How was Shabuot celebrated in Jerusalem?

רֵאשִׁית , בִּכּוּרֵי אַדְמָתְךָ , תָּבִיא בֵּית ה ‘אֱלֹקיך

Shabu’ot, the day in which we celebrate the giving of the Tora to Bnei Israel and the beginning of our covenant with God, can also be referred to as Hag KaKatsir, the festival of the harvest; and Hag HaBikkurim, the festival of the first fruits.

Let’s see why.

In this season, between spring and summer (in Israel), the plants, grains, and fruits of harvest were already beginning to mature. And so the first thing the Jewish people did, was turn to HaShem in thanks for giving us our land of Israel and blessing us with its fruits.

The most important aspect of the celebrating of Shabu’ot in the times of our Bet HaMikdash was the offering of the Bikkurim- the first fruits and grains.

Jews would come from all the villages of Israel and bring baskets filled with the first fruits.
But how did they know which fruits had bloomed first?

The Mishna tells us that when the field owners would inspect their fields, they paid close attention to which fruits would bloom first. When they would find a first fig, grape, or pomegranate, etc.; they marked it by tying a knot of ribbon made by vegetable fiber, around said fruit.

As Shabu’ot would approach, when it was time to go to Yerushalayim (as was done in all three pilgrimage festivals: Pesach, Shabu’ot, Sukkot), those fruits which were now mature, were picked and placed in a basket. In each town and city of Israel, a caravan of several families was organized to travel

together to the Bet HaMikdash. Aside from the fruits, they also brought pigeons, as well as usually a bull- which was used to be decorated. As they would pass through towns on their way to the Temple, the residents of each town would come out to greet them, honor them, and offer a place of rest, or water if necessary. When they approached the Holy City, the Jewish pilgrims sent a messenger to announce their arrival. A delegation of Cohanim (priests) of the Bet HaMikdash went out to receive them with honors and accompanied them into Yerushalayim. Usually, the caravans arrived on the eve of Shabu'ot. They spent the night in a place of lodging assigned by the Cohanim which was outside the city. At dawn, the Cohanim accompanied the caravans into the city of Jerusalem with songs and musical instruments (ie: flutes).

Once they were in Yerushalayim, the caravans were received by the dignitaries of the city, who accompanied them to the Temple Mount, and into the Bet HaMikdash. At this point, the joy was fused with emotion, from entering the Great Temple of Yerushalayim; seeing it in all its splendor, and hearing the beautiful songs of the Leviim (Levites). Once in the Temple, each individual would present their baskets before the Cohanim; and while holding the basket on their shoulder, they'd recite the following statement; "Today I came to declare [my gratitude] before HaShem…, that I have come to the land that He gave us, just as He has promised to our ancestors." The fruit basket was received by the Cohen, while the Israelite who offered it continued his praise with the following statement, "My father [Abraham Abinu] was a nomadic Aramaic; and his [descendants, later,] went down to Egypt with very few people, and resided there until they became a great nation, strong and numerous. The Egyptians mistreated us, made us suffer, and subjected us to forced labor. And then we cried to HaShem, the God of our fathers, and he heard our prayers, saw our misery… And HaShem brought us out of Egypt with His miracles… And He brought us to this place, and He gave us this land, where milk and honey abound. And for that reason [in a

sign of gratitude] I bring now the first fruits of the land that you HaShem, my God, have granted me.”

May HaShem renew His Presence in Yerushalayim, soon, in our days, AMEN.