



# Charles-Eudes Bonin: the first French Person to visit Dunhuang

MELODIE DOUMY 

RESEARCH

 ubiquity press

## ABSTRACT

The French diplomat, archaeologist and explorer Charles-Eudes Bonin (1865–1929) led two expeditions in China and Central Asia in the 1890s. He was the first French person to visit Dunhuang. Bonin has been described as one of the most knowledgeable French travellers and explorers in China and Central Asia at the beginning of the twentieth century, and as having made one of the longest and boldest journeys of the nineteenth century (Broc, 1998: 37), so why has he remained a comparatively obscure figure? Is it because he wrote only a few short articles (Bonin refs), or because he did not collect antiquities? Or are there other reasons why he is not better known? In this paper, I shall refer to Bonin's archives and photographs to introduce him (a longer biography is available in French, see Malsagne 2015), summarise his expedition to northwestern China in 1899, discuss his relationships with his contemporaries Paul Pelliot and Sven Hedin, and show that Bonin's contribution deserves to be better known.

## CORRESPONDING AUTHOR: Melodie Doumy

Asian and African Collections  
Department, International  
Dunhuang Project,  
British Library, London,  
United Kingdom  
[melodie.doumy@bl.uk](mailto:melodie.doumy@bl.uk)

## KEYWORDS:

Charles-Eudes Bonin;  
French exploration of Asia;  
Central Asia; China; Silk Road;  
Dunhuang; Mogao Caves;  
Paul Pelliot; Sven Hedin

## TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Doumy, M. (2023). Charles-Eudes Bonin: the first French Person to visit Dunhuang. *Silk Roads Archaeology and Heritage*, 1(1), 1–20. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/srah.3>

## INTRODUCTION TO BONIN AND HIS EXPEDITIONS IN CHINA

Charles-Eudes Bonin (1865–1929) was a French diplomat, archaeologist and explorer. In the context of political confrontation between the Russian and the British Empires known as the ‘Great Game,’ the Russian occupation of Turkestan from 1862 led to increased international scrutiny and interest in central Asia. While the Russian presence considerably reduced the possibility of conducting expeditions in Turkestan, especially for British explorers, the relatively smooth diplomatic relations between France and Russia meant that French travellers and researchers benefitted from more favourable access opportunities between the 1870s and 1910s (Gorshenina, 1998: 363). Bonin is one of the few individuals who visited central Asia at the end of the nineteenth century.

His two expeditions were among the most important French explorations in the region, and he was the first French person to visit Dunhuang and the nearby caves of the Thousand Buddhas. Bonin thus developed an expertise that was rare at the time, making him one of the most knowledgeable French explorers about China and central Asia (Broc, 1998: 37). Yet, despite featuring in several dictionary entries and in articles dedicated to European explorers and travellers (Malsagne, 2015: 9), his name almost never appears alongside the big names, such as Marc Aurel Stein (1862–1943), Sven Hedin (1865–1952) or Paul Pelliot (1878–1945). However, all three benefitted from his observations—and sometimes even his services—in their own endeavours.

Bonin was born in Poissy, France, on 26 June 1865 and died in Barcelona, Spain, on 29 September 1929. Nothing predisposed him to become one of the privileged witnesses and actors of the geopolitical upheavals that took place in China and central Asia at the turn of the twentieth century. He trained as an archivist and palaeographer at the École nationale des Chartes [National School of Charters] and, soon after graduating, started a career in the French administration. Following brief stints as secretary-general in Rennes and Caen, he was appointed to work in the French colonies at the end of 1889, aged 24. His first post in Asia was in Hai-Duong, in Tonkin.<sup>1</sup> He then served as deputy commissioner among the Muong of southern Tonkin in 1891–2, and was in charge of a scientific mission to Laos in 1893, and to Sumatra in 1894 (Malsagne, 2015: 24–82).

From 1895 to 1897, Bonin travelled from the French protectorate of Tonkin to the Siberian border, passing through Tibet, Mongolia and the Gobi desert, and completing his journey in Beijing 北京 (Bonin, 1898). As a result of this trip, he was the first ever recipient of the gold medal of the Ducros-Aubert Prize, which was established by the Société de Géographie de Paris [Geographical Society of Paris] in 1897, ‘for major progress both in the field of science and in our national interests’ (Broc, 2003:

229). The following year, he received the Duplex medal of the Société de Géographie Commerciale [Commercial Geographical Society] (Malsagne, 2015: 137). Encouraged by this success, Bonin started planning for a second mission to China and central Asia (Figure 1).



**Figure 1** Portrait of Charles Eudes Bonin taken around 1897. Collection Bonin A015761 © Archives du Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères – La Courneuve.

In 1897, he met the young explorer Fernand Grenard (1866–1945) at a gathering of the Société de Géographie (Malsagne, 2015: 129). Between 1891 and 1894, Grenard had taken part to the expedition led by the geographer Jules-Léon Dutreuil de Rhins (1846–1894) in Chinese Turkestan and Tibet (Dutreuil de Rhins, 1897–98). Grenard and Bonin decided to work together on a joint project. The expedition, led by Grenard with assistance from Bonin, would go through the northern provinces of China straight to Lanzhou 兰州, then to Xining 西宁, from where they would cross the northern Tibetan Plateau westwards to reach Ladakh or Kashmir. ‘Such a route,’ they argued, ‘would present, from a geographical, ethnographic and political point of view, an interest that no other would offer today to the same degree’ (AN, F/17/2940/1). The proposal was submitted to the Ministère de l’Instruction Publique [Ministry of Public Education] in May 1897, but it was not successful (Malsagne, 2015: 130).

Around the same time, Émile Roux (1868–1907), a junior officer in the French Navy, proposed a project to explore central Asia, setting off from Burma to go northeast through western part of Yunnan, Sichuan and Gansu, and to reach the Lake Baikal from Mongolia. The estimated costs were about five times lower (Malsagne, 2015: 130). In August 1897, Bonin found out from Roux that he had to abandon his expedition due to personal circumstances, so he sent a formal request to the Ministère de l’Instruction Publique to replace Roux. On 8 October 1897, he received the official decree giving him the go ahead (MAE, 26/PAAP/23: 144), while his mission order arrived the next day:

Following the itinerary approved by the Commission, you will have to cross the Asian continent in a general direction from south to north from the borders of Burma to Lake Baikal. You will endeavour to specify the orography and hydrography of the regions covered, to study the populations from an ethnographic point of view, and to collect the elements of their different dialects, the inscriptions, the plans of the monuments that you will come across on your way. [...] (AN, F/17/2940/1)<sup>2</sup>

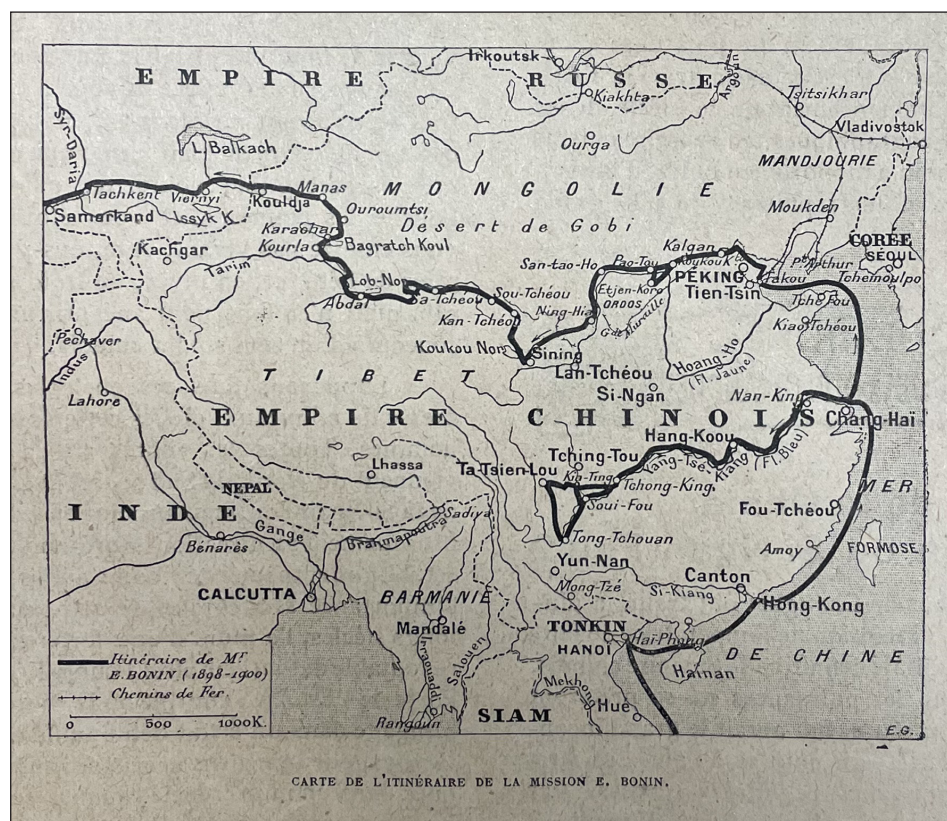
The expedition was placed under the auspices of three different ministries: the Ministère de l'Instruction Publique, which agreed to pay up to 15,000 francs for Bonin's expenses, the Ministère des Colonies [Ministry of the Colonies] and the Ministère des Affaires étrangères [Ministry of Foreign Affairs]. The Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres also offered to contribute an additional 20,000 francs. Bonin started his journey in Shanghai 上海 in March 1898. He followed the Yangzi River to Sichuan, climbed Mount Emei 峨眉山 and ventured into the Tibetan borders. On 8 October 1898, local Chinese people attacked Bonin and his men as they were crossing the Liangshan 凉山, which led to a change of plan. Bonin cut short his journey and decided to go to Chongqing 重庆 to seek justice (MAE, 26/PAAP/11: 67 and 72–82).

Unbeknown to Bonin, the Engineer André Leclère (1858–1915), who had been sent to China to compile a report on the geology of Yunnan as part of a mission to

assess the feasibility of building a railway line between Tonkin and Yunnan, had launched a complaint against him to the French consul in Mengzi. He accused Bonin of abusing his position to make local officials settle his bills, and deplored the reprehensible conduct of the members of his mission, lamenting the adverse effects this had on other French expeditions in the region (Malsagne, 2015: 161–164). Some local missionaries and the Viscount Bruno de Corbel Corbeau de Vaulserre (1853–1941), who had originally joined Bonin as his assistant, confirmed the allegations. Although the future of Bonin's mission was uncertain for a while, he was eventually authorised to continue his journey. He returned to Shanghai and travelled by sea and land to Beijing, from where he crossed northern China from east to west. This journey is discussed in more detail in the next section.

## BONIN ON THE SILK ROAD

On 20 February 1899, Bonin, then in Shanghai, wrote to the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, explaining that he had experienced a series of misfortunes since the attack in Sichuan, but nonetheless reiterated his determination to 'complete the mission entrusted to me, whatever the difficulties.' Instead of approaching central Asia through Sichuan, as initially planned, he would now go through Gansu (Figure 2) despite reports of growing hostility against foreigners:



**Figure 2** Map of the itinerary followed by Bonin during his second central Asian expedition (1898–1900), reproduced from *À Travers le Monde*, 1901: 109.



It is true, two days ago there were dispatches saying that Kansou [Gansu], through which I must pass, has also risen up, but since unrest is everywhere, I will not be any more at risk there than elsewhere. (Bonin, 1899: 219).

## FROM BEIJING TO GANSU

In March 1899, Bonin arrived in Beijing with a dozen Annamese soldiers that the Ministère des Colonies had charged to ensure his security, and two Chinese interpreters. Unlike many French explorers or diplomats in Asia, who had studied at the École des Langues Orientales [School of Oriental Languages] in Paris, Bonin did not have any Chinese (Malsagne, 2015: 16–17). Although he occasionally used Chinese characters in some of his reports, he did not speak Chinese and could not read Chinese texts without help (Malsagne, 2015: 17). He relied heavily on his interpreters during his entire journey. Departing from Beijing, Bonin and his men visited the Ming tombs, crossed the Great Wall at Nankou 南口 and went to Xuanhua 宣化, from where they reached the nearby city of Kalgan, known in Chinese as Zhangjiakou 张家口.

They travelled westward, following the Yang River 洋河<sup>3</sup> to Guihuacheng 归化城 (Hohhot), in Inner Mongolia. Thus started Bonin's journey to the northwestern regions of China on the so-called Silk Road, which he intended to retrace, walking in the footsteps of Marco Polo and others:

This was the beginning of the longest road of the Middle Ages, which, starting from Beijing, crossed all of Asia from east to west to reach ancient Bactria, from where it split towards Europe. It is the famous Silk Road, which the Greeks themselves knew, but which in their time veered off from Kansou [Gansu] towards Si-nganfou [Xi'an], capital of the kingdom of the Seres. Nowadays it is still delineated by round towers, raised on square platforms, which served to guide the march of caravans lost in the steppes: Ptolemy already speaks of the white tower that, in his time, marked the entrance to this road on the side of the Pamirs. (Bonin, 1901a: 285).

Only two Western explorers had travelled this route before: Père Armand David (1829–1900) in 1866 and William Woodville Rockhill (1854–1914) in 1891. Bonin's itinerary deviated somewhat from theirs and enabled him to complete and correct their mapping for the upper course of the river valley, with the Dongyang River 东洋河 and the Xiyang River 西洋河 (Bonin, 1901a: 284).

Two weeks after leaving Beijing, Bonin was in Hohhot, which he described as a cosmopolitan trading town between north China and Outer Mongolia for wool and leather (Bonin, 1901a: 285). He had already visited the 'Blue City' (the translation of the Mongolian name

Hohhot) on his first mission to central Asia (1895–1897) and did not stay long. He followed the valley of the Dahei River 大黑河 and, after two days, reached the village of Hekou 河口, at the confluence with the Yellow River, on the northern curve of the Ordos loop. He located it:

[...] south of the small Chinese town of To-tcheng [Tuocheng 托城<sup>4</sup>], dominated by the ruins of the ancient citadel of Tokto [Togtoh]. The latter played an important role in the time of the Gengis-Khanids [Mongols], when it guarded the passage of the Yellow River. This is Marco Polo's *Tenduc*. The enclosure, which I visited and photographed, is still in good condition; it has a square shape, without corner tower, but with two bastions to the south and north to defend the entrances (Bonin, 1901a: 286).

Bonin's identification of Togtoh as Tenduc was based on Rockville's writings (1894: 18). As Malsagne noted (2015: 177), this fed a discussion that was had been initiated in 1871 by the Scottish orientalist Henry Yule (1820–1889), to whom Tenduc was Hohhot, and developed by Henri Cordier (1849–1925) and Yule's daughter Amy Frances Yule (1852–1916) (Cordier, 1920: 62). Unfortunately, the photographs taken by Bonin and his description were insufficient to prove this identification, which is unconfirmed by archaeological surveys.<sup>5</sup>

In Dzungar, which possibly corresponds to the modern city of Ordos 鄂尔多斯市,<sup>6</sup> Bonin visited a Mongolian official, 27<sup>th</sup> descendant of Gengis Khan, who he had met during his first expedition (*À Travers le Monde*, 1897: 81). This 'king', as he called him, shared his growing concerns for the safety of foreigners in China, particularly missionaries established on his territory. On 20 May 1899, Bonin wrote to Stephen Pichon (1857–1933), who was serving as the French Minister to China in Beijing,<sup>7</sup> to alert him to the rise of xenophobic movements:

I promised to forward the warning he gave me. I do not believe it to be trivial, because of the situation of the person issuing it, his relations with the Manchu dynasty, and the way in which he keeps informed about the course of events through the newspapers from Beijing and Shanghai that he regularly receives deep in the desert. This warning coincides with the rumours of a general and forthcoming uprising against Europeans and Christians, of which I have heard at the other end of China and of which the troubles in Sse-tc'houan [Sichuan], not to mention the personal attacks I suffered, have been symptomatic (Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 1900: 4).

Bonin nonetheless continued his journey and went to Baotou 包头, where he rented a boat and sailed up the Yellow River for 40 days. On the way, he carried out

detailed hydrographic surveys. Only two explorers, George Littledale (1851–1931) and Montagu Sinclair Wellby (1866–1900), had navigated on the Yellow River before him. Both came from Tibet and, having lost their tools, were unable to record such information (Bonin, 1901a: 288). Bonin arrived at Yinchuan 银川<sup>a</sup> on 29 June 1899. There, he completed a report on Christian communities in central Asia (Bonin, 1900b). He made an excursion to the Alashan 阿拉善山 and the Galpin Gobi, inhabited by Kalmyk people, and described by the Russian explorer Nikolai Mikhailovich Przhevalsky (1839–1888) as the ‘Valley of Death’ (1876: xxx). On his return to Yinchuan, Bonin visited the remains of the fortifications built by the Ming emperors to stop Mongol incursions (Bonin, 1901a: 288).

In late July 1899, equipped with a caravan of twenty camels, Bonin left via a ‘direct route’ that ‘no traveller had yet undertaken.’ It took him fifteen days to cross the Gobi desert from east to west, overcoming some particularly arduous sections:

The most difficult part of the road is beyond the Bayanboulak camp: the famous Tengri-irissou dunes (“the dunes of the sky”), feared by all Mongols; their sand is so fine and flows so quickly under the action of the wind that any track disappears almost instantly, so that one is obliged, in order to cross the dunes, to surrender to the camels’ instinct, for fear of getting lost and perishing from heat and thirst (1901a: 289).

Bonin reached Liangzhou 凉州, Gansu, around mid-August. He studied the city’s archaeological landmarks, especially the Dayun 大云 Buddhist temple, in search of remains of the Tangut (Xixia 西夏) empire. Bonin knew of the research of the French sinologist Gabriel Devéria (1844–1899) on the rubbings of a bilingual stele in Chinese and Tangut (Devéria, 1898: 53–74). He obtained translations of a further 18 inscriptions in Chinese, and took notes and photographs (Malsagne, 2015: 187). He also made several rubbings, which he shared with Edouard Chavannes (1865–1918), Professor at the Collège de France, who was charged by the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres to examine the results of Bonin’s expedition from an epigraphic point of view (1901: 133–135; 1904: 193–295). Chavannes was later to work closely with Stein on his expedition finds (Fenet, 2023).

On 17 August 1899, Bonin went looking for a Tibetan tribe that he thought to be descendants of the Tanguts. He found a small community two days’ walk west of Liangzhou and compiled a report for the Ministère de l’Instruction Publique on 15 September 1899 (MAE, 26/PAAP/11: 230–239). He also made notes on their language. Bonin then travelled south towards Koko Nor (Qinghai Lake 青海湖). He proudly reported how this entirely new route had enabled him to explore the Nan Shan 南山 and given him the opportunity to study these mountains and

their orography across a large area (Bonin, 1901a: 289). The next steps of the journey unfolded quickly. Having traversed the mountains through a high pass, which he estimated at 5000 meters, Bonin reached the valley of the Datong River 大通河, a tributary of the Yellow River.

Bonin arrived in Xining 西宁 on 25 August 1899. He visited the Kumbum Buddhist monastery (Ta’ersi 塔尔寺) and stayed for a few days in the house closest to the central temple. There, he took photographs and acquired some printed *mantras*:

[...] with great ease I was able to visit and photograph the most curious places and to collect much information, which will be the subject of a special study. I visited all the great temples, the interior of the *golden tower*, which other travellers had been unable to enter, the printing press, the kitchen with its three gigantic pots, each of which can contain four whole oxen for a meal to feed the two thousand lamas of the monastery, the sacred trees bearing on its trunk and leaves characters of a mysterious origin from which I bring back a certain number of leaves offered by the lamas. They also gave me a collection of charms (mantras) printed at the monastery: they are important for the study of Lamaism (1901a: 291).

Bonin then journeyed to the town of Tangkar (Tongka 同卡), where the local official refused to provide him with the escort required by his passport. Two days later, after narrowly avoiding an ambush by bandits, he safely reached the eastern bank of Koko Nor (Malsagne, 2015: 193). He was the first French traveller to camp there since Père Evariste Régis Huc (1813–1860) and Père Joseph Gabet (1808–1953), who travelled to Lhasa in 1845 (Huc, 1928). While the shores of the lake appeared to be uninhabited, Bonin noted that there were Tibetan settlements in the foothills of the mountains surrounding it (1901a: 292). Before leaving, Bonin took a sample of the lake water with the aim of comparing it to that of Lop Nor (Luobu Po 罗布泊). He set off northwards, bypassing Bagha Nor, a small lake that had separated from Koko Nor.

Bonin continued marching through gorges and desert plateaus, swept by snowstorms (1901a: 292). In the lower valley of the Datong River, the ice had melted and rendered the river impassable. Fortunately for him and his men, after almost a day, they encountered a group of Tibetans and their yak caravan, who sent them in the direction of a ford where the river allowed passage ‘with water up the withers of the horses’ (Bonin, 1901a: 292). They then crossed the mountain range located north of the Datong River. On 7 September, they arrived at the Chinese fort of Ebuzhen (Ebao zhen 峨堡镇), an ancient city considered the north gate of Qinghai. Two days later, Bonin reached the city of Ganzhou 甘州 (Zhangye 张掖), located in the centre of the Hexi Corridor, Gansu:

I also took advantage of my visit to continue and complete the archaeological collection of ancient inscriptions from Kan-sou [Gansu], of which I am bringing back copies or rubbings. The inscriptions from the ancient city of Kan-tcheou [Ganzhou], the sand-covered ruins of which I explored, are particularly important from this point of view (1901a: 294).

Bonin realised that it would be impossible for him to complete his mission to China and Central Asia on schedule, and on 20 September 1899 submitted an official request to the Ministère de l'Instruction Publique for an extension of three additional months, without pay (Malsagne, 2015: 195–196).

### BONIN AT DUNHUANG AND THE MOGAO CAVES

On 23 September 1899, Bonin left Ganzhou and headed towards Lop Nor on the imperial road going through Jiuquan 酒泉, Anxi 安西, Shazhou 沙洲 and the Gobi desert. He continued to compile geographical data. He reported that the Yumen Pass 玉门关, the ancient frontier, was built in isolation in the Gobi Desert rather than connected to Han fortifications, as indicated on some maps (Bonin, 1901a: 293). He made notes about the numerous mineral deposits of western Gansu, including several gold mines and about a dozen oil sources. Most of these had been recently opened or discovered. After Jiuquan, Bonin arrived in Anxi on 12 October 1899. There, the local official refused to find the camels necessary to reach Lop Nor, and Bonin had to rent donkeys from a Turkic caravaner (Malsagne, 2015: 197).

Due to this delay, he departed from Anxi on 17 October 1899, leaving the main road to travel southwest through the desert and arriving at Shazhou three days later (Bonin, 1901a: 294). The oasis-town of Shazhou, also known as Dunhuang 敦煌, had once been a strategic point on the old routes, but had gradually lost its importance. As Bonin noted:

However, the old city founded in 111 BC by the Han still remains the centre of considerable traffic, being the end point of the desert roads which come from the Tsai-dam Mongol in the south, from Lob-nor to the west and from Hami to the north, these last two roads which cut through the Gobi [Desert] being followed only by the Turkic caravans (1901b: 210).

On 24 October 1899, he set off for the Mogao Caves, known generally as the Qianfodong 千佛洞 or “Thousand Buddha Caves”, located about 20 kilometres to the southeast of Dunhuang. A small number of European travellers had already visited the caves and drawn attention to them. The Austro-Hungarian team of Count Béla Széchenyi (1837–1893), which included the cartographer Gusztáv Kreitner (1847–1893) and the geologist and geographer Lajos Lóczy (1849–1920), had visited in May 1879

(Russell-Smith, 2000). Przhevalsky arrived later that year. The British explorer George Littledale (1851–1931) and his wife Teresa, née Harris Scott (1839–1928) travelled there in July 1893, and briefly mentioned the Buddhist cave complex in their account (1894: 460).

On the way to the Caves, Bonin stopped at a stupa containing three small Buddhist statues, with a stele dated from 1802 recording that this was a resting place for pilgrims heading to the Caves. Next to it, he noted the remains of a recently built small square tower surmounted by five pillars, which he assumed probably replaced ‘an older one, similar to those which marked out through Central Asia the great road from Beijing to Bactria’ (Bonin, 1901b: 211). From there he walked another hour, and finally reached the long cliff-face with hundreds of Buddhist caves:

By going up a breach between the sands, which was once the bed of a torrent, for another hour towards the south we finally arrive at Tsien-fo-Tong [Qianfodong]. The first impression is most singular. Imagine on the left bank of the stream, therefore facing East, an alluvial cliff (loess), the height of which sometimes reaches fifty metres or more, entirely pierced with square niches similar to the cells of a beehive; they reveal their interior decorated on all walls with paintings as bright and fresh as the day they were painted: but all are empty and plunged into the eternal silence of the desert (1901b: 212).

Bonin immediately understood the great value of the Mogao Caves to the study of Asian religions, in particular to the history of the transmission of Buddhism from India to China. He wrote:

Among the archaeological monuments I explored during the scientific mission to Central Asia entrusted to me from 1898 to 1900, the most interesting and important seems to be the *Caves of the Thousand Buddhas*, southeast of Sha-Tcheou [Shazhou] in Kansou [Gansu] (1901b: 209).

Bonin felt that the European explorers before him had failed to give an adequate description of the Mogao Caves and set himself that task. He explained the arrangement of the caves over several irregular storeys, often three, sometimes four where the cliff was high enough to accommodate an additional level. This corrected Przhevalsky’s description, which said there were only two storeys (1901b, 212). Bonin added that the caves themselves were of varying dimensions, ranging from small square holes barely a metre deep to vast rooms up to twenty metres in width:

The largest ones also offer, behind the altar which occupies the back, a narrow corridor just wide enough for the passage of a man, cut like the room itself in the cliff face: this passage can



have served only to perform the *paradakshina*, the ceremony of Vedic origin which consists of circumbulating the altar while keeping it on the right-hand side, that is to say in the direction of the movement of the sun (1901b: 212–213).

Bonin assumed, inaccurately, that there were no internal connections between the caves, built at different periods, and recorded that they could only be accessed from the outside.

He described the walls and ceiling of the caves as decorated with murals painted during different periods that were admirably preserved thanks to the dry air of the region. Some of the compositions included Chinese inscriptions, which he stated must have contained prayers or referred to the scenes depicted. The inscriptions were covered with a layer of brown paint, under which at least some of the characters were legible (Bonin, 1901b: 213). However, Bonin's lack of Chinese meant that he could not read them. He mentioned that the main rooms were paved with large earthenware tiles decorated with raised rosettes reminiscent of the tiles separating the Buddhist images painted on the walls. Statues of deities could also be seen in some of the chambers. These were shaped around a wooden structure and made of polychrome clay with traces of gilding, and most seemed to have been previously restored:

However, they had to be redone on the old models, and most offer a distinctly archaic character and much more Hindu than Chinese, in harmony with the characters of the frescoes whose costumes and attitudes they reproduce (Bonin, 1901b: 215).

Bonin noted in his report that the lower level of the caves in the cliff face was half silted up and would soon be completely blocked if no one took adequate precautions (Bonin, 1901b: 212). The irony of this insightful comment is that only eight months after his visit, in June 1900, the Daoist monk Wang Yuanlu 王圓箎, who had appointed himself caretaker of the site, accidentally stumbled upon a hidden cave when removing sand from the corridor of a large cave, Cave 16. The small room turned out to contain a cache of manuscripts, printed materials and other artefacts roughly dating from the fifth to the early eleventh centuries. The contents of this repository, now commonly referred to as the 'Library cave' or Cave 17, revolutionised studies of this region, and are comparable to the Dead Sea scrolls for their significance. Bonin therefore narrowly missed one of the world's greatest archaeological discoveries. Nowhere in his report did he refer to Wang or to any other residents at the caves. In 1907, the British-Hungarian explorer Marc Aurel Stein arrived at Dunhuang and convinced Wang Yuanlu to sell him a large number of items to provide funds to continue

restoring the caves. The following year, in 1908, the French sinologist Paul Pelliot arrived at the caves and acquired another large number of the contents of Cave 17.

Bonin did not leave the Mogao Caves completely empty handed. He took four rubbings of dated inscriptions from different periods. The first two are from both sides of a stele in the cave now known as Cave 148, which contained a statue of the *parinirvāṇa* Buddha measuring approximately 15 metres long (Bonin, 1901b, 215). These two rubbings are dated 776 and 894. The earliest praises a Buddhist follower, Li Taibin 李太賓 (dates uncertain), who commissioned religious murals; the later one recalls the memory of a member of the imperial family, son-in-law of Zhang Yichao 張義潮 (799–872), who swore allegiance to the Tang dynasty (618–907) (Chavannes, 1904: 202).

The other two rubbings come from two different steles erected during the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) to commemorate the religious foundations of Sulaiman, the King of Xining (d. 1351). Bonin found both steles in a cave that he described as a 'great hall with idols' (1901b: 215). By the time of Stein's visit, they were outside a shrine next to Cave 96, which houses a Buddha statue measuring 35.5 metres in height. Stein thus assumed that the stele originally belonged in the cave of the colossal Buddha (Stein, 1921: 799–801). One of the steles is dated to 1348 and features a four-armed bodhisattva Avalokitesvara surrounded by the six-syllable *Om mani padme hum* mantra in six scripts: Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese, Tangut, Phags Pa and Mongolian (Figure 3). Bonin was particularly proud of having taken a rubbing of this stele, which became an important document for



**Figure 3** Stele dated 1348, photograph taken by Raghu Vira (1902–1963) in 1955. © The British Library Board, Photo 1274/1(141).

the study of central Asian languages and scripts (1901b: 216). The other stele, dated to 1351, commemorated the restoration of the Huangqing Temple 皇庆寺.

Bonin also took some of the earliest known photographs of the Mogao Caves. This small corpus of under ten pictures bears no comparison, in terms of size and quality, to the hundreds of photographs of Dunhuang taken by Charles Nouette (1869–1910) in 1908 on Pelliot's expedition. It constitutes nonetheless an invaluable source of information (Figures 4, 5, and 6).

### FROM GANSU TO TURKESTAN

From Dunhuang, Bonin undertook a topographical survey of the region. He headed northwest, as far as what he called the 'Black Lake' or Kara Nor in Mongolian (Hala'er hu

哈拉尔湖), a desert plateau that drained the waters of the Nan Shan 南山 and Altyn Tagh or Altun Mountains (A'erjin Shan 阿尔金山) to form a salt lake in the spring. At the time of his expedition, the lake had already considerably shrunk due to drying up of the Gobi desert and the construction of canals used for irrigation along the Shule River 疏勒河, which used to flow into it from the East:

[...] what remains of it, a large pond with white edges of rock salt, is now one degree [latitude] further east than the ancient Kara-nor marked on Chinese maps; but we see from the movements of the ground and the saltpetre that covers it that the lake once extended much further west, as these documents indicate (1901a: 294).



**Figure 4** Dunhuang. Caves of the Thousand Buddhas. Detail of the central altar in Cave 61. Collection Bonin AO15228 © Archives du Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères – La Courneuve.<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 5** Dunhuang. Caves of the Thousand Buddhas. Inside view of the north wall of the corridor leading to Cave 61 with a mural of an astronomical map depicting 28 stars. Collection Bonin AO15229 © Archives du Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères – La Courneuve.





**Figure 6** Dunhuang. Caves of the Thousand Buddhas. Detail of Cave 331. Collection Bonin AO15227 © Archives du Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères – La Courneuve.

Bonin continued his reconnaissance into the desert towards the west from the southern shore of the lake, but he soon had to interrupt his trip and return to Dunhuang owing to the lack of drinkable water:

After progressing up to two degrees [latitude] of T'oung-hoang [Dunhuang], we were definitively stopped by the complete disappearance of the springs. The last well we dug gave us only a pot of a muddy and brackish liquid incapable of watering the caravan. Then heading straight south, I tried to join the road which the most recent edition of the Russian military staff map traces diagonally across the desert, from the Kara-nor to the Kara-Koshoun [Karakoshun] (Eastern Lob-nor),<sup>10</sup> adorning it with many waterholes bearing Turkic language names. After walking for half a day in this direction, we were stopped by a long stretch of dry and sandy marshes, whose saltpetred and crumbly earth broke like a light crust and sank under our feet; a high and ancient forest of dry trees covered this strange lagoon, an almost terrifying spectacle of death and silence (1901a: 294–295).

With great effort, Bonin and his men managed to cross to the other side and camped between dunes, where they searched in vain for waterholes. Using the map he had drawn earlier, Bonin was able to direct his team to a previously identified spring. From there, they returned to the limits of the oasis of Dunhuang, which he had left a fortnight earlier.

The exploration was not a complete failure as it led to an important archaeological and historical discovery for Bonin:

To my great joy, I indeed discovered in this direction the perfectly visible remains of an old cart route, doubtless abandoned for centuries, since the Chinese of the region not only no longer use it, but have no memory of it. This road is punctuated every 5 *li* by 10-metre high earthen towers (pao-ta<sup>11</sup>), exactly like the great imperial road of Kansou [Gansu], of which it seems to be an extension. These towers, a number of which are still standing, were linked together by a wall, which has now collapsed at ground level due to its singular construction (1901a: 295–296).

South of the road, Bonin also found the enclosure of a small fortress that locals called Fangpangcheng 方旁城, the 'square city', as well as other fortifications built in the Tang dynasty. According to Bonin, these remains were, without doubt, traces of ancient trade routes. Stein was later to confirm his discovery:

Owing to the want of reliable guides, or the reluctance of his Chinese escort to proceed further, he had been obliged to turn round to Tun-huang [Dunhuang] and travel by the mountain route, apparently after having reached the first marshes west of the Khara-nor. In the course of this unsuccessful attempt he [Bonin] passed ruined watch-towers, which recalled to him the *P'ao-t'ais* seen along the imperial highway in Kan-su [Gansu], and also correctly observed some remains of a wall running near them. The distinguished French traveller had shrewdly guessed the probably antiquity of these ruins and even their historical importance, as indicating the line of 'the great route, vainly

sought after till now, which, under the Han dynasty, ran to China through Bactria, Pamir, Eastern Turkestan, the Desert of Gobi, and Kan Suh [Gansu]' (1921: 566).

On 8 November 1899, Bonin set out from Dunhuang with a new guide (Malsagne, 2015: 203). Heading southwest, he walked towards the Altyn-tagh, which he reached after four days in the desert. He crossed the rocky heights of the Kumtag Desert, which proved particularly difficult because of the instability of the sand under the action of the wind (Bonin, 1901a: 297). The route then closely followed the first ridgeline and traversed, for the most part, either the Tibetan plateau or a corridor between two parallel chains of the Altyn Tagh. The highest point of this itinerary was a pass located at 3600 metres:

[...] we met, by way of living beings, only camels and wild horses, yaks, wolves and foxes. I am not talking about two corpses belonging to the caravan that had passed before us, looted and massacred by Chinese brigands (1901a: 298).

Bonin reported that they suffered from the cold and the lack of food (1900a: 235). In addition, there were very few unevenly located water points along the way. Bonin and his men took a route that went past glaciers and peaks, which enabled them to find potable water.

Bonin reached Abdal, a village situated by the Tarim River, on 30 November 1899.<sup>12</sup> Rather than following the same road as most travellers, i.e. going south through Charkhlik or Ruqiang 若羌, Bonin cut westwards in the direction of the north shore of the Kara Buran, a lake into which both the Cherchen and the Tarim rivers flow. On the way, he crossed the Tarim River twice on makeshift rafts. Bonin saw in the scattered ruins that they found in the course of the expedition a sign that the Lop Nor area was once populous and cultivated (1901a: 298). Stein would later confirm this observation. After arriving at the Kara Buran, Bonin followed the Tarim to the northwest, crossing the green stretch between the Taklamakan desert to the west and the marshy waters of Lop Nor to the east:

Having arrived at the north of Kara-buran, we began to ascend the banks of the Tarim towards the northwest and Kurla, through the fields of reeds and the forests of *toghrak* (*Populus balsamifera*) which cover them. Our route in this direction passes to the east of that followed by Bonvalot between Kurla and Tcharkalyk [Charkhlik]; moreover, due to the constant displacement of the bed of the Tarim, all the routes – done or to be done in this region – are also interesting for geography. This is how we successively crossed the arms of the river that bears the Chinese or Turkic names of: Ye-ta-ho,

Ye-mi-sou, Douralyk River, Kakkelyk River, Inshike-Darya and Kontje-Darya<sup>13</sup> (1901a: 299).

Bonin passed through Xingping 兴平 and Kurla (Ku'erle 库勒勒) and arrived in Karasahr (Yanqi 焉耆), at the foot of the Tianshan 天山, on 30 December 1899. Because he should have been back in France already, he decided not to visit Nikolai Fyodorovich Petrovsky (1837–1908), the Russian Consul in Kashgar, an important diplomatic post in western China, as it would take three months to make the journey there and back. Instead, he spent almost a fortnight in Karasahr and visited several nearby sites:

[...] to the west of the road, I visited the curious Buddhist monument which is called in Turkic: Ming-ouy (the thousand dwellings), and which calls to mind the caves of the Thousand Buddhas of Toung-hoang [Dunhuang] by its construction and its antiquity, but not by its historical and artistic importance (1901a: 299).

Bonin left no detailed notes about Ming-oi 明屋, a compound also referred to as Shorchuk or Qigexing 七个星. In 1907, Stein excavated some of the site's Buddhist ruins in the course of his second expedition to central Asia. He found the remains of colossal statues, woodcarvings, paintings and stucco reliefs (1921: 1183–1244). Bonin also mentioned visiting the ancient city of Tanzer, located to the east of the road, as well as a place called Bagdad-shahri, to the southeast, on the edge of the Bosten Lake. Bonin suggested that the latter might have been an ancient Nestorian settlement of which there were no remains (1901a: 299). Stein explored the site later and established that it must have been a 'town of importance', possibly the old capital of Karasahr during the Tang dynasty (818–907) (1921: 1182–3).

To reach Urumqi, Bonin decided to follow a route that no western traveller had taken before him — 'not even the Russians who always go through the road from Toksoun to Turfan,' as he explained in a letter to the Ministère de l'Instruction Publique, 30 December 1899 (MAE, 26/PAAP/11: 297). He suggested crossing the Tianshan range directly from south to north between Karasahr and Urumqi. Although guides tried to talk him out of this itinerary because the mountain path freezes over in winter and snow covers the passes, the trip went smoothly (Malsagne, 2015: 207). Bonin left Karasahr on 8 January 1900, with three men and three pack-horses. He headed southeast along the bank of the Bosten Lake to visit the leader of the Koshuts (a Mongolian tribe), who supplied him with guides and letters of permission to cross his territory (Bonin, 1901a: 300). Continuing northeastwards, Bonin entered the mountains to emerge two days later on a plateau. He crossed a first pass at 3860 metres and then three other passes before reaching the Algoi valley near an abandoned fort.

There, he observed a group of 200 Kyrgyz tents (Bonin, 1901a: 300).

Bonin kept going north and arrived at Urumqi (Ulumuqi 乌鲁木齐), capital of the newly created province of Xinjiang, on 17 January 1900:

It is curious that this city, one of the largest and most important in Central Asia, numbering 40,000 inhabitants, has hitherto been visited only by a few Russian travellers; this is due to its situation in a poor and cold country, outside the usual routes for explorers, who prefer to pass through the more pleasant oases of Kashgaria (1901a: 301).

From Urumqi, Bonin crossed the Kyrgyz steppe and went to Kulja, skirting the northern slope of the Tianshan. He arrived at Jarkent, Kazakhstan, in April 1900. He crossed the Russian border at Korgos, travelled through Semirechye, Russian Turkestan, across the Caspian and the Caucasus, from where he did reconnaissance work in Armenia. From there, he went to Batum and Constantinople, returning to France, which he had left two and a half years previously.

## BONIN AND HIS RELATIONSHIPS WITH HEDIN, PELLIOT AND FRENCH ORIENTALISTS

Born in 1865, Bonin was a contemporary of Stein, Pelliot and Hedin. As he was in central Asia in the 1890s, his information about matters ancient and modern was extremely useful to them. Stein called him ‘the distinguished French traveller’, but appears to have had no direct communication with him. He acknowledged that Bonin had correctly recognised the importance and character of the Dunhuang limes (1921: 566 – see fuller quote above) and that he had collected rubbings studied by Chavannes at the Mogao Caves (1921: 798). Bonin met both Hedin and Pelliot and had very different relationships with them.

### AN ENDURING FRIENDSHIP: SVEN HEDIN

A few months after leaving Dunhuang, in December 1899, Bonin met the celebrated Swedish explorer Sven Hedin, who was conducting his second expedition to Central Asia (1899–1902). Hedin was resting in Yangi-kol, a small lake along the Tarim River, after an arduous eighty days of travel on a purpose-built boat down river from Yarkand (Shache 莎车) (Bonin, 1901a: 299). Upon hearing that Bonin was passing close to his winter camp, he wrote to him, in French, on 15 December 1899 suggesting they might meet, and offering to share interesting information and to show him some maps and routes:

Cher Monsieur Bonin,

Having returned yesterday from an excursion, I found out that a ‘frenqui tura’ left today from Oullouq-Koell to spend the night in Tiara (?). As this resort is only (about) two kilometers away from my winter camp allow me to invite you to come to me instead of going to the resort. Or your caravan could go to the resort and I would be infinitely happy if you agreed to spend the evening with me and have dinner here. If you are in a hurry, this will not rob you of your time. Perhaps I could give you some useful information, and you would be interested to see the work I have just completed and my plans for the future. If you cannot come I will not fail to come and see you – but I have several maps and march-routes that I would like to show you. Mr Petrovsky will be waiting for you with impatience; he has letters for you.

Hoping that I will have the honour of getting to know one of the jolliest and most capable European travellers, I will always be, dear Mister Bonin, your most obedient servant.

Sven Hedin (MAE, 26/PAAP/23: 105–106)

Hedin specially chose one of his men, Parpi Baj, to act as a messenger because he had been with the Prince of Orléans and Bonvalot during their journey through Tibet and had witnessed Dutreuil de Rhin’s murder (Hedin, 1903:282). Parpi Baj returned with an answer on the 16 December 1899. Bonin had asked Hedin to meet somewhere halfway, on the Tarim River: ‘We could spend the evening together and the next day I will go to your camp, where I will stay all day if you accept my company’ (MAE, 26/PAAP/23: 272). Hedin rode at night to see Bonin, located just one mile to the north of his camp (Hedin, 1903: 282). Very few foreign travellers were venturing to these remote parts of Asia at the time, and Hedin was the first Westerner to cross Bonin’s path since he had left Beijing that spring. Bonin shared with him his discovery of the ancient trade route near Dunhuang, which Marco Polo had followed, with its perfectly conserved towers; and the Swedish explorer revealed that he had found the remains of similar structures near the confluence of the Tarim River and the Kongque River 孔雀河 or Konchi Darya.

According to Hedin, ‘nothing could be more pleasant during a prolonged journey in desolate regions than to meet a European, and now this was more than ever the case, for Bonin was a charming, cheerful, funny, and learned man, and it was an extraordinary pleasure for me to listen to his strange findings and hypotheses’ (1903: 283). After breakfast the following day, they made their way towards the village where Hedin was stationed. They reviewed Hedin’s map of the Tarim River and even took a short boat trip together (Hedin, 1903: 283). In the evening, they retreated to Hedin’s tent, where they dined and shared cigars until the early hours of the morning. Before they parted ways on 18 December 1899, Hedin



took a picture of Bonin and his men by his cart, later published in the Swedish edition of his second expedition (1903: 284).

The brief encounter made a lasting impression on both of them and sealed their long friendship. According to Bonin, these two days would ‘remain the best of my journey’ (1900a: 236). He also considered that Hedin’s topographical survey of the Yarkand and the Tarim rivers would be a ‘revelation for the cartography of a region that we thought we knew’ (1901a: 299). As for Hedin, he wrote that they ‘had an unforgettably pleasant day and night together’ and described the Frenchman as ‘an uncommonly amiable and scholarly man’ (1926: 236), who resembled a lama pilgrim with his long red cloak and red bashlik (1903: 284). A photograph, dedicated in French by Sven Hedin ‘To my dear friend and colleague, Charles E. Bonin’ captured the two of them looking at a map at Yangi Kol (Figure 7). A copy of it, without the handwritten note, was also included in Hedin’s report (1903: 280).

The two men continued to exchange information throughout their expeditions and afterwards. In a letter dated 14 May 1900, Hedin wrote to Bonin of his discovery of the missing link between the eastern and western parts of the ancient trade routes in central Asia. He described the ruins of an old settlement, which he did not have time to excavate but was planning to revisit later in the autumn, after an excursion in the Tibetan mountains:

It was really very kind of you to write to me from Kara-char [Karasahr], especially since you certainly had little free time. What you say about the Ming-Ois interests me a great deal. As for me, I have just returned from a wonderful trip. You had found the

eastern parts of the old road, [and] I had found the western part, but now here is the middle part in between, following the old bed of the Tarim and Kontje-Darya [Konchi Darya] south of Kourouk-taj, which falls into the ancient Lop-nor. I crossed this lake and on its shore I found an old post station, with pretty houses, charming wooden sculptures, jugs, different utensils and coins. Also, 5 new ‘tora’ or road pyramids, a fortress and something resembling a temple (MAE, 26/PAAP/23: 107–110).

Bonin’s archives show that he was also in touch with Hedin’s family. For instance, Carl Hedin, Sven Hedin’s brother, wrote to him on 12 August 1900 to report that his family had ‘received some good news from my brother, Sven Hedin, a few weeks ago’ (MAE, 26/PAAP/23: 118–119).

Their friendship was put to the test in August 1910, when Bonin and Hedin exchanged several letters over the “Strindbergsfejden” [the Strindberg Feud], one of the most significant literary and political debates in Swedish history (Järv, 1968). Hedin had returned to Sweden to great acclaim, but the writer August Strindberg (1849–1912), who had launched a series attacks on popular conservative symbols, claimed that the explorer did not deserve to be hailed as a national hero. He expressed his criticism of the expedition’s costs and questioned whether Hedin was truly the first Swedish person to have discovered Lop Nor and the Tarim basin, accusing him of merely surveying a territory that was already well known. His argument was based on a map of Dzungaria including Lop Nor and the Tarim Basin, drawn 150 years earlier by the soldier and cartographer Johan Gustaf Renat (1682–1744) (Stringberg and Meidal, 1988: 123–124).



**Figure 7** Bonin and Hedin by the Tarim River, 17 December 1899, Collection Bonin A015796 © Archives du Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères – La Courneuve.

On 10 August 1910, Bonin informed Hedin that he had heard in the press about the ‘controversy concerning the accuracy of the account of your explorations.’ He kindly offered to give a testimony on his behalf, ‘since I am the only European, as you declared, that you met during your mission in Central Asia and as such I can confirm better than anyone the veracity of your accounts’ (MAE, 26/PAAP/11: 182). A few days later, Hedin graciously accepted the unsolicited support coming from his ‘French best friend’:

The Stringberg case is just utterly ridiculous. Here, we make fun of him, we have known for years that he is not normal, and always writes bad things about people who are more famous than he is. He is a very famous playwright. He has nothing to do with geography at all. He wrote this summer a series of articles against Swedish literature, scandalising all the great writers that are loved by the people. In the end he wrote against Nansen<sup>14</sup> and me and some more explorers. I responded appropriately – this is what made so much noise. [...] Anyway, having seen that the case was in many French newspapers, I would really be very grateful if you would write a very small article for the French press; you can use the information I have just given you. For the general public it is always useful (MAE, 26/PAAP/11: 183–184).

Bonin chose to defend Hedin in *La Dépêche Coloniale*, the main daily newspaper for foreign matters. The article summarised the information previously supplied by Hedin:

Thirty years ago, Strindberg was attached to the Royal Library in Stockholm and discovered, in 1879, a map of Dzungaria and East Turkestan with the route of the Lob Nor and the Tarim River: this map, dated 1720, was due to a Swedish officer, J.-G Renat, imprisoned and sent to Siberia during the wars of Peter the Great. This is obviously the copy of a local map that this officer had obtained during his internment, and no legend indicates that he visited and mapped himself the region reproduced: this was already the authoritative opinion of General Stubbendorf, who published Renat’s map in 1881. [...] But nothing from what has just been exposed suggests that Sven Hedin was not the first of his nation to touch the shores of Lop Nor (*La Dépêche Coloniale*, 2 September 1910: 1).

In addition to this, Bonin relied on a French translation, dated to 1737, of the original memoirs of the Swedish prisoners in Siberia during the war between Sweden and Russia to demonstrate that previous Swedish accounts did not mention Lop Nor.

In a draft letter dated 15 September 1910, Bonin told Hedin that he had written a column about the Swedish explorer’s expedition to Lop Nor, ‘according to [his] wishes and following [his] indications.’ He also warned his correspondent that the publication had caused ‘the famous Savage Landor [to write] that he discovered the Trans-Himalaya before you’ (MAE, 26/PAAP/11, 185). A couple of days later, on 17 September 1910, Hedin sent his most effusive thanks for this intervention and used the opportunity to expand on the attacks from the British explorer Arnold Henry Savage Landor (1865–1924):

Thank you very much for your excellent article full of erudition and deep knowledge of Central Asia. I regard it as a great honour that you wrote it. [...] Encouraged by Strindberg, now the great Landor attacks me. I had already seen his article and I replied, last Monday, to *Le Matin*. The editorial staff telegraphed me that my answer would appear. So far I haven’t seen anything. My answer is very severe but only touches on geographical facts (MAE, 26/PAAP/11: 186).

In this reply, Hedin provided Bonin with all the elements needed to publish another article in the French press should his own response not see the light of day:

Do you think it would be useful to throw into the French press what I have just said? [...] I believe this would be good. If so, my name must not appear, to avoid a controversy that would lead to nothing (MAE, 26/PAAP/11: 189).

A letter from Hedin to Bonin, dated 5 October 1910, indicates that the French explorer may have produced another piece for the press (MAE, 26/PAAP/11: 192–193). The following year, Bonin contributed an article to the *Annales de Géographie*, where he discussed an ancient map of the sources of the Ganges, thus backing Hedin’s geographical discoveries in the Trans-Himalayan region regarding the origin of the great Asian rivers that flow down from Tibet to northern India (1911, 338–350). The archives of the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères [Ministry of Foreign Affairs] do not contain any correspondence between the two men beyond 10 June 1911 (MAE, 26/PAAP/11: 226). The Hedin archives contain a black and white photograph representing Bonin dedicated ‘To the Doctor Sven Hedin, [by] his admirer and friend, C.E. Bonin’, as well as nine letters from Bonin, dated from 1908 to 1912. In a letter dated 2 March 1912 and written onboard the cruise liner SS La Provence, Bonin informed his Swedish friend that he was moving to Canada:

[...] As you can see from this [headed] paper, I am once again on my way to a country that is a bit like Tibet for its climate, but far from it by

its distance, because the French Government has just appointed me Consul General in Canada and I am on my way to Montreal, which will be my residence. I hope to hear from you. [...] I will always be happy to know what you are doing and to be informed of what you publish because, although I am far away from it now, I do not cease to be interested in what concerns Asia, where I hope to go back some day (Swedish National Archives, The Sven Hedin Archives: Volume 412).

At the end of 1912, he sent a short note to wish Hedin a happy New Year 1913. Whether they kept in touch beyond this point is unknown. In 1914, the council of the Société de Géographie [Geographical Society] voted unanimously to remove Hedin from the list of its correspondents for he had been leading a very Germanophile campaign since the beginning of the First World War (1914–1918) (*La Dépêche Coloniale*, 18 November 1914: 1).

### A FRENCH RIVAL: PAUL PELLIOT

A photograph, now missing, in the archives of the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères [Ministry of Foreign Affairs] was catalogued as representing the Muslim leaders in Beijing, with Bonin, Pelliot, Casenave and Vêrondart (MAE, 26/PAAP/13). It would not be surprising for Bonin to have encountered the French sinologist Paul Pelliot. If not then, there would have been more opportunities for the two men's paths to cross. At the time, very few French people travelled to China and Central Asia, and it is likely that they navigated the same social circles. Pelliot certainly knew that Bonin had visited the Mogao Caves before him, and mentioned his work in his travel diaries (1906–1908, published 2008: 277). He also briefly acknowledged him in a presentation he gave at the Sorbonne on 10 December 1909:

Having left Ouroumtchi [Urumqi] in December 1907, we arrived in Touen-houang [Dunhuang], in the Far West of Kansou [Gansu] in the first days of February. As soon as we left Paris, Touen-houang [Dunhuang] had been set as one of the great stages of our journey. By Przhevalsky, Kreitner, Bonin, we already knew that there was, about 20 km southeast of the city, a considerable group of caves, called Ts'ien-fo-tung [Qianfodong] or caves of the Thousand Buddhas [...] (1910, 13).

Returning to France from his own expedition to Central Asia in October 1909, Pelliot was the victim of a virulent campaign. Although this also targeted Edouard Chavannes and the École Française d'Extrême-Orient, the spotlight was on Pelliot. Not only was doubt cast on the account he had given of his trip to Dunhuang and his examination of the contents of Cave 17, but he was

also accused of wasting public money and returning with forged manuscripts (Monnet, 2013: 154–172). One of Pelliot's main detractors, Fernand Farjanel (d. 1918), was a member of the Société asiatique, professor at the Collège libre des sciences sociales and librarian at the Ministère des Finances [Ministry of Finance]. He wrote several articles criticising Pelliot in French newspapers and periodicals. Tensions rose, and after Pelliot struck Farjanel at a banquet on 7 July 1911, the latter took him to court with a charge of assault (Monnet, 2013: 193–194).

Ten days after the incident, on 17 July 1911, Pelliot wrote to Bonin:

The jolly fellow that Farjanel is, having accused me of all kinds of deceptions, was slapped; now he summons me to Court. He will obviously take up his favourite theory; one of his arguments is that I said that the cache of manuscripts opened onto the access corridor of one of the caves, when you said that the caves opened directly on the cliff, without any internal corridors; you can see the rest: how did caves, without corridors during the passage of Mr. Bonin, had them during the visit of Mr. Pelliot? Could you tell me in a few lines what you think of this argument, or simply declare that among the hundreds of caves of Ts'ien fotong [Qianfodong], there are some that one accesses through corridors, and there are others without corridors? [...]

My case is due to be tried on the 20th; it is possible that it will actually be heard on the 27th; I would therefore be very much obliged if you would respond to me as soon as you have a moment of leisure.

P. Pelliot (MAE, 26/PAAP/18: 171)

Indeed, Pelliot's account that Cave 17 was carved into the corridor of one of the caves could be seen to contradict the following statement in Bonin's 1901 report on the Mogao Caves:

The caves do not communicate with each other through internal corridors, they emerge only through the door or the narrow windows that are carved into the earth wall next to the door; but some still have wooden balconies on the façade, which are accessed by ladders. It is likely that these balconies once ruled over the length of each storey and connected the cavities to each other (1901b: 213).

Bonin replied a few days later, in a letter to Pelliot dated 20 July 1911:

The first discoveries of manuscripts having been made by the local monk a year after my passage



dating back to 1899, obviously I cannot specify anything on the surroundings of the deposit; but if in the note that I read at the Académie des Inscriptions, and the text which I gave you before your departure on the mission I said that the caves give directly on the cliff, this can only apply to those that I visited during the few days I spent there, having not had, like you, the time and the leisure to study them all. My modest role as an explorer was limited to drawing the attention of the scholarly world to a monument which had been fairly forgotten since the passages of Przhevalsky and Széchenyi, and which seemed to me, as I said to the Institut, of major importance to the archaeology of Central Asia – [later] events proved that I was not completely wrong (MAE, 26/PAAP/18: 173).

This document provided the evidence Pelliot needed in order to prove that Farjenel's accusations were unfounded. However, it is not signed and may have been only a draft. We do not know if Bonin ever ended up responding to Pelliot. In any case, this would not have made much difference for his defence. On 25 October 1911, the court condemned to pay a fine of 5 francs and 1 franc damages for assaulting Farjenel (Monnet, 2013: 194). Pelliot's name was not cleared until the following year, when Aurel Stein published *Ruins of Desert Cathay* (1912: 217–218). In this book, Stein supported Pelliot's account and made it clear that he had left manuscripts behind at Dunhuang after his visit, thereby silencing Pelliot's critics. Why would Bonin have decided not to post the letter? It is possible that he feared that it would not reach Pelliot in time for the trial. However, there may have been another reason.

The letter records that Bonin had personally given a copy of his text “Les Grottes des Milles Bouddhas” to Pelliot before the latter embarked on his expedition to Central Asia, confirming the two of them must have met prior to 1906 and been on relatively friendly terms. Malsagne has suggested (2015: 200) that Bonin was perhaps upset to be eclipsed by his compatriot. He had been the first person in France to highlight the immense importance of the Mogao Caves, only for his own contribution to be marginalised within a matter of months by the discovery of the Library Cave, for which Pelliot had received all the attention. Bonin's archives reveal that he followed the activities of Pelliot in relation to Dunhuang with a keen interest. He kept several newspaper clippings about the Bonin-Farjenel case, as well as handwritten notes of the presentation delivered by Pelliot on 10 December 1909 in which he underlined the following section: ‘We promised ourselves to devote to their study, which no archaeologist had yet undertaken, all the time that their importance demanded’ (MAE, PAAP, 18: 178).

However, it is clear that Bonin (and Farjenel) were not the only people concerned about the attention being showered on Pelliot. Another letter in the same folder in the Bonin archives, dated 22 July 1911 and written on headed paper from the Direction des Affaires Politiques et Commerciales [Direction of Political and Commercial Affairs] of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, shows that Bonin had sought advice as to how he should handle the Sinologist's request:

I had Foucher the other morning, and he told me that Sylvain Lévi<sup>15</sup> had not been amenable to Pelliot's desires to turn the matter of the slaps with Farjenel into a triumphal parade of the Institute in his honour (MAE, 26/PAAP/18: 175).

The letter is signed ‘Philippe.’ This was certainly the diplomat Philippe Berthelot (1866–1934), who was a close friend of Bonin and his wife (Fenet, 2010: 45). In the end, Pelliot had the last word in his obituary of Bonin in the preeminent sinological journal *T'oung Pao*, of which Pelliot was the co-editor (1930: 235–236). Although he expressed the gratitude of the scientific community for his work, his introductory statement described the career of Bonin as ‘quite erratic’ and later comment that he did not produce any major publications, may bear witness to the fact that the two men had a fraught relationship.

## BONIN AND OTHER FRENCH ORIENTALISTS

Bonin demonstrated his keen interest in the ethnography, geography, history and archaeology of central Asia during his second expedition. The paper that he gave at the Société de Géographie de Paris on 11 January 1901 was very well received. He also wrote a series of articles and reports about his second mission to China and central Asia, as well as purely historical and geographical texts in important newspapers and periodicals. These were intended for a learned audience and did not help to popularise the results of his research, which means that he remained unknown to the wider public. However, it appears that Bonin was closely connected to the intellectual and political elites of his time.

He made about 90 copies of inscriptions in the course of his voyage (Malsagne, 2015: 209–210). As mentioned earlier in the article, Edouard Chavannes studied these and noted their importance to the scholarly community:

The rubbings collected by Mr. Bonin, during the scientific mission that he led from 1898 to 1900, represent almost all of the ancient inscriptions of Central Asia known to Chinese scholars and bring additional ones which were until now completely new; they allow us to reconstruct a whole chapter of Chinese epigraphy (1904: 193).

The two men exchanged several letters as part of this work. In 1901, at Bonin's request, Chavannes shared a number of bibliographic references on Islam in China (MAE, 26/PAAP/13: 7–8), a topic about which Bonin was particularly passionate. In a letter dated 22 March 1902, he suggested that Bonin should perhaps collect Islamic inscriptions (MAE, 26/PAAP/13: 11–12). Bonin also gave Chavannes dedicated copies of his book *Les Royaumes des Neiges* and of a couple of his articles (Fenet, 2010: 45).

Bonin was in contact with Henri Cordier (1849–1925), who was President of the Société de Géographie [Geographical Society] and played an important role in the development of East Asian and central Asian scholarship in France. Cordier included all of Bonin's relevant publications in his *Dictionnaire Bibliographique des Ouvrages Relatifs à l'Empire Chinois* [Bibliographic Dictionary of Works Relating to the Chinese Empire] (Cordier, 1904–1907). The archives of the Institut de France [French Institute] also contain 31 items dated from 1897 to 1915 that relate to the correspondence between Bonin and Cordier. These are catalogued under the shelfmark Ms 5444/Pieces 225–256.<sup>16</sup> In addition, Bonin was linked to the archaeologist and researcher Louis Finot (1864–1935), who graduated from École des Chartes the same year as him in 1888 and specialised in Southeast Asian cultures, as well as to the Indologist Emile Senart (1847–1928) (Fenet, 2010: 45).

During his second expedition to China and central Asia, Bonin had become a channel through which virtually much of the political information relating to the region transited (Broc: 2003: 68; Gorshenina, 1998: 368). Building on this success, he now aspired to a diplomatic career. In the second half of 1900, he submitted a typewritten report entitled “La création d'un consulat français en Asie centrale” arguing the necessity to establish a French consulate in central Asia (MAE, 26/PAAP/18: 329–345). When the position of vice-consul in Kashgar opened, he immediately submitted an application (Malsagne, 2015: 216). On 28 March 1901, he was appointed second class Consul of the French embassy in Beijing, a position which he occupied until 1904, becoming one of the rare witnesses of the collapsing Qing Empire. In the years that followed, Bonin was successively appointed Chargé d'Affaires in Cairo, Secretary of Embassy in Constantinople, Consul General of France in Montreal, and finally Minister Plenipotentiary in Persia.

Bonin did not seem to have attended the Congress of Orientalists, first held in Paris in 1873. The Congress provided a forum for European ‘oriental’ scholars, including the French Chavannes and Lévi, to announce their findings and discuss their work. This is perhaps because Bonin's efforts primarily aimed at supporting France's colonial interests, as reflected by his contribution to the Comité de l'Asie Française [Committee of French Asia], established in 1901 to focus on the country's

expansion in Asia (*L'Asie française*, 1930: 2). He was one of the first subscribers of the journal published by the Committee and joined as a member in 1925 (*L'Asie française*, 1925: 144). In his capacity as a French diplomat, he provided crucial support to the mission of the French archaeologist, philologist and art historian Alfred Foucher (1865–1952) in Afghanistan, a country which he had visited twice (Fenet, 2010: 45; 172–175).

The two of them knew each other through their common friend, Phillippe Berthelot (Fenet, 2010: 42, 171).<sup>17</sup> However, in a letter addressed to Stein on 1 January 1922, Foucher referred in passing to Bonin as ‘the man who may have first pointed out Touen-houang [Dunhuang]’s interest, but did not even stop there’ (Bodleian Library, Ms. Stein 77: 127–128; Fenet, 2022: personal communication). This untrue and somewhat pithy addition, written in the margin, was not in the original draft of the letter dated to the end of December 1921 (Fenet, 2010: 189–190). It may have been an indirect form of flattery towards Stein. This comment may also reflect the opinion Foucher and other French orientalis had formed about Bonin's expedition, twenty years after he explored the Mogao Caves – the implication being that the impact of his visit to the site and associated report was considered negligible in their time.<sup>18</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Charles-Eudes Bonin returned to France from his second expedition to China and central Asia at the end of June 1900, having crossed China three times and covered 40,000 kilometres since 1898. According to Broc, this ‘represents one of the longest and boldest journeys made in the 19th century’ (1998: 41). His greatest satisfaction was being one of the first Western travellers to explore new paths and to discover new regions, cradles of ancient civilisations. Bonin indeed followed a little known route between Ningxia and Liangzhou, crossed the Nan Shan by a new route, and was the first to cross the Tianshan directly from south to north between Karasahr and Urumqi (Froidevaux, 1901: 174). Bonin surveyed the orography of the country over a long distance, gathered detailed information on the hydrography of the regions he crossed, and studied the various peoples that he encountered. He was the first French person to visit Dunhuang and the nearby site of the Mogao Caves. He produced one of the earliest European descriptions of the site, and took some of the earliest photographs of the caves.

Despite stating his intention to return to Dunhuang to study further the Mogao Caves (1901b: 217), Bonin never travelled again to this part of the world. He joined the Diplomatic Service and his career took a different turn. His contemporaries Stein and Pelliot recorded his trip to Dunhuang in their accounts and relied on the information

he had supplied during their own expeditions. If Bonin was later outshone by them both, it was partly because of the ill timing of his visit to the Mogao Caves: he arrived 8 months before Wang Yuanlu came across Cave 17 and its contents. Maybe it is also because he did not collect any antiquities during his expedition. Another factor could be that he did not leave any large monograph or complete travel account as a legacy. Finally, the archives revealed that Bonin developed a strong friendship with Hedin after meeting him on the Tarim River. He generously shared his knowledge with the Swedish explorer and later provided him with support against his detractors.

## NOTES

- 1 From 1884 to early 1945, the term ‘Tonkin’ was used to designate the French Protectorate of Tonkin, which corresponded to the Northern region of Vietnam, then part of the Indochinese Union.
- 2 The citations in this article are translations from French into English and are my own.
- 3 The Yang River 洋河 is a tributary to the the Yongding River 永定河.
- 4 Possibly another way to designate Togtoh, known in Chinese as Tuoketuo 托克托.
- 5 Bonin took some very interesting photographs documenting his travels, which he donated to the Société de Géographie [Geographical Society] and to the archives of the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères [Ministry of Foreign Affairs]. These can be respectively consulted at the Department of Maps and Plans of the Bibliothèque nationale de France and at the Archives of the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères.
- 6 According to Bonin’s report, this place was the residence of the king of the Ordos and was located approximately 50 kilometres to the southwest of Hekou 河口.
- 7 During the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the French title for this role was ‘ministre plénipotentiaire,’ designating an accredited representative of one foreign power to another who did not enjoy the rank of ambassador.
- 8 Bonin refers to the city of Yinchuan as “Ningxia,” possibly because it was then known as a prefecture of Ningxia. Nowadays, Ningxia designates an autonomous region of China.
- 9 I am grateful to Sheng Yanhai 盛岩海 at the Dunhuang Academy 敦煌研究院, for his help identifying Cave 61 and Cave 331 in these photographs.
- 10 Karakoshun was a freshwater lake located in the southwest of the Lop Desert. Several early explorers confused it with Lop Nor.
- 11 This might be a transcription of the Chinese term *baota* 宝塔, which means “pagoda”.
- 12 Stein (1921: 350) describes Abdal as a hamlet on the Lop marshes.
- 13 This is the Kaidu River 开都河, whose ancient name is also the Chaidu-gol. It flows into the Bosten Lake or Bagratch-kul (Bositeng Hu 博斯腾湖), which it leaves under the name Kongque River 孔雀河, derived from the Uyghur Konchi Darya.
- 14 Fridtjof Wedel-Jarlsberg Nansen (1861–1930), a Norwegian polymath and Nobel Peace Prize Winner. He led the team that made the first crossing of the Greenland interior in 1888.
- 15 Sylvain Lévi (1863–1935) was a French orientalist and Indologist. He taught Sanskrit and Indian religion at the École Pratique des Hautes Études.
- 16 I was not able to access these for the purpose of this article and they remain to be explored.
- 17 Annick Fenet transcribed a draft letter from Foucher to Bonin, dated April 1921, where he refers to “their dear friend Philippe”.
- 18 I would like to thank Annick Fenet for kindly sharing this information, which she found when comparing the draft letter by Foucher to the letter he sent Stein (Ms. Stein 77) as part of her work on Stein’s correspondence, and for contributing to this analysis.


## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Sam van Schaik for reviewing the first draft of this article, as well as the editors Susan Whitfield and Helen Wang for their constructive feedback and suggestions. I am also extremely grateful to Annick Fenet, Sheng Yanhai 盛岩海 and Håkan Wahlquist their help and contributions.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

## AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

**Melodie Doumy**  [orcid.org/0000-0003-4223-8976](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4223-8976)  
Asian and African Collections Department, International Dunhuang Project, British Library, London, United Kingdom

## REFERENCES

### ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

Archives Nationales (AN) [French National Archives], Bonin file:

- F/17/2940/1
  - Note by Grenard, May 1897
  - Letter from the Ministry of Public Education to Bonin, 9 October 1897

Bodleian Library

- Ms. Stein 77: letter from Foucher to Stein, Teheran, 1 January 1921, 127–128.

Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (MAE) [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], Bonin file (26), Papiers d’Agent (PAAP):

- Folder 11 “Indochine, Birmanie, Tibet, Asie centrale, Yunnan [Indochina, Birma, Tibet, central Asia, Yunnan]”
  - Correspondence register, telegram from Bonin to the Shanghai newspaper *L’Echo en Chine*, Xichang, 14 October 1898, 67.
  - Correspondence register, Bonin’s report to the Chongqing Consul Frédéric de Haas, Jianchang, 15 October 1898, 72–82.
  - “La tribu tibétaine des Si-T’o-pa ou Si-pa-kia”, note from Bonin to the Ministère de l’Instruction Publique [Ministry of Public Education], Ganzhou (Zhangye), 15 September 1899, 230–239.
  - Letter to the Ministère de l’Instruction Publique [Ministry of Public Education], Karasarh, 30 December 1899, 297.



- Draft of a letter from Bonin to Hedin, Paris, 10 August 1910, 182.
- Letter from Hedin to Bonin, Stockholm, 14 August 1910, 183–184.
- Draft letter from Bonin to Hedin, Paris, 15 September 1910, 185.
- Letter from Hedin to Bonin, Stockholm, 17 September 1910, 186–189.
- Letter from Hedin to Bonin, Stockholm, 5 October 1910, 192–193.
- Letter from Hedin to Bonin, South Kensington, 10 June 1911: 226–227.
- Letter to the Imperial Commissioner of Xining, Ebuzhen, 8 September 1899, 220.
- Letter from Hedin to Bonin, South Kensington, 10 June 1911, 226.
- Folder 13 “L’Islam en Chine [Islam in China]”
  - Letter from Chavannes to Bonin, Fontenay-aux-Roses, 09 November 1901, 7–8.
  - Letter from Chavannes to Bonin, 22 March 1902, 11–12.
  - A photograph representing the Muslim leaders of Beijing with Bonin, Pelliot, Casenave, Vêrondart, not found in archives and not dated.
- Folder 18 “Siam, Asie, Asie centrale, Arménie [Siam, Asia, central Asia, Armenia]”
  - Letter from Pelliot to Bonin, Paris, 17 July 1911, 171.
  - Draft letter from Bonin to Pelliot, Paris, 20 July 1911, 173.
  - Letter from Philippe [Berthelot?], Direction des Affaires Politiques et Commerciales [Direction of Political and Commercial Affairs] to Bonin, 22 July 1911, 175.
  - Handwritten notes taken by Bonin of the conference given by Paul Pelliot on 10 December 1909 at the Sorbonne, 178. “La création d’un consulat français en Asie centrale”, typewritten report by Bonin, 329–345.
- Folder 23 “Chine, Vénézuëla [China, Venezuela]”
  - Official decree from the Ministère de l’Instruction Publique [Ministry of Public Education], Paris, 08 October 1897, 144.
  - Letter from Hedin to Bonin, Yangi-kol, 15 December 1899, 26/PAAP/23: 105–106.
  - Draft letter from Bonin to Hedin, Kuchlak, 15 December 1899, 272.
  - Letter from Sven Hedin, Yangi-kol, 14 Mai 1900, 107–110.
  - Letter from Carl Hedin to Bonin, Stockholm, 12 August 1900, 118–119.

Swedish National Archives, Stockholm

- The Sven Hedin Archives, Volume 412

## PUBLICATIONS BY BONIN

- Bonin, C.-E.** (1898). Note sur les résultats géographiques de la mission accomplie au Tibet et en Mongolie en 1895–1896 [Notes on the geographical results of the Mission in Tibet and Mongolia in 1895–1896]. *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie*, XIX: 389–403.
- Bonin, C. E.** (1899). Nouvelles de sa mission au Tibet. *Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 218–219. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3406/crai.1899.71381>
- Bonin, C. E.** (1900a). Mission Bonin en Asie centrale. *La Géographie: Bulletin de la Société de Géographie de 1900*, I(3), 235–236.
- Bonin, C. E.** (1900b). Note sur les anciennes chrétientés nestoriennes de l’Asie centrale. *Journal Asiatique*, 584–592.
- Bonin, C. E.** (1901a). De Pékin à la Mer Noire à Travers l’Asie. *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie Commerciale*, XXIII, 284–302.
- Bonin, C. E.** (1901b). Les Grottes des Mille Bouddhas. *Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 209–217. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3406/crai.1901.16780>
- Bonin, C. E.** (1910). Les Suédois en Asie centrale. *La Dépêche Coloniale*, 4592, 1. <https://www.retronews.fr/journal/la-depêche-coloniale/2-septembre-1910/1989/5161462/1?from=%2Fsearch%23allTerms%3DHedin%26sort%3Dscore%26publishedBounds%3Dfrom%26indexedBounds%3Dfrom%26tfPublicationsOr%255B0%255D%3DLa%2520D%25C3%25A9p%25C3%25AAche%2520coloniale%26page%3D1%26searchIn%3Darticle%26total%3D127&index=23>, last accessed on 06 November 2022.
- Bonin, C. E.** (1911). Une ancienne carte des sources du Gange, *Annales de Géographie*, 338–350. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3406/geo.1911.7317>

## OTHER PUBLICATIONS

- (1897). À travers le Yun-Nan, le Thibet et la Mongolie. Exploration de M. Ch. E. Bonin. *À Travers le Monde*, 11, 81–84.
- (1901). Les Voyages de M. Bonin en Asie Centrale. *À Travers le Monde*, 14, 109–110.
- (18 November 1914). L’Explorateur suédois Sven Hedin. *La Dépêche Coloniale*, 5950, 1. <https://www.retronews.fr/journal/la-depêche-coloniale/18-novembre-1914/1989/5158218/1?from=%2Fsearch%23allTerms%3DHedin%26sort%3Dscore%26publishedBounds%3Dfrom%26indexedBounds%3Dfrom%26tfPublicationsOr%255B0%255D%3DLa%2520D%25C3%25A9p%25C3%25AAche%2520coloniale%26page%3D1%26searchIn%3Darticle%26total%3D127&index=8>, last accessed on 06 November 2022.
- (1925). Le Comité – Assemblée générale du 30 avril 1925. *L’Asie française. Bulletin mensuel du Comité de l’Asie française*, 231, 144.
- (1930). Nos Morts. Charles-Eudes Bonin. *L’Asie française. Bulletin mensuel du Comité de l’Asie française*, 278, 2.

- <https://www.retronews.fr/journal/bulletin-du-comite-de-l-asie-francaise/1-mars-1930/1897/5230626/2?from=%2Fsearch%23allTerms%3DBonin%26sort%3Dscore%26publishedBounds%3Dfrom%6indexedBounds%3Dfrom%26tfPublicationsOr%255B0%255D%3DBulletin%2520du%2520Comit%25C3%25A9%2520de%2520l%2527Asie%2520fran%25C3%25A7aise%26page%3D1%26searchIn%3Darticle%26total%3D119&index=1>, last accessed on 07 November 2022.
- Broc, N.** (1998). Bonin (Charles-Eudes). In *Dictionnaire illustré des explorateurs et grands voyageurs français au XIXème siècle, tome II (Asie)*. Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques.
- Broc, N.** (2003). *Explorateurs en Asie Centrale. Voyageurs et aventuriers de Marco Polo à Ella Maillart*. Geneve: Olizane.
- Chavannes, E.** (1901). Rapport sur les résultats archéologiques de la Mission Bonin. *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 45(1), 133–135. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3406/crai.1901.16732>
- Chavannes, E.** (1904). Dix Inscriptions chinoises de l'Asie centrale, d'après les estampages de M. Ch.-E. Bonin. *Mémoires présentés par divers savants à l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres de l'Institut de France*. 1ère série(xi), IIe partie, 193–295. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3406/mesav.1904.1088>
- Cordier, H.** (1904–1907). *Dictionnaire Bibliographique des Ouvrages Relatifs à l'Empire Chinois: bibliotheca sinica. Volume 4 [Bibliographic Dictionary of Works Relating to the Chinese Empire: bibliotheca sinica. Volume 4]*. Paris: Librairie Orientale et Américaine.
- Cordier, H.** (1920). *Ser Marco Polo: Notes and Addenda to Sir Henry Yule's Edition, Containing the Results of Recent Research and Discovery*. London: J. Murray.
- Devéria, G.** (1898). Stèle Hi Hsia de Leang-tcheou. *Journal Asiatique*, 11(1), 53–74.
- Dutreuil de Rhins, J.-L.** (1897–1898). *Mission scientifique dans la Haute-Asie 1890–1895*. Paris: Ernest Leroux.
- Fenet, A.** (2010). *Documents d'archéologie militante. La Mission Foucher en Afghanistan (1922–1925)*. Paris: Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres.
- Fenet, A.** (2023). *La correspondance francophone d'Aurel Stein* (3 volumes). Strasbourg: Publications de l'Institut d'Histoire des Religions.
- Froidevaux, H.** (1901). M. Froidevaux's Paris Letter, *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society*, 33(2), 169–175.
- Gorshenina, S.** (1998). Voyageurs francophones en Asie centrale de 1860 à 1932, *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 39(3), 361–74. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3406/cmr.1998.2528>
- Hedin, S.** (1903). *Asien: tusen mil på okända vägar. Volume 2*. Stockholm: A. Bonnier.
- Hedin, S.** (1926). *My Life as an explorer*. New Delhi; London: Cassel and Company Limited.
- Huc, E. R.** (1928). *Huc and Gabet. Travels in Tartary, Thibet and China, 1844–1946*. London: G. Routledge and Sons.
- Järv, H.** (1968). *Strindbergsfejden. 465 debattinlägg och kommentarer utgivna av Harry Järv. Förord av John Landquist*. Staffanstorps: Bo Cavefors Bokförlag.
- Littledale, G. R.** (1894). A Journey across Central Asia. *The Geographical Journal*, 3(6), 445–472. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1773580> (last accessed on 01 September 2022). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1773580>
- Malsagne, S.** (2015). *Au Coeur du Grand Jeu: La France en Orient. Charles-Eudes Bonin (1865–1929), explorateur diplomate*. Paris: Geuthner.
- Ministère des Affaires Étrangères.** (1900). *Documents diplomatiques. Affaires de Chine: juillet 1899–octobre 1900*. Paris: Imprimerie nationale.
- Monnet, N.** (2013). Paul Pelliot et la Bibliothèque nationale. In J.-P. Drège & M. Zink (Eds.), *Paul Pelliot: de l'histoire à la légende* (pp. 137–204).
- Pelliot, P.** (1910). Trois Ans dans la Haute Asie conférence de M. P. P. au grand amphithéâtre de la Sorbonne, le 10 décembre 1909 [Data set]. NII “Digital Silk Road”/Toyo Bunko. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20676/00000241>
- Pelliot, P.** (2008). *Carnets de route 1906–1908*. Paris: Les Indes savantes: Musée national des arts asiatiques-Guimet.
- Pelliot, P.** (1930). Nécrologie de Charles-Eudes Bonin. *T'oung Pao*, 27, 235–36. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853230X00179>
- Przhevalsky, N. M.** (1876). *Mongolia, the Tangut Country and the Solitudes of Northern Tibet Being a Narrative of Three years' Travel in Eastern High Asia*. London. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/bhl.title.25541>
- Russell-Smith, L.** (2000). Hungarian Explorers in Dunhuang. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 10(3), 341–362. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25188034>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186300012943>
- Stein, M. A.** (1921). *Serindia: Detailed report of explorations in Central Asia and westernmost China*. London & Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Strindberg, A., & Meidal, B.** (Eds.) (1988). En svensk karta över Lop-nor och Tarimbäckenet. Av Johan Gustav Renat 1738 [A Swedish map of Lop-nor and the Tarim Basin. By Johan Gustav Renat 1738]. In *Samlade Verk 68. Tal till svenska nationen [Collected Works 68. Address to the Swedish Nation]*. Norstedts: Stockholm University, 123–124. A copy of the text is available on <https://web.archive.org/web/20070928081609/http://www.strindbergsmuseet.se/verken/Tal/fejd6.html>, last accessed on 06 November 2022.

---

**TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:**

Doumy, M. (2023). Charles-Eudes Bonin: the first French Person to visit Dunhuang. *Silk Roads Archaeology and Heritage*, 1(1), 1–20.  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/srah.3>

**Submitted:** 01 February 2023    **Accepted:** 19 September 2023    **Published:** 14 November 2023

**COPYRIGHT:**

© 2023 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

*Silk Roads Archaeology and Heritage* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Ubiquity Press.