Name _____

Date _____

MESOPOTAMIA
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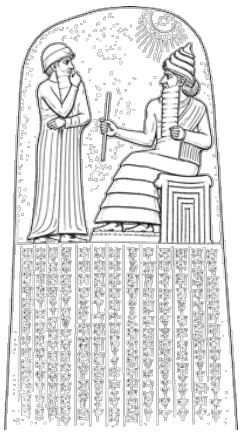
Hammurabi's Code

Laws are rules that people must follow. Hammurabi was a Mesopotamian king who ordered 282 laws to be inscribed on stone and displayed in a public place for everyone to see. The Code of Hammurabi was an early attempt at justice—but it did not treat everyone equally.



"An Eye For An Eye"

Hammurabi's Code prescribed specific punishments for citizens who broke the law. One law said, "If a man put out the eye of another man, his eye shall be put out." Later historians summarized this idea with the phrase "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." This means that a person who commits an injury would be punished in the same way. Although this may seem fair, the punishments were often harsh and left little room for mercy, or kindness in judgment. Today, many legal systems try to balance justice with mercy.

Criminal and Civil Law

Hammurabi's Code included what we today call both criminal and civil law. Criminal law consists of rules that define conduct. One law said, "If a son strikes his father, his hands shall be hewn off."

Civil law settles disputes among individuals. Hammurabi's Code states, "If a man builds a house badly, and it falls and kills the owner, the builder shall be killed. If the owner's son was killed, the builder's son shall be killed."

Trial By River

One exception to the "an eye for an eye" principle showed that Hammurabi believed the gods had power over people and events. An accused person could jump into the Euphrates River. "If he sinks in the river, his accuser shall take possession of his house. But if the river proves that the accused is not guilty and he escapes unhurt, then he who brought the accusation shall be put to death, while he who leaped into the river shall take possession of the house that had belonged to his accuser." The test depended on the river's outcome, which people believed reflected the will of the gods. Surviving meant innocence; drowning meant guilt.

Hammurabi's Babylon

Sumerian city-states dominated southern Mesopotamia, but power later shifted upriver as irrigation and overuse reduced soil fertility. Babylon, a city on the Euphrates River, grew into a center of wealth and trade. Hammurabi ruled Babylon from 1792 to 1750 BCE and expanded his kingdom by conquering nearby cities. In time, Babylon became one of the most important and wealthy cities in the region, known for its busy markets, grand temples, and impressive buildings. People still refer to a wealthy city with many luxuries as "a Babylon."

Laws and Social Class

Hammurabi's Code helps us understand what life was like in ancient Babylon. Equal punishment existed only when the two sides were of equal rank. The penalty for injuring a woman or a slave was less. One law said, "If a man strikes a free-born woman so that she loses her unborn child, he shall pay ten shekels for her loss." Another says, "If a man has caught either a male or female runaway slave in the open field and has brought him back to his owner, the owner of the slave shall give him two shekels of silver."

Discovery

Hammurabi's laws were forgotten for centuries until a French expedition in 1901 uncovered the stone pillar containing the Babylonian king's laws. Today, that artifact is on display at the Louvre, a museum in Paris, France.

Legacy

Hammurabi's Code helped create order and made the king's expectations clear, but it did not treat people equally and left little room for mercy.

*This is a higher order learning question. You must answer the question to the best of your ability, but any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.

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Name _____

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Fill in the Blanks

Hammurabi was a B__b__l__n__an king who placed his laws in a p__b__ic place for everyone to see. Hammurabi's Code is based on the principal, "An e____ for an e____, a t__o__h for a t__o__h." This means that a p__n__s__m__nt would often be equal to the crime.

Hammurabi's Code covered both c__i__i__al and c__v__l law, and while punishments were harsh by today's standard, an odd exception did exist. Hammurabi's Code states that an accused person could prove his i__n__c__n__e by jumping into the E__p__r__t__s River. If the accused person survived the ordeal, the person who made the a__c__s__t__on would pace punishment. Hammurabi's Code did not treat people equally. The punishment would not be as great if the injured person was a w__m__n or a s__a__e.

We know about Hammurabi's Code because a French e__p__d__t__on uncovered the stone p__l__ar with the Babylonian k_____'s 282 laws. The pillar is now on display at the L__u__re, a m__s__um in P__r__s, France.

Answer in complete sentences

*1. Draw a pictographic sentence that describes a phrase often associated with Hammurabi.

2. Why did Hammurabi have his laws engraved in stone and placed in a public place?

*3. Imagine that Hammurabi lived in modern society. Where might he post his laws so that everyone would see them?

*4. Mahatma Gandhi is often credited with saying, "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind." What do you think he meant? Do you agree? Defend your answer.

*This is a higher order learning question. You must answer the question to the best of your ability, but any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.

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