

Social Studies: Early History of Weaving: The Pazyryk Weavings

The Oldest Rug in the World

The Pazyryk Rug c. 500 BC

Russian archeologist Sergei Rudenko excavated the burial mound of a tribal chief in the Altai Mountains of eastern Russia, near the Mongolian border. The tomb was 2,500 years old. Among other treasures, a complete woven rug, what we commonly now call and “oriental rug” or a “Persian rug” was found beautifully preserved in the tomb.

The photo below is of one of the rugs preserved in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia.



How was it preserved for so long?

Grave robbers had entered the tomb to steal what they thought was valuable. Apparently they didn't close the door! Their entry allowed water to fill the tomb, and it froze into a solid block of ice, becoming permanently frozen and preserving the fibers until they were brought to light two and a half millennia later. If the grave had remained undisturbed, the fibers would long since have rotted away. As it was they took the small items of gold that were placed around the body of the chieftain. No one yet knows what

tribe or people wove this rug. What we do know is that a people we call “Indo-Scythian” people lived in the area at that time. Some scholars believe that the people who wove the rug were called the Massagetae, who were related to the Scythians.

Pazyryk Burials: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pazyryk_burials

Scythians: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scythians>

The rug found in the tomb was beautifully designed, with incredible detail, and woven with the Turkish or Ghiordes (Gordian) knot, very finely, with 277 knots to the square inch, which is about 17 knots per inch, making a very fine, dense carpet. Carpets today are woven with about 6 threads to the inch, much coarser than their ancestors of 2500 years ago.

Question: The design and techniques of this ancient carpet are very complex and advanced. What does this say about the accomplishments of the ancient peoples?

The designs on the Pazyryk rug are very similar to ancient Greek designs (the Scythians may have originated in what we now call northern Greece or Macedonia), or the Greeks may have copied woven designs to use in their pottery. You can research this by making a timeline of Greek and Scythian culture and placing the Pazyryk weaving on the timeline.

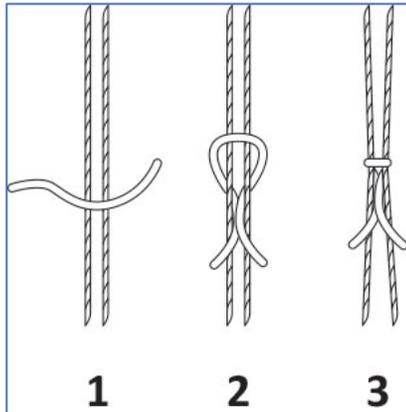
Learning the Ghiordes knot.

The “Gordian knot” is popular in literature as a metaphor for lives or situations entangled together, hard to straighten out. In reality, it is a simple knot tied around two warp threads.

How to tie it:

1. Warp the loom with 8 doubled warps. Start with four rows of plain weave to start your rug.
2. Cut yarn in 6” pieces. Do this by winding yarn around a 3” piece of corrugated cardboard, and cutting across the windings.

- Pick up one piece by the ends. For next steps, see below.

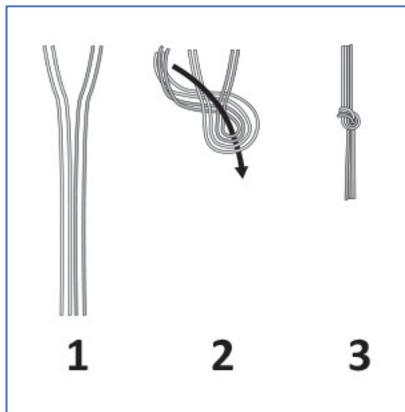


- Lay the middle across two warps (step 1) a couple of inches up from the weaving. Push the ends in on each side of the two warps while separating the warps with your fingers, and draw the ends up through the middle (step 2).
- Pull the ends tight (step 3).
- Push the knot down, and tighten it against the woven rows.
- Fill the row with knots (four knots per row).

Weave two rows of plain weave after the first row of knots. Tie another row of knots, then weave two rows of plain weave. Trim the ends of the knotted yarns after knotting each row if you want a carpet, or leave them long if you want a shag rug!

Finishing the woven piece

Cut the warp ends and tie pairs together in half hitch knots (see below), so there are two pairs for each half hitch knot.



Thoughts:

How long do you think it would take to make a rug large enough to cover the seat of your school chair?
Can you back up your estimate?

How much yarn would it take to make a 3-inch by 3-inch carpet?