

CHINESE RELICS IN ALASKA

BY

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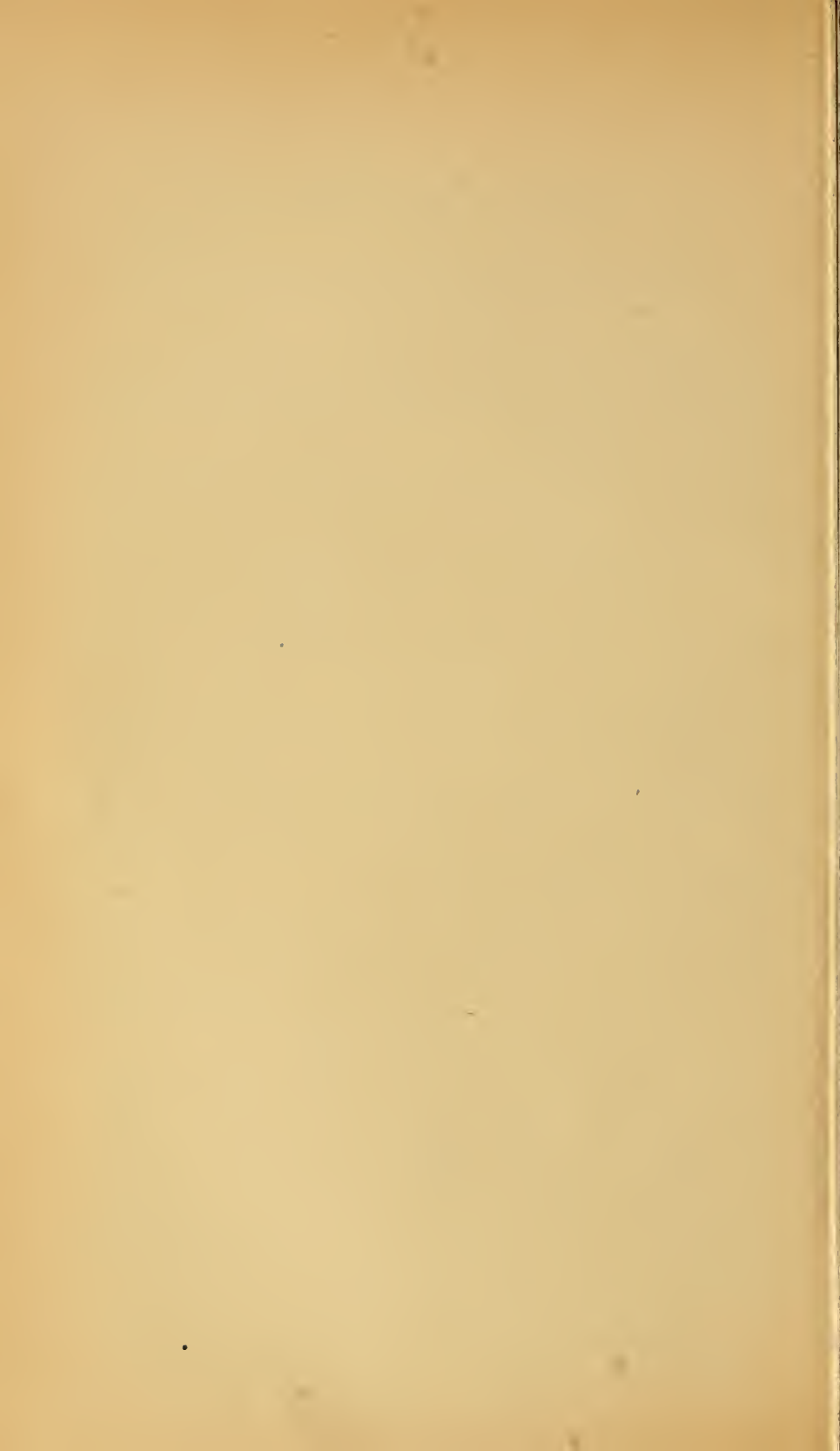
(With Plate XXIV.)

In a collection of ethnological objects from southeastern Alaska, donated to the National Museum in 1883-'85, there is a wooden mask which has for its eyes two large bronze Chinese Temple coins; so identified by Dr. D. B. McCartee.

The grave from which it was taken is located near the Chilcat Village at the mouth of the Chilcat River, Alaska, where stand a row of six grave-houses on a narrow strip of land close to the river, with a swamp back of them. Four of these graves were almost in ruins, but had evidently not been touched when we opened them. From the one in which the mask was found we got very little, its contents having nearly all rotted completely away, the mask in question being better preserved than the rest by a loose cedar board which protected it from the rain which leaked through in other places. The mask is skillfully carved from cedar wood and painted in the usual grotesque manner, but with strictly native colors. A sparse fringe of human hair partly rotted is inserted above the forehead. The wide gaping mouth is set with a double row of opercula, for teeth. Upon a casual inspection this mask does not show age, but, examined more closely, the wood is seen to be affected with dry rot, while the surface seems to have been protected by the paint which was probably mixed with fish oil.

The grave in which this mask was found was pointed out to me as being old, and that of a medicine man who had flourished more than two hundred years ago, six successors having filled this office; each one living to a good old age. Careful questioning failed to bring any other answer. When the coins were shown to the native Chilcats they could not remember having ever seen such objects before.

Knowing that at the date I made my collections the Indians themselves never entered or took anything out of graves, I am free to confess that I see no other possible conclusion to draw than that these coins were obtained two hundred years ago, and the natural surmise is that they came from a junk driven on the coast, Chinese most likely, as the Japanese would probably not have two such coins. To those who doubt the advent of junks on the West Coast at this early date, these facts will probably not be satisfactory, but it will be necessary for them to break down by direct evidence such a strong plea.





ALASKAN MASK WITH CHINESE MEDALS.

