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## **BORDER PROTECTION, BORDER CLOSURES IN THE MIRROR OF HISTORY**

**Abstract:** *In the article I write about the border protection methods used in Europe, especially in the Carpathian Basin and Hungary. The period covers from the Roman Empire to the Turkish occupation. I present the stages of the creation and development of border fences from a historical perspective, from the creation of the “limes” to the appearance of border fortresses. I deal in detail with the significance and development of border fortresses, as they were already directly built facilities with a border protection function. I also present the impact caused by border fortresses. I describe the results achieved by the use of physical possibilities and human resources in terms of the fights of the European states of that time against each other. I also touch on the efforts against the conquests against Europe. The work does not intend to deal with today's advanced technical border fences, nor does it cover the world wars.*

**Keywords:** *Migration, attack, fight, defense, border defense, method, “limes”, “ripa”, “gyepű”, border fortress.*

### **Introduction**

The territory of the Roman Empire had become so large by the 1st century that preventing migration, attacks and fighting became a new task. It became necessary to define a border line or border area that clearly showed that a given power was within it and others were outside it. This is of paramount importance, since a state apparatus could exercise its rights only within its own territory. Those living in the territory of a given state had to know where and how to observe the laws. The article seeks to answer the question of whether

historical models of border protection are still relevant today, or whether new models have emerged.

The old name for the state border is not uniform. "Limes"<sup>10</sup> originally meant a fortified military road that could lead towards enemy territory or along the given border. (Besenyő, 2017.) In modern usage, it means a military road fortified with built-up facilities. The coastal border was called "ora maritima"<sup>11</sup>, the river border was called "ripa"<sup>12</sup>.

In the Roman Empire, the border of the province of Pannonia was entirely aligned with the Danube, so in many contemporary sources the term "Ripa Pannonica" is mentioned. Although the term "limes" is still generally present in scientific common usage, "ripa" is becoming more and more well-known. The name of the border of the "Pannonia Provincia" is therefore "Ripa Pannonica". (Visy, 2011.a) In the later period of the province, the border sections of the "Valeria" and "Pannonia" II. provinces were called "Ripa Sarmatica", which is also substantiated by the fact that beyond the "limes" a "Sarmatian" buffer state, i.e. a vassal territory, was established.

In Europe, there were two "ripa", the Rhine and the Danube. The two rivers were connected by the Upper Germanic-Rhaetian inland "limes". "Pannonia", which existed from the time of the Roman Emperor Augustus until the 5th century, was one of the most important border sections of the empire. There were usually four strong legions and thirty auxiliary troops present on the continent. It should be mentioned that Hungary had a 420 km river border section, so the country was bordered by some river for such a long time. From the end of the 1st century, the entire provincial army was stationed near the border line, so the road or strip of land marked as the "limes" became a narrow, but densely and systematically built-up system, adapting to the terrain. In the present-day territory of Hungary, one could count on two permanent legionary camps and 24-25 auxiliary troops.

### **Territorial acquisitions in ancient Europe**

It is a fact that until the 1st century BC, the Romans were not interested in the land of the Pannonians<sup>13</sup>. They did not have adequate geographical and other knowledge of the

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<sup>10</sup> "Limes" was the Roman name for the empty, uninhabited area that marked the land border of a country.

<sup>11</sup> "Ora maritima" is the Roman name for the maritime border.

<sup>12</sup> "Ripa" is the Roman name for the border, which was also a riverbank.

<sup>13</sup> Pannonia was a province of the Roman Empire. It was bordered to the north and east by the Danube, to the west by the Celtic kingdom and then by a Roman province, and its southern border was about 30–50 kilometers from the Sava River. Its western border was shifted further west over time due to the need to

area, and they also misjudged the direction of the Danube. The area, inhabited by the barbarian Pannonians, was considered an uncivilized, problematic country. From the 1st century AD, they realized that the region was of geostrategic importance, as it provided a land connection between the Balkans and Italy, and the Amber Road also ran here. The Romans approached the area from the south. The center of their expansion was Emona<sup>14</sup>.

The first areas to be occupied in what is now Hungary were the areas west of Lake Balaton. Initially, the area was considered part of the “Illyricum Provincia”, and around 10 AD it was given the name “Illyricum Inferior”. The eastern part of Transdanubia came under Roman rule around 49 AD. Instead of the enlarged “Illyricum Inferior”, it was from then on called “Pannonia Provincia”. Pannonia was actually an external province, therefore it was under the control of the imperial governor, the “legati augusti propraetor”. Its capital was Carnuntum. During the reign of Emperor Claudius, auxiliary camps were built for border protection purposes in Arrabona<sup>15</sup>, Brigetio<sup>16</sup> and Aquincum<sup>17</sup>.

Then, in 582, with the capture of “Sirmium”, (Dimitrijevic, Whitehouse 2024.), that is, the northern gate of the Eastern Roman Empire, by the Avars, the territory of “Pannonia Provincia” came under Avar rule. This loosened the alliance of the Avar Kaganate with the Eastern Roman Empire, Constantinople. In exchange for the surrender of the territory, the Avars provided military support to the empire. (Szőke, 2019.a)

### **Border protection in Pannonia**

In the early period, we cannot yet speak of permanently fixed borders. In this sense, it was not so much the territory that was decisive, but rather who and what alliance they were in. The alliance system itself could often change on a daily basis, because there were cases when Constantinople hired the Avars to act against one of its enemies, the Avars then entered into an alliance with the enemy and jointly attacked another vassal of Constantinople. So the momentary relationship of dependence also determined the rule over a particular territory.

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protect the Amber Road. Its territory consisted of present-day Austria, the area of Slovakia, Slovenia, the western half of Hungary, northern Croatia, northern Serbia and the northern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

<sup>14</sup> Today's name Ljubljana.

<sup>15</sup> Today's name Győr.

<sup>16</sup> Today's name Szőny.

<sup>17</sup> Today's name Buda.

The Avar leaders began to protect their settlements with a wide border strip left uninhabited at the turn of the 7th and 8th centuries. This border strip became the “gyepű”. This strip was built mainly in the west, opposite the Bavarian Principality and the increasingly strong Carolingian Empire behind it, in the Danube Valley<sup>18</sup>, because the old roads provided unhindered access to the Avar settlements. A similar “gyepű” strip was created in the Principality of Carantania and the Lombard Kingdom<sup>19</sup>. In the south and east, the existence of artificial border obstacles is not so clear. The Danubian Bulgarian prince had ramparts built north and south of the Lower Danube (today's Dobruja and Bessarabia) in the 680s against the eastern borders of the Avar settlements, which were still a sufficient distance away at that time. The Bulgarians established the border at the Timok and Iskar rivers at the end of the 8th century. The Carpathians formed the territorial border of the Avar Kaganate in the north.

The “gyepű” border defense system was not only typical of nomads, but also of permanently settled, agricultural peoples. Such was the Sarmatian border defense system<sup>20</sup> built after 322. In addition to keeping neighbors at bay, the “gyepű” system of reinforcement could also cause them to migrate. This already meant a threatening presence, i.e. deterrence or keeping them at bay. (Bartkó 2020.) In parallel, the Khazars used fortifications, earthworks, and ditches suitable for border defense against the nomadic Pechenegs, and the Russians continued the same method against the Kipchaks, and it also appeared among the late Avars and then the conquering Hungarians, who renovated the Avar “gyepű” areas almost without any changes.

In addition to the counties and county governorships of St. Stephen, we can also find mentions of the border “ispánság” and the border “ispán” in the sources. The border ispánság is an administrative unit dependent on the king, under the control of the border span, with the elimination of the county “ispáns”, and its tasks are primarily military<sup>21</sup>. Following the Western European model, they were established along and near the borders of the country during the state organization of the time of St. Stephen, but only in the most endangered parts, to protect and control the national roads and gates. (Kristó, 1994.a)

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<sup>18</sup> Currently Austria.

<sup>19</sup> Currently Muraköz.

<sup>20</sup> Another name is devil's ditch.

<sup>21</sup> It's contemporary name was „marchia, comitatus confinii”.

There is no reliable data on where and for how long the border “ispánság”<sup>22</sup> existed. The descriptions state that the border “ispán” was primarily concerned with border protection and border traffic control. Based on the interpretation of the word “gyepű”, it can be concluded that the meaning “a meadow, uncultivated, uninhabited land, a dividing area” is valid. In this sense, it referred to the “no man’s land” separating the settlement areas of mostly nomadic peoples. In the 9th-10th centuries, the “gyepű” of the Hungarians could have been such uninhabited areas covering several days’ “walking ground”, i.e. tens or a few hundred kilometers, which they could easily penetrate during their adventures, i.e. they protected their settlements with a ring of uncultivated areas. It can be assumed that artificial border protection objects appeared among the Hungarians around the time of the founding of the state or after.

The earliest border barrier, or “opus” built by the Hungarians for border protection purposes, was first created in 1043, when they used this object to block the waters of the Rábca against the attacking Germans. The dam built was called “clausura” and the obstacle was called “obstaculum”. The “gyepű” was a well-proven tool in both the east and the west to keep neighbors and other enemies at a safe distance. This worked as long as there were areas of sufficient size, owned by the king and the neighbors also led a similar lifestyle. Royal land ownership formed the basis for the operation of the “gyepű” strips. The central part of Europe was already inhabited at the time of the conquest, so there were not many truly uninhabited areas, at most they were sparsely populated.

If the functional (administrative and military) institution established for border protection and border traffic control, or in another interpretation for the control of foreign trade, i.e. for the collection of customs duties, the border “ispánság” had the “gyepű” as its area of competence and operation, then the population had to be reckoned with there. In today’s sense, the “gyepű” can no longer be considered a border, because it was not marked and could only be understood as the edge of the area bordering the neighbors, which the given country claimed, thought or claimed as its own. The neighbors also claimed certain areas as their own at the expense of the Hungarians. Settlers from both neighbors lived in these border areas. Moreover, reconnaissance information could only be obtained by penetrating this area.

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<sup>22</sup> The „ispán” a government official supervising an area. „Ispánság” is the name of the area.

The term “several days’ walking distance” refers to the definition of distances, but this range soon decreased to below 80-100 km, which can be covered in 3-4 days on unpaved terrain. Border guards who entered the “gyepű” areas could not return immediately from such a distance, so they had to camp there. Later, these campsites became permanent. In addition to staying longer, it was logical to dig a well there, build a more permanent residence, and perhaps clear out part of the forest. This was the clearing-up management, which also appeared in a specific form in the “gyepű” areas. (Takács, 1980.)

### **Formation of border fortresses**

The concept of a border fortress cannot be exact. Any device that can be used as a fortress is considered a border fortress. Its extent and location changed dynamically, adapting to the current tasks. In Hungarian history, the nearby earthworks with turf also played a role as border fortresses, but also include “Töröcsvár”<sup>23</sup>, “Feketehalom”<sup>24</sup>, “Földvár”<sup>25</sup>, “Höltövény”<sup>26</sup> and “Rozsnyó”<sup>27</sup>, built by the Teutonic Knights against the Cumans. The expansion of the Ottoman Turks in the Balkans and the physical contact with the southern and southeastern borders of the Kingdom of Hungary created the first line of border fortresses. This can be linked to the reign of Sigismund of Luxembourg between 1387 and 1437.

The system was further developed by the Hungarian King Matthias I Hunyadi and the defense of Hungary, Croatia and the Austrian provinces was built on it, and as has been continuously stated since 1456, the defense of Christian Europe as well. The border fortresses were units of the defense system against the Ottoman conquest, first in the southern border zone of the country, and then on the edge of the conquest, forming a more or less continuous defensive line, with central or regional organization and control (chief captaincies, captaincies), forming a system that changed from time to time, that castles. The border fortress system always formed a double line. One on the Hungarian side, one on the Turkish side, and these could often shift depending on the outcome of the campaigns.

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<sup>23</sup> Today’s name Törzburg.

<sup>24</sup> Today’s name Zeiden.

<sup>25</sup> Today’s name Marienburg.

<sup>26</sup> Today’s name Heldsdorf.

<sup>27</sup> Today’s name Rosenau.

The function of the border fortresses was to protect the areas around and behind them, march routes, and strategically important crossing points, to provide shelter for the local population against the invading enemy, to secure supply routes, and to disrupt the enemy using them. Border fortress battles meant offensive and defensive battles against the fortresses that made up the border fortress system, or raids starting from the fortresses, or clashes of occasionally summoned “field armies”. Border fortress lines were established during the reign of King Sigismund, with Szörény-Orsova as the first line of defense. Along the Danube line to Nándorfehérvár, Szabács, and the castles of the Srebrenik Banat. Along the Sava, heading west, then turning south, Banja Luka, Jajce, Tinnin, Klisza, reaching the coast. The second defensive line, which was built a few decades later, ran along the Timisoara – Lugos – Karánsebes – Szerémség – Dubica – Krupa – Otosác – Zengg line.

The banates that had previously been organized around the larger castles were strengthened, such as the Macsói banate, the Szrebrenik banate, and the Jajca banate. Later, new border defense areas and zones were established, such as the Nándorfehérvár banate between 1430 and 1521. From 1521, a long series of attacks began against the southern Hungarian castles. At that time, several key fortifications of the southern defense line fell. The southern border castle system thus collapsed, leaving the country open to a major Turkish attack, which occurred in 1526 and 1541. (Pálffy, 1996.a)

After the Turks settled in Hungary, it became necessary to create a new defense line within the country, which stretched from the Adriatic Sea along the line of Szigetvár-Kanizsa-Győr-Komárom-Érsekújvár-Eger-Szatmár-Nagyárad-Temesvár all the way to the Lower Danube. The defense line consisted of fortifications of various defensive value, knight's castles, fortified noble castles, noble manor houses, fortified churches and monasteries, as well as quickly built palanquins. (Rázsó, 1973.)

During the border castle battles, there was no real strategy to speak of, except for castles of strategic importance. The strategy was based solely on protecting two main directions: Vienna and the hereditary provinces, and through them the mining towns. The border castle system was moved from the border edge to the interior of the country. This meant that geographical locations that had previously only functioned against invasions from the west or east became defensive points. The basic principle in establishing the new border castle line was that there should be strongholds at strategically important points, and that objects that were not part of the line and that the enemy could exploit should be

destroyed. Central measures were taken to destroy completely unusable castles. This was the principle, and the implementation was always determined by how far the Turks had advanced and where they had been stopped. The border castle was usually the administrative center of the given area and a place of refuge for the local population in the event of a Turkish attack.

Hungarian historian Gyula Szekfű estimated the number of our castles at around 140. Taking this calculation into account, it can be stated that there was one castle for every 7-8 kilometer section. The border castle system was also divided in depth. There were first-, second- and third-order castles. The Turks chose the Danube Valley or Graz-Klagenfurt directions for their attacks due to the terrain and road conditions. There were two sensitive areas, Zala County and Rábaköz. If the Turks crossed the Zala, they crossed the first strongest line of defense and their path along the Zala became clear, but they could also set off towards the Rába, from where Vienna was already close.

Tactics also adapted to this, changing from the beginning of the 16th century until the Peace of Karlóca. The initial chivalry, such as personal duels, slowly wore out, and instead, small-scale hussar military movements based on quick movement and surprise were given priority on both sides. However, invasions, raids, and conquest had to be prevented, so several smaller castles could solve this task much better. Small castles played the role of filling gaps. Unexpected raids by the Turks had to be prevented at all costs, and it was the small castles that indicated how long the edge of conquest would last. The line of border castles was not a permanent, unchanging, rigid border. As soon as one castle was lost, new ones took its place. With this flexibility and adaptation, small castles could even become a serious, main force.

#### **Stages of applying border fortifications**

The first phase of the border fortresses lasted from their formation until 1593, the outbreak of the so-called Long Turkish War. The military and political leadership of the medieval Hungarian kingdom in the 14th century did not yet sufficiently recognize the danger that threatened their country with the appearance of Ottoman troops entering European soil. (Moacanin, 1960.)

After the Hungarian King Sigismund of Luxembourg, later Holy Roman Emperor, experienced the directness of the Turkish threat on the battlefield of Nicopolis, and his



country and its western neighbors experienced the constant incursions, there was only one option left to defend Hungary. The foundations of a border defense system had to be laid that could effectively fight the enemy in the long term. With this objective in mind, Sigismund ordered the royal takeover of the border castles on the Danube, their reinforcement, and the construction of new castles between Szörény and Nándorfehérvár.

The so-called land militia was established, with which the ruler created a significant number of light cavalry troops that could be deployed at the edges. Furthermore, Serbian refugees who had become homeless due to the Turkish advance were recruited as military peasants in exchange for various exemptions.

Parallel to the increase in the defense force, the organization of border defense was made more unified. The forces of the counties were sometimes assigned to the command of the "ispan" for a major action, who at the same time received leadership authority over the military of the royal border fortresses in addition to his own soldiers. (Visy, 2011.b)

Ten years later, several castles came under royal jurisdiction, as a result of which a defensive zone was formed. In the Croatian and Slavonian territories, the two "bans"<sup>28</sup> also gained similar military powers, and the favorable border defense opportunities offered by the natural conditions in this area were also improved by strengthening the Sava crossings with wooden fortifications. At the same time, a chain of about twenty border castles under royal management in the Temesköz areas ensured border defense.

The development of the defense system in calmer circumstances was facilitated by the fact that the Ottoman state experienced its worst period during the interregnum period, between 1402 and 1413. In the years between 1440 and 1450, thanks to the campaigns and organizational activities of John Hunyadi, the medieval Hungarian kingdom managed to build a durable system suitable for defense in the entire southern territory of the country.

The Ottoman advance soon crushed the Balkan rival states. By the mid-15th century, Hungary was finally forced back to the border around Jajce. The nearly half-century-long state of peace that began in the mid-1460s, characterized mostly by the clashes of the opposing forces' raiding armies, offered the Hungarian ruler an excellent opportunity to unify and reform the defense system built by his predecessors, i.e. to organize for lasting defense.

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<sup>28</sup> „Ban”: official with territorial authority.

Less militarily active against the Turks, Matthias I. wanted to create a European great power that would successfully take on the Ottoman Empire.

The reorganization of the defense system was implemented in the mid-1470s. The innovations were aimed at creating a more unified defense organization than before, more effectively controlled from the center of the country, divided into as few political-military administrative centers as possible, and at creating a force that could be mobilized more quickly and more uniformly to protect the borders. He united the two basic elements of the defense system, the network and military strength of the border fortresses, and the county forces in the southern parts of the country, from the Adriatic Sea to the eastern range of the Carpathians, under the command of three military leaders. (Kristó 1994.b)

At the end of the 15th century, the medieval Hungarian kingdom was surrounded by a unified defense system, both horizontally and vertically structured. In depth, the border defense consisted of two parallel lines of border castles. In case of danger, the border captains, as military leaders of the more untouched inner counties of their part of the country, had a significant number of troops at their disposal and uniformly controlled both the border castles and the mobile troops. Amid the poor economic, social and political conditions of Jagiellonian Hungary, the defense system was already in a mutilated state before the fall of Nándorfehérvár. Then the loss of the castle started the process of its complete collapse. In 1526, when the last units of the remaining field army and the major castles of the second border line were lost, the southern defense system completely collapsed. The death of Louis II. also resulted in the fall of the medieval Hungarian kingdom. A significant change occurred in the medieval border defense system even before the complete collapse, but its effects were even less noticeable in the 1520s. In the first two decades of the 16th century, King Władysław Jagiellon and King Louis II, as well as the Croatian lords themselves, turned to Emperor Maximilian I. for help several times in the first two decades of the 16th century in order to jointly avert the threat that also threatened the Austrian provinces. Archduke Ferdinand of Austria, due to the threat that threatened the Austrian provinces under his rule, asked his brother-in-law, Emperor Maximilian II, to help him. At Louis' request, he proposed sending several thousand German infantry to help Hungary. The army existed, and the border defenses formed by the border fortresses could no longer be relied upon.

The second phase lasted from 1593 to 1683. The loss of Mohács created a new situation in the fight against the Turks. After that, the unified medieval Hungarian kingdom no longer stood in the way of the conquerors. The Austrian Empire defended itself in the territories of Hungary, which had been divided into three parts and remained under Austrian rule. Hungary's statehood and independence did not cease in the following centuries, and its territory became the scene of the clash between two European great powers, the Ottoman and the Habsburg Empires.

Civil war conditions prevailed in the country and the Croatian-Slavonic territories. Ferdinand commanded a very significant number of foreign, primarily German, troops in both parts of the country. These were supplemented by mercenaries from pro-Habsburg Hungarian and Croatian nobles, as well as county and insurgent units deployed in accordance with the laws of the country. Later, after the fall of Buda, it became clear that the Habsburgs could only defend their Austrian provinces and the empire in one way. Directed from Vienna, the enemy had to be stopped in the territory of Hungary, which had been divided into three parts, i.e. outside the borders of their provinces. The Habsburg military leadership began the formation of the first unit of the new defense system against the Turks in the Croatian border region.

In all this, the Ottoman leadership also helped him, as Suleiman I made fatal mistakes when he retreated to the line of the Lower Danube and the Drava in 1529 and 1532 and did not hold the castles that later stood against him as bastions of the new border defense and only came back into his hands after heavy fighting.

In Hungary, especially in the vicinity of Vienna, immediate measures were needed, as there was already a danger that the Ottomans would advance to the borders of the Austrian provinces.

In the second half of the 1540s, the Royal Commander-in-Chief Niklas Grafzu Salm<sup>29</sup> and the Archbishop-Vicar of Esztergom Pál Várday<sup>30</sup> played a decisive role in laying the foundations of the new defense system. As a result of their work, the process began at the turn of the 1550s, which two decades later led to the construction of a unified defense system stretching from the Adriatic Sea to the Transylvania. By 1556, it finally brought its result. The establishment of defensive zones throughout the country was made difficult by

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<sup>29</sup> Niklas Salm (1459-1530) military leader, famous for capturing Buda in 1527.

<sup>30</sup> Várday Pál (1483-1549) Roman Catholic bishop, episcopal period 1524-1526.

the fact that a significant part of the fortifications that could be included in the new castle system were still in private hands. Sometimes new fortifications were built, but the ruler brought several border castles under his own authority. Smaller guard posts were equipped with guards from larger castles, and castles, chateaux and monasteries that did not fit into the system were destroyed. The castles were equipped with guards and military equipment, and then transformed into fortresses. The construction was carried out in an improvised manner, mostly with the help of palisades made of earth and beams. They also began to build a system of signaling with cannon shots and fires, but the entire defense system did not work with the desired efficiency. In order for the border defense that was emerging and significantly different in each area to merge into a unified whole, a central control body was needed that could control the individual defense zones according to the same concept.

After the Ottomans gradually advanced in the Slavonian territories between the Drava and Sava in the 1540s, they began and completed in a relatively short time the laying of the foundations of the so-called Vende, i.e. Slavonian borderland, in order to protect Styria. (Szőke, 2019.b)

In Hungary, the construction of a new defense zone began most quickly in the areas protecting Vienna and Lower Austria. All this resulted in the organization of a border defense zone, in other words, a border region, similar to the one before Mohács and already partially formed on the Croatian borders, in Hungary.

By the mid-1550s, the construction of a new defense system had begun in every area of royal Hungary. This military machine, enormous even by European standards, was still far from operating under unified central control at that time. Strategy and tactics gradually changed, firearms played an increasingly decisive role, new, modern methods of fortress construction emerged, military science began to develop unusually rapidly, and increasingly large armies began to be used. (Pálffy, 1996.b)

All this required the development of qualitatively new logistical methods, the putting of the economy at the service of wars and, last but not least, the implementation of reforms that would enable the unified, central management and supply of armies and border defense zones. And although the signs of these changes appeared on the Hungarian battlefield in a barely recognizable form until 1556, the new system could not be managed uniformly even within this rudimentary framework without a central command body. All this was

recognized in time in Vienna, which was just becoming an imperial city, when the Court War Council was organized in November 1556.

With the establishment of the Court War Council in 1556, the problem of central military command was finally resolved. The commander-in-chief and his advisors were replaced by a permanent, daily-meeting, and larger expert college, which was given the task of full central control of military administration and military command by Ferdinand I. The development of the organization of the defense zones in the decade up to 1566 was shaped by the plans developed at the meetings of the Austrian and Hungarian orders. As the Ottomans gradually advanced, it became necessary to organize the Croatian-Slavonic border fortresses under a common, specifically appointed captain-in-chief. The Treaty of Adrianople, concluded for eight years in 1568, opened a new era in the Habsburg-Ottoman struggle following the Battle of Mohács.

By the mid-1570s, the royal border defense had developed into a unified system, but the Ottomans themselves had built up their own line of border fortresses, on which they slowly but steadily advanced. With their constant raids, they further expanded their taxing activities in Christian territories and conquered dozens of new villages. When the Treaty of Adrianople with the Turks expired in 1576, the Habsburg border defense had formed a unified, well-developed system. The 123 border fortresses counted at that time were manned by about 22,500 cavalry and infantry soldiers.

As a result, by the end of the quarter-century period of peace, the border fortresses had fallen into a rather dilapidated state. However, in the midst of the "war-like peace years", they still performed their task perfectly. The gradual advance of the Ottomans became more difficult, and their taxing activities were curtailed. The anti-Turkish defense system of the Habsburg Empire was functioning effectively in Hungary and its annexed provinces by 1577.

A significant number of German soldiers, organized into regiments, were stationed in many of Hungary's border fortresses. In addition to the system of border and district headquarters, completely new forms of border defense appeared and strengthened in the 17th century. All this was fundamentally related to the long period of peace and the anti-Turkish policy of the Habsburgs. In the 1640s, the number of border fortresses equipped with royal guards was 88, and the number of border fortress soldiers was 22,000.

The importance of the “hajdú” settlements, which had been increasing since the beginning of the 17th century, increased. The area behind the system of border castles took a much more active part in fulfilling the functions of border protection. The system of guardhouses previously maintained by the monarch was protected by the soldier peasants and “hajdús” led by the border lords and captains-general, and a fortified settlement and guardhouse system was built. This second line of defense complemented the royally maintained border castle system well, since the border and district captaincies were often concentrated in one place, which enabled more effective cooperation between the royal and private landlord troops.

The third phase lasted from 1699 to 1881. As a result of the war of liberation against the Ottomans launched in 1683 and concluded with the Peace of Karlóca in 1699, the border region of the two world empires was pulled back to the line of the Sava, Danube, Tisza and Maros. The further maintenance of the defense system built in Hungary by the Habsburg military leadership in the second half of the 16th century became unnecessary with the end of the occupation. With the exception of Temesköz and Belgrade, which were recaptured in 1718, the border conditions that existed before the Battle of Mohács were restored by the turn of the 18th century. In this situation, the question was whether the new, then anti-Turkish border defense system should be established in the southern areas of Hungary within the framework of the pre-Mohács or 16th-17th centuries, or perhaps in a qualitatively completely new way. Two solutions were developed for the construction of the new border defense.

The Hungarian orders wanted to restore the medieval defense system by reviving the banates and unified border defense headquarters, and by reviving the former authority of the ruler's military deputy, the palatine. At the same time, they wanted to ensure the defense of the border fortresses with a regularly paid, permanent force of 12,000 German and 12,000 Hungarian-South Slavic soldiers under the joint command of German, Hungarian and South Slavic captains. According to their idea, the latter would have been largely drawn from the old border fortress military, although, like the German military, they would have been organized into regiments in accordance with the requirements of the time. They considered the war tax of the reconquered country sufficient to ensure the salaries of the 24,000 soldiers. The idea of the Court War Council differed from the proposals of the orders. The

Viennese military leadership wanted to create border protection zones that were similar to those of the 16th and 17th centuries to some extent, but were nevertheless qualitatively new. They wanted to sharply demarcate these from the civil administration system that was reviving in the southern part of the country, the counties, i.e. they intended to build a separate border guard system. The Hungarian orders were not intended to play any role in the management of the border guard districts, which were divided into regimental districts in accordance with the requirements of modern warfare, as they wanted to solve their unified central management exclusively from Vienna.

This allowed them to simply abolish the previous division of the defense system into district and border chief captaincies and develop unified command powers. Contrary to the Palatine plan, the military to ensure border protection was not intended to be established from the former Hungarian border castles. On the one hand, they themselves were reluctant to leave their former border castles, around which they increasingly cultivated land and vineyards or engaged in animal husbandry in the 17th century, and on the other hand, their dismissed and vagrant members were recruited into Hungarian imperial regiments from the 1670s-1680s. Thanks to their special light cavalry fighting style, they were in great need on the French theater of the empire. Thus, the new military of the border regions consisted of the German regiments serving in the border fortresses, as well as the Serbian, Croatian and Vlach population who had fled from Ottoman territories and settled in the southern regions, and were then granted land with privileges in return for their military service.

The Hungarian orders and the War Council had only one common element: the reconquered Hungary had to financially contribute to the provision of the border guard districts that were to be built on its southern borders. The foundations of the new border protection system were laid in the first decade of the 18th century based on the concept of the Court War Council. From the Adriatic Sea to the Transylvanian territories, the border guard districts of Károlyi, Bán, Varaşd, Sava, Danube, Tisza and Maros were organized, which were later divided into clearly distinct regimental districts. While the protection of the larger border guard posts and border fortresses was ensured by the permanent German regiments, the military peasant border guards who were given land and who were privileged served in the guardhouses located between them. The central management of the new defense system was completely taken over by the Court War Council in Vienna. The Hungarian orders were completely excluded from the administration of the new system

established on the southern border of Hungary. The Viennese military leadership solved several problems by establishing border guard districts. In the 16th and 17th centuries, it finally decided the struggle with the Hungarian orders for the central and local administration of military affairs and border protection in its own favor. By settling the South Slavic population that had fled from the Ottoman territories and involving them in border protection, it eliminated the foci of social tension. In the meantime, it built a new defense system that effectively ensured the protection of Hungary and the Habsburg Empire against Ottoman troops until the establishment of nation-states in the 19th century.

### **Comparison of systems**

Comparison is a difficult task. It can be said that each border protection system met the conditions of the current era. Border protection is an activity that requires the cooperation of three levels. The top level is control, the middle level is execution, and the bottom level is support. The comparison is made in terms of efficiency, durability, and mobility. It is important that a state border is always static, so the examination of mobility can be carried out from the perspective of human resources. The “limes”, or “ripa”, as an independent unit, depended on geographical conditions. When it was the border of a state, natural features were exploited. A mountain range, a river, or in the case of “ripa”, a waterfront marked the border. Geographical formations could be protected, but a permanent military force was required. For example, the Roman legions performed their tasks as independent units, built roads, had their own leaders and executive staff. Support was provided by the people living there, either through cooperation or coercion. The “gyepű” was already a border strip, which also depended on geographical conditions, but it did not necessarily have to be a mountain range or a river. In fact, it was a land area with length and width, where there were residents who, in exchange for living there, performed border protection and military tasks. The executive and support units were on site. Control was centralized, and the head of state of the given area issued the orders. The border fortress system became an artificially created defense device. Here too, there was no longer a relationship of dependence on the geographical location. Its location was determined by the current political or territorial occupation situation. The border fortresses were located near the border line, had permanent military personnel. They could also be used for border protection and other combat operations. The executive and support units were on site, and control was centralized, and the head of state of the given area issued the orders.



	„Limes”/”Ripa”	„Gyepű”	Fortress
<b>Efficiency</b>	<b>medium</b>	<b>weak</b>	<b>best</b>
<b>Mobility</b>	<b>weak</b>	<b>best</b>	<b>medium</b>
<b>Durability</b>	<b>best</b>	<b>medium</b>	<b>weak</b>

In terms of durability, the “limes”/”ripa” can be mentioned in the first place, since here the natural geographical obstacles provide the first line of defense, which can be supplemented with the formations participating in the defense. Its effectiveness is medium, since it only supplements the combat actions at the location of the given formation, and does not facilitate the retreat from there or the attack launched from it. Its mobility is the weakest, since the geographical obstacles must be overcome by the soldiers themselves.

In terms of mobility, the “gyepű” is the best, as it is an area with vertical and horizontal extension based on personal decision-making, and can be designated anywhere in the required size. Its durability can be said to be medium, since a given area of land is constantly there, if residential buildings are destroyed or the land is burned, it can be renewed/renewable in a short time. In terms of efficiency, it is the weakest, since it requires permanent personnel living there, and serious reconnaissance work is required so that the people who have tied their lives and work there can prepare for battle, or help sent from elsewhere can arrive. These areas were often not inhabited by trained soldiers, but by farmers who had to fight if necessary.

In terms of efficiency, the border fortress system can be put in first place, since they had a permanent, trained, armed staff. The castles were usually located on high ground, so reconnaissance was not necessary, and the enemy could be detected from a considerable distance. If they were located within sight of each other, they could also communicate with signals. From the border castle, they could quickly set off on a raid or fight. Since it was a man-made building or structure (such as a palisade), its durability was the weakest after an attack. If the castle was lost, its replacement required a longer time and greater financial resources.

## Conclusions

In the conditions of the time, border guarding and border defense were actually territorial defense. Already at the end of the 15th century, it became clear that the Western

method of warfare was not effective against the Turks. Therefore, the Hungarian method of warfare had to be made suitable against the Turks, this was the older light cavalry and light infantry method of warfare. From this developed the hussar<sup>31</sup> army and the army of the “hajdús”<sup>32</sup>. The range of a border fortress was determined by the distance that the cavalry attacking from the fortress could cover, so that they had to return. This was also accompanied by the raid carried out by raiding. For the border fortress soldiers, enlisting as soldiers was a kind of livelihood opportunity, although there was no guarantee of survival. (Vízi, 1982.) Overall, it can be said that border protection and territorial defense have been an existing task for 1-2 thousand years, which appears in every state apparatus. (Teke, 2007.) Methods and technical means are constantly developing. (Majer, 2025.) Border protection can only be implemented effectively if there is an organization available that can respond appropriately to challenges and surpasses the threatening forces in terms of numbers and technical means. (Vájlók, Vedó, 2023.)

Based on what is described in the article, it can be stated that the historical models of border protection are still relevant today, since the border of a country today also means that the laws of the current state are valid within that border, and that the line marks the border within which the sovereign state operates. The national border is now a specifically definable line that is fixed. Its length is the entire length of the country's border. It is equipped with new protection tools discovered during technological development, and is provided with human resources using the tools, who exclusively perform border protection tasks. A border protection structure is successful if it can respond to challenges and influence illegal migration, (Orrú, 2025.) and is able to effectively protect the external border of a country, or for example, the European Union.

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<sup>31</sup> „Hussar” is a Hungarian light cavalry soldier.

<sup>32</sup> „Hajdú” is a Hungarian soldier during the Turkish occupation.

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