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Analysis: The Twelve Tables of Rome

Instructions: The following laws were included in the Roman Twelve Tables. These are the actual laws from the Twelve Tables. Your job is to match each law below with the translated version of the law on the bottom of this page.

- _____ 1. If anyone summons a man before the magistrate, he must go. If the man summoned does not go, let the one summoning him call the bystanders to witness and then take him by force.
- _____ 2. He whose witness has failed to appear may summon him by loud calls before his house every third day.
- _____ 3. A dreadfully deformed child shall be quickly killed.
- _____ 4. Females should remain in guardianship even when they have attained their majority.
- _____ 5. Any woman who does not wish to be subjected in this manner to the hand of her husband should be absent three nights in succession every year, and so interrupt the usucapio of each year.
- _____ 6. Let them keep the road in order. If they have not paved it, a man may drive his team where he likes.
- _____ 7. A man might gather up fruit that was falling down onto another man's farm.
- _____ 8. If one has maimed a limb and does not compromise with the injured person, let there be retaliation.
- _____ 9. If one shall permit himself to be summoned as a witness, or has been a weigher, if he does not give his testimony, let him be noted as dishonest and incapable of acting again as witness.
- _____ 10. If the theft has been done by night, if the owner kills the thief, the thief shall be held to be lawfully killed.
- _____ 11. A person who had been found guilty of giving false witness shall be hurled down from the Tarpeian Rock.
- _____ 12. The penalty shall be capital for a judge or arbiter legally appointed who has been found guilty of receiving a bribe for giving a decision.
- _____ 13. None is to bury or burn a corpse in the city.
- _____ 14. Marriages should not take place between patricians and plebians.
- _____ 15. If a slave shall have committed theft or done damage with his master's knowledge, the action for damages is in the slave's name.

The Twelve Tables: Translations

- A. An extremely deformed child will be killed immediately.
- B. You can't burn or bury a body in town.
- C. If you are going to challenge someone legally (sue them), they must go before the judge. If they don't go, the harmed person can call on bystanders to be witnesses and force the other person to go.
- D. If you physically harm someone, and will not pay damages, they can hurt you back in some way.
- E. If a slave committed a theft or committed a crime, the owner is not responsible and the slave must pay the damages.
- F. All women will always have a male to look after all of their affairs, no matter how old she is.
- G. Anyone can pick up the fruit that has fallen off a tree.
- H. It is legal to kill a robber at night.
- I. The classes may not mix in marriage. Plebians cannot marry Patricians.
- J. To get a divorce, a woman must leave her husband for three nights a year.
- K. If you lie as a witness, you will be labeled as dishonest and will never be allowed to be a witness again.
- L. If a judge should take a bribe, the penalty is death.
- M. If a witness does not go to court, the person who asked him to testify may stand outside the witness' house every third day and yell for him.
- N. A person who lies in court intentionally to hurt someone else will be thrown from a rock.
- O. Keep all roads in good shape. If the road is in bad shape, you may drive your horses wherever you please.

TAKING IT FURTHER...

Which laws seem "logical," and which laws seem to make no sense? Explain your thinking.



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