

Ancient Civilizations of the Middle East—Mesopotamia

Biography

HAMMURABI

?–1750 BC



HOW HE AFFECTED THE REGION

Hammurabi was a Babylonian king who established a set of laws to guide his people. The Code of Hammurabi is one of the earliest written collections of laws in history.

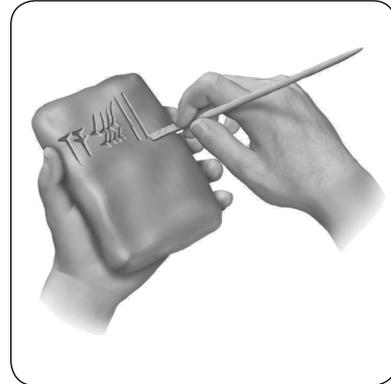


As you read the biography below, think about how King Hammurabi's code of laws helped govern the people of Babylon.

You may have heard the expression “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.” Did you know that this expression comes from a real law? The laws assembled by King Hammurabi were known as the Code of Hammurabi. There were a total of 282 laws used in ancient Babylon.

Hammurabi's laws were known to be strict and detailed. Punishment was harsh. For example, if you broke another person's bone, then your bone would be broken. Or if a carpenter built a house that later collapsed and killed the son of a homeowner, then the carpenter's own son would be put to death. Penalties varied according to status. Wealthy people were usually allowed to pay a fine instead of receiving physical punishment. If the victim was a poor person, a rich person who harmed him might not be punished at all. Many of the laws are now considered harsh and outdated. However, these laws helped govern ancient Babylon during the rule of Hammurabi.

Hammurabi was the king of Babylon from 1792 to 1750 BC. He conquered other regions near his kingdom and merged them into his own empire. Hammurabi's Babylonian Empire stretched from the Persian Gulf to what is now Iraq, and included parts of present-day Syria and Turkey.



VOCABULARY

cuneiform writing made by pressing a wedge-shaped tool into clay tablets

Hammurabi created his code by revising and elaborating on existing laws. The Code of Hammurabi was meant to protect the weak and to treat conquered people fairly. The 282 laws dealt with matters such as crime, business regulations, wages, debts, family matters, military service, witchcraft, and false accusations. The Code of Hammurabi is one of the earliest known legal codes in existence. It was written in **cuneiform** on stone tablets. A stone monument on which the laws were written can be viewed today in the Louvre Museum in Paris, France.

After Hammurabi's death in 1750 BC, the Babylonian Empire collapsed. Babylon was invaded and conquered by the Kassites. The Kassites ruled Babylon for 400 years and followed the Code of Hammurabi.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Explain What was the Code of Hammurabi?

2. Make Generalizations In what ways might the Code of Hammurabi be similar to modern laws here in the United States?

ACTIVITY

Suppose that you are King Hammurabi. You have begun writing laws for the people of Babylon. Make a list of five laws that you would consider the most important for your people to obey.

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Biography

Enheduanna

c. 2285–2250 BC



HOW SHE AFFECTED THE REGION

Enheduanna, the daughter of Sargon the Great, was a priestess and a writer. She is often considered history's first known author.



As you read the biography below, think about what it must have been like for Enheduanna to be a writer during her time.

Enheduanna was the daughter of Sargon the Great, the king who founded the first great empire in history. Sargon the Great, also known as Sargon of Akkad, conquered all of Sumeria around 2347 BC. He was the first king to unite northern and southern Mesopotamia. Sargon appointed his daughter Enheduanna to serve as high priestess at Ur, one of the Sumerian city-states.

Enheduanna was a writer and a poet. She is the oldest author who is known by name. Enheduanna wrote two or three major works. These are lengthy **hymns** to Inanna, the Sumerian goddess of love and war. She also wrote 42 shorter hymns about the Akkadian temples in the different cities in Mesopotamia, and the **deities** that were worshipped at those temples.

As high priestess Enheduanna was connected to the moon god Nanna, as well as his daughter Inanna. Many of Enheduanna's writings were devoted to Nanna and Inanna. Her poems show her faith in her role as high priestess and express her feelings toward Inanna, whom she favored over the other gods. In addition to praising her gods, Enheduanna wrote about her own life and the struggles she faced because of her faith. She also wrote about what she was thinking as she wrote her hymns.



VOCABULARY

hymn a song of praise

deities gods

Enheduanna is considered the oldest author known by name, but her writings are rarely studied in school. This may be because her style of writing was complex and challenging. Her writings have been preserved on cuneiform tablets that have survived more than 4,000 years.

It is likely that Enheduanna wrote many works that have been lost. Her most famous surviving works are *The Exaltation of Inanna* and *In-nin sa-gur-ra*. Both of these works were hymns written to be sung in praise the goddess Inanna. Enheduanna's work has a strong and personal presence, which is likely autobiographical in nature.

Little else is known about Enheduanna, although she is believed to be among the figures on a stone disk that was discovered by archaeologists at the site of the temple in Ur. The disk depicts a group of priests making an offering to the Sumerian moon god Nanna. The tallest figure in the center of the disk is thought to be Enheduanna.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Identify What were the subjects of Enheduanna's writings?

2. Contrast Compare what you have learned about Enheduanna with another famous writer. Tell how they are alike and how they are different.

ACTIVITY

Think about whether you prefer daytime or nighttime. Write a poem to either the sun or the moon, based on your preference. Use what you have learned about Enheduanna to try to make your poem unique.