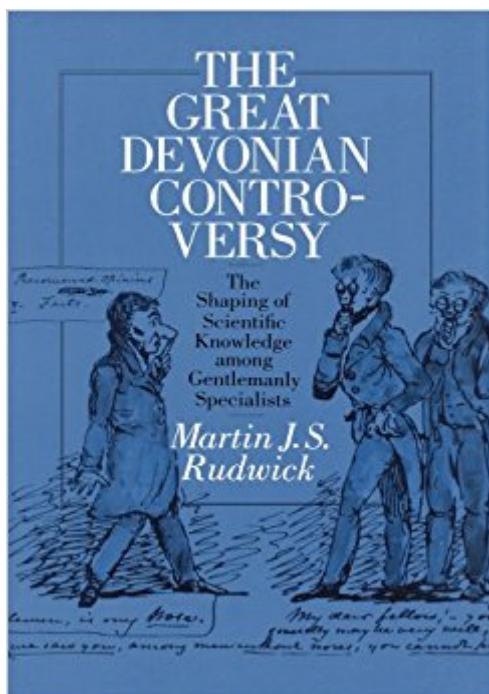


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The Great Devonian Controversy: The Shaping Of Scientific Knowledge Among Gentlemanly Specialists (Science And Its Conceptual Foundations Series)



Synopsis

"Arguably the best work to date in the history of geology."â "David R. Oldroyd, *Science*"After a superficial first glance, most readers of good will and broad knowledge might dismiss [this book] as being too much about too little. They would be making one of the biggest mistakes in their intellectual lives. . . . [It] could become one of our century's key documents in understanding science and its history."â "Stephen Jay Gould, *New York Review of Books*"Surely one of the most important studies in the history of science of recent years, and arguably the best work to date in the history of geology."â "David R. Oldroyd, *Science*

Book Information

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This very interesting, well constructed, and well written book is an important case study of scientific progression. The subject is a 19th century controversy about stratigraphy in Southwestern England. To a large extent, Rudwick uses this topic as a test of Thomas Kuhn's famous saltatory model of scientific progression. While apparently recondite, this stratigraphic controversy reflected a crucial issue in 19th century geosciences. A major aspect of geology in the early 19th century was the effort to reconstruct geohistory. Methodologically, this was quite difficult. The major method was direct observation of strata exposed by outcrops, riverbeds, cliffs, and mines. Since strata were often disturbed in complex ways by many geologic phenomena, this was a difficult task requiring great experience. As time went on, relatively sophisticated paleontologic analyses of fossil assemblages became an important aspect of stratigraphy. Following success with analysis of more

superficial (younger) strata, geologists of this period set out to map the deeper strata. The controversy over the stratigraphy became a major controversy about the nature of remote geohistory, whether or not such reconstructions were actually possible, the methods and criteria needed for appropriate stratigraphic reconstruction, and higher level theories about geological change. Rudwick opens the book with a nice, concise description of the state of the geosciences at the beginning of the controversy, the structure of the geology community in Britain, and a discussion of the status of the sciences in British society. Many of the major figures are introduced as well.

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