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The Blacksmiths of Delos

The inscriptions of the *hieropoioi* of Delos (*IG XI 135-289* and *Ins. Dél. 290-498*) mention more than two hundred workers by name. Three-quarters of these people appear only once or twice, a fact that suggests that the temple at this date had no custodial staff: when the *hieropoioi* needed work done, they took whoever was available. For the fifty repeating workers, it is possible to trace careers that may extend over decades. Some are general performers of odd jobs, but a significant number are professionals: blacksmiths, masons, plasterers, and carpenters. Job specialization was rather rudimentary, and we occasionally find even a professional doing a job outside of his specialty.

We can identify seven men who are probably professional blacksmiths, all but two of them in the first fifty years of Delian independence (that is, between 314 and 265); in the later years contract work became the rule, and individual workers eventually disappear from the inscriptions. In general there was no official blacksmith for the year: those smiths whose careers spanned a period of time will generally be found in every relevant inscription during the period.

In 282 BCE, the *hieropoioi* tried an experiment, employing three workmen—two stonecutters and a blacksmith—on retainer, paying thirty drachmae a month for the three of them, which comes out to two obols per man per day. They also paid a regular food allowance; the workmen seem to have received a daily prepared meal to be eaten on the job. Even so, they probably continued to take work on the side. The blacksmith, indeed, remained on retainer only two months; the others continued for the rest of the year. The experiment was not repeated: in the following year two blacksmiths are described as "the year's workmen," but they are paid per item.

Blacksmiths fell squarely into the category that we should call skilled blue-collar workers: payments to them were respectable but never involved very large sums. For nails and keys, a blacksmith probably procured his own iron; nails were bought directly from him, and were sold by weight, not by tale. For other jobs the customer supplied the raw material and paid the blacksmith only for his labor. A good number of payments are for making, repairing, or sharpening the tools of other workmen, and occasionally we find a blacksmith being paid for work in bronze. This fact suggests that the use of bronze on Delos was not sufficient to provide a living for a full-time coppersmith. (A silversmith, on the other hand, can be identified.)

The longest career known to us for a blacksmith is that of Artimas, who started before 301 and was still making keys in 281. Something—we cannot tell what, but it was probably made of bronze—was bought from him in 274; in another inscription of uncertain but probably rather late date he provides torches. One gets the impression that the hard work of iron forging was getting too hard for him; and in 268 we find a payment to Artimas' son—so identified, without a name of his own—for a repair. That old men retired at a certain point in their career was known to us from literary sources; the Delian

evidence suggests that at least for blacksmiths, retirement may have come rather earlier than we are used to thinking.