



Fakes and Forgeries

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The processes and techniques involved in detecting fakes and forgeries are, in themselves, almost totally unexciting: chemical analysis, radiocarbon dating, X-and other rays, spectrometry, refractometry and thermoluminescence arouse few passions on the page. So what is it that makes a book like this such compelling reading? It's the enormous range of things that people have thought it worthwhile to counterfeit - from Yeti scalps to the pound in your pocket - and the uneasy feeling that we may be the forger's next victim. Here we have such an array, well displayed-for each in a succession of examples we find out how the dissembling was done and how it was detected. Piltdown Man, Hitler diaries, the Conan Doyle-seducing Cottingly Fairies, Tom Keating's 'Sexton Blakés' and assorted antiques, gems and coinage all get the 'treatment. The appeal of the book is further widened by the inclusion of mysteries which may themselves attract fraudulent evidence, so Nessie, crop circles and UFOs get space too as we gradually learn about all the -ometries and -ologies involved, with sidelights on security. Less of a science book than its series title suggests, this is a competently assembled list of famous fakes with a serviceably informative text capable of creating genuine interest.

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