
Laws collections that molded culture and societies: Hammurabi code, the Bible, modern legal codes

Assess the effectiveness of Hammurabi's reign in Babylon and compare the similarities and differences of Hammurabi's Code on contemporary legal codes and the Bible.

The Code of Hammurabi is undeniably one of the most contested collection of laws that have been unearthed in the Middle East, during the turn of the twentieth century. The code became a system in which the rules and regulations of Babylonian society, unveiled the values and beliefs of a civilisation that was cemented in copious prospect. Likewise, the unveiling of these principles have thus revealed the disposition of Hammurabi, the prominence in the discovery of the diorite, Babylonian society before and after Hammurabi's death, the basis in which contemporary legal codes were based on and the similarities and differences with the Bible. Through these discernments, both historical and archaeological evidences are utilized, as the effectiveness of Hammurabi's Code will be in doubt crucial in understanding Babylonian society.

The importance of the recognition of Hammurabi's Code, requires there to be an understanding about the man who ratified the codes. Hammurabi, the sixth Amorite king of the Babylonian dynasty, reigned for forty two years, between 1792 BC to 1750 BC, and during those years, the city of Babylon prospered through his military campaigns and his constitution. In contrast, Hammurabi, was not just known for his military might, he was also involved in many building projects thought Babylon. Similarly, the prologue of the code reveals that Hammurabi calls himself "the exalted prince, the worshipper of the gods", the inscription further reads that his existence is "to cause justice to prevail in the lands, to destroy the wicked and the evil" The assessment of these accounts portray Hammurabi as a just ruler, who was chosen by the gods to bring peace and posterity to the lands of Babylon.

There has always been a primitive need for humans to reveal the revelations left behind a civilisation, Hammurabi's Code is an exemplar of this. The discovery of the code in 1901, located in Susa (modern day Iran) was led under a French expedition, by Jean-Jacques de Morgan, a geologist and archaeologist, who contributed greatly in the field of archaeology. Though the expedition was led by Morgan, it was the Swiss egyptologist Gustave Jéquier, who is credited with the discovery of the code. This is emphasised, as the English archaeologist and Assyriologist Leonard William King acclaims in his book, 'The Code of Hammurabi', that "...the stele containing the Code of Hammurabi was discovered in 1901 by the Egyptologist Gustave Jéquier" While historians contest this issue, the discovery of the code was far more important than its 'discoverer'. Furthermore, the first introduction to Hammurabi and his codes, were incited by Professor Bruno Meissner, who published in 1898, a translation of cuneiform tablets, from the Assyrian King Ashurbanipal. Meissener later proposed that these sections of tablets were parts of a copy of an old Book of Law from the time of the First Babylonian Dynasty. Nevertheless, a few years after the publication, the location of the renowned law code was found carved on a diorite stone, 2.25 metres high and 2 metres in circumference. The block was broken into three pieces, however a major portion of the stone was restored and is now displayed in Louvre Museum in Paris. The diorite stone embodies 282 edicts, that were divided into 44 columns, which were inscribed in Akkadian language. Moreover, the stone had a relief,

which portrayed King Hammurabi receiving the codes from the sun god, Shamash, who is illustrated as wearing a crown with four pairs of horns and holding a scepter, while having flames emanating from his shoulders. Likewise, the structure of the block is shaped in a way, so that the appearance of the stone is configured like the form of an index finger. Additionally, the contents of the code addressed case laws about unjust accusations, false testimony, injustice done by judges, property rights, family rights and various other forms of law. Most scholars believe that the code served as a series of amendments to the common law of Babylon, which in its earliest state drew inspiration from tribal influences. However, by the time of Hammurabi's rule, it was clear that the common law of Babylon had been forgotten.

Mesopotamia was one of the greatest civilisations of its time, in which no single empire ruled the entirety of Mesopotamia, until its consequent collapse in 359 BC, where Mesopotamia became part of the Achaemenid Empire. Like many great civilisations many empires rose, flourished and fell, including that of the Assyrians, Kassites, Mitannis and the Hittites. Known as the one of the 'cradles of civilisation', this ancient city was located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, hence the Greek derivation of the word 'Mesopotamia', meaning 'the land between two rivers.' The land was governed by Sumerians and Akkadians at the beginning of its emergence, however with constant turmoil and warfare, city-states were established. The Amorites were a semi-nomadic tribe in Western Syria that migrated across Mesopotamia around the third millennium BC, and by 1984 BC accounts of Amorite dynasty ruling had already begun in Babylon. When Hammurabi succeeded his father, Sin-Muballit in 1792 BC, he conquered southern parts of Mesopotamia including Larsa, Erech and Ur. After the death of Hammurabi, his son, Samsu-iluna succeeded him and reigned from 1750 BC to 1712 BC. Samsu-iluna's reign marks the beginning of the violent usurping of the cities that Hammurabi conquered, most notably, Elam and Assyria, in which both states had retracted from Babylon. However, despite Samsu-iluna various efforts to keep Babylon together, he "was left with a kingdom that was only fractionally larger than the one his father had started out with 50 years prior" One of Hammurabi's conquests involved the conflict between the kingdom of Elam, in which they invaded Mesopotamia. Hammurabi became allied with the King of Larsa and eventually defeated the Elamites. However, Hammurabi turned the King of Larsa, thus gaining control of the entirety of Mesopotamia by c.1763 BC. The evidence for these details are known to us by 'contract tablets', dated to the reigns of Hammurabi and with this discovery, a total of 55 letters were discovered, giving an insight into Hammurabi. After his reign, none of Babylon's heirs would be able to restore the ancient city, as it was during the time of Hammurabi's rule. There is no evidence to suggest that Hammurabi's Codes were utilised after his death, however, given the presumption, most scholars agree, that the Code became interwoven and adopted over time by other states or groups that invaded Babylon, but with the lack of evidence surrounding this period, it can only be assumptions and an accepted consensus by most of the leading historians.

Moreover, widespread components of contemporary legal codes around the world, have been constructed on the underlying foundations of Hammurabi's Codex. Law is one of the most basic policies and the most imperative, as it establishes a person's rights and obligations, while securing the guiding principles of justice and equity. Additionally, throughout history, the developments of systematic compilations of commercial, civil, criminal and common law have encompassed the world. Codes such as the Napoleonic Code, the German Civil Code, the Swiss Code and the Japanese Code have been dependent on the customs and principles compiled by ancient civilisations, like that of the Romans, the Salian Franks and the Babylonian's. Furthermore, Hammurabi's reputation as a lawgiver, had earned his portrayal to

be seen in several U.S. government constructions, like that found in reliefs conveyed in the chamber of U.S. House of Representatives in the United States Capitol building. Likewise, Charles L. Souvay stated that Hammurabi's Code conveys "a masterpiece of legislation...thriving and well-organised...inspired throughout by an appreciation of the right and humane sentiments that make it surpass it by far the stern old Roman law" Hence, underpinning the notion that Hammurabi's Code served as a basis of representation for legal codes utilised in the modern era, as it imposed laws that concerned itself with evidence and justice, in which a punishment was handed down to a person for a specific crime, thus also cementing the idea of innocence for the first time in history.

Furthermore, the unspoken truths between the Bible and Hammurabi's Code have criticised contemporary and traditionalist views upheld by most scholars. This is exemplified in the book "Inventing God's Law", published in 2009, by Professor David Wright, in which he states that the principles of the Mosaic Law, in Exodus chapters 20 throughout to 23 is shaped and structured from the basis of Hammurabi's Code. Wright claims that the dependency of the Ten Commandments rely "directly, primarily and throughout". Wright, further states that the "structure, sequence and ideas...and wording of many provisions of the Covenant Code were taken directly from the Laws of Hammurabi". By stating this, Wright became the first historian to directly address this issue. As well as that, historians have come up with controversies, such as that of the mystery that surrounds the non-existent appearance of Hammurabi in the Bible, as he was recognised as the dominant political power in his era. This statement is rebutted by the fact in Rabbinical Literature, Hammurabi is actually mentioned in the Bible, under a pseudonym known as Amraphel, King of Shinar, who is also believed to be Nimrod. Likewise scholars identify Hammurabi with Amraphel & the sages identify Hammurabi with Nimrod thus, concluding that Hammurabi, Amraphel and Nimrod are the same person. The name Hammurabi might actually mean "Ham the Great", as Nimrod was the grandson of Ham, son of Noah. thus concluding that Hammurabi is portrayed in the Torah. Perhaps the most famous law of Hammurabi's Code is the 'Lex talionis', also known as the law of retribution. Bible critics point out that the principles of Equal Retribution, expressed in Exodus 21:24 "an eye for an eye." is also applied in the Code. However, the code treats those who are born free, made free & slaves differently, hence the law of Equal Retribution being practiced only towards those who are born free. Moreover, Bible critics state that Moses could not have written the first five books of the Bible, because the art of writing was developed after his death. The above criticism has been negated by the discovery of the Code of Hammurabi. Some similarities between the code and the Bible is highlighted in the mention that the life of Hammurabi coincides with the life of Abraham approximately around the years between 1812-1637 BC. Numerous comparisons have been made between the Mosaic Law and the Code, however the similarities and differences are best summed up in this statement made by Doug Roush, "Perhaps the explanation for these similarities can be the civil and moral portion of the law of God that was handed down by word of mouth through the patriarchs."

The effectiveness of Hammurabi's Code serves as a testimony of the legal thoughts of the people of the ancient middle east, thus indicating the importance in which the codes were utilised during and after the years of Hammurabi's death. Though, Hammurabi's Code is not one of the earliest collection of laws to be discovered, it still is one of the first codes in which the presumption of innocence was expressed. In contrast historians will never know for certain, if Hammurabi's Code affected Babylonian society, because of the lack of information and the lack of understanding we have about the impacts of Hammurabi's Code, hence the conflicts between many scholars. However, the underlying fact that most legal systems around the world

are based on the principles of Hammurabi's Code, is one of great utilisations of the code that we may come to appreciate.

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