evolution of Jewish law

The Torah
Torah she-bichtav, the "Written Law." According to tradition, the Torah was given to Moses on Sinai, who transmitted it to Joshua, who transmitted it to the Elders, who transmitted it to the Prophets...and eventually, it was transmitted to the Sanhedrin.

The Mishnah
Codification and collection of Torah she-be'al peh, "Oral Law," transmitted by word of mouth over generations. Compiled by Rabbi Judah and his court around 160-200 C.E. in Palestine.

The Talmud

The Jerusalem Gemara
Compilation of the commentary on the Mishnah by the Amora'im in Palestine, approximate end of 4th century. Together with the Mishnah, this forms the Jerusalem Talmud.

The Babylonian Gemara
Compilation of the commentary on the Mishnah by scholars in the Babylonian academies, approximate end of 5th century. This is much larger and more significant than the Jerusalem Gemara. Together with the Mishnah, this forms the Babylonian Talmud.

Comments and decisions of the Ge'onim, 6th-10th centuries.

Commentaries by Rashi
(France, 11th century)

Tosafot: Commentaries by descendants of Rashi
(France/Germany, 12th-13th centuries)

Mishneh Torah by Maimonides,
"The Ramah", (Egypt, 12th century)

Shulchan Aruch: Code by Joseph Karo
(Palestine, 16th century)

Other codes and commentaries

Responsa literature...
the Mishnah
its arrangement and contents

THE MISHNAH
the collection of the
"Oral Law"

that is, the rabbinic commentaries, legal decisions, insights and interpretations of the Torah by the Tanna'im over several centuries, transmitted by word of mouth until the time of Rabbi Judah, head of the Sanhedrin, around 100 C.E. to 200 C.E. The huge collection was set down and arranged (codified) in Shishaq Sederim or Six Orders (major sections). Each "Order" in turn is made up of a number of books or "tractates." The language is Hebrew. The total number of tractates is 63.

FIRST ORDER: ZERA'IM ("Seeds")
Of the 11 books in this order, all but the first deal with the laws of agriculture. The 11 are:
Berakhot (blessings, prayer)
Ma'aser Re'ea (produce offerings)
Ma'aserSS (produce offerings)
Ma'aser Shita (second tithe)
Ma'aser Shita (second tithe)
Hilkhot (dough offerings)
Oches (fruit of the vines)
Bikkudes (first fruits)

SECOND ORDER: MOED ("Festivals" or "Appointed Seasons")
12 books:
Shabbat (Shabbot)
Eruvin (Shabbot travel regulations)
Passover (Passover)
Shekalim (sham脿a)
Yoma (day of atonement)
Sukkot (Sukkoth)
Yom Tov or Feast (on egg)
Hoshanot (new year observances)
Tevatf (last day of)
Maggidah (the scroll [of Esther])
Mo'ed Katan (minor-Sukkot days)
Hagigah (festival sacrifice)

THIRD ORDER: NASCHIM ("Women")
7 books on the laws of marriage and divorce:
Yevamot (vies in law)
Ketuvot (marriage contracts)
Nedarim (vows)
Nidah (the subterfuge)
Zera'ah (the suspended adulteresses)
Gedolah (adulteresses)
Niddah (marriage)

FOURTH ORDER: NEZIKIN ("Damages")
Of the 10 books all but one deal with civil and criminal law. The 10 are:
Bava Kama (the first gate)
Bava Metzia (the middle gate)
Bava Batra (the last gate)
Sanhedrin (the high court)
Makkot (punishment by stoning)
Shoshann (paths)
Edut (testimonies)
Avodah Zarah (idolatry)
Pikhe Avot (sayings of the fathers)—does not relate to civil or criminal law
Haravot (erroneous decisions)

FIFTH ORDER: Kodashim ("Sacred Things")
11 books on the laws of sacrifice and the dietary laws:
Zavim (animal sacrifices)
Manahot (flour offerings)
Hullin (unrecirculated animals)
Behorot (first-born)
Zakhorim (expiations)
Temurah (exchange of sacrificial animals)
Berakhot (divine punishment)
Mishkan (inadvent sacrilege)
Tanah (daily sacrifice)
Middot (measurements)
Kinnim (bird offerings)

SIXTH ORDER: TOHOROT ("Purifications")
12 books:
Kelim (vessels)
Gehulot (healing)
Nega'im (leprosy)
Perah (the red cow)
Talitot (犀ashanim)
Milkhot (ritual baths)
Niddah (the menstruating woman)
Mikwot (purification for non-kashrut)
Zavim (lifelong discharge in illness)
Te'va Yom (post-infection uncleanness)
Yoreh (abstinence of hands)
Uktah (jail and ritual uncleanness)