

Oetzi the Iceman dressed like a herdsman

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A famous Neolithic Iceman is dressed in clothes made from sheep and cattle hair, a new study shows. The researchers say their findings support the idea that the Iceman was a herdsman, and that their technique, reported today in the journal *Rapid Communications in Mass Spectrometry*, has use in the modern clothing industry.

The social and cultural background of the Iceman, dubbed Oetzi, has been the subject of much debate since his mummified remains were discovered in an Alpine glacier in 1991. Although his clothes were known to be made of animal skins, their exact origin was uncertain. This new study focuses on hair samples taken from Oetzi's coat, leggings and moccasin shoes.

"We found that the hairs came from sheep and cattle, just the types of animals that herdsman care for during their seasonal migrations," says lead researcher Klaus Hollemeyer of Saarland University in Germany.

The researchers analysed hair samples in excess of 5,000 years old using MALDITOF mass spectrometry. This allowed them to study patterns of peptides of fermented proteins present in the ancient hair and compare them with those of modern day animals. They found that Oetzi's coat and leggings were made from sheep's fur, whilst his moccasins were of cattle origin.

The researchers believe that MALDITOF mass spectrometry may be faster and more reliable than methods based on DNA analysis and that it could be applied in archaeology and evolutionary biology.

"This method could, for example, be used in checking the purity of products made from animal hair, such as pullovers and jackets made of Cashmere wool," says Hollemeyer. "I think that a major field of application will be to help manufacturers abide by the European Union law concerning the ban of dog and cat fur trade next year."

Source: Wiley

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