The Manuscript Tradition

Some significant readings allowed for the establishment of two very broad initial groupings within the manuscript tradition. This division became apparent by the additional readings found in Book 15.22, which deals with the death of the emperor John II Komnenos, which is supported by readings found in the sample chapters. It is also supported by Edbury’s chapter divisions of the Eracles text, where he divided the manuscripts into two groupings: α and β.1 The group α manuscripts do not contain the additional readings in Book 15.22, while those in group β do. I will use these designations for the two main groups. Any attempt to include the variant readings from all of the manuscripts within a single apparatus would be unwieldy and therefore I have divided the manuscripts into smaller groups.

These divisions are consistent with the group α manuscripts, as they can be divided into those manuscripts produced in the West and those produced in the East, or derived from those (e.g., F74 and F77). The Western manuscripts will continue to be labelled group α, consisting of the following manuscripts: F01, F02, F03, F04, F05, F31, F35, F38, F41, and F52. Some readings unique to the Eastern manuscripts signal a separation between these groups. These manuscripts will be labelled group λ. The break seems to coincide with the text having been taken from the West, where the translation was made, to the East. The earliest Eastern manuscripts appear to be F50 and F73, which have been dated on art historical grounds to c.1255–60, and so are early manuscripts.2 The Eracles text must therefore have been taken to the East shortly after the Ernoul-Bernard continuation was added to the text in the 1230s.3 The translation clearly became popular and spread from France to England and to the Latin East within thirty years of the translation being produced.4 These manuscripts can also be divided into two groups based on distinctive readings. The first group, λ1, comprises F50, F57, F70, F72, F73, and F77. The λ2 group of manuscripts comprises F49, F67, F68, F69, F71, F74, and F78. This division is generally

4 Edbury, ‘Translation’, p. 86: Marsilio Zorzi copied a portion of the text from a related manuscript in the mid-1240s.
consistent. However, in Chapter, 20.11, F74, dated to 1291–95, appears to be closer to the λ1 group. While this creates a problem in dividing the manuscripts in this manner, the majority of readings imply two distinct traditions. The fact that F74 appears to exhibit elements of both groups, but only for portions of the text of both the translation and the continuations, implies that exemplars were exchanged at some point in the transmission of this manuscript. This is one of the later manuscripts from this group, with only F57 given the later date of the first quarter of the fourteenth century. Both F67 and F68 are fifteenth-century manuscripts, but because they derive directly from F69 they are not being considered in this study. Both branches of these λ manuscripts appear to have been produced in the East, Acre in particular, but some made their way to the West, where they were copied. The fact that the Eastern manuscripts from group λ have been attributed to the Acre scriptorium implies that the production of both subgroups were in proximity to each other, and it would have been easy for exemplars to be swapped, either within the scriptorium or during their hurried removal to Italy.5

The group β manuscripts are much more numerous and, like group α, are of Western origin, with the possible exception of F06. They appear to represent a manuscript tradition that had branched off from the main α group before the continuations were added. Manuscript F06, which does not contain a continuation, is dated c.1260–68 while F51, which does, is dated c.1250–75. These groups appear to have been forming simultaneously, with the β group characterised by the additional material in Book 15.22 along with the alternative reading of ‘Egypte’ in Book 12.1 and the lack of background material regarding Sidon in Book 11.14. There are no major divisions that would allow an easy grouping of the manuscripts. Instead of a direct linear relationship, these manuscripts have a more complex relationship. Group β consists of the following manuscripts: F06, F30, F32, F33, F34, F36, F37, F39, F40, F42, F43, F44, F45, F46, F47, F48, F51, F53, F54, F55, F58, F60, F61, F62, F63, F64, and F65. It was more practical, in order to produce a stemma, to break this group into three smaller subgroups, as being easier to compare the variants from a smaller number of manuscripts. The difficulty of comparing all the manuscripts is compounded by the fact that several of the later manuscripts, notably F36 and F44, contain numerous variants that have been reworked and abridged.

5 The existence of the Acre Scriptorium has been questioned by Jens Wollesen in his posthumously published Acre and Cyprus: A new Approach to Crusader Painting around 1300 (Berlin, 2013). Despite uncertainties over the exact provenance of these manuscripts they are certainly textually related.