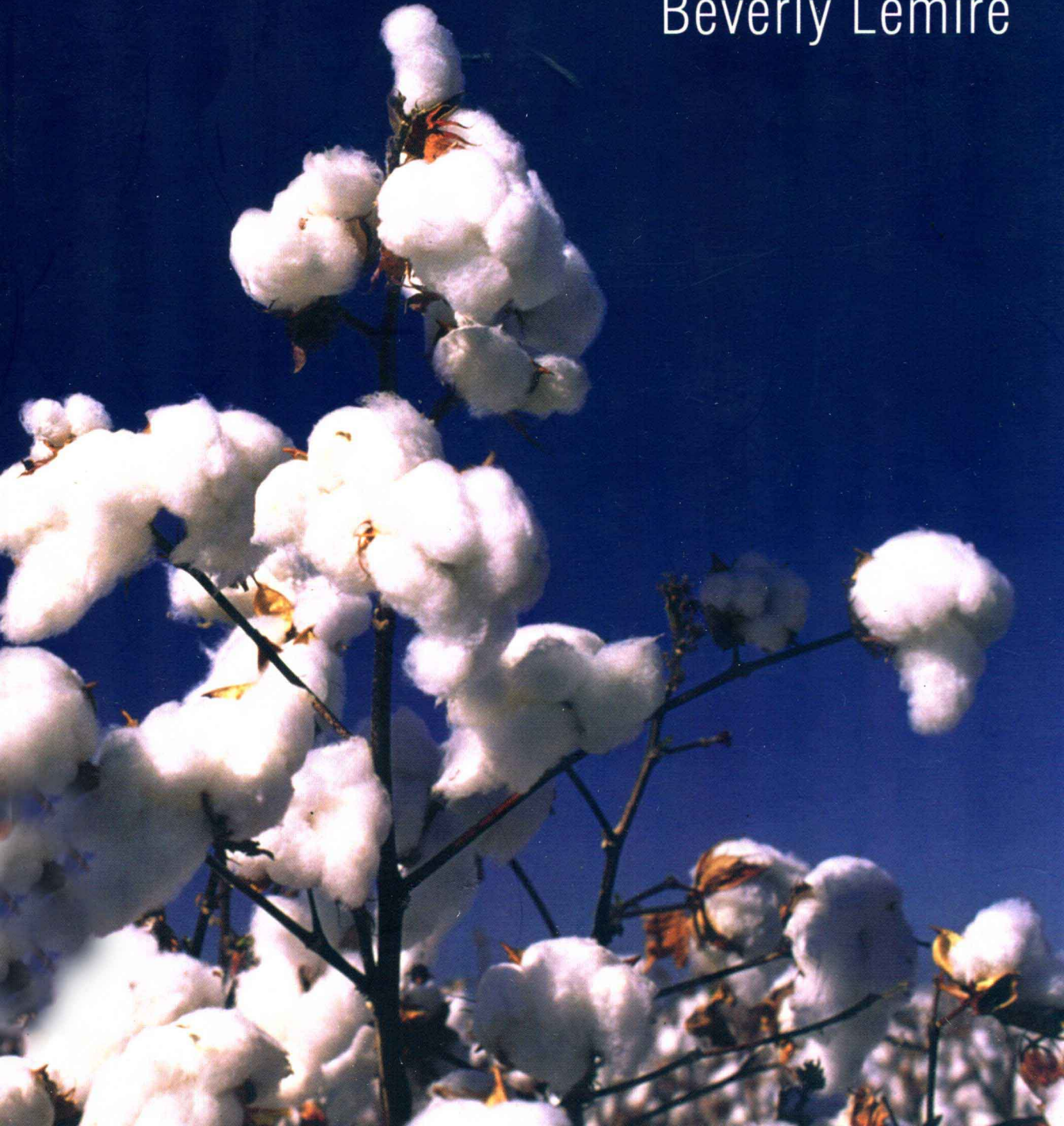


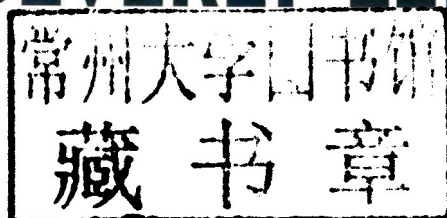
Cotton

Beverly Lemire



COTTON

BEVERLY LEMIRE



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Textiles that Changed the World

Series Editors

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COTTON

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The volume is a distillation of past research and more recent investigations. I can remember the occasion many years ago when I first saw an eighteenth-century Indian palampore, a painted cotton hanging, likely intended for a bedroom wall or as drapery for a poster bed. It featured a tree of life with an amazingly sinuous botanic design and still glorious colours. At that time I was working to decipher the economic and social dynamics of the Indian trade to Europe and this artefact encouraged me to combine material with documentary sources wherever possible. I returned to this topic in a very different context as a participant in the Global Economic History Network project on cotton. I am grateful for the opportunity to consult and collaborate with the colleagues involved in that venture. First, I thank Patrick O'Brien, who headed the enterprise and pulled me into this circle. I also thank Giorgio Riello who, at that time, was the research officer of the project and with whom I shared many conversations. His exceptional organizational capacities helped ensure the success of the venture. I profited immeasurably from repeated discussions with him and other participants in this global project and I thank them for their generosity: Prasannan Parthasarathi, Kaoru Sugihara, Tirthankar Roy, Harriet Zurndorfer, Suraiya Faruqi, Colleen Kriger, Om Prakash, Bozhong Li, Robert DuPlessis, Huw Bowen, Olivier Raveux, Ian Wendt and George Souza. I have enjoyed recurring conversations in and out of the global project and benefitted from the insights of Maxine Berg, Laurence Fontaine, Negley Harte, Pat Hudson, Adrienne Hood, Peter McNeil, Lynne Milgram, Lesley Miller, Arlene Oak, Ruth Phillips, Osamu Saito, Yoshitaka Suzuki and Karen Tranberg Hansen. My debts are many and my thanks are sincere. The opportunity to discuss historical topics is invaluable in the development of ideas. I am greatly indebted to these and many other colleagues.

Many years ago Adrienne Hood, then senior curator at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, gave me the opportunity to develop skills in object analysis. I am thankful for that original experience and for the subsequent years of discussion and debate on historical issues related to material culture and to this project. In recent years I have accumulated many other debts to museum curators who have been unfailingly generous with their time and their knowledge. The opportunity to study artefacts in conjunction with documentary research provides valuable insights

unattainable through other means. Lesley Miller, Rosemary Crill, Clare Brown and Susan North at the Victoria and Albert Museum have been repeatedly generous in every respect and opened a treasure trove of artefacts to my scrutiny, as well as sharing ideas and listening to hypotheses with great patience. Ruth Barnes shared the exceptional Newberry Collection at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford and I am grateful both for the opportunity to see these relics and to discuss their significance. Ebeltje Hartkamp-Jonxis and Bianca Du Mortier from the Rijksmuseum graciously provided me with opportunities to see some of their singular collections, for which I am grateful. Berit Elkvik of the Nordiska Museet and Merit Laine of the Royal Court Museum, Stockholm were both very generous with time and attention. Ana Cabrera at the Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas, Madrid and Maria Dolores Vila shared their rich knowledge of the Iberian world with me. I thank them for their generosity. The insights they provided were invaluable, as were those of Teresa Pacheco Pereira, Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon and Isabel Mendonça, Escola Superior de Artes Decorativas, Lisbon. Jacqueline Jacqué of the Archives du Musée de l'Impression sur Etoffes, Mulhouse, was generous with her time and knowledge of the critical subject of textile printing. Pam Parmal, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and Dilys Blum, Philadelphia Museum of Art, were wonderful guides to their exceptional textile collections, as was Linda Eaton at the Frances Du Pont Winterthur Museum. Alexandra Palmer was similarly kind in providing access to the Royal Ontario Museum Collection and Ryan Paveza, of the Art Institute of Chicago, was instrumental in organizing my visit to their collection. Vlada Blinova is a continuing support in my work with the Clothing and Textile Collection, Department of Human Ecology, University of Alberta. My thanks to Vlada and to Julia Petrov, former acting curator and to Anne Lambert, now retired curator of this collection, and to Anne Bissonette, curator of the Human Ecology Collection. Along with Marijke Kerkhoven, my colleagues in Human Ecology offer unfailing encouragement and access to this marvellous resource.

During my research for this project I travelled to various locations. My research assistant, Filip Ani, made a trip to Spain and Portugal more profitable and I thank him. Elysia Donald, Deanna Bullock and Margaret Luzono also assisted with this project and I thank them also, as did Nadine Lewycky and Matthew Neufeld. Eiluned Edwards provided a fascinating account of contemporary textile practice in India and as a result of her contacts, my colleagues and I had a rich introduction to the textile regions of western India. Mohmed Husain Khatri was an invaluable guide to the sites surrounding Bhuj, Gujarat, India and in this same region Ismail Mohammed Khatri revealed the exceptional skills required to perpetuate traditional wood-block printing. Both men illustrated the living and evolving textile traditions of their region. The staff at Maiwa Handprints, Vancouver, were likewise helpful, providing access to their library and collections. They work to maintain the viability of handcrafted textiles, particularly in India, and bring full circle the commercial connections that began this voyage.

Over the course of years spent working on this project, I have presented sections of this research at conferences and symposia in different parts of the world and benefitted from the comments of audiences and colleagues in attendance. Some of the ideas represented in this volume have been published in different versions in two edited volumes arising from the Global Economic History Network cotton project: Giorgio Riello and Tirthankar Roy (eds), *How India Clothed the World:*

The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500–1850 (2009) and Prasannan Parthasarathi and Giorgio Riello (eds), *The Spinning World: A Global History of Cotton Textiles, 1300–1850* (2009). Themes addressed in Chapters 2 and 5 have also been published in Japanese and Italian in the journals *Shakai-Keizaishigaku* (2006) and *Quaderni storici* (2006), and elements of Chapter 5 in *As Artes Decorativas e a Expansão Portuguesa: Imaginário e Viagem* (2010).

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Beverly Lemire

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1.

INTRODUCTION

There are almost as many histories of the cotton trade as there are nations and, within these nations, narratives are further subdivided.¹ Communities hold this heritage dear, despite the frequent trials embedded in these pasts. The stories that survive are often the lifeblood of regions – the tales of grandparents and great aunts, and the focus of local museums.² The American states of North Carolina and Rhode Island are two cases in point – cotton represents exceptional periods in both their histories. From the slave labour of transplanted Africans on cotton plantations, to share cropping after the Civil War, cotton was a cruel master for many Southerners of African American heritage, even as this crop funded wealth for the building of great plantations and commercial infrastructure. The advent of cotton mills in North Carolina followed in the nineteenth century after English and then New England forerunners, and these mills employed many thousands through much of the twentieth century, with a new way of life for once-rural people. Cotton seemed a permanent feature of this state, entwined with the local culture and economy in distinct ways. Yet this tradition was not proof against the migration of manufacturing to other regions of the world in the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For Rhode Island, the connection with cotton took an industrial form from the outset.³ Rhode Island's mills predated those of North Carolina by generations – indeed, the state boasts the first American water-powered machinery for carding and spinning cotton, opened in the 1790s by an English immigrant. The Rhode Island mill inaugurated an industry that flourished throughout New England, pulling in young female labour from the surrounding countryside, later drawing French Canadian migrant families with the hope of a better life.

There are common threads to the narratives in many former cotton districts. In Lancashire, the site of the world's first Industrial Revolution, there is pride in past achievements, as well as a sometimes palpable sense of a lost golden age after textile manufacturing moved offshore. Over several centuries, the cycle of economic development brought cotton, an alien fibre, to northern latitudes where it became the driving force in global change. More recently, the industrial strength of Asia has pulled production back to some of the original sites of cotton manufacture.

Long before factories were conceived, long before cotton T-shirts, dresses or jeans became the stuff of daily wear in the West, India was the largest producer of cotton cloth in the world. Indian artisans created the finest diaphanous muslins or the heaviest blue dungaree. Indian cottons were also renowned for their designs – brilliantly coloured and patterned, dyed and printed to the tastes of innumerable communities. These cloths were known and valued across much of the world from ancient times, from the South China Sea to the Mediterranean. For the Indian subcontinent, cotton represents a heritage unique among the world's nations, a heritage revived and celebrated in many regions and renewed in the contemporary production of hand-printed cottons, sold worldwide.⁴ Theirs was the model of trade and production that inspired imitation in Persia, Egypt, Turkey, central Asia and Indonesia and, finally, the West. Many regions aspired to match the breadth and quality of Indian-produced fabrics, but the skills underlying these textiles remained unsurpassed for millennia, in terms of their mastery of the fibre and proficiency in spinning, weaving, dyeing and printing. Likewise, the commercial acumen of India's merchants moved the products across much of the globe. The cotton plant that proved so successful in cloth production was selected through trial and error from the various natural stocks extant on the subcontinent. The colourfast washable dyes that distinguished their fabrics came from the natural wealth of flora and mineral resources in the Gujarat, Coromandel and Bengal regions, their dexterous use honed over generations.

Chapter 2 begins with an examination of the long process of development of the Indian cotton trade and its significance in the ecumene. I explore the intersecting skills required to build this industry and the context of its growth and dominance as a global commodity before 1500. The breadth and dynamism of this trade was in place long before the arrival of Europeans in the Indian Ocean commercial circuits. Only by giving full weight to this Asian tradition of industry and commerce can we comprehend the later transformations that arose in other parts of the world, as the reverberations from this commodity moved from one region to another. This perspective necessarily readjusts the narrative of Western development in important ways, acknowledging the centrality of Indian products to later Western growth. Material evidence forms an integral part of this study. The assessment of surviving Indian fabrics from the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries provides invaluable insights into the nature of the Indian cotton trade and its cross-cultural appeal. This chapter next considers the long process whereby Indian goods diffused through the early modern Western world following the arrival of Europeans in the Indian Ocean about 1500. One of the first responses to Indian goods in Europe can be traced in European needlework, as women interpreted Indian designs through their needles from the sixteenth century onwards. Their material translation was a key facet in the acceptance and domestication of these commodities into new venues. Women have left few written accounts of their response to these new material forms, but the renditions portrayed through their needles offer telling evidence of early globalization and reactions to this phenomenon. These features of exchange provide the foundation for the chapters to follow.

Fashion figures prominently in this volume. The role of Asian commodities in the genesis of a fashion system in Europe has been too generally ignored and is only now getting the attention deserved.⁵ Chapter 3 explores the sociopolitical tensions around dress in early modern Europe, looking most particularly at the British example. I dissect the rationale behind sumptuary legislation

that attempted to regulate the clothing of ordinary people, a practice that accelerated from 1500 as European economies grew, not least because of the growing trade with Asia. The forces of tradition and innovation collided repeatedly in this era, most particularly around the question of clothing. Wool cloth held a unique place in the British pantheon of goods, politically and socially. Wool was the material and cultural antithesis of Indian cotton and, thus, to understand the explosive political response to cottons we must consider its opposite. It is obvious that men and women wore clothes differently, evident in the cut of the garments and also the social politics of dress; the political climate in which men and women wore calico exemplifies this fact. Elite men wore Indian calicoes as banyans or informal robes, a mark of their intellectual affiliations with travel, scientific collection and mercantile advances. They also wore these robes in semi-private situations. Women wore calicoes in public and as such were the objects of violent retribution campaigns spanning decades. The advent of popular fashion and its articulation in women's calico gowns was a deeply contentious project with profound political and economic repercussions. This chapter uncovers the dramatic politics of fashion surrounding the gendered wearing of calico, events that rent British society. The anti-calico campaign was recorded on the bodies of women, targeted for their fashion transgressions. The eventual political acceptance of cotton textiles signified major transformations, including a broad acceptance of plebeian fashions as a driver of the economy.

The European textile environment was founded on wool and linen and those systems of production were critical to the later grafting of cotton to this industrial base. In Chapter 4, I investigate the gendered structures of manufacturing in both city guilds and rural putting-out systems. The latter was of particular importance. Both relied on a mass of female labour spinning thread in the quantities and qualities required by weavers. I take a long-run perspective on this subject, which better allows an assessment of regional developments across Europe, ultimately leading to the genesis of the cotton industry in Britain. The linen/cotton trade took root in north-west England in the seventeenth century, positioned to prosper as the geopolitics of cotton changed over the next century. Indian cottons were largely banned from British markets in the 1720s, as in most parts of Europe. Lancashire manufacturers were well aware that they could thrive by supplying facsimiles of Indian textiles, as close as possible to the originals. That became the goal of British manufacturers in Lancashire and Scotland; they began as specialists in linen textiles, evolved to produce a range of fustian⁶ cloths and ultimately triumphed by creating all-cotton fabrics in a vast array of styles, from warm velvets to fine muslins. The technological leaps that ensued during the 1700s altered the foundations of British society and then reshaped the wider world. Equally important were the implications for the regions supplying raw cotton, as cotton plantations expanded in parallel with industrial production. Plantation slavery grew dramatically in nineteenth-century America to feed the insatiable appetite for raw cotton in Europe and America, illustrating the wide-ranging effects of industrial innovation. Mills, factories and plantations represent the institutional features of the first industrial age.

Indian textile products included much more than plain or printed bolts of cloth – cotton quilts were among the most significant cultural commodities to arrive at early modern European ports. Quilts are a subject of extensive popular interest in the present day. They are typically described in a Western context, as a Western craft idiom, having decorated homes and warmed beds for centuries.

The assumption is often made that these were a European invention and that their popularity flowed from European initiatives, later transported into colonial regions of the world. Quilting was known in the medieval West and employed in items such as the jackets worn under armour; some date the appearance of quilts in twelfth-century Europe to contacts by Crusaders with the more dynamic material environment of the eastern Mediterranean, the terminus of well-developed trade routes with Asia. Rare examples of fourteenth-century European silk quilts in museum collections illustrate the value assigned these singular commodities.⁷ The later evolution of Western quilt culture is part of a broad global dynamic, beginning with the export of Indian quilts to Europe in the 1500s. Chapter 5 reveals the evolution and spread of quilt culture from India to Europe and beyond, from the 1500s to the twentieth century. Object study is critical to this investigation. The first generations of Indian quilts offer extraordinary evidence of cross-cultural exchange – embroidered treatises on the early years of Portuguese imperial adventures, with the figurative patterns presenting masculine celebrations of empire. India, once again, provided the template for a popular bedding that added new comfort and new cultural forms to ordinary lives. The gender and class focus of quilts shifted over the eighteenth century. And, with the industrialization of cotton production, quilts received an added boost, becoming a staple female craft across a vast range of communities. Ordinary people had more textiles to work with and could recycle and reuse in different ways, and the patchwork quilt is emblematic of these profound societal changes. This chapter traces the variable gender practices of quilting in Europe and America, creative systems animated by industrialization and mass migration in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Chapter 6 is a meditation on jeans. In this brief concluding chapter, I ask readers to consider the wider implications of the commonest, coarsest industrial fabric. In previous chapters I charted the great changes that arose with the adoption and adaptation of cotton textiles in the West, leading to exceptional industrial innovations that swept out from north-west Europe across the Atlantic world. The modern age has likewise been defined by the cultural meanings of jeans. This chapter assesses the various political connotations ascribed to hard-wearing fustian fabrics, from the radical English politics of the mid-1800s to the elaboration of jeans culture throughout nineteenth- and twentieth-century North America, Argentina and Europe. The ubiquity of jeans exemplifies the industrial age of cotton, with vast production and large-scale distribution, as well as the modern age of communication and advertising. Jeans are distinct in their democratic provenance and chameleon-like in their cultural capacities. Jeans are culturally tied to the American West, but for all that they reflect a demotic sensibility that is not constrained by the whims of advertisers or manufacturers. In my reflections on twentieth-century jeans, I consider the gendered meanings of fashion, anti-fashion and sufficiency as illustrated by this garment. The world was remade when cotton textiles spread west from India after 1500. Fashion and industrialization are exemplified in the heritage of denim jeans.

Throughout this volume I carry readers to times and places that encompass millennia and span the globe. The focus on fabrics requires careful study of surviving artefacts and wherever possible, I use museum resources to illuminate my analysis as well as illustrate these pages. This history of the cotton trade does not follow a well-worn path in all things, and this is an incomplete story. The impact of cotton extends well beyond the geographic boundaries I explore. Brazil, Russia and Japan,

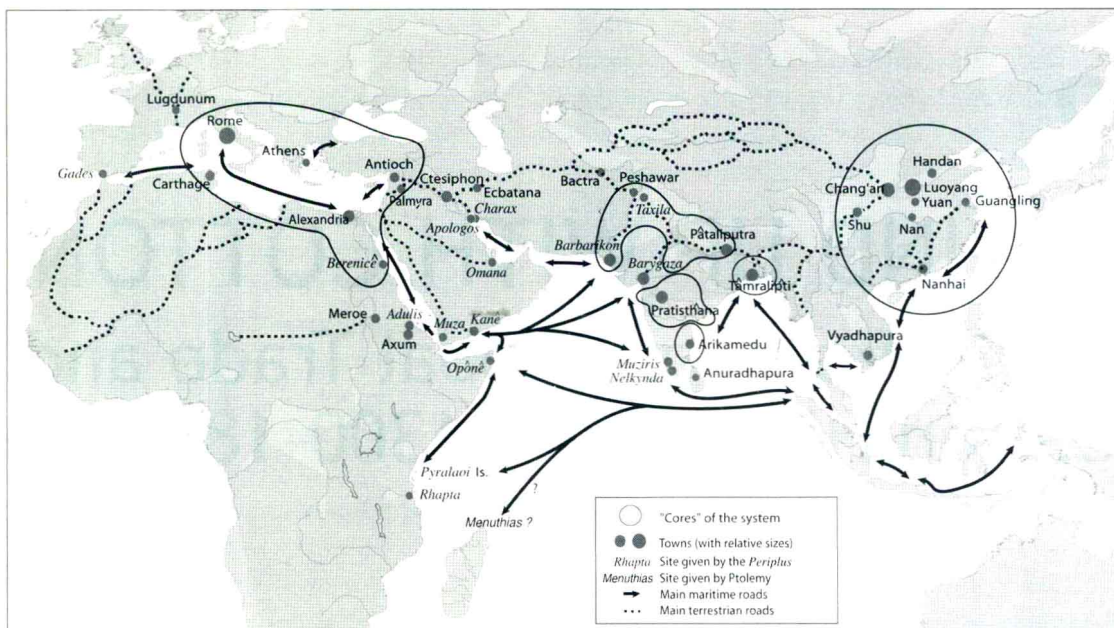
for example, are just three of the nations touched by the economic forces considered in this book. But they do not figure in this volume; constraints of space dictated this choice, rather than the value of their histories. One of the intentions of this book is to inspire readers to think again about the commonest cloth, to prompt questions that may be answered in part by this work, or which may require a wider search among the wealth of new research on this and related subjects. Indian cottons were one of the first global consumer commodities serving more than half the world long before Europeans arrived off the Indian coast in 1498. I call Indian cotton a catalyst commodity, whose very presence in a society inaugurated innovations. The industrialization of cotton in the West, centuries after its initial arrival, has employed a small army of historians and economists, all seeking to uncover the factors in this exceptional turn of events. The world was changed as a consequence of multiple sets of global forces, each interacting with the others. The changes, innovations and upheavals traced in this book touched generations, directly and indirectly. White shirt or print tunic, blue jeans or patchwork quilt, the everyday stuff of life that we take for granted depends for its existence on cotton. The history of this fibre has shaped our world.

2.

BOUND UP WITH COTTON

World Markets, Global Trade and Cotton Histories, c.1300-1800

The Indian Ocean teemed with sea-going traffic in the medieval era, linking the Red Sea and Persian Gulf in the west and the Straits of Malacca, Java Sea and South China Sea in the east, as craft of all sorts plied well-travelled routes. Trade by land was more physically challenging, yet here too there were seasonal circuits for great caravans and solitary travellers. Generations of pack animals and peripatetic merchants beat tracks across the face of continents, linking cities and peoples. Global trade before 1500 was complex and vibrant, even if very different in orientation than the era that followed. Most historical attention has fallen on the landmark events that came after the breaching of Europe's maritime boundaries with Columbus's arrival in America and Da Gama's landing in India, both in the 1490s. However a global trading system was in evidence even before those events and it is to this era that I turn first. The trade systems created in this era laid the foundations for global commerce in cotton, shaping the tastes and appetites that would animate this critical commodity in the centuries that followed. Looking at this earlier period demands a grasp of geography, along with a clear understanding of the connections that bound together land-based and water-borne commerce. Systems of trade, with mercantile, military and religious interactions developed over ancient times to the extent that some suggest a nascent commercial 'world system' a millennia prior to 1500.¹ Cycles of growth oscillated in waves from before the first century onwards, the ebbs and flows following a generally upward curve, building on the interactions of empires, kingdoms and regions. Ultimately this produced what has been called the Eurasian and African world system, the connections wrought by trade, religion and conquest crafting an intersecting network along which commodities and ideas flowed (see Figure 2.1). Philippe Beaujard describes the characteristics of this extended process: 'Each period of growth was accompanied by technological innovations in the domains of production, transportation, and



P. Beaujard

2.1 Map of the Eurasian and African world systems: reflecting economic growth and the connections wrought by trade, religious contacts and political conquest from the first to the third century.

trade, which allowed populations to overcome ecological constraints and human limitations by increasing productivity and transforming production.²

Networks of trade flourished and declined over millennia. The trade in cotton was part of the cycles of commerce. At its medieval apogee this network tied together regions from the East China Sea to Western Europe, commercial and social organisms that together constituted a dynamic world system of trade, anchored by major urban centres. Cities were well established and growing, but most were not yet large even by nineteenth-century standards.³ Trade drove the growth and expansion of these centres, intensifying the urbanization process; but again the volume of trade cannot be compared to modern or even early modern levels of exchange. Yet this commerce was decisive in societal development, as one region strived to produce what another intensely desired. The importance of commodity trade in this context cannot be overstated, supplying wants that were ‘humanly assigned and culturally constructed’.⁴ The collective material desires of Eurasian and African communities gradually expanded over centuries and fed all segments of the producer/consumer networks connected through this trade.

Seasoned merchants from this era often knew from personal experience only segments of busy mercantile channels, not surprising given the rigours of travel at this time. Nevertheless, evidence survives of those who travelled far and learned much about the ways to profit from trade. For example, a young Islamic trader, Allān B. Hassūn, journeyed from Cairo through the Red Sea to south-west India in the twelfth century, sending letters back to his family, marking his commercial adventures. After an absence of many months, Allān celebrated the loading of textiles, iron and