In 1943 Alfons Maria Schneider published a Greek inscription found on a block of fine, Proconnese marble in an underground vault in Iznik, ancient Nicaea. The inscription appears on one short side of the ashlar, at the lower end, underneath a large and finely detailed seven-branched menorah. In the ninth century C.E. the ashlar was reused as part of the masonry of a tower. Its narrow face to the left of the side with the menorah plus inscription was carved with a fresh Greek inscription, ‘Tower of Michael, the great king in Christ, the emperor’, a reference to the Emperor Michael III (842–67 C.E.). For some centuries the first Greek inscription must have been hidden in the masonry structure of the tower. But the block was once again reused, this time as one side of the square edging to the basin of the fountain of Böcek Ayazmas. In its new situation the Michael inscription was placed face upwards, with the original inscription facing across the surface of the basin.

On the basis of the presence of the menorah, Schneider identified the first inscription as Jewish. With restitutions by Josef Keil, this was reconstructed it as

\[\begin{align*}
\deltaο\deltaο\nuς\ \alphaγ[\alpha]-
\thetaο\ν\ \tauι\ \piα\sigmaι\ \sigma-
\alphaρκι,\ \deltaτι\ \epsilon[\varsigma]
\epsilon\omegaνα\ \epsilonλεο[\varsigma]
\alphaυτο\nu
\end{align*}\]

1 Schneider (1943: 36, no. 68), republished by Sahin (1979: 295b, no.615).
3 The date of the block’s reuse is uncertain, but must be later than the end of the sixteenth century: see Fine and Rutgers (1996: 5).
Allowing for itacism, and thus reading τῇ πάσῃ for τῇ πάσῃ, and αἰώνα for ἐώνα, this yields ὁ διδός ἀγαθὸν τῇ πάσῃ σαρκί, ὅτι ἐἰς αἰὼνα ἔλεος αὐτοῦ, ‘the one who gives good to all flesh, because his mercy is for ever.’ Schneider related it to the LXX version of Psalm 135:25 in Greek, ὁ διδός τροφῆν πάσῃ σαρκί, ὅτι ἐἰς τὸν αἰὼνα τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ. He dated it to the second century C.E., but did not indicate his grounds for doing so.

No photograph was available of the inscription until a few years ago, when Steven Fine and Leonard Rutgers re-examined the style of the menorah which they dated to the period between the fourth and sixth centuries C.E.. They stressed the importance of the combination of the menorah and the first inscription as the only evidence for a Jewish community in ancient Nicaea and as an important source for the history of Judaism generally in Asia Minor. On the basis of the photographs they provided an improved reading for the Jewish Greek inscription, substituting ἄρτον ‘bread’ for ἀγαθὸν, and commenting that this equivalence for ἄρτον is both closer to the Hebrew and also found in the readings of the later Jewish revisers of the Greek Bible Aquila and Symmachus for this very verse, for which the Hebrew reads: ח '"ו נאו .

Almost simultaneously Annie Pralong published an article focusing on the issue of the Christian reuse of the marble block, accompanied by several photos. Her dating of the Psalm inscription and menorah to the fourth century appears to rest largely on the iconography of the motif.

In 2001 Constantine Zuckerman presented a further improvement to the reading, using photos provided by Pralong. He pointed out that there was no room for the definite article before the participle at the beginning and that one should read διδός ἄρτον τῇ πάσῃ σαρκί, ὅτι ἐἰς αἰὼνα ἔλεος αὐτοῦ, ‘giving bread to all flesh, because his mercy is for ever.’ This is the reading accepted by the most recent editor, Ameling, in Inscriptioes Judaicae Orientis Vol.II. The verse cited in the inscription, Ps 135(136):25, is often used in benedictions. In fact it occurs in the first and probably the earliest blessing of the Birkat Ha-Mazon, the blessing after meals. Tradition attributes this section to Moses when the manna fell from heaven. (According to Mishna Sotah 7.1, the Birkat Ha-Mazon could be recited in

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