

THE CODE OF HAMMURABI

Name _____

Have you ever heard the phrase “written in stone?” Perhaps the phrase goes all the way back to ancient Mesopotamia. They were some of the first people to have written laws, and some were even carved in stone. One of the oldest surviving examples is the code of Hammurabi, a Babylonian king who ruled from 1792-1750 BC. His laws were carved on a large basalt (black volcanic rock) pillar (stele) over 7 feet tall. The pillar was placed near the temple in Babylon and was written in the common language. The panels on the pillar contained nearly 300 laws, each describing a situation and a consequence.

Image analysis: Examine the images of stele and answer the following:

1. Describe the stele including the shape, carvings, figures, and any additional distinctive features.
2. Examine the figures carved at the top. Describe the relative size, position, and posture of the figures.

Which figure do you think is more important? Why?

3. What could the wavy lines coming from the shoulders of the seated figure represent?
4. The seated figure is handing something to the standing figure. What could that mean?
5. Make a hypothesis about what could be happening in the scene.



Fill-in: The top of the pillar shows a scene with _____ standing before _____, the Babylonian _____ of _____. He is handing _____ a _____ and a _____.

Prologue: The top of the pillar gives a long prologue explaining the achievements of Hammurabi and the purposes of the laws. Read the first paragraph from the excerpts from Hammurabi’s Code and answer the following questions.

1. What does the prologue state are the purposes of the laws to follow?
2. Why do you think Hammurabi would want his name associated with the names of gods?
3. What are the purposes of the Preamble to the United States Constitution (6)? How are the purposes similar or different from the Code of Hammurabi?

The Laws: Choose 5 laws from the Code of Hammurabi (one from each set) to analyze using the following charts.

Set 1 (1, 3, 4, 11, 22-24):

Number	What aspect of law does this address?	"Modern" Translation	What can you infer about Babylonian society from the law?

Set 2 (109, 110, 136, 138, 162):

Number	What aspect of law does this address?	"Modern" Translation	What can you infer about Babylonian society from the law?

Set 3 (195-201, 206-208):

Number	What aspect of law does this address?	"Modern" Translation	What can you infer about Babylonian society from the law?

Set 4 (102, 104, 226, 229, and 233):

Number	What aspect of law does this address?	"Modern" Translation	What can you infer about Babylonian society from the law?

Set 5 (218-223):

Number	What aspect of law does this address?	"Modern" Translation	What can you infer about Babylonian society from the law?

Epilogue: The last column summarizes Hammurabi's achievements, and advises future leaders. Read last paragraph from the excerpts from Hammurabi's Code and answer the questions.

1. Many of the laws or punishments seem harsh in today's society. Even though you may not agree with specific laws or punishments from Babylonia, why are written laws better for civilization than not having written laws?

2. Hammurabi's code made the state (government) responsible for justice. Why is it important in a civilization for the state to be responsible to administer the law rather than for people to take the law into their own hands?

3. What are some conclusions you can make about Babylonian society? What evidence supports your conclusions?