INTRODUCTION

Ever since 2001, Radio Eins, a station most popular with young listeners in Berlin and the surrounding area, hosts an almost daily meeting with Jürgen Udolph, a renown professor of linguistics in Leipzig, where he holds the only teaching position in onomastics that exists in Germany. Within a special show advertised as 'Die Profis' ('the professionals'), Udolph responds to calls from people asking questions about the origin and significance of their family names. In his responses, the linguist often stresses the importance of the geographical, if not territorial, aspect of family naming practices. 'Tell me your name, and I'll tell you where you come from and who you are.' So far, only German names have been submitted to professional analysis, but the radio station's website provides a substantial bibliography for all those who wish to pursue the study of their own names beyond Udolph’s expertise or interest.1 Despite its smack of amusement, when drawing parallels between family and place names Udolph's program on Radio Eins is not very far from his research agenda. A student of W.P. Schmid, he endorses the idea of reconstructing Indo-European languages on the basis of place and especially river names. Like Schmid, Udolph believes that the oldest river names in Europe originated in a restricted area of the Continent, from which they later spread to other regions. Like family names, hydronyms can thus be used to divine identities. In the absence of callers asking questions about their family histories hidden inside their own names, Udolph writes ethnic history from hydronyms.

Few are the linguists whose theories have stirred as much interests among archaeologists as Udolph's. His 1978 Ph.D. dissertation at the University of

Göttingen\(^2\) is a major contribution to linguistic attempts to identify the Slavic *Urheimat* and thus to write the ethnic history of the Slavs. His conclusion was that the *Urheimat* was a restricted area in the northeastern foothills of the Carpathian Mountains, in what is now southwestern Ukraine. It was from this *Urheimat* that the Slavs spread to all directions and quickly settled an enormous area stretching from the Baltic to the Aegean Sea and from the Elbe to the Don River. This idea was enthusiastically embraced by some archaeologists. Udolph meticulously traced this migration on maps, showing the distribution of hydronyms and equipped with long, curving arrows springing from the southwest Ukrainian homeland. Not surprisingly, therefore, his ideas were enthusiastically received by Ukrainian archaeologists. To Volodymyr D. Baran, Udolph’s theory confirmed his own conclusions that the earliest archaeological assemblages to be attributed to the Slavs must be those of Bukovina and the neighboring regions.\(^3\) Kazimierz Godlowski, while adopting Baran’s archaeological conclusions, was more skeptical as to the possibility of, as well as explanations for, such a large-scale migration covering two thirds of the European continent within a relatively short period of time, but originating from a region smaller than the Netherlands.\(^4\)

To be sure, Udolph’s book was met with criticism from fellow linguists, and despite his thorough reply to his critics,\(^5\) his ideas generated anything but consensus. In the meantime, new, sharply contrasting ideas have been put forward by some of his critics, most prominently by Oleg Trubachev. The Slavic *Urheimat* has now moved from the foothills of the Carpathians into the Carpathian basin. Despite further acceptance (and support) from some linguists, the new theory stirred even more controversy.\(^6\) The impression one gets

---


