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| **Wounds Suggest Iceman Was Stabbed in the Back, Fought Attacker**  |
| **Rory Carroll - The Guardian Unlimited** |
| **March 26, 2002**  |
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| Scientists have discovered that the world's oldest and best preservedmummy, known as Oetzi the Iceman, was engaged in hand-to-hand combatshortly before perishing in the Alps 5,300 years ago.Two woundsto his right hand and wrist show he was stabbed while trying to defendhimself with a dagger against an attacker. The finding bolsterstheories that Bronze Age tribes waged war on mountain peaks, andscotches a recent claim that Oetzi may have been a human sacrifice.Instead, he may have been a warrior or the victim of an ambush whofought hard to save his life.The findings were revealed by the archaeological museum in the northern Italian town of Bolzano, which keeps the mummy in a refrigerated room. "This is very exciting. It tells us that Oetzi was involved in a battle, or at least in hand-to-hand combat of some kind," said Eduard Egarter Vigl, the main caretaker of the corpse. A sharp object, possibly a flint-tipped spear or dagger, punctured the base of the Iceman's thumb, shredding skin and muscle right to the bone. A second blow damaged a bone on his wrist. The thumb wound had no scar, meaning it was fresh when the Iceman died. It has been determined that the Iceman was 46 and was in a valley on the Italian side of the mountains hours before ascending the glacier with an unfinished bow, arrows, and a dagger. Forensic scientists and archaeologists have become detectives, conceiving and discarding theories about why and how he died. The discovery last year of an arrow blade in his left shoulder showed his death was violent, not the result of drowning, hypothermia, or a fall. Some researchers speculated that he was a sacrifice to appease the gods or the victim of an accident or a long-range ambush. The injured hand shows instead that Oetzi knew he was in danger and had time to defend himself. One of the German hikers, Alois Pirpamer, disclosed that Oetzi's dagger was not beside the corpse, as previously thought, but in his right hand, suggesting the killer was close. That detail prompted the scientist to reexamine the hand, which revealed a 15-millimeter-deep (one-half-inch-deep) zigzag wound. It is thought that Oetzi bled to death after the arrow shattered the scapula and damaged nerves and blood vessels before lodging near the lung.  |

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[The Observer](http://observer.guardian.co.uk), Saturday 3 May 2003

When hikers spotted a corpse poking from the Schnalstal glacier in the Austrian-Italian Alps in 1991, they thought they had found the body of a lost climber.

Then researchers took a closer look and announced the iceman was an ancient shepherd, a primitive farm worker who had got lost in the mountains and had died of hypothermia. Yet now, after 12 years of careful research, scientists have discovered the truth about Otzi the Iceman: that he was the Stone Age equivalent of a hi-tech trooper kitted with complex weapons and survival gear.

Otzi's equipment included a flint dagger, a longbow of yew, plants with powerful pharmaceutical properties, three layers of clothing made of deer and goat hides, a bearskin hat, a framed backpack, a copper axe, dried fruit and other foods wrapped in moss for protection and a fire-making kit that included flints and ores for making sparks.

Far from being a poor shepherd who had got lost and wandered to a lonely, icy death, Otzi was well-armed and well-protected when he died. Some scientists believe he may have been murdered - a theory backed by Italian scientists' announcement, in 2001, that they had discovered an arrowhead in Otzi's back, just under his left shoulder. This has still to be verified by other researchers.

His body was originally discovered on a high ridge just inside the Italian border with Austria. Only later did scientists realise he was the oldest and best preserved mummy in the world.

Initial investigations revealed Otzi was about 5ft 2in tall, in his mid-forties, and probably had a beard. Then archaeologists revisited the site of the body's discovery to uncover new evidence while researchers began studying the seeds and plants he was carrying, the contents of his stomach, the state of his skin, nails and hair, the make-up of his weapons and composition of his clothes.

Otzi was found to have been carrying two pieces of birch bracket fungus, which is known to contain pharmacologically active compounds. In short, he had his own first-aid kit.

Then there was his clothing: leggings, loincloth and jacket made of deer and goat hide; a cape made of grass and the bark of the linden tree; a hat of bearskin; shoes insulated with grass, with bearskin soles and goatskin uppers. He was protected against Alpine weather.

It is clear Otzi had been unwell: his fingernail growth patterns suggest he had been very ill three times in the last six months of his life. Austrian scientists have discovered he had become infested with intestinal parasitic worms that would have triggered diarrhea and dysentery.

The mystery still to be resolved concerns Otzi's identity. He was not a shepherd: as the scientists say, 'no wool was on or around his person, no dead collie by his feet, no crook in his hand'. He was not a hunter: his bow was unstrung and most of his arrows lacked heads.

'Other early ideas about Otzi are that he was an outlaw, a trader, a shaman or a warrior. None of these has any solid basis, unless the piece of fungus he was carrying had medicinal or spiritual use for shamans,' they conclude.