

‘O Cuorpo ‘e Napule: the Nile Statue

The history of Naples is richly interwoven with stories linked to the existence of foreign communities who had settled in Naples for reasons of trade and commerce. A group of merchants and sailors from **Alexandria in Egypt** settled in the area to the far East of the lower *plateia* of *Neapolis*, known as **piazzetta Nilo** today. The medieval name given to the place confirms this, as does the fact that the area of the Greek city where they settled was known as **Regio Nilensis** for a long time. The pedestrian area which opens out to the East of Piazza San Domenico Maggiore also takes its name from the **Nile**, a river which was dear to the Egyptian people and a divinity to be worshipped. When the merchants left, the river god and his white marble statue, were buried and forgotten.

The statue re-emerged in XVI century when the old seat of parliament was knocked down, nick-named “of the Nile” because of the amount of water under the building. By XVII century, the statue was already in place in the road known as **Vico degli Alessandrini** during the Middle Ages, and the statue was also referred to as coming from the Nile. The river deity is pictured in typical Greek fashion with an old man lying down, resting against a rock which water is pouring out from. His lower half is covered by a cloth and the river-god is surrounded by putti and a sphynx, to symbolise the branches of the river and its links with Egypt. Initially it was thought the body was that of a woman who, people liked to believe, symbolised Naples breastfeeding her children.

Ancient writings tell us of the conversations between the statue, known as **‘O Cuorpo ‘e Napule**, and the **Sebeto** river.

The Nile statue is Roman in origin though subsequent restoration work changed its appearance. The head, for example, was only added in 1657, when the statue was restored and placed near the Sedile del Nilo, because the statue had been headless when it was found.

The base the statue stands on today dates back to XVIII century when it was once again restored during the reign of Charles the Bourbon.