18. PIAZZA MERCATO

The square was originally called the **Moors' Marketplace,** because there were so many merchants from the East there. It was bordered to the West by the Greco-roman wall, to the North by the hill where the Angevins built the Church of Santa Maria La Nova and to the East by the Lavinaio.

It was here, on 29 October 1268, that **Charles of Anjou** had **Corradino**, the last monarch of the Svevian dynasty, beheaded, even though he was only 16 years old. From then onwards, the Moors' Marketplace became the **official site of State executions**.

During the Angevin period, the Piazza San Gennaro all'Olmo and San Gaetano commercial centres were transferred to Piazza Mercato and an abattoir and public oven were built. The Churches of Sant'Eligio Maggiore and Santa Maria del Carmine were also built in this period.

In 1356 the tradespeople of Piazza Mercato built a chapel (Santa Croce) in memory of Corradino di Svevia.

In the square there were still **two gallows and a guillotine** for capital punishment.

After the **1656 plague outbreak**, the grain stores in the middle of the square were used to bury the bodies of the victims and the square filled with crosses. About 100 years later, the crosses were removed and, to prevent the square losing its religious significance, another church (called Purgatorio) was built.

In 1781 there was a fire and the whole square was destroyed. King Ferdinand IV commissioned the court architect, **Franceso Securo** (who also designed the Mercadante theatre and Palazzo Salerno in Piazza Plebiscito) to rebuild it.

The square also formed the backdrop to the **Masaniello** revolution (1647) and many of the martyrs of the 1799 **Neapolitan Republic** were executed here, including **Eleonora Pimentel Fonseca** and **Luisa Sanfelice**.