

BORMIO WITCHES

Observation point: along the path from Cancano to Bormio, near by Bagni Nuovi.

Looking at the green and sunny valley of Bormio, you can hardly imagine that, during sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this area was hit strongly by witch-hunting in northern Italy.

Despite common opinion, witch-hunting wasn't a medieval phenomenon: it has origin infact from the deep crisis that marked the incoming of Modern Age.

While advancing Little Ice Age, with wet and cold climate, triggered a series of bad harvests, causing people to starve all over Europe, Valtellina was involved in the european war of 30 Years, between spanish and austrian Hapsburg against France: since 1512, the valley and the earldome of Bormio have taken part of the swiss republic of the Three Leagues of Grigioni, and now, from 1620 to 1639, it became the theatre of the so-called Valtellina wars, the religious struggles between Catholics, defended by spanish Hapsburg, and Reformed tolerant Grigioni - allied to France, Savoia and Venice.

Armies passed through the valley many times, with successive waves of violence, slaughters and robberies/plunders, then in 1629 the plague appeared at the borders of the country.

It was a period of fear, in which seemed that God wanted to punishing for men's sins, particuarly for the diffusion, among upper classes, of Protestant heretic doctrine, and among people, of Devil worship and sorcery. People searched refuge in the catholic faith, and Holy Virgin apparitions became frequent, while local authorities in one hand ordered to enrich churches with paintings, statues and also organs, on the other intensified heretic and witch hunting.

People - mainly women - belived to be magicians often for their knowledge of traditional medicine and their activity of healthcare, were accused by neighbours of causing deseases, deaths, stormy rains and also landslides; captured by autorithies, they were constrained by torture to admit their liaison with Satan.

Among 1630 and 1632, just in the little hamlets of Valdidentro and Livigno no less than 34 people were considered guilty of witchcraft, beheaded and then burned for this presumed crime!

But the slaughter in the valley, started about 1550, continued at least to the end of the seventeenth century; perhaps, the last victim killed as wizard was a man in Tirano, in 1703.

Bormio archives contain up to 5000 original manuscripts about processes for witchcraft or sorcery in its countryside, a very impressive testimony on this dark period of Modern Age, which is the actual, tragic counterpart of the numerous charming legends about witches told in many countries and lateral valleys ov Valtellina.