PARADOXES OF INEQUALITY IN RENAISSANCE ITALY

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Abstract: This Element explores the longest spell that can be computed from quantifiable fiscal records when the gap between rich and poor narrowed: the post-Black Death century (c.1375 to c.1475). Paradoxically, with economic equality and prosperity on the rise, peasants, artisans, and shopkeepers suffered losses in political representation and status within cultural spheres. Threatened by growing economic equality after the Black Death, elites preserved and then enhanced their political, social, and cultural distinction predominantly through non-economic means and within political and cultural spheres. By investigating the interactions between three ‘elements’ – economics, politics, and culture – this Element presents new facets in the emergence of early Renaissance society in Italy.

Keywords: Black Death, late Middle Ages, Renaissance, inequality, non-elites
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