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David F. Bright. *The Miniature Epic in Vandal Africa*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987. Pp. xiii, 297. \$29.95. ISBN 0-8061-2075-4.

The miniature epic or epyllion enjoyed two periods of efflorescence. The Hellenistic-Roman phase (Callimachus to Ovid) has attracted considerable attention from critics and historians of literature. Not so the later period (fourth and fifth centuries). Bright makes up this deficiency by examining four epyllia, *Hylas*, *Medea*, *De Raptu Helenae*, *Orestis Tragoedia*, by Dracontius of Carthage (fl. 470-500), and a fifth, *Aegritudo Perdicae*, often attributed to him (erroneously, in Bright's view).

Bright evaluates these works and places them within the highly elastic generic boundaries of the classical miniature epic form, providing sensitive critical descriptions of the five epyllia with particular attention to the poet's choice and manipulation of sources: Bright finds considerable innovation here. The structuring of narrative is carefully inspected, with convincing analysis of aesthetic motivations for detected patterns and distinctive aspects of characterization. He makes astute suggestions about the author's intention in regard to all features of his compositions, in a virtual passage by passage commentary. One wishes the rather inaccessible texts themselves had been included (some 2700 lines) for both students and professional scholars.

Bright stresses the importance of Dracontius as an innovative poet who reshaped a venerable genre under a variety of influences on style and content, including the rhetorical exercises of his educational training, contemporary pantomime, romance traditions, folktale, "subliterary" materials like mythographic compilations and scholia, and even certain tendencies in the visual arts (architecture, portraiture, mosaic). "Dracontius mediates between the classical and the medieval, between pagan and Christian; and in some fashion he also provides a bridge between the Roman world which produced the forms and subjects of his poetry, and the Germanic people who ruled the world he lived in." Bright well proves the suitability of a traditionally experimental literary form to the needs of a poet responsive to diverse cultural and aesthetic pressures.

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Paul Barnett. *Is The New Testament History?* Ann Arbor: Servant Publications, 1987. Pp. 173. \$5.95 (pb.). ISBN 0-89283-381-5.

The purpose of Barnett's book is to show that the events of the New Testament are not mythological or legendary, but took place in time and are corroborated to some extent by secular historiography. Barnett's methodology—relating the *non-theological* detail of the New Testament to that in classical, Jewish, and epigraphical sources—is traditional. The author relies primarily on the well-known references in Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny the Younger, Josephus, and the Talmud, presenting this material in a readily-digestible form and summarizing the "intersections" of secular and biblical history in parallel columns.

Barnett's claim that "the historical evidence for Jesus and the origins of Christianity compare[s] favourably with that available for . . . Alexander the Great" unintentionally focuses our attention on the fundamental problem of the historicity of the New Testament. We have very good reasons for believing