The Code of Hammurabi

ABOUT THE READING  In the 1700s BC, Hammurabi ruled the huge Babylonian Empire, which covered all of Mesopotamia. Hammurabi is famous for his code of laws—a collection of 282 rules that cover many topics. They were written down so that all members of the empire could read and obey them.

As you read think about why some of these laws were especially important to the many farmers living along the rivers of ancient Mesopotamia.

5. If a judge try a case, reach a decision, and present his judgment in writing; if later error shall appear in his decision, and it be through his own fault, then [the judge] shall pay twelve times the fine set by him in the case, and he shall be publicly removed from the judge's bench, and never again shall he sit there to [give] judgment.

6. If any one steal the property of a temple or of the court, he shall be put to death, and also the one who receives the stolen thing from him shall be put to death.

7. If any one buy from the son or the slave of another man, without witnesses or a contract, silver or gold, a male or female slave, an ox or a sheep, [a donkey] or anything ... he is considered a thief and shall be put to death.

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 [happened] ... 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 flooded.

55. If any one open his ditches to water his crop, but is careless, and the water flood the field of his neighbor, then he shall pay his neighbor corn for his loss.

120. If any one store corn for safe keeping in another person's house, and any harm happen to the corn in storage, or if the owner of the house open the granary and take some of the corn . . . the owner of the house shall pay its owner for all of the corn that he took.

122. If any one give another silver, gold, or anything else to keep, he shall show everything to some witness, draw up a contract, and then hand it over for safe keeping.

123. If he turn it over for safe keeping without witness or contract, and if he to whom it was given deny it, then he has no legitimate claim.

125. If any one place his property with another for safe keeping, and there, . . . through thieves . . . his property . . . be lost, the owner of the house, through whose neglect the loss took place, shall [pay] the owner for all that was given to him . . .

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. How is Law 5 different from all the other laws listed here?

2. Re-read Laws 7, 122, and 123. Why do you think it is important for people to have witnesses and a contract?
3. Explain why Laws 53, 54, and 55 would have been important to the farmers of ancient Mesopotamia.
Biography Enheduanna

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Enheduanna wrote about Akkadian temples, and also about the son god Nanna, and the goddess of love Inanna.
2. (Enheduanna; Shakespeare). Enheduanna wrote poems devoted to a god and goddess of her culture. Shakespeare wrote plays about many different subjects. Both writers could be considered complex and challenging.

Literature

CALL OUT BOX

1. There was no land in sight and a bird can fly great distances.

ANALYZING LITERATURE

1. There were too many people. The people made so much noise that the gods could not sleep.
2. The Epic of Gilgamesh and Noah’s flood from the Bible both have characters that are told to build a boat and fill it with animals. There was a flood, and mankind was destroyed in both stories. In Gilgamesh, the gods were angry because people made too much noise. In the Bible, God destroyed mankind because of their violence and to rid the Earth of evil.

Primary Source The Code of Hammurabi

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Students should recognize that it specifies punishment for someone in authority—a judge—while the other laws apply to everyone.
2. Answers will vary. Examples: A written contract can prove ownership of something. The contract shows that there is an agreement between the people involved. Without a written contract, people unfamiliar with what had happened would have no way of knowing which person was telling the truth.
3. Answers will vary. Examples: The laws protected farmers from the careless acts or neglect of their neighbors. The laws might have made people more careful since they would have to pay for the results of their carelessness. If fields were flooded and crops ruined, a farmer and his family could starve if the person who caused the flood was not required to pay for or replace the corn that was ruined.

Primary Source The Sumerian Flood Story

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. When he opens the hatch, there is sunlight. He may cry from relief that the storm is over and his family has survived, but he may also be saddened by the destruction he sees and all the people who died in the flood.
2. Answers may vary but should include an explanation. Example: Yes. Like the flood, a war is violent, often lasts a long time, and causes many deaths.
3. Answers will vary. Examples: The tale was told so often because it is so dramatic. Many people believed there had been a great flood long ago, and this was a way of explaining the reasons for the flood and for the survival of humans and animals. The story might have given people hope and courage when they endured natural disasters, because it describes how one good man and his family survived one of the worst disasters known at that time.