

Hammurabi's Code of Law

Standard: SSWG1.a Describe the development of Mesopotamian societies; include the religious, cultural, economic, and political facets of society, with attention to Hammurabi's law code

Timeline

Year	Event
c. 8000 BCE	Grain is grown in Mesopotamia . This is evidence of people starting to settle and farm rather than hunt and gather.
c. 4300-3100 BCE	Cities form in Mesopotamia
c. 3400 BCE	Egyptians develop a form of writing called hieroglyphs.
c. 3000 BCE	Civilization of Sumer in Mesopotamia emerges.
c. 3000 BCE	Babylonians use advanced math.
c. 2400 BCE	Sumerians develop a form of writing called "cuneiform".
c. 2000 BCE	Trade networks develop
c. 1792-1750 BCE	Hammurabi is king of Babylon and conquers much of Mesopotamia. He creates Hammurabi's Code of Law.
1901 CE	Hammurabi's Code of Law is discovered.

Vocabulary Terms

BCE: Before the Common Era, before year 1.

CE: Common Era, the years after year 1. We live in the Common Era.

c.: Circa (Around or Approximately).

Mesopotamia: a Greek word that means "between the rivers. The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers are the boundaries of this civilization.

Babylon: an ancient city in Mesopotamia on the Euphrates River.

Babylonians: people who lived in Babylon.

Background Information

In 1901, archaeologists (people who study the ancient world) found a black stone monument. On it was Hammurabi's Code, an ancient set of laws. Hammurabi was a King of Babylon in Ancient Mesopotamia. His code was not the first set of laws, but it is one of the earliest and most complete available to us today. Archeologists have since found parts of the Code also on clay tablets.

The Code had 282 laws. Below are some of those laws.

Code of Laws

3. If anyone accuses another of any crime that is punishable by death, and does not prove what he has charged, he shall be put to death.

8. If anyone steals cattle or sheep or a pig or a goat, if it belongs to a god or to the court, the thief shall pay thirtyfold; if they belonged to a freed man of the king he shall pay tenfold; if the thief has nothing with which to pay he shall be put to death.

15. If any one takes a male or female slave outside the city gates, he shall be put to death.

21. If anyone breaks a hole into a house [break in to steal], he shall be put to death before that hole and be buried.

104. If a merchant gives an agent corn, wool, oil, or any other goods to transport, the agent shall give a receipt for the amount, and pay the merchant. Then he shall obtain a receipt from the merchant for the money that he gives the merchant.

117. If any one fails to pay his debt, and sells himself, his wife, his son, and daughter for money or gives them away to slavery: they shall work for three years in the house of the man who bought them, and in the fourth year they shall be set free.

132. If the "finger is pointed" at a man's wife about another man, but she is not caught sleeping with the other man, she shall jump into the river for her husband.

133. If a man is taken prisoner in war, and there is food in his house, but his wife leaves that house and goes to another house: because this wife did not keep her court, and went to another house, she shall be thrown into the water.

134. If anyone is captured in war and there is not food in his house, if his wife go to another house this woman shall not be blamed.

195. If a son strikes his father, his hands shall be cut off.

196. If a man put out the eye of another man, his eye shall be put out.

202. If any one strikes the body of a man higher in rank than he, he shall receive sixty blows with an ox-whip in public.

203. If a free-born man strikes the body of another free-born man or equal rank, he shall pay one gold **mina**.

204. If a freed man strikes the body of another freed man, he shall pay ten **shekels** in money.

205. If the slave of a freed man strikes the body of a freed man, his ear shall be cut off.

274. If any one hires a skilled **artisan**, he shall pay as wages five **gerahs**, for wages of the potter five **gerahs**, for a tailor five **gerahs**, for a ropemaker four **gerahs**.

282. If a slave say to his master: "You are not my master," if they prove he is guilty his master shall cut off his ear.

Vocabulary terms

Mina: a very large unit of money. It is worth much more than a shekel.

Shekels: a unit of money, like a dollar. It is worth much more a gerah.

Artisan: a skilled workman, craftsman

Gerahs: a small unit of money, like a cent. It is worth much less than a shekel.

Hammurabi's Code of Laws Analysis

1. Write down the law number in the first column.
2. Restate the law in your own words in the second column.
3. Based on what the law means, what do you think life was like in ancient Mesopotamia? Write your answer in the third column.
4. Complete the chart for 8 different laws. The first one is completed for you.

Law Number	Restate the law in your own words.	What might the law tell you about life in ancient Mesopotamia?
3	You can be killed for an untrue accusation.	Some legal system or courts existed. This is an example of harsh or cruel punishment.