

Bismarck Monuments

Monuments are historical evidence we can see every day, but we need to place them into a larger context. Each monument has its own history and shows how people felt about historical events at the time the monument was erected. Perhaps more importantly for us, the way a monument is respected and cared for shows how people feel about these events today.

Try analyzing a monument on a field day excursion.

Bismarck monument in Hamburg

The world's largest Bismarck monument, designed by sculptor Hugo Lederer, stands 34 meters high in Hamburg St. Pauli. It is on a base built by architect Emil Schaudt. The 625-ton granite colossus shows Bismarck as a Roland figure leaning on a sword and looking westward toward the mouth of the Elbe and England, rather than eastward toward Berlin. Hamburg's city fathers wanted a large monument to impress William II. But the emperor disliked Bismarck and Hamburg (Bismarck criticized him after 1890 from nearby Friedrichsruh); also, he disapproved of Social-Democratic successes in Hamburg elections.

But William's favourite seaport, Bremen, had erected a monument to his unloved father, Frederick I. Hamburg businessmen hoped that their monument to Bismarck would increase the money from the German Empire spent to improve the seaport and harbour facilities in their city. Private citizens raised 500,000 German marks to pay for the monument. When the dedication ceremony was held in 1906, the emperor did not attend. The cost of repairing the monument in 2007 is estimated to be about 2 million Euro, which makes the city of Hamburg ask whether the monument is worth it. As one reporter wrote, "Hardly a postcard shows it, no city brochures praise it – it stands there, dirty, in a blind corner ... like something set aside."

M 1 Roland statue

From a modern dictionary:

"Roland statue: larger-than-life statue of a bare-headed knight with a drawn sword placed on or near a market place or main square in the 13th to 18th centuries.

The meaning and origin of the name has been lost. Roland statues referred to legal matters, to courts which heard legal cases, or to city rights and freedoms."

Adapted by D.N. from: Meyers Neues Lexikon, Mannheim 1993, vol. 8, p. 234.



M 2 Bismarck monument in Hamburg St. Pauli



Bismarck monument near Ascheffel

The Aschberg statue near Ascheffel, Schleswig-Holstein, differs from the Hamburg monument. It was built in 1900 by Adolf Brütt and was meant to stand guard at the foot of a 45-meter tower near Apenrade (Denmark today). It is made of hammered sheet-copper and stands seven meters high. Bismarck wears a 19th century cavalry uniform. His right hand holds a sword and the left rests on the Imperial German crown. The statue was moved out of Denmark in 1919, because German nationalists feared that it would be melted down if left on Danish soil. It took until 1930 to remove it from storage and put it up on the 98-meter-high Aschberg. Today, Bismarck faces north towards Denmark, although he originally faced south towards Germany.

M 3 Bismarck monument near Ascheffel

Monument Analysis Worksheet

1. Describing the monument

- Assess the importance of the monument's location.
- Find out what material it is made of and what it represents.
- Name the figures or objects which are used on the monument and what they symbolize.
- Note how the figures or objects are portrayed, their size, where they are placed in the monument, their body language, their clothing, objects placed near them, etc.
- Write down any inscriptions you find on the monument – texts, quotations, names, etc.
- Describe the impression the monument makes on you.

2. Finding information

- Find out as much about the building of the monument as you can: sculptor, architect, date built, sponsors, reasons for building it, name or title of the monument, its artistic style.
- Find out who supported building the monument and who paid for it.
- Look for evidence on how people felt about the monument at the time it was built: Find documents dealing with its dedication, its history, public debates about it.
- Note whether the monument is used in ceremonies or formal occasions, who maintains it, and any nicknames it has.
- Assess the importance of the location today.
- Examine why people visit the monument today – ask visitors why they have come and how they feel about the monument.

3. Interpreting the monument

- Analyze the impression the monument makes on a visitor today.
- Assess the importance of the monument's symbols to visitors today.
- Estimate which people will be enthusiastic about the monument today and which groups will not.
- Formulate what the monument stands for and your response to it in your own words.