

which never sees the sun, is not a place where people would have chosen to live. Near its mouth is a fireplace, clearly much used, but where there are surprisingly few remains of stone tools, bones and so forth, the normal residue of human habitation – far fewer than in most caves of the area. This appears to have been a place where people did not permanently live, but occasionally gathered.



The Hohlenstein cave where Robert Weizel and Otto Völzing found the fragments of the Lion Man in 1939

Professor Kind thinks the main cave was used by groups who came from a wide area, for relatively short periods of time, probably to take part in ceremonies.

In the smaller cave at the back, where the fragments were excavated, the recent digs have revealed nothing at all connected with daily life, but instead objects of a different sort: the teeth of Arctic foxes, wolf and deer, pierced so they could be suspended and worn with little ivory pendants and a cache of trimmed reindeer antlers. Like the Lion Man, these are objects of no practical use, but it is easy to imagine them being deployed in rituals. Professor Kind thinks that this inner cave was a special area where activities of some kind connected with the Lion Man may have

taken place, and where the ritual objects were stored. He thinks one might almost use the word ‘sanctuary’, and call it a holy place.

We shall never be sure what the Lion Man meant to those people on the edge of survival, who sacrificed so many hours to bring it into being. But we do know that they had minds, and that they were capable of complexity, so it may not be impossible to imagine what they were doing and thinking. Like everything to do with deep history, much is speculative, and is adjusted as new evidence emerges. The best hypothesis is that the people of the Lion Man made a great work of art, constructed a narrative linking the natural and supernatural worlds, and enacted that narrative ceremonially with a wider community. This is something that all human societies have done: searching for patterns, and then composing stories and rituals about them, which put us – all of us – in our cosmic place. You could say that it is when a group agrees on how the fragments of this great puzzle fit together that you have a community: that *Homo sapiens* is also *Homo religiosus*, where the search is not for *my* place in the cosmos, but for *our* place, and where believing is closely connected with belonging.

Though the Lion Man seems to have been kept at the back of the Stadel cave, there is only one place where his story could have been told. It is the place of visions, the place where stories have always been told: round the flickering, magical, warming and dangerous fire. That is the subject of the next chapter.