

SOCIAL SKINS OF THE HEAD

*Body Beliefs and Ritual
in Ancient Mesoamerica
and the Andes*



Edited by Vera Tiesler and María Cecilia Lozada

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EDITED BY

VERA TIESLER AND MARÍA CECILIA LOZADA

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*To the heads of the future,
our children
Fabio Cucina Tiesler
and
Alicia Haydon*

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Preface

VERA TIESLER AND MARÍA CECILIA LOZADA

This collection of essays was initiated by a passion for the study of Native American head treatments, shared among the contributors and the editors of this volume. Both editors look back on decades of active (bio)archaeological work on bodies and body modifications in the Andes and Mesoamerica. It was probably our sheer academic curiosity to learn more about the “other side” that triggered our initial conversations regarding the heads and skulls from the lands south and north of the Panama Canal. This curiosity was certainly tailgated by our dissatisfaction with the many ready-made, simplified, or Westernized explanations of Native “corporeity” to permeate the popular and academic literature alike.¹ Sadly, the scrutiny of Native headworks does not make an exception. A more rigorous and culturally aligned (or emic) reflection of the tantalizingly complex undercurrents that once bolstered Native body practices should go *a la par* with statistical validation and Western social semantization. We believe that these efforts are timely, given the amount of published groundwork on indigenous body models in the Andes and Mesoamerica.

Both cultural spheres stretch over extended territories and are known for the diversity and complexity of their world views and body works, focused on the head. The latter included a myriad of permanent modifications in the past, backed by deeply embedded beliefs about the cosmic makeup and its corporeal models. Once this connection is established, a host of specific inquiries fall into place:

How would Native concepts about life, cosmic vitality, and constructed, body-inscribed values motivate specific forms of embodiment? Which ideas about vitality, protection, and health led mothers to wrap and shape their babies’ head over the months and years? What did the first haircut mean to Natives for whom the hair harbored animic energy? Why were earspools important for hearing among ancient Andeans and Mesoamericans? And beyond the threshold of death: what cultural rationales inspired the protracted treatments of heads and skulls?

In 2012, we first shared the discussion table with twenty other invitees who had arrived from near and far in order to engage in dialogues on ancient head-shaping practices during a thematic symposium. This encounter was held in the “white city” of Mérida, Mexico, and was organized by the Autonomous University of Yucatán (fig.I.1). Our series of enlightened talks on heads culminated with a hands-on workshop on cranial taxonomies and an exhibit of artificial cranial vault modifications in the Americas. At the end of the late-autumn symposium, all participants were treated to a visit to a traditional community and its acclaimed celebration of Hanal Pixan (“food for the souls”), or simply Day of the Dead. Blending in with local Maya, we watched folk recover and clean the ancestral bones and skull *calacas* in the local cemetery as they prepared jointly for the long-awaited arrival of their deceased kin. Each year, the dead spirits are expected to stay with their family over the whole month before they leave again



Figure 1.1. Participants of the Second Mesoamerican Symposium of Bioarchaeology hosted in 2012 by the Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, Mérida, Mexico (photo, Laboratory of Bioarchaeology and Histomorphology, UADY).

in late November. As part of this “Maya way of receiving” dead kin, we were offered to eat “bodies” (*pibes*), as they were pulled out of the smoking soil. The delicious cakes are made of corn and red *achiote*. They come wrapped in green leaves and are baked beneath the ground, the earthy domains of the dead.

It was clear to both of us already that the topic of ancient head treatments in truth subscribes to a Pandora’s box of meanings, purposes, and culturally sanctioned body techniques, a subject abstrusely complex and varied both south and north of the Panama Canal, yet holding some common undercurrents in terms of both procedures and social values. At this point, both editors started to talk about a second, still more culturally engrained symposium, open to specialists in regional linguistics, art history, and ethnography. A two-part paper session entitled “Cultural Meanings of Head Treatments in Mesoamerican and Andean Societies” followed in 2014. Organized for the annual meeting of the Society for American Archaeology in Austin, Texas, it was this symposium that spurred the preparation of the present volume. A select group of international and local scholars working in Mesoamerica and the Andes engaged in a dialogue on culturally ingrained anthropological research related to the head. Building on the momentum of Native body and embodiment

research in the humanities, this dual-regional approach was intended to encourage out-of-the-box thinking. By bridging two highly specialized academic traditions in the Americas, we wished to find conceptual and analytical commonalities and/or points of disjuncture between Andean and Mesoamerican cephalic practices. Back home, the symposium-guided dialogues continued as the discussants’ comments were circulated among the participants to further encourage and enrich the ideas presented during the encounter. In this same spirit, we also invited a number of other scholars to write on the subject.

Each of the contributors was enheartened to align with a number of “cornerstones” from which to interpret and understand the cultural roles and meaning of the head in Native world views. First, we want to conceptualize the head and its physical insignia as a spiritual locus within the Native cosmos, the embodied *anecumene* within the *ecumene* if you will. This complementary notion between the sacred and the profane is an inherent part of Native cosmology on both sides of the Panama isthmus. Its confrontation contributes a new level of understanding of particular Native body treatments and prepares the ground for a renewed discussion of body concepts and physical embodiment in general.

We identify the term “physical embodiment” in this

volume as the physical representation of sociocultural conditions in the human body, enacted in body treatment and the cultural modification of its segments (in life or death). To achieve this, our *modus operandi* (and that of many contributors) confronts different sets of information with autochthonous body concepts, specifically those of the head and its vital components.

Second, we promote an interdisciplinary, dual approach between the Andes and Mesoamerica, as both spheres held—and still hold—body-anchored and specifically head-anchored world views. Despite the pitfalls in comparing two parallel but separately evolving cultural spheres, we believe that the cross-continental juxtapositions should facilitate a deeper causal understanding of the Native body beyond the region and invite broader questions regarding body concepts and embodiment. Interdisciplinary approximations have been encouraged whenever possible, drawing from discursive media and material data sets. Their joint interpretation and discussion is meant to re-create and contextualize broader meanings at the interstice between the self, the head, and culture, along with their mutual interactions.

Third, we encourage the wide thematic treatment of permanent and not-so-permanent forms of enhancement of the head and its surfaces (both in life and past death). In practice, this does not go as far as we would have wished, given the dominance of scholarship on head shaping and the ancient Maya. However, in addition to these head modifications, this volume does treat other forms of physical enhancement such as haircuts and facial paint, hair arrangements, dental reductions, and ear piercings, all of which have been covered only sparsely in the anthropological literature to date. Past death, the many meanings and mortuary pathways of trophy heads, venerated skulls, and headless bodies in the Andes and Mesoamerica acquire importance.

Our efforts would not have expanded into a thick oeuvre had it not been for the continued support and active engagement by the participants in this project. We

wish to extend a heartfelt thank you to each and all of our contributors for sharing efforts and expertise during the different stages of preparation and editing. Needless to say, both of us have enjoyed immensely our exquisite rounds of discussion and the academic exchange with everyone involved. This includes all those who for one reason or another could not be part of this book, namely Rosaura Yépez and Mary Weismantel. Jane Buikstra's discussion at our session at the SAA and her permanent inspiration in general have been instrumental for both of us in our advancement of this project and in conducting bioarchaeology from a human lens in the Andes and Mesoamerica. A thank you also goes to Josefina Mansilla and the late Carmen Pijoan Aguadé, whose rigorous analytical approaches in the human taphonomy of Mexico are well recognized worldwide. We are indebted to Pilar Zabala, our colleague and historian friend, with whom we have the pleasure of sharing also this continued quest for physical embodiment in the eyes of the conquerors.

Last but not least, we extend our thankful recognition to those institutions that have promoted this project through the years, specifically the University of Chicago and the Autonomous University of Yucatán. Thanks go to the editorial team of the University of New Mexico Press, led by John Byram, all of whom have generously supported us throughout. We are indebted to Khali Ashton, Flavius Beca, Catherine Harrison, Raúl López Pérez, and Kristie Sanchez for style correcting, formatting, and unifying the drafts as they came in. The feedback we received by two reviewers have strengthening the volume substantially. Their comments have been instrumental in stringing together the parts and chapters and in providing a more balanced treatment of information and conceptual frames.

NOTE

1. We conceive "corporeity" simply as the quality or state of having or being a body.

Introducing the Social Skins of the Head in Ancient Mesoamerica and the Andes

VERA TIESLER AND MARÍA CECILIA LOZADA

A HEADS-UP ON CULTURAL CONCEPTIONS

Society has long associated symbols, metaphors, and significations with the head and its vital components. Strongly influenced by modern biological sciences, our own Westernized conception usually identifies human evolution as the driving force behind the size, posture, and anatomical location of the human head. When the head became the uppermost part of the body—once hominids acquired an erect posture—it also became increasingly distinct from the trunk. The throat and neck narrowed, gradually separating the head from the body, both in topographic and functional anatomy. In their present anatomical arrangement, most of our sense organs are in the anterior portion of our head. Compared to our evolutionary ancestors, it is our relatively hairless and circumscribed *visage* that acts as the hub for our sensory exchange with the extrinsic world.¹

Beyond mainstream Western thought, really all cultures, past and present, have imbued the head with a central cultural paramountcy due to its prominent placement atop the body and because it is the physical locus of so many sensory, emotional, and spiritual domains (Arnold and Hastorf 2008). In this panorama of embodiment, the modern Westernized conception constitutes only one of the many ways of understanding our organic capital “hardware” for perception, thinking, feeling, and spiri-

tuality. For some cultures, heads and their components are social personifiers, which can vary epistemologically and ontologically with a tantalizing tangle of possible acceptations of bodies and what they stand for or not (Harris and Robb 2012). Within this spectrum, a head can represent an individual or metaphorically identify hierarchically organized groups, factions, or institutions (Arnold and Hastorf 2008). A significant number of societies have treated (or indeed still treat) heads as ritual objects, either venerated as the relics of ancestral kin, or as telluric or saintly beings, or collected as trophies from socially distant persons (Grewenig and Rosendahl 2015). One of the practices that has led to intense debate within the anthropological community is human headhunting: the separation and curation of the head after killing a person. This form of processing can be related to a number of social situations, most of which are identified with notions of collective superiority and attributions of soul power, appropriated and controlled by the head takers.

The head, in its natural or culturally adapted presentation, is a central locus not only of spirituality but also of appearance and body display. Put on the social stage, the head turns into a canvas for social discourse and performance—in reality, all human interaction (Turner 1984; Turner 2007). Above and beyond all else, this capital human canvas expresses socioculturally sanctioned ideals, standards, prohibitions, and taboos.² It is the organic hardware of what David Le Breton (1984:79–80) and Marcel

Mauss (2007; see also Turner 1984; Turner 2007) describe as “corporeal socialities” (*sociétés corporelles*), body techniques (*techniques du corps*), and embodied interactions. Equally sanctioned by society, and still more passive, is the notion of human corporeity described by Michel Foucault (1995). A plastic and fundamentally docile matter, the body (and therefore the head) can be trained, managed, disciplined, punished, and sometimes tortured in order to make it socially and economically productive. Thus, not only is the body the recipient of socially mediated action, but it also reflects and represents society as it assimilates self-assigned group identity.

These and other humanistic inquiries about the relationship between the body and society typically touch upon notions of physicality and corporeity, corporeality (i.e., corporeal existence), material interaction, self-reflection and representation, and ontogenetic and cosmological models (Lock and Farquhar 2007; Mauss 2007; Skibo and Schiffer 2009; Sofaer 2006; Turner 1984). Most work on this subject addresses the social “construction” of the body and its embodiment with the goal of inquiring about perceptions of the interstice between the mind, the body, and society. Note that not only is the head the sole part of our body that we cannot see directly, but it is also through it that we see the remainder of our body and our surroundings. In a similar fashion, we hear, smell, taste, and breathe through elements of our face and thereby define “organically” the locale of our personal sensory experiences.

The embodied layers of sociocultural conditions and norms may relate to gender, social age, or purely social constructs such as power, subordination, or ethnicity. In explaining the complexities involved in the relationships between society, persons, and bodies, modern scholars have been receiving increasing feedback by engaging with phenomenological, structural, and semiotic concepts (Csordas 1994:10–12). The social signification of bodies as readable texts, interwoven with their experienced realities, makes up much of the recent scholarship on the subject. This way of conceptualizing bodies has been taken up as a proxy—together with more objectifiable material information—by a number of the contributors in this volume.

HEADS, BODIES, AND NATIVE AMERICAN COSMOGRAMS

Although separate geographically and culturally, ancient Mesoamericans and Andeans imbued the morphology

of the head with deep ideological signification by recognizing it as a spiritual locus (fig. 1.1). Even during the contact period, the Inkas (Classen 1993) and the Aztecs (López Austin 1989, 2009) still clearly identified the head as the locus of human vitality and, at least among the Aztecs, as the abode of the heat-soul, *tonalli*. Additionally, the head (or whole body) could constitute a model for a broader entity, even the cosmos itself. In this role, it would become an anthropomorphic blueprint for the experienced landscape with its natural constituents, as Diego de González Holguín demonstrated semiologically for the Inkas in his dictionary of 1608. In this example, a nose is synonymous with a hilltop, and the term *uma* equates a head with a mountain peak (Classen 1993:110). In a number of other Native contexts, the head equally provides an anthropomorphic model for the spiritual universe and specifically for the appearances of gods and goddesses. This relationship is illustrated by the veneration of the maize god among the Classic-period Maya (250–900 CE). They often represented the tonsured head of this god with a postcoronary sulcus (a secondary morphological attribute found in some forms of head elongation), just as if his head had been artificially shaped during infancy (Tiesler 2014:226–28). Focusing on the same cultural sphere, María Luisa Vázquez de Ágredos Pascual and her colleagues, in this volume, reflect upon the head as the native crown of a Maya body, which could offer points of contact and exchange between humans and their sacred celestial universe.

The head, with all its representative qualities, clearly made a supreme anatomical canvas for body modification and treatment, the motivation for most of which, as several of our contributors conclude, went well beyond embellishment and visible display. Specifically concerning the regions under scrutiny, the illuminating studies by Alfredo López Austin (1989, 2009; López Austin and Millones 2008), Stephen D. Houston and colleagues (2006; Houston and Cummins 2004; Houston and Stuart 1998), Jill McKeever Furst (1995), Constance Classen (1993), Cheryl Classen and Rosemary Joyce (1997; Joyce 2009), and Denise Arnold and Christine Hastorf (2008) have aided the contributors in this volume and have also been helpful in guiding the editors’ own past and present inquiries on head enhancement and permanent modifications (Garcia and Tiesler 2011; Lozada 2014; Lozada and Buikstra 2002; Tiesler 2000, 2012, 2014).

The first part of our book title—“Social Skins of the Head”—pays direct tribute to Terence Turner’s seminal



Figure 1.1. General map of the two cultural spheres treated in this volume, highlighting major sites, countries, and modern cities mentioned in this book. Countries shaded in gray denote the cultural areas under study (drawing, Laboratory of Bioarchaeology and Histomorphology, Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, Mérida, adapted by Vera Tiesler and María Cecilia Lozada).

work on the subject (2007; see also Arnold and Hastorf 2008). At the same time, by using this title we hope to draw attention to the multilayered social meanings of head embodiment and its behavioral correlates in Mesoamerican and Andean societies. Here, the head was viewed not as a passive artifact but rather as a crucial anchor of identity and power. Note that both cultural spheres held—and still hold—body-anchored world views that convey particular importance to the head (Arnold and Hastorf 2008; Classen 1993:96–112, 154; Houston and Cummins 2004; López-Austin 2009; Wilkinson 2013). Ancient peoples all over the Americas embraced the head as a metaphor for the person, as a signifier for the individual, for the “self,” and for personhood. In doing so, the heads epitomized the constructed identity of a person or ancestor and, beyond that, served as a blueprint and spiritual locus for the indigenous universe (Classen 1993; Houston and Stuart 1998; Houston et al. 2006; López-Austin 1989; Velásquez García 2011; Weismantel 2015).

Crafting Heads, Working Heads, and Forging Identities

The anthropological study of Native body modification not only communicates fads and fashions, and individual and collective looks and styles, but, more to the point, sheds light on the enactment and effects of identity-forging practices. Among many pre-Hispanic communities of Mesoamerica and the Andes, these modifications began immediately after birth. The Inkas, for instance, celebrated the “presentation of the [head compression] crib to divinity” (*huahua, quirau*) (Latham 1929:542; Purizaga Vega 1991:43–45). While invoking the family *huaca* or totem, close kin would fabricate a child’s cradleboard, designed not only to shape the head but also to shelter and to protect the child from harm. Throughout the Inka Empire, this early crib placement, or *ayuscay*, was celebrated only a few days after a baby’s delivery and was recognized as crucial during this stage of life (Purizaga Vega 1991:6). Fetuses and infant *wawas* were permitted by this process of modification to transit smoothly through their liminal state of existence before becoming social, gendered persons. The practice of wrapping and molding a child’s head, as described by Deborah Blom and Nicole Couture for the Tiwanaku in chapter 13, speaks to the importance of heads in the active crafting of personhood. In the view of these authors, the physical binding of the head contained the “wild or presocial” child before the child could evolve and

reintegrate as a full human being representing his or her social group. This innovative interpretation adds to the conventionally understood significations of Andean head shaping, such as connoting group membership (among the coastal Chiribaya, see Lozada and Buikstra 2002), or connoting emblems of sacred adoration, as for the lunar cult among the Chancay and Ancon people on the central coast of Peru (Yépez 2017).

North of the Panama Canal, infant heads were transformed both physically and spiritually by being wrapped, hidden, sealed, or “ensouled,” as William Duncan and Gabrielle Vail note in chapter 2 of this volume (see also Tiesler 2012, 2014). In chapter 4, Andrew Scherer speaks of this same process as a form of “bodywork,” the active act of crafting, cultivating, and shaping little “unripe creatures” into humans by swaddling and shaping their heads. The calendrical and semantic connotations of these practices—with all their phrenological baggage—are brought into the open one more time in the discussion chapter by Vail (chapter 10) in this volume.

If we are to conceive of the head-shaping procedures used both north and south of the Panama Canal as a concerted set of body techniques (according to Marcel Mauss), these are not tied to festive occasions but rather to a quotidian routine that could be prolonged over months or sometimes even years. If not their daily enactment, at least their beginnings and ends would often be ritually sanctioned: these were occasions for seminal haircuts, naming ceremonies, and festivities of “rebirth.” In this light, head-shaping procedures appear as gradual transformations, concealments, and preparations rather than “ritual steps” in any strict sense. They were perhaps more akin to the concept of the training of the body (and specifically its capital segment), which prepared posterior integration per se, at least in the three-stage ritual frame adopted by Arnold van Gennep (1960; see also Scherer, chapter 4 of this volume). Some Highland Maya traditions still recognize this scheme. In this case, a baptism or *kaput-sihil* (literally, “to be born a second time”) sanctions the passage from childhood to puberty (Duncan and Vail, chapter 2 of this volume).

It is of note that the procedures leading to permanent head transformations that were enacted in later stages of childhood tended to be much less prolonged than head shaping (Dembo and Imbelloni 1938). Ear piercings, tooth filings, and facial tattoos, practiced on both sides of the isthmus, were accomplished not over the course of months and years but over a span of seconds, minutes, hours, or

days. They were often culminations of ritual preparations, such as among the Aztecs, for whom the piercing of the ears formed part of family celebrations called *pillaoano*, which took place every four years:

Moctezuma then danced a princely dance before the temple of Xiuhtecútlī. The name of the place was Tzonmolco. And at this time all people, everyone, tasted, sipped, the wine; [even] the small children. Thus the [feast day] was called pillaoano. And then they gave uncles, they gave aunts to the small children, a man, a woman whom those with children sought out and gave gifts [to]. These took [the children] upon their backs, and carried them to the temple of Ixcocauhqui. [The parents] perforated their ears, they pierced their ears; thus they placed a sign upon them, while their uncles and aunts looked on. Afterwards food was eaten. (Sahagún 1981:30)

Among the Inka, male youth, at the onset of their fertility, had their ears pierced in a manner that caused them to bleed copiously. This was a symbolic equivalent to the girls' menarche according to Constance Classen (1993:70), who, equating hearing with bleeding (sound and fluidity), associates the control of sexual activity with the degree to which a person obeyed oral traditions and respected cultural taboos. Classen demonstrates this connection through a number of the ritual elements of this transition rite, such as the coupled endowment of the youngster with both ear ornaments (to denote obeying orders) and breechcloths (from this point forward, he would cover his private parts and thus prevent shameful exposure).

In the context of puberty rites, body transformations often turned into trials of physical endurance. Now older, the youth possessed more individual agency. They were active participants and voluntary endurers of measures that could be quite painful (van Gennep 1960). Pain and blood were central elements in a number of these body practices, which took the form of scarifications, tattoos, tooth filings, or piercings of cartilage and mucous tissues. Bishop Diego de Landa (Tozzer 1941:91) remarked that during the sixteenth century, in Yucatecan societies, "this work [tattooing] is done a little at a time on account of the extreme pain, and afterwards, they would get quite sick of it, since the designs festered and matter formed. On account of all this they mocked those who were not tattooed" (see also Thompson 1946:18–19). Painfully engraved, these markings conjured social integration

and adulthood through penance, valor, rites of passage, and sometimes punishment of transgressions. However orchestrated, these rituals were tightly entwined with the concept of physical consumption (the deprivation of physiological needs, particularly sleep, and the endurance of intense pain), which was made visible by the end result inscribed in living tissue and which also left an invisible mark in the process: a challenging life experience as the hallmark of adulthood.

And finally, what distinguished permanent transformations from those that were shorter lasting or transient? Responses to this question are offered in this volume by María Luisa Vázquez de Ágredos Pascual and colleagues (on Native cosmetics), Virginia Miller (on hair color), and Andrea Vazquez de Arthur (on facial enhancement). All three essays relate to specific forms of body enhancement enacted daily or only during specific occasions. Although typically absent from mortuary inquiries, these arrangements do materialize in the imagery of ancient communities and cities. They may signify gender, age, social standing, or personal choice. They also identify festive occasions, subordination versus dominance, and the sacrificer versus the one to be sacrificed, as Miller traces at Chichén Itzá.

Miller's work specifically underscores the malleable quality of hair. Dead outside the body but living and growing from within, hair possesses a dual quality. Unlike tearing hair out by its roots, cutting hair causes no pain. Just like the act of grooming itself, Miller argues that it is the visible arrangement that counts: its color, length, texture. In an additional layer of signification, hair was thought to harbor the vital heat-energy of its human carrier. This person could experience the feeling of death and the loss of personal identity when it was disarrayed, or worse, shorn or torn out by captors and sacrificers, a point that both Miller and other scholars make clear (see, for instance, Houston et al. 2006).

The Social Skins of Heads

Above, we introduced the social construction of heads as a cultural process. But beyond the often symbolically laden procedures for the processing and adjustment of heads, the very results of these treatments were bound to carry a highly symbolic value. Denoted in shape, size, color, or texture, emblematic heads and head garb communicate gender, locale, and social age within groups. Outside the confines of communal areas, they convey ethnicity or foreign status. Some head displays even seem to have acted as

boundary-marking mechanisms, as, in this volume, Bruce Mannheim and colleagues argue regarding the Formative Cuzco area and the Colca Valley. Further north, in the Southern Maya lowlands, the confrontation between standardized and diversified cranial shapes, one profile against another, leads Vera Tiesler and Alfonso Lacadena to attest to their roles as collective statements of ethnic pertinence versus otherness. This association finds an astounding confirmation in the spoken isoglosses and artistic conventions of head portraiture among locals. The authors also note that the elongated head profiles were still crafted by mothers even after the collapse of the Classic Southern Mayan kingdoms, and they draw conclusions about the conservative reproduction of head shapes by successions of different generations of females. Just like spoken language, passed on in the domestic spheres of households by mothers and female kin, local head shaping traditions likely outlived more conflict-ridden, androcentrically led activities such as trading, political networking, and warring.

In other contextual situations, community identity was not embodied organically by the human carrier but instead crafted into head portraiture. Such are the paired and multiple Wari ceramic faceneck vessels, which are explored by Vázquez de Arthur in this volume. The author argues that facenecks were produced to represent the identities of individuals in unique ways. Their relationships may have extended beyond purely biological ties, as they likely expressed social connections among individuals and their respective roles within social networks. This approach is similar to the one taken by Laura Filloy Nadal in this book, who analyzes the rendering of individualizing features by elaborating on the concept of visage and the physical likeness among the portraits of the upper echelon of Palenque's Maya kingdom. She notes that ancient viewers identified a paragon by virtue of his or her individual physical traits and idiosyncratic markings, inscribed on the body or displayed in adornments, headdress, and garb. It is quite impressive to see that in the image of one noted local dynast, his visage was still recalled and reproduced faithfully decades after his passing, underscoring his transcendence and the continued use of this apical ancestor in his descendants' political affairs.

The facial skin as a screen for display for the ancient metropolis of Teotihuacan is addressed by Luis Adrián Alvarado-Viñas and Linda Manzanilla in this chapter 5. The authors discern a number of theater-type censers, which display human heads with facial paint and partic-

ular cranial contours. They conclude that within the multiethnic landscapes of urban Teotihuacan, human heads must have functioned as social signifiers of ethnic identity and cultural provenience, whereas facial paint and corporal paint would have been useful media for visual recognition within the urban core of this Early Classic metropolis (Manzanilla et al. 2011). Also, Vázquez de Ágredos Pascual and her colleagues focus their study on the face painting of different social factions rendered in Classic Maya polychrome vase painting. Here, what is important was not only form and symbolism but also the signification of the colors with which faces were covered. Particularly red and black hues, followed by white and occasionally yellow tones, signaled publically the condition of the human carrier as a warrior, ritual participant, or mourner. Unsurprisingly, the neck, cheeks, and forehead were the most frequently colored surfaces, visibly framing the center of the face. The application of facial paint went beyond the realms of aristocracy. Beyond the symbolic and aesthetic meaning, the colorful potions possibly held additional therapeutic value for their users. Most important for us was the conclusion of the authors that the colors radiating from the head and neck re-created the Native cosmos and its cardinal directions, each one representing a particular god or natural force. This last aspect certainly brings home the notion of the head as a blueprint for the Native cosmos and its forces.

Heads as Seeds, Heads as Tokens

Heads held a pivotal role in ceremonial acts of embodiment related not only to life but to death, such as in capital punishment, sacrificial decapitation, postsacrificial processing of severed heads, and veneration. The last aspect of this progression could take heads and skulls on often protracted journeys, materialized in the archaeological record by commingling and otherwise complex mortuary pathways (Chacon and Dye 2007). Cross-culturally, post-mortem heads (full-fleshed, skinned, defleshed, artificially mummified, or skeletonized) range in signification from honored ancestors to devastated enemies or simple criminals. Categorically, the severing of the head from the body dissociates the body, denying proper corpse treatment. Whether destroying or curating heads, given that they are potent sources of cosmic and personal vitality, these acts come to empower the living and establish continuity, as Sara Becker and Sonia Alconini point out in chapter 15 of this book.

In the Mesoamerican sphere, the cyclical movement of heads can be understood directly or indirectly from a *hierophagic* religious perspective (i.e., mutual but hierarchically organized consumption among humans and cosmic entities) that embodied life and all cosmic functioning (Monaghan 2000). Especially pre-Hispanic Mesoamericans deemed eating an essential activity not only among people but among their gods. The cosmic food chain started in the divine underworld and traveled to the earth, where food abounded and would be consumed by humans. Humans, in turn, were to feed the gods by donating food staples. These could be real or symbolic food provisions and usually comprised maize or copal. During ritual offerings, these foods became transcendent as fragrance or smoke, in a burned, roasted, boiled, or raw state, or in the form of copal balls or as tamales. In the eyes of the ceremonial congregation, these turned into flesh (specifically human flesh) and vital essences. Likewise, human heads were held to be appropriate “foodstaples” to feed the divine during human sacrifice, turning them into life-renewing seeds (Freidel and Reilly 2010; Stross 2010; Taube 1985).

By detaching the head from the body, the body is made partible (Duncan and Schwarz 2014; Geller 2014). The head then can act as a consecrated offering and be deposited near an altar, as Alvarado-Viñas and Manzanilla state is the case for Teopancazco, Teotihuacan. The authors suggest that decapitations and posthumous head processing in the seats of power of Teotihuacan’s central neighborhoods modulated social contradictions and promoted the transformation of roles, just like in other hierarchically organized traditional societies. More ideologically tinted is the conclusion drawn by Ximema Chávez Balderas from the complex chain of head processing at the Great Aztec Temple of Tenochtitlan. Decapitated and worked into skull masks by Mexica priests, or stuck on *tzompantli* racks, heads would experience a metamorphosis in the eyes of the Aztecs and turn into the supernatural beings they had already represented before their sacrificial immolation. Composing the divine mountain tree-paradise, these skulls reenacted mythical passages and created divine models of the cosmos (López Austin and López Luján 2009; Taube 2004). This practice is an old and extensive tradition. The *tzompantli* imagery, and even series of perforated skulls, have been dated to as long ago as the close of the first millennium CE. Additionally, some of these early representations and skulls have been documented well beyond the Mexican central highlands,

such as a couple of recently studied crania from the Sacred Cenote of Chichén Itzá (plate 1; fig. 1.2) (see also López Austin and López Luján 2009; Miller 2007, chapter 8 of this volume; Taube 2004).

Also in past Andean societies, the millenary traditions of head taking, head curation, and trophy skulls are powerful testaments to the significance of these body parts, as Vazquez de Arthur notes in chapter 16 of this volume. Similar to the Mesoamerican sphere, not all heads were treated equally. Here, even single heads could change their signification and purposes during different stages of preparation and curation (Arnold and Hastorf 2008). More than those from Mesoamerica, the shrunk or dried heads of the Andes can be instantly recognized as human. These “onlooking” heads or preserved skulls could be stern visual reminders of victory or power (Tung 2012; Tung and Knudson 2008; Verano 1995).

Cephalocentric practices were indeed deeply rooted in most ancient Andean cultural traditions including those of the Paracas, Nasca, Wari, and Moche, as John Verano demonstrates below in chapter 11. While the head is undoubtedly the focus of such corporeal treatments, Verano’s key point is that its removal from the body was aligned with much more complex social and cultural meanings such as warfare, human sacrifice, fertility, and other commensurate ritual activities more directly associated with ancestor veneration. Specifically in the Kallawayá area (Bolivia) during the arrival of Tiwanaku, decapitation appeared to provide a way for the new regime to consolidate power, as Becker and Alconini argue in chapter 15. This may suggest that the vital power harbored by severed heads was considered subversive and was therefore eliminated by destroying the heads prior to burial. Conversely, trophy heads were contained and transformed into *wawas* among the Tiwanaku, signifying both seeds and ungendered offspring, as Blom and Couture posit in chapter 13.

Disembodied heads and headless bodies often experienced dissimilar afterlives—that of the head may have involved protracted curation to preserve the facial features and hair, or processing of the head and skull by defleshing, perforation, sectioning of the cranium, surface decoration, or the attachment of suspensory cords. In chapter 12, Lozada and her colleagues suggest that heads were separated from the body for the rather mundane reason of ease of transport. They hypothesize that the heads of warriors who were killed in combat while away from their communities were removed from the body to be repatriated for proper burial. They also argue that, for La Ramada culture,



Figure 1.2a. A male skull with perforated sides from skullrack exposure, Sacred Cenote, Chichén Itzá. Note the significant head elongation, typical for the Maya during the Classic period (photo by Vera Tiesler; no. 07-7-20/58242), Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography, Harvard Museum, © 2018, President and Fellows of Harvard College.



Figure 1.2b. A tabular erect neurocranium with perforated sides from skullrack exposure, Sacred Cenote, Chichén Itzá (photo by Vera Tiesler; no. 07-7-20/58248 and 58257.0), Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography, Harvard Museum, © 2018, President and Fellows of Harvard College.

the head, as opposed to other body parts, was particularly important as a receptacle of personhood. This belief was and is also observed in other past Andean cultures.

It goes without saying that the impressive range of motivations for head processing suggests a considerable variety of meanings for the heads of naturally deceased

kin, either in ancestor worship or in fertility rituals and concealed power troves (Arnold and Hastorf 2008). Not dissimilar to trophy heads, these cult objects connected the human world and the otherworld. Beyond heads, the role of exchange is highlighted by the almost ubiquitous inclusion of food preparation and/or consumption vessels

(usually bowls and jars) in burial contexts. These forms of ancient manipulation could be instrumental for individual or group protection and spiritual strengthening. As these traditions show, the heads of the dead express multiple social situations, offering powerful venues for exploring social interaction and discourse, integration versus distinction, ancestor veneration versus profanation and sacrifice, and power display versus humiliation.

HEAD PRACTICES AFTER EUROPEAN CONTACT

After the arrival of the Spaniards, centuries of collective humiliation and devastation altered modern Native life-ways and distanced us, the observers, from the ancient cultural repertoires and belief systems, including those of physical embodiment. Different from other colonial powers such as the Portuguese, French, and Anglo-Saxon invaders (who were more interested in the economic exploitation of local resources), the Hispanic colonizers of New Spain and Peru not only claimed political and economic domination (fig. 1.3), they also bolstered their reigns with absolutist claims of cultural and religious superiority. The stated goal was the complete assimilation of all segments of Novohispanic society into the service of God and the Catholic kings (Tiesler and Zabala 2017). As part of these efforts, the Spanish Crown remained acutely alert to Native beliefs, dress, and customs.

All but the most strict European mentalities, and specifically Catholic attitudes toward the body, were used as arguments to discredit the “sacrilegious” modification of the natural form of the head, which had “been created by God to mirror his own image” (Cieza de León 1984:227; see also Lozada 2011; Tiesler 2014; Tiesler and Zabala 2011; Zabala 2014). By these standards, visible alterations of appearance seemed corrupt in the eyes of the conquerors. The effects of the European suppression efforts were severe in the Andes and Mesoamerica. Native forms of resilience and assimilation were diverse and depended significantly on the amount of control that the urban strongholds had on the indigenous communities, and most probably on the visibility of the bodyworks in the public sphere. Whether hidden and so continued, substituted, transformed, or abandoned altogether, the perpetuation of Native head treatments did not progress uniformly within the broader sphere of Hispanic America.



Figure 1.3. Engraving of a Spaniard in Peru who humiliates a Native by stepping on his head (adapted by Vera Tiesler and María Cecilia Lozada from Guaman Poma de Ayala 1944:552).

From Sacrilege to (Bio)Cultural Approximations

In the aftermath of Novohispanic oppression and faced with modernity and religious syncretism, most precontact Native forms of head enhancement had either been shifted, substituted, abolished, or forgotten altogether (Dingwall 1931). In today's world, the bulk of information on head modifications is, therefore, transmitted by ethnohistorical accounts and the archaeological record, including epigraphic inscriptions, portraiture, and, more directly, mummified or skeletonized remnants of the dead. Using physical remains to anchor our understandings of the Native world allows us to “zoom” in and out on mortuary assemblages. Without changing data sets, we may focus on individuals or move up the scale to encompass residential populations, village folk, urban neighborhoods, and areas beyond the local and regional cultural landscapes. In this manner, bioarchaeological research of

culturally modified tissues has provided us with multifaceted insights into the everyday lives and spiritual beliefs of communities long since vanished. With its interdisciplinary quality, this research interacts with other disciplinary approximations and, still more importantly, with the conceptual foundations of corporeity, corporeality, and the embodiment we have laid out in the paragraphs above.

In fact, most of the chapters in this book have benefited directly from advances in the field of bioarchaeology, a recently consolidated line of anthropological research that examines archaeologically retrieved human remains from a biocultural perspective. Because it focuses on the scientific analysis of human remains, bioarchaeology is uniquely positioned at the interstice between the humanities and material research and is therefore well suited to offer integrated explanations of humanity's past experiences (Buikstra and Beck 2006; Larsen 2015). The objects of study used in bioarchaeological analysis are the remnants of individuals, those who have shaped past societies and who, when alive, engaged actively in ancient interaction and belief systems (Sofaer 2006). The importance of bioarchaeology in developing a more nuanced understanding of the past is therefore more than apparent. It provides insights into important life issues ranging from health and diet to occupational stress and migration, from body enhancement to posthumous treatments of corpses and skeletons. As opposed to epigraphy or ethnohistory, bioarchaeological approximations typically encompass large time frames and can inform not only about the upper echelon of society but also about those members (non-elites, women, and children) whose voices tend to remain elusive, or altogether silent, in past discursive media. Thus, unsurprisingly, bioarchaeology has had an increasing impact in the research agendas of Mesoamericanists and Andeanists (Bonogofsky 2011; Chacon and Dye 2007; Tiesler 2014; Tiesler and Cucina 2014; Tung 2012; Verano 1995).

In the Mesoamerican sphere, physical anthropologists Eusebio Dávalos Hurtado (1909–1968), Javier Romero Molina (1910–1986), and Arturo Romano Pacheco (1921–2015) once spearheaded the skeletal research of pre-Hispanic head treatments in Mexico (see Romero Molina 1958; Romano Pacheco 1965). They addressed in detail the ancient techniques and outcomes of trephining, head shaping, and dental reductions. Juan Comas (1900–1979) also addressed pre-Hispanic head modifications in different parts of Mexico and engaged, beyond the Mesoamer-

ican sphere, in the research of traditional head flattening in contemporary Amazonian communities (Comas 1958). Likewise, nonlocal scholarship has made important contributions to the study of Mesoamerican physical embodiment. For example, the pan-continental works of T. Dale Stewart (1950, 1974) include discussions of trephination, dental decoration, and head form. Although most studies conducted during the twentieth century are methodological and descriptive, they have succeeded in reaching culturally tenable conclusions thanks to their incursions into nonosteological sources of data such as portraiture and ethnographic testimonials. By incorporating multiple fields of scholarship and different types of cultural artifacts, these researchers have been able to draw their conclusions from a larger breadth of indigenous heritage.

More recent Mesoamerican inquiries on the relationship between head practices and the head's sociocultural roles have more explicitly bridged the separate aspects of the head's physicality, its spiritual embodiment, its role in personal identity, and its ability to act as a model for the Native cosmos (Duncan and Hoflin 2011; Tiesler 2000, 2014). In addition to progress in bioarchaeology, this advancement has been supported directly by new frames of scholarly reference and a massive surge of scholarship on ancient Mesoamerican art. The breathtaking pace of epigraphic decipherment of Maya and Aztec scripts also has promoted religiously interwoven insights on head manipulation, especially due to the dominant place that the body and its animic components occupy in Native thought and religious action (McKeever Furst 1995; Houston et al. 2006; López Austin 1989; Velásquez García 2011).

Like in Mesoamerica, the head has long been a favorite study object in the Peruvian Andes. Since the early 1900s, mummified heads and skulls from archaeological contexts have been addressed by prominent physical anthropologists such as Aleš Hrdlička and Pedro Weiss. For Hrdlička and his contemporaries, skulls and heads already appear to have represented a basic research unit and were regularly called upon to answer questions regarding human variation, populational filiations, genealogies, migration, and evolution. During this period, not only were heads used to answer questions about indigenous history and ancestry, but they also anchored direct examinations of cultural practices such as cranial modification, head taking, and surgical trephinations. It is within this context that cranial modification was first described and identified

as an intentional act of body alteration. Julio C. Tello and Pedro Weiss were perhaps the first researchers to situate their osteological studies within an archaeological context in an effort to understand the meaning of such practices (Lozada 2014). Weiss, for instance, proposed that head shapes were culturally specific. To him, heads could be used to identify a particular ethnic group, just like ceramic types can. Trophy heads also became a focus of study during this period, generating debates about their significance and cultural meaning that continue even today: are they mementos of war, or are they revered ancestors?

During the early twentieth century, the head still served as the basis for many studies in the Andes, and it was not until much later that researchers began to depart from purely typological analysis. For example, Jane E. Buikstra and collaborators (Hoshow et al. 1995) conducted a study of head molding among the Tiwanaku people buried outside the Andean highlands. They incorporated ethnohistorical accounts and osteological data (sex and age), along with other contextual archaeological information, in an effort to understand the meaning of head modification practices in pre-Hispanic Peru. From this data, they determined that cranial modification was used to codify group membership in *ayllu*, a basic social unit in the Andes. John Verano conducted a seminal study of the indigenous body in 1995 in which he initiated bioarchaeological discussions regarding human sacrifice, warfare, decapitation, and the collection, curation, and burial of body parts. Today, his rigorous osteological analysis of the head, along with his archaeological and iconographic studies, serve as the basis for the study of disembodied heads in the Andes and beyond.

Another important and even more culturally aligned supplement to the study of the Andean head has materialized recently in the influential book by Denise Arnold and Christine Hastorf, *Heads of State: Icons, Power, and Politics in the Ancient and Modern Andes* (2008). Although not necessarily anchoring their work in bioarchaeology, these authors provide an exemplary account of the head from multiple viewpoints and time periods. They point out key arguments regarding the special and often complex significance of the head in relation to other parts of the body, and the many manifestations and variations that exist in cephalic practices. Within their work, they use both archaeological data and rich ethnographic data to provide detailed accounts not only about the symbolism of the head and the meanings and belief systems attached

to it but also about how the head once was procured, processed, and curated.

Likewise, a recent study by Mary Weismantel (2015) has provided a new perspective on the interpretation of the indigenous body in the Andes. Her study is based on Moche ceramic iconography, mortuary patterns, and, to a lesser degree, direct evidence from human remains. She proposes that the Moche understood the head as a repository of multiple energies that accumulated over a lifetime. Once an individual died, the vital powers contained in the head could be dispersed among the surviving population. According to Weismantel's interpretations, the body in the Moche perspective was a partible and permeable organism from which energies could escape and be recycled to contribute to the vitality of the community. The head in this context transcended from the individual to the collective, ensuring group cohesiveness and a long-standing permanency.

Similarly, Darryl Wilkinson (2013) has redefined how we comprehend the roles of the Inka body by moving away from Western standards of interpretation and attempting to understand the body through a detailed ethnohistorical analysis from the indigenous perspective. In his view, the Inka person was conceived as a biological (flesh and blood) and nonbiological categorical statute or *wawqi*, which was involved in a variety of affairs at the same time and in multiple spaces, and each was treated as if it were the Inka himself. Along the same vein, recent archaeological and ethnohistorical research is reconsidering relationships between the living and dead in the Andes, highlighting the often complex and unique perspectives of such indigenous categories (Shimada and Fitzsimmons 2015).

Although these provocative works are not necessarily based on physical remains, they contribute significantly to our understanding of indigenous anatomies and invite researchers to conceptualize the body in different dimensions. These novel propositions, in part generated by a philosophical current known as the "ontological turn," propose, among other things, that some Western perspectives do not apply to pre-Hispanic indigenous world views, especially those that include fluid perceptions of the body and personhood (Alberti et al. 2011; Viveiros de Castro 1998). Taken together, these (bio)cultural studies have provided a wealth of knowledge regarding cephalic practices in the Andes. They have been based on a combination of resources: ethnography, skeletal studies, art

history in textiles and ceramics, and historical research. It is our intention that this volume contribute to this rich dialogue by offering new insights, methodological approaches, and conceptual guides to the study of the head in both the Andes and Mesoamerica.

THE AGENDAS FOR THIS BOOK

Following in the spirit laid out in the previous paragraphs, this volume goes to great lengths to illuminate ancient Native head treatments and their multilayered meanings and purposes as observed in the Andean and Mesoamerican landscapes past and present. As is clear to us, the body, and specifically the head, can only be understood within the broader frames of cultural belief systems and daily practice. Society often defines an individual based on the inner and outer characteristics of the head. On a collective scale, therefore, cultural practices involving the head, whether heads of the living or of the dead, can be seen as promoting overall group cohesion and providing continuity for social and religious life. In this volume, we intend to explore the diverse ways in which cultural modifications of the head both reflect Native beliefs and fit within the context of daily life in Mesoamerica and the Andes. By balancing the reconstruction of the material and discursive records with emic (i.e., through the lens of Native mentalities) body inquiries, we seek to better understand the roles of a number of different head techniques and their linkages with past Native social processes, cultures, and identities. Although this is necessarily a *pars pro toto* approach to broader subject matter, there is no doubt that the head is a useful agent to explore central concepts of embodied ideology, culturally constructed (versus inner) beauty, personhood, aesthetics and portraiture, ideologically driven emulation of the divine, social distinction, and group identity in general.

The goals of this volume provide a roadmap for the chapters that follow. The volume is divided into two main parts: Mesoamerica and the Andes. Each of the two sections contains works written by scholars from a wide range of backgrounds and fields, including skeletal biology, archaeology, aesthetics, forensics, taphonomy, and art history. Each chapter offers textured interpretations of the indigenous body at the intersections of (bio)archaeology, osteology, ethnohistory, linguistics, and imagery. Jointly, these contributions are meant to promote state-of-the-art studies of specific Native body modifications, points

of departures for future scholarship, and new analytical agendas for studying past human expressions from the material record. These include a wide array of indigenous head treatments, including facial cosmetics and hair arrangements, permanent cranial vault and facial modifications, dental decorations, posthumous head processing, and headhunting (see also Bonogofsky 2011; Chacon and Dye 2007; Romero Molina 1958; Tiesler 2014; Tung 2012).

The combined explorations that constitute this volume not only re-create ritual enactment and quotidian routines but also are united by their quest to grasp broader Native emic concepts, namely those concerning representation, beauty, visage, and even the more general concept of desirability. From here, they unfold novel examinations of power, social age, gender, identity, and ethnicity. These often lead the authors to generate vibrant ideas, and in addition to new answers, original questions. As this volume shows, given the tantalizing complexity of these subjects, there will not be a comprehensive resource book on head practices or a titanic work that captures everything. Rather, we privilege much wider concoctions of long-standing indigenous customs, inextricably entwined with their subtle, obvious, or profound meanings, which recognize that body practices are inseparable from our corporeity, our lives, and our condition as humans.

NOTES

1. Our eyes, ears, nose, and mouth provide the organic hardware for sight, sound, smell, and taste. It is through the mouth in particular that we interact actively with the outer world, by uttering sounds and words, by processing food, and by communicating emotions through verbal or mimic expressions. And of course it is through the mouth (and nose) that we exhale and inhale enlivening air. Behind the face is the highly evolved brain, which coordinates the nervous system and mental activity and also oversees more ethereal dynamics related to our conscience, spirituality, and sensory experiences. Encapsulated by the cranial vault, the brain is the organic anchor of such areas of study as neurology, psychology, and even theology.

2. Although it is likewise mediated by individual choice, biology, and, of course, dynamics of a more circumstantial nature.

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