

## Description of Naples

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*Domenico Scarlatti*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983, pages 1–2.

In 1685 Naples was as populous, as noisy, and as dirty as it is now. Even then it was a little battered, and from the summit of the town its crumbling medieval fortresses looked out over the harbor. Up the hill from the waterfront swarmed a jumble of splendor and squalor, of magnificence and filth. Palaces with the stench of the gutter rising to their very cornices bounded broad sunlit squares or concealed the narrow alleys that were then as much out of bounds to the respectable rich as they were to the Allied soldiers of 1944. The inhabitants of these dark alley dens on the Neapolitan hillside lived then, as they live now, in the street. The street was not only the thoroughfare and the promenade, but also the center of social life and natural functions. There naked babies played in the dunghills; their brothers and sisters chased dogs and mules; and their elders made love. In the narrower passages an occasional clatter of hooves drowned out the muffled sound of human feet. In the streets that were broad enough could be heard the rattling of carriage wheels, the lashing of whips, and the soft belching cry of the Neapolitan carter to his horse or, more probably, a very Vesuvius of curses, as rich and colorful as the piles of melons and peppers on the street corners and as odoriferous as the fish of the nearby market. Only slightly subdued at the hour of siesta, this racket gave place at night to guitars and strident Neapolitan voices raised in quarrel or in amorous lament. But even in the relative stillness of the early morning hours Naples scarcely afforded a sense of calm. All was potentially in motion, explosive, as was that quietly smoking cone to the left of the great bay. Such respectability, cleanliness, or dignity as appeared on the streets of Naples passed scarcely noticed or became conspicuous only in the pomp of the viceregal and churchly processions. For the most part these virtues concealed themselves in palace courtyards and behind the tightly closed shutters of upper floors.