YIDDISH MOKUM + X TOPOYMS IN BARGOENS, PARTIALLY CONTEXTUALIZED

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Introduction

There are—roughly speaking—two ways for Yiddish words to enter the Dutch language: either directly from Yiddish or Post-Yiddish Dutch or indirectly via Bargoens, the Dutch counterpart of what is called Rotwelsch in Germany. Bargoens and Rotwelsch provided several lower class groups with a lexicon of their own so that qualifications like ‘thieves’ cant’ must be rejected as being oversimplifications.

An important study of Bargoens and related cryptolects is Moormann’s monograph De geheimalen, which comprises sixty sources, forty-nine in part II, called Bronnenboek (Source book), and eleven in part III called Nagelaten bronnen (Bequeathed sources), which is in fact an appendix to the original edition of 1932–1934. I will refer to individual sources by means of Q plus their respective numbers in Moormann (Q1, Q2, etc.). A sequence of sources will be indicated by means of Qn ^ space, followed by the pertinent numbers. However, Q32 and Q56 will be indicated by means of abbreviations of their titles: BT (= Köster Henke, De Boeventaal) and GT (= Van Bolhuis, De Gabbertaal). They will be quoted in accordance with Sanders’ facsimile edition. Wherever GT has plagiarized other sources (especially those collected in the original edition of Moormann) GT will not be quoted.

In Part I of his monograph Moormann provides Yiddish and Romani etymologies for Qn 1–43, the sources that he considers to represent

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2 W.L.H. Köster Henke, De Boeventaal. Zakwoordenboekje van het Bargoensch (Dokkum 1906). Henceforth BT.
3 E.G. van Bolhuis, De Gabbertaal. Woordenlijst van het Bargoens (Rijswijk 1937). Henceforth GT.
Bargoens proper. Unfortunately he does not identify all yiddishisms as such and his etymologies are sometimes incomplete. Thus, even though all Mokum + X toponyms of the sources are quoted as yiddishisms, the further discussion these elements require in some cases is lacking. These problems will be discussed in section 3, which will be preceded by a short section on other uses of the word mokum in colloquial Dutch and Bargoens. A postscript will put everything into ‘national perspective.’

As for the orthographies used in this article I have to ask the reader to bear with me. Bargoens data have to be quoted according to their sources—which implies the application of Dutch spelling conventions. The spelling of Dutch (West) Yiddish data will follow Hartog Beem’s ‘Dutch’ system, which implies <oe> = <u>, <ei> = <ey>, <sj> = <sh>, <ch> = <kh>, but <g> = <g>. Wherever I feel it is not necessary to distinguish between West and East Yiddish I will simply use ‘Yiddish.’

2. The Word mokum in Bargoens and Colloquial Dutch

Given its Hebrew-Yiddish etymology, BrG. mokum/mokem⁵ ‘should’ mean ‘town, village,’ but in the Bargoens sources there is a strong preference for the reading ‘town’ [Qn 7, 8/53, 16, 20, 23, 25, 35–37, 39, 42, 51, BT]. Nevertheless, the other reading is also available; witness mokum ‘(little) village’ [Qn 22, 40–41], grandig ['large'] mokum ‘town’ [Q22], the diminutive mokumtie [Q8] ‘village,’ or the compounds boerenmokem [GT] and kaffersmokum [Q23] ‘village’ ([lit.] ‘farmers’ place’).

By adding the adjectives grannig/groot ‘big, large’ and klein ‘little,’ the Bargoens speaker could create flexible pairs of names [Qn 15–16, 23, 25, 37, 42, BT]. E.g. Groot Mokum ‘Amsterdam’ could be construed with several Klein Mokums among which Haarlem [Q16] and Rotterdam [BT]. Moormann—who is aware of the use of Yidd. godel ‘large’ in Rotwelsch

⁵ The <u> in mokum indicates a centralized vowel, /œ/, which-in unstressed position-can hardly be distinguished from schwa. The representation of /am/with <um> may be inspired by the frequent occurrence of <um> in Dutch toponyms, such as Bussum, Dokkum, Gorcum. In either case (mokum and the toponyms) [Gem] should be qualified as spelling pronunciation. Note that things are different for Rotwelsch. In Rotw. Mokum/Mokom <u> represents a true full vowel, i.e. /ʊ/, in accordance with German orthography. This /ʊ/-sound is due to pre-labial rounding of a schwa. The corresponding sound is /ʊ/ in Dutch Yiddish, as in BrG. mokkom maaken ‘to get together’ ([lit.] ‘to make mokkom’) [Q53]. It may well be that the spelling of Rotwelsch words like Mokum and stikum ‘secretively’ in written German has indirectly supported the <um> spelling of BrG. mokum and stiekum.