



Late Period,
30th Dynasty
gilded-silver
funerary mask
in the Gul-
benkian collec-
tion, Lisbon.

Photos courtesy the Museum



ANCIENT EGYPTIAN ART AT LISBON'S CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN MUSEUM

Lucy Gordan-Rastelli continues her ongoing series featuring the Egyptian collections of Europe.

Born on March 29th, 1869, into a wealthy family of Christian Armenian carpet merchants and oil import/exporters in Scutari — today the Uskûdar district of Istanbul on the Asian side of the Bosphorus — Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian always lived on the fulcrum of the Oriental and Western worlds. He was educated at a local school — the French College of St. Joseph — until he was fourteen. With his father's graduation present — fifty piastres — he started his art collection, when he purchased some ancient coins — two electrum staters, minted in the ancient Greek colony of Kyzikos — at a local bazaar. Ironically, his father reprimanded him for not spending his money more wisely.¹

Above, Entrance to the Gulbenkian Museum in Lisbon.

Right, Sculpture on the grounds of the Museum depicting Calouste Gulbenkian seated in front of a reproduction of the famous falcon of Edfu.

Author's photos

Gulbenkian went on to study in Marseilles and later at King's College, London, where, in 1887, he was awarded a diploma with distinction in petroleum engineering from the Department of Engineering and Applied Sciences. Immediately afterwards his father sent him to examine the





Calouste Gulbenkian

Russian oil fields at Baku, today the capital of Azerbaijan; and from then on he played a major role in making the petroleum reserves of Russia and the Middle East available to Western development.

After becoming a British subject in 1902, Gulbenkian embarked on his mega-money business deals, the most crucial being: the 1907 merger resulting in Royal Dutch/Shell; and in 1912 the creation of the Turkish Petroleum Company (TPC), which was renamed the Iraqi Petroleum Company in 1929. His lifetime habit of retaining five percent of all the oil companies he developed earned him the nickname of "Mr. Five Percent." He reputedly said, "Better a small piece of a big pie, than a big piece of a small one."

With the enormous wealth he accumulated, Gulbenkian was able to indulge his passion for collecting works of fine art. He kept all 6,000 of these in a private museum at his four-storey, three-base-ment Paris home at Avenue d'Iéna No. 51, which he'd purchased in 1923. He was a generous lender, however.

Regarding only his fifty-four

ancient Egyptian artifacts (thirty-nine of which are now on display, with fifteen in storage), when he decided to decentralize his art collection in 1936, he loaned two extremely special pieces — an obsidian head of Senwosret III (catalogue No. 4) and a gilded-silver Thirtieth Dynasty funerary mask (No. 32) — to the British Museum for eighteen months. As the beautiful catalogue of this collection — written by Portuguese Egyptologist Luis Manuel Araújo, and published in 2006 by the Gulbenkian Museum — reports: "His intention was also to offer visitors a fine opportunity to admire works of art from a private collection that was not normally open to public viewing. The generous offer was soon expanded, and he ultimately loaned the famous London museum a total of twenty-six pieces."²

The British Museum included these objects its own catalogue (still useful for their study) and dis-

played them before and then again after World War II — until 1949, when they went on loan to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, at the request of the US Government. They remained on view there until 1960, when they traveled to Portugal, to join forever the more than twenty other Egyptian artifacts which had already been sent to Lisbon from Gulbenkian's Parisian home.

By the outset of World War Two, Gulbenkian had acquired diplomatic immunity as the Iraqi Minister to Paris. He followed the French government when it fled to Vichy and served there as Iranian Minister.

Gulbenkian left France with his wife, son, daughter and son-in-law — the Iranian diplomat Kevork Loris Essayan — in April 1942 for Portugal, which was a neutral country. His plan



One of the "star" objects in the Gulbenkian Museum Egyptian collection is this unique calcite chalice, which has been assigned to both the 3rd & 18th dynasties — although the Museum uses the earlier dating.

The Gulbenkian Museum's bronze cat coffin, dating to the Late Period. The Egyptian Museum, Cairo, & the Leiden Antiquities Museum have similar objects in their collections.



was to proceed on to the United States, but he fell in love with Portugal and lived there in a suite of the luxurious Aviz Hotel in downtown Lisbon, until his death on July 20, 1955.

The Gulbenkian Museum's website points out that between 1949 and 1952 Gulbenkian lent several works of art from his collection to Lisbon's Museu Nacional de Arte Antigua, out of gratitude for the kind hospitality he'd received in Portugal, which he'd "never felt anywhere else." The only Egyptian artifact he included in this loan was a small bronze lion (No. 47, but not on display currently), which dates to the early Ptolemaic period.³

At the time of his death, Gulbenkian's worth was estimated to be between US\$280 and US\$840 million. After undisclosed sums were distributed in trust to his descendants, the remainder of his fortune and his entire art collection were donated to the Portuguese people, in the form of a charitable trust named after him: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian — with the exception of US\$300,000–\$400,000 for restoration of the Echmiadzin Cathedral in Echmiadzin, Armenia, when relations with the Soviet Union permitted.⁴

It was Gulbenkian's wish that



This Graeco-Roman period schist head of an elderly official or priest was one of four Egyptian pieces in the "Only the Best: Masterpieces of the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon" held at New York's Metropolitan Museum in 1999/2000.



The Gulbenian's gold-inlaid bronze statue fragment of King Pedubast, founder of the 23rd Dynasty has been lent to the Metropolitan Museum for exhibitions twice in recent years.

his art collection be preserved in its entirety under one roof. This was carried out and his namesake museum opened its doors on October 2, 1969. In addition to maintaining the splendid art collection, today the Gulbenkian Foundation supports numerous scientific and cultural activities, and has its own planetarium, orchestra, libraries, ballet company and concert halls.

One of the finest private art collections in Europe, the exhibits of the purposely built Gulbenkian Museum (within its surrounding beautifully landscaped park, located at the intersection of Avenida de Berna and Avenida Augusto de Aguir in central Lisbon), span some 4,000 years: from ancient Egyptian objects to jewelry by René Lalique (1860-1945), a personal friend of Gulbenkian. In addition to the ancient Egyptian artifacts, its seventeen rooms — which open onto each other, with no doors — house collections of: ancient Greek vases and Roman coins (one of the world's best, inasmuch as coins were his favorite artifacts); Islamic textiles, glass, ceramics and carpets; Chinese porcelain and Japanese prints, screens, and lacquer ware; medieval illuminated manuscripts and ivories; European painting, from the Italian Renaissance to French Impressionism; and French Eighteenth Century and Art Nouveau decorative arts.

Since the Museum (and each separate collection) is purposely arranged chronologically, in order to trace the evolution of art through time, the Egyptian collection is displayed in Room One in state-of-the-art vitrines, installed two years ago. In the Museum catalogue, Luis Araújo writes: "The only items missing from the collection are from Egypt's prehistoric period, from the Early Dynastic Period (1st and 2nd dynasties) and the Coptic Period (from the 4th century BC).... These absences exist because the collector was not interested in the less clearly defined historical periods, and it did not occur to him to purchase objects

— mummies and sarcophagi — whose spectacular nature are now a major attraction in Egyptian collections.”⁵

“Although Gulbenkian acquired a relatively small number of Egyptian artifacts,” Professor Araújo told me when we met in person at the Museum, “most of the pieces are of the high-

est quality and trace the evolution over 3,000 years of Egyptian art, from the Old Kingdom to Roman times. Just the Amarna period — only about twenty years — is missing. The high quality of the artifacts and the fact that, for all intents and purposes, they represent every period of Egyptian art is what makes

this collection so special.”

“No Egyptian artifacts have been added since Gulbenkian’s death,” said Senior Curator Maria Rosa Figueiredo during my visit. “This is on purpose. We don’t want his collection to lose the personality of the collector. We want its visitors to wonder why he



Calouste Gulbenkian’s exquisite small-scale 12th Dynasty obsidian head of Senwosret III was on long-term loan to the British Museum from 1937-1949. It then was lent to the National Gallery in Washington, DC, until 1960, when it arrived in Lisbon.



The Gulbenkian Museum's painted-ebony funerary statuette, dated to the 11th Dynasty, purportedly was found in the area of Deir el Bahari at Luxor. Because of its unusual appearance, its authenticity has been debated by scholars.

chose this artifact and not that one. Its strengths and weaknesses are important to notice. Unlike some museums, mostly those connected to universities, we do not subsidize excavations in Egypt. The Universidade Nova of Lisbon excavates the Late Period site at Kom Tuman near Memphis, under the direction of Professor Maria Helena Trindade Lopes."

Gulbenkian visited Egypt just once, at the age of sixty-five, in 1934, and then only the classic sites: Cairo, Giza, Memphis, Sakkara, Aswan, Philae, Kom Ombo, Edfu, Esna, Luxor and Karnak⁶; but his first Egyptian acquisition, purchased at Christie's in London, dates to 1907. It was a fluted breccia bowl (catalogue No. 38). His next purchases were a bronze statue of the Lady Shepes (No. 27) in 1911; and a wooden statue of Henuttauy (No. 14) and a basalt naophore statue of Djedhor (No. 34), both in 1917.⁷

With Egyptologist Howard Carter as his advisor and frequent intermediary, most of Gulbenkian's later purchases date to the 1920s, (the most prolific decade of his art purchases in all fields): one artifact in 1920, four in 1921, twenty in 1922 (the year with the most acquisitions, sixteen purchased at auction, which had belonged to British collector and amateur Egyptologist Reverend William MacGregor [1848-1937]), two in 1924, one in 1925, three in 1926, one in 1928 and two in 1929.⁸ After 1929 Gulbenkian added only two more Egyptian artifacts, at auction in London in 1942: small limestone statues (Nos. 53 and 54), dating to the Sixth Dynasty, of male officials; these are not on display, considered by several international scholars to be fakes.

"The fact that Gulbenkian bought about forty percent of his collection the same year that Carter discovered Tutankhamen's tomb," Professor Araújo told me, "is a coincidence, because Carter discovered the tomb in November after Gulbenkian had already made his purchases. Besides those from MacGregor's collection, several others of Gulbenkian's Egyptian artifacts had

been in private collections and were purchased at auction with Carter's advice. However, directly from Carter himself, Gulbenkian purchased a blue-faience scarab (No. 48, not on display), the head of a Nubian man (No. 6), and



The Gulbenkian's 18th Dynasty ivory cosmetic spoon was once part of the MacGregor Collection. Found at Tuna el Gebel in Middle Egypt, it is both humorous & erotic, the figures clearly Nubian.

a Late Period statue of a seated cat (No. 29).⁹

"That Gulbenkian purchased artifacts already in private hands and thus mainly of unknown provenance," continued Araújo, "is the main weakness of this collection, as are perhaps the lack of mummies and coffins; but this is counterbalanced by their overall high artistic quality, thanks to Gulbenkian's exquisite personal taste. 'I want my collection to reflect... beauty and expression', he had written in a letter to Lucien Naville, an expert and antiquarian of old coins, during the late Forties.¹⁰

"The three stars, for it's a toss-up," Araújo continued, "all come from the MacGregor collection. My favorite and also the favorite of the prolific author and Egyptologist at the Griffith Institute in Oxford, Czech-born Jaromir Malek, is the already-mentioned magnificent very realistic fragmented obsidian head of King Senwoset III (No. 4), said to be 'the best piece of small-scale Egyptian art ever to be discovered'.¹¹ Studies made during the first half of the Twentieth Century had identified the head as belonging to Amenemhat III, the son of Senwoset III; but more-recent comparative studies of other likenesses of Senwoset III in the Metropolitan, the Louvre, the Luxor Museum, the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna and the Egyptian Museum in Berlin support the choice of father over son. Most likely this head comes from Medamud, a center for the worship of Montu, a powerful cult during the Twelfth Dynasty.

"The Collection's other star (No. 28), and favorite of the late Bernard von Bothmer, professor at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts," continued Araújo, "is a limestone statuette of an official, probably a judge, Bes, dating to the Late Period, early Twenty-sixth Dynasty (660-610 BC). From the inscriptions on the statue's base, rear and kilt, we know that Bes was a senior court official of King Psamtek I, whose name appears in a cartouche on the Bes's right shoulder. We do not know where it was made, but a reference in the inscription to Akhbit in the West Delta may suggest that it origi-

This 18th Dynasty ushabti, inscribed to one Hesremef, is unusual in that it is made of bronze, with gold inlays around the eyes.



nally came from there."

The third star of the Gulbenkian collection, and probably its oldest artifact, Professor Araújo and



The Gulbenkian Museum's Ptolemaic artist's limestone raised-relief study of an anonymous pharaoh is well carved & finely detailed.

Senior Curator Figueiredo agreed, is a cylindrical calcite cup (No. 1) decorated with three gently protruding ridges and an elegant bell-shaped foot. According to the Museum catalogue, the cup, "probably used to measure solids, ... was found in a tomb north of Thebes, at a place described as being Reqaqnah, and was part of the tomb-goods of the deceased from Tomb 40. The tomb dates from the 3rd Dynasty(?) of the Old Kingdom.... No other known piece has the same shape as this cup."¹²

French Egyptologist Christine Desroches-Noblecourt — who was invited to Lisbon by the Gulbenkian Foundation, first in 1962 and again in 1968 — proposed the Old Kingdom date for this seemingly unique vessel. She based her date on a mural in the tomb at Sakkara of the senior official Hesyra, which shows similar objects. On the other hand, during a visit to the Gulbenkian Museum in the company of his friend Araújo, Bothmer — without hesitation — dated this cup to the Eighteenth Dynasty, because some calcite objects from the tomb of three wives of Thutmose III (now in the Metropolitan Museum) have the same bell-shaped foot; and because such calcite cups were common during the New Kingdom. "At the Gulbenkian," said Professor Araújo, "it is still catalogued and displayed as Old Kingdom; but, after Professor Bothmer's attribution, we cannot be sure."

"Speaking of the Metropolitan, although, unlike our founder, we seldom loan our Egyptian artifacts," said Figueiredo, "we lent Bes and three of our other highlights — a low relief depicting Princess Merytites (No. 2), a bronze torso of King Pedubast (No. 16) and the head of an official (No. 39) — to a temporary exhibition called 'Only the Best: Masterpieces of the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon', held there in 1999-2000. The exhibition was titled 'Only the Best', because Gulbenkian liked to say: 'Only the best is good enough for me'. Last year I accompanied the torso back to the Met again, to the 'Gifts of the Gods: Images from Egyptian Temples', which ran from October 2007 to



Late Period bronze processional insignia in the form of a solar barque resting on the back of a crocodile. A similar object is to be seen in Leiden's Antiquities Museum.

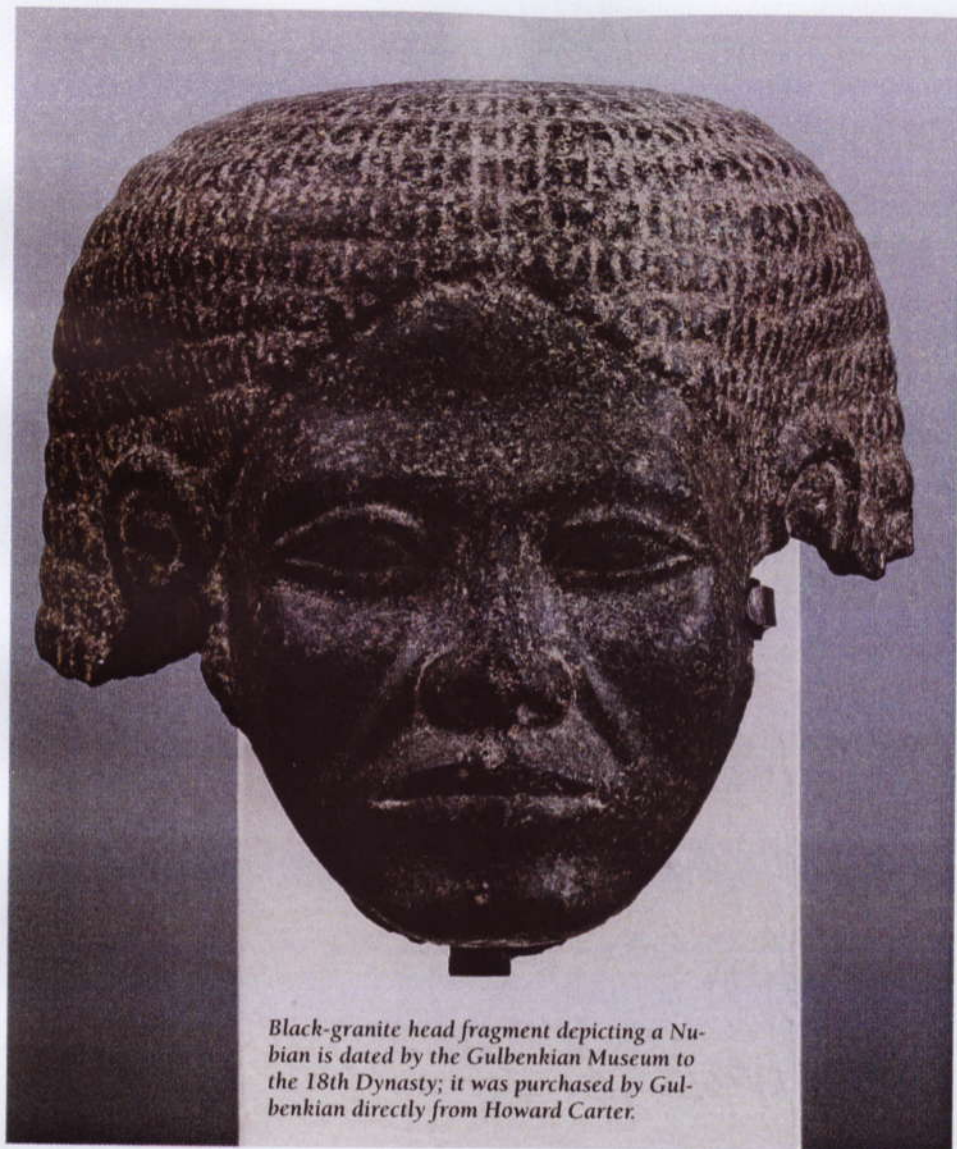
February of this year."

If Bothmer's New Kingdom date is correct for the "unique" calcite cup, the limestone low relief depicting the Princess of Merytites — which was taken from the tomb at Giza where she was buried with her husband, Akhtihetep — would be the collection's oldest artifact. It dates from the Fourth dynasty, when King Khufu had mastabas built nearby his pyramid for his wives and favorite children, Princess Merytites — which means "beloved of her father" — being one of the latter.

Also from the MacGregor

collection, this fragment had been acquired by Howard Carter in July 1922, just four months before his discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamen. Similar fragments from the same tomb are now in Rome's Museo Barracco and in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

Gulbenkian purchased the torso of King Pedubast I in 1921, the year before the relief of Merytites and fifteen other ancient Egyptian artifacts. The art dealers (and advisors to the American art collector/resident of Florence in Italy, Bernard Berenson) Duveen Brothers of Amsterdam guaranteed that it was "a very fine acquisition" since it was one of the best ob-



Black-granite head fragment depicting a Nubian is dated by the Gulbenkian Museum to the 18th Dynasty; it was purchased by Gulbenkian directly from Howard Carter.

jects from the Egyptian collection of Count Gregory Stroganoff.¹³

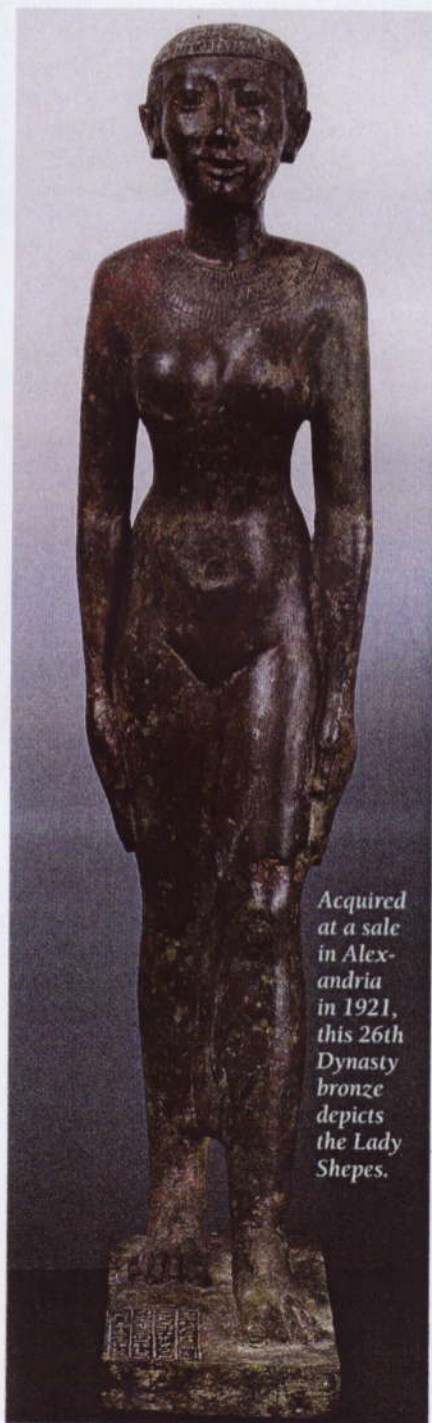
Founder of the Twenty-third Dynasty, Pedubast's name and titles are recorded in cartouches on the belt and vertical band of the figure's apron, which is inlaid with gold and copper. The torso's most unusual feature is the stylized head of a cat (or, more likely, a leopard) under the belt buckle, which may indicate that Pedubast had priestly duties. Otherwise it may just be a visual reference to the goddess Bastet.

The fourth artifact to be lent to "Only the Best" was the superbly modeled green-schist head of an official dating to the Graeco-Roman period, middle of the Ptolemaic era (c. 200 BC). "It is the portrait of a mature man, with very realistic features: jowls,

droopy eyelids, bald," said Professor Araújo, "unlike the other portraits of officials from this period, who are usually shown young and healthy. The Egyptian collections at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Museum in Berlin and Museum Civico Archeologico in Bologna count similar 'old age' portraits."

Araújo pointed out five other special artifacts: a limestone stela (No. 10) of the shaven-headed scribe Iry, which dates to the Eighteenth Dynasty, also once part of the MacGregor Collection, with its still clearly legible hieroglyphs; the finely carved ushabti of Hesmeret (No. 11), also dating to the Eighteenth Dynasty, but made of bronze, which was rare for ushabti at that time; the elegantly-carved wooden very feminine ushabti of Lady of the House Henuttauy (No. 14), which

clearly shows the deep respect felt for women during the New Kingdom"; a panel from a casket (No. 18), dating to the Late Period, perhaps the Twenty-sixth Dynasty, "considered to be among the most beautiful Egyptian works in ivory"; and a small statuette of Horus as a child (No. 37), dating from the Graeco-Roman period, early Ptolemaic dynasty (c. 300-350 BC), also once part of the MacGregor Col-



Acquired at a sale in Alexandria in 1921, this 26th Dynasty bronze depicts the Lady Shepes.



18th Dynasty polychrome-limestone statuette of one Mes (& detail). It was among works of art damaged by flooding in 1967 of the Pombal Palace in Oeiras, Portugal, where the Gulbenkian collection was displayed prior to Lisbon.

lection, and made of silver, "a metal," according to Araújo, "even rarer in ancient Egypt than gold."

Worth a trip to Lisbon for itself alone, the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum is open: Tuesday-Sunday 10 AM-5:45 PM; closed Mondays, January 1, Easter Sunday, May 1 and Christmas Day. The hard-bound catalogue of the Egyptian collection is available for 30 Euros, from the Museum bookstore, or by clicking on the website www.gulbenkian.pt. Another special volume to own — and also available from the bookstore for 32 Euros — is the paperback catalogue of an exhibition held here from July 19 to October 6, 2006, titled *The Collector and His Taste: Calouste Gulbenkian 1869-1955*. Published to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of his foundation, it aims to paint an accurate picture of this eclectic pioneer of the oil industry, financier, diplomat, art collector and philanthropist, as seen through his taste in art. "The study of Art," he wrote in a letter da-

ted December 14, 1948, to Robert Ably, a London antiquarian, "amongst my occupations has been a great relief and change to my mind. Very fine things are becoming more and more rare, but luckily I am very eclectic; if I do not find things in one section, then I become attracted to others."¹⁴

Notes

1. *The Collector and His Taste: Calouste Gulbenkian 1869-1955*, (Lisbon, 2006), 77.
2. *Egyptian Art: Calouste Gulbenkian Collection* (Lisbon, 2006), 51.
3. Other similar lions belong to the Egyptian collection in the Brooklyn Museum.
4. The website www.cilicia.com says that the Gulbenkian family has recently paid for the restoration of the high altar and of the marble floor in the cathedral.
5. *Egyptian Art: Calouste Gulbenkian Collection*, 50.
6. Information from Gulbenkian diaries, which he wrote in French, reported by curator Maria Rosa Figueiredo. He left Naples at 1 PM on the ship "Ausonia" on January 14, 1934. He arrived in Cairo on the evening of January 16 and immediately took a tour of the city. He remained in Cairo until January 24, visiting the Egyptian Museum several times, numerous mosques, the Arab Museum and its library, the Coptic Museum, the Zoo and

Heliopolis. After his visit to the Egyptian Museum on January 18, when he saw the treasures from Tutankhamen's tomb, he wrote in his diary: "After my studies, I expected to see splendid artifacts, but my imagination could never have conceived of so much beauty and so much culture."

On January 24, after a one-hour visit with the king at Koube Palace, he left Cairo for Aswan, where he arrived the next morning. That same afternoon he visited Philae and noted in his diary that he liked Aswan much more than Cairo, which he thought was an unpleasant place to live, in spite of its magnificent museums. The next day he visited by boat Elephantine Island, Lord Kitchner's Garden, the Aswan Museum and a tribal village; and, the day after, villages around Aswan by donkey, before embarking on the ship named *Sudan* for a four-day Nile cruise, which took him to Kom Ombo, Edfu, Esna, Luxor and Karnak. About the Temple of Karnak, he noted: "I never imagined that such magnificent architecture could exist. Before the majesty of such monuments, everything I've already seen in Greece, in the East and in the West, disappears."

On January 30th he visited six tombs in the Valley of the Kings — those of Seti I, Rameses VI, Rameses IX, "Harem Hepte" and Tutankhamen — and the Valley of the Queens in the afternoon. On the evening of the 31st, he took the train back to Cairo, where he stayed another week, before leaving for Jerusalem.

7. *Egyptian Art: Calouste Gulbenkian Collection*, 50.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.* "Gulbenkian didn't only buy at auction or through Howard Carter," according to Curator Figueiredo. "He knew everybody in the art world and they knew him and his tastes, and he used other intermediaries. On page 44 of the catalogue, The Collector and His Taste, is the amusing story of his using possibly Carter, whom he didn't always trust, to buy the splendid head of King Senwosret III. Sometimes he even brought works of art (not only the Egyptian ones) home on trial, to see if he wanted to purchase them. He only bought objects he liked, which were in perfect condition. He probably never bought a mummy or a mummy coffin because he didn't like them. We cannot be sure why."

10. *The Collector and His Taste*, 171.

11. *Egyptian Art: Calouste Gulbenkian Collection*, 66.

12. *Ibid.*, 58.

13. *Ibid.*, 98.

14. *The Collector and His Taste*, 99.

About the Author Lucy Gordan-Rastelli is an American journalist based in Rome. She has contributed several previous articles to the *Journal on the Egyptian collections of European museums*.