**Sparta: The warrior kingdom**

The city-state of Sparta was very different from Athens. Sparta had no fine temples or public buildings such as those in Athens. There were never more than 10,000 Spartans and they made up only about a seventh of the population of their city-state. The rest of Sparta's population were helots (serfs who had no rights and were owned by the Spartan state) and perioeci (people from settlements that were controlled by Sparta).

**The dominance of the Spartans**

The citizens of Sparta were tough, highly disciplined warriors called Spartiates. At all times they had to be ready to fight to suppress any uprising by the helots. The result was that they were full-time soldiers who did military-type training from the age of seven. Although the Spartiates were expected to marry at 20 years of age, they had to live in army barracks until the age of 30. They were not allowed to take part in any trade and were supposed to avoid luxuries. However, they were expected to be neatly dressed and have tidy hair before they went into battle.

As it had the only permanent army in Greece, Sparta dominated its neighbouring city-states. By 750 BC it controlled Laconia. It also captured the city-state of Messenia and made slaves of its people. By 550 BC almost every city-state in the Peloponnese (southern Greece) belonged to a league or alliance of city-states, which was led by Sparta.

**Government in Sparta**

As citizens, Spartan men had less power than the male citizens of Athens. Their city-state was ruled by two kings and a Council of Elders that was made up of 28 men. Each elder was aged over 60 and held his position for life. All citizens belonged to the Assembly, but this group had little power other than to elect ephors (chief magistrates). The role of the ephors was to punish law-breakers and carry out the decisions of the Assembly.

**Source D**

... From childhood the boy was under discipline; he had but one garment, he went barefoot. His food was scanty—but he was allowed (almost encouraged) to steal food, if he were too hungry. They thought that careful thefts would train the boy for... war, and to make sure that he stole [craftily], he was well whipped if he was caught... There was endless drill for them, in the gymnasium and in the open, and... killing helots at the order of the magistrates.

Plutarch's description of the training of boys in Sparta. Plutarch was a Greek historian who lived from about 46 BC to 120 AD.

**Did U know?**

Because all Spartan men had to be warriors, baby boys who were physically handicapped were killed by being thrown off a cliff.

**Source E**

One woman sent forth her sons, five in number, to war, and, standing in the outskirts of the city, she awaited anxiously the outcome of the battle. And when someone arrived and, in answer to her inquiry, reported that all her sons had met death, she said 'I did not inquire about that... but how fares our country?' and when he declared that it was victorious, 'Then,' she said, 'I gladly accept also the death of my sons.'

Plutarch's account of the reaction of a Spartan woman to the news of the death of her sons.