



# Cotton: The Fabric that Made the Modern World

*By Giorgio Riello*

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## **Cotton: The Fabric that Made the Modern World** By Giorgio Riello

Today's world textile and garment trade is valued at a staggering \$425 billion. We are told that under the pressure of increasing globalisation, it is India and China that are the new world manufacturing powerhouses. However, this is not a new phenomenon: until the industrial revolution, Asia manufactured great quantities of colourful printed cottons that were sold to places as far afield as Japan, West Africa and Europe. Cotton explores this earlier globalised economy and its transformation after 1750 as cotton led the way in the industrialisation of Europe. By the early nineteenth century, India, China and the Ottoman Empire switched from world producers to buyers of European cotton textiles, a position that they retained for over two hundred years. This is a fascinating and insightful story which ranges from Asian and European technologies and African slavery to cotton plantations in the Americas and consumer desires across the globe.

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### **Review**

"... a remarkable volume full of insight and originality ... Riello deserves a wide audience and the book will be of interest to a readership well beyond the audience for world economic history, including cultural and social history, the histories of art, design, fashion and, of course, textiles themselves."

Ian Donnachie, Reviews in History ([history.ac.uk/reviews](http://history.ac.uk/reviews))

"Mr Riello's meticulous approach and scholarly prose make for a dense work but one that is wide-ranging, beautifully nuanced and often surprising. Like its namesake, Cotton deserves a wide circulation."

Wall Street Journal

"Reveals much about globalisation ..."

Financial Times

"This is a brilliant study of two periods of globalization, centered and driven first by twelfth- to seventeenth-century Indian production of cotton textiles, and second by the gradual triumph of Europe, particularly Britain, beginning in the eighteenth century. Essential."

B. Weinstein, Choice

"... strikingly broad in coverage and even bolder in the sweep of its claims, geographical, chronological and methodological. ... [a] rich and elaborate work."

Eric Jones, EH.Net

"Giorgio Riello's important and ambitious study on cotton overlaps a bit with books in the commodity history genre, but it is incontrovertibly more. The author's primary aim is not merely to fill a gap but rather to contribute to our understanding of nothing less than the origins of modern economic growth and development. This short review can only hint at the wealth of important data and insights (not to mention the stunning illustrations) to be found in this book."

Peter A. Coclanis, Journal of Southern History

"This is a beautiful book, packed with dozens of rich photographs of cotton fabric and contemporary paintings ... Riello preserves a level of nuance and contingency rare in global histories. He has written an insightful economic history of cotton that should find a wide reading among economic historians and historians of the Atlantic world."

Andrew C. Baker, The South Carolina Historical Magazine

### **About the Author**

Giorgio Riello is Professor of Global History at the University of Warwick and a member of Warwick's Global History and Culture Centre. He is the author of *A Foot in the Past* (2006) and has co-edited several books including *The Spinning World* (2009), *How India Clothed the World* (2009) and *Global Design History* (2011). In 2009 he received the Newcomen Prize in Business History, and in 2010 he was awarded the Philip Leverhulme Prize.

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