

Hammurabi's Code

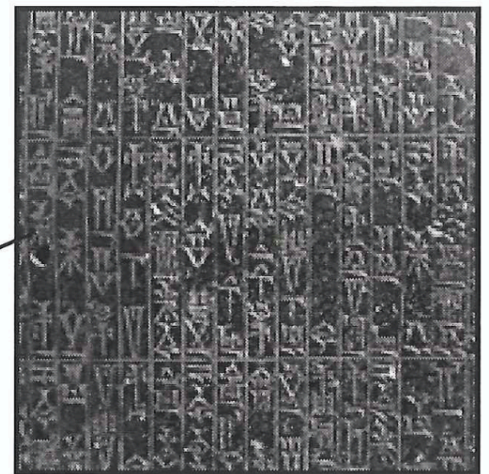
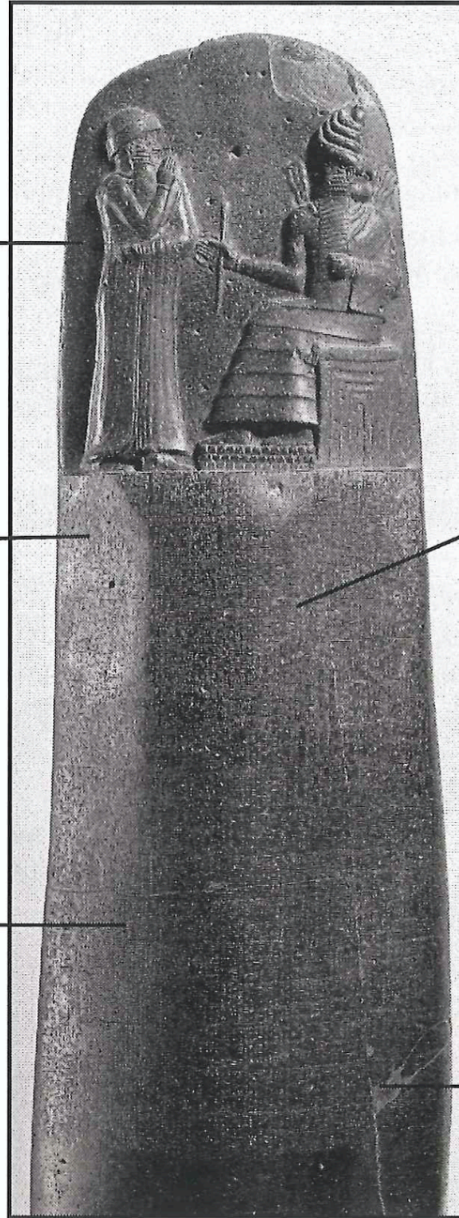
Source: Stone stele of Hammurabi's Code from the ancient artifacts collection of the Louvre Museum in Paris, France, circa 1754 BCE.

Note: The stele, carved from black diorite, stands more than eight feet tall and weighs four tons. This photograph shows the top third of the stele.

The carving at the top of the stele shows Hammurabi standing before Shamash, the god of justice, who is seated on his throne. Shamash is instructing Hammurabi in the law.

Below the two figures is the Prologue, in which Hammurabi lists the names of the gods, saying that they have given him the right to rule. The Prologue, like the rest of the code, is written in wedge-shaped cuneiform letters that have been carved into the stone.

Below the Prologue, closer to the base, are the 282 laws, organized by theme, including family life, agriculture, theft and professional standards. There are a total of 3,500 lines of writing, covering both sides of the stele.



Detail of the stele carvings.

Following the laws is an Epilogue, in which Hammurabi states how the laws should be carried out.

Stele = pillar

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Source: Excerpts from Hammurabi's Code, circa 1754 BCE.

Note: There are 282 laws in Hammurabi's Code. The numbers below refer to their order on the stele.

Law 21: If a man has broken through the wall [to rob] a house, they shall put him to death and pierce him, or hang him in the hole in the wall which he has made.

Law 48: If a man has borrowed money to plant his fields and a storm has flooded his field or carried away the crop, ... in that year he does not have to pay his creditor.

Law 168: If a man has determined to disinherit his son and has declared before the judge, "I cut off my son," the judge shall inquire into the son's past, and, if the son has not committed a grave misdemeanor ..., the father shall not disinherit his son.

Law 195: If a son has struck his father, his hands shall be cut off.

Law 196: If a man has knocked out the eye of a free man, his eye shall be knocked out.

Law 199: If he has knocked out the eye of a slave ... he shall pay half his value.

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Use the photo of stone stele (pillar) and the excerpt's from Hammurabi's code to answer the questions below.

1. What does the picture carved into the top of the stone pillar show?
2. What written language is carved into the stone?
3. How many total laws are carved into the stone?
4. What would happen if someone broke through a wall to rob a house?
5. How does law 48 help farmers?
6. What do you think law number 195 implies about the idea of respect?
7. Law number 196 is the most famous law on the pillar. What does it mean?