

Preface

With this work, I wish to share with a broad readership an encompassing empirical and interpretational synopsis of infant head modeling in Mesoamerica any beyond. The research is the outcome of decades of active, but slowly evolving quest for ancient Mesoamerican cranial modifications. The nature of this topic, and my personal research interests and diversified academic background, made it seem suitable to align different frames of reference from anthropological theory, as well as regionally based ideological and archaeological concepts. These are cornerstones in a survey of the Mesoamerican cranial record, iconography and historical testimonies. The latter have been patiently accrued and rigorously commented by my historian colleague, Pilar Zabala, who has participated actively in the endeavor of this work. The combination of different sources of information has been enormously facilitated in the data-rich Maya study environment, where integrated research provides the foundation for tracing head shapes to deeply embedded ideological schemes and their changes over time. During the years that I have dedicated to the study of Maya cranial modifications, I have not lost my sense of curiosity to learn more about this body practice. I keep being impressed by the coherence of the cultural elements involved in its performance and their adherence to deeply rooted social and ideological undercurrents. These have accompanied the unfolding of the broad historical processes that span the centuries and millennia of cultural evolvement in this sphere.

Milestones during these years of (re)search have been a Master and a Ph.D. thesis, two single-authored books and a sabbatical year of research dedicated to this topic. In 2012, our alma mater, the autonomous University of Yucatán, hosted an international colloquium on Mesoamerican head-shaping practices in our hometown, Mérida, Mexico, with the explicit goal to bring to the table, selected local and international scholars who are conducting research on American cranial modification. Conference sessions, rounds of discussion, and a practical workshop identified new venues of studying this and other native body practices. A need for standardized taxonomic criteria and active research was equally endorsed by the participants of the conference, which examined the social meanings and visible expressions of head modeling in different areas and at different moments within and around Mesoamerica. The contributions of the encounter are now in the process of publication as an edited volume.

I also hope that this work may lay groundwork towards a balanced, empirical, analytical, and conceptual perspective for future anthropological investigations on ancestral head-modeling practices in the Mesoamerican sphere and beyond. On an analytical level, this volume seeks to be a resource book. In this spirit, each chapter was written as an independent, yet articulated unit. Part I of this book delineates a set of interdisciplinary, basic analytical elements anchored in concepts derived from craniometrics, concepts in neural growth and adapted classification criteria, to be applied and interpreted in Part II of this volume. Although the research is anchored in physical anthropology and archaeology (specifically bioarchaeology), this book also integrates knowledge derived from anatomy and human physiology, historical and iconographic sources, linguistics (polisemy), and ethnography. Given its interdisciplinary focus, this volume fits well within Springer's *Interdisciplinary Contributions to Archaeology* series as it seeks integrated interpretations on the social and cultural roles of ancient head modifications (and body practices in general).

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