Primary Source Activity

MESOPOTAMIA

Lesson 2 Mesopotamian Empires

The Code of Hammurabi

King Hammurabi of Babylon formed his code of law between 1792 and 1750 B.C. This code is a collection of Hammurabi’s legal decisions during his reign. However, these decisions were based on Sumerian laws that had existed for hundreds of years. So Hammurabi’s code can be seen as representing centuries of legal tradition.

The code is made up of 282 laws. These laws cover economic issues dealing with trade and commerce. They also include criminal cases involving assault and theft. In addition, they include civil laws involving slavery and debt.

Hammurabi’s code advanced beyond tribal customs. For example, some tribes might support the personal retribution or revenge of one person on another. However, the code of Hammurabi did not support personal retribution. Instead, people who committed a crime would be given the punishment stated for that crime in the code. However, punishments for similar crimes could differ greatly, depending on the situation.

Directions: Read the following laws from Hammurabi’s code.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading 1 Hammurabi’s Code: Law 202</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading 2 Hammurabi’s Code: Law 203</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If a free-born man strike the body of another free-born man [of] equal rank, he shall pay one gold mina.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading 3 Hammurabi’s Code: Law 204</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If a freed man strike the body of another freed man, he shall pay ten shekels in money.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Reading 4 Hammurabi’s Code: Law 205</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If the slave of a freed man strike the body of a freed man, his ear shall be cut off.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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1. Analyzing Primary Sources
   Identifying  What is the punishment for a person who strikes the body of a man who is higher in rank?

2. Analyzing Primary Sources
   Identifying  What is the punishment for the slave of a freed man who strikes the body of a freed man?

3. Critical Thinking
   Comparing  How are laws 202, 203, 204, and 205 similar?

4. Critical Thinking
   Contrasting  How are laws 202, 203, 204, and 205 different?

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5. Critical Thinking
   Drawing Conclusions Why do you think laws 202, 203, 204, and 205 are different?
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Answer Key

1. He shall receive sixty blows with an ox whip in public.

2. He shall have his ear cut off.

3. They all deal with a person striking the body of another person.

4. The social classes of people involved in the crime are different. Also, the punishments differ.

5. The laws are different because the punishment for the same crime differed depending on the social rank of the person who committed the crime and the person against whom the crime was committed.