



The Renaissance in the Fields: Family Memoirs of a Fifteenth-Century Tuscan Peasant

Duccio Balestracci

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In the early 1980s, Duccio Balestracci discovered in a Sienese archive two account books kept from 1450 to 1502 by a Tuscan peasant named Benedetto del Massarizia. Benedetto knew how to read but not how to write. Infected by the urban habit of detailed personal record keeping, he asked various of his literate acquaintances to put into writing the details of his daily affairs. The resulting account books offer an unparalleled glimpse into the economic and social world of late medieval peasants.

In *Renaissance in the Fields*, Balestracci uses these account books and a host of supporting archival records to explore the lives of Benedetto and his family over the course of the fifteenth century. In Benedetto we see how country people could organize land and capital and protect themselves, at least a little, from rapacious landlords and urban administrators. By capturing the changing realities of life in the countryside, *Renaissance in the Fields* offers the best introduction to how the peasant economy really worked, and to how most people actually lived during the Italian Renaissance.

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