

# FORGING THE MINOAN PAST

KENNETH LAPATIN

## ABSTRACT

'Cretenses semper mendaces' was an ancient tag-line, and forgers on Crete produced fake 'antiquities' from an early date. Excavation and publication of prehistoric remains at Knossos vastly increased the value of Cretan artefacts. The romantic associations of the island's early civilisations with mythological figures, and the excitement created by the new discoveries engendered an eager market for objects that could be linked to what was lauded as the first high culture of Europe. Although not nearly so well known as the series of ivory figurines that began to surface a decade later, 'Minoan' terracottas, bronzes, carved horn, and engraved rings and gemstones produced in the first years of the 20th century were likewise fashioned to satisfy the desires of private collectors and foreign museum curators. Forgers relied on a variety of factors as they attempted to ensure the marketability of their products and increase their value. They employed precious or semi-precious materials, devised appealing iconographies, suggested plausible find spots, and invented colourful stories of recovery. This chapter contextualises some of these forgeries and explores their active effects: not just how they were designed to satisfy the desires of intended buyers, but also how they engendered new ideas about the distant past and yet simultaneously reinforced prevalent conceptions of it.