

## **Madelaine Sacco (PhD History)**

### *Miracles and folklore: The Madonna in Maltese story and rhyme*

The Virgin Mary, known under various names and titles, plays a prominent role in the development of the Maltese national identity. An example of her influence within the Maltese tradition comes in the form of children's stories, in which children are encouraged to form a devotion to her from an early age. Through analysis of children's literature, we are able to form understandings of how identity is developed from a young age. Stories are used to impress ideologies upon youth regarding society (such as religion, place, cultural values, and history). While these ideologies form at a local/micro level, they also feed into larger national narratives through transmission.

The miracles performed by the Virgin Mary in the Maltese Islands are integrated into the history of the people and framed as folklore with respect to the above. Three such miracles are inscribed in the *leggendi Maltin* series by Paul Mizzi: 'Our Lady of the Grotto', 'Our Lady of Hope', and 'Our Lady of the Oil'. These narratives show an intertwining of various aspects of Maltese culture, not only in relation to religion (through the miracles performed by Mary), but in the emphasis of landscape and community, the documentation of historical practices, and the etiological underpinnings of modern-day ritual. The material culture of the storybooks themselves provide further opportunities for understanding the development of identity in children. Analysis of context and intertextuality of the material provides a dialogue between Maltese culture and ideology concerning the Virgin Mary outside of purely literary considerations.

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