

The Code of Hammurabi

Of the several law codes surviving from the ancient Middle East, the most famous after the Hebrew Torah is the Code of Hammurabi, sixth king of the Amorite Dynasty of Old Babylon.

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. . . .

2: If any one bring an accusation against a man, and the accused go to the river and leap into the river, if he sink in the river his accuser shall take possession of his house. But if the river prove that the accused is not guilty, and he escape unhurt, then he who had brought the accusation shall be put to death, while he who leaped into the river shall take possession of the house that had belonged to his accuser.

15: If any one take a male or female slave of the court, or a male or female slave of a freed man, outside the city gates [to escape], he shall be put to death.

109: If conspirators meet in the house of a [woman wine-seller], and these conspirators are not captured and delivered to the court, the [wine-seller] shall be put to death.

110: If a "sister of a god"[nun] open a tavern, or enter a tavern to drink, then shall this woman be burned to death.

129: If a man's wife be surprised [having intercourse] with another man, both shall be tied and thrown into the water, but the husband may pardon his wife and the king his slaves.

130: If a man violate the wife (betrothed or child-wife) of another man, who has never known a man, and still lives in her father's house, and sleep with her and be surprised [caught], this man shall be put to death, but the wife is blameless.

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

195: If a son strike his father, his hands shall be [cut] off.

196: If a [noble-]man put out the eye of another [noble-]man, his eye shall be put out.

197: If he break another [noble-]man's bone, his bone shall be broken.

198: If he put out the eye of a [commoner], or break the bone of a [commoner], he shall pay one [silver] mina.

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.

200: If a man knock out the teeth of his equal, his teeth shall be knocked out.

201: If he knock out the teeth of a [commoner], he shall pay one-third of a [silver] mina.

Hammurabi, the king of righteousness, on whom Shamash has conferred right (or law) am I. My words are well considered; my deeds are not equaled; to bring low those that were high; to humble the proud, to expel insolence.

1. How does Hammurabi punish people guilty of crimes?
2. Locate articles in the code that deal with adultery. What is the punishment?
3. Analyze clauses 195-201, what are some differences in the punishments regarding slaves and freemen?