THE LIFE OF NĀGĀRJUNA FROM TIBETAN AND CHINESE SOURCES

By M. WALLESER

I. Tibetan Sources

The systematic development of the thought of voidness laid down in the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras is brought into junction with the name of a man of whom we cannot even positively say that he has really existed, still less that he is the author of the works ascribed to him: this name is Nāgārjuna. Indeed, we do not lack news about him either in Tibetan or in Chinese literature. Correspondingly to the extraordinary significance which the "Middle Course Teaching" ascribed to his ingeniousness has gained in the countries of the so-called Northern Buddhism, the interest in his person is uncommonly great. But this interest is displayed more by the invention of legendary traits than in the research of historical facts which are undoubtedly hidden behind the older accounts of the origin of the Mahāyāna.

The respective reports of the Tibetan sources are specially detailed. Here Nāgārjuna appears to us above all as the great sorcerer, a figure into which he has been changed seemingly under the influence of the Tantra-school that became from the ninth century more and more influential. As a sorcerer he is glorified in the text Grub-thob bṛgyad-cu-rtsa-bshihi rnam-thar rendered recently into German by A. Grünwedel under the title "Die Ge-

1 See my "Prajñāpāramitā, die Vollkommenheit der Erkenntnis" (Quellen der Religionsgeschichte, ed. by authority of the religio-histor. Commission of the Roy-Society of Sciences at Göttingen), 1914.

adventures, so also his death: God Brahman transformed himself into a Brähmana, asked for the Ačārya's head and obtained it as the Ačārya himself promised to give it. He killed himself by cutting-off his head with a blade of kūsa.

Much more detailed than this legendary account which indirectly goes back to Indian sources and which thereby in spite of many historically impossible details deserves attention, are the equally legendary reports which Śrī Candra Dās has published in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, vol. 51, Part i (1882), p. 115. Unfortunately he has neglected to mention his sources so that one may presume that he has thrown the various traditions together and thereby rendered the already confused tradition more contradictory and untenable still than it may have been by the separate accounts.

His very important information about the time of Nāgārjuna's birth should be met with the greatest doubt when referring to the rendering of the Tibetan sources. Tāranātha's “Geschichte des Buddhismus in Indien” (rgya-gar chos-hbyun) on p. 54 of the Tibetan text, p. 68 of the German translation agrees with Sum-pa mghan-po ye-čes dpal-hbyor's historical work dPal-bsam-ljon bzaṅ p. 84 in so far as Nāgārjuna is supposed to have appeared in the country of Bhaṅgala only after the presence of king Haricandra, the first of the Candra family, Śrī-Saraha or Rāhula having been contemporary with him. It must however be stated this chronological statement of our Tibetan sources is most doubtful, as it is not possible to identify that Candra prince with Sandrokottos, the contemporary of Alexander the Great, but on the other hand the founder of the Gupta Dynasty which began 308 A.D. can well be placed hundred years after Nāgārjuna. In this case Nāgārjuna must have lived in the third century A. D. which is not unlikely having regard to other reports of his co-existence with the kings Kaniśka and Satavāhana. Candra Dās would like to identify the above mentioned Candragupta with the founder of the Maurya Dynasty and proposes to

---

2 In the dPal-bsam-ljon-bzang, ed. by Śrī Candra Dās (Calcutta 1908) it is mentioned on p. 131 that the author was one of the pupils of Vajrāśrama (dgor-je gda-n-pa). According to p. 119 of the same text Vajrāśrama was the spiritual teacher of Rājā Nāyapāla of Bengal under whose reign Aṭṭa left the Vitkramāli monastery in Maghasa (1042 A. D., see V. A. Smith, Early History of India. 2nd ed., 1908, p. 368), in order to work in Tibet for the propagation of Buddhism. Nāyapāla ascended the throne 1030–1033 A. D., see Journal As. Soc. Bengal 1900 (vol. 69), p. 190.
3 Gräwedel, l. c. renders the name by Śālabhāṇḍa.
place Nāgārjuna’s life more than a century after Alexander’s invasion of India, whilst thus altering his own informations. He must however admit that there can be no certainty about Nāgārjuna’s time as long as we cannot obtain possession of the Indian historians of Buddhist time.1

It has to be agreed even to-day that an exact fixing of Nāgārjuna’s lifetime must remain entirely doubtful having regard to the contradictory nature of the tradition, always supposing that a writer of this name has existed at all.

The life of Nāgārjuna according to Śrī Candra Dāś’ reports may be summed up in the following manner. He was born in the land of Vidarbha2 as the son of a wealthy Brahman who had remained childless for many years. Astrologers were called to investigate the child’s fate, but they found that the child could only have a span of seven years. Before the end of the seventh year his parents sent him by a servant to a secluded place in order to be spared the painful sight of the predicted death. Here the Mahābodhisattva Avalokiteśvara Khasarpaṇa visited him in disguise and counselled him to repair to the large monastery Nālendra in Magadhā, and the child responded. At the suggestion of the High Priest of Nālendra, Śrī Saraha Bhadra, he became a monk, and he succeeded by special veneration of the Buddha Aparimitāyuh—apparently the same to whom the Aparimitāyur-dhāraṇi3 is addressed—to escape death at the fateful moment. The next years were devoted to religious studies; later his enchantment of the Goddess Candrajīkā by whose aid the numerous priests were provided with food, plays a considerable rôle. But in various other magical ways he obtained their means of livelihood. He contradicted the doctrines of the Brahmins and taught the monks of Nālendra. The Nāgas used to attend his sermons in the form of young boys. Their participation at his instruction was so large that they invited him to their dwelling place where he resided three months. They begged him to take up his permanent domicile in the domain of the Nāgas which he declined saying that he had to propagate the holy doctrine at Jambudvīpa. When leaving he promised to return some time to them. He went back to Nālendra with costly presents, with jewels of immense value, and with the religious work called the Nāgasāhasrikā. On account of his connections with the Nāgas he received the name of “Nāgārjuna”. Other travels took him to the land of Rādhā where he founded many chapels and Caityas, to Uttarākura into the town of Salama or Salamana, where he predicted a boy called Jetaka that he would once become a king which after three months really took place. After the death of the Saraha Bhadra he became in his stead High Priest at Nālendra and brought to maturity the Mādhyaṃkā-philosophy which had only been sketched by his teacher Saraha.

Although he was the head of the now spreading Mahāyāna sect, he also troubled about the well-being of the Śrāvakas or the followers of the Hinayāna as the older doctrine was henceforth called. In his own community he introduced sharp discipline and expelled 8000 monks whose moral purity was suspected.

By these means he became the acknowledged head of the whole Buddhist church. At that time the germ of a third division among his followers became visible which later led to the formation of the Yogācāra School. Under Nāgārjuna’s patriarchate Nālendra flourished more and more and soon obscured entirely the splendour of Vajrāsana (Buddhagaya), the main seat of the followers of the “lower vehicle” (Hinayāna). The kings Muṇja of Oṭiṣa (Orissa) and king Bhogadeva of Dhāra in Malva were converted with thousands of their subjects to Buddhism under Nāgārjuna’s influence who composed many works on the Mādhyaṃkā Philosophy, such as the Mūla-jīnā4, the sixth collection of knowledge,5 the Dharmo-dhātu-sūtra, the Sūtra-saṅgrahā. In the later part of his life Nāgārjuna visited Daksīṇāpatha (Southern India) where he became a friend of king d Ge-byed (Śaṅkara). By a common vow they were united to life and death. Nāgārjuna’s

---

1 L. c. p. 115.
2 Now called: Berar.
4 Sixth assemblage of vidyā. Should there not be a confusion with the Yuhtīṣṭhī, the “Sixty Arguments” which is generally called the second of Nagārjuna’s five “Collections of Rules”? (See Wassiljew’s note on p. 302 of Schiefer’s translation of Tāraṇātha.)
long life was thus communicated to the king whose last born son—his elder brothers having preceded him in death—obtained the sovereignty by making Nāgārjuna consent to his own death. Thereupon the prince severed the holy man's head by a stroke with a Kuša-blade from the body.

As stated, Śrī Candra Dās has omitted to mention the sources for this account of the life of Nāgārjuna, but they may have been taken for a part from the Dub-thah-sel-kyi-me-lon from which the other texts in the article are for the greater part derived. Details are also to be found in Tāranātha's historical works: "History of Buddhism in India" (rgya-gar chos-hbyun) and the "Book of the Seven Revelations" (bhak-babs-bdan-idan). Both supplement each other, as Tāranātha refers in the "History of Buddhism" which was published later on p. 58 of the Tibetan text, p. 73 of the German translation to the history of Nāgārjuna's life contained in the earlier work. It would not be correct to assume that both texts contain an unbroken presentation of Nāgārjuna's life, for they clearly go back to different sources. The earlier work is based on the tradition of the Tantras chools whilst the later one rests upon almost purely historical works such as those of the Tibetan Bu-slon.

But how did the life of Nāgārjuna pass according to the older of Tāranātha's two mentioned works? The Tibetan text (p. 2 et seq.) reports as follows:

Nāgārjuna, a pupil of Rāhula, was born at Vaidarbha in the South. By descent he was a Brahman. Immediately after his birth the astrologers foretold that, if hundred monks (bhikṣus), hundred Brahmans and hundred common people would be invited to the feast, he then would live seven years, seven months and seven days; a longer span of life would not be possible. His parents thereupon acted in the following manner. When the given time was about to end they sent the boy on a journey to other places, until he arrived at Nālanda; the Ācārya (mhan-po) Rāhula said, if he would murmur the Mantra of the immeasurable life (aparimittiyur-dhārani) he would have a long (properly "good") life. Thus he entered the holy order and learned the Pitakas of the great and little Vehicles (yāna) and all sciences. Then he attained the charms (śiddhi) of Mahā-mayūri, of Kurukullā², of the nine Yakṣinīs, of Mahā-kāla, besides many charms (śiddhi) such as those of the beads, of the eye-medicine, of the sword, of the swiftness of foot, of the elixir of life, of the treasure finding, of the complete destruction, of the restoration. Non-beings such as Yakṣas and Nāgas were subdue to him. Especially after having attained the elixir of life he received a diamond body, he is also said to have become efficient in magic powers (ṛddhi) and clairvoyance (abhijñā).

Further it is told how Nāgārjuna obtained all sorts of Siddhi (charms), how he made essence of gold at the outbreak of a famine and exchanged the grains of gold for corn in far-off countries free from famine and thus provided the community (sangha) with means of subsistence. In vain had the Acārya Rāhula-bhadra tried to magically produce rain by conjuring Tārā; when he saw at the end of twelve years the fields still desolate, he believed this was due the little compassion which Nāgārjuna showed towards living beings and which he thought in contradiction with the conduct of a Bodhisattva. Therefore he imposed upon him as penance the establishment of 108 monasteries (vihāra), 1000 temples and 10,000 Ciyatas. As Nāgārjuna saw that this was impossible for a single Bhikṣu, he sent for gold as building material by Yakṣas from Jambhala; being obliged to get Nāgas as workmen, he thought it was necessary to put confidence into the Nāgas, so he called by the Mantra of the Kurukullā the daughter of the

---

² According to Śrī Candra Dās, bhak-babs-bdan-idan, Introd. p. I, 1607 A. D.
³ See Tāranātha's Edelsteinmim, das Buch von den Vermittlern der sieben Inspirationen. Übersetzt von A. Grünwedel (Bibliotheca Buddhica, St. P.), p. 12 et seq.
⁴ According to the same tib. text, p. 2 from above, his teachers in ascending line were: Śthavira Kṛṣṇa (gnas-brdan naq-po), Bhadanta Aṣvaghoṣa (bsun-pa rta-shad), Upagupta (Her-stas).
⁵ According to the above mentioned account of Śrī Candra Dās, this invitation took place before the birth of the child after the father who had remained childless for many years had had the vision that he would only get a son if he made a present to one hundred Brahman and treated them festively.

¹ One of the five tutelary goddesses.
² One of the goddesses associated with Kuvera, the deity of riches.
³ See Wassiljew's note in Schiefner's German translation of Tāranātha p. 304 to p. 73, l. 25.
⁴ I read rgyur instead of rgyur p. 3, l. 9.
Nāga King Takṣaaka with her suite. When two women with their large suite appeared to listen to the sermon of the law (dharma) at the community (sangha), the place became filled by a profuse scent of sandal wood, and when they had left again that scent also vanished. This took often place. When he was asked: “What is there?” they replied: “We are the daughters of the Nāga Takṣaaka. In order to protect ourselves from pollution by men we are covered by dust of the best sandal wood.” He then wanted to make a statue of the Tārā from such sandal wood, and for this purpose the supply of sandal wood was necessary. “Although you are required, he said, for the building of my Vihāra and Caiya, yet you must say so to your father and come again.” Then the two said to each other: “If the Ācārya himself will come to the Nāga country, verbal instructions will be given by the Nāga king; it cannot be achieved otherwise.” Seeing great advantage in providing the Satasāhasrikā-prajñā-pāramitā for Nāgas and men, he proceeded to the country of the serpents (nāga).

It is told in some stories that he was a Bhikṣu who had seen the face of the past Buddhas, Kāśyapa, Kanakamuni, etc. As one thus can say of him that he had seen great things in another incarnation, he became great himself. Many Arhats of the teaching of the Bhagavat Śākyamuni who lived in this sanctuary of the Nāgas asked him: We are Arhats, but you are a man affected with the three poisons. Why do you not suffer from the poison of the Nāgas? Then he replied: I have found the spell of the Mahā-mayūrī.

Some other story relates: When he had told them after the announcement of Buddha that all things (dharma) were established as incorporeal while most Bhikṣus on earth contested this, he asked them: How then do you consider this yourself? Is the real existence (svabhāva) of things (dharma) your view? He likewise told them that Buddha had prophesied that later there would be but few Bhikṣus affected with this not freed (properly “dependent”, dmigs-pa) view and that the Madhyamaka-conceptions ought [not] to exist.

He remained there a long time announcing the law (dharma) to the Nāgas. He procured the complete Prajñāpāramitā, Dharmapīlas and many works of logic.

When it is said that some of the verses (pāda) of the Satasāhasrikā-prajñā had not been communicated by the Nāgas, as—so it was told—the time was not yet fulfilled, when enemies of the good law (sad-dharma) would arise three times, the last ones were indeed announced (by Buddha), but three chapters of the Chinese Satasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā are taken from the one of twenty thousand (Slokas).

Then he came again to the surface of the earth. He now began many text books (śāstra) such as the collections of law, etc. Bhikṣu Saṅkara and all others who hated the Mahāyāna were refuted by him in dispute. But when the enquiries made by Bhikṣu Sendhapa and many other discussions appeared opposing the Mahāyāna, he collected all copies (dpi?) and hid them under the earth.

Contending again in the South in the Town called Jātāsāṅgātā against five hundred Tīrthikas, he subjected them to his doctrine. In this way he erected a temple and a Caiya; the Caiya built by the Ācārya was to be seen from all directions. Thus he made the teaching of the Mahāyāna shine like the sun.

Many mountains like the Bell-rock (ghauṭāsālī) and in the north the Dhīkoṭa he wanted to turn to gold, but the venerable Tārā prevented him from it saying there would be a fight for it one day. However it is reported that many gold mines came into existence, or at least the stones were turned to golden colour.

1 Diceśa (aversion), lobha (avidity), moha (delusion).
2 Dhū-pa-nam-hyis bcos-pa min-na ruñ-ko. The translation is doubtful.
3 The Life of Nāgarjuna from Tibetan and Chinese Sources

---

1 gsun ba rigs-pa rigs du-ma sgyen-drak.
2 Phyi-ma-dag gsun, bhum rgya-nag-pa shabs-kyi lo hu gsun ni ū-hri-nas draks-pa-ho.
3 Sanskrit Pārtha-vimśati-sahasrikā-prajñāpāramitā. Grünwedel (perhaps from Jaeschke), "P. in twenty-eight thousand Slokas".
4 Rig-rtogs-las sogs-pa bhūtan-bunch ḷyod ma ka-ži lems. Grünwedel: "Er arbeitete dann viel an historischen Handbüchern, z. B. den zur Veda-Klasse gehörigen." No doubt rig-rtogs is synonymous with rigs-pa rigs-rtogs-sde, the five fundamental works on the Madhyamaka doctrine which are ascribed to Nāgarjuna. See Wassiljew in Schiefner's translation of Tāranātha, German edition p. 302 (to p. 71, l. 26), dPa-gsams lLon-bra, p. 47 below.
5 One may have to translate: Bhikṣu from the Indus region (sain-dhava) instead of Bhikṣu Sendhapa or Sendhava.
6 But comp. Grünwedel's note ibid. on p. 17, n. 2.
When he was on his way one day and found many children at play, he prophesied that one of them would become a king; then he proceeded to the Uttarakurus in the north; in another part of the world (dvīpa) and in the abode of the inhuman beings (amanusya) he remained twelve years. On his return to Jambudīpa that former child was king by the name of Sadvāhāna. He showed reverence to the Ācārya. Later the king obtained, having followed the advice of the Ācārya, the elixir of life and Yaksas as servants. In order to house the Bhikṣus he erected five hundred Vihāras. Some time later he stayed on the mountain of salvation (Sri-parvata) for two hundred years with a body of Yakṣīsīs and practiced exorcism (mantra); he also obtained the thirty-two marks (of a Buddha) on his body.

As later on he gave away his head he is reported to have lived 71 less than 600 years of the duration of each of half a year.

At that time the youngest son of king Sadvāhāna, named Suśakti, said: "Is the king's son only capable (suśakti) of sovereignty, or is he also in possession of sovereignty (saśakti)?" As he thus found pleasure at the royal rule, his mother remarked: "Your father is endowed with a blessing, he is believed to have as long a span of life as the Ācārya. Since the Ācārya possesses a diamond (vajra) body, he cannot die. The former sons of the king are dead without having obtained the royal government; sons and even grand-sons have passed away." This distressed his mind, but his mother told him: "There is a means. The Ācārya being a Bodhisattva he will consent if you will ask him for his head, and so when after the death of the Ācārya the king also will die, the government will fall to you." Thereupon the prince went to the Sri-parvata and begged him for his head. Remembering that he had some time in the past cut off the head of a living being (jīva) with green grass, he allowed himself to be beheaded by a Kusā grass, when at the same time the words were heard: "I am going from here to Suḥkāvati, but later I shall move again into this body." Thereupon the world began to tremble and it is stated that a twelve years' famine had taken place. The prince was afraid that the Ācārya might, having obtained the elixir of life,

unite again (viz. with his body) and carried the head many miles from the place of the cutting off. But here it was taken away by a Yakṣīīīī. Having placed the head on a large rock, it fell to pieces and bodies of stone (statues) of five Avalokiteśvara gods became visible. For the head as well as the body of each a temple was erected by the Yakṣini as donor. The intervening space between both used to be four miles apart, but at the present time it is said to be not even one hearing distance.

In this quite legendary biography of Nāgarjuna perhaps only the names of his place of birth and of the places of his later residence show some traces of historical truth, may be also the accounts of Nāgarjuna's relations to the legendary South Indian king bDe-byed or dDe-spyod who can be construed as Saṅkara or as Udayana or as Sadvāhāna and this biography is now placed by the reference in Tāranātha's "History" p. 58 (p. 73 of the German translation) within the frame of spiritual development, as it is sketched by this late-Tibetan writer in this his chief work by which alone he was known until recently to occidental research.

According to this biography, the origin of Mahāyāna goes back far behind Nāgarjuna's time so that he cannot by any means be considered as the founder of this branch. This is a point of great importance on which Tāranātha does not stand in opposition to any other of our sources. Soon after the time of Mahāpadma under the reign of Candragupta—this can only be the famous contemporary of Alexander the Great—a Mahāyāna book is said to have been issued, after the opinion of the Sautrāntikas the Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāparamitā but according to the contention of the Tantra school the Tattvasaṅgraha. If we may trust the reports of Tāranātha it was only after the council

1 Schiefner, Grünwedel and others: "Udayana" (bde-spyod).
which took place under Kaniṣka that various Mahāyāna texts were composed and recited by some Bhikṣus without any dispute with the followers of the older doctrine taking place. It was, however, only under king Kaniṣka’s son that the teaching of Mahāyāna advanced to greater extent. As the first who took up the doctrine of Mahāyāna the Sthavira Arhat Nanda who was a native of the Agra country is mentioned.

About this time a large number of friends of virtue suddenly arose in various parts who taught the Mahāyāna; all of them had heard the creed from Āryāvalokiteśvara, Guhyapati, Mañjuśrī, Maitreya separately and had separately obtained the Samādhi of the stream of the doctrine; there appeared the Mahābhādanta Avitarka, Vigatārāgadhvaja, Divyākaragūpta, Rahu-lamitra, Jñānāntala, the great Upāsaka Sangatala and the other teachers of the law, the 50, in number. At that time were also issued the manual Ratnabūta which contained 100 000 ślokas in 1000 chapters, the Avalamsaka which likewise contained 100 000 ślokas in 1000 prakarasas, the Lankāvatara containing 25 000 ślokas, the Ghanavijaya with 12 000 ślokas, the Dharmasanggiti with 12 000 ślokas, as well as many other works, partly Sūtras which were obtained from the Devas, Nāgas, Gandharvas, Rākṣasas in various regions mostly from the land of the Nāgas.

We now hear that royal patronage and sympathy are extended to the new movement: king Laksāva is stated to have erected on the top of the Abhu mountain five hundred Vihāras for the five hundred interpreters of the law who produced those books, to have appointed to each of them a promulgator of the law, and himself to have induced the kinsmen of those around him to enter the holy order. He then caused the Mahāyāna-Sūtras then existing to be laid down in writing, besides numerous new works were composed by those Bhikṣus; they were of irresistible intellect, had acquired patience, and each one of them displayed supernatural strength and clear knowledge. Most significant for the inward superiority of the new sect opposed to the older point of view is the remark that the Śrāvakas could not suppress them, although the followers in the 18 various schools had entered the holy order and lived together with them and though there were amongst thousands of Śrāvakas but few Mahāyāna teachers. When the fame of Mahāyāna spread more and more they tried to work against it by saying the Mahāyāna doctrine was not the word of the Buddha. It may be considered as a protest against this when the followers of Mahāyāna erected eight Vihāras at the native place of Śrīputra, according to Buddha’s own declaration the wisest of his disciples, at Nālanda (Nālanda) and deposited here all the works of Mahāyāna. To the time of the founder of the Guptā Dynasty whom Taranātha calls Haricandra (Tibetan translation p. 68) we however accept its third representative, Candragupta, the founder of the Guptā era, belongs the activity of Śrī Saraha and Rāhula-bhadra. The latter appears to have been of special importance to the development of Mahāyāna in so far as he is supposed to be Nāgārjuna’s immediate predecessor as “guardian of the law”. This would cause us to advance Nāgārjuna’s life time up to the middle of the fourth century A.D., if the contemporary existence of Nāgārjuna and Sadhāhana (Śātanāhana) noted by Taranātha in agreement with the Chinese sources would not refer us to the epoch of the subjection of Kṣaharata Naḥapāna by the Andhāra king Vīlīvāyakura II.

1 See V. A. Smith, Early History, 2nd ed., p. 265; Rapson, Indian Coins p. 24.
2 Bhandarkar’s view is that the initial year of the Śaka era marks the date of the Śaka victory; see Rapson’s Indian Coins § 79, p. 23; Oldenburg originally considered the abhiṣeka of Kaniṣka at Mathura as starting point of the Śaka era (Numismat. Zeitschr. 1881, p. 292 et seq.), but now (Gött. Gel. Nachr. 1911, p. 427 et seq.) inclines to Boyer’s estimation (Journal Asiat. 1900 I, p. 579), who places the Kaniṣka era towards the end of the First Century A.D.; see also Fleet, J. R. A. S. 1912, p. 785, “Naḥapāna... was overthrown by the great Śātāvāhana Śittakarti whom Gaumish-putra-Sri Śittakarti. The Śaka era beginning A.D. 78, was certainly founded either by Naḥapāna or by Chaṣṭana”, see J. R. A. S. 1907 p. 2043, note 2; i.e. 1910 p. 821.—Another view is taken by Sten Konow Z. D. M. G. vol. 68 (1914) p. 100: “it must then have been Wima Kadphises who extended the empire of the Kuṣaṇa’s to those parts of Western India where we find the Western Kṣātra-

Hirth Anniversary Volume.
Of Nāgārjuna’s personality and his activity we learn from Tāranātha’s later work not much more except that he paid attention to the care of the holy places at Buddhagāya, especially of the Bho-tree by fixing stone pillars and taking precautionary measures against inundations. With regard to his literary activity the information is worth noting that he had acquired many Dhāraṇis and the Satasāhasrikā-prajñā-pāramitā which was taken by the Srāvakas to mean that Nāgārjuna himself had composed the latter work which supposition appears thoroughly well founded having regard to the character of this immense text composed of parts taken verbally from the Astasāhasriikā or of endless repetitions. When Tāranātha adds that after this time no Mahāyāna Sūtras have been added, this appears highly probable, as resting upon the dates of the translations of Indian works into Chinese the Satasāhasrikā is proved to be one of the last, if not the last Mahāyāna Sūtra. In connection with the commentary which also is ascribed to Nāgārjuna, it was translated for the first time 402—405 A.D. by Kumārajīva, at a time when the Mahāyāna Canon had almost completely been rendered into Chinese.

Of other works by Nāgārjuna Tāranātha mentions the “Five Collections of Rules” (rigs-pahi byogs la) by which title the following texts contained in vol. (tsa) XVII of the bsTan-gyur mDo are comprised: 1) Mūla-Mahāyami-Kārikā, 2) Yuhtsi-śaśīta, 3) Sūnyatā-saṃśīti, 4) Vīgrahav-vyāvarṇa, 5) Vaidalya.

With this information by Tāranātha agrees that given by Sum-pa mkhan-po ye-ches dpal-hbyur in his Buddhist historical work dPal-bsam lhon-bran not only with regard to the contents, but largely to the text also. As to the proper history of the life of Nāgārjuna he particularly refers to the “History of the 84 Sorcerers” (grub-chen gya-bshis lhon-rgyas) whose statements he repeats to great extent. Of special note is the remark which is not taken from the work just mentioned that Nāgārjuna had entered the holy order of the Sarvāstivādin Sect at Nālandā, as both in his commentary on the Satasāhasrikā and the Mādhyamika-kārikā the teachings and rules of this school on the whole are laid down, though in a negative sense which is characteristic for the negativist stand-point of Sāṃśāra-vāda (p. 85 l. 23). This fact deserves special mention because it would result from this connection of Nāgārjuna with a sect which is not identical with the Shāhīra school of the Mahāvihāra at Anurādhapura familiar to us through the Pali tradition but is rather in opposition to it that the so-called Southern Buddhism—spread from Ceylon—is not affected by Nāgārjuna’s polemics. It would therefore be possible that the Singhalese school itself takes up the idea of “voidness” and that either has indeed been in the minds of the founder of the creed (as recently O. Franke tries to prove in an article: “Negativism in the old Buddhist teaching”, Festschrift Kuhn p. 366 et seq.) or that it has been interpreted into the original conception by the authors of the commentaries (athakathā), above all by Buddhaghoṣa. This negativistic feature has already attracted the notice of the Chinese traveller Hsūn-chuang, and he has observed it in his: “Buddhist Records of the Western World”. Thus he relates (T. E. XXXV, 7, 56 a, 11) in the chapter on Ceylon: the 20,000 men living in a hundred monasteries follow the teaching of the Buddha, in truth the Shāhīra school of Mahāyāna. After two hundred years they separated of their free choice and without authority into two sects. The one called Mahāvihāravāsinś rejected Mahāyāna and followed the teaching of Hinayāna. The other called Abhayagiri-vāsinś studied both vehicles (yāna) and propagated the “Three Baskets” (Tripiṭaka). Thus it is said on the occasion of a visit at Buddhagāya that all the thousand monks living in the Mahābodhi-saṅghārāma which was erected by a former king of Ceylon belonged to the Shāhīra school of Mahāyāna. Watters

---

1 It should be supplemented: after the introduction of Buddhism into Ceylon. See Beat’s Si yu ku, II p. 247, n. 19.
2 If p. 138. “It will be noticed that Yuan-chuang describes the monks of this establishment as Mahāyānists of the Shāhīra school, and he applies the same terms to the Brethren of Ceylon in his account of this island. As the Shāhīra school is generally represented as belonging to the early and Hinayāna form of
may be correct when assuming that the expression “Mahāyāna” at this and other places was used in a special sense. There is no reason why this expression should not be understood in the sense of the śīnaya-vāda. Even to-day the Buddhist scholars of Ceylon object, to my mind rightly so, to be called the followers of the “Lower Vehicle”. If I cannot accept the argument conducted by O. Franke in favour of this idea as decisive, yet there are enough places in the Pali Canon which do not admit any other interpretation save the negativistic one. Also in other respects the creed as represented to-day in Ceylon entirely corresponds to the notions of the original Mahāyāna which of course must not be confused with the modern eccentricities to be met in Tibet and China. The Anagārika Dhammapa (sic) quoted by Suzuki is quite right in his statement that there is no reason why the Buddhism of Ceylon should be considered as Hinayāna while teaching the most exalted and perfect knowledge (anuttara-samyak-sambodhi) as well as the six perfections (pāramitā)—these two features being considered as characteristic for Mahāyānism. He thinks it possible that the so-called Mahāyāna exercised great power over the whole of Central India at the time of Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva and that it found its champions on the Lion Island (Śimhaladvipa) as well. If we cannot perceive clearly at the present state of Buddhist studies how such an influence was possible, it does not preclude that a better knowledge of Sanskrit Buddhism—hereby I chiefly think of the exegetical literature connected with the Vitāhāsā and the Abhidharma-hoṣa—shows the threads which lead to Ceylon and the existence of which cannot well be contested having regard to the information by the Chinese travellers. A full disquisition of these points is inevitably to take into consideration the connection with the rest of the eighteen old schools and limit the various dogmatic conceptions by which they differed from each other as well as in respect of Mahāyāna more firmly than it has so far been possible.

Buddhism it would seem that in these and other passages Yunn-chuang uses the term Mahāyāna in a peculiar sense, as has already been stated. At his time many of the Brethren in the Magadha monasteries were evidently Mahāyānists in that sense.”

1 See Walleser’s Prajñāpāramitā p. 6, Philosoph. Grundlage des alt. Buddhismus p. 101 et seq.
2 Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism p. 3.

This disquisition will have to take place above all in relation to Bhavya’s Tarkajñālī the fourth chapter (lehorn) of which is devoted to the discussion of the teachings of the Śrāvakas.

We are indebted to the historical work of Sum-pa mkhan-po ye-ches dpal-hbyor for something more, that is the communication of two quotations from the canonical literature of Indian Buddhism which contain prophecies about Nāgārjuna, and this proves at once that Nāgārjuna’s life-time reaches back to the period before the texts in point were composed. They are taken from the Lapkātvāra and Mañjuśrī-milī-tantra.

There can be no doubt that the part of the Lapkātvāra which contains this quotation has been added later, and this follows from the fact that the final chapter in question which mentions the prophecies is wanting in the oldest Chinese version by Guṇabhadra (Nanjio No. 175, A. D. 443) and is only to be found in the one by Bodhiruci (No. 176, A. D. 513) and Sīkṣānanda.

2 L. c. p. 68; the Lapkātvāra a passage much condensed in the Text of the dPa-gsam-ljon-bzhag according to the Snar-than copy of the bKa-hgyur in the India Office in London runs as follows:


The Sanskrit text restored with the help of this Tibetan parallel from my own copy of the Lapkātvāra ms. belonging to the Royal, As. Soc.: Ms. Hodgson No. 5, f. 129b, l. 3-5, is to be found in the treatise by K. Watanabe, “The Story of Karmācārapāda”, J. R. A. S. 1909, p. 310:

Nirvāṇe sugata paścāti kālo ’tito bhavayaśe etc.

The Chinese parallel texts are to be found T. E. IV 6, 71a (Bodhiruci, Chap. 18) and T. E. IV 6, 114a (Sīkṣānanda, Chap. 10); in the oldest translation (by Guṇabhadra A. D. 443) this passage is not contained at all, the last two sections of the Sanskrit text being here wanting, moreover the edition of the text being widely divergent.

that according to the Indian view this was the right interpretation. However the Tibetan "de miṅ klu' shes bod-pa ste" permits the rendering "he who is called by the name of Nāga"; and also the Sanskrit compound Nāgāhāva Ya. "Serpent's call" not only allows the possibility to take the word such as it is as a proper name, but the name of Nāgāhāva Ya indeed occurring frequently, for instance, as the name of a famous pupil of Nāgārjuna himself, it also allows the translation: "the one called Nāga" or "the one named Nāga" so that Nāga would have been his real name, and this is, amongst others, the one of a Bhikṣu who defended the five "principles" (t. gzhis ssk. vastuṅa). The contesting of these five principles led to the council of Pāṭaliputra and to the separation of the Mahā-saṅghika sect (about 137 after Buddha). The latter view is urged by the Tibetan translation, and though it may appear impossible that his author thought of this quite unknown monk of the oldest Buddhist time, yet another bearer of the name of Nāga which was very frequent in compounds may have been in his mind. For this reason the quotation from the Lankāvatāra-sūtra should not be used without warning for the chronological fixing of Nāgārjuna, especially as the Lankāvatāra commentary by Jñānaśri, Tanjur mdo v. 42 (ni) NE fol. 291a:

Klu’ hphags sogs-pa mkhas-pa-rnams / tshe rin-ba yan rned-pa [hi]-rnams /

presumes the simpler form of "Nāga".

That by Nāgāhāva Ya in the Lankāvatāra passage nobody but Nāgārjuna is meant, may be taken from the quotation in the Mañjuśrī-mūla-tantra.

Here also the word compound klu’-shes-de-bḥod would stand for the Sanskrit Nāgāhāva Ya. That hereby Nāgārjuna is meant, further details which are given of the bearer of the name tend

---

1 See V. A. Smith, Early History of India, 2nd ed. p. 291, differently Hoernle J. R. A. S. 1911, p. 89ff.
3 L. c. p. 23 by the same "a Study of Paramārtha’s Life of Vasubandhu and the date of Vasubandhu" J. R. A. S. 1905, p. 12: "Vikramāditya must be a king of the Gupta Dynasty, and this king must be Skandagupta who ruled about 452—480 A. D. With his successor whose reign must have begun 481 A.D., or according to some accounts, 490 A.D. the old Gupta Dynasty came to an end".
4 See J. F. Fleet, J. R. A. S. 1911, p. 112.
5 See J. F. Fleet, L. c. p. 113; the same J. R. A. S. 1911, p. 486.
6 Edited with the commentary of Paramādīvara by Kern, 1874.
7 Lit. the Arjuna tree, Pentaptera Arjuna. See Eitel, Handbook of Buddhism.
to show: "That he will appear four hundred years after Nirvāṇa—this is a prediction of the Tathāgata himself—; that he will reach the grade (bhūmi) of Prāmuditā, live six hundred years, obtain the charm of the Mahāmāyā; attain great splendour, understand the precepts of the law and the significance of incorporeality; after having thrown off his body he will re-appear at Sukhāvatī." The whole characteristic entirely agrees with the Tibetan accounts of Nāgarjuna. Even the particulars referring to the temporal difference of Nāgarjuna from the founder of the doctrine agree with another tradition by which according to I-tsing Nāgarjuna is represented as a contemporary of Kaniska who himself was put down four hundred years after Buddha.

But the Mañjuśrī-mūla-tantra can claim still less than the two later Chinese versions of the Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra to be an historical source as it was no longer translated into Chinese. It therefore would belong to a literary epoch which had its seat no longer in India, but in the countries north of it where to Buddhism after internal and external defeats withdrew. It has been translated into Tibetan not before the eleventh century (by order of prince Byaṅ-chub-hod at Tho-ling by Kūmāra Kalaṣa and Śākya bLo-hgro) so that it may be doubted whether an Indian original text of it still existed at all or whether it be an apocryphical work of purely Tibetan origin. Yet one cannot but attribute to it special importance as chief source of the whole later Tibetan historical writing, and as long as the Indian works serving as basis to the Tibetan historians are not known to us,
the so-called “Bell-sound Stūpa”. From this work the explanation of the name of Nāga-arjuna as 龍猛 lung-mông, i.e. “Dragon Hero” is taken under rejection of the rendering of the name by 龍樹 lung-shu, i.e. “Dragon Tree” already declared by Hsüan-chuang to be incorrect. The passage pictures the first meeting of Nāgārjuna with his later pupil Ṭrīṣaṭea and details too closely the narrative of Ṭrīṣaṭea’s match with the Tirthikas challenged by the former by the sounding of a bell (ghaṇṭā) as to be able to pay greater attention to the description of Nāgārjuna himself. It is only mentioned that Nāgārjuna had already as a young man obtained fame on account of his great knowledge, that when grown up he had given up all worldly pleasure, left his home, devoted himself entirely to study and attained the first grade of inspiration. Also by the other statements which often go into details in the tenth section of the same work\(^2\) is the personality of Nāgārjuna sufficiently described to show that they relied upon reminiscences of a being of flesh and bone though legendary traits are not always wanting. As scene of his activity the capital of the (Southern) Kosala\(^3\) is here given; as the name of the mountain on which a Saṅghārāma (monastery) of great splendour was carved to him from stone by king Sātavāha, or Sadvāha\(^4\) is mentioned the Bhrāmara-giri (Black Bee mountain)\(^5\) lying 300 li to the South-West of the capital. Otherwise most traits of the particulars reported by Hsüan-chuang of Nāgārjuna agree with those of the Tibetan tradition. For instance his friendship with king Sadvāha or Sātavāhana which went so far that the king ordered a constant guard for his domicile; this can be connected with the legend according to which the life time

---

1. T.E. XXXV, 7, 38b, 15; Beal, Records of the Western World II, 97; Watters II, 101.
2. T.E. XXXV, 7, 52a, 13; Beal II, 210 et seq.; Watters II, 200 et seq.
3. Watters, l.c. p. 201. Cunningham makes it to be the ancient province of Vidarbha or Berar of which the present capital is Nagpur (A. G. I. p. 520) and Ferguson seems to agree with Mr. Grant in regarding Chattingarh as corresponding to the Kosala of our text, and Wyraughur as being the site of its capital (J. R. A. S. 1875, p. 260). Should not the name of the present capital remind us of Nāgārjuna?
4. 婆多婆詞 explained in Chinese with 引正 “well leading”.
5. On the Chinese rendering 龍猛未羅耆瓣山 of this Indian name see Watters, l.c. p. 207.

---

of the prince depended from that of his friend. Also the story of the end of Nāgārjuna’s days which is told, in a similar way as in the Tibetan tales, to have occurred at the instance of the heir to the throne with the consent of the hundreds of years old sage agrees roughly with the Tibetan accounts. Another point is his finding of the elixir of life to which he owed the possibility of unlimited life time as well as his power to change stones into gold which allowed him (according to Chinese reports) the means necessary for the erection of the Saṅghārāma founded by king Sadvāha and again (according to Tibetan reports) to provide the Bhikṣu community a long time with provisions, above all with corn during the outbreak of a famine. The differences in the details cannot deceive us about the connection of the chief traits of the tradition nor about their common Indian source.

As such we easily recognize an Indian biography which exists in a Chinese translation made by Kūmārajīva 405 A.D. (Nanjo No. 1461) which is characterized in the Fan-i-ming-i-chi as such though not with the same title as noted in the official Chinese Canon. The passage runs as follows: “Kūmārajīva\(^1\) says in the biography (scil. of Nāgārjuna): His mother gave birth to him under a tree for which reason (he called) himself Arjuna; Arjuna is the name of a tree. He obtained his instruction (literally ‘Way’) from serpents, therefore he is called serpent tree\(^2\) by means of a sign for serpent.” Immediately following it is stated: Fu-hsin\(^3\) says: The study of Nāgārjuna\(^4\) pervaded the world (lit.: under the sky) and found no obstacle. He wanted to criticize the Śūtras of the Buddha and teach himself the law (dharma). He announced: ‘I have no master.’ He succeeded in penetrating the palace of the dragons (nāga)\(^5\). In one summer\(^6\) alone he learnt by heart seven Buddhist Śūtras. He himself\(^7\) knew the subtle basis of the Buddhist law (dharma) and

---

1. Rendered in the Chinese text in the usual manner by the sign of the fourth syllable 什ikh, Sanskrit श (see Julien, Méthode pour déchiffrer, etc. No. 158).
3. 補行. It is not clear whether the name of a text, or of an author is meant.
4. Rendered in the text by the sign for ārjuna 阿
5. The succession of the word signs in the Chinese text of the T.E. is undoubtedly displaced.
6. Stands for the Sanskrit varṣa, i.e. summer rainy time.
7. 自 is probably to be put instead of 目 of the Tokyo edition.
left his home. He subjected the king of the country and overcame the followers of the opposing schools (tirthika). A Tirthika made by magic a flower pond and seated himself upon a lotus flower. Nāgārjuna then created an elephant who tore out the lotus flower and struck down the Tirthika. He compiled three kinds of law books (śāstra): first, the śāstra of ingenuity (kauśalya) in exalted charity; it explains the heavenly order (astronomy) and worldly rule, the preparation of jewels and medical herbs as well as the advancement of all worldliness. Secondly, the śāstra of divine splendour; it explains the change in virtue and morals. Thirdly, the exalted śāstra of fearlessness (akṣobhya), it explains the truth of the lower sense and expounds the middle teaching (madhyamaka-śāstra).

If we compare this passage in the Fan-i-ming-i-chi with the biography translated (or written?) by Kumārajīva it follows that, except an agreement of the contents, the later compilation proves to be a short condensation of the older text whilst omitting everything that appears unessential. One is tempted under these circumstances to subject the latter to close examination, and this is rendered easier because a short summary of it has been given by Wassiljew in his “Buddhismus”, Part I, German edition p. 232 et seq.

There are considerable difficulties in understanding the Chinese text because it has been handed down to us most imperfectly before it was printed the first time, as it did not belong to the Buddhist Canon proper, and because it offered in the oldest printed edition such difficulty that it was revised throughout for the next Chinese printed edition. This form with slight variations was used for the editions published under the Yüan and the Ming

1 The two ideograms 中 and 見 should probably be transposed.
2 This was in 972 A.D. by order of T'ai tsu, the founder of the later Sung Dynasty. A catalogue of this collection does not appear to have been prepared. See Nanjio. Introduction p. XXII, XXIII.
3 According to Nanjio, l.c. p. XXIV it was completed in Korea at the beginning of the 11th century by order of the Korean king Chih from the Chinese edition of 972 A.D. above mentioned and some Korean edition and also published. A copy of it is still to be found to-day at Tokyo.
4 Published 1239 A.D. during the Sung Dynasty. See Nanjio, l.c.

Dynasties1. It is open to doubt whether the text as adjusted later has everywhere proper meaning, but it seems impossible that it renders the original versions when the Chinese edition of 972 which was used by the later Korean edition, was prepared with the help of all the available and existing manuscripts which may have been few in number for reasons already mentioned. At any rate we have to take up Kumārajīva’s Biography of Nāgārjuna with great caution and must not at all imagine that we have here the authentic text before us. Wassiljew’s rendering should be no criterion in this respect as his translation is much abbreviated and not at all literal.

It is striking in this biography that the legendary element is, like in the Tibetan accounts, much more pronounced than in the records of Hsüan-chuang. From earliest childhood he heard recited by the Brahmans the four Veda-compilations each containing 40,000 Gāthās of which each contains 32 syllables. He recited these lines by heart and mastered their sense. At the age of twenty he had world-wide fame. In astronomy, mundane sciences, geography and prognosis there was nothing that he had not thoroughly fathomed. Tired of dull life and wishing to taste the pleasures of life he joined four other men of similar mind and eminence, took counsel with them how it was possible to enjoy a truly royal life, and when they had learnt that they could only succeed by gaining the charm of invisibility they addressed themselves to a necromancer who complies with their request. Thereupon they enter the royal palace where they seduce the women. But their presence is made known and communicated to the king who is enraged by it. The king sends for his chief officials in order to confer with them. They say, there are two ways possible to explain the strange event; they suspect either ghosts or magicians. In the latter case there should be foot prints visible, otherwise one should try to chase them away by exorcism. The gate-keeper is informed who soon recognizes

1 The Tokyo edition (T.E.) offers in its list of variations four variæ lectiones of the Sung edition, and two of the one of Yüan following itself the one of Ming.
2 This is the correct reading of the Korean edition while Wassiljew following the later Chinese editions mentions the number 42.
3 Wassiljew: "Er begann sich auf Reisen in verschiedene Reiche."
the foot prints of four men and reports his observations to the
king. An officer with one hundred men receive the order to occupy
the palace; the gates are closed and the soldiers brandish their
swords in the air. Three of the invisible men are killed, only
Nāgārjuna succeeds in saving his life, by stepping next to the
king and thus avoids the strokes, for in a radius of seven paces
he cannot be reached by the swords. At this moment awakens
in Nāgārjuna the thought of the sufferings of life, he looks into
the origin of suffering, conceives a dislike of the idea of desire
and the wish grows within him to leave his home: “If I obtain
deliverance, I shall become a Sramana and aspire to the state of
leaving home (prāvrājya).” As soon as he has escaped from the
palace he goes to the mountain where he enters the holy order
in a Buddhist temple (stūpa) and makes the vow of leading a
moral life (śīla). Within ninety days he understands the three
Piṭakas and penetrates their deep meaning. Near a Cauśa, far
away in the snowy mountains, lives an old Bhikṣu; he recites
with him Mahāyāna Sūtras, learns to value and to like them.
Though he understands their deep significance he does not yet
succeed in penetrating their value. He wanders through all countries
in order, also, to find the other Sūtras. In the whole of Jambudvīpa
he does not find them though he searches everywhere. He subjects
the foreign teachers (Tīrthikas) and Sramānas is so filled with
his own invincibility that he becomes haughty and of proud
mind. He considers that there is much dirt and mud in the worldly
things (dharma); the Sūtras of the Buddha are though deep not quite
perfect in logical respects. That which is not yet perfect must
be logically deepened. He who teaches must first of all clearly
understand and then study. In logic (lit. order) there is no con-}
deriction, in matter (artha) there is no fault. What can here be defi-
cient? After having meditated on these things he wanted to establish
a new dogma and alter the dress. He now made his distinctions
according to what was differentiated by the law (dharma) of the
Buddha. Then again he wants to manifest omniscience by non-
rejection and apathy. He chooses a day and fixes the time for
association with his disciples. He gives new precepts of conduct
(śīla), decides upon new garments and then wishes that the
disciples should walk about in it. A Mahā-Nāga sees him like that.

He takes pity with him and makes it possible for him to enter
the sea. In the palace hall he opens to him seven precious receptacles
(piṭaka). From various places (he takes) deep abstruse Sūtras
and precepts, numerous wonderful Dharmas and hands them to
him. Nāgārjuna recites them in 90 days and understands them
to great extent. His spirit penetrates deeply into their meaning
and obtains true benefit. The Nāga understands his thought
and asks him: Hast thou not yet penetrated the Sūtra which thou
seest (there)? He replies: In thy receptacle there are a great many
Sūtras, their number is inexhaustible. I must read them later again
in Jambudvīpa. The Nāga said: “What there is on
hand in my palace of Sūtras and law-books, is incomparably more.”
Then Nāgārjuna understands the uniform meaning of the Sūtras
and penetrates deeply into the concentration (samādhi) of the
resignation of non-beginning. The Nāga hands them to him and
he returns to Jambudvīpa. He furthers considerably the teach-
ings of the Buddha and defeats those of the Tīrthikas. He
explains the Mahāyāna in detail and composes the Upadeśa
of 100,000 Gāthās. Besides, he writes the Splendid Way of the Buddha
of 5000 Gāthās, the great Sāstra (textbook) on the art of compassion
of 5000 Gāthās, the Mahāyamaka-sāstra of 500 Gāthās. He causes the
spreading of the Mahāyāna doctrine far into India. He also
composes the Aksobhayā-sāstra with 100,000 Gāthās; the Madhyama-
aka-sāstra is contained therein.

At that time there is a Brahman who knows the magic formulas
and therefore wishes to fight with Nāgārjuna and defeat him.
He says to the king of India: “I can overthrow this Bhikṣu and the
king will witness it.” The king said: “You are very foolish. This
is a Bodhisattva. His light is like that of the sun and of the moon,
his knowledge and the mind of the Noble (ārya) have the same lustre.
Why are you immodest and bold and why do you refuse (Ch. E.)
the reverence?” The Brahman replied: “Why will not the king, in
order to know the man, allow himself to be convinced and see how he
is harassed and overthrown?” The king listens to him and at last
asks Nāgārjuna that both should sit on a bright morning on the
“Palace of law and virtue”. The Brahman thereupon creates by
god in front of the palace a big pond, broad, long and very clear.
There are in it Lotus flowers of thousand leaves. He himself
takes his seat on it and jeers at Nāgārjuna. "You are seated on the earth; you are not different from an ox, but you shall discuss with me who am sitting upon a pure Lotus flower and am rightly understanding the interpretation of the Sāstras." At that time Nāgārjuna also created by magic a white elephant provided with six tusks; on the surface of the pond it crushes the lotus seat. It embraces him with the tusk, tears him out and flings him on the ground. The Brahman wounded at the hip throws himself down and calls Nāgārjuna. "I myself do not abuse nor belittle the eminent master. I wish he may receive me mercifully and take me from that foolish man. They are teachers of Hinayāna who are always wrathful in their heart." Nāgārjuna asks him: "Are you glad that I stay long on earth?" The latter replies: "In reality I do not wish it." Nāgārjuna retires to an apartment, locks himself in, and does not emerge the whole day. A disciple demolishes the door and looks; a cicada flies at once from it. A hundred years after the death of Nāgārjuna temples were built for him in the countries of Southern India, and he was honoured like a Buddha.

His mother had given birth to him under a tree. As the tree was called "Arjuna" (he received) the name "Arjuna". As he obtained from the serpents the guidance (lit.: the way) he was called on account of the sign connected with Nāga (dragon) Nāgārjuna.

Note. According to the Sūtra on the “tradition of the Dharmaśīla” he was the thirteenth patriarch; he guarded (lit. kept) the teaching of the Buddha more than three hundred years.

So far goes the biography. Both recensions contain however another anecdote on the conversion of the South-Indian king. In the Korean edition (Ko.E.) it follows the story of the quarrelsome Brahman who produced by magic the flower pond and was thrown by Nāgārjuna's elephant from his flower seat on land (T.E. p.13a, 10); in the later Chinese editions (T.E. f. 114a, 7) it follows Nāgārjuna's return from the Nāgas and his attainment of the patience of non-existence (anupāda-kśānti).

1 Ko. E. “more than two hundred years”.

In the latter draft the episode has been communicated by Wassiljew to whom the Korean recension was unknown.

At the time when Nāgārjuna had returned from the serpents, the ruler of Southern India favoured the teachers (tīrthikā) from abroad and persecuted the followers of the Buddha. In order to convert him he directed the attention of the king upon himself by always carrying before him a red flag for seven years. The king began to wonder and at last enquired who the man was who always walked in front of him. He replied that he was a man all-knowing (sārajñā). When the king heard this, he was seized with great fright and asked: "A man all-knowing is something very uncommon. How can you prove that you are one?" Nāgārjuna replied: "If the king wishes to know my wisdom, he can learn it by instruction through me." The king thought by himself that he could make him his chief interpreter of the Sāstras and asked him what the Devas were doing at this moment. He replied that the Devas were fighting with the Asuras. The king heard a noise as if men were clearing their throats without being able to vomit nor to swallow. Believing that it did not come from the Devas he said there was nobody and how Nāgārjuna could prove the truth of his assertion. Thereupon all kinds of arms, swords, rapiers, lances and javelins fell down from heaven. As the king was still doubtful and remarked: "although these may be fighting weapons, why must they be those of the Devas and Asuras?" hands, feet, fingers, ears and noses of the Asuras came down. The king became frightened, bent his head and was converted. At that time there were 10,000 Brahmans on the roof of the palace; when they saw the wonder they cut down their beards and the hair of their heads and entered the holy order. Then Nāgārjuna propagated widely the Buddhist teaching in Southern India, subjected the Tīrthikas and interpreted at great detail the Mahāyāna.

This anecdote about the conversion of the South Indian king by Nāgārjuna is also known by the Korean edition—which precedes

1 This results from an acceptance of wrong readings of the Chinese editions where the Korean is correct, for instance of the statement that the Sūkta counts 42 syllables, instead of 32 (Ko. E.) or where the length of Nāgārjuna's patriarchate is given as "more than 300" instead of more than 200 (Ko. E.), also where he speaks of three (instead of two) kinds of the patience of non-existence (anupāda-kśānti).
in time the Chinese editions—although with a considerable difference. It lacks the characteristic information that Nāgārjuna drew the attention of the king upon himself by carrying for seven years a red flag before the king. What the Korean edition f. 113 a, 10 et seq. offers instead is essentially incomprehensible, at any rate contradictory. The complete want of clearness of this passage was no doubt the cause that one tried in the later editions to give the reason of the formation of the king’s acquaintance with Nāgārjuna in a different manner. This supposition would require no consideration if it could be proved how it happened that one added the story of the red flag. In that case the proof would also be brought that this particular feature has to be taken off the whole story as given in the biography by Kumārajiva.

How this doubt may be solved may be taken from the text itself of the biography transmitted in all recensions. In the final note an “account of the tradition of the Dharma-pitaka” is mentioned as the source for the information that Nāgārjuna was the thirteenth patriarch (“guardian of the law”) and as such had worked more than 200 years (in the later editions 300). No doubt this is the same text which was translated into Chinese under the title Fu-jā-tsa-ng-yin-yuān-fu 付法藏因緣傳, “Account of the history (lit. causes and conditions) of the tradition of the Dharma-pitaka” 472 A. D. by 吉迦夜 Chi-chia-yeh and 葡曜 T’an-yao.

Indeed, the presentation of the circumstances by which Nāgārjuna succeeded in converting the anonymous South-Indian ruler entirely agrees with the later edition as transmitted by the Chinese printed editions of the Canon, and again with the corresponding section of the “Account of the tradition of the teaching” from the year 472 with the exception of a few variations caused by editorial changes in the text of the “Biography”. How have we to explain the divergency of the “Account of the Tradition of the Law” from the “Biography” of the Korean edition? Undoubtedly in the same way as we have to understand those of the latter and the later Chinese editions of the Canon, that is by the desire to replace an incomprehensible, contradictory text (in the text of Kumāra-

1 The later Chinese editions add that it was a Sūtra.
3 T. E. XXIV, 9, 107 a, 10.

jīva) by a more intelligible one. There only remains to prove the origin of that legendary incident by which Nāgārjuna had taken to the ruse of the red flag. This point offers no difficulty in so far as in the same account the same event is told with regard to another “guardian of the law”, i.e. Buddha-mitra with the only difference that the latter had carried the flag for twelve years—not seven as by Nāgārjuna—before the king. This agreement is all the more evident as such suggestions within the “account” are not to be found. One can therefore hardly go wrong in supposing that the “Biography of Nāgārjuna” rendered (or composed) by Kumārajiva in the Korean version has been the original not only for the later Chinese versions, but also in the form given by Kumārajiva himself for the “Account of the Tradition of the Law” of the year 472. Hence the anecdote has passed into the later historical presentations of the Buddhist teaching in China, for example into the 佛習統紀 Fo-tsu-t‘ung-ch‘i (Nanjio No. 1661, A. D. 1269—1271), T. E. XXXV, 8, 51 a, 16, and the 佛習歷代通載 Fo-tsu-li-tai-t‘ung-tsai (Nanjio No. 1637, A. D. 1280—1308), T. E. XXXV, 10, 27 a, in the latter work into the much abbreviated version which has been communicated to us by Edkins in his “Chinese Buddhism” (1880).

Whatever the case may be about this particular incident of the Nāgārjuna legend: are we entitled to seek in it anything else but phantastic embellishments of occurrences simple in their origin and in their historical arguments as they may have happened in the life of a man who born and bred in the caste of the Brahmins is seized in his early manhood by a passionate longing, is stirred through a natural shock of his feelings and frame of mind by the thought of transitoriness and of world suffering and enters the Buddhist community and does not find satisfaction in the comparatively simple and primitive teaching of its founder, but whilst finding support in the older Sūtras of the Mahāyāna—which were at that time spread among the Buddhist sects—and especially in the “perfection of understanding” (Prajñā-pāramitā) is directed to the systematic scepticism of every kind of dogma, as long as this is not limited to the negation of all positive assertions? In this

1 T. E. XXIV, 9, 104 b, 3.
sense and from this point of view the statement deserves attention according to which Nāgārjuna instructed in far-off snowy mountains by an aged Bhikṣu in Mahāyāna plans to establish a new school with special attire and its own laws until he is carried back by a sympathetic Nāga (dragon) to the path of the doctrine of the Enlightened one. A representative of the extreme and consequent Negativism—as such appears the author of the Mādhyamika-vāda ascribed to Nāgārjuna—surely would not mind to what theories he brings his dissolving sophistry. We could also understand if, instead of the dogma of Buddhism, the ideology of the Sāṅkhya or Vaiśeṣika system would be dissected under the knife of the negativist. If negativism confronts us in the close connection with the Buddhist doctrine, the reason for it would be that Buddhism held a leading position in Indian intellectual life at the time of the beginning of those aspirations and that a new intellectual tendency could hold to have sufficed all demands if it had come to an understanding with the Buddhist doctrine which was spread amongst numerous schools and communities. One has to hesitate before characterizing the Nominalism of the Middle Ages a Christian conception and yet it fits in well into the idea of the scholastic philosophy, as it takes its ideology for granted and elaborates it. The same applies to the principle of the Sūnya-vāda, the theory of voidness or hollowness: this self-adopted name tends to show that there cannot be a question of a system for it, as just in the contrary the imperfection of any such system shall be proved. Yet it need not be a Buddhist one.

Any further details in the "Biography" published by Kumārajīva from which one might draw some historical conclusions about the circumstances of the time of Nāgārjuna's activity are wanting. The South-Indian king who has been mentioned and who is to be identified on the strength of the Tibetan accounts with the Andhra ruler Sadāvāha or Sātavāhana remains obscure. Therefore no great stress should be laid upon the statement made in the final note according to which Nāgārjuna was the thirteenth patriarch and as such worked for 200 and even 300 years. The enrolment of Nāgārjuna in the succession of the patriarchs would offer the possibility of a chronological determination of his lifetime. It does not appear possible that Buddhism enjoyed in its infancy an institution of that kind which could only be compared with that of the papacy, and even at a later period the ground for such an institution could only have been given when the monastic schools at Nālanda were established and Buddhism divided into a multitude of sects obtained a training-establishment whose spiritual leader embodying the recognized orthodox law could in time or had to acquire an authority which was not different from that of a religious ruler. The foundation of Nālanda which took place under the protection of Mahāyāna, quite contrary to the law of Hinayāna, cannot go back much before the time of Nāgārjuna, if indeed not originate after his activity. It would be difficult to understand that the influence of a single man, however eminent, could exercise the spiritual and the material power which was necessary for the establishment of extensive buildings and their colonization. Thus Nāgārjuna could not have been the thirteenth, but at the best the first of the succession of the Buddhist "popes", and any combination which would follow from the "account of the tradition of the law", would be fruitless.

If the fundamental idea, that of a solemn transfer of the mastership to the worthiest as a successor, may owe its origin to the minds of more recent times, there is no reason to regard in the mentioning of single leaders in the spiritual field or in monastic discipline the recollection of distinct, eminent men who may really have lived in a manner as described in those accounts and in about the succession such as represented here. In this sense the tradition according to which Nāgārjuna's predecessor in the office was Kapimala and his successor Āryadeva, should not be quite valueless, especially as both are designated as authors of works which are partly still contained in the Chinese and Tibetan Canon. But we cannot go so far as to put any value to the chronological classification in the frame of Chinese history¹ as to be found in the extensive works since the T'ang Dynasty, for instance in the work from the year 597 A.D. which is mentioned by Nanjio under No. 1504.

¹ According to 佛國歷代通紀 Fo-tsu-li-tai-t'ung-chi. "Complete account of Buddha and the Patriarchs" (Nanjio No. 1637) A.D. 1280—1368, T.E. XXXV, 10, 27a, 14, Nāgārjuna died in the 35th year of the reign of Emperor 懐皇帝 Shih-huang-ti of the Ch'in (秦) Dynasty, hence 212 B.C.
Whereas the "Biography" of Nāgārjuna offers us no clue at all for clearing up the historical position of that personality in any direction, it would be important to know for the inherent meaning of the relations of Nāgārjuna to the older doctrine how to understand the legend according to which a Nāga opened to him the wealth of the Mahāyāna Sūtras as the real and most profound teaching of the Buddha. There are various things which we can take from the reported accounts. Firstly, that Buddha according to this version did not leave his whole doctrine to his immediate disciples and followers, but that he rather withheld from them the more difficult and profound Sūtras in order to confide them to the care of the Nāgas who were to hand them over to mankind at a more favourable time. This fantastic tale is of course nothing less than historical. A multitude of apocryphical law texts which were filled more and more with the idea of the principle of inanity had to be placed within the educational work of the Buddha itself, and for this purpose the division into various periods of the Buddha\(^1\), and thus one had saved the trouble not only to explain away the contradictions of the separate Sūtras but one had succeeded in proving that Buddha himself was far above the dissensions of his doctrine and at the same time of his community.

Again, this theory of the tradition of the teaching by the Nāgas and their communication to Nāgārjuna by his followers could well be used as a reply to the objection that Nāgārjuna himself was in contradiction to the orthodox tradition since the real principles of Buddha’s teaching considered from the point of view of inanity were devoid of all sense. In reality the Madhyamakavāda, especially in the version given to it by Nāgārjuna in the Mādhyamika-hārikā, is nothing else but a *reductio ad absurdum* of the principles of the Buddha himself, since the controversy is entirely directed against these and not against the views held by other creeds or schools.

\(^1\) See Edkins, *Chinese Buddhism* (1880) p. 38 et seq. It has cost much labour to reduce the Sūtras into a self-consistent chronological order. The Northern Buddhists when they added the literature of the Mahāyāna to that which was composed by Śākyamuni’s immediate disciples, felt obliged to show in a harmonious scheme of his long life, to what years the various Sūtras of the Hinayāna and Mahāyāna, or “Smaller” and “Greater Development” should be assigned.