

Heyerdahl declares Odin no myth

Alister Doyle In OSLO

THE Viking god Odin might have been a real king who lived in what is now southern Russia 2,000 years ago, the Norwegian explorer Thor Heyerdahl said in a book released yesterday.

In *The Hunt for Odin*, Heyerdahl says his digs by the Sea of Azov in Russia backed evidence in 13th-century sagas by Snorre Sturlason that Odin was more than a myth.

Heyerdahl, who won acclaim for his 1947 voyage across the Pacific on the Kon-Tiki balsa raft, said Odin was a king who lived around Azov before being driven out by the Romans and taking his followers to Sweden.

Ancient metal belt holders, rings and armbands from 100-200 AD found near the mouth of the Don River were almost identical to Viking equivalents found in Sweden some 800 years later, he said.

"Snorre didn't sit down and dream this all up," Heyerdahl said at the launch of his book with his co-author, Per Lillestrom. "In ancient times, people treated gods and kings as one and the same thing."

Snorre's stories about Odin, viewed as the king of the gods in Norse mythology, portrayed him as fighting battles. By contrast, Snorre treated Thor, the god of thunder, as a mythical hammer-wielding figure riding through the air.

He said many of the place names in Snorre's sagas matched the ancient Greek names for places around the Sea of Azov, such as Tanais.

Heyerdahl's digs uncovered skeletons and ancient metal objects. "It's obvious that there was some link between the Nordic region and where we dug."

Some historians have criticised the findings as based on insufficient evidence and said Odin's name originated from the Germanic name Wotan. One likened Heyerdahl's quest for Odin to digging for the Garden of Eden. - Reuters