# The Cave

# 2

*The Mediterranean is . . . 1000 things at once. Not just one landscape but innumerable landscapes. Not just one sea, but a succession of seas. Not just one civilisation but many civilisations superimposed on one another. The Mediterranean is an ancient crossroads. For millennia, everything converged on it, disturbing and enriching its history.*

Fernand Braudel [51]

Civilisation begins with fish; fish in the Mediterranean. Its arrival was eagerly anticipated in the caves of the steep rock faces. The giant tuna, after all, always returned to the Mediterranean on its regular route past their beaches, so it was a question of waiting patiently in the right place. They must have been taught this from an early age, just as they were taught how to make fire and how to sharpen the edge of a stone to make a hand axe. Much about the Neanderthals remains a mystery, but we know that they were partial to bluefin tuna. They knew how to cut large fillets from the spine and roast it over the fire, perhaps with a sprig of rosemary as a first step in culinary evolution. Tuna, in any case, was a welcome change from the menu of shellfish, wild boar or ibex, the local mountain goat. As the days grew warmer, it was time to go in search of the big fish (Fig. 2.1).

So it must have started here, the fuss over tuna. In fact, that is quite surprising. Neanderthals are not the first candidates to spring to mind when it comes to catching and eating giant tuna. Eating tuna is different from plucking a berry from a bush or opening a shell and gulping down the contents. Tuna requires knowledge, organisation and skill. Catching this great fish involved passing on experience, demanding at least a rudimentary language and some degree of social order. Tuna entails governance: without governance there is no tuna.

The long journey of tuna begins here, in Gorham's Cave at the southern tip of Gibraltar. Like the Neanderthals, we look south from high up at the back of this


S. Adolf, *Tuna Wars*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20641-3_2

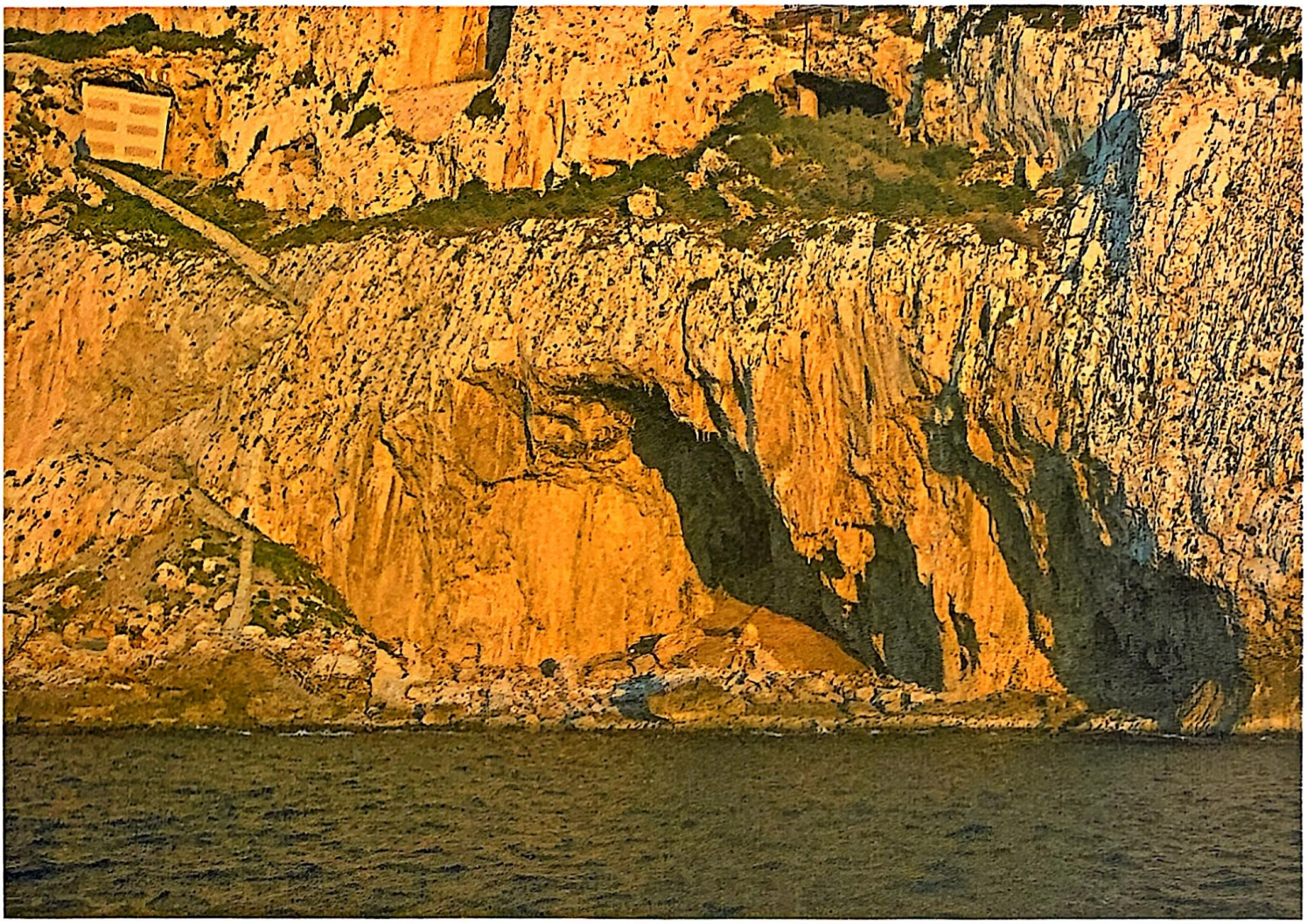

**Fig. 2.1** Gorham's Cave, last refuge of the tuna eating Neanderthals (S. Finlayson, by courtesy of Gibraltar Museum)

enormous cave. The view has changed since their day. They looked out over dune-like steppes which, a couple of kilometres further on, became the beach of the narrow strait dividing the continents. Over the last 50,000 years the sea level has risen substantially, a process that could well continue much further if climate predictions are to be believed. The seawater now laps at the foot of the cave entrance. Around us lie more caves and caverns once inhabited by Neanderthals, now withdrawn from sight, deep under the rising sea level. The view of Morocco remains the same, just as nothing has changed in the migration of the large shoals of giant tuna which pass by every spring towards the rising sun.