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DESCRIPTION OF ARCHITECTURE AND DECORATIONS OF THE MAYAN THEATRE

[BY FRANCISCO CORNEJO]

Editor's Note—In designing the Mayan Theatre, the architects, Messrs. Morgan, Walls and Clements, did not attempt to reconstruct the interior or exterior design of a typical Mayan structure, but borrowing and adapting the wealth of the ancient arts of the American style for their architectural and decorative qualities, applied them to meet modern conditions. Yet the ensemble of the completed work fully carries the exotic spirit of the highest culture reached by the ancient people, the Mayas predominating. (Wherever the eye encounters sculpture, painted decorations, textures and constructions, a fine craftsmanship is evidenced, due to the wonderful cooperation by journeymen and artists, shop managers and others who helped to make this undertaking a success. (Mr. Richard Sobieraj, decorating contractor, received the services of Senor Francisco Cornejo, Mexican artist and student of American archæology, who for many years has preached and practiced the use of our aboriginal art to decorative purposes, and has written specially for the Pacific Coast Architect the following article.

THE FACADE of the Mayan Theatre is divided into three distinct horizontal divisions: the entablature, the main walls, and the base. The entablature is composed of two alternate mosaic elements of geometric pattern, very deep in relief, which are characteristic of the wall treatments as found in the ruined cities of Uxmal and Chichen Itza in Yucatan, Mexico. An entwined serpent motif, combined with a mass ornament in the form of a conventionalized owl head, with Mayan mouldings, form the architrave, while the cornice is merely a simple splay moulding with an angular and waved silhouette against the sky.

The lower part is of two characters; another all-over pattern repeating geometric designs covers the base, while the belt course above is in contrast therewith and is elaborately sculptured into intricate designs derived from Mayan sources; human faces with fantastic headdresses, serpent heads, celestial symbols and Mayan mouldings.

This character is carried through in repeating units, tying up with the marquise, designed in a similar way and emphasized principally with a metallic treatment of greenish tones, suggesting ancient copper. The middle section of the wall over the main entrance is composed of a series of tall Mayan arches surmounted by a row of colossal figures in ceremonial robes, representing the god Huitzilopochtli, seated upon the symbolic earth monster. These figures resemble the Zapotecan funeral urns and were designed in this case to serve, besides their decorative qualities, as illuminating burners. Dividing this row of figures are pendants of conventionalized ser-

pent rattlers, an element of ornament frequently found amongst the aboriginal Americans. This highly ornamented, artificial stone was cast in a manner to resemble the rough and weathered sandstone, found in the ancient buildings, which has withstood the elements for many centuries. All the buildings in Yucatan have traces of once having been polychromed. Although much faded, they show that the ancient inhabitants had a good knowledge of pigments and mixed them so well that, today, where they exist at all, they are still bright.

This has been suggested in this modern building. The natural warm, grayish tone of this ornamented stone shows here and there traces of pigment in the primitive colors, forming a rich, neutral tone which is in a decided contrast to the main walls that are of intense variegated shades of red, resembling in color and porous texture the volcanic stone called Tezontle used so often by the Mexicans and later during the Spanish Colonial period. The walls are built to convey the impression of immense masonry; stones varying in size are laid in projecting and receding planes. These walls are pierced on each side by small deeply recessed windows to meet necessary requirements of the plans of the building, mullioned by coupled columns supporting the sculptured lintel above. These columns are remarkable in design. The entire shaft is sculptured, as is the prototype now at the Mexican National Museum that was found in Tula, the ancient Toltec city.

Entrance Lobby (Hall of Inscriptions)

The true principle of the arch was not known to the Maya architects, but they built an approximation to it by a method of corbelling. As the

corbelling was backed up by concrete, it resulted in reality in monolithic construction. This method of construction naturally limited the widths of interiors, the widest known being only about fourteen feet, but of lengths up to one hundred feet or more. The entrance lobby of the Mayan Theatre gives a good illustration of the character of Mayan interiors. The rectangular chamber with its high vaulted ceiling illustrates two types of Maya arches. The massive structure of the vault, with flat capstone, is commonly found in Maya buildings, while the arched openings which occur in the medial walls above the spring of the vault are of a peculiar trefoil shape which is found only in the palace at Palenque Chiapas.

The walls of the lobby from the floor to the spring line of the vault are profusely decorated with relief work of symbolic motifs. The upper band is particularly attractive and archeologically interesting, in that it is based on a portion of a stele discovered in Yaxillan, Mexico, dealing with the heavens. The Sky God is seen in the center with a moon and the Sun God and glyph at either side, while below is a narrow band bearing planetary signs. The original carving dates from about 490 A. D. The lintels over the doors are ornamented with an arrangement of shields, feathers and serpent motifs and rest on the sculptured jambs and mullions. On each side of the mullions appear sculptured figures of warriors in full regalia, which stand as guardians to the entrance of the palace, as it occurs, for instance, at El Castillo in Uxmal. They wear enormous headdresses, showing a heron's head, feathers, gold and silver ornaments, jeweled color ornament, breast brooch and arm and leg ringlets. The carving was suggested from a sculptured stele at Piedras Negras, but is largely an original composition. The two end walls of the

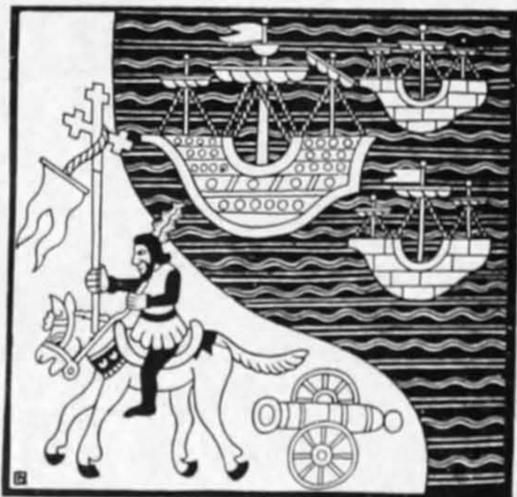


Panel, "Music and Dance,"
Emperor's Hall.
Designed by F. Cornejo

lobby are entirely covered with Mayan inscriptions, glyphs, as found in the Hall of Inscriptions at Palenque. An interesting feature of the lobby worth while studying is the elaborate tile floor. This interesting relief is based on a famous Zapote wood carving from the altar of the Temple of the Sun at Tikal, Guatemala. The design is exceptionally elaborate and in execution is considered in some ways the most remarkable specimen of Maya art. It represents a richly costumed personage, holding a standard or baton in his right hand; his face framed in the open mouth of a grotesque monster skin. He is inclosed by the arched body of a feather serpent of remarkable design, the head appearing at the left. Hovering over the serpent's arched body is a figure of a mythical bird, called by some authorities the Fire Bird. The figure is seated in a throne seat that is standing on a carpeted dais. Three steps covered with inscriptions lead up to this dais, supported on monstrous and fantastic masks and pigmy-like Atlantean figures.

The minor inserts at either side of the big centerpiece are priestly figures seated and in the attitude of making offerings before a shrine, one masked and the other unmasked. These ornamental tile inserts were done in a light buff color and are set in a fire-flashed wet tile field, laid in a basket pattern.

The recesses in the trefoiled arches in the vault are decorative paintings done in the primitive manner, outlined with black and filled with simple flat colors employed by the Mayans, as founded on the three rare codex or sacred books in existence. Over the capstones are other colorful touches of painted decoration, a conventionalized mask, and a symbolic representation of Tezontemoc, the descending sun.



Panel, "Arrival of Spaniards,"
Emperor's Hall.
Designed by F. Cornejo

Foyer—Hall of the Feathered Serpents

The foyer, following the curvature of the back wall of the auditorium, is wainscoted to door heights with slabs of Zapote wood heavily grained and carved with alternating horizontal figure designs raised in low relief. These motifs are of Inca origin and represent warriors holding arrows, one of them wearing a bird mask. In the center of the foyer, directly upon entering from the vestibule, is again found the Mayan arch motif. The archway is closed up with a recessed Inca textile design. The arch and stairways leading to the second floor are flanked on either side by feathered serpent columns supporting the frieze of the room, and the ornamental tile drinking fountains at either end of this foyer are similarly treated.

The motif of the serpent was the most predominating factor, both in the spiritual and cultural life of the Americans. From their mythology the feather serpent represented the unity of Quetzal, their sacred bird, God of the Air, and Coatl, the snake god of the earth, to the Mayas known as Kukulcan, and Quetzalcotal to the Aztecs; this divinity in the form of a plumed serpent column as found in Chichen Itza forms the main architectural feature of the foyer.

The head of the serpent is covered with scales; its body with graceful arrangement of feathers and the conventionalized rattlesnake tail. An Atlantean figure holding on his head a shallow Indian bowl serves as a drinking fountain, the background of which is made of polychrome tile with a design of the foliated cross as it appears in a Palenquee tablet. The stone frieze above the wainscoting forms a continuous band of elaborately carved ornament above the entire room, typical Mayan mouldings framing this section, top and bottom. The frieze of a yellow-



Panel, "Music,"
Auditorium Ceiling.
Designed by F. Cornejo

ish mustard colored stone shows traces of weathered polychrome pigments, as do also the ten columns. A shiny black base and border of material representing obsidian runs around the entire room, and is carried along the stairs to the second floor. The stairs have obsidian-like treads and nosing with tile risers in two colors, red and yellow, of a curious Aztec design. A plain carpet in Indian red covers the floor and stairs, but is relieved with a border of Quetzal's feathers in golden ochre and bluish green colors. A shallow coffered ceiling with square pendants at intersections of ribs covers the entire room. The coffer panels are decorated with numerous Aztec motifs painted in various highly keyed primitive colors representing the twenty-day signs, names of towns, and other symbols, some easily recognizable as serpent, rabbit, lizard, flowers, while others are merely symbols as gold, silver, water and other elements.

Auditorium

The ceiling of the auditorium expresses a wooden structure, supported on the Cyclopean masonry walls. It is made to imitate in its finish and natural color the Chico Zapote wood, a native wood of Central America that is exceedingly hard and durable, and was greatly used by the Mayas especially in their lintels over openings that were richly carved, of which several examples are still in existence.

The center of the ceiling enclosed by the ends of the cantilever beams forms a calendar diagram illustrating an entire Mayan year of 260 days. Equal Tonalamatl, based on the fundamental row of twenty-day symbols, are distributed as a cosmological picture over the four cardinal points. This feature in its shape was derived from an ancient native manuscript. The spaces enclosed in these Maltese crosses form four major and four



Panel, "The Offering,"
Auditorium Ceiling.
Designed by F. Cornejo

corner panels. The main features of the decoration of the ceiling are these major panels depicting ceremonial dances, music and priestly figures making offerings to the Sun God. These figures in brilliant blues, greens, browns, red and white, and outlined in black, are painted upon a brilliant orange background. The four corner panels are treated in a similar manner, representing a fantastic flowering tree, surmounted by the sacred Quetzal bird. Suspended from the center is the main lighting fixture of the auditorium, a sunburst design suggested by another ancient codex, with Ollin Tonatiuth, the sun in the very center. This dark mysterious suspended shadow, appearing to be made up of antique copper encrusted with verdigris and corrosion and inlaid with precious and semiprecious jewels such as turquoise, emeralds, black obsidian glass, shells, etc., contrasts pleasingly with the warm, colorful, intensely illuminated ceiling. The center of the ceiling is supported by cantilever beams carved with scales and feathers, as found in the Temple of Xochicalco, which terminate in a conventionalized snake head.

Framed between the cantilever beams on the four sides are the louvre beams framed angularly and perforated for the ventilating system, their soffits being decorated with various Indian frets. At the four corners are solid wood slabs between the cantilever beams, carved in low relief, showing Quetzalcoatl or his incarnation, inflicting self-punishment. This ornament, on red background, is high-lighted in orange and retains its wooden quality. The soffits of the lateral beams at each end of the cantilevers are carved with other Indian motifs of Inca origin. These beams are strutted up from the wall cornice with solid diagonal strut beams, throwing the weight of the entire wooden ceiling to the heavy stone walls. The triangular spaces between these beams are boarded up solid with planking heavily grained, showing the joints of the planks, and are decorated in alternating stenciled designs of grotesque faces and frets.

The junction between the strut beams and the outer lateral beam is held together by a large metal staple of antique copper hammered and perforated, forming cross arrows on a shield as found on the Temple of the Tigers at the Ball court at Chichen Itza. The wooden ceiling does not cover the entire auditorium, but stops at the main entrance to the balcony, forming a vertical truss of primitive framing as suggested in stone in the nunnery at Uxmal. This vertical truss is also louvered and perforated for the ventilating system of the theatre, the bottom chord being decorated with heraldic Aztec shields and quivers of feathered arrows. At each end of the truss, in a solid panel, is painted a plumed serpent whose head is decorated with nose plugs and feather

headdress. The flame-like object which issues from the mouth represents breath, and is an exact copy of Maya fresco.

The ceiling of the upper part of the balcony and the immense lintel spanning the entire rear wall constitutes another feature of mural decoration, showing in this case native picture writing, illustrating a procession of pilgrims carrying offerings to a temple that is situated on the banks of a lake, with a luminous sun rising over the roof of the temple against an intense blue sky.

The rear and side walls of the auditorium are built of acoustic plaster, giving the impression of Cyclopean masonry. The stones are splayed in staggered courses, giving great interest to an otherwise plain wall, and serve also on this account to help to improve the acoustic qualities of the room. The stone blocks retain the natural color of the material in a general way, but vary into different faint color tones.

The walls are topped up with a crenellated heavy cornice, the main motifs of which are a series of projecting stone corbels interspaced with metope panels resting on an architrave of splayed mouldings, relieved by incised ornaments. The main entrances to the balcony are framed with square solid stone piers supporting a heavy lintel on brackets, and are covered with characteristic sculpture of weird figures and forms, as suggested in the monuments at Quirigua, and with sentinels at the door jambs, as found at El Castillo.

The exit doors are plain openings in the wall spanned by a heavy stone lintel, decorated with a stencil design of an eagle with outspread wings. On the exit doors are other stencil designs of warriors with eagle headdresses, spears and shields, known as the Knights of the Eagle, done in various colors. The rear and side walls below the balcony are covered with Chico Zapote wood wainscoting, up to the balcony ceilings, built of diagonal stiles inserted with carved panels. The doors to the entrance foyer are framed with solid wood posts, decorated on the face with square inscriptions. The exit doors on the sides are in one case merely a hole cut through the panels, while the others are framed with sculptured jambs and lintels.

All these doors are sand-blasted on the auditorium side in very interesting designs continuing over both leaves of the door, showing a twining serpent with a human face emerging from its distended jaws, spearing a kneeling figure; glyphs, halos and strange plant forms complete the composition.

The balcony ceiling is a wood-beam design. The beams are ornamented with various decorative motifs derived principally from Aztec pottery, concentric circles, parallel lines, bird sym-

bols, wave motifs and serpent designs. The panels between the wood beams convey the idea of precious metal castings of gold and silver bars, embossed with ornaments and inlaid with turquoise, obsidian, emeralds and coral in the style of the Aztec mosaic work as found in the jewelry and in inlaid masks.

The outer edge of the ceiling on the soffit of the stone balcony rail is a series of shields imitating the manner in which the Aztec warriors covered their quilted wooden shields with beautifully colored feather mosaic work in heraldic designs, in which the Aztecs excel. The face of this stone balcony rail is ornamented with an effective motif suggested by the carvings on the famous temple at Xochicalco (Hill of Flowers).

The focal point of interest in the theatre is naturally the proscenium arch, an innovation in this building, and a bold departure from the traditional treatment of the proscenium was to frame the stage entirely with heavy bas-relief. The stage is divided into three parts, the main stage and two tableau stages. This division was obtained by the use of a group of ponderous monoliths in the form of square piers, or steles. The precedent for these monoliths is found in the early Mayan cities in the form of sculptured monuments.

In the ancient city of Quirigua in Guatemala there stands today a group of stone monuments buried in the dense jungles of Central America. These sculptures are of two classes, tall slender shafts, known as stelæ, thought to have chronological significance, and low massive forms sometimes referred to as altars. There are thirteen in number and they range from 11 to 26 feet in height; the oldest recording the date 490 A. D. These masterpieces of aboriginal art have been incorporated and form the feature of the proscenium arch of the Mayan Theatre.

The replicas, to be found in the museum at San Diego, enabled the architects and sculptors to study their wealth of ornament, feeling of modeling and texture. Slightly redesigned, these enormous figures, the tallest measuring thirty-one feet, frame and separate the three stages of the theatre.

They are elaborately carved with presentations of richly appareled personages, associated symbolic devices and glyphic inscriptions. The originals were doubtless erected to serve as memorials of personages who occupied high positions as priests or rulers. The stelæ in the Mayan Theatre show a male figure of a heavy type with thick lips, narrow eyes and pointed Egyptian-like beard. The figure stands on a grotesque mask, his head crowned with tall feather head-dress, is dressed in a velvet short embroidered skirt, heavily ornamented, sandals on his feet

and holds with his right hand a mannikin sceptre or ceremonial bar.

The seated figure from one of the altar carvings, known as the great turtle of Quirigua and considered as the crowning achievement of native American art, has been introduced on the brackets supporting the main lintel. The lintels are of huge proportions, sculptured with warrior figures, serpent motif, planetary glyphs and the mythical fire bird over the top of each stele; the center is decorated with a bat god and a sun symbol. The lintels over the side stages are treated in a similar manner, but are subordinated to the main lintels. Like the Greeks, the Maya painted their stone sculpture; the entire monument seems to have been painted over by a single tint. In other cases details of ornament were picked out in contrasting tones. The colors were usually applied in a fairly definite way; red for flesh tones, blue and green for ornaments, and feathers painted green to represent the plumage of the favorite Quetzal bird.

The finish of the proscenium, like all the rest of the stone work, is in a warm grayish tone, showing very definite faces of color, weathered and aged but growing more definite toward the center.

Curtains

The asbestos curtain carries in its design, primitive treatment and color, the general feeling and decorative scheme of the theatre. It represents an elaborate, fantastic tropical scene with strange vegetation, birds and animals. The summit of a temple pyramid appears at the background, while the foreground is occupied with an ensemble of standing and kneeling figures holding banners and offerings before a king who stands on a stone altar. The asbestos curtains on the side stages are arrangements from the famous altar slabs found at Palenque. The one at the right-hand side presents two priestly figures in the act of making offerings. One of them stands upon the back of a small masked figure, while in the center of the composition are two other figures clothed in jaguar skins supporting an elaborate platform upon which is the sun shield with expanded eyes and protruding tongue. Distributed at each side and center are columns of glyphic inscriptions; a band of planetary signs and a border of Quetzal feathers appear below.

The left curtain is somewhat similar in design, with the exception of the central portion, which is here occupied by a cross-shaped tree, perched on the top of which is a Quetzal. In contrast with the elaborate asbestos curtain is the grand drape, symmetrical and extremely simple and conventionalized in its composition. Between the silhouette of two pyramids terminated with the snake heads there stands a priestly figure in the attitude of adoration to the god of the day,

DESCRIPTION OF MAYAN THEATRE

[Concluded from page 18]

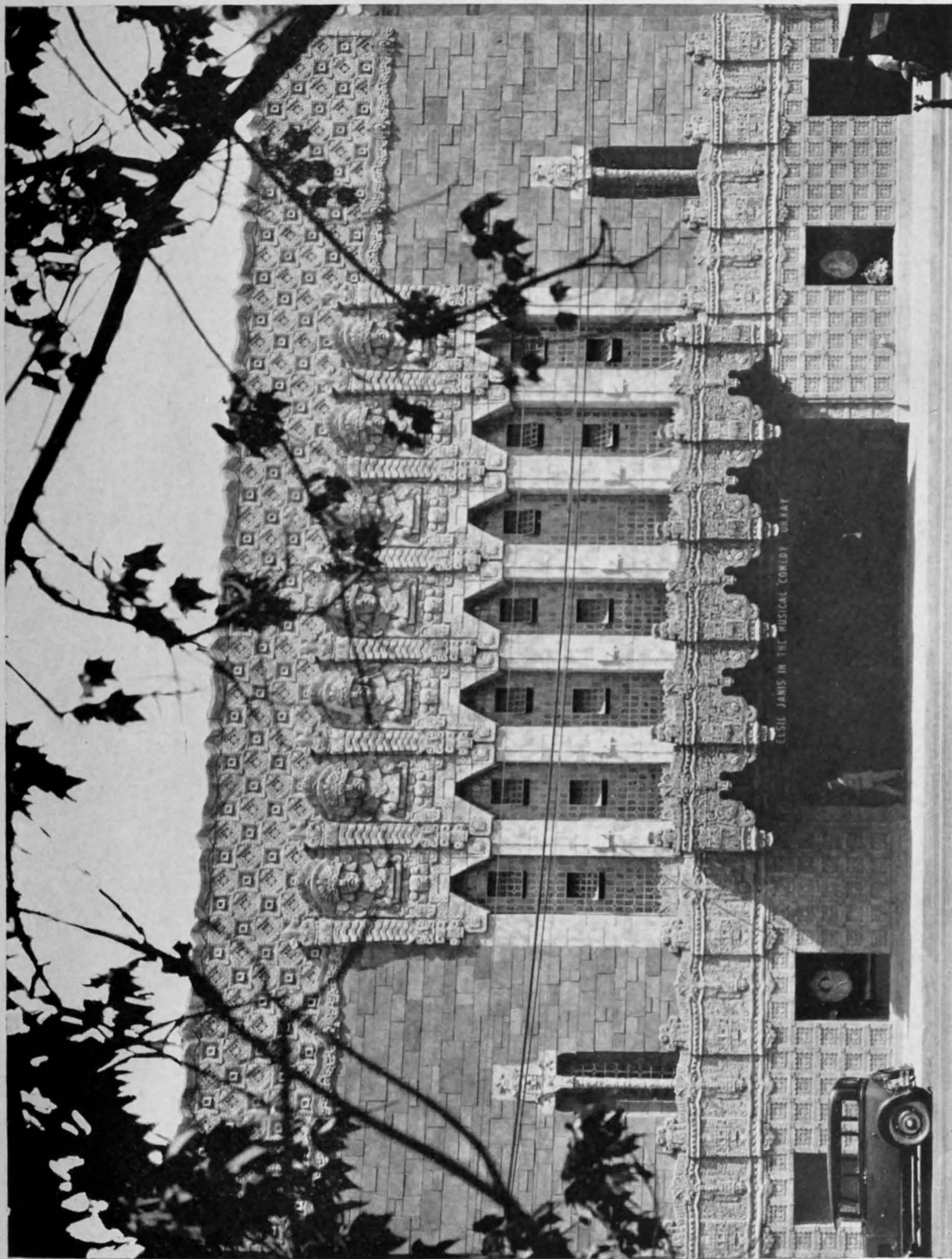
that rises before him in its graduations of fiery colors.

Mezzanine—Emperor's Hall

The main stairs leading from the entrance foyer lead to the mezzanine lounge, which is of a similar shape and of the same dimensions as the foyer below. The striking architectural feature is the arrangement of the massive stone beams supporting the balcony above. The mezzanine is entirely decorated with Aztec designs. The stone beams, varying in grayish warm tones, are richly decorated with stenciled designs that are both authentic and used to give a maximum of color harmony and variety. A procession of warriors with banners and shields, a fragment from the frieze around the so-called sacrificial stone illustrating the victories of Emperor Tizoc, eagles, serpents, monkeys, turtles and fish, are amongst the many decorative designs used. A black shiny belt course suggesting obsidian, encrusted with a small eagle head, divides the walls at door heights. The walls between this belt course and the floor are constructed of large blocks of masonry of a reddish color. The eight panels formed above by the spacing of the ceiling beams are decorated with hand-painted murals, done in the same manner as the ancient manuscripts or sacred books. Each is in itself a complete composition, showing the Aztec form of picture writing, and illustrates also great historical events and customs.

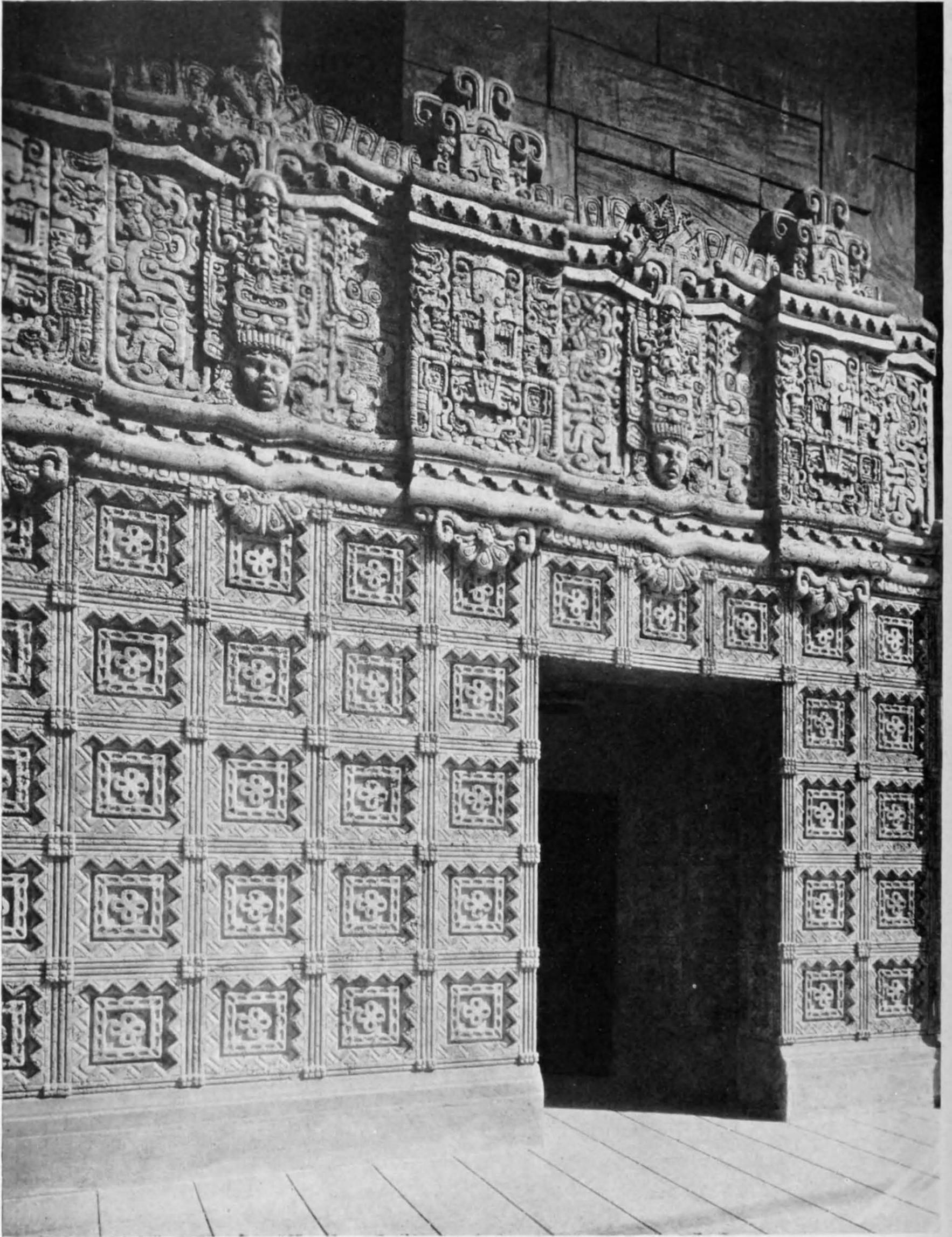
The four panels at the left hand of the central platform depict the immigration of the Aztecs, foundation of Tenochtitlan (Mexico City), a marriage ceremony and the sacred fire, while the other four are self-torture, music and dance, the great temple and the arrival of the Spaniards.

Over the central platform stands the manly figure of Cuauhtemoc (Descending Eagle), the indomitable last emperor of the Aztec dynasty. He wears a green feather robe with his symbol, short fringe and jewel skirt, leggings and sandals. The figure is in an attitude of defiance, unarmed, and is haloed by a plumed golden sun symbol, the banner of his race. This original conception is the culminating part of the decoration of the Emperor's Hall.



MAYAN THEATRE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA. MORGAN, WALLS AND CLEMENTS, ARCHITECTS

Photo by Padilla Co.



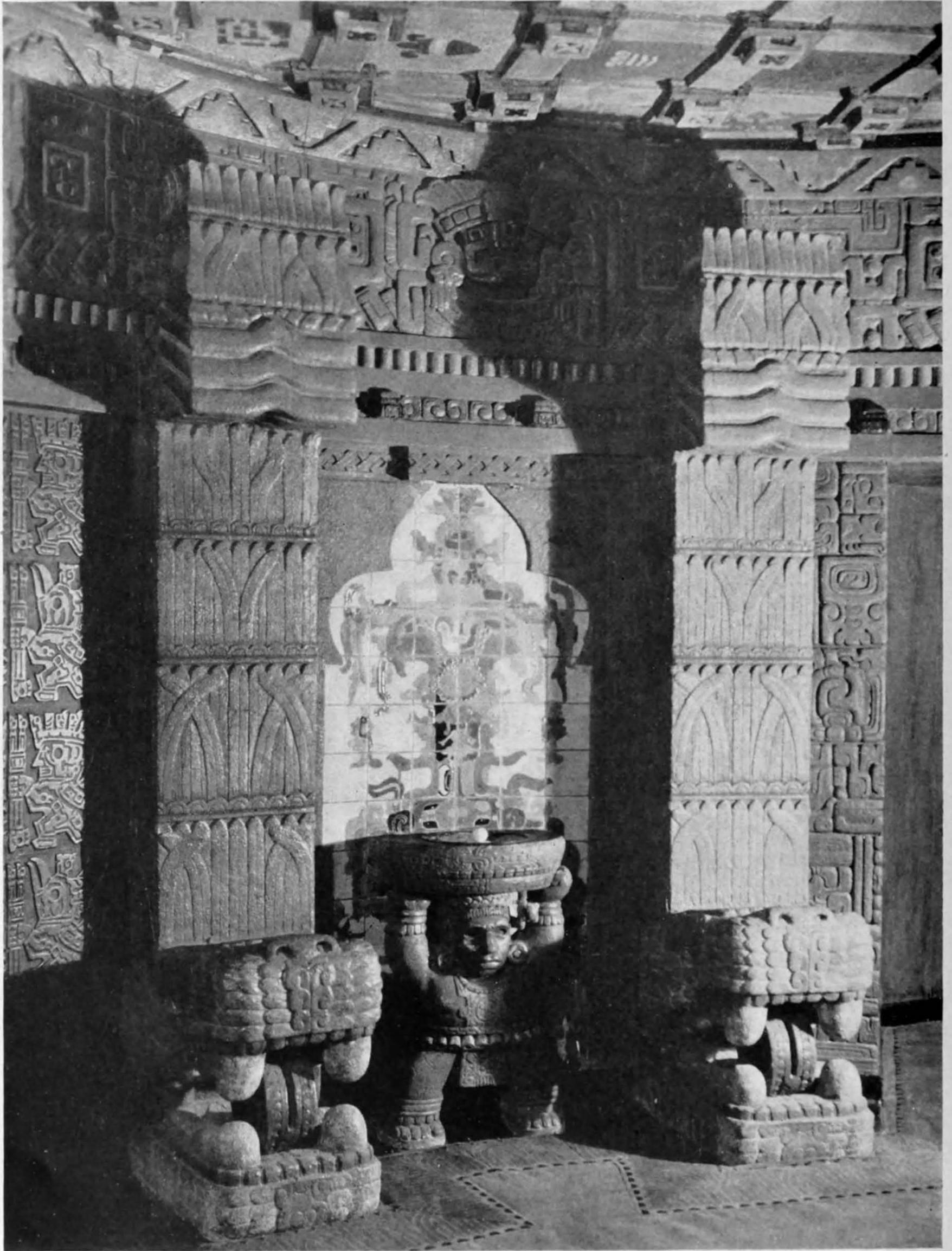
EXTERIOR WALL DETAIL, MAYAN THEATRE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA
MORGAN, WALLS AND CLEMENTS, ARCHITECTS

Photo by Padilla Co.



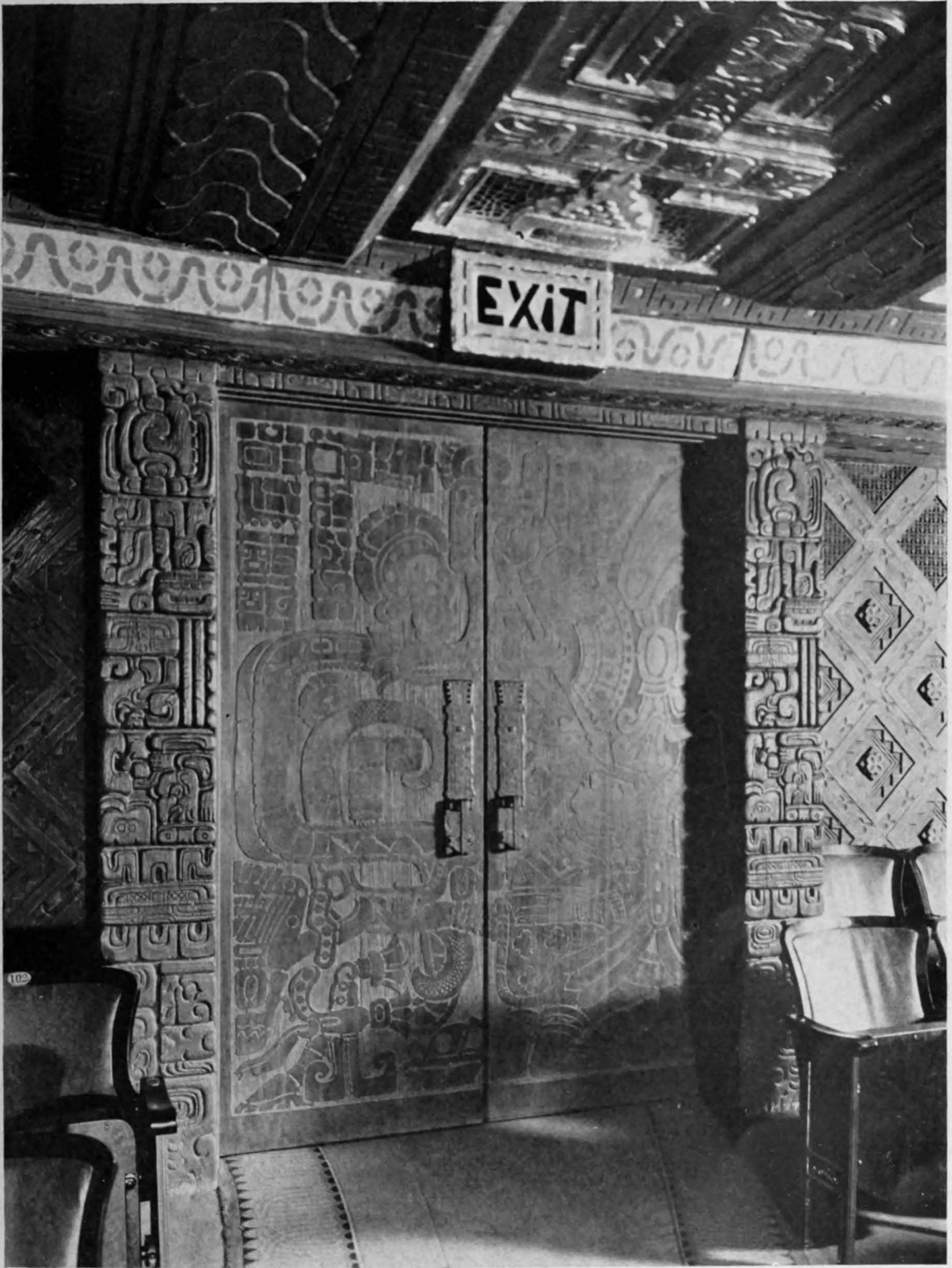
BALCONY EXIT, MAYAN THEATRE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA
MORGAN, WALLS AND CLEMENTS, ARCHITECTS

Photo by Padilla Co.



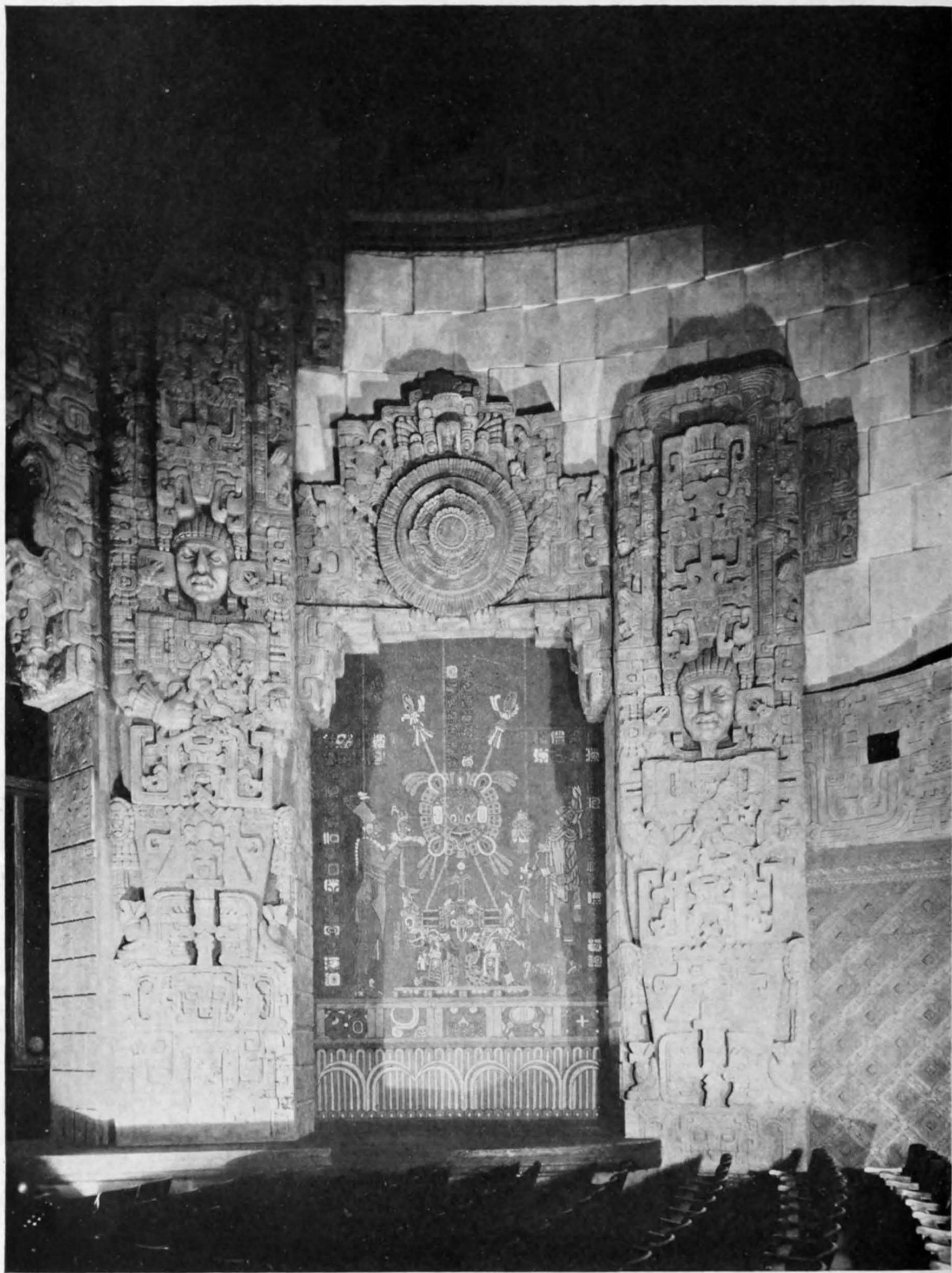
WALL FOUNTAIN IN FOYER, MAYAN THEATRE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA
MORGAN, WALLS AND CLEMENTS, ARCHITECTS

Photo by Padilla Co.



MAIN FLOOR EXIT UNDER BALCONY, MAYAN THEATRE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA
MORGAN, WALLS AND CLEMENTS, ARCHITECTS

Photo by The Mott Studios



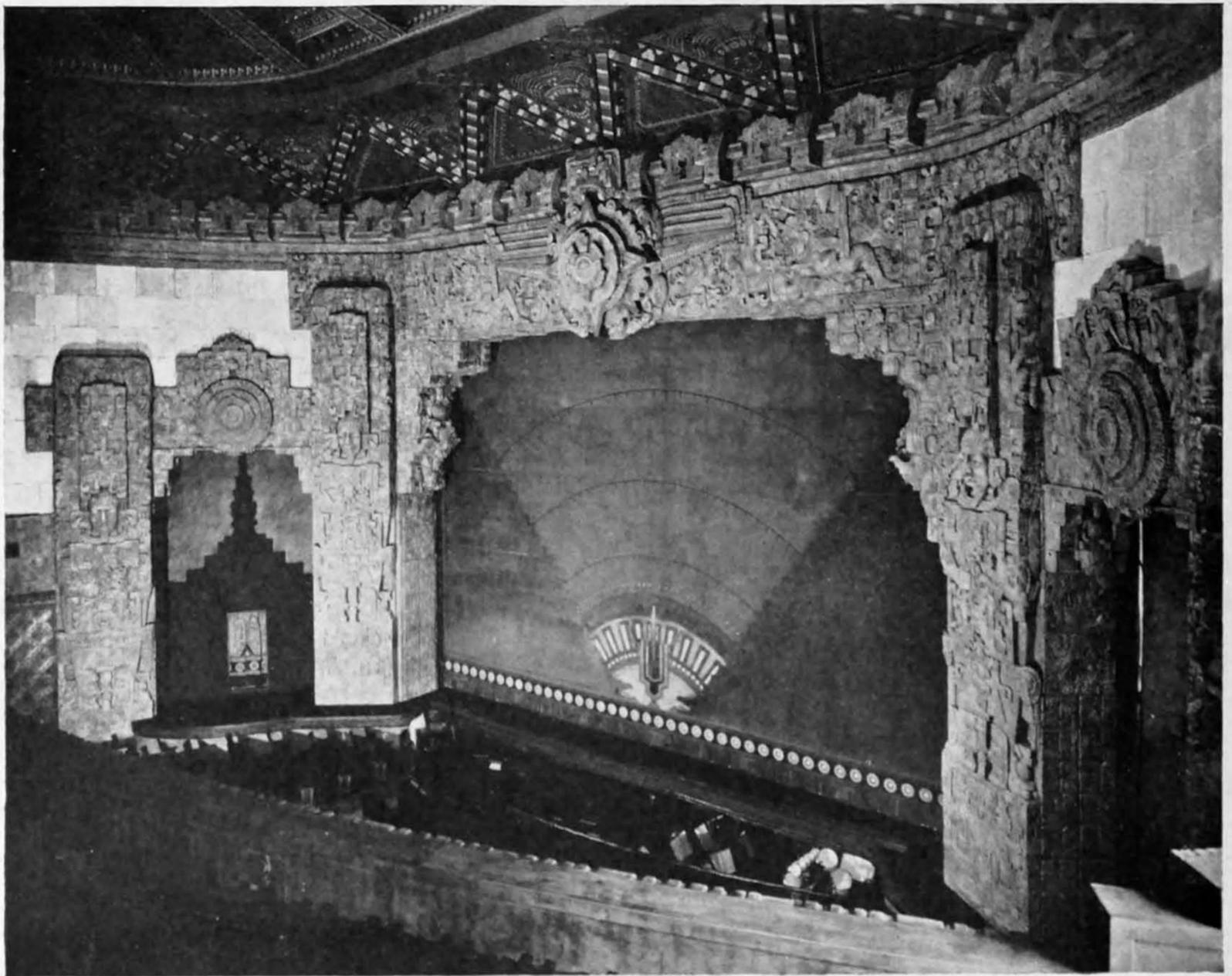
SIDE STAGE DETAIL, MAYAN THEATRE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA
MORGAN, WALLS AND CLEMENTS, ARCHITECTS

Photo by Padilla Co.

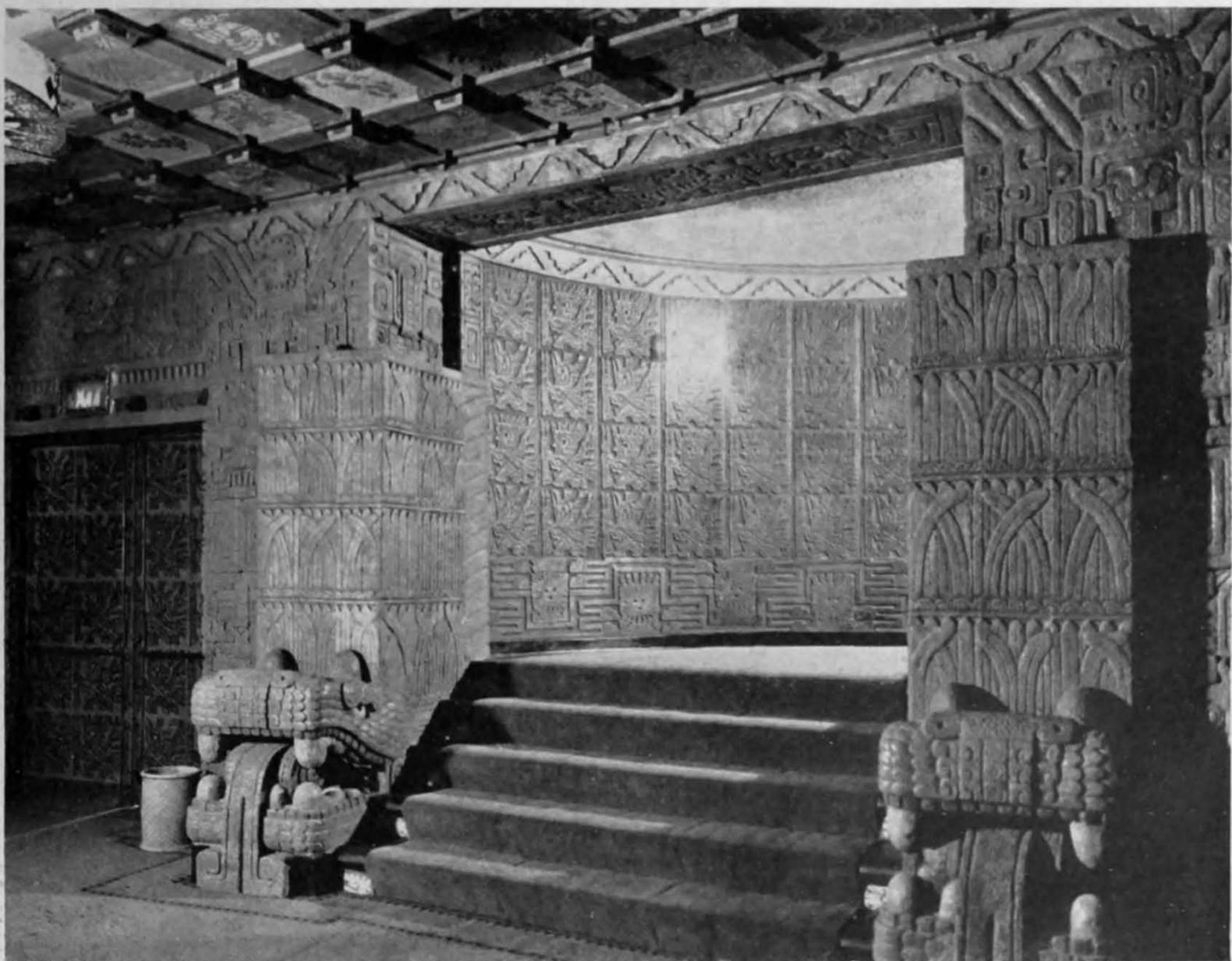
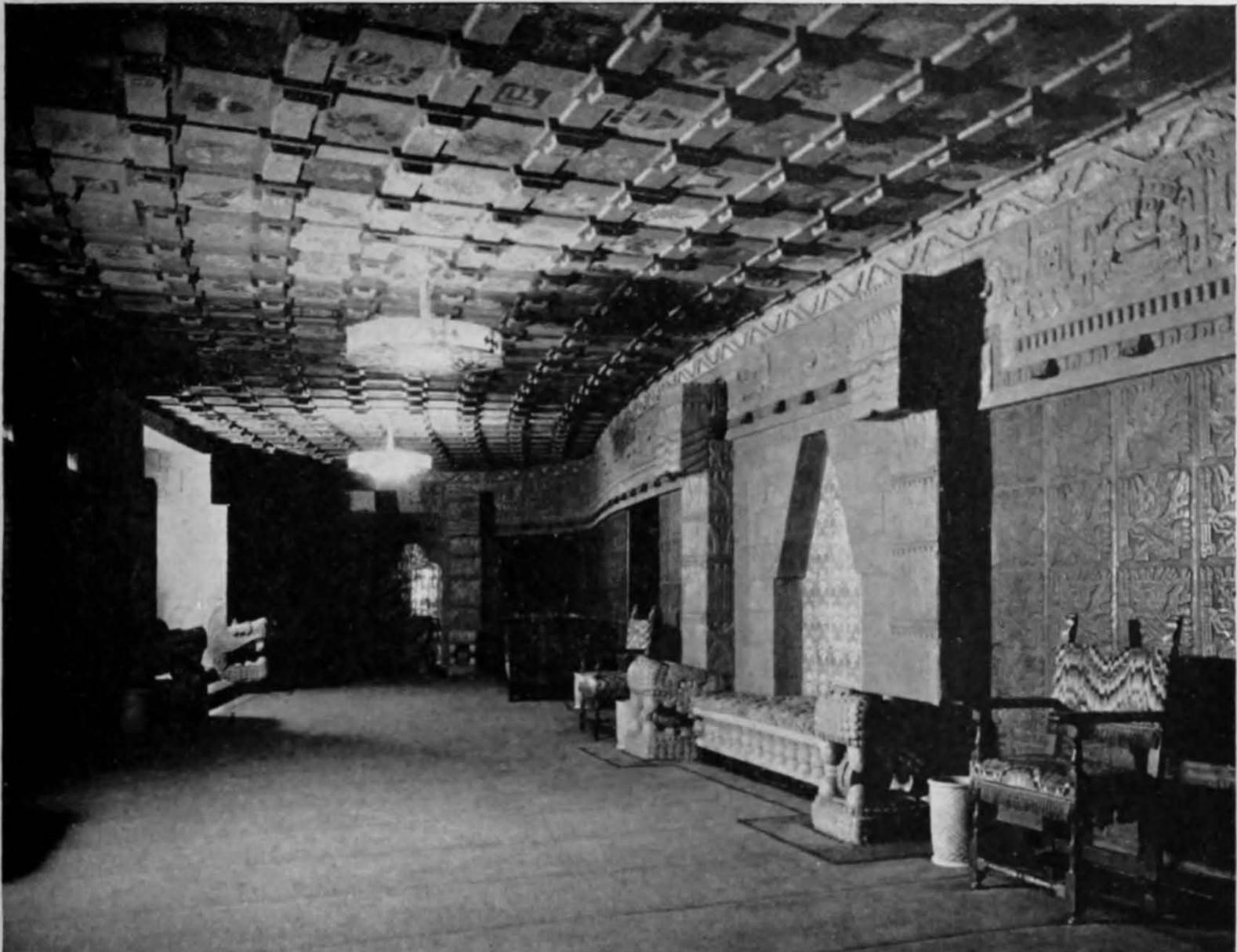


AUDITORIUM CEILING, MAYAN THEATRE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA
MORGAN, WALLS AND CLEMENTS, ARCHITECTS

Photo by Padilla Co.



PROSCENIUM ARCH, MAYAN THEATRE, LOS ANGELES. MORGAN, WALLS AND CLEMENTS, ARCHITECTS
Photos by Padilla Co.

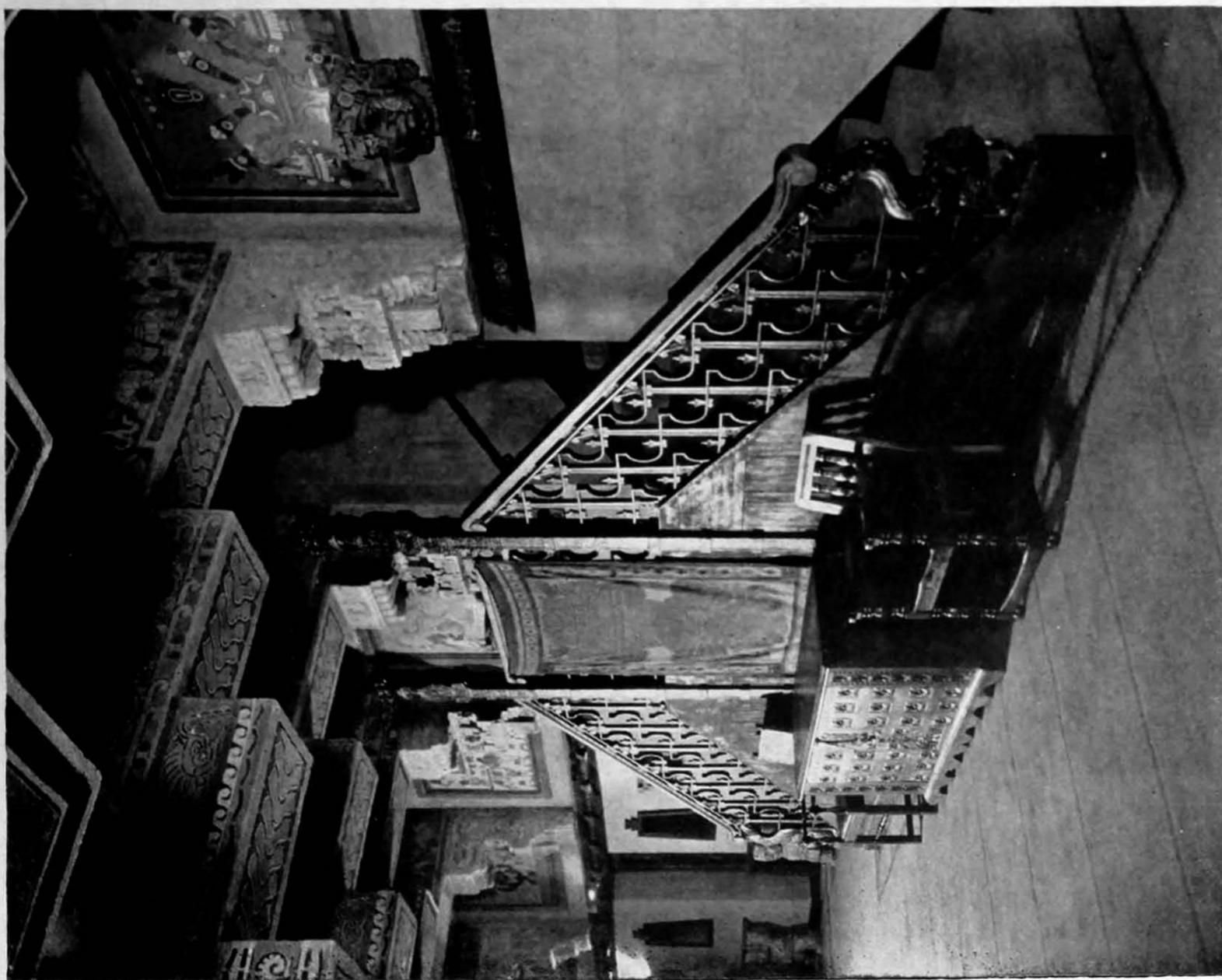
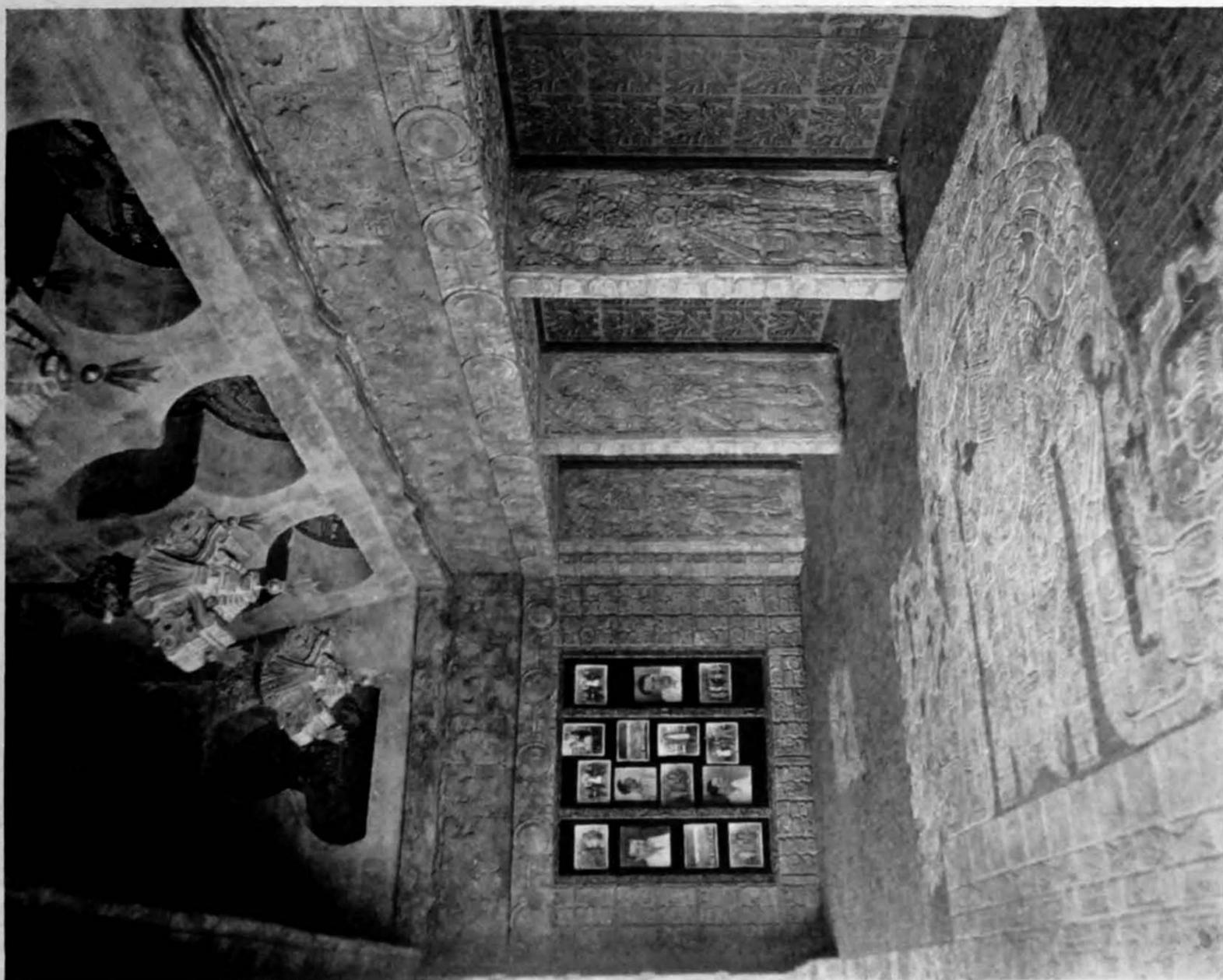


ABOVE—MAIN FOYER; BELOW—STAIRS TO BALCONY; MAYAN THEATRE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA
MORGAN, WALLS AND CLEMENTS, ARCHITECTS

Photos by The Mott Studios



AUDITORIUM, MAYAN THEATRE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA
MORGAN, WALLS AND CLEMENTS, ARCHITECTS



LEFT—BALCONY FOYER; RIGHT—EXTERIOR LOBBY; MAYAN THEATRE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA. MORGAN, WALLS AND CLEMENTS, ARCHITECTS

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