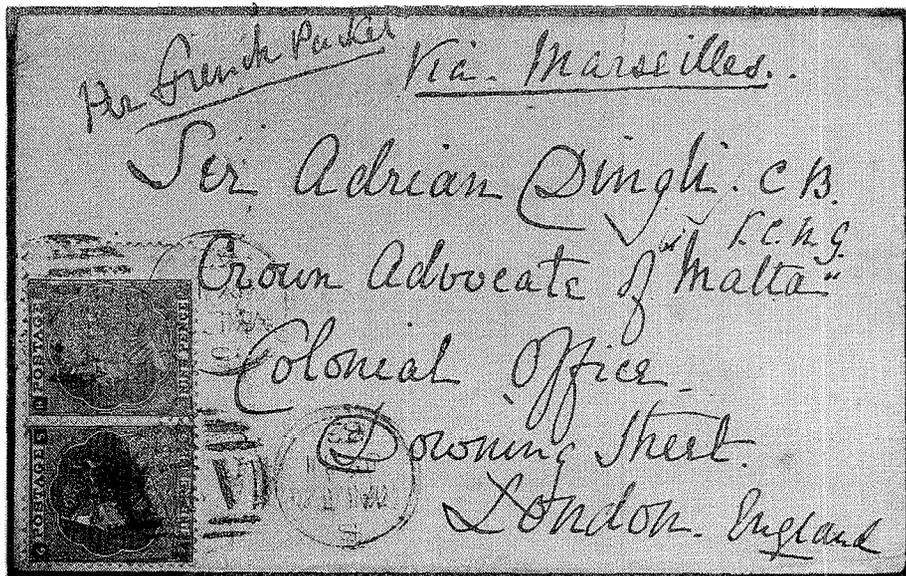


LETTER TO  
SIR ADRIAN DINGLI, CB, KCMG  
IN DOWNING STREET, LONDON

(11 July, 1862)

By Dr A. Bonnici



On the 22nd May, 1989, the above Sir Adrian Dingli cover, which originally belonged to the "Danson" collection, bearing a GB 1862, 9d. Bistre Pair, placed sideways at the lower left corner of the cover, and cancelled by the 11th July, 1862 Malta A25 duplex, addressed to Sir Adrian Dingli CB, KCMG, Crown Advocate of Malta, Colonial Office, Downing Street, London, England, featured in the "Francisco" collection sale by Christies Robson Lowe, as item No: 2310, estimated at £2,000 and realising the price of £2,800.<sup>1</sup>

On the 1st December, 1860 the 1/2d yellow Queen Victoria Malta stamp was issued for local internal mail, but as the Malta Post Office was still under Colonial administration, Great Britain Victoria stamps were used for external mail and cancelled with the duplex A25.

It was in January, 1885 that the Malta Post Office passed under local control and so the definitive Queen Victoria 1/2d green and 1/- violet set was issued for local and overseas mail, which replaced the GB stamps.

This fascinating historical cover left Malta on the 11th July, 1852, by the French Packet steamer to Marseilles, then by land through France, crossing the channel to London.

Looking at the cover, three main questions come to one's mind:

- 1 Who was Sir Adrian Dingli?
- 2 What was he doing in Downing Street in 1862?
- 3 What connection with Malta has the KCMG?

### 1. Who was Sir Adrian Dingli (1817-1900)?

Sir Adrian Dingli was born in Valetta on October 8, 1817, educated at the Seminary at Mdina and at the age of 19 years, graduated in 1836 as Doctor of Laws from the Malta University. He immediately undertook postgraduate legal studies in Rome, Bologna, Bonn, Heidelberg, London and the Sorborn Universities and these travels afforded him an opportunity to further his knowledge of European languages.<sup>2</sup>

Returning to Malta in 1843, he involved himself in local politics and was elected as the member for Gozo on the Council of Government in the first election under the 1849 Constitution.<sup>3</sup> Together with the Chief Secretary Henry Lushington, he drafted the Rules of Procedure for the Council and his first work involved him in amending the Code of Police Laws.

He met very strong opposition and became very unpopular, when in setting up the Malta Militia he tried to introduce general conscription in Malta.<sup>4</sup>

Sir Adrian was appointed Crown Advocate in January, 1854, on the vacation of this highly prestigious post of office, when Dr Antonio Micallef, the then Crown Advocate was appointed as Judge.<sup>5</sup>

Sir William Reid, the Malta Governor at that time, in a despatch dated January 27th, 1854, informed the Duke of Newcastle about Sir Adrian's appointment and among other matters he stated "the ability he has shown in the Council, as well as his character as a lawyer, make me think him the fittest person to recommend as Crown Advocate."<sup>6</sup>

This appointment was the first step, which led him up the path of a glorious administrative and legislative career, in which he exercised tremendous influence on the successive Governors that ruled over Malta.

In fact, historians quote him as the *de facto* Governor. In *La Gazzetta di Malta* we find: "*per molti anni, come Avvocato della Corona, fu Governatore di fatto di queste isole e l'arbitro onnipotente degli affari civili e politici.*"<sup>7</sup> As soon as he was appointed Crown Advocate, he began the great legislative work on the Civil and Commercial Code.

During this period, it was customary that after legislation passed through all its stages in the Council of Government, (1st reading, 2nd reading – committee stage – 3rd reading) where it was fully debated, amended and approved, it needed to be sent to London for final approval, where it was again examined for a whole year, before the Governor could give his assent.

Because of these frequent legal dispatches to London, he became very soon, well known at Whitehall, where he was very highly thought of and praised.

Among the numerous congratulatory dispatches from Whitehall received in Malta, we find one of the 19th July, 1857, sent to the Malta Governor from the Hon Minister Laboucher, approving ORD VII of 1857, in which he stated:

"I must not refrain from expressing the satisfaction of Her Majesty's Govern-

ment, with the lucid and careful commentary, with which, Dr Dingli has enabled you to accompany this enactment and by which in the present, as in many former instances, he has rendered great assistance towards its proper consideration."<sup>8</sup>

Apart from his great legislative involvement, he was consulted on all branches of Public Administration.

He was greatly involved in the development of the Grand Harbour as a naval base. This was the time when the Admiralty wanted to take over French Creek and develop it into a drydock, which involved the acquisition of considerable Government, and private property lying along the coast line. Because of this complicated project he had to go to London to negotiate with the British Government, and at Whitehall he had various meetings with the Admiral Sir Richard J. Duncan, Lord Carnarvon and the Duke of Newcastle. He was the only one authorised to negotiate with the British Government. When Sir Victor Houlton, the Chief Secretary, went also to London, and tried to interfere in the negotiations with the British Government, Capt Wilford Brett who was very close to the Governor, wrote to Sir Adrian telling him.

"You and only *you* took home credentials to England to represent the Governor's views and so authorised being in his full confidence to negotiate in his name."<sup>9</sup>

In another note he told him: "The Governor (Le Merchant) listened with the great attention to your very interesting letter detailing your interview at the Admiralty and other Departments.

I assure you he fully recognises and appreciates your valuable services, without which our great project would have failed to succeed.

He looks forward with great interest to each mail and I hope now, through your able negotiations, the important question will be favourably settled.

The Governor was delighted with your answers to the Lords of the Admiralty... I congratulate you most warmly on your successes due to your abilities and energy." etc.<sup>10</sup>

The project was approved and French Creek became the Drydocks, which continued to expand in future years giving employment to thousands of Maltese.

Among other projects in which he was involved, were the building of the Lunatic Asylum, the Valletta Market, Mgarr Gozo breakwater, and the Grand Opera House, which was started in 1801, the architect being the famous English architect Edward M. Barry, who was entrusted to build Covent Garden Theatre in London.

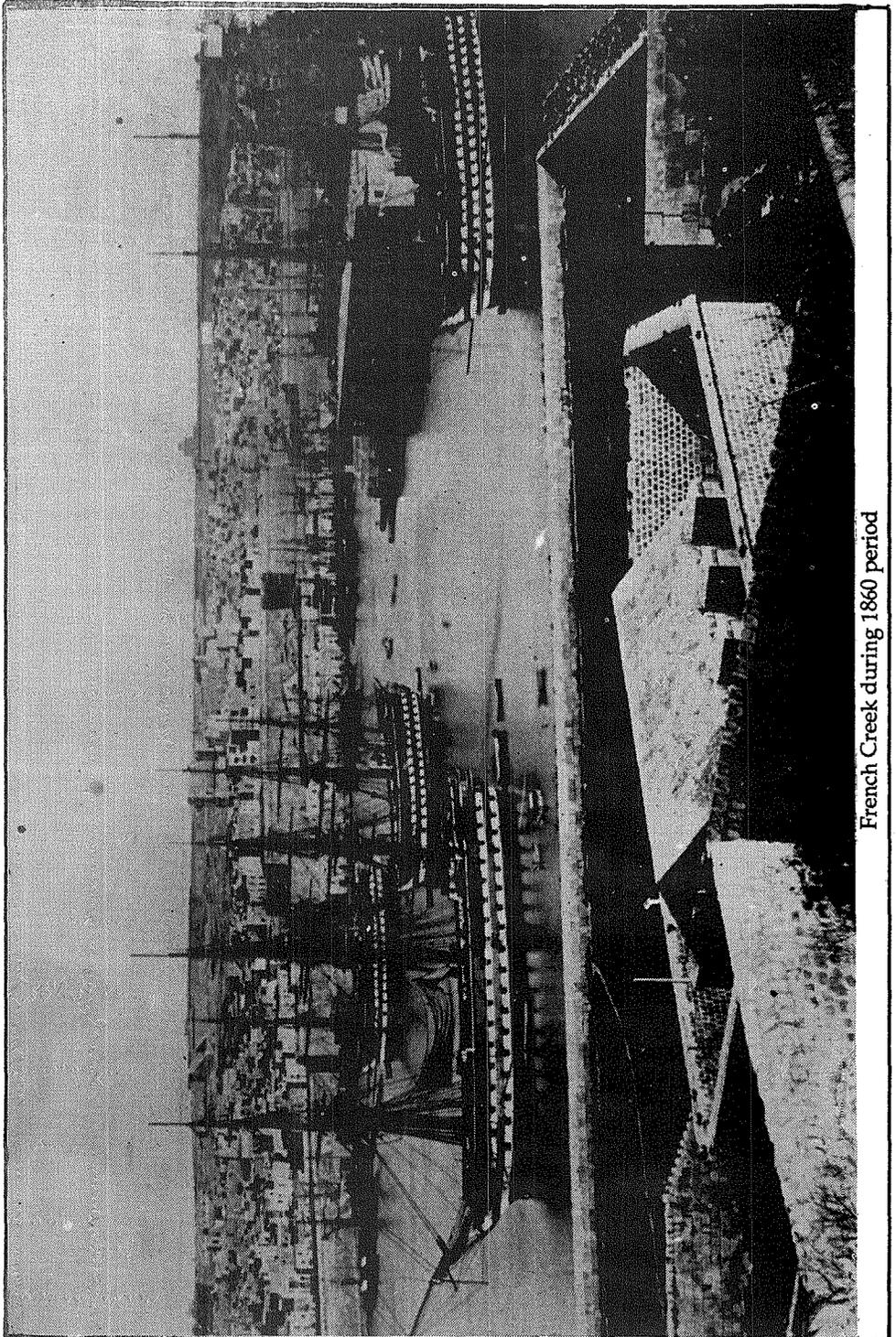
Together with Father (later Bishop) Pace Forno, Monsignor (later Bishop) PP Pace, Dr Felice Mercieca, Can Decan Michelangelo Garrone and others, he was instrumental in separating Gozo from the Maltese Diocese.

On the 22nd September, 1864 it was decreed from Rome, the erection of a new Cathedral and the establishment of the Gozo Diocese, under the direct jurisdiction of the *Santa Sede*. The first Bishop was Mons. Michele Francesco Buttigieg.

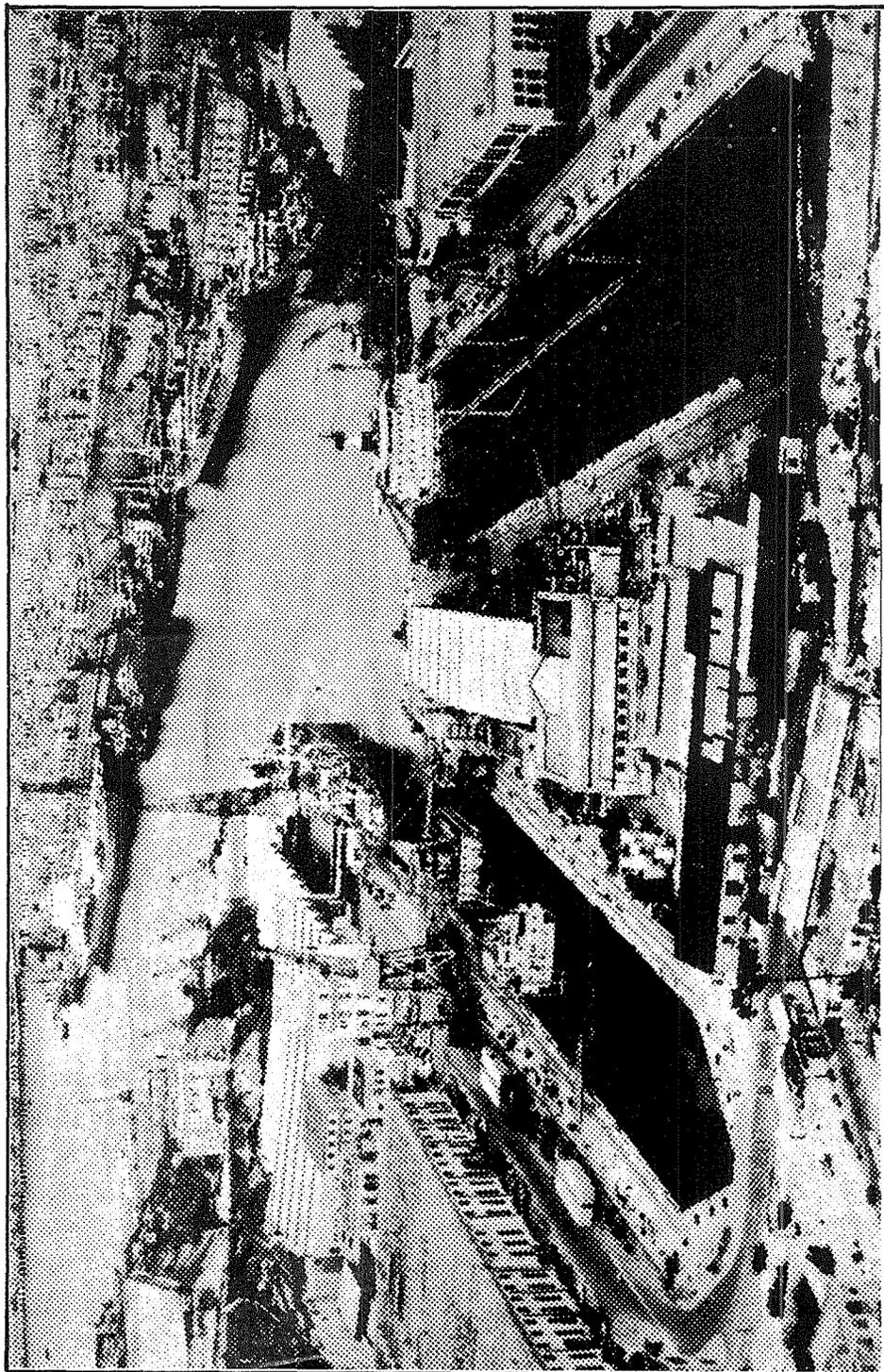
In a letter from the Governor Stor to Dingli, from London on the 18th September, 1877, he told him:

"Your report is highly thought of and I may tell you *entre nous* is styled 'an elaborate and able opinion' by the Law Officers to whom the papers were referred."<sup>11</sup>

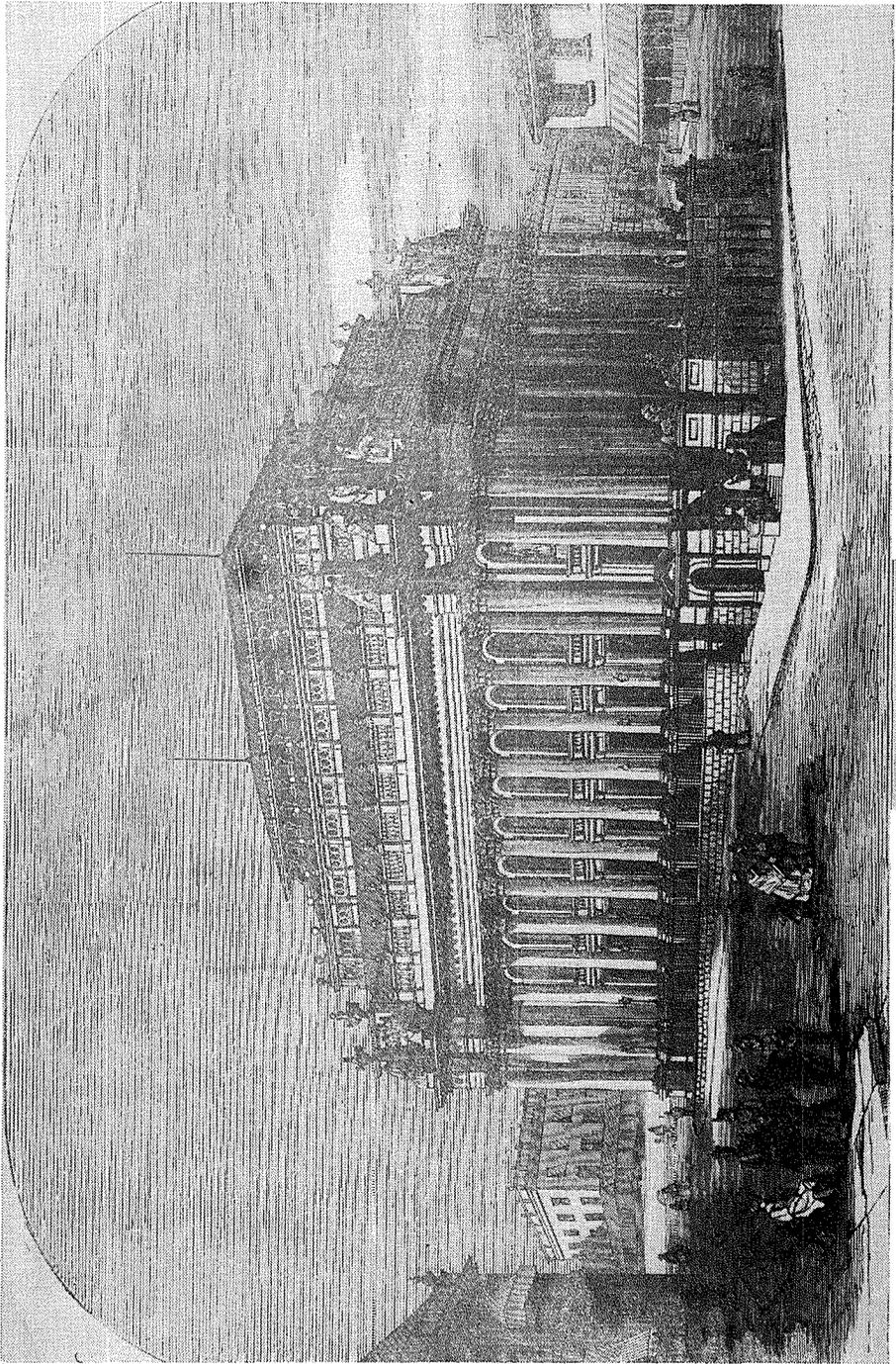
A big portrait in oil of Dingli was hung by the Cathedral Chapter in the Chapter Grand Hall, as a recognition of this service to make Gozo a separate Diocese.



French Creek during 1860 period



French Creek becoming the Drydocks



THE OPERA-HOUSE AT MALTA.



In recognition of his legislative and administrative work he received various honours.

In January 1856, he was appointed a Companion of the Order of St Michael and

St George (CMG).

On July 1, 1859, Dr Adrian Dingli was gazetted as a Companion of the Order of the Bath (CB – Civil Division) and promoted to Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George on 30th April, 1860 (KCMG).<sup>12</sup>

This explains the CB and KCMG after his name on the cover.

He was appointed legal Councillor to Sir Garnet Wolsely during the occupation of Cyprus and recommended a more liberal Constitution for Cyprus, which was opposed on military grounds, but the "Foreign Office praised him for the hard – difficult excellent work he had done."

The Cypriots had requested the Foreign Office that the High Commissioner about to be appointed should be a civilian and they requested that Sir Adrian be appointed to this office.<sup>13</sup>

In 1880 he was nominated President of the Arbitration Court in Tunis.

In Malta he is remembered as the author of the reviewed Criminal and Commercial Code, that had existed since 1774, *Code de Rohan*.

In 1880 he became President of the Malta Appeal Court and Chief Justice.

Together with his wife, he was presented to Queen Victoria on the occasion of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition.

He died on the 25th November, 1900, receiving very good press reviews about his career from all newspapers in Malta, and commemorated with impressive speeches in the Law Courts. On the 28th November, the Council of Government unanimously approved "the adjournment of the business of the day; condolences to be sent to his family, and the expenditure from public funds for a commemorative plaque." The Chief Secretary to the Government, Sir Gerald Strickland, in his commemorative speech praising Sir Adrian said: "The life of Sir Adrian Dingli leaves an indelible impression upon the history of Malta, and I may add that it has also had a part in the structure and the development of the British Empire beyond this one spot of the Mediterranean. His life was throughout a marvellous example of that most furious and perhaps phenominally rapid emalgamation of lands and races, of science and of religion, of progress and of commerce, which has consolidated the British Imperial ideal. This unprecedented emalgamation and dissimilation in order to be successful where the man is found to fit the situation. That man was found in Malta, at a most critical period, in Sir Adrian Dingli. I think that much of the social and political liberty we now enjoy, of the good feeling which is rapidly bearing fruit and of the local privileges that we now enjoy in Malta is due to the fact that during the period of transition which lasted more than half a century there was a Maltese Statesman on the spot, as the highest representative of the legal profession and of the cultural classes, who was fully and earnestly equal to the task of undertaking the heaviest responsibility of administration in this country on a standard as high as that high standard of practice ability and integrity which is the price of the English public service." etc. And Dr Enrico Mizzi, the leader of the Nationalist Party said: "*La fama di quest' uomo sarebbe assai piu grande, la sua azione sarebbe stata assai piu vasta, nella storia di tutto il mondo egli avrebbe lasciato una orma assai piu marcata, se invece di nascere in queste piccole isole, egli avesse avuto la fortuna di nascere in paesi grandi ove i suoi talenti, e particolarmente la sua dottrina aquisitata con indefeso studio, avrebbe potuto avere un campo o una sfera di attivita assai maggiore di quella che ha avuto in vita*".<sup>14</sup>

A monument of Sir Adrian Dingli was erected in the Mall Gardens, Floriana.

The bust was made in bronze sculptured by the famous Maltese artist Antonio Scirotino. The inauguration ceremony was held on the 15th April, 1907 in the presence of His Majesty King Edward VII during one of his visits to Malta. His Majesty in his reply to the speech made by Judge Alfred Parnis, said that he was happy to have known personally such an illustrious personality, appreciating his friendship and would hold him in very high esteem.<sup>15</sup>

Dingli Street in Sliema and Dingli Street in Gozo were named after him. Lately a Sub-Post Office was opened in Dingli Street, Sliema.



## 2 What was Sir Adrian Dingli doing in London in July, 1862, when the envelope was addressed to him in Downing Street?

This was the period of great political upheaval in Italy. The Risorgimento was in full swing and various criminals were finding refuge in Malta.

There was no extradition treaty and so the Maltese Government could not repatriate these highly undesirable elements of Italian society.

The British Government responsible for Malta, was greatly alarmed by this unhappy situation and called Dingli to Downing Street for consultation in July 1862.

That is why Dingli was in Downing Street during that period.

It was then decided that Dingli should proceed to Torino on a very special mission.

His brief was to start negotiations and finalise a treaty between London and Piedmonte, that would bilaterally enforce the extradition of delinquents.

His diary of his stay in Italy about this matter was published in *Archivium Melitense* (Vol X fasc. 3, 1938).<sup>16</sup>

He arrived in Torino on the 18th August, presenting himself to Sir James Hudson, with a letter from Lord Russel, the then British Foreign Secretary and started negotiations, which were finally concluded satisfactorily on the 3rd September and Dingli returned to Malta.

The Italian Government was so highly impressed by Dingli that they requested permission from the British Government to honour him. "Nell'Ordine dei SS Maurizio e Lazzaro".

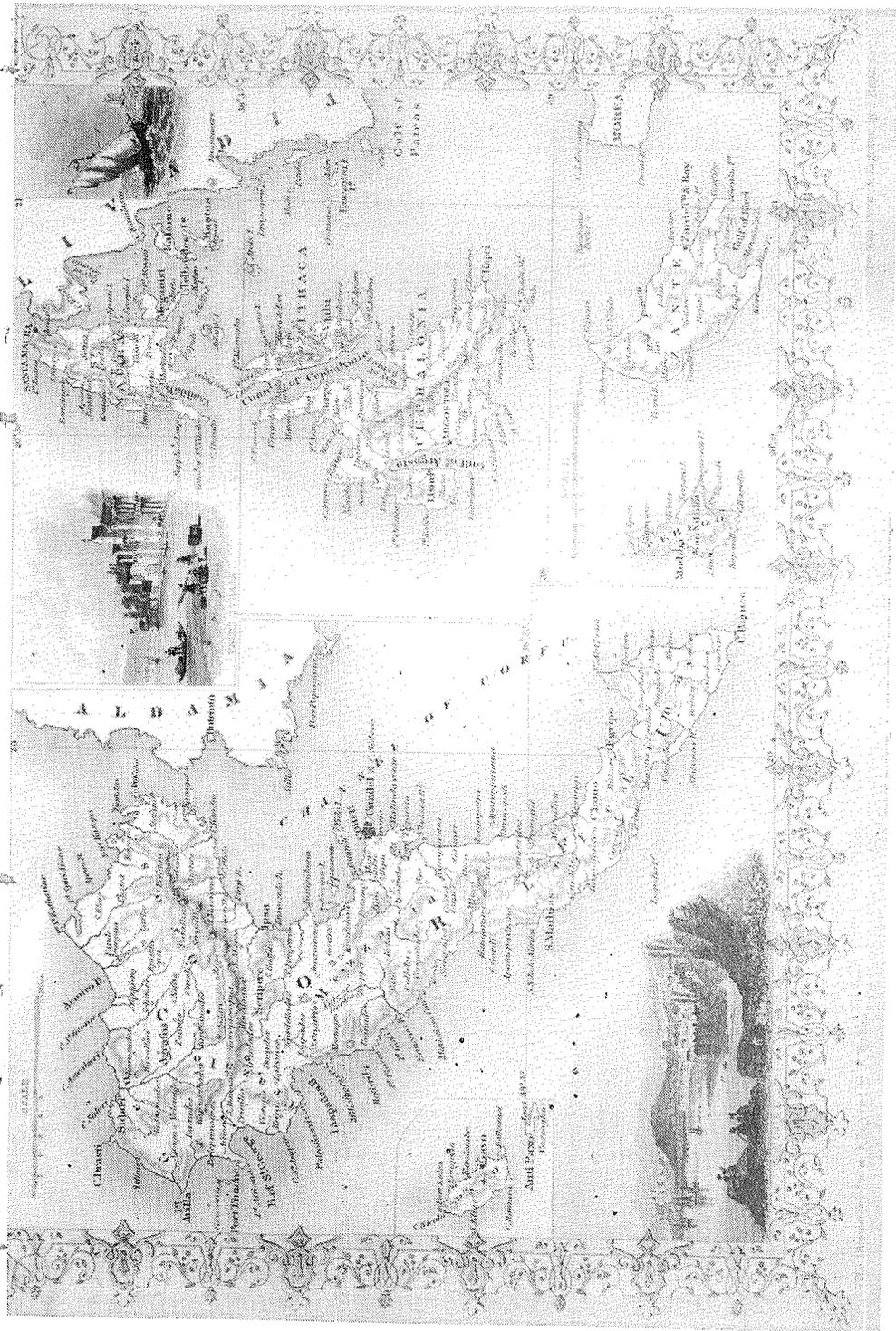
Lord Russel replied as follows on the 18th July, 1863: "It has afforded HM's Government pleasure to learn that the conduct of Sir A. Dingli on that occasion was such as to merit the approbation of the Italian Government. But the long established regulations of this country forbid the acceptance of foreign orders by British subjects, unless conferred for active and distinguished services, before an enemy, or for actual and active employment beyond the British Dominions in the service of the foreign Sovereign by whom the order is confirmed."<sup>17</sup>

In the House of Commons debate of the 18th May, Mr Chicester Fortesque, the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, stated: "That the negotiations with the Italian Government as regards the extradition of delinquents were conducted by a Maltese Lawyer of the highest distinction."<sup>18</sup>

## 3 What connection has the KCMG with Malta?

Sir Thomas Maitland 'King Tom', was appointed "Governor and Commander-in-





Malta and the Ionian Islands

Chief of Malta and its dependencies" on July 1813, the year that the plague hit Malta.

He was also Lord High Commissioner of the Ionian Islands, consisting of seven islands namely Corfu, Cephalonia, Zante, Santa Maura, Ithaca, Paxo and Cerigo.

From the start he realised that both the Maltese and Ionians had a great love for titles and so worked for the creation of a new Order, in order to reward meritorious Ionians and Maltese.

After some opposition which he overcame, the Order of St Michael and St George was set up.

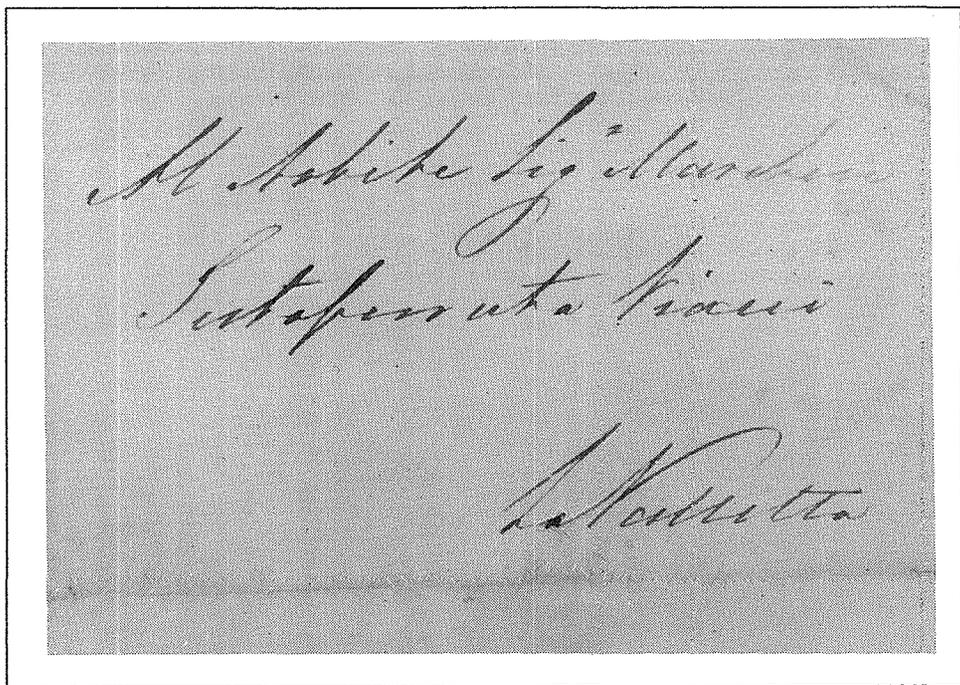
St George could not be the patron of the Order, so St Michael was added, because St George besides being the patron saint of England, was also the patron saint of another Order, the Order of the Garter.

Maitland commissioned Pietro Paolo Caruana, who painted St Michael inspired by Guido Reni's St Michael in the church of Santa Maria dei Cappuccini, and St George and the Dragon, inspired by Sir Thomas Lawrence's painting in the Vatican Museum.

Both these excellent paintings by Caruana now hang at the entrance to the House of Representatives in Valletta.

The new Order was a British Order, principally for non-United Kingdom subjects and was founded at Westminster on April 27, 1818.

Lord Bathurst described the Order as "the distinguished Order of St Michael and St George which it is His Royal Highness' (the Prince Regent's) intention to



The address of the entire containing the invitation to Marchese Testaferrata Viani for the first investiture

institute for the reward of meritorious services in the United States of Ionian Islands and in Malta.<sup>19</sup>

The new Order had the following three classes of members:

CMG – Commander of St Michael and St George.

KCMG – Knight Commander of St Michael and St George.

GCMG – Grand Cross of St Michael and St George.

(These letters were later interpreted by the Maltese jokingly as: Call me God; Kindly call me God; God calls me God.)

### The Rape of the Supreme Council Chamber

The Hall of the Supreme Council (*Sala del Maggior Consiglio* or *Gran Consiglio*) was used by the Grandmasters for state and official functions; which included the sessions of the Supreme Council and the holding of Chapters General. In the Museo Civico of Udine (Italy) there is a famous painting by Gianbattista Tiepolo (1693-1770) depicting the Supreme Council in Session.

This noble hall was adorned by twelve priceless frescoes by Mattia Perez d'Aleccio (1547-1628) depicting the salient phases of the epic siege of Malta by Suleiman in 1565 in all its glory. The panels are separated by allegorical figures representing: Religion, Charity, Hope, Faith, Temperance, Fortitude, Justice, Prudence, Happiness, Fame, Victory, Virtue, Patience, Perseverance, and Nobility.

At the end of the Hall was the throne of the Grandmaster surmounted by a crimson velvet canopy.

At the other end of the room is a minstrel's gallery beautifully carved in wood; originally the poop of a galley, adorned with six panels depicting the Creation of Adam, Adam being endowed with life, the Creation of Eve, the Fall, the Expulsion, from Eden, the building of the Ark, depicting new hope.

All this was changed to the neo-classical style under the direction of Lieut. Col. Whitmore, to become known as the Hall of St Michael and St George, where all the investitures were to be held.

The walls were covered from top to bottom with decorated canvas stretched over wooden frames, covering these priceless frescoes, and fluted wooden half columns were added at intervals along the sides, to give the new look and the beautiful elaborately coffred and painted timber ceiling covered.

It was through the intervention of King Edward VII, when during one of his visits to Malta, this sacrilege was pointed out, he immediately expressed a wish that the Hall of St Michael and St George should be restored to its former glory.

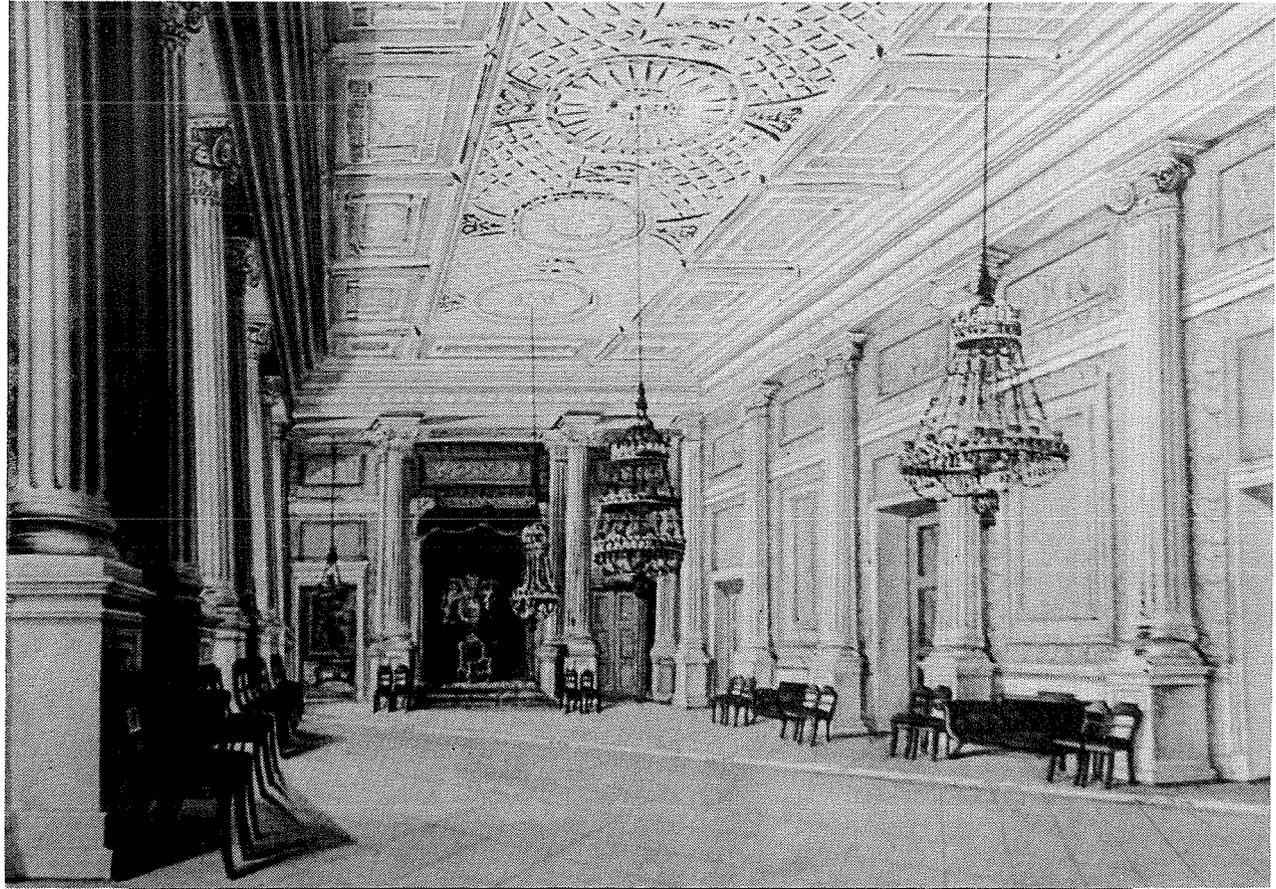
The work was soon taken in hand, during the residence in the Palace of Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Connaught (1908-1911).

The frieze of frescoes, comprising the twelve pictures of the Great Siege by the Turks in 1565 by Matteo Perez were restored by Mr Vincenzo Busuttill. The original Venetian type ceiling restored and the hall redecorated.<sup>20</sup>

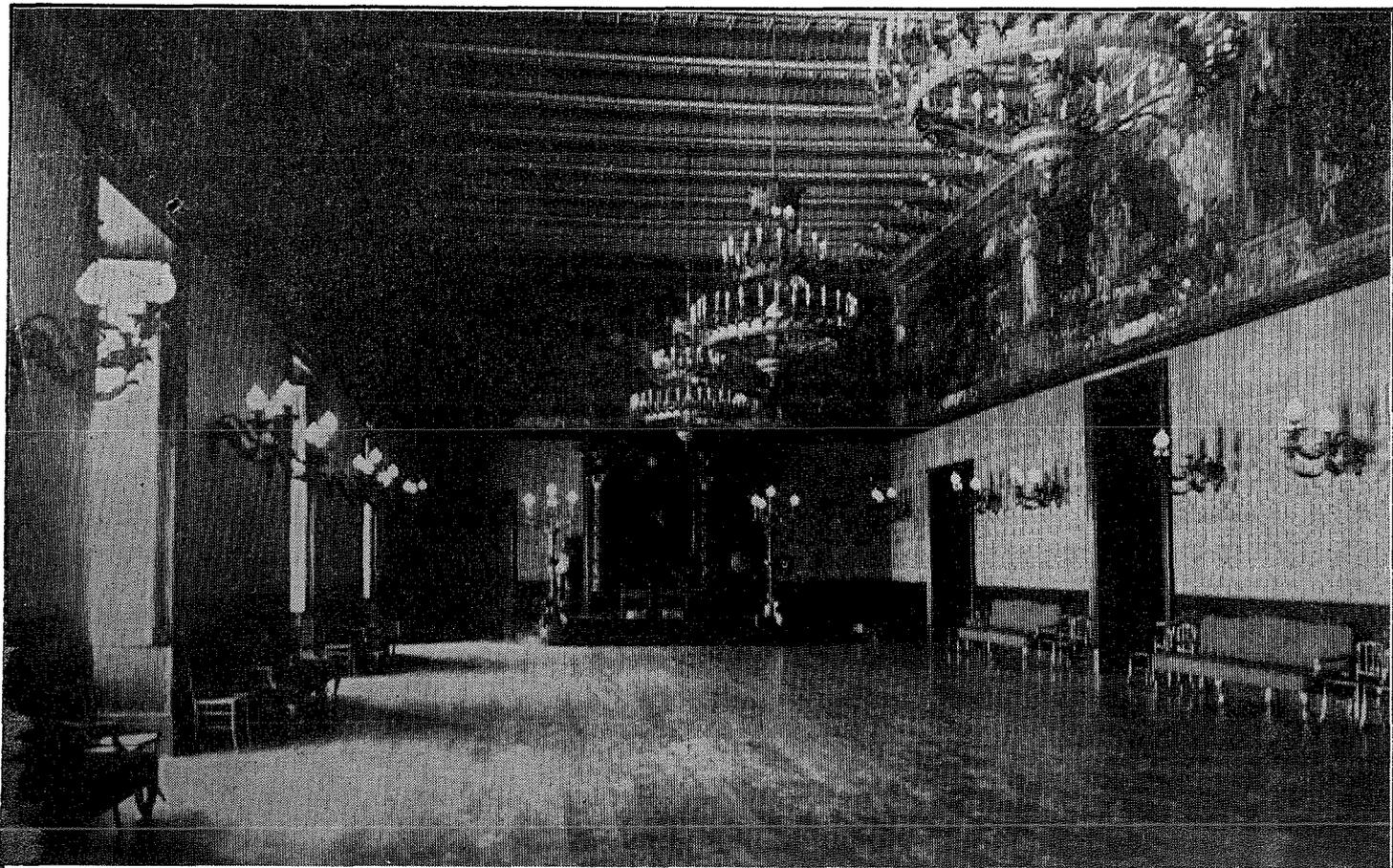
The first investiture was set up for the 16th December, 1818, declared a Public Holiday, and one of the first invitations issued for this investiture, issued to Marchese Terstaferatta Viani, who was at the time, Lord Lieutenant is being published.

The first Knights invested were:

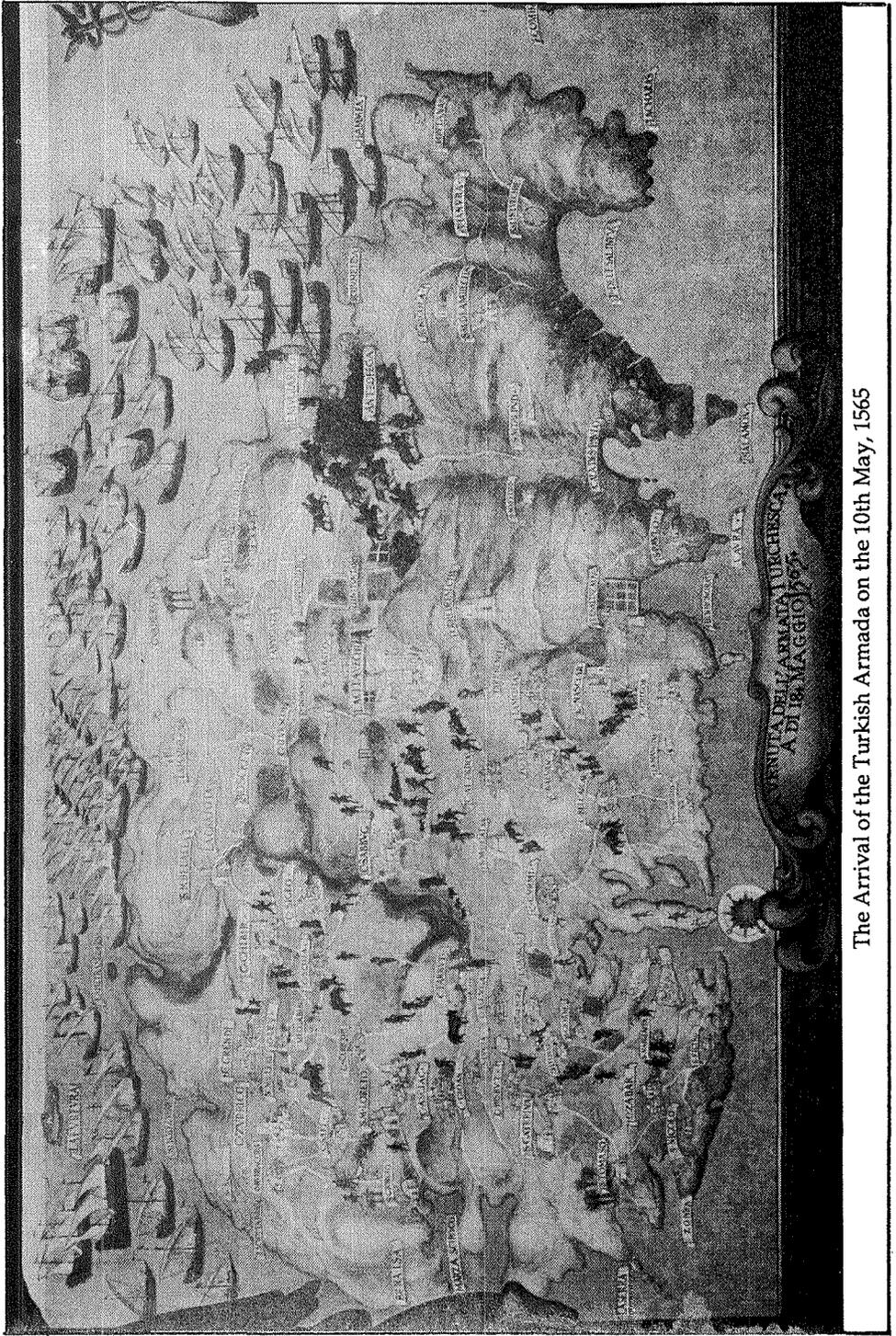
Rear Admiral of the White: Sir Charles Vinicomber Penrose, naval Commander-in-Chief, as First and Principal Knight Grand Cross (GCMG)



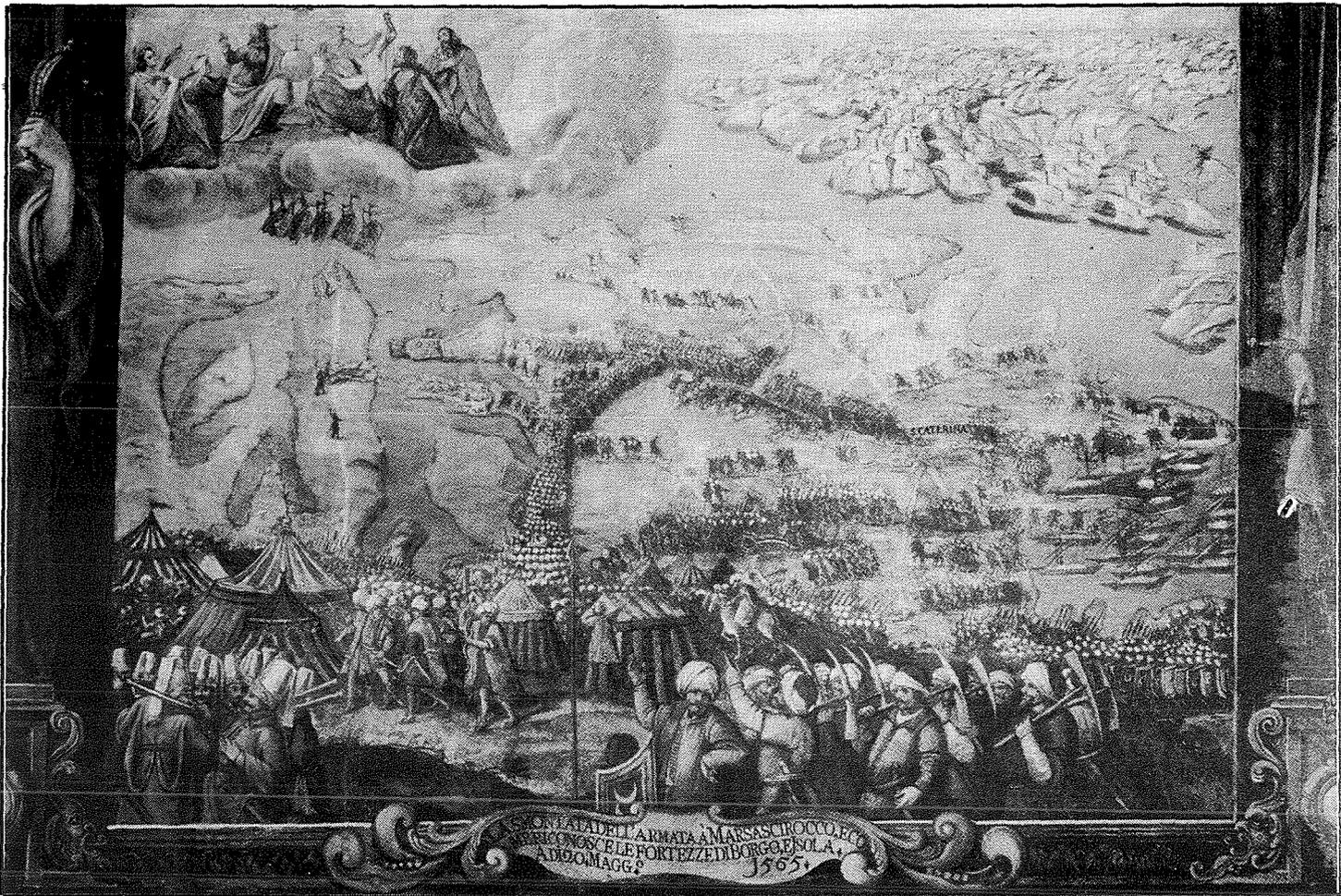
The Supreme Council Chamber as changed to The Hall of St Michael and St George under the direction of Colonel Whitmore



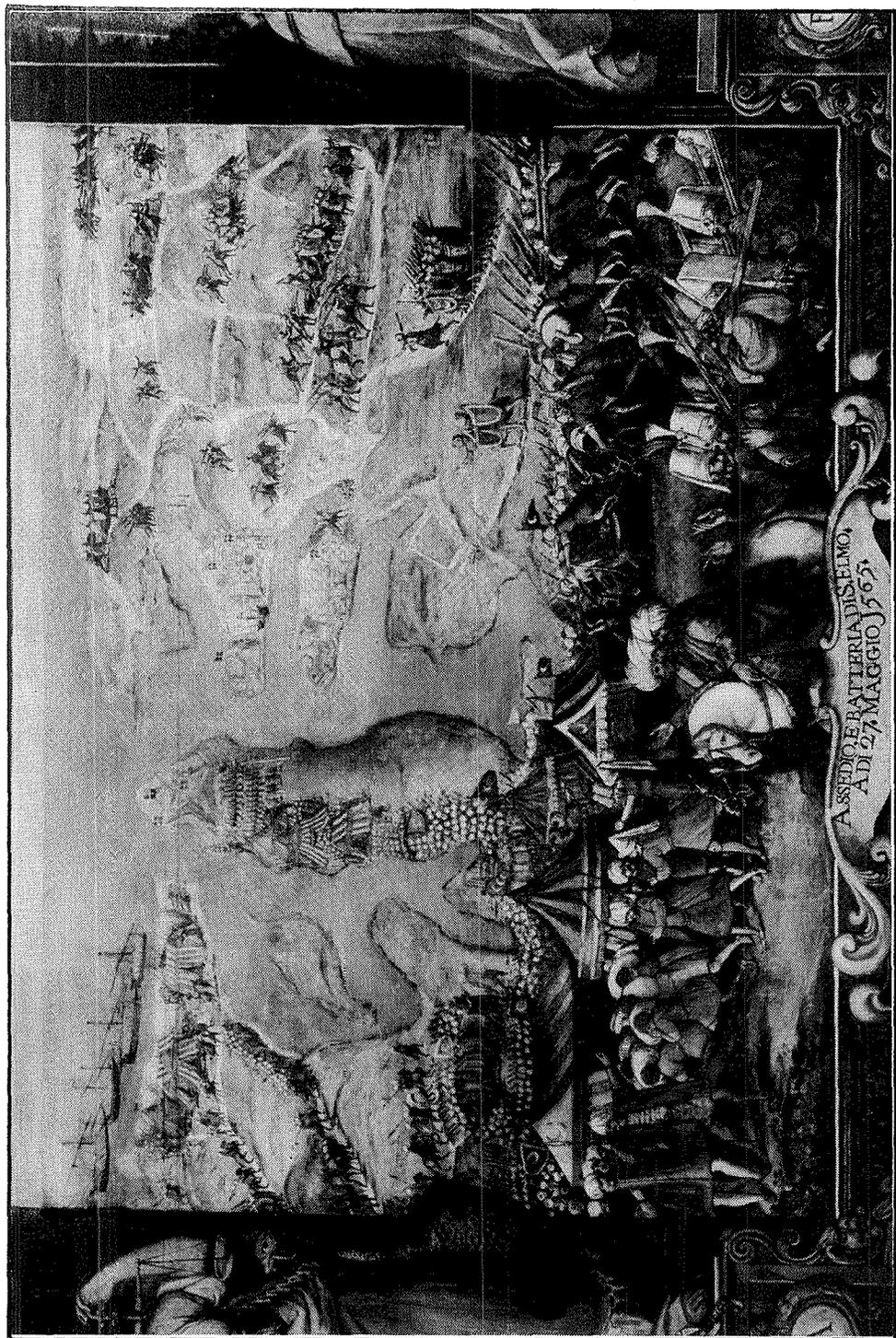
The Supreme Council Chamber after restoration by Mr Vincenzo Busuttìl



The Arrival of the Turkish Armada on the 10th May, 1565

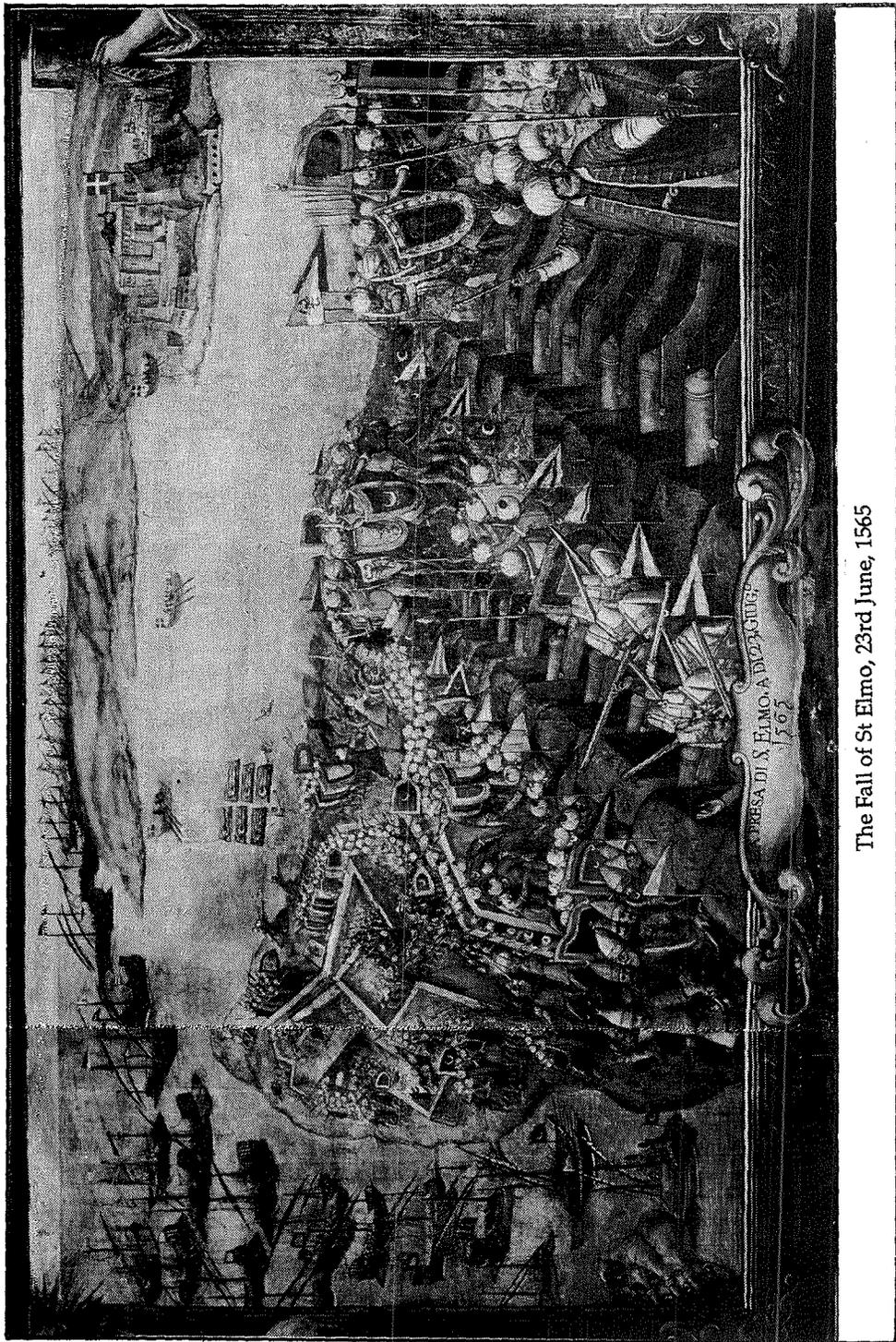


The Disembarkation of the Turkish Armada at Marsaxlokk on 20th May, 1565

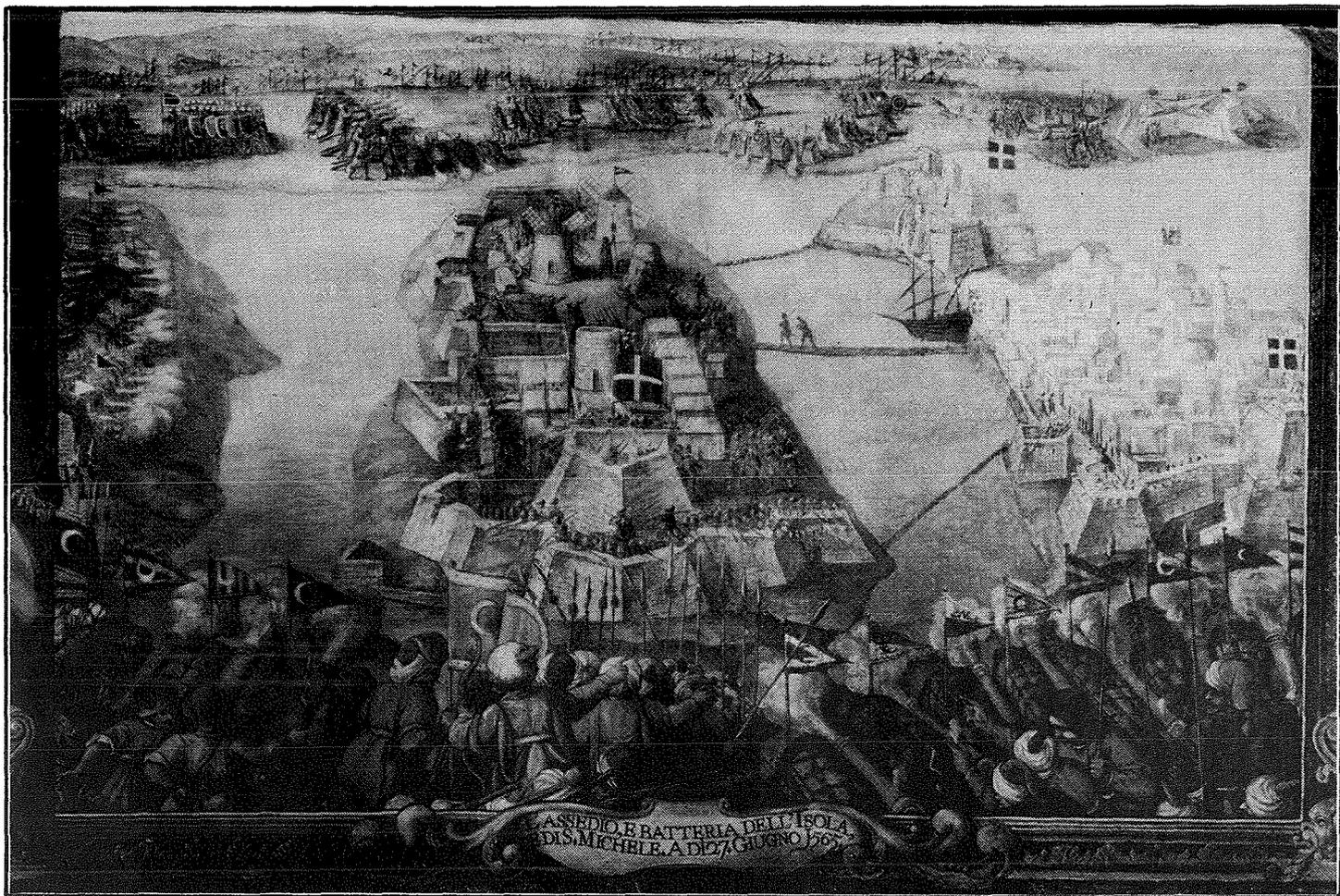


A SEDICER BATTERIA DI S. ELMO,  
A DI 27 MAGGIO 1657

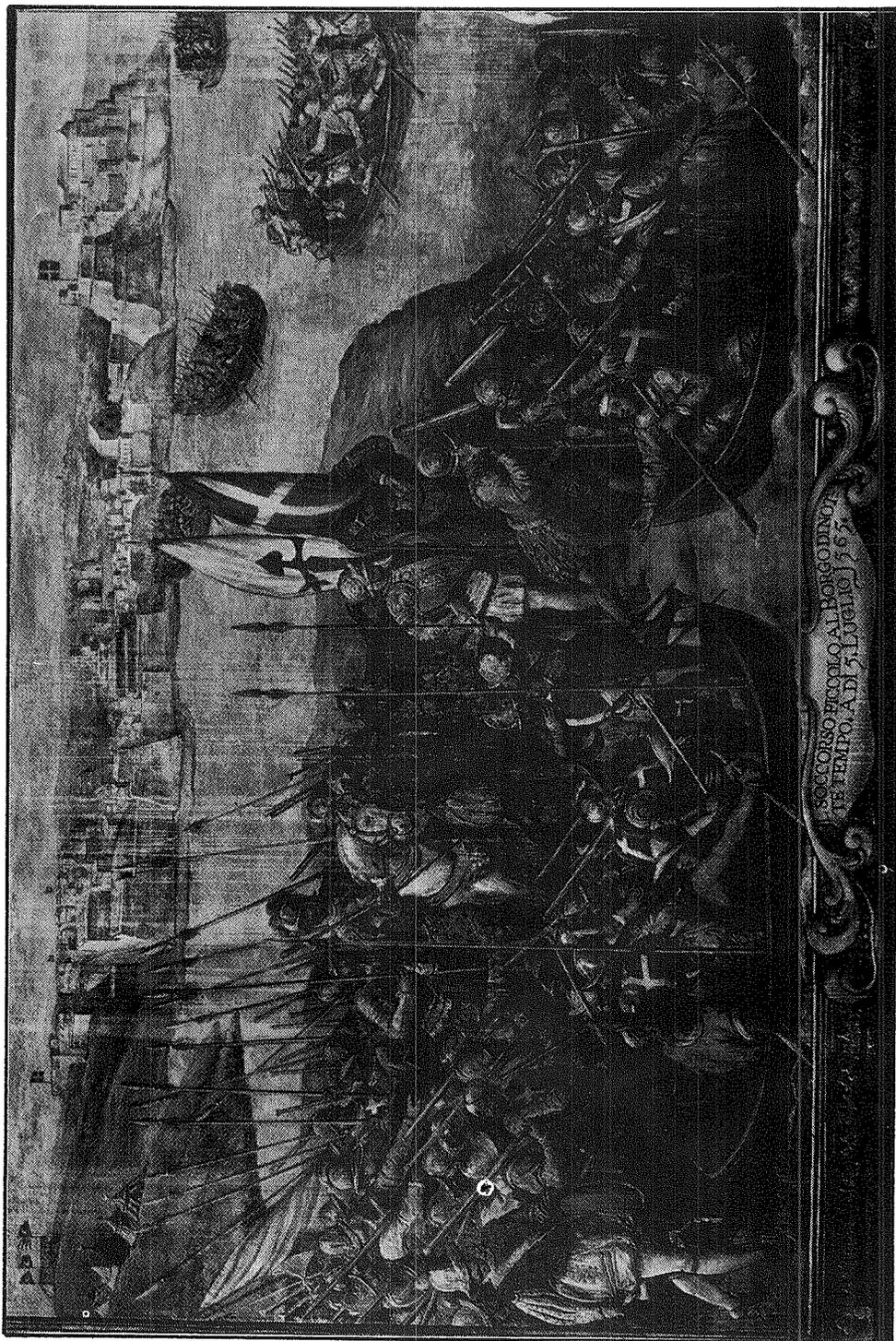
The Siege of St Elmo on the 27th May, 1655



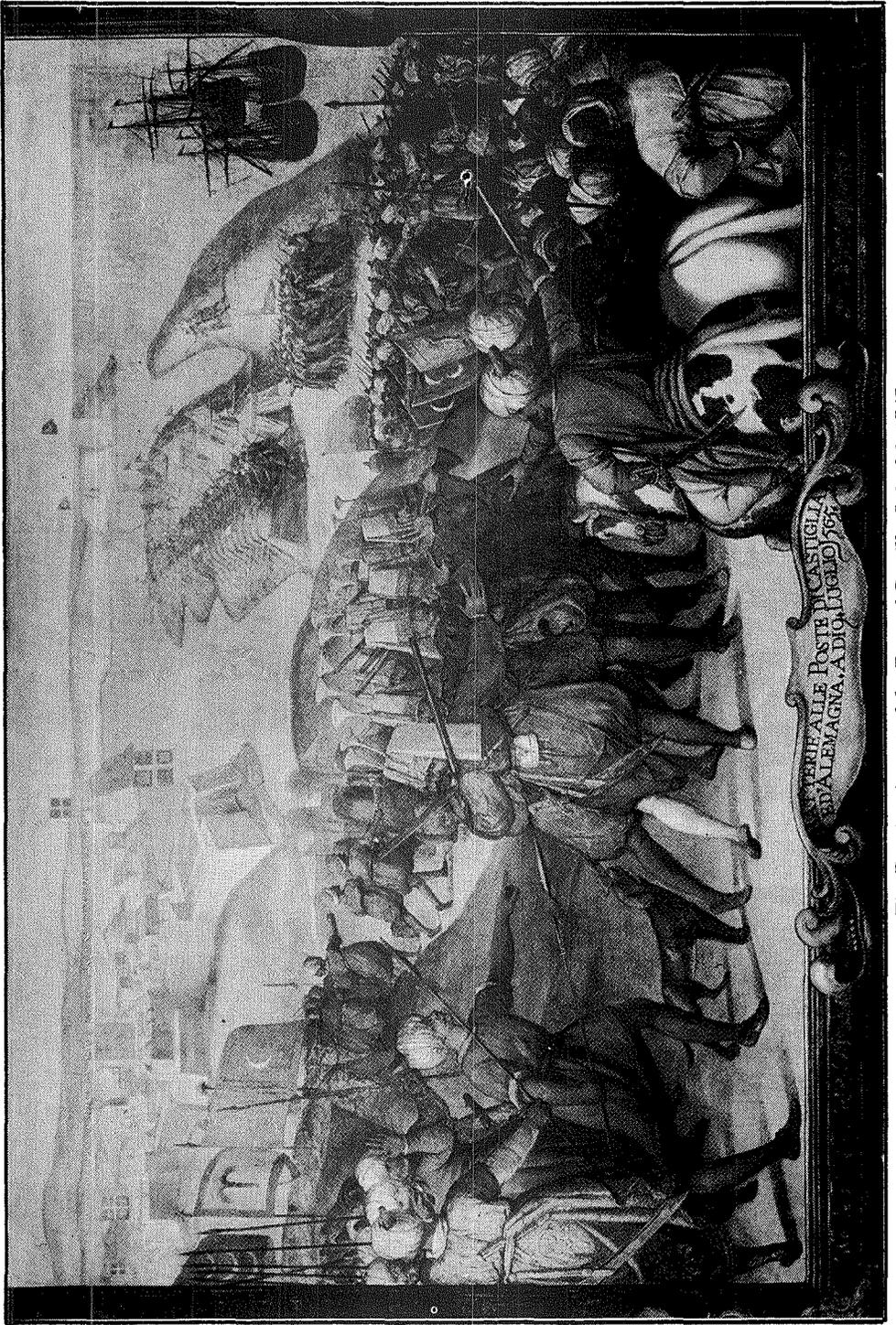
The Fall of St Elmo, 23rd June, 1565



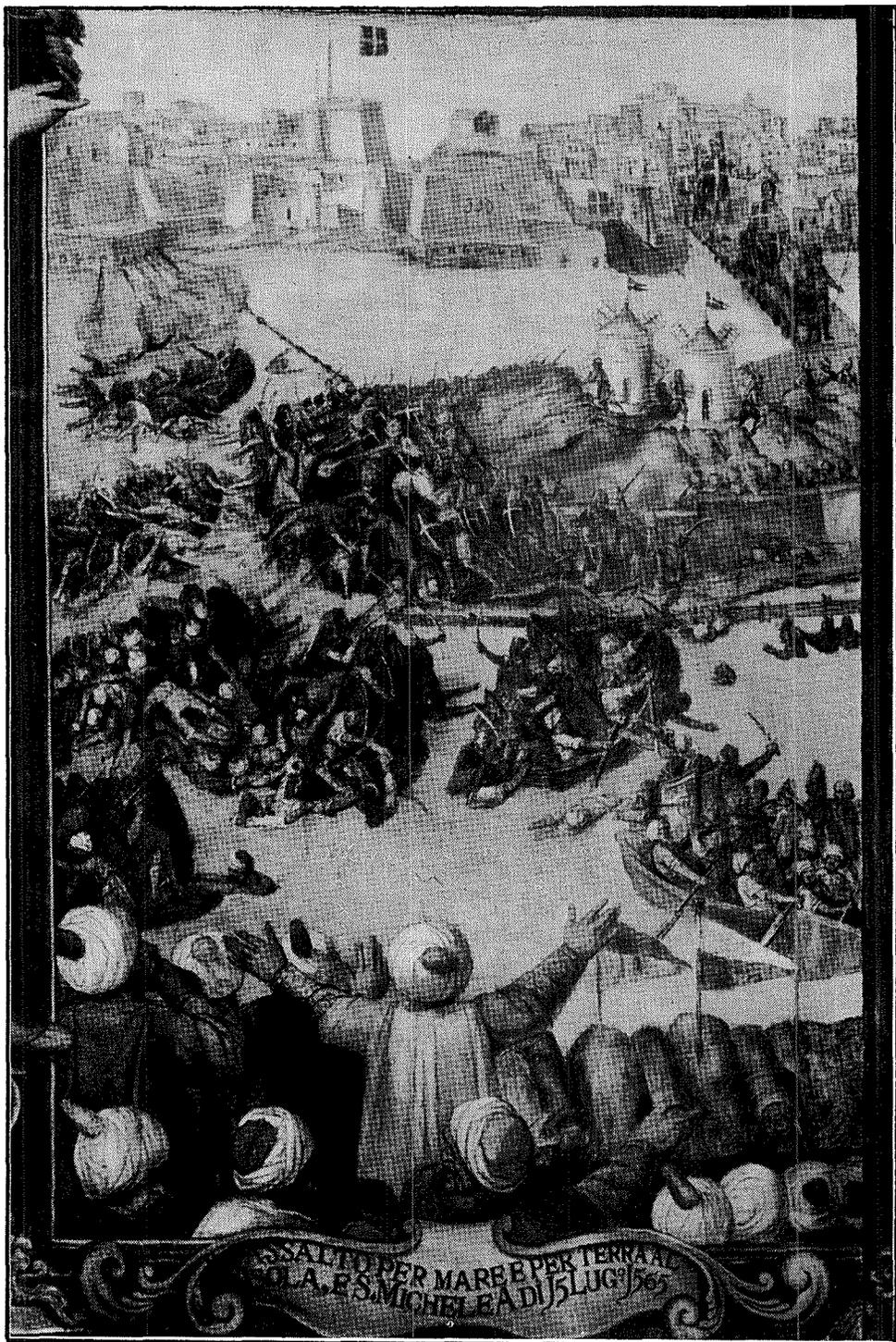
The Siege and Gun Enplacements of Senglea and St Michael, 27th June, 1565



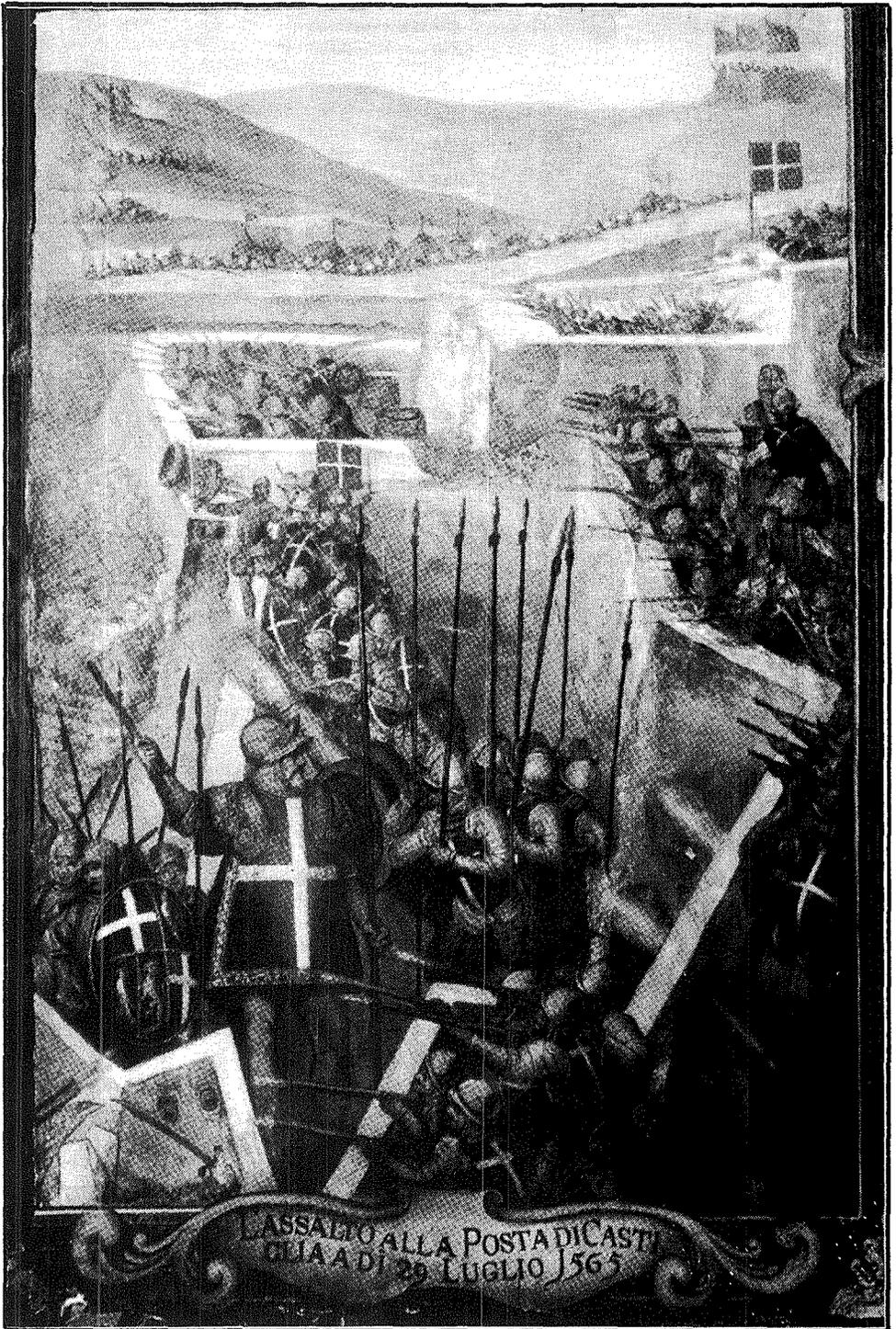
The Little Relief Force arriving at Birgu on the 5th July, 1565

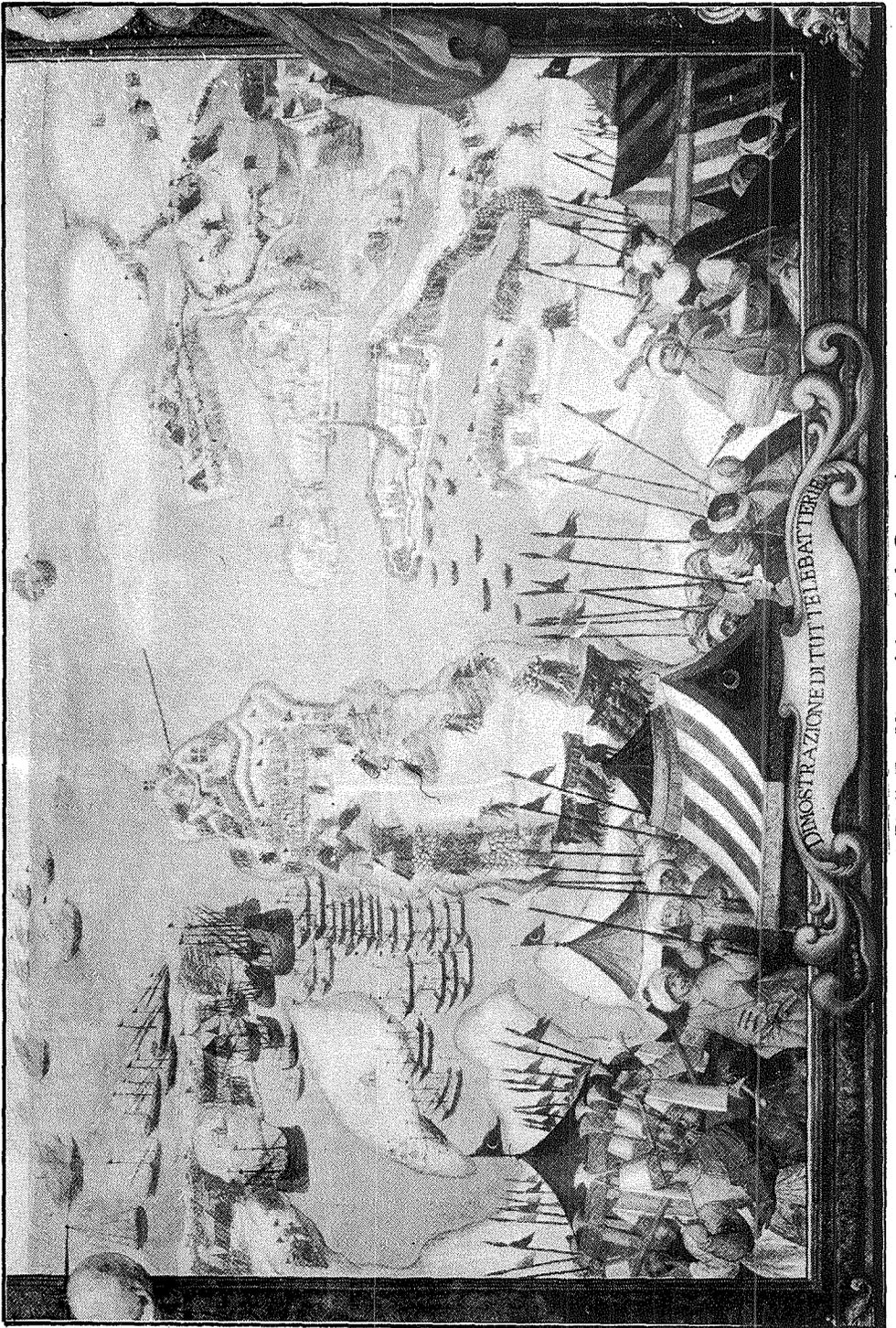


The Bombardment of the Post of Castille, July 9th 1565

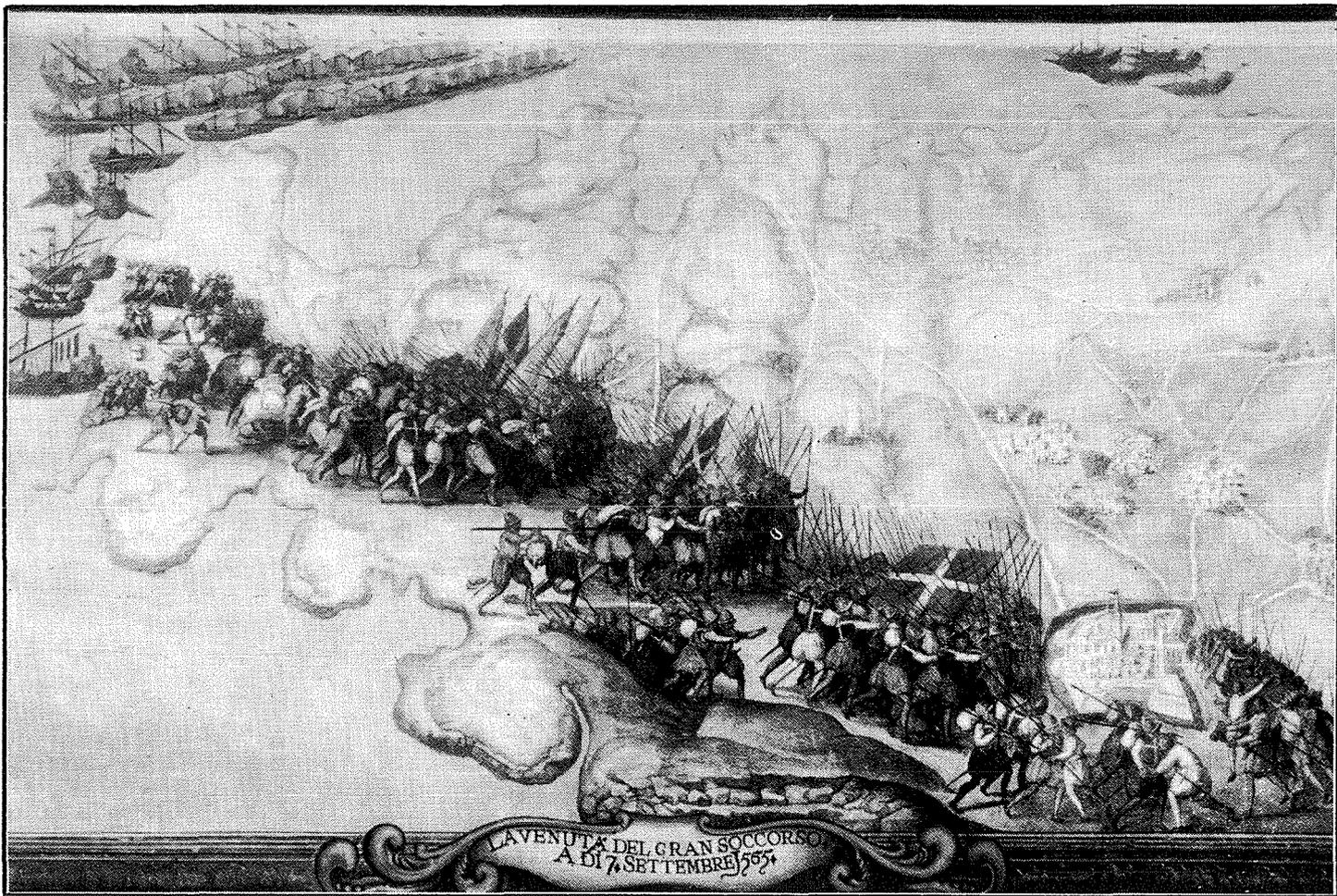


The Assault on St Michael by land and Sea, July 15th, 1565

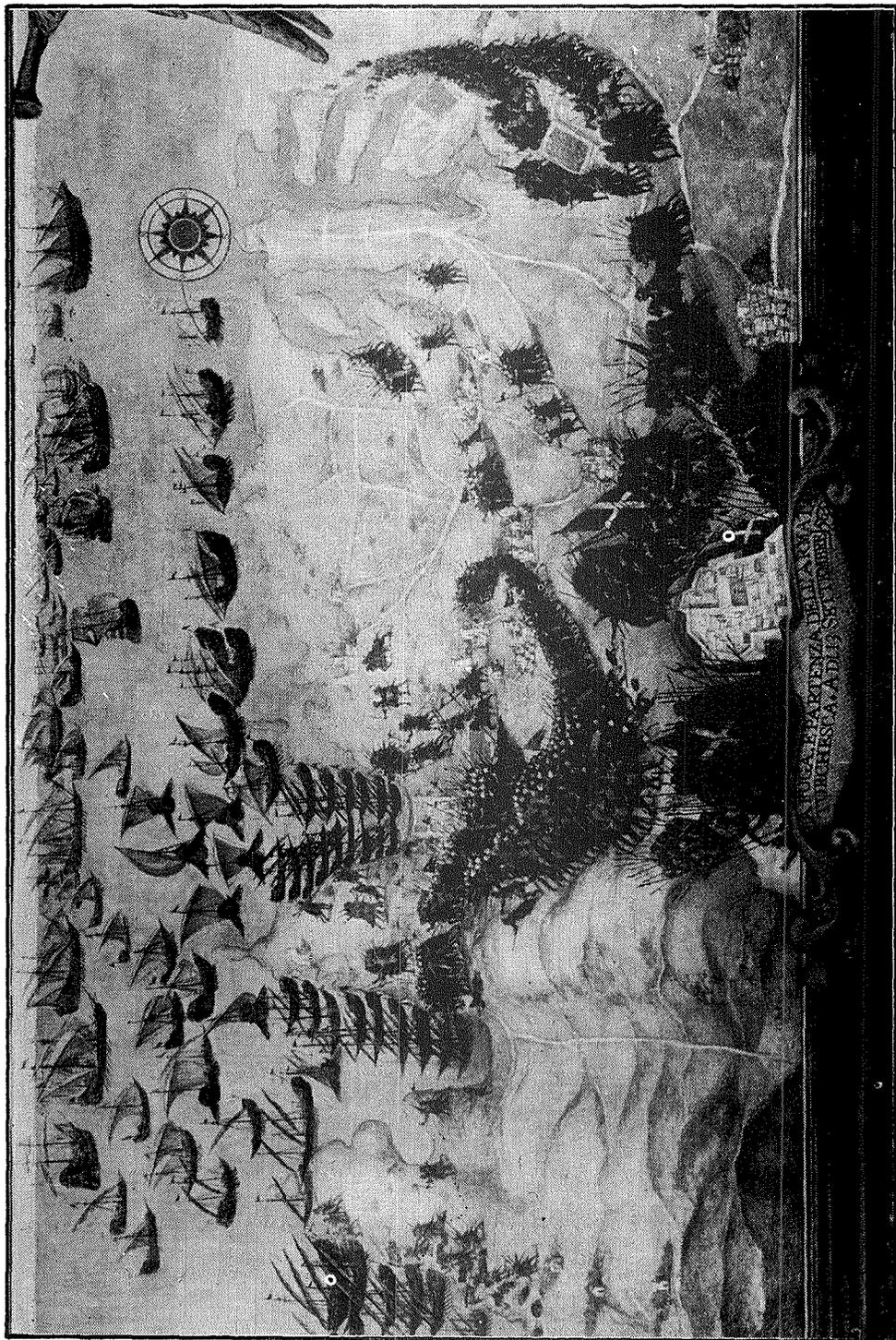




A Bird's Eye View of the whole Campaign



The Arrival of the Great Relief Force, September 7th, 1565



The Turkish Armada retreating on September 13th, 1565

VALLETTA, 19th December 1818.

*Sir,*

HIS EXCELLENCY THE GRAND MASTER OF THE MOST  
DISTINGUISHED ORDER OF St. MICHAEL AND St. GEORGE,

Having directed me to issue Tickets of Admission into the Hall of St.  
MICHAEL AND St. GEORGE, on Wednesday next the 16th instant,—I  
have the honor to inform you, that I have received orders to invite you to  
apply to me for the same.

*For your Obedient Servant*

I have the honor to be,

Your most obedient humble Servant,

To *Mardon Testaferrata Biani* F. RIVAROLA.

The Most Illustrious Dr Giuseppe Borg Olivier, President of the High Court of Appeal and Member of the Supreme Council of Justice, as Knight Grand Cross (GCMG).

The Most Illustrious Dr Raffaele Crispino Xerri, Member of the Supreme Council of Justice, as Knight Grand Cross (GCMG).

The Most Illustrious Dr Giuseppe Nicolo Zammit, one of His Majesty's Judges, as Knight Commander (KCMG).

Mr Richard Plashet, Chief Secretary to the Government of Malta, as Knight Commander (KCMG)<sup>21</sup>

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- 11 *Ibid*
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- 15 *Melita Historica* Vol 1 No 4 1955 – Sir Arturo Mercieca
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