The Chremonidean War was an important event in the history of Greece in the third century BC, but like most of the history of the third century, it is extremely poorly documented. We have two very brief accounts of the war, in Pausanias 3.6.4–6 and Justin 26.2. Not only are these short, but both of them leave out important details and we have no reason to think that even combining the two of them can give a full account of the war. Other references do provide further details of the war. For example, Pausanias 1.36.4 tells us that Antigonos destroyed the shrine of Poseidon Hippios at Kolonos, outside Athens. This must have happened in the course of the Chremonidean War, but cannot be placed in any definite context in it.

This limited literary material does give us some clear impressions on the nature of the war. Pausanias 1.7.3 tells us that Ptolemy Philadelphos’ admiral Patroklos came to rescue Athens, but failed to achieve anything worthwhile. This is supported by Pausanias’ later account, in 3.6.5f., which says Patroklos requested Areus, king of Sparta, to make an attack on Antigonos’ army, so that Patroklos’ troops could then attack the Macedonians in the rear, but Areus did not do so, but instead retreated when his supplies ran out. None of the other literary evidence contradicts this impression of Egyptian ineffectiveness in the course of the Chremonidean War.

The literary evidence also gives the impression that this ineffective resistance to Antigonos’ attempts to control Greece did not last for a very long period. J.J. Gabbert has recently taken another look at the literary evidence in an attempt to determine the dates of the war without going into the controversy over which years the archons at the beginning and end of the war held office. She concludes from it that the war cannot have lasted more than a few years.1

While the literary evidence on the Chremonidean War does not enable us to write a detailed history of it, inscriptions and archaeolog-

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ical evidence have been discovered which add a considerable amount of new information on the war. It is still not possible to write a full and detailed account of the course of the war, but we can supplement and modify the conclusions reached from the literary evidence and bring to light certain aspects of the war which have been totally lost in the brief surviving historical evidence.

The most important inscription is the decree, moved by the Athenian politician Chremonides, from whom the war has received its name, which created the alliance between Athens and Sparta which led to the outbreak of the war. Several fragments of the decree have survived, and in Syll. 434/5 we have the decree almost intact. It was passed in the second prytany of the archonship of Peithidemos, and it refers back to previous alliance between Athens and Sparta, when they opposed those trying to enslave Greece (line 7). In other words, the Chremonidean War is being compared to the war against Xerxes in the fifth century.

Ptolemy’s role is mentioned, but the Athenian alliance with Sparta is presented as the significant factor. Yet the fact that both Athens and Sparta were already allied to Ptolemy before this decree was passed suggests that he was actually the instigator of the war. Chremonides said that Ptolemy was motivated by his goodwill towards the Greeks and his concern for their freedom and that he was following the policy of his ancestors and his sister. This links Ptolemy to the theme of Athenian and Spartan resistance to the enslavement of Greece. However there are certain odd features of this formulation. Ptolemy Philadelphus had only one ancestor who had intervened in Greek politics, or even been in a position to have done so, his father Ptolemy Soter, who had indeed proclaimed his intention of freeing Greece when he arrived there in 309 BC; but when the Greek cities did not provide the financial and other support he demanded, Ptolemy had made peace with Kassandros and returned to Egypt (Diodorus Siculus 20.37.2). Ptolemy’s sister and wife Arsinoe’s concern for Greek freedom is not attested before this, but since most of her monuments are posthumous, this is not surprising. However it seems likely that her major interest in Greek affairs was the possibility of putting her son Ptolemy, by her first husband Lysimachos, on the throne of Macedon.

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2 Habicht, *Athens from Alexander to Antony*, 142f.; Marasco *Sparta agli inizi dell’età Ellenistica*, 141.