The central role of historical narrative in early European nationalism has long been noted. Indeed, the medievalist Patrick Geary writes, “Modern history was born in the nineteenth century, conceived and developed as an instrument of European nationalism. As an instrument of nationalist ideology, the history of Europe’s nations was a great success.” Few national histories have had an impact as profound and far-reaching as the History of the Greek Nation (Istoria tou Ellinikou Ethnous) authored by Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos. Published between 1850 and 1877, Paparrigopoulos’ magnum opus shaped in a lasting way both Modern Greek self-understanding and how Greek history is treated in historiography internationally. In this work, Paparrigopoulos traces the history of the Greek nation from the depths of antiquity to its liberation from the Ottoman Empire in the 1820s. In doing so, he offers his compatriots a global narrative schema, synthesizing disparate eras into a unified grand narrative. Moreover, he fuses aspects of pre-revolutionary, post-Byzantine Greek collective consciousness with conceptions of nationhood current in European revolutionary thought in the middle of the nineteenth century. His purpose was to demonstrate the linear continuity of the Greek nation through the centuries, at a time when narratives of Greek discontinuity abounded, while at the same time providing a historical validation for Modern Greek irredentism. The sweeping nature of Paparrigopoulos’s account might justify its description as a history of the Hellenic longue durée. Yet, what constitutes the Hellenic longue durée? What kind of time scales does it require? What are the forces that, in Paparrigopoulos’ view, shape and maintain Greek collective existence over the longest time scale? This essay will examine Paparrigopoulos’ conception of time, continuity, and change along three trajectories—linguistic change-continuity, cultural change-continuity, and political change-continuity—with the hope of shedding light on how the practice of history contributed to the shaping of national identity in nineteenth-century Greece.

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