

Smoke from wildfire blackens prehistoric Greek city walls

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Smoke raises during a wildfire over the ancient site of Mycenae, Greece, some 140 kilometers (90 miles) south of Athens, on Sunday, Aug. 30, 2020. The fire that broke out at the Mycenae, one of the most popular archaeological sites in Greece, has not caused any damage to antiquities at first inspection, according the Culture Ministry. (Vangelis Bougiotis/InTime News via AP)

Monuments at the archaeological site of Mycenae have not been damaged by a wildfire that swept through the area, despite blackening from smoke on the iconic entrance to the ancient citadel, Greece's culture minister said Monday.

Four water-dropping planes and two helicopters helped dozens of firefighters contain the blaze Sunday after it reached the fringes of one of Greece's most important archaeological sites, some 120 kilometers (75 miles) southwest of Athens.

The Bronze Age fortified city, whose rulers were key figures in ancient Greek legend, including the Trojan War, flourished centuries before the major Acropolis temples were built in Athens and was a major center of Mediterranean civilization.

Smoke from the flames blackened the 3,250-year-old Lion Gate, named after the monumental relief sculpture of two heraldic lions flanking a pillar that crowns the entrance to the ancient citadel.

"The damage caused by yesterday's fire was the least possible," Culture Minister Lina Mendoni said during a visit to the site Monday, adding that none of the site's monuments or the Mycenae museum had suffered any damage. Photos released by the ministry Monday showed no traces of burning inside the site.

"Smoke blackened some walls," Mendoni added. "The problem is (only) aesthetic."



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A helicopter operates during a wildfire over the ancient site of Mycenae, Greece, some 140 kilometers (90 miles) south of Athens, on Sunday, Aug. 30, 2020. The fire that broke out at the Mycenae, one of the most popular archaeological sites in Greece, has not caused any damage to antiquities at first inspection, according the Culture Ministry. (Vangelis Bougiotis/InTime News via AP)



A plane drops water during a wildfire in the ancient site of Mycenae, Greece, some 140 kilometers (90 miles) south of Athens, on Sunday, Aug. 30, 2020. The fire that broke out at the Mycenae, one of the most popular archaeological sites in Greece, has not caused any damage to antiquities at first inspection, according the Culture Ministry. (Vangelis Bougiotis/InTime News via AP)

"The Fire Service acted swiftly ... and prevention measures worked: Dry vegetation had all been cleared away," Mendoni said. "That's what saved the monuments,."

A spokesman for Greece's main political opposition, the left-wing Syriza party, questioned the speed of the response by the Fire Service, noting that the fire had entered the site.

The party said it was carrying out a separate inspection Monday, and called on the minister to issue a public apology for downplaying the damage.

Mycenae has been closed to visitors but the Culture Ministry said it will be reopened Tuesday.

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