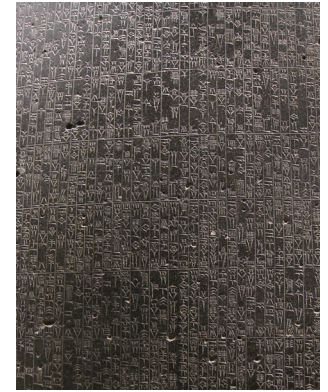


PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS: HAMMURABI'S CODE

Hammurabi's Code is a set of 282 laws from ancient Mesopotamia. It dates back to the 1700s BCE, when Hammurabi ruled the kingdom of Babylon. Hammurabi's Code was not the first legal code in history, but it is one of the best preserved. The laws reveal key information about the social structure and religious beliefs in ancient Babylon. There are four particularly groundbreaking elements of Hammurabi's Code:

- The laws were written in stone and publicly displayed.
- The laws clearly prescribed specific punishments for specific behaviors.
- The laws threatened harsh punishment to discourage bad behavior.
- The laws covered a wide range of personal and civic offenses from murder and injury to false accusations and accidentally flooding other people's properties.



This tall block of stone displays Hammurabi's Code, a set of 282 laws from ancient Mesopotamia. It was found in present-day Iran in 1901 and is currently displayed in the Louvre Museum in Paris, France.

Read the excerpts from Hammurabi's Code. Then answer the questions that follow.

THE PROLOGUE

The Prologue is an introduction defining the purpose of the laws.

Anu and **Bel** called...me, Hammurabi, the exalted prince, who feared God, to make justice visible in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil-doers; so that the strong should not harm the weak;...to further the well-being of mankind.

EXAMPLES OF LAWS

Law 2. If any one bring an accusation against a man, and the accused go to the river and leap into the river, if he sink in the river his accuser shall take possession of his house. But if the river prove that the accused is not guilty, and he escape unhurt, then he who had brought the accusation shall be put to death, while he who leaped into the river shall take possession of the house that had belonged to his accuser.

Law 3. If any one bring an accusation of any crime before the elders and does not prove what he has charged, he shall, if it be a capital offense charged, be put to death.

Anu, Bel: names of Babylonian gods

PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS:

HAMMURABI'S CODE

Keep reading the excerpts from Hammurabi's Code. Then answer the questions that follow.

EXAMPLES OF LAWS, *continued*

- Law 6.** If any one steal the property of a temple or of the court, he shall be put to death, and also the one who receives the stolen thing from him shall be put to death.
- Law 22.** If any one is committing a robbery and is caught, then he shall be put to death.
- Law 23.** If the robber is not caught, then shall he who was robbed claim under oath the amount of his loss; then shall the community, and...on whose ground and territory and in whose domain it was, compensate him for the goods stolen.
- Law 55.** If any one open his ditches to water his crop, but is careless, and the water flood the field of his neighbor, then he shall pay his neighbor corn for his loss.
- Law 195.** If a son strike his father, his hands shall be hewn (cut) off.
- Law 196.** If a man put out the eye of another man, his eye shall be put out.
- Law 197.** If he break another man's bone, his bone shall be broken.
- Law 198.** If he put out the eye of a common freed man, or break the bone of a common man, he shall pay one gold mina.
- Law 199.** If he put out the eye of a man's slave, or break the bone of a man's slave, he shall pay one half of [the slave's] value.
- Law 200.** If a man knock out the teeth of his equal, his teeth shall be knocked out.
- Law 248.** If any one hire an ox, and break off a horn, or cut off its tail, or hurt its muzzle, he shall pay one fourth of its value in money.

THE EPILOGUE

The Epilogue is a concluding message.

Laws of justice which Hammurabi, the wise king, established. A righteous law, and pious statute did he teach the land. Hammurabi, the protecting king am I. I have not withdrawn myself from the men, whom Bel gave to me, the rule over whom **Marduk** gave to me, I was not negligent, but I made them a peaceful abiding-place...

...let the oppressed, who has a case at law, come and stand before this my image as king of righteousness; let him read the inscription, and understand my precious words: the inscription will explain his case to him; he will find out what is just, and his heart will be glad, so that he will say: "Hammurabi is a ruler, who is as a father to his subjects, who holds the words of Marduk in reverence, who has achieved conquest for Marduk over the north and south, who rejoices the heart of Marduk, his lord, who has bestowed benefits for ever and ever on his subjects, and has established order in the land."

Marduk: the Babylonian king of the gods

PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS: HAMMURABI'S CODE

Answer the following questions about Hammurabi's Code.

1. In the prologue, Hammurabi states that he wants “to make justice visible in the land, to destroy the wicked person and the evil-doer, that the strong might not injure the weak.” Do you think the laws support his claim to protect people from being harmed? Give specific examples.

2. Law 2 refers to jumping in the river as a method of demonstrating guilt or innocence. If the accused survived, they were innocent; if they drowned, they were guilty. What does this practice communicate about the Babylonian belief that the gods played a significant role in their lives?

3. List four crimes that are punishable by death.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

4. Do you consider any of the laws to be particularly unfair, too harsh, or unwise?

5. What do Hammurabi's punishments for different classes of people (slaves, commoners, an equal, or an animal) say about the social system in ancient Babylonia?

6. Why was it significant that Hammurabi's laws were written in stone and publicly displayed? Cite two reasons this would be important.

7. Is Hammurabi a wise leader? Do you consider him to be a good “father to his subjects” as he calls himself in the epilogue? Cite two specific details from the text that support your assessment of Hammurabi.
