

Aug. 20th 1927.

THE NEW STATION GATEWAY

DR. REITZ'S PREFERENCE FOR THE KOODOO

The Pretoria representative of The Star writes:—

Dr. Hjalmar Reitz was in reflective mood this morning when I asked his opinion of the controversy he had caused in Johannesburg by his criticism of the new station elephants.

"My firm belief, I repeat," he said, "is that the animals at the gateway should be typical of Africa and Africa only. Why have statues of elephants when we have the rhino, the eland and the koodoo, which is a most beautiful animal? Elephants remind us of Asia rather than of Africa.

"I have never heard of the koodoo being depicted in statuary yet," went on Dr. Reitz, "and it is not too late to adopt it now instead of the elephant. A big and massive animal is required, of course, to be in keeping with the massiveness of Johannesburg's new station. But surely the animal could be enlarged in proportion, as statues often are—look at the statue of Paul Kruger in front of Pretoria railway station; it is far bigger than life size.

"Some people," remarked Dr. Reitz laughingly, "imagine that the suggestion of elephants is a friendly gesture towards Mr. Sastri, India's Agent-General, to make him feel more at home. No, it is not so."

"What about the lion?" Dr. Reitz was asked.

"Oh, no," came the quick reply. "The lion has been already annexed by the British people, though there are as few lions in England as unicorns."

Dr. Reitz added that the sight of a koodoo outside the Johannesburg station would impress itself on overseas tourists. Elephants, however, would not be given a second thought as they were far too common.

On being asked if he knew the opinion of Van Wouw regarding his suggestion, Dr. Reitz said he did not, but would very much like to. He hoped that Van Wouw would agree.

It would be the first koodoo in statuary and would give this famous South African sculptor ample scope for his talent.

"I might add," he concluded laughingly, "that a number of quantity surveyors agree with me. Elephants are so difficult to measure."

"The case of Dr. Reitz is really not quite hopeless. He admits that we have rhinos and lions and many other interesting animals. Many people either do not know that we have elephants or they forget it. I find in my journeys that there exists an appalling ignorance—pretty general, too—about South African conditions and resources. As an example, we have a huge deposit of the most beautiful marble in the world. Do many people realise it? We are going to use this marble, even if we lay ourselves open to criticism that we are infringing on Italy. It is certain that some of our marble is incomparably superior to the Italian. Then take our timber. We have some timber the like of which is not to be found anywhere else. It is superior both in beauty and durability."

Returning to the black elephants, Mr. Moerdyk emphasised that the proposal to have two huge bronze statues of them at the entrance to the new railway station was most appropriate. The elephants, the great baobab tree, the giant aloe, all were symbolic of the strange mystery of Africa.

THE CANONS OF DESIGN.

"But all that apart, we come to the practicability. Dr. Reitz, whose case, as I have said is not hopeless, is not averse to an enlarged koodoo. But you cannot play about with scale in this manner. The Kruger memorial in front of the Pretoria railway station is quoted by Dr. Reitz as an example of what can be done in the way of enlarging figures. The Kruger monument has been severely criticised, and if it is a failure, as some assert, the defects are due to the lack of co-ordination in scale. The pedestal is in small scale and the figure is on a huge scale and the combination of the two is not artistic. If you enlarge a lion or a meerkat to a size suitable for the position selected for the elephants in the railway station building, all sense of scale is lost entirely.

"You must, in a building such as this, stick to the human and not to the heroic scale, and for this purpose the elephant is most suitable. A life-size animal is all that is required. Then, too, the elephant answers to the simplicity, the severity and the compactness of the building to be ornamented. It is much more suitable than a luxurious animal like the koodoo.

"The elephant is symbolic of power and transport. He has stood for transport throughout the ages. Hannibal conquered Rome with the aid of the African elephant—I hope I am casting no slur on Mussolini."

"What about the lion?"

"We have considered the lion," said Mr. Moerdyk with a smile, "but South Africa already has a flag question. We do not think it desirable to set up a lion question as well.

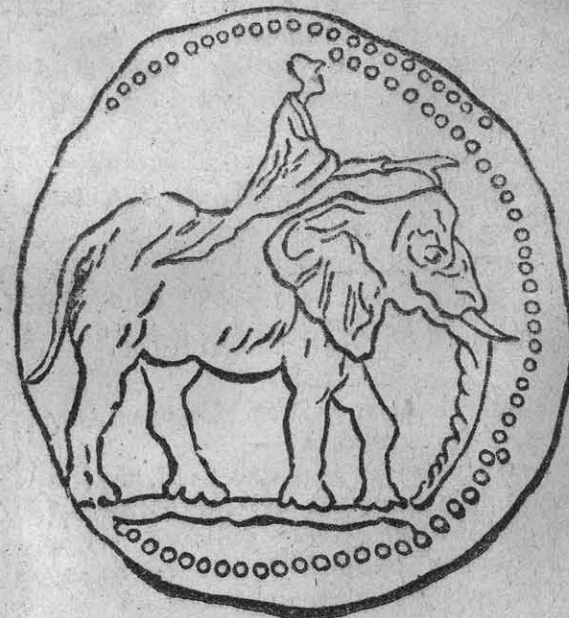
"I may add that in all probability Van Wouw will be the sculptor of the elephants for the new station."

THOSE ELEPHANTS

Mr. Moerdyk, in the statement which appeared in The Star yesterday, seems to have cleared up finally the interesting little discussion which Dr. Reitz raised by suggesting at the architects' dinner that koodoos or elands should be placed outside the new Johannesburg station instead of elephants. Mr. Moerdyk as a matter of fact pointed out on the same occasion that Dr. Reitz was doing an injustice to the elephant by saying it is not a typically African animal. Mr. Reitz in an interview this week made his position quite plain; he knows that the elephant is characteristically African, but he wants an animal that is exclusively African, and largely confined to southern Africa, as many of the larger antelopes are. The architect's reply seems to me pretty final. The elephant is not only compact and suitable as well as symbolic, but it can be executed in its actual size, so that it will not look grotesque or extravagant, as an enormous koodoo might. When it comes to the point we have a variety of elephant—the Knysna one—which is exclusively South African. I admit that the differences are not so great that the stranger entering our station portals would know it.

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Mr. Moerdyk in his speech referred to the far superior size of the African elephant. It is a curious fact that the ancient Romans considered the Indian one superior. That may have had something to do with the fact that it seems more easily tamed. That the Romans knew the African elephant well enough



is apparent from the extent to which they were used against Rome by Carthage—that feat of Hannibal's of taking elephants over the Alps into Italy remains one of the most astonishing things in history. There have been questions as to whether the Carthagenians did not buy Indian animals, but this idea was definitely disposed of by Sir Ray Lankester years ago, when he reproduced the Carthaginian coin shown here; the elephant on it, though not beautiful, is unmistakably African. The huge ear proves that at a glance, even without the general shape of the head which (though the tusks might have been far larger) goes to show the same thing.

The Pilgrim

MOERDYK

NEW STATION'S ELEPHANTS

ARCHITECT'S COMPLETE REPLY TO DR. REITZ

"I am glad to see that Dr. Reitz has so far recovered from the shock of learning that there are such things as African elephants that he is able to give interviews to the Press," said Mr. G. Moerdyk, one of the architects of the new Johannesburg railway station, to the Pretoria representative of The Star today.