

Magazen: History of a Word Told Through a Project of Digital Lexicography

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Abstract The paper presents the general structure of the research project *Vocabolario storico-etimologico del veneziano* (VEV), funded by the Swiss National Fund, and in particular the entry *magazén*, a word of Arabic origin, whose etymology and history are described in order to explain its widespread diffusion in the European languages and its peculiar semantic trajectory (from ‘storage’ to ‘wineshop’, in Venetian, and through the French word *magasin*, probably borrowed from Italian, to English and Global magazine ‘newspaper’).

Keywords Venetian dialect. Etymology. Digital lexicography. Arab words in Romance.

Summary 1 Gazettes and Magazines: from Eastern Mediterranean Languages to Global English (through Venice). – 2 On the Word *magazén*. – 3 An Etymological Dictionary in the twenty-first century, Between Tradition and Digital Innovation.




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1 Gazettes and Magazines: from Eastern Mediterranean Languages to Global English (through Venice)

What we now call Venetian dialect has played, throughout its history, the function of a crossroads for many words of exotic origin that have settled not only in Italian, but also in various other European languages. As a *bridge language* due to the cultural, economic, and political function Venice had for centuries in the relations between East and West, Venetian has a great importance in the mediation of Greek and Arabic words, some of which destined to particular fortunes also in areas remote from the commercial or seafaring ones in which contact or exchange originally takes place.

An eloquent example is offered by two lexemes which, in Italian and English but also in many other cultural languages, are among the most commonly used words to indicate the periodical press: *gazette* and *magazine*, the latter affirmed in the meaning 'journal' in the English context, and returned with this meaning to various European languages, which have welcomed it as more or less adapted Anglicism. Both words originate in the eastern Mediterranean and migrate into the languages of Western Europe, also passing through Venetian, which is indeed one of the most probable vectors.

Mario Infelise (2016; 2017), a distinguished historian of Venetian printing press, has already dealt with the history of the word *gazetta*, reconstructing the path through which the Greek name of the *crazia* (small coin minted in Venice at the end of fifteenth century to circulate in the Greek islands of the *Dominio da mar*) passed to indicate the printed sheets containing news of various kinds which, in the course of the Modern Age, progressively evolve towards what we now call *newspapers*. The word *gazetta*, in short, is actually a Venetian word transmitted into Italian, and from there into other European languages, such as German and, crucially, English, which is particularly exemplary; it was therefore among the first to be considered in the frame of the lexicographical project, co-directed by the writer, of the *Vocabolario storico-etimologico del veneziano* (VEV).¹

Only partially similar is the case of the Venetian word *magazen*, chosen as the title of the journal in which these pages are published due to its semantic allusiveness, which refers on the one hand to the meaning – typically Venetian – of 'public place, point of sale' (especially of wines), and on the other hand to the meaning – radiated from

¹ The entry *gazeta* of the VEV has been published in Tomasin, D'Onghia 2020, 81. By the way, this word has been recently re-semanticized in the field of Digital Humanities (and Digital Cartography in particular) thanks to the so-called *digital gazetteer*: see for instance the project lead by Andrea Nanetti, *Engineering Historical Memory* (<https://engineeringhistoricalmemory.com/>).

English – of ‘periodic publication’ (on the choice of this name, see Fischer, Mantoan, Tramelli 2020, 9).

It seemed almost inevitable to pay homage to this choice by publishing here, in the appendix, the article *magazen* of the VEV, and proposing some consideration on the digital side of the project, which represents the intersection area between the VEV and the scientific interests of the Venice Center for Digital and Public Humanities.

2 On the Word *magazén*

Some more hints about the word *magazén*, to illustrate the entry published in the appendix drawn up according to the criteria established for the dictionary: that is, based on the review of the occurrences of the word in a corpus of texts constituted as follows:

- a. for the ancient part (up to the end of the fourteenth century), the Venetian sub-corpus of the database in service of the *Tesoro della lingua italiana delle Origini (TLIO)* of the Istituto Opera del Vocabolario Italiano of the CNR of Florence. The *TLIO* is a database of ancient Italian texts that can be interrogated using a software (Gatto) created within the same institute and accessible through an online platform (vevweb.ovl.cnr.it). Thanks to the preventive lemmatisation of most of the texts inserted, not only combined searches are possible in the corpus, but also searches for lemmas, which take the (Italian) lemmary of the *TLIO* as a reference point;
- b. for the modern and contemporary part (fifteenth-twentyfirst centuries), about a hundred digitally acquired dictionaries, lexicons and glossaries (specifically: a library of files mostly in PDF format obtained by scanning volumes or parts of volumes of lexicographical interest with OCR) that are queried in a way that we could define semi-automatic, that is, both by using the normal search functions, and by means of punctual checks and controls on the digitised text;
- c. ancillary, to cover the gaps in the two previous corpora, a selected library of post-medieval texts written in Venetian, that represent the long tradition of Venetian dialect literature, which proved to be particularly useful for documenting the phases of Venetian less covered by the very rich lexicographic production relating to the Venetian;
- d. finally, as a further complement, the extensive scientific bibliography (in particular historical-lexical and etymological) produced by nineteenth/twentieth-century dialectology and concerning Venetian.

This is not the place to illustrate in more detail the structure and content of the corpora listed above, which have already been presented in various papers (D’Onghia, Tomasin 2019; 2021).

In the case of *magazen*, the examination of the materials obtainable from the overall testimonial thus allows us to reconstruct the Venetian history and diffusion of an Arabism (مخزن *maḥzan* ‘deposit’: Pellegrini 1972, 104-5) which, as in other similar cases, is adapted almost simultaneously to medieval Latin and to more than one of the Romance languages that came into contact with Arabic in the East (akin to the case of a semantically similar and also Arabic word, *fondaco*, in Venetian *fontego*).

The earliest known Venetian attestations are among the earliest ever in a Romance language: thus, *magazenos* available to Venetians are mentioned in a pact – drafted in Latin, but obviously saturated with vulgarisms like all similar texts of this era – signed in 1302 between Venice and the sultan Melech Nasser, king of Egypt; and again, this time in the vernacular, a long report written in 1306 by the Venetian merchant Marco Michiel, and relating to the troubles he experienced in Cyprus, speaks of *magaçeni* of the king of Cyprus, with ç equivalent to z as usual (Tomasin 2013, 40).

In the first decade of the fourteenth century, therefore, *magazen* is a word sufficiently clear and integrated in the Venetian commercial language to be used several times both in texts written in Latin concerning the relations with the Arabs, and in vernacular texts certainly written by Venetians.

Another Romance language, namely Spanish, had previously imported the same Arabic lexeme: it is the word *almacén* (characterised, as often in that language, by the agglutinated Arabic article: DCECH, s.v.), documented as early as 1225 and corresponding to the same word *maḥzan*, but destined to a much lesser success than the ‘sister’ *magazen*. In fact, even the Pisans – travelling companions and often rivals of the Venetians in the ports of the near East – in the same years had integrated the same entry into their commercial lexicon, so much so that the word *magazeno* also occurs in a Pisan document about the port of Cagliari written in 1318. Nor is it surprising to find a *magazenu* also in the Messinese translation (a *volgarizzamento*) of Valerio Massimo, drawn up between the twenties and thirties of the same century by Accurso da Cremona (TLIO, s.v. “magazzino”). And again in medieval Sardinia, the lexeme appears in the form *mazzen*, influenced by the Catalan *maatzem*, *matçem* (FEW 19, 115). And notwithstanding the early attestations in the sources in French, it is probable that, precisely in Italo-Romance commercial circles (and among the Venetians in particular), the term was adapted to the French language (Arveiller 2012, 361).

What is important to underline here is that the word in question, with a tonic vowel concordantly rendered as *e* by all the Italo-Ro-

mance varieties that adapt it in the fourteenth century (more recent is *magazzino* type with *i*, probably triggered by the combination of the Italian suffix *-ino*), appears to be documented in Venice earlier and more abundantly than in other Italian cities, which makes it entirely plausible that the Venetian mercantile environments are the ones from which the term radiated at least in the Italian context.

A further clue about the antiquity and vitality of the Venetian word *magazen* consists in the fact that right in the Lagoon it experiences a more complex semantic evolution than elsewhere. The development of the meaning of ‘tavern’ is peculiarly Venetian and vital and documented starting from the sixteenth century (but certainly earlier) and keeping vital at least in the sticky lexicographic tradition, until the last century (its decline may have been favoured by the success, precisely from the twentieth century and still current, of the synonymous *bàcaro*).

We are informed about the Venetian *magazzen* ‘tavern’, in its typical eighteenth-century meaning, by Francesco Zorzi Muazzo, an extravagant Venetian lexicographer active between the sixties and seventies of the eighteenth century and author of a *Raccolta de’ proverbii, detti, sentenze, parole e frasi veneziane, arricchita d’alcuni esempi ed istorielle*, a sort of monolingual Venetian paleo-dictionary (for its historical and linguistic importance see D’Onghia, forthcoming). Here is the passage relating to wine warehouses, also called bastions (ed. Crevatin 2008, 90):

Magazzen da vini. Do principalmente zè i caporioni che fa andar sti bastioni in Venezia: uno zè un tal Zuane Coa, villan da Bovolenta, veggio avaro e sordido che solamente el veder la figura fa ricavar cosa che de baronae, ladrarie e struzio della povertà vien fatte dai so omeni nei so bastioni che va a conto soo e che par tante spelonche de ladri e sassini quei so bastioni; l’altra zè la fameggia dei Coletti, onesti e onorati galantomeni, amai dal so Prencipe, dalla nobiltà e dalla povertà massime e che procura che a tutti ghe vegna dà el so giusto.

Magazzen for wine. The merchants who run these shops in Venice are two: one is Zuane Coa, a farmer from Bovolenta, a miser and dirty old man. Just to look at him, he brings to mind the crimes committed by his men against the poor in his warehouses, which seem like dens of brigands and murderers. The other is the Coletti family, honest and honoured gentlemen, loved by the Doge, the nobles and even the poors, and who behave very correctly with everyone.

3 An Etymological Dictionary in the Twenty-First Century, Between Tradition and Digital Innovation

The use of IT tools (in particular the digital libraries mentioned above) is already important in the preparatory phase of the VEV materials, and it becomes crucial in other phases of the lexicographical process. The VEV project envisages, as usual in the field of research lexicography, a complete online publishing of its entries, i.e. the progressive upload in a website created by Salvatore Arcidiacono: <http://vev.oivi.cnr.it>. The site is modelled on similar recent initiatives, and in particular on digital dictionaries created by the Istituto Opera del Vocabolario Italiano of the CNR of Florence, which hosts the digital platform of the VEV: see for instance the *Tesoro della lingua italiana delle origini* (<http://tlio.oivi.cnr.it>) and the more recent *Vocabolario dantesco* (<http://www.vocabolario.dantesco.it/>; see Arcidiacono 2020). In all these online dictionaries, entries are structured in a series of tabs, each corresponding to a fixed section, such as the phonomorphological variants, First attestation, Etymological notice, *Note* in which the problems and particularities of the single item are discussed.

It is almost useless to specify that the choice of an online dictionary allows the VEV to progressively present the results of its research (not necessarily having to publish the items in alphabetical order), and to correct the items already published. These are all too well known and obvious advantages, which, however, were not enough – in our case – to definitively discourage the parallel design of products made in the traditional paper form (accompanied, of course, by the open access publication of the volumes in PDF format).

Thus, starting from the autumn of 2020, a series of thematic volumes (*Parole veneziane*) began to be released by the Lineadacqua publishing house in Venice: one hundred at a time, groups of thematically related words are published *on paper*. After the Venetianisms of Italian (subject, together with the first entries of letter A, of the volume *Parole veneziane*, vol. 1, Tomasin, D’Onghia 2020), it was the turn of the insults (*Parole veneziane 2. Ingiurie impropri, contumelie*: Panontin 2021), and it will soon be that of the most typical terms of the legal and political system of the Serenissima, the Republic of Venice (Verzi, forthcoming, to be released by the end of the year). Other volumes are planned for games and toys, and others will be dedicated to Venetian architecture, boats, cuisine, and so on.

So why have we chosen the dual and parallel path of online and paper publication of the Dictionary? Let us clear the field of economic issues immediately: the funding obtained from the project – hitherto supported by the Swiss National Research Fund and the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa: hopefully other supporters will be added in the future – make the maintenance of both channels financially

sustainable for now. And the production of the volumes printed by Lineadacqua also has a mercantile response – that is concretely: a circulation and a purchase even outside the restricted circle of researchers, which makes them a commercially credible product.

This makes us reflect on the only apparent and unconditional openness ensured by the online publication of products that the less specialised public continues to prefer in more traditionally accessible and differently usable versions, as are the books (the theme, incidentally, seems to us not devoid of interest in the perspective taken today by the so-called Public Humanities).

However, there are further more strictly scientific reasons in favour of the choice to publish the dictionary in the double path of the digital full version on the one hand, and of the partial *excerpta* on the other. In fact, the consultation of the thematic volumes gives the work the possibility of a reasoned use (in the sense that the adjective *ragionato* has in the lexicographic tradition), that is the opening of thematic paths and monographic studies on single portions of the lexicon. A final index is planned for the *Parole Veneziane* series, which will allow to retrieve all the printed entries. It will make a distinct and complementary service to the one offered by the online dictionary, in which everything will be searchable in much more open and *liquid* form. This will make its perusal more suitable for some uses, but less suitable for others. Far from scrapping traditional lexicography, from this point of view, digital lexicography approaches it as a useful complement.

Still, a year of work on the VEV website has already shown that, counter-intuitively, the times and methods of traditional, paper publishing, prove to be more agile and quicker – at least in some phases: of course, the ἐντελέχεια of the dictionary remains the full and open publication of its contents – than those of the on-line dictionary. The latter is requiring a running-in and adaptation period that delays and slows down the possibility of immediately having the items on the telematic platform. In fact, at the moment (Summer 2021), only a hundred items are available on the site, while already two volumes – with about a hundred entries each – have come out and a third is in the works (about a thousand are the entries already ideally stored in the editorial warehouse, that is, already written, albeit at different levels of revision). In short, the computer version of the on-line dictionary is proving to be slower and more cumbersome than the well-proven system of paper publication of mini-dictionaries which, in fact, are the volumes of the series.

Finally, in the laboratory of the online dictionary, it is often necessary to ask oneself about the research possibilities that it makes sense (or does not make sense) to offer to those who consult such a tool, and in some cases arises the problem of the possible realisation – which obviously is automatic and rapid only in the results it

promises, but certainly not in the processes that are used to achieve it – of data reservoirs and related digital tools useful for obtaining quantifications and general statistics about the content of the work. For example: why not equip the VEV with the possibility of automatically extracting the statistics relating to the origin of the etymes of its forms, attributing appropriate labels when loading the entries? Or, why not make it possible with a click to elicit statistical data relative to the number of lemmatised adjectives, to compare them with the amount of verbs or nouns (masculine and feminine) to which an entry is entitled? Or again, why not make available to the user (no longer reader) graphs and statistics that can be obtained transversally with appropriate data entry and the creation of special tools?

Such functions were formerly, albeit more modestly, carried out by the indices of traditional dictionaries, but they have the natural tendency, in the digital environment, to multiply and make more complex objects investigable, sometimes bordering on issues that in the lexicographic research of the past would have been considered peregrine. In addition, the creation of such tools, which are easy and very quick to use once they are ready, requires time and work, and inevitably has repercussions on the procedures for editing and loading properly lexicographical materials.

The belief of the coordinators of the VEV project – who can benefit from the continuous and close comparison with the progressively printed paper volumes – is that the quantity and complexity of such digital equipment should be reduced to a minimum in the dictionary construction phase. In other words, what is available in the products of the great etymological tradition of the last two centuries must continue to be accessible in the new products of digital lexicography and must aim at the same levels of scientific (i.e. strictly *linguistic*) quality. It is on the basis of soberly but precisely indexed repertoires such as traditional etymological dictionaries that it has been possible to construct almost everything we know about the lexical history of the languages. The lexicographical frame defined by the works of a tradition already consolidated at the end of the nineteenth century constitutes the minimum lexicographic requirement that makes any language a lexicographically and etymologically well described language. What remains to investigate in our case – and in general, maybe, in the field of the digital lexicography applied to Romance linguistics – is whether the digital format can offer new possibilities and new perspective to enrich, to strengthen and to make more complex the lexicographical research. The light structure chosen to develop our project leaves those horizons open to further exploration.

In fact, what derives from the computer processing of these materials and from the devising of new tools of consultation or quantitative, statistical and in any case automated investigation of the available data represents a welcome complement but they actually do not

slow down or hinder the work of the etymologist, whose scientific agenda remains essentially unchanged. It is basically on the goodness of the etymological hypotheses, on the completeness and correctness of historical reconstructions, on the clarity and order of the expositions that it makes sense to evaluate the work of those who, being historical linguist, is unable to consider the development of a software or the exploration of new IT territories as a scientific objective.

The example of a great romance etymological dictionary such as the *Französisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (FEW), first and entirely made in traditional form, and then *de facto* digitalised in an excellent website (<http://lecteur-few.atilf.fr>), shows the ideal path of a work that has posed its author - a linguist - exclusively linguistic concerns (resulting in a masterpiece of etymology and historical linguistics) and has left to its followers the interesting IT challenges that make it a tool today easily and profitably available also in its online version.

The more bumpy path of other similar lexicographical projects, such as that of the *Lessico etimologico italiano* (LEI), born in the traditional form and transferred in the course of work on IT support, shows how the transition must face with significant executive problems (Prifti 2020).

Not to mention, of course, that all the great dictionaries printed in European history, starting at least from the *Crusca* of 1612 (today retro-digitised!) can still be read on the original pages at any time, without any digital accident temporarily obscuring (or, God forbid, making it permanently inaccessible) their fragile digital content, in need of continuous technical updates. In a field, such as Humanities, in which the scientific bibliography survives decades and sometimes centuries, this does not seem an insignificant detail.

Appendix. The Entry *magazen* of the VEV

(As for references to the corpus and for the meaning of the few conventional abbreviations, see the VEV website, <http://vev.oivi.cnr.it>).

magazen (magasen, magazzen, magazzino, magasin, magazin, masaghen)

1. s.m. 'deposito per le merci'.

■ *Corpus* VEV: 1306 Doc. venez. (4).

XIV SellaVen (mediolat. *magazenus, magazinus*); 1374-1434 *CodiceMorosini* 209, 210, 882 etc.; 1436 *CapitolareTernieri* 28; 1436-1440 BadoerGloss 84; 1463 *FoscariViaggi* 90; 1475-1505 *CapitolareVisdomini* 60, 76; 1483 *SanudoItinerario* 32; 1485 *ZorziDispacci* 49; 1496-1532 *SanudoDiarii* 1.135-57.267 (*m., magazzen*); 1537-1582 *Concina (m., magazzino)*; 1548-1613 *CortelazzoXVI*; 1684 *Volpe* 19, 20; 1732-1779 *FolenaGoldoni (m., magazzen, magazzin)*; 1767-1775 *Muazzo* 90, 91, 148 etc. (*m., magazzen*); 1775 1796 1821 *Patriarchi (magazzen)*; 1829 1856 *Boerio*; 1851 *Paoletti*; 1876 *Nazari*; 1922 *Rosman (magasen, magasin, masaghen)*; 1935 *Michelagnoli*; 1982 *Naccari-Boscolo (magasen)*; 1987 *Doria (magazin)*; 2007 *Siegea-Brugnera-Lenarda*.

► locuz.

- *capo da (del) m.* 'sottocapo' 1767-1775 *Muazzo* 205, 227, 235 etc.; «primo servente, ed è quello preposto alla cantina d'un magazzino di vino» 1829 1856 *Boerio*.
- *far m.* 'adunare insieme' 1829 1856 *Boerio*.
- *m. dale croste* «se dise alla gola e alla pansa» 1767-1775 *Muazzo* 172.

2. s.m. 'taverna, osteria' (spesso *m. da vin*).

1545-1584 *CortelazzoXVI (m. da vin)*; 1671 *VarotariVespaio* 135; 1675 *BalbiLigamatti* 34; 1688 *BonicelliBullo* 28, 29, 37; 1693 *MondiniPantalone* 77; 1732-1779 *FolenaGoldoni*; 1767-1775 *Muazzo* 90, 113, 122 etc. (*m. da vini, da vin*); 1829 1856 *Boerio (m. da vin)*; 1851 *Paoletti*; 1852 *Contarini (m. da vin)*; 1888 *Contarini-Malamani (m. da vin)*; 1928 *Piccio (m. da vin)*.

► der./comp.

- *imagasenare* v. 'mettere in magazzino' 1982 Nàccari-Boscolo.
- *magazenagio* s.m. 'immagazzinamento' 1829 1856 Boerio; 1851 Paoletti.
- *magazenetto* dim. 1767-1775 Muazzo 286.
- *magaz(z)enier* s.m. 'magazziniere', 'oste' XVII *BonicelliSpezier* 78; 1688 *BonicelliBullo* 36, 40, 44 etc.; 1767-1775 Muazzo 159 (*magazz-*); 1829 1856 Boerio; 1851 Paoletti; 1852 Contarini; 1875 *PiccoloCarena* 12 (s.v. *taverna*: «venez. *m. de vin*»); 1876 *Nazari*; 1888 *Contarini-Malamani*; 1935 *Michelagnoli*.
- *maga* s.m., forma abbreviata di *m.*, usata nell'espressione gergale dei barcaioli *andar al maga* 'andare a bere' 1829 1856 Boerio (s.v. *maga*).
- *magaz(z)eniera* s.f. 'ostessa' 1767-1775 Muazzo 541; 1829 1856 Boerio; 1851 Paoletti.

● Le occ. veneziane più antiche sono anteriori alla prima segnalata dal TLIO s.v. *magazzino* (Pisa 1318); l'occ. più antica segnalata dal DELIN (s.v. *magazzino*) proviene dal latino medievale di Curzola (1214).

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