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Evgenii Kononenko
Dc. Sc. (Art Studies)
The State Institute for Art Studies
(Russia)

j_kononenko@inbox.ru

COMPETITION PROJECTS FOR NEW MOSQUE OF KAZAN: A RANGE OF IMAGE SEARCHES

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Abstract. The competition for the projects of the Kazan Cathedral Mosque, held in 2022 as part of the 1100th anniversary of the adoption of Islam in the Volga region, was designed to create a normative monument of modern religious architecture of the entire Turkic world. This competition demonstrates the simultaneous desire to create a standard of "Tatar style" and the utmost caution of a formal experiment, an appeal to precedents, which has taken the form of adapting already known projects to the conditions of the new competition. Based on the published projects of the competition in Kazan, preliminary conclusions can be drawn about the trends in the search for the image of a contemporary mosque in the framework of solving the tasks set, the choice of prototypes and the reaction of the public.

Key words: contemporary mosque, architectural competitions, design, Kazan Cathedral Mosque, citation.

Introduction. A common place in the scientific literature has become indications that the architecture of the mosque is not limited by any standards and is subject only to the logic of prayer, and the image of the prayer building depends on a number of optional factors that do not contradict the requirements of Islam [2, p. 114–123; 5, p. 25; 6, p. 20–43; 13; 15; 16]. Such apparent freedom of choice of forms explains the increased interest of contemporary architects in open competitions for mosque projects in large cities: these competitions are perceived as challenges that simultaneously require compliance with logical restrictions, the search for the most expressive image and the development of an original constructive solution.

International competitions for the design of a contemporary mosque determine the current trends in shaping for many years, form the scale and vectors of searches, shift the boundaries of combining "tradition" and "avant-garde". An example is the story of the Kocatepe mosque in Ankara, when the ultra-modern project of Vedat Dalokay was replaced by a traditionalist project that strengthened the position of the neo-Ottoman trend for decades [17]. The same happened with the competition projects of mosques in Baghdad, Islamabad, Dhaka, Rome, Copenhagen [4, p. 90–122; 11; 14]. In 2013 a design competition was held for the Central Mosque in Pristina, and the concepts presented there have been discussed already for ten years [20].

A similar resonance should have been expected from the competition for the projects of the Kazan Cathedral Mosque, held in 2022. This object should become a landmark religious building of the entire Turkic world, and the ongoing competition can be viewed as a reflection of the existing architectural trends in the construction of mosques and the artistic tastes of those masters who take on the courage to reflect the ideas of the ummah about what a memorial mosque could become in one of the main centers of Russian Islam.

Theoretical justification. Competition conditions: explicit and implicit

The formal reason for holding the next architectural competition was the celebration of the 1100th anniversary of the adoption of Islam on the territory of the Volga Bulgaria. The proposed formulated conditions of the competition turned out to be both tough and leaving freedom for creativity. The contestants had to comply with urban planning regulations in the buffer zone of the "Kazan Kremlin Ensemble" cultural facility, take into account the traffic flows of a contemporary city, the complex hydrotechnical situation near the proposed site and the presence of underground utilities. The terms of reference included the creation of a spiritual and educational center with a prayer hall for 10 thousand people, the availability of sufficient parking spaces and a height limit of 80 m. Thus, in Kazan not only another religious building is planned, designed taking into account the prospects for the growth of the ummah, but also a new public space that fits into the concept of the development of a large city, and an obvious new architectural dominant that complements the existing historical ensemble of the ancient center, officially recognized as the "Russia's third capital" [1; 10].

Formally, there were no restrictions on the search for the image, but the participants of the competition were asked to take into account the wishes coming from both officials and representatives of the Islamic clergy. These

wishes were formulated in organized lectures and discussions with the contestants, not all of whom were familiar with both the cultural features of the Volga region and the peculiarities of the mosque in general.

First of all, it is necessary to pay attention to the fact that one of these wishes of the customer was the desire to abandon the orientation towards the familiar image of the "Turkish mosque", which goes back to the Istanbul buildings by Sinan. Many times, with varying degrees of categoricalness, it has been said about fatigue from the programmatic copying of Ottoman samples of cult monuments, the expansion of the neo-Ottoman trend and the need for architects (not only Russian ones) to turn to other regional traditions in the appearance of Islamic architecture [3; 4, p. 46; 6, p. 320; 8; 12].

It is very significant that if in the 2000s at the mosque competition in the Crimean Simferopol, the "Ottoman type" was taken as a directive [6, p. 190–193], then a few years later in Kazan it was proposed to ignore this type. The contestants were delicately invited to get acquainted with the historical monuments of Kazan, if possible, use carefully preserved elements of national art and create a new exemplary monument that can illustrate the idea of the "Tatar style", consolidate it for future generations and create a new landmark.

The organizers of the competition had to take into account the fact that a number of architectural bureaus took part in the competition, which have extensive experience in designing, erecting and decorating Christian Orthodox churches, but have not built mosques before. Indeed, for several decades the field of Islamic construction in Russia was on the periphery. Only in 2016, the department of temple architecture was opened at the renowned Moscow Institute of Architecture (MARHI), but the training programs there are focused primarily on the needs of the communities of Russian Orthodox Church.

It is obvious that the "wishes" of the organizers testify, firstly, to the concreteness of tastes of the leaders of the ummah, awareness of their role on a national scale and the desire to create a normative work of art that initially takes into account both the practical needs of the ummah and the features and traditions of Muslim and Tatar cultures, but at the same time, it is a unique monument that commemorates the anniversary and corresponds to modern architectural trends. One of the participants in the competition formulated the program as follows: "People should see the cathedral mosque and say that this is a Tatar mosque. It should reflect our nationality, our Tatar spirit. Also, in my opinion, it should break stereotypes, be unique and ultra-modern" [21].

Practical implementation. Types and Prototypes

As often happens, programmatic expectations were corrected by realities. The declared "internationality" of the competition was reduced (according to the press release) to "...representatives of Russia, the United Arab Emirates, Turkiye, Egypt, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan", and such a composition of participants deliberately narrowed the scale of formal searches and shifted the vector of searches towards traditionalism. Many architectural bureaus that presented their projects had no experience in designing and building not only mosques specifically, but religious buildings in general, they were engaged in the construction of restaurants, hotels, business centers, administrative and residential buildings.

It should be noted that neither any priorities, nor deliberately "losing" ideas, nor directions for searching for competitors before the announcement of the results were known to either the contestants themselves or the public, but the very next day after summing up the photos from the exhibition stands appeared on the Internet and became the subject of analysis and criticism [18] (hereinafter in the text the numbers of the competitive projects correspond to the marking of the published stands). We will not be interested in the authorship of specific projects; but almost two dozen presented architectural images allow us to highlight several architectural "themes" and draw conclusions about the starting points for searches.

First of all, it is noteworthy that the authors of many finalist projects started from the existing monuments of Islamic architecture of the Volga region, realizing the desire to create a proper "Tatar" or even "Kazan" style. At the same time, some went along the path of including in their projects individual elements of the composition and decor of the historical mosques of Kazan, while others offered full or partial recognizable replicas of existing buildings, focusing primarily on the Kul Sharif mosque, the reconstructed complex of the White Mosque in Bulgar and the new-made Ecumenical Temple in Kazan (№№ 1, 4, Project of students of the Kazan University of Architecture and Civil Engineering) (Fig. 1). As has already happened in the history of the construction of large contemporary mosques (primarily Turkish, following the neo-Ottoman trend), the copying of an existing building, devoid of creative originality, is presented as a continuation of the historical style [9].

Surprisingly and unfortunately, the largest group (№№ 7, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 18) (Fig. 2) was made up of proposals that, to varying degrees, "quoted" already known projects – both implemented and remained on paper, but gained fame. The sources of recognizable "quotes" were religious buildings in Algiers, Islamabad,

Doha. Separately, we have to talk about the "refinement" of architectural ideas previously presented at the competition in Pristina, as well as the projects of the mosque in Simferopol that were rejected during the competition.

On the one hand, bringing an interesting idea to practical implementation can only be welcomed – in the world architectural theory there are many solutions worthy of implementation in the material; on the other hand, such an active "quoting" (as well as "self-quoting") indicates an artificial narrowing of the range of searches and the perception of the Kazan project as secondary, provincial, where non-original ideas may well be in demand. It can be assumed that such participants were counting on the ignorance and lack of information of the competition committee and Kazan's isolation from modern architectural trends. Although such proposals made it to the finals of the competition and even turned out to be among the noted laureates, one cannot help but notice that the historical center of Islam in the Volga region clearly deserves more respect, and the reason for the competition – the anniversary of the adoption of Islam – involves original solutions, and not the creation of copies or implementation earlier plans rejected in other cities.

It is surprising that some of the contestants (№№ 13, 17) (Fig. 3) were guided by the Taj Mahal and/or the Sheikh Zayed Mosque in Abu Dhabi, once again embodying rather strange generalized ideas about "orientalism", referred to as "style of Ali Baba" or "Agraba style" and associated with kitsch. The idea of transferring the spectacular image of the fabulous eastern emirate to the Volga region should hardly be considered successful.

The presented images of the jubilee mosque in Kazan as a centric structure seem more original (№№ 5, Project from the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia) (Fig. 4). True, it should be remembered that in the history of Islamic architecture, centricity is more characteristic of a mausoleum or a reliquary (starting with Kubbat al-Sahra in Jerusalem) [5, p. 264–268; 7], and the implementation of such ideas based on the required capacity implies the complexity of engineering solutions. However, a similar centric mosque (for 2,000 worshipers) is already being built in Grozny (Olimpiysky village), and, accordingly, the uniqueness of such a mosque, even within the Russian Federation, is being devalued. In addition, in the eyes of Russians, a tall centric ("pillared") structure, surrounded by small domes, will inevitably be associated with the Church of the Intercession (St. Basil the Blessed), which was built on Red Square in Moscow to commemorate the capture of Kazan; the contestants had to take into account such a historical allusion, and it is unlikely that the choice of just

such an architectural type for the mosque in Kazan can be considered successful. The very next day after the publication of competitive projects, voluntary Internet critics assigned the nickname "Pentagon" to such projects, and it will be difficult to get rid of this association, which is far from Islamic values.

The projects that have become finalists of the competition compare favorably with the listed imitative trends. In one of them (№ 14) (Fig. 5), the octagonal courtyard in front of the mosque turns into an square-island surrounded by ponds and permeable galleries, and the architectural body of the domed building is interpreted as a kind of encyclopedia of Tatar decor, realized in white stone carving. True, four different-sized minarets evoke associations with Russian baroque (primarily with the Smolny Monastery in St. Petersburg), and it is this association that may not be very pleasant for Kazan (given the memories of the religious policy of Catherine II, whose reign is personified by the spread of baroque). The project that won first place in the competition (№ 8) (Fig. 6) proposed an avant-garde concept of a streamlined transparent volume pressed to the ground, interpreted by the author as "an ark visible from space" and reflecting "the aesthetics of the spaceship of the East". The implementation of such an ultra-modern project can create a new tourism object in Kazan, but the question of how such a mosque corresponds to the program of the jubilee monument and how such a mosque will be perceived by the conservative ummah of the Volga region remains open.

Public perception

Unfortunately, the holding of an architectural competition as part of the anniversary celebrations did not take into account the opinion of the public – the "final users" of the new mosque. The rounds of the competition were held behind closed doors, the participants were clearly afraid of a leak of ideas, and until the publication of the results of the competition, the public – neither the architects nor the residents of Kazan – had any idea about the proposed projects.

The townspeople were able to see and evaluate the proposals only after the announcement of the results, and already this secrecy caused bewilderment expressed by Internet users: "If they are going to build with donations, why were these people not invited to vote online for one of the projects? Do you want to build for people or for yourself??"; "Why are not all 18 projects presented for public consideration, let the people of Tatarstan also express their opinion, it will be right!" Those users who reviewed the published projects were more specific: "Probably it is very warm in Tatarstan in winter because

such projects as in the photo are designed for warm climates. I understand that one want a mosque like in Saudi Arabia or the UAE. But you need to look at reality. That the first project is all glass, that the second project has only stained-glass windows. And in winter, hundreds of thousands of rubles will be collected again for heating???"; "It doesn't even look like a mosque" [19].

It is significant that when, after the publication of the projects, Kazan internet portals held an alternative vote, none of the official finalists of the competition received the support of the citizens. In their opinion, the concept of a mosque with "ears" minarets (№ 2) has more grounds to claim the status of a new architectural landmark of Kazan. However, the results of this public vote were suspiciously quickly "lost" on the Internet...

Conclusion. The Kazan Cathedral Mosque project competition demonstrated several trends in the development of Islamic architecture in Russia at once, primarily the desire to create original buildings and the programmatic rejection of the neo-Ottoman style. Attention is drawn to the declaration of the need to create a recognizable sample of the "Tatar style", which should become a guide for a number of monuments. It is also important to strive to preserve the historical appearance of the city and to think over the emerging urban planning and transport problems in advance. However, in practice, the selection of projects and the determination of winners demonstrate the utmost caution and the limitations of a formal experiment, predominantly "quoting" and "adapting" already known projects to the conditions of the new competition. The appeal to precedents as a reaction to the proposed task sharply narrowed the variety and conceptuality of searches. Unlike the competition projects in Pristina, the use of the projects presented in Kazan is unlikely to go beyond the region. The closeness of the competition and the lack of public discussion of the projects also do not reveal the image of the mosque which would simultaneously meet the official aspirations, the needs of the ummah and the choice of the inhabitants of Kazan.

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Yevgeniy Kononenko (Rusiya)

YENİ KAZAN MƏSCİDİNİN MÜSABİQƏ LAYİHƏLƏRİ: OBRAZ AXTARIŞLARININ DAİRƏSİ

2022-ci ildə baş tutmuş müsabiqə layihələri Kazanın Baş məscidi, Volqa ətrafında baş vermiş islamın qəbulunun 1100-illik haşiyələrdə keçirilməsi bütün türk dünyasının müasir mədəni memarlığın normativ abidəsi yaratmaq iqtidarında idi. Bu müsabiqəin məqsədi "tatar üslubu" etalonu yaratmaq və artıq məlum olan yeni layihə formasının eksperimentini nümayiş etdirməkdir. Kazanda çap olunmuş müsabiqə layihələrinin qabaqcadan verilməsi müasir məscid obrazı axtarış təmayulləri barədə qarşıya qoyulmuş məsələlərin ilk nümunələri və ictimayyətin münasibətini əvvəldən seçim etməkdir.

Açar sözlər: müasir məscid, memarlıq müsabiqələri, layihələşdirmə, Kazan Baş məscidi, sitat gətirmə.

Евгений Кононенко (Россия)

КОНКУРСНЫЕ ПРОЕКТЫ НОВОЙ МЕЧЕТИ КАЗАНИ: ДИАПАЗОН ПОИСКОВ ОБРАЗА

Состоявшийся в 2022 г. конкурс проектов Казанской Соборной мечети, проведенный в рамках 1100-летия принятия ислама в Поволжье, был призван создать нормативный памятник современной культовой архитектуры всего тюркского мира. Этот конкурс демонстрирует одновременное стремление создать эталон «татарского стиля» и предельную осторожность формального эксперимента, апелляцию к прецедентам, принявшую форму адаптации уже известных проектов к условиям нового конкурса. На основании опубликованных проектов конкурса в Казани можно сделать предварительные выводы о тенденциях поиска образа современной мечети в рамках решения поставленных задач, выборе прототипов и реакции общественности.

Ключевые слова: современная мечеть, архитектурные конкурсы, проектирование, Казанская соборная мечеть, цитирование.

FIGURES

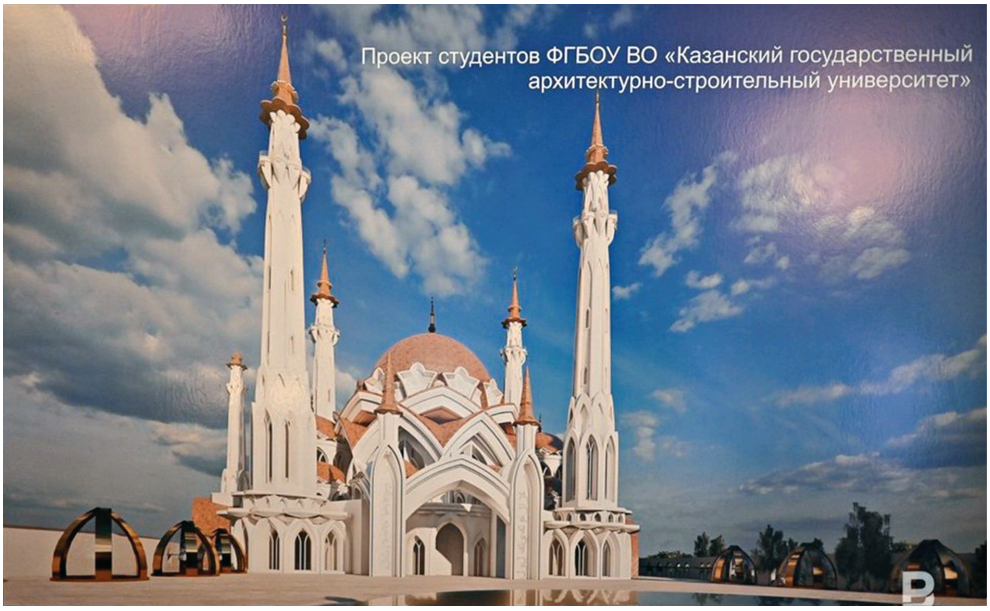

Fig. 1. Project of students of the Kazan University of Architecture and Civil Engineering

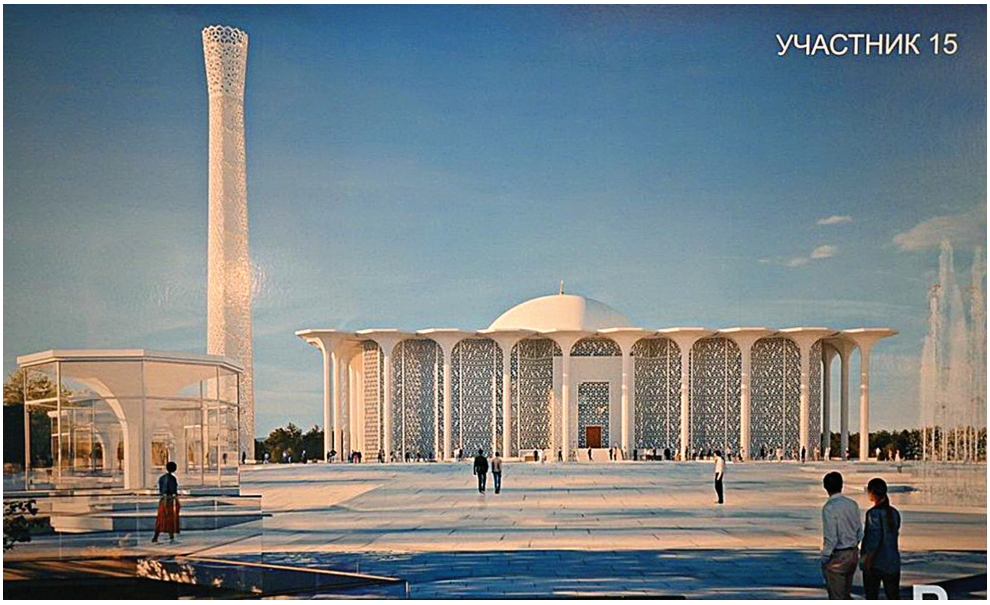

Fig. 2. Participant Project № 15 which shared 1st place

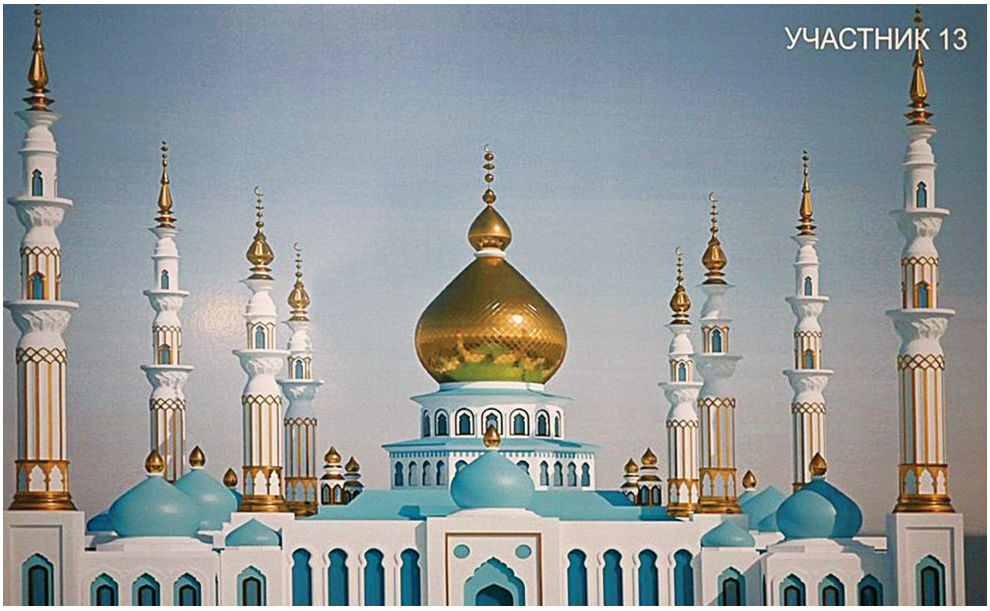

Fig. 3. Participant Project № 13

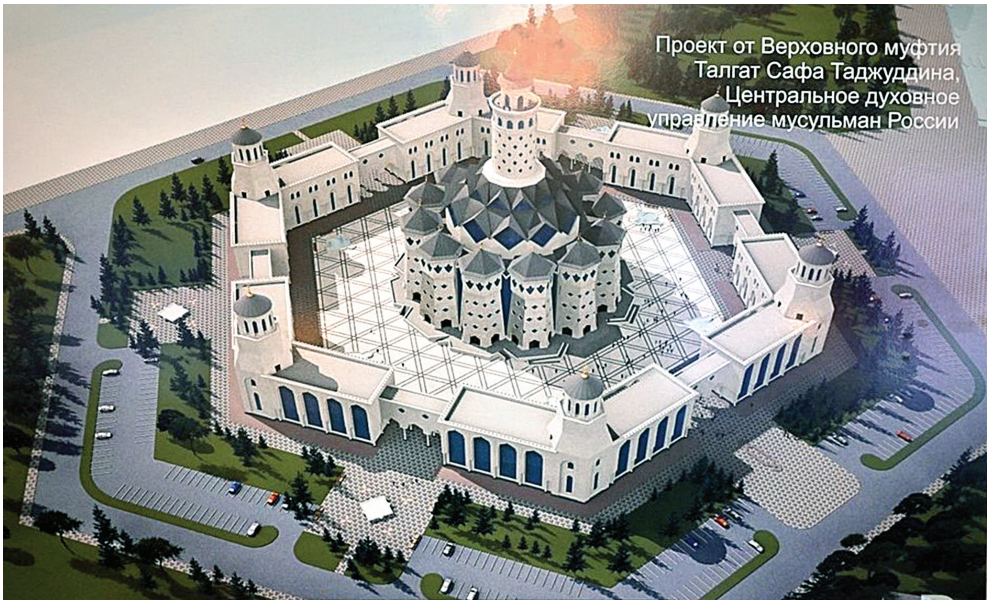

Fig. 4. Project from the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia

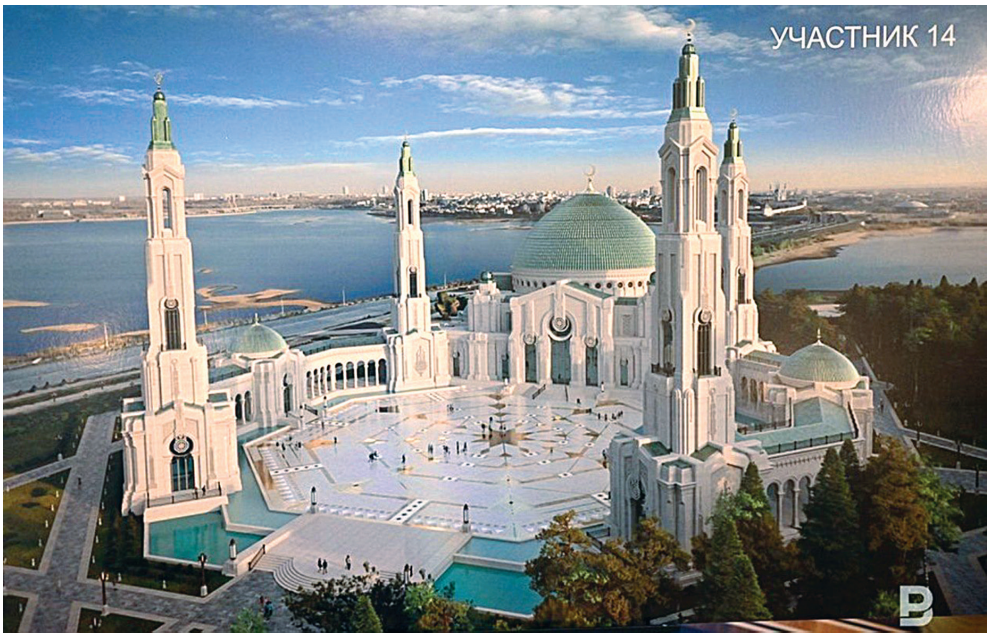

Fig. 5. Participant Project № 14, 2nd place

Fig. 6. Participant Project № 8, 1st place