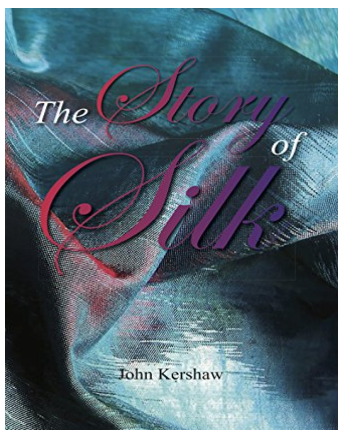


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Ausgabe **KINDLE**

My interest in silk dates from 1990. Since then I have bred my own silkworms and found something of interest about silk in all five continents. It all began 400 million years ago when ancestors of spiders crawled out of the sea onto dry land and used silk to prevent their eggs from drying out and make trap lines to detect prey. Many animals make silk: among them spiders reign supreme, but the silk industry depends on a moth, *Bombyx mori*, that has been bred in captivity over thousands of years and long since lost the power of flight to become the only insect to be completely domesticated.

We look at animals that make silk and how they use it, describe its composition, structure and properties, examine the silkmoth and its life history and see how its silk is extracted and processed. We find some of the world's earliest sites of silk production, accompany merchants conveying it along ancient trade routes across Asia from China to the Mediterranean, and follow the expansion of the silk industry into Europe in the mid 16th century, eventually reaching the Americas.

Though our story has its end, it is not the end of the silk story. Recent discoveries briefly mentioned in our closing paragraphs, including its use in reconstruction of human tissues, and the fact that silk forms the basis of the strongest

fibre of any type ever recorded point the way to a whole new chapter. But exciting though it is, that will be for others to write.