

COMPARING THE HITTITE LAW CODE AND HAMMURABI'S CODE

Laws in the Ancient World

As civilizations grew, people needed rules to create order and solve conflicts. Written laws helped leaders decide how problems should be handled and showed people what behaviors were acceptable. Two important early law systems were created by the Babylonians and the Hittites. Although these civilizations lived in different regions, both developed laws that shaped ideas about justice.

The Code of Hammurabi was created around 1750 BCE by King Hammurabi of Babylon in Mesopotamia. The Hittite Law Code developed later, around 1650–1500 BCE, in the Hittite Kingdom of Anatolia, an area that is part of modern-day Turkey. Unlike Hammurabi's Code, the Hittite laws were not created by one ruler. Instead, they developed over time and were recorded by scribes. Both law systems help historians understand how ancient people viewed fairness and responsibility.

The Code of Hammurabi

The Code of Hammurabi included nearly 300 laws about daily life, including trade, property, family relationships, and crimes. Hammurabi believed laws were necessary to keep society organized and protect his kingdom.

Many of Hammurabi's laws followed the idea of "an eye for an eye." This meant that punishments could match the harm caused by a crime. However, punishments were not always equal for everyone. A person's social class affected the consequences they faced. Wealthy people, common workers, and enslaved people could receive different punishments for similar actions.

The Hittite Law Code

The Hittites had a different approach to justice. Their laws often focused on restitution, which means repairing harm by paying for damage or replacing what was lost. Instead of harsh physical punishments, many Hittite laws required fines or compensation.

For example, if someone damaged another person's property, they might



Map of the Old Hittite and Old Babylonian Kingdoms (c. 1600 BCE).

have to replace the item or pay the owner. The goal was often to restore peace and repair relationships within the community.

Similarities and Differences

Both law systems helped organize society and included rules about property, family, and conflicts. However, they had different ideas about justice. Hammurabi's laws often emphasized punishment, while Hittite laws focused more on compensation and restoring harmony.

Studying these ancient law codes helps us understand how civilizations solved problems and how their values shaped their ideas about fairness. People still debate the role of punishment and restitution in the justice system. Many questions about justice that people discussed thousands of years ago are still important today.

Vocabulary

1. Define the term: restitution
2. Define the term: scribe

Comprehension Questions

3. When and where did the Hittite Law Code develop?
4. How did the Hittite approach to justice differ from the Code of Hammurabi?
5. How did social class affect punishments in Hammurabi's Code?

Critical Thinking

6. Which approach to justice do you think is more effective: Hammurabi's focus on punishment or the Hittites' focus on restitution? Explain your answer using evidence from the reading.

ANSWER KEY

Vocabulary

1. Define the term: restitution

Repairing harm by paying for damage or replacing what was lost.

2. Define the term: scribe

A person who recorded information in ancient societies.

Comprehension Questions

3. When and where did the Hittite Law Code develop? Hammurabi's Code?

The Hittite Law Code developed around 1650–1500 BCE in Anatolia, an area that is part of modern-day Turkey.

The Hammurabi Law Code developed around 1750 BCE in Mesopotamia, an area that is part of modern-day Iraq.

4. How did the Hittite approach to justice differ from the Code of Hammurabi?

Hittite laws focused more on restitution and repairing harm, while Hammurabi's laws often focused on punishment that matched the crime.

5. How did social class affect punishments in Hammurabi's Code?

Social class affected punishments because wealthy people, common workers, and enslaved people could receive different consequences for similar actions.

Critical Thinking

6. Which approach to justice do you think is more effective: Hammurabi's focus on punishment or the Hittites' focus on restitution? Explain your answer using evidence from the reading.

Answers will vary. Students should support their opinion with evidence from the reading. For example, a student may argue that restitution is effective because it repairs harm and restores peace, or that punishment is effective because it discourages people from breaking laws.