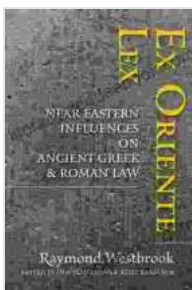


Near Eastern Influences On Ancient Greek And Roman Law

The legal systems of ancient Greece and Rome, which laid the foundations for Western jurisprudence, were profoundly influenced by the legal traditions of the ancient Near East. From the Code of Hammurabi to the Twelve Tables, the legal codes and principles developed in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and other Near Eastern civilizations played a pivotal role in shaping the laws and institutions of classical antiquity.

Mesopotamia and the Code of Hammurabi

Around 1754 BC, King Hammurabi of Babylonia promulgated the Code of Hammurabi, one of the earliest known legal codes in human history. Carved on an eight-foot-tall stele, the code contained 282 laws covering a wide range of legal issues, including criminal offenses, civil disputes, property rights, and family law.



Ex Oriente Lex: Near Eastern Influences on Ancient Greek and Roman Law by Bobby Akart

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

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Print length : 287 pages



The Code of Hammurabi reflected the highly organized and bureaucratic society of ancient Mesopotamia. It established a system of social hierarchy, with laws that varied in severity depending on the social status of the individuals involved. Punishments were often harsh, reflecting the belief that the law should deter crime by instilling fear in potential offenders.

Egypt and the Law of Ma'at

In ancient Egypt, the concept of Ma'at, or cosmic order and harmony, played a central role in legal thought. The law was seen as a manifestation of Ma'at, and judges were responsible for upholding justice and protecting the balance of society.

The legal system of ancient Egypt relied heavily on oral traditions and customary practices. Written laws were relatively rare, but there were some important legal texts, such as the Instructions of Ptahhotep, which contained maxims on ethical behavior and justice.

The Influence of Near Eastern Law on Ancient Greece

The legal systems of ancient Greece developed under the influence of both Near Eastern and indigenous Greek traditions. The earliest Greek legal codes, such as the Laws of Draco and the Laws of Solon, borrowed heavily from Near Eastern models.

For example, the Laws of Draco, enacted in the 7th century BC, included draconian punishments for even minor offenses, such as petty theft. This severity reflected the influence of the Code of Hammurabi, which also prescribed harsh punishments for a wide range of crimes.

However, the later Laws of Solon, enacted in the 6th century BC, introduced more humane and equitable principles, reflecting a move away from the harshness of Near Eastern law and towards a more balanced and rational approach to justice.

The Influence of Near Eastern Law on Ancient Rome

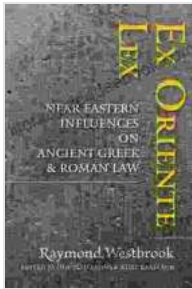
The legal system of ancient Rome was even more heavily influenced by Near Eastern traditions than that of ancient Greece. The Twelve Tables, enacted in the 5th century BC, were the foundation of Roman law, and they borrowed many of their provisions from the Code of Hammurabi and other Near Eastern legal codes.

For example, the Twelve Tables included laws on property rights, inheritance, marriage, and divorce that were based on similar principles as those found in the Code of Hammurabi. However, the Roman legal system also introduced some important innovations, such as the concept of equity, which allowed judges to modify the strict letter of the law in order to achieve a more just outcome.

The Near Eastern legal traditions had a profound and lasting impact on the development of law in ancient Greece and Rome. From the Code of Hammurabi to the Twelve Tables, the legal codes and principles of the ancient Near East provided a framework for the development of sophisticated and enduring legal systems that shaped the course of human history.

By understanding the Near Eastern influences on ancient Greek and Roman law, we gain a deeper appreciation for the origins of our own legal

systems and the rich cultural heritage that has influenced the development of law and justice throughout the ages.



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