

# Ambiguous associations: monuments referred to in the design of the Voortrekker Monument

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In Gerhard Moerdyk's communications, both orally and in writing, on the origin and importance of the design of the Voortrekker Monument (1949, Pretoria, South Africa) he often associated this monument with various other monuments across the world. These references fall in two groups: the first concerns a statement that developed and changed over time, wherein the Voortrekker Monument is placed in a scale relationship to well-known world monuments. These include the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, the Pantheon, St. Peter's Cathedral, the Dom des Invalides, the Taj Mahal, an Egyptian pyramid, the Great Wall of China and the Völkerslucht Denkmal. The second concerns the relationship of the design of the Voortrekker Monument to Great Zimbabwe, and explores the different views that Moerdyk expressed of this monument. The article shows how Afrikaner sentiment and ideology directed and shifted Moerdyk's own personal views and comments on the tension that arose between his personal interest as an architect and his public views as a representative of Afrikaner ideals.

**Keywords:** Voortrekker Monument, monument.

## **Dubbelsinnige assosiasies: Monumente verwys na in die ontwerp van die Voortrekker-monument**

In Gerhard Moerdyk se kommunikasies rondom die ontwerp van die Voortrekker-monument (1949, Pretoria, Suid-Afrika), beide mondelings en in skrif, assosieer hy gereeld die monument met 'n verskeidenheid ander monumente regoor die wêreld. Hierdie verwysings val in twee groepe: die eerste hou verband met 'n stelling wat verander en ontwikkel oor tyd, waarin die Voortrekker-monument geplaas word binne 'n skaal-vergelyking tot bekende monumente regoor die wêreld. Dit sluit in die Mausoleum van Halikarnassus, die Pantheon, die Petrusbasilika, die Dom des Invalides, die Taj Mahal, 'n Egiptiese piramide, die Groot Muur van Sjina en die Völkerslucht-denkmal. Die tweede behels die verband tussen die ontwerp van die Voortrekker-monument en Groot Zimbabwe, en ondersoek die verskillende opinies wat Moerdyk uitdruk oor hierdie monument. Die artikel wys hoe Afrikaner-sentiment en -ideologie Moerdyk se opinies beïnvloed, en lewer kommentaar op die verskille wat ontstaan tussen sy persoonlike belangstellings as argitek en sy publieke posisie as verteenwoordiger van Afrikaner ideale.

**Stutelwoorde:** Voortrekker-monument, monument.

This article will examine and discuss the well-known historical monuments that the architect Gerhard Moerdyk (1890-1958) referred to while he was designing the Voortrekker Monument. It will show that he did not necessarily acknowledge these monuments outright as influences on the design, but rather established more tentative associations between them and his own design for the Voortrekker Monument. It is my contention that these associations shifted over time, eventually becoming obscured in the light of contemporaneous architectural and social debates around what the design *should* represent in relation to what the respective monuments actually represented. This illustrates how, in the search for an authentic architectural expression of Afrikaner history, culture and society, a conflict developed between the architect's references to other monuments across the world and the search of the new Afrikaner society for a unique identity by means of an 'original' and 'authentic' architecture.

From the early decades of the twentieth century onwards, Afrikaner society was on the ascent. The French philosopher, Michel Foucault, defines this as the process by which a society gradually achieves higher spheres of power. This power in turn is used to generate and propagate

knowledge of that society, especially by means of written accounts and visual reproductions that define its identity. The individual, as a member of such a society, similarly ascends: his/her 'name' and genealogy, which situate him/her within a kinship group, become important. This sets up an affiliation with the group's written accounts and ceremonies that mark the power relations and structure of the society. Within this system, says Foucault, *monuments* 'bring survival after death'<sup>1</sup>.

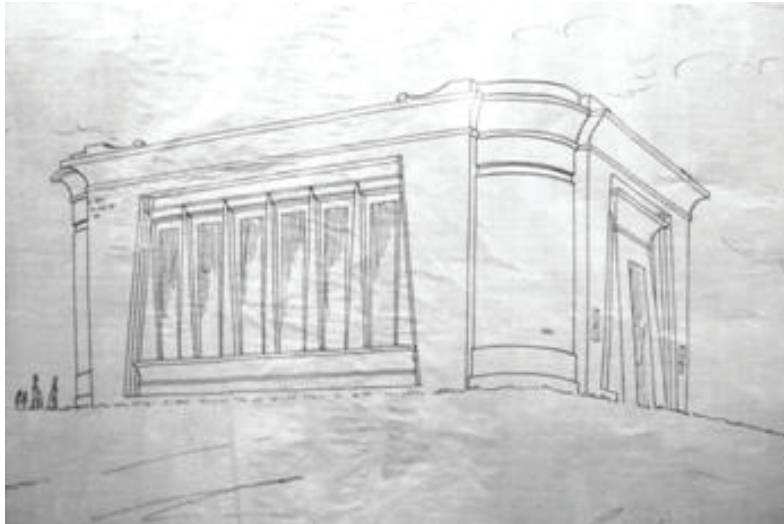
The idea of constructing a monument to commemorate the Great Trek had been raised as early as 1895, but it took a further thirty years before this wish was translated into a focused effort. The Great Trek of 1835-1838 was regarded as the foundation of Afrikaner society and, as the centenary of this event approached, so did the desire to express in material form the cultural power of their ascendance – thus giving rise to the idea to commemorate the event by constructing a national monument.

The *Sentrale Volksmonumentekomitee* (the Central VolksMonument Committee, CVC) was formed in 1931, and tasked with making this a reality. Much of their early efforts were focused on fundraising and mobilising popular and political support for the project. The media often reported on aspects related to the venture and the first hint of what the monument could look like came from a design that Gerhard Moerdyk gave to the press. This design, produced independently of the CVC, was published on 17 October 1935 in the newspaper *Die Volksblad*. It referred to a proposal for a large stone archway 'in the Egyptian style'<sup>2</sup>. The article unfortunately did not include an illustration of this design but there is a drawing in the Moerdyk Family Collection that could be of this proposal, see Figure 1. Moerdyk explained that the path leading through the arch would be symbolic of the road followed by the Voortekkers, with columns on each side representing the problems they experienced along the way. Although Moerdyk called these 'columns', they would have been more than mere supports, enclosing interior spaces. He proposed that the remains of the Voortrekker leader, Piet Retief, and his men be placed inside a sarcophagus in one of the columns, and that the walls of this space be decorated with relief panels by the sculptor Anton van Wouw, depicting important events associated with the Trek. The other column would house a museum dedicated to the Voortrekkers. This proposal also made provision for a rostrum overlooking a large amphitheatre. It is important to note that a few elements of this proposal found their way into the eventual design, namely the sarcophagus (which later became the altar), the relief panels visually relating the story of the Voortrekkers, and the amphitheatre.

The CVC gave the official task of determining the design of the proposed monument to the Form Sub Committee. This committee met for the first time on 26 January 1936, and a concise and precise brief for the project was captured in the minutes of this meeting:

*Insake die vorm, staan die komitee die gedagte altyd voorop: die monument moet die beliggaming van die Voortrekkeridee insluit.*

Regarding the form, the committee holds forth the following idea: the monument should embody the Voortrekker idea. [own translation]



**Figure 1**  
**Moerdyk [1936?]. Untitled drawing.**  
 (photograph of a drawing in the Moerdyk family collection: Nicolas Clarke, 2008).

It was resolved that the Secretary of Foreign Affairs would be asked to direct a request to the Union Missions in Rome, Paris, Berlin, New York and London to send to the committee portraits or drawings of historical monuments to be found in the countries in which they were stationed. Pictures of the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne were specifically requested. Examples of the wide range of materials, such as postcards, photographs and books received, following this request, can be viewed in the Archives of the Voortrekker Monument.

A month after the first meeting of the Form Sub Committee, on 29 February 1936, Gerhard Moerdyk was invited to address the committee on the advantages and disadvantages of a competition to determine a design for the monument. Moerdyk strongly advised against a competition and, not long afterwards, on 7 April 1936, he was appointed as *boumeester* (master builder) of the project<sup>3</sup>.

A day later, on 8 April 1936, an Afrikaans newspaper, *Die Volkstem* published a description of yet another design by Moerdyk, in this instance based on the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus. In the words of another newspaper, *The Rand Daily Mail*, of the same date, the monument ‘will take the form of an old Greek mausoleum’. No known drawing of this proposal exists.

But on 14 April 1936, less than a week after the description of Moerdyk’s second design proposal was published, the CVC put out an official statement to record their dismay over the unauthorised and incorrect reports that had been published on the design of the monument. They emphasised that the design had not been finalised but that the idea was of a massive building in white granite, bearing influences from ‘the Zimbabwe style’. A reverential atmosphere would be created within, with space for historical panels. In front of this monument would be placed the figure of a Voortrekker woman, arranged within a circular wall representing a laager. The Committee emphasised:

*Die Monument sal van eg Suid-Afrikaanse aard wees, en om te sê, soos in sommige ongemagtigde koerantberigte gedoen is, dat dit ‘n Griekse of enige ander soort monument sal wees, is heeltemal verkeerd.*

The Monument will be of true South African character, and to say, like in some unauthorised newspaper articles, that it will be a Greek or any other sort of monument, is completely wrong.<sup>4</sup>  
 [Own translation]

One can only assume that the description of the mausoleum proposal had been given to the press by Moerdyk himself and that he would have had no reason to give them an outdated design unless he deliberately wanted to mislead them. Regardless, it appears that the Committee's rebuke was directed at Moerdyk as much as at the press, and that there might not at this point have been agreement between Moerdyk and the Committee on the design. This is not the only anomaly that exists in relation to the Voortrekker Monument and other monuments, as will be shown here.

In September 1936, within a further six months, the final design of the Voortrekker Monument – in accordance with the CVC's description thereof – was revealed to the public in the form of a model that was exhibited at the Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg. From this point onwards, Moerdyk was often called on to clarify and defend this design. Up to this point, references to other monuments have included those by Moerdyk (an Egyptian archway, a Greek mausoleum) and one by the CVC (Great Zimbabwe). These references, together with further associations, will now be analysed in more detail. The first part of this analysis will deal with a group of world monuments that Moerdyk often referred to in relation of the Voortrekker Monument and the second will deal with the reference in the design to the Great Zimbabwe.

## World monuments

Both Moerdyk and the CVC, in official statements given to the press, repeatedly denied that the design of the monument had any foreign origin. At the same time, however, they often described the monument in relation to a select range of historical monuments. These associations are however peculiarly ambiguous, as will be shown here.

The following discussion will focus on extracts from a group of documents that can be found in the Gerhard Moerdyk Collection, housed in the Merensky Library at the University of Pretoria. The collection contains a wide range of material that had been donated for safekeeping by Moerdyk's family and includes a set of typed and hand-written documents by Moerdyk on the design of the monument. Although none of these documents are dated, it is possible, in most instances, to position them in the chronology of the project according to their content and focus. These documents illustrate how Moerdyk's range of references to other world monuments expanded over time. Three specific examples are quoted here in full and analysed.

The first statement comes from a document titled *Die wording van die Voortrekker Monument*, and reads as follows:

*Die Voortrekker Monument is omtrent dieselfde grootte as die Mauseleum van Halikarnasus, gebou in Klein-Asië deur die weduwee van Koning Mausulus. ... Die Voortrekker Monument is kleiner as die gebou in Parys waar die graf van Napoleon is. Dit is een-tiende so groot as die Taj Mahal in Indië. Dit is een-sewe-en-twintigste so groot as 'n piramied en dit is minder as een-duisendste van die wolume van die Muur van Sjina, so dit is nie een van die groot geboue van die wêreld nie, maar dit hou die indruk van geweldigheid. [verbatim]*

The Voortrekker Monument is roughly the same size as the Mausoleum of Halikarnassus, built in Asia Minor by the widow of King Mausolus. ... The Voortrekker Monument is smaller than the building in Paris where the grave of Napoleon is. It is one-tenth as big as the Taj Mahal in India. It is one-twenty-seventh as big as a pyramid and it is less than one-thousandth of the volume of the Wall of China, so it is not one of the big buildings of the world, but it holds the impression of tremendousness. [own translation]

The second statement, contained in a document titled *Ontwerp en simboliek van die Voortrekker Monument* reads:

*Die Voortrekker Monument is nie 'n groot gebou nie, dit is omtrent ewe groot as die mausoleum van Halikarnassus, 'n monument wat in Klein-Asië vir koning Mausulus opgerig is en die voorganger geword het van hierdie soort monument. Dit is kleiner as die Dom des Invalides in Parys, die graf van Napoleon; veel kleiner as die Taj Mahal in Indië, en slegs een-elfde so groot soos die Völkerschlacht Denkmal in Leipzig. Dit beslaan slegs een sewe-en-twintigste van die volume van een piramide en minder as een-duidendste van die volume van die Muur van China.*

The Voortrekker Monument is not a large building, it is nearly the same size as the mausoleum of Halicarnassus, a monument that was erected in Asia Minor for king Mausolus and which became the predecessor for this kind of monument. It is smaller than the Dom des Invalides (sic) in Paris, the grave of Napoleon; much smaller than the Taj Mahal in India, and only one-eleventh as big as the Völkerschlacht Denkmal in Leipzig. It occupies only one-twenty-seventh of the volume of one pyramid and less than one-thousandth of the volume of the Wall of China.

The third version of this comparison is contained in a document titled *Saamstelling en simboliek van die Monument as geheel* and reads as follows:

*Die Voortrekker Monument is nie 'n groot gebou nie, dit is omtrent ewe groot as die Mausoleum van Halikanassus in Klein Asië, wat die voorganger is van al hierdie soort monumente. Dit is kleiner as Dom-des-Invalides in Parys, waar die graf van Napoleon is. Dit is baie kleiner as die Taj Mahal in Indië. 1/11 van die Volkerslacht (sic) Denkmal in Leipzig. Die hele monument kan, so groot as wat hy is, binne in die Pantheon van Rome staan sonder dat dit eens die mure sou raak. Die monument kan deur die St Peters Kerk in Rome gedra word sonder om skade te doen. Dit is 1/27 van 'n piramide in Egipte en minder as 1/1000 van die muur om Sjina. Dit is dus nie een van die groot geboue in die wêreld nie.*

The Voortrekker Monument is not a big building; it is nearly the same size as the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus in Asia Minor, which is the predecessor for all these types of monuments. It is smaller than the Dom-des-Invalides in Paris, where the grave of Napoleon is. It is smaller than the Taj Mahal in India. 1/11 of the Volkerslacht (sic) Denkmal in Leipzig. The whole monument can, as big as it is, stand within the Pantheon of Rome without touching the walls. The monument can be carried through the St Peters Church in Rome without doing any damage. It is 1/27 of a pyramid in Egypt and less than 1/100 of the Great Wall of China. It is therefore not one of the big buildings in the world.  
[Own translation]

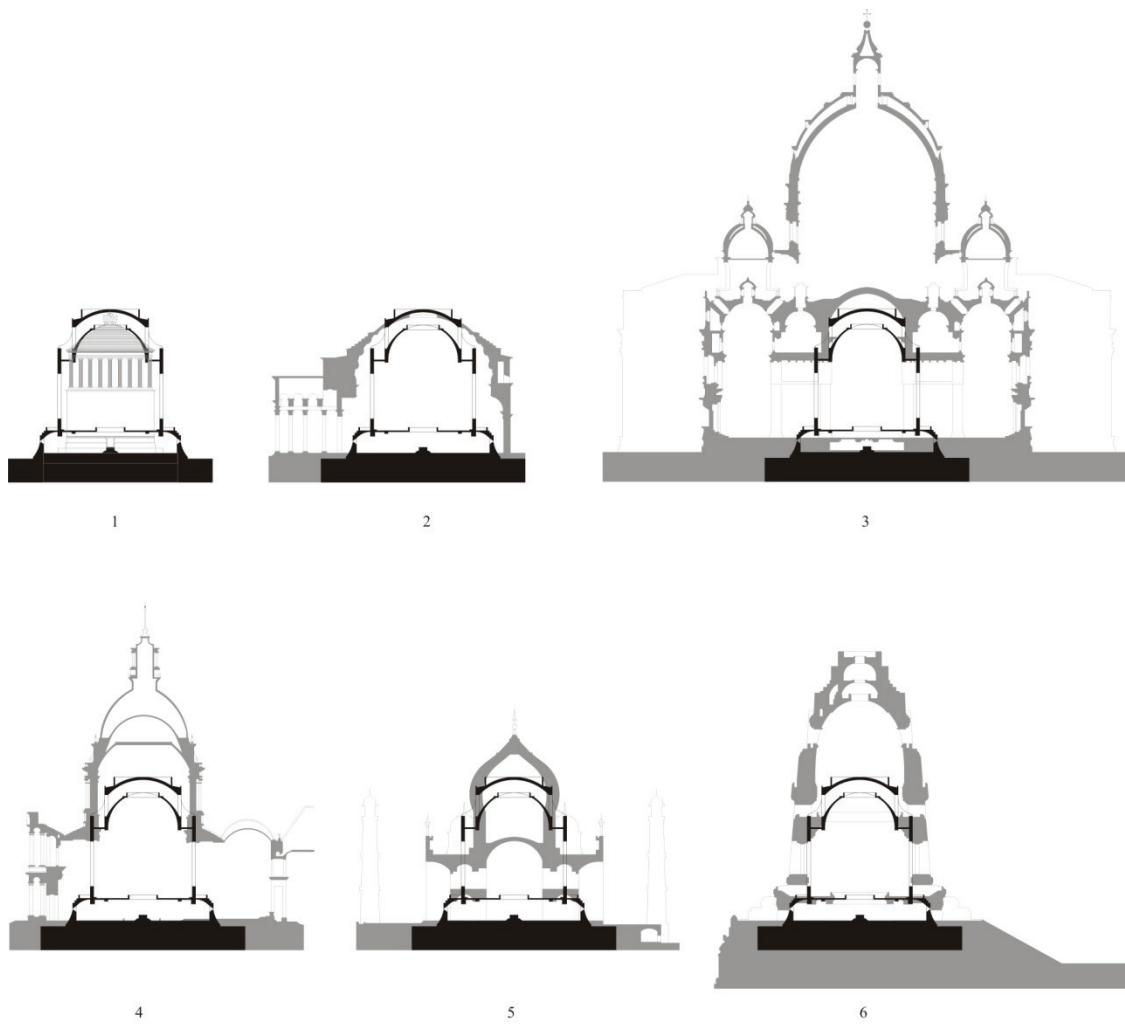
All three statements mention the following buildings in the following order: the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, the Dom des Invalides, the Taj Mahal, the Pyramid, and the Wall of China. All three statements begin by mentioning the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, the scale comparison of this monument remaining the same, with the Voortrekker Monument being, supposedly, nearly the same size. The last two statements acknowledge the Mausoleum as the predecessor for this type of monument, possibly meaning a building that commemorates an important person or event. In each instance, this reference is followed by one to the Dom des Invalides, which is larger than the Voortrekker Monument. The Taj Mahal follows, described incorrectly as being much larger than it actually is in comparison with the Voortrekker Monument. This seems to have been an inadvertent error. All three statements further mention a pyramid (the particular pyramid is never specified, although the Voortrekker Monument is always described as having one-twenty-seventh of the volume of such pyramid) and the Wall of China (twice less than 1/1000, once less than 1/100). The Völkerschlacht Denkmal (in Leipzig) is mentioned twice, with the Voortrekker Monument supposedly being one-eleventh of its size. The Pantheon and St Peter's Cathedral are each mentioned once.

How accurate are these scale comparisons? Figure 2 illustrates the actual scale relationship of these monuments. The sizes used in this representation are all derived from Bannister Fletcher's *A History of Architecture*, a book to which Moerdyk referred his readers in *Die Geskiedenis van Boukuns*, published in 1935. It is not unreasonable to assume that this might have been the source of his estimates of sizes. The only monuments in this group not represented in Fletcher are the Völkerschlacht Denkmal and the Voortrekker Monument. The sizes of these two monuments were obtained from scale drawings. The illustration of these comparisons in Figure 1 shows that Moerdyk's scale references were generally accurate. The Monument indeed almost fits within the Pantheon and it could nearly be carried through the St Peter's Cathedral, had the carrying of buildings been possible. It is in fact approximately the same size as the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, or at least the version of it that is shown in Fletcher, as the actual monument has disappeared long ago. It is in fact smaller than the Dom des Invalides. No verification has been attempted as far as the volumes are concerned. In what instances was Moerdyk thus off the mark in his comparison?

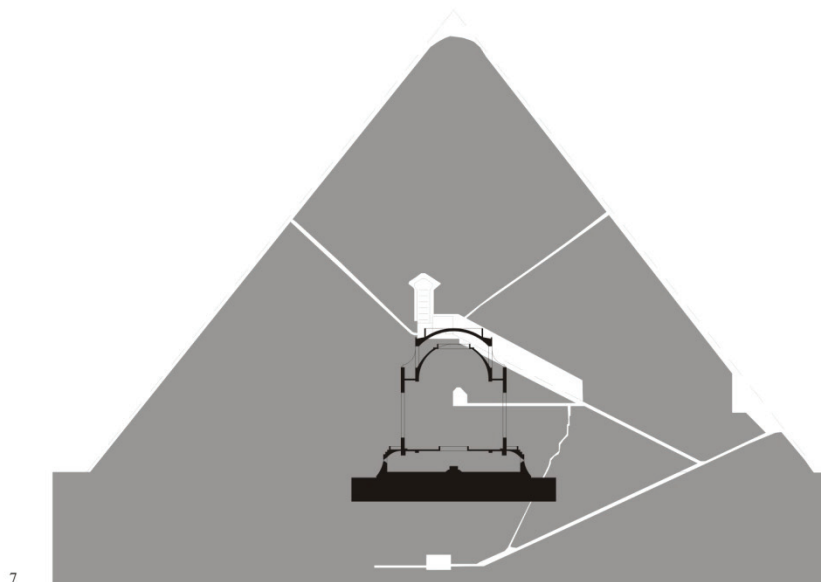
Well, the monument is clearly not that much smaller than the Taj Mahal. There is no obvious reason why Moerdyk would have made such a pronounced mistake with the scale of this building, as he had himself given its size in *Die Geskiedenis van Boukuns* as occupying 185 square feet, with the dome being 80 feet high (24.32m). In comparison, the dome of the Voortrekker Monument is 100 feet high (30.4m). It could be argued that in Islamic architecture the volume of the building is measured by the volume defined by the minarets – but whether Moerdyk would have been aware of this concept, is unknown and unlikely.

But by far the biggest discrepancy between Moerdyk's comparison and the actual scale relates to the Völkerschlacht Denkmal in Leipzig. Moerdyk referred to the monument as being one-eleventh of the Leipzig monument when in fact it is closer to one-half of it. The present author has previously put forward a theory that the spatial order and scale of the Voortrekker Monument was derived directly from the Völkerschlacht Denkmal, based on the close correspondence between their spatial arrangements and sections of these two monuments<sup>5</sup>. It was also speculated that someone other than Moerdyk – possibly the Form Sub Committee itself – had proposed this building as a reference for the design of the Voortrekker Monument. Had someone communicated to Moerdyk that the Voortrekker Monument was one-half of the Völkerschlacht Denkmal, in Afrikaans *een-helfte*, this could have been misinterpreted by Moerdyk as *een-elfde*, one-eleventh, with the pronunciations being very similar. This is the most plausible possible reason for this glaring mistake. The fact remains that, on this point, Moerdyk was completely off the mark.

Leaving that aside, one is left to ask what the meaning and intention of this comparison could have been? Moerdyk clearly wanted to convey to the public that the Voortrekker Monument would become an important monument, comparable with other well-known monuments across the world. But he needed to find a neutral way to do this, as it had become clear that the Voortrekker Monument needed to be regarded as distinct to the Afrikaner. Whereas the first two designs he had put forward were clear in their references ('in the Egyptian style', 'based on the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus'), his verbal articulation of the design then shifted towards a less committed association: 'smaller than', 'larger than', and 'as big as'. This made it more difficult for commentators and critics to say that the design was 'derived' from any of these monuments, yet it remained associated with them. The Voortrekker Monument simply took its place 'among' them. In this way, the monument was related to the world of architecture, albeit in a very non-committal and ambiguous manner. The ultimate aim seems to have been a subtle location of



- 1 Mausoleum of Halicarnassus
- 2 Pantheon, Rome
- 3 St Peter's Cathedral, Rome
- 4 Dome of the Invalides, Paris
- 5 Taj Mahal, Agra
- 6 Völkerslacht Denkmal, Leipzig
- 7 Great Pyramid of Cheops, Gizeh



**Figure 2**  
**Scale comparison of the Voortrekker Monument and other world monuments (source: the author).**

the monument among its predecessors without acknowledging any direct influence. I would propose that this is indicative of an emerging underlying architectural identity crisis that can be related to a deeper crisis of identity within the Afrikaner: having discarded cultural bonds and references regarded as ‘foreign’, they lacked an established architectural representation.

The one reference and association clearly deemed important by the CVC, as they specifically referred to it in the official statement that was published after the second design was made public, was the allusion to the Great Zimbabwe. This reference will now be analysed, and it will be shown that it is also ambiguous...

## Great Zimbabwe

In a hand-written document titled *Die Wording van die Voortrekker Monument*, Moerdyk emphasised that, as far as the world monuments were concerned, although the Voortrekker Monument could not compare in size to those buildings, it still created an impression of ‘tremendousness’. But, he went on; there were other sources to draw on for this quality: Africa, for instance, possesses a character of tremendousness, which ‘dwarfs the work of man’s hand’. If, he argued, one took the largest building in Europe and put it on Africa’s plains, it would immediately be dwarfed. This was not the result of actual measurements, or of scale and perception. The Egyptians, according to Moerdyk, were the only nation that understood how to reflect Africa’s tremendousness. In southern Africa, only one building conveyed the same idea, namely, Great Zimbabwe. This argument establishes the following position: that the Voortrekker Monument would be an impressive building, albeit small in comparison to other monuments; that, like the Egyptians, the Afrikaner as a nation understood what was needed to produce an impressive monument; and that this monument would be only the second in southern Africa to achieve this level of impressiveness. Any earlier built heritage in southern Africa, both imported and indigenous, is thereby repudiated and transcended. By implication, the Afrikaner would produce the first worthwhile monument since the Egyptians built their pyramids and the Zimbabwean civilisation constructed their monument.

It is generally assumed that the reference to Great Zimbabwe as offering some inspiration for the design of the Voortrekker Monument stems from Moerdyk’s appreciation of this building. In other words, it is assumed that he had such a high regard for this monument, which had sprung from the soil and civilisation of southern Africa that it was singled out as a reference for the monument of the Afrikaner nation. But his position on Great Zimbabwe is much more nuanced, ambiguous, and actually often highly derogatory. How did he know this place? What did he think of it?

We know that Moerdyk had visited and documented Great Zimbabwe in the late 1920’s<sup>6</sup>. In *Man en Monument* (1999), Moerdyk’s family recalls his fascination with these buildings: he often reflected on the ingenuity of its builders and the building techniques they had employed. For example, he specifically referred to the method of decreasing the size of building stones, as the height of the wall increased. He believed that this created the illusion of grandeur, and thus employed precisely this technique in important works of his own, such as the Voortrekker Monument and the Merensky Library. In this biography, he is portrayed as an architect with a deep-seated admiration and fascination for this particular monument and its builders

In *Die Geskiedenis van Boukuns* (1935), Moerdyk made it clear that he did not support the fantastical theories that Great Zimbabwe had been built by a foreign civilisation of sun-, moon-, and star-worshippers. Rather, he advised, “in the study of art, as in science, one should follow



the facts”<sup>7</sup>. The facts, as far as he was concerned, could only be found in the quality of its art and form. Investigations of these two aspects clearly indicate, in his opinion, that it was built by an uncivilised nation and that it was not older than 500 years. It did not evidence, in his mind, the slightest hint of an artistic consciousness or design ability, and it was constructed from rocks crudely stacked. One of the earliest signs of civilisation, he explained, was geometric knowledge [*meetkundige kennis*], and this was completely lacking at Great Zimbabwe. He stated that there was not a single definite geometric form to be found, not a single straight line, circle or ellipse – and he thus concluded that these structures were the product of an uncivilised nation. The admiration and fascination that he supposedly displayed towards this work is noticeably absent in this description and its associated sentiment. Could this ambiguity have been rooted in a deep-seated racial conundrum that presented itself to Moerdyk? Namely, that he was, as a worldly architect and a man of the world, truly fascinated by Great Zimbabwe but that this fascination became tempered when expressed through the racial filter of Afrikaner society – to acknowledge and deny the importance of this built work at the same time:

*Zimbabwe is eintlik nie baie groot nie en tog het baie besoekers dit al reeds beskryf as die grootste bou-werk wat ooit in Afrika verrys het, maar wat vergaan het in die welstand van naturelle bloed. Ek ken die afmetings van Zimbabwe, ek sien kans om dit met ‘n honderd kaffirs in minder as ‘n jaar te bou, maar tog het dit hierdie gevoel van geweldigheid.*

Zimbabwe is not really very big and yet many visitors have already described it as the biggest built work that has ever arisen in Africa, but which decayed in the welfare of Native blood. I know the dimensions of Zimbabwe, I [Moerdyk] see my way to, with a hundred kaffirs [Africans], build it in less than a year, and yet it has this feeling of tremendousness.<sup>8</sup> [Own translation]

This statement in itself is incredibly ambiguous, if not derogatory: Moerdyk maintains that it is not impressive in scale, and that, even if some do regard it as impressive in size, its value is diminished by its association with ‘Natives’. He also declares that it can be re-made relatively easily. Despite his almost dismissive view of the monument, Moerdyk does admit that there is something magical about it. It appears, quite literally, as if he is undecided as to the historical or architectural importance of Great Zimbabwe.

The press presented the Voortrekker Monument for public consideration by using headlines such as: *Memorial in style of Zimbabwe*<sup>9</sup>. It repeated the characteristics of the envisaged monument, portraying it as a massive stone structure showing traces of the Zimbabwe style with chevron motifs, but no traces of any known European architecture, except that its source would be geometrical.<sup>10</sup> There was, however, constant public criticism and attacks on the references and allusions contained in these descriptions of the monument. It was repeatedly asked how the monument could reflect the Afrikaner, or Afrikaner society, culture or history. Generally, these questions were responding to associations that had been described in words, rather than to their actual representation in the proposed design. The reference to Great Zimbabwe was deemed especially offensive, as many considered it as black by association, if not by origin. Conversely, references to historical monuments were taken to imply that the Afrikaner did not have its own unique architectural identity. Towards the end of 1936, a proviso was added to the established range of references – these monuments, it was stated, might have served as examples of sanctuaries and altars:

*Maar geeneen van die geboue gee ook maar enigsins die Voortrekker of ons land of onself weer nie. Die Voortrekkers het die beskawing gebring. Beskawing in die boukuns beteken orde en meetkunde. Die Voortrekker self het geen monumentale boukuns nagelaat nie, dus ons kan nie hul voorbeeld volg nie. Die barbaar het wel boukuns gehad, maar sonder meetkunde. Die grootste ou bouwerk in Suid-*

*Afrika, naamlik by Zimbabwe, was vreemd aan alle meetkunde. Daar is geen regte lyn, geen sirkel, geen enkele meetkundige vorm nie.*

But none of these buildings in any way reflects the Voortrekker or our country or ourselves. The Voortrekker brought civilisation. *Civilisation in architecture means order and geometry.* The Voortrekker did not leave behind any monumental architecture, thus we cannot follow their example. *The savage had an architecture, but without geometry.* The largest old building in South Africa, namely at Zimbabwe, was without any geometry. There is no straight line, no circle, not a single geometrical form.<sup>11</sup> [Own translation, own emphasis]

This point needs to be emphasised: according to Moerdyk, the monuments referred to were merely monuments, they did not reflect the Voortrekkers, and they had nothing to do with the monument for the Voortrekkers. The design is similarly disassociated from the Great Zimbabwe, which are considered to be of savage origin. Instead, it was argued, the monument would reflect the civilisation established by the Voortrekkers, which *can* be represented architecturally in order and geometry. Significantly, the conventional representation of the design – the drawings on paper and the models of it – did not change; it was not altered substantially, only its details were developed. However, the representation of space shifted to include categories and ideologies that were more palatable to public consumption. This powerfully emphasises the importance of ideology in relation to representations of space.

*Is dit nou onvanpas dat beskawing orde bring in chaos? Vandaar die sterk ontwikkelde geometriese ontwerp van binnelandse boumateriaal gebruik op Afrikaanse wyse. Daar het 'n kopie voor die hand gelê. Maar in die ontwerp is geen kopie, daar is ook geen enkele Europesese styl-motief toegepas nie, maar alleen 'n logiese geometriese toepassing van Afrikaanse boumateriaal. Die ontwerp is een van vierkante, kube, sirkels en vlakke – alles in harmonie met ons tafelvormige landskap.*

Is it inappropriate that civilisation brings order in chaos? Hence the strongly developed geometric design of local building material used in an Afrikaans way. There was a copy at hand. But in the design there is no copy, there is also no single European style motif applied, but only a logical geometric application of Afrikaanse building material. The design is one of squares, cubes, circles and planes – all in harmony with our tabular landscape.<sup>12</sup> [Own translation]

As the design was refined and the details were finalised, Moerdyk became adamant that it appropriately represented the Afrikaner. He substantiated this belief by referring to the strongly developed geometric design that was derived from local building material, and that was, more significantly, ‘used in an Afrikaans way’. Local building material would have referred to the granite used to build the monument, a material of the earth, extracted from the hard-won land. What ‘a logical geometric application of Afrikaans building material’ actually meant was not explained, but it might have been adequate to convince Afrikaners that this was indeed a true Afrikaner monument.

## **Conclusion**

The design of the Voortrekker Monument presented a challenge in that it needed to be both impressive and unique. As the project became more important in the public consciousness, the requirement for it to represent the Afrikaner ‘architecturally’ became more pronounced. The architect of the Voortrekker Monument was at pains to convey the importance of the building as a monument by repeatedly comparing it with other world monuments. He understood, though, that this comparison could not be based on stylistic similarities, as this might challenge the

authenticity and uniqueness of the volk's monument. Moerdyk thus solved this problem by basing his comparison on scale, rather than aesthetics. This located the Voortrekker Monument not only as one of the famous monuments of the world but also as unique to Afrikaners. At the same time, the design needed to be disassociated from its most direct reference and geographically closest relation, the Great Zimbabwe. This was achieved by shifting the focus from the shared decorative characteristics between these projects towards a normative reading of form: the geometry and order of the Voortrekker Monument expressed civilisation, whereas Great Zimbabwe clearly associated with the 'uncivilised'. It is thus my conclusion that the fundamental ambiguity contained in the various and evolving descriptions of the Voortrekker Monument's design signals that the growing interest in the world of architecture on the part of its architect, Gerhard Moerdyk, was increasingly moderated by a narrowing, exclusionary and inward-focused world of Afrikaner ascendance.

## Notes

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|---|---|----|---|
| 1 | Foucault, <i>Discipline and Punish</i> , 192.   | 8  | Moerdyk Papers, "Die wording van die Voortrekker Monument", Africana Collection, Merensky Library, University of Pretoria.  |
| 2 | <i>Die Volksblad</i> , "Sal Volksmonument in 1938 klaar wees?", 17 October 1935.  | 9  | <i>The Star</i> , "Memorial in style of Zimbabwe", 11 July 1936.  |
| 3 | Sentrale Volksmonumentkomitee, Notule 7 April 1936, Voortrekker Monument Archives.  | 10 | <i>The Star</i> , "Form of Voortrekker Memorial", 9 September 1936. <i>Die Volksblad</i> , "Hoe Voortrekkermonument daaruit sal sien", 10 September 1936. <i>Die Volkstem</i> , "'n Heiligdom binne 'n laer: grondidee van Voortrekkermonument", 11 September 1936. |
| 4 | <i>Die Vaderland</i> , "Massiewe bouwerk van graniet binne ringmuur met waens", 14 April 1936.  | 11 | <i>Die Vaderland</i> , "Monument moet verlede sowel as volkskarakter weerspieel: Mnr. Moerdyk verduidelik idee van sy ontwerp", 10 Desember 1936.   |
| 5 | Steenkamp, 2009. <i>A shared spatial symbolism</i> .  | 12 | Ibid.   |
| 6 | Vermeulen, <i>Man en Monument</i> , 50-54. Moerdyk began his search, with the artist Gustav Preller, for Monomotapa in 1924. It is stated that a few years afterwards he went to visit Zimbabwe but it does not say which year exactly. |    |   |
| 7 | Moerdyk, <i>Die Geskiedenis van Boukuns</i> , 23.   |    |   |

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| Moerdyk, G. 1935. <i>Die Geskiedenis van Boukuns</i> . Pretoria: JL van Schaik.                       | Vermeulen, I. 1999. <i>Man en Monument</i> . Pretoria: JL van Schaik.   |

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