

tinuation of these annuals, M.E. \*Stern attempted in 1844 to publish *Bikkurei ha-Ittim*, and Reggio together with Isidore \*Bush, *Bikkurei ha-Ittim ha-Ḥadashim* in 1845. While these attempts were unsuccessful, another annual, *Kokhevei Yizḥak*, did succeed. Its publication began in 1845 in Vienna, under the editorship of M.E. Stern, and lasted until 1873.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:** B. Wachstein, *Die hebraeische Publizistik in Wien* (1930), xiii–xl (introduction); R. Fahn, *Kitvei Re'uvon Fahn*, 2 (1937), 100–41 (*Pirkei Haskalah*).

[Getzel Kressel]

**BIKKURIM** (Heb. בִּכּוּרִים; "First Fruits"), last and shortest tractate of the Mishnah, Order *Zera'im*, dealing with laws relating to first-fruit offerings (Deut. 26:1–11; cf. also Ex. 23:19; 34:26; Num. 18:13). The Torah commands that the first fruits of the land be brought joyfully to the sanctuary, where they are to be offered in baskets to priests who are entitled to consume them in a state of purity. The offerers must recite a passage expressing their gratitude to God for delivering them from slavery in Egypt and bringing them to a rich land.

The laws set down in the Mishnah are based on an elaborate process of midrashic exegesis of the biblical texts, and the Mishnah (e.g., 1:2–5, 9) cites some of the relevant verses and their interpretations. Thus, the allusions in the recited passage to "fruits of thy land" and "the land which the Lord swore unto our fathers" were understood as excluding from the scope of the obligations people who did not own land or were not of Jewish descent. Similarly, the rabbis limited the precept to the seven fruits enumerated in Deuteronomy 8:8. From these basic premises, the Mishnah (especially in Chapter 1) develops its more detailed discussions of such topics as the relationships between the bringing of the fruits and the scriptural recitation, the appropriate time-frame for performing the precepts, precise identification of which fruits are subject to the obligation, what constitutes land ownership, the status of proselytes, and the extent of the owner's responsibility for the first fruits between the time of their designation and their delivery to the priest.

Most of Chapter 3 is devoted to a vivid narrative description of the ceremonial procession of bringing the first fruits to the Temple in joy, music, and fellowship. As noted by S. Lieberman, the abundance of details that cannot be ascribed to biblical sources or literary convention (e.g., the presence of an ox adorned with a garland on his gold-plated horns, a common feature of pagan *panegyre*) lends credence to the basic historicity of the Mishnah's description of the rustic folk custom. The statement in 3:4 that "even King Agrippa would take the basket and place it on his shoulder" was taken by scholars as an indication that the Mishnah was composed during the reign of one of the kings of that name.

Chapter 2 in the Mishnah is from a separate collection of traditions arranged by the formal pattern "There are features of x that are not in y, etc." By virtue of the references to first fruits at the beginning of the collection, the entire source was incorporated into the Mishnah.

Some Mishnah editions include a fourth chapter outlining laws related to the status of the *androgynos*. This represents a variant tradition of a passage also found in the Tosefta 2:3–7.

There is a full Palestinian Talmud to the three chapters of the Mishnah, but no Babylonian.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:** N. Sacks, *The Mishnah with Variant Readings: Order Zera'im*, vol. 2 (1975); J. Rabinowitz, *The Jerusalem Talmud (Talmud Yerushalmi): Bikkurim* (1975); S. Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (1962<sup>2</sup>); D. Hoffmann, *The First Mishna and the Controversies of the Tannaim*, trans. P. Forchheimer (1977).

[Eliezer L. Segel (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)]

**BILBEIS**, capital of the "Eastern Province" of Egypt (Sharqīya) during the Middle Ages. It had a well-organized Jewish community, mentioned in a letter written about 1100 by the *dayyan* Abraham b. Shabbetai to all Jews of the area, and also in a letter written by his son and successor Shabbetai later in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. When Ashkelon was conquered by the Crusaders in 1153, many Jews fled to Bilbeis; 15 years later Bilbeis was itself captured by the Crusaders and the Jewish community undoubtedly suffered. At the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Bilbeis was still considered one of the chief Jewish communities of Egypt. In a community law dated 1187, R. Judah ha-Kohen is mentioned as *dayyan* of Bilbeis (Maimonides, *Responsa*, ed. by J. Blau, 2 (1960), no. 346). Documents of the early 13<sup>th</sup> century found in the Cairo \**Genizah* contain his signature as head of the rabbinical court. In a letter R. \*Abraham b. Moses b. Maimon asked the Bilbeis community for financial assistance for the Jews in Jerusalem. Other documents mention Jews from Jerusalem who were visiting Bilbeis. Throughout the \*Fatimid and \*Ayyubid caliphates the Jewish community in Bilbeis had its own customs, such as indicating the value of a bride's dowry in the *ketubbah*. According to a late Jewish source, the persecution of Jews in Egypt in 1301 resulted in the conversion of all the Jews in the city to Islam, and of the synagogue into a mosque. However, in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, Meshullam da Volterra mentions 50 Jewish families in the city in 1481, while Obadiah di Bertinoro estimated them at 30 a few years later.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:** Mann, *Egypt*, 2 (1922), 25, 327, 329; R. Gottheil and W.H. Worrell, *Fragments from the Cairo Genizah...* (1927), 13ff., 139; S.D. Goitein, in: *Eretz Israel*, 4 (1956), 153ff.; Sambari, in: Neubauer, *Chronicles*, 1 (1887), 136; A. Yaari, *Iggerot Erez Yisrael* (1943), 60, 124; Ashtor, *Toledot*, 2 (1951), 423; 3 (1970); idem, in: *JJS*, 18 (1967), 23–27.

[Eliyahu Ashtor]

**BILDERSEE, ADELE** (1883–1971), U.S. educator and author. Adele Bilderssee was born in New York City. After teaching in New York City's elementary and secondary school system (1903–11), she was appointed instructor of English at Hunter College and remained there for the next 20 years, becoming acting dean in 1926. In 1931 she became dean of women at Brooklyn College, where she was also director of admissions from 1944 until her retirement in 1954. She also