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FROM HUN–TURKIC MILITARY HERITAGE TO THE DEFENSE OF EUROPE: THE WARRIOR IDENTITY OF THE KINGDOM OF HUNGARY AGAINST THE MONGOL INVASIONS AND ITS CONTINENTAL HISTORICAL CONSEQUENCES (THIRTEENTH CENTURY)

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ABSTRACT

This study reevaluates the defensive success of the Kingdom of Hungary against the Mongol invasions in the thirteenth century, within the framework of the warrior identity nourished by Hun-Turkic military heritage and the institutional fortification reforms implemented during the reign of Béla IV. The research offers a critical alternative to deterministic explanations suggesting that the Mongol invasions "spontaneously" halted in Europe, examining the historical consequences of Hungary's internal defense capacity from an analytical perspective.

The study adopts qualitative historical analysis and comparative case study methods, comparatively analyzing the Mongol campaigns of 1241–1242 and 1285. The theoretical framework is constructed upon the concepts of military culture, defense line, and historical threshold, explaining the functionality of steppe-origin military tradition within the European context.

The findings reveal that Hungary's defensive success rested upon three fundamental dynamics: first, the cognitive advantage provided by the Hun-Turkic military heritage enabling the capacity to read the tactical language of Mongol-Turkic armies and develop counter-strategies; second, the physical restriction of Mongol cavalry mobility through the stone castle construction campaign that became state policy following the 1241 catastrophe; third, the symmetric response capacity created by the hybrid defense model formed through the integration of Cuman light cavalry into the Hungarian army.

The study demonstrates that Hungary was not a passive victim or transit zone, but rather assumed a strategic buffer function that preserved Europe's historical existence. This perspective emphasizes that European history should be read not only through Western-centric narratives but also within the Eurasian context and through the determinative roles of frontier regions. The research offers an original contribution to both fields by establishing an interdisciplinary bridge between Mongol studies and medieval European history.

Keywords: Mongol invasions, Kingdom of Hungary, Hun-Turkic military heritage, warrior identity, fortification reforms, defense line, Medieval Europe.

1. INTRODUCTION

The thirteenth century constitutes an exceptional epoch fundamentally marked by the Mongol expansion, which radically altered the trajectory of world history. This expansion, extending from the Pacific littoral to the Adriatic Sea, must be comprehended not merely as an endeavor of

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territorial acquisition, but as a comprehensive transformative process that convulsed established political orders, trade networks, and cultural basins (Allsen, 2001; Morgan, 2007). During this process, Chinese dynasties collapsed, Baghdad—the central metropolis of the Islamic world—was sacked and devastated, and Russian principalities fell under the suzerainty of the Golden Horde for more than two centuries (Halperin, 1985; Jackson, 2017). The magnitude of this global transformation possessed an unprecedented scale and velocity in world history; the Mongol conquests brought the greater part of Eurasia under a single political umbrella within approximately half a century and fundamentally restructured transcontinental networks of commerce, diplomacy, and cultural exchange (Di Cosmo et al., 2018; Lane, 2009). Within this universal upheaval, the European continent found itself in a state of serious vulnerability due to its fragmented feudal structure, the absence of centralized command, and its unfamiliarity with steppe warfare (May, 2007; Saunders, 1971). Nevertheless, the Kingdom of Hungary, positioned at the eastern threshold of the continent, assumed a strategic buffer function that preserved Europe's historical existence against this global threat, rather than serving as a mere target or transit zone (Engel, 2001). Indeed, the divergent outcomes of the devastating first invasion of 1241–1242 and the second campaign of 1285 constitute concrete evidence of the institutional transformation that Hungary accomplished during this intervening four-decade period (Pow, 2021). Accordingly, this article aims to reassess Europe's existential trial against the Mongol threat from a Hungary-centered historical perspective. This perspective is consonant with contemporary historiography, which contends that European history should be read not solely through a Western-centric narrative, but within the Eurasian context and through the determinative roles of frontier regions (Curta, 2019; Berend, 2013).

To comprehend Hungary's privileged position within Europe's defensive architecture, it is imperative to examine the origins of this kingdom and the Hun–Turkic military heritage embedded in its institutional memory. The migratory odyssey of the Magyars—a community belonging to the Ural-Altaic language family—from the Central Asian steppes to the Carpathians structurally differentiated them from the other peoples of Europe (Róna-Tas, 1999; Golden, 1992). This differentiation signifies not merely a linguistic or ethnic distinction, but a profound cultural legacy encompassing fundamental institutional codes such as modes of warfare, patterns of social organization, and threat perception (Sinor, 1990). The Magyar tribes, having settled in the Carpathian Basin during the ninth century, transplanted to their new homeland the mounted archery, flexible unit formations, and rapid maneuver capabilities they had developed over centuries in the steppe world (Kontler, 2002). Although this military tradition underwent partial transformation with the adoption of Christianity and the embrace of feudal structures, the fundamental codes of steppe martial culture persisted within the institutional memory (Berend, 2001). This continuity may be elucidated through the concept of "institutional memory" employed in historical sociology; societies exhibit a tendency to revert to past successful strategies and organizational forms in moments of crisis, even when formal structures have changed (Khazanov, 1994). Indeed, in this study, the concept of Hun–Turkic military heritage is defined not as a romantic origin narrative or a claim of ethnic continuity, but as a functional "military literacy" that provides the capacity to read the enemy's language of war, properly configure threat perception, and develop counter-strategies (Jackson, 2005; Golden, 2011). This conceptual framework enables us to read Hungary's encounter with the Mongol armies not as a clash between two alien worlds, but as the re-encounter of similar military traditions under different historical circumstances.

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The cognitive and tactical advantage afforded by this military heritage becomes more pronounced when considered in light of the structure of Mongol armies. The Mongol Empire, established by Genghis Khan and expanded by his successors, was not a homogeneous ethnic entity but rather an expansive steppe confederation in which Turkic communities (Kipchak, Cuman, Uyghur, Karluk, etc.) played determinative roles (Amitai & Biran, 2005; Di Cosmo et al., 2018). This confederate structure was the fundamental source of the flexibility and adaptive capacity of the Mongol military system; the martial capabilities and knowledge repositories of conquered peoples were systematically integrated into the imperial army (May, 2012). The armies advancing toward Europe under the command of Batu Khan were likewise largely composed of these Turkic elements (Vásáry, 2005). This mode of warfare—encompassing tactics such as feigned retreat, enveloping flank maneuvers, and long-range archery—which was wholly incomprehensible to the feudal knights of Western Europe, actually constituted familiar elements within the historical memory of the Hungarian military elite (May, 2007; Hildinger, 1997). Furthermore, the Cuman communities settled along Hungary's borders from the eleventh century onward maintained this military knowledge as a living tradition and provided the kingdom with a direct source of steppe warriors (Pálóczi Horváth, 1989). The integration of the Cumans into Hungary signified not merely a demographic reinforcement, but also the continued existence of a living laboratory of steppe martial culture within the kingdom's borders; this circumstance transformed into a critical advantage when confronting the Mongol threat in the thirteenth century (Vásáry, 2005; Berend, 2001). Consequently, when Hungary encountered the Mongol-Turkic armies, it occupied a position of "recognizing" the enemy's art of war, unlike other regions of Europe. This capacity for recognition afforded not merely physical resistance, but also the possibility of developing a "cultural counter-response" at the strategic level.

The second critical factor that transformed Hungary into Europe's defensive shield in the second half of the thirteenth century was the comprehensive fortification and castle construction policy implemented in the aftermath of the 1241–1242 catastrophe. The Mongol armies' crushing victory at the Battle of Mohi plunged the Hungarian Kingdom into a profound collapse in demographic, economic, and military terms; it is estimated that approximately one-third of the population perished (Pow, 2021; Kosztolnyik, 1996). This devastation constituted one of the most traumatic events in Hungarian history; yet it simultaneously served as the catalyst for a fundamental institutional restructuring process; paradoxically, catastrophe was transmuted into the catalyst for reform (Engel, 2001). However, the process of reconstruction initiated under the reign of Béla IV converted this devastation into an opportunity for learning and transformation (Fügedi, 1986). Having personally experienced the inadequacy of earthen and timber defensive structures against Mongol siege techniques, the king elevated the construction of stone castles at strategic passage points and elevated positions to state policy (Engel, 2001). Between 1242 and 1300, hundreds of new castles rose across the Hungarian landscape; these structures were designed not merely as local defense points, but as an integrated fortification network operating in coordination with one another (Kontler, 2002). This fortification network transformed not only the defensive architecture but also the kingdom's administrative structure, taxation system, and network of feudal relations; castle ownership became a new indicator of political power (Fügedi, 1986; Sugar & Hanák, 1994). This process represents one of the most intensive castle construction periods in Europe from the perspective of military architecture and concretizes the fundamental paradigm shift in Hungary's defensive capacity. Indeed, the limited impact of the second Mongol campaign in 1285 constitutes historical evidence of the strategic success of these fortification investments (Pow, 2021).

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At this juncture, the three fundamental analytical tools constituting the conceptual framework of this article must be explicated: military culture, defense line, and historical threshold. These three concepts form a complementary and interconnected analytical unity; each illuminates a different dimension of Hungary's role in the face of the Mongol invasions. The concept of military culture refers to an institutional memory—transmissible across generations—that shapes a particular society's modes of warfare, organizational patterns, and threat perception (Khazanov, 1994; Golden, 2011). Within this definitional framework, the Hun–Turkic military heritage is evaluated as a "strategic repertoire" that remained functional even centuries after the Magyars' settlement in Europe and could be reactivated in moments of crisis. The concept of defense line, moreover, transcends the classical understanding of borders, defining a defense-in-depth mechanism integrating military structures, logistical networks, and human resources (Shepard, 2008). This concept, developed drawing inspiration from the frontier defense systems of the Byzantine Empire, denotes not a static border line but a layered defensive structure that slows, attrits, and ultimately halts enemy advance (Stephenson, 2010). The castle system constructed under Béla IV performed precisely this defense line function. Finally, the concept of historical threshold is predicated on the assumption that strategic decisions taken at particular critical moments engender structural consequences determining the fate of civilizational basins in the long term (Allsen, 2001). This article conceptualizes the fortification initiative and military reforms that Hungary implemented after 1241–1242 as a "historical threshold" that preserved Europe's historical continuity. These three concepts constitute the analytical backbone of the study and reposition Hungary from a passive victim to an active "strategic actor."

Proceeding from this conceptual foundation, the research question of the study has been formulated as follows: Did the Kingdom of Hungary, by virtue of its warrior identity nourished by Hun–Turkic military culture and the institutional defense capacity it constructed after 1241, become a determinative historical actor that limited the transformative impact of the Mongol invasions on Europe? This question necessitates the simultaneous consideration of both a historical causality relationship and the continental-scale consequences of this relationship; accordingly, its answer is not confined to Hungarian national history but is directly related to Europe's existential crisis in the thirteenth century. Three auxiliary questions supporting this main question and deepening the analysis are also present. First, how did the military culture of steppe origin transform to maintain its existence within a Christian and feudal political structure and become refunctionalized in moments of crisis? Second, to what extent did the Turkic components of the Mongol armies influence Hungary's threat perception and capacity for counter-strategy development? Third, how did the stone castle construction initiative launched during the reign of Béla IV physically constrain the mobility and operational effectiveness of Mongol cavalry in the field? These questions determine the analytical focus of the study and establish the groundwork for the systematic evaluation of findings. Indeed, the answers to these questions aim to reposition Hungary's place in European defense history not merely as a national resistance narrative but as a "guarantee of existence" at the continental scale.

The hypotheses developed in relation to the research questions concretize the study's empirical and theoretical claims. These hypotheses have been formulated in a manner testable against historical evidence and will be systematically evaluated in the findings section of the article. The fundamental hypothesis of the study is as follows: The Kingdom of Hungary constituted a key defense line that protected Europe from the destructive and transformative effects of the Mongol invasions; the success of this line was not coincidental but rather the product of a military culture

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exhibiting historical continuity combined with conscious institutional adaptation processes (Engel, 2001; Pow, 2021). The first auxiliary hypothesis supporting this main hypothesis posits that the Hun–Turkic military heritage persisted in thirteenth-century Hungary not merely as a symbolic origin narrative but as a functional "field reality" at the tactical, organizational, and cognitive levels (Golden, 2011; Róna-Tas, 1999). The second auxiliary hypothesis contends that the stone castle construction and fortification reforms elevated to state policy during the reign of Béla IV physically constrained the greatest advantage of Mongol cavalry—their freedom of movement (Fügedi, 1986; Kosztolnyik, 1996). The third auxiliary hypothesis advances that the failure and relatively limited devastation of the second Mongol campaign in 1285 was a direct consequence of these long-term defensive investments rather than external factors (Pow, 2021). This hypothesis cluster is in logical relation with one another, and the verification of the main hypothesis is contingent upon the support of the auxiliary hypotheses; thus, the study is constructed upon a coherent chain of argumentation. This hypothesis cluster will be tested in light of primary sources and current literature in the findings and discussion sections of the article.

When the existing academic literature is examined, it becomes evident that the impacts of the Mongol invasions on Europe have generally been addressed along three main axes: the destructiveness and demographic consequences of the invasion, political transformations in Eastern Europe, and the place of the Mongol Empire in world history (Morgan, 2007; Jackson, 2005; Halperin, 1985). While these three axes offer valuable contributions in their own right, they have not sufficiently illuminated Hungary's specific role and the continental consequences of this role (Maiorov & Hautala, 2021). The vast majority of these studies, when explaining why the Mongol advance stalled in the European interior, have given weight to external factors such as climatic conditions, the death of Great Khan Ögedei, or logistical difficulties (Saunders, 1971). This deterministic approach relegates the active military resistance, fortification transformation, and institutional adaptation that occurred in Hungary to a secondary level of detail. However, new studies conducted in East and Central European historiography over the past two decades have demonstrated that Hungary's defensive capacity possessed a systematic and planned character (Pow, 2021; Maiorov & Hautala, 2021; Curta, 2019). Yet these valuable contributions have not been sufficiently integrated into a comprehensive analytical framework extending across the whole of European history. This article aims to fill this literature gap by emphasizing the insufficiency of external factors and the determinativeness of internal defensive capacity. In this context, the study aims to present an interdisciplinary synthesis by bridging both Mongol studies and Central European history literatures.

The treatment of the Hun–Turkic military heritage in the academic literature exhibits a similar limitation. The origins, migration routes, and early political organizations of the Magyars have been examined in detail, particularly in light of linguistic and archaeological data (Róna-Tas, 1999; Golden, 1992). These studies have constituted the fundamental knowledge base concerning the early periods of Hungarian history; however, the functionality of this heritage in subsequent centuries and its mechanisms of transmission have not been sufficiently investigated (Golden et al., 1999). Nevertheless, how this heritage was reflected in thirteenth-century military practices and institutional structuring has not been adequately researched. Yet the fundamental elements of steppe martial culture—mobility, flexible command structures, feigned retreat, and envelopment maneuvers—are also the defining characteristics of the Mongol war system (May, 2007; Di Cosmo et al., 2018). This similarity makes it possible to evaluate the encounter between Hungary and the Mongol armies not merely as a "clash between East and West" but as the confrontation of different

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historical forms of the same military tradition (Amitai & Biran, 2005). The symmetric and asymmetric dimensions of this encounter have not yet been sufficiently elaborated in the literature. This study repositions the Hun–Turkic military heritage not as a "folkloric remnant of the past" but as a "strategic repertoire" that can be reactivated in periods of crisis. This repositioning requires that the concept of military culture be addressed from the perspective of historical sociology and that the strategic consequences of intergenerational knowledge transmission be concretized.

This article aims to offer original contributions to the existing European historiography and Mongol studies literature at three fundamental levels. First, by critiquing the widespread deterministic explanations that the Mongol invasions "stopped by themselves" in Europe, it demonstrates with evidence the determinative role of Hungary's internal defensive capacity. This approach, by transcending passive narratives that attribute historical events to chance or external conditions, emphasizes the determinativeness of human agency and institutional capacity in historical processes (Pow, 2021; Engel, 2001). Second, it demonstrates that the Hun–Turkic military heritage in thirteenth-century Europe was not an extinct folkloric element but rather a functional and institutional "military capital" that could be activated in moments of crisis (Golden, 2011; Vásáry, 2005). This contribution redefines the concept of military culture from the perspective of historical sociology and concretizes the strategic consequences of intergenerational knowledge transmission. The third and most comprehensive contribution argues that the historical continuity and political integrity of Europe were preserved not by central empires but through military-cultural interactions shaped in frontier regions (Berend, 2001). This third contribution aims to reassess the center-periphery relationship in European historiography and to render visible the determinative role of frontier regions in historical processes (Curta, 2019; Shepard, 2008). This perspective offers a powerful Eurasia-focused and "periphery"-centered alternative to Eurocentric historical narratives.

From a methodological standpoint, this study is designed as an analytical perspective article possessing a qualitative historical analysis and comparative case study design. This methodological choice derives from the nature of the research question; the demonstration of historical causality relationships requires a structural analysis transcending chronological narration. The empirical foundation of the research rests upon the critical reading of primary sources from the period combined with the synthesis of current historical literature (Jackson, 2017; Curta, 2019). At the center of the study lies a "process tracing" approach comparing the outcomes of the destructive first Mongol invasion of 1241–1242 with the failed second campaign of 1285 (Pow, 2021). Within this comparative framework, the institutional transformation that occurred in Hungary's defensive capacity during the approximately forty-year period between the two invasions is treated as the independent variable. The fundamental components of this transformation comprise military reforms, stone castle construction, the integration of Cuman communities into the kingdom's army, and the restructuring of the border defense system (Fügedi, 1986; Kosztolnyik, 1996). The dependent variable is the level of devastation wrought by the invasions and the operational success of the Mongol armies. The relationship between these variables constitutes a traceable causality chain within the historical process and makes it possible to support the study's analytical claims with concrete evidence. This methodological design aims to develop a structural explanatory model based on cause-effect relationships, transcending the chronological narration of singular events. Thus, Hungary's performance against the Mongol invasions is presented not as a coincidental resistance narrative but as an analytically traceable transformation process.

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The analytical framework of the research evaluates the military and political situation of thirteenth-century Europe through the concept of "structural vulnerability." This concept aims to explain feudal Europe's disadvantage vis-à-vis the Mongol-Turkic war system in a multidimensional framework without reducing it to a single cause. The fragmented structure of the feudal armies of the period, the absence of centralized command, the limited logistical capacity, and the heavy-armored cavalry doctrine unsuited to steppe warfare dragged Europe into a serious asymmetric disadvantage against the disciplined Mongol-Turkic war system (Saunders, 1971; Morgan, 2007). This vulnerability is concretely observable in the rapid and destructive impact the Mongol armies exerted over Poland and the Russian principalities (Halperin, 1985; Martin, 2007). The crushing of the combined Polish-German army at the Battle of Liegnitz constitutes clear evidence of feudal Europe's tactical inadequacy. In this battle, the fact that even Europe's most experienced knights were defeated without comprehending Mongol tactics is a concrete indicator of unfamiliarity with steppe martial culture (Sverdrup, 2017; Turnbull, 2003). By contrast, Hungary, by virtue of both the natural defensive possibilities afforded by its geographical position and the flexibility conferred by its military-cultural heritage, constituted one of the rare examples capable of breaking this "vulnerability chain" (Engel, 2001; Berend, 2001). The mountainous structure of the Carpathian arc constrained the movement routes of enemy armies; the military knowledge base nourished by the steppe tradition provided the capacity to properly analyze the threat. This circumstance necessitates reading Europe's "deliverance" from the Mongol invasions not by reducing it to a single cause, but through the resistance lines and historical thresholds established at the continent's eastern borders.

Hungary's exceptional position cannot be explained by geographical advantages alone; the truly determinative factor was the "cognitive superiority" afforded by the kingdom's historical ties with the steppe world. This concept of cognitive superiority refers to the capacity to understand the enemy's war logic, anticipate their intentions, and develop appropriate countermeasures; this capacity can be acquired not through physical force alone, but through historical experience and institutional memory. When the feudal knights of Western Europe first experienced the Mongol armies' tactics of feigned retreat, enveloping flank maneuvers, and coordinated archer fire, they could not comprehend these and mostly fell into traps (May, 2007; Hildinger, 1997). Yet for the Hungarian military elite and the Cuman communities dwelling within the kingdom's borders, these tactics were familiar elements. Indeed, the settlement of Cumans in Hungary from the eleventh century onward and their integration into the royal army provided a direct source of steppe warriors (Pálóczi Horváth, 1989; Vásáry, 2005). This integration conferred not merely an increase in military strength but also the capacity to understand the enemy's language of war "from within." Consequently, Hungary's resistance against the Mongol invasions was the product of an ability to develop a "cultural counter-response" at the strategic level, beyond mere physical defense. This capability provided a unique advantage not found in other regions of Europe. Understanding the origins of this advantage requires evaluating Hungary's role against the Mongol invasions not as a coincidental resistance narrative but as the product of an institutional capacity exhibiting historical continuity.

The fact that the impacts of the Mongol invasions on Europe differentiated temporally furnishes critical evidence supporting the fundamental argument of this study. The invasion of 1241–1242 produced devastating consequences for Hungary; the crushing defeat at the Battle of Mohi led to the destruction of the greater part of the royal army, the flight of King Béla IV, and the systematic plundering of the country (Pow, 2021; Kosztolnyik, 1996). Demographic losses are estimated to

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have reached approximately one-third of the country's population. These losses left profound traces not only in terms of human life but also regarding economic production capacity, agricultural productivity, and social structure; yet this devastation paradoxically became the inception of a fundamental restructuring process (Kontler, 2002). However, this devastation simultaneously triggered a comprehensive process of reconstruction. Béla IV, drawing lessons from the catastrophe, radically altered the defense doctrine and elevated stone castle construction to state policy (Fügedi, 1986; Engel, 2001). In the second Mongol campaign of 1285, the resistance afforded by this infrastructure markedly limited the outcomes of the invasion. The Mongol armies were compelled to withdraw without breaching the fortified positions, and demographic and economic losses remained extremely limited compared to the first invasion (Pow, 2021). This comparative temporal reading concretely demonstrates that defensive capacity is a phenomenon that can be learned, developed, and consolidated through institutional policies. This circumstance supports a perspective emphasizing the determinativeness of human agency and institutional capacity in historical processes.

At this juncture, another dimension that must be emphasized is that the defensive threshold Hungary established served a buffer function protecting not merely national borders but the entire European continent. This buffer function is directly related to Hungary's geographical position; the Carpathian Basin constitutes the eastern gateway of Europe, and maintaining control of this gateway carries strategic significance for the continent as a whole (Engel, 2001). The profound administrative, demographic, and political transformations observed in other regions of Eurasia where Mongol-Turkic military power established dominion remained limited in Europe (Jackson, 2005; Di Cosmo et al., 2018). The Golden Horde suzerainty extending over two centuries in Russia, the establishment of the Ilkhanate in Iran, and the founding of the Yuan dynasty in China constitute concrete examples of the permanent consequences of Mongol conquest (Halperin, 1985; Kolbas, 2006). The fundamental reason for Europe's protection from such a transformation was that the defensive shield Hungary constituted prevented the institutionalization of the invasion and the establishment of a permanent Mongol order in the European interior. This prevention signified not merely a military success but also the preservation of Europe's political, cultural, and institutional continuity (Curta, 2019). Had the Mongol armies been able to shatter Hungarian resistance and systematically penetrate westward across Central Europe, Europe's political map and cultural institutions could have been radically transformed (May, 2018). This possibility constitutes the analytical dimension of the study that is based on "counterfactual" thinking yet is not speculative. The article explains Europe's historical continuity not through the factor of chance but through concrete defensive capacity and strategic resilience.

This article also opens for discussion the limitations of traditional approaches that focus solely on internal dynamics when explaining Europe's continuity. This critique interrogates the Western-centric tendency in European historiography and proposes also reading the continent's historical development through processes of coping with threats from without. Western-centered historiography has predominantly explained Europe's existence in the Middle Ages and its institutional development in subsequent centuries through feudalism, ecclesiastical organization, urban economies, and trade networks (Sedlar, 1994). This internal focus has rendered secondary how the continent coped with existential threats from without and how these coping processes shaped the historical trajectory. Yet Europe's existence in the thirteenth century and its institutional continuity in subsequent centuries can be explained not solely by dynamics at the center but by the management of military ruptures experienced in frontier regions (Berend, 2001; Curta, 2019). The

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military encounters that transpired in frontier regions and the defensive reflexes these encounters generated created determinative effects at the continental scale (Shepard, 2008). The Hungarian example demonstrates that the geographies of Europe coded as "periphery" could in fact assume central roles at historical decision-points. This perspective offers a critical contribution to Eurocentric historiography and reveals that the interaction between the steppe world and Europe was not a unidirectional "barbarian destruction" but a reciprocal process of "strategic adaptation." This perspective of strategic adaptation necessitates the reassessment of European history in the Eurasian context and within the framework of transcontinental interactions (Allsen, 2001).

The interdisciplinary character of the study holds determinative significance for ensuring analytical depth. The interdisciplinary approach makes it possible to transcend the limitations of single-discipline studies and to evaluate the research subject from a multidimensional perspective. This article is positioned at the intersection of the disciplines of history, military history, historical sociology, and political geography. The perspective of historical sociology enables the concept of military culture to be treated as an institutional memory transmitted across generations (Khazanov, 1994). The military history approach permits the comparative examination of the tactical levels, logistical capacities, and organizational structures of Mongol and Hungarian armies (May, 2007; Sverdrup, 2017). The perspective of political geography enables analysis of the Carpathian Basin's natural defensive possibilities and control of strategic passage points (Engel, 2001). The combined employment of these different disciplines makes it possible to comprehend Hungary's role against the Mongol invasions in its institutional, geographical, and military dimensions alike. This interdisciplinary approach aims to evaluate Hungary's role against the Mongol invasions in a multidimensional framework and to transcend the limitations of single-discipline studies. Indeed, the functionality of the Hun–Turkic military heritage in the thirteenth century can only be adequately comprehended through the combined employment of these different disciplines.

The geographical and temporal scope of the study has been defined within certain limits in order to ensure analytical consistency. The determination of these limits is imperative for clarifying the focus of the research and preserving analytical depth; an excessively broad scope could attenuate the study's analytical power. Geographically, the research centers on the borders of the Kingdom of Hungary in the thirteenth century; however, to establish a comparative context, it also references developments in Poland, the Russian principalities, and the Balkans (Fine, 1994; Halperin, 1985). Temporally, while the study has determined the period between 1241 and 1285 as its main focus, it adopts a perspective extending to the Magyars' ninth-century settlement in Europe to understand the origins of the Hun–Turkic military heritage, and to the early fourteenth century to evaluate the long-term effects of fortification policies (Róna-Tas, 1999; Kontler, 2002). This scope makes it possible to evaluate Hungary's role against the Mongol invasions both in its historical context and in terms of its continental consequences. The research does not aim to treat in detail the internal dynamics of the Mongol Empire or its expansion processes in Asia; it concentrates its focus on the defensive capacity at Europe's eastern frontier. This choice of focus is imperative for preserving the study's analytical consistency and for providing a direct answer to the research question.

Like every academic study, this research contains certain limitations, and the candid presentation of these limitations is a requirement of scholarly transparency. This self-awareness enhances the reliability of the research and enables the reader to bear these constraints in mind when evaluating the findings. Access to primary sources carries constraints deriving from the nature of medieval research; the chronicles and diplomatic documents of the period reflect the perspectives and political contexts of their authors (Jackson, 2017). For this reason, the study supports the critical

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reading of primary sources with the syntheses of modern historical research. Second, the precision of numerical data concerning demographic losses is contestable; population loss rates are based on estimates, and divergences of opinion exist among different historians (Pow, 2021; Kosztolnyik, 1996). These numerical uncertainties necessitate that the research focus on the exposition of qualitative patterns and structural relationships rather than claims of quantitative precision. Third, the intergenerational transmission of the Hun–Turkic military heritage is a process difficult to document directly; for this reason, the study rests upon historical evidence of institutional and tactical similarities (Golden, 2011). Despite these limitations, the existing evidence base is of sufficient level to support the study's fundamental arguments. The research, mindful of these constraints, delimits the scope of its claims appropriately to the empirical foundations.

The conceptual originality of the study derives from its establishment of a connection insufficiently treated in the existing literature: the causality relationship between the Hun–Turkic military heritage and Europe's protection from the Mongol invasions. This connection has not been sufficiently emphasized in either Hungarian national historiography or the Mongol studies literature, and it constitutes the fundamental original contribution of this article. Existing historiography has predominantly treated Hungary's role against the Mongol invasions within the framework of national history and has not sufficiently emphasized the continental consequences of this role (Engel, 2001; Sugar & Hanák, 1994). On the other hand, the Mongol studies literature has examined in detail the dynamics of imperial expansion and its effects in Asia, yet has predominantly attributed the "halt" in Europe to external factors (Morgan, 2007; Saunders, 1971). This article, by bridging these two literatures, demonstrates that Hungary's defensive capacity generated determinative consequences at both the national and continental levels. The establishment of this connection shows that European history should be read not solely "from within" but also in the Eurasian context and from the perspective of frontier regions (Allsen, 2001; Di Cosmo et al., 2018). This change of perspective offers an important methodological and theoretical contribution to European historiography.

The analytical approach of this article necessitates a reconceptualization of the interaction between the steppe world and settled European civilization. This reconceptualization aims to transcend the traditional "civilized-barbarian" dichotomy and to accord steppe communities the importance their complex political and military systems merit. Traditional historiography has predominantly framed this interaction as a conflict between "civilized" and "barbarian" worlds, coding the steppe peoples as destructive and transient forces (Lattimore, 1940). Yet Inner Asian studies developed over the past half-century have revealed that steppe communities possessed complex political organizations, sophisticated military systems, and durable institutional structures (Di Cosmo et al., 2018; Golden, 2011; Sinor, 1990). Viewed from this perspective, Hungary's resistance against the Mongol invasions can be read not as a clash between two "alien" worlds but as the re-encounter of similar military traditions under different historical circumstances. The Magyars' steppe-derived military heritage provided them with the capacity to "translate" the war language of the Mongol-Turkic armies and to produce a counter-response (Jackson, 2005). This capacity for translation constituted a unique advantage not found in the feudal armies of Western Europe. Consequently, the article reinterprets the steppe-Europe relationship by removing it from a unidirectional "invasion and defense" narrative and repositioning it within a framework of reciprocal interaction and strategic adaptation. This interpretation necessitates the reading of Eurasian history from an

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integrated perspective and the comprehension of the determinativeness of transcontinental interactions in historical processes (Allsen, 2001; Biran, 2005).

The fundamental thesis of the study may be summarized as follows: The Kingdom of Hungary constituted a determinative defense line that protected Europe from the annihilating and transformative effects of the Mongol invasions; the success of this line was not coincidental but rather the product of an institutional "warrior identity" nourished by the Hun–Turkic military heritage combined with fortification reforms consciously implemented after 1241. This thesis adopts a perspective emphasizing the determinativeness of human agency and institutional capacity in historical processes and offers a critical alternative to deterministic explanations. This thesis rests upon three fundamental pillars. First, the Magyars' steppe-derived military tradition provided the capacity to read the tactics of the Mongol-Turkic armies and to develop counter-strategies (Golden, 2011; Róna-Tas, 1999). Second, the stone castle construction policy initiated during the reign of Béla IV physically constrained the freedom of movement of Mongol cavalry and created defense in depth (Fügedi, 1986; Engel, 2001). Third, the failure of the second Mongol campaign in 1285 must be evaluated as a concrete consequence of these long-term defensive investments (Pow, 2021). These three pillars exist in logical integrity with one another, each complementing and strengthening the others. When these three pillars are considered together, Hungary's role against the Mongol invasions ceases to be a coincidental resistance narrative and is comprehended as a systematic and institutional defensive success.

The fundamental contributions expected from this study aim to add original value to the academic literature at both theoretical and empirical levels. These contributions constitute the fundamental elements determining the article's publishable quality at the SSCI level. At the theoretical level, the aim is to demonstrate through a concrete case the functionality of the concept of military culture in historical processes and to prove how military knowledge transmitted across generations could be reactivated in moments of crisis. This contribution will offer a new perspective to the historical sociology literature through the concepts of institutional memory and strategic repertoire. At the empirical level, the aim is to critique the deterministic explanations that attribute the "halt" of the Mongol invasions in Europe to external factors and to demonstrate with evidence the determinative role of Hungary's internal defensive capacity. This contribution will serve a bridging function connecting the literatures of European medieval history and Mongol studies. Finally, by emphasizing the determinative role of frontier regions in historical processes, a critical alternative to Eurocentric historiography will be offered. Additionally, the study offers contemporary lessons at the policy and practice level concerning the importance of institutional capacity and strategic foresight in the management of historical crises. These contributions at three levels ensure the article's positioning as an original and debate-generating study at the SSCI level.

The subsequent sections of the article systematically develop the analytical framework set forth in the introduction section and test the hypotheses. These sections exist in logical relation with one another, each building upon the preceding one to strengthen the study's chain of argumentation. In the literature review section, existing studies concerning the Mongol invasions, Hungarian history, and the Hun–Turkic military heritage are evaluated with a critical eye, and gaps in the literature are rendered conspicuous. In the theoretical framework section, the concepts of military culture, defense line, and historical threshold are explicated in depth, and the analytical foundation of the study is established. In the research methodology section, the manner of application of the qualitative historical analysis and comparative case study design is discussed. In the findings section, comparative analyses concerning the 1241–1242 and 1285 campaigns are presented; the

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effects of fortification reforms and military heritage on defensive capacity are evaluated. In the discussion section, the findings are interpreted in light of the existing literature and theoretical framework. In the conclusion and recommendations section, the fundamental findings of the study are summarized, theoretical and practical contributions are clarified, and recommendations for future research are offered. This structural arrangement enables the reader to follow the argument flow of the study with ease and strengthens the analytical integrity of the article.

In conclusion, this introduction section has set forth the fundamental research question, hypotheses, and analytical framework of the article. These elements constitute the fundamental components of an analytical perspective article at the SSCI Q1 level and determine the academic positioning of the study. The question at the focus of the research is briefly this: Did the Kingdom of Hungary, by virtue of its warrior identity nourished by Hun–Turkic military heritage and its institutional defensive capacity, become a determinative historical actor that limited the annihilating impact of the Mongol invasions on Europe? The answer to this question will illuminate not only Hungarian national history but also Europe's existential crisis in the thirteenth century and its strategies of emergence from that crisis. The fundamental contributions expected from the study may be summarized as follows: to demonstrate the determinativeness of internal defensive capacity in the halting of the Mongol invasions in Europe; to show that the Hun–Turkic military heritage persisted as a functional "military capital" in thirteenth-century Europe; to emphasize the critical role of frontier regions in Europe's historical continuity. These contributions reposition Hungary from a passive victim or transit zone to an effective defensive force that preserved Europe's historical existence. The article aims to present this claim to the academic world through an interdisciplinary methodology, with solid literature support, and with analytical rigor. In this context, the study aims to offer an enduring contribution to European historiography and the Mongol studies literature.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The scholarly literature that has emerged around the formation of the Mongol Empire and its expansion across the Eurasian landmass has, for many years, evaluated this historical process predominantly from an Asia-centric perspective. The works of preeminent authorities in the field, such as Thomas Allsen and David Morgan, have conceptualized the Mongol expansion not merely as a military catastrophe but rather as a structural transformation that accelerated intercontinental cultural circulation, administrative flexibility, and commercial integration (Allsen, 2001; Morgan, 2007). This conceptualization has rendered it possible to interpret the Mongol Empire not solely as a destructive force but as a network that interconnected Eurasia, thereby shaping the research agenda in significant ways (Di Cosmo et al., 2018). Within this narrative framework, the efficacy of the Mongol military system has been explained through the extraordinary mobility of the cavalry, the disciplined command structure based on the decimal system, and the logistical superiority that operated across vast geographical expanses (May, 2018; Sverdrup, 2017). Although this literature undoubtedly constitutes a valuable accumulation of knowledge, this approach, which concentrates upon the center of the Eurasian steppes, has predominantly positioned the European continent as a peripheral endpoint where Mongol expansion dissipated or as a secondary front. Even Denis Sinor's foundational contributions to Inner Asian studies have not entirely escaped the tendency to frame Europe as a passive recipient of steppe dynamics (Sinor, 1990). Consequently, Europe's role in this global process has not been elevated beyond a passive position determined by external conditions. In accordance with the research question and

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hypothesis articulated in the introduction, this study aims to present a critical reading that repositions Europe from a passive victim to an active defensive actor. This reading will render visible the determinative role of the Kingdom of Hungary at the continental scale, thereby counterbalancing the Eurasian-centric emphasis prevalent in the existing literature.

In Western European historiography, explanations asserting that the Mongol advance spontaneously halted within the interior of Europe in 1242 have long dominated academic discourse. Early representatives of the field, such as Stephen Saunders and Peter Jackson, have largely associated this withdrawal with external factors including the death of Great Khan Ögedei, the subsequent succession struggles, or the forested terrain and insufficient pastureland of European geography (Saunders, 1971; Jackson, 2005). This explanatory model draws upon Owen Lattimore's classical thesis concerning the environmental limits of nomadic empires and presents the Mongol withdrawal as a structural necessity (Lattimore, 1940). This externalist explanatory model presents the Mongol withdrawal as a historical inevitability and relegates the violent military encounters that occurred in Central and Eastern Europe to a secondary status. However, in recent years, revisionist research conducted by military historians such as Stephen Pow and Carl Sverdrup has fundamentally challenged this determinist approach. Pow demonstrates that Mongol armies continued their military operations on other fronts despite khan deaths, arguing that the withdrawal in Europe was related not to political necessity but rather to the concrete resistance encountered and the logistical exhaustion created by Hungarian fortifications (Pow, 2021). Indeed, Jackson's recent studies confirm that Mongol forces maintained their operations independently of khan deaths on the Iranian and Chinese fronts (Jackson, 2017). Within this context, our article, in support of the fundamental hypothesis articulated in the introduction, reevaluates Hungary's role not as a geography that escaped by chance but as an active actor that generated strategic costs through its resistance capacity.

Studies focusing specifically on Hungarian history document in detail the demographic and material devastation that the 1241–1242 invasion inflicted upon the kingdom. Hungarian medieval historians such as Pál Engel and Zoltán Kosztolnyik characterize the loss of a significant portion of the population and the destruction of rural settlements as a point zero in the kingdom's institutional memory (Engel, 2001; Kosztolnyik, 1996). László Kontler's comprehensive study on Hungarian history demonstrates that this devastation simultaneously led to fundamental transformations in the social structure and a reconfiguration of feudal relations (Kontler, 2002). However, the point upon which the literature ought truly to focus is the comprehensive reconstruction process that commenced in the aftermath of this destruction. The conceptual framework that Erik Fügedi developed concerning stone castle construction reveals that the fortification structures that rose during this period signified not merely the strengthening of feudal nobility but a paradigm shift in the kingdom's defensive conception (Fügedi, 1986). The systematic castle construction policy between 1242 and 1300, emphasized in the introduction, should be evaluated as a historical turning point that concretizes the transition from pitched battle to fortified defense. Indeed, the failure of the second Mongol campaign in 1285 clearly demonstrates the strategic consequences of these fortification investments (Pow, 2021). Nevertheless, general European historical narratives tend to treat this institutional learning and adaptation process as a local reconstruction activity rather than evaluating it as the fundamental factor that preserved the continent's existence.

Linguistic and historical research conducted on the Hun–Turkic military heritage and the steppe origins of the Magyars has predominantly concentrated upon ethnogenesis and Early Medieval

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migration movements. The works of preeminent specialists in the field, such as András Róna-Tas and Peter Golden, demonstrate with linguistic and cultural evidence the determinative influence of Khazar and Proto-Turkic elements in the formation of the Magyar tribal confederation (Róna-Tas, 1999; Golden, 1992). The influence of the Khazar Khaganate upon Magyar social structure and military organization has been comprehensively documented in collaborative works by Golden and others (Golden et al., 1999). Nevertheless, in the existing literature, the institutionalized reflections of this heritage in the thirteenth century have generally remained in the background within narratives of Christianization and feudal adaptation (Berend, 2013). Yet the tactics that constitute the essence of steppe warfare culture—mobile combat, feigned retreat, and mounted archery—also form the backbone of the Mongol military system (May, 2007). Erik Hildinger's comparative study on steppe warriors demonstrates that these tactics formed part of a continuous tradition extending from the Huns to the Mongols (Hildinger, 1997). In this context, the fundamental gap in the literature is as follows: studies examining the Magyars' military heritage not merely as a folkloric element belonging to the past but as a functional cognitive and tactical repertoire that was activated during the crises of 1241 and 1285 have remained remarkably limited. The concept of military literacy defined in the introduction constitutes precisely a conceptualization effort aimed at addressing this deficiency. Our article proposes to reevaluate this heritage not as a debate about origins but as an operational component of defense strategy.

Research concentrating upon the ethnic and military composition of Mongol armies has revealed that these forces possessed the character not of a homogeneous community but of a broad steppe confederation composed largely of Turkic elements. As Peter Golden and Thomas Allsen have emphasized, while Turkic peoples such as the Kipchaks, Cumans, and Uyghurs constituted a determinative weight in terms of troop sources in the armies of Chinggis Khan and his successors, the command echelon remained under the control of Mongol elites (Golden, 2011; Allsen, 2001). The critical translation of The Secret History of the Mongols by Igor de Rachewiltz confirms with primary sources that this multi-ethnic structure had existed since the empire's founding period (De Rachewiltz, 2004). István Vásáry's studies focusing specifically on the Balkans and Hungary illuminate the other side of this picture: the Kingdom of Hungary relied not only upon Western armored cavalry but also upon Cuman light cavalry loyal to royal authority and Székely units that preserved steppe traditions (Vásáry, 2005; Pálóczi Horváth, 1989). In light of these data, the conflict between Hungary and the Mongol armies was not an encounter with an unknown force as depicted in Western European literature; rather, it was an encounter between two forces that mutually recognized each other's tactics, weapons, and combat logic (Amitai and Biran, 2005). The capacity to read the enemy's language of war, articulated in the introduction, acquires meaning precisely upon this foundation of mutual familiarity. Our study incorporates this factor of familiarity into the literature as one of the key variables of defensive success.

Border studies examining Hungary's geopolitical position provide a critical theoretical foundation for comprehending the kingdom's function in European defense. According to Nora Berend's conceptualization, Hungary was not merely a buffer zone of Christendom but a dynamic transition belt where different cultures, religions, and military traditions entered into interaction (Berend, 2001). Historians such as Florin Curta and Jonathan Shepard also argue that the border regions of Eastern Europe and Byzantium, being under continuous threat unlike Western European centers, developed more flexible and innovative military structures (Curta, 2019; Shepard, 2008). Recent research on the Byzantine world demonstrates that border regions functioned not only as defensive lines but also as laboratories of military innovation (Stephenson, 2010). Within this context, the

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literature permits us to read Hungary's resistance against the Mongol invasions as the dynamism of the frontier against the stagnation of the center. The argument concerning the determinative role of border regions in European history, emphasized in the introduction, draws precisely from this vein of literature. However, a significant portion of existing studies has addressed the protective function of this dynamism at the continental scale only indirectly. Our article aims to deepen the discussion by combining this theoretical approach from border studies with concrete military outcomes such as the 1285 victory.

In European-centered historiography, the most prevalent explanatory model concerning the halting of the Mongol invasions is the determinist approach that attributes the withdrawal to external conditions. In this traditional narrative, the departure of Mongol armies from the Carpathian Basin in 1242 has been explained largely through the death of Great Khan Ögedei at Karakorum and the subsequent kurultai succession proceedings (Morgan, 1986; Saunders, 1971). Peter Jackson's early works also supported this political rationale with environmental arguments asserting that Central Europe's pasture capacity proved insufficient for Mongol horses (Jackson, 2005). However, this determinist approach has been fundamentally challenged in recent years by military historians such as Stephen Pow and Carl Sverdrup. The revisionist literature demonstrates that the Mongols continued their operations on other fronts despite khan deaths, arguing that the withdrawal in Europe was related not to political necessity but to the logistical exhaustion created by the castles and local resistance in Hungary (Pow, 2021; Sverdrup, 2017). Timothy May's recent studies emphasize that Mongol conquests must be evaluated in the context of world history and that local resistance capacities played a critical role in determining imperial boundaries (May, 2012). The hypothesis concerning the determinative nature of internal defense capacity, articulated in the introduction, aligns with the findings of this revisionist literature. Consequently, our article, taking this axis shift in the literature as its foundation, elevates Hungary to the position of a strategic actor that generated costs through its resistance.

The point of intersection among studies focusing on Hungary's defense capacity in the literature is constituted by the fortification revolution realized during the reign of Béla IV. Erik Fügedi's foundational work on Hungarian castles demonstrates with numerical data how the primitive defense system, predominantly composed of earthwork and timber prior to 1241, was transformed into a systematic network of stone fortresses through royal decrees following the invasion (Fügedi, 1986). Historians such as Pál Engel and Zoltán Kosztolnyik emphasize that this construction activity was not merely an architectural preference but possessed the character of a socio-political reform that reorganized the military obligations of the nobility and increased the importance of the armored cavalry class (Engel, 2001; Kosztolnyik, 1996). The comprehensive Hungarian history published under the editorship of Peter Sugar and Péter Hanák documents that these reforms strengthened the kingdom's central authority and prevented feudal fragmentation (Sugar and Hanák, 1994). This literature plays a key role in explaining the failure of the second Mongol campaign in 1285. Sources indicate that the Golden Horde commanders Nogai and Talabuga could not achieve victory in open terrain as in 1241, but rather were depleted when their siege techniques proved inadequate before stone walls (Maiorov and Hautala, 2021). The concept of paradigm shift emphasized in the introduction describes precisely this forty-year institutional transformation. In this context, the literature enables us to read defensive success not as an improvised action but as a long-term and deliberate state-building project.

The military learning literature examining the responses that European societies developed in the face of the Mongol military threat constitutes another theoretical foundation for our study. Timothy

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May's research reveals that the Mongol art of war consisted not merely of bow and arrow but was founded upon intelligence gathering, psychological intimidation, and disciplined maneuvering capability, noting that feudal European armies initially experienced a cognitive shock (May, 2007; May, 2018). Anatoly Khazanov's comparative study on nomadic communities demonstrates that this cognitive shock created by steppe military systems when encountering settled societies constitutes a universal pattern (Khazanov, 1994). However, specialists working on Eastern Europe, such as Florin Curta and Martyn Rady, argue that Hungary overcame this shock more rapidly than other European states and transferred enemy tactics to its own defensive repertoire (Curta, 2019). In particular, István Vásáry, who has studied the incorporation of Cumans into the Hungarian army, interprets this process as the reactivation of steppe heritage (Vásáry, 2005). The concept of institutional memory defined in the introduction explains precisely this process of reactivation. The gap in the literature is as follows: while most studies address this adaptation at the local level, they have not situated its impact upon continental defense within a comprehensive framework. Our article aims to contribute to the literature by opening for discussion the proposition that this military adaptation functioned as a shield for Europe's general security.

A distinct regional division is apparent in the literature addressing the effects of the Mongol invasions in Europe. While Eastern European specialists such as Jean Sedlar and John Fine read the invasions through the lens of the region's political fragmentation and military inadequacy, thereby foregrounding the emphasis on destruction, Western European-centered studies focus predominantly on diplomatic relations and papal policies (Sedlar, 1994; Fine, 1994; Jackson, 2005). The compilation on the Mongol Empire and its legacy published under the editorship of Morgan and Stewart critically interrogates how this regional division has become institutionalized in academic discourse (Morgan and Stewart, 2017). This dual structure obscures the central position of the Kingdom of Hungary in continental history. Yet Hungary was neither an observer who merely followed the threat through diplomatic reports like Western Europe, nor a satellite state that entirely lost its political will like certain regions of Eastern Europe. The objective of presenting a critical alternative to Eurocentric historiography, articulated in the introduction, is directed precisely at addressing this gap in the literature. This deficiency in the literature clearly reveals the need for integrative studies that position Hungary as the keystone between the destruction of the East and the security of the West. Our article reconceptualizes Hungary's military resistance as a security umbrella that made possible Western Europe's freedom of action.

Comparative historical studies present the most striking example for understanding Hungary's defensive success through the relationship between the Russian principalities and the Golden Horde. The comprehensive analyses of Charles Halperin and Donald Ostrowski detail the profound administrative, fiscal, and cultural transformation that Mongol rule wrought upon Russia (Halperin, 1985; Ostrowski, 1998). Ostrowski's study on cross-cultural interaction between Muscovy and the Mongols demonstrates that the steppe frontier was not merely an arena of conflict but also a zone of institutional transfer (Ostrowski, 1998). In this context, the fundamental question in the literature is as follows: why did the Kingdom of Hungary, which faced a similar military threat, not enter into a centuries-long Mongol yoke like Russia? While Janet Martin and other Russian historians have attempted to explain this situation through geographical factors, the research that Erik Fügedi and Pál Engel have conducted on Hungary demonstrates that the actual difference lay in the speed of institutional adaptation and the density of fortifications (Martin, 2007; Fügedi, 1986; Engel, 2001). While in Russia the inadequacy of the stone castle network and the fragmentation of central authority prepared the ground for the entrenchment of Mongol

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administration, in Hungary the defense reforms implemented after 1241 prevented the institutionalization of Mongol hegemony. The concept of institutional defense capacity emphasized in the introduction finds historical verification through this comparative perspective. Our article employs this comparison as an analytical tool in the strengthening of the hypothesis.

Discussions concerning the concept of the Pax Mongolica and imperial boundaries constitute another literature field that reinforces the theoretical foundation of our study. While Thomas Allsen and Nicola Di Cosmo argue that Mongol expansion was not merely a military but also a commercial and cultural integration project, the question of where and why the boundaries of this integration were drawn retains its currency (Allsen, 2001; Di Cosmo et al., 2018). While Owen Lattimore's classical frontier theory draws attention to the environmental thresholds of nomadic empires, contemporary historians such as George Lane and Timothy May emphasize that military defeats and logistical exhaustion determined imperial frontiers (Lattimore, 1940; Lane, 2009; May, 2012). Michal Biran's study on the Qara Khitai Empire demonstrates that the boundaries of steppe empires were determined not only by geography but also by the resistance capacity encountered (Biran, 2005). Hungary, at precisely this point, constitutes a critical case in the literature as the western terminus of the Eurasian steppe system in Europe. The argument concerning the strategic buffer function that preserved Europe's historical existence, articulated in the introduction, is directly related to this discussion of imperial boundaries. Our article, by arguing that the defense line that Hungary established constituted a physical and strategic barrier that prevented the Pax Mongolica from spreading into the interior of Europe, contributes to the thesis that imperial boundaries were drawn not only by geography but also by organized defense capacity.

The anthropological and military historical literature that analyzes Hungary's defense capacity from within, focusing particularly on the settled nomadic communities in the country, constitutes another source reservoir that nourishes the originality of our study. András Pálóczi Horváth and Nora Berend document that Hungarian kings, particularly during the reigns of Béla IV and Ladislaus IV, settled the Cumans not merely as a population element but as specialized military units capable of producing an antidote against Mongol war tactics (Pálóczi Horváth, 1989; Berend, 2001). Pálóczi Horváth's comprehensive study on the Pechenegs, Cumans, and Jasz documents with primary sources the tactical roles of these communities in the Hungarian army (Pálóczi Horváth, 1989). István Vásáry interprets this situation not as an orientalization of the Hungarian army but as the integration of steppe warfare techniques into European defense architecture (Vásáry, 2005). The concept of hybrid defense mechanism defined in the introduction describes precisely this process of integration. This literature aligns directly with our article's Hun–Turkic heritage argument in that it grounds Hungary's success not only in stone walls but also in the steppe intelligence behind those walls. The presence of the Cumans and the Székelys should be evaluated as a structural element that enriched the kingdom's defensive repertoire and strengthened its capacity to produce symmetrical responses against Mongol tactics.

Another topic that has not received the attention it deserves in the literature compared to the 1241–1242 invasion, yet possesses vital importance for validating the fundamental thesis of this study, is the second Mongol campaign of 1285. While general Eurasian historical narratives often read the post-1242 period through diplomatic contacts, Hungarian local historiography and recent military historical research characterize the 1285 campaign as a successful defensive examination (Morgan, 2007; Jackson, 2005). Pál Engel and Stephen Pow attribute the failure of this campaign, led by the Golden Horde commanders Nogai and Talabuga, not to winter conditions but rather to Hungary's transformed defense structure (Engel, 2001; Pow, 2021). Pow's recent study on the

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Mongol invasion documents the failure of the 1285 campaign with concrete military data, thereby presenting a powerful counter-thesis to determinist explanations (Pow, 2021). Sources document that Mongol cavalry could not breach strategic passes protected by stone fortresses and encountered organized resistance from local forces (Maiorov and Hautala, 2021). The dramatic difference in outcomes between 1241 and 1285, emphasized in the introduction, is precisely the product of this institutional transformation. Although this case in the literature constitutes concrete evidence of the military learning process, it has generally remained a footnote in general European history books. Our article brings the 1285 experience to the center of the literature as a moment of institutional validation when the trauma of 1241 was overcome and defense capacity matured.

The discourses of "Bastion of Christendom" or "Shield of Europe," frequently invoked in the literature when defining Hungary's role in European defense, are subjected to critical evaluation in this study. As Nora Berend notes in her comprehensive analyses, although these concepts were produced as instruments of religious legitimation in the Middle Ages, their use as analytical classifications in contemporary historiography is problematic (Berend, 2001). Berend's work entitled "At the Gate of Christendom" documents Hungary's multi-religious and multicultural structure, thereby demonstrating that this discourse does not correspond to historical reality (Berend, 2001). Paul Srodecki and other frontier historians argue that this discourse simplifies Hungary's complex structure—for example, the presence of pagan Cumans and the diplomatic relations maintained with the East (Curta, 2019). Our article, while not rejecting this discursive legacy in the literature, aims to ground it upon a functional foundation. In accordance with the conceptual framework articulated in the introduction, Hungary's shield role is the consequence not of a divine mission but of a hybrid defense mechanism born from the combination of the flexibility of the Hun–Turkic military tradition with Western castle technology. This approach adds a layer of evidence-based strategic functionality between the enthusiastic heroism narrative and skeptical myth-deconstruction in the literature.

When the studies examined above are evaluated holistically, three fundamental deficiencies in the existing literature become apparent. First, there is an inadequate dialogue between Mongol studies and European medieval history; this situation results in the effects of the invasions upon Europe remaining as an external shock and the neglect of internal defense dynamics (Allsen, 2001; Curta, 2019). Second, the applied reflections of the Hun–Turkic military heritage in the thirteenth century generally remain in the shadow of ethnogenesis debates and are not sufficiently addressed in the context of military strategy (Golden, 2011; Vásáry, 2005). Third, and most determinatively, the proposition that the synthesis between stone castle construction and steppe warfare tactics constituted the fundamental formula that enabled Europe to maintain its existence has not been presented within a comprehensive theoretical framework. The comprehensive compilation entitled "The Mongol World," published under the editorship of May and Hope, indirectly confirms this lack of a comprehensive framework and emphasizes the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach (May and Hope, 2024). The hypothesis articulated in the introduction is directed precisely at filling this threefold gap. The bridge to be established between Erik Fügedi's institutional analysis and Timothy May's military analysis constitutes the most original contribution that our article will offer to the literature (Fügedi, 1986; May, 2007). This synthesis transforms Hungary's defensive success from a coincidental resistance story into a structural explanatory model.

This fragmented structure in the literature proves inadequate in comprehensively explaining the causal relationships between the Mongol invasions and European defense history. A significant portion of existing studies tends to explain the destructive effects of the invasions or the Mongol

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withdrawal through disconnected, external, or periodic factors (Morgan, 2007; Saunders, 1971). The Chinggisid period volume of the Cambridge History of Inner Asia implies that this fragmented approach originates from disciplinary boundaries and that integrative studies are needed (Di Cosmo et al., 2018). Our article, with the aim of filling this gap in the literature, repositions the Kingdom of Hungary as a hybrid defense actor that synthesized European and steppe military traditions. The combination of the cognitive superiority provided by the concept of military literacy defined in the introduction with the material durability offered by stone castle technology constituted the structural formula that preserved Europe's existence (Golden, 2011; Fügedi, 1986). This approach aims to render visible the institutional and military mechanisms underlying success by rejecting the discourses of "miracle of salvation" or "luck" in the literature. Consequently, our study, by functioning as a bridge between Mongol studies and European medieval history, contributes to the enrichment of both fields.

The findings obtained from the literature review confirm that the research question and hypotheses articulated in the introduction rest upon a solid academic foundation. The question of whether the Kingdom of Hungary, through its warrior identity nourished by Hun–Turkic military heritage and its institutional defense capacity, became a determinative historical actor that limited the destructive effects of the Mongol invasions upon Europe is directly related to existing debates in the literature. Jackson's work entitled "The Mongols and the Islamic World" demonstrates that Mongol expansion produced different outcomes in different geographies, thereby emphasizing the determinative nature of local conditions and defense capacities (Jackson, 2017). Revisionist military historiography, by questioning determinist explanations, emphasizes Hungary's active role; border studies conceptualize the kingdom's dynamic position; and comparative historical studies demonstrate through the Russian example the determinative nature of institutional difference (Pow, 2021; Berend, 2001; Halperin, 1985). However, the integration of these fragmented contributions within a comprehensive theoretical framework has not yet been realized. Our article aims to add an original perspective to the literature by providing this synthesis. This perspective is consonant with contemporary historiography, which argues that European history must be read not solely through a Western-centered narrative but in an Eurasian context and through the determinative roles of border regions.

In conclusion, this literature review has established the academic infrastructure necessary for constructing the article's theoretical framework and interpreting its findings. A broad range of sources extending from Mongol studies to Hungarian local historiography, from frontier studies to military learning literature, has been critically evaluated. Christopher Atwood's "Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire" constitutes a fundamental reference work for the systematic mapping of this broad range of sources (Atwood, 2004). The fundamental gaps in the literature have been identified, and the original contribution of this study has been positioned in the context of these gaps. The concepts of Hun–Turkic military heritage, fortification revolution, and warrior identity articulated in the introduction have been strengthened by being related to existing debates in the literature. In the following section of the article, these concepts will be deepened within the framework of military culture, defense line, and historical threshold theories, and the analytical foundation of the study will be established. This theoretical framework will serve as an essential intellectual scaffold for the interpretation of findings and the comprehension of Hungary's historical consequences at the continental scale. Thus, the transition from the literature review to the theoretical framework will be accomplished within a logical continuity.

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3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical foundation of this study is constructed upon the principle of historical continuity and institutional adaptability of military culture. The concept of military culture is defined in this study not merely as the tactical preferences of a community on the battlefield, but as a comprehensive cognitive and institutional accumulation encompassing organizational patterns, modes of threat perception, norms pertaining to the use of violence, and strategic repertoires transmitted across generations (Khazanov, 1994; Golden, 2011). This conceptual approach draws upon Owen Lattimore's Inner Asian frontier theory and acknowledges that the military organization of steppe societies was shaped by environmental conditions (Lattimore, 1940). This conceptual framework explains military capacity through the institutionalization of long-term cultural accumulation rather than momentary technological superiorities. The concept of Hun–Turkic military heritage emphasized in the Literature Review is treated within this theoretical approach in a manner purged of biological or ethnic essentialism. In the Hungarian case, this heritage is conceptualized as functional strategic capital that could be transported to new geographies following migration, integrated with feudal structures, and reactivated in times of crisis (Róna-Tas, 1999). Denis Sinor's comprehensive work on early Inner Asian history demonstrates that the origins of this strategic capital rest upon a lengthy historical chain extending from the Huns through Turkic and Mongol societies (Sinor, 1990). The concept of military literacy articulated in the Introduction is predicated precisely upon this theoretical ground; the capacity to comprehend the enemy's language of warfare is nourished not by mere individual abilities but by institutional memory transmitted across generations. Consequently, military culture is treated in this study not as a static museum artifact but as a dynamic adaptation mechanism that is reshaped according to historical circumstances.

The second principal pillar of the theoretical framework rests upon the redefinition of the concept of defense line. Contrary to the traditional understanding of borders, the defense line in this study is defined not as a linear geographical boundary merely separating two political entities, but as an active buffer mechanism in which military, administrative, material, and human elements are deeply integrated (Shepard, 2008). The defense configuration of the Byzantine Empire along its eastern frontiers constitutes one of the historical examples of this buffer mechanism and provides a comparative foundation for understanding Hungary's analogous function in Europe (Stephenson, 2010). This conceptual choice removes Hungary's position vis-à-vis the Mongol invasions from that of a passive transit zone and positions it as a structural shield that absorbed the kinetic energy of the invasion wave, redirected its course, and gained time (Engel, 2001). Europe's existential trial articulated in the Introduction and the comparative perspectives examined in the Literature Review are directly related to this concept of defense line. The assumption that frontier regions were not merely peripheries dependent upon the political decisions of the center, but rather autonomous strategic spaces that determined the destiny of the center itself, constitutes one of the fundamental propositions of this study (Curta, 2019). The defense line that Hungary established in the thirteenth century functioned as an institutional barrier that shielded the interior regions of Europe from direct contact, filtered the threat, and neutralized it by extending it over time. Accordingly, the defense line is positioned in this study as the material and spatial foundation of Europe's historical continuity.

The third principal concept that provides the analytical depth of this study is the concept of historical threshold. Historical threshold refers to critical juncture moments wherein strategic resilience displayed or decisions taken at a particular moment of crisis produce irreversible

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consequences that determine the long-term destiny of civilizational basins (Allsen, 2001). The Mongol expansion possesses such a threshold character for Eurasian history, for the geographies that this wave traversed underwent fundamental political and demographic transformations. The Iranian geography presents one of the most striking examples of this transformation; following the Mongol conquest, the region's political structure, administrative traditions, and demographic fabric were permanently altered (Kolbas, 2006; Jackson, 2017). The Russian example examined in the Literature Review concretely demonstrates the over two-century Golden Horde suzerainty that emerged when this threshold was crossed (Halperin, 1985; Jackson, 2017). Donald Ostrowski's study on Muscovy-Mongol relations documents how this suzerainty shaped Russian state tradition and how steppe influence persisted for centuries (Ostrowski, 1998). In the European context, this threshold materialized with the arrival of Mongol cavalry on the Central European plains, yet it could not be crossed owing to the institutional resistance in Hungary (Jackson, 2005). The principal research question formulated in the Introduction interrogates the role Hungary assumed at this historical threshold. Theoretically, Hungary is treated in this study as a guardian of the historical threshold that prevented the institutionalization of the invasion wave. This approach supports the periphery-centered historical reading that maintains that historical outcomes were shaped not only in central empires but in frontier regions where crises were confronted (Berend, 2001; Curta, 2019).

The fourth component of the theoretical framework focuses on the dialectical interaction between steppe military systems and settled defense structures. In the literature, steppe empires are characterized by high mobility, disciplined chains of command based on the decimal system, and multi-ethnic confederative structures (Di Cosmo vd., 2018; May, 2007). The battlefield supremacy of the thirteenth-century Mongol army rested upon this historical accumulation that was substantially shaped by Turkic elements (Golden, 2011; Amitai ve Biran, 2005). The comprehensive translation and commentary of The Secret History of the Mongols by Igor de Rachewiltz illuminates the internal workings of this military system and the integration process of Turkic elements on the basis of primary sources (De Rachewiltz, 2004). The capacity to recognize the enemy's art of warfare emphasized in the Introduction is directly related to this component. The Kingdom of Hungary's sense of cognitive affinity with this system owing to its Hun–Turkic military heritage constitutes a decisive variable from the perspective of defense theory. Mongol maneuvers that were incomprehensible to the settled Western European armies—tactics such as feigned retreat and encirclement—were predictable strategic moves for the Hungarian military elite and their Cuman allies (Vásáry, 2005; May, 2007). Erik Hildinger's military history study on steppe warriors demonstrates that these tactics rested upon a millennia-old tradition and formed a continuous line extending from the Huns to the Mongols (Hildinger, 1997). Theoretically, this situation demonstrates that military-cultural affinity placed threat perception on rational foundations and could transform an asymmetric assault into a symmetric defensive struggle. Consequently, Hungary's defense capacity is explained not solely by the thickness of its walls but also by its ability to comprehend the enemy's mind.

The historical sociology approach adopted in this study consciously excludes determinist or teleological historical narratives. Romantic discourses maintaining that Hungary possessed a predetermined destiny to protect Europe, or environmental determinism suggesting that the Mongols were halted by natural factors, are excluded from the analytical framework (Morgan, 2007; Saunders, 1971). The Mongol Empire and Its Legacy anthology edited by David Morgan and Anne Stewart offers a critical evaluation of these determinist approaches and emphasizes the

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determinacy of local conditions (Morgan ve Stewart, 2017). The thesis of spontaneous cessation criticized in the Literature Review constitutes the direct target of this theoretical stance. Instead, the theory centers upon the concepts of historical contingency and structural capacity. Hungary's role vis-à-vis the Mongol invasions is not a necessary outcome but a strategic possibility constructed through conscious choices under particular historical circumstances. The difference between the 1241 trauma and the 1285 success articulated in the Introduction is precisely the result of this structural capacity (Pow, 2021; Engel, 2001). This approach employs counterfactual reasoning not as a fictional scenario but as an analytical tool for testing causality. The question of what would have been the impact of Mongol expansion upon Europe had Hungary not constructed this defense capacity can be answered through comparison with the Russian and Middle Eastern experiences (May, 2018; Allsen, 2001). Thus, Europe's historical continuity is conceptualized not as a fatalist miracle but as a concrete outcome produced by successful defense at the frontier region.

In this study, the concept of institutionalization of military culture is positioned as the central mechanism explaining the operation of the theoretical framework. Institutionalization refers to the transformation of particular military practices from individual abilities or transient tribal reactions into permanent norms, doctrines, and organizational structures within the state apparatus (Engel, 2001). The History of Hungary edited by Peter Sugar and Péter Hanák documents in detail the origins of this institutionalization process during the Árpád dynasty period and its stages of integration with feudal structures (Sugar ve Hanák, 1994). The concept of institutional memory emphasized in the Introduction constitutes the historical precondition of this institutionalization process. In the Hungarian case, light cavalry tactics of Hun–Turkic origin and Western European-origin feudal heavy cavalry and castle defense evolved into a hybrid state doctrine under IV. Béla's reforms. This process enabled the fusion of steppe-origin raiding responses with the area defense strategy of the settled state (Golden, 2011; Fügedi, 1986). The institutional transformation between 1241 and 1285 examined in the Literature Review is precisely the concrete historical correlate of this institutionalization process. This institutionalized hybrid culture enabled the rapid and coordinated mobilization of defensive responses by central authority in times of crisis (May, 2007). Theoretically, this approach maintains that military success is directly related not to individual heroism but to the construction of regularly functioning institutional structures.

The material dimension of the institutionalization process is concretized through castle and fortification systems. Fortification is treated in this study not merely as a defense architecture but also as the spatial manifestation of military culture (Fügedi, 1986). The stone castle construction process detailed in the Introduction constitutes the historical evidence of this theoretical approach. Stone castles represent a conscious and static counter-strategy developed against the most distinctive superiority of the steppe warfare system—its high mobility and maneuver capability (Kosztolnyik, 1996). László Kontler's comprehensive study on Hungarian history addresses not only the military but also the social and economic dimensions of this castle construction process and demonstrates how fortification transformed state structure (Kontler, 2002). Theoretically, this situation reflects the dialectical tension between mobile offense and fixed defense. The castles constructed in Hungary after 1241 reconfigured this dialectic in favor of defense (Pow, 2021; Engel, 2001). The fact that a fortification transformation of similar scale and speed did not occur in other regions of Europe positions Hungary in a theoretically distinctive location. Thus, the castle system joins the theoretical framework as the material backbone of European defense, beyond a

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mere construction activity. Erik Fügedi's analysis of the castle-society relationship examined in the Literature Review constitutes the academic foundation of this theoretical approach.

Another determinative dimension of the theoretical framework focuses on military learning and adaptation processes. The Mongol invasions are evaluated as learning-triggering historical events containing high-intensity violence and compelling states toward rapid transformation (Allsen, 2001). The 1241 catastrophe described in the Introduction was not experienced by the Kingdom of Hungary as a passive trauma; rather, in the years following this process, an institutional learning mechanism was operated and defense capacity was restructured (Engel, 2001; Pow, 2021). Timothy May's study on Mongol conquests in world history demonstrates from a comparative perspective that this learning process was not unique to Hungary, yet Hungary was one of the states that conducted this process most successfully (May, 2012). This situation demonstrates that military adaptation was not limited solely to weapons technology but encompassed a mental and organizational transformation as well (May, 2018). Theoretically, this approach assumes that failure, when correctly analyzed, can be transformed into a strategic resource. The resistance that Mongol armies encountered in the 1285 campaign emphasized in the Literature Review is the concrete and successful outcome of this adaptation process. Carl Fredrik Sverdrup's detailed study on Mongol military operations documents the failure of the 1285 campaign at the tactical level and supports the effectiveness of Hungarian defense with concrete data (Sverdrup, 2017). This framework positions Hungary as an example of a resilient system that emerged strengthened from crisis. The difference between the Russian principalities remaining under Mongol suzerainty and Hungary preserving its independence demonstrates the determinacy of this learning capacity (Halperin, 1985).

In this study, frontier regions are theorized as productive spaces where military renewal and institutional experience are intensified. Borders are spaces where central authorities encounter direct and urgent threat perception, and therefore where administrative inertia is overcome and rapid decision-making mechanisms come into play (Shepard, 2008; Curta, 2019). Hungary strongly fits this theoretical framework because it was one of the first major European kingdoms to establish direct contact with Mongol-Turkic military power. Jean Sedlar's comprehensive study on medieval East Central Europe addresses in detail the distinctive position of Hungary's frontier location within regional dynamics and its comparative position with other Central European states (Sedlar, 1994). The intensive military experiences occurring at the frontier shaped Hungary's defense doctrine, and this doctrine came to serve as an example for the interior regions of Europe over time (Berend, 2001). Theoretically, this situation emphasizes the constitutive role of frontiers in European history. The frontier studies examined in the Literature Review constitute the academic origins of this theoretical approach. Accordingly, Hungary is treated in this study not as a peripheral march lord but as a center established at the frontier. This approach permits a reconsideration of the traditional center-periphery distinction and contributes a new perspective to the historiography of Europe.

Finally, this theoretical component offers a comprehensive perspective that explains Europe's historical continuity through defense capacity. Europe's existence in the thirteenth century is directly related not only to internal political dynamics but also to effective defense mechanisms developed against external threats (Berend, 2001; Jackson, 2005). Nora Berend's comparative study on the rise of Christianity and Central European monarchies demonstrates how these defense mechanisms became intertwined with religious and political legitimacy (Berend, 2013). The conceptualization of Europe's existential trial articulated in the Introduction corresponds to this

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theoretical approach. Hungary's institutionalized military culture and fortification system represent one of the most developed and functional examples of these defense mechanisms (Engel, 2001; Fügedi, 1986). Theoretically, this approach conceptualizes European history as an active strategic protection process conducted in frontier regions rather than a passive deliverance narrative. The success of this defense process was concretized by the inability of Mongol invasions to penetrate the European interior and to permanently transform the continent's political map (Jackson, 2017; Pow, 2021). Thus, Hungary's role is theorized as a structural and indispensable element in the preservation of Europe's historical existence. This theoretical framework will serve as a guiding compass for the interpretation of findings to be presented in subsequent sections of the study.

At this stage of the theoretical framework, the reciprocal relationship between military power and political legitimacy is addressed. Within the context of medieval state theory, military capacity is directly connected not only with tactical successes on the battlefield but also with the societal acceptance and reproduction of state authority (Berend, 2001; Engel, 2001). In the Kingdom of Hungary, the defense policies developed under the leadership of IV. Béla following the Mongol invasions were decisive in the re-establishment of the shaken royal authority. The 1241 trauma described in the Introduction was not merely a military defeat but also a profound crisis period during which political legitimacy was called into question. John Fine's study on the late medieval Balkans comparatively examines how other states in the region coped with similar legitimacy crises during this period and renders Hungary's distinctive position more apparent (Fine, 1994). This situation demonstrates that defense capacity simultaneously functioned as political integration. The institutionalization of the Hun–Turkic military heritage and concrete measures such as castle construction strengthened the legitimacy of the kingdom as a protective state (Golden, 2011; Fügedi, 1986). Theoretically, this approach maintains that military success is a constitutive element that consolidates state capacity. Thus, Hungary is conceptualized not merely as a frontier guardian defending Europe but as a sovereign subject that reconstructed its own political integrity through this defensive response. The state-building discussions examined in the Literature Review constitute the historical foundation of this theoretical approach.

The theoretical framework employed in this study also encompasses the reciprocal interaction between military power and cultural identity. Military culture is not merely a body of technical knowledge but also produces a world of meaning that is effective in the formation of social identity and is transmitted across generations (Khazanov, 1994). In the Hungarian case, the concept of warrior identity was reproduced through historical narratives and practices associated with the Hun–Turkic heritage (Róna-Tas, 1999). Peter Golden's comprehensive study on the history of Turkic peoples documents in detail the Central Asian origins of this warrior identity and its process of transmission to Europe (Golden, 1992). This concept constitutes one of the fundamental elements appearing in the title of the article and is directly connected to the research question articulated in the Introduction. Warrior identity played a decisive role in the mobilization of social resistance at moments of existential crisis such as the Mongol invasions (Golden, 2011). Theoretically, this situation demonstrates that the symbolic and material dimensions of military culture nourish one another and that identity can be transformed into a defense resource. The fact that a similar warrior identity mobilization did not occur with the same intensity in other regions of Europe partially explains the differences in defense capacity. Accordingly, warrior identity is theorized in this study as a complementary and indispensable element of defense success. The preservation of this identity in institutional memory constituted the social foundation of the resistance displayed against Mongol armies in the 1285 campaign.

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Another dimension of the theoretical framework focuses on the relationship between multi-ethnic military structures and defense strategies. The multi-ethnic structure of Mongol armies, characterized as a steppe confederation, provided significant advantages in terms of military flexibility and adaptability (Amitai ve Biran, 2005; Di Cosmo vd., 2018). Michal Biran's study on the Qara Khitai Empire reveals the pre-Mongol origins of this multi-ethnic structure and its historical continuity in the Eurasian steppes (Biran, 2005). Within this structure, the numerical and battlefield weight of Turkic elements—particularly the Qipchaq, Uyghur, and Qarluq communities—is accepted as one of the fundamental components of Mongol military success (Golden, 2011). Hungary's sense of cognitive affinity with this system emphasized in the Introduction is related precisely to the recognition of this multi-ethnic structure. Hungary's historical familiarity with similar multi-ethnic and steppe-origin military structures—particularly the Cumans, Pechenegs, and Székelys—permitted the development of defense strategies in a more realistic and targeted manner (Vásáry, 2005; Pálóczi Horváth, 1989). Theoretically, this situation demonstrates that recognizing the threat plays a decisive role in defense success. While the perspective that perceived Mongol armies as an entirely alien and incomprehensible force in other regions of Europe increased vulnerability, Hungary's cognitive affinity provided it with a strategic advantage (May, 2018). This framework theoretically grounds the cognitive and institutional superiority of Hungary's defense strategy.

The theoretical approach of this study employs counterfactual reasoning not as a fictional scenario but as an analytical tool for testing historical causality. Counterfactual analysis assumes that historical events did not follow an inevitable line of destiny; rather, in the absence of particular structural resistance points, outcomes could have changed fundamentally (Allsen, 2001; May, 2018). In this context, the penetration of Mongol-Turkic military power as far as the Rhine River or the plains of northern Italy in the event of the collapse of Hungary's defense capacity is evaluated as a plausible scenario in terms of the military balances of the period (Jackson, 2005). George Lane's study on Chinggis Khan and Mongol rule addresses the logic and limits of Mongol expansion and supports the historical plausibility of this counterfactual scenario (Lane, 2009). The Russian example examined in the Literature Review represents the geography where this counterfactual scenario was transformed into historical reality (Halperin, 1985). Janet Martin's study on medieval Russia documents in detail the lasting effects of Mongol suzerainty upon Russian state tradition (Martin, 2007). Theoretically, this approach renders Hungary's role measurable as a structural variable that determined Europe's destiny. Thus, Europe's present historical map is conceptualized not as a natural given but as an outcome produced by successful defense at the frontier region. This theoretical stance provides an essential intellectual framework for testing the principal hypothesis articulated in the Introduction.

The originality of the theoretical framework lies in its characterization of Hungary's defense model as a hybrid military ecosystem. This model rests upon the synthesis of Western Europe's static defense technologies—particularly stone castles and armored cavalry units—with the mobile warfare principles of the Eurasian steppe—particularly mobile defense and feigned retreat tactics (Golden, 2011; Fügedi, 1986). Stephen Turnbull's military history study on Mongol conquests comparatively addresses the tactical dimensions of these two warfare traditions and emphasizes the originality of the synthesis in Hungary (Turnbull, 2003). The process of integration with feudal structures described in the Introduction explains the historical formation of this hybrid structure. Theoretically, this hybrid structure displays a higher adaptation success in times of crisis compared to monolithic military systems. Why Mongol armies, which easily dispatched the cumbersome

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feudal armies they encountered in other regions of Europe, failed in Hungary in 1285 is explained precisely by this theoretical synthesis (Pow, 2021; May, 2007). Accordingly, this study relates defense capacity not solely to weapons technology but also to the ability to fuse different military cultures. This hybrid model constitutes the theoretical foundation of Hungary's distinctive position in European history. The necessity of an interdisciplinary approach emphasized in the Literature Review is precisely met through the analysis of this hybrid structure.

This study reverses the center-periphery conceptual framework dominant in European historiography in favor of the constitutive role of the frontier. Traditional theories assume that historical change begins at the center—particularly in great capitals such as Paris, Rome, or London—and spreads to the periphery. However, the theoretical framework of this article maintains that Europe's existential security and geographical boundaries were drawn in Hungary, which is characterized as the periphery (Berend, 2001; Curta, 2019). The Handbook of the Mongols and Central-Eastern Europe edited by Maiorov and Hautala comprehensively addresses the regional dynamics of this periphery-center relationship and documents Hungary's distinctive position within this dynamic (Maiorov ve Hautala, 2021). The conceptualization of Europe's existential trial articulated in the Introduction is a direct reflection of this theoretical reversal. The Kingdom of Hungary is theorized in this context not as a passive march lord of Europe but as an active shield preserving the continent's political existence. This approach shifts the perspective from internal institutions—particularly structures such as the Church and feudality—to military-strategic interactions at the frontier marches when explaining Europe's historical continuity (Shepard, 2008). The Western Europe-centered historiography criticized in the Literature Review is directly interrogated by this theoretical framework. Thus, Hungary is positioned as an indispensable focal point for understanding European history.

In order to ensure the coherence of the theoretical framework, the reciprocal relationship among data, concept, and theory must be analyzed at this stage. The data employed in this study consist of historical documents based on primary sources, testimonies contained in chronicles of the period, and archaeological fortification remains (Pow, 2021; Fügedi, 1986; Engel, 2001). Christopher Atwood's Encyclopedia of Mongolia constitutes an indispensable reference work for the systematic evaluation of these primary sources and supports the reliability of the study's database (Atwood, 2004). These data document the concrete difference between the 1241 catastrophe and the 1285 success described in the Introduction. At the conceptual level, analytical tools such as military culture, defense line, historical threshold, warrior identity, and hybrid ecosystem enable these data to form a meaningful whole (Golden, 2011; Khazanov, 1994). At the theoretical level, the historical sociology approach permits the interpretation of these concepts within a framework that is non-determinist and foregrounds structural capacity. The harmony among these three levels ensures the internal consistency and analytical power of the study. The integrated structure of data, concept, and theory functions as an essential intellectual scaffold for filling the gaps identified in the Literature Review. Accordingly, this study aims to transform fragmented historical information into a comprehensive explanatory model.

This theoretical framework is designed in an interdisciplinary structure that synthesizes the contributions of different disciplines. The factual ground provided by historical science, the institutional analysis tools of sociology, the strategy concepts of military sciences, and the cultural transmission approaches of anthropology are transformed into a common analytical language in this study (Allsen, 2001; May, 2018; Róna-Tas, 1999). The Mongol World anthology edited by May and Hope presents the most comprehensive example of this interdisciplinary approach in

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current academic literature and supports the methodological choices of our study (May ve Hope, 2024). The deficit of dialogue between Mongol studies and European medieval history emphasized in the Literature Review is remedied precisely by this interdisciplinary approach. The applied reflections of the Hun–Turkic military heritage in the thirteenth century are explained not solely through historical description but through the sociological concept of institutional memory (Khazanov, 1994). The strategic consequences of the fortification revolution are analyzed through the defense depth concept of military sciences (Kosztolnyik, 1996). The social function of warrior identity is grounded through anthropological identity theories (Golden, 2011). The volume of the Cambridge History of Iran addressing the Seljuq and Mongol periods provides an important model for how this interdisciplinary approach can be applied from a comparative perspective (Boyle, 1968). This interdisciplinary synthesis constitutes one of the fundamental sources of the study's original contribution. Thus, the article transcends the boundaries of a single discipline and addresses Hungary's historical role from a multidimensional perspective.

In conclusion, this theoretical framework integrates the concepts of Hun–Turkic military heritage, institutionalized defense capacity, warrior identity, and historical threshold within a comprehensive analytical structure. The Kingdom of Hungary is positioned within this framework as a historical subject that assumed the defense of Europe against the Mongol invasions and transformed its steppe-origin heritage into a strategic wall by fusing it with Western fortification technology (Engel, 2001; Pow, 2021). The comprehensive perspective offered by the Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia provides an indispensable framework for understanding the position of this historical subject within the Eurasian context (Sinor, 1990). The research question and hypotheses formulated in the Introduction become testable through this theoretical framework. The theoretical approach explains defense success through the transmissibility and adaptability of military culture and rejects determinist historical narratives (Róna-Tas, 1999; Morgan, 2007). Beatrice Manz's study on the rise of Timur demonstrates how the steppe military tradition was adapted in different geographies and supports the comparative validity of this theoretical approach (Manz, 1989). Thus, Europe's historical continuity in the thirteenth century is treated not as a coincidental deliverance but as the product of particular defense capacities and strategic choices. The threefold gap identified in the Literature Review—particularly the deficit of dialogue between Mongol studies and European history, the inadequate treatment of the Hun–Turkic heritage in the context of military strategy, and the failure to present the hybrid defense model in a theoretical framework—is filled by this theoretical structure. This framework will serve as a guiding compass for the interpretation of the research method and empirical analyses to be presented in the following section of the study. Accordingly, the transition from the theoretical framework to the research method is accomplished within logical continuity.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitatively oriented historical-analytical research design to explicate the defensive capacity of the Kingdom of Hungary against the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century and its determinative role in European history. In other words, this study, rather than relying upon numerical data, takes historical documents and scholarly interpretations as its foundation, aiming to elucidate the causes and interconnections underlying historical events. The research question and hypotheses articulated in the Introduction, the theoretical lacunae identified in the Literature Review, and the conceptual framework presented in the Theoretical Framework constitute the rationale for this methodological choice. The historical-analytical approach seeks

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not merely to provide a chronological enumeration of events, but rather to illuminate causal relationships and structural continuities (Morgan, 2007). This approach moves beyond the question "what happened?" to address the questions "why did it happen?" and "how did it happen?" In this regard, the study aims to develop an analysis that is not reducible to singular battle narratives but evaluates multiple strata in conjunction. The dramatic disparity in outcomes between the catastrophe of 1241–1242 and the success of 1285, as emphasized in the Introduction, directly attests to the necessity of this analytical method. The research examines how the concepts defined in the Theoretical Framework—"military culture," "fortification policies," and "defense line"—interact with one another and investigates the continental-scale consequences of this interaction (Engel, 2001; Khazanov, 1994). Thus, the method renders possible the generation of a comprehensive and structural answer to the question "why did Europe remain relatively unaffected by the Mongol invasions," one that excludes contingent explanations. This methodological choice establishes a chain of causality directly consonant with the study's theoretical claims and prepares the ground for testing the conceptual framework articulated in the preceding sections.

The data sources for this research comprise critical publications grounded in primary sources pertaining to the subject and an extensive secondary academic literature. Primary sources consist of original texts such as chronicles and official documents composed by witnesses of the period; secondary sources are books and articles written by historians interpreting these documents. This choice represents the methodological reflection of the interdisciplinary approach emphasized in the Theoretical Framework. During the data collection process, foundational works, edited volumes, and peer-reviewed articles on the Mongol invasions, Central Asian steppe military culture, and Central European history (Allsen, 2001; Di Cosmo et al., 2018) were systematically surveyed. This survey encompasses studies included in international databases and acknowledged by specialists in the field. Studies addressing the Kingdom of Hungary specifically within the context of the campaigns of 1241–1242 and 1285, representing both Western and Eastern European historiographical traditions, occupy the center of the data corpus (Engel, 2001; Pow, 2021). In the selection of the literature, academic publications of high international impact value and foundational texts of the field were prioritized. This approach aims to enhance the reliability and scholarly validity of the data employed. Furthermore, the conjoint evaluation of studies from history, archaeology, and military strategy offers an interdisciplinary reading that forestalls unilateral interpretations. To transcend the limitations of Western European–centered historiography critiqued in the Literature Review, Hungarian historiography, Eurasian steppe studies, and contemporary scholarship on the Mongol Empire (Curta, 2019; May and Hope, 2024) have been represented in balanced proportion.

The method of comparative historical analysis occupies a fundamental place in this study. This method facilitates the identification of similarities and differences by juxtaposing events across different temporal periods or geographical regions (Lattimore, 1940). This methodological choice is indispensable for explaining the difference between the two historical junctures emphasized in the Introduction. First, the outcomes of the first Mongol invasion of 1241–1242 and the second campaign of 1285 are compared through changing defense indicators (Pow, 2021). This comparison is not confined to tactical outcomes on the battlefield; it also encompasses institutional preparedness, logistical capacity, and transformations in fortification infrastructure. For instance, whereas Hungary's defensive structures proved inadequate during the first invasion, stone fortresses halted the enemy's advance in the second campaign; this difference is concretely demonstrated through the comparative method. Thus, the defensive capacity that changed over a

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forty-year period and the process of "military learning" conceptualized in the Theoretical Framework can be analyzed with concrete data. Additionally, the study tests the particularity of the outcome in Europe by indirectly comparing Hungary's situation with the responses of Russian Principalities or states in the Middle East to the Mongol invasions (Halperin, 1985; Jackson, 2017). The absence of comparable data of similar temporal scope and scale in other regions of Europe renders the Hungarian case methodologically even more significant. This comparative approach functions as a bridge addressing the dialogue deficit between Mongol studies and European history identified in the Literature Review.

In this research, the conceptual history approach is employed to trace the historical trajectory of the concept of "military culture" and to identify structural continuities. Conceptual history is a method that examines how a particular concept has changed over time and what it has signified in different periods (Kontler, 2002). This methodological choice is directly linked to the operationalization of the concept of Hun–Turkic military heritage defined in the Theoretical Framework. Within this framework, Hun–Turkic military heritage is treated not through biological or ethnic essentialism, but as a historically transmissible and institutionalizable corpus of practices (Golden, 2011). This perspective accepts that military heritage is transmitted from generation to generation not through blood ties but through learning and transmission. The fundamental characteristics of steppe warfare culture—mobile defense, feigned retreat, and the decimal unit structure—are analyzed comparatively with Hungary's defensive responses in the thirteenth century (Róna-Tas, 1999; Hildinger, 1997). The capacity to "recognize the enemy's art of war," emphasized in the Introduction, is concretized precisely through this conceptual history method. Methodologically, this approach aims to demonstrate that cultural heritage is not merely a symbolic narrative but provides a concrete strategic repertoire activated in moments of crisis. Furthermore, the cognitive influence of the Mongol armies' Turkic-component structure upon Hungarian defense strategies is also evaluated within this framework (Amitai and Biran, 2005). This method enables reading the functional consequences of military culture within its historical context and relating the claims in the Theoretical Framework to empirical data.

In this study, counterfactual analysis is employed in a limited and controlled manner to reinforce causal relationships and to situate Hungary's role on a structural foundation. Counterfactual analysis is a method of reasoning that by asking "what would have happened if this event had not occurred?" enables us better to comprehend the significance of what actually transpired. This approach uses the question "If the defense line in Hungary had collapsed, what would have been the probable consequences of the Mongol invasions upon Europe?" not to generate a fictional scenario but to test historical causality. In conducting this analysis, the concrete administrative and demographic transformations wrought by the Mongol invasions in other geographies—Golden Horde suzerainty in Russia, the Ilkhanate state in Iran, and the Yuan Dynasty in China—are taken as criteria (Jackson, 2017; Halperin, 1985). In these geographies, Mongol dominion persisted for centuries and fundamentally transformed social structures; Europe's escape from this outcome clearly demonstrates the importance of the defense in Hungary (Martin, 2007). The phrase "Europe's existential trial," emphasized in the Introduction, is concretized precisely through this comparative projection. Methodologically, this approach aims to demonstrate that historical outcomes were not inevitable but were shaped in dependence upon particular defense thresholds and institutional capacities. Thus, Hungary's role (Pow, 2021) is rendered measurable as an analytical "historical variable" without being reduced to exaggerated "savior" rhetoric. This

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method rejects the determinist historical narratives critiqued in the Theoretical Framework and demonstrates how defensive capacity determined historical outcomes.

To ensure the validity of the research, the fundamental concepts and analytical categories employed have been operationalized on the basis of established definitions in the literature. Validity refers to whether a study actually measures what it intends to measure; in this study, the consistent and explicit definition of concepts serves this purpose. Concepts constituting the backbone of the study—"military culture," "defense line," and "historical threshold"—have been established in a coherent structure with consideration of their usage in the fields of history, sociology, and strategy in the Theoretical Framework (Khazanov, 1994; Shepard, 2008; Golden, 2011). To prevent conceptual ambiguities from weakening analytical conclusions, findings pertaining to the Hungarian case have been grounded not in a single source but in multiple sources representing Hungarian, Western European, and Eurasian historiography (Engel, 2001; Kosztolnyik, 1996; Curta, 2019). This approach directly contributes to transcending the unilateral perspective critiqued in the Literature Review. Inter-source consistency has been accepted as the fundamental criterion of methodological validity. In this context, contradictory interpretations in the literature have not been concealed but rather evaluated as an enriching component of the analytical discussion. For example, differing explanations regarding the Mongol withdrawal—ranging from climatic factors to internal political conflicts—have been passed through a critical filter across a broad spectrum. This method ensures that the research is conducted on a comprehensive and interrogative scientific foundation rather than a selective one.

The reliability of the research has been reinforced through the systematic comparison of different scholarly interpretations of the same historical phenomena. Reliability refers to a study's capacity to yield similar results when replicated; in this study, the corroboration of the same phenomena by different sources meets this criterion. To this end, works by classical authorities on the Mongol invasions and Hungarian defense have been evaluated together with the findings of contemporary and innovative researchers (Morgan, 2007; Jackson, 2005; Pow, 2021). The approaches of foundational figures in the field such as David Morgan and Peter Jackson have been compared with the findings of recent researchers such as Stephen Pow and Florin Curta, thereby revealing continuities and ruptures in historiography. This comparative reading prevents falling into the trap of a one-sided narrative and concretizes at the methodological level the interdisciplinary approach emphasized in the Theoretical Framework. Moreover, the synthesis of studies from different geographical and disciplinary perspectives (Di Cosmo et al., 2018; May and Hope, 2024) ensures that interpretations rest on a balanced foundation. This plural source utilization prevents any individual historian's personal biases from influencing the conclusions. Methodologically, this approach enhances the transparency and reproducibility of historical narrative. The reader encounters a clear trajectory through which similar conclusions can be reached via the sources employed and the logical inferences drawn; this circumstance supports the scientific reliability of the study.

Certain methodological limitations of this research are also explicitly stated. No research is perfect; the explicit statement of limitations enhances the honesty and scientific value of a study. Because the study by its nature relies substantially upon extended secondary literature and published primary source editions, it cannot always attain the level of detail offered by direct raw documents—for example, the totality of local monastic records. Nevertheless, the comprehensive datasets and critical editions compiled by field specialists such as Peter Jackson and Florin Curta substantially compensate for this limitation (Jackson, 2017; Curta, 2019). A second limitation

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concerns uncertainties in the precision of thirteenth-century demographic and economic data; this circumstance renders it difficult to measure the effects of invasion and defense numerically. For instance, estimates regarding population losses of the period show significant variations depending on the source (Sedlar, 1994). Consequently, the analysis has focused upon qualitative causal relationships established within historical context rather than upon statistical precision. The hypotheses formulated in the Introduction are also tested within this qualitative framework. Third, the evaluation of certain primary sources in the Hungarian language through translation may have resulted in the loss of particular nuances of the original texts. However, the works of specialists such as Róna-Tas and Engel serve as reliable bridges to surmount this linguistic barrier (Róna-Tas, 1999; Engel, 2001). The explicit statement of methodological limitations in this manner enhances the analytical honesty of the study and permits the obtained conclusions to be evaluated within their proper context.

Ethical considerations are treated in this research as an integral part of the methodological framework. Ethics in historical research requires approaching past individuals and communities in a respectful, unprejudiced, and equitable manner. In analyzing historical actors and communities, anachronistic judgments projecting contemporary values onto the past and generalizing biases have been consciously avoided. Anachronism—that is, judging the past by the standards of the present—constitutes (Ostrowski, 1998) a serious error that can distort historical reality. Particularly in discussing the concepts of "Hun–Turkic military heritage" and "warrior identity" central to the study, expressions that might tend toward biological racism or essentialist interpretations have been scrupulously avoided. Instead, a historical-sociological language focused upon processes of cultural and institutional transmission has been preferred. The concept of "institutional memory" defined in the Theoretical Framework constitutes precisely the theoretical foundation of this ethical sensitivity. Additionally, respect has been accorded to different historiographical traditions, with Hungarian national historiography, Western European–centered historiography, and Eurasian steppe studies represented in balanced proportion (Berend, 2001; May, 2018). Alternative interpretations have not been excluded but rather rendered an enriching component of the analytical discussion. Transcending the unilateral perspective critiqued in the Literature Review is not merely a scientific but also an ethical responsibility. This ethical sensitivity strengthens the academic legitimacy of the study and ensures that the method offers a structure balanced not only technically but also in terms of values.

The research design of this study has been structured to establish a direct causal bridge between theoretical assumptions and empirical findings. This bridge ensures that abstract ideas are supported by concrete historical evidence and that claims do not remain unfounded. In particular, analyses of the geographical distribution and density of stone fortresses constructed during and after the reign of Béla IV have been examined in correlation with the movement routes and logistical chokepoints of Mongol armies during the 1285 campaign (Fügedi, 1986; Pow, 2021). This spatial analysis method enables defensive capacity to be transformed from an abstract claim into a concrete variable verifiable on the map. The placement of fortresses at strategic points such as river crossings and mountain passes is not coincidental but the product of deliberate defense planning (Pálóczi Horváth, 1989). The concrete consequences of the fortification revolution emphasized in the Introduction are demonstrated precisely through this method. The method relates not merely "the existence of fortresses" but "the strategic positioning of these fortresses"—particularly river crossings and mountain passes—to the failure of military operations (Engel, 2001; Kosztolnyik, 1996). Thus, by minimizing the contested external factors in the literature

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regarding the causes of the Mongol withdrawal—for instance, climatic conditions or the death of the Great Khan—the determinative role of structural defense factors can be disaggregated. The concept of "historical threshold" defined in the Theoretical Framework is concretized through this spatial analysis. This analytical step constitutes the methodological foundation for the "fortification-deterrence" relationship to be presented in the Findings section of the study.

In conclusion, the multilayered research methodology adopted herein—integrating historical-analytical examination, the conceptual history approach, and comparative case analysis—aims to transcend the determinist and Western-centric biases in European historiography. This comprehensive approach eliminates the blind spots that adherence to a single method might create and enables the attainment of more reliable conclusions. The tracing of institutional vestiges of Hun–Turkic military heritage and the support of defense line theory with empirical data—particularly archaeological findings and testimonies based upon chronicles of the period—augment the explanatory power of the study. The research question and hypotheses formulated in the Introduction, the lacunae identified in the Literature Review, and the conceptual framework presented in the Theoretical Framework become testable through this methodological framework. The method employed provides scholarly precision by defining the role of the Kingdom of Hungary not through exaggerated rhetoric but through measurable military and institutional indicators. Through the comparative approach, the difference between the catastrophe of 1241 and the success of 1285 is demonstrated as the product of a structural transformation rather than contingency. This methodological rigor demonstrates that the study's claims rest upon evidence rather than mere opinion. This methodological framework ensures that the findings to be presented in the following section are read not merely as a descriptive historical narrative but as an analytical defense grounded in causal relationships. Thus, the transition from method to findings is accomplished within a logical continuity.

5. FINDINGS

The primary and most decisive finding of this research is that the impact of the Mongol invasion of 1241–1242 upon the Kingdom of Hungary transcended a mere military defeat, constituting instead a structural rupture that fundamentally reconfigured the state's defensive conception and institutional capacity. In accordance with the conceptual framework articulated in the Introduction, this moment of rupture represents the historical turning point at which the kingdom transitioned from passive victimhood toward the active construction of an effective defense architecture. The research data reveal that in the pre-invasion period, Hungarian defensive strategy relied predominantly upon natural obstacles, marshlands, forested areas, and the battlefield dominance of light cavalry units. However, the comprehensive collapse at the Battle of Mohi demonstrated in painful terms that this defensive conception proved inadequate against the disciplined encirclement and siege tactics of the Mongol armies (Engel, 2001). This defeat constituted not merely a military failure but an existential shock that necessitated a fundamental redefinition of the Hungarian political elite's threat perception and strategic priorities (Kosztolnyik, 1996). Béla IV and the Hungarian political elite perceived this devastation not as a transient catastrophe but as an existential threat capable of recurrence at any moment, thereby subjecting their defensive conceptions to thorough scrutiny. The sharp increase in stone fortification permits observable in royal records during the post-invasion period demonstrates that this scrutiny was transformed into a concrete state policy (Fügedi, 1986). Indeed, this datum constitutes a historical validation of the concept of "institutional memory" examined in the Theoretical Framework; when confronted with

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existential crises, societies tend to abandon failed strategies and develop new defensive paradigms. Consequently, this finding reveals that Hungary did not passively experience the devastation of 1241 but rather transformed this trauma into an institutional learning process. This transformation directly supports the claim of "defensive paradigm shift" that constitutes the first pillar of the main hypothesis articulated in the Introduction.

The second fundamental finding of this research demonstrates that the Hun–Turkic military heritage conceptualized in the Introduction and Theoretical Framework sections did not remain merely a historical origin narrative in thirteenth-century Hungary but rather exhibited a functional continuity that was reflected in concrete military practices. This continuity empirically refutes the "folkloric remnant" approach critically evaluated in the Literature Review. When the organizational structure of the Hungarian army is examined in detail, a unique integration is observed in which the heavy armored knight tradition of Western European feudalism was combined under a single roof with light cavalry tactics of steppe origin. In particular, the institutional presence of Cuman and Székely units within the army structure demonstrates that this heritage was preserved as a strategic resource rather than remaining a folkloric remnant (Golden, 2011; Vásáry, 2005). The research data indicate that the Hungarian command echelon perceived the feigned retreat, encircling flank maneuvers, and mounted archery tactics employed by the Mongol armies not as "foreign" and "incomprehensible" elements but as a familiar language of war contained within their own historical repertoire. This perception substantiates the military dimension of the "cultural continuity" thesis articulated by Róna-Tas (1999). The concept of "military literacy" emphasized in the Literature Review acquires concrete meaning at this juncture; Hungary possessed the capability to anticipate enemy movements because it derived from a different branch of the same military tradition. This cognitive familiarity has been identified as the fundamental explanatory factor enabling Hungarian defense to act with foresight and planning rather than succumbing to panic during the second invasion of 1285 (May, 2018). Indeed, the fact that the Mongol armies were largely composed of Kipchak and other Turkic elements constituted a structural factor that facilitated the reading of the threat for the Hungarian side (Amitai and Biran, 2005).

Both quantitative and qualitative data pertaining to fortification policies demonstrate that the Kingdom of Hungary unequivocally placed stone castle construction at the center of its defensive strategy in the post-1241 period. Analyses conducted based on Erik Fügedi's comprehensive data indicate that the number of castles constructed or reinforced between 1242 and 1300 increased exponentially compared to earlier periods (Fügedi, 1986; Engel, 2001). This increase constitutes the most concrete historical evidence of the concept of "reactive institutional transformation" examined in the Theoretical Framework; crisis functioned as a catalyst triggering innovation. This increase does not exhibit a random distribution; rather, it concentrates upon strategic chokepoints such as river crossings, mountain passes, and trade corridors (Kosztolnyik, 1996). This finding demonstrates that Hungarian defensive planning was predicated upon a sophisticated geographic consciousness and identified the restriction of the invading force's movement capacity as its primary objective. When evaluated within the comparative historical analysis framework specified in the Research Methods section, the functionality of this new castle network was tested and successfully passed during the Mongol campaign of 1285 under the command of Nogai and Talabuga. As explicitly indicated in the chronicles of the period, Mongol cavalrymen lost their speed and maneuver advantages against stone walls, while their siege equipment proved inadequate in overcoming these fortifications (Pow, 2021). Consequently, these findings confirm

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that stone castle construction was not merely an architectural activity but the materialization of a comprehensive military doctrine that formed the physical backbone of European defense. This doctrine constitutes the empirical foundation of the second auxiliary hypothesis articulated in the Introduction—namely, the claim that fortification reforms restricted Mongol mobility.

The most striking finding derived from comparative historical analysis is that the outcomes of the first invasion of 1241 and the second campaign of 1285 stand in diametrical opposition to one another. This finding provides the empirical validation of the "military learning" process articulated in the Research Methods section. In 1241, the near-total annihilation of the Hungarian royal army at the Battle of Mohi and the pillaging of nearly half the country's territories demonstrated that the defense system possessed serious vulnerabilities predicated upon open-field warfare (Engel, 2001). From a demographic perspective, this devastation is estimated to have eliminated approximately fifteen to twenty percent of the kingdom's population—a proportion indicating a catastrophe of unprecedented magnitude by European standards of the period (Kosztolnyik, 1996). However, the research data document that the campaign of 1285, commanded by the Golden Horde leadership, encountered systematic and organized resistance from the Carpathian passes onward. Units that advanced as far as the approaches to Pest were compelled to withdraw with heavy casualties, unable to breach the stone walls (Pow, 2021; Jackson, 2005). The records appearing in the chronicles of the period, reporting that the invaders suffered serious casualties due to arrows and stones raining down from the castles, demonstrate that this failure was not coincidental but rather the direct result of the deliberately designed "defense in depth" strategy. This datum concretely confirms that the institutional capacity constructed over forty years had reached a level capable of neutralizing Mongol offensive power. The thesis of "dramatic outcome differential between 1241 and 1285" articulated in the Introduction is empirically supported by these findings.

The research findings demonstrate that the Kingdom of Hungary constituted a de facto and functional defensive threshold for Europe during the second half of the thirteenth century. This threshold functioned not merely as a military line but as a destruction trap that eliminated the most critical operational advantage of the invading force. The concept of "strategic threshold" conceptualized in the Theoretical Framework finds concrete historical correspondence at this juncture; Hungary constructed an impermeable boundary between Europe and the Eurasian steppe world. The research data reveal that the fortified storage strategy implemented by Béla IV and his successors paralyzed the Mongol armies' most potent weapon—their capacity for "living off the land" (Fügedi, 1986). Unable to find food and fodder in open terrain and incapable of taking stone castles with siege equipment, Mongol units were compelled to withdraw due to resource insufficiency (Sverdrup, 2017). The fact that Western European sources and papal correspondence began to characterize Hungary as the "Shield of Christendom" during this period constitutes qualitative data confirming that this defensive function was a concrete geostrategic reality perceived not merely locally but at a continental scale (Berend, 2001). This finding directly corresponds with the concepts of "buffer state" and "threshold" examined in the Theoretical Framework. Hungary, while defending its own territories, provided a geostrategic security umbrella for the remainder of Europe; by virtue of this umbrella, the kingdoms of Western Europe were protected from the direct effects of the Mongol threat. Consequently, this finding demonstrates that Hungary's role must be evaluated not within a narrative of passive victimhood but within the framework of an active defense architecture.

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The findings pertaining to military learning processes demonstrate that the interaction between the Hungarian defense elite and the Mongol-Turkic military order was not a unidirectional experience of destruction but rather encompassed a process of mutual adaptation and transformation. When the tactical structuring of the Hungarian army following the catastrophe of 1241 is examined, it is observed that Western-origin heavy armored cavalry units and Eastern-origin mounted archer forces were brought together within an integrated defense mechanism (Vásáry, 2005). This integration constitutes the concrete historical correspondence of the "hybrid defense model" concept examined in the Theoretical Framework. This model also corresponds with the "military culture transfer" theory articulated by Di Cosmo and colleagues (2018); different martial traditions can be pragmatically integrated during periods of crisis. The research data indicate that the incorporation of Cumans into the Hungarian defense order, in particular, conferred the capability to provide symmetrical responses to Mongol tactics. The ability to develop effective countermeasures against maneuvers such as ambush, feigned retreat, and encirclement is directly related to the recognition of the enemy's language of war. While other feudal armies of Europe lacked this tactical flexibility, Hungary's steppe literacy, grounded in its Hun-Turkic heritage, provided the capacity to anticipate enemy movements and implement countermeasures (Golden, 2011; May, 2007). This finding reveals that defensive success must be explained not merely through physical fortifications but through the strategic intelligence and institutional adaptive capacity behind these fortifications. Consequently, the Hungarian case demonstrates that military success is related not solely to material resources but also to the ability to recognize the enemy and provide appropriate responses.

The research findings confirm with concrete data that the stone castle transformation in Hungary rendered the traditional operational and logistics strategies of the Mongol armies ineffective. The Mongol military order was predicated upon the principles of high speed, securing surrender through the spreading of terror, and utilizing the resources of rural areas (May, 2007). This principle was grounded in the "movement superiority" doctrine that formed the foundation of the Mongol military system; however, this doctrine possessed a structural vulnerability when confronted with fortified defense (Hildinger, 1997). Nevertheless, the strategic grain storage and population withdrawal to fortifications policy implemented by Béla IV and his successors drove the Mongol army into a serious resource crisis during the campaign of 1285. According to Stephen Pow's analyses, Golden Horde units that found settlement areas empty and resources locked away were compelled to struggle with hunger and epidemic diseases as siege durations extended (Pow, 2021). Fügedi's data demonstrate that the stone walls that replaced the earthen ramparts of the pre-1241 period halted the blitzkrieg tempo of Mongol light cavalry and forced them into a war of attrition (Fügedi, 1986). This finding reveals that Hungary's victory was not merely a battle success but a comprehensive defense victory predicated upon resource management. When evaluated within the counterfactual analysis framework specified in the Research Methods section, it is evident that had this strategy not been implemented, the Mongol armies would have retained the same resource advantage and the defense would have faced a far more challenging test.

The findings pertaining to the ethnic and military composition of the conflict reveal the increasingly pronounced Turkic character of Hungarian defense in the second half of the thirteenth century and the strategic advantages this character provided. The Golden Horde army that attacked in 1285, while its command echelon was of Mongol origin, was largely composed of Kipchak and Turkmen elements in terms of military human resources (Golden, 2011; Halperin, 1985). On the Hungarian side, the Cuman light cavalry integrated into the army during the reign of King

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Ladislaus IV employed the same combat techniques, the same archery equipment, and similar maneuver language as the invading forces (Vásáry, 2005). This situation demonstrates that the concept of "steppe confederation" examined in the Literature Review was valid on both sides; both the attacking and defending forces drew from the same military culture pool (Sinor, 1990). The research data indicate that Cuman units provided symmetrical responses to Mongol tactics, thereby compensating for the cumbersomeness of Western-type heavy cavalry (Pálóczi Horváth, 1989). In this encounter between two forces speaking the same military language, the stone castle support behind Hungary tipped the balance in favor of the defense. This finding validates the thesis of "encounter between different historical forms of the steppe tradition" discussed in the Literature Review. The Hun-Turkic military heritage functioned as a cognitive filter that recognized the threat, anticipated its behavior, and neutralized it. This filter provided a unique defensive advantage absent in other regions of Europe.

This research empirically refutes the environmental determinism argument occasionally advanced in existing scholarship that attributes the halting of the Mongol advance solely to geographic factors. Geographic analyses demonstrate that Mongol armies were capable of traversing far more challenging terrain—for example, the Caucasian passes or the marshy plains of southern China; consequently, the halt in Hungary was not a natural but a constructed barrier (Morgan, 2007; Jackson, 2005). This finding directly refutes Saunders' (1971) thesis of "climate and geographic determinism" critiqued in the Literature Review. The research data reveal that the Hungarian kings fortified the Danube line and mountain passes, particularly the Verecke Pass, with a deliberate defense architecture (Engel, 2001). The fact that Mongol units were halted by ambushes set up by local Székely units at the mountain passes during the invasion of 1285 demonstrates that geography was not a passive obstacle but was employed as a force multiplier within an active defense strategy (Pow, 2021). This finding corresponds with the concept of "geography and strategy integration" examined in the Theoretical Framework. These data demonstrate that Europe's security was secured not by chance or climatic conditions but through a deliberate border management that combined geography with strategy. Consequently, the environmental determinism thesis lacks empirical foundation in the Hungarian case. This conclusion constitutes critical data supporting the main hypothesis of the research; defensive success is the product of internal rather than external factors.

The research findings demonstrate that the defense capacity developed by the Kingdom of Hungary against the Mongol invasions was not limited to professional military classes but was transformed into a societal defense mobilization. Following the collapse of the aristocratic and cumbersome feudal army structure in 1241, it has been determined that Béla IV and his successors devolved defense responsibility to local nobles and castle garrisons (Engel, 2001). The examined royal decrees demonstrate that the privileges granted to nobles in exchange for castle construction transformed defense from a centralized burden into a localized partnership of interests (Fügedi, 1986). This transformation validates the "Hungarian feudalism distinctiveness" thesis articulated by Kontler (2002); the defense imperative reconfigured center-periphery relations. The research data document that during the invasion of 1285, the local population demonstrated passive resistance by taking refuge in castles while light cavalry units conducted a war of attrition in the countryside. This multilayered participation model has been identified as the most critical societal factor disrupting the Mongol army's strategy of achieving rapid results. Considering that in other regions of Europe defense was generally left to the fate of the royal army, this depth and participatory defense in Hungary presented the invading force with a difficult-to-manage, multi-

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focal resistance environment (Vásáry, 2005). This finding constitutes the historical correspondence of the "societal mobilization" concept examined in the Theoretical Framework; defense became not merely the responsibility of the military class but of society as a whole.

The findings in the context of political integration and state-building reveal that the defense reforms unexpectedly strengthened the central authority of the Hungarian Kingdom. Although it is generally assumed in existing scholarship that feudalism weakened royal authority, the Hungarian case demonstrates that defense-oriented feudalism fortified the state (Berend, 2001). The research data indicate that the conditioning of stone castle construction upon royal permission provided Béla IV with the opportunity to supervise local power centers and integrate them into the national defense strategy (Kosztolnyik, 1996). This situation constitutes the concrete reflection in medieval Hungary of Charles Tilly's thesis that "war makes states"; external threat accelerated the development of state capacity (Engel, 2001). The increase in the state's military capacity between 1242 and 1300 simultaneously signified an elevation of administrative capacity. This situation demonstrates that the existential crisis created by the Mongol threat, rather than collapsing the state, rendered it more resilient by creating a militarized bureaucracy (Engel, 2001). The thesis of "external threat strengthening internal structuring" examined in the Theoretical Framework is empirically validated by these findings. Consequently, the fundamental factor underlying defensive success is not merely stone walls but the state intelligence that constructed, managed, and coordinated these walls. This finding reveals that Hungary's defense capacity was not solely a military success but simultaneously an institutional and administrative achievement.

The findings pertaining to psychological and societal factors demonstrate that the defense order in Hungary broke the most effective weapon of the Mongol armies—the legend of invincibility and the terror effect. While the fear and perception of "God's wrath" prevalent throughout Europe in 1241 led to surrenders without resistance, the Hungarian defense of 1285 exhibited a rational and confident appearance (Pow, 2021). This transformation constitutes a historical example of the concept of "collective psychological resilience" examined in the Theoretical Framework; societies can raise their fear thresholds through successful defense experiences. The research data reveal that the physical security provided by the castles preserved the morale of the defenders and neutralized Mongol psychological warfare techniques—methods such as spreading terror, creating noise, and displaying exaggerated numbers. Records in the chronicles of the period indicating that Hungarian and Cuman units displayed offensive courage against the Mongols demonstrate that psychological superiority had shifted in favor of the defense (Vásáry, 2005). The fact that Mongol commanders calculated the cost of resistance and decided to withdraw constitutes the most concrete indication that this psychological threshold had been overcome. This finding represents a turning point in European defense history regarding the management of fear. The thesis articulated in the Introduction that "Hungary was not a passive victim" is validated at the psychological level as well; when fear can be managed, numerical and technological superiorities relatively lose their significance.

The findings confirm that the status of "Bastion of Christendom" acquired by the Kingdom of Hungary in the eyes of Europe during the second half of the thirteenth century was not merely a rhetorical title but was grounded in concrete military data. When papal correspondence and Western European chronicles are examined, it is observed that Hungary was described as the gate holding back the storm from the East and that this function was institutionally acknowledged (Berend, 2001; Srodecki, 2016). This acknowledgment was not merely a religious discourse but a concrete reflection of the geopolitical realities of the period; the Papacy was conscious of

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Hungary's strategic importance and undertook diplomatic initiatives to provide military and financial support accordingly (Curta, 2019). The research results reveal, through geographic and transportation data, that in the event of the collapse of the Hungarian defense line—particularly the Danube and Carpathian line—the Vienna basin and the plains of northern Italy would have been left defenseless (Jackson, 2005). Consequently, the findings demonstrate that the role assumed by Hungary was not limited to protecting its own territories but provided a de facto security umbrella at a continental scale. The discourse critically evaluated in the Literature Review is transformed, in light of the research data, from rhetorical exaggeration into concrete geostrategic reality. However, this functionality derived not from an attributed divine mission but from constructed military capacity.

The findings pertaining to military organization's ethnic and tactical composition reveal that Hungarian defense acquired the capability for symmetrical warfare against Mongol armies through the Cuman factor. The acceptance of Cumans into the country and their inclusion in the military class by Béla IV and his successors integrated into the Hungarian army the mounted archery capacity absent in Western European feudal armies (Vásáry, 2005). Although this integration process initially caused serious tensions among Hungarian nobles, it was accepted as a pragmatic necessity following the catastrophe of 1241 (Pálóczi Horváth, 1989). The research data indicate that during the engagements of 1285, Cuman units on the Hungarian side employed the same maneuver language as the Mongol-Turkic invading forces, recognized feigned retreat tactics, and were able to anticipate ambush points in advance (Pálóczi Horváth, 1989). While other European armies—for example, the Teutonic Knights or Polish forces—remained cumbersome against Mongol tactics, this integrated army structure possessed by Hungary created the capacity to strike the enemy with his own weapons. This finding demonstrates that the concept of "military literacy" conceptualized in the Theoretical Framework was concretized through the Cumans. The Hun-Turkic military heritage was not a static memory from the past but a dynamic force multiplier updated and operationalized through the Cumans.

The findings based on the research's resource management data demonstrate that the Hungarian victory of 1285 was largely a resource strangulation operation. Because the Mongol military order was predicated upon the principle of living off the land, it was dependent upon agricultural products and pastures in the territories it invaded (May, 2007). However, the findings indicate that, thanks to the reforms initiated by Béla IV, grain stocks and valuable resources were withdrawn behind the walls of stone castles (Fügedi, 1986). This strategy seriously restricted the operational duration of the Mongol armies and forced them into a war of attrition in which they could not employ their strengths (Sverdrup, 2017). According to Stephen Pow's analyses, the Mongol army that entered Hungary in the winter of 1285 found no resources to plunder in the countryside and, unable to take the castles, was confronted with a serious hunger crisis (Pow, 2021). Records appearing in the chronicles of the period reporting that the invaders ate their horses due to hunger validate the success of this strategy. This finding reveals that Hungary's defense strategy was not merely military but a holistic defense designed around resource management. The "multidimensional analysis" approach specified in the Research Methods section is concretized in this finding; defensive success cannot be reduced to a single factor but is the integrated result of military, institutional, and economic dimensions.

The continental-scale comparative analysis of the findings demonstrates that a direct causal connection exists between the resistance of the Kingdom of Hungary and the security of Western Europe. It is documented in historical sources that when Hungarian defense collapsed in 1241,

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Mongol raiders reached as far as the Adriatic coast and the Viennese frontier (Jackson, 2005). This advance created a serious wave of panic in Western Europe and led to an intensification of apocalyptic discourse with "end of the world" themes in the chronicles of the period (Berend, 2001). However, in 1285, the holding of the fortification line in Hungary extinguished the Mongol advance within the Carpathian Basin and prevented any serious threat from forming toward the interior of Western Europe. The research results confirm that the reason the west of Europe—France, Germany, and Italy—did not experience Mongol devastation was not geographic distance but this structural shield established in Hungary (Berend, 2001). Considering that Poland and the Rus' principalities during the same period were either under Mongol pressure or had entered subjugation, Hungary's preservation of its independent defense capacity has been identified as a determining historical divergence in European geopolitics. This finding validates at the continental level the thesis articulated in the Introduction that "Hungary assumed a strategic buffer function that preserved Europe's historical existence."

The research findings reveal that the defense capacity in Hungary did not exhibit a homogeneous distribution throughout the country but rather contained regional differentiations according to strategic priorities. According to Erik Fügedi's data, the density of stone castles constructed between 1242 and 1300 reached its highest levels particularly in the western and northwestern regions of the kingdom—in Transdanubia and Upper Hungary (Fügedi, 1986). These regions possessed vital importance in terms of controlling the strategic corridors opening toward the Vienna basin and Western Europe. This prioritization indicates that the Hungarian command echelon correctly analyzed the threat orientation and deployed limited resources in a manner that would create maximum impact (Kosztolnyik, 1996). In contrast, in the eastern and southeastern border regions—Transylvania and Banat—it has been determined that defense relied more upon natural obstacles, timber-earthwork fortifications, and the mobile defense force of Székely and Cuman light cavalry units (Kosztolnyik, 1996). The findings demonstrate that Béla IV and his successors directed limited economic resources toward regions possessing the highest threat perception. This strategic imbalance ensured that Mongol armies encountered an increasingly hardening layer of resistance as they advanced from east to west, thereby reducing their offensive momentum (Engel, 2001). This finding demonstrates that defense planning was predicated not upon randomness but upon a deliberate prioritization logic.

The findings pertaining to small-scale defense examples demonstrate that during the invasion of 1285, local communities and garrisons participated actively and autonomously in the defense process. When royal decrees and local chronicles are examined, it is observed that defense was not left solely to the royal army; local nobles, church officials, and even the urban populace organized to defend their own regions (Berend, 2001). This participatory defense model constitutes a concrete reflection of the "societal resilience" concept examined in the Theoretical Framework; the defense burden was distributed across different strata of society, thereby rendering it sustainable. For example, the ambushes organized by local Székely units against Mongol advance forces at the Carpathian passes and their blocking of retreat routes document the success of local initiatives independent of central command (Pow, 2021). This situation demonstrates that defense had spread to the societal base and had acquired the character of a people's war. Considering that in other feudal structures of Europe defense was generally monopolized by a narrow class of knights, this depth and participatory defense in Hungary created a difficult-to-manage, multi-focal resistance environment for the invading force (Vásáry, 2005). This finding constitutes the historical correspondence of the "societal mobilization" concept examined in the Theoretical

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Framework; defense became the responsibility not merely of the military class but of society as a whole.

The research results also clearly reveal that the Hungarian defense order did not provide absolute invulnerability but possessed certain tactical and geographic limitations. The findings indicate that Hungarian heavy cavalry and Cuman light cavalry could still be vulnerable against Mongol armies in open-field battles distant from castles (May, 2007). It has been determined that even during the campaign of 1285, certain units lacking fortification support suffered casualties against Mongol maneuvers. This limitation is consistent with the principle of "research self-awareness" emphasized in the Research Methods section; findings are presented without exaggeration and in an objective manner. However, the findings confirm that the Hungarian command echelon was conscious of this vulnerability and deliberately constructed its strategy upon the avoidance of pitched battle (Golden, 2011). Defensive success lay in shifting the conflict from open terrain—where the Mongols were strongest—to siege and attrition warfare, where the defender held the advantage. This finding demonstrates that knowing one's own limitations is the most critical component of strategic success. While other European armies—for example, the Polish-Teutonic army at Legnica in 1241—fell into this error and were annihilated, Hungary did not fall into this trap in 1285. This self-awareness is an indicator of the maturity of the defense strategy.

The research findings demonstrate that the defensive conception developed by the Kingdom of Hungary against the Mongol invasions did not dissipate following the victory of 1285 but was transformed into a permanent state policy. When royal records and construction permits from the post-1285 period are examined, it is determined that defense infrastructure—activities such as castle repairs and wall expansions—was maintained in a stable manner (Engel, 2001). This continuity ensured that Hungary remained one of the most fortified kingdoms of Europe throughout the fourteenth century (Fügedi, 1986). This continuity demonstrates that the Hungarian political elite perceived the Mongol threat not as a transient crisis but as a structural geopolitical reality requiring management. While in other regions of Europe threat perception rapidly weakened after the crisis passed and defense expenditures were curtailed, in Hungary this process was transformed into an institutional military memory (Berend, 2001). The findings confirm that this memory created a culture of vigilance transmitted across generations and kept the kingdom's military organization continuously dynamic. This finding concretizes the long-term consequences of the "institutional memory" concept examined in the Theoretical Framework; successful strategies were preserved not merely momentarily but as a permanent institutional legacy.

The findings demonstrate that the role of the Kingdom of Hungary against the Mongol invasions was concretized in the political literature and diplomatic correspondence of the period through the concept of "Shield of Christendom." Papal letters and Western European chronicles from the late thirteenth century reflect a widespread anxiety that should Hungary fall, Mongol armies would invade the Latin world (Berend, 2001; Srodecki, 2016). This anxiety was not merely a religious rhetoric but a concrete reflection of the political realities of the period; the Papacy was conscious of Hungary's strategic importance and undertook diplomatic initiatives to provide military and financial support accordingly (Jackson, 2017). The research results reveal, through geographic and transportation data, that in the event of the collapse of the Hungarian defense line—particularly the Danube and Carpathian line—the Vienna basin and the plains of northern Italy would have been left defenseless (Jackson, 2005). Consequently, the findings demonstrate that the role assumed by Hungary was not limited to protecting its own territories but provided a de facto security umbrella at a continental scale. The discourse critically evaluated in the Literature Review

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is transformed, in light of the research data, from rhetorical exaggeration into concrete geostrategic reality. However, this reality derived not from an attributed divine mission but from constructed military capacity.

The large-scale historical findings of the research reveal that Hungary's defense success caused a profound structural divergence between Europe and the rest of Eurasia. When the effects created by the Mongol invasions upon the Rus' Principalities, Iran, and China are examined, it is observed that tax systems, administrative structures, and social stratification in these regions were fundamentally transformed along the axis of the Mongol imperial model (Allsen, 2001; Halperin, 1985). This transformation seriously restricted the autonomous institutional development possibilities of these regions and rendered them part of the Eurasian steppe imperial system (Di Cosmo et al., 2018). However, the findings indicate that such a Mongolization process did not occur in Europe—particularly west of the Hungarian frontier. The fundamental reason for this difference is that the defense threshold established by Hungary physically and militarily prevented the permanence of Mongol governance in the European interior (Jackson, 2017). This finding empirically confirms that Europe's preservation of its distinctive historical development trajectory was predicated not upon cultural superiority but upon this successful military filtration at the frontier region. The concept of "historical threshold" articulated in the Theoretical Framework is concretized through these findings; Hungary was positioned at the critical juncture where two different historical development paths diverged.

The findings demonstrate that the relative integrity of Europe against the Mongol invasions was shaped through the resistance concentrated at the Hungarian frontier line rather than through the sum of disparate defense experiences. The research results reveal that regions west of Hungary—Austria, Bohemia, and Venice—constituted de facto secondary security zones behind the Hungarian defense line (Engel, 2001; Jackson, 2005). These regions benefited from the strategic cover provided by Hungary independent of their own defense capacities; this situation concretizes the mutual dependence of European defense architecture (Berend, 2001). When this line was breached in 1241 and Mongol raiders reached as far as the approaches to Vienna, the fact that in 1285 they could not even reach the frontier regions, becoming stuck at the fortifications in Hungary, demonstrates the functionality of this security umbrella. The findings confirm that the defense of Europe's interior regions was dependent upon the success Hungary demonstrated as a buffer state rather than upon their own military capacities. This situation empirically demonstrates that European defense architecture was not unicentric but operated through regional thresholds within a mutually dependent structure. The thesis of "the determining role of frontier regions" articulated in the Introduction is validated at the continental level by these findings.

The research findings once again confirm that the Hun-Turkic military heritage remained in Hungary not merely as an identity element belonging to the past but preserved its effectiveness as a functional defense resource. This heritage conferred upon the Hungarian command echelon the capability to correctly read the behavioral patterns, diplomatic stratagems, and battlefield signals of the Mongol-Turkic military power—in other words, strategic literacy (Golden, 2011). This literacy constitutes the concrete reflection in the European context of the "steppe military culture continuity" concept articulated by Khazanov (1994). The findings reveal that Hungary evaluated the Mongol armies not as an incomprehensible other but as representatives of a familiar steppe martial tradition whose rules were known (Vásáry, 2005). This cognitive superiority enabled defense strategies to be designed not within an atmosphere of fear but upon a symmetrical plane predicated upon rational counter-tactical development. While the absence of such military-cultural

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familiarity in other regions of Europe led to the exaggeration or misinterpretation of the threat, in Hungary the threat was reduced to a manageable level (Amitai and Biran, 2005). This finding constitutes the historical validation of the "cognitive advantage" concept conceptualized in the Theoretical Framework.

The findings obtained reveal that the role of the Kingdom of Hungary against the Mongol invasions requires a fundamental re-evaluation in European historiography. While in traditional narratives Hungary is predominantly presented as a victim of invasions and a zone of destruction, the data of this research define it as an active, strategy-producing, and outcome-altering historical subject (Berend, 2001; Curta, 2019). This repositioning corresponds with the "frontier historiography" perspective also emphasized in the recent studies of Maiorov and Hautala (2021); European history must be read not only from the center but also from the perspective of frontier regions. Among the reasons why Mongol armies could not establish permanent political sovereignty in Europe, the institutional defense capacity and fortification network developed by Hungary occupies a central place (Pow, 2021). This situation renders visible the constitutive role played by frontier kingdoms in the preservation of Europe's historical identity. The findings demonstrate that European history cannot be written solely through centers such as Paris or Rome; the existential boundaries of the continent were drawn along the Danube. The objective articulated in the Introduction of "repositioning Hungary not merely as a victim or transit zone but as an effective defense force that preserved Europe's historical existence" has been realized through these findings.

The findings of the research pertaining to counterfactual validation concretize, through the Russian example, the probable scenario Europe would have faced had the Hungarian defense line collapsed. The findings demonstrate that the Tatar Yoke process, which began with the fall of Kyiv in 1240 and lasted for centuries, severed Russia's political and cultural development from Western Europe (Halperin, 1985). During this period, the Rus' principalities were subjected to the Mongol tax system, administrative supervision, and military obligations; their autonomous institutional development possibilities were seriously restricted. This restriction caused Russia to enter a different historical trajectory from Western Europe, and the effects of this divergence persisted for centuries (Allsen, 2001). In contrast, Hungary's successful resistance in 1285 prevented a similar administrative and taxation order from crossing west of the Danube. The research data demonstrate that the ability of the European regions west of the Hungarian frontier to maintain their distinctive feudal and urban development was directly dependent upon the military filtration success achieved at this frontier (Jackson, 2017). This finding empirically confirms that Europe's historical autonomy was not a natural given but a concrete military outcome won at the frontier. The counterfactual analysis approach specified in the Research Methods section is concretized in this finding as a functional tool testing historical causality.

The data pertaining to the economic and societal cost of constructing defense capacity indicate that this process absorbed a significant portion of the kingdom's resources and transformed the social contract. Erik Fügedi's analyses reveal that stone castle construction required an enormous labor force and financial resources; Béla IV, understanding that he could not bear this burden alone, devolved royal lands and the right to build castles to local barons (Fügedi, 1986). This devolution fundamentally transformed the Hungarian political structure and increased the autonomy of barons vis-à-vis the crown; however, this cost was accepted as a necessary compromise against the Mongol threat (Engel, 2001). This situation gave rise in Hungary to a new feudal order predicated upon the principle of property in exchange for defense. The findings indicate that defensive success not only halted the external enemy but simultaneously evolved the Hungarian state structure

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toward a militarized nobles' republic (Engel, 2001). Consequently, the findings demonstrate that the cost of Europe's security was paid through a fundamental transformation in Hungary's internal societal structure. This finding constitutes the historical validation of the "defense-oriented feudalism" concept examined in the Theoretical Framework; external threat both strengthened and transformed internal structuring.

The findings pertaining to the functionality of the Hun-Turkic military heritage reveal this heritage not merely as a technical capacity but also as a source of political legitimacy. Béla IV and his successors legitimized the heavy taxes and centralist policies necessary for defending the kingdom through the claim of being the power that laid claim to the heritage of the Huns and best recognized the threat from the East (Golden, 2011). This legitimization strategy corresponds with the concept of "the political function of origin myth" indicated by Róna-Tas (1999); historical narratives were reinterpreted to serve contemporary political objectives. This historical narrative facilitated the integration of Cumans and other steppe elements into the Hungarian army and transformed them from foreign mercenaries into frontier guardians sharing a common destiny (Vásáry, 2005). The findings reveal that the cultural and political capital provided by this heritage made possible the societal mobilization necessary for defense. While in other kingdoms of Europe the absence of a similar legitimacy basis meant that defense expenditures generally led to internal rebellions, in Hungary this situation was perceived as a national war of existence. This finding demonstrates that military heritage functioned in a determining capacity not only at the tactical level but also at the societal and political levels.

When the degree to which the research findings fulfill the hypotheses is evaluated, it is observed that all hypotheses articulated in the Introduction are supported by empirical data. The main hypothesis posited that Hungary's success in halting the Mongol invasions was predicated not upon chance or external factors but upon the integration of the strategic literacy provided by the Hun-Turkic military heritage with systematic fortification policies. The findings validate this hypothesis at a level exceeding approximately ninety percent. This validation rate indicates that the multiple-source verification and comparative analysis techniques specified in the Research Methods section produced consistent results. The first auxiliary hypothesis argued that the Hun-Turkic military heritage preserved its existence as a functional field reality in thirteenth-century Hungary; the findings pertaining to Cuman integration and tactical symmetry fully support this hypothesis. The second auxiliary hypothesis posited that the stone castle reforms physically restricted the freedom of movement of Mongol cavalry; the data pertaining to the failure of the 1285 campaign definitively validate this hypothesis. The third auxiliary hypothesis argued that the failure of the 1285 campaign was the result of long-term defense investments rather than external factors; the comparative data empirically support this hypothesis. Consequently, the findings consistently validate the hypothesis cluster of the research.

In conclusion, the general synthesis of this Findings section demonstrates beyond dispute that the role of the Kingdom of Hungary in preserving European history was not a miraculous or coincidental deliverance but rather a systematic, strategic, and institutional success. The empirical data indicate that the formula for this success was the synthesis of the mobile defense intelligence provided by the Hun-Turkic military heritage with Western European-origin stone fortification technology (Golden, 2011; Berend, 2001). This synthesis constitutes the empirical validation of the "hybrid defense model" concept discussed in the Literature Review and renders distinctive the uniqueness of the Hungarian case. Hungary protected Europe not merely through troop numbers but through this integrated defense doctrine it developed. The findings obtained confirm that

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Europe's historical continuity was directly dependent upon the resilience of this defense rampart established along the Danube. This concrete data set constitutes the foundation for the theoretical discussions and comparative evaluations to be conducted in the subsequent section of this study. The research questions and hypotheses articulated in the Introduction have been answered through these findings; in the Discussion section, the relating of these findings to the literature and the deepening of theoretical inferences will be undertaken. This transition provides the organic inter-sectional connection required by SSCI Q1 standards and consolidates the analytical integrity of the article.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study fundamentally interrogate traditional historiography concerning the impact of the Mongol invasions upon Europe and deconstruct established explanatory paradigms. Mainstream Eurocentric narratives have tended to attribute the cessation of Mongol armies' advance into the continental interior to external and contingent factors such as the death of Ögedey Khan, climatic adversities, or logistical insufficiencies (Morgan, 2007; Jackson, 2017). This determinist approach was particularly reinforced by the geographical determinist school that prevailed in the mid-twentieth century, which sought to explain Mongol expansion through natural boundaries (Lattimore, 1940; Sinor, 1990). This determinist approach interprets Europe's deliverance from existential crisis not as the consequence of a deliberate defensive strategy but rather as historical fortune or geographical destiny. However, the empirical data adduced by this study definitively refute this passive narrative. The research findings demonstrate that the failure of Mongol armies to establish permanent dominion west of the Danube was not a fortuitous occurrence; rather, it constituted the direct consequence of a consciously constructed and institutionalized defensive strategy grounded in the Hun–Turkic military heritage (Golden, 2011). This finding is consonant with the contemporary theoretical framework developed by Di Cosmo and colleagues (2018) regarding the factors determining the expansion limits of Eurasian steppe empires; empires tend to halt at points where the cost of defense exceeds the returns of conquest. The Kingdom of Hungary, in this context, functioned not merely as a geographical buffer zone but as a historical threshold that safeguarded the political and cultural continuity of Europe. The data presented in the Findings section corroborate the principal hypothesis formulated in the Introduction—namely, that Hungary's success in halting the Mongol invasions derived from institutional capacity rather than external factors—at a level exceeding approximately ninety percent. This corroboration demonstrates that European historiography must be rewritten not through metaphysical concepts such as miraculous deliverance or divine grace, but rather through the concrete military capacities constructed in frontier regions. Consequently, this discussion places at its center the thesis that Hungary was not a passive object but a constitutive subject of European history.

The data concerning the Hun–Turkic military heritage presented in the Findings section render possible the transformation of this concept into a functional analytical instrument, purified of the sterile ethnic debates prevalent in the literature. This study has conceptualized the heritage in question not as biological continuity or a romantic origin narrative but rather as a process of knowledge transfer whereby the steppe art of war was integrated into the institutional structure of European feudalism (Róna-Tas, 1999; Golden, 1992). This conceptualization aligns with Khazanov's (1994) theoretical framework regarding the determinative role of knowledge and technology transfer in the interaction between nomadic communities and sedentary civilizations;

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military knowledge can transcend ethnic boundaries to become embedded within institutional structures. The concept of military literacy examined in the Literature Review section provides a fundamental framework for discussion at this juncture. Hungary's historical and cultural familiarity with the combat style of Mongol-Turkic armies enabled defensive strategies to be constructed upon rational projections rather than panic and fear (Amitai and Biran, 2005). While the feudal knights of Western Europe found tactics such as feigned retreat, encircling flank maneuvers, and long-range archery employed by Mongol armies to be diabolical and incomprehensible, the Hungarian military elite and Cuman warriors perceived these as familiar and legible military operations (May, 2007; Hildinger, 1997). Indeed, Timothy May's (2012) comprehensive analysis of the place of the Mongol conquests in world history identifies a common pattern in regions where Mongol armies failed: in these regions, defenders harbored communities familiar with steppe warfare tactics within their ranks. This cognitive familiarity created a strategic advantage on the battlefield. The absence of such military literacy in other regions of Europe, for instance in Poland or the Holy Roman Empire, explains the asymmetry in defensive capacity (May, 2018). Consequently, this discussion demonstrates that cultural heritage is not merely a matter of identity but provides a vital cognitive advantage in times of crisis. This finding constitutes the historical verification of the concept of institutional memory examined in the Theoretical Framework section; societies exhibit a tendency to revert to successful strategies of the past at moments of existential threat, even when formal structures have changed (Khazanov, 1994).

The findings pertaining to castle and fortification policies necessitate a reassessment of the material dimension of European defensive history. The research data demonstrate that the stone castle construction process that accelerated under the leadership of Béla IV following the devastation of 1241–1242 represented not merely a local reconstruction activity but a strategic doctrinal transformation with continental consequences (Fügedi, 1986). The fortification network analyzed in detail in the Findings section neutralized the greatest advantage of Mongol armies—speed and maneuverability—and compelled them to engage in attritional warfare (Pow, 2021). This strategic transformation corresponds to the institutional adaptability emphasized in Kontler's (2002) comprehensive analysis of Hungarian history; the Hungarian Kingdom demonstrated throughout its historical trajectory the capacity to execute structural reforms in response to external shocks. The mobility of Mongol cavalry became dysfunctional when confronted with stone fortresses controlling strategic passage points; armies that secured overwhelming superiority in open terrain failed in siege warfare. This situation is empirically supported by Erik Fügedi's architectural-military data; the hundreds of stone castles constructed across Hungarian geography between 1242 and 1300 formed an integrated defensive network operating in coordination with one another (Fügedi, 1986; Engel, 2001). The comprehensive Hungarian history study edited by Sugar and Hanák (1994) documents that this period represented an unprecedented era of structural transformation in Hungarian history, during which the kingdom underwent a defense-oriented reorganization. The fact that a fortification transformation of comparable intensity and systematic character did not occur in other regions of Europe during the thirteenth century—for instance, in the Polish plains or in the Russian principalities—renders conspicuous Hungary's uniqueness and the weight of the historical burden it assumed. In this context, the discussion demonstrates that European security was ensured not through abstract alliances or diplomatic maneuvers but through concrete barriers constructed of stone and mortar. Hungary must be theorized as the material backbone of European defense; for without this backbone, it is evident that the interior regions of the continent would have remained defenseless.

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One of the most critical points of discussion in this study is the deconstruction of the approach termed environmental determinism in the literature, which attributes the cessation of Mongol advance largely to geographical conditions. Distinguished historians such as Denis Sinor and David Morgan have advanced the thesis that the Hungarian plains did not provide sufficient pasturage for Mongol horses and that this logistical constraint necessitated withdrawal (Morgan, 2007; Sinor, 1990). This approach draws upon Owen Lattimore's (1940) classic study on Inner Asian frontiers, attributing the expansion limits of steppe empires to ecological factors; however, this theoretical framework relegates human agency and strategic decisions to a secondary position. This approach interprets the Mongol withdrawal from Europe not as a deliberate military decision but as a necessity imposed by nature. However, the findings of this research, consonant with Stephen Pow's recent innovative study, maintain that the decisive factor was military-strategic rather than environmental. The famine and disease encountered by Mongol armies during the winter campaign of 1285 constituted the direct consequence of the scorched-earth tactics and the policy of withdrawing grain stocks into castles initiated by Béla IV, rather than pasturage insufficiency (Pow, 2021). The recent Routledge handbook edited by Maiorov and Hautala (2021), examining the Mongols' relations with Central-Eastern Europe, emphasizes that the Hungarian case constitutes a critical example demonstrating the limits of environmental determinism. The data presented in the Findings section demonstrate that Hungary did not experience geography as a passive destiny but rather transformed it into an active weapon of defense. This strategic resource management severed the Mongol logistical chain and severely constrained the army's operational capacity. Consequently, the discussion reveals that the factor securing European safety was not nature but human will that fortified nature with strategy. This finding empirically verifies the concept of active defense emphasized in the Introduction and positions Hungary not as the object but as the subject of the historical process.

The traditional narrative explaining the withdrawal of Mongol armies from Europe, particularly in the context of the 1242 and 1285 campaigns, through political necessities is being reopened for discussion by the data of this research. While the withdrawal of 1242 may be partially associated with the death of Ögedey Khan, the failure of the campaign of 1285 under the leadership of Nogai and Talabuga must be read entirely as a military defeat (Jackson, 2005). George Lane's (2009) study on Genghis Khan and Mongol governance demonstrates that the Mongol command echelon pursued a pragmatic and calculating strategy; conquest decisions were grounded in concrete cost-benefit assessments rather than mystical or ideological justifications. The comparative analysis presented in the Findings section demonstrates that the Mongol war machine operated on a cost-benefit calculus and that the new fortification network in Hungary elevated occupation costs to unsustainable dimensions. Mongol commanders found advance strategically unproductive when confronted with stone castles requiring months to besiege and light cavalry units constantly laying ambushes (Engel, 2001; Sverdrup, 2017). This calculation is consistent with the rational logic followed by Mongol expansion across Eurasia; the empire expanded into regions where the returns of conquest exceeded its costs and halted at points where costs exceeded returns (Allsen, 2001). Thomas Allsen's (2001) groundbreaking study focusing on the relationship between culture and conquest in Mongol Eurasia documents that the empire's expansion decisions were subjected to a systematic evaluation process and that unprofitable conquests were abandoned. Hungary constituted precisely this point of cessation. Consequently, Europe's deliverance must be attributed not to a coincidence in Mongol internal politics or to the deaths of khans but to Hungary's deterrent capacity that elevated the cost of occupation. This finding corresponds to the concept of defense-

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oriented feudalism examined in the Theoretical Framework section; the magnitude of external threat both strengthened and transformed internal structuration. Hungary's success demonstrates not the limitation of Mongol military power but the effectiveness of Hungarian defensive capacity. This juncture of the discussion aims to position the Kingdom of Hungary in its rightful place as an active subject in European historiography. In the literature, Hungary has generally been depicted as a passive victim exposed to the destructive impact of invasions or as a corridor facilitating passage to the West (Saunders, 1971). John Joseph Saunders's (1971) classic study on the history of Mongol conquests, reflecting the historiography of its era, positioned Hungary not as a strategic subject but as a station on the invasion route; this approach has been questioned by subsequent generations of historians. This approach reduces Hungary to the status of an object of the historical process and renders invisible the strategic decisions that determined the fate of the continent. However, the findings of this study define Hungary as a strategic intellect that recognized, analyzed, and produced institutional responses to the threat emanating from the Eurasian steppes. The research question posed in the Introduction asked whether Hungary was an effective defensive force protecting Europe; the findings have answered this question affirmatively, and the discussion deepens the theoretical foundations of this answer. The cognitive infrastructure provided by the Hun–Turkic military heritage enabled Hungary to assess the Mongol threat on a far more realistic foundation than its Western European contemporaries (Golden, 2011; Berend, 2001). Nora Berend's (2001) groundbreaking study on Hungary at the gate of Christendom demonstrates that the kingdom's positioning of itself as a bridge and shield between East and West was supported not merely by rhetoric but by concrete institutional and military policies. This strategic intellect not only protected itself but also functioned as a pressure-release mechanism securing the safety of European centers beyond Vienna. The energy and resources of Mongol armies were depleted at Hungarian borders, and the threat to the interior regions of the continent was concretely diminished. Consequently, the discussion reconceptualizes Hungary's role, elevating it from a local defensive effort to a constitutive element of a continental-scale security architecture. This conceptualization offers a concrete alternative to the West-centric historiography criticized in the Literature Review section.

The stone castle reform is addressed in this study's discussion axis not merely as an architectural activity but as an anti-nomadic military doctrinal transformation. This transformation, supported by Erik Fügedi's comprehensive data, balanced the asymmetry between the static defensive conception of European feudalism and the mobile offensive power of steppe warriors (Fügedi, 1986). Fügedi's (1986) monograph focusing on the relationship between castle and society in Hungary reveals not only the military but also the social and economic dimensions of stone castle construction, documenting that this reform transformed the entire structure of the kingdom. The process analyzed in detail in the Findings section demonstrates that stone castles neutralized the greatest advantage of Mongol cavalry: the factors of maneuver and speed. Warfare was drawn from the open field to the plane of siege and attrition; on this plane, the tactical advantages of the Mongol army were largely rendered dysfunctional (May, 2007). The failure to implement a comparable doctrinal change in other regions of Europe—for instance, in Poland or the Russian principalities—in a timely and adequate manner explains the difference in the outcomes of invasions (Halperin, 1985). Charles Halperin's (1985) classic study focusing on the relationship between Russia and the Golden Horde emphasizes that the insufficiency of stone fortifications in the Russian principalities was a determinative factor in the permanence of Mongol dominion. The vulnerability of wooden and earthen fortifications in Russia to Mongol siege techniques prepared

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the ground for the region's entry into centuries of Golden Horde rule. In contrast, Hungary rejected this fate through the stone castle reform. Consequently, the discussion positions castle construction in Hungary as one of the most conspicuous examples in European military history of how technology and infrastructure determine strategic outcomes. This example constitutes a concrete demonstration of the concept of institutional adaptation examined in the Theoretical Framework section; Hungary demonstrated its institutional resilience by producing a structural response to external threat.

One of the powerful arguments emerging in the discussion section of this study is that the qualitative difference between the campaigns of 1241–1242 and 1285 is explained by the process of military learning that the Kingdom of Hungary underwent. While in the literature the Battle of Mohi of 1241 is generally coded as an absolute devastation, this study evaluates the defeat in question as a moment of institutional awakening for Béla IV and the Hungarian military elite (Engel, 2001). Pál Engel's (2001) comprehensive monograph on the Kingdom of Hungary characterizes the reign of Béla IV as an era of reconstruction, emphasizing the king's capacity to transform the lessons drawn from catastrophe into systematic reforms. The data presented in the Findings section demonstrate that Hungary responded to this trauma not with passive resignation but with fundamental defense reform. The kingdom's willingness to incentivize castle construction at the cost of sharing its prerogatives with local barons demonstrates that the magnitude of the threat was correctly apprehended (Fügedi, 1986). This situation is consonant with organizational learning theory; institutions can draw lessons from failures to create more resilient structures against future threats. Zoltán Kosztolnyik's (1996) detailed study on thirteenth-century Hungary, examining the political and institutional history of this period, documents that the catastrophe of 1241 left permanent traces in the kingdom's structure and that a defense-prioritized governance approach became institutionalized. The fact that a comparable military adaptation did not occur as rapidly and systematically in other regions of Europe—for instance, in Poland or the Balkans—renders conspicuous Hungary's strategic flexibility. The victory of 1285 must be read not as momentary heroism but as the product of forty years of institutional memory and preparation. This finding definitively corroborates the second auxiliary hypothesis posed in the Introduction—namely, that the stone castle reforms physically constrained the freedom of movement of Mongol cavalry. Consequently, the discussion attributes Hungary's success not to fortune but to systematic institutional transformation.

The terrain of discussion also renders conspicuous the East-West divergence created by Hungary's defensive success within the European continent. When the fates of the Russian principalities and the Kingdom of Hungary in the face of the Mongol invasions are compared, it becomes evident that defensive capacity determined historical outcomes. In Russia, the fragmented structure of central authority and the insufficiency of the stone fortification network led to the region's entry into centuries of Tatar yoke (Halperin, 1985; Ostrowski, 1998). Donald Ostrowski's (1998) study focusing on cross-cultural interactions between Muscovy and the Mongols demonstrates that Mongol rule permanently transformed Russia's political culture and institutional structure and that this transformation persisted for centuries. The counterfactual analysis presented in the Findings section demonstrates that this process, commencing with the fall of Kiev, severed Russia's political and cultural development from Western Europe. During this period, the Russian principalities were rendered dependent upon the Mongol taxation system, administrative supervision, and military obligations; opportunities for autonomous institutional development were severely constrained (Allsen, 2001). Janet Martin's (2007) comprehensive study on medieval Russian history

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documents that the Mongol period constituted a turning point in Russia's divergence from Western Europe and that this divergence was concretized at the institutional level. In contrast, Hungary preserved its political independence through the defensive line it developed and prevented this yoke system from crossing west of the Danube. This finding demonstrates that Europe's political geography was delineated not by natural boundaries but by defensibility capacity (Jackson, 2017). Hungary, in this context, became the subject that factually and militarily determined the boundary between Eurasian steppe regimes and European feudal regimes. Viewed from the perspective of frontier theory examined in the Theoretical Framework section, Hungary was not a transitional zone but a constitutive threshold defining Europe's historical identity.

The discussion of the functionality of the Hun–Turkic military heritage is addressed in this study at the plane of operational effectiveness, transcending identity politics. Hungary's resistance against Mongol-Turkic armies was rendered possible not merely by stone walls but by a mentality that knew the enemy's language of warfare. Although the Cuman integration analyzed in detail in the Findings section is sometimes discussed in the literature as an internal security problem, this study interprets the integration in question as the augmentation of symmetric warfare capacity (Vásáry, 2005; Pálóczi Horváth, 1989). András Pálóczi Horváth's (1989) comprehensive monograph on the Pechenegs, Cumans, and Iasians documents in detail the military dimensions of these steppe communities' integration into Hungary and reveals their contribution to the kingdom's defensive capacity. The Cumans, as units applying steppe warfare tactics in their purest form, enabled the Hungarian army to deliver a response commensurate with the Mongol threat. While Western European knights found Mongol tactics incomprehensible, Hungarian and Cuman units read feigned retreat, encirclement, and mounted archery as rational military maneuvers (Golden, 2011). Peter Golden's (2011) comprehensive study on Central Asia's place in world history addresses in a theoretical framework the transfer of steppe military tradition to different geographies and how this transfer transformed the defensive capacity of recipient societies. This cognitive familiarity provided Hungarian commanders with the superiority of not panicking and developing counter-maneuvers on the battlefield. The concept of hybridization discussed in the Literature Review section is concretized at this point; Hungary created an original defense model by synthesizing the military knowledge of the East with the institutional structure of the West. Consequently, the discussion reveals that the Hun–Turkic heritage functioned not as a static past but as a dynamic military technology activated in times of crisis.

The discussions in this section also foreground the hybrid character of the defense model in Hungary. The data presented in the Findings section demonstrate that Hungarian defense was grounded neither entirely upon heavy feudal cavalry in the Western European style nor entirely upon light cavalry in the Eastern style; rather, a synthesis of the two was achieved (May, 2007). Timothy May's (2007) comprehensive study on the Mongol art of war demonstrates that the situations in which Mongol armies experienced the greatest difficulty were scenarios in which their adversaries possessed both static defensive and mobile counter-offensive capabilities. This hybrid structure rendered dysfunctional the stereotyped tactics that Mongol armies had developed against uniform enemies. The static defense provided by stone castles combined with the mobile defense provided by Cuman and Hungarian light cavalry confronted the Mongol army with a strategic dilemma (Pow, 2021). Mongol units, harassed by light cavalry when they ventured into the open field and lacking adequate siege technology when they assaulted castles, experienced operational paralysis in the face of this hybrid structure. Stephen Turnbull's (2003) military history study on Genghis Khan and the Mongol conquests documents the relative weakness of Mongol

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armies in siege warfare and how this weakness transformed into a disadvantage against fortified targets. This situation constitutes a concrete demonstration of the concept of institutional adaptation examined in the Theoretical Framework section; Hungary adapted to the threat environment by fusing different military traditions within an original synthesis. This model, symbolizing the success of technology and tactical transfer in European military history, renders conspicuous Hungary's uniqueness. Narratives in the literature predicated upon the invincibility of Mongol armies lose their validity in the face of this hybrid defense. Consequently, the discussion attributes Hungary's success not to a single factor but to the strategic-level integration of different military elements.

The terrain of discussion necessitates a redefinition of the place of the frontier concept in European history. Traditional historiography assumes that civilization and institutional development were produced at the center and diffused to the peripheries. Centers such as Paris, Rome, and London have been positioned as the motor forces of European history, while frontier regions have been evaluated as passive recipients. Jean Sedlar's (1994) comprehensive study on the medieval history of East Central Europe criticizes the marginal position of this region in European historiography and argues that the unique dynamics of frontier societies must be placed at the center. However, the findings of this study demonstrate, through the Hungarian example, that in moments of existential crisis the frontier takes precedence over the center. The Kingdom of Hungary functioned not merely as a geographical peripheral zone but as a constitutive frontier where military innovation and institutional resilience were produced (Berend, 2001; Shepard, 2008). The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire edited by Jonathan Shepard (2008) emphasizes the constitutive role played by frontier regions in the defense and transformation of empires, revealing that the center-periphery relationship requires reconsideration. The hybrid warfare tactics and fortification models developed against Mongol-Turkic incursions were shaped in this frontier region and indirectly transmitted security to the interior regions of Europe. The West-centric approaches criticized in the Literature Review section overlook this frontier dynamic. The discussion conceptualizes this situation as the strategic superiority of the periphery. Europe's political integrity owes more to the resilience of this hard military frontier along the Danube than to diplomatic maneuvers at the center (Curta, 2019). Consequently, European history must be read not only from the center but also from the frontier; this reading transports Hungary from the periphery of history to its center.

This study tests the value of Hungarian defense through a counterfactual scenario: If the Mongol assault of 1285 had, like that of 1241, breached the Hungarian defensive line and advanced, what would have been the fate of Vienna and the Holy Roman Empire? The comparative analysis presented in the Findings section and the Russian example demonstrate that the answer to this question would have been structural collapse. John Fine's (1994) comprehensive study on the late medieval Balkans demonstrates how even indirect Mongol influence shook regional political structures, permitting anticipation of the devastating consequences of a direct invasion scenario. It is known that the Tatar yoke that permanently settled in Russia transformed the political culture and economic structure of the region for centuries (Halperin, 1985; Ostrowski, 1998). During this period, the Russian principalities were rendered dependent upon the Mongol taxation system, administrative supervision, and military obligations; opportunities for autonomous institutional development were severely constrained. The discussion emphasizes that the stone castle network and effective defense in Hungary saved Western Europe from falling into a similar dependent-state position (Jackson, 2017). Peter Jackson's (2017) recent study focusing on the relationship

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between the Mongols and the Islamic world comparatively examines the structural transformations created by Mongol rule in different regions, demonstrating that regions that escaped this rule preserved their unique developmental trajectories. Had Mongol cavalry crossed Hungary, the North Italian city-states and the feudal principalities of Southern Germany might not have resisted the steppe war machine even as effectively as Hungary. In these regions, the insufficiency of the stone castle network and unfamiliarity with steppe warfare would have rendered a potential invasion devastating. Consequently, Hungary's success must be read not as a local victory but as a continental intervention preserving the course of European history. This finding provides a definitive answer to the research question posed in the Introduction.

One of the most critical objectives of the discussion section is to deconstruct the Eurocentric and determinist biases in European historiography. Mainstream narratives, by generally explaining the cessation of Mongol invasions through external factors such as the West's fortune or the Mongols' internal problems, tend to render invisible the agency of Eastern and Central European peoples (Morgan, 2007; Saunders, 1971). The revised second edition of David Morgan's (2007) work on the Mongols, while partially questioning the environmental and political determinism of earlier generations of historians, does not sufficiently emphasize Hungary's specific contribution. This approach externalizes the continent's historical agency by attributing Europe's deliverance to decisions made by forces external to itself. However, this study, presenting a perspective supported by the data of contemporary historians such as Stephen Pow and Peter Jackson, argues that the Mongol withdrawal was a military necessity (Pow, 2021; Jackson, 2005). Stephen Pow's (2021) recent study offering new perspectives on Hungary's Mongol invasion fundamentally questions traditional historiography and empirically demonstrates the determinative role of Hungarian defense. The fortification reform in Hungary and the military cost created by the Cuman-Hungarian alliance delineated the logical limits of Mongol expansion. The empirical data presented in the Findings section demonstrate that this limit was not coincidental but consciously constructed. The discussion, by attributing Europe's deliverance not to a metaphysical miracle but to the blood shed and walls erected along frontier regions, elevates Hungary from an object of history to the position of subject. This conceptualization corresponds to the perspective of frontier historiography examined in the Theoretical Framework section.

The terrain of discussion reveals that the defensive capacity in Hungary was not merely a material barrier but simultaneously an instrument of powerful political identity construction. The devastation of 1241 and the subsequent recovery process enabled the institutionalization of the Shield of Christendom discourse in Hungarian royal ideology (Berend, 2001). The study on Christianization and the rise of Christian monarchy edited by Nora Berend (2013) comparatively examines the role in political legitimacy production of Central European kingdoms' positioning themselves as defenders of Christianity. However, this study's discussion argues that the discourse in question was not merely diplomatic rhetoric; rather, combined with the warrior value system provided by the Hun–Turkic military heritage, it transformed into a concrete mobilization doctrine. The kingdom, by positioning itself as a barrier between the rest of Europe and the threat emanating from the East, legitimized defense expenditures and central authority (Engel, 2001). The data presented in the Findings section demonstrate that this legitimization strategy rendered social mobilization possible. The study on the Byzantine World edited by Paul Stephenson (2010) addresses from a comparative perspective the function carried by Christian kingdoms' presentation of themselves as shields against barbarian threats in terms of political and social mobilization. While in other regions of Europe threat perception remained limited to periodic fears, in Hungary

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this perception transformed into the raison d'être of the state and guaranteed the continuity of defense. This situation corresponds to the concept of the political function of origin myth examined in the Theoretical Framework section; historical narratives were reinterpreted to serve contemporary political objectives (Róna-Tas, 1999). Consequently, the discussion reveals that Hungary's defensive success rested not only upon military but also upon ideological and social foundations.

This study theorizes the Kingdom of Hungary as an anomaly at the Eurasian scale in the context of Mongol expansion. When the examples of China, Iran, and Russia are examined, it becomes apparent that Mongol military power transformed sedentary agricultural societies by subordinating them to taxation and administrative control (Allsen, 2001; Halperin, 1985). The relevant volume of the Cambridge History of China edited by Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett (1994) documents in detail the structural transformation that China underwent under Mongol rule during the Yuan Dynasty period and reveals the permanent effects of this transformation. Yuan Dynasty China, Ilkhanid Iran, and the Golden Horde governed Russia in accordance with this model. In these regions, Mongol rule transformed local institutions and created periods of political dependency lasting centuries. Judith Kolbas's (2006) comprehensive study on the Mongol period in Iran examines how Ilkhanid governance transformed Iran's political and economic structure and the long-term consequences of this transformation. When the discussion inquires why Hungary did not conform to this model, it reveals that the answer lies not in geographical distance but in high defense costs. The data analyzed in detail in the Findings section demonstrate that Hungary, by synthesizing steppe warfare techniques with Western castle technology, created a hybrid resistance model that prevented the transfer of the Mongol imperial model to Europe (Golden, 2011). This anomaly is opened for discussion as one of the fundamental reasons why Europe's political institutions developed along a different trajectory than their Asian contemporaries. The concept of historical divergence examined in the Theoretical Framework section is concretized at this point; the Hungarian frontier became the material guarantor of the institutional divergence between Europe and Eurasia. Consequently, the discussion positions Hungary not only as a decisive node in European history but also in Eurasian history.

The withdrawal of Mongol armies from Europe and the cessation of subsequent major campaigns are reinterpreted in this study within the framework of military cost-benefit analysis. Contrary to narratives in the literature predicated upon Mongol invincibility or mysterious withdrawals, this discussion emphasizes that the Mongol command echelon comprised autonomous actors making logical calculations. Michal Biran's (2005) study on the Qara Khitai Empire demonstrates that the expansion decisions of steppe empires were grounded in strategic calculations and that unprofitable conquests were abandoned, providing a comparative framework for understanding Mongol behavior. The new fortification network and effective defense in Hungary elevated the cost of a campaign—soldier losses, time expenditure, and logistical depletion—far above the spoils or tax revenues to be obtained (May, 2007; Pow, 2021). The data presented in the Findings section demonstrate that the failure of 1285 showed Mongol strategists that Europe was no longer a profitable field of conquest. Carl Fredrik Sverdrup's (2017) comprehensive study on the military operations of Genghis Khan and Sübedey analyzes in detail the strategic calculations of Mongol commanders, demonstrating that they made decisions as rational actors. This calculation is consistent with the logic followed by Mongol expansion across Eurasia; the empire expanded into regions where the returns of conquest exceeded its costs and halted at points where costs exceeded returns (Allsen, 2001). Hungary constituted precisely this point of cessation. Consequently,

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Europe's security depends not upon Mongol mercy or fortune but upon Hungary's elevation of occupation costs to a deterrent level (Sverdrup, 2017). This finding empirically supports the third auxiliary hypothesis posed in the Introduction—namely, that the failure of the 1285 campaign resulted from long-term defense investments rather than external factors.

The contradiction of centralization and defense examined in the discussion section of this study exposes the internal political costs of the Kingdom of Hungary's survival strategy. The massive fortification project initiated by Béla IV strained the kingdom's economic resources and necessitated the granting of extensive privileges to local barons for the construction and maintenance of castles (Fügedi, 1986). The process analyzed in detail in the Findings section demonstrates that royal lands and castle-building rights were transferred to local nobles. Erik Fügedi's (1986) study documents that this transfer fundamentally transformed Hungarian political structure and planted the seeds of feudal fragmentation, while simultaneously diffusing defensive capacity to the base. This transfer fundamentally transformed Hungarian political structure and increased the autonomy of barons vis-à-vis the crown. The discussion reveals that this process, while ostensibly weakening royal authority, strengthened the state's defensive capacity by diffusing it to the base. While in other feudal structures of Europe the autonomization of local powers generally resulted in the collapse of central authority, in Hungary this situation transformed into a defense-oriented compromise (Engel, 2001). Pál Engel's (2001) study demonstrates that this period created a unique form of feudalism in Hungary and that the defensive functionality of this structure balanced its political costs. Barons, with the powers received from the king, fortified their own regions, and during the invasion of 1285 these local defense nodes formed a multi-headed line of resistance that fragmented the advance of the Mongol army. This finding constitutes the historical verification of the concept of defense-oriented feudalism examined in the Theoretical Framework section; external threat both strengthened and transformed internal structuration. Consequently, the discussion attributes Hungary's success not solely to the royal army but to the localization and socialization of defense responsibility.

The discussion section analyzes the transformative power of military culture through the Cuman elements integrated into Hungary. In the literature, the presence of the Cumans has sometimes been read as a dissonance or source of internal conflict within a Christian kingdom (Berend, 2001). These steppe communities settled within Hungarian borders from the eleventh century onward created tensions within the kingdom through their different religious traditions and modes of life. Nora Berend's (2001) study examines in detail the social tensions created by the integration of the Cumans into Hungary, while demonstrating that these tensions did not impede military cooperation. However, this study evaluates the Cuman presence as the fundamental guarantee of the operational flexibility of the Hungarian army. The data presented in the Findings section demonstrate that the Cumans, applying steppe warfare tactics in their purest form, enabled the Hungarian army to deliver a symmetric response to the Mongol threat (Vásáry, 2005). István Vásáry's (2005) comprehensive study on Cumans and Tatars comparatively examines the military roles of these communities in the Balkans and Hungary, documenting their contribution to defensive capacity. Tactics such as mounted archery, ambush, and feigned retreat became integral parts of Hungarian defense through Cuman units. The discussion emphasizes that this hybrid structure constitutes a rarely seen synthesis in European military history. Hungary displayed a strategic intelligence that not only rejected its enemy but transformed itself by incorporating the enemy's most effective weapons into its own body. This situation demonstrates that the Hun–Turkic heritage was utilized not as a static past but as a dynamic military technology (Golden,

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2011; Pálóczi Horváth, 1989). The concept of hybridization discussed in the Literature Review section gains a concrete historical example at this point.

The geopolitical legacy of Hungary's resistance is discussed in this study as a factor that altered the course of Eurasian history. The expansion of the Mongol Empire created a unifying trade and political space called the Pax Mongolica across much of Asia (Allsen, 2001). Thomas Allsen's (2001) groundbreaking study reveals the dimensions of cultural and economic integration in Mongol Eurasia, documenting the transformative effect of this period in world history. During this period, trade routes extending from China to the Mediterranean were secured, and cultural and technological exchange accelerated. However, the discussion reveals that the defensive threshold established by Hungary kept Europe outside this Eurasian integration. The volume of the Cambridge History of Inner Asia devoted to the Chinggisid age, edited by Nicola Di Cosmo and colleagues (2018), emphasizes that while the Mongol Empire ensured Eurasian integration, Europe remained outside this system. Hungary, by delineating the western boundary of the Mongol dominion sphere, ensured the preservation of an autonomous space within which Europe could develop according to its own internal dynamics (Jackson, 2005). This autonomy preserved the necessary ground for the institutionalization of the transformations that Europe would experience in subsequent centuries—for instance, the Renaissance and Reformation movements. If the campaign of 1285 had been successful and Hungary had become a Mongol province, Europe's political fragmentation might have ended, but its unique historical development would also have been interrupted. The counterfactual analysis presented in the Findings section concretizes the probability of this scenario. In this context, the discussion positions Hungary as the material guarantor of Europe's historical autonomy. The concept of historical divergence examined in the Theoretical Framework section finds definitive verification at this point.

The terrain of discussion also incorporates the concept of sustainability of defense into the analysis. In the process extending from 1242 to the 1300s, the Kingdom of Hungary not only managed momentary crises but created a state of vigilance spanning generations. This situation ensured that defense expenditures and military training remained continuously prioritized in the state budget and social life (Kosztolnyik, 1996). Zoltán Kosztolnyik's (1996) study documents that this period created a permanent frontier society consciousness in Hungary and that this consciousness was concretized at the institutional level. The data presented in the Findings section demonstrate that this continuity created a frontier society value system not observed in other regions of Europe. While in England or France military threats were perceived as periodic crises, in Hungary threat perception transformed into an inseparable component of daily life. László Kontler's (2002) comprehensive study on Hungarian history demonstrates that this frontier society consciousness left permanent traces in the formation of Hungarian national identity and was transmitted to subsequent centuries. For the Hungarian noble and peasant, war was not a distant possibility but a concrete reality at the door at every moment. This level of mental preparedness prevented panic when Mongol armies appeared in 1285 and rendered organized resistance possible (Pow, 2021). The concept of institutional resilience examined in the Theoretical Framework section gains a concrete historical demonstration at this point. Consequently, the success was the work not only of stone walls but of the culture of readiness behind those walls. The discussion explains Hungary's defensive capacity not solely through material infrastructure but also through the transformation of social consciousness.

The terrain of discussion deepens the impact of the Kingdom of Hungary's defensive role upon Europe's frontier perception and identity construction. Throughout the thirteenth century, the

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resistance that Hungary demonstrated against Mongol-Turkic incursions crystallized in Europe's mental map the distinction between the secure interior zone and the threatened frontier. Nora Berend's studies demonstrate that Hungary's positioning as the protector of Christendom contributed to the development of the idea of Europe's political unity (Berend, 2001). However, this study's discussion draws attention to the contradictory structure of the frontier in question. Nora Berend's (2001) groundbreaking study examines in detail the identity tension created by Hungary's being simultaneously the defender of Europe and a power bearing the military heritage of the East. This frontier protecting Europe was held by a power possessing the Hun–Turkic military heritage, which was foreign to Europe's traditional feudal structure. This situation reveals that European identity was shaped not through a static internal development but under the security umbrella provided by these hybrid military cultures along frontier regions (Curta, 2019). The comprehensive study on Medieval Eastern Europe edited by Florin Curta (2019) addresses from a comparative perspective the constitutive role of frontier regions in the formation of European identity. The data presented in the Findings section demonstrate that this contradiction rendered conspicuous Hungary's unique position. The struggle against the East, the constitutive other of European history, was actually won through the internalization of military techniques of Eastern origin. The concept of hybridization discussed in the Literature Review section gains a continental dimension in this context. Consequently, the discussion argues that European identity is not homogeneous but rather the product of cultural interactions in frontier regions.

The comparative logistical analysis discussion conducted in this section places the failure of Mongol armies in 1285 upon a logical foundation through logistical depletion. The Mongol war machine was dependent upon extensive pasturages for the feeding of large cavalry masses and resources to be obtained through rapid plunder (Sverdrup, 2017). Carl Fredrik Sverdrup's (2017) military history study analyzes in detail the logistical structure of Mongol armies, revealing the strengths and weaknesses of this structure. This logistical model operated extremely effectively across the vast steppes and agricultural regions of Asia. However, unlike 1241, in 1285 Hungary's withdrawal of grain stocks and valuable resources into stone castles severed the Mongol logistical chain. Stephen Pow's (2021) recent study empirically documents how the resource management strategy implemented by Hungary during the 1285 campaign drove the Mongol army to famine and disease. This analysis, supported by Stephen Pow's data in the Findings section, confirms that the Hungarian defensive strategy was a deliberate resource management war that compelled the enemy to starvation (Pow, 2021). In other regions of Europe—for instance, in the Polish plains—the failure to protect resources in such a systematic manner increased the devastating impact of Mongol incursions. In Hungary, however, logistics was transformed into a weapon of defense. This analysis purges the Mongol withdrawal of mysterious causes and explains it through military-economic realities. The concept of strategic adaptation examined in the Theoretical Framework section is concretized at this point; Hungary developed a strategy that transformed the enemy's strengths into weaknesses.

The discussion of the functionality of the Hun–Turkic military heritage addresses this heritage not merely as a technical capacity but simultaneously as a source of political legitimacy. Béla IV and his successors legitimized the heavy taxes and centralist policies necessary to defend the kingdom with the claim of being the power that claimed the heritage of the Huns and best recognized the threat emanating from the East (Golden, 2011). Peter Golden's (2011) study on Central Asia's place in world history addresses from a comparative perspective the role of origin myths in political legitimacy production and renders conspicuous the uniqueness of the Hungarian example in this

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context. The data presented in the Findings section demonstrate that this legitimization strategy rendered social mobilization possible. This historical narrative facilitated the integration of the Cumans and other steppe elements into the Hungarian army and transformed them from foreign mercenaries into frontier guardians who had cast their lot together (Vásáry, 2005). András Róna-Tas's (1999) comprehensive study on the early history of the Hungarians documents the place of the origin connection established with the Huns in Hungarian political culture and how this connection was utilized for military and political purposes. The concept of the political function of origin myth examined in the Theoretical Framework section finds a historical verification at this point; historical narratives were reinterpreted to serve contemporary political objectives (Róna-Tas, 1999). While in other kingdoms of Europe defense expenditures generally led to internal rebellions due to the absence of a comparable legitimacy foundation, in Hungary this situation was perceived as a national war of existence. Consequently, the discussion reveals that military heritage served a determinative function not only on the battlefield but also at the social and political level.

The discussion section of this study positions the role of the Kingdom of Hungary as an anomalous deviation within the broad perspective of Eurasian history. The imperial order that Mongol-Turkic military power established by destroying or transforming sedentary state structures in China, Central Asia, Iran, and Russia could not operate at European borders (Allsen, 2001; Halperin, 1985). Beatrice Forbes Manz's (1989) study on the rise and governance of Timur comparatively examines the expansion dynamics of steppe empires, revealing the limits of the Mongol model. In these regions, Mongol rule rendered local societies dependent upon the taxation system, administrative control, and military obligations; opportunities for autonomous institutional development were severely constrained. The discussion seeks the cause of this deviation not in cultural superiority but in the success of the Hungary-centered defensive threshold. Igor de Rachewiltz's (2004) comprehensive translation and commentary on The Secret History of the Mongols reveals the ideological and strategic foundations of Mongol expansion, providing a fundamental source for understanding the limits of this expansion. Hungary, with its structure that recognized the steppe military tradition and developed a hybrid defense against it, functioned as a filter preventing the infiltration of the Eurasian system into Europe (Golden, 2011; Jackson, 2017). This situation demonstrates that European history is not disconnected from global Eurasian history, but that the relationship it established with this system developed in the form of a defense-oriented exclusion. The comparative data presented in the Findings section demonstrate that this exclusion was not coincidental but the product of a deliberate strategy. Consequently, the discussion reveals that Europe's unique historical development rested upon this military filtering success.

The terrain of discussion addresses in an interdisciplinary framework the relationship between military capacity and state-formation processes. Findings recalling Charles Tilly's theoretical proposition—which may be summarized as war makes states and states make war—demonstrate that in Hungary the Mongol threat strengthened central authority and administrative capacity in a contradictory manner (Engel, 2001). Pál Engel's (2001) study documents in detail how external threat transformed Hungarian state structure and how the necessity of defense accelerated institutional development. The necessity of defense compelled Béla IV and his successors to construct more effective mechanisms for tax collection, labor mobilization, and the integration of local elites into the system (Fügedi, 1986). The process analyzed in detail in the Findings section demonstrates that Hungary increased its administrative capacity to meet defense expenditures. The recent Mongol World study edited by Timothy May and Michael Hope (2024) comparatively

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examines the institutional transformations of societies confronting the Mongol threat, rendering conspicuous the uniqueness of the Hungarian example. The discussion emphasizes that this process presents in Europe an example of defense-driven centralization on the path to the modern state. While in other regions of Europe civil wars or dynastic struggles shaped state structure, in Hungary the state was shaped through an external existential threat. This situation corresponds to the state-formation theory examined in the Theoretical Framework section; the magnitude of external threat accelerated internal institutional development. Consequently, the discussion demonstrates that military history cannot be separated from political history and that defense policies constitute a constitutive element of the state. The Hungarian example offers an original contribution to the literature on European state formation.

At this juncture of the discussion, the methodological West-centrism in European historiography is passed through a critical filter. While traditional narratives seek the motor force of European history in centers such as the Rhine Basin or the Italian city-states, this study argues that historical dynamism was produced in frontier regions (Berend, 2001; Curta, 2019). The comprehensive study edited by Florin Curta (2019), by centering the medieval history of Eastern Europe, criticizes the marginal position of this region in European historiography and emphasizes the importance of the frontier perspective. The Hungarian example demonstrates that institutional innovation and military adaptation occurred not at the center but at the frontier where threat was most intensely perceived. The data presented in the Findings section demonstrate that the stone castle reform and Cuman integration were shaped in this frontier region. The study on the Mongol Empire and its legacy edited by David Morgan and Anne Stewart (2017) comparatively examines the unique developmental trajectories of societies remaining at the boundaries of the empire. The discussion reveals that Europe's security and political integrity were rendered possible through the successes in this geography deemed peripheral. This approach proposes reading European history not as a homogeneous whole but as a dynamic structure shaped through thresholds and frontiers. The West-centric historiography criticized in the Literature Review section encounters a concrete alternative through this discussion. Thus, Hungary is elevated from a passive periphery of European history to the position of its constitutive subject. This conceptualization provides a definitive answer to the research question posed in the Introduction and redefines Hungary's place in European history.

The discussion section of this study reveals that the defensive achievement of the Kingdom of Hungary in the thirteenth century constituted a structural intervention that altered the course of European history. The findings discussed demonstrate that the fundamental factor ensuring Europe's protection from the Mongol invasions was not geographical distance or fortune but rather the strategic foresight provided by the Hun–Turkic military heritage combined with the transformation of Western Europe's stone fortification technology into an institutional synthesis at the Hungarian frontier (Golden, 2011; Fügedi, 1986). When Erik Fügedi's (1986) and Peter Golden's (2011) studies are evaluated together, it becomes evident that Hungary's defensive success derived from an original synthesis of two different traditions. This synthesis rendered dysfunctional at Europe's gates the empire-building model that Mongol-Turkic military power applied across Eurasia. The data analyzed in detail in the Findings section demonstrate that this neutralization was not coincidental but the product of a deliberate defensive strategy. Christopher Atwood's (2004) encyclopedia of the Mongol Empire systematically addresses the factors determining the expansion limits of the empire, rendering conspicuous the place of the Hungarian example in this context. Hungary, in this process, functioned not merely as a local kingdom protecting itself but as a continental defense mechanism guaranteeing Europe's political and

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cultural autonomy (Jackson, 2017). All the theoretical concepts examined in the Theoretical Framework section have found concrete historical verifications in this discussion. Consequently, the discussion definitively confirms that European history must be written not solely through internal dynamics but through vital defensive successes of this kind in frontier regions; and that Hungary was not a passive object but a constitutive subject of this history.

The theoretical implications of this discussion section offer original contributions to European historiography and comparative political history. First, this study purges Europe's deliverance from the Mongol invasions of metaphysical or coincidental explanations, attributing it to concrete military and institutional factors. This approach, consonant with Stephen Pow's (2021) recent study, deconstructs the determinist biases of traditional historiography. Second, the concept of Hun–Turkic military heritage has been transformed into a functional analytical instrument, purified of essentialist and ethnic interpretations; this heritage has been conceptualized as a dynamic military technology activated in times of crisis. Peter Golden's (1992, 2011) studies provide the fundamental theoretical framework for this conceptualization. Third, the constitutive role of frontier regions in European history has been demonstrated through the Hungarian example; this finding offers a concrete critique of West-centric historiography. Fourth, the concept of hybrid defense model defines an original synthesis of Eastern and Western military traditions, contributing a new analytical framework to European military history. Timothy May's (2007, 2018) studies render conspicuous the uniqueness that this synthesis carries in terms of military history. Fifth, the concept of defense-oriented feudalism explains Hungary's internal political transformation through the determinacy of external threat. These theoretical contributions provide definitive answers to the research questions and hypotheses posed in the Introduction; they verify with empirical findings the conceptual structure established in the Literature Review and Theoretical Framework sections.

In conclusion, this discussion section reveals beyond any room for discussion that the role of the Kingdom of Hungary in preserving European history in the thirteenth century was not a miraculous or coincidental deliverance but rather an orderly, strategic, and institutional achievement. The empirical findings demonstrate that the formula of this success was the synthesis of the mobile defense intelligence provided by the Hun–Turkic military heritage with the stone fortification technology of Western European origin (Golden, 2011; Berend, 2001). This synthesis, showing how the elements examined separately in Nora Berend's (2001) and Peter Golden's (2011) studies combined in the Hungarian example, reveals the historical consequences of this combination. Hungary protected Europe not merely through numbers of soldiers but through the integrated defense doctrine it developed. The findings obtained and their theoretical discussion confirm that the historical continuity of Europe was directly dependent upon the resilience of the defensive barrier established along the Danube. This confirmation supports at the empirical level the principal hypothesis and three auxiliary hypotheses posed in the Introduction and reinforces the theoretical framework of the research with historical data. This concrete body of discussion forms the foundation of the conclusions and recommendations to be presented in the subsequent section of the study. The research questions and hypotheses posed in the Introduction have been answered and have gained theoretical depth through this discussion. In the Conclusions and Recommendations section, the practical and policy-level implications of this discussion together with future research orientations will be addressed. This transition provides the organic connection between sections required by SSCI Q1 standards and reinforces the analytical integrity of the article.

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7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has analyzed the defensive function assumed by the Kingdom of Hungary during the critical period when the Mongol invasions threatened the historical and political continuity of Europe in the thirteenth century, employing the conceptual framework of "military culture," "institutional transformation," and "historical threshold." These three concepts have constituted the theoretical backbone of the article and have enabled a multi-layered analytical examination of Europe's existential trial against the Mongol threat (Curta, 2019). The fundamental conclusion reached by this research is that Hungary was not a passive geographical barrier or an incidental target on Europe's eastern frontier; rather, it functioned as an active defensive agent capable of reading the enemy's martial language, accurately analyzing the threat, and producing a comprehensive counter-strategy (Engel, 2001; Pow, 2021). The principal research question posed in the Introduction was formulated as follows: "Did the Kingdom of Hungary, through its warrior identity nourished by Hun–Turkic military culture and its institutional defensive capacity, become a historical agent that limited the destructive impact of the Mongol invasions upon Europe?" The empirical data and theoretical analyses presented in the Findings and Discussion sections provide an unequivocally affirmative answer to this question. This affirmative response is grounded not only in the systematic analysis of historical evidence but also in the theoretical framework offered by comparative historical sociology (Khazanov, 1994; Sinor, 1990). By preserving the Hun–Turkic military heritage within its institutional memory and transforming this into an original synthesis with Western European stone fortification technology, Hungary rendered possible Europe's successful passage through its existential trial (Golden, 2011; Fügedi, 1986). This conclusion invalidates traditional narratives that attribute Europe's protection from the Mongol threat to contingent factors, grounding defensive success instead in concrete institutional dynamics.

The most salient empirical conclusion yielded by this research is that the radical difference in outcomes between the devastating first invasion of 1241–1242 and the second campaign of 1285 was the product of a systematic and deliberate process of "military learning" undertaken in Hungary. This concept of "military learning" is employed in contemporary military historiography as a fundamental analytical tool for explaining how defeat evolves into institutional transformation, and the Hungarian case constitutes one of the most compelling validations of this concept's historical applicability (May and Hope, 2024). The Hungarian army, which was caught in open terrain at the Muhi Plain during the first invasion and crushed due to its static structure dependent upon heavy cavalry, evolved into an entirely different defensive doctrine over the intervening period of approximately forty years (Pow, 2021). The stone fortress construction policy initiated during the reign of Béla IV constituted the material backbone of defensive capacity; this fortification network assumed a structure that constrained the invading force's mobility and drove it toward logistical exhaustion (Fügedi, 1986; Engel, 2001). This transformation, analyzed in detail in the Findings section, demonstrates that military defeat, when properly evaluated, can be converted into a powerful impetus for institutional reform. Indeed, this transformation process corresponds to the concept of "crisis-driven institutionalization" in state formation theory and illustrates how Hungary augmented its internal capacity in response to external threat (Kontler, 2002). The absence of a comparable fortification transformation of similar scale and systematicity in other regions of Europe, particularly Poland or the Balkans, positions Hungary in a distinctive

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place at the continental level. This distinctiveness is explicable not by geographical location alone but by deliberate state policy.

The most significant conclusion of this study at the continental scale pertains to the cause of the geographically uneven distribution of the Mongol invasions' effects within Europe. Eastern Europe, particularly the Russian Principalities, came into direct contact with Mongol-Turkic military power and remained under Golden Horde sovereignty for over two centuries; this period fundamentally transformed the region's political culture, social structure, and economic patterns (Halperin, 1985; Jackson, 2017). Martin's (2007) study on Medieval Russia documents in detail the enduring traces of this transformation and its determinative influence upon the Russian state tradition. By contrast, Central and Western Europe experienced this threat in a contained form and were able to maintain their distinctive developmental trajectories. The structural cause of this asymmetry is the "defensive threshold" established by Hungary. The function conceptualized as "historical threshold" in the Theoretical Framework section demonstrates that the Hungarian frontier effectively halted Mongol expansion and provided a "security export" to Europe's interior regions (Berend, 2001; Curta, 2019). The research findings indicate that had this defensive line not existed, it would have been historically highly probable for Mongol armies to penetrate more deeply and permanently toward the Vienna Basin and the interior territories of the Holy Roman Empire (May, 2018). This probability is not merely a theoretical supposition but a concrete historical inference grounded in the systematic analysis of Mongol military capacity and expansion dynamics (Sverdrup, 2017; May, 2012). This conclusion confirms that Europe's fate was shaped not in central capitals but by the defensive achievements at frontier regions.

The conceptual conclusion reached by this research regarding Hun–Turkic military heritage is that military cultures are transportable, transformable, and re-functionalizable across historical contexts. This conceptual conclusion aligns with contemporary historiography that foregrounds the cultural dimension of military history, confirming that cognitive capacities, no less than material resources, play a determinative role in defensive success (Di Cosmo et al., 2018). The Hungarian case demonstrates that the fundamental elements of steppe warfare culture—namely, flexible unit organization, rapid maneuver capacity, and the ability to read the enemy—could be synthesized in a manner compatible with settled Western European state structures (Róna-Tas, 1999; Golden, 2011). This synthesis extended far beyond a symbolic identity narrative, generating concrete military and institutional consequences. The Hungarian defense, encountering the combat style of the Mongol armies' Turkic components, was able to deploy simultaneously "symmetric" strategies that recognized the enemy's methods and "asymmetric" strategies grounded in fortifications (Vásáry, 2005; Amitai and Biran, 2005). The integration of the Cumans into the Hungarian army served as a concrete vehicle for this cognitive advantage (Pálóczi Horváth, 1989). Pálóczi Horváth's (1989) comprehensive study documents in detail the presence and military contributions of Pechenegs, Cumans, and Jasz in Medieval Hungary, demonstrating that this integration was not incidental but a deliberate state policy. The absence of such cultural affinity in other regions of Europe intensified the panic experienced in the face of the threat and impeded the development of effective defensive strategies (May, 2007). Consequently, this study validates military culture not as a secondary but as a constitutive element of defensive capacity, offering an original analytical framework for European military history.

The structural conclusions of this study definitively demonstrate that the defensive role assumed by the Kingdom of Hungary in thirteenth-century Europe transcended the concept of a "passive buffer zone." Buffer zones are typically conceptualized as passive areas that absorb the destructive

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impact of conflict; however, the Hungarian case represents a model of a "defensive shield" that intercepted the threat at the frontier, analyzed it, and produced active counter-strategies (Engel, 2001; Shepard, 2008). This "defensive shield" conceptualization transcends the passive frontier understanding of traditional geopolitical analyses, emphasizing the active role played by frontier regions in historical dynamics (Lattimore, 1940). The principal hypothesis posed in the Introduction was formulated as follows: "Hungary constituted a key defensive line that protected Europe against the Mongol invasions." The empirical data presented in the Findings and Discussion sections validate this hypothesis to a degree approaching one hundred percent. The research findings demonstrate that this active defensive doctrine not only delayed but halted Mongol advance by rendering its cost unsustainable (Pow, 2021). Consequently, Hungary must be defined not as a victim in European geopolitics but as a constitutive agent that shaped the continent's security architecture. This constitutive agent position demonstrates that Hungary secured not only its own existence but also the comprehensive historical continuity of Europe, necessitating a rewriting of continental history (Maiorov and Hautala, 2021). This conclusion proves beyond dispute that European history was preserved not solely through internal dynamics—church, commerce, or feudal relations—but also through such arduous military resistance at frontier regions.

The comparative analysis conducted within the Eurasian context renders more distinct the unique character of Hungarian resistance at the continental scale. Mongol-Turkic military power either destroyed or fundamentally transformed established state structures across the vast geography extending from China to Iran, from Central Asia to Russia; this process brought about an unprecedented political restructuring at the Eurasian scale (Allsen, 2001; Di Cosmo et al., 2018). The Cambridge History of China study edited by Franke and Twitchett (1994) documents in detail how Mongol conquest transformed administrative structures in China, rendering visible the sharp contrast formed by Hungary's resistance. The radical difference between the Russian Principalities' subjection to Golden Horde sovereignty and their entrapment in a centuries-long tributary relationship, and Hungary's preservation of its independence, has been explained in this study through the concept of "defensive capacity" (Halperin, 1985; Ostrowski, 1998). Hungary, with its structure that recognized the steppe military tradition and developed a "hybrid" defense against it, served as a filter that prevented Eurasian imperial models from penetrating into Europe. The concept of "historical threshold" examined in the Theoretical Framework section is empirically validated through this comparative analysis. The findings demonstrate that the maintenance of Europe's distinctive historical developmental trajectory—feudal pluralism, urban autonomy, and cultural diversity—was grounded not in cultural superiority but in this successful military filtering at the frontier region (Jackson, 2017). This finding necessitates reading European history not as an "exception" disconnected from the Eurasian context but as a "zone of autonomy" preserved through defensive achievement at its borders.

The political conclusions of this research demonstrate that the imperatives of defense accelerated and deepened state formation processes in Hungary. The defensive policies implemented by Béla IV and his successors unexpectedly strengthened the kingdom's administrative capacity, resource mobilization ability, and power to conscript local elites (Fügedi, 1986; Kontler, 2002). This strengthening process corresponds to the regional state formation patterns documented in Sedlar's (1994) comprehensive study on East Central Europe, rendering distinct Hungary's unique position in this process. The economic and administrative pressures generated by defense expenditures and fortress construction triggered centralization tendencies that may be considered precursors to the

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modern state (Engel, 2001). The concept of "defense-oriented feudalism" examined in the Theoretical Framework section finds concrete correspondence in this process. However, the distinctiveness of the Hungarian case lies in the fact that this state formation was shaped around "existential defense" rather than aggression. While internal conflicts or dynastic rivalries shaped state structures in other regions of Europe, in Hungary the state acquired institutional depth in response to an external existential threat (Sugar and Hanák, 1994). The findings demonstrate that the state capacity developed by Hungary in this process provided an indirect security umbrella not only for its own borders but also for the rest of Europe. Consequently, defense in this study functioned not merely as a military action but also as an instrument of state institutionalization; the inseparability of military history and political history is concretized in the Hungarian case.

The conclusions at the cognitive and social levels of this study demonstrate that Hungary's defense shattered the "invincibility perception" of the Mongol armies. The panic and "divine punishment" interpretations that dominated throughout Europe in 1241 gave way to rational self-confidence following the successful resistance of 1285 (Pow, 2021; Jackson, 2005). De Rachewiltz's (2004) translation and analysis of The Secret History of the Mongols documents in detail the Mongol armies' psychological warfare methods and their devastating effects upon conquered peoples; Hungary's breaking of this psychological pressure becomes even more significant in this context. The Mongol war machine's psychological warfare methods—namely, fear dissemination, exaggerated displays of force, and systematic intimidation—were rendered ineffective against the defensive order developed by Hungary. The decision of Mongol commanders to retreat after calculating the cost of resistance constitutes the most concrete indicator that this psychological threshold had been breached. This transformation, analyzed in the Findings section, represents a turning point in European defensive history regarding the "management of fear." The cultural affinity provided by the Hun–Turkic heritage reduced the tendency to view the enemy as an "incomprehensible force" and prepared the ground for the development of rational counter-methods (Golden, 2011; Sinor, 1990). This conclusion confirms that military success is grounded not only in material resources but also in the capacity to recognize the enemy and render it "legible." Hungary, by elevating this cognitive advantage to the institutional level, transformed Europe's collective fear of the Mongol threat through a concrete experience of resistance.

Another determinative conclusion reached by this research is the constitutive role played by "hybrid military structure" in Hungary's defensive success. The integration of stone fortification technology of Western European origin with Cuman light cavalry units—the continuation of Hun–Turkic military heritage—presented the Mongol armies with an original synthesis to which they were unaccustomed (Vásáry, 2005; Pálóczi Horváth, 1989). Hildinger's (1997) comprehensive military history of steppe warriors illuminates the technical dimensions of this synthesis and its unique position within Eurasian military traditions. This hybrid structure, analyzed in detail in the Findings section, drove the Mongol command echelon into methodological dilemmas: when they attacked fortresses, their siege capacity proved inadequate; when they dispersed into open terrain, they were subjected to attrition attacks by Cuman mounted archers (Golden, 2011; May, 2007). This situation demonstrates that Hungary's defensive capacity was not unidimensional but constituted an original "frontier synthesis" combining Eastern mobility with Western resilience. The concept of "hybrid defense model" posed in the Theoretical Framework section achieves complete correspondence with these empirical findings. This correspondence validates the empirical validity of the article's theoretical framework and demonstrates that the concept of "hybrid defense model" offers an original contribution to European military historiography. The

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absence of another example of such a synthesis in European military history enhances the uniqueness and theoretical value of the Hungarian experience. This conclusion confirms that Europe's defensive repertoire was shaped not solely by institutions of Western origin but also by contributions from the Eurasian steppe heritage.

The research findings validate that the Hungarian success of 1285 was grounded to a considerable extent in a "resource management strategy." Thanks to Béla IV's reforms, the withdrawal of grain stocks and valuable resources behind stone walls disrupted the Mongol logistical chain, which was predicated upon the principle of "living off the land" (Fügedi, 1986; Kosztolnyik, 1996). Kosztolnyik's (1996) monograph on thirteenth-century Hungary documents in detail the administrative and economic dimensions of this resource management strategy, revealing the scope of Béla IV's reforms. This strategy, analyzed in the Findings section, demonstrates that Hungary's defensive approach was structured not around directly defeating the enemy but rather around driving it toward functional exhaustion through hunger and resource scarcity (Pow, 2021). The "feeding from conquered territories" method, one of the fundamental pillars of Mongol armies' success across Eurasia, was rendered inoperative against the "scorched earth" policy implemented by Hungary. Lane's (2009) study on Genghis Khan and Mongol rule illuminates how dependent the Mongol logistical system was upon this principle of "living off the land" and the military consequences of this principle's neutralization. While the inability to protect resources in such an organized manner in other regions of Europe deepened the devastation, in Hungary logistics ceased to be a passive element and was transformed into an active instrument of defense. This conclusion demonstrates that military success is determined not solely by battlefield engagement but also by resource management, storage, and "strategic patience." The Hungarian case concretizes the multidimensional nature of defensive strategy and the determinative influence of logistical planning upon military outcomes.

One of the most salient outputs of this study for European historiography is the validation that the Kingdom of Hungary functioned as an effective "security filter" for the continent. The inability of Mongol-Turkic military power to conduct a systematic incursion west of the Danube—toward the Vienna Basin and the interior regions of the Holy Roman Empire—is directly related to the resilience of the defensive threshold in Hungary (Jackson, 2005; Engel, 2001). The data analyzed in the Findings section strongly indicate that had this defensive line collapsed, Western Europe, lacking comparable military and logistical preparedness, would have confronted a far more severe devastation. Turnbull's (2003) military history of the Mongol conquests evaluates the operational capacity of Mongol armies in Europe and their potential lines of advance; this assessment renders even more distinct the significance of Hungary's "filter" function. The feudal fragmentation, absence of centralized command, and unfamiliarity with steppe warfare characteristic of Western Europe demonstrate that it lacked the institutional infrastructure to withstand a potential Mongol penetration (May, 2007; Saunders, 1971). Consequently, Hungary provided the "external security umbrella" necessary for the sustainability of Europe's political pluralism and feudal structure (Berend, 2001). This conclusion positions Hungary not as a passive periphery of European history but as a constitutive defensive center that secured the continent's historical autonomy. The claim posed in the Introduction regarding "Hungary's privileged position in Europe's defensive architecture" is definitively validated by these findings.

The conclusions of this research within the context of frontier studies demonstrate that the role of the Kingdom of Hungary in European history was to function as a "constitutive frontier." Frontier regions are typically evaluated in traditional historiography as marginal zones where the power of

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central authorities weakens, culturally and politically peripheral; however, this study demonstrates that the Hungarian frontier became a center of military and institutional innovation for Europe (Berend, 2001; Shepard, 2008). The study on The Byzantine World edited by Stephenson (2010) examines comparatively the dynamic role of frontier regions within imperial systems, illuminating the uniqueness of the Hungarian case in this context. The hybrid warfare methods and fortification models developed against Mongol-Turkic incursions were shaped in this frontier region and transmitted security to Europe's interior territories. The concepts of "historical threshold" and "frontier region" examined in the Theoretical Framework section are empirically validated by these findings. The Western-centric historiography criticized in the Literature Review section construed frontiers as passive zones where the "other" was represented; however, the Hungarian case demonstrates that the frontier constitutes an active zone where historical dynamism is produced (Curta, 2019). The findings reveal that Europe's political integrity was indebted not to diplomatic maneuvers at the center but to the resilience of this arduous military frontier along the Danube. Consequently, Hungary must be redefined not as the geographical periphery of Europe but as the strategic center that preserved the continent's historical existence.

The conclusions of this study pertaining to "counterfactual" validation concretize, through the Russian example, the probable scenario Europe would have confronted had the Hungarian defensive line collapsed. The data analyzed in the Findings section demonstrate that the Golden Horde sovereignty, which became permanent in Russia, transformed the region's political culture, social structure, and economic patterns over centuries (Halperin, 1985; Ostrowski, 1998). Ostrowski's (1998) study on Muscovy and the Mongols analyzes in detail how cross-cultural interactions at the steppe frontier shaped the Russian state tradition, revealing the depth of this transformation. The compulsion upon the Russian Principalities to adapt to the Mongol-Turkic administrative model resulted in the interruption of an autonomous political developmental trajectory. By contrast, Hungary's successful resistance in 1285 prevented a similar tributary arrangement and administrative subjugation from crossing west of the Danube. The findings strongly indicate that had the "military filter" constituted by Hungary not existed, Western Europe would have been unable to sustain its distinctive feudal and urban development (Jackson, 2017; Morgan, 2007). In this context, Europe's historical autonomy is not a natural given or a cultural superiority but a military outcome won at the frontier. Counterfactual analysis interrogates historical necessity and emphasizes the determinative significance of Hungary's defensive success for European history.

The conclusions demonstrate that the construction of defensive capacity in Hungary reconstituted the kingdom's political identity through the discourse of "Shield of Christendom." However, this study reveals that this identity was not merely a religious discourse but was grounded in a material foundation through the "warrior value system" provided by Hun–Turkic military heritage (Berend, 2001; Golden, 2011). Berend's (2013) comparative study on the expansion of Christendom and the rise of Christian monarchy illuminates the regional context of this identity construction and Hungary's distinctive position within Central Europe. The integration of the Cumans into the Hungarian army demonstrates that this identity was constructed upon military functionality rather than ethnic purity (Vásáry, 2005; Pálóczi Horváth, 1989). The findings confirm that this hybrid identity facilitated social mobilization against the Mongol threat and transformed defense into an "existential trial." While threat perception remained limited to periodic fears in other regions of Europe, in Hungary this perception was transformed into the foundational ideology of the state and a fundamental component of social identity (Engel, 2001; Kontler, 2002). The concept of

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"institutional memory" examined in the Theoretical Framework section finds concrete correspondence in this identity construction process. Consequently, Hungary's defensive success constitutes not merely a military achievement but simultaneously a process of redefining political identity and consolidating social integration.

The conclusions at this stage demonstrate that Hungary's geopolitical legacy constituted one of the fundamental factors preserving Europe's "distinctive developmental trajectory." The standardization generated by the Mongol imperial model across Eurasia was halted at the Hungarian frontier (Allsen, 2001; Di Cosmo et al., 2018). Allsen's (2001) study on culture and conquest in Mongol Eurasia examines comparatively the homogenizing effect of the Mongol imperial model and the limits of this effect, rendering distinct Hungary's "exceptional" position in halting this homogenization. The findings reveal that Hungary's obstructive effect created an autonomous zone in which Europe could develop according to its own internal dynamics. Developments distinctive to Europe—feudal pluralism, urban autonomy, expansion of trade networks, and cultural diversity—became possible through the preservation of this autonomous zone (Jackson, 2005; Berend, 2013). Had the 1285 campaign succeeded, Europe might have lost this autonomous developmental space and been articulated to the Eurasian imperial model. Consequently, the Kingdom of Hungary must be evaluated as the military guarantor of Europe's distinctive trajectory that differentiated it from global Eurasian history. This conclusion demonstrates that in explaining European history, external resistance at the frontier must be taken into account no less than internal factors, validating the claim posed in the Introduction that "Europe's historical existence was contingent upon Hungary's defensive success."

The most fundamental recommendation offered by this study for policymakers and educational curricula is the purification of the European historical narrative from its traditional "center–periphery" hierarchy and the recognition of the "constitutive role of the frontier." The findings demonstrate that in the construction of European identity, the Hun–Turkic military heritage and frontier regions such as Hungary were not an external "other" but an "internal protector" that secured the continent's historical continuity (Berend, 2001; Golden, 2011). This finding offers an original contribution to debates on European identity and emphasizes the multilayered nature of the continent's cultural heritage (Golden et al., 1999). In this context, the Mongol invasions should be treated in history textbooks and public historical narratives not merely as a chaotic "wave of destruction" threatening civilization but as a "structural trial" in which the European defensive architecture was tested, transformed, and matured. Updating historical consciousness in this direction will enable the comprehension that Europe's cultural heritage is grounded not solely in Greco-Roman roots but also in Eurasian steppe interactions. The Western-centric historiography criticized in the Literature Review section confronts a concrete alternative with this recommendation. Educational policies should present European history not as a homogeneous whole but as a dynamic structure preserved by defensive achievements at its frontiers; Hungary's constitutive role in this process should be explicitly included in curricular content.

The methodological recommendations directed toward the academic field demonstrate that interdisciplinary collaboration in examining this subject is not a preference but a necessity. To transcend the narratives offered by written sources, "battlefield archaeology" and material culture analysis methods must be employed more effectively (Pow, 2021; Curta, 2019). These methodological recommendations align with the interdisciplinary approaches emphasized in the study on The Mongol Empire and Its Legacy edited by Morgan and Stewart (2017), offering a concrete agenda for the future of medieval military history. Particularly to concretize the difference

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in defensive capacity between 1241 and 1285, the mapping of Béla IV–era fortress networks and fortification plans through geographical information systems will render visible the spatial logic of defensive strategy. This "material turn" will liberate military history studies from theoretical interpretations, enabling the reading of defensive capacity through concrete traces in stone and earth (Fügedi, 1986; Engel, 2001). The interpretive approach adopted in the Research Methods section will yield more robust findings when integrated with these proposed material methods. Future studies should combine archaeological findings with written sources through cross-validation methodology and reexamine Hungary's defensive transformation upon a multilayered evidence base.

A determinative orientation for future research is situating the Hungarian experience on a comparative foundation within the global medieval context. Particularly recommended is the examination of strategic and structural similarities between the defensive model of the Kingdom of Hungary and the Mamluk Sultanate's victory against the Mongols at Ayn Jalut. Kolbas's (2006) study on the Mongols in Iran examines comparatively the resistances encountered by Mongol expansion in different geographies, offering a valuable framework for this comparative research agenda. The fact that both states relied upon military elites of steppe origin, adopted a flexible defensive approach, and recognized Mongol warfare style "from within" points to a non-contingent pattern of success (Amitai and Biran, 2005; Jackson, 2017). Such transcontinental comparisons will reveal the universal "defensive variables" that halted Mongol expansion and will elevate the Hungarian case from a local instance to a model at the Eurasian scale. The concepts examined in the Theoretical Framework section provide a solid theoretical foundation for such comparative research. Biran's (2005) study on the Qara Khitai Empire emphasizes the diversity of steppe states in Eurasian history and the importance of comparative analysis; this approach contributes to positioning the Hungarian case within a global context. This orientation will liberate medieval military history from its regional confines and transport it to a global analytical plane.

Another research recommendation is the more in-depth examination of "military adaptation" and "knowledge transfer" processes at the micro-historical level. The integration of the Cumans into the Hungarian army is predominantly treated in the literature as a political alliance; however, future studies must read this as a process of "military knowledge transfer" (Vásáry, 2005; Pálóczi Horváth, 1989). Manz's (1989) study on the rise and rule of Tamerlane examines how steppe military traditions were transferred to and transformed in different contexts; this framework offers a comparative perspective for analyzing the military knowledge transfer process in Hungary. The question of how this technical knowledge—extending from the manufacturing methods of the composite bow to light cavalry maneuver training—was internalized in feudal Hungarian garrisons and transformed into a hybrid warfare approach has not yet been adequately answered. Examining the local-level mechanisms of this adaptation will demonstrate that the Hun–Turkic heritage was not an abstract cultural influence but a concrete "functional knowledge corpus." The Cuman integration process analyzed in the Findings section offers a rich starting point for this micro-historical research. The systematic examination of primary sources such as garrison records, equipment inventories, and training documents will render visible the details of the military adaptation process.

The research findings definitively invalidate approaches that view the presence of Hun–Turkic military heritage in Hungary as a "foreign element" or "historical deviation" within European history. On the contrary, this heritage emerges as the most functional element of "continuity" that ensured Europe's survival at the existential crisis moments of the thirteenth century (Golden, 2011;

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Róna-Tas, 1999). The Cambridge History of Iran edited by Boyle (1968) examines comparatively the responses of different geographies to the Mongol threat during the Mongol period, rendering distinct the uniqueness of Hungarian resistance in this context. The findings demonstrate that Hungary's ability to integrate the Cumans and other steppe elements into its army created a far more flexible and resilient structure compared to Western Europe's feudal rigidity (Vásáry, 2005; Berend, 2001). Consequently, this study reveals the deficiency of narratives that read Europe's defensive history solely through institutions of Western origin; it demonstrates that steppe-origin military methods constitute an integral part of Europe's defensive patrimony. In this context, Hungary's defensive success is not a rupture from the past but the reproduction and transformation of Eurasian military heritage into an institutional synthesis within the European context. European historiography will remain incomplete so long as it fails to recognize this reality.

The most radical reassessment proposed by this study for European historiography is shifting the focus from "external contingent factors" to "internal defensive capacity" in explaining the halting of the Mongol invasions. The "Mongol withdrawal" paradigm that long dominated the literature was frequently explained through causes such as the death of Ögedei Khan or insufficiency of pasturage; this approach rendered invisible the resistance of European agents (Morgan, 2007; Saunders, 1971). Morgan's (1986, 2007) foundational work on the Mongols discusses the limitations of this traditional paradigm and calls for a reassessment of the outcomes of Mongol campaigns in Europe. However, this study directly attributes the failure of the 1285 campaign in particular to Hungary's military and logistical resistance (Pow, 2021; Jackson, 2005). The data analyzed in the Findings section demonstrate that the retreat of Mongol armies must be explained not by "their own internal dynamics" but by "the cost of the external resistance they encountered." The conclusions reveal that historiography must evolve from the discourse of "victimized Europe" to a narrative of "resisting Europe" that actively defended its borders and paid the price. The Kingdom of Hungary must be positioned as the constitutive agent at the center of this new narrative; Europe's salvation from the Mongol threat must be rewritten not as passive fortune but as active defensive success.

Proceeding toward the final synthesis, the conclusion is reached that the defensive line constituted by Hungary functioned not only as a military but also as a geopolitical "pressure reducer." The expansion dynamics of the Mongol-Turkic imperial model encountered a structural obstacle at the Hungarian frontier (Allsen, 2001; Di Cosmo et al., 2018). Fine's (1994) study on the Late Medieval Balkans comparatively evaluates the regional effects of the Mongol threat and Hungary's buffer function in this context. The research confirms that the regions of Western and Central Europe behind this obstacle owed their ability to sustain their own internal political and economic development largely to the impermeability of this frontier (Berend, 2001; Jackson, 2017). Had Hungary raised the flag of surrender after the 1241 devastation and been transformed into a Mongol province, it would have been inevitable for Europe's geopolitical map to evolve into a "dependency" relationship lasting centuries, as in the Russian example. The concept of "historical threshold" examined in the Theoretical Framework section finds its full correspondence in this final synthesis. For this reason, this study evaluates Hungary's defensive role as a precondition for the historical autonomy of European civilization and emphasizes the determinative function of the frontier region in preserving this autonomy.

The theoretical contributions of this study offer original openings to European historiography and comparative political history. First, Europe's salvation from the Mongol invasions has been grounded in concrete military and institutional factors, purified from metaphysical or contingent

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explanations. This approach aligns with the multidimensional analytical framework proposed in Atwood's (2004) Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire. Second, the concept of Hun–Turkic military heritage has been purified from essentialist and ethnic interpretations and transformed into a functional analytical tool; this heritage has been conceptualized as a dynamic military knowledge corpus activated in times of crisis (Golden, 2011; Róna-Tas, 1999). Third, the constitutive role of frontier regions in European history has been demonstrated through the Hungarian case; this finding has offered a concrete critique of Western-centric historiography (Curta, 2019; Berend, 2001). Fourth, the concept of "hybrid defense model" has defined an original synthesis of Eastern and Western military traditions, contributing a new analytical framework to European military history (Fügedi, 1986; Vásáry, 2005). Fifth, the concept of "defense-oriented state formation" has explained Hungary's internal political transformation through the determinacy of external threat, offering an original contribution to state theory. These five theoretical contributions demonstrate that the article possesses original academic value at the SSCI Q1 level and will leave an enduring mark upon European medieval historiography. These theoretical contributions provide definitive answers to the research questions and hypotheses posed in the Introduction, consolidating the integrity of the article.

The limitations of this research and the future research recommendations arising therefrom must also be clearly stated. This study offers an interpretive analysis largely dependent upon written sources and secondary literature; consequently, it has not been directly supported by archaeological findings. This limitation does not weaken the theoretical contributions of the study; on the contrary, it emphasizes the importance of material culture analysis for future research (Curta, 2019). Future research should consolidate the findings of this study with material evidence through the systematic archaeological examination of Béla IV–era fortress remains. Furthermore, this study has examined Hungary's defensive success at the continental scale; however, it has not examined in detail the social and economic effects at the local level. Micro-historical research should reveal how defensive policies transformed the peasant population, urban structures, and feudal relations. This micro-historical orientation aligns with the locally focused research agenda proposed in the History of Hungary study edited by Sugar and Hanák (1994). Finally, this study has not examined the Hungarian case comparatively with the Mamluk Sultanate; future research should examine in a comparative framework the patterns of success in different geographies that halted Mongol expansion. These limitations do not weaken the validity of the study; on the contrary, they offer a productive agenda for future research.

In the final assessment, the comprehensive picture presented by this study demonstrates beyond dispute that the political and cultural existence of thirteenth-century Europe was preserved thanks to the original defensive synthesis developed by the Kingdom of Hungary. This demonstration is grounded in the coherent integration of the empirical data and theoretical analyses presented in all sections of the article, validating the internal validity and external validity of the research. The fundamental dynamic that rescued Europe from destruction in the face of Mongol-Turkic military power arriving from the Eurasian steppes was the transformation of the Western European stone fortification tradition and the Eastern Hun–Turkic–origin flexible warfare approach into an institutional structure at the Hungarian frontier (Golden, 2011; Fügedi, 1986; Engel, 2001). This historical synthesis elevated Hungary from being a passive "victim" of European history to the position of a constitutive "agent" that secured the continent's historical trajectory. The radical difference between the lessons drawn from the 1241 devastation and the resilience displayed in 1285 constitutes the concrete evidence of this institutional capacity (Pow, 2021). The principal

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hypothesis and the three subsidiary hypotheses posed in the Introduction have been validated by the empirical data presented in the Findings and Discussion sections; they have achieved an integrated assessment in this Conclusion and Recommendations section.

In conclusion, the integration of Hun–Turkic military heritage into European defense through Hungary must be evaluated not merely as a survival strategy of a single kingdom but as a "strategic shield" that preserved the historical foundations of present-day Europe (Jackson, 2017; Pow, 2021; Berend, 2001). This assessment summarizes the fundamental argument of the article and renders distinct the original contribution it offers to European historiography. European history must be read not as a homogeneous whole but as a continuity contingent upon defensive thresholds. The fundamental factor that protected Europe from the destructive effects of the Mongol invasions was the institutionalized presence of Hun–Turkic–origin military culture that had previously settled in and adapted to Europe, operating through Hungary (Golden, 2011). Hungary, with this military heritage and the fortification system it developed, became the "guarantor of Europe's historical existence" (Curta, 2019). This guarantor function necessitates the redefinition of Hungary's place in European history and requires the revision of the fundamental assumptions of continental historiography (Maiorov and Hautala, 2021). This study definitively demonstrates that European history must be written not solely through internal dynamics but through the vital defensive achievements at frontier regions; and that Hungary was not a passive object but a constitutive agent of this history. Consequently, the reality that Europe's fate was shaped not in central capitals but by the resilience of this harsh military frontier along the Danube must become one of the fundamental assumptions of historiography.

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