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Temple Tifereth Israel, Cleveland

CHARLES R. GRECO, Architect

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THE last few years have been notable for the great increase in the number and sizes of the new synagogues which have been erected in larger cities all over the country. Among the largest and most costly of these is the new temple of the Tifereth Israel Congregation of Cleveland, having a seating capacity of 2,000, and completed a few months ago at a cost of approximately a million, two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

In order to understand the planning of this building it is essential to know the peculiarities of its site. The plot chosen for the new temple, on East 105th Street, where it flanks the beautiful Wade Park, in which is the new Art Museum, while offering a prominent and imposing site for a lofty religious edifice, presented also some very unusual problems on account of its shape and topography. Situated in the acute angle (less than 24°) at the junction of 105th Street and Ansel Road, with a frontage of about 550 feet on the former and about 600 feet on the latter, the greatest width being less than 250 feet at the north property line, the difficulty was further complicated by the fact that at the northerly end East 105th Street is fully 20 feet below the grade of Ansel Road. These conditions proved to have far more influence on the ultimate arrangement of the building than is the case with the normal rectangular city lot.

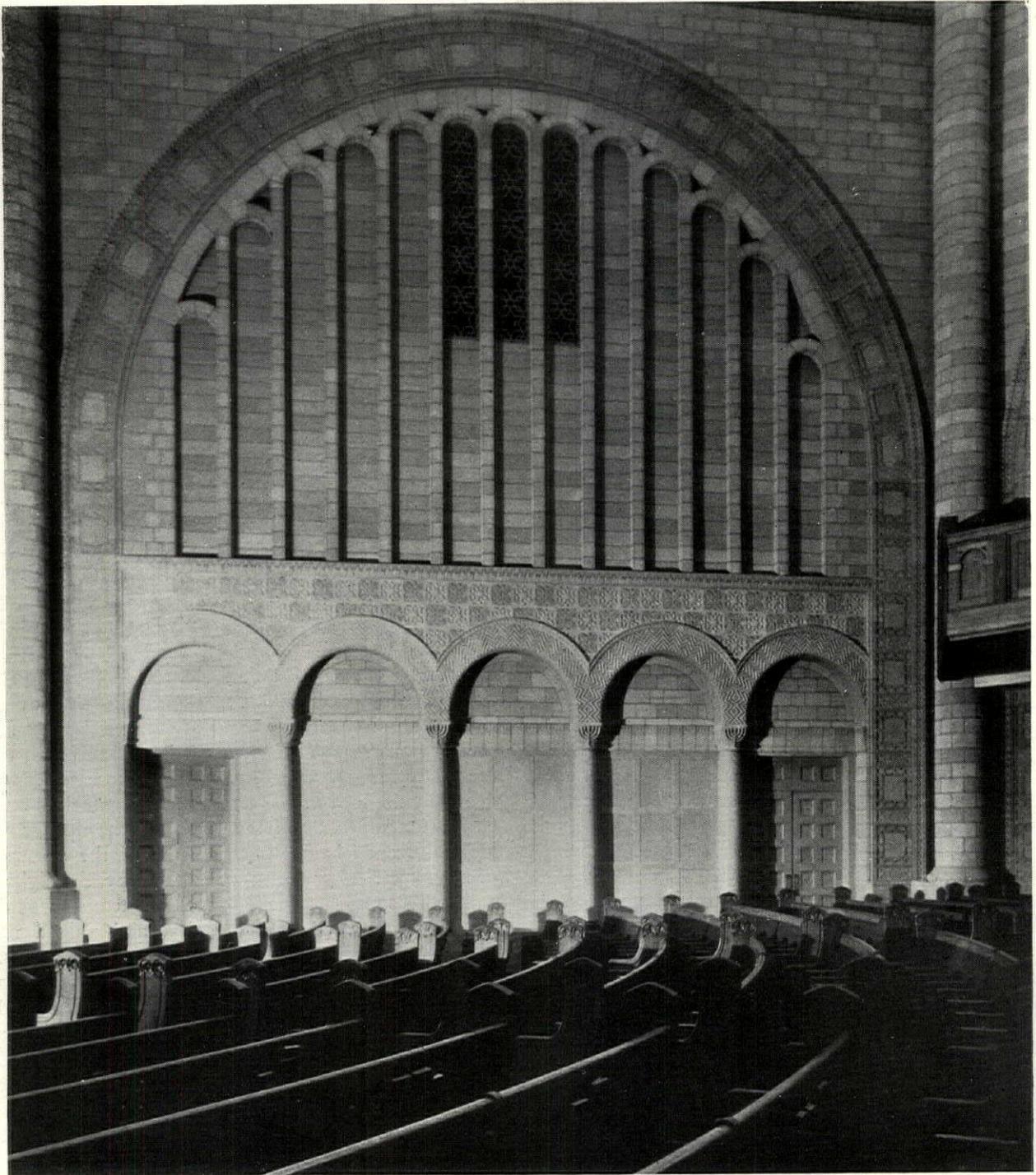
As the activities to be carried on in a building of this type divide into three phases, the religious, the educational and the social, so the plan of the building is divided into three main groups: the temple itself, occupying approximately the center of the lot and facing south; the offices and school, facing west on Ansel Road, both for advantages of light and the quietness of the lesser street; and the gymnasium and playcourt, or social portion of the building, facing east on East 105th Street. This latter group, owing to the drop of nearly 20 feet, is at the basement level, but is still above ground on the 105th Street side, making possible architectural treatment.

These three parts are coordinated by the spacious lobby, running completely across the building from the office entrance on Ansel Road to the 105th Street front, with side connections to the temple in two

places, to the school, and to the balcony of the playcourt. The playcourt is the only part of the building still held for future construction, its functions being temporarily performed by the gymnasium, which is directly connected with a large and completely equipped kitchen, for use on social occasions. The school, which is three stories high, contains 27 classrooms, and, in the basement, the heating equipment for the entire group, janitor's quarters, and a swimming pool, connecting directly both to the school above and to the gymnasium at the lower level.

It was early decided that the form of the main temple portion should be, or approach, that of a circle, both for religious and architectural reasons, the religious reason being that it lends itself best to the seating of the congregation and expresses most definitely the idea of the Unity of God, which is one of the fundamentals of the Jewish faith; the architectural reason being that, in spite of the absence of a symmetrical or even rectangular base, the higher and more conspicuous portion of the temple would rise against the sky, symmetrical and unified no matter from which direction it happened to be seen. Working from the circular form to polygons, it was soon discovered that a heptagon, or seven-sided polygon, fitted the lot to perfection, presenting a side parallel to each street, and it was then decided to make this seven-sided polygon the keynote of the temple plan. The main entrance, facing a broad forecourt and mall extending over 200 feet to the southern apex of the plot, is flanked by two minor, seven-sided towers, carrying the planes of the upper portion down to the ground, as seen from any point.

The exterior of the temple is faced throughout with Indiana limestone laid in wide and narrow courses alternating, the wide courses having a smooth finish, while the narrow bands are tooled. With a brief period of weathering this will give a slightly banded effect similar to that of Santa Sophia and other buildings in the near East. On the entrance front this is relieved by inlays of colored marble over the entrance arches and under the windows in the flanking towers. The main dome and the two smaller domes are of special yellow-buff tile, while the roofs over the rest of the building are almost flat.



Detail, Side Wall, Temple Tifereth Israel, Cleveland

The interior of the temple, in form a heptagon 90 feet in diameter, is carried out in two tones of wall tile, every fourth course being in the deeper tone, giving a suggestion of banding as given to the exterior. Each of the seven interior faces has a great arch with a broad band of arabesque, touched with color on the faces and reveals of the voussoirs. These arches, 34 feet in diameter and 40 feet high, support a plain wall surface, with five beautiful stained glass windows of Byzantine motifs, extending up to the dome. The corner columns are unbroken shafts from floor to the spring of the dome,

and are carried up in the form of semi-hexagonal ribs decorated with arabesques, all meeting in the center of the dome, 88 feet above the floor. The great arch over the Ark and choir gallery carries back in the form of a barrel ceiling treated as a grille of Byzantine design and opening on each side into the organ chambers. Under this stands the Ark, the focal point of the interior, with the arcaded choir gallery forming a harmonious screen across the back of the central arch. The Ark and screen are carried out entirely in selected walnut and are elaborately carved and inlaid, the chairs and reading desk being



Detail, Entrance Facade, Temple Tifereth Israel, Cleveland

of the same materials and of special design. This treatment of the woodwork is repeated in the front of the balcony, which follows four of the seven interior faces, where three panels in each face are carved in symbolical representation of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, other panels bearing an interlaced symbol combining the shield of David with the Menorah, or seven-branched candlestick. All the carving is emphasized by a use of gold and color in the backgrounds of the symbols and arabesques.

The impression of color, both in material and in lighting, is particularly emphasized in the broad

entrance vestibule, from each end of which the main stairways lead to the balcony. The floor is of alternating equilateral triangular blocks of pink and gray Tennessee marble, with a large bronze insert in the center, showing the interlaced pattern of the shield of David, the seven-branched candlestick, and the ring or circle, in low relief. The walls are also of marble from floor to ceiling, in wide and narrow bands, the wide bands being of especially selected gray marble of deep tones with broad splashes and veins of ox-blood red, of very striking effect, the same marble of which the four exterior columns at

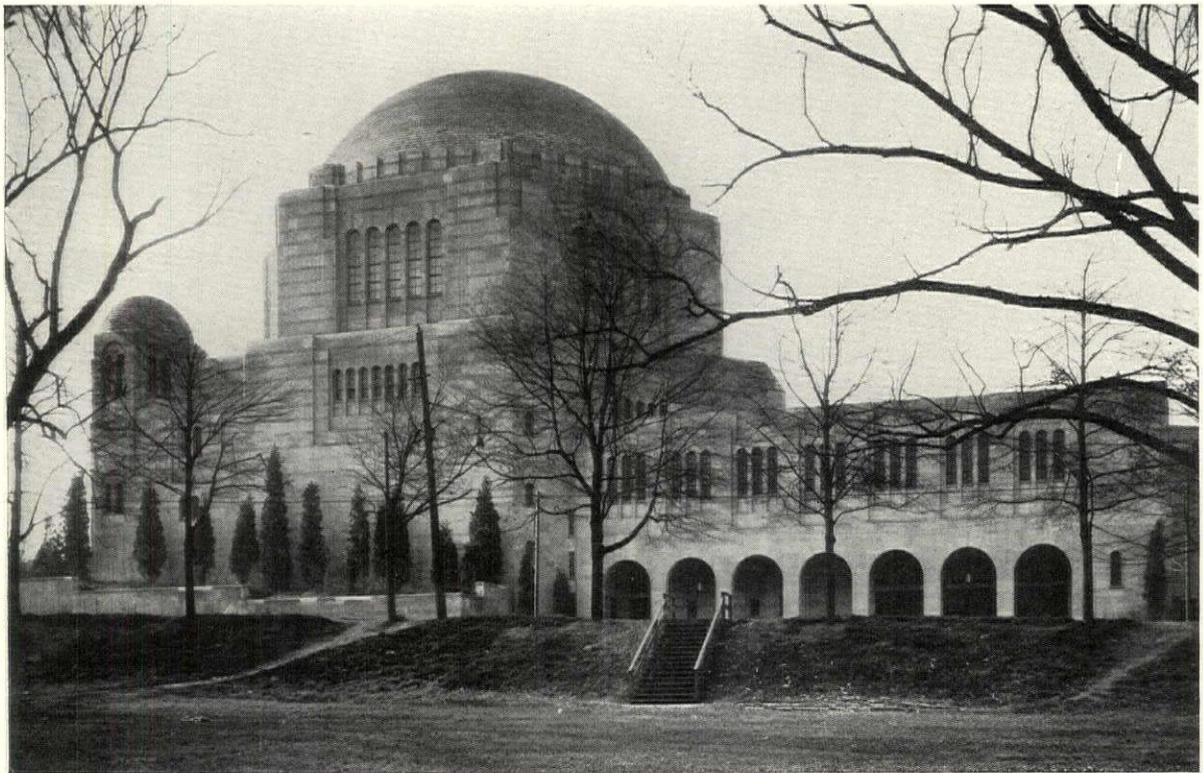
the entrance are made. The narrow bands are of rare imported marble. The ceiling is of modeled plaster in a design of hexagonal basis, the lines thus paralleling the 60° angles of the floor designs, and treated in bronze and dull gold. The whole effect of color is heightened by the lighting, all the light coming through three glass traceried hexagons, set flush in the ceiling, the bulbs above being treated with gold. The result is a red-gold glow of color, of such richness that the air itself seems almost to be colored.

Passing from this brilliance of color into the more somber tones and great height and breadth of the temple auditorium, the feeling of reverence is enhanced by the unusual softness and mellowness of the lighting. Except for small fixtures under the balcony and in the recesses of the great arches above it, all the lighting is indirect and very effective. In the upper part of each of the seven faces is a row of five deeply recessed stained glass windows, with splayed jambs and sills. In the splay of each sill, under amber glass, is a concealed floodlight aimed upward toward the domed ceiling, while outside the stained glass windows, in the space between the inner and outer walls, are other strong white lights shining through the colored windows. The result is a glowing effect of subdued daylight, through stained glass, as in the mediæval cathedrals, and practically the same at night as in actual daylight, which, with the soft, warm, rose-buff tones of the wall surfaces, greatly heightens the feeling of religious significance.

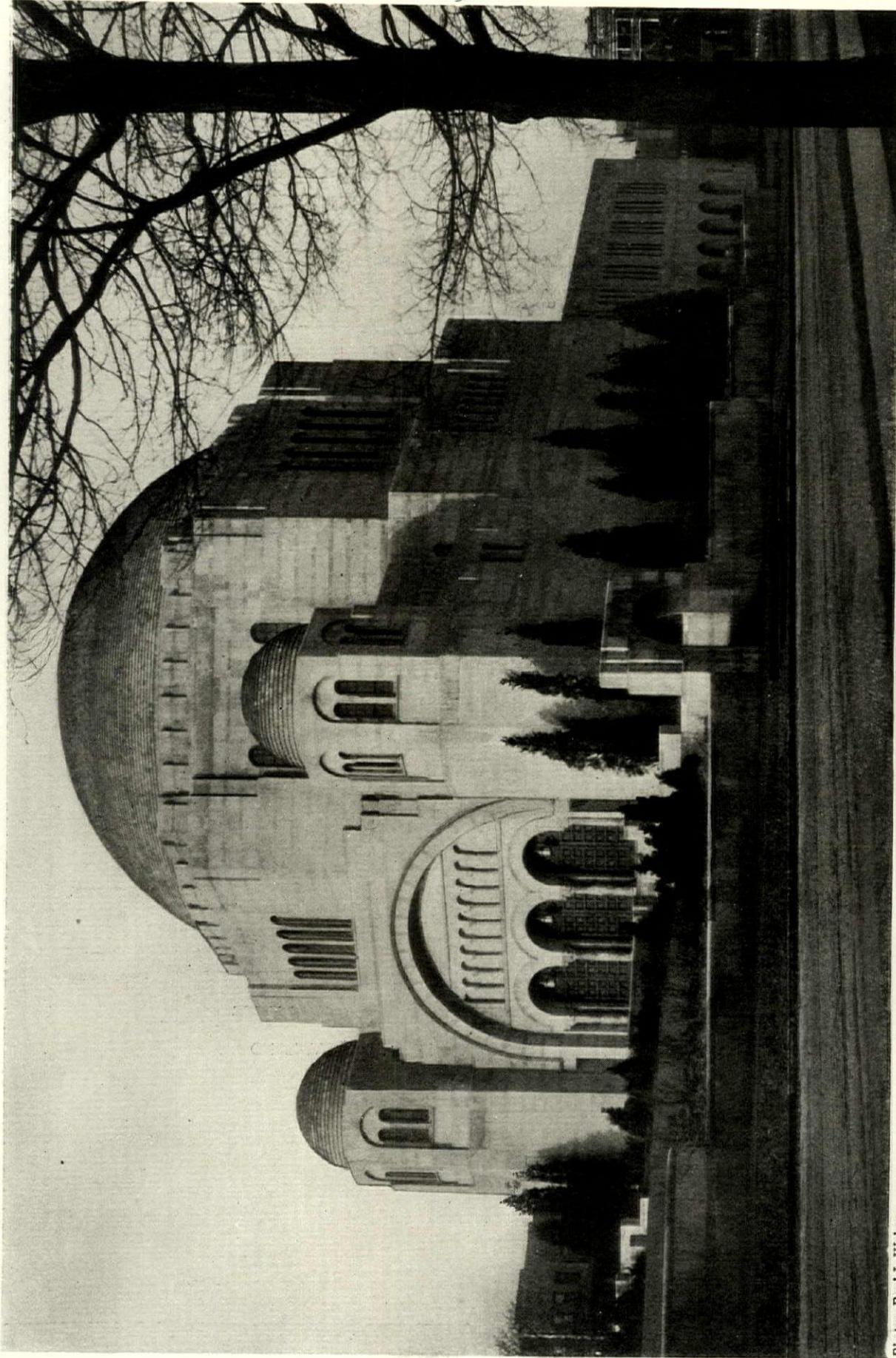
The question of acoustics was studied very carefully, both from the point of excluding sounds from outside and avoiding echoes and reverberation within. To achieve as nearly perfect stillness as possible,

in regard to external sounds, in a building located as this on a main traffic artery, the whole of the drum of the dome, as well as the dome itself, is a double shell. The only points where the interior and exterior walls are one are those on the two sides parallel to the two streets, for a short space at the back of the balcony, but the wall here is also furred doubly, and seven small windows have also two sashes each. The interior received very careful study to eliminate all echo from the standpoint of the speaker, without at the same time smothering the resonance and tone of the organ, which are equally necessary to the best effect. It was a great satisfaction to all concerned, when the completed building was put to the test of actual use, to find that the result had fully justified all the effort put into this important detail.

The architect and the committee felt from the beginning that the architectural treatment of the new building should not be based on any of the usual styles, but should rather be developed from the basic forms of those regions where the Jewish race passed the period of its national existence, taking only such motifs from various sources as could be welded into a harmonious entity. The outcome has been a type which is, perhaps, more Byzantine than anything else, but which is still not too oriental in feeling to prevent a transition without undue shock from the mass of the temple to the more modern and practical regularity of the school and other everyday portions of the group of buildings. It is felt that in solving the problem in this way there has been achieved a building which is not only architecturally satisfying, but which expresses in itself the deeply religious spirit and the essential unity of the Jewish faith.



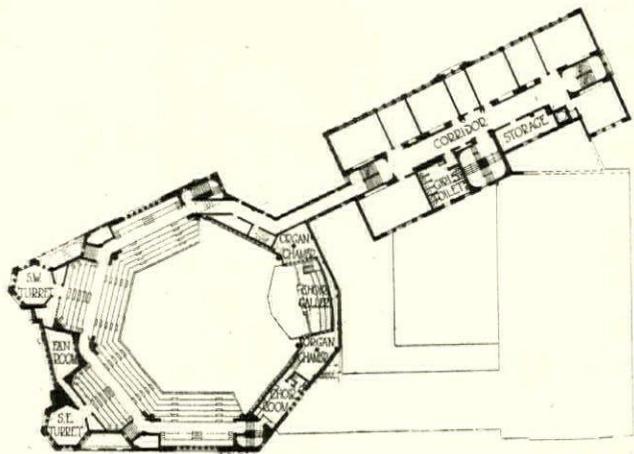
General View, Temple Tifereth Israel, Cleveland
Charles R. Greco, Architect



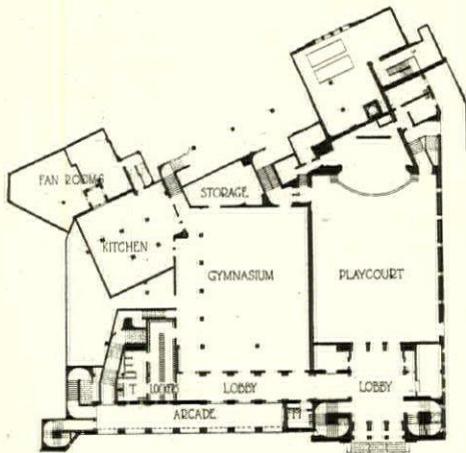
Photos. Paul J. Weber

TEMPLE TIFERETH ISRAEL, CLEVELAND
CHARLES R. GRECO, ARCHITECT

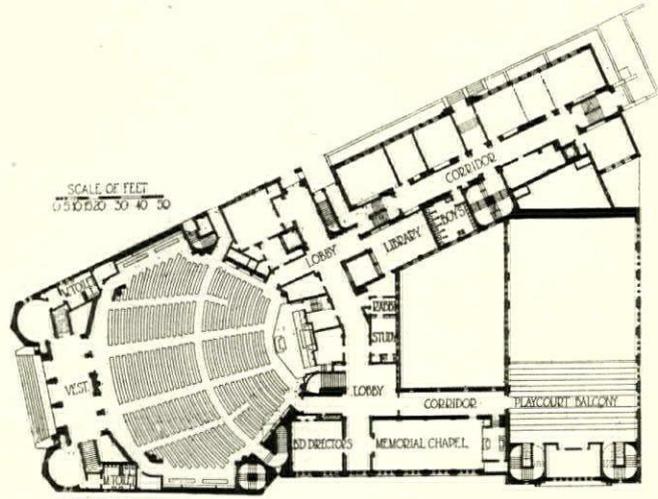
Plans on Back



BALCONY AND SECOND FLOOR



BASEMENT



MAIN FLOOR

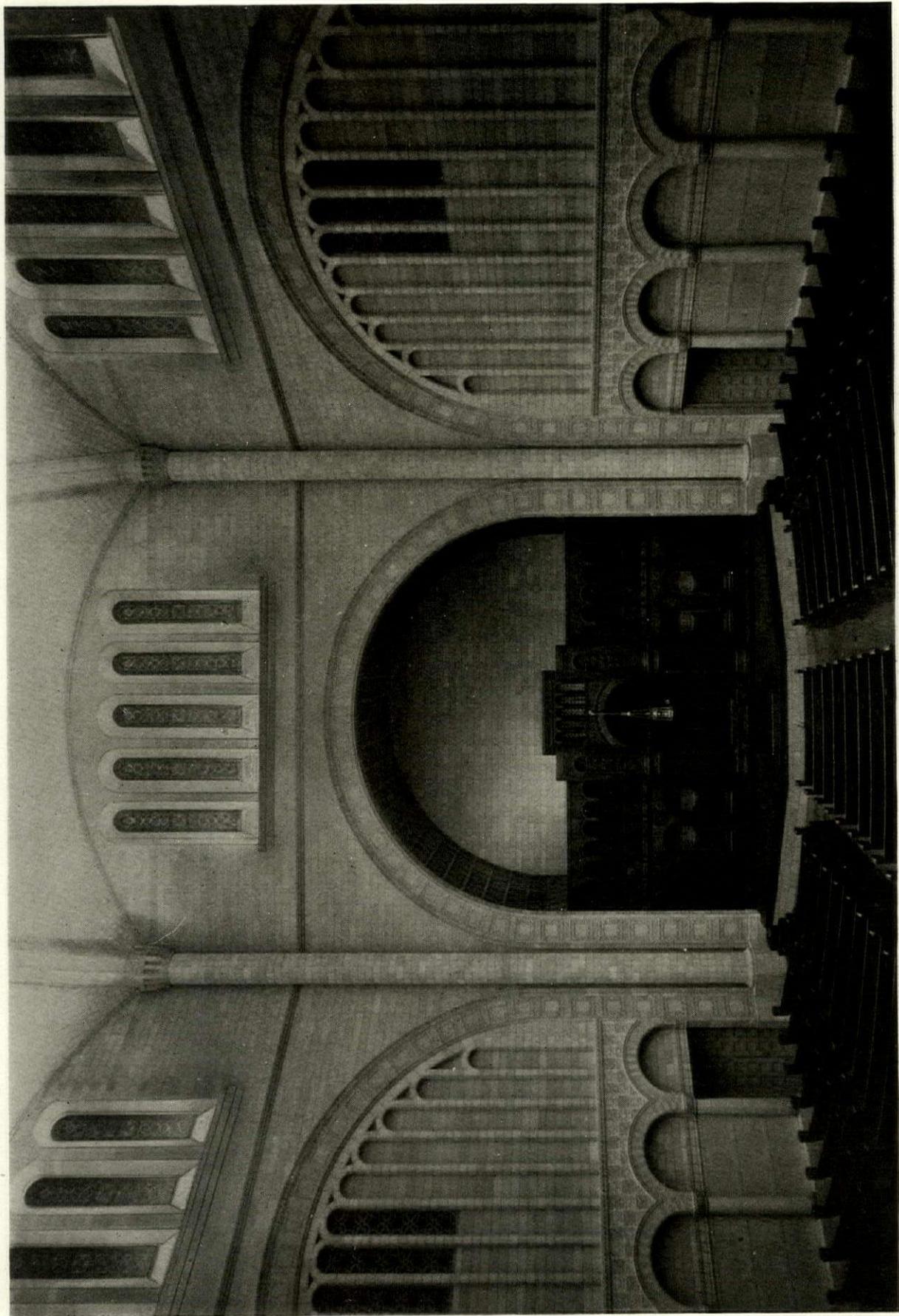
PLANS, TEMPLE TIFEREETH ISRAEL, CLEVELAND
 CHARLES R. GRECO, ARCHITECT



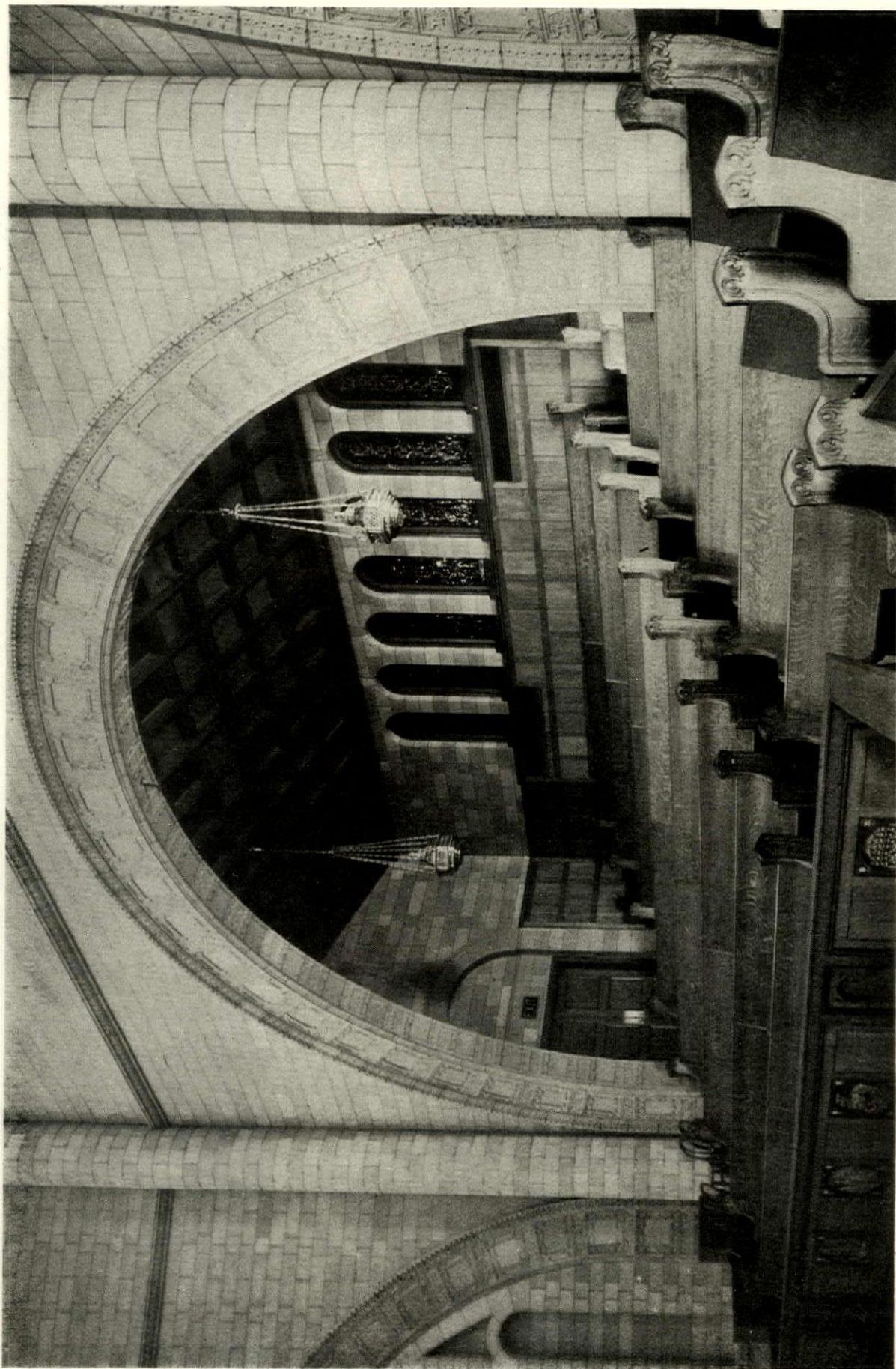
DETAIL OF ENTRANCE
TEMPLE TIFERETH ISRAEL, CLEVELAND
CHARLES R. GRECO, ARCHITECT



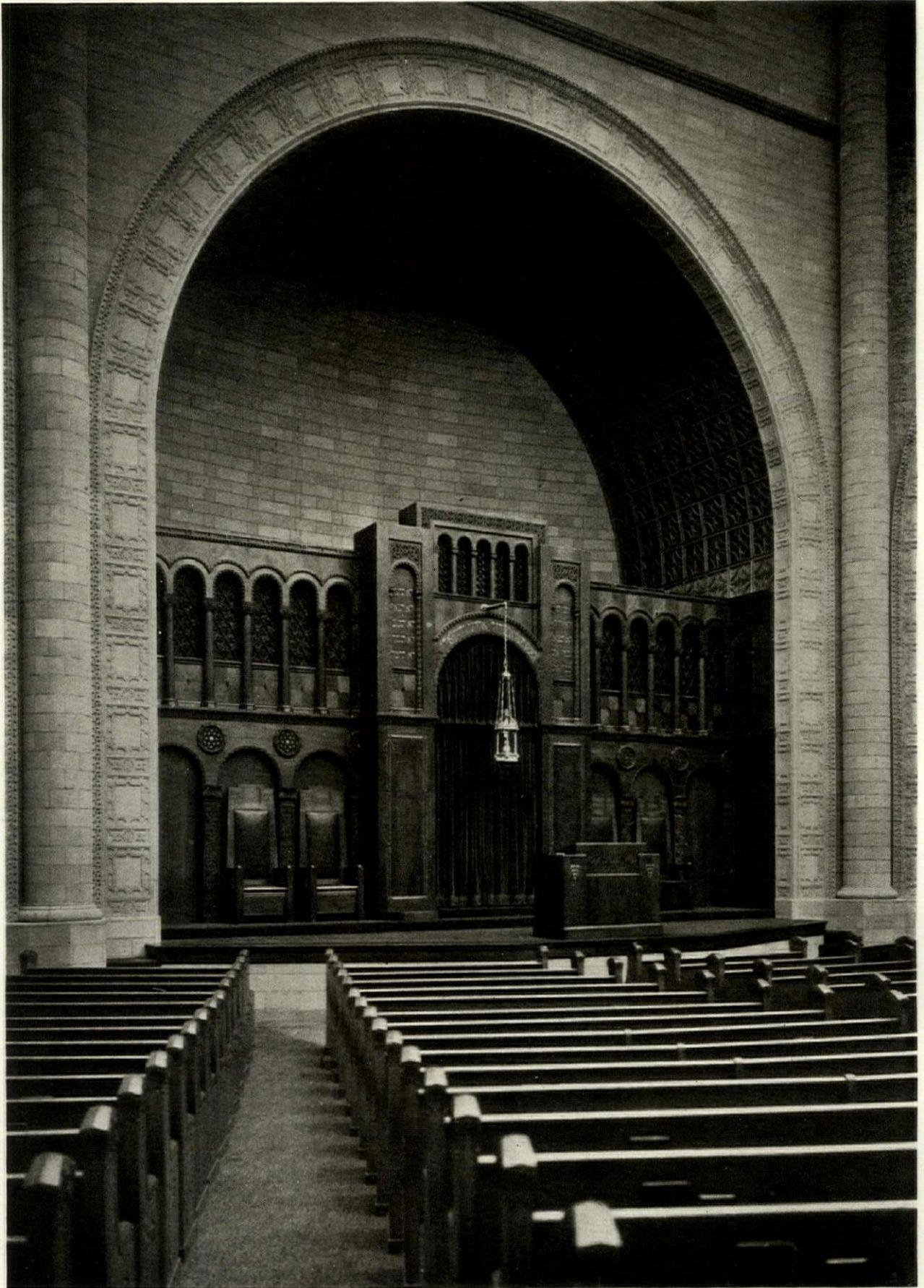
DETAIL, ENTRANCE DOORS
TEMPLE TIFERETH ISRAEL, CLEVELAND
CHARLES R. GRECO, ARCHITECT



INTERIOR OF TEMPLE TIFERETH ISRAEL, CLEVELAND
CHARLES R. GRECO, ARCHITECT



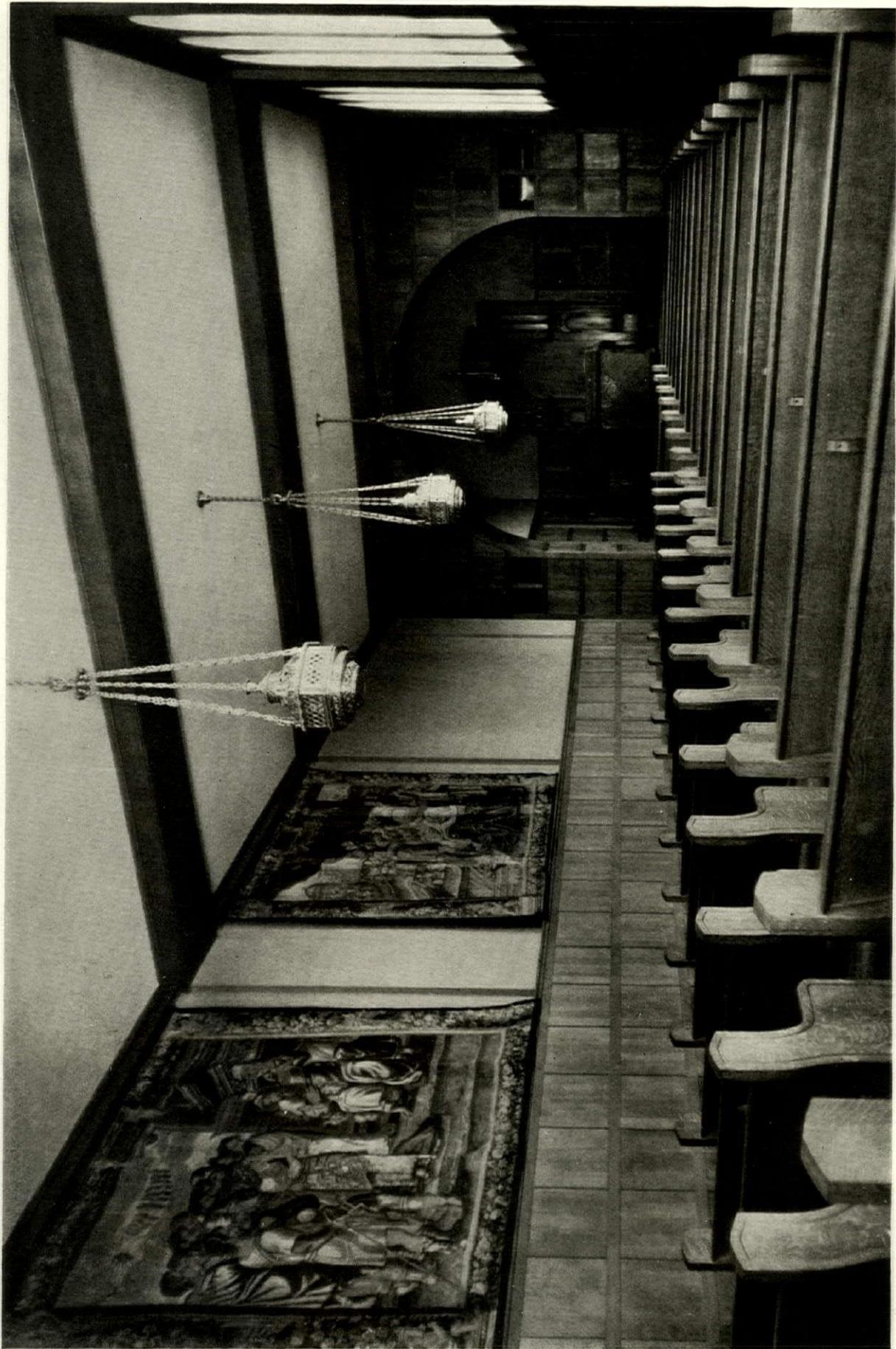
DETAIL, ONE SECTION OF THE BALCONY
TEMPLE TIFERETH ISRAEL, CLEVELAND
CHARLES R. GRECO, ARCHITECT



DETAIL, ARK AND CHOIR GALLERY
TEMPLE TIFERETH ISRAEL, CLEVELAND
CHARLES R. GRECO, ARCHITECT



DETAIL OF ARCH AND WALL DECORATIONS
TEMPLE TIFERETH ISRAEL, CLEVELAND
CHARLES R. GRECO, ARCHITECT



THE CHAPEL
TEMPLE TIFERETH ISRAEL, CLEVELAND
CHARLES R. GRECO, ARCHITECT