CHAPTER TWO

THE TEXTUAL ENVIRONMENT AND THE SOURCES
OF THE LETTER OF LOVE AND CONCORD

2.1. GENERAL REMARKS ON THE CONTEXT
OF THE LETTER OF LOVE AND CONCORD

The Letter of Love and Concord is based on a very ancient Armenian tradition about the voyage of King Trdat and Catholicos Gregory the Illuminator to Rome and their alliance with the Roman Empire.¹ The description of the voyage and the alliance, as well as almost all the other parts of the Letter, can be traced to traditions well-known from renowned Armenian historians, hagiographical works, ecclesiastical, as well as secular traditions. The use of apocryphal sources is also quite conspicuous and not surprising given the abundance and importance of this material in Medieval Armenian literature.² These were all brought together in the text of TD written some time during the last decade of the twelfth century in Armenian Cilicia. The purpose of this chapter is to explore and identify the sources used by the author of TD and suggest a date for its composition. The chapter is organised according to themes elaborated upon in TD, such as its political ‘agenda,’ its ecclesiological aspects, the tradition of the voyage to Rome, etc. Before embarking on a detailed analysis of specific sources some further remarks must be made regarding the general textual environment when TD was composed, beyond the polemical/dogmatic sources analyzed in the previous chapter.

As was observed in Chapter 1, towards the end of the twelfth century a new tendency in Armenian dogmatic literature can be traced. Armenian authors refer more and more to Roman usages and to the Church of Rome in general when discussing their own traditions. The names of Emperor Constantine and Pope Sylvester, in particular,

¹ See the section on Travel to Rome pp. 50–52 for a more detailed analysis and a presentation of sources and literature on this tradition.
² For a general appraisal of this material and its importance in the Armenian culture, Stone 1996.
resurface when justifying liturgical usages particular to the Armenian Church. But besides the polemical or apologetic works discussed in the previous chapter, there were other types of texts composed in this same period that were based on the tradition of the voyage of Trdat and Gregory to Rome and their alliance with Romans. One can consider TD to be part of a cluster of such texts. These texts were in many respects similar to TD but focused more on apocalyptic-eschatological expectations. Only a small portion of them are published and known to scholars today, since interest in these types of sources has not been great in previous decades. However, the analysis of the available eleventh and twelfth century material leaves no doubt that there were heightened expectations of the End of Times from the second decade of the eleventh century and throughout the twelfth. Various historical events that occurred in this period, such as the invasions of Seljuk Turks, the loss of independence by various Armenian ruling dynasties, especially that of the Bagratids, and the arrival of the Crusades were interpreted in this light. Moreover, since an older prophecy ascribed to St. Sahak (and a motif taken up also in the prophetic section of the Life of Nersēs) stated that before the End of Times the Armenian Kingship would be renewed, Levon’s coronation could not but be associated with the eschaton as well. From among apocalyptic texts either written or re-edited during the Cilician period which were known to the author of TD the following must be mentioned: the Prophecies of Agat’on (henceforth: PA), the Sermo de Antichristo (hence-

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3 Ample discussion on this issue, including analysis of flourishing legendary literature on the subject can be found in Hovhannisyan 1957, 33–90. On the wide-spread emergence of apocryphal-eschatological texts in this period, see also Sargisean 1898. On the reasons behind the growing interest in the Last things and the reflection of a certain ‘apocalyptic mentality’ expressed in various sources from the eleventh and twelfth century, cfr Pogossian 2008.

4 Pogossian 2008. Speculations that Levon was the ‘Last Armenian King’ were not limited to the apocalyptic genre, but a sermon pronounced by the renowned theological Vardan Aygek’i clearly alluded to Levon I as the Last Armenian King. Cfr La Porta 2008.

5 The text of this prophecy [henceforth PA] was published only partially; Awger 1913. The problems of this edition are discussed in Pogossian 2008. Here two very different recensions are juxtaposed to each other, obfuscating the fact that some information is found only in one recension and not in all text-types of PA. This is important when analyzing the sources of TD since it seems that its author knew one of the recensions which has a particular paragraph—a historical preamble—absent in the other two recensions. There are more than fifty mss with the text of PA, including numerous manuscripts at the Matenadaran in Yerevan, such as Mss. 517, 527, 613, 641, 1382, 1999 etc. Other extant mss are preserved in other libraries as well. It is my hope to prepare a critical edition of PA in the near future.

6 SA 1976.