

# MECHANICAL LEARNING AND THE BOOK OF NATURE

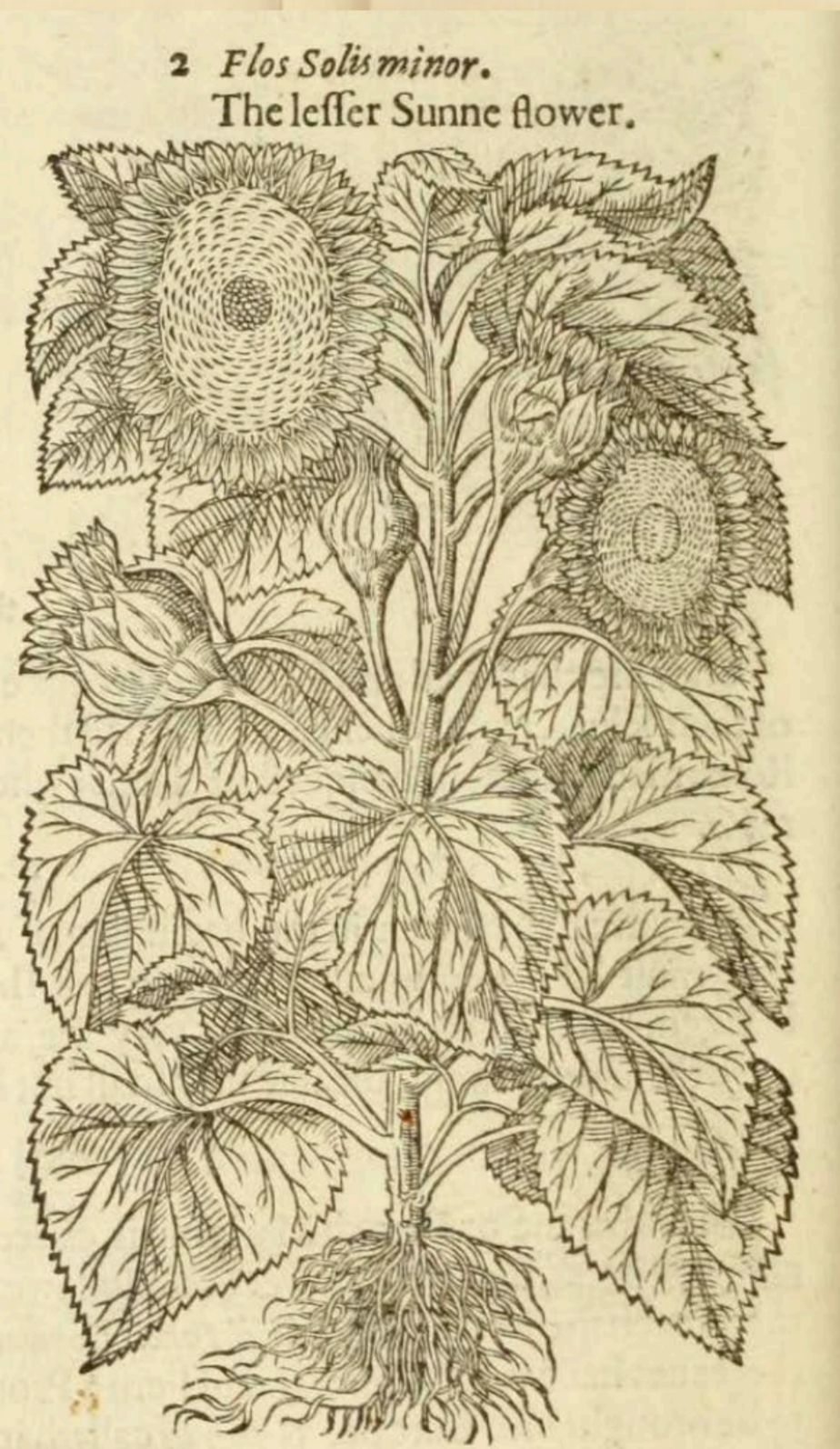
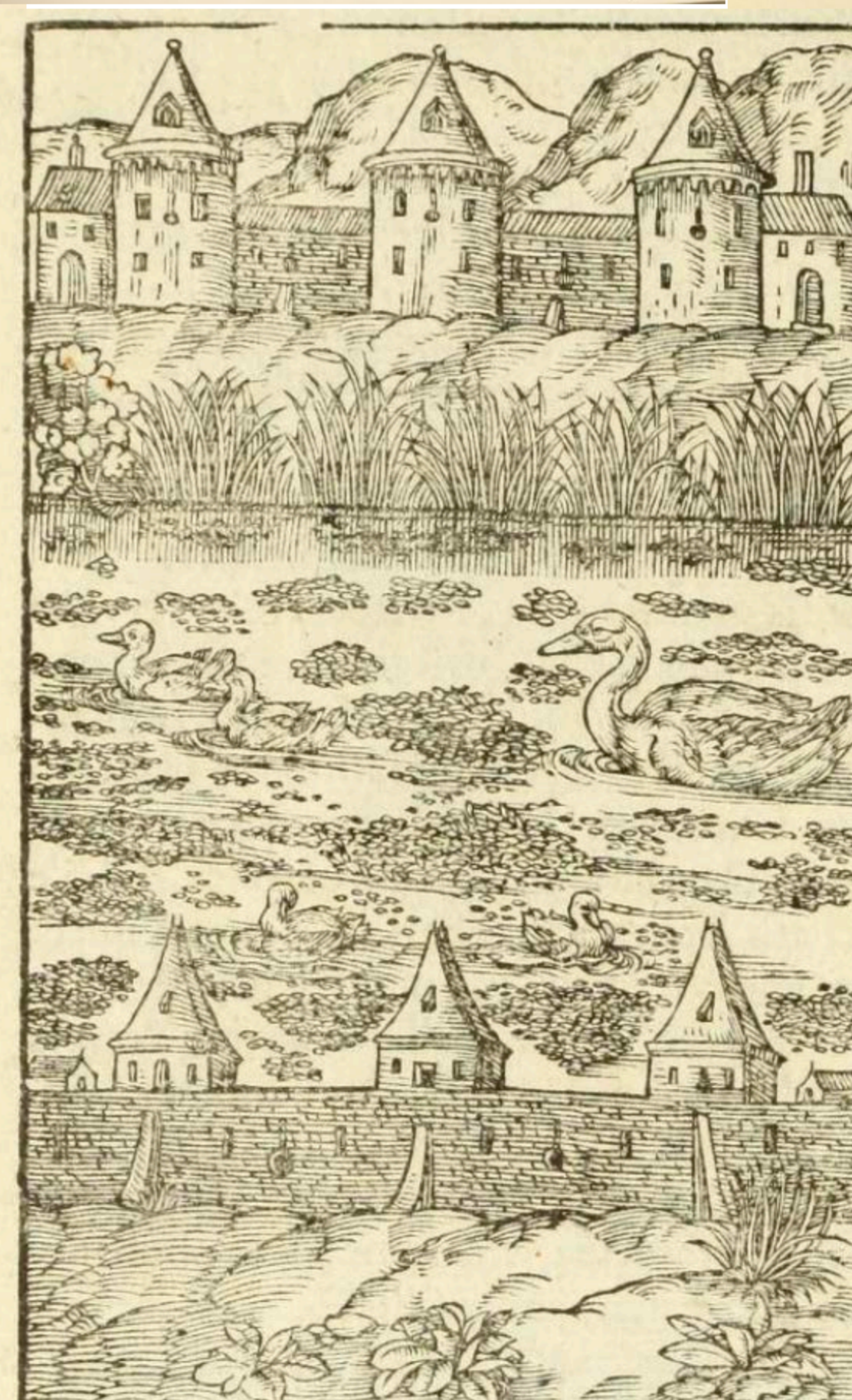
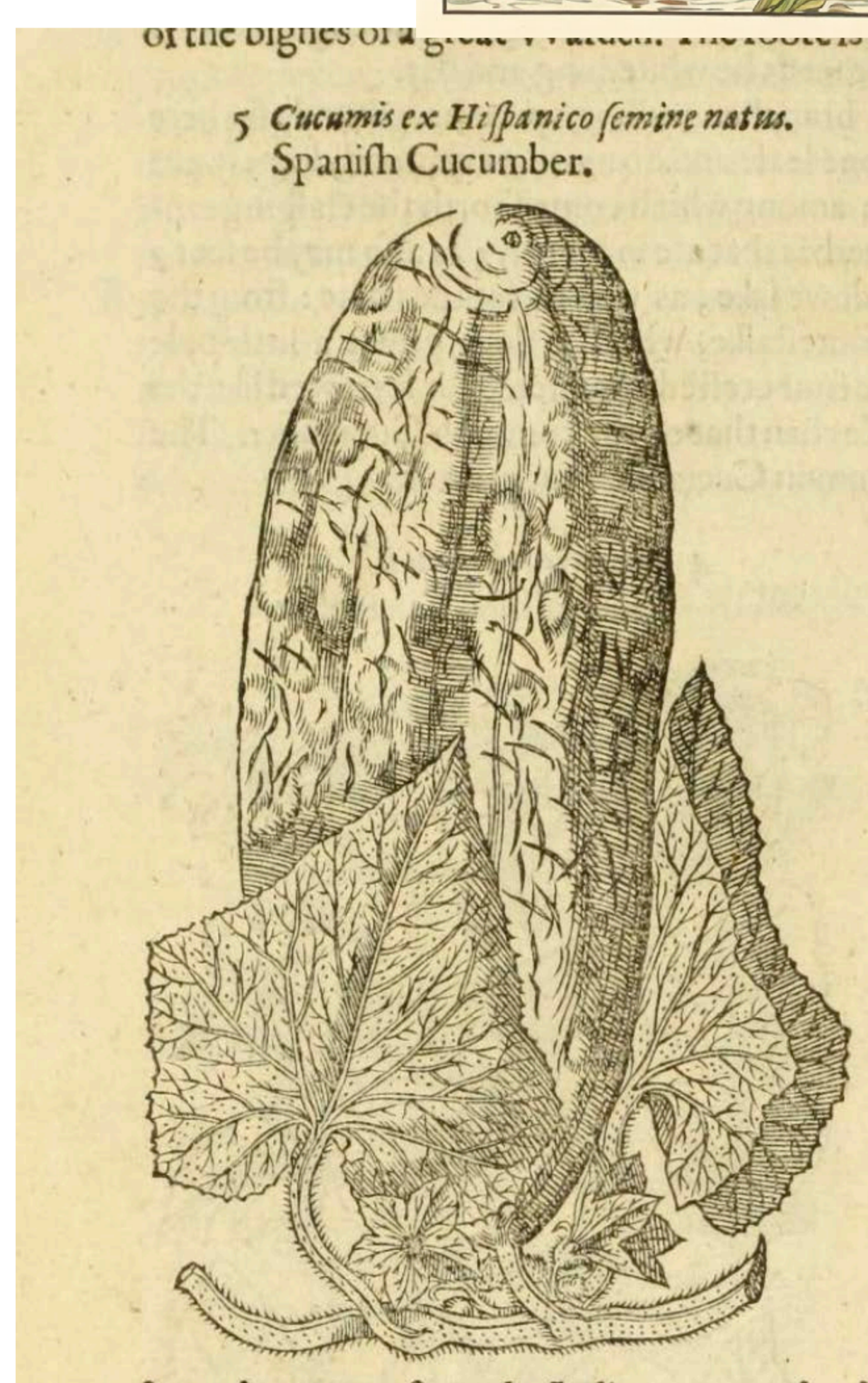
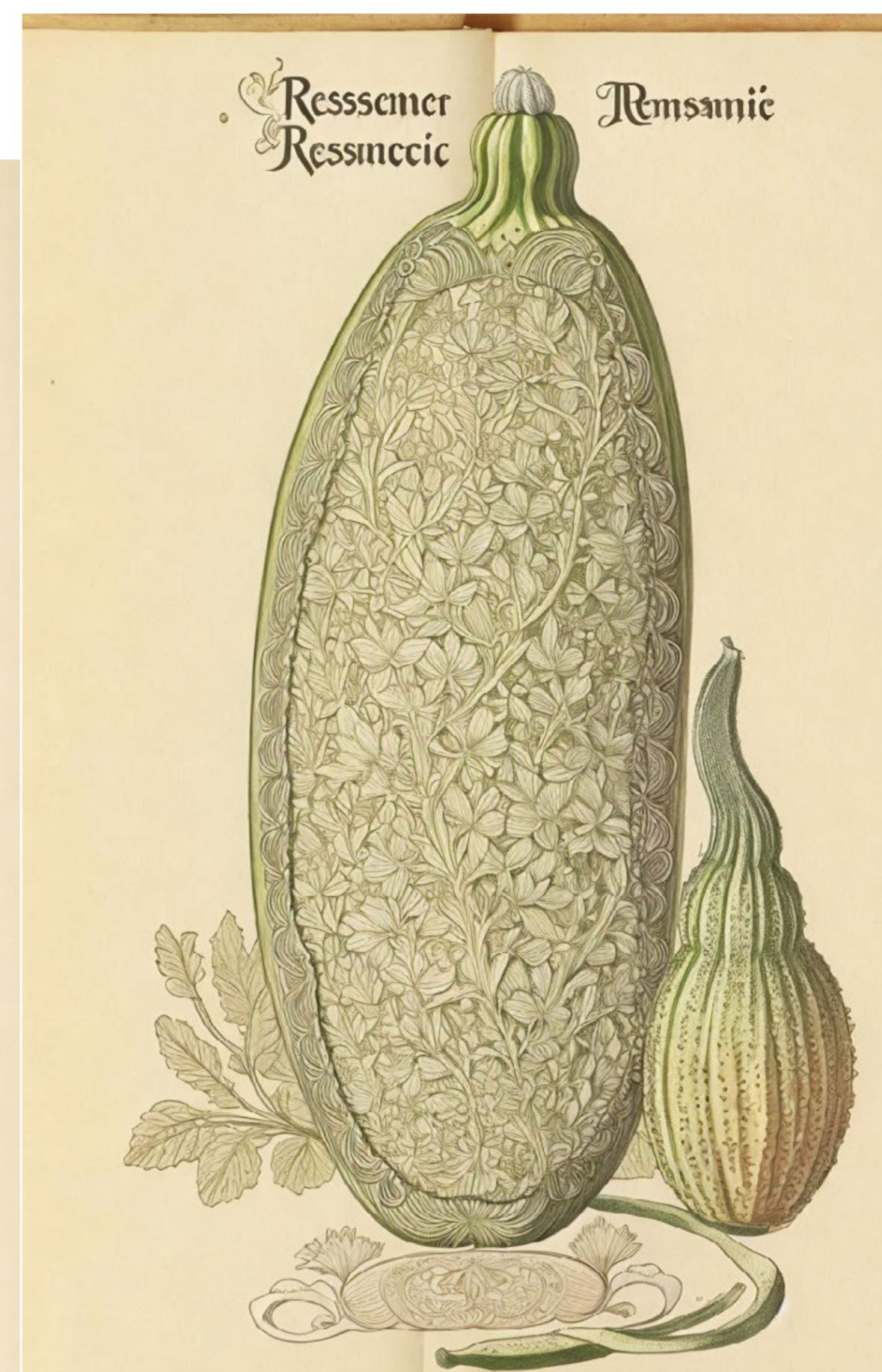
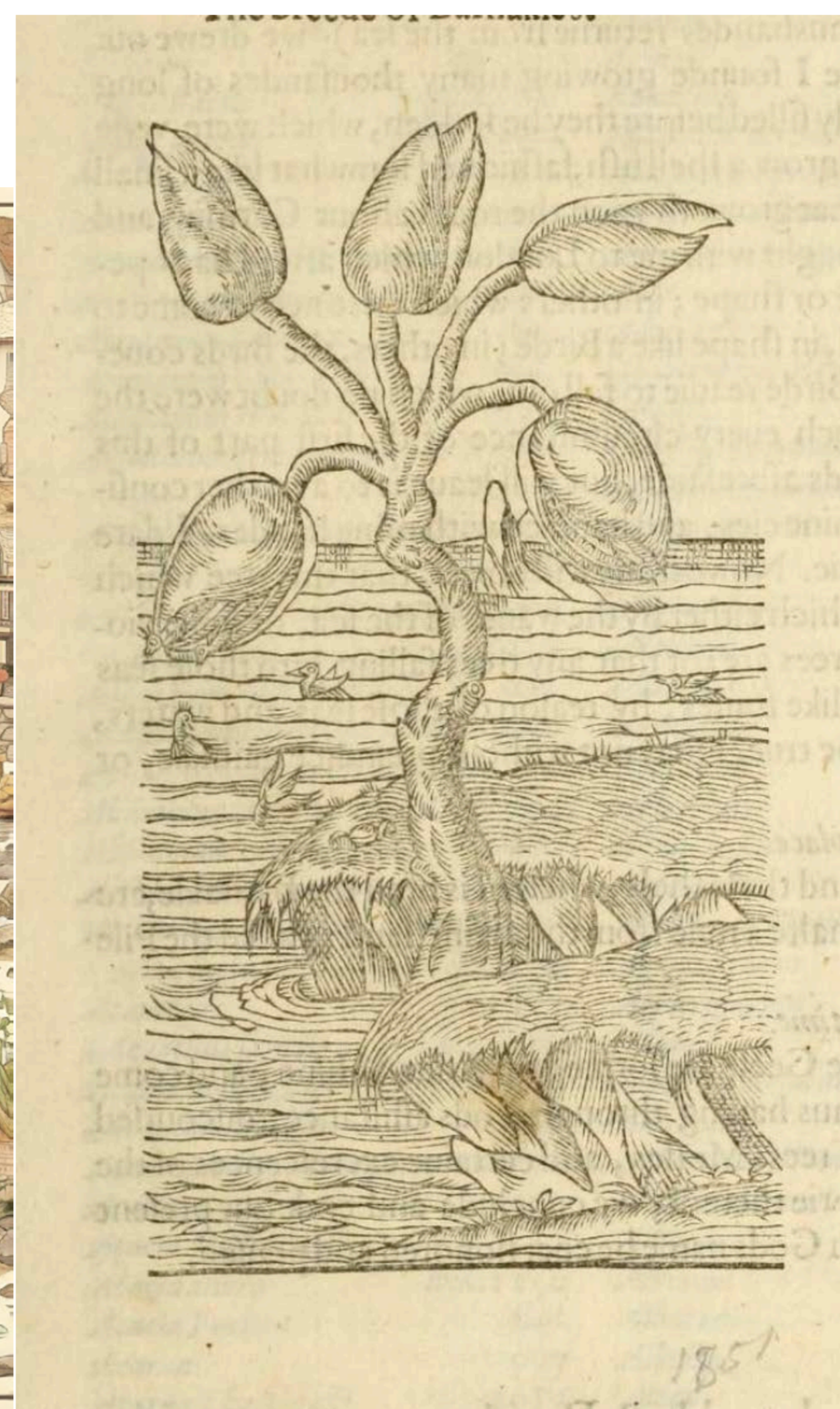
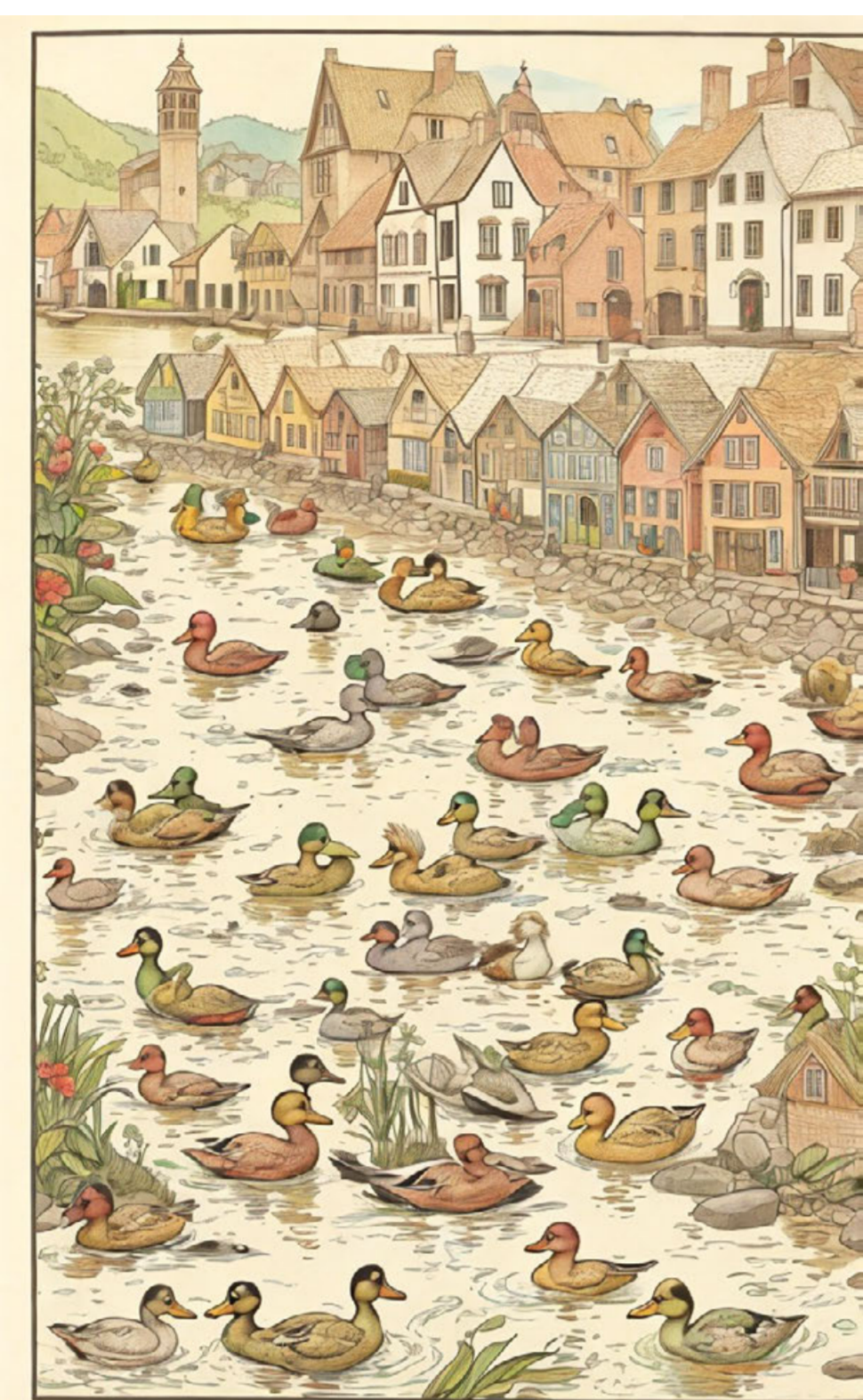


DIGITAL HUMANITIES,  
HISTORY, PLANT  
HUMANITIES

A FACILITATED INTERACTION BETWEEN  
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND RENAISSANCE  
HERBAL BOOKS

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FOUNDING LAB  
SEMESTER PROJECT 2023/24

**'Mechanical Learning and the Book of Nature'** is a critical AI art piece that suggests an alternative history of Artificial Intelligence through comparison with renaissance herbal literature, specifically John Gerard's 'Great Herbal' of 1597. This project draws connections between the mechanical plagiarism integral to both knowledge systems and the generation nonsense that emerges as a result. Combining AI image generation with Gerard's texts and images, a book was created to root AI knowledge systems in the aesthetic landscape of Renaissance herbalism. In this context, the results of system combination highlight the way information technologies reproduce the sources they draw from and undermine the idea of AI as a new and futuristic system of learning. Alongside the hubris of constructing a 'book of life' to mechanically contain and comprehend an entire created order, the concept of a General AI that can do the same for our modern data sets no longer seems so futuristic. The text you may read contains Gerard's plagiarised information about plants which is full of absurd tales and faulty details. The images, generated from the originals and a basic prompt by an AI image generator recreate the nonsense inherent to knowledge systems aiming for totality by introducing new strangeness to Gerard's images (Both 1597 originals and 2024 AI hybrids are shown on this poster).

