

The Aztecs revered ten divine animals (divinities), that weren't quite full-fledged gods (deities). These critters were all "consecrated" as days (*tonalli*) in the ceremonial calendar. As Part I of The Aztec Animal Divinities, the following galleries display the first five of these alphabetically in the Nahuatl language: Cipactli, Coatl, Cozcacuauhtli, Cuauhtli, and Cuetzpallin.

CIPACTLI (Crocodile) {see-pak-tee}

Cipactli is a vast crocodile (more properly a caiman) or fish monster vanquished by the god Tezcatlipoca, who created the First Sun (Four Jaguar) on her back. She is a *nagual* (aspect) of Tlaltecuhltli, the hermaphroditic Lord of the Earth. Ce Cipactli is the 1st day of the ceremonial calendar leading into the initial Crocodile *trecena*. The day-sign for Cipactli is commonly the head of a toothy-mouthed reptile, but the style of each of the ancient codices is quite different. In a four-plate section of Codex Borgia, the tonalli are also shown as full-figure formal day-signs.



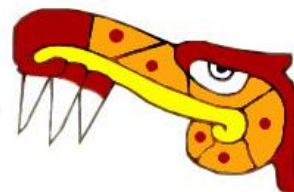
Aubin



Borbonicus



Borgia



Cospi



Fejervary-Mayer



Laud



Nuttall



Vaticanus B



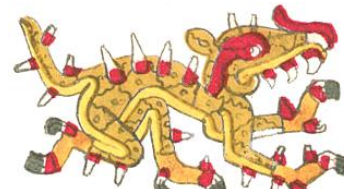
Vaticanus B



Vindobonensis



Yohual



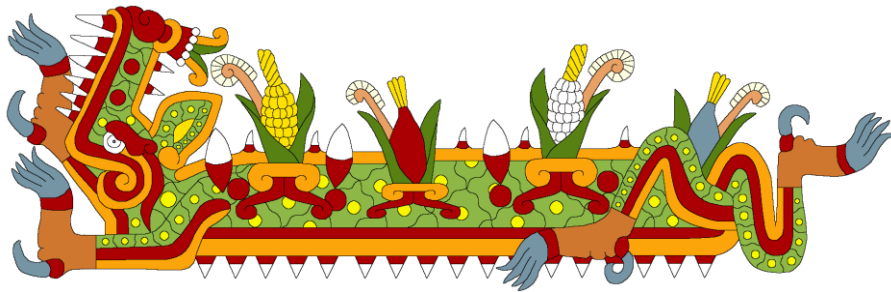
Borgia (formal day-sign)



Images of Cipactli occur mostly in Codex Borgia, like the rampant figure on the left. Like the detail of a serpentine monster one the right, she is often used as a decorative border with an assortment of details and color schemes.



Cipactli also appears as a full-scale Earth Monster with maize-plants growing from her body:



Other codices also depict the primordial battle with Tezcatlipoca and visualize Cipactli differently. (Those full scenes I'll save for a future Tezcatlipoca gallery.)



Borgia



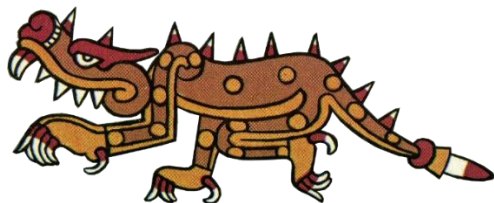
Fejervary-Mayer



Laud



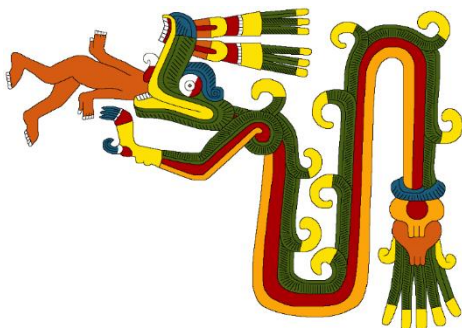
Vaticanus B



Nuttall

In the historical Codex Nuttall, a striking Cipactli swims in a lake with other aquatic creatures in a scene of a naval battle with three Aztec warriors. Like in the Borgia images, this monster suffers from an emblematic extreme overbite.

In the tradition of the gaping maw of Tlaltecuhltli as the entrance to the Underworld, Borgia also shows a one-legged Earth Monster devouring a person and another swallowing a rabbit.



COATL (Snake) {*ko- atl*}

Coatl is the 6th day of the *vientena*. Besides serving as day-signs, snakes were symbols of spiritual and sexual power. Probably the most frequent “animal” shown in the divinatory codices, snakes were portrayed in several styles as thumbnail day-signs and in thematic contexts.



Aubin

Borbonicus

Borgia

Cospi

Fejervary-Mayer

Nuttall

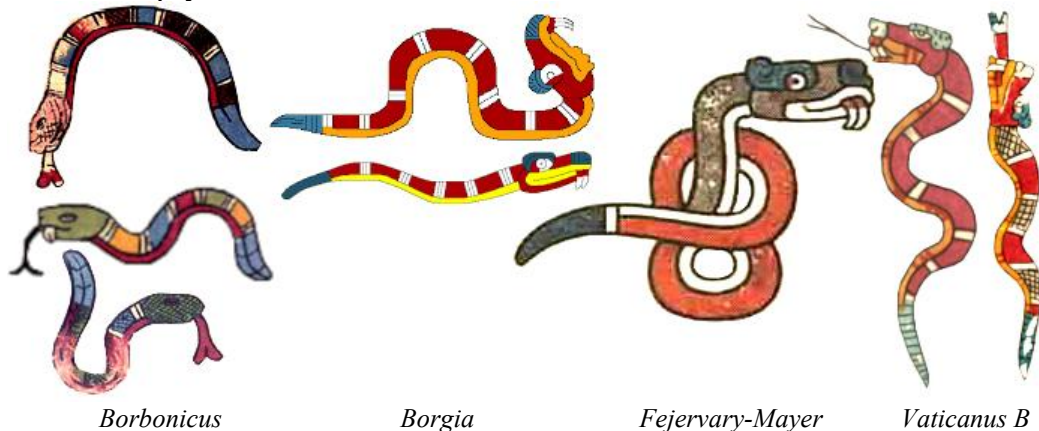
Vaticanus B

Vindobonensis

Yohual

Borgia (Formal Day-Signs)

The simplest snakes are presented in natural sinuous shapes in colorful patterns. The white bands around their bodies show their readiness for sacrifice by vivisection. Especially the Borbonicus examples look like psychedelic rattlesnakes.



Borbonicus

Borgia

Fejervary-Mayer

Vaticanus B



Borbonicus

Vaticanus B

The two-headed snake is often found in headdresses and as nose-pieces, but some are shown separately, probably as ornaments or arcane symbols.

Sometimes snakes are used for decorative designs or fanciful ornaments, even in the historical Codices Nuttall and Vienna (Vindobonensis):



Borgia

Fejervary-Mayer

Nuttall

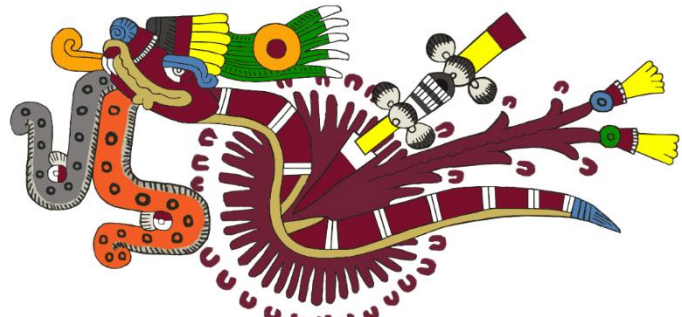
Vindobonensis

As mentioned, snakes were important sacrifices, often dispatched by vivisection, burning, or stabbing with an arrow. The jaguar-spotted orange and grey curlicues are flame and smoke.

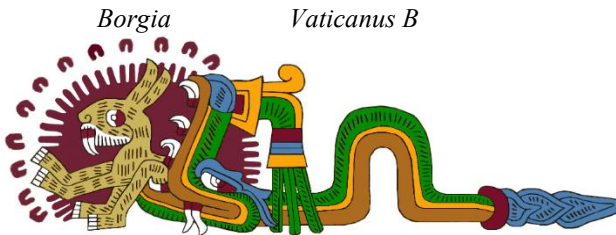


Borgia

Vaticanus B



Borgia



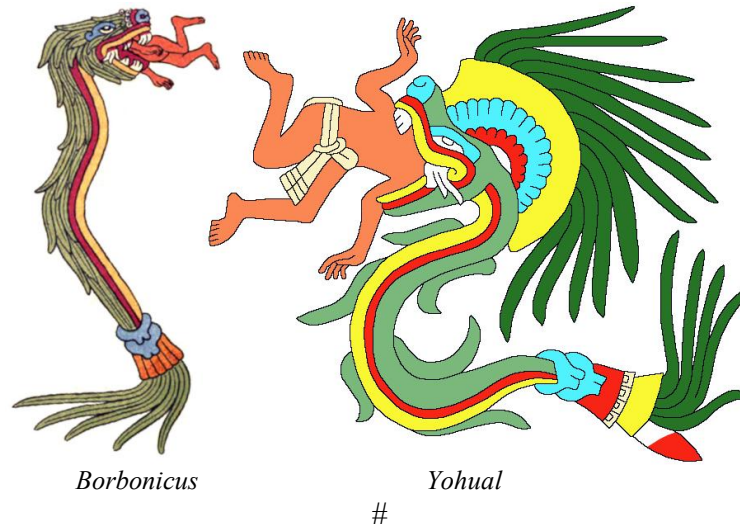
Borgia

Reflecting the same motif with Cipactli, Coatl is also found swallowing a rabbit. The eagle's head included in the Vaticanus image may be part of some story involving sacrifice. The Borgia image is definitely a rattlesnake, albeit anatomically fanciful.



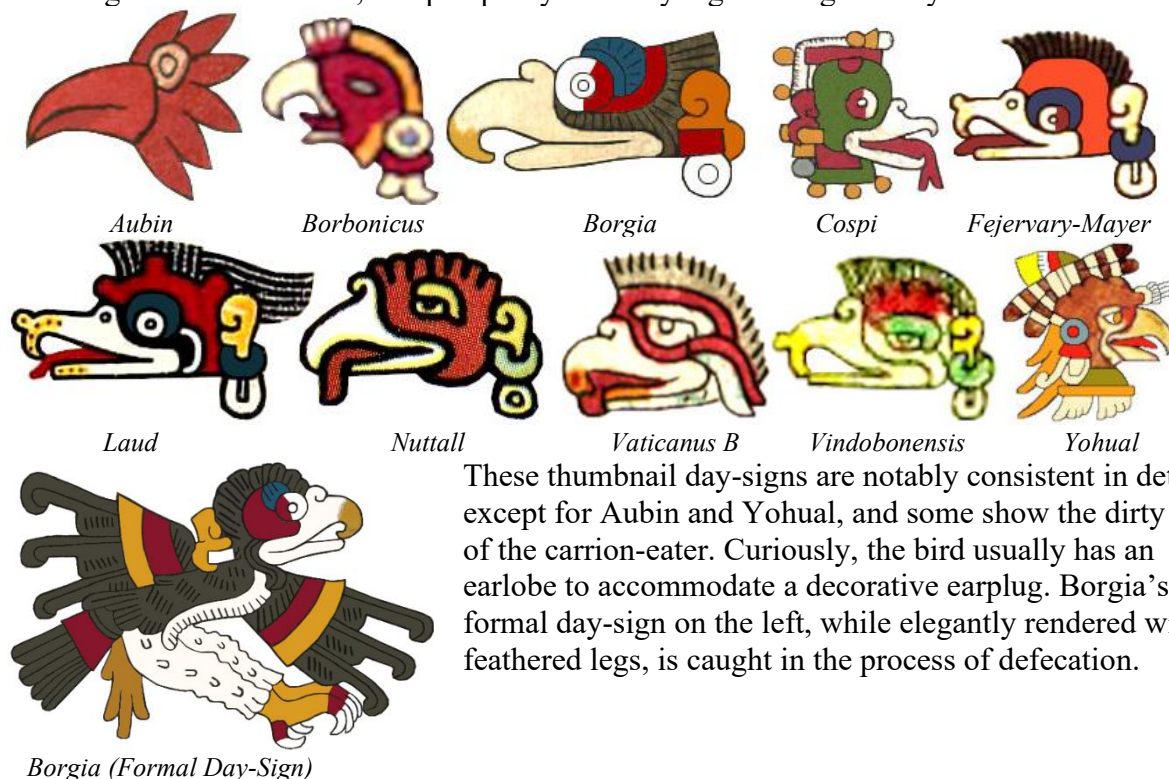
Vaticanus B

Coatl was also conceptualized as the ancient deity Quetzalcoatl (Kukulcan to the Maya) or the Plumed Serpent. Like the Borgia image of Cipactli, the following two examples come from patron panels of the Dog *trecena* where a no-legged serpent devours a human being. Both Cipactli and Coatl must have functioned as metaphorical entrances to the Underworld.

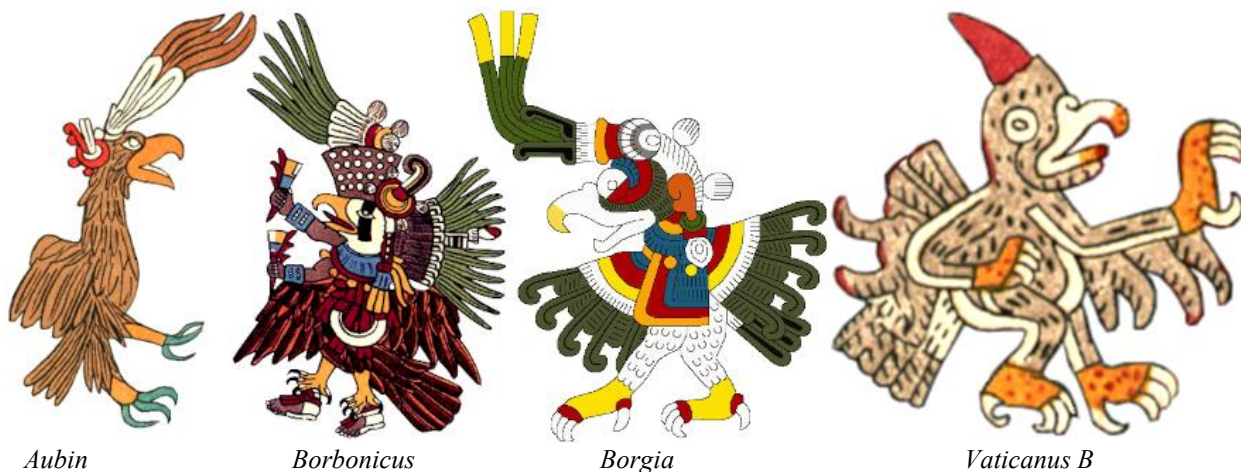


COZCACUAUHTLI (Vulture) {koz-ka-kwawh-tee}

In the Aztec calendar, Cozcacuauhtli is the 16th day of the *veintena*. (For the Maya calendar, the day was known as *Kib'* (Wax or Candle) in Yucatec and *Ajmac* (Owl or “sinner”) in Quiché with no connection to a vulture. The Aztecs saw the Vulture as relating to the spiritual realm, restoring order and balance, and prosperity. The day-sign was again a stylized headshot.



These thumbnail day-signs are notably consistent in details, except for Aubin and Yohual, and some show the dirty beak of the carrion-eater. Curiously, the bird usually has an earlobe to accommodate a decorative earplug. Borgia’s formal day-sign on the left, while elegantly rendered with feathered legs, is caught in the process of defecation.



Aubin

Borbonicus

Borgia

Vaticanus B



Yohual

Besides as day-signs, Cozcacuauhtli only appears in five codices as a quasi-patron of the Earthquake *trecena* along with Tlazolteotl (Goddess of Filth). Though the day-signs look much alike, there doesn't seem to have been a cohesive concept of the whole bird in terms of plumage and regalia. In each codex, the vulture's image was unique and noteworthy. In Aubin, it looks like a comic rubber chicken, but Borbonicus offers a guy in a vulture-suit with oversized regalia. (The smoking mirror is an emblem of Tezcatlipoca.) The Borgia image relates to its formal day-sign, and the Vaticanus figure is weird for having claws on its wings. In Yohual on the left, we again have a man in a vulture suit, rather less ornate than Borbonicus, but both have a strange black stripe across the bird's eye, whatever that means.

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CUAUHTLI (Eagle) {*kwawh-tlee*}

Cuauhtli is the 15th day of the *veintena*. The Eagle signifies bravery, lofty ideals, acuity of vision and mind and was seen as an avatar of the sun and emblematic of high authority. The elite order of Eagle Knights was devoted to Huitzilopochtli and prominent in Aztec society. The day-sign was again a stylized head of the regal raptor.



Aubin

Borbonicus

Borgia

Cospi

Fejervary-Mayer

Laud

Nuttall

Vaticanus B

Yohual



Borgia's formal day-sign on the left is a striking rendition of the eagle with wing-feathers reminiscent of the vulture. The bird's plumage in other codices varies widely, maybe reflecting the several species of eagle in Mexico and Central America. The flint knives attached to some of its feathers are a frequent motif representing a divine nature. Some images of Cuauhtli are seriously stylized, many verging on the abstract.

Borgia (Formal Day-Sign)



Aubin

Borbonicus

Borgia

Yohual



Laud

Nuttall

Vaticanus B

Vindobonensis

Recalling earlier scenes of Cipactli and Coatl devouring rabbits (one with an eagle's head hovering), there are some dramatic full-body images of Cuauhtli battling with Coatl over prey. A rabbit in Borgia, it's a lizard in Fejervary-Mayer being snatched by an almost psychedelic eagle from a decorative rattlesnake.



Borgia



Fejervary-Mayer

The most majestic composition, a competition again with a rattlesnake, appears as a full-page image, which likely implies a major mythological or legendary narrative.

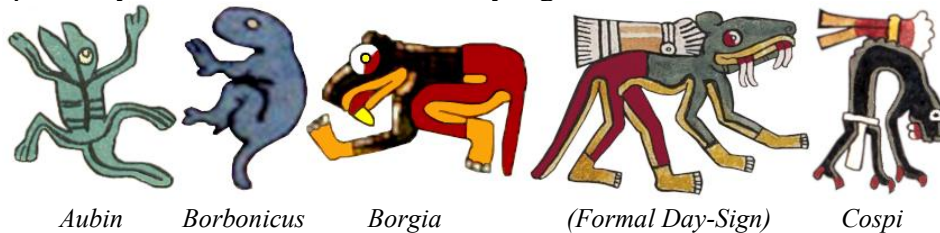


Vaticanus B

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CUETZPALLIN (Lizard) {kwetz-pal-leen}

Cuetzpallin is the 4th day of the *veintena*. The Aztecs broadly linked the Lizard to sexual organs and reproduction, and as Five Lizard, it was one of the Ahuiateteo. A deity of sexual indulgence, he may have been a *nagual* (aspect) of Huehucoyotl. Images of Cuetzpallin occur only rarely in the codices, primarily as thumbnail calendrical day-signs.



Aubin

Borbonicus

Borgia

(Formal Day-Sign)

Cospì



Fejervary-Mayer

Laud

Magliabechiano

Nuttall



Vaticanus B

Vindobonensis

Yohual

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