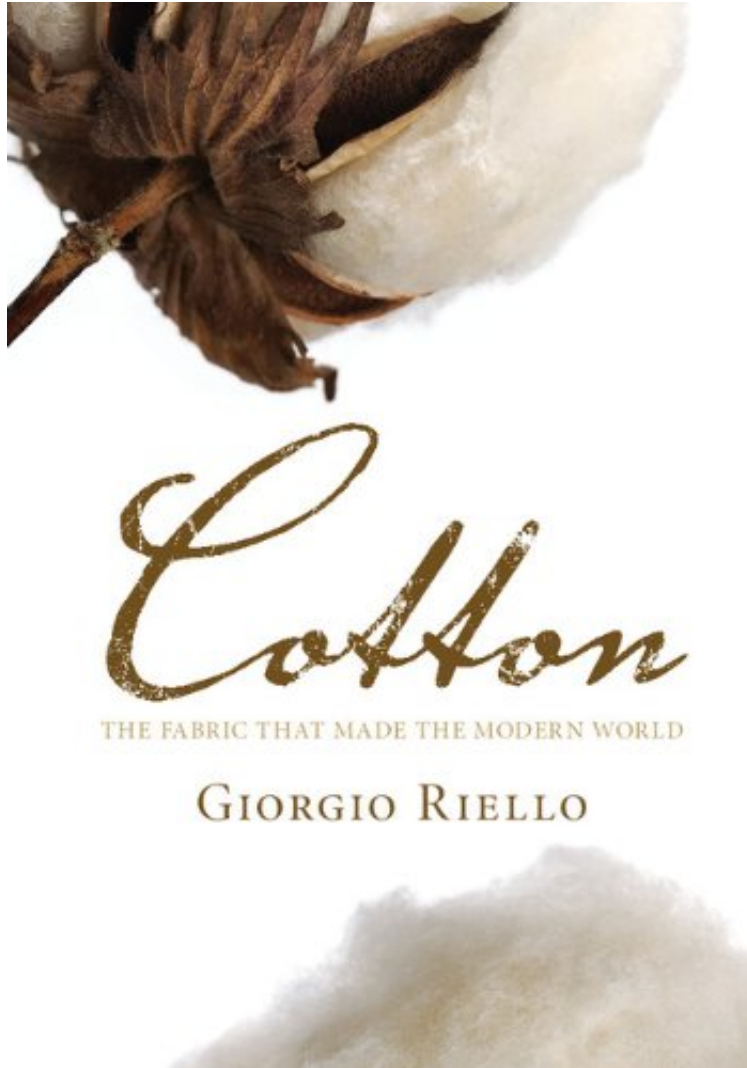


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Cotton: The Fabric that Made the Modern World

Giorgio Riello

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Giorgio Riello : Cotton: The Fabric that Made the Modern World before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Cotton: The Fabric that Made the Modern World:

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India, its trade in Asia, exchange and consumption in the West, the modification and advances of European industry to accommodate demands and expansion of the global markets. The 407 pages book is divided into 13 chapters spread over three parts, including an introduction to familiarize the reader with a brief history of cotton. Part I, "a centrifugal system", is about the first cotton revolution from 1000 to 1500 AD, covers the Indian origins of cotton from planting to manufacturing to export and trade. The system was based on diffuse methods of sharing production, information and profit in the Asian subcontinent with India at its core. Part II, covers the next 250 years, when cotton was discovered by European traders, influenced consumers and manufacturing in England, France and Europe and eventually spread to America. Between 1670 and 1760 the English East India Company imported an average of 15 million yards of Indian cotton textiles a year, which it sold to European merchants. Europeans consumers favored Indian cotton because of the quality of the weave and the fade-resistance of their bright colors. Cotton clothes were much cheaper than silks or woolens, could be washed frequently and were more affordable to the masses. These fashionable and cheap commodities threatened the local silk, linen and wool industries, which instigated a ban on cotton at the beginning of the 18th century. Women wearing cotton were attacked in the streets and frequently stripped naked. Colorful Indian textiles were "corrupting the morals of society" as depicted in the 1703 comedy "Strange Trollops in Callicoe Gowns" at the London Royal Theater. By the end of the 18th century, European manufacturers mastered the Indian weaving techniques and the use of mordants (substance that fixes dyes). Better cotton textiles were produced in Europe, and were thus freed from their xenophobic association causing the ban to be lifted. Part III, "a centripetal system", (1750 to 2000 AD), deals with the capitalist driven cheap production of cotton by true slavery in the New World and relative slavery of cheap labor, under brutal conditions, in the mills of Europe and America eventually becoming the most significant component of the industrial revolution and the most common material in textiles. The last chapter analyzes the evolution of the systems of commerce and the shift from the divergence of cotton manufacturing from India to the West in the 19th and 20th centuries, until its convergence back to Asia within the past decades. Cotton is now a global industry worth about 425 billion dollars with production firmly based in Asian countries, where cheap labor is exploited in dismal sweatshops and unsanitary factories, as illustrated by the disaster of 2013 in Dhaka (Bangladesh) that resulted in the deaths of over 1000 garment workers. Cotton is inferior to the new synthetic fibers in strength, durability, elasticity and absorption of colors. It is also not as "environmentally friendly" with its high water consumption, causing soil depletion and replacing food staples, such as rice, in Asia and Africa. Riello's book is based on extensive research with almost 100 pages (297 to 392) of Notes and Bibliography. There are many tables, figures, and plates in color and black white illustrations of fabrics and designs. It is a remarkable achievement that succeeded in combining not only the history of the cultivation, production, trade and economic impact of cotton but also its influence on the textile industry, culture, design, fashion and art; the book should be considered as a reference on these subjects. It is a fascinating read, especially for anyone interested in understanding the subject in exhaustive detail, but it is a difficult book to categorize and, therefore, to review fairly. As a reference it would easily rate as 5 stars, but for the casual reader it might be overwhelming or even boring, depending on his/her level of interest.

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.

"... 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, s in History (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 AuthorGiorgio 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.