Ancient Greece
(Adapted from Discovery Techbook)

Islands and Mountains
Ancient Greece was located in southeastern Europe along the Mediterranean Sea, which separates Europe from Africa. Other great civilizations surrounded the Greek civilization, including the Egyptians to the south, the Romans to the west, and the Persians to the east.

Unlike many of these other civilizations, the Greek civilization did not develop in a river valley, but it was surrounded by water. Ancient Greece had the Mediterranean Sea to the south, the Ionian Sea to the west, and the Aegean Sea to the east.

Greece is actually a series of islands or archipelago and peninsulas. These islands and peninsulas were covered with high mountains, making travel by land very difficult. As a result, the ancient Greek people mostly traveled by water.

Greek civilization developed into independent city-states because Greece’s mountains, islands, and peninsulas separated the Greek people from each other and made communication difficult.

Using Natural Resources in Ancient Greece
The steep mountains of the Greek geography also affected the crops and animals that farmers raised in the region. They raised goats and sheep because these animals were able to move on mountains. They planted olive trees and grape vines that could grow on a hill. They made oil from the olives and wine from the grapes, and used goats and sheep for milk, cheese, and wool.

The mountainous islands of Greece limited the amount of farmland to the Greeks. As a result, the Greeks decide to conquer other areas. They also established colonies in Southern Italy, Northern Africa, Turkey, and the southern coast of France. In addition to military conquests and the establishment of colonies, trade became an important aspect of Greek life.
Mycenae
One of the earliest settlements in ancient Greece was Mycenae. The Mycenaeans ruled much of southern Greece from 1500 BCE to 1100 BCE.

The Mycenaeans used the sea to improve their civilization. The Mycenaeans’ strong naval fleet controlled nearby waters and conquered other cities.

The Mycenaeans also used trade with other kingdoms to get the resources they needed. Ancient Greece’s location on the sea made trade an important part of its economy. The Mycenaeans traded with civilizations in Egypt, Palestine, and Syria. Mycenae’s trade with other civilizations, as well as its military strength, made it a commercial and cultural center in the Mediterranean until about the year 1200 BCE.

Unique City-States
After Mycenae, several other Greek city-states began to increase in power. Athens, Sparta, Corinth, and Thebes were among the most powerful of these city-states. Eventually, Athens and Sparta developed as rival powers. Athens and Sparta developed their own style of government and culture that would eventually influence other Greek city-states and civilizations.

Although the Greek city-states developed independently, they shared some common culture and goals. When faced with danger, the Greek city-states could defend themselves, but could work together to protect one another. This danger often came from another great power—Persia. Persia wanted to expand its own power and influence in the region. This often caused wars between Persia and Greek city-states.