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### 1. The laryngeal theory

#### 1.1. The early stage; de Saussure, Möller

Systemic considerations were of the greatest importance already for the young de Saussure, whose dissertation dealt with the system of vowels to be reconstructed in the Indo-European protolanguage. Observing (1879, 146) the symmetry of the singular and plural Sanskrit and Greek forms

ás-mi	εἷ-μι	Dor.	φᾶ-μί	< phea-mi
ás-(s)i	εἷ		φᾶ-ς	< phea-si
ás-ti	εἷ-σι		φᾶ-τί	< phea-ti
s-más	ἦ-μες		φα-μές	< pha-mes

he concluded that the long vowel in the third column must be the outcome of a contraction of an original diphthong, so that the Doric forms were parallel to those in the other two columns at the left. However, the second vowel of the root in the sing. forms (in the fourth column) could not be the normal vowel *a*; he therefore postulated two Indo-European phonemes that he designated by the symbols *A* and *Q*, respectively (1879: 178). He applied to them the term 'coefficients sonantiques', the same designation as for the *i, u, r, l, m, n* in roots such as Gr. λείπ-ω : ἔ-λιπ-ον, φεύγ-ω : ἔ-φυγ-ον, τείν-ω < τέν-ω : τα-τό-ς (= τῆ-τό-ς). Such forms of ablaut he found paralleled by cases such as Gr. τί-θη-μι : θε-τό-ς, Dor. ἦ-στᾶ-μι : στα-τό-ς, δί-δω-μι : δο-τό-ς; again, the long vowel of the full form would be the contraction of the basic vowel of the root with what remains in the weak form after the reduction. On this hypothesis, the two sonantic coefficients provided for the length in the full-degree form by contracting with the preceding vowel. But

they were also supposed to modify the adjacent vowel's quality; hence, if  $eQ > \bar{o}$  and some  $eA > \bar{a}$ , one could suppose that  $Qe > o$  and some  $Ae > a$ .

The overall picture of I.E. ablaut gains substantial regularity through the introduction of these ideas. There are, however, two particular weak points in de Saussure's system, namely, the unexplained double development (of  $eA$  into either  $\bar{e}$  or  $\bar{a}$ ; of  $Ae$  into either  $e$  or  $a$ ) and the outcome of the schwa (i.e., the sonantic coefficient between consonants) in Greek, as shown either in the forms θε-τό-ς, στα-τό-ς, δο-τό-ς, or by the alternations in χῆρο-ς : χᾶ-τι-ς, κῆμα : κτά-ομαι, etc. The first of these difficulties was removed by Hermann Möller (1850–1923), who in several of his works beginning with (1880, especially 151 n.1) regularized de Saussure's system into the simple formulas:  $eE, eA, eO > \bar{e}, \bar{a}, \bar{o}$ ;  $Ee, Ae, Oe > e, a, o$ . A similar system and notation was developed by Cuny (1942–43), who also used the symbols *E, A*, and *Q*.

Möller in his subsequent works posited an Indo-European – Semitic family, or phylum, of languages and tried to reconstruct its protolanguage. This attempted reconstruction brought in the necessity of assuming the existence of four different phonemes influencing the quantity and quality of neighboring vowels; it is unnecessary to recapitulate the details here, as this form of reconstruction has since been discontinued. Möller called these phonemes (in German) 'Gutturale' in (1906: 255), and 'Laryngale' in (1917); these terms were very close to Oštir's (1913) 'Kehlkopflaute', but had the advantage of being internationally more intelligible and applicable.

#### 1.2. The term 'laryngeal'

In addition to de Saussure's *sonantic coefficients*, in the century since his dissertation, two other main terminological usages have