This article examines several verses from the Niraupamyastava, where Nāgārjuna makes explicit references to the non-empty aspects of the doctrine of emptiness—a topic systematized and crystallized in the doctrine of Tathāgatagarbha, thought to have appeared later than his date and to have been unknown to him.

Establishing the authenticity of the hymn, in addition to the criteria utilized by Lindtner, the article analyses the style and the relationship of the text with texts belonging to other schools, thus locating Nāgārjuna in his historical and temporal context. The article also brings into focus the overlooked or marginalized topics present in Nāgārjuna’s texts such as the practice of devotion and visualization of the Buddha as method for realizing emptiness.

Introduction

The Niraupamyastava, a hymn ascribed to Nāgārjuna by traditional and contemporary scholars, contains some very unusual statements: 1

\[ \text{dharmadhātu asambhedā yānabhedo 'sti na prabho/} \\
\text{yānattritayam ākhyaṭatāṃ tvayā sattvāvatārataḥ/21} \]

Since the dharmadhātu cannot be differentiated, there can be no different vehicles, o Lord. [But] the three vehicles have been preached by you for the sake of ushering the beings into [the path] (avatārataḥ).

\[ \text{nityo dhruvah śivah kāyas tava dharmamayo jināḥ/} \\
\text{vineyajanaḥetoś ca daśitā nirvṛtis tvayā/22} \]

Your body made out of dharma is eternal, imperishable, auspicious, victorious. But, for the sake of the people who need to be trained, [entering into the final] cessation (nirvṛti) has been shown by you.

1. I’d like to extend my profound thanks to Dr Peter Oldmeadow for his numerous corrections and valuable suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper. The remaining mistakes are mine alone.

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In verse 21, the hymn refers to non-differentiation of the dharmadhātu as the basis for the one vehicle. In the following verse, it states that the dharmamaya kāya (body made out of dharma, an obvious reference to Buddha’s dharmakāya) is permanent/eternal (nitya), stable/imperishable (dhruva), and peaceful/auspicious (śiva). These two points led David Seyfort Ruegg to remark that the hymn is “not far removed from the theory of the absolute expounded in the doctrine of the tathāgatagarbha.” However, the theory of tathāgatagarbha was not used or mentioned in any of the works reliably attributed to Nāgārjuna and, according to many scholars, was unknown to him. Jikido Takasaki, after reviewing Ratnagotrabvibhāga, and all known Tathāgatagarbha sūtras preceding it, writes: “They seem to have appeared after Nāgārjuna, and the Tathāgatagarbha theory, like the Vijñānavāda, is an entirely new and later theory of Mahāyāna Buddhism.” So, how can we explain the fact that in the two verses quoted above Nāgārjuna uses stock terms typical for explaining the tathāgatagarbha? Does it mean that the hymn is not authored by him? Yet, if it is, then what is its relationship with the tathāgatagarbha doctrine? Answering these questions will be the task of the present paper.

Approach

I shall argue that Nāgārjuna, an early champion of the Mahāyāna movement who lived and worked at the time when its institutional boundaries were being negotiated, is the author of the Niraupamamaṇḍava and that the peculiar verses are best approached as strategic devices to respond to the specific demands of the social and institutional context in which he wrote. The approach suggested here builds on the recent groundbreaking study by Joseph Walser. In order to fully appreciate his approach, we need first to consider the state of Mahāyāna as a movement at the time of Nāgārjuna.

There are hundreds of inscriptions from the second- to fifth-century recording gifts to monastic orders of land, money, slaves, villages, relics etc., but not a single reference exists of a gift or patronage to the Mahāyāna as a group until the end of the fifth or the beginning of the sixth century. Obviously, the Mahāyāna was not an independent Buddhist institution but a marginalised minority and, quite often, an embattled movement. Since there is no evidence

7. Ratnāvalī, Chapter IV, particularly verses 79–89, analysed by Schopen, “The Mahāyāna and the Middle Period,” 7–10, clearly shows great effort on the part of Nāgārjuna to secure acceptance of Mahāyāna in a suspicious, if not hostile environment.
of Mahāyāna monasteries at this time, the only reasonable assumption is that Mahāyānists lived in the same monasteries with members of the mainstream (śrāvaka) Buddhist schools who controlled the economic resources and the monastic law, thus leaving them economically and legally dependent. This meant that Mahāyānists could not independently secure lay support and meritorious donations needed to propagate their own ideas (most notably, through proliferation of their scriptures). Legal dependence stems from the fact that all monks living in one monastery took the same ordination vows and would have to accept the same criteria concerning what constitutes buddhavacana in accordance with the standards of the monastic mainstream.8

Walser starts from the obvious although rarely considered fact that Nāgārjuna, as a Buddhist monk, had to live in a monastery affiliated with and dominated by one of the śrāvaka Buddhist schools. Naturally, the proponents of these schools controlled all resources, controlled the religious law and determined which texts deserved to be copied and preserved in the monastery’s library. Walser asks how could Nāgārjuna, as an advocate of a minority movement, secure the preservation and proliferation of his texts, as well as how — by what means and strategies — could he establish a favourable position for his brand of Buddhology? He simply could not have succeeded while ignoring the opinions of the dominant mainstream schools that hosted him. His most important audience — the one he would need to persuade — would be the one that controls the resources and decides what is buddhavacana. Most Western scholarship on Nāgārjuna assumes that his intended audience is either his Mahāyānist supporters or his philosophical opponents (i.e., the Sarvāstivadins, the Śāmkhyas and others). However, Walser says, “What is elided by such arguments is a third and functionally more important audience — those monks and laypeople in control of the resources that the Mahāyānists needed.”9 Using numerous examples, Walser shows that Nāgārjuna was very well aware of his predicament and used various strategies to align his doctrines with those of the dominant schools of his time and place. He further shows that Nāgārjuna often makes shifts in terminology that can be explained only if his purpose was to align himself with the doctrines of the particular school.10 Logically speaking, from the point of view of presenting consistent Madhyamaka doctrine, the shifts are unnecessary and, arguably, do not contribute positively to the consistency of the doctrinal position. The most reasonable answer is that without the endorsement of the “third audience,” he would not have been able to secure proliferation of his texts or secure a favourable position for his minority orientation.

The presence of the “third audience” helps us discover the geographical location of the work. Walser discerned a presence of Pudgalavāda (most

8. Walser, Nāgārjuna in Context, 58.
10. Specific examples about Nāgārjuna’s attempt in Mālamadhyamakakārikā to harmonise his doctrines with those of Prajñāptivādins on pp. 238–39 and with those of Pudgalavādins (Śāmkhyas) on pp. 245–46. In Ratnāvalī (see pp. 261–63), there is no evidence of any effort to harmonise the doctrines with those of Sarvāstivāda or Pudgalavāda (in fact, the latter is openly criticised in verses 61–62), but there is clear evidence of an attempt to harmonise the doctrine of emptiness with the doctrine of momentariness advocated by Pūrvasālīs and Aparasālīs.

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likely Śāṃkritiya, Prajnaptivāda, and a polemical stand on Sarvāstivāda in the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā and, on that basis, concluded that the most probable place of composition of the work was Mathurā.\textsuperscript{11} In contrast, in the Ratnāvalī Walser could not detect any reference to Sarvāstivāda and found no favourable treatment of any Pudgalavāda themes and concluded that those two schools were likely not present or influential where the Ratnāvalī was composed. But he did find references to the doctrine of momentariness — associated by Buddhaghoṣa with Pūrvaśailas and Aparaśailas — which was treated by Nāgārjuna in the same fashion as the doctrine of pudgala in the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā. That led him to conclude that Pūrvaśailas and Aparaśailas had taken the place of the Pudgalavādins as the ones whom Nāgārjuna needed to convince.\textsuperscript{12} Since Pūrvaśailas and Aparaśailas were active in Andhra in the lower Kṛṣṇa River Valley, he concluded that the Ratnāvalī was composed among Andhakas (the Buddhist schools of the Andhra region).

Walser’s hypothesis seems well founded since it is in accord with other evidence found in the work that allowed Ian Mabbett and Walser to establish the time of composition as during the reign of Yājña Śrī (175–204).\textsuperscript{13} The absence of Pudgalavāda from the Amarāvatī/Nāgārjunakonda region, which explains the open criticism to some tenets of this school in Ratnāvalī, and the absence of Sarvāstivāda from the region, which explains the absence of any mention of this school, can be taken as further support of the hypothesis.

After these preliminary observations, the attention can turn to the Nirupamyastava. I shall provide more details establishing the authenticity and examine the relationship of the hymn with texts belonging to the Pūrvaśaila school. The comparison between the Nirupamyastava and a relevant Pūrvaśaila text will shed some light on the relationship between Nāgārjuna and the tathāgatagarbha doctrine.

The Authenticity of the Nirupamyastava
First of all, we should be assured that the Nirupamyastava is a hymn undeniably authored by Nāgārjuna. Lindtner has already noted that it was ascribed to and quoted by no lesser commentators than Āryadeva, Bhāvaviveka, Candrakīrti, Prajñākaramati, and others.\textsuperscript{14} To strengthen the case of authenticity, I shall add the analysis of the style and the relationship with Pūrvaśaila school. The comparison between the Nirupamyastava and a relevant Pūrvaśaila text will shed some light on the relationship between Nāgārjuna and the tathāgatagarbha doctrine.

\textsuperscript{11} The following evidence seems to further strengthens the case: In Mathurā, on the Lion capital inscription, dating from the time of Śodāsa in the Kusana era, is an inscription recovering a rivalry between the Mahāśāṅghikas and the Sarvāstivādins. The latter school had sent a prominent debater to Mathurā to teach the Mahāśāṅghikas the truth. Better yet, the only inscription mentioning the Śammitiyas during the Kusana era also hails from Mathurā. Furthermore, the Sammitīyantikāvasāstrā (T.1649) actually uses Mathurā as an example in one of its discussions — further suggesting a connection between the Sammitiyas and Mathurā (Walser, Nāgārjuna in Context, 269).

\textsuperscript{12} Walser, Nāgārjuna in Context, 263.


\textsuperscript{14} Lindtner, Nagarjuniana, 126.
case that the hymn was written by the same author as the Ratnāvalī at approximately the same time and place — between 174 and 205 CE in Andhra.

**Style**

Following the method taken by Tilman Vetter in his comparison of the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā and the Sanskrit fragments of the Ratnāvalī, I shall review the presence of vipulā, the presence of particles, and the presence of compounds in the Nirānapamyaastava.

Turning to vipulā first. According to the theory of anuṣṭubh, there are two main types of this metre: pathyā, which is the “ordinary” or regular form, and vipulā, which is the “expanded” or irregular form. An anuṣṭubh stanza is called pathyā if the fifth, sixth, and seventh syllables of the two hemistichs show the ja-gana pattern: v- - (short, long, long). According to Pingala, the oldest authority on the field of metrics, only four deviations from the regular pattern were allowed:

- bha-vipulā (- v v) the fifth syllable is long, and the sixth and seventh are short;
- ra-vipulā (- v -) where the fifth and seventh syllables are long, the sixth being short;
- na-vipulā (v v v) where the fifth, sixth, and seventh syllables are short;
- ta-vipulā (- - v) where the fifth and sixth syllables are long, and the seventh is short.

The Buddhist metrician Ratnārakśānti also allows:

- ma-vipulā (- - -) where the fifth, sixth, and seventh syllables are long.

Theoretically, we can further distinguish:

- ca-vipulā (v – v) where the fifth and seventh syllables are short, and the sixth is long, and
- sa-vipulā (v v -) where the fifth and the sixth syllables are short, the seventh is long.

According to Vetter, in the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (out of 884 lines [two pādas per line]), there are 160 instances of vipulā, which is 18%. In Ratnāvalī (out of 605 lines preserved in Sanskrit), based on Michael Hahn’s data, the

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15. As they appear in Michael Hahn’s (Nāgārjuna’s Ratnāvalī, Vol. 1, The Basic Texts (Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese) [Bonn: Indica et Tibetica, 1982]) edition and later emendations, which constitute 60% of the 500 verses.
17. The syllable is long if it contains vowels ā, ī, e, ai, o, au, (ɐ), visarga (ʰ). The vowel before a double consonant is also counted as long (e.g., āgni).
18. 45 lines have na-vipulā, which is 5.1%,
19 have bha-vipulā, which is 1.9%,
40 have ma-vipulā, which is 4.5%,
48 ra-vipulā, which is 5.4%,
6 ja-vipulā,
3 sa-vipulā,
1 ta-vipulā.

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percentage is 14.9%. Vetter is the first and, to my knowledge, the only scholar to have used the analysis of style as a criterion for establishing the authenticity of a work attributed to Nāgārjuna. Joseph Walser uses this evidence in supporting his claim (which he arrived at independently and on the basis of other lines of examination) that the Ratnāvalī had been written later than the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā. Unfortunately, no analysis of style has been applied to any other work attributed to Nāgārjuna. Such a line of investigation productive, especially after Vetter and Walser showed it can be used profitably, and it would be useful to apply it to Niraupamayastava.

The Niraupamayastava is a hymn containing 25 verses, 24 of which are written in amusthub metre. Based on the examination of the 48 lines, 7 of them contain vipulā (4 na-vipulā: 6a, 7a, 13a, 14a; 1 bha-vipulā: 13c; 1 sa-vipulā: 11c; and 1 ma-vipulā: 8a), which is 14.7%. The percentage is close to that of the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā and almost identical to that of the Ratnāvalī.

The analysis of the vipulā does not offer definite proof of the authorship of the work, but it does show specific features of an author’s style and, consequently, to eliminate possible candidates for authorship of a given work. For example, Vetter eliminated Āryadeva as a possible author of the Ratnāvalī because his Catuhsatakā contains only 2.3% vipulā — 7 of a total of 303 Sanskrit fragments — and all are ma-vipulā. The much higher percentage of vipulā in Nāgārjuna’s works compared to Āryadeva’s suggest that the former did not pay too careful attention to composing pathyā verses and considered vipulā to be just as acceptable. To further support the hypothesis, one can examine the Lokāṭāstava, another hymn attributed to Nāgārjuna by the tradition and the contemporary scholars. Ten out of its fifty-six lines contain some kind of vipulā (3 ra-vipulā: 8c, 10a, 18a; 3 na-vipulā: 13c, 19a, 22c; 1 bha-vipulā: 5c; and 3 ma-vipulā: 8a, 11c, 17c), which is 17.8%. The percentage fits between those of the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, the Ratnāvalī, and the Niraupamayastava, suggesting that we are dealing with the idiosyncratic feature of Nāgārjuna’s style. Perhaps it is worth mentioning in this context that the Acintyatstava — whose attribution to Nāgārjuna has been on numerous times denied because of the presence of technical words, suggesting Vijñānavaḍa origin — has only 3 lines

20. Out of 605 lines,
29 have na-vipulā, which is 4.8%,
22 have bha-vipulā, which is 3.6%,
30 have ma-vipulā, which is 5.0%,
7 have ra-vipulā, which is 1.2%,
2 have sa-vipulā which is 0.3%.

According to Hahn, 13, there is a single occurrence of a ja-vipulā in 5.27a: parānudayaḥvuto, but for metrical reasons and in accordance with 5.26a (anuvijnaptisamayukto), he emended the transmitted yuto to yuto<ā to, thereby creating a regular (pathyā) amusthub. Therefore, according to Hahn, there are no ja or ta vipulās in the existing Sanskrit fragments of the Ratnāvalī.

24. Problematic are verses 44–46, but particularly the last paḍa of verse 45, containing the phrase paramantratantra tu vidyate (dependent on another, however, is evident). Mādhyamikas held
out of 118 containing vipulā (1 na-vipulā: 9c; 1 ma-vipulā: 1a; and 1 ca-vipulā: 41c), which is around 2.5%. Instead of suspecting the validity of vipulā-analysis as the criterion for the authenticity of a work attributed to Nāgārjuna, I would rather say that here I see another reason for suspecting the authenticity of the Acintyastava.

In his comparison of the stylistic features of the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā and the Ratnāvalī, Vetter also examined the presence of particles and of compounds. I do not find that these two elements of style give specific pointers to the author’s idiosyncrasies as the vipulā, but I shall examine them in order to show how close the similarities between the Ratnāvalī and the Niraupamyastava are.

In the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, according to Vetter, 94% of the lines contain some particle.25 In the Ratnāvalī, the percentage is 55%,26 while in the Niraupamyastava, it is 56%.27 Again, the percentage is almost identical to that in the Ratnāvalī. Concerning compounds: in the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, 21% of the lines contain a compound, while in the Ratnāvalī the number is 48.5%. Furthermore, in the Ratnāvalī lines occur regularly where the caesura between the pādas a and b or pādas c and d is formed by a juncture between two stems of a compound, something which never happens in the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā. In the Niraupamyastava, 35 lines, or 70%, contain a compound. On two occasions (verses 10 a-b and 23 c-d) the caesura is formed by a juncture between two stems of a compound. That shows a considerable similarity with the Ratnāvalī.

Overall, the Niraupamyastava shows very close stylistic similarities with the Ratnāvalī in all three examined elements: vipulā, particles, and compounds.

According to Mabbett and Walser, the Ratnāvalī was composed in Andhra and, as the latter author pointed out, among the Andhakas who were his real audience. I shall argue that the Niraupamyastava shows an obvious connection with Buddhist schools from Andhra and in this I find another close similarity with the Ratnāvalī.

Connections with the Pūrvaśaila

Analysing the Lokānuvartanasūtra, one of the earliest Mahāyāna sūtras translated into Chinese, Paul Harrison finds that it has distinct echoes in the Niraupamyastava and thinks that Nāgārjuna must have been familiar with some form of this text.28 From Harrison’s paper we learn that the text of the sūtra falls into two halves, the first dealing with the Buddha’s person and the second

that pratantrasvabhāva only exists samvritatā and not paramārthataḥ, but Yogācārins, as the Lankāvatārā states, held that pratantara exists. The quoted pāda of Acintyastava seems to make a claim in line with the latter.

25. In the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, according to Vetter: ca is present in 41% of the lines, eva in 16.4%, api in 9.4%, iti in 7.5%, hi in 7.5%, vā in 5.2%, punah in 4.1%, tu in 2.6%. Altogether, 94% of the lines contain some particle.

26. In Ratnāvalī, in 605 lines existing in Sanskrit: ca is present in 126 lines, eva in 41, api in 74, iti in 43, hi in 7, vā in 15, punah in 8, tu in 22. Altogether, 336 lines contain some of the particles, which is 55%.

27. In 50 lines, ca is present in 18, which is 36%, eva in 3, which is 6%, api in 2, which is 4%, iti in 4, which is 8%, hi is absent, vā is absent, punah is absent, and tu in 1, which is 2%. Altogether, particles are present in 56% of the lines.

with his teaching. In the first half, we find references to his daily activities (cleaning his teeth, bathing, dressing etc.). Despite the appearance of humanity, however, the Buddha remains supramundane or transcendent. The illusion he creates is only for the purpose of furthering the salvation of sentient beings. In the second half we find the teaching of emptiness, “the merely conventional validity of verbal distinctions as opposed to the true undifferentiated nature of the dharmadhātu, and so on.”29 The procedure throughout the work, as Harrison describes, is the same: “each verse contrasts a particular aspect of the ‘show’ with the reality behind it, after which comes the refrain . . . ‘it is in conformity with the ways of the world that he makes such a show.’”30

Even at first glance one can detect several striking similarities with the Niraupamyastava. Doctrinally, in both works we observe the standard discussion of emptiness of all dharmas and reference to the non-differentiation of the dharmadhātu. In terms of the structure, the Lokānuvartanasūtra has a section dealing with the teaching and a section dealing with the person of the Buddha, while the Niraupamyastava has a section dealing with the qualities of the Buddha’s mind (verses 2–15, where the teaching is exposed) and a section on the qualities of the Buddha’s body (verses 16–24, where it is stated that his physical appearance was shown only for the advancement of beings). In both cases, the Buddha is supramundane and perfect in every way, and a particular aspect of the “show” is contrasted with the reality behind it. Harrison31 quotes two verses of the Niraupamyastava that resemble the Lokānuvartanasūtra in every detail described above:

nāmayo nāsucih kāye kṣutṛsāṃsambhavo na ca/
tvayā lokānuvṛtyartham darśita lauṅkī kriyā//19

There is no disease or impurity in your body, no arising of hunger or thirst either [but], for the sake of conforming yourself to the world, worldly behaviour has been shown by you.

karmāvaranadosaś ca sarvathānagha nāsti te/
tvayā lokānukpārthaṃ karmaplutiḥ pradarśita//20

In no way do you have the faults [caused by] the obstacles of actions, o faultless one, [but] because of the pity for the world you have shown [yourself] as submersed in action.32

Both verses refer to the show performed by the Buddha in order to conform to the world. Verse 19 even uses the word lokānuvṛtti, from which lokānuvartana derives.

It is not surprising that Nāgārjuna might have been familiar with some form of the Lokānuvartanasūtra tradition because, even though the

32. Apart from the Lokānuvartanasūtra, these verses closely resemble a section of an unnamed sūtra quoted in the Mahāvastu, where around twenty verses discuss the daily routine of the Buddha, such as washing his teeth, wearing robes, taking medicine, drinking, etc., ending regularly with “this . . . is mere conformity with the world” (J. J. Jones, Trans. Mahāvastu, Vol. 1 [London: Luzac & Company, 1949], 132–34).
Lokānuvartanasūtra presents doctrinal tenets, which are trademarks of the Lokottaravāda school, this school was an offshoot of the Mahāsāṅghikas and, as such, shared many tenets (arguably whole sūtras) with other schools of the same origin. One such school is the Pūrvaśaila, active in Andhra at the time of Nāgārjuna. Since Lokottaravādins were not active in Andhra, it is reasonable to assume that Nāgārjuna’s version of the Lokānuvartanasūtra comes from Pūrvaśaila circles. To further support this thesis, one can refer to Candrakīrti who, as can be learned through Harisson’s critical analysis, quoted eight verses that closely resemble the sūtra, on one occasion naming the source as the Lokānuvartanasūtra and ascribing it to the Pūrvaśaila.33

Summary
The style of the Niraupamyastava is very similar to that of the Ratnāvalī and the similarity suggests that both works have been authored by the same person. Furthermore, there are established close links with the Pūrvaśaila school, which strengthens the connection with the Ratnāvalī. Based on these two pieces of evidence, and not forgetting that the Niraupamyastava was attributed to Nāgārjuna by his earliest commentators, there is a very high possibility that the hymn is an authentic work composed at approximately the same time and place as the Ratnāvalī. The relationship of the hymn with the Pūrvaśaila sūtra also provides insight into the most important audience for the work. It is most likely that Nāgārjuna composed this hymn while living in the environment dominated by the Pūrvaśailas.

Further Similarities with the Pūrvaśailas: Relationship with the Śrīmālasimhanāda-sūtra
The influence of Pūrvaśaila circles on the Niraupamyastava seems to provide a clue for understanding the peculiar verses. It seems that the statements can be best understood through comparison with another work coming from the same circles and composed in the third century: the Śrīmālasimhanāda-sūtra. The Śrīmālasimhanāda-sūtra also advocates “One Vehicle” but takes the embryo of the Tathāgata (tathāgatagarbha) as the basis. Even more significantly, it has a passage translated by Wayman and Wayman: “Lord, this Tathāgatabarbha is the embryo of the Illustrious Dharmadhātu, the embryo of the Dharmakāya, the

33. Harrison writes: “Now these seven verses in the Madhyamakāvatāra, which are introduced with the words ‘As is stated at length in the Verses according to the Pūrvaśailas . . . ’, are all to be found in the Lokānuvartanasūtra, although not in the order in which Candrakīrti has quoted them.” (Harrison, “Sanskrit Fragments,” 226).

Furthermore: If we now put our findings together, we have Candrakīrti (late sixth, early seventh century) citing in various works of his a total of eight different verses — three of which appear more than once — from a sūtra, apparently in Prākrit, which he at one point names as the ’Jig rten mthun ’jug mdo (= Lokānuvartanasūtra), twice refers to as āgama or lūn, and which he also ascribes to the Pūrvaśailas. These same verses are found in the Lan (Harrison, “Sanskrit Fragments,” 227).

The same verses quoted by Candrakīrti are discussed by Ruegg (David Seyfort Ruegg, “Le Dharmadhūtastava de Nāgārjuna,” Études Tibetaines dédiées à la Mémoire de Marcelle Lalou, [Paris: Librairie d’Amérique et d’Orient, 1971], 459–60) in context of the relationship between the Dharmadhūtastava (another hymn attributed to Nāgārjuna) and Pūrvaśaila.
embryo of supramundane dharma, the embryo of the intrinsically pure dharma.” Here the Śrīmālāsimhanāda-sūtra equates the tathāgatagarbha with the dharmadātu and with the dharmakāya. After establishing these equations, the statement about the ground on which the “One Vehicle” can be established becomes identical. Furthermore, regarding the positive description of the dharmakāya, the Śrīmālāsimhanāda-sūtra uses exactly the same three stock terms to describe the tathāgatagarbha (adding a fourth — sāśvata — “eternal”). In short, there is a very close resemblance both in terminology and in logic behind some doctrinal claims between the Niraupamavastava and the Śrīmālāsimhanāda-sūtra, that is, between Nāgārjuna’s doctrine of dharmadātu and Śrīmālāsimhanāda-sūtra’s doctrine of tathāgatagarbha.

In their study of the Śrīmālāsimhanāda-sūtra, Wayman and Wayman discuss the approximate dates of composition. As an early Mahāyāna sūtra, they place the Śrīmālāsimhanāda-sūtra soon after the early Prajñāpāramitā sūtras, the most important of which, such as the Aṣṭasāhasrikā, were written in the period between 100 BCE and 200 CE. These early Mahāyāna sūtras refer only to two bodies of the Buddha, the rūpakaṇḍa and the dharmakāya. Later Mahāyāna sūtras, such as the Avatamsaka (c. 200–400 CE) and the Lankāvatāra (fourth-century CE) refer to the third body — the sambhogakāya. The Śrīmālāsimhanāda-sūtra clearly refers to the first two bodies but shows no signs of knowledge of the third. Of course, the Śrīmālāsimhanāda-sūtra could be concurrent with the Avatamsaka but definitely predates the Lankāvatāra sūtra since the latter quotes it. Hence, the terminus ad quem is the fourth century CE.

Wayman and Wayman find clues for more definite placement of the sūtra “in the Śrīmālāsimhanāda-sūtra’s glorification of the Buddhist Queen and the stress on the ‘good daughter of the family’ side by side with the ‘good son of the family’.” To them, this points to a period when the prosperity of the Buddhist community depended heavily on the patronage of royal ladies. According to

35. See Wayman and Wayman, 45, for discussion on the four stock terms.
36. Wayman and Wayman, 1.
37. Lindtner’s (Nagarjuniana) evidence concerning similarities between numerous verses of Nāgārjuna’s works and the Lankāvatāra must be taken seriously. It seems beyond doubt that Nāgārjuna knew a certain version of the Lankāvatāra-sūtra, even though not in the form in which we know it today. (For further discussion on the relationship between Nāgārjuna and the Lankāvatāra-sūtra see Paul Williams, “Review Article” [of Lindtner’s Nagarjuniana], Journal of Indian Philosophy 12 [1984]: 89–94), and Christian Lindtner (“The Lankāvatāra-sūtra in Early Indian Madhyamaka Literature,” Asiatische Studien, 46/1 [1992]: 244–79). It seems unlikely, however, that the version of the Lankāvatāra known to Nāgārjuna included quotations from the Śrīmālāsimhanāda-sūtra. On that point we should be mindful of the note given by Wayman and Wayman:

The Lankāvatāra had been profoundly influenced by the Śrī-Mālā, partly for its “embryo of the Tathāgata,” which the Lankāvatāra equates with the “store consciousness” (ālayavijñāna), and partly for its “three bodies made of mind,” which the Lankāvatāra develops at length and in a manner inconsistent with the Ratnagotravibhāga. This indicates that the Lankāvatāra was composed outside of the Mahāsāṃghika circle, which had given rise to the Śrī-Mālā, and was freely syncretising the Śrī-Mālā with doctrines of other Buddhist sects. The fact that the Ratnagotravibhāga does not cite the Lankāvatāra, which may have already been written, is possibly due to a disagreement over interpreting the Śrī-Mālā (Wayman and Wayman, 6–7).
Wayman and Wayman, “the only known area that could apply is South India, especially the Andhra country where there are celebrated Buddhist remains, Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda.” In light of the historical and epigraphic evidence from major Buddhist centres in India between the second and fourth centuries, particularly centres where Mahāyāna ideas could have been comfortably expressed, the above claim seems well founded. As we learn from Indian historians, a very interesting feature of Buddhism in Andhra is that to a very large extent it progressed independent of the patronage of kings, but almost all Buddhist monuments restored or constructed during the third century were the result of donations made by royal ladies and pious private citizens. Hanumantha Rao informs us that, “After the death of Aśoka, all the dynasties that ruled over Andhra, with the exception of one or two individual rulers were Brāhmaṇical in religion.” During the period under consideration, there appears to have been a synchronised and vigorous religious policy of the Sātavāhanas for the revival of Vedic ritualism, restoration of the caste system and upholding the superiority of the Brahmin. There is a strong possibility that Nagarjuna addressed his Ratnāvalī to one of the Sātavāhana kings, Yajña Śrī, and persuaded him not only to be tolerant to Buddhism but to patronise it. From that time, there appears to be a change in the attitude of the Sātavāhanas to Buddhism. Rao also informs us that, “One of the last Sāthavāhana kings, Vijaya, actually visited Śrīparvata on Vaiśākha-Pūrṇimā” But, the situation quickly changed with the fall of the South Indian Sātavāhana empire, around 220 CE. Several smaller kingdoms emerged, including the Ikṣūkā, ruling over the Kṛṣṇa-Guntar region of Andhradesa. The founder of the dynasty is said to have been Vāsiṣṭhiputa Śrī Chāntamūla who “was a devotee of Mahāśena-Virupākṣa and was a performer of Vedic sacrifices including Aśvamedha, Agniṣṭoma and Vājapeya.” It is during this time that we see evidence of antagonistic and even vindictive Brahmanical reaction towards the pro-Buddhist late Sātavāhana. It is impossible to say whether the king led this reaction, but he did perform the Aśvamedha in the Nagarjunakonda valley, just under the shade of the Mahācāitya that enshrined Dhātuvāra, which for Rao is a sign of “the spirit of vengeance exhibited by the revived Brāhmaṇism under royal patronage.”

Seven kings are said to have ruled the Ikṣūkā kingdom in fifty-seven years and it seems that they were all supporters of the Brahmanical tradition. Interestingly, during this time Andhra became a flourishing centre of Buddhism, where old monuments were renovated and enlarged and several new ones constructed. One only needs to take a brief look at the inscriptions from the Buddhist site at Nagarjunakonda and nearby areas — now well documented by

38. Wayman and Wayman, 1.
41. For extensive discussion on the subject see Mabbett, “The Problem of the Historical Nagarjuna Revisited,” and Walser, “Nāgarjuna and the Ratnāvali.”
42. Rao, Religion in Andhra, 62.
44. Rao, Religion in Andhra, 62.

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Especially during the reign of Śrī Viśrṣṭadatta, the daughter of Śrī Chāntamūla, royal ladies “vied with one another in making donations to the Buddhist Church.” The king himself does not seem to have had an active part in obtaining religious merit by founding the religious monuments of Nāgārjunakonda but all the highest-ranking ladies from the royal court, including his mother, his aunt and his wife, obviously had a very active role. From Vogel’s and especially from the Rao’s et al. edition and translation of the text of the inscriptions one finds these ladies’ names, ranks, and relationships to kings. Practically each pillar of the monument of Nāgārjunakonda is erected by their devoted patronage.

The flourishing of Buddhism under the lavish support of these royal ladies at the time when all kings were supporters of the Brahmanical tradition is a unique occurrence among Buddhist centres. In comparison, on the inscriptions from Mathurā in the Kuśana period, one finds names of merchants, nuns, sons and daughters of ordinary people, but nothing that brings the attention to the queens and ladies from the court. The situation is similar in other centres.

Wayman and Wayman postulate that the Śrīmālasimhanāda-sūtra, a sūtra in which the main character, the princess Śrīmālādevī, evokes the Buddha, who appears in front of her in his dharmakāya. After properly worshiping him, she is granted eloquence in exposition of the most profound doctrine. The sūtra “was composed partly to honour the eminent Buddhist ladies who were so responsible for this glorious period of South Indian Buddhism.” That places the composition of the sūtra tentatively within the Ikṣvāku dynasty of the third-century Andhra or, more precisely, during the fifty-seven years of their reign, approximately 220–277 CE, in the same region and only a few decades after Nāgārjuna.

Historians tell us that at that time and place, the dominant Buddhist schools were Mahāsāṅghika sects, particularly the Pūrvaśaila, Aparāśaila, and Caitīya. Thus, Wayman and Wayman conclude that, “The Śrī Māḷā is a Mahāyāna outgrowth of the later Mahāsāṅghika.” To further support this claim, they refer to the Mahāvastu, a text of the Lokottaravādins — another sub-school of Mahāsāṅghikas. Comparison of the two works has led them not only to the discovery that several difficult terms in Śrīmālasimhanāda-sūtra can be clarified by reference to the Mahāvastu but also that the latter provides a set of Bodhisattva career-phases that neatly fits the chapter division of the first part of the former, which also contains various special tenets of the Mahāsāṅghikas. In the final analysis, Wayman and Wayman are firm in their conclusion that, “The Śrī Māḷā is a production of the Mahāsāṅghika sect in third-century Andhra.” Based on the evidence examined above, this thesis seems acceptable with a

46. Rao, Religion in Andhra, 64.
47. Rao et al., Buddhist Inscriptions.
49. Wayman and Wayman, 2.
50. Wayman and Wayman, 2.
51. Wayman and Wayman, 3.

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proviso: since there is no evidence of donations to the Mahāyāna prior to the fifth century in any of the known inscriptions, it is most likely that the Śrīmālasimhanāda-sūtra was a product of one of the Mahāsāṅghika schools of the region. It may have been a Mahāyāna outgrowth of the later Mahāsāṅghika, as Wayman and Wayman consider it, but it would have had to be in accord with the understanding of budhavaccana by the dominant śrāvaka school of the time and place — the Pūrvaśaila, Aparaśaila, or Caitiṇya.

Considering that Nāgārjuna lived in the same region most likely during the last quarter of the second to the first quarter of the third century, he may well have been exposed to the doctrines that found their final formulation in the Śrīmālasimhanāda-sūtra. It is impossible to tell when this doctrine appeared or started gaining popularity among Andhakas, but the ease with which the Śrīmālasimhanāda-sūtra speaks of the tathāgatagarbha suggests that it is not treated as a new and potentially controversial topics but as one to which the audience is quite open and receptive. Hence, there is no reason to exclude the possibility that some form of the theory of the tathāgatagarbha could have been popular among Andhakas at the time of Nāgārjuna.

To summarise, through a comparison with the Śrīmālasimhanāda-sūtra, the peculiar verses become easier to understand. If one assumes that Nāgārjuna was responding to the doctrinal understanding of his host audience and was using doctrinal terms and phrases well suited to forge alliances with his hosts, the Pūrvaśailas, the content of the two verses becomes clear.

It is worth making another point, which grounds the composition of the Śrīmālasimhanāda-sūtra more firmly in the Ikṣvāku era. The Ikṣvāku kings were no doubt staunch supporters of Brahmanical ritualism and devotionalism but, because of the royal ladies, were tolerant towards Buddhism. However, during their time, as Rao observes, “Buddha came to be looked upon as Bhagavān both by the Theravadins and Mahāsāṅghikas and was invoked to fulfil the desires of the devotees.”

Further Similarities with the Pūrvaśaila: Bhakti and Buddhānusmrīti
The content of verse 23 of the Nīraupamayastava is also not easy to grasp:

lokadhātusv ameyeṣu tvadbhaktaiḥ punar īkṣase/
cyutijanmābhisambhodhicakranirvṛtīlāsaih//23

But in the countless worlds you are seen anew by your devotees eagerly longing [for] your descent, birth, perfect enlightenment, teaching and [entering into the final] cessation.

The words bhakti (devotion) or bhakta (devotees) are not used in the Mūlamadhyāmakakārikā or the Ratnāvalī. Here, not only is bhakta used, but it also stands in the same sentence with seeing the Buddha. It cannot be the case that the verse offers a simple thesis that śrāvakas in general cannot really see the

52. Rao et al., Buddhist Inscriptions, 134.
Buddha because they do not understand his body as transcendent. That would perhaps make sense in polemics with Sarvāstivādins who considered the body of the Buddha as a human body, subject to illness, deterioration, and death. There is not the slightest evidence anywhere else in the hymn that Nāgārjuna is addressing Sarvāstivādins, and there is no reason to assume he is doing that here. It would be difficult to maintain that the verse is polemical because Mahāśāṅghikas accepted the doctrine of the two bodies, the physical body being perfect in every way. So, the statement in the verse must refer to something else. Perhaps the Śrīmālasimhanāda-sūtra can provide insight: bhakti is exactly the relationship that the queen has with the Buddha. Again, this is not to say that there exists a direct relationship between the Nirāupamastava and the Śrīmālasimhanāda-sūtra, but one can detect some ideas towards which Andhakas were sympathetic. In this case, it can be safely assumed that the Pūrvaśāīlas saw devotional worship as very important. It is possible that Nāgārjuna responded to that notion. It is also possible that seeing the Buddha refers to the practice of evoking the Buddha (buddhanusmṛti) similar to the one described in the Śrīmālasimhanāda-sūtra. At the beginning of the first chapter one reads that the queen evokes the Buddha (buddhanusmṛti), who approaches in his inconceivable body. She praises his two bodies, which are the form body and the dharma body. After she takes the ten vows, she prays for the Tathāgata’s power to make her eloquent (pratibhāna) to teach in the scope of the great aspirations, to teach the far-ranging meaning, to teach the great meaning (constituting ascending levels of the “three all-inclusive aspirations” of the Bodhisattva), to preach eloquently the embrace of the Illustrious Doctrine that was held and explained by all Buddhas, and to still further explain the faultless meaning. It is through the practice of buddhanusmṛti that the queen meets the Buddha — he appears in his dharma body — and, subsequently, through his grace he gives her inspired eloquence (pratibhāna) to teach the faultless meaning of the Illustrious Doctrine.

It is beyond doubt that the Andhakas, who authored the Śrīmālasimhanāda-sūtra, endorsed the practices of buddhanusmṛti and related it to accumulation of the immeasurable merit necessary for travelling the bodhisattva path to its final fruition. The casual manner in which the practice is introduced suggests that it was well known.53 Buddhanusmṛti may not have been Nāgārjuna’s own practice or maybe not his chief practice — he may have been primarily concerned with reasoning into emptiness, even though in the Ratnāvalī he pays attention to generating merit more than to anything else. Nonetheless, it is

53. At the very beginning of the first chapter we read that the queen receives a letter from her parents praising the infinite merit of the Tathāgata. Convinced that the message has an auspicious meaning, she says:

> It is said that the voice of a Buddha is most rare in the world. If this saying be true, I must serve thee.
> If the Lord Buddha may come for the sake of the world, may he, with compassion, come here on behalf of the teaching for me (Wayman and Wayman, 60).

Without any further introduction to the practice of evoking the Buddha, the sūtra continues:

> At that very instant, the Lord approached in the space [in front], and she saw the inconceivable body of the Buddha seated there, emitting pure light rays (Wayman and Wayman, 60).
certain that he makes clear allusions in the Niraupamayastava to using it. It seems fair to assume that in the environment in which he composed the Niraupamayastava such allusions would have been seen favourably as an approved method of hearing buddhavacana. It could be another instance of rhetorical strategy but, even if that is the case, the fact that he would use it proves that this practice was accepted and valued at the time and place.

Conclusion: the Niraupamayastava and the Tathāgatagarbha

The question arises — could Nāgārjuna have known the tathāgatagarbha doctrine? Accepting that the Śrīmālasimhanāda-sūtra might postdate Nāgārjuna by a few decades, one possibility would be that at his time only the dharmadātu doctrine was known and he endorsed it. Yet, by its content, this doctrine had very close similarities to tathāgatagarbha doctrine and was only a few short steps removed from it (even though those steps might have been unacceptable from Nāgārjuna’s Madhyamaka point of view). Another possibility is that the doctrine of tathāgatagarbha had been known to Andhakas at the time of Nāgārjuna and that he knew about it and had to address it in order to align himself doctrinally with the mainstream Buddhism of the time and place, which he did by this hymn. If that is the case, then the Niraupamayastava can be seen as Nāgārjuna’s very clever attempt to address a difficult topic, pleasing his audience by using stock phrases they would understand and accept, while not compromising his own Madhyamaka position. In other words, if that is the case, then Nāgārjuna conveniently endorses the non-controversial doctrine of dharmadātu, describes it in tathāgatagarbha terms to which his audience is accustomed (presuming that would bring him their acceptance), but never actually endorses the new doctrine. Perhaps, between the lines one should read caution for the new doctrine and attempt to illustrate how all the positive content of the doctrine can be retained (through dharmadātu) without endorsing something with such a close resemblance to ātman. If such was the case, it seems fair to say that the genre (stotra kāvya) and the content (worship of the qualities of the Buddha) were very well chosen: a hymn in praise of the Buddha and the qualities of the Buddha is not expected to attract as much doctrinal criticism as would an analytical and polemical treatise. Be that as it may, the point remains that in the religious

54. Even the most basic examination of the form of the Niraupamayastava will show that most of the verses make direct reference to the Buddha as if he were personally present and Nāgārjuna spoke directly to him. Out of twenty-five verses, the first being salutation and the last dedication of merit, twenty-two address the Buddha directly. Furthermore, the majority of the verses evoke qualities of the Buddha (one section dedicated to the qualities of his mind, the other to the qualities of his body) — one of the most commonly used ways of practising anusmṛti. Listing the types of buddhanusmṛti as found in the old sūtras, Paul Harrison (“Commemoration and Identification in Buddhanusmṛti,” in The Mirror of Memory: Reflections on Mindfulness and Rememberance in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism, Janet Gyatso, ed. [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992], 216) writes: “By performing this recitation in a meditational context, practitioners are encouraged to recall or call to mind (1) the virtues of the Buddha, (2) the superiority and profundity of the Buddhist teaching. . . .” That is exactly what our hymn does. Finally, verses 16 and 23 directly refer to seeing the Buddha, while the latter, as we saw, refers to devotional worship (bhakti) of the Buddha. That is another link to buddhanusmṛti since the practice in Mahāyāna was directly related to vision and worship of the Buddha (Harrison, “Commemoration”).
environment in which the hymn was composed, an environment dominated by schools sympathetic (possibly strongly enthusiastic) towards the doctrine of the tathāgatagarbha, Nāgārjuna chooses the genre of devotional poetry to introduce for the first time an important, possibly controversial, topic, the dharmadātu, in terms so very close to the new doctrine. In doing so, he travels a very narrow line in this hymn and enters into a cataphatic description of reality, contrary to his apophatic practice in the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā. Perhaps this is the testimony to the importance he gives to the real audience. So great was that importance that he almost went too far by endangering his Madhyamaka doctrinal position. Or, perhaps it is testimony to Nāgārjuna’s self-confidence in his skills that he could allow himself to walk the narrow path and end up not only maintaining his own doctrine but also forging alliances along the way with his host audience.

Similarities between the Niraupamastava and the Śrīmālasimhanāda-sūtra in terms of the content and description of the dharmadātu may provide help in answering the difficult but important question: what is the significance of the positive description of reality for Nāgārjuna (found in verse 22 of the Niraupamastava)? In the Śrīmālasimhanāda-sūtra, that language is connected to a very significant complement to the doctrine of emptiness involving the asūnya and śunya aspect of the garbha: the tathāgatagarbha is śunya because it is empty of klesas, but it is asūnya because it is endowed with buddhadharmas that are inseparable from the dharma-kāya.55

From the Śrīmālasimhanāda-sūtra alone, it is not possible to deduce the reasons for the complement but it is possible to do so with the help of another tathāgatagarbha work, the Ratnagotravibhāga. It is no accident that this sāstra calls itself Uttaratantra (the later exposition), as opposed to the early exposition in the Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras. The Ratnagotravibhāga does not declare that the Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras are incorrect in their assertion that everything is empty (śunyaṃ sarvam) but offers the correction that the word sarvam means sarvaka-leśa, which excludes the Buddha Qualities. Therefore, the word śunya implies asūnya — not empty of the qualities of Buddhahood and of the garbha.56

In what sense is Nāgārjuna using the positive assertions? At present, I cannot find any other plausible answer but that Nāgārjuna is also suggesting the asūnya aspect of the doctrine of emptiness. Whether that is only a rhetorical strategy in order to gain endorsement by the host audience and to align himself with the mainstream, a skilful means (upāya) for instructing a particular audience, or that it is indeed his own philosophical position, remains to be examined.

55. The Śrīmālasimhanāda-sūtra:
[Empowered by eloquence awarded by the Buddha, the queen Śrīmālā speaks:] “The voidness knowledge of the Tathāgatagarbha is of two kinds. The two are as follows:
“Lord, the Tathāgatagarbha is void of all the defilement-stores, which are discrete and knowing as not liberated.
“Lord, the Tathāgatagarbha is not void of the Buddha dharmas which are non-discrete, inconceivable, more numerous than the sands of the Ganges, and knowing as liberated (Wayman and Wayman, 99).

56. For more detailed explanation see Takasaki, A Study on the Ratnagotravibhāga, 55.