At birth, parents in many cultures bind the heads of infants to impart a permanent and socially meaningful marker of their child's individual identity. This chapter presents an analysis of crania from cemeteries in San Pedro de Atacama, Chile (AD 500–1500) when Atacameños interacted with foreign powers and local exchange partners, and witnessed substantial demographic shifts. One way they acted on and reacted to these changes was the culturally proscribed and permanent alteration of head shape. Results suggest that earlier-phase individuals used modification to affiliate with foreign powers. In contrast, individuals from a later period of social and economic upheaval demonstrate that head shaping was used to consolidate group identity. The reshaping of the head is a long and intimate process, and its presence in this group reflects social stability and the physical manifestation of long-lasting social identities.

Leslie Cecil’s chapter demonstrates the advantages of combining information gleaned from technological and stylistic analysis. In this case, the focus is predominantly on slips, although research on pastes is included, and Cecil is able to incorporate another valuable type
of information: ethnohistorical accounts of the Petén Lakes groups, especially the Kowoj and Itza. By marshalling these disparate sources, Cecil is able to make suggestions about links between style, technology, and sociopolitical identity and even trading patterns that would remain speculative using archaeological data alone. One of the exciting aspects of Cecil’s research is her ability to link patterns in the pottery data with these ethnohistorically and historically known groups. Thus, her work contributes to a substantial literature in ceramic studies on the contested links between style (technological and otherwise) and identity, particularly the problematic concept of “ethnic” identity.