



# Siena: City of Secrets

*Jane Tylus*

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## Siena: City of Secrets Jane Tylus

Jane Tylus's *Siena* is a compelling and intimate portrait of this most secretive of cities, often overlooked by travelers to Italy. Cultural history, intellectual memoir, travelogue, and guidebook, it takes the reader on a quest of discovery through the well- and not-so-well-traveled roads and alleys of a town both medieval and modern.

As Tylus leads us through the city, she shares her passion for Siena in novelistic prose, while never losing sight of the historical complexities that have made Siena one of the most fascinating and beautiful towns in Europe. Today, Siena can appear on the surface standoffish and old-fashioned, especially when compared to its larger, flashier cousins Rome and Florence. But first impressions wear away as we learn from Tylus that Siena was an innovator among the cities of Italy: the first to legislate the building and maintenance of its streets, the first to publicly fund its university, the first to institute a municipal bank, and even the first to ban automobile traffic from its city center.

We learn about Siena's great artistic and architectural past, hidden behind centuries of painting and rebuilding, and about the distinctive characters of its different neighborhoods, exemplified in the Palio, the highly competitive horserace that takes place twice a year in the city's main piazza and that serves as both a dividing and a uniting force for the Sienese. Throughout we are guided by the assured voice of a seasoned scholar with a gift for spinning a good story and an eye for the telling detail, whether we are traveling Siena's modern highways, exploring its underground tunnels, tracking the city's financial history, or celebrating giants of painting like Simone Martini or giants of the arena, Siena's former Serie A soccer team.

A practical and engaging guide for tourists and armchair travelers alike, *Siena* is a testament to the powers of community and resilience in a place that is not quite as timeless and serene as it may at first appear.

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