

New research and findings from Tell Sufan

We report on Tell Sufan, Nablus, Palestine, a low hill 1.5 km to the west of the city (area 15 donum). The first known reference to the site was made in the 1880 Survey of Western Palestine under the name of Saffin and, in 1931, Böhl carried out the first survey. There has been no previous research on the site.

Our results so far show settlement occurred from the late Bronze Age to the Iron Age, followed by a gap during the Persian and Hellenistic eras. Major finds include Roman, Byzantine and early Islamic structures, numerous pottery vessels, and six coins. Our report is based on discoveries from the 2016-2017 An-Najah National University (ANNU) summer research and training excavation campaigns. ANNU first explored the site in 1998; dating of storage jars and a pit found there then was not supported by stratigraphic information. The site has been divided into 625 squares and each square was initially shovel tested. We then carried out excavations in Area A, (south east slope) and Area B (high ground). We used square and loci numbers to record the pottery we found. We excavated three squares in 2016 and three in 2017.

In 2016, finds from two squares excavated in Area A included an olive oil press, a stone screw weight, a circular silo and a pottery storeroom containing a number of broken earthenware jars. In the third square in Area B we found over 3,000 potsherds belonging to storage jars used for agriculture and olive oil. These originate from the local factory at Bisan/Scythopolis and are red, grey or black in colour with white decoration and ribbing at the neck; they date to the late Byzantine era. We also found one row of stones from two silos, indicating intensive agriculture.

In 2017, in the three squares excavated in Area A, structural remains were found of walls, a silo, a gate and a floor, and, in addition, over 6,000 potsherds. Those identified were from late Byzantine/early Islamic pottery. We based our dating of the majority of our pottery finds, mainly consisting of tableware and storage jars, to the late Byzantine and early Islamic periods, on archaeological data, comparison with similar pottery, there being close similarity in pottery found at sites in Palestine and Jordan, and related literature. A coin we found was identified by its legend; it was struck in Wasit, Iraq, in 124 AH/741 AD and is from the reign of Ummayyad Caliph Hisham Ibn Abd Al Malik (105-125 AH/724-743 AD).

The pottery functions suggest the site was used for olive oil production as well as agriculture; the pottery was used either for storage or transport. The olive oil press located near

a Byzantine storage area indicates production of olive oil during the Byzantine era. Our chronological analysis, based on these functions, allowed us to ascertain that the site was mainly occupied from the late Bronze Age (1550 BC) until the early Islamic period (7th century). We were able to date the site to the Umayyad period (661-750 AD), based on a single coin from the period.