





# DIMITRIS FOSKOLOS

*Outdoor café, Panormos Bay, Tinos*

*A new piece of marble is carved to complete an ancient, broken architrave. The ancient marble is coated with a clay slip, the two massive pieces are rolled together to touch, and the clay leaves marks where the fit is not yet precise.*

MOST OF THE PEOPLE who have worked on the Acropolis are natives of Tinos, master marble carvers who've started here, have learned the art here, like me. We've fallen in love—at least me—I've fallen in love with marble and this particular art. And it was always my dream to go and work on the reconstruction of the Acropolis.

I was born here in 1957. I grew up and finished elementary school here. I started [with marble] when I was a little boy. We did what we could, engraving marble with iron tools. Playing around! We saw it as a game. We'd take a piece of marble and first we'd



engrave our names, like this, *taka-taka-taka*, on any piece of marble we'd find, on the low walls and benches in the courtyards. We didn't understand then what we were ruining. The school here had tools. They were in our homes, too. The old folks, my granddad, had a *velóni*. There was an old *mandrakás*. . . . I'd find them in drawers, in trunks. So, I'd find a tool and see that it worked for what I wanted, and use it.

From there on, my hands slowly became free. And gradually I saw, and others did too, that I had an inclination towards marble and that I could continue. An aunt of mine was telling me since I was little that I should go to school and learn the art of marble carving. But it was also the local craftsmen who saw me, as a young boy. They urged me to continue this work.

I went to the marble school here, the one in Pyrgos.<sup>19</sup> My first professor of sculpture was called Paraschos. Vassilis Paraschos. Also Yiannis Maniatakos.<sup>20</sup> I was in my last year [as a student] and Yiannis Maniatakos was in his first year [teaching]. I finished that school, and was second in my class, so I got a scholarship to the Athens Polytechnic. I understood that Yannis sent me to the Polytechnic because I'd matured as a boy. He said to me, "Dimitris, you should go, even though times are hard, go."

It was one level of learning there [in Athens], another here [on Tinos]. Here, we were kids.<sup>21</sup> Older students didn't come here then. Almost everyone was from Tinos. There were no foreigners then.<sup>22</sup> And we were all kids. The students were different in Athens. Things had become serious there. There we had to deal with different people from different schools. It was great. The professors were very good. There the marble professor was Bárba-Yiorgis Kouskouris.<sup>23</sup> But the conditions were not good then.

I arrived there at the worst time. It was the time of the Junta, the Dictatorship.<sup>24</sup> Things were hard. There were beatings; there were strikes. We couldn't have our lessons. There was a great upheaval in Athens. What can I tell you. . . .

Well, you see, the Polytechnic was an assembly point. And the dictators didn't want people assembling anywhere. But we, all the kids, did our protesting. I also

19 The Preparatory and Professional School of Fine Arts of Panormos (also known as the School of Fine Arts at Pyrgos) has been training marble carvers on Tinos since 1955.

20 Yiannis Maniatakos (1935–2017), sculptor and painter, director of the School on Tinos for thirty years.

21 Between thirteen and sixteen years old.

22 Non-locals, or non-Tinians.

23 *Bárba*:- literally, "uncle." When hyphenated before a first name becomes a traditional, old-fashioned form of affectionate, respectful address for an older man.

24 1967–74.



went out to the gates shortly before the tanks came in. I can't say for sure since I wasn't there the last evening. I'd left the day before the invasion.<sup>25</sup> And what happened, happened. They didn't want any assemblies. They invaded the studios and busted up everything. [Students] on one side; the police, riot police, on the other. They wouldn't let us concentrate. How could you study like that? My seeing all that—I tell you—and for financial reasons, it was a difficult time. Some withstood it, others committed suicide, others were lost. . . . Others, I don't know. . . I lost a lot of colleagues. Some said they were killed, others that they were thrown [out of windows]. I had an acquaintance at that time who was thrown from the fifth floor.

All of Athens was turned upside down. You couldn't go out and about. I stayed there only one year, because of all of the events that were taking place, plus financial reasons. My parents couldn't afford to have me there and pay for me to study. I was from a poor family. There were no possibilities for me to work outside because we had morning and afternoon classes. We went to painting and sculpture classes with nude models in the afternoon, in the evening. I didn't have the hours. And I had to choose: to stay—I don't know how I could have—or to go out to work, which I did.

I went to work outside in a workshop. There I really learned the art well. I was seventeen, eighteen. Then, of course, the army took me, like all the kids. After I was discharged, I continued in a workshop for a decade more. We worked a lot on ecclesiastical projects. When we say ecclesiastical works, we mostly mean Byzantine. We made icon screens, *despotiká*, pulpits. We carved bell towers. The *despotikó* is where the priest goes up and chants. Then I went to the Acropolis, which was my dream. I pursued it. I must have been twenty-nine or thirty.

But the one job is completely different from the other. On the Acropolis, someone who hasn't worked there, no matter how skilled an artist he is, no matter how much he says he knows the craft . . . what happens on the Acropolis doesn't happen outside of it. It doesn't happen in any workshop. It's different. And that difference is what pulls all of us . . . . Whatever you do on the outside, freelance, it has absolutely no worth before the pieces we worked on that went in alongside the pieces [carved by] the ancients.

Let's begin at the beginning. You put your hands [on the marble] and work on top of the hands of the ancient Greeks. It's terrific, inconceivable! We would try to find some mistake they'd made. And we couldn't find it for anything! It was perfect. That was exciting.

Before I went to work on the Acropolis, I had no idea what restoration was. In the beginning, like everyone, we were scared. And then our hands were freed.

<sup>25</sup> On November 17, 1973, tanks crashed through the gates of the Athens Polytechnic and it was violently invaded. Many students died.



We got into the job, this specific job. We said, “It’s something extraordinary.” Restoration can’t be done by just anyone. This kind of restoration. That is, a shop on the outside, a workshop, can’t do this work. You have to work [on the Acropolis] for a while to understand what’s going on in there.

The first person and friend I met up there (I knew him from before) was Francesco Alexopoulos. He is a great friend above all—I want to stress that—and a terrific craftsman. I learned a great deal from Francesco. Not from the foreman. Because Francesco is a person who can talk to you calmly, he can explain things to you. I learned a lot [from him] and for that reason, afterwards, they chose me and made me a foreman. I took the first steps inside the temple there, [because of] Francesco Alexopoulos. It’s important to have a person like that. He’s my close friend. He left the Acropolis a little before me because he is older. We hung out together every day. Every day! If I wanted something, I’d go to him secretly and ask him, “Hey, what should I do now?” Or when I was asked to become a foreman, I asked his opinion, “Hey, Francesco do you think I can do it?” A brother! A brother! Francesco was in charge of the work crew, but he wasn’t a foreman. He was a really responsible person. We did difficult jobs. We turned over capitals, we turned over the first cornices . . . which were difficult jobs. None of us had any idea [until] I learned from him and then we did it for fun, it became a little game! He was admirable.

I worked a lot with Giorgos Angelopoulos, who’s also an admirable person, a very good craftsman. I have a lot to say about Giorgos. And Mihalis too!—he’s a great guy. He was with us, we took him under our wing. We chose the good guys. First of all, we wanted people with good characters. Never mind if you weren’t a very good craftsman. It didn’t matter. If you were a good person, that was all! Your day passed pleasantly. Because we were working, right? A lot of work! We were sweating, and getting tired.

And I remember—this is very important—I worked on the eastern corner when I first arrived, and we installed a . . . what was it? Was it an architrave? I’d worked on it and so had Giorgos Angelopoulos. My daughter came up to the Acropolis from grammar school. When she told her teacher and explained to the kids that we had made the marble that was up there, I was really proud. Alongside the ancients, I too had contributed the little that I knew. Because, I confess that we can’t approach them. They were untouchable! Were they gods? We don’t know . . .

An amazing thing I participated in was when we lifted up the entire column with that *paténta*—what I’d call it—made by Manolis Korres and Kostas Zambas.<sup>26</sup>

26 *Paténta*: a unique solution or invention to solve a specific problem; an innovation or invention, either of a tool or a method, or both. Not a necessarily a patent, as in the English meaning;



We lifted up the entire column and changed a drum from below. It was a half drum. I don't know if you've seen it in a photograph. Then we matched the piece, supplemented it there, and then we reinstalled it. Under the entire column! I don't recall how many tons it was. It was very impressive! That is . . . what can I say? You felt like you had a superpower! Since you lifted the Parthenon!

I was there for twenty-five years. We were all good guys on the team, good craftsmen, and, most of all, friends. We worked side-by-side with enthusiasm, with gusto, and we were being paid. We got fully into the work. In the beginning we worked on the eastern side. We lifted one corner to fix a capital and the other corner because we wanted to take down the lion that was on the left eastern corner, towards the Erechtheion. We took down whatever marbles had to be taken down, we corrected them on the ground—as we do now—and we reinstalled them. We reworked them. We worked with the *mandrakás, velóni*. Like normal!

Filling in missing pieces wherever a piece is missing, patching, using the pointing machines . . . it's how we make a patch. We have an ancient piece, which is broken. The first process is to make a copy of it. We take plaster, we take wadding and we make a plaster cast of the break. Then we remove the plaster from the marble and we take a piece of new marble, always using the same measurements of the piece we're missing and we try to match it. We match the plaster by carving centimeter by centimeter with a tool called a pointing machine. It becomes a copy of the broken piece.

The electric tools help to take off large amounts of marble. When there was a surface with a lot of marble that had to go, the electric tools helped a lot. All of them. The saw, the sander, the drill . . . but you can't use them on the detail. The hand is what. . . . Okay, when you're a master carver you use the electric tool with skill. That is, all the tools certainly help, but the person using them has to use them appropriately. The hammer is needed in some areas and the pneumatic chisel elsewhere. The hammer and *velóni* are for heavy jobs, to remove a lot of marble. We use the pneumatic tool when we are reaching the detail. Of course, there is also the pneumatic tool that is for rough work, the heavy removal. And there is the pneumatic tool that's for the detail, those small pneumatics we have. You can use it. But the fine detail is done by hand.

Manolis Korres (b. 1948), currently a professor at the National Technical University, Athens, is the foremost scholar on the archeology of the Athenian Acropolis, and was the chief architect of the Acropolis Restoration for over twenty years, directing the study of the construction techniques and materials used in the site's historic buildings; Kostas Zambas (b. 1952), a civil engineer and the former supervising engineer of the Acropolis Restoration project, engineered many high-risk dismantlings of the Acropolis's ancient monuments, including the 2007 removal of the Erechtheion's caryatids to the Acropolis Museum.



So after we work all the marble and it becomes a perfect copy of the cast of the broken marble—always according to the measurements that we’re missing for it to complete the piece—we then go to apply the new marble to the old marble, to glue it. The gluing is done with white cement, a very fine material, and titanium spiral rods. According to the weight they must bear, we insert the appropriate diameter of titanium. We glue it and then we fit it. It is very well-bonded—of course it should stand twenty or thirty days to cure, so the statistics say. There is no problem doing this with either a marble that’s new on its own or an ancient one with a new piece. You can work on it without fear.

Then the exterior carving of the marble takes place, with the various surface designs it has on it; it could be guttae or have flutes, like on the columns. This warrants special attention since it’s fine work, so it doesn’t break on you. Okay, that’s where the art comes in! It could, of course, also be straight. When it’s finished it matches up exactly in accordance with the work of the ancients. And since we have now worked it on all sides, it’s finished and ready to go into its place.

Oh, the guttae! In the beginning we were cautious and scared. No, not scared. Wary. A lot of tools, a lot of folds, a lot of fluting, a lot, a lot! It’s a lot of ups and downs, angles up and down. In the beginning we didn’t want to make a mistake, neither me, nor Giorgos. We were gripped with tension. Then our hands got untied and it became like child’s play when we became comfortable. We considered it a game.

Kostas Zambas, the engineer, had me make some of the first fluting we worked on. And then all the guys did it. Even my son did it. . . . It’s great—I feel like I’ve left an heir behind! It was in the pronaos, on the right, just as you enter.<sup>27</sup> In fact, I made the base, down at the bottom. I worked on it in situ—that was the hard part—and I couldn’t finish because it was so low down at the bottom. I left a piece so that if someday they take it apart, then they could finish it easily afterwards. They were the first flutes. I worked alone there because two people couldn’t fit. I really loved that job!

I worked on everything! That is, whatever required the most responsibility, was the most difficult, I worked on. Of course, always with a partner. Up there you never do anything alone. And I think that’s the right thing. If something happens, some mistake, your mate alongside you can correct you. We always used two people. We always chose the most specialized people to do the difficult work.

Whatever requires a lot of attention is difficult . . . whatever doesn’t allow for error. How can I say it? If you make a mistake up there you feel . . . You are given [a task] that takes a lot of responsibility, something that not everyone does, that’s what interests you. It gives you an appetite.

27 Pronaos: the vestibule at the front of a classical temple.