



As one of the first projects, the restoration of the Hercules monument is symbolic for the reorganization of the Kassel museum landscape consuming an investment total of 200 million Euro. It forms the starting point for one of the most comprehensive cultural investment projects in Germany. The aim is not only to conserve the cultural heritage of Hessen-Kassel and the city landmark for the population, but to preserve it for future generations. This investment is sought to enhance the often underrated tourist value of the region in northern Hessen and to give it a more distinct tourist profile so that more visitors will fancy the region Nordhessen and Kassel. So, we talk about a cultural and economic sponsorship project at the same time.

The State of Hessen ist also highly aware of the international significance of the Kassel heritage. Thus, under the title "Water features and Hercules within the Bergpark Wilhelmshöhe" the State Government is promoting the nomination of this unique example of representation of absolutistic power for inscription on the UNESCO world heritage list. The final decision will be made by the world heritage committee presumably in 2013.

In the name of the State Government I thank the citizens of Kassel who donated a considerable amount to support the state investment. I take this as a strong signal that all parties involved are acting in concert to confer a new appeal on Kassel.

Eva Kühne-Hörmann

Eva Kühne-Hörmann
The Hessen Minister of Higher Education, Research and the Arts

Hercules: dates and figures of a landmark

- Construction of the octagon: 1701 – 1711
- Construction of the pyramid: 1714 – 1715
- Construction of the Hercules statue: 1713 – 1717
- Altitude above sea level: 527 metres
- Height of the octagon: 33 metres
- Diameter of the octagon: 68.50 – 73.50 metres
- Height of the pyramid: 30 metres
- Height of the Hercules statue: 8.30 metres (without pedestal) 11.30 metres (including pedestal)

More detailed information:

- Von Herkules gekrönt. Die Idealprospekte Jan und Rymer van Nickelens für Landgraf Karl. Katalog bearbeitet von Agnes Tieze, Monographische Reihe, Band 13, Kassel 2004
- Thomas Ludwig, Der Herkules im Schlosspark Wilhelmshöhe. Historische Baudenkmäler, Parks und Gärten in Hessen, Broschüre 22, Regensburg 2004
- Das Herkulesbauwerk im Bergpark Wilhelmshöhe. Berichte zur Restaurierung. Arbeitshefte des Landesamtes für Denkmalpflege Hessen, Band 18, Stuttgart 2011

Contact

Hessisches Ministerium für Wissenschaft und Kunst
Rheinstraße 23-25, 65185 Wiesbaden
www.hmwk.hessen.de

Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel
Postfach 410 420, 34066 Kassel
www.museum-kassel.de



Picture credits

Title photo: Arno Hensmanns, mhk; Hercules total view: Administration of the Public and Stately Homes and Gardens Hessen; all other photos: Arno Hensmanns, mhk; Hercules engraving: mhk Graphic collection

The Hessen State Government is editor of this publication as part of its public relations work. It may not be used by political parties or campaigners or electoral helpers during an election for the purposes of campaigning. This applies to local, state and federal elections. In particular distribution at election rallies, at information stands of parties, inserting, overprinting or attaching of information or campaign material for a particular party will be considered improper use of the brochures. Passing the brochures on to third parties for use as election campaign material is not allowed either. It must not be used, even outside an election campaign, in a way that could be interpreted as support by the State Government for individual political groups. These restrictions shall apply regardless of when, by what means and of how many copies these publications reached the recipient. However, the parties are permitted to use this publication to inform their own members.

Hessen State Ministry
of Higher Education, Research
and the Arts



Hercules – A living myth

A restoration project with symbolic power

Information on the Hessen Kassel museum landscape No. 1,2



Dear readers,

There are buildings that develop a highly symbolic power and become an identification mark for towns, regions or countries.

The Hercules structure erected in Bergpark Kassel-Wilhelmshöhe certainly belongs to this category. For almost 300 years it has towered above the city of Kassel at the eastern edge of the forest "Habichtswald", visible from afar, and has become its characteristic landmark.

The Hercules monument, a symbol of reposing strength, has practically been a "nursing case" ever since its completion. Cause for concern is above all the octagon which supports the pyramid on which the crowning Hercules statue is based. In 1951/52 it already underwent extensive renovation works. The fact that these efforts were undertaken shortly after the end of the war shows the importance given to the restoration of the Kassel landmark. 55 years later the current fundamental rehabilitation has been initiated as all necessary works could not be performed at that time for financial reasons. In 2008 the restoration of the Hercules statue itself had already been finished to a great extent.

The State Government is determined to consequently and extensively continue the general overhaul of the structure. It is envisaged to complete the restoration of the octagon by 2015/2016. Any delay in the works would be tantamount to an irresponsible treatment of a unique cultural heritage. And it could hardly be made plausible to the Kassel people who not only support "their" Hercules sentimentally, but also financially.



Octagon and Hercules

Symbol of a prince's will to create



Hercules – the courageous, strong, wise and above all virtuous hero of the Greek mythology who, thanks to his merits, was admitted to Olympus and so became immortal – bore quite a considerable identification potential for a prince who wanted to be an example to his subjects and set up a monument for himself.

The Kassel statue represents the ancient demi-god, however, not as a fighting hero, the contractor Landgrave Karl decided to present Hercules reposing self-contained and composed, after having fulfilled his duties, in the awareness of his strength, prepared to face new challenges. Just the way the landgrave saw himself after the end of the War of the Spanish Succession: as a victorious and foresighted sovereign.

On a journey to Italy from 1699 to 1700 the landgrave's decision was inspired by a

Hercules statue standing in the courtyard loggia of the Roman Palazzo Farnese. With 8.30 metres the Kassel Hercules has, however, about three times the height of his ancient example. In 1900 a round badge was found underneath Hercules' scull cap stating that the Augsburg goldsmith Johann Jakob Anthoni was the creator of the monumental statue. It was erected by Anthoni between 1713 and 1717, made from single embossed copper sheets which were soldered and riveted in brass quality. The refined sheets of barely three millimetres were assembled on a stable wrought-iron carcass which was anchored in the steep pyramid serving as a pedestal. Hence, Hercules is one of the earliest larger-than-life monumental statues realised in Europe which were made from copper sheets.

The original design of the monument on Karlsberg hill did not include the Hercules standing on his pyramid. The design of the architect Giovanni Francesco Guerniero from Rome rather favoured a central cascade axis which should extend from an octagonal grotto structure, including a belvedere storey on the top of the hill, over a stretch of one thousand metres to a new castle. Between 1701 and 1711 only octagon and upper third part of the cascades could be realised due to funding bottlenecks. To give the building a worthy complexion, in 1713 the decision was taken to crown the octagon with a Hercules statue.

This decision aggravated the construction challenges which had existed from the very beginning and which lay in the very bad grounds, the use of local tuff vulnerable to weathering as construction material and other construction and planning failures. Already from 1715 on, the octagon had to be stabilised year after year: broken structural elements, dangerous vaults and sunken walls had to be newly grounded, re-erected or stabilised by fortifying structures. The once clear contrast between the rock-like grotto basis and the refined, seemingly transparent belvedere storey diminished. It has almost entirely disappeared.



Demi-God on Crumbly Rock

Permanent construction site over 300 years

The monumental Hercules building is by far not as unwavering as it appears to be: In 1715 only shortly after its completion considerable damages became apparent to such an extent that it was said that the architect Guerniero had preferred to turn his back on Kassel straight away.

The Italian had not only committed some structural errors – even if one considers the times in which static calculations were still a very long way off indeed. On top of that the grounds could not bear the enormous weight of the octagon, especially the eastern area at the edge of the slope which bases on fissured basalt rock. In addition, the local tuff used as construction material proved to be little pressure-resistant and extremely prone to weathering under conditions of humidity, frost and wind: all in all, this was not a good basis for Hercules.

Previous renovation works had to remain incomplete, not least for funding reasons. The on-going fundamental rehabilitation works aim at a sustained strengthening of the structure to warrant its permanent stability to the farthest possible extent. A particular critical issue is the acute back weathering of the tuff. Numerous weakened rocks have to be exchanged. But the deposits in the tuff quarry of the Habichtswald forest are limited; the use of other rocks poses technical problems. Therefore, the development of artificial tuff rock is in process to protect the limited natural resources.

The size and volume of this enormous “giant castle”, as it is also called, are a big and costly challenge: 70 kilometres of joints have to be overhauled. And again and again the designers encounter unpleasant surprises: Therefore, the hope that the building will ever be “completed” seems to be illusory. It rather requires continuous care, as it is the case with big cathedrals and their site huts. The current rehabilitation works will probably continue until 2015/2016.

The Hercules statue itself defied the passage of time better than its monumental supporting structure. Still, here as well restoration works became necessary in the past. There are documents relating to works in the years 1900 and 1951/52. The most recent restoration works started in 2007 on the basis of a comprehensive identification of damages. They showed considerable damages to the copper skin and the wrought-iron inner construction. The skin showed local blackenings and incrustations, finer cracks and wholes, old mends and defective rivet joints – many minor damages which had to be removed in arduous work. Inside, the iron belts dating back to the fifties which were attached to the inner side of the copper skin, have corroded so badly that they had to be exchanged completely. Now, corrosion-resistant stainless steel is used, just as well as for the additional anchorages which shall stabilise the statue against increasing wind loads. In addition, the lightening protection system was renewed, improved ventilation and dehydration are supposed to reduce the corrosion risk remarkably.

In August 2008 the renovation works of the Hercules statue were completed by symbolically bringing the statue's head back in place again.

