

Sellers LAWRENCE

Renting from the Gods: The Athenian Use of the Temple Resources on Delos in the Second Century B.C.

During the Third Macedonian War the Athenians remained loyal to Rome, and in 166 B.C. the Senate granted them Lemnos, Haliartos, and Delos. After the Delians were evicted, the Athenians returned to the island not just as administrators, as in earlier centuries, but as settlers as well. However, possession of Delos came with a proviso that they could not charge harbor dues (Polybius 30.20). As a free port, Delos became the focal point of trade in the Aegean, but the lack of such dues limited the Athenians ability to exploit the economic opportunities of the island. They had to find other ways to profit. One avenue was the revenues from the cult holdings on the island, particularly the leasing of the temples properties. Two well-preserved records of these transactions ([ID 1416](#) and [1417](#)) provide details on how the Athenians exploited the situation. This evidence for Athenian activity in the early years of their control of Delos has not been discussed in previous scholarship ([Roussel, 1916; 1987; Habicht, 1997; Rauh, 1999](#)), yet the records provide a glimpse at how Athenian officials used their positions both to increase the revenues of the temples (and thus the Athenian state) and to benefit individual Athenians.

The new Athenian officials on Delos leased temple lands, loaned the gods moneys and kept inventories of the temples treasuries. Over eighty documents recording their transactions survive from 166 to the mid 130s (*ID 1401-1496*). The most informative ones for the leasing of temple holdings, *ID 1416* and *ID 1417*, date to the years 157/6 and 156/5. The property included houses, apartment buildings, and workshops, as well as a doctors office and a shipshed. There were also leases for farmland and orchards. *ID 1416* gives new regulations that shifted responsibilities to the renters that the temples had performed before 166. The view of the Athenians as more aggressive landlords is borne out by the evidence for leases in

ID 1416. Many of the leases concern properties reclaimed from tenants for failure to pay or abandonment. Where the old and new rents are preserved the new rate is almost always greater. In some cases the increase was small, in others the rent tripled. These increases were windfalls for the temples.

Each lease gives the old and new tenant with their ethnic or city affinity. When we compare the individuals losing their lease and those taking over the properties in 157/6 (*ID 1416*), there is a clear trend. Only three Athenians were evicted or broke their leases, while Athenians made up a large percentage of the new leasers. The goal of the administrators may have been to remove slaves and Asians and to award the properties to Greeks, mainly Athenians. The leases for the year 156/5 (*ID 1417*) support this, as Athenians received at least seventeen out of the twenty-six new leases. This bias for Athenian renters may be the explanation for the new rules governing leases and the temple administrators' aggressive enforcement of them. The trends revealed by the inscriptions suggest that the administrators gave special consideration to their fellow

Athenians in the renting of the temples properties, thus increasing the economic opportunities for individual Athenians on Delos.