

Wherever found, the eagle was regarded as sacred among the Indian tribes both east and west, and its feathers were highly prized for ornamental and "medicine" purposes, and an elaborately detailed ritual of prayer and ceremony was the necessary accompaniment to its capture. Among all the tribes the chief purpose of this ritual was to obtain the help of the gods in inducing the eagle to approach the hunter, and to turn aside the anger of the eagle spirits at the necessary sacrilege. The feathers most valued were those of the tail and wings. These were used to ornament lances and shields, to wear upon the head, and to decorate the magnificent war bonnets, the finest of which have a pendant or trail of eagle-tail feathers reaching from the warrior's head to the ground when he stands erect. The whistle used in the sun dance and other great ceremonies is made of a bone from the leg or wing of the eagle, and the fans carried by the warriors on parade and used also to sprinkle the holy water in the mescal ceremony of the southern prairie tribes is commonly made of the entire tail or wing of that bird. Hawk feathers are sometimes used for these various purposes, but are always considered far inferior to those of the eagle. The smaller feathers are used upon arrows. Eagle feathers and ponies were formerly the standard of value and the medium of exchange among the prairie tribes, as wampum was with those of the Atlantic coast. The standard varied according to place and season, but in a general way from two to four eagles were rated as equal to a horse. In these days the eagle-feather war bonnets and eagle-tail fans are the most valuable parts of an Indian's outfit and the most difficult to purchase from him. Among the pueblo tribes eagles are sometimes taken from the nest when young and kept in cages and regularly stripped of their best feathers. Among the Caddo, Cherokee, and other tribes of the timbered country in the east they were shot with bow and arrow or with the gun, but always according to certain ritual ceremonies. Among the prairie tribes along the whole extent of the plains they were never shot, but must be captured alive in pitfalls and then strangled or crushed to death, if possible without the shedding of blood. A description of the Arapaho method will answer with slight modifications for all the prairie tribes.

The hunter withdrew with his family away from the main camp to some rough hilly country where the eagles were abundant. After some preliminary prayers he went alone to the top of the highest hill and there dug a pit large enough to sit or lie down in, being careful to carry the earth taken out of the hole so far away from the place that it would not attract the notice of the eagle. The pit was roofed over with a covering of light willow twigs, above which were placed earth and grass to give it a natural appearance. The bait was a piece of fresh meat, or, as appears from this song, a piece of tallow stripped from the ribs of the buffalo. This was tied to a rawhide string and laid upon the top of the pit, while the rope was passed down through the roof into the cavity below. A coyote skin, stuffed and set up erect as in life, was