



PROJECT MUSE®

---

*Hallowed Stewards: Solon and the Sacred Treasurers of  
Ancient Athens* by William S. Bubelis (review)

Claire Taylor

Classical World, Volume 111, Number 1, Fall 2017, pp. 156-157 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/clw.2017.0099>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/676967>

is a painful reminder of the pressures placed on ex-slaves and their families and of the rapacity of their patrons and would-be patrons. So too the plight of decurions unable to escape their burdens (10.32); of bound tenants and *coloni* (11.48); of ambitious clerks striving for seniority, salary, bribes, and exemptions from onerous services (12.19). There is no text like this for revealing the greed, ambition, pressures, and suffering of everyday life in late antiquity. It is much better than fiction.

The late Ernst Badian once told me that any student of Roman literature needs to know something about Roman law; he was right, and I have been grateful for that advice ever since. But until recently (and still in Europe), Roman law has been the property of law schools rather than Latinists. (Perhaps that explains the extraordinary price for these volumes. Who but a lawyer could afford them?) That in the United States it has begun to move to departments of classics or history is a good thing both for the subject and for students of the classical world: it is a major part of Roman culture, and a major body of texts. Nobody has done more in recent times to make Latin and law mutually intelligible than Bruce Frier, and this superb *Codex* is another step in that direction. Thank you, Justice Blume. Thank you, Bruce and your fellow editors. You do justice to the *Codex*.

JAMES E. G. ZETZEL  
Columbia University

William S. Bubelis. *Hallowed Stewards: Solon and the Sacred Treasurers of Ancient Athens*. Societas: Historical Studies in Classical Culture. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016. Pp. xv, 272. \$75.00. ISBN 978-0-472-11942-4.

This book examines Athenian fiscal administration through the lens of sacred treasurers in the archaic and classical periods. Bubelis argues that treasurers played an essential, though rather accidental, role in the developing institutional landscape of Athens from Solon to the fourth century, and through careful examination of their evolving responsibilities he pieces together changes in the management of cult finances that shaped the Athenian state. These changes were inherently conservative: fiscal innovations occurred not through design, but as a result of competition within the elite for offices exclusively reserved for them. Holding office brought prestige and allowed the elite to use communal resources to further their own standing and electoral prospects whilst the revenues of the polis were increasing. This, in turn, led to the development of new structures for the administration of sacred property, but also fostered electoral patronage and institutional change.

In chapters 1–3 the focus is primarily on archaic Athens. Here Bubelis argues that Solonian laws shaped institutional practices over the long term. *Prima facie* this makes sense, but the devil is in the detail. So, the Solonian law that restricted service as *tamias* to the *pentakosiomedimnoi* also established *klerosis ek prokriton* as the selection procedure and, as such, served as a model for reforms of the archonship in 487/6 (chapter 1). Other laws—the ghost-like remnants of which are, according to Bubelis, preserved in the sacrificial calendar of 399—laid out duties for officials that were centered on their responsibilities to

the polis (chapter 2). The incentives of power were such that officials controlled resources greater than their personal finances through their service, making such office-holding attractive to the elite and competitive, and, over time, it prompted institutional change (chapter 3). A recurring problem in these chapters is the limited evidence. Bubelis does his best to reconcile disparate sources but ultimately—without a more robust theoretical framework to hold the chronologically fragmentary pieces of evidence he discusses—many of the suggestions can only be speculative. To be fair, Bubelis is aware of this problem, but this joint-the-dots approach makes this part of the book rather old-fashioned, an exercise in piecing together “intriguing clues.” Frequently, Bubelis has to couch his argument in phrases like “it is likely that,” “it is reasonable to think that,” or “we cannot be sure that.” That is, despite the valiant effort to build a coherent picture, the evidence is not strong.

Bubelis is on a surer footing in the second part of the book, where he outlines the duties of treasurers (chapter 4) and the development of sacred property administration into the classical period (chapters 5–7). Here Bubelis argues that there were differences between categories of sacred property used for various purposes and administered by different officials. Only *tamiai*, by virtue of their exclusive status, were in control of *hiera* wealth (immobile property, off-limits outside cult practice), whereas other sacred officials managed the day-to-day finances, with the authority to designate *demosia* (public) property as *hosia* and therefore to make funds available for lending or leasing. The tribes were the main locus of these “fiscal innovation[s]” in the immediate pre- and post-Kleisthenic period, but these developments occurred piecemeal and primarily as a result of intra-elite competition.

This is not a book for the undergraduate syllabus but squarely targeted at a specialized audience with technical knowledge. Even so, a firmer editorial hand should have been taken with the dense text that makes the argument, in places, difficult to follow. The claims made here are rather grand: that this is a reappraisal of the Athenian public economy and the institutional history of Athens (17–18). It is not a radical one for sure: Solon remains a central, almost domineering, figure—a “catalyst” for future institutional change—the elite are motivated by competition with one another, religious innovation is conservative and traditional by impulse. These conclusions are not necessarily wrong, but they are hardly surprising. The book does, however, shine a light on a relatively neglected part of Athenian constitutional history and makes a strong case for a greater understanding of the role of sacred property and its administration in the classical period. For that, Bubelis has provided a great service.

CLAIRE TAYLOR  
*University of Wisconsin-Madison*

### REVIEWS in This Issue:

- W. S. Bubelis**, *Hallowed Stewards: Solon and the Sacred Treasurers of Ancient Athens* (C. Taylor) 156.  
**M. Domingo Gygax**, *Benefaction and Rewards in the Ancient Greek City: The Origins of Euergetism* (P. Hunt) 152.  
**M. C. Farmer**, *Tragedy on the Comic Stage* (C. Catenaccio) 146.