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Friday, June 1:

I'm incredibly happy to be back in Greece; it's difficult to say just how much I've missed it here. It's just a little bit weird. Here I am in the same city as a year ago (and even in the same room), but so many things are different. I guess it must be me, but I feel the same. I remember how out of place I felt here last year. I remember how weird it was to land and try to reconcile this place with the land I'd been reading about for years. As I sat in this very room one year ago, a thunderstorm passed through Thessaloniki. My first night in Greece, and already I'd upset the local weather patterns. For some reason, my first thought was that Zeus was upset and wanted me to get out of this place. How funny it seems in retrospect. Last night, on the other hand, it felt like I was coming home. Not a logical feeling towards a place I've spent precisely four days of my life, but perhaps more logical than assuming Zeus was out to get me.

It reminds me of a quote by my favorite mole, Tryfan of Duncton Wood: "Why does a mole have to travel so far just to find himself in the same place?" I've traveled so far just to find myself back here. The theme this year seems particularly appropriate for me, since I'm coming back to the same place but with a different outlook.

Enough deep thoughts for now. I shall go to greet the group.

I have now done things with my day, and oh what a day. I met the group and we walked around Thessaloniki. We wandered around for a bit and then Niki talked about the history of Jews in

Thessaloniki. We went to the Jewish Museum, and this time I think we spent a little more time there. Still very interesting. Alice talked about Ottoman architecture, and Sophie presented on the Hagia Sophia (my site from last year!). Last year, we got to the Hagia Sophia as it was closing and didn't get to spend much time there; this year, we got to see a lot more. [There was a butt...]

Such a beautiful church.

We had lunch on the street. David and I got tyropites and ate them with Joe, Nikitas, and Sophie. Afterwards I presented on the Arch of Galerius and Rotunda. Even though I researched it, I kind of forgot how spectacular the Rotunda is. Probably one of the coolest things in the city. The mosaics are spectacular, and I love that the minaret remains.

We walked down to the White Tower and Alice talked about it. Still didn't go inside...whatever. A group of us then walked along the water, down to the umbrellas. I dipped my feet in the water and deep chilled for a few hours—much needed. Afterwards we had dinner, joined by Xenophon and his wife, Nicoletta, and it was delicious as usual. Wow, I missed Greek food. They also joined me, David, Nikitas, Joe, and me at the place on top of the baths that I didn't go to last year. It's a beautiful building, and I'd love to explore it during the daytime.

Unfortunately, I'm still unable to express myself particularly well in modern Greek, but at least I'm a lot better now. I'm also a lot more confident in terms of speaking, partially because I'm just better at translating my thoughts into words now than I was a year ago. I've had a few successful conversations with shopkeepers and the like, but generally I'm more comfortable letting experienced Greek speakers talk for me.

Despite the late hour, I find myself energized. I didn't sleep at all last night, and I doubt I'll sleep much tonight. There's something about Greece that sates my need for sleep. I'm not sure if I'll be able to keep it up for the rest of the summer, but I can certainly try.

I surprise myself with the quantity and quality of my happiness. I'm at peace for the first time in a long time, after a very challenging semester. I can't wipe this stupid grin off my face.

Unadulterated joy feels so good; I'd almost forgotten what it was like. Today at the umbrellas, I sat and watched the waves roll in. I watched the snails glide across the rocks. I stared into the horizon and thought about how amazing it is that I'm here and that I am a happy human being. I can't remember the last time I had time to do that. This is what living is about.

Saturday, June 2:

This morning Sylvie and I spontaneously and simultaneously woke up at 7:30. I showered and got breakfast at the hotel, then we left in cabs to check out the city walls. We spent a good deal more time there than we did last year. There was a line of spoons across the floor of one of the rooms. Alice asked what they were for, and the answer was "monsters" (apparently actually *mostra*, the Greek word for showcase). Modern art is weird.

From the walls, we walked down from the acropolis. We saw Moni Vlatadon (where a baptism was occurring), Hosios David (the awesome guy from last year had left, but the mosaic was just as fantastic—beardless Christ is insane; also loved the icons of David the Dendrite), and Nikolaos Orfanos. The latter site was new this year. The frescoes were beautiful; I particularly

liked the depictions of Jesus and the humanoid animals, including lions. After Hagios Demetrios (where Irene gave her presentation), we broke for lunch, and I went with the same crew as yesterday. In the afternoon we met up to go on a tour of the modern art museum with Nicoletta, then we went to Acheiropoietos and Chalkeon. We went to dinner afterwards, which was nice but very loud. Later, a bunch of us pretended to be Greek youths by sitting at the water until early morning. Not convinced I'm going to sleep tonight.

Sunday, June 3:

I slept from 6-11 today, so that was fun. I just showered and packed, and then we met for lunch. Lisa talked with us about how to conduct interviews with the nuns. Nardeen talked about the fire of 1917 and the waterfront, and Malina talked about the subway construction. We left for the monastery at 4, and I am sooo looking forward to going back.

Now back at the monastery, and it feels like I never left. It took me literally five minutes of standing by the church to realize that it has indeed been an entire year since I was here.

Everything is exactly the same, and the similarities are taking me back in time to when I first felt this sense of peace.

After arriving at the monastery, Xenophon took us on a tour of the museum and library. We had coffee and dinner in rapid succession. Unfortunately, I was still full from my unbelievably overindulgent lunch, so I'm afraid I didn't fully appreciate the awesome food. It was zucchini, pasta, kolokithokeftedes, feta, salad, and cherries. It's not a fasting period right now, so cheese! Yay! As if I haven't been gorging myself on cheese for the past few days as it is...

After dinner, Niki and I talked about how empowering it is to step far outside of your comfort zone yet succeed. Then we had a group conversation with Makrina and Theologia, in which we introduced ourselves and chatted about light topics that are unrelated to heavy theological issues. I'm now preparing for bed. Perhaps tonight I'll actually sleep? Or will this amazing Mediterranean air take the place of my daily sleep quota yet again??

I'm unbelievably glad to be back here in one of the most beautiful places I've ever been and to see my nun pals again. Everyone is so welcoming—I love being in a place where they remember my name even a year later. I can't control the incessant smiles and giggles that threaten to overcome my composure. I'm just too happy.

Monday, June 4:

I got real sleep (5 hours) last night and now I'm totally energized. I showered and ate breakfast (koulouria, jams, olives, cherries). After breakfast, a group of us went to the garden. We picked lemon verbena and tied mint bundles together, and then a few people left to gather herbs on the mountain. I stuck around with a couple of other girls, drinking frappes and eating mousmela, which were just as awesome and sweet as I remembered. We talked about life for a while before heading back up to the monastery for lunch.

It was so so so nice to see Elias after all this time. I missed him very much, and his affection is always very welcome. When he spotted me walking towards him this morning, he immediately shouted my name and came towards me to give me a big hug and a kiss. I wasn't expecting him

to pick me up and swing me around, but I guess I'm not surprised that he did. He told me that my Greek was very good; it's not, but at least it's better than it was last year.

After lunch, Erene gave her presentation about manuscripts, and Sylvie talked about cycles in the visions of Hildegarde. We walked down to the cemetery for Nardeen's presentation, which was a series of questions about the nature of the Trinity and the theology of the common believer. After Nardeen's talk, we had coffee and went for a walk to Lakos. The area is just as beautiful as I remember it, and we had a lovely time.

When we got back, we had dinner and talked with the nuns. I am very tired and will go to bed now instead of putting the requisite effort into describing my day. I fear that my entries from this point forward will be less descriptive and introspective, as my days will get busier and my mind will be unchained from the burden of technology. The flowery language will probably wane as well.

Tuesday, June 5:

Completely back to real sleep now. I set my alarm for 6:30 am and then slept until 8:45. Some people went to the garden and apparently Elias asked after me. I felt bad about missing my daily garden session, so I headed down with Nikitas after breakfast. I planted flowers, pruned some other flowers, and picked lavender at the garden. After our frappe break, we went to a nearby field to pick St. John's Wort. On the way, I was up front with Elias and we had a conversation in Greek—my first real conversation in Greece ever. I told him about where I was from and what

my house is like, and he told me about what Pachomia does to prepare the St. John's Wort for use in the apothecary.

We got back to the monastery a little late for Alice's presentation about refugees, but we made it. While Alice was presenting, Elias brought me a cup of water for the flowers that he'd given me for the abbess. I still haven't given them to her and I'm a little nervous to at this point. We got lunch, and then after lunch we had Sophie's and Niki's presentations.

After the presentations, Xenophon and I started going over the Christophoros text, but we didn't finish because it was time to leave for Serres! We started at the acropolis again, and then walked down to the city itself. We were followed by a dog, whom we named Bouteri. This time, we actually got to go inside the little Prodromos in Serres, which was really cool; Xenophon casually had the key. We also went to Agios Giorgos and wandered around Serres for a bit. Nikitas, David, Joe, Sophie, Erene, and I went to a bar before dinner, and Sophie and I purchased some throat drops at a local pharmacy where the pharmacist spoke only Greek. Very exciting. At dinner, Alice and I poured out our hearts to one another. It was a late night back to the monastery, and I am very tired.

Wednesday, June 6:

After breakfast this morning I played messenger for a bit, carried stuff, made loukoumi, etc. Most importantly, I finished going over the text with Xenophon. We were about to go for a walk to see all of the sites mentioned, but just then Niko arrived and Fonta wanted to talk with his old friend.

The full-day Niko tour of the church started at 10:45 and went until lunch at 2:00. We learned a lot, but I'm absolutely exhausted. After lunch I took a nap, and then we walked up the bell tower to wind the clock at 3:50. I forgot how beautiful it is up there, even though I have a ton of photos from last year. Afterwards, we went into the tower and went for a walk down to the bridge and toured the ossuary. I put Malina's archaeological advice to good use. Much hilarity ensued.

Thursday, June 7:

Today we went for our full day out of the monastery. After an early start and a sink shower, we boarded the bus (medium size) and set off on our way. We stopped for bougatsa and coffee and then toured Philippi. An incident occurred there, because Niko was pointing out and even *explaining* some archaeological features, which is strictly against the site's rules. A man with a stick blew his whistle and started yelling at Niko that he needed to *stop explaining things*. Niko responded in his characteristically mild-mannered way, but Joe sassed the guard a bit. We walked away and Niko stopped explaining things, but Xenophon went back to inform the man of who Niko was; the guard was embarrassed and apologetic afterwards, but I thought the whole affair was pretty hilarious. Otherwise, Philippi was awesome!

After Philippi, we went to the site where Lydia (the first Christian) was baptized. We went into the water, so now my legs are holy. Next, we went to Kavala, where I got some amazing and cheap masticha ice cream. While there, we saw a mosque that had been converted into a church (crazy!), and a few of us went for a walk up to the castle. We had a feast for lunch and then went

swimming at the beach. Late this afternoon, we went back to the monastery and ate dinner. Yet another exhausting day.

Friday, June 8:

Today was dominated by synaxis and synaxis-related preparations, so there isn't a lot to report. After breakfast, I presented on the broad topic of water and Malina presented on death rituals. Afterwards, we worked on synaxis stuff for pretty much the entire afternoon (with breaks for lunch and coffee, of course). After dinner, Nikitas quickly taught us a Greek dance. Synaxis followed swiftly thereafter. It was (predictably) very nice, with nutella loukoumades. The nuns' video was very well done, and it turns out that Sophie has the voice of an angel. Once again, I helped Makrina set up the projector, which was fun and surreal. I'm very tired—it was a long and exhausting day with very few breaks. I'm almost tired of writing that at this point.

Saturday, June 9:

The monastery was very busy this morning, because there was a memorial service in the church. I did my best to listen to the service while avoiding the hoards of people visiting the monastery. After breakfast, we helped in the kitchen because there were so many busloads of visitors, all of whom expected refreshments! Then we got a while to shop in the bookstore; I got more tea and a book, but I would've gotten more if I didn't have to carry it around for the next 9 weeks as well. It's so weird to know that I won't be in the US at all this summer.

After shopping, Lisa talked about her Cyprus fieldwork, which was interesting but took a long time—until lunch. In the afternoon we went for a walk in the environs of the monastery (the

same walk we did in the early morning last year). The little Agia Paraskevi church now has a huge, glorious bridge in front of it. It always seems so strange to have things change at the monastery, because so many things stay the same. We also visited the waterfall, which was way more spectacular than I remembered it being. It was so nice to be able to show the others the incredible landforms that karst can create!

In the evening, we returned to Serres for our dinner with the gardeners. Attempting to speak in Greek was quite a lot of fun, even if I wasn't always successful. We got another gigantic crepe with ice cream, which was simply amazing! A predictably exhausting but (more importantly) fun-filled night!

Sunday, June 10:

I can't believe this was my last day at the monastery! It feels like home again.

I woke up ridiculously early to pack but ended up reading for a while. Then I headed downstairs to listen to the service, but I ran into Nardeen and we spontaneously had a heart to heart. A nun shushed us so we headed to the upper benches. Eventually we ran into Sylvie, and all three of us were very hungry for our late breakfast this morning. To distract us from the hunger, I took them on a walk to the waterfall we visited yesterday, where we sat in silent contemplation for about 15 minutes. By then, it was almost breakfast time, so we headed back to fill our bellies (which are now accustomed to being filled at regular intervals and cannot handle this whole late breakfast thing).

After breakfast, we said goodbye to the nuns. It was very emotional, and I finally felt the same attachment to the place and the people that I'd felt over the past year. It was also funny, because Sophie had a nosebleed mid-hug. As with all things, the nuns were very effective at dealing with the bloody nose.

We rounded up our supplies and loaded them into Elias's truck. I sat up front with him and told him about my upcoming adventures in Greece for the rest of the summer. Then we got on our bus and went on our way. I spent most of the bus ride to Thessaloniki already missing the nuns, the monastery, and the new friends I've made. Luckily, I don't have to say goodbye to all of the latter just yet. A lot of us parted ways in Thessaloniki, but a few of us are staying in the city for the next few days. I love this city so much, and I'm looking forward to spending the upcoming days here with such lovely people.

I feel like I should end this part of my journal (i.e., the part that will get published and become famous one day) with some nostalgia or melodrama or something, but I don't really think that my feelings need to be put into words at this particular moment. The monastery is with me in my heart, and I don't need much else.