

Lizard

Latin name	various	Polarity	Masculine
Families	various	Element	Air
Order	<i>Squamata</i> (Scaly Reptiles)		
Sub-order	<i>Lacertilia</i> (Lizards)		
Etymology	Middle English from Old French <i>lesard(e)</i> , from Latin <i>lacertus</i>	Deities	Unkulunkulu, Meuler, Tarrotarro, Moko, Hermes, Serapis, Ahriman

Varieties

Lizards and snakes belong to the subclass of reptiles called the *Lepidosauria*, of which all except one species belong to the order *Squamata*. The *Lacertidae* (True Lizards) include the Sand Lizard (*Lacerta agilis*), which is the most common lizard of central Europe; the Wall Lizard (*Lacerta muralis*), mostly found in the Mediterranean region, but also in western and central Europe; the Green Lizard (*Lacerta viridis*), found in southern and central Europe; and the Common or Viviparous Lizard (*Lacerta vivipara*), whose young hatch in the female's body in northern and central Europe, but from eggs in the Pyrenees. The Common lizard is sometimes found as far north as the Arctic Circle. The *Scincidae* (Skinks) include the Snake-eyed Skink (*Ablepharus kitaibellii*), found mostly in south-eastern Europe. There are about three hundred species of Geckos (*Gekkonidae*), which are small climbing lizards. The *Agamidae* family includes the Indian Bloodsucker (*Calotes versicolor*), so called because the throat of the male swells and reddens when it fights another male during the mating season; the Spiny-tailed Lizard (*Uromastix acanthinurus*), which lives in the Middle East; and the Agama (*Agama sanguinolenta*), which lives on the steppes of Central Asia. The *Iguanidae* include the Green Iguana (*Iguana iguana*), which lives in the tropical regions of America; the Chuckwalla (*Sauromalus obesus*) from the deserts of Arizona and the south-west; and the American Basilisk (*Basiliscus americanus*). The *Cordylidae* (Girdle-tailed Lizards) include the Armadillo Lizard (*Cordylus cataphractus*) of Central and South Africa. The *Anguidae* (Slow-worms) have no limbs and are often mistaken for Snakes. The Slow-worm (*Anguis fragilis*) is said to live to over fifty years old. Another member of this family is the Glass-snake or Scheltopusik (*Ophisaurus apodus*), which lives in southern Europe and central Asia. It was formerly believed that all lizards were poisonous, but this is only true of the *Helodermatidae*, which live in the deserts of Mexico and the southern states. These include the Gila Monster (*Heloderma suspectum*). The *Varanidae* (Monitors) are carnivorous lizards found in India, central Asia, North Africa, Arabia, Iran, and western India. The chameleon (q.v.) is also a species of lizard.

Folklore

The lizard was believed to have no tongue and to feed only on dew. Because of this, it was a symbol of silence. The Romans believed that the lizard slept

through the winter, so to them it symbolised death and resurrection. In Roman art, the lizard was often depicted with sleeping cupids.

In a Santal folktale, a man was lying asleep when his soul became very thirsty and left his body in the form of a lizard. It got into a pitcher of water, but someone put the lid back on before it could return to his body. Just as his friends were preparing to cremate him, someone lifted the lid off the pitcher, and the lizard-soul was able to return. When the man asked his friends why they were weeping, they told him that they had thought him dead. He explained that he had gone down a well to get water but had been unable to get out.

Mythology

The Araucanian people of Chile have a god of winds called Meuler who is depicted as a lizard.

The Bantu god Unkulunkulu sent a chameleon to tell humans they were immortal, but the chameleon lingered, so he sent a lizard to tell them they were mortal. The lizard arrived first, so humanity became mortal. In some parts of Africa the lizard was believed to be able to transform itself into a leopard, a lion or a hyena. It can be a totem animal, but may also have a sinister aspect.

In Australian mythology, the lizard Tarrotarro is a culture hero. He divided humanity into two genders and taught the people the arts. In Polynesian mythology, Moko, the King of the Lizards, protects fishing. In Maori mythology, the lizard pulled the first human from the waters of creation. In Hawaii, there are lizard gods who are both animal ancestor figures and tutelary spirits. There was a stone temple in Tahiti dedicated to a lizard god. The lizard was regarded as the guardian of the soul in the body.

To the people of the Amazon River, the lizard is a manifestation of the Lord of Animals and Fish. It is also the messenger of the god who told men they were mortal.

In Central America, the desert peoples believe the lizard to be a form of the Great Spirit.

In Europe, the lizard is generally regarded as a sinister creature, because it was thought to be venomous. Shakespeare used this idea in both *Macbeth*, where a lizard's leg was an ingredient of the witches' cauldron, and *Henry VI* (Part II, Act III, Scene II).

Symbolism

In ancient Egypt and Greece, the lizard symbolised divine wisdom and good fortune; it also averted evil. It appears with other creatures on the votive Hand of Sabazios. It was also sacred to Hermes and Serapis.

In both Zoroastrianism and christianity, the lizard symbolises evil. In Zoroastrianism, it represents Ahriman; in christianity, it represents the devil.

Poetry

"I am the Lizard King
I can do anything..."

Jim Morrison