

## FOREWORD

Titus Burckhardt, a German Swiss, was born in Florence in 1908 and died in Lausanne in 1984. He devoted all his life to the study and exposition of the different aspects of Wisdom and Tradition.

He was the lifelong friend and associate of Frithjof Schuon, and is the main continuator of the current of intellectuality and spirituality of which René Guénon and Frithjof Schuon were the originators. It was on this basis that, in this age of scientism and technocracy, Titus Burckhardt was one of the most resolute exponents of universal truth in the realms of both philosophy and traditional art. In a world of existentialism, psychoanalysis, and sociology, he was a major voice of the *philosophia perennis*, namely, that ‘wisdom uncreate’ of which Saint Augustine spoke. In literary and philosophical terms, he was an eminent member of the ‘Traditionalist’ or ‘Perennialist’ school of twentieth century authors.

Most of Burckhardt’s works were on sacred art. He had a particular love for the Christian Middle Ages, as his books on Chartres and Siena—not to mention his pioneer publication of a facsimile copy of the entire Book of Kells—bear witness. In these matters, Burckhardt was not merely a scholar; the full nature of his vocation emerges from what he himself has written:

“In order to understand a culture, it is necessary to love it, and one can only do this on the basis of the universal and timeless values that it carries within itself. These values . . . meet not only the physical, but also the spiritual needs of man; without them his life has no meaning.

“Nothing brings us into such immediate contact with a given culture as a work of art which, within that culture, represents, as it were a ‘center’. This may be a sacred image, a temple, a cathedral. . . . Such works invariably express an essential quality, which neither a historical account, nor an analysis of social and economic conditions, can capture. A work of art . . . can, without any mental effort on our part, convey to us immediately and ‘existentially’ an intellectual truth or a spiritual attitude, and thereby grant us all manner of insights into the nature of the culture concerned.”

Burckhardt was imbued with the Platonic doctrine that ‘beauty is the splendor of the true’, and it was in this spirit that the present volume on Siena was written. It is an enlightening account of the rise and fall of a Christian city which, architecturally speaking, remains to this day something of a Gothic jewel. Most important of all, however, is the story of its saints, whose fascinating lives and writings may have been hitherto unfamiliar to many readers. Burckhardt devotes many of his pages to Saint Catherine of Siena (who, in the troubled times in which she lived, did not hesitate to cajole and exhort the Pope of the day whenever she felt he had fallen short of his duty) and to Saint Bernardino of Siena (a preacher and spiritual guide who was perhaps the greatest of the Catholic practitioners and teachers of the saving power of the Holy Name).

The art historian Emma Clark has spoken of the extraordinary perceptiveness and beauty of Burckhardt’s writings, and of his masterly capacity to analyze and appreciate Christian art. May these gifts, which are amply exhibited in *Siena, City of the Virgin: Illustrated*, bring pleasure and profit to a large cohort of new readers.

William Stoddart  
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Features in

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