

HAMMURABI

?–1750 BC



WHY HE MADE HISTORY Hammurabi was a Babylonian king who established a set of laws to guide his people. The Code of Hammurabi is one of the earliest written collections of laws in history.

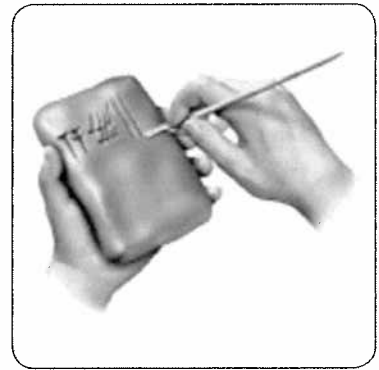


As you read the biography below, think about how King Hammurabi's code of laws helped govern the people of Babylon.

You may have heard the expression “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.” Did you know that this expression comes from a real law? The laws assembled by King Hammurabi were known as the Code of Hammurabi. There were a total of 282 laws used in ancient Babylon.

Hammurabi's laws were known to be strict and detailed. Punishment was harsh. For example, if you broke another person's bone, then your bone would be broken. Or if a carpenter built a house that later collapsed and killed the son of a homeowner, then the carpenter's own son would be put to death. Penalties varied according to status. Wealthy people were usually allowed to pay a fine instead of receiving a physical punishment. If the victim was a poor person, the rich might not be punished at all. Many of the laws are now considered harsh and outdated. However, these laws helped govern ancient Babylon during the rule of Hammurabi.

Hammurabi was the king of Babylon from 1792 to 1750 BC. He conquered other regions near his kingdom and merged them into his own empire. Hammurabi's Babylonian Empire stretched from the Persian Gulf to what is now Iraq, and included parts of present day Syria and Turkey.



VOCABULARY

cuneiform writing made by pressing a wedge-shaped tool into clay tablets

Hammurabi created his code by revising and elaborating on existing laws. The Code of Hammurabi was meant to protect the weak, and to treat conquered people fairly. The 282 laws dealt with matters such as crime, business regulations, wages, debts, family matters, military service, witchcraft, and false accusations. The Code of Hammurabi is one of the earliest known legal codes in existence. It was written in **cuneiform** on stone tablets. A stone monument on which the laws were written can be viewed today in the Louvre Museum in Paris, France.

After Hammurabi's death in 1750 BC, the Babylonian Empire collapsed. Babylon was invaded and conquered by the Kassites. The Kassites ruled Babylon for 400 years and followed the Code of Hammurabi.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. What was the Code of Hammurabi?

2. **Make Generalizations** In what ways might the Code of Hammurabi be similar to modern laws here in the United States?

3. ACTIVITY

Imagine that you are King Hammurabi. You have begun writing laws for the people of Babylon. Make a list of five laws that you would consider the most important for your people to obey.