

# Beware The Wrath Of Abibارشim!

Recently excavated clay tablets shed new light on the most famous engineering failure in antiquity. Although some of the words are conjectural, this translation contains a clear message for modern engineers. Do you know someone who might benefit from this voice from the past?

I, Abibارشim, Great King, King of Kings, Ruler of Kish, Babil, Agade and Sankhar, and of the regions across the Hilla, conqueror of Ninevah, destroyer of Sepharia, having striven mightily and met with grief, lay down this Code that ye may not also strive mightily and meet with grief, nor fall flat on thy ass.

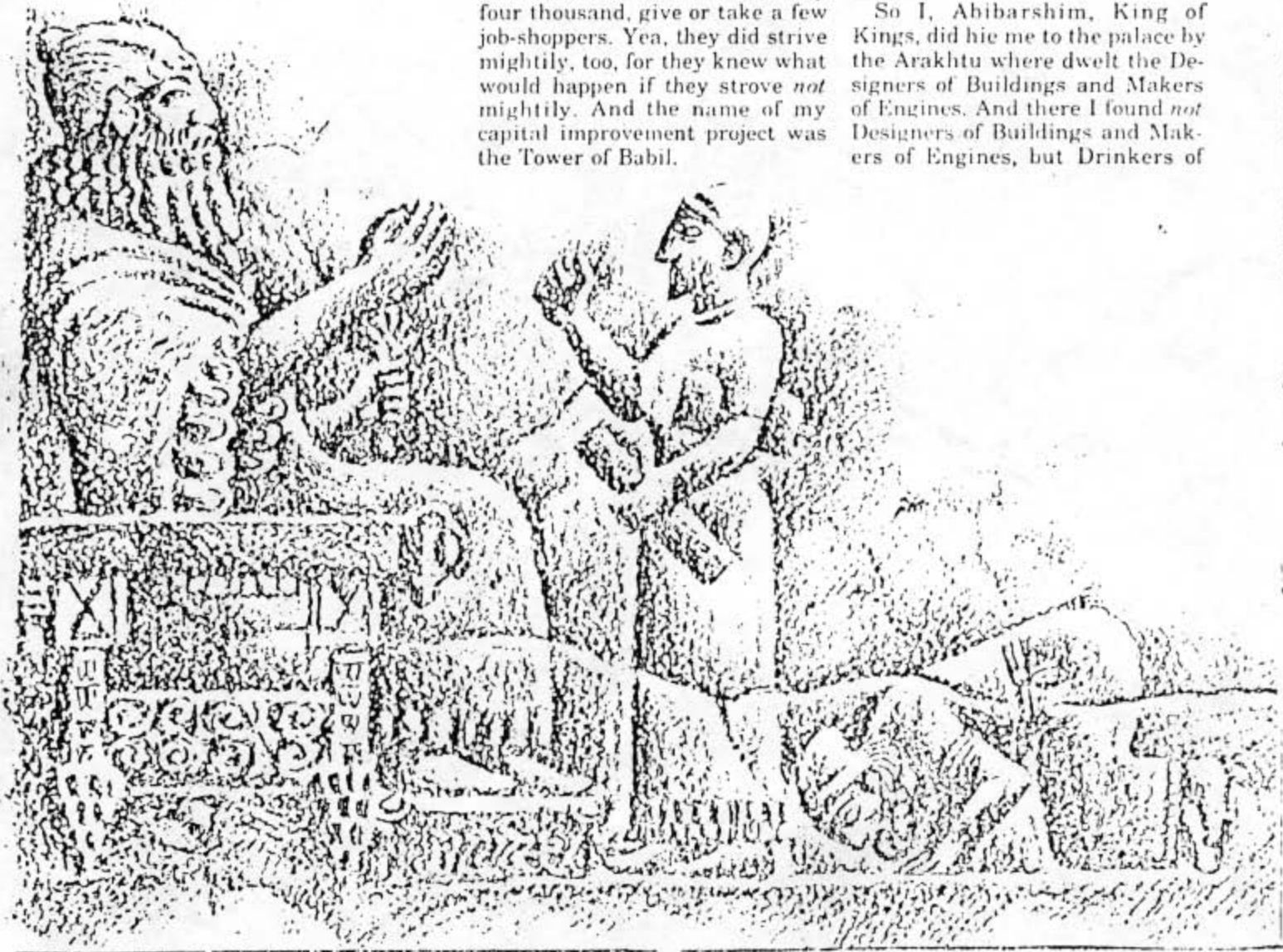
By PAUL PENDRAGON  
*Translator*

For I, Abibارشim, King of Kings, and all that, did buy many Aethyopeans and hire many artisans and scribes and masons and Makers of Engines and Designers of Buildings. And great was their craft and great their number, which was one hundred and forty four thousand, give or take a few job-shoppers. Yea, they did strive mightily, too, for they knew what would happen if they strove *not* mightily. And the name of my capital improvement project was the Tower of Babil.

Yea, great was their craft and wonderful to behold what the Designers of Buildings wrought on papyrus. All who looked thereon did marvel at their genius. I, Abibارشim, did also look thereon and did declare their designs to have much nift.

But many days did pass, and many times did the moon wax and wane, and the tower was not yet builded.

So I, Abibارشim, King of Kings, did hie me to the palace by the Arakhtu where dwelt the Designers of Buildings and Makers of Engines. And there I found *not* Designers of Buildings and Makers of Engines, but Drinkers of



Coffee and Tellers of Tales (whom men call hurlers of bull dung). So I vented my royal spleen, which did perturb them mightily.

"Look here, O King, etc.," saith the Chief of the Makers of Engines. "Some things can't be rushed. If thou wantest us to get thy bloody tower builded on time, then thou hadst better givest us a little respect. For canst thou build thy tower without us?"

"But I have given thee this palace in which they work may be done, and I pay thee many talents of gold and silver, plus all the usual fringies. What more wouldst thou have me do to get this project moving?"

"Well, thou canst start with alabaster lamps for the draughtsmen," saith the Chief of the Makers of Engines, refilling his cup. "And maybe draughting instruments of silver and electrum..."

"Thou shalt have them. Just get my tower builded." And I, Abibarshim, King of Kings, did depart the palace of the Makers of Engines with my tail betwixt my legs.

And many days did pass, and many times did the moon wax and wane, and the tower was still not yet builded. So I, Abibarshim, did corner the Chief Scribe and ask him, "What goeth on here?"

The Chief Scribe fell to his knees and said: "O Great and Merciful King, the Makers of Engines give us scrolls of material for to purchase. But, verily, no man knoweth what the scrolls signify, save the Makers of Engines themselves. For they call not a spade a spade, but call it

here a delver and there a digger and another place an entrenching tool and yet another a geovol-vometer, so that the scroll of material agreeth not with the design papyrus. And strange to behold is their numerology."

So I, Abibarshim, gave certain orders to try to keep the Makers of Engines from creating their own language, saying, "How did it come to pass that those who have such swiftness of mind, even as the gazell, lack the sense of geese?"

And many days did pass, and many times did the moon wax and wane, and the estimate did wax and never waned, and the tower was not yet builded.

So then I did ask the Chief Mason, "What giveth?" and he, throwing himself prostrate before me, spake thus:

"O King, every day we toil from dawn until the dusk! Every week the Makers of Engines say they have wrought new and niftier designs, of which we knew not, and what we have builded hath been fashioned unto obsolete papyri. Then my team tearth down and starteth over, O Great King, Merciful King, King of Kings..."

So I, Abibarshim, gave certain orders that did fix those designs thenceforth.

But many days did pass, and the tower did rise slower than sap rolleth down the bark of a tree.

So I, Abibarshim, did seek out the Chief Aethyopean, who seemed to know where it's at, and asked, "How come no tower?"

And he did answer, "O Great and Merciful King, I be running short of bolt tighteners."

"Well, buy some more!"

"I have, O King, but each one either getteth used up or runneth off as soon as he learneth his trade."

"Which is?"

"The Makers of Engines have designed the granite facing panels such that no man hath arms long nor thin enough to reach the bolts. Thus each panel requireth that a bolt tightener crawl behind and affix the bolts."

"So?"

"So then he cannot get back out, O King, but is entombed there forever."

I, Abibarshim, did then call for a redesign which cost us three months and one thousand gold talents. But the days did pass and



KORNON



the tower had attained only four tiers in height. So I did go to the Chief Scribe to inquire why.

"O King, we have been awaiting, lo, these many months, the columns of Corinthian marble for the fifth tier."

"Is marble from Corinth so hard to find, then?"

"Nay, Sire, but the Corinthian stone cutters make columns only in heights which be whole numbers of cubits. And the Makers of Engines have specified columns which be twelve cubits plus eleven-seventeenths part of a cubit. Such columns are not to be found in all of Corinth as an off-the-shelf-item."

"Well, let's just change the drawings and round them off to thirteen cubits even."

"Nay, Sire, for they must match unto the interior columns, which are bought pre-cut from Ionia and which we have aplenty."

"Okay, we'll cut the Ionian columns down and go unto twelve cubit columns all around."

"Nay, for the Ionian columns be all of one piece with their capitals. To shorten them would mean cutting off their capitals."

"What in the name of Marduk is wrong with that? We can just fit new capitals on top of the shortened columns!"

"Nay again, Sire. The entire structure unto the very top is designed around monobloc columns. To add new capitals would weaken the fifth and higher tiers and require a complete redesign!"

I, Abibarshim, King of Kings, avouch that Makers of Engines, for all their craft, know not how to fly. For surely the Chief of the Makers of Engines and all his men would have flown down, had they known how, from the fourth level of my tower, from which parapet I, Abibarshim, King of Kings, had them flung.

Therefore have I, Abibarshim, King of Kings, created this Code and ordered it displayed at the Coffee Machine and all other places where hangeth out the Designers of Buildings and Makers of Engines.

## The Code Of Abibarshim

**I** Once thou decidest what name to call a thing, that shall be its name forever after, until eternity passeth. Nor shalt thou call any other thing by that name, for each thing shall have a name unto itself.

**II** And in like manner shall be the enumeration of each thing.

**III** Continue not to design a thing unto perfection, for, verily, an ounce of timeliness is more valuable than a pound of perfection. Once thou hast approved a design, go not back and improve it, unless of necessity most dire.

**IV** Cover not thy tracks but make thy calculations plain, that those who follow thee may trace any error to its beginning and thus set it and all its brethren upon the path of righteousness.

**V** And mock not the necessary papyrus work, for it is the handmaiden of what thou createst in stone and iron. Completest all thy papyri as thou goest and hoardest them not as a surprise for manufacturing.

**VI** Attendest first to that which hath the most importance. Waste not time fixing thy wind to heavy papyrus with wire.

**VII** He who designeth without a plan is like he who rusheth forth into darkness without a torch. Rush not ere thou knowest whither, for there are many snares and pitfalls in the dark, and wild beasts to reach up and bite thine ass or camel on the path named Critical.

**VIII** Specify not odd-ball sizes and kinds of things, but design unto standards, that the scribes may buy stuff off-the-shelf and dabble not with specials.

**IX** Designest not assemblies which require four arms to put together or operate. Verily, the guy we hire in these days hath not four arms but ten thumbs.

**X** Remember well that all which thou designest shall be a balance of time and cost and quality and function. If thou attendest not to all four, then miserable shall be thy lot and brief thy employment (unless thou knowest how to fly).