

## 24. SAN LORENZO MAGGIORE

San Lorenzo Maggiore is one of the oldest churches in Naples. It stands between Via Tribunali and Via San Gregorio Armeno, in the heart of the Greco-roman city. The still visible layers of history within the church's structure provide ample testimony to the importance of the whole area over the centuries.

The Church of San Lorenzo Maggiore is considered one of the most interesting examples of gothic architecture in Naples, even though the Angevin structure was built on top of a pre-existing religious building dating back to V or VI century A.D. The fact that it was founded during the paleochristian period is demonstrated by the imposing Roman columns with bases and capitals in black and white granite or cipollino marble. These were re-used as decoration on the composite columns supporting the pointed arches which mark the entrance to the side chapels in the Angevin church. Some of the capitals were taken directly from the *macellum or abattoir* which lay below and which corresponded to the food market in Roman times. Remains of this can still be seen, including the walls and the *tholos* which have been incorporated into the foundations.

Legend has it that it was in San Lorenzo that **Giovanni Boccaccio** used to meet his muse **Fiammetta**, the beautiful Maria d'Aquino, daughter of the King, Robert of Anjou, after seeing her at mass on Holy Saturday in 1334. Boccaccio described San Lorenzo as a graceful and beautiful temple.

It should also be remembered that **Francesco Petrarch** stayed in the convent for a few days and, on the night of 4 November 1343, when he was terrified by a hermit who predicted a huge storm, he came down from his cell to join the monks in prayer.

The Church has an imposing bell tower, which is also known as "**Masaniello's Tower**" because of its role in the 1647 insurrection. Different sources say that the bell tower was used as a fort, and that weapons and cannons were locked inside it. The tower also played a leading role in the 1701 "**Macchia Conspiracy**", which saw the capture of the Duke of Popoli. It was only after this that the tower could finally become just a simple church bell tower. The **coats of arms belonging to local Neapolitan areas** can be seen around the top and there is a statue of Boccaccia in one of the niches.

There is an interesting **altar cloth** inside the church depicting three scenes, one of which is a view of the **city of Naples during Renaissance times** with the Anticaglia Roman theatre and the whole facade of the Dioscuri temple.