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The Pazyryk Carpet - A Deep-frozen Treasure from a Tomb in the High Altai.

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The written history of pile-carpet manufacture was challenged dramatically, following the discovery of the so-called "Pazyryk carpet" in the late-1940s, during an archaeological dig led by Sergei Ivanovich Rudenko, in the Pazyryk Valley, amid the Altai Mountains in southern Siberia. The carpet (which measures 1.83 metres by 1.98 metres) was found in a kurgan (or tomb) and is currently held in the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg. The kurgans in the Altai region have interested archaeologists since the nineteenth century, with expeditions led by Radloff in 1865, Griaznov (with Rudenko) from 1925 to 1929, Shibe in 1927 and again by Rudenko from 1947 to 1949. This latter series of digs was found to be the most fruitful archaeologically, and lead to the discovery of the carpet and a range of other interesting artifacts. The circumstances of the carpet's survival were fortuitous. Shortly after the kurgan's construction, water seeped into the tomb and, on freezing, held the contents in a deep frozen state for around two-and-a-half-thousand years. Other, much smaller, pile-carpet fragments as well as appliquéd felted fabrics were also found during the Rudenko series of digs. This paper describes the circumstances of the Pazyryk carpet's survival and discovery. Attention is focused on the technical aspects of its manufacture, and the structural and thematic characteristics of its design. The intention is to develop the debate relating to the carpet's provenance and usage prior to its entombment in the kurgan.