

THOR HEYERDAHL 1914-2002

*Te moana nui é
Te pahi iti é
A hakaé tangata "Kon-Tiki" é*

[The sea is vast
The boat is small
Brave is the Kon-Tiki man]

Thor "Kon-Tiki" passed away quietly in his home in Italy on the 18th of April 2002, at the age of 87. As one of the most famous Norwegians ever, he 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 Rapa Nui and East Polynesia. He was awarded a state funeral in Oslo on the 26th of April 2002, but his final resting place is on the family estate at Colla Micheri in Italy.

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 young wife Liv set out to live on Fatu Hiva in the Marquesas archipelago in 1937-38. This journey had a great influence on the rest of his life. Before reaching the Marquesas he was "adopted" by Chief Teri'iro'o 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 so that the ancestors or forerunners of the Polynesians could have come from the East – South America.

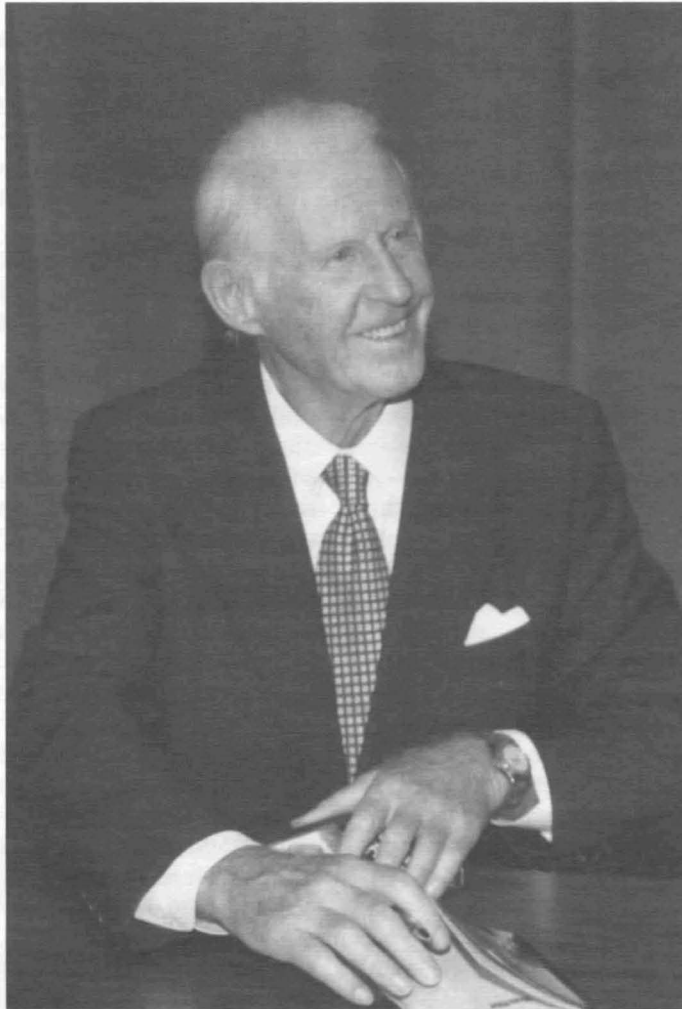
Later he developed this theory in his book "American Indians in the Pacific". The scientific community of the time did not accept his ideas and this is the reason why he decided to prove this theory in real life. On the 28th of April 1947, he and his five crew members set out from Callao in Peru on the Kon-Tiki balsa raft which they built in a traditional style. They drifted 4300 miles during 101 days and ended up on Rarua in the Tuamotus archipelago. The voyage was a success

and Heyerdahl's book about the voyage became a bestseller and was translated into at least 70 languages; it has sold in many millions of copies all around the world. Thor's film about the voyage was awarded an Oscar for best documentary in 1951.

Thor Heyerdahl has always been dedicated to prove his theories concerning contacts of prehistoric societies with the aid of traditional boat types. In 1968 he built the reed ship *RA* after models of traditional boat types in Egypt. The goal was to prove that the Old and the New World had prehistoric contact over the Atlantic Ocean. He and his international crew crossed the Atlantic Ocean in this vessel, but due to poor construction it disintegrated just before reaching the Caribbean. Then he set his mind to make another try. With *RA II* he set out from Safi in Morocco in 1969 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, the 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 Islands in 1952-53 and Easter Island in 1955-56 and in 1986-88, he and his archaeologists were pioneers in

Pacific archaeology. In addition to this he carried out research on the Maldives in 1983-84, Tucume, Peru in 1989-94, Tenerife in 1991, 1999 and 2000 and in Azov, Russia during 2001 as well as sponsoring research on 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.



Thor Heyerdahl in 1998
(courtesy of Pacific Lutheran University)

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 lived a very productive and full life. With his artistic and intellectual abilities he has, for example, created such classic books as *Kon-Tiki*, *Aku-Aku* *The Secrets of Easter Island*, which were enjoyed by millions of readers all around the world. Furthermore, his scientific papers and books have in various ways inspired a whole generation of scientists dealing with prehistory of the Pacific.

The Famous Kon-Tiki raft as well as *RA II* are housed at the Kon-Tiki Museum in Oslo which was started by Heyerdahl and Knut Haugland (one of the crew on Kon-Tiki) in 1950. Since 1986 an institute for Pacific Archaeology and Cultural History is tied to the Museum as well. Heyerdahl lived his last years on Tenerife, The Canary Islands, with his third wife Jacqueline, where he took part in creating a Museum and center for research. Heyerdahl lived also in Colla Micheri in Italy, where his life ended. He, and his second wife Yvonne, and children Annette (†), Marian, and Bettina owned and restored a village from the Roman era.

With his first wife Liv (†), he had two children, Thor Jr., and Bjørn of which the former is the current head of the board of the directors at the Kon-Tiki Museum, and the latter is taking care of the family farm in Italy producing olives and wine.

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 to prove his theories on diffusion and 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 many scholars.

Thor, *Te Rai ma te ata*
Maururu Nui

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FROM THE EDITORS

NEWS OF THOR HEYERDAHL'S DEATH saddened us all. He will be long remembered. It was through his early books, such as *Aku-Aku*, that many of us first became fascinated with Easter Island. We thank Helene Martinsson-Wallin and Paul Wallin of the Kon-Tiki Museum for providing an obituary for the *Journal* and to Don Ryan for the photograph.

ONE OF EASTER ISLAND'S "culture-bearers" has died. We are sad to report that Rafael Haoa (1925-2002) passed away in July of this year. Rafael was in the Armada de Chile for 36 years, beginning in 1946. Following his retirement, and for the next twenty years, Rafael worked with many scholars, anthropologists, and writers who studied the Rapanui culture, and was an associate professor of Rapanui language at the school on Easter Island. He worked with Ramón Campbell on *La Herencia Musical de Rapa Nui* and with also with Federico Felbermayer (*Historias y Leyendas de Isla de Pascua*). He leaves two surviving children, Ana Betty and Miriam Magdalena, and his widow, Ana Rapahango. His daughter, Ana Betty, is the director of the Biblioteca Rapanui at the Fonck Museum in Viña del Mar.

IN THIS ISSUE WE PRESENT a second portion of papers from the International Union of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences Symposium, held in Belgium last year. The first group of papers was published in *RNJ* (Vol. 16:1). Papers in this issue include "The *Marae* Temple Grounds in the Society Islands, French Polynesia: A Structural Study of Spatial Relations" by P. Wallin and R. Solsvik; and "Sea, Land, and Sky as Structuring Principles in Easter Island Prehistory" by H. Martinsson-Wallin.

PAUL TRACHTMAN'S essay in the last *RNJ* (Vol. 16:1) provided our readers with the opinions and thoughts of many Rapanui islanders. In this issue he presents more in-depth discussions with the island's artists and a photo essay of islanders and islander art. As an artist himself, Trachtman was embraced by the

artists of Rapa Nui who shared their thoughts and experiences with him.

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE we welcome Andreas Mieth, Hans-Rudolf Bork and Ingo Feeser of Ökologie-Zentrum, Universität Kiel. Their paper discusses land use on Poike peninsula and provides a fascinating analysis of the soil and what that can tell us about ancient agricultural practices and settlement of that understudied part of the island. It is probable that soil erosion rates were very high from the late 13th to the early 15th centuries. The people of Rapa Nui lost most of their very fertile soils in one century, and not only at Poike but also in the western slope of Rano Raraku. Their research project continues, and we hope to have more on their work in a future issue of the *Journal*.

FERREN MACINTYRE CONTRIBUTES another out-of-the-ordinary paper, "Simultaneous Settlement of Indo-Pacific Extremes?" MacIntyre, a professor of Oceanography, is our "in house" version of Stephen Jay Gould, providing us with thought-provoking essays such as his two-part study of the physical oceanography of El Niño (*RNJ* Vol. 15, Nos. 1-2).

WE ARE PLEASED TO INCLUDE an update on "things Rapanui" by David Stanley, the noted travel writer. Stanley was on the island recently, gathering material for his next edition of *South Pacific Handbook* and kindly shared his observations with us. Things are changing on the island, as Stanley notes, and not all of them are positive. There are two things that shock visitors who return to Rapa Nui after many years away: the proliferation of automobiles (including hordes of taxis) and the appearance of shacks (*paepae*) that have sprung up around the island, often disastrously near *ahu* and other sacred sites. The one located in front of Ahu Akivi has been an eyesore for years and totally ruins the ambience of the site. But now more islanders are claiming land and putting up *paepae*. Visitors come to glory in