



## Abstract

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*Importing the law? Possible elements of the Mesopotamian legal tradition in New Kingdom  
Egypt  
(1549-1064BCE<sup>1</sup>)*

### **Features of New Kingdom justice not attested earlier**

- Oracle courts, as attested at Deir el-Medina<sup>2</sup> and elsewhere<sup>3</sup>
- Increase in severe corporal punishment: for example, mutilation of nose and ears becomes a standard element in oath formulae<sup>4</sup>
- Detailed protasis-apodosis legal decrees, such as the Karnak Decree of Horemheb<sup>5</sup> (1328-1298BCE) or the Nauri Decree of Seti I<sup>6</sup> (1296-1279).

### **Why might this be connected to Mesopotamia/Semitic law?**

- “Hyksos” period (1650-1549BCE) immediately prior to New Kingdom
- Amarna letters/greater exposure to Akkadian in Egypt during New Kingdom
- Legal associations: Akkadian and Egyptian copies of Ramesses II – Hattusili III treaty<sup>7</sup> (1258BCE), where corporal punishment is a prominent topic
- Mesopotamian law, and broader scholarship, often associated with protasis-apodosis<sup>8</sup>
- Mesopotamian law often associated with severe corporal punishment: for instance, see Code of Hammurabi (1792-1750BCE)<sup>9</sup>, Middle Assyrian Laws<sup>10</sup> (c.1400-1100BCE) etc.

### **Why might this NOT be connected to Mesopotamia/Semitic law?**

- Were earlier periods truly different, or is this down to chance preservation of sources?
- Protasis-apodosis has precedents in the Middle Kingdom (2066-1650BCE): for instance, see 2<sup>nd</sup> Semna stela of Senusret III (1865BCE)<sup>11</sup> or Illahun Medical papyri (c.1800BCE)<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> All Egyptian dates are calculated according to the chronology set forth in Dodson & Hilton 2004: 287-294, while Mesopotamian dates follow the chronology in van de Mieroop 2007: 302-317.

<sup>2</sup> McDowell 1990: 143-186.

<sup>3</sup> Kákósy 1975: 600-606; Černý 1962: 35-48.

<sup>4</sup> Lorton 1977: 33-38, 50-51; Tyldesley 2000: 81.

<sup>5</sup> Kruchten 1981.

<sup>6</sup> Kitchen 1975-1990: 53-55 (text 24); Davies 1997: 277-308.

<sup>7</sup> Langdon & Gardiner 1920.

<sup>8</sup> Bottéro 1992: 125-137, 156-184; Roth 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Roth 1997: 71-142; Richardson 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Driver & Miles 1935; Roth 1997: 153-194.

<sup>11</sup> Sethe 1924: 83-84.

<sup>12</sup> Quirke 2002; Collier & Quirke 2004: 53-64.