

(di-til-la) from Lagash in southern Babylonia dating from the last Ur dynasty reveal a fully developed governmental machinery of justice in the hands of the city prince and later a bench of judges. Such a set up accords with the general character of the period. The trial under Old Babylonian law was of a more private nature. The decision of the court was not binding but became so only indirectly, when the parties to the suit submitted to it through a document expressing the renunciation of the complaint (duppu la ragamin). Unless such renunciation was forthcoming suit might be brought again. In addition there evolved an authoritarian jurisdiction of the king and of his officers, who passed final decision upon the disputes brought before them. The material on trials contained in the Old Assyrian, Subarcean and neo-Babylonian texts awaits systematic research. ¶ The family organization of the leading peoples of the Near East was patriarchal, with the father ruling the house. It differed from the Roman patria potestas in that it did not necessarily last throughout his life; nor did it exclude the personal property of members of the family, especially of the wife. Accordingly the monogamous marriage was a marriage by purchase or based upon purchase, although the documents differentiate in phraseology between such a marriage and a purchase. According to Old Babylonian law the bridegroom paid his prospective father-in-law a bride price (tirhatum). This was the engagement through which the bridegroom became the "owner of the wife" (bēl aššatim) in accordance with the rules governing all buying and selling. The engagement became a marriage when the bride was handed over to the household of the husband or at least when a written marriage contract was drawn up. Thereafter only the husband might dissolve the marriage--the wife, who was merely an object of the marriage contract, had no right of divorce--while the prospective groom could cancel the engagement by surrendering the bride^{price} or the bride's father by returning it twofold. In Sumerian law, at least during the later period, the bride price was converted into a marriage present to the wife, which served to take care of her in case of widowhood and which later the husband often confirmed as a