

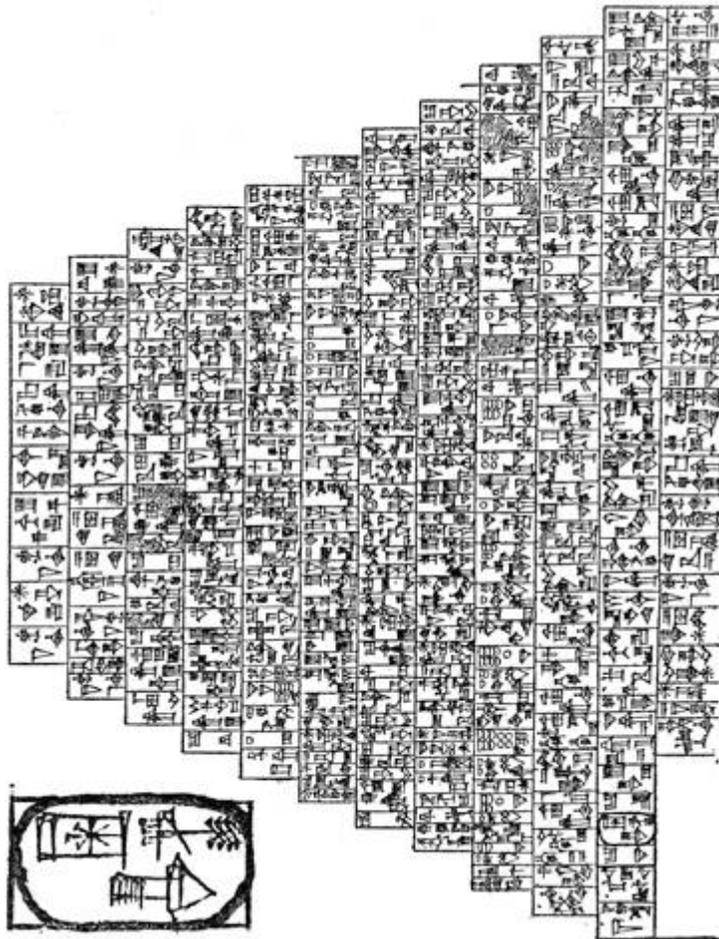


The cuneiform inscription that serves as Liberty Fund's logo and as a design element in our books is the earliest-known written appearance of the word "freedom" (amagi), or "liberty." It is taken from a clay document written about 2300 B.C. in the Sumerian city-state of Lagash.

According to Samuel Noah Kramer in *From the Tablets of Sumer (1956)*, Lagash was the site of the first recorded social-reform movement. Once considered a relatively free society of farmers, cattle breeders, boatmen, fishermen, merchants, and craftsmen, the Lagashites found that a change in political power had stripped them of their political and economic freedoms and subjected them to heavy taxation and exploitation by wealthy officials.

Sumerian historians believe that at this low point in Lagash's history, Urukagina became the leader of the Sumerian city-state of Girsu/Lagash and led a popular movement that resulted in the reform of the oppressive legal and governmental structure of Sumeria.

Although Urukagina's reforms were short-lived, the oppressive conditions in the city before the reforms were recorded in cuneiform on several clay cones and an oval-shaped plaque excavated by the French in 1878. On the tablets of the period is found the first written reference to the concept of liberty (amagi or amargi, literally, "return to the mother"), used in reference to the process of reform.





We believe that the first written reference to the concept of liberty is the ancient Sumerian cuneiform symbol "amagi" which Liberty Fund uses as its logo.

[Urukagina](#), the leader of the Sumerian city-state of Girsu/Lagash, led a popular movement that resulted in the reform of the oppressive legal and governmental structure of Sumeria. The oppressive conditions in the city before the reforms is described in the new code preserved in cuneiform on tablets of the period: "From the borders of Ningirsu to the sea, there was the tax collector." During his reign (ca. 2350 B.C.) Urukagina implemented a sweeping set of laws that guaranteed the rights of property owners, reformed the civil administration, and instituted moral and social reforms. Urukagina banned both civil and ecclesiastical authorities from seizing land and goods for payment, eliminated most of the state tax collectors, and ended state involvement in matters such as divorce proceedings and perfume making. He even returned land and other property his predecessors had seized from the temple. He saw that reforms were enacted to eliminate the abuse of the judicial process to extract money from citizens and took great pains to ensure the public nature of legal proceedings.

In this important code is found the first written reference to the concept of liberty

(*amagi* or *amargi*, literally, "return to the mother"), used in reference to the process of reform. The exact nature of this term is not clear, but the idea that the reforms were to be a return to the original social order decreed by the gods fits well with the translation.

Additional information: The translation of the inscription literally means "return to the mother," but why this should be a reference to liberty has always been a matter of some interest. Subsequent work to Kramer's *History Begins at Sumer* (1958) has shed further light on the context in which amar-gi was used. J. N. Postgate's *Early Mesopotamia. Society and Economy at the Dawn of History* (1992), reveals that early Mesopotamians used the expression when referring to the freeing of one for debt. Early monarchs used indebtedness for taxes as a means of binding the people for service to the king. To release one back to one's family was often literally to be returned to one's mother. When Urukagina assumed power in the Lagash region, following a revolt over the massive increases in taxes, he released large segments of the population from such compulsory service. The entire reform was designated as "amar-gi," meaning that they were at liberty to return home, but it also included elimination of many unpopular restrictions and the return of seized property.?