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# Growing Up in Hospitaller Malta (1530-1798): Sources and Methodologies for the History of Childhood and Adolescence

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## ABSTRACT

The study of young people in the past is fraught with methodological problems and unearthing source material on children and adolescents can be problematic. It requires the adoption of a different set of lenses through which textual primary material can be viewed. This entails striving to recognise and release previously unheard voices. Furthermore, the textual material can be complemented by an array of visual and material objects that have preserved a certain image of children and adolescents in the past. This chapter commences with a brief outline of the methodological developments that have taken place in this field since Philippe Ariès's seminal book appeared in 1960, and traces the resulting changes and innovations that concern sources. In particular, it will underline the importance to historians of taking into account recent developments in the field of childhood archaeology. Furthermore, the fundamental role of religion in people's lives in early modern times necessarily influenced their upbringing. In turn, most of the sources that are available from this era – court records, statutes, paintings – were either produced by religious institutions, or were heavily influenced by religious beliefs. Thus, this chapter will strive to demonstrate how approaches used in one place can be adapted and used in different historiographical contexts, and how vital it is to adopt an interdisciplinary approach.

*L-istudju dwar it-tfulija u l-adoloxenza fil-passat ipogġi lill-istoriku biswit sfidi kbar fejn jidhol il-materjal li jista' jitfa' dawl fuq dawn, kif ukoll liema metodoloġija wiehed għandu juża sabiex jgħarbel u jifhem l-idea u l-esperjenza li tkun tifel / tifla u adoloxenti fl-imghoddi. Biex dan iseħħ hemm bżonn li wiehed iħares minn latt ieħor lejn id-dokumentazzjoni primarja halli ilhna differenti ikunu jistghu jinghatu widen. Barra minn hekk, l-informazzjoni li tinkiseb mid-dokumentazzjoni tista' tiġi kumplimentata minn*

*ghejun obra ta' taghrif, bhal ma huma pitturi u oġġetti obra materjali li jagħtuna impressjoni ta' kif it-tfal u l-adoloxenti kienu jidhru fl-imghoddi.*

*Għaldaqstant l-għan ta dan il-kapitlu hu li juri x'żviluppi sebhew f'dan il-qasam ta' studju minn mindu l-ktieb imporanti ta' Philippe Ariès deher għal ewwel darba fl-1960. Fuq kollox, ser tingħata attenzjoni lill-iżviluppi u bidliet li qed ikun hemm fil-mod u it-tip ta' ghejun ikkonsultati. Barra minn hekk, żviluppi riċenti fl-arkoloġija tat-tfulija joffru numru ta' ideat li l-istoriċi jistgħu jaddattaw fl-istudji tagħhom. Wiehed irid ukoll jiftakar li kull aspekk tal-hajja fil-perjodu modern bikri kien influwenzat mit-twemmin reliġjuż u li dan kien jaffetwa kif wiehed kien jitrabba u jgħix. L-importanza tar-reliġjon f'dan iż-żmien tisser ukoll li hafna mill-ghejun storiċi – bhal ma huma dokumenti tal-qradi, statuti, pitturi, etc. – kienu magħmula u mahruġa minn istituzzjonijiet reliġjużi. Anke meta l-ghejun ma kinux magħmula direttament mill-Knisja xorta tinhas l-influwenza tar-reliġjon. Dan kollu jiġi mwiežen f'dan il-kapitlu, li ser ukoll juri kif metodoloġiji użati f'kuntest storiku partikolari jistgħu jiġu addatti għal kuntest Malti, speċjalment meta wiehed ihares lejn is-suġġett b'mod inter-dixxiplinarju.*

*Dan l-artiklu huwa maqsum f'żewġ partijiet. Fl-ewwel nofs tingħata harsa lejn tip ta' metodoloġija msejja 'Vocabulary of Age' ('Vokabularju taż-Żmien') li ġiet użata minn Paul Griffiths għall-Ingilterra fi żmien modern bikri, u minn Ilaria Taddei għal Firenze fi żmien ir-Rinaxximent. It-tfixxija għall-vokabularju taż-żmien Malti tgħina niġmu l-ideat u l-esperjenzi tat-tfulija u l-adoloxenza f'Malta fi żmien il-Kavallieri ta' San Ġwann. Fit-tieni nofs tal-kapitlu jiġu diskussa ghejun mhux miktuba (bhal fdalijiet arkeoloġiċi u pitturi) u metodoloġiji, li flimkien mad-dokumentazzjoni iwasslu sabiex tinbena stampa aktar shiħa. Fl-abharnett, dan l-artiklu jipprovdi qafas u gwida għal aktar ricerka u studju dwar it-tfal u l-adoloxenti fl-imghoddi ta' Malta.*

## INTRODUCTION

The pioneers and developers of childhood history – Philippe Ariès, Lloyd de Mause, Edward Shorter, Lawrence Stone, Peter Laslett, Georges Duby, Jacques Le Goff, David Herlihy, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, Jean-Louis Flandrin, James F. Traer, Michael Anderson, Linda Pollock and Alan Macfarlane – developed their ideas largely upon the basis of literary texts, polemics, biographies, diaries, letters, advice books, paintings and historical demography<sup>1</sup>. As regards early modern Malta, biographical material of the kind used by these authors proves to be elusive, possibly due to a lack of access to the private archives of families pertaining to sectors of society generally expected to keep diaries at the time. As for historical demography, there is a growing corpus of information that is being derived from parish registers, which is largely being generated through dissertations produced at the University of Malta<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, the information available so far is still limited in terms of quantity. New historiographical trends in the history of childhood and adolescence have tended to emphasize a redirection in

terms of the sources used. Thus, there has been a general shift away from the models described above, to an increasing use of legal documents, and in particular court records. Such documentation is considered to provide an intimate glimpse into the lives of diverse people, including those who would not normally leave records about themselves<sup>3</sup>. Young people from diverse social backgrounds fall squarely within the paradigm of those whose voices would not, by and large, have entered the historical record in any other way. Naturally, these two methodological approaches are not mutually exclusive. In fact, by combining methods and sources from across different disciplines and historiographical traditions it becomes possible to achieve a deeper and multifarious understanding of the subject under consideration<sup>4</sup>. Such an interdisciplinary approach helps historians to develop a child-centred analysis and methodology.

### A 'VOCABULARY OF AGE'

Nine years after the commencement of the building of Valletta, an Apostolic Delegate – Mons. Pietro Dusina – was sent by Rome to Malta in 1575 to report on the state of the Church on the islands. He observed that in Valletta no catechism was taught because there were so few children<sup>5</sup>. In 1632, a particularly detailed population census was carried out through which it is possible to observe how dramatically the situation had changed. By then, Valletta had a population of 8,000, eleven percent of which were children under the age of five. At this point, the population of Malta and Gozo was about 51,750, with fourteen out of every one hundred persons being under the age of five<sup>6</sup>. If one then envisions all those between the ages of six and sixteen, who were not recorded as a separate category, the presence of children and adolescents as a proportion of the wider population becomes considerable. Furthermore, estimates (that can vary between nineteen and thirty-six percent<sup>7</sup>, and between forty and sixty-five percent<sup>8</sup>) show that in most documented societies, be they foragers or industrialised nations, children constitute a significant demographic component. Nevertheless, children and adolescents remain largely invisible in the historical record of early modern Malta, partly because of a persistent difficulty in picking them out and identifying them.

A child or an adolescent is an individual at a certain stage in the life cycle, but who that person is and how others perceive him or her is all relative to context, circumstances, personal perceptions and actions. In Hospitaller Malta, an educated group of clerks, notaries, magistrates and administrators, who were responsible for drawing up early modern documentation, tended to show an awareness of children and adolescents as a category set apart from adults by virtue of their young age. A link was perceived between age, the development of reason, the ability to take on adult roles, and the capacity for decision-making. Thus, this part of the chapter deals with inferences that can be obtained from the way in which young people were spoken of. Ariès consulted the registers of colleges with an eye for the correlation between a pupil's age and school

class. His argument hinged on the equation that the rise of a concept of childhood was linked to the rise of a schooling system that excluded adults<sup>9</sup>. However, this methodological aspect of his work tends to be sidelined as attention is mostly focussed on his use of visual evidence and the reactions this elicited<sup>10</sup>. This part of the discussion seeks to tease out the correlation between age and ideas about children and adolescents so as to identify a ‘vocabulary of age’ used to describe and discuss young people.

The idea of a ‘vocabulary of age’ is derived from the work of Paul Griffiths on youths in early modern England, and from the study by Ilaria Taddei of 14th- and 15th-century children and adolescents in Florence<sup>11</sup>. What Griffiths means by a vocabulary of age is that significant age-titles like ‘child’ and ‘wench’, which derive directly from the life-course, and which often appear in judicial records, can be taken as gauges of societal attitudes towards children and adolescents<sup>12</sup>. On the other hand, Taddei highlights how even though the language that designated age was often imprecise, it nonetheless reflected certain ideas about the significance of age, particularly on a juridical plain<sup>13</sup>. Age was a crucial criterion for attaining social and political roles<sup>14</sup>. This chapter adapts Griffiths’s conceptual tool of a vocabulary of age, and Taddei’s ideas about age and law, to Hospitaller Malta. In all three cases, an important limitation is that it is not very common to discover a precise age attached to these titles; however, by combining evidence from various archives, a sample can be elicited. Admittedly the sample is not large or exhaustive, but it does convey an impression of the sentiments and conceptualisations of those in positions of power or who held public offices, as they resorted to a vocabulary of age<sup>15</sup>. The results are set out in Table 1. The sample is made up of 28 references from the Archives of the Order of St John (A.O.M.) held at the National Library of Malta (N.L.M.), 22 references from the Archives of the Inquisition (A.I.M.) held at the Cathedral Archives of Mdina, Malta (C.A.M.), 51 references from the *Magna Curia Castellaniae* (M.C.C.), and 5 from the *Libri dei Carcerati*, both held at the National Archives of Malta (N.A.M.), and 50 references from the manuscripts of eight different notaries held at the Notarial Archives, Valletta, Malta (N.A.V.). Thus, the sources for this study in general, and for the vocabulary of age in particular, are of a legal nature. Court records provide the broadest access to a wide range of historical actors, including those whose voice would not otherwise have entered the historical record<sup>16</sup>. Conversely, notaries formed an intimate and integral part of Mediterranean medieval and early modern societies, so that the records produced by them are crucial to the reconstruction of these same societies<sup>17</sup>. The Archives of the Order of St John, then, present a different sort of dynamic. This is because, as the archives of a sovereign military-religious institution, they contain material that covers a vast chronological expanse and deal with the Order’s own affairs and its rule over Malta.

Age	Alunno	Alunna	Bambina	Creatura	Fanciullo	Fanciulla	Figlio	Figlia	Figliolino	Figliolina	Figliolo	Figliola	Giovane	Giovanetta	Puella	Ragazzo	Ragazza	Servo	Serva	Verginella / Zitella	Total	
Womb																						
0-1			1	1																		2
1							1															2
2			2				1	2	1			1	1									8
3				1							2	2										5
4							1	4											1			6
5								1			1	1				1						4
6					1		2				1	1										5
7	1	1					2	1				2										7
8					1	1	2					1	1			1	1	1				9
9							1					1						1	1			4
10							3	2			1		1					1	1	2		11
11							3	4							1			2	1			11
12							7	2			1					1		3	1			15
13							3	1				1				1	1	1		1		9
14							5	2			1					2			1			11
15							3	1			1					1		1	2			9
16							4	3					2			2						11
17							1	1					1			1			1	1		6
18							4						1			5		1	2			13
19								1					1			1						3
20	1						1					1				1						4
Total	2	1	3	4	2	1	44	23	2	1	8	11	7	1	14	5	1	11	11	4		

Table 1. The Vocabulary of Age in Hospitaller Malta.

In order to keep Table 1 to a manageable size, words used in the plural were merged with the singulars. So for example, *figli* was merged with *figlio*<sup>18</sup>. On the other hand, the diminutives derived from *figlio/a*, that is *figliolino/a* and *figliolo/a*, were entered separately. The terms *figliolino/a* were associated exclusively with the tender age of two. On the other hand, the use of *figliolo/a* was more widespread over the age cohort. *Figliolo/a* – along with *puella*<sup>19</sup> in the case of females – often served as alternatives to the more predominant *figlio/a*. This data depicts a slightly higher interest in associating the age-title of a male with his age. Thus, although there are only 8 male age-titles out of a total of 21, the age for males was given 82 times, as opposed to 71 times for 12 different female age-titles. *Bambina*, *creatura*<sup>20</sup>, and *figliolino/a* were exclusively associated with the age bracket stretching from conception to the age of five. *Alunna*, *fanciullo/a*, *giovanetta*, *ragazza* and *verginella*<sup>21</sup> were exclusively associated with the age bracket six to ten. The other age-titles are roughly spread over the entire age bracket in the table, with the exceptions of *zitella*, which does not occur above the age of ten, and *puella*, which does not occur above the age of eleven<sup>22</sup>. The single most commonly used age-title was *figlio*, and the highest concentration was at the age of twelve, which was also the age most frequently noted down.

In broad terms, these sources ascribed eighteen as the age of majority, and those who were under eighteen years of age were considered to be young<sup>23</sup>. In a number of notarial transactions involving land, sons were empowered to act by virtue of their having reached the age of eighteen, described explicitly as the age of majority<sup>24</sup>. Yet it is also clear that the ages of sixteen<sup>25</sup> and fourteen (designated in one case as the age of puberty<sup>26</sup>), together with marriage customs, were significant in determining phases and notions of childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Behaviour was another way of gauging one's age and what was expected of a person. Some ways of behaving were deemed to be childish, and noise-making topped the list. When in 1778, the Hospitaller Fra Don Antonio Ribay, conducted an inspection of *Santo Spirito* Hospital (in Rabat, Malta) for women and foundlings, he suggested that the age of admittance for ill girls be reduced from ten years to eight years. This was to be done "as long as they take the medicines prescribed to them by their doctors and as long as they remain calm without making any of those noises, lamentations and fracasas that are normal to persons of their age"<sup>27</sup>. In the case of the Holy Infirmary – the main hospital in Malta run by the Hospitallers themselves – it was established that in order for discipline to be maintained, no boys under the age of seven were to be admitted for treatment<sup>28</sup>.

The precision of age recording in the past has been questioned and it has been argued that its mention in documents should be regarded with caution due to the possibility of slippery memories. Moreover, numeracy, like literacy, was an art that had to be acquired<sup>29</sup>. Substantiation of such a claim can be found in a case brought before the *Magna Curia Castellaniae* (the secular law court) on 23 August 1680, when the same young boy who featured in the matter in question was alternately described as being

six, ten and eight years old<sup>30</sup>. Faced with such imprecision, the historian has to delve deeper into the text and look expressly for words and phrases that were in use and that denoted the state of being a child or an adolescent. Such a list of words and phrases is given in Table 2. Thus, when the age of a person was not stated, the use of certain words, or age-titles, denoted one's tender or youthful age: *fanciulezza* (childhood), *pueritia* (childhood / boyhood), *picciulta* (childhood), *putti* (young children), *giovani* (youth / youthful), and most frequently the phrase *di minor eta* (being a minor)<sup>31</sup>.

Word / Phrase	Meaning	Reference ( <i>inter alia</i> )
<i>picciulta</i>	childhood	Cathedral Archives of Mdina, Malta, Criminal Proceedings, Vol. 38A, Case 302, 21 August 1617, f.45 <sup>r</sup> .
<i>era piccolo</i>	he was young	Cathedral Archives of Mdina, Malta, Criminal Proceedings, Vol. 86A, Case 364, 16 July 1687, f.360.
<i>fanciulezza</i>	childhood	National Archives of Malta, <i>Magna Curia Castellaniae, Processi Criminali</i> 92/04, Box 27, Doc. 26, 14 Dec 1589 – 15 Jan 1590, f.10 <sup>r</sup> .
<i>pueritia</i>	boyhood	National Archives of Malta, <i>Magna Curia Castellaniae, Processi Criminali</i> 92/04, Box 27, Doc. 26, 14 Dec 1589 – 15 Jan 1590, f.10 <sup>r</sup> .
<i>minore dece et octo anni</i>	under 18 years of age	National Archives of Malta, <i>Magna Curia Castellaniae, Processi Criminali</i> 92/04, Box 141, Doc. 26, 11 Aug 1640, f.6 <sup>r</sup> .
<i>in pupillarj etate</i>	in the age of childhood	Notarial Archives Valletta, Malta, Notary N. de Agatiis, R202/4, 1540, ff.131-132 <sup>r</sup> .
<i>l'eta piu tenera delli sedici anni compliti</i>	under 16 years of age	National Library of Malta, Libr. 174, f.19v, Clause 49.
<i>gl'anni della puberta' (cioe a dire dall'anno 14<sup>o</sup> compito)</i>	the years of puberty (that is from when the fourteenth year is attained)	National Library of Malta, Archives of the Order of Malta 1678, f.45.

Table 2. Words and phrases that denote childhood and adolescence in Hospitaller Malta.

On the other hand, evidence related to the slave population indicates that where there was a financial incentive, the age of the individual concerned was meticulously recorded (Table 3). The price of slaves was determined by the market situation and the qualities of the individual slaves<sup>32</sup>. These factors acted as a catalyst for accuracy and detail, which attest to a sophisticated level of numeracy and literacy. Moreover, because most transactions concerning slaves were carried out between two parties – seller and buyer, testator and heir, and so on – one kept an eye on the other to ensure precision and avoid fraudulent practices. What all this data demonstrates is that among the different sectors of society in Hospitaller Malta, there was undoubtedly a consciousness of childhood and adolescence as distinct stages of life. The vocabulary of age and the age-titles analysed



here reflect the perceptions both of those who drew up the documentation, as well as those – both high and low – who would have described them in an oral manner.

Name of Slave Child / Adolescent	Description	Gender	Age of Slave Child / Adolescent	Value
--	A black slave mother and her son	M	4	28 <i>uncie</i>
Georgio	A black slave mother and her baby boy	M	Baby	26 <i>uncie</i>
Helena	A black slave mother and her baby girl	F	Baby	--
--	Two Ethiopian boys	M	11 and 9	70 <i>scudi</i>
Francesco	--	M	15	17 <i>uncie</i>
--	--	F	18	10 <i>scudi</i>
Galia	A white infidel Tunisian	F	11	19 <i>uncie</i>
Axa	A white Moor	F	14	18 <i>scudi</i>
--	An infidel Moor	M	12	--
Fatima	A white Moor	F	15	20 <i>uncie</i>
Johanna	A black slave	F	18	--
Fatima	A white Moor	F	10	50 <i>scudi</i>
Xamet	A black slave	M	18	50 <i>scudi</i>
--	An infidel Tunisian	M	11	--
Catherina	A black slave	F	15	44 <i>ducati</i>
Joanna	An Ethiopian mother and her daughter	F	9	--
Xadra	An Ethiopian slave	F	14	130 <i>scudi</i>
Bologna	A Christian slave	F	17	160 <i>scudi</i> and 6 <i>tareni</i>
--	--	F	9	--
--	A Moor	F	2	--
Della de Mandra	An eunuch	M	13	--
Ahmude	A Moor couple and their son	M	10	--
Fatima and Chalima	A slave couple and their two daughters	F	5 and 2	--
Fatima and Michamit	A white female slave and her two children	M and F	8 and 11	--
--	A young female slave	F	--	49 <i>scudi</i>
Muhammet	Sick slave boy	M	12	--
Ignatio di Giuynari	A Christian slave boy	M	13	110 <i>scudi</i>
Vasilij Ustamamet	A Turkish slave	M	10	50 <i>scudi</i>
Issecin Cader Ogli	A Turkish slave	M	8	40 <i>scudi</i>
Isseyen Mustafa	A Turkish slave	M	12	50 <i>scudi</i>

Table 3. A list of some slave children and adolescents. (This sample is made of up 10 references from the Archives of the Order of St John, 3 references from the Cathedral Archives of Mdina, Malta, and 17 references from the Notarial Archives, Valletta, Malta).

Hence, an essential factor that needs to be taken into account here is the difference that existed between the language spoken and the language in which these documents were written. Most people in early modern Malta – especially in the rural districts – spoke only Maltese, with a possible smattering of Italian. Maltese is a Semitic language very

different from Italian and in the early modern period this difference was starker than it is today. Until the late 18th century Maltese remained a largely unwritten language, with no grammar or official orthography. It therefore follows that whereas people gave witness in Maltese, the clerks of the law courts and notaries wrote everything down in Italian or Latin. The only exceptions would be words for which no equivalent could be found in Italian or Latin, and these were not very common. There is, therefore, a certain disjunction between the sources and those they speak about. Nonetheless, through a process of inferring, it is possible to get to at least some of the original Maltese words that would have been used to describe children and adolescents. In 1796, the Maltese scholar Michaele Antonio Vassalli, published the first dictionary of Maltese, giving the Latin and Italian equivalents of words<sup>33</sup>. It emerges that many of the words in use towards the end of the 18th century are the same words that are still in use in Maltese today<sup>34</sup>. Table 4 is a summary of all the Italian and Latin age-titles found in the sources consulted for this chapter; wherever an equivalent was found in Vassalli’s dictionary, this is reproduced in square brackets next to the word concerned.

Masculine	Feminine	Plural Masc.	Plural Fem.	Plural
alunno	alunna	alunni	alunne	--
bambino [tarbía / tyfel ɕkejken]	bambina	bambini	bambine	--
bastardo	bastarda	--	--	bastardi
bastaso	--	--	--	--
creatura		--	--	--
--	--	--	--	esposti
figlio / filius	figlia / filia	figli	figlie	--
figliolo	figliola	figliolini	figliole	--
figliolino	figliolina	figliolini	figlioline	--
fanciullo [tarbía / tyfel]	fanciulla [tyflae]	fanciulli	fanciulle	--
giovane [ɕebb]	giovannetta [ɕebba]	--	--	giovannitti / juvenij [ɕbÿb]
infantibo [tarbía / tyfel ɕkejken]	--	--	--	infanti / infantes
--	--	gaczunj	--	--
novitio	--	novizij	--	--
--	--	orfani	orfane	--
piccolo	--	--	--	--
paggio	--	paggi	--	--
puer [tyfel]	puella [tyflae]	--	--	--
pichottu	pichotta	--	--	--
putto [tyfel ɕkejken]	--	--	--	putti
ragazzo [tyfel]	ragazza [tyflae]	ragazzi	ragazze	--
schiaivo / schiavotto	--	--	--	--
servo	serva	--	--	servuli
--	--	sculari	--	--
--	verginella	--	verginelle / vergini	--
--	zitella	--	zitelle	--

Table 4. Some age-titles in Maltese.

By combining this evidence it is possible to assert the ancient origin of these words and the very great likelihood that they were the actual Maltese words uttered in the law courts and in front of notaries during the period being investigated here.

In the Inquisitorial Records – but not in the *Magna Curia Castellaniae* – stillborn and unbaptised children were referred to as *creaturae* (creatures). Hence, in one instance, a woman described how she had lost a creature that had only had a five-month period of gestation<sup>35</sup>. Significantly, when the midwife Magdalena Bongiorno was brought before the Inquisitor accused of having clandestinely baptised a Jewish baby, the infant was referred to as a *creatura* in the court records until that point in the narrative where it was baptised, and henceforth described as a *bambina*<sup>36</sup>. She was therefore literally elevated from the status of a creature to that of a human girl. Baptism thus made the life or death of an infant a more significant event with wider social implications. In a Europe characterised by a heightened sense of religious sensibility, infant baptism was a cornerstone for practically every denomination. All Christians were gravely concerned about the question of children and the afterlife<sup>37</sup>. At the same time, baptism into one faith rather than another was an important social marker of a family's and a whole community's sense of their own identity. However, in some cases, even after baptism, a three-year-old child could be described as a *creatura*, the reason for this apparently being the fact that the child had some sort of physical malformation<sup>38</sup>. *Creatura* therefore was an age-title of the vocabulary of age that denoted perceived states of imperfection – both spiritual (lack of baptism) and physical (a disability).

Consequently, the conceptual world of magistrates, notaries, clerks and administrators (who drew up these documents) included a vocabulary of age, which placed people in age groups and helped to construct borders between them<sup>39</sup>. Such notions were determined through a complex interaction between laws, age, gender, social background, mores and values. A vocabulary of age helps to deal with the question of the relationship and interaction between children, adolescents, social change and the family. It therefore addresses in a practical manner the problem of identifying children and adolescents in the historical record. Age, though often ill defined, was a crucial criterion in determining notions of adequate behaviour, responsibility and obligation. In order to arrive at a proper comprehension of the correlation between age and ideas about growing up, language – particularly that which is derived from legal records – is particularly important. Though there is a certain chasm between what was spoken and what was written, the gap can be bridged. Furthermore, religion moulded the vocabulary of age in terms of what people thought and said, as well as the way such ideas were collected in the records of institutions created by the church, or which were heavily influenced by religious beliefs.

## NON-WRITTEN SOURCES

In the late 1970s, the chance discovery of a trail of hominid footprints about 3.6 million years old at Laetoli in Tanzania, Africa, caused a sensation. This discovery had an added sense of magic to it because it was observed that there was also a smaller set of footprints, very likely to pertain to a child<sup>40</sup>. Images of a prehistoric human child amusing itself by stepping into its parent's footsteps were soon evoked and form a charming part of a famous story that is recounted even in children's books<sup>41</sup>. Such a story alerts researchers to the importance of looking out for non-written sources – material objects – that hold important clues about young people in the past. Furthermore, the early modern period witnessed an increase in the desire and the capacity of larger numbers of people to acquire and own things. This fact by itself points to the importance of considering non-written sources in an investigation of childhood and adolescence in this period. Therefore, material objects complement in a crucial way the findings of the largely textual methodology discussed in the preceding section of this chapter.

With regards to material objects, one of the major concerns of recent archaeologists has been to go beyond the assumption that a small object equals a child's object. When this assumption is made the object gets relegated to the "frivolous playful world" of the child and its possibly wider function is ignored<sup>42</sup>. Young people have generally been an understudied arena of historical archaeology, being usually discussed in terms of presence or absence at a particular site, rather than as engaged social actors in their own right<sup>43</sup>. One of the key ways to address this is to give adequate consideration to context and agency. This involves understanding the social situation of children and adolescents in the past on its own terms, rather than through modern pre-conceived notions of life<sup>44</sup>. It also means allowing young people in the historical record to acquire agency by recognising that they could take responsibility for their own actions and seize the initiative, rather than being mere passive recipients of the ideas of adult society. In this regard, material remains pose some of the more challenging interpretative questions. This is because it is difficult for modern Western researchers to distance themselves from a very particular and ingrained idea of childhood as a time of innocence and dependency, which idea was not necessarily present in past societies where young people tended to be much more integrated into the society around them<sup>45</sup>. Thus, objects identified as pertaining to children and adolescents tend to be seen as "by-products of parents" attempts to instil values in their children, not as statements made by children<sup>46</sup>. Consequently, the term "adult" is set as diametrically opposed to "child" and "adolescent", creating clear-cut age boundaries where a more fluid understanding would be more appropriate<sup>47</sup>. A common consequence of this is that the young are reduced to being appendages to women, particularly their mothers, while the relationship between them is not adequately considered<sup>48</sup>. These are all considerations that historians need to make as well.

Ideas about gender and age, and how these mould children and adolescents, who in turn react to them, have produced key approaches to tackling the many issues raised above. “Gender”, “childhood”, and “adolescence” are cultural constructs that ascribe specific roles, activities and behaviours to individuals according to their biological sex and age<sup>49</sup>. During childhood, people are socialised into the social and gender roles they are expected to take up throughout their lives. Gender and age are therefore an analytical pair that are essential in order to comprehend contemporary prescribed ideas and young people’s reaction and adaptation to such mores<sup>50</sup>; they also assist modern researchers in being alert to his / her own pre-conceived notions when approaching the past. Nevertheless, whereas the body is central to the understanding of the young, it should not be the main object of investigation to the exclusion of the wider cultural and material environment<sup>51</sup>. From birth to death and burial, people are immersed in the material world; children and adolescents handle, produce, break, and react to the whole range of objects around them, and not just those intended (or considered to have been intended) specifically for them<sup>52</sup>. This is why non-written sources are so central to an investigation of the experience of growing up in the past in Malta and elsewhere. In this vein, a project that could be pursued would be the archaeological excavation of the former cemetery of the *Sacra Infermeria* [Holy Infirmary] in Valetta<sup>53</sup>. It would seem that a whole section of this cemetery was reserved for the burial of children who died whilst at the Holy Infirmary<sup>54</sup>. By integrating documentary sources from the records of the Holy Infirmary with the archaeological finds, such a project could potentially yield highly significant long-term information about young people in early modern Malta.

Conversely, paintings probably constitute one of the most versatile and as yet untapped sources of information on childhood and adolescence in early modern Malta. Contemporary paintings often give priceless insights into ways of dressing, games and material culture in general, which the written sources may fail to capture so vividly. Ariès made extensive use of visual evidence, although much of his methodology is now considered to have been inadequate<sup>55</sup>. There is now a far greater awareness of the conceptual tools that need to be brought to bear on pictorial evidence, not to mention the increased importance of other material objects such as toys and furniture<sup>56</sup>. Ariès also argued that prior to the 17th / 18th centuries, children had only been represented in art as miniature adults, an assumption that has been taken for granted as often as it has been challenged. In 4th century BC Greece, for instance, children were represented in a life-like manner, and not as small adults. Certain positions were attributed to them, such as sitting or crawling, and distinctions were also made between children of different ages. Hence, the proportions of the body and the depicted clothes varied according to whether one was a very young child or an adolescent boy or girl<sup>57</sup>. In medieval times, there were subtle innovations in the way children were represented, caused by a reevaluation of Aristotle and a consequent new importance being attributed to the senses and to movement<sup>58</sup>. The 18th-century, then, saw the birth of the visual genre of childhood

innocence in the works of elite 18th-century British portrait painters such as Sir Joshua Reynolds, Thomas Gainsborough and Sir Henry Raeburn<sup>59</sup>. This particular way of looking at young people continues to prevail to this day. Despite the fact that paintings are commissioned and produced by adults, they still reveal a lot about the presentation and perception of childhood and adolescence in various settings<sup>60</sup>. In the case of early modern Malta, the paintings and statues in churches that depict Jesus, Mary and John the Baptist as children, images of noble children, as well as surviving costumes from the era, are crucial non-written sources for the study of ideas about the experience of growing up in Hospitaller Malta.

## CONCLUSION

The approaches developed and used by Griffiths and Taddei to analyse understandings of age in early modern in England and Renaissance Florence respectively, yielded fascinating results when transferred to the Maltese historical context. The vocabulary of age method is flexible enough to be tailored to different historical and historiographical settings, depending on which sources are available. In the case of Hospitaller Malta, religious institutions generated most of the sources utilized here. The Order of St John, a religious corporation, not only produced its own archive, but it also established the *Magna Curia Castellaniae* to administer the judicial system in Malta. On the other hand, the records of the Inquisition were produced by a tribunal of the Roman Catholic Church and so bear a very strong religious imprint on them. Notarial documents, though not produced directly by a religious institution, were heavily influenced by the pervasive presence of religion in society, which is reflected in their content, particularly in the marking of events according to the liturgical calendar.

Children and adolescents formed an integral part of society at all levels – social, economic, religious and political. This is why it is so important for a historian to place young people at the heart of his / her analysis and methodology. While the vocabulary of age indicates the way children and adolescents were thought of and spoken about, non-written sources can illustrate what they looked like, how they behaved and their interaction with material culture. A historian studying young people needs to adopt an interdisciplinary approach, which allows him / her to attain an increased sensitivity to the processes and experiences of growing up. This, in turn, provides the possibility of developing explanations and interpretations that integrate disparate elements from the existing historical sources.

## NOTES

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- <sup>6</sup> J.F. Grima, *Żmien il-Kavallieri f'Malta, 1530-1798*, Malta 2001, p. 117.
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- <sup>15</sup> Griffiths, *Youth and Authority* cit., p. 24. N. Orme, *Medieval Children*, New Haven - London 2003, p. 309. Taddei, *Fanciulli e Giovani* cit., p. 35.
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- <sup>17</sup> C. Violante, *Atti Privati e Storia Medievale, Problemi di Metodo*, [Fonti e Studi del Corpus Membrarum Italicarum], Rome 1982.
- <sup>18</sup> *Figlio* is the Italian for 'boy / son', and *figli* is the plural form. *Figlia* means 'girl / daughter'.
- <sup>19</sup> *Puella* is the Latin for 'girl'.
- <sup>20</sup> *Bambina* is the Italian for 'girl'; *creatura* is the Italian for 'creature'.
- <sup>21</sup> *Alunna* is the Italian for an 'alumna'; *fanciullo/a* is the Italian for 'boy / girl'; *giovanetta* and *ragazza* are the Italian for a 'teenage girl'; *vergine* is the Italian for a 'young virgin'.
- <sup>22</sup> *Zitella* is the Italian for 'spinster'.
- <sup>23</sup> See for example: National Archives of Malta, *Magna Curia Castellaniae Processi Criminali* (hereafter N.A.M., M.C.C., P.C.) 92/04, Box 141, Doc. 26, 11 Aug 1640, f.6r.
- <sup>24</sup> Notarial Archives Valletta, Malta, Notary (hereafter N.A.V., Not.) Nicolo de Agatiis, R202/4, ff.86v-87v, 23 December 1539; R202/11, ff.177v-178, 1 March 1547; Not. Brandano de Caxaro, R175/42, ff.301v-302v, 22 October 1554, *passim*.
- <sup>25</sup> National Library of Malta (hereafter N.L.M.), Libr 174, f.19v, Clause 49.
- <sup>26</sup> National Library of Malta, Archives of the Order of Malta (hereafter N.L.M., A.O.M.) 1678, fo.45.
- <sup>27</sup> N.L.M., Univ. 44, f.9r, 4 November 1780, '... *purche queste si contino di prendere i remedj prescritti loro dai Medici e stiano quiete senza fare rumori, pianti e fracassi proprii all'eta loro* ...'
- <sup>28</sup> N.L.M., A.O.M. 249, f.249v, ca. 31 August 1795.
- <sup>29</sup> Griffiths, *Youth and Authority* cit., pp. 32-33.
- <sup>30</sup> N.A.M., M.C.C., P.C. 92/04, Box 219, Doc 9, ff.1r-2r.
- <sup>31</sup> *Inter alia*: N.A.M., M.C.C., *Cedulae Suppliche et Taxationes*, Vol. 3, ff.43r, November 1566. N.A.M., M.C.C., P.C. 92/04, Box 27, Doc. 26, 14 Dec 1589 - 15 Jan 1590, f.10r. Cathedral Archives of Malta, Archives of the Inquisition of Malta, Criminal Proceedings (hereafter C.A.M., A.I.M., C.P.), Vol.23A, Case 321, ff.323, 18 June 1601. Box 27, Doc. 26, ff.102v, 14 December 1589.
- <sup>32</sup> S. Bono, *I Corsari Barbareschi*, Turin 1964, p. 223.
- <sup>33</sup> M.A. Vassalli, *Ktjyb jil Kljym Malti, Mfjysser byl-Latin u byt-Taljan*, Rome 1796, pp. 81, 96, 108, 560, 631.
- <sup>34</sup> Making allowance for orthographical changes: for example, the letter 'c' now stands for the letter 'ç', and the letter 'x' now stands for the letter 'ç'.
- <sup>35</sup> C.A.M., A.I.M., C.P., Vol. 17, Case 105, ff.202v-203, 5 November 1593, '... *essa Benda disse che ["I]o ho desertato un masculo [or suaculo] et che era de creatura de mesi cinque [""]* ...'
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- <sup>48</sup> G. Lillehammer, 'The World of Children', in J. Sofaer Derevenski (ed.), *Children and Material Culture*, London - New York 2000, p. 17.
- <sup>49</sup> Wilkie, *Not Merely Child's Play* cit., p. 111; Baxter, *The Archaeology of Childhood* cit., pp. 2-3.
- <sup>50</sup> Baxter, *The Archaeology of Childhood* cit., pp. 17, 83.
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