

Chalandamarz

Every year on March 1st, Chalandamarz is celebrated in various regions of Graubünden. It holds particular significance in the Engadine Valley, where it is considered „the children’s holiday,“ in which the entire village participates. Chalandamarz originated during the Roman occupation of Raetia. In the Julian calendar, the year began on March 1st. In Romansh, Chalandamarz simply means the beginning of the month of March, then known as „Calendae Martii.“

Each village has its own way of celebrating Chalandamarz. In Zuoz, Chalandamarz begins two days earlier, and the procession lasts a day and a half. This procession is organized by the „patruns“ and „patrunas.“ Chalandamarz begins with the „not libra“ at midnight. At four o’clock in the morning, the patruns and patrunas go to each boy’s house to wake him with whip cracks and remind him that the procession starts at seven o’clock. The procession then winds its way through the villages of Madulain and Zuoz. The children wear blue peasant blouses, a pointed cap, a red neckerchief, and bells or cowbells of varying sizes – „brunzinas, talocs, zampuogns e s-chellas“. The largest bells in Zuoz are called „Maruns“ and can easily weigh 12 kilograms.

At selected points along the way, traditional Chalandamarz songs are sung. In some Engadine houses with the traditional „sulèr“ (a type of door), the children are allowed inside with their bells, making a tremendous racket and thus driving the winter spirits out of the house. The procession ends at the schoolyard with the ringing of bells and the cracking of whips. In the afternoon, a ball takes place with music and dancing, and in the evening, the community gathers in the gymnasium for a convivial evening. There are performances by the students and another ball.

Until 2022, only boys were allowed to participate in the Chalandamarz procession. The „Cumischiun da Chalandamarz“ (Chalandamarz Carnival Association) finally admitted girls in 2023 – initially, however, only without bells and cowbells. Now, there are no longer any distinctions between boys and girls.

Zuoz is the only village that has maintained the tradition of holding municipal elections on March 1st. The local authorities are elected by ballot every year on Chalandamarz. This date has always marked the beginning of the municipality’s fiscal year. Thus, Chalandamarz has not only social but also political significance for the villagers.

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