

Hammurabi's Code

Central Historical Question: *What can we learn about Babylonia from Hammurabi's Code?*

Document A: Hammurabi's Code—Religion (Modified)

The following selection is from the introduction of Hammurabi's Code. As you read, pay attention to the religion of Babylonia. What did people believe in? Who were their gods?

When Anu the **Sublime** . . . and Bel, the lord of Heaven and earth, who **decreed** the fate of the land, assigned to Marduk, the over-ruling son of Ea, God of righteousness, power over earthly man, and made him great . . . they called Babylon by his celebrated name, made it great on earth, and founded an everlasting kingdom in it. Then Anu and Bel called by name me, Hammurabi, the **exalted** prince, who feared God, to bring about the rule of righteousness in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil-doers; so that the strong should not harm the weak; so that I should rule over the black-headed people like Shamash, and enlighten the land, to further the well-being of mankind.

Source: *"Code of Hammurabi," 1780 BCE.*

Vocabulary sublime: greatest
decreed: ordered exalted: highly
thought of, grand

Document B: Hammurabi's Code—Economy

The following selections from Hammurabi's Code discuss the economy in Babylonia. As you read, pay attention to what was important to Babylonians as they tried to make a living.

42. If any one take over a field to **till** it, and obtain no harvest from it, it must be proved that he did no work on the field, and he must deliver grain, just as his neighbor raised, to the owner of the field.

43. If he do not till the field, but let it lie **fallow**, he shall give grain like his neighbor's to the owner of the field, and the field which he let lie fallow he must plow and sow and return to its owner.

53. If any one be too lazy to keep his dam in proper condition . . . if then the dam break and all the fields be flooded, then shall he in whose dam the break occurred be sold for money, and the money shall replace the corn which he has caused to be ruined.

54. If he be not able to replace the corn, then he and his possessions shall be divided among the farmers whose corn he has flooded.

59. If any man, without the knowledge of the owner of a garden, **fell** a tree in a garden he shall pay half a mina in money.

Source: "Code of Hammurabi," 1780 BCE.

Vocabulary till: farm, work fallow:

land with no seeds planted fell:

cause to fall

Document C: Hammurabi's Code—Society

The following selections from Hammurabi's Code discuss rules for Babylonian society. As you read, pay attention to how society was structured. Was everyone treated equally?

117. If any one fails to pay a debt, and sells himself, his wife, his son, or daughter for money or give them away for forced labor: 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.

138. If a man wishes to separate from his wife who has borne him no children, he shall give her the amount of her purchase money and the **dowry** which she brought from her father's house, and let her go.

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

198. If he put out the eye of a freed man, or break the bone of a freed man, he shall pay one gold mina.

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 its value.

202. If any one strike 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 strike the body of another free-born man or equal rank, he shall pay one gold mina.

Source: *"Code of Hammurabi," 1780 BCE.*

Vocabulary dowry: money or property that a wife's family gives to her husband when they marry

Guiding Questions

Central Historical Question: *What can we learn about Babylonia from Hammurabi's Code?*

Document A: Religion

1. According to this document, where did Hammurabi get his power as king?

2. Monotheistic or Polytheistic?
 - a. According to this document, was Babylonia a monotheistic society (belief in one god) or a polytheistic society (belief in many gods)?

 - b. How do you know this from Hammurabi's Code?

3. According to this document, what is the goal of Hammurabi's Code?

Document B: Economy

1. Working the fields: Summarize laws 42-43 in your own words.

2. The dams: Summarize laws 53-54 in your own words.

3. Type of Economy
 - a. According to this document, do you think most people in Babylonia made money in cities or in the country?

 - b. How do you know this from Hammurabi's Code?

Document C: Society

1. Laws 196-199 discuss putting out the eye of “another man,” a “free man” and a “slave.”
 - a. According to this document, whose eye was worth the most?

 - b. According to this document, whose eye was worth the least?

 - c. How do you know?

2. Equality
 - a. According to this document, was everyone equal in Babylonia?

 - b. How do you know this from Hammurabi’s Code?
 - i. Evidence 1:

 - ii. Evidence 2:

3. Women
 - a. According to law 138, what happens to a dowry if a man leaves his wife?
 - b. What does this suggest about the position of women in Babylonian society?

Summary

1. What are some of the limitations of Hammurabi's Code as evidence of life in Babylonia?
2. What other sources might help us to better understand life in Babylonia?

Use evidence from the historical documents you read to answer the central historical question by completing the sentences below:

What can we learn about Babylonia from Hammurabi's Code?

1. Historians can learn a lot about Babylonia from Hammurabi's Code. According to the Code, Babylonian religion was.....
2. According to the Code, the Babylonian economy was based on.....
3. According to the Code, Babylonian society was structured around.....