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## The Vibrant Culture of Igbide Kingdom and the Abame Festival

By Idenze Ezeme

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THE VIBRANT CULTURE OF IGBIDE KINGDOM AND THE ABAME FESTIVAL

# The Vibrant Culture of Igbide Kingdom and the Abame Festival

*By Idenze Ezeme · Cultural Heritage · Ozikoro.com*

Igbide is one of the nine administrative clans in Isoko South Local Government Area, Delta State, Nigeria. A significant natural feature of this region is the Urie-Igbide (Igbide Lake), a major water outlet connected by a narrow but deep creek to Patani, an Ijaw town on the River Niger. Historically, this waterway served as a primary route for traders and travelers until the highway from Warri to Patani was constructed. Due to annual floods and abundant fishing ponds in the swampy forests and the lake, Fishing has remained the primary occupation of the people throughout the seasons.



The Abq-ame (Abame) Festival of the Igbide Kingdom. Photo: @Thelsokos (X)



Igbide is surrounded by neighboring towns that speak different dialects of the Isoko Language, with minor variations. To the south is Umeh, to the north is Olomoro, to the northeast is Emede, to the east is Uzere, and to the west is Enhwe.

According to oral tradition, the founder of Igbide, Eru, migrated from Mgbidi in Imo State. His journey took him through Elele in Rivers State and via the River Niger to eastern Isoko. Initially settling at Owodokpokpo, Eru moved further inland to escape frequent raids by slave traders and warriors from Aboh and Ijaw. He ultimately settled at the current site of Igbide after a brief stopover at Otowodo, a high ground above flood levels. This site, later called Egbo-Igbide, became a storage site for war materials and shrines dedicated to ancestors.

Eru's eldest son, Eheri, an explorer and hunter, established a settlement now known as Emede. Despite these ties, the people of Emede claim descent from Benin (Edo) and assert no direct relation to Igbide except through intermarriages.

The descendants of Eru in Igbide belong primarily to two groups: the Ekpo and Okporho kindreds. These groups, collectively referred to as Unuame (riverine people), trace their origins to Igbo land. Another group of immigrants, the Uruwhre and Owoma kindreds, claim Benin ancestry and are commonly called Okpara (land dwellers). These distinct heritages have influenced the culture, including activities like the renowned Abame wrestling dance.

Nigerians, like other Africans, are deeply religious and often communicate with the Supreme Being through gods, goddesses, and ancestral spirits. In Igbide, deities such as Amededho, Edho-Idodo, Oni-urie, Edho-Oboko, and Edhivi are venerated. Each deity has a chief priest who mediates between the community and the divine. These deities are believed to govern various aspects of life, including war, peace, harvest, fertility, wealth, and healing.

However, the advent of Christianity led to the destruction of many shrines and a decline in ancestral worship. Some Christian sects, such



as Jehovah's Witnesses, abstain from participating in traditional festivals like the Abame dance.

### *The Abame Festival and Wrestling Dance*

The Abame festival, unique to Igbide, has no ties to any deity. It began as a communal activity tied to the bailing of fish ponds such as Atawa, Ofori, and Oyoze, overseen by the council of elders (Ogbedio). Fishing in these ponds was restricted until sanctioned by the Ogbedio. During bailing, disputes over seniority among youths were resolved through wrestling contests, which later evolved into organized entertainment.

The wrestling contests, categorized into junior, intermediate, and senior levels, were competitive and marked by intense preparation. The main wrestling arena, a virgin plot near the Atawa pond, was trampled by foot rather than cleared with tools, believed to enhance the potency of charms.

Abame contests symbolized honor and pride for individuals and kindreds. Preparations involved crafting potent charms and engaging in rituals. The contests were preceded by vibrant processions, with groups chanting war songs, drumming, and showcasing their representatives. While the wrestling showcased skill and valor, the aftermath often included violent clashes, leading to injuries and loss of property.

Preserving the Abame wrestling dance remains essential for its socio-cultural, moral, and disciplinary significance in Igbide.

Ophori, I. (n.d.). Igbide Kingdom. Practicing photojournalist and cultural documentary photographer.



#### 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.



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