

# Jesus in Yiddish

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Politically incorrect as it may be to say so, the traditional Jewish and Christian religions had it in for each other big-time. True, they believe in the exact same messiah (yes, that one, descended from Ruth, Jesse and David), but with that seemingly minor point of contention about whether he came once and will return or whether he has yet to come at all.

Such lofty theological concerns were, however, psychologically dwarfed in the Jewish psyche by the centuries of persecution and massacres inflicted on the minority that would not accept the Christian version of the messiah, the abrogation of laws concerning kosher food and circumcision, and much else.

As a result, the figure of Jesus became, for untold generations of Jews, a symbol of The Thing for which their people could be discriminated against, persecuted, expelled, massacred and, it seemed, forever abused.

So now with all that out of the way, we come to the Yiddish word for Jesus. There's the modern politically correct, neutral (and colourless) word: **Yézus**.

And there's the traditional pejorative, whose every mention evokes an intricate complex of emotions, entailing fear, bitterness, betrayal and an almost wistful thought about what might have been had a world-power religion not emerged that persecuted so many Jewish people over so many centuries.

The most common rendition is **Yóske Pándre** (or **Yóske Pándre's** where the second name is the patronymic possessive as in, say, Shlóyme Nosn's = Shlóyme son of Nosn).

This is an amazing Yiddish retention of an ancient Greek multitheist (ie pagan) slur on the Christian Christ, usually assigned to the second century philosopher Celsus. Celsus, author of the first comprehensive work against Christianity, claimed that Jesus's father

was a Roman soldier called Panthera, not God or the Holy Ghost.

This was verily a case of pagan-Jewish coalition against the rising tide of Christianity. From Celsus, it seems, this alternative genealogy of Jesus made it into Jewish parlance, and eventually into the polemic **Tóldoys Yéyshu** (Toledót Yéshu), an anti-Christian history of Jesus. It was also recorded in the Talmud, where the rendition is sometimes **Pandera** with a 'd' (as in the later Yiddish). These passages were removed from many editions of the Talmud in Christian lands to avoid giving offense and the dire consequences of such offense. But like so much else, the term survived in everyday spoken Yiddish, transmitted through the generations.

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