

MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER
The Thor Heyerdahl Archives
(Norway)

Ref N° 2010-27

PART A – ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

1 SUMMARY

“Borders, I have never seen them, but I know they exist in some people’s minds”.

The statement is Thor Heyerdahl’s and provides a good characterisation of him as a person and humanist, and his work as an adventurer, writer and communicator. Few people challenged and crossed as many boundaries of geography, time and culture as he did.

World citizen, explorer, writer and scientist, Thor Heyerdahl’s legacy is an archive of unusual richness that encompasses photographs, films, manuscripts and documents of historical, artistic and cultural value. The archive is administered by the Kon-Tiki Museum and the National Library of Norway in Oslo.

His photographic collection depicts his expeditions and work from as early as 1937 up to his death in 2002. All of his expeditions were filmed and the archive also includes films in their final edited state and as raw footage. Both the photographic and film materials document cultures and traditions that have undergone major changes due to the influence of modern society.

The collection of documents encompasses diaries, original book and article manuscripts, private letters, expedition plans, articles and newspaper clippings. The archive provides a unique insight into the life and work of one of the greatest communicators and renowned explorers of the 20th century, who at the same time was a source of inspiration for generations of people and scientists throughout the world. Far more than 100 million copies of his 20 books have been sold and they have been translated into more than 70 languages. The film of the Kon-Tiki Expedition experienced a similar success and was rewarded with an Oscar.

Through his expeditions and research Heyerdahl was interested in how different cultures had influenced each other throughout history. His adventurous ocean voyages on the balsa raft Kon-Tiki across the Pacific Ocean, the reed boats Ra and Ra II across the Atlantic Ocean, and Tigris across the Indian Ocean, showed that it was *possible* to cross from one continent to another using vessels designed with ancient technology.

2 DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR

2.1 Name

The Kon-Tiki Museum, Oslo, Norway.

The National Library, Norway

2.2 Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated

Thor Heyerdahl was one of the founders of the Kon-Tiki Museum and donated most of an extensive collection of his own work to the museum. The film material is owned by the Heyerdahl family and deposited at the National Library of Norway.

2.3 Contact persons

Maja Bauge, Director of the Kon-Tiki Museum
 Reidar Solsvik, Curator of the Kon-Tiki Museum
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3 *IDENTITY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE*

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

THE THOR HEYERDAHL ARCHIVES

3.1.1 Archives at the Kon-Tiki Museum (KTM):

KTM Thor Heyerdahl Document Collection
 KTM Thor Heyerdahl Photography Collection
 KTM Thor Heyerdahl Book and Book Editions Collection
 KTM Newspaper Clippings Collection

KTM Film and Audio Collections

3.1.2 Thor Heyerdahl's film archive at the National Library:

Collection of expedition films

Collection of original raw footage from the expeditions

3.2 Description

Description and inventory

The three archival collections described below make up an almost complete archive of Thor Heyerdahl's life and work including the public coverage of his expeditions and the public reception of his books and films.

Archives at the Kon-Tiki Museum:

The Kon-Tiki Museum holds the main part of Thor Heyerdahl's original book manuscripts, papers, correspondence, research notes, newspaper and magazine clippings, and his private library collection. These collections also contain Heyerdahl's entire photographic research collection and most of the pictures taken during his expeditions.

Archives of expedition films in the National Library:

This collection contains Thor Heyerdahl's earliest and most famous expedition films and a huge amount of original, unused footage filmed on these expeditions. The documentary of the Kon-Tiki Expedition won the Oscar for best documentary in 1951, and is definitely the most famous documentary of any sea voyage and experiment with prehistoric maritime means of transport in history. The collection also contains the documentary of *The Galapagos Expedition* (1953); the film *Aku-Aku. Mystery of Easter Island* (1960); *The Ra Expeditions* (1972), nominated for Oscar, and *The Tigris Expedition* (1979).

Assessment of physical state and condition

Archives at the Kon-Tiki Museum:

The photographic collection showed some early signs of deterioration, but was in 2007 moved to a cold storage room providing fixed temperature and humidity. Both the document and library collection are in an excellent state, but are being re-catalogued. Plans exist for digitising the entire photo archive to enhance the preservation of the originals by avoiding using the originals. The most valuable books and documents will be digitised and thus become more widely available to the general public.

Film archive at the National Library:

The film archive showed some signs of poor preservation as it was transferred to the National Library in 2007. The National Film Institute, which is a part of the National Library, has plans for the long-term preservation and digitization of the Norwegian film heritage including this collection.

4. JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION/ ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

4.1 Is authenticity established?

The authenticity of the archival material is established by the fact that Thor Heyerdahl himself produced and collected the documents along with his associates at the Kon-Tiki Museum during his lifetime. Further material was collected by employees of the museum and professionally examined and described. The film material housed at the National Library was collected by the Kon-Tiki Museum directly from the film producers themselves.

4.2 Is world significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability established?

World significance is found in the fact that these archives reflect the life and work of the most famous explorer, adventurer and writer of non-fiction in the 20th century. These archives principally contain original letters, photographs, and manuscripts and cannot be replaced. The archive contains Thor Heyerdahl's own manuscripts and films, which have inspired generations of explorers, scientists, and the general public. The most important of these are the manuscripts and film of the Kon-Tiki Expedition.

Heyerdahl's maritime expeditions and his archaeological projects gained worldwide interest. The archaeological projects document the cultural development of island or coastal communities. However, the documentation of the projects themselves resulted in unique photo and film material being collected from places that soon after would face modernisation and globalisation processes. The communities on Easter Island and Rapa Iti in the Pacific Ocean and the "Marsh Arab" culture in Iraq are prime examples of peoples and cultures that have since changed, making the pictures and films documenting their transitional period even more important, both for the local communities as well as the modern world that imposed these changes upon them.

In particular the Norwegian Archaeological Expedition to Easter Island and the East Pacific and the resulting book *Aku-Aku. The Secrets of Easter Island* (1958) and the film by the same name (1960) had an important role in the modernization of Easter Island society. The expedition helped spark the indigenous population's interest in their own cultural heritage. The expedition forever changed the face of the island through its excavations and the numerous research expeditions that it inspired. The immensely popular book *Aku-Aku. The Secrets of Easter Island* (1958) framed the modern world's interest in Easter Island or Rapa Nui as it is known today and created a steady stream of tourists willing to travel to this isolated island in the East Pacific. Today tourism is the main industry on Easter Island. The documentation of an island culture on the brink of modernization that is found on the photographs, film, and raw footage from the expedition is a unique historical document as the expedition itself set in motion processes that forever changed this island, its landscape and cultural heritage.

To a lesser extent the same goes for the documentation of the Norwegian Archaeological Expedition to Easter Island and the East Pacific from the island of Rapa Iti in French Polynesia and Thor Heyerdahl's travels to the Marsh Arab culture in Iraq prior to his Tigris expedition in 1978. The uniqueness of the documentation of the largely changed culture of the Marsh Arabs is the focus on their knowledge of the *berdi*-reed and their tradition and technology in making floating islands and boats of this material.

Although *not part of* the nomination, the Kon-Tiki Museum also holds the Kon-Tiki raft and the reed ship Ra II. There is thus a direct link between the archives which documents the organisation of these expeditions and the research behind them which tells this story to a world-wide audience; and the museum displays which have shown the original vessels to more than 15 million visitors.

4.3 Is one or more of the criteria of (a) time (b) place (c) people (d) subject and theme (e) form and style satisfied?

(d) Subject and themes

Thor Heyerdahl was born in 1914 in Norway. He was originally a student of zoology, but while studying wildlife in the Marquesas Islands he became more interested in the culture history of the region. This led him to organize the expedition on the balsa raft Kon-Tiki from Peru to Polynesia in 1947 to prove that aboriginal South Americans had the maritime technology to sail on the open ocean. The story of the voyage was related in Heyerdahl's book *Kon-Tiki* (1950) and in a documentary film of the same name.

He began experimenting with the seaworthiness of reed ships in 1969, and in 1970 with an international crew, he sailed the reed ship Ra II from Safi, Morocco, to Barbados. The voyages were described by Heyerdahl in *The Ra Expeditions* (1971) and were the subject of a documentary film, which was nominated for an Oscar. The voyage proved that a papyrus vessel was *capable* of crossing the Atlantic in pre-Columbian times.

Thor Heyerdahl was one of the post-World War II period's great communicators with respect to culture and the past. Many people have called him the 'last great explorer' because he travelled in and reported from the past. How did these ideas arise and develop? How have they been communicated to an entire world? This especially applies to the history behind the publication and sales of Heyerdahl's large public successes, the stories of the Kon-Tiki, Aku-Aku and Ra expeditions. The archive documents the story of the dissemination of information and the impact of the Kon-Tiki Expedition, especially the book and the film.

1. The Kon-Tiki: Expedition, book, film and cultural phenomenon:

Thor Heyerdahl's Kon-Tiki Expedition, although first and foremost a scientific experiment, was carried out on a wave of optimism after the end of WWII. The Kon-Tiki story excited the whole world, creating a publishing and cinematic phenomenon which still captivates people's imagination today.

Thor Heyerdahl and his companions crossed the Pacific from Peru to Polynesia in 1947, on a balsawood raft. The voyage took 101 days and was a great success. The purpose was to argue for a theory of population movement. But so what? Why did people – not to say the whole world – care?

Academia and the general public were puzzled and fascinated in equal measures. The question of how Polynesia became populated was no more intriguing than other pre-historic or more recent phenomenon. However, Heyerdahl's unique way of bringing the practical experiment to the historical sciences intrigued the media and the public

and forced scientists to discuss his theories. The question of how Polynesia was settled was debated by professors and amateurs alike, in seminars, in newspapers and on the radio.

The book *Kon-Tiki. Across the Pacific by raft* (1950) was by many considered a literary masterpiece. It has been translated into some 70 languages and has sold some 100 million copies, becoming the most sold copyrighted non-fiction book ever.

The documentary of the expedition (1951) made cinematic history by making a box-office success out of technological simple black-and-white film shoots in a time when more and more films were made in colour. The film is the most famous documentary of any sea voyage or experiment with prehistoric maritime means of transport in history. It also won Oscar for best documentary in 1951.

The story became part of people's imagination to the extent that Kon-Tiki became synonymous with adventure. After World War II most heroes were identified with military endeavours. With Kon-Tiki a refreshing new breed of heroism emerged. Heroes who challenged the forces of nature, sought knowledge from primitive man, and disproved long-standing dogmas of academia. The general public throughout the world could identify themselves with the man considered to be an amateur who challenged the international scientific community. Heyerdahl's journeys and work, though still disputed, continue to intrigue and fascinate.

Heyerdahl was an ardent believer in friendship and cooperation across national borders. An important aspect of his research was to listen to and appreciate the oral history of indigenous people, rather than studying such lore as mythology. A man of great integrity, he will be remembered as an original thinker who was always exploring new ideas and seeking ways to test and improve those ideas.

Another more subtle impact of Thor Heyerdahl's writing, cinematic productions and fame is how his work – together with many others - from the 1930s onwards changed the public image of native peoples amongst Europeans and Americans. Prior to this period the general public in the Western World interpreted native peoples, with the exception of Asia, as peoples without history in a strict European definition of this term. Heyerdahl's skills as a communicator of culture and history and his impact on popular culture through *Kon-Tiki. Across the Pacific by Raft* (1950) and *Aku-Aku. The Secrets of Easter Island* (1958) and again in *The Ra Expeditions* (1970) where he portrayed the superiority of ancient practical knowledge of maritime technology, traditions, and the elements to the modern theoretical knowledge of archaeologists and scientists. This raised awareness in the general public about how other cultures had a history and practical knowledge overlooked or forgotten by modern man.

2. The field of Maritime Experimental Archaeology

Maritime experimental archaeology is the study of ancient and historical watercraft and maritime knowledge through practical experiments. By building replicas of ancient boats and sailing them we may learn something about their technical capabilities or the practical skills of those who built and used them. The Kon-Tiki Expedition was not the first replica to be built or sailed. However, it was the first maritime experimental archaeological expedition conceived as an experiment to test the feasibility of a theory of population movement.

The discipline of maritime experimental archaeology developed from the 1960s onwards and is today a recognized academic discipline in its own right. Thor Heyerdahl had a tremendous impact on this field through his Kon-Tiki Expedition, his two Ra Expeditions, and later his Tigris expedition. The archives connected to the Kon-Tiki, Ra and Tigris expeditions reflects the development of this academic discipline as they were a source of inspiration and a model to work from.

3. Pollution of the world's oceans

Heyerdahl's research and his belief in the importance of the world's oceans did not stop with the significance it had for ancient peoples. During the first Ra voyage in 1969, the crew discovered vast belts of lumps-of-oil floating in the sea on each side of the Atlantic. They announced this discovery in a letter to the United Nations as a message from the past to the future and were asked by the UN Secretary-General to make daily pollution observations during the Ra II voyage. The reports were one of several elements forming the background for the international community's extensive efforts to improve the state of the world's oceans after a symposium organized by the UN in 1972.

During the 1970s, Thor Heyerdahl was one of the most significant and outspoken people in creating awareness of the vital global role of the sea, contributing to making people understand that the world's oceans are a single interconnected system.

4.4 Are there issues of rarity, integrity, threat and management that relate to this nomination?

Rarity: An archive containing many original documents that describe in detail the life work of one of the 20th century's best known researchers and explorers is totally unique.

Integrity: The close partnership between the Kon-Tiki Museum and Thor Heyerdahl ensured that the archive is as complete as possible and contains relevant material.

Threat: The archive material is handled, stored and divided up in accordance with physical and safety related requirements. Over time photos and films will deteriorate from a quality point of view no matter how they are stored. However, this has been taken into consideration to ensure they are stored in the best manner possible, while at the same time digital copies are being made.

5 LEGAL INFORMATION

5.1. Owner of the documentary heritage

The Kon-Tiki Museum
Bygdøyenesveien 36
0286 Oslo, Norway

The Heyerdahl Family

c/o Thor Heyerdahl jr
 P.b. 1019 Skurva
 2605 Lillehammer, Norway

5.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage

The Kon-Tiki Museum
 Bygdøynesveien 36
 0286 Oslo, Norway

The National Library
 PO Box 2674 Solli
 0203 Oslo, Norway

5.3 Legal status:

(a) Category of ownership

The Kon-Tiki Museum holds full ownership of Thor Heyerdahl's photographic collection and documents collection.

The Heyerdahl Family holds full ownership of the film material located at the National Library of Norway.

(b) Accessibility

The libraries and archives at the Kon-Tiki Museum are open for research and study to the wider public.

The films at the National Library of Norway will be accessible after digitization.

(c) Copyright status

There is no copyright connected with the archives but agreements with the owners are required before use.

(d) Responsible administration

The Kon-Tiki Museum and the National Library of Norway are responsible for security and custody.

(e) Other factors

6 MANAGEMENT PLAN

6.1 Is there a management plan in existence for this documentary heritage?

YES

Management plan: A detailed management plan has been laid following the conservation and archival standards of international and national institutions. A vision of digitizing the entire collection is conceived by both the Kon-Tiki Museum and the National Library of Norway. This measure will ensure that over time the archives will become more accessible to

researchers, scholars, students, authors, filmmakers, and other interested parties. A catalogue will be produced that covers the entire archive of material, independent of location. The catalogue will be available online.

7 *CONSULTATION*

7.1 Provide details of consultation about this nomination with (a) the owner of the heritage (b) the custodian (c) your national or regional *Memory of the World* committee

- (a) Thor Heyerdahl's family's representative, Thor Heyerdahl jnr., is the chairman of the Kon-Tiki Museum and understands and agrees with the nomination.
- (b) The Kon-Tiki Museum and the National Library of Norway are nomination partners.
- (c) The Kon-Tiki Museum and the National Library of Norway have had a dialogue regarding the nomination with the secretariat of the Norwegian National Commission for UNESCO.

PART B – SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION

8 *ASSESSMENT OF RISK*

8.1 Detail the nature and scope of threats to this documentary heritage

In so far as all the archive material has not been digitized, there is a risk that it will be impossible to avoid using the originals. It will be impossible to reconstruct the archive if the originals are destroyed before digital copies are made of the archive materials.

9 *ASSESSMENT OF PRESERVATION*

9.1 Detail the preservation context of the documentary heritage

The preservation plan with priorities is presented under 6.1.