

To: Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA
From: Dave Reser, LC Representative
Subject: “Between”, “Before” and “After” dates (Revision of RDA 9.3.1.3)

We thank the British Library for investigating the topic of questionable dates for persons, however, we don't agree with the proposal. We think that RDA already allows adequate flexibility for recording dates that are uncertain by identifying the date as “probable” or “approximate.” Using the “period of activity of the person” element is preferable to creating additional categories of speculative dates for birth and death.

Currently, date information for a person that does not fit into 9.3, can be added to the existing RDA 9.17 element “Biographical Information.” In addition to dates of baptism and marriage, 9.17 can also accommodate detailed information about questionable dates that are not appropriate to record in 9.3 and do so in a more user-friendly context. For example, using 9.17 a cataloger could record, “According to the historian Y, Person X was born during the reign of the Emperor Theodosius II, who ruled 408-450.” Source consulted (RDA 8.12) elements may be added for differing dates found in different sources.

Under the proposal, a cataloger would record a date of birth for a person born in 1901 and known to have lived a few decades as “1901,” and the cataloger may also know that the person was baptized in 1902—indicating a death date of “after 1902” may be true under the instruction, but not useful for identification. Likewise, recording a date of birth as “before 2014” for any person who died before this year (even those living in prior centuries) may be true under the instruction, but not really satisfying any user tasks. Taking two uncertain dates and combining them to express a range for a period of activity (e.g., active between 1310 and 1319-not after 1325) may even challenge comprehension.

As dates of birth and death are core elements in RDA, we would argue that some of the vague dates identified in the proposal are simply not “ascertainable,” one of the benchmarks for core elements in 0.6.

While we appreciate the additional thoughts included in the ALA response, for reasons stated above we do not wish to change the current instructions. Additionally, we reject ALA's proposed change 4 to move the paragraphs and examples from 9.1.3 to 9.3.4.3. Although ALA states that this would have no impact on chapter 10 because 10.4.1.3 already refers to 9.3, the reference to 9.3 is the very reason it would require extensive changes to 10.4. Date associated with the person has three element sub-types: date of birth, date of death, and period of activity. Date associated with the family has no

element sub-types. Thus, the dates associated with family can only be recorded using the general recording instructions at 9.3.1.3. Moving the instructions on ranges of dates to 9.3.4 would disallow recording ranges of dates for families.