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The Code of Lipit-Ishtar

(circa 1868 B.C.)

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Finding only a portion of these laws in the 1930's, they are believed to be some of the earliest known codified laws. Found to be originally written on what is believed to be stone tablets in the Sumerian language. Lipit-Ishtar, was a shepherd and farmer from Nippur, Iraq who became the ruler of Isin from about 1868 B.C. to 1857 B.C.

Foreword

When Anu and Enlil had called Lipit-Ishtar, Lipit-Ishtar the wise shephard whose name had been pronounced by Nunamnir, to the princship of the land in order to establish justice in the land, to banish complaints, to turn back enmity and rebellion by force of arms, and to bring well-being to the Sumerians and Akkadians, then I, Lipit-Ishtar, the humble shephard of Nippur, the stalwart farmer of Ur, who abandons not Eridu, the suitable lord of Erech, king of Isin, king of Sumer and Akkad, who am fit for the heart of Inanna, established justice in Sumer and Akkad in accordance with the word of Enlil.

What has been found of the Code of Lipit-Ishtar

1. If a man entered the orchard of another man and was seized there for stealing, he shall pay ten shekels of silver.
2. If a man cut down a tree in the garden of another man, he shall pay one-half mina of silver.
3. If a man married his wife and she bore him children and those children are living, and a slave also bore children for her master but the father granted freedom to the slave and her children, the children of the slave shall not divide the estate with the children of their former master.
4. If a man's wife has not borne him children but a harlot from the public square has borne him children, he shall provide grain, oil and clothing for that harlot. The children which the harlot has borne him shall be his heirs, and as long as his wife lives the harlot shall not live in the house with the wife. **This is the earliest known codified provision for child support.*

5. If adjacent to the house of a man the bare ground of another man has been neglected and the owner of the house has said to the owner of the bare ground, "Because your ground has been neglected someone may break into my house: strengthen your house," and this agreement has been confirmed by him, the owner of the bare ground shall restore to the owner of the house any of his property that is lost.

6. If a man rented an ox and damaged its eye, he shall pay one-half its price.

7. If a man rented an ox and injured the flesh at the nose ring, he shall pay one-third of its price.

8. If a man rented an ox and broke its horn, he shall pay one-fourth its price.

9. If a man rented an ox and damaged its tail, he shall pay one-fourth its price.

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