

A Century Ago

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Some centenaries and anniversaries that fell during 1998

300 years ago (1698)

In the afternoon of 12th April a hoard of Arab gold and copper coins was discovered at Mdina at a depth of 6-7 palmi while clearing rubble to enlarge the cathedral square. The copper vessel in which the thousands of coins were found is still preserved at the Mdina Cathedral Museum. Although the exact number was not given, the weight was stated as 35 libre arid 6 onze. Studies indicate that the spot was in front of what now is No.1 St. Paul Square, on cathedral property. The discovery was considered a miracle at the time, because the bishop and cathedral chapter were at a loss wherefrom they were to obtain funds for the rebuilding of the cathedral, destroyed in the 1693 earthquake. Since the Grand Master thought he should have a share, the pope was requested to give his ruling. He decided that the coins should be shared between the chapter and the inquisitor, the former to rebuild the cathedral and the latter to perform works of mercy. The coins were of Fatimid times. The inauguration of the Numismatics Section on 28th March 1998 at the Cathedral Museum, Mdina, proved to be an appropriate occasion 300 years later! (Ref. A)

100 years ago (1898)

John Henry Cooke continued his excavations in Ghar Dalam by digging his ninth trench, in which he found remains of a bear. He had been excavating the site since 1892.

Albert Mayr of Germany continued his excavations and studies of megalithic remains. Among other things he studied the so called "tower" (It-Torri) or *Il-Borg ta' L-Imramma* of *Ix-Xaghra l-Kbira* at Gebel Ta' Cenc, Gozo. It appears to have been first brought to his attention by the Jesuit Manwel Magri.

The first proper survey of the Abbatija tad-Dejr hypogeum was undertaken by Filippo Vassallo on 30th May 1898. Vassallo figures again in this centenary, since he made the drawings for the

lithographic plates appearing in the book published by Annetto Caruana also in 1898, *Ancient Pagan Tombs and Christian Cemeteries...* This important government publication contains 33 plates and 129 pages, (and sold for 8 shillings!). Apart from the general sections on tombs, it includes also a monograph on St. Paul's Catacombs and another on the Abbatija Tad-Dejr. The following year Caruana published a similar work on the pottery, this time painted by Giuseppe Call, because Filippo Vassallo had meanwhile died (Ref. B) Malta Archaeological Review. Issue 3 1999

75 years ago (1923)

Excavations started at both Ta' Hagraat Temples at Mgarr, and the Roman Villa at Rabat, and continued until 1926. Important finds from Mgarr which included some interesting stone blocks, and earthenware and red lamps from Rabat with interesting decorations and designs were placed in the Valletta Museum. (Ref.C)

60 years ago (1938)

On 24th February quaternary deposits were found in "Tal Gizzu" quarry at Mqabba. In June some silo shaped tombs were found at H' Attard) and several others found later. (Ref.D)

50 years ago (1948)

Six tombs dated as 4th century BC were excavated in Triq il-Liedna, Fgura, from 28th October to 21st December. (Ref.D)

25 years ago (1973)

Media reported discovery of silos at Marfa in October.

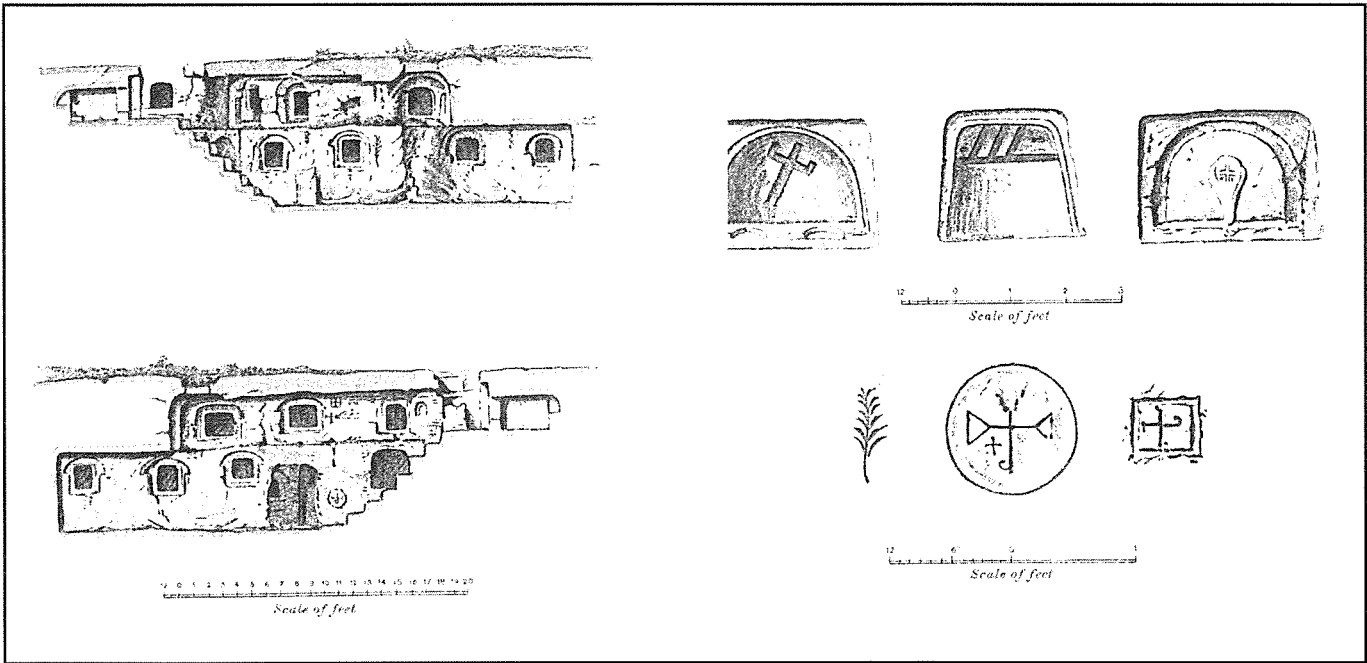
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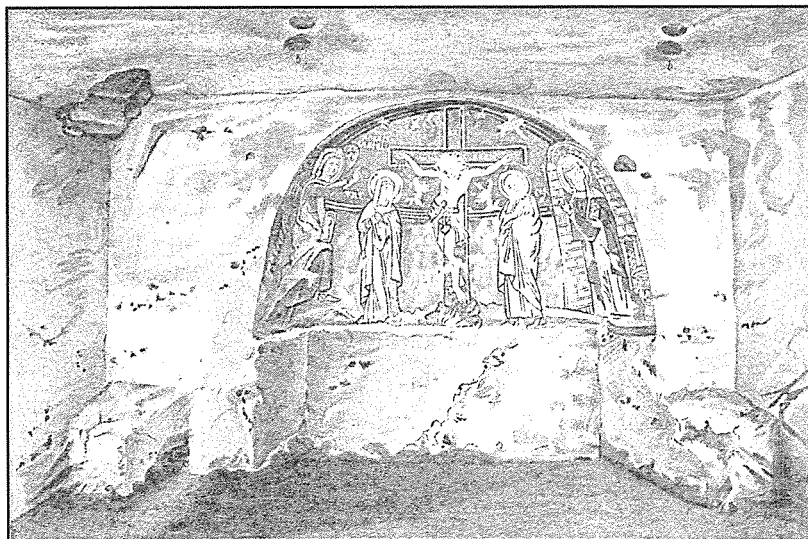
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Illustrations from A.A. Caruana *Ancient Pagan Tombs and Christian Cemeteries...*(1898). Lithographs based on drawings by Filippo Vassallo.



“Tal-Liebru” Catacombs



Fresco at Abbatiya tad-Dejr