

BURKE'S PEERAGE

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GARDEN ORNAMENTS PAST AND PRESENT

Gardens are places of mystery and hope. Flowers bloom, water flows, and nature recreates itself in an endless cycle that spans the seasons. Throughout history, gardens have fascinated the warrior and poet alike, serving as a barometer of culture, stability and prestige. What better place to exhibit man's art than amongst the masterpieces of nature?

Statuary, urns, vases, sundials, jardinières and pedestals are often used to adorn gardens. The practice first began in antiquity. One of the earliest archeological sites displaying an abundance of garden statuary is found in the Villa of Poppaea at Oplontis. Located near Mount Vesuvius, the country villa was covered

in volcanic ash and preserved intact when the volcano erupted in 79 A.D.

Scholars were delighted to discover the 44 statues placed around the pool and throughout the courtyard. Their arrangement and subject matter were far different from the pieces that had been unearthed in nearby Pompeii. A typical Pompeiian home would have a centaur or satyr displayed in the atrium, whereas the Villa of Poppaea featured a true gallery of provincial art.

It may be surprising to learn that ancient garden art was not limited to mythological creatures. The Villa of Poppaea boasted a large stone crab and the ubiquitous statuette of a boy holding a duckling, among other light-hearted subjects.

During the 15th century, it became chic to collect antiquities. The wealthy collectors displayed small items, such as coins, inside the home but preferred to place ancient statues, altars, and sarcophagi outside for all to see. Because the pieces were too heavy to steal, they served as the perfect status symbol for the antique collector. Subsequently, ancient sculpture

Sculptures for the garden and home can take on many forms, whether mythical or classical.

