

CHIANG ER-SHIH RECENT WORKS



THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

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February 7 - March 29
1970

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Front Cover : “ *Cascades Through Autumn Foliage* ”, ink and colour on silk.
Collection of The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of the Joseph and
Helen Regenstein Foundation.

FOREWORD

Chiang Er-Shih had his first one-man show in Chicago at the Art Institute in November, 1955, following successful showings in Tokyo, Honolulu and on the West Coast. There had earlier been little opportunity in the Midwest to see or evaluate contemporary Chinese painting and the warm appeal of his subject matter and versatility of brushwork created a wide circle of admirers. Deft brushstrokes of black and grey defining a small bird on a branch, or the same rich ink and light color suggesting a craggy mist-enshrouded segment of Chinese landscape evince the long training the gifted Chinese painter undergoes. A thorough study of earlier masters and complete control of brush and ink on paper or silk were all inherent in the composition and execution of these early works.

Now, fifteen years later. The Art Institute of Chicago readies an exhibition of recent works by Mr. Chiang. All of the terms of craft proficiency enumerated above apply to the new paintings, but with added discernible differences. Greater maturity has brought a sureness of execution, combined with boldness, both in use of color and in composition. Fresh approaches to subject matter bespeak the variety of visual experiences the artist has enjoyed in recent years.

Born in Kiangsu Province, China, in 1913, Mr. Chiang shares his name with a distinguished group of forebears. Artists, poets and men of official rank have brought distinction to the family name in cultural and intellectual circles from the late Ming Dynasty to the present. His great-grandfather Chiang T'ing-Hsi (1669-1732) was a master painter of his period and paintings by him are included in the inventory of the Palace Collection. Following the conventional classical education, Mr. Chiang served both in the Museum and School of Fine Arts in Kwangsi. An important and perceptible part of his early training was as a pupil of Huang Ping-Hung (1864-1955), one of the last great scholar-painters in the traditional sense. Like his teacher, Chiang patiently

studied and copied the old masters, a study facilitated by his own family's fine collection of paintings and calligraphy and heightened by his master's keen eye and connoisseurship. Unlike his teacher, whose individualistic paintings were not widely appreciated, and who has gained greater stature only after his death in 1955, Chiang Er-shih won more immediate recognition in China and subsequently in Hong Kong.

The Japanese, traditionally responsive to Chinese style and technique, warmly received his one-man show in Tokyo in 1954. The following year Mr. Chiang traveled to Hawaii and the United States, and now lives and paints in Switzerland and Spain. One-man shows in New York and more recently in Switzerland, France and Spain have broadened the appreciation of his artistry and enriched public and important private collections throughout the Western World.

Like most artists, Chiang Er-shih tends to minimize the merits of his earlier works in his enthusiasm for those of the present and recent past. A retrospective exhibition, however, would reveal that through sheer technical mastery of traditional forms alone, these earlier works have a beauty and vitality which would assure their artistic importance. Certain fine examples from the 1950's and early 1960's indeed stand out with particular brilliance. Fresh subject matter, bold but never strident color, and an inquisitive, inventive exploration of compositional possibilities characterize his recent work.

Contemporary Chinese painting has many faces, from the purely decorative, traditionally oriented, Sunday-painter studies of bird, bamboo and chrysanthemum to the often explosive abstractions by imaginative painters of the "Now Generation". The minimal merit of the former remains purely decorative, seldom transcending the dry and static rendering of an old familiar theme. The more demanding statements of the latter frequently hold promise, but are almost invariably international in style and, except to the initiated devotee, scarcely oriental. Between these extremes, a few contemporary Chinese artists, thoroughly grounded in traditional discipline, have attempted to use their heritage as a point of departure in recording their twentieth-century surroundings. Though the training be faultless and the intent of the highest order, the efforts all too frequently suggest an uneasy compromise between the alien traditions of East and West. Too much is imitative, though not in the traditional oriental sense of pupil copying master.

However, a small, even more select group have successfully used traditional training as a springboard, embracing certain aspects of contemporary Western painting to enhance and advance their art. Chiang

Er-shih is among this group. A cluster of russet-tiled cottages on a Spanish hillside bespeaks Spain, through the selective Chinese eye, just as do branches of flowering almond, or the stream through a rocky cleft near his home in Marbella. A panoramic mountain view, clearing after a sudden storm, is at once less specific geographically, and more precise in the assimilation of impressions. These shared visual experiences are at once timeless and of the moment. The sure setting down of clearing valleys in the Alps near Lucerne certainly was preceded by many studies of the improbable mountains of China ; and wanderings by cascades and falls in Kiangsi, and reading the poems they inspired bring to life the deceptively simple rendering of a similar scene in Spain. By 1975 or 1980, Mr. Chiang may be less enthusiastic about the paintings in this exhibition. Certain examples, though, will join other early fine and hoped-for future works to form a comprehensive picture of a gifted painter.

Jack V. Sewell
Curator of Oriental Art
The Art Institute of Chicago

CATALOGUE

1. *Cascades Through Autumn Foliage.*
Collection of The Art Institute of Chicago.
2. *Clearing After the Storm.* Collection of Avery Brundage.
3. *Landscape of Switzerland.*
4. *Reminiscence of China.*
5. *Summer Mountains under Fresh Snow* (Switzerland).
6. *Morning Clouds.*
7. *Old Pine.*
8. *Sailing.*
9. *Lotus.*
10. *Spring in Ronda* (Spain).
11. *Summer in Lucerne* (Switzerland).
12. *Rowing under Cliffs.*
13. *Bamboo.*
14. *Representation of a Dream.*
15. *Almond Blossoms.*
16. *Apricot Tree.*
17. *Mijas* (Spain).
18. *Mountain Retreat* (Spain).
19. *Multicolour Cliffs* (Spain). Collection of Avery Brundage.
20. *Pond of Heaven* (Spain). Collection of Avery Brundage.
21. *Dawn in Switzerland.* Collection of Avery Brundage.
22. *Sand Cliffs* (Portugal).



2. *Clearing After the Storm.*
Collection of Avery Brundage.



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3. *Landscape of Switzerland.*



4. *Reminiscence of China.*



5. *Summer Mountains under Fresh Snow* (Switzerland).



6. *Morning Clouds.*



7. Old Pine.



樹色暈深谷松濤出晚
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海峽湖上厚竹草楊
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9. Lotus.



10. *Spring in Ronda* (Spain).



11. *Summer in Lucerne* (Switzerland).



12. *Rowing under Cliffs.*

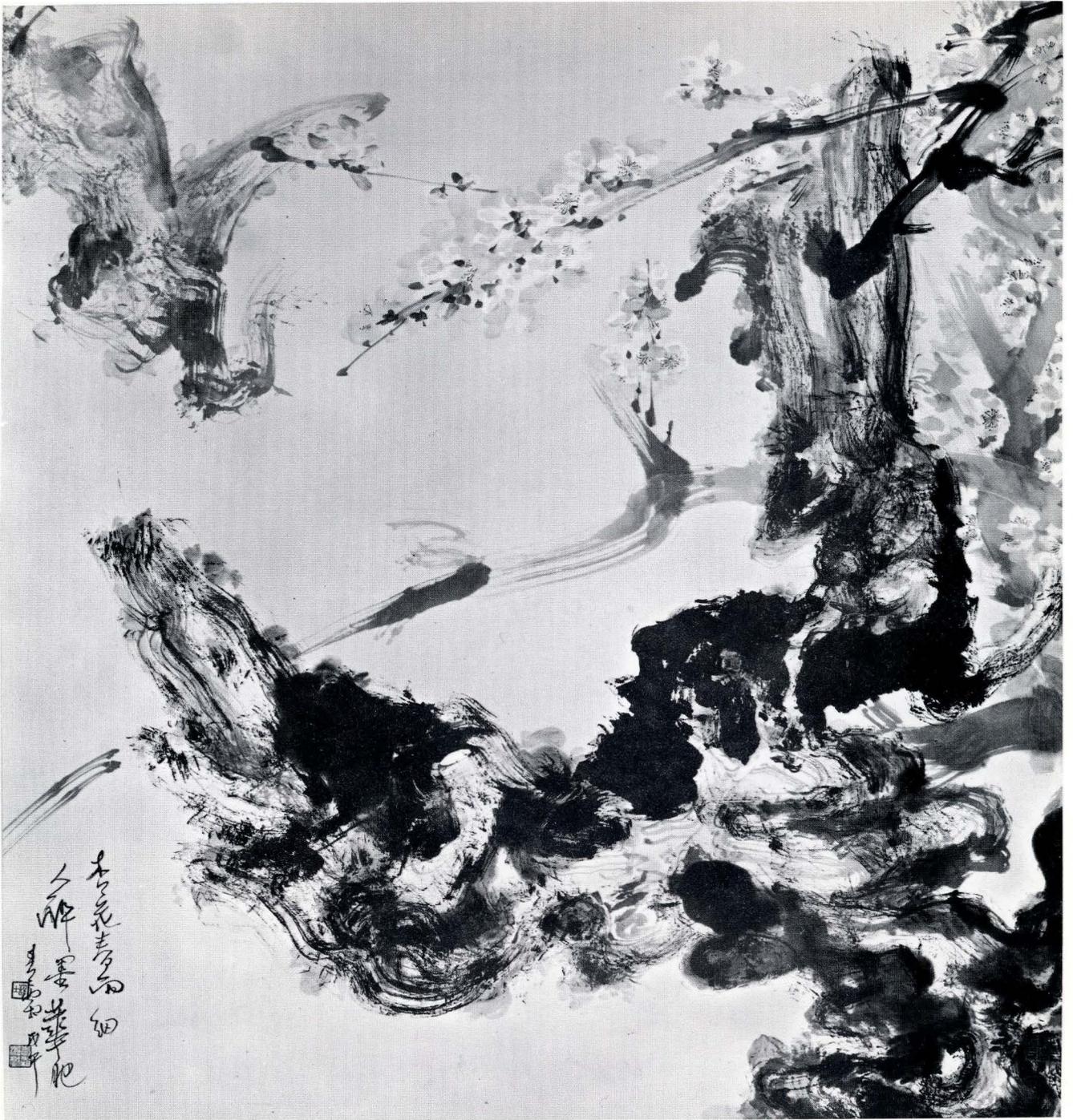


13. - Bamboo.



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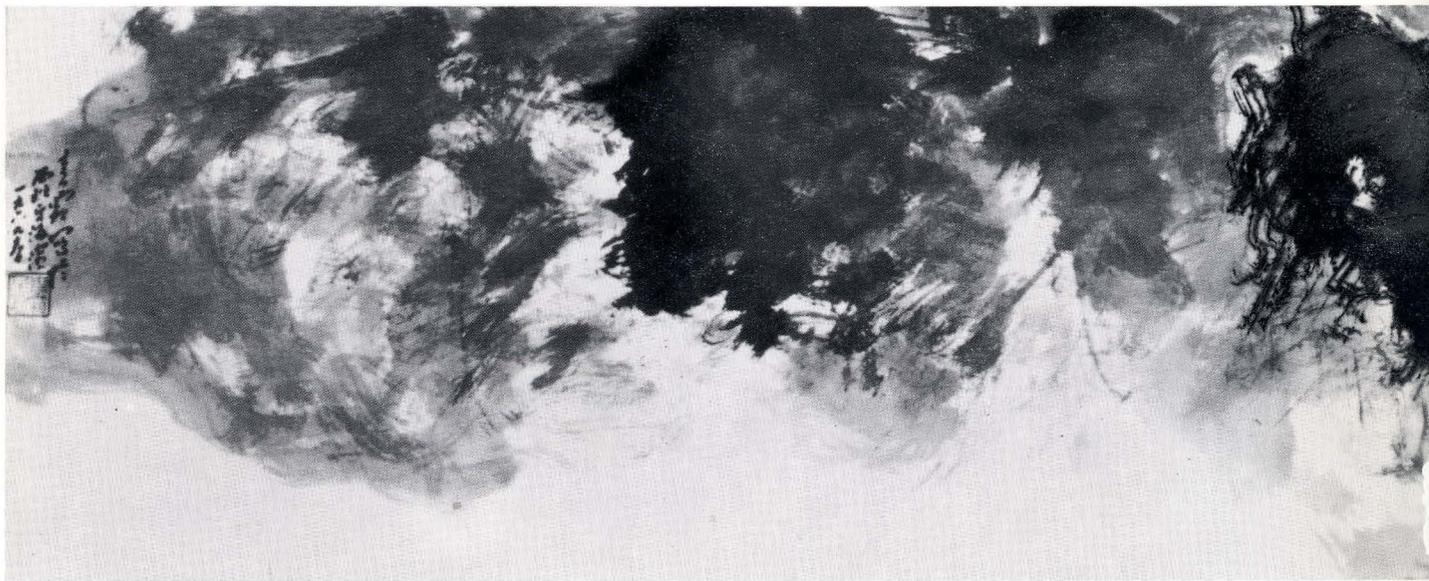
14. Representation of a Dream.



15. *Almond Blossoms.*

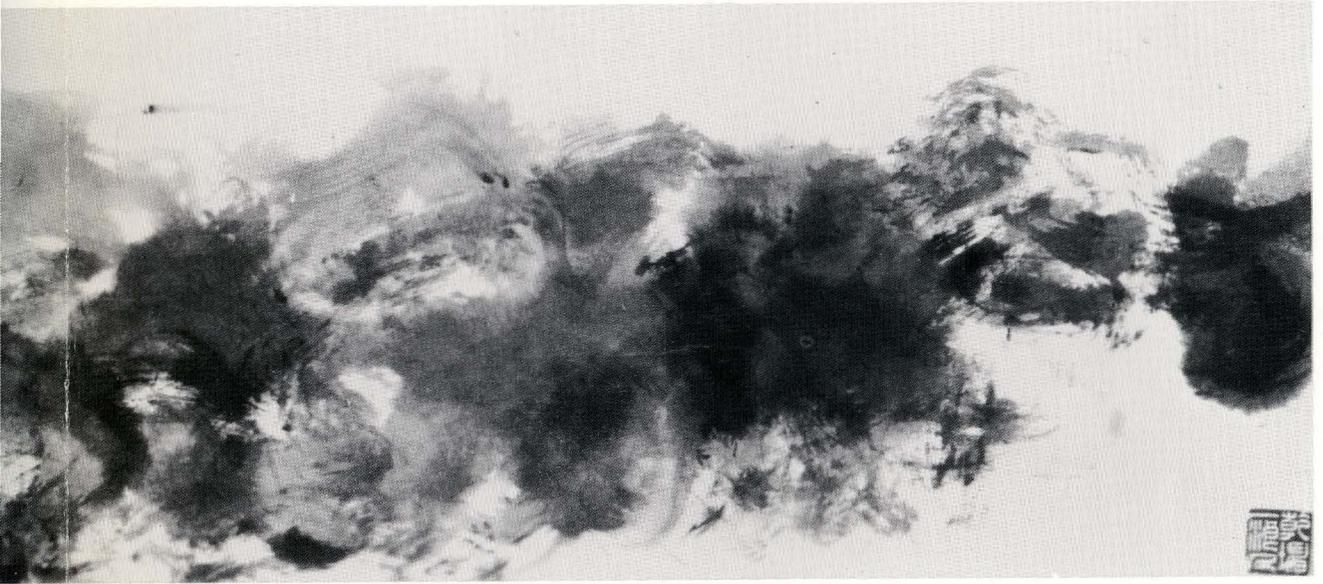


16. *Apricot Tree.*



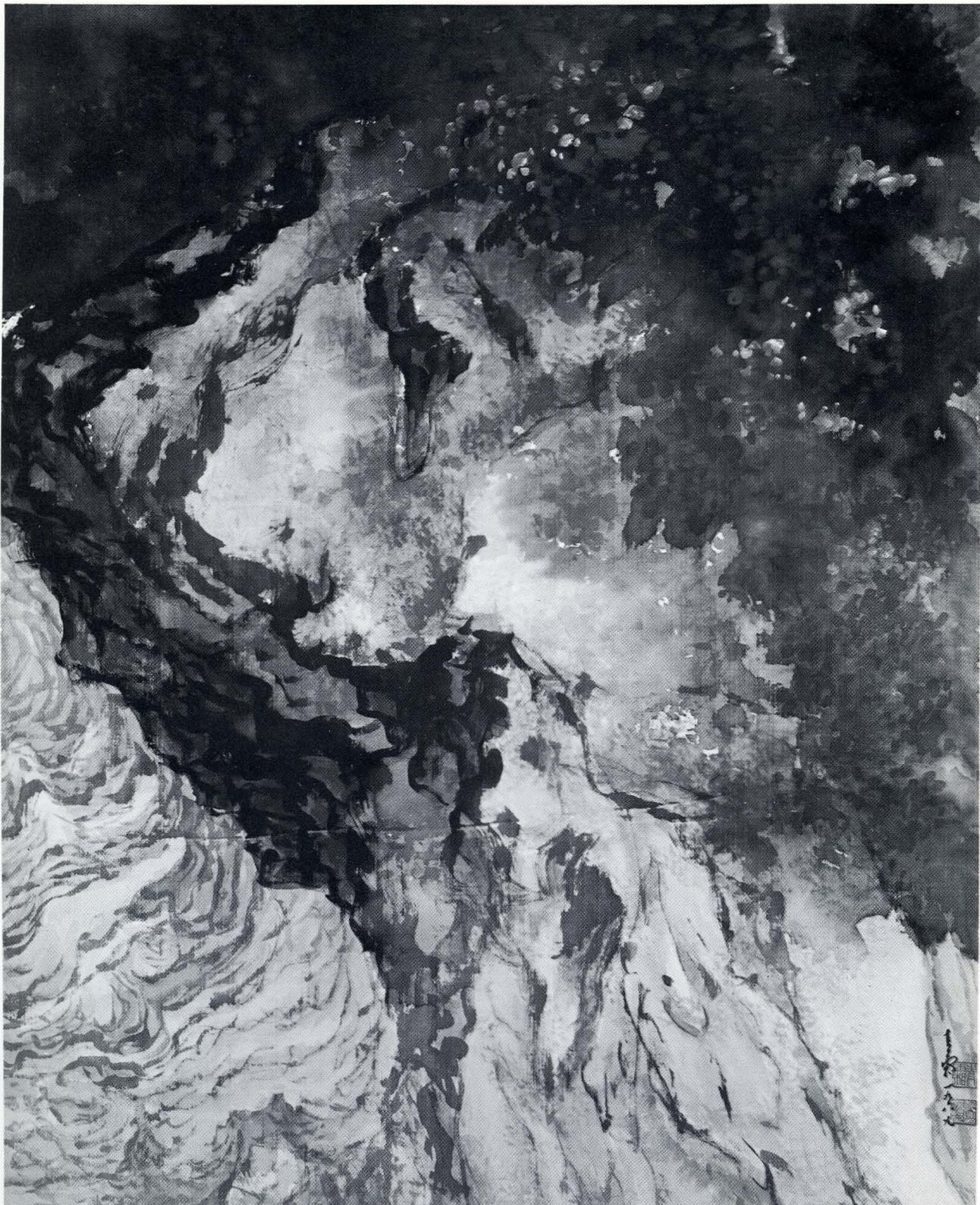


17. *Mijas* (Spain).





18. *Mountain Retreat (Spain).*



19. *Multicolour Cliffs* (Spain).
Collection of Avery Brundage.



20. *Pond of Heaven* (Spain).
Collection of Avery Brundage.



21. *Dawn in Switzerland.*
Collection of Avery Brundage.



22. *Sand Cliffs* (Portugal).

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