

EXCERPT FROM *HAMMURABI'S CODE OF LAWS*

1780 B.C.

Anu created a land called Babylon he made it great on earth, and founded an everlasting kingdom in it, whose foundations are laid so solidly as those of heaven and earth; then Anu called me by name, Hammurabi, 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 just like
5 Shamash, and be a light in the the land, to further the well-being of mankind.

Hammurabi, the prince, called of Bel am I, making riches and increase, enriching Nippur and Dur-ilu beyond compare, sublime patron of E-kur; who reestablished Eridu and purified the worship of E-apsu; who conquered the four quarters of the world, made great the name of Babylon, rejoiced the heart of Marduk, his lord who daily pays his devotions in Saggil; the royal scion whom Sin made; who enriched
10 Ur;... who recognizes the right, who rules by law; who gave back to the city of Ashur its protecting god; who let the name of Ishtar of Nineveh remain in E-mish-mish; the Sublime, who humbles himself before the great gods; successor of Sumula-il; the mighty son of Sin-muballit; the royal scion of Eternity; the mighty monarch, the sun of Babylon, whose rays shed light over the land of Sumer and Akkad; the king, obeyed by the four quarters of the world; Beloved of Ninni, am I.

15 When Marduk sent me to rule over men, to give the protection of right to the land, I did right and righteousness in . . . and brought about the well-being of the oppressed.

1. If any one ensnare another, putting a ban upon him, but he can not prove it, then he that ensnared him shall be put to death.

2. If any one brings an accusation against a man, and the accused man goes to the river and leaps into the
20 river, if he sinks in the river his accuser shall take possession of his house. But if the river proves that the accused is not guilty, and he escapes 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.

3. If any one bring an accusation of any crime before the elders, and does not prove what he has charged, he shall, if it be a capital offense charged, be put to death.

5 4. If he satisfy the elders to impose a fine of grain or money, he shall receive the fine that the action produces.

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 he 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 render
10 judgement.

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, an ass or anything, or if he take it in charge, he is considered a
15 thief and shall be put to death.

8. If any one steal cattle or sheep, or an ass, or a pig or a goat, if it belong to a god or to the court, the thief shall pay thirtyfold therefor; if they belonged to a freed man of the king he shall pay tenfold; if the thief has nothing with which to pay he shall be put to death.

14. If any one steal the minor son of another, he shall be put to death.

20 21. If any one break a hole into a house (break in to steal), he shall be put to death before that hole and be buried.

22. If any one is committing a robbery and is caught, then he shall be put to death.

23. If the robber is not caught, then shall he who was robbed shall claim under oath the amount of his loss; then the community, on whose ground and territory and in whose domain it was, will compensate him for the goods stolen.

5 27. If a chieftain or man be caught in the misfortune of the king (captured in battle), and if his fields and garden be given to another and he take possession, if he return and reaches his place, his field and garden shall be returned to him, he shall take it over again.

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 occurred be sold for money, and
10 the money shall replace the corn which he has caused to be ruined.

59. If any man, without the knowledge of the owner of a garden, cuts down a tree in a garden he shall pay half a mina in money.

104. If a merchant give an agent corn, wool, oil, or any other goods to transport, the agent shall give a receipt for the amount, and compensate the merchant therefor. Then he shall obtain a receipt from the
15 merchant for the money that he gives the merchant.

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

117. If any one fails to pay his debt, and sells himself, his wife, his son, and daughter for money or gives them away to forced labor: they shall work for three years in the house of the man who bought them, or
20 the proprietor, and in the fourth year they shall be set free.

121. If any one stores corn in another man's house he shall pay him storage at the rate of one gur for every five ka of corn per year.

126. If any one who has not lost his goods states that they have been lost, and makes false claims: if he claim his goods and amount of injury before God, even though he has not lost them, he shall be fully
5 compensated for all his loss claimed. (I.e., the oath is all that is needed.)

145. If a man takes a wife, and she bear him no children, and he intends to take another wife: if he takes this second wife, and brings her into the house, this second wife shall not be allowed equality with his wife.

148. If a man takes a wife, and she be seized by disease, if he then desires to take a second wife he shall not
10 put away his wife, who has been attacked by disease, but he shall keep her in the house which he has built and support her so long as she lives.

168. If a man wishes to put his son out of his house, and declare before the judge: "I want to put my son out," then the judge shall examine into his reasons. If the son is not guilty of a great fault, for which he can be rightfully put out, the father shall not put him out.

15 195. If a son strikes his father, his hands shall be cut off.

196. If a man put out the eye of another man, his eye shall be put out.

198. If he put out the eye of a former slave, or breaks the bone of a former slave, he shall pay one gold mina.

199. If he puts out the eye of a man's slave, or breaks the bone of a man's slave, he shall pay one-half of its
20 value.

197. If he breaks another man's bone, his bone shall be broken.

200. If a man knocks out the teeth of his equal, his teeth shall be knocked out. [A tooth for a tooth]

201. If he knocks out the teeth of a former slave, he shall pay one-third of a gold mina.

202. If any one strikes the body of a man higher in rank than he, he shall receive sixty blows with an ox-whip in public.

5 203. If a free-born man strikes the body of another free-born man or equal rank, he shall pay one gold mina.

204. If a former slave strikes the body of another former slave, he shall pay ten shekels in money.

205. If the slave of a former slave strikes the body of a former slave, his ear shall be cut off.

206. If during a quarrel one man strikes another and wound him, then he shall swear, "I did not injure
10 him on purpose," and pay the doctors.

209. If a man strikes a free-born woman so that she lose her unborn child, he shall pay ten shekels for her loss.

210. If the woman dies, his daughter shall be put to death.

229 If a builder builds a house for some one, and does not construct it properly, and the house which he
15 built fall in and kill its owner, then that builder shall be put to death.

230. If [the house] kills the son of the owner, the son of that builder shall be put to death.

LAWS of justice which Hammurabi, the wise king, established. A righteous law, and pious statute did he teach the land. Hammurabi, the protecting king am I. I have not withdrawn myself from the men, whom Bel gave to me, the rule over whom Marduk gave to me, I was not negligent, but I made them a peaceful
20 abiding-place. I expounded all great difficulties, I made the light shine upon them. With the mighty

weapons which Zamama and Ishtar entrusted to me, with the keen vision with which Ea endowed me, with the wisdom that Marduk gave me, I have uprooted the enemy above and below (in north and south), subdued the earth, brought prosperity to the land, guaranteed security to the inhabitants in their homes; a disturber was not permitted. The great gods have called me, I am the salvation-bearing shepherd, whose
5 staff is straight, the good shadow that is spread over my city; on my breast I cherish the inhabitants of the land of Sumer and Akkad; in my shelter I have let them repose in peace; in my deep wisdom have I enclosed them. That the strong might not injure the weak, in order to protect the widows and orphans, I have in Babylon the city where Anu and Bel raise high their head, in E-Sagil, the Temple, whose foundations stand firm as heaven and earth, in order to bespeak justice in the land, to settle all disputes,
10 and heal all injuries, set up these my precious words, written upon my memorial stone, before the image of me, as king of righteousness.

I am the king who rules among the kings of the cities. There is no wisdom like mine. By the command of Shamash, the great judge of heaven and earth, let righteousness go forth in the land: by the order of Marduk, my lord, let no destruction befall my monument. Let my name be ever repeated; let he who has a
15 question of the law, come and stand before this my image; let him read the inscription, and understand my precious words: the inscription will explain his question to him; he will find out what is just, and his heart will be glad, so that he will say: "Hammurabi is a ruler, who is as a father to his subjects."