

5. VIRGIL THE MAGICIAN

Publio Virgilio Marone (70-19 B.C.), **the great Latin poet**, acquired legendary status during the Middle Ages when he became associated with mysticism **and magic powers**.

Virgil, a magician and benefactor of Naples, is said to have hidden an egg somewhere in the Castel dell'Ovo. This egg was put in **a glass jar and then inside an iron box**. **The fate of the city** was linked to the egg: if it ever got broken, disaster would strike.

In a letter from Chancellor **Corrado di Querfurt**, one of Emperor Arrigo VII's chancellors, he recounts the **miracles this poet-magician performed**. He made a bronze horse which could cure horses, he produced a fly which could rid the city of its insects and he built an abattoir where meat could be preserved for weeks at a time without going off. Virgil also had a remedy for **safeguarding the city from volcanic eruptions**. He built a statue of a man with bow and arrow poised ready to fire and aimed at the mouth of the volcano. The remains of a Roman Villa in Marechiaro, near the areas of Gaiola and the Pausilypon Villa, is still known as "The House of Spirits", or "**Virgil's School**", the place where the poet was traditionally supposed to have initiated his pupils in the arts of magic. Another legend has it that the magician was able to carve out the ***Crypta Neapolitana***, the long tunnel through the tuff in the Piedigrotta area, **in the space of just one night**. The aim was to make transport links between Naples and Pozzuoli easier because there, according to tradition, lay **the gates to the Campi Flegrei**, which led to the mythical land of lakes and burning volcanoes. Tradition also has it that Virgil was responsible for creating some **thermal baths** near Baia which could cure all known ills..

The Neapolitan origins of the Virgil legend, according to some experts, can be traced back to the French rather than to Naples, and was linked to the fact that Virgil was supposed to be buried here according to tradition. His **tomb**, which was traditionally identified in the remains of a Roman Columbarium on *Via Puteolana*, was already attracting hosts of pilgrims in the Roman Imperial Age, and continued to be the basis and venue for local cults and ceremonies which gradually changed from Pagan to Christian. The "tomb" now forms part of the visitors' tour of the small park behind **the church of Santa Maria di Piedigrotta**, near the Mergellina railway station.