

“He Lied to the People, Saying ‘I Am Nebuchadnezzar’”

Issues in Authority Control for Rebels, Usurpers, Eccentric Nobility, and Dissenting Royalty

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Current cataloging guidelines for creating name authority records (NARs) for royalty and nobility assume that an individual's claim to a royal title is clear and unambiguous. In the case of historical rebels, usurpers, and eccentrics who claim royal titles for themselves, however, the guidelines are not so clear. When we attempt to describe people and places from a disputed past, we actively enter into their struggles for power, but descriptive cataloging standards such as Resource Description and Access (RDA) do not address the question of the legitimacy of a claimed title. Fortunately, recent scholarship on self-determination in NARs for living creators and subject terminology for contested political jurisdictions can help to develop more ethical practices for historical names of ambiguous legitimacy. This paper uses Nidintu-Bēl/Nebuchadnezzar III, a rebel against the Achaemenid emperor Darius I named in the Behistun inscription (6th century BCE), as a case study to establish best practices for the identity management of historical representatives of dissenting royalty.

Carved into the cliff face of the mountain of Behistun, overlooking the plain of Kermanshah in western Iran, is a massive and historically important relief sculpture. The Behistun inscription—also called the Bisitun, Bisotun, or Bisutun Inscription—recounts the tumultuous events of an early phase of the Achaemenid Empire. The image depicts Darius I, a major figure in the empire's history, standing before a procession of nine figures, bound as prisoners; a tenth is beneath the king's foot. Above him is a sun disk bearing the god Ahura Mazda; behind him are two anonymous figures bearing a bow and lance.

Created shortly after the first year of his reign, the Behistun inscription describes Darius's rise to power in the years 522–519 BCE. Over the preceding decades, Cyrus the Great extended his power enormously, conquering the Babylonian and Egyptian empires and, at his death in 530 BCE, leaving behind the largest single empire in history. The death of his son and successor Cambyses II in 522 BCE led to a chaotic period that is poorly recorded in the extant historical sources.¹ From this turmoil emerged Darius, who participated in the assassination of one of Cambyses' successors and established himself as King of Kings. Darius soon faced a series of rebellions against his rule from all corners of

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the empire established by Cyrus. The Behistun inscription commemorates his stamping out of these rebellions, each represented by one of the prisoners before Darius in the inscription's relief. Each figure is accompanied by a label, designating each as a liar who falsely proclaimed himself a king: "This is Ashina who lied, 'I am king of Elam'... This is Nidintu-Bēl who lied, 'I am Nebuchadnezzar, a son of Nabū-na'id... This is Fravartish who lied, 'I am Khasha-treti, a descendant of Cyaxares'."² A more detailed account of Darius's first year accompanies the image in three languages (Elamite, Babylonian, and Old Persian). Over two millennia after it was carved, this trilingual inscription was vital to the decipherment of cuneiform, and has been compared to the Rosetta Stone.³

Darius's inscription is vitally concerned with the question of truth and falsehood. As Briant explains, Darius places himself beyond reproach: he "presents himself as a man who does not lie and who has never lied, and he guarantees it by invoking Ahura-Mazada (§§56-58). The lie (*drauga*) is implicitly opposed to the truth (*arta*), and both terms belong equally to the political and the religious domain—if indeed Darius and his people could ever have distinguished and separated the political from the religious."⁴ Darius, as the emergent victor from a period in which "Falsehood grew greatly in the land," represents god-sanctioned Truth.⁵ His victories are not mere military ones, but victories of truth over falsehood. The assassination that propelled him to power was not of a legitimate king, but of an impostor. Throughout the text of the inscription, Darius presents the "real" names of those who rebelled against them, and the "false" names and lineages that they adopted for themselves. (Ironically, Darius justifies his own right to the throne with a somewhat dubious claim of succession from Teispes, founder of the Achaemenid dynasty).⁶ Moreover, the chronology of Darius's victories is also unclear: he seems to have shifted dates to be able to claim that he suppressed all of the revolts against him within a single year. An exception is the final figure on the relief, the Saka chief Skunkha. This late addition to the image represents a military victory in 519 BCE, likely about two years after the remainder of the image and text were completed.

Though they are depicted in uniform imprisonment, the nine rebels standing before Darius in the Behistun relief represent a variety of types of revolt. Several of the rebels he claims to have defeated do not seem to have been able to raise an army, potentially limiting the status not only of their claims to kingship, but of their status as proper rebels as well. But at least one figure—Nidintu-Bēl, alternatively named Nebuchadnezzar III of Babylon—seems to have been recognized as monarch in his homeland for several months.⁷ Documentary evidence from Babylon suggests that he held power from October-December 522 BCE, and he commanded an army that represented

a real challenge to Darius's power.⁸ The inscription itself describes this upstart's success in achieving power in Babylonia: "The Babylonian people, all (of them), went (over) to that Nidintu-Bēl; Babylonia became rebellious, (and) he seized the kingship in Babylonia."⁹ But with its emphasis on the lying nature of Darius's opponents, the Behistun inscription is designed to leave us in doubt, and the paucity of reliable historical sources on this tumultuous period gives us little with which to resolve it.

Darius's declaration that each of the leaders he defeated was a "liar" extends beyond their claim to political power: it extends to their very names. Thus, the Behistun inscription raises an interesting question for authority control and identity management. The 2008 publication of *Nebukadnezzar III/IV* by Jürgen Lorenz, which seeks to bring together all of the surviving textual sources for the period of revolt symbolized in the Behistun inscription by Nidintu-Bēl/Nebuchadnezzar III and Arakha/Nebuchadnezzar IV, gives us literary warrant that now requires a resolution.¹⁰ Given that the question of a true or legitimate name is a central issue in struggles for royal power like those depicted at Behistun, in selecting a preferred name for a name authority record for a historical rebel, the cataloger is, by definition, revisiting the question of these claims to legitimacy. For the purposes of this paper, the focus is on Nidintu-Bēl/Nebuchadnezzar III.

This rebel's claim to be a son of Nabonidus—the final king of Babylon before Cyrus's conquest—was almost certainly false, and yet he actually held some degree of power in Babylon, however briefly. Should the cataloger therefore accept his title as legitimate, and choose Nebuchadnezzar III as his preferred name? If not, should the claimed title be used as a variant name? This historical conflict is a question of preferred names, and by settling on an answer, the cataloger chooses a side. The Behistun Inscription illustrates the connection between names, naming, and power. As Bell hooks noted: "the privileged act of naming often affords those in power access to modes of communication and enables them to project an interpretation, a definition, a description of their work and actions, that may not be accurate, that may obscure what is really taking place."¹¹ Sandberg notes that cataloging librarians participate in these power dynamics:

[Names] might be tied to painful histories of colonialism, enslavement, or government naming policies.... Catalogers who do personal name authority work are often in a position to actively seek out these stories, to decide which stories to include in an authority record (with some stories represented explicitly and others only hinted at), and sometimes to tell a story of their own within an authority record. This gives catalogers a very specific type of power over the people they describe, which comes

with ethical questions. What considerations should catalogers take when they encounter a story about a name that is told by somebody other than that person?¹²

When we attempt to describe people and places from a disputed past, we actively enter into their struggles for power. And yet, though we engage actively with these questions of power and legitimacy, the existing rules for the names of kings in the current (July 2021) release of Resource Description and Access (RDA) provide little guidance regarding these questions. Fortunately, recent scholarship on self-determination in name authority records (NARs) for creators and subject terminology for contested political jurisdictions can help to develop more ethical practices for historical names of ambiguous legitimacy.

Literature Review

The question of the nature and origins of political legitimacy is a complex topic, and a thorough discussion of it is outside the scope of this paper. Modern discussion of the subject begins with Weber's tripartite division of sources of political authority into 1) rational or legal; 2) traditional; or 3) charismatic.¹³ Weber's model has been the subject of debate, but what matters for the purposes of this paper are not the specific sources of authority so much as the process by which a claim to power is legitimized. Duyvesteyn notes that "Legitimacy seems to be a concept that only appears as an interesting topic for discussion when there is an apparent lack of it, or there is a perceived crisis of legitimacy. Otherwise legitimacy in its many shapes and guises is most of the time taken for granted."¹⁴ Kasfir identifies the three defining characteristics of "rebel governance" as "territorial control, a resident population, and violence or threat of violence."¹⁵ Seymour, speaking specifically of the separatist region of Kosovo, takes a descriptive rather than a normative approach, emphasizing the importance of recognition by external political entities using "a tipping model," in which a certain amount of external recognition culminates in a "tipping point" of legitimacy.¹⁶ This is the approach taken by this paper, looking in particular at those who have failed to meet the requirements of legitimacy or governance as defined by Weber and Kasfir, being unable to create a sustainable claim to rule or to reach the crucial tipping point of recognition.

The question of royal titles is little explored in the literature on authority control. However, recent emergent topics in the field are related to the question. Two main areas of overlap are geographic names for disputed territories, and self-identification of authors from marginalized groups. The question of the role of text string headings in a linked data catalog environment also bears consideration.

Geography

The selection of geographical headings for disputed geographic territories has become a topic of particular interest in recent years, largely due to the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by the Russian Federation in 2014. In a 2019 paper, Hostage detailed the problematic role of the Library of Congress (LC), as a government body, in determining terminology for regions where the US government does not recognize the legitimacy of the government administering the territory.¹⁷ This creates a problem when facts on the ground—for example, the reorganization of the administration of the Crimean Peninsula following its annexation by Russia—do not align with US recognition of sovereignty. According to the State Department, Ukraine rightfully controls the peninsula, but the area is now administered by the Russian government, and this administration, legitimate or not, has created laws and other publications that require cataloging. In 2014 a new NAR was created for "Crimea (Territory annexed to Russia, 2014-)." Though the heading avoided taking sides in the conflict over the territory and sought simply to describe the publications at hand, LC canceled it, leaving no valid heading for works issued by the Russian governmental body currently administering the region. Similar issues occur in places like the country formerly known as Burma, which was renamed "Myanmar" by its military government in 1989. The US government does not recognize the name, despite it being the name now most commonly used by its residents and its administering government. Hostage argued that, in the case of Myanmar and similar regions, "It is time to free libraries from U.S. foreign policy and use the name by which the country is nowadays most commonly known."¹⁸

Holloway has been similarly critical of the available subject terminology for the Southern Levant, finding that "LCSH does not contain the terms that Palestinians would choose to describe their history, geography, or culture."¹⁹ He notes that, though LC has a global role and shapes scholarly discourse both within the US and internationally, it remains, in many key respects, beholden to the US government's foreign policy interests. In particular, Holloway finds that references to Israel's occupation of territories outside its pre-1967 borders are largely absent from LCSH. Holloway describes the terminology and records present in LCSH as "artificially neutral" and reflecting a "disingenuous apoliticism."²⁰ In the face of an increasing consensus that "cataloging is not a neutral act," these attempts at neutrality in geographic headings for places in the Southern Levant and other politically contentious regions instead serve to reinforce the claims of the occupying military force and fail to reflect geopolitical realities.²¹

Hughes has explored the colonialist nature of geographic headings for Kurdistan, a region of Upper Mesopotamia.

She criticized existing headings that treat Kurdistan, a transnational region, as a subset only of the modern states that control its territory (Turkey, Iraq, and Iran): “This ahistorical description assumes Kurdistan to consist of parts of nation states that were not in existence during the Ottoman and Persian Empires, and reproduces a ‘methodological nationalism’ that naturalizes the category of nation-states as the main units of analysis.”²² With the division of these empires, Hughes noted, “the possibility of Kurdistan disappeared from the map, and the Kurds experienced new periods of political subjugation.”²³ Notably, part of this subjugation pertains to the names of places. Hughes specifies the town of Dersim, renamed “Tunceli” by the Turkish state authorities; the former name is used by residents, but the latter name, being the official, state-sanctioned toponym, is privileged in the town’s authority record.²⁴ Adopting methodologies from the movement to decolonize subject terminology describing the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, Hughes favors approaches that invert the colonial structure of these headings, identifying the various state-controlled regions of Kurdistan not as subsets of the nation-states that control them, but as occupied portions of a greater marginalized region; and consulting Kurdish scholars to determine ethical headings that best represent the self-determined terminologies used by the people and places described in the authority file.²⁵

A 2015 paper by Duarte and Belarde-Lewis provided a number of guidelines and concepts to govern postcolonial cataloging practice that apply to both geographic and personal name authority records.²⁶ Duarte and Belarde-Lewis identified the methods by which the library catalog perpetuates the segregation and colonization of Indigenous peoples, including “misnaming, or using Western-centric terms to describe Indigenous phenomena... [and] emphasis on modern nationalist periodization, inclusive of the notion that history as it is written by the colonizers cannot be changed.”²⁷ These practices result in “re-mapping territories, re-writing histories, re-inscribing institutions, re-classifying sovereign peoples as citizen subjects, and re-naming individuals and phenomena to cohere within dominating epistemologies.”²⁸ In opposition to this, Duarte and Belarde-Lewis propose techniques of *imagining*, defined as “creating figurative and literal spaces for the work of building, analyzing, and experimenting with Indigenous knowledge organization,” based on the methodologies of “envisioning, and discovering the beauty of our knowledge.”²⁹ Through this practice of imagining, “we can better appreciate practices that more accurately and precisely name, describe, and collocate historically subjugated knowledge.”³⁰ This imagining process can help bring library practice into closer alignment with the principle of self-description stated in ICP 2.3 (discussed below).

Though Duarte and Belarde-Lewis, Hughes, Holway, and Hostage write of very particular geopolitical

locations and colonial regions, many of their ideas apply just as much to the ancient past, the received history of which can represent a “dominating epistemology” every bit as all-encompassing as colonialism. Our library subject terminology and naming practices for the past often present history as something fixed, determined, and dominated by imperial powers. Library subject vocabularies and naming convention practices represent an area of cataloging practice ripe for liberation from epistemologies of repression.

Naming Practices

Wiederhold and Reeve identify ethical authority control practice as a key trend in authority control today.³¹ Recent literature on name authorities has reflected a growing consensus in the cataloging community that authors should have more power of self-determination over the content of name authority records that describe them. (Though this conversation has occurred in numerous venues, a concentration of views on the topic appear in the 2019 volume edited by Sandberg, *Ethical Questions in Name Authority Control*).³² This consensus has grown out of critiques from two primary approaches that have converged toward a single solution of greater authorial self-determination: name authority records for transgender and gender non-binary people, and for Indigenous people.

The gender critique of RDA largely began with a 2014 article by Billey, Drabinski, and Roberto, though it has precedents in the work of Olson and Berman.³³ Billey, Drabinski, and Roberto critiqued RDA rule 9.7’s suggestion that catalogers should “describe the gender of the author as part of the project of constructing access points and relationships between bibliographic entities,” rendering binary gender a reified and static category that all individuals with an NAR must be fit into.³⁴ Notably, the authors also raised the possible harm caused by an NAR “outing” transgender persons. This paper resulted in the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC) charging an Ad Hoc Task Group on Gender in Name Authority Records, which submitted a 2016 report containing suggestions for better ways to address gender in NARs, including expanding the suggested terminology for gender to incorporate terms for transgender and non-binary people, and for catalogers to consider “the potential for... information to harm the [person] through outing or violating the right to privacy” and the question of whether the individual “consents to having this information shared publicly.”³⁵

Since the publication of this report, the literature on NARs for transgender and non-binary people has expanded. In a 2016 paper, Thompson proposed a shift toward greater authorial control over data in NARs, shifting to a system “where authors have the agency to self-describe their own experiences to whatever extent they wish.”³⁶ More recently, Adolpho critiqued the PCC report from a transgender

perspective, similarly calling for greater agency, self-determination, and direct control over NARs by the people they describe: “Of the task group’s recommendations, the only guaranteed ethical way to record information about someone’s gender in their NAR would be after direct communication in which an individual explicitly states their gender and desired terminology, fully knowing where this information will be recorded and used. Every other option contains the possibility of outing, deadnaming, and misgendering transgender and gender diverse people.”³⁷ Cohen critiqued the report’s Anglocentrism, citing examples from Hebrew-language literature, which marks gender differently than English, resulting in gender self-identifications not accounted in the PCC task group’s report. Billey’s approach to the topic has developed, and in a 2019 paper she noted that “catalogers presume that they are recording facts about the person, but there are plenty of places in an authority record where judgment or biases may creep in and potentially cause harm for the individual being described.”³⁸ Billey called for a return to a simpler, pre-RDA type of authority record that focuses more on entity names themselves than entity attributes like gender, governed by the principles of simplicity (rather than the more expansive data recorded under RDA rules) and minimizing potential harm, and leaving more complex data collection to bibliographies, encyclopedias, and linked data projects that enable greater nuance and more authorial input.

More generally, Shiraishi has raised the question of “accuracy” of data recorded in NARs, noting that this term has different meanings in different contexts:

But what exactly is ‘accurate information’ about a person’s identity? Is it (a) as close as possible to how society as a whole perceives that person? Or is it (b) as close as possible to the role that person plays in the specific literary or academic community? Or is it (c) as close as possible to how one perceives oneself (or how one requests the society to perceive oneself)?³⁹

This question of self-identification versus societal identification has a direct bearing on the question of legitimacy that dissenting royalty raise. Speaking specifically of authors of zines, but with a principle relevant to many different types of person, Fox and Swickard approach authority work from the standpoint of an “ethics of care”: “The real shift that needs to happen is training NAF contributors to reframe their approach to information, shifting their perspective from considering only the information seeker to considering both the information seeker as well as the subject of the information at hand.... Catalogers... should take the time to recognize and empathize with the persons that information [in an NAR] is describing.”⁴⁰

Approaches that call for authorial input and self-description rely on the active participation of a living subject. An approach for a historical person is described in a paper by Wagner concerning Joe Carstairs, a gender non-conforming boat racer active in the 1920s.⁴¹ In the case of a historical person, it may not be possible to obtain personal input into the content of an NAR. Wagner proposes NARs that encompass multiplicities of identities, rather than focusing on a single, “real” one: “To catalog queer identities with multiplicities of possible identities cannot be a discussion of this *or* that identity. It has to embrace the possibility of this *and* that *but also maybe even* this identity. This ambiguity is necessary and it means looking to cataloging and authority as a far less fixed process.”⁴² Wagner’s multiple approach to authority work suggests a path forward for dissenting royalty, whose ambiguous legitimacy resembles, in many respects, the ambiguous gender categorization of figures from the past like Carstairs.

Similar critiques of existing practices for name authority records have emerged in connection with headings for Indigenous persons. Indigenous approaches to knowledge organization have been used since the development of the Brian Deer Classification Scheme in the 1970s.⁴³ More recently, name authority control is an area of growing concern. Exner, Little Bear’s 2008 paper “North American Indian Personal Names in National Bibliographies” is a pivotal moment in the conversation.⁴⁴ The author described Indigenous American approaches to naming, including two concepts—name sequence and name set—that are poorly accounted for by Western authority cataloging standards, and details numerous examples within LCNAF and other national bibliographic databases indicating a variety of interpretations of how Indigenous names should be incorporated into a name authority file.

Elzi and Crowe’s 2019 paper calls for greater incorporation of non-Western languages in NARs, particularly variant and/or preferred names that reflect the names of Indigenous people in their own languages: “Our goal is... to break down barriers, resulting in an open system that allows for recognition of Indigenous names for indexing, discovery and retrieval by all levels of scholarship and research.”⁴⁵ This relates to the question of self-determination that has emerged in discussions of transgender and gender diverse people. Explorations of specific issues in name authority records for both individuals and communities include 2020 papers by Amey on Māori names and Hobart on demographic terminology for Indigenous authors.⁴⁶

Linked Data

A final trend bears consideration: the growing use of linked data in resource description. An extreme view of the possibilities of linked data proposed in Niu’s 2013 paper

suggested that, in the near future, linked data will completely replace name authority cataloging: “Globally unique IDs will replace authorized headings and will be recorded in the bibliographic records along with the names of the agents carried by the resource being cataloged. Since no authorized headings will need to be created, current rules for choosing and formulating authorized headings can be eliminated.”⁴⁷ While it is true that the issue of disambiguation can largely be solved by using unique identifiers, the fact that identifiers need human-readable labels means we will still need to think about names, and especially about choosing between multiple names. It is worth keeping in mind that, though the linked data focus is shifting to “things not strings,” Elzi and Crowe indicate that more options for text strings are precisely what many authors from Indigenous and marginalized communities want. Rather than eliminating text strings in favor of identifiers, the authors call for a multiplicity of text strings, expanded display of variant spellings, pronunciation information, and identification of name components—namely an expanded amount of contextualizing textual information.⁴⁸ Even in a linked data environment, text strings are needed for searching and display, and our current, limited textual information is inadequate to meet the needs of Indigenous creators, researchers, and library users. Rather than linked data replacing authority cataloging, authority cataloging should grow to incorporate linked data methodologies—but this does not mean eliminating entity description and abandoning the ethical responsibilities that it entails. This need is better expressed in Zhu’s 2019 paper, which combines the linked data shift to unique identifiers rather than human-readable text strings with an increased focus on identity management.⁴⁹ Zhu notes several factors in identity management that enable greater participation from described entities in creating and maintaining the metadata associated with their identifiers, including increased input from communities outside the library and incentives for researchers and authors to create their own identifiers early in their careers.⁵⁰

Research Method

In the following sections, the author explains use of terminology and relevant cataloging rules and principles as applied to ambiguous royalty.

Terminology

In this paper, an original typology of three kinds of ambiguous royalty is used:

- *Rebels* are individuals who declare themselves as heads of state in opposition to more widely recognized

kings or emperors, generally claiming dominion over a smaller part of a larger political body. This can be either a revival of a superseded or subsumed state, or a declaration of a new state.

- *Usurpers* are individuals who claim an existing royal title and position held by another who has a more widely recognized claim to the title.
- *Eccentric nobility* or *royalty* refers to individuals with no documentable claim to an existing past or present royal dynasty who claim a title for themselves that has not previously existed, and that is not recognized by any nation, state, or government.

Collectively, all these types of royalty will be referred to as *dissenting royalty*. Though there is a great deal of variety in the details of the monarchs and nobles within this umbrella category, the unifying factors are the *ambiguous legitimacy* of their claims to royal status and their *failure to achieve sustainable rule*.

Two additional, related terms are outside of this typology, but bear mentioning. *Pretender to the throne* is a general term that can apply to either a rebel or a usurper, and given its generally derogatory sense, it will not be used. *Self-proclaimed royalty* refers to those who claim a new title that *do* become recognized by a nation or other governments. Examples include Napoleon Bonaparte and Zog I, King of the Albanians. In general, because they become recognized heads of state, self-proclaimed royalty reach the “tipping point” of legitimacy. Thus they are unambiguously accounted for in existing cataloging rules and practice, and are outside the scope of this paper.

Relevant Cataloging Rules and Principles

There are several areas of RDA that provide information about how to proceed with selecting a preferred form of name for an individual who is identified as royalty. Although RDA is very clear about the order of elements in a name, it remains silent on establishing the legitimacy of a claim to a royal title. The general guidelines for selecting a name point toward choosing “form of name most commonly found in resources associated with that person... [or] a well-accepted name or form of name.”⁵¹ However, the question of what is “commonly found” and the guidance to refer to information from associated resources provides no guidance for a name for which many or all of the information sources reflect bias against the person and their self-identification. RDA 0.6.7 (“Recording Attributes of an Agent”) refers to “Title of the person (a word or phrase indicative of royalty, nobility, ecclesiastical rank or office)” and “Title of the person (another term indicative of rank, honour, or office),” but without guidance on how to identify the reality or legitimacy of the title claimed. The most directly applicable section,

9.2.2.20 (“Names of Royal Persons”), does not comment on the question of establishing legitimacy, focusing instead on identification: “If the name by which a royal person is known includes the name of a royal house, dynasty, territorial designation, etc., or a surname, record the name in direct order. Record titles by applying the instructions at 9.4.1.4.”⁵² The cited section, “Titles of Royalty,” includes a reference to the question of authority in 9.4.1.4.1 (“Person with the Highest Royal Status within a State, etc.”). A footnote to the instruction to record both the title and the name of the state or people adds: “Persons with highest status are kings and queens, emperors and empresses, and persons with other titles that indicate such a status within a state or people (grand-dukes, grand-duchesses, princes, princesses, etc.). **Rank is the only determining factor in applying these instructions. The degree of authority or power is not a factor.**”⁵³ This could be interpreted as an indication that no authentication of legitimacy is needed, and that a claim to a royal title—with or without a degree of authority or power—justifies the inclusion of a royal title in an NAR. The presumed case represented by this note is a situation wherein a monarch is a figurehead or a ceremonial position—essentially the opposite of a usurper—but the phrasing of the note could be applied in either case.

A different picture emerges, however, from 9.2.2.13 (“Surnames of Former Members of Royal Houses”), which suggests what to do when a royal title has been revoked or otherwise rendered null: “For a member of a royal house no longer identified as royalty (e.g., the house is no longer reigning or the person has lost or renounced the throne), record a name containing a surname (or a name that functions as a surname).”⁵⁴ This suggests that, where a royal title is revoked by whatever societal body had previously given it, the cataloger should similarly revoke it.

Other areas of RDA further emphasize this question of identification, pointing toward the form of the name found in the resources being cataloged—but, again, without reference to the possibility of bias in those resources. However, several other guidelines lead us to privilege the self-identification of the individual being described. 9.2.2.4 (“Recording the Preferred Name”), for example, instructs: “If a person’s preference is known to be different from normal usage, follow that preference when choosing the part of the name to be recorded as the first element.”⁵⁵ Similarly, 9.2.2.8 (“Individuals with More Than One Identity”), points toward the use of the name used by the individual, rather than any name(s) used by their opponents: “If an individual uses only one pseudonym and does not use his or her real name as a creator or contributor, choose the pseudonym as the preferred name.” Surely, the preference of a rebel king would be to be identified by a regnal name, and Nidintu-Bēl/Nebuchadnezzar III’s own administration used his regnal name rather than his birth name in documents issued during his brief rule.

An important governing principle from the *Statement of International Cataloguing Principles (ICP)* was issued by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) in 2016. ICP 2.3 states: “Controlled forms of names of persons, corporate bodies and families should be based on the way an entity describes itself.”⁵⁶ RDA guidelines should be interpreted through the lens of the ICP’s emphasis on self-description. However, the question of establishing the legitimacy of a claim to a royal or noble title is not addressed in IFLA’s *Guidelines for Authorities and References (GARR)*.⁵⁷ Similarly, establishing legitimacy is not addressed in IFLA’s *Functional Requirements for Authority Data (FRAD)* or the Name Authority Cooperative Program (NACO)’s *NACO Participants’ Manual* (where titles of nobility are considered under the heading “Other attributes of a person or corporate body”).⁵⁸

Much of the language concerning titles of royalty and nobility is essentially the same as what appeared in the Anglo-American Cataloging Rules, second edition (AACR2). For example, the language of the RDA footnote concerning rank versus power or authority is virtually identical to a similar note in AACR2 22.16A1.⁵⁹ As in RDA, GARR, FRAD, and the NACO Participants’ Manual, AACR2 makes no reference to the legitimacy of a royal, ecclesiastical, or noble title. The primary difference is AACR2 section 22.2C, concerning a change of name, which makes reference to “a person who has acquired and become known by a title of nobility.”⁶⁰ However, there is no reference to what constitutes the acquisition of such a title.

Little further insight into the question of royal legitimacy is provided in the major guidebooks to authority cataloging. *Maxwell’s Guide to Authority Work* does not address the issue, focusing instead on the question of the “commonly known” form of the name.⁶¹ Clack’s *Authority Control* raises the issue of usage of the name, raising the possibility of a claimed title as well as a widely-recognized one: “If the entry element of the name in the heading is a title of nobility that *the person uses* in place of her or his own surname, a *see* reference should be made from the person’s surname to the title.”⁶²

Dissenting Royalty: Example Records

Combining RDA’s limited guidance with the emerging preference for self-identification in recent literature, a best practice for dissenting royalty becomes clear: those who claim royal titles should receive NARs containing those royal titles, if not as a preferred form, then certainly as a variant form. Examination of some examples shows that this has not been the practice adopted for all those who have claimed a throne. The following examples demonstrate that no one approach has been used in creating NARs for

dissenting royalty. The individuals discussed below were chosen because (1) they are the subjects of works published within the last fifteen years, and (2) they each represent a different approach to how claims to authority are treated. The changes suggested here are not intended to instill “neutrality,” but rather to give a more complete picture of the disputes over names and titles, and to increase the subjects’ self-representation in the forms of name included on their NARs.

Pescennius Niger

The year 193 is known as “the Year of the Five Emperors” due to a power struggle in the Roman Empire. Following the assassination of Commodus on New Years’ Day, Pertinax was named Caesar, but he was assassinated a mere three months into his reign. His successor, Didius Julianus, met the same fate after only a few weeks. In the aftermath of these three assassinations, Septimius Severus claimed the throne, but he found a rival in Pescennius Niger, Governor of Syria, whom the legions of Syria had declared Caesar at the same time. Niger had the support of several of the eastern provinces and their armies. Clodius Albinus was appointed co-Caesar with Septimius while the latter pursued war against Niger, defeating him in May. Niger controlled the eastern provinces and minted silver coinage there, but never extended his power further west than Byzantium.⁶³ He was the one of the subjects of an exhibition catalog published in 2021.⁶⁴

Pescennius Niger’s NAR (OCLC ARN 9961342) was created under RDA rules in 2014. The preferred name in the record grants him the title given to him by the legions of Syria:

\$a Pescennius Niger, \$c Emperor of Rome, \$d -194

The title also appears on both variant forms of his name:

\$a Niger, Pescennius, \$c Emperor of Rome, \$d -194

\$a Gaius Pescennius Niger Augustus, \$c Emperor of Rome, \$d -194

The NARs for three of the other four emperors in 193 also include the title:

\$a Pertinax, Publius Helvius, \$c Emperor of Rome, \$d 126-193

\$a Didius Julianus, \$c Emperor of Rome, \$d 137-193

\$a Severus, Lucius Septimius, \$c Emperor of Rome, \$d 146-211

There is currently no NAR for Clodius Albinus, but if one is created, it should likely follow the same pattern as that of other recognized Emperors of Rome.

Clement VII (Robert of Geneva)

In 1309, the seat of the papacy was moved from Rome to Avignon in Southern France. Pope Gregory XI returned to Rome in 1377, but when he died shortly thereafter, there was dispute over the choice of his successor. On April 8, 1378, the College of Cardinals at Rome elected Bartolomeo Prignano as Pope Urban VI. He soon alienated his court, however, and on September 20, thirteen of the College’s sixteen cardinals met to elevate Robert of Geneva as Pope Clement VII, initiating a period known as the Great Western Schism. Clement returned to the papal palace at Avignon, initiating a period during which the church had two (and later even three) simultaneous popes, each supported by different factions within Christendom.⁶⁵ He was the subject of a book published in 2021.⁶⁶

Clement’s authority record (OCLC ARN 438660) was created in 1980 and was updated to RDA in 2013. The preferred form of name in the record takes the side of his opponents:

\$a Clement, \$b VII, \$c Antipope, \$d 1342-1394

The variant forms are his given name:

\$a Robert, \$c de Genève, \$d 1342-1394

\$a Robert, \$c of Geneva, \$d 1342-1394

Clement was recognized by a significant portion of the Catholic Church. However, the headings for Clement and his direct successors at Avignon adopt the Roman Catholic designation of “antipope,” certainly not a title that they would have claimed for themselves. This term, which could be considered pejorative and is certainly not neutral, currently appears in the preferred form of name on fifteen NARs for figures in the history of the Catholic Church. The term “antipope” should not be used in preferred forms of name on NARs, and should be replaced with a non-pejorative term, or simply the title used by these figures and their followers—“Pope.” If disambiguation is needed—such as the distinction between the Avignon pope Clement VII and the later Roman pope with the same name and regnal number—a more descriptive, modified title as “Pope (Avignon)” could be introduced. This would serve to disambiguate “Clement, VII, Pope (Avignon), 1342-1394,” from both

his immediate rival “Urban, VI, Pope, 1318-1389” and the later-named “Clement VII, Pope, 1478-1534.”

James Francis Edward Stuart (“The Old Pretender”)

In 1688, the Catholic King James II of England was deposed by his Protestant daughter, Mary II, and her husband William III of Orange, an event that became known as the “Glorious Revolution.” James II went with a small number of supporters into exile in France, under the protection of Louis XIV. Upon James’ death in 1701, his son James Francis Edward Stuart claimed the titles and regnal numbers of King James III of England and King James VII of Scotland. His supporters, known as Jacobites, staged a series of uprisings throughout the first half of the eighteenth century that intended to restore his line to the English and Scottish thrones (James’s son Charles Edward Stuart claimed the title and regnal number King Charles III; the line ended with the death of his brother Henry in 1807). In addition to the Jacobites, the French crown also recognized James as the rightful king of England and Scotland, until the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 obligated its recognition instead of the Succession of Hanover.⁶⁷ He was the subject of a book published in 2019.⁶⁸

James Stuart’s authority record (OCLC ARN 64329) was created in 1980 and updated to RDA in 2013. The preferred name in the record is his recognized title of Prince of Wales:

\$a James, \$c Prince of Wales, \$d 1688-1766

Variant forms reflect his recognized Continental title (and variant spellings thereof):

\$a St. George, \$c chevalier de, \$d 1688-1766

And the fuller form of his name:

\$a James Francis Edward, \$c Prince of Wales, \$d 1688-1766

\$a Stuart, James Francis Edward, \$c Prince of Wales, \$d 1688-1766

\$a Wales, \$c Prince of (James), \$d 1688-1766

Additional variant forms reflect the pejorative nickname given to him by his opponents:

\$a James, \$c the Old Pretender, \$d 1688-1766

\$a Old Pretender, \$d 1688-1766

Given the presence of these pejoratives, the record is certainly biased against the Jacobite position. James’ claimed titles—James III, King of England, and James VIII, King of Scotland—are not reflected as variant forms in his NAR, though a 670 note does specify that his supporters referred to him this way. These titles should be added to his NAR, and given his self-identification as James III, this may be a better choice of preferred name. In parallel to the headings for his opponents’ nickname “The Old Pretender,” an additional variant for the nickname used by his supporters, “The King Over the Water,” may also be appropriate.

Emperor Norton

Joshua Abraham Norton (1818-1880) was a British/South African immigrant to the US who settled in San Francisco in 1849. After a bad investment left him destitute, he proclaimed himself Emperor of the US in September 1859 in an announcement published by the San Francisco *Bulletin*. In 1863, in reaction to Napoleon III’s invasion of Mexico, he also claimed the title of Protector of Mexico. Dressed in an elaborate blue uniform, Norton became a popular eccentric figure in San Francisco. An effort by a private security guard to have him arrested and committed to a mental asylum in 1867 failed due to an outpouring of support from the city’s community.⁶⁹ Norton made efforts at establishing diplomatic relations with other countries, and Kamehameha V, King of Hawaii, recognized him as the ruler of the US.⁷⁰ In 2018, the Emperor’s Bridge Campaign hosted a series of exhibitions and public events in connection with the bicentennial of his birth.⁷¹

Emperor Norton’s authority record (OCLC ARN 1501190) was created in 1985 and most recently updated in 2020 under RDA rules. It gives his legal name as the preferred name:

\$a Norton, Joshua Abraham, \$d 1818-1880

Variant names are recorded for:

\$a Norton, \$b I, \$c Emperor, \$d 1818-1880

\$a Emperor Norton, \$d 1818-1880

Oddly, Norton’s royal name is recorded, but without an indication of what territory he claimed to be emperor. The usage of the works on this figure are clear that he was best known, during his life and after, as Norton I, Emperor of the United States, and this form of his name and title should be reflected and used as the preferred name on his NAR. Moreover, Drury noted that, following the 1859 proclamation of his Emperorship, Norton never used the name “Joshua Norton” again.⁷² Thus, the existing NAR reflects neither

Norton’s own usage nor the usage of works about him. In addition to better reflecting his self-identification, a change to the royal title for the preferred form of name would serve library users, who are far more likely to know this individual by his title and regnal name than by his birth name.

Roy Bates

Roy Bates (1921-2012), sometimes referred to as “Paddy” Roy Bates, was part of a movement of British pirate radio broadcasters who arose in reaction the British Broadcasting Company’s monopoly on radio programming. These broadcasters sought to avoid regulations by broadcasting from ships and offshore stationary platforms. Bates established Radio Essex, later known as Britain’s Better Music Station, in Knock John Tower, a British naval defense platform in the mouth of the River Thames that was abandoned after the second World War. Following his conviction for illegal broadcasting, Bates relocated his operation to Roughs Tower, another abandoned naval fort located in international waters. On September 2, 1967, Bates declared the one-acre platform to be an independent nation, dubbed the Principality of Sealand, with himself and his wife Joan as its Prince and Princess. The following year, a British court determined that it did not have jurisdiction over Roughs Tower, which Bates took as a tacit recognition of his sovereignty. He used both his standard name and his title alternatively throughout his life. Though Bates retired to the English mainland, the platform remains occupied by caretakers representing the continued claim of his son, Michael, who has inherited the title of Prince.⁷³ He was the subject of a biography published in 2020.⁷⁴

No NAR currently exists in the OCLC authority file for either Bates or the Principality of Sealand, though there is literary warrant to create both. If and when a record for Bates is created, it should include his claimed title as well as his name:

\$a Bates, Roy, \$d 1921-2012

\$a Roy, \$c Prince of Sealand, \$d 1921-2012

Conclusion

The examples discussed above show a range of approaches to dissenting royalty:

- *Pescennius Niger*: Usurper; claimed title presented as legitimate in NAR
- *Clement VII*: Rebel; claimed title not present in NAR; pejorative term used in preferred form of name

- *James Stuart*: Rebel; claimed titles not present in NAR; pejorative term used in variant form of name
- *Emperor Norton*: Eccentric nobility; birth name used as preferred name; incomplete form of claimed title in variant form of name
- *Roy Bates*: Eccentric nobility; no NAR; no geographic heading for territory related to the claimed title.

These examples demonstrate a splintering of practice regarding how NARs should be constructed for rulers of questionable, ambiguous, or failed bids for legitimacy.

There is a growing consensus among catalogers that both NARs and subject headings should be approached with more care than that suggested by a straightforward reading of RDA’s guidelines. The “ethics of care” proposed by Fox and Swickard, the “simplicity” advocated by Billey, and the self-description suggested by Thompson all call for an approach to NARs that considers the viewpoint of the individual or entity being described, rather than the society that views and too often objectifies them. Similarly, the approach to community-defined geographic terminology suggested by Hughes and Holloway advocates for an approach to cataloging that sees beyond the geopolitical realities affirmed by colonialism and imperialism. We are seeing an increasing shift toward authority cataloging that abandons the false idea of neutrality, and instead takes into consideration the self-understanding of the people and communities our authority files describe.

As important as it is to bring this sense of agency and control to those outside the library in the present, the same approach can and should inform our cataloging of historical persons. If we seek to decolonize the library catalog, we must also turn our attention toward the imperial and colonial ideologies represented by headings describing historical periods. With Duarte and Belarde-Lewis, we should imagine alternative pasts as well as futures, envisioning and empathizing with individuals whom we cannot contact to ask how they would prefer to be described. This practice should inform our approach to the victims of past empires, and those marginalized by past societies, including rebels like Nidintu-Bēl, whom Darius executed for his rebellion against the burgeoning Achaemenid Empire. Regarding legitimacy, our current resource description standards do not address the question because there *is* no objective standard of royal legitimacy. A monarch is legitimate not because of some inherent quality, but because a large enough portion of their society recognizes them as legitimate. Duyvesteyn notes that, in normal circumstances, the question of political legitimacy is “taken for granted.”⁷⁵ At a time when questions of political legitimacy are of increasing importance in contemporary politics both in America and around the world, catalogers should examine how legitimacy is described, presented, and bolstered within the catalog.

Ultimately, a recognized title is as imaginary as an unrecognized one. Royal legitimacy is a continuum, conceived and constructed by human actors with biases, agendas, and ideologies. We as catalogers cannot fix any individual to a particular point on this construct.

We must also remember that, just as we cannot be fully without bias, no historical source is without bias either, particularly not in the case of texts of imperial propaganda like the Behistun Inscription. In reference to the now-deprecated LCSH for the “Jewish Question,” Berman argued that the apparent “neutrality” of this term is anything but: “The phraseology is that of the oppressor, the ultimate murderer, not the victim.”⁷⁶ Neither should we take the side of Nebuchadnezzar III’s murderer when choosing what name to use for his access point. While we need not romanticize these figures—there is little to suggest that the brief reign of Nebuchadnezzar III was any more egalitarian, fair, or inclusive than what preceded or followed it—we can nevertheless imagine the preferences of those who sought to reframe their own identities against the dominant powers that controlled their world.

Toward this end, the author proposes the following:

- NARs for dissenting royalty should include, as a preferred or variant form of name, the title claimed by the individual, including its geographic coverage.

This is in keeping with RDA 9.4.1.4.1 n4, which instructs catalogers to disregard the actual degree of power or authority held by the individual, though this practice has not been universally applied.

- When deciding whether the royal name should be the preferred or variant form of the name, catalogers should err on the side of the self-identification of the individual being described, considering also the question of recognition of their rule or title as a secondary factor.
- Terms like “pretender” and “antipope” should only be included if there is significant literary warrant for them, but these terms should not appear in the preferred form of name. Alternative terminology may need to be devised for use in preferred forms of name for individuals who currently have these terms in their NARs.

These proposals aim both to provide a pattern of cataloging practice for dissenting royalty, and to extend the emerging preference for authorial self-identification to cover historical persons from disputed pasts. By taking up the principles outlined in this paper, catalogers will construct authority records that better describe those who, like Nidintu-Bēl/Nebuchadnezzar III, stand outside of societal consensus on questions of authority and legitimacy.

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