

# **IKONO IBOM ANNUAL LECTURE: IKONO IBOM DAY, 2020 CELEBRATIONS**

**LECTURE TOPIC: IKONO IBOM PEOPLE, THEIR ORIGIN AND BACKGROUND**

***BY***

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Ikono Ibom clan in Uyo LGA is the cradle of Ibibio civilisation. This fact is well documented by early European researchers, and well-meaning indigenous historians to warrant any further debate.

E. A. Udo on page 47 of his book, WHO ARE THE IBIBIO, puts it this way: “from Ibom the Ibibio migrated to IKONO, 9km north of the modern Uyo Township. Here they settled for a very long time, and when the population grew large, they expanded to the various areas that they occupy today in Ibibio land. Many clans in Ibibio land have the parent villages close to the Ikono village.”

Ikono people are found all over Akwa Ibom State: in Ikot Abasi, Uruan, Abak, Eket, Mkpat Enin, etc. The Ikono in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District are still one and the same people with their brothers in Uyo; occupying the same geographical space, spanning between Ikot Abasi and Arochukwu in Abia State. However, an ancient war with Ibiono people in the distant past split Ikono people into the two major groups we are having today, namely:

1. **Ikono Ibom Clan in Uyo LGA** – the parent group, and
2. **Ikono LGA in Ikot Ekpene sensational district** – migrated to their current location from Ikot Oku Ikono, Uyo LGA.

As a result of the ancient war, the two Ikonos now lie separated, by Itak community coming in between, keeping them apart in two different local government areas today.

## 2.0 IKONO IBOM PEOPLE OF UYO LGA: DESCENDANTS OF **IKONNO AKPAN ANYANG**

Ikono Ibom people occupy the northern part of Uyo LGA, living in 18 mega villages grouped into one clan. By land mass, Ikono Ibom is the largest clan in Uyo LGA.

Among Ikono Ibom people of Uyo LGA, are the direct descendants of **Ikonno Akpan Anyang**, the progenitor of the Ibibio race; whose first name: **Ikonno Edise**, meaning, “*come gather and watch*”, has been corrupted to **Ikono** today. According to legend, Ikonno was the first son of Anyang (Akpan Anyang), the formidable Ibibio matriarch, who was deified, after her death and worshipped as Anyang Nsit, the Ibibio ancient goddess at **Afaha Nsit**. Before Ikonno established his new kingdom, the Ibibio had operated a matriarchal social system, where a powerful woman ruled and controlled the Ibibio groups. Children were named after their mother, not their father. After the death of Anyang, there was a power struggle, between Ikonno and his sister, Abam. Ikono failed in the struggle and left Afaha Nsit (a village they used to call IKOT OKU ANYANG in ancient times) and migrated north-eastward through the forest to another place where he named IKOT OKU IKONNO. His first abode is said to have been where we have Etefia shrine today. He set up a new patriarchal dynasty in Ikot Oku Ikono, and a new Ibibio civilization flourished for a very long time. Children started bearing their father’s name. For this reason, it is usually said in common parlance: “Ikono ado ette Ibibio” or “Ikono ado ntype Ibibio”, meaning: Ikono is the progenitor of the Ibibio race.

Legend has it that, Ikonno later relocated to another place called **Akai Utono**, found today in IKOT MBON IKONO. He attained the height of his reign and glory while ruling the Ibibio nation from Akai Utono in Ikot Mbon Ikono. He is said to have spent several years here. It is also said that he relocated again, in his old age, to **Ikot Oku Ikono** and built his palace where we have **Asan Ibibio** today.

Ikonno is said to have died in Ikot Oku Ikono, and his body taken to his first home (the Etefia Shrine) and buried there. Like his mother, Anyang, Ikonno was also deified and worshipped as the ancient Ibibio god **Etefia**. Legend also has it that, Abam, Ikonno’s sister, who later

migrated to Itak area, from Afagha Nsit, was also deified and worshipped as **Abam Itak**, by her descendants after her death.

### 3.0 THE EMERGENCE OF OKUKU UTONO

According to legend, after the death of Ikonno, his first son **Utono**, who was the living Okuku Afagha then, staying at Akai Utono, in Ikot Mbon Ikono, emerged as the next **Edidem** (Monarch) and ruled the Ibibio nation from his palace at Akai Utono. That is why the head of every leopard (ekpe) killed by great hunters, in ancient Ibibio was always taken to **Udod Ekpe** in Ikot Mbon Ikono and severed to perform the relevant traditional rituals. Utono was the first son of Ikonno, and in Ibibio tradition first sons always consume the head of any animal slaughtered for food, especially when it is ceremonial. Besides Utono was also an Okuku Afagha, and leopard hunters from Ediene Clan must always pay tribute to the head of Afagha (the chief warrior). Leopard hunting was seen as a very heroic feat, akin to victory in a war fight, in ancient Ibibio tradition.

The presence of other ancient Ibibio relics like **Obodom Onyong, Usan Ude**, etc in Ikot Mbon Ikono is today a reminder of the long reign of Utono, the strong, yet very kind hearted Edidem, who is said to have stopped the execution of new yam law offenders in Ibibio land in a messianic manner. He is said to have offered himself to be killed, in place of a widow offender and her five kids.

### 4.0 THE LOST TRIBES OF ANCIENT IBIBIO

During the days of Ikonno, the 18 villages of Ikono Ibom Clan that we now have today (representing 18 ekpuks or family groupings, in ancient Ibibio) were grouped into 6 clans or tribes (each headed by an **Okuku**), according to their functions and roles in ancient Ibibio society as follows:

1. Afagha or Nung Ikonno – warriors, kings and king makers:

**Ikot Mbon, Mbiabong and Ikot Eboro.**

2. Ibiaku or Nung Oku – priests and the priesthood stock: **Ikot Ofon, Ikot Ebo and Ikot Oku.**
3. Ukpom – custodians of tradition, culture and protocol, the Ibibio intelligentsia: **Ikot Odung, Ikot Ekpeyak and Miya.**
4. Mbiokporo – the Ibibio judiciary (Obong Ikpaisong, who usually preside over murder cases is always selected from Mbiokporo): **Nung Ukim, Ikot Obio Mkpong and Ikot Ayan.**
5. Ikpa – palace guards/power brokers: **Nung Asang, Anan and Ikot Offiong**
6. Ediene – hunters/protectors against wild animals/meat providers: **Ikot Eyienge, Ikot Nsung and Iton.**

Society was grouped into the above six clans in ancient Ibibio. Today these ancient Ibibio tribes have been lost. We only have remnants preserved in names like **Afagha** Offot, **Ibiaku** Itam, **Ukpom** Miya, **Mbiokporo** Nsit, **Ikpa** Ibekwe, **Ediene** Abak, etc.

The various names of villages that we are having today in Ikono Ibom clan and the rest of Ibibio Land is a much recent development in Ibibio history. In ancient times you were either an Ibiaku or Ikpa or Afagha man, etc. All the Ikot-This and Ikot-That names of villages we are having today did not exist then. It was after the collapse of the Ibibio ancient monarchy, long after the time of Ikonno and after the reign of Utono Ikonno, during the time of Ambon Utono, *Okuku Afagha* that the Ibibio nation dispersed from Ikot Oku Ikono, Uyo LGA to other parts of Akwa Ibom State. Ikono Ibom people are a privileged Ibibio stock, who had led the ancient Ibibio to prominence, in precolonial and also in colonial times, as heirs and custodians of the Ibibio tradition. In this 21st century, the descendants of Ikono Akpan Anyang should be challenged to unite and re-enact today a modern leadership feat with greater glory than what their forebears had achieved in the past.