

MYSTERIES UNEARTHED

THE CODE OF HAMMURABI

(c.1700BC). King of Babylon, receiving the law from an enthroned sun-god called Samas. The original stone from which this photograph is a part, is in the Louvre in Paris. The stone, a black slab of diorite, was found in 1901-2 at Susa (Shushan of the book of Esther) and measures 7 feet 5 inches tall and 6 foot wide. It is engraved with nearly 300 paragraphs and 282 laws all dealing with legal provisions to do with different aspects of Babylonian life: viz: -property i.e. personal, real estate, trade and business; person i.e. family, injuries, labourers and labour. These codes are significant in that they show the existence of social conditions during the 1st half of the 2nd millennium BC. Before, they were only known from the patriarchal stories of the Bible, and in consequence, the Mosaic laws were not anachronistic as critics had suggested.

RESEMBLANCES

CODE OF HAMMURABI	MOSAIC LAWS
1. a.) CH196 “If a citizen destroys the eye of the son of a citizen his eye shall be destroyed.”	Leviticus 24:19,20 “And if a man cause blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done to him; so shall it be done to him; breach for breach; eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in man so shall it be done to him again.” (cf. Ex.21:23-25)
b) CH 197 “If he breaks the bone of a citizen, his bone shall be broken”. c) CH 200 “If a citizen knocks out a tooth of a citizen, his tooth shall be knocked out.”	Deuteronomy 19:21 “And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”
2. CH 206 “If a citizen has struck a citizen in a brawl, and has caused him injury, this citizen shall swear, ‘I did not strike him deliberately.’ but he shall pay the bill of the physician.”	Exodus 21:18,19 “And if man strive together, and one strike another with a stone, or with his fist, and he die not, but keepeth his bed; if he rise again, and walk abroad upon his staff, then shall he that smote him be quit: only he shall pay for the loss of his time, and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed.”

If there are definite resemblances between some of Hammurabi ‘s statutes and the Mosaic laws, there are also more striking differences, essentially in the philosophy behind their ruling (see especially point 4.)

DIFFERENCES

1. Content	Mostly civil (governing almost every aspect of life's activities except religious) and criminal.	Civil, Health, ceremonial (or priestly) and moral.
2. Type of society	Adapted to the irrigation - culture and the highly commercialised urban society of Mesopotamia.	Suit a simple agricultural, pastoral people of dry land like Palestine.
3. Origin	Received by Hammurabi from the Sun god, Shamash.	Received by Moses from God on Mount Sinai.
4. Morality	<p>a) Cruel law - names about 10 varieties of bodily mutilations, i.e. A physician who operates on a but slightly wounded man with the bronze scalpel shall have his hands cut off.</p> <p>b) No control of lust.</p> <p>c) No limitation of selfishness: A Babylonian master could kill his slave with impunity, since he was considered but a piece of property.</p> <p>d) No postulation of love.</p> <p>e) No religious motif which recognises in.</p>	<p>Based on love for God and mankind.</p> <p>Deeply spiritual and religious. Places greater value on human life: A Hebrew master would have been tried for murder if he had killed his slave.</p> <p>Demands more human treatment of slaves.</p> <p>Moves on a high moral and spiritual plane.</p>

In conclusion, the Mosaic laws not only correspond to the cultural level of civilisation in that period but are also ethically superior, in that they reflect a regard for human life and morality.

N.B. The Code of Hammurabi belongs to the 18th century BC but since it was discovered, an older code has been found belonging to the 19th century BC: Lipit-Ishtar Code [1947] and also one belonging to the 21st century BC: Ur-Nammu Code [1952].

Therefore, Hammurabi's code is a codification of older laws, going back, perhaps beyond the 21st century BC to an even older code - an archetypal body of common law (Gen.26:5). Which could account the similarity in the laws of Moses and Hammurabi in that they copied a code more ancient than themselves.