

NIPPUR

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Despite the continuing uncertainties about the situation in Iraq, there has been continued archaeological activity in the northern area, with Iraq and foreign groups carrying out a variety of excavations and surveys that are transforming our knowledge of the Assyrian heartland and the mountains in monumental ways. But there has also been some activity in the south also. Iraqi, French, Italian, and British expeditions have initiated excavations around Ur, at Girsu and Nina (parts of the Lagash kingdom), and there are reports that an Italian team will begin work at Eridu, while Elizabeth Stone and Paul Zimansky of Stony Brook have been given permission to work at Ur itself. And more important for us, Carrie Hritz, an Oriental Institute Research Associate, who carried out one season of work at Girsu a few years ago, has been given permission to conduct a survey in the Nippur area.

In anticipation of the work that Carrie and her small team will do, I contacted my agent in Baghdad to tell him to put into motion a plan that we had agreed on a couple of years ago when I was last at Nippur. At that time, I met with a local contractor, Ziara Abid, who happens to be the son of our old foreman and who was himself a pickman on the dig twenty-five years ago, and we discussed what would be needed to make the Nippur dig house livable. The house has not been occupied since 1990, and it was partially burned and repaired cheaply but fast in 1996. But the house badly needed to have its mud plaster walls and roof redone, and because much of the electrical system and the plumbing had been stolen by the people who set fire to the house in 1996, a more general, thorough repair was called for.



Ziara (left) inspects outer court of Nippur dig house



Bedrooms with restored doors



Workroom looking to architect's room with surveying equipment



Workroom burned in 1996, new roof and electricity

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Workroom with equipment



Workroom painted during house repair, May 2015

Because Carrie was to begin work in June 2015, Ziara put a crew on the job and had the house in good shape in May, complete with the plaster job, a re-engineering of part of the roof to make it drain better, new cement walkways, new doors where needed, new electrical wiring and lights, and a new water system.

As it turns out, although there was a permit for Carrie to do the work in June, she could not obtain visas. She now intends to do the work in October, which is the best time to begin any project in southern Iraq. It will still be hot in the middle of the day, but the nights will be cool and the local fauna (insects, scorpions, snakes) will start going into hibernation.

We hope that this initial survey is only the beginning of a new phase of Oriental Institute commitment to Nippur, and that excavations can start soon. It is a giant mound, whose history we have only begun to uncover. As one site that has not been extensively looted, it takes on added significance for future research.