

P. Koschaker, "Cuneiform Law" (from the Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences 211-19)

**CUNEIFORM.** By cuneiform law is meant all laws which make use of the cuneiform script for their written inscription. According to the present status of excavation their geographical scope includes not only the original lands of Babylonian civilization--Babylonia and Assyria--but extends in the east as far as the mountainous Elam region, reaching northward to the Zagros Mountains, while it extends toward the west through Mesopotamia and Asia Minor to Syria and the coast of the Mediterranean. Chronologically cuneiform law begins at least as early as 3000 B.C. with the first interpretable legal inscriptions and continues down to the gradual disappearance of Babylonian civilization during the second and first centuries B.C. It is obvious that there could not have been a uniform legal system covering this vast geographical area and enduring throughout this long period. What we have to deal with is rather a complex of laws of the peoples who settled in the mother countries as well as of those who, located in the surrounding regions, came under the influence of Babylonian civilization. The cuneiform script, however, which was peculiar to Babylonian civilization, may serve as the external criterion of this cultural influence as well as of a certain historical unity; in this connection the Chinese script offers an analogy.

Up to the present time there have been made eleven subdivisions, geographical as well as chronological, in cuneiform law: Sumerian, Old Akkadian, Old Babylonian, Elamitic, Old Assyrian, Middle Babylonian, Middle Assyrian, Hittite, Subarcean, Neo-Assyrian and neo-Babylonian. Sumerian law dates from the oldest legal inscriptions to the fall of the last dynasty of Ur about 2200 B.C. The Sumerians were the earliest inhabitants of Babylonia to leave legal inscriptions; they invented cuneiform writing and founded Babylonian culture. Knowledge of Old Akkadian law is limited chiefly to the dynasty of Akkad, about 2700 B.C. to 2600 B.C. The Akkadians differed from the Sumerians, whose agglutinative language has made linguistic classification thus far