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Shustov's cognac and wine production seized to exist after the revolution. Petitions of surviving brothers of Nikolai Shustov remained unanswered. Their assets in Armenia, and elsewhere, were nationalized. So what happened next?

Условие продажи

1. Цена приобретения (привести в рублях и копейках по списку Ц.С.О.С.Р.)
2. При приобретении товара указать, какие из комплектующих использовались в изделии.
3. На какой срок.
4. Откуда полученный товар и как долго он находился в эксплуатации.
5. Наименование изделия (с указанием количества комплектующих).

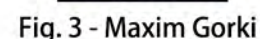
ОТВЕТСТВЕННЫЙ

Москва — г.а., 1-го Мая № 14 (наименование, наименование) — Москва № 40.

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One of the gems of my collection is a 1927 price list of the Wine & Cognac Trust Ararat (fig. 1) which regulated prices on the territory of the Transcaucasia Soviet Socialist Republic. It also states that the Trust had departments in Moscow (21 1st of May St., previously Myasnitskaya, and in Leningrad on 40 Makhovaya St.). At the time cognac produced at the Ararat Trust factory in Yerevan was divided into the following categories fig. 2 left column):

- *** (three stars) – 1 ruble 80 kopeks for a 1 bottle;
- **** (four stars) – 2 rubles 10 kopeks for a 1 bottle or 1.15 for half a bottle;
- Fine Champaign – 2 rubles 30 kopeks for a 1 bottle or 1.25 for half a bottle;
- Fine Champaign old – 2 rubles 90 kopeks for a 1 bottle or 1.55 for half a bottle;
- Fine Champaign better – 3 rubles 10 kopeks for a 1 bottle or 1.65 for half a bottle; and
- Fine Champaign selected – 3 rubles 60 kopeks for a 1 bottle or 1.90 for half a bottle.



The right column of the inlay showed prices for the wines also produced by the Trust; as we are referring to only cognac production that part is out of the scope of this article.

In 1928 Maxim Gorki (fig. 3), the revolution singer and petrel, associate of Lenin and Stalin, number one writer of the soviet period visited the Armenian land. During his stay in Yerevan he was offered a tour of the Ararat wine factory, in the basement of which the admired guest abundantly tasted strong content of the barrels. They say that he pronounced his well-known words in this very place, *Maybe it's easier to get on Ararat mountain, than from the basement of Ararat.*



Fig. 4 - Margar Sedakian



Fig. 5 - Avetik Isahakian



Fig. 6 - Dvin

New period in the cognac production in Armenia began in 1927 when Margar Sedrakian (fig. 4) started working at the Ararat wine factory. Born in 1907 in Kharakonis Village, Van vilayet, Osman Empire, he was raised in an orphanage after his parents were massacred during the genocide. He did not know his last name, only his first and father's name, Sedrak, so he was given last name derived from this, Sedrakian. While working at the factory M. Sedrakian graduated from the Yerevan Agricultural Institute in 1930.

His first cognac Margar Sedrakian created in 1937. He wanted to name it *Armenia*, but famous Armenian poet and writer Avetik Isahakian (fig. 5) talked him out of it; scary times of mass repression, executions and exiles were behind the doors. To avoid being charged with nationalism Sedrakian named the cognac *Jubilee*. He created his *Armenia* later, in 1940.



Fig. 7 Papanin



Fig. 7a

Many legends are told about Margar Sedrakian. Anastas Mikoyan, a prominent Soviet political figure, called him *A Man Who Cheated Stalin*. The story goes that during the WWII all USSR factories producing alcohol were considered to be of military importance as they were delivering spirits to the soldiers. Officers, in their turn, were supplied with cognac spirits. Stalin decreed that all spirits were to be shipped to the army, leaving at the factories only ready-made cognac (which was, of course, of much lower proof). Margar Sedrakian, being a member of the Central Tasting Committee, had trusty relationship with another

member, Comrade Snegovskaya. They made a plan to print 1,000 labels of non-existent cognac *Artashat* and approve it backdating it to March of 1941. Thus, the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic was able to preserve all its reserves of cognac spirit.

Another legend is related to creating *Dvin* cognac (fig. 6). In 1937 Papanin was about to embark on an expedition to the North Pole (fig. 7 & 7a). All Soviet republics took part in supplying the team with various goods and products. Belarusians provided warm clothes, Ukrainians salo (fat or pig lard), Armenians – cognac. There was an article printed in *Pravda* newspaper displaying Papanin team photograph next to a barrel of cognac and their letter where they complaint that the 42 proof cognac was not keeping them warm enough. A question was raised before cognac producers, was it possible to create higher proof cognacs? And Margar Sedrakian brilliantly answered the challenge by creating his 50 proof *Dvin* cognac.

Although working hard and having friends in the higher echelons of the Soviet government he was not exempt from false accusations and repression. In 1946 he was arrested at the pretense that he had Yeghishe Charents (who was expected as a public enemy and died in prison hospital – fig. 8) works in his library. The fact that Sedrakian was ordered to mine the factory which he refused returning explosives to the KGB also played role in his arrest. He was ordered to leave to exile to Siberia, but his friend Anastas Mikoyan falsified marching documents and sent him to Ukraine instead to give a push to the cognac factory. There Sedrakian created two brands, *Odessa* (1948) and *Ukraine* (1949).

He would probably remain in Odessa for the rest of his life, but the fate decided differently – he returned to Yerevan in few years due to Winston Churchill's interference, per another controversial legend. The fact that Churchill tasted the Armenian *Dvin* cognac is undeniable, but whether it happened at the Tehran (fig. 9) or Yalta Conference (fig. 10) of the *Big Three* is debatable. It is said that Churchill appreciated the drink and Stalin ordered quarterly delivery of 10 boxes 20 bottles each to him. While Sedrakian was in exile in Odessa the reserves of the Dvin blend were depleted and the current personal of the factory did not know the recipe to create new. In the late 40-is (per other sources, in 1951) Churchill noticed that the taste of the drink has changed and asked his staff to relate this to Stalin (other



Fig. 8 - Y. Charents

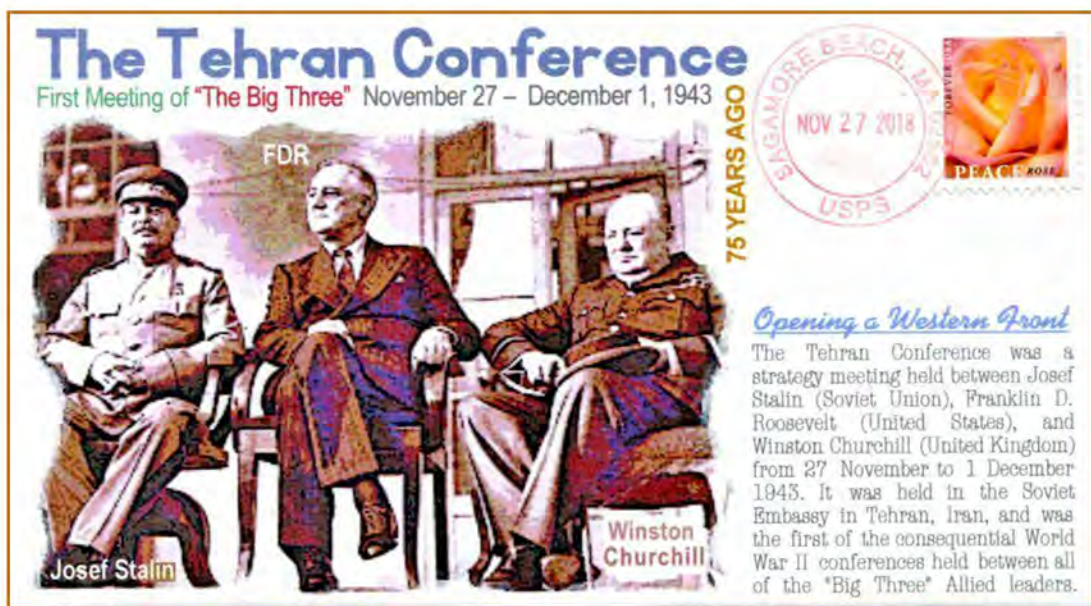


Fig.9 Tehran Conference

sources say he wrote him a letter which is not supported by any archive documents). Stalin ordered an investigation and was told that Sedrakian was exiled to Siberia, but could not be found anywhere there. During a meeting with Stalin Mikoyan told him that Sedrakian was arrested based on a ridiculous charge, and was currently in Odessa. Stalin demanded his return to Yerevan. What Margar Sedrakian did was unheard of – he would agree only on a condition that his arrest record was squashed and his years in Odessa were counted as a business trip. The condition was honored and Sedrakian returned to Yerevan to continue working on the creation of new brands of the Armenian cognac. He was also awarded Hero of Socialist Labor (fig. 11) in 1971. Here is the list of all brands created by the Master (fig. 12):

- 1937 – Jubilee (Hobelyanakan – 43 proof, aged over 10 years)
- 1939 – Selected (Entir – 40 proof, aged 7 years)
- 1940 – Armenia (45 proof, aged 10 years)
- 1941 – Artashat (see above, never created)
- 1942 – Dvin (50 proof, aged 10 years)
- 1947 – Yerevan (57 proof, aged 10 years)
- 1948 – Odessa
- 1949 – Ukraine
- 1955 – Festive (Tonakan – 42 proof, aged over 15 years)
- 1957 – 40-year old (40 proof)
- 1967 – Akhtamar (40 proof, aged 10 years)
- 1967 – 50-year old (40 proof)
- 1977 – Vaspurakan (created based on his recipe posthumously – 40 proof, aged 15 years)



After his death in 1973 his legacy was immortalized by yet another memento – monument to the Master was erected on the territory of the Ararat Cognac Factory (fig. 13). His 105th Anniversary of birth was widely celebrated in Yerevan, and the invitation to the festivities depicted a bottle of *Dvin* cognac (fig. 14 & 14a).

Towards the end of 1940-is the demand for the production has increased as the cognac became very popular in the USSR. The territory of the old factories and workshops became inadequate for the effective operation, and in 1953 cognac and distillation combined workshops moved to a specially designed for cognac production factory, thus creating Yerevan Cognac Factory. The building was constructed on a hill where Sardar's Palace was situated before revolution (fig. 15). The territory of the new factory occupied 8 hectares in the center of Yerevan. The new building is presented on 1982 postal stationary (fig. 16), architect – Hovhannes Margarian (fig. 17 – postal card mailed intercity Yerevan).

When the construction of the Government Building #2 was completed (around 1953) Ararat Trust moved into that building (architect H. Margarian, with M. Grigorian S. Safarian). Fig. 18 shows that building on a postcard mailed in circa 1960 from Yerevan to France with correct international airmail postage of 1r 60kop.



Fig. 11 - Hero of Socialist Labor Medal

We also know that Yerevan Cognac Factory used to have its envelope for advertising and business matter. All my efforts to find one issued or mailed during the Soviet times were in vain. In 2003, when a cognac-grape stamp was issued by Armenia, several such covers appeared on the market in Armenia. Probably, somebody had few envelopes from that old times, and used them to create philatelic items. I was able to obtain one (fig.19 & 19a) which was mailed intercity Yerevan with registration, although the postage was substantially overpaid (300 dram instead of required 85 dram for a registered postcard).



Fig. 12 - Margar Sedakian List of Cognac Brands



Fig.13. - Margar Sedakian Monument



Fig. 14 - Invitation Cover



Fig. 15 - Sardar's Palace near Erivan

During Soviet period Armenian winemakers were at the pick of fame. In 1940-1985 cognac production increased 17-fold. Almost every brand produced at Yerevan Cognac Factory received high level international awards at regular and blind tastings.

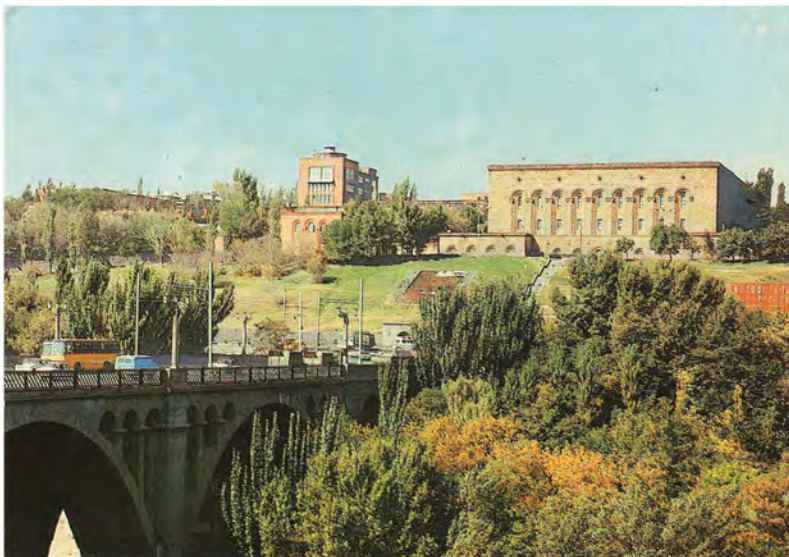
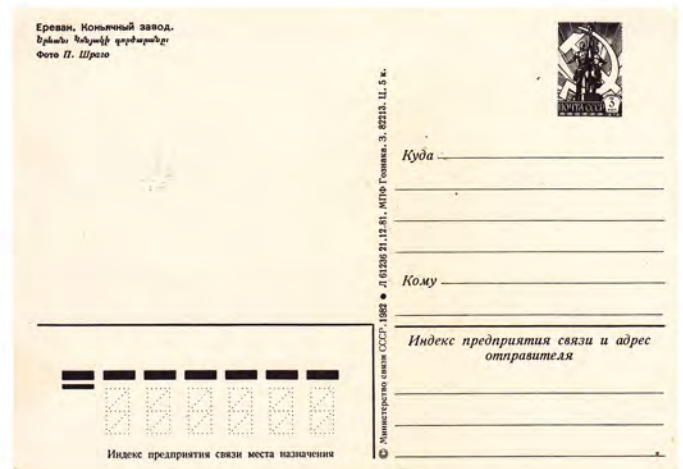


Fig. 16 - Ararat Cognac factory Building



Back of Fig. 16 postcard

The other secret of the taste is the climate. Long term observations in the Ararat valley (fig. 20) located at 700 m above sea level have shown that the valley enjoys So what makes Armenian cognac distinct from cognac produced in other countries? The secret of taste is that Ararat cognac gently effects on all five senses thanks to its unique characteristics: deep amber color, vivid aroma, rich taste with a velvety texture and long aftertaste.

300 sunny days a year. These conditions cause a high concentration of aromatic substances and sugars in the grapes.

In addition, there are nearly 30 soil varieties in the Ararat valley. As a result, the same grape variety can have multiple taste nuances which is another characteristic of the Ararat cognacs. Almost always (with the exception of several years after collapse of the Soviet Union) Ararat cognac was produced from local grape varieties, such as Voskehat (translated as Golden – fig. 21), Kangun (translated as Stable – fig. 22),

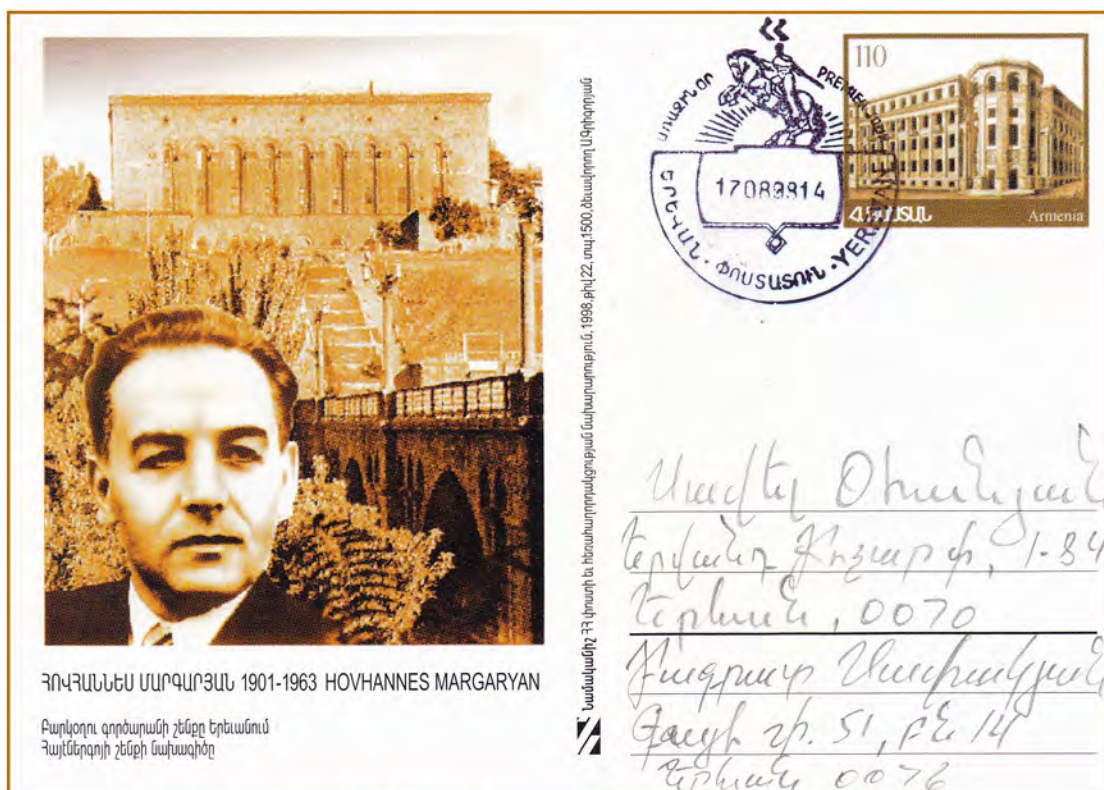


Fig. 17 - Hovhannes Margaryan



Fig. 18 - Trust Building



Back of the Fig. 18 postcard

Mskhali (fig. 23), Garan Dmak (fig. 24), Chilar, and Rkatsiteli (fig. 25). Transplanted to other areas these grape varieties either do not take root at all or lose their unique character. These grapes intense aroma and rich taste transform into a delicate, long aftertaste with notes of vanilla, dried fruits and chocolate. The color varies from pale flax in young cognacs to a deep, darker amber in aged cognacs.

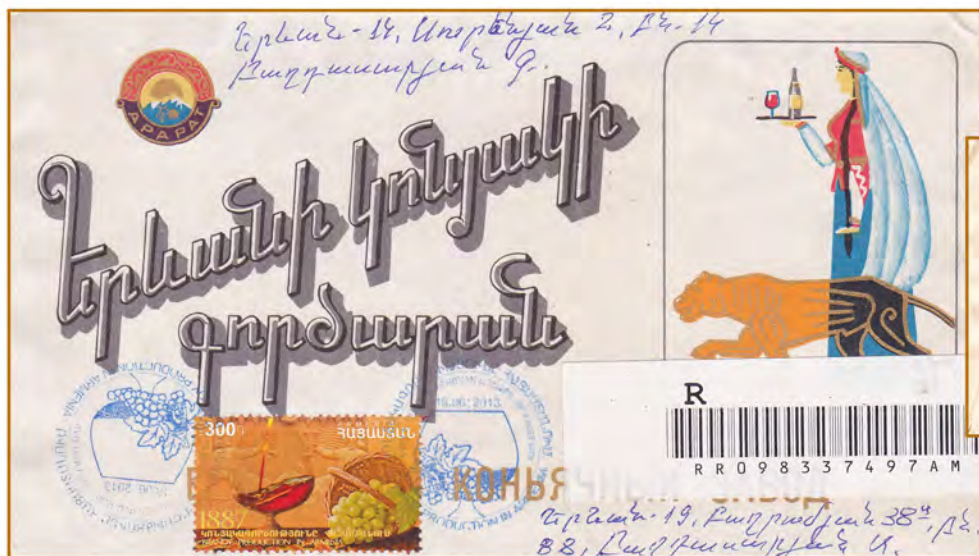


Fig. 19 - Ararat Factory Cover



Back of Fig. 19 Cover

Yet another secret of the taste of the Armenian cognac is the aging in oak barrels. Originally, during Shustov times, barrels were imported from France, later from Bulgaria. But the most intense taste comes from the barrels manufactured from the Caucasian Oak which grows in Armenia. Such barrels were used almost explicitly, but manufacturing from the Caucasian Oak was interrupted in 1990s and was resumed only in 2002. Famous in Europe for its dense rose-tinted structure barrels made of Armenian oak complement the taste of vanilla, chocolate and dried fruit already present from the distilled local grape varieties.



Fig. 20 - View of Ararat valley and Mount Ararat



Fig. 21 Voskehat



Fig. 22 - Kangoon



Fig. 23 - Mskhali



Fig. 24 Garan Dmak



Fig. 25 - Rkatsiteli

1990s saw a big change in the way cognac was produced in Armenia, but this will be a theme for another times.