

Oetzi's last days: Glacier man may have been attacked twice

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Another chapter in a murder case over 5000 years old. New investigations by an LMU research team working together with a Bolzano colleague reconstructed the chronology of the injuries that Oetzi, the glacier man preserved as a frozen mummy, received in his last days. It turns out, for example, that he did in fact only survive the arrow wound in his back for a very short time - a few minutes to a number of hours, but no more - and also definitely received a blow to the back with a blunt object only shortly before his death.

In contrast, the cut wound on his hand is some days older. "We are now able to make the first assertions as to the age and chronology of the injuries," reports Professor Andreas Nerlich, who led the study. "It is now clear that Oetzi endured at least two injuring events in his last days, which may imply two separate attacks. Although the ice mummy has already been studied at great length, there are still new results to be gleaned. The crime surrounding Oetzi is as thrilling as ever!"

It is the oldest ice mummy ever found. Oetzi, the man from the Neolithic Age, is giving science critical information about life more than 5000 years ago, not least from his equipment. His copper axe, for example, reveals that metalworking was already much more advanced in that era than was previously assumed. Yet Oetzi's body, too, gives us many details as to his diet, state of health - and not least to his murder.

"Some time ago, we detected a deep cut wound on Oetzi's hand that he must have survived for at least a couple of days," says Nerlich, head of

the Institute of Pathology at Municipal Hospital Munich-Bogenhausen and member of the Medical Faculty of LMU. "Another team at about the same time found an arrow tip in Oetzi's left armpit. The shaft of the arrow was missing, but there is an entry wound on the back." It is probable, in that case, that the man died of internal bleeding because the arrow hit a main artery. What was unclear, however, was the age and exact chronology of the injuries.

Now, Nerlich has reconstructed the missing chronology while working together with LMU forensic scientist Dr. Oliver Peschel and Dr. Eduard Egarter-Vigl, head of the Institute for Pathology in Bolzano. According to the new information, Oetzi did in fact only survive the arrow wound for a very short period of time, of no more than a few hours. A few centimeters below the entry wound they detected an additional small discoloration of the skin, which was probably caused by a blow from a blunt object. In both cases, the researchers, using new immunohistochemical detection methods, managed to detect very briefly survived, yet unequivocally fatal bleeding.

Above the spine are more discolorations that are not associated with bleeding. They probably occurred after the man's death, due to his interment, for example. "Oetzi had only shortly survived the arrow wound and the blow on the back," Nerlich summarizes. "At least a couple of days before his death, however, he sustained a severe cut wound on his right hand. Over several days, then, Oetzi suffered at least two injuring events - which could point towards two separate attacks."

Source: Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

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