

In recent years scholars like Edith Hall have begun to examine Athenian trials as performances, and have emphasized similarities between these and dramatic performances. I would like to expand these suggestions by focusing on law (Hall and others mostly focus on drama) and conducting a full study of the performative aspects of ancient Greek law from its beginnings through the classical period. This is obviously too big a topic for one talk, so I will focus here on two scenes in early Greek poetry whose performative aspects have hitherto been overlooked.

The first is the trial scene depicted on the Shield of Achilles in *Iliad* 18 (497-508) in which two men bring their dispute to a group of elders in the agora to be settled. A number of features mark this scene as a ritual performance, including the physical space -- the elders sit on polished stones in a circle in a public space (cf. *Odyssey* 8.6, 3.405-16) -- the orderly sequence of speech-acts (regulated in part by the use of scepters), and the participation of litigants, elders, heralds, and a large crowd of community members, all of whom voice their views. The poet describes all these elements in motion in a way that in fact is quite similar to the scene of weddings that immediately precedes the trial (18.490-96). There the focus is on the central characters (wedding couples) in a procession with sound and motion and an audience of respectable married women who certify the validity of the performance. A comparison of this scene of weddings sheds interesting light on the trial scene as a performance.

Finally, I will also look more briefly at Hesiod's portrayal of a king (*basileus*) settling disputes in the *Theogony* (80-92). Comparing the king to a poet, Hesiod presents his act of settling a dispute as a performance in the agora before an audience of community members, similar to the performance of a poet, which is described in *Theogony* 94-103.

I will also note similarities between these scenes in Hesiod and the trial scene on the Shield of Achilles.

I will end with a few remarks about the implications for such an analysis with regard to law and community in Greece.