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Wine counterfeiting in Russia: continuation

Sergei V. Jargin

Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Moscow, Russian Federation

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Correspondence: Sergei V. Jargin, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, 117198 Moscow, Russian Federation. E-mail: sjargin@mail.ru

Previously we reported with illustrations about wines and other beverages of foreign denominations, sold in Russia, which tasted differently from their analogues in other countries.¹⁻³ The following data have been found in the literature: in the late 1990s, ~60% of legally sold alcoholic beverages contained non-beverage (technical) alcohol.⁴ In 2007 about a half of vodka and other alcoholic beverages was falsified.⁵ Numerous lethal intoxications after the intake of moderate doses were reported, while the blood ethanol concentration was relatively low.³⁻⁷

The self-price of wine is relatively high. Manufacturing of wine (in the true sense of the word) has been reduced drastically since the Anti-Alcohol Campaign (1985-1989). As reported in 2018, Krasnodar Krai used ~50% of vineyards compared to 1985, Dagestan – 30%, Rostov Province – 25%.⁸ According to the same article, 55% of wine sold in shops was falsified at that time. Similar figures are published in a monograph.⁹ Prefabricated concentrates, flavoring agents, technical ethanol, sugar or glucose-fructose syrup is broadly used.⁸ Both domestic and foreign wines have been falsified and corresponding labels used. Insufficiency of control measures is acknowledged in the monograph dated 2016, where it is estimated that 30% of legally sold wine is falsified.¹⁰ Based on experience, the author believes that this percentage is an underestimation. Cognac is habitually falsified as well, which is evident if compared with originals. Reportedly, 27% of all alco-

holic beverages were counterfeited in 2021.¹¹ The current situation is difficult to evaluate due to unavailability or questionable reliability of published data. The criticism tends to be avoided in today's literature. According to the above-cited monograph, detection of wine falsification on the basis of existing methodical approaches and regulations is often impossible or may lead to incorrect conclusions. If anything, organoleptic methods (personal palate) are predominantly used by controlling authorities. The same monograph recommended the use of chromatographic methods.¹⁰

The decline of vineyards went along with mass production of falsified wine and other beverages, which has been recognized by the literature and noticed by consumers with Soviet-time experience. The lucky exclusion has been the GUM (Upper Trading Rows) near the Red Square in Moscow, where products and beverages have been of better quality than in other shops. In particular, the Gastronom No. 1 within the GUM has one of the best wine collections in Moscow.¹ Elsewhere, a product with the same foreign or domestic label may taste differently. On March 07, 2026, a bottle of Tawny Port, produced according to the label “from carefully hand-picked grapes of the Douro Valley [sic]”, has been purchased in the above-mentioned shop. The color was not exactly tawny but somewhat reddish (Figure 1). The taste, flavor and color was surprisingly similar to the ‘Chateau Cotes de Saint Daniel



Figure 1. Tawny Port, reddish color.



Figure 2. Porto Infantado Tawny.

Forte' discussed in the preceding article¹ and Portwein Red Livadia, all of them sold at the same shop. Porto Infantado Tawny (Figure 2) was certainly better.

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