Before we turn to the body of our translation and exegesis of Mishnah Bikkurim Chapter Three, let us recall the points necessary for understanding the chapter’s concerns and, then, outline its specific structure and content. According to M., the Israelite landowner is required each year to designate his first ripe produce as a consecrated gift for the priests in the Temple. This gift is dedicated to the priests as an offering for God, acknowledging God’s act of giving the fertile Land of Israel to the Israelites.¹ As a proper acknowledgment, firstfruits are designated only from choice produce of the seven kinds native to the Land of Israel, barley, wheat, olives, dates, figs, pomegranates and grapes (cf. M. 1:3, Deut. 8:8). After the harvest, the landowner brings his firstfruits to the Temple, where he offers them to the priest at the altar. During the ceremonious presentation, the Israelite recites the passage denoting the purpose of the offering (see Deut. 26:3–11), and the priest waves the firstfruits before the altar (cf. Lev. 23:20). After this ceremony, the firstfruits become the property of the priests.

M. Bik. Chapter Three presents a sequence of laws about firstfruits from the point at which they are first designated as a holy offering by the landowner until they are in the hands of the priest.² The chapter consists of three parts: 1) the ritual of designating firstfruits (M. 3:1); 2) the procedure of bringing the offering to the priest (M. 3:2–9); and 3) the offering in the custody of the priests (M. 3:10–12).

These topics are organized in chronological and conceptual order. Once the firstfruits are designated by the landowner (M. 3:1), they

---

¹ This notion is explicit in Scripture (see Deut. 26:1–11) and implicit in many of the laws of M. Bik., e.g. M. 1:4, 1:5, 1:10, 3:11 (cf. EF, vol. VI, p. 1314, I.C.C. Deut., p. 288).
² This completes the discussion begun in the first chapter concerning which landowners are eligible to bring the offering of firstfruits and to make the accompanying recitation. The second chapter compares the laws of the firstfruits to those of two other holy offerings, heave-offering, and second tithes.
assume the status of consecrated produce, set apart as an offering for
the Temple priests.\(^3\) M. 3:2–9 takes up the next logical question: How
is the offering brought to the priest? The unit consists of a narrative
(M. 3:2–6) describing the various stages in this procedure, followed by
several rulings (M. 3:7–9) focusing on unclarified details. M. 3:10–12
deals with the final issue, the legal status of the various components of
the offering when they are in the priests’ possession. The major difficulty
in this regard is the status of produce other than the firstfruits that the
landowner adds to his offering as a supplement or decoration. The
question is whether or not the priest should treat these additional items
in accordance with the stringencies that apply to consecrated firstfruits.\(^4\)
The answer depends (M. 3:10–11) upon two criteria that determine
whether or not the produce should be considered firstfruits. If the addi-
tional produce a) is native to the Land of Israel and b) has been des-
ignated as firstfruits by the landowner, it is subject to the laws pertaining
to consecrated firstfruits. But if the additional produce does not meet
these criteria, it is not suitable for the consecrated status of firstfruits.
M. 3:12 closes the chapter by addressing the general question of whether
firstfruits are the personal property of a particular priest specified by
the landowner or the common property of all the priests on duty in
the Temple. In all, M. Bik. Chapter Three specifies how firstfruits
become a holy offering, how the offering is transferred from the landown-
ers to the priests, and what the priests may do with the offering once
it is in their possession.

T. for this chapter follows the order of topics in M., restating selected
points, clarifying ambiguous references, adding details, and developing
secondary issues. T.’s substantial contribution is T. 2:12–14, which
simplifies the discussion (M. 3:10–11) of the additional produce in the
offering.

\(^3\) A prevalent notion in Mishnah is that man’s act of designation activates the holiness
of agricultural offerings. Neusner, *Judaism: The Evidence of the Mishnah*, comments:
[In Mishnah], it is the act of designation by a human being which activates that
holiness inherent in crops . . . Once the human being has designated what is holy
within the larger crop, then that designated portion of the crop gathers in itself
the formerly-diffused holiness and becomes holy, set aside for the use and benefit
of the priest to whom it is given.

\(^4\) The stringencies pertaining to the firstfruits themselves are taken up in M. Bik.
2:1–5.