CAPTAIN COOK AND OMAI[1]

by E. H. McCormick

For a man who attained such eminence before his death, surprisingly little is known of Cook's personal life. Of his relations with parents, wife, family, and fellow Yorkshiremen not much is recorded beyond the bare facts and what is contained in a handful of unrevealing letters. His journals, informative as they are about many subjects, do not often dwell on the friendships--and the animosities--that developed on the quarterdeck or in the confines of the great cabin. Nor do the comments of his contemporaries and shipboard companions penetrate very deeply. "He is," lamented his editor and biographer, "an exceptionally difficult man to get inside."[2]

There is, however, one association that Cook made that is more fully documented than usual. His first object in the forthcoming voyage, he informed a French correspondent early in 1776, was "*de reconduir Omaï dans son îsle.*"[3] Omai was a special charge, entrusted to his care by the Admiralty and in particular by the First Lord, the Earl of Sandwich, who was his own patron. So when the *Resolution* set out later in the year, he apparently felt called upon to supply details of the man's conduct both in his journals and his correspondence. And when he was cursory or silent the gaps were often filled by other witnesses keenly interested in the returning celebrity and the comedy-drama of his dealings with Captain Cook. My purpose here is to trace the fluctuating course of their relationship during the period of sixteen months they were together. But, first, a glance at Omai.

He was, as every student of the Pacific knows, the first Polynesian to reach Britain but not the first to visit Europe. He had been preceded by a Tahitian, Ahutoru, taken to France by Bougainville. Omai's early life is obscure and even his original name is uncertain. In the manner

[1]A slightly revised version of a paper, "Cook's First Mission on His Third Voyage," presented on 27 April 1978 at the Cook Conference, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C., Canada. The paper in its turn was based on my *Omai, Pacific Envoy* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1977) to which readers are diffidently referred for points of detail. Subsequent footnotes, usually collected under one reference for each paragraph, indicate the source of quotations from other publications.

[2]J. C. Beaglehole, "On the character of Captain James Cook," *Geographical Journal* 122, part 4 (December 1956), 417.

[3]James Cook, *The Journals of Captain James Cook*, ed. J. C. Beaglehole, 3 vols. (Cambridge: The Hakluyt Society, 1955-1967), II, 700. Hereafter referred to as "Cook."

of his countrymen he might have changed it more than once and may have decided to call himself Mai because that was the designation of a chiefly family. Through a misunderstanding the English prefixed the article *o* to many personal and geographical nouns, so that Tahiti became known as Otaheite and Mai as Omai. Born in the island of Ra'iatea about 1753 of the "middling" class or *ra'atira*, at the age of ten or so he was overtaken by disaster. His native island was invaded by warriors from neighboring Bora-Bora under their chief Puni and he lost his father in battle. Following this incident, he and other refugees, among them the chief and priest Tupaia, fled to Tahiti, one hundred miles to the southeast. With other relatives he settled on the northern coast of the island.

Thus Omai was there in June 1767 when Captain Samuel Wallis of HMS *Dolphin,* in search of the supposed Southern Continent, lighted on Tahiti. He was only about fourteen years of age, too young to join the warriors in their efforts to repel these unwelcome newcomers; but he was wounded by gunfire in the final clash at Matavai Bay. Apparently he bore the British no resentment, for he was one of the admiring throng that greeted the *Endeavour* a couple of years later. Led by Lieutenant James Cook, this expedition came to observe the transit of Venus across the sun and brought two members of the Royal Society, Joseph Banks and Daniel Carl Solander. On leaving Matavai Bay, Banks took with him as human specimens Tupaia and a young servant, both of whom died at Batavia on the homeward voyage. Some time later Omai seems to have made his way back to Ra'iatea to join in an unsuccessful attempt to dislodge the Bora-Boran usurpers. He narrowly escaped death and sought refuge in nearby Huahine.

He was still at Huahine in September 1773 during a brief visit of the *Resolution* and the *Adventure* in the course of Cook's second voyage. It was originally intended that Banks and Solander should again set out, but as the result of a quarrel with his old friend Sandwich, Banks withdrew at the last moment. Omai for his part became a favorite of men on the *Adventure* and, with the consent of its captain, Tobias Furneaux, embarked as a supernumerary under the name Tetuby Homy. Cook was not impressed by the volunteer, describing him in his journal as "dark, ugly and a downright blackguard."[4] At the island of Tongatapu he was further disappointed when neither Omai nor his own recruit, Hitihiti, could understand the local language, though it was closely related to their own tongue. However, he gave grudging approval to

[4]Cook, II, 428, n. 2.

Furneaux's action, doubtless in the belief that both men would be restored to their homes on his return to the Society Islands later in the voyage. As it proved, the *Adventure* failed to return. The two ships parted in a storm off the New Zealand coast and by the time the *Adventure* limped into the agreed rendezvous at Queen Charlotte Sound the *Resolution* had already left. On the eve of his own departure Furneaux sent some of his men to gather greens. When they failed to reappear, a search party went out, only to discover the mangled remains of their companions and on a neighboring hill natives in the midst of a cannibal feast. Furneaux gave up all thought of rejoining Cook and immediately made for home. After calling at the Cape of Good Hope, he reached Spithead on 14 July 1774 and set out for London with his living trophy from the South Seas.

So it came about that an average Polynesian had been picked up and, more or less by accident, transported across the world. Omai or Omiah, as he was now called, met Lord Sandwich, who handed him over to Banks, delighted to heal the breach with his friend and take charge of this unexpected replacement for the dead Tupaia. A few days later he was presented to George III and launched into society. Circumstances could scarcely have been more favorable for his reception. The educated public, already familiar with the ideas of Rousseau, had in the recent past been both instructed and entertained by varied accounts of the Pacific. These ranged from Bougainville's lyrical descriptions of New Cythera, as he named Tahiti, to a sensational narrative of the *Endeavour* expedition and verse satires on Banks's supposed amours with the "Queen" of Tahiti. Above all, thousands of readers had perused and pondered over the three volumes of Hawkesworth's epic of British discovery in the South Seas. In Omai they saw not merely a denizen of this fabled region, the representative of a new race, but the embodiment of that philosophical abstraction, natural man. His success was assured. For the two years of his stay he was fêted by aristocrats, entertained by the Royal Society, depicted by leading artists, and introduced to such celebrities as Dr. Johnson, Mrs. Thrale, and Fanny Burney. Sandwich had him to stay at his country house and took him for a long cruise on his yacht. Banks was his escort in the world of fashion and carried him on tours through the English countryside. They had set off on a visit to Mulgrave Castle in Yorkshire when the *Resolution* returned in the summer of 1775.

Cook's immediate response to the situation he found is, alas, not on record. He was doubtless surprised when he discovered from Solander and other visitors to the *Resolution* that the ill-favored, undistinguished

islander he had met briefly in the South Seas had become the lion of high society. And, touching him even more closely, he must have learned with mixed feelings that this low-born native was the favorite of his own patron Lord Sandwich, the protégé of his friend and mentor Banks. With his appointment as leader of the new expedition in February 1776 he accepted responsibility for carrying Omai back to the Pacific and restoring him to his people. In the months that followed both men were fully occupied, Cook with preparations for the voyage, Omai with instructions in the elements of English and social engagements in a circle that now included Mrs. Thrale and her friends. They must, however, have met each other, though there is only indirect evidence of the fact. Entering his journal early in April 1776, James Boswell described a conversation he held with Cook at a dinner given by the president of the Royal Society. At one point they discussed Omai, who was about to go home, and who, according to Cook, 'begged" to take back two things, port wine, "which he loved the best of any liquor," and gunpowder. The captain went on to say that he would not let Omai have the power of firearms and foretold that for a time he would be "a man of great consequence" but would then sink into his former state and want to return to England.[5]

His remarks to Boswell were not Cook's last words on Omai before he again set out on the *Resolution.* Assisted by Dr. John Douglas, Canon of Windsor, and to a lesser extent by Lord Sandwich, he had in the previous months been preparing the journal of his second voyage for publication. In describing the visit to Huahine in 1773, he made handsome amends for his slighting reference to Omai as "dark, ugly and a downright blackguard." Deleting that passage, he wrote more mildly that he had rather wondered that Captain Furneaux should pick up this man who had no advantage in birth or rank and no distinction of shape, figure, or complexion. But since his arrival in England, he candidly confessed, he had been convinced of his error and now doubted whether any other native would have given greater satisfaction. He went on to list Omai's virtues--his "very good understanding," his "honest principles," the "natural good behaviour, which rendered him acceptable to the best company," and the "proper degree of pride, which taught him to avoid the society of persons of inferior rank." Then followed a tribute to his sobriety, ascribed to the example set by "the persons of rank who honoured him with their protection." Certain of these

[5]Charles Ryskamp and Frederick A. Pottle, eds., *Boswell: The Ominous Years 1774-1776* (London: Heinemann., 1963, pp. 310-311.

persons were specified in a paragraph summarizing the events of his stay. Soon after his arrival, it opened, the First Lord introduced him to His Majesty at Kew. There he met with "a most gracious reception, and imbibed the strongest impression of duty and gratitude to that great and amiable prince"--an impression, it was predicted, that he would "preserve to the latest moment of his life." During his sojourn, the account continued, "he was caressed by many of the principal nobility, and did nothing to forfeit the esteem of any of them; but his principal patrons were the Earl of Sandwich, Mr. Banks, and Dr. Solander." Though Omai lived in the midst of amusements in England, it was observed, the return to his native country was always in his thoughts and, while not impatient to go, he expressed satisfaction as the time approached. "He embarked with me in the *Resolution*," the passage ended, ". . . loaded with presents from his several friends, and full of gratitude for the kind reception and treatment he had experienced among us."[6]

In the final sentence Cook was anticipating future events. They did not leave until 24 June 1776, from which date their joint actions are amply documented. It was Cook himself from his special vantage point who opened the saga of Omai's return. They set out for the ship at six o'clock in the morning, he wrote in his journal on 24 June, and reached Chatham some five hours later. On the road from London, he recalled, his companion displayed "a Mixture of regret and joy: in speaking of England and such persons as had honoured him [with] their protection and friendship he would be very low spirited and with difficulty refrain from tears; but turn the conversation to his Native Country and his eyes would sparkle with joy." He was "fully sencible of the good treatment he had met with in England" and "entertained the highest ideas of the Country and people." On the other hand, "the prospect he now had of returning to his native isle loaded with what they esteem riches, got the better of every other consideration, and he seemed quite happy." The riches included a suit of armor, an electrical machine, and an assortment of European clothing; in addition, the ship carried animals and birds for distribution in the Pacific, among them a flock of sheep and a peacock and hen. Cook omitted such details but again listed Omai's principal benefactors and concluded with an illuminating comment which had no parallel in his earlier report: "In short every method had been taken both during his aboad in England and at his depar-

[6]James Cook, *A Voyage towards the South Pole*, 2 vols. (London: Strahan and Cadell, 1777), I, 169-171.

ture to make him convey to his Countrymen the highest opinion of the greatness and generosity of the British Nation."[7]

Journal entries for the Channel passage yield only one reference to Omai who, it was recorded, did not go ashore at Deal "to the great disapointment of many people . . . assembled there to see him." Omai-watchers had better luck at Plymouth, for, as Cook wrote to Banks on 10 July, he was "very much carressed" by "every person of note" in that city. He had received three guineas pocket money, was consequently in high spirits, and sent his 'best respects" to Mr. Banks and Dr. Solander. Cook had already acknowledged receipt of his secret instructions which stated: "Upon your arrival at Otaheite, or the Society Isles, you are to land Omiah at such of them as he may chuse and to leave him there."[8] To give effect to this and more elaborate directions he set off on the 12th leaving the *Discovery* to follow when its commander, Captain Charles Clerke, should be released from legal entanglements in London.

There was little to report as the *Resolution* made for the Cape of Good Hope by way of Tenerife. Towards the end of August they were in tropical waters, where on the 23rd Cook noted a great many small dolphins of which they caught several with a white fly and rod. "Omai," he commented, "first showed us the way and caught twice the number of any body besides." His slightly cryptic tribute was followed two months later by a letter to Sandwich. "I embrace the first [opportunity]," he wrote from Cape Town on 23 October, "to acquaint your Lordship with my safe arrival at this place, with Omai, and every Animal intend[ed] for Otaheite in a fair way of living to arrive at their destined spot." At that time he was still waiting for the *Discovery,* but on 26 November he again wrote to the First Lord to inform him that the ship had now joined them and they would soon leave for the south. "The takeing on board some horses has made Omai compleatly happy," Cook went on, "he consented with raptures to give up his Cabbin to make room for them, his only concern now is that we shall not have food for all the stock we have got on board." There followed reassuring references to his "good state of health and great flow of Spirits" and a final tribute to his personal qualities: "Sence he has been with me I have not had the least reason to find fault with any part of his conduct and the people here are surprised at his genteel behaviour and deportment." The same day a letter went to Banks conveying similar senti-

[7]Cook, III, 5.

[8]Cook, III, ccxxi, 6, 1511.

ments often phrased in identical terms. Omai, wrote Cook, enjoyed good health, and his conduct since he left England had not given the least cause for complaint. "He desires," the letter continued, "his best respects to you, Dr Solander, Lord Seaford and to a great many more, Ladies as well as Gentlemen, whose names I cannot insert because they would fill up this sheet of paper, I can only say that he does not forget any who have shewed him the least kindness."[9]

By the end of November the *Resolution,* loaded with supplies and animals, lacked only a few females of their own species to become "a Compleate ark," as Cook jested in writing to Sandwich. On 1 December the two ships weighed anchor to head southeast in search of land already reported by French explorers. During this episode, which resulted in the sighting and naming of several bleak islands, Cook made no mention of Omai. He was preoccupied with navigational problems in these hazardous waters and also with the plight of his live cargo. After losing many animals through cold and hunger he decided to seek milder weather and fresh fodder in Van Diemen's Land. There it was, on 27 January 1777, that Omai emerged from the obscurity which had enveloped him in the two months since he left the Cape. Once more he won praise for his skill as a fisherman and through an encounter with the unsophisticated aborigines was again referred to in the captain's journal. One of the natives, wrote Cook, set up a stick to aim at but proved himself a poor marksman; whereupon "Omai to shew them how much superior our weapons were to theirs, fired his musket at the Mark, on which they instantly ran into the woods. . . ."[10] It was a trifling incident in a brief visit that did something to restore both "cattle" and men. On the 30th they set out for New Zealand, where they arrived on 12 February.

When they entered the familiar haven of Queen Charlotte Sound, Omai was in the forefront--a position he was to hold for the next eight months. Waving a handkerchief, he announced to the occupants of several canoes that "Toote" had returned. They seemed reluctant to approach, fearing, Cook supposed, that he had come to revenge the death of Captain Furneaux's sailors. Nor did Omai help matters by speaking openly of the massacre. Gradually, however, they were won over and boarded the ships to pay their respects and engage in barter. Among the visitors two were specially noted: the first a handsome youth about seventeen years of age, Te Weherua by name, remembered for his

[9]Cook, III, 14 n. 3, 1515, 1520, 1521.

[10]Cook, III, 53, 1520.

friendliness and honesty during earlier visits; the other a chief of sinister mien, known as Kahourah, reputedly a leader of the band which had killed and eaten the Adventure's men. Cook made every effort to discover details of the affair and four days after their arrival led a large party to the scene of the attack.

During the excursion--indeed throughout the whole visit--Omai acted as interpreter. This was a little surprising, for on the previous voyage he had shown no linguistic aptitude whatsoever; seemingly with enhanced social status he had acquired the gift of tongues! Cook described him speaking to a ring of attentive listeners and elsewhere said quite explicitly that he understood the New Zealand language "perfectly well." On the present occasion he collected eyewitness accounts of the fatal affray which tended to show, as Cook observed, that "the thing was not premeditated" but had arisen from thefts committed by the New Zealanders and "too hastily resented" by the Adventure's men. For these reasons, in spite of contrary advice from other members of the expedition and even from the natives themselves, he decided not to punish any of the guilty warriors, of whom Kahourah was the most notorious. Omai was outraged by the decision, protesting to the captain: "why do you not kill him, you tell me if a man kills an other in England he is hanged for it, this Man has killed ten and yet you will not kill him, tho a great many of his countrymen desire it and it would be very good."[11]

Along with the principles of British justice Omai had picked up from his high-born patrons notions of the privileges befitting a man of rank. For some time before they reached New Zealand, Cook explained, his protege had "express'd a desire to take one of the Natives with him to his own Country." He wished, in fact, to enlist the nucleus of an entourage. A suitable recruit soon appeared in the person of the amiable youth Te Weherua who volunteered his services and came to live on the ship. Thinking he would leave after getting what he could from Omai, Cook at first paid little attention, but when he stayed on it looked as if Omai had deceived the young New Zealander and his family by telling them he would be brought back. "I therefore caused it to be made known to all of them," Cook emphasized, "that if he went away with us he would never return, but this seemed to make no sort of impression on either him or his friends."[12] Te Weherua persisted in his resolve and, since he was of chiefly rank, another youth was chosen

[11]Cook, III, 62, 64, 68.

[12]Cook, III, 69-70.

to go as his servant. He, however, left the ship, to be replaced at the last moment by a boy named Koa, about nine or ten years of age.

Thus, to please Omai and minister to his vanity, Cook had broken one of his inflexible rules. Up to this point he had taken on islanders for limited voyages but had refused to remove them permanently from their homes and had given Tupaia a passage only when Banks accepted full responsibility for the chief's future. Now he was condemning the two New Zealanders to lifelong exile--an action that obviously concerned him deeply. He again pointed out the improbability, or rather impossibility, of their return, but to no effect. "Not one," he wrote, "even their nearest relations seem to trouble themselves about what became of them." Despite his own misgivings, he allowed Omai to carry them off, the more willingly, he remarked, because he "was well satisfied the boys would not be losers by exchange of place"--an allusion, it would seem, to the insecurity of life in their native land and the cannibalistic habits of their countrymen.[13]

On 25 February the ships left Queen Charlotte Sound, soon heading northeast for Tahiti. At first Omai's retainers, seasick as well as homesick, regretted their decision and for days on end wept inconsolably. But in time, according to Cook, "the tumult of their minds began to subside" and they thought no more of friends or country. He himself seems to have forgotten the exiles--or at least to have ignored them in his journal--until they parted in the following November. During this stage of the voyage, as they entered the tropics after more than a month at sea, he had urgent problems of his own to consider. He had hoped that the supplies taken on at New Zealand would last until they reached Tahiti, but progress was slow and before the end of March both fodder for the animals and water were running out. On the 29th land came into view, the island of Mangaia, southernmost of the group which now bears Cook's name. Though the place seemed to offer all they needed, the inhabitants rejected Omai's overtures, while a coral reef made landing hazardous, if not impossible. They could do nothing but sail on until, a couple of days later, they reached Atiu where the people resembled those of Mangaia but were more friendly. Led by a chief carrying a coconut branch, the token of peace, men came on board to be greeted by Omai who understood them "perfectly" and made the correct responses to their incantations.[14] He guided them over the ship and in return for their presents, Cook noted, gave them a

[13]Cook, III, 70.

[14]Cook, III, 76, 81 n. 4.

prized dog he had brought from England. Altogether, conditions seemed most propitious, but alas there was no anchorage and again no break in the encircling barrier. In desperation Cook arranged for a boating party to make for the reef whence they would be carried ashore in canoes. Omai was the go-between in negotiations with the natives and, as usual, the interpreter.

After spending a whole day on the island, the frustrated mariners returned to the ships at nightfall. Not only had they failed to gather any supplies worth mentioning but they had lost all their loose possessions and, in the opinion of some, had survived only because of Omai's presence. Throughout their stay they had been pestered and pilfered by a vast throng of islanders who turned a deaf ear to their requests while firmly resisting all attempts to escape. At one point Omai was greatly alarmed to see an earth oven being heated, but his fears were allayed when a pig was brought for roasting. He eased the tension by taking a club to show how it was used in his country and, as darkness fell, surprised and intimidated the spectators by lighting a small pile of gunpowder. In short, he was the hero of the occasion and received praise on all sides for his courage and resourcefulness. In his version of the proceedings Cook, who had remained on the *Resolution,* paid a deserved tribute to the young man's loyalty to Britain and his command of hyperbole. "Omai," he wrote, "was asked a great many questions concerning us, our Ships, Country and according to his account the answers he gave were many of them not a little upon the marvellous as for instance he told them we had Ships as large as their islands, that carried guns so large that several people might sit within them and that one of these guns was sufficient to distroy the whole island at one shot."[15]

While the episode had relieved the monotony of the voyage, it had added nothing to the ships' resources. They did, however, gather some meager supplies from the desert islet off Takutea and then made for the Hervey Islands. Here they were again greeted by hostile natives and, since a landing proved impossible, Cook was forced to take stock of the situation. Disappointed at every landfall since leaving New Zealand, held back by contrary winds, he concluded that he could not possibly reach the Northern Hemisphere in time to carry out his Arctic mission in the coming summer. Everything must now be done not only to save the animals but to conserve stores so that the search for a northern passage could be made a year later than originally intended.

[15]Cook, III, 86.

Instead of continuing towards Tahiti, therefore, he directed his course toward the Tongan Archipelago which he had twice visited during the previous expedition and, because of the unstinted hospitality of its people, named the Friendly Isles.

Hardly had Cook recorded this decision, early in April, when fate relented. On the 13th they sighted an uninhabited islet of the Palmerston atoll, not easy of access but, it proved the following day, covered with coarse grass and young coconut trees. These with other vegetation were gathered for the famished animals by foragers who also profited from the abundant resources of the lagoon. Omai, Cook's escort when he left the *Resolution,* was now in his element. As the grateful captain acknowledged, he "caught with a scoop net in a very short time as much fish as served the whole party for dinner, besides sending some to both ships."[16] He demonstrated other talents by preparing delicious meals in an earth oven heated by stones (an accomplishment he had displayed to his hosts in England), and he showed his companions how to obtain fresh water by digging in the sand. During excursions to this and neighboring islets he in turn was escorted by his two retainers and was so delighted by the whole place that he announced his intention of returning to become "King." It was a brief but happy interlude, perhaps the high point of his association with Cook before both became embroiled in the complexities of life in the Friendly and Society Islands. At sunset on 17 April they left the atoll, reaching their anchorage at Nomuka a fortnight later.

This was Omai's second visit to the group. In October 1773 he had landed at Tongatapu, an inconspicuous native of lowly origins and doubtful character, and had been dismissed by Cook for his total failure to comprehend the local language. Now he accompanied the captain ashore, thenceforward to act as interpreter and intermediary in all dealings with the islanders. Soon, observed Mr. King of the *Resolution,* he had gathered an audience who paid him great attention and listened with awe to the stories he told about "Britannee." He was the go-between in trade and, in return for articles brought from England, laid in for himself a stock of the red feathers, so plentiful here, so rare and precious in his own islands. Reverting to Polynesian custom, he often slept on shore with the "wife" supplied by his hosts and within a few days had acquired an influential patron, Finau. This chief came from Tongatapu and was introduced to the skeptical Cook as "King of all the friendly isles." Whatever his true status, he was powerless to pre-

[16]Cook, III, 93.

vent his countrymen from pilfering--the one defect that marred their otherwise exemplary conduct. At the end of ten days the navigators had, as Cook confessed, "quite exhausted the island of all most every thing it produced" and must move on.[17] Following Finau's advice, they made for Lifuka in the northeast.

The stay on that island marked the idyllic climax of the visit to Tonga and perhaps of the entire voyage. On their arrival, with Omai, Finau, and other dignitaries, Cook landed, to receive a welcome far more elaborate than any he had experienced before. Two lines of natives appeared bearing gifts which they placed in separate piles, one for Omai and the other, twice as large, for Cook. The guests, surrounded by thousands of spectators, were next diverted by varied entertainments, while they in return staged military exercises and at nightfall let off rockets. Omai again seized the opportunity to emphasize British power, pointing out how easy it was for his companions to destroy not only the earth but water and sky. These and other spectacles opened an episode marred rather less than elsewhere by pilfering. One important chief, however, was caught stealing a cat. Consulted about the matter, Omai recommended a sentence of a hundred lashes on the grounds that the higher the criminal's rank the more serious his misdemeanor. In the end, after receiving a token punishment of one lash, the man was set free. Towards the end of May, since provisions were once more running low, Finau set off on a foraging expedition to the north. In his absence a man called Paulaho turned up to announce that he, and he alone, was king of the islands. Omai, reported Cook, "was a good deal chagrined" to find there was someone who might be greater than his own patron.[18] But before the question could be settled they left Lifuka to continue their locustlike progress through the archipelago. On 10 June they reached Tongatapu which was meant to be their last anchorage.

The final weeks in Tonga were marred by signs of discord on all sides. In a confrontation between the two royal pretenders Paulaho had already proved his superior status, but Finau retained some authority--sufficient at any rate for him to offer Omai the chieftainship of the island of Eua. The honor seems to have gone to the chief-presumptive's head, for in a quarrel with a sentry he struck the man, who had the impudence to return the blow. Highly incensed, Omai complained to Cook and when the captain refused to interfere stalked off with his retainers, vowing he would settle here and travel no farther. Somehow

[17]Cook, III, 100, 102.

[18]Cook, III, 116.

the affair was patched up, only to be followed by a further difference involving the Tongans. These hospitable people, now perhaps a little weary of their importunate guests, were beginning to treat them coldly and sometimes with violence. One day they set upon a shooting party from the *Resolution* and robbed them. On their return the victims asked Omai to intercede with his royal friends for the return of their possessions. He complied, but Finau and Paulaho, fearing the captain's wrath, fled the neighborhood and returned only when assured that he did not hold them responsible for the assault. He was "very much displeased" by the incident, Cook wrote in his journal, and "gave Omai a reprimand for meddling in it." All things considered, it was high time they moved on. As a farewell gesture, Cook decided to present the chiefs with some of his livestock, but the decision again led to friction with Omai who claimed that the cattle were meant for him. Nevertheless, at the captain's prompting, he told Finau and other friends "that there were no such animals within many Months sail of them, that they had been brought them at a vast trouble and expence, and therefore they were not to kill any until they became very numerous, and lastly, they and their Children were to remember that they had them from the men of Britane." Before leaving the islands the ships called briefly at Eua. Cook thought Omai might have remained there to become chief had he himself consented to the scheme. As it was, he disapproved, though he added darkly, "it was not because I thought he would do better in his own Native isle."[19] So it was with some misgivings over the future of his charge that he set off for Tahiti on 17 July.

His fears were more than confirmed in the period of nearly two months they spent on the island. Arriving off Vaitepiha Bay on 12 August, they were hailed by natives who climbed aboard from their canoes to see old acquaintances and engaged in barter. With great emotion Omai greeted his countrymen and when embracing one who turned out to be his brother-in-law displayed "marks of strong feeling & great tenderness." They for their part responded "rather Coldly than cordially" until he took them below to distribute gifts of the red feathers he had brought from Tonga. Then all was changed. The Tahitians now began to "caress" Omai, while those who had previously treated him with indifference overwhelmed him with presents or sent ashore for produce in return for the precious mementoes. His brother-in-law, a man of "most forbidding countenance," was specially singled out for

[19]Cook, III, 133, 137, 158.

censure by critical observers, but his sister fared rather better. She arrived in tears to welcome her brother in a scene that Cook found "extreamly moving and better concieved than discribed." She, too, received her quota of red feathers and so did "all who had the art to profess friendship," remarked the disapproving Mr. King. The same officer is a witness to differences of opinion which, already aired on the *Resolution,* would further mar the relations between Cook and his charge. During the voyage, King said, the captain had repeatedly urged Omai to do everything possible to conserve the riches he had brought from England and secure his own "consequence," "but he would never listen to any plan, except that of destroying the bora bora chiefs & freeing his Native Island." "Omai," King ended, "was not the least obstinate & it answered a bad end, in making him rather fear than love the Capt[n]. "[20]

For the remainder of their stay in the southern part of the island the young man persisted in his wilful course. When they went ashore to attend the first ceremonial welcome, he displayed none of the sartorial good taste which had won him praise in England. On the contrary, to Cook's displeasure, he arrayed himself "not in English dress, nor in Otaheite, nor in Tongatabu nor in the dress of any Country upon earth, but in a strange medly of all he was possess'd of." Again, ignoring the captain's advice (and apparently to curry favor with both dignitaries), he offered the youthful chief not only gifts for himself but a rich present of Tongan feathers for dispatch to the high chief Tu in the north. On most nights he stayed ashore and, freed from the restraints of his fellow voyagers, consorted with all and sundry. Cook had witnessed his reception by mercenary relatives and self-styled friends who were, he maintained, in love not with the man but his property and who, but for his red feathers, would not have given him a single coconut. He had not expected anything else, Cook bleakly admitted; still, he had somehow hoped that with the property he now owned Omai would have had the prudence to make himself "respected and even courted by the first persons." Instead, during his sojourn here, he had "rejected the advice of those who wished him well and suffered himself to be duped by every designing knave."[21] At the end of ten days they had made the most of local resources--their reason for coming in the first place--and moved on to Matavai Bay.

In spite of past experience, Cook still hoped that Omai might learn to mend his ways; and at the outset of this his final visit to the historic

[20]Cook, III, 186, 187, 1368-1369, 1370.

[21]Cook, III, 186, 189.

anchorage there seemed grounds for optimism. When they landed to pay their respects to the high chief Tu, he recorded in his journal on 24 August, "Omai was dress'd in his very best suit of clothes and conducted himself with a great deal of respect and Modesty." Approaching the chief (or "King," the designation usually found in the annals of the voyage), he knelt to embrace the monarch's legs. Just as Cook had foreseen, the boy chief at Vaitepiha Bay had kept Omai's costly gift of feathers for himself, sending in its place a small tuft, not a twentieth part of its value. Now the suppliant tried to atone for his lapse by giving Tu a piece of gold cloth and more of the prized feathers. None of the vast assembly seemed to recognize him and no one paid him much attention until later in the morning when they had all made their way to the *Resolution.* Here they were joined by Tu's mother who brought gifts of food and cloth, some for Cook, the rest for Omai. Apparently she had learned of the lowly Ra'iatean's wealth and with other members of her family began to seek his friendship. Cook encouraged them to do so, he explained, because he wished Omai to settle here, knowing that "the farther he was from his native island the better he would be respected." Moreover, he intended leaving most of the livestock in this part of Tahiti and thought Omai "would be able to give some instruction about the Management of them and their use." Without more ado that same afternoon he had a large consignment transported to the neighboring district of Pare where Tu presided. "And now," he wrote, "found my self lightened of a very heavy burden, the trouble and vexation that attended the bringing these Animals thus far is hardly to be conceived."[22]

He was equally relieved to learn that Tu favored a marriage between his youngest sister and Omai, who was now living ashore with his relatives who had followed him from Vaitepiha Bay. The proposed alliance with the royal family would have furthered all Cook's aims for his protégé by ensuring his safety, enhancing his status, and keeping him in Tahiti with the animals. But alas for these benevolent intentions, before the marriage could be arranged the prospective bridegroom fell into the clutches of unprincipled "raskels" who contrived to alienate him from Tu and in a nocturnal attack succeeded in robbing him of much of his property. Faced by the collapse of his plans, Cook again complained that the willful young man rejected his advice, acted in such a way as to lose the friendship of Tu and every other person of note, and "associated with none but refugees and strangers whose sole

[22]Cook, III, 192, 193, 194.

Views were to plunder him." To save him from ruin the captain felt compelled to impound most of his remaining possessions. Had he not done so, wrote Cook, Omai would not have been left with "a single thing worthe the carrying from the island."[23] As a result, he was reduced to temporary destitution and forced to beg for victuals in order to feed the household he had set up with his family and a growing number of hangers-on.

The two men linked together by an accident of history were not always at odds. Dressed in English uniform, Omai was Cook's aide-de-camp on formal occasions and continued to act as the expedition's interpreter, a role he was, of course, fully qualified to undertake in this part of the Pacific. Despite the breach with Tu, he usually accompanied the captain on his visits to the royal seat at Pare and assisted him in his investigation of local politics and customs. For some years Tu and his ally Tutaha had been at war with a rival faction on the neighboring island of Mo'orea. So far the results had been inconclusive, but at this time the Tahitians were preparing for a decisive onslaught on their enemy. To ensure the success of the invading fleet, which he was to command, Tutaha announced his intention of offering up a human sacrifice. Thinking it, Cook said, "a good oppertunity to see something of this extraordinary and Barborous custom," on the morning of 1 September he set out to attend the ceremony with Omai and other members of the expedition. During the lengthy proceedings the European onlookers restrained their feelings, but at the conclusion they voiced their indignation in a stormy meeting with Tutaha. "Omai was our spokesman," Cook related, "and entered into our arguments with so much Spirit that he put the Chief out of all manner of patience, especially when he was told that if he a Cheif in England had put a man to death as he had done this he would be hanged for it." Whereupon Tutaha 'balled out '*Maeno maeno*' (Vile vile) and would not here a nother word; so that we left him with as great a contempt of our customs as we could possibly have of theirs." On his return later in the month after an unsuccessful attack on Mo'orea, Tutaha was magnanimous enough to overlook Omai's part in the incident. In exchange for a gift of red feathers, he presented the young man, as Cook reported, with "a very fine double Sailing Canoe, compleatly equiped Man'd and fit for the Sea."[24]

[23]Cook, III,193, n. 2.

[24]Cook, III, 199, 206, 219.

It was a pity, thought his shipmates, that Omai was not settling here to enjoy the patronage and protection of Tutaha, who might thus have taken the place of the affronted Tu. But, scorning the advice of his well-wishers, he refused to remain in Tahiti. So there was nothing for him but to sail on and, as the Lords of the Admiralty had decreed, carry him to the island of his choice. As their stay at Matavai Bay drew to a close, Cook with invincible optimism decided Omai was beginning to act more prudently. The treasure brought from England was somewhat diminished, but he invested a portion of what was left in local cloth and coconut oil, of finer quality than elsewhere in these islands and in great demand for trade. Much of Omai's erratic behavior, in the captain's opinion, had been due to the influence of his relatives and their cronies who had tried to keep him to themselves with the sole aim of stripping him of all he possessed. By taking charge of the residue Cook had frustrated their designs. Now, to prevent further depredations, he forbade Omai's sister and brother-in-law to follow him as they intended. On 29 September they all set out for Mo'orea, only ten miles distant. Cook had not visited the island before but, his curiosity roused by what he had seen in Tahiti, he decided to call there on the way to Huahine. Omai sailed in his own canoe, gaily hung with pennants of his own making and manned by his now considerable band of retainers. Later in the day he was followed by the ships, which reached their destination the next morning.

In the sheltered harbor on the northern coast where they came to anchor, events followed a customary pattern. Curious islanders swarmed round the ships in their canoes or climbed up to welcome the voyagers and engage in barter. The Europeans for their part exchanged trifles for native produce and soon after arriving set up a depot for the collection of wood and water. In addition they landed the remnants of their live cargo--a couple of horses, an assortment of poultry, pigs, some goats--most of them intended for Omai. The days passed without incident and, because supplies were running short at the end of a week, Cook decided to sail on. All was ready for departure when he learned that one of the goats set ashore to graze had been stolen. "The loss . . . would have been nothing," he wrote, "if it had not interfered with my views of Stocking other islands with these Animals but as it did it was necessary to get it again if possible." Acting decisively with the aid of two local elders, he secured the goat's return, only to discover that a second one, a prized female big with kid, had disappeared. He immediately sent out a search party, but the islanders fobbed off the men with empty promises or treated them with ill-concealed derision. "I was now

very sorry I had proceeded so far," Cook admitted, "as I could not retreat with any tolerable credet, and without giving incouragement to the people of the other islands we had yet to visit to rob us with impunity."[25]

Faced by this awkward situation, the captain consulted Omai and the two elders who told him to go and shoot every soul he met. This "bloody advice" he could not follow, Cook commented, but he resolved to lead an armed party across the island to reassert his damaged prestige and reclaim the lost goat.[26] He left at daybreak on 9 October accompanied by the zealous Omai who wanted to fire on the first person they encountered. Cook forbade him to do so and, further, ordered him to make it known that no one would be hurt, much less killed. As a result there was no opposition until they came to the village suspected of harboring the goat. Here armed warriors showered Omai with stones and, even when threatened with the loss of their property, would not admit any knowledge of the stolen animal. Cook accordingly ordered some houses to be burned and several war canoes broken up. Once released the flood of violence was not easily stemmed. For the rest of that day and most of the next Cook led his men through the island in an orgy of looting, burning, and destruction. He had only just got back to the *Resolution* on the evening of the 10th when he leaned that during his absence the precious goat had been restored. The spoils of the foray added a quantity of fresh provisions to the ships' stores, but the person who profited most was Omai. He had been in the forefront of the rampage and returned with two more canoes and enough timber to build a European-style house on the island of his preference. The choice had narrowed down to one between his native Raʻiatea and Huahine, whither they directed their course on the morning of the 11th.

At midday on 12 October the ships reached their destination and found that Omai in his large canoe had again outsailed them. He soon boarded the *Resolution* to announce that he wished to settle at Raʻiatea but first wanted his fellow voyagers to help him drive out the Bora-Boran usurpers. Cook flatly refused to have any part in such an invasion and, ignoring the Admiralty's instructions, took the long-deferred decision into his own hands. "Huaheine," he resolved, "was therefore the island to leave him at and no other." Once this question was settled, he acted with his customary vigor. To clinch matters, at a gathering of local chiefs summoned for the purpose, he went ashore the next

[25]Cook, III, 228, 229.

[26]Cook, III, 229.

morning with other members of the expedition and Omai. That unpredictable person, he noted, had dressed himself "very properly," brought with him some handsome gifts, and, now he was clear of the "gang" which had surrounded him in Tahiti, was behaving "with such prudence as to gain him respect." After offering tributes to the gods, he gave thanks for his return, not forgetting to mention the high chief of "Pretan" (George III), Lord Sandwich, and the two captains of this expedition.[27] Then, prompted by Cook, he addressed the assembled chiefs, first warning them to lay aside their thievish ways. He went on to say that he had been well treated in England and sent back with many articles that would be very useful here. Were the chiefs, then, prepared to give or sell a piece of land where he could build a house for his servants and himself? After due consultation the request was granted. In return for axes, beads, and other trifles, Omai received a small estate extending along the shore and toward the hills.

With this transaction completed, Cook did everything in his power to ensure his protégé's comfort and security. To safeguard the treasure brought from England, he put the carpenters to work building a house from the timber pillaged in Mo'orea and employed other hands to plant a garden with European fruits and vegetables. Omai, he observed, was beginning to attend seriously and now repented his extravagance in Tahiti. A brother and a married sister were living here, but they did not plunder him as his other relatives had done. Still, they were powerless to protect either his person or his property, so, fearing he would be robbed when the ships left, Cook advised him to distribute some of his "Moveables" among the chiefs and in this way secure their favor and support. He adopted the suggestion, which Cook followed up with a promise that anyone who injured his friend would feel the full weight of his "resentement." That this was no empty threat was borne out by the one serious incident to occur during the visit. On the night of 22 October the loss of a sextant was reported to Cook, who had the thief arrested and put in irons on the *Resolution*. Under Omai's insistent questioning he revealed where he had hidden the instrument and, as he appeared to be "a hardened Scounderal," Cook explained, "I punished him with greater severity than I had ever done any one before."[28] He omitted details but other chroniclers supplied them. With hair shaved and both ears cut off, the man was put ashore in a bleeding condition as a warning to others. The spectacle certainly inspired horror among

[27]Cook, III, 233, 234.

[28]Cook, III, 235, 236.

the islanders and even Omai was affected, though he tried to justify the captain's actions by saying that in Britain the thief would have been killed. The miscreant himself was far from cowed. A couple of nights later he uprooted plants in the newly formed garden and openly threatened to kill Omai and burn his house when the Europeans had gone. Cook again acted vigorously. He had the man seized and imprisoned on the *Resolution* with the intention, he said, of carrying him elsewhere or, as others alleged, of marooning him on a desert island. But after a few nights on board the indomitable captive managed to free himself from his shackles. The reward offered for his return proving of no avail, he remained at large, a threat to Omai's person and his future.

The carpenters had now completed their work, and the wooden house was ready for occupation. Since they could be securely stored, the remnants of Omai's treasures were transferred from the ship under the eyes of a wondering audience. Among "many other useless things," to quote Cook's dismissive phrase, were an electrical machine, a hand organ, fireworks, and, most admired of all, a box of toys. In contrast, hardly anyone so much as looked at the pots, kettles, dishes, mugs, and so forth brought from England to "civilize" the Pacific. Indeed, observed the captain, Omai began to think likewise: "that a plantain leafe made as good a dish or plate as pewter and that a Cocoanut shell was as good to drink out of as a blackjack." So, to augment his depleted fortune, he exchanged kitchen-ware for hatchets or iron tools. Not all his possessions were so innocuous. His armory included a musket, a fowling-piece, a couple of pistols, two or three swords, and cutlasses. Then there was a suit of armor and a helmet, supplemented in some accounts by a coat of mail. To these were now added cartridges, balls for muskets and pistols, and some twenty pounds of gunpowder. Cook did not impose a ban on weapons, as he had threatened to do in speaking with Boswell; but he did express some uneasiness. The supply of gunpowder, he said, made Omai quite happy and that, he added, was the only reason he left it, "for I was always of Opinion that he would have been better without fire Arms." On the other hand, he could have no doubts about the usefulness of the livestock left on the island. Most precious in native eyes were two horses, male and female, which Cook predicted would be the progenitors of a breed. He also stocked the estate with an assortment of poultry--geese, turkeys, ducks--and as a parting gift presented Omai with a boar and two sows "of the English breed" and a goat big with kid."[29]

[29]Cook, III, 237, 239.

In fact, as he summed up his impressions at the end of his stay, Cook felt that the animals were the greatest asset likely to result from Omai's travels. Had the young man not visited England, he reflected, in all probability they would not have come here. As it was, he was confident they would multiply so that in time these islands would equal, if not exceed, "any place in the known World for provisions." He also believed that the trees and plants he had brought would flourish and form "no small acquisition." He had little hope, however, that Omai would be able to introduce many European arts and customs to his people to improve those they already possessed. For he was not a man of much observation and, though endowed with "a tolerable share of understanding," lacked the application and perseverance to exert it. But whatever his fault, Cook acknowledged, they were more than overbalanced by "his great good Nature and docile disposition." Throughout the whole time they had been together he had very seldom had reason to find fault with Omai's conduct. Moreover, his grateful heart always retained "the highest sence of the favours he received in England," nor would he "ever forget those who honoured him with their protection and friendship during his stay there."[30]

Describing events on the last day at Huahine, 2 November 1777, Cook turned for the only time since their recruitment to Omai's retainers and reported a mild crisis of conscience. "If there had been the most distant probability of any Ship being sent again to New Zealand," he wrote, "I would have brought the two youths of that Country home with me, as they were both desireous of coming." Te Weherua, the elder, he described as "an exceeding well disposed young man with strong natural parts and capable of receiving any instructions." Fully aware of the difference between his own savage homeland and these islands, he "resigned himself very contentedly to end his days upon them." But Koa did not submit as willingly; "the other was so strongly attached to us that he was taken out of the Ship . . . by force." He was "a witty smart boy," Cook added, "and on that account much noticed in the Ship." There was one more parting to record on that final afternoon. When all the other islanders had disembarked, Omai stayed on board until they were at sea. At last he took "a very affectionate farewell of all the Officers," sustaining "himself with a manly resolution till he came to me," wrote Cook, "then his utmost efforts to conceal his tears failed, and . . . he wept all the time in going ashore."[31]

[30]Cook, III, 240-241

[31]Cook, III, 240-242.

Cook had a little more to say on the subject. A couple of weeks later., while anchored off Ra'iatea, he noted that Omai had sent two of his people with a message: "every thing went well with him, except that his Goat had died in kidding and [he] desired I would send him another and two axes."[32] Cook complied and, relieved at last of his importunate charge, set out for the north. In October 1778, on his return from the unsuccessful attempt on the Arctic passage, for the first time since leaving Cape Town he had an opportunity to send letters home. Writing from Unalaska, he briefly reported to the Admiralty that during his voyage in the South Pacific he had given two horses to Omai and left him at Huahine. He sumamrized more recent activities and announced his intention of wintering in the newly discovered Sandwich Islands. There, on 14 February 1779, he was killed in an affray with the Hawaiians. Omai seems to have survived his patron for only about a year. As far as somewhat confused accounts indicate, both he and the New Zealand boys died of sickness some thirty months after the expedition left Huahine.

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[32]Cook, III, 244-245.