

“Index of Art Historical Sites: Siena, Italy: The Duomo of Santa Maria dell’ Assunta”
Mary Ann Sullivan

The Duomo
begun c. 1226



Distant view from the north



West façade

The Duomo of Santa Maria dell'Assunta is set on a wide platform raised above the piazza; 11 stairs, perhaps originally 12 to represent the Apostles, lead up to the platform.

The western facade, an additional bay, was added to the front of the Duomo from c. 1284-1310. Giovanni Pisano is credited with the design, although scholars debate what portion of the front represents his thinking. Some believe he is only responsible for the lower story for both biographical and artistic reasons: it is known that he left Siena in 1300, the verticals of the upper and lower story do not coincide, and the rose window is too large for the 13th century nave vault. (The roof was raised in the 14th century.) The front features three broadly splayed portals of almost the same size with triangular gables above them. Much of the original sculptural decoration by Giovanni Pisano has been removed to the Duomo Museum for preservation.



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Details of the western façade: the left portal, the left gable, and the right side



Views of the nave and the campanile and dome



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From 1321-39 the Duomo Nuovo was under construction. This ambitious design would have made the existing nave and choir of the cathedral the new transepts, with a new nave constructed at right angles to the old one. The roof in the image at the left is part of the side aisle for the new nave. The green car in that photograph is partly parked over the white stone marking the placement of a pier for the left of the nave. As a result of the Black Plague in 1348 and the discovery that the new structure was unsound, this project was given up. The campanile, shorter than that of the [Palazzo Pubblico](#), has six rows of windows, which widen toward the top.



The Baptistry (or East façade)

The Duomo was built on a steeply sloping site. Between c. 1316-25 the east end of the Duomo was extended, with the Baptistry at the lower level and an extended choir on top of it. The doorway at the top of the stairs would have led into the nave of the Duomo Nuovo.



Duomo Interiors

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Views of the nave looking into the long choir

What is particularly striking about the cathedral is the black and white marble stripes which cover the walls and emphasize the powerful columns that march down the nave. The photograph on the left shows the Pisano pulpit in place. [See additional views of Nicola Pisano's pulpit.](#)



The crossing



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The hexagonal dome



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Side isle from the crossing



View toward the entrance.



Plaster busts of 171 Popes, beginning with Peter and ending with Lucius III – added in the 15th and 16th century.

The marble floor

The marble mosaics cover the floor of the cathedral and are divided into 56 panels of various sizes and shapes. In addition, they illustrate various techniques from the simplest--holes and lines drilled in marble and then filled with bitumen--to entarsias of multi-colored marbles or gray and white mosaics with additional colored pieces. Most of these were probably executed in the second half of the 14th century. Some of the floor panels have been restored or reconstructed.

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The Sieneese She Wolf with emblems of 12 confederate cities



Wheel of Fortune,1372



Detail of *The History of Fortune or the Hill of Virtue*, based on designs by Pinturicchio in 1504 and executed in 1506



Detail of *Massacre of the Innocents* by Matteo di Giovanni, 1481

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The Piccolomini Library, begun in 1492

Commissioned by the Archbishop of Siena, who later became Pope Pius III, the library was intended to house the manuscript collection belonging to his uncle Pope Pius II as well as to honor this important humanist scholar. Beautiful illuminated manuscripts are opened all along the perimeter of the library. The walls and ceilings are covered with frescoes by Pinturicchio, executed between 1502-1503 and 1505-1507. The scenes on the walls illustrate events in the life of Enea Silvio Piccolomini, Pope Pius II.



Enea Silvio, Bishop of Siena, who arranged the marriage, presides over the meeting of the betrothed couple, Frederick III and Eleanor of Aragon, and center—right panel: Enea Silvio ordained cardinal

Whole of the betrothal fresco containing many portraits of contemporary persons



Enea Silvio ordained cardinal (left) and Papal coronation of Pius II

The canonization of Saint Catherine of Siena

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