

THE  
USE OF MASKS AND HEAD-ORNAMENTS

ON THE  
NORTH-WEST COAST OF AMERICA

BY

DR. FRANZ BOAS,

Prof. at the Clark University, Worcester U.S. A.

(With Plate II & III).

Our museums contain large collections of masks from the North-West coast of America, but it is only occasionally that the descriptions and catalogues give information as to their use and meaning. On my first visit to British Columbia, in 1886, I paid special attention to this subject. A considerable collection of drawings and photographs of masks, which I carried with me, did not help me materially in my investigations. I frequently showed the drawings to Indians whom I expected to be conversant with every thing referring to this subject, but it was only in rare cases that they recognized the masks, and were able to give any information as to their use and meaning. Very soon I arrived at the conclusion, that, except in a few instances, the masks were no conventional types representing certain ideas known to the whole people, but were either inventions of the individuals who used them, or that the knowledge of their meaning was confined to a limited number of persons. The former hypothesis did not seem probable, as the same types of masks are found in numerous specimens and in collections made at different times and by different persons. Among the types which are comparatively frequently found, I mention the *Tsonō'koa*<sup>1)</sup> of the *Kwakiutl*, (a typical representation of which may be seen in „Original-Mittheilungen aus der Ethnologischen Abtheilung der Kgl. Museen zu Berlin,” No. 4, Plate I, Fig. 4), the crane, eagle, and raven.

Further inquiries showed that the probability of ascertaining the meaning of a mask increased when the particular village was visited in which the specimen was collected. It was thus that I ascertained the meaning of the double mask figured in Woldr's „Cpt. JACOBSEN'S Reise an der Nordwestküste Amerika's,” p. 129. The outer face represents a deer; the inner, a human face. It refers to the tradition of the origin of the deer, which originally was a man, but was transformed, on account of his intention to kill the son of

<sup>1)</sup> *k* a guttural *k*, almost *kr*. *q* the German *ch* in *Bach*. *sl* an exploded *l*.