

**FINAL REPORT ON 2016-17 EXCAVATIONS AT TELL
SUFAN, NABLUS, PALESTINE**

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Abstract:

Tell Sufan, also known as Tell Sofer, is located on the western side of the city of Nablus. An-Najah National University has been carrying out large-scale exploration projects at and around the site since summer, 1999. Excavations were preceded by detailed mapping of the site; it was subsequently divided into 625 squares. This was followed by a survey using shovel-tests in each square, and then full-scale excavations were carried out in two areas. Our research suggests the site was first settled in the early Bronze Age, and was occupied from the middle Bronze Age to the late Iron Age (8th century BCE). This was followed by a settlement gap during the Persian and Hellenistic eras among the major discoveries are Roman, Byzantine and early Islamic structures, among which we found numerous pottery vessels, and a coin. Our aim is to present a summary the results of the 2016–17 explorations at the site.

Keywords: Tell Sufan; Neapolis; Late Byzantine era; Archaeology; Palestine.

Site location and identification

Tell Sufan is located 1.5km west of the city of Nablus, and has a surface area of 15 donum (1.5 hectare) (Figs. 1-2). It is a low hill in an area where there are a number of archaeological sites that date back to different periods.

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Although the site is one of the earliest inhabited in the Nablus area, it does not appear in ancient sources, and the first specific reference to it was made in the 1880 Survey of Western Palestine in which it appears under the name of Saffin*. The first survey of the site was carried out by Böhl in 1931†. Hence, very little information has ever been written or published on the Tell. Israeli archaeologists have identified Tell Sufan as the site of Sofer (son of the biblical prophet Job)‡, but this attribution is clearly debatable and not supported by archaeological evidence. The Department of Archaeology at the An-Najah National University (ANU) subsequently became involved with the site.

Excavations: The first excavations undertaken by the ANU Department of Archaeology at Tell Sufan were carried out in 1999; during the excavations, the finding of storage jars and a pit dating to the late Bronze Age was recorded. These findings have not yet been confirmed by subsequent investigations.

Two excavation campaigns were later carried out by the author in 2016 and 2017. The combined aim was to collect information on the site and to provide training for students in archaeological procedures.

Chronology

Due to the fact that stratigraphic data was not recorded during the 1999 excavations, pottery dating from that time has to be considered provisional with more precise information to be established in future excavations. There is insufficient information on the pottery in the Nablus area to provide reliable substantiating evidence.

Our analysis of the pottery found during the 2016 and 2017 seasons is based on two site zones, Area A, comprising the south-eastern part of the Tell (not shown on the site grid), and Area B,

* Conder C.A. & Kitchner H.H. *Survey of Western Palestine 1882-1888*. Palestine Exploration Fund. 1880. Pp. : 45.

† Böhl, F.M. DE L. 1931. *Palästina in het licht der jongste opgravingen en onderzoekingen*,. Pp.: 65-67.

‡ Job 2.11, 11.1, 20.1, 42.9.

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found at the upper part of the site (Fig. 2). In order to organize the stratigraphic information we have dated the pottery using these two grid areas and the excavation loci as references.

The work began with the excavation of three grid squares in 2016 (14S, 15S and 15T), and another three in 2017 (16T, 17T, 16S); the six 5 m squares left 50 cm balks on each side making 4m squares.

Excavations 2016

We carried out excavations in Area B between 24/5/16 and 16/6/16, administered by the ANU Department of Tourism and Archaeology (Permission Number 2/ 2016 and Reference Number 181710/ 173220). The excavation manager was Loay Abu Alsud, the author of this report, the square supervisor was Atef Khwiereh, and the archaeological illustrator was I. Iqtait (Fig. 10).

The finds from the three squares we excavated, 14S, 15S, and 15T are as follows:

- An olive oil press (14S): We found a stone screw weight (length 1.5 m, diameter 1.1m) that seemed to have been moved a short distance from its original location (Fig. 3).
- A silo (15S): The silo is a circular structure with a diameter of 180 cm (Fig. 11).
- Pottery storeroom (15T): A number of earthenware jars were found, in pieces. (Fig. 11).
- Pottery: We found a large quantity of sherds – in total, 3,267 (Table 1); most of them belonged to jars translated from the local factory at Bisan (Scythopolis) (Fig. 9). They were found in Area B, in locus 4, in square 15T. The jars, of grey material with white lines and ribbing at the neck, were produced on a potter's wheel. Belonging to the late Byzantine era (5th-6th centuries AD), the jars would have been used for storage of agricultural products and olive oil

We also found an olive press near the pottery storeroom where the sherds were found. Only one sherds with geometric decoration and green paints were found – in the topsoil of square 15T. There are two undulating lines below two straight lines incised on the

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sherd (Fig. 6. 1-3, please see the identifiable sherds figs 12-15; tables 5 and 6).

Table 1. Potsherds from 2016 season

No	Square	Loci	Total Potsherds	Identifiable sherds
1	15T	Topsoil	4	2
2	15T	1	0	0
3	15T	2	0	0
4	15T	3	0	0
5	15T	4	8	8
6	14S	Topsoil	1861	227
7	14S	1	105	10
8	14S	2	0	0
9	14S	3	26	7
10	15S	Topsoil	682	42
11	15S	1	330	19
12	15S	2	0	0
13	15S	3	52	5
14	15S	4	42	5
15	15S	5	157	6
Total:			3267	331

Excavations 2017

We carried out excavations in Area B between 2/7/17 and 31/7/17, administered by the ANU Department of Tourism and Archaeology (Permission Number 1/ 2017 and Reference Number 181710/ 173220). The excavation manager was Loay Abu Alsud, the author of this report, and the square supervisor was Atef Khwierh. The archaeological illustrator was I. Iqtait (Fig. 11).

We excavated three squares 16T, 17T and 16S and a number of structures were identified including walls, a silo, a gate and a floor. Pottery found was mainly from the late Byzantine and early Islamic periods. A single coin was found (Table 2, 3). Pottery: We found a large quantity of sherds – in total, 6132 (Table 4); most of them belonged to jars translated from the local factory at Bisan (Scythopolis) and local potteries (Please see the identifiable sherds figs. 16-20; tables 7 and 8).

Coin Specifications

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The coin from the reign of Ummayyad Caliph Hisham Ibn Abd Al Malik (105-125 AH/724-743 AD) was found in Square 17T in Locus 2. The legend on the coin tells us it was struck in Wasit in 124 AH/741 AD. Wasit (واسط) is a city located east of Iraq. The Governor at that time was Yusuf Bin Amr Al Thaqafi, who had killed Zayd Bin Ali (great grandson of Ali Bin Abi Talib). (Fig. 10). The specifications follow:

Dirham of Caliph Hisham bin Abdul Malik

الله احد الله الصمد لم يلد و لم يولد و لم

Obverse Field:

لا اله الا الله وحده لا شريك له

There is no deity except (the one) God alone. He has no equal

Obverse Margin (triple borders with five annulets around):

بسم الله ضرب هذا الدرهم بواسط سنة اربع وعشرين ومئة

In the name of God. This Dirham was struck in Wasit in the year one hundred twenty four

Reverse Field:

الله احد الله الصمد لم يلد و لم يولد و لم يكن له كفوا احد

God is One God. The eternal and indivisible, who has not begotten, and has not been begotten and never is there His equal (112).

Reverse Margin (five annulets):

محمد رسول الله ارسله بالهدى و دين الحق ليظهره على الدين كله ولو كره المشركون

Muhammad is the messenger of God. He sent him with guidance and the true religion to reveal it to all religions even if the polytheists abhor it. (9.33)

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Weight: 2.90 g, **Diameter:** 25 mm, **Denomination:** Dirham,
Metal: AR, **Year:** 124 AH /741 AD), **Mint:** Wasit (Iraq).

Structures found in 2017 season

The walls, silo, gate and floor found in Squares 16S, 16T and 17T, were distributed as in Table 2 below :

Table 2. Structures found, 2017

No.	Stratum	Structure	Location in Square
1	Square 16S, Locus 1	Wall	Eastern side of square
2	Square 16S, Locus 2	Wall	Centre of square
3	Square 16S, Locus 3	Wall	Western side of square
4	Square 16S, Locus 4	Floor	Centre of square
5	Square 16T, Locus 1	Silo	Centre of square
6	Square 16T, locus 2	Gate	Leading to silo in the south
7	Square 16T, locus 3	Wall	Centre of square (north-south) near the silo
6	Square 16T, Locus 4	Wall	Southern side of square
9	Square 17T, Locus 1	Wall	Western side of square (extending north to south)
10	Square 17T, Locus 2	Floor	In the center of the square
11	Square 17T, Locus 3	Silo	Eastern side of square

Table 3. Artifacts found, 2017

Artifacts, 2017 Season			
N o.			Tools
1	Top Soil, Square 16S		Flint
2	16S		Pestle
3	16S		Mortar

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4	16 T	Nails
5	16 T	Oil Lamp (incomplete)
6	Square 16 T near locus 1 (the wall)	Mortar x 2

Table 4. Potsherds found, 2017.

No.	Square	Loci	Total Potsherds	Identifiable sherds
1	16T	Topsoil	2043	151
2	16T	1	582	98
3	16T	2	0	0
4	16T	3	451	83
5	16T	4	0	0
6	16T	5	0	0
7	16T	6	0	0
8	16T	7	0	0
9	16T	8	0	0
10	16T	9	142	5
11	16T	10	0	0
12	17T	Topsoil	549	55
13	17T	1	621	221
14	17T	2	0	0
15	17T	3	406	47
16	17T	4	299	45
17	16S	Topsoil	520	155
18	16S	1	0	0
19	16S	2	245	80
20	16S	3	58	17
21	16S	4	130	46
22	16S	5	86	22
23	16S	6	0	0
Total:			6132	1025

Conclusions

The pottery we analyzed, documented during the 2016 and 2017 excavation seasons at the Tell Sufan site comprised a large quantity of tableware and storage jars, other wares in lesser quantities, and a very small amount of cookware. We dated the majority of pieces discovered to the late Byzantine (450-638 AD) and early Islamic periods using archaeological information,

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comparing the pottery with other similar pottery from local and Mediterranean sites and referring to related literature. Storage jars and sherds from Tell Sufan were found to belong to the Umayyad and late Byzantine periods because of their close similarity to pottery from other sites in Palestine and Jordan.

The functional use of the pottery suggests that the site was used for pottery production during the periods of occupation, as well as agricultural activity. The pottery would have mainly been used for storage or transporting agricultural products or water. The olive oil press located near a Byzantine storage area indicates production of olive oil during the Byzantine period. Our chronology based on pottery analysis which is allowed us to date the site from Late Bronze Age and Iron Ages to the fifth and seventh centuries after Christ and early Islamic periods. We are able to conclude that the site dates to the Umayyad period due to the dating of the single coin found dating to Hisham Ben Abdel Malek Ben Marwan (724-743AD) (Fig. 9).

Figures

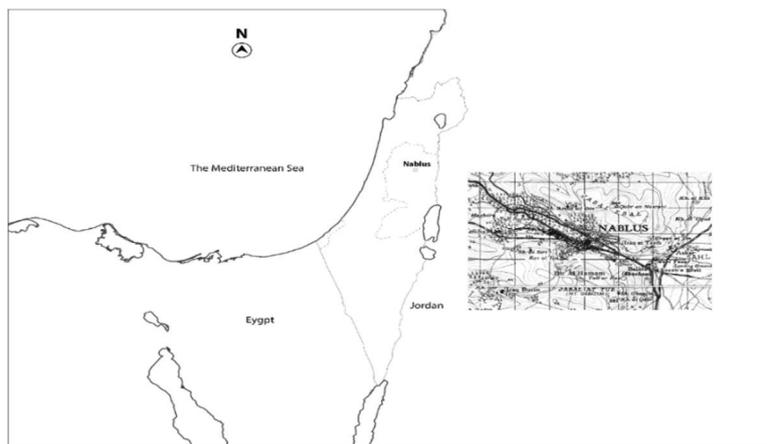


Fig. 1. Location of Tell Sufan on map of Palestine (Drawing by Abdel Hadi Jawabreh)

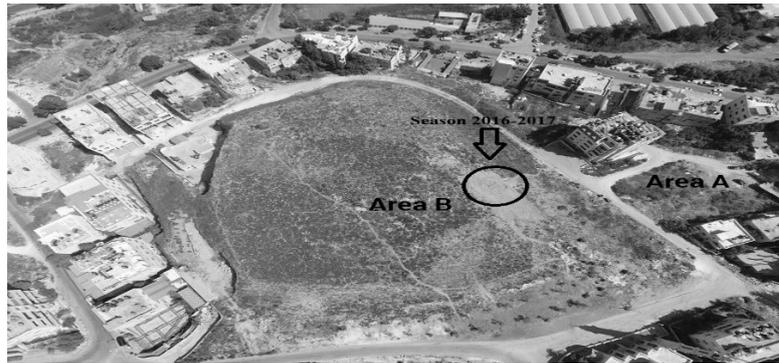


Fig. 2. Drone photo of Tell Sufan (Courtesy Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Maher Barghouthi).



Fig. 3. Screw weight found in Square 14S, 2016 season.

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Fig. 4. Part of jar found in Square 15T, 2016 season.



**Fig. 5. Mortar in the north-eastern corner of Square 16S,
Locus 4.**

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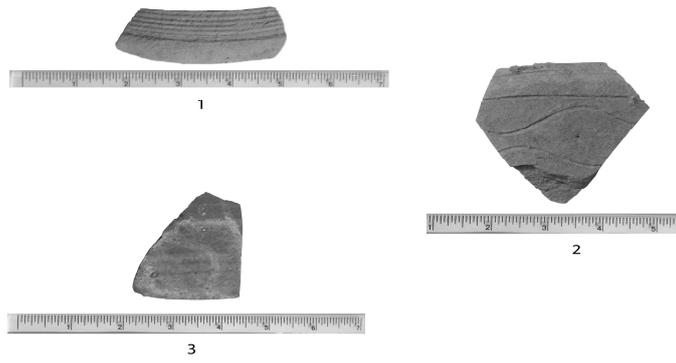


Fig. 6. Shards of pottery with color and geometric shapes from the excavation of 2016.



Fig. 7. Two ancient mortars on floor, Square 17T, Locus 2.



Fig. 8. Silo in Square 17T, Locus 3.

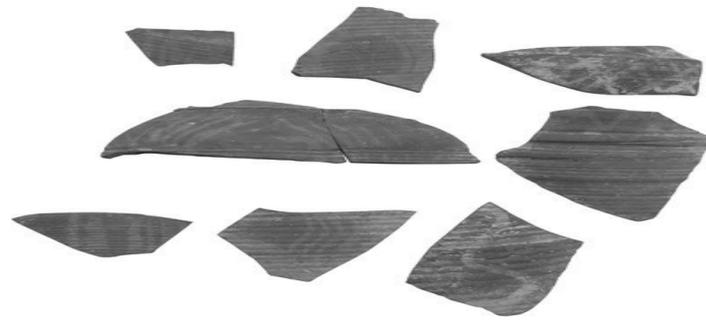


Fig. 9. Pottery from the site dated to the early and late Islamic periods.



**Fig. 10. Coin dedicated to Caliph Hisham
Ben Abdel Malek Ben Warwan.**

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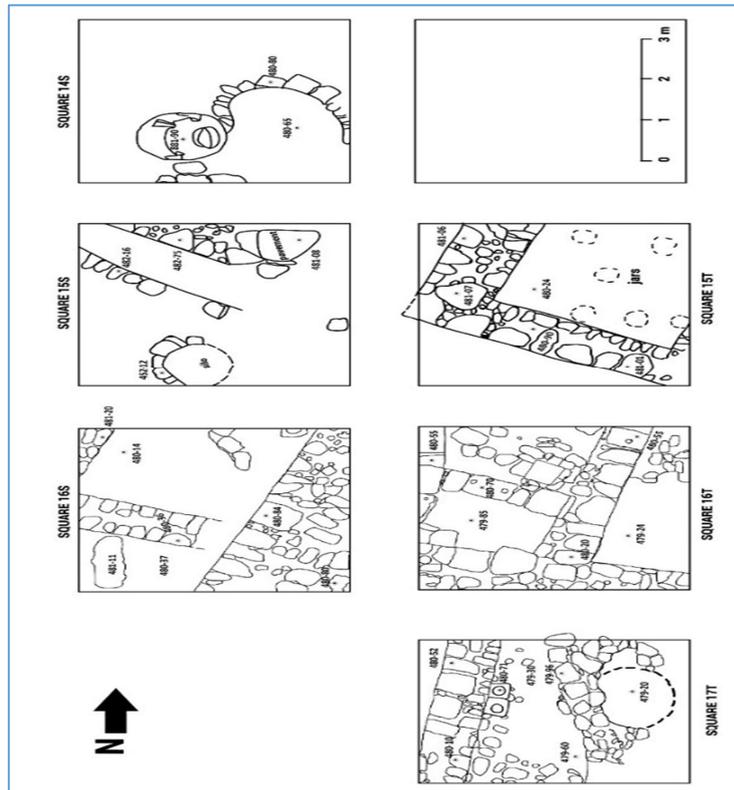
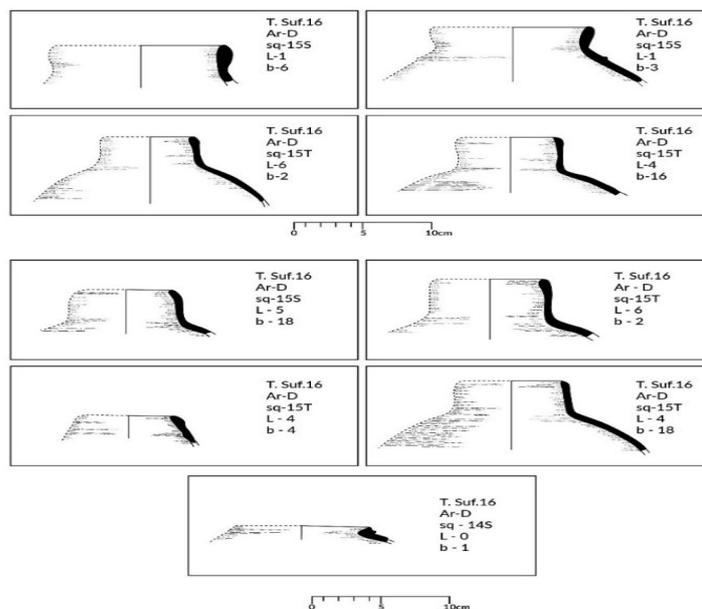


Fig. 11. Maps of six squares excavated in 2016 and 2017 seasons

Table 5. Identifiable Rim Sherds of Pottery Discovered During Season of 2016.

N ^o	Area	Square	Loci	Bucket	Fig. n ^o
1	B	T15	6	2	12.1
2	B	S15	5	18	12.2
3	B	T15	4	18	12.3
4	B	T15	4	4	12.4
5	B	S14	0	1	13.1
6	B	S15	1	3	13.2
7	B	S15	1	6	13.3
8	B	T15	4	16	13.4
9	B	T15	6	2	13.5

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**Fig. 12. Drawing of the rim sherds of the Pottery 2016
(Drawing by I. Iqtait).**

Table 6. Identifiable sherds of handles and bases 2016.

N	A	Square	Loci	Bucket	Fig. n°
1	B	S15	1	6	14.1
2	B	T15	0	1	14.2
3	B	S14	0	1	14.3
4	B	S14	0	1	14.4
5	B	S14	0	1	15.1
6	B	S14	0	1	15.2
7	B	T15	4	4	15.3
8	B	S14	3	9	15.4
9	B	S14	0	3	15.4
10	B	S14	0	3	15.6

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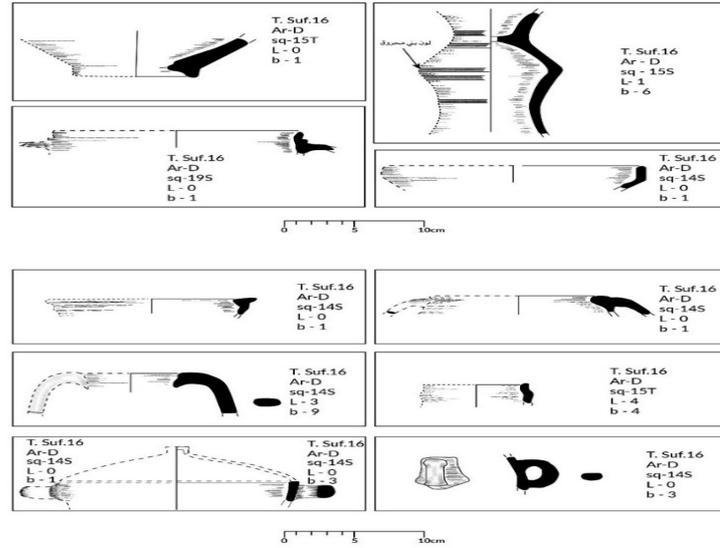


Fig. 13. Drawing of the handles sherds 2016 (Drawing by I. Iqtat).

Table 7. The identifiable sherds of rim, handles and bases 2017.

N°	Area	Square	Loci	Bucket	Fig. n°
1	B	S16	4	10	16.1
2	B	T17	4	14	16.2
3	B	T16	0	15	16.3
4	B	T16	3	7	16.4
5	B	T16	3	9	16.5
6	B	S16	2	8	17.1
7	B	S16	5	12	17.2
8	B	T16	1	5	17.3
9	B	S16	2	8	17.4
10	B	S16	3	9	17.5
11	B	S16	4	10	18.1
12	B	S16	0	6	18.2
13	B	S16	0	6	18.3
14	B	S16	5	15	18.4
15	B	T17	3	11	18.5
16	B	T17	3	12	18.6
17	B	T17	4	12	19.1
18	B	T17	4	12	19.2

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19	B	T16	0	6	19.3
20	B	T16	0	6	19.4
21	B	T16	3	9	19.5
22	B	T16	3	9	19.6

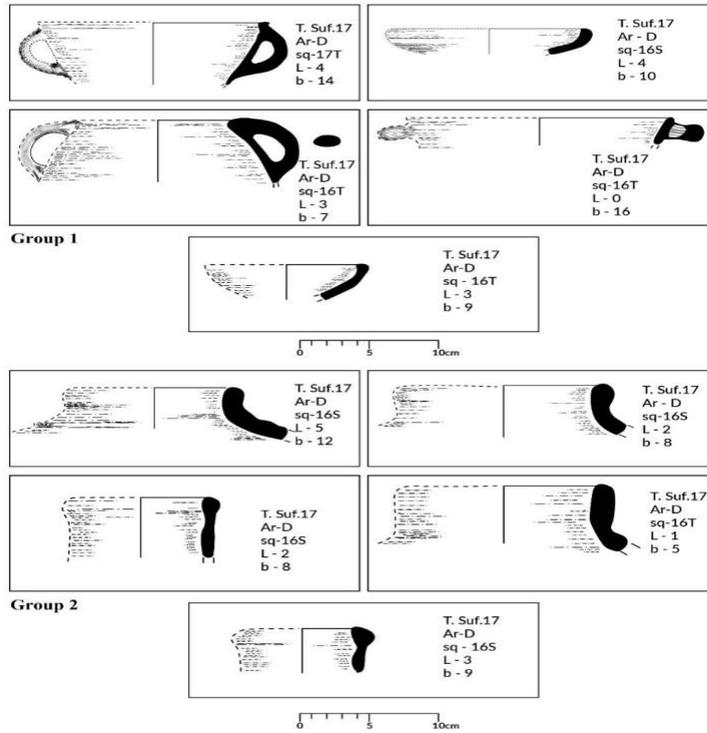


Fig. 14. Group 1 (From Left to Right: 1-5): Drawing of the handles and rim sherds. Group 2 (From Left to Right: 1-5): Drawing of the rim sherds 2017 (Drawing by I. Iqtiat).

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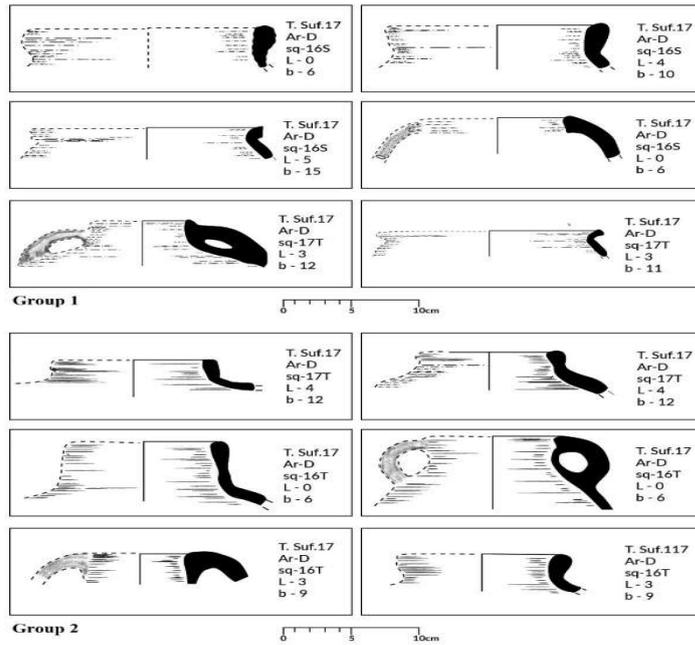


Fig. 15. Group 1 (From Left to Right : 1-6) : Drawing of the rims and handles sherds ; Group 2 (From Left to Right : 1-6) : Drawing of the rims and handles sherds 2017 (Drawing by I. Iqtia).

Table 8. The identifiable sherds of bases 2017.

N	Area	Square	Locality	Buc ket	Fig. n°
1	B	T16	3	9	20.1
2	B	T16	3	9	20.2
3	B	T16	3	9	20.3
4	B	S16	2	4	20.4
5	B	T16	0	2	20.5
6	B	T16	0	2	20.6

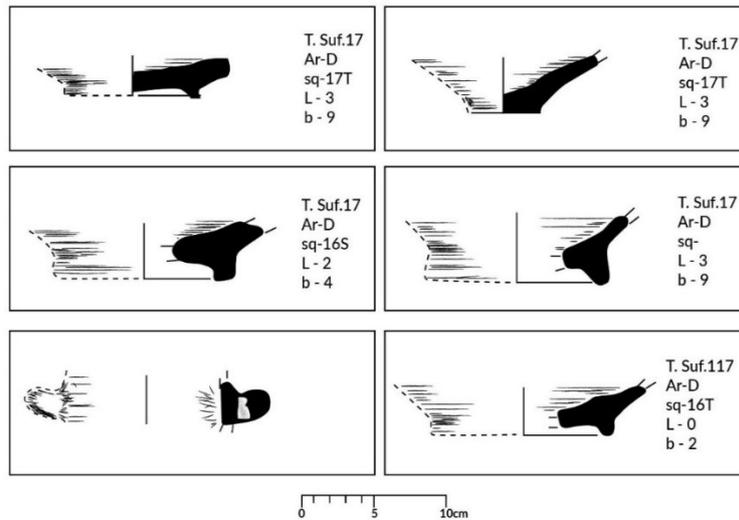


Fig. 16. From Left to Right : Drawing of the bases sherds 2017 (Drawing by I. Iqtia).

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