

Further thoughts on the syntax of *Il.* 5.265–269

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Abstract

In response to a recent article by P. Probert on the same passage, it is argued that we need not assume that *Il.* 5.265–269 obliquely refers to an otherwise unknown ‘stud farm’ of Zeus if we want to maintain that the phenomenon of *attractio relativi* is only attested in post-Homeric times. The relative pronoun ἧς on which Probert’s reading is based should rather be understood as representing either a ‘descriptive’ genitive or, even more likely, an early instance of the genitive of price.

Keywords

Greek syntax – Homer – relative clauses – genitive of price

1. In her article “Zeus on the stud farm? Against a Homeric instance of *attractio relativi*”, which has appeared in a recent fascicle of this journal, Philomen Probert has lucidly discussed the disputed syntax and meaning of *Il.* 5.265–269, a passage in which Diomedes explains to Sthenelos why Aeneas’ horses are of unusual value and hence worth capturing. The punctuation, analysis, and translation advocated by Probert are as follows (cf. Probert 2016, 379):

τῆς γάρ τοι γενεῆς, ἧς Τρωΐ περ εὐρύοπα Ζεύς
δῶχ’ υἱὸς ποινὴν Γανυμήδεος, οὐνεκ’ ἄριστοι
ἵππων, ὅσσοι ἕασιν ὑπ’ ἥῳ τ’ ἡέλιόν τε –
τῆς γενεῆς ἔκλεψεν ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν Ἀγχίσης,
λάθρη Λαομέδοντος ὑποσχὼν θήλεας ἵππους·

For from that breed of which far-seeing Zeus gave to Tros as a price for his son Ganymede, because they are the best of all the horses there are under the dawn and sun – from *that breed* Anchises lord of men stole, putting mares under them without Laomedon knowing.

Although she also discusses other points – notably the question whether or not one should punctuate strongly, with full stop/colon rather than just comma/dash, at the end of line 267¹ – Probert’s main focus is on the relative pronoun ἧς in line 265. In her ground-breaking recent monograph on early Greek relative clauses (Probert 2015), she had supported earlier claims whereby so-called *attractio relativi* is attested with certainty only from the fifth century BC onward; yet, it is precisely ἧς in our passage

¹ Strong punctuation is preferred by most modern editors (see e.g. Leaf 1900, 212; Ludwich 1902, 202; Willcock 1978, 68; van Thiel 1996, 86; West 1998, 150; contrast Monro 1906, 90; Monro and Allen 1920, 97; Allen 1931: 134), but Probert 2016, 368–369 compellingly shows that, for reasons to do with the normal structure of Homeric nominal sentences, the assumption of a single long sentence with proleptic (and subsequently resumed) ‘Theme’ constituent (τῆς γενεῆς) is preferable.

which, on the contrary, “has convinced several scholars that *attractio relativi* can be found as early as Homer” (Probert 2016, 370; cf. Probert 2015, 169–182).²

2. Now, if one finds it hard to accept such a completely isolated early occurrence of a phenomenon that is well-attested only much later,³ there are two possibilities. Either one can follow Förster 1868, 46–47, and Bekker 1872, 12–13, who had been the first to highlight the apparent anachronism, and demand that the transmitted text be emended – most easily by writing ἦν instead of ἦς. Or else, one can try and do what Probert does, namely to keep ἦς and justify it without reference to *attractio relativi*. On balance, the latter would seem to be the safer, since less intrusive, option, not least because it is impossible to see any good reason why a presumptive early ἦν should ever have been changed into ἦς during the transmission process; after all, *attractio relativi* was never compulsory in the history of Greek. However, Probert’s alternative also comes at a price. According to her, ἦς represents a partitive genitive, which necessarily entails that Zeus had a “pre-existing stock or breed of horses” *from which* the god gave some animals to Tros in order to compensate him for the loss of Ganymede. And although Probert 2016, 379, finds that “Homeric audiences would have taken this implication on board without difficulty” because “[t]hey were familiar with the concept that a god might breed horses on a farm and then give them to a mortal”,⁴ this is not entirely straightforward either, for a number of interrelated reasons.

Firstly, as already noted by Förster and Bekker (who therefore preferred to emend), we simply do not hear of horse-breeding activities of Zeus anywhere else in Greek literature. To this, Probert 2016, 376, objects that “[s]ome things do appear just once in Greek literature, and once-mentioned items happen to include stud farms”; so the point cannot perhaps be pressed. But, secondly, it would also seem more natural (since distinctly more adequate a compensation for the ‘loss’ of a son) that the king of the gods should have given to Tros an entire γενη of horses, not just selected animals *from* one (and, the audience might legitimately ask, how many? one, two, a dozen?). Moreover, thirdly, the Homeric formulation would be an unnecessarily clumsy and ambiguous way of describing the horses referred to; for the truly essential point was clearly that the horses Anchises dealt with belonged to the γενη that descends from whatever horses Zeus gave to Tros, not that they belonged to a wider γενη that continued to have other branches as well (as would be implied by the partitive genitive). In principle, the latter fact would even leave room for the (mis)understanding that Anchises accessed such a *different* branch in order to breed his own horses (cf. Bekker 1872, 13) – something he might still have wished to hide from the current owner of the Trojan branch, Laomedon (for whom the primarily undesirable thing was in any case that one of his subjects

² Thus, Wackernagel 1926, 55, cites *Il.* 5.265 as “das älteste Beispiel der Attraktion des Relativums in der griechischen Sprache” and finds, with apparent regret, that “es ist nicht wegzubekommen” (‘it cannot be done away with’; the usually excellent translation by Langslow 2009, 77, here misses the point when it takes Wackernagel’s wording to mean that “[t]he attraction of the relative in Greek] becomes a hard habit to break”). Shipp 1972, 140, wonders about ἦς being an “Atticism in Homer”.

³ Note that *attractio relativi* is additionally ruled out for ἦς in *Il.* 5.265 by the fact that “relative-clause-internal nouns and adjectives standing in a predicative relationship to the relative pronoun take the same case as the relative pronoun, whether or not there is *attractio relativi*”; in other words, if ἦς were due to *attractio*, we would need ποινῆς instead of ποινῆν in line 266 (Probert 2015, 370).

⁴ Similarly, scholars like Leaf 1900, 212, Ameis and Hentze 1908, 61, Monro 1906, 300, Chantraine 1953, 237, Willcock 1978, 234, and Kirk 1990, 87, do not seem to regard the issue as problematic, but neither do they comment on it in any detail.

became the owner of equally noble animals), but not something Laomedon himself could have done much to prevent.

3. Admittedly, none of the above reservations constitutes an unsurmountable obstacle for Probert's reading, let alone an invitation to emend with Förster and Bekker. But taken together they are nevertheless sufficient to encourage further reflection on whether Probert's partitive interpretation of ἧς is really the best way to 'get rid' of Homeric *attractio relatiui*. For what the discussion so far appears to have overlooked is that, for once, not just *tertium* but *tertium quartumque dantur*.⁵

To start with the first of the two alternatives to be outlined, we should consider seeing in ἧς not a partitive genitive, but a 'descriptive (appositive) genitive' or (in a wider sense) a genitive of material. The ποινή or 'compensation' which Zeus gives to Tros for the rape of Ganymede then *consists in* the γενεή of horses referred to. In other words, ποινήν may be taken not as a predicate noun in agreement with the direct object of δῶκε, but as the direct object itself; and τῆς ... γενεῆς, ἧς Τρωΐ ... Ζεύς | δῶχ' υἱὸς ποινήν Γανυμήδεος can be translated as 'from that γενεή a compensation consisting in which Zeus gave to Tros for his son Ganymede'. That this results in rather cumbersome English must not distract from its being perfectly regular (poetic) Greek. Both descriptive (appositive) genitives and, more generally, genitives of material are well-attested in Homer (cf. e.g. *Il.* 4.350 etc. ἔρκος ὀδόντων 'enclosure of [= consisting in] teeth', *Od.* 15.507 δαῖτ' ἀγαθὴν κρειῶν τε καὶ οἴνου 'a good meal of [= consisting in] meat and wine').⁶ Also, the fact that ποινήν thus ends up being construed with two adnominal genitives – one an objective genitive (υἱὸς ... Γανυμήδεος), the other our 'descriptive' genitive – cannot really be objected to: such constructions, though not terribly widespread, are still common enough to ensure that Greek *Sprachgefühl* was comfortable with them.⁷

4. Having said that, preference may nevertheless be given to the second, and even simpler, alternative solution. Apart from *Il.* 5.265, one other Iliadic passage has occasionally been regarded as an instance of *attractio relatiui* in Homer, but this one is refuted more easily by Probert 2015, 178:

... χαίρει δέ μοι ἦτορ,
ὥς με' ἀεὶ μέμνηται ἐννέος, οὐδέ σε λήθω
τιμῆς ἧς τέ μ' ἔοικε τετιμῆσθαι μετ' Ἀχαιοῖς. (*Il.* 23.647–649)

⁵ Leaving aside the unhelpful "suggestion of Ameis and Hentze (1882, 92) that the problem disappears if ἧς is considered an 'Ablativ des Ursprungs', with the sense being 'von der Stammart, Race'" (Probert 2016, 371); as Probert rightly remarks, "as long as any implication that Zeus got the horses from some pre-existing stock is perceived as a problem ... it does not help to label ἧς an 'ablative of origin'".

⁶ See Chantraine 1953, 57 and 62, with further examples and the observation that the two categories cannot always be told apart: "Un tel génitif [sc. the 'descriptive' genitive, A.W.] se trouve proche du génitif de matière"; cf. also Kühner and Gerth 1898–1904, 1.264–265 and 1.333; Schwyzler and Debrunner 1950, 121–122 and 129 (with further examples).

⁷ See Kühner and Gerth 1898–1904, 1.337; Schwyzler and Debrunner 1950, 135. Neither they nor Chantraine 1953 cite Homeric examples, but since such 'double genitives' always come about by mere syntactic coincidence (cf. Schwyzler and Debrunner 1950, 136, "Die Geltung eines besonderen Syntagmas kommt keiner dieser meist etwas zufälligen Konstruktionen zu"), the situation is different from the one with 'attracted' relative pronouns; whereas there would have been numerous occasions to make use of the latter if the epic poets had felt entitled to do so, the former are *a priori* unlikely to occur with any frequency.

And my heart is glad at how you always keep me in mind as being well-disposed, and I do not escape your notice as regards the honour “ἥς” it is fitting for me to be honoured by the Achaeans. (tr. P. Probert)

Here, Probert notes, “the crucial point is that ἥς is straightforwardly taken as a genitive of price or value, depending on τετιμῆσθαι: ‘the honour at which it is fitting for me to be honoured by the Achaeans’”. Although “there are no other Homeric examples of the genitive of price or value with the verb τιμάω ‘honour’, ... the genitive of price or value itself is attested in Homer, and it is found with τιμάω in classical Greek.” Thus, it is not surprising that both Monro 1891, 148, and Chantraine 1953, 57–58, also cite this very passage as a pertinent instance; it would indeed be odd to take it any differently.

But if this is so for ἥς in *Il.* 23.649, why not also for ἥς in *Il.* 5.265? As Chantraine 1953, 58, further remarks on the Homeric genitive of price, “[c]ette notion de prix se retrouve avec les verbes signifiant ‘acheter’ ou ‘racheter’: X 50 χαλκοῦ τε χρυσοῦ τ’ ἀπολυσόμεθα (cf. A 106, etc...); – λ 327 χρυσὸν φίλου ἀνδρὸς ἐδέξατο τιμήντα ‘reçut de l’or précieux pour prix de son mari’. Ainsi s’explique l’emploi du génitif avec ἀμείβω ‘échanger’: Z 236 τεύχε’ ἀμείβεν χρύσεα χαλκείων ‘il échangeait des armes d’or pour des armes de bronze’.”

It hardly needs stressing that the verbal phrase διδόναι ποινήν ‘to give compensation’ belongs to the same semantic group as ‘buying’ or ‘paying’. The root of the verbal noun ποινή, **k^wey-*, is the same as that of the – also already Homeric – verb ἀποτίνω ‘repay (in compensation)’, of which διδόναι ποινήν is a phraseological equivalent (cf. *Il.* 3.286 τιμήν δ’ Ἀργείοις ἀποτινέμεν ‘to give compensation to the Achaeans for their honour’). Hence, just as Homer can use an expression χαλκοῦ τε χρυσοῦ τ’ ἀπολύεσθαι ‘to pay with bronze and gold’ (cf. above), so there would be nothing peculiar about, say, *χαλκοῦ τε χρυσοῦ τ’ ἀποτίνειν ‘to repay with bronze and gold’; nor, by implication, about *χαλκοῦ τε χρυσοῦ τε διδόναι ποινήν ‘give compensation with (= at the price of) bronze and gold’. At the same time, if a φίλος ἀνὴρ can be the ‘currency’ or price with/at which payment is made (cf. above), then surely a γενεὴ ἵππων may also represent the price at/with which compensation for something is made. In other words, the use of the phrase διδόναι ποινήν with a genitive of price can hardly be treated as unexpected, and it must certainly not confuse the modern reader of Homer. Nothing could be more straightforward than a translation of τῆς ... γενεῆς, ἥς Τρωῖ ... Ζεὺς | δῶχ’ υἱὸς ποινήν Γανυμήδεος as ‘of/from that γενεή at the price of which [~ with which] Zeus gave compensation to Tros for his son Ganymede’ (cf. e.g. *τῶν τριάκοντα ταλάντων, ὧν τις ἐπρίατο χωρίον ‘of/from the 30 talents at the price of which [~ with which] someone bought a piece of land’).

5. Finally, one may perhaps still ask whether it would not have been *simpler* – albeit a little less precise – for the Homeric poet to do what most Homerists appear to have wanted him to do: i.e., to use ἣν instead of ἥς and treat ποινήν as a predicate noun (‘of/from the γενεή which Zeus gave *as/in* compensation’). In response to this question, it should be stressed, first of all, how dangerous it is to be guided in one’s approach to any foreign language, ancient or modern, by the structures of one’s own native language. What seems simpler to us need not have seemed simpler to a speaker of Greek in the archaic age. And when English presents us with a choice between, say, *to pay 30 pounds in compensation* and *to pay a compensation of 30 pounds*, we also do not categorially prefer one structure over the other. But in the particular case of our Homeric passage, it

may even be possible to make out an additional incentive for using ἧς rather than ἥν (while not denying that both could yield acceptable grammar).

With ἥν, the central components of the relative clause would have been *(τῆς γενεῆς), ἥν Τρωῖ ... Ζεὺς δῶχ' υἱὸς ποινήν. *One* reading of this is the aforementioned '(of/from that γενεή) which Zeus gave to Tros as/in compensation for his son'. In a poetic text, however, a second structural analysis would have been equally feasible. According to this, ἥν ... ποινήν would have represented not the direct object of δῶκε + a predicate noun agreeing with that direct object ('which Z. gave to T. as/in compensation'), but a single direct object of δῶκε in hyperbaton – and with the relative clause's antecedent incorporated into the relative clause itself ('which compensation Z. gave to T.'). Now, as Probert 2015, 130–133 and 480, has demonstrated, such relative clauses with an incorporated antecedent are "inherently maximalising"; as such, they "refer to a unique entity, everything in a set, or a complete lot of stuff" (Probert 2015, 131). This in itself would not be a problem in our context since the compensation (ποινή) is indeed to be thought of as a complete whole – there is not one part of it that Zeus gave to Tros and another part he did not give to Tros. However, Probert 2015, 242–261, esp. 243, also observes that, in Homeric Greek, "inherently maximalizing relative clauses are used when it is clear what is excluded as well as what is included, and when the exclusion of material is important for one or both of the following reasons: (i) the preceding context does not make the excluded material more or less inferable already, and/or (ii) there is a strong explicit or implicit contrast between what is included in the denotation of the inherently maximalizing relative clause, and what is excluded from it". This means that ἥν ... ποινήν in the sense of 'which compensation' would only have been acceptable on condition that there be some other contextually relevant compensation that had to be excluded – which is not, of course, the case in the passage under discussion. Thus, in order to avoid any misleading implicature, the poet had every reason to opt for an alternative, unambiguous, construction: namely the one involving ἧς as a genitive of price.

6. Summing up, a fairly literal (and correspondingly unelegant) translation of *Il.* 5.265–269 might look as follows:

For from the breed at the price of which [~ with which] far-sounding Zeus gave compensation to Tros for his son Ganymede (because they are the best horses that exist under the dawn and sun) – from that breed Anchises lord of men stole, putting mares under them without Laomedon knowing.

If we understand the verses in this way, we *neither* have to maintain that Zeus had some otherwise unknown pre-existing stud farm from which he occasionally gave out a horse or two to make up for his misdeeds *nor* to accept that *attractio relativi* is found already in Homer. Instead, we can probably add *Il.* 5.265 to the small but consistent group of Homeric lines that attest a genitive of price for the language of early Greek epic.

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