

**1904****Letter from Rostom [Stepan Zorian] to Samson  
[Tadeosian]****Citation:**

"Letter from Rostom [Stepan Zorian] to Samson [Tadeosian]", 1904, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Part B, Folder 15, Document 6, Armenian Revolutionary Federation Archives, Watertown, Massachusetts. Also available in Rostom Namakani: Mahvan Uts'unameakin Art'iv [Rostom Letters: On the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of his death] (Beirut: Hamazkayin Vahe Set'ian Press, 1999), 362-65. Contributed, translated, and annotated by Hourii Berberian.  
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/301004>

**Summary:**

An undated letter, probably produced in 1904 or 1905, handwritten in Eastern Armenian by Rostom, a co-founder of the the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), and addressed to Samson (Tadeosian), an ARF activist in Salmas in Iran's Azerbaijan Province and participant in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution.

**Original Language:**

Eastern Armenian

**Contents:**

Translation - English

Date: undated

Dear Samson,

We received the information you sent from Sham.<sup>[1]</sup>

In no way may the great fault of our bodies at the Pers[ian] border be forgiven; how can care not be taken concerning provisions? It is always an offense not to keep a certain amount of extra stock. You just have one habit, every year or two, making general demands on the Bureaus and then being consoled by expressing grumblings. . . What comes out of that? Throughout the years, we have insisted on decentralization so that local forces, by trusting themselves, strengthen, progress, take on responsible actions, and you again [with] Bureau<sup>[2]</sup>, Bureau!. . .<sup>[3]</sup>

They would have written from Tabriz about the proposal to purchase a large quantity of weapons.<sup>[4]</sup> Think well and promptly write the response; just keep the issue a secret.

Beside 3,000 fr[ancs] yesterday we transferred also 5,000 fr[ancs]. We also wrote to Russia to satisfy Sham's current actions until the formation of a fundamental plan.<sup>[5]</sup>

The purpose of my letter is different. I want to write a few things about explosive elements, for which there will be a great need soon. Your sites are suitable for all kinds of experiments. We always place our hope on dynamite, but that is difficult to find. It is possible to use a few compounds, which, although they do not have the force of a real dynamite, are strong enough, which you will see from the experiments. Today, I write about a couple of them. Gradually, I will also communicate about others. The essential part of all these compounds is potassium chlorate (chlorate de potasse)<sup>[6]</sup> (with which they infuse the throat). It is necessary to get a hold of it in great quantity, a few *put'*.<sup>[7]</sup> If it cannot be found in Persia in great quantity, telegram or write, we will send it immediately; you may also have it brought from Russia. They sell it at every depot, and the transport is entirely safe.

That salt combined with a series of other elements, produces good explosives. Let me give a few examples.

- 1) Potassium chlorate 75 parts  
sugar 25 parts
- 2) Potassium chlorate 87 parts  
coal powder 13 parts
- 3) Potassium chlorate 82 parts  
sulfur 9 parts  
coal powder 9 parts

For the present, these three compounds. They must be prepared in the following way. The potassium chlorate must be taken, ground well in the mortar so that it turns entirely into a thin powder. Then, pulverize the sugar or the coal in the same way (but separately). Mix the designated amount with great caution; it may explode immediately, but it must be mixed well. The mixture must be kept in a safe place because it may explode from the blow and the fire. For that reason, it is better to keep the powders separate and mix them only at the time of execution. With that compound, you may fill a bomb and explode it for practice. And if there is no bomb, bring it into a vessel, although in a small amount, then insert a capsule with a wick in it and run. The capsule must not be placed too deep; the wick must not touch our compound before exploding the capsule; otherwise, it will catch fire and burn, and the force of the explosion will weaken. If you don't have a capsule, take an ordinary piston (only the large one will do), make a tube from paper, and reinforce the piston around the tube's end; pass the wick through the tube until it reaches the piston. Place the paper tube in the vessel in such a way that the piston barely penetrates the mixture. Light the wick and run.

Bring a youth from Baku who has learned how to cast a bomb.

Conduct experiments on all three of these, get familiar; we will write about the others. With these, it is possible to make underground mines, destroy buildings, etc. . . . Of course, dynamite has a lot of advantages in preserving, transporting, in terms of might, but the convenience of these is that by having potassium chlorate, it is possible to prepare at every moment, in every place because sulfur, sugar, coal may be found everywhere. Let me add this as well: for the coal, the soft one must be selected (willow, for example, and not oak), and sulfur in pieces.

For now, this much, I await your experiments.

R[ostom]

[1] Sham refers to one of the eastern Ottoman provinces, Van/Vasburagan, with a majority Armenian population at the turn of the twentieth century.

[2] The Bureau is ARF's highest-ranking body. At the time, two bureaus existed: the Western Bureau (headquartered in Geneva) and the Eastern Bureau (headquartered in Tiflis/Tbilisi). Their jurisdiction corresponded roughly to the historical division of eastern and western Armenian populations in the Romanov Empire and Qajar Empire (Eastern Bureau) and the Ottoman Empire, Europe, and North America (Western Bureau).

[3] In this paragraph, the plural form of the second person, you, is used.

[4] Tabriz was a critical node in the network of arms transfer.

[5] The reference to actions in Van is likely to ARF's plans of an uprising in the Van and Sasun regions in 1905, the same year of the party's failed assassination attempt on Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II (r. 1876-1909).

[6] Potassium chlorate was used to treat sore throats.

[7] The Russian пуд/pud, equivalent to around 16.38 kilograms (36.11 pounds), was in use until its official abolition in 1924.