



# CHAVANNES, EMMANUEL-ÉDOUARD

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**CHAVANNES**, emmanuel-idouard (b. Lyons, France, 5 October 1865, d. Fontenay-aux-Roses, 29 January 1918), French sinologist who also contributed to the study of Iranian history and religions. After completing his education at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris, where he became interested in China, Chavannes joined the French delegation to Peking as attaché at large in 1889 (Cordier, pp. 198-99). While there he began work in two main areas that were to occupy most of his attention for the rest of his life: translation of ancient texts and archeological investigations. He undertook first a study of the memoirs of the Han dynasty historian and biographer Ssu-ma Ts'ien/Si-ma Qian (ca. 145-87 b.c.e.) and prepared a translation, the first five volumes of which appeared in 1895-1901 but which remained unfinished (cf. Cordier, 1918, pp. 199-203). The first of his archeological studies was a book on Chinese stone sculpture under the two Han dynasties, which appeared in 1893 (Cordier, p. 200).

In the same year Chavannes succeeded the Marquis d'Hervey de Saint-Denys at the Collège de France, in the chair of Chinese and Manchu Tartar languages and literatures, which had been founded by Abel Rémusat in 1815 (Cordier, p. 201). During his tenure there he remained active in translating texts and also led or participated in a number of archeological expeditions to China and Central Asia. For example, he published translations of the memoir of I-tsing (1894; Cordier, pp. 203-05) and the accounts of several other Chinese Buddhist



pilgrims who had traveled west and whose travel accounts contain important geographical and cultural information, especially about Khotan and places in Central Asia, such as Bāmīān (see list in Cordier, pp. 226-27). In 1899 he discovered at Hunan thousands of fragments of so-called “oracle bones,” inscribed with Chinese characters, a discovery of paramount importance for the history of Chinese script (Cordier, pp. 221-22). In 1907-08 he made a tour of monuments and sites in northern China; he published two albums of plates and maps (1909), but the accompanying commentary never appeared (Cordier, pp. 217-18). He also participated in the surge of scholarly activity that resulted from discoveries in Central Asia around the turn of this century, collecting and translating documents on the western Tou-kiue or Turks (1903; Tou-kiue = T’u-chüe/Tu-jue, *Mathews’ Chinese-English Dictionary*, nos. 6540, 1680) and contributing translations with commentaries of Chinese documents collected by Sir Mark Aurel Stein (1903; 1913; Cordier, pp. 210-12). All these works contain source materials for the history of the Iranian peoples in Chinese Turkistan, especially Khotan, during the last 400 years before the Muslim conquest (ca. 1000 c.e.).

In 1911 Chavannes joined with Paul Pelliot in publishing, in three successive installments, an annotated translation of the so-called “Manichaean Treatise” (See [caves of the thousand buddhas](#); [chinese turkestan viii](#)), which acquainted Western scholars for the first time with an authentic and substantial Manichean book in Chinese. Chavannes had originally doubted the existence of Chinese Manicheism (1897, esp. p. 85), but study of this treatise led him to revise his views. As H. J. Polotsky subsequently demonstrated from parallels with Coptic texts, the “Treatise” contains passages from the original teachings of Mani, for instance, in the allegories of the two dark nights and the three bright days (Schmidt and Polotsky, pp. 73-79). As it also includes the best-preserved version of the Manichean “Sermon on the Light Nous,” the translation and commentary by Chavannes and Pelliot is also fundamental to the identification and decipherment of surviving fragments of the same text in Parthian, Sogdian, Old Turkish, and other languages (Sundermann, pp. 231-42; Klimkeit and Glintzer, pp. 82-117) and to the study of doctrinal developments in eastern Manicheism. The 2nd and 3rd installments of this work included translations of other Chinese source materials on Manicheism in China and Central Asia, which have remained useful and have been only supplemented by more recent work (e.g., a study and revised translation of the Chinese version of the trilingual—Chinese, Old Turkish, Sogdian—inscription at Kara Balgasun, pp. 177-99; see [chinese turkistan viii. turkish-iranian language](#)



contacts). Chavannes's other major publications included a rendition of 500 stories from the Buddhist scriptures (1910-11), which is also valuable for the study of Buddhist literature in Sogdian and Khotanese.

In 1895 he had succeeded [James Darmesteter](#) as secretary of the Société Asiatique; he became vice-president in 1910. In 1903 he was elected to the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, which he served as president from 1915 until his death (Cordier, pp. 208, 215). In 1904 he became co-editor of *T'oung Pao*, which had first appeared on 1 April 1890 (Cordier, p. 214). He was a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of St. Petersburg and an honorary member of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland (Cordier, p. 208).

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