10

The traveller

10.1 Introduction

It was warm for the time of the year, September 1991, when hikers in the Italian-Austrian Alps encountered the remains of a frozen human body, half emerging from a tomb of ice where he had lain buried for over five millennia. The years following his discovery led to many more remarkable discoveries. The ice-man, who was named 'Ötzi', had travelled from Italy into the Alps before meeting an unfortunate fate in the form of an arrow lodged in his left shoulder. Although we will never know exactly what events resulted in his death, Ötzi must have been shot and died while trying to get away from his attackers. He died in a mountain pass at an altitude of over 3200 metres and was quickly frozen and covered in ice. The ice, however, did not merely trap Ötzi but also the clothing he wore and the equipment he brought with him. This included a copper axe, a fire-making kit, a bow and quiver with arrows, a flint knife and birch bark containers (for a complete overview of this find and all objects recovered, see Egg and Spindler 2009).

If we ignore the wealth of organic remains (including his clothing and even some sort of back-pack) and focus on those objects that would have normally survived in the archaeological record, there is a remarkable similarity with the Bell Beaker package. Apart from the copper axe, all the items found with the Iceman would fit perfectly well in a typical Beaker burial. Some researchers even listed this collection of finds as one of the reasons why they believe the find of Ötzi may not have been the result of a wounded traveller who died and was frozen *in situ*, but instead represented a formal burial and should be interpreted as a grave (Vanzetti *et al.* 2010). Although this theory did not gain traction (for comments see Zink *et al.* 2010), it is interesting that an 'unfortunate traveller' bears so much resemblance to a carefully arranged grave. I assert that it may actually be the other way around. Ötzi – the traveller – does not resemble a Beaker grave, it is people in Beaker graves that resemble travellers like Ötzi.

10.2 The world of wandering

The objects that are typically part of the Bell Beaker package – archery gear, flint tools, a fire-making set, a knife or dagger, containers with food/drink and various items that were part of a person's (formal) dress – fit surprisingly well with the array of items found with Ötzi. The find of Ötzi confirms that these were the kinds of items one

would take along on a journey.[296] Both the style in which these objects were made, but also the nature of the objects themselves (beads/ornaments as part of a formal type of dress) indicate the importance of personal presentation to *others* along the way, as part of a widely shared and accepted social front. Apart from the similarities with Ötzi's gear, there are, however, also various other lines of evidence pointing to the importance of *travel*, both physically in the real world, but also on a symbolical level.

The various studies recently published on aDNA and stabile isotopes all point to a highly dynamic and mobile society in the 3rd millennium BCE (*e.g.* Allentoft *et al.* 2015; Haak *et al.* 2015; Knipper *et al.* 2017; Olalde *et al.* 2018; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2016; 2019c; Price *et al.* 1998). These studies clearly show both a high mobility of individuals, in part related to the exchange of marriage partners over long distances, but also of 'massive migrations' affecting the DNA make-up of entire populations. This period in time must have been highly dynamic. A period of extremely high mobility where both individuals and larger populations moved across large distances on a fairly regular basis. This is also evidenced by the pan-European distribution of objects, object styles, and raw materials (see Chapter 6; Vander Linden 2007b, 349). To a large extent this will be related to the introduction and widespread acceptance of new innovations in the 3rd millennium BCE, including wheeled carts, horseback riding and the spread of Indo-European languages (Anthony 2007).

The notion of 'travel' also played an important role in the cosmology of both the LNA and LNB. The oldest wheels found in the Netherlands date to the mid-3rd millennium[297] and were deposited in waterlogged locations, some were even specifically produced for deposition (Van der Waals 1964a). One was deposited near a supposedly ceremonial trackway which ended in the middle of the bog (see Chapters 3 and 5). In Yamnaya burials, wheels or carts were even included in the grave (Anthony 2007, 362-363; Kaiser and Winger 2015).

The dispersed distribution of barrows in the landscapes (in the LNA often in alignments that could continue for many kilometres) required one to physically travel through the heathlands in order to visit or commemorate one's ancestors (see Arnoldussen and Drenth 2015; Bourgeois 2013). The graves themselves were aligned with the sun, travelling the sky (see Chapter 7). Throughout the antique world the movement of the sun is linked to the notion of travelling to the afterlife or through the underworld.[298] The objects in LNA graves were either obtained through travel and exchange and/or were needed to maintain or establish long-distance contacts. The

296 While discussing a specific grave that contained a set of possible arrowhead blanks, Turek (2004, 155) also noted a similarity with the find of Ötzi and asserted that perhaps some of the equipment in Bell Beaker graves could be seen as equipment for a long journey.

297 Date ranges span the period between 2900-2200 BCE, based on seven dates published in Lanting and Van der Plicht 2000.

298 Carlin (2018, 213), who investigated the BB complex in Ireland, also relates the BB 'costume' with the notion of travel, whether actual or mythological. Although his interpretation is largely in line with the interpretation presented in this thesis, it must be noted that the Irish dataset is different in the fact that the objects in the BB 'package' are not found in graves but deposited elsewhere in the landscape. The manner in which people interpreted and subsequently dealt with these BB related objects is thus comparable but different. Perhaps this is, in part, related to the fact that Ireland is an island and the notion of travel may thus have had very different connotations. It is also of interest to note that Carlin and I both developed these interpretations independently from each other and only first discussed these during the 2018 EAA conference in Barcelona.

items in LNB graves referred to a specific social front employed in social interaction (see Chapter 9). In both periods they were moreover produced in supra-regional styles. These were not items meant to celebrate or commemorate small, isolated communities. Quite the contrary, they were meant to signal a belonging and relatedness to people far and wide.

10.3 Have a drink

Although Ötzi did bring birch-bark containers, probably containing food, on his travels, he did not bring heavy and fragile ceramic containers. If we interpret the Bell Beaker grave as a set of items related to travelling – as part of a specific social front adopted by travellers to signal a specific identity recognizable by others – the presence of beakers needs further exploration. Throughout the 3rd millennium BCE, the Beaker is the most frequently occurring type of object in Dutch graves. Although produced in international styles, there is no evidence to support the beakers themselves were subject to widespread international exchange (see Chapter 4). Given their fragile nature they furthermore do not seem like practical containers to take along on travels (but see Heitz and Stapfer 2017). So, how does the Beaker fit in this interpretive model?

A few years ago (2011) I was travelling through Morocco with my sister who at the time was an anthropology student. Luck would have it that while we were crossing the Atlas mountain range south-east of Marrakech it began to rain. Being an arid country it hardly ever rains, meaning the infrastructure was poorly prepared for this downpour. The road quickly became covered with mud. Large boulders and rocks, resulting from mudslides, lay scattered across the road. Utility poles had collapsed and electricity cables lay next to and partly on the road. At some points streams of water had obscured the road entirely. Slowly and carefully we drove along, around and through these obstacles until we spotted a car parked on the side of the road with a man and a younger boy waving and signalling us. It appeared their car had broken down in the midst of this turmoil and they asked if we could take the boy with us to the next town in order to get help. We agreed and drove on to the town which by coincidence was also our next planned stop. When approaching the town, the boy directed us to go to a large, apparently luxurious house, on the edge of the town with a large 4×4 parked on the driveway. The boy explained that this was the house of his uncle and summoned us to come along as his uncle would surely like to receive us to thank us for our assistance.

Upon entering the house, we were directed to a room which seemed to have been specially designed for receiving guests. It was a long and narrow rectangular room with nice carpets, benches all along the sides of the wall and in the middle a large, long rectangular table which covered most of the available floor space. Basically, the only thing you could do in this room was walk around the table and sit. After we were seated, we were kept waiting for about 20 minutes, the boy was sitting with us silently, waiting for his uncle to arrive. After a while his uncle appeared, dressed in fine clothing and bringing with him a silver platter with cups and a large elaborately decorated and elegantly styled pot of mint tea. He started with thanking us for helping out his nephew and explained we were expected to share tea with him. As we were not familiar with this ritual, he explained that he would first pour in (from

quite a height increasing the dramatic effect of the whole performance) a half cup for me. I was supposed to try it and approve the quality of the tea, after which also the other cups were filled and mine was topped-up.

Upon finishing the first round our host began explaining that this tea ceremony was their way to formally receive guests. He explained that his family were caravan traders who would cross the Sahara Desert to Timbuktu. After we were formally introduced, we were invited to see the rest of the house, to visit his warehouse and look at his trade goods and we were invited to come back later that evening so he could arrange for us to go see an oasis in the desert. This unexpected experience started with a formal tea ceremony, where we – being the guests – were received by a host wearing formal attire, who used a particular set of material culture and drinks to welcome us in a highly standardized/ritualized manner. And eventually it resulted in the exchange of goods, a decorated ceramic (fruit) bowl that I use to this day and which often serves as the topic of conversation when I am myself hosting guests and tell this story.

It is at this point that we return to our beakers. The aim of our prehistoric travellers was not to go out into the great wide open and to merely camp in nature. The aim was to go meet and visit people in faraway places, to visit relatives who lived far away, to obtain exotic knowledge and goods. This also means that an essential part of travelling was to be *received* by others, to be a *guest* and for others to be a *host*. The concept of a social front does not only mean that the guest would present him/herself in a particular standardized and widely shared and accepted manner, it also means that the host did the same. A social front does not merely relate to one's dress or paraphernalia, it also includes other patterns of behaviour, speech and language, but also setting. Receiving someone in a specially dedicated room and offering tea for example would be part of this.

I propose that the widespread occurrence of these highly standardized beakers is part of just such a practice. They were part of a widespread social front and practice that facilitated and regulated travellers, adorned with widely recognizable symbols, to be received by hosts in a standardized manner.[299] By employing this stereotypical front, the host would know upon seeing a stranger that this stranger adhered to a shared custom, a shared notion and cultural idiom of guest-host relations. The host would know what the stranger expected, a shared beaker with beer or mead[300] (see Chapter 4), and likewise the stranger would know it would be safe to approach a potential host. Even if both persons would have never met before, this custom would structure their first encounter and create a safe environment to start social interaction and exchange.

10.4 Guests and hosts

The main part of this thesis and most of the interpretations presented above were already written down years ago[301], well before the recent discoveries in the field of aDNA. It was not until these papers were published that I started reading about this

299 Sherratt (1987, 379) proposes a similar "convention of hospitality" when discussing the rise of drinking cups in the Carpathian Basin in the 4th millennium BCE.

300 A Proto-Indo-European derivative of the term for honey is **medhu-* referring to mead, a drink that probably played a prominent role in PIE rituals (Anthony 2007, 90).

301 The funding for this research-project ran from 2008 to 2012, after that period the research was largely stalled and was picked up again in 2016 to its completion.

proposed 3rd millennium BCE influx of Steppe peoples that were moreover associated with (Proto-)Indo-European languages. As a result of this I started reading about this subject as well, and it was at this point that some fascinating connections between archaeology and linguistics could be made.

So far, the interpretation of the Beaker as a proxy for a widespread drinking-ceremony linked to a formal, widely shared, social front intended to structure the interaction between people – travellers – who were *strangers* but through this interaction became *guests* and *hosts*, was purely based on archaeological research and data. However, while reading about Proto-Indo-European (PIE) it appeared our colleagues from Comparative Linguistics had reconstructed a PIE word that seems to exactly describe this particular practice: **ghos-ti-*.

David Anthony (2007, 31; 304) explains that the oldest Germanic cognates for the word *guest*[302] are thought to derive from the Proto-Indo-European word **ghos-ti-* which probably meant both *stranger*, *guest*, and *host* and referred to a *system of hospitality* between strangers, rather than referring to one of its roles specifically. As I do not claim to have expert knowledge in this field, I will explain this concept by citing Anthony (2007, 304)[303]:

> "The Yamnaya horizon is the visible archaeological expression of a social adjustment to high mobility – the invention of the political infrastructure to manage larger herds from mobile homes based in the steppes. A linguistic echo of the same event might be preserved in the similarity between English *guest* and *host*. They are cognates, derived from one PIE root (**ghos-ti-*). (A 'ghost' in English was originally a visitor or guest.) The two social roles opposed in English *guest* and *host* were originally two reciprocal aspects of the same relationship. The late PIE guest-host relationship required that 'hospitality' (from the same root through Latin *hospes* 'foreigner, guest') and 'friendship' (**keiwos-*) should be extended by hosts to guests (both **ghos-ti-*), in the knowledge that the receiver and giver of 'hospitality' could later reverse roles. The social meaning of these words was then more demanding than modern customs would suggest. The guest-host relationship was bound by oaths and sacrifices so serious that Homer's warriors, Glaukos and Diomedes, stopped fighting and presented gifts to each other when they learned that their *grandfathers* had shared a guest-host relationship. This mutual obligation to provide 'hospitality' functioned as a bridge between social units (tribes, clans) that had ordinarily restricted these obligations to their kin or co-residents (**h4erós-*). Guest-host relationships would have been very useful in a mobile herding economy, as a way of separating people who were moving through your territory with your assent from those who were unwelcome, unregulated, and therefore unprotected. The guest-host institution might have been among the critical identity-defining innovations that spread with the Yamnaya horizon."

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302 Gothic *gasts*, Old Norse *gestre*, Old High German *gast*, Proto-Germanic **gastiz* (Anthony 2007, 31).

303 I have discussed this approach and Anthony's explanation of **ghos-ti-* with Dr. Tijmen Pronk (lecturer in Comparative Indo-European Linguistic at Leiden University).

And he (Anthony 2007, 340) continues to state that:

> "…with the evolution of the Yamnaya horizon, steppe societies must have developed a political infrastructure to manage migratory behavior. […] One of those might have been the creation of mutual obligations of 'hospitality' between guest-hosts (**ghos-ti-*). This institution […] redefined who belonged under the social umbrella, and extended protection to new groups. It would have been very useful as a new way to incorporate outsiders as people with clearly defined rights and protections, as it was used from the *Odyssey* to medieval Europe."

It must be noted that it is unlikely that Bell Beaker people were speakers of Proto-Indo-European, because by 2500 BCE PIE already was a dead language (Anthony 2007, 58). However, also in the Indo-European daughter-languages this concept would have continued to exist. The importance of the Guest-Host relationship and the mutual obligations this created can be found throughout the antique world. In Ancient Greece the term *Xenia* refers to the concept of hospitality where strangers have the right to protection (Herman 2002). This in part came from the belief that strangers/travellers were under the protection of Zeus and could even be *deities in disguise* (Still 2010, 149). Violation of the guest-host relationship is a major theme in the writings of Homer. For example, in the Iliad, the Trojan war was sparked by Paris who betrayed his host Melenaos by stealing his wife Helen. Likewise, in *The Odyssey*, Penelope has to host her many suitors during her husband's absence. The suitors abuse their hosts' hospitality and in the end are killed when Odysseus returns home. Also in Biblical context this theme is well known. For example Lot, who lives in Sodom, receives two guests (who are interestingly *angels in disguise*). The men of the city gather in front of Lot's house and demand that Lot gives over his guests, presumably to rape them. Being a good host, Lot refuses and offers his daughters instead (Genesis 19:8).[304] The notion of hosting guests and offering them protection is also present in the highest levels of modern society where nation states host representatives of other nation states – ambassadors – who, being guests, are granted diplomatic immunity.[305]

It can thus be assumed that the concept of **ghos-ti-* would have been familiar in Bell Beaker times, given the fact that it was a well-established institution among the speakers of Proto-Indo-European (who pre-dated the Bell Beaker period), and also a well-established phenomenon in later times.

It is also interesting to note that in both the example of Lot and the Ancient Greek notion of *Xenia* we find the presence of deities in human form, posing as strangers. Although one could be critical to the use of these two very particular examples, the notion of strangers being related to supernatural beings (*e.g.* Gods, Ancestors) is actually

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304 This is a continuing theme also in modern popular literature, see for example the novels in the Game of Thrones series by George R.R. Martin in which 'guest right' is a sacred ancient custom. An interesting quote from this book series is "*we make peace with our enemies, not our friends*". This underlines that a system of hospitality by no means implies there is no conflict or war. In a Utopia devoid of violence and conflict there would not be a need for diplomats.

305 A similar system existed in Ancient Greece called *proxenia*, where a citizen could live in one city-state while representing the interests of another city-state while enjoying immunity (Jönssen and Hall 2005, 64).

a very common theme in anthropology (Helms 1988, 4; 1998, 37). The concepts of 'long ago' and 'far away' are connected and a geographically distant place can therefore be associated with various superior, ideological or cosmological notions (Helms 1998, 148). According to Helms (1988, 4) horizontal space and distance can be perceived as sacred or supernatural, the home of gods, ancestors or spirits in traditional societies. If that is the case, it follows that strangers coming from afar may indeed have derived from such mythical places and in fact be supernatural beings themselves. These notions are thus not solely present in Indo-European mythology, but are actually a widespread concept found in various traditional societies. There is even reason to believe that these concepts were present in Proto-Indo-European mythology. Kristiansen and Larsson (2005, 264) describe the myth of the Divine Twins quite extensively (paraphrasing Ward 1968). These figures are sons of the sky-god, they are connected to travelling the skies, circling the earth in a day, but are also connected with travelling the sea. They are the gods of light and break open the daylight for their sister the sun-goddess. Apart from their connection to travel and the sunrise, they are also considered to be "close to humans, having wandered among them" (Kristiansen and Larsson 2005, 264). Given the fact that these figures are present in various Indo-European pantheons (*e.g.* the Aśvins in the *Rig-Veda* and the Dioskouroi in Greek mythology) it is considered likely that they have a Proto-Indo-European origin (also see Kristiansen 2010).

The role of the guest-host relationship in Indo-European society, as well as the connection between strangers and gods is perfectly summarized by an early 'ethnographic' description made by Diodorus of Sicily (1st century BCE) when he describes the attitude towards strangers among the – Indo-European – Celtiberians:

> "As to their manners, they are very cruel towards their enemies and other malefactors, but very courteous and civil to strangers; for to all such, from what place soever they come, they readily and freely entertain them, and strive who shall perform the greatest office in kindness and respect. Those who are attended upon by strangers they commend and esteem them as friends of the gods" Diodorus of Sicily (5, 33; cited by Sánchez-Moreno 2001, 392).

10.5 Souvenirs and passports

Today, when you go on a long travel to exotic places, the most important thing to take with you is your passport. An object legitimizing the claim to your identity and origin. Upon returning home your friends and family all want to hear of your adventures and see the photos and souvenirs you collected along the way. Travel is not merely about the movement of people, it is also about the objects they bring along, interact with and take back home again.[306]

The concept of **ghos-ti-* is essentially about the relationship between people, between strangers forging a reciprocal bond. Given that from the offset this thesis fo-

306 Parker Pearson *et al.* (2019a, 452) mention an example of this. A British Bell Beaker burial found close to the Amesbury Archer, known as the Archer's 'Companion'. His isotopic history suggests that he may have travelled some distance but returned over the course of his life and was buried where he grew up.

cussed on the role of objects, I would like to bring this discussion back to these objects and explore what role objects may have played in forging these relationships.

In the first place objects play a role in establishing relationships by being used to construct particular widely recognized fronts. This included items such as amber ornaments, wristguards, particular sets of clothing, but also distinctively styled pottery used for receiving guests. Objects, however, were not merely used to establish relationships, they were also part of the goal, to obtain rare and exotic materials. The most obvious example would probably be metal: gold and copper. As was discussed in Chapter 6, the gold and copper items in LNB graves are extremely rare, but were produced in very particular styles. Copper metal signatures furthermore show that they came from the same 'metal-pool' or metal circulation zone. This all indicates that it was not the metals themselves that were so rare, but rather their inclusion in the grave. Copper knives, axes and gold ornaments must have been much more plentiful than the grave records lead us to believe.

The objects obtained during such exchanges would not only have been desirable for their intrinsic value. The concept of **ghos-ti-* indicates the forging of relationships, of bonds, between guests and hosts, and the objects exchanged captured those relationships. They became the memento of these travels, they served to legitimize the claims of the traveller, both during the journey itself as well as when returning home.

Sánchez-Moreno (2001) presents a fascinating account with respect to the Celtiberians (mentioned above) who used so-called *tesserae hospitalis*. These were small portable tablets of bronze or silver, some of which were engraved with early writing. These tablets could have the form of animals, but some were even in the shape of two hands holding each other (as if they were shaking hands). The engraved writings indicated agreements between strangers: guest and hosts, either representing individuals, families or cities (Sánchez-Moreno 2001, 393-398). From those tablets that mention place names it is clear that these relations spanned distances of up to 400 kilometres, across rivers and mountain chains. Such tokens would perhaps serve to legitimize claims of a traveller – while traveling through the domains of others – that he or she was *en route* to visit a host, which would perhaps invoke some level of protection. Back home it would serve to legitimize claims of the relationships established. But such items would also be transferable in time. For such long journeys it is entirely plausible that any individual would only be able to make such travels a limited number of times during his or her life-time. If these relations were to be maintained during longer timespans it would require others, perhaps sons or daughters, to maintain such relationships after their parents had died. In such a situation a recognizable object could be instrumental to legitimize claims of pre-existing relations and obligations. As mentioned above, Homer's warriors, Glaukos and Diomedes, stopped fighting and presented gifts to each other when they learned that their *grandfathers* had shared a guest-host relationship (Anthony 2007, 304).

Objects thus played a central role in establishing contact between strangers, forging bonds between guests and hosts and perhaps even transferring these relations to future generations in order to maintain such relations through time.

10.6 Conclusions

This chapter set out with the observation that there is a striking resemblance between the objects generally associated with Bell Beaker graves and the objects found scattered around Ötzi, the *in situ* frozen traveller. It was suggested that people buried in Bell Beaker graves were dressed and equipped as travellers and that traveling played a hugely important role in the 3rd millennium BCE. Recent genetic research has shown evidence of large migrations and high levels of mobility associated with genetically distinct groups of people. In addition, the concept of traveling also seems to have played an important role in cosmological terms as evidenced for example by the deposition of disc wheels in peat bogs. The connection between travelling, carts and graves is especially apparent in Yamnaya graves which could include wheels or even complete carts as well as horses (Anthony 2007, 363; Kaiser and Winger 2015).[307]

There are two sides to the importance of travelling. On the one side there is the traveller who sets out from home in search of new relations, goods and knowledge. But on the other side there is also the host who receives the traveller as a guest. The use of a stereotypical front employed throughout Europe indicates a general understanding of how to present oneself to potential hosts and simultaneously how to receive guests. The role of the beaker would have played a pivotal role in the latter, receiving guests by offering drinks. This narrative was entirely constructed based on the interpretation of the archaeological evidence presented in this thesis. This interpretation, however, can be corroborated by the work of our colleagues from the field of Comparative Linguistics who reconstructed a PIE word – **ghos-ti-* – which meant simultaneously *stranger*, *guest* and *host* and referred to a system of hospitality.

Hospitality and the rules structuring it were hugely important and can be found throughout Indo-European cultures and various examples were presented, including the writings of Homer, Ancient Greek culture and mythology, Biblical texts or Roman historians describing practices among the Celtiberians. The importance of receiving guests, offering them protection as a way of forging relations or alliances between people far and wide is moreover still in use today, for example in the form of diplomats who are hosted in foreign countries, treated as guests and are granted diplomatic immunity.

It was posited that the items found in Bell Beaker graves are the material remnants of a standardized and widely shared social front and drinking ceremony that played a central structuring role in this system of hospitality. The role of these objects in life were to connect people over vast distances in space (horizontal axis). By including them in the grave they served a similar purpose connecting the living and the dead and the recently deceased to their ancestors far away in time (vertical axis).

307 In cultures around the world death is associated with the notion of travel or the making of a journey (Van Gennep 2004).