

Preserving the Reje Linge Tomb Site: Safeguarding Islamic and Gayo Cultural Heritage in Central Aceh

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Abstract

The Reje Linge Tomb Site is a significant historical landmark that represents both the ancestral legacy and the cultural identity of the Gayo people. This study aims to identify the cultural remains at the site, examine its current condition, and evaluate preservation efforts based on the Cultural Resource Management (CRM) framework and Indonesian Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The analysis focuses on preservation strategies and the heritage values embodied in the site. The findings reveal that the site comprises the Reje Linge tomb complex, the *Telege Linge* (historic well), and a replica of the traditional *Umah Pitu Ruang* (seven-room Gayo house). A designated site custodian currently manages the site. Preservation initiatives include protection through the construction of protective shelters and boundary fences, development through infrastructure improvements, and utilization through the strengthening of Gayo cultural identity and historical awareness. The study concludes that the sustainable preservation of the Reje Linge Tomb Site requires stronger collaboration and long-term commitment from both the government and the local community to ensure effective management in accordance with established cultural heritage conservation principles.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage Preservation; Authenticity; Islamic Heritage; Cultural Resource Management; Reje Linge Tomb Site.

Abstract

Situs Makam Reje Linge merupakan salah satu situs bersejarah yang merepresentasikan warisan leluhur sekaligus identitas budaya masyarakat Gayo. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi tinggalan budaya yang terdapat di situs tersebut, mengkaji kondisi terkini situs, serta mengevaluasi upaya pelestarian berdasarkan kerangka *Cultural Resource Management* (CRM) dan Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 11 Tahun 2010 tentang Cagar Budaya. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Analisis difokuskan pada strategi pelestarian serta nilai-nilai warisan budaya yang terkandung di dalam situs. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan

bahwa tinggalan budaya di situs ini meliputi kompleks makam Reje Linge, *Telege Linge* (sumur bersejarah), dan replika rumah adat *Umah Pitu Ruang* (rumah adat Gayo tujuh ruang). Pengelolaan situs saat ini dilakukan oleh seorang juru pelihara yang ditunjuk. Upaya pelestarian meliputi perlindungan melalui pembangunan bangunan pelindung dan pagar pembatas, pengembangan melalui peningkatan infrastruktur, serta pemanfaatan melalui penguatan identitas budaya Gayo dan kesadaran sejarah masyarakat. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pelestarian berkelanjutan terhadap Situs Makam Reje Linge memerlukan kolaborasi yang lebih kuat serta komitmen jangka panjang dari pemerintah dan masyarakat setempat guna mewujudkan pengelolaan yang efektif sesuai dengan prinsip-prinsip pelestarian cagar budaya.

Kata Kunci: Pelestarian Cagar Budaya; Autentisitas; Warisan Islam; *Cultural Resource Management*; Situs Makam Reje Linge.

INTRODUCTION

The Kingdom of Linge is one of the oldest political entities in the Aceh highlands, with genealogical ties to the early center of Islam in Peureulak, East Aceh. This kingdom is regarded as the historical and symbolic foundation for the Gayo people in shaping their political and religious identity. Local historical traditions reveal that this kingdom has its roots in the migration of nobility along the Persia-Southeast Asia trade route, which subsequently gave rise to the lineage of local kings in the Takengon region until the emergence of Reje Linge as the supreme ruler of the Gayo region.¹ The exact timing of Islam's arrival in Gayo remains unclear, though some scholars suggest that Islam was introduced to Gayo via Peureulak, East Aceh.² This process demonstrates that Islamization in the interior of Aceh did not occur in isolation but was connected to coastal trade and political networks. Trade relations existed between the King of Rum and the King of Genali, the king of the Linge Kingdom.³ Supporting evidence of the Linge Kingdom's existence—which serves as tangible proof of a socio-political structure that had developed since the early Islamic period—can be observed at the Linge Kingdom site in the form of royal tombs, traditional wells, and the remains of ancient settlements in the Linge region. In

¹ Yusra Habib Abdul Ghani, *Gayo Dan Kerajaan Linge: Dari Kerajaan Menuju Kecamatan, 1025-1945* (Mahara Publishing, 2023), <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=RTTYzwEACAAJ>; Daniela Simeonova-Korudzhieva, "Institutional and Normative Aspects in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage," *Cultural and Historical Heritage: Preservation, Presentation, Digitalization* 9, no. 1 (June 30, 2023): 177–90, <https://doi.org/10.55630/KINJ.2023.090114>.

² A R Hakim, *Bunga Rampai Cerita Rakyat Gayo Seri Iv* (Proyek Penerbitan Buku Sastra Indonesia dan Daerah, 1986); Popi Puspitasari, Sudaryono Achmad Djunaedi, and Heddy Shri Ahimsa Putra, "Ritual and Space Structure: Pilgrimage and Space Use in Historical Urban Kampung Context of Luar Batang (Jakarta, Indonesia)," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 36 (2012): 350–60, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.03.039>.

³ Abdurrahim Dandy, "Sejarah Daerah Dan Suku Gayo," 1979, <https://repository.kemendikdasmen.go.id/27446/>; Peng Liu et al., "Can Tropical Nature Reserves Provide and Protect Cultural Ecosystem Services? A Case Study in Xishuangbanna, China," *Integrative Conservation* 2, no. 3 (September 1, 2023): 119–32, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/inc3.27>; Timika A Anindhita et al., "The Protection of Natural and Cultural Landscapes through Community-Based Tourism: The Case of the Indigenous Kamoro Tribe in West Papua, Indonesia," *Land*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.3390/land13081237>.

the collective memory of the Gayo people, the Linge Kingdom is viewed not only as a political entity of the past but also as a symbol of the community's dignity and cultural legitimacy to this day.⁴ Therefore, the Reje Linge Tomb Site is not merely a burial ground but a historical representation of the formation of the Gayo people's Islamic identity in the highlands of Aceh—one that must be preserved.

As a cultural heritage site of great historical, archaeological, and social value, the Reje Linge Tomb Site requires conservation efforts capable of ensuring the sustainability of the values it embodies. In the context of cultural heritage, conservation is not merely understood as an effort to preserve the physical existence of a site, but also to safeguard the values, meanings, and historical context inherent to that site. Modern conservation concepts emphasize the importance of protecting the authenticity and integrity of cultural heritage as the primary foundation for managing historic sites. Through the Nara Document on Authenticity, UNESCO affirms that the authenticity of cultural heritage relates not only to physical materials but also encompasses the form, function, traditions, techniques, location, environment, and cultural significance inherent to a site.⁵ Thus, effective preservation is not only focused on physical repairs or renovations, but also on maintaining the original character that is the source of a heritage site's cultural significance.

This principle is also in line with Indonesia's cultural heritage preservation policies. Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage Sites stipulates that preservation aims to maintain the authenticity, integrity, and significance of cultural heritage sites so that they can be passed on to future generations. In practice, however, preservation often faces various challenges, particularly when the need for protection, utilization, and tourism development conflicts with efforts to maintain a site's original character. Various preservation programs in Indonesia are still often understood as physical renovation activities focused on aesthetics and visitor comfort, resulting in insufficient attention being paid to the material authenticity, archaeological context, and historical value of the sites. Consequently, many cultural heritage sites have undergone significant physical changes that have compromised their authenticity and integrity.⁶

⁴ Malika Khamidovna Aliskhanova, Aruzha Magamedovna Gelagaeva, and Lalita Rukmanovna Isipova, "Aspects of Preserving Cultural Diversity in Modern Conditions," *SHS Web of Conferences* 164 (2023): 00009, <https://doi.org/10.1051/SHSCONF/202316400009>.

⁵ Ismail Serageldin, Ephim Shluger, and Joan Martin-Brown, *Historic Cities and Sacred Sites: Cultural Roots for Urban Futures* (World Bank Publications, 2001); Aliskhanova, Gelagaeva, and Isipova, "Aspects of Preserving Cultural Diversity in Modern Conditions."

⁶ Amos Setiadi et al., "Prosiding Seminar Nasional Finding the Fifth Element After Water, Earth, Wind, and Fire," May 21, 2015, <https://repository.uajy.ac.id/id/eprint/10836/>; D R Kausar, J Damanik, and D Tanudirjo, "Borobudur as Priority Tourism Destination: How Political Economy Affects World Cultural Heritage Site

Studies on the cultural heritage and history of Islam in Aceh have long encompassed a variety of research themes. Most of this research has focused on the history of Islamization, tombstone typology, epigraphy, trade networks, and the development of Islamic politics in the Aceh region. Tjandrasasmita explains that Islamic tombs and tombstones are important sources for reconstructing the development of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago as well as the cultural ties between Aceh and other regions of the Islamic world.⁷ Meanwhile, Guillot and Kalus demonstrate that the forms, ornamentation, and inscriptions on tombstones can be used to understand the chronology as well as the political and cultural networks of Islam in Sumatra.⁸ These studies make important contributions to understanding the development of Islam in Aceh; however, attention to the management and preservation of these sites remains relatively limited.

In the context of the Gayo people, research has focused primarily on the history of the Linge Kingdom, the cultural identity of the Gayo people, and the oral traditions that have developed in the highlands of Aceh. Dien Madjid identifies the Linge Kingdom as a key element in the history of Aceh and emphasizes the contribution of the Gayo people to the formation of the region's historical identity.⁹ Studies of Gayo culture are closely linked to Islamic teachings, which the community has incorporated through a system of values, customs, and social norms passed down from generation to generation.¹⁰ In addition, research on cultural heritage sites in Aceh shows that historical artifacts play an important role in shaping the collective memory and historical awareness of local communities.¹¹ Other studies highlight the importance of community and heir involvement in the management of cultural heritage to support the sustainability of preservation and the development of religious tourism.¹²

Management and Heritage Preservation,” *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 1366, no. 1 (2024): 12057, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/1366/1/012057>.

⁷ Uka Tjandrasasmita, *Arkeologi Islam Nusantara* (Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia bekerja sama dengan École française d'Extrême-Orient dan Fakultas Adab dan Humaniora UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 2009), <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=Muoj7z9IOI8C>.

⁸ Dick van der Meij, “Les Monuments Funéraires et l’histoire Du Sultanat de Pasai à Sumatra,” *Studia Islamika* 17, no. 1 SE-Book Review (April 30, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v17i1.471>.

⁹ M Dien Madjid and Johan Wahyudi, “The Kingdom of Linge and Early Islamization in Central Aceh,” *TAWARIKH* 12, no. 1 (2020): 1–20; Angga Prasetya, Warto Warto, and Sudiyanto Sudiyanto, “Discourse on Gayo through Historical Narration: Linge Kingdom, Loyang Mendale, and Loyang Ujung Karang,” *International Journal of Social Science And Human Research* 05 (December 23, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijsshr/v5-i12-75>.

¹⁰ Arfiansyah, “Islam Dan Budaya Masyarakat Gayo, Provinsi Aceh: Kajian Sejarah Dan Sosial,” *Jurnal Sosiologi Agama Indonesia (JSAl)* 1, no. 1 SE-Research Articles (March 31, 2020): 1–31, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jsai.v1i1.482>.

¹¹ Aulia Rahman, “Cagar Budaya Dan Memori Kolektif: Membangun Kesadaran Sejarah Masyarakat Lokal Berbasis Peninggalan Cagar Budaya Di Aceh Bagian Timur,” *Mozaiik Humaniora* 20, no. 1 SE-Articles (August 31, 2020): 12–25, <https://doi.org/10.20473/mozaiik.v20i1.15346>.

¹² Marduati Mukhtar et al., “Involvement of Families as Owners of Cultural Heritage Improving Religious Tourism in Banda Aceh: Perspective of Maslahah Theory,” *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 6 (December 3, 2022): 655, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v6i2.12537>.

Nevertheless, these studies still place greater emphasis on historical aspects, cultural identity, collective memory, and the utilization of cultural heritage. Studies that specifically evaluate conservation practices and their impact on a site's authenticity remain very limited. On the other hand, various conservation studies indicate that physical interventions that do not take the archaeological context into account can alter a site's original character and diminish its authentic value. Sulayman and his colleagues, for example, demonstrate that the conservation of historic buildings must consider original materials, architectural character, and historical context in order to preserve cultural heritage value.¹³ The same perspective is also reflected in the Cultural Resource Management (CRM) approach, which emphasizes the importance of research, documentation, planning, and minimal intervention in the management of cultural resources to preserve authenticity. Authenticity is one of the key concepts and a crucial component of CRM.¹⁴

CRM studies in the context of conservation often face a tension between the need for site utilization and the protection of a site's historical value. A study of the dynamics of physical change and spatial structure in historic districts shows that urban development interventions that do not take into account the original spatial organization tend to reduce the level of integration, coherence, and structural value of historic districts within the overall district system.¹⁵ The management of heritage sites is often geared toward tourism, but in developing the use of cultural heritage sites, attention must be paid to the principles of utilization, safety, authenticity, and the preservation of the values they embody.¹⁶ UNESCO emphasizes that conservation must preserve both the physical structure and the authentic value of cultural heritage so that it can be passed down sustainably.¹⁷ Law No. 11 of 2010 in Indonesia also stipulates that conservation efforts must preserve the authenticity, integrity, and cultural significance of a site.¹⁸ However, research

¹³ Mohammed Sulayman et al., "Specific Issues of Conservation and Restoration of Libya Mosques (7th Century – 1815)," *International Journal of Conservation Science* 15 (June 15, 2024): 861–78, <https://doi.org/10.36868/IJCS.2024.02.08>.

¹⁴ F P McManamon and A Hatton, *Cultural Resource Management in Contemporary Society: Perspectives on Managing and Presenting the Past, One World Archaeology* (Routledge, 2000), <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=gRqYWcgtgZsC>.

¹⁵ Yasin Lotfata and Aynaz Lotfata, "Effect of Physical Changes on the Spatial Structure of Historical Area, the Historical District of Urmia City as a Case Study," *Journal of Sustainable Development* 11, no. 4 (July 29, 2018): 174, <https://doi.org/10.5539/jsd.v11n4p174>.

¹⁶ Assyifa Adiyanti, Aditha Agung Prakoso, and Primantoro Nur Vitrianto, "Sinergi Pemangku Kepentingan Dalam Pelestarian Cagar Budaya Melalui Urban Heritage Tourism Di Kota Lama Semarang," *Khasanah Ilmu - Jurnal Pariwisata Dan Budaya* 16, no. 2 (September 30, 2025): 101–7, <https://doi.org/10.31294/KHASANAH.V16I2.11942>.

¹⁷ UNESCO, "World Heritage Centre - Basic Texts of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, Edition July 2025," accessed July 17, 2026, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/basictexts/>.

¹⁸ Kementerian Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata, *Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 11 Tahun 2010 Tentang Cagar Budaya* (Direktorat Jenderal Sejarah dan Purbakala, Kementerian Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata, 2011); Cut Nursaniah et al., "Safeguarding Cultural Heritage Site: Comparative Study For Establishing Conservation Initiatives

specifically evaluating the impact of conservation practices on the authenticity of Islamic heritage sites in rural Aceh—particularly the Reje Linge Tomb Site—remains very limited and thus requires further study.

The issue of preserving the authenticity of cultural heritage sites is particularly relevant in the context of the Reje Linge Burial Site. Based on initial observations, many modern interventions have been carried out within the site area, including the installation of ceramic flooring, the use of cement to join tombstones, the construction of permanent partitions, and the addition of new structures within the site's core area. These interventions were carried out with the aim of beautifying the area and enhancing visitor comfort. However, these physical changes have the potential to alter the original materials, spatial context, and archaeological information contained within the site. If carried out without adequate archaeological assessment and conservation planning, such actions could diminish the authenticity and integrity of the site as an Islamic cultural heritage of significant value to the Gayo community.

Based on this literature review, there is a clear research gap. Studies on Aceh's Islamic heritage have so far been dominated by research on the history of Islamization, tombstone typology, cultural identity, and the collective memory of the community. Meanwhile, research specifically evaluating the impact of modern conservation practices on the authenticity of Islamic heritage sites remains very limited, particularly at sites located in the interior regions of Aceh. To date, there has been no research specifically examining how the conservation practices applied at the Reje Linge Tomb Site affect the site's authenticity and integrity based on the principles of cultural heritage conservation.

Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the conservation practices at the Reje Linge Tomb Site through the lens of cultural heritage conservation and the Cultural Resource Management (CRM) approach. This study is grounded in the argument that conservation efforts focused primarily on physical renovation—without being supported by adequate archaeological studies and conservation planning—have the potential to diminish the site's authenticity. By evaluating the forms of intervention that have been carried out and their impact on the site's authenticity and integrity, this study is expected to contribute to the development of a model for the preservation of Islamic cultural heritage that not only safeguards the physical existence of the site but also sustainably preserves the historical, cultural, and identity values of the Gayo community.

METHODS

The units of analysis for this study encompass the physical elements and conservation management practices at the Reje Linge Tomb Site, which include the tomb complex and tombstones (Aceh types G, C, and H), supporting heritage elements such as Telege Linge and areas associated with Umah Pitu Ruang, as well as various forms of conservation interventions that have been carried out within the site area. The selection of these units of analysis is based on the consideration that all these elements directly reflect cultural heritage management practices while also demonstrating the impact of interventions on the site's authenticity.

The selection of these units of analysis is based on the consideration that these elements directly reflect cultural heritage management practices and their impact on the authenticity and integrity of the sites. From an academic perspective, focusing on these units allows for an evaluation of preservation not only in terms of material aspects but also in terms of the spatial, functional, and symbolic dimensions that influence the cultural significance of the sites in the context of cultural heritage management.¹⁹ This study employs a qualitative design with a descriptive-analytical approach to examine conservation practices, management policies, and forms of physical intervention implemented at the site in relation to the principles of cultural heritage conservation. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to describe empirical conditions in the field while analyzing the policy implications for the sustainability of the site's cultural value.

The descriptive-analytical approach also allows for an evaluation of the alignment between normative policies and actual practices in the field, particularly regarding the protection of a site's authenticity. Methodologically, this approach is relevant for identifying the consequences of conservation policies on the sustainability of a site's cultural value, as well as the impact of modern interventions on the site's archaeological and symbolic context.²⁰ This study employs the Cultural Resource Management (CRM) perspective as the primary analytical framework for assessing conservation practices at the Reje Linge Burial Site. This perspective emphasizes the importance of managing cultural resources through research, minimal intervention, the protection of material authenticity, and stakeholder involvement in the conservation process.

¹⁹ Daud Aris Tanudirjo, "Paradigma Arkeologi Publik Dan Undang-Undang Cagar Budaya 2010," *KRITIS*, October 28, 2022, 49–63, <https://doi.org/10.24246/KRITIS.V0I0P49-63>.

²⁰ John W Creswell and J David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Sage publications, 2017); Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage, Uses of Heritage* (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203602263>.

The use of CRM enables a critical analysis of the extent to which preservation practices at the Reje Linge Tomb Site align with modern conservation principles and national legal provisions, particularly Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage. From an academic perspective, this approach also helps assess whether the conservation interventions carried out still preserve the site's historical context and cultural value or, conversely, distort the authenticity of the cultural heritage.²¹

This study was conducted at the Reje Linge Burial Site, located in Central Aceh Regency, Aceh Province, which was selected for its historical and symbolic significance as part of the early Islamization process in the Gayo Highlands. This site also represents the cultural identity of the Gayo people, which continues to hold spiritual and social value to this day. The research focuses on the physical condition of the site, supporting heritage elements, and various forms of conservation interventions, such as the construction of facilities, tomb restoration, and infrastructure development within the site area. Thus, this study not only examines material elements but also assesses changes in spatial planning and management practices that affect the sustainability of the site's cultural value.

Data collection was conducted through systematic observation, semi-structured interviews, and a documentary review. Observations focused on identifying forms of conservation interventions that could potentially affect the site's authenticity, such as the use of modern materials and changes to the spatial layout. Interviews were used to gather information on conservation decision-making processes, policy implementation, and stakeholders' perceptions regarding the site's function and authenticity. A literature review was conducted to examine regulations, conservation policies, and previous research in order to understand the historical and administrative context of the site's management. This combination of methods provides a strong empirical basis for evaluating the relationship between conservation policies and practices in the field.²²

Data analysis was conducted using an interpretive qualitative approach by organizing the data into main themes, such as forms of conservation interventions, levels of compliance with conservation principles, and their impact on the authenticity and integrity of the sites. The analysis began with a description of the empirical conditions, followed by a classification of intervention types, and concluded with an interpretation of the impact of conservation efforts on the cultural value of the sites. The empirical findings were then analyzed comparatively against

²¹ Tanudirjo, "Paradigma Arkeologi Publik Dan Undang-Undang Cagar Budaya 2010."

²² Frank C Costigliola, "Awkward Dominion," in *American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919–1933* (Cornell University Press, n.d.), 381–82, <https://doi.org/doi:10.7591/9781501721144-016>.

the principles of Cultural Resource Management—including minimal intervention, reversibility, and protection of authenticity—as well as the provisions of national law outlined in Law No. 11 of 2010.²³ This approach makes it possible to identify gaps between normative policies and actual conservation practices in the field, while also assessing their implications for the sustainability of the site's cultural value.²⁴

DISCUSSION

The Reje Linge site is believed to have been part of an early Islamic kingdom in central Aceh during the early stages of Islam's spread. Before the establishment of the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam, the Kingdom of Linge (or Lingga) is said to have existed earlier as a local political entity in the Gayo highlands. In Acehnese historiography, it is noted that the emergence of new kingdoms in eastern and inland Aceh was linked to the weakening of the Kingdom of Perlak following an attack by Sriwijaya in 986 CE. This event spurred the spread of Muslim communities and the formation of new centers of power, such as Samudra/Pase, Isak, Lingga (Central Aceh), Seribu Jadi, and Peunaron.²⁵

The founder of the Lingga Kingdom was Adi Genali, also known as Teungku Kawee Teupat (Kik Betul), who, according to Gayo oral tradition, was a descendant of Meurah Tanjoeng Krueng Jambo Aye, the brother of Sultan Perlak Malik Mahmud Syah Johan Berdaulat (reigned 1012–1059). His successor was Meurah Linggeu, while his other sons established new territories in Aru (Karo) and joined a missionary expedition to the Indra Purba region at the tip of Sumatra.²⁶ In the course of regional political developments, the kingdoms of Aceh were subsequently unified under the rule of Sultan Ali Mughayat Syah in the early 16th century, forming the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam as the leading political power in northern Sumatra.²⁷

²³ Sarah Wurz and Laurajane Smith, "Archaeological Theory and the Politics of Cultural Heritage," *The South African Archaeological Bulletin* 61 (December 1, 2006): 215, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20474935>.

²⁴ Jukka Jokilehto, "Considerations on Authenticity and Integrity in the World Heritage Context," *Edinburgh Architecture Research* 30, no. 1 (2006): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.2218/ear.2006.9747>; Marta Torre, "Values and Heritage Conservation," *Heritage & Society* 6 (November 7, 2013): 155–66, <https://doi.org/10.1179/2159032X13Z.00000000011>.

²⁵ M. Junus Djamil, *Gerak Kebangkitan Aceh: Kumpulan Karya Sejarah* (Bina Biladi Press, 2009), <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=MixvcgAACAAJ>.

²⁶ Agung Wardana and Venansius Haryanto, "Development for Whom? The Politics of Heritage Conservation-Cum-Tourism in Indonesia," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 56, no. 3 (May 27, 2026): 459–76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2025.2561810>.

²⁷ D Lombard and W Arifin, *Kerajaan Aceh: Jaman Sultan Iskandar Muda, 1607-1636* (Balai Pustaka, 1986), <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=D34bAQAAMAAJ>; Suadi Zainal et al., "Actualizing Local Knowledge for Sustainable Ecotourism Development in a Protected Forest Area: Insights from the Gayonese in Aceh Tengah, Indonesia," *Cogent Social Sciences* 10, no. 1 (December 31, 2024): 2302212, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2302212>.

The integration of the Gayo region into Aceh's political structure is believed to have taken place gradually during the 17th century, in tandem with the process of Islamization and the consolidation of central authority over the inland regions.²⁸

During the colonial period, particularly after the Dutch expedition to Aceh (beginning in 1873), the Gayo region was also affected by prolonged armed conflict. The Dutch military expedition in the Gayo highlands culminated in 1904 with repressive actions that some studies have described as a mass massacre. The colonial government subsequently strengthened local administrative structures by appointing and consolidating the authority of regional rulers (kejurun), as well as implementing a tax system and a hierarchical administrative structure. These colonial transformations had a significant impact on the social and religious life of the Gayo people. In Isak, Kejurun Linge shifted the center of power and asserted his authority within the framework of the colonial administration, while in Takengon, a collaboration emerged between nationalists and Islamic modernists to establish new educational institutions that implicitly embodied an anti-colonial spirit. These dynamics contributed to the formation of the Gayo people's socio-political identity up until Indonesia's independence.²⁹

An understanding of the history of the Linge Kingdom and the sociopolitical dynamics of Gayo society serves as a crucial foundation for discussing current conservation practices at the Reje Linge Tomb Site. Historical reconstruction functions not only as a narrative of the past but also as an interpretive framework for understanding the symbolic meaning, collective identity, and cultural values inherent in the site. Without an adequate understanding of the historical context of its formation—from the process of Islamization, through political integration into Aceh Darussalam, to colonial transformation—conservation practices risk becoming trapped in a purely physical approach and neglecting deeper value dimensions. Therefore, the historical discussion in this article is not merely a backdrop but an analytical foundation for evaluating the extent to which modern interventions align with—or deviate from—the principles of conservation based on the authenticity and integrity of cultural heritage. Thus, historical analysis reinforces the argument that site preservation must be conducted in a contextual, research-based manner that is sensitive to the cultural values shaping the identity of the local community.

²⁸ John R. Bowen, "Muslims through Discourse: Religion and Ritual in Gayo Society," *Princeton University Press*, 2020, 1–376, <https://www.torrossa.com/en/resources/an/5641916>; Mohamed Mahmoud, "Muslims through Discourse: Religion and Ritual in Gayo Society," *American Ethnologist* 26 (January 7, 2008): 232–33, <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1999.26.1.232>.

²⁹ Ibrahim Alfian, *Perang Di Jalan Allah: Perang Aceh, 1873-1912* (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1987), <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=Rh8sAAAAMAAJ>.

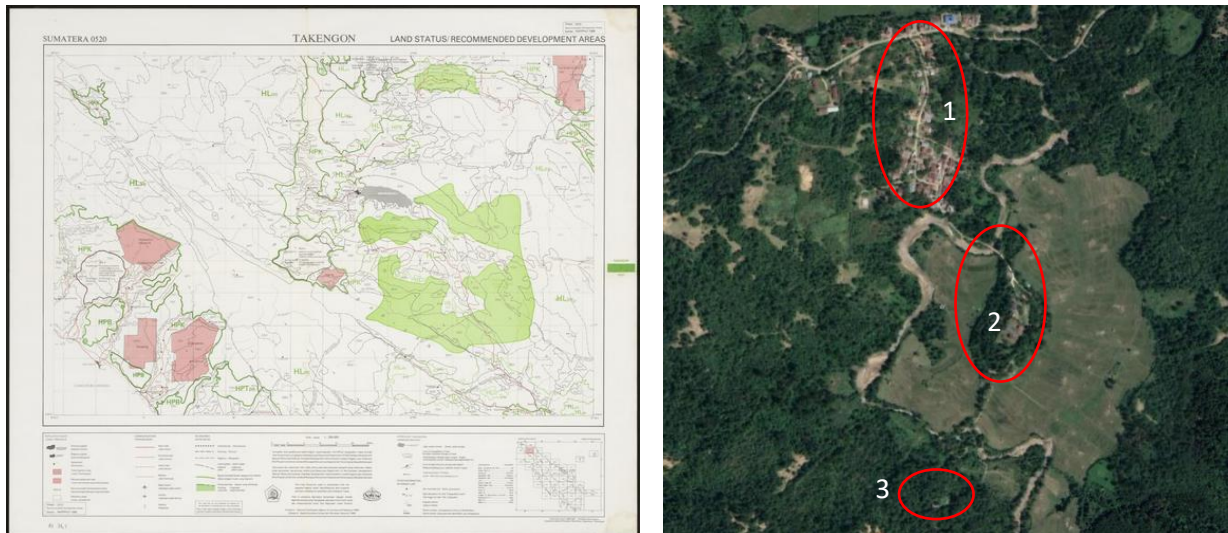


Figure 1: Map of Takengon, D N 38.5, KITLV, Leiden University Libraries Digital Collections (reproduced in 1998) (left). Figure 2 Research locations and cultural heritage sites: (1) Linge Village, (2) the residence of the Reje Linge, (3) the Reje Linge burial complex. (Source: created using Google Earth)

Based on the results of the observations, the Reje Linge Tomb site is of significant archaeological importance because it provides material evidence of the early presence of Islamic power in the Gayo Highlands. The tomb complex, which occupies an area of approximately 16,000 m² and features gravestones of the Aceh type (G, C, and H, referring to Othman Yatim's gravestone codes), indicates the presence of an organized social structure as well as cultural ties with the Islamic centers along the Aceh coast during the 15th–16th centuries CE.³⁰ The presence of Acehnese stone tombstones featuring floral ornamentation, bungong sagoe motifs, spiderweb patterns, and Arabic calligraphy (the Shahada and “la ilaha illallah”) indicates a symbolic integration between the local Gayo identity and the broader Islamic epigraphic traditions of northern Sumatra. Variations in tombstone types and differences in grave protection (royal family mausoleums) also reveal social stratification within the community.

The site's significant archaeological value also lies in its spatial context. The burial complex is situated on a hill (Buntul Pekubun) and is associated with other landscape features such as Umah Pitu Ruang and Telege Linge. The placement of the graves on high ground reflects symbolic and political considerations in the choice of location, a pattern commonly found in traditional centers of power. Furthermore, the presence of a stone well (Telege Linge) with a stacked stone construction, as well as the presumed hill structure believed to be a fortress,

³⁰ Othman bin Mohd. Yatim, *Batu Aceh; a Study of 15th-19th Century Islamic Gravestones in Peninsular Malaysia* (British Library Document Supply Centre, 1989).

provides evidence of spatial organization and a defense system that reinforces the interpretation of the site as a center of power, rather than merely a burial complex.

From an artifactual perspective, the discovery of pottery and the use of oval-shaped natural stones as gravestones indicate the continuity of local traditions that transformed the arrival of Islam. The combination of Aceh-style grave markers with natural stone markers reflects a phase of cultural adaptation, in which Islamic symbols coexist with local burial practices. This is archaeologically significant because it documents a gradual and contextual process of Islamization, rather than an abrupt change. Thus, this site holds the potential to provide stratigraphic and chronological data that can shed light on the dynamics of the Gayo people's socio-religious transformation.

Another key value lies in the integrity of the site's cultural landscape. The replica of Umah Pitu Ruang now standing in Buntul Linge reflects the community's collective memory of the former center of power, even though the structure itself is not an original cultural heritage site. The land and its spatial context retain archaeological value because they represent the continuity of spatial memory. The relationship between the tomb complex, the well, the hill, and the surrounding rice fields reveals a unified historical landscape that must be understood as a cultural landscape, not as separate elements.

Overall, the archaeological significance of the Reje Linge Burial Site lies not only in the typology of its tombstones but also in its spatial context, cultural landscape, social stratification, and material evidence of the Islamization process in inland Aceh. There is significant potential for further research through systematic archaeological surveys, limited excavations, and epigraphic analysis to enrich our understanding of the political and religious history of the Gayo region. Therefore, any conservation efforts regarding this site must comprehensively consider its archaeological dimensions to avoid losing the original context, which serves as the primary source of its historical information.

Preservation Practices at the Reje Linge Tomb Site as Islamic Heritage

Research findings indicate that the Reje Linge burial complex contains royal family tombs featuring Acehnese tombstones of types G, C, and H, as well as other graves marked by natural stone tombstones that are oval-shaped and have not been altered. Some of the tombstones are damaged, with wear on the calligraphic panels, and are overgrown with moss that could potentially damage their surfaces. In addition to the graves, other supporting artifacts at the site include a replica of Reje Linge's house (*umah pitu ruang*) and the Linge well (*telege Linge*). The umah pitu ruang features distinctive Gayo ornaments such as the Mun Berangkat, Pucuk Rebung,

Tapak Sulaiman, and Tali Putar motifs, which symbolize the values of togetherness, kinship, and the social philosophy of the community.³¹

Efforts to ensure the sustainability of the Reje Linge Tomb site demonstrate that conservation practices have been implemented through various forms of physical protection and site management. These efforts include the construction of a shelter to protect the tomb, improvements to access within the site, the installation of a perimeter fence, the restoration of damaged tombstones, and the involvement of caretakers in maintaining the site's cleanliness and security. On a practical level, these actions demonstrate local awareness of the importance of preserving the site as part of the Gayo people's historical identity.

These findings show that preservation is not always synonymous with conservation based on historical value. In some cases, physical protection efforts actually risk erasing important archaeological information inherent in the site's original materials. This is consistent with the view of Tanudirjo et al., who emphasize that preservation must maintain the historical context and original materials, rather than merely preserving the physical existence of the site.³²

Thus, the preservation of the Reje Linge Burial Site highlights the tension between the intention to protect the site and technical practices that have not yet fully taken scientific conservation principles into account. This situation broadens the discussion in cultural heritage preservation studies, suggesting that the success of preservation is not measured solely by the presence of physical protection, but by the extent to which the site's authenticity is maintained. The research findings are presented in the following table:

Type of Practice	Description of Findings	Impact on the Site	
Construction of a tomb shelter	Construction of a wooden and corrugated-iron shelter to protect the royal family's graves.	Protect the grave from rain and heat, but be mindful that a fence could alter the grave's original landscape.	
Repairing a gravestone with cement	A broken gravestone was repaired using modern cement	Reducing the authenticity of the material and the traces of the original craftsmanship	

³¹ Noorca M. Massardi and Indri Ariefiandi, "77 Warisan Budaya Takbenda Indonesia," 2014, <https://repository.kemendikdasmen.go.id/23270/>.

³² Tanudirjo, "Paradigma Arkeologi Publik dan Undang-Undang Cagar Budaya 2010."

Installing ceramic tile flooring	The floor of the tomb was replaced with modern ceramic tiles	Removing the original soil from the grave	
Road Access Improvements	Construction of stairs and access to the site	Increasing traffic but potentially changing the site's landscape	

Research findings indicate that conservation practices at the Reje Linge Burial Site have been implemented through various forms of physical protection and site management. These efforts include the construction of protective shelters over the graves, improvements to access roads leading to the site, the installation of fences, the restoration of damaged tombstones, and the involvement of caretakers in maintaining the site's cleanliness and security. On a practical level, these actions reflect local awareness of the site's importance as part of the Gayo people's historical identity. From a cultural heritage studies perspective, this community involvement can be understood as a form of community-based heritage stewardship, which, according to Laurajane Smith, demonstrates that heritage is not merely a material object but also a social practice that gives meaning to the community that supports it.³³ Thus, the preservation of the Reje Linge Tomb site demonstrates that it remains alive in the collective memory of the community.

However, when analyzed through the framework of Cultural Resource Management (CRM), some physical interventions carried out reveal fundamental issues regarding conservation principles. The use of cement to repair broken gravestones, the installation of ceramic tile flooring in the burial chamber, and the construction of permanent structures without a comprehensive archaeological study are forms of intervention that violate the principle of minimal intervention. In modern conservation practice, interventions should ideally be as minimal as possible, reversible, and should not alter the original character of the material. When modern materials replace or cover original parts, the archaeological information contained in the texture, weathering, and construction techniques may be permanently lost.

Furthermore, the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994) states that the authenticity of cultural heritage is determined not only by its visual form, but also by its materials, craftsmanship,

³³ Laurajane Smith, *Archaeological Theory and the Politics of Cultural Heritage*, *Archaeological Theory and the Politics of Cultural Heritage* (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203307991>.

location, context, and associated cultural significance.³⁴ Based on this principle, physical modifications that alter the original materials or the spatial context of a site have the potential to reduce its level of authenticity. Jokilehto also emphasizes that the integrity of a site lies in the harmony between its material elements and its historical context, so any intervention must take into account the continuity of these values.³⁵ In the context of the Reje Linge Site, changes to the cemetery landscape—including the use of new materials and the leveling of the ground—could disrupt the historical relationship between the gravestones, the topography of the hill, and its traditional layout.

On the other hand, the preservation practices carried out by communities can also be understood as a form of negotiation over the meaning of heritage in a modern context. Smith argues that heritage often serves as a meeting ground between professional authorities and local interpretations, which do not always align. In the case of Reje Linge, the desire to maintain and beautify the site so that it appears well-preserved may conflict with scientific conservation principles that demand caution regarding physical interventions. This tension demonstrates that preservation is not merely a technical issue, but also an epistemological one concerning who determines value and how that value is maintained.

Thus, the preservation of the Reje Linge Burial Site demonstrates that the success of cultural heritage protection is measured not only by the existence of physical safeguards, but also by the extent to which its authenticity and archaeological integrity are maintained. The integration of community participation and a values-based conservation approach is key to ensuring that current interventions do not erase the potential historical information contained within the site. A collaborative approach among local communities, the government, and conservation experts is necessary to ensure that conservation practices align with the Nara Principles of authenticity and the CRM framework, which prioritizes context as a key element in archaeological conservation.

The Authenticity of the Site and the Impact of Modern Interventions on Islamic Heritage

Authenticity is a key issue in the preservation of Islamic burial sites, as their spiritual, symbolic, and historical value is closely tied to their original physical condition and spatial layout. This study found that the greatest challenges to the authenticity of the Reje Linge Burial Site stem from the use of modern materials and changes to the landscape of the burial area.

³⁴ ICOMOS, “The Nara Document on Authenticity (1994),” 1994.

³⁵ Jokilehto, “Considerations on Authenticity and Integrity in the World Heritage Context.”

Form of Intervention	Material Impact	Spatial and Symbolic Impact
Joining gravestones with cement	Original material covered by modern materials	Traces of historical craftsmanship lost
Installation of ceramics	Original surface of the grave covered	Grave landscape altered
New partitions and structures	Modern structures entering the core zone	Archaeological context disrupted

The use of white cement to repair cracks in tombstones alters the character of the original material and obscures traces of past craftsmanship. Furthermore, the installation of ceramic tile flooring and permanent structures around the graves alters the visual context and spatial structure of the cemetery complex. This situation aligns with Rahardjo's finding that many heritage sites have been transformed into spaces of modern reconstruction that prioritize aesthetics and neatness over historical accuracy.³⁶

In the context of Islamic heritage, these changes also affect the symbolic dimension of the site. The tradition of Islamic burial sites in Aceh generally emphasizes simplicity and harmony with the surrounding environment. The addition of modern architectural elements, however, creates a new visual experience that no longer reflects traditional burial practices. Thus, the loss of authenticity occurs not only on a material level, but also on the level of symbolic meaning and the experience of religious space.

These findings expand upon previous studies by demonstrating that the degradation of authenticity at Islamic sites is not always caused by natural deterioration or destruction, but also by preservation practices that are not grounded in scientific research and well-thought-out conservation planning. Therefore, an analysis using the CRM perspective shows that a number of preservation measures actually result in physical interventions that have the potential to diminish the site's authenticity. The use of cement to repair broken tombstones, the installation of ceramic tile flooring inside tomb chambers, and the construction of permanent structures without comprehensive archaeological studies are forms of intervention that go beyond the principle of minimal conservation.

³⁶ Supratikno Rahardjo, "Beberapa Permasalahan Pelestarian Kawasan Cagar Budaya Dan Strategi Solusinya," *Jurnal Konservasi Cagar Budaya* 7, no. 2 (2013): 4–17, <https://doi.org/10.33374/jurnalkonservasicagarbudaya.v7i2.109>.

Evaluation of Conservation Practices from the Perspective of Cultural Resource Management

CRM Principles	Site Conditions	Key Findings
Minimal intervention	Numerous permanent interventions	Principles not yet optimally implemented
Site zoning	Original surface of the burial site covered	Landscape of the burial site altered
New partitions and structures	Modern structures encroaching on the zone core	Modern structures encroaching on the core zone

The application of the Cultural Resource Management (CRM) framework in this study allows for a more systematic evaluation of the decision-making process regarding the preservation of the Reje Linge Burial Site. CRM requires a comprehensive inventory, an archaeological assessment before any intervention, and the development of a research-based management plan. Within this framework, conservation is understood as a knowledge-based process, in which every technical decision must have a clear scientific justification. In the context of Reje Linge, this approach reveals that the main issue lies not in a lack of attention to the site, but rather in the weak integration between archaeological knowledge and technical practices in the field.

The research findings indicate that some interventions were carried out without adequate archaeological studies or a clear zoning system, even though these principles are in line with the mandate of Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage. The absence of delineated core and buffer zones has opened the door for modern development to encroach upon areas that should be strictly protected. In fact, the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994) emphasizes that various attributes, including materials, design, location, context, and cultural significance, determine the authenticity of a cultural heritage site. When original materials are replaced or covered by modern materials such as concrete and ceramic tiles, these attributes of authenticity are at risk of being degraded. The integrity of cultural heritage concerns not only physical completeness but also the preservation of the historical relationships between its material elements and the surrounding landscape.³⁷ In this case, changes to the structure and landscape of the burial site risk disrupting the historical continuity that forms the basis of its archaeological interpretation.

³⁷ ICOMOS, "The Nara Document on Authenticity (1994)."

The phenomenon at Reje Linge also reflects what Laurajane Smith refers to as “Authorized Heritage Discourse” (AHD)—that is, the tendency to view cultural heritage through the lens of a particular authority that emphasizes monumental and visual aesthetic aspects. In many cases, a development approach focused on neatness and visual representation often takes precedence over a conservation approach grounded in value and context. Heritage is then “staged” to look beautiful and well-maintained, even though such actions may diminish its authenticity. In this context, conservation practices in Reje Linge reveal a tension between the local interpretation of the site as a sacred space that needs to be “beautified” and the principles of scientific conservation that demand minimal intervention.

Interestingly, challenges to the authenticity of the site do not stem solely from administrative negligence, but rather from the community’s good intentions in preserving their ancestors’ graves. However, interventions lacking a technical foundation and archaeological analysis can result in the loss of context and irreplaceable scientific information. Meanwhile, the Nara Principles emphasize that every intervention must respect the cultural values passed down across generations, including both their material and intangible dimensions.³⁸ Thus, the issue of conservation in Reje Linge has shifted from a lack of attention to a matter of aligning intentions, policies, and value-based conservation principles.

Conceptually, this study asserts that the success of preservation cannot be measured solely by the presence of physical protection, but by the extent to which authenticity and archaeological integrity are maintained. The integration of community participation and scientific conservation principles is key to avoiding counterproductive preservation practices. Drawing on the work of Nara, Jokilehto, Smith, and Tanudirjo, this study demonstrates that effective preservation must strike a balance between local cultural values and professional conservation standards, ensuring that sites remain alive in the collective memory without losing their historical substance.

The research findings indicate that some interventions at the site were carried out without adequate archaeological studies or a clear zoning system, even though these are required under Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage.³⁹ The absence of core zone restrictions has allowed modern development to encroach on areas that should be strictly protected.

This situation reflects a broader phenomenon in the management of cultural heritage in Indonesia, where development-oriented approaches often take precedence over conservation strategies based on historical value. This study provides empirical evidence of the gap between

³⁸ ICOMOS, “The Nara Document on Authenticity (1994).”

³⁹ Kementerian Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata, *Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 11 Tahun 2010 Tentang Cagar Budaya*.

normative policies and their implementation on the ground. Interestingly, challenges to a site's authenticity are not always caused by negligence, but rather by the community's well-intentioned efforts to maintain the graves. However, without a technical and scientific foundation, these actions actually result in interventions that undermine the site's historical value. This finding shifts the conservation discussion from the issue of a lack of attention to the issue of misdirected interventions.

Community-Based Conservation and the Dynamics of Local Management

This study also highlights the importance of community involvement in site management through the roles of caretakers and residents. Routine maintenance—such as cleaning the area, mowing the grass, and monitoring visitors—is carried out voluntarily, often using personal funds.

However, the study's findings indicate that community-based conservation requires technical and institutional support to prevent misguided conservation practices. Without professional guidance, restoration practices—such as repairing gravestones with cement—are viewed by the community as appropriate solutions. Community involvement in preservation is crucial, but it must be accompanied by professional communication and guidance to ensure the site's authenticity is maintained. Therefore, community-based preservation requires ongoing dialogue among local communities, cultural heritage experts, and the government.⁴⁰

Implications of the Findings for Studies on the Preservation of Islamic Heritage

By integrating field findings, the CRM theory, and the national legal framework, this study demonstrates that the authenticity of Islamic heritage sites is a dynamic concept influenced by contemporary conservation practices. The Reje Linge Tomb site illustrates how conservation challenges in remote areas often arise due to limited technical resources and the community's strong attachment to the site.

This study shows that the degradation of authenticity is often not the result of intentional destruction, but rather the result of preservation strategies that emphasize function and aesthetics over historical integrity. Thus, this research makes an important contribution to the study of Islamic cultural heritage preservation in Indonesia, particularly in the context of community-based site management in remote areas.

⁴⁰ Sally M Farid, "Tourism Management in World Heritage Sites and Its Impact on Economic Development in Mali and Ethiopia," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 211 (2015): 595–604, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.11.078>.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that conservation practices at the Reje Linge Burial Site create a tension between protection efforts and intervention. Modern interventions—such as securing tombstones with cement, installing ceramic flooring, and constructing a canopy—alter the site’s material authenticity and spatial layout. These findings indicate that without archaeologically informed planning, conservation efforts can lead to the loss of historical value. Repairs using modern materials obscure the original carving techniques and traces of historical craftsmanship. Spatial changes, such as the installation of ceramic tiles and concrete partitions, disrupt the tomb’s original context. The loss of authenticity is not only material but also symbolic, altering the public’s perception of the site. Thus, the preservation of Islamic heritage at Reje Linge must take into account both material integrity and cultural value.

This paper makes an important contribution to the study of Islamic cultural heritage preservation in the interior of Aceh. These findings indicate that preservation must be viewed from material, spatial, and symbolic perspectives. This research emphasizes that community involvement must be balanced with technical guidance. This analysis enriches the literature on the preservation of Islamic heritage with an empirical study of the impact of modern interventions. These findings challenge the notion that preservation is merely a physical matter; it is also a matter of meaning. Thus, this research reinforces the importance of integrating community-based preservation with technical approaches to maintain the authenticity of Islamic heritage.

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