

**“READING TOWELS”:
RUSSIAN DECORATIVE ART
AMONG L. S. TOKSUBAYEVA’S EXPEDITION MATERIALS**

L. S. Toksubayeva (1948–2017) was an outstanding figure of the Kazan ethnographic school and played a major role in the studies of ornaments and semantic function of towels in family rituals. This article is the first attempt to examine the scientific biography of L. S. Toksubayeva based on her field materials and archival documents and to analyze the main areas of her work on the development of ethnography at Kazan University. L. S. Toksubayeva became one of the pioneers in the development of research tools, conducting field research of Russian folk art in the Middle Volga region and analyzing the collected material. She also made a significant contribution to the development of ethnographic research in Kazan. Considering towels as one of the important research objects of Russian decorative art, L. S. Toksubayeva concluded that they were an iconic part of family rituals. Together with her colleagues, she managed to assemble a diverse collection of material culture of the Russian population in the Kazan Volga region in the late XIX — early XX centuries, and, in particular, to reconstruct the territorial and chronological patterns of towel ornamentation, identify their traditional functions and consider their transformation.

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