

**Guide to Siena and the Senese: [www.siena-guide.com](http://www.siena-guide.com)**

## **SANTA MARIA DEI SERVI and the PORTA ROMANA**

**An impressive Gothic church with interesting paintings, near one of Siena's most imposing gates.**

### **Santa Maria dei Servi (properly San Clemente in Santa Maria dei Servi)**

*To get to Santa Maria dei Servi from the Campo, take the via Porrione, and go straight on for a long way, past St Martino and on until a signed road forks to the left towards the church.*



*Santa Maria dei Servi, seen from the Palazzo Pubblico*

The campanile is 14th century and the church was also begun in that period, so the building is mostly Gothic – although as so often with churches it took a couple of hundred years to complete, and the facade remains unfinished to this day. It is the monastery church for the Servites who live next door. Inside it is handsome and spacious and its interesting paintings make it well worth a visit. The nave and transepts are covered in painted decoration; although probably dating from the 19th century, it gives an impression of what the church was like originally. When the lights are on, the joyous gaiety is almost impious to our eyes. When the lights are off, it is unfortunately quite hard to see the paintings.

Starting on the right at the back, between the first and second chapels, there is an attractive fragment of 14th century fresco of the Madonna rescuing the souls of children from Purgatory at the time of the Last Judgement.. In the second chapel on the left is an important painting of the Madonna and Child by the Florentine artist **Coppo di Marcovaldo**, one of the earliest Italian painters – he probably

inspired both Guido da Siena and Duccio. He was captured by the Sieneese at the battle of Monteperti in 1260, and painted this picture as the price of his freedom. It is a marvellous example of Italian Byzantine, highly stylised with great emphasis on the folds of the rich and gorgeous robes, a perfectly balanced and elegant composition.

The church has not one but two extremely gory pictures of the Massacre of the Innocents, a subject of which Sieneese painters were strangely fond. The first, in the fifth chapel on the right, is by Matteo di Giovanni and has recently been restored and lovingly regilded. The second is a fresco in a chapel of the right and is thought to be partly by **Pietro Lorenzetti**. The agonised expressions of the mothers are powerfully rendered, and there is an interesting early example of the use of horses for crowd control. To the left is another possible Lorenzetti of St Agnes with her symbol of a lamb. Under this is the mummified body of the Blessed Francesco Patrizi, his bony hand stretched out.

In the end chapel of the right transept, there is a large and handsome 13th century crucifix of the Duccio school, as is the Madonna and Child over the door of the sacristy. Over the high altar there is a messy Coronation of the Virgin by **Bernardino Fungai**, and in the chapel on the far left of the altar there are yet more Lorenzetti frescoes, rather damaged, of the dance of Salome – note the head of St John the Baptist still steaming, or are they holy rays? – and of the ascension of St John the Evangelist. There is a pretty nativity above the altar of this chapel, with a hoopoe at the bottom, painted by **Taddeo di Bartolo** in 1404.

In the left transept, the Madonna della Misericordia is by **Giovanni di Paolo**, painted in 1471. The Madonna is looking rather constipated, but is elegant of shape, with curiously piercing eyes as she shelters mankind under her cloak. In the third chapel on the right, there is a Birth of the Virgin by Rutilio Manetti, with a great play of light and dark as befits a follower of Caravaggio.

Finally, before leaving, pause to admire the beautiful marble font near the door, dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

## Porta Romana



*The outer gate of the Porta Romana, as seen by those approaching the city.*

To the south of Santa Maria dei Servi, the road to Rome goes out of the old city through the magnificent Porta Romana (also known as the Porta Nuova), one of the largest of Siena's defensive gates. It was built in the 14th century when a new outer wall was constructed around the south of the City after it expanded beyond the previous walls. Like most of Siena's gateways, it has a double gate. The outer gate is highly crenellated, machicolated and decorative; the more sober inner gate gives more of an impression of force and power, to remind those leaving of the might and wealth of the city. In the 16th century, after Florence had finally taken over Siena, Grand Duke Cosimo I de' Medici put the large Medici crest on the wall between the two gates. Above the inner door the space can still be seen where there was once an icon of the Madonna painted in 1417 by Taddeo di Bartolo to protect the city.



*The outer gate as seen by those leaving the city down via Roma*

*1980s, revised 2004*