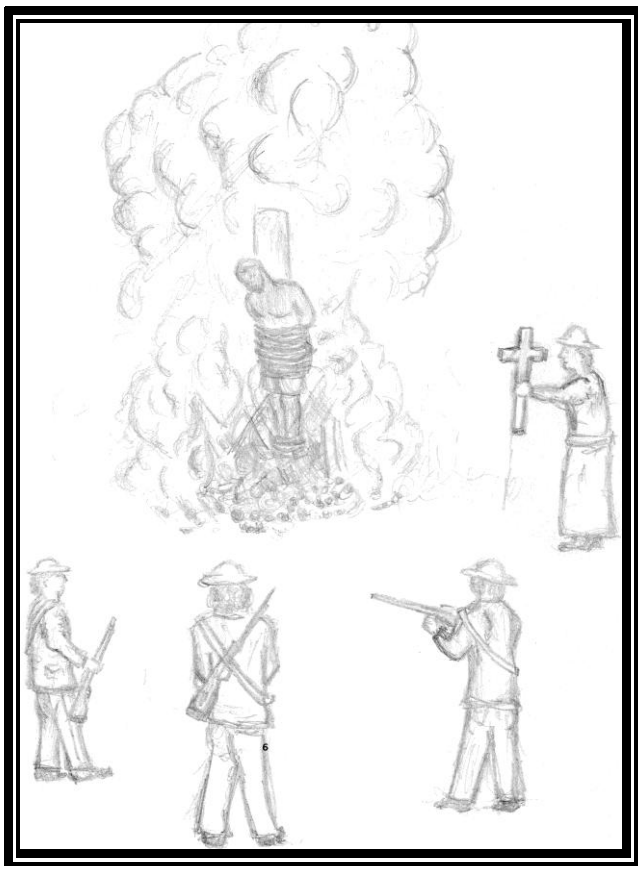
The Failed Spartacus or the Joan of Arc of the Seychelles

By Julien Durup a student of history

On 15 August 1810, a slave named Pompée, the Joan of Arc, or perhaps the failed Spartacus of the Seychelles, was burned alive by the Seychelles authorities. Pompée was born in Mozambique around 1780, described as a *noir de pioche* (field Negro). He was the slave of Dr. Louis Edmé Emmanuel François Poupinel, a native of Hennebont, Morbihan, France, and worked in the cultivation of yam. On the 21st August 1809, he assassinated Pierre Michel Hinard his overseer. In court Pompée testified that "Hinard used to beat him and that he did not like to be commanded by a white man". After killing Hinard, Pompée went maroon on the advice of other slaves on his master's plantation. He was caught after nearly a year.



Trevor Laval's impression of Pompée at the stake

As a slave he was tried under the Code Noir of 1723, a barbaric piece of legislation for the control of slaves. The slavery policy was judged *ex cathedra* by France and the Roman Catholic Church, as indispensable to the development of the French Colonies. Articles 1-10 of the Code Noir regulate the religious aspect of the slaves.

Article 26 of the Code of 1723 specified that: “The slave who, having struck his master, his mistress, or the husband of his mistress, or their children, shall have produced a bruise, or the shedding of blood in the face, shall suffer capital punishment. More or less the same punishment applies for the same offence against a free person. A three times fugitive slave can also, according to article 31, be sentenced to death and the two offences can be put on trial by an ordinary judge.”

However, Pompée was put on trial and convicted under the Code Noir, by the “Special Court” set up by a decree of General Decaen, Code Decaen 39, articles 1 and 2. According to the said decree, all serious crimes committed by slaves had to be presided by three ordinary judges, and three officers, and as if the Seychelles was in a state of war. They can, according to the decree, hear the case on ‘close door’. Both the Code Noir and Code Decaen, does not specify the burning alive as a sort of punishment. However, they allowed, like the British Barbados Code, for the slaves’ owners to do entirely as they wished to their slaves, including mutilating and burning them alive, without fear of reprisal.

A day after the crime, most of the slaves working with Pompée were taken one by one to Jean Baptiste Queau-Quincy’s (the French Commandant of the Seychelles) office to give affidavits. The state of war was declared as soon as Pompée had runaway after killing Hinard. An armed sentinel patrol was set up of white men and slaves who were sent to look for him with success. He was arrested by (François an Indian cook), as being an armed slave after Pompée had been nearly a year in the bush.

After his arrest, a special court was set up. Jean-François Hodoul who the second deputy of the court of peace was appointed as commissioner reporter and he was assisted by Henri Jerome Dumont the acting clerk. On 20 July 1810, at 3 pm, they met for their first sitting and Pompée appeared before them. During the interrogations Hodoul asked him for his name, surname, age, caste and age. He was also asked why he ran away from his master’s habitation and about his accomplices etc...

The next day the court started earlier at 9 am and was again presided by Hodoul in a form of *voie dire,* he summoned all the slaves’ witness to confirm they evidences, that they made on 22 August 1809, which he re-read to them. He also

asked them if they recognised the accused and the bush hook that Pompée used to kill Hinard, they replied in the affirmative. Then Hodoul order that the bush hook be kept in the office of the clerk of the court as evidence.

Eight days later on the 28 July 1810 at 9 am Queau-Quincy convened the "Special Court", this time they meet in full bench with the following persons:

1. Queau-Quincy, as President.
2. François Le Roy, administrator/accountant acted as first deputy of the court of peace.
3. Jean Loiseau ; Antoine Maurel ; Pierre Langlois and Henri de Lacour acted as members.
4. Jean-François Hodoul, acted as the second deputy of the court and commissioner reporter.
5. Louis Henri Jérome Dumont notary acted as acting clerk of the court.

Jean-François Hodoul opened the trial by reading the court proceedings and the charges against Pompée. Qeau-Quincy ordered that the accused be taken before the court accompanied by his defendant Sieur André Joseph Lablache. He was appointed by Jean-François Hodoul in line with article XI of the regulations.

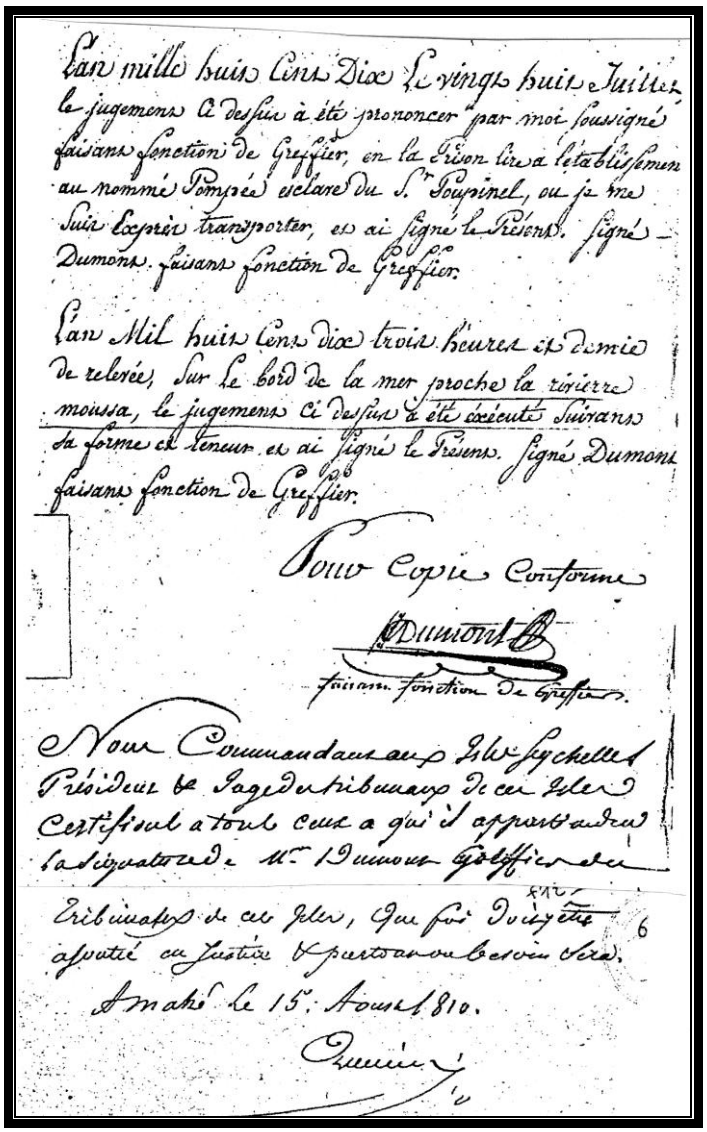
Pompée was asked by Queau-Quincy if he was the one who committed the crime. He later called Julie and Neptune, two slaves to confirm under oath, of their previous evidence against Pompée. The two other evidence's of Mars and Lamour, were read by Jean-François Hodoul, both *in absentia*. Mars was an accomplice of Pompée who went maroon and he had been arrested earlier than Pompée and was sent to Mauritius along with Cesar to be executed. Queau-Quincy wanted their case to serve as example for any other slaves who wanted to rebel. Lamour, had runaway one day before the trial. Qeau-Quincy, then asked Pompée if he had anything to say on the set of evidences against him, he replied no. Then he asked all the presiding judges if they had any questions to ask Pompée, they replied no. He asked them if they had anything to say and they said that the court had been well instructed.

Queau-Quincy, then asked Pompée and his defendant if there was any objection against the witnesses who were present and in absentia and if they had anything to say for the defence, both said no. He immediately, ordered Lablache to retire

and Pompée taken back to prison. And then Jean-François Hodoul went over all the affidavits and the court records concluded that the accused be found guilty and condemned as subject to law and that the court concurred in unanimity.

As it was impossible to find on the island an executioner, the court ordered that the guilty should be burned. According to the court records the following persons signed the court's judgement: Maurel, Loiseau, Langlois, de La Cour, Le Roy, Queau-Quincy and Dumont and no explanation was given to why Jean-François Hodoul did not signed.

Soon after the judgement Dumont went to the prison and read the above judgement to Pompée. The date of the execution is not easy to indentified on the records, it was at 3.30 am 1810 and the place was near sea near the Moosa River, and this cruel and unusual punishment was signed Queau-Quincy as having taken place on 15 August 1810, the date of Saint Napoleon.



Lan mille huit Cens Dix Le vingt huit Juillet
le jugemens Ci dessus a été prononcer par moi soussigné
faisans fonction de Greffier, en la Prison tirs a l'etablissemen
au nommé Pompée esclave du S.r Poupinel, ou je me
Suis Exprès transporter, et ai signé le Présent. Signé –
Dumont. faisans fonction de Greffier.

Lan Mil huit Cens dix trois heures et demie
de relevée, Sur le bord de la mer proche la rivierre
moussa, le jugemens Ci dessus a été éxécuté Suivans
sa forme et teneur et ai signé le Présens. Signé Dumont
faisans fonction de Greffier.

Pour Copie Conforme

Dumont

faisans fonction de Greffier.

Nous Commandant aux Isles Seychelles
Président le Siege du tribunaux de ces Isles
Certifions a tous ceux a qui il appartiendra
la signature de M.r Dumont Greffier de
Tribunaux de ces Isles, Que foi Doit y être
ajoutée en Justice et partout ou besoin sera.
A Mahé le 15. Aout 1810.

Queau

The last page of Pompée's judgement signed by Dumont and Queau-Quincy

Looking at the old plans of the Port Victoria the place where Pompée was burned at the stake was opposite the Roman Catholic Cathedral near the Happy Youth Club. The partly burned human remains discovered recently by the Chinese contractor on that site could have well been that of Pompée.

According to Code Noir, as a slave, Pompée was not a person but an "object" belonging to his master. Inexplicably, the same code specified that all the "objects" (slaves) should be instructed and baptised in only the Roman Catholic Religion. Pompée's complaint of his constant beating by Hinard is inadmissible in law and none of his slave's compatriots could testify for him against a white man according to the Code Noir, (Article 24 Code Noir 1724). Juristically as a slave Pompée had no right before the law. However, slave's witnesses were allowed to

testify under oath against Pompée. We are told by the Mauritian, Guy Lionnet, the former Director of Culture of the Seychelles, that in general the slaves in the Seychelles were treated better than other slaves in the Mascarene. And he had a tendency to deny the existence of barbaric white men. However, this barbaric Judgement proves otherwise. Coming out of prison on the way to be tortured, Pompée was offered heaven by baptism before he climbed on to the stake. May be he asked if he will meet some French men in heaven? When they replied yes, without doubt Pompée would have said to hell with it I do not want to go there. Facing his executioner he might have also said something like Machiavelli the Italian Philosopher "I desire to go to Hell and not to heaven. In Hell I shall enjoy the company of Popes, Kings and Princes. But in Heaven are only beggars, monks, hermits and apostles". This kind of sentence was also in line with the Roman Catholic official punishment for heresy, which was promulgated by the Synod of Verona.

The Seychelles has a history based on the elite population and little on the servile population. Queau-Quincy who was behind this famous atrocity has too many places named after him after independence. However, in May 2000, the Seychellois dramatist, Christian Servina wrote and staged a play trying to immortalise Pompée. For the benefit of the majority of the Seychellois who are from the servile population a plaque, should be erected by the Ministry of Culture near the Happy Youth Club in memory of Pompée. History is full of people who were burned at the stake looking for justice; we have so far at least one which has been documented. So one can legitimately ask why our society forgets Pompée and remember Joan of Arc.

Ref.

1. Pompée's Trial, Seychelles National Archives.
2. Code Noir of 1724.
3. Code Noir of 1685.
4. The Barbados Slave Code of 1661.
5. Karl Noêl : L'ESCLAVAGE A L'ISLE DE FRANCE (Ile Maurice) de 1715 à 1810.