

Code of Hammurabi

The first great king of Babylon was King Hammurabi. He conquered all of Mesopotamia and established the first Babylonian Empire. Hammurabi also established a set of laws that is today called the Code of Hammurabi.

How do we know about the Code of Hammurabi?

The Code of Hammurabi was written down on clay tablets and etched into stone. It is one of the oldest recorded codes of laws in the world.

The stele is a large stone shaped like a giant finger. It is about 2 meters tall and 60 centimetres wide. It contains around 4000 lines of text describing 282 different laws. At the top, or "fingertip", of the stele is a carved picture of King Hammurabi being given the laws from the Babylonian sun god Shamash.

The Code of Law

Many of the laws that had to do with one subject (i.e. slavery) were grouped together. This would have helped people to find and read just the laws that pertained to them. Here are some of the major sections of the code:

- Legal Procedures
- Household laws
- Slavery
- Trade and business
- Religion

In the stele Hammurabi states his desire for justice for all saying *"Let the oppressed man come and stand before my image as king of righteousness. Let him understand my words and his case, so he will understand what is just and his heart will be glad."*

Examples of the Laws

Many of the laws describe exactly what a worker should earn. Some laws were very harsh and the penalties severe:

- If a son should strike his father, his hands shall be cut off.
- If a man put out the eye of another man, his eye shall be put out.
- If any man should strike a man of higher rank, he shall receive sixty blows with an ox-whip.

What makes the code important?

The code itself tells archeologists a lot about the lives of the people of Babylon. It also contains some important ideas like having people provide evidence of a crime, innocent until proven guilty, and protection for the weak.

Interesting Facts about the Code of Hammurabi

- Shamash, who is featured at the top of the diorite stele, was the Babylonian god of law, justice, and salvation.
- The stele was originally found by archeologists in the ancient city of Susa. Today it can be found in the Louvre Museum in Paris, France.
- The code was written using cuneiform script.