

Herkulesbrunnen

You are now standing in front of the third splendid fountain of Augsburg, the “Herkulesbrunnen”.

On a 3.5 m high pedestal the larger-than-life Hercules is in combat with the seven-headed Hydra. This dramatic mythological motive shows one of the twelve trials, which Hercules the demigod is challenged with. He defeats the water monster Hydra with a flame club. Over the hexagonal marble basin an also hexagonal fountain pillar is rising. It is crowned by the Hercules-Hydra-group and enclosed by several bronze figures.

The bronze sculpture shows the moment of struggle between the monstrous beast and Hercules, acting in classical nudity. The fountain is worth looking at from all sides. It offers different magnificently constructed perspectives from each angle of view. The lion shaped gargoyles fixed on the upper cornis of the pillar refer to Hercules’ heroic deed: killing the Nemean Lion. Half way up the fountain pillar there are three Graces, also called naiads or nymphs of spring. Those personify grace and charm and symbolize beauty and purity.

The Myth says that the Graces, sitting on the „clear waterside“, were the first to welcome the deified hero Hercules on Mount Olympus. This could also be read in a dedicating inscription that doesn’t exist anymore, it says that the fountain is dedicated to the virtue and the Graces. Under each Grace you can find a shell-shaped basin, each is held by a tritone. According to antique myths they were lascivious sea creatures that loved to pester women.

Their fish-like bodies merge with the fountains architectural features. On the lower pillar you can see three Erotes with wings in the form of three youths. They are emulating Hercules by struggling with geese or swans. The fountains’ theme deals with the overcoming of vices by virtue. Hercules was rewarded for his virtuous action by becoming immortal. The pedestal is decorated with three gilded reliefs.

Chronologically they show the foundation of the city of Augsburg:

To follow the story chronologically we shall start with the relief left of the fountains front, following the one on the front and continuing counterclockwise. At the first relief one can identify the foundation of the city, symbolized by the drawing of a boundary with help of an ox pulling a plough.

The next relief shows the triumphal procession of the personification of the city called Augusta.

The last relief shows the personification of the city of Rome as well as of Augsburg. As a symbol of unity they are joining hands. Augusta is equipped with a brick crown and a pinecone.

The bronze is constructed as a „figura serpentinata“, a winding figure showing different perspectives from each angle of vision, typical for the artistic style called “mannerism”.

The fountain was shaped by Adriaen de Vries and casted in bronze by Wolfgang Neidhart. Originally one could reach the upper part of the city from the „Heiliggrabgasse“. The former surrounding area of the fountain wasn't always as extensive as nowadays. The sight towards church St. Ulrich was blocked by a row of big houses. Thus the fountain of Heron, which was turned a little, was embedded into a square and welcomed everybody who reached the upper city. Hercules was to represent the cities power and invincibility.

For further information about the technique of bronze casting, listen to the podcast „bronze cast“.