

Along with the spread of maize agriculture across Mesoamerica (see The Aztec Maize Deities), the supremely important natural element of water was deified quite early in prehistory, both in male and female versions. The earliest extant graphic image of a water goddess is the nameless Great Goddess in a mural from Teotihuacan from around 2000 years ago. The Maya water goddess Ix Chel is only found much later in the post-Classic Dresden Codex (c. 1200 AD). Another several centuries later, an image of Ix Chel appeared in the Madrid Codex which was created by a remnant of the Maya in the early 17th century. (The Spanish finally conquered the last independent Maya kingdom, the Itza Maya in the Petén Basin, in 1697.)



Water Goddess, Teotihuacan Mural



Ix Chel, Dresden Codex



Ix Chel, Madrid Codex

Ix Chel's name means "Lady Rainbow." As a beautiful young maiden, she was the ancestral goddess of the moon and feminine matters like motherhood and domesticity. As an aged crone, Ix Chel was a beneficent water goddess often paired with the rain god *Chaak* and called *Chak Chel*, closely associated with lakes, rivers, and oceans.

For the Maya, the snake was a powerful symbol connected with water and the rainy season, and in succeeding millennia, it remained such across the Americas. Ix Chel's emblematic coiled serpent headdress signified powers in medicine, healing, intuitive wisdom, and spirituality.

Meanwhile, the be-feathered avian water goddess from Teotihuacan dramatically illustrates the stylistic difference between these two ancient civilizations. Ix Chel and the Great Goddess both underlay the newer goddesses in the Nahua and ultimately Aztec cultures.

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CHALCHIUHTLICUE {*chal-chewh-tlee-kwe*}

Chalchiuhtlicue, the Jade Skirt, is goddess of rivers, streams, and lakes, as well as of youthful beauty and ardor. Every stream or lake had its own local *chalchiuhtlicue*. With a birth day-name of *Ce Atl* (One Water), she was patron of women in labor, childbirth, children, and motherhood. Some of her purification rites struck Spanish clergy as similar to their sacrament of baptism. As goddess of storms and forces of nature, she could be dangerous. In the sacred calendar, she was patron of the day Snake and Reed *trecena*, the 5th lord of the night, and the 3rd lord of the day.

Variouly the consort of Tlaloc, Tezcatlipoca, and Xiuhtecuhtli, she was reputedly mother of the Moon God Tecciztecatl and twins Xolotl and Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli (aspects of Venus), maybe others... She ruled the Fourth Sun (Four Water), an era ended by flood.

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In the five codices with *tonalamatl* (book of days) sections, elaborate visions of the water goddess Chalchiuhtlicue celebrate her patronage of the Reed trecena with a flood of water that illustrates her name, the Jade Skirt. In it are helpless victims of her destructive forces.



Tonalamatl Aubin

In fact, Tonalamatl Aubin has two *trecena* patron panels with Chalchiuhtlicue, the orthodox Reed, as well as that for Rain where she pinch-hits for the god of storms, Tlaloc. In that one, she bears two stripes on her cheek, an insignia usual in Codex Borgia.



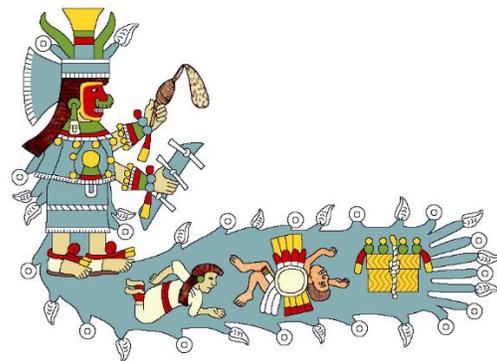
T. Borbonicus

T. Borgia

The most elegant image in Tonalamatl Borbonicus has only one cheek-stripe but a profusion of blue regalia suggesting Maya blue. Meanwhile, Tonalamatl Borgia's ornate version has a river in two shades of blue that degraded to greys in the original. My re-creation here also restored the greens of her signature earth-monster headdress and nosepiece of a two-headed snake.



T. Vaticanus B



T. Yohual

The other two images of the Reed *trecena* patron are faithful variations on the theme, impressive in their own particular styles.



Chalchiuhtlicue is often shown in other sections of the codices with the same emblems and insignia, but without the jade skirt. This lightly repaired Codex Borgia image the 5th lord of the night shows the original deteriorated colors to compare with my detailed recreation of her as a deity of motherhood.



Her image as patron of the day Snake, quite similar to these, is too damaged to include. On a later page appears a scene of a standard Chalchiuhtlicue with her consort Tlaloc which I didn't attempt to retouch. I wonder what they're doing with the little guy in the cookpot. Note the ears of maize in it as well. A divine stew?

C. Borgia: upper left, Lord of the Night; right, Goddess of Motherhood; bottom, with Tlaloc



C. Fejervary-Mayer

C. Laud

C. Magliabechiano



C. Vaticanus B: as Lord of the Night, Motherhood, patron of day Snake, and victim of Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli

Besides its iconic patron panel, Codex Vaticanus B also provides a range of images of the water goddess in her calendrical and motherhood roles. Most intriguing is the last one above, a detail from a scene of her being attacked for some reason by Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli. The scene casts doubt on her being his mother. In the Aztec pantheon, divine genealogy is fairly devious and dubious. For instance, some say she was the mother of Quetzalcoatl, but elsewhere he's called the offspring of the ancestral dual deity Ometeotl. Whatever...

In some of the *tonalamatl* sections of the codices, each day-sign can be accompanied by a “thumbnail” of the day and night lords. T. Aubin and Borbonicus include both as well as the totem birds of the numbers, though T. Aubin’s images are too awkward and indistinct to show.



T. Borbonicus (Day & Night Lord)



C. Cospi (Night Lord)

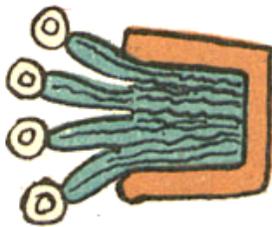


T. Yohual (Night Lord)

The day-count in Codex Cospi is presented in a spreadsheet format with each day-sign and lord of the night, and T. Yohual cycles the nine night lords through the *trecenas* in profiles with emblematic motifs—like the water flows with this last small image of Chalchiuhtlicue.

Representing specifically fresh water, the Jade Skirt had two oceanic *naguals* for whom I’ve found no codex images. One is **ATLACAMANI**, the goddess of oceanic storms, embodying the unbridled power of the sea. The other is **HUIXTOCIHUATL**, the goddess of salt (water).

As a thematic footnote, Water (*Atl*) is the 9th of the 20 named days in the month. Its day-sign is a pot containing or pouring out water.



T. Aubin



T. Borbonicus



T. Borgia



C. Cospi



C. Fejervary-Mayer



C. Laud



C. Nuttall



C. Vaticanus B



T. Yohual

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