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**haverhill's**

VOYAGE OF RA

To prove a theory



UPI

Ra in Safi: Crew and vessel buoyant.

Thor Heyerdahl believes in ancient, transoceanic cultural migration.

He proved it—or its possibility—for the Pacific 22 years ago when he sailed the raft Kon Tiki from Peru to Tahiti.

He is now trying to demonstrate it—or its possibility—for the Atlantic, with a voyage from North Africa to Mexico (see page 534).

As he and his crew struggled in Safi, Morocco to get their 12-ton wickerwork boat on its way last week, one thought pushed them on: They had better reach Yucatan before the hurricane season.

Originally scheduled to set forth early in the week the expedition was delayed for several days while the seven-man crew finished loading and fitting out with masts and sails.

The masts, says Heyerdahl, may be of crucial importance to the voyage. If the reed-boat Ra can ride high enough in the water so that sails can catch the wind, the trip across the North Atlantic may take only 40 days; if it just drifts, it will be a slave to the current, and the expedition could stretch out to three-and-a-half months. That would take it into the hurricane season.

The crucial question is the long-term buoyancy of the reeds.

Although some pessimists have claimed that the reeds would become waterlogged and disintegrate in two weeks Heyerdahl obviously doesn't go along with them. His confidence was supported last week by a report from the Norwegian Wood Research Institute, which tested a sample of the papyrus he is using and declared it to be less water-absorbent than the balsa wood with which Heyerdahl constructed Kon Tiki.

At launch time, the ship was riding high, and the crew's spirits were as buoyant as their vessel.

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