



Südtiroler Archäologiemuseum  
Museo Archeologico dell'Alto Adige  
South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology



Landesmuseen Südtirol  
Musei provinciali Alto Adige  
Museums provinciai

## Press Information

### **September 19, 2021: 30 Years Since the Discovery of Ötzi, the Iceman Research, Records, and an Open-Air Event**

30 years' time has gone by since Ötzi, the Iceman was freed from the ice. On September 19, 1991, he was lucky enough to be discovered by two observant hikers, the Simon family from Nuremberg, Germany, in the Tisenjoch area above Schnals Valley in the Ötztal Alps. His body remained hidden in ice for more than 5,000 years, a representative of the Copper Age preserved to this day. He was not just anyone, but of all things the victim of a murder and the traces of this can still be seen on his body today.

Such an ancient, well-preserved body will always be a global sensation in archaeology, but its importance is not limited to classical studies. It was because of the Iceman that various historical and scientific disciplines came together for the first time to acquire shared knowledge. It was because of the Iceman that bioarchaeology experienced its breakthrough. Infinite details could be brought to light with the help of clever minds, scientific research, and technical measurement methods. In the last 30 years work on the famous mummy has been a career boost for more than 800 researchers.

In the last five years, there have also been countless international scientific publications about the Iceman, his belongings, and his living environment. The most significant findings concerned his hunting equipment and extensive trade relations in the Copper Age. In addition, further details came to light about his local and genetic origin, his diet, his health, the climate during Ötzi's time, as well as plants and microorganisms. You will find an overview with the most important data from the last 30 years of research on the Iceman in the attachment.

Nevertheless, not everything has been said or discovered. New research methods will also raise new questions in the future and lead to further findings, particularly in the fields of microbiology and molecular biology, imaging techniques in x-ray technology, but also further archaeological excavations. In turn, findings based on scientific investigations will further refine our knowledge about our ancestors, though the Iceman's personal secrets will probably never be fully revealed.

For this reason, even 30 years later a meeting with the mysterious original holds a certain fascination which is difficult to escape. Since the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology opened in 1998 more than 5.5 million people have been astounded to see the Ötzi and his belongings. Even more people around the world have become aware of and curious about the mummy because of media reports, documentaries, and feature films.

Thirty years ago, no one could have guessed that the public's interest in the oldest wet mummy in the world would remain unbroken to this day. That is why the sponsor of the museum, the Autonomous Province of South Tyrol, is currently planning a new, larger museum in an easily accessible location in the provincial capital of Bolzano. The new building should provide enough space for the Iceman and his belongings, archaeological research in South Tyrol, special exhibitions, and visitor services.

## **Event for 30 Years of Ötzi in the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology**

For safety reasons in a COVID pandemic year, the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology and its visitors will celebrate outdoors at the Talferwiesen in Bolzano, only about 200m away from the museum:

**Saturday/Sunday 18-19 September 2021, 11 a.m.-6 p.m.**

### **Back to the Stone Age: Working with flint - just like in Ötzi's time**

An adventure weekend for the whole family at the Talferwiesen in Bolzano

Silex (flint) was an essential raw material for people in Ötzi's time. This was used to make arrowheads, knife blades, and scrapers that could be used to work wood and bones, cut up game, harvest grain and vegetables, or prepare food.

This weekend young and old can try out original techniques such as making a blade or an arrowhead, working on leather, wood, or antlers, and lighting a fire under expert guidance. Doing so, participants will get an idea of the astonishing material knowledge and technical skills of our ancestors.

Participation in the archaeology festival at the Talferwiesen is free. On this weekend, entry to the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology is also free. A Green Pass is required for both events.

## Why is Ötzi so famous?

Ötzi, the Iceman, is a man of superlatives. The mummy is invaluable for archaeology and archaeotechnology as well as for medical science, genetics, biology, anthropology, and many other disciplines.

Ötzi is the world's oldest wet mummy and the clothes he wore and equipment he carried are unique; no other organic material from the Copper Age has survived. The circumstances of his death are extraordinary and his state of preservation remarkable thanks to an incredible series of coincidences: a murder in the high mountains, favorable climatic factors leading to mummification and preservation, and the fortuitous discovery of the mummy just as the ice was beginning to melt.

Since the Iceman was found alone and was not the subject of a burial, important clues (e.g., ceramics) are missing to help us assign him to a particular cultural group. On the other hand, Ötzi's sudden death in the ice has preserved him virtually unchanged for thousands of years, giving us a snapshot of the routine life of a Copper Age hunter. This is an absolute first. Never before has such a well-preserved individual been discovered from the Stone Age.

Ötzi's chronometric age has moved the beginning of the Copper Age in the Alpine region back by about 1,000 years. Until Ötzi's discovery, we had no exact knowledge about technological skills of late Neolithic people and archaeologists have been surprised by their scope and precision. Clothing in particular had never before been preserved. In this respect, too, the discovery of late Neolithic skills in the use of materials and the meticulous, even decorative, workmanship has been a boon to historical research. Analysis of flint tools revealed a supply radius encompassing the area from Monti Lessini to the Lombard basin (distance: approx. 200km). The copper ore used to make Ötzi's axe, which was once assumed to come from local deposits, actually comes from Tuscany.

Ötzi's shoes are the only insulated shoes and the second oldest intact shoes ever found anywhere in the world.

Ötzi's axe is the oldest and only fully preserved copper-blade axe from the Neolithic (wooden haft and blade).

The state of preservation of his arrows is unparalleled and has revealed previously unknown information about the way they were made. The fletching of the arrows is also unique.

Ötzi's retoucheur is the only one in the world made of wood and an antler tip that looks like a pencil. Aside from a few Stone Age antler tips used for similar purposes, no other such tool is known.

Not only is Ötzi's bowstring the first of its kind to be discovered, but it was also fully preserved. In addition, his entire ensemble of tools and weapons represent the oldest complete set of hunting gear in the world.

All this unique, new information allowed experimental archaeology to make a quantum leap.

Ötzi's discovery was a stroke of luck for the study and mediation of prehistory. Now that we can picture a man of flesh and blood with a cultural background, countless finds from prehistory and

ancient history have been re-evaluated. Ötzi, together with Stonehenge and the Egyptian pyramids, has become a universally recognized time marker.

Ötzi has the oldest known tattoos in the world. They were made for medical reasons to ease pain, not for decorative purposes. Since they are located along acupuncture lines, this therapeutic practice may have been discovered in Europe and not in – or at least not solely in – China.

Ötzi's genome (nuclear DNA) is the only completely decoded DNA from a *Homo sapiens sapiens* mummy. The oldest medical evidence of red blood cells, collagens, borreliosis (Lyme disease), the gastric bacterium *helicobacter pylori*, arteriosclerosis, and much more has been identified from tiny tissue samples taken from the mummy. This information is furthering our understanding of the genesis – and in future perhaps also the treatment – of diseases.

### Other records:

*Visitor numbers:* Since the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology in Bolzano opened on March 28, 1998, the Iceman and his artefacts have been viewed by over 5.5 million visitors from all corners of the world. On average, around 300,000 people visit the museum every year (pre-COVID). The Ötzi website at [www.iceman.it](http://www.iceman.it) is consulted annually by three times as many people as visit the museum (650,000). More than 20,000 Facebook fans follow Ötzi on OetziTheIceman. Ötzi is the subject of the most Google search hits (2,140,000); Tutankhamun ranks second with 420,000.

*Researchers:* Well over 800 scientists from the world over have focused on the Ötzi phenomenon, whether from the point of view of archaeology, archaeotechnology, botany, anthropology, or the history of civilization. Many have examined him for forensic medicine purposes. Ötzi has also greatly stimulated the development of the field of bioarchaeology.

*Findings:* To date, research on the Iceman has led to the publication of about 800 peer-reviewed papers, which can be found in the "Iceman Database" on the museum's website ([www.iceman.it/en/database/](http://www.iceman.it/en/database/)). Many questions on life in the Stone Age and the personal fate of the mummy have been answered. Other secrets will probably not be unlocked as quickly – or indeed ever.

*Media response, renown:* Even today, most of the media report on new revelations about Ötzi, because, for diverse reasons, countless people worldwide are intrigued by fresh details of the life of one of their ancestors from the Copper Age.

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