

a few hundred. Their primary concern must have been getting and bringing in food, making clothing, keeping the fire going, protecting their children from predators, and so on. Yet they allowed someone of great ability to spend a lot of time away from such tasks, acquiring and exercising the skills needed to make the Lion Man. Why would a community make such a huge investment in order to produce an object which could play no part in its physical survival? Jill Cook gives her view:

*I think it is probably more about the community's psychological survival, something that strengthens the sense of themselves as a group. We do not know whether the Lion Man was a deity, a spiritual experience, a being from a creation story or an avatar used to negotiate with the forces of nature. But it is an object that makes sense only if it is part of a story, what we might now call a myth. There must have been a narrative or a ritual to accompany the statue that would explain its appearance and its meaning. What that story was, of course, we can now only guess. It was about humans and animals obviously – but presumably it was also about something beyond ourselves, beyond nature, which can somehow help to strengthen a community and enable it to overcome dangers and difficulties.*

*We know that at this time the people in the area were also making and listening to music. A variety of flutes, for example, have been found, some made of bird bones, which were already hollow, others much more complex and carved from ivory, which would again*

A bird-bone flute found in the Ulm region, contemporary with the Lion Man



*require a large investment of skill and time. We have also found a little figure who is clearly dancing. All these objects are about shared social activity, but also about transporting you into another realm, and that may well link to the purpose of the Lion Man.*

There are two important recently discovered details about the physical condition of the statue. Dr Kurt Wehrberger, the scholar at the Ulm Museum now responsible for the Lion Man, reports that examination by digital microscope has revealed that the mouth – and only the mouth – has been infiltrated by an organic substance, which may be blood. Its presence suggests some sort of ceremonial ritual in which the lion's mouth played a part.

Perhaps even more importantly, it can also be seen that the irregularities you would expect to find on the surface of mammoth ivory are not present: they have been smoothed away as a consequence of prolonged handling. Dr Wehrberger thinks that the Lion Man must have been held by many people over many years, possibly even over several generations. Made by an individual, this figure was shared by the group over a long period of time. Jill Cook imagines the scene:

*I think we can visualize them sitting round the fire, which will keep them warm and keep the wild animals away, listening to the sound of a flute, looking at the magic that the flames create, handling the statue, telling stories of this composite creature as an avatar who could link them to unseen spirits, either benevolent or dangerous. Tales of the visible world, but also of worlds that transcend it, to which the Lion Man, as a transformed fantastical being, could give access – not as an individual experience, but as something in which all could share.*

The people in the cave who handled the Lion Man were human beings very like us. They were the same species as we are – *Homo sapiens* – and had essentially the same brains as we do. They – we