Here the Nazis had stabled their horses and converted the upper sanctum into a house of prostitution.

contained nothing Jewish. The great Bajrakli Mosque was listed as a "cultural and historical monument" and the Serbian Orthodox Cathedral as a "museum."

Later, as my wife and I roamed a street near Republic Square, a young man with a gold Star of David dangling from his neckchain briskly strode past us. I called out to him, and he turned back. A friendly fellow, he was named Michael Blam. He told us, in fluent English, that he would get us the exact address of the synagogue if we would accompany him to his apartment around the corner.

Entering his home—with both a mezuzah and a crucifix on the doorpost—we found an exotically furnished living room, with zebra-skin rugs and souvenirs from many lands. Michael Blam introduced us to his Serbian wife, who brought us a tray of drinks and cakes. It turned out that Michael Blam was one of the country's top jazz bass players who performed frequently on national radio and television and as a soloist at jazz festivals abroad. His father, Raffaelo Blam, was also a well-known musician, composer and professor of music. It was he whom Michael telephoned to get the address and schedule of services at the synagogue.

"Tata" Blam, as Michael called him, had been an official of the synagogue and was an observant Jew. The son seemed less attached to his roots and was more typical of the younger generation.

Later, on a Friday evening, my wife and young son and I climbed into a taxi to go to 19 Birjuzowa Street, the address Michael Blam had given us to get to the only remaining synagogue in Belgrade. My American pronunciation of English baffled the cabbie until I finally articulated, "Sin-ah-gog."

"Yes," the driver said in stumbling English. "I know 'sin-ah-gog.' I take you. My wife is Jew." So it began to seem that everyone knew of the synagogue except the tourist office.

The graceful gray and white stone building with prominent Stars of David on its windows was set back from the street, inside a wide, wooden-fenced courtyard shaded by leafy trees. Stone steps led up to a main hall. On both sides of the downstairs entrance, Roman-arched doorways opened into a chapel that I soon learned had been the scene of frightful events during the Nazi occupation years, 1941 to 1944.

Here the Nazis had stabled their horses. And in a calculated, cynical act of desecration, they had converted the upper sanctum into a house of prostitution for military personnel.

A group of elderly men whom we met in the courtyard told us they were waiting for a minyan to assemble. (Most of them spoke Ladino; I spoke Spanish.) The scheduled service was already half an hour late, and there were only eight men, including myself. Two young women in their early 20s arrived, non-Jewish university students, who said they had never been to a synagogue. Eager to observe what they thought would be an "exotic" mystical experience, they wandered in and out of the building, wondering what was delaying the service until I explained that we were waiting for the required 10 males.

Presently, we all entered the sanctuary, a 19th-century–style chamber with parquet flooring, illuminated by scores of electric-candle bulbs and dominated by a huge wooden Star of David above the ark. The stark emptiness of the hall was accentuated when most of us clustered into two narrow rows of benches. The students shyly sat at the back. There was no rabbi; he was said to be away at a conference in Bucharest. The congregants decided that my wife and son could be counted as members of the minyan.

With the chanting of the age-old Sabbath eve prayers and kiddush, an intense feeling of kinship with the seven other men—all of whom had survived the Holocaust—surged through me. My thoughts drifted beyond the plaintive voices murmuring prayers to haunting images of drunken Wehrmacht soldiers, and to sounds of their raucous, lewd laugh-