

Crossroads and Contested Lands: Ten Pivotal Moments in Afrin's History Before 2010

I. Introduction

The Afrin region, known historically and locally by its Kurdish name Çiyayê Kurmênc and in Arabic as Jabal al-Akrad (both translating to "Mountain of the Kurds"), occupies a distinct geographical and cultural space in northwestern Syria.¹ Nestled in the northern Aleppo Governorate near the Syrian-Turkish border, this highland area forms part of the Limestone Massif, characterized by fertile valleys carved by the Afrin River and its tributaries.¹ Human settlement in the area stretches back to the Neolithic period, indicating its long-standing appeal for habitation.⁴

Historically, the region has been recognized primarily for its significant Kurdish population, often described as overwhelmingly or homogeneously Kurdish before the demographic shifts of the 21st century.¹ However, Afrin has also been home to diverse communities, including Arabs, Armenians, Turkmens, and various religious minorities such as Yazidis, Alevis, and Christians, contributing to a complex social fabric.¹ Its location has placed it at the crossroads of empires and cultures, making it a strategically important, and often contested, territory throughout history.

This report aims to identify and analyze the ten most significant historical events and periods that fundamentally shaped the Afrin region's trajectory prior to 2010. The selection of these moments is based on their demonstrable long-term impact, transformative nature, or representative importance as reflected in available historical sources. While the interpretation of historical significance can vary, these ten junctures represent crucial developments in understanding Afrin's political, social, and cultural evolution leading up to the profound changes witnessed in the subsequent decade. The analysis draws upon a range of provided historical accounts and research materials to reconstruct this narrative.

Timeline of Afrin's Ten Most Significant Pre-2010 Events

Event Number & Title	Approximate Date/Period
1. Foundation and Flourishing of Cyrrhus (Nebi Houri)	c. 300 BC – 6th Century AD
2. Integration into the Roman Empire	From 64 BC
3. The Muslim Conquest and Shift in Rule	637 AD onwards
4. Consolidation of Kurdish Settlement and	Notably 16th–18th Centuries

Identity	
5. Integration into the Ottoman Administrative System	c. 16th Century – 1918
6. Establishment of Afrin Town as a Regional Center	19th Century
7. The Demarcation of the Syria-Turkey Border	1921–1923
8. The French Mandate Period: Administration and Development	1920–1946
9. Turkey's Annexation of Hatay and Afrin's Encirclement	1937–1939
10. Era of Ba'ath Rule: Marginalization and Denial of Kurdish Identity	Post-1963 – 2009

II. The Ten Most Significant Events in Afrin's History (Pre-2010)

(1) Foundation and Flourishing of Cyrrhus (Nebi Houri) (c. 300 BC – Byzantine Era)

The ancient city of Cyrrhus, whose ruins lie near the modern village of Nebi Houri, represents the earliest major urban and administrative center documented within the Afrin region.¹¹

Founded around 300 BC by Seleucus Nicator, one of Alexander the Great's successors and the founder of the Seleucid Empire, the city was strategically located along the ancient route connecting the major centers of Antioch and Zeugma, near the fertile banks of the Afrin River.¹¹ Its name was derived from the Macedonian city of Cyrrhus, reflecting its Hellenistic origins.¹¹

Following the Roman conquest of Syria by Pompey in 64 BC, Cyrrhus was incorporated into the Roman province of Syria and experienced a period of significant prosperity.¹¹ It evolved into an important Roman administrative, military, and commercial hub, even minting its own coinage.¹² Its military significance is underscored by its role as a base for the Roman legion Legio X Fretensis.¹² This Roman military presence highlights the region's strategic value in antiquity, likely tied to controlling trade arteries and managing the frontiers with powers such as the Armenian Empire to the north and the Persian empires to the east, against whom Rome conducted campaigns or defended.³ The stationing of a legion indicates that Cyrrhus was not merely a provincial town but a key node in Rome's regional security apparatus.

During the Byzantine period, the city, then known as Hagiopolis ("Holy City"), gained prominence as a major Christian pilgrimage destination.¹¹ This status was linked to the veneration of the relics of Saints Cosmas and Damian, believed to have been martyred nearby and whose bodies were transferred to the city.¹¹ Reflecting its importance, Emperor Justinian I further embellished and fortified Cyrrhus in the 6th century, adding to its already formidable defenses.¹² Surviving remnants of this long history include a Roman theatre, two Roman bridges still functional in modern times, the foundations of a basilica, and fortifications.¹¹ A

Roman-era tower tomb on the site would later be incorporated into the Muslim shrine complex of Nebi Huri.¹⁵

The history of Cyrrhus establishes the Afrin valley's deep historical roots and its early integration into the major political, economic, and religious currents of the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine worlds. The city's strategic positioning and development laid the groundwork for the region's significance long before the emergence of the modern town of Afrin. Furthermore, the evolution of Cyrrhus from a Hellenistic foundation to a Roman military and commercial center, then a Byzantine pilgrimage site, and eventually the location of an Islamic shrine (Nebi Huri), demonstrates a remarkable continuity of human activity and the layering of cultural and religious significance onto a single location.¹¹ This adaptability across different eras suggests the site possessed an enduring importance—whether strategic, symbolic, or resource-based—that allowed it to be reinterpreted and remain relevant under successive ruling powers and cultural systems.

(2) Integration into the Roman Empire (From 64 BC)

The transition from Seleucid to Roman rule, formalized after Pompey's conquest of Syria in 64 BC, marked a defining era for the Afrin region.¹² This integration brought the area firmly into the orbit of a vast and powerful empire, initiating a long period of relative stability and administrative organization. The region was incorporated into the Roman province of Syria, later specifically within Coele Syria, and with the administrative reorganizations of the 4th century CE, the area east of Afrin became part of the province of Euphratensis, centered at Hierapolis Bambyce (Manbij).³ The Romans referred to the Afrin river valley area as Ufrenus, the likely precursor to the later Arabic and Kurdish names.³

Roman administration fostered significant development. Cyrrhus flourished as a key military base, hosting Legio X Fretensis, and serving as an administrative and commercial center on the vital trade route linking Antioch to the Euphrates crossing at Zeugma.³ The Romans invested in infrastructure, evidenced by the surviving Roman bridges near Cyrrhus and likely the development of road networks facilitating troop movement and trade.¹² The establishment of robust administrative frameworks and the strategic military investments solidified the region's importance on the empire's eastern frontier, particularly against Parthian and later Sassanid Persia.¹²

The imposition of Roman administrative divisions like Coele Syria and Euphratensis, along with Latin or Greek place names like Ufrenus, exemplifies how external imperial powers structured and defined the local landscape.³ This pattern of external administrative overlay would be repeated by subsequent rulers, including the Ottomans and the French, highlighting a recurring theme in Afrin's history: its definition and governance being heavily influenced by larger, external political entities rather than solely internal dynamics. The Roman focus on military infrastructure, such as the fortifications at Cyrrhus enhanced under Justinian, and the development of trade routes likely had lasting economic consequences.¹² These investments may have entrenched patterns of agriculture—the region's association with olive oil is noted as ancient—and trade routes that either persisted through later periods or were revived due to enduring geographical advantages, potentially laying the groundwork for the region's later economic specialization.²

(3) The Muslim Conquest and Shift in Rule (637 AD)

The arrival of Muslim armies in the 7th century marked a fundamental turning point for the Afrin region, shifting its political allegiance and cultural orientation. In 637 AD, forces of the Rashidun Caliphate conquered the area from the Byzantine Empire, integrating it into the expanding Islamic world.³ Administratively, under the Umayyad Caliphate that followed, the region became part of the Jund Qinnasrin, a military district of the province of Bilad al-Sham.⁴ Subsequent centuries saw the region pass under the control of various Muslim dynasties. It experienced a period of semi-independent rule under the Hamdanids based in Aleppo during the Abbasid era.⁴ Later, the area faced incursions during the Crusades. While not a primary focus of Crusader activity, parts of the region, including Cyrrhus for a time, fell briefly under the control of the Crusader Principality of Antioch, based to the west.³ Muslim rule was reasserted, with figures like Nur ad-Din Zangi capturing Cyrrhus in 1150.¹² Following the Mongol invasions of Syria in the mid-13th century, the region came under the control of the Mamluk Sultanate based in Egypt.³

This era witnessed a gradual decline of Cyrrhus as a major urban center, described by the 13th-century geographer Yaqut al-Hamawi as largely in ruins.¹¹ This decline might suggest shifts in regional power centers, perhaps towards Aleppo, or changes in trade routes under the new Islamic empires, indicating that the region's prosperity was closely linked to the priorities and structures of the prevailing imperial system. However, the region remained inhabited and strategically relevant. A significant development during the Mamluk period was the transformation of the Roman tower tomb at Cyrrhus into a Muslim shrine dedicated to Nebi Huri in 1303, with an adjacent mosque built shortly after in 1314.¹⁵ This act demonstrates the process of cultural layering and the reinterpretation of ancient landmarks within the new Islamic context, ensuring the site's continued significance. The brief Crusader interlude also serves to reinforce Afrin's historical position as a frontier zone, situated between competing powers – in this instance, the Frankish Crusaders and various Muslim emirates and sultanates. This recurring status as a borderland likely contributed to both instability and opportunities for cultural interaction throughout its history.

(4) Consolidation of Kurdish Settlement and Identity (Notably 16th-18th Centuries)

While some sources propose a Kurdish presence in the Afrin region dating back to antiquity or the Seleucid era, possibly as mercenaries or early settlers along routes to Antioch⁴, the historical record becomes much clearer during the Ottoman period. Evidence points to a significant consolidation of Kurdish settlement and the firm establishment of the region's Kurdish identity between the 16th and 18th centuries. A British traveler in 1599 recorded the presence of a group called "Coords" in the mountains between Aleppo and Alexandretta, potentially referring to Yezidi Kurds, suggesting established settlement by that time.³ Crucially, the Ottoman administration itself recognized the region's distinct character, referring to it as *Kurd Dağ* (Mountain of the Kurds) in Ottoman Turkish, a name mirrored in Arabic sources as *Jabal al-Akrad*.¹ Local Kurds referred to it as *Çiyayê Kurmênc* (Mountain of the Kurmanj), referencing the Kurmanji dialect spoken there.¹ Ottoman documents from the 18th century also identified it as the "Sancak of the Kurds".³ This external and internal

recognition solidified the area's identity.

During the Ottoman era, powerful Kurdish tribal confederations held sway in northern Syria, including the Afrin area. The Reshwan confederation, originally based further north, expanded its influence, while the Milli confederation dominated the northern Syrian steppe in the latter half of the 18th century.⁴ Within the Kurd Dagħ region itself, specific tribes established themselves in different sub-districts, such as the Amkan (Amki), Biyan (Biyi), and Sheikhan (Sheikhi) in the northern and western areas (Bilbile, Rajo, Shiye), the Khastiyan (Khasti) in the Mabetan area, the Jumiyan (Jumi) in the southern plains near Jindires, and others like the Shikaki, Robari, Sherewi, and Heyshti in the eastern parts.¹⁷ This tribal structure was fundamental to the region's social organization, likely influencing land ownership, local politics, and interactions with Ottoman authorities. The existence of these well-defined tribal groups underscores a deeply rooted Kurdish society.

Furthermore, historical records indicate movement and connections beyond the immediate district; from the 1800s onwards, Kurds from Kurd Dagħ were noted as settling in the major urban center of Aleppo, suggesting established patterns of migration and interaction.¹ The area also developed a distinctive Sufi Kurdish Islamic tradition, noted for being perhaps less conservative than surrounding areas.¹⁰ The varying accounts of *when* Kurds first settled—ancient times versus the 16th–18th centuries—may not be contradictory but rather reflect a long process. It is plausible that smaller Kurdish groups existed in the region for centuries, but large-scale settlement, demographic dominance, and widespread administrative recognition occurred more definitively during the Ottoman period. This era was thus crucial in shaping the region's enduring Kurdish character and social structure that persisted into the modern era.

(5) Integration into the Ottoman Administrative System (c. 16th Century - 1918)

For approximately four centuries, from the early 16th century until the empire's dissolution after World War I, the Afrin region was integrated into the administrative framework of the Ottoman Empire. It was generally considered part of the larger Vilayet (Province) of Aleppo, although its administration was sometimes linked with the nearby Sanjak (District) or Province of Kilis, located just north of the modern border.³ This potential fluctuation in higher-level administrative attachment might reflect Ottoman administrative reorganizations over time or the region's position straddling different zones of influence, possibly affecting the consistency of governance and local power structures.

Despite formal incorporation, the mountainous terrain and the strong presence of Kurdish tribal groups likely afforded the region a degree of local autonomy. However, it remained subject to Ottoman laws, taxation systems, and the broader political currents of the empire. The Ottomans clearly recognized the region's demographic makeup, consistently using names like *Kurd Dağ* or *Jabal al-Akrad* in official contexts.¹

A notable episode highlighting the integration of Kurdish elites into the Ottoman power structure was the governorship of the Janbulad (Jumblatt) family over the Vilayet of Aleppo between 1591 and 1607.⁴ The fact that a Kurdish dynasty could hold such a high provincial office, requiring Ottoman sanction, indicates that the relationship between Kurdish leaders and the Ottoman state was complex, involving periods of cooperation, alliance, and

integration into the imperial hierarchy, rather than solely opposition or marginalization. This Ottoman period embedded Afrin within a vast imperial system, shaping its governance and economic links, while simultaneously acknowledging and, to some extent, formalizing its identity as a distinctly Kurdish region within the empire's diverse territories.

(6) Establishment of Afrin Town as a Regional Center (19th Century)

While the Afrin region boasts ancient settlements like Ain Dara and Cyrrhus³, the town of Afrin itself is a relatively recent development, founded as a market center in the 19th century.³ This contrasts with the historical pattern of settlement in the Kurd Dagħ, which consisted primarily of small villages and dispersed farms.¹⁸ The emergence of Afrin town likely reflects broader trends of market centralization and administrative consolidation occurring across the Ottoman Empire during the 19th century, rather than being solely an outcome of local dynamics.

Initially, the town was small; its population was recorded as only 800 permanent residents in 1929.³ However, its importance grew significantly, particularly under the subsequent French Mandate administration, which actively developed the town as the administrative center for the surrounding district.³ Its main square became the bus station, and while the old settlement area was on a hillside, newer development spread across the Afrin River.³

This administrative function, combined with the region's agricultural economy centered heavily on olive cultivation², fueled substantial growth in the 20th century. By 1968, the town's population had increased nearly tenfold to 7,000 inhabitants.³ Satellite imagery analysis indicates a corresponding physical expansion, with the town's urban footprint growing from approximately 0.5 square kilometers to 4.8 square kilometers over the 50 years leading up to 2018.¹⁸ The establishment and subsequent growth of Afrin town provided a necessary focal point for administration, commerce, and social life in the Kurd Dagħ, marking a shift towards a more centralized structure compared to the predominantly rural and dispersed patterns of earlier centuries.

(7) The Demarcation of the Syria-Turkey Border (1921-1923)

The end of World War I and the subsequent collapse of the Ottoman Empire ushered in a period of profound political restructuring in the Middle East, orchestrated largely by the victorious Allied powers, primarily Britain and France.² The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 had already secretly outlined spheres of influence, assigning the region encompassing modern Syria and Lebanon to France.¹³ Following the Turkish War of Independence, the new border between the emerging Republic of Turkey and the territories mandated to France needed formal definition.

The Ankara Agreement, signed between France and the Turkish nationalist government in October 1921, terminated the state of war and provided the initial framework for the border.²³ The final demarcation on the ground, however, was codified in 1923, coinciding with the Treaty of Lausanne which established the boundaries of modern Turkey.³ For the Afrin region, this border creation was a pivotal event. It formally detached the Kurd Dagħ area from the Kilis Province, with which it had historical administrative links under the Ottomans, and placed it definitively within the territory of French-mandated Syria.³

This act of drawing an international boundary had deep and lasting consequences. It was an

imposition by external powers (France and Turkey) that prioritized their own strategic and political interests, often cutting across existing ethnic, social, and economic landscapes.²⁰ The new border divided the contiguous Kurdish-populated areas of the former Ottoman Empire among several newly created states (Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran), fragmenting the Kurdish population and hindering cross-regional connections.²⁰ For Afrin specifically, it severed traditional ties northwards to Kilis and positioned the district as a borderland within the nascent Syrian state. Its location adjacent to Turkey, combined with its predominantly Kurdish population straddling the new frontier, immediately rendered it a sensitive zone. This geopolitical reality, created by the externally imposed border, set the stage for future political complexities, including concerns within Syria regarding national cohesion and security anxieties within Turkey regarding cross-border Kurdish movements and identity politics.

(8) The French Mandate Period: Administration and Development (1920-1946)

Following the Ottoman defeat in World War I and a brief period under the Arab Kingdom of Syria, French forces occupied Syria in 1920, establishing direct colonial rule under the framework of a League of Nations Mandate, formally approved in 1922.²¹ The Mandate charged France with administering the territory, developing its resources, and preparing it for eventual self-government.²⁴

During this period, the French implemented various administrative structures. Initially, Syria was divided into several statelets, including a State of Aleppo, to which Afrin belonged.³ Although these divisions were later revised towards a more unified Syria (excluding Lebanon and, eventually, Hatay), French policy sometimes played on ethnic and religious divisions to maintain control.²² Paradoxically, by administering Afrin/Kurd Dagħ as a distinct district recognized for its Kurdish character, the French may have inadvertently reinforced its unique identity within the larger Syrian entity, even as they integrated it into the Mandate system. The French administration undertook development projects, including building roads and encouraging agriculture, which benefited areas like Afrin.²⁴ They specifically contributed to the development of Afrin town as the district's administrative center.³ This era solidified Afrin's position within the boundaries of the modern Syrian state.

The Mandate period also witnessed the arrival of Kurdish Alevi refugees in Afrin's Mabeta subdistrict during the 1930s.¹ These refugees were fleeing persecution and massacres by Turkish forces in the Dersim region of Turkey.¹ Their settlement in Afrin highlights the region's role, at least during this specific time, as a relative sanctuary for Kurds facing violence across the newly established border. This event underscores the interconnectedness of Kurdish communities and political issues across state lines, positioning Afrin as a recipient of migration driven by political turmoil in Turkey.

The Mandate concluded after World War II. Following a period of joint British and Free French occupation and considerable political maneuvering, French troops finally withdrew from Syria in April 1946, leaving behind an independent Syrian Republic.²¹ Afrin thus transitioned from being part of an Ottoman province to a district within a French colony, and finally to a part of an independent Arab state.

(9) Turkey's Annexation of Hatay and Afrin's Encirclement (1937-1939)

A critical event during the late French Mandate period profoundly altered Afrin's geopolitical

situation: the cession of the Sanjak of Alexandretta to Turkey. This territory, historically part of the Vilayet of Aleppo and included in Mandate Syria, had a mixed population including a significant Turkish element.²⁴ Facing pressure from Turkey and prioritizing its broader strategic relationship with Ankara on the eve of World War II, France agreed to a process that led to the Sanjak's detachment from Syria.²¹

Through the Franco-Turkish agreement of May 1937, the Sanjak was granted autonomy.²³ It formally separated from Syria in November 1937 following a controversial referendum.²³ In September 1938, a pro-Turkish assembly declared the short-lived Republic of Hatay, which was then formally annexed by Turkey in June 1939, becoming Hatay Province.³

This annexation had immediate and dramatic consequences for the Afrin district.

Geographically, Afrin, which previously bordered Turkey only to its north and west, now found itself almost entirely surrounded by Turkish territory – along its northern, western, and newly extended southern borders.³ Its only remaining connections to the rest of Syria were narrow corridors to the east (Azaz District) and southeast (Mount Simeon District).³

The loss of Hatay transformed Afrin into a geographical salient, a near-enclave protruding into Turkey. This dramatically increased its strategic sensitivity and vulnerability. Any political developments or instability within Afrin would now occur along a much longer border directly abutting Turkey, heightening Turkish security concerns. This geographical isolation, a direct result of great power politics prioritizing Franco-Turkish relations over Syrian territorial integrity under the Mandate, created a unique geopolitical vulnerability for Afrin that would significantly shape its future relationship with both Damascus and Ankara. The event also established a historical precedent of Turkish territorial expansion southward at Syria's expense, achieved through negotiation with a major external power, a pattern noted by some observers in relation to later Turkish actions in northern Syria.²¹

(10) Era of Ba'ath Rule: Marginalization and Denial of Kurdish Identity (Post-1963 - 2009)

Following the rise of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party to power in Syria in 1963, Syrian Kurds, including the population of Afrin, entered a prolonged period characterized by systematic discrimination and policies aimed at promoting Arab nationalism at the expense of minority identities.² While some of the most severe state-sponsored Arabization campaigns were concentrated in other Kurdish regions, the overall political climate profoundly affected Afrin as well.

A key event predating Ba'ath rule but whose consequences persisted and intensified under it was the controversial census of 1962 in Hasaka province (Jazira region). This census resulted in approximately 120,000 Kurds being stripped of their Syrian citizenship, arbitrarily classified as "foreigners" or "unregistered," and rendered stateless in their own homeland.² This deprived them of basic rights, including property ownership, access to state employment and education, and political participation.² Subsequently, the Ba'ath regime implemented the "Arab Belt" project along the border in the Jazira region during the 1970s. This involved the expropriation of vast tracts of fertile land from Kurdish farmers and the construction of "model villages" to settle Arab families relocated from other parts of Syria, explicitly aiming to alter the demographic composition of the border strip.²

Significantly, available sources indicate that the Afrin district was largely spared these two specific, highly aggressive measures – the mass denaturalization via the 1962 census and the implementation of the Arab Belt project.⁷ This relative exemption might be attributable to Afrin's geographical isolation, its mountainous terrain, different local power dynamics, or perhaps a strategic calculation by the Ba'ath regime to focus its most intense efforts on the resource-rich and geographically contiguous Jazira region. This difference likely contributed to Afrin maintaining a more demographically homogeneous and cohesive Kurdish population compared to the more ethnically mixed Jazira leading into the 21st century.²

However, escaping the Arab Belt did not mean escaping discrimination. Afrin's Kurds were subjected to the Ba'athist state's broader policies of cultural suppression and political marginalization. The Kurdish language was banned from official use and education; teaching it was prohibited.² Kurdish cultural expressions, such as the celebration of Newroz (Kurdish New Year), were often suppressed or restricted.⁹ The regime actively promoted an Arab nationalist ideology that denied or repudiated distinct Kurdish identity, viewing its assertion as a threat to the "Arab nation".² An attempt was even made in 1977 by official decree to rename the region from *Jabal al-Akrad* (Mountain of the Kurds) to *Jabal al-'Uruba* (Mountain of Arabism), although the older name persisted.¹ Political participation for Kurds was heavily circumscribed, and access to state positions, particularly in security and administration within Kurdish regions like Afrin, was often limited for local Kurds, with posts filled by personnel from other parts of Syria.²

Therefore, despite avoiding the most extreme forms of demographic engineering seen elsewhere, the decades of Ba'athist rule constituted a period of significant political marginalization and cultural denial for the Kurds of Afrin. This shared experience of discrimination fostered a sense of collective grievance and preserved a strong sense of Kurdish identity, creating conditions ripe for political mobilization and demands for rights when the authority of the central state began to weaken after 2011.

III. Conclusion

The history of the Afrin region before 2010 is a rich tapestry woven from threads of ancient civilizations, imperial integrations, borderland dynamics, and the enduring presence of its predominantly Kurdish population. From the strategic prominence of Hellenistic and Roman Cyrrhus to its integration into the Islamic world and subsequent consolidation as the Ottoman *Kurd Dağ*, the region has consistently occupied a significant, if often peripheral, position within larger political entities.

The ten events and periods highlighted in this report underscore key transformations: the establishment of foundational settlements and infrastructure in antiquity; the shifts brought by major conquests and changes in imperial rule (Roman, Muslim, Ottoman); the crystallization of a distinct Kurdish identity and social structure, particularly during the Ottoman era; and the profound impacts of modern state formation in the 20th century. The drawing of the Syria-Turkey border in 1923 and the subsequent annexation of Hatay by Turkey in 1939 were particularly pivotal, reshaping Afrin's geography and embedding it as a sensitive, near-encircled border district within the Syrian state. The French Mandate period further

solidified its administrative place within Syria while contributing to local development, and the ensuing decades under Ba'ath rule, characterized by cultural suppression and political marginalization despite escaping the harshest Arabization campaigns seen elsewhere, forged a collective experience that shaped the region's identity heading into the 21st century. Afrin's pre-2010 history is thus marked by continuity and change: the continuity of settlement in a fertile land, the persistent Kurdish character of the Kurd Dagħ, and its recurring role as a strategic frontier. It is also a history of change driven by external forces – imperial conquests, colonial administration, border demarcations, and state-level ideologies. Understanding this complex past, characterized by layers of cultural influence, periods of relative autonomy and integration, and experiences of both development and marginalization, provides essential context for comprehending the dramatic events that unfolded in Afrin and northern Syria after 2010.

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