Abstract: This chapter outlines the modern history of Jews in Croatia from the Edict of Toleration issued by the Habsburg Emperor Joseph II, which permitted Jews to settle in the Kingdom of Croatia (or Dalmatia–Croatia–Slavonia), to the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1918. This period saw the numerical growth of the Jewish minority and its increasing influence in Croatian political and social life, as well as the parallel growth of anti-Semitic attitudes and ideas among certain political groups, who identified the Jews with the worst aspects of modern urban life and the ideologies of liberalism and socialism. The chapter goes into some detail on the reasons for the general emergence of anti-Semitism in nineteenth-century Europe, as well as the simultaneous evolution of race theory in both Europe and Croatia.

Jews in the Kingdom of Dalmatia–Croatia–Slavonia

In contrast to the large Orthodox Serb minority, which had been settled in the Kingdom of Dalmatia–Croatia–Slavonia (i.e. the historic Croatian provinces) for centuries, the history of Jewish settlement in Croatia is of relatively recent origin. With the exception of the old Sephardic Jewish communities in the Dalmatian port towns of Split and Dubrovnik, existing from the late Middle Ages, the numbers of Jews in other parts of Croatia were insignificant. Under Habsburg rulers in the early modern period, Jews and Protestants were not permitted to settle in the Kingdom of Croatia. In 1697 the common Hungaro–Croatian parliament forbade by law any non-Catholics from owning property in Croatia. Jews were allowed to trade in certain goods on the territory of the Habsburg Empire until the end of the eighteenth century, and they also arrived in northern Croatia as travelling merchants from Austria, Hungary, Bohemia and Moravia. However, the law against Jewish settlement in Croatia was upheld by the Croatian parliament in 1729. In 1741 the Hungarian parliament confirmed (at the request of the Croatian parliament) the law that only Catholics could live on the territory of Croatia.

Croatia’s position within the Habsburg Monarchy itself was determined by the Croats’ status as a ‘historic nation’. The term ‘historic nation’ referred to all those peoples (including the German–Austrians, Hungarians, Poles and Czechs), or more accurately, to the nobilities of these peoples, which possessed a tradition of statehood dating from the Middle Ages. Croatian historic state right was founded on the legal continuity of the medieval Kingdom of Croatia, institutionalised in the office of the Ban (viceroy) and the Sabor (parliament), which functioned long after Croatia’s incorporation in the Habsburg Monarchy in 1527. The nobility of Civil Croatia (north-west Croatia) saw itself as the rightful heir to the medieval kingdom and its former territories, lost in past centuries to the Ottoman and Venetian empires, which included Dalmatia, the Military Frontier, eastern Istria and parts of Ottoman Bosnia and Herzegovina (the parts known as ‘Turkish Croatia’ and ‘Turkish Dalmatia’). Formerly Venetian Dalmatia and Istria became Austrian provinces in 1815, and were administered by Vienna, in contrast to northern Croatia–Slavonia (Civil Croatia and Civil Slavonia), which had been in union with the Kingdom of Hungary since 1102, until both had passed to the Habsburg crown. Despite their administrative divisions, the historical political unity of the Croatian provinces was still