
Chapter 10

Laying down the Law

Bellwork

You are a Mesopotamian farmer. You want to acquire some fish for dinner. You approach the marketplace and spot a vendor selling fish. “I’ll take some fish,” you say. “How many guvies of fish?” He asks. You look at him confused. “I’ll take 2 yuptas of fish,” you say. He looks at you confused and scratches his head in dismay.

What is the problem with this scenario? How do we fix it?

King Shulgi

King Shulgi: proud, writes hymn honoring himself (Shulgi “Hymn to Himself”)
PRIMARY SOURCE

Nippur: 100 miles North of Ur; Shulgi claims he ran there and back in 1 day

May have written story himself without help of Scribe; could read and write

Came to throne in 2094 BCE, reigned for 48 years; Mesopotamia flourishes

King Shulgi

Ruled during 3rd Dynasty of Ur (Ur III)

Kings emphasized peaceful aspects of their reigns in inscriptions; built first ziggurats, made roads safe

Ziggurat: high temple tower for gods, much taller than earlier temples

He encouraged trade by setting standards for weights and measures

Standardization: people all over kingdom could say and mean the same things

Scribes kept track of every tax that was paid, every payment to worker, every donation to temple

Many of these tablets have survived

King Shulgi

Shulgi: though proud, he actually cared about poor in kingdom

Established “justice” in the land and put together list of laws, fragments that survive compose the world's first and earliest set of 37 laws

“if man lies in court, he shall weight and deliver 15 shekels of silver” (heavy fine)

Laws list all sorts of crimes: chopping off another man's foot, knocking out someone's tooth, cutting off a person's nose

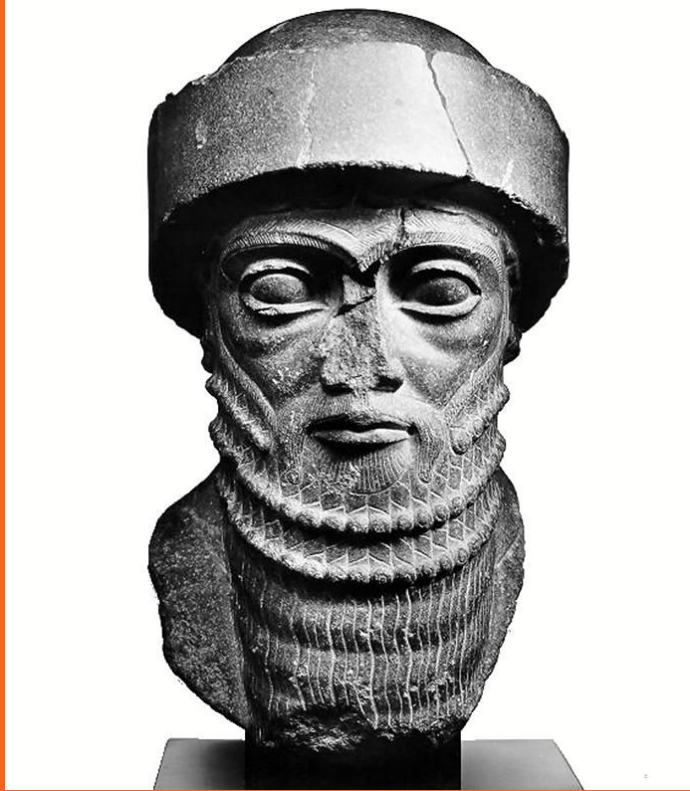
Punishment listed for each crime, discouraged people from taking justice into their own hands and standardized it

King Shulgi's downfall

Empire eventually collapses, however; Amorites or “westerners” poured in; had been threat during Shulgi's reign (wanted a wall constructed to keep them out)

Mesopotamians did not like Amorites (tent dweller, eats raw meat, has no house)

Instead, they become part of Mesopotamian prosperity



Hammurabi

Hammurabi: one of the Amorite kings, ruled city of Babylon for 43 years (1792-1750 BCE). All of Mesopotamia fell under his control after he begins building empire.

Has the biggest Mesopotamia had seen since Sargon (600 years earlier). Claimed he conquered cities because their gods supported him (Sargon)

Some of his letters have survived, many were “turned to mud” and lost when water level in soil rose.

Much of what is known about Hammurabi comes from his laws. People still copied them thousands of years after his death. Called himself “King of Justice”

Hero to poor: those that owed debt were forgiven, those that were slaves were set free

Style of Laws

Crowning achievement: 282 laws inscribed on a monument 7 1/2 feet high, written in stone, topped with image of Hammurabi standing in front of Shamash, god of justice

Laws covered many types of possible court cases: divorce, property, duties to king, criminal acts, theft, assault

Shulgi punished with fines, Hammurabi punishes with fines and suffering (sometimes he forced criminal to suffer same fate as victim)

type of law: “eye for an eye”, though no law against murder... maybe too obvious?

“If a man accuses another man and charges him with murder but cannot bring proof against him, the accuser shall be killed.”

discouraged conflict

Thoughts overall

Underlying message: court system powerful, and everyone needs to respect it

Hammurabi not the inventor world's first laws... that is Shulgi; most of Shulgi's however, have been lost or mis-credited (some credited to his father and known as laws of Ur-Nammu)
