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# UNDER THE SIGN OF THE RAM THE «MARANHOS»



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In the current speech of the old natives of Beira, "maranhos" meant, and still means, "complications" "intrigues", "difficult tasks". "Strangers abound in tall stories and intrigues", says that undying master playwright Gil Vicente. In terms of local gastronomy - t.i., the gastronomy of Beira Baixa - the word is less exotic and, in my view, much more attractive. It denotes a dish which is truly peerless and which has at least the virtue of not belonging to any of the "ragout", "rôti" or "pot-au-feu" families that so often appear at the head of the genealogical trees of international menus. Let us now give the recipe: Wash a sheep's craw, thoroughly scrape the inside, and cut it into 3 or 4 pieces. With these make "bags" sewn with thread and needle, but do not close them at once as you will have to introduce the stuffing. Meanwhile, prepare very small bits of mutton (preferably from the thinner parts), sausage and ham in the proportions of 3/5, 1/5 and 1/5. Add a good quantity of mint, salt, pepper and white wine and keep the whole overnight in a cool place (but not in a refrigerator). Now comes the final stage in the preparation of the "maranhos". Complete the stuffing with raw rice, fill up the "bags" and sew them with thread and needle. In this operation account should be taken of the dil-

tation of the rice after boiling, wherefore the "bags" should be only three-quarters and not entirely full. The next step is plain cooking in water with salt and mint.

And there it is! On your table you have now a typically Portuguese dish inherited, I think, from the Arabs who peopled this country nine centuries ago (mutton, mint, water and salt are basic ingredients of the Arab cuisine). Served with tomato slices, spinach and beet-root steeped in vinegar, it is truly worthy of a place in an exquisite bill of fare and of a good dry red wine.

P.S. - I nearly forgot to recommend the broth which, naturally, should not be wasted. If you add to it dry Madeira you will get an exquisite consommé to start the meal.

A final word of advice: you don't come very easily across "maranhos" outside old mansion houses and wedding parties of the Beira peasantry. Nevertheless I have enjoyed this dish in a Lisbon restaurant - the "Flecha de Prata", near Conde de Redondo - whose cook is from that region. So here is the hint, without any hidden thought of making publicity.

José Cardoso Pires