The Beginnings of Egyptomania

Classical Accounts & The Middle Ages
- Egyptomania is rooted in the history of Egyptology

- What makes Egyptology interesting is the depth of time associated with the discipline.

- “Discipline” isn’t used in the modern academic sense - but instead the interest of rich amateurs (or very early scholars).

- Earliest examples of interest in ancient Egypt are the ancient Egyptians themselves

- Where do we draw the line?
Classical Accounts of Egypt and its Antiquities
During classical times, Egyptian culture was still “living” (though changed from earlier periods).

Many classical accounts were fundamental in the formation of the earliest European interest in ancient Egypt.
Herodotus
The Histories
The Histories - written by the Greek historian Herodotus

After he visited Egypt somewhere between 460 and 455 BC

A collection of observed facts, folks tales, myths, historical accounts, and personal commentary
Of Egypt, Herodotus said:

There is no country that possesses so many wonders, not any that has such a number of works that defy description.
The journey from Alexandria to Aswan resulted in a mass of information, as well as misinformation.

Difficult to separate his personal commentary from hearsay, folktales, and other information.

Interest in Egyptian religion - details of personal worship and elaborate state festivals.

Wrote on mortuary customs - paid special attention to the process of mummification.
Diodorus Siculus
Diodorus Siculus lived in the Nile Valley from ca. 60 BC to c. 57 BC - *Bibliotheca historica*

- The first author to fully describe the huge seated statues of Amenophis III that dominated the Theben floodplain

- Named the Colossi of Memnon after the Homeric hero
• Discovery and correct translation of an inscription on one of the Colossi

• Allowing him to attribute the temple (Ramesseum) to Ozymandias, the Greek equivalent of User-ma’et-Re - the Horus name of Ramses II.
Strabo
The Greek geographer Strabo accompanied Aelius Gallus, a Roman prefect in Egypt, on his expedition to Upper Egypt in 25 BC.

*Strabo’s Geography* is a monumental compilation of factual information from throughout the Roman world.

Mainly geographic in nature, include a catalog of towns and resources in Upper Egypt.
Perhaps the most interesting feature of his accounts derives from his trip to Memphis. There, he visited the Serapeum, and accounts that:

“…[o]ne finds also at the temple of Serapis, in a spot so sandy that the wind causes the sand to accumulate in heaps, under which we could see many sphinxes, some of them almost entirely buried, others only partially recovered.”
Strabo was also the first to refer to the Valley of the Kings:

“...[a]bove the Memnonium, are tombs of kings, which are stone-hewn, are about forty in number, are marvelously constructed, and are of spectacular worth seeing.”

He also notes that:

“...[w]e found nothing there except the results of pillage and destruction.”
The Collapse of Rome and the Middle Ages
With the eastern empire’s adoption of Christianity, Egypt became even more interesting as the location of many of the events recorded in the bible.
Lady Etheria
Lady Etheria - a nun from Gaul

Travel account of a journey taken between AD 379 and 388

Identify and visit many of the Egyptian locales recorded in the bible.

Lady Etheria journeyed no farther south than Delta, describing the site of Tel el Maskhuta and Tel Defenneh, both of which were later excavated by Sir Flinders Petrie.
Bernard the Wise
Bernard the Wise, a Catholic monk who set out from Rome in order to visit Jerusalem in AD 870

Bribed their ship’s captain so that he would put them ashore in Alexandria

Arrested in Cairo and thrown into jail for lack of identification.

First recorded description of the Pyramids of Giza - refers to them as Joseph’s granaries
Abdel Latif
Abdel Latif - a doctor from Baghdad who taught and practiced medicine in Cairo in the 13th century:

- Described that the smaller pyramids of Giza had been demolished for building materials
- ventured two-thirds into the upper portion of the Great Pyramid - described hordes of treasure hunters
- Detailed description of an intact Sphinx
On his visit to Memphis, he remarked:

“…[i]t requires a half-day’s march in any direction to cross the visible ruins. It is a gathering of marvels to confound the mind. The more one looks upon them the greater grows the admiration they inspire; and each fresh glance of the eye upon these remains is a renewal of delight.”
After the Crusades
The end of the Crusades prompted a renewed European interest in pilgrimages to the holy places.

In an effort to protect the pilgrims, the Sultan el Nasir entered into diplomatic relations with the Pope, the King of Aragon, and the King of France.

Made it possible for pilgrims to travel by sea from Genoa or Venice to Alexandria and then overland to Jerusalem.
The Voiage and Travaile of Sir John Maundevile, Knight
The Voiage and Travaile of Sir John Maundevile, Knight - 14th Century “guide” for pilgrims going to Jerusalem

Describes the pyramids thusly:

“...full well made of masons’ craft, of which two be marvelously great and high, and the tother ne be not so great...An within they be all full of serpants...And some men say they be sepultures of great lords, that were sometime, but that is not true, for all common rumor and speech is of all the people there, both far and near, that they be the garners of Joseph...”
- Sir John of Maundevile never really existed

- The descriptions were the work of Jean d’Outremeuse, a notary of Liège

- Compiled his information from sources dating back to classical authors.

- Doesn’t detract from its usefulness as a litmus test for the popular opinions concerning the nature of ancient Egyptian society
The End