

FRAMING THE DELPHIC ORACLE, INSTITUTIONALIZING THE OLYMPIC GAMES: PHLEGON OF TRALLES' *OLYMPIADS**

ABSTRACT

This article re-examines the account of the Delphic oracle in Phlegon of Tralles' *Olympiads* (FGrHist 257 F 1). It argues that the oracular utterance is framed in an attempt to bolster the Lycurgan institution of the Olympic Games in 776 B.C. More specifically, according to Goffman's theory, the divine anger of Zeus (ménis) is keyed to the modulation of the frame, or the cognitive perspective, that has been radically changed by warfare and plague in the Peloponnese, thus serving a heuristic function in achieving political rationality. By showing the Delphic oracle to be even more dynamic than previous scholarship has suggested, frame analysis increases knowledge and understanding of the literary, social and political progresses reported in ancient sources.

Keywords: Delphic oracle; Olympic Games; Phlegon of Tralles; Erving Goffman; frame analysis; divine anger¹

Phlegon of Tralles was a Greek writer from the time of Hadrian (reigned A.D. 117–38). Standard accounts make him a freedman of the philhellenic Emperor, with Publius Aelius Phlegon as his official name, but nothing else about him is known for certain.² In *On Marvels* Phlegon claims that he encountered a sex-changer called Aetete/Aetetus in Syria in 116, when Hadrian was governor, and this suggests that he has been part of Hadrian's entourage prior to his accession.³ There is a good likelihood that Phlegon maintained a life-long connection with Hadrian's court and, in Yourcenar's words, served as an 'indispensable ever-attendant' in the imperial itinerary.⁴ Phlegon is credited by Byzantine lexicographers with a number of works, and has in recent decades received

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¹ The following works are repeatedly cited: P. Christesen, *Olympic Victor Lists and Ancient Greek History* (Cambridge and New York, 2007); J.E. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle: Its Response and Operations* (Berkeley, 1978); E. Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York, 1974); H.W. Parke and D.E.W. Wormell, *The Delphic Oracle* (Oxford, 1956); K.E. Shannon-Henderson, 'Phlegon of Tralleis (1667)', in S. Schorn (ed.), *Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker. Part IV. Biography and Antiquarian Literature*, E.2 (Leiden and Boston, 2022). In citing Phlegon, Eusebius and Plutarch, I use the section/line numbers of the *FGrHist/BNJ* edition, P. Christesen and Z. Martirosova-Torlone, 'The Olympic victor list of Eusebius: background, text, and translation', *Traditio* 61 (2006), 31–93, and the Loeb edition. The translation of Phlegon is based on J. McInerney, 'Phlegon of Tralles (257)', in I. Worthington et al. (edd.), *Brill's New Jacoby* (Leiden and Boston, 2012).

² *PIR*, P 389; *RE* s.v. Phlegon 2; *LGPN* 5B s.v. Φλέγων 1.

³ *FGrHist* 257 F 36.9 = Phlegon, *Mir.* 9 Stramaglia. See Shannon-Henderson (n. 1), ad loc.; W. Hansen, *Phlegon of Tralles' Book of Marvels* (Exeter, 1996), 39; A.R. Birley, *Hadrian: The Restless Emperor* (London and New York, 1997), 75.

⁴ M. Yourcenar, *Mémoires d'Hadrien* (Paris, 1951), 183, 207. For recent discussions about Phlegon's life and career, see Hansen (n. 3), 1–3; S. Fein, *Die Beziehungen der Kaiser Trajan und Hadrian zu den litterati* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1994), 193–9; J. Doroszewska, *The Monstrous World: Corporeal Discourses in Phlegon of Tralles' Mirabilia* (Frankfurt am Main, 2016), 15–20.

considerable scholarly discussion.⁵ The *Olympiads* is a chronological work, an *opus magnum* recounting the entire history of the Olympic Games from its institutionalization in 776 B.C. down to the 229th Olympiad (A.D. 137–40), when Hadrian died: this also offers an approximate *terminus post quem* for Phlegon's activity.⁶ In the discussion that follows, I explore the textual, literary, and historical contexts of the work (in section 1). I then apply a Goffmanian frame analysis to Phlegon's account of the Delphic oracle as what scholars call 'communicating text' in the course of policy deliberation (in section 2). I argue that frame analysis may bring to light new aspects of the Lycurgan institution of the Olympic Games: first, that warfare and plague initiate the process of framing and frame change from 'competition' to 'festival'; secondly, that within the 'festival' frame, divine anger is keyed to the needs of modulating the monotonous tone of the Delphic oracle in the progress of policymaking. As such, frame analysis will ignite further research and enhance our understanding of ancient sources.

1. A PHILOLOGICAL-CUM-HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE *OLYMPIADS*

First, the physical presence and ancient testimonia of the *Olympiads* need surveying. The late ninth-century manuscript, Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, Cod. Pal. graec. 398 (fols. 234v–236r), preserves the beginning either of the sixteen-book *Olympiads*, or of its eight-book excerption, or of its epitomized version in two books, all of which are listed in the *Suda*. I follow McNerney in arguing that the *Olympiads* is a conflation of the *Olympic Victory Lists* in eight books and the *Historical Chronicles* in the remaining eight books, and that the 'eight books' referred to by the *Suda* compilers belong to the first half.⁷ It comes as a surprise that the chronographical work occurs in this single manuscript between the paradoxographical writings of Phlegon (fols. 216r–234v) and those of other authors (fols. 236v–261v) that deal with variously marvellous phenomena, and scholars tend to identify the exemplar of the 'Phlegon' portion with a preceding collection of his works.⁸ Among the testimonies

⁵ Christesen (n. 1), 57–62; A. Giannini, *Paradoxographorum Graecorum reliquiae* (Milan, 1966), 170–219; K. Brodersen, *Phlegon von Tralleis. Das Buch der Wunder* (Darmstadt, 2002); R.M.T. Pereira, *Flégon de Trales: História, Histórias e Paradoxografia* (Coimbra, 2019). But largely because of its fragmentary condition, the *Olympiads* does not attract the same attention as *On Marvels* does. For the latter see K.E. Shannon-Henderson, 'Constructing a new Imperial paradoxography: Phlegon of Tralles and his sources', in A. König, R. Langlands and J. Uden (edd.), *Literature and Culture in the Roman Empire, 96–235: Cross-Cultural Interactions* (Cambridge, 2020), 159–78.

⁶ *FGrHist* 257 T 1, T 4 with Doroszevska (n. 4), 15, 17. On the dating of the 'first Olympiad' (884, 828, 776 or 704 B.C.), see T.F. Scanlon, 'Homer, the Olympic Games, and the heroic ethos', in M. Kaila et al. (edd.), *The Olympic Games in Antiquity: Bring Forth Rain and Bear Fruit* (Athens, 2004), 61–91, at 61–3. Phlegon's account (*FGrHist* 257 F 1.1) that twenty-eight Olympiads were neglected from Iphitus to Coroebus, who won the first Olympic stadion race, would point to 884, hence separating the 'Lycurgus–Iphitus Olympics' from the canonical 'Coroebus Olympics' of 776, but this issue is of no significance for our purposes: Christesen (n. 1), 18–21, 146–57; P.-J. Shaw, *Discrepancies in Olympiad Dating and Chronological Problems of Archaic Peloponnesian History* (Stuttgart, 2003), 70–1.

⁷ *Suda* φ 527 Adler = *FGrHist* 257 T 1: McNerney (n. 1), ad loc. Doroszevska (n. 4), 17, among others, claims that there are an abbreviated version in eight books and an epitomized version in two books. There is no citation of the sixteenth book and so a fifteen-book version of the *Olympiads* is entirely possible: Christesen (n. 1), 328–9.

⁸ Interest in chronological details such as listing the Athenian archons and the Roman consuls is also attested in *On Marvels*: see Christesen (n. 1), 331–2; Shannon-Henderson (n. 1);

of the *Olympiads* at our disposal, Photius alone mentions that it is dedicated to a certain Alcibiades, freedman and chamberlain (*cubicularius*) of Hadrian.⁹

Now for the contents and literary parallels of the *Olympiads*. Regrettably, only the proem of the work has come to us, and even this fragment does not seem to survive intact.¹⁰ But it is easy to grasp the structural outline of the extant eleven sections of this chronographical work. The text as transmitted relates in §1 the pre-Lycurgan festivals at Olympia that were held intermittently by mythical, if not shadowy, figures such as Pisis, Pelops and Heracles; in §§1–8 Lycurgus' attempts to end a civic strife (*stasis*) by re-establishing the Olympic Games in 776; and in §§9–11 king Iphitus of Elis' aid to Sparta until the seventh Olympiad in 752. There is reason to believe that Phlegon aspires to give a thorough and authoritative account of the Olympic Games, inasmuch as Photius states that 'Phlegon begins his collection from the first Olympiad, because earlier periods, as nearly everyone else agrees, have not been recorded with any detail and reliability'.¹¹ Indeed, we see an amalgam of literary commonplaces and historical information reminiscent of Phlegon's paradoxographical writings that reconcile different styles and sources.¹² The major part of §1 concerns the prehistory of the Olympic Games. Its earliest extant parallels are found in Pindar's *Olympian Odes* 2.3–4 and 10.24–85, which record Heracles' founding of the Olympic Games, but this seems a trivial matter in the proem.¹³ §§1–8 comprise narratives of war and peace (στάσις, ὁμόνοια, εἰρήνη, τὰ ἀρχαῖα νόμιμα, ἐκεχειρία, πόλεμος, φιλία) and of plague and famine (λοιμός, φθορὰ καρπῶν, λιμός), which are attested in Strabo 8.3.33 (πολεμεῖν, εἰρήνη), Plutarch's *Life of Lycurgus* 1.1, 23.2 (ἐκεχειρία, εἰρήνη), Pausanias, 5.4.5–6, 5.8.5, 5.20.1 (στάσις, νόσος, λοιμώδης, τὰ κακὰ, πόλεμος, τῶν ἀρχαίων λήθη, ἐκεχειρία), Eusebius' Olympic victory list in the *Chronica*, lines 20–44 (πόλεμος, ἀπαλλαγὴ τῶν κατεχόντων πολέμων, ἐκεχειρία, χεῖρας ἀλλήλους οὐκέτι ἐπιφέρειν), and some other predecessors including Heraclides Lembus' *Excerpta politiarum* 10 (ἀνομία, ἐκεχειρία, τὸ κοινὸν ἀγαθόν) and a scholiast to Plato's *Republic* 465d (ὁμόνοια). §§9–11 give further details about the performances of the Olympic Games and find echoes in Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *Roman Antiquities* 1.71.5 and Eusebius' list, lines 20–44, but intertextual connections can hardly be established among them.

According to ancient tradition, the historic motive that impels Lycurgus (and Iphitus and Cleosthenes) to restore the Olympic Games is a *stasis* threatening the

A. Stramaglia, *Phlegon Trallianus: Opuscula De rebus mirabilibus et De longaevis* (Berlin and New York, 2011), xiv–xvi.

⁹ Phot. *Bibl.* 97.83b = *FGrHist* 257 T 3. See also *PIR*, A 134; Birley (n. 3), 151; Doroszewska (n. 4), 16–17; Hansen (n. 3), 1; B. Baldwin, 'Photius, Phlegon and Virgil', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 20 (1996), 201–8, at 201.

¹⁰ See, following Jacoby, Christesen (n. 1), 58 n. 30.

¹¹ Phot. *Bibl.* 97.83b = *FGrHist* 257 T 3 ἀρχεται δὲ τῆς συναγωγῆς ἀπὸ τῆς πρώτης ὀλυμπιάδος, διότι τὰ πρότερα, καθὼς καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι σχεδὸν τι πάντες φασίν, οὐκ ἔτυχεν ὑπὸ τινος ἀκριβοῦς καὶ ἀληθοῦς ἀναγραφῆς. See also Christesen (n. 1), 333.

¹² G. Schepens and K. Delcroix, 'Ancient paradoxography: origin, evolution, production and reception', in O. Pecere and A. Stramaglia (edd.), *La letteratura di consumo nel mondo greco-latino* (Cassino, 1996), 373–460. See Shannon-Henderson (n. 1) for a summary.

¹³ On this subject see T.K. Hubbard, 'Pindar, Heracles the Idaean dactyl, and the foundation of the Olympic Games', in G.P. Schaus and S.R. Wenn (edd.), *Onward to the Olympics: Historical Perspectives on the Olympic Games* (Waterloo, 2007), 27–45. D.W. Roller, *A Historical and Topographical Guide to the Geography of Strabo* (Cambridge, 2018), 451 remarks that the dual creation of the Olympic Games reflects a mythical-historical foundation. It is widely accepted that the informal, pre-Lycurgan Olympic Games consisted only of running events: Scanlon (n. 6), 61; S. Instone, 'Origins of the Olympics', in S. Hornblower and C.A. Morgan (edd.), *Pindar's Poetry, Patrons, and Festivals: From Archaic Greece to the Roman Empire* (Oxford and New York, 2007), 71–82, at 73.

Peloponnesians. Table 1 below, along with the aforementioned literary parallels, indicates that the antitheses of war and peace and the Delphic oracle are recurrent themes in ancient sources. The only omission in Phlegon is the metonymic expression ‘misfortune’ (τὰ κακά), as we read in Pausanias 5.4.6, but this does not rule out the possibility that Phlegon might have reworked part of the tradition represented by Pausanias, for two reasons.¹⁴ On the one hand, although the expression ‘pestilential disease’ (νόσος λοιμώδης) is stronger than Phlegon’s ‘plague’ (λοιμός), by combining *stasis* and ‘plague’ in a single phrase (ὑπὸ ἐμφυλίων στάσεων καὶ ὑπὸ νόσου λοιμώδους), Pausanias seems to provide a rather compact version, in which the oracular consultation is performed by Iphitus alone for ‘relief from these misfortunes’ (λῦσιν τῶν κακῶν).¹⁵ On the other hand, Phlegon mentions Iphitus’ aid to institutionalizing the Olympic Games, but what is noticeable in his version is that Lycurgus runs into a difficulty when there is an obstinate refusal among the Peloponnesians to end the war, and emphasis is put on Lycurgus’ three visits to Delphi (§§3–7). The oracular consultation is presented by Phlegon as a matter of the public interest of Sparta, but the expression ‘a baneful famine and a pestilence’ (κακὴ λιμὸς καὶ λοιμός, §6) still reminds us of Pausanias’ ‘misfortune’ (τὰ κακά). It is likely that Phlegon brings together a wide range of pre-existing themes in one passage and adds further details about Lycurgus’ consultations of the Delphic oracle. More significantly, in the second oracular response (§6), the *Olympiads* carries a solitary reference to the divine anger: that is, Zeus’s μῆνις and θυμός.

Table 1: Themes in Phlegon of Tralles’ *Olympiads* and Other Literary Sources

	Platonic						
	Phlegon	Pausanias	Scholiast	Heraclides	Strabo	Plutarch	Eusebius
1. Cleosthenes	✓		✓				
2. Custom	✓			✓			
3. Divine anger	✓						
4. Famine	✓						
5. Friendship	✓						
6. Harmony	✓			✓			
7. Iphitus	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
8. Lycurgus	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
9. Misfortune		✓					
10. Oracle	✓	✓	✓				✓
11. Peace	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
12. Plague	✓	✓					
13. <i>Stasis</i>	✓	✓		✓			
14. Truce	✓	✓		✓		✓	
15. War	✓	✓			✓		✓

¹⁴ Cf. Fontenrose (n. 1), 268–70; L.O. Juul, *Oracular Tales in Pausanias* (Odense, 2010), 216–17. The account of Charillus’ tyrannical rule falls into the category of *stasis*, and both φίλια and ὁμόνοια convey the notion of political reconciliation: see also section 3 below.

¹⁵ On the Greek words for ‘plague’, see P. Michelakis, ‘Naming the plague in Homer, Sophocles, and Thucydides’, *AJPh* 140 (2019), 381–414, at 389–95.

The *Olympiads*, vivid a work though it is, has to be handled with caution. So concerned was Hadrian with his personal reputation that, according to the *Historia Augusta*, he published an autobiography under the name of Phlegon, and even Phlegon's books are said to have been written by him. But this statement seems to have relied heavily on scandal and imagination, and it would be groundless to treat 'Phlegon', which means 'inflaming' in Greek, as a pen name of the emperor.¹⁶ To what extent, then, does Phlegon's account reveal the historical truth behind the legend? It would be justified to cite Plutarch here, who makes it clear at the beginning of his *Life of Lycurgus* that nothing can be said without dispute about the lawgiver.¹⁷ Nevertheless, it is plausible to place the Lycurgan establishment of the Olympic Games in the wider context of archaic Peloponnesian history. Heraclides Lembus, for instance, reports that Charillus (also named Charilaus, the nephew of Lycurgus) was ruling tyrannically in those days.¹⁸ More importantly, Phlegon mentions (§4) a discus inscribed for the Hellenic judges (*Hellandicae*), which commanded them to conduct the Olympic Games. This true relic at Olympia or its copy is to be identified with the one witnessed by Aristotle, who, just as Pausanias would later do, recorded that on it there is an inscription carrying the name of Lycurgus. In juxtaposing Lycurgus with Iphitus, there is a tendency among ancient authors to emphasize the determining role of Iphitus. Phlegon refers (§9) to the fact that the Eleans 'took care of the Olympics', but this seems a less significant matter in the poem. The 'Sparta' theme features, and the central prominence of Lycurgus *prima facie* reflects his cult in the Roman period—a point to which I will return in section 3 below.¹⁹

Relevant to the matters of authenticity and historicity are the oracular quotations that recur in Phlegon.²⁰ Photius remarks that Phlegon is preoccupied with oracles of all kinds.²¹ This style is marked by a combination of prose and verse, or what scholars would nowadays call oracular prosimetrum.²² Different suggestions have been evoked for the composition, operation and transmission of the Delphic oracle, and for the sake of brevity, I propose that oracular utterances preserved in hexameter are quasi-historical; in other words, by quoting or composing them in verse, Phlegon (or an enquirer like Lycurgus) seeks to underscore authority and authenticity.²³

¹⁶ *Hist. Aug. Hadr.* 16.1 = *FGrHist* 257 T 5 with Shannon-Henderson (n. 1), ad loc. See also R. Syme, 'Journeys of Hadrian', *ZPE* 73 (1988), 159–70, at 159: 'The biography of Hadrian is the most intricate and baffling in the whole work.'

¹⁷ *Plut. Lyc.* 1.1.

¹⁸ Cf. Heraclides Lembus, *Excerpta politiarum* 10; *Plut. Lyc.* 3.4, 5.5. See also Christesen (n. 1), 61 n. 32.

¹⁹ Cf. *FGrHist* 257 F 1.4; Arist. fr. 408 Gigon = *Plut. Lyc.* 1.1; Strabo 8.3.33; *Plut. Lyc.* 23.2; Paus. 5.4.5–6, 5.8.5, 5.20.1; Ath. *Deipn.* 14.37 = Hieronymus of Rhodes, fr. 33 Wehrli; Eusebius' list, lines 20–44; Σ *Pl. Resp.* 465d; see also Christesen (n. 1), 60–2, 85–8; Fontenrose (n. 1), 115 n. 31; Shaw (n. 6), 65. The expression ἐπιμέλειάν τινας ποιέισθαι is understood as 'to take charge of something' by McInerney (n. 1), but see LSJ s.v. ἐπιμέλεια A.1; Christesen (n. 1), 60.

²⁰ See *FGrHist* 257 F 1, F 36.2–3, 10 = Phlegon, *Mir.* 2–3, 10 Stramaglia.

²¹ Phot. *Bibl.* 97.84a = *FGrHist* 257 T 3. See also Christesen (n. 1), 333.

²² 'prosimetria oracolare': A. Stramaglia, 'Le voci dei fantasmi', in F. De Martino and A.H. Sommerstein (edd.), *Lo spettacolo delle voci* (Bari, 1995), 1.193–230, at 221–3.

²³ Fontenrose (n. 1), 268–70 and *passim*; Parke and Wormell (n. 1), 2.197–200; L. Andersen, *Studies in Oracular Verses: Concordance to Delphic Responses in Hexameter* (Copenhagen, 1987), 38–9 and *passim*; M. Scott, *Delphi: A History of the Center of the Ancient World* (Princeton and Oxford, 2014), 11–12, 19–20, 27. H.W. Parke, 'The use of other than hexameter verse in Delphic oracle', *Hermathena* 65 (1945), 58–66, at 58 is right to argue that the authenticity of an oracular response should be examined primarily on historical rather than metrical grounds (say, those given in iambs should be judged spurious). On its oral composition and performance:

Furthermore, these quotations are denoted by *diplê*-like signs on the margins of the manuscript (fols. 235v–236r), and this suggests that the ancients have attached importance to them.²⁴ Similar to the close connection of Lycurgus' founding of the *eunomia* with oracular confirmation, the proem of the *Olympiads* and the oracular quotations lay stress on Sparta's link to Delphi, and therefore should be approached as good examples illustrating the Lycurgan, and even Greek, way of agenda-setting and communication.²⁵

2. TOWARDS A GOFFMANIAN EXPLORATION OF THE *OLYMPIADS*

In recent scholarship on ancient divination, the prevailing characterization of the approach to political communication is that of functionalism. This perspective seeks socio-political dimensions inherent in divination practices while overlooking religious experiences such as beliefs and anxieties in everyday life.²⁶ One might well wonder how frame analysis will offer a new reading of Phlegon's accounts of the Delphic oracle, especially his reference to divine anger. To answer this question, we take as a premise that the process of framing, or 'schemata of interpretation', is a unique and ubiquitous form of human communication.²⁷ In a classicist's explanation, for instance, a playful signal such as a nip or slap in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (1095–8) may initiate a 'play' frame, which will in turn lead to a 'joke-making' frame as distinguished from an actual aggression (say, Meidias' public slap on Demosthenes in *Against Meidias*, 74).²⁸ Yet different signals would initiate a variety of frames in different historical and cultural backgrounds. The Olympic Games were for a contemporary Chinese an instrument for rejuvenating a postcolonial nation state through international sports, while to the Greek mind they meant a competition among warrior-like athletes as well as a festal assembly in honour of Zeus. Strabo, for example, argues that after the oracle of the Olympian Zeus failed to respond, the reputation of the sanctuary persisted 'on account

L. Maurizio, 'Delphic oracles as oral performances: authenticity and historical evidence', *ClAnt* 16 (1997), 308–34; narrative patterns: J. Kindt, *Revisiting Delphi: Religion and Storytelling in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge and New York, 2016). Epigraphical evidence indicates that a chest might be used to keep the archives of oracular responses (LSJ s.v. ζύγαστρον). Herodotus (6.57.4) tells us that the Spartans kept the oracular responses as official archives: *CAH*², 4.541.

²⁴ See also Shannon-Henderson (n. 1).

²⁵ Cf. Hdt. 1.65; Xen. *Lac.* 8.5; Plut. *Lyc.* 2.3, 5.3, 6.1–4, 13.6, 23.2, 29.2–4. See also Parke and Wormell (n. 1), 1.82–98; Scott (n. 23), 56–7.

²⁶ This derives from the *polis*-religion model developed by C. Sourvinou-Inwood, 'What is *polis* religion?', in R. Buxton (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Greek Religion* (Oxford, 2000), 13–37. See further J.-P. Vernant, 'Speech and mute signs', in J.-P. Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays* (Princeton, 1991), 303–17; R.C.T. Parker, 'Greek states and Greek oracles', in Buxton (this note), 76–108; H. Bowden, *Classical Athens and the Delphic Oracle: Divination and Democracy* (Cambridge, 2005); K. Trampedach, *Politische Mantik. Die Kommunikation über Götterzeichen und Orakel im klassischen Griechenland* (Heidelberg, 2015). For literature reviews see J. Kindt, 'Polis religion – A critical appreciation', *Kernos* 22 (2009), 9–34; T. Harrison, 'Review article: Beyond the *polis*? New approaches to Greek religion', *JHS* 135 (2015), 165–80; L.G. Driediger-Murphy and E. Eidinow, 'Introduction', in L.G. Driediger-Murphy and E. Eidinow (edd.), *Ancient Divination and Experience* (Oxford, 2019), 1–14, at 2–5.

²⁷ Goffman (n. 1), 21. See also V. Farenga, *Citizen and Self in Ancient Greece: Individuals Performing Justice and the Law* (Cambridge, 2006), 144–5.

²⁸ S.E. Kidd, *Nonsense and Meaning in Ancient Greek Comedy* (Cambridge and New York, 2014), 102, 109–11, unlike J. Robson, *Humour, Obscenity and Aristophanes* (Tübingen, 2006), 16–18, 29–36, is inclined to apply this process to Bateson's theory of play, which is developed by studying animals at play. Cf. Goffman (n. 1), 49.

both of the festival and of the competition' (διὰ τε τὴν πανήγυριν καὶ τὸν ἀγῶνα τὸν Ὀλυμπιακόν, 8.3.30).²⁹ As regards the Delphic oracle, it may be argued that the oracle functioned as an information centre and provides 'sense-making mechanism' in political deliberations and policy decisions.³⁰ It becomes a persuasion strategy, as in the Themistoclean/Herodotean exploration and interpretation of 'wooden wall' and 'blessed Salamis' during the second Persian invasion of Greece.³¹ Each pair of oracular consultation and response, therefore, constitute a 'communicating text' that could be applied to frame analysis.³² Phlegon reworks literary materials, but the narratives adorned by various responses from the Delphic oracle indicate that the *Olympiads* is not a product of hasty compilation. Scholars have collected a group of oracular responses to the 'Lycurgus–Iphitus' Olympic Games.³³ These sources can, in accordance with the perceived realities in Greek thought, be placed within two frames: one the 'competition' frame, the other the 'festival' frame, as suggested by such expressions as τὴν πανήγυριν καὶ τὸν ἀγῶνα τὸν Ὀλυμπίασιν (§1), τὴν τε πανήγυριν τὴν Ὀλυμπικὴν ... καὶ ἀγῶνα γυμνικόν (§2) and ἔροτιν καὶ ἀγῶνα (§6). The two homogenous but competing frames are embedded in the proem of the *Olympiads*, and, forged in the style of oracular prosimetrum, become manifest in the communicating text. Phlegon's account of the Olympic Games offers a case study that may, in Goffman's terms, contribute to an explicit understanding of the primary frame and the frame transformations. The ancient literary sources represent a particularly fruitful area of frame analysis.³⁴

The first oracular consultation is performed to ask for an end to the *stasis* among the Peloponnesians (στάσις ἐνέστη κατὰ τὴν Πελοπόννησον, §1) and for restoring peace and harmony (εἰς ὁμόνοιαν καὶ εἰρήνην, §2). The response to Lycurgus (and other political elites) is confirmatory to 'the decision to restore the Olympic festival according to ancient customs and to hold an athletic competition' (τὴν τε πανήγυριν τὴν Ὀλυμπικὴν ἔγνωσαν ἀνάγειν εἰς τὰ ἀρχαῖα νόμιμα καὶ ἀγῶνα γυμνικὸν ἐπιτελέσαι, §2). Thus, 'the god said that it would be better if they did these things. He commanded them to declare a truce in the cities wishing to take part in the competition' (ὁ δὲ θεὸς ἄμεινον ἔφη ἔσεσθαι ποιούσιν. καὶ προσέταξεν ἐκεχειρίαν ἀγγεῖλαι ταῖς πόλεσιν ταῖς βουλομένας μετέχειν τοῦ ἀγῶνος, §3). This may have helped initiate a primary 'competition' frame, as the recurring Greek word for 'competition' implies. Within this frame, the listeners would select certain aspects of a perceived reality, such as the heroic competitions in the Homeric epics,

²⁹ On the 'Olympic Dream' and nationalism in China see G. Xu, *Olympic Dreams: China and Sports, 1895–2008* (Cambridge, MA, 2008), chs. 3, 8.

³⁰ Cf. Scott (n. 23), 27–30.

³¹ Hdt. 7.141.3–144.3; *SEG* 22.274 = C.W. Fornara, *Translated Documents of Greece and Rome*, vol. 1: *Archaic Times to the End of the Peloponnesian War* (Cambridge, 1983²), 53–5 (no. 55). On this subject see *CAH*², 4.540–2; Bowden (n. 26), 100–7; Fontenrose (n. 1), 124–8, 316–17; Parke and Wormell (n. 1), 1.169–72; Trampedach (n. 26), 468–9.

³² See R.M. Entman, 'Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm', *Journal of Communication* 43.4 (1993), 51–8, at 55: 'Framing in this light plays a major role in the exertion of political power, and the frame in a news text is really the imprint of power.'

³³ See Fontenrose (n. 1), 268–70; Parke and Wormell (n. 1), 2.197–200; M. Nelson, 'The first Olympic Games', in G.P. Schaus and S.R. Wenn (edd.), *Onward to the Olympics: Historical Perspectives on the Olympic Games* (Waterloo, 2007), 47–58, at 56 n. 28.

³⁴ Goffman (n. 1), 21–39 ('primary frameworks'), 40–82 ('keys and keyings'), 345–77 ('breaking frame'). See also E. Günther and S. Günther (edd.), *Frames and Framing in Antiquity*, 2 vols. (Changchun, 2022–3).

notably the funeral games for Patroclus in the *Iliad*.³⁵ Be that as it may, the frame concentrates on the civic enthusiasm for competition, which bears a resemblance to the ancient customs established by mythical figures (τὰ ἀρχαία νόμιμα, §2), but which has no essential difference from the human relationship in warfare. Deference to the elite opinion does not come automatically, and it is likely that Lycurgus intends to muddle through by repeating a confirmative response from the Delphic oracle to the decision made beforehand by the political elites. The Peloponnesians strongly resist his idea, or framing, of ‘competition’ (οὐκ ἄγαν δὲ προσιεμένων τὸν ἀγῶνα, §5), and the second consultation is performed soon after a disaster strikes. In this phase Lycurgus is sent to ask for an end to a pestilence (τοῦ λοιμοῦ παύλαν καὶ ἴασίν τινα, §5), not to the *stasis*. The Pythia delivers the second response in hexameters (§6):

ὦ γῆς ἀκρόπολιν πάσης Πελοπηίδα κλεινὴν
ναίοντες πρέσβεις τε βροτῶν πάντων καὶ ἄριστοι,
φράζεσθ’ ἐξ ἐμέθεν χρησμόν θεοῦ, ὅτι κεν εἶπω.
Ζεὺς ὑμῖν μῆνιν τελετῆς ἔχει ἦν διέχρησεν,
οὔνεκ’ ἀτιμάζοντες Ὀλύμπια πασιάνακτος
Ζηγός—τοῦ πρώτος μὲν ἰδρύσατο καὶ θέτο τιμὴν
Πεῖσος, καὶ μετὰ τόνδε Πέλοψ, ὅτε δὴ μόλεν αἶαν
Ἑλλάδα, θῆκε δ’ ἔπειτ’ ἔροτιν καὶ ἔπαθλα θανόντι
Οἰνομάῳ, τρίτατος δ’ ἐπὶ τοῖς πάσις Ἀμφιτρώουτος
Ἡρακλῆς ἐτέλεσσε ἔροτιν καὶ ἀγῶν’ ἐπὶ μήτρῳ
Τανταλίδῃ Πέλοπι φθιμένῳ, τὸν δήποθεν ὑμεῖς
λείπετε καὶ τελετὴν ἧς χωσάμενος κατὰ θυμὸν
ὄρσε κακὴν λιμὸν παρὰ τοῖς καὶ λοιμόν, ὃν ἔστι
παῦσαι ἀνορθώσαντας ἐορτὴν τῷ πάλιν αὐθις.

O you who dwell on the Pelopian acropolis, famous throughout the entire earth, and best ambassadors of all mortal kind, take heed of this godly prophecy from me, which I deliver. Zeus has wrath against you regarding the rite, which he has nursed, because you dishonour the Olympics of omnipotent Zeus—which first Pisis founded and placed in honour; and after him Pelops, when he came to the land of Hellas, then established a festival and prizes for the dead Oenomaus; and third after them Heracles the son of Amphitryon performed a festival and competition for his deceased maternal uncle, the Tantalid Pelops, but now you entirely neglect this competition and rite. So he grows angry in his heart, and has stirred up a baneful famine and a pestilence against you, and to stop it, you must reinstate the festival for him once again.

In this passage, ‘rite’ (τελετή × 2) and the act of performing rites (τελεῖν) add an extra element to the ‘ancient customs’ (τὰ ἀρχαία νόμιμα) in the first oracular consultation, and things divine are much more involved. The oracle is placed within what counts as a ‘festival’ frame, and, contrary to the ‘competition’ frame, associates the Olympic Games with the human–divine relationship to substitute for the previous oracular utterance that purports to resolve human disputes. Regarding the second oracular consultation and response, Fontenrose argues that they occur as a result of neglecting the first response, which incurs the wrath of Zeus. Rather, plague and famine trigger a frame change, and it is for this reason that, after Lycurgus has inquired of the god in more detail about the prophecies in his third visit to Delphi (§7), the Peloponnesians receive this oracle (§8) within the new ‘festival’ frame.³⁶ Elsewhere in the fragments attributable to Phlegon, we find an allegation that a festival would, as a cure, bring plagues, pestilences

³⁵ Hom. *Il.* 23.258–897. Cf. 11.689–702 and Strabo 8.3.30 for a possible allusion to the Olympic Games; Scanlon (n. 6), 63 and *passim*; Roller (n. 13), 449.

³⁶ Pace Fontenrose (n. 1), 268–9.

and diseases to an end.³⁷ To validate this point, one is tempted to mention a legendary version that associates the festival of City Dionysia with the worship of the god. The story goes that (perhaps) in the time of Pisistratus a disease struck the males in their privy parts as a punishment for showing a lack of respect for Dionysus, and after consulting a certain oracle, the Athenians honoured the god and held a phallic procession to commemorate their misfortune. Only by performing these rites, it seems, the god-sent disease could be cured.³⁸

The divine anger deserves our close attention, since very rarely does *μῆνις* occur in the oracular corpus from Delphi.³⁹ Scholars have long neglected this emotional display, in part because the first two lines of the oracular utterance seem to have forced *μῆνις* out of a cardinal position.⁴⁰ These opening lines should be treated as a dramatic proclamation that brings the audience to the act of listening.⁴¹ We should instead explore the precise way in which the divine anger is experienced among the Greeks; that is, how they respond to its destructive power depending on the perceived realities and belief systems. The 'epic anger', *μῆνις*, is easily distinguished from *ὀργή*, *θυμός* and their cognates. For not only has the wrathful Achilles been at the fore of European literature, but so too has the anger of affronted deities that inflicts agonies (plague, famine, etc.) on human beings throughout the Homeric epics and their successors.⁴² In the *Olympiads*, therefore, *μῆνις* provides a kind of motivating force, and is the keyword of the oracular utterance to strike a chord in the hearts of the listeners.⁴³ The divine anger, as it were, inspires fear and hits the nerve, especially in times of terror, so as to influence thinking and suggest remedies among the Peloponnesians. For our purposes, the use of *μῆνις* functions to change the tone of a dialogue in the process of framing and calls to mind 'key and keying' in Goffman's theory. This metaphorical, if not perplexing, concept is defined as follows:

I refer here to the set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else. The process of transcription can be called keying. A rough musical analogy is intended.⁴⁴

³⁷ *FGrHist* 257 F 40.1.1 (referring to the Secular Games of Rome). See also McNerney (n. 1), ad loc.

³⁸ Σ Ar. *Ach.* 243a: see also H.W. Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians* (London, 1977), 126; C. Sourvinou-Inwood, 'Something to do with Athens: Tragedy and ritual', in R.G. Osborne and S. Hornblower (edd.), *Ritual, Finance, Politics: Athenian Democratic Accounts Presented to David Lewis* (Oxford, 1994), 269–90, at 270. For the plague as a consequence of pollution (*miasma*) in the consulting city, see Parker (n. 26), 94.

³⁹ The indexes in Parke and Wormell (n. 1), 2.250 and in Andersen (n. 23), 175 yield only this result.

⁴⁰ Fontenrose (n. 1), 180.

⁴¹ Cf. Aesch. *Pers.* 249; Soph. *Aj.* 859, *OT* 1223; Eur. *Hel.* 1593, *IT* 1386, *Phoen.* 1225.

⁴² See Hom. *Il.* 1.1–9, 43–75, 5.178, *Od.* 2.66, 5.146–7; *Hom. Hymn Dem.* 254, 305–12; Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.802–3; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1.38.2; Lucian, *Vera Historia* 2.20; Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.9; [Aeschin.] *Ep.* 1.2; Lib. *Or.* 32.23; L.C. Muellner, *The Anger of Achilles: Mēnis in Greek Epic* (Ithaca and London, 1996), 15, 99–102. A common explanation is that *μῆνις* is mainly associated with the divine: LSJ s.v. *μῆνις* A; D. Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature* (Toronto, 2006), 48. Aristophanes, for example, employs *ὀργή* to describe Pericles' wrath against Megara whilst comparing him to the Olympian Zeus: Ar. *Ach.* 530–4 = Fornara (n. 31), 141 (no. 123B). But see D.L. Cairns, 'Ethics, ethology, terminology: Iliadic anger and the cross-cultural study of emotion', in S. Braund and G.W. Most (edd.), *Ancient Anger: Perspectives from Homer to Galen* (Cambridge and New York, 2003), 11–49, at 31–2 for the manifestation of *μῆνις* among mortals.

⁴³ On *μῆνις* as a 'taboo word' see Cairns (n. 42), 32 n. 93; Muellner (n. 42), 186–94.

⁴⁴ Goffman (n. 1), 43–4. See also Farena (n. 27), 145 n. 51.

By alluding to the divine anger, Lycurgus/Phlegon promotes a particular problem definition and commends a solution to it: the Peloponnesians are keyed up to understand the Olympic Games within a rearranged, transformed, ‘festival’ frame, and eventually hold the festival to conciliate divine powers.⁴⁵ Two points require further notice. First, in a typically Greek way, the honour-words, ἀτιμάζειν and τιμή (§6), are linked with the ‘anger’ theme to highlight the violation of what Goffman may call the ‘sacred self’.⁴⁶ In the Aristophanes scholia, too, the cause of a disease is interpreted in like manner: Dionysus cherished wrath (μηνίσσαντος) and brought evil upon the Athenians because he was not received with due honour (μετὰ τιμῆς). Second, the reference to θυμός is a surprise, inasmuch as in the oracular corpus from Delphi this word usually connotes a firm and confident spirit that encourages the enquirers to take actions.⁴⁷ More arresting still is that Phlegon himself uses it elsewhere to describe young girls with ‘fresh-budding minds’.⁴⁸ The expression κατὰ θυμόν may raise the question of the inauthenticity of the oracular utterance, but it can be understood strategically rather than literally. Since θυμός is universally recognized as ‘associating psychological activity with air and breath’, Lycurgus/Phlegon makes the emotional display of Zeus more evocative.⁴⁹ Assuming its final shape of a divine intervention, the μῆνις-sentence acquires in the divinatory dialogue the meaning ‘Now, I am really serious about this’, as an example illustrated by Goffman of (re)keying the flow of words: that is, maintaining the existing patterns between ‘notes’ (elements of speech) but signalling a change in the tone or significance of the dialogue.⁵⁰

3. FRAME CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY

It is no accident that, Phlegon writes, after Lycurgus’ third visit to Delphi, the Peloponnesians ‘entrusted to the Eleans the establishment of the competition at Olympia and the announcement of a truce to the cities’ (ἐπέτρεψαν τοῖς Ἡλείοις ἀγῶνα πθένα τῶν Ὀλυμπίων καὶ ἐκεχειρίαν ἀγγέλλειν ταῖς πόλεσιν, §8). By ring composition, Phlegon stretches back intelligently to the opening section and keeps pace with the literary tradition of privileging Iphitus and the Eleans in the re-establishment of the Olympic Games. The closing sections of the proem are adorned

⁴⁵ Cf. Entman (n. 32), 52.

⁴⁶ E. Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior* (New York, 1967), 32. See also Cairns (n. 42), 39–41, to which this point is due.

⁴⁷ Such as courage, and hence ‘spiritedness’ (τὸ θυμοειδές): cf. Hdt. 7.140.3; Plut. *Thes.* 24.5; Paus. 8.9.4; Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 6.3.1 = Porph. *De philosophia ex oraculis haurienda* 171 Wolff; see also Parke and Wormell (n. 1), nos. 94, 154, 163 and 470. On θυμός as a male ideal see C.A. Faraone, ‘Thumos as masculine ideal and social pathology in ancient Greek magical spells’, in S. Braund and G.W. Most (edd.), *Ancient Anger: Perspectives from Homer to Galen* (Cambridge and New York, 2003), 144–62; for further discussions see Cairns (n. 42), 21; P.W. Ludwig, ‘Anger, eros, and other political passions in ancient Greek thought’, in R.K. Balot (ed.), *A Companion to Greek and Roman Political Thought* (Malden, MA, 2009), 294–307, at 298–301; K. Kalimtzis, *Taming Anger: The Hellenic Approach to the Limitations of Reason* (London, 2012), ch. 1. There is one attestation of ὀργή in the corpus, but in this case it is used to describe an enquirer who treats his son harshly: *Suda* δ 1145 Adler = Aelian fr. 106 Domingo-Forasté with Fontenrose (n. 1), 351; Parke and Wormell (n. 1), 2.189–90 (no. 468).

⁴⁸ Cf. *FGrHist* 257 F 36.10a = Phlegon, *Mir.* 10A.472 Stramaglia: ὄσσα ἐν ἡλικίῃ νεοθηλέα θυμὸν ἔχουσιν with Shannon-Henderson (n. 1), ad loc. A search in the *TLG* database yields no further attestations of θυμός in Phlegon.

⁴⁹ Cf. D.L. Cairns, ‘thymos’, in *OCD*⁴.

⁵⁰ Cf. Goffman (n. 1), 502.

with pairs of oracular consultations and responses, and Iphitus is said to have paid two visits to Delphi to confirm, respectively, the Elean supervision of the Olympic Games (§9) and putting wreaths on the Olympic victors (§10).⁵¹ These seem immaterial to the specific focus of frame analysis, but the word 'competition' (ἀγών) marks a transition from the process of framing to the ultimate performances, or institutionalization, of the Olympic Games. The 'Elis' theme serves as a supplement to the 'Sparta' theme and indicates that frame and framing play a significant role in socio-political behaviours and even affect institutions. It is after the institutionalization of the Olympic Games that the overlap between warfare and sport becomes a cultural phenomenon in Sparta.⁵² This may have led some scholars to suppose that the Olympic stadion race 'originated as a run to the altar of Zeus', and others to describe it analogously as a training for 'run up and stab'.⁵³ The overlap exists not just in early Greek thought, but also in the minds of the Athenians down to the Classical period. For example, despite the egalitarianism in democratic Athens, ordinary people were inclined to support elite athletes as if they were warriors.⁵⁴ It is justified to cite here Vernant, an exponent of the *polis*-religion model, to show the impact of framing on policy deliberation and its potential for the wider studies in structuralism and institutionalism.

War in classical Greece is an *agôn*. It takes the form of an organized competition that rules out both the fight to the death to annihilate the enemy as a social and religious being, and conquest designed to absorb him totally. It is related to the great Panhellenic Games in which rivalries are played out peacefully in a framework of rules that are in many respects similar. Those who take part in the Games confront each other in the name of the same city-states as those that go to war against each other. The fact that the protagonists are the same, as is the structure of these two institutions, makes warfare and the Games as it were the two opposite sides of one and the same social phenomenon. All military operations had to be suspended for the duration of the Games.⁵⁵

I turn finally to frame (dis)continuity in the context of being Greek under Rome. It has been argued in section 2 of this article that the perceived realities—warfare and plague—initiate the process of framing and frame change. Goffman refers to the development of New Comedy (and its Latin counterparts) under the Roman domination as an example of 'frame change through time'. He points out that many artists pandered so much to the low tastes of the Romans as to present sexual displays and real executions on the stage. Luckily though, Goffman seems to imply, this change has been 'sufficiently slow and separate'.⁵⁶ While some scholars note that Phlegon gives more space to recent events throughout the *Olympiads*, the central prominence of Lycurgus in the proem has from the very beginning shown a historical perspective.⁵⁷

⁵¹ The oracle is not named 'Delphic' in these passages, but the identification is almost a matter of course: McNerney (n. 1), ad loc.

⁵² Cf. Plut. *Lyc.* 24.4 χοροὶ δὲ καὶ θαλία καὶ εὐωχία καὶ διατριβαὶ περὶ τε θήρας καὶ γυμνάσια καὶ λέσχας τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον ἐπεχωρίαζον, ὅτε μὴ στρατευόμενοι τύχοιεν.

⁵³ See Instone (n. 13), 78–82.

⁵⁴ D.M. Pritchard, *Sport, Democracy and War in Classical Athens* (Cambridge and New York, 2013), ch. 5.

⁵⁵ J.-P. Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece* (New York, 1990), 42.

⁵⁶ Goffman (n. 1), 54. Cf. Mart. *Spect.* 9; Apul. *Met.* 10.34; Tert. *Apol.* 15.5; F. Fellini's film *Satyricon* (1969); R. MacMullen, *Changes in the Roman Empire: Essays in the Ordinary* (Princeton, 1990), 206; J.P. Sullivan, 'The social ambience of Petronius' *Satyricon* and *Fellini Satyricon*', in M.M. Winkler (ed.), *Classical Myth and Culture in the Cinema* (Oxford and New York, 2001), 258–71, at 262.

⁵⁷ S. Swain, *Hellenism and Empire: Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World, AD 50–250* (Oxford, 1996), 78 n. 33.

The cultural memory and worship of Lycurgus loomed large in the Roman period, and literary sources and visual evidence indicate that he was, back then in Sparta, second to none after Heracles.⁵⁸ It is also worth asking whether the oracular passages may have not met Hadrian's literary taste, particularly his interest in poetry and composing oracle (for example, to deify Antinous after his premature death).⁵⁹ Be that as it may, a close examination of the *Olympiads* casts light on the two sides of the same coin. Phlegon, one may argue, is completely obsessed with Greek elements. In the oracular quotations, φιλία (§9) reflects a community-oriented aspect of 'civic friendship'; ὁμόνοια, meaning 'political reconciliation', can be traced to the narrative tradition of the Trojan War (Isoc. 10.67); and μῆνις exhibits a tendency to Homerize.⁶⁰ 'From where Homer was born, and whose son was he?' (Πόθεν Ὅμηρος καὶ τίνοϛ;), Hadrian once asked the Pythia.⁶¹ It is hard not to consider the philhellenic emperor's enquiry as a fair representation of frame (dis)continuity under a multicultural background. The same may be said of Phlegon, perhaps an attendant at the Roman court, but certainly an important Greek writer in the Empire of Letters.⁶²

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⁵⁸ E.g. Paus. 3.14.8, 3.16.6. Further on this subject see A. Hupfloher, *Kulte im kaiserzeitlichen Sparta: eine Rekonstruktion anhand der Priesterämter* (Berlin, 2000), 178–82; N.M. Kennell, 'Spartan cultural memory in the Roman period', in A. Powell (ed.), *A Companion to Sparta* (Hoboken, NJ, 2018), 643–62, at 648–9.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Hist. Aug. Hadr.* 14.7–8 with Birley (n. 3), 356 n. 38; Syme (n. 16), 162, 164. Notice, too, Hadrian's visit to Delphi in 125: S. Swain, 'Plutarch, Hadrian, and Delphi', *Historia* 40 (1991), 318–30.

⁶⁰ If the second, 'Homeric' oracular response is forged by Lycurgus, it also reflects to some extent his role in the early reception and transmission of the epics: cf. Plut. *Lyc.* 4.4–5.

⁶¹ Cf. *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi* 35; *Anth. Pal.* 14.102 with Fontenrose (n. 1), 263–4; Parke and Wormell (n. 1), 2.188 (no. 465).

⁶² On this conception, see A. König, R. Langlands and J. Uden, 'Introduction', in A. König, R. Langlands and J. Uden (edd.), *Literature and Culture in the Roman Empire, 96–235: Cross-Cultural Interactions* (Cambridge, 2020), 1–33, at 21–2.