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Law Collections  
from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor  
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**Writings from the Ancient World  
Society of Biblical Literature**

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Harry A. Hoffner, Jr.  
Peter Machinist  
Patrick D. Miller, Jr.  
William J. Murnane  
David I. Owen  
Robert R. Ritner  
Martha T. Roth

Volume 6

*Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*

by Martha T. Roth

Edited by Piotr Michalowski

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# **Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor**

SECOND EDITION

*by*  
Martha T. Roth

*With a contribution by*  
Harry A. Hoffner, Jr.

*Volume editor*  
Piotr Michalowski

Society of Biblical Literature  
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## Series Editor's Foreword

Writings from the Ancient World is designed to provide up-to-date, readable, English translations of writings recovered from the ancient Near East.

The series is intended to serve the interests of general readers, students, and educators who wish to explore the ancient Near Eastern roots of Western civilization, or compare these earliest written expressions of human thought and activity with writings from other parts of the world. It should also be useful to scholars in the humanities or social sciences who need clear, reliable translations of ancient Near Eastern materials for comparative purposes. Specialists in particular areas of the ancient Near East who need access to texts in the scripts and languages of other areas will also find these translations helpful. Given the wide range of materials translated in the series, different volumes will appeal to different interests. But these translations make available to all readers of English the world's earliest traditions as well as valuable sources of information on daily life, history, religion, etc. in the preclassical world.

The translators of the various volumes in this series are specialists in the particular languages and have based their work on the original sources and the most recent research. In their translations they attempt to convey as much as possible of the original texts in a fluent, current English. In the introductions, notes, glossaries, maps, and chronological tables, they aim to provide the essential information for an appreciation of these ancient documents.

Covering the period from the invention of writing (by 3000 B.C.E.) down to the conquests of Alexander the Great (ca. 330 B.C.E.), the ancient Near East comprised northeast Africa and southwest Asia. The cultures represented within these limits include especially Egyptian, Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Hittite, Ugaritic, Aramean, Phoenician, and Israelite. It is hoped that Writings from the Ancient World will eventually produce trans-

lations of most of the many different genres attested in these cultures: letters—official and private, myths, diplomatic documents, hymns, law collections, monumental inscriptions, tales, and administrative records, to mention but a few.

The preparation of this volume was supported in part by a generous grant from the Division of Research Programs of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Significant funding has also been made available by the Society of Biblical Literature. In addition, those involved in preparing this volume have received financial and clerical assistance from their respective institutions. Were it not for these expressions of confidence in our work, the arduous tasks of preparation, translation, editing, and publication could not have been accomplished or even undertaken. It is the hope of all who have worked on these texts or supported this work that *Writings from the Ancient World* will open up new horizons and deepen the humanity of all who read these volumes.

Simon B. Parker  
Boston University School of Theology

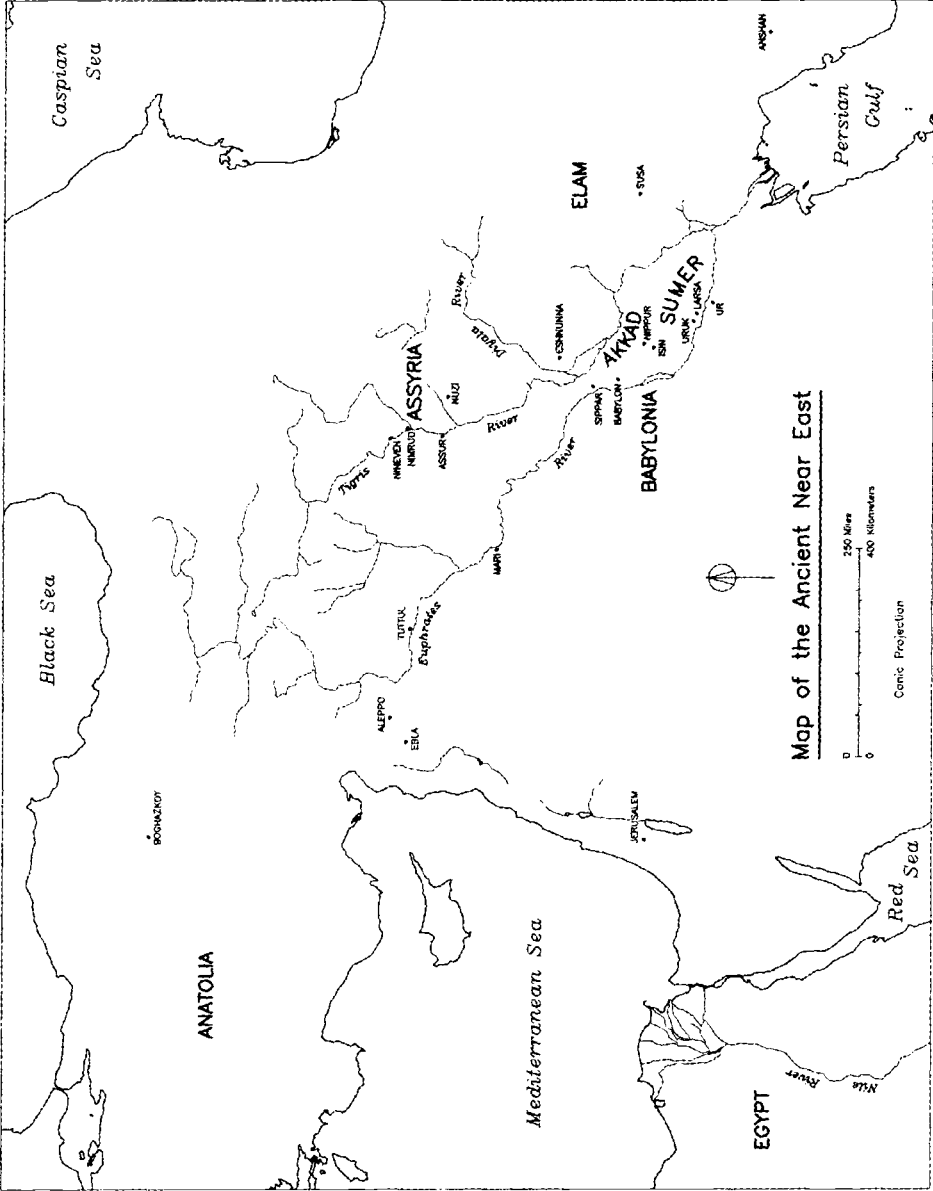


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## Chronological Table

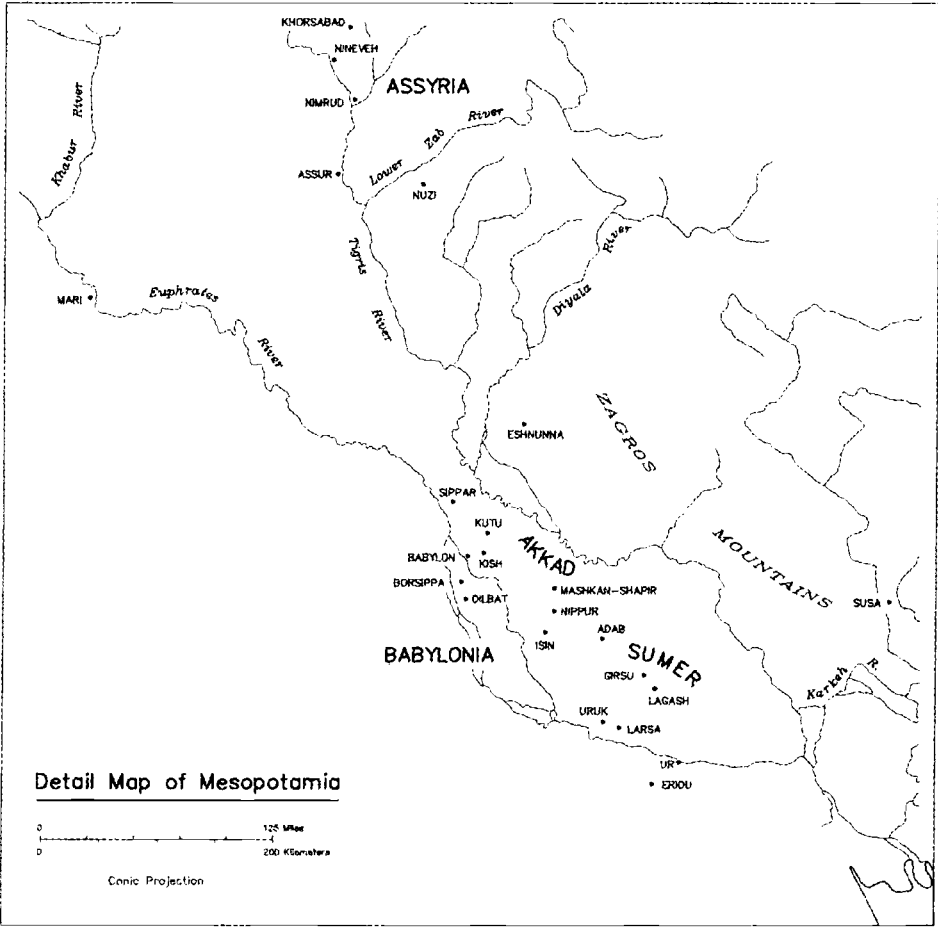
Third Dynasty of Ur Ur-Namma (2112–2095 B.C.E.) Shulgi (2094–2047 B.C.E.)	2112–2004 B.C.E.
Larsa Dynasty	2025–1763 B.C.E.
First Dynasty of Isin Lipit-Ishtar (1934–1924 B.C.E.)	2017–1794 B.C.E.
First Dynasty of Babylon Hammurabi (1792–1750 B.C.E.)	1894–1595 B.C.E.
Middle Assyrian State Ashur-uballit (1363–1328 B.C.E.) Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243–1207 B.C.E.) Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 B.C.E.)	ca. 1400–950 B.C.E.
Neo-Assyrian Empire	ca. 950–627 B.C.E.
Neo-Babylonian (or Chaldean) Dynasty Nabopolassar (625–605 B.C.E.) Nebuchadnezzar II (604–562 B.C.E.) Nabonidus (555–539 B.C.E.)	625–539 B.C.E.
Persian Empire Cyrus II (The Great) (538–530 B.C.E.)	538–331 B.C.E.



Map of the Ancient Near East

0 250 Miles  
0 400 Kilometers

Conic Projection





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## Explanation of Conventions, Signs, and Abbreviations

The typographical conventions and sigla used here follow generally accepted Assyriological practice. These include the differing typography marking the different languages: lower case roman (with morphemes separated by hyphens) for Sumerian; lower case italics (with hyphens when not normalized) for Akkadian; upper case roman (with periods) for logograms or Sumerograms of uncertain reading.

In the English translations, some proper nouns are given in their commonly accepted English spellings rather than in the more accurate transcription (Babylon rather than Bābili, Shalmaneser rather than Shulmānu-asharidu, Hammurabi rather than Ḥammu-rapī, etc.). In the English translations, I transcribe the phoneme /š/ as /sh/ (Shamash rather than Šamaš), but sometimes retain the velar fricative /ḫ/ (pronounced as in German "auch"), and the emphatics /ṣ/ and /ṭ/. Other notations and symbols include the following:

- [ ] Full square brackets mark restorations to broken text in the original.
- ⌈ ⌋ Half square brackets mark damaged but likely readings.
- < > Pointed brackets mark modern insertions of text omitted by the ancient scribe.
- « » Double pointed brackets mark deletions of text erroneously included by the ancient scribe.
- ( ) Parentheses enclose material added to the English translation.
- ... Ellipses mark untranslatable text or a gap.

The only bibliographic abbreviations used are:

- AHw See von Soden 1959–81.
- CAD See Oppenheim, Reiner, et al. 1956–.

The law collections in this volume are identified by the following abbreviations:

HL	Hittite Laws
LE	Laws of Eshnunna
LH	Laws of Hammurabi
LL	Laws of Lipit-Ishtar
LNB	Neo-Babylonian Laws
LOx	Laws about Rented Oxen (Ox Laws)
LU	Laws of Ur-Namma
LX	Laws of X
MAL	Middle Assyrian Laws
MAPD	Middle Assyrian Palace Decrees
SLEx	Sumerian Laws Exercise Tablet
SLHF	Sumerian Laws Handbook of Forms

Additional abbreviations used:

col.	column
obv.	obverse of tablet
r.	reign
rev.	reverse of tablet

Chronologies follow Brinkman 1977.

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## Weights and Measures

Weights and measures have been converted in the translations into basic units, to facilitate comparisons between and within the laws. Thus, silver and other commodities usually weighed are reduced to shekels, area measures to ikus, and capacities to silas. Although the correspondences varied during the three-thousand-year history of their attested uses, the measurement systems used in the Sumerian and Akkadian law collections are consistent.

The cuneiform writing systems almost always indicated numbers, measurements, and commodities using logograms, usually without phonetic complements, and the grammatically correct Akkadian readings often are impossible to determine. In transcribing weights and measures I render the numeral either in Akkadian or logographically in Arabic numerals and fractions, the measurement notation in the absolute state, and the commodity in the appropriate grammatical case: e.g., 1 *mana kaspam išaqqal*, "he shall weigh and deliver 1 mina of silver" (passim), or 6 *mana šipātum ana 1 šiqil kaspim*. "360 shekels of wool for 1 shekel of silver" (LE ¶ 1); so, too, when the commodity is understood but not written, as in 12 *uttet idūšu*. "12 barley-corns is his hire" (LE ¶ 7), with *kaspum*, "silver," understood. The distributive is rendered here with the locative-adverbial ending *-um*, with the associated commodity in the appropriate grammatical case: thus, e.g., *ana 1 burum 60 kur še'am imaddad*, "he shall measure and deliver 18,000 silas of grain per 18 ikus of land" (LH ¶ 255); see Goetze 1956: 36; and Borger 1979: 114 ad ¶ 44.

### Table of Weights and Measures

Weight measures (used for silver, gold, tin, wool, etc.)

- 1 *biltu* (gún) "talent" (ca. 30 kilograms) = 60 "minas"
- 1 *manû* (ma-na) "mina" (ca. 500 grams) = 60 "shekels" [Hittite "mina" = 40 "shekels"]
- 1 *šiq̄lu* (gín) "shekel" (ca. 8.33 grams) = 180 "barleycorns"
- 1 *uṭṭetu* (še) "barleycorn" (ca. 0.046 grams)

Capacity measures (used for grain, etc.)

- 1 *kurru* (gur) "kur" (ca. 300 liters) = 5 "bariga"
- 1 *pānu* (bariga) "bariga" (ca. 60 liters) = 6 "seahs"
- 1 *sūtu* (bán) "seah" (ca. 10 liters) = 10 "silas" [Neo-Babylonian "seah" = 6 "silas"]
- 1 *qū* (sila) "sila" (ca. 1 liter) = 60 "shekels"

Surface measures (used for fields, houses, etc.)

- 1 *buru* (būr) "bur" (ca. 64,800 sq. meters or ca. 6.5 hectares) = 18 "ikus"
- 1 *ikū* (iku) "iku" (ca. 3600 sq. meters or ca. 0.36 hectares) = 100 "sars"
- 1 *mušaru* (sar) "sar" (ca. 36 sq. meters or ca. 0.0036 hectares)

Length measures (used for walls, textiles, etc.)

- 1 *nindānu* (ninda) "ninda" (ca. 6 meters) = 12 "cubits" [Neo-Babylonian "ninda" = 14 "cubits"]
- 1 *qanū* (gi) "reed" (ca. 3 meters) = 6 "cubits" [Neo-Babylonian "reed" = 7 "cubits"]
- 1 *ammātu* (kūš) "cubit" (ca. 50 centimeters) = 30 "fingers" [Neo-Babylonian "cubit" = 24 "fingers"]
- 1 *ubānu* (šu-sí) "finger" (ca. 1.66 centimeters) = 6 "barleycorns"
- 1 *uṭṭetu* (še) "barleycorn" (ca. 0.28 centimeters)

Table 2. The standard Old Babylonian weights and measures as used in the Sumerian and Akkadian law collections. Akkadian terms are indicated in normalized italics, Sumerian terms in (hyphenated) syllabic roman, and English translations within quotation marks. The different equivalencies in the Hittite and Neo-Babylonian systems are indicated within square brackets. See Powell 1987 and van den Hout 1987.



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## Acknowledgments

It is a pleasure to offer my acknowledgments to many people. Sections of this volume have been in preparation for many years, since the mid-1970s, and the final product owes much to numerous conversations with teachers, colleagues, and students. Especially valuable have been the insights from colleagues in legal history at the University of Chicago, whose questions and promptings helped shape my translations, and I thank in particular Charles Gray and James Lindgren. I first studied the Mesopotamian law collections at the University of Pennsylvania under the direction of Barry Eichler and Åke W. Sjöberg, to both of whom I am grateful for lessons in philology and methodology. Portions of the manuscript, in various drafts, were read and commented on by several colleagues at the Oriental Institute: Miguel Civil, who also allowed me access to his hypertext files, and Walter Farber, Erica Reiner, and Matthew W. Stolper; John A. Brinkman made available to me his draft translations of the Laws of Hammurabi and of the Middle Assyrian Laws. The manuscript was read with great care by the volume editor, Piotr Michalowski. I thank all these colleagues for their cooperation, suggestions, and insights.

Editorial assistance for this volume was provided by Stephanie Endy, Linda McLarnan, and Helen Rosner (for the Sumerian and Akkadian collections), and by Scott Branting (for Harry Hoffner's translation of the Hittite Laws). The maps were prepared by Peggy Sanders, Archaeological Graphic Services; the indexes were prepared with the assistance of Rachel Dahl. I am grateful for the patience and editorial guidance of the two series editors, Burke O. Long and Simon B. Parker. Numerous questions relating to computer problems were always cheerfully answered by John Sanders. The Oriental Institute and its Director, William Sumner, provided essential material support. Manuscript preparation was aided by a 1993 National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Stipend.

I have been able to collate many of the original cuneiform documents for the Sumerian and Akkadian law collections, including all those in the University Museum, Philadelphia, by courtesy of Åke W. Sjöberg; in Yale University, New Haven, by courtesy of W. W. Hallo; in the Free Library of Philadelphia, by courtesy of the Curator of the Rare Books Department; in the Oriental Institute, Chicago, by courtesy of J. A. Brinkman; in the British Museum, London, by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum;<sup>1</sup> in the Musée du Louvre, Paris, by courtesy of the Trustees of the Musée du Louvre.

I dedicate this book to my family: to Bryon, Helen, Joseph, and Lillian.

#### Note

1. For the LU, Finkelstein (1969a: 66) noted that he was able to make "collations of the Ur fragments in the British Museum"; the tablets are now in Baghdad, at the Iraq Museum, and have not been recollated.

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## Introduction

The law collections presented in this volume are compilations, varying in legal and literary sophistication, recorded by scribes in the schools and the royal centers of ancient Mesopotamia and Asia Minor from the end of the third millennium through the middle of the first millennium B.C.E. Some of the collections, like the famous Laws of Hammurabi, achieved a wide audience throughout Mesopotamia for centuries; others, like the Laws about Rented Oxen, were scribal exercises limited to a local school center. All, however, reflected and influenced contemporary legal practice in the scribes' recordings of contracts, administrative documents, and court cases, and also provide the modern historian with evidence of abstractions of legal rules from cases.

### Cuneiform Script

The cuneiform script—a system of wedges impressed into damp clay tablets or, in imitation, impressed into wax, incised into stone or metal, or painted on other surfaces—was used throughout the ancient Near East from the late fourth millennium B.C.E. until the first centuries C.E. In the local languages and dialects, cuneiform was used to record a range of private and public documentation: accountings of incomes and disbursements and ration lists, private letters and diplomatic correspondence, contracts and lawsuits, literary compositions and historical annals, medical and astronomical treatises, mathematical problems, ritual and religious compilations, lexical lists, and so on. In Mesopotamia, these texts in Sumerian and in the Semitic Akkadian dialects of Babylonian and Assyrian entered (or sometimes were composed for) the curricula of the schools where scribes were trained in the ancient and accepted formal traditions of their craft, both

practical and esoteric: from how to draft a letter or produce an inventory, to how to record an astronomical observation. (For an introduction to cuneiform writing, with further bibliography, see Walker 1987.)

### The Scribal Curriculum

One of the skills necessary for the scribe was mastery of the legal terminology and clauses that he would use in recording a formal court case or in drawing up a contract or agreement between private parties. To this end, the scribal curriculum included such works as *ana ittišu* (Landsberger 1937)—a multitabular series of thousands of Sumerian and Akkadian legal terms and formulas which would be copied and memorized by the aspiring student—or the Laws about Rented Oxen (LOx, in this volume)—an exercise collecting a small series of laws or contract formulas relating to a single theme. Most students would later use the lessons learned from these to draft the daily contracts of local life. But the rare and fortunate scribes might be called upon to help collect, organize, and publicize a larger formal collection of laws and cases, possibly one with a royal sponsor and patron. One such collection is that promulgated under the name of King Hammurabi of Babylon about 1750 B.C.E., which was copied and recopied in the scribal centers for over a thousand years.

### The Formats and Structures of the Law Collections

Some of the earlier Sumerian and Babylonian collections frame the body of legal provisions with a historical-literary prologue and epilogue (the Sumerian Laws of Ur-Namma, Laws of Lipit-Ishtar, Laws of X, and the Akkadian Laws of Hammurabi). These frames establish a political context for the compositions, relating the series of laws to the role of king as the divinely authorized guardian and administrator of justice. The high literary style and language of the prologue and epilogue contrast with the dry legal and contractual style of the laws, but the essential link between the laws and their literary frame must not be severed. The prologue and epilogue outline the historical circumstances that allow the ruler to present himself as a worthy recipient of the gods' favor and support, the highest mark of which is his ability to administer and dispense justice throughout his realm. In return for his able exercise of these powers, he demands absolute loyalty from his subjects. Surely it is no coincidence that the very first legal provisions in the Laws of Hammurabi, after a lengthy prologue establishing Hammurabi's credentials, deal with the consequences of false accusations (i.e., in the political realm, treason) and establish the state's right to impose a death penalty, and that the last provision, after more than 275 laws, deals

with the consequences of a slave's challenge to his master (i.e., insurrection). The political context of the laws is emphasized by these associations with the prologue and epilogue frame.

The law cases or legal provisions included in the collections are formulated in a variety of styles (Yaron 1988: 96-110). The most frequently used is the casuistic formulation that first describes a situation and then sets out the resolution or sanction that restores balance: "If a man (or an ox, or a slave, etc.) does such and such, then he shall weigh and deliver so many shekels (etc.)." This characteristic formulation predominates throughout most of the collections in this volume: in the Sumerian Laws of Ur-Namma, Laws of Lipit-Ishtar, Laws of X, Ox Laws, and Sumerian Laws Tablet (tukum-bi lú, etc.), in the Akkadian Laws of Eshnunna, Laws of Hammurabi, Middle Assyrian Laws, Middle Assyrian Palace Decrees (*šumma awilum*, etc.), and also in the Hittite Laws (*takku LÜ-an*). A variation of this casuistic formulation is the relative construction "A man who . . ." (*amēlu ša*), which is almost the only style used in the latest collection in this volume, the Neo-Babylonian Laws, and in the Middle Assyrian Palace Decrees. The relative construction is also found, along with other styles, in the Laws of Eshnunna, Middle Assyrian Laws, and Middle Assyrian Palace Decrees. Also less common is a negative apodictic statement, much like the "Thou shalt not" injunctions of the biblical commandments; a few of these formulations are found in the Laws of Eshnunna, Laws of Hammurabi, Middle Assyrian Laws, and Middle Assyrian Palace Decrees. Finally, in addition to legal rules, the Laws of X, Laws of Eshnunna, and Laws of Hammurabi also include wage and price regulations, helping to assess the relative values of labor and commodities; these should be compared to the standardizations established in the prologue of the Laws of Ur-Namma, again clearly linking the literary frame to the legalistic body.

Each "rule" or unit—casuistic clause, relative construction, negative apodictic statement, or wage and price regulation—usually (but not always) begins with a new line on the cuneiform tablet or stela; there is often no other marking, ruling, or indentation that would distinguish one unit from the next. The designation by seriatim numbers or letters of these units and the division of the text into "laws," "provisions," or "paragraphs" is purely the work of modern scholarship and not of the native compilers. The prologue and epilogue sections consist of continuous cuneiform text, and the paragraphing in these narrative sections also is a modern editorial innovation.

The sequences and groupings of legal situations within each law collection vary. In any one collection, there is a complex interplay of literary and compositional principles, of legal requirements, and of unusual cases and common circumstances. Associative principles draw law provisions together into larger blocks, and certain cases in the provisions serve as

bridges linking together such blocks (see Petschow 1965, Petschow 1968, Sauren 1989). These blocks (or "chapters") were sometimes consciously marked by the ancient scribes, as seen in the few subject headings found in some late Old Babylonian copies of the Laws of Hammurabi. Within these larger groups of laws, two compositional principles—presentation of polar cases with maximal variation and juxtaposition of individual legal cases—dictate sequencing of the provisions (Eichler 1987). The entire tablet of Middle Assyrian Laws A, with more than fifty-five provisions, deals almost exclusively with offenses involving women as victims or perpetrators and with sexual offenses (including charges of sodomy); these are best studied along with the Middle Assyrian Palace Decrees, which record the decrees formulated by Assyrian rulers to regulate the behavior and etiquette of the palace women and of those royal officers whose functions demand proximity to them. The more fragmentary collections (such as the Laws of X) and the less polished and shorter exercises, excerpts, or drafts (such as Sumerian Laws Exercise Tablet or the Neo-Babylonian Laws) are more difficult to dissect and explain.

#### The Nature and Function of the Law Collections

The legal function of the law collections has been the subject of much debate throughout the twentieth century, ever since the stela of the Laws of Hammurabi was first published in 1902; and the debate has, predictably, centered on that most famous and largest of the collections. None of the collections is comprehensive or exhaustive, and it is clear that none attempts to set out a complete "law of the land"; but it is not clear what conclusions follow. Certainly, a lack of comprehensiveness does not, in itself, detract from the legal import or applicability of a set of laws. There are scholars who view the collections as codifications of existing practice, providing precedents for the courts and the administration of justice (see Haase 1965: 22ff.). In recent decades, the weight of scholarly opinion has come down strongly in recognition of the collections as products of the scribal schools, and as manifestations of the intellectual processes that developed other scientific treatises, including such topically diverse treatises as the god lists, tree lists, professions lists, mathematical lists, star lists, omen lists, pharmacopoeia, etc. (Kraus 1960; Bottéro 1992; Westbrook 1985). Others maintain that the connection of the law collections with their royal sponsors is paramount, and that the laws must be read with other products of the royal administration of justice (such as the edicts and debt remissions) as royal apologia with political and historical implications (Finkelstein 1961).

Throughout Mesopotamian history, the concern of the king with justice and the legal process is emphasized in royal inscriptions, royal epithets, iconographic representations, and literary allusions. Whether or not the

king was always himself an active participant in the administration of the legal system, he was always its guardian, for the application of justice was the highest trust given by the gods to a legitimate king. This point was made in a letter from eighteenth-century B.C.E. Mari on the upper Euphrates, which reports the message conveyed by a prophet of the god Addu of Aleppo to the Mari ruler Zimri-Lim: "I (Addu) gave the entire country to (your father) Yaḥdun-Lim . . . He abandoned me and so I gave the country which I had given to him instead to Samsi-Addu (of Assyria) . . . (Later) I restored you to the throne of your father's house . . . Now heed this one matter: When anyone makes an appeal to you for a judgment, saying, 'I have been wronged!' you be present and render a judgment for him! Respond to him with righteousness! This alone I ask of you!" (Durand 1993: 43-45). This important message was delivered on several occasions and reappears in yet another communication from the god to the same king: "Am I not Addu, lord of Aleppo, who raised you in my bosom and who restored you to the throne of your father's house? I ask nothing else of you but that when a man or woman who has been wronged appeals to you, you be present and render a judgment for them! This alone I ask of you" (Lafont 1984: 9-11). Any ruler would certainly take such admonitions seriously, and the law collections in this volume provide numerous examples (both in the literary prologues and epilogues and in the body of the legal provisions) of the king as the ultimate authority in the day-to-day affairs of the courts and the judicial process, and as the moral leader maintaining the divinely inspired and ordained ideals of justice.

These law collections are not the sole evidence of the law from the ancient Near East. Tens of thousands of surviving cuneiform tablets record lawsuits, court cases, and legal agreements and transactions (real estate sales and leases, loans, pledges, marriages, adoptions, inheritance dispositions, slave transfers, etc.), and any comprehensive treatment of a legal subject in a given time and place within the three millennia of the cuneiform record must rely on these functional and practical legal documents and not exclusively on the law collections. One must ask, then: What are the relationship and the degree of legal concord between the provisions of the law collections and the contemporary transactional documents?

In numerous studies of a range of legal situations, little correspondence has been found between the provisions in the law collections and contemporary practice. Furthermore, no court document or contract makes a direct reference to any of the formal law collections. From such an absence of linking evidence some scholars have concluded that the law collections had little or no impact on the daily operation of legal affairs. There is, however, one Old Babylonian letter which does make reference to a "stela" (Akkadian *narū*) upon which wages were inscribed, reminding us of the provisions in LH 𒂗𒂗 273-74, which establish daily wages for several categories of work-

men. The letter was sent by an administrator to one of his team leaders in response to a complaint he received about unreasonable demands made by some weavers. The text reads, in full:<sup>1</sup>

(1-3) Speak to Nabi-Shamash, thus says Alammush-našir: May the gods Shamash and Marduk keep you in good health!

(4-6) Concerning the woven-textile workers whom you brought in (to work) and who spoke to you as follows: (6-10) "15 barleycorns of silver is the daily wages per man. If you will not weigh and deliver 15 barleycorns of silver, then we (as a group) will take (payment in rations of) 20 silas of grain, 5 silas of beer, and 4 silas of bread per day." (10-11) Thus they spoke to you and thus you wrote to me. (12-13) The wages for a hired worker are recorded on the stela. (14-16) In accordance with what they spoke to you, either in grain or in silver, do not withhold their wages! (rev. 17-20) And when I come there, I will investigate the matter personally and I will deduct their wages from their work assignment.

(21-24) Furthermore, the mat which is to be produced should not require 3600 shekels (of fiber materials)! Rather 1800 shekels for the woof, 600 shekels for the warp, in all 2400 shekels is enough for one mat. (25-27) Let them make that mat 12 cubits long and 7 cubits wide.

(28-29) Furthermore, appoint a trustworthy person and let him supervise them!

The wages demanded by the workers in this letter are triple the daily wages set out in LH ¶ 274. But from that fact one cannot conclude that the economic parameters set forth in the law collection were out of touch with the reality of the market (Sweet 1958: 111). Furthermore, of course, there is no reason to assume that the wages set out in the Laws of Hammurabi were not *minimum* wages rather than *maximum* wages; the regulations in the Laws of Hammurabi, for example, could protect workers from exploitation. This would be in keeping with the intent and claims of the prologue as well. Nonetheless, whether or not the letter's reference in lines 12-13 to the stela is indeed an allusion to the stela of Hammurabi upon which his laws were inscribed, the tone of the entire letter is one of outrage—both at the workers' audacity in demanding high wages and at their attempt to cheat the administrator by using 50 percent more wool than necessary to accomplish their task. His response indicates neither acquiescence in the face of labor's demands nor acceptance of the inconsequence of the "stela"; rather, he orders his on-site representative to make the work progress at whatever cost, and promises that he himself will rectify the abuses when he arrives to assess the situation in person. Thus it is entirely possible that the writer referred to the Laws of Hammurabi (or to another collection of laws written and displayed on a stela, see below) and would keep in mind its provisions in his final settlement with his workmen. His comment, "The wages for a hired worker are recorded on the stela," confirms the publicity and publication value of the law collection in its contemporary context.



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