

To: Jule L. Sigall  
Associate Register for Policy  
and International Affairs

From: Axel Leijonhufvud  
Professor of Economics  
UCLA

Re: Comment on Notice of Inquiry

The problem is not confined to ancient texts. Here is an example:

In 1997 I published a paper in a conference volume. Two years ago, an Italian publisher wanted to translate and publish this paper in a volume of other papers of mine translated into Italian. This publisher was unable to locate the copyright owner. It turned out that the original copyright owner has been merged into another, larger firm. That firm could not locate a record of the publication in question. After repeated inquiries, it finally emerged that, following the merger, the "list" on which this conference volume had appeared has been sold off to a third (very small) publisher. This publisher in the usual way of such things gladly gave permission for the translation without asking compensation.

The point here is simply that the detective work turned out to be rather difficult and very time-consuming and that the Italian publisher eventually was going to give up the effort (while insisting that they would not print the piece without such permission).

Suggestion: New legislation should address the problem of copyright transfers due to mergers and acquisitions. The firms might be required to inform authors. Or, in cases of scholarly papers of insignificant commercial value, the rights might be made automatically to revert to the author.

Sincerely yours,  
Axel Leijonhufvud