Matthew Williams Stirling Encyclopedia Article

Matthew Williams Stirling

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1896-1975

American archaeologist and ethnologist who parlayed a childhood interest in collecting arrowheads into a pioneering career in archaeology and, ultimately, the discovery of the lost Olmec civilization, one of the earliest cultures in Mesoamerica (far more ancient than the earliest Mayans). From 1928 to 1958 Stirling was Chief of the Bureau of American Ethnology. During this tenure he undertook a variety of investigations including his long-term field project (1939-46), supported by the Smithsonian and the National Geographic Society, studying the Olmec culture.