

TO: Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR

FROM: Hugh Taylor, CILIP representative

SUBJECT: Rule proposals for archival and manuscript resources

LC's intention, in preparing this document, was "to keep the rules at the level of a general cataloguer's needs". In reviewing and commenting on the document, therefore, there is clearly a need to consider both the success of the proposal in meeting that overall objective as well as to look at the specifics of each paragraph.

CILIP started by trying to imagine what might be going through the mind of a general cataloguer faced with the need to describe one or more manuscript resources, or an archive. (In truth, this wasn't exactly the librarian's equivalent of "method acting" – none of the immediate CILIP reviewers claims any real experience in cataloguing manuscripts or archives.) There is a valiant attempt (RDA 11.2.2) to explain the principles of archival control to the non-specialist, but in raising the concept of levels of description it doesn't directly answer the cataloguer who knows nothing about this and whose institution doesn't organise its materials in this way, and who simply has a single manuscript to describe.

There seems to be an underlying assumption that the physical sorting and arrangement of an archive should precede its description, with the result that a generalist lacking an understanding of the principles of arrangement (and whose institution may not even realise it possesses an archive, even less that it needs describing in archival terms) is left without some of the basic guidance that it was the intention to offer in the first place. In this respect, whilst adhering closely to the principles of archival resource cataloguing, it starts from an assumption that the overall concept will be understood – and wanted – by those non-specialists who are its intended audience. This is an interesting dilemma, and one which may repay further consideration.

Is the implication of this document that the only provision made in RDA for describing manuscript resources will be in the context of archival control?

Another equally general point perhaps comes from a rather more specific geographic standpoint. Whilst DACS may have emerged in the US, an elegant butterfly ready to catch the next spring breeze, in the UK it has yet to extend much beyond the stage of a barely-visible caterpillar, hidden beneath some foliage. We know it's there, but we haven't spent too much time looking for it. And, if we've found it, we certainly haven't studied it at close quarters. Basing the proposal on DACS is probably a good choice – especially with publication of RDA still some way in the future – but in at least some of the specific comments that follow, the reader will notice references to ISAD(G) that appear to offer either contradictory or alternative approaches to a particular point.

We would like to thank LC for the clarity of its presentation. Providing the DACS source for each proposed rule greatly assisted the review process.

The remainder of this response addresses individual points raised by 5JSC/LC/3 in the order in which they appear there.

Introductory remarks

Greater prominence should be given to the fact not all descriptive elements are required in all descriptions. Some definitive statement should be given about the mandatory (minimum acceptable) elements required for an adequate description (similar to ISAD(G) I.12). We note, too, that 5JSC/LC/3 states some things to be essential that are not obligatory in ISAD(G): e.g. 5JSC/LC/3 14.3.

RDA 11.2.2

ISAD(G) does not allow single-level descriptions. (In practice the multi-level rule may only be observed by linking to the repository description at MAD Level 0, but should some kind of equivalent structuring be mandatory in RDA?)

An equivalent to the ISAD(G) rule 2.4 (non-repetition of information) should also be considered.

RDA 12.9

It's unclear why the example includes MARC coding here. It would be perfectly possible to demonstrate the point without resorting to examples encoded using MARC.

It might be worth citing ISO 3166 (geographic codes), unless that is regarded as being outside the scope of the rules (see, for example, 13.2 where various thesauri are cited).

RDA 13.3

This has no direct equivalent in ISAD(G).

We suggest lower-case and/or italicised *x/x*'s rather than X.

RDA 13.6 and 15.1

The DACS decision to combine the 'existence of originals/copies' concept with the 'availability' concept appears to confuse rather than clarify. That a repository holds both originals and photographic copies but will ordinarily produce only photographic copies for consultation; that a repository holds only photographic copies of originals; and that the location is known of the originals of which a repository holds only photographic copies, are all useful pieces of information, but under ISAD(G) would belong to different 'areas' of a description.

RDA 14.2

The ISAD(G) term 'Scope and content' is used in the examples but doesn't appear in the main text of the rule, where it would seem to be required.

RDA 15.1

Name and location of repository is not a required element of an ISAD(G) description.

RDA 16.2

CILIP queries the use of the term ‘provenance’ to designate the source of acquisition of an archive. The word has a larger significance for archivists and its employment in this more limited sense might lead to confusion. The ISAD(G) term ‘Immediate source of acquisition or transfer’ would be preferable.

RDA 16.3

It’s unclear to us whether ‘Restrictions on use’ is a wider concept than the corresponding ISAD(G) concept ‘Conditions governing reproduction’ (i.e., is there, or can there be, any ‘use’ except ‘reproduction’?).

Part III of RDA: Access Point Control

CILIP dislikes the style adopted here – a rather discursive, wordy explanation – but is unable to come up with anything better.

Some of the second paragraph seems to be out of scope for RDA; or maybe even that whole paragraph, which is to do with the provision of access point control not the mechanism(s) that might be employed to achieve it. Also, this paragraph might be taken to imply that ISAD(G) descriptions contain no information regarding the names of creators and contextual information about them. ISAAR(CPF) is a tool for creating standardised ‘archival authority records’ but does not replace the related descriptive elements from the Context Area of an ISAD(G) description (e.g. ‘Name of creator(s)’ and ‘Administrative/Biographical history’).

Finding aids element

We would recommend treating this element either as the equivalent of an “index” note, or expanding the range of notes so that it becomes a separate element in its own right.

Ancient, Medieval, and Renaissance Manuscripts (AACR2, 4.7B23)

We agree with the recommendation.

Crosswalk

If any further work were to be done on this crosswalk, then it might be useful to add ISAD(G) descriptive elements to the table.