

## THE BEGINNINGS OF BELIEF

On 25 August 1939 two men were excavating at the back of Stadel cave in the Hohlenstein cliff, not far from Ulm in south-west Germany. The area, just north of the Danube, was known to contain remarkable material from the Ice Age, and it was hoped that this cave might yield some new finds. It was the last day of the dig: as everybody knew, war was about to break out. Both men – the anatomist Robert Wetzel and the geologist Otto Völzing – had received their call-up papers for the German army.

As Wetzel and Völzing were preparing to pack away their tools, they made a discovery. Forty metres in, in a further, smaller cave, they found many tiny fragments of mammoth ivory which looked as though they had been worked by human hands. But there was no time to examine the fragments, or to begin to work out what they were or what they might mean. They were packed away with other material from the excavation, and put into temporary storage, and the two men went off to war.

Wetzel briefly noted in a local scientific journal in 1941 that he and Völzing had made a 'sensational' find, but for thirty years no one really knew what they had discovered. The finds from the

The Lion Man of Ulm, made from mammoth ivory 40,000 years ago, the earliest-known representation of something beyond human experience

