

HAMMURABI¹

Hammurapi was an East Amorite king, sixth of the first dynasty of Babylon who ruled from about 1792 b.c.e. to his death in 1750 b.c.e. He is best known for his surviving law code in the form of a long inscription dedicated to Shamash, the ancient Near Eastern god of Justice. Little is known of his early life or kinship relations, other than the names of some of his family: His father, Sin-muballit, his sister, Iltani, and his eldest son and successor, Samsuiluna.

The date formulas of his reign, which are based on a significant event from the preceding year, reveal Hammurapi's involvement with temple building and restoration, the construction and maintenance of irrigation canals, city defenses and public buildings, and the waging of war. Military and political strength depended on an elaborate network of fealty and alliances in the fragmented world of the second-millennium ancient Near East. Contemporary records show that Hammurapi spent most of middle portion of his reign forging, realigning, and strengthening these alliances. His last 14 years were spent in recurring warfare with a powerful alliance of Ashur, Eshnunna and Elam east of the Tigris, probably over access to metal production in what is modern day Iran; his final victory over Rim-Sin of Larsa for the control of the irrigation waters of the Euphrates; and his defeat of his former ally Zimri-Lim of Mari, resulting in Hammurapi's control of the main trade-route to the north and west.

Hammurapi presided over the transformation of Babylon from a city-state to a mighty regional power. Perhaps his personal involvement in the daily details of his administration, characteristic of the kings of his day, kept him from setting in place an effective administrative infrastructure to maintain his hard-won expansion. After his demise in 1750 b.c.e, his territorial achievements soon disintegrated.

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1. biography based primarily on EB.