

AAS Distinguished Service Award 2021

George E. Lankford

Background

Dr. George E. Lankford completed his PhD degree in Folklore at Indiana University-Bloomington in 1975. He later became Endowed Professor of Folklore and Chair of Social Sciences at Lyon College (formerly Arkansas College) in Batesville, AR. Throughout his long and distinguished career, Dr. Lankford developed a reputation as one of the foremost scholars working in the field of Native American studies, writing and editing numerous books and contributing chapters to many others in addition to authoring dozens of journal articles.

Career Highlights and Scholarship

Among his wide-ranging scholarly interests, Dr. Lankford's research and publications in Native American folklore, iconography, and archaeoastronomy have been of considerable interest to Arkansas Archeological Society members. His dissertation, titled *The Tree and the Frog: An Exploration in Stratigraphic Folklore*, is noteworthy for its attempt to go beyond the stock-in-trade identification and comparative assessment of characters, motifs, and themes represented in storytelling traditions, to examine the links between the distribution of mythic traditions and regional cultural chronologies using Native American examples. An associated product of this interest is his comparative examination of Southeastern Indian legends (Lankford 1987).

One of Dr. Lankford's most prolific areas of research addresses the iconography of ancient material culture in the Southeast. A founding member of the Mississippian Iconography Workshop, hosted annually by Professor F. Kent Reilly III at Texas State University in San Marcos, Lankford contributed extensively to that group's research. As but one example, his innovative approach to examining motifs rendered on marine shell cups and gorgets, ceramics, embossed copper, and other artifacts revealed unprecedented insights into the structure and organization of ancient cosmological beliefs among indigenous communities throughout the Southeast (Lankford 2004, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2011a, 2011b; Knight et al. 2001; Sharp et al. 2011; Steponaitis et al. 2011) and interlinkages in belief systems among separate North American regions (e.g., Lankford 2006). His methodological framework, along with more encompassing examinations of Native American folklore and iconography, are presented in additional volumes (Lankford 2007d, 2008).

Many members of the Arkansas Archeological Society will also recall the great excitement brought forth during the 1980s and 1990s by the reexamination of Hernando de Soto's *entrada* across the Southeast, in which several Arkansas archeologists and historians joined the effort begun by Dr. Charles Hudson (University of Georgia) and his collaborators. Dr. Lankford contributed important scholarship to this effort as well, examining the historicity and folkloric content of key primary source materials (e.g., Lankford 1993, 2009; see also Lankford 1977).

Arkansas Archeological Society Participation

Always eager to share his knowledge through participation in volunteer activities, Dr. Lankford was a familiar figure in Arkansas Archeological Society activities, including the summer training programs, annual Society meetings and statewide Archeology Month activities, and local chapter activities—

foremost among the latter with the Central Mississippi Valley chapter at Arkansas State University. He is a favorite lecturer of the Central Mississippi Valley Chapter and also presented lectures to several other chapters on a variety of topics. As a Society and CMV member, he was active in research and preservation of sites in his local community and Independence County. In 2012 he provided the annual meeting keynote presentation on the topic of Mississippian iconography.

Summary

Dr. Lankford's scholarship, together with his dedicated participation in our Society's activities across many decades, have been a major influence for ARAS staff and AAS members alike, particularly with respect to the importance of folklore studies for understanding Native American culture and history in general, and expanding our interpretation of the archeological record in particular. For these enduring contributions, we are honored to nominate Dr. George E. Lankford for the Arkansas Archeological Society's 2021 Distinguished Service Award.

Dr. Juliet Morrow, Research Station Archeologist
Dr. George Sabo III, Emeritus Director

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