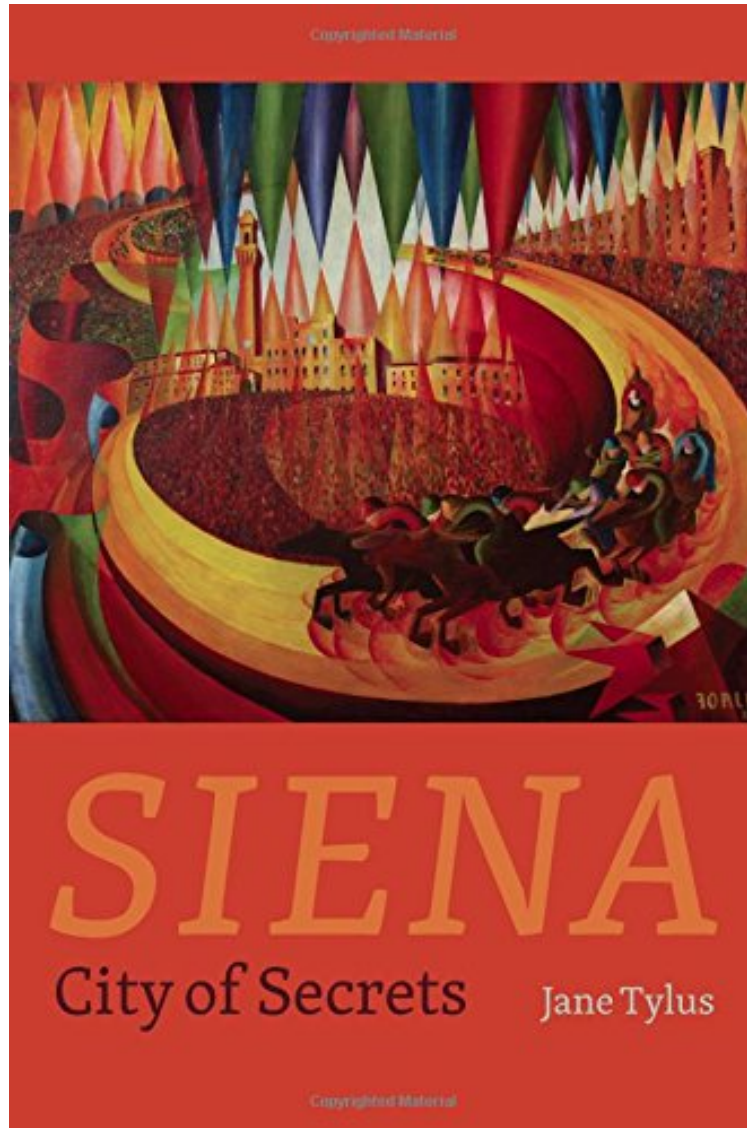


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Siena: City of Secrets

Jane Tylus

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Jane Tylus : Siena: City of Secrets before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Siena: City of Secrets:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Nigh essential if you already are enamored with Siena or if you will be going there for an extended visit By R. M. Peterson I have been fascinated with Siena since taking a college course about the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Then, about twenty years ago, I was fortunate enough to spend a week in and around Siena; it was a high point of my rather limited experiences as a world traveller. I doubt that I will return, although I would love to. Given that background, I probably was much more predisposed to like SIENA by Jane Tylus

than the average general reader. Having read it, I doubt that it will persuade people unfamiliar with the city that it is indeed one of the more special and singular cities on earth. However, for those who already are enamored with Siena, or are going there for an extended visit, the book should not be missed. Jane Tylus is a professor of Italian studies and comparative literature at New York University. She spent considerable time in Siena over the years. Her book is a learned and literate -- and loving -- survey of Siena and many of the sites, people, and cultural artifacts that make it special. (The center of the city is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.) She gives some attention to the contrade, or neighborhoods of Siena, and to the Palio, the famous horse race around the Piazza del Campo held twice each summer. She also discusses some of the more famous buildings of the city -- for example, the Duomo, the Palazzo Pubblico, and the Spedale di Santa Maria della Scala (about 1,000 years old and one of the world's oldest hospitals). But she focuses more on the past of Siena, especially its cultural past. Among the famous Sieneese who figure prominently in her account are Saint Catherine (her preserved though shriveled head can be seen in a side chapel of San Domenico; her body is interred in Rome) and Aeneas Silvia Piccolomini, better known as Pope Pius II. The book does not really serve well as a travel guide to Siena. Nor, as a history, is it comprehensive. (For example, relatively scant attention is given to the Black Death plague of 1348, which reduced the population of Siena by about two-thirds.) Instead, the book seems to cover what most interests Jane Tylus. Moreover, she is not systematic in her presentation. Rather, her text meanders from topic to topic, returning again and again to some while leaving others mentioned only once. In noting these points, I am not being critical; Tylus's approach is an idiosyncratic but ultimately charming one. *SIENA* is a handsome book. It is quite well-written, with a flowing style that I found reminiscent of Ingrid D. Rowland (whom Tylus quotes). Sometimes, however, the prose began to wash over me and lull me into a doze, a phenomenon, by the way, I also have experienced reading Rowland. The book includes thirty-five illustrations, mostly Sieneese works of art and most in color. There also are three maps, but I would have appreciated more detailed maps on which one could more readily locate all sites discussed in the text.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. there are fascinating facts for those who've never been to this beautiful city. And for those who have

By susan klein Jane Tylus has written a story of Siena chock-full of insights. From plumbing to pilgrimages, money to monasteries, there are fascinating facts for those who've never been to this beautiful city. And for those who have, this book sheds light on why modern Siena is the way it is now. Integrated with the author's personal experiences with her family over many trips to Siena, whether you are an academic or tourist, this is a "must read" book, especially if you plan on a visit in the future.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars

By Customer/CAGreat book if u r interested in the history of Siena.

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 Sieneese. 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.

"Successfully mixes a wide variety of genres and in many ways defies categorization. . . . The result is an outstanding volume, which demonstrates all the qualities the author has shown in her earlier works, and more. . . . At the book's structural heart lies the Santa Maria della Scala, or Spedale. One of the first hospitals in Europe, it began by welcoming pilgrims and then the sick. One of its last patients before it reopened as a museum was the writer Italo Calvino, who died there in 1985 after a stroke, and from whom Tylus seems to have learned not a few lessons in terms of the simplicity and lightness of her style and the intricate patterns of her textual architecture. Like Calvino, Tylus has an eye for detail. . . . During the course of her journey, she accumulates many riches, which she generously passes on here."