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Elements in the Renaissance

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PARADOXES OF INEQUALITY IN RENAISSANCE ITALY

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-97038-9 — Paradoxes of Inequality in Renaissance Italy
Samuel K. Cohn, Jr.
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108970389
DOI: 10.1017/9781108980586

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First published 2021

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-108-97038-9 Paperback
ISSN 2631-9101 (online)
ISSN 2631-9098 (print)

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Paradoxes of Inequality in Renaissance Italy

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DOI: 10.1017/9781108980586
First published online: July 2021

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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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ISBNs: 9781108970389 (PB), 9781108980586 (OC)
ISSNs: 2631-9101 (online), 2631-9098 (print)

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