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THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL ACTIVITY OF J. T. MILIK DURING HIS STAY IN JERUSALEM (1952-1961)

Abstract: *As a thirty-year-old Polish biblical scholar, J. T. Milik (1922--2006) would certainly not have expected that, alongside the study of scrolls, archaeological research would occupy his time for a decade in the École Biblique of Jerusalem. Yet by March 1952 he had already discovered the Cave of Timothy in the Qumran cliff and in September of the same year he worked with Father Roland de Vaux in Cave 4 and discovered Cave 5. He then took part in the second, third, forth and fifth expeditions at Khirbet Qumran and at 'Ain Feshkha and undertook small excavations with Frank M. Cross in the heart of the Judean Desert. He also cooperated with Father Bellarmino Bagatti at Dominus Flevit in Jerusalem and personally discovered several Second Temple tombs with ossuaries close to Jerusalem. Furthermore, in cooperation with Father Jean Starcky, he found many hundreds of Nabataean inscriptions over the course of two expeditions. He certainly was not only a genius epigrapher, brilliant philologist and the co-founder of Qumranology, but also, in the best sense of the word, a biblical archaeologist.*

Keywords: *J. T. Milik; R. de Vaux; F. M. Cross; Khirbet Qumran; Judaean Desert; Qumran caves; Jerusalem; ossuaries; Nabataea; J. Starcky*

Father Józef Tadeusz Milik, a twenty-five-year-old Polish priest, came to Rome in October 1946 with the aim of obtaining a Ph.D. in *Re Biblica* at the Pontifical Biblical Institute (Kapera 2011, 16; Kapera 2012a, 25-28). He soon obtained his baccalaureate in July 1947 and then his licentiate a year

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later. He first thought of writing a Ph.D. dissertation on ancient literature and languages as he was fascinated by ancient epigraphic documents. Unsurprisingly, he soon developed an intense interest in the newly discovered Hebrew scrolls at the ‘Ain Feshkha Cave near the Dead Sea and subsequently Milik’s superior (later Cardinal), Augustine Bea, accepted his proposed dissertation subject on the Community Rule scroll from Cave 1. In the academic year 1950/1951, Milik fulfilled all the preliminary requirements for the title of *candidatus ad doctoratum* (*CD*) and in late spring 1951 he became the first scholar to translate (into Latin) and philologically comment on the full text of the Community Rule (1QS) (Kapera 2012a, 30-32; Kapera 2012b, 62-64). It was an exceptional achievement for such a young scholar and this epigraphic talent most probably attracted the interest of Gerald Lankester Harding, the Director of the Department of Antiquities in Jordan and Father Roland de Vaux, the head of the French Biblical and Archaeological School in Jerusalem. They were both looking for an editor of the non-biblical scrolls from Cave 1, which they had explored in February – March 1949 (Fields 2009, 203-206).

Milik certainly did not expect that, aside from the scrolls, archaeological research would occupy him for a decade. In 1950, Milik had visited an archaeological museum in Turin and he had noticed some late Hellenistic pots from Ptolemaic Egypt which were very similar in size and form to the ‘Qumran jars’ from the ‘Ain Feshkha Cave. Milik’s article about the jars appeared in *Biblica*, the quarterly of the Pontifical Biblical Institute at the end of 1950. It was one of his first articles connected with the scrolls (Milik 1950) and it is worth adding that scholars have lately been ‘rediscovering’ the similarities described by Milik more than 60 years ago (Lönnqvist and Lönnqvist 2011), with some of them not even aware of the existence of Milik’s article and of his brilliant ideas. We must at once explain that at the time of the discovery of the ‘Qumran jars’, E. L. Sukenik and other archaeologists were looking in vain for other objects of the period to date the pottery properly (Harrison 1961, 54). Milik’s remarks about the jars were highly important in the ‘First Battle of the Scrolls’, when scholars were unsure of their antiquity. In my opinion, Milik’s article was the reason why Harding officially invited him to Jerusalem. In accepting the young scholar, he obtained not only a Hebrew and Aramaic specialist, but also someone interested in archaeological artifacts. Let us add, as an aside, that Milik owed his knowledge of biblical archaeology to his study at the Warsaw archbishopric seminary and Father T. R. O’Callaghan’s lectures in Rome in 1947/1948. Milik (1949, 323-324) had access

to the intriguing small museum at the Warsaw seminary and later an important archaeological museum of the biblical lands at the Institute in Rome.

Harding and de Vaux's invitations changed the course of Milik's life by radically altering his scholarly career. After collecting together all the scholarly literature on the scrolls from the years 1948-1951 and sending it to the editors of *Verbum Domini* (the Institute's Latin quarterly) in an extensive report on the contemporary state of discussion on the Hebrew manuscripts from the Dead Sea (Milik 1952), Milik left Rome in late Autumn 1951 and, at the very beginning of 1952, he reported to the French School in Jerusalem.

The year 1952 was full of excavations connected with the scrolls. Having just started work on the text of the Pesher of Micah from Cave 1, Milik witnessed the organization of the first expedition to the caves of Wadi Murabba'at in the heart of the Judaean Desert (January 21 to March 3, 1952). He was too inexperienced then to be taken into consideration as a member of the expedition. However, at the next opportunity, when the Bedouins appeared at the École with manuscripts from a new cave, known as Cave 2, he got his archaeological chance. As only a survey and minor excavation was planned, he became a regular member of an expedition organized by the French School and the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem to check all the caves and ravines of the Qumran cliff in search of new scrolls in order to forestall the Taamire' Bedouins (March 10 to 29, 1952) (de Vaux 1953; Reed 1954).

During the search, Milik and an Arab boy discovered the Timothy Cave, which is now known in Qumran literature as Cave 29. It yielded five earthenware jars for keeping food, four pots used as jar covers, one bowl and an exceptionally well preserved palm mat. It was so close to the description of a cave with ancient manuscripts in a letter of the Nestorian patriarch, Timothy I, that Milik insisted on connecting it with the discovery near Jericho of about AD 785 (Mébarki 2000, 132). Father de Vaux rejected the proposed identification, but more importantly, due to his preoccupation with the cave, Milik (as well as the whole expedition!) missed what could have been his greatest discovery. He took no interest in a visible great hole which was the entrance to the cave later called Cave 4 (Kapera 2006a, 154-155). However, it was his great good fortune that he participated in the expedition itself, as it later provided him with an offer not to be refused: to publish the Copper Scroll. The scroll was discovered in Cave 3 by Henri de Contenson, but the young scholar was a professional field archaeologist unable to publish such a complicated text himself. Edited by Milik, the text

appeared in the volume on 'small caves', namely vol. 3 of the *Discoveries in the Judean Desert* series in 1962 (Milik 1962b, 199-302).

For many months in 1952, Milik worked patiently on the scrolls of Cave 1, but his task was again interrupted at the end of the summer. The Taamire' Bedouins had discovered Cave 4 and Father de Vaux had to organize rescue excavations at once. On September 22, Milik himself started digging the soil of the cave, with Father de Vaux acting as his archaeological mentor. Some 14,000 fragments had already been removed by the Bedouins, but the ground held another 1000 scraps of manuscripts. Milik later recollected moments when he was cleaning and identifying fragments of the *Book of Enoch* or the *Rule of the Community* on the spot (Mébarki 2000, 132). While surveying the close surroundings of Cave 4, Milik located Cave 5 and dug it out. He saved seventeen ancient documents, taking special precautions to preserve them for future study (Milik 1962a, 165-197). Milik also played a part in the discovery of Cave 6.

It is worth mentioning that Milik had a collector's interests. He regularly visited the Jerusalem antique shops and, being on good terms with the owners, he was able to buy two interesting jars with inscriptions and five plates from the vicinity of Cave 6 in the Qumran area (Milik 1959a). As the spherical jar had its capacity stated, it was possible to establish that one *seah* in the New Testament times was equal to 16.6 litres of dry measure. On another occasion, Milik bought an arrow head with the oldest Phoenician inscription of the 12th century BC. Thanks to cooperation with Frank Cross (who was the Director of the ASOR in Jerusalem at the time) he was able to collect a great deal of treasure (including javelin-heads) from the Bethlehem area (Milik and Cross 1954; Cross and Milik 1956).

At the end of 1952, Milik was almost ready to publish his texts from Cave 1 and was engaged to help in the editing of Wadi Murabba'at manuscripts. However, being highly regarded by Father de Vaux, he was also included in subsequent expeditions to Khirbet Qumran. Milik liked to work with the shovel, but he was also responsible for the supervision of some sectors of the excavations, the reconstruction of pots, the sorting of shards and the entering of objects into the catalogue (Milik 1954, 139). Over the course of the excavations he was introduced to the basic principles of practical archaeology by his master. Milik was keen on inscriptions and had the chance to discover some of them himself. We owe to him, for example, the discovery of an ostracon with Paleo-Hebrew characters of the 7th century BC and a handle with a royal seal which was also from the Iron II period (Mébarki 2000, 134). Even if de Vaux did not mention all the members

of the Qumran expeditions in his reports every time, we know (thanks to the preserved photographs) that Milik participated in the second (9.02. to 24.04.1953), third (13.02. to 14.04.1954), fourth (2.02. to 6.04.1955) and fifth (18.02. to 28.03.1956) campaigns and also in the search of 'Ain Feshkha (early 1958) meaning that Milik spent a total of nine months at Khirbet Qumran. Owing to his practical knowledge of the site, he was able to present the most extensive description of the Qumran ruins (with an emphasis on the industrial area in his handbook of the scrolls of 1957 (Milik 1957, 41-47; Milik 1959b, 45-56). This was long before the appearance of Father de Vaux's monograph, *Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (1961). In the latter publication we find several important points of disagreement between de Vaux and his pupil concerning the interpretation and chronology of the site, especially the dating of a large number of pots from the assembly hall and the pantry (earlier than Milik thought), the number of inhabitants (larger than estimated by Milik) and the interruption of habitation between periods Ib and II (much longer than in Milik's opinion). It later turned out that Milik had been right on several of these points. De Vaux did, however, accept the results of Milik's research at Buqei'a concerning the Copper Scroll, the custom of preserving scrolls in jars and even the identification of the Teacher of Righteousness (de Vaux 1961, see index *s.v.* Milik). In the introduction to Milik's handbook, de Vaux wrote that 'This volume was written by a specialist who knows the places and texts about which he speaks as nobody else' (Milik 1957, 9). It was true. To give one example, de Vaux never described the aqueduct supplying water to the site, but Milik and Allegro investigated it to the last detail. Allegro took very good photographs and Milik kept looking for a parallel example in the Judean Desert before eventually finding it at Hyrcanion, the fortress built by Hyrcanus I, which was contemporary with the Qumran water installations (Milik 1959a, 152, note 4). In contrast to the view of de Vaux, who was interested in Khirbet Qumran as a site per se, we can call Milik's method a precursor of the now so popular regional archaeology. He was looking at the site in the context of the whole Judean Desert.

By the time of the third Qumran expedition, Milik had already become interested in the earliest phase of the settlement, the Iron Age (8th-7th centuries BC). The artifacts he studied 'suggested [that he should do] more systematic research of material remains of that period in the Judean Desert'. As he said in one of his unpublished reports, 'My own surface research and small scale excavations conducted with Frank Cross in August

[19]55 made it possible to establish the presence of three small settlements from the monarchic period in the valley of Buqei'a on the Judean plateau west of Qumran.' The search of sites such as Khirbet Abu Tabak, Khirbet es-Samrah, and Khirbet el-Maqari suggested a central administration present in the area as well as the use of forced labour. This was visible in the layout, the masonry of the walls, the irrigation system and the amphorae. An analysis of chapter 15 of the *Book of Joshua* enabled Milik and Cross (1954) to identify the sites as Middin, Sekaka, and Nisban, while the Khirbet Qumran site was the City of Salt. Milik (about 1965, mss, 2) noted, with some pride, that Professor William Foxwell Albright, a well known authority in the field, described their effort as 'the most brilliant example of small archaeological explorations known to me.' Eventually, Khirbet Qumran in its early phase was placed within a system of desert forts in the province of Judaea created not later than the times of Uzziah and identified with Ir ham-Melah (the City of Salt). In the early 1970s, with the encouragement of Milik (and Cross), Lawrence E. Stager (1976) undertook the study of ancient agriculture in the Buqe'ah Valley of the Judean Desert during the Iron Age and conducted excavations at Khirbet Abu Tabak.

During the Jerusalem years, Milik was on good terms not only with the École and the Dominicans, but also with the Franciscan Biblical School (*Studium Biblicum Franciscanum*). He cooperated with them in excavations, lectured to their students, and researched inscriptions in their museum. His work with Father Bellarmino Bagatti was particularly fruitful. Bagatti conducted excavations in the early 1950s at Dominus Flevit, where, in the garden of the Mount of Olives, tombs of the late Hellenistic and the early Roman period were discovered (135 BC to AD 70, possibly before AD 135). At his request, Milik deciphered the inscriptions on ossuaries taken out of niches, which were called '*kokhim*'. He not only read and interpreted the inscriptions on the limestone boxes, but also studied their paleography and language, and even started to analyze the names of persons statistically (Milik 1958, 70-109). The final publication was evaluated by W. F. Albright (1960, 37) as the best single publication of ossuaries. He agreed with Milik that the graffiti on ossuaries from the hypogeum 65-80 could be dated to after AD 70.

It seems that Bagatti's excavations impressed Milik greatly and that he himself embarked upon a project to publish a corpus of Palestinian ossuaries in which he wished to describe all existing ossuaries. He made use of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum* but the volume concerning eastern Mediterranean countries was already outdated (Frey 1952). Milik

checked many of the inscriptions on originals in European and Middle Eastern museums and also added a few dozen ossuaries he had discovered to the corpus. In 1958-1960, with some help from the Department of Antiquities in Jordan, he conducted a systematic search of the southwest necropolis of Jerusalem and in the mid-1950s he discovered three Jewish hypogea from the turn of the era in the area of Silwan in the Kidron Valley at Gebel Hallet et-Turi, er-Ras, and Karm es-Seh. The publication of the objects in the *Liber Annuus* of the Franciscan Biblical School confirmed Milik's thorough knowledge of the problems concerning ossuaries and their typology and also demonstrated his brilliant deciphering of the inscriptions. The objects from Gebel Hallet et-Turi were particularly precious. One of the five *kokhim* contained 32 ossuaries, for the most part decorated and painted. The two-line inscription from the cover of one of the ossuaries with a prohibition of re-use (cf. *Mishna*, *Nedarim* 1.1-4) is very interesting for Aramaic scholars. Kitchen pots and lamps made it possible to date the tomb to the period of the 1st century BC and more precisely AD 70 (Milik 1956/1957, 232-267). We can say with complete confidence that, in the rescue work connected with building in Jerusalem, Milik demonstrated his best qualities. Unfortunately, we know nothing about his later excavation work in the city, which he mentions in the cited report.

Milik's idea of a corpus of ossuaries has still not been executed to this day, even though numerous new hypogea have been discovered in recent decades due to the extensive building programme in Jerusalem. We do, however, possess a summary description of the necropolis of Jerusalem in the Second Temple period in which Milik's excavations are included (Kloner and Zissu 2007, 263). We also have a catalogue of all the ossuaries kept in the state museums of Israel (Rahmani 1994). It is only recently that the first volume of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palestinae* was published (Cotton *et al*. 2010) and we can see great progress in the study of ossuaries and early Jewish onomastics. Therefore, even if Milik was unable to continue his studies on ossuaries, he could certainly be called a proponent of that kind of research. More importantly, his contributions to the field are very rarely absent from citations by current authors (cf. Evans 2003, 167, index *s.v*. Milik).

In dealing with Milik's archaeological activity, we must not forget to mention his studies on the historical topography of ancient Palestine in which he cooperated closely with Father Virgilio Corbo. Beginning in 1957, 'a series of field searches were undertaken in the Judean Desert with a view to rediscovering and identifying the remains of monasteries,

economic installations, hermitages and inhabited caves of Byzantine monks who lived in the desert between the 5th and 12th centuries' (Milik about 1965, mss). Finally, Milik published 'a repertory of monasteries and sanctuaries of Jerusalem and its neighbourhood as well as the Judean Desert' in which he used 'literary documents as well as archaeological remains of the Christian buildings concerned' (Milik about 1965, mss). The repertory included eighty sanctuaries from the Jerusalem area alone (Milik 1960). Milik's most important work in this field is a fundamental dissertation on the topography of the Holy City at the end of the Byzantine period (Milik 1961). In this large study, Milik used unpublished Arabic codices from the famous library of St Catherine in Sinai and reinterpreted known literary transmissions beginning with the view of Jerusalem on the Madaba mosaic map.

At his own initiative, Milik (1959/1960) also undertook hagiographic studies devoted to the saints of Transjordan in which – in his own words – he put together 'Christian archaeological and epigraphical data' (Milik about 1965, mss). Behind each study first-hand knowledge of the area, literary sources and inscriptions were present.

It is amazing how Milik was able to combine his everyday obligatory work on the scrolls from Cave 1 from Wadi Murabba'at and the so-called 'minor caves' of Qumran and, from Autumn 1953, the deciphering of the most complicated texts from Cave 4, with all the archaeological research we have mentioned. And that is not all. In the mid-1950s, he started a new field of research: the search for and publication of Nabataean inscriptions. He first came to be engaged with them in connection with the publication of the Wadi Murabba'at hoard of Nabatean coins (Milik and Seyrig 1958). After Father Jean Starcky, his close friend, requested his help, he entered into an area which earned him, after his death, the title of 'epigrapher of Nabataea par excellence'. He visited Nabataea for the first time in July 1955 (Starcky and Milik 1957), and the last in 1974. In the field, the two friends discovered or rediscovered as many as 974 inscriptions in the local language, 48 in Greek, 11 in Latin and 6 in Thamudean (Graf 2007, 125). Again, we must say with great sorrow that their publication has been woefully delayed (Nehmé 2012). We can only hope that, in the end, the name of Milik will be shown, as has been promised, on the covers of the four volumes of the Nabatean collection (Puech 2006, 338-339) of *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*, which is currently being prepared under the auspices of the Academie des Inscriptions et Belles Letters in Paris, as his work laid the foundations for the history of ancient Nabataea.

It is difficult to deliver a brief conclusion summarizing the entire archaeological activity of Milik. Milik was not an archaeologist by education in the strict sense, yet acquired a good knowledge of archaeology during his studies. He knew the principles of the discipline and was certainly a practicing archaeologist, who quickly rose from 'amateur' to extremely knowledgeable specialist on archeological artifacts. In addition, he was a brilliant epigrapher in the area of West Semitic studies and was, without doubt, an exceptionally talented field researcher. He did not conduct excavations on a large scale, but his output as a field archaeologist is far from modest. In fact, he must be recognized as the leading expert of his time on the topography of ancient Palestine, Syria and Nabataea, and especially of the Judean Desert.

Milik is known in popular literature as 'the fastest man with a scroll', 'a giant of Qumranology', 'the Champollion of the scrolls' and the 'epigrapher of Nabataea *par excellence*' (Kapera 2006b, 87, 88, 104; Graf 2007, 132). Yet none of these descriptions reflect the full range of his scholarly research. Americans are very proud of the previously mentioned W. F. Albright, a great 20th century scholar in the field of archaeology of the ancient Near East and Palestine in particular. In my opinion, the Poles should be similarly proud of the achievements of Milik, who was younger than Albright and was fascinated by him. Milik, like Albright, was a 'Biblical archaeologist' in the best, but now abandoned, meaning of the word. For sure, Milik was a man possessing a brilliant mind able to survey immeasurable horizons, even though his scholarly achievements have not yet been properly evaluated. One of the British newspapers (*The Times*, February 8, 2006) posthumously described him as a 'scholars' scholar'. I fully agree with that opinion.

The history of Polish archaeology in the 20th century cherishes the illustrious names of Father Władysław Szczepański (1877-1927), the great searcher of Sinai and Arabia Petraea and of Father Urban Atanazy Fic (1901-1943), a great student of ancient Jerusalem. To these two we should add the name of Milik, for whom the Jerusalem decade (the years 1952-1961) was the 'the most beautiful period' of his life.

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Pl. 1. 1 – Father Roland de Vaux, Józef T. Milik and Gerald L. Harding.
© Archive of J. M. Allegro
2 – J. T. Milik standing at the northwestern tower of the Qumran site.
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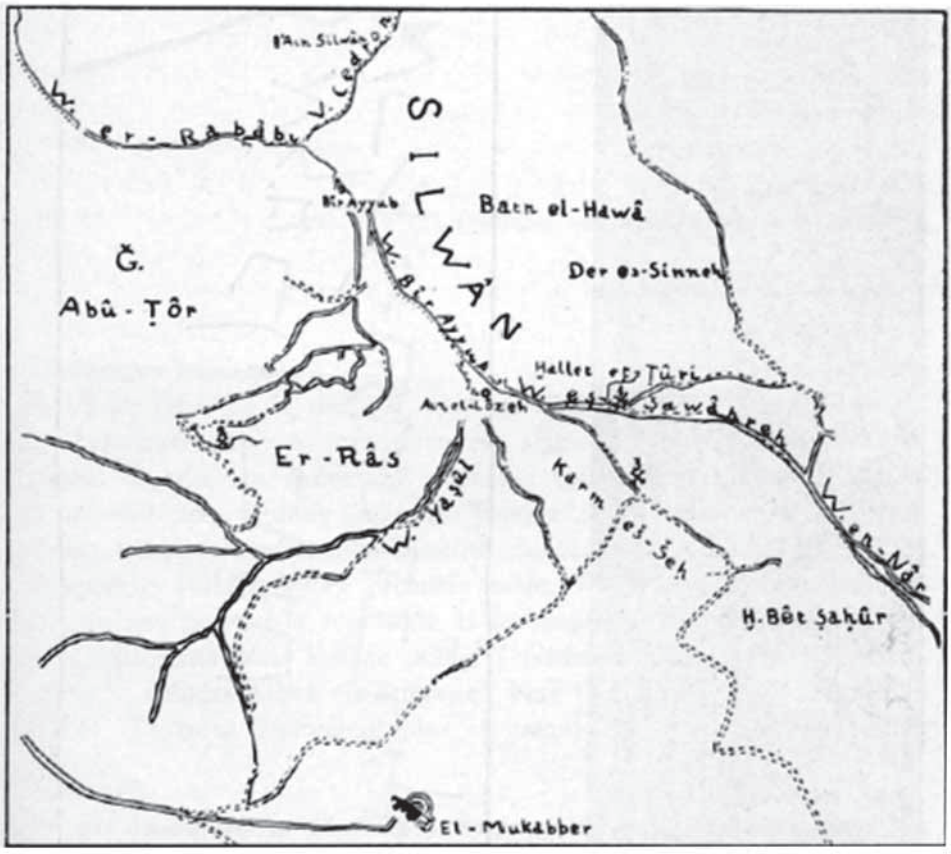

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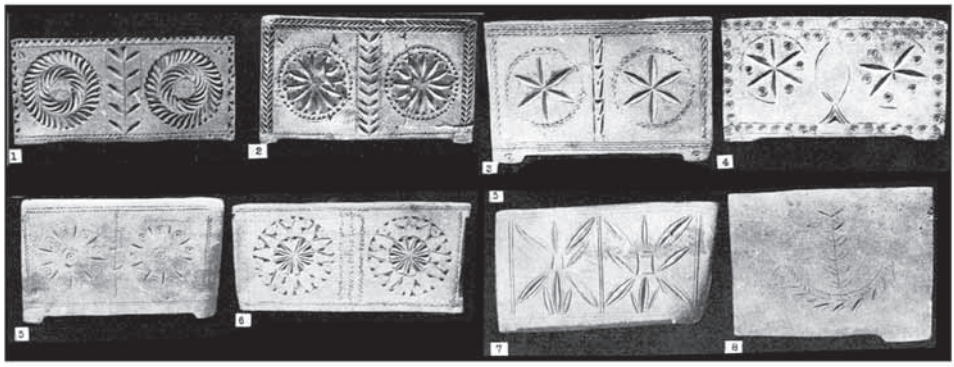

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Pl. 2. 1 – Area of Milik's ossuary research near Jerusalem. © J. T. Milik's private archive
2 – Some of the ossuaries discovered by Milik. © J. T. Milik's private archive

Pl. 3. J. T. Milik offering the first volume of the DJD series to his colleages.