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, get 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 (polisemey), 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).

My thankful recognition go to all institutions, projects, and colleagues who have engaged actively in the academic endeavor of this work, and to those who have facilitated information or access to valuable resources for the research that supports it. I am grateful to Nene Lozada and William Duncan for their useful advice and their reviews. My thanks go to Pilar Zabala, my colleague, historian, and co-author of this book, with whom I have the pleasure of sharing this ongoing quest and research. I am also greatly indebted to my all-time academic mentor, Professor Arturo Romano of the National Institute of Anthropology, for his continued support for this research and for sharing his broad experience and knowledge of cranial examination in the fine “Old School” manner. I am also grateful to Andrea Cucina, for proofreading and commenting on preliminary drafts of this manuscript but, above all, for his encouragement and support at all stages of writing.

In general, I wish to credit and at the same time thank all the many projects and institutions for kindly providing access to the skeletal series illustrated or mentioned in this review. These include the Dirección de Antropología Física (José Antonio Pompa, INAH), the National School of Anthropology and History (INAH), the INAH Centers of Yucatán, Quintana Roo, Oaxaca, and Campeche. Similarly, the University of Yucatán, has been very supportive in this research, as has been the Na Bolom Museum in Chiapas, and the Claustro de Sor Juana in Mexico City. In Guatemala, the Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología (IDAEH, Guatemala) and the Atlas Arqueológico de Guatemala (Juan Pedro Laporte, IDAEH) and the French Mission (CEMCA) kindly assisted this study in the form of collaboration and study permits. The state authorities of Honduras and their collaboration with an ongoing Japanese initiative at the site of Copán, facilitated access to the skeletal series from the Copán Valley of Honduras. My thanks also go to Jorge Gómez-Valdés and Teresina Jaén Esquivel for sharing their work and illustrations. The Popol Vuh Museum of the Universidad Francisco Marroquin kindly granted permission to use images taken of its exquisite figurine collection.

The Peabody Museum of Harvard University and the Middle American Research Institute of Tulane University granted access to bibliographic sources and skeletal material. The University of Chicago has funded research at the Sierra Lacandona in
Chiapas, which includes research on historical head practices. My thanks also go to the community of Mensabak who kindly shared knowledge and gave logistical help. The University of La Sapienza, which curates the Sergii skeletal collection, and the Musée de l’Homme in Paris, France, have been helpful in providing illustrations and advice. in the early stages of this research, which have been financed over the years by the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, PIFI, PROMEP, CONACYT, UADY, and Wenner Gren funds. A full list of project credits is published in my book (2012) Transformarse en maya. El modelado cefálico entre los mayas prehispánicos y coloniales. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, México, D.F.

Other colleagues, friends and family, who kindly helped with this research are Linda Manzanilla, Carlos Serrano, Jane E. Buikstra, Grégory Pereira, Cármen Valverde, and Laura Sotelo, Mercedes de la Garza, Rosaura Yepez, José Gamboa and Ana Leslie Escalante, Thelma Sierra, Allan Ortega, Nora López, Luis Felipe Bate, and Nydia Lara. Thanks also go to Attilio Cucina (†), Ekkehard Tiesler (†), Luz Evelia Campaña and Karina Romero, to Fernando Robles, Rafael Cobos, Adriana Velázquez, Enrique Nalda (†) and Sandra Balanzario, Ramón Carrasco, William Sanders and Rebecca Story, Juan Pedro Laporte (†) and William Folan. More recently, this work has benefited enormously from the generous intellectual input and encouragement by Nene Lozada, John Verano, Virginia Miller, Takeshi Inomata, Oswaldo Chinchilla, Grégory Pereira, T. Douglas Price, Lilia Escorcia, Bill Duncan, Andrew Scherer, Gabriel Wrobel, Rosaura Yépez, and Erik Velázquez. On an ideological plane, the advice by Joel Palka, Gabrielle Vail, Victoria Bricker, Ana García, and Alfonso Lacadena has been instrumental in assigning meanings to Maya head terminology and their input is gratefully appreciated here. The comments and suggestions of the editorial board of Springer Press have been instrumental during the proposal stage and writing process. Titanic logistical help was provided by Khali Ashton-Lomax, Belem Ceballos, Kadwin Pérez, Mirna Sánchez, and Shintaro Suzuki. Thanks for your patience!
The Bioarchaeology of Artificial Cranial Modifications
New Approaches to Head Shaping and its Meanings in Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica and Beyond
Tiesler, V.
2014, XXVII, 269 p. 68 illus., 13 illus. in color., Hardcover
ISBN: 978-1-4614-8759-3