are symbols of discrimination, oppression and misery.’<sup>1154</sup>

It has been the goal of the Monument to distance itself from these damning associations. It was all very well for the chief executive officer responsible for the Voortrekker Monument and Nature Reserve, Major-General (retd) Gerrit Nicolaas (Gert) Opperman, to argue in 2007, in a paper for the African Congress on Peace through Tourism in Uganda, that the Monument was never intended to represent apartheid.<sup>1155</sup> In that apartheid was the signature strategy of the government, the Monument inevitably became associated with that egregious policy. Moreover, the speakers at the

<sup>1152</sup> Kruger 2002, 89.

<sup>1153</sup> Grundlingh and Sapire 1989, 29.

<sup>1154</sup> *Daily Maverick*, 25 May 2018; <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2018-05-25-ramaphosa-delivers-an-impromptu-sona-2-0-gordhan-continues-his-clean-sweep/#.WzgTLNizbIU>

<sup>1155</sup> He stated that ‘the Voortrekker Monument ... over the previous nearly fifty years had, *incorrectly so*, been seen by many as an “icon of Apartheid”, (Opperman 2007, 3, our italics).



**Figure 321:** Crowds at Voortrekker Monument for inauguration, December 1949 (*The Illustrated London News* 31.12.1949; courtesy of UCT Thompson, Newspaper clippings, 1938–50)

inauguration, such as the prime minister and other government officials, had used it as an occasion to promote white supremacy<sup>1156</sup> – and indeed the frieze presented nothing to suggest that white supremacy was not what the Monument celebrated. As a defence, Opperman offered the comment that it ‘had been misused for political purposes during the previous government as it had such a tremendous appeal to the Afrikaner nationalism [sic]’: to those who thought of the Monument as an apartheid icon, this sounded more like a calculated whitewash than a vindication.<sup>1157</sup>

<sup>1156</sup> See ‘Speeches at the inaugural ceremony of the Voortrekker Monument’, typescript, UCT Special Collections. Excerpts from the speeches are included in the Introduction.

<sup>1157</sup> Opperman 2011.



**Figure 322:**  
Volkspelers  
(folk dancers) in  
Voortrekker dress  
at inauguration in  
amphitheatre of  
Voortrekker Monu-  
ment. 16 December  
1949 (Botha 1952,  
261)

As Opperman had earlier stated, ‘because of wide spread mistrust and even fear about what could happen in the post 1994-dispensation, inter alia with the monuments and museums that were associated with the history of the descendents [sic] of the European settlers, ... it was opted to privatize the Monument and to place it under the control of a non-profit company with its own board of directors’.<sup>1158</sup> To put that in plain English, there was a fear that the Monument would be destroyed if it was still part of the national portfolio after the first democratic elections of 1994 and the installation of a new government,<sup>1159</sup> and hence the pre-emptive action to save it, and the founding of a non-profit Section 21 Company, the Voortrekker Monument and Nature Reserve, in 1993.<sup>1160</sup> That the grounds had been declared a nature reserve is a development to which we will return.

Given the close association of the Monument with Afrikanerdom, it was difficult to judge how its demise from a national monument to a private institution and its ambivalent position in a newly defined South Africa would impact on the support of the people to whose concept of nationalism it had so amply contributed. And questions were being asked about whether it should survive in a post-apartheid state.

Fears that the Voortrekker Monument would be destroyed under an ANC government were to prove unfounded, but the old regime’s monuments could be as comprehensively undermined by neglect as by an active programme of demolition. The formation of a private company to run it, as

<sup>1158</sup> Opperman 2007, 2.

<sup>1159</sup> Cecilia Kruger (2002, 114) points out that, in terms of the National Monuments Act of 1969, amended 1986, the Monument did not meet the criterion of being fifty years or older to be declared a national monument, and the period was extended to sixty years under the replacement Act No. 25 of 1999.

<sup>1160</sup> In a similar move, an artefact closely associated with the Monument, the Louis Trichardt ox wagon (Mostert 1940, 47) that took part in the 1938 ossewatrek, and which had been in the keeping of the University of Pretoria since then, was reclaimed in 1993 by the ATKV, which installed it at its Hartenbos Museum (Schmahmann 2013, 33–36).



**Figure 323:** Hans Hallen. Voortrekkermonument, Winburg. 9.11.1988 (<https://www.boerenbrit.com/archives/15687/dsc01030-2#main>)

well as lobbying for continued government funding, avoided this fate for the Monument and for the Blood River site which came under its care. The third Voortrekker memorial, the Piet Retief sculpture in Pietermaritzburg, has also avoided mistreatment because it is part of the Voortrekker precinct within the Msunduzi Museum. But the fourth at Winburg has not been so fortunate. Winburg only narrowly missed being selected as the premier site for the Voortrekker Monument, and the SVK undertook to honour the erection of a monument for this, the first town of the Orange Free State, established in 1835, in whose vicinity important events, such as Piet Retief's inauguration as governor of the Voortrekkers, had taken place. Nearly twenty years after the Monument in Pretoria, a symbolic modernist structure, designed by architect Hans Hallen, was erected, with five curving vertical forms of cast concrete to represent five main trek leaders (fig. 323).<sup>1161</sup> Assigned to the care of the local municipality after the change of government in 1994, the Winburg monument has fallen prey to declining interest, dwindling funds, and a general lack of care. When visited in 2015, the site gates were locked and the building found to be in a state of disrepair, the grounds overgrown, and salvageable elements, such as the bronze plaques, electrical cables and floodlights, stolen. It stands today as a signifier of a discredited ideology.

## Destroyed or redefined?

Initially, there seems to have been a remarkably discreet turnover in monuments associated with apartheid after the ANC government was installed in 1994.

South Africa's transition to democracy had in fact seen neither the kind of triumphant toppling of monuments that accompanied the demise of the Soviet Union, for example, nor even a sustained project of removing objects associated with former dispensations. While the visual domain included numerous monuments that attest to the influence of British imperialist or Afrikaner nationalist ideas, only objects with the potential to be highly inflammatory had for the most part been removed.

<sup>1161</sup> After its completion, the SVK disbanded on 21.11.1968.



**Figure 324:** Statue of Hendrik Verwoerd being removed from the front of administrative buildings, Bloemfontein. 9 September 1994 (<http://www.apar-chive.com/metadata/youtube/2cf6fca890e306669c7bcf99ef364282>)

In a context where the focus was on reconciliation and where, for example, hearings held under the auspices of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission were perceived as a way of enabling different parties to overcome divisions and histories of conflict, the overall approach was to enable diverse histories to be commemorated.<sup>1162</sup>

President Mandela himself took a conciliatory position, cautioning against the wholesale removal of Afrikaner icons. After a figure of Hendrik Verwoerd, widely considered the chief architect of apartheid,<sup>1163</sup> was removed from in front of the administrative buildings in Bloemfontein on 9 September 1994 (fig. 324),<sup>1164</sup> he said, ‘We must be able to channel our anger without doing injustice to other communities. Some of their heroes may be villains to us. And some of our heroes may be villains to them.’<sup>1165</sup>

However, Dirk van den Berg quotes an ANC policy proposal of 14 October 1994 which recommended

that no monuments be retained in their public places because this kind of siting lends each a special status ...  
that, where monuments be removed, they not be destroyed or kept under lock and key but that they be displayed in some special building ... as a museum of truth and reconciliation ...  
that they be used in their new siting for deconstructive and conscientization purposes by means of carefully researched and written commentary ... This can be done with monuments that cannot be removed as well.<sup>1166</sup>

There was clearly some tension between conciliatory concepts that existing monuments should be retained and strongly held views that they should be removed, and these continued even once new policies were in place that recommended a policy of conservation. Sabine Marschall cites the Minister of Arts and Culture, Dr Ben Ngubane, in 2000 instructing the chairperson of the newly established South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA), which replaced the National Monuments Council, ‘to compile a register of all apartheid and colonial monuments that inhabit the South African public space’ as a matter of urgency and to draft a policy document which ‘should motivate for the removal, reconfiguration, and re-interpretation of the colonial-apartheid monuments and should also advise me on the commissioning of new monuments to address historical imbalances’.<sup>1167</sup>

While the removal of monuments was never instituted as policy, the view that they should be removed from public places has to some extent been met in the gradual disappearance, without fanfare, of a number of images of those who were considered closely involved in upholding apartheid, chiefly the busts of Afrikaner leaders in public buildings, and of others associated with Afrikaner culture. But their availability for viewing and didactic purposes proposed in 1994 does not seem to have been realised to any extent. The whereabouts of most of the displaced sculptures are typically difficult to discover, apart from an array of busts of apartheid leaders on ‘Monument Hill’ in the implausible Afrikaans-speaking white enclave of Orania, which undoubtedly still intends to honour them not deconstruct them, as also the statue of Hendrik Verwoerd at the

<sup>1162</sup> Miller and Schmahmann 2017, x–xi.

<sup>1163</sup> Verwoerd was active in developing apartheid legislation, first as Minister of Native Affairs under Malan from 1950, then as prime minister from 1958 until his assassination in 1966.

<sup>1164</sup> See Van den Berg 1995. A different sculpture had originally been proposed, but after Verwoerd’s assassination, it was decided to erect a statue of him instead (*ibid.*, 14). It was unveiled on 17.10.1969.

<sup>1165</sup> Wilkerson 1994.

<sup>1166</sup> Frank Rumbolt, ANC advisor, quoted in Van den Berg 1995, 15.

<sup>1167</sup> Marschall 2009, 38.

entrance to the town.<sup>1168</sup> Some sculptures have been placed in museums, such as the bust of John Vorster,<sup>1169</sup> transferred from the notorious John Vorster police headquarters (now Johannesburg Central) to the police museum in Pretoria.<sup>1170</sup> After the gargantuan bronze head of J.G. Strijdom<sup>1171</sup> in Pretoria fell into the cavity created when the overarching dome of the monument and the roof of the underground parking garage below collapsed, it was relocated to Strijdom House and Museum in Modimolle.<sup>1172</sup> As the collapse occurred on 31 May 2001, the old Republic Day, it was thought that it might have been a deliberate act of sabotage, but it has generally been put down to structural failure – an ‘act of God’ rather than a political intervention.<sup>1173</sup>

Other sculptures are no doubt in storage somewhere, like the number of busts from public works buildings that have found their way into the gallery storerooms of the Voortrekker Monument, including six of Verwoerd.<sup>1174</sup> Some sculptures more generally associated with an Afrikaner past have also been re-erected on this site. A restored statue of Danie Theron, hero of the Anglo-Boer War, from the discontinued Danie Theron Combat School in Kimberley, was installed at Fort Schanskop in 2002 (fig. 325). And Hennie Potgieter’s 1962 *Getemde vryheid* (Tamed freedom), a well-built man with naked torso restraining an enormous bull that conjured up an idea of Europeans controlling untamed Africa, which had been commissioned for the Provincial Administration Building in Pretoria, now stands at the entrance to the Heritage Centre at the Monument (fig. 326).<sup>1175</sup> There is a particular irony in these images finding a ‘safe haven’ at the Voortrekker Monument when many believed that this prominent structure so closely associated with apartheid rule would not endure under the new regime. Louis Eksteen, who regarded the Monument as a symbol of Afrikanerdom, created a three-part linocut in 1991 that portrayed the building dislodged from its foundations and propelled into an uncertain future (fig. 327). He recalls that it reflected

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**1168** In 1990, Verwoerd’s son-in-law, Carel Boshoff, bought the tiny town in the Northern Cape – originally established for a Department of Water Affairs project, no longer viable by 1985 – on behalf of Orania Bestuurdienste (Orania Management Service) (Cavanagh 2013, 69). Verwoerd’s widow, Mrs Betsie Verwoerd, was visited there in 1995 by Mandela, in one of his extraordinary conciliatory gestures.

**1169** Vorster was Minister of Justice and Minister of Police and Prisons, before he became prime minister in 1966.

**1170** Baird 1997.

**1171** Annie Coombes (2003, 22) incorrectly assigns this work to Danie de Jager, but it was one of Coert Steynberg’s many Nationalist commissions. De Jager was responsible for the nearby fountain with four galloping horses elevated on a column, which also formed part of the monument in Strijdom (now Lillian Ngoyi) Square.

**1172** Previously Nylstroom, this was the town where Strijdom lived for many years in a house designed by Moerdyk, who was born there. For Strijdom House and Museum, see <http://www.diepos.co.za/articles/news/19572/2013-06-14/strijdomhuis-op-modimolle-kry-nuwe-baadjie>. The damaged head was temporarily housed at the Voortrekker Monument.

**1173** It seems ironic that the rather dubious aesthetic quality of the work received positive publicity as a result: perhaps distancing himself from any likelihood of sabotage, Pretoria mayor, Smangaliso Mkhathshwa, is widely reported as saying, ‘The monument was one of our most prominent landmarks ... and a work of art, it is always a sad day when an irreplaceable artwork is lost.’ (See BBC News 31.5.2001, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1362381.stm>).

**1174** Dave Morton reports on an interview with Opperman: ‘In 1994, after Nelson Mandela and the ANC moved into Pretoria’s Union Buildings ... they had little use for the apartheid-era figures glaring down at them from the walls. Opperman was informed that unless he fetched the official portraits and bronze busts of ... apartheid leaders and Afrikaner icons, they would be disposed of. (Some of the bronzes had been commissioned for the Union Buildings in the early 1990s and never installed.) Opperman found a place for them in a storage room at the administration building at the Voortrekker Monument, along with paintings and objects removed from other government buildings, where they will remain mothballed until the indeterminate day when they can come out again without giving offense’ (<https://hoteluniverso.wordpress.com/2011/11/10/in-the-vaults-of-the-voortrekker-monument/>). These items have in fact been displayed from time to time when appropriate for themed exhibits.

**1175** Prior to its relocation to the Monument, this sculpture had already been moved away from the main entrance in Church Street in 1980, evidently because the well-endowed virility of the bull was considered offensive (Crump and Van Niekerk, unpublished, 21–22). Eric Bolsman kindly brought to our attention that another Potgieter sculpture on a seemingly innocuous enough subject, a ‘Caucasian looking’ sower and reaper (*Saaier en maaier* 1966), was also relocated from Pretoria to the Ditsong Willem Prinsloo Agricultural Museum near Cullinan (email communication, 8.9.2017), as part of the makeover of Pretoria as an ‘African city’.

**Figure 325:** Statue of Danie Theron, formerly at Kimberley's Danie Theron Combat School, installed in 2002 at Fort Schanskop adjacent to Voortrekker Monument (photo the authors)



**Figure 326:** Hennie Potgieter. *Getemde vryheid* (Tamed freedom). 1962. Bronze. Installed outside Heritage Centre at Voortrekker Monument (photo courtesy of VTM)



his sense of how many Afrikaners, shocked by the unbanning of the ANC in 1990, 'felt hopeless against the wave of liberal politics and the loss of their country and independence'.<sup>1176</sup> He titled the work *Quo vadis–triptiek* (*triptych*), echoing but inverting the tone of the Latin phrase for 'where are you going' that Malan had posed as a challenge to Afrikanerdom in the triumphant moment of the Monument's inauguration in 1949, now a query of uncertainty.

<sup>1176</sup> We are grateful to Louis Eksteen for an insightful email (8.1.2019) about his work, which is reproduced in *Voortrekker Monument 1938–2018*, 62.





The belief that the Monument would not be permitted to survive under an ANC government was visualised in a design by Penny Siopis for the cover of the programme for a History Workshop symposium at the University of the Witwatersrand in July 1992, entitled ‘Myths, monuments, museums: New premises?’ (fig. 328). Her vision of the Monument being toppled by a crowd pulling on ropes was of course impossible in real terms – those hundreds of square metres of granite-faced concrete would resist anything but the most strategically planned implosion – but the image was memorable and widely reproduced. It might even have fed the fears of those who decided to ‘rescue’ the Monument the next year. So there is a sense of disbelief that not only has it survived and prospered, but it has been declared a national heritage site by the ANC government, the first Afrikaner monument to be given this status.<sup>1177</sup> The idea of Paul Mashatile, at the time Minister of Arts and Culture, delivering his address of 16 March 2012 to formally announce the decision in front of the marble panel that depicted the Boers routing the Zulu warriors at Blood River, as pictured in publicity photographs at the time (fig. 329),<sup>1178</sup> may seem bizarre, but highlights a commitment to the inclusive concept of ‘shared culture’.<sup>1179</sup> This concept was outlined the following year by the Department of Arts and Culture in the second draft of the ‘Revised White Paper on arts, culture and heritage’, as a model to overcome the contempt of human rights and different cultures of the apartheid regime.<sup>1180</sup>

Equally unexpected but reflecting the same principle was the opening by President Jacob Zuma the previous year of an access road to link the Voortrekker Monument with Freedom Park. Built to honour those who supported human rights in South Africa’s history of struggle for democracy and equality, the new monument, like the old, celebrates freedom, but defines it in a way that is surely the antithesis of the values of the Voortrekkers who brought white domination to the interior.<sup>1181</sup> The unforeseen twinning of the conflictive sites was also echoed in the choice of date for Zuma’s opening, which took place on 16 December, the old Day of the Vow that commemorated the victory of the Boers over the Zulu, the date chosen for so many significant events at the Monument. As we

**Figure 327:** Louis Eksteen. *Quo vadis-triptiek*. 1991. Linocut, each 18 × 15 cm (courtesy of the artist; photo © Die Erfenisstigting; *Voortrekker Monument 1838–1938*, 62)

<sup>1177</sup> Gazetted on 8.7.2011, this was the successful outcome of submissions by Monument staff since 2006 to the South African Heritage Resources Agency.

<sup>1178</sup> The text is recorded in Mashatile 2012.

<sup>1179</sup> See Parker 2017, 486–489.

<sup>1180</sup> Officially released 4 June 2013. <http://www.dac.gov.za/sites/default/files/REVISEDWHITEPAPER04062013.pdf>

<sup>1181</sup> Ironically, the trekkers too saw themselves as striving for freedom, in this case from the British.



**Figure 328:** Penny Siopis. Design for ‘Myths, monuments, museums: New premises?’ History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. 1992 (Khan 1992, frontispiece; UCT Libraries, Special Collections)



**Figure 329:** Minister of Arts and Culture, Paul Mashatile, proclaiming the Voortrekker Monument a national heritage site. 16.3.2012 (courtesy of 2012Media24; foto24 Brendan Croft)



**Figure 330:** Freedom Park. Aerial view (photo courtesy of Graham Young; retrieved from a downed drone, owner unknown)

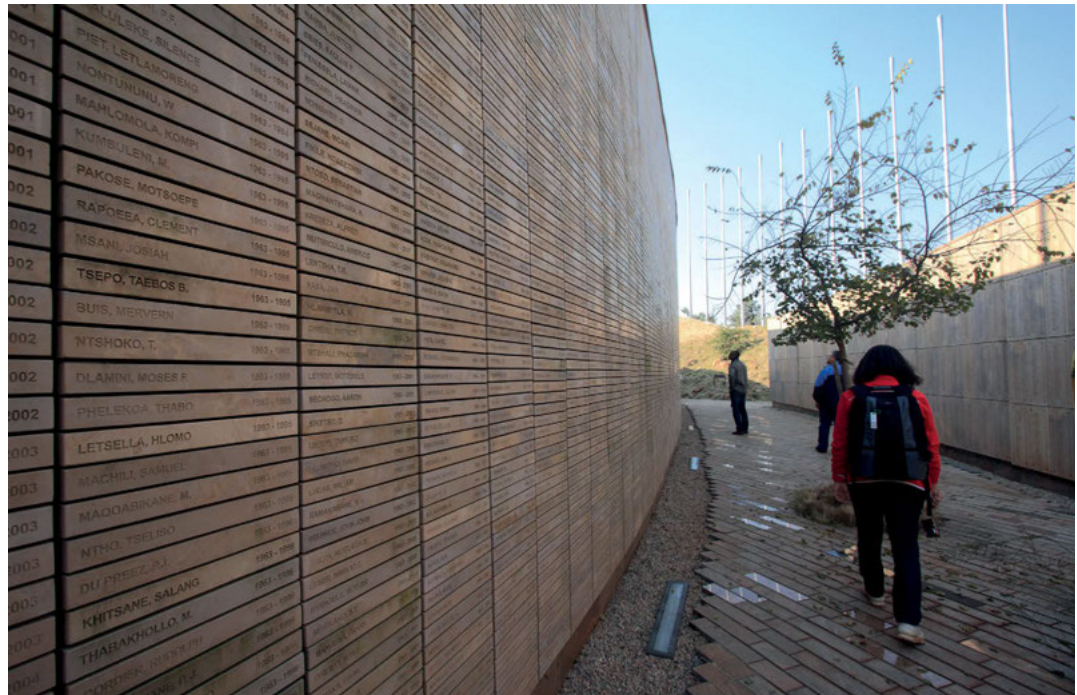
discussed in Chapter 1, it had been rechristened the Day of Reconciliation by the new government, again outplaying old concepts of white power with those of a new all-embracing democracy, and in these terms was an appropriate day for opening the new ‘Road of Reconciliation’.

While retaining 16 December as a public holiday could be considered a conciliatory gesture that permitted Afrikaners to continue to honour the Day of the Vow, it might also be considered a clever inversion of the original Afrikaner meaning of the day, aimed at neutralising its close association with white rule in South Africa. Freedom Park itself represents an adroit answer to what might be done with the Voortrekker Monument, the ultimate realisation of the Church of the Vow: the aim was to outplay the old edifice, to counter its ideology rather than to destroy its fabric. Alex Duffey recalls that, when the Monument was discussed in detail at the workshop on symbolic repatriation at the Transformation and Reconciliation Commission offices in the Sanlam Centre in Johannesburg on 13 February 1997, there were a number of delegates who thought it should be removed. But ultimately it was preserved, influenced, Duffey recounts, by his presentation, ‘National monuments in South Africa: Their future’, when he discussed how, after the fall of Constantinople, the Ottoman sultan spared the domed basilica of Hagia Sophia, saying to his soldiers that history would judge them harshly if they destroyed such a magnificent edifice:<sup>1182</sup> the Christian basilica was saved and converted into a mosque, and has served since 1935 as a museum. The Voortrekker Monument hardly falls into the same category as Hagia Sophia, but it too was spared, and not even appropriated for a new purpose. Although there were rumours that the Monument would be used for an exhibition on ANC resistance and ultimate success in overcoming white rule, attention was instead focused on an ambitious presidential legacy project, Freedom Park, to commemorate the struggle (fig. 330).

The new project, a memorial on an outcrop facing the Monument across the southern highway into central Pretoria, set up a rival grand narrative that both countered and complemented the values that the earlier edifice represented.<sup>1183</sup> Pattabi Raman writes:

<sup>1182</sup> Our thanks to Alex Duffey for this information (personal emails, 18.9.2017). The event Duffey cited took place in 1453 under Sultan Mehmed II, who spared the building so as to have it ‘transformed into his royal mosque’. See Mark and Çakmak 1992, 195–198 (quote *ibid.*, 197; Gülru Necipoğlu).

<sup>1183</sup> For a comparison of the two monuments, see Rankin 2017.



**Figure 331:** Freedom Park. Wall of Names (photo David Evans; [www.cs.virginia.edu/~evans/pictures/za2010/0622\\_freedom-park/](http://www.cs.virginia.edu/~evans/pictures/za2010/0622_freedom-park/))

The location of Freedom Park at Salvokop adjacent to the hill on which the Voortrekker Monument stands is in itself a type of insurrection and therefore a meaningful proposition. Viewed together, the heritage sites constitute a metaphor for what the physical, social, political and cultural landscape of South Africa [has been] in the past and in the present as well as what it may become in future as cultures interact and change.<sup>1184</sup>

Quite different in approach from the monolithic Monument, Freedom Park embraces the idea of an indigenous landscape inhabited by a series of shrines and memorials of stacked natural stone, which pays homage to ancient African forms – from modest dry-stone-wall settlements to the monumental structures of Great Zimbabwe. And it aims to be inclusive, commemorating all those who died as victims or fighters in the cause of human rights stretching back over the past four centuries of South Africa’s history, even if the Wall of Names, devoted to those who died in the struggle, is the most prominent (fig. 331).<sup>1185</sup> It was intended to give form to Nelson Mandela’s vision in 1999 that

... the day should not be far off, when we shall have a people’s shrine, a Freedom Park, where we shall honour with all the dignity they deserve, those who endured pain so we should experience the joy of freedom.<sup>1186</sup>

The addition of this inclusive memorial to counterbalance the edifices of the British colonial Union Buildings and the Afrikaner Voortrekker Monument echoes ideas that have been voiced in the face of current American contention over Confederate statues that represent leaders of the shameful secession and Jim Crow periods of that nation’s history, damned by those of liberal persuasion and defended by reactionaries.<sup>1187</sup> Even some liberals resist their destruction, however, feeling that the

<sup>1184</sup> Oliphant, Raman and Serote 2014, 47.

<sup>1185</sup> The inclusive agenda at Freedom Park included commemorative walls for pre-colonial wars, genocide, slavery, wars of resistance, the Anglo-Boer War, and World Wars I and II; the largest is for those who died in the struggle; initially some 75 000 names were inscribed on narrow stone blocks making up this 697 metre Wall of Names, with more being added as they are nominated and verified.

<sup>1186</sup> From Mandela’s speech on Freedom Day, 27 April 1999, Oliphant, Raman and Serote 2014, 10.

<sup>1187</sup> See, for example, J.J. Charlesworth, ‘Statue-phobia’ (*Art Review*, 16 August 2017, <https://artreview.com/opinion/>)

absence of such monuments might mute memories of a reprehensible history that should not be forgotten, so that it would be preferable to counter them with monuments to those previously marginalised or those who stand for nobler values – very much in the way that Freedom Park intends to do. But others feel that the very presence of Confederate monuments is an insult and that the only solution is to remove them, even if they are not destroyed.

In South Africa's Boer republics, there were few prominent Afrikaner monuments when the British took over after the Anglo-Boer War so the question of how to address them hardly arose.<sup>1188</sup> But the growth of Afrikaner nationalism led to a brisk rectifying of this deficiency, especially once the Nationalists came into power in 1948. While the economic need to retain English speakers' support meant that colonial monuments and memorials were not disturbed, these were soon matched by new works reflecting new interests. It meant the steady employment of sculptors such as the prolific Coert Steynberg, who turned out numerous bronzes of Afrikaner heroes and politicians. Such was the demand that it led to the opening of a second bronze foundry by Afrikaner Hendrik Joubert, who had worked at the Vignali foundry in Pretoria, and set up in competition with it in 1958.<sup>1189</sup> But while one might also have expected a rapid replacement of cultural capital, or at least a bevy of new figures after the end of the apartheid era, any demise of statues of Afrikaner leaders after 1994 did not immediately usher in an array of alternative sculptured heroes, perhaps because the memorial statue is so much a part of a western tradition, and itself smacks of colonialism.<sup>1190</sup>

In the case of Steve Biko, the celebrated anti-apartheid figure who was tortured and died in 1977 in police custody, for example, we are aware of only a bust at Durban's University of Technology on the campus named after him, and one full-length sculpture of him by Naomi Jacobson in East London, unveiled by Mandela in 1997 to mark twenty years since the Black Consciousness leader's death.<sup>1191</sup> There is also a recent life-size bronze, though not an individual monument, amongst the crowd of figures of Groenkloof's 'Long walk to freedom', discussed below. Contrarily, in view of the limited deposition of Afrikaner icons, such images sometimes become the target of right-wing retribution. The East London statue was vandalised soon after its unveiling, graffitied with the signature of the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (Afrikaner resistance movement; AWB), in what journalist Mary Braid called 'a particularly vicious act. For at the very time that Biko's image was being defaced the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was hearing the testimony of five

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opinion\_online\_jj\_charlesworth\_statue-phobia/?); Christopher Knight, 'What to do with Confederate monuments? Put them in museums as examples of ugly history, not civic pride' (*LA Times*, 18 August 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-confederate-monuments-20170818-htm1story.html>); and the twelve historians and art historians interviewed for *Art News*, 23 August 2017 (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/confederate-monuments-experts-1058411>).

**1188** One might cite the Paardekraal Monument, an obelisk erected in 1892 over a cairn of stones gathered by Afrikaners at the time they decided to wage war on Britain to reverse its annexation of the ZAR. During the Anglo-Boer War the stones were said to be dismantled by British soldiers. A major Afrikaner monument in this early period was the one to Paul Kruger of 1896, briefly discussed in Chapter 2. The British confiscated the supporting Boer sculptures, which were not added to the monument until 1925, and only after the National Party came to power in 1948 was the monument installed as originally intended in Church Square, in 1954.

**1189** One of the Steynberg sculptures that Joubert would cast was the figure of Piet Retief (see *Church of the Vow*), for the SVK-supported monument to the Voortrekkers in Pietermaritzburg. See Du Plessis 1996, 180–181. The Vignali foundry apparently lost most of its Afrikaner clients to Joubert, such as Hennie Potgieter and Laurika Postma as well as Steynberg (*ibid.*, 189). Other Afrikaner sculptors supporting the new foundry were Danie de Jager and Tienie Pritchard.

**1190** See, for example, Gamedze 2015: 'Imperialist bronze-casting methods are an unwelcome import, with their reference points and chosen sites of exhibition being stolen land and resources. ... In a project of decolonization, our imagination of public symbolism surely needs to originate *here*, using our own image-makers and artists' skill sets and disciplines, in a process that takes as departure point a democratic conceptualization of who and what needs to be memorialized, and how we would like to see that done.'

**1191** A second casting of the head of the East London statue has been installed in the garden of the Steve Biko Monument in King William's Town. Thanks to Grant Parker for passing on this information from the Biko Foundation.

security policemen who have confessed to causing his death 20 years ago'.<sup>1192</sup> Biko is included in the Gallery of Leaders at Freedom Park in Pretoria, where individuals are represented unpretentiously with portrait heads printed on banners. Generally, memorials in Biko's name are not figurative,<sup>1193</sup> such as the Garden of Remembrance developed around his grave in the Ginsberg township, King William's Town, and the Steve Biko Foundation and Centre,<sup>1194</sup> a community development organisation, also in his hometown. The Foundation in his name may go some way to meet the problem of balancing these commemorative symbolic acts with the practicalities of the South African situation, an issue raised by one of Biko's relatives, E. Naidu, who told Zayd Minty:

There's a need to balance the delivery on some of the social quandaries ... and the symbolic stuff that is taking place. In other words, it's all well and good to take John Voster [sic] bridge and rename it the Steve Biko bridge ... and then we will put up a statue or something else the other week, but if there's no houses built in that week, then it's only a matter of time before the programme collapses.<sup>1195</sup>

Naming and renaming have been favoured ways of recognising individuals neglected in the past, from airports and institutions to city streets, sometimes with the old names in cancelled form below to aid the unfamiliar, making overt South Africa's process of transformation. A different form of re-inscription has transformed the meaning of monuments too, as in two war memorials in Johannesburg. The Monument to the Rand Regiments, who fought for the British in the Anglo-Boer War, is now dedicated to the 'men, women and children of all races and nations who lost their lives' in the war, thus including not only other colonial troops, but 'enemy' Boers, as well as black South Africans fighting on either side, and all the civilians who lost their lives in concentration camps. The Johannesburg Cenotaph for the fallen of World War I is re-inscribed to honour 'all those who made the supreme sacrifice in all wars, battles and armed struggle for freedom, democracy and peace in South Africa', a purview similar to Freedom Park.<sup>1196</sup>

In an effort to explain the significance of commemoration, quite often the victims of past oppression have been remembered in memorials that are linked to museums, so that the circumstances related to their lives and deaths can be recounted. The Hector Pieterse Memorial and Museum in Soweto opened in 2002 to commemorate the children who died in clashes with police in 1976 while protesting the enforcement of Afrikaans in their schools. Although photographs and videos form part of the displays in the museum, at the memorial site the only representational form is an enlargement of the press photograph by Sam Nzima that pictured young Mbuyisa Makhubo carrying the lifeless twelve-year-old Hector Pieterse, with the boy's distraught sister running alongside (fig. 332). This moving image attracted immediate international attention, and led to Pieterse being widely identified as the first victim. Another commemorative and didactic combination, the Human Rights Precinct and Exhibition Centre at Sharpeville near Vanderbijlpark, also opened in 2002, has a memorial garden with sixty-nine symbolic pillars rather than figurative representations to commemorate the sixty-nine people shot during a peaceful protest in 1960.<sup>1197</sup>

The decision to build a museum as part of the Freedom Park complex is another example of using exhibitions to augment memorials by recording neglected histories, reflected also in the

**1192** Braid 1997.

**1193** Roux (2017, 95–97) describes an illicit but potent graffiti stencil of Biko in Port Elizabeth opposite the building where Biko was detained. She also discusses a number of ephemeral, performative works related to Biko, particularly in commemoration of the twenty-fifth and thirtieth anniversaries of his death (ibid., 107–113).

**1194** See [www.sbf.org.za](http://www.sbf.org.za)

**1195** Interview quoted in Minty 2006, 434.

**1196** These new dedications date from 1996 and 1999 respectively.

**1197** The opening of this memorial by ANC dignitaries, and its naming which omitted mention of Sharpeville, caused an outcry by the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), as it had been a pass protest organised by that group that was fired on by police, and they felt it had been appropriated by the ANC (see Marschall 2010, 52–53). A noteworthy point for our study is that the memorial garden is entered through a pylon gateway, not unlike Moerdyk's first design for the Monument.



**Figure 332:** Hector Pieterse Memorial, Soweto (<https://image.jimcdn.com/app/cms/image/transf/dimension=4096x4096:format=jpg/path/sef617628751e3ff6/image/i18a2a4da54b7db25/version/1478599632/image.jpg>)

naming of the museum in an almost forgotten language as the //hapa museum, which evoked ‘the ancient wisdom of the San and Khoi that “a dream is not a dream until it is shared by the entire community”’.<sup>1198</sup> The exhibits survey South Africa’s past from Neolithic times to the present to create a grand narrative that connects South Africa to the rest of the continent: it is conspicuous that there is little mention of the Great Trek, so abundantly addressed in the neighbouring Voortrekker Monument. It is revealing to reflect on the different approach to providing a historical record at the Monument at the time it was established, when the marble frieze was intended to fulfil this role. But supplementary material was soon planned to augment the frieze, with captions to identify the subject matter of each scene, and essays in the *Official Guide* to communicate the intended meanings and symbolism, which we discuss at length for the individual scenes. There were also museum exhibits in the lower part of the Monument, and a separate museum was added in the 1960s, its chief intent no doubt to provide a fuller presentation of the Voortrekker story with a similar agenda, all the more strident with the National Party securely in power and a republic achieved. Although still treating subjects of Afrikaner interest, more recent exhibitions have aimed at a less partial view of South Africa’s history and culture. But while museum exhibits could be changed, what of the Monument and its frieze in a post-1994 South Africa? We have already commented on the effective authority of an impermeable marble narrative: should it become desirable to modify it, its very permanence makes this problematic. As Marc Ross comments, ‘its meanings have literally been set in stone’.<sup>1199</sup>

It might be suggested that Freedom Park acts not so much as competition for the Monument but a welcome respite in that it addresses a history that the Monument does not, broadening its range and providing a complementary focus. And there is yet another alternative, somewhat anecdotal history provided nearby, opened in 2015 at Groenkloof Nature Reserve. There a stretch of lawn hosts an array of esteemed figures, life-size but informal in style and in tinted bronze, ultimately intended to be over four hundred strong, who vigorously stride forward in what is dubbed the ‘Long walk to freedom’. They are led by Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, and Walter and Albertina Sisulu hand-in-hand, with Steve Biko not far behind, and invariably tourists mingle amongst them to take

<sup>1198</sup> As described by Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe at the opening (Oliphant, Raman and Serote 2014, 29).

<sup>1199</sup> Ross 2007, 247.



**Figure 333:** Dingane. 'Long walk to freedom' at Groenkloof Nature Reserve, Pretoria. Painted bronze, life size (photo the authors)

advantage of the photo opportunity. The institution that initiated this project is the National Heritage Project Company, headed by Dali Tambo, perhaps providing a deliberate counterpoint to the Monument's Heritage Foundation. The Groenkloof figures include King Dingane (fig. 333) amongst its host of heroes, but not Piet Retief or any other Voortrekker.<sup>1200</sup>

Apart from the unusual array of bronzes at Groenkloof, Nelson Mandela is the one figure that has been an exception in terms of the remarkable number of statues of him in myriad locations. Many are on sites associated with his life story, such as Hawick in KwaZulu-Natal where he was arrested in 1962, outside the Magistrate's Court in Johannesburg where he was tried,<sup>1201</sup> and at the Victor Verster Prison in the Western Cape where he was released in 1990. These sculptures occupied new sites, but the gigantic nine-metre bronze Mandela at the Union Buildings in Pretoria, unveiled in 2013 only three days after his death, displaced a statue of past prime minister Hertzog by Coert Steynberg that previously stood in that position (fig. 334).<sup>1202</sup>

Yet Steynberg's equestrian *Louis Botha*, erected at the Union Buildings in 1946, although boarded up and used as a platform for the media during Mandela's inauguration as president, has remained in place (fig. 335). Sculptures of Boer generals have by and large fared better than those of Afrikaner politicians in post-apartheid South Africa. This was perhaps because the former are thought of as resisting British imperial power in the Anglo-Boer War, rather than as part of the Afrikaner republics that were forerunners of the Republic of South Africa, established in 1961 under an apartheid government. Steynberg's *Louis Botha* wears the dress of a Boer general and is

<sup>1200</sup> The one-hundred figures already installed by 2018 include a number of white South Africans, such as Olive Schreiner and Father Trevor Huddleston. It is notable that almost all the sculptures were made by white sculptors, some in collaboration with black artists. In 2019 the sculptures were on display at the Cradle of Humankind, Maropeng, and are scheduled to travel to Cape Town's waterfront (<https://www.nhmsa.co.za>)

<sup>1201</sup> These two sculptures of 2012 and 2013 by Marco Cianfanelli are not traditional figurative bronzes but constructions conveying likenesses of Mandela through ingenious configurations of metal elements.

<sup>1202</sup> The making of this work by sculptors André Prinsloo and Ruhan Janse van Vuuren was overseen by Dali Tambo.





**Figure 334:** André Prinsloo and Ruhan Janse van Vuuren. *Nelson Mandela*. 2013. Bronze, h. 9 m. Union Buildings, Pretoria (photo and copyright courtesy of Thomas Thomsen)



**Figure 335:** Coert Steynberg. *Louis Botha*. 1946. Bronze. Union Buildings, Pretoria (photo courtesy of Alamy ACT05P)

seated on his warhorse, Bles.<sup>1203</sup> The more dramatic bronze of Botha erected in 1931 in Cape Town, its showier horse with high-raised foreleg, arched neck and flowing mane and tail, which was designed by Romanelli and cast by Vignali as discussed in Chapter 3, by contrast shows Botha in the uniform of a military commander in the Union forces, stressing his role as South Africa's first premier. There have apparently been some objections to this sculpture, but it still stands near the Houses of Parliament, although it was defaced with paint in 2015, the inscription 'LOUIS BOTHA, FARMER, WARRIOR, STATESMAN' scored through with red (fig. 197).<sup>1204</sup>

It is undoubtedly purely coincidental that this particular sculpture of Louis Botha, rather than the Boer presentation in Pretoria, was a target, however. The vandalism occurred during the 'Rhodes Must Fall' protests of 2015 when some students at the University of Cape Town (UCT) demanded the removal of the sculpture of Cecil John Rhodes, British imperialist, mining magnate and Cape premier, and when anything that smacked of colonialism was fair game in support of demands for the eradication of colonial and apartheid symbols.<sup>1205</sup> The episode serves to demonstrate how demands for the dismantling of a statue or monument represent something far deeper, for which the memorial is merely a symbol, and which its swift removal – as was the case with the Rhodes statue at UCT, ironically built on land bequeathed by Rhodes – did little to address. In this case the protests related to the Eurocentrism that is perceived to continue at South African

<sup>1203</sup> Du Plessis (1996, 117) points out that 'Shifting alliances within the dominant ideological groups in the government probably dictated that in contrast to the Cape Town *Louis Botha*, a [later] statue of the general in Pretoria should depict him as Boer field commander'. The reference to the general's horse (ibid., 134) is from an article in *Libertas*, October 1941, 30.

<sup>1204</sup> A more creative intervention with the Botha equestrian statue took place in 1999 when artist Beezey Bailey temporarily transformed the general into a Xhosa initiate, *Abakwetha*, by painting his face white and dressing him in a blanket and hat, as part of artist collective Public Eye's PTO project, where artists were invited to submit proposals for recontextualising old monuments without damaging the original; see Minty 2006, 432–433.

<sup>1205</sup> For further examples of the defacing of public sculptures in the wake of the Rhodes Must Fall campaign, see Miller and Schmahmann 2017, ix–x.

universities in both the curriculum that is taught and the demography of the staff that teach it. And wider defacement of monuments associated with South Africa's past, like the 1931 *Louis Botha*, reflect the widespread disappointment and dissatisfaction that the peaceful negotiated transition that took place in South Africa has not yet delivered the equality that it promised, with unemployment and poverty rates still very high. As W.J.T. Mitchell remarked recently in the debates over Confederate statues in the United States, 'Let's not get fixated on statues: statues and their enforcers represent a much deeper pathology.'<sup>1206</sup> It is indicative that the Rhodes Must Fall campaign shifted into a demand that 'Fees Must Fall', a protest that represented student grievances at a more fundamental level.

Yet monuments are potent symbols and can be flashpoints for the rage provoked by frustration at social ills. As Mitchell astutely asked in an earlier essay:

Is public art inherently violent, or is it a provocation to violence? Is violence built into the monument in its very conception? Or is violence simply an accident that befalls some monuments, a matter of the fortunes of history? The historical record suggests that if violence is simply an accident that happens to public art, it is one that is always waiting to happen.<sup>1207</sup>

The temperature of protest in South Africa creates a volatile situation for the Voortrekker Monument's existence. And this is exacerbated by the fact that, just as the Monument was an effective signifier for Afrikaners during their rise to power, in the period of transition in South Africa it became a rallying point for the far right.<sup>1208</sup> During the time of political transition, after F.W. de Klerk had announced the unbanning of the ANC and the release of Mandela, the Conservative Party chose the Monument as a site for 'demonstration of right-wing Afrikaner solidarity against the prospect of political change presented by the forthcoming elections', with some 65 000 supporters attending in 1990 and 100 000 in 1993 (fig. 336).<sup>1209</sup> Through such events, associations of the Monument with the most extreme racism were being reinforced.

In the meantime the outgoing Nationalist government, playing a conciliatory role in the lead-up to the 1994 elections, had the challenge of trying to match old values to new goals: the history represented by the Monument now 'had to be reinterpreted in such a way as to (i) provide an ideological paradigm for a common white cooperative effort, (ii) to continue to act as a rallying symbol for Afrikanerdom, and (iii) to a[vo]id offending or alienating black opinion'.<sup>1210</sup> So one might well ask how the Monument has responded to changing circumstances, other than in its privatisation, in providing a haven for deposed Afrikaner images, and in achieving status as a national heritage site, none of which seems to radically modify its original purpose. What has been done to defuse the perception that it is an 'icon of apartheid', or at the very least a political institution tightly harnessed to conservative Afrikanerdom, and even to the far right, and make it acceptable to a new constituency? As Annie Coombes has queried,

... how far is it possible to disinvest such an icon of its Afrikaner nationalist associations and reinscribe it with new resonances than enable it to remain a highly public monument despite a new democratic government whose future is premised on the demise of everything the monument has always stood for. How is it possible for black constituencies to simply accept the coexistence of such an oppressive reminder of apartheid?<sup>1211</sup>

<sup>1206</sup> See artnet news 23.8.2017; <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/confederate-monuments-experts-1058411>

<sup>1207</sup> Mitchell 1990, 885–886.

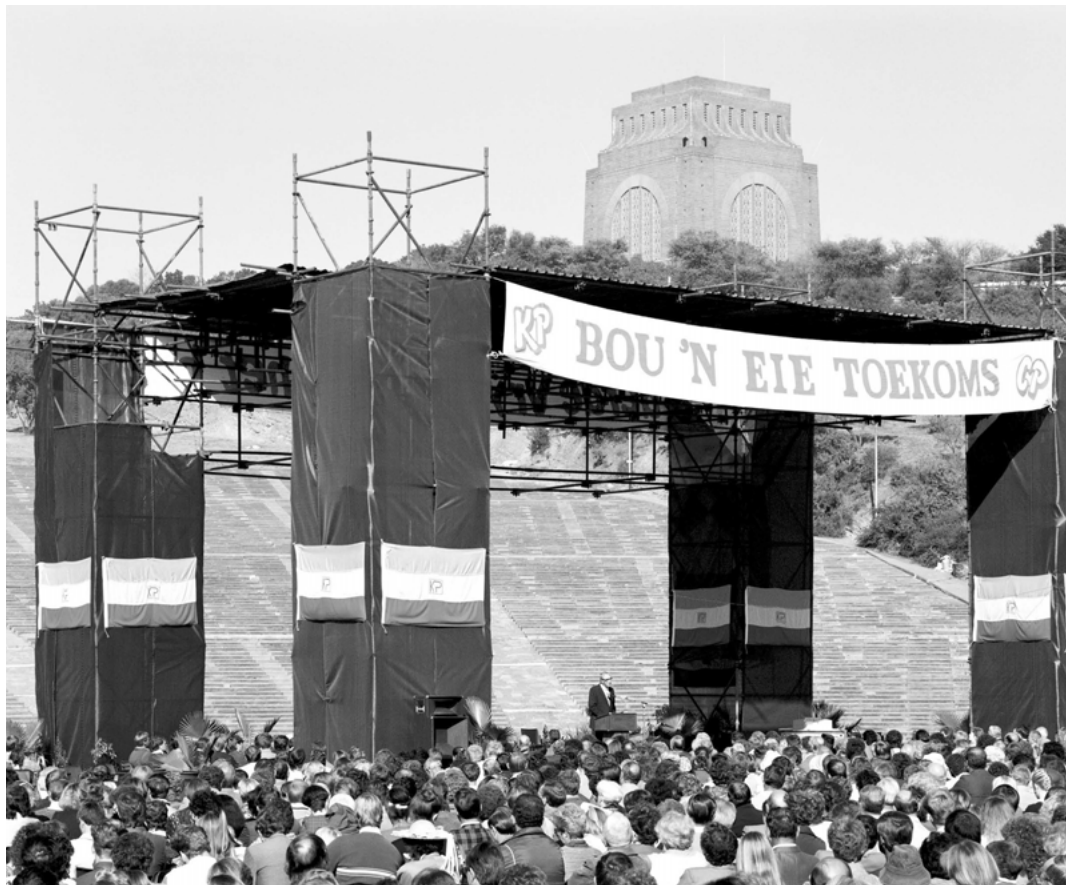
<sup>1208</sup> *Washington Post*, 1 June 1986, [www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1986/06/01/afrikaners-draw-10000/cb7ce6eb-55bd-410e-8427-d175de085858/?utm\\_term=.193a607e73f1](http://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1986/06/01/afrikaners-draw-10000/cb7ce6eb-55bd-410e-8427-d175de085858/?utm_term=.193a607e73f1)

<sup>1209</sup> Coombes 2000, 182–183; 2003, 31–32.

<sup>1210</sup> Grundlingh and Sapire 1989, 31.

<sup>1211</sup> Coombes 2003, 23.

**Figure 336:** David Goldblatt. *The Voortrekker Monument and a Sunday service of the ultra-conservative Afrikaanse Protestantse Kerk (Afrikaans Protestant Church) after a rally of right-wing Afrikaners who threatened war if South Africa became a non-racial democracy, Pretoria, Transvaal, 27 May 1990.* 1990. Silver gelatin print on fibre-based paper. Edition of 10. The slogan reads 'Build our own future' (photo courtesy the David Goldblatt Legacy Trust and Goodman Gallery)

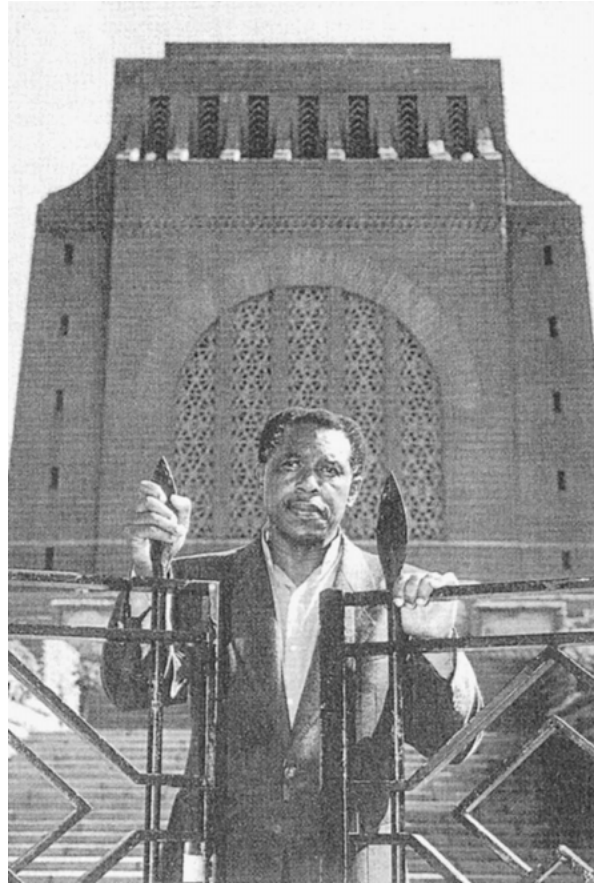


Coombes considers examples of how the new regime reacted, citing how Tokyo Sexwale, then premier of the Gauteng province where the Monument is located, appropriated aspects of the monument to a new agenda on a visit in 1996. For instance, he inverted the usual understanding of the assegais that are so frequently shown in the frieze, and represented on the gates (fig. 337), as the weapons of barbarism which the Voortrekkers had to overcome to bring civilisation to the South African interior. Sexwale reclaimed them for Africans in general and the ANC in particular, cleverly reversing the old order by saying that it was not the Voortrekkers but the armed wing of the ANC, 'Umkhonto we Sizwe, the spear of the nation, [that] opened up the path of civilisation'<sup>1212</sup> – an organisation he had served in himself.

Grundlingh recounts an extraordinary event of March 1990 when the head of ANC Intelligence, none other than the contentious later president, Jacob Zuma, met secretly with the head of the South African Security Police, and was afterwards taken with his colleagues on a late night tour of Pretoria, with the Monument as the main stop. Grundlingh interprets this 'as a symbolic act of tentative accommodation, since members of the Afrikaner elite in power were prepared to share what was usually regarded as an exclusive site of Afrikaner might with the "enemy"'.<sup>1213</sup> In fact it may simply indicate that the Monument had lost its power to offend. For, as he goes on to suggest, black leaders in a post-election South Africa probably countenance the Monument's continued existence because 'its symbolism belongs to the past: after all, what the monument stood for – apartheid – has been defeated'. And he adds that it could have taken on a new meaning: 'Implicit in this assertiveness is an inversion of symbolism; the monument is seen as a signifier of what

<sup>1212</sup> *Sunday Times* 15.12.1996, cited in *ibid.*, 37.

<sup>1213</sup> Grundlingh 2009, 168.



**Figure 337:** Tokyo Sexwale, then premier of Gauteng province, at assegai gate of Voortrekker Monument (photo *Sunday Times* 15.12.1996)

blacks had to overcome.’<sup>1214</sup> In a similar vein is the point of view of PAC cultural representative, Fitzroy Ngcukana, described by Marschall, that despite a belief that monuments ‘should represent the population as a whole ... the PAC did not intend to demolish existing buildings and monuments, because they were needed “to show our children how our oppressors lived”’.<sup>1215</sup>

Such interpretations may have ensured the survival of the Monument, but they undermine all it had stood for in the past. So how has the Monument addressed the challenges of existing in a post-apartheid society? How has it been reinventing itself for its new environment?

## Rebranding the Monument

As already suggested by the remarks of Voortrekker Monument CEO Opperman quoted earlier, officials have been actively trying to distance the Monument from its old political position. The process of de politicising could be said to have already begun in the waning years of apartheid, although not through any action on the part of the Monument itself. While it continued to attract support from those on the far right, they did not represent Afrikaners at large, where apathy to history and its commemoration was more prevalent than activism. Changes of attitude were found amongst the

<sup>1214</sup> *Ibid.*, 169. He also adds the incorrect statement that it could be considered a tribute to black labour, and quotes Pretoria councillor Donsie Khumalo who said ‘our black people provided all the labor for building the thing’. As discussed earlier, white builders were employed: the error is a reflection of how deeply established the division of labour under apartheid had become.

<sup>1215</sup> Marschall 2009, 26.

burgeoning white-collar Afrikaners who embraced urban capitalism, and also in the first tentative steps towards liberalisation in government in the 1980s. Grundlingh and Sapire point out how ‘the official FAK Great Trek celebrations of 1988 were ... noticeably lacking in a sense of purpose, vigour and ideological coherence’.<sup>1216</sup> In considering the presentation of the Great Trek in the popular weekly *Huisgenoot* in 1990, Martjie Bosman wrote:

In 1988 Afrikaner people were probably more divided than at any other time in this century – politically, culturally and in religious terms. In 1938 the symbolic ox wagon trek succeeded in overcoming political differences; in 1988 the commemoration of the Great Trek was almost symbolic of the divisions. Not only were there two separate celebrations arranged by two opposing cultural organisations, but a large section of Afrikaner people were totally indifferent to the commemoration of the Great Trek for a variety of reasons. Amongst a large section of Afrikaners today there is disappointment over his leaders’ lack of vision for the future, and a disillusionment, often also a feeling of shame about his past. With history, including the Great Trek, he would rather have as little to do as possible.<sup>1217</sup>

Opperman acknowledged a similar trend continuing through the 1990s, and filtering into attitudes to the Monument, as its ‘traditional support base ... were increasingly withdrawing from public life and deliberately distancing themselves from what was considered to be politically incorrect’, resulting in what he identified as ‘a period of gradual but consistent recession’.<sup>1218</sup> The traditional support of the Monument was failing, and the wider public felt negative about it, or at best indifferent. In her MA thesis of 2002, Cecilia Kruger, today herself managing director of the Monument, noted that

By 1999, the year in which the fiftieth anniversary of the Voortrekker Monument outside Pretoria was celebrated, this Monument was in dire need of, not only physical renovations, but it was also imperative that perceptions about this erstwhile ‘Afrikaner monument to Apartheid’, be redressed. Negative, even derogatory articles in the media as well as a decline in visitor numbers due to apathy amongst Afrikaners and other South African cultural groups, forced the then Managing Council to reconsider the entire management of this Monument.<sup>1219</sup>

She goes on to describe the appointment of ‘a younger, more dynamic Council [under Opperman], who realised that change was essential if this Afrikaner monument was to survive in a post-apartheid society’.<sup>1220</sup> Market research and a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis acknowledged that the Monument was ‘a multi-dimensional facility package that undeniably impresses visitors’ and that the new political situation and changed management attitude could provide an opportunity ‘to be part of the liberating process’. But it needed to acknowledge the handicap of its Afrikaner connotations and draw in new audiences in view of the ‘apathetic attitude’ of its old power base.<sup>1221</sup>

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**1216** Grundlingh and Sapire 1989.

**1217** ‘In 1988 was die Afrikanervolk waarskynlik meer verdeeld as op enige ander tydstip in hierdie eeu – polities, kultureel en kerklik. In 1938 kon die simboliese ossewatrek daarin slag om politieke verskille te oorbrug; in 1988 word die Groot Trek-herdenking byna simbolies van die verdeeldheid. Nie alleen word twee aparte stele feesvieringe deur twee opponerende kultuurorganisasies gereël nie, maar ’n groot deel van die Afrikanervolk staan om verskillende redes heeltemal onverskillig teenoor die herdenking van die Groot Trek. Onder ’n groot deel van die Afrikaners heers vandag teleurstelling oor die gebrek aan toekomsvisie van sy leiers en ’n ontugtering, dikwels ook ’n gevoel van skaamte oor sy verlede. Met die geskiedenis, ook dié van die Groot Trek, wil hy liefes so min as moontlik to doen hê’ (Bosman 1990, 99).

**1218** Opperman 2007, 2.

**1219** Kruger 2002, viii. More recent developments at the Voortrekker Monument are detailed in Antonites and Nel 2019.

**1220** Kruger 2002, viii.

**1221** Elize Duncan, *Kritiese evaluering van die huidige bemarkingsaksies van die Voortrekkermonument en natuurreserveaat* (Critical evaluation of the current marketing campaigns of the Voortrekker Monument and Nature Reserve). Quoted in Kruger 2002, 154.



**Figure 338:** Chinese tourists at Voortrekker Monument on Hug-a-Tourist Day (photo courtesy of VTM)

The development of ‘cultural tourism’ was an obvious opportunity. The Monument had always been an item on tourist itineraries, which brought in much needed revenue, and fresh marketing approaches have boosted attendance, so that it is one of the most visited attractions in South Africa. International tourists, led by China, followed by Germany, consistently make up more than half the numbers of paying visitors, regularly exceeding locals by as much as 10%.<sup>1222</sup> An on-site restaurant, tea garden and refreshment kiosk are available, as well as a gift shop.<sup>1223</sup> There is signage in Mandarin and apps providing explanations, and revised guidebooks, now attractively illustrated in colour, are available in Mandarin, German, French, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese, not just the Afrikaans and English of the past. As regards local tourists, while guidebooks are not available in other official languages, North Sotho is included in some of the wall texts, and tours are offered in Setswana, Sesotho, isiZulu and Tshivenda as well as English and Afrikaans. For those who take package tours, particularly popular with Chinese travellers, the Voortrekker Monument is a regular stop, a favourite with its convenient parking for buses and inexpensive entrance fees, as well as the promise of an impressive edifice with the added bonus of excellent views of Pretoria, as well as museum exhibits and pleasant surroundings. The Monument received the Golden Award at the China Outbound Travel and Tourism show in Beijing for overall performance in 2012, and an article by Luke Alfred in the *Mail and Guardian* of 24.4.2015 claims that 43% of all Chinese visitors

<sup>1222</sup> International visitors over the past five years have constituted 57% (2012/13), 53% (2013–15), 51% (2015/16), and 55% (2016/17). The lower percentage around 2015 may relate to the significant drop in Chinese visitors, the largest foreign group, because they associated the Ebola scare with the whole of Africa. Customarily in excess of 40 000 per annum, Chinese visitors fell to 23 547 in 2014/15, before rising to 30 180 in 2015/16, then returning to their previous levels. In 2016/17 Chinese visitors numbered 43 706 out of a total of 97 636 international paying visitors. But there has again been a drop in numbers over the past two years, as low as 25 701 Chinese out of a total of 73 349 international visitors for 2018/19, accounted for by more stringent visa regulations, particularly demanding in China where there are only two application centres and tourists have to apply in person. We are grateful to Lizette Jansen, the Monument’s head of marketing and tourism, for supplying us with statistics.

<sup>1223</sup> Most of these facilities are outsourced, but the Monument gains good revenue from rentals, although by far the highest generator of income is visitor fees (estimated at over R2 million in 2001/02). See Kruger 2002, 169.

to South Africa go to the Monument (fig. 338). It is intriguing to speculate what they make of it: they probably respond to the imposing scale of the Monument and the frieze rather than engaging deeply with its historical significance, as is no doubt typical of tourists in general. The article describes what Alfred observed of Chinese visitors' reactions:

They take photographs and coo admiringly as they ascend the staircases up into the dome to sample the monument's pitch-perfect acoustics. They photograph the jasmine and admire the old ox wagon at the base of the stairs, and the commanding views, soaking up the brutal splendour of it all.

The article went on to compare the visitor numbers at the Monument, reported to be as much as 250 000 per annum (though not all of them paying visitors), with the estimated 54 000 at Freedom Park, linked by the Reconciliation Road with the Monument.<sup>1224</sup> Is it cynical to wonder whether this was one of the reasons why an access road was built from Freedom Park, which has not enjoyed the same popularity and might have hoped to boost its numbers in this way?

The income generated by tourists, chiefly international but also from other parts of South Africa, is essential for the economic viability of the Monument. If that were its only recognition, however, its survival would be as a historical curiosity, no more than a relic of the apartheid era that has been wholly discredited and which many South Africans would like to forget. So as well as growing tourist numbers and increasing revenue, the management team has been energetic in finding ways to reinstate the worth of the Monument in a post-apartheid era, through what CEO Opperman called 'aggressive marketing' to develop the 'image' and the 'legitimacy' of the Monument.<sup>1225</sup> Uncoupling the Monument from its negative associations, it is aimed to rebrand it as heritage for all South Africans. Their most splendid coup was having Nelson Mandela accept an invitation to speak at the dedication of the Danie Theron sculpture at Fort Schanskop, mentioned above (fig. 325), on the Monument site on 6 March 2002. Mandela's imprimatur gave the Monument a new status and guaranteed it considerable publicity. His generous participation must have exceeded their most optimistic expectations, for not only did he speak and lay a wreath to the Afrikaner hero, but he used Afrikaans, and acknowledged the contribution of Afrikaners in the development of South Africa, even saying that Africans and Afrikaners shared a common bond in fighting for their freedom against the imperial rule of Britain.

That I hold the Afrikaner people in particular esteem is no secret ... That we have had grave and deep differences with some of the political leaders from this community and with the racial policies emanating from them, in no way detracts from our sense of appreciation of the role of Afrikaners in building our common land ... It is not to put one community against the other when we note the deep-rootedness of the Afrikaner people in this African soil of ours. And they are the one part of the white community that has fought a war of liberation against imperial domination ... It may be argued that the outcome of that struggle in turn led to the domination of others, but that shared experience of fighting for one's freedom binds us in a manner that is profound.<sup>1226</sup>

Apart from valuable publicity, this event would have gone some way towards meeting Opperman's target of improving the Monument's 'legitimacy (measured in terms of acceptability to all citizens

<sup>1224</sup> See <https://mg.co.za/article/2015-04-23-no-easy-road-between-voortrekker-monument-and-freedom-park/> At the time this was written, the link road was closed, no doubt prompting the article, which compared the busy Monument with Freedom Park which 'seems to suffer from a severe over-employment problem ... with too many security guards, gardeners and ticket officers and too few visitors and paying guests'. It also compared the R64 million annual state grant at Freedom Park as a national monument with the running costs of the largely self-funding private Monument at about R16 million. While closed for some time, the road between the sites was reopened on 1 March 2016 ([www.freedompark.co.za/media-releases/178-reconciliation-road-between-freedom-park-and-the-voortrekker-monument-re-opens.html](http://www.freedompark.co.za/media-releases/178-reconciliation-road-between-freedom-park-and-the-voortrekker-monument-re-opens.html)).

<sup>1225</sup> Opperman 2007, 3. He referred to this as one of three essential pillars, the other two being 'sound management [and] excellent service'.

<sup>1226</sup> *The Herald*, 7 March 2002. See Ross 2007, 246.





**Figure 339:** School children on a visit to Voortrekker Monument (photo courtesy of VTM)

of the country ...)'.<sup>1227</sup> And as Marc Ross points out, 'the fact that some right-wing Afrikaner groups loudly protested Mandela's visit ... only serves to further help the new administration separate itself from the apartheid-era policies'.<sup>1228</sup>

Less newsworthy, but arguably more important in the long term, are the youthful black visitors that the Monument attracts on a regular basis in school groups (fig. 339). The education team has been energetic in promoting its programmes, which account for 36% of visitor numbers according to the most recent statistics, with considerable success in attracting black schools. Presentations are offered in Setswana, Sesotho, isiZulu and Tshivenda as well as Afrikaans and English, though many opt for English. Manager of Education Services, Christo Rabie, organised an event for township educators in 2013 which had particularly positive results, so that black pupils now make up at least 60% of the school visitors.<sup>1229</sup> The Funda Discovery Centre, the new education facility opened in April 2019, will provide better facilities for hands-on programmes about comparable crafts and skills in the different cultures of South Africa, for example, to augment current discussions of common concerns shared by trekkers and other groups, such as cattle, land and trade. In this way the Monument actively addresses new South African audiences, attempting to include those who were once discounted, as discussed in general terms by Witz, Minkley and Rassool in their chapter 'Heritage and the post-apartheid':

Redeemed and bearing their histories, the excluded, archived ideally as indigenous and as resisters, were now categorised as part of the civic citizenry and able to partake in the rainbow multicultural rituals of the new society and its past. When negotiated into public institutions for the display of history and culture, it was this assertion to occupy and represent the margins, 'the previously neglected,' that inversely authenticated the claim on power to construct public history as heritage.<sup>1230</sup>

<sup>1227</sup> Opperman 2007, 3.

<sup>1228</sup> Ross 2007, 246 n 19.

<sup>1229</sup> We are grateful to Christo Rabie for supplying information about the educational programmes and taking the time to answer our many queries. In addition, we consulted the programme brochures on the Monument's website, <http://www.vtm.org.za/educational-services/brochures/>.

<sup>1230</sup> Witz, Minkley and Rassool 2017, 226.

But while the changes in educational presentations at the Monument may attempt to draw in marginalised stories to supplement that of the Voortrekkers, they do not supplant it. Day-long programmes that incorporate the new material also include visits to the Monument. Rabie speaks of how, if the theme of discussions happens to be trade in southern Africa, for example, the frieze panels on Trichardt can be used to show different aspects – trading in ivory and hides and seeking outlets at seaports (see *Soutpansberg* and *Delagoa Bay*). The frieze can also be used as the basis of discussions about conflicting historical interpretations, the treaty between Dingane and Retief being a prime example: it raises issues of how differently Zulu and Boer understood the event and the reasons for its tragic aftermath (see *Treaty and Murder of Retief*), and also the different understanding of the possession of land, which a chief could allow others to live and work on, but would never cede outright.

Rabie acknowledges, a little ruefully, that sessions on the visual arts are the easiest to run, drawing on the marble frieze, bronze and granite sculptures, and the tapestries and Coetzer's oil painting in the lower hall; there are also visits to the Monument's art gallery and art competitions. But he does not shy away from challenging topics such as Afrikaner nationalism played off against current nation-building. While fully acknowledging the Voortrekker history that is fundamental to the Monument, Rabie is anxious to shift away from cultural and historical stereotypes. Many themes are offered, and at different levels for the different grades, such as traditional Venda or Zulu culture, the lifestyle of the Afrikaner pioneers, early Pretoria history, San hunter-gatherers, the first cattle farmers,<sup>1231</sup> colonisation of the Cape, and democracy and citizenship in South Africa, which can also be presented via PowerPoint at schools. But for groups that come on visits, good use is made of the resources on site, not only the Monument itself and its historical frieze, but the displays of Voortrekker life in the museum, and exhibitions in the Heritage Centre. Sessions on the Anglo-Boer War incorporate a visit to Fort Schanskop, and there is sometimes a demonstration of firing the cannon there which is no doubt popular with schoolboys.<sup>1232</sup>

Given the breadth of the historical and cultural context that Rabie is promoting, in 2018 a full one-day course was introduced for tour guides to build a comprehensive understanding of the South African pioneer phase. Rabie is responsible for training guides to the Monument, both internally employed and external, whom he urges to encourage questions from visitors and to engage with them in a positive and open-minded way. So, while the events depicted in the frieze are presented to tourist groups in a matter-of-fact fashion as part of the history of South Africa, this can lead to more challenging and sometimes controversial discussion (fig. 315). Rabie recounts that the call for reinterpreting the official Monument symbolism generates interesting views. It is unlikely though that the debates go far enough to meet the radical revisionism called for by some academics, such as Lize van Robbroeck, who suggests the Monument would best be used as

... an exemplar of how nationalist identities are visually and symbolically constructed – it constitutes a kind of textbook example of the narcissism, chauvinism and dangerous ideology of nationalisms wherever they may be found. All nationalisms rest on grand narratives that distort history to justify possession of land, and all nationalisms depend on the creation of a debased and excluded other. If properly curated, the Voortrekker Monument could be used as an educational tool, but as long as white power is still naturalized and white privilege continues unabated, it must remain a provocation and a reminder that South Africa's white populations came off scot-free.<sup>1233</sup>

But, even if we agree with Van Robbroeck's belief that it is 'naïve to think that cultural and political meanings can be unravelled', the efforts of the Monument's educational services warrant acknowledgement. Their programmes are certainly a far cry from the propagandistic use of the Monument and the frieze in the Monument's heyday, perpetuated over two decades in Moerdyk's contributions to the *Official Guide*.

<sup>1231</sup> For cattle as central to South African history, see Glover 2019.

<sup>1232</sup> The cannon is also fired every first Friday of the month.

<sup>1233</sup> Van Robbroeck and Van Heerden 2017.



**Figure 340:** Aerial view of Voortrekker Monument site, showing the extensive grounds, the amphitheatre, and Fort Schanskop beyond (photo courtesy of VTM)

While new views can be aired, however, the subject matter of the frieze is unchanging, and in its confrontation between black and white remains as prominent as it was when Prime Minister Smuts decreed the removal of a particularly violent group of a Zulu killing a baby in *Bloukrans*. And if the frieze can still evoke pride in Voortrekker history for some, it can lead to more negative responses from others. For example, South African photo-journalist Joseph Louw wrote after a visit in 1992, 'I left the monument in a profound state of sadness ... Nowhere was there portrayed even a single gesture of kindness, mercy, magnanimity or heroism by any black. Instead they are shown either kneeling or killing.'<sup>1234</sup>

However, while the visual testimony of the frieze cannot be changed without actually destroying it, supporting material can. The main exhibit on Voortrekker life in the museum under the Monument shifts the emphasis to cultural history rather than conflict, and there are changing displays in the art gallery in the old museum building and additional temporary exhibitions in the Heritage Centre, which opened in 2008. These exhibits temper previous messages by broadening the perspective on Afrikaner history provided by the Monument itself, and this is further developed for those who take guided tours or participate in school programmes, which aim to diversify discourse and challenge old views.

Some of the developments to expand the scope of the Monument, such as the opening of a nature reserve on its 341-acre site,<sup>1235</sup> seemed to anticipate a later initiative of the ANC-led government which defined heritage very broadly in the second draft of the 'Revised White Paper' of June 2013, mentioned above, as

the sum total of wildlife and scenic parks, sites of scientific or historic importance, national monuments, historic buildings, works of art, literature and music, oral traditions and museum collections together with their documentation which provides the basis for a shared culture and creativity in the arts.<sup>1236</sup>

<sup>1234</sup> Coombes 2000, 185, quote from *Saturday Star*, 7 November 1992.

<sup>1235</sup> Administrator's Notice 270, Nature Conservation Ordinance (No. 12 of 1993) (Kruger 2002, 107).

<sup>1236</sup> See p.68 in <http://www.dac.gov.za/sites/default/files/REVISEDWHITEPAPER04062013.pdf>. However, this last clause is omitted from Heritage in the latest draft of the 'Revised White Paper', released in February 2017, with a new clause under Principles, related to nation-building: 'Foster a sense of pride and knowledge in all aspects of South African arts, culture and heritage to encourage mutual respect, tolerance and intercultural exchange between the

When the nature reserve was established in 1993, however, it was probably not thought of in those terms, but as a way of giving renewed meaning to the extensive grounds that had been allocated to the Monument, which had amply accommodated the enormous tent towns and thousands of celebrants at the centenary and inauguration, and had ensured that the edifice would always stand apart and free of the encroachment of city developments (fig. 340). One might see the conceptualising of the grounds as a nature reserve as a way of justifying the huge acreage and as one of the strategies being developed at the Monument to shift the emphasis away from Afrikaner history and politics, with the new Section 21 company controlling the site even named the Voortrekker Monument and Nature Reserve. Zebra, wildebeest and buck species were introduced for game enthusiasts, and bird watching is accommodated too. Quite different from an early project in the 1950s to create the trekkers' routes in miniature around the Monument,<sup>1237</sup> now trails are promoted for joggers and cyclists. The Monument Athletics Club meets on the site and hosts races for Athletics Gauteng North,<sup>1238</sup> and horse riding is also available. Country markets with home-made produce and craft items for sale take place regularly, and antique and collectables fairs are held on some public holidays. The amphitheatre provides a venue for events such as open-air concerts that range from classical to popular. Something of the range of activities can be demonstrated by following the Monument newsletters: across the three months from July to September 2017, for example, it listed Youth Day events, a fundraising concert for fire-devastated Knysna, the Springbok 'Vasbyt' race, an annual golf day, an Antiques Fair, Heritage Day celebrations, a Bethel gospel group concert, a Voortrekker (youth group) eighty-fifth birthday, a night tour of the Monument, and an upcoming Park Acoustics concert at Fort Schanskop. These activities have a double benefit: while they all contribute to the concept of a more secular Monument that is a venue for all South Africans to enjoy,<sup>1239</sup> many are privately run, and provide an ongoing source of income. Recent statistics show that markets, fairs and other events contribute 5% of the Monument's income, and another 11% comes from hiring out spaces for functions such as school dances and weddings.

So successful have the efforts to de politicise the Monument been that a 2017 article by Anton van Vollenhoven issued 'a warning that such a change needs to be dealt with carefully as it may lead to the decontextualisation of the monument, which in turn may result in it losing its status as Grade I heritage site'.<sup>1240</sup> However, although it is no doubt something of a balancing act with new initiatives, the Monument continues to foster its traditional supporters, and does not deny its Afrikaner roots. The overriding goal of the Heritage Foundation, established as a separate non-profit company in 2002,<sup>1241</sup> is 'to conserve threatened heritage resources, especially those of emotional, cultural and historical importance to the Afrikaans-speaking section of the population'.<sup>1242</sup> A

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various cultures and forms of art to facilitate a shared cultural identity constituted by diversity.' See '2.3 Principles', p.9 ['4.4 Heritage', p.20] in [http://www.dac.gov.za/sites/default/files/Revised%203rd%20Draft%20RWP%20on%20ACH%20FEBRUARY%202017\\_0\\_0.pdf](http://www.dac.gov.za/sites/default/files/Revised%203rd%20Draft%20RWP%20on%20ACH%20FEBRUARY%202017_0_0.pdf)

**1237** A tall tapering shaft of polished granite commemorating Retief and naming the (white) followers who died with him, designed by Hennie Potgieter in 1971, was a marker of the site of their deaths on one of these routes, with a rock inscribed kwaMatiwane, and a single Zulu beehive dwelling nearby intended to represent uMgungundlovu.

**1238** <http://www.vtm.org.za/monument-athletics-club/>

**1239** Success in this regard may be measured by the readers of the newspaper *Record* picking the Monument as the best place to take out-of-town visitors four years in a row, and newspaper *Beeld* readers selecting it as the best monument out of four provinces for 2016 and 2017.

**1240** Van Vollenhoven 2017. He is referring particularly to the development of other structures, and recommends that a 'buffer zone' be developed around the Monument, and that anything without a direct connection be placed outside that zone.

**1241** The professional staff of the Monument also work for the Heritage Foundation, which completed an independent centre on the Monument site for exhibitions, a library and an archive in 2008. We are indebted to Cecilia Kruger for her generous assistance with information on this and many other aspects of the recent management of the Monument.

**1242** As described on the official website of the Monument ([www.vtm.org.za/heritage-centre/](http://www.vtm.org.za/heritage-centre/)). It is notable that this is not limited to white Afrikaners: one of the research projects is on the Griquas of Campbell (see [es.orgza/en/griquas-of-campbell-3/](http://es.orgza/en/griquas-of-campbell-3/)).



**Figure 341:** Gedenktuin (Garden of Remembrance), Voortrekker Monument (photo courtesy of VTM)



**Figure 342:** Chapel, Voortrekker Monument (photo courtesy of VTM)

‘Friends of the Voortrekker Monument’ membership has been established, where a modest annual fee entitles holders to free entry to the site. And the most important event on the Monument calendar remains 16 December when a service is held to honour the historical Vow,<sup>1243</sup> and participants witness the sun’s rays falling on the cenotaph (fig. 2).

A new amenity aimed at the same community has been the creation of an enclosed Garden of Remembrance, a ‘Gedenktuin’, which offers commemorative niches to house ashes in a secure, secluded place where loved ones can be remembered, at a time when there have been concerns about the desecration of cemeteries (fig. 341). The chapel in the Monument grounds is also available for funerals (as well as weddings), and it is notable that it and the columbarium are non denominational (fig. 342). These developments are, however, particularly aimed at members of the conservative Afrikaner community who continue to value the Monument and what it stands for.

Another recent development is more contentious. Despite many submissions from veterans, Freedom Park has refused to record the names of South Africans who died while serving in the South

<sup>1243</sup> The problematic history and wording of the covenant is discussed in *The Vow*.



**Figure 343:** SADF Wall of Remembrance, Voortrekker Monument (photo the authors)

African Defence Force (SADF), because it is deemed that they were fighting to uphold apartheid and hence in breach of human rights. Fundraising was undertaken for an independent memorial wall, and permission was given for it to be erected in the Monument grounds (fig. 343).<sup>1244</sup> Echoing the form of the Wall of Names at Freedom Park, it commemorates 2 489 SADF members who gave their lives between 1961 and 1994, with further names added since it was inaugurated on 25 October 2009. Much appreciated by the families of those who died, it is often visited, and some 1 000 attended the inauguration. It was decided to have an annual event on the Sunday nearest 31 May, the old Republic Day, from 2011, and there have been various other commemorations held there. As conscription was in operation, those serving in the SADF were by no means all Afrikaners or supporters of the National Party, but the association of the memorial with the SADF that upheld government policy does link it firmly with apartheid, and the new state military, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), have declined to take part in the annual commemoration. Possibly more than anything else on the site, the Wall of Remembrance underlines differences from Freedom Park, and makes a rival claim to heritage that suggests a continuing political role for the Monument.

Perhaps this can be justified, not only by acknowledging the need to mourn for all who lost family members, whatever the cause they were fighting for, but also the need to remember history. At the ceremony regarding the elevation of the Voortrekker Monument to a national heritage site, Minister Mashatile quoted from the Constitution: ‘We the people of South Africa, recognize the injustices of our past. Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.’ He went on to say,

Part of our history is painful. It is a history of exclusion, suppression, domination of one by another and a history of division.

However, we cannot wish away this history!

<sup>1244</sup> See <http://www.vtm.org.za/wall-of-remembrance/>. Much of the funding came in the form of donations of material and skills, and Monument funds were not deployed.

It must be told and told in full to current and future generations.  
 It must be embraced as a defining feature of where we come from  
 and who we are as a nation.  
 This history must be a constant reminder that Freedom and Democracy  
 came at a price. It must therefore be defended jealously.<sup>1245</sup>

He probably did not have South Africa's border wars in mind, but they too are part of that history.

## Representations and rejoinders

From the outset, the Monument was associated with images of popular culture in the many souvenirs that were made for both the centenary and inauguration celebrations. The SVK kept a careful eye on these and tried to control the quality of designs. Many came from W.H. Coetzer, who prepared motifs suitable for application to china and other artefacts in both 1938 and 1949. The Africana Museum acquired a number of those made for the inauguration at the same time as it bought Coetzer's sketches for the frieze, discussed in Chapter 2, and the museum's accessions register lists pencil drawings for such items as a bowl, jug and tumblers, spoons, a penknife, table cloth and napkins.<sup>1246</sup> Uniewinkels were given the right to handle souvenirs; an agreement dated 17 November 1937 gave them sole agency in return for a 10% royalty for Monument funds.<sup>1247</sup> An example with their logo on the base is a small bowl, modelled on those used as cups by the trekkers, the centenary identified by the motif of a burning candle with the dates 1838/1938 (fig. 344). This acts as a divider between sepia images of the intended Monument on one side and an ox wagon in the Drakensberg on the other, motifs that are repeated again and again in different combinations. In another example, an ox wagon makes its way along the handle into the bowl of a commemorative spoon – and hence directly into the mouth of the person using it: here history is spoon-fed (fig. 345). Items like these are probably to be found in many South African homes, some still treasured, others forgotten at the back of a shelf, gathering dust. There were possibly also many personal mementoes made that would not have been publicised like the commercial souvenirs, not least the many garments lovingly stitched for the occasion. A very unusual example is recorded in a letter of 3 October 1941 from I. Juta to SVK secretary Scheepers, offering for a raffle to raise funds for the Monument 'a white silk tea table cover embroidered in black, some Voortrekker scenes, which

<sup>1245</sup> Mashatile 2012.

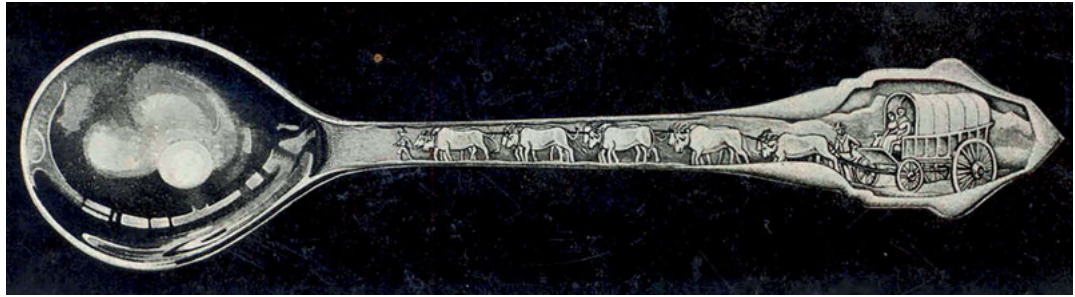
<sup>1246</sup> Coetzer's designs for souvenirs, stamps and medals are to be found in the catalogue of the Africana Museum (Kennedy 1971, 152–156; items C1035–1077).

<sup>1247</sup> It appears from SVK minutes that Uniewinkels were still the preferred supplier for the inauguration, with sole rights to sell on the site, although their offer of 5% royalties was felt to be inadequate (SVK 16.8.1948: 18; 14.2.1949: 15).



Figure 344: W.H. Coetzer. Souvenir bowl for 1938 centenary (private collection; photo the authors)

**Figure 345:** Souvenir spoon for 1938 centenary (private collection; photo the authors)



**Figure 346:** Leanie van der Vyver. Voortrekker Monument tea set. 2012. Porcelain, h. 29 cm (Zulu warrior teapot), 26 cm (Voortrekker maiden teapot) (courtesy of the artist; photo Kleinjan Groenewald)



was made by an old man, who is a great grandson of the Voortrekker Comdt Johannes Stephanus Maritz'.<sup>1248</sup>

It is hard not to smile when one reads that, amongst the many ideas that were put forward for designs related to the Monument, one was proposed for a wireless – presumably without the knowledge that the Art Deco Monument had been criticised for looking like an enlarged Bakelite radio.<sup>1249</sup> But there have been some intentionally light-hearted pastiches of the building, such as a Monument-dovecote in Evita Bezuidenhout's garden, as well as a statuette with a dodo nesting on top of a diminutive Monument, items matching the irreverence of Pieter-Dirk Uys' satirical monologues on South African culture and politics when he takes on this celebrated persona.<sup>1250</sup> Equally quirky but more serious in purpose is a contemporary Art Deco tea set designed by Leanie van der Vyver in 2012, based on the Monument (fig. 346). In the designer's words, it is given 'a Post-Apartheid make over, where all South Africans are celebrated equally. I based various elements on sculptures from the original Monument. ... The Voortrekker woman and the Zulu warrior now enjoy equality in the context of my tea set'.<sup>1251</sup> The small figures emerge as busts from her teapot lids, where the Zulu warrior still brandishes his assegai. The Monument is so well known and so readily recognisable

**1248** HF Archives (old numbering) VTM vol. A7. The letter stipulated as the only condition that the winner's name be published in the *Transvaler* and *Vaderland*.

**1249** A letter of enquiry dated 26.5.1940, sent from attorney Chas L. Murray on behalf of a client, seeking permission to 'market a wireless set with a cabin designed after the Voortrekker Monument' in return for a royalty of 5/- per set sold, is in the HF Archives (old numbering) VTM vol. A7.

**1250** The Voortrekker Monument newsletter for November 2017 mentioned that this celebrated comedian, Pieter-Dirk Uys, who had recently visited the Monument, is a descendant of the Uys family depicted on the frieze – Jacobus (*Presentation*), Piet and Dirkie (*Dirkie Uys*). In Uys' ongoing YouTube series 'Evita's Free Speech', an image of the Voortrekker Monument invariably appears in the background to remind viewers of Evita's (and Uys') Afrikaner origin.

**1251** <http://cargocollective.com/Leanie/The-Most-Amazing-Tea-Set-Ever>





**Figure 347:** Commemorative medal issued by mayor of Johannesburg for inauguration of Voortrekker Monument. 1949 (courtesy of VTM Museum VTM 549; photo the authors)



**Figure 348:** Commemorative medal issued for the quarter-century of Voortrekker Monument. 1974 (courtesy of VTM Museum VTM 889; photo the authors)

that the form lends itself to such appropriations; and its symbolism also invites parody. One day someone will probably design a ‘Medal for Dishonour’ for the Monument, in the manner of sculptor David Smith, a counter-piece to the many that have been made in its honour.

There were a number of commemorative medals struck in 1938, some with the ubiquitous ox wagon, but one designed by Coetzer portrays the Monument-to-be, inscribed VOORTREKKER-EEUFEEES 1838–1938 (fig. 317). The reverse shows two young runners carrying torches, inscribed KAAPSTAD – MGUNGUNDLOVU – PRETORIA – FAKKELLOOP (torch run).<sup>1252</sup> Another with the same representation of the Monument has an image of a lighted candle surrounded by a chain on the reverse, similar to the Coetzer bowl motif. Interestingly, the same relief image of the Monument was struck for the inauguration, even though the representation of the wall of wagons was not accurate;<sup>1253</sup> only the inscription was changed to read simply VOORTREKKERMONUMENT

<sup>1252</sup> A Uniewinkels advertisement amongst the Engelbrecht papers at the NHKA states that the edition, of oxidised bronze and limited to 1 000, was designed by Coetzer and produced by Silwerfabriek Voorschoten in Holland; the cost was 12/6d.

<sup>1253</sup> What appears to be a double structure is shown around the Monument with a circle of wagons fused with a higher wall; this may be the result of the compressed perspective of the small-scale medals as a pencil drawing by Coetzer



**Figure 349:** Frikkie Kruger. Model of Voortrekker Monument. 1949. Metal, h. 16 cm (courtesy of VTM Museum VTM 1646; photo the authors)

PRETORIA. The reverse in this case portrays the head of a young Voortrekker woman in a kappie, or, alternatively, an elderly bearded Voortrekker man both inscribed INWYDING – INAUGURATION – 16.12.1949. Another inscribed PRESENTED BY THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL JOHANNESBURG has that city's crest on the reverse (fig. 347). For a medal commemorating the Monument's quarter century in 1974, a more formal frontal view of the Monument is depicted, framed by the five-pointed plan of Van Riebeeck's Cape Town Castle. The reverse in this case is inscribed QUO VADIS (fig. 348),<sup>1254</sup> quoting Malan's challenge to Afrikaners in his inauguration speech of 1949, with the response ONS ANTWOORD (we answer). These medal reliefs were the chief 'sculptural' mementoes. The sculptors were not permitted to make miniature facsimiles of the panels of the frieze, as they had requested; Frikkie Kruger did make a small metal replica of the Monument itself (fig. 349),<sup>1255</sup> however, and there were also some casts made in ceramic.

Although there were no replica souvenirs of the frieze, the original became extremely well known, if not through visits to the Monument itself, through the numerous photographs reproduced not only in guides to the building, but history books and especially school textbooks. Scenes from the frieze also featured prominently in David Millin's popular film *Die Voortrekkers* of 1973. As with the treatment of the Trek in *Bou van 'n nasie*, the emphasis is on Retief's story, with many similar episodes. Of interest for a consideration of the afterlife of the Monument is Millin's use of the Hall of Heroes and the frieze. The film opens with a group of white school children climbing the steps to visit the Monument (appropriately from Dirkie Uys School, as acknowledged in the credits).

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dated 1949 in the Museum Africa collection (fig. 363), which corresponds closely, demonstrates that the wagons were intended to be an independent circle.

**1254** Clearly Malan's question had caught attention; a cartoon in the *Cape Times* of 17.12.1949 headed 'Whither South Africa?' featured Voortrekker Monument/1949 on an unfolding scroll, where the next image was an outline of South Africa with the dates 2000–3000 AD and an enormous question mark.

**1255** A cast was included in the exhibition *Monumentaliteit / Monumentality*, curated by Cecilia Kruger, at the Heritage Centre Museum, VTM, 2014/15. Small replicas of some of the scenes of the frieze are available today among the mementoes on sale at the Voortrekker Monument.



**Figure 350a:** Aerial view of commemorative laager at Blood River. 1971 (photo courtesy of Freddy Reck, [www.Reckfilm.de](http://www.Reckfilm.de))



**Figure 350b:** One of sixty-four full-size Voortrekker wagons replicated for commemorative laager at Blood River. 1971. Bronzed cast iron (photo the authors)

Solemn faced, they make their way around the Hall of Heroes, gazing at the frieze, while a voice-over outlines information about the Trek;<sup>1256</sup> the subsequent credits have the Voortrekker tapestries as a background, and Coetzee paintings and other Afrikaner works are also used. Even once the dramatic enactment of the Trek is under way – and it is a rousing account in the adventure movie genre – there are occasional visual references back to the frieze, as when the scene of Dirkie Uys

<sup>1256</sup> Interestingly, Ransford (1972) is credited as Millin's source.

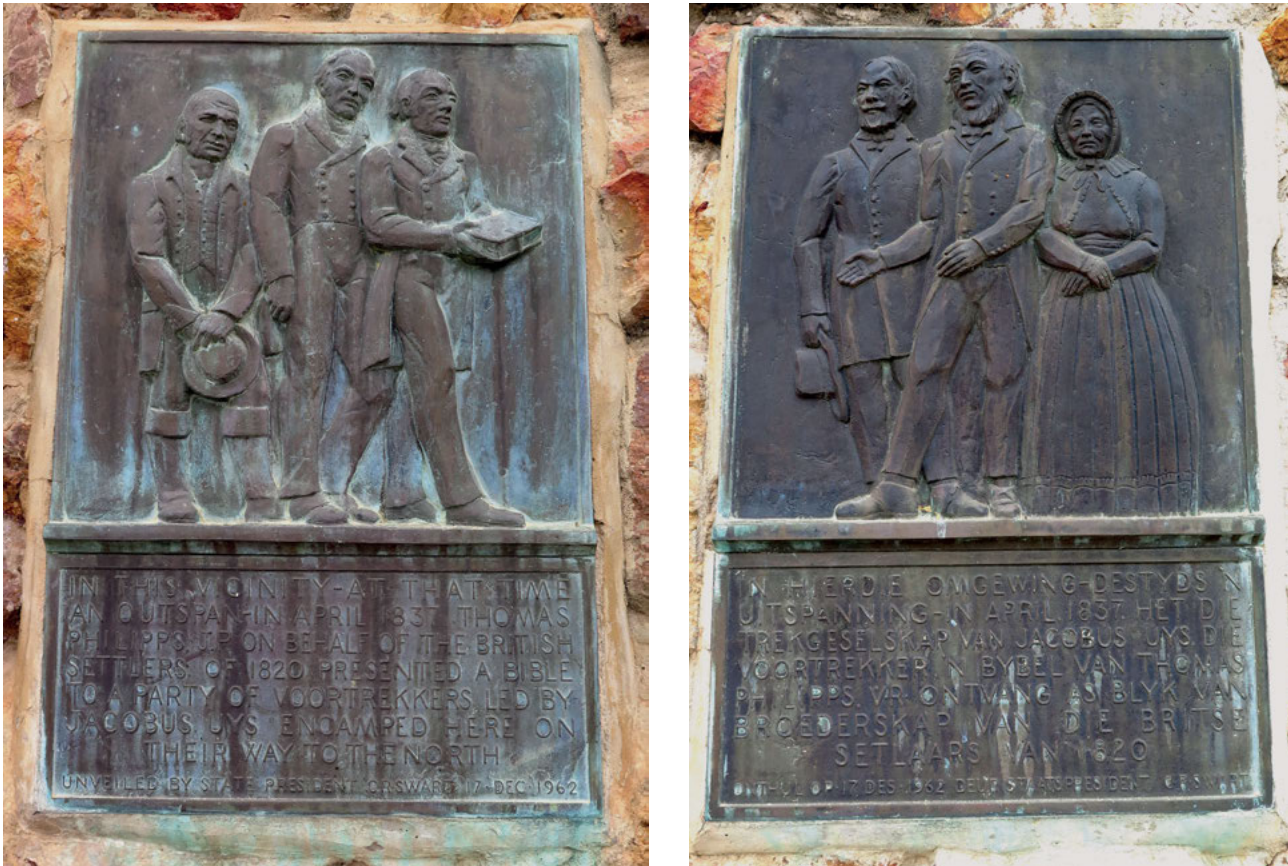


**Figure 351:** Harry Atkins. Frieze of the Jansen extension of Voortrekker Museum, Pietermaritzburg, 1959. Stone (photo courtesy of Louis Eksteen)

defending his wounded father appears after the Italeni misadventure of the Vlugkommando led by Piet Uys and Hendrik Potgieter.<sup>1257</sup> The 1971 memorial at Blood River – full-size copies of sixty-four Voortrekker wagons made in bronzed cast iron (figs 350a–b), erected in situ to recall the original Boer laager (replacing Steynberg’s earlier granite ox wagon erected for the centenary) – is used in the film as a backdrop for the representation of the battle evoked by shadowy Zulu figures. But for the concluding episode of the Trek narrative, the film finale reverts back to details of the frieze and the Monument and shows the ray of sunlight falling on the cenotaph in the lower hall. The silent attentiveness of the children and the interleaving of the monumental reliefs with the drama serve to suggest that this was far more than an adventure movie, and reminded viewers that the Trek was a significant historical event that continued to be an uplifting example for youth. The Monument could equally be used in a negative way, however. The 1971 film *Afrikaner*, an acerbic expose of Afrikanerdom made for the BBC by Hugh Burnett, opens with a view of Van Wouw’s *Voortrekker mother and children* (fig. 49) and then the Monument itself. The commentator identifies it as an ‘Afrikaner symbol of his intention to live forever’ and suggests that the Afrikaner is still fighting the world from within a defensive laager, like that around the building. Whether used in a positive or a negative light, the Monument and its art provide a strong signifier.

The frieze casts a long shadow: it is not possible that any artist creating a monument related to the Voortrekkers after 1950 could do so without awareness of that precedent. We know of three that invite direct comparison with the Monument: the small relief frieze over the door of the Jansen extension to the Voortrekker Complex, part of the Msunduzi Museum in Pietermaritzburg, completed in 1959 by Harry Atkins (fig. 351); the two bronze panels of the 1962 Bible Monument at Grahamstown by Ivan Mitford-Barberton (fig. 352); and the six reliefs at the Vegkop Monument, inaugurated as late as in 1984, also in bronze, designed by Coert Steynberg but carried out by his daughter, Isa (fig. 353). They are discussed in Part II in relation to the relevant scenes of the frieze – *Church of the Vow*, *Presentation* and *Vegkop* respectively – but it is worth noting here that all are episodic, and do not attempt to create a continuous narrative in the manner of the Voortrekker Monument frieze. The Bible Monument represents only the one event, even though depicted in two panels that definitively divide the British settlers from the Boer trekkers, to whom they present a Bible. The Pietermaritzburg museum frieze is continuous but brings together three rather different narratives: crossing the Drakensberg and Dirkie Uys flanking the Vow in the centre. Only Vegkop tells a story, and expands the subject matter of *Vegkop* and *Negotiation* at the Voortrekker Monument into six independent panels. Stylistically too the later reliefs differ: those at Pietermaritzburg

<sup>1257</sup> One wonders whether the subject matter of the frieze may have influenced some elements in the film, particularly the prominence given to *Teresa Viglione* and *Marthinus Oosthuizen*, neither of whom appears in *Die bou van ’n nasie* although the coverage of the Trek is similar in many respects. Another feature that suggests a relationship to the frieze is that one of the women who demand revenge after the Bloukrans massacre states that she would stay to fight ‘al moet ek kaalvoet loop’ (even if I have to walk barefoot), which seems to be attempting to make Moerdyk’s misplaced quote in the *Official Guide*, of Susanna Smit threatening to walk barefoot over the Drakensberg to leave British rule in Natal, more logical at this earlier point in the narrative.



**Figure 352:** Ivan Mitford-Barberton. Bible Monument, Grahamstown. 1962. Bronze panels with English settlers presenting Bible (left side of monument) to Voortrekkers (right side) (photos the authors)

and Grahamstown follow the shallow planar compositions of the Monument, but the figures are more stylised, closer to Cape Town's Old Mutual frieze discussed at some length in Chapter 2. The Vegkop Monument reliefs are more naturalistic and far more pictorial, using perspective devices such as diminishing scale to create deep space.



**Figure 353:** Isa Steynberg. Three panels of the Vegkop Monument: *Attack, Flight of Ndebele, Help from Rolong*. 1984. Bronze, each 0.9 × 1.39 m (photo courtesy of Vegkop Monument)

Another type of pictorial representation, directly related to the Monument, is found in the sets of stamps commissioned by the SVK. The first three stamps, issued in May 1933, were part of the earliest fundraising efforts, as outlined in Chapter 1, and had motifs of a Voortrekker man and maiden, based on Van Wouw sculptures, and an ox wagon.<sup>1258</sup> Ox wagons had appeared on earlier stamps of 1927–1928, one inspanned, one outspanned, but the Voortrekker one was differentiated by showing a wagon's steep ascent up a precipitous mountainside. A further Voortrekker Monument Fund stamp issued in 1936 depicted the so-called Church of the Vow, with the ½d value inscribed on flanking Zulu shields. There were thus eight stamps in all, as they were issued in both Afrikaans and English (fig. 21). Sales of these stamps continued up to the end of September 1938, and supporters who affixed them to special envelopes, decorated with an ox wagon curving its way across the bottom to climb a precipice on the left, designed by Coetzer, were able to consign them to the Ox Wagon Post of the ossewatrek (fig. 354). The organisers undertook to have them franked at key places along the route. The response was so overwhelming that the official trek postmaster, Tienie van Schoor, soon realised that the *Piet Retief* and *Andries Pretorius* wagons would not be able to complete the task but would fail under the weight, initially half a ton, already increased by about one hundred kilograms by the time they had reached Worcester. The post had to be off loaded so that the ossewatrek could continue, and an additional large wagon, christened *Hendrik Potgieter* (fig. 33), was rapidly built by Phillips wagonmakers in Paarl and transported by train to the site to load all the envelopes, and then catch up with the other wagons of the symbolic Hoof trek.<sup>1259</sup>

Of course none of the early stamps could represent the Monument itself, as no decisions about it had been made at that stage, but this was remedied in 1938. When Coetzer designed commemorative brochures and a matching envelope for the centenary, while the back repeated the familiar ox wagon, the front depicted the intended Monument framed by an arch of wagons and supported on a stepped base to accommodate a new set of stamps.<sup>1260</sup> And the new set of six designs issued to mark the centenary, also by Coetzer, included the Monument as the uniquely monochromatic blue

<sup>1258</sup> These stamps carried both the value of the stamp and the amount for the Monument Fund.

<sup>1259</sup> Mostert 1940, 43. For more details on this and the stamps, see [http://www.southafricacollector.com/Collect\\_Southern\\_Africa/10\\_1933\\_38\\_Voortrekker\\_Issues.htm](http://www.southafricacollector.com/Collect_Southern_Africa/10_1933_38_Voortrekker_Issues.htm)

<sup>1260</sup> More detail is provided in the booklet *Description of the new South African Voortrekker centenary stamps (Designed by W.C. Coetzer)* in ARCA, Jansen file PV94 1/75/1/9.



**Figure 354:** W.H. Coetzer. Envelope for centenary ossewatrek with Voortrekker Memorial Fund stamps (1933–36), addressed to SVK chair. 1938 (courtesy of ARCA PV94 1/75/19; photo the authors)

3d stamp. This time the stamps, again printed separately in Afrikaans and English, were pictorials of landscape format to accommodate panoramas behind the motifs, most as two-colour framed views (fig. 22). They depicted a 1/2d farming scene, two of 1d with wagons crossing the Drakensberg and a wagon wheel with a braking chain respectively. A further two of 1 1/2d depicted Voortrekkers surveying the landscape on one and on the other the signing of the treaty by Dingane, reminiscent of Coetzer's monochrome oil of the subject that he had painted at the time he made sketches for the frieze (fig. 113). Coetzer was also responsible for the set of three stamps produced for the inauguration in 1949. This time the stamps were bilingual, with both English and Afrikaans, portraying a trek scene for the magenta 1d, and a Voortrekker woman and man flanking a burning candle with a Bible for the blue 3d. The blue-green 1 1/2d shows the Monument framed in a Cape Dutch gable of the holbol type from the so-called Church of the Vow, implying that the new memorial also fulfilled that promise (fig. 23).<sup>1261</sup>

The many publications for the centenary and the inauguration, particularly the special supplements produced by newspapers, also provided design opportunities. While the numerous advertisements invented patriotic slogans and drew ingenious parallels between Voortrekker and modern products, some also employed (invariably pedestrian) illustrations especially made for the occasion, with ox wagons by the hundred. The Vacuum Oil Company, which marketed Pegasus and Mobiloil, produced a map as a poster with the main stops for the symbolic ossewatrek, embellished with vignettes of Zulus attacking a laager and of some of the trek leaders, together with scrolls of the Retief treaty and descriptions of the places along the route to the Voortrekker Monument, which itself provided the largest of the icons (fig. 355).<sup>1262</sup> The special commemorative supplements often drew on the work of recognised artists to create images of topics which, as we saw when considering the initial designs for the frieze, had been little depicted previously. Although *Die Huisgenoot* magazine was usually in black and white, the commemorative publication *Gedenkuitgawe van die Huisgenoot* of December 1938 went to the expense of including colour plates – for example, a painting of *Blood River* by W.H. Coetzer, very like his sketch for the frieze, and an aerial view of uMgungundlovu by Margaret Carey that corresponds quite closely to the city portrayed in *Murder of Retief*, although shown from a different vantage point. There are also black-and-white illustrations, including striking little panoramas by Pierneef at the head of some of the text pages, to represent trek routes, with views of the Karoo and the Northern Transvaal. The cover by Pierneef is a colour reproduction of a painting with an approaching ox wagon in front of his hallmark 'cubist'

<sup>1261</sup> In 1974, an elongated 4 cent stamp in full colour, showing the vast encampment around the Monument at the time of the inauguration, was produced for its twenty-fifth anniversary.

<sup>1262</sup> Mostert 1940, 40, records a message from the company.



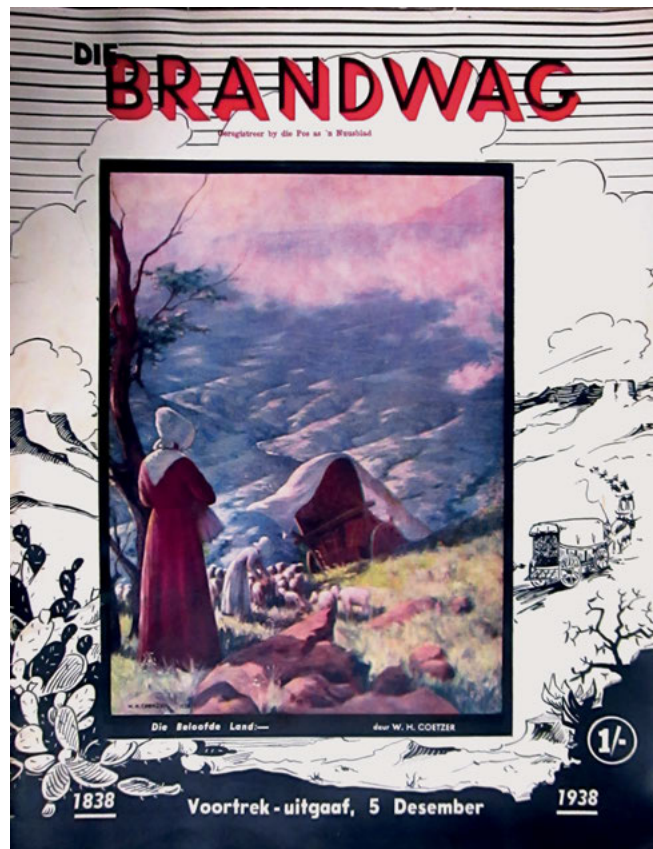




**Figure 356:** J.H. Pierneef. Painting of the Trek used on cover of commemorative publication for *Die Huisgenoot*, 1938 (courtesy of UCT Libraries)



**Figure 357:** J.H. Pierneef. Linocut for the cover of centenary publication, *Die Volkstem*, 1938 (courtesy of UP Archives, Moerdyk files)



**Figure 358:** W.H. Coetzer. *Die beloofde land* (The promised land). Cover of commemorative pull-out section of *Die Brandwag*, 1938 (courtesy of ARCA PV188/20; photo the authors)



**Figure 359:** W.H. Coetzer. *Monument Onthulling (inauguration)* 1949. Oil on board, 66.7 x 40.8 cm. Used for cover of commemorative publication in *Die Transvaler* (courtesy of DNMCH HG 54517; photo Jan Middeljans)



**Figure 360:** J.H. Pierneef. *Die Voortrekkermonument*. 1949. Oil on canvas, 144 × 154 cm (courtesy of VTM Museum OV 106; photo ID 46182592 © Kaido Rummel, dreamstime.com)

rendering of the Drakensberg, rectilinear precipices flooded with pink light and shadowed with lilac (fig. 356).<sup>1263</sup> Less successful is the Voortrekker patriarch who takes up a rigid pose in the foreground, gun in his right hand, his left arm at right angles to his body as he gestures towards some distant goal. Pierneef's unfamiliarity with figure studies is patent. The self-same trekker reappears with a companion in a black-and-white print for the centenary publication of *Die Volkstem* of 9 December 1938, with ox wagons in smaller scale between rocky outcrops below the figures' vantage point (fig. 357). The Voortrekker is still very stiff and angular, but better suited to the stylisation of the linocut, and his action is also more convincing, as he appears to be pointing out something to the attendant figure.

H.W. Coetzer was also a source of images, apart from those he made specifically for the frieze. For the cover of its special publication of 5 December 1938, *Die Brandwag* reproduced his *Beloofde land* (Promised land) as a colour inset framed by a black-and-white sketch of a landscape with the obligatory ox wagon (fig. 358). The painting celebrates the role of Voortrekker women, one looking out across the foothills of Natal, while another drives sheep downhill behind a descending wagon. In 1949 Coetzer produced an unusual oil painting portraying the Monument, *Monument onthulling* (inauguration) that appeared on the cover of the special supplement of *Die Transvaler* of 13 December 1949 (fig. 359). It is a fanciful scene, flanked by rapportryers on their horses who move from the foreground towards an elevated Monument, floating in the distance, bathed in golden

<sup>1263</sup> Illustrated also in Daniel Horst's essay 'Dutch traces in South African art' (Gosselink, Holtrop and Ross 2017, 324 fig. 19.8), which discusses works by Frans Oerder, Anton van Wouw and Jacob Hendrik Pierneef (ibid., 316–333).

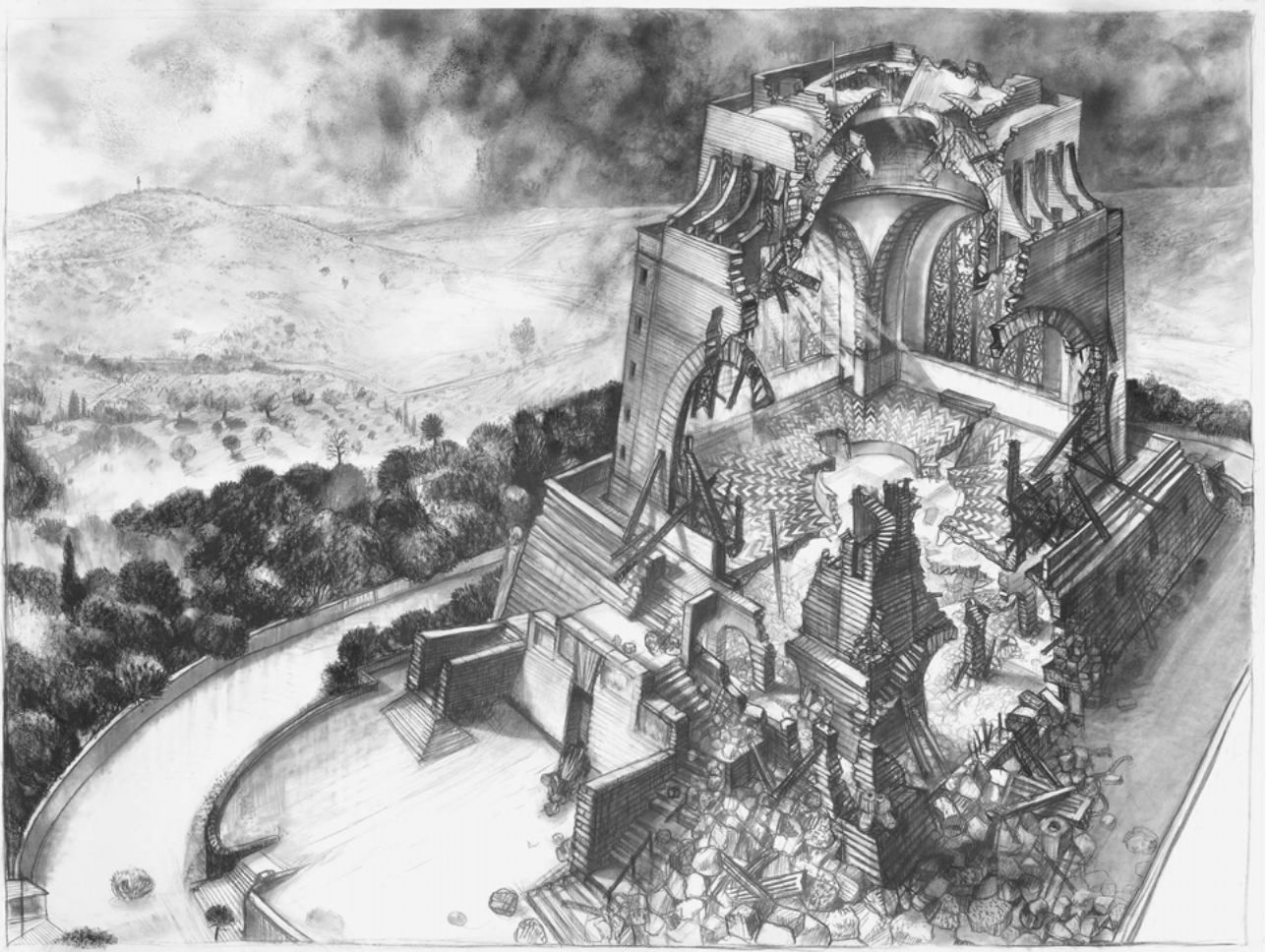


**Figure 361:** *Die Kerkblad Eeufeesuitgawe* (centenary publication), 7 December 1938. Cover with Moerdyk's Drawing 4, entitled 'Servants of the Most High' (courtesy of UP Archives, Moerdyk collection)

light. In front of this vision appear ghostly wagons of the 1938 ossewatrek – or perhaps the original Trek. This imaginative work, quite different from the down-to-earth little sketches that Coetzer had produced for the frieze, reflects something of the idealism associated with the Monument project. Pierneef also made a painting of the Monument in 1949, a far more pragmatic scene, in this case commissioned by the Vacuum Oil Company (fig. 360).<sup>1264</sup> With the permission of the SVK, he was to portray the Monument and the amphitheatre as they would appear when completed, consulting with Moerdyk when necessary. His Monument, like Coetzer's, is elevated in the distance, but is more prosaically located on the ground beyond the amphitheatre. In the foreground contemporary figures in Voortrekker dress, together with a wagon, are grouped amidst the tents that would be erected for the inauguration, with a row of flags, those of the old republics flanking the South African one, suggesting the aspirations of the time.

Widely reproduced in both 1938 and 1949 were Moerdyk's sectional drawings of the Monument, analysed in Chapter 2, which appeared in many newspapers and journals. And the one we have called Drawing 4 (fig. 54), where the sun's ray falls on the cenotaph, was used for the cover of *Die Kerkblad Eeufeesuitgawe* (centenary issue) of 7 December 1938 with the added phrase 'Knegte van die Allerhoogste' (Servants of the Most High) referring to the godliness of the Voortrekkers (fig. 361). The same image was also available as a souvenir postcard, which featured the cenotaph

<sup>1264</sup> The original painting is in the collection of the Voortrekker Monument (VTM Museum OV 106). It had been in the possession of the University of Potchefstroom for many years, but was presented to the Monument in 2011, and it is currently on display in the Cenotaph Hall.



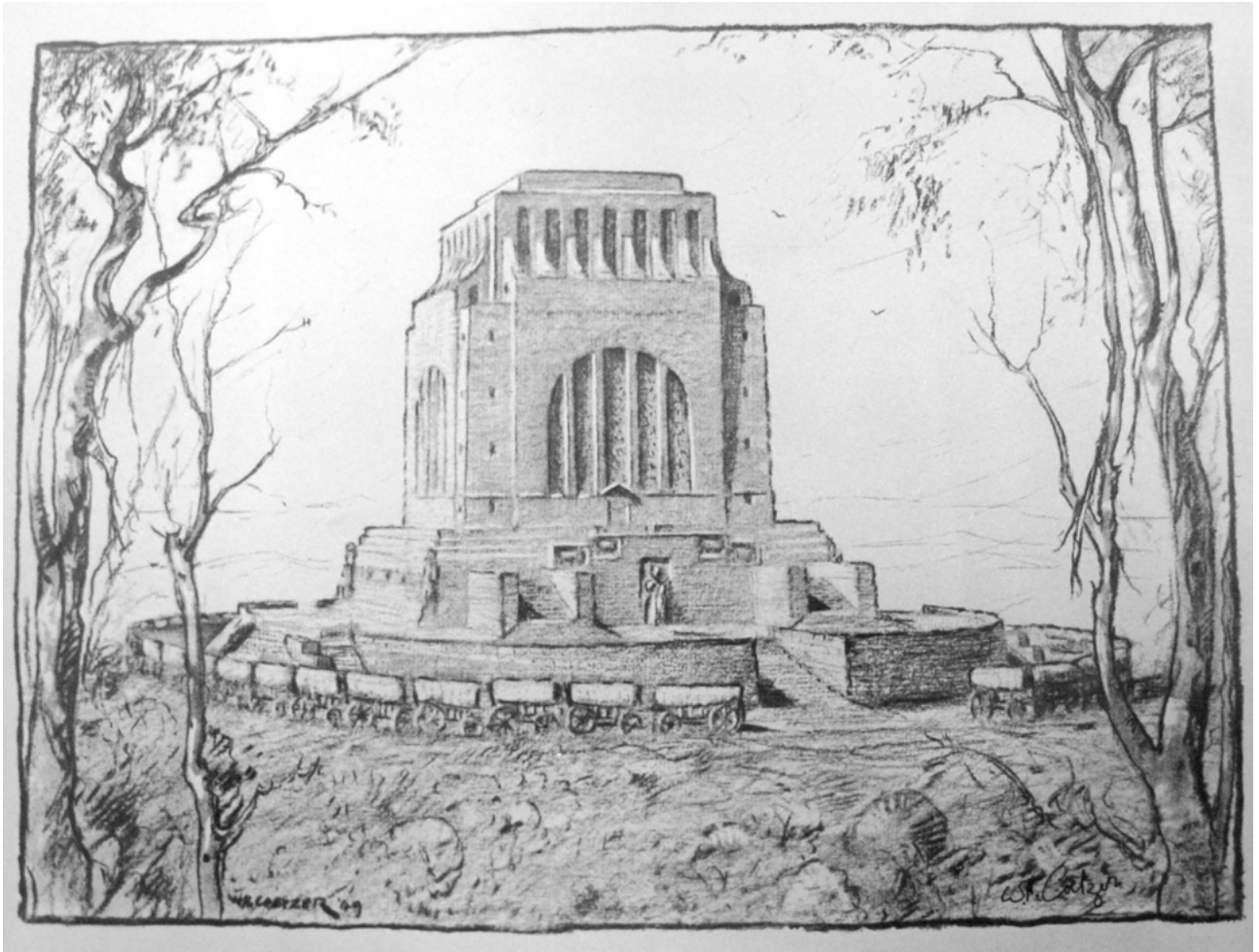
inscription 'Ons vir jou Suid Afrika', with 'Hulde aan 'n heldegeslag' (Homage to a generation of heroes) printed on the reverse above the space for the address and message.<sup>1265</sup>

This was the architectural drawing of the Monument that became the best known, reinforced by its use in the *Official Guide* across two decades. So when artist Diane Victor was seeking an image of the Monument for her *Drawings of mass destruction* of 2007, it is not surprising that this was the one she used. The sectional view was particularly well suited to her purpose, for she was transforming the well-known landmark into a ruin, although not with the iconoclast intentions that had prompted Penny Siopis' toppling Monument drawing of 1992 previously discussed (fig. 328). Fifteen years later, Victor was intent on creating visual metaphors of South Africa's unfulfilled promise and continuing violence despite all the hope generated by the country's peaceful negotiated transition, a theme that she also pursued in an acerbic etching series entitled *The disasters of peace*. In her charcoal drawing *Monument*,<sup>1266</sup> the exposed interior, used by Moerdyk to display the Monument's complex structure and the symbolic ray of light, is transformed to represent a building torn asunder with walls turned to rubble (fig. 362). A corner staircase stands exposed, reminiscent of the vagaries of ruined bomb sites. It serves to hide the cenotaph and, although some sunlight makes its way between storm clouds to filter through the east window, the divine shaft through the oculus is also missing. Most telling of all, the frieze with the Voortrekker story is blank

**Figure 362:** Diane Victor. *Monument*. 2007. Charcoal, 100 × 150 cm (photo courtesy of the artist and David Krut Publishing)

<sup>1265</sup> Museum Africa Archives.

<sup>1266</sup> Victor also developed a dramatic etching with a passing storm, based on this drawing, entitled *Monument to the things we broke*.



**Figure 363:** W.H. Coetzer. *Voortrekkermonument*. Pencil (courtesy of Museum Africa; photo the authors)



**Figure 364:** Images of the Voortrekker Monument in various media in the Monument's collection (photo © Die Erfenisstigting; *Voortrekker Monument 1938–2018*, 66)



and Van Wouw's *Voortrekker mother and children*, symbol of the women whose steadfastness and procreation were said to have made the civilising of the interior possible, has fallen from its pedestal and lies face down in the forecourt.

Victor's charcoal is a rare re-interpretation of the Monument. Apart from the 'visionary' rendering by Coetzer that was used on the 1949 *Transvaler* supplement, customarily artists represent it in a straightforward fashion, the only variation being the angle from which it is viewed and the medium in which it is represented. The iconic form evidently spoke for itself and needed no further interpretation. Typical are four works in the collection of Museum Africa in Johannesburg: a pencil drawing by Coetzer (fig. 363), a linocut by Pierneef, another graphic image by Peter Kent, and a more expansive painting by Terence Cuneo that includes the amphitheatre.<sup>1267</sup> There are also numerous 'popular' artworks depicting the Monument in a variety of media – the more unusual being collages embellished with silver paper, even a tufted carpet – in the Voortrekker Monument collection (fig. 364).

**Figure 365:** Anton Kannemeyer. *n is for nightmare (monument)*. 2008. 8-colour lithograph, 67 × 57cm (photo courtesy of the artist)

<sup>1267</sup> These are registered in the Museum Africa collection as 968.035 VM, Pretoria: the graphic works are 61/222, 73/19 and 84/540 respectively. The painting, a view from the amphitheatre dated 1951, can be seen at <http://www.artvalue.com/auctionresult--cuneo-terence-tenison-1907-199-voortrekker-moument-from-the-1926824.htm>

The Monument can act as a shorthand reference to Afrikanerdom, as already seen in Eksteen's *Quo vadis–triptiek* (trptych), which reflected Afrikaners' bewilderment about what their place in South Africa might be after the first democratic elections of 1994. More than a decade later, Anton Kannemeyer picked up the same theme in a satirical lithograph, tellingly inscribed – mimicking children's alphabet books – 'n is for nightmare' (fig. 365).<sup>1268</sup> Against a golden image of the Voortrekker Monument an outline drawing depicts despondent white litter-bearers in the service of a reclining black master, inverting the role of black servants in a colonial past, and providing an ironic comment on Afrikaner fears of a reversal of power relationships. Conrad Botes, long-time collaborator with Kannemeyer, used the Monument in a comic-strip presentation where a banner over an image of the Monument floating on a cloud reads 'The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom' (fig. 366). The cartoon character explains in a colloquial mixture of Afrikaans and English: 'For those of you who are a bit confused, "the road of excess" represents Afrikaner history. "The palace of wisdom" is a sarcastic reference to the Voortrekker Monument.' He promises to expand this into satire and socio-political critique, but soon gives up because he 'is depressed enough as it is'.

This was a Backpage cartoon for number 11 of *Bitterkomix*, a mocking send-up of many aspects of South African culture that is a joint publication of artist-editors Conrad Botes and Anton Kannemeyer (with the pseudonyms Kondradski and Joe Dog). The 1999 English edition of *Best of Bitterkomix* by Botes tells the Voortrekker story leading up to Blood River in a comic strip that pays no respect to the sacred cows of Afrikaner foundation myths (fig. 367). Piet Retief tries unsuccessfully to push the Zulu king into signing the treaty document, so that an angry Dingane commands 'Kill the colonialist pigs'; Sarel Cilliers has great difficulty remembering how the Vow was worded as he dictates his memoirs on his deathbed; Andries Pretorius is a strong but ruthless military leader. The importance of Blood River is explained as being the day on which 'DEVINE intervention' (sic) ensured victory, showing that Afrikaners are (together with the Israelites) God's chosen people. The intended political parody behind the story is clear: one frame quotes President Steyn saying, on 16 December 1910, 'When Pretorius broke the neck of the barbarian, God placed the kaffers under the white man's guardianship ... this is the burden that the white man will have to carry for ever,' then switches to Minister Botha, at the Monument on 16 December 1978, talking of the bigger threat South Africa was facing when, 'instead of the Zulus, it is now Russian, Cuban and East German impis that are charging our laager'.

The story then diverts to a farfetched action adventure – *Bitterkomix* can be considered a critique of violent action comics as well as Afrikaner ideology – and ends with a scene in hell where a figure, unnamed but very like the preceding Pretorius, dies in a sea of boiling blood, like the Zulu at Blood River, despite his protestations that he had 'struck a deal with the big guy', a colloquial reference to the Vow. The exaggerated expressions of the figures could be thought of as echoes of Preller's 1916 movie *De Voortrekkers* where the silent film medium encouraged melodramatic gestures. The comic strip is an antidote to the romanticism of that movie, and of clichéd picture stories such as 'Stryd' in *Die Brandwag* of 8 December 1938, forerunner of today's television soaps. There the young Voortrekker hero and heroine rescue each other from every kind of misfortune, including Xhosa attacks in the Cape and Zulu attacks in Natal, in contrast to the black humour of *Bitterkomix*. Amidst the *Bitterkomix* mix of historical fact, caustic humour and radical critique are frames strongly reminiscent of Coetzer's sketches for the frieze (fig. 368): a baby battered to death on a wagon wheel (fig. 193); Zulu attacking from the donga below the laager and perishing in the waters of Blood River (fig. 131). Interestingly, they are images that did not ultimately form part of the frieze: the derisive imagery of *Bitterkomix* is the antithesis of its idealised forms.

Another 'alternative' publication, *Loslyf*, had quite a different way of undermining conservative Afrikanerdom. With a title roughly translated as 'loose life', this first Afrikaans porn magazine, launched in 1995 and edited by Ryk Hattingh, claimed a serious – if slightly tongue-in-cheek –

<sup>1268</sup> Our thanks to Anton Kannemeyer for email correspondence and supplying images (29.3.2019).



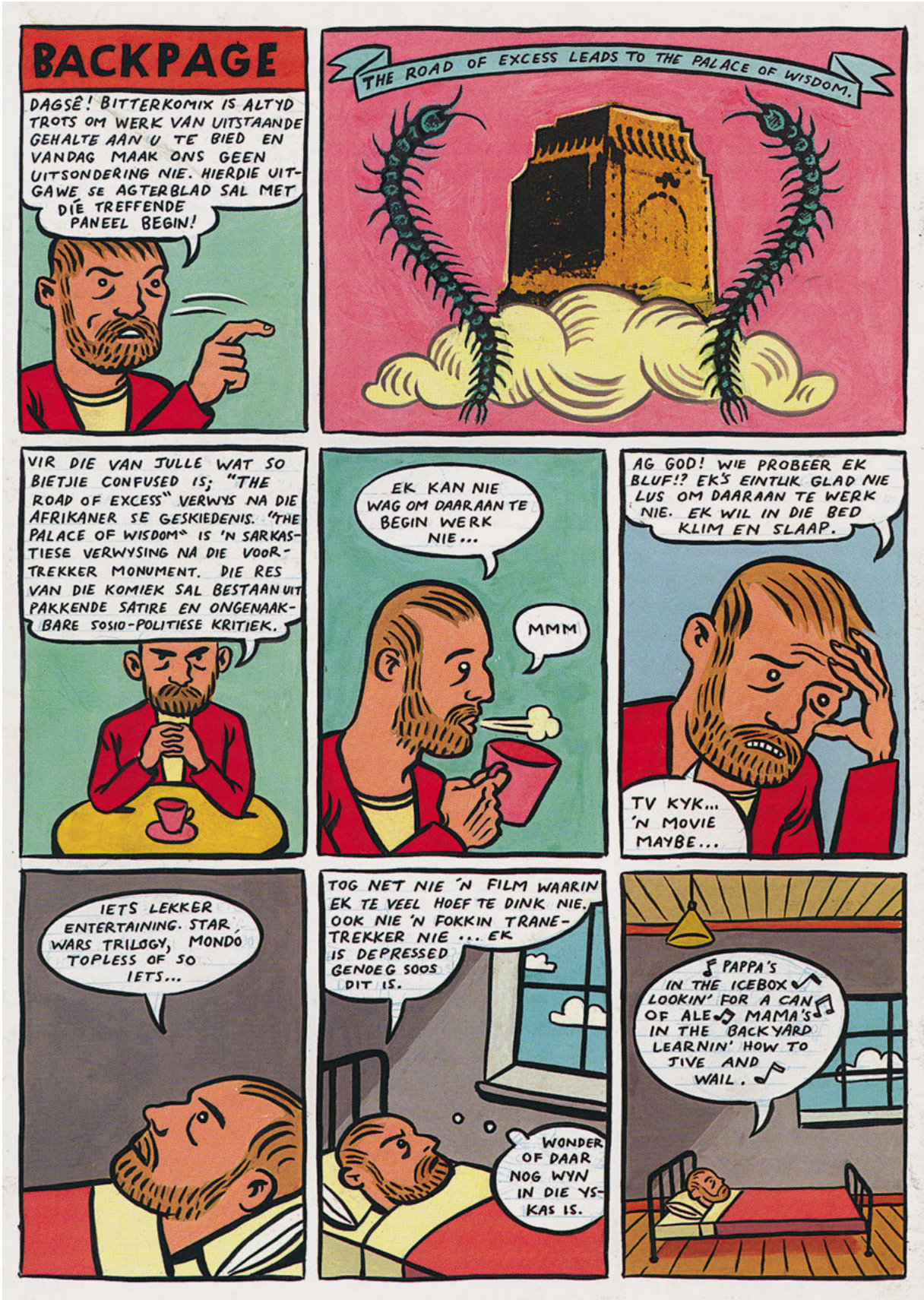


Figure 366: Conrad Botes. 'Backpage' of *Bitterkomix* 11, June 2001 (photo courtesy of Anton Kannemeyer and Conrad Botes)

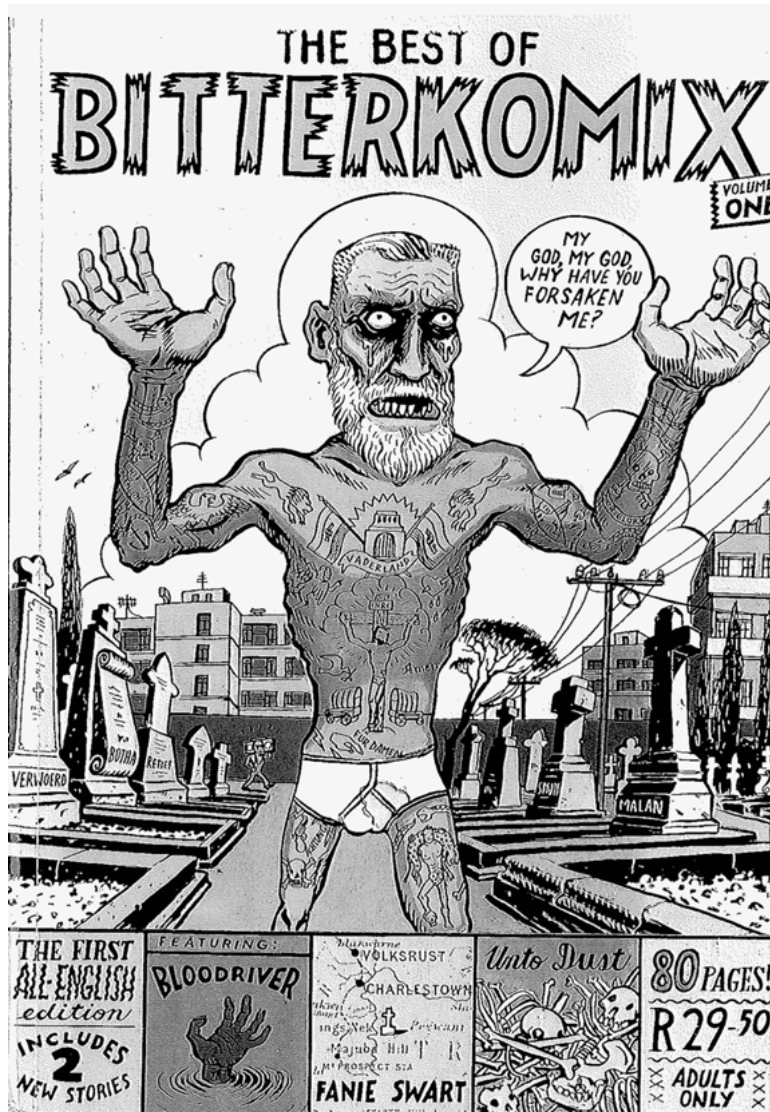
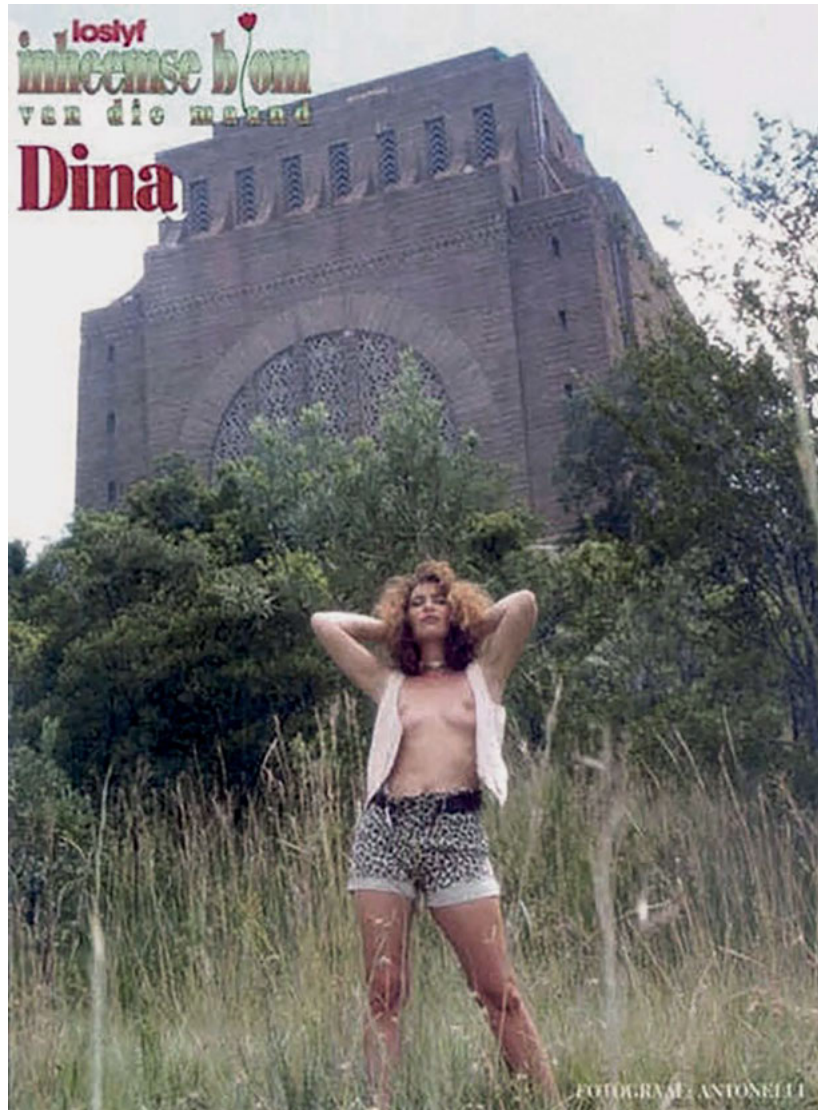


Figure 367: Conrad Botes. Cover of *Best of Bitterkomix 1* with the story of Blood River. 1999 (courtesy of the artist)



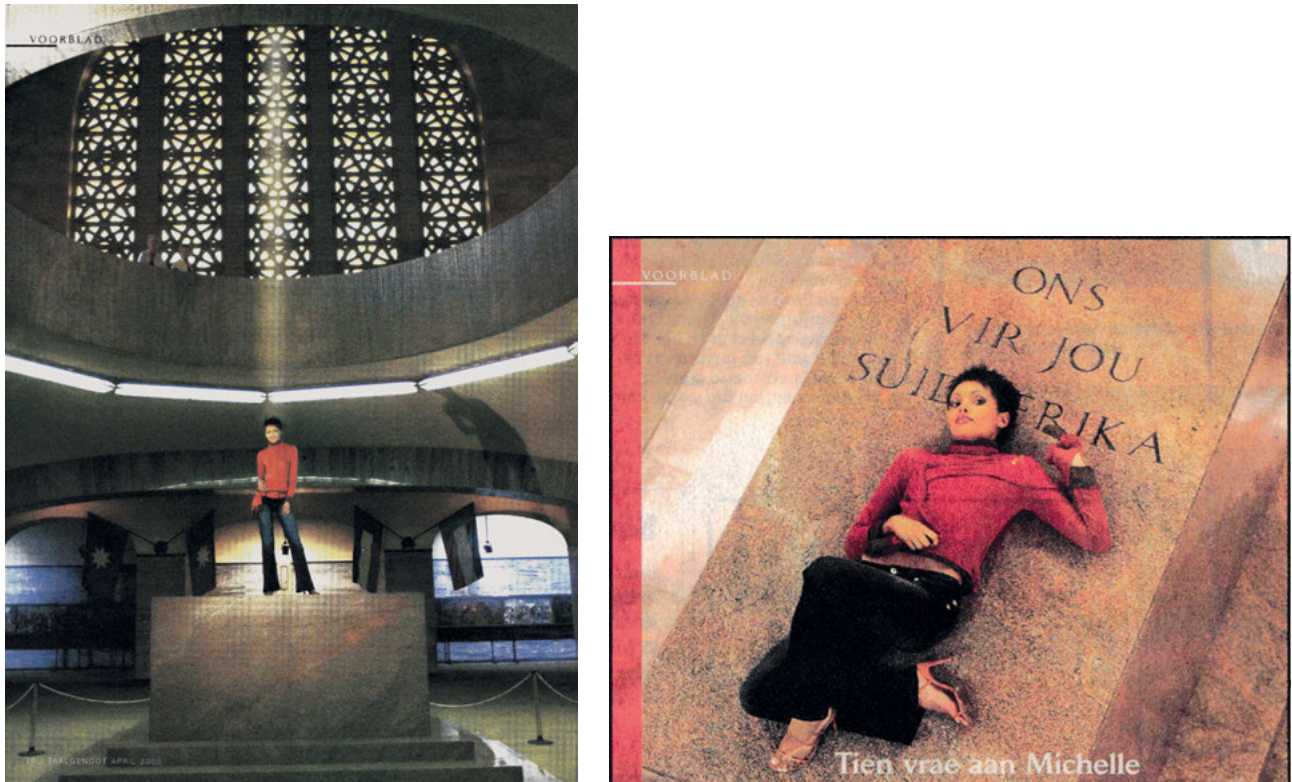
Figure 368: Conrad Botes. Two frames from *Best of Bitterkomix 1*. 1999 (courtesy of the artist)



**Figure 369:**  
 ‘Dina – blom van die maand’ (flower of the month). Cover of *Loslyf* June 1995, 125

agenda to promote the use of Afrikaans as a vibrant, real-life language, as appropriate for sexual encounters as for academic or moralistic writing. Its ‘indigenous flower of the month’ photographic feature offered the expected titillating pin-up not in a boudoir or neutral setting but one with cultural implications. The first of these ‘flowers’, twenty-four-year-old Dina, in the June 1995 issue, is photographed in the veld in front of the Voortrekker Monument, bare-breasted and in scanty leopard-print shorts (fig. 369). While perhaps not quite as obvious in its sexual relationship to the Monument as ‘Pollie’, who is pictured against the phallic form of the Paarl Taalmonument (Language monument), the strongly erotic overtones were considered sacrilegious and extremely offensive in this context.<sup>1269</sup> There were many outraged letters of complaint to the editor (one cannot help wondering why these upright folk were looking at *Loslyf* in the first place); objections that focused on the Monument underscore that it continued to have sacred connotations in Afrikaner culture.

<sup>1269</sup> *Loslyf* June 1995, 124–125. The following two pages are more sexually explicit but do not include the Voortrekker Monument building. Pollie appears in March 1996, 115. See also Coombes 2003, 39–42, figs 13–14; Peffer 2005, 51–54, fig. 4.



**Figure 370:** Photographs of TV star Michelle Pienaar on the cenotaph, Voortrekker Monument (*Taalgenoot* April 2006; photos courtesy of VTM)

As Marnell Kirsten writes of the Dina pages, ‘The Voortrekker Monument is employed as a symbol of Afrikaner culture, apartheid and former repressions – in this instance by implication primarily sexual repression,’<sup>1270</sup> while Dina represents sexual freedom. Her bare-breasted image in an out-of-doors setting could be read as a provocative ‘white’ response to the naked Zulu women portrayed in *Death of Dingane* inside the Hall of Heroes, as well as a challenge to the values the Monument enshrined. But it could also be said that Dina makes overt a subtext of the Monument’s sculptures which adulate the Voortrekker woman as the procreator whose ‘courage and enterprise founded a white civilization in the interior of the black continent’, as Moerdyk stressed.<sup>1271</sup> It is paradoxical that in Van Wouw’s bronze and the historical frieze she was presented as an untouchable figure, wife and mother, modest in a dress that covers her from neck to ankles, and irreproachable in her behaviour. She is the complete converse of a carnal sex symbol yet admired for her fertility, the very quality that Dina makes explicit. It is ironic that Dina, like Van Wouw’s model for the Voortrekker mother, was also a nurse. What must have made her all the more shocking in conservative Afrikaner eyes is that she is described in *Loslyf* as a true ‘Boeremeisie’ (Boer girl) who is very proud of her great-great-grandfather, trek leader Hendrik Potgieter, and has a great love of Afrikaans and Afrikaans culture. She appositely proclaims that, ‘All the people who are now so eager to punish the Afrikaner people by knocking down and profaning their monuments are playing with fire. If they mess with my symbols, they mess with me.’<sup>1272</sup> By having Dina profess to values that were dear to Afrikaners, those values were comprehensively subverted.

A less deliberate but in some ways more offensive photograph was published in the ATKV journal *Taalgenoot* after a photo shoot with *Egoli* soapie star Michelle Pienaar in 2006 that was clearly aimed at spectacle rather than critique (fig. 370). The actress is posed standing on top of

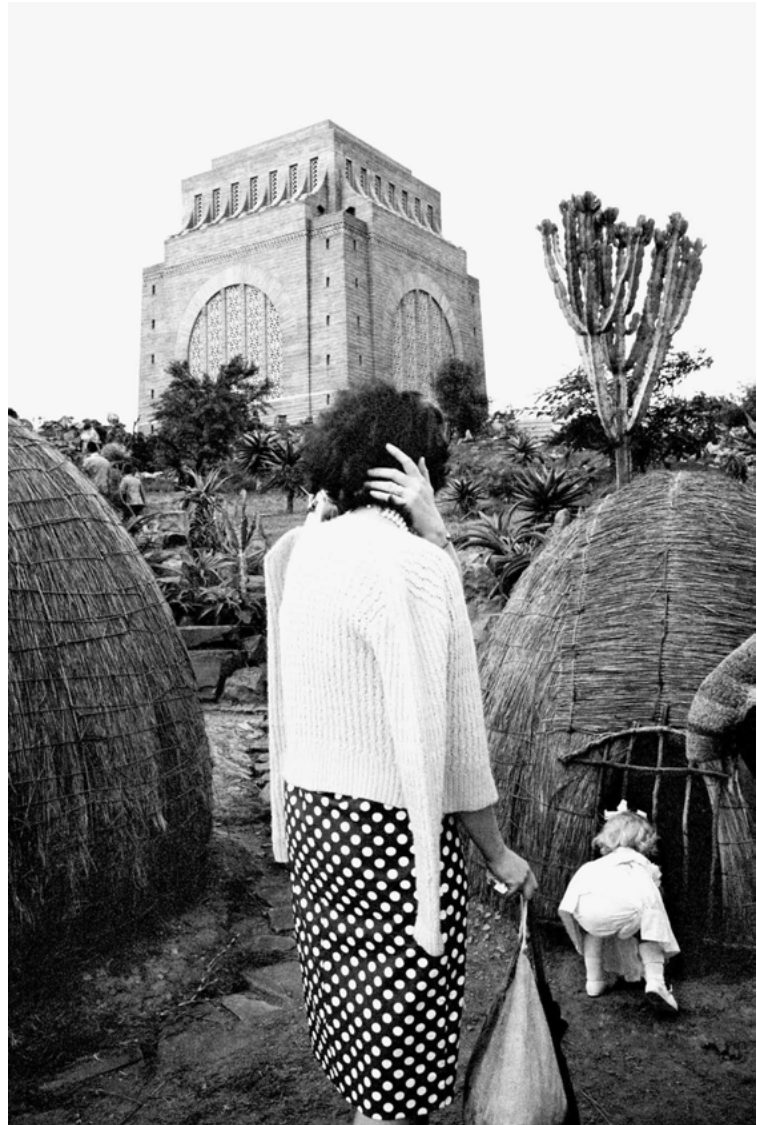
<sup>1270</sup> Kirsten 2013, 65.

<sup>1271</sup> *Official Guide* 1950, 36.

<sup>1272</sup> ‘Al die mense wat nou so graag die Afrikanervolk will straf deur hulle monumente om te stamp en te onheilig, speel met vuur. Hulle moet weet, as jy aan my simbole vat, vat jy aan my’ (*Loslyf* June 1995, 125).

the cenotaph in the lower hall of the Monument, and in another shot lies on it with her head against the inscription ‘Ons vir jou Suid-Afrika’.<sup>1273</sup> There was an outcry when the photographs appeared, with many newspaper articles.<sup>1274</sup> CEO Opperman was quick to issue a statement disavowing any complicity in the offensive photographs, explaining that the photographic crew, unsupervised because they arrived late for their appointment, must have illicitly removed the protective cordons around the cenotaph to take the shots. Pienaar herself spoke contritely about having been obliged to follow the photographer’s instructions, but not intending to be disrespectful. The editor of the magazine, which as the mouthpiece of the ATKV promotes Afrikaans language and culture, implied that it had come about as part of the publication’s efforts to modernise itself, and promised to print an apology in the next issue. Thinking of the adage ‘all publicity is good publicity’, one wonders whether the *Taalgenoot* team did not feel as much satisfaction as remorse.

When one thinks of photographs at the Monument, it is usually images of visiting dignitaries or admiring families in Voortrekker dress that spring to mind. But, as the *Taalgenoot* episode illustrates, permission has been given for diverse photo shoots at the more secularised post-apartheid Monument, although these are usually staged outside. There have been some dramatic fashion photographs with the Monument as a backdrop, such as ‘33<sup>rd</sup> Ray’ photo shoot for *Gaschette* (the name referring to the sun’s ray on the cenotaph), which highlighted an intensely vibrant collection of red gowns against a monochrome Monument,<sup>1275</sup> and Cornel van Heerden shot a spectacular series of the Before Sunrise group of ballet dancers poised on the parapets.<sup>1276</sup> For photographers like David Goldblatt, on the other hand, the goal was not spectacle and his shots were not posed. His photograph taken at the Voortrekker Monument on the Day of the Covenant, 1963, suggests something of the changing attitude to the once sacred day: the Monument is relegated to the background beyond visitors enjoying the public holiday in this informal shot of a woman in a polka-dot dress, who watches a little girl exploring the Zulu huts in the Monument grounds, no thought of the special service to commemorate the day in their minds (fig. 371).<sup>1277</sup> Twenty years later, a more staged image by Gisèle



**Figure 371:** David Goldblatt. *Child with a replica of a Zulu hut at the Voortrekker Monument, on the Day of the Covenant, Pretoria. December, 1963.* 1963. Silver gelatin print on fibre-based paper. Edition of 10 (photo courtesy the David Goldblatt Legacy Trust and Goodman Gallery)

<sup>1273</sup> *Taalgenoot* April 2005.

<sup>1274</sup> See, for example, *Beeld* 18.3.2005; *Die Burger* 18.3.2005; *Rekord Centurion* 1.4.2005. It is an indication of the level of outrage that newspaper articles appeared even before the *Taalgenoot*’s official April issue date.

<sup>1275</sup> <https://www.behance.net/gallery/3224067/The-33rd-Ray>

<sup>1276</sup> <http://cornelvanheerden.blogspot.co.nz/2012/08/before-sunrise-ballet-dancers-at.html>

<sup>1277</sup> <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O199848/at-the-voortrekker-monument-pretoria-photograph-goldblatt-david/>



**Figure 372:** Gisèle Wulfsöhn. *Clothing designers Shanie Boerstra and Jerome Argue, Voortrekker Monument, Pretoria, 1985* (photo courtesy of Mark Trapido and Paul Weinberg)

Wulfsöhn in 1985 focused on two fashion designers, Shanie Boerstra and Jerome Argue, in front of the Monument (fig. 372).<sup>1278</sup> Their anti-establishment clothes and hair are bizarrely out of place in the Monument setting and suggest, in contrast to the uniformed school children in the background, the cultural deviations developing amongst young Afrikaners, potently expressed in the trendy Afrikaans punk music groups that have emerged. But not all have shifted ground to embrace this non conformist position. In August 2009, a conservative Afrikaans youth group, Pretoria Verkenners Jeug, objected to the Pink Jacaranda Music Affair held in the amphitheatre at the Monument, leased

<sup>1278</sup> Although this was a fashion shoot, its political implications were not coincidental. In an interview Wulfsöhn said, 'I think my photography at that time was a bit of personal expression as well as trying to make a statement. I think my photographing people in certain settings would make a statement in a political way' (quoted in Wienand 2012).

for the occasion – widely perceived as a gay event although the organisers denied this – which featured Afrikaans music groups and cross-dressers in Voortrekker drag. The complainants said, ‘The grounds of our forefathers are being misused to fund “Sodom and Gomorrah”.’<sup>1279</sup>

These critics would probably also find Minnette Vári’s video *Chimera* of 2001 offensive, because it introduces a naked female spectre into the frieze’s ranks of historical Voortrekker figures (fig. 373).<sup>1280</sup> The title refers to the mythic ancient creature – literally ‘she-goat’, a Homeric monster, with lion’s head and snake’s tail on a goat’s body<sup>1281</sup> – and here conjures up the illusory nature of the beast as well as its hybrid form. The artist’s self-image provides the chimera, sometimes taken from still photographs, or from staged video clips made for this work, and her moving naked body, her face masked, often with animal heads, creates particularly absorbing interventions. Playing on the word ‘frieze’, Vári has isolated figures in the reliefs by patiently and painstakingly editing out the background of her video footage, frame by frame, to leave them as silhouettes, frozen forms that appear in varied combinations and occasionally in reverse, perhaps echoing the unreliability of memory. Her own remembered experiences of regular obligatory visits to the Monument as a schoolgirl were modified for this work chiefly by her adult sensibility but also because, as she videoed it, she experienced the frieze amongst international tourists who read it in many different ways, and whose muted comments are important elements in the soundtrack. Her four-channel digital video is projected onto four free-hanging transparent voile screens for her installation, each starting at a different point in the sequence, so that complex relationships are set up, further complicated by the projections being duplicated as they pass through the screens onto the surrounding walls (fig. 374).

In the opening sequence the cut-out sheep and goats of *Departure* process across the screen before fading back into the full relief, when Moerdyk’s dog from *Negotiation* appears, floating in front, and Vári’s own masked form materialises like a shepherding shaman figure behind. In other sequences silhouettes from the frieze morph into the autobiographical figure, sometimes a static composite form, sometimes releasing the frozen figures into metamorphosing shapes and dramatic movement. The chimera appears amongst the tumbling Ndebele figures in *Kapain* as though the cause of their chaotic demise (fig. 375), and she hovers over the supine Voortrekker woman of *Bloukrans*, who seems threatened by the advancing goat-headed figure as much as by the Zulu warriors (fig. 376). There is a strong emphasis on the women of the frieze and one might see Vári’s naked form as a challenge to their chastity, not entirely unlike that of *Loslyf’s* Dina. But above all, the hybrid figures suggest the mythical status of the Voortrekker story and how it has haunted the South African imaginary, evoking an elusive political commentary. As Clive Kellner writes, *Chimera* addresses ‘the complex contradictions that exist in post-apartheid South Africa, by drawing an analogy between a past that is monstrous and the monsters of ancient mythology’.<sup>1282</sup>

Lize van Robbroeck offers an apposite comment that applies to many of these artists:

By playing visual games with the iconic status of the Voortrekker monument, both Kannemeyer and Vári demonstrate that instead of regarding places of remembrance as places of reappropriation (of a monolithic Self), they can be reinvented as loci of reflection for promoting self-knowledge. This may be one way of confronting the Afrikaner individual with his personal alienation, displacement and hybridity, thereby possibly enabling him to revel in a newly discovered, celebratory freedom.<sup>1283</sup>

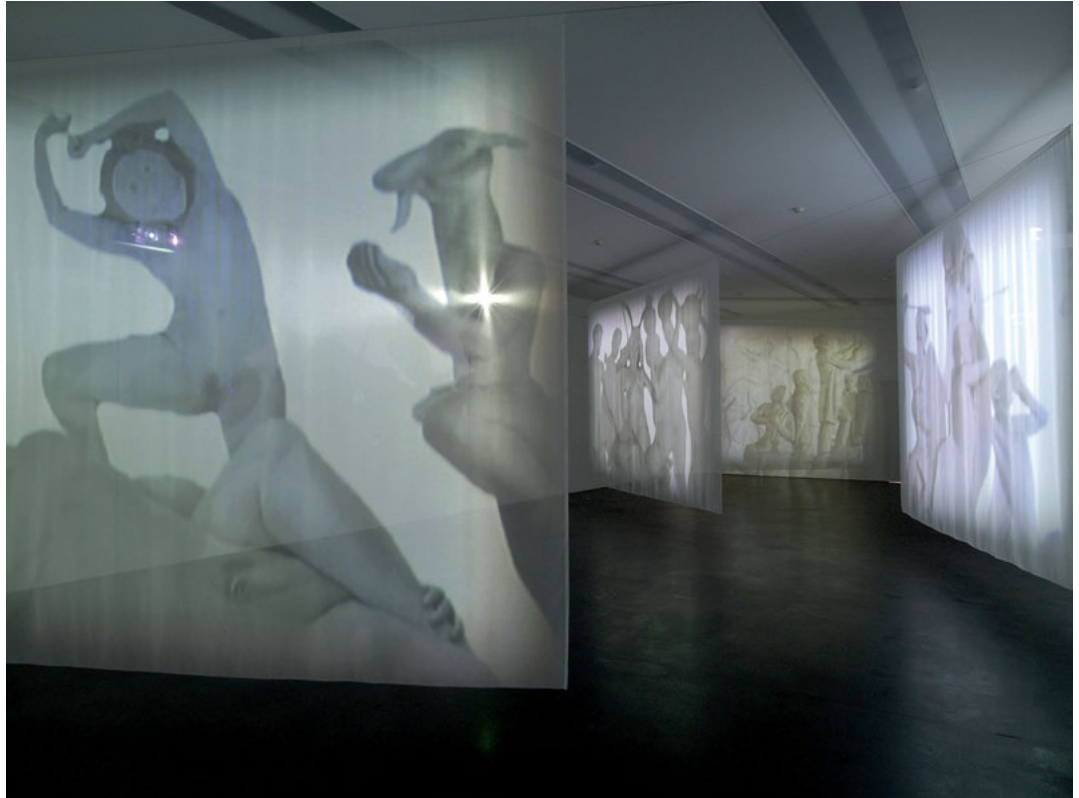
<sup>1279</sup> See [www.mambaonline.com/2009/08/18/voortrekker-group-objects-to-pink-jacaranda/](http://www.mambaonline.com/2009/08/18/voortrekker-group-objects-to-pink-jacaranda/)

<sup>1280</sup> Clips of the white edition can be viewed at <http://minnettevari.co.za/video/chimera-white-edition>. Vári also produced a black edition of *Chimera* in 2002 in response to the requirements of different venues (accessible through the link given above), but the images themselves are the same although the visual effects of the two editions are quite different. Our thanks to the artist for an interview in Johannesburg in January 2015 and for supplying images. See further Van der Watt 2004.

<sup>1281</sup> Homer, *Iliad* 6.181; Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 5.905.

<sup>1282</sup> Clive Kellner, ‘Chimera’, <http://minnettevari.co.za/video/chimera-white-edition>

<sup>1283</sup> Von Robbroeck, ‘The Voortrekker in search of new horizons’, <http://rozenbergquarterly.com/reshaping-remembrance-the-voortrekker-in-search-of-new-horizons/>



**Figure 373:**  
Minnette Vári  
*Chimera*. 2001.  
Installation shot  
(photo courtesy of  
the artist)



**Figure 374:**  
Minnette Vári  
*Chimera*. 2001.  
Installation shot  
(photo courtesy of  
the artist)

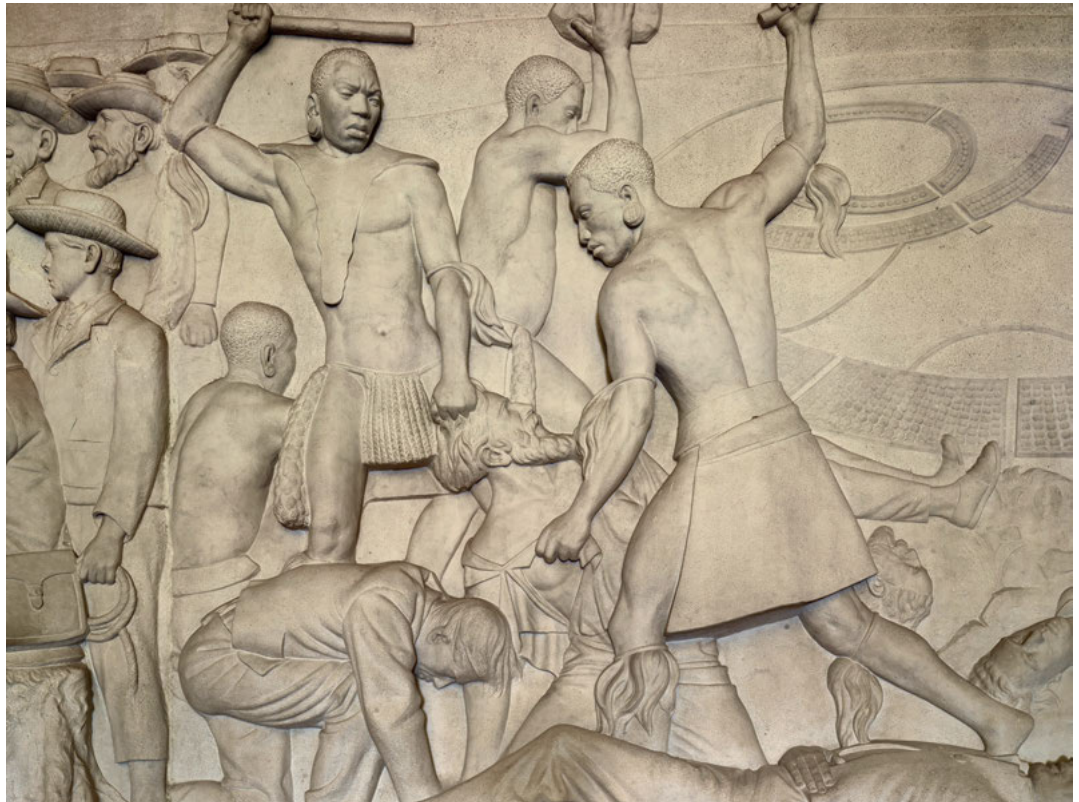




**Figure 375:**  
Minnette Vári  
*Chimera*. 2001.  
Video still (photo  
courtesy of the  
artist)



**Figure 376:**  
Minnette Vári  
*Chimera*. 2001.  
Video still (photo  
courtesy of the  
artist)



**Figure 377:** Pieter Hugo. *At the Voortrekker Monument*, 2013. C-print, edition of five 104.7 × 139.5 cm; edition of nine 82.5 × 109.8 cm (photo courtesy of the artist)

Artist Pieter Hugo, who describes himself as a ‘detrribalised Afrikaner’, speaks of the difficulty of situating himself and his young family as South Africans in today’s post-apartheid South Africa, and asks the question, ‘How much do I owe to the burdens of history?’ His representation of the Voortrekker Monument frieze is quite different from Vári’s mythological exploration. The detail of *Murder of Retief*, one of a series of 96 colour photographs entitled *Kin*, was made ‘to gain some clarity and make some peace with my past’ (fig. 377).<sup>1284</sup> The range of the series was described at the time *Kin* was exhibited at the Michael Stevenson galleries in Johannesburg and Cape Town in 2013, as including images of

... cramped townships, contested farmlands and abandoned mining areas; psychologically charged still lifes in people’s homes; sites of political significance; drifters and the homeless; his pregnant wife, and his daughter moments after her birth; the domestic servants who have worked for the Hugo family over three generations. The series alternates between intimate and public spaces. ... It confronts complex issues of colonisation, racial diversity and economic disparity.<sup>1285</sup>

Hugo says that while his other images were assembled quite organically, it was a conscious choice to photograph the Monument, which ‘really expresses a desperate need of the Afrikaner culture to define its identity through a narrative’. He found himself returning again and again to the same part of the frieze, the brutal slaying of Retief’s men by Dingane’s Zulu warriors, saying, ‘Somehow I felt it important to include this particular historic aspect in the series,’<sup>1286</sup> which he titled quite simply *At the Voortrekker Monument 2013*. Given his conflicted feelings about the past it is surely not coincidental that Hugo selected this scene of the nadir of the Voortrekker story, with Boer men

<sup>1284</sup> Personal email, 4 June 2018. We are grateful for Hugo’s response to our enquiries and for supplying a quality image.

<sup>1285</sup> [http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/hugo/index\\_kin.html](http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/hugo/index_kin.html)

<sup>1286</sup> Personal email, 4 June 2018.



**Figure 378:** Abrie Fourie. *Detail, Voortrekker Monument, South Africa, 2001*. Lambda print diasec, 80 × 120 cm (photo courtesy of the artist)



**Figure 379:** Abrie Fourie. *Waymark/Wanton, 1999–2000*. Lightjet print, 34 × 42 cm (photo courtesy of the artist)

**Figure 380:** Dewald van Helsdingen. Photograph of Pink Voortrekker Monument, Cool Capital festival, Pretoria 2014 (photo courtesy of Carla Crafford)



helpless victims in the face of Zulu brutality. But he challenges its iconic place in Afrikaner history by juxtaposing it with contemporary scenes that can also invoke melancholy and despair.

The pervasive presence of the Monument in the South African imaginary is also addressed by photographer Abrie Fourie who remembers it as ‘permeating his youth’, but thinks of it now as ‘a casket emptied of its historic glory, the remnant of a past best forgotten’.<sup>1287</sup> He too challenged the certainty of the frieze, but not by subverting the narrative as Vári’s *Chimera* does or locating it as only one of an array of affective images as Hugo does in *Kin*. In a photograph entitled *Detail, Voortrekker Monument, South Africa, 2001*, instead of a detail of the frieze as might have been expected, Fourie has photographed a corner of the marble-clad wall and its reflection on the floor beneath, an image of golden light which is seductive, but also potently signals an absence of the authoritative narrative (fig. 378).<sup>1288</sup> This was one of a series of photographic works commenting on the changing status of the Monument.<sup>1289</sup> They have been presented in different ways – lightjet prints and slide projections (*Waymark/Wanton, 1999–2000*; fig. 379), a screensaver (*Cradle, 2001*), and an installation of lightboxes (*Whatever/Wherever 2003*). In these works portraying the exterior of the Monument, Fourie defies typical representations where it is depicted as a grand centralised form dominating the format. Instead the Monument is doubly removed, first by being distanced as an insignificant form on the horizon, sometimes also marginalised at the edge of the image, and secondly by being shot through blue Perspex which makes it faint and ghost-like, a spectre which seems, in Philippa Hobbs’ words, ‘a blueprint to a failed ideology’.<sup>1290</sup>

A Monument in a different hue can send a different message, as became apparent during Pretoria’s 2014 Cool Capital Biennale. Describing itself as ‘the world’s first uncurated, DIY,

<sup>1287</sup> <http://abriefourie.com/works/waymark/#nogo>. Our thanks to the artist for correspondence during 2017 and for permission to reproduce his work.

<sup>1288</sup> <https://www.scadmoa.org/art/collections/detail-voortrekker-monument-pretoria-south-africa>

<sup>1289</sup> For the opening event of *Where-we-r.com* in Switzerland in 2006, which included some of these works, Fourie also made small replicas of the Monument cast in chocolate, offering a different way of ‘removing’ the iconic form – by consumption.

<sup>1290</sup> Hobbs 2006, 18.

guerrilla biennale', it issued an open invitation for proposals and sponsored 250 creative interventions,<sup>1291</sup> all manner of projects from guerrilla gardening to performances and artworks. The aim was to present in a new and positive light the city that had been the capital in turn of the nineteenth-century ZAR, the Union of South Africa and the Republic after 1961, and is now the administrative headquarters of a reinvented post-apartheid country. Two projects that demonstrated that the capital was 'cool', and that clearly disassociated it from Afrikaner conservatism, involved well-known monuments. While the statue of Paul Kruger was clad in tinfoil, the Voortrekker Monument was lit in pink with twenty-two metal halide lamps (fig. 380) – an initiative of the Open Window Institute and the Pretoria Institute for Architecture in collaboration with Voortrekker Monument management. It is a particularly unexpected, even edgy choice, in that it could have been associated with TV commentator Barry Ronge's frivolous but provocative suggestion in 1999 that the Monument should be painted pink and turned into a gay disco,<sup>1292</sup> an idea that had more recent reinforcement in the debate around the Pink Jacaranda Music Affair in 2009. The goal in 2014 was not subversive, however: as expressed in the catalogue, it took advantage of the visibility of the Monument as 'one of Pretoria's most recognisable buildings ... to communicate the biennale's festive atmosphere and to make passersby smile'.<sup>1293</sup>

It is apt that it was the pink Monument that became the logo for the project, reflecting the goal of transforming a questionable past into a positive future. And, when a range of Cool Capital's structures were taken to an international audience at the 2016 Venice Architectural Biennale, it was an enormous photograph of the floodlit Monument that was the key image forming a backdrop to the exhibition. If it seemed an unlikely choice to represent democratic South Africa, it held out the possibility of even the most reactionary historical symbols taking on new meanings in the present and future. And a recent comment by Daniel Rankadi Mosako about a painting he made in 1996 – a vivid image of the Voortrekker Monument, seemingly sinking into rocky terrain, and provocatively titled *Settlements* (fig. 381)<sup>1294</sup> – bears this out:

The art work represents the narrative that African people contributed and played supportive roles in the Great Trek and ensuing battles. In essence the art work commemorates the acknowledged and unacknowledged historical presence and socio-political roles played by unsung African heroes and heroines in South Africa.<sup>1295</sup>



**Figure 381:** Daniel Rankadi Mosako. *Settlements*. 1996. Acrylic and oil on board. 80 × 70 cm (photo courtesy of artist)

<sup>1291</sup> Our thanks to Carla Crafford for information on this project. For a range of Cool Capital projects, see <http://www.coolcapital.co.za/news.aspx>

<sup>1292</sup> Coombes 2003, 51.

<sup>1293</sup> Cool Capital Catalogue, 28, [https://issuu.com/coolcapital/docs/cool-capital-catalogue\\_2016/40](https://issuu.com/coolcapital/docs/cool-capital-catalogue_2016/40). A more permanent intervention is a replica of a 'koeksister', a sweet Afrikaner confection, one of ten benches set up in Pretoria during the biennial, which has rather incongruously been installed on the lower steps of the Monument.

<sup>1294</sup> There is some irony in the fact that we are only able to reproduce this work in small scale: unlike the Monument itself, this work has disappeared from view and we were unable to trace its present owners to acquire a better image than the low-resolution photograph owned by the artist.

<sup>1295</sup> *Voortrekker Monument 1938–2018*, 72.

## Epilogue

Created as a grandiloquent memorial to the Voortrekkers, with its frieze giving monumental form to the foundation myths of Afrikaner nationalism, the fundamental basis of apartheid, the Monument can never be the simple 'fun' presence that the pink Monument implies, however much it may be secularised as a landmark and tourist attraction. Given its contentious past and the messages of the historical frieze, it can surely never be truly de politicised. In contrast to published texts, the petrified form of the frieze cannot be revised or published in a new edition to accommodate changing views and ideologies. Yet the 'resistant' property of this, the only large-scale visual history of the Great Trek, enables people to engage with that history face to face, whether in comfortable accord, indifferent dismissal or intense disagreement. Something of the range of popular responses is represented in brief on a single page of the Monument's visitors' book in February 2012. Alongside reverent repetitions of the cenotaph's 'Ons Vir Jou Suid Afrika', we find the admiring 'amazing and beautiful'; the more qualified 'asemrowend – laat mens dink' (breathtaking – makes you think); the laconic 'very nice'; and the denunciation 'this place is BAD!' The marble frieze offers an exceptional reference for South Africa's history which can be used to re negotiate views on past and present issues – concepts of freedom and resistance, legal rights and land ownership, ethnicity and ethics, colonialism and postcolonialism – and to think about how to produce and to perceive such visual history. Having endured adulation and vilification, and survived dramatic social and political change, the Monument and its frieze continue to evoke reactions both positive and negative from viewers, and to prick the imagination of designers and artists to create works in response to the architecture and the sculptured narratives, giving them an ongoing relevance in South African culture. And for art historians they provide an engrossing case study of the interaction of history, ideology and iconography, and of the complex story of how they shaped the ambitious architectural and sculptural forms of the Voortrekker Monument.





**Figure 382:** The Voortrekker Monument (photo courtesy of HF Archives F 39.1.30 k)



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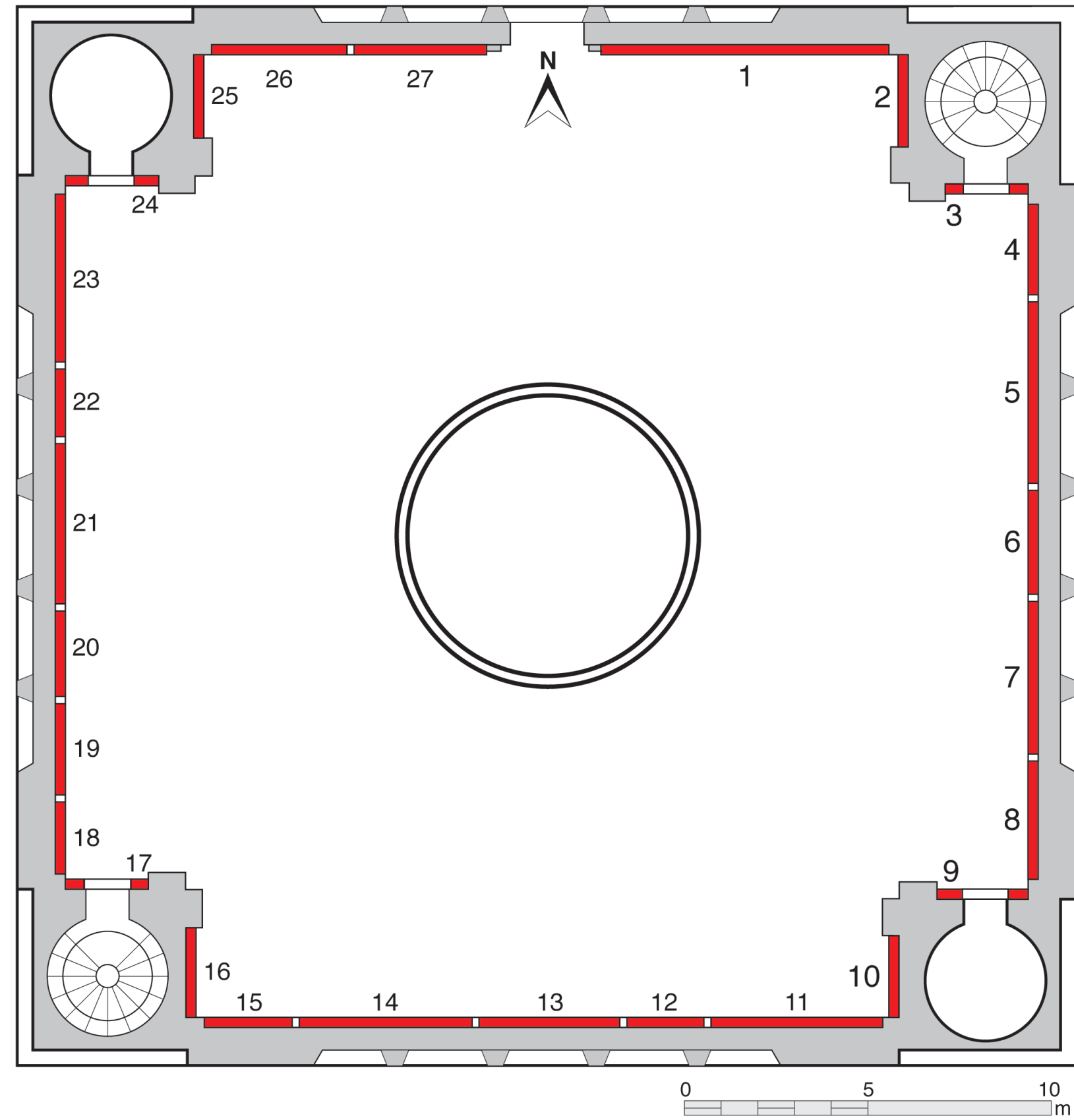
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- 15 Teresa Viglione
- 16 Dirkie Uys
- 17 Marthinus Oosthuizen
- 18 Women spur men on
- 19 Arrival
- 20 The Vow
- 21 Blood River
- 22 Church of the Vow
- 23 Saallaer
- 24 Mpande
- 25 Death of Dingane
- 26 Return
- 27 Convention

Ground plan: Hall of Heroes, order of scenes (drawing Tobias Bitterer)