ELLE TURKEY (POEM)

Posted on January 22, 2011 by Keghart



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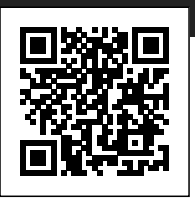

Alan Whitehorn, 21 January 2011

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A terrible beauty amidst haunting images
of the ruins of Ani and the genocide.
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Asbarez, 20 January 2011
Fashion magazine Elle Turkey has used the ruined medieval city of Ani as the backdrop for a photo shoot featured in the magazine's December editorial spread.

The fashion spread, photographed by Senol Altun and styled by Melis Agazat, depicts models Ana Zalewska and Karolin Machova in several poses inside and along the ruins of the Ani Cathedral.

The photos, posted on Fashion Gone Rogue have been met with condemnation from Armenian commentators angry that Elle would hold a "taste-less" photo-shoot on hallowed ground, in a city rid of its population through massacre and Genocide. Independent Armenian online news magazine, ianyanmag, reported on the reactions to the spread in an article titled, Elle Turkey's Fashion Faux Paus Stirs Controversy.

Located on the border of present-day Turkey and Armenia, Ani is the site of an ancient fortress dating back to the 5th century. The city, however, is known for its prominence as the once majestic capital of the Armenian Bagratuni Dynasty, established by King Ashot III in 961 AD.

At its height, Ani was renowned for its splendor and magnificence. Considered "The City of 1001 Churches," it had a population of 100,000–200,000 and was the rival of Constantinople, Baghdad and Cairo.

But the city was sacked and most of its population slaughtered during the invasion of the Seljuk Turks in the early 11th century. Since then it has been under the occupation of successive Turkish regimes, which have pilfered, looted and destroyed almost all of its buildings and churches.

Today, Ani is a desolate ghost town, left abandoned by a Turkish government eager to let the sands of time erase the evidence of its Genocide of the Armenian people. Last year, the Global Heritage Fund included Ani in a list of twelve historic sites around the world that are “on the verge of vanishing” because of mismanagement and neglect.