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Unveiling Ogwashi Ukwu's Rich Heritage: *A Historical Reflection*

By Chuka Odike

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FEATURE
IMAGE

A titled Igbo man from Ogwashi Ukwu, (Aniocha), Enuani in Delta State, photographed by Northcote Thomas in 1912, and later colorized by Ukpuru in 2019.

Article image · caption retained from the published Ozikoro article



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Ogwashi Ukwu was founded by Odaigbo (Adaigbo), a descendant of Eze Nri from Agukwu Nri.

The progenitor of Ogwashi-Ukwu, one Odiagbo, is said to have been banished from Nri for committing an abomination. He then fled across the Niger and in a place he established a large ancestral shrine called Ogwa similar that of his father Eze Nshi. The shrine became very popular attracting a large number of people who came there to be healed. They therefore called the shrine Ogwa-Nshi-Ukwu, which was later anglicised as Ogwashi-Ukwu.

Odaigbo, also known as Odaba Igbo, crossed the Niger River with his brother Edini. They are believed to have fled Agukwu Nri due to local issues. In several versions of the story, they were given a ritual pot, which would break at the location where they were destined to settle.

The name Ogwashi Ukwu, meaning “the great shrine-hall of the Nshi (Nri) people,” reflects this heritage. Edini later founded Igbuzo (Ibusa) alongside other Isuama people, in present-day Imo State, led by Umejei, a son of Eze Isu (Nwa Eze Isu).

The Ogwashi-Ukwu and Ogboli traditions of origin state that the founders of Ogboli-Igbuzo and Ogwashi-Ukwu were born of the same parents. They were the sons of Eze Nshi (Eze Nri Agu), whose period of reign has yet to be determined. Their mother was one of the many wives of the king. Both brothers lived happily with their parents at Nshi until the senior one, Odaigbo, committed murder.

Spilling the blood of a kinsman was a serious offense and, according



to the law of the land, the offender must either go into exile or be hanged. Eze Nri Agu and Odaigbo's mother chose exile for their son. They prepared a pot of medicine for Odaigbo and instructed him to settle down anywhere the pot fell from his head. Edini, Odaigbo's younger brother (some accounts say that Edini was, instead, Odaigbo's sister), volunteered to accompany the exile; Edini was also presented with a pot of medicine and given similar instructions. It is believed that Odaigbo and Edini were accompanied into exile by a sizeable party of volunteers in order to lighten their pain and loneliness.

The group left Nri and travelled westward until they got to the Niger River and were ferried across by some riverine traders. They journeyed further west but when they got to Ani Udo, barely three miles from the Niger, Edini's pot fell to the ground and broke. He and his companions cleared the bush and founded there a settlement that later took the name of Ogboli.

After a few days, possibly months, of rest at Ani Udo, Odaigbo and some of his companions resumed their journey westward. Balanced on Odaigbo's head was his pot of medicine. When the party got to Eke, somewhere near the present site of Ogwashi-Ukwu, Odaigbo's pot fell from his head and broke. The party stopped, cleared the bush, and founded a new settlement there.

The years rolled by and Odaigbo became the father of four sons: Dei, Eshe, Ase, and Etumukwu. Odaigbo became a prosperous man and built an ogwa (a shrine or meeting shed) in memory of his father and the home he left behind. This ogwa was very large and because it was fashioned after his father's meeting shed at Nshi, passers-by spoke of it as ogwa ukwu nwa eze Nshi. This term was equally applied to the settlement which grew around it. In later days, however, this term was shortened to Ogwa-Nshi-Ukwu, which the British mispronounced as Ogwashi-Uku.

At Ani Udo, Edini also prospered. He became the father of Eze-keke, Ezekeke the father of Umuokpala, Umuokpala the father of

Umuodogwu, Umuodogwu the father of Achoshia, Achoshia the father of Odogwu. Oral historians believe that many of the Ogboli clans that dot Anioma today were formerly the inhabitants of the original Ogboli community that was founded by Edini in Ani Udo. They also believe that the Benin-Anioma wars played a major role in dispersing the original residents of the Ogboli community, forcing them to abandon their homes at Ani Udo. Some moved closer to Igbuzo, where their new settlement became known as Ogboli-Igbuzo. Some moved to Issele-Ukwu to occupy the Ogboli-Issele-Ukwu quarters. Many more moved to Atuma and Akwukwu, while a large party fled across the Niger river to settle in Ogboli-Onitsha. Till this day, these Anioma communities still boast that they are umu Nshi, that is, the children of Nri.

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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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