

The adoption of Oriental laws into Greek law is the subject of elaborate accounts by Hellenistic historiographers. Occasional references in earlier sources such as Plato and Aristotle are consistent with those accounts. The resulting model was used by Roman historians for their early law and has formed the basis of modern discussion of the reception of Ancient Near Eastern law into Greek law. This model sees the reception of foreign law as a conscious act by a Greek ruler, usually after visiting a foreign land and selecting from rules made by a named local ruler. Within the ancient Near East, the reception of laws by one society receives no mention in the native sources. Nonetheless, comparison of the many different systems reveals the existence of a legal *koine* that remained remarkably stable from the mid-third to the mid-first millennium. A process of diffusion, mostly but by no means exclusively from Mesopotamia, seems to be responsible. Diffusion, however, can only in small part be correlated with conquest and occupation of territory, indicating that other factors were in play.

The pattern of diffusion can be discerned on three levels: intellectual, institutional, and substrate. The intellectual level is the most obvious and is represented by the so-called law codes and by notarial traditions. It is linked with the spread of cuneiform writing. The institutional level is reflected in common conceptions of government, especially kingship, and might be associated with trade and diplomacy. A substrate level, apparently dating back before historical records, is discernible in certain widespread common structures in areas such as inheritance and trial procedure. At all these levels foreign influence is anonymous and undatable. It reflects legal systems that were not hermetically sealed against foreigners and a law that depended on tradition rather than legislation. It also reflects a jurisprudence based on Mesopotamian science, which was limited in its ability to formalize amorphous traditions.

The pattern of diffusion through the Near East does not stop dead at the shores of the Mediterranean but is evident in early Greek law. Comparison with the Oriental model therefore suggests that the Greek model does not reflect historical reality for the period to which it relates, namely the early first millennium BC. It reflects rather a new perception of law that is connected with the Greek philosophical tradition.