Relief - Ercole I d'Este (1431-1505) Duke of Ferrara

Object: Relief
Place of origin: Emilia (made)
Date: ca. 1471-1500 (made)
Artist/Maker: Unknown
Materials and Techniques: Carved marble in relief
Museum number: 452-1869
Gallery location: Medieval & Renaissance, Room 62A, Discover the Renaissance World, case 5

Public access description
The profile portrait, inspired by ancient Roman models, often appears in Italian Renaissance art. It might show a famous Roman ruler or statesman – Julius Caesar or Cicero for example – or a realistic or idealised image of a contemporary figure such as this example depicting Duke Ercole I d’Este of Ferrara. Ercole D’Este was born in 1431 and was Duke of Ferrara between 1471-1505. He married Eleanor of Aragon. Under Ercole Ferrara experienced a significant enlargement that trebled the area within the city walls and it became one of the leading cities of Europe. This is known as the Herculean Addition. Ercole was a generous patron of the arts and especially vocal music. He also assembled a great library amongst other achievements.
The House of Este were rulers of Ferrara (1240–1597), and Modena and Reggio (1288–1796).

Descriptive line
Relief, marble, with the profile of Ercole I d’Este (1431-1505) Duke of Ferrara, Italy (Emilian), second half of the 15th century

Physical description
The sitter is shown in profile to the left, wearing a jewel on his breast and a high cap. At the sides the relief is enclosed by a moulding. There is an inscription on the protruding base. The upper part of the relief has been broken diagonally on the left and right along and behind the cap, and has been made up in marble. The made up sections of the background do not necessarily preserve the original proportions of the relief.

Dimensions
Height: 54.8 cm, Width: 38.1 cm, Depth: 16 cm maximum

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Object history note
Purchased in Florence (Gagliardi) in 1869.

Historical context note
Ercole D’Este was born in 1431 and was Duke of Ferrara between 1471-1505. He married Eleanor of Aragon. Under Ercole Ferrara experienced a significant enlargement that trebled the area within the city walls. This is known after its patron as the Herculean Addition. Ercole was a generous patron of the arts and especially vocal music. He also assembled a great library amongst other achievements.
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John Pope-Hennessy states that the relief is copied from a medal by Baldassare d’Este (d.1504). Pope-Hennessy also remarked, with regard to this marble relief, that ‘the carving is of poor quality’. Pope-Hennessy was unsure whether the relief was a contemporary variant of the Baldassare d’Este medal mentioned previously, or a relief made after Duke Ercole’s death as part of a series of Este portraits.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O125646/ercole-i-deste-1431-1505-relief-unknown/