

Consilium 39

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Marianus Albentius, in his last testament, left his wife [Violanta], whom he loved specially even though he had not received any sons from her, as the universal inheritor of each and every one of his goods, provided that she would not enter into a second marriage, but would remain a widow, and chaste, and would conduct her life free from all suspicion of dishonesty; he ordered that, if she either entered into a second marriage or lived dishonestly, and was not free from suspicion of it, she would be deprived of all the inherited goods, which [in that case] he wished to hand over to a certain religious house. When the woman's husband had been dead for two years, that religious house called Violanta to trial for living dishonestly, insisting that the inheritance of her husband be handed over to them. Among the many things which they produced for proving Violanta's dishonesty was the pregnancy of that very woman, who was not able to conceal the belly which was swelling in a remarkable fashion; yet, Violanta swore that she could not be pregnant since she never received another man. Nevertheless, the religious house, believing that the time for the birth was near, insisted that she be taken into custody which could not be denied to them. Moreover, all the months required for gestation passed when, behold, with considerable pains coming first, the woman expelled copious amounts of water with coagulated blood, her stomach deflated and subsided, and she was well. Nevertheless, this religious house did not let these things go since they confirmed that the woman had given birth to a mole, [arguing that], since it is not possible for a mole to be generated without the use of a man, it was now evident that Violanta had lived dishonestly, and they insisted that they be given the inheritance. When Violanta had given an answer to the judges for each and every accusation which was placed against her honesty, as no two of those which were placed against her could settle [the matter], the Judge ordered that the truth of this matter should be uncovered through learned physicians. Therefore, we were asked whether Violanta had expelled a mole and, given that she had expelled a mole, whether it is possible to generate one without the use of a man.

Summary:

1. *What is a mole?*
2. *Flesh is nothing but coagulated blood.*
3. *A mole is a kind of false conception.*
4. *How a mole is generated.*
5. *A mole cannot be generated without male semen (the contrary argued in number 10 and 17).*
6. *Every principal of formation [arises] from male semen. (I speak on this in number 11.& seqq).*
7. *Since membranes are spermatic parts, they cannot be generated from anything other than sperm (and number 14).*
8. *A mole is conceived contrary to nature, and therefore does not have an established gestation period.*
9. *A mole is fed and grows through the umbilical cord.*
13. *Whether a woman has both [kinds of] semen in herself, namely masculine and feminine semen.*
15. *Blood is coagulated by fibers.*
16. *Foetal membranes are generated by the female semen.*

As far as the first point [asserted] on the part of the religious house, it was said that Violanta expelled a mole, that is to say that she expelled a kind of fruit of coagulated blood which appeared fleshy and displayed a greater hardness than simple coagulated blood is accustomed to have; in fact, certain membranes were seen expelled together with the abovementioned fleshy fruit, which, are not possible unless they are of a mole, or of a mole's envelope. [1] A mole, however, is nothing other than unformed flesh, generated in the uterus in the manner of a foetus, as is said in Hippocrates, *On Sterility*, and in Galen, *The Therapeutic Method* (book 14, chapter 13). [2] But, indeed, flesh is nothing other than coagulated blood, or blood having a constant, non-fluid substance (Galen, *On the Natural Faculties*, chapter 10.) Thus, when blood is of

constant and non-fluid substance, it cannot be anything other than flesh; and, when it is unformed flesh, it cannot be anything other than a mole.

[3] And this can be seen to a greater extent in the accompanying circumstances which occurred in the gestation of this mole; since, although the mole is a kind of false conception, in many ways, it emulates a true conception, as in the retention of the menses, in the swelling of the belly, in the provocation of symptoms which are familiar to pregnant women, in the production of milk, and, generally, in the [time of gestation] and in other ways, all of which were conspicuous in the present case: as, indeed, when Violanta's menses ceased completely, her belly was swollen, and she was troubled by all the symptoms which commonly trouble truly pregnant women, and, at length, in the accustomed time for a mole to gestate *in utero*, she expelled one. Whence it was not to be doubted that this was a true mole and thus, since this cannot generate without male semen, this makes it certain that Violanta had entangled herself with a man, and that she made a true and natural offspring.

Besides this, it was not possible that [what this woman produced] was a simple aggregation of blood because every day we see that many women labor with every kind of menstrual retention, not only for months but for years, yet we do not see in them even that their stomachs grow in the first year, nor other symptoms, nor do they greatly suffer so very similar to pregnancy, as Violanta suffered; [4] certainly, this cannot, in truth, proceed from a simple aggregation of blood; but, it is most reasonable that it proceeds from a false conception, that is a mole, which is not accustomed to come about except from a diseased male semen, fermenting itself or female blood, so that from it something was generated; indeed, when male semen, on account of a diseased constitution, acts on female semen, a true conception cannot generate, [and] a false and unnatural conception generates, which is a mole. For, without this fermentation, which cannot be had except by means of the male semen, by which all principal movement exists, there will be no movement in the semen or female blood, and thus, no generation follows; this is observed, again and again, in many women, in whom, although their menstrual blood is retained through several months and years while they are of the proper age [for menstruating], nevertheless a mole does not follow, since the virile semen, by which fermentation is provoked, [and] which is the principal of generation, is lacking. For no menstrual blood, retained in that manner, has the principal to generate anything from itself and, on that account, a mole is never generated from

the simple retention of it, although it may happen gradually, more and more frequently; therefore, when any conception blooms, even a faulty one like a mole, it ought to be established that it was not begotten from any other source than the virile semen from which a fermentation springs forth, from which, whatever generation finally comes about, has followed; for without it, as was said, neither any fermentation, nor any movement, nor any change, nor any generation can proceed.

[5] As far as the second point [asserted] on the part of the religious house, it was said that is not doubtful that, Violanta expelled a mole, and it was generated from virile semen, since without it, it would not have been generated at all, as is the common opinion of the Doctors, Hippocrates, Aristotle, Galen, and other great men with established authority, of whom you have many recorded (*book 1 of the present work of questions, Heading 3, part 3, question 6, number 2*). [6] This opinion seems most pressingly and most definitively proven by reason and, especially, by that maxim, which [is stated] above, namely, that every principal of formation arises from male semen (Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body, book 14, chapter 1*). And concerning this case, at no time has a woman appeared who bore a mole without the use of a man (Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body, book 14, chapter 10*) since this cannot be generated from female semen alone because it does not have any principal movement; to this, other reasons are added, all taken from our *Questions*, (principally, *part 5, question 6*, and additionally, *number 7* and following) which are likewise confirmed by much experience.

[7] In addition, the generation of membranes, which was observed in this mole, presses the point, on the part [of the religious house]; indeed, it is known that membranous parts of this kind are spermatic [in origin] and cannot be generated in any manner other than from semen, which the substance and colour of them reveals well enough; and, it ought not be said that female semen is sufficient for the generation of them, since, [according to] Galen (see, book 1, chapter 10 of *On the Natural Faculties*), no spermatic part is able to be generated without both seeds; on this matter, there is no controversy. Accordingly, even if it could be conceded that a mole could be generated without both seeds, or from female semen alone, certainly, one could never, ever say that membranes, which are spermatic parts, could be generated without both seeds. From this, consequently, it remains proven that Violanta had entangled herself with a man, and, from this,

her dishonesty seems to remain to be proven, finally, with many coinciding clues greatly against her, and with many presumptions substantiating her impurity.

But, greatly superior reasons seemed to contend for the part of Violanta, because they were able to persuade easily that she did not gestate a true mole, or given that she had gestated a true mole, that one could not doubt her honesty from it, that she had conceived a mole from another man. For, even given that a mole cannot be concocted without masculine semen, nevertheless, nothing from this can raise doubt about Violanta's honesty. [8] As far as this, an outside chance is extended among all physicians that, since a mole is an unnatural kind of conception, it does not have an established time for its gestation as does a natural conception, because sometimes, with some women, it is gestated for years, as is attested by Hippocrates (*Diseases of Women*, book 1, Section 3, number 97), Aristotle (*On the Generation of Animals*, book 4, chapter 7), Avicenna ([*Canon of Medicine*], Book 3, Fen. 21, Tract 1, chapter 9), Rodrigo de Castro (*On the Diseases of Women*, book 3, chapter 7), and Mercati (*On Sterility and Pregnancy*, book 3, chapter 8) and, nay more, by the whole life [works] of Aristotle, Avicenna and others who confirm this. When, therefore, Violanta gave birth to a mole after two years had passed since the death of her husband, the mole could still have been created with the contribution of her living husband and, after the abovementioned period of two years, expelled from the uterus; this would seem so much more likely, as it was well-known that her husband was always sterile, and neither with Violanta, nor with his other wife whom [he was married to] before Violanta, could he ever procreate. From this conjecture, we are able to deduce that, perhaps, he had diseased semen and, on account of this, it never generated, but, furthermore, Hippocrates (*Diseases of Women* book 1, section 3, number 97) taught that, from this manner of diseased semen, moles are generated; and thus, although we say that a mole cannot come to be without male semen, all suspicion against Violanta is put to rest, since she conceived a mole with her own husband, not another man. It is not possible to oppose [the fact] that no suspicion of pregnancy, either true or false, against Violanta came to light when her husband was living, except a certain menstrual disorder and a small customary purgation, which did not seem worthy to be held in consideration. For, if at that time she had had a mole in her uterus, other signs proving its presence would have appeared, as are accustomed to appear in others, [signs] which, in themselves, had made a suspicion of pregnancy; since the signs of pregnancy, either true or false, clearly are the same for a natural

fetus as for a mole, as is taught by Hippocrates (cited in this place and in *On sterility*), Aristotle, Avicenna, Paulus, Aetius, and all others.

But, to this objection, there was an easy and readily available answer, evidently that, just as a true conception sometimes presents no signs of itself and, on occasion, still reveals no entirely certain signs of itself when the third and fourth month have passed, or even the fifth and sixth; thus, in fact, very frequently, and easily, in [the case of] a mole, it happens that no signs of this kind of conception appear, or if they are observed to appear, [as] in a true conception, either a lessening or total retention of the menses are reported, as it happened in our case, since Violanta, when she had not conceived for many years after living with Marianus, could have no suspicion of pregnancy and even less of a mole. And, if she experienced such symptoms from the conception of a mole, she rejected the lessening and corruption of the menstrual flow as [the result of] either a pregnancy or a mole, since the signs of pregnancy, as much as of a mole, and of retention of the menses are similar, as was clearly proven in Book 1, Section 3, question 1, and elsewhere, and also as I said above, from Hippocrates. This, indeed, seems convincing enough, but it was added from an abundance that Violanta did not give birth to a mole but had expelled a copious amount of coagulated blood, which she housed in the cavities of her uterus through many months, from which already for a long time through her monthly evacuation she was purged insufficiently, and, soon, over many months, [her menses] were suppressed altogether. It may be granted that this blood had coagulated, yet, not truly as flesh, since it did not have a solid substance just as flesh customarily has, because even from the testimony of the physicians and midwives this remains more clearly established, since all unanimously testified that Violanta expelled in childbirth something produced of coagulated blood, which appeared carnal, yet coagulated blood could in fact seem to be flesh but not be, unless it at once acquired a solid substance as flesh ought to have; nay rather, to this point, for this coagulated blood to be called a mole, it would not be enough for it to have had the familiar consistency of flesh, but rather, it would be required to have that consistency which the flesh of a mole is accustomed to have; indeed, regarding this, all the great authors say, [the flesh of a mole] is so hard that an iron sword is not able to cut it; thus says Aristotle (cited above, *On the Parts of Animals*, book 4, chapter 2) and however many physicians who have experience in this matter. Therefore, this epithet of very hard flesh is added to the definition of a mole.

[9] Therefore, there is not enough for it to be determined to have been a mole, since the physician, and equally the midwives, added that, evidently, that sanguineous fruit expelled from Violanta appeared to be granted a more complete hardness than blood so coagulated is accustomed to have; except that if this had been a true mole, at this time, it would have to have veins and arteries spread throughout it, and perhaps even be provided with an umbilical cord or a part equivalent to an umbilical cord through which it could be fed and it could achieve sustenance, as is customary in other [true moles], as it would have been observed; and, gradually, it was observed by physicians to be something else, which was not fed nor able to grow; but in this sanguineous mass, no veins nor arteries were present, and [likewise] no nerves, no umbilical cord, nor any part proportional to an umbilical cord, without which it could not happen that it might develop into such a mole and eventually to increase, as a natural fetus, in the likeness of which a mole is procreated and achieves sustenance.

[10] Besides, even given that this could be a true mole, still no certainty can be fashioned concerning Violanta's dishonesty because the opinion bearing that a mole is not generated without masculine semen is controversial and it is not true that it is the common opinion of physicians, since important authors support the contrary opinion and there are not a few whose experiences oppose the experiences observed by Galen, who wished to consider that no woman gestates a mole without the use of a man. [These authors suggest] that it is not possible to doubt the chastity of such a woman, about whom many stories have been collected, who without commerce of a man gestated moles. Schenck, in of book 4 of his *Observations* entitled, *On the uterine mole*, in fact, [affirmed] valid reasons for this point that a mole was procreated without the use of a man to persuade others, cited in this piece, number 7 and following.

[11] And that reasoning, which supporters of the opposite opinion believe to be most valid, namely, that the whole principle of generation comes from masculine semen, and therefore without it no generation can follow, can be granted a twofold answer. First, it ought to be said that the conclusion holds precedence and is true in natural and uncorrupted generation, but by no means [is it so] in unnatural, imperfect and corrupt generation; for, therefore, generation does not follow as it ought because the natural, and first principle of generation, that is the male semen, is lacking; whence, the female semen, lacking [the male counterpart], and not capable of generating

a perfect conception, sets in motion what it is able to, and generates what is permitted to it to be able to generate.

[12] Second, it is replied that the conclusion that the entire principle of generation results from the male semen is to be understood not as the semen of a male but as *masculine* semen. [13] But if a woman has in herself as much masculine as feminine semen, if we believe Hippocrates in his book *On Giving Birth*, number 7, whence female semen itself participates not only passively but also actively in generation, which I already affirmed with a double demonstration in book 7, title 3, question 1, number 25 and following, [affirming] that the principle of generation can be from female semen, more truly, by that part of the female semen, which is warmer and more potent, and, therefore, assumes the name of *masculine*, in the same way that that part of the semen in a man which is weaker and colder holds the name of feminine, as Hippocrates (cited above) himself explained well. He taught that masculine semen proceeding from either a male or a female generates males, and feminine semen proceeding from either a male or a female generates females. Is it remarkable, therefore, that masculine semen of a female is able to have in itself such activity that it is powerful enough to generate a certain rough and imperfect [uterine] mole, if it alone cannot generate a natural, male fetus? Can it be that it was not examined already by later [authors] often cited here that a feminine person participates with her semen so actively in generation that it might overcome the active power of that male semen? Indeed, we have observed that fetuses born from animals of different species receive the specific character of form from the female, since from an equine mother and a ruminant father, an equine fetus is born; moreover, according to Aristotle, the fetuses born from animals of different species who afterwards breed among themselves generate offspring at last returning the species of the mother, and eventually mules always follow the nature of the mother, whence from a horse, they are born strong and healthy, and from an ass they are born puny and flawed.

[14] From these things, furthermore, that which was added about that blood expelled from Violanta, that it was clearly a coil of membranes, is easily deduced to be meaningless; since membranes are spermatic parts, they are only able to be brought about from both seeds, following the teaching of Galen on these things (indeed, concerning this point, it was said by no means to confirm that these membranes enclosed blood, since the experts did not set this to rest, but they declared that certain membranes were expelled together with the blood, especially

according to the physician, who ought to be believed chiefly in these matters) either as corporal membranes or filaments which are very different from membranes; but if these membranes are called bloody, or a mole, they must enclose in themselves, and there must necessarily be an umbilical cord that makes itself a place through them, as was said, and veins and arteries spread through them whence it can be nourished and grow, all of which were lacking here, and these membranes were therefore those which experts called membranes or rather membranous, corpuscular filaments and fibers of that blood, and therefore they did not enclose that blood, but were mixed with it; [15] for these fibers and filaments are customarily observed over time in any exemplary blood whatsoever and they are the reason that blood is coagulated, as Hippocrates teaches (in his book, *On the Flesh*, number 9).

[16] But, it is not true that membranes of this manner are generated from virile semen, or from both [seeds], since Galen (*On the Natural Faculties*, book 1, chapter 7), Fernel, (*Physiology*, book 7, final chapter), André du Laurens (*Historia anatomica*, book 8, question 16) and others believe that they are only brought about with the semen from a woman. Whence, conceding that they were true membranes, by no means, thereupon, could anything be deduced because this [only] proves that there was a mixture with virile semen and, thus, nothing is deduced that could construct a case against Violanta's chastity. For even if that coagulated blood were truly a fleshy mass, and those fibers or filaments were actual membranes, nay rather, even if these membranes enveloped that fleshy mass, or mole, and in addition an umbilical cord were conspicuous, and finally, if Violanta had expelled a true mole, nothing could be concluded against her, since that mole, with all its coverings, could come together and be generated without union with a man, as it was, in fact, generated.

Finally, the adversaries themselves do not dare to deny that this was not a true mole, but a kind of body very similar to a mole which itself cannot be generated without virile semen, given, therefore, that the thing itself should have the same manner. Then, I say, insofar as at some time it was confirmed by certain physicians that a mole cannot be generated without the use of a man and without his semen, this is to be understood concerning a true mole, namely a kind of fleshy mole, hard and unformed, having veins, arteries, nerves and even, by chance, its wrappings from the protected umbilical cord or part proportional to an umbilical cord having nourishment and growing, and, nevertheless, not to be applicable to this false, bloody mole, with formed elements

of flesh, [a mole's customary] hardness, veins, and arteries, and other parts missing and lacking whatever other part which, I say, would be able to be procreated from semen. And, from these things, no suggestion ought to be concluded concerning this case which contends against Violanta's honesty.