

# Hammurabi's Code: What Does It Tell Us About Old Babylonia?

## Introduction

King Hammurabi ruled Babylon, located along the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, from 1792-1750 BCE. During his time as king he oversaw a great expansion of his kingdom from a city-state to an empire. However, today he is most famous for a series of judgments inscribed on a large stone stele and dubbed Hammurabi's Code. Scholars are still debating its precise significance as a set of laws, but the Code's importance as a reflection of Babylonian society is indisputable.

## Guiding Questions For The Code of Hammurabi text.

What can we learn about Old Babylonian society from Hammurabi's Code?

## Background Information for the Teacher

In the 18th Century BCE, Hammurabi (also spelled Hammurapi) became the sixth ruler in the First Dynasty of Babylon. The success of Hammurabi's military operations expanded Babylon north along the Tigris and Euphrates and south to what is now called the Persian Gulf. The empire he created is known as Babylon, while the civilization is often referred to as Old Babylonia.

The Code of Hammurabi, inscribed on a large stone stele—an upright slab—was uncovered by a French expedition in 1901. Its leader, Father Vincent Scheil, translated the code the following year. At the time, it was the oldest known set of what appeared to be laws. Since that time, however, earlier similar "codes" have been unearthed. Though Hammurabi's Code is not unique, it is still the longest code yet discovered and one of the only ones known to have been inscribed on a stele.

Check out the following website

## [Hammurabi's Steel](#)

Below is the link for the actual codes.

## [The Code of Hammurabi](#)

In the prologue, Hammurabi claims that his authority comes directly from the gods. He also states that the purpose of the Code is "to bring about the rule of righteousness in the land... so that the strong should not harm the weak." The third precept indicates the existence of a judicial system with elders serving as judges. The fourth precept indicates that fines of money and/or grain were imposed and implies the existence of something akin to our civil suits in which the complainant received a settlement. Number sixty indicates the existence of something akin to a sharecropping system in which one person farms land in exchange for land in five years. Such a system would tend to redistribute land from large to small owners. Number one hundred and eight indicates that women could own at least some kinds of businesses in Old Babylonia. Number one hundred ninety-six is perhaps the most famous of the precepts. Finally, number two hundred twenty-eight shows the specificity of the precepts and implies that there was a set fee schedule for the work of skilled tradesmen, in this case a set fee of two shekels for each *SAR* of building, comparable to modern builders who charge so much per square foot.

