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Karl Frederik Kinch – A Danish Pioneer in Thessaloniki

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The Danish archaeologist and philologist Karl Frederik Kinch (1853–1921) is probably best known for his investigations on Rhodes, where, together with Christian Blinkenberg, he led the excavations on the acropolis of Lindos between 1902 and 1905. This article focuses on another aspect of Kinch's research: his pioneering work on the Arch of Galerius in Thessaloniki. By studying the iconography of the sculpted reliefs, Kinch could show that the monument was not, as then generally believed, erected in honour of Alexander the Great or Constantine. He was, in fact, the first to establish that the arch celebrated the Emperor Galerius's victory over the Sasanian Persians in 297/98. Kinch published his results in *L'Arc de triomphe de Galère* (Paris 1890), which is also the first monograph on the monument. I here take a closer look at this publication, situating it within the researcher's life and work.

Life and work – a short overview

Karl Frederik Kinch was born in Ribe, Jutland, 15 March 1853, and was the son of the historian Jakob Frederik Kinch.¹ He studied Classics at the University of Copenhagen and was awarded the cand.phil. degree in 1878. Five years later, he defended his dr. phil. dissertation on the Roman historian Quintus Curtius Rufus: *Quaestiones Curtianae criticae* (1883). For a couple of years, Kinch earned a living as a private teacher of Latin and French. Then, from 1885 onwards, he travelled widely in Greece, Turkey and Italy. He was particularly interested in the monuments of Macedonia and of the Macedonian peninsula Chalkidiki, where he discovered the

¹ Biographies, Drachmann 1922, 891; Heiberg 1921-1922, 37–45; Friis Johansen 1933–44 (1979–84). The most detailed and comprehensive presentation is Pierre Juhel in Juhel & Nigdelis 2015, 1–28, who bases his discussion on Kinch's letters, diaries and travelogues, preserved in Det kgl. Bibliotek and Rigsarkivet in Copenhagen.

tomb that came to be known as the ‘Kinch Tomb’.² He also took a keen interest in the epigraphy of the area and diligently copied the inscriptions he saw on his five travels through Macedonia between 1885 and 1893.³ Because of the political situation and dangers associated with travelling in the more deserted parts of Chalkidiki, then under Ottoman rule, Kinch often found it advisable to stick to the safer urban environment of Thessaloniki. He therefore decided to devote himself to a study of the triumphal arch (*Fig. 1*). The result of this work is the short, but groundbreaking, monograph *L’arc de triumphe de Salonique*, published in 1890.

In the 1890s, Kinch was mainly occupied with teaching. From 1895–1898 he served as headmaster of a Danish secondary school at Maribo on the island of Lolland. When the school closed down in 1898, Kinch was free to return to archaeology and embark upon new adventures on the island of Rhodes.

Exploring Rhodes

In the early twentieth century, Kinch spent most of his time abroad, especially in connection with the Danish Rhodes Expedition. Kinch, in collaboration with the archaeologist Christian Sørensen Blinkenberg (1863–1948), led the excavations of the Athena Lindia sanctuary on the acropolis of Lindos in three campaigns, 1902–5, financed by the Carlsberg Foundation.⁴ Among the members of the team was the painter Helvig Amsinck (1872–1956), a graduate from the Royal Academy in Copenhagen, who drew many of the illustrations for the Lindos publications.⁵ In 1903, Helvig and Karl Frederik got married. The newlywed archaeologist still found time to carry out investigations of Mycenaean tombs at five different sites in southern Rhodes.⁶ In 1907 and 1908, he excavated the archaic settlement at Vroulia, at the southern tip of the island. This was a vast enterprise, for the site encompassed a long fortification wall, houses and a cemetery. For political reasons – mainly the fact that local people disliked extensive excavations on their private grounds – he was forced to leave the island in early 1909. Kinch was, however, able to return to Vroulia in 1913 and 1914, the year that saw the publication of his second monograph *Fouilles de Vroulia*.⁷

² Kinch 1920.

³ Pantelis Nigdelis in Juhel & Nigdelis 2015, 43–166, compiles a catalogue of 128 inscriptions which Kinch had recorded and annotated in Danish, illustrations, 189–250, figs. 8–131. The material is based on Kinch’s many notebooks and diaries. This important publication can be downloaded from Nigdelis’ academia.edu site.

⁴ Kinch & Blinkenberg 1903, 1904; Kinch 1905, 1907.

⁵ Helvig Agnete Amsinck, see <https://natmus.dk/historisk-viden/verden/middelhavslandene/graekenland/den-danske-rhodosekspedition> (accessed 25.12.2018)

⁶ Rathje & Lund 1991, 39.

⁷ Kinch 1914. Illustrations by Helvig Kinch. For Kinch’s work on Vroulia, see the excellent account by Stine Schierup in Kanina & Schierup 2017, 96–108.



Fig. 1 Arch of Galerius, Thessaloniki. View from the northwest in 2002.
Photo: Bente Küllerich, University Bergen ©.

The outbreak of World War I made it impossible to continue work in Greece; Kinch therefore returned to Copenhagen, where he lived with his wife and their daughter, again earning his living by teaching. Sadly, after having suffered a brain haemorrhage in 1917, followed by other attacks, his health seriously deteriorated. He died, 26 August 1921, at the age of 68.

A versatile researcher

In spite of his proficiency as an archaeologist, Kinch never held a formal academic post. He wrote his dissertation in Latin and published in French, German and in his native tongue, Danish. His published works, however, are comparatively few, including just two monographs and little more than a dozen articles and reports.⁸ Due partly to his declining health, he failed to finish many of his undertakings. All the same, the titles of the printed works provide evidence of a researcher with many interests:

⁸ For his bibliography, see Juhel in Juhel & Nigdelis 2015, 26, who notes fifteen items, of which no. 13, the exploration of Rhodes, contains four reports, published in 1903, 1904, 1905 and 1907 respectively, the first two written in collaboration with Blinkenberg. The full publication of the Rhodos expedition only appeared many years after Kinch's death.



Fig. 2 Arch of Galerius, Thessaloniki. South pillar, around 1900/1910.
Photo: Lykides; archive: H. Torp ©.

studies include a Roman wall painting, a Byzantine church, numismatics, linguistics, Hellenistic tombs, epigraphy and the subject of the present paper, the late antique triumphal arch in Thessaloniki.

Kinch and the triumphal arch in Thessaloniki

Over the years, the Arch of Galerius, as it is now known (thanks to Kinch), has played an important part as a landmark in Thessaloniki's topography. It was erected on the intersection of the *cardo maximus* and the *decumanus maximus* on the processional way that linked the palace to the south and the Rotunda to the north. Only three of eight pillars remain. When Kinch studied the monument, it was difficult to get an overall

view of the various reliefs, as small houses, shops and sheds were situated close up to the arch. Old photographs document the ruinous state of the monument. The photos also provide fascinating glimpses of how daily life went about in close proximity to the imperial arch (*Fig. 2*). Shoe-shiners and travelling salesmen sat on its step – plausibly the reason why the reliefs are particularly worn in the lower parts of the structure. Horse-drawn carriages and, from 1907 onwards, the electric tram drove through the central passage (as one may imagine the imperial cortège once to have done⁹). It is doubtful whether the locals who had the opportunity to view the images carved in relief in superposed registers on the still standing parts of the triumphal arch had the slightest idea about who was being honoured and what was represented in the complex scenes. The arch was sometimes referred to as the ‘Arch of Philip’ (of Macedon). Some thought that it was a monument to Philip’s son Alexander the Great, as it is titled ‘Arc du Alexandre le Grand’ on a postcard. Other postcards carry the label ‘Arc du Constantin’. The local community was certainly aware that it was an antique monument, but unsure of whether this meant Greek or Roman.

Kinch’s monograph on the triumphal arch was published in Paris in 1890, with financial support from the Carlsberg Foundation. In the preface, the author informs us that he visited Thessaloniki in 1885, 1886 and twice again before 1890. He thanks local authorities for their benevolence (leaving out some of his less fortunate experiences, such as being arrested in Chalkidiki on suspicion of being a spy).⁹ As for the illustrations in the book, which consist of only ten plates and a few figures, he notes that he himself took the photographs except for the first two plates that were made by a local photographer before the restoration of the monument in 1889 (*Fig. 3*). His friend, the painter Oscar Willerup, despite suffering from a fever, made drawings of the parts of the arch that were difficult to photograph.

Kinch introduces his work on the arch with a preliminary description (pp. 3–8). He provides pertinent information on material, technique and measurements. He observes that the arch was originally an octapylon of which only three of eight pillars stand. What happened to the rest has never been determined, but much of it presumably ended as building material or in the limekilns. He notes, again correctly, that the central passage of this grand arch was originally higher than the rest, reaching a total height of ca 15 m. It is instructively reproduced in a drawing in one of his plates (*Fig. 4*).

The introduction includes a short overview of the state of research (pp. 8–9). Because of the lack of written evidence, it had proved difficult to assign a date to the arch. One suggestion had been that it was raised in honour of Theodosius I, as one local tradition had it.¹⁰ However, as a closer look at the reliefs revealed: the icono-

⁹ Juhel & Nigdelis 2015, 7.

¹⁰ Stuart & Revett 1794, 54. Considering the fact that in antiquity the Rotunda was closely connected with the arch and in all likelihood became the palatine church of this emperor, and that the arch also served as a gate to the processional way that once led to the Rotunda, this was not a totally far-out idea.



Fig. 3 Arch of Galerius, Thessaloniki. View from the northwest, shortly before 1890. Photo: K.F Kinch, 1890 *L'arc de triomphe de Salonique*, pl. I ©.

graphy was pagan, not Christian. The arch was certainly erected before the reign of Theodosius, Kinch reasons. Some early visitors had believed the arch to have been erected in honour of an Antonine emperor, perhaps due to confusion with another, no-longer-extant arch.¹¹ Other early visitors had proposed that it was an Arch of Constantine, celebrating his victory over Licinius or the Sarmatians.¹² However, as Kinch notes (p. 9), the emperor's adversaries look decidedly Oriental (Persian); furthermore,

¹¹ Pococke 1743, 220.

¹² Cousinéry 1831, 30.

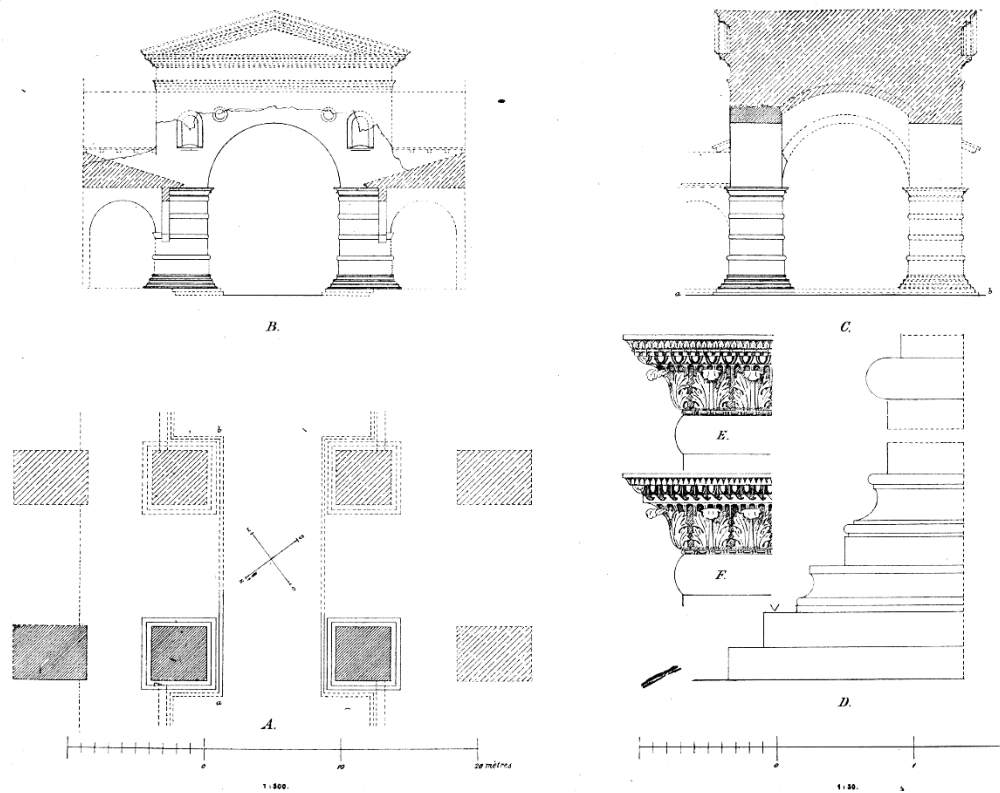


Fig. 4 Arch of Galerius, Thessaloniki. Reconstruction drawing.
 Photo: K.F Kinch, 1890 *L'arc de triomphe de Salonique*, pl. III ©.

next to a river goddess, he found a clue in the inscription *ΠΟΤΑΜΟΣ ΤΙΤΡΙΣ* (no longer visible), evidence that the combat depicted on the monument took place in Mesopotamia. Having now briefly dismissed the earlier propositions, Kinch goes on to argue his attribution of the arch to Galerius.

Focusing on the reliefs, Kinch observed two emperors performing sacrifices and images of Jupiter and Hercules. Since these were the favoured divinities of Diocletian and Galerius, the conclusion reached is close at hand (p. 10). Moreover, Galerius chose Thessaloniki as his capital city and Galerius triumphed over the Persian king Narses. The author was able to establish the date of the monument on historical grounds to between 297 – the victory – and before 311 – the death of Galerius. He narrowed the date to before 305, when Diocletian and Maximian abdicated (p. 11). Today there is consensus on this chronology.¹³ Kinch further notes that “*il est assez vraisemblable que l'arc a été dédié non pas à Galère seul, mais aux quatre empereurs en commun*”

¹³ See, e.g. Torp 2018, 20–1.



Fig. 5 Arch of Galerius, Thessaloniki. South pillar, Diocletian and Galerius sacrificing.
Photo: Bente Küllerich, University of Bergen ©.

(p. 11): in other words it was a monument celebrating all four members of the Tetrarchy. This is also generally acknowledged today. Kinch closes the introductory chapter by proposing that the pictorial programme was arranged chronologically, picturing different campaigns on the different faces of the pillars (p. 12).¹⁴ Kinch reckons that several artists must have sculpted the reliefs, one hand was ‘*tâtonnant*’, fumbling, and his work resulted in a ‘*lourd et pénible*’, heavy and hard, style.

Iconographical analysis of the reliefs

The main part of the book (pp. 13–48) is a thorough iconographical analysis of the reliefs by means of a close reading. Starting with the S(W) pillar (pp. 13–39) he systematically presents and describes in detail the characteristic features of each of the individual reliefs on each of the four sides. Kinch notices details like the images of Jupiter and Hercules that decorate the front of the altar in the scene that depicts Diocletian and Galerius sacrificing (Fig. 5). Since these small figures have eroded over the years, his description is of significance:

¹⁴ For a different opinion, Pond Rotman 1977.

Sur les deux côtés de devant il y a des reliefs, dont celui à gauche représente Jupiter assis, le buste nu, le vêtement jeté sur les cuisses et les jambs, le sceptre placé à la main gauche, à la droite un globe. Sur le relief à droite, Hercule est figuré assis, nu, sur un rocher; à la droite il tient la massue, l'arc à la gauche; la peau de lion est étendue sur le genou droit.¹⁵

As the passage shows, the author's descriptions are matter-of-fact and concise, presenting the reader with information based on autopsy. In other parts of the analysis, he uses historical sources to build up a historical backdrop for the represented scenes.

In his iconographical analysis, Kinch was able to draw upon his solid philological knowledge, bringing various Latin and Greek authors, ranging from Livius to Mamertinus and Malalas, into the discussion in order to clarify details of dress and paraphernalia. The historical sources also help him in determining which particular situation a given relief refers to. The same method is applied to the N(E) pillar, only with fewer extant reliefs the discussion is shorter (pp. 40–47) (Fig. 6). Enigmatically, the text ends somewhat abruptly, not with a proper conclusion but with a comparison between the programme of the arch and that of Trajan's column (pp. 47–48). However, on the final pages, a 'table des reliefs' provides a useful overview.

The importance of Kinch's *L'Arc de triomphe*

Kinch was not the very first to attribute the arch to Galerius. In a book from 1880 about the topography of Thessaloniki, M. Chatzi Ioannou had suggested Galerius, but did not enter into further discussion.¹⁶ It is uncertain whether Kinch was familiar with this book. He might have come across it in one of his sojourns in the city, and just chose to ignore it, or he may have been unaware of Galerius having been mentioned, if only in passing. In any event, it was Kinch who must be credited with arguing the case. In evaluating Kinch's text, the descriptions and the ensuing iconographical interpretations are astute. But his association of specific scenes with specific topographical and geographical locations is open to discussion: today one might prefer to read certain representations in a more general way as propagandistic images of imperial *virtus* (fighting) and *pietas* (sacrificing), rather than as historical documents.

In the monograph, it is noticeable that questions of style barely enter. Except for a broad attempt to distinguish different hands, the author is not concerned with the visual impact of the monument. Still, this is, in effect, understandable, inasmuch

¹⁵ Kinch 1890, 35–6 (translation: 'On the two front sides [of the altar] are reliefs, the one to the left shows Jupiter seated, naked torso, the drapery thrown over his hips and legs, the sceptre in his left, in his right a globe. On the relief to the right, a naked Hercules is figured seated on a rock; in his right hand he holds the club, the bow in his left; the lion pelt is laid out over his right knee').

¹⁶ The reference to Chatzi Ioannou, *Αστυγραφία Θεσσαλονίκης* 1880, is given by Laubscher in his monograph from 1975.



Fig. 6 Arch of Galerius, Thessaloniki. North pillar. Photo: K.F Kinch, 1890 *L'arc de triomphe de Salonique*, pl. VIII ©.

as monuments like the triumphal arches and columns were not intended as artworks meant for aesthetic appreciation, but were large billboards announcing imperial power and might.¹⁷ This (modern) view is in accordance with Kinch's treatment of the monument, not as a work of art but as an important manifestation of imperial power. What particularly strikes the modern reader is the narrow focus on the monument; it is treated as a self-contained entity without considerations of its wider topographical context. In the late nineteenth century, the various remains of Galerius's palace had not yet been located, let alone excavated.¹⁸ Still, one monument, the Rotunda of St

¹⁷ Cf. Küllerich 2013; 2018.

¹⁸ Another Dane, Ejnar Dyggve, came to play an important role here. In 1939 he excavated large parts of the palace area; Dyggve 1940, 1941.

George, then serving as a mosque, was conspicuously present. Strangely, Kinch does not mention the Rotunda; it apparently did not strike him that there could be a connection between the arch and this large circular building, both situated on the same N-S axis.¹⁹ However, he does briefly note that the arch might have been connected with the palace, which he rightly assumes to be situated south of the arch. In fact, he mentions remains of substructures – ‘*une série de galeries voûtées*’ (p. 10) – discovered near the arch.

Kinch’s small monograph is just one example that the interest in late antique art and archaeology has deep roots, and that Scandinavian researchers were often at the forefront in this field.²⁰ Regarding the importance of *L’Arc de triomphe de Salonique* it is telling that it took another 85 years before the next monograph on the arch was published.²¹ For the main part of the twentieth century, it was therefore Karl Frederik Kinch’s publication that provided the starting point for any study of this important triumphal monument. The book, duly acknowledged as a ‘pioneering monograph’,²² remains a groundbreaking work.

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¹⁹ It was left to Hébrard 1920 to establish the connection. For the Rotunda and the topography of the palace, see Torp 2018, ch. 1.

²⁰ Another pioneering early Scandinavian scholar was the Norwegian art historian Lorentz Dietrichson, see Nordhagen 2018.

²¹ Laubscher 1975.

²² Pond Rothman 1977, 427.

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