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The ancient Mayan civilization of southern Mexico and northern Central America has long been described as "mysterious," even though scholars have been studying this culture for hundreds of years. Our view of the Maya has changed dramatically based on the various findings of these scholars; what were once thought of as "vacant ceremonial centers," inhabited by only a few calendar priests and used as places of ritual by the surrounding peasant farmers, have now been redefined as ancient thriving cities of thousands of Maya. Hieroglyphic inscriptions, once thought to be astrological mumbo-jumbo, now read as names of historical individuals and the cities they ruled.

The Handbook to Life in the Ancient Maya World provides a comprehensive and accessible reference to the greatest and most mysterious of civilizations, hailed for its contributions to science, mathematics, and technology. The book focuses on recent groundbreaking discoveries while presenting the civilization's earliest beginnings to its conquest by the Spanish in the 16th Century. Each chapter is supplemented by an extensive bibliography as well as photographs, original line drawings, and maps. Different sections include civilization and archaeology, evolution, geography, society and government, astronomy and the calendar, funerary beliefs and customs, and many more,