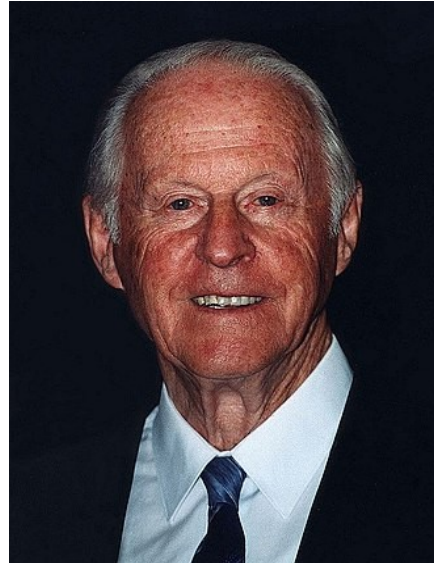
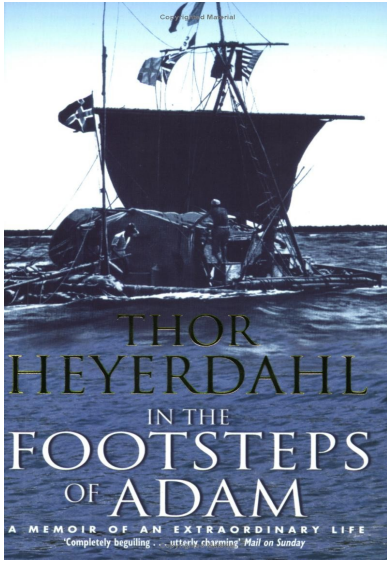


THOR HEYERDAHL

OCTOBER 1914 – APRIL 2002



Brief Insight into his Life:

Born in Larvik, Norway, he was educated as a Biologist in Oslo, but later changed to Anthropology. He organised and led a number of Archaeological expeditions and ocean crossings in aboriginal vessels.

Thor was married three times. The first was to Liv Coucheron-Torp in 1936, and they left the next day for Fatu-Hiva in the Pacific Marquesas Islands, where they lived for a year as "Adam & Eve". It was here that he first developed his theories about the possibilities of pre-Columbian contact between Polynesia and South America. Upon return they wrote a book "Hunt for Paradise" in 1938, which was only ever published in Norwegian. After serving in the Free Norwegian Services during WWII, and then making his famous Kon-Tiki voyage, they divorced in 1947.

His second marriage, in New Mexico to Yvonne Dedekam-Simonsen in 1949. The marriage lasted until 1969, when they divorced. Thor blamed the break up on his being away from home for much

of the time. He married a third time to Jacqueline Beer in 1991. and they lived on Tenerife. However, he died in Italy in 2002, aged 87, from a brain tumour, whilst visiting family there, and was given a state funeral by the Norwegian Government in Oslo Cathedral.



Kon-Tiki Expedition

In 1947 Heyerdahl and five fellow adventurers sailed from Peru to the Tuamotu Islands in French Polynesia in a balsa wood (and other native materials) raft, christened the Kon-Tiki. The expedition was inspired by old reports and drawings made by the Spanish Conquistadors of Inca rafts, and by native legends and archaeological evidence suggesting contact between South America and Polynesia. The *Kon-Tiki* smashed into the reef at Raroia in the Tuamotus on 7 August 1947 after a 101-day, 4,300-nautical-mile (5,000-mile or 8,000 km) journey across the Pacific Ocean. Heyerdahl had nearly drowned at least twice in childhood and did not take easily to water; he said later that there were times in each of his raft voyages when he feared for his life. The book he subsequently wrote has been translated into 70 languages.

Galapagos Expedition

In 1952/53, Heyerdahl took professional archaeologists to a group of islands no-one believed had been visited by any human beings before the arrival of Europeans. They found pot shards which have been identified as the remains of at least 131 different pre-Inca jars from Ecuador and Peru.

Easter Island Expedition

He led a Norwegian Expedition Archaeological to Easter Island. Highlights included experiments in the carving, transporting and erecting of *Moai* (the famous statues of the island). Based on native testimony and archaeological research he claimed the island had been originally colonised by “Hanau Sepe” (Long Ears) from South America and that the Polynesians, “Hanau Momoko” (Short Ears) only arrived in the mid-sixteenth century. Native tradition says there was an uprising by the Short Ears against the ruling Long Ears, which the former won. More recently, DNA analyses have shown that after 1680 only Polynesians lived on the island. Heyerdahl did not accept that Polynesians could sail into the prevailing winds and currents, and conjectured that they must have reached the islands by migrating on foot via the Bering Strait and down through the Americas to Peru, and then sailed west with winds and currents.



Boats Ra1 and Ra2

In 1969 and 1970, Heyerdahl built two boats from Papyrus and tried to cross the Atlantic from Morocco. On Ra1, of the crew of seven, only Thor and Norman Baker from the US had sailing and navigation experience. Their boat was based on drawings and models from Ancient Egypt and named after the Egyptian Sun God, Ra. After some week and 4000 miles Ra began taking on water (the stern should have been built higher to prevent this from happening). They were rescued by a private yacht when they had to abandon ship. They were still some hundred miles from the Caribbean Islands. Ra2 was constructed incorporating lessons from this earlier voyage and in 1970 made a successful crossing from Morocco to Barbados. Ra2 is now in the Kon-tiki Museum in Oslo.

The Reed Boat “Tigris”

Heyerdahl built yet another reed boat in 1977, *Tigris*, which was intended to demonstrate that trade and migration could have linked Mesopotamia with the Indus Valley civilization in what is now Pakistan and western India. Tigris was built in AL Qurnah in Iraq and sailed with an international crew through the Persian Gulf to Pakistan and then made its way into the Red Sea. The voyage also aimed to prove that co-operation was possible in a cramped space and under stress between people of different colour, nationality and faith. After about five months at sea and still remaining seaworthy, the *Tigris* was deliberately burnt in Djibouti on 3 April 1978 as a protest against the wars raging on every side in the Red Sea and Horn of Africa. The tiny but still neutral Republic of Djibouti was the only place they were allowed to land for reasons of security.

In the years that followed, Heyerdahl was often outspoken about international peace and the environment.

Legacy

Although much of his work was not accepted by the scientific community for many years, Heyerdahl nevertheless increased public interest in ancient history and anthropology. He also showed that long-distance ocean voyages were possible with ancient designs. As such, he was a major practitioner of experimental archaeology.

Paul Theroux, in his book *The Happy Isles of Oceania*, criticises Heyerdahl for trying to link the culture of Polynesian islands with the Peruvian culture. However, recent scientific investigation that compares the DNA of some of the Polynesian islands with natives from Peru suggests that there is some merit to Heyerdahl's ideas and that while Polynesia was colonised from Asia, some contact with South America also existed; several papers have in the last few years confirmed with genetic data some form of contacts with Easter Island. More recently, some researchers published research confirming a wider impact on genetic and cultural elements in Polynesia due to South American contacts.