

Gerald H. Groom III. *Torches, Thieves, and Tinder: Recurring Themes in Mythical Origins of Fire*. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S degree. May, 2020. 76 pages.
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Fire is one of the basic forces of the world. We cook with it, we see with it, and we use it for just about everything central to our lives. But how did we get it? Fire can be stolen or gifted, clutched in claws or carried in hands. Myths regarding the origin of fire help to explain some of the potential thoughts and reasoning that we can find globally, to understand what people were thinking about fire around the world.

Eighteen origin of fire myths from around the world were examined using content analysis methodology to discover similarities across stories. Findings include the possible reasons behind the theft of fire, an examination of why theft might be lightly punished, and the roles of animals in fire myths.

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TORCHES, THEIVES, AND TINDER: RECURRING THEMES IN MYTHICAL
ORIGINS OF FIRE

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Introduction

Fire. One of the primordial elements, recognized in the classical four element system of ancient Greece, the Wuxing five element system of China, and the Buddhist Mahabhuta arrangement, among many others, as being a force of change and energy, activity and heat, burning away at its foundations of what it was set to even as it heats what's close. And yet, how do we see fire, in our mythologies? The forces of fire are easy to understand, but by what forces did fire come to be originally? A gift from the gods, perhaps? Or was it taken as spillage from a travelling star? Or did the gods keep it for themselves, until it was stolen from them and taken into the hands of mortals? Fire, one of the primordial forces regardless of the system you choose to look at, is something key to our lives throughout history. We used it in the open to cook our food and keep away predators as campfires, and now we cook our food in microwaves and keep away predators with flashlights and hunting. But at the core, even our modern applications of technology still bring us back to the same themes of fire: a light, as heat, a defense, an attack, a source of safety and comfort. A gun does not scare a predator quite so easily as a burning brand, held aloft in the dark, nor does it give such comfort in the cold as a campfire or a warm home.

It's only sensible, then, to wonder how fire has been seen in myths and legends. Has it always been a source of comfort, or was it feared for its power? How did it come to be in the hands of mortals, this warming light, this source of what we find

good? And what is the nature of fire's origin? Divine, terrestrial, or infernal; given or stolen; good or ill? How we see fire in our myths can only serve to shape how we see it in our everyday lives, and much as any story, what we hear about it at first is the impression that we're left with every time we see it afterwards. It's the nature of this curiosity, as driving a force as heat itself, to look at what our cultures throughout the world have said of fire, and to come to a better understanding of what we view fire as being, and perhaps answer the question of what we, as humans, think fire is at its most primal and primordial state, when the first light was kindled.

Literature Review

Research into the myths themselves isn't new. The two most notable examples of this would be the ATU, or Aarne-Thompson-Uther Index, and the Motif-Index of Folk-Literature, also called the Thompson's Motif-Index, which are major examples of research done by folklorists to categorize recurring themes and tropes that appear in folklore, though each of those texts goes about their organization in a different way. For a more local, and similar, text, the SILS library here at UNC-CH has both editions of *The Storyteller's Sourcebook*, both authored by Margaret Read MacDonald, with Brian Sturm also contributing as an author to the second edition. In that text, for example, under the section A for mythological motifs, the classification A1414 pertains specifically to motifs regarding the origin of fire, while A1415.2 pertains to motifs that directly involve the theft of fire. Since each text of the Sourcebook does use the entire English alphabet, A-Z, to categorize the types of motifs, as well as including some examples of myths or folktales that feature those motifs it can safely be said that there is a great deal of research into the motifs themselves, as they stand in regards to the overall world of folktales. However, unlike this paper's purpose, each motif only tends to have one or two texts that it refers to as examples, and the sources of those texts are scattered around the world, instead of this paper's purpose, to take a single motif and look more closely into how it is told, expanded upon, and changed in various locations around the world.

While there aren't as many tales about the origin of fire as I'd hoped while searching, indicating that the subject might be under-researched, there are some traces of research into various origins of fire, ranging from the mythological to the historical. Martina Bucková, for example, wrote an article entitled *Variations of Myths Concerning the Origin of Fire in Eastern Polynesia* about a number of Pacific Island cultures that share a similar story of Maui, who was the one that would end up acquiring fire, and had some differing variations in terms of how he got the fire, if there was punishment, who his family was (or if one was mentioned), and so on, which is an excellent example of how even myths in a similar location can have a range of variations (Bucková, 2009). Within these variations, which can include details like the number of family members and the genders of some of the major characters within the stories, like the fire deity, there are almost always a few constants. Chief among these are that the fire deity, to whom Maui is almost always related, will give Maui a source of fire that he will extinguish, because his goal for getting fire from his ancestor, said deity, is not to get the fire itself, but instead to acquire the secret of making fires from them, in order to have that knowledge for himself, and usually then pass it onto humans. Also commonly recurring, according to Bucková, is that Maui causes the fire deity to come to harm or harms them himself in his pursuit of the secret, which is accompanied by the fact that Maui causing the harm is never accidental, and the fact that Maui's parents are the ones who know the secrets of how to get to the underworld where the fire deity lives.

Stephen J. Pyne (2016) wrote another article, entitled *Fire in the Mind*, which took a look at how fire, as a conceptual existence, was responsible for influencing

mythology, theology, philosophy, and cultural direction, and how fire's myriad of forms were responsible for each of these influences, as well as providing examples that could then be used to link to myths, or correlate those themes with other examples. He breaks the various relationships of fire into a few different categories, of which three are important to this paper: "Fire and mythology," "Fire and religion," and "Fire and natural philosophy." From the section on mythology, Pyne reflects on the connection between fire, and how it forms the core power of humanity, even in myth. He reflects upon two versions of the Prometheus myth, one by Hesiod and the other by Plato, both of which give different explanations for how fire came to humans, with both giving valid reasons for why fire is so important, as well as mentioning the vast variety of myths from various regions of Europe that endured for centuries or longer, until the Greco-Roman standard became so ubiquitous that most of the others have been primarily forgotten unless sought out, and yet all shared themes of who got the fire, and why it was being controlled. However, the bulk of the relevant text of Pyne's paper comes from the other two sections I mentioned.

In the "Fire and religion" section, Pyne mentions some of the origins of the worship of fire and the sun, bringing up the Egyptian Ra, the Hindu Agni, and the Canaanite Baal among others, but a large amount of the section in question is dedicated to the Hebrew fire traditions that exist in the Old Testament. Among them are included the ideas of sacred fires that Yahweh commonly manifested in, such as the burning bush of Moses or the throne of flames that David saw the deity sitting upon in a vision. Pyne also ties many of these traditions and perspectives back to older traditions, like the sacred hearth of Hestia for the Greeks, or sacred flames

found in the Aeneid, while also explaining how those older traditions were modernized and made smaller in the transition to popularized Christianity. In the section on “Fire and natural philosophy,” however, the view takes a turn slightly towards the abstract, though no less important, as it gives a potential set of explanations for why fire is considered so important to us, at a very primal level. One of those ideas is one that was mentioned in the introduction: the idea of the four “natural elements” of the world as espoused by the Ionians and marshalled by Empedocles into a unified idea, composed of earth, air, water, and, of course, fire. But fire was also considered important, not just by the ancient masters, but by those that came after, as the element of change and life. Fire breathes and eats, is born small and grows larger and older, but with age shrinks and becomes weaker. Fire is birthed and dies, and in its presence, change occurs, making ashes of wood, making metal of ore, cooking out impurities of food and water. Alchemists used it heavily, and divided it among many other elements, like sulfur and oils, and saw its actions as forming a potential source for the other three elements, when a smoky fire boiled water to steam and turned wood and coal to ash. And as the Enlightenment came, fire was reduced from what it was once seen as, but simply took on new forms from new ideas. Fire, as Pyne argues, has become the ultimate shapeshifter, one that exists in a myriad of forms and shapes, unthought-of in its base form in most cases, and yet still the great root of change.

Of the various examples I found, though, the most important example that is also seemingly the oldest I’ve seen thus far in my review of existing literature, Sir James G. Frazer published *Myths of the Origins of Fire* in 1930, which he states to be an

essay, but is truly a roughly 240 page text on the origin of fire myths from different cultures and continents, some long and some short, but all covering some variations of the myths, as well as looking at the different myths themselves, both historically, in regards to the sections on ancient Greek and Indian myths (to be distinct, Indian in this case referring to the subcontinent of India), and contemporarily, in regards to the information and knowledge as it stood in 1930, as well as providing a summary of his essay. This volume could be considered lacking in some places, which modern folklore research might make up for, and also has some inconsistencies in places, such as where names for cultures and regions in the modern era no longer reflect the times in which Frazer was writing. Frazer's book is a mixture of a catalog of myths and an examination of the various myths. In the book, he does examine the myths that take place in similar regions, but usually only in cases of ones or twos. While this is not wholly dissimilar to some of the sections later in this paper, his eventual method of synthesis looks for different information and comes to different results than this paper and its corpus were intended to.

Frazer's examination, in particular, looks at the stories and reflects them back upon the physical. He looks at what he refers to as the three ages, which are the "fireless age," the "age of fire used," and the "age of fire kindled," and how the stories that he collected reflect, primarily, the second and third ages, with the stories themselves sometimes relating about the first age in their introductions. The point of the stories, however, is always to move away from an age where fire isn't accessible or used, and into one where fire is, if not kindled freely, at least available for people to use to cook food and light their way. In this way, Frazer's paper focuses more on

physical elements than the storytelling, which is the primary concern of this paper.

The paper that follows looks at how, in these stories, certain elements recur, even countries or continents apart, and what those recurring elements can tell us about the stories that we still tell, stories where the world was still young and the first fires were still being made to bring humans to an even greater whole.

Method

The first step of the research was to decide what was defined as acceptable as being a myth related to an “origin of fire.” After a number of revisions due to problems involved with finding myths that directly followed the event patterns I was searching for, which will be elaborated upon later in this section, I come to define myths involving the origin of fire as such: “Fire origin myths are stories that relate the creation of fire as a constant in the world, defining it as a natural element and part of creation. This can include stories that either involve the creation of fire directly, stories where fire comes into the possession of a majority of mortals by any means, or stories where both elements are present, so long as fire does not pre-exist in the former case, or is not already available to most mortals in the latter.” This definition does still leave some gaps, which will be elaborated upon in the next section, but the summary of the problem is that some mythologies seem to lack translated or available stories that fulfil even these criteria. It does, however, provide us with a wide enough scope that we can include both stories where the universe, or Earth specifically, is freshly created and the ordering of creation is happening, and stories where the world is being properly made or established, be that by the creation of living beings or simply by establishing what will be part of the world, and fire becomes part of that establishing. “Mortals” is used here because not all of the myths that were accessed and used as part of the corpus for this paper involved humans; requiring human participation would remove many important stories from consideration. Since no

stories used in my corpus had fire traveling in the reverse process (that is, exiting mortal hands to come into the possession of gods or demons), the use of moving to mortal possession from elsewhere was clear enough to explain what was being done, while still limiting who was getting the fire.

I also felt the need to define what I mean by “fire,” which seems like a simple concept until you’re dealing with myths. Fire, for the purposes of this paper, is something that can be controlled and used by mortal hands, or other methods for animal characters. It is not the primal fire of the sun, which rages uncontrolled in the sky and burns those who seek it, but the fire of torches that can light homes and caves. It is not the wildfire that blazes out of control and turns grasslands and forests to ash, it is the fire of hearths that warm a home and cook food. The fire that this paper looks to deal with isn’t wild and untamed, at least not by the end. This paper deals with fire that can be controlled and used, fire that can be corralled by stone and dirt, and fed safely to grow its blaze in times where more is needed. It is the fire as tool that is being considered here: torches, campfires, cooking fires, firebrands, piles of kindling, roaring forges. This is not to say that there’s no mention of primal fire, because some mythologies seem to only consider the origin of fire as being their primal fire, but the primal fires mentioned in this paper are going to be exceptions, as opposed to rules, to demonstrate the difference between those myths and myths more appropriate to the paper within the same regional categories.

Until research was interrupted by a major pandemic in early 2020, the corpus of texts I was using was originally divided into three major categories with subcategories: “Research Texts,” “Storybooks,” and “Mythological Anthologies.”

Over time, this ended up becoming the much simpler pair of “Academic Texts” and “Nonacademic Texts” for ease of sorting, although the latter still had multiple subdivisions related to what kind of nonacademic text it was. To find relevant texts for research, database searching was done using the keywords “fire,” “mythology,” “origin,” “fire origin,” and “fire mythology” in some combination or permutation of terms. Texts that seemed relevant from the title and a short description or abstract were marked down and set aside for further review. For academic texts, this was mostly done through major research databases such as MLA International Bibliography, the ATLA Religion Database, and Library & Information Science Source, all accessed using UNC permissions. For non-academic texts, searching was done through major search engines such as Google, as well as through library-specific databases in the local area, including UNC, NC State, Duke, and the local public libraries in Orange and Wake Counties. Most of the textual titles, as opposed to research articles, fell under Library of Congress classification class BL, “Mythology, religions, rationalism;” but others were found under classes GR, “Folklore,” and PN, “Literature (General),” with picture books of mythologies for younger readers generally falling under PZ, “Fiction and juvenile belles lettres.” The exact reason for the variation of classes for non-picture books, I suspect, had to deal with the primary subject matter of the text in question.

I also discovered additional resources serendipitously, like aggregate mythologies that might carry multiple variations on different myths from regions of the world. These are not all, of course, direct myths relating to fire, which made some of the results misleading at first. To give an example, while Michel Faber’s *The Fire Gospel* (2010)

seemed promising at first, attesting to be a combination of a retelling of the Prometheus myth linked with Christian mythology, it fails to contain any actual relation to fire mythologies besides the tenuous connection to Prometheus. Other resources, however, were part of those myth aggregate sources, be they books, newspaper articles, or other resources that mention targets for further exploration, like a few lines about a Native American myth about Coyote and the other animals bringing fire back, as mentioned as part of a bulk of stories from some older publications (Mundall, 1974) which means that one of my possible routes for sources became reviewing older book reviews, if they've been indexed, to search for transliterations of various versions of fire myths. While time ran out to explore many of these avenues of discovery for this paper, it does indicate that much more can be done in the discovery of minor regional differences of nearly identical myths.

After finding the texts and setting aside an initial corpus, I went beyond checking the title, keywords, and abstract or summary to find the relevant sections of the story texts. Those that had turned up as false positives were discarded, because they didn't contain useful information or sources. The most common cause for false positives was texts that dealt with individual keywords (i.e, fire and mythology), but not the combined concept of "fire mythology." Other sources were discarded because they used fire mythology in post-origin states, in this case meaning that they related to fire mythology, but didn't deal with fire origin mythology, or more plainly that fire had already been created and the text in question was examining what was being done with it after that fire had already been acquired. Still more were discarded as pieces of comparative mythology, usually contrasting fire myths against flood myths, but those

also usually fell under the post-origin problem as well. What I didn't discard were scraps of myths that hinted at other myths or hinted at properties that weren't covered in the texts in question. While not quite useful on their own, they did at least give a basis for further research, and allowed me some room to make inferences and logical assumptions, though I will be clear when stating if I'm inferring or not. I notably didn't impose any form of length requirement on the myths that I decided to use. My reasoning for this is that myths can be any length so long as they fulfill the following requirements: The story has a logical chain of events that happen to the characters involved; the story could serve as the kernel of a further expanded folktale; the basic elements of a story, for example a rising action and a climax, are present. What I needed were not, after all, necessarily full stories, but stories that could fit with my definition and allow me to derive data from their text.

Once I had my corpus of 18 stories, I went looking for a few different categories of data. My original searches were just to find relevant terms that would allow me to mark the stories I chose as usable or no, in which case I would again prune them from my corpus of works. Once that pruning was done, and my terms were both found and compressed to as far as I felt would still provide enough information without overloading on categories, I was left with six major categories for what data had been gathered. Other pieces of information that might be important, like if both humans and animals were present, which wasn't always the case but did affect a main category, were marked down as well, but not considered quite as important as the primary six, and were mostly left as notes instead of coded into categories, and some

of my pruned notes I still considered important enough to leave in the final version.

The six main categories, however, are as follows:

- 1) Did fire exist, and if so, who possessed it? This two-part question is really just linked into a single important question, and was to check and see if anybody already had fire of some kind, or if it would be made from nothing in the process of the myth.
- 2) What was the method of creating the fire? If the fire was made during the myth, or if its method of creation before the start of the story was mentioned, what was it? It feels like this is an important step in trying to discover the actual origin of fire.
- 3) Where was the fire kept? If it already existed, it had to be in a vessel or location of some kind, and if it was created, it likely had to be placed somewhere to hold it. So, what was the “original location” of the fire, as it were?
- 4) By what manner was the fire carried? Generally speaking, fire is impossible for mortals to carry in their hands, and the point of these myths is that humans, or animals, end with having access to fire. Since they can’t physically carry it, a tool of some kind has to have been used.
- 5) Who was the one that got the fire? Mortals are the most likely to be getting the fire, but what mortal is the one doing it, if it is a mortal? Who plays the most important role in the myth, is the crux of the question here. The one who actually carries the fire is, necessarily, the most important character, and so their identity becomes important in the process.
- 6) Was it stolen? Probably the most direct of the categories, this is a binary choice. There might be a bit of waffling over the decision between yes or no over the

question of if it was really a theft or not, but it all does come down to “Yes, someone stole the fire” or “No, this was not stolen.”

These are rendered on the charts that I used, and the copies of the charts in each section, as “Original Possessor,” “Method of Creation,” “Original Location,” “Method of Transport,” “Who Gathered It,” and “Was It Stolen” respectively.

Results

The results that I found were, in some ways, both surprising and not. There does seem to be a strongly trending theme of theft in the myths that I found, but it is not necessarily always from divine to mortal. Some stories did have it being taken by animals from other animals, although this did depend upon where the myth was from, or humans from other humans. At the same time, not all stories involved theft, and some simply involved the retrieval of something previously forbidden, hidden, or out of reach, while others would invoke the ideas of happy accidents, the creation of fire coming from unrelated means and creating something new. The main chart that was compiled for my general review is divided here by continent, and therefore by section, into six smaller charts for each of the six continents, excluding Antarctica. Each subheading further in this section is dedicated purely to the stories from those continents, including summaries, noted similarities and thoughts on the matter of how or why those similarities occurred, and thoughts on possible connections of these myths to other stories, events, or appearances in the natural world. To note some details about organization, Central America is being defined as part of the North American continent, and Australia is sharing space with Oceania, as most of the islands of the Pacific seem to be within that region of geographical “control”, as opposed to the control of any North American or Asian powers.

6.1 North America

Origin Culture	Continent	Original Possessor	Method of Creation	Original Location	Method of Transport	Who Gathered It	Was It Stolen	Other Notes
Chumash	North America	Sky Snake	Spit (some versions specify that Sky Snake spit a bolt of lightning).	The Gods (Divine)	Not specified	Chumash	No	There are some minor variants in this story, but it's only a small part of a larger one. The larger story has to deal with crossing a rainbow bridge to a new place to live, but the important parts for this paper are all at a very small section of the start.
Mazatec	North America	"Lady Fire"	Taken from newborn stars while the world was young	The home of "Lady Fire" (Terrestrial)	Opossum's tail	Opossum	Yes	Opossum steals the fire to give it to everyone, but it was "created" by the old woman, "Lady Fire," when everything was still being made, by taking still-hot starstuff. So, while there is a clear creator, Opossum still had to get it somehow, but it's surprising that there wasn't a fox involved. This may be the case a different regional archetype, as I'm unsure of Opossum's archetypes.
Jicarilla Apache	North America	The fireflies	Unspecified	The firepit of the fireflies (Terrestrial)	Fox turns his tail into a torch and spreads fire into the trees and bushes	Fox	Yes	Color me unsurprised that Fox, the known trickster archetype, ended up stealing something. Still, it does explain a lot of Fox's appearance in the process, as well as why most every tree and bush burns, although I also wonder what the one tree that doesn't burn is supposed to be, since it was allegedly never touched by the embers and sparks coming from Fox's flaming tail. Also burning your own tail, that's twice now in North America, with other harms happening elsewhere, burns and not. A sacrifice theme, maybe?

The Chumash story from North America actually has a significant number of details about what comes after the creation of fire, but the act of creating it is very short and simple. The humans were cold and hungry, so the Sky Snake, husband of Hutash, the creator of the Chumash, sent down a bolt of lightning to start a fire, which the people kept going in order to keep warm and cook their food (Wood, 2000). The rest of the story deals with moving the Chumash to a new home after they become too noisy in their original home, but the core point of creating the fire stops there, which seems relatively simple when compared to many of the other myths in this paper. There's no theft involved, since it was a gift, and no animals to the story, making it probably one of the shortest to tell as well, which is fitting as part of a larger story. The other two stories, however, have much more in common with each other than

with this one, which is interesting since the Chumash and Jicarilla are much closer to each other than either of them are to the Mazatec, indigenous to the southern parts of Mexico.

The Mazatec, of Mexico, and the Jicarilla Apache nation, now found in New Mexico, have very similar stories and themes, and other than the animal species and a few plot points are strikingly similar. For the Mazatec, the story goes that every animal was cold in the world, because the only one who had fire was an old woman, called Lady Fire, who had gathered her flames from the heat of the world and stars as they were still young and fresh from being made, but didn't share it with anyone. One afternoon, after Opossum told everyone that he would get fire and they should prepare to gather some, he went to her home and asked to be let in by the fire because he was freezing to death. She allowed him in, and he crept closer and closer to the fire, until he finally plunged his furred tail into it and ran out of her house, distributing the fire to everyone along his path and burning all the fur on his tail off forever, leaving opossums with the tail they have now (Austin, 2010, p.196). The Jicarilla story is similar to this, but with some differences, key of which is a lack of any humans at all. Instead, Fox went to visit the geese to learn how to cackle from them, which they agreed to if he would fly with them, the only caveat being that he had to keep his eyes closed. As they flew, and passed over the walled home of the fireflies, he opened his eyes and fell. After trading to two of them for knowledge of the way out, Fox painted himself as a medicine-man and convinced the rest of the fireflies that they should have a grand feast with a roaring fire. During the feast, he stuck his tail in the fire, and after lighting it like a torch, ran out of the fireflies' camp,

using the way out he'd learned earlier. As he ran, sparks fell from his tail, first touching the cedar he used to escape, then the other trees along his way, before he passed the fire off to a hawk, who passed it onto a crane, who spread the fire to every tree except one, unidentified, kind that will apparently never catch fire. The fireflies, meanwhile, found Fox in his burrow, and told him that his punishment was that he could never use fire (Frazer, 1930, pp.142-142).

Of the three, two are very similar, although that might be something of a regional similarity. They all involve different combinations of humans and animals, though the humans of the Opossum story seem to be relegated to the background with all the other animals, but it's the purely human-centric one that seems to involve divine intervention directly. If the Lady Fire is a deity or mortal is unclear, considering the reference to her being around when the stars were newborn, though we can likely assume that she's some form of deity. Opossum and Fox both share a trickster archetype in these stories, and both of their stories involve theft, while the Chumash story mostly just seems to be part of their original creation myth as a peoples, as opposed to the Mazatec and Jicarilla stories that apparently happen after the world and its inhabitants are settled or beginning to become settled. As a note, both Fox and Opossum suffer punishments for their theft, but the exact kind of punishment differs, even though both carried the fire the same way, using their tail as a torch. While I can only make assumptions, this might be because Fox passed off the fire, while Opossum did not. Fox's story might also explain typical fox markings, since Fox painted himself to resemble a medicine man: the markings of a red fox, native to the South-East US, are shades of white or cream fur in some places, and black in other.

6.2 South America

Origin Culture	Continent	Original Possessor	Method of Creation	Original Location	Method of Transport	Who Gathered It	Was It Stolen	Other Notes
Lingua (Enxet)	South America	Thunderbird	Burning tinder (sticks)	A hollow tree with burning sticks (Terrestrial)	Burning sticks	Unnamed Man	Yes	I thought the thunder-bird was a North American mythological animal, but I guess if it's a bird that starts storms, it's going to be called a thunder-bird. Makes sense. It is surprising, though, that the bird didn't just make more fire, since it had apparently already made it before. Did it forget? Or was its fire also stolen from someone else?
Timbe	South America	Vultures	Friction	Unknown, brought by vultures (Terrestrial)	Fire-brand	Unnamed Medicine Man	Yes	Interesting to me that the vultures didn't spot something wrong when, at the exact spot someone just tried to steal fire from them shortly previous, with the same tapir corpse still present, there just so happened to be a new hunting hut built when they came back. Especially when the vultures were apparently just men with cloaks of feathers that allowed them to fly. That makes the identification of human versus animal harder, but I'm still ruling this as a primarily mixed human-and-animal situation.
Jibaro (Shuar)	South America	Taequea, a Jibaro	Friction	Taequea's home (Terrestrial)	Hummingbird lit his tail, then used it to light a tree	Hummingbird	Yes	This one is a little weird, on the animals/humans thing. If all the Shuar could be birds at will, do they count as both roles at once? Personally, since there's an independent hummingbird that doesn't turn into a person, I'm going to say that it's mostly human characters, but the plot action is driven by an animal.

This region's stories were unique in that all of them involved, primarily, human casts with only a small number of animal inclusions. The only one where an animal made a significant difference, at least in my opinion, was the Jibaro (now known as the Shuar) myth, but avian species did play roles in all three of the myths to varying degrees. However, while the Lingua (modernly called Enxet) story had its only animal as the thunder-bird, there were many more birds in the other stories, with the property of becoming humans, which the thunder-bird didn't possess. All three of them, as well, were theft stories. Just as the Lingua story was the exception to the animals rule, the Jibaro was the exception to who did the stealing, where a bird stole from a human instead of the other way around.

In the myth of the Lingua, a man who was having no success hunting went to find some snails to eat, and observed a bird doing its own snail catching, dropping them off at a tree before going out again. The tree was also emitting a thin trickle of smoke, and when the man came to the hollow tree, he found snails on sticks, cooking over a fire. The man took some of the sticks, and brought them back to his village, where others gathered dry wood and kindled their first fire. The bird, however, came back and found its fire dead, and couldn't rekindle it. Swearing revenge against the thief, it found the village with its new fire and, now knowing where the thief was, created a thunderstorm to damage the village and terrify the villagers as retribution (Frazer, 1930, pp.123-124).

In the story of the Timbe, a bird was the only one to have fire again, but it was known that it had the fire. The king vulture was the only one with access to fire, and so the villagers resolved to steal it. They killed a tapir and let it rot for three days so that the vultures would come, and when they did, they had a firebrand with them. Shedding their cloaks, the vultures took on the shape of men and kindled a great fire before beginning to roast maggots from the corpse over it. The Timbe leapt out of hiding, trying to ambush the vultures, but they threw their cloaks back on and fled, taking all the fire with them. The Timbe then built a hunting-lodge in the same location, with the same corpse still there, and a medicine man hid inside it. This time, when the vultures came to roast the maggots, the medicine man leapt out of hiding and, as the vultures were pulling their cloaks on to escape, stole a firebrand from the flames, imparting the trees with the fire he'd stolen as the vultures flew away with the rest (Frazer, 1930, p.130).

For the Jibaro, the myth involves a single man, Taquea, who knew how to make fire but, because of his enmity for all other Jibaro except his wife and family, refused to share the secret to anyone else who came to his door as a human and, since the Jibaro could also take the shape of birds, would crush any other Jibaro that tried to steal the secret while in bird shape. A regular hummingbird, not one of the Jibaro, soaked itself in water and pretended to be freezing, and upon seeing him, the wife of Taquea picked him up off the road so that she could dry him out and make him a pet. When the hummingbird was dry enough, he whisked his tail through the flames, too small to carry a brand, and then flew out and lit part of a tree on fire, before carrying that to a human who could kindle more flames and spread fire to everyone (Frazer, 1930, pp.134-135).

The running theme in the South American myths seems to be birds. In two of the cases, the birds have the source of fire for themselves, and in the third, the bird helps to spread fire to everyone, instead of hoarding it. In every case, however, a bird is directly involved in the process of fire being obtained or distributed to people, though the species of bird was different each time. What kind of bird the Lingua's thunderbird was is unidentified, but the other two birds, vultures and hummingbirds, both fit into the stories in ways that suit them, but don't just make them another generic bird, while also emphasizing that they play different roles and demonstrate different traits. It's also worth noting that the vultures, carrion birds, were stolen from and could generally be seen as a party that should be reacted to with hostility, while the hummingbird, a species which is generally considered inoffensive to and appreciated

by humans, was happy to cooperate with people in order to help the rest of the community.

People turning into birds (or the reverse) shows up in two of the three myths, which makes me wonder if the Timbe and Jibaro had important cultural connections to, or connotations about, these specific kinds of birds, or even just to birds in general. This even, to a slightly lesser degree, applies to the Lingua, whose legend implies that every thunderstorm is a result of the thunder-bird taking his revenge for the theft of his cooking fire. In all three cases, birds seem to have a deep, cultural connection to the story of fire, but also in all three cases, there's no indication that it would need to be birds directly. I say this because, other than for purposes of ease-of-travel, there's no reason why some of these cases couldn't be substituted for terrestrial animals, whereas in other stories in my corpus, birds were necessary because they were retrieving divine fire (the general category for getting fire from "the heavens" or the sky), fire that could only ever be obtained from the sky and required wings to reach that source in the first place. For these three, the origins of the Lingua's fire is unclear before it got to the bird, but it didn't just gather or kindle more from the sun; the Timbe's fire came from the vultures, but it's also clear they could just kindle more, without having to retrieve it from the sky; and the Jibaro's fire was already being made by a man who knew the secret of it.

An interesting anomaly that I didn't include in the corpus was the story told by the Toba, or Qom, people. According to them, before any Toba walked the earth, the surface of the world was swept by a massive fire that burned everything, leaving nothing behind except itself. It's at this point where the first Toba man, their myth

stating that no Toba women existed yet, seized a firebrand from the still-roaring great flame, and carried it away, an act imitated by each successive Toba man to rise from the earth (Frazer, 1930, pp.125-126), which seems to be simultaneously, an origin of fire myth, a creation myth, and an apocalypse myth. This story serves as a rather extreme outlier for how minimalistic a story can get, but still fulfil the qualifications of these kinds of myths, possessing all of the qualities with a cast of only one generalized character (the first Toba people). The reason it was not included in a myth was because it felt more like the kernel of a larger story than a full story in and of itself, not necessarily something that would exclude it from inclusion, but less interesting and detailed than what eventually did end up in the corpus.

6.3 Asia

Origin Culture	Continent	Original Possessor	Method of Creation	Original Location	Method of Transport	Who Gathered It	Was It Stolen	Other Notes
China	Asia	Unlit/No Fire	A bird pecking a tree	Terrestrial (?)	Not Specified	A "Wise Sage"	No	While there was no "original creator," per se, the sage did see a bird make fire by pecking a dry tree. Also, while his journey (the story does use a male pronoun) took him "beyond the bounds of the moon and the sun," we can assume he was probably still on Earth, or at least some terrestrial surface.
Buriat	Asia	Tengri	Unspecified	The Heavens (Divine)	Not Specified	Swallow	Yes	I have to admit, it's impressive, all the feats birds seem to do in these myths. Stealing from a deity that appears to literally be the sky, Tengri, is pretty high on that list. It's also nice to see bird myths where humans swear to never harm their nests or eggs afterwards as repayment.
Nias	Asia	The Belas (evil spirits, singular "Bela")	Unspecified	The homes of Belas (Terrestrial)	Learning of secrets	An Unnamed Man	No	While there is not theft, this myth does involve trickery. However, since the fire is not actually stolen, it's marked as a "No" for theft. That's because, while the secret of making fire was, indeed, stolen, the substance of fire itself wasn't. I also wonder if the Belas were hostile before this or not, since they're called evil spirits but seem cordial in the myth.

Asian myths seem to mix the humans and animals in their stories, depending on the region. The more well-known Chinese culture seems to be an exception to this, as the one myth I could find, in Frazer's *Myths* (1930, pp.103-104), had a human inspired by an animal, but the animal played no active role in gathering or making the fire, simply serving as an inspiration on how to do things. In the story, a sage who walked "beyond the bounds of moon and sun" saw a bird pecking at a tree, which ignited a fire, and inspired the sage to do so himself and, presumably, bring this knowledge back to China. This contrasts directly with the Buryat myth (Frazer, 1930, pp.104-105), from southern Siberia, where a swallow took pity on mankind, who were cold and could not cook food, and stole fire from Tengri, the sky deity. Tengri shot at the swallow and pierced its tail, explaining why the tail is parted to this day, but did not kill it, and when the swallow brought fire back to mankind, they swore off

killing swallows. These are cases where the two binary states of the fifth main category are at one of their most unclear: In the Buryat, the humans form the impetus, but all actions are rooted purely upon the actions of the animal character; whereas in the Chinese, the animal creates the inspiration, but the actions of bringing back the fire and being able to create it for most mortals seems to rest purely upon the human sage. Would either of these be considered to fall under the “both” category? Or would just one of them, or neither of them? From the criteria I provided, neither of them would count as a “both” case, the Buryat being animal-driven and the Chinese being human-driven. While elements of the other choice are present, neither of them forms a core part of the story. In the Chinese, the bird only serves as an example of what the technique can be, while in the Buryat, the humans make a plea but otherwise have no agency or action. This can be compared to a myth I mention later, in the Africa section, where both animals and humans play core roles in the myth.

The Nias myth involves its own question, though not one to do with animals. In it, the Nias, who are humans, and Belas, men turned into evil spirits that can only be seen by holy men in modern times, lived in a peacefully cooperative society, with only one major difference between them: Only the Belas knew how to make fire, and no Bela would tell the humans. In the story, an unnamed man goes to fetch fire from the wife of a Bela, but her fire had gone out. When she asks the man to cover his eyes with a garment to keep from seeing how the fire was kindled, he replies that he can see through the garment, and that she should put a basket over his head instead, something he knew that he would be able to see out of and learn the secret. When the man revealed that he had watched her make the fire through the basket and now knew

the secret, the Belas as a whole replied that mankind would no longer be allowed to see or communicate with them (Frazer, 1930, p.96).

The myths from this continent are widely varied. Other than birds showing up twice, in Buryat and China, not much really seems to recur between the different cultures. Even in that case, there's a significant difference between the Chinese myth, where the bird only performs a single action, passively and in the presence of a human, and the Buryat myth, where the swallow drives the entire plot by agreeing to help the humans with their problem, and being rewarded with kindness in return. The only other recurring theme is the connection of wise men to fire, with the sage from Chinese stories and the Belas from Nias tales, but even then, the rule about holy men being the only ones able to see the Belas came after fire was spread amongst mankind, not before.

Japan is an anomaly in this case. Frazer leaves them out of his text, and I was only able to track down a single reference over multiple texts, which looped me back to the Shinto creation myth. In it, when the primary mother goddess, Izanami, is giving birth to the kami, the Shinto term for gods or deities, she gives birth to the kami Kagutsuchi, the god of fire, and his birth burns her to death, also marking the first death in Shinto mythology. Kagutsuchi is promptly killed by his father, Izanami's husband Izanagi, and his body parts are used in the creation of more kami (Ashkenazi, 2003, pp.76-77). Besides this incident, I was unable to find much about fire myths and mythology in traditional Shintoism, though it did seem apparent that the Japanese would likely consider fire, as a whole, unlucky, both on account of the mythological incident recounted above, and because of the general construction

materials in Japan at the time, which would primarily have been wood and rice paper, with perhaps other flammable or semi-flammable materials composing rooves of buildings if stone was too heavy or ceramic too expensive. That being said, I didn't turn up any conclusive Japanese myths that explained the acquisition of fire by man.

6.4 Europe

Origin Culture	Continent	Original Possessor	Method of Creation	Original Location	Method of Transport	Who Gathered It	Was It Stolen	Other Notes
Greeks	Europe	The Olympians	Unspecified	Hephaestus' Forge (Divine)	Unspecified	Prometheus	Yes	Depending on some minor variations, it was either theft outright or a gift. Regardless, Prometheus was not supposed to take the fire. In this exact version, Prometheus gave fire to humans because the creator of every other creature, the titan Epimetheus, had forgotten to leave something for man to have to make them equal to the other creatures.
Norse	Europe	Muspelheim	Death of Ymir*	Ymir (Divine)	Not specified	Borr's Sons: Odin, Vili, and Ve	No	An interesting case, fire existed in, or as, Sotur's realm of Muspelheim since the dawn of creation, but it was only with the death of Ymir and the creation of the other worlds by the sons of Borr after Ymir's death that it was released to everyone, seemingly an integral part of creation. It could be said that Ymir's death was the method of creation and distribution, as there appears to be no alternative myth.
French	Europe	"The good God"	Unspecified	The Heavens (Divine)	Carried by a wren	Wren	No	This is an interesting one, from the Normandy region of France. I can't place a date to it, but it definitely seems more contemporary than the rest of the list: The version of the myth consulted refers to a monotheistic "good God," which would imply that this was originally told after the introduction of Christianity to the region. However, that is only an assumption. Regardless, there do appear to be variations from around France, most with just the wren as the driving force, but some with other birds included. The fire being stolen can also vary by version, in this one it is not.

Europe's myths were very complicated in trying to decide what did and didn't belong in this paper. Other than Greco-Roman myths, which are generally very well known in the Western world, the sources I consulted didn't have much to say about the myths of individual regions. I discuss this further in the paper, but it strikes me as odd that cultural myths wouldn't be passed on in time, and leaves me with only a few guesses as to why it could have happened. That being said, this section is also notable because it contains the one instance of primordial fire that's mentioned in this paper, the fires of Muspelheim as explained in the Prose Edda, and I'll be happy to explain why I decided to include the myth, as well as my justification for the myth being

present, as the third myth summary for this section, though I will say that Muspelheim itself is not the fire under consideration, or at least not its whole self.

The standard version of the Grecian myth is one that most people in the Western world, it feels, would be able to recite off the top of their head. On consulting some texts, however, I found at least two different versions of the Prometheus myth, one of which I used in my corpus, which still keeps one of the major themes, but changes some of the circumstances around why the fire was stolen. In this version of the myth, another Titan, the brother of Prometheus named Epimetheus, was responsible for shaping all of the other living creatures of the world and assigning them traits that would make them better able to survive. However, much as Prometheus embodies forethought, his brother embodies afterthought, and so when he arrived at humans, there was nothing left to give them that would make them able to better survive in the world, at which point he asked Prometheus for help. Prometheus took the proto-humans, gave them a shape resembling the Titans and Olympians, and then stole some fire from the forges of Hephaestus, as they were the only source of fire not on Olympus, and so were the only flames safe to steal from, before also stealing some of Athena's knowledge of mechanical skills from the same place, gifting humans with these as their tool to match the claws, fangs, wings, and scales of the other animals (Hamilton, 1942, pp.85-86). It still does resemble, closely, the common version of the myth, more so than another variation that didn't have enough detail to be considered, but still did include Prometheus stealing fire for the humans as a primary plot action.

The French myth, from the Normandy region, felt much more contemporary than the others, regardless of continent, for reasons I will explain. In it, there was no more

fire upon the earth, and the only way to get more was to ask a bird to go and fetch more from the “good God” in the heavens. All of the large and medium birds refused, but one of the small birds, the wren, volunteered for the task, even though it might kill her to complete it. When the wren finally managed to ascend to the heavens, she reached the good God, and was invited to perch on his knee, before being warned about the dangers of carrying the fire back down to earth, and told not to fly too fast, or she would ignite herself. When she began her return, she followed the instructions, but as she got closer, she finally couldn’t keep herself from speeding up, and when she finally delivered the fire to everyone, all of her feathers had burned off completely. In response, every bird save for the screech-owl plucked a single one of their feathers to weave a new plumage for the wren, leading both to their speckled appearance, and to the general dislike of screech-owls by other birds (Frazer, 1930, pp.190-191). The myth also includes an explicit warning at the end not to harm wrens or their nests, lest you draw the fires of heaven down on your own house, and leave your children homeless orphans. Besides the startlingly direct threat of retribution, even more to-the-point than the Buryat people considering swallows to be their friends, I also suspect there might be some Christian influence in this myth, making it more contemporary than others. However, the only suggestion there is of this is the repeated and precise use of the same capitalization for “the good God” every time those words appear in sequence, as well as not just using the word “God” on its own at any point.

One of the nearer outliers of the corpus is the Norse myth, taken from the Prose Edda. In the “Gylfaginning,” which is the first book of Snorri’s version of the origin

myth, there is a recounting of how creation came to be, told to Gangleri, the name of the disguise of King Gylfi of Sweden. The king made his way to Valhall, or Valhalla as we more commonly know it, in Asgard, so that he could speak to the Aesir about their cunning and how things always went according to their will. As Gangleri began to ask his questions, he was regaled, piece by piece, of the history of the world and how all things came to be. Key to this, for this paper, are two facts. The first is that, originally, there were only three major realms. The first of these was Ginnungagap, also called the Yawning Void, a great emptiness which is where the other two would meet, the third melting the second. The second of these was Niflheim, a realm of ice and freezing water, from which sprung Hvergelmir, one of the major springs that would later feed the world tree, Yggdrasil, and was the origin of many rivers. And the third realm was Muspell, or Muspelheim, a land of fire and heat, ruled by the fire giant Suttur, who would slay anyone that would trespass upon his realm.

It's from the meeting of Niflheim and Muspelheim within Ginnungagap that the great Rime-Giant, Ymir, would eventually be born of the heat and sparks of Muspelheim mixing with the rime and rain of Niflheim, in the great and empty void. Later in that same primordial place, Buri, the father of Borr and grandfather of Odin, Vili, and Ve, would be born of a block of ice. The sons of Borr would be the ones to slay Ymir, and from his corpse would create the rest of the Nine Realms. In the act of creation, they took the stray sparks and embers of Muspelheim, and made them into both the stars in the heavens and the world itself, setting the shapes and places of those flames and making them a part of creation (Snorri, 1916, pp.16-21).

It's hopefully clear from how long it took to summarize that myth how complex the creation of fire in Norse mythology was. In short, the fire for the rest of creation was made by taking the sparks of primordial fire, and putting them into the "proper" shapes, things like stars, or wildfires, or cooking fires. The fires themselves were in place before humans had begun to walk the earth, because the world as we know it hadn't been created yet, but the origin of fire still took place as part of the original creation of the world. This makes its place between a primordial fire, and the more controlled fires that tend to exist in the rest of these myths, which can be controlled and gathered, used to cook and light and heat, very delicate. I do consider it to be, narrowly, of the latter category, because we do, in fact, have a very clear example of a primordial fire in the same myth: Muspelheim. It's also clear that the sparks could be manipulated by the sons of Borr to serve their purposes, and to be set in shapes that would be useful for the world. As such, while this is an outlier to some degree, it does fit within the corpus as being a fire that was controlled, and made so that it could be used by mortals once they eventually came to be.

There's not really a strong connection here between these stories, unlike most of the other regions. The Greek and Norse both involve primordial beings commanding fire, though the French is arguable depending on the actual state of being of "the good God," but very little else seems to be in common, in term of overarching themes. The French and Norse lacked theft: In the former fire was a freely given gift and in the latter, fire came from the death of a primordial being, an event that was also the impetus for the creation of the rest of existence besides the primordial beings and locations that were already in place. There might also be a tenuous connection

between the, again recurring, bird theme of the French myth with the corpus' variant of the Greek myth, since that also involved the creation of all the animals as its key event, but that connection seems to be stretching somewhat at what could be considered a reasonable relationship between the two. It feels as though the reason the French and Norse myths are so different, considering they're closer to each other than either one is to Greece, feels to be a matter of time. The French myth, as I mentioned before, feels to be much more contemporary than the Norse, which would account for how much more modern it feels, in terms of phrasing used and, again, the seeming inclusion of the Abrahamic God. Distance seems to be slightly anomalous, however, for this reason: The variant of Norse that the Prose Edda was written in might have been in use in Normandy, which was a Norse territory for some amount of time (Adams, 1898, p.336). While the Prose Edda itself was written in Iceland, the fact that the same language might have been in use in the same region means that the myth might have been retold there. This indicates two things to me: That the Normandy myth in use in this paper is almost certainly the most contemporary fire origin myth in this paper, and that the original myth told in the Normandy region might have been entirely lost, possibly wiped out or incorporated into an alternative myth first by the Norse that colonized the region, with any remnants subsumed by the Christian myth that came later in history.

6.5 Africa

Origin Culture	Continent	Original Possessor	Method of Creation	Original Location	Method of Transport	Who Gathered It	Was It Stolen	Other Notes
Bergdamara	Africa	A family of lions	Unspecified	Lions' firepit (Terrestrial)	Firebrand	An Unnamed Man	Yes	I have to admit, this one caught me a little by surprise. I mentioned in the intro to my paper about driving off animals with fire as one of the earliest uses of it? This is not what I meant. Also, the unnamed man doesn't use his stolen brand to do any driving off, just the already lit cooking pit and a river. However, it does make me wonder where the lions got the fire.
Sakalava & Tsimihety (Madagascar)	Africa	Sun, leader of the flames	Sun's creations, otherwise unspecified	Sun's Earthly soldiers (Terrestrial)	N/A	Unspecified Humans	No	An interesting case for this one, where fire was sentient. Each flame was a soldier of the Sun, and after losing the war to Thunder, all the fire hid inside wood, iron, and hard stone. This one was gathered by "unspecified humans" purely because, after the fire hid, anyone could find the materials to make it.
Loango	Africa	Unlit/No Fire	Holes poked in the sky	The Sky (Divine)	Not specified	Unspecified Humans	No	This is a case where I would mark it as a "both," even though humans carry fire down to Earth. That's because they wouldn't have obtained the fire if Spider's thread hadn't gotten blown into the sky, and if woodpecker hadn't poked holes in the sky to make stars. While the humans did most of the resolving action, it still had to be set up by the animals.

Animals, as I stated in a previous section of this paper, aren't always helpful in these myths, though they tend to be in a majority of cases where they appear. A strong example of this exception is the Bergdamara myth from South-West Africa that Frazer relates (Frazer, 1930, pp.111-112). In it, a man who is cold tells his wife that he is going to go and take a firebrand from the village of lions. He ignores the warning of his wife, wades across a river, and enters the hut where the lion, lioness, and their cubs live in the lion village. As conversation wears on, he slowly makes his way from his original position, the place of honor opposite the door, to somewhere closer to an escape, and when he judges that he's reached a good spot, jumps up, pulls a brand from the flames, and hurls one of the lion cubs into the fire, making his escape. By the time the lion and lioness have rescued their cub, the thief is already across the river, where the lions balk at crossing, and the man gathers more wood

before starting his own fire. This is a clear, but rare, example of animal characters being the ones who already have fire and have to be stolen from, and aren't in a role helpful, or at least neutral, to humans in a fire origin myth. This role is one thing that truly made it stand out to me while reading and shows that there is probably always going to be a story that balks the major trends.

The myth of the Sakalava and Tsimihety cultures of Madagascar provides a unique take on some of the elements of the creation myth: It is also a story of conflict between two deities. It tells the story of the Sun ruling the earth, and the flames that the Sun created were its soldiers to guard the planet. Sun's soldiers, however, declared war on Thunder, and after two skirmishes in which neither side was able to truly defeat the other, Thunder recruited the clouds to rain upon the battlefield of their third encounter. When they did so, the rain forced the king of the flames to retreat, followed by the common soldiers. The officers of the army of flames hid inside the mountains, and now only emerge with volcanic eruptions, actually being the root cause of volcanoes themselves. The common soldiers, however, hid inside things like wood, or iron, or hard stones, which is how all of those things can now be used as methods of starting fires: by sparking it from the soldiers of Sun still hiding inside (Frazer, 1930, pp.108-110). Standing in contrast to the war story from Madagascar, the story of the Loango people is much shorter, and yet provides its own interesting points. Their story begins with Spider weaving a single thread so long that, when the wind picked it up, it blew so high as to stick to the uniformly dark sky above. Then, Woodpecker climbed the thread, and began poking holes in the dark sky with its beak, creating the stars we can see. Finally, a man climbed up the thread and, from

the holes that Woodpecker had poked, gathered the fire of the stars to bring back down. The ending has a minor variation, but it does all amount to gathering the fire that came from the stars Woodpecker had made (Frazer, 1930, 117).

It's very interesting to see a story of conflict in these myths. There are some violent acts here and there in some of the theft stories, the Bergdamara one being a prime example, but I believe the Sakalava and Tsimihety myth is the only example of outright warfare present in the entire corpus of myths I've used. The Sakalava and Tsimihety myth does resonate slightly with the Loango myth, but the only really shared theme is the heavens, which serve at cross purposes in those two myths, with the Loango's being a place where new things are discovered and made, and the Sakalava and Tsimihety's being a place where deities prepare for the wars that they wage while on the surface of the Earth.

Perhaps the most interesting thing that I noticed was a lack of fire mythology from Egypt. In doing further research, I couldn't even seem to find an explicit fire deity in the pantheon. Ra, of course, was the closest, but Ra is better associated with the sun, primal fire, rather than fire-of-mortals, as is his son Horus, whose eyes are the sun and moon. Perhaps slightly closer would be considered Sekhmet, but in spite of allegedly being able to breathe fire and possessing the sun disk in some of her depictions, a link to Ra's solar nature and his own emblem, Sekhmet is better associated with warfare and plagues than with fire. When I noticed both this anomaly, and the lack of fire myths in general in Egypt, I went to my thesis advisor and asked for his advice, and if he would be able to find anything that I missed. Surprisingly, he was unable to find anything from searching the resources he had at-hand as well. My

personal theory is that either fire origin myths might have been folded into the Egyptian solar myth, a series of stories that explains the whys and hows of the sun rising in the east and falling in the west, and what it does when it is beyond the horizon, or the fire myths have been lost or untranslated, and as a result have not made their way into any collections or modern retellings.

6.6 Australia and Oceania

Origin Culture	Continent	Original Possessor	Method of Creation	Original Location	Method of Transport	Who Gathered It	Was It Stolen	Other Notes
Maori	Australia and Oceania	Mahuika	Pulled finger/toe nails	Mahuika herself (Divine)	Not specified, resides in trees by the end of the story	Maui	No	Buckova, from the literature review, notes that this version of Mahuika, who Maui gets fire from, is female, which is not always true. Technically not stolen, because it was given freely, but the method of getting it was cruel. Also, Maui's behavior is very poor, since he deliberately put out the fires that humans already had, before going to get more. He certainly seems less mature in this text than characters in other myths, even compared to mortals or other trickster archetypes. Mahuika is assumed to live in the underworld, as Buckova notes that as the fire deity's common home, but it's unclear in the text.
Gippsland Aborigines	Australia and Oceania	Two unnamed women	Unspecified	Unspecified, but obtained while traveling with the women (Terrestrial)	A fire-stick, likely a torch or brand	An Unnamed Man	Yes	Other than the man turning into a wren after the end of the story, there's no animals actively within this story. Still, it does beg the question of how the two women created fire, and why they refused to share it with the Aboriginal people. As the fire was stolen while traveling, I assume it was taken from a campfire, but can't confirm that. It feels like there was context missing from the myth, but I'm not sure if that's true or where one would find it.
Motu (New Guinea)	Australia and Oceania	The Taulites	Unspecified	Taulite cooking fire (Terrestrial)	Fire-brand	Dog, who brought it back to humans	Yes	This is a technical "Yes" to theft in my opinion, but still a yes. If people try to kill you before you can even bargain for some fire, then feel free to steal it, but it is stealing because you're just running off. Dog being the last of a handful of animals trying to gather fire from the people on Taulu means both sides, human and animal, were deeply involved in this story, even if most animals were unsuccessful (and still dislike Dog for it).

This one was, along with Europe, one of the more troublesome ones to properly sort the data for. Some of the answers get very technical, and tease the lines of what is or isn't theft, and one of them feels like it's missing details, which might be because it was intended to be the seed of a story, something for the teller to elaborate on, rather than a condensed version of the whole story, like most of the other examples used in this paper seemed to have been. This region includes Oceania both because of the regional geography, and because of the mythological geography: Bucková, who I mentioned originally in the literature review, found that versions of the Maui myth, or at least with Maui as a character carrying out similar actions, can be found throughout

the Pacific as part of different island cultures, providing a reason for why they should all be considered part of the same region.

To start with the most interesting myth in the field of character behavior, we can start with the Maori story of Maui. Maui, unlike his more friendly depiction recently by Disney, is an extremely unpleasant character in this myth, just based on his behavior, though he does apparently fulfil a trickster archetype in this region of the world, not that it fully excuses his actions. In the myth, Maui puts out all of the fires in the village, no matter how large or small, during the night, then volunteers to be the one to fetch more fire from the fire goddess Mahuika, one of his own ancestors. His parents instruct him to introduce himself by name so that she knows who he is, and when he finally arrives at her home and calls out to her to greet her, he fails to introduce himself properly, leading her to ask repeatedly who he is until she finally guesses that he's her grandson. He asks her for fire, and she pulls out one of her own fingernails, drawing fire with it. He takes the nail from her, and then travels some distance out of sight before snuffing the flame, at which point he returns and tells her that it went out, and he needs more. He repeats this process so many times that she's down to her last toenail, and when she pulls it off, she instead dashes it against the ground, setting her home on fire. Maui flees the scene, first on foot, then by turning into an eagle, but the fire pursues him closely no matter what, and even when he dives into a lake, the fire begins to start boiling the water. In desperation, he calls upon two more of his ancestors to quench the flames with a grand rainstorm. They do so, nearly killing Mahuika before she can get to shelter, and she flung the last of her flames into some of the trees, imparting wood with their nature, before her flame was completely

extinguished, apparently forever. When he returned home, his parents chastised him, but he simply replied that he would do the same thing again if he had the chance, or would commit similar actions whenever he felt like, without a single care about who it was harming, forever (Bucková, 2009, pp.328-330).

Unlike the Maori myth, the Gippsland Aboriginal myth from Australia is more pleasant, though it does feel like it's another part of a longer myth. In it, there are a pair of women who have fire, and yet refuse to share it with the Aboriginal people for reasons unspecified. They also control access to the fire very strictly, so an unidentified man, who apparently isn't Aboriginal but is still friendly to them, decides to pretend to be fond of the women so that he can join them on their journeys. Eventually, he manages to steal a burning brand from them and, hiding it behind his back, flees from their camp to deliver the brand to the Aborigines, who thank him for delivering the fire to them (Frazer, 1930, pp.5-6). He eventually, through means unspecified, becomes a bird, either a finch or a wren, with a red mark over its tail to symbolize fire. For the part of the Motu people, the myth is almost similarly short compared to the Maori epic. In it, the Motu people have no fire to cook their food or warm themselves, until one day the humans and animals all spot smoke coming from the nearby Taulu Island. One by one, the snake, bandicoot, bird, and kangaroo all tried to cross the water to the island, but failed. Then, the dog offered to go. He managed to swim to the other island, but before he could say anything, the women around the fire decided to kill him. In response, he seized a brand and went back into the water, swimming back home, and the people on his home island watched him bring the fire back. When he did, the humans celebrated, but the other animals were

jealous and acted as though they could have easily done the same task, even though each had just failed to do so. The dog snapped at them, and ever since then, there has been enmity between the various animals of the islands (Frazer, 1930, p.38).

The Motu myth is the only one to have animals in this section, and interestingly has its bird, of an unnamed species, fail in its task, which I believe is unique among all the birds that appear to carry fire in these myths, in occasions where the bird is actively carrying the fire. The other two are fully human-centric, and both of them feel like they're more deeply connected to other stories than just the ones that were used for this paper's corpus. For Maui, that should be a given: A figure like a demigod trickster isn't just going to vanish after a single story, he's going to be a recurring character. For the Gippsland story, however, this is more of an assumption simply based off the text that was used. Too many things are unexplained, and while it's possible that they were just as unexplained in every version, it feels too far-fetched for there to not be some story that covers why the two women refuse to give fire to the Aborigines, or how a man (who we could reasonably assume should be Aboriginal himself, and yet apparently isn't) managed to convince the two women that he was fond enough of them that they should permit him to travel with them. Something about the story simply feels incomplete, as though it was pulled from part of a greater series of stories and lacks some context for the events that are contained within it.

The Maori and Gippsland myths both have women that are in charge of the fires, though the Gippsland women are presumably mortal while the Maori's woman is a goddess. Additionally to this, in the Motu myth, the ones tending to the fire when the

dog lands on the shore are stated to be women as well. While I can only make assumptions as to why, I do at least have a guess, based on general historical trends. A fire would generally be considered a core part of a home or village, placing it within the realm of the domestic, which would also generally be the duties of a woman to care for. A prime example of this would be the Greek Hestia, explicitly stated to be the goddess of the hearth, meaning that she would have her duty to watch over the fire at home to make sure it was maintained for whatever it was needed for. It could, as a result, be assumed that the reason all three of these myths have women in positions where they have domain over fire is due to a logical conclusion: If a woman is going to be the one making sure something important like this is maintained while the men aren't home, then it makes sense for the person, divine or mortal, who had it originally to be a woman as well. The only problem that I have with this theory is that Bucková also says that, in most other Polynesian versions, Mahuika, who Maui gets the fire from, is a man instead of a woman (Bucková, 2009, p.341).

Recurring Themes

There are many recurring themes to be found in stories, because they form well-defined patterns, something humans tend to like on a psychological level. The idea of replicating patterns, of mimicking what works, is also part of nature, and the replication of patterns is something that catches the human eye, drawing our attention to objects and creatures, whereas more randomized displays, like the coats of animals tend to be, seem to blend into the background, where we ignore it unless we're looking for it. It should be no surprise that, as an extension, recurring parts and themes of stories stick in the mind, and draw your attention to the details they're attempting to impart. One of these concepts is the archetype, and archetypes are one of the key recurrences in stories of any genre, such as the noble knight, the humble old sage, or the wandering adventurer. The stories I've spoken of in this paper are all old myths and folktales about the creation of things, in this case the creation of fire, and as a result all have something in common: The archetypes they use can be catalogued and categorized. This is not one of the main intentions of the paper, but is something that, in the process of finding recurring language and themes, you end up coming across a realization that becomes obvious the more you think about it; the reason we can see the archetypes, recognize them, and categorize them so easily is because they've been in use for thousands of years, in hundreds of permutations. The

story of the wise old sage imparting knowledge to a humble child, or of a caring mother goddess spreading a blessing to her children, the humans and animals, is simply the core seed of the stories we still tell today, and because we can now hear and read the stories of so many cultures so easily, we as readers can recognize the archetypes that occur without needing to parse them through our local variation.

In the more concrete, now that we've had the chance to review the entire corpus of data, let's look at the statistics.

2.1 The Importance of Theft

Theft, stealing fire, is another one of those concepts that seems like it's timeless, and at the same time feels like it can't be all-prevalent. And it isn't, but at the same time, the thoughts of it creep into our minds. The noble thief, the heroic robber, the rogue that fights for justice and the greater benefit of society, all three of these and many, many more are recurring archetypes that lend a noble air to a profession that many would consider dubiously tolerable at best. Take, for example, Robin Hood as an easily recognized character who would fall under this general archetype. He steals from the rich and gives to the poor in the wake of high taxes and poor governance. But, in the case of the myths of this paper, the thief is stealing something much more valuable and useful than gold, they're stealing the very bounty of the sun, the earth, and the gods. Fire, that can cook food and drive away the cold and dark, that can melt metal and inspire minds. This one doesn't really have a lot of qualifying criteria: Was theft involved in the movement of fire into mortal hands? This, though, does give us an interesting question, which I mentioned a little bit about above. If we compare the Greek Prometheus myth with the Buryat swallow myth, we can notice an important similarity that affects the results. Both of them have an intermediary steal the fire, and that intermediary then gifts the stolen fire to mortals. This is distinct from myths where the thief is also the one who generally spreads fire to everyone, such as the African Bergdamara myth, where the man steals the fire directly before kindling more of it in his hut and spreading it, without an intermediary to get it for him. This, then, begins to raise the question of how often fire was stolen directly by a human, and how

often fire was stolen by a non-human, be that an animal or a god, and given to humans afterwards.

Of every myth catalogued in this paper, theft occurred 10 times out of the 18 stories, which is 55% of the stories. While the circumstances of the theft might have varied to some degree, depending on cultural factors, social environment, the body type of the thief, or a combination of these factors, fire was stolen in this corpus by a slight majority of the time. Of these ten instances of theft, six of those cases (making up ~33% of the total corpus) were carried out indirectly; which are cases where a human was not directly involved in the theft, but was instead given fire, or acquired it, after it had been stolen by someone acting for the benefit of humanity. In the other four cases (which comprise ~22% of the total corpus), the fire was stolen directly by a human, who then spread it to other humans, without the step of getting the fire from an intermediary source. In every one of the ten cases, however, a theft is carried out, and while some themes remain the same between the thefts, all of them also have distinctly unique attributes.

But why is it stolen? Theft is, after all, generally seen as a negative thing in society, even more so when you consider how important or integral something like fire would be to early communities. It can drive off the cold, keeping people from freezing to death. It can be used to cook impurities out of meat or make certain roots and vegetables edible, making it an important part of nutrition. It keeps the dark at bay, an essential aid for a species that, as humans do, relies upon sight rather than scent or sound in order to detect threats. We need fire, and that's a fact that can't be denied. But why do we steal it? Is there some cosmic reason that fire isn't simply

handed out to humans freely, or is there something deeper behind it? And for that matter, when it's not stolen by a human, who's stealing it for us and why?

For some of these myths, there is a question, it seems, of worthiness. The being or beings who possess fire decide that humans, for whatever reason, can't or shouldn't be trusted to have fire on their own, to control as their own, and so keep the secrets of kindling it away from the general population, if those knowledge keepers are also human, or they keep the secrets away from the entire species if the ones with the knowledge aren't human themselves. In many of these cases, the motivation for restricting the knowledge that humans have about fire isn't expressed clearly. In some, like the Gippsland myth, it's expressed plainly: The two women who know how to make fire quite simply just don't like the Aborigines. In others, like the Timbe, it's much more opaque: Do the vultures not trust humans to use fire properly, or did the idea of sharing fire simply not occur to them? Do they even have any motivation at all to not share the fire? The problem with asking these questions of folktales and myths is that, quite often, you're never going to receive a satisfactory answer. There might, perhaps, be a version that does answer those questions, but there just as easily might not be, and so the question of motivations and reasoning can be left up in the air in cases where, for one reason or another, it simply isn't expressed in the story.

The problem with trying to determine why humans are unworthy of the knowledge of making fire is that we can, at best, guess, and through multiple layers of differing thoughts, at that. The motivation behind the characters has to be filtered through the storyteller's interpretation of the characters, as well as the presumed

natures of the characters themselves. Even in the most clear-cut cases, this can lead to a confusing muddle. For example, with the Prometheus myth used in this paper, Prometheus gave humans fire because there were no natural gifts left to give them. But why did he choose fire, of all things? Was it because he believed humans would know how to best use this tool that has, before, belonged only to the sun and the gods? Was it out of pity for this new life that would, in all likelihood, be snuffed out by much better armed animals? Was it because he, whose name is believed to mean “forethought,” already knew what passing on fire would do for humans? It could, really, be any of these or none of these, because each one, depending on the teller and the circumstances, could be considered a logical reason for why fire was selected as humanity’s gift for their creation. To decide upon the worthiness of humans based only on what a story says is that, without knowing the motivations behind the creation of a character and circumstances of the tale, the reader can be left only to guess from context and vocabulary, which doesn’t provide a certainty in one direction or another.

To turn to the question of knowledge, in a few of the myths sourced from Frazer, he seems to imply in the text leading into some of the stories in question that humans are simply unable to think of a way to start making fires themselves, without having an active fire presented to them. The way it’s usually phrased indicates that the language in question is an original part of each of the myths being related, which brings up an interesting quandary: How is it that the humans are unable to think of how to make fire for themselves? It’s not uncommon, after all, for fires to be started by thunder strikes or similar phenomena, which would provide a possible, if not exactly reliable or regular, way of getting fire that could then be used to kindle further

fires, resolving the myth as might be expected. Of course, this could be interpreted in at least two different ways, but the two that leap to mind are ones that could be considered directly and narratively important. I specify narratively, because the first point is that humans knowing how to make fire already, even if it might be common sense, ruins the entire point of telling a story about the origin of fire, or really any story at all. The point of stories, after all, is to explain and enthrall. A good storyteller can capture the attention of a room and hold it with their voice and words, weaving a narrative that unfolds itself to the listeners. While text on a page does not, necessarily, hold the same power, it's important to keep in mind that most of these stories would, traditionally, have been told vocally, in a public or private setting depending on the time period and location, rather than being committed to text that would simply be read. As a result, in order to keep the attention of the listeners, belief in certain things must be suspended. If the storyteller says that humans did not know how to make fire, then it's doesn't matter why, because they simply didn't.

Also following in the thread of narrative importance, is the fact that most of the stories still don't specify how to make fire, even after it is stolen. Some do, mentioning methods of either friction or making sparks through striking hard materials, but many do not. This helps to reinforce the idea of fire being important, and its creation being a secret that had to be stolen: Not even the stories will explain how fire was created afterwards. Some things can be inferred, absolutely. Stories involving wood will, likely, be from regions where a friction method was used, even if it wasn't specified in the story. Sparking, from rocks or metals, could also be a method. But, very rarely is this stated specifically, with the most glaring example of

this being the story of the Nias, where the thread of the story explicitly states that a human watched fire being kindled to steal the secret, but never actually says what the stolen method was. Instead, it is often torches and brands that are stolen, and used to light new fires that then, we can assume, feed the rest of the communities in that region. But rarely is a fire kindled anew from nothing, without an already burning flame being introduced, stolen or not. A pre-existing flame fuels new fires, but a fresh one is rarely kindled from simple sparks or grand lightning. The secret of fire is kept hidden, even in stories where that very fact leads to fire being stolen in order to spread the knowledge and use of fire.

2.2 The Thief and The Carrier

So, if fire is being stolen, who fills the role of this eponymous “thief of fire?”

What forms, to call back to the beginning of this section, the archetype of our thieves, stealing fire from its keepers to deliver it to us, the mortals who rely upon it, in one form or another, for everything we do? They take various shapes, mortal and immortal both, though the immortal thieves only have Prometheus in that category for this set, since Maui was ruled as not having actively stolen fire. Of the nine remaining mortal thieves, five were animals and four were humans, giving us a slight animal trend. The animals were a swallow, a hummingbird, a dog, an opossum, and a fox, giving a slight trend towards smaller terrestrial animals over birds, though how this reflects against the greater trend of animals is discussed later. All of the animals, however, were small, with the dog probably being the largest depending on the breed, since that detail is unmentioned in the story itself. The size of the animal makes sense for a topic that will be discussed shortly, but it also indicates that there might be a secondary idea of how size might not matter when compared to the effort put into helping the community. A larger animal might be able to do more with their size, but a smaller animal who can move swiftly can help just as much with carrying fire and bringing forward flames without having to rely on a brute force solution. For the animals, theft was a predetermined goal for most of them, although Fox only really decided to steal fire when he stumbled upon it, though he did put effort into preparing to steal it, which might count as premeditation. Dog’s theft was more abrupt, and not quite as premeditated, but still counts as theft, since there was no attempt to negotiate

or ask for fire, though there was also no chance to, and we can likely assume that Dog was going to take some fire home regardless of if it was by agreement or theft.

For the humans, all of the thieves were male, with the implications that they were of a middle adult age or slightly older, as the theft myths seemed to lack any strong age indicators. In most cases with a human thief, the theft was predetermined as a goal of their efforts, though the Lingua myth is an exception. Of the more human-centric stories, however, all of them still included animals in some way. For the Gippsland myth, it feels more positive or neutrally inclined, where the thief eventually turned into a bird, and the Timbe myth also feels very neutral in its animal inclusion, where the vultures weren't sharing fire, but also never undertook any directly antagonistic actions against the humans. This contrasts with the Lingua and Bergdamara myths, where animals become, or already are, actively antagonistic towards human efforts to get fire, and either implicate or apply violence.

Cunning and deception are the primary orders of the day, when it comes to stealing the fire. As mentioned earlier, while brute force would certainly be one avenue of achieving the goal of getting fire, that doesn't fit with any of these kinds of stories. These are the stories of the tricksters and the cunning, the people and animals who think through their plans and commit daring deeds to achieve their goals without even having to threaten anyone, instead of relying on strength and endurance to make their way through to the end. That's not to say that there's none of those attributes, because the Normandy myth certainly shows a great deal of endurance to go with the strength of character that the wren had, in order to make it back with the fire, but the more general theming of these myths has to do with thinking and planning, figuring

out a way to get the fire from someone that won't share it if it has to be stolen, or even just thinking outside the box in order to find a way to reach that goal. But, there's also a very important trait that most of the protagonists share, thief or not, that also presents a possible theme, with its associated exceptions. This same theme might be considered somewhat related to cunning, but with less negative connotations applied to it, though I'm unsure if there's a proper word for it. Instead of applying their cunning to their own, personal, benefit, they direct it towards how it can do the most good.

You might have noticed, through the summaries of these myths or from reading them yourself, that all of the protagonists gain fire, but do something interesting with it. For the thieves, this would be exceptionally curious except for the fact that it falls under a certain character trait or behavior. Nobody keeps the fire for themselves at the end of the story. Every character, thief and not, gives up the fire after getting it, even if it cost them something to bring it back. They're willing to accept those losses to make things better for everyone, and even if the most of a reward they get for it is heartfelt thanks, it's still accepted as a just reward. Self-sacrifice and the community good. This is discussed a bit further in the "Punishment" subsection below, but in every one of the stories, with the possible exception of the Maori story, the protagonist who gets the fire doesn't keep it for themselves, but instead spreads it out to the rest of the community, allowing everyone to reap the benefits of their effort. The beneficence of this action seems to fly directly in the face of how thieves are generally assumed to act, with the exception of certain cases and archetypes, much like Robin Hood as was mentioned at the beginning of this section.

So, our archetypical fire thief for this corpus could be either a human or an animal, but slightly more likely to be an animal. They generally won't commit any violent acts unless they find themselves in a situation where violence is the only possible solution to their current situation, and may find themselves harmed by their own efforts in the process, although the harm might come from an aggrieved party if they manage to catch the thief. Their actions are usually undertaken with an eye towards cunning and away from brute force, preferring trickery and making their way into situations which they end up either literally or metaphorically talking their way into or out of, if not both.

But what about the cases where fire isn't being stolen? After all, only a minor majority of cases had fire being stolen. This can be somewhat tricky, though, as some of these myths don't quite have a defined role for someone who gained fire in another manner. The Sakalava & Tsimihety myth, for example, just had fire in place as something in the world from the very beginning, which is shared with the Norse myth. For the other six, there's a mixture of a few themes. For the Chumash, French, and Maori, the general cause could be considered divine intervention, although the exact kind of divine intervention varies between the three, as does the divinity intervening. The Nias myth once again comes back to trickery and cunning, although in this case the theft wasn't of fire itself, but of knowledge, which puts it more into this category than the other. And for the Loango and Chinese, fire is kindled by the efforts of humans, either by climbing to the heavens, or by learning from nature and the world. The same general themes, though, still occur: The protagonists come by their fire or their information by gathering it themselves or discovering the secret, and

bring the fire back to their community, sometimes at a cost and sometimes freely except for their effort.

2.3 Punishment

This is an interesting subject to mention, and while it might be one of the shorter sections, it does bear some discussion. Typically, a story can do one of a few things, and the most common for older stories are either explaining why or how something happens, or conveying particular morals and ethics to children. The myths covered in this paper are, for the most part, explanatory myths with other elements thrown in, such as those of creation myths or teaching stories, but that does bring up an important factor. Generally speaking, theft is seen as a negative trait, although some caution should be used when applying this as a universal rule. And, generally, when performing a negative action, there is some form of punishment. This leads us to a particular quandary, because in every myth where fire is stolen, there is no major negative repercussion. Yes, certain animals might develop traits as a direct result of their actions, but nothing that would generally be considered purely negative to their health and wellbeing. For some, the punishment might be strict, like Fox being forbidden from using fire, but even that is not directly and immediately harmful and repercussive, being more of a long-term punishment than being thrown in jail or otherwise directly harmed or punished for theft.

So, why aren't thieves being punished in these stories? In this case, the simplest answer might be the most correct: Because while they're doing something wrong, they're doing it for a good reason. I'm sure that arguments can be made that anything wrong is simply wrong, though I would generally state that purely black-and-white thinking can cause issues when interpreting stories, but there's more layers to it than that. Yes, theft is wrong, and generally detrimental to a community. However, the

thefts undertaken usually act in the direct opposite manner: The theft directly benefits the community by providing them with something important (fire) that they previously lacked. Because the communal good is being acted upon, there's less of a reason for a retaliatory action from the community, but since theft is still wrong, it has to be punished somehow, leading to smaller, but still noticeable, punishments, ranging anywhere between Opossum losing all the hair on his tail to the actually repercussive thunder strikes from the thunder-bird of the Lingua myth. The latter, though, might fall under its own category, where it's not so much a punishment as simply direct retaliation for the theft, though the point still stands. In most cases, the response for the theft is a punishment that, while possibly significant in its later effects, does not produce a strong level of lasting harm to the punished, with some outliers both in the direction of a pure lack of harm, in the case of the Belas no longer talking to the Nias and vanishing from their sight, to the directly retaliatory thunder strikes just mentioned.

2.4 The Role of Animals

Animal characters are another distinct recurring feature, notable just about everywhere for their presence. Even in stories where they don't play a central role, we still sometimes see animals appearing in the stories, with animals appearing to some degree in 11 of the 18 stories, or 61.1% of them. But why do they keep showing up? There are a few possible reasons. One is that animals are much closer to the world than we are. Fire is, after all, considered a foundational force of creation by many traditions, and something that is deeply connected to the environment. Even outside of philosophy and religion, fire is a core part of the world for keeping a balance in nature, with forest fires being a prime example. Forest fires clear away underbrush and weak or dying plants and trees, leaving space for new growth to occur. Some species of plants even require wildfires in order for their seeds to germinate and grow properly, and when we try to stop wildfires from happening, the result is usually that we get even worse fires in those regions when a fire does, inevitably, get started and prove to be unstoppable. However, plants aren't active. They don't move, they don't interact, they simply sit in place and photosynthesize. Animals, on the other hand, are active and dynamic. Animals move with purposes, they seem to recognize their friends and foes, they have clear intentions in what they do and how they act. Animals reflect, to some degree, the behavior of humans, and we can see ourselves as reflections in some of their traits. As a result, maybe it isn't such a surprise that, when we don't want to put humans into a myth as the actors, we place the next best thing, something that we already feel is connected to both us and the rest of the world.

But it's also important to recognize that animals represent something, in the human psyche. Our language and thoughts are built deeply on symbolism and looking for deeper meanings, and we apply this to animals as well. After all, a coat of arms isn't just a pretty image, it's a layered symbol that means something to those who recognize the "language" it was built upon. In much the same way, animals mean something to us, although it's usually less abstract and interpretive than a coat of arms. Instead, we can look back to a few previous sections, because animals also usually have some archetype or archetypes applied to them. While there's always some variance, because defying expectations is a given in some stories, we can draw assumptions from the general archetypes of animals to infer some of the reasons for why they appear in these stories, and from those assumptions and archetypes, we can expand our understanding of the meanings of these animals in the case of these stories, and reach a deeper understanding of the symbolism behind them, and why humans can't play these same crucial roles without damaging the underlying meaning of the stories they appear in.

Some of the animals in these myths are easier to understand and decipher than others. The dog found in the Motu myth, for example, is the one that successfully brings back fire. It is lauded by the humans, and hated by the other animals. This does very clearly reflect the normal dogs of our daily lives: They like us, like being around us, try to help us, and try to guard against threats like other people that might be unfriendly, or animals that might try to harm us. But the dog from the myth also reflects on a different level. While the other animals give up before making it to the island where the fire is, the dog both makes it there, and then makes it back, with a

minimal amount of rest. Since even a bird either couldn't, or wouldn't, make the same journey by wing, we can assume one of two things. Firstly, that the dog is being shown here as more dedicated to humans than the other animals because it was willing to carry out this difficult task, which is why it still defends us. As a reasonable extension of this idea, the other animals were lazy or unhelpful, and so don't get to live as comfortably as the dog and its descendants do. Alternatively, it's possible that this is reflecting the dog's loyalty first, instead of an extension of the idea of why the dog was willing to get the fire. Because the dog was driven by its loyalty to, and liking for, the humans that it was part of the community with, the dog was driven to greater feats, while the animals that weren't as close to humanity didn't have as strong of a drive, and were driven off because they had no strong attachment to the community.

Another somewhat easy one to deal with is the fox, who has a common archetype that we can derive information from. The fox is a trickster, who always gets into interesting and odd situations, and usually ends up doing something he didn't fully intend to as a result, although if this is good or bad can vary. In this case, Fox certainly wanted to carry off the fire of the fireflies, and tried to prepare himself for it, but seemingly wasn't prepared for how hot the fire actually was, and when he burned himself, panicked because he didn't know what to do when his plan was thrown off, not that walking off with his tail safely ablaze was much of a plan to begin with.

While I'm not quite as familiar with Opossum's archetype, the text that I consulted implied that he shares a few qualities with Fox, namely that he tends to have plans that should work fine in theory, but usually have unanticipated results, which in the

case of this story would be burning the fur of his tail off. Both of these mammals share the fact that they sacrifice a part of themselves in order to carry fire, which could possibly be interpreted as feeding it with themselves instead of with wood or coal as humans do. They also both fulfil some amount of the trickster archetype, or the qualities of a thief of fire archetype I proposed above, relying on cunning plans and losing part of themselves in the process of bringing fire to the rest of the mortal world, paying their respective prices for the good of the community, and suffering little direct punishment for it.

Birds, however, present an interesting case. Birds aren't bound by the laws of gravity, but are able to reach to the heavens themselves, on their wings. It's in this way that birds seem to reflect more of the ethereal nature of fire, rather than the terrestrial. While birds are involved in myths where the flames are already on Earth, some of the more memorable from this corpus involve getting fire from the heavens, either as a gift or by stealing it. This, of course, is because of their unique position, in that they're not bound to the Earth as we are, but are instead free to transcend it, much like the gods are. Their nature is less bound to the world, making them the obvious choice to transcend the barrier between the mortal and divine spaces, but because they're still tied to the Earth in some way, they still return to the world, and they still work to help the inhabitants of it. Because they're willing to provide us with their assistance, we also reciprocate it, by leaving them alone and helping if we can. I'm sure many of us, after all, heard talks from adults about not bothering bird nests or baby birds, and we can see from some of the myths in this corpus that being kind to birds for what they've done for us is not a new tradition, it's simply that the

reasoning has gone from being about the mythological reasons, that birds helped to give us fire and deserve our kindness and respect for that, to the more grounded and reasonably pragmatic, such as respecting all life, or not bothering fallen hatchlings because their parents won't take them back if they smell that they've been touched by humans.

Animals also feel as though they have a greater degree of agency in some cases than the humans do. Whereas human actions tend to be rather limited in perspective when it comes to what they can and can't do, or perhaps more appropriately phrased as when it comes to what they seem to be capable or incapable of doing, animals very rarely seem to face the same restrictions, depending on the animal involved. For a case of animals with greater agency than similar humans, we can look at the Jibaro myth. Hummingbird, as you might remember, is a true bird unlike the shapeshifting Jibaro humans, and yet seems more capable of thinking laterally and using trickery to get to the fire and bring it to everyone else. In some cases, such as the Motu myth or even the French myth, we can see that some animals even have agency over other animals. For the Motu, the dog was the only animal that could successfully bring fire back, even over the seemingly more logical bird, which might be due to the agency granted to it by cultural importance. Dogs are, after all, loyal to their families and humans, and so it would make more sense for them to be helpfully cooperative than the birds or other wild animals. For the French, it seems to be more of an agency granted by the reasoning behind the story itself, but still linked into real circumstances. The wren chooses to carry the fire as opposed to the larger birds, and so the myth explains both the origin of fire, and the reason for why the wren looks the way it

does, and why birds react to screech-owls the way that they do. The circumstances of the environment dictated the agency when the myth was being formed, which leads to changes in the agency that can be displayed by the actors, who are, in this case, the animals present within the myth.

2.5 The Source of Fire

Where fire is being taken from is important, not just in the case of theft, but in every case. And yet, as you might have noticed in each section, the place where fire came from varies wildly. There are a few recurring locations, but there doesn't seem to be any location that appears significantly more than any others. Fire pits, divine secrets, the wood and stone of the world, the heavens, all of these are recurring locations that fire can be found and sourced from, but none of them appears to be truly prevalent over any of the others, at least in this corpus. And yet, even this can provide us with a few pieces of information to glean. While some of this is supposition and guesswork, it would still fit within the greater theoretical framework of the myths.

Firstly, fire pits and terrestrial materials. This suggests a stronger connection of fire to the earth itself, instead of having fire be of divine provenance. In these stories, divine beings are less likely to appear, and affairs of getting and making fire will be carried out purely by mortals, with some minor exceptions. When this happens, there's also usually a smaller chance of fire being given as a gift, and instead some price will be exacted in exchange for fire, like Fox burning himself and not being allowed to use fire for himself, or the Lingua's thunderbird taking his revenge. These myths also usually, but not always, have a human or a mammal taking the key role in dealing with fire, as opposed to one of the birds, though birds will still occasionally appear in these myths.

To the other side of the spectrum, we have the divine and heavenly fires, which, as might be assumed, are more strongly attuned to heavenly or non-earthly sources.

These aren't necessarily divine fires, but rather any fires that come from sources that are beyond earth, such as the sun, the stars, or yes, divine origins like soldiers of flame. However, these fires don't stand in opposition to terrestrial fires, but rather serve as a counterpoint to them. Instead of assigning the provenance of fire to a worldly creation, fire is seen as extraordinary and otherworldly, something that we can borrow and even create, but something beyond the comprehension of mortal creatures to truly understand. As might be expected, the animals attuned to this fire are more likely to be avian of some variety than anything else, although it can be assumed that any creature with a reasonable way to reach the heavens might be assigned a role in these stories, so long as the disbelief of the listeners can be reasonably suspended.

Though there appears to be a coincidence with to this same statistic appearing in the section about animals as well, though animals will be discussed next, fire seems to be terrestrial in 61.11% of cases, or 11 out of the 18 stories of the corpus. It not clear exactly how important the difference is, although some assumptions can be drawn. Firstly, as mentioned back in the introduction, fire is one of the core elements of the world, regardless of if you use the four or five element classical systems. The strong tendency of fire being terrestrial could be linked back to that, as one of the "core parts" of the world, helping to compose and structure it. The terrestrial connection could also possibly be linked to how it's created without the intervention of deities, as when a divine intervention is lacking, it's the wood and stone of the world that tend to become the tools used to make new flames. Fire also tends to be associated more closely with the earth than with the heavens, as the only real sources of heavenly fire

are the sun and lightning, though the second doesn't always count as fire, and in cases where divine fire isn't the same as terrestrial, it's either a reflection, such as Hephaestus's forge, or an unobtainable paragon, such as the sun. Fire that we, as mortal humans, can control and use is seen as something that is powerful and mystic, and yet has also become something within our control, which might be why fire has a slightly stronger connection to the terrestrial than the divine. It still retains a strong divine nature, but is also a core part of the world.

Interestingly, of the terrestrial myths, 9 of the 11 (roughly 81.81%) are also animal myths. The animals in these myths is, once again, a mixture of birds and mammals as mentioned before, since birds seemingly don't have a monopoly on their importance in fire myths. What this implies, though, is that animals are important, to some degree, in the myths that comprise this corpus. Their roles vary, and their actions differ, but animals do seem to appear very often in these myths. It feels as though this relates back to the assumption that animals appear because of their closeness to the world, being closer than humans to nature, as well as their symbolism for humanity's traits. This might also be because animals, in worlds where humans don't yet have the fire to make many tools, potentially have a greater agency to act, possessing their natural traits, than humans do, once again something mentioned previously.

Limitations

Two of the major flaws that occurred to me early on weren't problems that I was, or am, in a place to fix, and is something that I think research into this field encounters quite often. I personally realized it during my research for the literature review, when I found some interesting sources, and then realized that I couldn't read them. The first major flaws, which come in a pair, are that I had to rely on English translations, which may have modified the context that the myths were told in, and that it's possible that some myths have never been translated and are only told in their native languages. This ended up being proven right during a search for Egyptian origin of fire myths turned out to be fruitless, which indicated the either the myths hadn't been translated, or that there was another limitation in place that was preventing their location and usage.

The other limitation, of course, is the fact that some myths and pieces of folklore or legend might have been entirely lost to time: they were never written down, or never translated, or any copies and/or translations have been lost to history. While disheartening to think it, it should be expected that, over the entire breadth of history, some things would become lost and not be recovered. While it is possible that my searches were simply bringing me to the wrong places at the wrong times, it is also possible that we have a handful of legends that do fit my original criteria at the outset,

and other examples that might simply no longer exist. The exact reason for why there might be gaps in this knowledge could vary, though as librarians we can simply hope that the only reason for the gaps is a lack of translations being made, but this does point out that stories aren't just mutable, but ephemeral, and shows why it's so important to have written records that later generations can access and use themselves.

This, of course, also introduces the limitation of false equivalency. While the basis of my research was "Myths that relate a story about how fire came to be," when such myths seem to be lacking and there's a need to gather more data and draw more comparisons, the search is inevitably widened. However, in expanding the search, the idea that everything you're adding to the pool of data can be held on-par with everything else is introduced, which is not necessarily going to be true. I would not say that the fire themes derived from the Egyptian Ra story would be the same as the seemingly scant portions of Japanese mythology that mention their short-lived fire Kami, and neither quite matches up with the classically Greek Prometheus. Instead, each one has to be judged based off of its own qualities, semi-independently of the others while forming a coherent narrative.

Lack of detail, too, is a problem that could be considered omnipresent. Storytelling is a very fine and delicate art. You're weaving, with your voice and words, images for the mind that go beyond just what you describe. You're seeking to pull people in and get them engaged, and that requires the addition of details that might not otherwise be present, even if you're just adding those details to your personal variant of the story. But, and this is crucial, that also means that some stories

are very bare-bones in order to leave room for the storyteller. The entire Ra sun cycle, in the case of Egyptian mythology, is a very well detailed story about what happened, and how the other gods were involved, but the Prometheus story can be told very quickly, and other than minor variances about what, exactly, the eagles were eating from his body, isn't always written or transcribed with very fine detail, which can be a problem for interpretation if you use a shorter version.

The most important and ever present limitation that I eventually became aware of, however, comes down to sources. My research into this area was affected, greatly, by the resources I consulted and had at hand, a pool which swiftly began to dwindle as libraries and universities began closing their doors in the face of the coronavirus pandemic of early 2020. Gaining access to the actual texts proved more difficult than anticipated.

Further Research

This paper has a great deal of potential. If research hadn't been severely curbed in the wake of the 2020 Coronavirus outbreak, I think much more could have been done if additional sources had been located, as I attempted to not rely too heavily on Frazier's *Myths*, something that I ended up having to do. As it stands, beyond the expansion of this paper, there are a few other ways it could be expanded. One that came to mind originally, in the process of writing, was to expand the paper into part of a cyclical set, detailing more about the origins of the other three Western or four Eastern elements of their respective cycles. Alternatively, much in the line of Bucková, research could be done into the individual regions of the world to see if, on a smaller scale, the results of this paper are borne out or rejected, which could give some additional data on if the patterns noted on a global scale are unique because of the breadth of the corpus, or if they mimic those of individual regions, simply on a much larger scale.

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