

THE FIA FAIA: ANCESTRAL, MAGIC, UNIQUE

What is the Fia-Faia?

La Fia-faia is the party that opens the celebration of Christmas in the towns of Bagà and Sant Julià de Cerdanyola. In its origin it was part of the rituals that accompanied the winter solstice festival, a pre-Christian ritual of sun worship, which transformed and incorporated into Christmas has been able to reach our times through the centuries. The Fia-Faia has similarities with other festivals that are celebrated in the regions of the Alt Pirineu at the summer solstice.

Currently, on Christmas Eve, at dusk, marked by the touch of prayer, each village lights a bonfire on the mountain, this fire will be moved, and at night in the villages with torches made with a Margera grass, said also faia. The descent of the torches by the mountain is a unique spectacle, especially the years of snow. When arriving at Bagà, the fallaires are received by the authorities, who put a handkerchief around their neck, and then distribute the fire to the rest of the Baganese who wait for them with their torches ready. In Cerdanyola the handkerchief was distributed at the initial moment of the descent, which is also done up to the church square.

Then the general burning starts in each town, accompanied by very short songs: "Fia-faia, que nostro senyor ha nascut a la paia", and a music on which the bells of the respective churches stand out at certain moments. As faies go consuming, the last part of the torch is added to a common fire, previously ignited; In Bagà the youths jump over this bonfire, and around the youth they throw the fae and then a band is formed to dance the dance of the party.

In Bagà the cream is spectacular with more than four hundred torches breaking the darkness. At the end, the dance of the Fia-Faia is done and the cake is distributed with garlic and quince oil, a traditional delicacy of the party. In Sant Julià de Cerdanyola party has a more intimate air, the descent of welcomes the majority of fallaires. After the general burn, the dance is danced and then all-i-oli of quince is distributed with toast. After the family celebration in each house, the youth returns at night, around the same fire, it becomes a candle, and the sunrise is fun; in these hours the traditional "order" is made, where the objects of the citizens left outside the house will be changed.

The faies are made with a tall stem grass, popularly Faia, harvested from Sant Martí, so that it has time to dry properly. Made with skill, usually have a length greater than two meters, being however very light. Its realization can be an art. There are small differences between the torches of Bagà and those of Cerdanyola.

The territory of the Fia-Faia

For scholars the historical isolation of Alt Berguedà is evident since prehistory, it is a geographical corner rather badly communicated with respect to the neighboring counties of Cerdanya, Ripollès, Osona and Solsonès. Even in known historical times, the Alt Berguedà has not suffered many of the invasions and influences that have affected the rest of the country: constancy of permanent Roman occupation, only the conquest, nor any remarkable find. Nor did the Saracens leave any testimony of their presence; never even occupied by the French during Napoleon's time. A broken and difficult country where the bandits, the Carlists, the maquis and the smugglers became strong, until recent times. This isolation and the continuity of its population are some of the factors that explain the maintenance of long-lasting traditions such as trust.



PHOTO: Xavier Pedrals

Bagà is a village of around 2,000 inhabitants, which in the mountains is very, old barony chief, rich in traditions, with a splendid medieval old town. Sant Julià de Cerdanyola, a village located in a high valley, keeps the authenticity of the traditions, customs and way of being of the people of the region, but above all a remarkable stubbornness to keep the town alive: over the years it has seen the disappearance of twenty villages of the high Berguedà's valleys of its environment.

The Fia-Faia: a celebration of the winter solstice

It is an **ancestral** festival, with pre-Christian roots that could have been part of an ancient ritual of sun worship. It would correspond to the celebration of the winter solstice: the day when the sun has a shorter duration in the sky. The solstices, both winter and summer, by Sant Joan, have been celebrated in most cultures based on agriculture or livestock.

The party was altogether a prayer to the sun so that it did not shorten the day any more, and the hours of light began to grow, what happened after the celebration.

These beliefs, deeply rooted, survived, with more or less changes, the Roman Empire, staying more genuine in the territories where Romanization was shallow, as was the case of Alt Berguedà, the Pallars, Aran and Vallespir, which they coincide in being also of delayed Christianization.

Christianity, wisely, chose to integrate these ancestral celebrations, placing Christian feasts at the same dates; in the case of the summer solstice, it coincided with Sant Joan and the winter solstice with the commemoration of the birth of Jesus. Today the dates of the solstices have been slightly displaced by the modifications made in the calendar.

At Christmas some Pyrenean localities light public bonfires, but no other torch cream in the Catalan Pyrenees remains on these dates. The faies of Bagà and Sant Julià de Cerdanyola are **unique** on Christmas Eve, which would correspond to the winter solstice. The summer solstice has remained strong, and there are a number of Pyrenean locations that burn falles, and the party has been enriched over the years. The winter has been drowned by a very powerful Christian holiday, Christmas, and only in a very transformed way are some reminiscences of the ancient cults, one of them would be the *tió*, another the Fia-Faia.

This festival has remained almost unknown in the mountains of Alt Berguedà, with all its charm and **magic**, becoming one of the most characteristic and original of Catalonia in the Christmas festivities. It could have gone unnoticed because Christmas Eve is a favorable day for privacy, and its scope has been strictly local. Every Christmas the fallaires of Bagà and Sant Julià de Cerdanyola will stop the advance of darkness again, following an atavistic rite: Fia-Faia!

As it could not be otherwise Bagà and Sant Julià de Cerdanyola feel deeply united with all the other fallaires of the Pyrenees.

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