

Cambridge University Press
978-1-316-60686-5 - Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus
Sir Thomas Browne
Excerpt
[More information](#)

HYDRIOTAPHIA
URNE BURIALL
OR
A BRIEF DISCOURSE
OF THE SEPULCHRALL URNES
LATELY FOUND IN
NORFOLK

Cambridge University Press

978-1-316-60686-5 - Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus

Sir Thomas Browne

Excerpt

[More information](#)

HYDRIOTAPHIA,
URNE-BURIALL,
 OR,
A Discourse of the Sepulchrall
Urnes lately found in
NORFOLK.
Together with
The Garden of CYRUS,
 OR THE
Quincunciall, Lozenge, or
Net-work Plantations of the An-
cients, Artificially, Naturally,
Mystically Considered.
With Sundry Observations.

By Thomas Browne D. of Physick.

L O N D O N,
 Printed for *Hen. Brome* at the Signe of the
 Gun in *Ivy-lane.* 1658.

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-316-60686-5 - Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus
 Sir Thomas Browne
 Excerpt
[More information](#)

TO MY
 WORTHY AND HONOURED FRIEND
 THOMAS LE GROS
 OF CROSTWICK ESQUIRE

When the Funerall pyre was out, and the last valediction over, men took a lasting adieu of their interred Friends, little expecting the curiosity of future ages should comment upon their ashes, and having no old experience of the duration of their Reliques, held no opinion of such after considerations.

But who knows the fate of his bones, or how often he is to be buried? who hath the Oracle of his ashes, or whither they are to be scattered? The Reliques of many lie like the ruines of Pompeys, in all parts of the earth; And when they arrive at your hands, these may seem to have wandred far, who in a direct and Meridian Travell, have but few miles of known Earth between your self and the Pole.

That the bones of Theseus should be seen again in Athens, was not beyond conjecture, and hopeful expectation; but that these should arise so opportunely to serve your self, was an hit of fate and honour beyond prediction.

We cannot but wish these Urnes might have the effect of Theatrical vessels, and great Hippodrome Urnes in Rome; to resound the acclamations and honour due unto you. But these are sad and sepulchral Pitchers, which have no joyful voices; silently expressing old mortality, the ruines of forgotten times, and can only speak with life, how long in this corruptible frame, some parts may be uncorrupted; yet able to out-last bones long unborn, and noblest pyle among us.

We present not these as any strange sight or spectacle unknown to your eyes, who have beheld the best of Urnes, and

HYDRIOTAPHIA

noblest variety of Ashes; Who are your self no slender master of Antiquities, and can daily command the view of so many Imperiall faces; Which raiseth your thoughts unto old things, and consideration of times before you, when even living men were Antiquities; when the living might exceed the dead, and to depart this world, could not be properly said, to go unto the greater number. And so run up your thoughts upon the ancient of dayes, the Antiquaries truest object, unto whom the eldest parcels are young, and earth it self an Infant; and without Ægyptian account makes but small noise in thousands.

We were hinted by the occasion, not caught the opportunity to write of old things, or intrude upon the Antiquary. We are coldly drawn unto discourses of Antiquities, who have scarce time before us to comprehend new things, or make out learned Novelties. But seeing they arose as they lay, almost in silence among us, at least in short account suddenly passed over; we were very unwilling they should die again, and be buried twice among us.

Beside, to preserve the living, and make the dead to live, to keep men out of their Urnes, and discourse of humane fragments in them, is not impertinent unto our profession; whose study is life and death, who daily behold examples of mortality, and of all men least need artificial memento's, or coffins by our bed side, to minde us of our graves.

'Tis time to observe Occurrences, and let nothing remarkable escape us; The Supinity of elder dayes hath left so much in silence, or time hath so martyred the Records, that the most industrious heads do finde no easie work to erect a new Britannia.

'Tis opportune to look back upon old times, and contemplate our Forefathers. Great examples grow thin, and to be fetched from the passed world. Simplicity flies away, and iniquity comes at long strides upon us. We have enough to do to make up our selves from present and passed times, and the whole stage of things scarce serveth for our instruction. A compleat peece of

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-316-60686-5 - Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus
 Sir Thomas Browne
 Excerpt
[More information](#)

URNE BURIALL

vertue must be made up from the Centos of all ages, as all the beauties of Greece could make but one handsome Venus.

When the bones of King Arthur were digged up, the old Race might think, they beheld therein some Originals of themselves; Unto these of our Urnes none here can pretend relation, and can only behold the Reliques of those persons, who in their life giving the Law unto their predecessors, after long obscurity, now lye at their mercies. But remembring the early civility they brought upon these Countreys, and forgetting long passed mischiefs; We mercifully preserve their bones, and pisse not upon their ashes.

In the offer of these Antiquities we drive not at ancient Families, so long out-lasting by them; We are farre from erecting your worth upon the pillars of your Fore-fathers, whose merits you illustrate. We honour your old Virtues, conformable unto times before you, which are the Noblest Armoury. And having long experience of your friendly conversation, void of empty Formality, full of freedome, constant and Generous Honesty, I look upon you as a Gemme of the Old Rock, and must professe my self even to Urne and Ashes,

Your ever faithfull Friend,

and Servant,

*Norwich
 May 1*

Thomas Browne.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-316-60686-5 - Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus
Sir Thomas Browne
Excerpt
[More information](#)



En sum quod digitis Quinque Levatur onus p̄oport:

Cambridge University Press
978-1-316-60686-5 - Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus
Sir Thomas Browne
Excerpt
[More information](#)

HYDRIOTAPHIA URNE BURIALL

CHAPTER I

IN the deep discovery of the Subterranean world, a shallow part would satisfie some enquirers; who, if two or three yards were open about the surface, would not care to rake the bowels of *Potosi*, and regions towards the Centre. Nature hath furnished one part of the Earth, and man another. The treasures of time lie high, in Urnes, Coynes, and Monuments, scarce below the roots of some vegetables. Time hath endlesse rarities, and shows of all varieties; which reveals old things in heaven, makes new discoveries in earth, and even earth it self a discovery. That great Antiquity *America* lay buried for thousands of years; and a large part of the earth is still in the Urne unto us.

Though if *Adam* were made out of an extract of the Earth, all parts might challenge a restitution, yet few have returned their bones farre lower than they might receive them; not affecting the graves of Giants, under hilly and heavy coverings, but content with lesse than their owne depth, have wished their bones might lie soft, and the earth be light upon them; Even such as hope to rise again, would not be content with centrall interrment, or so desperately to place their reliques as to lie beyond discovery, and in no way to be seen again; which happy contrivance hath made communication with our forefathers, and left unto our view some parts, which they never beheld themselves.

Though earth hath engrossed the name yet water hath proved the smartest grave; which in forty dayes swallowed

Cambridge University Press

978-1-316-60686-5 - Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus

Sir Thomas Browne

Excerpt

[More information](#)

HYDRIOTAPHIA

almost mankinde, and the living creation; Fishes not wholly escaping, except the Salt Ocean were handsomely contempered by admixture of the fresh Element.

Many have taken voluminous pains to determine the state of the soul upon disunion; but men have been most phantasticall in the singular contrivances of their corporall dissolution; whilest the sobrest Nations have rested in two wayes, of simple inhumation and burning.

That carnall interment or burying, was of the elder date, the old examples of *Abraham* and the Patriarchs are sufficient to illustrate; And were without competition, if it could be made out, that *Adam* was buried near *Damascus*, or Mount *Calvary*, according to some Tradition. God himself, that buried but one, was pleased to make choice of this way, collectible from Scripture-expression, and the hot contest between Satan and the Arch-Angel, about discovering the body of *Moses*. But the practice of Burning was also of great Antiquity, and of no slender extent. For (not to derive the same from *Hercules*) noble descriptions there are hereof in the Grecian Funerals of *Homer*, In the formall Obsequies of *Patroclus*, and *Achilles*; and somewhat elder in the *Theban* warre, and solemn combustion of *Meneceus*, and *Archemorus*, contemporary unto *Jair* the Eighth Judge of *Israel*. Confirmable also among the *Trojans*, from the Funerall Pyre of *Hector*, burnt before the gates of *Troy*, And the burning of *Penthisilea* the *Amazonian Queen*: and long continuance of that practice, in the inward Countries of *Asia*; while as low as the Reign of *Julian*, we finde that the King of *Chionia* burnt the body of his Son, and interred the ashes in a silver Urne.

The same practice extended also farre West, and besides *Herulians*, *Getes*, and *Thracians*, was in use with most of the *Celtæ*, *Sarmatians*, *Germans*, *Gauls*, *Danes*, *Swedes*, *Norwegians*; not to omit some use thereof among *Carthaginians*

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-316-60686-5 - Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus
 Sir Thomas Browne
 Excerpt
[More information](#)

URNE BURIALL

and *Americans*: Of greater Antiquity among the *Romans* than most opinion, or *Pliny* seems to allow. For (beside the old Table Laws of burning or burying within the City, of making the Funerall fire with plained wood, or quenching the fire with wine) *Manlius* the Consul burnt the body of his Son: *Numa* by speciall clause of his Will, was not burnt but buried; And *Remus* was solemnly burned, according to the description of *Ovid*.

Cornelius Sylla was not the first whose body was burned in *Rome*, but of the *Cornelian* Family, which being indifferently, not frequently used before, from that time spread, and became the prevalent practice. Not totally pursued in the highest runne of Cremation; For when even Crows were funerally burnt, *Poppæa* the Wife of *Nero* found a peculiar grave enterment. Now as all customes were founded upon some bottome of Reason, so there wanted not grounds for this; according to severall apprehensions of the most rationall dissolution. Some being of the opinion of *Thales*, that water was the originall of all things, thought it most equall to submit unto the principle of putrefaction, and conclude in a moist relentment. Others conceived it most natural to end in fire, as due unto the master principle in the composition, according to the doctrine of *Heraclitus*. And therefore heaped up large piles, more actively to waft them toward that Element, whereby they also declined a visible degeneration into worms, and left a lasting parcell of their composition.

Some apprehended a purifying virtue in fire, refining the grosser commixture, and firing out the *Æthereall* particles so deeply immersed in it. And such as by tradition or rationall conjecture held any hint of the fnall pyre of all things; or that this Element at last must be too hard for all the rest; might conceive most naturally of the fiery dissolution. Others pretending no natural grounds, politickly declined the malice

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-316-60686-5 - Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus
 Sir Thomas Browne
 Excerpt
[More information](#)

HYDRIOTAPHIA

of enemies upon their buried bodies. Which consideration led *Sylla* unto this practise; who having thus served the body of *Marius*, could not but fear a retaliation upon his own, entertained after in the Civill wars, and revengeful contentions of *Rome*.

But as many Nations embraced, and many left it indifferent, so others too much affected, or strictly declined this practice. The *Indian Brachmans* seemed too great friends unto fire, who burnt themselves alive, and thought it the noblest way to end their dayes in fire; according to the expression of the Indian, burning himself at *Athens*, in his last words upon the pyre unto the amazed spectators, *Thus I make my selfe Immortall*.

But the *Chaldeans*, the great Idolaters of fire, abhorred the burning of their carcasses, as a pollution of that Deity. The *Persian Magi* declined it upon the like scruple, and being only sollicitous about their bones, exposed their flesh to the prey of Birds and Dogges. And the *Persees* now in *India*, which expose their bodies unto Vultures, and endure not so much as *feretra* or Beers of Wood, the proper Fuell of fire, are led on with such niceties. But whether the ancient *Germans* who burned their dead, held any such fear to pollute their Deity of *Herthus*, or the earth, we have no Authentick conjecture.

The *Ægyptians* were afraid of fire, not as a Deity, but a devouring Element, mercilesly consuming their bodies, and leaving too little of them; and therefore by precious Embalments, depositeure in dry earths, or handsome inclosure in glasses, contrived the notablest wayes of integrall conservation. And from such *Ægyptian* scruples imbibed by *Pythagoras*, it may be conjectured that *Numa* and the Pythagoricall Sect first waded the fiery solution.

The *Scythians* who swore by winde and sword, that is, by life and death, were so farre from burning their bodies, that they declined all interment, and made their graves in the ayr: