Ötzi the iceman reveals secrets of European migration

Stomach contents of a frozen 5,300 year old corpse discovered in the Alps by tourists 24 years ago has shed new light on the origins of European man

By David Millward
11:38PM GMT 07 Jan 2016

Ötzi the iceman has fascinated scientists since his frozen 5,300-year-old corpse was discovered by Alpine hikers in 1991.
Now, three and a half years after discovering that Ötzi was murdered, experts have now found he was suffering from a nasty stomach bug.
It is this bug which has shed fascinating new light on the migration patterns of prehistoric man, showing that Europe’s first farmers are most likely to have come from the Middle East.

The findings have been presented to the journal Science by a research team from the Institute for Mummies and the Iceman, at the European Research Academy in Bolzano, Italy.
Painstaking work has enabled the scientists to use the ulcer bacterium in Ötzi’s stomach to determine the origins of Europe’s first farmers.
Scientists recovered samples from his frozen stomach tissue. It is a bacterium which infects about half the human population and is also linked to stomach ulcers.
Ötzi the iceman reveals secrets of European migration
Stomach contents of a frozen 5,300 year old corpse discovered in the Alps by tourists 24 years ago has shed new light on the origins of European man

A hybrid version of the bacterium is still to be found in modern day Europeans. It is a hybrid of strains originating in Eurasia and Africa. The strain discovered in Ötzi’s stomach remains is purely Eurasian which, according to experts, is hugely significant. It had been believed that Africans moved into Europe more than 20,000 years ago as the glaciers began to retreat. Had this been the case there should have been evidence of the African strain in Ötzi’s stomach tissue.

But the presence of only the Eurasian strain has led scientists to believe that the Africans arrived after Ötzi came to a bloody end – having been shot with an arrow and then bludgeoned to death. Instead Ötzi’s DNA resembles that of farmers who came from the Middle East, possibly having originated in Asia – with the strain of bacterium most closely resembling that now found in and around India.

Assignment: How does the finding of Ötzi help historians and archeologists understand the early humans? What do you find most interesting about Ötzi and why? Answer in at least 5-7 sentences on separate piece of paper.