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Poets, Playwrights, and the Politics of Exile and Asylum in Ancient Greece and Rome

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International Journal of Refugee Law, Volume 6, Issue 3, 1 January 1994, Pages 402–424, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/6.3.402>

Published: 01 September 1994

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Abstract

This article examines the ways in which the literature of ancient Greece and Rome dealt with the pervasive problems of exile and asylum. It illustrates, through the writings of great poets and playwrights such as Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles, Ovid and Seneca, how powerful were these themes to

the classical mind. The author considers the role of exile as a punishment in classical states, and the moral and political implications of asylum as a means of mitigating the predicament of refugees and of furthering or thwarting the interests of the state. The article shows that we can learn from the classical analysis of asylum, including the role and effects of refugee warrior communities in earlier times. Finally, the article explores the ways in which exile and the literature to which it gave rise, served as vehicles not only for powerful drama, but also for criticism of political regimes and for the assertion of the exile's rights and identity.

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