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# Another Avatar of Mātariśvan? On the Hesychian Gloss Ἰθάς, Ἰθαξ (ι 387 L)\*

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1. This paper concerns a puzzling gloss recorded in the corpus of the ancient lexicographer Hesychius, which mentions a character named Ithas or Ithax:

Hsch. ι 387 L

Ἰθάς· ὁ τῶν Τιτῆων κῆρυξ. Προμηθεύς. τινὲς Ἰθαξ

*It<sup>h</sup>as*: the herald of the Titans. Prometheus. Some (say) *It<sup>h</sup>aks*<sup>1</sup>

In this work I intend to provide a possible etymology of the name and to explain why Ithas is identified with Prometheus and called ‘herald’ at the same time. For this purpose, I am going to focus on the linguistic and textual data about Prometheus’s fire-theft in Greek. I will also try to frame the gloss in its inherited background by comparing the Greek phraseological and mythological material with the Rigvedic evidence for Mātariśvan’s fire-theft. A close look at the phraseological components that Prometheus/Ithas and Mātariśvan have in common will cast new light on the apparently isolated tradition preserved by Hesychius.

2. The etymology of Ithas is clear: the noun can be traced back to a Proto-Indo-European root ‘kindle’, commonly reconstructed as *\*h<sub>2</sub>ejd<sup>h</sup>-* (*LIV*<sup>2</sup> 259),<sup>2</sup> but better reconstructed as *\*h<sub>1</sub>aid<sup>h</sup>-*, i.e., as a secondary root with the shape

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\* A special thank you to José Luis García Ramón, Stanley Insler, Gregory Nagy, Georges-Jean Pinault, and Charles Stocking for their valuable help and suggestions. All remaining mistakes are, of course, my responsibility. When not otherwise indicated, the reference texts for the printed translations are Jamison and Brereton 2014 (RV) and Most 2007 (Hesiod).

1 The obscure literary context of the gloss has long been the subject of scholarly debate; cf. Welcker (1849:II.415), followed by Pohlenz (1916:588 n.2), M. West (2002:113–4), and Debiasi (2004:103 n.239), who all consider the gloss to be part of Eumelos’s *Titanomachy* (= Eum. fr. 5 W) because Τιτῆων (for Τιτάνων) usually occurs in hexameter poetry. Differently, the gloss is recorded as the title of a lost satyr play on Prometheus in the *TGF* (II 8i ΙΘΑΣ vel ΙΘΑΞ). Providing an answer to this difficult question goes beyond the scope of this paper, which will not engage in further speculation.

2 Cf. Latte 1966:354; see also Morani 1983:42.

\**h<sub>1</sub>ai-d<sup>h</sup>*- ‘make warm’ in light of Hitt. *aāri* ‘is warm’, *inuzi* ‘makes warm’, which show no trace of an initial laryngeal two (*LIV*<sup>2</sup> 259 n.1). Derivatives of \**Haid<sup>h</sup>*- are widely attested in IE languages.<sup>3</sup> Some of the nominal derivatives can be framed in the Caland system (Nussbaum 1976:35–6); cf. αἰθίωψ ‘Aethiopian’ (lit. ‘whose face is burnt’),<sup>4</sup> Ved. *vīdhrá-* ‘clear sky’; OIr. *áed* (*u*-stem, gen. *aeda*) ‘fire’; Ved. *édhas-* (ntr.) ‘firewood’, *idhmá-* ‘id.’.<sup>5</sup>

The zero-grade of the root is displayed by several Greek lexemes,<sup>6</sup> namely, the Mycenaean man’s name (MN) *I-ta-ra-jo Itharaios*/ (PY Jn 431.10); the Al- phabetic Greek MN Ἰθαρος (Sardis+; cf. Robert 1963:45–7); the adjective ἰθαρός ‘cheerful, glad’ (Alc. fr. 5.8, 58.18 V, Call. *Aetia* fr. 85.16 H, Hsch. ι 386 L), ‘pure’ (Simmias fr. 25.6 P [= *AP* 15.22.6]); the verb ἰθαίνω ‘warm up, cherish’ (Hsch. ι 382, 399 L); the substantive ἰθή· εὐφοροσύνη “*it<sup>h</sup>ē*: mirth” (Hsch. ι 392 L), reflecting a semantic evolution from ‘kindle/heat’ to ‘cherish/comfort’, not unparalleled in Greek; cf. ἰθαίνε θυμόν “cherish the heart!” (*P.Ox.* 1.61, matching the compound ἰθαινόθυμος, Herod. III 2.260.10 L);<sup>7</sup> and θάλησι θυμόν “warms the heart” (B. fr. 20b.6–7 M).<sup>8</sup>

3 See the dossier of *LIV*<sup>2</sup> 259, completed with the material of *LIV Addenda* s.v. \**h<sub>2</sub>ejd<sup>h</sup>*-.

4 Lesky 1959:33, criticized by Beekes (1995–6:28).

5 Av. *aēśma-* ‘firewood’ reflects \**Haǵd<sup>h</sup>-s-mo-* (Hoffmann and Forssman 2004:95, Catt 2014: 39–41). Lat. *aestus* (gen. *-ūs*) might reflect \**Haǵd<sup>h</sup>-tu-* or \**Haǵd<sup>h</sup>-s-tu-*; see Nussbaum 1998: 527: *u*-substantivization of a *to*-stem; cf. Gmc. \**aista-* ‘hot’ > OE *āst* ‘kiln’.

6 The entire dossier presented here was discussed by Peters (1980:109–10), according to whom the forms should be kept separate from αἰθω.

7 Nominal \*-*aró*-derivatives pairing with \*-*anjo/e*-verbs, beside \*-*ró*-derivatives pairing with \*-*ñojo/e*-verbs, may point to an original *r/n*-stem (cf. *GEW* and *EDG* s.v. αἰθήρ), according to a well-attested pattern (Risch 1974:290, García Ramón 1992:191–3); cf. ὕδρος ‘water-snake’, Ved. *udrá-* ‘aquatic animal’, etc., ὕδαρος\* ‘watery’ (Hsch. υ 59 L) :: ὕδραίνω (< \*ὕδαίνω) ‘to wash, water’, *udanyáti* ‘to irrigate, water’ :: ὕδωρ ‘water’, *udán-* ‘water’, *udaká-* ‘id’. Accordingly, it has been proposed that ἰθαρός ‘cheerful, pure’ :: ἰθαίνω ‘cherish, heat’ points to a heteroclitite ἰθαρ (García Ramón p.c.); cf. Hsch. ι 385 L ἰθαρ· εὐθέως, ταχέως “*it<sup>h</sup>ar*: forthwith, quickly,” whose meaning may point to a possible misunderstanding or secondary contamination between \*ἰθαρ and \*ἰθαρ, an itacistic rendering for εἰθαρ ‘at once, forthwith’ (*Il.* 5.337+).

8 Dubious zero-grade congeners are κακῖθά· λιμηρά “*kakit<sup>h</sup>á*: hungry,” κακῖθής· ἄτροφος ἄμπελος “*kakit<sup>h</sup>ēs*: non-nutritious grape-vine (?),” κακῖθής· χαλεπόν, λιμηρές “*kakit<sup>h</sup>ēs*: difficult, hungry” (Hsch. κ 306–8 L). The compound might be interpreted as a possessive form, meaning ‘having a bad (κακός) burning/hunger’, or ‘having a drying/consuming burning/hunger’ with a first compound member \*κακ° going back to PIE \**kenk-* ‘burn (?)’; cf. Eng. *hunger*. Indeed, hunger is *traditionally* described as burning; cf. αἰθωψ λιμός ‘fiery hunger’ (Hes. *Op.* 363), λιμός αἰθων ‘id.’; cf. Hes. fr. 43a.5–7 MW, Aeschin. in *Ctesiph.* 184.7, Call.

3. If Ἰθάς was paroxytone, as proposed by Latte (1966:354), it reflected the type Θόας, -αντος, probably based on a thematic stem. Alternatively, the original form of the name might be \*Ἰθάς (M. Schmidt 1860:350) with accent retraction, perhaps influenced by Ἰθαξ. An original PN \*Ἰθάς could reflect the type φυγὰς or Δρυὰς: a proto-form \*ἰθάς, -άδος, \*‘heating, glowing’ (?) would exist beside ἰθή \*‘warmth/heat’ and αἶθω ‘kindle, heat’ in the same way as φυγὰς ‘exile, fugitive’ exists beside φυγή ‘flight’ and φεύγω ‘flee’.<sup>9</sup> Alternatively, if Ἰθαξ was the original form of the name, an *ak*-form could synchronically pair with a thematic name \*ἰθός or a feminine ἰθή, just as πῖδαξ ‘spring’ pairs with a feminine \*πιδή, probably underlying πιδήεις ‘rich in springs’ and πιδάω ‘gush forth’ (Kölligan 2016:119–23, 2017:369–70).

4. The link between the semantic field of ‘warmth/heat’ and Prometheus can be easily reconstructed on the basis of the Greek sources about the Titan. According to the Hesiodic accounts, Prometheus steals fire in a “fennel-stick,” the νάρθηξ,<sup>10</sup> e.g.,

Hes. *Th.* 566–7

κλέψας ἀκαμάτοιο πυρὸς τηλέσκοπον αὐγὴν  
ἐν κοῖλῳ νάρθηκι [...]

Stealing the far-seen gleam of tireless fire in a hollow fennel stalk<sup>11</sup>

Prometheus is thus considered the ‘fire-lighter’ (πυρκαῖης, A. *TGF* III \*\*204a–7a) and ‘fire-bringer’ (πυρφόρος, S. *OC* 55)<sup>12</sup> par excellence. Besides, he is referred to as the discoverer of fire-sticks in a later Greek source:

*h.Cer.* 66–7, *Schol. in Lycophr.* 1396, on which see Levaniouk 2000:36–9. On ἀκάκητα as a possible congener of PIE \**kenk-* see Massetti: in preparation.

9 Cf. Rau (2004:139), who presents other *ad*-substantives or adjectives pairing with both zero-grade verbs and zero-grade feminines or adjectives, such as ἰλλάς (f., Hom.) ‘rope, band’, (S.), adj. ‘close-packed’ :: ἰλλω ‘wind’ (S.+) :: ἰλλός ‘squinting’; λαμπάς (f., A.+) ‘torch’ :: λάμπω (Hom.+) ‘shine’ :: λαμπή (A.+) ‘torch’; τυπάς (f., S.+) ‘mallet’ :: τύπτω (Hom.+) ‘strike, beat’ :: τυπή (Hom.+) ‘blow’, τύπος (Hdt.+) ‘stamp, impression’.

10 The νάρθηξ is a fennel stalk used to carry the fire and is identified with the thyrsus; cf. E. *Ba.* 146–8 πυρσώδη φλόγα πεύκαζ/ ἐκ νάρθηκος ἄϊσσει/ δρόμῳ “(Bacchus’s) flaming pine torch shoots a flame from the fennel wand, while running.”

11 Cf. also Hes. *Op.* 52.

12 Both epithets are transmitted as the titles of lost plays of Aeschylus; see Ussher 1977:291.

## D.S. 5.67.2

Ἰαπετοῦ δὲ Προμηθέα τὸν παραδεδομένον μὲν ὑπὸ τινων μυθογράφων ὅτι τὸ πῦρ κλέψας παρὰ τῶν θεῶν ἔδωκε τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, πρὸς δ' ἀλήθειαν εὐρετὴν γενόμενον τῶν πυρείων, ἐξ ὧν ἐκκάζεται τὸ πῦρ

And to Iapetus was born Prometheus, of whom tradition tells us, as some writers of myths record, that he stole fire from the gods and gave it to the men, though the truth is that he was the discoverer of fire-sticks, from which fire is kindled.

5. While a possible overlap between Ithas and Prometheus is easily conceivable, the link between “the herald of the Titans” and Prometheus is apparently missing. Prometheus is never called a herald or a messenger because he does not carry any message in the literary sources in our possession.<sup>13</sup> In order to solve this issue, Reinhardt (1949:41) and Kerényi (1963:50–5) proposed an overlap with the Olympian god Hermes, the ‘messenger’ (ἄγγελος, Hom.+) and the ‘herald’ (κῆρυξ, Hes.+) of immortal gods. To be sure, Prometheus shares a variety of characteristics with Hermes, namely:

- a. The discovery of fire-sticks (see §4 above), ascribed to Hermes in the fourth *Homeric Hymn*; cf. Ἑρμῆς τοι πρότιστα πυρήια πῦρ τ' ἀνέδωκε (v. 111) “it was Hermes who first delivered fire-sticks and fire.”
- b. The invention of sacrifice or of sacrificial allotment, attributed to Prometheus in Hes. *Th.* 535–60 and to Hermes in *h.Merc.* 4.115–41.
- c. The association with thievery, e.g., Hes. *Th.* 566 κλέψας ἀκαμάτοιο πυρὸς τηλέσκοπον αὐγήν “(Prometheus,) who stole the beam of the untiring fire, which can be seen from afar”; Hippon. fr. 3a G Ἑρμῆ ... φωρῶν ἐταῖρε “Oh Hermes ... companion of thieves!”
- d. A number of common epithets, e.g., ἀκάκητα ‘guileless, gracious (?)’, which applies *exclusively* to Hermes (*Il.* 16.185, *Od.* 24.10, Hes. fr. 23 MW) and to Prometheus (Hes. *Th.* 614), or compounds with the structure [ποικιλο°THOUGHT]: ποικιλομήτης ‘having various wiles’ (Hermes, in

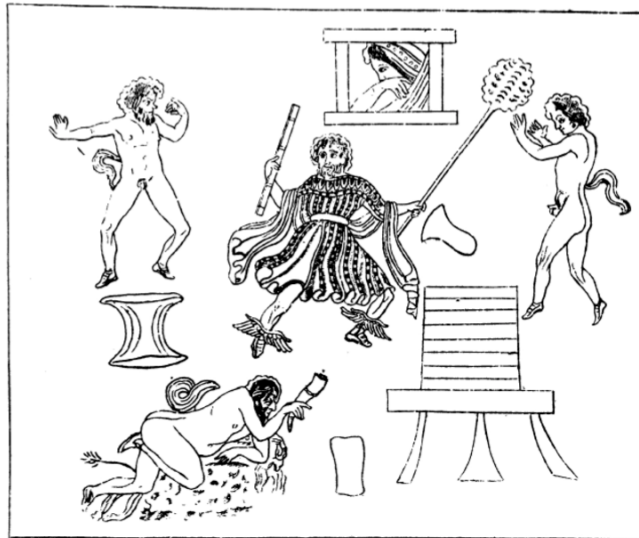
13 A. *Pr.* 199–221 mentions the diplomatic activity of Prometheus. Accordingly, Prometheus was a sort of mediator between the gods and the Titans. For Eumelus’s poem as the source of some themes found in A. *Pr.*, see S. West 1994:129–49.



*h.Merc.* 4.155), ποικιλόβουλος ‘having a changeful counsel’ (Prometheus, in *Hes. Th.* 510).

Such significant common characteristics undeniably imply that Hermes and Prometheus have similar roles in narratives involving the same traditional themes, i.e., the invention of sacrifice and the discovery of fire through deceit and theft (Sowa 1984:200–1). However, they are not conclusive for reconstructing how the label “herald of the Titans” came to apply to Prometheus. Despite the genealogical relation between him and Hermes (Stocking 2017:92–100),<sup>14</sup> the two characters were *always* kept apart in Greek. Above all, they always maintained a different “status”: Prometheus a primordial god, a Titan; Hermes the son of Zeus. The source of the association between Prometheus and the act of carrying messages should be sought elsewhere.

6. In this regard, some iconographical and literary data may be enlightening.



Vase painting from a lost pelike, Morchini collection, Turin (Gerhard 1868:pl. 21.2)

In a lost vase painting (pelike of the Morchini collection, once in Turin) preserved only in a drawing by Eduard Gerhard (1868:pl. 21.2), the central figure, which, according to Beazley (1939:633), is to be identified with Prometheus or,

14 Hermes is the son of Maia, daughter of Atlas (*h.Hom.* 18.3–4, *Hes. Th.* 938), who, like Prometheus, is the son of Iapetus (cf. *Hes. Th.* 507–10).

maybe, Dionysus, carries a fennel stalk in his right-hand<sup>15</sup> and a thyrsus in the left. The character wears winged boots and is surrounded by satyrs. The gestures of the frantic satyrs match those of the satyrs surrounding Prometheus in other vase paintings, but no parallel can be found for the winged boots,<sup>16</sup> a standard accessory of messengers in Greek vase paintings and literary sources.

Further literary passages suggest that the association between Prometheus and fire lies at the basis of his identification with “the herald of the Titans.” In some literary sources, the delivery of a message and the act of “carrying fire” are explicitly connected. Herodotus (8.98.1–2) compares the Persian riding post to the Greek torch races: the messengers of the ἀγγαρήιον-post pass their charge from hand to hand “as in the Greek torch-bearers’ race in honor of Hephaestus” (κατά περ ἐν Ἑλλησι ἢ λαμπαδηφορίῃ τὴν τῷ Ἥφαιστῳ ἐπιτελέουσι).<sup>17</sup> In a similar way, in Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon* the news about Troy being set on fire by the Achaeans travels up to Mycenae, as if it were a torch race:

A. *Ag.* 281–316

Ἥφαιστος, Ἰδῆς λαμπρὸν ἐκπέμπων σέλας·  
 φρυκτὸς δὲ φρυκτὸν δεῦρ’ ἀπ’ ἀγγάρου πυρὸς  
 ἔπεμπεν [...]   
 [...] τοιοῖδε τοί μοι λαμπαδηφόρων νόμοι, [...]   
 νικᾷ δ’ ὁ πρῶτος καὶ τελευταῖος δραμῶν.  
 τέκμαρ τοιοῦτον σύμβολόν τέ σοι λέγω,  
 ἀνδρὸς παραγγεῖλαντος ἐκ Τροίας ἐμοί

(Clytemnestra:) — Hephaestus, sending a bright blaze on its way from Mount Ida; and then from that courier-fire beacon sent on beacon all the way here. [...] Such, I tell you, were my dispositions for this torch-relay.

15 This detail would match Prometheus’s iconography in E. *Ph.* 1121–2: δεξιᾷ δὲ λαμπάδα/ Τῖτάν Προμηθεὺς ἔφερεν “in his right (hand) he carried a torch, like the Titan Prometheus.”

16 In one vase painting (*LIMC* VII.2 s.v. *Prometheus* 12 [= Beazley 1939:pl. 15], Iekanis, Berlin Staatliches Museum) Prometheus, surrounded by satyrs, wears a short chiton and boots.

17 As Charles Stocking points out to me (p.c.), in Hdt. 6.105–7 Philippides, carrying the message from Marathon, claims to have seen the god Pan, who is celebrated in Athenian torch races. Pan is not a fire-god, but is associated with Hermes, both genealogically (cf. *h.Hom.* 19.1–5+) and phraseologically; see, e.g., the collocation Ἀρκαδίας μεδέων “guardian of Arkadia,” referring to Hermes (*h.Merc.* 4.2+) and Pan (Pi. fr. 5.1 SM).

[...] the first and the last runner were alike victorious! Such, I tell you, is the evidence and the token that my husband has transmitted to me from Troy.<sup>18</sup>

Although neither Herodotus nor Aeschylus mentions Prometheus, their passages still tell us something about him. Indeed, Hephaestus, Athena, and Prometheus were worshipped together in the Athenian festivals that included torch races (Dougherty 2006:50), as confirmed by Pausanias:

Paus. 1.30.2

Προμηθέως βωμός, καὶ θεοῦσιν ἅπ' αὐτοῦ πρὸς τὴν πόλιν ἔχοντες  
καιομένας λαμπάδας

(There is) an altar to Prometheus, and from it they run to the city carrying  
burning torches.

Finally, Hyginus seems to retain a connection among Prometheus's theft, the torch race, and the idea of carrying a message:

[Hyg.] *Astr.* 2.15.1.5–15

*Prometheus [...] deuenit ad Iouis ignem; quo deminuto et in ferulam coniec-  
to, laetus ut uolare, non currere uideretur, ferulam iactans [...]. Itaque  
homines adhuc plerumque qui laetitiae fiunt nuntii, celerrime ueniunt. Prae-  
terea in certatione ludorum cursoribus instituerunt ex Promethei consuetu-  
dine ut currerent lampadem iactantes*

Prometheus [...] approached the fire of Jove, and with a little of it shut in a  
fennel-stalk, he came joyfully tossing the stalk, seeming to fly, not to run  
[...]. Up to this time, men who bring good news usually come with speed. In  
the rivalry of the games they also make it a practice for the runners to run,  
shaking torches after the manner of Prometheus.

To the modern reader of the passage, the connection between Prometheus's speed, the "joyful message," and the torch race seems unjustified. Given the fact that ἰθή meant 'mirth' (Hsch.) and was etymologically related to 'Ithas', the insistence on Prometheus's joy (*laetus, laetitia*) in Hyginus appears to be a remarkable coincidence. Did Hyginus and Hesychius's lexicon depend on the same source, which associated Ithas and 'mirth' (*ithḗ*)? Attractive as it might appear, this suggestion remains highly speculative. The connection between carrying messages and fire is, however, clearly confirmed by Hyginus's passage.

18 For a commentary on the entire passage see Fraenkel 1950:153–69.

## 7. To sum up:

- a. Ἴθας and Ἴθαξ can be traced back to PIE *\*Hajdʰ-* ‘kindle’, which underlies also Ved. *edh-* ‘id.’. Indeed,
- b. Prometheus is the fire-kindler (πυρκαῖς, A.) and the fire-bringer (πυρφόρος, S.) par excellence. Additionally, he was considered the discoverer of fire-sticks (εὐρετήν ... τῶν πυρείων, D.S.).
- c. Prometheus and Ithas share an association with fire. Their action of “carrying fire” was reproduced by athletes, through the torch races performed during the *Prometheia* in Athens. We can conclude that Prometheus and Ithas are messengers *because they are ultimately associated with fire*.

8. The comparative phraseological analysis of the Vedic passages about Mātariśvan reveals that the Greek and Vedic episodes of the fire-theft share some significant coincidences. Mentioned twenty-seven times in the Rigveda, Mātariśvan is sometimes identified with Agni, e.g., RV 3.26.2ab *tām śubhrām agnīm āvase havāmahe, vaiśvānarām mātariśvānam ukthiyām* “we invoke the beautiful Agni for help, who is Vaiśvānara and praiseworthy Mātariśvan,”<sup>19</sup> or as the one who brought Agni to Bhṛgu or Manu, e.g., RV 1.60.1d *rātīm bharad bhīgave mātariśvā* “Mātariśvan brought him (: Agni) as a gift to Bhṛgu,” while he is identified with the wind in the *Atharvaveda*.

Indeed, it is likely that Mātariśvan meant originally ‘master of the fire’. Stanley Insler<sup>20</sup> proposed to reconstruct an original *\*ātar-íśvan-* ‘Lord of the fire’, with a second compound *°íśvan-* belonging to Ved. *ís-* ‘master’ (cf. OAv. *isvan-* ‘lord’) and a folk-etymological transformation of the first compound member; cf. RV 3.29.11c *mātariśvā yád ámimīta mātári* “he (: Agni) (becomes) Mātariśvan when he has assumed his measure in his mother.”<sup>21</sup>

19 Cf. also RV 1.96.4, 1.164.46, 3.5.9. Mātariśvan is identified with Bṛhaspati in RV 1.190.2.

20 I am very grateful to Prof. Insler for sharing his ideas with me (p.c.).

21 The folk etymology found in the *Nirukta* (Roth 1852:111) is ‘swelling in the mother (fire-stick)’; see Nagy 1990:103. Parpola (2004–5:26–7) mentions Insler’s etymology, proposing a re-interpretation of a sequence *\*m ... \*ātariśvan-*. The etymology of the name is still the subject of debate; see Scarlata 1999:540–1: *\*meh<sub>2</sub>t<sub>2</sub>-h<sub>2</sub>ik-ye<sub>n</sub>-* ‘who has power over the mothers’; Pinault 2011:284–92: *\*dméh<sub>2</sub>-t(e)r<sup>o</sup>h<sub>2</sub>ik-ye<sub>n</sub>-* ‘who disposes of the timber’, whom I thank for the bibliographical reference.

As first noticed by Johanna Narten (1960:132–5), Mātariśvan’s theft is often described using Ved. *mathi* ‘rob’,<sup>22</sup> which might go back to the same root as Gk. Προμᾶθεύς, PIE *\*math₂-* ‘rob (?)’.<sup>23</sup> The outcome *-th-* notated ⟨θ⟩ from a sequence *\*-th₂-* is problematic in Greek.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the etymology of Prometheus as ‘Forethought’ *ex Graeco ipso*, as related to μανθάνω ‘learn’, like his brother’s name, Ἐπιμηθεύς ‘Afterthought’, may have played a role in reshaping \*Προμᾶτεύς (the putative outcome of *\*<sup>o</sup>māth₂-*) to Προμᾶθεύς.

9. Not only do Prometheus and Mātariśvan have the same role in the myth of the discovery of fire through theft, but their achievements are described by means of the same collocations within their respective mythological traditions, namely,

- a. [to STEAL – FIRE]: Prometheus: Hes. *Op.* 55 χαίρεις πῦρ κλέψας καὶ ἐμὰς φρένας ἠπεροπεύσας “[Zeus:] you (: Prometheus) are pleased that you have stolen fire and beguiled my mind”; Mātariśvan: RV 1.148.1a māthīd yād īm viṣṭō mātarīśvā “since with effort Mātariśvan stole him (: Agni).”
- b. [to STEAL – FIRE – from AFAR]: Prometheus steals fire *visible from afar*; cf. Hes. *Th.* 566 κλέψας ἀκαμάτοιο πῦρὸς τηλέσκοπον αὐγὴν “by stealing the far-seen gleam of tireless fire.” while Mātariśvan steals the ‘far-radiant’ (*vibhāva-*, RV 1.148.1d) fire, or brings fire ‘from afar’; cf. RV 1.128.2fg yām mātarīśvā mánave parāvāto, devām bhāh parāvātah “he whom Mātariśvan (brought) to Manu from afar—the god he brought from afar.”<sup>25</sup>
- c. [to STEAL – FIRE – CONCEALED]: Prometheus steals the fire that Zeus had concealed; cf. Hes. *Op.* 50–1 κρύψε δὲ πῦρ τὸ μὲν αὖτις ἐὺς παῖς Ἰαπετοῖο/

22 Both Mātariśvan and the wind appear in a collocation with *mathi*; cf. AVŚ 2.30.1ab yāthedām bhūmyā ādhi, tñam vāto mathāyāti “wie der Wind hier das Gras von der Erde hinweg raubt”; cf. AVP 9.25.13, AVP 10.9.26, commented on by Narten 1960:126–8.

23 On common points between Prometheus and Mātariśvan see Roth 1852:112, Kuhn 1859:8–44, Bergaigne 1878:I.52–7, Charpentier 1911:69–83, Kuiper 1971:85–98, who criticizes the former hypothesis of an overlap between Prometheus and Mātariśvan. See Melchert 2016 on a possible lengthened grade *\*māth-* in the name of Prometheus.

24 In some cases, the second laryngeal seems to cause aspiration of the preceding voiceless stop; cf. 2nd sg. perf. ending *\*-th₂e > -θα*: Gk. οἶσθα ‘you know’; cf. Ved. *véttha* ‘id.’ In other cases, however, the aspiration does not seem to occur, e.g., Gk. πλατύς ‘broad’ < *\*p[th₂us]* vs. Ved. *pṛthú-* ‘id.’

25 Cf. also RV 3.9.5cd, where the form *mathitá-*, referring to fire, can be interpreted as ‘robbed’ or as ‘churned’; see Jamison and Brereton 2014:481.

ἔκλεψ’ ἀνθρώποισι “And (Zeus) concealed fire; but the good son of Iapetus stole it for human beings.” Mātariśvan steals the fire, which was hiding; cf. RV 3.5.10cd *yādī bhṛgubhyaḥ pári mātariśvā, gúhā sántam havyavāham samīdhé* “when Mātariśvan kindled him hiding from the Bhṛguṣ, conveying the oblation.”

- d. [to BRING (\**bʰer-*) – FIRE]: Prometheus is the fire-bringer par excellence; cf. S. OC 55–6 [...] δ’ ὁ πυρφόρος θεός/ Τιτὰν Προμηθεύς “the fire-bringer god, the Titan Prometheus.” As proof of this, Prometheus’s Argive avatar was called Phoroneus, the ‘(fire-)bringer’;<sup>26</sup> cf. Paus. 2.19.5 οὐ γάρ τι ὁμολογοῦσι δοῦναι πῦρ Προμηθεῖ ἀνθρώποις, ἀλλὰ ἐς Φορωνέα τοῦ πυρὸς μετέγειν ἐθέλουσι τὴν εὕρεσιν “For they do not admit that fire was given to mankind by Prometheus, but insist on assigning the discovery of fire to Phoroneus.” Ved. *bhar* (also *ā-bhar*) often describes Mātariśvan’s achievement; cf. RV 1.93.6ab *ānyām divó mātariśvā jabhār<sub>a</sub>, amathnād anyām pári śyenó ádreḥ* “Mātariśvan bore the one here from heaven; the falcon stole the other from the rock.”

As emphasized by Insler (p.c.), the onomastic and phraseological evidence speaks in favor of a common tradition about the fire-theft, which lived on in different ways within two IE languages: the Greek material emphasized the theft through the *agent* names, Prometheus ‘the fire-thief’, Phoroneus ‘the fire-bringer’. Therefore, the tradition about Prometheus’s punishment as a consequence of his crime is widely developed in the Greek literary tradition. Differently, in the Vedic one, it is the *verb*, not the agent, which expresses the dim memory of the legend of the Lord of Fire.

**10.** Significantly, Mātariśvan shares with Ithas and Prometheus the association with PIE \**H<sub>2</sub>idʰ-* ‘kindle’, as shown in the following passages:

RV 3.5.10

*úd astambhīt samīdhā nākam ṛsvó*  
*<sub>a</sub>’gnīr bhāvann uttamó rocanānām*

26 Names in -ωνεύς can pair with thematic stems in -ωνός, which, in turn, may point to an original *n*-stem as a derivational basis; cf. κολωνός ‘hill’ (*h.Cer.* 2.272+) : Κολωνεύς (toponym in *IG* 2. 944.48); μελεδωνός ‘attendant, guardian’ (*Hdt.* 3.61) : μελεδωνεύς ‘id.’ (*Theoc.* 24.106). A MN Phoronos is preserved in *Suid.* φ 616: Φορωνεύς ὄνομα. καὶ Φόρωνος, ὄνομα κύριον “*Phorōneus*: name. Also *Phorōnos*, proper name.”

*yādī bhṛ̥gubhyaḥ pári mātariśvā  
gúhā sántaṃ havyavāhaṃ samīdhé*

Towering, Agni has propped up the vault of the sky through his kindling, becoming the highest of the lights, when Mātariśvan kindled him hiding from the Bhṛ̥gus, conveying the oblation.

RV 1.143.2

*sá jāyamānaḥ paramé vyòmanṇy  
āvir agnir abhavan mātariśvane  
asyá krátvā samidhā́sya majmánā  
prá dyāvā śocīḥ pṛthivī́ arocayat*

As he was being born in the highest distant heaven, Agni became manifest to Mātariśvan. By the resolve and the might of him as he was kindled, his blaze illuminated heaven and the earth.

As Prometheus was imagined as the “discoverer of fire-sticks” in at least one Greek tradition, it is also significant that the Vedic root-noun *samīdh-* commonly denotes the ‘kindling stick’; cf. RV 5.6.4ad *ā te agna idhīmahi, dyumántaṃ devājāram / yád dha syá te pánīyasī, samíd dīdáyati dyávi* “Agni, here would we kindle your brilliant and unaging (flame), oh god, so that this kindling stick of yours, admired more, will shine in heaven.”

Furthermore, in the *Rigveda* Mātariśvan is called messenger, Ved. *dūtá-*. This term usually describes Agni; cf. RV 1.36.4ab *devāsas tvā váruṇo mitró aryamā, sám dūtám prasnám indhate* “the gods Varuṇa, Mitra, and Aryaman kindle you, their primordial messenger.” Agni is called *dūtá-* because he brings the ritual oblations to the gods and leads the gods to the sacrifice.<sup>27</sup>

Since Mātariśvan is identified with Agni (H.-P. Schmidt 1968:68–71), he also took over Agni’s epithet ‘messenger’; cf. RV 3.5.9 *úd u śtutáh samídhā yah-vó adyauḍ, várṣman divó ádhi nābhā pṛthivyāḥ/ mitró agnir ídyo mātariśvā, á dūtó vakṣad yajáthāya devān* “praised, the young one has flared up through his

27 Several Vedic passages (RV 1.36.4, 1.118.1, 5.3.8, 5.8.6, 5.26.6, 7.2.3, 7.3.3, 10.91.11, 10.110.1) document an association between the notion of ‘kindling’ / ‘kindling stick’ and those of ‘messenger’ / ‘role of messenger/mission’. Fire is compared to an eagle and a messenger also in one Hittite passage; cf. KUB 43.62 ii 1–10 *paḥhur šai[t] [...] ŠA TI<sub>8</sub><sup>MUSEN</sup> iwar ANA TI<sub>8</sub><sup>MUSEN</sup> ma ḫal[ugaš pair]* “fire became enraged, [...] He sprang up like an eagle, and to the eagle (went as a) messenger” (Melchert 2003:283–4).

kindling, upon the summit of heaven and the navel of earth. To be invoked as Mitra and Mātariśvan, Agni as a messenger will convey the gods to the sacrifice.”

In at least one passage, however, “messenger” applies to Mātariśvan as an individual figure, distinct from Agni:

RV 6.8.4cd

*ā dūtó agnīm abharad vivásvato  
vaiśvānarām mātariśvā parāvataḥ*

The messenger of Vivasvant brought Agni hither—Mātariśvan (brought) Vaiśvānara from afar.

Finally, Mātariśvan is mentioned as the one who brought “the messenger” (: Agni) or as the one who allowed Agni to engage in carrying messages from the men to the gods:

RV 1.60.1

*váhniṃ yaśásam vidáthasya ketúm  
suprāvyàṃ dūtám sadyóartham  
dvijánmānam rayīm iva praśastám  
rātīm bharad bhṛgave mātariśvā*

Glorious conveyor and beacon of the rite, pursuing (his ritual duties) well, the messenger who immediately (reaches) his goal, of double birth, celebrated like wealth—Mātariśvan brought him as a gift to Bhṛgu.

RV 1.71.4

*máthīd yád īm vibhṛto mātariśvā  
grhé-grhe śyetó jéno bhūt  
ād īm rájñe ná sáhīyase sácā sánn  
ā dūtyām bhṛgavāno vivāya*

When Mātariśvan, borne away, stole him, and he of worthy birth came to be gleaming in every house, after that (the fire) of the Bhṛgu undertook the role of messenger, as if for a more powerful king, being associated with him.

**11.** The comparative analysis of the linguistic and textual data reveals that Ithas/Ithax and Mātariśvan share a limited but still significant number of components:

- a.  $\text{ṛ}I\theta\alpha\varsigma/\text{ṛ}I\theta\alpha\xi$  goes back ultimately to PIE  $*H_{ajd}h-$  ‘kindle’, which underlies Gk.  $i\theta\eta$  ‘warmth/glow’, whence ‘mirth’, and Ved.  $(sam)edh$  ‘kindle’, which de-



scribes one of Mātariśvan's actions in the Rigveda; cf. *mātariśvā* [...] *samīdhé* (RV 3.5.10cd) and *samīdh-* 'kindling stick', a tool discovered by Prometheus within the Greek tradition (εὐρετήν ... τῶν πυρείων, D.S. 5.67.2).

- b. The identification between Ithas and Prometheus essentially relies upon their association with fire. At the same time, Prometheus shares several collocations with Mātariśvan, which can be synoptically presented as follows:

	[STEAL	FIRE	([visible] from AFAR)	CONCEALED]
Prometheus (Hes.)	ἔκλεψε/κλέψας	πῦρ/πυρός	αὐγὴν τηλέσκοπον	(Zeus) κρύψε
Mātariśvan (RV)	<i>māthīd</i>	<i>agnīm</i>	<i>parāvataḥ</i>	<i>gūhā śāntam</i>
	[BRING	FIRE]		
Prometheus (S.+)		πυρφόρος		
Argive tradition	Φορῶνεύς			
Mātariśvan (RV)	<i>bharat</i>	<i>agnīm</i>		

- c. The identification of Ithas and, indirectly, of Prometheus as "the herald (κῆρυξ) of the Titans" might be understood in the framework of the *Prometheia* within the Greek tradition, although Ithas is never mentioned in connection with the Athenian torch race. Strikingly, Mātariśvan is directly called *dūtā-* 'messenger' in at least one Rigvedic passage (RV 6.8.4cd).

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of the Greek and Vedic textual evidence about the figures connected with the fire-theft within their respective traditions casts light on an obscure Hesychian gloss.

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