

The Earliest Copy of the Philensis Decrees


Maxim Panov



Independent researcher

THE ARCHIVE of Sir J.G. Wilkinson in the Bodleian libraries contains two copies of the hieroglyphic text of the Rosetta stone, made in different time, and catalogued under the numbers a. 20, fol. 72 and b. 11, fol. 2-3¹. Each line of the hieroglyphic signs is accompanied by English translation. Moreover, the scholar copied the Greek text (b. 11, fol. 85-86) and gave its translation (b. 11, fol. 83-84). The historiography of this famous monument has missed the name of J.G. Wilkinson, for this reason publication of these pages is currently important even two hundred years later after the deciphering of the Egyptian script.

To identify a copy of two more sacerdotal decrees, namely Philensis I and Philensis II, in the folder with records relating to the Rosetta stone (it is no. a. 20, fol. 73, see Fig. 1-4) has been a remarkable discovery. The hieroglyphic copy is written on a long sheet (consists of five pages), rolled-up several times, and this is just one out of two versions of the priestly decrees. As for the demotic texts, either the scholar did not copy them, or these certain pages have been lost. The staff of the imaging service failed to find the demotic copies on my request.

The exact date of the drawings is unspecified. We know that J.G. Wilkinson engaged in Egyptological studies under the guidance of W. Gell went to Alexandria in 1821. Considering that his first visit lasted until 1833, this piece of work may be the first copy of the Philae decrees, being unknown to us for many years. Among J.G. Wilkinson's papers one can find few other sketches brought from his journey to the Philae island, such as "Right hand Wall, Chamber of Osiris, Philae" (dep a. 14, fol. 14). A panoramic view of the island with the remains of the ancient temple complex is one of his most famous watercolors². Moreover, J.G. Wilkinson visited a temple in "Dakki" (as labeled in his paper), and copied several

¹ It is difficult to define the earliest copy. The drawing a. 20, fol. 72 made by a steady hand missed some details of the signs visible on the stone and appeared on sheet b. 11, fol. 2-3. Thus, on the latter the lower part of the sign  in the first preserved line is distinct; for reading, see comments in R. BIRK, "Der Rand des Rosettasteins. Eine Neulesung von Z. 1 des hieroglyphischen Texts", *ChronEg* 96/191, 2021, p. 13-16. However, the *bee*-sign in *nsw-hjt* in the final line is apparent on sheet a. 20, fol. 72, while on b. 11, fol. 2-3 there is an obscure image made by a person who was uncertain about the sign he saw. It seems that the translation on the sheet b. 11, fol. 2-3 was written later, since for line 8 the author wrote "each temple of Egypt" with the word

 "Egypt" placed under the group , on sheet b. 11, fol. 2-3 the word "Egypt" written earlier was properly crossed out. Both copies and translation might have been done before the famous letter of J.-Fr. Champollion was published.


² URL: <https://www.alamyimages.fr/photo-image-l-ile-de-philae-aquarelle-realisee-par-john-gardner-wilkinson-1797-1875-voyageur-et-archeologue-britannique-le-pere-de-l-egyptologie-britannique-ancien-temple-egyptien-sur-le-nil-complexe-pres-de-aswan-57360845.html> [accessed 06.12.2022].

inscriptions, e.g. the sheet a. 14, fol. 13 verso contains texts equivalent to that under nos. 29 и 30 in the edition of F.L.I. Griffith published in 1930s³. Seeing that the texts have numbers 21 and 22, other sheets with corresponding copies may also be discovered.

The finding of the earliest copy of these significant historical documents from the 2nd century BC can hardly be overestimated. The inscriptions were copied long before that was done by J.-J. Ampère⁴ and C.R. Lepsius⁵, and what is more by the 20th century the wall with engraved texts has suffered damage. Although J.G. Wilkinson and C.R. Lepsius saw the relief in the same state of preservation, their copies differ. Drawings edited by C.R. Lepsius are a joint work of few members of the expedition, but the discussed document is a draft copy: in the second part of Philensis II the author was occasionally wrong and misrepresented the order of lines. Afterwards J.G. Wilkinson himself commented the proper replacements and could emend inaccuracies if he had intended to make a publication.

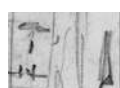

I received the scans of the sheets after my monograph with Russian translation of these decrees had gone to print, and the article providing among other things improvements for the texts of these decrees had been published⁶.


The copy of the hieroglyphic inscription under study is made on the pages, glued together, most likely, by J.G. Wilkinson himself. The text of Philensis I goes first, the author documented the inscription starting from the right side in accordance with the arrangement of the texts on the wall. For orientation he also contoured images of the gods and Ptolemy XII and royal cartouches, engraved on top of the inscriptions.

The drawing is made in pencil, the author frequently got the bird signs  confused; in many cases the sign contours are blurred, numerous omissions and false hieroglyphs occur. Today, being familiar with the content of the text, its epigraphic features and language of that period, these indistinct signs are easily identified. The copy permits to confirm and specify few hieroglyphs, erased at a later date.

N.B.! Line numbers follow the edition of D. von Recklinghausen⁷.

1. Notes on Philensis I

h15: Wilkinson: , cf. LD VI, 34a: .

The sign  is distinct in the modern photo and in the copy of K. Sethe (*Urk.* II, 212, 7), hatched in von Recklinghausen, *Die Philensis-Dekrete*, II, 71.




³ F.L.I. GRIFFITH, *Catalogue of the demotic graffiti of the Dodecaschoenus I-II*, Oxford, 1935-1937.





⁴ J.-J. AMPÈRE, “Voyage et recherches en Egypte et en Nubie”, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Paris, 1848, p. 63-89; M. PANOV, “Some Notes on the Sacerdotal Decrees of Canopus and Memphis”, *ENiM* 15, 2022, p. 313, pl. IV.

⁵ See LD VI, 34 (= C.R. LEPSIUS, *Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Äthiopien I-VI*, Berlin, 1849-1859).

⁶ See M.B. ПАНОВ, *Документы по истории государства Птолемея* [Documents on the History of the Ptolemaic Kingdom], Египетские тексты, т. XVIII, Новосибирск, 2022; M. PANOV, *ENiM* 15, p. 313-315.

⁷ See D. VON RECKLINGHAUSEN, *Die Philensis-Dekrete: Untersuchungen über zwei Synodaldekrete aus der Zeit Ptolemaios' V. und ihre geschichtliche und religiöse Bedeutung*, *ÄgAbh* 73, Wiesbaden, 2018.

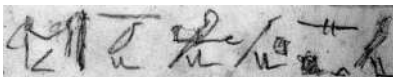

h16 (G00_13169⁸): , cf. Wilkinson: , LD VI, 34a: .









J.G. Wilkinson missed a faded sign , C.R. Lepsius's copy has a wrong sign , suitable by its phonetic value, but unequal to the original; corrected by K. Sethe (*Urk.* II, 214, 1: ); cf. von Recklinghausen, *Die Philensis-Dekrete*, II, 72: , the hatching follows the photo of the Prussian expedition (Berlin 0434), differs from the present-day one (G00_13168), J.G. Wilkinson's copy confirms that the signs were visible.




2. Notes on Philensis II

h3:  => 

cf. Wilkinson: ; LD VI, 34b: 


For . The sign  is distinct in the photo (Berlin 0428), the left lower sign is faded but essential for interpretation. J.G. Wilkinson hatched the sign , in C.R. Lepsius's copy it resembles . K. Sethe used (*Urk.* II, 217, 6):  (collated with the photos of the Prussian expedition; however, according to the photo to include in the copy the sign neither unhatched nor without a question mark is improper, in fact K. Sethe completed the copy of C.R. Lepsius); cf. D. von Recklinghausen (*Die Philensis-Dekrete*, II, 43): . The words  and  are not listed in the dictionaries and unexplainable because of these determinatives.

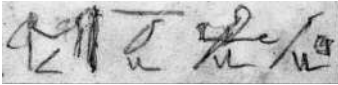
For  K. Sethe proposed “ein präpositioneller Ausdruck im Sinne von »in betreff des« oder »an Stelle von« oder »im Auftrage des«”⁹. Over the past hundred years occurrence of the preposition *m-st* in hieroglyphic has never confirmed. I doubt the correctness of both signs:

⁸ Edition der Tempelinschriften von Philae (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften).


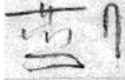
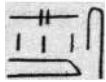
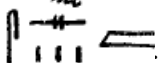
⁹ See K. SETHE, “Die historische Bedeutung des 2. Philä-Dekrets aus der Zeit des Ptolemaios Epiphanes”, *ZÄS* 53, 1917, p. 40; for other opinions, see D. VON RECKLINGHAUSEN, *op. cit.*, I, p. 40, n. n.


☉ and ☒.¹⁰ I suggest the third variant which matches the photos.

To support a noun *st* “place” it is enough to change a doubtful sign by the determinative $\overline{\text{𐤎}}$. According to TLA archive in the Graeco-Roman period the word occurred twice with the phonetic components $\overline{\text{𐤎}}$ either with or without a determinative, see *DZA* 28.793.300; *DZA* 28.793.490 = Edfou I, 209. Accordingly we have a common grammar construction: preposition + noun + genitive, cf. *Wb* IV, 6.20:  “an Stelle des...” (one of three readings proposed by K. Sethe). Thus, it was Aristonikos, who reported the victory over the enemy and stood in front of the pharaoh in the place (i.e. instead) of Comanos: *m st q3mnws*. A parallel line in demotic (d4) has a preposition (*r*)-*db3* (*DG*¹¹, 620-621: “wegen”), inseparable from the cognate words *db3* “ersetzen” and *db3* “Ersatz” (*DG*, 618-620); in hieroglyphic the preposition *r*-*db3* also stands for “an Stelle einer Person” (*Wb* V, 559, 17). I suggest exploring this idea as basic to interpret this demotic line (cf. the idiomatic (*r*)-*db3* *hd* “for (i.e. in return for) money” in demotic). If my arguments are reasoned then two versions of the decree are correlated.


For . J.G. Wilkinson gave the initial sign $\overline{\text{𐤎}}$ in Comanos’s name, omitted by C.R. Lepsius; nowadays it is damaged, but supported by the Berlin photo. K. Sethe repeated C.R. Lepsius’s omission; only recently it has been corrected, see von Recklinghausen, *Die Philensis-Dekrete*, I, 40, n. o.

J.G. Wilkinson’s copy proves the spelling of this name.

h7: , cf. Wilkinson: , LD VI, 34b: , *Urk.* II, 221, 3: .

The photo (Berlin 0448) and three copies confirm a scribal error: $\overline{\text{𐤎}}$ instead of $\overline{\text{𐤎}}$. Cf. von Recklinghausen, *Die Philensis-Dekrete*, II, 46: .

¹⁰ The example in Philensis I, h16 shows that one should not rely on C.R. Lepsius’s copies totally; J.G. Wilkinson had doubts about the sign $\overline{\text{𐤎}}$ and hatched it. Let see another case where he did not identify the

sign $\overline{\text{𐤎}}$ in the word *hrp* (line h3): , the photo provides no other variant for reading (G00_13134): .

¹¹ *DG* = W. ERICHSEN, *Demotisches Glossar*, Kopenhagen, 1954.

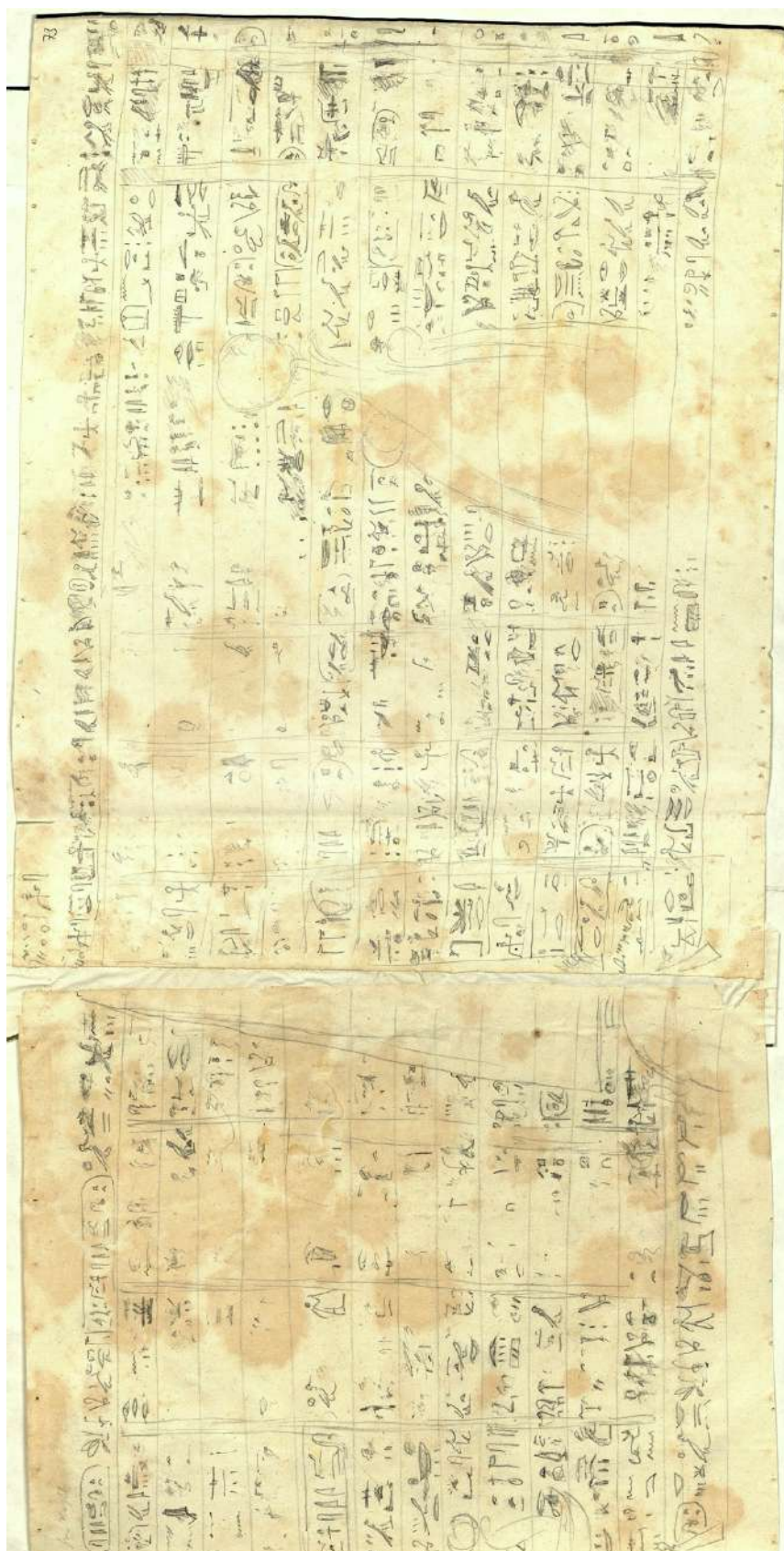


Fig. 1. Philensis I (© The National Trust).

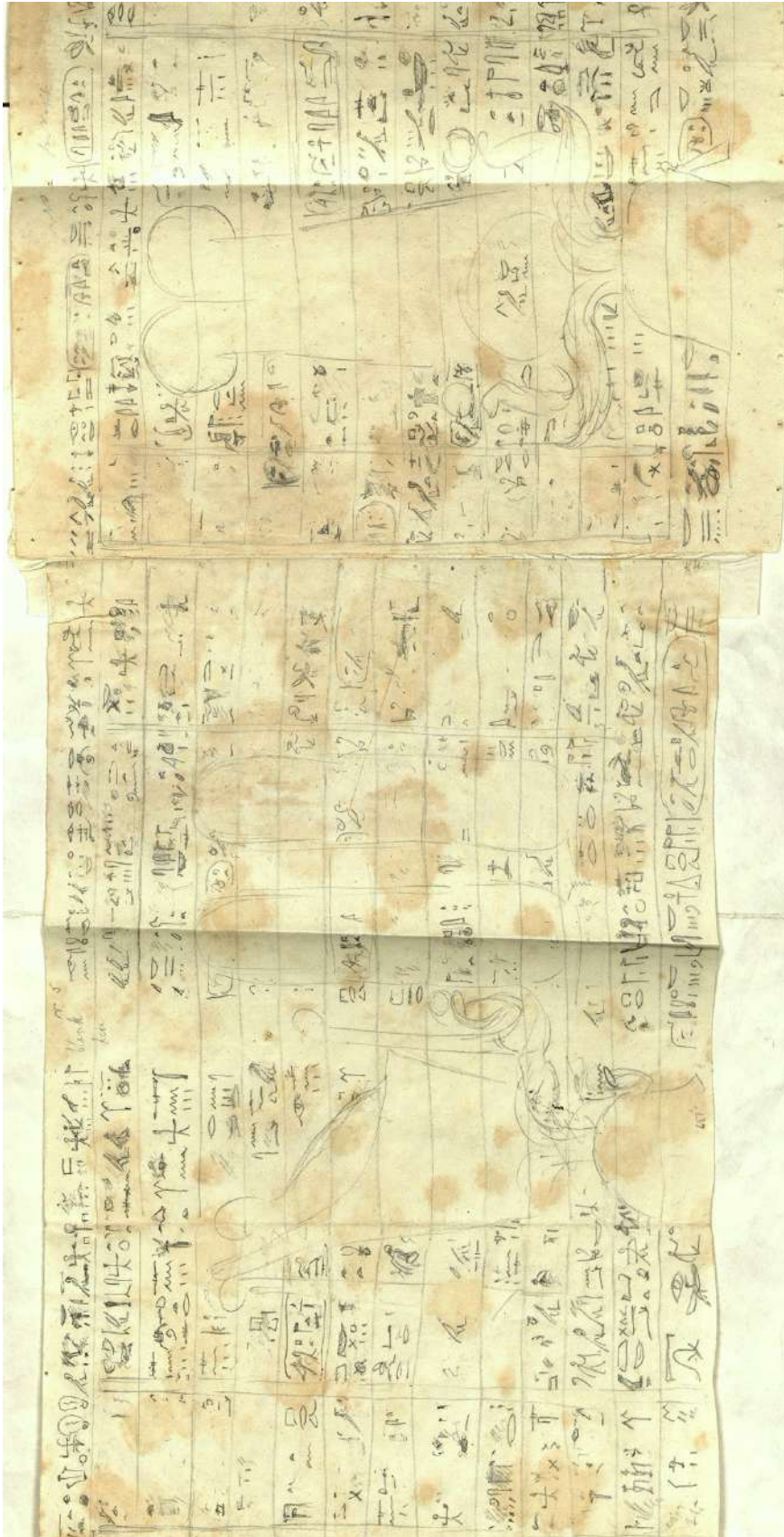


Fig. 2. Philensis I and II (© The National Trust).

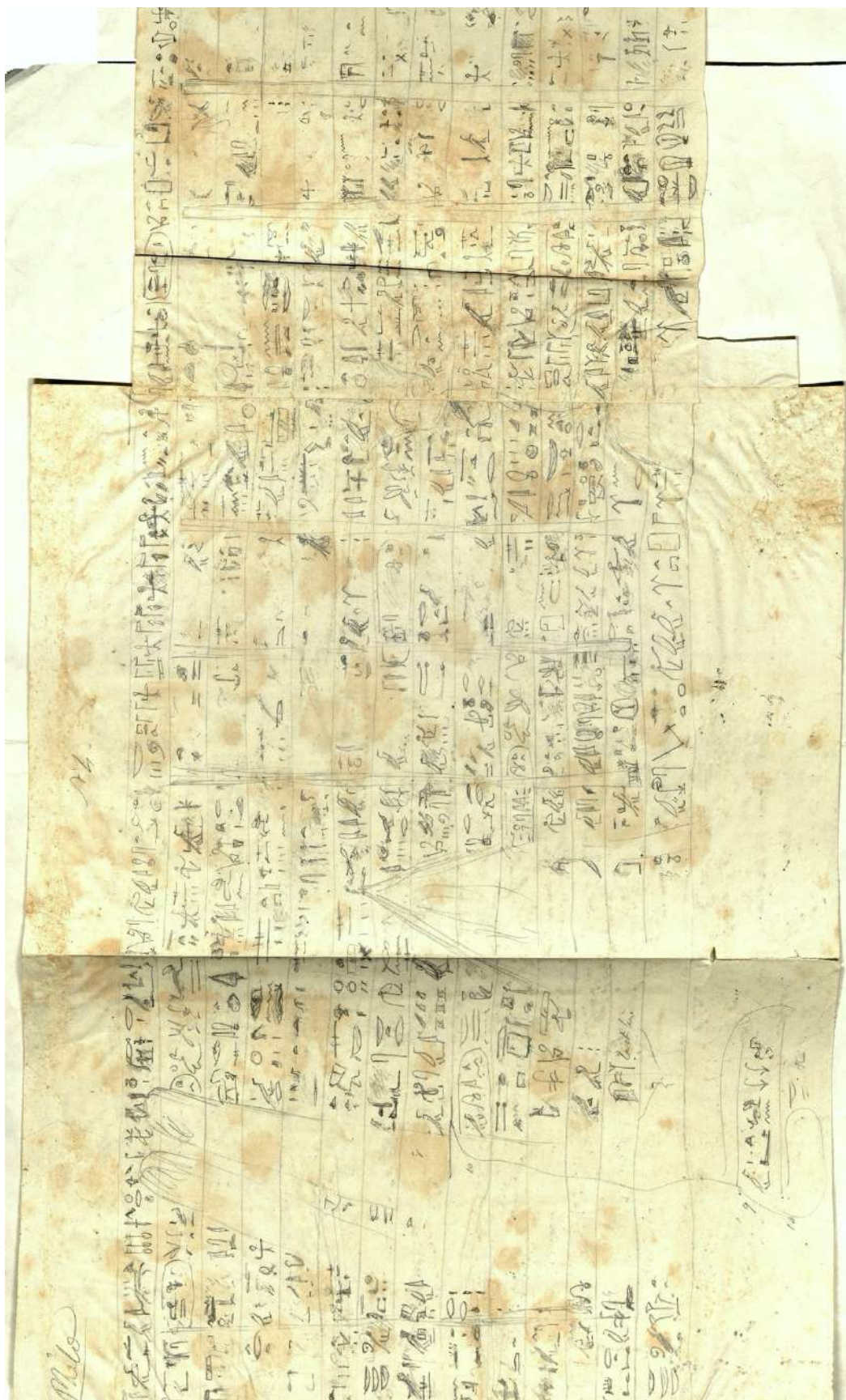


Fig. 3. Philensis II (© The National Trust).

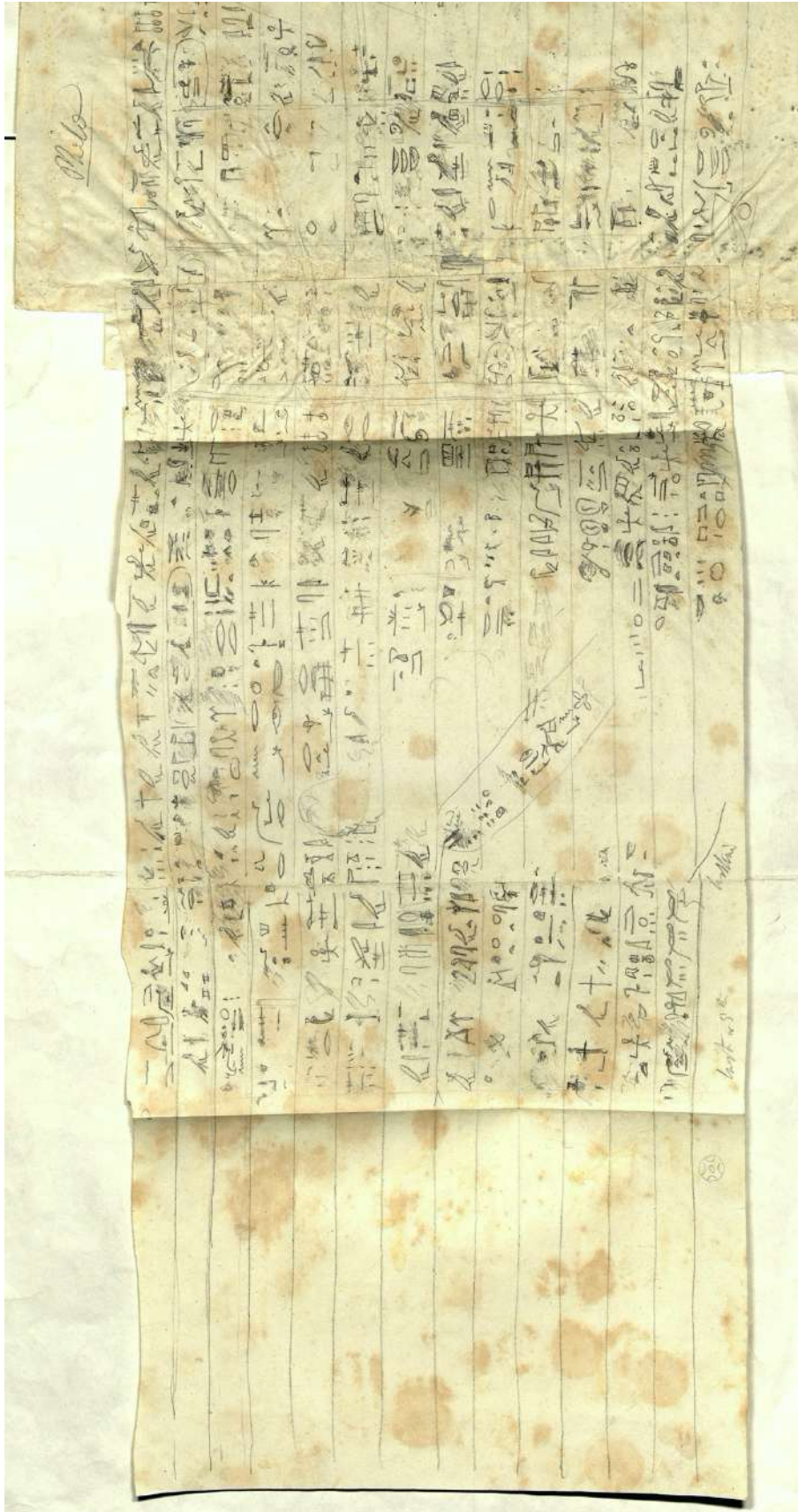


Fig. 4. Philensis II (© The National Trust).