Some remarks on the names for pigeon in Lithuanian

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There is some evidence (Lith. karvus ‘bald’, karvelis ‘a plant bearing blue flowers’, Latv. karsa ‘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 karvelis 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 balaždis (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 karvelis ‘pigeon’, allegedly a metaphor — the ‘little cow’.

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. balaždzio pienas). 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 karvelis is masculine, whereas kárve 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 kárve could so readily become a masculine karvelis. Besides this incongruity in gender, another fact to consider if we want to find a satisfactory

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explanation for "karvelis" is also a term for a plant bearing blue flowers (LKŽ V 356).

My intention here is to proceed along the lines of reasoning established by Jules F. Levin, with his idea that the lexemes I. *balaidsis* 'pigeon, wild dove' and II. *balaidsis* '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 *balaids meaning 'whitish' (balaids 'white') that served as a basis for deriving both lexemes with the suffix -i-o. As was observed by Jules F. Levin himself, this idea is in accordance with the facts, both semasiologically and derivationally (as for the suffix -i-o, sometimes -i-o-), cf. Lith. baauas and baauja 'hornless cattle; person with close-cropped hair': baauja 'hornless; bare-headed, bald; bare, empty'; simula 'hornless cattle; person with close-cropped hair'; simula 'hornless; with close-cropped hair, bald'; skulys 'hornless cattle; person with close-cropped hair': skulys 'hornless; with close-cropped hair, bald'; balaidsis 'hornless cattle': balaids 'hornless, bare-headed', balaids 'hornless'. 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. laibkas (and labukas) 'having a white spot on the forehead or a white mottle, snout, bald'; Latv. lauku 'blissful' (Oln. ré cite 'shines, is bright'); Lith. plikas 'bald; naked, bare', Latv. pliks 'naked, nude'; pleiks 'bald', Lith. pleiki (and plaiki, pleiki) 'bare patch; small vacant area, bare spot...': Lith. pleiki, -iai 'shine brightly'). With these semantic peculiarities in mind, we are entitled to suggest that the attested adjective karus, -i 'bald' 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 karvelis as well as karvelis 'a plant bearing blue flowers' would be instances of a simple process of substantivation of the primary colour term *karvelis*, subsequently remodelled and assimilated to the large class of nouns with the diminutive suffix -ulis. The reconstruction of the colour term karus || *karus* 'bald; having a white head or a white spot

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3 More on adjectives with the meaning 'hornless' cf. S. Sabaliauska (1964:59-65).
4 K ar u s, calvus, lyaj; k a r u s, nagi pagorek, lyse wzgorze, Akieliewicz (1890:80); karus, -i 'plikas, plikagalvin' LKŽ V 359.

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balađis is found in Zhemaitian and East Prussian Lithuanian, but karvelis is specifically Aukštaitian. According to Lietuvių kalbos atlasas, the isoglosses of karvelis and balađis coincide more or less with the boundaries of the Aukštaitian and Zhemaitian dialects. But both balađis and karvelis are found in some places far beyond their areas; moreover, in some localities of the Vilkaviškis region (Gražišiai, Kybartai, Pajevoňys, Vistytis) only a wild dove is called balađis (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 balađis was used.

It thus seems most likely that a unified semiotic process underlies the denomination of this species in Baltic (Lith. kersulius etc.: kersulius, karvelis: karvus and Lith. balađis, baladis, Latv. balađis: *balandis ‘whitish’). A possible etymological counterpart of the latter in Iranian (cf. Osset. balon ‘domestic pigeon’, Abaev 1958:249) does not seem to contradict this statement.

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