1. MIDDLE INDIC FORMS FOUND IN THE LÜSHUN FRAGMENTS

In the Sanskrit fragments of the Central Asian manuscripts of the Lotus Sutra, preserved in the Lüshun Museum (abbr. Lü), of which photographs along with its transcription have been recently published by Prof. Jiang, we find some peculiar forms in prose parts as well as in verses. As these fragments are thought to date back to the fifth or sixth century based on paleographical evidence, they are much older than any extant Nepalese MSS. (not earlier than the eleventh century), the Gilgit MSS. (not earlier than the seventh century) and so-called the Kashgar Manuscript (later than the ninth century) of the Lotus Sutra.

Some examples of outstanding forms, found in these fragments are as follows:

1.1. bhiks.ave (voc. pl.)

The only voc. pl. of the Skt. bhiks. u, which appears in the Nepalese, Gilgit and the Kashgar MSS., is the Classical Sanskrit form bhiks. avah (“o monks!”), whereas in the Lüshun fragments the form bhiks. ave is predominantly seen.1

K.156.5. bhiks. avas (= O etc.) / Lü (B-6.Recto 2).\[v\]e
K.157.2. bhiks. avas (= O etc.) / Lü (B-6.Recto 6). bhiks.(v)ē
K.200.6. bhiks. avas (= O etc.) / Lü (B-7.Verso 3). bhiksave

Is bhiksave a scribal error? I assume not. In the Pali Canon, we find quite often bhikkhave as the voc. pl. of Pä. bhikkhu along with another such pl. bhikkhavo, which corresponds to the Classical Sanskrit form bhiksavaḥ. Bhikkhave is assumed to be one of Eastern forms, or “Magadhisms” as occasionally called, which are regarded as the remnants of the language used by the historical Buddha.

In the Pali Canon, bhikkhave occurs exclusively in addresses of the Buddha towards his disciples. This archaic form of the Buddha’s address, presumably representing Śākyamuni’s own accent, is retained even in some

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Pali canonical and post-canonical texts, which were apparently composed after the Buddha’s death.

We may assume that the archaic voc. form bhikkhave or its Sanskritised one bhikṣave was used in addresses of the Buddha in an earlier version of the Lotus Sutra presumably with the purpose of showing its authenticity as his own words, and that the Lüshun fragments retain this archaic form.

Presumably, redactors of the Sutra in a later period, who may have had a sound knowledge of Classical Sanskrit, could not overlook this dialectal form and, therefore corrected it to the classical form bhikṣavah, which we, at present, find in the Nepal, the Gilgit and the Kashgar MSS.

It must be pointed out that the above cited occurrences of bhiks. ave are all from the prose parts. When we read the manuscripts from Nepal, Gilgit and Kashgar, we soon notice that the prose parts of the Lotus Sutra are composed in a more Classical Sanskrit style than the verses, which contain many Middle Indic forms. Considering that the above mentioned Middle Indic form bhikṣave is from the prose parts of the Lüshun fragments, we may assume, therefore, that earlier recensions of the Sutra contained more Middle Indic features in prose parts as well as in verses than any of the extant manuscripts.

1.2. sād-yathā, syād-yathā

Middle Indic or quasi-Middle Indic forms which might retain linguistic features of earlier recensions of the Sutra, are not limited to bhikṣave.

For example, where other manuscripts read tad yathā (“namely, to wit”), the Lüshun fragments read sādyathāpi nāma or syādyathēdam; e.g.

K.156.5. tad yathā (= O etc.) / Lū (B-6.Recto 2). sādyathāpi nāma
K.239.7. tad yathā (= O etc.) / Lū (B-11.Recto 4). syādyathēdam
K.361.3. tad yathā (= O etc.) / Lū (B-14.Recto 1). syādyathēdam
K.398.4. tad yathā (the Kashgar Manuscript is broken here) / Lū (B-18.Recto 8). syādyathē[da]m
K.401.2. tad yathā (the Kashgar Manuscript is broken here) / Lū (B-18.Verso 9). (s)yādyath[th]ēdam

Sādyathā and syādyathā, which appear in the prose parts of these fragments, might be a Sanskritised form of a Māgadhism seyyathā (se + yathā < Skt. tad + yathā). The same Sanskritised form syādyathēdam is seen also in the Prātimokṣasūtra of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādīn school. Other Sanskritisations of the Eastern form seyyathā (+ idam, + api) are found in the Mahāvastu and Bhikṣunīvinaya of the same school, namely sayyathidam, sayyathāpi, sāmyathidam, saṃyyathidam and