

The Azerbaijan Connection

Challenging Euro-Centric Theories of Migration

by **Dr. Thor Heyerdahl**

Other articles related to Thor Heyerdahl:

- (1) Thor Heyerdahl in Azerbaijan: [KON-TIKI Man](#) by Betty Blair (AI 3:1, Spring 1995)
- (2) [Azerbaijan's Primal Music Norwegians Find 'The Land We Come From'](#) by Opheim (AI 5.4, Winter 1997)
- (3) [Thor Heyerdahl in Baku](#) (AI 7:3, Autumn 1999)
- (4) [Scandinavian Ancestry: Tracing Roots to Azerbaijan](#) - Thor Heyerdahl (AI 8.2, Summer 2000)
- (5) [Quote: Earlier Civilizations - More Advanced](#) - Thor Heyerdahl (AI 8.3, Autumn 2000)
- (6) [The Kish Church - Digging Up History](#) - An Interview with J. Bjornar Storfjell (AI 8.4, Winter 2000)
- (7) [Adventurer's Death Touches Russia's Soul](#) - Constantine Pleshakov (AI 10.2, Summer 2002)
- (8) [Reflections on Life](#) - Thor Heyerdahl (AI 10.2, Summer 2002)
- (9) [First Encounters in the Soviet Union](#) - Thor Heyerdahl (AI 10.2, Summer 2002)
- (10) [Thor Heyerdahl's Final Projects](#) - Bjornar Storfjell (AI 10.2, Summer 2002)
- (11) [Voices of the Ancients: Rare Caucasus Albanian Text](#) - Dr. Zaza Alexidze (AI 10.2, Summer 2002)
- (12) [Heyerdahl Burns "Tigris" Reed Ship to Protest War](#) - Letter to UN - Bjornar Storfjell, Blair (AI 11.1, Winter 2003)

In late November 1994, Dr. Thor Heyerdahl visited Azerbaijan where, among other things, he wanted another chance to see the boat petroglyphs of the ancient caves of Gobustan not far from Baku.

Here, in the pages of Azerbaijan International, Heyerdahl makes public for the first time his "growing suspicion" that Azerbaijanis may be ancestors of the Scandinavians including his own native countrymen in Norway.



In the global research that I've been involved with for many years, Azerbaijan is beginning to play a rather pivotal role. My growing suspicion is that what today is left as the little Republic of Azerbaijan around the capital Baku is only vestiges of what was once a large and dynamic nation bordering on an inland sea but transmitting merchandise and even colonists to remote outposts in both Asia and Europe.

For a long time, I've been puzzled by the fact that three great civilizations surrounding the Arabian peninsula appeared in about 3,000 B.C. as ready-developed, organized dynasties at the same astonishingly high level and all three were remarkably alike. The definite impression is that related priest-kings at that time came from elsewhere with their respective entourages, and imposed their dynasties on areas formerly occupied by more primitive or, at least, culturally far less advanced, tribes.

Boat Petroglyphs

But where could they have come from? Is there a "zero hour for civilized man"? I've been convinced for quite some time that the clues to this mystery, no doubt, lie in the prehistoric boat petroglyphs which are found on widely scattered continental shores and islands all over the world and even near dried-out waterways deep inside the Sahara Desert. Petroglyphs and rock paintings of watercraft represent the earliest known illustrations of human architecture and even predate pictures of dwellings or temples. I've seen such sketches from below the equator in Polynesia to above the Arctic Circle in Northern Norway. Everywhere they testify to the fact that boats were of extreme importance to early man as they provided

security and transportation millennia before there were roads through the wilderness.

Our lack of knowledge about our own past is appalling. In the course of two million years of human activity, ice has come and gone, and land has emerged and submerged. Forest humus, desert sand, river silt and volcanic eruptions have hidden from view large portions of the former surface of the earth. The sea level has altered; 70% of our planet is now below water, and underwater archaeology has barely begun in coastal areas. We are accustomed to finding sunken ships with old amphora and other cargo beneath the sea, but speculation as to the discovery of other human vestiges on the bottom of the ocean still remains a subject for science fiction writers.

Identical Petroglyphs in Norway and Azerbaijan

It may not be pure coincidence that the ship petroglyphs that the early Azeri depicted while navigating on the Caspian Sea and up the Russian rivers are identical to those of the ancestors of the Vikings along the fjords of Norway millennia later. In Scandinavia, there are two different types of boat petroglyphs, both well represented in Norway. One is similar to those at Gobustan and is drawn as a simple sickle-shaped line which forms the base of the ship with vertical lines on deck to illustrate crew or raised oars.

Famous "Foldable Boats"

The other ship type probably represents a "skin boat" with a rather short and bulky hull and an interior framework of wood, appearing on the petroglyphs as if viewed from outside. Such a boat is mentioned in early Norwegian sagas written down by the Icelander, Snorre Sturlason, before his death in 1241, (Snorri, *The Sagas of the Viking Kings of Norway*. English translation: J. M. Stenersens Forlag, Oslo 1987). According to the saga, the Viking kings descended from Odin, an immigrant hierarch who came in a vessel called Skithblathnir (Skidbladner) which could be folded together like a cloth. Odin came from the land of the "Aser", and is, therefore, frequently referred to as "Asa-Odin". The legendary land of the people known as Aser is given a very exact location in Snorre's saga as east of the Caucasus mountains and the Black Sea.

From there, according to the same saga, Odin, owner of the foldable boat migrated with all his people northwestwardly through Russia, Saxland, and Denmark into Sweden where he died and lay buried in a huge funerary mound at Sigtuna. Asa-Odin's saga with his boat and his itinerary has been considered by Nordic historians as a myth concocted in medieval times, although they consider the Nordic people as Caucasians. But, perhaps, Odin's boat may indicate that the land of the Aser really lay by the Caspian Sea east of the Caucasus. In fact, in the 5th century B.C., the Greek historian, Herodotus, described such marvelous foldable boats used precisely in the area referred to in Asa-Odin's saga as the home of th Aser, namely the land of the present day Azeri and Armenians.

In this area, Herodotus wrote, traveling merchants used boats built with a framework of wood and canes covered with skin, and of such great size that they carried one or more donkeys in addition to crew and cargo. They navigated down river to Babylonia where they sold their merchandise and the framework (wood), then they folded the skins and loaded them on the donkeys for their return upstream in preparation for the next voyage.

Oral Tradition or Fairy Tale?

I'm personally convinced that Snorre recorded oral history rather than a concocted myth, and I think it's time to look for the land that my Scandinavian ancestors came from and not merely where they subsequently went on their Viking raids and explorations. They certainly did not come out from under the glaciers when the ice-age ended so they must have immigrated from the south. Since their physical type is referred to as Caucasian and their very own descendant preserved an itinerary from south of the Caucasus and north of Turkey, I suspect that the present Azeri people and the Aser of the Norse sagas have common roots and that my ancestry originated there.

The unwritten history of both the Scandinavians and the Azeri doubtlessly began with ships and navigation. Both had access to waterways which permitted them to explore and travel far and wide. The Azeri could easily have sailed across their inland sea to the great centers of civilization in antiquity and up the river Volga which was navigable past present-day Moscow to its sources which are suspiciously close to the sources of the river Dvina which empties into the Baltic Sea at Riga, where the first Christian Norwegian Viking king, Olav Trygvason, was born.

Azerbaijan as Spreading Center of Caucasians, not Europe

This would mean that Azerbaijan and not northern Europe was the spreading center of the Caucasian people buried in northwestern China some 4,000 years ago and now discovered by Chinese archaeologists who theorize (probably wrongly) that they came from northern Europe because they were tall, blond, blue-eyed and with Caucasian features. According to modern scholars in Azerbaijan, there used to be a strong blond and fair-skinned element in the aboriginal Azeri population, as illustrated by the stone-age hunters at

the Gobustan Museum. Subsequent invasions by Romans and Arabs have somewhat modified the original Azeri type.

As to the remarkably high level of culture evinced by the 4,000 year old mummies in China, no people in Northern Europe had reached a corresponding cultural level at that early time. But the merchants of Azerbaijan could have, due to their long-range trade by skin-boats with Babylonia.

Beyond a Euro-Centric Perspective

We must as scientists get beyond the dogmatic medieval view of history printed by us in Europe in which we describe our own ancestors as the discoverers of the rest of the world. There were advanced civilizations with navigators and script in Asia, Africa and Middle America before mariners from Crete brought script and civilization from the Middle East to southern Europe. Before European history began, mariners from Africa had settled the Canary Island, voyagers from America had settled the West Indies, and every inhabitable island in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific had been peopled from Asia and America. Azerbaijan, and not Europe, was part of the fermenting kettle of brewing civilization with navigators that spread early trade and cultural impulses far and wide.

Many clues are still invisible about the human history prior to the sudden cultural bloom in Egypt, Sumer and the Indus valley some five millennia ago. But with advanced technology, some day the answers may be found under the sand and sea. The challenge for scholars is to look deeper into foreign relations in the region of present-day Azerbaijan to determine what those prehistoric roots and linkages were.

From **Azerbaijan International** (3.1) Spring 1995.

© Azerbaijan International 1995. All rights reserved.

[Back to Index AI 3.1 \(Spring 1995\)](#)

[AI Home Page](#) | [Magazine Choice](#) | [Topics](#) | [Store](#) | [Contact us](#)