

# Hammurabis legal law code essay sample



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During the ancient times, the people of Mesopotamia lived under the rule of the Babylonian king, Hammurabi. Babylon is located along the Euphrates and Tigris River. During his reign, from approximately 1795- 1750 B. C. he oversaw a great expansion of Babylon to an entire empire. Not only did Hammurabi renew the greatness of Babylon and create the world's first big city, but he is also most famous for a series of laws that he created.

Hammurabi created his code of laws, which consists of 282 laws, in the year 1750 BC. The Code of Hammurabi was inscribed on stone. The code of laws encouraged people to accept authority of a king, who was trying to give common rules to govern the subjects' behavior. The actual laws range from public to private matters, with humane approaches to human problems. The laws include almost everything from marriage and family relations, negligence, fraud, commercial contracts, duties of public officials, property and inheritance, crimes and punishments, techniques of legal procedure, protection for women, children, and slaves etc. The purpose of the Legal Code of Hammurabi was to use political power to create common bonds among the diverse people of the society.

It greatly influenced a total dependence on the power of their one ruler, and it was a conscious effort to exalt the king as the source of earthly powers. It unified the empire by offering the standards for moral values, class structure, gender relationships, and religion. It was the most important of all Mesopotamian contributions to civilization. But why? How was a code of laws such a huge impact on not only the society, but also the world we live in today? Over the next few paragraphs I will discuss the importance of this Code of Laws as well as the time period from which it was derived. After a

Careful analysis, historians may be able to pin point a clear picture of the culture and society of ancient Babylonia. One aspect of this civilization evident in the Code is stratification. The society of ancient Babylonia was divided into three distinct social classes. First were the free men and women, then the commoners, and last were the slaves. The laws in the Code differed based upon a person's social class.

The upper class was protected by laws of equal retaliation, such as law 196 which states that "if a man has knocked out the eye of a patrician, his eye shall be knocked out." Conversely, lower classes usually received monetary compensation for their losses as evident in law 198 which asserts that if a man "has knocked out the eye of a plebian or has broken the limb of a plebian, he shall pay one mina of silver." However, though the Babylonian social structure was based on a class system, the gulf between genders was relatively slim. For example, a woman had the right to divorce her husband on the condition that she was not to blame for marital problems and could establish that her husband had committed wrongdoings. Secondly, the Code of Hammurabi makes it clear that the Babylonians had a complex system of internal trade. Internal trade in this time period was of vital importance. Most often this is where the civilization as a whole gained most of its product and supplies. In the Code, there are laws which regulated the pricing and quality of goods and services. For instance, law 275 states that "If any one hire a ferryboat, he shall pay three gerahs in money per day"

This governmental control over trade also shows historians the extent to which the government of ancient Babylonia was centralized. A government would require strong, national control over its lands in order to enforce such

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pricing regulations. Furthermore, there were laws pertaining to quality of craftsmanship and medical care. Builders were responsible for constructing sturdy houses, and regulations similar to modern malpractice laws ensured that doctors did all they could for their patients. Further analysis of these laws provides insight into more technological knowledge from the Babylonians. For instance, laws pertaining to the treatment of cataracts show that these ancient people had at least a general knowledge of surgical techniques. Lastly, a third area that the Legal Code of Hammurabi covered was the duties of public officials and the Babylonian legal system. Babylonian laws ensured that judicial procedures remained sufficiently impartial. For example, perjury was somewhat prohibited. As seen in law 3, if a man had "borne false witness in a trial...that man shall be put to death." Additionally, public officials were expected to serve the people they administered.

For instance, when a citizen died the governor of that district was required "to pay one mina of silver to the deceased's relatives." Though many historians believe Hammurabi's accomplishments are exaggerated, he actually completed several major changes in Mesopotamian history to gain his fame. Hammurabi was the greatest ruler in the first Babylonian dynasty, primarily for extending his empire northward from the Persian Gulf through the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys and westward to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. He devoted most of his energies to protecting his frontiers and fostering the internal prosperity of the empire. The purpose of most of his operations was to gain the water from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, on which agriculture was depended. The last fourteen years of Hammurabi's reign were overshadowed by war. He fought many cities and

successfully took over the older Sumerian cities in the south. During the last two years the king concentrated on building defensive fortifications.

By this time, Hammurabi was old and the government was in the hand of his son, Samsuiluna. The basis economy of Babylonia was typical for Mesopotamia at the time. Irrigation and dike controlled the waters of the Euphrates River, providing bountiful harvests of grain, vegetables, and fruit in normal years. These foods were supplemented by herds of sheep and some cattle. The Babylonians traded food surpluses for raw materials like copper, gold, and wood, which they used to manufacture weapons, household objects, jewelry, and other items that could be traded. As far as religion goes, the Babylonians worshipped many gods, but chief of these was Marduk, god of the city of Babylon. Marduk was represented by a dragon in the artwork that decorated the city. Festivals were held throughout the year in honor of specific gods to assure their favor. The New Year festival for Marduk assured fertility in the fields. The city reflected that wealth in its extensive and highly decorated monuments. The government of Babylon adopted many of the Assyrian imperial practices, which probably contributed to its own short life.

The king had overall administration power, in addition to his central role in important religious rituals. Governors ruled important provinces on behalf of the king, but most of these were Babylonians appointed from the outside the local area. Local puppets were often left in place to rule local kingdoms, but this occasionally led to revolt, as in the case of Jerusalem. Architecture was also important to Babylonian society. The city was destroyed and rebuilt several times. Buildings and walls were constructed of mud bricks.

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Architecture had to of played an important role in order for jobs to get completed and walls to protect the city to be built. In conclusion, does the Code of Hammurabi sound harsh, fair, or lenient? Penalties such as exile and mutilation were less severe than death, but was harsh justice necessary in Babylonia? In the actions of accusing a man for murder and not able to convict him, stealing an animal, stealing from another's home or property, and aiding a slave to escape the punishment of death sounds too harsh.

In my point of view a lie should have a less severe punishment as like stealing. Perhaps imprisonment or a few whips sound more reasonable. Aiding a slave should have a much similar punishment, or banished from town sounds reasonable too, of course also depending on how bias you are. In some cases harsh punishment was necessary in Babylonia. Cases like murder, rape, and kidnaps did deserve harsh punishments. Hammurabi in his code was somewhat of an enlightened ruler. He did give some knowledge of what justice was and how it was used. He also created these laws and warned the people. Hammurabi's code influences us by his methods and it also helps us realize its mistakes on cruel and unusual punishments. Some general characteristics of ancient Near Eastern urban societies are that if you did something wrong you were punished and justified accordingly with the code of Hammurabi. Laws were strict and you had to follow them.