

**MINISTRY OF CULTURE OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA  
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA  
ACADEMY OF MUSIC, THEATRE AND FINE ARTS**

Submitted in Manuscript Form

CZU 745.52.043(043)

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**THE SEMANTIC EVOLUTION OF PLANT MOTIFS APPLIED  
IN THE DECORATION OF TRADITIONAL FABRICS IN THE  
REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA**

**ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS**

**FIELD OF DOCTORAL STUDIES: 021.3 VISUAL ARTS**

**DOCTORAL PROGRAM: FINE AND DECORATIVE ARTS**

(scientific doctorate)

**CHISINAU, 2026**

**The thesis was developed within the Doctoral School of Arts and Cultural Studies  
Academy of Music, Theatre and Fine Arts**

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The defense will take place on June 18, 2026, at 14:00, in the meeting of the Commission for  
the defense of the doctoral thesis in Arts, within the Academy of Music, Theater and Fine Arts  
(Chisinau, str. 31 August 1989, nr. 137).

The doctoral thesis and the abstract can be consulted at the National Library of the Republic of  
Moldova (Chisinau, str. 31 August 1989, 78A), at the Library of the Academy of Music,  
Theater and Fine Arts (Chisinau, str. Alexei Mateevici, nr. 111), on the ANACEC and  
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## CONCEPTUAL LANDMARKS OF THE RESEARCH

**Topicality of the topic.** Folk art presents an inexhaustible source of inspiration and knowledge of cultural identity, providing access to the values, traditions and way of life of past generations. By studying traditional fabrics and exploring decorative motifs, making techniques and meanings of symbols transmitted from ancestors, one can discover deep meanings related to spirituality, aesthetics and man's relationship with nature. At the same time, the study of folk art contributes to the preservation of the national cultural heritage and to its valorization in a contemporary context, stimulating creativity and dialogue between the past and the present.

An integral part of folk art, and more broadly – of popular culture, traditional fabrics in the Republic of Moldova are defined by a coherent structural unity, but also by an expressive ornamental diversity that reflects a centuries-old artistic experience, adapted to the historical and socio-economic conditions specific to this cultural space. The research of decorative motifs through the prism of traditional fabrics is essential, since these motifs are not simple ornaments, but bearers of symbolic, historical and spiritual meanings. Or, the ornamentation of fabrics is currently a field of interdisciplinary research in which specialists from different fields participate: ethnographers, folklore anthropologists, geographers, sociologists, historians, archivists, museographers, etc.

A reference name is V. Buzilă, known for her valuable studies on folk costumes, the symbolism of ornaments and cultural identity. In the volume *Traditional Art of the Republic of Moldova*, she offers a synthesis of the evolution of the national culture and the main occupations of the ancestors, illustrated by suggestive images. The work focuses on the essential landmarks of traditional art in the Republic of Moldova, highlighting folk craftsmen and their creations – fabrics, towels, crochets, folk costumes and national symbols. Also, Varvara Buzilă's research is important, focused on the symbiosis of the technical and practical characteristics of carpets, on the artistic and symbolic analysis of the different types of decorative motifs of the textile pieces from the historical collection of the Bessarabian Zemstva Museum, whose constitution began in the last decades of the nineteenth century and continues to this day through the effort of the National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History in Chisinau. This collection of carpets, exceptional for its antiquity, variety and authenticity, proves that traditional fabrics, through their rich decoration with various motifs, have been considered objects of public heritage since the nineteenth century, while they have been family heritage since ancient times. An essential historiographical and scientific support regarding the ornamentation of traditional fabrics is constituted by the works of the researchers: E. Postolache, V. Buzilă, Gh. Mardare, L. Moisei and

others.

A more detailed description of the decorative motifs in traditional fabrics, especially carpets, can be found in the works of the researchers: Gh. Mardare, V. Buzilă, G. Stoica, E. Postolachi. Investigations regarding the functions of ornamentation in traditional fabrics in semiotic, aesthetic and as a sign of cultural identity were carried out by the researcher L. Moisei.

Studies dedicated to plant motifs in the decoration of traditional fabrics made of vegetable fibers, such as Moldovan towels and towels, are signed by the researchers: S. Șaranuță, Z. Șofranksy, M. Ciocanu and E. Postolachi, who collected valuable materials and information from field research and museum collections. In this context, Z. Șofranksy made a classification of textile pieces according to: utility, raw material, decoration, name and dimensions.

The museographer M. Ciocanu, in the catalogue *Moldavian Deletion* (late nineteenth century – early twentieth century), identifies the historical periods of the old deletion collection, shows the research methods and describes the pieces based on the collections of the National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History [5].

From the above, it can be seen that traditional ornamentation has been studied in general, but there is still space for research on the weight of certain classes of motifs in traditional fabrics; among them, plant motifs are dominant and, for this reason, deserve a more detailed analysis – a situation that generated **the problem of research**. Seen from this perspective, there is a need for a broad, coherent and multifaceted research of the targeted field, because the semantic evolution of plant motifs in traditional fabrics in the Republic of Moldova is reflected fragmentarily in catalogs, articles and studies. This paper proposes a complex approach to the characteristics of the most important plant motifs. The particularities of their integration into the ornamentation of wool and vegetable fiber fabrics in different historical periods imply a chromatic, semantic and symbolic dynamics in the traditional fabrics of different regions of the country – aspects that we intend to fully elucidate in this paper.

**The purpose of the research** is to identify, systematize and analyze the semantic evolution of the plant motifs placed in the decoration of traditional fabrics in the Republic of Moldova.

**Research objectives:**

1. Characterization of traditional fabrics according to destination, raw material and origin.
2. Identification and description of stylized plants in decorative motifs.
3. Systematization and classification of plant motifs applied in the decoration of traditional fabrics.

4. Determination of the symbolic meaning of the plant motifs integrated into the decoration of the fabrics.

5. Characterization of the ways of placing the decoration on the surfaces of traditional fabrics.

6. Analysis of the semantic evolution of plant motifs.

**Novelty and originality of the work:** The research aims to complete a less studied segment in textile arts – the description and characterization of the semantic evolution of plant motifs, which constitute the most representative class in the decoration of traditional fabrics in the Republic of Moldova and capitalized in contemporary textile art.

Since the placement of plant motifs in the compositional field of traditional fabrics is in close interdependence with their destination, the types of traditional fabrics have been analyzed and systematized; identified and characterized the most important plants, whose image appears in the decoration; classified and described the plant motifs specific to the geographical areas; established the structural and semantic evolution of plant motifs in traditional wool and vegetable fibre fabrics; The meanings and symbolism of the plant motifs that give individuality to the decoration of the fabrics have been analyzed.

**Theoretical and methodological basis:** The formulation of the theme and the research problem required a theoretical framing of the work in the context of the development of the historiography of the field. The achievement of this goal was possible both thanks to the accumulation, systematization and analysis of several sources, as well as to the revelation of the contributions of the previous authors to the study of the theme. For factual documentation, museum collections, catalogs and exhibitions were studied.

Regarding the typology and functionality of traditional wool and vegetable fiber fabrics, an essential source of ethnographic information was the museum heritage of the Republic of Moldova. The National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History includes, from a historical and territorial point of view, the richest and most representative collections of Moldovan carpets (late eighteenth century – twentieth century). The ethnographic museums and ethnography sections integrated into historical museums, located in the cities of Soroca, Edinet, Orhei, Tighina, Cahul, Ungheni, Vulcanesti etc., also contribute to the preservation and promotion of traditional national fabrics.

Field research has been of major importance for the research of various plant motifs in traditional fabrics. From 2020 to the end of 2025, the museums in the city of Bucharest were visited. Chisinau and from the districts of the Republic of Moldova, such as: Ungheni – the villages

of Florițoaia Nouă, Cetireni, Pârlița; or. Criuleni – Museum of History and Ethnography, Or. Straseni – Museum of History and Ethnography, Strășeni city. Cîmislia – Museum of Ethnography and Art and other localities where there are collections of traditional fabrics.

The collections of traditional fabrics made of vegetable fibers with a wide destination and variety of plant motifs were also analyzed. These plays represent the traditions of all districts of the Republic of Moldova, as well as of Bessarabia. They are hemp, cotton, linen and borangic fabrics, classified according to the weaving and decoration techniques into: simple, raised, unedited, with choices, embroidered, with horbotic, fringes and canaps.

The inscriptions recorded on carpets and embroidery, indicating the year of the realization and, frequently, the name of the author, have also served as important sources in identifying the historical period and geographical area. Such pieces with inscriptions were documented during festivals and carpet fairs and in monasteries in the Republic of Moldova. An essential role in the data collection process, as well as in the identification and analysis of the reasons, was played by the involvement of community members, the so-called informants, who inherited traditional fabrics (carpets, towels, tablecloths, pillows, etc.) from parents and grandmothers.

The types of decorative motifs applied in the ornamentation of traditional fabrics on the territory of Moldova have a rich history, reflected in the valuable research of ethnographers such as: V. Buzilă, M. Ciocanu, E. Postolache, M. Livșiț, Z. Șofranksy, S. Șaranuța, L. Moisei, Gh. Mardare, D. Goberman, V. Marcheveci, V. Zelenciuc and others.

In terms of age and diversity, the factual richness of the fabrics was completed by some older publications, which contained useful information. In this way, we managed to accumulate an imposing factual base, so as to ensure the objectives assumed in the paper.

Given the importance of fabrics in the life of communities, but also their artistic value, they have been noticed as a more frequent spread since the nineteenth century. They benefited from prints in the form of albums from the beginning of the twentieth century, but their research from an artistic perspective begins in the '60s of the twentieth century with the works of D. Goberman, who included Moldavian carpets in the scientific circuit from the perspective of the study of art.

Another stage in research is related to the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, which marks a theoretical deepening in the analysis of some defining aspects of the field. For the specificity of the wipes - Ciocanu M., for the wiping and chromatics of the fabrics - Șofranksy Z., regarding the emphasis on the interpretation of the meaning of ornamental motifs - Buzilă V., Moisei L., Mardare Gh.

The elaborations of the art historian N. Dunăre [13] on the comparative research of the ornaments of the peoples of the world and the classifications undertaken according to several criteria have facilitated our operation with this valuable artistic fund, in order to make it relevant. The scientific results of Romanian authors, such as: P. Petrescu, T. Bănăţeanu, G. Stoica, E. Florescu, I. Ciubotaru, S. Ciubotaru and others, have provided a methodological framework that is still valid today both in considering the artistic values of ornamentation as a whole, of certain ornamental types, and regarding the evolution and significance of ornaments integrated into the compositional space of traditional interior fabrics.

The perspectives of analysis were completed in the context of other cultures: A. Losev, I. Gherciuc, N. Besciastnov, L. Butkevici, Coev I., Kalashnikova N., Fokina D. etc., who approached the issue of the symbolism of decorative motifs.

The concepts and ideas regarding the compositional principles and the plastic means specific to the decorative and ornamental composition were correlated with the researches carried out by: I. Daghi, S. Meyer, L. Moisei etc.

Of great value were dictionaries and encyclopedias of a general nature, as well as specific to folk art. Important informational landmarks also served electronic sources, which contributed significantly to the diversification of the available data.

Depending on the issues examined, the research methodology focused on various methods, such as: *comparative-historical, observation and description, analysis and synthesis, field research, case study, systematization, classification, typology, etc.*

These methods were applied to the complex study of traditional fabrics in the Republic of Moldova, to the analysis of the ornamental background, especially of the diversity of plant motifs integrated in the ornamental decoration of the fabrics, of the compositional principles and of the plastic means applied in the decoration, of the chromatics and semantics of the plant motifs in various periods of evolution.

**The applicative value of the work.** The results obtained present a valuable material for museographers, ethnographers, folk craftsmen and young researchers in decorative and folk arts. The study reflects a complex vision of the traditional fabrics of the Republic of Moldova and the diversity of plant motifs applied in their decoration, information that will serve as a methodical support for students from the specialties *of Decorative Arts and History and Theory of Fine Arts*, for teachers in the field and folk craftsmen. Also, the description of the meaning and symbolism of plant motifs will be an inexhaustible source for plastic artists, ceramists and folk craftsmen in

creating artistic and folk art works. The theoretical results will be useful for the *History of Decorative Arts course*.

**Approval of research results.** The doctoral thesis was carried out within the Doctoral School *of Arts and Cultural Studies* of the Academy of Music, Theater and Fine Arts and was discussed at the meetings of the Steering Committee. The scientific results are reflected in 5 articles and 6 communications at national and international scientific conferences.

**Volume and structure of the thesis:** introduction, annotations in Romanian and English, three chapters, general conclusions and recommendations, bibliography of 139 titles, 138 pages of basic text, annexes.

## CONTENT OF THE THESIS

### CHAPTER 1. THE DIVERSITY OF DECORATIVE MOTIFS REPRESENTED IN TRADITIONAL FABRICS PRESENTS

folk art as a source of research on decorative motifs that contribute to the preservation of the national cultural heritage, to the knowledge of the cultural identity, traditions and way of life of past generations. Traditional fabrics made of wool and fibers of vegetable origin in the Republic of Moldova are distinguished by a considerable diversity, determined by a number of factors such as the nature of the raw materials used, the variety of ornamental motifs, the color palette and the functionality of the pieces.

In the popular creation of the Republic of Moldova, traditional home fabrics occupy a significant place, being the bearers of an art of great diversity and richness. Made of natural materials - hemp, linen, borangic, cotton and wool - most of them were produced in peasant households and satisfy certain vital, aesthetic and social needs in human life: to decorate the house, to organize celebrations and to celebrate rituals. In this context, researcher V. Buzilă mentions: "... traditional fabrics represent human creativity in time and space, man's conception and vision of the world in which he lives, built with the local raw material, tradition, skills and craftsmanship knowledge transmitted from generation to generation as a reference" [2, p. 104-109].

Several types of fabrics are known, established in relation to the function they perform and the place they occupy within the interior of the home:

- *household fabrics* - simple hemp wipes, laces (sheets) of hemp or hemp, some tablecloths, "lattices" for cereals, unornamented or very poorly decorated with a few stripes at the ends;
- *functional fabrics* - *decorative* or *strictly decorative* - laces, veils, barks, kilims, rejects, tablecloths, towels, pillowcases;
- *ceremonial fabrics* - wiping and "carving" for weddings, napkins for "cumetrii" or funeral, pillows, barks, etc.

In turn, traditional fabrics constitute a complex field organized into several functional and decorative subcategories, such as:

- fabrics for floors and floors - used for both decoration and heating, including *carpets and floors*, pieces commonly found in traditional households;
- wall fabrics - having an aesthetic and thermal insulating role, this category includes *wall and wall carpets*;
- fabrics for the sleeping space – fulfilling, in addition to the aesthetic role, also apotropaic or protective functions, these pieces include *barks, laiceres, pillowcases, bedspreads and sheets*, designed to ensure both the comfort and beauty of the interior;

- household fabrics - used for decorating and serving meals, such as towels, towels, napkins and tablecloths, having both functional and ceremonial roles;
- utilitarian fabrics for transport - traditionally used for the transport of products, such as *disagii and trăistute* [12, p. 398-402].

As for the raw material, fibers of natural origin have been used since ancient times:

- *wool*, coming from sheep breeding, was the basis for carpets, bark and wool;
- *flax and hemp*, widely grown in households, were used for interior fabrics, wiping and costume pieces;
- *Cotton*, introduced later, completed the repertoire of plant fibers.

Wool fabrics are classified into two categories:

1. *Wool fabrics for bedding* - constitute bedding carpets (*laicere, cergi, lădare, șatrançi and cioltare.*) and covering various items of furniture, such as: washbasins, walls on the perimeter of the room and lattices [16, p.45].
2. *Wool fabrics for covering the walls: War, Paretarele, Cortes, Măcatul (pologul,) Ungherarele and Cordarele.*

Traditional fabrics made of natural fibers - *hemp, linen or cotton* are: *Towel, Towel, Ceremony towel, l Tablecloth, Pillowcase and Bed towel*. These pieces fulfill both a utilitarian and a decorative role in the interior space, being distinguished by the presence of multiple motifs, including vegetal ones. One of the most important pieces of decorative, ceremonial and household use is *the towel*, which has a wide variety of names: *towel, napkin, towel, fisherman, towel, towel, cloth, head cloth, head cloth, head towel, patch, boccea, zolnic, leissier, etc.*

Based on what has been reported, it is found that traditional fabrics occupy an important place in the material culture of Moldovans and fulfill multiple functions: decorative, aesthetic and social, being used both for decorating the interior of the house and during various celebrations and community rituals.

These textile pieces constitute an essential segment of the cultural heritage, going beyond the strictly utilitarian role, they are integrated into a symbolic and ritual system that reflects the conceptions of life, cosmos and community identity. These valuable objects are made from local raw materials and reflect the continuity of crafts passed down from generation to generation.

The decorative motifs present on traditional fabrics bring together a rich imagery heritage and preserve numerous archetypal elements, symbols and motifs with ancient roots and magical meanings. These motifs are not simple figurative transpositions, but codified expressions of a symbolic vision of the world, integrated into a coherent decorative system. The convergence

between the traditional ornamental repertoire and the prehistoric symbolism cannot be interpreted exclusively as a formal coincidence, but must be analyzed in the perspective of a long-term continuity of the mental and aesthetic structures, reflected in the evolution of decorative art in the Moldavian space.

The researcher N. Dunăre proposes a model of analysis of decorative ornaments based on five distinct criteria, thus configuring a complex methodological framework for investigating the structure and functionality of traditional decoration: morphological, structural, historical, geographical and semantic [14].

Ornaments that have lost their initial emotional charge are considered abstract or abstract. They appear mainly on embroidery (sometimes also on barks or laces) in the form of dots, continuous lines, interrupted lines, squares, holes, etc., forming images without a semantic message, intended only to enhance the beauty of the objects they adorn. However, there are much more numerous concrete or realistic ornaments, the weight being formed by the group of physiomorphic motifs with an infinity of variants brought together in five characteristic subgroups: cosmomorphic, geomorphic, phytomorphic, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic.

In the opinion of researchers Ciubotaru S., Ciubotaru I. [10], the category of concrete ornaments also includes the groups of social and skeomorphic motifs.

Following the analysis and research of the specialized literature in the fields of decorative art, folk art and ornamentation (Prut C., Buzilă V., Cherciu I., Petrescu P. etc.), the decorative motifs applied in the decoration of traditional fabrics are classified into the following categories: *geometric, vegetable, anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, avimorphic, skeomorphic and social*.

***Geometric motifs*** It represents a set of ornamental structures based on fundamental abstract forms (line, triangle, square, rhombus, circle) organized in rhythmic, repetitive or symmetrical compositions, integrated into the decorative field of textile pieces [16]. For example: the rhombus, the zigzag and the spiral, through combination and repetition, have generated numerous decorative motifs (saw teeth, flute, suveica, various rhombuses, etc.), frequently encountered, in particular, on the edges of the shells. These motifs constitute one of the most archaic layers of folk ornamentation and frequently appear on barks, lattice, erasing, being arranged in registers, borders or central fields. They can have abstract origins or can represent stylized (abstracted) forms of cosmic, vegetative, or anthropomorphic symbols. For example, the rhombus is symbolically associated with fertility and the solar principle, and the zigzag can suggest water, energy or the dynamics of existence.

***Plant motifs*** represents a set of ornamental structures inspired by the phytomorphic universe

(*flowers, leaves, branches, branches, trees, ears, vines* etc.), rendered in a stylized or geometrized manner and integrated into decorative compositions with axial, symmetrical or rhythmic-repetitive organization.

In the ethnographic context of the Republic of Moldova, plant motifs are one of the most frequent ornamental categories. Being present on the barks, laicere, erasing, they reflect the structural relationship between rural communities and the agrarian environment, symbolically expressing ideas such as fertility, cyclical regeneration, continuity of life and cosmic harmony.

Stylistically, plant motifs can appear either in naturalistic forms or in a pronounced abstraction, adapted to weaving techniques. From a functional perspective, they fulfill aesthetic, identity and, in certain contexts, ritual roles, reinforcing the status of traditional fabrics as objects with both utilitarian and symbolic value.

***Anthropomorphic motifs*** represent ornamental structures that depict the human figure, in whole or in part, in a stylized, schematic, or geometrized manner, integrated into decorative compositions with aesthetic and symbolic functions [12]. These motifs appear within the decorative composition, arranged either individually or in narrative or rhythmic bands. The representations may suggest female or male silhouettes, ritual characters, dancers, symbolic couples, or figures associated with scenes of mythical or ritual significance. From a morphological perspective, the human figure is often reduced to essential elements (head, torso, and laterally arranged arms), formed through angular lines and geometric shapes, reflecting adaptation to weaving techniques and the traditional decorative canon. Symbolically, anthropomorphic motifs express ideas related to fertility, the cyclicity of life, and the integration of human beings into the cosmic order. In certain contexts, they may also serve ritual or protective functions, contributing to the semantic richness of the textile piece. This ornamental category is less common in fabrics, but it has a tradition old typology, evolving from schematic representations to elaborate forms, with well-defined details. Among *the anthropomorphic motifs* are female and male figures, the masked man, the eye, the hand, the female figures often depicted chained in the hora, with their arms raised and carrying floral branches.

Among the *Motivele anthropomorphic* Favorite is the image of the woman captured in a few poses: the woman with the hem of her bell-shaped coat, one of the oldest; the singular image of the woman representing an autograph of the one who made the fabric or, perhaps, a signature belonging to the object.

As a sign, the image of the man with wings appears on the barks, and the masked man, a very plastic image, appears on the barks of Causeni. The human hand is found among the motifs specific

to the barks at the bottom of the Dniester, sometimes approaching the image of the fork or the comb. The difference is seen in the number of fingers/teeth. The hand has 5 fingers, the fork has 4 teeth, and the comb is represented with a magic number of teeth: 9 or 12. The important thing is that the comb used to weave the fabric also has, most of the time, 12 teeth. For example, out of 11 such objects preserved in the museum's patrimony, 7 have 12 teeth each, and 3 have 9 teeth each [3, p. 40].

**Motivele zoomorphs** are motifs inspired by the animal, real or mythological world (*horse, dog, goat, birds* etc.), stylized and integrated into the décor, rendered in a symbolic, geometric or simplified form. In our culture, the depicted motif has a special meaning: for example, the bird can symbolize the soul or freedom, the horse - strength and vitality, and the snake - protection or regeneration. Within traditional fabrics (carpets, barks, wiping), zoomorphic motifs are adapted to the technique of making them (weaving, embroidery), which determines a specific stylization that harmoniously integrates them into the ornamental ensemble.

In the décor of traditional fabrics, these motifs are taken from the local fauna, the distant exotic world and the imaginary world. Often, zoomorphic representations follow the general shape of the animals, but also the attributes characteristic of each animal.

Within the avimorphic motifs (*pigeon, peacock, crane, rooster, hen, hoopoe, woodpecker, etc.*), the most widespread are the birds that accompany *the Tree of Life*.

**Motivele scheomorfe** They represent decorative elements inspired by the shape of man-made objects, integrated and stylized in the decoration of the fabrics. Scheomorphic motifs reproduce, in a simplified or geometric manner, objects such as: vessels, tools, weapons, architectural elements, symbols of the peasant household. These motifs (the mill wheel, the chair, the saw, the comb, the saw, the fork) are not realistic representations, but decorative transpositions adapted to the weaving technique, keeping only the essential features of the object [10, p. 81]. Symbolically, they can suggest the idea of protection or stability, community occupations, and prosperity.

**Social motifs** – are decorative elements of traditional art that reproduce the daily life of the village, the relationships between people, social status, occupations, rituals and important events within society. In traditional fabrics, social motifs may include stylized depictions of wedding scenes, hora, agricultural work, symbols associated with family and community. These motifs with an ornamental, narrative and identity role contribute to the transmission of collective memory and to the consolidation of cultural identity through the symbolic language of ornamentation. In Bessarabian plastic representations there are *hores* made up only of women or only of men and *mixed hore*.

Within the traditional textile heritage of the Republic of Moldova, *plant motifs* occupy an important place, both through their decorative frequency and through the symbolic density they concentrate in the ornamental field. This can be explained by a convergence of geographical, cultural and symbolic factors, which have shaped the collective imagination and the artistic expression of creators.

Geographically, our country is located in southeastern Europe, a territory that is characterized by predominantly hilly relief, fertile chernozemic soils and a favorable climate for agriculture. These natural conditions have determined, since ancient times, an agrarian economy, based on the cultivation of cereals, vines, fruit trees and animal husbandry.

The dominance of plant motifs in traditional fabrics reflects the geographical and agrarian determinism of space; the rural economy based on the cultivation of plants; the sacralization of nature within the collective mentality; the ritual and identity function of fabrics. This convergence explains the privileged status of *plant motifs in the* traditional ornamental system.

The cultural factor favored the predominance of plant motifs through the way communities built and transmitted symbolic meanings related to nature. In traditional culture, plants were charged with mythological and spiritual meanings. Nature has been capitalized as the main source of inspiration, and the stylization of plant forms has become a specific aesthetic code. These patterns have been preserved through customs, rituals and crafts, being passed down from generation to generation as part of cultural identity.

The presence to a large extent of vegetal motifs must also be interpreted in relation to the social-ritual function of traditional pieces, which not only had a utilitarian role, but also participated in rituals (birth, wedding, funeral) and in marking social status. The vegetal ornament was not a simple decoration, but a reason for symbolic protection [15].

In the decoration of traditional fabrics, *plant motifs* are stylized or rendered in freer forms and expressively reflect people's deep connection with nature, artistically transposed into traditional textiles.

Representations of *plant motifs* dominate all natural forms used in traditional and contemporary textile ornamentation. To date, a colossal number of modern handicrafts and fabrics bear the imprint of artistic-plastic interpretations of natural motifs [31].

The skillful application of images of plants and flowers in textile arts focuses on making sketches from nature and drawings through memory, representation and imagination. All the methods historically known by the artist in the representation of plants have a common feature - the shape of the plants is used in ornamentation with a certain degree of artistic generalization or

stylization. This rule is clearly seen in the comparison of "living" nature with the products of decorative and applied art of different eras and peoples; It is through the principles of artistic processing of plant forms that the difference between existing methods can be observed [15].

Studying *the plant motifs* on textiles from different historical periods, we observe an obvious change in the characters of ornaments, although the natural sources in their mass do not change dramatically. The recognition of many plants in various images shows that ornamentation did not only follow the path of copying, transforming and developing historical cultural samples, but was also constantly nourished by natural impressions. The influence of fieldwork in the creation of new ornaments gradually increased and led to a number of methods and techniques of transposing the external forms of plants into ornamental motifs.

In contemporary ornamentation, plant motifs continue to play an important role, often being reinterpreted in a modern or conceptual key. Therefore, *plant motifs* have a long and complex history in the decoration of traditional fabrics, reflecting a wide range of meanings and uses - from religious and spiritual symbols, to aesthetic and stylistic elements

**CHAPTER 2. THE PLACEMENT OF PLANT MOTIFS IN THE ORNAMENTAL COMPOSITION OF TRADITIONAL FABRICS** elucidates the types of decorative motifs applied in the decoration of fabrics. Their analysis shows that the traditional ornamental repertoire is organized around three main categories of motifs: *motifs derived from the circle* - primordial geometric form with multiple symbolic valences; *spiral motifs*, both in simple and compound forms; *symbolic motifs* with direct representation of the elements of the surrounding nature - anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, phytomorphic and other variations derived from nature - configured in a stylized manner. At the basis of the creation of an ornamental decoration in traditional fabrics are the principles of elaboration of the decorative composition: *repetition, alternation, symmetry, rhythm, dynamics and balance*.

The ways of organizing the motifs in the decoration of the traditional fabrics of the textile piece are carried out through plastic elements specific to the field, such as: border, tape, longitudinal axis and transverse axis. These elements are part of the compositional structure of the textile piece and contribute to the deciphering of the ornamental repertoire.

*In the decoration of the laiceres*, the compositional structure of the textile piece, the decorative organization is predominantly carried out in a longitudinal direction, respectively along the major axis, even in situations where the ornamental registers are arranged transversely to the technical structure of the fabric. This orientation determines a linear dynamics of the composition and contributes to accentuating the impression of elongation (length) of the laicer.

*In the decoration of the walls*, the orientation of the motifs is made in a transverse direction to the longitudinal axis of the canvas, which leads to the configuration of a compositional structure that favors the extension of the decoration to the side. This axial opposition is not only a formal solution, but represents a significant typological criterion, since it reflects both the function of the object and the particularities of the regional tradition in the conception of textile ornamentation.

According to researcher V. Buzilă, carpets consist of a central field and a border (*margină, pervaz, guler*). The placement of ornaments and decorative motifs in the compositional framework, both at the level of the central field and the border, presents significant differentiations. The organization of motifs in the central field highlights a typological variety, from simple, strongly stylized forms to elaborate compositional structures, developed according to well-defined ordering principles [3].

In most of the barks of the nineteenth century, the background of the central field was light in color, although there are also successful specimens with a dark brown or black background. Usually, ornamental motifs are placed differently in the central field from the border. Often, a motif is repeated over the entire surface, and rhythm, alternation and symmetry are created by changing colors vertically or horizontally. Sometimes the ornaments are organized in vertical registers, where the same motifs are repeated or two or three motifs are combined, with color variations. Less often, the registers are placed along the length of the carpet, in some compositions one can see the preference for the mixed ornamental field in which the vegetal motifs intertwine with the anthropomorphic or zoomorphic ones.

In the compositional organization of plant motifs in the decoration of traditional fabrics, two main tendencies can be perceived: the unitary ordering of ornaments, according to the laws of symmetry and balance between the component parts, and the orientation towards the dynamism of the whole, based on the importance of the element, thus implying the agglomeration of the components of the decoration by virtue of a tendency of decentralization.

An important element in the decoration of woven pieces is *the chromatics of the background*. As a component of the visual ensemble, the background influences the plastic organization and the way in which the decorative composition is perceived both optically and psychologically. These characteristics are directly manifested in the woven pieces, which, according to the preserved specimens, have demonstrated a marked vulnerability to historical and climatic conditions. As a result, the oldest barks and walls preserved to date date back to the second half of the eighteenth century, being preserved in museum and private collections.

The analysis of wool samples indicates that the pieces with dark backgrounds were woven in

the peasant environment, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, being widely practiced until the middle of the nineteenth century. Preference was given to backgrounds in shades of light ochre-green, light brown and reddish, less often navy blue and dark pink, almost purple [40].

And the dark and black ones begin to weave, in Bessarabia, at the intersection of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Because of their later manufacture, it is also natural that such carpets have been preserved in a much larger quantity than those of the previous categories and, therefore, formally, they produce the impression of the "national" specificity of Bessarabian carpets, in general [18, p. 212].

The analysis of the decoration in traditional fabrics at the end of the eighteenth century highlights the existence of pieces with a single edge (border), with two or three edges, their number being determined by the destination of the piece inside the house. For example, the chosen walls most frequently have a single edge, arranged at the top when hung on the wall, or three edges, made to integrate compositionally with the bedding on the bed or chair [33, p. 7].

The dominance of the vegetal decoration within the frame is constituted by small motifs, made either in an accentuated, geometric manner, or in a form closer to the naturalistic representation. These motifs are rendered in the form of small flowers, leaves, garlands or vine branches. The flowers arranged in borders are repeated in various chromatic compositions, either by alternating several colors or by using the same color in different shades. However, in certain examples of barks datable to the end of the eighteenth century, the ornamental composition of the border is distinguished by the integration of a motif of considerably larger dimensions.

The border, together with the edges or edges of the carpet, contributes to the enhancement of the motifs in the central field and to the amplification of their symbolic functions, through a logic of delimitation and isolation of the textile object from the outdoor space. Frequently, the motifs arranged in the central field are made on a larger scale than those in the frame, which is justified by their essential role in articulating the symbolic message conveyed by the piece.

In some pieces datable to the end of the eighteenth century, the border can be designed in the form of a double border, which emphasizes its role of delimiting and structuring the ornamental composition. It is made up of a vegetal motif arranged in the curves of a broken line, treated in chromatic alternation, a process that generates a dynamic and balanced decorative rhythm [3].

In the museum collections, specimens provided with a triple border have also been preserved, a structure that emphasizes the elaborate character of the decorative composition. The marginal border, often made by the motif "in stairs" and treated in a dark, predominantly black chromatic, has the role of firmly delimiting the entire piece. The middle and inner borders, which

mark the transition to the central field, are chromatically differentiated and enriched with various ornamental motifs, contributing to the dynamism of the decorative ensemble and to the consolidation of the compositional balance.

As a result of the research carried out on the pieces from the eighteenth century preserved in museum collections, it is found that the plant motifs arranged on the surface of the central field are generally small or very small. The same motif is repeated repeatedly, being organized through a carefully structured chromatic rhythm, which gives the composition unity and decorative coherence.

Analyzing the chromatics of the nineteenth-century pieces, we observe relevant clues on the evolution of aesthetic taste and the painting techniques used. In the case of older pieces, simple chromatic harmonies predominate, built on combinations of *brown, olive, yellow* and *red* in pastel shades. The subtle combinations between the colors of the *green, pink* or *yellow* background and those of the *red, green, ochre* or *light tan border*, as well as the chromatic accents of the decorative motifs, made in shades of *pink* and *dark blue*, generate a refined and balanced harmony [40].

In the traditional pieces made in the nineteenth century, a subtle differentiation can already be observed in terms of the location and proportions of the plant decoration, in relation to the organization of the central field and the ornamental border. The borders can be wide, most of them with a red background, some pink, on which the plant motifs unfold, some of a single color without outline, others being outlined in black, curves with a vegetable motif chosen in different shades and outlined in black. The central field is usually of a different color: green, olive, pink [29].

In some samples from this period, the total absence of the border is noted, the composition being conceived without a distinct marginal delimitation. In these cases, the background of the piece is made in a uniform color, usually black; On the longitudinal axis, along both edges of the fabric, garlands made up of symmetrically arranged plant motifs develop. These decorative elements replace the traditional function of the border, marking the limits of the composition by means of an ornamental register integrated directly into the decorative field. Through this solution, the border between the center and the edge becomes less rigid, and the composition acquires an increased visual continuity, in which the vegetal motif is no longer just a decorative element, but also an organizing structure of the entire textile surface.

The barks of the town. The *camenca* is characterized by the absence of the border with ornamental motifs, which is replaced by the border. Unlike other types of barks in which large or small floral elements appear, the edges of these pieces are structured exclusively by serrated lines, rhythmically arranged and reiterated in varied chromatic alternations.

In the museum collections there are preserved barks from the north of Moldova, within which the decoration of the central field is delimited by an ornamental border. It integrates the vegetal motif of the flower, rendered in a pronounced stylized manner, which contributes both to the compositional articulation of the piece and to the highlighting of the main decorative field.

Also during this period, a diversity of compositional solutions is characteristic: making the border on the entire perimeter of the piece (in the case of barks and laceries), only on the side sides or arranging it exclusively in the upper part, specific to the walls; In some cases, such as in the case of the bow, only a border is present, marking the total absence of the border. The vegetal motif used in the frame clearly differs from the one present in the central field of the piece, both in terms of compositional organization and decorative function.

The traditional wool fabrics, made during this period, reached a high level of chromatic harmony through the nuance and tonality of the colors obtained from different elements of the plants (flowers, fruits, leaves, shoots, bark, roots, etc.) with which the raw material was dyed [28]. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the wool of carpets was dyed with natural dyes, according to ancient techniques, quite difficult. The use of these techniques has favored the achievement of a great chromatic diversity, of warm and luminous shades, which have analogies in the colors of Bessarabian nature.

The decline began with the penetration of synthetic dyes (aniline) and naturalistic patterns imported from Germany. In contrast to the pastel, balanced and warm chromatics of old carpets, the coloring obtained by aniline paints was characterized by intense tones and strident semitones. Also, the resistance of these dyes over time was reduced, the colors being prone to rapid discoloration [3].

At the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a visible change in the way of organizing and placing the vegetal motif in the structure of the textile decoration. If in previous periods these motifs were integrated into a strictly rhythmic composition, being strongly stylized and adapted to the geometric framework of the ornamental field or the border, at this stage they are arranged in a freer and more naturalistic manner. Plant motifs often occupy larger areas of the central field or are placed in wider decorative registers, becoming dominant elements of the composition. This change in location is also accompanied by a transformation of the way of representation. The motifs are no longer reduced to geometric shapes or schematized ornamental signs, but are rendered with a greater degree of similarity to the natural model, which allows the identification of the suggested plant species more clearly.

At the same time, the chromatic palette becomes richer and more intense, the colors being used in a more vibrant manner, which contributes to accentuating the decorative and expressive character of the composition. Thus, the vegetal motif no longer fulfills only an ornamental function subordinated to the traditional geometric structure, but acquires a more prominent role in the visual organization of the decoration.

Therefore, we notice that at the beginning of the twentieth century changes occur in the decoration of traditional pieces, especially carpets: plant motifs become more naturalistic and occupy larger areas, and the use of synthetic dyes intensifies the color palette, but reduces the durability of colors. The decorative composition varies between rhythmic, repeated floral motifs and more realistic floral bouquets, contributing to the dynamics and ornamental balance of the textile pieces.

Regarding the decoration of traditional embroidered fabrics, we highlight an ornamental and chromatic consistency closely linked to the functionality of the pieces and their role in the interior design.

In the decoration of towels, the ornamental composition is organized on parallel axes – *horizontal, perpendicular* or on the entire surface, in meshes or rhombuses, but the decoration is more accentuated at the ends. In all these cases, the structure of the towel includes *the attic*, the name of the central field, and *the ends*, the areas intended for ornamental decoration [6]. The integration of plant motifs into the decoration of towels stands out for a great compositional and stylistic diversity. They can appear in the form of larger motifs, placed on the bridge of the towel, constituting the central element of the ornamental composition, or they can be arranged on the edges of the piece, in smaller proportions, or organized in the form of decorative garlands. In some cases, the plant motifs placed on the bridge are delimited by monochrome or polychrome beams; They can also be framed or completed by other categories of motifs that contribute to the creation of a balanced decorative ensemble.

In most of the towels, a compositional system is noted based on the arrangement of motifs in linear registers, oriented on width (in most pieces) and organized in a rhythmic and symmetrical succession that includes motifs such as *flowers, trees, vines, tendrils, sinusoidal lujeres, bouquets, flowers in the pot* and *the ear of wheat*, sometimes associated with representations of *birds* or combined with registers decorated with geometric motifs.

The decoration can also consist of woven or chosen ages, among which the embroidered decoration is placed. The towels for the wedding, as well as those for the interior, are necessarily adorned with two-sided wide horbotics, and in the central and southern areas - with three or even

four sides [37, p. 57]. In the central area they were woven into two threads with a clean bridge, and the ends were decorated with monochrome stripes; In rare cases, the wipes were woven in stripes and along the length of the canvas, at the edges.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a large part of the erasure was made *in the frame* (a decorative motif of square shape, obtained by intersecting the thicker warp and beating threads), the vegetal motif was placed at the ends of the piece. From a chromatic point of view, the surface of the pieces stands out for a relatively sober and harmonious range, while the plant motifs in the decoration are rendered in a more varied and expressive chromatic, contributing to the dynamism of the decorative ensemble.

The overall analysis of the embroidered and crocheted textiles highlights an ornamental and chromatic consistency determined by the functionality of the pieces and their role in the interior design. The towels of the nineteenth century are characterized by a predominantly geometric decoration, in which naturalistic interpretations rarely appear. An important role is played by the old ones, made of monochrome or polychrome threads, which structure the ornamental field, delimit the decorative registers and sometimes the attic of heads. Through their frequency and variety, they give the pieces sobriety, compositional balance and artistic value. Already in the twentieth century, the plant decoration becomes richer and more realistic. Some pieces are made in the frame, and the plant motifs are placed at the ends. The interior and wedding towels are distinguished by a rich ornamentation, in various stylistic interpretations, while the pieces intended for funeral rituals have a more modest decoration.

Regarding the valorization of vegetal motifs in contemporary textile art, we note that the plastic artists (V. Poleakova, N. Serova, C. Golovinova, A. Negură, E. Ajder, I. Lencăuțan, I. Lupu, I. Savițkaia-Baraghin, F. Leancă, L. Bîlba etc.) take the forms of traditional motifs and their symbolic meanings and adapt them to a current plastic language, according to the new aesthetic trends. Therefore, the folk textile art at the origin of the constitution of contemporary tapestry, offered artists a valuable treasure of shapes, symbols and chromatic harmonies. It continues to inspire contemporary artists to capitalize on traditional motifs, to experiment with various processes of stylization of forms, to apply different compositional structures and chromatic expressiveness.

**CHAPTER 3. THE SEMANTIC EVOLUTION OF PLANT MOTIFS IN THE DECORATION OF TRADITIONAL FABRICS includes the description of arboreal, floral and other plant motifs integrated into the decoration of traditional fabrics.**

A distinct and significant segment of the repertoire of plant motifs in the traditional fabrics

of the Bessarabian space is constituted by the *arboreal*. These, regardless of the forms in which they are represented - miniature or schematized - women in rural communities call them: *Tree of Life, brad* or *fir tree*. These two symbolic pillars, *the tree* and *the fir tree*, synthesizes the essence of the vegetal universe in folk ornamentation: *the tree*, as a representative of the culturalized and cultivated space, *the fir tree*, as a symbol of pure nature and cyclical permanence.

The diversity of forms in which these motifs are represented is remarkable: from trees with or without visible roots, to stylized variants in glaze, with zoomorphic elements such as birds placed on branches, or with floral inserts, to representations devoid of foliage or extremely simplified renderings.

*The motif of the fir tree* and, in particular, the fir branch are frequently found in the ritual scenography of the most important moments in the cycle of life, the wedding and the funeral, having a deep symbolic role. The symbolic variants of the Tree of Life, such as the tree of the dead, the tree of the living or the tree with alms, are "... an integral part of the ritual props associated with funerals and ceremonies to commemorate those who have passed away" [3, p. 38].

The diversity of forms in which these motifs are represented is remarkable: from trees with or without visible roots, to stylized variants in glaze, with zoomorphic elements such as birds placed on branches, or with floral inserts, to representations devoid of foliage or extremely simplified renderings.

In the category of arboreal motifs, the motif called *vines is also included*, particularly representative in the variants made by the weavers from the central and northern area of Moldova. The motif *of the vine*, in its various poses, is not limited only to the ornamentation of carpets, but is also present in the decoration of fabrics made of vegetable fibers: in the field of towels, tablecloths, as well as in the structure of the lace used for bed towels. The preference given to these arboreal species – the tree, the fir, the vine – is based on a selective collective memory, which preserves and transmits archetypal symbols.

**Trees.** The reason *tree of life* It is part of the old ornamental repertoire of folk art in the Moldavian space. Being an archaic symbol with multiple mythological and spiritual valences, it represents the connection between heaven, earth and the underworld and is considered an axis mundi (axis of the world), which connects the universe vertically. *Trees* are highlighted by the associated reasons (*flower branches, stylized flowers* or even geometric motifs, anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and avimorphic motifs). The image of the tree is stylized and adapted to the weaving technique, which highlights the craftsmanship of folk craftsmanship.

The plastic representation of trees in traditional pieces are:

- *The tree, primordial fir tree* - in its original archetypal form, represented by a simple fir branch;
- *The tree, an antipodean fir tree* - in the shape of *fir trees* arranged according to the principle of inversion - identified in the paintings of Cucuteni pottery;
- *The image of the "magic staff" tree* - visual representation on a vertical axis, extending in opposite directions through branches and roots, giving rise to the fabulous *Cosmic Tree* in the shape of a *fir tree*;
- *The primordial fir tree with metaphorical aspects* – its branches metamorphose at the extremities into delicate ticks or even basil *petals*, or associated with the shape of a candlestick;
- *The cosmic fir* - the representation as an axial element, integrated into the very structure of *the roots*.

The reason „*bradului primordial*” it retains its symbolic and stylistic continuity, being identified on the ages of the laiceras of the eighteenth century. Starting with the mid-nineteenth century, the stylized figures of the fir tree are apparently arranged randomly among other decorative elements, contributing to the semantic ensemble of the ornamental composition of the carpets. *The tree of life* from Bessarabian fabrics, derived from the archetypal concept of *of the cosmic tree*, bears striking similarities to the prototypes of trees designated as 'biblical' or 'Iranian'. Often, their crown is adorned with representations of large fruits and birds, while the trunk, slightly thickened at the base, symbolizes the root, thus strengthening the link between the terrestrial and cosmic elements. [18, p. 143-146]].

In traditional fabrics, the compositions of the tree motif reflect all the traditional elements of the symbol: the root, from which several branches branch, the straight stem with oblique, uneven and asymmetrical branches, sometimes loaded with leaves, flowers and large fruits. Over time, in contact with the traditions of the local culture, the motif evolved, sometimes undergoing changes in its structure: the tree was transformed into a column, cross or stele, and the birds were replaced by human figures or fantastic animals. On the territory of our country, the most remarkable representations of *the tree* were made on the fields of lattices and barks, in the decoration of towels, tablecloths, bed towels and other pieces. The image of *the anthropomorphized tree* frequently appears on many Bazaar carpets dating from the second half of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century.

On various traditional textiles (weaving, embroidery), the motif of *the tree* is also rendered in the version of *the flower vase* called *vason (glastre) in local terms*. Over time, the representation

*of the tree in the glaze* undergoes significant transformations, acquiring configurations specific to the local space, sometimes difficult to recognize. Approximately in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the process of stylization and reinterpretation of flowering trees with fantastic shapes and a special aesthetic ends, outlining images of ornamental glazes. In the fields *of the laicera* and *paretares*, *the tree* - as a tree of life is associated with avimorphic and anthropomorphic motifs: birds and people who guard it.

An alternative variant of the *tree of life* is *the flower tree*, or *the gingerbread tree*, which most likely originated in ancient agrarian rituals, where trees adorned with offerings had a ceremonial role. On the surface of several carpets from the nineteenth century, there is frequently a stylized tree with a rhomboidal shape, represented either horizontally or vertically, with a crown made up of elements similar to "gingerbread". As a rule, this crown is supported by a pair of oblique "nourași", symmetrically arranged under it. In addition, the space between the trees is often decorated with solar "throne chairs", symbols that reflect fertility and abundance. In the spaces between the trees marked at the root with solar crosses, stylized representations of birds appear along the edges, considered symbols of the spirits of vegetation and crops. Starting from this iconographic concept, throughout the nineteenth century a whole series of arboriform images were outlined, ranging from trees with rhomboidal crowns, resting on "nourași", to stylized representations of various flowers, especially basil, integrated into the decorative structure of this type of tree.

From the end of the eighteenth century until the middle of the nineteenth century, representations of *Trees* with similar structure *candelabrelor*. This peculiarity of the representation of trees is specific not only to the southern region of Moldova, the districts of Causeni, Stefan Voda, but also to the northern area, in Donduseni, in private collections.

In the decoration of traditional fabrics, the image *of the tree* is frequently found in a central position, having an axial function, as a pivot of the ornamental composition. Among the beautiful pieces of decoration, where the tree motif has a prominent place are the towels, called differently in various ethnographic areas of Moldova: towels (the finest - *naframe*) in the northern and central areas; *monastery* (Transnistria); *Peșchir* (southern area), traditional fabrics that are used at the peak moments of human life [37].

The *tree of life motif* in the decoration of the *sretgars* is placed in various ways, depending on the compositional structure and the symbolic function of the piece: the tree, central singular motif; repeated central motif; repeated motif at the ends; singular motif at the ends. The tree motif in the decoration of the towels appears alongside anthropomorphic motifs, especially in the decoration

of the towel in rows, in pairs, dolls, horse riders, woman between two riders. Anthropomorphic motifs (of women) alternating with plant motifs (trees, flowers) and zoomorphic motifs. In the south, anthropomorphic motifs are chosen, in the center and northeast they are embroidered.

**The vine.** In the traditional pieces of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in small proportions, the motif of the vine frequently fulfilled the function of an edge element in the composition of the barks, but it was also often found as a central motif in the decoration of the walls. In its various poses, this motif is not limited to the ornamentation of carpets, but is also present in the decoration of fabrics made of vegetable fibers, such as towels, tablecloths and lace used in bed towels. From an iconographic point of view, the representations vary: in some pieces only the leafy vine is depicted, in others the vine with grapes appears, and in some cases only the leaf is illustrated, treated as an autonomous decorative element.

In the ethnographic area of central Moldova, the vine motif stands out as one of the most recurrent elements of the textile ornamental repertoire, which indicates both its symbolic persistence and its organic integration into the decorative structures specific to the region. It is mainly used in the decoration of tablecloths, where it functions as an element of visual articulation and delimitation of the ornamental field, but also on the central field of towels, where it acquires a dominant compositional role. The insertion of the motif in these privileged areas of the textile object reveals an aesthetic option oriented towards balance, rhythm and formal continuity, characteristic of the central area. At the same time, the frequency and mode of representation of the vine can be correlated with the domestic and ceremonial functionality of these pieces, suggesting a close relationship between plant symbolism, social practice and regional cultural identity.

It can be assumed that the high frequency and technical diversity of the representations of the vine motif in the decoration of traditional fabrics in Moldova are directly correlated with the viticultural specificity of the region, functioning as an identity and symbolic marker of local communities. Thus, the presence of this motif in multiple techniques of realization – weaving, embroidery, crocheting, sewing – not only reflects its ornamental adaptability, but also a deep cultural valorization, through which the vine is transposed into textile language as an expression of continuity, prosperity and social cohesion. In museum and private collections, this motif is found in the decoration of tablecloths, in the edge lace or in the lace of the wrist [34, p. 40].

In the decoration of some erases dating from the end of the nineteenth century, the motif *of the vine* is initially organized in a vertical direction; however, through the rhythmic repetition of this ornamental element, the general composition of the piece is constituted, which acquires a

predominantly horizontal decorative character. This alternation between the orientation of the motif and its mode of repetition contributes to the visual balance and structuring of the textile ornamentation. In other deletions from the same period, the motif *of the vine* appears, represented by grapes, leaves and currants.

*The vine* is not just a simple decorative motif, but a complex, polysemantic symbol, associated with values such as fruitfulness and abundance, life and continuity, joy and celebration, as well as spiritual protection. This symbol is frequently found in the decoration of traditional fabrics in most ethnographic areas of Moldova.

**Leaf.** In the representation *of leaves*, two tendencies can be observed: one in which these shapes are geometrically stylized, appearing only in the essential lines, or, relatively more recently, they are characterized by a non-geometric rendering, in the manner of free drawing, reproducing a form closer to that of nature. In the first case, as a result of excessive geometrization, the leaf takes the shape of a rhombus or square. Other times the leaf takes on trapezoidal shapes, and the flower, rendered only in general lines and reduced, is represented as a square or a tiny rhombus. More commonly, this simplification process is practiced in the case of marginal or intermediate garlands, which achieve the separation of the main registers.

In ornamental compositions, *the leaf* is arranged in mostly trigeminate or bigeminate meetings, being less often singular. The leaves are sometimes arranged asymmetrically, sometimes symmetrically in an original and diverse composition, being linked by petiole to thin, gracefully drawn stems, with which together they make up the branches. In textile pieces dating from the eighteenth century, the leaf motif is rendered through an accentuated process of ornamental stylization, which makes it difficult to accurately identify the species to which the representation refers. In some samples of carpets from the nineteenth century, the leaf motif is integrated into the decoration of the border, where it appears organized in the form of an ornamental garland. This garland runs rhythmically along the edge of the carpet, being periodically interrupted or accentuated by the presence of a floral motif, the species of which cannot be precisely identified. Sometimes, the leaves appear as a chain-shaped braid, grouped around a tree that embodies an axis of symmetry, which runs through the ornamental field in the form of rounded curls from curved lines or, more frequently, broken.

In certain ornamental compositions, the leaves are arranged around a central floral motif, being made in a single color, but in different shades, which gives the decoration a subtle chromatic variation and a plus of visual dynamism.

In the decoration of traditional towels, the leaf motif frequently appears in different compositional forms, being integrated into various ornamental structures. It is often found in the form of twigs with stylized leaves or branches decorated with leaves and flowers. Therefore, we notice that the leaf has long been represented, for the most part, in a generalized form, unrelated to the shape of specific species, inspired by the most frequent and simplest flowers, such as field flowers, forest flowers, meadows: *basil*, *beech flower*, *lily of the valley*, *snowdrops*, *field bells*, *peony*, etc., encountered by man everywhere. However, they appear in many morphological variants: dozens of different models of *clover*, *rose*, *marjoram*, *carnation*, *tulip*, *sunflower*, etc.

**Flowers.** The plant that is most frequently found in the creations of folk craftsmen in the Republic of Moldova and of course in the great family of plant motifs, placed in the decoration of traditional fabrics is **basil**. In the decoration of Bessarabian carpets, the basil motif is attested in two variants of representation: *The basil flower with four petals* - the oldest and most common, very stylized and seen from above, in frontal projection, being arranged on the ages of the carpet, it can make up the main motif of the decoration. The second method consists of the shape of a large or very small steble represented in *profile projection*. In this variant, the image of basil resembles that of the wild, field carnation.

In his first representations, identified in the Bessarabian carpets of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the motif of the basil flower appears with four petals, rendered in frontal projection [18]. This variant, simplified and harmoniously integrated into the ornamental compositions, constitutes the central decorative core of the pieces and is often associated with other traditional motifs, such as the star, the wheel of fire and the cloud, expressing the aspiration for fertility, abundance and divine protection. Subsequently, in the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the motif underwent morphological and compositional diversifications, also appearing in profile projection, in the form of a bud stem. This new variant, frequently found on the ceiling, erase and lace, marks a trend of formal renewal and adaptation to the aesthetic tastes of the time, without losing its original meaning [30].

*The basil flower* is a common motif in the decoration of towels, being represented stylized, with four petals and rendered in frontal projection, seen from above. It can be the central element of the decorative composition or it can be placed at the ends of the piece, on the horbotic. We notice that *the basil motif* has gone through a complex process of stylization, adaptation and symbolization, keeping its status as an essential decorative and symbolic element in traditional Moldovan textile art.

***The clover.*** In the decoration of the towels dated to the end of the nineteenth century and the

beginning of the twentieth century, the presence of this plant motif is frequently noted, invested, on a symbolic level, being associated with luck, prosperity and protection. The representation of *the four-leaf clover*, especially in flat projection, seen from above, shows obvious morphological similarities with the basil motif, often stylized in an analogous way in traditional fabrics. This formal approximation, determined by the decorative conventions and the tendency of schematization specific to folk art, makes it difficult to clearly delimit the two motifs.

**Peony.** Through its symbolism, the peony has pronounced affinities with the rose. "The image of this flower penetrated the iconography of carpets at the beginning of the twentieth century and most often we find it in almost naturalistic poses on the great wars, called "Tray", "Bouquets" or even "Planks", often executed according to models specially prepared by professionals" [18].

The most numerous traditional textile pieces that integrate the floral motif of the peony date back to the first half of the twentieth century, they can be found in a variety of household and ceremonial objects, such as barks, looms, laiceres, paretar, towels, tablecloths and other textiles. In ornamental compositions, peonies often appear next to avimorphic motifs or are integrated into bouquets, associated with geometric or vegetal elements, such as *the tree of life*, vine branches or *stylized leaves*. In the context of the decoration of the towels, the peony motif occupies a special place, being often included not only on the surface but also in the structure of *the horbotic*, richly ornamented and loaded with symbolic meanings. On the "great wars", peonies are often represented in rich bouquets with wavy outlines and full petals, made with an intense chromatic, dominated by red, cherry and pink.

In the interwar period and in the first half of the twentieth century, the floral motif of the peony turned into a central element of the decoration of carpets and wool barks, coexisting with other vegetal or geometric motifs, *branches, leaves, the tree of life* or *the vine*. The chromatics become more and more varied, and the relationship between background and decoration highlights the tendency towards contrast and visual dynamism. In some cases, the closed funds highlight the intensity of the red peonies, giving the composition a ceremonial effect. Other times, open and pastel backgrounds suggest a more refined sensibility.

**The rose.** It is one of the most common flowers in traditional Moldovan ornamentation, being rendered in complex decorative compositions that include open flower, bud and leaves. Application of the plea *Rose* in the ornamentation of traditional fabrics, it represents a relatively recent innovation, becoming frequently only from the middle of the nineteenth century. The presence of the rose in the decoration of fabrics: in carpets, wedding towels, textiles for baptism, emphasizes its importance in the spiritual universe of Moldovans.

In several samples from the late nineteenth century, a tendency to amplify the shape of the rose motif is observed, often represented in hypertrophied variants with stylized petals and exaggerated proportions. In some cases, the decorative composition is dominated by one or three roses placed on the field surrounded by other plant elements, which gives the piece a monumental and expressive character. These trends can be seen in the northern part of Moldova.

The rose motif is found in the decoration of towels in the south, central and northern areas of Moldova. In the border of the lace (*horbotica*) of many towels and tablecloths are integrated, through the crochet technique, either rose flowers or garlands of roses arranged in rows, along with other decorative motifs. These may include depictions of birds, animals, or various plant elements. The plant decoration on the surface of the towels is arranged in accordance with functional and aesthetic requirements.

***Starflower.*** In the horbotics of towels and tablecloths made in the first half of the twentieth century, *the flower with eight petals, with five petals or six petals persists.* The eight-petal motif, called *a starflower*, is visually perceived as having eight petals, but in reality, its structure derives from four petals arranged in such a way as to create the impression of a stellar shape.

***The flower in the pot.*** The flower represented in a vase, protected by two birds or two mammals, illustrates the symbolic motif of the *tree of life*, frequently found in more recent interior fabrics. In various sources, this motif appears under names such as "*flower in glastre*", "*flower in pot*", "*flower in basket*". It is commonly found in the décor of various traditional fabrics, such as: *carpets, towels, bed towels, tablecloths and pillowcases.*

In most barks, it appears on a black background, frequently associated or alternating with other traditional motifs, such as *the tree of life* or *the ear of wheat in the glaze*. In the decoration of carpets it is found not only on the central field, but also on the border of the piece.

In the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, in the decoration of the towels in the museum collections, an abundance of floral motifs represented in the vase **is noted**. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in the decoration of towels in the north, center and south of Bessarabia, a gradual transformation of floral motifs is noticed. The chromatics become more varied, using two or three shades, and the representation of the vase acquires a clearer and better outlined form within the ornamental composition. More frequently in the decoration of fabrics, the motif stands out for balanced and varied compositional organizations, being integrated both in the central field and in borders or medallions. Its evolution reflects the transition from strongly stylized and geometrized forms, characteristic of the nineteenth century, to more naturalistic and chromatically rich representations in the twentieth century.

Plant motifs representing **food**, as a source of human existence, found symbolic, metaphorical and, sometimes, naturalistic expressions in the decoration of traditional textiles. The researcher Gh. Mardare highlights the close connection between this ornamental representation and the myth *of the Nourishing Tree*, understood as a primordial source of life and abundance. In his view, the motif *of the root of life* acquires a distinct position within the ornamentation of the Bessarabian laicera, experiencing a diversified development, materialized in at least four compositional typologies. The popular names attributed to these variants, "beetroot" or "root", reveal, on the one hand, the vegetal origin of the motif, and on the other hand, its organic integration into the imagination and daily experience of the Bessarabians.

The wheat ear motif in the decoration of traditional fabrics presents one of the most beautiful decorative motifs used in carpet ornamentation. Most of the fabrics analyzed, with the black background on the entire surface, the motif *of the ear of wheat*, stand out for its placement exclusively in the central field of the composition - a fact that can be interpreted symbolically in relation to the meaning of the fertile land. In the ornamental and symbolic tradition of textile art, the color black is frequently associated with fruitful soil, the depth of the earth, and the idea of germination and regeneration. Through this chromatic and symbolic relationship, the idea of fertility, continuity and prosperity is emphasized, fundamental values in the traditional agrarian mentality.

In the motifs of the Causeni barks, the image *of the wheat grain*, the *ear of wheat* and the *twinning wheat frequently* appears. In some pieces, the stylized image of the ear of the ear serves as a sign, sometimes as a sign of ownership, and in others, the theme of wheat takes various forms of expression and constitutes the dominant theme. It is necessary to note in these themes the sacramental attitude towards bread of the inhabitants of Bessarabia, promoters of a traditional culture, agrarian by definition [2].

The motifs *of the ear of wheat* in the decoration of the towels are represented in a stylized and linear manner, adapted to the technique of embroidery with white thread on a white background, specific to ceremonial towels. Their ornamentation is usually organized in horizontal registers, and the ear motif appears in a distinct register, where it is rendered by a continuous axial line suggesting the stem of the plant. The stylization of the motif is accentuated by the simplicity of the geometric shapes and the discreet contrast between the denser and more transparent areas of the fabric. Through this decorative technique, the plant motif is reduced to its essential elements, while preserving the recognizability of the natural form. The symbolic image of the grain thrown into the ground is frequently found in the decoration of nineteenth-century carpets [18].

Also, in the decoration of Bessarabian carpets we find motifs: *wreaths made of flowers, petals, twigs* - motifs with the name of *jemna maresei* (bread), the groom's coil, the bride's coil. These ornamental elements reflect a strong connection with the ritual symbolism of the Moldavians, for whom bread is present in numerous forms and carries various meanings, correlated with the stages and functions of the ritual sequences in which it is used.

In the iconography of samples dated to the border of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there are pronounced stylized representations of concrete species of cultivated plants, such as: *sunflower* and *corn cobs*. The presence of these images attests to the persistence of the theme of "edibility" in carpet decoration even at a relatively late stage of the evolution of textile ornamentation, highlighting the continuity of interest in plant symbolism associated with food and fertility.

## GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Folk art presents an inexhaustible source in the exploration of plant motifs, techniques of realization and the meanings of symbols passed down from ancestors to later generations.
- The predominance of vegetal motifs in the ornamentation of traditional fabrics in the Republic of Moldova is explained by the convergence of geographical, cultural and symbolic factors that contributed to the configuration of the collective imaginary and to the shaping of the artistic vision of the creators. The weight of plant motifs in traditional fabrics reflects the geographical and agrarian determinism of space, the rural economy based on the cultivation of plants, the sacralization of nature within the mentality of people, the ritual and identity function of fabrics. This convergence explains the privileged status of plant motifs in the traditional ornamental system.
- The presence to a large extent of vegetal motifs is interpreted in relation to the social-ritual function of traditional pieces, which not only had a utilitarian role, but were also integral elements of ritual practices (birth, wedding, burial), but also of marking social status. The plant ornament was not a simple decoration, but a reason for symbolic protection.
- At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, in the ornamentation of traditional fabrics there is a significant expansion of the plant repertoire, with an obvious predilection for floral motifs. In some compositions, the reference to the natural pattern retains formal features that refer directly to the organic structure of the flower, in others, however, it is subjected to an accentuated process of stylization, which leads to the abstraction and reconfiguration of the vegetal element.
- Most of the traditional fabrics kept in museum or private collections, whose decoration was made by dyeing with natural dyes, have a great cultural value, because this process involved the application of ancient, complicated processes, passed down from generation to generation, reflecting a good knowledge of natural resources and methods of obtaining colors. The use of

natural dyes made it possible to obtain varied chromatic ranges, characterized by warm, bright and harmonious shades, in line with the chromatic palette of the natural environment.

- The introduction of chemical dyes in the dyeing of the fibers causes the diversification of the color palette and the appearance of saturated tones, difficult to obtain previously. This technological innovation favors the development of innovative decorative solutions and contributes to the plastic expressiveness of the visual language of fabrics. In this setting, the floral motif is valued mainly from the perspective of its aesthetic function, to the detriment of the traditional symbolic dimension, which gradually loses its relevance in favor of a predominantly decorative approach.
- In the fabrics researched, the motif *of the tree* evolves from deeply geometric representations, reduced to symbolic schemes, to increasingly elaborate formulas with curved branches, flowers, birds and recognizable plant elements. This stylistic transformation, visible especially from the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, denotes both the influence of new aesthetic sensibilities and the desire of folk craftsmen to preserve and update ancestral messages in a contemporary visual language. The diversity of making techniques – weaving, choosing, embroidery, crocheting, lacing – demonstrates the ability of the tree motif to organically integrate into the décor of traditional fabrics.
- The comparative analysis of the vine motif in the fabrics of different areas of the Republic of Moldova demonstrates a significant formal diversity, determined by the ethnographic area and the production technique. For example: in the northern area, the motif *of the vine* is frequently geometrized and stylized, integrated into rigorous ornamental registers, while in the central area it acquires balance, rhythm and compositional clarity, being harmoniously adapted to the domestic and ceremonial function of textile objects. In the south, the representations tend towards fluidity and accentuated realism, reflecting the region's long winemaking tradition. This regional variation confirms the motif's ability to adapt to the local context without losing its essential symbolic charge.
- The basil plant motif in the decoration of traditional fabrics asserts itself as a central element of the symbolic universe, bringing together religious, magical and therapeutic valences, which give it a privileged status, with a constant presence in family customs, ritual practices and beliefs related to destiny, love and protection. The integration of the basil motif into the ornamentation of traditional fabrics confirms the transfer of these meanings on an artistic level, where the plant is transposed into a stylized decorative language that becomes not only a decorative motif, but also an identity symbol.
- The plant motifs that symbolize food – *the ear of wheat, the root of life* – reflect an archaic layer of sacred meanings, being associated with symbolic representations of bread and fertility. The motif, *the ear*, is found in the décor of carpets and towels and is reduced to its essentials, while retaining the recognizability of the natural form. The image of the grain of wheat, the ear of wheat and the twinned wheat acquires various forms of expression and becomes the dominant theme of the composition, highlighting the sacramental attitude towards bread of the inhabitants of our country, promoters of the traditional agrarian culture. These motifs are not mere decorative elements, but true visual codes through which cultural values, beliefs and traditional practices are transmitted.

- The ornamentation of traditional fabrics continues to inspire contemporary artists in capitalizing on decorative motifs, in experimenting with various processes of stylization of forms, in the application of different compositional structures and chromatic expressiveness. By preserving popular traditions in textile art, artistic tapestry acquires a distinct and recognizable style in the context of contemporary art, standing out through its ornamental richness, symbolism, lyricism and specific particularities.

#### **Recommendations**

- It is necessary to identify, collect and artistically capitalize traditional fabrics from the national museum heritage and from private collections that are not included in the exhibition circuit or fairs. These traditional pieces, woven or embroidered, undocumented until now, would provide a valuable scientific support for the analysis of ornamental motifs (vegetable, geometric, zoomorphic, anthropomorphic, etc.) integrated into the decoration.
- Further field research should be undertaken for the identification, semantic and morphological analysis of plant motifs in correlation with other decorative motifs located in the ornamentation of traditional fabrics.
- The creative application in the creations of plastic artists of the vegetal motifs from the decoration of traditional fabrics from the second half of the twentieth century, which have specific meanings to the Moldavian space.
- Elaboration of teaching materials (course support, methodical guide) for students of the first cycle, bachelor's degree, specialty of Applied Decorative Arts (Artistic Tapestry/Artistic Ceramics/Artistic Metal), in order to facilitate the access of young people to a deeper knowledge of the values of folk art.

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**ADNOTARE**  
**PLAȚINDA SVETLANA,**  
***Evoluția semantică a motivelor vegetale aplicate în decorul țesăturilor tradiționale din***  
***Republica Moldova,***  
Chișinău, 2026

**Domeniul de studii doctorale:** 021.3 Arte vizuale.

**Program de doctorat:** Arte plastice și decorative (doctorat științific).

**Volumul și structura tezei include:** introducere, trei capitole, concluzii generale și recomandări, bibliografie din 139 de surse, adnotare (română, engleză), 138 de pagini text de bază.

**Cuvinte chee:** broderie, chenar, covor, decor, motive vegetale, ornament, păretar, simbol, scoarță, ștergar, țesături tradiționale.

**Rezultatele cercetării** sunt reflectate în 5 publicații științifice, 6 comunicări la conferințe științifice, expoziții de grup.

**Scopul cercetării** constă în identificarea, sistematizarea și analiza evoluției semantice a motivelor vegetale amplasate în decorul țesăturilor tradiționale din Republica Moldova.

**Obiectivele cercetării:** Caracterizarea țesăturilor tradiționale în funcție de destinație, materie primă și origine. Identificarea și descrierea plantelor stilizate în motive decorative. Sistematizarea și clasificarea motivelor vegetale aplicate în decorul țesăturilor tradiționale. Determinarea semnificației simbolice a motivelor vegetale integrate în decorul țesăturilor. Caracterizarea modurilor de amplasare a decorului pe suprafețele țesăturilor tradiționale. Analiza evoluției semantice a motivelor vegetale.

**Noutatea și originalitatea științifică:** Cercetarea își propune să completeze un segment mai puțin studiat în artele textile, legat de descrierea și caracterizarea evoluției semantice a motivelor vegetale care constituie clasa cea mai reprezentativă în decorul țesăturilor tradiționale din Republica Moldova. Au fost identificate și caracterizate cele mai importante plante, imaginea cărora apare în decor; clasificate și descrise motivele vegetale specifice zonelor geografice ale R. Moldova; stabilite evoluția structurală și semantică a motivelor vegetale în țesăturile tradiționale din lână și din fibre vegetale; analizate semnificațiile și simbolistica motivelor.

**Semnificația teoretică a cercetării** constă în caracterizarea celor mai importante motive vegetale aplicate în decorul țesăturilor tradiționale din R. Moldova; analizate evoluția cromatică, semantică și simbolică a motivelor vegetale în diferite tipuri de țesături. Teza completează istoriografia domeniului cu date importante din colecțiile muzeale și cercetările de teren.

**Valoarea aplicativă a lucrării.** Rezultatele obținute prezintă un material valoros pentru muzeografi, etnografi, meșteri populari și tineri cercetători în artele decorative și populare. Studiul reflectă o viziune complexă asupra țesăturilor tradiționale din R. Moldova și a diversității motivelor vegetale aplicate în decorul lor, informație ce va servi ca suport metodic pentru studenții de la specialitățile din domeniul artelor decorative.

**Aprobarea rezultatelor cercetării.** A fost discutată la ședințele Comisiei de îndrumare. Rezultatele științifice sunt reflectate în 5 articole, 6 comunicări la foruri științifice internaționale.

**ANNOTATION**  
**PLATINDA SVETLANA,**

*The Semantic Evolution of Floral Motifs Applied in the Decoration of Traditional Textiles from the Republic of Moldova, Chişinău, 2026*

**Field of doctoral studies:** 021.3 Visual Arts.

**Doctoral program:** Fine and Decorative Arts (scientific doctorate).

**The volume and structure of the thesis** include: introduction, three chapters, general conclusions and recommendations, bibliography comprising 139 sources, annotations (romanian and english), and 138 pages of main text.

**Keywords:** embroidery, border, carpet, decoration, floral motifs, ornament, wall rug, symbol, *scoarță*, towel, traditional textiles.

**The research results** are reflected in 5 scientific publications, 6 presentations at scientific conferences, and group exhibitions.

**The purpose of the research** consists in identifying, systematizing, and analyzing the semantic evolution of floral motifs incorporated into the decoration of traditional textiles from the Republic of Moldova.

**Research objectives:** Characterization of traditional textiles according to their function, raw material, and origin. Identification and description of stylized plants represented in decorative motifs. Systematization and classification of floral motifs applied in the decoration of traditional textiles. Determination of the symbolic significance of floral motifs integrated into textile decoration. Characterization of the ways decorative elements are arranged on the surfaces of traditional textiles. Analysis of the semantic evolution of floral motifs.

**Scientific novelty and originality:** The research aims to complete a less-studied segment in textile arts related to the description and characterization of the semantic evolution of floral motifs, which constitute the most representative class within the decoration of traditional textiles from the Republic of Moldova. The most important plants whose images appear in decorative compositions were identified and characterized; floral motifs specific to the geographical areas of the Republic of Moldova were classified and described; the structural and semantic evolution of floral motifs in traditional wool and plant-fiber textiles was established; and the meanings and symbolism of the motifs were analyzed.

**The theoretical significance of the research** lies in the characterization of the most important floral motifs applied in the decoration of traditional textiles from the Republic of Moldova; the chromatic, semantic, and symbolic evolution of floral motifs in different types of textiles was analyzed. The thesis supplements the historiography of the field with important data from museum collections and field research.

**The applied value of the work:** The obtained results represent valuable material for museum specialists, ethnographers, folk artisans, and young researchers in decorative and folk arts. The study reflects a complex vision of traditional textiles from the Republic of Moldova and of the diversity of floral motifs applied in their decoration, information that will serve as methodological support for students specializing in decorative arts.

**Approval of the research results:** The thesis was discussed during the meetings of the supervisory committee. The scientific results are reflected in 5 articles and 6 presentations delivered at international scientific forums.

**SVETLANA PLAȚINDA**

**THE SEMANTIC EVOLUTION OF PLANT MOTIFS APPLIED IN THE  
DECORATION OF TRADITIONAL FABRICS IN THE REPUBLIC OF  
MOLDOVA**

**ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS IN ARTS**

**FIELD OF DOCTORAL STUDIES: 021.3 VISUAL ARTS**

**DOCTORAL PROGRAM: FINE AND DECORATIVE ARTS**

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**Approved for printing: Paper Paper size 60x84 1/16**

**offset. Tipar offset. Tiraj ..... ex.**

**Printing sheets: 1.5 Order no. ....**