

CHAPTER  
2

## Section 1

PRIMARY SOURCE from *The Code of Hammurabi*

More than 3,500 years ago, Hammurabi, king of the Babylonian Empire, ordered scribes to chisel a code of 282 laws onto a tall column of black stone. The column also featured an introduction explaining the intent of the code and a summary of Hammurabi's kingly deeds. As you read these laws from the code, think about how Mesopotamians defined crimes and how criminals were punished.

Before this portrait let every man who has a legal dispute come forward, read this text, and heed its precious words. The stone tablet will enlighten him in his trouble, and thus may he find justice and breathe easier in his heart, speaking these words: "Hammurabi is a king who cares for his people like a loving father."

1

If a man bring an accusation against a man, and charge him with a capital crime, but cannot prove it, he, the accuser, shall be put to death.

48

If a man owe a debt and Adad inundate his field and carry away the produce, or, through lack of water, grain have not grown in the field, in that year he shall not make any return of grain to the creditor, he shall alter his contract-tablet and he shall not pay the interest for that entire year.

53

If a man neglect to strengthen his dike and do not strengthen it, and a break be made in his dike and the water carry away the farm-land, the man in whose dike the break has been made shall restore the grain which he has damaged.

54

If he be not able to restore the grain, they shall sell him and his goods, and the farmers whose grain the water has carried away shall share the results of the sale.

113

If a man hold a debt of grain or money against a man, and if he take grain without the consent of the owner from the heap or the granary, they shall call that man to account for taking grain without the consent of the owner from the heap or the granary, and he shall return as much grain as he took, and he shall forfeit all that he has lent, whatever it be.

148

If a man take a wife and she become afflicted with disease, and if he set his face to take another, he may. His wife, who is afflicted with disease, he shall not put away. She shall remain in the house which he has built and he shall maintain her as long as she lives.

149

If that woman do not elect to remain in her husband's house, he shall make good to her the dowry which she brought from her father's house and she may go.

153

If a woman bring about the death of her husband for the sake of another man, they shall impale her.

195

If a son strike his father, they shall cut off his fingers.

196

If a man destroy the eye of another man, they shall destroy his eye.

197

If one break a man's bone, they shall break his bone.

200

If a man knock out a tooth of a man of his own rank, they shall knock out his tooth.

216

If he be a freeman, he (the physician) shall receive five shekels.

218

If a physician operate on a man for a severe wound with a bronze lancet (surgical knife) and cause the man's death, or open an abscess (in the eye) of a man with a bronze lancet and destroy the man's eye, they shall cut off his fingers.

## Hammurabi's Code of Laws

The image at the right shows the top of a pillar that had Hammurabi's Code engraved on it. Hammurabi's law code prescribed punishments ranging from fines to death. Here are some examples of the laws:

### PRIMARY SOURCE

8. If a man has stolen an ox, a sheep, a pig, or a boat that belonged to a temple or palace, he shall repay thirty times its cost. If it belonged to a private citizen, he shall repay ten times. If the thief cannot pay, he shall be put to death.
142. If a woman hates her husband and says to him "You cannot be with me," the authorities in her district will investigate the case. If she has been chaste and without fault, even though her husband has neglected or belittled her, she will be held innocent and may return to her father's house.
143. If the woman is at fault, she shall be thrown into the river.
196. If a man put out the eye of another man, his eye shall be put out.
198. If he puts out the eye of freed man or break the bone of a free man, he shall pay one gold mina.
199. If he put out the eye of a man's slave, or break the bone of a free man, slave, he shall pay one-half of its value.

CODE OF HAMMURABI, adapted from a translation by J. B. Pritchard

