CHAPTER TWO

THE GREEK TEXT:
MANUSCRIPTS, TRANSLATIONS, STELLMA CODICUM

1. The Greek Manuscripts

The text of Theophrastus’s *On First Principles* survives in eighteen Greek manuscripts dating from the ninth to the sixteenth centuries, a medieval Arabic translation from the second half of the ninth, a medieval Latin translation from the middle of the thirteenth, two further Latin translations from the Renaissance, and an Aldine *editio princeps* from 1497 which, for the purposes of the establishment of the text, has the value of a manuscript (Burnikel 29–30). It is a rich and diverse tradition, which has engaged the attention of scholars for some time, as a result of which not only the main lines but also the details of transmission have become relatively clear. In particular after the fundamental researches of Burnikel (1974) on the manuscripts of the Essay and his establishment of a stemma codicum, and the equally fundamental edition by Laks & Most (1993) which built upon and further corroborated Burnikel’s results,¹ it is now possible to proceed more expeditiously and to concentrate on all the essential evidence for the establishment of the text, eliminating what is redundant, derivative, and misunderstood.

Briefly, the situation with the Greek manuscript tradition of the Essay is as follows. It divides into two major families, one of which is represented by the single manuscript P (Paris. gr. 1853), and the other by two sub-families: manuscripts JCL (Vindobonensis phil. gr. 100, Venet. Marcianus gr. Z 211, Florent. Laurentianus 28,45) and the manuscripts in sub-family Σ (as called by Burnikel, pp. XXXVIII–XXXIX), which includes fourteen manuscripts and the Aldine edition of 1497. These manuscripts are described and discussed extensively by Fobes (pp. xxvi–xxxiii), Burnikel, and Laks & Most (pp. xl–lxxx) in a way that renders

¹ The approach and conclusions of Burnikel in this study were also favorably reviewed by N.G. Wilson in *Gnomon* 51 (1979) 59–60.
repetition nugatory; the interested reader is referred to these works. Here only the manuscripts and translations immediately relevant to the establishment of the text of the Essay in this edition will be discussed.

P  Paris, gr. 1853

One of the two most ancient (tenth century) and reliable manuscripts containing the works of Aristotle (manuscript E of the Aristotelian treatises), the Parisinus has been repeatedly studied and analyzed in the literature, most recently by Hecquet-Devienne 2000 and 2004. It “is the result of a strong ‘editorial’ project … carried out by three scribes capable of correcting transliteration errors and other types of copying errors. It is the result of a collation of models [i.e., exemplars], which were themselves carefully executed” (Hecquet-Devienne 2004, 172). It contains both the Metaphysics of Aristotle and the Essay by Theophrastus, in that order, and at the end of the Essay it has the Scholium about its authorship and nature (12a3–12b5) discussed above in Chapter 1.2. The fact that other scholia of this nature in the same manuscript transmit information also from the commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics by Asclepius, the student of Ammonius (fl. early sixth century), and that these scholia must have been present in at least one of the exemplars from which P was copied and with which it was collated, constitutes another indication among others that will be discussed later, that the text of Theophrastus’s Essay in this manuscript ultimately goes back to a Neoplatonic archetype from the period of Asclepius. This information accords well with the findings resulting from a study of the readings in P of the Essay: P has by far the largest number of correct readings in common with Ψ, the Greek exemplar of the Arabic translation, which itself also ultimately derives from the same Neoplatonic archetype but from a line independent from that of P (see the list of these readings below in this chapter, section 3). This indicates the reliability of the text in P vis à vis that in the other extant Greek manuscripts. However, P was copied from (a) minuscule manuscript(s) (e.g., at 11b5 ἀνευ, corrected as such by the scribe, was written originally ἀν ἐν) ultimately deriving from the same transliteration from uncial to minuscule writing as manuscript J.2

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2 For a discussion and the evidence see Irigoin 1997, 183–187.