

RA/VILA/#2.28.101.Obeah Case, Est. Morning Star

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Enclosed I have the honor of submitting a transcript of the court records of this police district including an examination undertaken for the investigation into would-be witches or Obeah arts at Morning Star Estate. It has been established that the Negro Joseph, who belongs to Slob Estate, himself has admitted to having been present at Morning Star to perform some rites. As to what kind of rites were performed, Joseph had declared during the first examination that he knew nothing of Obeah arts, but at the same time he confessed that he went to Morning Star to cook or prepare something for a sick women and, later during the examination, he admitted having neglected to mention that 'the things found in his house were to be ground and some to be put into water for a drink, some to be strewn on the road, but that all this was for (the above-mentioned invalid) Augustus's wife'. The latter part he has repeatedly mixed up with what was to be done for Peter. The foreman George Phillips' statement, which has been admitted by Joseph, and the court proceedings in general, show how inconsistent and faltering his statement has been.

Judging from the above proceedings in general, and particularly from the explanation given by the Negro Cornelius, it seems that the accused Joseph has indeed practiced Obeah arts, a practice of and a belief in which lately seems to been on the increase, and which without a doubt has an extremely harmful influence on the rural population and the slave populations on the plantations. I therefore humbly recommend, pending your Excellency's decision, that in accordance with the law, Book 6, Chapter 1, Article 10, Joseph be punished by a life sentence of hard labor, and that the island coffers pay his owner 170 rix dollars, as stipulated by the provision of Oct. 22, 1743, or/and that, in accordance with article 12 of the law, that his owner be ordered to escort him out of the country, and that, until that can be done, he remain in custody in the meantime so as to be harmless and prevented from practicing the above-mentioned arts.

The Negro Peter, who is the property of Morning Star Estate, has repeatedly denied having solicited or asked Joseph to come to Morning Star to practice the above-mentioned arts. And no evidence has been found that he has. Cornelius, who belongs to La Reine, has also denied the same, although Joseph has said that it was him who brought him Peter's message, and in this matter there might be some suspicion, as Peter is known to be a bad person who has been punished on several occasions. But as there is no evidence against him, as mentioned above, I see no reason to put him up for punishment.

The Negro August, however, has admitted to having carried a message from Augustus at Morning Star to Joseph that he was to come to the plantation, and admitted that it was concerning Augustus' wife, who Augustus had said has lately been ill. This, however, Augustus has denied, but after the interrogation it seems not unlikely, and I therefore take the liberty of putting both August and Augustus up for corporal punishment in the form of 20 or 30 lashes because of their actions.

Christiansted Police Station, May 9, 1844

I remain your humble servant

Friederichsen

His Excellency

Major General, Lord Chamberlain v. Scholten

Grand Cross of the Dannebrog and Silver Cross of the Order of the Dannebrog

Grand Commander of the Honor Legion, Commander of the Order of Guelphe, Knight of the Order Pour la Merité Militaire, Governor General



Transcript

Of the Police Court Records of Christiansted Judicial Authority

On April 15, 1844, at ten o'clock in the morning the Police Court of Christiansted was in session. Present were the Police Commissioner and the Police Officer S. Adams, and witnesses were examined.

No 22/1844 Examination investigating would-be witches or the practicing of Obeah arts at Morning Star Estate by a slave belonging to Slob Estate. The Chief of Police presented a letter received on the 2nd from the overseer at Morning Star Estate, whereto the above-mentioned Negro belonging to Slob Estate had been sent. He now appeared before the court, and on being questioned, explained that his real name was Joseph or Carden – the latter because he used to belong to a man by the name of Carden. He was born on the coast of Africa and had come here as a young boy. He does not know his age, but is estimated to be about 60 years of age. He has been baptized and belongs to the Anglican Church. He used to be a cook for Madame Beckmann, who passed away quite some time ago, but has now for some time been at Slob Estate, to which he now belongs.

On being examined he said the following: Last Thursday evening the accused had gone to La Reined Estate to visit the Negress Hanna, his common-law wife. After a short stay there, Hanna told him that the Negro Augustus belonging to Morning Star Estate was outside and wished to talk to the accused. When he came out to Augustus, the latter said that he had a sick wife, Susanna, at Morning Star for whom he wanted the accused to prepare something. The accused answered that he did not have much knowledge of such matters,

but when Augustus insisted, the accused agreed to help, and to that purpose he picked some young banana flowers which he intended to cook up for the sick woman. But when he arrived at Morning Star Estate, no one could show him where the above-mentioned woman's house was, and as he was looking for the house, the accused came to the foreman's house, who immediately seized him and beat him up and took him to the manager, who had him arrested.

The accused says that he knows nothing of Obeah arts or how those are performed, and that it was not his intention to dabble in such matters, but that he went to Morning Star, as mentioned above, to cook or prepare something for the above-mentioned sick woman. Furthermore the accused says that Peter, who belongs to Morning Star, sent another Negro, whom the accused believes is called Cornelius, to the accused with a request to do something or perform some witchcraft so that he could have a better life at the plantation, as both the overseer and the foreman did not like him. This happened about a week before Augustus approached the accused, who to that end picked some herbs. But as the accused claims that he has no knowledge of anything related to Obeah arts, he did not know how to use those herbs, and neither Peter nor Cornelius have subsequently approached the accused on these matters. That is all the accused wanted to say before he was put in jail, and as other business was more urgent, the examination was postponed for the time being. The court was adjourned.

Friderichsen

On April 16, 1844, at 10 in the morning the court was in session in Christiansted. Present were the Police Officer and the Sergeant Halvorsen. Examination was done into the investigation of alleged witchcraft or Obeah arts on Morning Star Estate performed by a slave belonging to Slob Estate.

The Chief of Police observed that the previously mentioned Negro Peter had now been sent to the court to be questioned. He was confronted with Joseph's explanation and was asked to comment on it. He adamantly refused to have sent Cornelius, as explained earlier, and claims that he does not know Joseph and knows nothing of what he does or that he performs Obeah arts.

On further examination he says that he has lately been working as a carpenter at La Reine Estate, and that when his work was done last Saturday night, he went to Windsor Estate, where his wife, named Thaby, lives. He spent the night with his wife and therefore did not know that Joseph had gone to Morning Star until late at night (he could not tell the court at exactly what time), when a person knocked on the door to Thaby's house. Joseph got up and opened the door, and outside was the Negro James from Morning Star. James had come to tell them what had happened at the plantation, where an Obeah man had been arrested. Joseph's brother Augustus had sent James to ask Joseph to come to the plantation as there was some sort of disturbance as a result.

Joseph had answered that it was none of his business, and that he knew nothing of what could be going on between Augustus or anybody else, and that he did not want to go to Morning Star, whereupon James went away. Some time later a colored freeman, George Duncan, brought a similar message. Duncan also said that the Obeah man was to have said that it was Joseph who had asked him to come to Morning Star – so Joseph had better come back as quickly as possible to explain himself. Joseph had answered that he could not have

taken anyone to Morning Star as he had been at Windsor Estate since 7 o'clock. Duncan insisted that Joseph accompany him, which Joseph did. On the return trip the driver told him what has already been explained, and that it was to practice Obeah arts for him and the overseer – which Joseph adamantly denied.

Joseph again appeared before the court and was confronted with Peter's explanation, as stated above. Joseph stuck to his own explanation that it was Cornelius who had brought him Peter's message. He added that Cornelius had met Joseph on the road, and said that Peter had come to his room on the plantation. It was only then that he had passed the above-mentioned message to Joseph. Therefore he does not believe that Cornelius would have approached him if he had not been sent by Peter. Joseph furthermore mentioned that he had known Cornelius for years and that he had never on any previous occasion spoken of Obeah. Therefore Joseph is quite certain that Peter must have sent him.

Peter, who was present at the last examination, insisted that he had not asked Joseph to go to Morning Star, and that he had not sent Cornelius to him, as mentioned earlier.

Joseph stuck to his explanation, and even when confronting them with each other, it was not possible to come to an agreement on the events – therefore they were sent back to their cells in the lockup and the examination postponed for the time being. The court was adjourned



On April 20, 1844, at 7 o'clock in the morning Christiansted Police Court was in session. Present were the Police Officer and Sergeant Bergsøe at Morning Star Estate, where the case was resumed.

No. 22/1844 Examination into alleged witchcraft on Morning Star Estate performed by a slave from Slob Estate.

The Negro Augustus appeared before the court. When questioned, he stated that he did not know Joseph from Slob Estate, and that he had not sent any message to him, and that his wife's name is Cathrina and not Susanna.

The arrestee Joseph, who was present at the examination, appeared before the court and explained that he does not know the Augustus who was present in the court. The August that he had mentioned belonged to La Reine Estate. He now explained that this August came to him and told him that a man from Morning Star wanted to speak with him. But when he went outside his house, he did not find this man, whereas August told him that it was a man from this plantation, namely Augustus, who had a wife – Susanna – who was ill after giving birth. The Augustus present in the court he does not know.

On being questioned further, Joseph now explains that it was Cornelius, who belongs to La Reine, who first told him that Peter from this plantation wanted to speak with him (At that point in time Peter worked at La Reine). When he later talked to Peter, Peter told him that he was never left in peace because of the overseer and the driver. Therefore Peter asked Joseph to do something for him – but Joseph knew what he could do.

In spite of this Peter insisted on his request to Joseph that he should come to the plantation to do something to solve his problem with the manager and the driver. Joseph therefore decided to pick some banana leaves and collect a few other bits and pieces, which he took with him. Peter had gone on ahead and not back to this plantation, but to his wife at Windsor. Joseph came here and now says that he went to Susanna's house. However, he could not find the house as he did not know her, nor did he know where her house was. Therefore by mistake he came to the driver's house.

The above-mentioned Susanna – according to what August from La Reine told Joseph –is supposedly the wife of Peter's brother Augustus from this plantation. As already mentioned Joseph does not know that woman.

The Manager present, Dam, explained that some time ago the Negro Peter from this plantation worked at La Reine as a carpenter, and that August from La Reine in return worked for him here. He furthermore explained that the present Augustus is Peter's brother, but that his wife's name is Cathrina (as he has already explained). There is a Negress called Susanna on this plantation, who used to belong here, but she was freed. This Susanna was brought before the court, but she says that her husband's name is Simon, and that she has been married to him for several years, and that she does not know the accused Joseph.

Joseph adds that he does not know Susanna, whereupon examination of her ended.

Then the Negro James from this plantation was questioned, and on being questioned he answered that last Saturday, having gone to sleep on this farm in a shed where the carts are kept, he heard noise from the Negro houses. He did not know what it was about, but shortly after Peter's brother Augustus came and asked him to go to Windsor Estate to get hold of Peter and tell him that the man he had called for from Slob Estate had been arrested. James did not want to leave the plantation, but when Augustus insisted, he hurried to Windsor where he met Peter and asked him to return to the plantation. Peter answered that he did not know the man in question and that he would not come. He told Augustus that when he returned. Augustus did not react to that.

Augustus is examined again.

He accepted James' explanation, but other than that he says that he does not know anything about his brother Peter having asked Joseph to come to the plantation. He only heard Joseph because he had guard duty on

Saturday night and saw the driver take him to the overseer. He heard Joseph say that it was Peter who has asked him to come and heard that James was asked to get hold of Peter.

However, Peter did not come until the next morning, and when he had been arrested, Augustus went to the door where Peter (...) and asked him why he had sent for Joseph. Peter answered that he had not sent for Joseph and that he did not know Joseph.

Augustus says that the next day he heard that George Duncan had been to Windsor on Saturday night to ask Peter to come home to the plantation because Joseph had been retained and had said that Peter had asked him to come to the plantation. August had not asked him to go –as stated above. On being questioned further Augustus says that it was not Peter who had been arrested, as stated above, but Joseph, and that it was Peter and the overseer, the driver and some others who went to the door where Joseph was being retained. Here Peter said that he did not know anything of Joseph, nor had he asked him to come. Joseph likewise said that he did not know Peter or know anything about him.

George Duncan was examined again

He is a freeman but lives on this plantation because he used to belong to the previous owner, Dr. M. Dougall

On being questioned he explained that last Saturday between 8 and 9 he left his house, which is quite close to the main road, to go Windsor Estate. At that moment he met the accused Joseph, whom he did not know or knew who was. Joseph asked where the driver's house was, and when he had told him where, he went there. Duncan spent some little time at his house looking for something he was to take to Windsor, whereupon he left to go there.

But before he had come down the hill on the main road, he heard noise from the driver's house and therefore he went back there. He found the driver busy tying Joseph up. At that moment the overseer, Høyer, came to the scene, and when he and the driver said that they would take Joseph to the Manager, he went on his way to Windsor, where he knew that Peter had a wife, Thaby, at whose house he found Peter. Here he told Peter that a man had been arrested home on the plantation, who claimed that he had been called for by Peter, and that Peter had better return home. Peter answered that he knew nothing of the matter, and that he would not return home. Thaby said to Peter that as his name had been mentioned, it would be better to go home. To this Peter answered that they should leave him be, but he took his hat and his stick and went down the road. Duncan assumed that Peter would go to the plantation – which, however, Peter said nothing about, nor did Duncan ask him. He just turned around and left without saying where he was going. He did not come back in the night, nor did he come back on Sunday. He knew nothing of what had happened to Joseph until he came back here. This is supposing he did not return to Thaby's house or spoke to her of the matter.

Joseph was questioned again.

Joseph was asked to comment on Duncan's explanation. He admits to having met Duncan, as explained above. He had indeed asked him for the way to the driver's house, but it was actually Augustus he wanted to reach. On being asked repeatedly, he answers that he wanted to buy some yams from the driver.

George Duncan was recalled.

He added to his previous explanation that Joseph had not asked for directions to Augustus or to Augustus' house, but only for direction to the driver, George Phillip's, house. Joseph admits this and adds that he did not know the driver, but that it was Peter who had told him that the driver's name was George...

Several pages of the records missing!

Hannah was questioned

(missing pages) She answered that she was not Joseph's wife and had nothing to do with him, other than that she knew of him and knows that he belongs to the neighboring plantation, The Slob. Joseph is not in the habit of coming to her house, nor has he, to the best of her recollection, ever been to her house.

But on Thursday before the Saturday when he was detained at Morning Star Estate, he came to La Reine in the evening just as it was getting dark while Hannah was cooking her supper. He asked her for a couple of fish, which she was unable to give him.

At the same time, or while Joseph was in her kitchen outside the house, she saw August from La Reine come and heard him say that he was to speak to Joseph. What Joseph answered to this, she could not tell as she was busy tending to her pots. She did notice that August and Joseph stepped aside and talked together, but did not hear about what.

On being asked, Hannah answered that she did not know that Joseph had been arrested at Morning Star Plantation until in the morning of the following Sunday as August at that time worked at Morning Star and came home to La Reine on Sunday and had told her of the events. That is all she knows.

Joseph was questioned again.

He was asked for a response to Hannah's explanation. He believes it to be a misunderstanding that he is supposed to have said that Hannah is his wife, as that is not the case. Other than that he confirms her explanation and says that it must also be a misunderstanding that he is supposed to have been inside Hannah's house, as he stayed outside close to the house, as stated earlier. It was here that August from La Reine – and not Augustus from Morning Star Estate – showed up and said he wanted to talk with him. After they had stepped a little aside, August said that somebody at Morning Star wanted him to go there, namely Peter's brother Augustus. Other than that nothing more happened than what Joseph has previously explained.

Joseph was led back to the prison.

Hannah was dismissed

Hereby ended the proceedings and the court was adjourned.

Friderichsen

(the court exhibits are enclosed)

The accuracy of the records is certified by

Friderichsen



ⁱ One or two words missing in text.