The origins of this essay lie in a visit in 2007 to the city of Laodicea on the Lycus, in what was once Phrygia, in modern Turkey. A colleague, the intrepid Mark Wilson of the Asia Minor Research Center, now in Antalya, directed me to a pile of column fragments west of the Roman cardo, where he told me I would find a fragment with a cross and a menorah. Eventually, I found the pile—which has since become a standard stop on the Christian tourism/pilgrimage route—and with great excitement the column. This fragment, which was published in a brief note by the excavator, Celal Şimşek, in 2006, was discovered in the ruins of Nymphaeum A at Laodicea, “to the north side of the so-called Syrian Road,” a building
destroyed in an earthquake in 494 CE. The presence of a menorah in the nymphaeum compound at the very center of the city did not surprise me. After all, numerous roughly inscribed menorahs were found in the Sebastion of Aphrodisias from late antiquity, a period during which the erstwhile emperor temple compound was subdivided into shops. Similar rough menorahs were found in the shops adjacent to the Sardis synagogue (also a building in the city center), on a reused marble slab found in the Library of Celsus in Ephesus, and adorning tombs—including some in nearby Hierapolis (Pamukkale)—at numerous other sites. Alternatively, perhaps this well-carved column fragment derived from some lost Jewish communal building—perhaps a synagogue.

The image of the menorah on this column fragment, flanked on the left by a shofar, a ram’s horn, and on the right by a palm frond or lulav, was a well-known visual trope in Jewish art across the empire, but our piece is distinguished by the fact that this is the first archaeological evidence published for the Jewish community of Laodicea. The form of the menorah is also typical, though the portrayal of flames as short irregular lines above the branches is less common. Although no traces of pigment remain on this object, I wonder if the flames might have been colored differently than the rest of the lamp, though this is probably pushing very standard iconography. The angular shofar is typical of portrayals of ram’s horns from Asia Minor.

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4 See *IJO Kleinasien*, 151, 398–440, and the bibliography there.
5 See Rachel Hachlili, *The Menorah, the Ancient Seven-Armed Candelabrum*.
6 On the history of the Jewish community at Laodicea, see Paul R. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 14, 17, 31, 101–103, 198. Şimşek tells me that “[w]e have found only one menorah at the Laodikeia excavations yet, but we found a lot of Jewish inscriptions” (e-mail message to author, October 13, 2010).
7 Şimşek informs me that “[t]here wasn’t any evidence of plaster or coloration within the menorah or the cross” (e-mail message to author, August 18, 2009).