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CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Ogbukele Festival of the Ekpeye Igbo Community: *A Celebration of Heritage*

By Chuka Odike

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FEATURE
IMAGE

**Ogbukele drum and band at
Ogbukele festival, Ekpeye Igbo
(Ekpafia).
Photograph by G.I Jones, 1930s.**

Article image · caption retained from the published Ozikoro article

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Ogbukere drum, Ekpeya Igbo. Photograph captured by G.I. Jones in the 1930s.

The Ekpeye Igbo community, also known as Ekpafia, is a subgroup of the Igbo people of Nigeria, renowned for their rich cultural heritage and vibrant traditions. Among their most significant cultural events is the Ogbukele festival, a celebration that intertwines spiritual practices, artistic expression, and communal identity. This festival was notably documented in the 1930s by G.I. Jones, an anthropologist and photographer whose work has preserved the visual history of many Nigerian cultures.



Ogbukele drum and band at Ogbukele festival, Ekpeye Igbo (Ekpafia). Photograph by G.I Jones, 1930s.

01

Dancers and Ritual Performance

The Ogbukele festival is characterized by elaborate dance performances that embody the cultural and spiritual essence of the Ekpeye people. One such performance, captured in a photograph by

Jones, features a male dancer adorned with culturally significant regalia. His attire, including what appears to be symbolic ornaments and a skull-like headpiece, is a testament to the festival's ritualistic elements. The dancer's posture and facial expression reflect the deep spiritual connection that performers maintain during these events. These dances are accompanied by the resonant sounds of drums and chants, which serve to create a trance-like state that bridges the physical and spiritual realms.



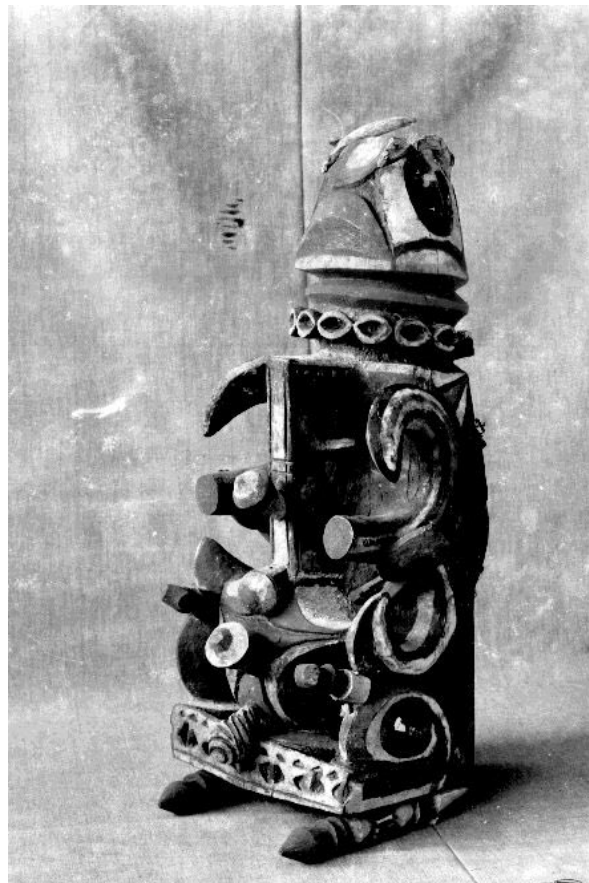
A dancer at the Ogbukele festival from the Ekpeye Igbo community (Ekpafia). Photograph by G.I. Jones, 1930s.

02

The Symbolism of the Ogbukele Mask

Another remarkable aspect of the Ogbukele festival is its use of intricately carved masks, such as the one photographed by G.I. Jones

and now housed in the Liverpool Museum. These masks are extraordinary works of art, featuring bold geometric patterns and symbolic carvings. The Ogbukele mask holds profound spiritual significance, often serving as a vessel for ancestral spirits during festival rituals. Such masks are not merely artistic expressions but serve as cultural artifacts that preserve and communicate the Ekpeye people's beliefs, values, and identity.



Ogbukele Mask (Liverpool Museum) – Ekpeya Igbo Photograph by G.I. Jones, 1930s.

03

Cultural and Historical Significance

The Ogbukele festival plays a vital role in maintaining the Ekpeye cultural heritage. Beyond its entertainment value, the festival serves as a medium for intergenerational knowledge transfer, strengthening



social bonds, and reaffirming the community's spiritual beliefs. G.I. Jones's photographic documentation has ensured the preservation of this cultural event, allowing future generations to appreciate and study the Ekpeye people's traditions. Today, these images are not just historical records but powerful reminders of the resilience and richness of Nigeria's cultural diversity.

Jones, G. I. (1930s). Photographs of the Ogbukele festival, Ekpeye Igbo community. [Archival material]. Liverpool Museum, Liverpool, UK.

Liverpool Museum. (n.d.). Ogbukele mask.
<https://jonesarchive.siu.edu/ekpeye-ekpafia-igbo/>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chuka Odiike

I'm a dedicated civil engineer with a passion for infrastructure development and community empowerment. With a strong background in engineering, my work focuses on creating sustainable solutions for urban and rural development projects. Outside of my professional career, I'm deeply interested in Igbo history and culture. I actively explore ways to impact society by using historical lessons to inspire and educate others about the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people, aiming to bridge tradition and modern development.



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