**The Laws of 12 Tables** 

**The Twelve Tables:**

An important step in the political development of any people is the organization and publication of their laws in a way that makes it possible for all persons to know what the law is. About 450 B.C.E., the Romans codified their laws and inscribed them on twelve bronze tables which were set up in the Roman Forum. These Twelve Tables were the basis of all later Roman law, and through it, of the legal system of much of the world today.

Below are some of the more important excerpts from the Twelve Tables:

**TABLE III:**

1. In the case of an admitted debt of awards made by a court, 30 days shall be allowed for payment.

2. In default of payment, after these 30 days of grace have elapsed, the debtor may be arrested and brought before the magistrate.

3. Unless the debtor discharge the debt, or someone come forward in court to guarantee payment, the creditor may take the debtor away with him and bind him with thongs and fetters the weight of which shall be fifteen pounds, or less if the creditor wishes . . .

5. In default of settlement of the claim, the debtor may be kept in bonds for 60 days. In the course of this period he shall be brought before the judge on three successive market days, and the amount of the debt shall be publicly declared. After the third market day the debtor may be punished with death or sold beyond the Tiber.

**TABLE IV:**

1. Monstrous or deformed offspring may be put to death by the father.

2. The father shall, during his who life, have absolute power over his children. He may imprison his son, or scourge him, or keep him working in the fields in fetters {chains}, or put him to death, even if the son held the highest offices of state . . .

**TABLE V:**

1. All women shall be under the authority of a guardian.

2. The provisions of the will of a paterfamilias [head of the household] concerning his property and the tutelage [support] of his family, shall have the force of law.

**TABLE VI:**

1. The legal effect of every contract, and of every conveyance shall rest upon the declarations made in the transaction.

2. Any one who refuses to stand by such contractual declarations shall pay a penalty of double damages.

**TABLE VII:**

7. Holders of property along a road shall maintain the road to keep it passable; but if it be passable, anyone may drive his beast or cart across the land wherever he chooses.

**TABLE VIII:**

1. Whoever publishes a libel—that is today writes falsely imputed [intending] crime or immorality to anyone—shall be beaten to death with clubs . . .

3. For breaking a bone of a freeman, the fine shall be 300 asses; of a slave, 150 asses ..

12. A person committing burglary in the night may be lawfully killed.

13. A thief in the daytime may not be killed unless he carried a weapon . . . .

23. Perjurers and false witnesses shall be hurled from the Tarpeian Rock . . . .

26. Seditious [conspiratorial, rebellious] gatherings in the city during the night are forbidden.

 The Laws of 12 Tables

1. What are the 12 tables?
2. What role did the Romans have in the codifying of them? Why?
3. In your own words, reinterpret the laws of debt. (Table III)
4. Who is the head of the family in Roman Society? What rights does he have?
5. How are the rights of women limited by the Twelve Tables?
6. How are social class distinctions mentioned in the twelve tables?
7. What are some similarities between the Roman Twelve Tables and Babylon’s Code of Hammurabi? What are some differences?