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FRAMING THE SACRED: SAFEGUARDING THE CULTURAL MATERIALITY IN THE VISUAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE ABAM NAMING RITE AMONG THE FANTE OF GHANA

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Abstract

As globalisation and radical religious changes threaten to wipe out the living traditions of Indigenous communities, the protection and preservation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) has become a very important goal in the twenty-first century. In Ghana's coastal region, the Fante People of the Edina Ampenya traditional group, located in the Komenda/Edina/Eguafo/Abirem Municipality in the Central Region of Ghana, West Africa, have a complex ritual system called Abam that helps twins and children born in certain birth orders make spiritual transitions. This ritual is not just a social event or a mere ceremony; it is a deep practice tied to spirits that keep the lineage in harmony. However, the rise of exposure to western cultures, charismatic Christianity, and neo-prophetic movements has led to the demonisation of some traditional cultural practices like the Abam ritual, which has often led to the physical destruction of sacred objects like the Abam beads. This report offers a comprehensive examination of the Abam ritual from the perspective of visual sovereignty while utilising technology to facilitate the transmission of knowledge across generations. This study records the rhythmic cadence of the nsagu (libation) and the tactile delicacy of the "Eto" mashed yam and the ritual bath through photography, thereby documenting the Abam naming order and the importance of beads strung on raffia as pivotal symbols of cultural identity.

The results highlight the camera's capacity to serve as a permanent elder, connecting ancestral wisdom with a younger generation increasingly influenced by visual culture.

Keywords: *Abam ritual, visual ethnography, material culture, Fante people, digital preservation*

1. Introduction

The modern Ghana cultural environment is a blend of traditional spiritualities and contemporary digital ambitions (Safo-Ankama & Donkor, 2023). Although this may be, the Fante people, a prominent subgroup of the Akan ethnolinguistic group, persist in steering intricacies of their rich identity via rituals that delineate the borders between the physical and the spiritual word. One of the most important but endangered institutions of the prominent subgroup of the Akan is the Abam ceremony notably among the Fante people (Field, 2024) of Ghana. The Abam ceremony is specifically practised by the fishing villages of the Edina traditional group located in the Komenda/Edina/Eguafo/Abirem Municipal District in the Central Region of Ghana, West Africa. For the Fante people, the passage from the spirit realm (Asamando) to the human sphere is a perilous endeavor, especially for infants born under exceptional conditions (Tetteh, 2024) Twins (Ntaafo) and their subsequent siblings in either case are said to embody a remarkable spirit (sunsum) that must be ceremonially acknowledged and welcomed to the earthly realm in order to avert their untimely return to the ancestral domain where it is believed the emanated from (Yalley, 2015).

Within the context of these multisensory performances, many rituals, incantations, artefacts, and forms of art play a key and functional role. Markedly herbal bath or cleansing (Egur or Eguradzi), the application of white clay (Hyireow), and the tying of certain beads (Ahondze) strung on raffia around the wrists and ankles of the initiates are all symbolic and sacred components of the ceremony. To emphasise, these beads are not only used as ornaments, but function as spiritual vessels that signify the child's unique identity and spiritual strength within the context of culture (Tetteh, 2024).

On the contrary, in Ghana, charismatic Christian groups alongside Western Cultures (Niedźwiedz, 2023) have demonised it. This has resulted in the traditional rite being labelled as fetishistic or demonic. Families are often subjected to coercion to be forced to destroy their beads (Tetteh, 2024). Meanwhile, beads sever the concrete link that families have to their lineage (Oppong, 2003; Owusu-Ansah, 2019). Traditions from the West and Christianity are believed to be civilised, whilst indigenous practices such as Abam are seen as backwards (Niedźwiedz, 2023).

Innovative preservation strategies must be implemented since the use of traditional oral transmission mechanisms is on the wane (Markwei & Appiah, 2016). As a result of their increased familiarity with smartphone technology and digital media, the younger generations of Ghanaians are becoming visually driven, meaning that they are seeking contact with their identity via the use of visuals rather than the traditional oral narrative method (Ayisi et al., 2024; Markwei & Appiah, 2016). This research suggests that visual ethnography, which is defined as the systematic use of photography and videography to capture cultural practices, may be able to bridge the gap between generations (Dutta, 2019; Ofosu-Asare, 2025). Conversely, this may be able to paradigm a digital archive that supports visual intricacies. This will foster ownership among traditional people, having control over their own representation, consequently maintaining the knowledge of the birth succession naming process (Dutta, 2019; Ofosu-Asare, 2025).

The primary aim of this project was to use photography to safeguard the Abam rite for a visually oriented younger generation. The objective of the study was to 1. Examine the material culture of the Abam ceremony. 2. Analyse the ritual stages of performances as cultural identity for twins using ethnographic interviews and visual documentation. 3. Document the cultural performances of the Abam rituals through photography. In achieving the objective of the project, the research question asked was; 1. What objects and materials are central to the Abam ceremony and how do their use and symbolism reflect cultural beliefs and social roles? 2. How do the distinct stages of the Abam ritual performance express and reinforce identity among twins as captured through ethnographic interviews and visual documentation? Which key visual elements and moments of the Abam ritual performances best convey their cultural meaning when documented through photography. The study systematically records and analyses the Abam rituals at a time when many indigenous cultural practices face erosion due to modernisation, generational change and influence from charismatic Christian groups alongside Western Cultures. By examining the material culture, ritual stages and performative identity of twins, the research preserves knowledge that would otherwise remain largely oral and vulnerable to loss, while providing a detailed account of how cultural meaning is embedded in objects, action and social roles. The use of ethnographic interviews and photography ensures that both the emic perspectives of participants and the visual dimensions of the rituals are documented for community memory and cultural education. Ultimately, the study contributes to anthropology and heritage studies by deepening understanding of how ritual performances function as living expressions of identity and continuity in the community.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Heritage, Technology and the Visual Turn

The safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in Africa has progressed remarkably since the ratification of the 2003 UNESCO Convention. Modern studies underscore that the Intangible Cultural Heritage is not a static artefact of history but a living heritage that is perpetually redefined by communities' reaction to their surroundings and historical context (Gwerevende & Mthombeni, 2023). The vulnerability of these non-material representations is a persistent subject, especially during cultural homogenisation propelled by globalisation and religious transformation (Falk & Hagsten, 2025; Vondolia et al., 2022).

2.2 The Role of Photography and Visual Ethnography in Preservation

2.2.1 Digital Archives and Mobile Integration

Archives should use widely known metadata formats (e.g., Dublin Core) to store audio visual recording and photos (Hill, 2021; Weibel & Miller, 2009). Moreover, the proliferation of cell phones in West Africa presents an opportunity for public participation via mobile app that enhance access to cultural knowledge (Arora & Scheiber, 2017; Opoku-Mensah, 2022). Visual anthropology has evolved from its colonial origins, when the camera served as an extractive instrument to record exotic beings as specimens (Banks, 2018; Poole, 2020). Contemporary techniques prioritise shared Anthropology, seeing the researcher and the community as partners in the development of cultural documentation (Pink, 2021; Chilisa, 2020). Photography serves as a time capsule, preserving events that transmute into history for subsequent generations (Edwards, 2016; Dyer, 2014). In the realm of Ghanaian rites, visual documentation is powerful since it encapsulates the embodied knowledge that writing sometimes neglects to convey, such as the unique method of bead threading and tying, the texture of raffia, or the exact application of white clay (Agyekum et al., 2023; Quarcoo, 2020). Recent initiatives such as Heritage through Pixels (2022) illustrate that digital technology, particularly smartphones, may promote significant cultural participation among young people (Kpedekpo 2024). Contrary to the notion that technology estranges youth from their culture, these efforts demonstrated the digital

storytelling and serve as a conduit, making legacy accessible and relevant in contemporary society (Malm, 2019; Opoku-Mensah, 2022). The visual turn in heritage studies acknowledges that communities are progressively reclaiming their identity via visual sovereignty, using pictures to speak back against histories of distortions (Bell, 2019; Smith, 2021).

2.2.2 Symbolic Significance of Beads in Fante Culture

Beads occupy a pivotal role in the aesthetic and spiritual existence of the Akan people (Ajadi & Oyeniyi, 2023; Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2015; Lawer et al., 2025). In Fante cultures, beads are used throughout the life cycle, from birth to death, to convey ranks, health and spiritual alignment (Sutherland-Addy, 2011; Owusu-Yeboah, 2025). The Abam beads come with a distinctive meaning: red- (Kɔkɔw), white- (fufuw), black (tuntum), and blue (bibire) beads signify energy and spiritual warmth, whilst yellow (akokɔangua) traditional known as the ‘Bota’ beads denote royalty and the prosperity anticipated from a child within the bloodline (Yalley, 2015). The use of raffia as the threading material is noteworthy as a natural fiber, it symbolises a link to the soil and ancestral heritage, in stark contrast to the synthetic materials that are becoming prevalent in contemporary markets (Tetteh, 2024).

2.3 The Religious Dispute and Cultural Disruption

Charismatic Christianity in Ghana poses a substantial danger to local ceremonies since its emergence (Appiah-Kubi, 2023; Agyapong, 2020). Similarly, scholars have seen a decoupling tactic used by neo-prophetic leaders, whereby conventional family structures are dissociated from their spiritual foundations (Appiah, 2013; Agyapong, 2020). By designating relatives as demons, these groups successfully obliterate the cultural identity of practitioners of the ritual (Resane, 2026; Agyapong, 2020). This has resulted in a condition of strategic syncretism, whereby people traverse multiple realms of existence openly adhering to Christian beliefs while clandestinely upholding ancient practices such as the Abam ritual to save their offspring from imagined spiritual threats (Yalley, 2015). This dispute highlights the need to record these rites promptly, before the tangible objects and the memory of their execution are entirely obliterated by subversive forces.

2.4 Cosmological Structure and the Order of Birth Succession

In order to comprehend the Abam name convention, one must first analyse the Fante dual lineage framework. From a broader viewpoint of an individual’s life, the individual is a result of two interconnected forces: The Ebusua (matrilineal lineage) and the Ntɔn (patrilineal essence) (Sankofa Digital Heritage Library, 2026; Elias, n.d.). The Ntɔn serves as the spiritual shield that offers protection and defines an individual's character in accordance with African beliefs. The Abam ritual is explicitly intended to fortify this barrier for infants regarded as extraordinary or spiritually endowed (Sankofa Digital Heritage Library, 2026; Elias, n.d.).

2.5 The Akan Sacred Naming System

Central to Fante identity is the Kra dzin (soul name), which is determined by the day of the week on which the child is born (Agyekum, 2006; Dadey, 2025). Each day is associated with a planetary deity that bestows certain qualities upon the child.

Table 1: Male and female day-born names in Fante and associated deity.

Day of the Week	Associated Deity	Male Soul Name	Female Soul Name
Sunday (Kwasida)	Ayisi (Awusi)	Kwasi	Esi
Monday (Dwoda)	Adwo	Kojo / Kodwo	Adwoa

Tuesday (Benada)	Bena	Kwabena / Kobena	Abena
Wednesday (Wukuda)	Wuku	Kwaku / Kweku	Akua /Ekua
Thursday (Yawda)	Kow	Ekow / Yaw	Aba / Yaa
Friday (Fida)	Bomsom Efi	Kofi	Afua / Efua
Saturday (Memeneda)	Memne	Kwame	Amma / Ama

Source: (Sankofa Digital Heritage Library, 2026; Elias, n.d.).

2.6 The Special Hierarchy of Births

While the day-name provides the base identity, the Fante society recognises a specific hierarchy of births that require the protective mechanism of Abam (Yalley, 2015). This ritual complex is not limited to twins but extends to the children born in the subsequent order, as they are believed to share in the supernatural potency of the multiple birth (Tetteh, 2024).

Table 2: Male and female day-born names in Fante and associated deity.

Category	Designation	Spiritual and Social Significance
Twin(s)	Ntaafo	Possess a potent shared <i>sunsum</i> (spirit) direct link to deities.
Child after Twins	Tawia	The “mediator” who manages the spiritual energy of the twins.
Child after Tawia	Nyankomago	The “stabiliser” who ensures the spiritual potency is balanced.
Successive Same Sex	Mensa / Mansa	The 3rd successive child of the same sex, symbolic of ritual persistence.
Seventh Born	Esoun	A sacred number associated with the earth and agricultural fertility.
Tenth Born	Badu	Represents the “completion” of the birth cycle.
Specific Succession	Akyere/ Akyere	The only boy or girl after many siblings of the opposite sex.

Source: (Tetteh, 2024).

The Abam ritual acts as the spiritual “rope” that anchors these children safely into the human domain. Without it, the community believes the children remain “strangers” who might easily return to the spirit world, manifesting as persistent health issues or psychological disturbances (Isabirye, 2020; Ohaja, & Anyim, 2021; Mokgobi, 2014).

3. Conceptual Framework

Indigenous knowledge systems, fundamentally reliant on rituals, symbolic representations, and oral traditions, have traditionally served as the primary means by which cultures transmitted information across successive generations (Kelly, 2015)

Recent research confirms that indigenous knowledge systems are experiencing degradation due to diminishing oral tradition and epistemic displacement in postcolonial contexts (Briggs & Sharp 2004; Khan et al., 2025) This process of cultural disruption poses a threat not only to the community of rituals but also to the construction of identity, given that ritual objects and practices serve as crucial links between individuals, their heritage, and their understanding of the universe (Boiven, 2009). Therefore, the decline of ceremonies like the Abam indicates a

broader issue concerning the preservation of culture and the validation of knowledge within African societies.

In this context, visual ethnography and digital heritage practices are essential tools that can change how we preserve things. Digital technologies, such as photography, video, and 3D documentation, are crucial for preserving and reinterpreting indigenous cultural heritage (Bentkouska & MacDonald, 2018). These methods allow us to transform temporary, performative, and oral traditions into lasting and easily accessible visual archives, which helps pass down knowledge between generations. Research shows that digital cultural content significantly improves engagement, understanding, and retention of cultural values among younger, tech-savvy audiences (Yulin, 2025). Furthermore, the incorporation of digital media into cultural practices illustrates overarching trends of cultural hybridity, wherein traditional belief systems are recontextualised within a modern digital context (Mkhelkhel, 2025). In this context, visual ethnography serves as a way to document, focusing on ethical, social, and technological connections that help bring together different ways of understanding.

Conversely, the efficacy of digital preservation strategies is contingent upon ethical, social, and technological factors. Recent scholarship (Skaržauskienė et al., 2025) emphasises that successful digital heritage projects necessitate prioritising community involvement, indigenous data sovereignty, and culturally relevant ethical frameworks to prevent the perpetuation of colonial representational practices. Furthermore, concepts like the co-production of knowledge and the CARE principles, Collective benefit, Authority to control, Responsibility, and Ethics, underscore the necessity for indigenous communities to maintain control over the documentation and dissemination of their cultural heritage. Furthermore, designing digital heritage infrastructures requires a socio-technical systems approach, prioritising participation, accessibility, and contextual understanding (Pereda et al., 2025). When these methods are effectively implemented, they not only help preserve cultural artefacts but also strengthen identity, particularly by enabling communities, especially younger generations, to engage meaningfully with heritage.

4. Methodology

The technique comprises both the peripheral insider and the Shared Anthropology approaches. For the goal of this inquiry, Visual Ethnography was adopted based on the concept of Peripheral Insider Positionality (Ataci, 2024; Trnka, 2024). Consequently, for the researcher to get access to the sacred ritual areas, this strategy acknowledges that the researcher must first establish a high level of trust within the Edina Ampenyi community (Ataci, 2024; Gair, 2012).

Employing the essential capabilities of digital media and visuality that characterise the current era is a crucial approach to addressing the crisis of transmission, as it makes use of those capabilities (Ma et al., 2025). An examination of the image depicting beads strung on raffia was conducted. A visual analysis of the evidence pertaining to rituals, as well as the objectives of the research, was presented. The fundamental objective of this project is to make use of visual recording in order to preserve the Abam ritual for a younger generation that is becoming more visually orientated (Ibrahim, 2026; Chung, 2025). For this reason, it was necessary to research the material culture of the Abam rite as well as the cultural importance of the ritual. Also, a study of the ritual phases of performances as they relate to the cultural identity of twins was conducted, using ethnographic interviews and visual recordings during the analysis. Finally, photography was used to document the many activities that are carried out throughout the ceremonies.

The researcher performed from inside the cultural cluster (as a “Fante person”), but maintains a professional distance for the aim of ensuring that the analysis in question is rigorous (Kanu,

2019; Kuada, 2023). Obtaining access to information-rich instances, such as those involving ritual specialists (Akomfo) and grandmothers, who act as the primary agents responsible for preserving the secrets of the Abam, requires this positionality, which is necessary for getting access to such instances (Abioye et al., 2021; Sefa Dei, 2002).

The camera was used as a tool for making heritage in partnership with the community (Pink, 2020; D'Amico et al., 2023). In this particular instance, shared anthropology and visual sovereignty were both used (Ginsburg, 2018). The participants were given the chance to inspect the photographs and evaluate whether or not the representations of the images were in agreement with their cultural perceptions of what constitutes the sacred (Pink, 2020; Ginsburg, 2018). Within the context of this paradigm, the digital record is seen as a modern guardian. In this consequence, the camera is referred to as a permanent elder in the terminology (D'Amico et al., 2023).

The rhythmic tempo of the ceremonies, which include Nsagu (pouring of libation) and the placement of beads, was captured to attain research goals. A technique of deliberate sampling was used in order to choose families in Edina Ampenyi that had just started participating in the Abam program (Palinkas et al., 2016; Patton, 2002). The data gathering process included both participant observation and interviews that were conducted using the photo-elicitation method (Harper, 2002; Clark-Ibáñez, 2004). The researchers took pictures of the rituals during the performance and used those images to encourage the elders to elaborate on their symbolic meanings of the items used in the ceremonies (Harper, 2002; Clark-Ibáñez, 2004).

5. Results and Discussion

This provides a thorough examination of the primary item of the Abam ritual: the beads that are threaded on raffia strands. The tactile substance of the Abam-bɔ (bead-tying ritual) as seen in the photograph. The use of raffia marks a significant indicator of traditional authenticity. Unlike manufactured rayon or silicon fibers. Raffia is a natural substance that is cultivated and harvested from the ground, symbolising the ritual's role in connecting the child to the tangible world. The visual code in this practice was represented by the visible solid beads, which were red, white, blue, yellow and black. The red and blue beads symbolise the spiritual heat and vigour that the twins should identify with their environment. The blue gives them the spiritual calmness and sanity that assures them that they have a spiritual being with them, while the yellow beads symbolise gold and the wealth of the child's soul. This image serves as a visual anchor for the youth, providing a definitive reference for the material requirements for the ceremony. The initiate's natural body is the focal point of the ritual's performance dimension during the transition phase. The black bead-(bota), a natural black seed that carries the soul of Abam- kofi deity that links the child and the spiritual realms. It is believed to be the centre of the Abam ritual which protects the wearer.



*Image 1: Abam ritual bead.
Source: Field work 2025*

The application of white kaolin clay (Hyirew) represents a connection to the divine and a victory over mortality. The presence of an elderly hand in the frame suggests the communal nature of Fante culture, in which the child is ushered into the physical world by the elders who understand and have experienced the powers of their collective ancestry rather than just the parents. This visual documentation is essential for capturing the multisensory reality of the ceremonial bath and ornamentation, which is not adequately conveyed through writing.



*Image 2: White kaolin applied on the arm and forehead of the twins.
Source: Field work 2025*



*Image 3: The ritual stages of performances of cultural identity.
Source: Field work 2025*

5.1 The Abam Ritual Procedure:

The Abam ceremony was conducted on a Friday, known as Abam Kofi (Sacred Friday), in reverence to the presiding deity, Kofi Abam. The procedure had four different phases. Traditionally, the initial Friday occurring two weeks after the twin birthday (Ndaa Awotwe).

5.1.1 Phase 1: Introduction and the Convergence of the Sacred

The ceremony began at the family residence (Ebusua Fie), where the family members and loved ones met for the occasion. The head of the father's family arrived first at the grounds with his council, and the child's parents together to strengthen the family bond between the two families.



Image 4: The family members and love ones gathered at the family residence (Ebusua Fie) honouring culture and ancestry.

Source: Field work 2025

The Abam clay pot (kukuo) / wooden receptacle and the metal basin (yaawa), white kaolin clay (hyirew), cutlass (afena/nkrante) and sacred plants such as “nyanya”, “adwene”, “eposu”, “baakasu”, and “kradafuofou” were carefully gathered. This phase served as a pivotal site for intergenerational transmission, where elders impart knowledge of the practices to the younger generation through the proper management of ritual artefacts. The Abam ritual is not complete without these specific materials: a cutlass (afena or nkrante), metal basin (yaawa) and wooden basin, herbs and water, mashed yam (Ɛto fufuu, without palm oil / Ɛto kokoo, with palm oil and eggs). The cutlass represents protection, strength and the ability to clear paths in life. During this ritual, the cutlass was used as a tradition to symbolise cutting away evil, danger, or ancestral curses on anyone who tries to harm the children. Herbs and seawater in the wooden basin are used for ritual washing and purification. Herbs are chosen for cleansing, protection and blessing. The metal basin often holds sea/ lagoon water for libations or for washing the mother/child to separate the sacred from the ordinary, while wood is closer to earth/nature and used for things that need to absorb spiritual energy. Together, they represent purification, cooling of the child’s spirit after birth and welcoming the child into the community in a clean state. The white clay or kaolin (Hyire) symbolises belonging to the earth, it represents purity, peace and a fresh start, feeling the texture of mother earth.

Mashed yam (“Ɛto fufuu” -without palm oil/ “Ɛto kokoo”, with palm oil and eggs) are considered as the sustenance of life. Yam is believed among the community as ancestral food, it is given to affirm the child’s right to be fed and sustained by the lineage. “Ɛto” represents the mashed yam, used to introduce the child to the ancestors and are acknowledged as part of the family. The eggs are added as a symbol of the fertility and continuity of the ancestors’ return. Adding boiled eggs makes it a full meal. The egg shows respect; they say “we are giving to what sustains the living”. Once the ancestors are served first, the rest was shared among the family and people gathered.



Image 5: Cutlass, kaolin, mashed yam, herbs in wooden bowl and metal basin. Wooden receptacle with sacred “Nyanya” leaves, that holds sea water for libation. Source: Field work 2025



Image 6: Cutlass, “Nyanya” leaves in wooden bowl and metal basin. Source: Field work 2025



Image 7: White Clay or Kaolin mixed with water. Source: Field work 2025



*Image 8: Wooden receptacle which holds the herbs and water.
Source: Field work 2025*



*Image 9: “Eto” mashed yam mixed with palm oil with eggs in an earthenware bowl.
Source: Field work 2025*

5.1.2 Phase 2: Ritual Bath and Invocations

The invocation of Kofi Abam by pouring libation (nsagu) becomes the focal point of the internal ritual. The Ebusuapanyin, or in the absence of the clan head, the grandfather of the twins' father, first pours the libation, invoking the presence of their family deities and ancestral spirits who live well in their community, seeking their permission for the rituals and asking for their blessings.

The libation (nsagu) starts by calling on the Supreme God (Onyankopon). The Akpeteshie (locally distilled alcohol) is raised towards the heavens to get the attention of the Supreme God (Onyankopon) calling his name, thereafter, a little of the Akpeteshie (locally distilled alcohol) was poured on the ground. Next, Mother Earth (Asaase Yaa) was acknowledged as the sustainer of life, the belief was that all blessings from heaven reach humans through the earth.

Ancestors who lived good lives are invited to the gathering to witness, bless, and protect the occasion. The names of past chiefs, family heads and forebears were mentioned and a little of the Akpeteshie (locally distilled alcohol) was poured on the ground. After the invocation, the person pouring states why people have gathered. They ask guidance, peace, prosperity, health, love and unity for everyone present. In humility and respect to the spirits present, the person pouring removed their sandals and bared their chest if they were wearing a cloth. It is a way to say we have come with respect and humility to the ancestors.



Image 10: The family head (Ebusuapayin) performing the libation (Nsagu) to call on the Supreme God (Onyankopon). Source: Field work 2025

The child's ancestral vitality was suppressed by grinding the purifying botanical plants into the water. The performative potency of this stage emanates from the aural ambience generated by strong words on invocations and the chant's cadence, which functions to possess the atmosphere and the twins from the supernatural realm and reintegrate them into the corporeal society. During the Abam ritual, ground plants often herbs like "nyanya", "adwene", "eposu", "baakasu", "kradafuofou" or sacred leaves specific to the family, are believed to ward off evil spirits, bad luck and illness. Sprinkling or bathing the child with the concoction was a way of cleansing, washing away anything negative the child might have picked up in the spiritual realm before birth or during those first days. It is a way to say they belong to this land, the people and their roots. The Elderly woman (Obaapayin) recites prayers while grinding the herbs in water and sprinkling. The plant's leaves act as a medium; the physical act carries the spoken blessings to the child. It is also believed that green plants symbolise life, growth and fertility. Putting them into water and using them on the children was symbolic. Meaning "may you grow strong, green and healthy like these plants." On the other hand, a lot of plants used have actual medicinal antiseptic properties. The ritual also served as early childcare, preventing skin infections and calming the baby, especially before modern medicine was widespread.



*Image 11: The Elderly woman (Obaapayin) reciting prayers while grinding the herbs “Nyanya” leaves in water and sprinkling on the baby.
Source: Field work 2025*



*Image 12: The Elderly woman (Obaapayin) giving a drop of the herb water to the Twins one after the other.
Source: Field work 2025*



*Image 13: The Elderly woman (Obaapayin) sprinkling the herb water on the twin.
Source: Field work 2025*



Image 14: The Elderly woman (Obaapayin) smearing the herb water of the body of the twin babies. Source: Field work 2025

5.1.3 Phase 3: Nomenclature and Decoration

The children were adorned with white kaolin clay (hyirew), and Abam beads were tied to their wrists with raffia after the washing. During this phase, the child's kra dzin (soul name) was reinforced, and they were publicly introduced to the community as attached members of the lineage in a public setting where family members and the community gathered. This is the moment when the stranger newborn was recognised as a member of the Fante society. White Clay or kaolin (Hyire) symbolises purity, peace and a fresh start, feeling the texture of Mother Earth. It was applied in thick lines on the baby's forehead, arms and legs to signify that the child comes into the world clean and without sin. It is believed that white is the colour of peace and spatial cleanliness. Symbolically, they say, "May your life be pure and may you walk in peace". The children were adorned in all-white clothes to represent their innocence and purity.



Image 15: The twins smeared with white clay and adorned in all white cloth . Source: Field work 2025

Traditional belief holds that beads ward off evil spirits and evil eyes. Specific bead colours and patterns can indicate the child's family, clan, or even the day they were born. The visual code in this practice was represented by the visible solid beads, which were red, white, blue, yellow and black. The red and blue beads symbolise the spiritual heat and vigour that the twins should

identify with their environment. The blue gives the twins the spiritual calmness and sanity that assures them that they have a spiritual being with them, while the yellow beads symbolise gold and the wealth of the child's soul. The black bead-like (presumably Bota) is a seed that carries the soul of the Abam-Kofi deity and the white links the twins and the spiritual realms. It is believed to be the centre of the Abam ritual which protects the wearer. Practically, the beads are also used for health monitoring. If they got too tight, it means the child was gaining weight and healthy.



Image 16: The twin baby wearing the bead on the right wrist. Source: Field work 2025

5.1.4 Phase 4: The Communal Banquet and Initial Repast

The twins and their successors partake in a ceremonial meal of “Etɔ” (mashed yam and palm oil with poached eggs) at the concluding phase, referred to as “wɔkahɔnɔnɔ”. Before feeding the twins, the senior woman spiritualist would traverse certain parts of the community to sprinkle the “Etɔ” (mashed yam and palm oil with poached eggs). It is believed that the ancestors are still part of the family and are present at such important gatherings, protecting and making sure everything go as planned. Sprinkling the mashed yam on the ground was an offering to them. The spiritualist proclaims, “We remember you, we honour you, come and partake with us”. The ground represents Asaase Yaa, Mother Earth, who sustains life. Giving her the first portion of food shows gratitude and asks for her continued blessing. It is the same principle as pouring libation with the Akpeteshie. During the process, the elders pray for the children, seeking the ancestors to bless and protect the child and may the child never lack in life. It also symbolises other and priority, ancestors and earth first, then the living. You do not eat before honouring those who came before and made your existence possible. It sets the right spiritual order for the ceremony. That small sprinkle was the most important part of the ceremony.



Image 17: Elderly women sprinkling “Eto” to the ancestors.
Source: Field work 2025



Image 18: Elderly women sprinkling “Eto” to the ancestors at the family house,
Source: Field work 2025



Image 13: Elderly women sprinkling “Eto” to the ancestors around the community.
Source: Field work 2025

After the ancestors are fed, the child gets its first taste of “*Ẹtọ*” (smooth mashed yam and palm oil with poached eggs) before anyone else. The twins were given mashed “*Ẹtọ*” to taste, then after the mother was fed by an elderly hand. It is a symbolic welcome and to stay. The yam represents food for security, wealth, and life. The spiritualist invokes words, saying, “May you never lack food, grow strong and have enough to share, and the names of their good ancestors were mentioned to them while offering the food. It links spiritual protection with physical nourishment. It was not just feeding the baby, it was a condensed blessing, identity, sustenance, health and ancestral connection.



Image 14: The twins being “Ẹtọ” as their first dining with the gods . Source: Field work 2025



Image 15: The mother of the twins being fed “Ẹtọ”. Source: Field work 2025

Everyone present receives a share of the blessing, health, protection, prosperity and long life by partaking of the “*Ẹtọ*”. It was the moment of communion from the ritual. It breaks down barriers between the two families, in-laws and guests. The communal eating at this ceremony symbolises that those present are tied to the growth of twins in the community, turning witnesses into kin. It is a silent agreement: “We acknowledge this child, we will support and protect them.” No one leaves the ceremony without participating in the eating of the “*Ẹtọ*” because absence would mean non-acceptance. The mashed yam goes from a spiritual offering to a communal meal. It is how the blessing moves from the ancestors into the whole community

and the twins' lives. The open palm means you are open to receive blessings, life and goodwill. In that same way everyone gets the same amount regardless of status.



*Image 16: The mother of the twins being served “Eto” in her palm
. Source: Field work 2025*



*Image 17: The families and friend being fed “Eto” mirroring how the baby was fed.
. Source: Field work 2025*



*Image 18: Community members gathered being served “Eto” in their palm.
. Source: Field work 2025*



*Image 19: Friends and families gathered being served “Etɔ” in their palm.
 . Source: Field work 2025*



*Image 20: Friends and families gathered being served “Etɔ” in their palm.
 Source: Field work 2025*

Drinking from one cup was a significant feature of this ritual. A drink is poured into one cup and passed for all present to take a sip of the drink. One cup represents one family, one community. Everyone shares the same mouthful, so there is no “mine” and “yours” in that moment. It physically demonstrates that the blessing for all of us, not for an individual in isolation. Men drink from the Akpeteshie (locally distilled alcohol) that was used to offer prayers to the Supreme God.



Image 21: Men from the family and the community being serve Akpeteshie (locally distilled alcohol) which was used to offer prayers the Supreme God. Source: Field work 2025



Image 22: Men from the family and the community being served Akpeteshie (locally distilled alcohol), which was used to offer prayers to the Supreme God. Source: Field work 2025

The mother of the twin babies was ushered into a cutlass (afena/nkrante) dance by an elder woman who has given birth to twins and has had lots of children in the community. The community members gathered sing and clap their hands with a local song specifically for twins' naming ceremony. Twins are seen as spiritually powerful and sacred, but also means they attract spiritual attention, both good and bad. The cutlass represents the ability to slaughter evil, witchcraft, misfortune and anything that might harm the twins or their mother. As she dances, she is symbolically clearing the path for the babies and warding off danger. Dancing with the cutlass was a public declaration: “she survived, she is strong, and can protect her children, therefore inviting all spirits and community members present to be witnesses that she has come through the dangers of childbirth”.



Image 23: Mother of the twin babies dancing with a cutlass (afena/nkrante) during the ritual ushered by an elderly woman who has given birth to twins and has had lots of children in the community. Source: Field work 2025



Image 24: Mother of the twin babies dancing with a cutlass (afena/nkrante) during the ritual lead by an elderly woman who has given birth to twins and has had lots of children in the community. Source: Field work 2025



Image 25: Mother of the twins dancing with a cutlass (afena/nkrante) during the ritual. Source: Field work 2025

The atmosphere during the Abam ritual feels like a sacred, protected space and is traditionally meaningful. The mothers become central figures, for honour. The twins' mother wears blue and white African cloth, where the blue represents peace, harmony and connection to the spirit world. She ties a white cloth on her wrist which represents victory, purity and peace. Twins are seen as a blessing and spiritually powerful. Kaolin smeared on her body explains her joy in surviving childbirth. Community members present smeared kaolin - “hyirew” on their body, tie a white cloth around their neck or wrist, symbolising shared identity and partakers of the blessings. The kaolin acts as a spiritual seal believed to protect from picking up any negative spiritual residue while you are in that space.



Image 23: Mother and family members smeared with kaolin and a white cloth around their neck.

Source: Field work 2025

5.2 A discussion concerning the future of digital content and the concept of visual sovereignty

This documentation is not only for an academic pursuit but also cultural sovereignty (Steenkamp, 2026). The documentation of the Abam ritual via the use of visual ethnography as an act of re-placement of an identity unexploited through foreign influence. The documentations of these significant moments of history and culture during the Abam ritual gives the community a voice against the demonisation of their tradition and the preservation for future generations.

6. Conclusions

The implementation of a digital strategy considered different aspects Fante's of Edina Ampenyi's culture to guarantee the continuous existence of the Fante heritage throughout time. The process of developing robust digital archives that contain audio-visual recordings and photographs, making use of metadata formats that could be recognised all over the globe and even through mobile integration. Young people in Ghana have easier access to cultural knowledge as a result of the widespread use of smartphones (Kpedekpo, 2024). Visual storytelling as pedagogy refers to the introduction of digital heritage outputs, such as photobooks and films, into the educational curriculum with the intention of creating a sense of pride and identity in young people (Kpedekpo 2024). This method highlights how technology can be a powerful tool for demonstrating that young people are becoming increasingly alienated from their culture as a consequence of its use. The training of local teenagers to become digital elders who chronicle their own family traditions is the fifth component of community-based inventorying. To ensure the protection of the community's intangible cultural property, must

be done to ensure the effective implementation of the UNESCO Convention of 2003. This profound cultural practice, known as the Abam ritual, carried out by the Fante people in Edina Ampenyi must confluence ancient cosmology and modern religious influences on heritage for which urgent action should be discussed. This study illustrates that the preservation of digital legacy on visual ethnography provides a workable answer to the problem of preserving these living traditions. This concept is presented within the framework of a generation that is becoming more visually orientated. In light of the results of this investigation, the following suggestions could be considered as possible remedies to the problem:

It is recommended that the Ghana National Commission for Culture and Monuments board adopt the permanent model of digital recording to protect rites such as Abam rituals from the loss of tangible artefacts that may occur as a result of foreign influence. To avoid the gaze that was both extractive and objectifying in the past, such documentation projects need to be given importance to community ownership and visual sovereignty. The policy for intangible heritage should include the establishment of digital living museums through local traditional councils. These museums would preserve and make these visual recordings of birth succession rites available to the young people, and the knowledge of the Abam beads culture on raffia would continue to be an active component of their cultural identity.

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