

## The IRIS Consortium (Florence, Italy) and RDA: Perspectives and Possibilities from a Loyal (Non!) Opposition

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### ABSTRACT

The IRIS consortium of Florentine area art history and humanities libraries with its American, Dutch and Italian partners accommodates in its union catalogue RDA records currently arriving from the Berenson Library (Villa I Tatti, The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies) and the Library of Congress via the Z39.50 protocol. This brief paper will describe what steps the consortium is taking to assure that our rich specialized bibliographic patrimony does not find its end in a bibliographic “silo”. With reference to the evolving situation in Italy regarding the transition to RDA: the decision taken by the Vatican Apostolic Library and URBE (Unione Romana Biblioteche Ecclesiastiche) to move to RDA in 2017 could be for IRIS consortium a precious source of guidance based on shared experience.

### KEYWORDS

Associazione IRIS; IRIS consortium; RDA; AACR2; Cataloguing.

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I would like to begin my lightning talk today by thanking the organizers of this conference for the opportunity to describe what the IRIS Consortium of Florentine area member libraries are doing with regard to RDA records coming into our union catalogue and how best we are preparing ourselves to meet the challenges of this evolving environment.

First a bit of background: the IRIS Consortium, founded in 1993, is an association of art history and humanities libraries consisting today of seven members: the Berenson Library (Villa I Tatti – The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies), the Library of the Dutch University Institute for Art History (the presence of Utrecht University in Florence), the libraries of the Gallerie degli Uffizi which include the main library of the Uffizi, the Prints and Drawings Library of the Uffizi, the six highly specialized libraries at Palazzo Pitti, the Library of the Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, the Biblioteca «Ugo Procacci» of the Opificio delle Pietre Dure (focused on the literature regarding the conservation and restoration of art objects) and, the Leonardiana Library at Vinci (2007), the library of record for a vast bibliography on all aspects of Leonardo studies. In 2017 we welcomed with pleasure a new partner: the Library of the Museo Nazionale del Bargello.

We are clients of ExLibris: our ILS is ALEPH Version 22.

Our catalog consists of over 356,000 bibliographic records plus a file of some 143,000 authority records mainly from the Library of Congress. Our catalogers use AACR2 in English and its translation in Italian. We are a bilingual catalog: the American and Dutch partners catalog in English, the Italian catalogers in Italian. For subject analysis the American and Dutch partners use the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) while the Italian catalogers provide subject access using terms from the Soggettario BNCf, the thesaurus maintained by Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze.

Our sources of records in RDA are: monthly file loads from the Berenson Library, and LC records available to all our catalogers via the Z39.50 protocol. As of the writing of this paper the number of RDA records in our union catalog is 5,790.

Our presence in WorldCat via OCLC's initiative "Art Discovery Group Catalogue" is a point of pride for us: some 327,00 of our records point the end-user to the IRIS catalog. For a notable number of titles we are the unique source.

As the Cataloguing Specialist for the consortium, I monitor the AUTOCAT and RDA-L listservs whose lively discussions, e-forum offerings and podcasts have permitted me to have a decent if general overview of the cataloguing situation as many libraries make the transition from AACR2 to RDA. As time passed, however, my colleagues and I realized that the moment had arrived to give both our cataloguers and library staff with reference duties an overview of what was happening in the RDA world, and what our decisions and positions would be with regard to that situation. Basically, the what, the why, and the how we were positioning ourselves in this evolving environment.

For now, our decision is to not take the "full plunge" into using RDA as a cataloguing code for original cataloguing, but to successfully accommodate incoming RDA records, assuring a co-existence with our AACR2 "legacy" records.

As Gordon Dunsire (2016) wrote in his conclusion to his article in a the recent issue of JLIS, the online Italian Journal of Library and Information Science: the “... economic constraints faced by the entire cultural heritage sector” was and is particularly true of the situation in Italy.

Libraries large and small, public, private, academic, those depending on funds from the state or other sources, have all been hit hard. Our reasons for not adopting RDA for the present will sound very familiar to those of you who have had to evaluate your local cataloguing situation.

For the IRIS Consortium the annual subscription with multiple licenses to the RDA Toolkit, the retraining and follow-up of staff who, more often than not have multiple duties not involving cataloguing, or, indeed, are staff consisting of one person, were reasons too imposing to ignore. The necessary disruption of cataloguing “productivity” in collections where massive amounts of material remain to be put online was an additional reason too imposing to be ignored. Taken together, the decision in favor of our transition to RDA could not be justified for the present to our board of directors. However to this rather negative list I must add a positive: that our holdings visible in WorldCat via the Art Discovery Group Catalogue were guaranteed a continuity by OCLC’s realistic and pragmatic decision to continue accepting AACR2 records.

The arrival of records in RDA into our catalogue has caused us to take a fresh look at our cataloguing practices to see what we could be doing to make our records more user-friendly. A number of these changes have come from a continuous analysis of the trends we see evolving in the RDA records we load from the two external sources previously described.

Here are some of our cataloguing decisions:

Our cataloguers have been instructed to avoid the use of abbreviations not only in the 300 tag, but also in the 5XX note tags. This is particularly important for us because notes may be added to any record in either English or Italian.

Also to be avoided if at all possible is the use of “S.l. : s.n” in tag 260, instead making more use of the internet to verify information regarding place and publisher or the entity responsible for the publication. Under consideration for adoption, always as a last resort, is the use of [Place not identified], and [Publisher not identified]. We will continue to use the 260 tag, but will add the 264 tag when the copyright date differs from the date of publication. The 264 tag displays the label “Copyright Notice” so its appearance should not cause confusion to the end-user.

Our cataloguers are encouraged to make use of the 520 field, especially when the title of the work and/or the “creative” graphics on the title page in hand seem designed more to attract attention than to describe actual content. Those of you who catalogue art-related publications, especially art exhibitions, will know what I mean!

What are we doing with regard to accommodating RDA records coming into our catalogue from the Berenson Library or from the Library of Congress?

We will not edit RDA records back to AACR2.

We will not delete RDA fields 336, 337 and 338. They do not display in our OPAC but may be useful in a future which we cannot predict.

We will not delete the relationship designators (sub-field “e”) from the access points where they appear.

However, for our original cataloguing, we will not be adding sub-field “e” to the access points, but we will continue to “justify” the presence of these access points – when necessary – with brief notes.

Regarding authority records in RDA:

We have noted with much appreciation the richness in detail of authority records created according to RDA guidelines. The “downside” is, of course, the time necessarily needed to bring together and provide this level of detail. We wonder if there isn’t some “middle way” to proceed to avoid decisions, however necessary, which penalize the goals of clear identification and uniform access to materials in library catalogues.

Regarding the situation in Italy for cataloguing in RDA:

A review paper for EURIG (the European RDA Interest Group) by Alan Danskin and Katharine Gryspeerdt entitled “Changing the Rules: RDA and Cataloguing in Europe” stated that as of the time of writing several translations of RDA were underway (Danskin and Gryspeerdt 2014).

The Italian translation was among those listed, and was added to the RDA Toolkit in 2015. The translation, eliminating a linguistic barrier, owes its existence to the concerted effort and dedication of a group of nationally-appointed Italian cataloguing experts from major public and private libraries, university libraries, bibliographic agencies and the Vatican Apostolic Library. I would like to note here the impressive contributions to the translation by Professor Mauro Guerrini of the University of Florence and Professor Carlo Bianchini, University of Pavia, and their team of research assistants.

We in Florence are especially fortunate to have the presence “locally” of Professor Guerrini. As part of the an effort to keep our IRIS colleagues current with the transition to RDA, and developments on the BIBFRAME front, Professor Guerrini held for the IRIS colleagues a seminar on RDA. Anyone who has heard him speaking will agree with me that one can “enter” as it were with doubts, and “leave” instead, convinced!

Professors Guerrini and his colleagues have also fostered promotion of RDA in Italy for a number of years by publishing widely, organizing courses, lectures and seminars in Florence and elsewhere in Italy featuring prominent figures in the development of RDA such as Barbara Tillett and Gordon Dunsire. The title of an article by Prof. Guerrini (2015) nicely sums what their efforts are aiming for: “RDA in Italian: an Opportunity to Join the International Context”. A recent issue of JLIS was dedicated to this very topic. Articles included overviews and critical studies of RDA in Italian translation. And space was accorded to the “opposition”: a contribution by Michael Gorman (2016) provocatively entitled “RDA: the Emperor’s New Code”.

So, given the interest, promotion and dissemination of RDA who in Italy is actually currently cataloguing using RDA as a content standard? The answer as of 2016 was: our consortium partner, the Berenson Library at Villa I Tatti, and Casalini Libri in Florence, the highly-regarded vendor of a suite of library services, which include RDA bibliographic and authority records, for their English language clients. This scenario is changing with the decision that both the Vatican Apostolic Library

and URBE (the Unione Romana Biblioteche Ecclesiatiche) will begin production of records in RDA in 2017. The announcement is good news for our consortium, as these two notable bibliographic entities located in Italy will probably represent an incentive for those of us in an “evolving” cataloguing situation. I take this opportunity to congratulate them on this major step, and would like to think of the possibility of our future collaboration on some level with these prestigious institutions which would be of enormous benefit to us.

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