



The Kon Tiki crew, from left to right: Knut M. Haugland, Herman Watzinger, Torstein Raaby, Erik Hesselberg, Bengt Danielsson, and Thor Heyerdahl.

way through the enemy's ring of steel that he personally considered his most crucial moment. Not because of his own danger, but because he had put others in danger. This was masterfully reconstructed in Arne Skouen's film *Omringet* ("Surrounded").

It was at this precise moment when the world was down for the count, and our civilisation was licking its wounds, struggling with the trauma left by war, that a breath of fresh air chose to brighten those bleak days. Six brave chaps, with Knut as one of them, sailed across the world's largest ocean on a raft right into a South Sea paradise. The Kon-Tiki expedition became the realisation of a war weary world's dream, an escape from the ruins and painful memories. The book and documentary about the expedition held the entire world spellbound. A sea-borne expedition has probably never before, or since, fascinated quite as many people. Thus it is probably no exaggeration to claim that Knut again left his mark in history with the Kon-Tiki expedition.

The late Thor Heyerdahl would also expect to Knut to be remembered as his closest friend and colleague. While Thor saw no point in preserving the Kon-Tiki raft, Knut was aware that it could act as a source of inspiration and adventure for all those who could not embark upon such an adventurous expedition themselves. And if there were enough of these and the income from tickets was sufficient, one could build a museum and raise funds to continue research into the Pacific region, and thus strengthen the scientific grounds for the Kon-Tiki expedition. Knut thus built up the Kon-Tiki Museum to become one of Norway best visited museums, which attracts up to a quarter of a million visitors every year. The museum that Knut Haugland organized became for many years the centre of Thor Heyerdahl's scientific expeditions, the most known is the expeditions to Rapa Nui in 1955-56 and 1986-88 and the excavations in Tucume, Peru from

1988-1992. The museum also became an independent, foundation with its own research department which has provided grants to researchers from many countries within the fields of anthropology and maritime experimental archaeology. Knut also persuaded Thor to donate his private library and document- and picture-archives to be the core of an excellent library, archives and collections at the museum. Today, the Kon-Tiki Museum continues to play an important role in Pacific Ocean research, on the other side of the globe!

The fact that Knut simultaneously managed to establish the Norwegian Resistance Museum in Akershus Fortress in Oslo is alone worthy of an entire chapter. Our war history was thus documented for prosperity in the hope that those who would follow would learn from what happened and thus avoid it happening again. Once confronted with the question why a professional soldier would spend most of his life organizing two museums, Knut turned silent for a moment, before he answered: "It was my way of contributing to peace and understanding". This statement holds the highest standards and aspirations for what role a museum can play in society.

More does not need to be said in a short eulogy such as this to justify Knut Haugland's honourable place in history. However, you can be just as certain that much more will be said.

## REVIEWS

### Questioning Collapse: Human resilience, ecological vulnerability and the aftermath of empire

Edited by P. A. McAnany and N. Yoffee  
New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010; 374 pp.

*Reviewed by John Flenley and Paul Bahn*

We like the title. Questioning is a good idea. That is the way that understanding and knowledge and science progress. One has to have debate. It has been said that the good debater is one who can improve his opponent's own argument, but still defeat it. Unfortunately in the present book not all measure up to this standard. The volume is a collection of articles by specialists on the various examples of collapse claimed by Jared Diamond (2005) in his book *Collapse – how human societies choose to fail or succeed*. Diamond says that 'collapse' involves reduction of population and/or political/economic/social complexity over a considerable area for an extended time. By choosing, Diamond means that societies may or may not respond constructively to external factors such as climatic change or to self-induced factors such as ecological degradation.

The editors, in an introductory chapter, make their own position clear: humans will always behave rationally and thus will exhibit resilience, bouncing back from disaster. Therefore, they argue, collapse does not exist, and Diamond is merely a geographical determinist, a position long regarded

as extreme. The idea that humans will always behave rationally was novel to us.

The part of the book of most interest to readers of this journal is Chapter Two by Terry L Hunt and Carl P Lipo. Their title “Ecological Catastrophe, Collapse and the Myth of ‘Ecocide’ on Rapa Nui (Easter Island)” makes their position clear from the start. According to them, the deforestation of the island was caused by rats eating palm nuts, the people adjusted with little difficulty to living without trees, and then visiting Europeans introduced disease which caused a population crash and this continued from 1722 (first contact) until the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Several pages are given up to explaining the date of arrival of people on Rapa Nui as being around AD1250. This seems irrelevant to whether or not there was collapse, except that the more rapidly the forest decline occurred after then, the more appropriate it seems to consider it as ecocide. Therefore a late arrival of people supports the idea of collapse.

The decline of the forest and the elimination of palms is described as resulting entirely from the eating of palm nuts by human-introduced rats. Several pages are given over to describe a similar occurrence leading to the elimination of the palm *Pritchardia sp.* On O‘ahu Island, Hawai‘i. It is surprising that there is no mention of the elimination of the palm *Howea forsteriana* from Lord Howe Island by (European) rats (N. Wace, pers. comm.).

The argument for the rat hypothesis is based on the fact that 100% of the palm nuts found in the authors’ excavation near a dwelling site were rat-gnawed. Probably they had not seen the recent paper by Mieth and Bork (2010), who took material from many sites and found only 10% of the nuts were rat-gnawed. One is reminded of the saying attributed to 19<sup>th</sup> century farmers sowing seed: “One for the mouse, one for the crow, one to rot and one to grow.” Ten percent gnawing is not enough to eliminate a species. It now seems clear that *Rattus exulans* is a species closely commensal with humans. A similar pattern has emerged in New Zealand: sites of human habitation yield rat-gnawed nuts of three tree species. A site only 2 km away in the forest gave 0% gnawing (Wilmshurst and Higham, 2004; Sutton et al., 2008).

Actually, of course, the rat argument is irrelevant: either way, humans destroyed the forest. Unless of course it was volcanic activity or climate change, neither of which is considered by the authors.

Surely the important point is whether there was a population crash before AD1722, the first recorded external contact. Let’s take Hunt and Lipo’s own data. They suggest the maximum population was 3-5,000 people, and was reached by AD1350-1370. Thereafter it fluctuated around these values. They also say that deforestation was complete by AD1650. So the real question is whether there was a population decline between AD1650 and the first-known contact by Roggeveen in AD1722. Roggeveen estimated the population as ‘thousands’. That could mean 3-5,000, i.e. no change since deforestation. Or it could mean 2,000 (suggesting a 50% drop

in numbers), or it could mean 8,000 (suggesting an increase). It is impossible to say whether there was collapse or not, using these figures. Was there evidence of cultural decline in the period AD1650-1722? Statue-building stopped around then, although some *ahu* date to later, so a few may have been completed after 1722. It is difficult to see how the shortage of timber for cooking fires (Orliac, 2000) could not have affected people’s lives significantly. It is also hard to envisage how only 3-5,000 people were needed to deforest the entire island, when only 2,000 people of Tahiti were needed to deforest only 10% of their island at contact (Anderson, 2009). But the islands have differing ecology, so maybe it is possible.

The authors do put forward some interesting figures for the number of habitations on the island, dated by obsidian hydration dating. There appears to have been a small decline in the period 1500-1600 and a larger one after 1750. The meaning of this is enigmatic.

The one cultural change which – amazingly – is not even mentioned by Hunt and Lipo is the rise of the bird-man ceremony at ‘Orongo. ‘Orongo seems to bridge the crucial period 1650-1722, but rose to prominence later and continued into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It could represent ‘resilience’ – so why is it not mentioned?

Clearly the jury must remain out on the ‘ecocide’ of Rapa Nui until further research has been done. A conclusion such as this would have done credit to the title of the book. As it is, the chapter on Easter Island calls into question the entire volume. One wonders whether the other authors are equally biased. Only specialists on those areas can comment.

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*See page 68 for further thoughts by Flenley and Bahn concerning the position taken by Hunt and Lipo.*