

THE KON-TIKI EXPEDITION

Thor Heyerdahl



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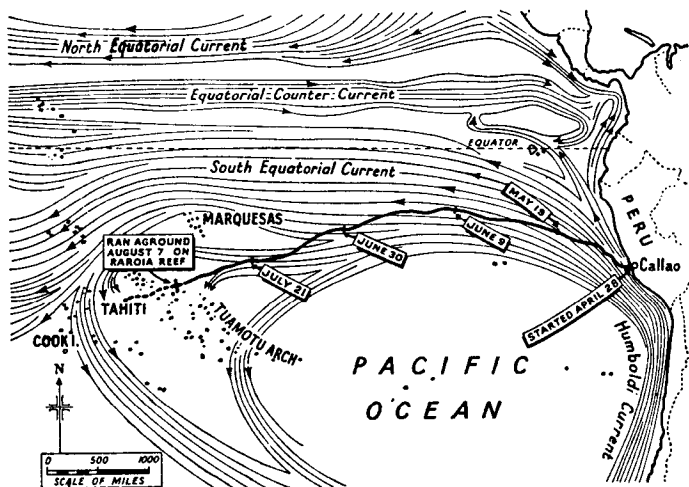
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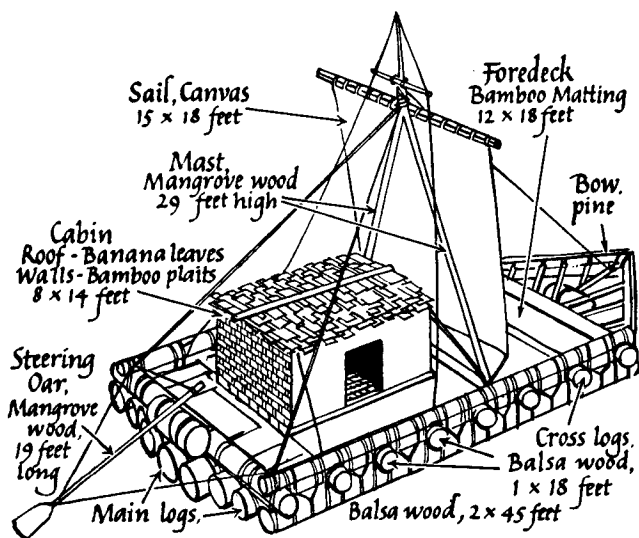
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The Pacific Ocean



The Raft

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Chapter 1

A theory

SOMETIMES you find yourself in a strange situation. You get into it gradually and in an ordinary way, but when you are in it you are astonished, and you ask yourself how it all happened.

If, for example, you go to sea on a wooden raft with a parrot and five companions, you will certainly wake up one morning on the sea and begin to think about it.

On one such morning I sat writing in a wet log-book :

"17th May. Norwegian Independence Day. Rough sea. Fair wind. I am cook to-day and found 7 flying fish on deck, and some other sea creatures . . ."

Here the pencil stopped, and I began to think how it all began.

If I turned left, I saw a great blue sea with noisy waves rolling away to the horizon. If I turned right, I saw the inside of a shadowy cabin in which a man with a beard was lying and reading Goethe.¹ His bare feet were fixed in the roof.

"Bengt," I said, pushing away the green parrot, which

¹ Famous German poet (1749-1832) /

wanted to stand on the log-book, "can you tell me why we are doing this?"

Bengt's book sank down under his beard.

"You know best yourself," he said. "It was your idea, but I think it's fine."

He moved his feet higher and went on reading Goethe. Outside the cabin three other men were working in the sun on the hot deck. They had brown skins and beards. Then Erik came creeping through the opening with his sextant and a lot of papers.

"98 degrees, 46 minutes west by 8 degrees, 2 minutes south—a good day's run!"

He took my pencil and drew a small circle on the chart which hung on the wall. This circle was the last of nineteen which stretched from the port of Callao on the coast of Peru. Herman, Knut and Torstein came eagerly in to see the new little circle that placed us forty sea miles nearer the South Sea islands than the last of the others.

"That means," said Herman proudly, "that we're 850 sea miles from the coast of Peru."

"And we have to go another 3,500 to reach the nearest islands," Knut added cautiously.

"And we're 15,000 feet above the bottom of the sea," said Torstein.

So now we all knew exactly where we were, and I could go on speculating why.

Perhaps the whole thing had begun the winter before in the office of a New York museum. Or perhaps it had already begun ten years earlier, on a little island in the Marquesas group in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Perhaps we should land on the same island now, unless the

north-east wind sent us farther south, in the direction of Tahiti and the Tuamotu group. I could remember the little island clearly, with its rough, rust-red mountains, the green jungle on their slopes, and the thin palm trees that waited along the shore. The island was called Fatuhiva, and there was no land between it and us now; yet it was thousands of sea miles away. I remembered the narrow Ouia valley where it opened out towards the sea. I remembered how we sat there on the lonely shore and looked out over this same endless sea, evening after evening. I was with my wife then, not among bearded men as now. We were collecting all kinds of living creatures, and other things left by a dead civilization.

I remember very well one particular evening. The civilized world seemed far away and unreal. We had lived on the island for nearly a year, the only white people there, in a hut which we had built for ourselves under the palm trees, and we ate what the tropical woods and the sea offered us.

We learnt much about the problems of the Pacific. In body and mind we often followed the first primitive men who had come to those islands from an unknown country, and who had ruled the islands until men of our own race came there.

On that particular evening we sat, as so often before, on the shore in the moonlight, with the sea in front of us. We were filled with the romance which surrounded us. We breathed the scent of the jungle and the salt sea, and heard the sound of the wind in the palm-tops. The great waves rolled in from the sea and rushed over the land until they were broken among the rocks. There was a roar among

the millions of stones, till all grew quiet again and the sea water drew back to gather strength for a new attack.

"It's strange," said my wife, "but there are never breakers like these on the other side of the island."

"No," I said. "But this is the windward side. There are always waves running in on this side."

We sat there and admired the sea, which always rolled in from eastward, eastward, eastward. It was the eternal east wind, the trade wind, which rolled the sea forward. Here the sea was stopped and broken by the rocks, while the east wind rose above the coast and woods and mountains, and continued to the west, from island to island, towards the sunset.

This had always happened, and the first men who reached these islands knew it. And we knew that 4,300 sea miles away lay the open coast of South America, and there was nothing but sea between.

We listened to an old man who sat, half-naked, before us and stared down into a little burnt-out fire.

"Tiki," said the old man quietly. "He was both god and chief. It was Tiki who brought my ancestors to these islands where we live now. Before that we lived in a big country beyond the sea."

The old man sat thinking. He remembered the ancient times, and he worshipped his ancestors and their deeds, back to the time of the gods. Old Tei Tetua was the only man left of the tribes on the east coast of Fatuhiva. He did not know how old he was, but his skin looked a hundred years old. He was one of the few men on these islands who still remembered and believed his father's and

grandfather's legendary stories of the great Polynesian chief and god, Tiki, son of the sun.

When we crept into bed that night, I remembered Tei Tetua's stories of Tiki, and the old home of the islanders over the sea. It all sounded like a voice from far-off times, which had something which it wanted to tell. I could not sleep. Suddenly I said to my wife:

"Have you noticed that the great stone figures of Tiki in the jungle are like the monoliths which are the remains of dead civilizations in South America?"

I felt sure that a roar of agreement came from the waves of the sea. And then they rolled back, and I slept.

Perhaps the whole thing began then. Certainly the events which brought the six of us and the parrot on to the raft began then.

When I came back from Fatuhiva, I began to study primitive peoples. The mysteries of the south seas attracted me strongly, and I wanted to find out who Tiki was.

Thousands of books and collections in museums in Europe and America offered plenty of material for use in the puzzle which I wanted to solve. But there has never been any agreement about the origin of these island people, and no one knows why this type is only found in the lonely islands of the Pacific.

The first Europeans who crossed the great Pacific were surprised to find these isolated islands. Where had their people come from? They spoke a language which no other people knew, and the newcomers found cultivated fields and villages with temples and huts on all the islands. On

some islands they found old pyramids, good roads and stone statues as high as a house in Europe with four floors. But no one knew where the people had come from.

There have been many suggestions. Malaya, India, China, Japan, Arabia, Egypt, the Caucasus, Atlantis,¹ even Germany and Norway, have been suggested as the homeland of the Polynesians. But no answer has ever been decisive.

Some people noticed that the monoliths found on Easter Island were like those in South America. Perhaps there had once been a bridge of land over the sea, and perhaps this had sunk. But it has been proved from a study of the insects on the South Sea islands that in all the history of mankind these islands have never been joined with each other or with any other mass of land.

Therefore the original Polynesian race must have sailed to the islands, and this must have happened not many centuries ago; for they have not developed different languages in the different islands. It is thousands of sea miles from Hawaii to New Zealand, and from Samoa to Easter Island; yet all these tribes speak the Polynesian language. Writing was almost unknown on the islands, but they had schools where they learnt history and religion. They worshipped their dead chiefs, back to Tiki's time, and they said that Tiki himself was the son of the sun.

Men on almost every island could tell the names of all the island's chiefs back to the time when it was first peopled. Modern investigators have collected these names

¹ An island which is said to have existed in the ocean west of what is now called Gibraltar.

from the different islands and they have found that they agree together surprisingly; even the numbers of generations agree. By taking a Polynesian generation to be twenty-five years, it has been found that the South Sea islands were not peopled before about A.D. 500. Later some new men with their new chiefs reached the islands about A.D. 1100.

Where did these immigrants come from? Although they were intelligent, they were a Stone Age people; they brought stone tools with them. And in A.D. 500 or A.D. 1100 the only Stone Age people still in the world were in America. There even the highest Indian civilizations knew nothing of the use of iron.

These Indian civilizations were the Polynesians' nearest relations to the east. To westward there lived only the black-skinned people of Australia and Melanesia, and beyond them were Indonesia and Asia, where the Stone Age lay very far back in time.

Thus my attention in the search was turned away from the Old World towards America. The nearest coast to the east of the islands was Peru, which was full of indications if one looked for them. Here an unknown people had once built one of the world's strangest civilizations, and had then disappeared. They left behind them enormous stone statues and pyramids built in steps like those on Tahiti and Samoa. With stone axes they cut great blocks, moved them for miles, and set them up on end or placed them on top of one another to form gateways and walls, exactly as we find them on some of the islands of the Pacific.

When the Spaniards first came to Peru, the Inca Indians

told them that the enormous monuments in the country were put up by a race of white gods who had lived there before the Incas themselves. These gods were described as wise, peaceful instructors who had come from the north long before, and had taught the Incas architecture and agriculture. They had white skins and long beards, and were taller than the Incas. Finally they left Peru as suddenly as they had come, and they disappeared for ever across the Pacific to the west.

When the Europeans came to the Pacific islands they were astonished to find that many of the natives had beards and almost white skins. Sometimes the hair was reddish, the eyes blue-grey. But the other Polynesians had golden-brown skins and black hair. The red-haired men called themselves *urukehu* and said that they were directly descended from the first chiefs of the islands, who were white gods. Some of the people of Easter Island said that their ancestors came across the sea from a mountainous land in the east.

As I followed these signs, I found in Peru surprising indications which made me go on with greater interest to find the place of origin of the Polynesian god, Tiki. And I found what I wanted. I was reading the Inca stories of the sun-king Virakocha, who was the head of the vanished white people in Peru. I read:

"The original name of the sun-god Virakocha was Kon-Tiki, which means Sun-Tiki or Fire-Tiki. Kon-Tiki was the high priest and sun-king of the white men who left the enormous ruins on the shore of Lake Titicaca. These men were attacked and killed in a battle on an island in Lake Titicaca, but Kon-Tiki himself and his closest friends

escaped and went to the Pacific coast; from there they finally disappeared over the sea to the west."

I was now sure that the chief-god Sun-Tiki of Peru was the same as the chief-god Tiki, son of the sun, whom the inhabitants of the Pacific islands claimed as the original founder of their race. But all over Polynesia I found signs that Kon-Tiki's peaceful race had not been able to hold the islands alone for long. Other men with a new civilization had come to the islands and mixed their blood with that of Kon-Tiki's race. This was the second Stone Age people that came to Polynesia about A.D. 1100.

But when I was looking for more signs, the war broke out and I joined the army. Peace came, and one day my new theory was complete. I had to go to America to tell others about it.

Chapter 2

An expedition is born

I SAT with an old man in a dark office in a big museum in New York. We were surrounded by things of the past, and by books, some of which the old man had written.

"No!" he said. "Never! You're wrong."

"But you haven't read my arguments yet," I said, pointing to the manuscript on the table.

"Arguments!" he said. "You can't solve racial problems by arguments."

"Why not?"

"The work of science is to find things out, not to prove this or that. It is quite true that South America was the home of the most curious civilizations of the past. But we know that none of the people of South America reached the islands of the Pacific. They couldn't get there. They had no boats!"

"They had rafts," I objected. "Balsa-wood rafts."

The old man smiled. "Well," he said, "you can try a trip from Peru to the Pacific islands on a balsa-wood raft."

I could find nothing to say. It was getting late. We both stood up. The old scientist took me to the door and said that if I wanted help, I had only to come to him. But

I must specialize on Polynesia or America, and not mix them up.

"You've forgotten this," he said, giving me my manuscript. I looked at the title: *Polynesia and America: a Study of Prehistoric Relations*. I put it under my arm and went out.

That evening I went to see an old friend, a thin little man who gave me some supper.

"No one will read my manuscript," I said.

"People think that you've got just a passing idea," he said. "And these specialists always work on one subject. It's not usual for one person to try to put together what is found in different subjects. What did your friend at the museum say to-day?"

"He wasn't interested either. He said that the Indians had only open rafts, and they couldn't have discovered the Pacific islands."

"Yes. That seems a practical objection to your theory."

"I'm so sure that the Indians crossed the Pacific on their rafts," I said, "that I'm willing to build a raft of that kind myself and cross the sea, just to prove that it's possible."

"You're mad!"

He thought that it was a joke, but I did not smile. I understood now that no one would accept my theory because of the enormous stretch of sea between Peru and Polynesia.

I had not much money at that time, and I went to stay at the Norwegian Sailors' Home where the prices were low. I had a small room, and I had my food with all the seamen. They were of different types, but they all talked