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0521389216 - An Introduction to the Historiography of Science

Helge Kragh

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Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1987

First published 1987
First paperback edition 1989
Reprinted 1991, 1994

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0-521-33360-1 hardback
ISBN 0-521-38921-6 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2003

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Preface

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The subject of the present work is what I consider to be the essentials of the historiography of science. I discuss a number of problems which, I suggest, are of fundamental importance to almost any serious historical study of science, irrespective of its particular field and period. There are, of course, historiographical issues which are peculiar to certain approaches, disciplines and periods. Most of these I have left untreated or only touched lightly. Thus science before 1500 only figures sporadically in the book, and issues peculiar to the social and institutional history of science have only received scant attention. Apart from these limitations there are other important topics which I do not discuss because they are only indirectly related to the main themes of the book. These include various philosophically based views concerning the historical development of science, such as the historiographical theories of Kuhn, Lakatos and others, and also the question of the so-called driving forces of scientific development.

The structure of the book is as follows. Chapter 1 gives an outline, separated from the rest of the work, of the prehistory of history of science. The chapters 2 to 7 deal with matters of a general historiographical nature, being an introduction to theory of history as applied to history of science. As a historical discipline, history of science is amenable to the same theoretical reflections which are valid in general history. Practitioners of the discipline, whether trained as scientists or historians, should be familiar with these reflections. In chapters 8 to 10 I discuss some of the basic problems in the general historiography of science. These include problems of periodization, ideological functions and the tension between diachronical and anachronical historiography. The rest of the work deals with the critical use and analysis of history of science sources and related issues. While the analysis of sources is

essentially the same for any historical discipline, in some respects the historian of science faces problems that are peculiar to his field. One such problem is the possibility of experimental reconstruction of history. The two last chapters give a critical review of versions of quantitative history of science.

An earlier Danish version was translated into English by Jean Lundskjær–Nielsen. The work has received support from the Danish Research Council for the Humanities. I gratefully acknowledge this support. The book has benefited from various suggestions and critical remarks made by two referees unknown to me.

Helge Kragh
June 1986