

IF YOU WERE EMPEROR OF A BRAND NEW CIVILIZATION, WHAT WOULD YOUR FIRST THREE ACTIONS BE? FOR EXTRA HELP, LOOK AT THE "COMMENT" FOR THIS SECTION.

- .
- .
- .

**Comment**

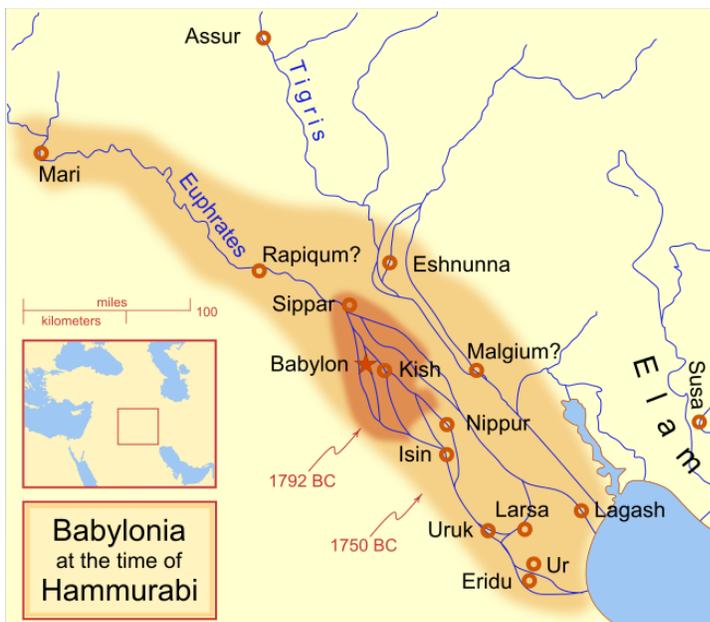
Click [here](#) to watch a video about Hammurabi

### Hammurabi's Code is a collection of 282 laws from the Babylonian Empire in the late 1700s B.C.E.

"An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth."

This sentence may sound familiar, but it goes way back to the ancient Mesopotamian culture.

"An eye for an eye" comes from a collection of 282 laws that were written on a stone pillar. These laws are called Hammurabi's Code. The stone pillar was found in 1901 in the ancient city of Susa, which is in modern-day Iran.



Dark brown shows the land controlled by Hammurabi when he first became king. Light brown shows the land he conquered and came to control throughout his rule. *Source: Wikimedia Commons, MapMaster*

Hammurabi was the king of the Babylonian Empire from 1792 B.C.E to 1750 B.C.E. At the start of his rule, he only controlled an area of about fifty square miles. Over the years, he took control of more and more cities. He put together this "code" so that all of the different cities that he controlled would be ruled by the same set of laws.



**To the left:** Sculpture from the top of the stone pillar that has Hammurabi's Code inscribed upon it. *Source: Louvre Museum, BrokenSphere*

### **A need for justice**

**King Hammurabi had the laws written down to provide one set of laws for all the cities he conquered.**

Hammurabi knew that he needed a single set of laws for all the different people he conquered. He sent his experts in the law to go to all areas of his kingdom and collect all the different laws that already existed.

All these laws were carefully checked and combined to create a final list of 282 laws. Many people believe that this is the oldest set of laws that exist.

#### **PART A: Why did Hammurabi feel that he needed a special code of laws?**

- Hammurabi was trying to get all groups to worship the same god.
- The ruler before him had no laws, and there was chaos in the kingdom.
- He was ruling over many different peoples who all had their own different sets of laws.
- He thought he should record all the laws that had ever existed.

#### **PART B: Which piece of evidence from the text best supports your answer to PART A?**

- All these laws were carefully checked and combined to create a final list of 282 laws.
- Hammurabi knew that he needed a single set of laws for all the different people he conquered.
- "An eye for an eye" comes from a collection of 282 laws that were written on a stone pillar. These laws are called Hammurabi's Code.
- He sent his experts in the law to go to all areas of his kingdom and collect all the different laws that already existed.

The city of **Elba** had a set of laws from about six hundred years before Hammurabi, but it was not as complete. Most people think of Hammurabi's Code as the oldest legal code.

### **Justice and order**

The introduction to Hammurabi's Code makes it clear that he wants to provide justice and order in all areas of life. The laws were about the economy, family life, how to punish criminals, and other parts of life. Hammurabi said that he wanted "to make justice visible in the land, to destroy the wicked person and the evil-doer, that the strong might not injure the weak."

Some laws back this up. They include laws that made sure that those with difficult lives were cared for. The introduction to the code says, "In order to protect the widows and orphans, in order to bring justice in the land, to settle all disputes, and heal all injuries, I do set up these, my precious words."

Other laws show that people of lower classes were not valued as much as those from the upper classes.

Let's take a look at the "eye for an eye" law:

**If a man has destroyed the eye of a man of the gentleman class, they shall destroy his eye... If he has destroyed the eye of a commoner... he shall pay one mina of silver. If he has destroyed the eye of a gentleman's slave... he shall pay half the slave's price.**

This shows that the Babylonian people were treated differently based on their position in society. The gentleman's eye is worth removing the criminal's eye, but a commoner's eye is only worth one mina of silver.

Hammurabi's Code also has rules meant to prevent false accusations. It says:

**If anyone brings an accusation of any crime before the elders and does not prove what he has charged, he shall, if it be a capital offense charged, be put to death.**

A capital offense is a crime that is punishable by death. This means that you could not accuse anyone of murder without proper evidence. It also meant that if you were the victim of a crime but didn't have evidence that it happened, it would be dangerous to make an accusation.

Based on the wording of the "Eye for an eye" law, what is the social hierarchy of Hammurabi's empire? Highlight the options that orders the hierarchy from most important people to least important people.

- Commoner, Gentleman, Slave
- Gentleman, Slave, Commoner
- Commoner, Slave, Gentlemen
- Gentleman, Commoner, Slave

The code also includes economic laws that show how to deal with the theft and destruction of property as well as business crimes. Here is an example of a business law:

**If anyone owe a debt for a loan, and a storm prostrates (kills) the grain, or the harvest fail, or the grain does not grow for lack of water, in that year he need not give his creditor (the person he owes money to) any grain; he washes his debt-tablet in water and pays no rent for this year.**

In other words, if there is a bad harvest, then you would not be forced to pay your debts for that year.

The code also provides rules for family issues. These include marriage, divorce, and adoption. It even gives guidelines for how much doctors and other professional workers should be paid. If a doctor made a mistake and someone was killed, he would get a very serious punishment:

**If a physician makes a large incision with the operating knife and kills him... his hands shall be cut off.**

The code includes rules about farming and animal herding. It also gives laws about owning slaves. For example:

**If a slave says to his master: "You are not my mast," his master shall cut off his ear.**

### **More examples from the code**

Hammurabi's Code included laws that seem unusual to modern day readers.

Which option best describes how Hammurabi's Code of laws affected Babylonian society?

- The rules created an equal society by making sure that all types of people faced the same punishment for the same crime.
- The rules created order by explaining what punishments should be used for different people and crimes.
- The rules made sure that the original Babylonians had more power than the newly conquered people.
- The rules encouraged violence in society by ordering body parts to be cut off and removed as punishment.

Hammurabi's Code was written four thousand years ago. This means that it can be difficult for us to understand because we say things differently now and care about different things. For instance, in the modern American system, god and government are kept separate. However, Hammurabi said that he got the code from Babylonian gods:

**Anu and Bel called by name me, Hammurabi, the exalted prince, who feared God, to bring about the rule of righteousness in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil-doers: so that the strong should not harm the weak; so that I should rule over the black-headed people like Shamash, and enlighten the land, to further the well-being of mankind.**

Other laws included in Hammurabi's code are designed to preserve order and maintain control over the king's subjects:

- If anyone finds runaway male or female slaves in the open country and bring them to their masters, the master of the slaves shall pay him two shekels of silver.
- If anyone is committing a robbery and is caught, then he shall be put to death.
- If a tavern-keeper (feminine) does not accept corn according to gross weight in payment of a drink, but takes money, and the price of the drink is less than that of the corn, she shall be convicted and thrown into the water.
- If a son strikes his father, his hands shall be hewn (cut) off.
- If a man knocks out the teeth of his equal, his teeth shall be knocked out.
- If a man strikes a free-born woman so that she loses her unborn child, he shall pay ten shekels for her loss.

We can see from these laws that Hammurabi was not just interested in fairness and justice. Hammurabi's Code was used to control the many people under his rule. The laws helped keep social order in the growing Babylonian society.

### **Go jump in a river!**

Although some parts of Hammurabi's Code seem similar to modern laws, other parts are quite surprising! This reminds us that ancient Babylonian culture was different from our culture in important ways.

Even though it is thousands of years old, Hammurabi's Code is quite similar to some modern laws. But there are also some big differences. One of the differences is that the person who accused someone of a crime had to bring the accused person to court by themselves. That could be dangerous if the accused person was stronger or wealthier than you. Today, that is the job of the police.

Select one of the laws mentioned above and briefly discuss how this law helped maintain social order or helped people receive justice for their suffering. (4-5 sentence response).

Hammurabi's Code also had a way to show if a person was guilty or innocent. Quite a few of the laws required the accused person to jump into the Euphrates River. If the person made it out of the river alive, they were innocent. If they drowned, it proved they were guilty! Laws like this came from the Babylonian belief that people's lives were controlled by their gods. The gods would show guilt by making the person drown or innocence by helping them escape.

Although some parts of the code promised fair treatment and justice for all people, the code also shows that not all people were considered equal in Babylonian society. Slaves, common people, and the rich were all treated differently.

However, women had quite a few rights, including being able to buy and sell things and get a divorce. Hammurabi's Code gives us a very interesting look into what life was like in Ancient Babylon.

## ~END OF TEXT~

### Written Response

In one strong, well-developed paragraph, analyze how creating one code of laws helped Hammurabi govern over his growing empire. **THINK:** Hammurabi was constantly taking over other peoples who all had their own laws. Why would this be challenging to a ruler? How did Hammurabi's one set of laws likely help all the people under his rule coexist?

Craft a strong topic sentence that makes a bold claim about the prompt. Then, use 2-3 pieces of evidence from the text to support your claim. Be sure to integrate quotes properly into your writing. Click here for a rubric that reminds you of what a strong paragraph contains.

### Paragraph Rubric

The paragraph is indented and includes the by-line	0	1	2	3	4
This paragraph has an informative topic sentence	0	1	2	3	4
Evidence has an introduction sentence	0	1	2	3	4
Evidence is cited/paraphrased from the text	0	1	2	3	4
Evidence has thorough explanations	0	1	2	3	4
This paragraph has a closing sentence	0	1	2	3	4
• Does more than restates the topic sentence					
The paragraph sticks to one main idea	0	1	2	3	4