

UTILIZING VILLAGE HALLS AS AN ALTERNATIVE FOR CONSERVATION OF ANCIENT SITES IN THE VILLAGE

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Abstract

Indonesia possesses a cultural heritage from its ancestors that remains buried and undiscovered. This heritage includes ancient sites that are part of the rich cultural wealth of the archipelago. The lack of public awareness regarding ancient sites in their areas hinders the exploration and conservation efforts of these sites. This study aims to analyze the challenges faced by the village community in conserving ancient sites within the village. Additionally, the study seeks to provide solutions to educate the villagers on how to conserve these ancient sites. This research employs a descriptive qualitative design conducted through field observations, interviews, and analysis of the discovered artifacts. The data analysis technique used in this study is narrative analysis. Data obtained from observations and interviews are analyzed to describe the phenomenon. The research conducted in Tanjungmojo Village Kangkung District, Kendal Regency, Central Java, revealed an ancient artifact in a local farmer's field. This discovery occurred in October 2020 and was reported to the Kendal Regency Education and Culture Office and the Directorate of Culture, Ministry of Education and Culture. Some of the discovered artifacts include large stones buried more than a meter deep in the ground. Around these stones, pottery, ancient red bricks, and hand-sized stones arranged in a specific pattern were found. When the artifacts were found, the villagers were unaware of the appropriate steps to take. The lack of public knowledge should be addressed by establishing the Village Hall as a temporary center for storing and conserving historical artifacts. The Village Hall should also provide accessible information to villagers if they discover historical artifacts, making it an educational hub for historical artifacts.

Keywords: conservation, ancient sites, village, village hall, education

A. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia possesses an extraordinarily rich cultural heritage, much of which remains hidden and undiscovered (Simanjourang, 2024). This heritage encompasses a variety of archaeological sites, including temples, ancient ruins, and relics of past civilizations scattered across the archipelago. One of the most famous discovered sites is Borobudur Temple in Magelang, Central Java, one of the largest Buddhist temples in the world and a symbol of Indonesia's cultural wealth. Additionally, Gunung Padang Site in Cianjur, West Java, is a significant discovery, believed to be the largest megalithic site in Southeast Asia, shrouded in mysteries about Indonesia's early civilizations (Ericssen, 2014). Beyond these known sites, many others remain hidden across the region, awaiting discovery and further study.

Artifacts unearthed from these archaeological sites, such as statues, ceremonial tools, everyday objects, and other historically significant items, are preserved in various museums across Indonesia to protect and showcase them to the public (Hasanah, 2022). For instance, the National

Museum of Indonesia in Jakarta houses an extensive collection, including statues from the Hindu-Buddhist period in Java and relics from prehistoric times (Muthi'ah & Sachari, 2021). These objects serve not only as historical evidence but also as reflections of Indonesia's cultural values and local wisdom from the past (Irawan, 2018). Despite these efforts, many more relics are believed to be hidden, either on land or underwater, yet to be discovered. Research and preservation efforts continue to unearth the remnants of Indonesia's ancestral culture.

Field observations reveal that many archaeological sites in Indonesia have not been thoroughly excavated, especially in remote areas or rural regions. Remnants of temples, ancient structures, and historically valuable objects are often found in various locations without adequate restoration or protection efforts. In several villages, local residents frequently encounter stone structures or artifacts believed to be remnants of past civilizations. Unfortunately, limited resources and accessibility to these sites often hinder research and conservation efforts. The potential discovery of such sites underscores the abundance of historical artifacts scattered throughout the archipelago, awaiting further exploration and attention.

The primary challenge in preserving Indonesia's archaeological sites is the lack of public awareness and knowledge about the importance of cultural heritage in their regions (Sulistyanto, 2011). Many residents are unaware of the historical and cultural value of these sites, leaving them unmotivated to protect or report their findings to authorities. As a result, numerous potentially significant sites are neglected or even abandoned (Cahyani et al., 2022). This is regrettable, considering that every archaeological discovery can significantly contribute to Indonesia's archaeological and historical research (Ekwandari, Triaristina & Susanto, 2021). Education and public outreach on the importance of conserving archaeological sites are crucial to addressing this challenge (Muttaqin, 2021).

For example, in Tanjungmojo Village, Kangkung Subdistrict, Kendal Regency, Central Java, a farmer once discovered an artifact believed to be part of an ancient site on his farmland. The artifact was a brick structure differing in shape and size from modern bricks, suggesting it likely originated from a very distant past. Unfortunately, the local community's lack of knowledge about handling archaeological sites hindered preservation efforts. The villagers were unfamiliar with the proper procedures for excavation or cultural heritage conservation techniques, putting this valuable artifact at risk of loss or damage due to inadequate measures.

Additionally, the lack of facilities and support from the government to assist rural communities in conservation efforts remains a major obstacle (Putri & Nst, 2024). Limited access to information and technical assistance makes it difficult for local residents to participate in preservation activities. If provided with adequate knowledge and support, communities could become the frontline defenders of preserving archaeological sites in their areas (Pamungkas, Cahyono & Utami, 2020). Basic conservation training, guidance from archaeologists, and infrastructure support such as informational signage and site protection are essential to ensure that historical sites in rural areas are preserved and utilized as sources of knowledge and educational tourism for future generations (Baroh, 2018).

This research aims to analyse the various challenges faced by rural communities in their efforts to preserve archaeological sites within their environment.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design, incorporating various data collection methods, including field observations, in-depth interviews, and artifact analysis. Field observations

were conducted from August to October 2020 to directly examine the conditions and potential of archaeological sites in the target village. During the observations, the researchers documented findings through field notes, sketches, and photographs of the sites, providing a comprehensive overview of the state of the sites and their surrounding environment. Additionally, interviews were conducted with village residents, particularly farmers frequently active around the sites, to gather information on artifact discoveries and community perspectives on site preservation.

In the research process, the researchers also collaborated with relevant stakeholders, such as the Kendal Regency Youth and Sports Tourism Office (Disporapar) and the Directorate General of Culture under the Ministry of Education and Culture. The aim was to report the site findings and seek support for the preservation of these archaeological sites. Through these communications, it is hoped that government agencies can play an active role in securing the sites and providing conservation guidance to the local community. This step is crucial, given the limited resources and knowledge available to the community for independently preserving archaeological sites. Coordination with authorities also aims to ensure not only the security of these sites but also their potential development as sources of education and cultural tourism in the future.

The data analysis technique applied in this study is narrative analysis. Data collected from observations and interviews were systematically examined to describe and interpret the phenomenon of utilizing village halls as an alternative approach for conserving ancient sites in the village. By focusing on narratives shared by local residents, stakeholders, and community leaders, this approach provides deeper insights into how village halls can serve dual functions: as community centers and as tools for heritage preservation. The analysis emphasizes the cultural, social, and historical dimensions of these spaces, offering recommendations for optimizing their role in balancing community development with the conservation of archaeological sites. This method ensures that the voices and perspectives of those directly involved are central to the findings.

The results of this study recommend ensuring the security of archaeological sites in remote areas and empowering village communities in the preservation process. The recommendations include increasing community awareness of the historical value of the sites, providing basic training on artifact conservation, and equipping the sites with simple protective facilities. Moreover, government participation and engagement from other stakeholders are expected to be more active in offering technical assistance and support to the village communities. By doing so, the archaeological sites in rural areas can not only be protected from the risks of damage or looting but also bring benefits to local communities through enhanced knowledge and the development of cultural tourism potential.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The discovery of a site believed to be a cultural heritage area has provided significant inspiration, particularly in raising awareness of the importance of preserving cultural heritage. The finding of a brick-based site in a rural area not only serves as a historical marker that must be safeguarded but also fosters the understanding that Indonesia possesses an invaluable wealth of antiquities. Such discoveries illustrate the richness of past civilizations scattered throughout the archipelago. Therefore, it is crucial for local communities to recognize their pivotal role in preserving this cultural and historical legacy.

Stories of ancient brick site discoveries are common in Indonesia, with some leading to major findings following further research (Mahmud, 2023). For example, sites like Sambisari Temple in Yogyakarta were initially hidden underground until they were excavated and preserved (Seputar Yogyakarta, 2023). This demonstrates that sites appearing modest on the surface may hold significant potential for history and culture. Experiences like these highlight the importance of equipping local communities with knowledge about unearthed archaeological sites. With proper training, communities can become more vigilant and responsive to potential archaeological discoveries that could be classified as cultural heritage (Utama, 2023).

Previous studies explain that accidental discoveries often increase interest and preference, as they evoke the thought of “what if” the discovery had not occurred, creating an impression of destiny. This research notes that the discovery of ancient artifacts by laypeople is highly valued, whether intentional or not (Fulmer & Reich, 2023). Long before the advent of empirical science, Late Bronze Age Greeks (1300 BCE) discovered fossilized rhinoceros astragalus bones (*Stephanorhinus*) at the Mycenae site. These findings indicate that the collection and discovery of large fossils occurred earlier than previously documented. The fossils were used by mainland Greek communities for social or symbolic purposes (Meier, Pliatsika, & Shelton, 2024).

The discovery of ancient artifacts by the public also occurred among gold panners at the Bongal Site. They unearthed wooden artifacts during the gold mining process, varying in size and found at depths of 3-4 meters below the surface. In 2020, gold panners discovered wooden artifacts inscribed with what is suspected to be Pallawa script (Siregar & Prayogo, 2024). Post-reform, archaeological exploration in other locations, such as Patiayam, has gained momentum. Local residents have played a leading role in discovering ancient objects through their community groups (Aji, 2023).

However, the discovery of ancient artifacts by the public sometimes creates challenges. Research indicates that some irresponsible community members negatively impact the existence of cultural heritage, driven by excessive profit motives in the utilization and development of heritage sites (Fauzi, 2022). This issue stems from a lack of attention or support from the government, insufficient involvement of youth in preserving archaeological sites, and limited public interest in learning about technological advancements, which hinders the development of such sites. For example, the Liang Bua site suffers from limited support due to the younger generation's lack of interest in documenting and writing about the site (Loy, Anita & Se, 2023).

Based on observations and interviews, local communities require basic knowledge of how to conduct temporary evacuation and proper reporting procedures to authorities such as tourism or cultural agencies. With this knowledge, the community can not only maintain the temporary condition of the sites but also understand where to report findings for further action. Simple socialization and training on identifying archaeological sites, handling artifacts, and formal reporting procedures can enhance the community's active role in cultural preservation. Equipped with this knowledge, local residents can become the forefront of safeguarding historical sites while ensuring that these discoveries contribute to education, tourism, and national history.



Figure 1. Discovery of Large Stone Fragments in the Rice Field



Figure 2. Discovery of an Unusual Large Stone in the Rice Field



Figure 3. Discovery of Bricks Around the Large Stone Fragments



Figure 4. Discovery of Bricks Around the Large Stone Fragments



Figure 5. Discovery of Bricks Around the Large Stone Fragments



Figure 6. Excavation Conducted Manually by Local Residents

The discovery of artifacts in Tanjungmojo Village, Kangkung District, Kendal Regency, Central Java, has revealed the presence of large stones buried more than one meter underground. These large stones were found concealed beneath a thick layer of soil, indicating that the site may have been buried for a long time and untouched by human activity. The presence of these stones, believed to be part of an ancient structure, serves as an essential clue for further research into the region's past civilizations.

Surrounding the large stones, other artifacts were also found, including pottery, ancient red bricks, and smaller stones arranged in specific patterns. The pottery and ancient red bricks strengthen the belief that this site holds significant historical and cultural value, indicating human activities in the past, potentially involving a distinct culture or construction system. The arrangement of smaller stones in specific patterns further supports the hypothesis that this site may have had a particular role or function in its time.

The specific dimensions of the findings include large stones structurally resembling volcanic rocks, weighing between 20 and 30 kg. The presence of volcanic stones in the middle of a paddy field is quite anomalous. The pottery fragments, numbering six pieces, are heavily eroded and no longer intact. The material of the pottery resembles modern pottery, made from fired clay, with a dark red color and a very worn appearance. Meanwhile, the bricks at the site differ from modern bricks; they are heavier, estimated to weigh 3 to 4 kg, with three chunks discovered. These findings are believed to be connected to the Boto Tumpang Temple Site in Rowosari District, Kendal Regency, which dates back to approximately 630 CE.

The discovery of these artifacts opens significant opportunities for more in-depth archaeological research, particularly to understand the function and meaning of the stone arrangements and structures at this site. The implications of the discovery and exploration of the site in Tanjungmojo Village are substantial in understanding the history of civilization in Kendal. This site has the potential to unlock insights into the lives of the region's past communities, including their social systems, culture, and technologies. By studying the artifacts, building structures, or living patterns present, we can reconstruct how local communities lived, interacted, and adapted to their environment.

Additionally, the site provides an opportunity to delve deeper into Kendal's role in trade networks, politics, and culture in Central Java, as well as its connections to other centers of civilization in the archipelago. The Tanjungmojo site can be critically compared to the Boto Tumpang Site in Kendal, which has already been identified as a significant historical relic in the region. The Boto Tumpang Site, with its ancient brick structures believed to be part of a temple or religious building, indicates the presence of an established religious community during the Hindu-Buddhist period in Kendal. In contrast, the Tanjungmojo site, if studied further, may offer a different perspective in terms of function, age, and socio-cultural context.

A unique contribution of the Tanjungmojo site could be the possibility of uncovering settlement patterns, economic activities, or local community interactions not evident in Boto Tumpang research, which focuses more on religious aspects. If the Tanjungmojo site reveals evidence of links to maritime or trade activities along Java's northern coast, it would expand our understanding of Kendal's strategic role in ancient trade networks across the archipelago, providing a new dimension to regional historical studies.

When the artifacts were discovered in the village, local residents felt confused and unsure of the steps they should take in response. This highlights a lack of knowledge and awareness about the importance of preserving historical sites. Therefore, researchers recommend that these artifacts be promptly reported to the relevant authorities, such as cultural or archaeological agencies, to enable further assessment and research. With intervention from competent parties, it is hoped that the artifacts can be protected and studied further for the benefit of science and cultural preservation.

As of 2024, despite the community's awareness of the discovery, no concrete steps have been taken to conserve the artifacts found in the village. This lack of conservation efforts reflects a gap

between the potential of these artifacts and the understanding and resources available at the local level. Hence, it is crucial to enhance coordination between village authorities, local governments, and relevant institutions to formulate effective conservation strategies to protect and utilize these artifacts.

D. CONCLUSION

The lack of community knowledge about the importance of preserving historical artifacts can be addressed by establishing the Village Hall as a temporary center for the storage and preservation of discovered artifacts. The Village Hall would not only function as a storage facility but also as a space where residents can report the discovery of historical items to the relevant authorities. In this way, the Village Hall can serve as a starting point for safeguarding the preservation of historical objects in the village while ensuring that these artifacts are treated in accordance with established preservation standards.

Additionally, the Village Hall should be equipped with facilities to provide easily accessible information to residents on how to report historical findings. These informational resources could take the form of bulletin boards, brochures, or even regular educational programs conducted at the Village Hall. The aim is to raise public awareness about the importance of preserving historical objects and to provide a better understanding of their role in safeguarding cultural heritage. The Village Hall could also function as an educational center, where villagers can learn more about the history and cultural significance embedded in each artifact discovered.

The use of the Village Hall as a conservation hub has practical applications that are highly relevant and feasible, particularly in the context of preserving the historical sites in Tanjungmojo Village. As a facility located within the community, the Village Hall offers easy access for storing, displaying, and maintaining artifacts or archaeological findings from the site. Furthermore, it could serve as a community education center by hosting exhibitions, workshops, or historical discussions aimed at increasing awareness of the importance of cultural heritage preservation.

From a feasibility standpoint, the Village Hall often already possesses basic infrastructure, such as a multifunctional room, which can be adapted for conservation needs at a lower cost compared to constructing a new facility. With support from local government and the community, the Village Hall can also become a collaborative space for archaeologists, academics, and local residents to explore historical potential while fostering economic benefits through culture-based tourism.

The implications of this research are far-reaching, not only for the conservation of historical sites in the village but also for the development of more inclusive and community-based cultural preservation policies. Utilizing the Village Hall as a conservation center unlocks the potential to involve local residents in the preservation process, which not only enhances their awareness of the importance of cultural heritage but also strengthens collective responsibility for historical sites.

Future research directions could focus on comparative studies examining the effectiveness of utilizing village facilities in different regions for historical site conservation and their impact on local social and economic dynamics. Further research could also draw on ongoing studies, such as the use of public spaces for preservation purposes in other communities or investigations into the successes and challenges of village-based conservation models in countries with strong preservation traditions. This would enrich the scholarly discourse on community-based conservation and significantly contribute to the sustainable preservation of ancient sites.

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