

To: Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA
From: John Attig, ALA Representative
Subject: Change to 19.3 and Appendix I, Recording relationships to persons, families, and corporate bodies associated with works of unknown or uncertain origin

ALA thanks the British Library for this discussion of attributed responsibility. This was very welcome, particularly to our colleagues who deal with special collections and cultural heritage resources. Like ACOC and LC, we support the intent of the proposal, but are unsure that the changes proposed will achieve the desired outcome.

We have several main areas of concern: the proposed use of the relationship designator to carry this information, and the proposed limitation to work-level relationships.

1. Use of the relationship designator

Attribution information is not the same as “role” information: it does not identify a role, it indicates the state of knowledge about a given relationship. This information is quite distinct and needs to be treated as such, as both types may need to be recorded, e.g., an artist to whom responsibility for an illustration has been attributed.

A pattern for RDA may be found in the treatment of attribution information in Chapter 2 of *Cataloging Cultural Objects*. In CCO, attribution is treated as a separate data element qualifying the names of creators and other entities responsible for or associated with an object, as in the following example:

Name: Ricci, Marco
Role: painter
Qualifier: attributed to

Defining uncertainty as a separate data element in RDA would be very useful, not only for relationships between persons, families, and corporate bodies and resources, but for relationships between entities.

ALA also has some problems with the term proposed, because it does not distinguish between current and former attributions. This would be an extremely useful distinction, especially for art works where attributions commonly change, and where it is desirable to record previous attributions. Such an attribution-certainty element could be used in combination with many of the relator terms in RDA Appendices I, J, and K at any of the WEMI levels, for example:

Attributed to: + [name] + resource
Formerly attributed to: + [name] + resource

2. Limiting the relationship designation to the work-level relationships

ALA strongly disagrees with the British Library's contention that there is "no compelling justification for equivalent changes at expression or manifestation level." Attributions are not limited to creators, as illustrated in these roles, all of which might involve attribution of responsibility:

Expression: translator, compiler, illustrator, illuminator

Manifestation: printer, publisher, writer of manuscript (as opposed to the creator of the content)

Item: binder, annotator

Treating attribution information as a separate element applicable at all levels would also facilitate a more global approach to recording uncertainty about other types of relationships. A person may have been related to another person or family by birth or by marriage; a person may have been associated with a manufactory such as Gobelins or Sèvres.

Creating additional relationship designators ("attributed author," attributed illustrator," etc.) seems to be a cumbersome solution that might open the door to unnecessarily long lists of relationship designators and unforeseen difficulties.

3. Affect of attribution on the selection of creators

The language of the British Library proposal seems to exclude assigning a person, family, or corporate body the role of creator if the attribution has ever been uncertain, regardless of whether there is currently consensus. The proposed definition of *attributed creator* apparently makes everyone "attributed" if there has ever been any uncertainty about the attribution. We do not believe that this interpretation is justified.

For these reasons, ALA would prefer to create a separate element for attribution information; to allow attribution information to be recorded for any WEMI level; to make a distinction between current and former attributions; and to define attributed creator as indicating *current* uncertainty about the attribution.