I traveled to Greece for a second summerschool (see here for the first). I left Arizona on a Monday morning and arrived in Thessaloniki on Tuesday afternoon before traveling on to Naxos on Wednesday. Thessaloniki is the second largest city in Greece and the capital of the Greek province of Macedonia. After Naxos, I would be traveling to the Republic of Macedonia which, under Greek pressure, may be changing its name to the Republic of Northern Macedonia (more below). Of course, some Greek nationalists don’t want the name Macedonia mentioned at all and some Macedonians don’t like the change either. When I was here, a scandal erupted of meddling by the Russians who don’t want this ‘deal’ either since it will pave the way for Macedonia to join NATO.

Thessaloniki was built and rebuilt many times: it went from a pre-historic settlement to Macedonian, Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman rule. Its fire in 1917 made it possible to plan a new city (see picture below). It was on the Via Egnatia (as is Ohrid) which connected Rome to Istanbul and is now a footpath. Old city walls are still around.
From Thessaloniki, I went to Naxos for the summer school (with some 35 participants some of whom are shown below). Naxos continues to be a wonderful place: lots of history, swimming, and hiking. Some highlights follow below.
**Moni Chrisostomou** overlooks the chora of Naxos; two nuns remain in the monastery, which has a most beautiful church. To its left in the picture is the tiny cave chapel of Theologaki.

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<th>Theologaki and Moni Chrisostomou</th>
<th>Inside Moni Chrisostomou</th>
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In addition to the Orthodox Cathedral from the 1780s (not shown), there is another large Agios Nikodimos with elaborate frescoes. As you can see from the picture on the right, the lowered flag indicates the human loss caused by the fires close to Athens. These claimed over a 100 (?) lives and seem to have been set.
Dionysus, the Greek God of merriment and wine, was revered in various places as the protector of Naxos, e.g. in Iria, the valley of Livadi. The cult goes back to the 14th Century BCE and flourished till the Roman period. The below reconstruction is of the temple from 580 BCE.

Iria, **Dionysus Sanctuary**

Two years ago, I had seen the 10 meter-long **Kourosof Apollo**. This year, I saw **two more kouroi** from the early 6th century BCE close to Melanes, the kouro of Flerio and the one of Faranghi. The kouroi were transported in unfinished states from the marble quarries to their destinations but these were abandoned after they had broken on their way. Marble is economically still important on the island and is carefully quarried (i.e. they no longer use explosives) as well as **emery**, a granular rock used to make sand paper, for pavements, and for grinding rice.
I had visited the 6th Century Panagia Drosiani before but it remains a very interesting site with early frescos and a plentiful cool (hence `drossia') waters.

Both Chalki and Filoti are tourisy places from where lots of hikes start and where relatively regular buses drop you off. Chalki has a kitron distillery and old churches in the vicinity and, like Filoti, many places to eat. The Hagias Georgios Diasoritis is Byzantine from the 10th century, allegedly built on a site with a temple to Zeus. Two years ago, it wasn’t yet accessible!
Hagias Georgios Diasoritis, near Chalki, restored

Church of Taxiarches, at Monoitsia

Filoti

Oldest olive tree, possibly in Greece. Close to Ayios Ioannis Theologos
One day, four of us took the bus to Filoti and then walked to the Fotodotis Monastery and to Aperathos. There is a hiking trail system and our trip involved routes 2 and 3 (some info is available [here](#)). As we started our walk, a woman was about to open the church and gestured us to come see it. While in this church, a storm came in which followed us most of the day, the first in months! We also encountered lots of figs, fruit trees, old oaks, donkeys, sheep and goats.

Fotodotis Monastery is built in a special place. Two stories high with no monks remaining but connected to important festivals, surrounded by old oaks and orchards, it has fantastic views of the Mediterranean and Donoussa Island.
Looking back to Filoti and with three rain/thunder storms to go

Across the saddle towards Aperathos

Fotodoti from a distance, sea in the background

Inside Fotodoti

Its gate with a plane tree in the courtyard

The path out of Filoti

Into Aperathos
In Aperathos, we had dinner and walked the hilly streets of the town. The bus back took about an hour and the next day I left for Thessaloniki and then to Ohrid in Macedonia.

**Macedonia** is quite mountainous and earthquake prone. The map below shows some of the places I went to.

Macedonia (Република Македонија) was a new country for me. It borders the Greek province of Μακεδονία and these names have led to much dispute. As I write this, the Macedonian side will hold a referendum at the end of September to decide on a new name, *Republic of North Macedonia*. It is hoped this change will appease the Greeks who will then no longer stop attempts for Macedonia to join NATO and the EU. As I mentioned, this is not uncontroversial.
Macedonian is a South Slavic language which, together with Greek (and Albanian, Bulgarian, Rumanian, etc), forms part of the Balkan Sprachbund. These languages share linguistic features through intense language contact. The Balkans are certainly a melting pot of languages, cultures, and religions. I knew this from a theoretical but not a practical point of view.

I visited friends who are steeped in the ancient and current history and culture of the Balkans so I saw and learned a lot. With them, I went to Ohrid, Struga, Navrovo, and Skopje. Most recently, Macedonia was part of the Republic of Yugoslavia to become its own republic in 1991. Many ethnicities, Turkish, Albanian, Greek, Bulgarian, Roma, and Macedonian, have managed to find common ground in the idea of Macedonia.

The city of Ohrid retains an old feel to it. Human settlements in this region go back to prehistoric times. The city is situated on the eastern side of Lake Ohrid, which forms a border between Albania and Macedonia in the SW. It has cobbled streets, old buildings, a 10th century fortress, churches and mosques, and newer high rises.

St Sofia Church was built in the early 11th century on the remains of an even earlier basilica. Many of its early frescoes didn’t survive its temporary conversion to a mosque in the 15th century. Currently, it has a new tile floors and an iconostasis (shown on the image), controversial to many.
St. Kliment Church, of which I took no pictures, has amazingly vivid frescoes by Mihail and Eutihije from the 13th and 14th centuries. They were restored after WW II. Kliment, who like Naum and Kiril and Metodij was a 9th century Christian priest, taught scripture and promoted writing and reading in Slavic (through Glagolitic and Cyrillic) around Ohrid. All four of them have frequent statues, churches, roads, etc. named after them. Below are some other pictures from Ohrid.

A 1000 (?) year old plane tree (platanus)

in the middle of Ohrid

Ohrid high school

Ohrid's older layers
Ohrid is very popular with Dutch tourists. One of the reasons is apparently the Dutch author A den Doolaard, who wrote about Macedonia and has a museum and statue dedicated to him. In the 1930s, he traveled all over Europe writing about the rising of fascism.

Struga is a town on Lake Ohrid and the river Drim. I really liked its old houses that are less polished than in Ohrid. The city is closer to the Albanian border and therefore has more Albanians. It has a wonderful National Museum of Natural Science, started by a Russian doctor in the 1920s.

From Lake Ohrid, we traveled north along the river Drim, which is dammed up to form Globočica Lake and Debar Lake. Some cities on our way with significant Albanian and Turkish populations were Vraništa, Velešta, and Debar. From Debar on, we entered the Mavrovo National Park. The entire trip from Struga to roughly Tetova went through really remote areas. It would be wonderful to hike here!
Along the Drim River/Dam complex, looking south

Past Dibar, spa area

Navrovo National Park
After this stunning nature, it was – always is for me – a shock to get to the city, i.e. the capital Skopje. A major event that is still referred to a lot is the earthquake of 1963. Various governments have deemed it necessary to rebuild Skopje in even grander shapes with even more statues and bridges (tearing down older buildings).

This is a city that has many layers of the present and past centuries. Built along the river Vardar, its center has a governmental south side and a ‘Turkish’ north side although now some museums, ministries, and Symphony are also on the north side. Many things are ugly here, Mother Teresa’s Memorial House and the three pirate ships are among them.
Mother Teresa’s Memorial House

One of three concrete ships that constrict the flow of the river

Bridge of Civilizations

Bridge of Arts, all men ...

A smart parking garage!

Old railroad station, with clock left to time of the earthquake
There are thousands of statues in Skopje, many on horses and many inspired by Greek (!) mythology. The one of Misirkov on the right is a small one pushed to the side. Perhaps it will disappear? Misirkov had in fact argued that Macedonia(n) was separate from other Balkan languages and identities but then seems to have changed his views. I haven’t read him myself so can’t judge, but it is quite complex with so many statues to decide on for size and place! He should probably stay though.

Krste Petkov Misirkov, pushed aside

The Turkish part is fun, with lots of older streets, stores (e.g. selling gold and wedding dresses), eateries, and mosques.

The trip was wonderful. I loved the teaching/swimming/hiking in Greece and feel at home in Naxos. Macedonia was really new and so much more remote in many ways and I loved (re)connecting with my friends there. I conclude with a few more pictures.
Street art in Greece and Macedonia

Thessaloniki

Ohrid

Struga