



Call for Papers: Pardoning and Pardon Letters in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe (15th-17th centuries)

Brussels, 5-6 June 2025

The PARDONS project (<https://pardons.eu/>) funded by the Belgian Science Policy Office invites proposals for a conference on **pardoning and pardon letters in late medieval and early modern Europe**. Since the work of Natalie Zemon Davis, Robert Muchembled and Claude Gauvard, historians have turned to the analysis of pardon letters to interrogate not only the workings of premodern violence, but also the everyday life, habits and cultural assumptions of those who petitioned for mercy. While large-scale quantitative surveys of legal records have long been a staple of the history of crime and justice, new methodological advances coupled with developments in the digital humanities have increasingly enabled historians to reconcile the analysis of huge swathes of archival data with the more grounded approaches characteristic of microhistory, zooming in upon regions, periods and outlier examples to establish nuanced accounts of violence in its social, political and religious contexts.

A collaborative and multi-institutional project, PARDONS is situated precisely within this trend, and over the past few years has harnessed technological advances in order to digitize, transcribe and analyse the late medieval and early modern pardon letters held in central Belgian archives. Organized by the State Archives of Belgium, the Centre d'histoire du droit et de la justice (UCLouvain) and the Early Modern Research Group (KU Leuven), with the support of the Centre de recherches en histoire du droit, des institutions et de la société (UCLouvain-Saint-Louis), this

conference aims to consolidate new insights and foster dialogue between scholars working on the history of violence, crime, and royal mercy in Western Europe.

We invite proposals for 20-minute papers on the following themes:

- The regulation of violence, at times of war or peace
- The aftermath of violence and strategies of reconciliation
- Fictionalization and narratives in pardon tales
- Good justice, criminalisation, state formation and the power to pardon
- Gender and gendered stories
- The taming of noble violence and relationships between sovereign and aristocracy
- Record keeping and the conservation of pardon letters
- Debates surrounding the supposed decline of violence in early modern Europe
- The historiography of pardon letters

Proposals for papers on related topics will also be considered. Proposals can be submitted in either English or French, and should include a title, an abstract of 300-500 words, and a short bio with contact details.

Submissions are encouraged from members of all ranks of academia, including early career researchers and postgraduates. The PARDONS project offers funded accommodation for speakers for the two nights of the conference. Additional funding to reimburse some travel expenses may be available.

The deadline for proposals is 15 February 2025, with speakers to be informed of the outcome by early March. Please send proposals to pardontales@gmail.com.

We look forward to hearing from you. Please reach out to Dr. Luke Giraudet (luke.giraudet@kuleuven.be) or Dr. Quentin Verreycken (quentin.verreycken@uclouvain.be) for any enquiries.

Scientific Committee

- Prof. Éric Bousmar (UCLouvain–Saint-Louis)
- Prof. Hans Cools (KU Leuven)
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