

Station Document Analysis: Belief Systems

Directions: In your groups, go from station to station and examine the images/read the documents. Using the questions below, discuss with your groups and list as much information about the belief system as you can infer.

Belief System: Religion / Way of Thinking / Way of Societal Organization	Document Analysis: What does this tell you about what these people believed? How did they think about the world and the afterlife? How did they organize society? What were their rituals or rules?
Polytheism / Early Law (Mesopotamia)	
The Mandate of Heaven (China)	
The Afterlife (Egypt)	
The Caste System (India)	
Monotheism (Hebrews / Persia)	

Mesopotamia: Polytheism and Early Law:

You know the city Shurrupak, it stands on the banks on Euphrates? That city grew old and the gods that were in it were old. There was Anu, lord of the firmament [heavens], their father, and warrior Enlil their counselor, Ninurta the helper, and Ennugi watcher over canals; and with them also was Ea. In those days the world teemed, the people multiplied, the world bellowed like a wild bull, and the great god was aroused by the clamour. Enlil heard the clamour and he said to the gods in the council, "The uproar of mankind is intolerable and sleep is no longer possible by reason of the babel [confusion of voices]." So the gods in their hearts were moved to let loose the deluge [great flood]; but by lord Ea warned me in a dream. He whispered their words to my house of reeds, 'Reed-house, reed-house! Wall, O wall, hearken reed-house, wall reflect; O man of Shurrupak, son of Ubara-Tutu; tear down your house and build a boat, abandon possessions and look for life, despise the worldly goods and save your soul alive. Tear down your house, I say, and build a boat...

For six days and six nights the wind blew, torrent and tempest and flood overwhelmed the world, tempest and flood raged together like warring hosts. When the seventh day dawned, the storm from the south subsided, the sea grew calm, the flood was stilled; I looked at the face of the world and there was silence, all mankind turned to clay. The surface of the sea stretched as flat as a rooftop; I opened a hatch and the light fell on my face. Then I bowed low, I sat down and wept, the tears streamed down my face, for on every side was the waste of water...

-From *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, ancient Mesopotamian legend, c. 2100 B.C.E.

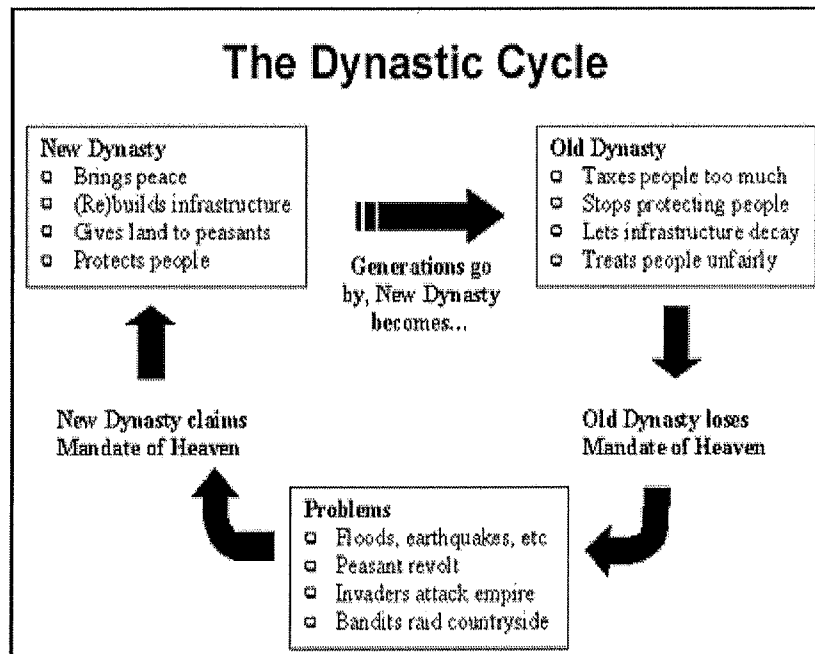
Hammurabi's Code: An Eye for an Eye



Hammurabi is the best known and most celebrated of all Mesopotamian kings. He ruled the Babylonian Empire from 1792-50 B.C.E. Although he was concerned with keeping order in his kingdom, this was not his only reason for compiling the list of laws. When he began ruling the city-state of Babylon, he had control of no more than 50 square miles of territory. As he conquered other city-states and his empire grew, he saw the need to unify the various groups he controlled... The prologue or introduction to the list of laws is very enlightening. Here, Hammurabi states that he wants "to make justice visible in the land, to destroy the wicked person and the evil-doer, that the strong might not injure the weak." The laws themselves support this compassionate claim, and protect widows, orphans and others from being harmed or exploited. The phrase "an eye for an eye" represents what many people view as a harsh sense of justice based on revenge. But, the entire code is much more complex than that one phrase. The code distinguishes among punishments for wealthy or noble persons, lower-class persons or commoners, and slaves.

<http://www.ushistory.org/civ/4c.asp>

China: The Mandate of Heaven / Dynastic Cycle:



He said, "Oh! of old the former kings of Xia cultivated earnestly their virtue, and then there were no calamities from Heaven. The spirits of the hills and rivers alike were all in tranquility; and the birds and beasts, the fishes and tortoises, all enjoyed their existence according to their nature. But their descendant did not follow their example, and great Heaven sent down calamities, employing the agency of our ruler-who was in possession of its favoring appointment. The attack on Xia may be traced to the orgies in Ming Tiao... Our king of Shang brilliantly displayed his sagely prowess; for oppression he substituted his generous gentleness; and the millions of the people gave him their hearts. Now your Majesty is entering on the inheritance of his virtue; -- all depends on how you commence your reign. To set up love, it is for you to love your relations; to set up respect, it is for you to respect your elders. The commencement is in the family and the state....

"Oh! do you, who now succeed to the throne, revere these warnings in your person. Think of them! -- sacred counsels of vast importance, admirable words forcibly set forth! The ways of Heaven are not invariable: -- on the good-doer it sends down all blessings, and on the evil-doer it sends down all miseries. Do you but be virtuous, be it in small things or in large, and the myriad regions will have cause for rejoicing. If you not be virtuous, be it in large things or in small, it will bring the ruin of your ancestral temple."

-From James Legge, trans, *The Sacred Books of China: The Texts of Confucianism*, in F. Max Mueller, ed., *The Sacred Books of the East*, 50 vols., (Oxford: Clarendon, 1879-1910), Vol 3. pp. 92-95, repr. in Alfred J. Andrea and James H. Overfield, *The Human Record: Sources of Global History, Vol 1*, 2d. ed., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), pp. 25-27

Egypt: The Afterlife:



Those used to philosophies centered on a single God, focused on the uniqueness of the individual, and formed by the view that earthly existence precedes an eternal paradise become easily confused by the various divinities and their role along the treacherous path of the Egyptian afterlife. It is impossible to encapsulate the full scope of the divine, since not only was it extremely crowded, but it also changed over the centuries. Gods and goddesses performed different tasks at different times, but all were deeply concerned with the dead.

Every Egyptian held deep concerns for the Beyond. Although gods and goddesses demanded mollification and obeisance while one was alive, when you died the gods became beneficent protectors - provided the dead passed the netherworld's many hurdles. Representation of the deities was often a fascinating blend of man and animal. Those animals that might seem comical, like the hippo or the baboon, often assumed a more menacing air - or assumed a certain nobility - when attached to the body of a man or woman.

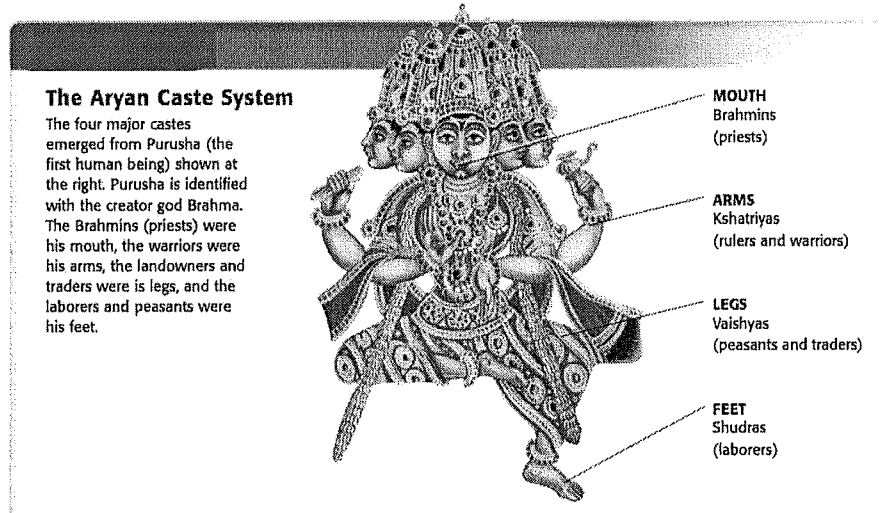
Death was not seen as the last stage of life, simply as a state in which one was at rest awaiting revivification. We know little of the peasantry; their lives, and thus their deaths, are not easily reconstructed. For those fortunate to live comfortably, however, funerary objects, mummification, and entombment tell us how dangerous the next life could be. Ample evidence exists of how terrifying the afterlife was: inscriptions from the Book of the Dead, the Book of the Two Ways, the Amduat (a section of the Book of the Netherworld) found their way onto objects accompanying the corpse. These inscriptions were spells to be ward off and protect the dead as they progressed from netherworld to the Hall of Judgment. The dead chose to travel on the solar barque, a low-slung boat from which Re, the sun god, recreated the world every day, as a way to achieve eternal life.

A priest had to perform the, "Opening of the Mouth," ceremony over the mummified body, whereby all the incantations restored all the senses to the body. Speech especially was needed, since the Egyptians had to justify their time on earth upon arrival at the Hall of Judgment. The other senses were needed immediately because the first trip after death was to the Field of Reeds, the land of wish-fulfillment. Having to pass through seven gates, aided by the magic spells inscribed upon the funerary objects, the dead arrived in the presence of Osiris, god of the netherworld, to face judgment. The ceremony was called, "weighing the heart," and explains why the heart remained intact while the priests removed the other vital organs and placed them in canopic jars.

Justifying himself was not easy. Face to face with forty-two gods, the heart of the dead was weighed in the presence of the jackal-headed Anubis, god of the dead, against a feather, representing Maat, goddess of truth. Balancing the scale meant immortality. Should the heart not balance perfectly, Amemet devoured it, and Seth, murderer of Osiris, ate the rest of the body. It is little wonder then that spells, tokens, ushebti, shabtis, amulets, and charms held such sway over the Egyptians.

<http://legacy.mos.org/quest/afterlife.php>

Indus: The Caste System:



Caste is the system of social organization. Each person is born into a caste and expects to be reborn after death into a higher caste. Socially mobile Westerners may have difficulty understanding why a person would accept caste. Hindus, with their sense of security, occupation continuity, and guarantee of rebirth to a higher plane, wonder at Westerners' discontent and ambition. Restrictions on caste involve regulation on cooking and dining, marriage, occupation and social position. These help to maintain the mosaic that is India, but they foster stagnation. Read the following Bronze Age Vedic poem on the origin of the castes.

When the [the gods] divided the Man,
Into how many parts did they divide him?
What was his mouth, what were his arms,
What were his thighs and his feet called?
The brahman [priest] was his mouth,
Of his arms was made the warrior,
His thighs became the vaishya [farmer or merchant]
Of his feet the shudra [servant] was born.

This poem demonstrates two aspects of the Indian caste system. First, that it appears to be divinely ordered and is therefore acceptable; secondly, that all parts of the caste are integral parts of the man—Indian society.

Another group, the untouchables, were considered to be ritually unclean because they held occupations which were religiously improper, i.e., slaughtering animals, cutting hair, cleaning up streets and human excrement, etc. These persons were considered necessary to society, but outside the bounds of the caste system. All persons, however, would be reborn again and again and all would rise up through the levels of society and eventually become pure enough to enter paradise. The lower one was in the caste system, the less expected of them regarding behavior.

Persia and the Hebrews: Monotheism:

The Zoroastrian Creed

The Creed is a very ancient prayer, parts of which are recited every day by Zoroastrians. Notice the chant-like repetition in the verses and the many holy aspects which the creed mentions, such as asha (fire). The creed also reinforces, first a hostility toward evil, and then a love of good. What other issues seem to have been important for the composer of the Creed?

1. I curse the Daevas.

I declare myself a Mazda-worshipper, a supporter of Zarathushtra, hostile to the Daevas, fond of Ahura's teaching, a praiser of the Amesha Spentas, a worshipper of the Amesha Spentas. I ascribe all good to Ahura Mazda, 'and all the best,' the Asha-owning one, splendid, xwarena-owning, whose is the cow, whose is Asha, whose is the light, 'may whose blissful areas be filled with light'.

2. I choose the good Spenta Armaiti (Holy Spirit) for myself; let her be mine. I renounce the theft and robbery of the cow, and the damaging and plundering of the Mazdayasnian settlements.

3. I want freedom of movement and freedom of dwelling for those with homesteads, to those who dwell upon this earth with their cattle. With reverence for Asha, and (offerings) offered up, I vow this: I shall nevermore damage or plunder the Mazdayasnian settlements, even if I have to risk life and limb.

4. I reject the authority of the Daevas, the wicked, no-good, lawless, evil-knowing, the most druj-like of beings, the foulest of beings, the most damaging of beings. I reject the Daevas and their comrades, I reject the demons (yatu) and their comrades; I reject any who harm beings. I reject them with my thoughts, words, and deeds. I reject them publicly. Even as I reject the head (authorities), so too do I reject the hostile followers of the druj.

7. As the belief of the waters, the belief of the plants, the belief of the well-made (Original) Cow; as the belief of Ahura Mazda who created the cow and the Asha-owning Man; as the belief of Zarathushtra, the belief of Kavi Vishtaspa, the belief of both Frashaostra and Jamaspa; as the belief of each of the Saoshyants (saviors) -- fulfilling destiny and Asha-owning -- so I am a Mazda-worshipper of this belief and teaching.

8. I profess myself a Mazda-worshipper, a Zoroastrian, having vowed it and professed it. I pledge myself to the well-thought thought, I pledge myself to the well-spoken word, I pledge myself to the well-done action.

9. I pledge myself to the Mazdayasnian religion, which causes the attack to be put off and weapons put down; which upholds khvaetvadatha (kin-marriage), which possesses Asha; which of all religions that exist or shall be, is the greatest, the best, and the most beautiful: Ahuric, Zoroastrian. I ascribe all good to Ahura Mazda. This is the creed of the Mazdayasnian religion.

Persia and the Hebrews: Monotheism:

Exodus

The Book of Exodus [Revised Standard Version]

And God spoke all these words, saying,

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

"You shall have no other gods before me.

"You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; 5 you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the LORD your God gives you.

"You shall not kill.

"You shall not commit adultery.

"You shall not steal.

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's."

Now when all the people perceived the thunderings and the lightnings and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled; and they stood afar off, and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die." And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to prove you, and that the fear of him may be before your eyes, that you may not sin."