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– ARTICLE –

The Head-hunters of the North and the Polynesian Shadow: Thor Heyerdahl's skull-collecting act on Fatu Hiva, Marquesas Islands, 1937

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ABSTRACT:

This paper addresses Thor Heyerdahl's skull-collecting act on Fatu Hiva in 1937 by approaching it from its historical context. Particular attention is paid to craniology as a scientific method, its purpose and the strong belief in its reliability during this period. It is also argued that the use of unauthorised collecting of human remains in contemporary travelogues, as elements of literary suspense and vehicles for the protagonist's bravery, shows that the practice was largely socially accepted. Skull-collecting was viewed by the collector, from the perspective of a conservative world view, as a heroic act of protection and preservation.

Keywords: Thor Heyerdahl, human remains collecting, craniology, Marquesas Islands

INTRODUCTION

'One day […] we decided to set out to collect some of the old human crania we had seen tucked away among the overgrown ruins' (Heyerdahl 1974a: 118–119). With this sentence Thor Heyerdahl opens the story of his collecting action on Fatu Hiva in 1937 (see Heyerdahl 1938: 76–77, 1974a: 118–133). Heyerdahl then goes on to tell how he and his wife Liv, while passing through a small village on their way to the burial-ground, picked up an old copra sack to keep their 'loot' in (1974a: 119). But when passing through the village they also picked up an unwanted companion: '[we] noted to our annoyance that one of the men started to follow us' (1974a: 119). Their follower, simply referred to as 'the shadow',[1] accompanied the Heyerdahls to clarify their intentions – they were allowed to see but not to remove. The Heyerdahls hence needed a cunning stratagem to complete the task at hand:

> det var Ikke muligt at nappe en Bensplint for den brunes vagtsomme Blik. […] Da fik vi en lys Ide og lagde Planer op paa Norsk. En Mand er et Menneske paa Fatuhiva, mens en Kvinde er en Kvinde. (Heyerdahl 1942: 69)
>
> [The brown one's watchful eye made it impossible to take as much as single bone-fragment […] but then we had a bright idea and started scheming in Norwegian. A man is a human being on Fatu Hiva, but a woman is just a woman.][2]

They tricked 'the shadow', and while his back was turned Liv filled the copra sack with human crania.

From an ethical standpoint the story presents a rather dubious behaviour. The Heyerdahls undoubtedly stole the skulls. They were hardly alone in this conduct. Similar collecting practices can be seen in many archaeological and ethnographical expeditions of the period; for instance, Eric Mjöberg's expeditions to the Kimberley and Queensland in the 1910s (Mjöberg, E. 1915, 1918; Hallgren 2003, 2010a-b), Harry Shapiro's expeditions in East Polynesia (Anderson 2012), and the American-Australian expedition to Arnhem Land in 1948 (May 2010; McCarthy & Setzler 1960; Thomas & Neale [eds.] 2011).

For the latter, historian Martin Thomas reflects on the conflict one has to face when approaching the subject of human remains collecting: 'I deliberately left the archaeologist nameless […] and thereby detach him from his social fabric and identifiers, as he did the men, women and children who became 'specimens' in his collections' (2014: 141). Thomas of course eventually rejects the idea of dehumanising the archaeologist Frank Setzler. The history of science has very little to gain from acts of vengeance. This is one point I want to stress in this paper, that even the most appalling practices of the past need to be read in their historical context. The collecting of human remains was viewed very differently in the time and minds of Heyerdahl, Setzler and their compatriots than it is today, a fact that will not change whatever we might think of it from present perspectives.

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Figure 1. Liv Heyerdahl and 'the shadow' on Fatu Hiva 1937. Photo taken by Thor Heyerdahl. Courtesy of The Kon-Tiki Museum, Oslo.

In this paper I thus want to discuss this collecting act of Heyerdahl's in its historical context, by approaching human remains collecting and craniology as a scientific method and discussing its reason, value and practice. I also wish to address it from the perspective of heroism in literary narrative and discuss the act's motivation in the light of conservative ideas of preservation and protection in the mind of the perpetrator.

HEYERDAHL'S MARQUESAS EXPEDITION

It is hard to pinpoint a single reason for Heyerdahl's 1937 expedition to the Marquesas. The expedition had an official purpose as fieldwork for an upcoming PhD project in zoology at Oslo University. But in publications after the expedition, Heyerdahl himself claimed that the purpose had been to 'escape civilisation' (see further Andersson 2007, 2010: 17, 2011; Heyerdahl, 1938, 1974a Jacoby 1965: 55–78; Kvam 2005: 130–210; Skolmen 2000, 2010: 235–237). The two purposes, however, do not necessarily have to be in conflict with each other. In a newspaper article[3] published a few weeks before Heyerdahl's departure, he states that the reason for the expedition was twofold; both to collect zoological specimens[4] and to show that modern Europeans were able to live like primitive people. Heyerdahl's focus on the romanticised escape from civilisation in his subsequent popular account and later biographical work is not particularly surprising; as the same pattern can be claimed for *Aku-Aku* (1957) as an account of the Easter Island expedition (see Heyerdahl & Ferdon [eds.] 1961, 1965). Heyerdahl's popular books are not focused on science but on adventure, and his account of the Fatu Hiva expedition does not deviate from this pattern.

There is nothing to indicate that human remains collecting, studies of Polynesian migration patterns or physical anthropology were planned features of the expedition. In his pre-expedition presentation, held at the Zoology Department of Oslo University in November 1936 (Heyerdahl n. d. b.), Heyerdahl only addressed racial questions in general terms. He made no mention of any other origin than Polynesian for the inhabitants of the Marquesas Islands. He also connected the many ruins found on the islands to depopulation as a result of European contact. However, at the time it was common practice for zoological and botanical expeditions also to bring back ethnographical or skeletal material (see Ljungström 2004: 77; see also Latour 1987: 232–252). Heyerdahl's claim that he had been asked both by the University of Oslo and the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin to bring back skeletal material (1974a: 119) is thus not particularly unexpected or surprising.[5]

In his published travelogue of 1938, however, Heyerdahl starts to speak about a mysterious race that had inhabited the Marquesas Islands before the Polynesians arrived in the 13th century. This mysterious race was supposed to have built all of the megalithic architecture of the Marquesas Islands (1938: 69–70). Heyerdahl first mentions this theory in a letter sent from Fatu Hiva (October 1937) to Bjarne Kroepelien. In the letter, Heyerdahl speaks of a visit to Puamau Valley and refers to the many ruins he

saw with the question 'who built them?' (letter published in Skolmen 2010: 258–264). Heyerdahl's attempt at contacting Oslo University's physical anthropology professor Kristian Schreiner to obtain permission from the French government to collect human remains[6] adds to this picture. It seems likely that Heyerdahl's encounter with the rich prehistory of the Marquesas Islands, as well as the meetings with the former Norwegian beachcomber Henry Lie and the Marquesan elder Tei Tetua during the expedition (1974a, 1991; see also Andersson 2011), sent Heyerdahl out on his path to discover 'the mysterious race' that he thought had settled the Marquesas Islands and Easter Island (1938: 69–70).

THE RACE WALL – THE IMPORTANCE OF CRANIA

Eastern Polynesia was and still is regarded as the last part of the world settled by human beings. The vast distance between the small archipelagos and the closest settled continents gave the process of settlement a mystical aspect. Who were these people? And where had they come from? To answer these questions, which drew attention far beyond scientific circles, craniology was seen as a key method. Since it was thought that the shape of the cranium was a static racial characteristic, this would suggest that if the 'Polynesian race' could be defined then so could its origin. For Heyerdahl and many others a crucial feature of this discussion was the so-called 'rasemuren' [The race wall] (Heyerdahl n. d. c.). This *race wall* was drawn between Island Melanesia and Polynesia, separating the darker Melanesians, Papuans and Australians from the somewhat fairer-skinned Polynesians. Since the *race wall* disallowed the most logical migration path – the Polynesians could not have come from Melanesia–other solutions had to be sought for. The most common suggestion, generally presented using both racial characteristics and studies of material culture, was that the Polynesians had migrated from Asia, with no or limited interaction with Melanesian and Papuan populations (for instance Buck 1938; Dixon 1920; Duff 1970; Heine-Geldern 1928, 1932; Skinner 1943). Some archaeologists, like Kenneth Emory, also thought that South American cultural traits could be found in Polynesia (see Emory 1933: 48, 1942; Ferdon 1961). Heyerdahl is known as the most famous advocate of the South America theory. However, Heyerdahl's theories are much more complex than simply claiming a South American origin for the settlers of Polynesia, an extensive matter which is not the focus of this paper.

Whichever of these theories one favoured, racial studies would have been a cornerstone of the argumentation. Material culture and languages could be adapted and changed; biology, on the other hand, could not. However, it was not really that simple. Since it was generally believed that Polynesian populations of the early 20th century had recently 'intermixed' with alien 'race' elements, the reliability of data recovered from present populations could be questioned. If such data were to be regarded as reliable they had to come from 'pure race' Polynesians, which were considered as hard to come by (see for instance Wood-Jones 1930: 60–61). However, since it was believed that this intermixture had occurred only after European contact, archaeological sites could provide an 'untainted' data-set. Skull-collecting thus became an integral part of the quest for Polynesian origins.

CRANIOLOGY AS A SCIENTIFIC METHOD: THE CEPHALIC INDEX

Even though craniology included a number of different measurements, the one most commonly used and believed to be of the greatest value for racial characterisation was the cephalic index.

The cephalic index was invented in the mid-19th century by Anders Retzius at Uppsala University. The method documents the shape of the crania by calculating the relationship between the longest and the widest parts of the head. Depending on the ratio between length and width, the shape of the skull could then be divided into *dolichocephalic* (long-headed) or *brachycephalic* (short-headed). The method in itself can hardly be described as controversial (although for the substantial debate over standardisation of measurements in the 19th century, see for instance Garson 1885; Zimmerman 2001: 86–106); however, the interpretation of the results was another story. Retzius proposed, drawing on various contemporary mentality studies, that the shape of the skull bore a close relation to the intellectual and moral capacity of the individual (Kyllingstad 2012: 47). This was later combined with ideas of racial typologies, which meant for Retzius that psychological behaviour could be attributed to racial affiliation (see Rowley-Conwy 2007: 60–80). Since racial characteristics were believed to be static, the cephalic index became significant for the emerging fields of ethnology and archaeology. It provided a method that could be applied to both living and prehistoric populations, enabling comparisons between the two to detect migratory movements in the past. Thus the method came to have a significant impact, and racial studies gained an instrument that went beyond the superficialities of skin colour (see Kyllingstad 2004, 2014; Svanberg 2012, 2015; see also Ljungström 2004).

The merging of the cephalic index, early archaeology and Darwinism meant that racial divisions of mankind could also be attached to different stages of development. This evolutionary perspective implied that some 'races' were considered to have remained in an earlier stage of cultural development. They were seen as still in the 'Stone Age', and therefore were considered to occupy a lower position on the evolutionary ladder. Science had thus provided a tool for the legitimisation of colonial guardianship and denial of human rights for populations that met the criteria for 'Stone Age cultures' (see further Kyllingstad 2012; Rowley-Conwy 2007: 60–80; see also Douglas 2008: 65–66;

May 2010: 19–23).

The cephalic index as a method and particularly its interpretation were already criticised in the late 19th century (see Howes 2013: 178–182; Ljungström 2004: 314–345). A severe blow to the method's reliability was Franz Boas's study *Changes in the Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants*, published in 1912. Boas had compiled the results of a massive study of United States immigrants, and could demonstrate that variations in the shape of the crania occurred between parents and children (Boas 1912; see also Fforde 2004: 36; Sparks & Jantz 2003). This not only meant that the idea of static racial characteristics was questioned, but that it was falsified. It might seem that Boas's study was completely devastating for use of the cephalic index; however, even Boas did not claim as much:

> The opinion […] has been expressed or implied, that our observations destroy the whole value of anthropometry, in particular the study of the cephalic index has been shown to have no importance. It seems to me, on the contrary, that our investigations, like many other previous ones, have merely demonstrated that results of great value can be obtained by anthropometrical studies, and that the anthropometric method is a most important means of elucidating the early history of mankind and the effect of social and geographical environment upon man. (Boas 1912: 562).

A decade after Boas's study was published, the Harvard professor R. B. Dixon wrote in his book *The Racial History of Man*:

> Out of the very large number of measurements and ratios which have been tried and advocated at one time or another, a relatively small number have come to be accepted as undoubtedly of real significance in the determination and classification of races. […] The most widely used, and commonly regarded as the most important single criterion of this sort is the cranial or cephalic index (1923: 5).

For Heyerdahl, measuring crania using the cephalic index had been an integral part of his academic training at the Department of Zoology at the University of Oslo in the mid-1930s:

> My academic training was at the faculties of zoology and geography of the University of Oslo. But man is

Figure 2. Swedish anthropologist Gustaf Bergfors measuring crania at the Field Museum in Chicago, 1920s. Courtesy of the Umeå University Research Archive, Umeå.

> the youngest species in the animal kingdom to any zoologist, and physical anthropology was part of our courses. My tutor in zoology was Professor Kristine Bonnevie, who taught us more about human crania and blood types than about animal life in the wilderness. (Heyerdahl 2014: 59).

In the 1930s measurement of the cephalic index was still considered as a significant and reliable scientific method. The important thing to remember here is that the belief in and use of the method during this period does not automatically relate to racism. There is a need to distinguish physical anthropology or racial studies for the physical characterisation of human beings from the use of physical anthropology as a method to define the mental capacity of the individual through his or her racial affiliation. The separation between the two is, however, not always very clear, as can be illustrated by Earnest Hooton's statements on the use of race as a condition for psychological behavioural characterisation:

> The reviewer [Hooton] cherishes no ideal of racial equality. He considers it wholly possible that there may be psychological correlates of the physical combinations whereby races are distinguished. He would welcome any scientific demonstration of a relationship between the objective physical criteria of race and psychological states or mental abilities. Up to the present time not one scrap of scientific evidence has been presented to indicate the intellectual superiority of the Nordic race over the Alpine race or over the Ainu race or over any other race (1929: 165).

In this period, race defined through 'physical criteria' such as the cephalic index was, as Hooton writes, 'objective', while the association between physical race and mental abilities was considered 'subjective', not scientifically proven. This is also important to bear in mind for Heyerdahl's education in the subject. Heyerdahl studied under Bonnevie and Kristian and Alette Schreiner, who all could be said to share Hooton's views. This separates them from scholars who regarded the relationship between mental abilities and physical characteristics as an objective criterion, and used these ideas predominately for political purposes, such as Herman Lundborg, Jon-Alfred Mjøen or Hans Günther (for a more detailed account of the historical context and complexity of the physical anthropology scene in Norway at the time, see Kyllingstad 2004, 2014).

CRANIOLOGY AS FIELD PRACTICE

The actual field practice of craniology at this time can be divided into the documentation of living individuals and the documentation of deceased individuals. For studies carried out in the Marquesas and in Polynesia in general, it was common to recompense the individual studied with a photograph or a glass of wine (see Anderson 2012: 239; Handy, W.C. 1965: 54–57). However, this did not mean that the studies were undertaken under an informed agreement between the researcher and his or her object of study. Handy, for instance, mentions the problematic situation of taking measurements of individuals who saw the touching of one's head as *tapu* (1965: 54–57), and Anderson mentions an incident where a man refused to be measured 'like another pig' (see Anderson 2012: 239).

There were also contemporary objections to the practices of collecting human remains for scientific purposes. For instance, it was against the law to collect human remains from burial grounds both in Australia in the 1910s (see Mjöberg, L. 2006: 8–9) and in the Marquesas Islands in the 1930s (see Andersson 2011)[7]. MacDonald (2010) describes how highly questionable methods in the collection of human bodies for anatomical studies led to full-scale riots in Edinburgh in the early 1800s (MacDonald 2010; see also Fforde 2004: 64–84). However, it is important to point out that protests like these were not directed towards the collecting of archaeological material. It was more a question of concern for the living, the recently deceased and Christians. The fact that attitudes were different when it came to archaeological material and 'primitive cultures' can be exemplified by Mjöberg's 'uncensored' descriptions of collecting human remains during his expeditions in Australia in the 1910s:

> Ryktet hade länge förtalt, att en neger låge begraven i ett träd omkring tjugufem mil uppåt floden. Jag brann av nyfikenhet att med egna ögon få skåda en av dessa underliga gravar […] Jag drog min slidkniv och lossade benen från varandra. De hängde ännu segt fast vid varandra. Lukten var sannerligen allt annat än behaglig. Men det hela var ju en kortvarig operation. (Mjöberg, E., 1915: 271–276).
>
> [I had for a long time heard a rumour. It was said that a Negro was buried in a tree, no more than 150 miles up the river. I was overtaken by curiosity to be able to see one of these peculiar burials with my own eyes […] I pulled out my knife and dismantled the bones. They still stuck together. The smell was anything but pleasant. But after all it was a short operation.]

Mjöberg did not try to cover up the dubiousness of his behaviour; he even referred to himself as 'a grave robber' (1915: 280), and he was – like Heyerdahl – very well aware that the collecting of human remains was outlawed. Yet this seems to have been of little importance. Mjöberg's accounts, in all their grim and gory details, were published by Alber Bonniers förlag, one of Sweden's leading and most respected publishing houses at the time, and were aimed at the general public (Hallgren 2010a: 236). In the reception of the monograph there was no criticism of the questionable methods used for collecting human remains

or of the fact that it was illegal in Australia; instead, Mjöberg was portrayed as a heroic figure, and his decapitation of not yet decomposed corpses was depicted as a significant contribution to science (see further Mjöberg, L. 2006: 65–76). As this example illustrates, the controversial nature of the act from a present-day perspective cannot be said to exist in contemporary reception: times have changed. That Heyerdahl proudly presented his collecting act on Fatu Hiva in his 1938 book and again in the new version of 1974, but not in the third reworked version in 1991, also illustrates how attitudes towards this behaviour changed over time. This can also be seen when it comes to human remains collecting in general in the Marquesas group, where the act of skull-collecting was established already with the first exploration voyages (see Govor 2010; Ferdon 1993), but became particularly frequent from the 1880s up until the mid-20th century. The Bishop Museum's extensive Bayard Dominick Expedition and expeditions led by Harry Shapiro in the 1920s and 1930s all collected large amounts of human remains and carried out racial data collection among the living populations (see Anderson 2012; Gregory 1921; Handy, E. 1923; Handy, W. 1965; Linton 1923, 1925; Shapiro 1929, 1930; Sullivan 1921, 1922, 1923). During Shapiro's expeditions, human remains were collected with methods similar to those employed by Heyerdahl (Anderson 2012).

Shapiro would later initiate a more extensive archaeological project in the Marquesas Islands, when he and particularly his student Robert Suggs excavated on Nuku Hiva in the mid-1950s (Shapiro & Suggs 1959; Suggs 1961, 1962). The first indications of a change in attitudes towards the collection of human remains in the Marquesas can be traced to this period. Even if the researchers still very much wanted the material and had confidence not only in its scientific value but also in its relation to racial ideas, they were now more reluctant to resort to any means possible to get their hands on it. This change of heart can be seen already in the early 1950s, when anthropologist Bengt Danielsson visited the Islands. Danielsson also collected his own sack of crania at a burial ground, but in contrast to his predecessors he did not attempt to hide it, and instead went down to the village with the intention of trying to persuade the villagers that the skulls would be better off in a museum (1956: 63). The end of Danielsson's story, where he reburies the skulls, after finding out that the local population to trick looters had replaced the original human remains of their ancestors with bones from Chinese traders (1956: 63), reveals something about the extent of human remains collecting in the Marquesas Islands at that time. Schreiner's attempt to secure permission for Heyerdahl to collect human remains in the Marquesas was also a direct response to the information he had received from Heyerdahl on how human remains were burned and thrown into the sea to avoid looters.[8]

THE HEROIC NARRATIVE – CRANIA COLLECTING AS LITERATURE

In his reading of the collecting practices described by Mjöberg, Claes Hallgren points to the use of human remains collecting as a way for the writer to present the protagonist (himself) as a fearless heroic figure; someone who, without blinking an eye, could work and live among 'savages' and even, when necessary, cut the flesh from a decomposing body (Hallgren 2003). A similar example is Sten Bergman's travelogues from Papua New Guinea (1951: 9, 1959: 61–74). Bergman, for instance, responds to a photograph he is shown:

> Jag trodde knappt mina ögon, när jag fick se dessa bilder. På somliga såg man hundratals storväxta, nästan kolsvarta män. De var alla helt nakna och såg otroligt vilda ut. (1959: 61)
>
> [I couldn't believe my eyes. In some of the pictures there were hundreds of heavy built, black men. They were all nude and looked incredibly wild.]

Bergman, of course, immediately had to go to the remote area populated by these 'wild men', but just like Mjöberg, not before he had made sure his gun was loaded (1959: 63). The protagonist is attracted to the danger, the situations are used to propel the narrative and present the protagonist (the author) as a brave and fearless hero. And as Hallgren and Lotta Mjöberg's work shows, these stories were highly appreciated in their own time (Hallgren 2003, 2010a-b; Mjöberg, L. 2006: 65–76; see also Kvam 2005: 213–225 for the reception of Heyerdahl's travelogue).

Heyerdahl's story follows a similar pattern, even though the details are somewhat differently presented. The bravery and heroism of Heyerdahl's alter ego does not come from his fearless gun waving, but from his cunning, his cleverness, which allows him to outsmart 'the savage'; it is the intellect rather than the muscle (rifle) that is the protagonist's main weapon. This does not just refer to 'the heist', the looting of the crania, but also to the chain of events that follows. The Heyerdahls have to sit through a dinner in the local village, which is described as a heroic feat in its own right, constantly fearing that the sack of crania would attract attention (1938: 76–80). They then hide their loot under the bed and to elaborate the bravery of handling and hiding this material further, the sack of crania then becomes the key prop in a ghost story (1938: 80).

The way Heyerdahl's story is constructed has a striking parallel and possible inspiration in F.W. Christian's account of skull-collecting in the Marquesas Islands. In Christian's story, he fills his sack with skulls from a big banyan tree, when the 'hermit' living next to it is not watching (1910: 169–171). Just like Heyerdahl, he then attracts curious eyes in the village:

> *'He á te mea i oto no te kaka?'* 'What's in that bag?' To which I turned, and once for all gave the pithy reply, *'Ua pi te kaka i te eita, i te eita, piau te eita'* 'The bag is full of weeds, weeds, stinking weeds.' Loud bursts of laughter greeted this unexpected sally, and I continued my walk down to the beach in peace. (1910: 171)

Christian also hides his ghostly load under the bed (1910: 171). And just like the others do, he uses the story to present the bravery and cleverness of the protagonist, his superiority to 'the savage'. This way of presenting the reader with the amusing daredevil antics of the explorer reveals that there was an extensive social acceptance of this type of behaviour. The ethical concerns that these actions present us with from a present perspective were not on the minds of the author and readers of accounts such as Christian's or Heyerdahl's.

WHITE RHINOS – SKULL-COLLECTING AS PROTECTION

In the early 20th century there was a widespread assumption that Pacific Island communities were about to become extinct. This is perhaps most vividly illustrated by the title of a 1919 story in *National Geographic Magazine* called *A Vanishing People of the South Seas: The Tragic Fate of the Marquesan Cannibals, Noted for Their Warlike Courage and Physical Beauty*. This belief was founded on recent discoveries of how European colonialism and diseases had impacted Pacific Island communities during the 19th century. Population estimates for the Marquesas Islands indicated that perhaps as much as 99% of the population had vanished during the course of the 19th century (this image has been prevalent, but is becoming more nuanced in recent research: compare Bellwood 1972: 47; Conte & Maric 2007; Molle & Conte 2015). The situation was particularly grim around the mid-1930s when the island of Ua Huka, for instance, reached its recorded population low (Molle & Conte 2015: 272). This was an important aspect for Heyerdahl, and is stressed in his 1936 pre-expedition presentation (Heyerdahl n. d. b.). His outlook for the 'future of the Marquesan race' was also bleak; after his return he writes, 'The race seems to have been sentenced to death' (Heyerdahl 1940: 545). Thus the period's obsession with collecting human remains and making measurements of human heads should also be seen as an attempt to preserve whatever little was left of the dying 'race', or at least of what Heyerdahl and his peers believed was 'the pure race'. These collecting acts can therefore be perceived almost in the same way as present attempts at preserving endangered animals like the white rhinoceros (for a more extensive discussion on the concept of 'salvage anthropology': see Buschman 2009; Penny 2002; Samson 1998; Steinmetz 2004).

This view of rescue and protection lies at the heart of the collectors' intellectual attempts to explain and justify the act. Eric Mjöberg, for instance, asserted the necessity of his behaviour through a rather paradoxical combination of appreciative support and condescending vilification. He was a politically active supporter of the Aboriginal cause (rights to control land and live 'traditional' lives): he even went as far as supporting the beheading of missionaries, whom he considered to be responsible for the cultural degeneration of the Australian Aboriginals (1918: 353–458). But at the same time he expresses a very evident patronising social Darwinist perspective, where 'the black' is portrayed as an inferior 'Stone Age man', a child positioned on the lowest level of the evolutionary ladder (1915: 282). However, this paradox is all in line with a conservative world-view, where it is the responsibility of the strong to protect the weak. In Mjöberg's case this meant that the 'stronger race' had a responsibility to protect the 'weaker endangered race'.

Harry Shapiro, who in contrast to Mjöberg was an outspoken anti-racist (see Hooton 1936; see also Anderson 2012: 251–252), also justified his collecting in a very similar way. In his own view, he stole the skulls to rescue them, to preserve them for science and not let them slowly decay for sentimental reasons (see Anderson 2012: 239). That the Marquesans did not agree with Shapiro was attributed to them being weighed down by superstition and unable to see things through the rationality of science.

The same pattern of thought is evident for Heyerdahl. The vindication of his actions drew on the value of the collected material. He wrote: 'Some would have to be saved for professional study rather than left to disintegrate for sentimental reasons' (1974a: 120). He believed that the Marquesans were unable to see and understand what was best for them. The material needed to be saved from decay and for this all methods were allowed. Heyerdahl also pointed out that none of the contemporary population had any close relatives buried in the burial ground; their recent ancestors rested next to the Christian church in consecrated ground (1974a: 120). In his opinion the traditional burial ground had therefore moved from the active present to the passive past; it was no longer a question for religious or emotional concerns but a question for science. Like Shapiro, he justified his actions with the concept of rescuing not just the material in itself, but the entire possibility of historical studies, and in this vein rescuing Marquesan history for the benefit of the Marquesans. The collector looked upon his actions as a necessary evil to be carried out to save the historical record for the future, something that in his own mind became a heroic act in the name of science and in the broader sense in the name of mankind.

EPILOGUE

The point made in this paper is the need to approach practices like unauthorised human remains collecting from their own time and mindset. This is not a self-evident task. When Heyerdahl, for instance, writes in a let-

ter to Kroepelien that he had to hide his collected skulls because of the 'thieving nature of the Polynesians' (letter published in Skolmen 2010: 258–264), the lack of self-awareness makes it hard not to condemn, not to judge the perpetrator. A judgemental approach is, however, neither particularly progressive nor enlightening. In this paper I have thus tried to approach Heyerdahl's collecting act on Fatu Hiva from its scientific background, from its narrative function in his travelogue, and by considering the collector's motivations in committing this act.

I have argued that in the 1920s and 30s there was a strong belief in the methodological reliability of craniology. Physical 'race' was seen as a reality and a key aspect for the study of Polynesian migration patterns. Crania retrieved from archaeological sites were considered to be unaffected by modern interactions and therefore highly sought after.

The use of skull-collecting in travelogues and the reception of these books show that this practice was largely socially accepted. Tales of human remains collection were used to give credibility to the narrative, to assert the necessity of the adventure. The late 19th century Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen stated concerning the scientific aims of his expeditions: there had to be a purpose for the adventure, otherwise it would seem hollow and pointless, an act of stupidity rather than bravery (Frängsmyr 1984).

I have also argued that the collectors justified their actions through a conservative world-view, where they saw their acts as the responsibility of the strong to protect the weak. Human remains collecting was believed to be a way to help save the last of a dying breed, a protective and preserving effort.

As a final remark, perhaps with a hint of poetical justice, Heyerdahl never managed to get his stolen skulls out of Fatu Hiva.[9] They are still there, hidden away in a crevice.

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Endnotes

1. Heyerdahl never refers to the Marquesan follower/guide by name, he is just called 'Den brune' [the brown one] in the Norwegian original of 1938 and its Danish translation of 1942. However, he becomes just 'the shadow' and similar terms in the 1970s' versions of the book (1974a-b, 1976).
2. All translations in this paper are free translations by the author. The translations have been focused on content and little or no attention has been given to transferring the authors' stylistic or artistic intentions.
3. Anon. Ungt norsk ektepar vil leve de innfødtes liv på Marquesas-øiene. *Tidens tegn* 15/12/1936. Kon-Tiki Museum Archive.
4. Records held by the Kon-Tiki Museum and the University of Oslo shows that a significant amount of effort was expended in the collection of zoological samples during the expedition (Heyerdahl n. d. a.)
5. Note that only the first one can with certainty be confirmed by archival material at present.
6. Schreiner letter to the Dean of Oslo University, 14/10/1937
7. See also Schreiner letter to the Dean of Oslo University, 14/10/1937 and Thor Heyerdahl letter to Schreiner, 4/3/1939
8. Schreiner letter to the Dean of Oslo University 14/10/1937, Heyerdahl letter to Schreiner 4/3/1939
9. This is made clear by a letter from Heyerdahl to Schreiner (4/3/1939).

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Les Chasseurs de Crânes Nordiques et l'Ombre Polynésienne: la collecte de crânes de Thor Heyerdahl sur Fatu Hiva, Marquises, 1937.

RÉSUMÉ :

Cet article examine l'acte de collecte de crânes humains réalisé par Thor Heyerdahl sur Fatu Hiva en 1937 en abordant le sujet sous l'angle de son contexte historique. Une attention particulière est accordée à la craniologie en tant que méthode scientifique, le but de celle-ci et la forte conviction en sa fiabilité existant à cette période. Il est également avancé que l'intégration dans les récits de voyage contemporains d'actes de collecte non autorisee de restes humains, utilisés en tant qu'éléments de suspense littéraire et illustration de la bravoure du protagoniste, montre que la pratique était largement acceptée socialement. La collection de crânes était vue par le collectionneur, en fonction d'une vision conservatrice du monde, comme un acte héroïque de protection et de préservation.