



Village Justice: Community, Family, and Popular Culture in Early Modern Italy (The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science)

Professor Tommaso Astarita PhD

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Pentidattilo, in the Kingdom of Naples, 1710. A peasant woman, Domenica Orlando, is brought to trial for the murder by poison of her husband. Tried with her are Anna de Amico, a neighbor who provided the poison, and Pietro Crea, Domenica's alleged lover. During the trial, it is revealed that over the years Anna had helped both Domenica and other village women obtain abortions. After numerous villagers recount the circumstances of both the murder and the abortions, Domenica confesses and all three defendants are tortured. Domenica escapes while awaiting sentencing. Anna receives a fifteen-year prison term whereas Pietro is allowed to go free.

Village Justice: Community, Family, and Popular Culture in Early Modern Italy is an analysis of the society and culture in which Domenica and her accomplices lived. Their trial took place at a time of significant changes within the European judicial system, and historian Tommaso Astarita uses the events in the small village of Pentidattilo to study rural society and culture in Italy in the early modern period. The case demonstrates a legal justice system caught between the state and the church's efforts to regulate popular behavior and local practices and ideas of morality. The case also provides a clear example of how justice operated at the local level, and outlines the difficulty of bringing order and morality to rural communities.

Drawing on primary-source materials from secular and ecclesiastic archives, Village Justice: Community, Family, and Popular Culture in Early Modern Italy is an important scholarly study for social and cultural historians of early modern Italy and Europe.

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