

Some remarks on the names for pigeon in Lithuanian

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There is some evidence (Lith. *karvus* 'bald', *karvėlis* 'a plant bearing blue flowers', Latv. *karva* 'black soil') suggesting that there was a colour term **karvus* || **karvas* 'having a white head or a white spot on the forehead; motley, variegated; bluish; black with white patches...' along with its expanded form **karvelis* 'id.' which might have served as a basis for the derivation of the pigeon term *karvėlis* in Lithuanian.

When reading Jules F. Levin's article "Pigeons, cows and April in Lithuania" (Levin 1992) I was impressed by his insight in detecting inherent semantic connections between *balañdis* (1) 'pigeon, wild dove', (2) 'April' (the 4th month of the year), and (3) 'hornless cattle' as well as in attempting the difficult task of bridging the wide gap in meaning between *karvė* 'cow' and *karvėlis* 'pigeon', allegedly a metaphor — the 'little cow'¹.

Cows were kept customarily for milk, and the pigeon is the only bird that feeds milk to his young. The ability of pigeons to lactate was observed and known to ordinary folk (cf. Lith. *balañdžio piėnas*). Jules F. Levin assumes that this fact provides the link between the signata 'cow' and 'pigeon', which is the necessary prerequisite for the metaphor ('pigeon' as the 'little cow'). Jules F. Levin notes correctly that *karvėlis* is masculine, whereas *kárvė* is feminine, and that its diminutive **karvelė* is not attested. Lactation in the male pigeon may be taken to explain, Jules F. Levin goes on arguing, why the feminine *kárvė* could so readily become a masculine *karvėlis*. Besides this incongruity in gender, another fact to consider if we want to find a satisfactory

¹This idea goes back to K. Būga's connecting Lith. **karvas* 'Brüller' > 'Taube', diminutive *karvėlis* 'Taube' with Pr. *kurwis* 'Ochse' < 'Brüller' (Būga 1908:180) which led to its interpretation as 'the little ox', cf. Toporov (1980:241).

explanation for *karvėlis* is that *karvėlis* is also a term for a plant bearing blue flowers (LKŽ V 356).

My intention is here to proceed along the lines of reasoning established by Jules F. Levin, with his idea that the lexemes I. *balañdis* 'pigeon, wild dove' and II. *balañdis* 'hornless cattle' are close cognates, and that the latter is to be interpreted as 'one with a bare or white head'. In other words, there was an adjective **balandas* meaning 'whitish' (: *bālas* 'white') that served as a basis for deriving both lexemes with the suffix *-io-*. As was observed by Jules F. Levin himself, this idea is in accordance with the facts, both semasiologically and derivationally (as for the suffix *-io-*, sometimes *-iio-*), cf. Lith. *baūšis* and *baužys* 'hornless cattle; person with close-cropped hair': *baūžas* 'hornless; bare-headed, bald; bare, empty'; *šmūlis* 'hornless cattle; person with close-cropped hair'; *šmūlas* 'hornless; with close-cropped hair, bald'; *škūlis* 'hornless cattle; person with close-cropped hair': *škūlas* 'hornless; with close-cropped hair, bald'; *baluñdis* 'hornless cattle': *baluñdas* 'hornless, bare-headed', *būlas* 'hornless'². On the other hand, the meaning 'bare-headed, bald' is associated with the meaning 'having a white head or a white spot on the forehead or head' and ultimately with the meaning 'white, bright', cf., e.g., Lith. *laukas* (and *laukas*) 'having a white spot on the forehead or a white muzzle, snout; bald', Latv. *lāuks* 'blässig' (: OInd. *rócate* 'shines, is bright'); Lith. *plikas* 'bald; naked, bare', Latv. *plīks* 'naked, nude', *pleiks* 'bald', Lith. *plėikė* (and *plaiķė*, *pleikė*) 'bare patch; small vacant area, bare spot...' (: Lith. *plīēkti*, *-ia* 'shine brightly'). With these semantic peculiarities in mind, we are entitled to suggest that the attested adjective *karvus*, *-i* 'bald'³ may formerly also have had the meaning 'with a white head, with a white spot on the forehead'. It is also very likely that this Lithuanian adjective had an enlarged form **karvelis* (as was the case, e.g., with *didis* 'great': *didelis* 'big, large, tall' and *daug* 'much, plenty of': *daugel* 'many'). If this is true, then the pigeon and wild dove term *karvėlis* as well as *karvėlis* 'a plant bearing blue flowers' would be instances of a simple process of substantivization of the primary colour term **karvelis*, subsequently remodelled and assimilated to the large class of nouns with the diminutive suffix *-elis*. The reconstruction of the colour term *karvus* || **karvas* 'bald; having a white head or a white spot

²More on adjectives with the meaning 'hornless' cf. S. Sabaljauskas (1964:59-65).

³*K a r v u s*, calvus, lysis; *k a r v a*, nagi pagórek, lyse wżgórze, Akielewicz (1890:80); *karvus*, *-i* 'plikas, plikagalvis' LKŽ V 359.

on the forehead...', could be substantiated, first, by Latv. *karva* 'black soil (melnzeme, degzeme)' EH I 590, in which the meaning 'black' can be easily detected, and, secondly, by such Lithuanian hydronyms as *Karvė*, *Karvėis*, *Karvėys* and, possibly, *Karvedà* (with the suffix *-eda* as, e.g., in *Leb-edà* and *Sug-edà*), since efforts at finding a satisfactory etymon for the latter have failed so far (cf. Vanagas 1981:148-149). In this colour spectrum ranging from white to black an intermediate shade would be represented by Lith. *karvėlis* 'a plant bearing blue flowers'.

Karvus || **karvas* would then contain the suffix *-v-u-* || *-v-a-*, characteristic of colour terms, cf. *bėrvas* 'reddish-brown', *mulvas* 'reddish, ruddy, clay-coloured', *palvas* 'straw-coloured, pale yellow', *širvas* 'grey, dapple grey' and *žalvas* 'yellowish, light bay' (Skardžius 1943:176-377).

Concerning the cognates of *karvus*, two possibilities may be considered. On the one hand, by postulating an interchange of the consonants *k* : *k̄*, we might compare it with Lith. *šarvas* 'grey, dapple grey' LKŽ XIV 530 and *širvas* 'id.'⁴. On the other hand, *karvus* < **kor-v-* may be associated with the root of the colour term Lith. *kėršas* (and *keřšas*) 'piebald, dappled; having a white back; having a motley, variegated head...' < **ker-s-* (with the regular change of *s* into *š* after *r*)⁵. This association reveals some interesting parallels between the derivatives of *kėršas* and those of *karvus*. First of all, we find an adjective *keršalas* 'blotchy', a derivative of *kėršas* with *-al-*, which would parallel **karvelis* (from *karvus* with *-el-*). Then there are several names for a wild dove (*Columbia palumbus*) derived from *kėršas*: *keršūlis*, *keršolys* and *kerščiūlis* < **kerš-(s)ti-* LKŽ V 623, 625, 628 (cf. also such syntagms as *keršinis balandis* 'wild dove', *keršūlis karvelis* 'speckled, spotted pigeon' LKŽ V 624, 628). This would be parallel to the proposed derivation of *karvėlis* 'pigeon' from *karvus* 'bald' (|| **having a white head or a white spot on the forehead*) through its expanded form **karvelis* 'id.'.

If the assumption that *karvus* and *kėršas* are cognates is correct, then the fact of names for a wild dove being derived from the stem **ker-s-* would suggest that the stem **kor-v-* yielded a name for the domesticated pigeon, i. e. *karvėlis* was a domesticated pigeon term. There are sufficient data supporting this unexpected conclusion. As was observed correctly by Jules F. Levin,

⁴More on *šarvas* and *širvas* cf. Būga (1908:138), Fraenkel (1962-1965:989); on the interchange of *k* : *k̄* cf. Stang (1966:91-93), Karaliūnas (1968:87-91).

⁵More on *kėršas* cf. Fraenkel (1962-1965:245).

balañdis is found in Zhemaitian and East Prussian Lithuanian, but *karvēlis* is specifically Aukshtaitian. According to *Lietuvių kalbos atlasas*, the isoglosses of *karvēlis* and *balañdis* coincide more or less with the boundaries of the Aukshtaitian and Zhemaitian dialects. But both *balañdis* and *karvēlis* are found in some places far beyond their areas; moreover, in some localities of the Vilkaiviškis region (Gražišiai, Kybartai, Pajevonys, Vištýtis) only a wild dove is called *balañdis* (cf. *Lietuvių kalbos atlasas* I, p. 149, map No 76). Among Prussian Lithuanians this distinction was also observed, and moreover the *i*-stem feminine form *balandis* was used⁶.

It thus seems most likely that a unified semiotic process underlies the denomination of this species in Baltic (Lith. *keršūlis* etc. : *kéršas*; *karvēlis* : *karvus* and Lith. *balañdis*, *balandis*, Latv. *baluōdis* : **balandas* 'whitish'). A possible etymological counterpart of the latter in Iranian (cf. Osset. *bælon* 'domestic pigeon', Abaev 1958:249) does not seem to contradict this statement.

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⁶Taube, Karwēlis, élio, m.; wilde Taube, Balandis, -iēs, f. Ruhig (1747:349). — Taube, Karwēlis, lio, m.; wilde Taube, Balandis, -ies, f. Mielcke (1800:466). — Balandis, dēs f. von Memel bis Ragnit herab, die Taube im allgemein; um Insterburg die wilde Taube, Holztaube, Nesselmann (1851:318). — Balañdis, džio m. *die Taube*. In manchen Gegenden: *wilde Taube* im Unterschiede von der zahmen Taube, Karwēlis, Kurschat (1883:37).

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