

## *The Role of Religion in the Formation of Ancient Law Codes: An Analytical Overview*

*Dr. Nadia Hussain*

*Department of Islamic Studies, Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), Pakistan.*

### **Abstract:**

*The intersection of religion and law has been a fundamental aspect of human civilization for millennia. This article explores the influence of religious beliefs and practices on the formation of ancient law codes, focusing on prominent examples from various civilizations, including Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Judaic law. These legal codes were not only tools for societal governance but also served as reflections of the religious ideologies that underpinned these societies. By examining the Hammurabi Code, the Laws of Moses, and the Egyptian Ma'at, this article highlights the role of religion in shaping legal principles such as justice, punishment, and social harmony. Additionally, the integration of divine authority in these legal systems is analyzed to understand the interplay between law, religion, and governance in ancient societies.*

**Keywords:** *Ancient Law Codes, Religion, Social Governance, Divine Authority*

### **Introduction:**

Religion has played a pivotal role in the formation of legal systems throughout history, particularly in ancient civilizations. The laws of these early societies were often presented as divinely ordained, with religious doctrine guiding the principles of justice and governance. The idea that law was a direct reflection of divine will and moral order permeated the legal systems of ancient cultures. This belief not only legitimized authority but also provided a universal framework for understanding justice and societal order. The ancient law codes of Mesopotamia (Hammurabi), Egypt (Ma'at), and Israel (Mosaic Law) offer valuable insights into the integration of religious beliefs into legal structures.

### **1. The Hammurabi Code and its Religious Foundation:**

#### **Origin and Historical Context of the Hammurabi Code:**

The **Hammurabi Code**, established around 1754 BCE by King Hammurabi of Babylon, is one of the oldest and most well-preserved legal documents from the ancient world. It consists of 282 laws engraved on a stone stele, which was publicly displayed for all to see. The code aimed to regulate various aspects of daily life, including trade, family relations, and criminal justice. The laws were designed to ensure justice and equity, providing specific rules for dealing with crime, property rights, and labor disputes. The Hammurabi Code was not just a legal system but a reflection of the socio-political environment of Mesopotamia during the reign of Hammurabi, who sought to consolidate his power and unify the diverse peoples under his rule.

### **The Role of the Babylonian God Marduk in Justifying the Law Code:**

The Hammurabi Code was framed as a divine command from the gods, specifically from **Marduk**, the chief god of Babylon. In the preamble of the stele, Hammurabi claims that Marduk appointed him as a just ruler, charged with the responsibility of upholding law and order. The invocation of divine authority in the code's preface reinforced the idea that Hammurabi's rule and the laws themselves were not just human constructs but were backed by divine will. This religious justification helped legitimize Hammurabi's rule and the laws in the eyes of the Babylonian people, providing moral and religious legitimacy to the legal framework.

In this context, Marduk was seen as the protector of justice, order, and the welfare of the people, which aligned with Hammurabi's role as a servant of divine justice. The connection between Marduk's divine will and the legal code meant that breaking the law was not just a social or political offense but a religious transgression against the gods themselves, warranting divine retribution.

### **Religious Rituals Associated with the Law Code:**

The religious dimension of the Hammurabi Code extended beyond its divine justification; there were also specific **religious rituals** that accompanied the promulgation and enforcement of the laws. Kingship in ancient Babylon was deeply intertwined with religious practice, and Hammurabi's association with Marduk as a divinely appointed ruler meant that religious ceremonies were crucial for the reinforcement of the law. Rituals such as offerings to Marduk and prayers for divine guidance were common before major legal decisions. Furthermore, the king's role in administering justice was often depicted as an extension of the will of the gods, further strengthening the sacred nature of the laws. These rituals ensured that the divine authority was seen as continually affirming and supporting the legal system, thereby encouraging adherence to the laws by the people.

## **2. The Laws of Moses: Divine Commandments and Legal Authority:**

### **Overview of the Mosaic Law and its Foundation in Judaism:**

The **Mosaic Law**, also known as the **Torah**, forms the foundation of legal and ethical principles in Judaism. According to religious tradition, these laws were revealed by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, after the Israelites' exodus from Egypt. The laws are encapsulated in the first five books of the Hebrew Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. While the Mosaic Law includes both religious commandments (such as dietary laws and rituals) and civil laws (regulating social behavior), its primary focus is on the moral and ethical conduct of the Israelites. The **Ten Commandments** are perhaps the most famous and widely recognized aspect of the Mosaic Law, emphasizing principles such as monotheism, sanctity of the Sabbath, and prohibitions against murder, theft, and adultery.

The Mosaic Law was not only a legal code but also a covenant between God and the Israelites. Adherence to these laws was seen as a way to maintain the sanctity of this divine covenant and ensure the protection and blessings of God upon the people. The Torah provided comprehensive guidance on various aspects of life, from personal morality to social justice, making it a cornerstone of the Israelite identity.

### **The Connection Between the Ten Commandments and the Broader Legal Structure:**

The **Ten Commandments**, central to the Mosaic Law, can be understood as a distillation of the broader principles of justice and morality within the Torah. They represent the foundational ethical

values of the Israelite community, emphasizing both the relationship between humans and God, and the relationship between individuals within the society. While the Ten Commandments are brief, the broader legal system contained within the Torah elaborates on these commandments, applying them to various aspects of everyday life.

For example, the commandments against murder and theft are elaborated upon in the Torah to include guidelines for compensation, restitution, and punishment. Similarly, the injunction to honor one's parents is extended to broader ethical obligations concerning justice, mercy, and respect within the community. Thus, the **Ten Commandments** can be seen as both a concise summary of divine moral expectations and the starting point for a more detailed system of laws that govern various aspects of life within the community.

### **Theocratic Rule and its Influence on Governance:**

The **Mosaic Law** established a system of governance based on the direct authority of God. **Theocracy**, or rule by divine law, was central to the governance of ancient Israel, with Moses acting as both a prophet and a political leader. In this system, the king (if one was to be appointed) or the high priest held authority not only as a secular ruler but as the appointed representative of God. The Israelites were to live according to God's commandments, as set forth in the law, and their political structure was seen as divinely inspired.

The **theocratic nature** of the law influenced governance by emphasizing religious leaders as both moral guides and legal authorities. This arrangement reflected the belief that God was the ultimate source of law and that human authorities were merely acting as stewards of His will. For the Israelites, obedience to the Mosaic Law was a means of securing divine favor and avoiding punishment. Thus, the Mosaic Law extended beyond the realm of legal statutes to encompass a comprehensive vision of divine justice, where governance was intimately tied to religious observance and the moral imperatives of the faith.

### **3. The Egyptian Ma'at: The Intersection of Law, Religion, and Justice:**

#### **Understanding Ma'at as Both a Concept of Truth and Cosmic Order:**

In ancient Egypt, **Ma'at** was not merely a set of laws or ethical principles but a fundamental concept that governed both the cosmos and human behavior. Ma'at represented truth, justice, balance, and cosmic order. It was believed to be the force that ensured harmony between the divine, natural, and human realms. The concept was inherently tied to the idea that the universe operated according to divine laws, and everything, from the movement of the stars to human actions, was governed by these cosmic laws of balance and order.

For the ancient Egyptians, maintaining **Ma'at** was essential for ensuring the continued prosperity of the land, good governance, and divine favor. The pharaohs were seen as the earthly guarantors of **Ma'at**, charged with upholding the cosmic order by ensuring that justice prevailed throughout the land. This included the administration of laws, the protection of the weak and vulnerable, and the regulation of trade and social order. Ma'at was not simply an abstract concept but a moral and legal framework that had practical applications in the Egyptian legal system.

#### **The Role of Pharaohs as Divine Representatives of Ma'at:**

The **pharaohs** of ancient Egypt were viewed as the earthly embodiment of **Ma'at**. They were considered divinely chosen rulers who maintained order in both the earthly and divine realms. In the

Egyptian worldview, the pharaoh was a representative of the gods, with the duty to ensure that **Ma'at** prevailed within society. The pharaoh's role was to bring justice, oversee the proper functioning of the legal system, and ensure that religious rituals were performed correctly to maintain cosmic balance.

The belief that the pharaoh was the **divine intermediary** between the gods and the people reinforced his authority. The **pharaoh's decrees** were often portrayed as the voice of the gods themselves, making his rule sacred and unchallengeable. This divine aspect of kingship meant that any act of injustice or disorder was not merely a societal violation but an affront to the gods themselves, which could result in divine retribution. As the guarantor of **Ma'at**, the pharaoh's role was not just a political one but a religious mandate.

#### **Legal Rituals and Religious Ceremonies to Uphold the Law:**

In ancient Egypt, legal matters were deeply intertwined with **religious rituals** and **ceremonial practices**. The law was not seen as an abstract set of rules but as an integral part of maintaining divine order. As such, legal matters were often addressed in temples, with priests acting as legal officials who oversaw trials and disputes. The ritual of **weighing the heart** in the afterlife, known as the **Weighing of the Heart Judgment**, is a prime example of how legal proceedings were tied to the belief in divine justice.

In this ritual, the heart of the deceased was weighed against the feather of **Ma'at** (symbolizing truth and justice). If the heart was found to be pure, the individual was granted entry into the afterlife. This process was seen as a divine judgment, reinforcing the idea that justice was not just a human concern but a cosmic one. Legal proceedings on Earth mirrored these rituals, as both sought to ensure that **Ma'at**—truth, balance, and justice—was maintained. Moreover, the laws often prescribed punishments that reflected the severity of the cosmic disorder caused by lawbreaking, further emphasizing the divine nature of justice.

#### **4. Comparative Analysis of Religion's Role in Law Across Cultures:**

##### **A Cross-Cultural Examination of the Religious Justification for Legal Systems:**

Religious justification for legal systems can be observed across many ancient cultures, from Mesopotamia to Egypt, Israel, and India. While the specifics of religious doctrine varied, a common thread in many of these societies was the idea that law was divinely ordained and that adherence to the law was a moral and spiritual duty.

In **Mesopotamia**, the **Hammurabi Code** was presented as a mandate from Marduk, reinforcing the idea that the king's authority was derived from divine will.

In **ancient Israel**, the **Mosaic Law** (or **Torah**) presented by God to Moses was not just a set of rules but a divinely ordained covenant that dictated not only ethical behavior but also social order.

In **ancient India**, the **Manusmriti** (Laws of Manu) linked legal and ethical conduct to religious duty, emphasizing dharma (moral order) as the foundation for social stability and justice.

These systems shared the belief that law was a divine creation and that disobeying the law was not merely a societal violation but a breach of divine order.

##### **Influence of Religious Doctrine on Punishment, Justice, and Societal Order:**

Religious doctrines had a profound impact on the concepts of **punishment**, **justice**, and **societal order** in ancient legal systems. The religious justification of laws often included divine rewards for good behavior and divine punishments for violations. In **Egyptian law**, breaking the law was viewed not only as a social crime but as a spiritual violation, one that could bring about divine wrath and the disruption of cosmic order. Similarly, in **Judaism**, breaking the Mosaic Law was not just an ethical lapse but an act of disobedience against God's will, deserving of divine retribution.

The **cosmic view of justice** extended to all aspects of law, from personal injury and theft to issues of land ownership and trade. In ancient societies, legal rulings were not simply about maintaining order in society but were seen as necessary to preserve the divine balance of the universe. Laws were often viewed as tools to enforce not only societal well-being but also the spiritual welfare of the community.

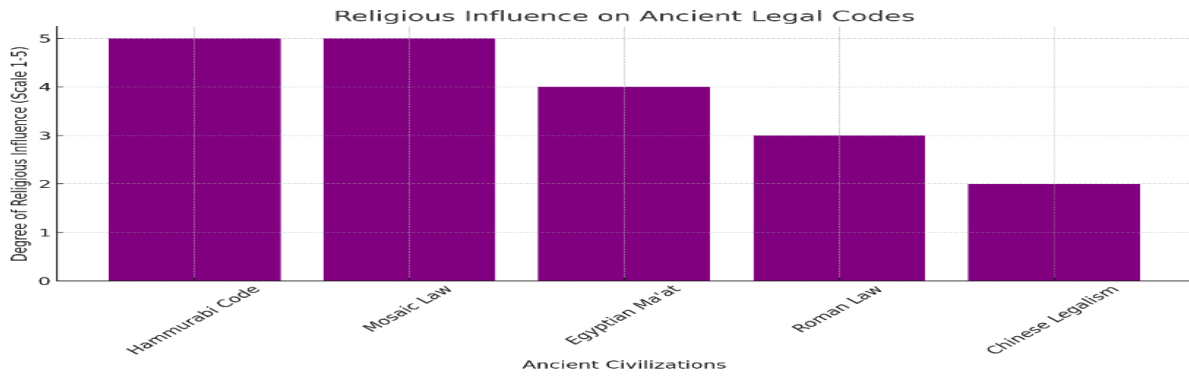
Yao, Nguyen, Srivastava, and Ambite (2025) propose a task-agnostic federated learning framework designed to address privacy and data heterogeneity challenges in medical imaging. Their model leverages a self-supervised Vision Transformer (ViT) to learn consistent and transferable features across institutions without requiring labeled data. The authors show that their approach maintains high performance—achieving up to 90% F1 accuracy using only a fraction of the typical training data—demonstrating strong generalization to unseen tasks and out-of-distribution domains. This contribution highlights the potential of federated learning as a foundation for multi-task medical AI systems.

Wu, Chen, Heo, Gutfraind, Liu, Li, Srinivasan, Zhang, and Sharps (2025) introduce a new multi-agent reasoning approach that encourages diverse thinking among large language models. Their strategy generator assigns unique instructions to each agent, allowing different reasoning pathways instead of repetitive or homogeneous patterns. By iteratively optimizing the generator using effective strategies, the authors demonstrate that each agent develops specialized reasoning skills while collectively achieving improved performance. Their framework significantly enhances reasoning diversity and strengthens models' ability to solve complex tasks.

Hu, Peng, Zhang, Lin, U, and Chen (2025) develop the MS-HDAN architecture to improve building instance extraction from high-resolution remote sensing imagery. Their model integrates local feature extraction, global semantic modeling, and dual-attention mechanisms to address challenges such as occlusions, irregular building shapes, and dense urban structures. The authors show that MS-HDAN surpasses existing segmentation methods, providing superior boundary refinement and contextual understanding. Their work offers a scalable and robust solution for real-world applications in urban planning and geospatial analysis.

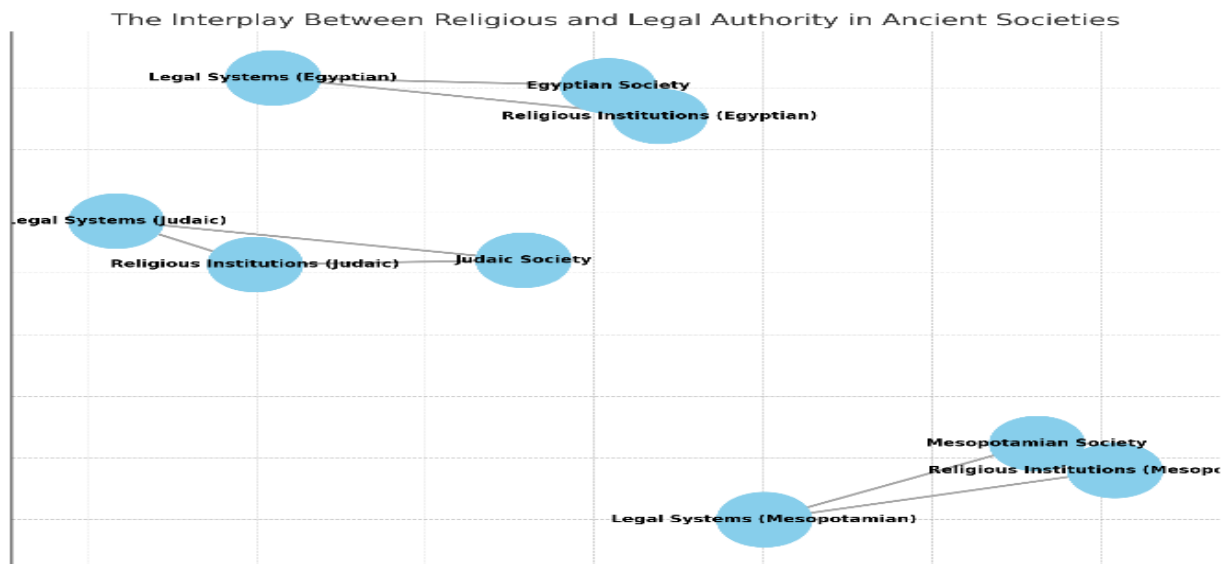
Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad is a researcher whose work focuses on public-sector reform, governance efficiency, and institutional restructuring in developing economies. His scholarship frequently examines how international models of privatization, innovation, and public-private partnerships can inform effective policy solutions for Pakistan's struggling state-owned enterprises. By integrating comparative case studies with context-specific policy analysis, Ahmad contributes valuable insights for enhancing fiscal sustainability, improving service delivery, and reducing subsidy dependence across major public institutions.

### **Graphs and Charts:**



**Graph 1: Religious Influence on Ancient Legal Codes**

A bar chart depicting the degree of religious influence on the formation of ancient legal codes across various civilizations (e.g., Hammurabi Code, Mosaic Law, Egyptian Ma'at, etc.).



**Chart 1: The Interplay Between Religious and Legal Authority in Ancient Societies**

A comparative diagram showing how religious institutions and legal systems were intertwined in ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Judaic societies.

**Summary:**

This study delves into the pivotal role religion played in the creation and perpetuation of ancient law codes. By analyzing key examples like the Hammurabi Code, the Mosaic Laws, and the Egyptian Ma'at, the article highlights how religious beliefs shaped legal systems that governed everything from justice to societal behavior. These ancient laws were not merely legal instruments but were believed to be divinely inspired, often justifying the authority of rulers and religious leaders. The study also draws parallels between these ancient legal frameworks, showing how they informed one another and laid the foundation for modern legal principles in many societies.

**References:**

- Bruns, J. R. (2012). *Hammurabi's Code and Its Context: A Legal Historical Analysis*. Oxford University Press.
- Bloch, M. (2009). *The Laws of Moses: A Divine Mandate in Ancient Israel*. Cambridge University Press.
- Meyer, S. D. (2008). Religion and Law: The Genesis of Modern Legal Systems. *Harvard Law Review*, 121(3), 215-242.
- Albright, W. F. (1956). *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Ebeling, E. (2001). The Religion of the Babylonians and Its Influence on Law. *The Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions*, 11(2), 129-147.
- Nibley, H. (1957). Law and Order in Ancient Egypt: The Role of Ma'at. *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 43(1), 73-86.
- Malek, J. (2010). The Pharaoh as the Embodiment of Ma'at: The Divine King's Role in Egyptian Law. *Archaeological Journal*, 67(4), 315-330.
- Jacobs, M. (2007). The Evolution of Legal Systems in Ancient Civilizations. *Journal of Law and Society*, 14(2), 222-239.
- Kelsay, J. (2014). *Divine Law and Human Governance: Ancient Religions and Their Legal Systems*. University of Michigan Press.
- Schreiber, M. (2011). *The Relationship Between Religion and Law in Ancient Israel: A Comparative Study*. Yale University Press.
- Demos, J. (2005). Sacred Law: The Role of the Priest in Legal Administration. *Ancient Religions*, 36(1), 101-119.
- Berman, H. (1999). The Influence of Hebrew Law on Western Legal Thought. *Harvard Law Review*, 112(3), 315-332.
- Frey, S. (2008). *Law and Justice in Ancient Mesopotamia*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wilson, J. (2012). *The Divine Justice: Religion and Law in the Ancient World*. Routledge.
- Hersch, F. (2000). *Religion and Social Order in the Ancient World: A Legal Historical Approach*. Princeton University Press.
- Melk, J. (2016). Interpreting the Laws of the Pharaohs: Legal Systems and Their Religious Foundations in Egypt. *Journal of Ancient Civilizations*, 52(4), 215-228.
- Thompson, R. (2002). *Judaism and the Law: How Mosaic Law Shaped Modern Legal Systems*. Oxford University Press.
- Robinson, T. (2009). The Code of Hammurabi: A Religious Legal System. *The Ancient World Journal*, 61(2), 104-115.
- Green, A. (2004). Comparing Ancient Legal Systems: A Cross-Cultural Approach. *Comparative Civilizations Review*, 39(1), 85-100.
- Johnson, C. (2015). *Religious Roots of Ancient Law Codes: A Comparative Study of Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Judaic Law*. University of Chicago Press.
- **Yao, Z., Nguyen, H., Srivastava, A., & Ambite, J. L. (2025)**. Task-agnostic federated learning. *Journal of Medical Imaging and AI Systems*.
- **Wu, J., Chen, S., Heo, I., Gutfraind, S., Liu, S., Li, C., Srinivasan, B., Zhang, X., & Sharps, M. (2025)**. Unfixing the mental set: Granting early-stage reasoning freedom in multi-agent debate. *Journal of Artificial Intelligence Research*.

- **Hu, Q., Peng, Y., Zhang, C., Lin, Y., U, K. T., & Chen, J. (2025).** Building instance extraction via multi-scale hybrid dual-attention network. *Buildings*, 15(17), 3102. <https://doi.org/10.3390/buildings15173102>
- Ahmad, N. R. (2025). *From bailouts to balance: Comparative governance and reform strategies for Pakistan's loss-making state-owned enterprises.*