

THE COLONIAL, THE NATIONAL, AND THE LOCAL:  
LEGACIES OF THE 'MINOAN' PAST

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ABSTRACT

The 'Minoan' past was constructed at the beginning of the 20th century by colonial and national processes as the first 'European civilisation'. The remnants of the Cretan Bronze Age were recast, reordered, re-created, and forged to produce a world of objects, sites, and images that would satisfy the Eurocentric colonial imagination and its territorial aspirations as well as the national project of the Cretan intellectuals. The European imagination produced its 'future anterior' and, given the background of some of its architects, a mirror image of the British Empire. Local Cretan intellectuals saw in this construction an important resource in their struggle for the unification of Crete with Greece. Since then, the 'Minoan' past has been acting as a signifier of a strong and distinctive local and regional identity, a performative enterprise which is mediated by key apparatuses such as tourism and the State Archaeological Service. This local and regional identity is, at the same time, incorporated in the broader Hellenic narrative as an important precursor of the Hellenic Classical 'civilisation'. This is, however, an 'ambivalent incorporation', for the local reserves the right to negotiate the terms of this process and affords multiple readings.