



A.G. OBERHOLSTER (ed., in association with Pieter van Breda). *Paarl Valley 1687-1987*. Human Sciences Research Council: Pretoria, 1987. 284 pp. Illus. R25,00 (exclusive). ISBN 0 7969 053 8.

The Drakenstein Valley is not only known for its scenic beauty, good wines and delicious fruit. It was here that the Afrikaans language, the wagon industries and the railways of southern Africa were established. Furthermore, the valley was also the home of the Huguenots, as well as personalities like the Revs S.J. du Toit and Andrew Murray, and C.P. Hoogenhout. These are only a few of the many interesting facts to be found in this beautiful work on the history and development of the Paarl Valley over the past three hundred years.

Arie Oberholster, editor, and Pieter van Breda, both from the HSRC's Institute for Historical Research, must be congratulated on this excellent work, the publication of which must have been a tremendous task.

Not many historical works of this nature have been published in South Africa. Similar publications include *Stellenbosch 300*, *Pietersburg: die eerste eeu 1886-1986*, and *Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988*. *Paarl Valley 1687-1987* is however the first of its kind. The history and development of three (four when Pniël is added) towns in this region are discussed, and in this respect it differs in principle from the other publications mentioned. This fact, and also the involvement of thirteen co-authors, made the task of the editor that much more difficult.

From the source references and the list of sources it is clear that thorough research was done by all who made a contribution. The publication gives a historical background of nearly every aspect of the history of this region, viz. evolution of the landscape; white settlement up to 1700; local government institutions; communication; economics; history of the church and education; cultural development; facets of the community such as interesting personalities, famous visitors, medical services, service organizations, sport and recreation; defence, law and order, and finally political developments since 1795. This thematic approach gives a clear and well-structured picture of the development over the past three centuries.

Significant, too, is the macro-approach which links the economic, geographical and other aspects of the various towns mentioned. In fact, the history, development and contribution of the three towns are indirectly compared with one another. In this respect, Chapter Five gives a clear indication that agriculture played a prominent role right from the beginning. The production of wine, and later fresh fruit, became the most important substantial agricultural activities of the Drakenstein Valley. Obviously, industries, trade and finance developed later as a result of agriculture. No doubt the economy of the region is, still today, based on the well-established agricultural development.

Much effort was made with the presentation and layout of the publication itself. The attractive dustcover shows a photograph of the Paarlberg with Table Mountain in the background. The letter type was a good choice whilst the language reads easily — something that is very difficult to maintain with so many co-authors. The illustrations, maps and photographs have been well chosen and well placed and give the reader an interesting view of the past. The statistical figures are used in such a way that they do not disturb the reader but, in fact, help to create a historical perspective. Lastly, the index, the references of the various chapters and abridged list of sources at the back of the book will help the reader to easily refer to a particular source.

The year 1687 saw the allocation of the first farms along the Berg River to a number of free burghers by Simon van der Stel. The allocation of these farms represents the establishment of the first permanent settlement in this region. The reason for this view is given in the preface by the editor himself: 'It is clear from historical evidence that Khoi were already visiting the Paarl Valley regularly by the time the Dutch settlement was established at the Cape. However, as the Khoi were nomads, it is doubtful that they ever stayed permanently in this region.' Although this is an acceptable argument, there is no reason why some information could not have been included in, for example, Chapter Two, in connection with the first inhabitants. This could have given a better perspective of the region. The little that has been referred to in the text (e.g. chapters two, six and seven), is not sufficient. One cannot simply ignore these first inhabitants just because they were not permanent. They eventually played an important role in the various communities of the Paarl Valley.

Another point of criticism is the long titles of some of the chapters. The words 'Drakenstein Valley' could have been omitted in the titles of chapters one, two, six, eight and eleven. The title of the book gives the name of the region and it is therefore not necessary to include it in some of the chapter titles as well. Moreover, I find it very strange that the title of the book is 'Paarl Valley', while in the text and table of contents the authors refer to 'Drakenstein Valley', which is, geographically speaking, more appropriate than 'Paarl Valley'. (The former embraces the whole valley, including Wellington, Paarl, Franschhoek and Pniël.)

Probably the most serious criticism is the absence of a substantial conclu-

sion. The conclusion in the book consists of approximately 250 words or three short paragraphs which is hardly sufficient. In fact, it really says nothing. It does not give a critical evaluation of the origin and growth of the various communities of the valley. Nor does it mention the influence the valley had on the history of southern Africa.

This book, which is available in both official languages, is however a remarkable and valuable source of information about the development of the valley over the past three hundred years. It will therefore be useful not only to the historian, but also to the people of the Drakenstein Valley.

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