

## E. Hammurabi and the Babylonian Empire

1. The reunification of Mesopotamia was accomplished by a ruler named Hammurabi. His capital was the city of Babylon.
2. Hammurabi managed to reestablish centralized control over a large territory, and his famous code of laws reflects his desire to establish order after the chaos of war.
3. The Code of Hammurabi (**c.1700 BC**)
  - a) It is one of the first written law codes in all of history.
  - b) The basic idea of these laws is often stated as “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,” i.e. the punishment is equal to the crime.
  - c) Hammurabi's said that he wanted to create a set of laws that would help “orphan and widow,” i.e. the weak, who would otherwise fall prey to the strong.
  - d) The actual laws of the code reveal that the conquering lords of Babylonia were given preferential treatment, with commoners treated more harshly, and slaves the harshest of all.
  - e) Death was a common penalty, imposed for wide range of crimes from kidnapping to theft. Even the receipt of stolen goods resulted in death.
  - f) The lords/nobles received only fines for crimes committed against those beneath them in the the hierarchy of Babylonian society.
4. Of all the history of the archaic past of Mesopotamia, only the Code of Hammurabi really qualifies as an “anchor fact” of history.
  - a) It is the only fact about Mesopotamia that is especially useful to know and learn about still today, because it provides a *foil* for understanding human progress in the area of individual rights and the law.
  - b) *Archaic* codes of laws such as Hammurabi's do not recognize individual rights, and thus do not (indeed cannot) protect freedom. Instead, regardless of whatever benevolent verbiage accompanies them, they are made essentially to protect “order,” i.e. the privileges of the ruling class of a society.
  - c) Among the greatest achievements of Western civilization is the premise of “equality before the law.” We will see the roots of this notion in the culture of ancient Greece—and only there, ever, in the entire history of humankind. Knowing of the code of Hammurabi can help us to properly treasure this achievement as a component of modern life.

## F. The Succession of Empires

1. The Babylonian Empire was destroyed by a mysterious people known as the Kassites. Then came yet another “dark age,” and a series of empires of the same archaic character.
2. The most important empire in this still early stage of history was the Assyrian Empire. This empire conquered the Hebrew kingdom of Israel, and thus became a part of Jewish and Christian lore. In particular, Assyria deported Jewish people to other parts of the empire, beginning a long tragic story of the Jewish people being torn from their homeland and flung to the far corners of the world. This story, known as the “Jewish Diaspora,” is the background to the formation of the modern country of Israel, and thus a useful “anchor fact” in understanding the modern controversies surrounding Israel and its enemies in their full context.
3. Because of its connection to the people of the Christian Bible, Assyria was the most well known empire of Mesopotamian history to Europeans when the study of Mesopotamia’s archaic past began. Thus the subject of Mesopotamian history became known as “Assyriology.”
4. Assyria was also the first Mesopotamian empire to conquer Egypt, c. 664 BC.
5. Assyria was itself conquered by an alliance of people known as the Medes (from part of Persia) and Babylon (who are known as the “Neo-Babylonians,” because they were a *new* Babylonian empire.)
6. The Neo-Babylonians were famous for their architecture in ancient times. Their ziggurat of Babylon inspired the fable of the Tower of Babel. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon were considered one of the wonders of the ancient world.

## G. The Climax of Archaism: The Persian Empire

1. The Median Empire was mysteriously taken over by the Persians under the leadership of a king known as Cyrus “the Great.”
2. Like all “great” kings, he conquered great swaths of territory, from the western edge of India to western Turkey (then called Lydia), and finally, Babylon.
3. The most original feature of Cyrus’s kingship was that he allowed conquered peoples to maintain their local religions. In the history of Mesopotamia, it was traditional for conquering cities to impose their gods on the conquered. Archaic peoples were accustomed to thinking of worldly affairs as the expression of a contest between gods, but this meant that their religious worship was always connected to wars and rebellions. Cyrus hoped to sever this connection. He hoped to prevent rebellions because conquered people would have one less reason to rebel if conquest did not mean religious defeat.
4. (In connection to his religious toleration, Cyrus is viewed as a hero by the Jewish people. He allowed them to return home from Babylon and helped them rebuild their temples.)

5. Cyrus's heir, Cambyses, continued to rule in the same way. In 525, Cambyses conquered Egypt, and he applied Cyrus's idea of religion toleration in a particular way. He became the Pharaoh of Egypt and thus the leader of the Egyptian religion.
6. (Notice how this is the opposite, in a way, from traditional Mesopotamian practices. Not only did the conqueror not impose his views. He effectively abandoned them in order to rule! This is the very definition of what is today known as "pragmatism.")
7. The third of the most accomplished Persian emperors was Darius "the Great," whose rule was celebrated in the Behistun Inscription.
8. To keep Persia's conquered territories better organized, Darius divided the empire into provinces known as "satrapies." Each one was ruled by a Persian nobleman, whose title was "satrap." It was the satrap's job to maintain local order.
9. Although satraps were chosen for their loyalty, Darius still assigned them secretaries, known as the "King's Ear," who were his personal spies in their courts. These agents regularly reported back to the capital on activities in the satrapies.
10. Darius also created a network of roads and a postal system of mounted couriers to make sure reports could reach him from the far reaches of his empire.
11. Because Darius was worried that even his secretaries and satraps might rebel, he also had other agents accompanied by a small army to monitor them all. This "King's Eye" moved from satrapy to satrapy without advanced notice, to check up on satraps.
12. The success of Darius's efforts to organize the empire is hard to gauge, because the story of his efforts to organize the empire is swamped by a crisis faced by the Persian Empire starting c.500 BC. From this point onward, the Persians were fighting the Greeks in the Greco-Persian Wars—which the Persians would eventually lose.
13. The Persian Empire was the greatest of the archaic empires—but we can all be thankful that it could not snuff out the first spark of human freedom that we turn to next in the story of ancient Greece.