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## Omu Nwagboka: *The Last Female Leader of Onicha and Her Legacy in Women's Authority*

By Chuka Odike

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FEATURE  
IMAGE

### Omu Nwagboka

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**OMU NWAGBOKA**

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Unidentified women photographed by Henry Crosse with the Royal Niger Company, c. 1886–1895. Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge. It is plausible to identify the woman on the left as Omu Nwagboka, the last Omu of Onicha (Onitsha).

Omu Nwagboka was a prominent and wealthy trader, appointed as Omu in 1884 by Obi Anazonwu, the ruler of Onicha. She wielded significant authority, holding her own ofo (a sacred symbol of leadership and authority) and possibly an abani (a royal Benin-style staff). Nwagboka was also influential in her personal life, purchasing the prestigious Ozo title for her son and securing over ten wives for him.

Her tenure marked a turning point in the struggle for women's authority in Onicha, as colonial Victorian ideals began to erode women's traditional roles in leadership. In response, Omu Nwagboka organized and led a powerful women's protest. Her efforts were so impactful that, after her death in 1888, Obi Anazonwu refrained from appointing another woman to the position of Omu in Onicha.

Crosse, H. (c. 1886–1895). Photograph of unidentified women with the Royal Niger Company. Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge.

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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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