

Let us turn to Webber's second major set piece of the voyage 'Captain Cook in Ship Cove, Queen Charlotte Sound' (Plate 2). Cook is presented shaking a Maori chief by the hand, a European mode of greeting that it is unlikely that he would have proffered since he knew well enough that nose rubbing was the traditional Maori greeting. Nor does the scene confirm the written evidence of any of the journals. For, on entering Ship Cove on this occasion Cook found the Maori afraid to come aboard, though many of them knew him well from his previous visits. They were afraid he had come to avenge the massacre of Furneaux's men, eight of whom had been killed and eaten at Grass Cove nearby, on the previous voyage. With Omai as interpreter however, friendly relations were quickly established with the parties visiting the ships.



Plate 2. John Webber, 'Captain Cook in Ship Cove, Queen Charlotte Sound', pen, wash and water-colour, 60.7 x 98.5 cm. 1777. National Maritime Museum, London.

Yet there is no evidence that the obvious reading of this composition records an actual event. That is to say Cook did not on this occasion come off his landing boat and go up and shake a Maori chief by the hand. To all accounts the portion of the beach they landed on was unoccupied—a natural precaution in any case—and it was not until a little later that a party of the Maori came and set up some temporary habitations nearby. It is indeed true that friendly relations were established on this occasion quickly enough and this may be credited to Cook's practical good sense, true too that all we should expect from a record of an historical event rendered in the mode of a history painting is the general spirit of the occasion, not evidence as to what actually occurred. But my point is that in staging the event in this way Webber