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Título: Fire. The Spark That Ignited Human Evolution

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The association between our ancestors and fire, somewhere around six to four million years ago, had a tremendous impact on human evolution, transforming our earliest human ancestor, a being communicating without speech but with insight, reason, manual dexterity, highly developed social organization, and the capability of experimenting with this new technology. As it first associated with and then began to tame fire, this extraordinary being began to distance itself from its primate relatives, taking a path that would alter its environment, physiology, and self-image.

Based on her extensive research with nonhuman primates, anthropologist Frances Burton details the stages of the conquest of fire and the systems it affected. Her study examines the natural occurrence of fire and describes the effects light has on human physiology. She constructs possible variations of our earliest human ancestor and its way of life, utilizing archaeological and anthropological evidence of the earliest human-controlled fires to explore the profound physical and biological impacts fire had on human evolution.

Anthropology professor and primate expert Burton combs the evidence for clues to how our ancestors went from observing wild grassland fires to producing and using their own, and how that ability furthered evolutionary development. At the heart of the text lies a detailed study of light; Burton details the quantity of light produced by various natural sources, from a moonless night to bright sunlight, and discusses how light reception impacts humans. For instance, "Would a campfire have produced the light necessary to have had a physiological effect on our ancestors?" Comparing results from a detailed campfire experiment with research on melatonin and circadian rhythms, Burton concludes that, in fact, "the repercussions throughout hormonal systems and patterns of brain activity over time may be a critical factor in explaining the divergence of our species." Burton further explores bipedalism, diet and social groups, and discusses scientific evidence for the dating of fire's use. With great detail and concise arguments, this well-sourced work will fascinate armchair scientists with an interest in anthropology and evolution.

Frances D. Burton is professor of anthropology at the University of Toronto. She has studied primates in Costa Rica, Honduras, Barbados, China, Malaysia, Kenya, Morocco, and Gibraltar, examining the biological bases of behavior. Her many publications include the edited volume

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Social Process and Mental Abilities in Non-Human Primates: Evidences from Longitudinal Field Studies and a pioneering CD titled "A Multimedia Guide to the Non-Human Primates."