

Eszterházy Károly Catholic University

Doctoral School Of History

Tímea Sáfrány

„I set my sights on a career in parliamentary politics”

The political career of Gábor Klauzál

Thesis of doctoral (PhD) dissertation

Eger

2026

I. Topic and objectives of the dissertation

In this dissertation, I have undertaken to present the political career of Gábor Klauzál. In addition, given the available sources, my work aims to explore aspects of his private life. A significant part of Klauzál's life and political career was spent in the National Assembly, from the Diet to the civil parliaments, and the experiences and human relationships he gained there. Among his friends and personal relationships, Ferenc Deák was the most influential. His contemporaries and later historians mostly regarded him as Deák's friend and comrade-in-arms. The dissertation sheds new light on their relationship and places Klauzál among the prominent figures of the reform era who consistently fought for reforms, had political ambitions, and possessed outstanding abilities.

Gábor Klauzál made the statement quoted in the title of this dissertation during the most crucial session of his political career, on August 16, 1843, at a district-session of the counties, while discussing a proposal for a criminal code: „I set my sights on a career in parliamentary politics.” At the end of his life, speaking to his constituents

in Szeged before the parliamentary elections on October 29, 1865, he said that the greatest reward for a patriot is the trust that gives him a mandate to represent. Both his contemporaries and later major historical summaries, as well as professional works on the Diet, mention Klauzál among those who attracted attention among the newcomers to the Diet of 1832–36. Even then, he was already considered one of the prominent members of the „stable reform opposition.” He subsequently participated in two more reform-era diets, those of 1839–40 and 1843–44. Then he became minister of agriculture, industry, and trade in the first representative national assembly and the first responsible Hungarian government. In the twilight of his life, he took part in the national assemblies of 1861 and 1865, but did not live to see the Compromise.

Klauzál's biographies and short summaries of his life focus heavily on his work as a county deputy and minister, providing a general overview. In contrast, his activities in Csongrád County and his public life there remain almost entirely unknown to historians. Apart from encyclopedia entries and data archives, only a few papers have been written about his life, nearly all of which refer

to him as a friend of Deák. These do not deal in detail with his early career in the county, mostly mentioning only his positions as honorary deputy notary and judge of the county court, and later as salaried judge of the county court. They then move on to his role in the Diet. The memorial speeches and eulogies written after his death do not describe this phase of his career in detail, not even those written by the people of Csongrád County. The reason for this may be that they themselves felt that it was not his activities in the county but his activities in the Diet that were truly significant.

While his work in the Diet is easier to learn about from the minutes, the press of the time, the statements of his contemporaries, and the reports of the secret police, his career in county public life is less well documented, thus posing a much greater challenge for researchers. It is difficult for the author of Klauzál's biography to break away from the assessments of his contemporaries and the literature based on them, as well as from comparisons with Deák, and it may not even be possible to go beyond them. An essential objective of the thesis was to explore Klauzál's activities in the Diet and county life, to highlight

his political values and motivations, his independent initiatives, and his own undertakings, in other words, to individualise him within the broad camp of reformist politicians.

Another essential objective of the research was to explore and present the public and political conditions in Csongrád County during the reform era, as well as Klauzál's activities in the county and in the Diet, without which it would be difficult to interpret his political career. Thanks to recent research, we have an ever-expanding knowledge of public life in the county during the late feudal era. Through my archival research, I have sought to reconstruct the balance of power and the aspirations of political groups in the county, because only by doing so can we understand the political opportunities open to Klauzál from the mid-1820s to the mid-1840s.

II. Sources and methods used in the dissertation

The available sources, or lack thereof, fundamentally determine how we can reconstruct a person's life and

career. In the absence of sufficient personal records, it is impossible to write a biography, let alone a psychobiography, of Klauzál. The surviving sources provide ample material for researching his political roles and activities, but very little is available about his personality and private life. Therefore, it is not possible to fully reconstruct his personality and character traits; from the dual perspective of biography, his career takes precedence over his character, shifting the balance between the two. In Klauzál's case, I was able to write a political career profile, as the sources also provide insight into these aspects of his life. At the same time, it is not an easy task to uncover the motives behind a politician's speeches and actions, as we can never be entirely sure what intentions lie behind what they say or write. A significant portion of the sources relating to Klauzál are connected to the Diets, and researchers today have access to official diaries, minutes, various handwritten reports, the diaries and correspondence of Diet participants, secret police reports, as well as ambassadorial reports and instructions. However, to get the whole picture, we need to look beyond a much wider range of sources. Of course, the sources are

disproportionately distributed, with far more available on his activities in the Diet than on those in the counties. For this reason, the latter cannot be described in as much detail as the national assemblies.

To sketch Klauzál's career, extensive archival research was necessary, as I sought to review all records that could contribute to a structured overview. For the genealogy of the Klauzál family, I reviewed the relevant section of Zoltán Daróczy's genealogical collection in the Ráday Archives of the Reformed Church District of Dunamellék. For the family history, I also consulted the registers of military church organizations in the Military History Archives. I researched Klauzál's studies in the Central Archives of the Hungarian Province of the Piarist Order. Then I researched his legal studies in Section O of the Central Archives of the National Archives of Hungary (NAH).

The primary sources for Klauzál's activities in Csongrád are the minutes and documents of the county assembly, which can be supplemented by records from the localities under the county's jurisdiction, such as Szentes and Hódmezővásárhely. The former is located at the

Szentes branch of the NAH Csongrád-Csanád County Archives, while the latter is located at the Hódmezővásárhely branch. Related to these are the records of the Szeged City Assembly at the Szeged County Center of the County Archives. The records of the deputy lord lieutenant are negligible. In contrast, the official records of the lords lieutenant, administrators, Prince Antal Grassalkovich, Gábor Keglevich, Count György Károlyi, and Lajos can be found in Section P of the NAH Central Archives and in family archives. I have not seen any such material on other county officials, Lőrinc Orczy, János Tajnay, and Gábor Földvári. In contrast, the official papers of József Bene are available in the Reformed Church Collection in Hódmezővásárhely. The legacy of Ferenc Kovács, which also contains information about Klauzál's life, is also stored there. County or city officials did not leave behind any personal records containing information about Klauzál's life. In many cases, it was difficult to find relevant documents because they had disappeared over the years. For example, Mihály Kaszap's legacy, which included letters written to Klauzál and Ferenc Kovács about the 1843–44 diet, is no longer

available. There were also records in the Szentes archives that archivist László Barta had read and used, but I was unable to access them.

To gain a better understanding of public and political life in the county, it became necessary to search for additional sources. For this reason, I also reviewed the correspondence (P 398) of the most prominent landowners in the county, the members of the Károlyi family, which is preserved in Section P of the NAH Central Archives. First, however, I needed to know which estate employees and county officials whose letters in the collection were worth reading. Very few of Klauzál's letters have survived, and those that have were addressed to his fellow politicians. Similarly, there are a few letters written to him; Klauzál was presumably not a prolific correspondent. At the same time, correspondence from several of his acquaintances has survived, so I assumed it might also contain information about him. Therefore, I reviewed the published correspondence of Ferenc Deák, Count István Széchenyi, Count Lajos Batthyány, and Lajos Kossuth. I also considered it necessary to review the correspondence and letter copies of Miklós Wesselényi, which are

currently available on microfilm and in digital form at the NAH Central Archives. This research yielded unexpected results, as Wesselényi's correspondence with Antal Somogyi, István Bezerédj, Ferenc Deák, Gedeon Ráday, and Lajos Kossuth contained a wealth of important information about Klauzál. In addition to the archives, I also searched for Klauzál's letters in the Manuscript Collection of the National Széchényi Library.

I also researched Klauzál's interests and leases in Vas County in the NAH Vas County Archives, as well as in the documents of Kázmér and Gusztáv Batthyány in Section P of the NAH Central Archives. In connection with Klauzál's 1828 mission to Esztergom, I reviewed the materials from the county assembly in the NAH Komárom-Esztergom County Archives. I researched his ministerial activities in the relevant sections of the Ministry Archives (H), which are currently available on microfilm and in digital copies. At the same time, press publications became increasingly important. I myself encountered the value of these sources and tried to make use of them. The press of the 1940s, especially the *Pesti Hírlap*, which had a well-organized network of reporters,

also provided valuable information about county public life. However, I was also able to use the reports and articles of others, even pro-government newspapers, and the press became my most important source of information about the years of absolutism.

The lack of direct sources posed a serious problem during my research, so I reviewed as much material as possible to find indirect evidence on Klauzál's career.

III. Results of the dissertation

Evaluating a life and political career is no easy task, as the image of the person under examination is formed chapter by chapter, and both the author and the reader would like to see it as a whole at the end.

Gábor Klauzál's brothers mostly pursued careers that were popular at the time: Imre and Gábor studied law, József graduated from a military academy, while Miklós began studying medicine. After graduating from law school, Gábor presumably became an honorary judge of the county court through the intercession of his uncle, Imre Babarczy, who was then the deputy lord lieutenant of

Csongrád County. One of the dissertation's essential results is that it provides summaries not only of Gábor Klauzál but also of his brothers, especially Imre's life and work. Gábor Klauzál's career start in the county administration was typical. Still, he differed from his fellow officials in that he was connected to the county only through his mother, and his family did not own any property there, unless his mother had landholdings. His family connections to Csongrád County were limited to his maternal relatives, which is perhaps why he married Mária Prezetska, the daughter of a wealthy Szeged pharmacist. His uncle certainly supported him at the beginning of his career, but he had little influence on his later career.

Klauzál's career start was not unusual for the time, as after holding an honorary position, he was appointed to a salaried position as a judge of the county court, from which he never moved on. His duties and assignments were routine, but in the course of performing them, he learned about the state of the county and the social conditions of the time. Examining his role in local public life was made difficult by the fact that the archontology of the county's officials had not yet been compiled. I made up

for this myself to gain a more accurate picture of Klauzál's knowledge and position within the county's power structures. His candidacy for county deputy in 1826 and for deputy lord lieutenant in 1829 was prestigious, but he had no real chance of winning either position at the time. He was a more serious contender in the 1830 county deputy elections, but József Bene still defeated him. In performing his duties as a judge of the county court, he became familiar with other jurisdictions beyond his own county. He visited Esztergom in connection with the 1828 national census, and a year later, he gained insight into conditions in Croatia by participating in the census there. During the cholera epidemic, he also became familiar with the public health conditions of the time and gained extensive new experience while commenting on the committee's regular work. All of this provided him with a solid foundation to represent his county at the 1832 Diet.

During his first appearance in the Diet, he became close friends with Ferenc Deák, a relationship that remained significant throughout his life. His contemporaries paid special attention to him among the new envoys who arrived at the Diet. Already at his first

Diet in Pozsony, he stood out among his fellow envoys from Csongrád with his activity, which he maintained in later years. During the 1835 election, he was confirmed in his position as judge of the county court, even in his absence, although he failed to win the deputy lord lieutenant position. Between the two Diets, he was mainly occupied with the issue of perpetual tenure in Szentes. Klauzál retained his position after the restoration of 1838, despite Count György Károlyi's attempts to influence the election. Károlyi was appointed administrator the following year, but his inauguration and the election of the county deputies were far from conflict-free. I was able to reconstruct most of the events of that time from the Missiles material in the Károlyi archives, which I consider an essential result of my dissertation.

During the 1839–40 Diet, Klauzál worked excellently with Deák and became a stable member of the opposition. At the end of the Diet, he was elected to the committee tasked with drafting the criminal code, which brought together prominent members of the liberal and conservative political parties. Criminal law issues further strengthened his professional expertise and his

receptiveness to reforms. Before starting this work, in 1841, he ended his long tenure as a salaried judge of the county court and resigned from his position, but he did not withdraw from public life in the county.

During the most critical period of his career, Klauzál had to stand his ground without his constant „comrade-in-arms”, Deák, and of course, his performance was measured accordingly. He was only able to fulfill the tasks assigned to him with varying degrees of success. In addition to examining the events of the Diet, I consider it particularly important to publish the opinions expressed in private correspondence, as they provide valuable insight into how his contemporaries viewed his role in the Diet.

In 1845, in line with the government's objectives, changes were also made in Csongrád County. Klauzál's former colleague, József Bene, became the administrator, who, in cooperation with the Károlyis and Klauzál's cousin, Antal Babarczy, carried out a conservative turnaround in the 1846 elections. The records of József Bene, administrator, which I found in the Reformed Collection in Hódmezővásárhely, greatly contributed to the reconstruction of these events. The official

correspondence sheds light on what the introduction of the administrative system meant for the county. In 1845, Klauzál still frequently attended county assemblies, where he argued with his cousin, the leader of the conservatives. He did not participate in the 1846 elections or the subsequent assemblies, so his name did not even come up in the 1847 elections.

The year 1847 brought nothing good to Klauzál, either in his private or political life, and 1848 did not start very well either. We do not know how he was affected by his failure to win a Diet seat. Still, he experienced severe personal crises, losing first his brother Imre and then his wife, while his health also deteriorated. During my research, one of the biggest challenges, besides reconstructing the county context, was to uncover his role in the events of 1848. I have not found any new information about how he became a member of Lajos Batthyány's government. Still, I believe that his close relationship with Deák, his consistent history as an opposition reformer, and his moderating role in the events of March in Pest made him a realistic candidate for portfolio distribution. There may be doubts about whether

he had the necessary expertise for his portfolio. Still, the department heads and senior staff in his ministry were recognized experts who ensured the smooth running of the administration. However, due to the limited sources available, it is not possible to adequately assess his work as minister.

He also retired during the war of independence. Reconstructing his private and public life from this period onwards proved even more difficult, as even fewer sources were available than before. He re-entered political life at the 1861 and 1865–66 sessions of the Diet. He continued to support his friend Deák, but did not live to see the completion of his great work, the Compromise. His last appearances in the Diet reveal a politician who was shaken and worn down by the difficulties of life, but still ready to serve his country.

Among the results of my research into his career, I consider the reconstruction of public life in Csongrád County to be the most significant, partly because it reveals the politician's background, and partly because of its relevance to local history. However, the sources and the literature I have studied did not allow me to write a

biography that went significantly beyond the scope of a political biography. However, I feel that I have still managed to reconstruct Klauzál's career to the best of my ability.