Ozi Ikòrò

AFRICAN HISTORY · CULTURE · INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

HISTORICAL STUDIES

Dike Nwaàmị:
The Warrior Women of Ohafia and Their Legacy of Courage

By Idenze Ezeme

Ozikoro.com · Historical Studies · 3 min read

FEATURE IMAGE

Ohafia women with long braids, a popular style in Ohafia at that time. The photo was taken by Rev. William T. Weir and published in *The Women's Missionary Magazine of the United Free Church of Scotland* in 1904.

Article image · caption retained from the published Ozikoro article

Ozi Ikòrò
DIKE NWAÀMỊ

Dike Nwaàmị̀: The Warrior Women of Ohafia and Their Legacy of Courage

By Idenze Ezeme · Historical Studies · Ozikoro.com

Ohafia is a community where rights to farmland are passed down through the maternal line. It is also a place where, although rare, women could join the usually male-only Ekpè society. Some Ohafia women warriors, known as dike nwaàmị̀, are remembered in the history and folktales of Ohafia.

One story tells of Nne Mgbaafo, a brave woman who wore war gear and risked her life to find her husband, whom she believed had been killed by enemies in Ibibio territory. Facing great danger, Nne Mgbaafo intimidated the enemies until they revealed that her husband had been kidnapped, not killed. Through her courage, she rescued her husband and brought him back to Ohafia.

Another story is about Inyan Olugu, whose husband, Itenta Ogbulopia, had not taken any heads in battle, which meant he was not recognized as a dike (valiant warrior). As an onye ụjọ, a coward, his status opened him and his wife up to harassment and humiliation. Determined to restore their honor, Inyan Olugu took matters into her own hands. She convinced her husband to go with her into the Nkalu forests under the pretense of harvesting palm fruits.

While her husband climbed a palm tree, Inyan Olugu used his gun to kill five Nnong Ibibie men. She collected their heads, placed them in a basket, and brought them back to Ohafia. Presenting the heads to the ikòrò (ancestral slit drum), she ensured her husband was celebrated as a warrior. However, Inyan Olugu made it clear that the honour should also go to her, as she was the one who had secured the heads

and their family's dignity.

Later, in the 20th century, Nne Uko Uma Awa of Akanu Ohafia became famous for her courage and leadership. Guided by instructions from the divinity Kalu Akanu, she and other girls from her age group performed a ritual hunt typically reserved for boys. Nne Uko wore a male warrior's attire, including a loincloth and a leopard cap (òkpu agụ).

She continued to dress in traditionally male clothing and was later accepted into the Ekpè society, which was usually for men only.

Nne Uko also performed the male warrior's iri agha dance and married two wives. Her wives had children through Nne Uko's brother. With their help, Nne Uko became a successful farmer, earning yam titles. She also became the keeper of the maternal lineage shrine dedicated to female ancestors. In her later years, she began wearing more traditional female clothing. Nne Uko once said, "I dressed like a man because by creation I was meant to be a man. But as it happened, when coming into this world I came with a woman's body."

These are just a few stories about the dike nwaàmị̀ of Ohafia, women who showed remarkable strength and courage in a traditionally male-dominated society.

- Azuonye, C. (1990). The Performances of Kaalu Igirigiri, an Ohafia Igbo Singer of Tales.
- McCall, J. C. (1996). Portrait of a Brave Woman. American Anthropologist, 98(1), 127–129.
- Igbo History. (n.d.). Dike Nwaàmị̀ Ọhafīā: The Female Warriors of Ohafia.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Idenze Ezeme

Nze is an Igbo history and culture enthusiast with an in-depth passion for exploring the rich cultural heritage, traditions, and historical narratives of the Igbo people. His works is mostly focused on pre-colonial Igbo societies, traditional belief systems, leadership systems, and the impact of European colonialism.



Ozi Ikòrò

History worth reading.

African history · culture · indigenous knowledge

OZIKORO.COM