

# THE MEMAYU RITUAL TRADITION ROUTE AS A SACRED SPACE OF CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

## CASE STUDY: KANOMAN PALACE, CIREBON, INDONESIA

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### ABSTRACT

Memayu is part of the Muludan tradition, commemorating the birth of Prophet Muhammad SAW in the Cirebon Palace, Indonesia. The unique thing about this ritual is that many palace disciples from villages outside Cirebon City are involved in its event. Disciples, also known as wargi, get engaged from the preparation stage in their respective villages to implement traditions in the palace. Part of wargi's ritual activities are full of meaning, and routes from the villages to the palace are sacred paths. The perception and belief of wargi form this meaning space as traditional actors, based on understanding the memayu sacred value. Based on that, the article aims to describe the activities of the memayu ritual tradition held in Kanoman Palace and explore the form of space that occurs and the meaning contained in these ritual tradition spaces. The research method of this research is descriptive qualitative. The results showed that the villagers who were the palace disciples, position, and route to the palace created an imaginary sacred spatial pattern. The spatial pattern created in this memayu is physical evidence of an imaginary sacred space of the Cirebon cultural landscape whose elements are symbolically purified and believed to bring blessings to the palace wargi. Besides that, the aspects of ritual traditions of memayu, such as the palace, routes from villages to the palace, and the sacred objects used as a ceremonial compliment, contain Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). All of that is a part of the picture of the Cirebon cultural landscape.

**Keywords:** Cultural Landscape, Kanoman Palace, *Memayu* Tradition, Palace Disciples, Sacred Space

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

A cultural landscape is a unique landscape. It is a product of human intervention using culture as the agent (Sauer, 1963). Campolo et al., (2020) said that the cultural landscape is essential in aligning people's lives with nature. Nature has a vital role in shaping the pattern of community life. Tangible and intangible elements will shape the uniqueness of the cultural landscape in an area. Patru-Stupariu (2019) states that tangible are physical aspects, while intangible are non-physical. Both have heritage values that focus on land use practices whose impacts are directly visible on landscape formation. These practice activities by local communities in this landscape will form a space. The spatial formation of this cultural landscape can be real or imaginary (Singh, 2010; Rosmalia, 2016)

One of the cultural landscapes formed by intangible elements is shown in the Kanoman Palace ritual tradition in Cirebon City, West Java Province, Indonesia. This Sultanate is one of the fragments of the Cerbon Kingdom, which once triumphed around the 15th to 17th centuries. The Kanoman Sultanate itself has been independent since 1667 AD. Although it has been separated, the cultural traditions of the Cerbon Kingdom are still maintained using the *Aboge* calendar, i.e., based on the lunar cycle. According to the minister of adat and tradition of Kanoman Palace, *Pangeran Komisi* (Rochim, 2014), the palace ritual traditions are held almost every month. Still, the largest is *muludan* because many palace followers attend it for more than a month (from 1st Sapar to 15th Mulud).

*Muludan* is a tradition to commemorate the birth of Prophet Muhammad SAW. In its implementation, this traditional ritual is divided into three parts, namely, (1) preparation and (2) the *panjang jimat* ceremony as the culmination of the *muludan* tradition (held on the 12th of Mulud), and (3) post-ceremony. One of the important things in preparation for the *muludan* is *memayu*, which is the activity of cleaning the entire palace. Setiawati (2017) quoted from Pangeran Patih Qodiran (the prime minister of the Kanoman Sultanate) that in the current context of *memayu* is to organize oneself, clean, and take care of oneself so that it becomes more beautiful, smooth, and blessed, be it speech, behaviour and sustenance. This *memayu* traditional tradition is carried out by the disciples of the palace in preparation for the *panjang jimat* ceremony. Rochim (2016) mentioned that the Pangeran Komisi, the disciples of this palace, come from various villages in the city and outside Cirebon. They participate in the *memayu* tradition to get blessings. These followers also believe that their involvement in this traditional tradition will keep them away from harm, calamity and disaster. *Memayu* is held every 25th Sapar, starting in the morning (around 6 am) until the time of zuhr (noon prayer time for Muslims). This activity was carried out in stages, starting from the front of the palace, the Lumpang Alu area, and then to other parts of the palace complex. This Lumpang Alu is an artefact with heritage value, a legacy of the Cerbon Kingdom.

Thus, the ritual tradition of the *memayu* in the Kanoman Palace is a unique element of the cultural landscape, involving many disciples from various regions with pure intentions. For this reason, this paper aims to reveal how the uniqueness of the *memayu* ritual tradition forms a space based on the activities and travel routes of the disciples, how the meaning of the space is created, and the significance value revealed from this traditional ritual.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on palace traditions as part of the cultural landscape are minimal, especially in architecture, i.e., a critical look at cultural tradition elements as the shaper components of space and the description of cultural landscape per se. The cultural tradition within the cultural landscape perspective has always had meaning and philosophy. These studies have been explored by anthropologists such as Masud (2011), Vinscak & Smiljanic (2012), and geographers Singh & Rana (2011). However, other cultural landscape researchers from the realm of landscape architecture and architecture tend to explore more cultural landscape management (Jain, 2007; Dahlan et al., 2013) and elements of the cultural landscape (Ahmad, 2010; Wuisang, 2014; Rosmalia, 2016; Rosmalia & Prasetya, 2018).

A cultural landscape is often related to sacred space and discussed from various perspectives. According to Olsen (2019), sacred space can be identified with ritual space, a location for symbolic performances closely related to symbolic meaning. In principle, Norberg-Schulz (2013) views a sacred space as closely associated with a meaningful place, and each space has a different meaning. On the other hand, Eliade (1987) states that different places certainly have different concepts in their sacred spaces. While Guo (2019) emphasizes identity differentiation and daily resistance in sacred space, Jones (2019) discusses the production of precarious sacred spaces. Sacred space is generally described by Norberg-Schulz (2013) with ritual acts such as worship, sacrifice, meditation, prayer, and pilgrimage and is attached to the worship space. Therefore, cultural practices can create a sacred space in any architectural element. Sacred space is not limited to places of worship as Santoso (2008) includes places of worship such as temples and mosques with elements as sacred space, but Marlina (2020) finds them in a residential area of the palace. Zarcone (2010) and French (2022) have researched sacred spaces in gardens with buildings and sacred sites in them that are designed to express healing purposes.

In its development, sacred space, a space full of meaning, can be increasingly eroded by time. Modernity has the potential to erode the sacred sense of space. Kinnard (2014) discusses how sacred space is produced and contests other needs; Kinnard (2014) calls it places in motion. In another study, Jones (2019) saw that sacred space was produced not only by ritual but also by modification, socialization, and negotiation. Guo (2019) confirms that sacred space is vulnerable to placeness production, identity differentiation and daily resistance. It shows that sacred space has a background in its meaning and can shift over time.

In the context of the palace, several studies discuss sacred space. In Java, Santoso, Setioko and Pandelaki (2021) saw that there had been a change in the sacred space around the palace, namely the Kidul Square of the Surakarta Palace, which was influenced by changes in the physical condition and function of the square as a result of the development of the city's present and future needs. In another study, Royandi et al., (2021) showed a significant change in space's physical function and function. The nature and value of space are no longer essential as a sacred space due to tourism factors and economic factors' needs. Rosmalia & Prasetya (2018) agree with Munawar et al., (2021) stating that sacred space has the potential to be developed as a tourism area destination, especially for religious tourists. Exploration of the attractiveness of tourism, based on the spiritual area of the palace disciples, can be used as part of the cultural tourism space, especially in Cirebon. As one of the cultural landscapes in Indonesia, Cirebon is very interesting and important to study, especially in the context of its sustainability.

Therefore, this paper provides an overview of one of the ritual activities in Kanoman Palace, Cirebon and the value of the significance of cultural landscape elements. Studies on the culture of Kanoman Palace are not specific enough and general, such as those done by Ali (2007), which only generally examines religious tourism in Cirebon & Muhaimin (2006) discusses Islamic traditions in Cirebon. While research specifically discusses the Kanoman Palace and its relation to sacred space, it has yet to be done. Agustina (2017) is more about showing the King's role in the strength of public trust in sacred space and is still the orientation of the people who are deliberately present to open the people's way of life. In other research on the Kanoman Palace, there is a discussion on the perspective of cosmology and building orientation (Lestari et al., 2021). There is also research on the Palace Palace, which looks more at the role of dance as a tourist attraction (Narawati, 2019), the development of tourist information technology (Hartono et al., 2020), the conservation of palace buildings (Agustina et al., 2021) and viewing Kanoman Palace in a spatial concept (Agustina et al., 2019). Due to limitations in research that discusses sacred space at Kanoman Palace, exploration is needed on how the activity of *memu* tradition constitutes the cultural landscape of the palace and how it meets the requirements of the outstanding universal value (OUV) criteria developed by the World Heritage Center (2008).

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

This research was conducted in three stages, i.e., data collection, analysis, verification, and conclusion/finding, from 2013 until 2019. The method used in this research is a qualitative analysis introduced by Miles et al., (2019). Primary data was collected through surveys and observations, and interviews with six key people as informants from royal officials, traditional practitioners, culturalists, and historians. The analysis stage was conducted by gradual reduction and classification, from collecting data until the conclusion, based on the intangible and tangible elements, such as the origin of the practitioners, the sequence of ritual activity, the buildings and places of ritual activities, the complementary ritual elements, and the meaning of activity and

place/building. After the classification, the next stage is mapping the place and path of the ritual tradition to find the ritual tradition spatial pattern and correlation between every element of ritual traditions. Finally, the conclusion was obtained through verification, conducted repetitively at the early data-collecting stage. This process was done to maintain the research validity. The stages of the research method can see in Figure 1 below.

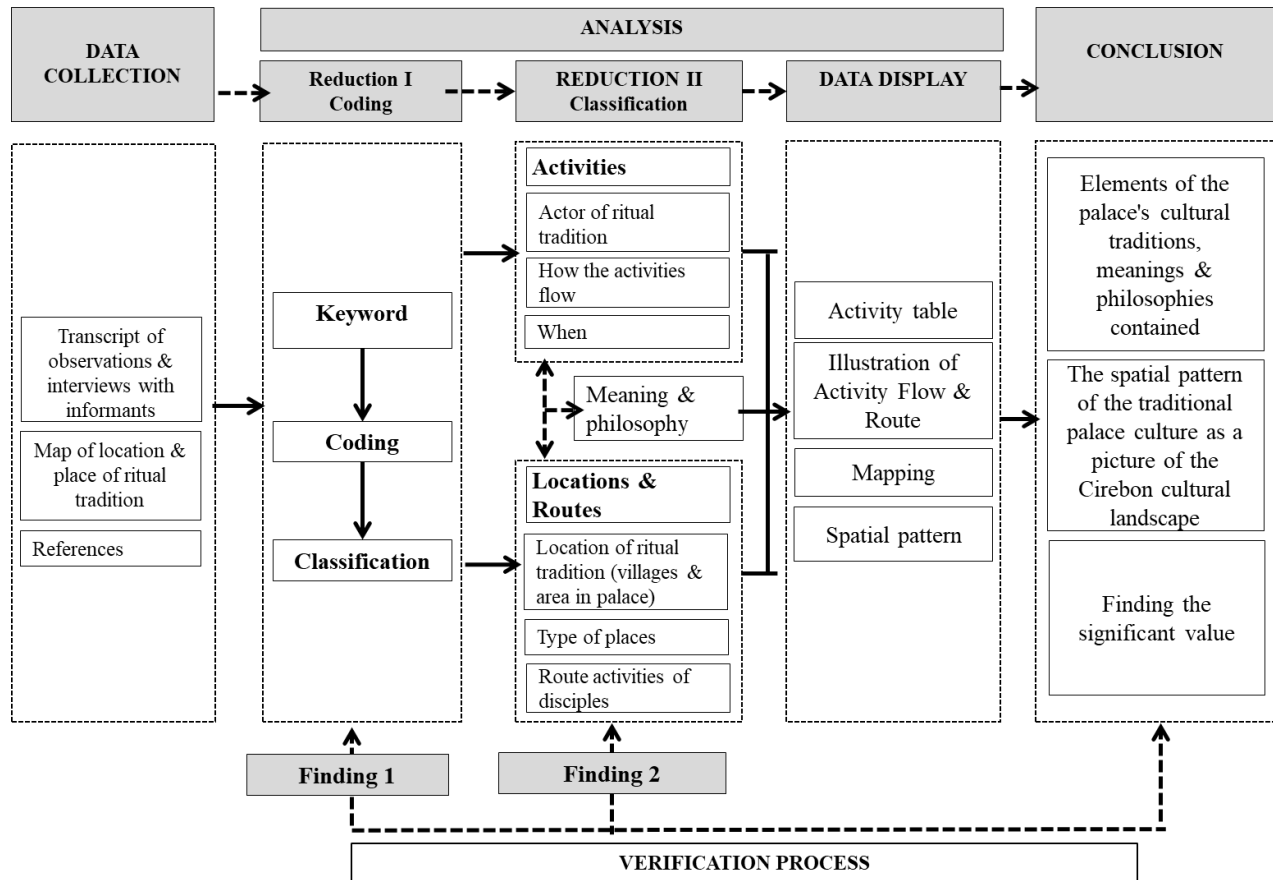
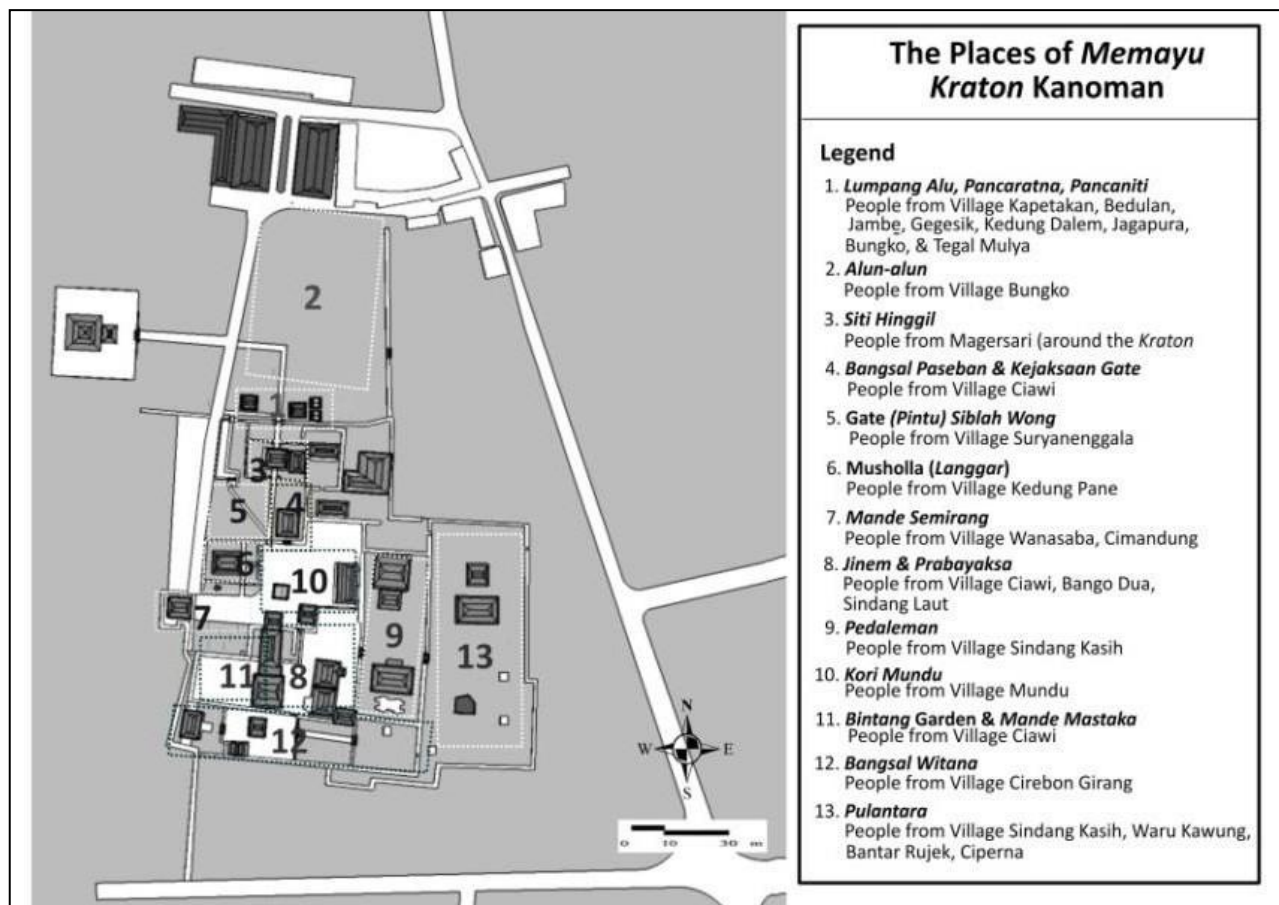


Fig. 1: Procedure Data and Analysis of Research

## 4.0 RESULT

### 4.1 Memayu Tradition of Kanoman Palace

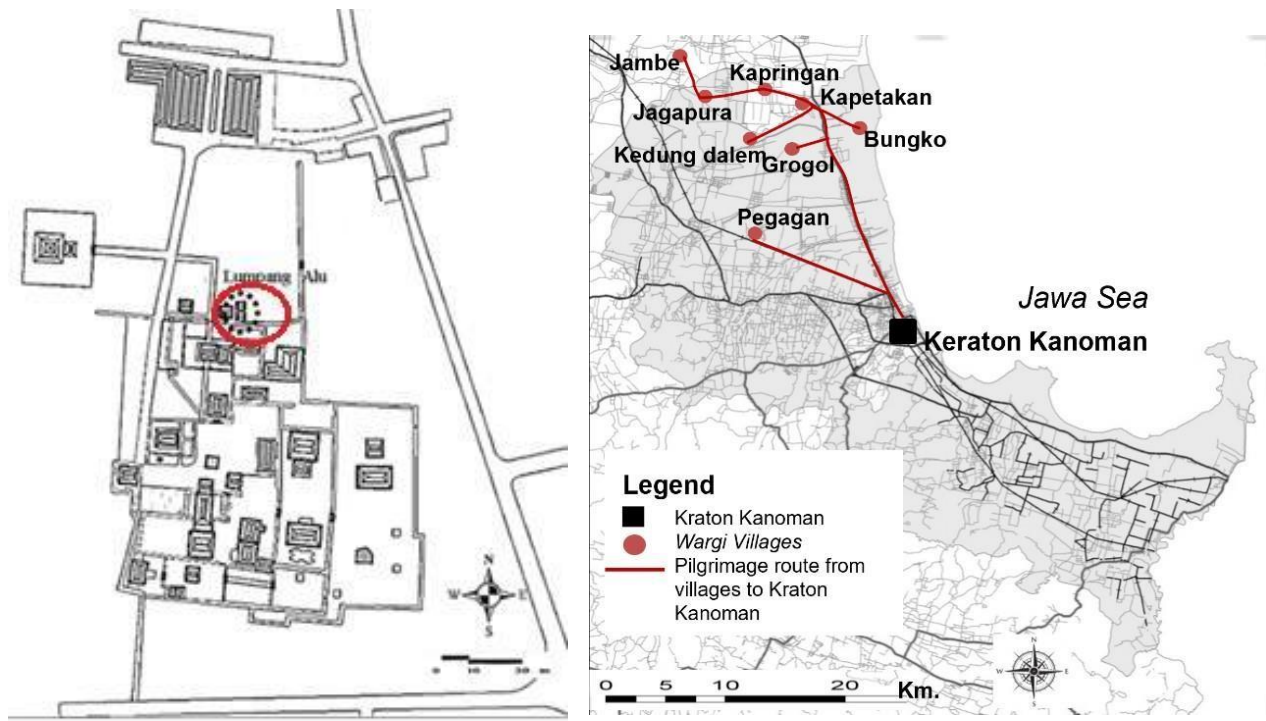
This *memayu* tradition is conducted in the entire part of the Kanoman Palace. Usually, it starts at around 6 am. and finishes around 11 am. This activity is conducted sequentially, from the front part, i.e., Lumpang Alu area, then Alun-alun (plaza), Siti Inggil, and Sibbleh Wong Gate, all the way to the back area of the palace, i.e., Witana and Pulantara. Each palace area is cleaned by a para *wargi* group, coming from up to eight villages in several regencies around Cirebon City, where the palace is located, i.e., Cirebon, Majalengka, Kuningan, and Indramayu. Figure 2 shows the 13 locations in Kanoman Palace that were cleaned by *wargi* from more than 28 villages surrounding Cirebon City. Every year, the number of *wargi* and villages involved in this traditional activity is usually different.



**Fig. 2:** Person in Charge of *Memayu* Location in Kanoman Palace  
 Source: (Rosmalia, 2016)

#### 4.2 Activity and Sacred Space of *Memayu* Ritual Tradition at Lumpang Alu

Based on the previous statement in the introduction chapter, Lumpang Alu is the main and most important area of the *memayu* tradition. In Lumpang Alu, the traditional activities will be started with a ritual before the *wargi* cleans all locations of the palace. Traditionally in Lumpang Alu, activities will end with a closing ceremony (Rochim, 2014). The activity was conducted by cleaning the weeds, sweeping the area, and replacing the *welit* (grass) roof of the Lumpang Alu building. The *wargi* on duty at Lumpang Alu comes from eight villages from Cirebon Regency, i.e., Jambe, Jagapura, Kapringan, Kapetakan, Bedulan, Grogol, Kedung Dalem, and Pegagan Villages. Each group of *wargi* has tasks, such as the *wargi* from Kapetakan village as the leader of traditional activity in Lumpang Alu. In contrast, the *welit* roof of the Lumpang Alu building was replaced by *wargi* from Kapringan and Kedung Dalem Villages (Figure 3).

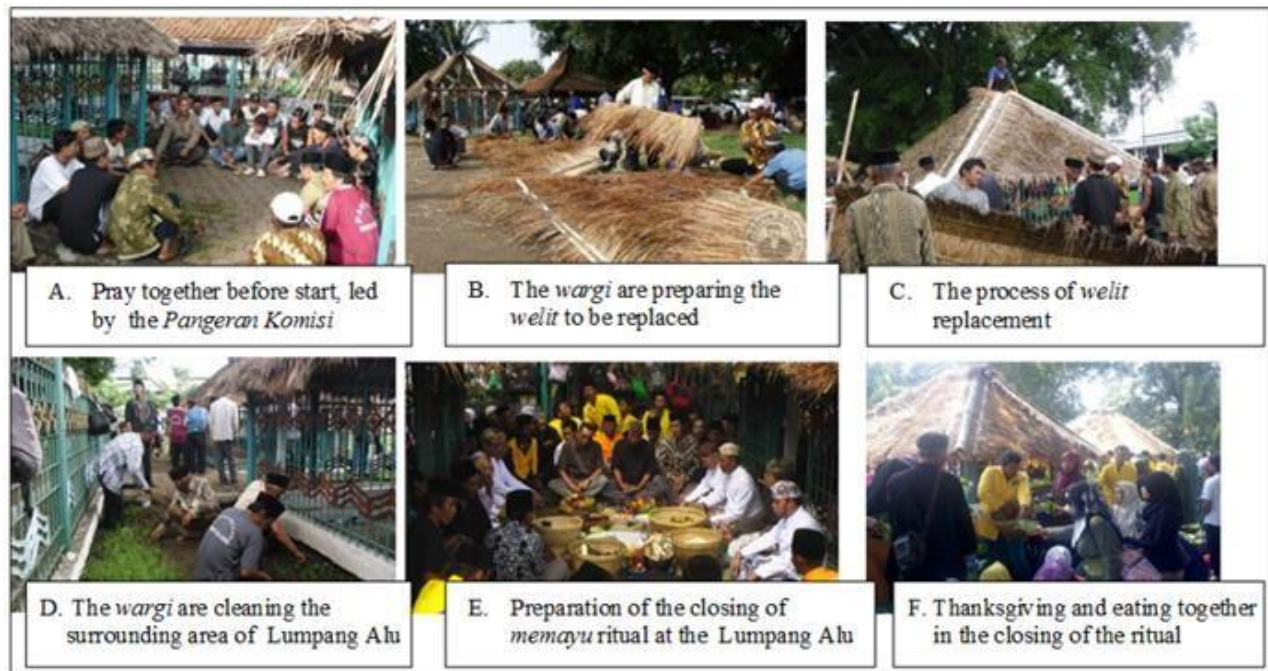


**Fig. 3:** Left: The position of Lumpang Alu at the Kanoman Palace; Right: Villages of *wargi* that practice the *mamayu* and the route to *Kanoman Palace*.

Source: (Rosmalia, 2016)

The sequence of the *memayu* ritual started when the *wargi* left their respective villages. Depart from their village, the Jambe Village *wargi* sequentially pick up the *wargi* from Jagapura Village, Kapringan Village, Kapetakan Village, Grogol Village, Bungko Village, and then Kedung Dalem Village, and finally to Pegagan Village. *Wargi* from Jambe village left after the morning prayer and arrived at the palace around 6 am. The route trip from the villages where the *wargi* live to the palace every year is a route full of meaning because all *wargi* have a sacred perception of this tradition.

The *memayu* traditional activity at Lumpang Alu of Kanoman Palace started with a prayer held in the space between the Lumpang and Alu buildings. Pangeran Komisi leads this activity. Then, the chair as the keeper of Lumpang Alu, who comes from Kapetakan Village, designates *wargi* to climb the roof of the building to replace its existing *welit* roof, where another *wargi* is helping him to install the roof and clean up the bottom part, both inside and outside, of the building. After the new *welit* roof is installed and another part is cleaned up; thus the ritual is finally closed with thanksgiving led by Pangeran Patih of Kanoman Palaces, representative of the Sultan. This thanksgiving consisted of prayer and *tawasul* and ended with lunch. *Tumpeng* Rice, prepared by the *wargi*, is then distributed to all participants in Lumpang Alu. The leftover will be wrapped and taken home for the relatives. The old *welit* roof of the Lumpang Alu is then distributed to the *wargi* who might need it. Both covered rice and *welit* are symbols of *memayu*. The *tumpeng* rice is conceived as the sign of blessings granted by Kanoman Palace, whereas the *welit* roof is regarded as *tumbal* (a repellent of a misfortune). Moreover, they will be placed on farms, paddy fields, stores, and places of importance. Shortly, they will symbolically be secured from bad influences. After the *memayu* tradition is over, the *wargi* will all return home (Figure 3).



**Fig. 4:** The sequence of *memayu* tradition at the Lumpang Alu of *Kanoman Palace*  
 Source: (Rosmalia, 2016)

Therefore, the positions of the participating villages and the trip route to the palace created a sacred imaginary spatial pattern. The concept of sacred space in this trip route corresponds to the concept that sacred space is intrinsic and is only understood by the users based on their deep beliefs (Singh, 2011). Thus, the boundary of this traditional space's sacredness is only explicitly understood by wargi as traditional practitioners. Figure 1 on the left shows the spatial pattern formed from the trip route of the wargi from the village to the palace.

## 5.0 DISCUSSION

### 5.1 The meaning of Memayu Tradition Activity in Lumpang Alu

The traditional activities of *memayu* at the Kanoman Palace are understood as activities to clean the palace and have other meanings that the ritual performers feel. This symbolic practice is what Emma from Pegagan felt, and Rokhman from Kapetakan Village felt. They were engaged in this traditional activity to seek blessings and hoped to bring home sacrifices (*tumbal*) such as rice *tumpeng* wrapped in teak leaves (*Tectona grandis*) and *welit*-reeds from the roof of the Lumpang Alu building for repelling evil. They believe that the items they get from *the memayu* tradition and then take them home can not only be an antidote to bad luck but also bring blessings. They believe that traditional rituals have purified these items at the palace, a sacred place. The palace is the residence of the Sultan, the descendant of Sunan Gunungjati, who was the first King of the Cirebon Kingdom. He introduced the locals to Islam and significantly contributed to developing Cirebon. Therefore, the wargi strongly believe that through the objects from the ritual of the *memayu* tradition, the sacredness of the Palace and Sunan Gunungjati will be carried over and attached to the wargi who are involved in traditional activities and transmitted to their families and relatives. The blessings attached to the items brought home will be a repellent to reinforcements in their homes, gardens, rice fields, and places of business. Agustina (2017) stated that the role of the King as the ruler who raised Cirebon made all the legacy left behind sacred as a form of respect.

From the discussion above, it can be seen that the perception of sacredness from the village where the *wargi* live to the palace and back again forms an imaginary sacred space. The sacred value of this space is strengthened by the presence of items used for traditional ritual activities brought home by the *wargi*, which are always maintained every year. The patterns and routes of this sacred pilgrimage are similar to those in the Middle East (Zarcone, 2010; Masud, 2011) and India (Singh & Rana, 2011). In these three cases, the pattern of sacred space is formed from the perceptions of the pilgrims toward the glorified figures in the locations visited. The conditions and processes of space formation at the three locations are like what happened in Cirebon. As for the sacred items that carry blessings that pilgrims bring home only in India.

## 5.2 Assessment of the Significance of *Memayu* Tradition Activity

Based on the World Heritage Center (2008), the cultural landscape space formed from elements of the palace and the pilgrimage route of the *wargi* (from the village to the palace) is included in the cultural landscape that is still evolving. This sacred space is imaginary in which several elements contain Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) (World Heritage Center, 2008), including Lumpung Alu, Kanoman palace, ritual activities of the *memayu* tradition, and the mythology of the *memayu* tradition and sacred objects used as a ceremonial compliment.

As part of the palace area/facility, Lumpung Alu is regarded as historical evidence of the existence of Tegal Alang-alang Village, the earliest village that had existed since the 15th century, long before the presence of Cirebon City. Lumpung Alu unveils (and is also) a technological form developed at that time and has become a historical monument of the existence of once the glorious Cerbon Kingdom.

*Memayu* activity at the Lumpung Alu is proof of extraordinary uniqueness since it has been done since the establishment of the palace. It all started in the 17th century, as the Cerbon Kingdom was divided into the Kanoman palace and the Kasepuhan palace. Concerning *memayu* tradition, the coming of practitioners from the surrounding area of Cirebon and Indramayu is conceived that the palace's existence is still well preserved. The *wargi* from various surrounding areas is believed to be historically connected with the Kanoman palace. The view of the *wargi's* journey from the village to the palace is considered unique. Nevertheless, the beauty of that view can only be conceived by the *wargi* since the journey contains the meaning for the sustainability of their lives in the future.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

The more than 400 years old *memayu* reveals a heritage-valued tradition. It is not only contained in the traditional activity, which involves the *wargi* from generation to generation but also embedded in the place and supporting tools of the traditional activities. The fundamental elements in the forms of participants, place, supporting tools, and time, all the way to the meaning contained within this *memayu*, are a complete description of part of Kanoman Palace's cultural landscape. The spatial pattern created within this *memayu* becomes physical evidence of an imaginary sacred space believed to bring blessings to the *wargi*, especially at Lumpung Alu. Through this imaginary sacred space, the entire traditional elements are symbolically purified. It is also part of their beliefs that those intangible spaces are spiritually connected to Sunan Gunungjati, *Susuhunan*, which had once significantly contributed to the glory of the Cerbon Kingdom. Both spaces and elements in the *memayu* have specific historical value, uniqueness, and authenticity that can only be discovered in Cirebon. The practitioners and the visitors/tourists can obtain these unique and authentic experiences. These have made the *memayu* significant, especially in providing beautiful and meaningful scenery



to describe its extraordinary entirety. Therefore, sacred spaces are supposed to be protected. Furthermore, that should be gradually implemented in stages, i.e., from the central government, regency/municipality to the village level. The worthy protected spaces are not only in the villages of the *wargi* but also deal with the linear spaces along the trip route from the village to the *palace*. They must be culturally protected and given a clear boundary for improving spatial quality. If the unique spaces are well protected, thus the embedded cultural tradition can also be maintained its sustainability, as this paper argues. In the future, however, they will probably be contested over time.

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**Interview**

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