

How India Clothed the World: The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500-1850

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The trade of cotton textiles was a worldwide activity well before the globalization of the nineteenth century. The significance – even centrality – of the Indian Ocean is well recognized. Yet, scholarship has mostly examined the Europe-bound trade in textiles and other commodities. This book shows how this was just one ingredient in a web of transactions that were land-based and sea-borne, domestic and global, managed by European as well as Asian capital and merchants.

This volume is also an important contribution to wider issues currently discussed in global history. Through the examination of a specific commodity, it provides new insights on the structure and functioning of the early modern world economy. It argues against the preponderance of Western Europe as the 'motor of the world' (as suggested, among the many, by historians such as Braudel and Wellerstein). This point of view has been recently adopted by Kenneth Pomeranz in his rehabilitation of China, but research on the global role of the Indian subcontinent in the early modern period is still scarce. This book attempts to further this research agenda by assessing the relative size, geographic extension and economic relevance of cotton production and trade between 1500 and 1850. The book raises several questions also on the causes, dynamics, and effects of colonialism on India, as well as the effects of Indian manufactures on European productive structures.

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