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Nec Vi Nec Insiidiis, Leo Et Draco: The Lion, The Dragon and the Triumph of Christ

By the beginning of the 5th century Saint Augustine was able to announce the arrival of *Christiana tempora* and to have a vision of Christ in full armor, shield and sword in His hands, resembling a victorious Roman emperor. One of the images that seems to have developed out of the new symbiosis between the Church and the empire is the representation of young Christ in military armor treading on demonic animals underfoot. The model for such an image of Christ is not hard to recognize in representations of official imperial propaganda, with emperors trampling on small figures of defeated enemies. However, during later Roman empire the defeated enemy loses his human form of wretched barbarian and turns into a snake, a reptile or a dragon – the symbol of empire's enemies. First instances of this iconography appear on coins of Valentinian III, although some pieces struck during the reign of Honorius show the same tendency. One lost mosaic from the destroyed church of S. Croce in Ravenna (1st half of 5th century), known only from an inscription, could represent a possible model for this image in monumental arts. It would seem that the official imperial iconography has been the main influence in creating yet another iconographical type for a triumphant and victorious Christ at the time when last, decisive battles were won against the keepers of the traditional Roman religion. However, it is also important to look at the reverse process, whereby new tendencies, in particular Christian ideas, permeate traditional imagery and produce new symbols, able to express new religious and political concepts, in particular the changed role of the Christian emperor. The image of Christ, treading on demonic animals, a reference to verse 13 of Psalm 90, used often by Augustine and other Church Fathers is a typical example of this new symbolism, bringing together Biblical references and traditional imperial imagery.