

Section 9 – Patriarchal Monotheism

We are accustomed, in the West, to the idea of strictly enforced, written laws, of which the first known complete set comes from the Semitic king Hammurabi of Akkadia, around 1800 BCE. Hammurabi probably adapted his code, which he had carved onto a stone and set up in public, from an earlier Sumerian one known as *The Instructions of Šuruppak*.¹

The Bible and the Qur'an borrow a great deal from the *Code of Hammurabi* via the later Assyrian *Code of the Assura*. These are not the source of human morality, but an attempt to define it in patriarchal terms. They codify the ownership of property. More significantly, they are preoccupied with controlling the fertility of women through marriage and the sexuality of both women and men through restricting with whom and how they are permitted to have sex. All of the codes go into great detail specifying the relative worth of women and men and what behaviour is acceptable. Most importantly, they define women as the property of men, in much the same way as they do sheep, goats or cattle; women become livestock that may be exchanged for other forms of material wealth.

To understand this development in Western culture, we need to look at early Judah.

¹ <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.5.6.1&display=Crit&charenc=gcirc&lineid=t561.p12#t561.p12> Retrieved 24/05/2014.