Previously, Choris the draftsman with the von Kotzebue expedition had done two watercolors identified as "Grasset," which he himself mounted as a single sheet, suggesting a relationship. Left is a portrait of a woman of the lower class.

The other portrait is of a woman of rank, right, with her contriving bust, was painted from life, Mr. Charlot believes. As evidence of this, he points to the patient expression of the two models; their stately, easy-to-keep posture.

"Sandwichans," for the official von Kotzebue report, is an odd blend of the two previous models. For it, Choris borrowed the bone torso of one; pose, head accessories of the other. Aesthetic intuition was at work here.

CHORIS AND THE CHIEFESS

by Jean Charlot

Garments: a red malo draping his loins and, on his shoulders, an ample black cloak of native type. When the time came for the sitting, Kamehameha begged to be excused and reappeared, shortly punctiliously clothed in European shirt and scarf, blue pants and an English sailor's vest. Sketch was printed.

Our concern, however, is with the story of another Choris portrait - that of a chiefess, published in his "Voyage autour du Monde." This plate forcefully evokes a pagan paradise and must have brought a sigh to the armchair traveler of old, leafing through the pages of Choris' album. And the reader of today, looking at this successful evocation, may well envy the men of Choris' generation, such sights.

The documents on which the following study is based are two watercolors owned by the Honolulu Academy of Arts and a plate, "Sandwichans," from the Russian first edition of von Kotzebue's "Voyage.

The two watercolors are of the same size, and were mounted by Choris himself on a single mat - as if to suggest some sort of relationship. Choris was usually pressed for time, jotting down outlines from life in hurried fashion; scribbling color notes in the margin, to be acted upon later. Exceptionally, these two watercolors are drawn and painted from life. That they are suggested by the patient expression of the models, the static, easy-to-keep pose, the fleeting light effects that hover over the forms and the spatial rendering of backgrounds.

Technically, alike, the two papers describe contrasting models. One is a woman of the lower classes, perhaps one of the mental servants to be found in the suite of a royal princess. Wrapped in the native pahu that leaves the torso bare, she squats in a cringing posture. Her stooped back and rather flabby anatomy suggest anything but the beautiful or the heroic.

The second watercolor represents a woman of rank, dressed in European clothing. Her skirt is rather sumptuous in the plate, but the blouse, striped and with ruffles at the neck and sleeves, holds a whiff of the rococo of the previous century. There is a necklace made of beads of a type acquired by barter - possibly from American traders. A native touch is the lei palu, whale-tooth pendant hung from an elaborately braided bunch of human hair and symbol of its wearer's high rank. Equally native is the curious hairdo, cut short at the hairline and artificially discolored with lime bath, in startling contrast with the mass of natural black hair and the swarthy complexion of the face.

The third document, "Sandwichans," is a plate from the Russian first edition of von Kotzebue's official report. Naturally enough, this print lacks the fresh, impromptu quality of the watercolors. As draftsman of an imperial scientific expedition, Choris would tone down his art to meet his employer's standards. There is also a change of pace, technically: the drawing was translated for publication into a combination etching and aquatint, a medium for which the artist showed little affinity. The outlines are transferred shakily and the modelings simplified in stencil fashion. The plate was printed in a tawny buff that lacks accent. "Sandwichans" (Womans of the Sandwich Islands) is a curious blend of the two dissimilar models that posed for the watercolors. From the one, Choris borrowed the bare torso - better attuned to a returned traveler's tale than a calico blouse. In the original, the pahu reached to the breasts. By lowering it somewhat and by straightening up the cringing posture, Choris suggests a woman at ease in nudity. The pose, the head, the accessories are all borrowed from the other watercolor, with corrections. A hesitant search for proportions has scarred the face of the chiefess with multiple pendimenti lines around cheek and neck. These are now erased and the texture of the flesh softened. The pahu is moved from a frontal to a three-quarter position, the better to display the hook characteristic of this traditional form. The body, however, remains unchanged and an awkward

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HAWAIANNA

CHORIS and the CHIEFESS

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For over thirty years, the “Sandalwood Trade” between Hawaii and China was brisk indeed. History records that Van
couver, calling at Kauai in 1793, found men collecting the fragrant wood at eighteen dol-

The necklace of basketed beads worn under the native pa'a and somptuous rings

...around the one visible ear.

twist results, while the bone pendant, which
should fall in place along the median axis of
the torso, tends to rest on the left
shoulder. Lesser details, such as the pattern
of light and dark on the forehead, ending
on a vertical line, clinch the relationship
between watercolor and aquatint.

Blending the two models into one type
proved more than a conscious device. Aesthetic intuition was at work, and went
further than the eye could see. As published,
the woman acquires a gentle dignity
—a native quality expressed by the Hawaiian
word ohia, which, paired with nudity,
captures the feel of native culture before it
was marred by foreign inroads.

The final link in our sequence is Plate
XVII of the section on Hawaii in Choris’
own folio, “Voyage autour du Monde,” pub-
lished in Paris. “Femme des Iles Sand-
dwich,” by means of a lie, “Femme des Iles Sand-

The name of the artist, Koepe, who
worked for the publication, appears on
his own page, free to do as he pleased. In the 1820s,
a man in his early twenties would have pre-
romantic leanings. Choris-the-artist and
Choris-the-draftsman could be at odds.

When the artist did a bust of Kameha-
mea for von Kotzebue, he stuck to facts and
carved the king clothed in the red
vest he wore for the sitting; for his own
“Voyage,” however, Choris cloaked the king
in exotic black tapa, his own Rousseau-
esque idea of the noble savage. In the
same vein, von Kotzebue’s “Sandwichiana” re-
mains close to the truth, even though filtered
through a corrective process. And “Femme des Iles Sandwich,” reworked to the artist’s
own taste, borders on the fabulous.

Technically, the French plate is the bet-
ter of the two. It is a lithograph and Choris
proved more at ease with crayon on stone
than he had with needle on metal. The
body, now seen from the left, is posed after
the watercolor of the servant woman and
preserves the curve of its shoulders and the
slant of its left arm. From the same source
comes the change in the axis of the head,
upright instead of slanted downwards as in
the aquatint. Tired shadows under the
eyes, underlined in the painting, are now
eliminated and the smile, barely suggested
before, is now warm with welcome. Hairdo,
earrings and necklace are those of the
princess. The string of beads and the pa'a,
unlike the body, are seen from the same
angle at which they appeared in the aqa-
tint. As a result, the unnatural twist ob-
served in the Russian tint is eliminated and
the bone hook hangs normally, between the
breasts.

The lowering of the loincloth or pa'a,
which had had but an indecisive start in
“Sandwichiana” proceeds boldly to the hips,
with some of the best crayon work modeling
the navel in full light. A startling change of
proportions transforms the woman into a
giantess, her form forever free of stays and