

The Kon-Tiki Expedition



The balsa wood raft Kon-Tiki was built as a copy of a prehistoric South American vessel. Constructed of nine balsa logs collected from Equador, a crew of six men sailed the raft from Callao in Peru the 28th of April 1947 and landed on the island of Raroia in Polynesia after 101 days. This successful voyage of c.4300 miles proved that the islands in Polynesia were within the range of this type of prehistoric South American vessel. A documentary of the voyage won an Oscar in 1951 and the book about the expedition has been translated into no fewer than 66 languages.

The Ra I and Ra II Expeditions



Thor Heyerdahl built this 45 foot long copy of an ancient Egyptian papyrus vessel in 1969, with the aid of members of



the Burundi tribe from Chad in Central Africa. Constructed at the foot of the Pyramids and named after the sun god Ra, it was later transported to Safi in Morocco, from where it set sail for Barbados. After c. 3000 miles there were problems with the construction of the stern, which could not take the strain. Just a short distance from Barbados the ship had to be abandoned. Ten

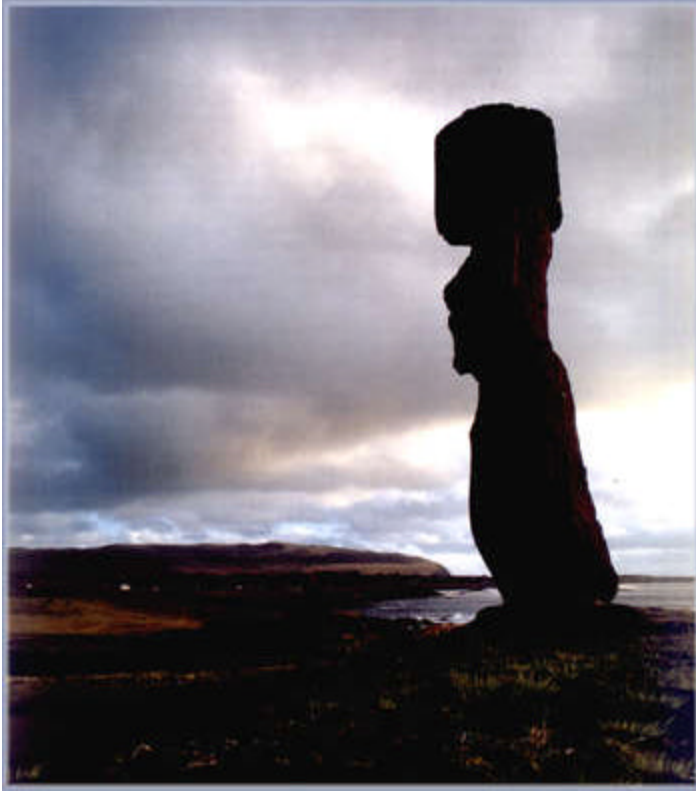
months later four Aymara Indians from Bolivia, who still mastered the traditional art of building reed boats, built Ra II. This boat went on to complete a successful transatlantic crossing, covering the 4000 miles to Barbados in just 57 days. The voyages with Ra I and II proved that it had been possible with transatlantic contacts between the old civilisations and the Americas. Photo Ra II.

Tigris



To prove that there could have been contact and influences between the great cultures of Mesopotamia, the Indus valley and Egypt across the sea, the Tigris was built in 1978. The same Indians who built Ra II aided with the construction of this boat. This time it was built in Iraq using the local berdi reeds. At over 50 foot long and a crew of 11, the Tigris was Thor Heyerdahl's largest reed craft. The expedition headed down the River Tigris through the Persian Gulf and into the Indian Ocean. After c. 5 months the voyage came to a sudden end at the entrance to the Red Sea. Due to wars ranging all around, the Tigris was not allowed leave the harbour in Djibouti. In protest against the wars, Heyerdahl eventually set fire to Tigris.

Easter Island



In 1955 Thor Heyerdahl went on an archaeological expedition to Easter Island and East Polynesia. The expedition was self-financed but patronaged by King Olav V of Norway. Heyerdahl's archaeologists found that the famous *moai* stone heads were huge statues in fact buried in soil and quarry waste. Incised into one of these statues was a large papyrus boat with mast and sail. The expedition also discovered a previously unknown type of statue, which was similar in style to some statues, found in South America. The members of the expedition also visited secret family tombs where they found skeletal remains and small stone sculptures.

Túcume



Between 1988 and 1994 Thor Heyerdahl led the archaeological excavations in Tucume in Northern Peru. The area houses 26 pyramid-like adobe structures and a range of other ceremonial sites. Perhaps the most important find was a temple mound where the walls were adorned with sea going reed boats surrounded by bird men in high relief. Depictions of birdmen that are similar in style to the ones in Tucume are found on Easter Island.

Thor Heyerdahl

Sr. Kon-Tiki passed away quietly in his home in Italy the 18 of April 2002, at an age of 87. As one of the most famous Norwegians ever, he has accomplished many different things in his life, but his name will always be intimately tied to the Kon-Tiki voyage and the archaeological investigations on Easter Island (Rapa Nui) and East Polynesia.

He was born in the small town of Larvik on the 6th of October 1914. As a young boy he was interested in zoology and biology and had a dream to become an explorer and travel to exotic countries far away. After university studies in biology and geography at Oslo University as well as studies of anthropology in Bjarne Kroepelien's famous Polynesia library in 1933-36, he and his first wife, set out to live on Fatu Hiva in the Marquesas archipelago in 1937-38. This journey had a great influence on his life. Before reaching the Marquesas he was "adopted" by Chief Teriirō on Tahiti, who appropriately gave Thor the name *Te Rai ma te ata* (Reflection of the Sky). On Fatu Hiva the young couple lived like Polynesians and experienced both good and bad days. However, the important experience for Thor was that he saw that plant life, the winds and currents as well as traditional history could point to that the ancestors or forerunners of the Polynesians could have come from the East – South America.

Later he developed this theory in his book "*American Indians in the Pacific*". However, the scientific community did not accept his ideas and this is the reason why he decided to prove this theory in real life. On the 28th of April 1947 he, and his five crewmembers, set out from Callao in Peru on the Kon-Tiki balsa raft built in a traditional style. They drifted 4300 miles during 101 days and ended up on Raroia in the Tuamotus archipelago. The voyage was a success and Heyerdahl's book about the voyage became a bestseller and translated to at least 70 languages it has sold in millions of copies all around the world. Heyerdahl's film about the Kon-Tiki voyage was awarded an Oscar for best documentary in 1951.

Thor Heyerdahl has always been dedicated attempting to prove his theories on contacts of prehistoric societies with the aid of traditional boat types. In 1969 he built the reed ship RA after models of traditional boat types in Egypt. He and his international crew crossed the Atlantic Ocean in this vessel, but due to a mal-construction it dissolved just before reaching the Caribbean. Then - he set his mind to make another try. With RA II he set out from Safi in Marocco in 1970 and came ashore on Barbados 57 days later. In 1977 - Heyerdahl constructed still another reed ship. It was built in Iraq and named Tigris. He sailed with an international crew during 5 months in the Persian and Arabian Sea with the goal to end up in Egypt to prove that the great ancient civilizations in Mesopotamia, Indus Valley and Egypt had contact by sea. Actions of war in the area stopped the voyage and in protest Heyerdahl burnt his ship.

In addition to his maritime interests he has also sponsored archaeological research. With his investigations on The Galapagos in 1952-53 and Easter Island in 1955-56 and 1986-88, he and his archaeologists are pioneers in Pacific archaeology. In addition to the research in the Pacific region he has carried out research on The Maldives in 1983-84, Tucume Peru in 1989-94, Tenerife in 1991, 1999, 2000 and Azov in Russia during 2001. In addition he has sponsored research on pre-historic monuments on Sardinia and Sicily. Even during his last days he had far-reaching plans of an archaeological expedition to Samoa to excavate the largest ceremonial monument in the Pacific, Pulemelei on Savai'i.

With several honorary doctorates and other awards as well as an extensive production of books, articles and films in addition to his many expeditions and travels he has lived a very productive and full life. With his artistic and intellectual abilities he has for example created classical books as "*The Kon-Tiki expedition*" and "*Aku-Aku, The Secrets of Easter Island*", enjoyed by millions of readers all around the world. Furthermore, his scientific papers and books have inspired a whole generation of scientists dealing with the prehistory of the Pacific.

Heyerdahl lived his last years on Tenerife, Canary Island, where he took part in creating a Museum and center for research. The famous Kon-Tiki raft as well as RA II is housed at the Kon-Tiki Museum in Oslo. Tied to the Museum is an Institute for Pacific Archaeology and Cultural History.

Thor Heyerdahl was an extraordinary and complex person in many ways, both controversial and humble at the same time. He cared very much for the environment and reflected over the "big issues" in life as well as battling fiercely for his theories on diffusion and maritime contacts between the great civilizations of the past.

Now, when he has set out on his final journey he will be greatly missed, not just by family and friends but also by his many readers and admirers as well as different scientists, some whom he worked with and some whom he battled against.

Thor, *Te Rai ma te ata*

Maururu Nui

On his later years he continued to work actively, amongst others with [Donald Ryan](#). He also was a [board member](#) of the Green Cross international.