

What can we as historians learn about Babylonian society from the *Code of Hammurabi*?

Slide # 8 -- Watch the Turning Points in Law video: Hammurabi's Code of Law (stop at 1:55), and respond to the question below. (0:00-1:55)

What was one key idea that you learned about the Code of Hammurabi from you video excerpt?

Directions: Read the excerpt below, annotate the source as you read, then respond to the questions.

literate: able to read

scribes: a person who copies out documents

offense: an illegal act

Hammurabi is best known for The Code of Hammurabi. This was one of the first codified or written law codes. It was written around 1754 BC. It was written on a stele, or a large stone monument, and placed in a public place so that all could see it. Even though it was visible for all to see, few were literate enough to read the cuneiform writing. A carving at the top of the stele shows King Hammurabi receiving the laws from the god Shamash. The inscription states that King Hammurabi was chosen by the gods of his people to bring the laws to them.

The code of Hammurabi contained 282 laws. These laws were written by scribes on 12 tablets. The Code consists of rules and the punishments for if those rules were broken. The structure of the code is very detailed: each offense receiving a particular punishment.

Hammurabi's law code set the standard for future codes because it dealt with the evidence of the crime. What decided one's guilt or innocence was something called the Ordeal. During the Ordeal, the accused person was sentenced to perform a certain task such as being thrown into a river or swimming a certain distance across a river and, if they succeeded, they were innocent. If they did not survive the ordeal, they were considered guilty.

- **Who** wrote *The Code of Hammurabi*?

- **When** was *The Code of Hammurabi* written? **Where** was *The Code of Hammurabi* written?
- What type of source is *The Code of Hammurabi*?
- **Where** was *The Code of Hammurabi* placed? Why was it placed there?
- **Why** was *The Code of Hammurabi* written?

What can we as historians learn about Babylonian society from the *Code of Hammurabi*?

Document 1: The Code of Hammurabi — Religion

Context: The following is a selection from the beginning of Hammurabi's Code. As you read, pay attention to the religion of Babylonia.

When Anu the Sublime, King of the Anunaki, and Bel, the lord of Heaven and earth, who decreed the fate of the land, assigned to Marduk, the over-ruling son of Ea, God of righteousness, dominion over earthly man, and made him great among the Igigi, they called Babylon by his illustrious name, made it great on earth, and founded an everlasting kingdom in it, whose foundations are laid so solidly as those of heaven and earth; then 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.

1a. Based on the excerpt above, what are three conclusions you can make as a historian about religion in ancient Babylon.

Document 2: The Code of Hammurabi — Economy

Context: Babylonia was located in the **Fertile Crescent** between the **Tigris** and **Euphrates** Rivers. This land was excellent for **agriculture**. Society depended on these crops for **trade** and feeding the people.

53. If any one be too lazy to keep his **dam** in proper condition, and does not so keep it; if then the dam break and all the fields be flooded, then shall he in whose dam the break occurred be sold for money, and the money shall replace the corn which he has caused to be ruined.

54. If he be not able to replace the corn, then he and his possessions shall be divided among the farmers whose corn he has flooded.

59. If any man, without the knowledge of the owner of a garden, fell [cause to fall] a tree in a garden he shall pay half a mina in money

Source: "Code of Hammurabi." Translated by L.W. King. *The Eleventh Edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 1915.
Found on the Fordham University's Ancient History Sourcebook:
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/hamcode.asp>

1a. What were the occupation(s) [jobs] of the Babylonians mentioned in Document 1?

1b. Who was punished for the damage caused by flooding if a dam breaks?

1c. Based on Document 2, **identify one consequence** for damaging someone else's property in Babylonia

Document 3: The Code of Hammurabi — Social Classes

199. If he put out the eye of a man's slave, or break the bone of a man's slave, he shall pay one-half of its value.

202. If any one strike the body of a man higher in rank than he, he shall receive sixty blows with an ox-whip in public.

203. If a free-born man strike the body of another free-born man or equal rank, he shall pay one gold mina.

Source: "Code of Hammurabi." Translated by L.W. King. *The Eleventh Edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 1915.
Found on the Fordham University's Ancient History Sourcebook:
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/hamcode.asp>

2a. What is the difference between a free-born man and a slave?

2b. What is the punishment if a free-born man "strike the body" of "another free-born man?"

2c. What is the punishment if a man "strike the body" of a "man higher in rank than he?"

2d. How do the punishments differ if a man "strike the body" of "another free-born man" or a "man higher in rank than he?" Which punishment is more severe?

2e. According to this document, was everyone equal in Babylonia? Explain.

Document 4: The Code of Hammurabi – Women

138. If a man wishes to separate from his wife who has borne him no children, he shall give her the amount of her purchase money and the dowry which she brought from her father's house, and let her go.

141. If a man's wife, who lives in his house, wishes to leave it, plunges into debt, tries to ruin her

house, neglects her husband, and is judicially convicted: if her husband offer her release, she may go on her way, and he gives her nothing as a gift of release. If her husband does not wish to release her, and if he take another wife, she shall remain as servant in her husband's house.

143. If she is not innocent, but leaves her husband, and ruins her house, neglecting her husband, this woman shall be cast into the water.

148. If a man take a wife, and she be seized by disease, if he then desire to take a second wife he shall not put away his wife, who has been attacked by disease, but he shall keep her in the house which he has built and support her so long as she lives.

Source: "Code of Hammurabi." Translated by L.W. King. *The Eleventh Edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 1915.
Found on the Fordham University's Ancient History Sourcebook:
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3a. According to law 141, what happens if a woman wants to leave her marriage but her husband refuses to release her?

3b. According to law 138, what happens to a dowry if a man leaves his wife?

3c. How do the punishments differ for a man and a woman?

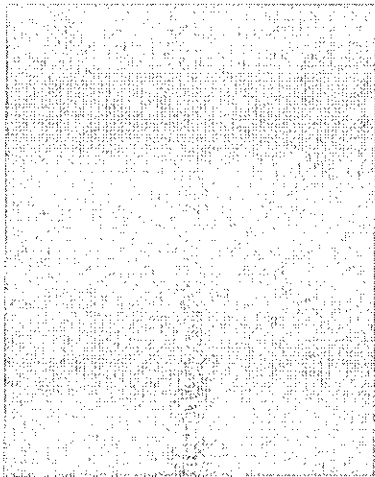
***The Code of Hammurabi* provides important context about life in the Babylonian Empire. However, like all primary sources, there are limitations and historians need to corroborate this piece of evidence with other pieces of evidence to have a clearer understanding of what life was like in the Babylonian Empire.**

Directions: Describe evidence that would help you gain a clearer understanding of what life was like in the Babylonian Empire.

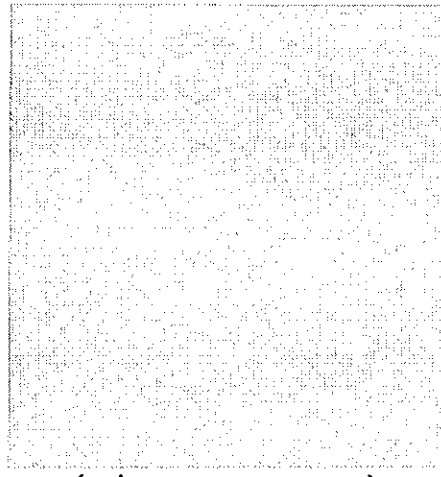
If a historian wants to learn more about the **life of women** in the Babylonian Empire, a **corroborating** piece of evidence would be...

If a historian wants to learn more about the **lives of people in the lower classes** in the Babylonian Empire, a **corroborating** piece of evidence would be...

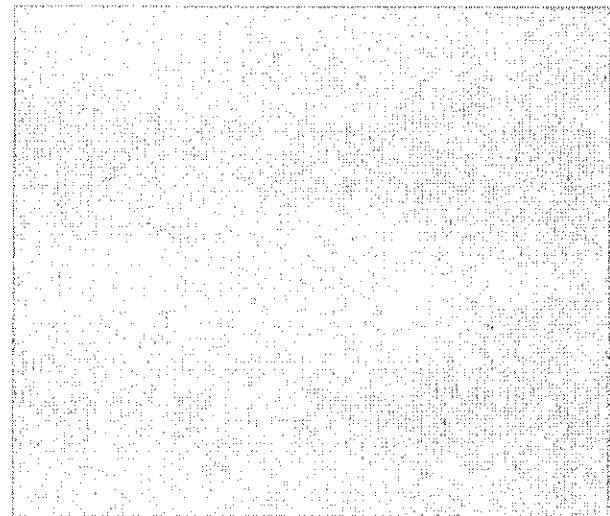
If a historian wants to learn more about the **lives of people in the higher classes** in the Babylonian Empire, a **corroborating** piece of evidence would be...



(primary source type)



(primary source type)



(primary source type)

Using evidence from the four documents, answer the central historical question by completing the sentences below.

According to the Code, Babylonian religion was _____

According to the Code, the Babylonian economy was based on _____

According to the Code, Babylonian society was structured around _____

According to the Code, the status of Babylonian women was _____
