Spartan rule

Dorians settled at the site of Sparta around 1000 BCE. During the eighth century BCE, Sparta took control of the Laconian plain and conquered neighbouring Messenia. The Spartans made most Laconians and Messenians slaves, called helots, whom they controlled brutally.

Initially, Sparta was ruled by two kings who inherited their position. By about the end of the seventh century BCE the government had become an oligarchy. Most power was in the hands of a few families who controlled the ephorate and dominated the council of elders (called the gerousia). These two bodies decided what laws and policies the Spartan citizens in the assembly of Spartiates would vote on. Citizens could not discuss these matters. They could only shout ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to a proposal. Even if they voted ‘no’, this decision could be overruled.

SOURCE 3 Government in Sparta

6.5 Activities

To answer questions online and to receive immediate feedback and sample responses for every question, go to your learnON title at www.jacplus.com.au. Note: Question numbers may vary slightly.

Check your understanding

1. Who could be:
   (a) Athenian citizens
   (b) Spartan citizens?
2. What percentage of the people who lived in Athens were citizens?
3. What happened to you if you were ostracised from Athens?
4. What is the difference between the direct democracy of Athens and the representative democracy of Australia? Discuss as a class which you think is best described as ‘rule by the people’.
5. Study Sources 2 and 3 carefully and answer these questions.
   (a) How were members of the boule chosen?
   (b) Who prepared the proposed laws and policies in Athens and Sparta?
   (c) Why could war generals become powerful in Athens?
   (d) Why were the ephorate and gerousia so powerful?