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**Lost for Words: Chalcedonian Christology Revisited**  
**Im Nebel der Worte: die Christologie von Chalcedon**

**Review of Ecumenical Studies**



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Lost for Words: Chalcedonian Christology Revisited  
Im Nebel der Worte: die Christologie von Chalcedon

guest editors

**Sebastian Mateiescu, Florin George Călian**

The Institute for Ecumenical Research, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu  
Institut für Ökumenische Forschung, Lucian Blaga Universität Hermannstadt

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# The Topic of Penetration of Fire into Iron in Byzantine Christology<sup>1</sup>

DMITRY BIRIUKOV\*

*In this article I seek to show in what manner the Stoic principle of total blending, illustrated by the example of the penetration of fire into iron, finds its refraction in Byzantine Christological teachings. According to the Stoics, total blending occurs when one body accepts certain qualities of the other, while remaining itself, or when both mixed bodies acquire qualities of each other while preserving their natures. I argue that Origen's use of the example of incandescent iron had an effect on the later theological discourse. There it appears in two contexts, Christology and deification. In this article the focus is on Christology. I claim that the example was introduced into the Christological discourse by Apollinarius of Laodicea. Then, I investigate how it was transformed in later theological writings by (Ps.-) Basil of Caesarea, Theodoret of Cyrus, Cyril of Alexandria, Sever of Antioch, John of Damascus, and the Corpus Leontianum. In this context, I pay special attention to the discrepancy between John of Damascus and Leontius of Jerusalem as regards the issue of the complexity of Christ's hypostasis. I clarify the causes of this discrepancy.*

**Keywords:** *Byzantine Christology, total blending, Stoicism, physical paradigms, properties, passions*

## Introduction

As I mentioned in a previous paper dedicated to the fire-iron theme in Byzantine theological literature<sup>2</sup>, the example of iron and fire as an illustration of the interpenetration of bodies came to Christian theologians from Stoic doctrine.<sup>3</sup> The Stoics used this example, among others, in order to substanti-

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\* Dmitry Biriukov, postdoctoral researcher at the Poletayev Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in the Humanities of National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE). National Research University Higher School of Economics, 101000, Russia, Moscow, 20 Myasnitskaya Ulitsa, dbirjuk@gmail.com.

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<sup>2</sup> Dmitry Biriukov, "Penetration of Fire into Iron. The Sense and the Usage Mode of This Metaphor for Description of Theosis in the Byzantine Theological Literature", in: *Scrinium. Journal of Patrology and Critical Hagiography* 15 (2019), p. 163-182, [https://brill.com/view/journals/scr/15/1/article-p143\\_10.xml](https://brill.com/view/journals/scr/15/1/article-p143_10.xml), viewed on 10.10.2019.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Aphrodisiensis, *De mixt.* IV; XII, in: Ivo Bruns (ed.), *Alexandri Aphrodisiensis praeter commentaria scripta minora*, Berlin 1892, p. 218.1-3, 227.11-228.4. See: Robert Todd,

ate their teaching about the *total blending* of bodies (as distinguished from *conflation* and *composition*). According to the Stoics, the blending (μίξις, κρᾶσις) of bodies takes place when a body receives certain qualities of another, while remaining, nevertheless, itself, or when both mixed bodies acquire the qualities of each other, while preserving their own natures. By contrast, in the case of *conflation* (σύγχυσις), bodies lose their identity as they establish a new entity, and in *composition* (παράθεσις), they merely touch each other externally. The blending with preservation of the nature of the mixed bodies was understood by the Stoics as *total blending* (κρᾶσις δι' ὅλων),<sup>4</sup> that is, such that one body penetrates into another completely and totally. As the tradition testified by Stobaeus asserts, for the mixture, the Stoics distinguished κρᾶσις as applied to liquids and μίξις for non-liquids (it was the μίξις type of mixture that Stoics demonstrated through the example of iron and fire).<sup>5</sup>

The principle of total blending was illustrated by Stoics with the following examples: mixture of wine with water, penetration of soul into body,<sup>6</sup> piercing of air by light,<sup>7</sup> and iron made incandescent by fire. In the last case, a piece of iron receives the properties of fire (burning), while preserving its nature of iron. The Stoic teaching about blending, whereby the mixed bodies retain their identity, was appropriated and creatively applied by Christian authors.

In my recent paper,<sup>8</sup> I have attempted to delineate the character and ways of usage of the fire and iron example in Byzantine theological literature. In my view, this example with its Stoic connotation was used in Byzantine theology in two contexts. First, it was applied as an example illustrating *theosis*: when the divine properties appear in the deified human being. And second, it was employed to represent the conjunction of two natures of Christ in one hypostasis and to clarify the specificity of communication of these natures.

In addition, I have suggested that the example of iron penetrated by fire made its first appearance in the Christian literature in the writings of Origen.<sup>9</sup> Origen used it to describe the way in which the Logos is conjoined

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Alexander of Aphrodisias on Stoic Physics. A Study of the *De Mixtione* with Preliminary Essays, Text, Translation and Commentary, *Philosophia Antiqua* vol. 28, Leiden, Brill 1976, p. 29-72.

<sup>4</sup> As a technical term, the notion of *total blending* has been mostly in use.

<sup>5</sup> Joannes Stobaeus I, 17, 374-377, in: August Meineke (ed.), *Ioannis Stobaei Eclogarum. Physicarum et Ethicarum* vol. 1, Lipsiae in Aedibus B. G. Teubneri 1869, p. 102.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>7</sup> For ex.: Alexander of Aphrodisias in: *De mixtione* 4, p. 218.9-10.

<sup>8</sup> See: D. Biriukov, "Penetration of Fire into Iron".

<sup>9</sup> Origen, *De princ.* II, 6, 6, p. 181-195, in: Origène, *Traité des principes, Tome I (Livres I et II)*, Trad. par H. Crouzel et M. Simonetti, (SC, 252), Paris 1978, p. 321.

with Christ's soul. In my view, Origen's model became paradigmatic for illustrating the penetration of the uncreated into the created, and influenced how two of the abovementioned interpretations of the Stoic topic of mixture were shaped in Byzantine literature: when it was used for describing *theosis* of a human being, and when the image of burning iron was employed within the Christological context, even though the Christology of subsequent Byzantine authors was radically different from that of Origen.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, generally, in Byzantine theological literature the example of fire and iron has usually been applied in a narrative where two diverse natures interact with each other so as to form a unity in one way or another (in regard to hypostasis for Christ; in regard to powers, properties or energies for the other cases). Depending on their objectives some Byzantine writers emphasized the difference of the interacting natures and thus brought to bear its *distinctive potential*, while other writers did the opposite and focused on its *uniting potential* as we will see later.

In Christological texts, as well as in writings dedicated to *theosis* of man, there was the model of fire and iron was sometimes exploited for its uniting potential and at other times for its distinctive potential. In the latter case, the authors sought to make obvious the correlation between the divine and human principles in Christ.

Below I will trace how the example of fire and iron functioned in the Christological thought of Eastern Christian theologians. There are studies that discuss the use of this example by one or another of the authors I will talk about below.<sup>11</sup> My goal is to create a general picture that shows how this example was used in Eastern Christianity from Apollinarius to John Damascus.

### **Blending fire with iron before Chalcedon**

This topic appears in the works of Apollinarius of Laodicea. According to the Christological doctrine of Apollinarius, Christ has accepted the human nature in such a way that the divine Logos took the place of human mind, that is, having incarnated, Christ accepted only the irrational soul and the body of man, but not the mind. When speaking about the correlation be-

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<sup>10</sup> D. Biriukov, "Penetration of Fire", p. 146-147.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Cross, "Perichoresis, Deification, and Christological Predication in John of Damascus", in: *Mediaeval Studies* 62 (2000), p. 89-90, 94-95, 101-102, 105, 112; Steven McKinon, *Words, Imagery and the Mystery of Christ. A Reconstruction of Cyril of Alexandria's Christology*, Leiden, Brill 2000, p. 41, 66-78, 217; Istvan Perczel, "Once again on Dionysius the Areopagite and Leontius of Byzantium", in: Tzotcho Boiadjiev et al. (eds.), *Die Dionysius-Rezeption im Mittelalter*, Turnhout, Brepols 2000, p. 60-65; Richard Norris, *Manhood and Christ*, Oxford, Clarendon Press 1963, p. 106-111.

tween the divine and human in Christ, Apollinarius utilizes the example of fire and iron:

If blending [fire] with iron, manifesting the iron as the fire inasmuch as it acts like fire, does not modify its [i.e. iron's] nature, then the junction of God with a body does not entail any modification of the [nature] of the body, even though the body is able to spread its divine energies onto what it is touched with.<sup>12</sup>

Here one can see a difference between Origen's and Apollinarius' use of the example of penetration of fire into iron. For the former divine properties are bestowed on the soul of Christ whereas the latter has a model that is closer to the future common Byzantine usage of the example in the Christological context. Apollinarius states that the divinity and humanity constitute in Christ a unity, which can be compared with fire and iron made incandescent by it, which, due to being penetrated by fire resembles the fire while retaining at the same time its own nature of iron. The same is correct for the body of Christ, which also preserves its nature and carries within itself the energies of the deity and acts like God, i. e. accepts the divine properties—because of the junction of divine and human principles in Christ. It is a specificity of Apollinarius' Christology that when discussing the human principle in Christ, he speaks of the body of Christ, not of the human nature as such, which would comprise the component of mind.<sup>13</sup> As a whole, it should be stated that here the uniting potential of the metaphor prevails over the distinctive one, while also retaining the latter. It is evident from the words of Apollinarius that the iron heated by fire reveals itself as fire, and similarly, the body of Christ unified with the deity reveals itself as acting similarly to the deity.

The later theologians often referred to the fire and iron example when they considered how Christ's passion, which is proper to him through his humanity, correlates with the fact that Christ unites in himself not only a human, but also a divine component. In their texts the suffering of the heated iron, which is likened to the bodily component of Christ, is juxtaposed with the fire that does not suffer during its interaction with the iron, where the fire is likened to divinity. Christ's carnal passibility is related in these texts either to the bestowing of divine properties on Christ's humanity, due to the

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<sup>12</sup> Hans Lietzmann, *Apollinaris von Laodicea und Seine Schule* I. Texte und Untersuchungen, Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr (PaulSiebeck) 1904, p. 238, fr. P. 128: Εἰ ἢ πρὸς σίδηρον ἀνάκρασις, πῦρ ἀποδεικνῦσα τὸν σίδηρον ὡς καὶ τὰ πυρὸς ἐργάζεσθαι, οὐ μετέβαλε τὴν φύσιν αὐτοῦ, οὐδὲ ἢ τοῦ θεοῦ πρὸς τὸ σῶμα ἔνωσις μεταβολὴ σώματός ἐστιν, καίτοι τὸ σῶματος τὰς θείας ἐνεργείας παρεχομένου τοῖς ἐφάψασθαι δυναμένοις.

<sup>13</sup> See: Leontius Jerosolymitanus, *Contra Monophysitas*, PG 86, 1869A.

junction of divine and human principles in the person of Christ, or to the passion that Christ has endured in his historical being (or with both of them simultaneously).

For example, in the “Homily on the Birth of Christ” by (Ps.-) Basil of Caesarea,<sup>14</sup> the topic of fire and iron is used to illustrate the character of the incarnation of Christ, as well as to clarify the topic of passibility of the incarnated Christ as possessing two natures.<sup>15</sup> In the thought of Basil, the strength of fire does not lessen when its properties are imparted to iron, but entirely penetrates the heated iron. Christ’s deity remains inalterable also because Christ, having been incarnated, obtained the body without descending to the domain of corporeal. The same applies to the bodily infirmities of Christ: as the fire, while transferring its properties, heat and luminosity, to iron, remains itself untouched by the qualities of iron, i. e. does not become darker and colder as a result of interaction with it, so the divinity of incarnated Christ remains dispassionate and untouched by the infirmities of his body.

### **Fire-iron and the passions of Christ.**

In the treatise “That God is One”, Cyril of Alexandria introduces another component into the considered example: he speaks of the case where iron that has been made incandescent is deformed from the outside through the hammer blows upon it (where iron is an analogy of the flesh and fire is that of Christ’s divinity):

B. Then how will the Same (they say) suffer and not suffer?

A. By suffering in His own flesh and not in the Nature of Godhead. And wholly ineffable is the plan of these things and no mind can attain ideas so subtle and exalted: yet following reasoning which tends to right belief and viewing the plan of what is fit, we neither alienate Him from being said to suffer, lest we first say that the Birth too after the flesh is not His but another’s, nor do we define that the things pertaining to the flesh have been wrought upon His Divine and Most Supreme Nature: but He will be thought of (as I said) as suffering in His own flesh, albeit not suffering in His Godhead after some such mode as this. And every force of illustration is feeble and comes behind the truth, yet it sends into the mind a subtle imagination of the reality and as it were from what is before it, brings it up unto the height which is beyond the reach of words. For as iron or other such matter in contact with

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<sup>14</sup> *Clavis Patrum Graecorum* [CPG], Vol. II, Cura et studio M. Geerard, Brepols-Turnhout 1974, p. 167, refers to this text as *dubia*, see: CPG 2913.

<sup>15</sup> Basiliius Caesariensis, *In s. Chr. Gen.*, PG 31, 1460.

the onset of fire gives it admission and travails with the flame: and if now it chance to be struck by ought, the matter [struck] admits of injury, but the nature of the fire is in naught damaged by that which strikes; thus will you conceive in regard of the Son being said to suffer in the flesh, not to suffer in His Godhead. And petty (as I said) is the force of the illustration, but it bears nigh to the truth them who choose not to disbelieve the holy Scriptures.<sup>16</sup>

As one can suppose, in his variation of the example, the blow refers to the origin of Christ's passions. According to Cyril, the fire that makes the iron incandescent modifies its form together with the latter when this iron is subject to the blows of the hammer. Yet one cannot say that the fire changes its form and suffers because of the blows, unlike the iron which actually changes its form: similarly, the divinity in Christ remains untouched by the passions of his flesh. It follows from Cyril's example that, whereas Christ is one, the passibility relates to the divinity of Christ in an oblique way—through Christ's flesh, which is the immediate subject of the passions.

Severus of Antioch has his own take on the topic. He calls it an example that has “come from the fathers”, by which he evidently means the treatise “That God is One” by Cyril of Alexandria. As a representative of Miaphysitism, Severus rejected the Chalcedonian Christology, which spoke of two natures of Christ after the Incarnation, and taught instead a distinction of divine and human properties in the sole nature of Christ. Severus affirms that Christ is dispassionate in one respect, while in the other he is subject to passions. In order to illustrate this model, he puts forward, after Cyril, the pattern of the iron that has been made incandescent by fire which suffers from hammer blows and is deformed by it:

And again the <...> question, as to how we say that the same suffered in the flesh, and in his Godhead remained without suffering, and, while we do not make him alien to suffering, we keep him without suffering. *The defense*: Now we will give a sufficient answer to that question also, how we say that the same suffered in the flesh, and did not suffer in the Godhead, and, while we do not make him alien to suffering, we keep him without suffering. On the same subject we will lay before you an example which has come to us from our fathers. The force of examples is in truth small, and far removed from the truth; nevertheless, if only

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<sup>16</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *That the Christ is one*, A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church 46, trans. Philipp Edward Pusey, Oxford, James Parker 1881, p. 316. For the Greek text see: Cyrille d'Alexandrie, *Deux dialogues christologiques*, SC 97, Paris, Cerf 1964, p. 504.40-506.21.

in some thin and shadowy phantasies, it offers to the understanding a beginning of conceptions. As, when iron or another similar substance is abundantly warmed by fire, and is heated by flame, we know that, while the iron does not pass out of its own nature, the iron which has passed into a complete flame, and has been made to hiss and to glow by it, it appears to be all fire, and, while it is in this state, blows are applied to it, it being smitten by a hammer or by means of other kinds of strokes, but the iron is exposed to the blows themselves, being expanded and narrowed at the same time, while the nature of the fire is in no way injured by the smiter, so must we also understand the mystery concerning Christ also, even although all the power of speech shrinks, from the glory of the fact. He was hypostatically united to a body with a rational and intelligent soul, but he permitted it to suffer naturally from the blows of pains, I mean on the cross, when he might have deadened these also as God, but he was not desirous of this, for it was not for himself, but for our race, that he was purchasing the successes of victory. Therefore he permitted his body to suffer, while even he himself also was not alien from suffering, for he was united to a suffering body, and, as it is his body, so also it is called his suffering; nevertheless as God he remained without suffering, for God is not touched by suffering.<sup>17</sup>

Here Severus gives the example the same meaning as Cyril had done. However, he introduces an additional aspect in regard to Cyril's interpretation. He holds that the blow of a hammer on heated iron corresponds to the suffering of Christ on the cross. Cyril asserts that inasmuch as Christ unifies in himself the divine and human principles, he could by means of his divinity avoid the bodily pain of suffering on the cross, yet he has not done this in his wish to suffer for our sake. Speaking of a possibility for Christ not to perceive the bodily pain due to the action of his divinity, Severus, as it might seem, appropriately makes use of the part of the example relating to the iron enduring the action of the fire heating it. In the Christological discourse, it corresponds to the bestowal of divine properties on the human principle of Christ with due attention to the junction of the divine and human principles in Christ. It seems fair to say that Severus stands in a tradition that goes back not only to Cyril but also to Apollinarius.

In sum, Severus fittingly uses both the uniting and the distinctive potentials of the example of the penetration of fire into iron. In the latter

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<sup>17</sup> Severus Antiochenus, *Ep.* LXV, in: Ernest Walter Brooks (ed. and transl.): *A Collection of Letters of Severus of Antioch from Numerous Syriac Manuscripts*, Paris, 1920<sup>1</sup> [Brepols, 2003<sup>2</sup>], p. 40-42 [210-212]. *PO*, t. XIV, fasc. 1, No 67.

case he accentuates the difference between the suffering and the dispassionate principles in Christ, which are flesh and divinity. In the former case he speaks of a bestowal of divine properties on the human principle in Christ, which is compared with the bestowal of the properties of fire on iron.

### **Fire-iron and the natures-hypostasis**

The Chalcedonian theologians, i. e. those Byzantine theologians who insisted that Christ possesses two natures and a sole hypostasis after the Incarnation, did also actively utilize the distinctive and uniting potentials of the example of the penetration of fire into iron. Theodoret of Cyrus, for example, uses it to illustrate the co-existence of two natures in Christ, divine and human, where they do not merge but where the first nature is thoroughly penetrating the second (the circumstance allowing us to affirm the explicit Stoic natural philosophy context in this thesis by Theodoret).<sup>18</sup> It is obvious that Theodoret applies the distinctive potential of the example.

By contrast, the use of the example we find in the *Corpus Leontianum*, in the works attributed at the present to Leontius of Jerusalem, appears a more complicated case. Leontius employs the example of fire and iron not only when he speaks about the two natures of Christ but also when he speaks about his sole hypostasis. Accordingly, he affirms that the iron and the fire heating it, while retaining the distinction in their natures, constitute a sole hypostasis. Thus, as compared with Theodoret, Leontius accentuates the uniting potential of the example.

Leontius polemicized against the Nestorians who were teaching that there are two hypostases in Christ correlating with his two natures, as well as with the moderate Miaphysites like Severus, who insisted that Christ possesses a sole composite nature. Accordingly, by Leontius, in the case of the iron made incandescent by fire, the fire and the iron preserve their natures, however, the nature of fire obtains the hypostasis of iron as its own, and due to that the fire becomes joined in hypostasis with the nature of iron.

For it is not each junction that necessarily leads to the emergence of a new nature or hypostasis. Indeed, the iron put into the coals and made incandescent by fire does not reveal by itself either another nature or a new hypostasis. In the same way correlate the hypostasis of iron and the hypostasis of burning coals. In the hypostasis of iron, the nature of fire, which is non-hypostatic as itself, joins with the nature of iron becoming of the same hypostasis with it.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Theodoretus Cyrrensis, *Eranistes* 2, in: Gerard H. Ertlanger (ed.), *Theodoret of Cyrus, Eranistes*, Oxford, Clarendon Press 1975. p. 144-145.

<sup>19</sup> Leontius Jerosolymitanus, *Contra Nestorianos* 1.49, PG 86, 1512AB.

In another important excerpt, Leontius, applying the example of the iron made incandescent by the fire, declares also that the fire and the iron do not constitute any *composite hypostasis* as well as any composite nature. The same takes its place in the case of enfleshed God, Christ: the Incarnation of God does not entail formation either of a composite nature or of a composite hypostasis, but enfleshed Christ possesses two natures within one simple hypostasis, while the compositeness relates to Christ's hypostatic idioms:

As we do not count the iron made incandescent in an oven as another hypostasis of the form of fire but as having accepted its nature into its hypostasis – for the hypostasis of fire remains unhurt even upon incandescing the iron – we likewise affirm that [in the Incarnation of Christ] a junction of the natures by hypostasis has come to pass, yet no complicated nature did appear, for they do not unite via merging; and no complicated hypostasis has appeared, for [the hypostasis of Christ did not come out] of hypostasis, but more complicated idiom of the hypostasis of the Word has emerged out of manifold idioms composed within it upon the Incarnation. This proves that neither nature nor hypostasis of his is complicated and mutable.<sup>20</sup>

Further, as for the other Chalcedonian supporters, there is an exciting modification of the fire-iron example in the writings of Maximus the Confessor. He makes a step which should be considered a response to Leontius. For him, the doctrine of two natures and a single hypostasis of Christ is the one requiring no articulation. Therefore, like Severus, it is the interaction of divine and human principles (or natures, as Maximus follows the Chalcedonian nomenclature) in Christ that Maximus demonstrates through the fire-iron example. Namely, Maximus focuses on a specific moment connected with the bestowal of divinely properties to Christ's human nature, that is, on his omniscience:

How ought we to think about the ignorance of the Son concerning the end?<sup>21</sup>

Ignorance is somehow double: the one is reproachable and the other is irreproachable. And the one depends upon us and the other not upon us. And that which is reproachable and depends upon us is the ignorance regarding virtue and piety. And that which is irreproachable and not dependent upon us is whatever we do not

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<sup>20</sup> Idem, PG 86, 1485CD. Apart from the mentioned places, Leontius of Jerusalem uses the example of fire and iron in an analogous context, for ex., in: *Contra Monophysitas*, PG 86, 1816A.

<sup>21</sup> See: Mt. 24.36; Mk. 13.32.

know (although we wish to know), such as, the things that happen far off, [and] that happen in the future. And so, if, in the case of the holy prophets, they discerned by grace the things from far off and not dependent upon us, how much more did the Son of God not know all things and because of this, also his humanity [did not know], [that is] he did not [know] by nature but by union with the Logos! For just as iron having been heated in the fire has all the properties of fire – for it shines and burns – surely, it is not fire by nature but iron; so also the humanity of the Lord, because it was united to the Logos, knew everything, and clearly everything worthy of God was revealed in him. But as far as [how] human nature was united with it [Logos], he is said to be ignorant.<sup>22</sup>

According to Maximus, as the iron in itself has no properties of fire, yet when incandesced by fire, it possesses such properties (those of shining and burning), the same way the human nature of Christ in itself does not hold omniscience, however, inasmuch as it is adjoined hypostatically to the divine nature, it accepts its properties, in particular, that of omniscience. It is due to this that we must say that Christ possessed omniscience and knew everything.

Finally, John Damascene did actively utilize the example of penetration of fire into iron. Damascene has adopted from Cyril of Alexandria the theme of deformation of the iron made incandescent by fire through hammer blows, where the iron is an analogue of the flesh and the fire is that of the divinity of Christ. His interpretation of this theme is not factually distinct from Cyril's: the iron suffers from a blow of hammer, but the fire does not receive it, and similarly the divinity of Christ remains dispassionate when Christ suffered in flesh.<sup>23</sup>

As for the problem of complexity resulting from the Incarnation, which Leontius has discussed, we have a notable example of its transformation in the text of Damascene:

Therefore, the Word has become flesh neither having been converted by nature, nor in imagined economy, but, being one hypostasis of the hypostases of deity, has also become one of the hy-

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<sup>22</sup> Maximus Confessor, *Quaestiones et dubia* 1.67, in: Jose H. Declerck (ed.), *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones et Dubia*, CCSG 10, Turnhout, Brepols 1982, p. 155, transl. in: Despina Prassas, *St. Maximus the Confessor's Questions and Doubts: Translation and Commentary*, A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Department of Theology School of Religious Studies of The Catholic University of America in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy, Washington 2003, p. 258-259.

<sup>23</sup> Joannes Damascenus, *Contra Nestorianos* 37, in: Bonifatius Kotter (ed.), *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 4, Berlin, De Gruyter 1981, p. 277.

postases of humanity, while having substantiated in its hypostasis the flesh from the Virgin, which was ensouled by the reasonable and intelligent soul, and standing out as a hypostasis for it. Like a sword fabricated of iron is one of the nature of iron's hypostases, and a kindled fire is one of hypostases of the nature of fire, and the sword, while having approached to the fire, became kindled and did not accept the previously existed hypostasis of fire, but, having taken some firstling of the nature of fire, became a hypostasis also for it, and the sword, which previously was a simple hypostasis of the nature of iron, has become a composite hypostasis, having also become a hypostasis of fire, while it possesses both the nature of iron immutable and the adjoined nature of fire with no detriment, – so Christ, being one hypostasis of the hypostases of deity and possessing in himself the entire nature of deity with no gap, has accepted the enhypostatic flesh from the Holy Virgin, not a hypostasis but a firstling of our nature affirmed in being within him. And being initially a simple hypostasis, he later became a composite one – not a composite nature, but a hypostasis which is composed of the previously present in him deity and of lately added flesh ensouled by the reasonable and intelligent soul.<sup>24</sup>

Damascene seeks to actualize the topic that Leontius had set out previously, that is, the combination of fire and iron example in the Christological context with the language of relationship of nature and hypostasis. In this version of the example, the human nature of Christ becomes similar to iron. As we have seen, Leontius talks on the initial hypostaticity of iron, which it has owned prior to its being made incandescent by fire. This suggests that also the humanity of Christ should possess some authentic hypostaticity. Yet Leontius does not propose any solution to this issue. Such a solution is offered by Damascene, who asserts that the human nature of Christ was hypostatic due to the fact that Christ had accepted it from the Virgin while having borrowed from her the hypostatic idioms which revealed themselves in his mind, soul and flesh. This hypostatized human nature was adjoined to Logos (the Son), one of the hypostases of God, after the Incarnation. It resulted, as by Damascene, in formation of a *composite hypostasis* (not a composite nature).

In applying the example of fire and iron within the terminological framework of nature and hypostasis in the Christological context, Damascene follows Leontius. There is just one crucial difference, as regards the issue of the complexity of Christ's hypostasis. As I have shown above, Le-

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 264-265.

ontius denied that the hypostasis of Christ is composite, while it is the very point that Damascene affirms. It is possible to suppose the matter of the divergence of interpreting this topic between John Damascene and Leontius of Jerusalem.

First, on the factors common to both of them. In the quotations given above, when describing the conjunction of the iron and the fire making it incandescent Leontius interprets it in the sense that the nature of fire is hypostatized in the hypostasis of iron, i. e. is accepted in it. This is also what John Damascene speaks of here. According to him, the hypostasis of fire, which existed prior to its junction with iron, ceases to exist at this junction because the fire is now hypostatized in the hypostasis of iron. Generally speaking, such an understanding of the junction of fire with iron as transferred to Christology suggests that, in the Incarnation, the divine nature—correlating with fire, which bestows the iron with its properties—is hypostatized in the hypostasis of the human nature of Christ, which corresponds to the iron. It does not mean that Leontius of Jerusalem and John Damascene expressly said so, but that it is what their use of the example of fire and iron formally suggests. At the same time, going against the literal sense of the cited example, Damascene states here that there is an opposite Christological mode: the humanity of Christ is accepted, or hypostatized, into the hypostasis of the divine nature, that is, into the hypostasis of Logos (the Son).

What differentiates Damascene's viewpoint from that of Leontius is that he does not share the idea of the non-hypostaticity of the nature of fire, which is expressed by Leontius, according to whom the fire can possess its own hypostasis in something other (in *Contra Nestorianos* 1.49, PG 86, col. 1512AB, see above). Yet as by Damascene, the nature of fire can be hypostatized in the very fire, albeit in this case, by its junction with iron, the fire gains its hypostasis in the nature of the iron made incandescent by it. It is clearly correlated with a point that Damascene makes, namely that the human nature of Christ was hypostatized by the flesh of the Virgin where it has originated from, although in conjunction with the hypostasis of Logos (the Son), Christ's humanity gains its hypostasis in that of the divine nature.

In my opinion, it is right here that the divergence between John Damascene and Leontius of Jerusalem emerges. Leontius inclines to the idea that once the nature is hypostatized in the hypostasis of another nature, one cannot speak of the hypostatic idioms of the first nature as such (therefore Leontius asserts that the nature of fire, which is hypostatized in the hypostasis of iron, is non-hypostatic). Nevertheless, Damascene does not agree with this vision. According to him, the nature hypostatized in the hypostasis of another nature has all the same its own hypostatic idioms. This intuition

permits Damascene to speak of the *composite* hypostasis of the enfleshed God, Christ, as well as of that of the iron made incandescent by fire. For Leontius the nature hypostatized in the hypostasis of another nature has not its own hypostatic idioms, which allows him to speak of the *simplicity* of the constituted common hypostasis.

Thus it is possible to conclude that Leontius of Jerusalem and John Damascene make skilful use of the uniting and distinctive potentials of the example of the iron made incandescent by fire, while taking different approaches, in a certain respect. Both authors use by default the basic level of the example allowing for a distinction between the divine and human nature in the enfleshed Christ. As for the uniting potential, it could be stated that in a conceptual sense, both Leontius and Damascene take the same attitude of unity by suggesting that a certain nature is hypostatized in or accepted by the other nature, with the result that this hypostasis becomes common for both of these natures. Yet unlike Leontius, Damascene shows an inclination for the distinctive potential of the example, a fact that is apparent from his conception of composite hypostasis or, more precisely, from the presuppositions behind this conception, which I have analysed above.

## Conclusion

In sum, we have shown that the Stoic paradigm of total blending of physical bodies provided Byzantine authors with a suitable instrument for the expression of their intuitions about the character of the union of the divine and human principles in Christ incarnate. This paradigm presumes that two bodies can be blended in such a way that both acquire properties of each other – or one of them acquires the properties of the other – both preserving their own nature at the same time. Within the framework of the same paradigm Early Christian and Byzantine theologians, analysed in this paper, understood the character of the union of the divine and human natures in Christ: the human nature of Christ accepts the properties of the divine nature, retaining its own nature and its properties. To express this understanding, they used in particular the example of the penetration of fire into iron, based on the Stoic paradigm of total blending.

As we have seen, this theme appears in Origen, who described the union of Christ's soul with God in the following way: the soul of Christ accepts the divine properties in the same way, as the heated iron accepts the qualities, which are characteristic for the nature of fire – light and heat, – while at the same time retaining its own nature. However, the ontological status of the Christ figure (who is Christ: man or God?) is not fully defined by Origen, at least from the perspective of the future Byzantine theology.

This is why the subsequent Byzantine tradition adopted this image from Origen both for the description of the deification of man and for the description of the union and relation of the Divine and human natures in Christ. The subject of my research in this article has been the latter.

In this way of thinking the example of iron and fire illustrated a kind of *union* in diversity (implying that the iron heated by fire unites with this fire in a certain sense). But this could mean either the union of properties – when the theologians described Christ as man acquiring divine properties, or the oneness of hypostasis – when they discussed the meaning of the presence of two natures in one hypostasis of Christ incarnate.

As far as we can see, Apollinarius of Laodicea was the first who used the image of the penetration of fire into iron in a way that is typical for Byzantine thought. Apollinarius asserts that the divinity and humanity in Christ unite in a way that is similar to the union of fire with the iron heated by it. Being permeated by fire, the iron looks like fire, while at the same time retaining its own nature. In the same way the body of Christ bears the energies of God and acts like God due to the union of the divine and human elements in Christ, while at the same time retaining its own nature.

The later Byzantine theologians often used the image of iron and fire trying to explain how Christ's suffering in his human nature is related to the Divine element in him. For them, the passible state of iron heated by fire (iron being compared to the bodily element in Christ), was opposed to the lack of passibility in fire in its interaction with iron (thus fire is similar to the Divinity). They connected this passibility of Christ in his flesh either with the endowing of the humanity of Christ with Divine properties due to the union of the Divine and human natures in his person, or with the passions suffered by Christ in his historical existence (or with both).

We find the first approach in (Ps.-) Basil of Caesarea, who insists that after the incarnation of Christ his Divinity remains unchangeable and untouched by the weaknesses of his flesh. Cyril of Alexandria uses the second approach, introducing into this topic the subject of passibility, which results from the action of an external force: fire, which heats the iron, does not suffer anything, while the heated iron changes its form under the impact of the blows of a hammer; in the same way the Divinity of Christ remains untouched by the suffering of his flesh on the cross. Severus of Antioch, elaborating Cyril's application of the image of iron and fire to Christology, deliberates on the exact way of the interaction of the Divine and human properties in Christ due to the union of Divine and human elements in him. He says that although Christ, being God, could avoid the passion of the cross, which befell him, he accepted it for our sake. Such an understand-

ing presumes that Christ in his humanity has some property of Divinity (as the heated iron has properties of fire), which nevertheless he did not manifest, and which thus remained a potency. The direction of deliberations of Maximus the Confessor is typologically close to that of Severus: Maxim also reflects on Christ having properties of the Divinity in his humanity, using the image of iron permeated by fire. However, Maxim mentions one property of Divinity which, as he insists, was fully manifested in Christ as man due to the union of Divinity and humanity in him, namely, the property of omniscience.

As we have seen, another important topic in the context of the application of the iron/fire image to Christology is the reflection of the Chalcedonian authors on the union of the Divine and human elements in Christ in terms of *nature*, *hypostasis* and *enhyposstasis*, in which they employ the categories of simplicity and complexity. Thus, Leontius of Jerusalem insists that when iron is heated by fire, each of them retains its own nature, but fire acquires the hypostasis of iron as its own, and as a result of this one simple hypostasis is formed. The same way, according to Leontius, the incarnation of God should be understood: it does not lead to the formation of a complex nature, or a complex hypostasis, but Christ incarnate possesses two independent natures in one simple hypostasis.

John Damascene's understanding of this topic differs from the position of Leontius in one important aspect: according to Damascene the hypostasis of a sword heated by fire, as well as the hypostasis of Christ after the Incarnation, is complex. It seems that this discrepancy is connected to the difference in understanding of the mechanism of *enhyposstasis* and the character of the hypostasized nature by these two philosophers. In the case of a nature hypostasized into the hypostasis of some other nature, Leontius tends to think that the hypostasized nature cannot have existence in any hypostasis pertaining to this very nature, but only in the hypostasis of some other nature, therefore this hypostasized nature is clean of all "admixture" of any hypostatic properties of the hypostases of this nature. This is the reason why Leontius understands the hypostasis, which accepts, besides its own, some other nature, hypostasized in it, to be simple. But according to Damascene, the hypostasized nature bears in itself an "admixture" of the hypostatic properties of this nature, which is connected to the aetiology of the concept of *enhyposstasis*. Therefore, Damascene understands this hypostasis as complex.