



*By Major G. Blake Palmer*

THE city of Siena, situated on an irregular and steeply sloping hill surrounded by nearly seven kilometres of walls, has luckily escaped damage during the recent fighting.

Like all the larger cities of Tuscany, Siena was once the centre of an independent republic which preserved its freedom in the face of repeated disasters and great hardships. The people of Siena are proud of their city, of its heroic past—its contributions to painting, architecture and the lesser arts of carving and wrought iron work, and of its quaint customs, especially the Palio.

Siena had a relatively brief period of supremacy, and its greatest years were a short space between 1260 and 1269. It continued to undergo sieges and great internal difficulties even when neighbouring states were more or less tranquil.

The city shows a remarkable uniformity of style in many of its major public buildings, palaces and churches, due in large measure to the tremendous building activity during the brief years of its supremacy. It was late in experiencing the influences of the Renaissance and these were slight in their effects on architecture which retains the best feeling of the Italian Gothic. Thus Il Campo, that irregular cobbled Piazza in the centre of the town, is dominated by two of the best examples of this style, and many other Palazzi retain its essentials. The Cathedral is also a superb example.

Siena has a charm which is felt as soon as one enters its narrow streets.

The first thing to strike the visitor is the prominent Wolf and Twins symbol. The best examples are those in the Piazza Tolemei and the XVth Century example outside the Palazzo Pubblico. Siena claims its origin from the sons of Remus but does not seriously believe this. It seems possible, however that a small settlement did exist before the IVth Century B.C. A second legend is that the Gauls of Brennus left their sick and their herds near Siena on their way to sack Rome in 387 B.C.

A Roman Colonia—Sena Julia also known as the Urbs Lupata or City of the Wolf—was formed, under the Lombards. Siena grew and Charlemagne ruled it through one of his counts. Later, it came under the jurisdiction of its bishop, who for many years pursued a desultory struggle with the more powerful Bishop of Arezzo. This feud with Arezzo persisted with intervals for centuries, and the last word went to Arezzo, for during the disturbances of 1799 bands of so-called patriots from that city entered Siena. The pillage was worthy of the Middle Ages and the old sport of Jewburning was revived during the sack of the town. The French association with Siena has also been a long one. French troops helped both to defend and betray the Republic during its last struggle for independence which ended in April, 1555.

Two important battles figure in the town's history. The first was Montaperti, 1260, when the Senese, with allied contingents, completely defeated the Florentines. The second is the siege