

## Taxonomical Studies of Some Acacia Seeds Growing in Saudi Arabia

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**Abstract:** The aim of this work is to study the morphological and anatomical characters of seeds of eleven species and subspecies of genus *Acacia* which were collected from the western and southwestern region in Saudi Arabia. Morphological studies of seeds show many different characters related to the seed shape and size, central aerole, where size difference between small seeds in *A. raddiana*, *A. tortilis* and large seeds in *A. gerrardii*, *A. ehrenbergiana*. Studying the characters of the central aerole shows that they are undistinguished in species *A. ehrenbergiana* and distinguished in all other investigated species. Also open or closed central aerole with divergent straight equal or unequal arms, and area inside the aerole and the ratio between the central aerole area and seed surface area, where consider as very diagnostic characters for seed morphology. The character related to the level of the central aerole was used as specified characters Scanning electron microscope of seeds surface show many different ornamentation such as, regulous: reticulate tuberculate, reticulate rugose, Jagged with grooves, granulate colliculate, rough, crimped foveolate, granulose, striated papillose, micro granulate, reticulate foveolate. Anatomical studies of seed coat, of the eleven investigated species indicate the presence of different characters such as different lengths of Malpighian cells and structure of the light line. Two keys conclude the results, one is based on the morphological characters of seed, and the second is based on the anatomical characters of the seed coat.

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**Key words:** Acacia seeds, central aerole, ornamentation seed surface, Malpighian cell

### 1- Introduction

*Acacia* is a genus of shrubs and trees belonging to the subfamily Mimosoideae of the family Fabaceae, first described in Africa by the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus in 1773. (Reference 2008).

Many non-Australian species tend to be thorny, whereas the majority of Australian acacias are not. They are pod-bearing, with sap and leave typically bearing large amounts of tannins and condensed tannins that historically in many species found use as pharmaceuticals and preservatives( Simmons, 1987) . The genus *Acacia* previously contained roughly 1300 species, about 960 of them native to Australia, with the remainder spread around the tropical to warm-temperate regions of both hemispheres, including Europe, Africa, southern Asia, and the Americas (Orchard and Maslin 2003). However, in 2005 the genus was divided into five separate genera , *Acacia*, *Vachellia*, *Senegalia*, *Acaciella* and *Mariosousa* (Kodala and Wilson 2006), most of the traditional acacias of Africa are now treated in the genera *Vachellia* and *Senegalia* while some of the American species are placed in *Acaciella* and *Mariosousa*. The majority of species still treated in the genus *Acacia* are confined to Australia. (Seigler and Ebinger 2005).

Trees and shrubs are important in preserving the ecosystem of any region, particularly in areas where the vegetation is rich (Wasson 2003). The number of tree species in Saudi Arabia is only 97,

which is about 4% of the total floristic elements. Out of these, more than 80% are present in the southwestern and western regions, including Taif region. Among the tree genera, *Acacia* contains the highest number of species (16 species) Acacias, in general, are the most dominant tree species in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Arabian Peninsula.

*Acacia* seeds have been morphologically studied by a few authors (Brenan 1970), (Vassal 1972), (Al-Kinany 1981), (Mahmoud *et al.* 1981), (Behawi and Mohamed 1982) and (Singh 1982) .Number per pods and arrangement on the placentaion were discussed by (Andrews 1956) , (White 1962), Tackholm (1974) and (Chaudhary 1983). (Gunn1984) and (Martin and Williams 1973) describe the shape and color of the seeds rather oval to elliptic, black to greenish. AL-Gohary (2007) study surface sculpture of 11Egyptian *Acacia* species and construct an indented key. Paula Venier (2012) studied the seed coat structure through histochemical analysis in five Neotropical *Acacia* species from xerophytic forests of central Argentina. The present study on *Acacia* seeds in Saudi Arabia show at least 10 morphological characters and 5 anatomical characters in the 11 *Acacia* species under investigation

### 2- Material and Methods:

#### 2-1- Sample collection:

Fresh materials of 10 *Acacia* species growing

wild in western region and west south region were collected during different seasons 2004-2005. Attention was paid for studying specimens who were collected from localities representing the geographical range of each species (Table 1). One herbarium specimens were studied where the fresh materials was not available during this seasons. The collected materials were identified according to Migahid (1978) Batanouny (1981), Collenette (1985), Boulos (2000) and Chaudhary (2001). Samples of the identified materials were kept at Botany Department Faculty of Science King Abdul-Aziz University (Girls section).

**Table (1)** Collected specimens of Acacia species in Saudi Arabia

Species	Locality
<i>Acacia abyssinica</i>	El Hadda road
<i>A. ehrenbergiana</i>	Old Jeddah – makkah road
<i>A. etbaica</i>	Makkah road –wadi elsal
<i>A. etbaica ssp.uncinata</i>	El Hadda road
<i>A. gerrardii</i>	El Baha – Belgrashi road
<i>A. gerrardii var. najdensis</i>	El Madina Road (Gebel elfaqra)
<i>A. hamulosa</i>	Herbarium sheet
<i>A. mellifera</i>	Jeddah – El Madina road
<i>A. nubica</i>	Hadda el sham region
<i>A. raddiana</i>	Assfane road
<i>A. tortilis</i>	Assfane road

### 2-2- Morphological studies

Acacia seeds were collected from mature pods, seeds were studied from both surface noted shape,

size, central aerole and the position of funicle ,length of arms, area inside the aerole and the ratio between the central aerole area and seed surface area.

Examination takes place by Nikon light microscope and photographed by Nikon camera 4500. Measurements given are the mean of 10 seeds.

### 2-3- Anatomical studies

Anatomical sections were made from seeds soaked in a mixture of equal parts water, Glycerol, and ethyl alcohol for 30 hours, then sectioned with a razor blade. Sections were stained in saffranin and light green dehydrated in alcohol-xylol series, cleared in clove oil and mounted in Canada balsam, photographed by Nikon Microscope. Measurements given are the mean of 10 seeds.

### 2-4- Scanning electron microscope

For scanning electron microscopic, seeds were dehydrated in an acetone series, critical point dried using carbon dioxide and, together with dry seeds, were mounted directly on stubs using double-side adhesive tape, and sputter-coated with gold. Observations were made in a Philips LX-20 Auto scan SEM. Terminology of seed-coat surface sculpturing basically follows Stearn (1992) and Font Quer (1993).

### 3- Results

In table (2&3) the 11 investigated *Acacia* species were arranged according to systematic treatment Chaudhary (2001) vertically while the morphological and anatomical characters of seeds were arranged horizontal.

**Table (2): Seed morphological characters of the 11 Acacia species growing in Saudi Arabia**

Species	Size L x W/ mm	Shape	Color	Texture	Funicle	Central aerole			
						Shape	Length of arms	Size	Color
<i>A. abyssinica</i> (Fig.1 A&B)	4x6	Elliptic compressed with pointed apex	Reddish brown	Reticulate tuberculate	subterminal twisted long thick	closed equidistance concave	-	1/3 of seed area	Dark
<i>A. ehrebergiana</i> (Fig.2 A&B)	4x6	Elliptic compressed with pointed apex	Dark brown	Reticulate rugose	subterminal twisted long thick	not distinguish	-	-	-
<i>A. etabica</i> (Fig.3 A&B)	5x7	Elongated compressed with pointed apex	Light brown	Jagged with grooves	lateral non twisted short thick	open equidistance flat	equal arms	1/2 of seed area	Dark
<i>A. etabica ssp. uncinata</i>	6x10	Elongated compressed	dark green	granulate colliculate	subterminal twisted	open equidistance	equal arms	1/2 of	Dark

(Fig.4 A&B)		with pointed apex	shinning		long thick	convex		seed area	
<i>A.gerrardii</i>		Elliptic compressed with round apex	Yellowish green	Jagged rough	subterminal twisted long medium thick	open equidistance convex	not equal arms	1/2 of seed area	Dark
(Fig.5 A&B)	4x7								
<i>A.gerrardii ssp. najdensis</i>		Rhombic compressed	Dark green	crimped foveolate	subterminal no twisted short thick	open equidistance	equal arms	3/4 of seed area	Light
(Fig.6 A&B)	5x6								
<i>A.hamulosa</i>		circular compressed with apiculate apex	Yellowish brown shinning	granulose	subterminal twisted long thin deciduous	open V-shape	not equal arms	1/4 of seed area	Dark
(Fig.7 A&B)	7x8								
<i>A.mellifera</i>		Quadrated compressed with pointed apex	Greenish brown shinning	striated papillosed	subterminal twisted long thick	open cross-shape concave	not equal arms	1/4 of seed area	Light
(Fig.8 A&B)	7x8								
<i>A. nubica</i>		Ovate with round apex	Light brown	microgranulate	subterminal twisted long thin	open concave	equal arms	1/3 of seed area	Dark
(Fig.9 A&B)	4x5								
<i>A.raddiana</i>		Ovate with pointed apex	Dark brown	reticulate tuberculate	subterminal twisted long thin	open flat	not equal arms	1/2 of seed area	Dark
(Fig.10 A&B)	2x4								
<i>A.tortilis</i>		Ovate compressed with pointed apex	Reddish brown	reticulate foveolate	subterminal twisted long thin	open equidistance flat	not equal arms	1/2 of seed area	Dark
(Fig.11 A&B)	3x4								

**Table (3): Seed anatomical characters of 11 Acacia species growing in Saudi Arabia**

Species	Outer integuments			Inner integument	Endosperm	
	Cuticle	Malbeganian cell	Light line		Cell type	Reserve food
<i>A. abyssinica</i> (Fig.1C&D )	Thin	Bone shape with conical end 58 µm length	In the above 1/3 portion	Number of rows of lignified parenchyma cells	Thin wall parenchyma cells	color substance
<i>A.ehrebergiana</i> (Fig.2 C&D )	Thick	Bone shape with straight end 35 µm length	In the middle portion	One row of thin parenchyma cells	Thick wall parenchyma cells	crystals and color substance
<i>A. etabica</i> (Fig.3 C&D )	Thick	Bone shape with straight end 56µm length	In the middle portion	Number of rows of thin parenchyma cells	Medium thick wall parenchyma cells	color substance
<i>A.etabica ssp. uncinata</i> (Fig.4 C&D )	Thin	Bone shape with conical end 61 µm length	In the above 1/3 portion	Number of rows of thin parenchyma cells	Thin wall parenchyma cells	-
<i>A.gerrardii</i> (Fig.5 C&D )	Thick	Bone shape with straight end 84µm length	In the middle portion	One row of thick parenchyma cells	Thick wall parenchyma cells	color substance

<i>A. gerrardii ssp. najdensis</i> (Fig.6 C&D )	Thin	Bone shape with conical end 83 $\mu$ m length	In the above 1/3 portion	Number of rows of lignified compressed parenchyma cells	Thick wall parenchyma cells	oil substance
<i>A. hamulosa</i> (Fig.7 C&D )	Thick	Bone shape with conical end 40 $\mu$ m length	In the above 1/3 portion	One row of thin parenchyma cells	Thick wall parenchyma cells	color substance
<i>A. mellifera</i> (Fig.8 C&D )	Very thick	Bone shape with conical end 55 $\mu$ m length	not distinguish	One row of thin parenchyma cells	Thick wall compressed parenchyma cells	color substance
<i>A. nubica</i> Fig.9 C&D )	Thick	Bone shape with conical end 57 $\mu$ m length	In the middle portion	Number of rows of lignified parenchyma cells	Thick wall parenchyma cells	color substance
<i>A. raddiana</i> (Fig.10 C&D )	Thin	Bone shape with conical end 30 $\mu$ m length	In the above 1/3 portion	One row of thick parenchyma cells	Thick wall compressed parenchyma cells	color substance
<i>A. tortilis</i> (Fig.11 C&D )	Thick	Bone shape with conical end 83 $\mu$ m length	In the middle portion	Number of rows of thin compressed parenchyma cells	Thin wall parenchyma cells	color substance

#### 4- Discussion

Our study was concentrated first on the description of the seeds for the 9 species and 2 subspecies of *Acacia* under investigation. About 7 characters have been recorded, viz; seed shape and size, areole features including open or closed with divergent, straight equal or unequal arms, area inside the areole ratio between control areole area and seed surface area, also surface texture, Hassen (1989) employed some of this characters in his study. All these characters help to distinguish between the 11 species and subspecies of *Acacia* plant under investigation.

*A. ehrenbergiana* is specialized by its undistinguished central areole between all the often investigated species. Also *A. abyssinica* is specialized by its distinguish closed central areole, while *A. raddiana*, *A. mellifera*, *A. hamulosa*, *A. gerrardii* were distinguish by the open central areole and unequal arms, as well as. The central areole occupies half the seed surface area in *A. gerrardii* and less than half in left other species. Central areole characters can be described by Esau (1977) as a major character to differentiate between leguminous seeds. In case of open central areole with equal arms, is specialized for the species and subspecies *A. etbaica*, *A. etbaica ssp.uncinata*, *A. gerrardii var. najdensis*, *A. tortilis*, *A. nubica*.

In this study we recognize the level of the central areole, as a specific character. Species of *A. abyssinica* and *A. mellifera* can be distinguish by their concave central areole, while in *A. hamulosa* and *A. etbaica* the central areole is flat, and in *A.*

*raddiana*, *A. nubica*, *A. gerrardii var. najdensis* the central areole is convex.

Scanning electron microscope investigation of the seed surface shows some variation between the species; different types of seed surface ornamentation are recognized *A. abyssinica* is reticulate tuberculate, *A. ehrenbergiana* is reticulate rugose, *A. etbaica* is jagged with grooves, *A. etbaica ssp.uncinata* is granulate colliculate, *A. gerrardii* is jagged rough, *A. gerrardii var. najdensis* is crimped foveolate, *A. hamulosa* is granulose, *A. mellifera* is striated papillose, *A. nubica* is microgranulate, *A. raddiana* is Reticulate foveolate, *A. tortilis* is reticulate tuberculate. Our results were agree with which used dry mature seeds of 26 species of 4 Leguminous genera, to standardize a procedure for identifying the seeds through SEM on the seed surface and seed sections

Anatomical structure of the seed coat of the investigated species shows many different characters that can be used in the separation of studied species according to Esau (1977) and Werker (1997). The coat of the mature seed may be described as hard, cartilaginous, leathery, papery features determined by the structure of its cells.

In all investigated *Acacia* species, seed coat was so hard except *A. hamulosa* which contains a mucilaginous layer. Sections of testa in all investigated seeds species show the differentiation in protective layer (cuticle and sclerenchyma). Malpighian cells as mechanical layers and also responsible for its impermeability, light line which is a refractive zone across the upper half or in the middle of each cell running continuously along the

Malpighian layer. Inner integument layer with different cell shape and the inner most endospermic layer. Based on those characters, *A. mellifera* is specified by the undistinguished light line, while it is well distinguish in upper one third Malpighian layer in species *A. hamulosa*, *A. abyssinica*, *A. tortilis*, and subspecies *A. gerrardii* var. *najdensis*, *A. etbaica* ssp. *uncinata*; and in half Malpighian cell *A. gerrardii*, *A. ehrenbergiana*, *A. nubica*, *A. raddiana*, *A. etbaica*.

Length of malpighian cell show a great variety, short cells between 30-60µm in *A. ehrenbergiana*, *A. nubica*, *A. etbaica*, *A. hamulosa*, *A. abyssinica*, *A. tortilis* or long cells between 61-80 µm in *A. gerrardii*, *A. raddiana* and subspecies *A. gerrardii* var. *najdensis*, *A. etbaica* ssp. *uncinata*.

The inner integument of all investigated species in addition to the endosperm is considered as a reserve tissue. Reserve materials, a nutritive tissue, sometimes proteins, starch, and lipid accumulate in the inner integument layer for germinating embryo. In species of *A. nubica*, *A. abyssinica*, *A. gerrardii* and subspecies *A. gerrardii* var. *najdensis* the inner integument formed of several lignified rows with reserve colored materials. In *A. raddiana*, *A. etbaica* and subspecies *A. etbaica* ssp. *uncinata* formed of thin wall cells in several rows *A. gerrardii*, *A. raddiana* were specified by one row, while, *A. hamulosa*, *A. ehrenbergiana*, *A. mellifera*, were distinguish by one row with thin wall integument cell. Crystals are quite common in seed coats in some species apparently and in protection against predators. They may be located in various layers, sometimes in specialized idioblasts. *A. ehrenbergiana* shows number of solitary crystals in the inner integument cell.

## 5- Artificial keys

### 5-1- Morphological key

- I. Undistinguished central aerole.....  
..... *A. ehrenbergiana*
- II. Distinguish central aerole
- A. Distinguish closed central aerole..... *A. abyssinica*
- B. Distinguish open central aerole
- i. Open central aerole with equal arms
- \* The central aerole less than half the seed surface area..... *A. nubica*
- \* The central aerole equal or more than half the seed surface area
- + Flat central aerole
- a) Seed surface jagged with grooves..... *A. etbaica*
- b) Seed surface Reticulate foveolate ....  
..... *A. raddiana*
- + Concave or convex central aerole

- a) Seed surface granulate colliculate..... *A. etbaica* ssp. *uncinata*
- b) Seed surface is crimped foveolate.....  
..... *A. gerrardii* var. *najdensis*
- ii. Open central aerole and unequal arms
- \* The central aerole less than half the seed surface area and cress shape
- + Seed surface granulose..... *A. hamulosa*
- + Seed surface striated papillose.  
..... *A. mellifera*
- \* The central aerole equal or more than half the seed surface area
- + Seed surface jagged rough..... *A. gerrardii*
- + Seed surface reticulate tuberculate..... *A. tortilis*

### 5-2- Anatomical key

I. Non distinguish Light line ..... *A. mellifera*

II. Distinguish Light line

A. light line passes across the middle of the Malpighian layer

i. short Malpighian cells between 30-60µm

\* The inner integument formed of one row of thin cell... *A. ehrenbergiana*

\* The inner integument formed of several rows of cells

+ Thin wall parenchyma

cells..... *A. etbaica*

+ Thick wall parenchyma

cells..... *A. nubica*

ii. Long Malpighian cells between 61-85

\* The inner integument formed of one row of lignified cells

..... *A. gerrardii*

\* The inner integument formed of several rows of thin cell..... *A. tortilis*

B. light line pass in the upper one third of the Malpighian layer

i. Short Malpighian cells between 30-60µm

\* The inner integument formed of one row of thin cells..... *A. hamulosa*

\* The inner integument formed of lignified cells

+ One row of lignified parenchyma

cells..... *A. raddiana*

+ Several rows of lignified parenchyma cell..... *A. abyssinica*

ii. Long Malpighian cells between 61-85

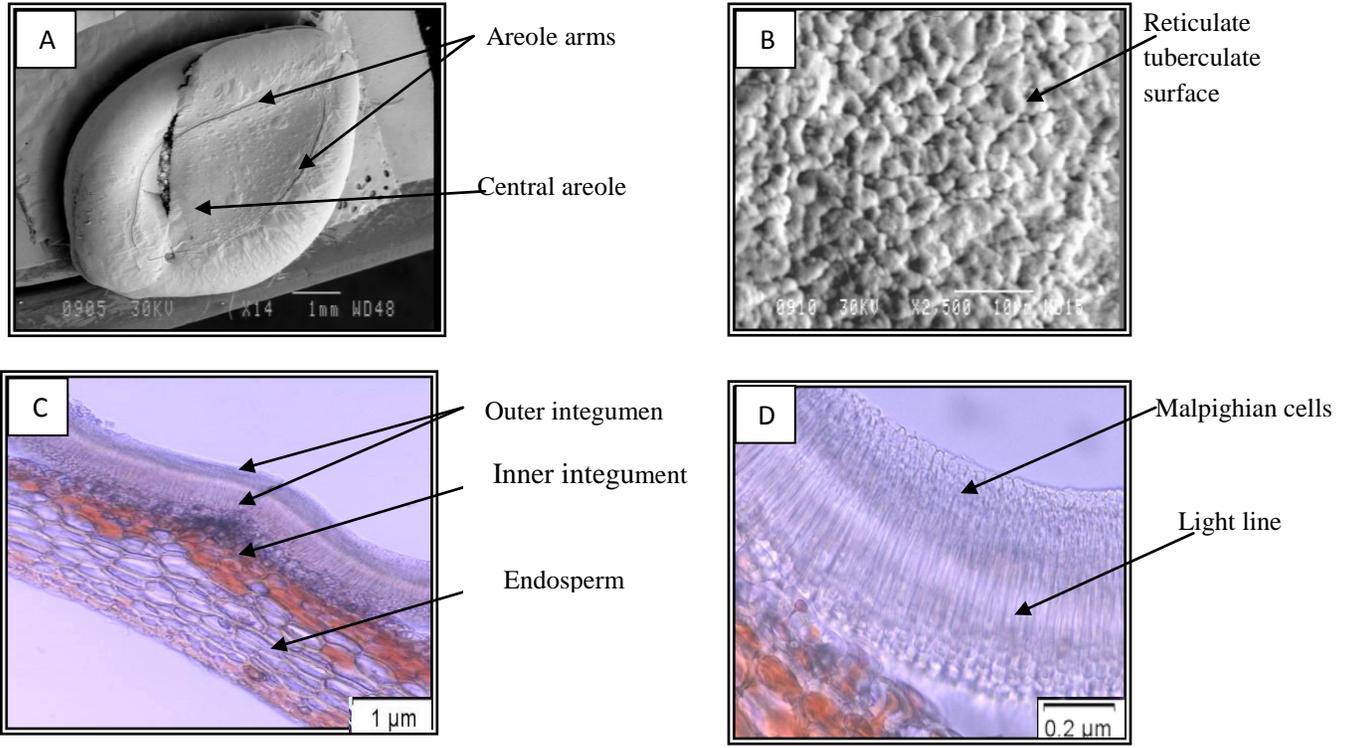
\* The inner integument formed of several rows of thin cell

..... *A. etbaica* ssp. *uncinata*

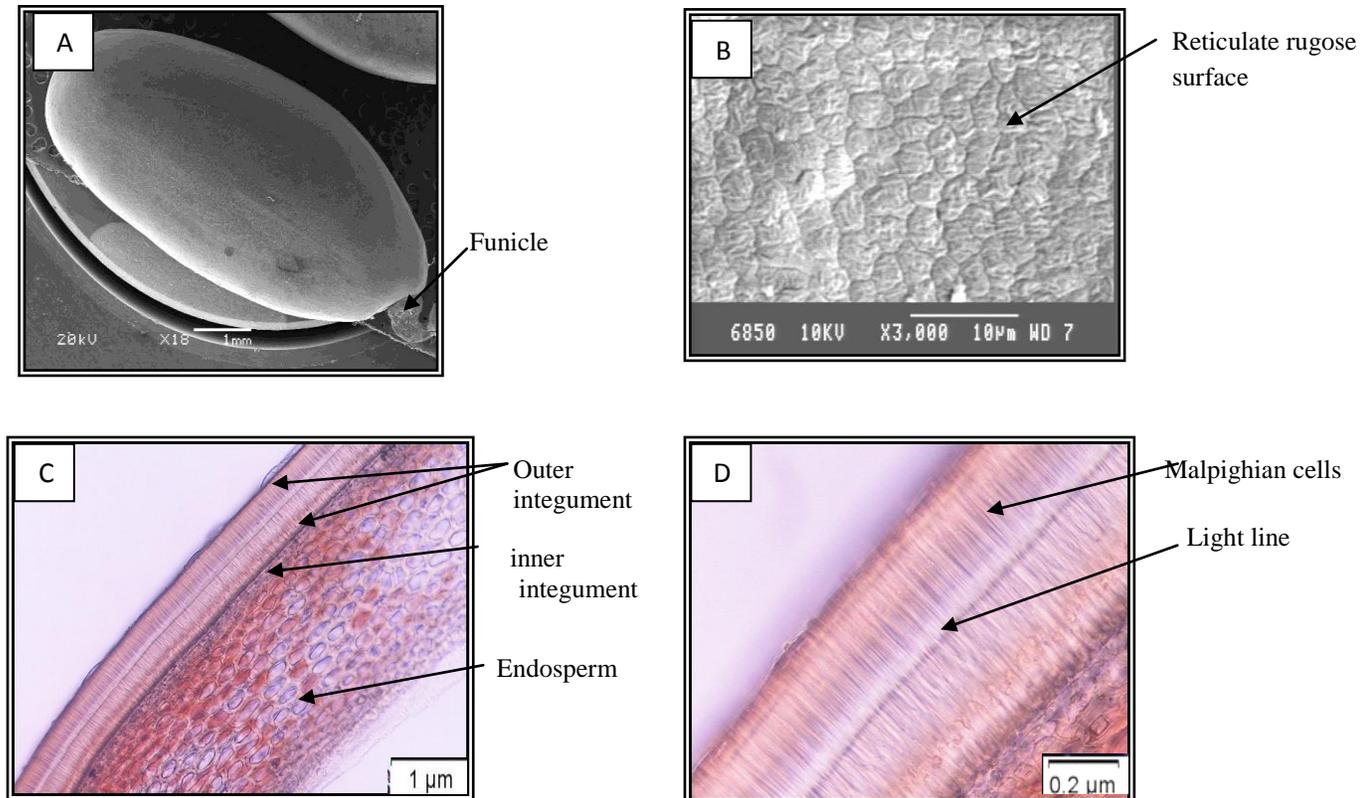
\* The inner integument formed of several rows of lignified cells

..... *A. gerrardii* var. *najdensis*

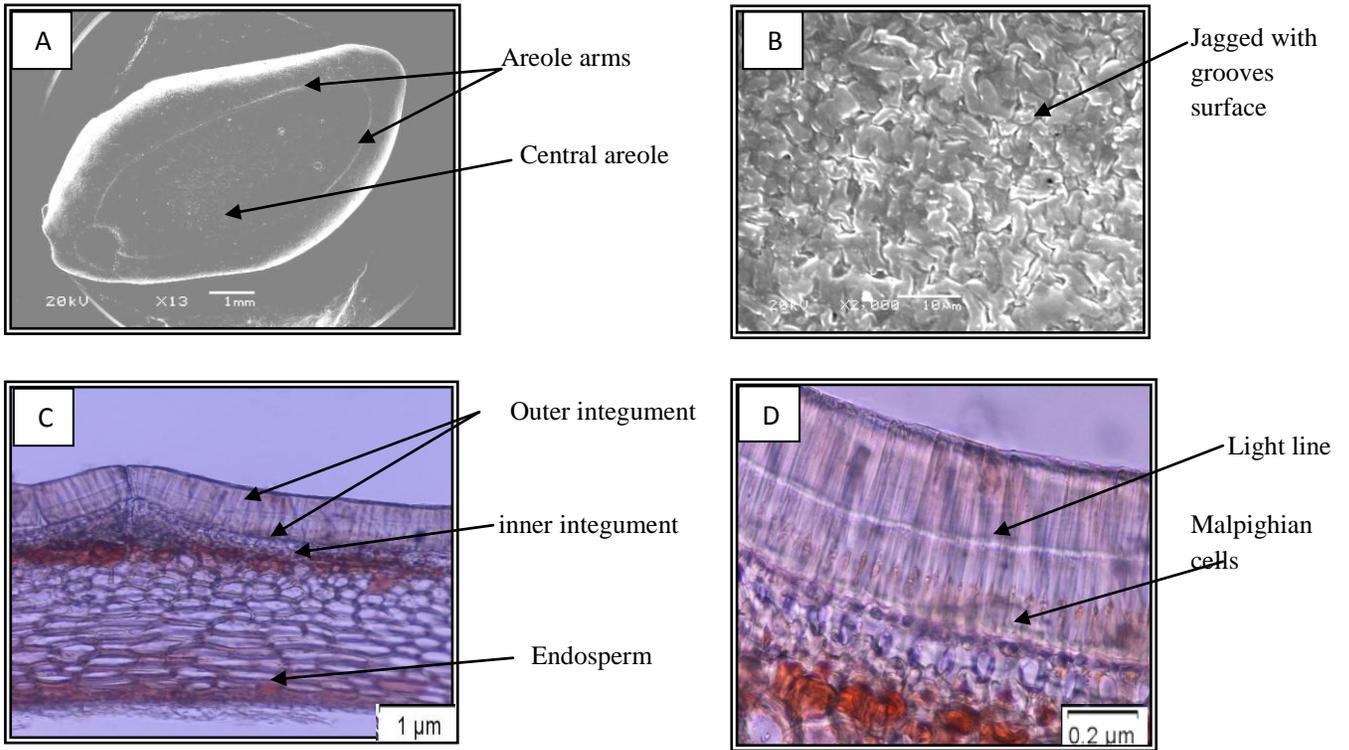
**Fig. 1** *Acacia abyssinica* A&B SEM seed and seed sculpture ,C&D T.S. in seed coat 20x&40x



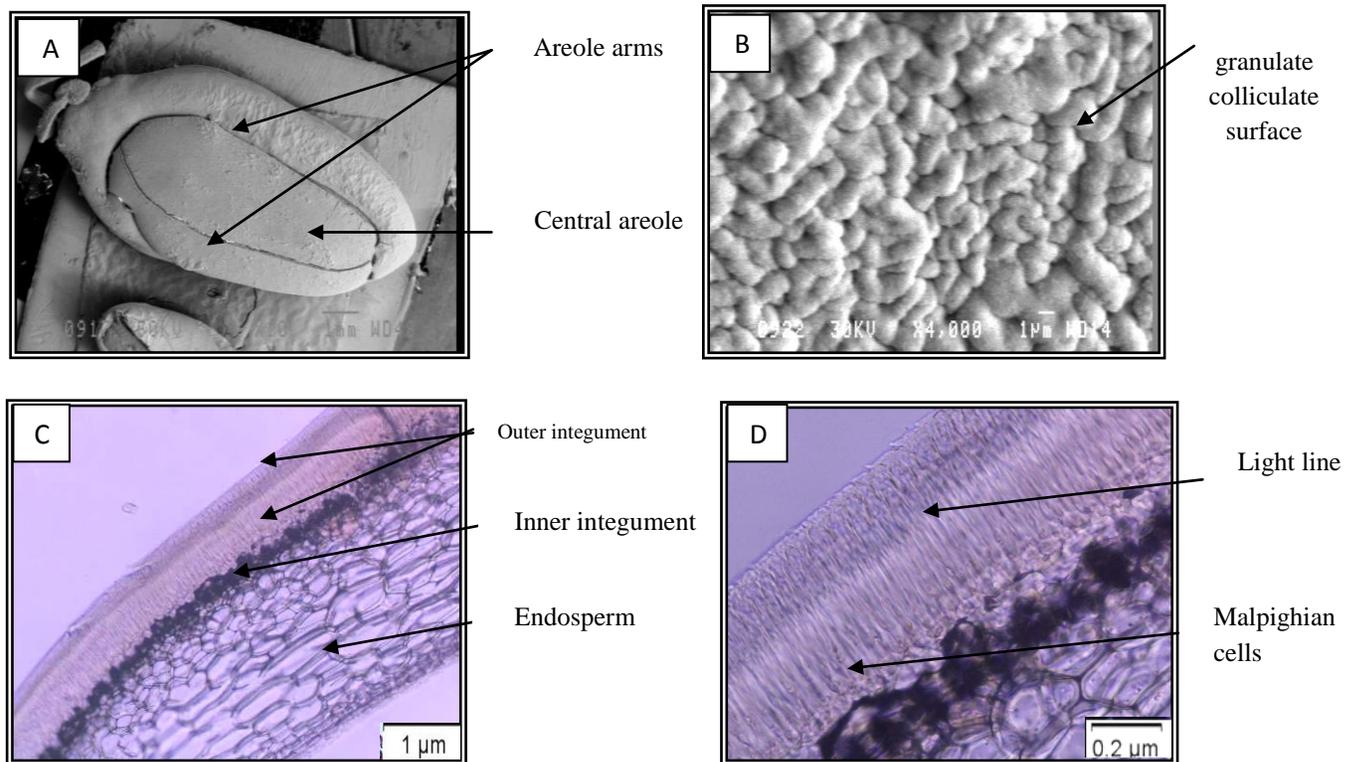
**Fig 2** *Acacia ehrenbergiana* A&B SEM seed and seed sculpture ,C&D T.S. in seed coat 20x&40x



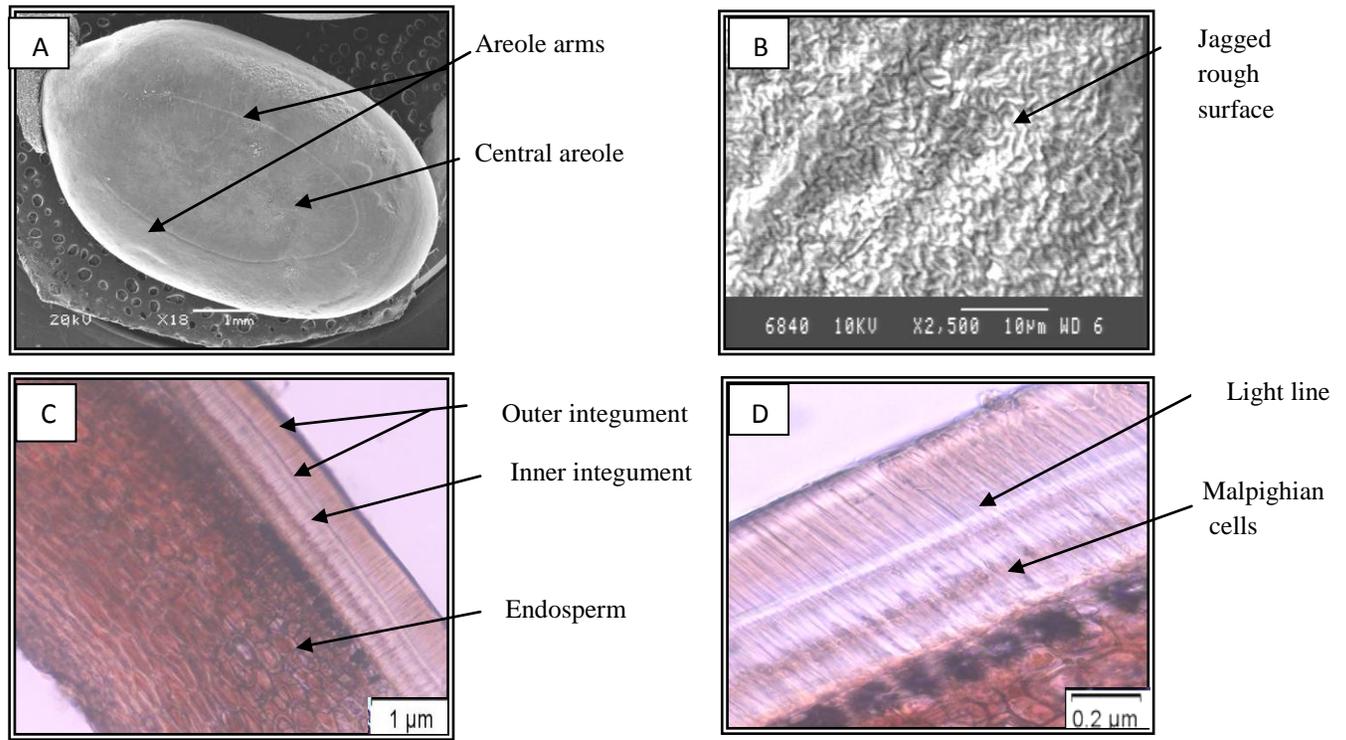
**Fig 3** *Acacia etbaica* A&B SEM seed and seed sculpture ,C&D T.S. in seed coat 20x&40x



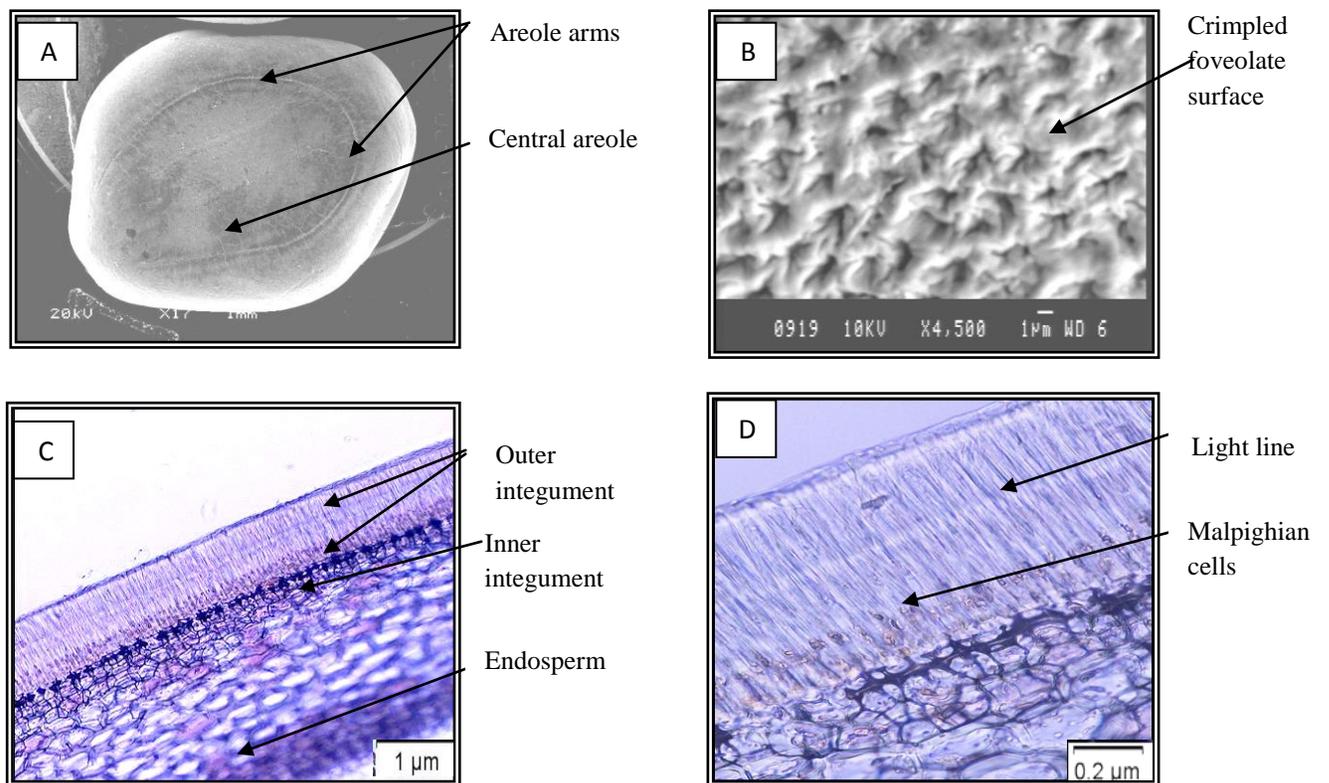
**Fig.4** *A. etbaica ssp. uncinata* A&B SEM seed and seed sculpture ,C&D T.S. in seed coat 20x&40x



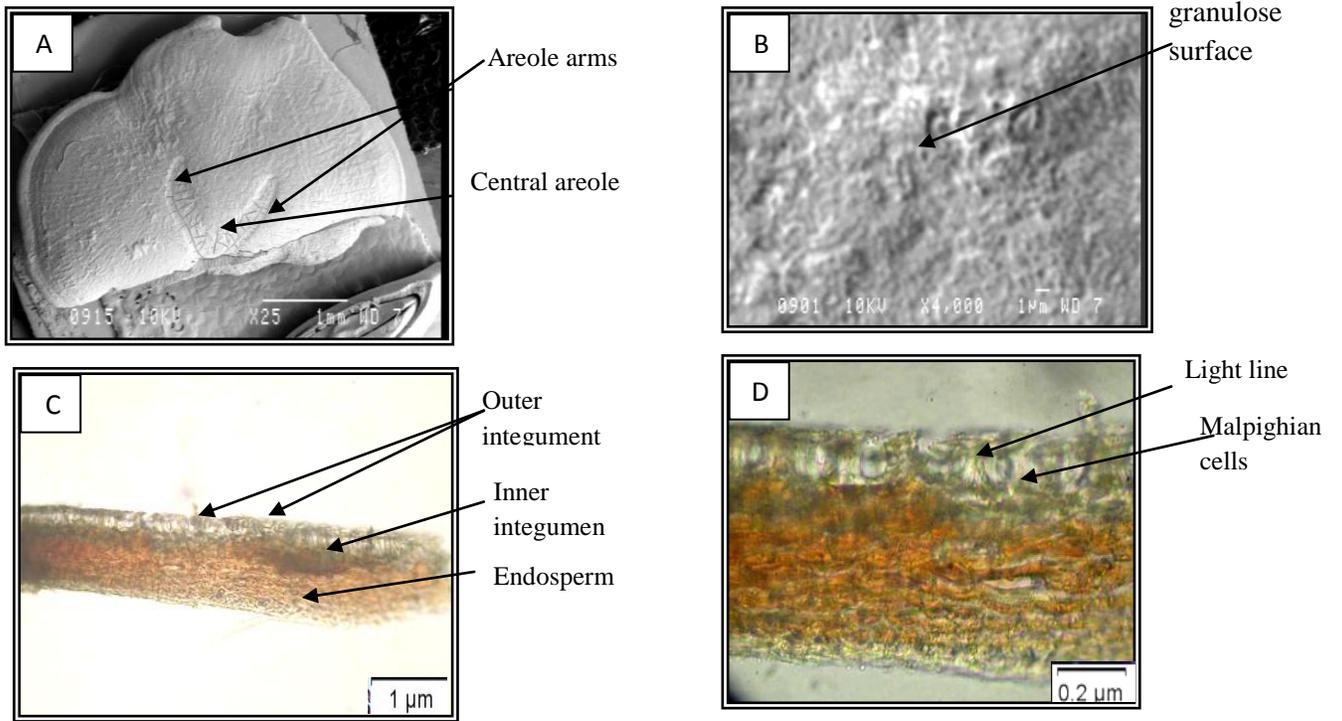
**Fig 5 *Acacia gerrardii*** A&B SEM seed and seed sculpture ,C&D T.S. in seed coat 20x&40x



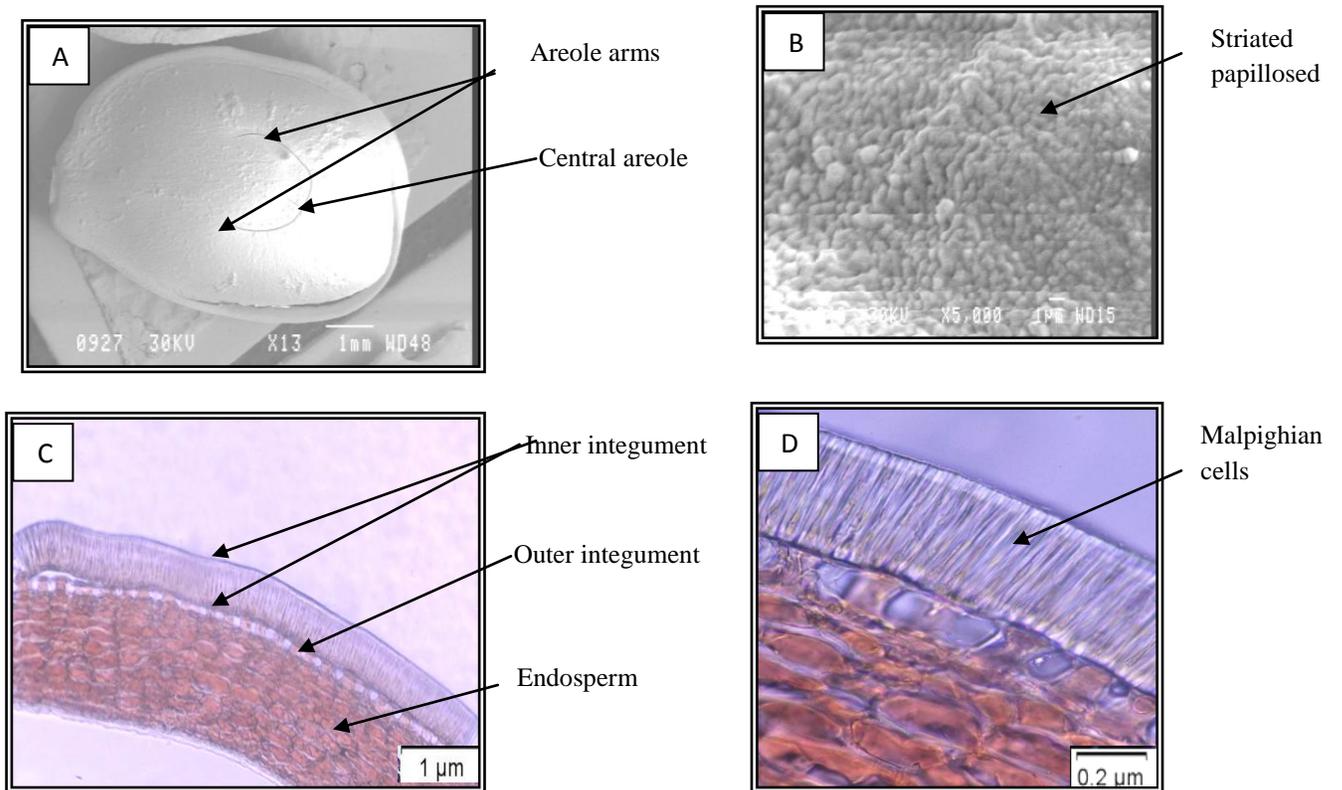
**Fig 6 *Acacia gerrardii* var *najdensis*** A&B SEM seed and seed sculpture ,C&D T.S. in seed coat 20x&40x



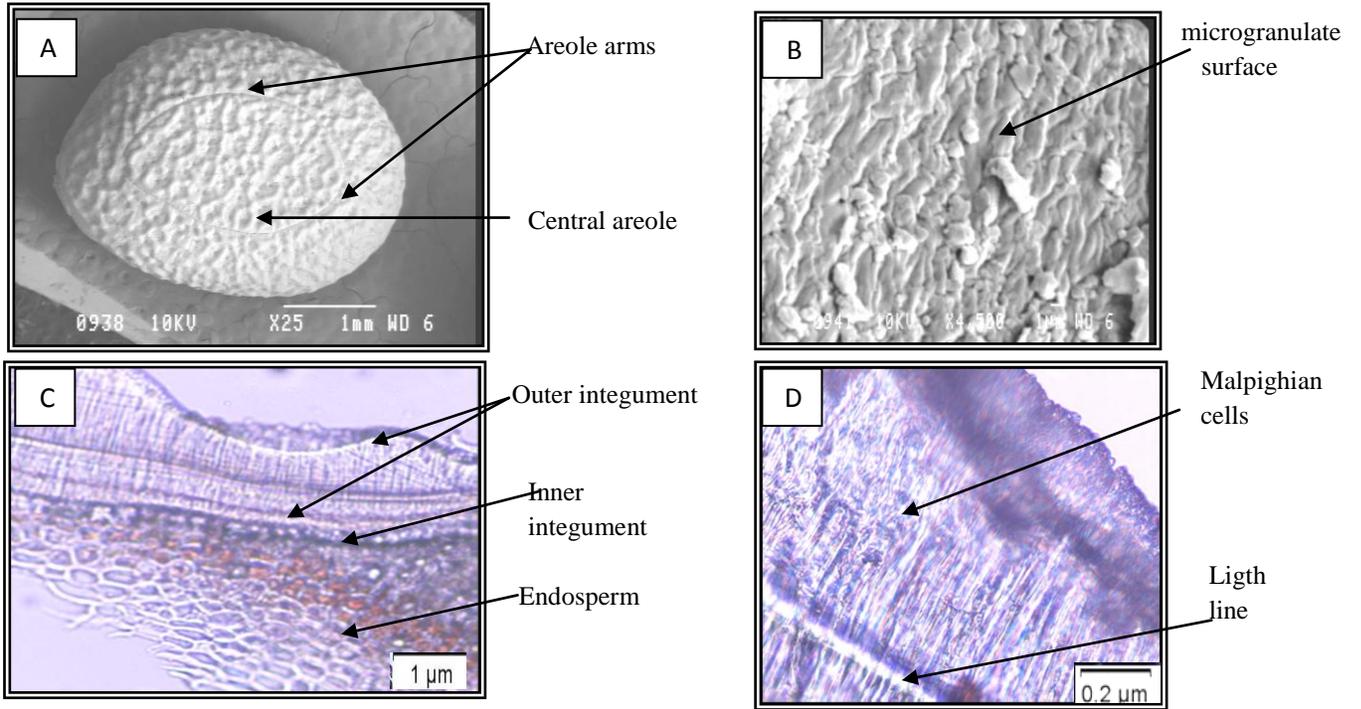
**Fig.7 *Acacia hamulosa*** A&B SEM seed and seed sculpture ,C&D T.S. in seed coat 20x&40x



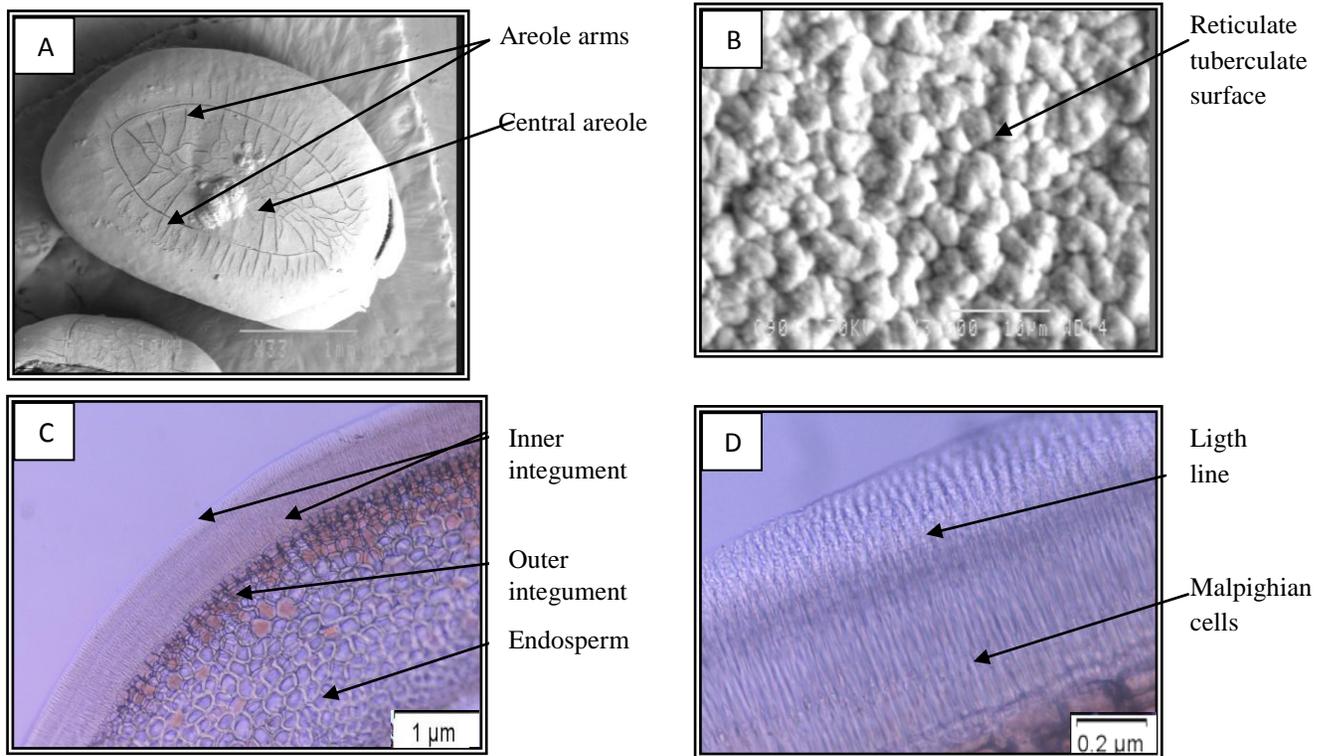
**Fig.8 *Acacia mellifera*** A&B SEM seed and seed sculpture ,C&D T.S. in seed coat 20x&40x

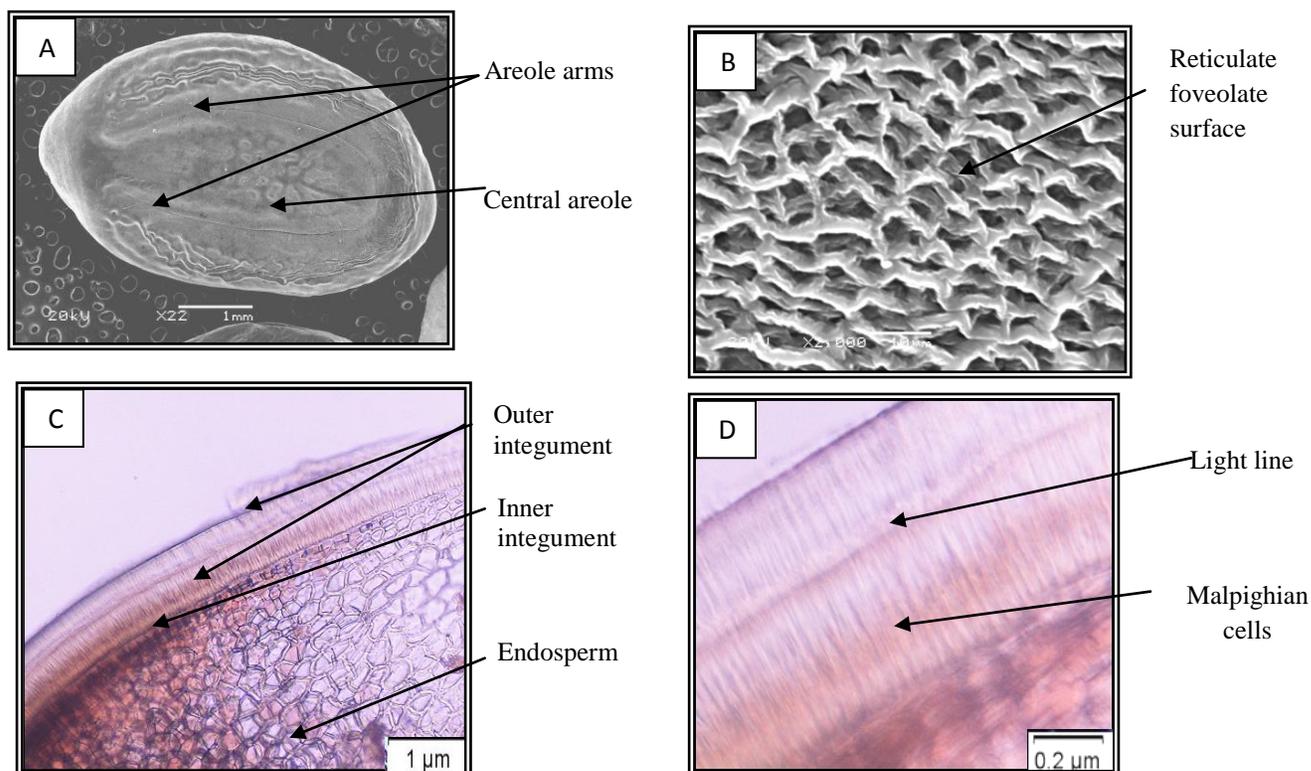


**Fig 9** *Acacia nubica* A&B SEM seed and seed sculpture ,C&D T.S. in seed coat 20x&40x



**Fig.10** *Acacia raddiana* A&B SEM seed and seed sculpture ,C&D T.S. in seed coat 20x&40x



**Fig.11** *Acacia tortilis* A&B SEM seed and seed sculpture ,C&D T.S. in seed coat 20x&40x**Corresponding Author**

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