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Values and Material Culture in Rosemary Sutcliff's Roman Britain Stories

By DAVID WALSH

ABSTRACT

This article discusses how the acclaimed twentieth-century author Rosemary Sutcliff drew upon the archaeological record to advance the didactic aspects of her narratives. Sutcliff was aware that she had a platform to instil certain values in her young readership, and these values were repeatedly exhibited by her protagonists, particularly bravery and fortitude in the face of adversity. In many cases, certain objects are passed down through the generations as a symbol of these values. Usually, these items were drawn either directly from the archaeological record or display close parallels with real-world objects. Subsequently, for the readers of Sutcliff's narratives, the real-world version of the artefact, or a similar item, become encoded with these values and serve to inspire them to emulate her heroes.

Keywords: reception; Rosemary Sutcliff; literature; Rudyard Kipling; material culture

Rosemary Sutcliff (FIG. 1) was one of the most successful and prolific authors of historical fiction in the twentieth century. Primarily considered a children's author, although she wrote several novels for adults, her works have been translated into a variety of languages and *The Eagle of the Ninth* alone has sold over a million copies. She was also the recipient of several literary awards along with an OBE and CBE. While her works were set in a range of periods and locations, ranging from Homeric Greece to Civil War England, Sutcliff is best known for her many novels and short stories set in Roman to post-Roman Britain. *The Eagle of the Ninth* (1954) began an eight-book series that followed a family living in Britain from the early second century until the turn of the twelfth century.[1] In chronological order, the first three novels (*The Eagle of the Ninth*, *The Silver Branch* (1957) and *Frontier Wolf* (1980)) are set under Roman rule, while the fourth and fifth (*The Lantern Bearers* (1959b) and *Sword at Sunset* (1963)) concern the decades following the Roman withdrawal in the mid-fourth century. *Dawn Wind* (1961) is set in the late sixth century, although it features various characters who still identify as Romano-British. Alongside these are

[1] Referred to here as the 'Dolphin Ring Saga', although Sutcliff never gave it an official name.

FIG 1. *Portrait of Rosemary Sutcliff by Mark Gerson. (*© Mark Gerson/National Portrait Gallery, London*)*

stand-alone novels such as *Outcast* (1955), *Mark of the Horse Lord* (1965) and the retelling of the Boudiccan Revolt, *Song for a Dark Queen* (1978). *The Capricorn Bracelet* (1973) is a collection of short stories following several generations of a family living in Roman Britain, while her other short stories, including *The Bridge Builders* (1959a), *A Circlet of Oak Leaves* (1968), *Eagle's Egg* (1981) and *The Hundredth Feather* (1984), appeared in multi-authored anthologies. The protagonists of Sutcliff's stories sometimes play a role in major historical events, particularly battles, and encounter famous individuals, including the emperors Carausius, Allectus, Constantius Chlorus and Constans, Queen Boudicca, the governor Agricola and Aurelius Ambrosianus.

Sutcliff's works have had significant impact on how children and young adults, especially those growing up in the 1950s to 1980s, have conceptualised Roman Britain, and there has been some specific scholarly attention paid to this.[2] There have also been various studies on the appropriation of Roman culture, particularly that of the late Republican and early Imperial periods, by Victorian and Edwardian societies, as well as how these societies perceived the legacy of Roman Britain.[3] However, how Roman Britain has been presented in post-war media is an uncommon topic

[2] There have been three monographs on Sutcliff: a short volume by Margaret Meek that was published relatively early in Sutcliff's career (1962); Barbara Talcroft's *Death of the Corn King: King and Goddess in Rosemary Sutcliff's Historical Fiction for Young Adults* (1995), which explored the theme of the sacrificial king in some of Sutcliff's novels; and *Making Britannia das Epische Erzählen vom Werden eines Volkes: Untersuchungen zu den Roman Britain Novels Rosemary Sutcliffs* (2015), a published PhD thesis by Jan Martin Eschbach. The third volume is the only extended study of Sutcliff's portrayal of Roman Britain, although its focus is limited to the first four books in the 'Dolphin Ring Saga'. In the field of classical receptions, there is Philip Burton's article 'Rosemary Sutcliff's *The Eagle of the Ninth*: a festival of Britain?' (2011), which discusses various themes in the titular novel, and a couple of articles by Deborah Roberts (2007; 2010) regarding Kipling's influence on Sutcliff. There is also T.P. Wiseman's (2013) article that explores how post-war excavations in Exeter inspired certain elements of *The Eagle of the Ninth*.

[3] For the influence of the Classical world on Victorian and Edwardian society, see Vance 1997; Stray 1998; Hoselitz 2007; Vandiver 2010; Eastlake 2018. On the reception of Roman Britain in these societies, see Beard 2003; Bradley 2010; Hingley 2000; 2008; 2018.

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in academic discourse, despite the considerable impact this has on how the general public understand Roman Britain and its relationship with modern British society. The material culture of Roman Britain is especially neglected in the analysis of the reception of Roman Britain in modern Britain.

This article explores how Sutcliff employed archaeological materials as a device to enhance the didactic nature of her stories. Sutcliff felt a responsibility to impart certain values to her young readers, and so her protagonists, who are usually males in the late teens to early twenties, were designed to serve as role-models (albeit flawed) for her audience.[4] It will be argued here that Sutcliff drew on the archaeological record not only to link together different generations across her stories, but also to enhance her readers' connection to an imagined Roman Britain and encourage them to cultivate the values exhibited by her protagonists, particularly the ability to demonstrate courage and fortitude in the face of difficult odds. Subsequently, when readers of Sutcliff's stories gaze upon an object that has been inserted into her narratives, or a similar item, they are led to 'fill in the gaps' in the object's biography with the fictional object biographies created by Sutcliff. These biographies are encoded with values repeatedly exhibited by Sutcliff's protagonists, who interacted with these objects. This reinforces the readers' sense that they are not only the inheritors of the material culture itself but also the values associated with it. Moreover, as these values were in reality a reflection of contemporary concerns, it would appear to the reader/viewer that these qualities had been passed down continuously to the most recent generations, who had defended Britain from the threat of Nazi invasion.

ROSEMARY SUTCLIFF IN PROFILE

As with all authors, Sutcliff's own life and experiences informed her narratives, both consciously and subconsciously. In the case of Sutcliff, we are fortunate that she wrote a memoir, *Blue Remembered Hills* (1983), which recounted her life until the publication of *The Eagle of the Ninth*. She was born in Surrey in December 1920 to naval officer George Sutcliff and his wife Nessie. The young Rosemary endured a difficult childhood, with her father often away at sea while his wife and daughter moved between various naval bases. The frequent moves made it difficult for Sutcliff to form lasting friendships, and this was further compounded by the onset of Still's Disease at an early age, which would leave Sutcliff with limited mobility for the rest of her life. She passed away in 1992, while writing *Sword Song*, which would become the penultimate novel (chronologically) in the Dolphin Ring Saga.

Despite the intense loneliness Sutcliff experienced throughout her childhood, she also had many fond memories. In particular, she described how her mother would read her the works of Beatrix Potter, A.A. Milne, Charles Dickens, Robert Louis Stevenson and Hans Christian Andersen, along with historical novels that gave her a view of history that was more 'the minstrel's than the historian's'.[5] Consequently, Sutcliff was introduced to the history and archaeology of the Roman Empire through a lens of literary flair, with her particular favourites including Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome* (1842), a series of poems reciting famous episodes in the Eternal City's early history, and Arthur Weigall's *Wanderings in Roman Britain* (1926) and *Wanderings in Anglo-Saxon Britain* (1927).

Yet of all the authors that influenced Sutcliff, one towered above all others: Rudyard Kipling. For Sutcliff, a self-professed 'Kipling addict', Kipling's works had a profound effect and would remain a constant source of inspiration throughout her life.[6] Unsurprisingly, among her

[4] Sutcliff 1974, 306: 'I am aware of the responsibilities of my job; and I do try to put over to the child reading any book of mine some kind of ethic, a set of values'.
[5] Sutcliff 1983, 54.
[6] Sutcliff 1960b 103.

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favourite Kipling stories were those of the Romano-British centurion Parnesius featured in *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906), and the influence of these stories on her own works has been extensively documented by both scholars and Sutcliff herself.[7]

SUTCLIFF'S ROMANO-BRITISH HEROES

Fictional Roman (or Romano-British) heroes intended to serve as exemplars to children already had a long history prior to the publication of *The Eagle of the Ninth*. The desire to instil the virtues of Roman (often Republican) heroes in students at British private schools, who would go on to serve the British Empire in its administration or among the clergy, was a common theme in much of the classic children's literature of Sutcliff's childhood.[8] In *Lays of Ancient Rome*, Macaulay described these virtues as: 'fortitude, temperance, veracity, spirit to resist oppression, respect for legitimate authority, fidelity in the observing of contracts, disinterestedness, ardent patriotism'.[9] Thus Classics were taught not only with the aim of familiarising students with Latin and Greek, but also to illustrate the qualities that had allowed the city of Rome to forge a great empire. This model is illustrated in Kipling's short story *Regulus*, which is about a boy at private school who exhibits the same stoical approach to punishment as that of the Roman Republican hero Regulus, the central figure in Horace's *Ode* that he and his classmates translate at the opening of the story.[10]

However, as Macaulay would note, the Romans were not without their faults, for 'Christian charity and chivalrous generosity were alike unknown to them.'[11] Moreover, it was difficult to reconcile the greatness of Rome with its eventual collapse, which was often described as the result of a moral decline among its leaders. Kipling epitomised this sentiment in his and Charles Fletcher's *A School History of England*: 'The greatest empire that the world has ever seen was slowly dying at the heart, dying of too much power, too much prosperity, too much luxury. What a lesson for us all to-day!'[12] That there were lessons to be learnt from Rome's decline was not merely a literary flourish; rather, fears regarding the precarity of Britain's own imperial status, particularly after the failures of the Boer War and in the face of German expansion, were increasingly prevalent. For example, the Scout Movement was founded by Robert Baden-Powell in 1910 in response to such anxieties.[13] Yet there was reason to believe that the British Empire could avoid meeting a similar fate to that of Rome, for, as Kipling and Fletcher described, the British of the early twentieth century were not only the inheritors of the Romans who conquered Britain, but also the 'Celts' whom they subjugated: 'Celtic mothers bore British sons to Roman fathers, and crooned Celtic songs over the cradles of babies, who would one day carry the Roman flag.'[14] Later the Anglo-Saxons, who despite being 'stupid' were also 'brave, patient and cool-headed … He honoured his wife and his home … He never knew when he was beaten', added to this mixing pot of cultural values, and they were followed by the Normans, who were not only 'the cleverest, strongest and most adventurous race alive',

[7] Jones and Way 1976, 147; Wright 1981; Sutcliff 1983, 53–4; Roberts 2007; 2010; Eschbach 2015, 31–45. As a testament to her love for Kipling, one of the few non-fiction works written by Sutcliff was a monograph discussing his stories for children: see Sutcliff 1960b.
[8] Hingley 2000, 25; Butler 2012; Eastlake 2018.
[9] Macaulay 1842, 37.
[10] Plotz 1993.
[11] Macaulay 1842, 38.
[12] Fletcher and Kipling 1911, 22.
[13] Butler 2012.
[14] Fletcher and Kipling 1911, 21.

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but had also kept the customs of the Roman state alive and had re-introduced them to Britain in the wake of 1066.[15]

It was within this climate of anxiety regarding Britain's imperial status that we see the emergence of Romano-British literary heroes who represent the best of both the British and Roman worlds. Kipling's Parnesius is one example, but there was also G.A. Henty's *Beric the Briton* (1892), a young man from a British tribe who puts up an admirable fight against the Roman conquest before being captured, earning his freedom, and returning as governor of Britain.[16] In Henry Treece's *Legions of the Eagle* (1954), a boy from the Trinovantes is adopted by a Roman family and eventually joins the Roman army. In a reversal of the usual narrative, Marjorie Rowling's *They Fought for Brigantia* (1950) saw the son of a Roman soldier captured and raised by a British tribe, although eventually he saves his biological father and decides to return to Rome with him. Many of these figures demonstrate the virtues outlined by Macaulay, but also exhibit traits they have developed from their exposure to British culture. As a result, they contrast notably with the Roman elites who care more about their own personal gain than the good of the Empire, such as Magnus Maximus and 'the great glutton' Rutilianus in *Puck of Pook's Hill*; Nero and Rufinus in *Beric the Briton*; and Clodius Albinus who seeks to overthrow Severus in *They Fought for Brigantia*.[17]

Many of Sutcliff's protagonists are of a similar mould. They are either a Roman soldier who decides to remain in the province and marry a British woman (e.g. *The Eagle of the Ninth*, *The Capricorn Bracelet* and *Eagle's Egg*) or can trace their lineage back to Roman soldiers and their British wives. One unusual case is Beric in *Outcast*, who follows a similar trajectory to his namesake in Henty's book, whereby he is the son of Roman citizens, but is raised by a British tribe before being captured and taken to Rome. Eventually, Beric is adopted by a Roman soldier who lives in Britain, and at the close of the novel decides to join the Roman army. In any case, the Roman and British aspects of the characters' identities merge and the resulting combination sees them repeatedly exhibit certain characteristics, most notably bravery and fortitude in the face of adversity. This could take a variety of forms: Marcus is decommissioned due to his injured leg and then embarks on the treacherous quest to retrieve the lost eagle (*The Eagle of the Ninth*); Justin overcomes his stutter and poor constitution to help lead the successful rebellion against Allectus and his Saxon mercenaries (*The Silver Branch*); Alexios must overcome the shame of his failure on the German frontier to lead his men to safety (*Frontier Wolf*); both Aquila (*The Lantern Bearers*) and Owain (*Dawn Wind*) survive life as Saxon thralls, with the former eventually joining Artos in defending Britain from the seemingly unstoppable Saxon threat.

Key to the development of the protagonists' courage and resilience is military service, with the majority of Sutcliff's protagonists serving in the Roman army.[18] This service instils in them the

[15] Fletcher and Kipling 1911, 28–9, 43.

[16] Hingley 2000, 25, 82–4.

[17] The rise of a Romano-British hero as an exemplar for children in place of Roman Republican archetypes also correlates with changing perceptions of classical studies in Britain. In the 1930s and '40s, fictional portrayals of classics teachers in literature appear to shift toward depictions of well-meaning but out-dated figures, such as in Hilton's *Goodbye, Mr Chips* (1934) and Waugh's *Scott-King's Modern Europe* (1947), who attempt to impart a more traditional all-round education in the face of an increasing science- and grade-based curriculum. Sutcliff (1983, 79, 100) neither enjoyed learning nor excelled at Latin and did not suggest it had any positive impact on her. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that this was also the period when the field of Romano-British archaeology became increasingly prominent in the public consciousness, particularly in the post-war period as reconstruction provided opportunities for new excavations.

[18] Where the protagonists do not serve in the Roman army, the Roman soldiers that they encounter, such as Titus Drusus Justinius in *Outcast* and Titus Hilarion in *Mark of the Horse Lord*, are portrayed in a generally positive light. In the case of the former, Justinius becomes an adopted father to Beric and inspires him to join the Roman army at the end of the novel. In *Mark of the Horse Lord*, Hilarion acknowledges that he and Phaedrus might have been friends in

qualities that help them persevere and triumph despite hardships, injury and loss of loved ones. That Sutcliff saw merit in military service is unsurprising given the significant role the British Armed Services played in her own life, from residing at various naval bases as a child to the admiration she had for those serving in World War II, which included her father and her beloved cousin Edward. It is also no coincidence that the growing threat of the Germanic tribes and the efforts of her Romano-British protagonists to keep them at bay, sometimes with little to no hope of success, is a recurring theme in Sutcliff's novels set in the third century onward. Subsequently, the parallels with Britain's own status in 1940, with Britain holding out alone against the expansion of Nazi Germany before turning the tide, would be readily apparent to many of Sutcliff's readers.[19] Moreover, many of Sutcliff's readers in the 1950s would have expected to undertake military service, as for 17- to 21-year-olds an 18-month period of National Service remained compulsory until 1960. Sutcliff herself developed a great sense of resilience in response to the uncompromising position her mother took toward her disability. In her memoir, Sutcliff described Nessie's 'Spartan' treatment of her and how she acted as though she was raising a boy rather than a girl. Nessie would force her daughter to undertake long walks despite her disability, determined that the young Rosemary would not be defined by it. Despite the pain and discomfort this caused Sutcliff, she believed that it helped her to develop a strong resolve that served her well.[20]

However, Sutcliff's protagonists demonstrate courage not only in the face of external threats, for they question – even disobey – orders from superiors if they think there is good cause. In *Frontier Wolf*, Alexios gives the brother of a local tribal leader a swift death rather than the prolonged suffering ordered by his superior, while in *The Lantern Bearers* Aquila saves the life of his half-Saxon nephew and sends him back to the Saxon camp despite expecting to be punished for it. In *The Silver Branch*, the heroes lead the resistance against Allectus, the new emperor of Britain, after he orchestrates the assassination of Carausius. We can trace this willingness to stand up to misguided authority back to influences in Sutcliff's childhood, particularly her relationship with Colonel Crookenden whom she met when living at Sheerness naval base. Sutcliff admired how Crookenden (who she thought looked like a Roman general) was unusual in allowing his men to undo their collars during stifling temperatures, saying he did not care about breaking regulations even if it cost him promotion.[21] The influence of Kipling's Parnesius is also apparent, for while Parnesius believes it is important to be hard on the men for their own good, he refuses orders from Magnus Maximus to execute disobedient soldiers.[22]

Sutcliff's readers would never find themselves defending Hadrian's Wall or trying to survive as a Saxon thrall, but they could still look to Sutcliff's heroes as examples of young men who were faced with challenges and persevered, much like their immediate forebearers during the Wars. Importantly, Sutcliff was keen to demonstrate that one might not receive a tangible reward for doing so, or achieve what was originally intended, but, as her protagonists discover, the results can still be satisfying: a home, a family or community, and a sense of accomplishment.[23]

different circumstances but is forced to carry out his duty to the detriment of Phaedrus and his tribe for the good of the Empire. Notably in *Song for a Dark Queen*, despite it being a story about the Boudiccan Revolt told from the perspective of a member of the Iceni tribe, several chapters conclude with letters home from the young Agricola, who displays many of the qualities exhibited by Sutcliff's other protagonists.

[19] Kutzer 2000, 131–2; Eschbach 2015, 223–42. By the mid-1960s, Sutcliff had largely ceased writing stories set in late to post-Roman Britain that included the threat of the invading Saxons, perhaps due to the increasing chronological distance from the events of the War.

[20] Sutcliff 1983, 54–5 and 101–2.

[21] Sutcliff 1983, 27–8.

[22] Kipling 1906, 158.

[23] Fisher 1975, 190.

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Moreover, although they are not kings or generals and go unnamed in the historical texts, her heroes still have an impact on major events. In doing so, they remind her readers that even everyday people can play a positive role in determining the course of history.

SUTCLIFF AND THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD

Sutcliff drew significantly from the archaeological record when developing her narratives and would spend up to three months researching before writing a first draft of a novel, which included reading a broad range of archaeological scholarship.[24] To prepare for *The Lantern Bearers*, Sutcliff read works by some of the most prominent archaeologists of the early to mid-twentieth century, such as R.G. Collingwood, Mortimer Wheeler and Ian Richmond.[25] In the forewords for certain novels, Sutcliff highlighted the archaeological discoveries she employed directly in the novel. In *The Eagle of the Ninth*, Sutcliff explained how the discovery of the bronze eagle (FIG. 2) in the basilica at Silchester in 1866 (originally thought to be a legionary eagle) had inspired her to write the novel.[26] In *The Silver Branch*, the Saxon spy and Evicatos were based on the remains of a male found in a ditch at Rutupiae (Richborough) and the Ogham stone of Evicatos (Ebicatos) found at Silchester respectively.[27] In *Sword at Sunset*, she discussed the burial of a young girl laid under nine horses discovered at Trimontium.[28] Sutcliff's correspondence also reveals instances where she inserted objects from the archaeological record into her narratives but did not state this in the novel. In a letter to her friend Jac Cowie, Sutcliff mentions a 'Mithraic' altar at St Mary's Church at Stone-in-Oxney that she included in *Outcast*, which is set up by Roman soldiers on 'Bull Island' (the Isle of Oxney).[29] In other cases, there are no records of Sutcliff stating specifically that she employed an object directly from the archaeological record, but it is apparent that this is the case. For example, the description of a shield-boss owned by Marcus' uncle Aquila is clearly based on the Battersea Shield, a bronze shield boss recovered from the Thames dating to 350–50 BCE.[30] Cyril Walter Hodges' accompanying illustration in the original edition of the novel also depicts Marcus holding what appears to be the Battersea Shield. Evidently the inscription recording the construction of the Serapeum at York by the order of Claudius Hieronymianus, legate of the Sixth Legion, served as the inspiration for the character of Claudius Hieronimianus, the Egyptian legate in *The Eagle of the Ninth.*[31]

There were also instances where Sutcliff was influenced by the archaeological record but did not draw on specific materials. Weigall's description of the Bignor villa as a place where

[24] Green 1992.

[25] Meek 1962, 71.

[26] It is possible that Sutcliff first read about the eagle in Weigall 1926, 32, which also refers to the disappearance of the ninth legion (1926, 101). Sutcliff also read Traill's *Social England*, which suggests that the eagle was buried during the battle between Allectus and Constantinus' forces (1894, 63–4), a story repeated in Thomson 1924, 61–5. It is now thought that the eagle was originally part of a bronze statue and was part of a foundation deposit created in the second century (Durham and Fulford 2013).

[27] For the remains at Richborough, see Bushe-Fox 1949, 80, who interpreted them as that of a Saxon raider. The inspiration behind the inclusion of Evicatos was likely the description of the Ogham stone in Windle's (1923, 135) account, which Sutcliff listed in her bibliography for *The Lantern Bearers*. Another possible source is Thomson 1924, 667–8.

[28] Possibly based on the account in Curle 1911, 111.

[29] Seven Stories Archive JAC/01/01. Contra Cock 1935, 4, the altar is unlikely to be Mithraic; rather, it bears an Apis bull relating to the worship of Isis or Serapis: see Kater-Sibbes and Vermaseren 1975, no. 341.

[30] Possibly inspired by Windle 1923, 7–8. Another potential source is Rowling's *They Fought for Brigantia* where, as in *The Eagle of the Ninth*, the shield is the subject of a conversation regarding how the differences between Roman and local worldviews manifest in art. This scene is also accompanied by an illustration of the shield.

[31] *RIB* 658.

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FIG 2. *Bronze Eagle found at Silchester, now in Reading Museum.* (© Reading Museum)

'Generations of Roman or British landlords must have lived … where the first owner had erected the house in sheltered and ideal surroundings … some ten miles from Chichester' may have influenced Sutcliff's decision to have Marcus found the family farm on the South Downs at the end of *The Eagle of the Ninth*, but she later denied that Bignor was the archetype. Instead, she was inspired by the 'Roman bits and pieces all over the Downs and the Weald', although she could imagine Marcus' farm being discovered one day 'a dozen or so miles northeast of Porchester'.[32] It would also seem that there was no single inspiration behind the famous dolphin ring, as there are no known emeralds decorated with a dolphin motif from Roman Britain. However, dolphins do frequently appear on intaglios found in Roman Britain, with an illustration of one present in Wheeler's *London in Roman Times* (FIG. 3), whose work, as noted above, Sutcliff was acquainted with.[33]

ENCODED OBJECTS

The narrative device of a protagonist who obtains an object that symbolises a legacy is a common trend in children's literature published in the 1950s–70s.[34] Such plot devices would feel particularly pertinent to younger readers who, in the aftermath of two World Wars, had inherited or encountered objects left behind by those who had not returned from the conflicts. However, this is not a purely modern concept. In the Homeric poems, the association that various objects, particularly arms and armour such as Meriones' boar-tusk helmet and

[32] Thompson 1999; Weigall 1926, 220; Seven Stories Archive JAC/01/01.
[33] Wheeler 1930, 98. On intaglios from Roman Britain bearing images of dolphins, see Marshman 2015, 118.
[34] Butler 2006, 262–3.

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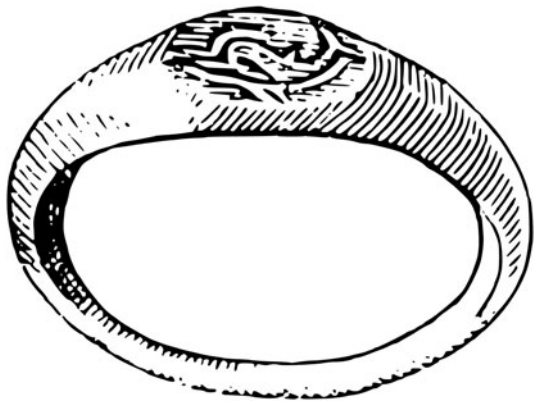

FIG 3. *Drawing of a ring with a dolphin insignia found in London. (*After Wheeler 1930, 98*)*

Ereuthalion's armour, have with their previous owners is used to inspire the current holder and their associates.[35] Given Sutcliff's familiarity with the *Iliad* (her novel *Black Ships Before Troy* is an adaptation), she would have been aware of how such object biographies could be used as effective literary devices.

The concept of object biographies has become well established in archaeology and has been the subject of considerable discourse.[36] In essence, the concept describes how objects can take on different meanings as they move from one context to another. For example, a coin might be used for a monetary transaction, then offered as a votive, then turned into jewellery, and finally passed on as an heirloom, with each of these constituting a different chapter in its biography. However, we can never reconstruct an object's biography in its entirety, particularly when there are no textual sources to guide us, and we are left with many gaps in the story. Within these gaps there is ample space for the viewer to create their own narratives, as Susan Pearce observes when discussing a jacket worn by a soldier during the Battle of Waterloo:

> As the viewer stands in front of the showcase, he makes use of the various perspectives which the object offers him, some of which have already been suggested: his creative urges are set in motion, his imagination is engaged, and the dynamic process of interpretation and reinterpretation begins, which extends far beyond the mere perception of what the object is. The object activates our own faculties, and the product of this creative activity is the virtual dimension of the object, which endows it with present reality, The message or meaning which the object offers is always incomplete and each viewer fills in the gaps in his own way, thereby excluding other possibilities: as he looks he makes his own decisions about how the story is to be told of, for example, Lieutenant Anderson's feelings on that day.[37]

The same effect might also occur in relation to material culture that does not have ties to a specific individual or group, according to R.G. Collingwood:

> There is no better way of thinking oneself back into the Roman point of view than to look up on a map a well attested piece of Roman road and follow it for a few miles across country . . . . . Get a

[35] Crielaard 2003.
[36] On the concept of object biographies, see Kopytoff 1986; Gosden and Marshall 1999.
[37] Pearce 1994, 26.

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> Roman road, or, for that matter, any road, under your feet, and you enter the spirit of the men who made it; you see the country through their eyes; you get into your bones a feeling of what they meant to do with the country, and how they meant to do it.[38]

Consequently, when Sutcliff's readers are faced with the real-world equivalent of an object that appears in her narratives, they have a fictional object biography to draw upon that allows them to 'fill in the gaps', which are encoded with didactic elements of her stories. For the viewer, while they are aware they are looking at a Roman artefact which could have been used for various purposes by different people, there is rarely any information as to who these people were. Thus, Sutcliff's readers can fill these gaps with the experiences of her protagonists in much the same way viewers of Anderson's jacket might apply narratives to this object, as Pearce describes above. This need not be the exact object from the narrative but one that is similar, and we have examples from Sutcliff herself discussing this. Long after the publication of *Warrior Scarlet*, set in Bronze Age Sussex, upon reading about a flint celt that had been fashioned for use by a left-handed person that had been discovered nearby, Sutcliff immediately thought 'Obviously it was Drem's, my Bronze Age boy's'.[39] Evidently, Sutcliff did not mean this literally, but as the object was similar to that used by Drem she could not help but think of him. Elsewhere, Sutcliff discussed in one of her letters to Cowie how various archaeological objects were 'in use' while her protagonists were living in Britain:

> Thank you very much for the potsherd, which is now sitting on my workroom windowsill in company with a little bit of marble from the Parthenon, a shell fallen out of the plaster at Troy, a lump of Roman road surface presented to me by some small boys from a prep school and one or two other treasures of a like kind. Not only was this latest addition still in use when Aquila met Eugenius at Viricovium [*The Lantern Bearers*], but it was lying around broken in the general sack and turmoil, when Owain wandered back there looking for any remnants of the British war host, and found Regina in the ruins! [*Dawn Wind*][40]

The potency of objects that become entwined with narratives, real or fictional, should not be underestimated.[41] As Weiner has observed regarding heirlooms, '[T]he object acts as a vehicle for bringing past time into the present, so that the histories of ancestors, titles, or *mythological events* become an intimate part of a person's present identity' [emphasis added].[42] It is not the intention here to digress into whether objects have agency, but there can be little debate that objects can have a considerable impact on people's thoughts and feelings, particularly when they are associated with particular individuals or events, real or imagined. Sutcliff was evidently aware of this, and frequently utilised it as a didactic tool to encourage her readers to cultivate certain values.

COURAGE, FORTITUDE, AND MATERIAL CULTURE IN SUTCLIFF'S STORIES

As discussed, Sutcliff's protagonists are frequently soldiers who exhibit courage and fortitude in the face of significant odds, whether this be external threats, their superiors or their own

[38] Van der Dussen 1980, 406, quoted from Collingwood's 'Rome in Britain' articles for *The Home-Reading Magazine*, 1925.

[39] Sutcliff 2001, 117–18.

[40] Seven Stories Archive JAC/01/04. In her essay *History is People* (1974), Sutcliff also recalled visiting the museum at Heraklion where she beheld a tiny pottery tree with five or six branches ending in a fat little bird and how this led her to reflect on the 'young girl' that would have owned it several thousand years ago.

[41] Hooper-Greenhill 2000, 108–11.

[42] Weiner 1985, 210. The concept of 'inalienable possessions' (i.e. objects retained within families and social groups) that have mythological pasts applied to them is explored more thoroughly in her 1992 volume.

disabilities. Throughout her stories, various objects are passed down through the generations by these protagonists which become symbolic of their previous owners' triumphs and sacrifices and remind the present owner of the legacy they have inherited. So potent is this connection to their predecessors that at times the protagonist can almost visualise their ancestors before them when interacting with these objects.

In the Flavius Aquila family, there is Marcus' father's dolphin signet ring, which Marcus retrieves along with the legionary eagle. The ring later passes to Flavius (*The Silver Branch*), Alexios (*Frontier Wolf*), Aquila (*The Lantern Bearers*), Aquila's son Flavian and grandson Minnow (*Sword at Sunset*), Owain (*Dawn Wind*) and later descendants living under Viking and Norman rule.[43] Frequently the ring is passed on when the father falls in combat (often against the Saxons), such as Marcus' father, Flavian in *The Lantern Bearers,* Aquila and Minnow in *Sword at Sunset* and Owain's father in *Dawn Wind*. Thus, the inheritance of the ring becomes intwined with a tradition of courage and sacrifice in defence of one's honour, family and home (as opposed to, say, death in a drunken bar brawl or being run over by a cart). In instances where the protagonist's immediate predecessor does not feature in the novel, such as *Frontier Wolf*, the legacy of the ring is still made apparent. Following his failure on the German frontier, Alexios looks at 'the flawed emerald ring with its intaglio-cut dolphin on his signet finger. An old and battered ring that had come down to him through a long and proud line of soldiers. And, the only thing he could do for them now, having utterly failed them, was to take his beating in a way that wouldn't shame them still further.' Later, after leading his men to safety, Alexios looks at the ring again and acknowledges he has lived up to his ancestors' legacy.[44] Even in *The Shield Ring*, when Bjorn receives the ring in the eleventh century, he is told how 'the people of the legions … [passed it down] from father to son' and receives his (long deceased) father's dirk with it.[45]

The bronze eagle of the Ninth Legion also links together various generations of the Flavius Aquila family and becomes symbolic of their bravery.[46] As with the dolphin ring, initially the eagle connects Marcus to his father, who died a noble death trying to lead the last of his men to safety, as the legate Claudius laments: 'Many times [the eagle] found honour in the wars, against foes abroad and rebellion at home. Shame came to it; but at the end it was honourably held until the last of those who held it died beneath its wings. It has led brave men.'[47] In *The Silver Branch*, the eagle is rediscovered by cousins Justin and Flavian in the hypocaust under the family home in Calleva (Silchester) and it becomes a focus for their own legion to rally around (quite literally in the final battle) as they lead the resistance against Allectus: 'We have our dunghill legion – and now the gods send us a standard to follow, and who are we to refuse a gift of the gods?'[48] Justin particularly feels the eagle connects him to his ancestor Marcus:

> Again there came to him as he worked that sense of kinship with the young soldier who had made a home in this downland valley, the young soldier who surely had brought the lost Eagle of a lost Legion home to its own people, so that Eagle and farm were linked, and it was fitting that the ancient standard should go out from here to its last fight. The feeling of kinship was so strong that when, just as they had finished their task, someone loomed into the open doorway, he looked up almost expecting to see the other Marcus standing there with the windy dark behind him.[49]

[43] Eschbach 2015, 148–53.
[44] Sutcliff 1980, 14, 186.
[45] Sutcliff 1960c, 73–4.
[46] Eschbach 2015, 153–6.
[47] Sutcliff 1977, 277.
[48] Sutcliff 1958, 159.
[49] Sutcliff 1958, 163.

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In *The Capricorn Bracelet*, the titular object – which carries the emblem of the first Calpurnii's legion – undergoes a similar process as it is passed down through the family during the Roman period and beyond. Arguably even more so than the dolphin ring, the Capricorn bracelet is an explicit symbol of a tradition of courage within a family. It is for courage shown in the line of duty that the first Lucius is awarded the bracelet, and fittingly the Capricorn is already the personal device of his family. In the subsequent stories, Lucius' descendants often describe how the bracelet elicits thoughts of him and their other ancestors, and what their predecessors would make of what had become of the Roman army. In the final short story, when Lucian Calpurnius' father leaves to serve in Magnus Maximus' ill-fated campaign on the continent, he tells his son to remember always that 'you are Roman'.[50] Later, the bracelet is returned to Lucian by a former friend of his father's, who is revealed also to have been the commander of the guard on the night before his execution. Despite being on opposite sides of the conflict, the man tells Lucian his father met an honourable death in the best of company. However, Lucian's father left no parting words for his son, for, as the man tells Lucian, 'the bracelet *is* the message' [emphasis in the original text].[51] Notably, when Lucian initially receives the bracelet, he assumes his father will appear as he and the object are so intertwined. Now in possession of the bracelet, Lucian takes charge of the family and tells his mother and sister they will start a new life elsewhere, although he continues to consider what his father would do. Finally, Lucian makes a pledge to pass the bracelet on to his children, as it will allow them to retain their link to Rome despite being the first generation of the family for centuries not to be born under Roman rule.

In *Sword at Sunset*, the pommel inlaid in the hilt of Ambrosius Aurelianus' sword leads Artos to consider his ancestry while he contemplates leaving Ambrosianus' court to undertake his own campaign against the Saxons:

> I stood for a long time looking at the great seal, waking and losing the star in the heart of the amethyst, oddly moved by the link across the years with my great-grandsire, the proud Spanish general who had married a princess of Arfon and so founded our line before his own legionaries and proclaimed himself Emperor … and now it seemed to me that I was holding the whole history of our line … A stormy history, but a proud one; of Maximus himself; of Constantine, the son he had left …[52]

After winning the Battle of Badon Hill, Artos gives a speech to his men, drawing attention to the pommel as a symbol of his imperial lineage before going on to state how 'The Island of Britain is all that still stands of Rome-in-the-West and therefore it is enough that we in Britain know that the light still burns.'[53] The pommel has become a symbol of Artos' imperial heritage, the legacy of Roman Britain, and the continuing resistance against the darkness of the Saxon invasion.

However, the objects, and the values encoded within them, which appear in Sutcliff's novels need not necessarily be passed on only within a family group. This is illustrated in Sutcliff's novels *Warrior Scarlet* and *Knight's Fee*, set in the Bronze Age and Middles Ages, respectively. In *Warrior Scarlet*, the young warrior Drem suffers a lame right arm which forces him to adapt and use his flint handaxe with his left hand. In *Knight's Fee*, the protagonist Randal finds Drem's flint handaxe and feels 'some living bond running back through the blue, living flint, making him part of other men and sheep and wolves, and they part of him'.[54] As Marder has observed, 'For both Drem and Randal, the major problem is to conquer their

[50] Sutcliff 1973, 130.
[51] Sutcliff 1973, 135.
[52] Sutcliff 1963, 24.
[53] Sutcliff 1963, 426.
[54] Sutcliff 1960a, 128.

handicap, to learn not to allow resentment to colour their relations with their fellows, and to give and accept friendship.'[55] The object connects Randal to Drem across the centuries, and in doing so Randal emulates Drem by overcoming what others perceive to be his disadvantages. For Sutcliff's readers, just because they are not related to Marcus or Lucius Calpurnius is no impediment to them emulating them.

Indeed, Sutcliff's Romano-British protagonists themselves encounter objects associated with long-dead soldiers to whom they have no direct connection, which not only lead them to reflect on the past, but carry out certain actions. Often, these objects come in the form of an altar or gravestone. In *The Eagle of the Ninth*, Claudius describes how Eburacum is haunted, not by actual ghosts, but by the 'altars to Spanish gods they [the Ninth Legion] set up and worshipped at; by their names and numbers idly scratched on the walls … it can create an atmosphere which is unpleasantly strong', which leads Marcus to enquire about the fate of the Ninth Legion and propose that he attempt to retrieve the eagle.[56] In *The Silver Branch*, Evicatos shows Justin and Flavius an altar that Sylvanus Varus, standard bearer of the fifth Tungrian Cohort of the Second Augustan Legion, set up to the Fates a century or two earlier; after contemplating what Varus needed help for, the cousins leave a sestercia [sic] in the hope the Fates will help them.[57] In *Frontier Wolf*, inspired by an altar he had seen in a German forest, which was dedicated to Pan Sylvanus by Gneus A. Drusillus, Tribune of the Sixth Gaulish Cohort, for the finest boar he ever killed, Alexios pours out an offering of wine to 'the shades of the men who had kept the lookout and guarded the signal fire in this place'.[58] In *The Lantern Bearers*, as Rutupiae is abandoned, Aquila thinks of the ghosts that are left behind: 'of the men who had left their names on the leaning gravestones above the wash of the tide? A Cohort Centurion with a Syrian name, dying after thirty years' service, a boy trumpeter of the Second Legion, dying after two'. Immediately thereafter, seemingly inspired by these monuments to these fallen soldiers, Aquila lights the beacon in the lighthouse, symbolising that the spirit of Roman Britain will continue to burn in the oncoming darkness.[59] In *Dawn Wind*, Owain sets a rabbit trap on the grave of Marcus Petronius of Vicenza, Standard Bearer to the Fourteenth Legion, outside Viroconium and wonders what the dead man would think of it. When he returns later, this is the only snare that has caught anything, leading Owain to salute Marcus' memory in thanks for helping to him trap his dinner.[60]

These inscriptions commemorating deceased soldiers would serve as acute reminders for Sutcliff's readers of those who had died in more recent conflicts, echoing the monuments erected to the fallen of World War I in many towns and villages across the country.[61] Many of those commemorated on these monuments would have died before Sutcliff's readers were born,

[55] Marder 1977, 139.
[56] Sutcliff 1977, 120.
[57] Sutcliff 1958, 65.
[58] Sutcliff 1980, 52.
[59] Sutcliff 1959b, 21.
[60] Sutcliff 1962, 31–3. The tombstone of Marcus Petronius, which was found in 1752 outside of Wroxeter, is the only one of these inscriptions taken directly from the archaeological record (*RIB* 294). The full inscription reads: 'Marcus Petronius, son of Lucius, of the Menenian voting-tribe, from Vicetia, aged 38, a soldier of the Fourteenth Legion Gemina, served 18 years, was a standard-bearer and lies buried here.' The dedication erected by Gneus Drusillus in Germany might be based upon an altar found near Stanhope that was set up by a prefect in thanks to Silvanus and the Divinities of the Emperors for helping him hunt down a boar (*RIB* 1041). There is no extant reference to a Fifth Tungrian Cohort, of which Varus was the standard bearer, although the First Cohort of Tungrians is attested in various inscriptions from Housesteads and Castlesteads, while a second cohort was present at Birrens and Castlesteads (Crow 2004, 61–5). At York, there was an altar to Silvanus erected by the *cornicularius legionis VIIII Hispanae* Lucius Celerinius Vitalis (*RIB* 659), along with several building inscriptions and gravestones referring to members of the Ninth Legion (e.g. *RIB* 255, 260, 665, 673, 680). Richborough has produced very few inscriptions, none of which refer to the individuals commemorated in *The Lantern Bearers*.
[61] Until relatively recently, memorials were rarely erected to the fallen of World War II: see Hewitt 2003.

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or at least when they were too young to remember the conflict, yet these memorials would consistently remind them of those who had fallen in the Wars, and by extension the values for which they had sacrificed themselves. Such memorials would have been particularly poignant for Sutcliff, who spent her childhood living among military communities and her early adulthood painting miniatures of young men who would shortly depart to fight in the War.[62] Moreover, Kipling's prominent role in the War Graves Commission, partly resulting from the death of his own son in World War I, would no doubt have made these memorials even more pertinent to Sutcliff.[63]

Finally, there is another object that features in many of Sutcliff's narratives that connects large numbers of people across the centuries: Hadrian's Wall. For Sutcliff's protagonists, the Wall often marks the edge of civilisation, for although Roman power extends beyond it, they are not safe when they cross to its northern side. In *The Eagle of the Ninth*, the Wall is still a relatively recent construction, the purpose of which is to keep out the 'menace to the north'.[64] Later, the Wall becomes a symbol of safety for Marcus and Esca, much as it will for Alexios when he and his men flee south from Castellum. The protagonists can even feel a shift in the atmosphere to the north of the Wall, with Marcus noting how the hills are 'desolate and the distances darker', a sentiment later repeated by Artos.[65] The barrier that the Wall provides against the darkness to the north echoes the allusions to light and darkness that pervade Sutcliff's novels set in late to post-Roman Britain, whereby the Romano-British must keep the light of civilisation alive as the 'Dark Ages' descend with the Saxon invasion.[66] Although the Wall does not appear in *The Lantern Bearers*, Aquila takes solace in knowing that by standing watch on the border with the Saxons he is continuing to defend the light against the darkness just as his predecessors had done while standing watch on Hadrian's Wall.[67] For Sutcliff's readers, the parallels this would elicit with World War II created an imagined historical lineage of (Romano-)British soldiers defending a frontier against the forces of barbarism across the centuries, with Hadrian's Wall a symbol of their brave resistance.

CONCLUSION

As a popular author of books for children and young adults, Rosemary Sutcliff felt a responsibility to impart certain values to her audience. Consequently, recurring values are exhibited by her

[62] Sutcliff 1983, 134.

[63] Medlock 2014. The phrases 'Known unto God' and 'Their name liveth for evermore' were selected by Kipling from biblical verses, while 'Lest we forget' is taken from his 1897 poem 'Recessional'.

[64] Sutcliff 1977, 159.

[65] Sutcliff 1977, 163; Sutcliff 1963, 165.

[66] For example, in *The Silver Branch*, the lighthouses at Dubris (Dover), Limanis [sic] (Lympne) and Rutupiae are used by Carausius as an analogy for how Britain must remain a beacon in the darkness (Sutcliff 1958, 31). As noted above, in *The Lantern Bearers* Aquila ignites the lighthouse at Rutupiae after the last Roman ship leaves. The titles *The Lantern Bearers*, *Sword at Sunset* and *Dawn Wind* all allude to the 'light' of the Romano-British surviving the Dark Ages: see Meek 1962, 40–1.

[67] Sutcliff 1958, 65. There is not the space here to explore how Sutcliff's understanding of the Wall evolved over time, but it is worth noting that in *Mark of the Horse Lord* a more nuanced description of its purpose is provided. Phaedrus initially refers to the Wall as a barrier between light and darkness, keeping with Sutcliff's earlier narratives, but is then corrected by Sinnoch who states that it mainly serves as a checkline to keep track of who is moving north and south (Sutcliff 1965, 67–8). In the second story in *The Capricorn Bracelet*, which follows Lucius Calpurnius II's involvement in the construction of the Wall, no overt reference is made to light or darkness and the primary reason for its construction is to stop thieves raiding Brigantian territory and Brigantians doing the same in the north. This shift in how the Wall is presented reflects wider changes across the twentieth century in how its function was understood. Indeed, the function of the Wall in these later stories appears to draw on Collingwood's *Roman Britain*, which Sutcliff read, where he argues that the Wall was intended as an elevated sentry walk intended to obstruct smugglers and raiding parties rather than full-scale military threats: see Collingwood 1924, 32 and Hingley 2012, 38–9, 47–9.

protagonists which reflect the attributes that Sutcliff felt young people should cultivate, most notably courage and fortitude in the face of difficult odds. In Sutcliff's narratives, we often find objects passed down among the generations that serve to inspire the current protagonist to emulate their forebears in this regard. Many of these objects were either materials drawn directly from the archaeological record, including the bronze eagle from Silchester and Hadrian's Wall, or fictional items that resemble real-world objects, such as a ring or a bracelet. As a result, the reader is led to apply the fictional biographies recounted in Sutcliff's novels to the actual object, or a similar item, to 'fill in the gaps' in its biography. As these fictional biographies are encoded with the bravery and resilience exhibited by Sutcliff's protagonists, so too do the objects become conflated with these values. It is no impediment that these protagonists are fictional characters that Sutcliff's readers can have no real connection to, for the protagonists themselves are influenced by their interaction with altars and tombstones to long-dead individuals unrelated to them. Of course, rather than reflecting genuine Roman or Romano-British sensibilities, the values that Sutcliff's heroes exhibited were those of the author and her contemporaries. This would add further weight to the reader's sense that they are not only the inheritors of this material culture but also of the values encoded within the objects, as it would appear these values had been upheld until the most recent generation, who had fought to overcome great odds in defeating Nazi Germany.

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Newcastle University
David.Walsh@newcastle.ac.uk

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