

DOMENICUS MAGRI

AND HIS APPARENTES S. SCRIPTURAE CONTRADICTIONES

DOMENICUS MAGRI, or in a latinized form Macrius, was born in Valletta on the 28th March 1604 and was baptized in the parish church of Portu Salvu on the 2nd April. When he was sixteen years of age he received minor orders from the Bishop Balthasar Cagliares. He was then sent to Palermo to study law under Julius Casaurius, his maternal uncle and professor of Law. But the young student did not like law and, by his father's consent, he went to Rome to study philosophy. Before completing his studies he was chosen by Card. Alexander Ursinus to be sent to the Patriarch of Antioch to settle certain matters which had lately arisen concerning the Maronites of Rome. When he returned to Rome, he resumed his studies of philosophy, theology, Greek and Oriental Languages. After being ordained priest he came to Malta, but was soon called back to Rome by Card. Pallesotto to take part in the commission for the edition of the Arabic Bible which was published by the Congregation De Propaganda Fide in 1671.

In the year 1661 he fell ill and was in danger of death. But to his many friends who visited him he used to say that he would not die of that illness. In fact a short time after, he was received by H.H. Pope Alexander VII to whom he expressed his gratitude for the indulgence *in articulo mortis* which the Pope had granted him. Then he came to Malta to see his centenarian father for the last time.

Later he accompanied Card. Brancato to the conclave for the election of Clement X. On the 4th August 1671 he was again taken ill and died on the 4th March 1672. His remains were buried in the Cathedral Church of Viterbo.

PUBLICATIONS:

Hierolexicon; a dictionary explaining the meaning of about eight thousand ecclesiastical terms. First published in Messina in 1664; three Italian editions during the author's lifetime; Latin edition with additions by his brother Carlo; reprinted many times.

Apparentes Sacrae Scripturae Contradictiones; published both separately and as an appendix to the *Hierolexicon*; 1st edition Venice 1645.

Breve racconto del viaggio al monte Libano; Rome 1655; Viterbo 1664; Malta 1928.

Epistula ad Eminentissimum Cardinalem Brancatum conscripta disser-

ens de Cafe, post fructus descriptionem, de eius qualitate atque effectibus etc. Italian translation Rome, 1671.

Dichiarazione letterale degl'Inni del Breviario published under the anagrammatic name Nicodemo Grima; Viterbo, 1645.

See also A. Schembri, *Selva di autori e traduttori maltesi*, Malta, 1855.

The *Contradictiones* is a list of 268 passages from the Old and New Testament which in a way or another seem to contradict other passages. The solution is generally based on the interpretation that was current in those days. In the preface the author acknowledges his indebtedness to Tirinus whose commentary on the Old and New Testament was published in 1632 when Magri was 28 years old. Hence his interpretation is generally correct. His Greek knowledge enabled him to consult and quote the LXX and to derive therefrom a better reading and a better interpretation than that given by the Vulgate. Thus in Eccles. 18, 1 the word *simul* is explained according to the Greek koine in the sense of *communiter, pariter*. The name *Alexandria* in Ez. 30, 14 is a proleptic appellation of a town called *No* in Hebrew and *Diospolis* or Jupiter's town in Greek. In IMacc. 1 *primus* does not mean 'first', as if Alexander was the first king of Greece, but 'before' as the Greek *πρότερος*. In IMacc. 4, 6 he followed the Greek reading 'The Jews had no arms as much as they needed' against the Vulg. 'gladios non habebant', which contradicts v. 15. In IMacc. 11, 34 the Greek text to which he refers should have suggested the right explanation. In IMacc. 14, 25 the word 'Romanus' should be deleted according to the Greek text. In IMacc. 16, 3 instead of 'fratres mei' read 'fratris mei' with the Greek. In Amos 7, 14 he adopts the Greek reading 'I was not a prophet', which is adopted by many modern interpreters. It is doubtful whether Magri knew Hebrew. In Job 19, 17, where LXX and Symmachus are quoted, Hebrew would have provided a better explanation.

As an illustration of Magri's exegesis I shall submit here some of his solutions. Gen. 40, 19 'Auferet Pharaon caput tuum' seems to contradict what is said in the same verse 'suspendet te in cruce'. Pharaon's baker either had his head taken off or was hanged. Magri answers: To take off one's head means to put one to death either by hanging or in any other way. There is, therefore, no contradiction. In Ex. 12, 2 the year begins with the month of Nisan which corresponds to March-April, but in Ex. 23, 16 the end of the year and consequently the beginning of the next year coincides with the gathering of the crops, that is with September-October. The difficulty is rightly solved by the fact that the Hebrews had two calendars, an ecclesiastical one with Nisan as the first month and a civil one with Tishri as the first month. ISam. 13, 14 God would have

given to Saul, who was of the tribe of Benjamin, a durable kingdom if he had been faithful to Him. But God had already promised an everlasting kingdom to the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49, 10). Magri: God's promise to Judah was made in view of his foreknowledge of Saul's disobedience. ISam. 28, 19 Samuel predicted to Saul that the following day he (Saul) and his sons would be with Samuel. But this is impossible, because Saul died for his iniquity (IChr. 10, 13) and therefore presumably he is damned, while Samuel presumably is saved. How could they be together? Magri answers: Saul will be with Samuel in the nether world, that is, Saul will die. IKgs 11, 13 God assigns to the kingdom of Judah one tribe alone, the tribe of Judah. But the tribe of Benjamin still formed part of the kingdom of Judah (IKgs 12, 21). Magri's explanation: The tribe of Benjamin was on the border of the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, but actually was always reckoned as a part of the kingdom of Judah. In Zach. 2, 4 it is said that Jerusalem will have no walls. But Nehemias has rebuilt the walls. Magri explains: The sense is that Jerusalem will be inhabited by so great a multitude that it will be like a city without walls. The double genealogy of Christ in Matthew and Luke is explained in the traditional manner according to which Matthew gives the natural parents of Joseph, and Luke his legal parents. And he adds the remark that Matthew uses the verb 'beget' which denotes natural generation, while Luke says:... Joseph who was (the son) of Heli, who was (the son) of Matthat... The attribution to Isaiah of a prophecy from Malachiah is considered as a case of double quotation attributed to the more prominent prophet, in this case Isaiah. John 7, 16. My doctrine is not mine: this is an obvious contradiction. How can a doctrine be *my* and *not mine*? Magri answers: The doctrine was *his*, Christ's, because it was given by him, but at the same time it was *not his* because it had been given to him by the Father.

Sometimes the explanation proposed by Magri is altogether wrong or inadequate. Thus in Ex. 20, 5 God's threat to punish the fathers' sins in their children down to the third and fourth generation in contrast with his declaration that the children will not be punished for their fathers' sins is explained as a conditional threat, that is, if the children will imitate their fathers' sins. But in this case, why down to the fourth generation only and not indefinitely? In Judg. 21, 4 it is said that the Israelites built an altar and offered sacrifices upon it; but this is against the Mosaic prescriptions which forbid the erection of any altar except that in the temple court. Magri exculpates the Israelites from any infringement of the law by supposing the altar to be erected within the temple or tabernacle: a supposition which is entirely against the context. In ISam. 13, 1 it is said that Saul was one year old when he became king

and that he reigned for two years. This is contradicted by Acts 13, 20 where Saul is said to have reigned forty years. The contradiction is removed by the supposition that the one year refers to Saul's candour and innocence rather than to his age, and that the forty years of Saul's reign include the last thirty-eight years of Samuel's leadership. In Is. 16, 1 Magri rejects the correct interpretation and adopts Jerome's interpretation who applies this text to the Messiah. The word 'barbarians' in Act. 28, 1 is said to mean 'peasants, countrymen'. It means rather 'natives', that is, people who did not understand the language of those who were saved from the shipwreck, people of a non-Greek land, hence natives. Hebr. 9, 7 Magri ignores the distinction between the inner and the outer part of the tabernacle, that is, the Holy of Holies and the Holy. The high-priest went into the Holy of Holies only once a year but he entered the Holy daily to burn the incense.

Magri was so imbued with Rabbinic literature that he not only quotes many mediaeval Rabbis, but sometimes he even accepts their legends. Thus we read in Gen. 46, 6 that Jacob went down to Egypt with all his sons and daughters. But Jacob had only one daughter, Dina. How, therefore, could the author of Genesis speak of Jacob's daughters? Magri following the Rabbinic traditions explains thus: Jacob's wives had twins in every childbirth, a son and a daughter, who later became husband and wife. Of all his daughters Dina alone is mentioned because she was born without a twin brother. So in reality Jacob had many daughters, although only one is mentioned. Rabbinic traditions come again to Magri's help to explain the contradiction between Numb. 20, 29, 33, 38; Deut. 32, 50 where Aaron is said to have died and to have been buried on Mount Hor and Deut. 10, 6 where he is said to have been buried in Mosera. Following the Rabbinic traditions Magri says that Aaron died really on Mount Hor, but was taken to Mosera by the Israelites who had lost all hope of entering the land of Canaan. There they mourned him as if he had actually died there.

Magri's work does not offer any original contribution to biblical exegesis, but it is a document of his vast learning and a justification of the high favour which he enjoyed with ecclesiastical authorities.

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