Oriental Origins Of Hemisphere's Culture Suggested At Symposium

By EDDIE PRICE

“Perhaps civilization was invented only once,” reflected Dr. Ignacio Bernal of the Mexican National Institute of Anthropology, speaking of the similarities between Eastern and Western cultures at the Rice symposium on “Prehistoric Man in the New World.”

The symposium, one of the outstanding events of the year in the field of anthropology, was concluded Saturday afternoon with Dr. Bernal’s summary. Condensed papers had been presented on Friday and Saturday in Hamman Hall by a distinguished group of anthropologists, ethnologists, and linguists.

THE OBJECTIVE of the conference was to review and appraise facts and theories about prehistoric peoples and cultures in North and South America.

Dr. Bernal’s hypothesis was propounded in connection with a discussion of the phases of trans-Pacific diffusion of culture. He explained that linguistic and cultural studies indicated South American relations with Old World peoples.

COMMENTING ON this idea, Dr. Edward Norbeck of the Rice anthropology department suggested that there had been chance contacts: Chinese or Polynesian mariners blown across the Pacific to America and Indian sailors washed up in Oceana.

Taking a telescopic view in his summary, Dr. Bernal said that he regretted the general distrust of history among anthropologists: “There is no such thing as ‘prehistory;’ it is simply the history of those people who did not leave written records . . . New world archeology is part of the cultural heritage of the Spanish-speaking individual, and to him it has a historical meaning.”

THE SYMPOSIUM itself was the first of its kind in many years. Dr. Norbeck indicated that one of its main achievements was the development of “a great deal of good will toward Rice.”

Many professional anthropologists and other guests came to Houston to hear the papers.