

Laws from the Code of Hammurabi

Citizen Accused of Stealing an Ox

1. If a person stole an ox or a sheep or an ass or a pig or a boat, and if it belonged to a church or to the state, that person shall make thirtyfold restitution (give 30 times the worth in return); if it belonged to a private citizen, that person shall make tenfold restitution. If the thief cannot pay, he shall be put to death.
2. If a person claimed that suspected stolen property found in his possession was sold to him by someone else, that person must produce witnesses to the sale. The person who claimed the property was stolen from him must also produce witnesses that support that claim. If the person in whose possession the stolen property was found cannot produce witnesses to the sale of the property, that person shall be put to death.

Commoner Accused of Harboring a Runaway Slave

1. If a person has helped a palace slave or a commoner's slave to escape out of the city gate, that person shall be put to death.
2. If a person has harbored in his house a fugitive slave owned by the palace or owned by a commoner, and that person has not surrendered the slave at the demand of the police, that person shall be put to death.
3. If a person has captured a fugitive slave in the open country and has returned the slave to his master, the owner of the slave shall pay that person two shekels of silver.
4. If a person has captured a fugitive slave in the open country and the slave will not name his owner, that person shall take the slave to the palace and inquire into his record and then return the slave to his owner. If that person keeps the slave in his house and the slave is captured in that person's possession, that person shall be put to death.

Commoner and Soldier Claiming the Same Piece of Land

1. If a soldier is ordered on an errand of the king and does not go, or pays a hireling to go in his place, that soldier or constable shall be put to death, and his hireling shall take his estate.
2. The field, orchard, and house of a soldier or constable cannot be sold.
3. If a person has purchased the field, orchard, or house of a soldier or constable, his contract tablet shall be broken, and he shall forfeit his money. The field, orchard, or house shall return to its rightful owner.

Nobleman and Slave Involved in a Brawl

1. If a nobleman has broken the bone or destroyed the eye of a nobleman's slave, he shall pay the other nobleman one half of the slave's value.
2. If a nobleman has knocked out another nobleman's tooth, his own tooth shall be knocked out.
3. If a nobleman has knocked out the tooth of a commoner, he shall pay the commoner one third of a mina of silver.
4. If a nobleman slaps another nobleman, he shall pay that nobleman one mina of silver.
5. If a slave slaps a nobleman, the slave shall have his ear cut off.

Builder Accused of Faulty Construction

1. If a builder constructed a house for a nobleman, but did not make his work strong and the house that he built collapsed and caused the death of the owner of the house, that builder shall be put to death.
2. If a builder constructed a house for a nobleman, but did not make his work strong and the house that he built collapsed and caused the death of a son of the owner of the house, the son of the builder shall be put to death.
3. If a builder constructed a house for a nobleman, but did not make his work strong and the house that he built collapsed and caused the death of a slave belonging to the owner of the house, the builder shall give another slave to the owner of the house.
4. If a builder constructed a house for a nobleman, but did not make his work strong and the house that he built collapsed and destroyed goods, the builder shall make good whatever was destroyed; also, the builder shall reconstruct the house at his own expense.

Man Seeking Divorce Without Financial Settlement

1. If a man has put away (divorced) his wife who has not borne him children, he shall return her dowry and pay her the marriage portion that she brought from her father's house.
2. If the wife of a man has made up her mind to leave their house to engage in business and has acted the fool, neglecting the house and humiliating the husband, the court shall rule against her. If her husband has said "I put her away," he shall put her away, she shall leave, and he shall not pay her anything for the divorce.
3. If a woman hates her husband and has said "You shall not possess me," the court shall inquire into her record. If she has been economical and has no vice, and her husband has greatly belittled her, the court shall rule in the wife's favor, and she will take her marriage portion and go back to her father's house.

Farmer Refusing to Pay Rent

1. If a person rents a field for cultivation, but does not produce grain on the field, he shall give to the owner of the field as much grain as was produced on an adjoining field.
2. If a person has neglected to strengthen a canal on his property, and the canal breaks, pouring flood waters into fields, that person who owns the canal shall make good the crops that were flooded and ruined.
3. If a person who owns a broken canal that poured flood waters into fields is not able to make good the ruined crops, that person and his goods shall be sold for money, and the farmers of the fields whose crops were ruined shall share the money.

Woman Seeking Damages for Her Father's Wrongful Death

1. If a wild bull has gored and killed a person, that case has no remedy.
2. If an ox that is owned by a person was dangerous, and this was made known to the owner, but the owner took no steps to tie up the ox or blunt its horns, and the ox has gored and killed a person, the owner of the ox shall pay half a mina of silver for a nobleman or one third of a mina for a slave.

Dispute Between Nobleman and Doctor over Patient's Death

1. If a doctor makes a large incision with an operating knife and cures a nobleman's disease, or if he opens a tumor over the nobleman's eye with an operating knife and saves the eye, he shall receive 10 shekels of silver.
2. If a doctor makes a large incision with an operating knife and cures a commoner's disease, or if he opens a tumor over the commoner's eye with an operating knife and saves the eye, he shall receive 5 shekels of silver.
3. If a doctor makes a large incision with an operating knife and kills a nobleman or commoner, or opens a tumor with the operating knife and cuts out the eye of a nobleman or commoner, the doctor's hands shall be cut off.
4. If a doctor makes a large incision with an operating knife and kills a slave, the doctor shall buy another slave for the slave owner.