Jews in Croatia
– Jewish Communities
(by Melita Švob, Izvor, Zagreb with Jewish community Zagreb Research and Documentation Center »Cendo« in Zagreb and K. D. Šalom Freiberger, Zagreb, 2004).

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The second edition of the book »Jews in Croatia – Jewish communities« by Melita Švob [Izvori, Zagreb and Jewish community Zagreb Research and Documentation Center »Cendo« in Zagreb and K. D. Šalom Freiberger] in two books on Croatian and English language presents Jewish history from their first settlement in Croatia until today. The author of this book is scientific associate at the Institute for Migration and Nationalities in Zagreb and for the last ten years she has been engaged in research of Jewish population in Croatia. Melita Švob is director of the Research and Documentation Center inaugurated in 2000 in the Jewish community, Zagreb. She has founded, together with eng Zoran Mirković, a database of Holocaust victims and survivors in Croatia. The second edition of the book Jews in Croatia has been expanded by research on the Croatian Jewish communities and the effect of the Holocaust on socio-demographic changes and migrations of Jewish population.

The first part of the book »Jews in Croatia – 18th–20th century« concentrates on historical and legal framework of Jewish presence in Croatia, the position of Jewish communities and their institutions during that time. It also gives population censuses from 1857 to 1991. The author presents the history of Jewish settlement in Croatia, migrations, life and organization of Jews and Jewish communities. She traces their presence through many political regimes and various governmental systems in Croatia over hundred years: from the days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Independent State of Croatia (NDH) during the Second World War, to the Federative People’s Republic of Yugoslavia, to the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, and finally to today’s Republic of Croatia. The population censuses and the places where Jews lived (according to the censuses) give clear evidence of their historical presence in Croatia.

The best example of Jewish presence, work and influence are their communities (kehile). They are organized Jewish communities in Diasporas, which go back as far as 2500 years. These are local Jewish organizations with authority that governs all Jewish religious and related matters, making sure Jewish tradition is honored where Jews are present. Kehile
are not only religious but they are also so-
cial communities because they take care
of all their members, especially of those
who are in need. Life in these communi-
ties is based on ethical principles of Juda-
ism.

In the second part of the book »Jewish
communities in Croatia« 29 such commu-
nities, which existed before the Second
World War, are described. They were the
centers of life, identity and activity of
Jews in Croatian towns and other settle-
ments. The Jewish community in Zagreb
is treated separately in co-authorship
with Zoran Mirković. The processes of the
formation of Jewish communities in Cro-
atia and organization of their life in many
ways depended on position and rights of
Jews in Croatia during the 18th, 19th and
20th century, as well as on the global
changes in Europe at that time. The aut-
lor tried to give a short account of each
community and its institutions, its orga-
nization and activities in Croatia, follo-
wed by original documentation.

The number of Jews in every commu-
nity according to the population census
1857–1931 is shown graphically. Tabular
presentation of the numbers of Jews in
1921 and 1931 is given for every commu-
nity in the whole District and not only for
the places where Jewish communities
were situated, since Jews from surround-
ing places were under the competence of
one communal rabbinate. This causes for
the difference between the population
census and direct data from Jewish com-
nunities. The data are necessary for the
understanding of the specific conditions
of Jewish settlement in this geographic
area. These communities existed before
the Second World War and most of their
members were victims of the Holocaust.
After the War only a few survivors return-
ed, while several communities disap-
peared altogether. The Jewish communi-
ity in Croatia now consists of 10 local
branches. That is all that has remained of
the once vigorous Jewish community of
30 local communities after the outbreak
of the Second World War. The book also
describes the development and organiza-
tion of Jewish communities, schools, wo-
men’s and youth organizations under the
influence of Enlightenment in Europe
and later by the Zionist movement, which
affected the changes in Jewish communi-
ty of Croatia, but also in its total popula-
tion. The lists with names of victims of
the Holocaust and, wherever it was possi-
ble, the names of those who survived are
of special importance. In this way the
book avoids general and approximate as-
sessments of the numbers of people who
were killed in or survived the War, avoid-
ing generalizations too often used in po-
tics and polemics. Accordingly, each vic-
tim and each survivor keeps his or her
dignity and individuality, which is lost in
generalizations based on numbers and
statistics. This book presents an elaborate
scientific study, substantiated by a
number of original documents from the
18th to 20th century. Relevant demograp-
hic data are presented in the form of tab-
les and figures, while the book also inclu-
des original photographs, various private
correspondences and documents that pre-
sent the evidence of time and real life sto-
ries. It also gives an account of life and
activities of Jewish communities in Croa-
tia and their distinguished members and
how they contributed to the economic and
cultural life of wider local community.
Private letters, photographs and post-
cards are simple mementoes of people
and their families who once populated
these communities, animated their asso-
ciations and whose lives were lost or just
barely preserved in time of destruction
and prejudice. »Jews in Croatia – Jewish
communities« by Melita Švob is valuable
contribution to all relevant scientific re-
search of Jewish population in Croatia. It
offers opportunities for future research
projects while the published preliminary
data provide a chance for eventual correction with help of Holocaust survivors and people who are searching for the information about their family members and friends. Analysis and reconstruction of history and activities of Jewish communities in Croatia clearly indicate Jewish presence in Croatian history and their contribution to the enrichment of Croatian heritage.

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