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The History of Agbonta: *A Symbol of Royal Heritage in Ubulu-Uku*

By Idenze Ezeme

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FEATURE
IMAGE

**The 25 years old Obi of Ubulu Uku
kingdom Obi Chukwuka Noah
Akaeze.**

Article image · caption retained from the published Ozikoro article

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THE HISTORY OF AGBONTA

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Agbonta is a well-known quarter in Ubulu-Uku Kingdom, Delta State, Nigeria. This community is highly regarded among its people as it happens to be the largest among all the quarters in the Ubulu-Uku community. The Agbonta community has been considered the cradle of the Kingdom of Ubulu-Uku, as the roots of its culture and tradition first took root there.

The name “Agbonta” translates to “the epitome or splendour of hunting.” It is therefore believed to have been an abode of hunters. At the center of this quarter is the Ubulu tree, a gigantic *Nauclea* species whose fruit attracted wild animals, making the area a popular hunting ground. This tree played a central role in the identity of Ubulu-Uku, giving the kingdom its name, which means “the land of the great Ubulu tree.”

The Ubulu Tree and the Founding of Ubulu-Uku

The Ubulu tree was more than a natural landmark; it was a totemic symbol of unity and identity. Four notable spots in Agbonta were known for this tree, with the largest of them giving rise to the name Ubulu-Ukwu, meaning “the big Ubulu tree.”

Oral and written historical accounts place the revered founder of Ubulu-Uku, Ezemu, near this tree. Ezemu built the first Ukpo in Agbonta-Idumuede, and his descendants are still considered custodians of this heritage.

Although the palace was later moved to Ogbe by Obi Shieze after Obi

Ojukobi stepped down, the memory of Ezemu's settlement remains strong in Agbonta. This is shown during the Iwu festival, where the chief priest, called Eze-Iwu-Ezemu, is also known as Eze-Iwu-Alumu, meaning Ezemu lived in the Alumu part of Agbonta.

Agbonta is divided into two main royal lineages:

1. Ụmụ-Obi-Olise: Descendants of the king's dynasty.
2. Ụmụ-Ọzọma-Dibiaokwu: Descendants of Ọzọma, the king's immediate younger brother.

These two lineages form the two bases of Agbonta's six large kindreds, namely:

2. Agbonta Udogwu (A mix of Ụmụ-Obi-Olise and migrant settlers from Onicha-Okpe)

The Role of Ọzọma in Ubulu-Uku Royalty

The Ọzọma title is reserved for the king's immediate younger brother, a position of trust and authority. For years, Ọzọma titleholders have been part and parcel of Ubulu-Uku's first-class administrative council, known as the Idimas, which are made up of nine chiefs.

Some of the positions making up this council include:

- The Obi: He is regarded as the ceremonial head among the chiefs.
- Onishe: A traditional prime minister in charge of presiding over meetings anytime the Obi is absent.
- Ọzọma and Ojiba: Brothers of the Obi with responsibilities for keeping watch on the interests of the king and alerting him to any suspected threat.

Other senior members on the council include the Odafe, Ojunwa, Ọshizọma, Ojigwu, Akwe, and the Allo titleholder.

Over several centuries, a number of Ọzọma titleholders have left

unforgettable marks on Ubulu-Uku's history. The following are among them:

- Ọzọma Dibiaokwu: A master strategist and diplomat whose name actually translates to “master of dialogue.”
- Ọzọma Inyagba and Ọzọma Mordi: Renowned leaders who had left their marks on the sands of time as far as Ubulu-Uku's governance and military successes were concerned.

The Ọzọma titleholders were also warriors. For instance, Ọzọma Dibiaokwu and his brother Obi Olise led Ubulu-Uku's forces during the famous Adesuwa War against the Bini Empire in the mid-18th century. Their unshakeable bond laid the foundation for the enduring kinship among Agbonta's lineages.

Despite its large population, Agbonta remains a united quarter under only two ọfọ (traditional staffs of authority)—one for Ụmụ-Obi-Olise and another for Ụmụ-Ọzọma-Dibiaokwu. The leadership in the different lineages is still handled through gerontocracy, where the eldest assumes the position of Dịọkpa.

They are proud of their royal heritage. The people in a royal lineage are accorded the “Ọnyá,” which when interpreted means “nobleman” or “bag bearer,” being of a higher standing than the rest in the Ancient Ubulu-Uku.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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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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