But not so. The aim of this article is to rattle that assumption. Infanticidal mothers, perhaps even especially those pregnant from illicit sex, regularly escaped execution and had a significant place among the pardoned. This was so first of all because that was how justice essentially worked in late medieval France. There was a general reluctance to carry out executions. Unwed and infanticidal mothers were not exceptions to this rule. This was so, too, for reasons that speak to the interplay of justice with a number of social and cultural norms: mercy, female agency (or rather the perceived lack thereof), the overwhelming power of both divine and demonic agency by contrast, and finally, gender and honor. For honor could serve as justification for killing perpetrated by women much as it could for men.

In a way my claims in this article should come as no surprise. Historians are well aware that royal pardons played a role of considerable importance in the medieval judicial system. It is not news that religious and secular officials alike could be merciful in their expression of judicial authority, mitigating punishment or granting absolution or pardon, and even to the worst possible of criminals. Failure to show mercy, after all, might result in divine retribution for the cruel or