

Was 'Iceman Otzi' a Copper Age fashionista?

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The mummy of an iceman named Otzi, discovered in 1991 in the Italian Schnal Valley glacier, is displayed at the Archaeological Museum of Bolzano on February 28, 2011

The 5,300-year-old Alpine mummy known as the Tyrolean Iceman died wearing leather clothes and accessories harvested from no less than five wild or domesticated species, a DNA analysis published Thursday revealed.

Frozen solid after being fatally wounded by an arrow in the back, the brown-eyed, Copper Age nomad, nicknamed "Otzi", was discovered in 1991 in the Otztal Alps between Italy and Austria.

Details about his ancestry, what he snacked on, and his sundry diseases and ailments have all been dissected with scientific precision over the last two decades, but no one had taken a close look at the origin of his attire. Until now.

A team led by Niall O'Sullivan, a researcher at the Institute for Mummies and the Iceman in Italy (and University College Dublin), put nine samples from Otzi's leather accoutrements under the microscope to determine their origin.

These included a fur hat, an archery quiver, a composite leather coat, a loin-cloth, grass-lined shoes, and tight-fitting leggings.

What they found, to their surprise, was a medley of fauna, both domesticated and wild.

The fur from the hat came from the ferocious brown bear, a species that can easily top 300 kilos (660 pounds).

Otzi, who was about 45 when mortally wounded, would have to have been an ace shot to take one down with his slender arrows.

The quiver sheathing those arrows came from another wild species—a roe deer, while his jacket was stitched together from domesticated goats and sheep.

"The coat alone was a combination of at least four hides and two species," the study concluded.

But the piece de resistance of the Iceman's wardrobe was the glove-like leggings, made of the same kind of goat's skin favoured by haute couture houses in Paris.

He may even have started a trend: similar leather was used to make 4,500-year-old leggings found in Schnidejoch, Switzerland, the researchers point out.

Conclusion? Our pre-historic fashionista "made considered choices when manufacturing clothes, and used everything that was available to him," O'Sullivan told AFP.

The findings, published in the peer-reviewed journal *Scientific Reports*, were made by sequencing mitochondrial genomes from each of the leather samples.

Unlike nuclear DNA, which is transferred to

offspring by the mother and father combined,
mitochondrial DNA is inherited from the mother
alone.

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