



SILK, ART AND WINE

Richard Hopton reviews three histories with a difference

1 **SILK** by Aarathi Prasad

Humanity has used silk for at least 5,500 years. Nowadays, the word suggests luxury and opulence, the silk dressing gown, silk suits, silk curtains, silk upholstery, the preserve of haute couture but, as Aarathi Prasad writes, 'the knowledge and use of silk, in all its wonderful varieties, is a global story'; it is 'an ancient material with a surprisingly technological future'. The best-known source of silk is *Bombyx mori*, the domesticated silk moth, but it also derives from other creatures, including spiders and marine bivalves, the source of sea silk. *Silk* is a fascinating book, part exploration of the different types of silk, part history of the naturalists who studied the creatures that produce the material, and part an examination of the myriad uses, ancient and modern, to which it can be put. *William Collins, £22*

2 **VENICE: CITY OF PICTURES** by Martin Gayford

The story of Venice and the city's art history has been told many times. Bellini, Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese, Canaletto, Guardi, and Tiepolo are the laurel-crowned heads in the pantheon of Venetian artists, acknowledged masters of Venice's Golden Age. Martin Gayford writes that 'Venice has been interwoven into my life for decades' and his new book brings its art history right up to date with work by Chris Ofili and Paula Rego, recently exhibited at the Venice Biennale, and Banksy. Gayford's central contention in this engaging, sumptuously illustrated book is that there is a continuing artistic relationship between Venice's past and her present, or as he puts it: 'A twenty-first-century video artist echoes Tiepolo and so alters our response to his paintings'. This is the present influencing the past and vice versa, living history. *Thames & Hudson, £30*

3 **VINES IN A COLD CLIMATE** by Henry Jeffreys

This entertaining, informative book shows 'how English wine went from a joke to world class in 30 years.' It's both a history of how the English wine industry has grown from its amateurish beginnings into a multi-million pound business and a treasure chest of anecdote, offering lively portraits of the individuals involved and their vineyards. In allowing the vineyard owners and winemakers speak for themselves, Jeffreys reveals the optimism, ambition, and determination which underpin their efforts but also their diverse views on their industry. The book has much to say about the difficulties of viticulture and making wine in England but also about the seemingly endless ingenuity with which producers tackle these problems. 'England's wine,' he concludes, 'as befits an industry that is barely 50 years old, is very much a work in progress.' *Allen & Unwin, £16.99*