

Expulsion of the Jesuit Order from Malta

23 April 1768

by

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*Grand Master Emanuel Pinto de Fonseca
1741-1773, (Portuguese) - by Antoine Favary.
St Johns Cathedral. Valletta. Malta.*

Pope Paul III (Farnese) had asked Ignatius Loyola probably born in 1491, in the Basque country - Spain, to found the Society of Jesus – the Jesuit Order which he did. He was a mystic, burning with the fire of divine love, a priestly apostle and a spiritual director. Pope Paul III formally approved the Society of Jesus on 27 September 1540. Ignatius was chosen as superior and led the Society between 1541 and his death in 1556.

Next to the Lutheran revolution, no single event traumatised the Catholic world as severe as the suppression of the Jesuits by Pope Clement XIV in 1773, who according to Giovanni Bonello reached that final decision, because of a scandal involving a Maltese family – *the Pisani imbroglio* ¹

This was the time when the Catholic Church was encountering the Lutheran – Calvin religious revolution, and the Jesuits became the commandoes of the Catholic Church.

The early Jesuits were involved mainly in aiding souls through spiritual ministries, like giving the *Exercises*, preaching the Word of God and celebrating the sacraments of the Eucharist and penance. Alongside this, however, they were also active in social ministries, like visiting and serving the sick in hospitals and working for the reconciliation of those estranged. In Rome in 1543, Ignatius himself helped set up the Santa Maria built for women who had abandoned life of prostitution.

A very significant development was the request from various quarters that the Jesuits should set up schools. The first school exclusively for lay students was opened,

¹ Giovanni Bonello. The Pisani imbroglio and the suppression of the Jesuits in 1773. The Sunday Times of Malta. 12 January. 1997. p33.

with ten very carefully chosen Jesuits by Ignatius himself, in Messina, Sicily, in 1548². In the short space of fifteen years as superior general, Jesuit missionaries were in India, Japan, Brazil, Congo.

Ignatius had hoped to found a college even in Malta.

Bishop Dominic Cubelles of Malta, asked Ignatius to open a college, and promised funds for the school, but this did not materialize in Ignatius life time, becoming a reality in 1592, when Pope Clement XIV had asked Bishop Gargallo and Grand Master Jean l'Evesque de la Casserie to set up a college, and consequently the *Collegium Melitense* was accordingly founded in Valletta in 1592, which was the forerunner of the University of Malta.

Baroque architecture and art are closely associated with the society. The church of the *Gesu'* in central Rome erected for the Jesuits by Cardinal Alessandro Farnese 1568 onwards, is considered the prototype of baroque religious architecture.

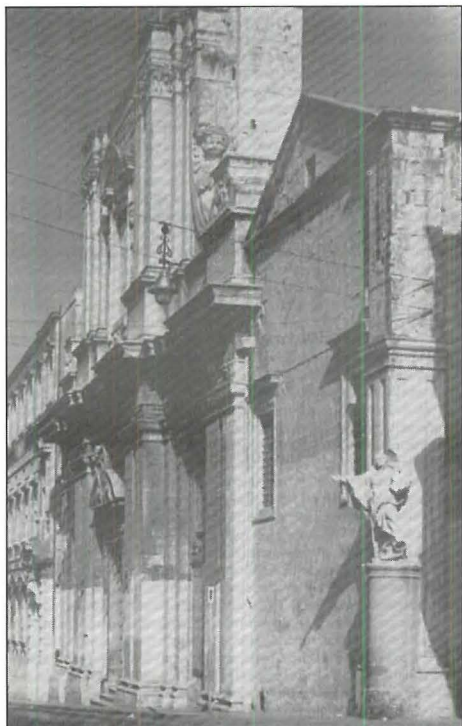
In 1658, the society commissioned Lorenzo Bernini to work on Sant Andrea al Quirinale, one of the most splendid baroque churches in Rome.³

From 1600 to 1750, Jesuits enjoyed great prestige in the Church, and in European Society and were very active and innovative in the foreign missions.

By the middle of the 18 century serious problems arose.

The process of the suppression of the Jesuits initially involved territorial expulsions.

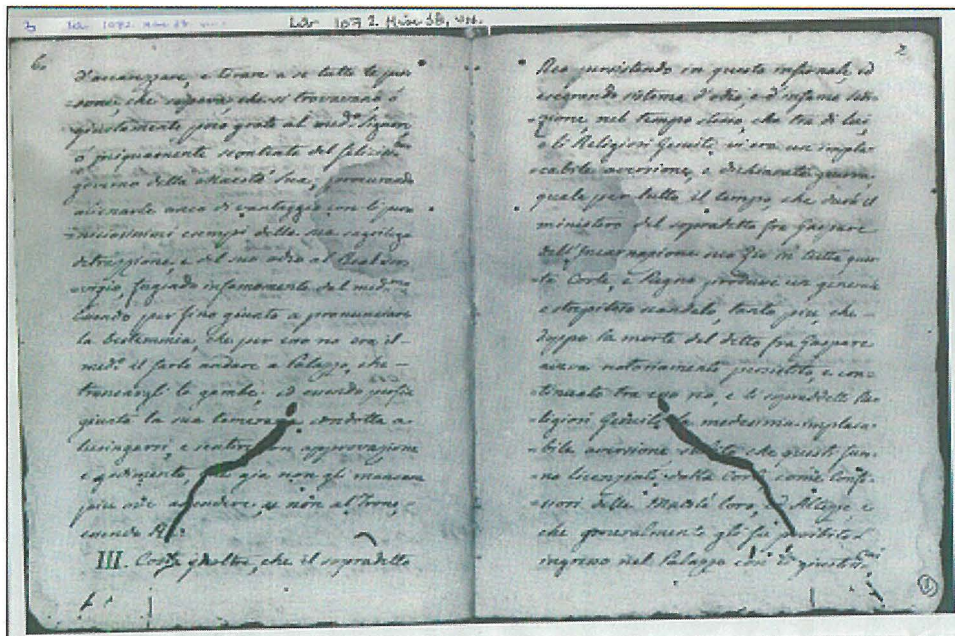
It started in Portugal in 1759. The dominant figure there was Sebastian Jose de Carvalho, de Mello, Marques de Pombal. A staunch monarchist and former ambassador in London. The Jesuits with their vow of obedience to the Pope, defended the monarchical model but not regal absolutism. Pombal decided they had to be eliminated.



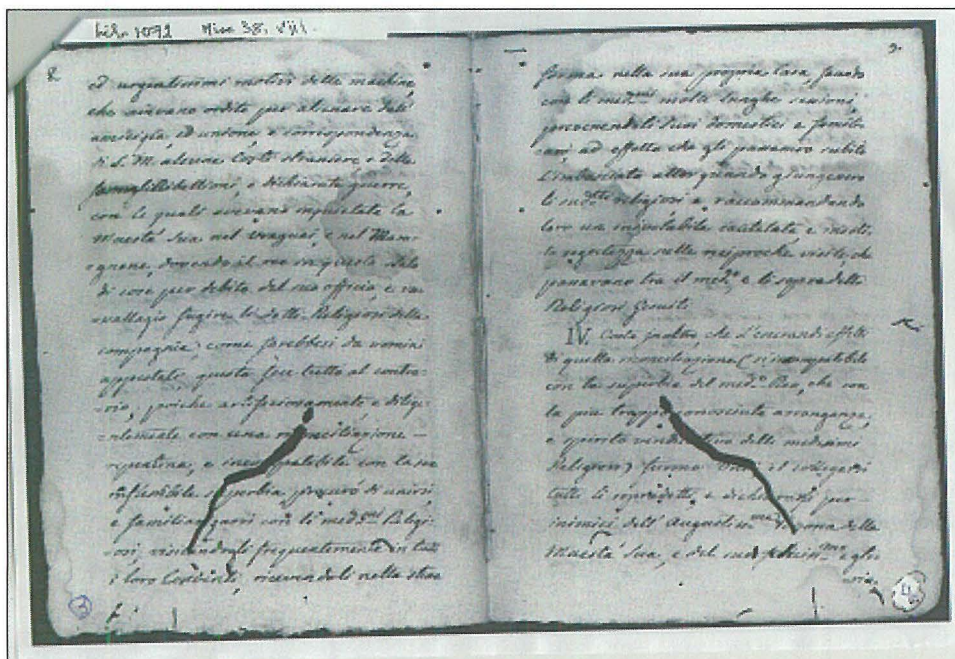
Marques de Pombal

² Fr Robert Soler. Ignatius of Loyola and the expansion of the Jesuit Order. Sunday Times of Malta April 20, 2014.

³ Fr R Soler , Ignatius of Loyola etc. op cit.p37



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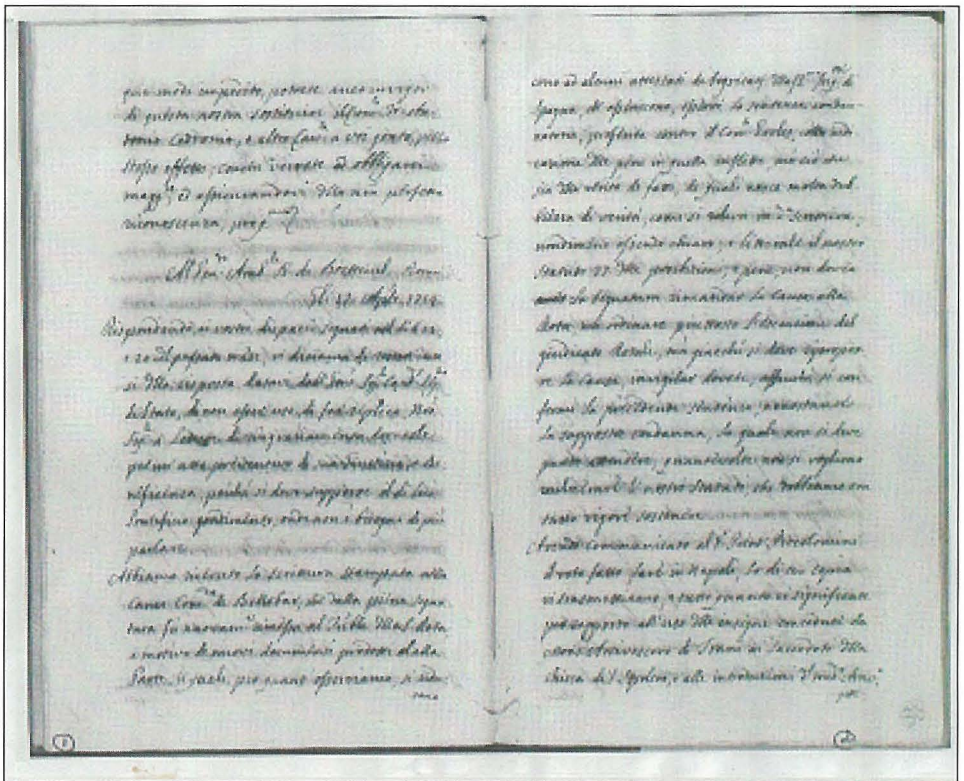


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There was the problem of the *Indios*, and in 1755, an earthquake struck Lisbon, The Jesuit Gabriel Malagrida unwisely wrote that this was divine retribution for grievous public sins, and not due merely to natural causes which upset Pombal.

On 3 September 1758 an attempt on the life of King Joseph I, Pombal without any proof blamed some Jesuits⁴, among which was Malagrida who was later brutally murdered.

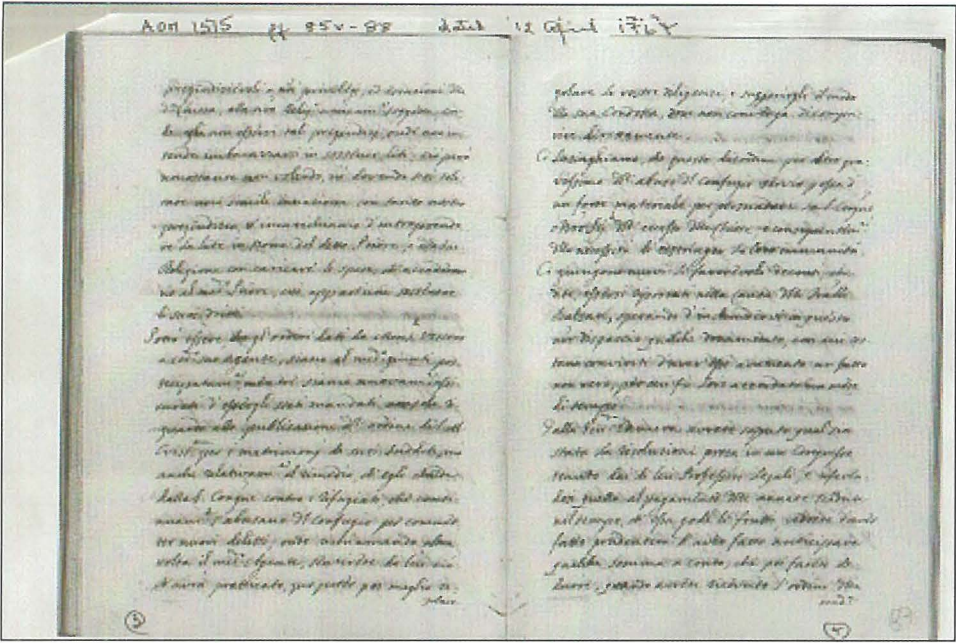
In March 1758 the Order's ambassador in Rome sent Pinto a copy of a report⁵,



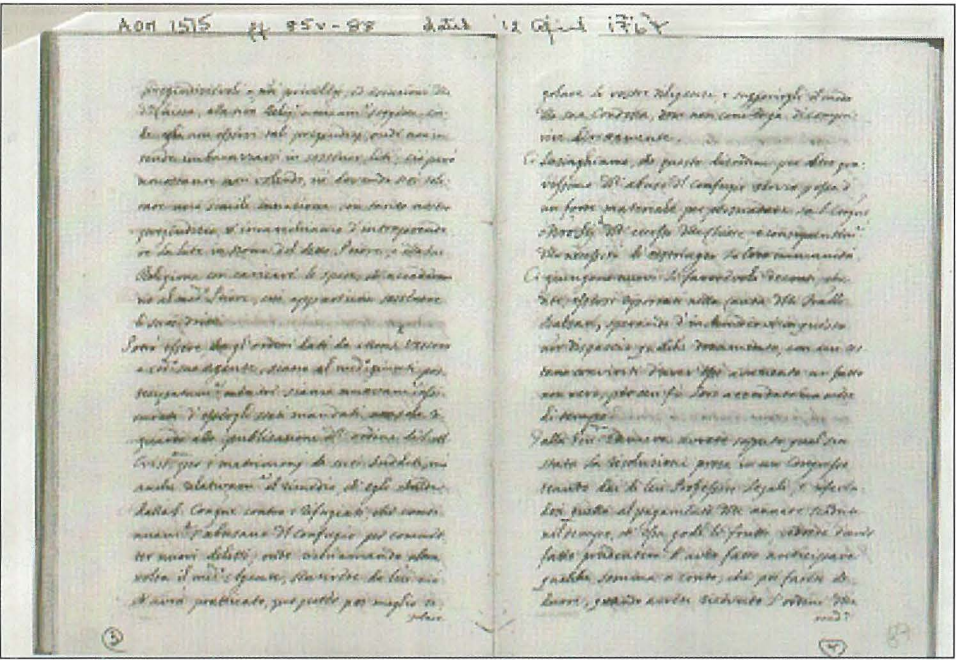
AOM 1515 ff 85v-88 dated 12 April 1767 P1& 2

⁴ Lib. 1072; Misc.38, viii

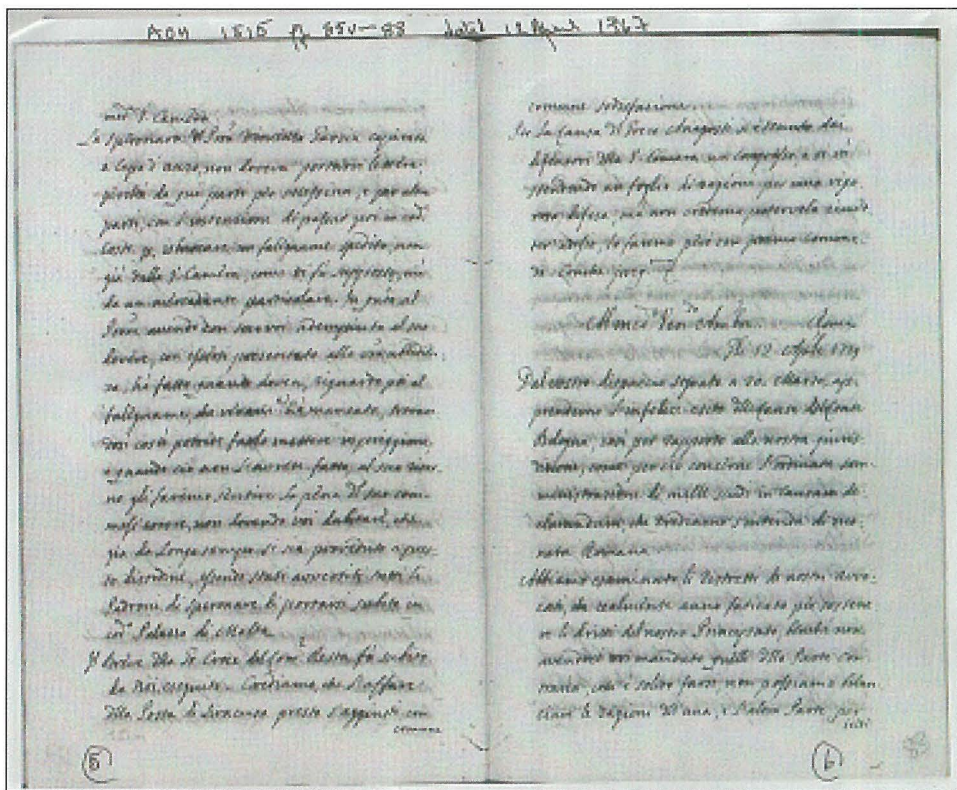
⁵ Lib.1146 (ii), f.9.



AOM 1515 ff 85v-88 dated 12 April 1767 P1& 2



AOM 1515 ff 85v-88 dated 12 April 1767 P3&4



AOM 1515 ff 85v-88 dated 12 April 1767 P5&6

obviously prepared and issued by influential circles in the Portuguese government, accusing the Jesuits of founding republics of their own in Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the Americas, and a manifest on the duty of the king of Portugal to castigate the Jesuits.⁶

In Malta Pinto soon became aware of where the wind was blowing and made haste to prepare accordingly.

In his letter of 12 April 1759⁷ he prepared Bali Breteuil, his ambassador at the Holy See, for the impending tussle for their properties.

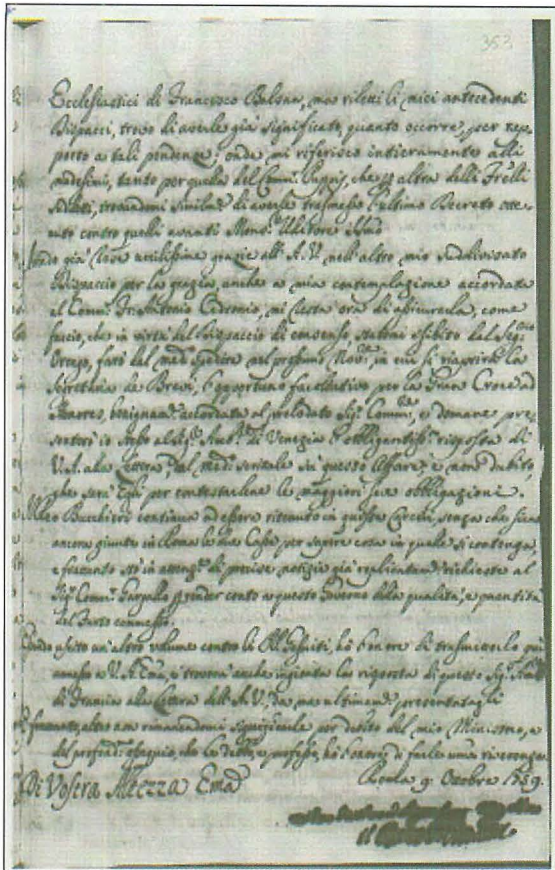
9 October 1759 Breteuil sent the Grand Master *un' altro volume contro il P Gesuiti*⁸ which had just been published. (put in document AOM 1356 f 353)

1 April 1759, Joseph I informed the Pope that he was expelling the Jesuits from Portugal, which he did.

⁶ C Testa, The Life and time of Grand Master Pinto. P 279

⁷ AOM 1515

⁸ AOM 1356



AOM I 356 f353 dated 9 Oct 1759

suppressed the Society throughout France, but nevertheless allowed former Jesuits to remain in the country.

The next country to expel the Jesuits was Spain.

Jesuit historian Ferrer Benimeli (2013) mentions the strong influence, if not power, the Jesuits had through their schools, their role as the King's confessors and advisers. The Jesuits were falsely accused by Crown Attorney Campomanes of plotting to overthrow the King because they affirmed the people's right against rising food prices. As the Jesuits opposed regal absolutism, Charles III believed the accusations, decreeing their expulsion from Spain on April 16, 1767,

Pinto was kept informed by Breteuil, his ambassador at the Holy See on these dramatic events. In his dispatch of 21 April 1767⁹ wrote about "the resolution taken

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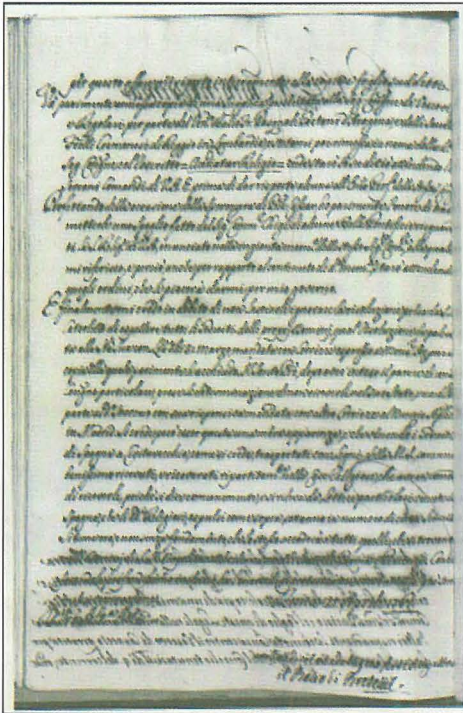
The Jesuits had to struggle with the Encyclopaedists whose liberal philosophy eventually helped to level all social barriers and usher in the French Revolution

The Jesuits had to cope with the Jansenists and Madame de Pompadour the influential mistress of Louis XV.

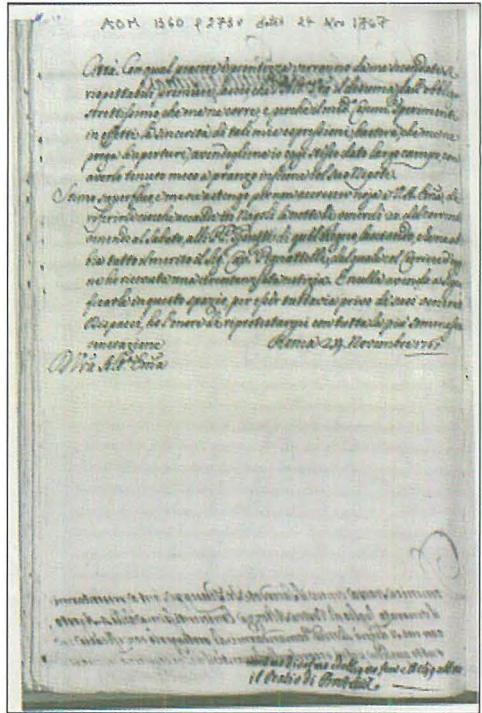
Following an adverse decision in a commercial lawsuit against the French Branch of the Jesuits, the Court went a step further pronouncing the Order's constitution as incompatible with the laws of the land since it tended to drag away from the king his subjects, allegiance

On August 6, 1762, The Paris Parliament barred the Society from France, disbanding its communities and confiscating its buildings, and in November 1764 King Louis XV reluctantly

⁹ AOM 1360



AOM 1360 f 195v dated 21 April 1767



AOM 1360 f 273v dated 24 Nov 1767

by His Most Catholic Majesty of expelling all Jesuits from his domains, announced to His Holiness by an *express letter of the 31 March*. It is now feared that the same fate would befall those who are found in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and in the States of Parma and Piacenza”

Pinto replied to Bretteuil that “We have been surprised by the news of the Jesuits” expulsion from the Spanish Kingdom. We have no doubt that this will be followed in the neighbouring States of Parma and Piacenza.¹⁰

On the trumped-up charges that the Jesuits were plotting against the State, Ferdinand IV of the Two Sicilies, the younger brother of the King of Spain, did the same, and immediately on the night of 20/21 November 1767 ordered their expulsion¹¹

Malta’s Turn:

In 1530 when the Maltese Islands were donated by Charles V to the Order of St John in full sovereignty, one of the few conditions which were stipulated in the

¹⁰ AOM 1523, f.79.

¹¹ AOM 1360, Despatch dated 24 November 1767