

In addition to tiny, beautiful prayer books and rosary beads, people of the past liked to express their love of religion and beauty with objects known as prayer nuts. These artifacts were not actually carved from nuts--rather, they were carved from wood, but tiny enough to look like walnuts.

Prayer nuts were mainly produced in northern Europe during the 16th century. Due to the incredible skill required to make these items, only the wealthy could afford them. In addition to being a symbol of a person's faith, they were also a status symbol.





The outsides alone were marvelously carved with intricate designs, including text. Everything was held in place with wooden hinges carved right into the piece. These prayer nuts would usually be attached to a belt or a rosary.





When the nut opens, the first things you see are panels carved with various religious scenes. These vary based on the prayer nut, and might be dedicated to a certain saint, religious event, or type of prayer. The one above shows the Annunciation scene on the bottom, and around the images, you can see the prayer passages carved in.



But there's more! The inside panels could also open, by way of more tiny wooden hinges, and revealed even *more* miniature carvings. Because of the round shape of the prayer nuts, these scenes would be spectacularly detailed, with rows of lifelike little figures. Imagine the patience and the skill one would need to create something like this!

In addition, the prayer nuts were often scented with a variety of perfumes, so that the scenes would be an even greater sensory experience for their owners.











The prayer nuts you see here are all from the 1500's, with most coming from Dutch regions. Today , they're prized as incredible works of art, and can be found in many museums.