

# Ani.

## Between pride and decay

Ani used to be one of the most important towns along the northern route of the Silk Road. Today a four-lane road ends here on the Turkish side of the border. The ruins are spread along a sparse plateau framed by deep gorges and snow-covered summits on the horizon.

Through the biggest gorge flows a river that is called *Arpaçay* in Turkish and *Akhurian* in Armenian. Both shores are marked by watchtowers of the Turkish-Armenian border. The red national flag with halfmoon and star is waving above Ani though. The former capital of the Armenian kingdom today lies within Turkish boundaries.

The remains of Ani are still stunning. The ruins of the Cathedral, the Church of Saint Gregory and the Apostles church give an idea of the ancient glory of the so-called "*city of 1001 churches*". Yet today little has survived. Over time wind, natural decay and human influence have left deep scars.

The hills along the city wall are perforated with holes where people used to live in. Today they are used as barns or storage rooms by the inhabitants. The few people that live here today are shepherds and farmers. Their animals graze behind the city walls. Much in pride they speak about *their* Ani.

Since 2004 foreigners are allowed to visit the ghost town. A touristic infrastructure is lacking. Nonetheless Ani has become the main attraction of the small village. As a visitor one enters the site in awe yet stands before ruins. Pride and neglect are very close together here.