

The code of hammurabi essay sample



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Codes of Hammurabi are regarded the first recorded laws in the human history. The laws 247-269 from Hammurabi Codes clearly depicts that with the settlement of Semitic tribes in the agriculturally rich valleys of Mesopotamia, the city states came into being with its distinct socio-cultural and political life. Another manifestation of the development of this urban life was city laws. The rudimentary tribal customs and traditions were molded to fit according to the requirements of city life. These laws further depicts that primarily the Babylon society was agrarian as most of the laws were related to agricultural activities i. e. ploughing, farming, hiring and breeding of cattle etc. Normally, landowners used to cultivate their land themselves regularly but it was also usual they can lend a piece of land or might employ a husbandman. So these contacts of land cultivation were brought under the law and certain rules were devised to carry on a smooth cultivation.

Furthermore, these laws illustrate the socio-economic strata that differentiate different classes. Although the laws (247-269) does not reinforce this idea of class privileges that were bestowed upon the aristocratic class of Babylon state but it has certain distinction between the treatment of a slave and a noble aristocrat.[1]

These laws describe Hammurabi as a just ruler. Although some provisions of his Codes are harsh, for example “ If any one agree with another to tend his field, give him seed, entrust a yoke of oxen to him, and bind him to cultivate the field, if he steal the corn or plants, and take them for himself, his hands shall be hewn off” but it was a normal practice in those days. Most other unrecorded laws of the ancient world suggest such harsh punishment to the

convicts. The Hammurabi's intention was to make the rule of law and order a norm of the day. His ultimate objective was a peaceful and ordered society.

The most important contribution of this law to modern society is that it paved the way for recorded and written laws. The Roman Laws, that set precedents for modern laws to follow its steps, are also considered to be derived from these Babylon laws. Another contribution of these laws is that it seeks to defend the various institutions of urban life as well as the individual rights. Furthermore it puts some obligations on the individual. All these factors add to the progress and prosperity of the society and set the civilization of wheels.

These codes were written and were unalterable on personal whims of the ruler or the high-ups of the society. Additionally these codes accepted the significance of intention. For example the proprietor of a gorer ox was only accountable for the damages done by that ox if he was aware of the bad qualities of that ox otherwise he was considered as innocent and was not responsible for any act. These are the ultimate cornerstones of modern society and has contributed toward the development of a more just and law-abiding society.

[1] For example Law 251 states, " If an ox be a goring ox, and it shown that he is a gorer, and he do not bind his horns, or fasten the ox up, and the ox gore a free-born man and kill him, the owner shall pay one-half a mina in money" whereas Law 252 states, " If he kill a man's slave, he shall pay one-third of a mina." So there is a difference of compensation for the life of a slave and of a free citizen of Babylon.