

# CYPRUS SCENES

## The Ayia Solomoni Church



Picture: Tony Benson

As one walks along the road linking the town centre of Paphos with the port area, a curious sight meets the eye, a roadside tree with numerous pieces of cloth and old clothing draped over it. Closer investigation reveals a flight of some twenty steps leading down to an underground chamber, where the flickering light of many candles reveals frescoes on the walls. 'Ayia' is the word for a female saint, but who Solomoni was supposed to be I do not know. The burial chamber is traditionally the place of burial of seven members of the Maccabee family, martyred by Antiochus Epiphanes and later granted sainthood by the apostate church, and archaeologists believe that the chamber was used as a burial place in those times; but the idea that those Jewish patriots would have been buried here is, of course, nonsense.

The frescoes are dated to the twelfth century A.D., and since then the chamber has been used as a church. It has the reputation of being a holy site, and the pieces of cloth, mainly handkerchiefs, draped over the tree are there because the tree is regarded as holy, providing a cure for the ailments of those draping the tree with their handkerchiefs. Here is another example of pagan superstitions from Old Testament times being carried over into corrupt Christianity. The tree is a terebinth tree, found also in Israel, and otherwise known as the Atlantic pistachio. Many of the references to 'oaks' in the AV and other translations in fact relate to this species of tree, and sometimes they are referred to as well-known landmarks. Their use as places of idolatrous worship is attested in Ezekiel 6:13, which refers to "every thick oak" as places where the apostate Jews "did offer sweet savour to all their idols". On a Friday afternoon the place was deserted, but according to a local website an enactment of the Christmas nativity scene each December attracts many visitors.—*Tony Benson*