



Inv. no. 16/2012

PRAYER BEADS, IVORY

TURKEY; 19TH-20TH CENTURY

The Sufi uses prayer beads to keep track of the religious litanies that he recites alone or together with other brethren in his order. The number of beads on the string corresponds to the number of litanies that characterize the ritual of prayer in each order. The Indian Chishti order is known to have as many as 5,000 beads on one string. The most common number, however, is 99 – as on these two strings – corresponding to the number of the names of God.

In many orders, a novice is given prayer beads as part of his initiation ritual. The precious materials, fine workmanship, and lack of signs of wear on many prayer beads indicate that they have also played a role as symbols of authority.