

# From Exile to Heritage: Efforts to Preserve the Tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol in North Sulawesi

## Dari Pengasingan ke Warisan: Upaya Pelestarian Makam Tuanku Imam Bonjol di Sulawesi Utara

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### ABSTRACT

Tuanku Imam Bonjol is one of Indonesia's national heroes who played a pivotal role in resisting colonialism in Sumatra. This resistance eventually led to his exile, along with his followers, to North Sulawesi, where he spent the remainder of his life. The Tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol, located in Lotta Village, Minahasa, is a significant symbol of the nation's struggle and has been designated a Cultural Heritage Structure. However, excessive utilization without adherence to preservation principles has created several problems, including alterations to the tombstone and grave marker that have diminished the site's authenticity and integrity. In fact, under Law Number 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage, any use must ensure sustainability. This research aims to formulate strategies for the preservation and utilization of the Tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol to ensure its sustainable protection while providing benefits for the community. The methods employed include field observations, interviews, and literature studies with a cultural heritage management approach. The findings indicate that preservation and utilization strategies should be directed toward four main aspects: (1) physical conservation and regular maintenance, (2) strengthening governance through collaboration between the government and the community, (3) public education to enhance preservation awareness, and (4) regulated utilization in line with educational, religious, and cultural functions. This study emphasizes that with appropriate and well-directed utilization, the preservation of the tomb can be maximized while generating both social and religious benefits.

### Kata Kunci:

Pelestarian warisan budaya,  
pemanfaatan berkelanjutan,  
pengelolaan warisan  
budaya berbasis komunitas.

### ABSTRAK

Tuanku Imam Bonjol merupakan salah satu pahlawan nasional Republik Indonesia yang berperan penting dalam melawan kolonialisme di Sumatera. Perlawanan tersebut berujung pada pengasingannya bersama para pengikut ke wilayah Sulawesi Utara hingga akhir hayatnya. Makam Tuanku Imam Bonjol yang terletak di Desa Lotta, Minahasa, merupakan simbol penting sejarah perjuangan bangsa sekaligus telah ditetapkan sebagai Struktur Cagar Budaya. Namun, pemanfaatan yang berlebihan tanpa memperhatikan prinsip pelestarian telah menimbulkan sejumlah permasalahan, termasuk perubahan pada nisan dan jirat makam yang mengurangi nilai keaslian (*authenticity*) dan integritas (*integrity*) situs. Padahal, sesuai Undang-undang Nomor 11 Tahun 2010 tentang Cagar Budaya, setiap bentuk pemanfaatan harus tetap menjamin kelestarian. Penelitian ini bertujuan merumuskan strategi pelestarian sekaligus pemanfaatan makam Tuanku Imam Bonjol agar dapat terjaga secara berkelanjutan dan memberikan manfaat bagi masyarakat. Metode yang digunakan meliputi observasi lapangan, wawancara, serta studi pustaka dengan pendekatan pengelolaan warisan budaya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi pelestarian dan pemanfaatan perlu diarahkan pada empat aspek utama: (1) konservasi fisik dan pemeliharaan berkala, (2) penguatan tata kelola melalui kolaborasi pemerintah dan masyarakat, (3) edukasi publik untuk meningkatkan kesadaran pelestarian, serta (4) pengaturan pemanfaatan agar sejalan dengan fungsi pendidikan, keagamaan, dan kebudayaan. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa dengan pemanfaatan yang tepat dan terarah, pelestarian makam dapat terjaga secara maksimal dan memberi manfaat sosial maupun religius.

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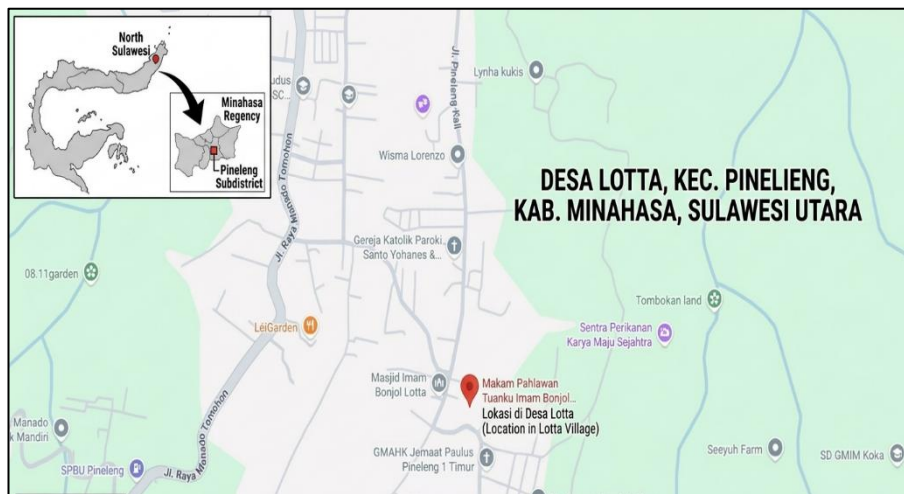
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## INTRODUCTION

Archaeological remains play a crucial role in reconstructing cultural history and understanding the dynamics of cultural transformation (Fagan et al., 1992). These material remains are essential cultural assets that preserve a nation's identity. Furthermore, cultural identity serves to reinforce noble values that are deeply intertwined with a community and its traditions (Asworth, et al., 2007). A prominent example of this inherited cultural identity is the tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol in Lotta Village, North Sulawesi, which reflects the Minangkabau heritage within a land of exile and highlights the critical importance of preserving non-renewable archaeological resources (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Map of the Tuanku Imam Bonjol Tomb in Lotta Village, Pineleng Subdistrict, Minahasa Regency, North Sulawesi (Source: [Map Imam Bonjol - Google Earth](#))

Due to its irreplaceable value, the tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol is legally protected as a Cultural Heritage Structure (No. RNCB.20070326.03.000951) by the Ministry of Education and Culture under Decree No. 266/M/2016<sup>1</sup>. ([Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 11 Tahun 2010 Tentang Cagar Budaya, 2010](#)). This protection is mandated by the law, which defines a cultural heritage site as a location containing evidence of past human activity or events. This legal designation requires the site to be managed in accordance with preservation principles to provide the greatest benefit to the public. Currently, tourism remains the major activity at the site. However, viewing preservation from a broader perspective, its profound cultural and historical significance could be expanded into other sectors such as academic research and education. Addressing current issues at the site requires comprehensive preservation techniques that maintain both its physical characteristics and associated symbolic values. By implementing such strategies, the tomb can function not merely as a tourist destination, but as a

<sup>1</sup><https://kebudayaan.kemdikbud.go.id/dpk/makam-tuanku-imam-bonjol-dan-makam-kyai-mojjo/#:~:text=Penetapan%20Makam%20Tuanku%20Imam%20Bonjol,.007%2FMKP%2F2007.>

dynamic center for historical education, a place to reflect on resistance beliefs, and a means of strengthening national historical consciousness.

Furthermore, preservation challenges extend to the graves of Tuanku Imam Bonjol's followers located near the main tomb. Many of these burials are in poor condition, and some have undergone unsuitable modifications that diminish their archaeological relevance ([Figure 2](#)). The lack of crucial details, such as the followers' names, dates of death, and backgrounds, complicates historical reconstruction. Nevertheless, their existence is historically significant for comprehending the broader context of Tuanku Imam Bonjol's exile and the experiences of his companions. Even if these burials are not legally classified as cultural heritage, their preservation is vital to support the holistic development and historical integrity of the main tomb site.

Given these pressing issues, there is an urgent need to formulate comprehensive and sustainable preservation strategies that safeguard both the site's physical authenticity and its associated historical and symbolic values. Preservation must be viewed from a broader perspective, expanding its utilization beyond mere tourism to encompass academic research, historical education, and cultural advancement. By doing so, the Tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol can transcend its role as a tourist destination to become a dynamic center for strengthening national historical consciousness. This research is therefore essential to ensure the site continues to function as a living heritage, one that generates tangible benefits for local communities while remaining relevant in addressing the challenges of modern cultural heritage management.



**Figure 2:** *Grave of the Followers of Tuanku Imam Bonjol*  
Source: (Documentation by Imam Mashud)

Previous studies on Tuanku Imam Bonjol have broadly explored his biography, the Padri movement, and related regional aspects. More specifically, Masrun et al. discussed the fading ethnic identity among the descendants of his guards in Lotta Village, noting that most no longer maintain their original identity as they were born in exile ([Masrun et al., 2016](#)). Additionally, Umaternate et al. examined the site's regional development potential, finding it highly suitable for designation as a Strategic Area of the Regency. To support this prioritization, their

study proposed a comprehensive four-zone planning system comprising the core, buffer, development, and support zones ([Umaternate et al., 2016](#)).

Although previous studies have explored the historical role and exile of Tuanku Imam Bonjol ([Umaternate et al., 2016](#); [Masrun et al., 2016](#); [Rozi, 2015](#); [Nashir, 2008](#); [Yetti, 2008](#); [Rozi, 2017](#)), none have specifically examined the cultural identity represented in his tomb or its utilization as a cultural heritage site from an archaeological perspective. This indicates a significant gap in literature. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the cultural identity reflected in the tomb and to formulate strategic recommendations for its preservation and utilization. The research is guided by two main questions: (1) how are history and cultural heritage represented in the tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol, and (2) what strategies can enhance its management and public engagement?

## METHODS

This study adopts an integrated approach by drawing upon Archaeological Heritage Management (AHM), a field that emphasizes the protection, preservation, and utilization of archaeological remains within contemporary social, economic, and cultural contexts. Rather than focusing solely on physical conservation, the concept of AHM encompasses the management of historical values, cultural identity, and community involvement. According to Smith and Waterton, contemporary archaeological heritage management should be understood as a dynamic social process wherein the meanings and values of archaeological remains are constantly negotiated among various stakeholders, including governments, academics, and local communities ([Smith and Waterton, 2013](#)). This interconnectedness is further highlighted by Carman, who explains that Cultural Resources Management (CRM) closely intersects with Archaeological Resource Management (ARM), AHM, Cultural Heritage Management (CHM), and Public Archaeology, as they all contribute to the broader discourse on protecting and utilizing heritage resources ([Carman, 2015](#)).

In addition, contemporary approaches in AHM highlight the importance of sustainability and stakeholder engagement in cultural heritage preservation. Holtorf and Högberg argue that heritage management must account for the needs of future generations by safeguarding the integrity and authenticity of sites while ensuring their utilization provides social and economic benefits, such as fostering education, tourism, and a collective identity ([Holtorf and Högberg, 2021](#)). A key element within this framework is active local community engagement, which Jameson and Musteață emphasize not only raises public awareness but also strengthens a sense of ownership over cultural heritage ([Jameson and Musteață, 2019](#)). Consequently, preservation should not be regarded solely as the responsibility of governments or academic institutions, but rather as a shared duty that actively involves the communities surrounding the sites.

Cleere further elaborates that the management of archaeological heritage is founded on a philosophical basis that emphasizes its value for cultural identity, its educational function, its economic potential through tourism, and its academic importance for safeguarding and preserving data sources ([Cleere, 1989](#)). Barbara J. Little, cited in Darvill, asserts that archaeologists today must not remain isolated within their academic sphere but should be aware of the reciprocal relationship between archaeology and the public ([Darvill 2020](#)).

The reasoning applied in this research is inductive. Several data collection techniques are employed in this study, including field observation, interviews, and literature review. Field observation involves direct examination of archaeological data at the site, allowing researchers to preserve the contextual integrity of the artefactual findings. The observation aims to understand the current condition of the site or area, as well as to assess the potential of the Tuanku Imam Bonjol Cultural Heritage Site. Observations were conducted in and around the tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol and the surrounding area of Lotta Village. Following the field observations, interviews were conducted.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

The Padri movement emerged in West Sumatra in 1803, initiated by three pilgrims who had returned from Mecca: Haji Miskin (Pandai Sikek), Haji Sumanik (VIII Koto), and Haji Piabang (Tanah Datar). This movement ultimately gave rise to the figure of a national hero, Tuanku Imam Bonjol ([Rozi, 2015](#)). After resisting Dutch forces at Fort Bonjol, Tuanku Imam Bonjol was successively exiled to West Java, Ambon, and finally in Minahasa in 1841, where he died in 1864.

### History of the Padri Movement and Tuanku Imam Bonjol

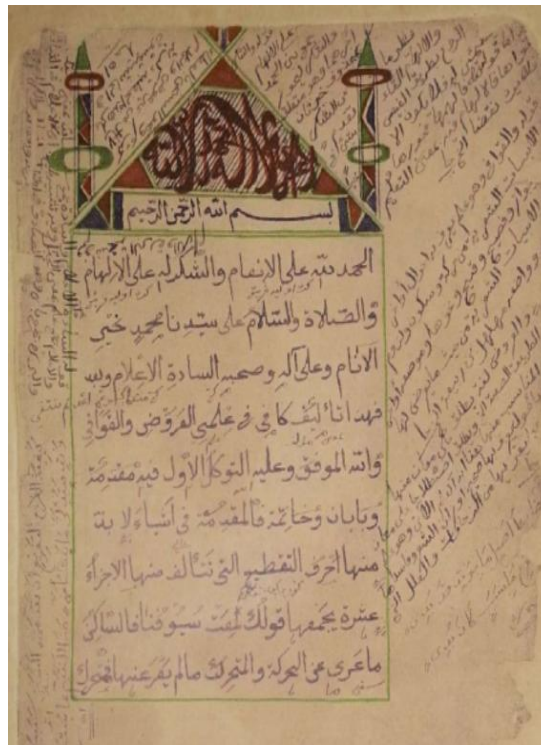
Tuanku Imam Bonjol was part of the Padri reform movement, which sought to purify religious practices in Minangkabau society. Historical accounts of this movement are preserved in classical Malay manuscripts that narrate the Padri War and its socio-religious context in West Sumatra. The Kingdom of Pagaruyung, located in West Sumatra, governed various regions through *penghulu adat* (traditional leaders). Although these leaders were Muslim, many of their practices contradicted Islamic teachings, such as drinking *tuak* (palm wine), gambling, and cockfighting. These circumstances motivated the formation of the Padri Movement in 1803, which aimed to purify religious practices in the region. The movement's founders were supported by local Islamic scholars, particularly Tuanku Nan Renceh of Lubuk Agam, who was based in Kamang ([Rozi, 2015](#)).

The conflict intensified in 1809 when Tuanku Lintau initiated negotiations with the Pagaruyung kingdom and traditional leaders in Koto Tengah to discuss religious and social issues. However, before the talks began, one of Tuanku Lintau's subordinates launched an attack, resulting in chaos and the massacre of unarmed royal family members. The only survivors were Raja Alam Muningsyah and his grandson, who escaped to Kuantan and hid in Lubuk Jambi ([Yetti, 2008](#)). In 1819, the arrival of the Dutch in Padang was leveraged by the *adat* faction to combat the Padri. By 1821, the Dutch launched an assault on Fort Simawang. Dutch involvement in the Padri War fundamentally transformed the conflict, as the Padri were now directly confronting a colonial force rather than just local traditionalists. In 1822, the Dutch reinstated Alam Muningsyah as Regent of Tanah Datar, and in 1824, they constructed Fort Van de Kock to consolidate their control in Lubuk Agam. This provoked a new confrontation led by Tuanku Imam Bonjol ([Marzoekie Ahmad, n.d.](#)).

Tuanku Imam Bonjol began his defense at Fort Bonjol in 1833 when the Dutch attempted to seize this final Padri stronghold. Lieutenant Elout sought assistance from General Van den Bosch in Java. After years of resistance, the Padri forces were ultimately defeated when the Dutch captured Fort Bonjol in 1837 ([Yetti, 2008](#)). Although Tuanku Imam Bonjol and his followers initially escaped,

the Dutch later invited him to peace talks in Palupuh. Upon arrival, he and his followers were arrested and exiled – first to West Java, then to Ambon, and finally to Manado (Minahasa) in 1839.

Tuanku Imam Bonjol rose to leadership within the Padri movement after joining forces with Tuanku Nan Renceh. Born as Peto Syarif in Tanjung Bungo, he was the son of Tuanku Radjo Nudin. Peto Syarif, also known as Tuanku Mudo, studied Islam under several scholars, including Tuanku Tuo Tjangking ([Marzoekie Ahmad, n.d.](#)). Upon joining the movement, Tuanku Mudo was granted land and chose to establish a koto (fortified settlement) on Bukit Tajadi in eastern Alahan Panjang. There, he built a house and a mosque. As the settlement developed, he gradually relocated his family and followers, naming the new village Bonjol. Gradually, the people of Bonjol began referring to him as Tuanku Imam, a title that eventually solidified his status as the leader of the Bonjol territory. Thus, he became widely known as Tuanku Imam Bonjol.



**Figure 3:** Manuscript of Tuanku Imam Bonjol  
Source: ([Marzoekie Ahmad, n.d.](#))

As a leader, Tuanku Imam Bonjol was not only well-versed in Islamic teachings but also knowledgeable in the arts and astronomy. According to [Marzoekie Ahmad, n.d.](#) he was a gentle teacher and a skilled poet in Arabic ([Marzoekie Ahmad, n.d.](#)). One piece of evidence supporting this is a manuscript believed to be authored by him. This manuscript was obtained by [Marzoekie Ahmad](#) in 1915 from Tuanku Bandoro Sati, then head of the Lubuk Sikupang and Bonjol district ([Figure 3](#)).

## Cultural Heritage Complex of the Tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol

The Tomb Complex of Tuanku Imam Bonjol comprises several interrelated elements—including the main tomb symbolizing anti-colonial resistance, a spiritually significant prayer site, and the graves of his loyal followers—which collectively led to its designation as a Cultural Heritage Structure under Decree No. 266/M/2016 by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia. According to oral accounts obtained from the descendants of Tuanku Imam Bonjol's guards, the complex was initially established by the Regional Government of Manado City in 1960 to honor his legacy, serving as a respected historical landmark and pilgrimage site. Over time, the complex underwent structural modifications to ensure its sustainability, a 1971 renovation inadvertently damaged the original gravestone, while a subsequent 1982 expansion by the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) enhanced the surrounding area and modified the *cungkup* (mausoleum canopy). Although these successive interventions altered some aspects of the site's material authenticity, the descendants note that the canopy's roof was deliberately retained in the traditional Minangkabau *rumah gadang* style as a crucial form of cultural respect and heritage continuity.

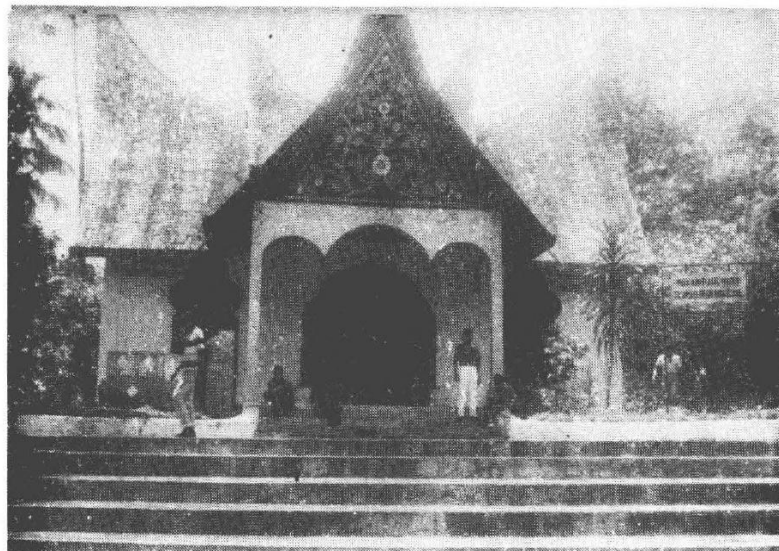
In Islamic archaeology, a tomb serves as a material manifestation of cultural expression traditionally composed of three core elements: the *nisan* (gravestone), *jirat* (raised platform), and *cungkup* (canopy structure) (Mash'ud, 2021). The first element of an Islamic tomb is the *nisan*, which refers to a stone or other material placed above the grave as a marker. These gravemarkers are typically positioned at two points: the head (north) and the feet (south) of the deceased. In certain cases, the gravestones are fused with the *jirat*, forming a unified structure (Mash'ud, 2021), as is observed in the tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol, where the gravestone is integrated with the *jirat*.

The gravestone of Tuanku Imam Bonjol appears to be relatively modern, made of ceramic with a bracket-shaped top. This current form is the result of renovations carried out by the Indonesian National Armed Forces in 1980. Notably, only the headstone remains, with no corresponding footstone present at the site (Figure 4). The second element of the tomb is the *jirat*, or *kijing* in Javanese, which is the raised foundation that distinguishes one grave from another. *Jirat* structures are typically rectangular with various decorative motifs (Mash'ud, 2021). The *jirat* has undergone renovation, which has removed much of its original character and historical patina. It features a simple form with three distinct tiers, resembling ancient tomb structures that generally have between three to five levels. The third element is the *cungkup*, a roofed structure built above the tomb. The *cungkup* serves multiple purposes, primarily to protect the grave from environmental exposure such as rain and sunlight, as well as from vandalism or theft (Mash'ud, 2021).



**Figure 4:** Gravestone and Jirat of Tuanku Imam Bonjol  
 Source: (Documentation by Imam Mash'ud)

Most ancient Islamic tombs have *cungkup* structures that vary in form, ranging from domes to simpler designs. In Indonesia, traditional *cungkup* roofs often adopt the *tumpang* (tiered) roof form, which is a cultural adaptation from earlier traditions known as *meru* (Mash'ud, 2021). However, not all *cungkup* structures utilize this form. The *cungkup* structure reflects Minangkabau architectural tradition, particularly the iconic *Rumah Gadang* roof with its upward-curving, horn-like design (Figure 5).



**Figure 5:** *Cungkup* of Tuanku Imam Bonjol's Tomb, 1982  
 Source: (Direktorat Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional, Tahun 1986)

The Rumah Gadang, the traditional house of the Minangkabau people, was historically developed into its present form by Datuk Tantejo Gurhano (Damayanti, 2016). The style later spread to several areas, such as Padang Panjang and Tanah Datar. There are two main architectural styles of *Rumah Gadang*: the “Koto Piliang” style, also known as “Sitinjau Lauik,” characterized by elevated side chambers (beranjung) and forward-projecting roofs; and the “Bodi Caniago” style, which does not feature side chambers or verandas, differing markedly from the Koto Piliang style (Damayanti, 2016). Other architectural styles include *Gajah Maharam*, *Surambi Papek*, and *Rajo Babandiang*.

The tomb's *cungkup* follows the Koto Piliang style and has reportedly remained structurally unchanged since 1982 (Figure 5). The choice of Koto Piliang may be influenced by its association with traditional Rumah Gadang architecture used in the Pagaruyung Palace. Like the Rumah Gadang, the tomb's *cungkup* roof is also upwardly curved at the ends, resembling buffalo horns that taper to a point. This style, known as the Gonjong roof, comprises several parts, including labu-labu, belimbing, and anting-anting. According to Damayanti, the sharp upward curves were designed in response to Sumatra's rainy climate, allowing rainwater to easily flow downward (Damayanti, 2016). At the front of the *cungkup* of Tuanku Imam Bonjol's tomb is an Arabic inscription that reads (Figure 6):



**Figure 6:** Arabic Inscription on the Cungkup of Tuanku Imam Bonjol  
Source: (Documentation by Imam Mash'ud)

وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتًا ۗ بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ

Translation:

"And do not think of those who have been killed in the cause of Allah as dead. Rather, they are alive with their Lord, receiving provision."

This inscription serves as both an honor and a reminder to Muslim heroes, emphasizing that those who struggle in the cause of Allah will be rewarded

accordingly. The inscription has remained unchanged and corresponds with archival photographs from 1982 ([Figure 6](#)).



**Figure 7:** *The stone used by Tuanku Imam Bonjol as a place for prayer.  
Source: (Documentation by Imam Mash'ud)*

In addition to the grave, the Tuanku Imam Bonjol complex also preserves another cultural relic in the form of a stone structure that holds significant historical and spiritual value ([Figure 7](#)). This stone is believed to have been used by Tuanku Imam Bonjol as a place for tirakat (spiritual retreat) and prayer during his exile, before the mosque in front of the grave complex was established. On the surface of the stone are human-made carvings, most likely created by Tuanku Imam Bonjol or his followers. The existence of this stone structure also symbolizes perseverance, sincerity, and humility in fulfilling religious duties while reinforcing faith in times of trial.

## DISCUSSION

The Tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol, which has been classified as a Cultural Heritage Structure, needs to be managed properly and methodically in accordance with the guidelines outlined in the Cultural Heritage Law in order to prevent damage or improper modifications to cultural heritage sites.

In an attempt to address the concerns brought forth in this study, this discussion centers on four primary conservation and utilization strategies. The four components are: (1) physical conservation and routine upkeep; (2) enhancing governance through multi-stakeholder cooperation; (3) educating the public about the importance of cultural heritage; and (4) controlling site use to maintain its educational, religious, and cultural purposes.

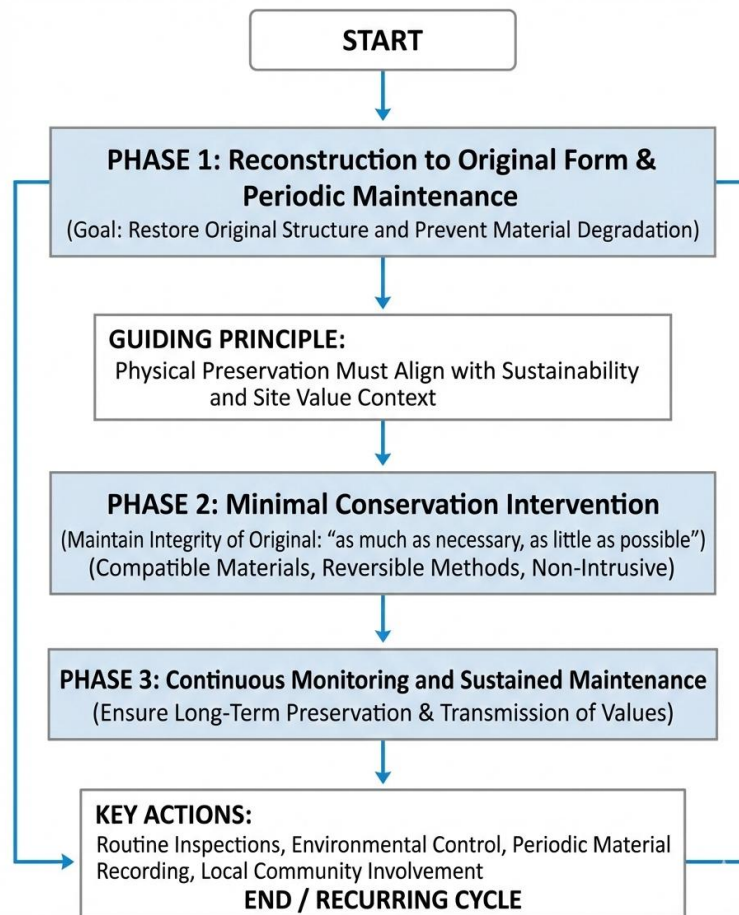
From AHM's perspective, conservation and utilization are not seen as two contradictory interests, but rather as processes that must be managed in a balanced and sustainable manner. Holtorf and Högberg emphasize that effective archaeological heritage management must be able to maintain the authenticity and integrity of sites, while also allowing them to be used for educational purposes, cultural identity, and community welfare ([Holtorf and Högberg, 2021](#)).

### **Preservation Strategy for Tuanku Imam Bonjol's Tomb**

The preservation of the Tuanku Imam Bonjol complex faces numerous complex challenges. First, the site's structure has changed without preserving its authenticity, which could compromise its integrity and authenticity – two crucial elements that have evolved into global standards for the preservation of cultural materials ([Gao & Jones, 2021](#)). Second, conservation efforts have been incomplete and unsustainable due to a lack of collaboration amongst institutions, including local government, site managers, and cultural institutions. Third, vandalism by visitors who do not appreciate the significance of the site poses a major threat. All of these issues, if not addressed, have the potential to destroy the historical, spiritual, and societal significance of the cultural heritage.

Based on the identification of these issues, a more systematic and multifaceted preservation plan is required. To ensure the long-term viability of Tuanku Imam Bonjol's tomb, three strategies must be implemented: physical conservation and periodic maintenance, strengthened governance through government and community engagement, and public education to enhance preservation awareness.

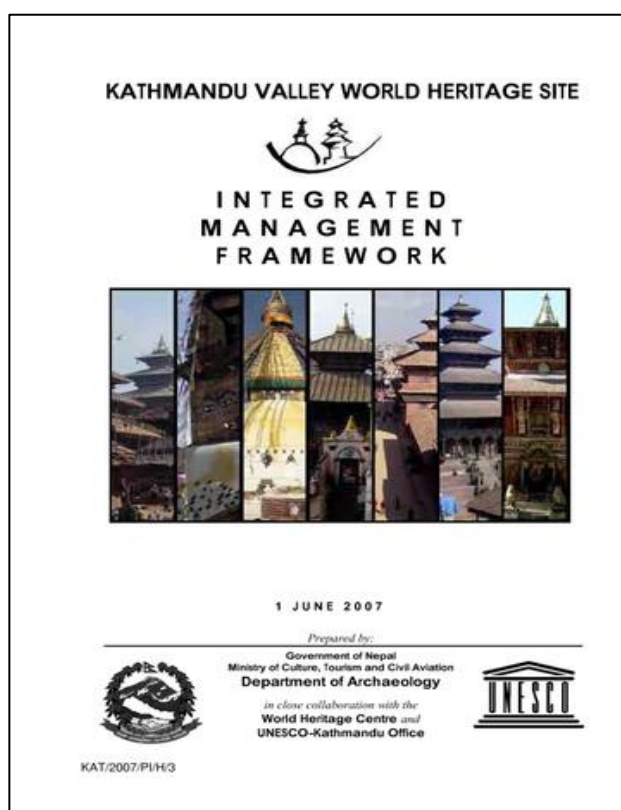
In the first strategy, physical conservation is carried out so that the cultural heritage of the tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol can be restored to its original form. This stage can be carried out in numerous stages, including the ones listed below ([Figure 8](#)). First is rebuilding to its original form followed by periodic maintenance, which attempts to restore and maintain the original structure while preventing material degradation of the site. According to recent studies, the concept of sustainability should guide physical preservation in order to preserve the site's aesthetic appeal while also taking into account the context of its significance ([Holtorf & Högberg, 2021](#)). In the following step, known as minimal conservation intervention, physical actions are restricted to maintaining the original materials without changing their aesthetic appeal or cultural significance. In addition, UNESCO recommends using materials that are compatible with the original materials, reversible procedures, and non-intrusive interventions. Manually clearing vegetation, reinforcing damaged structures with comparable materials, and controlling moisture to stop weathering are a few examples of this. In this stage, the principle of "do as much as necessary, as little as possible" serves as the direction ([UNESCO, 2019; Jokilehto, 2020](#)). The third step is continuous monitoring and maintenance. UNESCO suggests periodic documentation of material condition changes, environmental control around the site, and a regular inspection plan to keep an eye on the structure's state. Furthermore, local community participation in maintenance activities is valued highly by both field implementers and supervisors. In order to ensure that historical, spiritual, and cultural qualities are transmitted to future generations, places can be protected and kept safe from repetitive destruction by methodical monitoring ([UNESCO, 2021](#)).



**Figure 8:** Diagram of the Preservation Strategy for the Tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol.  
Source: (Created by Imam Mash'ud and Irfanuddin Wahid Marzuki)

The second strategy is to strengthen governance through multistakeholder engagement, which aligns with UNESCO's recommendations on participatory management and inclusive governance. UNESCO underlines that cultural heritage preservation cannot be done only by the government, but rather through an inclusive governance system that includes communities, academics, and business organizations (UNESCO, 2015).

In practice, the first step is to form a joint management board with representation from several sectors. This board acts as a coordinating platform for developing conservation plans, establishing program priorities, and monitoring the sustainability of site management. A comparable concept was successful at the Kathmandu Valley World Heritage Site in Nepal, where multi-stakeholder engagement improved government sustainability (Figure 9). The next step is to establish clear roles and duties in accordance with UNESCO's governance principles. In this case, the government has regulatory responsibility and provides policy support; academia contributes scientific research, archaeological documentation, and conservation guidance; local communities are directly involved in daily maintenance, interpretation of cultural values, and delivery of historical narratives to visitors; and the private sector supports through sustainable funding, development of environmentally friendly facilities, and heritage promotion.



**Figure 9:** *Integrated management in Kathmandu, Nepal.*  
 Source: ([unesdoc.unesco.org](http://unesdoc.unesco.org))

Furthermore, this collaborative governance must be supported by transparent monitoring, evaluation, and reporting methods. In order to guarantee active engagement, UNESCO highlights the necessity of public audits, frequent reports on site conditions, and open platforms for discussion with local populations ([UNESCO, 2021](#)). These methods not only boost community ownership, but they also prevent one group from dominating management. According to a study by Meskell, community involvement in decision-making makes conservation much more successful since it involves communities as part of the solution rather than just as recipients of policy ([Meskell, 2018](#)). Thus, enhancing multi-stakeholder governance would ensure that the Tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol is managed in an inclusive and sustainable manner, and providing concrete benefits to future generations.

The third strategy, public education, can be applied contextually to Tuanku Imam Bonjol's tomb, highlighting the historical, spiritual, and national qualities contained therein. This tomb is more than just the final resting place of a national hero; it is also a symbol of colonial resistance and the fight for justice. In this regard, training local guides to be able to tell the complete story of Imam Bonjol's struggle can be the first practical step towards public education. This is in line with UNESCO recommendations regarding the significance of heritage interpretation that links the site with contemporary meanings ([UNESCO, 2011](#)). Furthermore, the public's access to correct historical information will be increased via the distribution of educational resources such as bilingual information boards, virtual

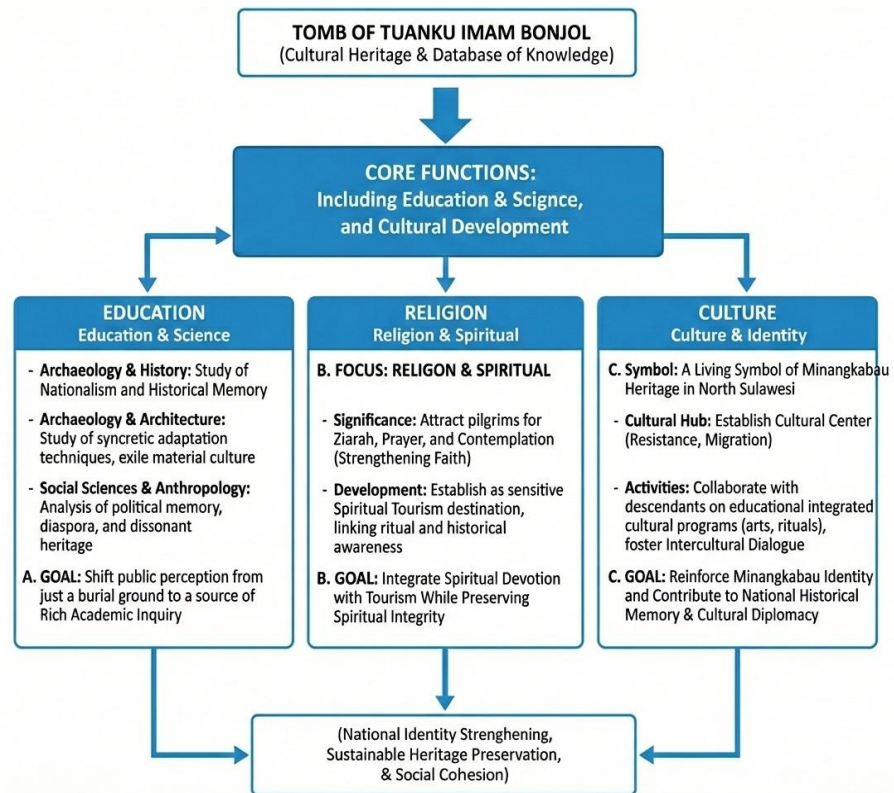
tours based on QR codes, and booklets about Imam Bonjol's life and fight ([UNESCO, 2015](#)).

Furthermore, to decrease the possibility of vandalism and damage, tomb complexes must have greater visiting restriction measures in place. In international practice, this can be accomplished by limiting the number of visitors, employing specialist guides, and implementing contemporary surveillance systems. This recommendation is consistent with recent research demonstrating the negative effects of tourist activities on archeological sites, where stringent regulation has been demonstrated to prevent damage and increase the community's social control over the site. With this method, sites can stay open to the public while protecting their authenticity and long-term preservation.

### **The Utilization of the Tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol**

In archaeological studies, cultural heritage is often regarded as an archaeological resource one of the key assets for development, alongside natural and constructed resources. Preservation of archaeological resources is a prerequisite for their utilization, and vice versa use must support long-term preservation for current and future generations ([Weiss, 2006](#)). A common form of utilizing archaeological resources is as tourist destinations. Beyond ideological and academic significance, these resources also offer economic value. Promoting archaeological sites as tourism destinations also provides the public with an opportunity to appreciate and engage with cultural heritage ([Simon, 1992](#)).

Cleere argues that cultural heritage and archaeological remains serve philosophical purposes that relate to cultural identity. They are also useful for educational, economic (through tourism), and academic functions by preserving the database of knowledge on these resources ([Cleere, 1989](#)). Based on government regulations and these identified functions, the tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol may be utilized in various fields, including education and science, religion, and cultural development ([Figure 10](#)) ([Darvill, 2020](#)).



**Figure 10:** Diagram of the Utilization Strategy for the Tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol  
Source: (Created by Imam Mash'ud and Irfanuddin Wahid Marzuki)

### *Educational Utilization of the Tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol*

The Tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol holds significant potential for educational and scientific development across various academic disciplines. From an archaeological perspective, it offers valuable insights into the material culture associated with exile and colonial punishment. The physical elements of the tomb (such as the ceramic gravestone, the three-tiered jirat, and the protective cungkup) may represent layered historical meanings and construction phases, which are important for analyzing the site's transformation and symbolic adaptation over time. Furthermore, the tomb can support the advancement of Islamic archaeological research in North Sulawesi by providing a case study for examining Islamic funerary traditions, architectural characteristics, and the diffusion of Islamic cultural heritage in the region.

From a historical perspective, this tomb serves as a tangible source for understanding Indonesia's anti-colonial struggle and the socio-political dynamics of the Padri War. Researchers and history students can analyze the tomb and its surrounding context to reconstruct the life, exile, and leadership of Tuanku Imam Bonjol. Archives, oral histories from descendants and local communities, and physical elements of the tomb provide rich material for historiographical studies. Through this analysis, researchers can explore themes of resistance leadership, colonial oppression, forced migration, and the preservation of Islamic identity in exile, while also increasing historical literacy and critical understanding of the national heritage.

In anthropology, the tomb offers an opportunity to study cultural change, memory preservation, and the adaptation of Tuanku Imam Bonjol's descendants in North Sulawesi. It can reveal how the Minangkabau diaspora negotiated their identity in a different socio-cultural environment. Elements such as burial customs, oral traditions, and ritual practices passed down through generations can be explored through ethnographic methods to better understand processes of cultural resilience. This aligns with the view of Waterton and Smith, who emphasize that community-based heritage practices are essential for sustaining intangible heritage across generations ([Waterton and Smith, 2010](#)).

Additionally, in the field of architecture, the tomb allows for a detailed examination of design choices and building techniques used historically and during its renovation. The site serves as an example of adaptive reuse in heritage conservation, relevant to studies of material culture, traditional construction, and symbolism in funerary architecture. As Feilden and Jokilehto argue, successful conservation must strike a balance between preserving authenticity and allowing for social relevance, especially for sacred heritage sites ([Feilden and Jokilehto, 1998](#)).

In terms of educational outreach, the site could be integrated into heritage education programs, field schools, or museum-based learning. Schouten asserts that heritage sites, when effectively interpreted, become spaces of dialogue between academic knowledge and public understanding ([Schouten, 1995](#)). Interpretive signage, digital documentation, and even augmented reality experiences could be developed to enhance public knowledge. Ultimately, the goal of scientific and educational use is to shift the public's limited perception of the tomb—from merely a burial ground—to a rich source of historical, cultural, and academic inquiry.

### ***Religious Utilization of the Tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol***

The religious significance of the Tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol is rooted in the figure's historical role as both a national hero and an Islamic preacher. This dual status elevates the tomb to a place of spiritual reverence, attracting visitors not only for historical interest but also for religious purposes such as ziarah (pilgrimage), prayer, and contemplation. Timothy and Olsen have observed that religious tourism represents a convergence of spiritual devotion, cultural heritage, and education ([Timothy and Olsen, 2006](#)). In this sense, the tomb is an ideal site to bridge ritual activity with historical awareness, enhancing its meaning beyond individual spirituality. The sacredness of the site is socially constructed and maintained through continued pilgrimage and community recognition.

The tomb has the potential to be developed as a spiritual tourism destination in North Sulawesi, similar to religious tourism centers in Ampel (Surabaya) and Giri (Gresik). These sites demonstrate how pilgrimage and religious travel can support local economies while preserving intangible religious heritage. Globally, examples such as Ajmer Sharif in India or Imam Reza Shrine in Iran show how tombs of revered religious figures become spaces for both religious devotion and cultural interaction.

By formalizing the tomb as a site of religious tourism, supported by respectful infrastructure and informative narratives, it can attract pilgrims, Islamic scholars, and spiritual tourists, especially from Sumatra and other regions. This

approach aligns with the growing global trend of integrating spiritual journeys with tourism. Urry and Larsen explain that contemporary tourists seek immersive experiences, where history, place, and spirituality converge in meaningful rituals and sensory encounters ([Urry and Larsen, 2011](#)).

In addressing the dialectical tension between economic motives and spiritual integrity, structural intervention through government regulation is imperatively necessary. The government cannot simply act as an infrastructure facilitator, but also as the main regulator to prevent the desacralization of the site. Referring to the ICOMOS, the cultural heritage management principles, it is necessary to apply strict spatial zoning in regional land use regulations, separating the “core zone” for worship from the “buffer zone” and commercial “development zone” ([ICOMOS, 2021](#)).

Furthermore, the legalization of site management must be integrated into the Regional Tourism Development Master Plan and reinforced by a Regional Regulation on Cultural Heritage that regulates collaborative governance. These regulations must ensure the involvement of local communities and descendants in decision-making, ensure that the narrative constructed is an authentic one, and preserve the symbols of interfaith tolerance inherent in these sites from being eroded by the exploitation of mass tourism.

### ***Cultural Utilization of the Tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol***

Culturally, the tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol represents a living symbol of Minangkabau heritage outside of Sumatra. Its presence in North Sulawesi speaks to historical migration, resistance, and identity preservation. As such, the tomb may serve as the foundation for developing a Minangkabau Cultural Center in the region. This center could function as a hub for cultural education, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and artistic expression. UNESCO stresses the importance of community involvement in the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, which includes performing arts, traditional knowledge, and social practices ([UNESCO, 2003](#)). By anchoring cultural programs at the tomb, the local Minangkabau community can express and preserve their cultural identity while also educating the public.

Through collaboration with the descendants of Tuanku Imam Bonjol and his followers some of whom continue to live near the site authentic cultural programs could be organized. These might include traditional Minangkabau music, dance, cuisine, storytelling, and rituals, designed not only for internal community bonding but also for public engagement and cultural tourism. argue that when heritage spaces are democratized, they become platforms for intercultural understanding and the promotion of human rights ([Silverman and Ruggles, 2007](#)).

Cultural programming at the site could also foster intercultural dialogue, especially in the pluralistic context of North Sulawesi. The site’s transformation into a cultural hub would align with international practices found in places like Amsterdam, Paris, and UNESCO World Heritage Sites, where sacred or historic places are adapted into centers for public learning and cultural expression. Borobudur, for instance, has adopted similar models that combine religious reverence with artistic festivals and educational tourism to enhance the site’s cultural impact.

Thus, the cultural utilization of the tomb reinforces not only the identity and pride of the Minangkabau community, but also the shared historical memory of the Indonesian nation. It contributes to broader efforts in cultural diplomacy, heritage preservation, and the creative economy. Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge highlight that cultural heritage, when managed with vision, serves not only as a repository of the past but also as a resource for future innovation and societal cohesion ([Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2000](#)).

## CONCLUSION

The preservation of Tuanku Imam Bonjol's tomb as part of cultural heritage plays a strategic role in maintaining the historical identity, spiritual values, and local wisdom of the community. Preservation strategies need to be comprehensive and sustainable, including four main aspects that are integrated together: (1) physical conservation and regular maintenance to preserve the authenticity of the structure, (2) strengthening good governance through inclusive collaboration between the government and the community, (3) public education to promote awareness of the site's importance, and (4) arrangements for its use to be consistent with its educational, religious, and cultural functions. Preservation is not merely about maintaining the material aspects, but also requires an inclusive, collaborative, and community-based management system. Public education plays an essential role in establishing the tomb as a historical resource and learning tool for generations, as well as fostering collective awareness regarding the importance of protecting cultural heritage.

Moreover, the study emphasizes the urgency of establishing clear regulations to govern the utilization of graves in accordance with preservation principles and legal regulations, such as Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage. These regulations can be implemented through local regulations or derivative regulations that regulate the limits of utilization for religious, tourism, and educational functions, as well as legalizing the role of local communities in routine management and economic benefit sharing. The utilization of tombs based on educational, religious, and cultural values allows the site to remain relevant for today's society while also being physically preserved. Thus, a preservation and utilization strategy that integrates technical, participatory, and instructional aspects provides a solid foundation for the sustainable long-term management of cultural heritage, ensuring that the tomb of Tuanku Imam Bonjol remains preserved and provides social, historical, and religious benefits for future generations.

## AUTHOR DECLARATION

Imam Mash'ud (IM) and Irfanuddin Wahid Marzuki (IWM) are the authors of this article. All authors actively participated in the initial field observations, critical discussions, and primary data collection at the cultural heritage site. Specifically, IM held full responsibility for the conceptualization and formulation of the initial ideas, drafting the manuscript outline, writing the introduction, defining the research methodology, as well as conducting in-depth data analysis and interpretation. Meanwhile, IWM contributed significantly to strengthening the substance of the archaeological/historical study, performing editing, and

conducting the final review and alignment of the manuscript before its submission to the journal.

The draft of this article has been read, reviewed, and approved by all authors prior to submission. The order of authorship has been established based on the mutual agreement of all authors. The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the writing or publication of this article. This research did not receive any external funding; hence, there is no external influence affecting the content and scientific substance of this article. All authors adhered to the Copyright Notice set by Berkala Arkeologi.

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