

REMPEG BALUNG BUTO DANCE: A MYTH-BASED CREATION AS A REPRESENTATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL IDENTITY IN MANYAREJO, SANGIRAN

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Paper received: 20-7-2025

revised: 06-11-2025

accepted: 30-11-2025

Abstract: *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance is an artistic creation inspired by the *balung buto* myth, a local narrative rooted in the collective memory of the Manyarejo community in Sangiran. More than a form of aesthetic expression, this dance serves as a cultural preservation strategy that reflects archaeological values through an artistic approach. This study aims to examine how local myth can be transformed into an artistic creation that reinforces archaeological identity and enhances collective awareness of heritage sites. The research employs an artistic research methodology with an ethnocoreological approach. Data were collected through participant observation and in-depth interviews with cultural practitioners and local residents. The findings show that *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance effectively integrates myth and archaeological context into a contextual, communicative, and participatory performance. The myth, intertwined with the geographical landscape and collective memory, shapes the dance's dramatic and symbolic structure. This performance functions as both a medium for cultural value dissemination and a representation of archaeological identity, strengthening the community's emotional connection to the Sangiran heritage site in a participatory and contextual manner.

Keywords: *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance, local myth, artistic creation, archaeological identity

Abstrak: Tari *Rempeg Balung Buto* merupakan sebuah kreasi seni yang terinspirasi dari mitos *balung buto*, yakni narasi lokal yang hidup di tengah masyarakat Manyarejo, Sangiran. Lebih dari sekadar ekspresi estetis, tarian ini dirancang sebagai strategi pelestarian budaya yang merefleksikan nilai-nilai arkeologis melalui pendekatan artistik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana mitos lokal dapat diolah menjadi karya seni yang memperkuat identitas arkeologis sekaligus meningkatkan kesadaran kolektif masyarakat terhadap situs purbakala. Metode yang digunakan adalah *artistic research* dengan pendekatan etnokoreologi. Data diperoleh melalui observasi partisipasi dan wawancara mendalam dengan pelaku budaya dan masyarakat setempat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tari *Rempeg Balung Buto* berhasil mengintegrasikan mitos dan konteks arkeologis ke dalam bentuk pertunjukan yang kontekstual, komunikatif dan partisipatif. Mitos yang berkelindan dengan lanskap geografis dan ingatan kolektif masyarakat membentuk struktur dramatik dan simbolik tari. Tarian ini menjadi media diseminasi nilai budaya dan representasi identitas arkeologis, yang memperkuat hubungan emosional masyarakat terhadap warisan budaya Sangiran secara partisipatif dan kontekstual.

Kata kunci: Tari *Rempeg Balung Buto*, mitos lokal, kreasi seni, identitas arkeologis

1. Introduction

Sangiran is one of the world's most important paleoanthropological sites, located in Central Java. Spanning the Sragen and Karanganyar regencies, it was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1996 due to its rich findings of early human fossils and other prehistoric

artifacts (Arofah & Suparno, 2019; Hermanto, 2024). Within this area, Manyarejo Village plays a key role as a major discovery site for hominin fossils. This is reflected in the presence of the Sangiran Archaeological Museum Cluster in Manyarejo, which serves as a center for education and the conservation of archaeological findings (Legowo et al., 2024).

The discovery of *Homo erectus* fossils, stone artifacts, and other biological remains in Manyarejo Village highlights its significance not only geographically but also scientifically. The presence of the Manyarejo Cluster of the Sangiran Archaeological Museum reinforces the scientific value of these findings and affirms the symbolic and historical relationship between the local community and the broader narrative of human evolution. One symbolic association is reflected in the local myth of *balung buto*. Before the term “fossil” was introduced by foreign researchers in the 1930s, the people of Manyarejo referred to such findings as *balung buto*, a Javanese term meaning “giant bones.” This term conveys not only the physical characteristics of the fossils but also a mythological dimension embedded in the community’s collective memory. To this day, the *balung buto* myth remains known among the older generations in the Sangiran area, who continue to pass down these origin stories as part of their cultural interpretation of the archaeological heritage in their environment (Handini, 2023; Sulistyanto, 2009). Thus, Manyarejo functions as a dialectical space where scientific knowledge and local tradition mutually reinforce one another in shaping a distinct cultural identity.

The *balung buto* myth, believed by communities in the Sangiran area particularly in Manyarejo Village is closely linked to the presence of early humans in the region. This belief reflects a distinct local characteristic and reveals how the community responds to archaeological phenomena within their environment. The emergence of the myth represents a cultural interpretation of the large bone remains that were later identified as early human fossils. With Sangiran’s designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the *balung buto* myth has acquired renewed significance as part of a collective narrative aligned with scientific evidence of *Homo erectus*. As such, the myth serves as a cultural resource that not only represents traditional heritage but also functions as a medium for strengthening local identity and enriching preservation and dissemination strategies for archaeological values through culturally grounded approaches.

The dissemination of archaeological values reflected in culturally based heritage sites holds a vital position as a strategic step in conserving legacies that represent traces of human evolution. Ruano and Soutelo (2024) emphasize that the dissemination of heritage sites should go beyond mere promotion; it must also raise social awareness of their historical and cultural significance. They further argue that effective dissemination must consider the site’s intrinsic value as an expression of cultural identity. In line with this, Aslan and Can (2022) highlight the importance of culturally grounded dissemination in preserving traditional rural archaeological settlements such as Yoran/Didyma. Similarly, Kalla (2022) and Jameson (2020) stress that this approach can foster the conservation and safeguarding of archaeological heritage as essential evidence within the broader narrative of human evolution. Thus, structured and culturally based dissemination contributes not only to the physical preservation of sites but also to the reinforcement of their social, historical, and educational significance.

Artistic creations rooted in heritage sites and their surrounding cultural contexts play a crucial role in supporting the conservation of culturally based sites. This approach serves as both an aesthetic appreciation and an interpretive medium that strengthens emotional and intellectual connections between communities and cultural sites. Morin (1999) asserts that contextual art can aid conservation by fostering closer relationships between people and heritage sites. Similarly, Jacobson, McDuff, and Monroe (2007) argue that art can promote conservation by cultivating emotional bonds and introducing new perspectives that complement scientific approaches. Thus, the integration of artistic expression into preservation strategies enables heritage sites to be not only physically maintained but also revitalized

through relevant and contextual cultural narratives.

In line with the importance of culturally based dissemination of archaeological values, the *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance was developed, inspired by the local myth of *balung buto* a narrative deeply rooted in the living traditions of the Manyarejo community in Sangiran. This myth, grounded in the community's lived experience with the surrounding archaeological landscape, positions the dance not merely as an aesthetic representation, but as part of a cultural conservation strategy that artistically reflects the traces of human evolution. By emphasizing the intrinsic value of the site as an expression of cultural identity, *Rempeg Balung Buto* becomes a relevant and effective medium for dissemination. In this context, artistic creations rooted in site-specific and local narratives are expected to strengthen emotional and cognitive connections between the community and its cultural heritage. Therefore, *Rempeg Balung Buto* functions not only as a form of cultural expression but also as a preservation instrument that conveys archaeological values through a contextual, communicative, and participatory artistic language.

This article aims to describe how artistic creations based on local myths can contribute to the construction of archaeological identity and the reinforcement of local wisdom within communities. In this context, the *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance was developed as an artistic exploration that integrates archaeological values with the *balung buto* myth, which continues to live within the Manyarejo community in Sangiran, a community located at a significant archaeological site. Through this approach, art functions not only as a medium of cultural expression but also as a preservation strategy that strengthens the relationship between the community and its heritage site. Anom et al. (2020) state that local mythology, when transformed into artistic products, can reinforce cultural identity and build meaningful connections among communities, myths, and heritage sites. Similarly, Bakeer (2023) emphasizes that dances rooted in mythological narratives have the potential to forge strong ties with a community's collective identity. Thus, myth-based artistic works such as *Rempeg Balung Buto* can be positioned as participatory instruments in the preservation of cultural sites, while also serving as a medium to enhance collective awareness of the local community's archaeological identity.

The existence of the archaeological site in Manyarejo is closely intertwined with the social life and belief systems of the local community. This connection is reflected in the *balung buto* myth, which functions as a collective symbol and a representation of the emotional bond between the community and the archaeological site. From an anthropological perspective, the myth serves as a symbolic mechanism that preserves the continuity of cultural values while reinforcing a sense of belonging to ancestral heritage. Thus, the archaeological site functions not merely as a historical relic but as a living cultural artifact that actively contributes to the formation of the community's social identity. This interrelation demonstrates how spiritual, mythological, and historical values are interwoven in the construction of meanings that shape the collective identity of the Manyarejo community.

The cultural potential embedded in this relationship can be further explored through the development of a locality-based dance work as an effective strategy to revitalize the meaning of the *balung buto* myth amid the dynamics of modern life. Performing arts, characterized by their attractive, communicative, and participatory nature, have the capacity to rearticulate traditional narratives into expressive forms that resonate with younger generations. Within this framework, performing arts serve not merely as a medium of entertainment but as a vehicle for the transmission of cultural values, memory, and identity. As stated by Fabryka-Protska et al. (2024), cultural identity manifested through performance art constitutes a framework for representing values and meanings that emerge through the interaction between cultural archetypes and social contexts. Therefore, community engagement in recontextualizing the archaeological site through performance art not only

strengthens the continuity of cultural heritage but also fosters a reflective and adaptive sense of cultural identity among the younger generation.

2. Method

This study is an example of artistic research, a form of inquiry rooted in creative practice as its primary method for generating knowledge. As an artistic investigation, the main focus lies in the process of artistic creation, which is not only aesthetic in nature but also serves as an interpretive and reflective medium for engaging with its surrounding cultural context. In this case, the chosen approach is ethnocoreology, which examines dance as a cultural product by considering its historical, social, and symbolic dimensions. The use of artistic research aligns with the study's objective to explore how artistic creation can contribute to the preservation of cultural sites that hold archaeological significance and local wisdom, particularly in the Sangiran area, specifically in Manyarejo. As Thompson (2019) explains, artistic research allows artistic practice to become an integral part of scientific inquiry, for example through cultural documentation using creative media such as virtual reality panorama photography. Within this framework, artistic exploration is carried out on the local *balung buto* myth as the foundation for dance creation. The ethnocoreological approach reinforces the understanding that in creating myth-based art, it is essential to ensure harmony between the resulting artistic form and the cultural context, values, and systems of meaning upheld by the community that owns the myth.

The main data sources in this study include participant observation, in which the researcher was actively involved in the creative process of the *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance. This involvement encompassed direct participation in dance workshops, dialogues with local artists and community members, and the exploration of mythological elements associated with the Sangiran archaeological site, particularly in the Manyarejo area. Participant observation enabled the researcher to not only document but also experience firsthand the social, symbolic, and emotional dynamics embedded in the cultural practice. Additional data were obtained through in-depth interviews with local community leaders. All sources were then reflectively analyzed using artistic logic and an ethnocoreological perspective to shape a dance form that embodies the mythological, archaeological, and local values of the Manyarejo community. Through this approach, the study produces not only an artistic work but also a deeper understanding of how art can serve as a medium for cultural preservation and contextual expression.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The *Balung Buto* Myth as a Conceptual Basis for Dance Creation

The *balung buto* myth holds a strong connection with the community of Manyarejo, Sangiran. This aligns with Irawan's statement (interview, July 13, 2022), who noted that the collective memory of the Manyarejo people regarding the myth remains deeply rooted. A similar view was expressed by Maimo (interview, June 16, 2022), who emphasized that the *balung buto* myth is an inseparable part of local life. Furthermore, Sumadi (interview, July 21, 2022) explained that belief in the myth is not limited to the people of Manyarejo, but also extends to neighboring areas within the Sangiran archaeological zone, such as Grogolan, Brangkal, Krikilan, Ngebung, Bukuran, Tegalombo, and Pungsari. This indicates that the *balung buto* myth is widely circulated and deeply embedded in the cultural memory of Manyarejo and its surrounding communities.

The *balung buto* myth, preserved in the collective memory of the Manyarejo community and its surrounding areas, represents a cultural response to the discovery of large skeletal remains now recognized as fossils scattered across the Sangiran archaeological site. The term, which literally means "giant bones" (*balung* meaning bone and *buto* referring to a

giant being in Javanese cosmology), reflects how the local community constructed an understanding of unfamiliar geological phenomena that were difficult to explain rationally in everyday life. As a cosmological narrative, *balung buto* not only embodies a form of folkloric heritage, but also functions as a symbolic medium for channeling collective unease, as well as an unwritten social norm that shapes the community's behavior and worldview toward natural artifacts in their environment (Handini, 2023; Saputra et al., 2021). Thus, the myth creates a symbolic space in which people can coexist with the archaeological and paleontological landscape they inhabit, affirming the role of myth as an interpretive and articulative mechanism within local culture.

The *balung buto* myth, functioning as an interpretive and articulative mechanism in response to unfamiliar geological phenomena, has also shaped the magical beliefs surrounding fossils found in the Sangiran area. Sulistyanto (2009) notes that belief in the mystical powers of fossils emerged as a form of cultural adaptation to the natural environment. These fossils are believed to possess healing properties for various ailments, such as digestive disorders, fevers, or wounds caused by venomous animal bites. Beyond their therapeutic function, *balung buto* is also regarded as having protective powers as amulets to ward off evil spirits or to enhance physical resilience (Maimo, interview, June 16, 2022). This belief illustrates how the community perceives fossils not merely as physical objects, but as symbolic entities imbued with spiritual power. In this way, the existence of fossils, as interpreted through the *balung buto* myth, reflects the sacralization of natural artifacts within the framework of local cosmology, demonstrating that such fossils acquire special meaning within the cultural structure of the Manyarejo community in Sangiran.

The origin of the *balung buto* myth is closely linked to local folklore about a giant figure named Tegopati, who, in the oral tradition of the Sangiran community, is known as an invincible giant king defeated only with the help of the gods. Paimin (interview, August 7, 2022) stated that the *balung buto* myth is rooted in the tale of a great battle between Tegopati and Raden Bandung along with his human army, a narrative widely used to explain the presence of large bones in the area. This account aligns with Maimo's testimony (interview, June 16, 2022), who explained that Tegopati and his troops, whose bodies were destroyed in battle, were believed to have transformed into the fossils scattered across the hills and riverbanks around Sangiran. This belief not only forms the narrative structure of the myth but also influences the community's attitudes toward fossils. Sulistyanto (2009) noted that people refrain from casually touching or relocating fossils, except for medicinal purposes. The religious and magical values embedded in fossils through the *balung buto* myth have shaped a unique ecological-cultural relationship between humans and the Sangiran landscape. Thus, *balung buto* has become part of a meaning system that mediates the community's understanding of both ancient heritage and their natural environment.

The deep connection between the *balung buto* myth and the lives of the Sangiran community, including the Manyarejo area, is reflected not only through oral traditions but also through toponyms rooted in the myth's narrative structure. Sulistyanto (2009) noted that Tegopati, the giant king who opposed Raden Bandung, is said to have established his kingdom in Glagahombo. After his tragic death his stomach tore open and his body hurled far away Tegopati's corpse was believed to have fallen in an area now known as Bapang. Meanwhile, his army of giants was said to have drowned due to a dam built by Raden Bandung's forces, and their blood flooded the area of Saren. These three place names Glagahombo, Bapang, and Saren are still in use today around the Sangiran archaeological site, illustrating how the *balung buto* myth has forged a strong symbolic relationship between geographical landscape, cultural heritage, and the collective identity of the local community.

The *balung buto* myth deeply intertwined with the geographical landscape, cultural heritage, and collective identity of the Sangiran community, particularly in Manyarejo holds

significant potential as a foundation for dance creation. The community's close relationship with the myth makes it an authentic source of inspiration for artistic exploration, materialized through dance expression. In this context, the *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance was developed as an artistic representation that reinterprets the mythologized fossil narrative through the medium of performance. The myth serves not only as a thematic source of inspiration but also as a conceptual foundation for constructing the dance's dramatic and symbolic structure. The core of this approach lies in how fossils imbued with cultural meaning through myth are re-presented in performative form as part of a cultural preservation strategy. Thus, the *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance contributes to the construction of the community's archaeological identity and reinforces the values of local wisdom embedded in the Sangiran archaeological landscape.

3.2. *Rempeg Balung Buto* Dance: Artistic Innovation Inspired by Myth

Rempeg Balung Buto is a dance that represents a horde of giants from the *balung buto* mythological narrative, which is closely linked to the discovery of early human fossils in the Sangiran area. The *balung buto* myth, preserved in the community's collective memory and associated with large skeletal remains, serves as the primary source for the creation of this dance. The title *Rempeg Balung Buto* explicitly emphasizes the visual and symbolic aspects of the myth, particularly the giant figures that serve as central characters in the narrative. Although the myth tells of a battle between Tegopati and his giant army against Raden Bandung and his human forces, the dance does not aim to reconstruct the dramatic structure or storyline of the myth in a narrative form. Instead, its primary focus lies in visualizing the collective strength and spirit of the giants as representations of the myth's central figures. Thus, *Rempeg Balung Buto* emphasizes the character and symbolism of the giants figures explicitly referenced in the myth's name and directly associated with the presence of large fossils in the Sangiran region rather than offering a literal or complete narrative depiction of the myth itself.

The word *rempeg* in the title *Rempeg Balung Buto* refers to a group dance form that emphasizes togetherness and unity. The choreography is structured using a *rampak* presentation model, a type of group choreography that prioritizes synchronization and harmonious movement among dancers. This presentation pattern not only creates a rhythmic and energetic visual dynamic but also reflects the spirit of collectivity that is commonly characteristic of folk dance traditions. In the context of *Rempeg Balung Buto*, the *rampak* format serves as a primary medium for expressing communal values while simultaneously animating the giant characters featured in the *balung buto* myth. The emphasis on synchronized movement reinforces the representation of the giants' collective spirit and constructs a symbolic narrative that resonates with the communal nature of the society that upholds the myth.

The movement sequences in *Rempeg Balung Buto* are designed to represent the form and motion of fossils as if they were alive, an imaginative embodiment of the community's perception of the "*balung buto*" or giant bones that serve as the source of the myth. Movement exploration draws upon the basic patterns of the *gagah* style in Surakarta court dance, such as the *tanjak* legs position and specific arms gestures, to construct fuller and more expansive body lines, thereby evoking a visual impression of giants as depicted in mythological narratives. These movements are composed in a simple and structured manner, enabling participation across age groups from children and adolescents to adults and the elderly with the aim of fostering an inclusive space for community involvement. This simplicity also enhances the communicative function of the dance, allowing symbolic messages to be conveyed in a direct, culturally resonant, and easily comprehensible form.

The musical elements in *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance are deliberately designed to

enhance the dramatic atmosphere while supporting the structural dynamics of the choreography. The primary rhythmic instruments employed are the drum and *bendhe*, which not only provide a strong, driving beat but also serve as auditory cues that signal transitions in movement. As melodic instruments, a bamboo-based ensemble known as *gambus* is utilized, consisting of five bamboo tubes: two long tubes played by blowing and three shorter ones played using a plucking technique. Beyond instrumentation, the musical structure of the dance also incorporates *tembang* (traditional Javanese chants) as an essential component of its dramaturgy. The *Balung Buto* chant is performed when the dancers are in a kneeling (*jengkeng*) position, accompanied by *ulap-ulap tawing* hand gestures and a face-to-face line formation. In contrast, the *Buto-Buto Galak* chant is featured during more dynamic sections of the performance, marked by the *laku telu engklek* movement pattern and circular formations. In Javanese tradition, *Buto-Buto Galak* is often used to depict fierce and intimidating giant figures, making its use in the dance particularly appropriate for embodying the mythical character of the giant in the *balung buto* legend. The integration of musical instruments and *tembang* not only deepens character representation within the dance but also transforms the performance into a space of collective expression, rich in local nuance and symbolic meaning.



Fig. 1. The presentation style of *Rempeg Balung Buto* as a form of myth-based artistic creation (Source: Hartanto, 2022)

Makeup in the *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance functions as a key visual element that reinforces the representation of the mythological character *balung buto*. Some versions of the performance adopt facial makeup styles from *wayang orang* giants, including the use of *cangkeman*, a distinctive facial pattern that enhances a fierce expression. In addition to makeup, the performance employs masks to represent the character. These masks depict fearsome giant figures, aligning with the mythological theme. The use of masks not only strengthens characterization but also establishes a symbolic boundary between the dancer's personal identity and the fictional role. As a result, the mask enables a complete transformation of the dancer into a mythical figure rooted in the community's collective imagination.



Fig. 2. Makeup and costume design of the *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance
(Source: Hartanto, 2022)

The costume in the *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance is crafted from dried banana fronds, split lengthwise and strung together to create a rough texture and natural aesthetic that reinforces the performance's theme. This material is chosen for its earthy brown color and organic appearance, aligning with the mythological giant figure in the *balung buto* narrative. The costume consists of a skirt-like lower part tied around the waist and an upper part made of frond strands worn like a necklace. This design evokes a primitive and archaic impression, symbolically reflecting the giant figure associated with prehistoric human fossil discoveries in Sangiran. Thus, the costume functions not only as a visual complement but also as a representational medium that embodies the myth being portrayed.



Fig 3. The presentation style of the *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance featuring the use of masks
(Source: Hartanto, 2022)

The *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance is a performative creation deeply rooted in the *balung buto* myth, a narrative inspired by the discovery of prehistoric human fossils in the Sangiran area. However, the dance does not aim to reconstruct the myth narratively; instead, it focuses

on visualizing the giant figure as an imaginative symbol embedded in the community's collective memory. Through synchronized group movements that emphasize unity and collective spirit, the dance embodies the communal power of the mythological figure within an inclusive folk dance format. As a myth-based work, it not only visualizes a local narrative but also revitalizes cultural values through artistic expression grounded in shared memory.

3.3. *Rempeg Balung Buto* Dance and the Representation of Archaeological Identity

The *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance is a myth-based work rooted in the *balung buto* legend, which developed within the community of Manyarejo, Sangiran, an area renowned as a significant archaeological site. This myth is not merely a traditional narrative but is closely tied to the geographical landscape, reflecting an integral connection between folklore, physical space, and the community's collective identity. In this context, the dance holds strong potential as a representation of the archaeological identity of the Manyarejo community, as it unites narrative and spatial elements shaped by the historical relationship between humans and the ancient environment.

The interconnection between myth and geographical landscape reflects a symbolic relationship between space and cultural narrative, which can serve as a form of archaeological identity. Slapšak and Slapšak (2022) illustrate how the people of Rodik in Slovenia construct a meaningful "spatial matrix" through oral traditions, local rules, and taboos, demonstrating how myth structures space. Similarly, Nash (2018) argues that the link between landscape and local stories strengthens emotional attachment to place. In the same vein, Echarri-Iribarren and Echarri-Iribarren (2021) found that Basque myths imbue the environment with spiritual and cognitive value, fostering pro-environmental behavior and reinforcing local identity. Within this context, the *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance rooted in a myth tied to geographical conditions and an archaeological site emerges as a representation of archaeological identity, reflecting the Manyarejo community's deep connection to the landscape and the historical values they inherit.



Fig 4. The *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance reflects the close relationship between cultural expression, geographical landscape, and archaeological sites
(Source: Hartanto, 2022)

Archaeological identity in the *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance is manifested through the visual elements presented in each performance. The dance creates an expressive unity of movement, music, makeup, costume design, and dramatic structure. In particular, the movement patterns and costume design reflect a strong connection to the Sangiran landscape, known as a prehistoric human site. The choreography expresses the collective spirit derived

from the *balung buto* myth, while the natural materials used for costumes along with makeup and masks emphasizing the *buto* (giant) character evoke a primitive impression inspired by imagined prehistoric life. This coherence across elements positions the dance not merely as an aesthetic performance, but as a narrative medium articulating the cultural values of the Manyarejo community tied to myth and archaeological heritage. Walter and Hamilton (2014) emphasize the importance of cultural landscape approaches in heritage conservation, which integrate customary values into site management. Likewise, Kato (2006) highlights that place-based spiritual relationships and identity can strengthen conservation efforts in World Heritage sites such as Shirakami-sanchi, Japan. Within this framework, the *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance, by combining mythological narrative and visual representation of the archaeological landscape, serves as a form of archaeological identity representation.

The *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance is a creative work that emerges not only from a local mythological narrative but also from a process of internalization within the daily life of the Manyarejo community. The dance now holds social and cultural functions closely tied to community activities, particularly those related to the local archaeological site. Its acceptance as part of communal cultural practice indicates that it has transcended its artistic role and transformed into a representation of collective identity. The community's active involvement in performances as dancers and musicians further reinforces the dance's position as an authentic and rooted cultural expression. Thus, *Rempeg Balung Buto* not only reflects creativity grounded in local tradition but also serves as a medium that represents the emotional, historical, and identity-based connection of the Manyarejo community to their inherited archaeological landscape.

Community involvement in the presentation of the *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance which is rooted in local mythology and closely linked to the archaeological site plays a vital role in shaping cultural identity and preserving cultural heritage. Active participation by residents, both as dancers and musicians, reflects a reciprocal relationship between cultural expression and historical awareness of the heritage site. Nam and Thanh (2024) emphasize that local community participation is key to successful conservation, as it strengthens a sense of ownership and helps preserve traditional values. Similarly, Sacko (2021) argues that community involvement in the preservation of earthen architecture not only restores traditional techniques but also revives socio-cultural structures and heritage identity. Jang and Mennis (2021) further note that UNESCO increasingly recognizes local communities as primary stakeholders in World Heritage site management to ensure sustainable preservation and the authenticity of cultural values. In this context, the *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance functions not only as a medium of expression but also as a means of community engagement in safeguarding the archaeological site and reinforcing a collective identity rooted in local mythological narratives.

Thus, the *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance can be understood as a representational medium of archaeological identity that not only embodies local myth but also reflects the community's ecological, historical, and emotional relationship with the prehistoric landscape of Sangiran. The dance bridges traditional narratives with visual representations of the inherited ancient terrain, creating a form of cultural expression that is both contextual and meaningful. Its sustained presence as a performance integrated into the life of the Manyarejo community reinforces collective awareness of the importance of preserving cultural heritage sites. Therefore, the *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance serves as a concrete example of the integration between tradition, local identity, and community-based conservation, each reinforcing the other.

4. Conclusion

The *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance is an artistic creation that profoundly represents the

integration of local myth and archaeological values within the context of cultural heritage preservation. Rooted in the *balung buto* myth that lives within the Manyarejo community of Sangiran a community residing in a major archaeological site this dance serves not only as a medium of aesthetic expression but also as a strategic instrument for culture-based conservation. The main findings of this research highlight that an artistic approach grounded in local narrative can revitalize archaeological sites through contextual, communicative, and participatory performance. The myth, deeply intertwined with the geographical landscape and the community's collective memory, provides an authentic source of ideas that shape the dance's dramatic and symbolic structure while also strengthening the emotional bond between the community and their inherited archaeological space.

Beyond symbolic visualization, the dance positions the giant figure as an allegory of the community's collective strength in responding to their historical legacy and cultural identity. As such, the *Rempeg Balung Buto* dance serves as a representation of archaeological identity, reflecting the ecological, historical, and emotional connections between humans and the ancient landscape of Sangiran. Its presence in the cultural life of the community demonstrates that myth-based artistic creation can serve as an effective medium for disseminating archaeological values and strengthening collective awareness of cultural heritage preservation. In this context, performing arts function not only as a form of expression but also as a means of reinterpreting and revitalizing local identity through narratives that are both living and culturally relevant.

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