The eponym of the Tushingham plaque is Director A. Douglas Tushingham, formerly of the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem, but presently of the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. In the Spring of 1953 the plaque was acquired from the famous Ohan Collection at the Muristan in Jerusalem. Most recently it has been incorporated into the well-selected Case Archaeological Collection at the University of Chicago.

The plaque (Plate I) is a moderately thin but solidly formed architectural panel of hard baked clay, superfine in texture and softly tan in color. Coloristically it is pleasingly modulated in pastel shades. Much pigment, in simple decorative schemes of red and yellow and blue, still adheres to the surface of the artifact.

In architectonic terms the panel consists of a substantial rectangular podium or base crowned by a perfectly semicircular conch, with a steep gable superimposed thereon. The podium is three and one-half inches wide and two and one-half inches high. The gable, at the protruding outer corners, is three and three-fourths inches wide. From the peak of the gable to the bottom of the base, the panel measures five and three-fourths inches high.

The rectangular base is framed in substantial strips of clay that are closely striated in a simply diversified fashion: diagonally across the side pieces and along the length of the base beam, and vertically across the long top strip. These notwide earthen strips are so firm as to give the impression of quite solid beams. The diagonal striations on the side pieces are distinctly suggestive of the windings of spiral columns. This columnar impression is further accented by two oblong capitals that mutually crown the shafts at the sides; the capitals being plain oblongs, nothing more. In between the capitals the upper rim of the podium is in lower relief than are the oblongs that crown
the pilasters at either end. My friend Raymond Bowman indicates that the diagonal cross-strokes on the base beam seem to him to be echoing and prolonging the strong diagonal lines of a tile floor, thought of as extending beneath and in front of the base beam itself.

To an observant student of Jewish ossuaries, the whole scheme of cross-stroke decoration is reminiscent of one of the commonest framing devices presented on the ample sides and the short ends of ostophagi of the imperial era.¹ There the long horizontal strips, top and bottom, carry vertical striations, while vice versa the short vertical strips at the end carry horizontal cross-strokes. The enframe-ment pattern on the Tushingham panel, with its considerately placed diagonal strokes, is a restrained elaboration of this familiar framing device frequently reiterated on the ossuaries of the period. All the decorative striations on the Tushingham panel: vertical or horizontal or diagonal, are presented in relief, rather than being incised.

Filling the center of the large rectangular space is a sizeable and high circumference measuring one and five-eighths inches in diameter. Four small circles, surrounding tiny knobs at their foci, occupy the four corners of the rectangle. These circles and knobs, like the cross-strokes on the enframing beams, are rendered in relief. Two similar circles at lower corners of the substructure, pin together the cross-hatched side pieces and the lengthy base member. This repeated stress on perfect circles cannot be overlooked in any attempt to interpret the entire design.

Surmounting this box-like structure there rises, in a distinct second storey, a colorful conch that is a perfect semi-circle (Pl. I). Its polychrome rays, which are strongly defined, radiate from a very unusual two-thirds circle that rises directly from the lintel below. At the lower center of this segment a tiny knob stands in relief just where the focus of the full circle would be located, were the circumference rendered completely. Here, then, is a unique double emphasis on circularity, incomplete and complete. Why this singular repetition of emphasis just here? We shall later endeavor to answer that question also.