

– had emerged in Africa, and by around 60,000 years ago seem to have spread out rapidly, reaching Asia, Europe, Australia and eventually America. Earlier hominids had been making tools and hunting animals for well over a million years, but these people were, in one crucial respect, different.

Clive Gamble, Professor of Archaeology at the University of Southampton, is an expert in early human development:

*Imagination is at the core of it. The thing that really singles us out is how our brains work, our ability to go beyond the here and now. What we do very well is thinking ahead, into the future, beyond our individual lives, as well as into the past. That lets us embark on long journeys – the speed with which Homo sapiens inhabits the earth is astonishing. We can construct myths and legends. We can inhabit other worlds and make great imaginative leaps, bringing together things which do not occur in nature, as in the Lion Man. That is a really new and dynamic departure.*

For Clive Gamble, it is these sorts of imaginative leaps that are necessary to establish a view of our place in the cosmos, and of how we relate to other animals. They allow us to imagine other people – the community – continuing to exist when we no longer do, to develop a belief in an afterlife, to create symbols, ceremonies and rituals.

*Those beliefs – whatever we call them – would not be something special and separate, but an integral part of social life, pervading all activities. And it is not just about their own immediate group.*

*I think that belief systems at this stage could have been almost as important as having enough people to defend your territory, or even controlling a food supply: because shared beliefs would have allowed people to connect across social universes much larger than the local group. They would share with others a particular understanding of the world, and the symbols or rituals that could*

The 'Little Lion Man', also from the Ulm region, between 31,000 and 33,000 years ago



*be used to articulate it. And that would give them some sort of kinship – a kind of community – over a much larger area than was ever possible before.*

Supporting this last suggestion – that belief systems and practices might have been shared over a wide area, and drawn people together across considerable distances – is the discovery of at least one other statue of a Lion Man in the region. In recent years the cave where the Lion Man was found has been re-excavated by Professor Joachim Kind of Tübingen University. It is spacious, roughly rectangular, about forty metres deep and ten metres wide, not unlike a chilly village hall. It would always have been very cold, because it faces north. Professor Kind believes that this cave,