

THE PLAN-DES-DÉBATS

GIGNOD

On the western slope of the hills of Gignod, above the Chaligne and Mendey chalets, a number of small mounds rise. Legend has it that they date back to the period immediately following the plague of 1630: to escape the plague, the inhabitants of the parish of Saint-Etienne (Aosta) and Gignod vowed to go up in pilgrimage to Chaligne every summer on August 16, the feast of Sain Roch. For some time the two processions, meeting on the mountain, united songs and prayers; then someone came up with the idea of planting a cross on Pointe Chaligne. The two parishes divided the expenses and provided an equal number of sturdy bearers.

One August 16 – it is impossible to determine the exact year - a larger-than-usual crowd of devotees left early in the morning to attend the ceremony of the elevation of the cross. But, when it came to planting it in the ground, some claimed it should be oriented towards Gignod, the others towards Saint-Etienne. Tempers flared and the people started crying violently. Pilgrims became aware that they had sticks and lanterns in their hands, and a few stones were thrown up in the air. Before long the tumult became widespread, leading to several casualties. The sight of blood, kindling the thirst for revenge, sparked a real battle. In the evening the fallen were counted and buried at the site, which took the name Plan-des-Débats from that time onwards.

The motivations leading to those ancient feuds have long been forgotten, but every year the procession stops in that place. Having blessed the burials, the priest starts singing the Libera me, Domine, inviting the crowd surrounding the cross to meditate on the pettiness of human affairs.

Taken from: T. GATTO CHANU, *Fiabe e leggende della Valle d'Aosta*, Rome, Newton & Compton Editions, 2004