The key to understanding and appreciating this book lies in accepting it on its own terms. The author states (p.1), "This guidebook is not an academic study." Truer words were never spoken. But in spite of the author's caveat — given that BMCR is an academic review — I shall at least give some overview of the book from an academic point of view.

What this is is a largely undocumented guidebook-cum-travelogue. The author — whose biography and credentials are nowhere cited, nor on the dust jacket — discusses his own personal choices (pp.1,3) of the Roman remains that are worth visiting. He begins by noting his personal disappointment that he could find no existing guidebooks of Roman ruins in southern France, but only "general books" and "individual guides to a limited number of sites" (p.xiii). He proposes to fill this need with this comprehensive description of some seventy Roman sites in "the 'south'," which he defines as the Languedoc-Roussillon, Provence, and Cote d'Azur regions.

The book begins with a brief historical summary of the period c.650 BC - AD 470s (pp.5-11), which is followed by a Chronological Table (pp.13-15). The bulk of the remainder of the book (pp.17-292) consists of descriptions of the sites. For many sites, a discussion of the historical development of the site is given. This is followed by individual descriptions of particular monuments. Finally, museums are described in detail, down to the contents of particular rooms. The hours of both sites and museums are given as of the time of the author's visits; but admission prices are not: "they change more often [than the hours of operation]" (p.4). This section is followed by a glossary (pp.293-297).

It is in the historical commentary that one finds the primary flaw in this book, for it is marred by numerous errors of both fact and omission. In the introductory historical overview, for example, the author tells of the abandonment of the oppida (p.8), but has no discussion of formation of civitates (which are discussed in the glossary, p. 294) or their role in the Roman scheme, even though he notes that "in southern France romanisation is dominated by the city" (p.1). The discussion of Gaul during the Roman Empire has no mention at all of the Gallic Empire of Postumus (AD 259-268). The activities of emperors such as Constantius, Julian, and Valentinian I in Gaul are omitted. The settlement of the Visigoths in Aquitania is mistakenly dated to "the 420s" (p.11).

The book also is replete with egregious and inexplicable chronological errors of the most fundamental sort. Take the chronological table on pp.14-15 — which seems to have been compiled by someone oblivious to the text. It has the Gallic Wars of Caesar beginning in 57 BC, whereas the text (p.7) gives the correct date of 58 BC. The "Victory of Caesar" is given as 49 BC. The reigns of Caligula and Claudius are given as AD 37-42 and 42-54 (rather than 37-41 and 41-54). The Civil War under Severus ends in AD 194 (rather than AD 197, which already had been given on p.9!). The years AD 96-192 are called "The Adoptives" (Commodus [180-192], of course, was not adopted). Sidonius Apollinaris is given the years "AD 432-80?" here, but "c.430-80" on p.11. Perversely, however, the table gives the correct date of 60 BC for the First Triumvirate, but 59 BC is given in the text (p.7), and the correct date for the deposition of Romulus Augustus (AD 476), whereas the text (p.10) gives a date of AD 474. Elsewhere, one encounters similar errors, e.g. the 1st and 2nd Punic Wars dated to 261-244 BC and 219-202 BC. Indeed, not a single date or historical comment should be accepted without some outside confirmation (an attribute this book shares with the Historia Augusta).

The author also pays little attention to the existing scholarship on either Roman Gaul in general or individual sites in particular. The individual entries only rarely (e.g. pp.66, 140, 223-4) contain any references to any of the scholarship on any of the items or sites discussed. In a very brief introductory bibliographical excursus (p.4), the author cites only Rivet's Gallia Narbonensis, King's Roman Gaul and Germany, Cunliffe's Greeks, Romans, and Barbarians, and MacKendrick's Roman France. A seven-page bibliography at the end of the book lists both general books and references to specific sites.

Throughout the book, moreover, one is at the mercy of the author with regard to what will or will not be covered. Fortunately, the author generally takes an eclectic approach. But the author's personal interests also are apparent, as in the long descriptions of sites of St. Romain-en-Gal (pp.36-43), which clearly struck his fancy. The illustrations, too, are spotty and strictly a result of the author's preferences — or what he happened to have available. There is an excellent series of photos, for example, of various aspects of the Pont du Gard. On the other hand, the book is very weak on inscriptions, which clearly are not an interest of the author. On p.11, for example, there is a mysterious allusion to "the last known Roman milestone erected in the 430s" — with no mention that this is the famous milestone of the prefect Auxiliaris (CIL 12.5494). There is, however, a good discussion of the Orange cadaster (pp.191-194).

Although there are excellent maps and plans throughout the book, they often fail to give the ancient names of modern sites (although the map on p. 77 does give both the ancient and modern names of Forum Domitii/Montbazin, even though neither appears in the text!). Likewise, the discussions of sites also sometimes fail to give the ancient names of sites, especially the more obscure ones. E.g., Le Perthus (p.76-8) is Ad Pyreneum in the Antonine Itinerary. There also are some problems with the Latin, inter alios, viciarius as a "governor" (p.9), "Aelio" translated as "Aeliae" rather than "Aelius" (p.20), and civitas as a plural (p.294).
From an academic point of view, therefore, the book is seriously flawed. In several regards, it also is flawed even in a non-academic sense. There are inconsistencies simply in the formal construction. The illustrations, for example, give references to the pages where they are discussed, but the discussions themselves give no cross-references to the illustrations, so one has no idea at all whether an item discussed has an illustration or not (perhaps this is because the illustrations were not added until a time when alterations in the text could no longer be made). Moreover, cross references to relevant illustrations often are lacking, e.g. the discussion of the Via Domitia is on pp. 59-60, but the helpful map is on p. 79. The index is also very sketchy, and only provides the modern names for sites — a reader who does not know that Cemenelum is modern Cimiez is in for rough sledding. Stylistically, moreover, the text is marred by jarring changes in verb tenses (e.g. p.6, "continue" for "continued").

But as a vade mecum for the Roman ruins of Southern France, which after all is all this book claims to be, this book is splendid. Each site has been personally visited by the author, and he gives detailed advice on how best to walk the sites. There are major entries, for example, on Vienne, Narbonne, Nimes, Arles, Vaison, and Orange, although it is unfortunate that the author did not extend his purview just a bit to include Lyons to the north and Toulouse to the east.

Detailed site plans of many towns, areas, and buildings are provided. The author offers digressions on particular kinds of architecture, e.g. theaters (pp.46-49), amphitheaters (pp. 123-125), and houses (pp. 241-244), as well as on the mills of Barbegal (pp. 156-160) and the olive presses at Bouillons (pp. 177-180). The book also is good on the path of Via Domitia, which surfaces as a recurrent theme (although here fuller citations from the ancient itineraries — see p. 295 where only one is mentioned at all — would have been most welcome). At the same time, the author provides some cautionary words about the continuing destruction and deterioration of some of the Roman remains (e.g. p.55)

In general, this guidebook will provide an invaluable aid both to the tourist and to the scholar. Along with his descriptions of the "major" sites, the author also describes, briefly, a number of smaller sites that probably would go unnoticed otherwise. The "academic" flaws cited above, however, are unfortunate, and lessen the usefulness of the book, especially for the neophyte. Many of these flaws could have been easily avoided, and the responsibility for many of the purely formal flaws, of course, ultimately must be laid at the doorstep of the editor and not the author. One final question remains — just what is the "second best villa" in France, tantalizingly alluded to on pp.xiii-xiv, but never discussed!

'Having already put it to good use, I can unhesitatingly vouch for The Roman Remains of Southern France. This excellent guidebook is systematically organized ... highly informative at both the practical and the academic level while also serving the needs of a wider audience ... generously (for the price) and adroitly illustrated, and fully comprehensive;' - Greece & Rome.