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**THE GOLDEN BOUGH**

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**ABSTRACT**

Research photography, with its experimental languages and openness to interaction with other media, is a powerful means of contemporary reflection. With *The Golden Bough* I tried to investigate the origins of the ‘Science of man’ and an imaginary -the colonialist one- which should belong to our past but which perhaps still concerns us more than we can imagine.

**KEYWORDS**

anthropology; ethnography; photography; colonialism; racism

**BIO**

I graduated in Cultural Anthropology, at the University of Rome “La Sapienza”; in 2001 I was a founding member of ARSDEA, Association for Research and Demo-Ethno-Anthropological Studies, through which I carried out various activities: research on the territory, museum installations, participation and organization of conferences, publication of articles. With Nahid Rezashateri, Iranian photographer-filmmaker, in 2018 I founded the collective SARAB. In recent years I have dealt with the relationship between Anthropology and Photography, addressing issues of the ethno-anthropological method, such as identity, memory, landscape, body, etc., through experimental photographic projects.

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The origin of Anthropology as 'science of primitive societies' is to be found within the intellectual climate of positivist Evolutionism where the history of human society appeared as the result of identical cumulative laws. Therefore, the 'contemporary primitives' represented the most remote stage of cultural development. An ethnocentric vision that presupposed a division of societies into 'inferior' and 'superior'. Non-European ethnic groups were observed and analyzed as 'living fossils' of evolutionary stages surpassed by western civilization, useful to study as caviets to shed light on our past. The pattern of historical and cultural development adopted by the Victorian evolutionary anthropology was that of the three evolutionary stages of eighteenth-century derivation. The peoples were classified and placed on three evolutionary steps, savage-barbarian-civilized.

An anthropology based on these strongly ethnocentric concepts was functional to the colonial States that saw in the science of primitive peoples an effective tool for ruling over ethnic groups considered inferior: know better to govern. Parallel to the vision of the savage as a representative of a humanity firm in the evolutionary path, matured the false idealist myth of the 'good savage', full of stereotypes: a romantic vision not free from ethnocentric drifts. Fortunately, modern anthropology will release itself from the meshes of power until it becomes a self-reflexive science often active in the defense of the rights of ethnic minorities, making participating observation a central method: to understand, the anthropologist must pitch his own tent in the center of the village.

The project *The Golden Bough*, borrowed from the famous essay by the evolutionary anthropologist James Frazer, aims to investigate the imagery of this period so controversial that it has seen entire ethnic groups disappear and subjugate millions of human beings at the hands of the European conquerors in the name of progress and an alleged superiority.

But how much of Victorian ethnocentrism still survives in our imagination, in political thought and in the sciences, how much do we still think standing on that highest step?



PHOTO 1



**PHOTO 2**



**PHOTO 3**



PHOTO 4



PHOTO 5



**PHOTO 6**

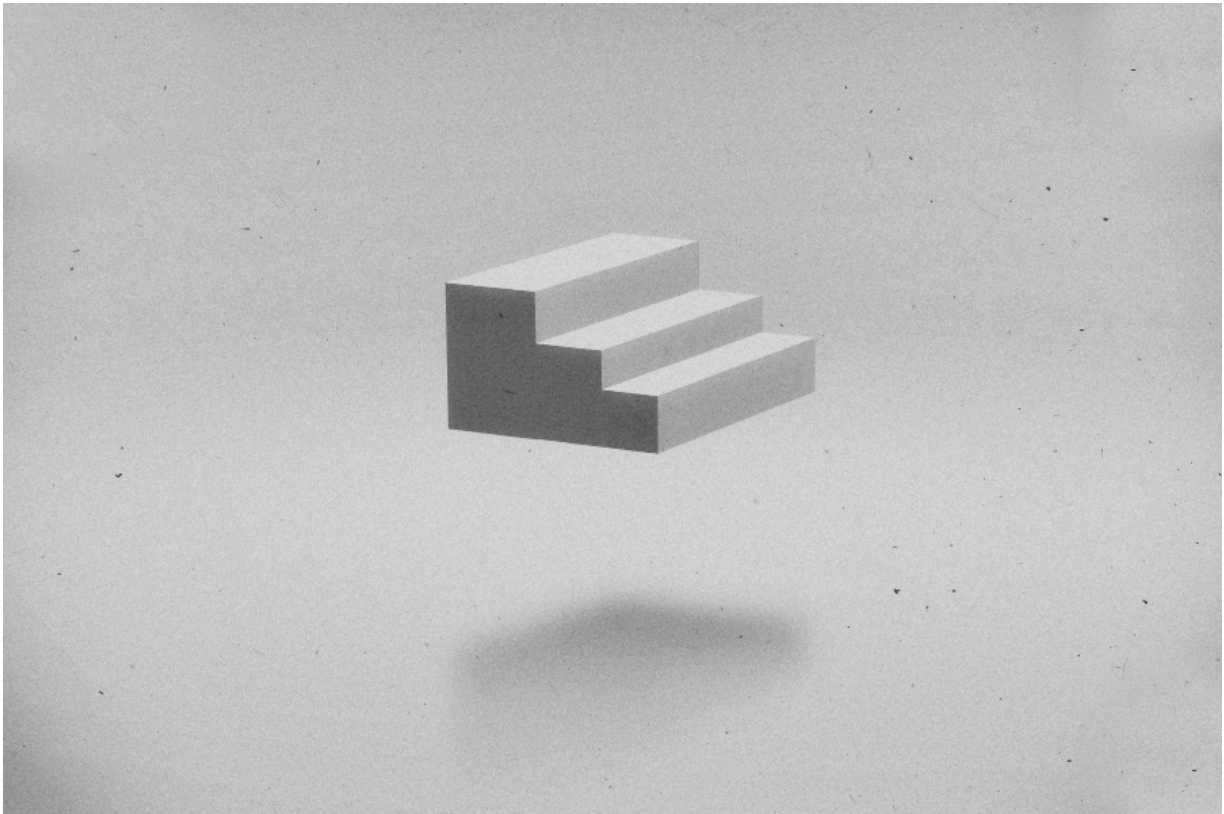


PHOTO 7



PHOTO 8

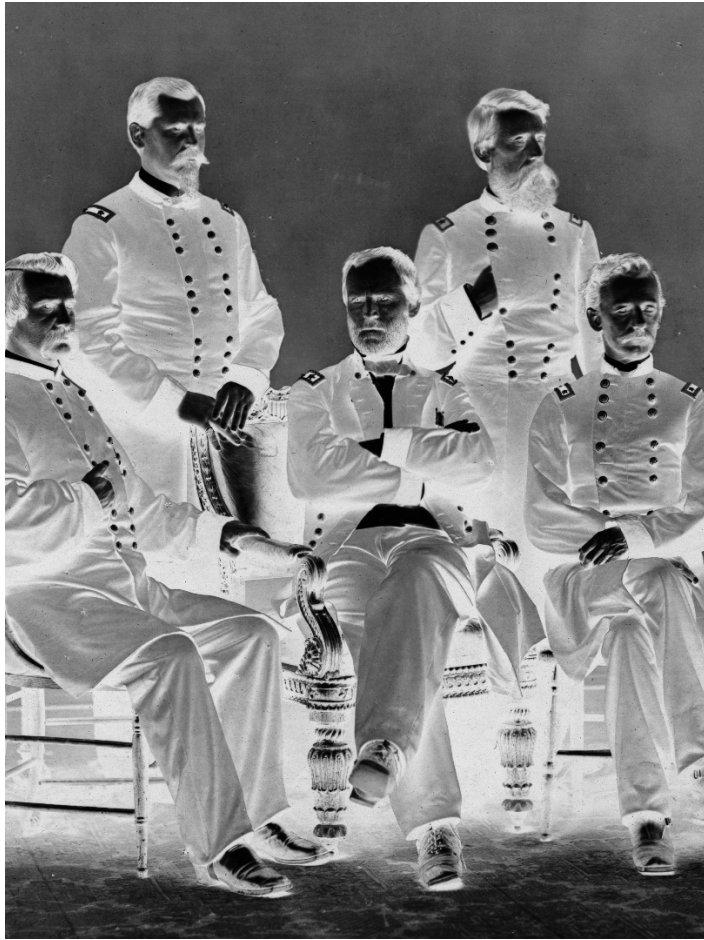


PHOTO 9



PHOTO 10



PHOTO 11



PHOTO 12





PHOTO 13



PHOTO 14



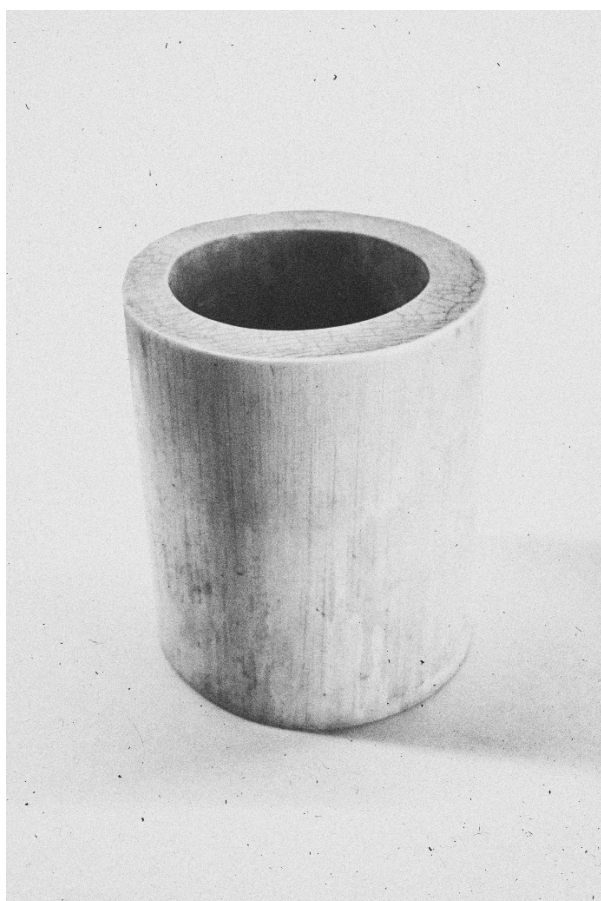
PHOTO 15



PHOTO 16



**PHOTO 17**



**PHOTO 18**

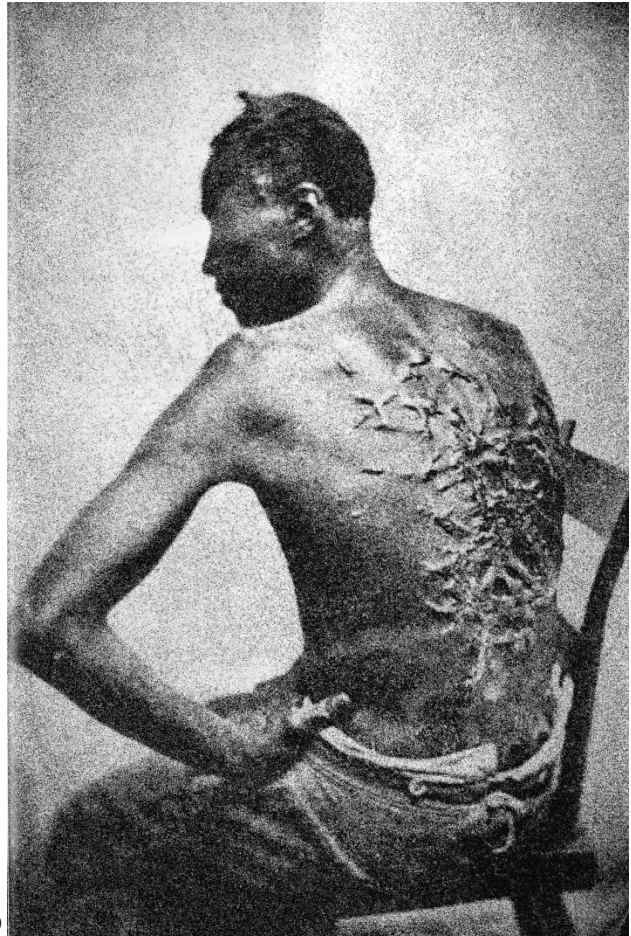


PHOTO 19



PHOTO 20