

May my nose and ears be cut off: Practical and “supra-practical” Aspects of Mutilation in the Egyptian New Kingdom

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Abstract

This paper investigates mutilation of the nose and ears in New Kingdom Egypt (c. 1550-1070BCE). The topic is first contextualised within cross-cultural mutilation research, before discussion shifts to focus more closely on Egypt. The threat of mutilation in oaths is considered, as is the possibility of mutilation not being enforced if such oaths were broken. The paper then investigates the lived experience of mutilation, encompassing both physiological and social impairments. Finally, a ‘supra-practical’ aspect is proposed, considering the esoteric connotations of mutilation, this latter understood as a set of practices including but not confined to actual physical dismemberment.

Keywords

Mutilation – corporal punishment – lived experience – nose – ears

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*As Amun endures and as the Ruler endures, if I speak falsehood [replaceable by potentially any reprehensible action], may there be cut off my nose and ears, me being (banished) to Kush.*⁶

Although predominantly mentioned as a deterrent in oaths, the severing of nose and ears also occurs in other legal contexts. As will be illustrated later, the Turin Judicial Papyrus records corrupt royal judges being punished in this way,⁷ while the Nauri legal decree of Seti I threatens nose and ear mutilation for misappropriation offences.⁸ The highly fragmentary Karnak legal decree of Horemheb also mentions mutilation, albeit removing the nose only. While specification of the precise offence in question is now missing, the surrounding context strongly implies corrupt taxation and temple administration.⁹ It therefore follows that mutilation was not just a hypothetical sanction invoked in oaths: it was probably a very real physical punishment.¹⁰ However, as argued below, it was perhaps much more than just this: growing out of the practical was a supra-practical dimension, incapacitating organs to effectuate less tangible, belief-based punishments.

1 Limitations and Research Approaches

Research into Egyptian mutilation practices has two fundamental limitations, and hence any conclusions are perhaps somewhat mutilated themselves. Firstly, it is almost purely text-based. Most material comes from very

6 Variants of the oath make it clear that banishment to Kush refers to forced labour. See for instance Lorton, "The Treatment of Criminals": 35-8 and *passim*, and Tyldesley, *Judgement of the Pharaoh*: 81.

7 *KRI V*: text 148: 359, ll.14-6. See also Peden, *Inscriptions of the Twentieth Dynasty*: 206-9 (sections 6.1-6.5).

8 *KRI I*: text 24: 54, ll.3-4, 55, ll.12-4. See also B. G. Davies, *Egyptian Historical Inscriptions of the Nineteenth Dynasty* (Jonsered: Paul Åströms förlag, 1997): 294-5 (sections 50-2), 298-9 (sections 71-4).

9 J.-M. Kruchten, *Le Décret d'Horemheb: Traduction, commentaire épigraphique, philologique et institutionnel* (Brussels: Université de Bruxelles, 1981): 50-1. See also Lorton, "The Treatment of Criminals": 24-5; and W. J. Murnane, *Texts from the Amarna Period in Egypt* (Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1995): 236-7.

10 Egyptian mutilation practices are also noted in Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 1: 78. This includes the severing of hands for theft and noses for adultery. For further references concerning the practicality of mutilation, see footnote 38 on p. 272 in this work.

high-profile (often royal) contexts unlikely to typify broader Egyptian society.¹¹ Available cases from lower down are few, and almost all revolve around the Deir el-Medina *ḥnbt*-court, itself constituted of mainly elite royally-employed craftsmen from a highly structured and probably somewhat atypical environment.¹² Extrapolating wider practices based on such texts alone is speculative at best, and a more holistic approach also incorporating archaeological findings would be preferable. Sadly this is most difficult: since mutilation affects only nasal and aural cartilage, it leaves no trace on skeletal remains. Mummies would be the exception, but evidence of mutilation on these has proven elusive.¹³ This is hardly surprising, as mutilated convicts were almost certainly not mummified. Statues, which could also be susceptible to mutilation, would be another exception,¹⁴ but here it is far from clear if mutilating a statue was in any way comparable to mutilating a living human. There is also the challenge of reliably differentiating deliberate and accidental damage.

The second limitation is chronological scope, which covers only the New Kingdom. Egyptian facial mutilation almost certainly began earlier,¹⁵ considering how firmly established it was by New Kingdom times, but there are very few comparable judicial sources from earlier periods. This paper therefore cannot pretend to be a comprehensive study across Egyptian society or across time, although its findings hopefully might indicate broader trends.

In view of these limitations, this paper divides into four parts. The first offers a brief initial overview of existing mutilation research, providing a general

11 A perfect example is the Turin Judicial Papyrus—for discussion and further references see Peden, *Inscriptions of the Twentieth Dynasty*: 195 and especially Y. Koenig, “À propos de la conspiration du harem.” *Le Bulletin de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale* 101 (2001): 293–314. Here, it is highly likely that each of the 37 conspirators was personally known to the King owing to their senior positions at court.

12 For more on legal matters at Deir el-Medina, see J. Černý, *A Community of Workmen at Thebes in the Ramesside Period* (Cairo: IFAO 50, 1973) and especially McDowell, *Jurisdiction*.

13 G. Sperati, “Amputation of the Nose throughout History.” *Acta Otorhinolaryngologica Italica* 29 (2009): 44–50.

14 Although dating to a much earlier period, it is noteworthy that some attention has already been drawn to systematic mutilation of ears on Old Kingdom “reserve heads”—see R. Tefnin, *Art et magie au temps des pyramides: L’énigme des têtes dites de “remplacement”* (Brussels: Fondation Reine Elisabeth, 1991): 85–6.

15 It has indeed been suggested that the practice was already established in the Old Kingdom. If so, the mutilations of “reserve heads” of the dead in tombs might have reflected contemporary practices applying to the living. For more on this and further references, see Tefnin, *Art et magie*: 86.

comparative and theoretical framework and noting that Egyptology is yet to make a significant contribution in this field. The second investigates the enforcement of mutilation in Egypt, focusing on known instances when mutilation anticipated in oath statements was either definitely carried out or definitely not carried out. The third considers the practical dimension (lived experience) of mutilation, while the fourth argues for the presence of a supra-practical (esoteric/symbolic) dimension.

1.1 *Existing Scholarship on Mutilation*

Many cultures beside Egypt severed noses and ears, but the sociology of facial mutilation remains surprisingly understudied when compared to that of other violent sanctions. Nonetheless, it has been shown that facial disfigurement can not only precipitate intense shame in the disfigured person, but also lead to social isolation as a result of looking different and potentially also lacking the ability to make conventionalised facial expressions.¹⁶ Frembgen¹⁷ has carried out an important case-study in this last domain, concentrating on nose-cutting. He proposes two main conceptual strands. The first underlines earlier observations of noses being deemed phallic across vastly different cultures, from indigenous Amazonians to Southern Slavs.¹⁸ In these societies, nasal mutilation is principally seen as punishing sexual transgression by generating aesthetic 'disgust'.¹⁹ Frembgen notes that some South Asian societies still continue to sever noses of adulterous women,²⁰ while historically this practice

16 For more on social interaction and the effect on facial expressions, see F. C. MacGregor, "Facial Disfigurement: Problems and Management of Social Interaction and Implications for Mental Health." *Aesthetic Plastic Surgery* 14 (1990): 249-57 and G. Sperati, "Amputation": 48. For a variety of broader theoretical approaches and further references, see F. E. Mascia-Lees & P. Sharpe (ed.), *Tattoo, Torture, Mutilation and Adornment: the Denaturalization of the Body in Culture and Text* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

17 J. W. Frembgen, "Honour, Shame, and Bodily Mutilation: Cutting off the Nose among Tribal Societies in Pakistan." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. 3rd Series 16/3 (2006): 243-60.

18 K. Himberg, "Phantasmen der Nase. Literarische Anthropologie eines hervorstechenden Organs." In *Körperteile: eine kulturelle Anatomie*, ed. C. Benthien & C. Wulf (Reinbeck: Rowohlt Verlag, 2001): 88-91 and Frembgen, "Honour, Shame, and Bodily Mutilation": 244.

19 Frembgen, "Honour, Shame, and Bodily Mutilation": 252.

20 Ibid.: 250.

also occurred in medieval Spain,²¹ Novgorod²² and the Holy Roman Empire.²³ In the Egyptian context, no native sources indicate that mutilation was specifically linked to sexual offences, but Diodorus Siculus does report that the noses of adulterous women were cut off as an express means of compromising their appearance.²⁴ This notion of 'disgust' being visually associated with the convict may certainly be relevant to understanding the punishment experience.

Frembgen's second research strand follows the broader scholarship cited above by analyzing facial mutilation as symbolic conferral of 'shame'.²⁵ He notes that severing of noses and ears occurred in Achaemenid Persia and the Ottoman Empire before convicts were executed;²⁶ the mutilation magnifying ignominy before death, rather than being the climax of punishment. It is possible that the medieval Japanese custom of severing the nose of an enemy also had at least some element of this.²⁷ Such traditions emphasize the possible role of mutilation beyond just practically making convicts live without nose and ears: not only did it render them physically unattractive, but it also cut off social respectability alongside parts of the body. This would seem likely for Egypt too.²⁸

21 H. P. Duerr, *Intimität. Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990): 290.

22 H. P. Duerr, *Intimität. Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß*, vol. 3. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993): 389, 632.

23 Sperati, "Amputation": 45. For further references, see also C. J. Eyre, "Crime and Adultery in Ancient Egypt." *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 70 (1984): 97.

24 Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 1: 78. Naturally the extent to which this account is reflective of indigenous Egyptian practice in earlier periods is highly debatable, but the allusion is nonetheless worth noting.

25 Frembgen, "Honour, Shame, and Bodily Mutilation": 255-7.

26 Ibid.: 254.

27 The accepted viewpoint is that noses were severed from the heads of the dead primarily because they were more portable as war trophies. However, the mutilation of an already defeated enemy may have had added undertones of humiliation too. For more on the practice, see S. Turnbull, *Samurai Invasion: Japan's Korean War 1592-1598* (London: Cassell & Co, 2002) and S. Hawley, *The Imjin War: Japan's Sixteenth-Century Invasion of Korea and Attempt to Conquer China* (Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society, 2005).

28 For a broader range of examples across multiple parts of the body in Egypt itself, including castration and the removal of hands and tongue, see references in Helck, W., E. Otto & W. Westendorf (ed.), *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1975-1992) (henceforth *LÄ*), VI: col. 69 (W. Boochs 1986). For more on the severance hands, see M. A. Abdalla, "The Amputated Hands in Ancient Egypt." In *Studies in Honor of Ali Radwan*, eds. K. Daoud, S. Bedier & S. Abd el-Fattāh (Cairo: Supreme Council of Antiquities, 2005): 25-34. For more on the severance of phalli, see *LÄ* IV: col. 1019 (P. Behrens 1982). A

Finally, it is noteworthy that other Near Eastern cultures contemporary to New Kingdom Egypt also severed noses and ears. For instance, the Hittites could do this both when settling private disputes and when legally punishing burglars.²⁹ The Middle Assyrian Laws also prescribe mutilating the ears, and sometimes the nose, when punishing theft, marital infidelity, incorrect dressing practices, and some other unspecified offences.³⁰ Indeed, it has even been suggested that the New Kingdom Egyptians absorbed the practice from the Assyrians after advancing into the Levant.³¹ This is very uncertain, but the presence of a wider ancient Near Eastern mutilation culture should be acknowledged.

1.2 *Mutilation Enforcement and its Consequences*

Mindful of this background, the focus of the paper can return to Egypt. First, one must consider the circumstances in which mutilation may have been enforced. At first sight this might seem a straightforward question, simply requiring identification of those crimes for which mutilation could be a punishment. The most clearly attested such crime was perjury, for which—as shown earlier—many New Kingdom legal oaths prescribed the severance of nose and ears. This broadly fits the only unambiguous attestation of this punishment being carried out: a record in the Turin Judicial Papyrus relating to four judges guilty of associating with the accused despite a duty to the contrary. The exact expression relating to them is as follows:³²

text mentioning amputated hands and phalli as war trophies is also quoted in Tyldesley, *Judgement of the Pharaoh*: 85.

29 H. A. Hoffner, "Hittite Laws." In *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, 2nd edn, ed. M. T. Roth (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997): 219, 229.

30 M. T. Roth, "Middle Assyrian Laws." In *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, 2nd edn, ed. M. T. Roth (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997): 156, 162, 168, 176.

31 Lorton, "The Treatment of Criminals": 50. There may be parallels here with certain other mutilation practices, namely the severing of hands, which appears to have entered Egypt from the Near East, possibly with the Hyksos. For more on this, see *LÄ* 11: cols. 939–40 (H. Altenmüller 1977), M. A. Abdalla, "The Amputated Hands", and especially the conclusive archaeological evidence for hand severance in M. Bietak *et al.*, "Report on the Excavations of a Hyksos Palace at Tell el-Dab'a/Avaris." *Ä&L* 22/23 (2012–13): 31–32.

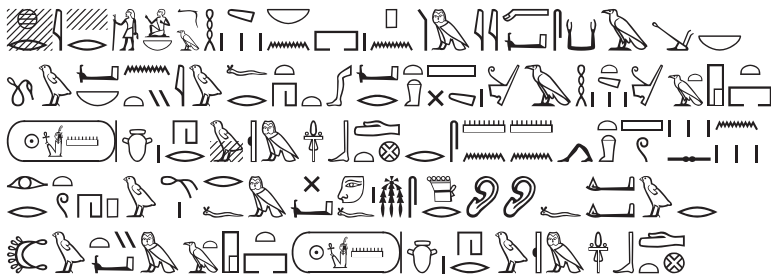
32 *KRI* V: text 148: 359, ll.14–6. See also Peden, *Inscriptions of the Twentieth Dynasty*: 206–9 (sections 6.1–6.5).



rmt ĩryt n-w sb3yt m s3w fnd-w msdrw-w hr p3 ĥ3^c ĩ-ĩrĩ-w n3 mtrw nfrw dd n-w

Persons to whom was done punishment by severing their nose and ears, on account of them ignoring the good instructions said to them.

Considering the court setting, it seems likely that breaching these “good instructions” would have involved violating an oath, and the punishment would seem to match that accordingly. Nevertheless, the Nauri Decree of Seti I also prescribes mutilation for offences which seem to go beyond perjury:³³



*[ĥ]r ĩr sr nb ĩmy-r 3ĥwt nb n pr pn ^c3m sk3 nb rwdw nb nty ĩw-f r tht r t3š n
3ĥwt n t3 ĥwt Mn-m3^ct-r^c ĩb hr-w m 3bdt r smnmn t3šw-sn ĩr-tw ĥpw r-f m sw3
fnd-f msdrwy-fl(y) ddiw r ^cĥwty m t3 ĥwt Mn-m3^ct-r^c ĩb hr-w m 3bdt*

As for any official, any overseer of fields of this estate, any Asiatic of ploughing, (or) any agent who will overstep the border with regards to the boundary of the fields of the temple of Menmaatre, contented heart in Abydos, in order to shift their boundaries, the laws will be applied against him in cutting off his nose and ears, (he) being made a peasant in the (lands of the) temple of Menmaatre, contented heart in Abydos.

33 KRI 1: text 24: 53, l.16-54, l.4. See also Davies, *Inscriptions of the Nineteenth Dynasty*: 294-5 (sections 50-2).

Another example from the same decree states:³⁴



*m-mitt p3 nty iw-tw r gmt:f hr it3 tp n izwt nb n t3 hwt Mn-m3^ct-r^c ib hr-w m
3bdt ir-tw hpw r:f m sw3 fnd:f msdrwy:f(y) diw r hwt m t3 hwt Mn-m3^ct-r^c
ib hr-w m 3bdt r [sw3 hb]:f hn^c dit hmt:f hrdw:f r ndwt imy-r3 pn*

Likewise, the one who shall be found appropriating any head of cattle of the temple of Menmaatre, contented heart in Abydos, the laws will be applied against him in cutting off his nose and ears, making (him) a peasant in the (lands of the) temple of Menmaatre, contented heart in Abydos, in order to haul(?) his plough, as well as making his wife and his children into dependents of this overseer.

Likewise, the mutilation mentioned in the decree of Horemheb³⁵ appears to be associated with stealing or misusing temple or other non-private belongings, although the text is too damaged to determine the exact context. It seems to be punishing abuse of office, which broadly supports the idea that mutilation was connected to breach of trust and perjury-related matters.³⁶ Considering the formal nature of the texts in question, there seems little reason to believe that mutilation would not be enforced, it being sanctioned by the highest legal

34 KRI I: text 24: 55, ll.11-4. See also Davies, *Inscriptions of the Nineteenth Dynasty*: 298-9 (sections 71-4).

35 Kruchten, *Le Décret d'Horemheb*: 50-1; Murnane, *Texts from the Amarna Period*: 236-7.

36 This would also broadly fit the statements relating to adultery made in Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 1: 78. It is easy to see how adultery could be seen as a variation of perjury/breach of trust, even if the Egyptian concept of “marriage” may not have been clearly defined. For an enumeration of offences associated with nose and ear mutilation, see also S. Allam, “Un Droit pénal existait-il ‘stricto sensu’ en Égypte pharaonique?” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 64 (1978): 67.

authority.³⁷ Based on just these documents, the picture initially seems quite clear.

Nevertheless, such a viewpoint ultimately lacks nuance. Several pioneering studies of ancient Near Eastern law emphasize the dangers of accepting legal evidence at face value.³⁸ In the context of this study, one should therefore note that evidence for mutilation being enforced in some instances, like the Turin Judicial Papyrus, does not necessarily mean that this was the case universally. Indeed, in one well-documented instance the opposite is true. This is Papyrus Deir el-Medina 27,³⁹ from around the reign of Ramesses VI (1143-1136 BCE). Unlike the previous examples, it comes from the more junior Deir el-Medina *ḫnbt*-court, rather than a royal setting. The papyrus describes a fairly routine village dispute: the workman Mry-Šhmt being caught committing adultery with the bride of another villager. The *ḫnbt*-court administered the mutilation oath, whereby his nose and ears were to be removed if this recurred. However, Mry-Šhmt was undeterred and resumed the relationship, impregnating the lady. The papyrus states that the court responded to this only by making him swear another oath not to disrupt the marriage. No act of mutilation is recorded, and other Deir el-Medina ostraca⁴⁰ reveal that Mry-Šhmt continued living and working there, participating in further legal and economic transactions. The fact that he seems thus to have retained his status strongly suggests that

37 For a longer discussion on why there can be little doubt that mutilation did genuinely occur, see Müller-Wollermann, *Vergehen und Strafen*: 208. For a description of an Egyptian settlement (Rhinocolura) apparently set aside for the mutilated, see Strabo, *Geography* XVI, II: 31. For a fragmentary image of an individual who appears to have a mutilated nose, see L. Keimer, "Das Bildhauer-Modell eines Mannes mit abgeschnittener Nase." *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 79 (1954): 140-3. This image postdates the New Kingdom, dating to perhaps the 26th Dynasty, but it does provide further indication of the punishment being enforced and, considering the textual evidence, there is no compelling reason for taking this as an exceptional occurrence.

38 For instance, see R. Westbrook, "Lex Talionis and Exodus 21: 22-25." *Revue Biblique* 93 (1986): 52-69 and R. Westbrook, "A Matter of Life and Death." *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 25 (1997): 61-70. For an Egyptian example of the possible discrepancies between legal theory and practice, see the discussion on the role of the King in law in R. Jasnow, "Egypt: New Kingdom." In *A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law*, ed. R. Westbrook (Leiden: Brill, 2003): 294-6.

39 Allam, *Hieratische Ostraka*: 301-2; J. J. Janssen, "Two Personalities". In *Gleanings from Deir el-Medina*, ed. R. J. Demarée & J. J. Janssen (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1982): 119-20.

40 Janssen, "Two Personalities": 116-123.

he had escaped judicial mutilation.⁴¹ If mutilation stipulated by oath was not carried out in one case, there were probably others too.

A logical explanation for these enforcement differences would be varying levels of court seniority: there is now broad consensus that corporal punishment could only be ordered by courts operating under royal authority.⁴² This could conceivably have been expanded to the vizier or other senior officials, but almost certainly not to provincial *ḫnbt*-courts like Deir el-Medina. Indeed, the late Ramesside Papyrus Turin 1887 criminally indicts a provincial priest for conducting an ear mutilation without pharaonic approval,⁴³ suggesting that the right to mutilate was an exclusive prerogative not to be encroached upon. It thus seems probable that the Deir el-Medina situation stems from the court's limited powers: in a royal or even vizieral court, maybe Mry-Shmt would have lost his ears and nose after all.⁴⁴ However, his case was not important enough to merit the attention of higher justice, so he escaped physical punishment.

There is however a further dimension to consider: just as the threat of mutilation could be limited by inadequate enforcement, so could physical mutilation itself be limited by an ensuing death penalty.⁴⁵ This is best evidenced in the Tomb Robbery Papyri, where the mutilation oath is frequently invoked by

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- 41 On characteristic changes in lifestyle commonly associated with facial disfigurement, see MacGregor, "Facial Disfigurement". No behaviours indicating mutilation are observable here.
- 42 Peet, *The Great Tomb Robberies*: 26-7; Kruchten, *Le Décret d'Horemheb*: 160; Jasnow, "Egypt: New Kingdom." 296; S. Lippert, "Law Courts". In *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, ed. E. Froom, E. W. Wendrich. Los Angeles: <http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz002djg21> (2012): 6.
- 43 P. Turin 1887, recto 2, 3, transcribed in A. H. Gardiner, *Ramesside Administrative Documents* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1968): text xxv: 76, ll.4-5. For this case in context, see P. Vernus, *Affairs and Scandals in Ancient Egypt*, trans. D. Lorton (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2003): 95-107.
- 44 In cases such as this, it is worth considering whether or not the Egyptians distinguished "criminal" cases (offences against the state and King, with which the texts pointing to enforced mutilation are connected), from "civil" cases relating to private disputes (such as the Mry-Shmt affair). For more on this distinction, see Allam, "Un Droit pénal": 65-8 and S. Allam, "Strafrechtliches im pharaonischen Ägypten". In *Strafe und Strafrecht in den antiken Welten: unter Berücksichtigung von Todesstrafe, Hinrichtung und peinlicher Befragung*, ed. R. Rollinger *et al.* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012): 129-46.
- 45 Note here the apparent similarity to other mutilation systems discussed earlier and in Frembgen, "Honour, Shame, and Bodily Mutilation": 254. For a discussion on the significance of mutilating a live body rather than a corpse, see M. A. Abdalla, "The Amputated Hands".

known tomb robbers fully expecting death sentences,⁴⁶ easily enforceable by the pharaonically-constituted senior court trying them. Indeed, these papyri even contain oaths explicitly stating that nose and ear mutilation is to precede death by impalement.⁴⁷ Likewise, the Turin Judicial Papyrus mentions a convict ordered to commit suicide after the severing of his nose and ears.⁴⁸ Overall, this suggests that the role of mutilation in punishment, as well as its enforcement, was much more variable than might first seem. Three distinct scenarios arise (*fig.1*):

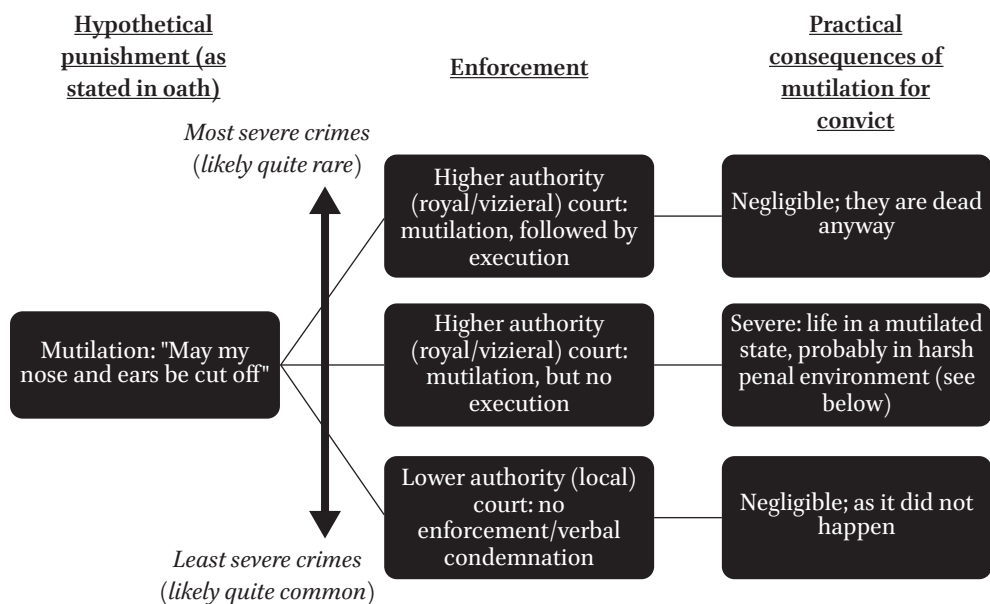


FIGURE 1 Different possibilities in legal situations involving mutilation

46 Lorton, "The Treatment of Criminals": 33-5.

47 J. A. Wilson, "The Oath in Ancient Egypt." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 7/3 (1948): 137-8. See especially paragraphs 45 and 53. For a much broader treatment of threats associated with oaths, see S. Morschauer, *Threat Formulae in Ancient Egypt* (Baltimore: Halgo, Inc, 1991). While this work does not specifically discuss the nose and ears, it provides a good overview of the wide range of sanctions which could be invoked, and how these could be combined into strings of multiple punishments.

48 *KRI V*: text 148: 359, ll.14-6. See also Peden, *Inscriptions of the Twentieth Dynasty*: 208-9 (section 6.2).

If these are correct, it seems very probable that there was more to severing the nose and ears than just physical practicality. After all, two of the three ‘practical consequences’ categories above would not have entailed life after mutilation,⁴⁹ but the concept was presumably still somehow relevant. One can perhaps suggest that this was simply due to mutilation being a widespread element across oaths regardless of its practicability, but this is not entirely convincing: why specifically mention cutting off the nose and ears, if this is not the real punishment? An alternative suggestion is a belief-based supra-practical punishment: the nose and ears being seen as “cut off” in terms of their symbolic and esoteric properties. If so, the punishment would definitely apply when the nose and ears were removed physically, but could also linger in circumstances where they remained physically attached or where the convict had died. This interpretation in no way contradicts the important physical aspects linked to many instances of mutilation, but, as shall be shown, it does suggest that mutilation was more comprehensive and symbolically complex than might seem initially.

1.3 *The Practical Dimension—Living without Nose and Ears*

Since some people almost certainly did have their noses and ears physically cut off, it makes sense to investigate the practical implications of this before discussing the perhaps less obvious supra-practical aspects. The first question is whether such mutilation was even survivable. Wounds would trigger rapid blood loss, creating a risk of fatal hypovolemic shock⁵⁰ or subsequent infection.⁵¹ Texts never specify whether or not the mutilation was carried out in one go or several instalments, but risks would be especially severe if the two ears and nose were all severed at the same time, creating a multitude of head wounds. However, the mutilation oaths and royal decrees imply that survival was expected—after all, the mutilated were then supposed to work. From a medical perspective, documents like the Edwin Smith Papyrus show that the Egyptians had the surgical expertise to attempt treatment of aural and nasal injuries, and had some understanding of combating infection.⁵² Even so, it is

49 Excluding any beliefs on life after death—this aspect is briefly discussed on p. 285 in this work.

50 J. Udeani, “Hemorrhagic Shock: Background.” In *Medscape*, ed. J. Geibel (WebMed LLC, 2012): <http://emedicine.medscape.com/article/432650-overview>.

51 H. Singhal, “Wound Infection: Background.” In *Medscape*, ed. J. Geibel (WebMed LLC, 2014): <http://emedicine.medscape.com/article/188988-overview>.

52 A. L. Pahor, “Ear, Nose and Throat in Ancient Egypt.” *Journal of Laryngology and Otolaryngology* 106 (1992): 863-73; G. M. Sanchez & E. S. Meltzer, *The Edwin Smith Papyrus: Updated*

very unlikely that convicts received such medical attention: it is unclear if they could expect even the most basic treatment, such as just stopping the profuse bleeding. Some would almost certainly have died. Nonetheless, the forced labour expectation is unlikely to be purely fictitious, so some probably survived.

Regarding the survivors' lived experience, nothing is known from ancient records but much seems deducible from current medical knowledge. The primary physiological function of the outer ear is funneling sound waves into the ear canal, while it also helps in locating sound sources around the hearer.⁵³ Consequently, convicts would probably have been hard of hearing, although not wholly deaf. They may also have been confused and disoriented when hearing noises from multiple sources. As for the nose, smell would be largely unaffected as nasal cavity olfactory tissue would stay intact.⁵⁴ However, removal of the cartilaginous superstructure would destroy mucous membranes associated with primary immune response, and would deplete the organ's capacity to filter out dust particles on inhalation.⁵⁵ Much more dust would thus settle on the trachea and bronchi, almost certainly causing inflammation. Symptoms would resemble those of modern-day heavy smokers: chronic chest infections, bronchitis, in some cases emphysema, and reduced energy levels. Alongside this, sustained pathogenic attack on exposed orifices at severed extremities would probably trigger Systemic Inflammatory Response Syndrome—a debilitating condition which primarily results in high fever.⁵⁶

Overall, it therefore seems clear that the mutilation generated chronic illness far beyond the removed body parts. Convicts would probably struggle to breathe, struggle to hear, and struggle to work. Such symptoms were seen as typical ailments of old age, as for instance recorded in the *Maxims of Ptahhotep*:⁵⁷

Translation of the Trauma Treatise and Modern Medical Commentaries (Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2012): 107-27, 163-5.

- 53 D. W. Batteau, "The Role of the Pinna in Human Localization." *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological Sciences* 168/1011 (1967): 158-80.
- 54 V. A. Benignus & J. D. Prah, "Olfaction: Anatomy, Physiology and Behaviour." *Environmental Health Perspectives* 44 (1982): 15-21.
- 55 S. M. Archer, "Nasal Physiology." In *Medscape*, ed. A. D. Meyers (WebMed LLC, 2014): <http://emedicine.medscape.com/article/874771-overview>.
- 56 J. Kaplan, "Systemic Inflammatory Response Syndrome." In *Medscape*, ed. M. R. Pinsky (WebMed LLC, 2014): <http://emedicine.medscape.com/article/168943overview#showall>.
- 57 Z. Žába, *Les Maximes de Ptahhotep* (Prague: Éditions de l'Académie Tchèqueoslovaque des Sciences, 1956): 16-7, ll.16-22 (version C), trans. 70-71. For a translation of a slightly different variant, see also W. K. Simpson (ed.), *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 3rd edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003): 130, ll.4,3-5,1.



irṯy nds·w cṇḥwy id·w sḏr ib rm·w r^c nb ib mh·w n sh3·n·f sf ks mn n·f i3w fn[d db3]·w n ssn·n·f

The eyes are weak, the ears are deaf, the heart lies inactive, weeping, every day. The heart is forgetful; it does not remember yesterday. As for the bone, old age suffers on account of it. The nose is [blocked]; it does not breathe.

While the mutilated clearly had no connection to the respected Ptahhotep, it is perhaps conceivable that mutilation was seen as a mechanism for imposing the pains of old age early.⁵⁸ That said, ultimately this may not have mattered too much: if convicts were indeed forced into labour, they probably did not last very long with such poor health. Interestingly, some of the above respiratory diseases do leave traces on skeletal remains, and some work in this direction has already been done at Nubian sites. Data from Tombos⁵⁹ and Amara West⁶⁰ already suggests that much of their population was in poor health, and lived under severe physical stress. It is tempting to think that some of the bodies

⁵⁸ Another possibility is the use of mutilation with the primary goal of permanently incapacitating criminals, reducing possibilities of repeat offending while also serving as a deterrent. For examples taken from ancient China, as well as further references, see S. Kan, "Corporal Punishments and Optimal Incapacitation." *Journal of Legal Studies* 25/1 (1996): 121-7.

⁵⁹ M. R. Buzon, "Health of the non-elites at Tombos: Nutritional and Disease Stress in New Kingdom Nubia." *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 130 (2006): 30-35; M. R. Buzon, "A Bioarchaeological Perspective on Egyptian Colonialism in Nubia during the New Kingdom." *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 94 (2008): 177-80.

⁶⁰ M. Binder & N. Spencer, "The Bioarchaeology of Amara West in Nubia: Investigating the Impacts of Political, Cultural and Environmental Change on Health and Diet." In *Regarding the Dead: Human Remains in the British Museum*, ed. A. Fletcher, D. Antoine & J. D. Hill (London: British Museum Press, 2014): 123-36.

there might belong to mutilated convicts “banished to Kush”,⁶¹ although using this material in this way runs into problems. There is currently no way of telling if any of it does come from convicts, and in any case respiratory diseases can easily develop without mutilation. Consequently, while more archaeological data is certainly good news, for now conclusions can only be drawn from medical extrapolations. On the basis of these, it appears that mutilated convicts probably had a very low standard of living.

There would also have no doubt been serious social repercussions associated with displaying the marks of mutilation, and therefore conviction, on the face. Convicts would almost certainly have suffered from difficulties in social interaction considering the damage done to facial tissue,⁶² and this would likely be greatly exacerbated by social stigma derived from an understanding of where the injuries came from. The mutilation would also make any attempts to escape considerably more difficult, announcing convict status on the face of any potential escapee. Furthermore, as well as signaling exclusion from the social community,⁶³ mutilation may have been a sign of being blocked from interacting with the divine—an extra layer of punishment discussed below.

1.4 *The Supra-practical Dimension: the Nose and Ears (and their removal) in Egyptian Belief*

Having discussed the practical side, one may now approach the supra-practical: aside from literal readings, what might a symbolic severance, or incapacitation, of the nose and ears have meant to Egyptians? Perhaps the most obvious evidence for the significance of this comes from the well-established ancient Egyptian tradition of mutilating statues in this way:⁶⁴ despite obvious

61 For the context of this expression, see p. 265 in this work.

62 MacGregor, “Facial Disfigurement”: 249–51.

63 The extent of social exclusion is, naturally, impossible to gauge: by virtue of their status, socially excluded individuals are unlikely to feature in administrative records, while archaeological studies of this type of social exclusion are hindered by the difficulties in determining mutilation from skeletal remains.

64 For a range of multi-period examples, see A. R. Schulman, “Remarks on the Alleged ‘Fall of Senmūt.” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 8 (1970): 38–41; N. S. Picardo, 2007 “‘Semantic Homicide’ and the So-called Reserve Heads: the Theme of Decapitation in Egyptian Funerary Religion and Some Implications for the Old Kingdom.” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 43 (2007): 230–33; M. Nuzzolo, “The ‘Reserve Heads’: Some Remarks on their Function and Meaning.” In *Old Kingdom, New Perspectives: Egyptian Art and Archaeology 2750–2150BC*, ed. N. Strudwick & H. Strudwick (Oxford: Oxbow, 2011): 206–13; and B. M. Bryan, “Episodes of Iconoclasm in the Egyptian New Kingdom.” In *Iconoclasm and Text Destruction in the Ancient Near East and Beyond*, ed. N. N. May

physical similarities, statues are not sentient humans, so removing their noses and ears can hardly be seen as an attempt to trigger physical pain, long-term suffering or social stigma. While inflicting shame on their owners would almost certainly have been a factor, it also seems logical that mutilating statues could have been a way of interfering with their cultic and esoteric capabilities, as this was often their primary function.⁶⁵ Thus, if statues were mutilated for reasons potentially going beyond the practical, it could follow that humans might have been treated in this way too.

Moving towards an understanding of any such “supra-practical” dimension involves developing an awareness of what the ears and nose may have represented in Egyptian culture and belief, and consequently what could be lost if they were symbolically (or indeed practically) cut off. Almost any mention of these organs in a text can potentially yield some clue, but conceptions surrounding their key physiological functions (i.e. hearing for ears and breathing for nose) might be particularly instructive. An analysis of how images of each organ were used, both in hieroglyphs and elsewhere, can also highlight potential roles of the nose and ears. By combining these evidential fragments into a broader understanding going beyond practical physiology, one may hope for a more nuanced view of mutilation.

2 Nose

Above all, the nose and nostrils were tied to inhalation, breathing and various associated aspects of esoteric interaction. This becomes evident in a number

(Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago): 363-94. For an example of statue mutilation of the nose and ears still occurring in medieval Egypt, for overtly religious reasons, see U. Haarmann, “Regional Sentiment in Medieval Islamic Egypt.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 43/1 (1980): 64 (provides further references). For a comparable example from Mesopotamia, see C. Nylander, “Earless in Nineveh: Who mutilated ‘Sargon’s’ Head?” *American Journal of Archaeology* 84/3 (1980): 329-33.

65 For instance, for a detailed case study of mutilation of the inanimate human form as a possible means of limiting the powers of the deceased represented by it, see Tefnin, *Art et magie*: 85-6 and *passim*. For more general literature on cult images and statuary specifically, see D. Lorton, “The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt.” In *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: the Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, ed. M. B. Dick (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999): 123-210 and G. Robins, “Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt.” In *Cult Image and Divine Representation in the Ancient Near East*, ed. N. H. Walls (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2005): 1-12.

Furthermore, the Egyptian verb *sn*—“breathe/smell”⁶⁸ is unsurprisingly written with the nose determinative.⁶⁹ This verb is significant in a supra-practical context as it has strong associations with worship,⁷⁰ which fits well with the examples above. There may also be underlying connections to key theological concepts of reanimation and *ṯ3w n ʿnh* (“the breath of life”);⁷¹ indeed it is perhaps no coincidence that rebirth in the afterlife could be artistically represented with a nose smelling a flower,⁷² while in the much earlier Pyramid Texts the organ was already associated with the god Wepwawet, the “Opener of the Ways”.⁷³ In what may be a similar vein, the Coffin Texts mention those attempting to enter the afterlife without knowing the names of its divine gatekeepers facing their noses being cut off.⁷⁴ Building on the afterlife theme, *ḥnd f ʿnh* (“he whose nose lives”) was also an epithet of Osiris.⁷⁵ The theological importance of the nose also appears to be highlighted in the blessing bestowed upon the Pharaoh in the Tale of Sinuhe:⁷⁶



mr R^c Hr Hwt-Hr fnd.k pw špss mrrw Mntw nb W3st c^{nh}.f dt

- 68 Erman, A. & H. Grapow *Wörterbuch der Ägyptischen Sprache*, 7 vols. (Berlin: Akademie-
Verlag, 1926-1971) (henceforth *Wb*), vol. 4: 153.
- 69 A. H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar, Being an Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs*, 3rd
edn (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957): 452.
- 70 *Wb*. vol. 4: 154.
- 71 For a further example of god-given breath entering through the nose, see for instance
Z. Y. Saad, "Preliminary Report on the Royal Excavations at Saqqara." *Annales du Service
des Antiquités de l'Égypte* 41 (1942): 386.
- 72 E. Teeter, "Egyptian Art." *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 20/1 (1994): 20.
- 73 See Utterance 215, Pyramid Texts, §148 in R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid
Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969): 42.
- 74 See Spell 404, Coffin Texts v, 182-83 in R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts:
vol. II: Spells 355-787* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips Ltd, 1977): 48. For a more detailed discus-
sion of this section, see D. Mueller, "An Early Egyptian Guide to the Hereafter." *Journal of
Egyptian Archaeology* 58 (1972): 113-6.
- 75 *Wb*. vol. 1: 578.
- 76 Transcription after R. Koch, *Die Erzählung des Sinuhe* (Brussels: Éditions de la Fonda-
tion Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1990): 69, ll.237-8 (version B). Translation by present
writer.

May Ra, Horus and Hathor love this your august nose, which Montu, lord of Thebes, wishes to live forever.

Breath, and hence presumably also the nose, were also deemed important in obtaining judgment, with the release of acquitted defendants known as *rdit t3w* (“giving breath”) in lawsuits.⁷⁷ One can therefore already begin to understand why it may have been such an important organ, and why losing it could pose major problems in the belief sphere.

However, the connotations of the nose went further. The nose determinative was regularly present in words conveying emotion, such as *rš*—“rejoice”, *hntš*—“take pleasure”, *sfn*—“be mild”, *bṭn*—“disobey” and *gfn*—“rebuff”.⁷⁸ Although the exact nature of its function here is unclear, it seems likely that the organ was seen as somehow involved in emotional life, and potentially also decision-making.⁷⁹ Indeed, the god of wisdom, Thoth, could be referred to as *fnḏy*—“the Nosy One”,⁸⁰ which may have links to this decision-making element as well as reflecting his ibis identity. In any case, even if this last point is merely coincidental, the perceived role of the nose in emotion and feeling seems beyond serious doubt. While it is hard to say what exactly losing the nose meant, it seems possible that severing this link to emotion was part of the consequences.

3 Ears

The ears were likewise important. For a start, they were frequently known as *nḥwy* (literally “lives”), invariably written with the cosmologically significant *nḥ*-trilateral,⁸¹ which is unlikely to be entirely fortuitous.⁸² They were certainly

77 Lippert, “Law Courts”: 6.

78 Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*: 452.

79 This could be associated with the role of the nose in shaping facial expressions—for a comparison of the human face with and without nose, see Sperati, “Amputation”: 45.

80 *Wb.* vol. 1: 578; R. O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1962): 98.

81 *Wb.* vol. 1: 204-5.

82 While it is quite likely that there is no direct derivation, with the words simply being homophonous, the implications of the similarities in pronunciation and writing may still have been highly significant in terms of creating double meaning. For more on homophony in Egyptian, see P. Vernus, “Idéogramme et phonogramme à l’épreuve de la figurativité: les intermittences de l’homophonie”. In *Philosophers and Hieroglyphs*, eds. L. Morra & C. Bazzanella (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2003): 196-236.

closely associated with the vastly important notion of *sdm* (“hearing/listening”), always written with the ear determinative,⁸³ and on occasion accepted as a deity in its own right.⁸⁴ Listening was intrinsically connected to absorbing wisdom in didactic literature, with the *Maxims of Ptahhotep* providing perhaps the best-known example:⁸⁵



s3 sdm m šms Hr nfr n-f m-ht sdm:f

A son who listens is as a follower of Horus. It is wonderful for him, because he listens.

Similar ideas are conveyed in numerous other texts that circulated in the New Kingdom. These include the *Instruction of a Man for his Son*, the *Dialogue of a Man and his Ba*, the *Instruction of Amunnakhte* and the *Instruction of Amenemope*.⁸⁶ Indeed, the concept of hearing was important enough to feature as a standard valedictory blessing in personal letters, rendered as *nfr sdm-k*—“may your hearing be good”.⁸⁷ Overall, there can thus be little doubt that connections between ears, wisdom, and ultimately life and living were important. Severing the ears could perhaps jeopardize these.

The role of the ears also extended beyond this domain. They could be associated with gods hearing prayers and granting requests. By the New Kingdom,

83 For more on the uses of the ear determinative, see Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*: 463.

84 See *LÄ* II: cols. 1234-5 (R. Schlichting 1977), which point out that hearing (*sdm*) could be seen as an auxiliary god of decision-making, a helper of the god Thoth, and one of the 14 kas of Ra and the King. For more on hearing as a god, see E. Brunner-Traut, “Der Seh Gott und Hörgott in Literatur und Theologie” In *Fragen an die altägyptische Literatur: Studien zum Gedenken an Eberhard Otto*, eds. J. Assmann, E. Feucht & R. Grieshammer (Wiesbaden, Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1977): 125-45.

85 Transcription after Sethe, *Ägyptische Lesestücke*: 41, ll.16-7. Translation by present writer.

86 For translations of these works and further references, see Simpson (ed.), *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*: 176, 182, 221, 225.

87 Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*: 143. For more details on attestations of this formula, see A. E. Bakir, *Egyptian Epistolography: from the Eighteenth to the Twenty-first Dynasty* (Cairo: Institut Français d’archéologie orientale, 1970): 65.

stelae depicting ears or votive ear models⁸⁸ could be offered to several important deities; primarily Ptah, sometimes known specifically as *msdr sdm*—"the ear which hears"⁸⁹ but also Hathor, Sekhmet, Horus, Isis, Amun, Thoth, and Soped.⁹⁰ Indeed, it has been argued that reproducing ears on artefacts, and indeed the presence of ears on any given object, was seen as a way of strengthening communication between people and gods.⁹¹ Furthermore, the ears could be seen as powerful⁹² or indeed divine in their own right: in the Book of the Dead, they were identified with Wepwawet,⁹³ while in the Pyramid Texts they are described as the children of Atum.⁹⁴ This last point might not be heavily significant, but overall the connection between ears and the divine granting of requests seems strong. If so, severing the ears may have been viewed as disrupting that communication channel.

Combining these findings, there is therefore a strong case for both the nose and ears having perceived functions surpassing their inherent physiology. These may have included partaking in offerings, receiving the breath of life,

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- 88 For a photographic catalogue and translation of New Kingdom Deir el-Medina ear stelae, see E. E. Morgan, *Untersuchungen zu den Ohrenstelen aus Deir el Medine* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004): 69-127. For a typical example of an ear model, see Brooklyn Museum (Online Catalogue), *Ear: Egyptian, Classical, Ancient Near Eastern Art* (New York, 2009): <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/open-collection/objects/185794/Ear>.
- 89 R. H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003): 125.
- 90 A. I. Sadek, *Popular Religion in Egypt during the New Kingdom* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1987): 245-67.
- 91 For the original argument see M. Blok, "Remarques sur quelques stèles dites 'à oreilles'". *Kemi* 1 (1928): 132-135. For the most recent and comprehensive interpretation of the role of ear stelae and models, see Morgan, *Untersuchungen zu den Ohrenstelen aus Deir el Medine*: 48-54. This argues that the ears in question are not necessarily those of the gods themselves, instead having a range of broader religious and artistic meanings determined by the human craftsmen. In particular, p.52 of this work argues that ear models represent ears of humans and are associated with restoring hearing. For a review of earlier scholarship and further references, see pp. 43-44 of this work.
- 92 For a hypothesis on the powers of the ear, see Tefnin, *Art et magie*: 86. For an example of ears being incapacitated in a cosmic struggle to subdue a hostile power, see the subjugation of Apophis R. O. Faulkner, "The Bremner-Rhind Papyrus IV". *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 24/1: 45, ll. 16-17.
- 93 See Spell 42, Book of the Dead in R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead* (London: British Museum Press, 1972): 62.
- 94 See Utterance 215, Pyramid Texts, §148 in Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*: 42.

obtaining clemency in court, governing emotions, uptaking spoken wisdom and experience, and communicating with the divine. If these organs were physically cut off, it is logical to assume a belief in considerable damage being caused to the above benefits, as well as to health and social standing.

Removing these benefits, although based on a very practical concept, was supra-practical: it would not have contributed to physical lived experience in the same way as the aforementioned illnesses of mutilated convicts. Consequently, for this side of the punishment to take effect, it may not have mattered if the physical mutilation itself remained unenforced, or was superseded by execution. If this framework is correct, as soon as a person broke the mutilation oath, their nose and ears might have been seen as cut off—barred from functioning—regardless of whether or not they remained on the body, or even whether the person remained alive. Thus, although the physical pain may have been avoided, a degree of additional punishment remained. Much of this would naturally depend on how strongly the convict believed in the esoteric qualities of the nose and ears, but the evidence cited above does suggest that such beliefs were commonplace in Egypt at the time.

Finally, one must bear in mind the potential supra-practical role of nose and ear mutilation in terms of religious beliefs concerning the afterlife. Egyptian religion is well known for its significant focus on reanimation and a life after death, including the preservation of the body and its organs. If during life before death these organs had been removed⁹⁵ or rendered ineffective, it is quite likely that the consequences of this were thought to continue in the afterlife—perhaps in the divine tribunal responsible for judging the deceased. However, while such a proposal is tempting, caution must be exercised—as might be expected, there are no texts describing the fate of individuals with dysfunctional noses and ears beyond the grave.

Overall, while the multiple strands of the supra-practical hypothesis are impossible to test and therefore cannot be definitively proven, there seems to be no other logical explanation for cases involving mutilation where it left no practical consequences. The main alternative to accepting the supra-practical dimension would be to assume that mentioning mutilation was inconsequential in certain circumstances, which is hardly satisfactory considering the evidence above.

95 In instances where mutilation was carried out physically, one cannot exclude that burial was altogether denied. The possibility of imperfect bodies not being buried is raised in S. Quirke, *Exploring Religion in Ancient Egypt* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015): 47.

Conclusions

Egyptian nose and ear mutilation was a complex practice, characterized by multiple layers of enforcement and meaning. It was often threatened but not always carried out. It could be a practical procedure, and yet seems to have had a supra-practical side which added multidimensionality to the punishment. Moreover, it fails to neatly fit established academic discourse on broader mutilation. Unlike the case in many other cultures, it apparently lacked sexual connotations, instead targeting a wider range of offences often connected to perjury or breach of trust. However, wider symbolic meaning, often highlighted in approaches to mutilation elsewhere, is definitely relevant here too.

When carried out, mutilation was undoubtedly very painful if not fatal, and caused major longer-term problems for both physical and emotional health. The supra-practical dimension operated on a different level; a belief-based incapacitation of key organs and an associated loss of esoteric capabilities like interacting with the divine and receiving wisdom or judicial mercy. Furthermore, such punishments may also have been seen as potent in the afterlife. This multifaceted supra-practical side, although by definition intangible and hence most difficult to prove, should not be underestimated: it seems likely that many courts had no legal capacity to physically mutilate, but would still have needed some mechanism for punishing and deterring criminals. With practical measures unavailable, such supra-practical frameworks may have been all they had to rely on.

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