Mass Of Historical Fact, Order Often Beyond Historian’s Vision

By ROBERT ZELENKA

“I hope to set the historian against the ire of the philologist, to arouse the dismay of the anthropologists and the specialists generally—all in the name of specialization.”

Humorously, Dr. Diaz de Santillana gave the reasons for his lecture “The Frog’s Eye and the Historian of Science,” given Monday night in the Memorial Center.

A FROG’S EYE is able to discern a moving fly, but should the fly cease moving, the frog is no longer able to detect it. Such is the historian of science: he can see certain fractions of apparent history, but often the mass of historical fact and order lies beyond his vision.

History is profoundly ambiguous, although, through revision, it is constantly renewed.

Says Dr. Santillana, “Our time has very largely forgotten history.” From Darwin and others came the philosophy of constructive evolution: a simple delineation, a single image. The philologist, the student of history through the language, culture and religion of various peoples, has become too narrow, just as the frog who sees only what passes in front of him. “If their minds are programmed for bad dreams, then they will read into their documents bad dreams.”

A MIND OF science is required to read the documents of science. Often, in the past and in recent years, important histories of astronomy, tables of the planets compiled by ancient peoples, have been dismissed by frog-minded philologists as “sexual rites” or other such trash simply because the historians had neither the knowledge nor the sense of science.

IT IS UNWISE, it is often insane, to search for patterns where there are none. But it is a greater narrowness to deny historical patterns when they are present.

There are a great number of universal parallels in history: the constellation of Orion (as we are given to call that group of stars) is represented in history again and again as the form of a hero.

THE LEGEND of this personage are similar; their adventures and deeds are parallel, although the names and exact stories diverge. Hence, there is in space and time some common bond.

As mentioned before, tables of the planets appear in a great many of the records of civilized peoples. Patterns exist and are ignored. Again remarked Dr. Santillana, “Never underestimate the power of pure human foolishness.”

Nature reacts positively to the physical scientist. She explodes his test-tubes, short-circuits his computers, and wreaks havoc on his experiments when he ventures outside of the truths of natural phenomena. Her ways are more subtle with the erring philologist. Whole edifices of theory will crumble, he said, when one small brick of historical falsehood is made known.