After the Avar and Slavic attacks\(^1\) that caused the abandonment of the Danubian frontier in the first decades of the 7th century, and after the establishment of Bulgaria in 680, the Byzantine navy continued to exert in the intervening period some degree of control over the river, engaging in operations against Bulgaria. On the Danubian sector close to the sea, it is possible that Noviodunum (Isaccea) possibly remained a harbor for the Byzantine ships throughout the entire 7th century,\(^2\) and a stopping point on the way to Durostorum (today Silistra), as did Carsium (Hârşova) for a shorter period.\(^3\) The city of Durostorum was involved in the war of September 680 against the Bulgar ruler Asparukh who occupied the so-called Onglos, as a lead seal issued by Constantine IV between 679 and 680 is showing (the seal belonged to a message sent to a high Byzantine dignitary, most probably military, from Durostorum).\(^4\) Closer to the mouths of the Danube, at Nufâru, the lead seal of a dignitary named Kyriakos (dated to 696–697) is a valuable proof that the small fortification that existed there in the 4th–7th centuries was still under Byzantine domination some years after the arrival of the Bulgars.\(^5\) Unfortunately, no extensive excavations were possible within the modern village, although the site appears to have grown in importance after the 10th century.

Not too far from Nufâru and Isaccea, the earthworks enclosing an area near the village of Niculițel are still a conundrum. Their identification with Onglos is not suitable, because it is quite clear from the accounts of both Theophanes Confessor and Nikephoros that that well defended place, surrounded by rivers and marshes, was located north, not south

\(^1\) Dimitrov 1997, 26–34; Madgearu 1997, 315–324; Curta 2006, 66–69; Madgearu 2007, 265–266.

\(^2\) There are many 7th century seals (Barnea 1997, 354), but very few coins issued after Phokas (Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1996, 104; Iacob 2000, 493).

\(^3\) For coin circulation at Durostorum: Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1996, 103–106. For Carsium, a coin from 629–630 attests the preservation of the contacts with the empire (Custurea 1986, 277, nr. 6). Haldon 1999, 74 admitted that some Danubian fortresses survived in the 7th century because they were supplied by the fleet.


of the Danube. Moreover, both authors write of Onglos as a place, not a region (Theophanes even said that the Onglos was appropriate to accommodate the small number of people that remained after the wars). The “steep rocks” mentioned by Nikephoros seem to be his own invention, because Theophanes, who was better informed, did not record them. Nikephoros may have had in mind the legendary Riphaei Mountains. Some unidentified “fortifications” (εχώρωμα) were included in the Onglos. Between Onglos and the Danube was a small marshy zone. The rivers that bordered the Onglos are not named, but they cannot be either the Dnieper or the Dniester, because the Bulgars are said to have crossed them before settling in Onglos. The name Onglos comes from the Türkic word agul / aul, which means “court”, “enclosure”. Many historians identified the Onglos with the entire southern part of Moldavia, bordered by the rivers Siret or Prut, and the Dniester, as well as by the Vadul lui Isac-Tatarbunar earthen dike, but the best identification points to a small area between the mouths of the rivers Siret and Prut, confined by the earthen dike built there in the early 2nd century between modern villages of Şerbeşti and Tuluceşti, whose purpose was to provide an extra-defense for the Roman camp at Barboşi.

The theory presented above was rejected by Rašo Rašev, who believed that before 680 Asparukh had conquered a large region bordered by the dike in southern Bessarabia, the Şerbeşti-Tuluceşti dike, and the so-called Small Earthen Dike in Dobrudja. The center of this region, the first Bulgar state, was the ringwork at Niculiţel—the actual Onglos. It is true that, according to the Bulgarian Vision of Prophet Isaiah written in the second half of the 12th century, Ispor (Asparukh) had built a great fortification or dike from the Danube to the sea, but this particular text cannot be

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7 Hălcescu 1989, 341.
8 Fehér 1931, 24; Božilov 1975, 31. The etymology from the Latin angulus, supported by some historians, is wrong, because Nikephoros specifically mentions that Onglos was called so in the language of the Bulgars.
11 Rašev 1982, 76–79; Rašev 1987, 49–51; Rašev 1997, 49–54; Rašev 2004, 277–282. This is a developed form of the theory first advanced by Škorpil 1918, 145–152, according to whom Onglos referred to the earthworks as Niculițel.
12 Fehér 1931, 16; Gjuzelev 1984, 33–34; Squatriti 2005, 59–60, 63, 70; Petkov 2008, 195. For the value of this text, see Dimitrov 1993, 97–109 (only the data about the 11th century are somehow reliable, see Stanev 2012, 21–25).