

ANI RUINS ON VERGE OF VANISHING

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The report identifies nearly 200 heritage sites in developing nations as being at risk, highlighting 12 in particular as being on the verge of irreparable loss and destruction. Three sites in the Middle East -- Iraq's Nineveh, Palestine's Hisham's Palace, and Turkey's Ani -- are among those most in danger. The ruined city of Ani, on the border of Turkey and Armenia, dates back to the 11th century.

According to the GHF report, many of Ani's remaining buildings are now on the brink of collapse. The report said the ruins are under threat from regular picnickers and homeless people who take shelter in its buildings.

The ruins came into spotlight last month when Turkish nationalists performed Muslim prayers there in response to a service which Ankara recently permitted to go ahead in an Armenian church in eastern Turkey. The prayers came less than two weeks after the service on Van's Akdamar Island in a church that had been closed for services since the 1915 incidents during the World War I.

GHF executive director Jeff Morgan told CNN that Ani is probably one of the top 10 sites in the world, right up there with Machu Picchu and Angkor Wat. For him, Ani has been "caught in a political morass," because of its position on the border of two countries -- Turkey and Armenia -- that don't have diplomatic relations. Morgan also argued that restoring these heritage sites will attract tourism that can pay for their ongoing preservation and bring sustainable income to local communities.

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