



The History of Embryology: The Greeks, Romans, and the Arabs

Sūrat al-Insān 76:2

إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ أَمْشَاجٍ نَبْتَلِيهِ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا

Verily, We have created man from *nuṭ'fatin amshājin* (semen mixtures) in order to try him, so We made him hearer, seer.

Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī

ḥadīth number: (#130)

author: Al-Bukhārī (d. 256 H.)

<https://shamela.ws/book/1681/232>

<https://sunnah.com/bukhari:130>

Note: Unfortunately, the translation for this the last part of this ḥadīth on the [Sunnah.com](https://sunnah.com) website is quite bad. Some narrations that are similar mention either 2 nutfahs, or an *asfar* (often translated as yellow, but it can also be pale) fluid for women. And this also ties into 76:2 of the Qur'ān where people are created from nutfah mixtures.

Narrated Umm Salama:

Umm-Sulaim came to Allah's Messenger (S.A.W.) and said, "Verily, Allah is not shy of (telling you) the truth. Is it necessary for a woman to take a bath after she has a wet dream (nocturnal sexual discharge?) The Prophet replied, "Yes, if she notices a discharge." Umm Salama, then covered her face and asked, "O Allah's Messenger (S.A.W.)! Does a woman get a ~~discharge~~ wet dream?" He replied, "Yes, let your right hand be in dust (An Arabic expression you say to a person when you contradict his statement meaning "you will not achieve goodness"), ~~and that is why the son resembles his mother~~ **So, how then, does her child resemble her?**"

قَيْمٌ يُشْبِهُهَا وَوَلَدُهُ

Sahīh Muslim

ḥadīth number: (#313 a.)

author: Imām Muslim (d. 261 H.)

<https://sunnah.com/muslim:313a>

Umm Salama reported:

Umm Sulaim went to the Messenger of Allah (S.A.W.) and said: Apostle of Allah, Allah is not ashamed of the truth. Is bathing necessary for a woman when she has a sexual dream? Upon this the Messenger of Allah (S.A.W.) said: Yes, when she sees the liquid (vaginal secretion). Umm Salama said: Messenger of Allah, does a woman have sexual dream? He (the Holy Prophet)

said: Let your hand be covered with dust, in what way does her child resemble her?

A Brief Historical Survey of Generation (From Hippocrates (469-399 B.C.) to the Controversy between "Spermatists" and "Ooists")

Annals of Reproductive Medicine and Treatment

(2016): 1(1): 1002.

Sergio Musitelli and Ilaria Bossi

(Page 3)

<https://www.jscimedcentral.com/public/assets/articles/reproductive-medicine-1-1002.pdf>

However let us start by taking into consideration chapters 189th and 190th of the pseudo-galenic treatise *Definitiones medicae*....

"A debate arose whether women emit semen like males ejaculate it. Indeed a female enjoys the same pleasure as a male during sexual intercourse and suffers from the same diseases; moreover dissection clearly shows that she too is provided with seminal ducts. **However, the fact that offspring that look like their mothers are born is the clearest proof that females too produce semen.**"

Galen, On Semen

translation and commentary by Philip De Lacy

(Pages 151-153)

page 151

[https://digilib.bbaw.de/digitallibrary/servlet/Scaler?
fn=/silo10/cmig/cmig_05_03_01/&pn=151&dw=471&dh=1375](https://digilib.bbaw.de/digitallibrary/servlet/Scaler?fn=/silo10/cmig/cmig_05_03_01/&pn=151&dw=471&dh=1375)

page 152

[https://digilib.bbaw.de/digitallibrary/servlet/Scaler?
fn=/silo10/cmig/cmig_05_03_01/&pn=152&dw=471&dh=1375](https://digilib.bbaw.de/digitallibrary/servlet/Scaler?fn=/silo10/cmig/cmig_05_03_01/&pn=152&dw=471&dh=1375)

page 153

[https://digilib.bbaw.de/digitallibrary/servlet/Scaler?
fn=/silo10/cmig/cmig_05_03_01/&pn=153&dw=471&dh=1375](https://digilib.bbaw.de/digitallibrary/servlet/Scaler?fn=/silo10/cmig/cmig_05_03_01/&pn=153&dw=471&dh=1375)

Therefore, just as there would be no need, if milk were seen contained in all men's breasts, to seek to discover through reasoning whether it exists, **in the same way, in my opinion, since we see semen contained in females, there is no need to inquire whether they secrete semen.**

Then let them no longer quarrel with Hippocrates when he says; at the beginning of the treatise On the Nature of the Child, **"If the semen from both remains in the uterus of the woman"**; but let them inquire what use it provides. For as we said in the preceding book, nature can generate from it the allantoic membrane, and the male semen will have been able to prepare for itself a congenial and initial nutriment, and Hippocrates supposed that from the mixing of the two one complete semen can be generated; and even if these things would not be possible, at least the excitement

of the female to sexual desire is most especially in the power of the female semen.

Indeed it would have been much better to trust the visible evidence that the semen of female exists and to inquire by reasoning what its power is, The visible evidence was given before and will now be given again. Spermatic ducts, full of semen, secrete this semen apart from the union of female with male, females experiencing effusions [wet dreams] in sleep as males do, and in the way that was mentioned earlier in the case of the widow;

Galen, On Semen

translation and commentary by Philip De Lacy

page 147

And the full quote is:

https://digilib.bbaw.de/digitalibrary/servlet/Scaler?fn=/silo10/cm9/cm9_05_03_01/&pn=147&dw=471&dh=1375

“If the semen from both remains in the uterus of the woman, first it is mixed together, since the woman is not quiet, and it collects and thickens as it is heated.”

or it has also been translated:

Hippocrates of Cos, Nature of the Child

(by Loeb Classics)

https://www.loebclassics.com/view/hippocrates_cos-nature_child/2012/pb_LCL520.31.xml

“If the seed from both (sc. parents) remains in a woman’s uterus, first this is mixed together - since the woman does not remain still - and then on being warmed it aggregates and becomes thicker.”

Musnad Aḥmad

(Ḥadīth No. #26,673)

compiled by: Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241 H.)

<https://web.archive.org/web/20210414111528/http://islamport.com/d/1/mtn/1/89/3528.html>

<https://archive.fo/5X4Wc>

It was narrated on the authority of ‘Abdullah bin Rafi’, the freed slave of Umm

Salamah, on the authority of Umm Salamah that:

Umm Sulaym, the wife of Abu Talhah said: "O, Messenger of Allah! Is it necessary for a woman to perform ghusl (take a bath) if she sees what a man sees (i.e. a wet dream)? So, the Messenger of Allah (sallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam) said, "Yes, if she sees wetness." Umm Salamah, then inquired, "O Allah's Messenger!

Does that really happen? (i.e. does a woman get a wet dream?")
He replied, "Yes, may your right hand be covered in dust. How else would the resemblance (of the child to be born) to the maternal uncle occur?"

Whichever of the two-semens (*two-nutfahs*) [النطفتين] is first to the uterus determines the resemblance."

And it was authenticated by:

Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (d. 463 H.), in his book ***Al-Tamheed lima fi'l-Muwatta' min al-Ma'aani wa'l-Asaaneed*** (Section No. #8/336), commented that it (the hadith) is ***thabit*** (proven).

Moreover, in ***Musnad Ahmad*** with the takhrīj of Shu`ayb Al-Arna'ūṭ, Shaykh Shu`ayb Al-Arna'ūṭ wrote the following: "An authentic (***Ṣaḥīḥ***) hadith. It's men are *thiqaat* (trustworthy). The men of the two-shakyhs. (Al-Bukhārī & Muslim)."

Likewise, in his *tahqiq* (grading) of ***Sharḥ Mushkil al-Āthār***, Shaykh Shu`ayb Al-Arna'ūṭ deemed it as authentic (***Ṣaḥīḥ***) according to the conditions of (Imām) Muslim.

Additionally, Dr. Abdul Ghafoor Abdul Haq Al-Balushi declared it to be authentic (***Ṣaḥīḥ***) and the men of its chain of narration to be *thiqaat* (trustworthy) in his *tahqiq* (grading) of ***Musnad Ishāq Ibn Rāhwayh***.

<https://archive.fo/HfZ7i>

And it was collected by:

Ishāq Ibn Rāhwayh (d. 238 H.) in his Musnad: [Ḥadīth No. #1,822]

Imām Aḥmad (d. 241 H.) in his Musnad: [Ḥadīth No. #26,673] or (#26,631) in other editions.

Aṭ-Ṭaḥāwi (d. 321 H.) in Sharḥ Mushkil al-Āthār: [Ḥadīth No. #2,662]

Aṭ-Ṭabarānī (d. 360 H.) in Al-Muʿjam al-Kabīr: [Ḥadīth No. #998]

Our commentary:

And it is substantially similar to the scholars of what was called the discipline of generation (embryology) living long before the advent of Islam. Some examples of which include both Hippocrates and Aristotle.

Women in the Classical World: Image and Text

E. Fantham, H.P. Foley, N.B. Kampen, S.B. Pomery, H.A. Shapiro
(Page 186)

<https://books.google.co.uk>

“A woman was thought to ejaculate semen directly into her womb when she reached orgasm during sexual intercourse, but despite the numerous therapies in the Hippocratic gynecology for causing women to conceive, there is no indication of how to bring about female orgasm other than the simple act of intercourse.”

Encyclopedia of Women in the Ancient World

Joyce E. Salisbury

(Page 143)

<https://books.google.co.uk>

“Finally, the Hippocratic collection believed that a woman ejaculated seed directly into her womb when she reached orgasm during sexual intercourse, paralleling men's ejaculation.”

Aristotle on Female Animals

Sophia M. Connell

(Page 106)

<https://books.google.co.uk>

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/aristotle-on-female-animals/menstrual-blood-and-female-semen/AC5144F0DD5B6D636DD5E214A6578B51>

“There is no good no good reason to reject clear indications from the text that Aristotle was perfectly happy, in some instances to count the female contribution as seminal. If this is so, is so then it is worth considering evidence from other works that Aristotle adhered to two-seed hypothesis, in particularly the *Historia Animalium X* (or 'On Sterility'). Recent commentary on HA X argues that it ought to be included in the Aristoteleian corpus as authentic, representing an earlier theory of the female contribution to generation. **The theory found there, which is not presented in an overly theoretical manner, but rather with reference to the diagnosis and treatment of female infertility, states that both the male and female emit semen at sexual climax to a place in front of the uterus; then the uterus draws up the two semens.**

(HA 634b29–39; 636a4–8).”

Aristotle's History of Animals, by Aristotle

Translator: Richard Cresswell

(Pages 289-290)

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/59058/59058-h/59058-h.htm>

<https://archive.fo/Qfbax>

“And when women have lascivious dreams, the same affections of weakness and debility often occur, as if they had been lying with a male. It is plain, therefore, that if they appear to have emitted a

seminal fluid in their dream, they will then conjecture that after their dream the same place will become moist, and they will be obliged to bestow the same attention upon themselves as if they had had sexual intercourse. **So that it is evident that there must be an emission of semen from both if it is to be productive. But the uterus does not emit its semen into itself, but on the outside, into the place where that of the male also is received, and then draws it into itself.**”

Our Commentary:

We can see that Hippocrates died circa 375 B.C.E. Moreover, Aristotle after him, died more than 930 years before the advent of Islam. Although, initially agreeing with Hippocrates about the nature of “female semen”, he later refuted the idea of the existence of a so-called “female semen” in his later works.

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aristotle>

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hippocrates>

Aristoteles, De generatione, in Männlich-weiblich-zwischen

Prof. Dr. Christof Rolker (Universität Bamberg)

(Online Article)

<http://intersex.hypotheses.org/?p=1112>

<https://archive.fo/X8zio>

<https://archive.fo/RuzKA>

De gen. I, 20

“There are some who think that the female contributes semen during coition because women sometimes derive pleasure from it comparable to that of the male and also produce a fluid secretion. This fluid, however, is not seminal; it is peculiar to the part from which it comes in each several individual; there is a discharge from the uterus, which though it happens in some women does not in others.”

Aristotle, Generation of Animals

With an English Translation By

A.L. Peck, M.A., Ph.D.

(Pages 97-99)

<https://archive.fo/6OIVo>

<https://archive.fo/Mokzv>

<https://archive.org/details/generationofanim00arisuoft>

“Here is an indication that the female does not discharge semen of the same kind as the male, and that the offspring is not formed from a mixture of two semens, as some allege. Very often the female conceives although she has derived no pleasure from the act of coitus and, on the contrary side, when the female derives as much pleasure as the male, and they both keep the same pace, the female does not bear...”

Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim

ḥadīth number: (#311)

author: Imām Muslim (d. 261 H.)

<https://shamela.ws/book/711/844>

<https://archive.ph/YfKMa>

<https://islamqa.info/en/answers/2458>

<https://archive.fo/1usjk>

<https://islamqa.ws/ar/answers/2458>

<https://archive.fo/xhdpH>

Umm Sulaym (may Allah be pleased with her) asked the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) about a woman who sees a dream like a man sees (i.e., an erotic dream). The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “If a woman sees that, she should do *ghusl*. Umm Sulaym said: I felt shy when I heard that. She asked, is that possible? The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: How else would the child resemble his father or mother? The water of the man is thick and white, and the water of the woman is thin and yellow **أَصْفَرُ** pale (*asfar*). Whichever of the two prevails or comes first decides which parent the child will resemble.”

Our commentary:

And *a'la* can also literally mean higher than. For example, see *Sūrat al-A'la* in the *Qur'ān*. Moreover, some scholars (Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī) thought this prevalence was according to whoever ejaculated the higher amount of semen (the man or the woman).

See:

Fath al-Bārī sharh Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī

author: Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852 H.)

<https://web.archive.org/web/20240321183318/http://islamport.com//srh/2275/4006.htm>

<https://archive.fo/1Sjcv>

A History of Embryology

Joseph Needham

(Pages 60-61)

<https://books.google.co.uk>

The Epicureans also had opinions on these subjects. They thought the foetus in utero was fed by the amniotic liquid or the blood, and they also believed, in

contradistinction to the Peripatetics, that both the male and female supplied seed in generation, as is shown by the lines of Lucretius:

*usque adeo magni refert, ut semina possint
seminibus commisceri genitaliter apta
crassaque convenient liquidis et liquida crasso.*

*A matter of great moment 'tis in truth
That seed may mingle readily with seed
Suited for procreation, and that thick*

Should mix with fluid seed, with thick the thin

Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud

Thomas Laqueur

Page 38

<https://www.hup.harvard.edu/books/9780674543553>

The difference between so-called two-seed and one-seed theories --

Galen versus Aristotle--is therefore not an empirical question that could be

resolved by reference to observable facts. Even in Aristotle's one-seed

theory, *sperma* and *catemenia* refer to greater or lesser refinements of an

ungendered blood, except when they are used as ciphers for the male and

female "principles." What one sees, or could ever see, does not really matter except insofar as the thicker, whiter, frothier quality of the male semen is a hint that it is more powerful, more likely to act as an efficient cause, than the thinner, less pristinely white, and more watery female ejaculate or the still red, even less concocted, menstrea.