

Gian Marchet Colani

Gian Marchet Colani was an extraordinary, albeit controversial, hunter. Even almost 200 years after his death, legends still swirl around the Engadine native, who is said to have killed 2,700 chamois. In Pontresina, he is commemorated with a simple inscription on his former home and on a gravestone in the Santa Maria cemetery: Gian Marchet Colani (1772–1837). Colani is still considered one of the greatest hunters in Graubünden. He was called the „Rübezahl of the Bernina region,“ the „Magician of Pontresina,“ or the „King of the Chamois of Graubünden.“ Many half-truths and outright lies circulated about Colani even during his lifetime. For example, he is said to have murdered around 30 hunters who ventured into his hunting grounds in the Val Roseg. However, the only documented fact is that Colani kept unwanted strangers at bay with warning shots.

Gian Marchet Colani was born in Chamues-ch in 1772. At the age of 24, he went to France, where he worked in a confectionery shop and also learned gunsmithing. Homesick for his Engadine roots, he soon returned home. There, he initially worked as a locksmith. In 1808, Colani moved to Pontresina, where he married his second wife, Maria L. Branger. His marriage to his first wife, Margaretha Ambas, had ended early; they had two children. Colani and Maria had five more children. For several years, he was a tenant farmer and innkeeper in one of the Bernina mountain huts. He also occasionally worked as a mountain guide and porter. In 1835, Colani is said to have been the first mountaineer to climb the east summit of Piz Palü, together with Oswald Heer. He also rescued numerous people from avalanches and other mountain emergencies. However, his primary occupation was always farming.

Colani is described in various publications as quick-tempered and impetuous, but also as fond of children and eloquent. He must also have been a gifted storyteller, who immediately became the center of attention, especially at the tavern table. It's no wonder that his hunting success was rumored to be due to enchanted bullets. Colani's death was not exactly honorable. In 1837, he made a bet that he could mow a meadow alone in the same time as the two best Tyrolean mowers. He won the bet, but the exertion made him ill, and he died of pneumonia. Today, his name is immortalized as the „Colani Stübli“ in the Hotel Walther in Pontresina, as the „Gian-Marchet“ brand of ammunition, and as „Acla Colani“ on the hunting lodge at the beginning of the Val Roseg.

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