



HS255: THE PALIO AND THE CONTRADE OF SIENA

IES Abroad Siena

DESCRIPTION:

This course examines the importance of the Palio in Siennese history, culture, and mentality, with particular attention given to the social, folk, intellectual, political, economic, and gender implications of this ancient and distinctly Siennese event. Students will have the distinct privilege of not only studying the history of the Palio, but also experiencing it in July and participating in the events leading up to it.

In addition to learning about the world's longest continuously run horse race, students will explore the city's history from its Etruscan-Roman origins to the end of the Republic in the 16th century, and great focus will be placed on the Middle Ages and Renaissance when Siena became one of Italy's most successful city-states. It was during these periods that popular festivals and games connected to religious festivities and political-military events were born, including the Palio. Beyond an annual competition (that has necessarily evolved over the centuries), the Palio is rooted in the 17 wards of the city, called Contrade. The course will explore the present-day institutional organization of the Contrade and the complexity of their annual activities, and how the Contrade and Palio continue to be a source of great civic pride, fundamental to Siennese identity.

CREDITS: 3

CONTACT HOURS: 45

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION: English

PREREQUISITES: none

ADDITIONAL COST: none

METHOD OF PRESENTATION:

In-class lectures and discussions, plus guided visits to various Siennese sites. Cultural experiences such as dinners in the Contrade will be organized, and students will be encouraged to attend as many Palio events as possible. Lectures will include slideshows that will then be available to Moodle.

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:

- Active class participation and class discussion: 10%
- Moodle assignments: 30%
- Presentation: 20%
- Research paper: 20%
- Final exam: 20%

COURSE ELEMENT:

- **Active class participation, and class discussion:** Students are expected to complete all readings for each class and actively engage in discussions related thereto.
- **Moodle assignments:** There will be 4 online assignments (posted on and submitted through Moodle) that will assess students' understanding of course-related trips, Palio events, and themes of the previous lessons. Students may be asked to share these assignments during class discussion.
- **Presentation:** 10- to 15-minute presentation with slideshow on a topic related to the Palio and/or Contrade of Siena. Q&A to follow, providing an opportunity to clarify points that will be further examined in the research paper.
- **Research paper:** 8-10 double-spaced pages expanding upon themes introduced in the presentation. Term-paper and presentation guidelines will be posted on Moodle together with grading framework (including penalties for late work).
- **Final exam:** In-class written exam with multiple-choice questions and short essays (2 hours).

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- engage with primary and secondary sources both critically and analytically;

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- analyze the historical, folk, and social context of Siena and Tuscany from the Middle Ages to today;
- acquire an extensive knowledge of the most important popular festivals in Italy, and recognize the persistency of this medieval cultural heritage.
- describe another culture's traditions in historical and contemporary contexts.
- consider themselves Palio experts.

ATTENDANCE POLICY: Successful progress of the program depends on the full cooperation of both students and faculty members; regular attendance and active participation in class are essential parts of the learning process. Attendance at and participation in all class meetings and course related trips are required. IES Abroad Siena allows a maximum of TWO excused absences per semester. Each further absence will automatically result in a penalty of two points off (2/100) of the final grade. SEVEN absences per course (including the 2 excused absences) will result in a failing grade for that course. Furthermore, an absence on the date of scheduled tests, presentations, or quizzes does not entitle the student to recover/reschedule such tests. Failure to attend the midterm and/or final exam will result in an F grade on that paper/exam.

CONTENT:

Week	Content	Assignments
Week 1	Introduction • General introduction to Siena's History: from the Etruscan-Roman origins to the medieval Golden Age of the city under the Government of the Nine to the loss of independence. • Walking tour of the city with an emphasis on urban development.	• HOOK, <i>Siena. A City and its History</i>. • JACKSON-NEVOLA, <i>Beyond the Palio: Urbanism and Ritual in Renaissance Siena</i>. • BOWSKY, <i>A Medieval Italian Commune</i>, pp. 260-298. • Palio documentary. • Moodle Assignment.
Week 2	The Palio horse races and other traditional festivals in medieval Italy • Origins, traditions and political meaning of the ancient <i>Palio alla lunga</i> horse race. • Other typical popular and ritual games in medieval Siena: the <i>pugna</i>, the <i>elmora</i>, the <i>battaglia dei sassi</i>. • Visit to a Contrada (museum, oratory, stable, social club).	• HEYWOOD, <i>Palio and Ponte</i>. • FALASSI, <i>A Municipality, a Festival and a City</i>, pp. 8-11. • FALASSI, <i>The contagious Myth: an Exploration of the Mythologies of the Palio</i>, pp. 63-90. • CATONI, <i>Factious harmony</i>, pp. 225-272. • Moodle Assignment.
Week 3	Historical origins of the Sienese Contrade. • The Contrade in the 16th century: organization and participation in the Bull Hunt. • The fall of the Sienese Republic: the Contrade survive the tragedy. • The cult of the Virgin in the city. • Contrada rivalries: walking tour with Palio anecdotes.	• MAZZINI, <i>Organization and origins of the Contrade in their Participation in the Bull Hunts</i>, pp. 305-316. • ASCHERI, <i>The Contrade: Their Historical Development and Connection with the Palio</i>, pp. 19-62. • FALASSI, <i>A Municipality, a Festival and a City</i>, pp. 12-15. • DUNDES-FALASSI, <i>La terra in piazza. An interpretation of the Palio of Siena</i>, pp. 11-16, 19-56. • ARGENZIANO, <i>The Origins and Development of the Iconography of the Madonna in Siena</i>, pp. 91-110. • Moodle Assignment.

Week	Content	Assignments
Week 4	The 17th c - The institution of the Palio in the Piazza del Campo. - The Heraldry of the Contrade: origins and meanings of their symbols and names. - IN PREPARATION FOR PALIO: How the 4 days of the festival work, from the assignment of the horses to victory in Provenzano! - Walking tour to Palio locations.	- TURRINI, <i>Threads of History. Contrade and Palio in the Documentary Sources</i>, pp. 259-304. - FALASSI, <i>A Municipality, a Festival and a City</i>, pp. 16-19. - DUNDES-FALASSI, <i>La terra in piazza. An interpretation of the Palio of Siena</i>, pp. 57-214. - BISOGLNI, <i>La Madonna di Provenzano</i>, pp.111-128. - Moodle Assignment.
Week 5	18th and 19th c - The 1700s: the “Proclamation of Violante” about the Contrade’s boundaries and the rules of the modern Palio. - The 1800s: from the Risorgimento to the Societies of Mutual Aid. - The artistic evolution of the drappellone, the Palio prize. - Visit to the Duomo.	- FALASSI, <i>A Municipality, a Festival and a City</i>, pp. 20-27. - HEYWOOD, <i>Our Lady of August and the Palio of Siena</i>. - JAMES, <i>Siena Early and Late</i>, pp. 220-237.
Week 6	Tradition and song - The Palio in song. The Palio as a metaphor for the Sienese worldview. - The 1900s: stories, memories and civic identity. - The Contrade today . - Review of course contents. - Presentations.	- HENRY, <i>Gaudenzia: Pride of the Palio</i>. - FALASSI, “A Municipality, a Festival and a City,” pp. 28-47. - SILVERMAN, “On the Uses of History in Anthropology,” pp. 413-436. - FALASSI, <i>Siena’s Festival</i>, pp. 9-88.
Week 7	Final Presentations and Exams	- Research paper due. - Final Exam.

COURSE-RELATED TRIPS:

Course-related trips allow students to receive the maximum advantage from the local context (a perfectly preserved medieval social entity) and enrich students’ experience by discussing and experiencing core concepts *in situ*. Please note that the session number of the course-related trips is subject to change depending on Contrada members’ availability, museum/church opening hours, and the overall IES semester calendar. Palio experiences will occur between 29 June and 2 July outside of class time, but students will be expected to attend as many Palio-related events as they can in order to get the most out of their experience in Siena.

REQUIRED READINGS:

All the required excerpts and articles (in English) are available on the course’s Moodle site in PDF format. The instructor is happy to suggest additional readings (both in English and Italian).

- Argenziano, Raffaele. "The Origins and Development of the Iconography of the Madonna in Siena," in *The Palio and its Image. History Culture and Representation of Siena's Festival*, ed. by M.A. Ceppari Ridolfi et al. Siena: Nardini Editore, 2001.
- Ascheri, Mario. "The Contrade: Their Historical Development and Connection with the Palio," in *The Palio and its Image. History Culture and Representation of Siena's Festival*, ed. by M.A. Ceppari Ridolfi et al. Siena: Nardini Editore, 2001.
- Bisogni, Fabio. "La Madonna di Provenzano," in *The Palio and its Image. History Culture and Representation of Siena's Festival*, ed. by M.A. Ceppari Ridolfi et al. Siena: Nardini Editore, 2001.
- Bowsky, William M. *A Medieval Italian Commune. Siena under the Nine, 1287-1355*. Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1981.
- Catoni, Giuliano. "Factious harmony," in *Palio*, ed. by Alessandro Falassi and Giuliano Catoni, 225-272. Milano: Electa, 1983.
- Crociani-Windland, Lita. *Festivals, Affect and Identity: A Deleuzian Apprenticeship in Central Italian Communities*. London: Anthem, 2011.
- Dundes, Alan and Falassi, Alessandro. *La terra in piazza. An interpretation of the Palio of Siena*. Siena: Nuova Immagine, 2005.
- Falassi, Alessandro. *A Municipality, a Festival and a City in Palio: the colors of Siena*. Siena: Arti Grafiche Nencini, 1998, pp. 7-47.
- Falassi, Alessandro. "Siena's Festival," in *Palio*, ed. by Alessandro Falassi and Giuliano Catoni, 225-272. Milano: Electa, 1983.
- Falassi, Alessandro. "The contagious Myth: an Exploration of the Mythologies of the Palio," in *The Palio and its Image. History Culture and Representation of Siena's Festival*, ed. by M.A. Ceppari Ridolfi et al. Siena: Nardini Editore, 2001.
- Falassi, Alessandro and Catoni, Giuliano. *Palio*. English trans. Milano: Electa, 1983.
- Henry, Marguerite. *Gaudenzia: Pride of the Palio*. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1960.
- Heywood, William. *Our Lady of August and the Palio of Siena*. Siena: Enrico Torrini, 1899.
- Heywood, William. *Palio and Ponte*. London: Methuen and Co., 1904.
- Hook, Judith. *Siena. A City and its History*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979.
- Jackson, Philippa and Fabrizio Nevola. *Beyond the Palio: Urbanism and Ritual in Renaissance Siena*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006.
- James, Henry. "Siena Early and Late," in *Italian Hours*. New York: Penguin Books, 1995, pp. 220-237.
- Mazzini, Giovanni. "Organization and origins of the Contrade in their Participation in the Bull Hunts," in *The Palio and its Image. History Culture and Representation of Siena's Festival*, ed. by M.A. Ceppari Ridolfi et al. Siena: Nardini Editore, 2001.
- Silverman, Sydel. "On the Uses of History in Anthropology: the Palio of Siena". *American Ethnologist*, 6 (1979): 413-436.
- Turrini, Patrizia. "Threads of History. Contrade and Palio in the Documentary Sources," in *The Palio and its Image. History Culture and Representation of Siena's Festival*, ed. by M.A. Ceppari Ridolfi et al. Siena: Nardini Editore, 2001.

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

- Civai, Mauro and Toti, Enrico. *Palio: The Race of the Soul*. English trans. Siena: AL.SA.BA., 2005.
- Piperato, Anna. "The Palio of Siena: A Journey through Time", in *Artistic Responses to Travel in the Western Tradition*, ed. by Sarah J. Lippert: 86-107. London: Routledge, 2018.