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## Macédoine ou Comenolitari? A Historical Comment on Early Modern Cartography

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*Summary:* Comenolitari is a bizarre geographical term so far of unknown origin which has been used extensively for centuries both by cartographers and geographers to denote the south part of Macedonia or even Macedonia as a whole. This paper follows the uses of this term through a long series of maps and geographies dating back to the 16th and up to the 19th century. It is argued that Comenolitari is a well known physical monument of Albania, which overlooks a strategic pass leading from Korçë to the valley of river Devoli. In the same trend the paper clarifies the origin of the strange terms Jambol (for Central Macedonia) and Janna (for Thessaly) both used in early modern cartography.

In 1790 cartographer Antonio Pazzini Carli Attivo published a map under the bizarre title *Il Camenolitari*. It depicts an expanded version of Albania (covering Epirus and Macedonia as well) plus the region of “Livadia”, the latter identified with the modern Greek districts of Thessaly and Sterea Hellas (Fig. 1). Apparently of Greek etymology, “kameno lithari” (καμένο λιθάρι) means “burnt stone”; a name not related to any of these well-known regions depicted on Attivo’s map.



Figure 1. The 1790 map of Antonio Pazzini Carli Attivo.

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In fact the origin and the exact content of the name *Cameno* or else *Comenolitari* are absolutely unknown to historians, who are not familiar even with the existence of such name. Students of Balkan cartography are also ignorant about the origin of *Comenolitari* but they are familiar with the term. This is because Attivo's map is a part of a rather lengthy cartographical series of various publishers sharing, more or less, the same three odd characteristics: the presence of *Comenolitari* as the SW part of present Greek Macedonia; the place name *Janna*, instead of Thessaly, and the designation of Central Macedonia/Halkidiki as *Jamboli*.

The first map in this series is by Jacomo Gastaldi *Totius Graeciae Descriptio* (1560). On this map *Comeno* (not *Cameno*) *litari* is a region (*regi*) south of present Greek Macedonia, divided from Macedonia by the mountains of Domorignitza, on top of which have been placed the names "Domorignitza" and "Eleftherochori" (Fig. 2). "Comeno" (κομμένο) means "cut"; but the different letter in Gastaldi's map does not render the identification any easier; nor do the other two place names. In any case this Domorignitza-range is to the south of river Aliakmon. Therefore, at first sight, *Comenolitari* appears to be somewhere in Thessaly, if not Thessaly itself. On the same map the region "L'Ianna" is placed to the south of the Pamvotis Lake of Ioannina. It is easy to guess that this term denotes the region and not the town of Ioannina. *Jamboli* is another region on Gastaldi's map, in the vicinity (NE) of Thessaloniki. The second map was one of Greece by Mercator (1590), in the *Atlas sive Cosmographicae Meditationes de Fabrica Mundi et Fabricati Fugura*. He placed *Comenolitari* to the East of Kastoria and to the South of one of two Aliakmon's feeder rivers; yet very close to the mountain range separating Epirus from Macedonia. *Jamboli* and *L'Ianna* do not appear on this map.



Figure 2, 3. Gastaldi, *Totius Graeciae Descriptio* (1560) and Lauremberg, *Macedonia Alexandri M. Patria* (1638).

Many other cartographers follow in the 17th and the 18th centuries: At Lauremberg's *Macedonia Alexandri M. Patria* (1638) *Comenolirati* is part of Magnesia, to the SW of Macedonia, where Lake Vegoritis (Ostrovou) also lies (Fig. 3). On Philip Briet's map, *La Macédoine et l'Albanie* (1640), it is delineated as a distinctive administrative region, overlapping present Greek Western Macedonia. Gerard and Leonard Valk, on their map of Greece and the Archipelago (1641), placed it to the West of Pieria, parallel to the river Aliakmon. On *Graeciae Descriptio* (1660) by Philipp Clüver, *Comenolitari* lies SW of Emathia, between the rivers Penios and Aliakmon. He decided that Europus was a town in that region. Joan and Guiljelmus Blaeu (1666) call it *Comenolitare*. On Cantelli da Vignola's maps of Ancient Greece (1683) and of Macedonia (1689, see Fig. 4) the same region was to the North of the Kamvounia mountains, between Lyngistis and Deuriopus, stretching as North as Kastoria. On the map of Greece by Frederick De Wit (Fig. 5), *Comenolitari*

was identified with the misplaced region of Magnesia and the same was true for the maps of N. Vissher (1648) and P. Mortier (1708). In the *Atlas* of R. και J. Ottens (1675) Veroia (Cara-Veria) was situated at the centre of *Comenolitari*. On two other maps, *Carte de la Grèce* (1707) by Wheler and Tournefort and *Turquie d'Europe et partie de celle d'Asie* (1783) by Sr Janvier, “Macédoine **ou** Comenolitari” was written clearly, indicating that the two regions were identical. In most of these maps *Jamboli* or *Iamboli* covered fully or partly Halkidiki, while *Janna* or *Ianna* was located in the place of Thessaly. Naturally none of these terms appeared on the great map of Greece by Rigas Velestinlis (1797).



Figure 4. Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola (1689).

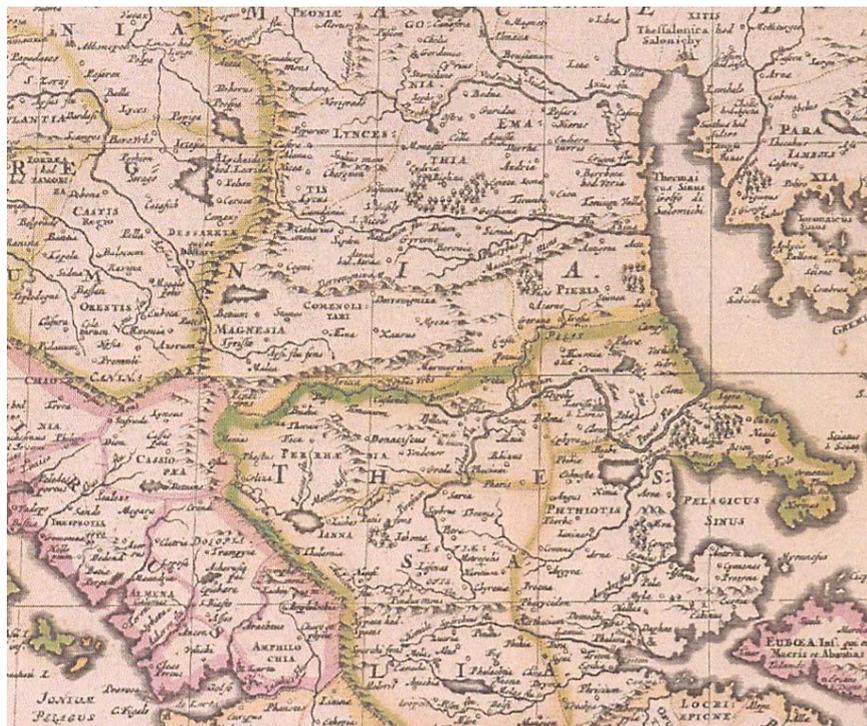


Figure 5. Frederick De Wit (ca. 1680).

*Janna* caught the attention of Anthimos Gazis who, in one of his letters to the French geographer Barbié du Bocage, in September 1801, expressed his doubt for the term which had never been used either by the Greeks or by the Turks (Koumarianou 1966: 49-50). He was rightly upset, because, by his time, the three terms had been a common place in numerous European geographies, heavily influenced (if not authored) by cartographers. Perhaps the first mention in a text is by the astronomer Giovanni Antonio Magini from Padua in his lengthy introduction of the work *Geografia cioè descrizione universale della terra* (Venetia 1598), where he presented the Italian translation of Claudius Ptolemy by Leonardo Cernoti. In this publication (vol. 1, p. 120), which was kindly brought to my attention by Mr Victor Melas, Magini noted that Thessaly, being a part of Macedonia, has been named by Gastaldi *Comenolitari*, because, in his own view, this vast plain was full of wrinkles or folds (*colma di piegature*) and was surrounded by high mountains. In his *Historia del regno di Negroponte* (Venezia, 1645), the cartographer Vincenzo Coronelli pointed the contradiction that some cartographers, following Gastaldi, named Thessaly as *Comenolitari*, like the Turks themselves did (!), while, according to Briet and to the locals (!) only a small part of Thessaly was included into this region (p. 298 and 325). In the *Novum lexicon geographicum* of Philippus Ferrarius published in 1677 (vol. 1, p. 441), under the subject “Macedonia”, it was commented that the regions *Iamboli* and *Comenolitari* were the central and southern parts of Macedonia respectively. The same view was shared by others: In 1693 by the English cartographer and publisher Robert Morden shared in his *Geography Rectified: Or, A Description Of The World* (p. 270); in 1698 by Johann Jacob Hofmann in his *Lexicon universale, historiam sacram* (vol. 4, p. 3); and in 1794 by Laurence Echard in his work *A Most Compleat Compendium of Geography General and Special*. For Echard *Emboli* or Amphipolis together with Contessa were most renowned towns of the province *Jamboli* or *Emboli*, which corresponded to Ancient Mygdonia. The most famous towns of *Comenolitari*, he wrote, were Cogni and Tyrissa (p. 107). The former might be Konitsa. The latter, according to Pliny and Ptolemy, was a town of Emathia (Leake, 1835: 313).

Indeed this odd division of Macedonia went on throughout the 18th century. It concerned both the geographical dictionaries (see for example vol. 1, p. 267 of the translated from English *Dizionario geografico portatile* Venezia, 1762) and the text-books of education. In the book of Nicolas Lenglet Du Fresnoy *Méthode pour étudier la géographie ; Où l'on donne une description exacte de l'univers* (Amsterdam, 1718), a sub-chapter of the chapter “Turquie Méridionale ou la Grèce” is entitled “La Macédoine ou Comenolitari”. This region was divided into three parts: *Iamboli* in the East, *Veria* in the West and *Janna* in the South (see the 4th rev. edn 1768, vol. 7, p. 56-57). *Janna* was ancient Thessaly and was separated from *Comenolitari* by the Dragoniza mountains (p. 59). Approximately the same information was provided in 1723 by *The Compleat Geographer* (p. 374-5). While Du Fresnoy pointed that the Turks still called this region “Makidunia” (vol. 9, p. 192), William Perks, in his work *The Youth's General Introduction to Geography* (London, 1793), claimed that they call it *Comenolitari* (p. 294). The same was mentioned in *Geografia moderna* (Madrid, 1779) by Josef Jordan y Frago (p. 85-88): The parts of Macedonia were *Jamboli*, *Veria* and *Janna*. Capital of *Jamboli* was Thessaloniki. Mr Demarville, however, in his work *Géographie: des jeunes demoiselles* (London, 1757), thought that the capital of *Iamboli* was Philippoi and Canavella (instead of Cavalla), a strong town. *Comenolitari* was the only town in the region with the same name, indeed a town “of very little importance” (vol. 2, p. 152-4). No less misleading is the testimony of the great French *Encyclopédie*: *Comenolirari* is identified as a “grand pays de la Turquie en Europe, dans la Grèce, qui comprend la Thessalie ancienne & la Macédoine” and *Jamboli* as a “contrée de la Macédoine moderne aux confins de la Romanie, de la

Bulgarie & de la Macédoine propre”. The same errors were reproduced even in the middle of the 19th century, in the work of Francesco Costantino Marmocchi, *Corso di geografia storica: antica, del medio evo e moderna* (vol. 3, p.186) and in *Larcher's Notes on Herodotus, Historical and Critical Comments on the History of Herodotus* (vol. 2, p. 296). The latter author supported that *Comenolitari* was Macedonia and Thessaly together.

Obviously and quite naturally geographers were influenced by cartographers and both of them copied and reproduced previous editions of maps and books uninterruptedly and recklessly. Reason is not of much help in explaining why this odd terminology was standardized and survived for three centuries, although it was never confirmed by travelers. Yet we have some clues to explain how all this mess came about. It is easier to understand what happened with the displacement of *L'Ianna*. It “moved” (due to the distortion, common in the maps of the Ptolemaic tradition) to the SE, thus drifting apart from Ioannina town and from Lake Pamvotis. When it “reached” the middle of the Thessaly planes, it was only natural to become an alternative name for that region.

The case of *Jamboli* is more complicated: We know for sure, as Peter Koledarov noted (1973: 167), that the name *I/Jamboli* is associated with Amphipolis. It was Cantelli da Vignola himself who marked on his map *La Grecia Universale antica Paragonata con la Moderna* (1683) the place name “Emboli” as being identical to the ancient town of “Amphipolis”. However, it was on the same map that the Italian cartographer also identified *Iamboli*, as a region, to ancient Amphaxitis and placed them both, despite the name (meaning “on both sides of the river Axios”/Vardar), in the mainland of the Halkidiki peninsula. Apparently the presence of *Jamboli* at any map had become a common place before the end of the 17th century. Thus it could not be disputed by any cartographer or disregarded by geographers; even though the real etymology was not unknown to some of them (Salmon 1774: 555; *The Modern Traveller*, 1830: 300; Laurent, 1830: 91).

The case of *Comeno* (not *Cameno*) *litari* is the most complicated. Koledarov (1973: 168-9) suggested that this is an Italian word for the Albanian mountain Kamena and the region of Kostenari. I believe he was wrong. The name belongs to the mountainous pass of “Guri i Prerë” (cut stone), in the vicinity of the once Greek village Protopapa, leading from the Korçë region to Voskopojë, to the valley of river Devoll, Berat and eventually to the plain of Muzaka (Fig. 6). It is a pass of paramount strategic importance, which was described by William Martin Leake in his *Travels in Northern Greece* (vol.1, p. 348-49) in 1835. It was named after a round rock, sixteen metres high, on top of which, the central tower stood of a square fortress, in the days of Ali pasha Tepelenli. Today this is a natural monument of Albania (see URL1). Given this, one can verify Koledarov’s guess that the Domorignitza mons (or Dorrorignizza or Dragoniza) is the nearby Mt Tomor. To go back to 1590: if the SE distortion is taken into account and his map rectified accordingly, then Mercator appears to have been pretty accurate. But, as in the case of *Janna*, both the pass and the mountains “slipped” from Albania, in the SW of the Prespa and Ochrid Lakes, to the SE, in the way of Thessaly. And they stayed there for some four hundred years. It proved impossible to trace the source of Gastaldi. Considering that these highlands and passes had been defended by Skenderbeg in the mid 15th century, I searched thoroughly the book by Marinus Barletius, *De vita moribus ac rebus praecipue adversus Turcas, gestis, Georgii Castrioti, clarissimi Epirotarum principis*, published in the very early 16th century. Skenderbeg was a constant factor in Venetian foreign policy at the time, while Barletius, a Catholic Albanian from Shkodër, lived and worked in Venice in the early 16th century, when Gastaldi was still a boy. My search was in vain. Perhaps Gastaldi’s source was not a published one, but a simple Venetian sketch or oral information. In

any case, his wrong decision to call *Comenolitari* a region was the origin of an un-precedented confusion which has never so far bothered historians.

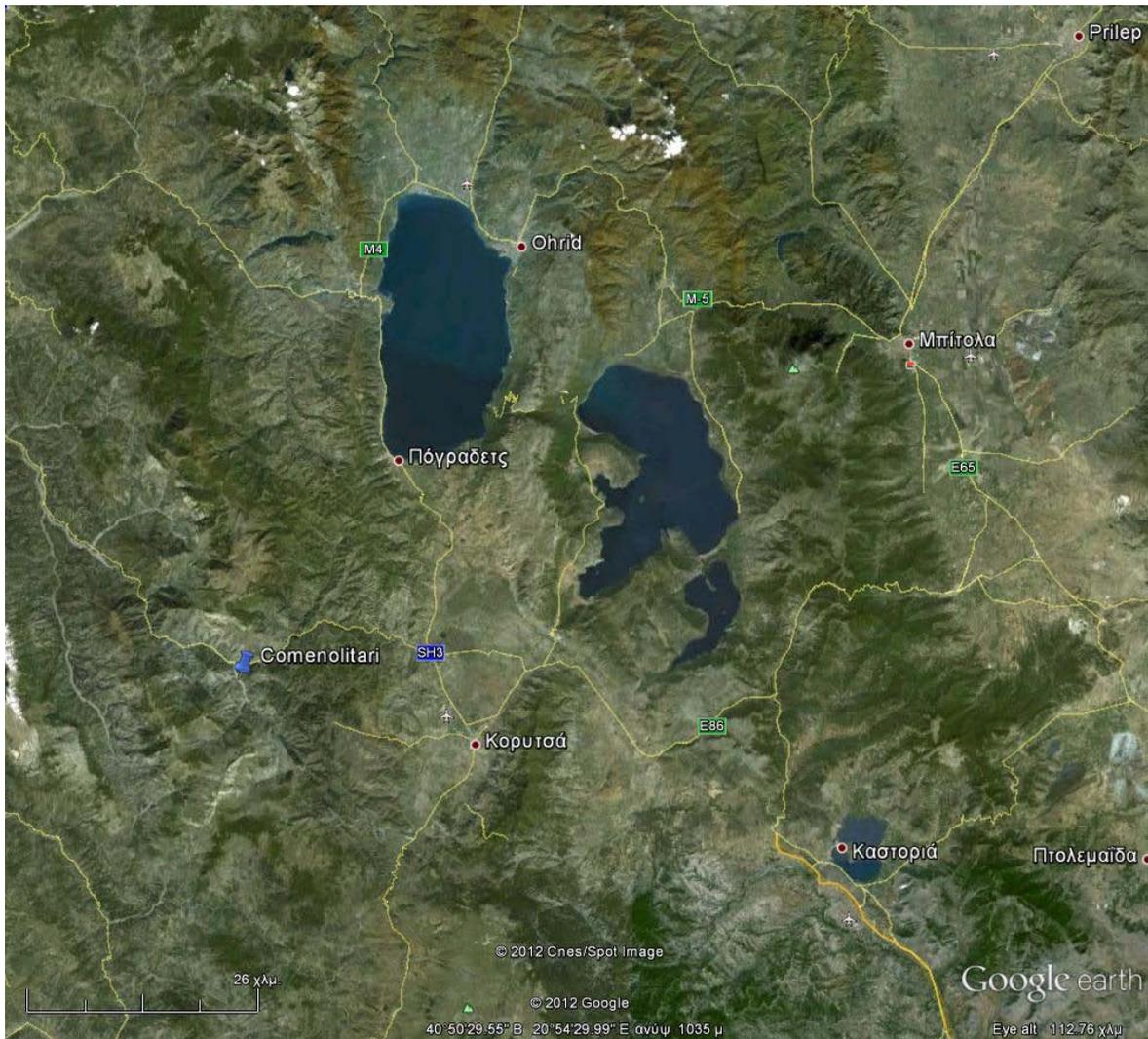


Figure 6. The location of Comenolitari.



Figure 7. The Comenolitari or Guri i Prerë (see URL2).

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