

“Item: a Payre of Beads; Or, what *not* to call a Rosary” A Class at University of Atlantia, October 4, 2003.
c. Lady Kateryn Rous (Marybeth Lavrakas).

What is, and is not, a period Rosary:

A rosary (in period) was not a physical object. It was a set of meditations and prayers focused on the life of Christ and divided into the 5 Joyful, 5 Sorrowful, and 5 Glorious mysteries. Each meditation is followed by reciting 10 Ave Maria (Hail Mary) and 1 paternoster (Our Father) prayers.

A “pair “of beads, paternoster beads, chaplet of beads (German) etc., was needed to keep track of one’s place while reciting Ave Marias, etc. A rosary book was vital to working through the detailed meditations on each of the mysteries. Earliest Rosary book circa 1480.

The Beads: The use of prayer beads to assist in prayer & meditation in western Europe dates back to at least the 12th century. Number and type of beads varies greatly through time. Late 15th C artwork suggests a particular fondness for coral beads. Amber appear in art & written sources. Gold and silver beads for those who could afford it. Documentary evidence for glass beads. Boxwood beads much cheaper. Mary Rose shipwreck finds included several boxwood pairs of beads; also some cheap metal beads and stones. Typically strung on silk; examples survive of round tablet woven cords used to string Rosary beads in England. During 16th C the beads might be worn as a necklace or hanging from waist to highlight the piety and/or wealth of the owner.

The Books: I have been examining the available rosary books printed in England between 1526-1599. The earlier books highlight variation in prayer format ; the later books take pains to explain doctrine and how the Rosary fits in. I believe this is a reflection both of the effects of the Council of Trent (ended 1563) and the outlawing of the Rosary in England in 1571.

Why pray the “Rosary”? 1. Focuses mind on life of Christ; ritual participation in it. 2. Addition of Credo (Nicene Creed) and the Gloria makes it an expression/teaching tool of orthodoxy 3. Communal & personal benefit via granting of indulgences. This sort of prayer, and the earlier, simpler versions of reciting multiple prayers over and over, only make sense if you understand the idea of the ‘communion of saints’ and the doctrine of Purgatory.

Society of the Rosary: Confraternity founded 1475 in Cologne. By 1482 there were 100,000 members in Europe.

- Members join by adding their name to a local roster. They can do so by proxy.
- No discrimination based on gender or social status
- No punishments for failure to pray
- No set version to be prayed, and no designated time to pray
- Local language used for meditations
- Literacy not a requirement

Why join the Society? Communal grace. Local groups also sponsored chapels to go to pray, processions, etc (i.e., provides a social tie to others)