Written in Stone: SEG XXXIV 1581, its Viewers, and their Perspectives

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Written in Stone:
SEG XXXIV 1581, its Viewers, and their Perspectives.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in the Department of Classical Studies from
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by

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Hidden in the corners of the Classical Studies library of the College of William & Mary, two large blocks of limestone lie covered in semi-opaque plastic covering. Together, these stones comprise the two fragments of an honorary inscription, SEG XXXIV 1581. The inscription was found in 1923 by the Harvard University-Museum of Fine Arts Expedition and has been on loan to the Classical Studies Department of William & Mary since 1954 through the efforts of the late Dr. George Ryan.¹ SEG XXXIV 1581 reads:

Σαραπίωνα Ἀπολλωνίου A
toῦ Ἀπολλωνίου Σωσι-
kόσμειον τὸν καὶ Ζή[νει]-
on, ἄρχοντα γενόμενο[v], B
νεωκόρον θεοῦ Ἁδριανοῦ 5
καὶ ἀγορανόμον, ἐξηγητή[v]
η πόλις
φιλοτιμίας ἐνεκεν τῆς
[πρὸς ἑαυτήν].

Translation: "Sarapion, son of Apollonios the son of Apollonios, [of the tribe] of the Sosikosmioi and [of the deme] of the Zenioi, who became archon, neokoros of the [temple of] deified Hadrian and agoranomos, exegete. The city [honors him] on account of his noble ambition [towards it]."

Dedicated to Sarapion, son of Apollonios, the son of Apollonios, this inscription has been published twice, once by Linda Reilly in the *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 78, (1974) and then in French by Andre Bernand in his book *Les portes du désert* (1984).² Sarapion is unknown outside of this inscription, and the inscription itself can be dated to the late 2nd c. to

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early 3rd c. CE because of the mention of the deified Hadrian (θεοῦ Ἁδριανοῦ), who died in 138 CE, and because Sarapion lacks the Roman tria nomina, or three names, which he would have gained after the Constitutio Antoniniana in 212 CE. It should be noted that Bernand heavily cites Reilly throughout his discussion of the inscription, taking his text, images, and many of his notes directly from Reilly’s brief article. Both publications agree on the text and its translation, but neither delve deeply into the context and interpretation of this inscription. Reilly comments on the rarity of this type of inscription in Egypt as a whole, while also providing one inscription as a comparandum (SB 7789), and interprets the inscription as possibly that of a wealthy Alexandrian who held magistracies and influence in Koptos. Bernand agrees with Reilly, adding to this interpretation that this is the only attestation of the tribe of the Sosikosmioi in Roman Egypt; all earlier references come from the Ptolemaic period. Both Reilly and Bernand also agree that the magisterial positions listed on the inscription are in chronological order, primarily based on the scholarly work of Priesigke.

Together, Reilly and Bernand wrote about four pages on SEG XXXIV 1581, and, while both do mention the physical dimensions and provide pictures of the inscription, they primarily treat it as a textual source rather than an archaeological source. The goal of this paper is not only to explore SEG XXXIV 1581 in terms of its physicality but also in terms of its archaeological context. We will attempt to place, as accurately as possible, SEG XXXIV 1581 back into its

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hypothesized provenance, and then to interpret SEG XXXIV 1581 in terms of the inscriptions around it and how viewers in Koptos would have been able to interpret and interact with it.

The first step to understanding SEG XXXIV 1581 is identifying its formula, and I have identified it as an Egyptian formula, which I will henceforth called $\text{ΗΠΟΛΙΣ}$ (ἡ πόλις or ‘the city’) because of SEG XXXIV 1581’s distinctive line 7, which has $\text{ΗΠΟΛΙΣ}$ in much larger lettering on a line of its own. While the use of $\text{ΗΠΟΛΙΣ}$ in the nominative in honorary inscriptions is not rare and would usually not be a word used to distinguish epigraphic formulae, the formatting and positioning of the word makes this type of inscription characteristic in Egypt and especially in the context of Alexandrian inscriptions. In Asia Minor, Attika, and the Peloponnese, $\text{ΗΠΟΛΙΣ}$ usually comes first in honorary inscriptions, (cf. IGRR IV 1422, GIBM 763, and SEG XXXXIV 1113, IG II² 3596, IG II² 3620, IG II² 3666, IG IV 589, IG IV 588, IG IV²,1 605). Furthermore, in none of these places does it have its own line on the inscription. However, as I will show, in Egypt there are many inscriptions which place $\text{ΗΠΟΛΙΣ}$ after the honoree and, most of the time, on its own line, and these inscriptions were usually reserved for particularly elite members of Greco-Egyptian society.

I will argue that, while inscription SEG XXXIV 1581 is not typical for the $\text{ΗΠΟΛΙΣ}$ formula in Egypt, it utilizes the $\text{ΗΠΟΛΙΣ}$ formula. The use of this formula puts SEG XXXIV 1581 into conversation not only with $\text{ΗΠΟΛΙΣ}$ inscriptions in Koptos, but also with $\text{ΗΠΟΛΙΣ}$ inscriptions in Alexandria. Literate viewers from Koptos itself would have been seen its variance from most Koptite inscriptions and its formulaic similarity to a small group of inscriptions found near the same area. At the same time, educated viewers who came from or had been to Alexandria would have seen its similarity to aristocratic inscriptions in Alexandria and interpreted it within that context. This paper argues that this interaction purposefully curated the
viewer’s experience to heighten and communicate the prestige of Sarapion by speaking not only to locals in the Thebaid and in Koptos but also to educated visitors from Alexandria and beyond the Roman Empire.

**History of Koptos**

Koptos (Kuft, Quft, Qift in modern times, Gebtu in Middle Egyptian) was a prosperous town in Egypt about 48 km north of Thebes. It is located along a sharp bend in the Nile that places it a short 174 km away from the nearest Red Sea port, Myos Hormos, and 392 km away from the second nearest, Berenike. Once trade through the Red Sea and to the Arabian Peninsula and India became prominent, Koptos quickly became an important Egyptian city. The earliest evidence for Koptos’ occupation dates to Dynasty IV of Egypt (2613-2494 BCE), and worship of Min in the area also dates to this time period. Because of its important trade function, the city was richly sponsored by the Egyptian and Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt. It was the religious and administrative capital of Nome V of Egypt and even retained that position in the Roman Empire. The main temple of Min was constructed by the Middle Kingdom at the latest and was reconstructed in the New Kingdom by Tahutmes III and later by early Ptolemaic kings. Around the 2nd c. BCE, Ptolemies heavily invested in the infrastructure of Koptos in

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11 Petrie, W. M. Flinders. *Koptos*. 1896. 5, 9-10, 17. Petrie is unsure which Ptolemy refurbished the temple but thinks it must have been done in the Early Hellenistic Period.
order to redirect more of the Red Sea trade through it. During the Roman era, Strabo and Pliny describe Koptos as a booming and economically prosperous emporium.

Strabo writes (17.1.45):

Translation: “From here the isthmus is (extends) to the Red Sea near Berenike, (which is) without a harbor, but has good landing-places because of the fortunate position of the isthmus. Philadelphus is said to have first opened the road, which is without water, with an army and to have established stations. (It is also said that) he did this because there was bad-sailing through the Red Sea, especially for those setting out from the bay. The great utility of this plan was shown by experience, and now all Indian, Arabian, and Ethiopian merchandise which is imported by the Arabian Gulf is carried into Koptos, and this is the emporion of these goods. Not far from Berenike is Myos Hormos, a city having a naval base for departing vessels, and not far from Koptos sits the city called Apollon, so that the two cities are the boundaries of the isthmus on either side. But now Koptos and Myos Hormos are popular and, they are used for these purposes…. And on this isthmus there are mines for emerald, and other precious stones, (found by) Arabs digging some deep tunnels.”

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13 Strabo 17.1.45; Pliny NH 5.11.60. All translations in this paper are mine unless otherwise noted.
And Pliny (Nat. 5.11) writes:

aegyptus super ceteram antiquitatis gloriam [xx] urbium sibi amase regnante
habitata praefert, nunc quoque multis etiamsi ignobilibus frequens. celebrantur
tamen apollinis, mox leucotheae, diospolis magna, eadem thebe portarum centum
nobilis fama, coptos, indicarum arabicarumque mercium nilo proximum
emporium, mox veneris oppidum et iterum iovis ac tentyris, infra quod abydus,
memnonis regia et osiris templo inclutum, [vii] d p. in libyam remotum a flumine.

Translation: “Egypt, besides its singular honor of ancientness, asserts (that it had)
100 inhabited cities while Amasis ruled, and even now (there are) many even if
frequently irrelevant. Nevertheless, let (the following) be celebrated: The city of
Apollo, next of Leucothea, Great Diospolis, Thebes itself famous in reputation for
its hundred gates, Coptus, an emporium of Arabian and Indian goods nearest to
the Nile, next the town of Venus and another of Jove and Tentyris, below which is
Abydus, the palace of Memnon, famous for the Temple of Osíris in Libya far
from the river…”

Neither Strabo nor Pliny discuss the temple of Min in the Geographica or the Naturalis Historia.

Both emphasize the role of Arabian and Indian trade on the city’s growth and importance, but
neither assign Koptos any type of cultural importance. Strabo uses the word εὐδοκιμεῖ to
describe the status of Koptos and Myos Horomos during his time. Εὐδοκιμεῖ has a myriad of
meanings, but generally means “to be of good repute, highly esteemed, popular, [or]
distinguished.”14 However, these meaning all deal with the reputation of a site rather than any
geographical qualities the city.

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Strabo does not explain to his readers why Koptos and Myos Hormos are more popular than Berenike and Apollon during his time period. According to Strabo, despite Berenike being ἀλίμενον (without a built-up port), it is still a good port, and Koptos is not far from Apollon. However, Strabo did not have a good understanding of the geography of this area. The isthmus that Strabo refers to is geographically unclear, but probably refers to the headland near which Berenike sits. If we look instead at the map of the area, it is easy to see why most of the trade

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traffic would have flowed through Myos Hormos and Koptos during Strabo’s time. Koptos did have a major positional advantage over other cities in the area because of its location on the bend of the Nile, and Myos Hormos is dramatically closer to Koptos than Berenike is.\textsuperscript{17} Koptos only became more influential after the construction of additional forts between Koptos and Myos Hormos in the early 2\textsuperscript{nd} c. CE.\textsuperscript{18} Despite Strabo’s inaccuracies regarding geography, Koptos was an extremely important trading location during Strabo’s time. Pliny finds Koptos to be one of the 21 most famous cities in Upper Egypt and gives it a longer description than he gives Thebes. The reasoning for this description is probably twofold. A Roman audience would have likely heard more about Thebes than about Koptos, and Pliny finds Koptos so important that he wants to educate his audience.

**Problems of Provenance**

Koptos as an archaeological site is a complicated one to work with and study, mainly because of the state of its excavation and publication. It was first excavated in 1893 by W.M. Flinders Petrie.\textsuperscript{19} He was primarily interested in the Temple of Min in Koptos, and he was an Egyptologist by training. He did publish his findings in his book *Koptos*, but as a result of his biases, pre-Ptolemaic findings are given more discussion than later Greek or Roman material.\textsuperscript{20} In his publication Petrie also does not indicate the findspots of the objects and lists his objects in chronological order instead of by general find location.\textsuperscript{21} Many of the objects Petrie published

\textsuperscript{17} Roller, Duane W. *A Historical and Topographical Guide to the Geography of Strabo*. 2018. 943.

\textsuperscript{18} Brun, J. “Chronology of the Forts of the Routes to Myos Hormos and Berenike during the Graeco-Roman Period.” 2018. 17.


\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
were not excavated by him and were instead “bought at Coptos” from locals who had looted some antiquities themselves.\footnote{Petrie, W. M. Flinders. \textit{Koptos}. 1896. 26.} Petrie did keep an excavation journal, but it does not provide findspots either. It is about 14 pages long and covers his excavations in Koptos from November 27\textsuperscript{th}, 1893 to February 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 1894.\footnote{Boussac, Marie-Françoise, and Musée des Beaux-Arts (Lyon). \textit{Autour De Coptos: Actes Du Colloque Organisé Au Musée Des Beaux-Arts De Lyon (17-18 Mars 2000)}. 2002.} In his journal, he details the multiple methodological problems his excavation team faced during the excavations. He writes “We have had much trouble from dealers and loafers and spies about in our work; as a public road runs through the temple site we cannot keep people out entirely… Both Quibell and I have had regular tussles with men who would not move off.”\footnote{Boussac, Marie-Françoise, and Musée des Beaux-Arts (Lyon). \textit{Autour De Coptos: Actes Du Colloque Organisé Au Musée Des Beaux-Arts De Lyon (17-18 Mars 2000)}. 2002. 9.} Damage was continuously done to the site by farmers digging for fertilizer from the ruins and by looters searching for valuable antiquities to sell.\footnote{Herbert, Sharon C, Andrea Berlin, and Donald T Ariel. \textit{Excavations at Coptos (Qift) in Upper Egypt: 1987-1992}. \textit{Journal of Roman Archaeology. Supplementary Series}, 53. Portsmouth, R.I.: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2003. 14.} Because of these factors and the brevity of the journal, it is not useful for reconstructing the precise location of the inscriptions and artifacts excavated by Petrie. The extent of Petrie’s excavations can be shown by his map of the site (Fig. 2).
As shown by the map, Petrie’s excavations primarily focused on the Temple of Min/Pan itself, not venturing far beyond the walls of the sanctuary. The large rectangular structure in black is the temple of Min, dating to before the Ptolemaic period, and within it is the even earlier Temple of Min dedicated by Tahutmes III (XVIII Dynasty, 1479–1425 BCE). To the north of the temple is a Roman retaining wall, and to the west are partially excavated pylons and a large wall which Petrie interprets as the city walls of Koptos. To the south-west of the temple is a structure identified as a dwelling built at the same time as the temple proper.

Koptos was once again excavated in 1923, and this is when Sarapion’s inscription was excavated, according to the acquisition records of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. It was

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27 Tahutmes III is called Tahutmes III by Petrie but is referenced as Thutmose III in more modern scholarship.
carried out by the Harvard University-Museum of Fine Arts Expedition, and, as far as I can tell, the excavation was never formally published. It should be noted that the Boston Museum of Fine Arts records explicitly state ‘excavated,’ but, without the actual excavation reports or publications, it is still possible that ‘excavated’ is an assumption or generalization of a museum recordkeeper. I have had personal correspondence with the Department Coordinator for the Art of Ancient Egypt, Nubia, and the Near East of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Collections Steward at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, and the Collections Steward at the Harvard Art Museums, and none of them have any records of this excavation as far as they could tell. *The American Discovery of Ancient Egypt* (1996), an exhibition catalogue published by Los Angeles County Museum of Art mentions the 1923 excavation conducted by Dows Dunham.28 There is also a record of an Egyptian-Nubian excavation which he took part of from 1923-1925.29 Dows Dunham worked in the Harvard-University- Museum of Fine Arts expedition and became curator of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1942.30 In 1927, Dunham helped curate a new exhibition for the Egyptian Department of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and describes part of the collection as having artefacts and inscriptions from Greco-Roman Egypt.31 While he does not explicitly mention SEG XXXIV 1581, it is possible that it and other objects from the 1923 expedition would have been on public display at this time. The Boston Museum of Fine Arts’ Giza Archives contain unpublished diary and journal entries from the Harvard

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28 Thomas, Nancy, Gerry D. Scott, and Bruce G. Trigger. *The American Discovery of Ancient Egypt*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art. 1995. 11. I would like to thank Jeremy Pope for directing me to this source.


University-Museum of Fine Arts Expedition, but this specific excavation is missing from their records, as they have a large gap from December 1915 to October 1924.\textsuperscript{32}

Koptos was once again excavated in 1987 by the University of Michigan jointly with the University of Assiut.\textsuperscript{33} This was primarily a survey excavation with the goals of better understanding and producing the sequence of local pottery in the Eastern Desert of Egypt.\textsuperscript{34} They not only take a detailed look at the chronology of Pottery but also produce detailed descriptions of the architectural features around the Temple of Min/Pan. Because of the nature of their excavation, this excavation was not a major source of new inscriptions from the area. Like Petrie’s previous expedition, the Michigan/Assiut excavations also had trouble with locals disturbing the excavation process. A Roman-period inscription photographed and documented by them in 1990 had disappeared by 1992 and the site was actively used as a garbage dump throughout the excavations.\textsuperscript{35} New roads have run through the site, and new apartment buildings have encroached on the site’s area.\textsuperscript{36} The breadth of the damage was so great that it “has left few areas suitable for stratigraphic excavation.”\textsuperscript{37} The full extent of the exposed area of Koptos at the end of their excavations can be seen in their map (Fig. 3).

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
Fig. 3. Map showing the state of the site after the Michigan/Assiut excavations.\textsuperscript{38}

This map shows significant progress in the excavation of the site and displays many of the same features that Petrie excavated. The circles and the squares within them indicate the areas that Michigan excavated. The center of the map shows the temple of Min/Pan and to the west is the same wall that Petrie identified as the main wall of Koptos. Excavations have Continued on the east side of the temple, exposing an early Hellenistic temenos, or sanctuary border. To the north of the temple the Michigan has uncovered a Hellenistic enclosure. This map also includes the modern roads of Quft in dotted lines all around the temple. This map lacks the southern dwelling on Petrie’s map, but it would be located where the legend and compass of the map are. It is possible that it no longer exists due to the significant and continuous modern damage to the site.

Since most of the Greek inscriptions from Koptos were not excavated by Petrie nor by the Michigan team, it is possible to tentatively reconstruct the area of the 1923 excavations. We can glean at least some information about the provenance of the inscriptions of Koptos by comparing the areas excavated by Petrie with the total area exposed by the end of the Michigan expedition. For one, all the inscriptions that have been excavated from the site were found within 100m of the walls of the temple of Min/Pan. Inscriptions documented by Petrie must be from the area excavated or they were purchased by him. If excavated, they must come from the temple proper or the west side of the sanctuary. If the inscriptions were purchased instead of excavated, most of them still probably would have come from near the site due to their heavy weight. Since Petrie excavated down to Pre-Dynastic periods, all other inscriptions (if found \textit{in situ}) must come from areas not originally excavated by Petrie. This leaves two options for undocumented inscriptions. Inscriptions not documented by Petrie must either come from the Southeast, East, Northeast, or North of the temple, or they were not found \textit{in situ} and could have been purchased or be from somewhere besides Koptos or this excavation area altogether. Both options are likely, as the Giza Archives do mention excavators purchasing inscriptions from locals in 1924.\textsuperscript{39} However, the comparable inscriptions also found from Koptos (SB 7789, SB 6212, and SEG XXXV 1595) imply that this type of inscription is not impossible to find on the site, and there is no reason to doubt the records of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, which state that the inscription was excavated rather than purchased from elsewhere.

SEG XXXIV 1581

Now that we have tentatively located SEG XXXIV 1581 in Koptos, it is time to investigate the physical inscription in more detail. SEG XXXIV 1581 reads:

Translation: "Sarapion, son of Apollonios the son of Apollonios, of the tribe of the Sosikosmioi and of the deme of the Zenioi, who became archon, neokoros of the (temple of) deified Hadrian and agoranomos, exegete. The city (honors him) on account of his noble ambition [towards it]"

There are 4 main components to the formula of this inscription. First presented (in blue text) is the name of the man being honored in the accusative, along with his patronyms and adjectives which describe his tribe and deme. Next (in green text) is the participle γενόμενον (having become) and then the magisterial and religious positions that Sarapion held. After this (in red text) is ΗΠΟΛΙΣ ("the city") in the nominative case, centered on the block and provided its own line. Then (in orange text) is the reason the city of Koptos decided to honor Sarapion.

Physically, the inscription is broken into two large carved limestone blocks (henceforth called fragment A and fragment B). The fragment A has a height of .36m, a width of .79m and a thickness of .66m. The fragment B has a height of .47m, a width of .79m, and a thickness of .27m. The letters of lines 1-6 and 8 are ~.05m high and on line 7 they are ~.07m high. The letters are excellently preserved and clearly readable despite some minor mistakes made by the
inscriber. There is also evidence that the letters were painted originally, and red pigment adhesive remains on some of the letters on fragment B. On lines 1, 4, 5, and 6 the inscriber ran out of space on the block and had to shrink some letters to allow them to fit on the block. For line 1, these are the letters IOY; for line 4 ON; for line 5 OY; for line 6 HN.\textsuperscript{40} The top of fragment A and the right sides of both blocks are purposefully rusticated. There is a break in the text of A on the bottom right (end of line 4) and B is missing at least one line of text at the bottom (hypothesized line 9). Outline chisel marks remain on the bottom of A, and the top and bottom of B is roughly chiseled to the extent that many letters on line 5 are missing about a centimeter of their tops. Both blocks have a chiseled, underlined “5” on their tops, and this along with the chisel marks on A indicates the original inscription was broken sometime after the adoption of the Arabic numeral system. The backs of both are also broken and appear incomplete, however B has sustained much more modern damage on the back and the top half of line 4 is partially damaged. Because of the rustication of the right sides of the fragments and the rustication of the top of the first block, it is likely that block A was originally atop Block B before the break. It is possible that there are more lines of text missing between lines 4 and 5. Reilly does not think this is the case because of how well preserved the lettering is, indicating care taken by the excavators or discoverers to maintain the whole inscription. Bernand agrees with Reilly, comparing it to another, shorter \textit{HIIIOAIΣ} inscription, noticed by Reilly herself, from Koptos now preserved in the Museum of Alexandria (Inventory #: 21781).\textsuperscript{41} I agree with them that there are no missing lines the absence of which prevents the inscription from making sense in-between lines 4 and 5.

\textsuperscript{40} Measurements taken by me confirm those reported by Reilly, Linda Collins. "A Greek Inscription at Williamsburg." 1974. 157.


However there are many inscriptions from Alexandria which are much longer than PDD 75 (e.g. IGRR 1.1060, IGRR 1.1063, and IGRR 1.1064), which means that there is a possibility that SEG XXXIV 1581 is missing a significant amount of text. There is a grammatical and archaeological possibility that a whole block is missing, especially because the ending -ov (line 4) is an extremely common ending in Greek. However, the reading proposed by Reilly is consistent with the vast majority of ΗΠΟΛΙΣ inscriptions. Besides the much longer inscriptions from Alexandria, there is no archaeological evidence that SEG XXXIV 1581 contains missing lines, and thus the inscription should best be considered whole.

The arrangement of the lettering of the inscription would draw the viewer’s eyes to a couple of places on the inscription. Lines 1, 6, 7, and 8- [9] would have stood out from the rest of the inscription. Line 1 would draw the eye by virtue of it being the first line. Line 7 is inscribed with the largest letters of the inscription and the largest spacing between in and other lines. This makes the line ‘pop’ against the background of regular lettering around it. At the same time, lines 6, 8, and [9+] stand out because of their proximity to line 7. The visual effect of such a large line can be confirmed by other inscriptions utilizing similar formulae. From Alexandria, IGRR 1.1063, IGRR 1.1060, IGRR 1.1067, and SB 1.592 all place the name of the primary benefactor of the πόλις immediately after this gap. If we agree with Reilly that before this name the offices of Sarapion are given in chronological order, then this means that his most recent and most important position in the Egyptian cursus honorum42 is placed right before line 7.

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42 For the existence of an Egyptian cursus honorum system, see Ballou, Susan H. "The Carrière of the Higher Roman Officials in Egypt in the Second Century." Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association 52 (1921), 96-110.
The Inscriptions of Koptos

In order to understand how SEG XXXIV 1581 interacts and communicates with its reader, it is necessary to place it within its linguistic and epigraphic environment. In order to do this, this paper will first show how SEG XXXIV 1581 interacts with the corpus of inscriptions from Koptos. From there, we can see how people native to Koptos and the region in general would have been able to contextualize and understand SEG XXXIV 1581. After discussing Koptite perspectives, this paper will move out to the larger Egyptian context and relate SEG XXXIV 1581 to inscriptions in Alexandria, and then discuss how educated viewers from the rest of the Roman empire might have viewed SEG XXXIV 1581.

A total of 246 inscriptions are identified as coming from Koptos. Bernand’s *De Koptos a Kosseir* lists 185 inscriptions from Koptos and its immediate region, and his *Les Portes Du Désert* lists 56 different inscriptions from Koptos. The *Supplimentum Epigraphicum Graecum* lists 5 inscriptions which are not published in either of those publications. *De Koptos a Kosseir* is a collection of inscriptions found at Koptos and the surrounding area written with a focus on studying the worship of Min/Pan. *Les Portes Du Désert* was written as a collection of inscriptions from trade hubs in the eastern desert of Egypt like Koptos.

As argued above, all the inscriptions from Koptos would most probably come from the Southeast, East, Northeast, or North of the temple, if they were acquired by excavation. This leaves roughly 375 m² from which SEG XXXIV 1581 could have come. This means that most, if not all, of these inscriptions come from a tightly packed area around the Temple of Min. Even if we assume that only 50% of the inscriptions are from the excavated area and were not purchased or that only 50% were visible and not obstructed at any given time, then this still results in about
one inscription per every 3.04 square meters. That distribution assumes the inscriptions were all displayed evenly throughout the space, and this was probably not the case. Much like the distribution of graffiti from Pompeii, these inscriptions probably grouped in areas of importance or access. The result of this clustering is a large amount of communication between the inscriptions near the Temple of Min/Pan in Koptos. Since we know little about the precise provenance of the inscriptions, it is possible that many of the inscriptions would have been blocked, used in fill, or utilized as building material and thus not been visible to the ancient public. People visiting the temple would have seen all the un-blocked extant inscriptions next to each other, with no indication of when the inscriptions were made. Recently, many scholars have studied this phenomenon in terms of the ‘synchronic gaze’ in sanctuaries and cities of the ancient world. A synchronic gaze is one which does not consider when objects were created while looking at them, and primarily focuses on the relationships between objects which arise from being placed near each other. This methodology gives us the ability to ask what is happening in Koptos and understand how ancient viewers perceived areas filled with inscriptions, like Koptos.

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The inscriptions from the site mainly follow three formulae: a simple name formula, a προσκύνημα (dedication) formula, and a Πανί (to Pan) formula, which is also used for other gods less frequently. The simple name formula only writes out the name of the person who is donating the inscription, with no main verb or noun not in the nominative case. The προσκύνημα formula usually, but not always, begins with τό προσκύνημα and then places the donor in the genitive with no main verb. The Πανί formula has the donor in the nominative case and then is followed by Πανί, also with no main verb. There are also some less common formulae found in this collection, like the ἥκω (I came [here]) and ἐποίει (he made this) types, where there is a main verb and not just an implied one. In both of those types, the name of the donor, artist, creator, or traveler is still rendered in the nominative.

Of the inscriptions which do not fit into the three previous categories, three are just an expanded type of the name formula, with an indication that the name in the nominative is the one who wrote the inscription (γράφος or ἔγραψα). Eleven inscriptions are too fragmentary to be categorized properly, but they would have been too large to fall into one of the main formulae.
Three inscriptions follow the same ΗΠΟΛΙΣ type formula as Sarapion’s inscription. The remaining three inscriptions are all honorary inscriptions; however, each follows a different formula, and one is in Latin. The text of these honorary inscriptions is provided below:

**Inscription 19 from De Koptos a Kosseir reads:**

**Latin:**
Dida Damana filius, nationi Volqu,
eques alae Vocontiorum, turma Maturi,
armatum feci stationi meses {menses} quinque,
pro salutem Imperatore {Imperatoris} feliciter.

Translation: “Dida the son of Damana, Volquin by nationality, /Cavalry of the wing of Vonconti, in the squad of Maturus, /I accomplished being armed at my post for five months /For the benefit of the Emperor, luckily.”
Inscription 41 *De Koptos a Kosseir* reads:

Greek:

a.1 ἐπὶ Τεβερίου Ἐκτορὶς (Τιβερίου) Καίσαρος Σεβαστοῦ, Ποπλίου Ἰουεντίου Ρούφου μεταλάρχη (μεταλλάρχη) ζμαράκτου καὶ βασίου καὶ μαρκαρίτου καὶ λατόμων πάν-
4a των τῆς Αἰγύπτου, Ποπλίου Ἰουεντίου Ἀγαθόπους, d.14 Μέρσις ἁρχι-

d.14 ἅπελεύθερος 15 ἐκτον. 
αὐτοῦ καὶ 
προνοητὴς 
πάντων, 
έτους έ 
Τιβερίου Καί-

20 τιώτη 
σαρος Σεβαστοῦ, 
σπίρης Νίγ-

Φαϊφι έ. ρου ἐπὶ τῷ 

Translation: “During the reign of Tiberius Caesar Augustus, from Poplius/ Juentius Rufus, the Overseer of the mines of emerald/ and of stone(?) and of pearls and of all the quarries/ of Egypt, Poplius Juentius/. B Agathopous /His freedman and /The supervisor /Of all /In the 5th year /Of Tiberius /Caesar Augustus/ In the 5th Phaophi /C The dedication of Aryothes son of Phatreos, the registrar/ D Mersis the architect/, the dedication by Mamogai, son of Bataios, the soldier of the division of Nigros upon the work of Juentius/ Mersis the architect.”

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45 Bernand says βασίου could be a shortening of Basiliou, a miss-spelling of Kasiou (Casius), or a title that we do not know about relating to βάσις. Bernand, André. *Les Portes Du Désert: Recueil Des Inscriptions Grecques D’antinooupolis, Tentyris, Koptos, Apollonopolis Parva Et Apollonopolis Magna*. 1984.
Inscription 105 De Koptos a Kosseir reads:

Greek:
Πεταορήρ-
ις Πετεμίνι-
ος, σκληρουργό-
ς, ἐκ Πέρσου, καὶ Τ-
άμος Τύμεως

Translation: “Petaoreris, / Son of Peteminis,/ The mason/ From Perses, and/ Tamos son of Tymeus”

While all three are honorary inscriptions, their formulae vary extremely. While both inscription 19 and 105 place the person who they are honoring in the nominative and were probably funded by the person in the nominative, inscription 19 is written in Latin and includes much more detail than inscription 105. None of these inscriptions match the ΗΠΟΛΙΣ formula used by SEG XXXIV 1581.

There are 3 inscriptions from Koptos which do fit the formula of SEG XXXIV 1581 from Koptos. I have highlighted sections similar in their grammar with the same colors as with SEG XXXIV 1581. I have also highlighted in purple any indication of who funded the inscription. A very similar inscription from Koptos reads:
SB 7789 reads:

Translation: “Eulimenos son of Ptolemaios son of Herodes from the Tribe of the Mousopateroi and the deme of Althaiea, after becoming archon and exegete, the city (honors him) on account of his noble ambition towards [it].”

SB 6212 reads:

Translation: “The city (honors) King Ptolemy Soter by (the money of) …. The head-accountant of the Nome.”
SEG XXXIV 1595 reads:

Αὐτοκράτορα Καίσαρα
Τίτον Αὐλίον Ἄδριανον
Ἀντωνείνον Σεβάστον
Εὐσέβην τον Σώτερα
Καὶ εὐεργέτην τῆς οἰκουμένης
ἡ πόλις

Translation: “The city (honors) Emperor Caesar Titus Aelius Hadrianus Antoninus Augustus, the Pius and the Savior and the Benefactor of the inhabited world.”

These three ΗΠΟΛΙΣ inscriptions cover a large date range. SB 6212 is Hellenistic, while SEG XXXIV 1595 comes from the reign of Antoninus Pius (138-161CE). Despite this date range, these inscriptions were not excavated by Petrie, and so, if excavated, they must come from the 375 m² of space discussed above. It is also fair to assume that many, but not all of these inscriptions would have been visible and unobstructed at any given time during Koptos’ history. Because of this, for the purposes of understanding how Koptites would have seen and understood SEG XXXIV 1581, we can tentatively treat them as if they existed contemporaneously in the Koptite gaze. From these inscriptions, we can see that, in Koptos, ΗΠΟΛΙΣ inscriptions were reserved for particularly elite members of their society. Two of these inscriptions honor ruling sovereigns (Antoninus Pius and King Ptolemy Soter respectively), while the other two honor men who held exceptionally rare jobs in Koptos, and these are the only extant inscriptions
mentioning *exegetai* and archons from Koptos. The inscription for King Ptolemy Soter and the inscription to Antonius Pius could have been present in Koptos before the production of the *exegetai’s* inscriptions, and so it likely that anyone who could read inscriptions would recognize the similarity in formula.

![Types of Jobs at Koptos](chart)

With reference to the titles and jobs mentioned on SB 7789 and SEG XXXIV 1581, these titles are also rare. They are the only two inscriptions from Koptos which mention archons, *neokoroi, agoranomoi*, or *exegetai*. More often at Koptos, army positions and craft jobs are mentioned in inscriptions rather than administrative or legal occupations. Mentions of Religious positions are also relatively common, which makes sense because of the temple to Min/Pan in Koptos, which is the likely provenance of most of the inscriptions from Koptos.

There are four main types of viewers in Koptos who would have viewed SEG XXXIV 1581 from particular, localized viewpoints: foreigners, general residents, elite residents, and religious workers.
Foreign Perception

Since Koptos was a large and important *emporion* it is likely that many people who did not speak or write Greek went through the city. For those who could not speak Greek, the only impression they would receive are the colors and shape of the inscription. The original color of the letters is unknown, but even if the pigment adhesive only remained, they would be bright and eye-catching. From the pigment alone foreigners would have been impressed by the colors. The rustication on the sides of the inscription would give the impression of the antiquity of the inscription, and the excellent carving of the letters would display the care with which the inscription was made.

If the foreigners had the good fortune of being able to read Greek, the deme, tribe and job positions would probably not be completely understood or contextualized for them. However, they would have been able to understand line 7, 8, and [9]. These lines, translated literally as “The city, on behalf of noble ambition [towards it],” get the main purpose of the inscription across to viewers even if they cannot read the rest of it or even parse out Sarapion’s name. Furthermore, this meaning comes ‘packaged’ entirely within a section of three lines, and the lettering of line 7 is much larger than the lettering on the rest of the inscription, which would improve readability. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, English readers are influenced by and can accurately interpret text between .01m and .1m high while standing still at 10m.\(^46\) While it is doubtful that modern readers engage with written words in the

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\(^{46}\) Howett, Gerald L. *Size of Letters Required for Visibility as a Function of Viewing Distance and Observer Visual Acuity*. Washington. 1983. 22. While I have doubts about how large of a range of size Howett used per point of data, SEG XXXIV 1581’s lettering is much larger than .01m high.
same way that ancient readers did, it is still likely that even poor readers of Greek would have been able to read this inscription from a minimum distance of 5m.

Foreign readers of Greek would have also been able to read, at least to some extent, the other inscriptions from the area around the Temple of Min. SEG XXXIV 1581 is longer than 86% of the other inscriptions, and it only resembles in form 2% of the other inscriptions. Even if foreigners would not understand to whom the other ΗΠΟΛΙΣ εις ιερείαν inscriptions from Koptos were dedicated to, their length would have been evident, and foreigners might be able to tell that they were less common. Together, foreigners at all familiar with the Roman and Greek epigraphic habit would understand that SEG XXXIV 1581 and other inscriptions like it were more expensive to create.47

Resident Perspective

Moving away from foreigners, there are two main types of non-elite residents who would have engaged and interacted with SEG XXXIV 1581: those who could read and those who could not.48 Those who could not read with any sort of proficiency would have gained similar meanings from the inscription as foreigners, but unlike foreigners they would have engaged with this inscription more frequently while living in Koptos. This might transform SEG XXXIV 1581 from an object providing mostly epigraphic information into a marker of the place that it was in. Instead of only looking at the large inscription in terms of its size and appearance, there would be a chance for it to also indicate to the viewer that they were in a particular section of the city. This

47 While the exact relative price of inscriptions from Koptos are not known, Duncan-Jones details all the epigraphic knowledge dealing with costs in Italy during the Roman Empire, and a significant portion of funerary costs went towards the creation of funerary inscriptions. Duncan-Jones, Richard. "An Epigraphic Survey of Costs in Roman Italy." Papers of the British School at Rome 33 (1965), 189-306.
effect is made more likely not only from the distinctive formatting of line 7 and the relative length of the inscription (longer than 86% of other inscriptions found at Koptos), but also by the paint that would have made the lettering more eye-catching. If SEG XXXIV 1581 had to fight for viewer’s attention, it stood a good chance of winning.

For residents of Koptos who could read, the deme and tribe on SEG XXXIV 1581 would not necessarily have much meaning other than ‘not-from-here’ as they are from Alexandria. Sarapion’s name would gain significance for these people. If they were alive while Sarapion was still performing his magisterial duties in Koptos, then this name would reference someone that they knew of and could imagine in their heads. Not only would they just remember him, but, especially on an inscription labeling his official positions, they would remember the actions he took and things he did while performing these duties. The lack of a tria nomina would also be apparent and would signal to literate viewers that Sarapion was not a Roman citizen but was a wealthy member of Egyptian society who could afford to have such a large inscription created for him. Furthermore, by adding in Sarapion’s grandfather’s name and including that in his naming formula, the inscription also draws attention to Sarapion’s status as ‘almost Roman’ by replicating a Roman-style tria nomina. To confirm that this was not a popular naming style, there is only one other inscription in Koptos which mentions someone’s grandfather’s name (SB 7789).

49 Reilly, Linda Collins. "A Greek Inscription at Williamsburg." 1974. 157. Bernand, André. Les Portes Du Désert: Recueil Des Inscriptions Grecques D’antinooupolis, Tentyris, Koptos, Apollonopolis Parva Et Apollonopolis Magna. 1984. 222. There is a chance that local residents would recognize the deme and tribe as Alexandrian, and these people would be able to recognize Sarapion as important both in Koptos and in Alexandria.

Residents of Koptos also would have understood the titles that Sarapion held. While the exact function of archons in Koptos is not known, generally in Egypt they were administrators of Nome capitals and were presided over by prytaneis, which were members of a board of chief magistrates. Archons were also in charge of the election of magistrates within a Nome and, altogether, managed public finances. Because Koptos was a Nome capital, this position makes sense to list on an inscription and would have been understood by local viewers as a powerful local position. Anyone wanting to gain any sort of public office in Koptos would have had to deal with an archon at some point or another, and, if they wanted to be elected, it would have been good for them to be on the archons’ good side.

Sarapion’s position as *neokoros*, or a senior cultic member of a sanctuary with administrative or care-taking duties, would have been understood within the religious and geographical knowledge of Koptos. Sarapion was the *neokoros* of the ‘divine Hadrian’ in particular. This probably references the Hadrianeion at Alexandria, especially given Sarapion’s Alexandrian deme and tribe, but no matter which temple of Hadrian this refers to residents of Koptos would not necessarily know which temple this was. Since no temple to Hadrian is known to have existed at Koptos, this position emphasizes the breath of the magisterial positions held by Sarapion. Although Sarapion was not a *neokoros* of the sanctuary of Min/Pan, the position was still important. To the local viewer, he doesn’t only participate in the running of Koptos, but he is also involved in the religious management and imperial connections of some other city.

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52 Bowman, Alan K. *The Town Councils of Roman Egypt. 1971. 16.
Sarapion was also an *agoranomos*, or a magistrate who oversaw the market or *agora*. This makes him a member of the local *boule*, or legislative council, of Koptos.\(^{55}\) Because Koptos was an important *emporeion*, the management of the *agora* (the local town-square and marketplace) was an extremely important duty, and Sarapion and other *agoranomoi* would have had their hands full making sure that trade from Arabia, Ethiopia, and India was conducted in an orderly way. Most, if not all, residents of Koptos would have interacted with the agora on an almost daily basis, and so this position would have been especially important to the multitude of traders and craft-people who lived in Koptos. Based on the number of craft jobs listed on inscriptions from Koptos, there were a large amount of people who relied upon the *agora* and the trade which Koptos facilitated for their livelyhoods. To these people, an *agoranomos* would have been someone who could make or break their means of living with their policies.

The last magisterial title that SEG XXXIV 1581 lists is ‘*exegete*.’ In Egypt, *exegetai* were senior members of the local *boulai*, and were higher ranking than *agoranomoi* and archons.\(^{56}\) There is also strong papyrological evidence that *exegetai* in Egypt were almost always also *archiprytaneis*, which would place them as the ‘chair’ or ‘president’ of the local *prytany*, an ‘executive’ council that oversaw the actions of archons and members of the *boulai*.\(^{57}\) *Exegetai* and *archiprytaneis* held sway over conflicts between archons and *bouletai*, supervised the local lists of magisterial and administrative roles, determined the divisions of different socio-economic classes, and were in charge of the water supplies in the city.\(^{58}\) In other words, this would make Sarapion one of the most important local administrators in Koptos.

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\(^{55}\) Bowman, Alan K. *The Town Councils of Roman Egypt*. 1971. 29.  
\(^{57}\) Bowman, Alan K. *The Town Councils of Roman Egypt*. 1971. 15-16, 32.  
For a non-elite resident of Koptos, the main effect all these titles would have had is one of power, prestige, and dedication to administration. Not only was Sarapion shown as an effective magistrate, but also a versatile one. Over his political career, he would have had to have been in the boule, been on the council of archons, been in the prytanis, helped run the agora of one of the most important emporia in the Roman empire for eastern trade, and assisted with the care-taking of a temple in Alexandria, one of the most important cities in the antiquity. From these titles and positions alone, a resident of Koptos would have no choice other than to be impressed.

Residents of Koptos who could read also could compare SEG XXXIV 1581 to other inscriptions from the area of the Temple of Min. Like foreigners, it would be obvious that this inscription was much longer and larger than other inscriptions from the area. The inscriptions whose formula matches SEG XXXIV 1581 only make up 2% of the extant inscriptions from this area, and they are only dedicated to a select group of people. In chronological order, SB 6212 honors King Ptolemy Soter, SB 7789 honors Eulimenos, who was both an archon and exegete, and SEG XXXIV 1595 honors Emperor Antoninus Pius.

SB 7789’s similarity in structure and magisterial positions to SEG XXXIV 1581 is remarkable, and, if both were visible at the same time, residents of Koptos would have been able to see the inscriptions’ resemblance. This is especially true because of how physically close together they probably were; as argued above, if they were both excavated, they must have been within a relatively tight 375m² of each other. If it were possible to know which inscription were erected first, then it might be possible to argue that one was ‘copying’ or ‘mimicking’ the other,
but SEG XXXIV 1581 dates to between 138 CE and 212 CE while SB 7789 dates to between 146 CE and 211 CE.  

With respect to SEG XXXIV 1581’s relationship with SB 6212 and SEG XXXIV 1595, both SB 6212 and SEG XXXIV 1595 would have had to have been erected before SEG XXXIV 1581. SB 6212 dates to before Roman control of Egypt (30 BCE), and SEG XXXIV 1581 dates to before the death of Antoninus Pius (138 CE). If, as seems likely, all three inscriptions were erected within the same 375 m² and, as is possible, visible over the same span of time, the grammatical and visual similarity would not be lost on local viewers. Both SB 6212 and SEG XXXIV 1595 honor reigning sovereigns who controlled the entirety of Egypt, while SEG XXXIV 1581 honors a man who was important to the city of Koptos but was in no way as powerful or influential. I would argue that the visual, grammatical, and locational similarities would heighten the prestige and perceived importance of Sarapion in SEG XXXIV 1581. The manipulation of words and images for political and prestige purposes did occur in ancient Greece, and it seems unlikely that SEG XXXIV 1581 would use its formula without being aware of other inscriptions which also use this formula.

Overall, SEG XXXIV 1581 practically exudes connotations of prestige, high-ranking magisterial positions, and prominence in Koptite society. To someone not in the upper echelons of Koptos, many of positions listed on SEG XXXIV 1581 would have been virtually


unobtainable, and all of them would have had direct influence on their lives, especially the positions of *agoranomos* and *exegete*. While individuals would each experience this bombardment of prestige differently, it would be hard for a non-elite viewer to deny the high-ranking status of Sarapion.

**Elite Perspective**

Elites from Koptos would see much the same thing that non-elite residents would see. It is fair to assume that all members of the upper classes of Koptos’ society would have at least some proficiency with reading or speaking Greek because Greek had been the official administrative language for several centuries before the creation of SEG XXXIV 1581. The visual effects of the inscription would still apply, but elite members would also be able to more accurately identify how expensive this inscription was to create. Educated citizens of the Roman empire were aware of different building materials and pigments and their value, and so could probably understand the relative price of objects accurately. Not enough pigment remains on SEG XXXIV 1581 to determine the original color of the lettering, and, without chemical analysis, there is a chance that the reddish pigment remaining is just adhesive. Even if it is not adhesive, then the current color does not necessarily reflect the original ancient color.

The *deme* and tribe of would also be accessible to particularly well-educated elite members of Koptos’ society. As stated above, the tribe of the Sosikosmioi and the deme of the Zenioi are Alexandrian in origin, and so elite members of society could have understood this.

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63 Plin. Nat. 35.12
The fact that Sarapion had an Alexandrian deme and tribe, especially placed so close to the beginning of the inscription, would have affected elites by making them aware that Sarapion was not a member of the local elite in Koptos, but was a transplant from Alexandria. Alexandria, for much of its history, had highly divided social classes and large wealth gaps between those classes. Sarapion’s Alexandrian associations would probably have communicated a large amount of wealth to educated viewers, and this would only be heightened by how well made and large SEG XXXIV 1581 was relative to most inscription in Koptos.

Elite members of Koptite society might have been less impressed with some of the titles listed on SEG XXXIV 1581. Although there is only one other attested archon or exegete, there would have been several archons and agoranomoi in Koptos at any given time to manage and run such a prosperous and important city. As a result, many elite Koptites probably would have had relatives or friends who were archons or agoranomoi, and the positions would not display the same levels of influence and control that they might display to a non-elite member of Koptite society.

Opposingly, local elites might have been more ‘wowed’ by the other titles on SEG XXXIV 1581. Neokoros of the divine Hadrian is the only non-local religious job listed on any inscription in Koptos, and local-elites might guess, like Reilly, that it refers to the Temple of the Divine Hadrian in Alexandria. This would place Sarapion on a higher rung on the social ladder than most of the elites and religious officers in Koptos. Sarapion is also a wrung higher in the local governance of Koptos as well. As an exegete, Sarapion was more than likely also an

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archiprytanis, which would make him literally an overseer of many local elites in the hierarchy of Koptos’ administration.

In sum, foreign and local viewers, no matter their level of education or skill at reading Greek could see SEG XXXIV 1581 and be impressed by it. On a visual level, it is larger, wordier, and more expensive than most inscriptions found from the Eastern side of the temple of Min/Pan. Sarapion’s name is constructed to remind viewers of the Roman tria nomina, his deme and tribe communicate wealth to those who know where they are from, and his magisterial and religious titles depict Sarapion not only as a highly important administrator in Koptos, but also in Alexandria, arguably the most important city in Egypt during the Roman Empire.

Comparanda from Alexandria

While Koptite residents and elites would have seen SEG XXXIV 1581 often, elites and traders from elsewhere in the Empire and Egypt would have also encountered and seen the inscription. They would not just interpret the inscription in terms of other inscriptions from Koptos and would instead bring their own epigraphic knowledge from all over the empire. These intra-empire traders and elites would have most definitely visited Alexandria before arriving at Koptos because the trade route flowing out of Egypt leaves through Alexandria. Fortunately, most inscriptions which resemble SEG XXXIV 1581 are not from Koptos and are instead from elsewhere in Egypt, so there is a good chance that traders and especially Alexandrian elites would have had exposure to inscriptions of this type before. Below are examples of this formula from Alexandria, color-coded like SEG XXXIV 1581. It should be noted that there are many

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inscriptions from other sites in Egypt which resemble SEG XXXIV 1581, and those presented below are not all the inscriptions from Alexandria which resemble SEG XXXIV 1581 (cf. Bernand, Inscr. Métr. 176; IGR I,5 1100; IGR I,5 1104; IGR I,5 1154; OGIS 703; SEG 12:557; SB 1.176; SB 1.177; SB 5.8796; Breccia 155; and Milne 21,9228).

Breccia 148 reads:

Translation: “Having become hupomnematographos and archipresbeute, the great gymnasiarch, the city [honors him].”
SB 1592 reads:

Translation: “Tiberius Claudius Erota, the great gymnasiarch, and [one] connected with the crowns of office [lit. in the wreaths], the city [honors him], using the funding of Flavia Apolinaria, his mother.”
IGRR 1.1067 reads:

Translation: “Julia Domna Augusta, the mother of Augusti and of undefeatable legions, the city [honors her], using the funding of Didymos, son of Sarapion, the ruling archpriest of the Augustan Lords, having become the royal registrar of the Nome of Hermopolis. [Dedicated in] year 19 Phamenoth 27th.”
IGRR 1.1063 reads:

Translation: “The Emperor Marcus Aurelius Severus Antoninus, the Greatest Parthicus, the Greatest Bretannicus, the Greatest Germanicus, Felix Pius Augustus, the lover of Sarapis, and Jouilia Domna Augusta the mother of undefeatable armies and the god Severus, the city [honors them] [through the funding of]...os and , as I am called, serving as….. [related to] Aurelius Komonos…. And as he is called, being an archpriest……made in year 24, 25th of Phamenoth.”
SEG L 1863 reads:

Translation: Tiberius Claudius, the son of Tiberius Claudius Isidors, the gymnasiarch, and the
son, called Curina Geminus and Isidoros, the gymnasiarch, the Hypomnhmatograph, the
chiliarch, the epistrategos of the Thebaid and the arabarch [of the Thebaid], the city [honors him]
using the funding of Tiberius Claudius Herakles.”
SEG XLV 2075 reads:

Translation: “______ Ptolla, child of_____, the two times an agoranomos and exegete and gymnasiarch and nephew of A________ the son of Herakeidos the gymnasiarch and ________

the gymnasiarch, [____ Ptolla] the perpetual and great gymnasiarch, the city [honors them], by the funding of Nikios son of A_____ the gymnasiarch…”
SB 1:2100 reads:

Translation: “Lukarion son of Noumenios, the brother of Ptolemy, [who was] the father of Noumenios, ‘cousin’ by honor, and chief councilor, and chief financial officer, and *exegete* in the city, and gymnasiarch, the city [honors him].”
Translation: “Emperor Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus Armeniacus Medicus Parthicus the Greatest, the city [honors him], using the funding of Apollon the ruling priest of the Augustan Lords, son of Apollonius; the [grandson] of Leonidas who was the archpriest of the Augustan lords; and [descendant] of Hierax the Younger and Leonidas [the son of] Seleukos, who all were archpriests of the Augustan lords; and [first-cousin] of Leonidas who was assigned the archpriestdom of the Augustan lords; and the first cousin's son on his father’s side of Apollonios the Elder who was a gymnasiarch and agoranomos; and [the first cousin's son] of Alexander who was gymnasiarch and agoranomos and general of Apollonopolis and Sethrotos, on his mother’s side [the first cousin's son] of Aurelius Polykles who was archpriest of the..."
Augustan Lords and royal registrar; and [the first cousin's son] of Mareotos and Achillammon, who performed the duties of an archpriest and *agoranomos*; the second cousin of Aurelius Asklepadiados who was a gymnasiarch and general of Herakleopolis; and [the second cousin] of Alexander who was a gymnasiarch; and [second cousin] of Apollonios of gymnasiarchal and agoranomal class; and [second cousin] Sarapion [the son] of Serenos, who was a gymnasiarch, and Herrennios the second; and [the second cousin] of Polykles and Titianus and Isodorus, who were all gymnasiarchs; similarly, the [second cousin] of Sarapion who was the archpriest of Hadrian and the Augusti; and [the second cousin] of Arian who was archpriest of Hadrian and royal registrar; and [second cousin] of Bouseiritou and Sarapion [the son] of Ammonios, who was the archpriest of Aelius Antoninus and the Augusti; and [second cousin] of Hierax [the son] of Heraiskos, who was archpriest of the Augustan lords, and the other Hierax who was the archpriest of Hadrian and the Augustan gods; the uncle, on his father’s side, of Hierax the elder the archpriest and of Apollonios the elder who is a gymnasiarch and general of Sethrotos and royal Bubastites; and [the uncle] of Apollonios the third, who is a gymnastiarhc and *exegete*; and [the uncle] of Asklepadiados who was a gymnasiarch and royal registrar; and [the uncle] of Sebennutos up the way and of Alexander the gymnasiarch. On his mother’s side, the uncle of Isidoros who is an archpriest and general of Apollonopolis, and [the uncle] of Isidoros son of Zosimos who is an archpriest.

[Made in] year 11 of Emperor Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus Armeniacus Medicus Parthicus the Great, 1st of Hathur.”

**Wider Viewership**

Traders and elites from elsewhere in the Roman empire would have had much the same perspective while looking at SEG XXXIV 1581, and I will distinguish where their perceptions might have differed.

With respect to the physical size of SEG XXXIV 1581, it would not be nearly as impressive to traders and non-local elites with any experience of Alexandrian inscriptions like those above. For one, almost all of them are at least as long and as verbose as SEG XXIV 1581. SB 1592 is 7 lines, IGRR 1.1067 is 10 lines, IGRR 1.1063 is 12 lines, SEG L 1863 is 8 lines, SEG XLV 2075 is 11 lines, SB 1:2100 is 8 lines, and IGRR 1.1060 is a colossal 34 lines. Like local elites, traders and non-local elites would probably have been able to identify and understand the paint that would have been on the letters.
The inclusion of Sarapion’s tribe and *deme* would be of particular note to viewers familiar with Alexandria, and they would have been able to identify Sarapion as Alexandrian in origin. While this might not have impressed these viewers *per se*, because they themselves would have been either from Alexandria or just come from Alexandria, it would not have had a negative effect. If they were from Alexandria, they might know of Sarapion’s name and thus his family along with the tribe and *deme*. Depending on their relationship with that family, their experience of SEG XXXIV 1581 might range from nostalgic to indignant to pleased. However, in all these situations, their base reaction would be one of recognition.

With respect to the titles on SEG XXXIV 1581, the only one which would really impress an elite with enough wealth to travel to Koptos would be the *neokoros* of the deified Hadrian. The *neokoros* of a temple in the imperial cult was a hotly contested religious position, one which people who may have just visited the Temple of Hadrian in Alexandria would recognize and understand. With respect to the title of *agoranomos*, while traveling elites might not be impressed by that title, professional traders would have been impacted by it in a similar way that local craftsmen would have been impacted; *agoranomoi* were in charge of their place of livelihood.

Inscriptions which follow the *ΗΠΟΛΙΣ* formula in Alexandria and elsewhere in would have also impacted how these traveling elites and traders would have viewed and perceived SEG XXXIV 1581. Firstly, many of the *ΗΠΟΛΙΣ* inscriptions from Alexandria follow the same pattern as some of those from Koptos, namely honoring either a king, an emperor, or a member of the imperial family, and IGRR 1.1067, IGRR 1.1063, IGRR 1.1060 honor Julia Domna, the

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Emperor Caracalla, and the Emperor Marcus Aurelius respectively. Like in Koptos, this style of inscription seems to be reserved for the most elite members and the ruling class of Egypt. In fact, ΗΠΟΛΙΣ inscriptions from elsewhere in Egypt also primarily honor members of the imperial household or Ptolemaic rulers (cf. Milne 29,9265; SB 5.8796; SB 5.8798; SEG VIII 642; IGRR 1.1156; SB 1.176; and Milne 21,9228). When viewing SEG XXXIV 1581 in this context, Sarapion’s inscription might seem discordant to traveling elites. Sarapion was by no means a member of the imperial household and was not even a full Roman citizen. As shown by IGRR 1.1060 and IGRR 1.1067, SEG XXXIV 1581 could have honored a member of the imperial household and Sarapion could have been credited as the funder of the inscription.

Gymnasiarchs are another class of people which are typically associated with ΗΠΟΛΙΣ inscriptions from Alexandria. Breccia 148, SB 1592, SEG L 1863, SEG XLV 2075, and SB 1:2100 all directly honor a member of the gymnasiarchal class, and IGRR 1.1060 and SEG XLV 2075 were both funded by gymnasiarchs. In Alexandria, gymnasiarchs were both a socio-economic class and an administrative position.69 This distinction can be seen in IGRR 1.1060, which uses γυμνασιάρχου (the gymnasiarch) and γυμνασιαρχήσαντος (one who performs the duty of a gymnasiarch) separately for different people to distinguish between the job and the social class. Gymnasiarchs were a privileged class of people of Greek extraction, and their ‘purity’ was managed and tracked through administrative lists held by exegetai in their home city.70 The fact that SEG XXXIV 1581 does not call Sarapion a gymnasiarch would have been noticed especially by elites from Alexandria. The effect of this is twofold, educated traveling elites would have viewed this differently than the local populace, who may have been more aware of the gymnasiarch’s responsibilities and their social standing.

70 Although Sarapion is an exegete, he would not be an exegete in control of the administrative lists in other towns, if he is only an exegete in Koptos as Reilly has interpreted it. Therefore, I do not think that this title would have had much effect on traveling elites. Bowman, Alan K. The Town Councils of Roman Egypt. 1971. 28. Reilly, Linda Collins. "A Greek Inscription at Williamsburg." 1974. 222.
elites would be able to perceive that SEG XXXIV 1581 utilizes a particularly elite epigraphic formula, and they would be able to perceive that Sarapion does not fit into the class of people typically honored by it.

However, in the end, SEG XXXIV 1581 presents Sarapion as, at the minimum, a well-educated Alexandrian who not only knew of this formula but gained enough prominence in Koptos to use it. His Alexandrian origin would have been emphasized to traveling elites and traders by his deme, his tribe, and his choice of epigraphic formula. While most of Sarapion’s titles might not have mightily impressed elites with enough money to travel, *neokoros* of the deified Hadrian certainly would have been an extremely remarkable title to them.

**Synthesis**

All in all, SEG XXXIV 1581 had a message for any viewer who could see it. Even if someone couldn’t read Greek, they could be dazzled by its size and its colors, and people who were well educated would have been impressed by Sarapion’s titles and associations with Alexandria. Studying how ancient people would have interacted with and viewed this inscription was a worthwhile endeavor, and this type of methodology can be accomplished for any inscription with enough archaeological and epigraphic data. Despite the lack of well documented records from Koptos’ 2nd excavation, there is much information that can be gleaned from SEG XXXIV 1581’s interaction with its probable epigraphical neighbors. It is larger, longer, and contains more impressive titles than most inscriptions from Koptos, and it even comes close to holding its own among Alexandrian honorary inscriptions. Like Strabo said, Koptos was *the emporion* of goods from Arabia and India for the Roman empire, and, as a result, Koptos was a busy, important *emporion*, and would have had many people living, working, and traveling there.
The travelers, foreign merchants, craftspeople, and local administrators would each bring their own knowledge to their perception of the inscription, and the inscription has more than enough information on it for all of them to experience it positively. Sarapion’s inscription may sit in the Classical Studies library of William & Mary covered and hidden from the larger world, but, in its prime, it would have been εὐδόκιμον.
Works Cited


