Abstract

This Thesis adopts a variety of different approaches in order to throw light on French perceptions of the British at the turn of the twentieth century. Introduction, chapters one and two set these in the broader context of nineteenth-century attitudes, in particular the genre of invasion literature, and the corpus of work produced by writers from the Ecole Libre, Paris. Not straightforwardly Anglophobic or Anglophile, both drew upon similar British stereotypes, and were shaped by French self-perceptions and internal concerns. The impact of the 1898 Fashoda incident and 1899-1902 Boer War upon French attitudes generally and these strands is considered, before analysis of French diplomacy. This departs from the contending ideas that the French Foreign Minister, Delcassé, determinedly sought an alignment with the British from June 1898 onwards, or that across 1898-1901 he was presumptively hostile to Britain, suggesting instead a self-interested opportunist agenda pursued irrespective of others in policymaking circles. Chapter five takes up John Keiger’s suggestion that the Paris press may have been less hostile towards Britain before and during the Fashoda incident than is often depicted, to broaden its evidential base, and push it further, arguing that French anger over Fashoda was in part directed against other, often domestic, targets and its Anglophobia was largely retrospective. Chapter six pursues this story into the early months of the Boer War, pointing to how French press opinions, if emboldened by the tide of international criticism of British policy, again strongly reflected internal preoccupations. The French who volunteered to fight on the Boer side in the war might represent an avowed kernel of Anglophobic opinion. Chapter seven, however, concludes that their motivation had more to do with asserting a certain vision of France, not least at home, something clearly understood by them and the French press of the time.

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The Fashoda Incident brought Britain and France to the brink of war. The Mahdi died a few months later and the Sudan was to pose little threat to Egypt in the following years. The Sudan and the headwaters of the Nile were to be an area competed for by Britain and France as Britain was concerned that Egypt's agriculture might be affected by any power controlling this area. With the defeat of the Khalifah's army and the settlement with the French following the Fashoda incident Britain remained the dominant European in the region and made all the more powerful after WW1 when the Ottoman Empire collapsed. Indeed, there followed a number of international 'incidents', including the 1898 crisis between Britain and France, - over the arrival of a rather small French military mission at Fashoda on the Upper Nile, - which went very close to war. As an interesting aside, I should quote Churchill on its historical background, - his reflections on Japan's meteoric rise to power from the 1850s, this taken from 'The Grand Alliance' the third volume of his Second World War series. (WC5). And as he went on to explain, what emerged was the Anglo-French Agreement of 1904 in which "...the essence of the compact was that the French desisted from opposition to British interests in Egypt, and Britain gave general support to the French views about A French expedition to Fashoda on the White Nile river sought to gain control of the Upper Nile river basin and thereby exclude Britain from the Sudan. The French party and a British-Egyptian force (outnumbering the French by 10 to 1) met on friendly terms, but back in Europe, it became a war scare. The British held firm as both empires stood on the verge of war with heated rhetoric on both sides. It was a diplomatic victory for the British as the French realized that in the long run they needed the friendship of Britain in case of a war between France and Germany.[2][3] It was the last crisis between the two that involved a threat of war (until 1940[4]) and opened the way for closer relations in the Entente cordiale of. 1904.