



***A whirling *swastika* of rivers  
and a mountain on the move –***  
**The transferred geography of Mt Meru-Kailash**

Bettina Zeisler  
[zeis@uni-tuebingen.de](mailto:zeis@uni-tuebingen.de)

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## 1. Introduction

Tibetan history is often viewed in relation to Tibet's eastern and southern neighbours, China and India.

Little is known about the influences from Tibet's western and northern neighbours.

While some efforts have been made to identify traces of Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism in Buddhism, a more prominent influence from the Iranian world (albeit via India) on the conceptualisation of political and sacral geography seems to have been overlooked.

## 2. The 'four' rivers of Mt Kailash

The Tibetan Kailash counts as source of four great rivers, flowing into the four directions,

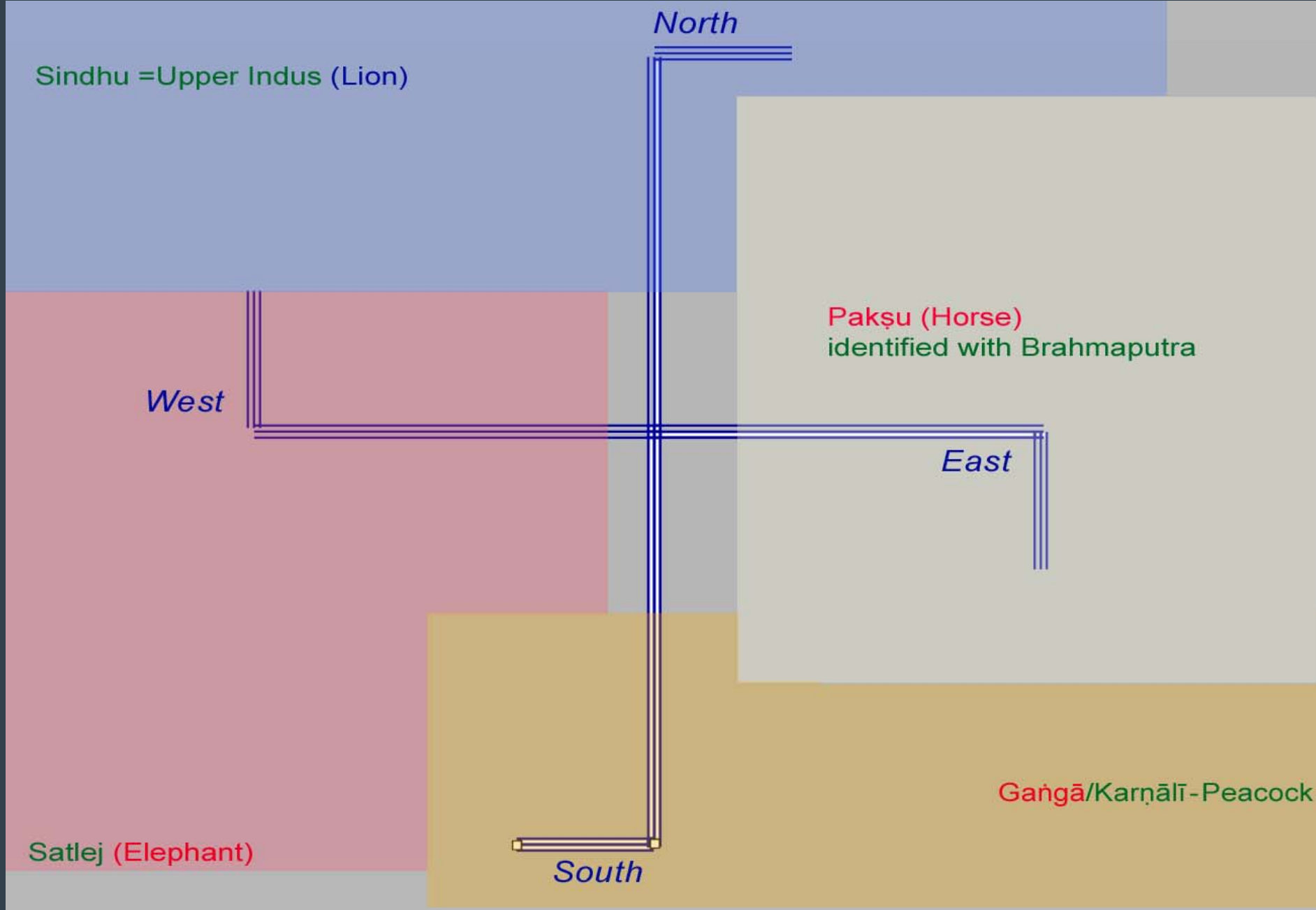
East: Brahmaputra,

South: Gaṅgā

(or rather the Karṇālī or Alakanandā),

West: Satlej,

North: Indus.



The Tibetan standard model

This template does not really fit the geography near the Kailash: Only three rivers take their source in its vicinity, and even if the Karnālī is included, the rivers practically combine two-by-two and flow only in two directions: South-East and South-West.



Vitali (2015) and McKay (2015) thus conclude that this template has nothing to do with the real world, but is merely a projection of an idealised transcendent sphere.

I should like to show that it does have a real origin, down on earth, in the West, and that it is possible to explain how, and perhaps also why, it got transformed.

### 3. The world axis: Mt Meru

The geographic *maṇḍala* of Mt Kailash mirrors the Indian concept of Mt Meru (also भेरु, Sumeru सुभेरु, or Mahāmeru महाभेरु).

In the early Indian cosmological worldview, transmitted both in the Buddhist *Abhidharma* literature and in the Hindu *Purāṇas*, Meru is a gigantic mountain at the junction of four continents (or later of some kind of larger regions).

Meru functions as the watershed of four great rivers, that origin from a central lake (Anavatapta) and flow into the four cardinal directions, reaching the four 'oceans' of the cardinal directions.

This certainly looks like an idealised mythical conceptualisation of a world axis, but



this central and majestic mountain is located vaguely in the northwest of India.

Meru can thus be identified with the Great Pamir Knot, the original *Bam-i-Dunya* or ‘Roof of the World’,

or with a prominent mountain therein, such as:

the Naŋga Parbat (Diamir, i.e., the ‘mountain of gods’ or ‘the mountain who is a god’),

the Rakapośi, or

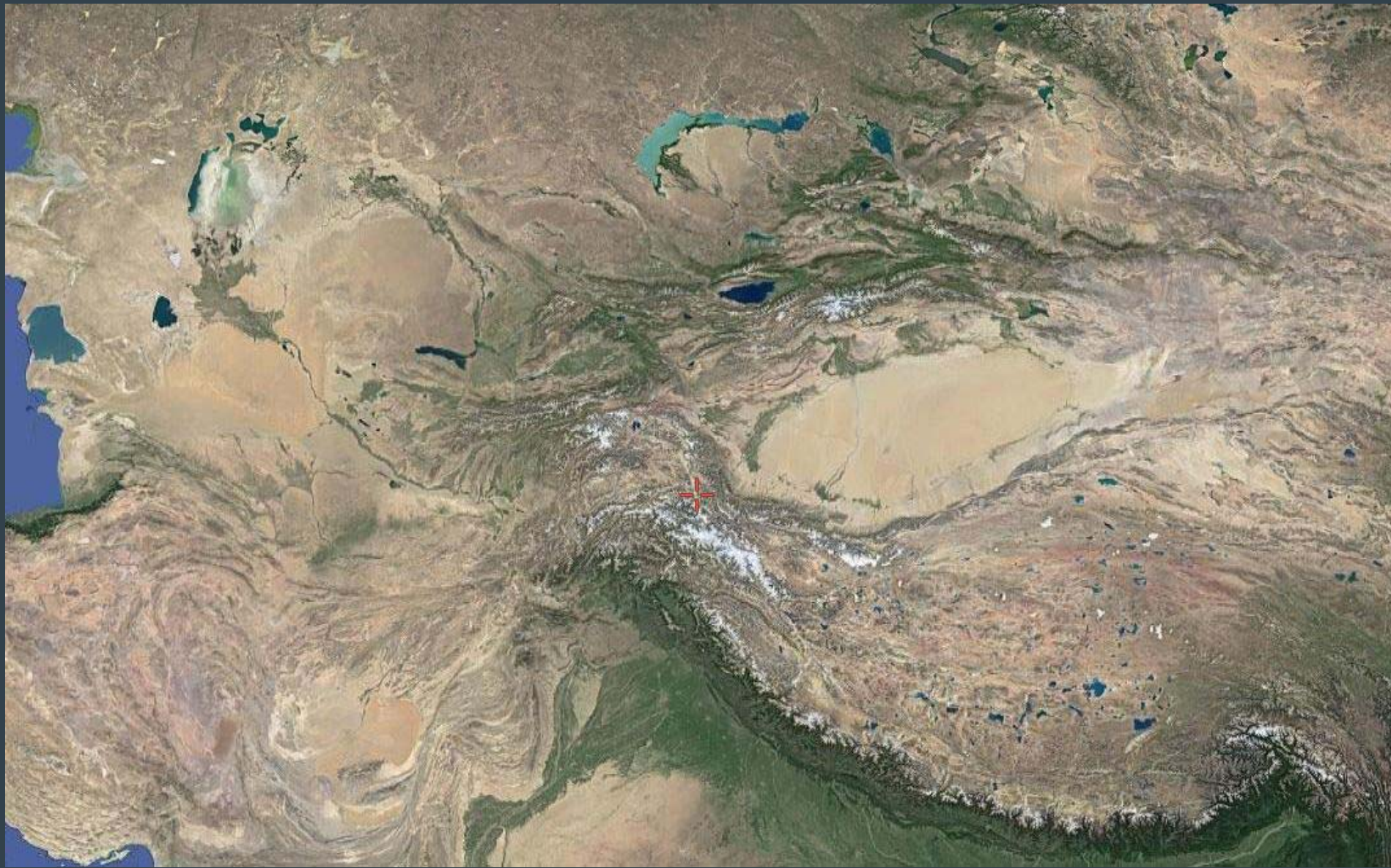
the Tirich Mir.

The Great Pamir Knot forms a gigantic X.

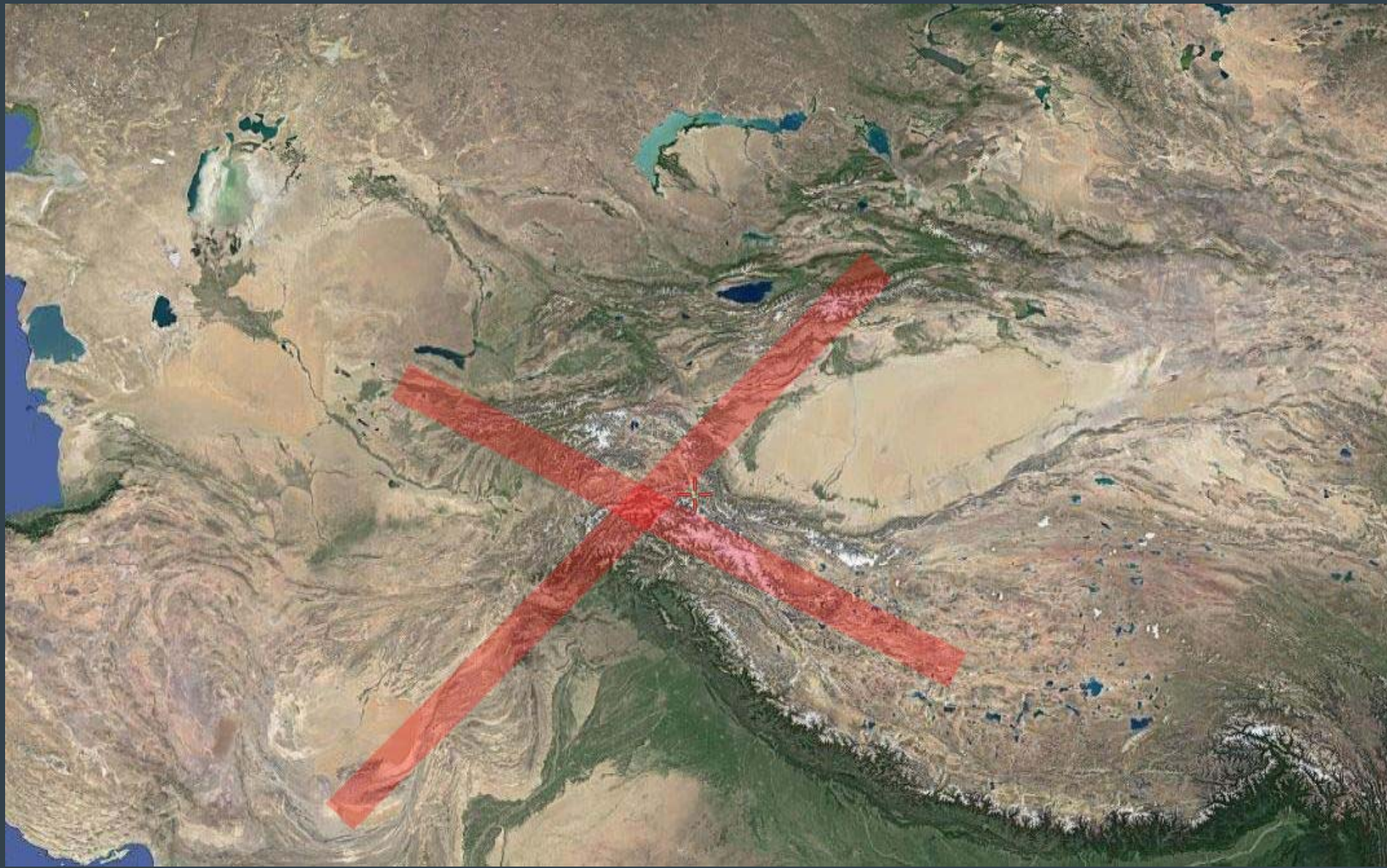
It hosts the sources of four great rivers between its branches, and these rivers flow approximatively in the four directions, each reaching a different 'ocean', or at least a larger salt water body:

- the *Sītā*/ Tarim to the East, reaching the Lob Nor – or even via an underground passage turning into the Yellow River and reaching the Yellow Sea in the East
- the Gilgit-Sindhu\* to the South, reaching the Arabian Sea,
- the *Vakṣu*/ Oxus roughly to the West, reaching the Aral Sea in the North, but also the Caspian Sea in the West via the Uzboy channel,
- the *Bhadrā*/ *Bhadrāsomā*/ Iaxartes to the North-West, reaching the Aral Sea further North.

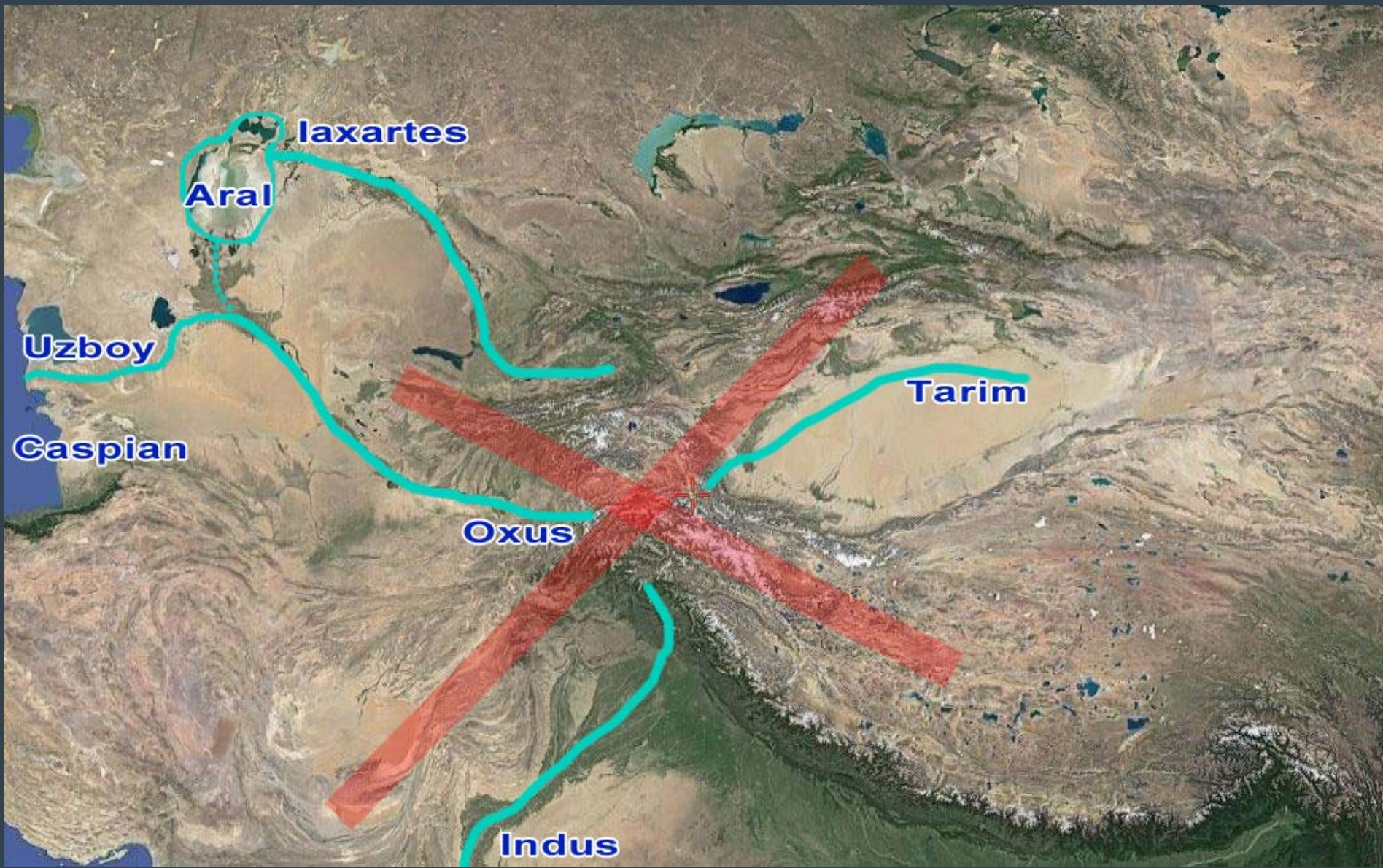
\*The West Tibetan upper part of the Indus was either unknown to the ancient geographers or it was taken to be too insignificant. It was the Gilgit river that counted as source river.

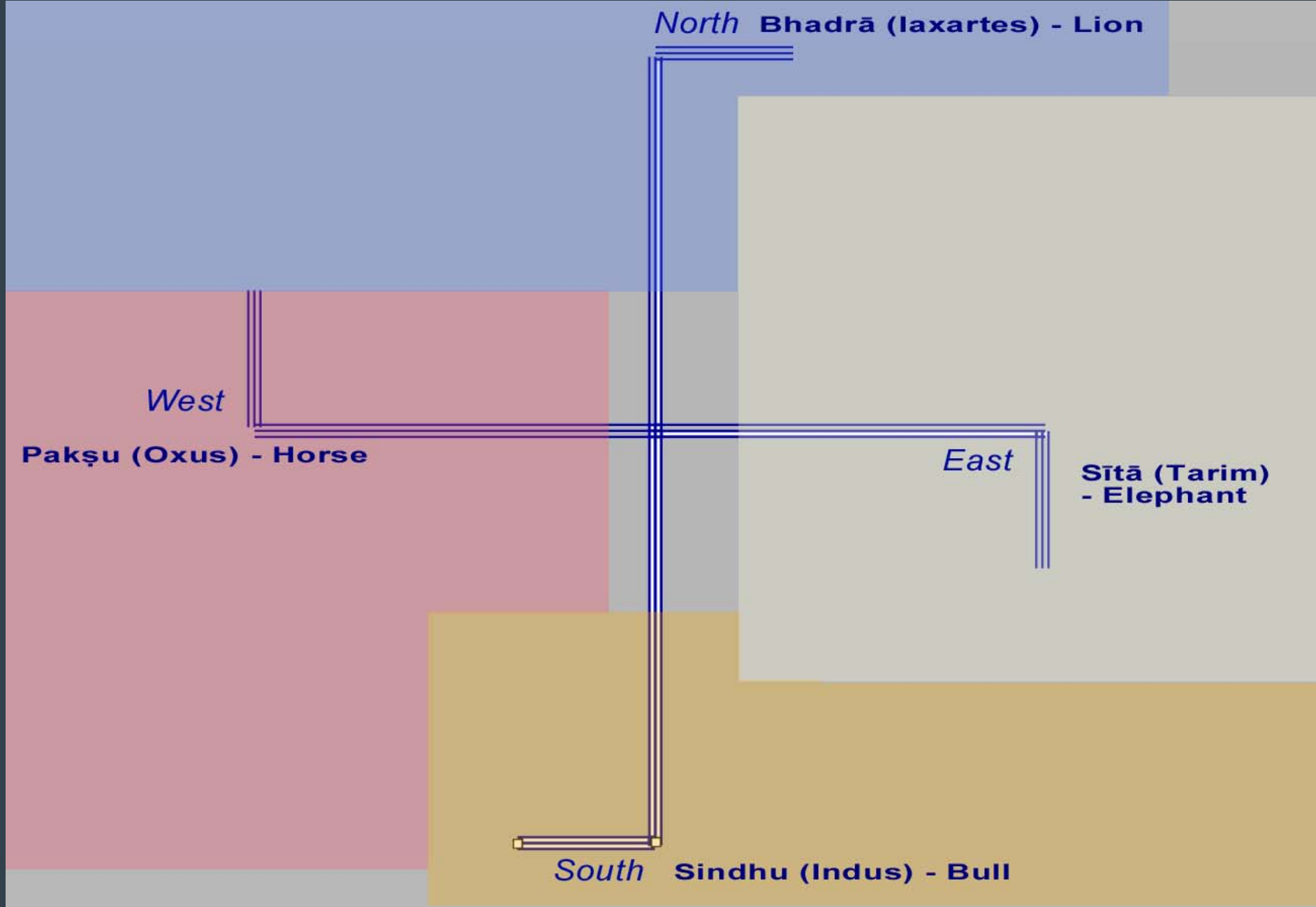












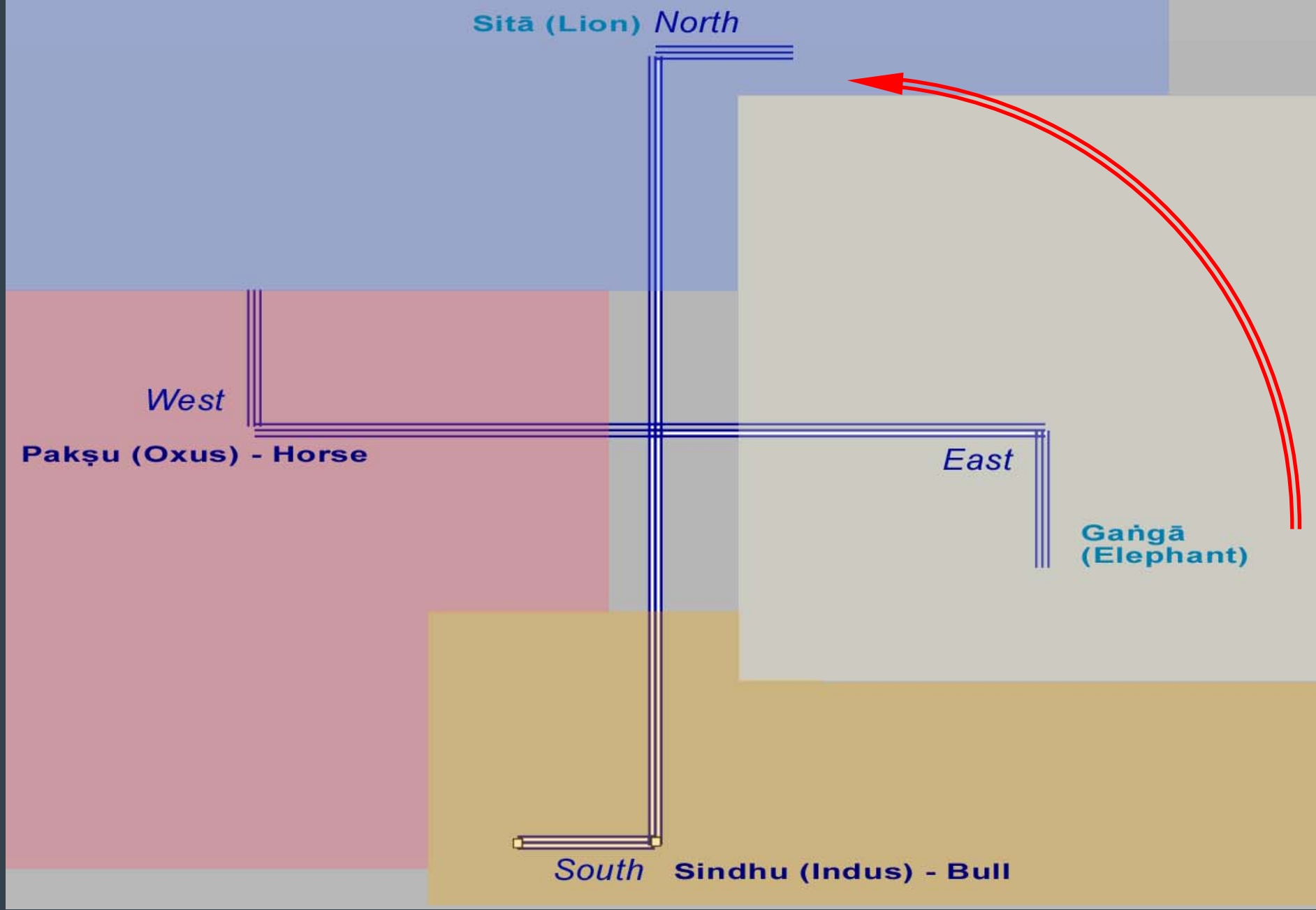
Reconstructed template, unfortunately not attested as such

In early Buddhist sources, beginning with the ca. 3<sup>rd</sup> CE *Abhidharmakoṣa*, the Gaṅgā appears in the East, pushing the Sītā to the north.

This testifies to a shift in political interests southward towards India, but it is also quite evident, that the Gaṅgā flows *east* only in relation to the Pamir region, not in relation to the (modern) Kailash and lake Manasarovar.

- East: Gaṅgā, elephant
- South: Sindhu, bull
- West: Vakṣu, horse
- North: Sītā, lion



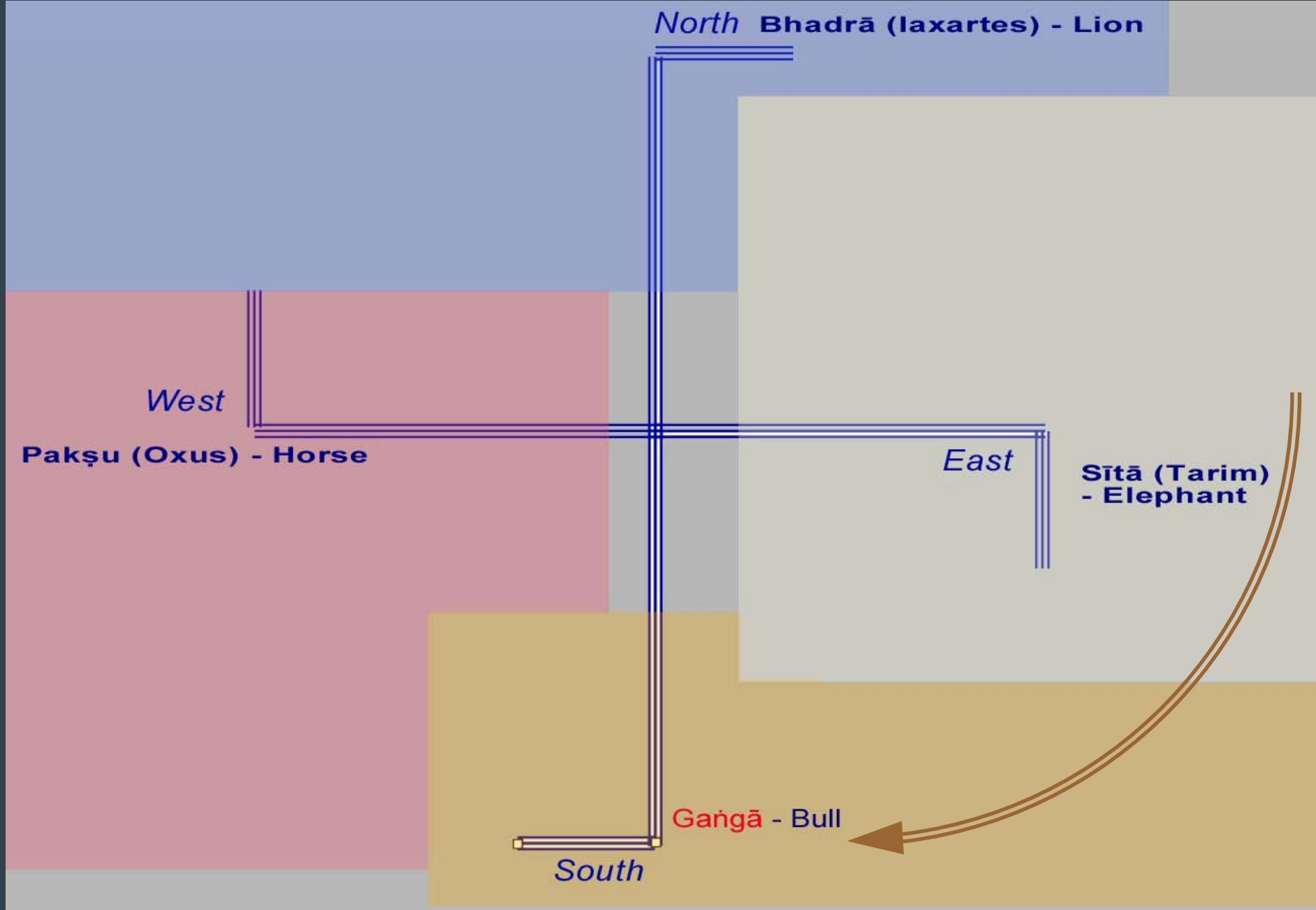


Buddhist template

Somewhat later than the Abhidharma literature, a different early Paurāṇic model testifies to an eastward shift of the ideal centre and to a further adaptation towards the political interest of regional forces in India.

While the same animals are associated with the four directions, the Gaṅgā replaces the Sindhu in the South:

- East: Sītā, elephant
- South: Gaṅgā, bull
- West: Vakṣu, horse
- North: Bhadrasomā, lion



Paurānic template

The Abhidharma template with the Sītā in the north and the Gaṅgā in the East is still attested in the 7<sup>th</sup> century description by Xuanzang.

- East: *King-kia* (*Jingjia*; Gaṅgā), bull (!), silver side
- South: *Sin-to* (*Sinduo*; Sindhu), elephant (!), golden side
- West: *Po-tsu* (*Bozu*; Vakṣu), horse, lapis-lazuli side
- North: *Si-to* (*Siduo*; Sītā), lion, crystal side

## 4. The Tibetan traditions

Pt 958, the Tunhuang version of the *Lokaprajñapti* (a cosmological Abhidharma text; see Macdonald 1962, Dietz 1988) gives a strangely inverted template of the four rivers, which is further associated with the template of the *Kings of the Four Quarters* (for which see in detail R.A. Stein 1959).

The four kings or kingdoms and their ‘jewels’ or symbols of prosperity are (according to a majority of the respective texts):

East: China/ Miñag, king of divinatory sciences/ men

South: India/ Kaśmīr, king of religion/ elephants

West: Iran/ Žaňžuň > Greeks > Arabs, king of precious stones/ riches

North: (Khrom/Phrom) Gesar/ Yuechi/ Giň.šam>Turks, king of the armies/ horses

(In individual versions of this template, one will find a confusion of the western and eastern directions, so that Miñag may be located in the **West** or Žaňžuň may be found in the **East**. – This is also something that we will encounter in the river templates.)

This template of kingdoms seems to be alluded to also in the badly damaged *Inscription at the tomb of Khri-lde Sroñ.brtsan*, 815–817 (a23f., a29f., a39).

Richardson's readings are not in all cases verifiable. Uncertain readings are thus in square brackets.

[šar.phyogs \$ ||] rgyal.po chen.po+r [Rgya ḥdug-pa-dañ] || ...

[lho.phyogs-kyi rgyal.po+r] Rgya/Cha.gar ḥdug-pa yañ || ...

[several lines unreadable]

[---][byañ] phyogs [na] Dru.gu [ḥdug] s [---] Ho[r.se]r

‘For the mighty king/ kingdom [of] the East, there appears to be China. ... For the mighty king/ kingdom of the South, there appears to be India. ... In the North, there appear to be the Turks.’

The four-river template of Pt 958 runs as follows:

*mtsho de.la chu-ni phyogs bžir* [AM: *bžihī*] *re.re ḥbab.ste* |

From this lake [Anavatapta, *mtsho ma.dros.pa*] rivers descend in the four directions.

*šar.gyi chu.bo glañ.gi kha.nas ḥbyu*[?]. *žin ḥbab.bo* ||  
*chuḥi* [ts... rest del.] *myiñ-ni bhag*[AM: *bhañ*].*kša* *žes bgyi.ste* |  
*šar.phyogs phyogs.kyi yul.ḥdzin.dan* [for -*dañ*]  
*myi rin.po.che.la mñah.dbañ.baḥi rgyal.po rgya.rje.la lta.ḥo* ||

The river of the **East** comes down out of the mouth of an ox.  
As for the name of this river, it is *Bhag.kša* [=Pakṣu],  
and it is directed (lit. looks) towards the king who seizes the eastern countries and possesses the ‘jewel’ of **men**, the ruler of **China**.



*lho.ḥi chu.bo ban.glañ.gi kha.nas ḥbyun.žin ḥbab.ste |  
chu.boḥi myiñ-ni si.ta žes bgyi.ste |  
lho.phyogs.kyi yul ma.ga.ta  
gtsug.lag ban.lañ rin.po.che mñah.baḥi rgyal.po rgya.gar.gi  
rgyal.po.la lta.ḥo ||*

The river of the **South** comes down out of the mouth of an **elephant**. As for the name of the river, it is **Si.ta** [=Sindhu? or Kaśmīr Sītā?], and it is directed towards the king who possesses the southern country of Magadha and the ‘jewel’ of sciences and **elephants**, the king of **India**.

*nub.phyogs-kyi chu.bo seṅ.ge.ḥi kha.nas ḥbyun.žin ḥbab.bo ||*

*chu.bo.ḥi myin-ni | ḥgaḥ.ḥgaḥ žes byi.ḥo ||*

*nub.phyogs.kyi seṅ.ge.ḥi yul*

*tshon.dpon maṅ.po.ḥi rgyal.po ḥphrom ge.sar-la lta.ḥo ||*

The river of the **West** comes down out of the mouth of a **lion**.

As for the name of this river, it is **Ḥgaḥ.ḥgaḥ** (=Gaṅgā).

It is directed towards the king of the western country of lions and the many **traders**, **Ḥphrom Gesar**.

*byan.gi chu.bo rta.ḥi kha.nas ḥbyun.žin ḥbab.ste |  
chu.bo.ḥi myin-ni si.to žes bgyi.ḥo ||  
byan.phyogs.kyi yul gab.la.ste |  
mgyogs.rtsal.dan ldan.žin rta maṅ.po.ḥi bdag.po rta rin.po.che  
mnaḥ.ba.ḥi rgyal.po ta.zig.taṅ dru.gu.ḥi rgyal.po ḥbug.cor sde.la  
lta.ḥo ||*

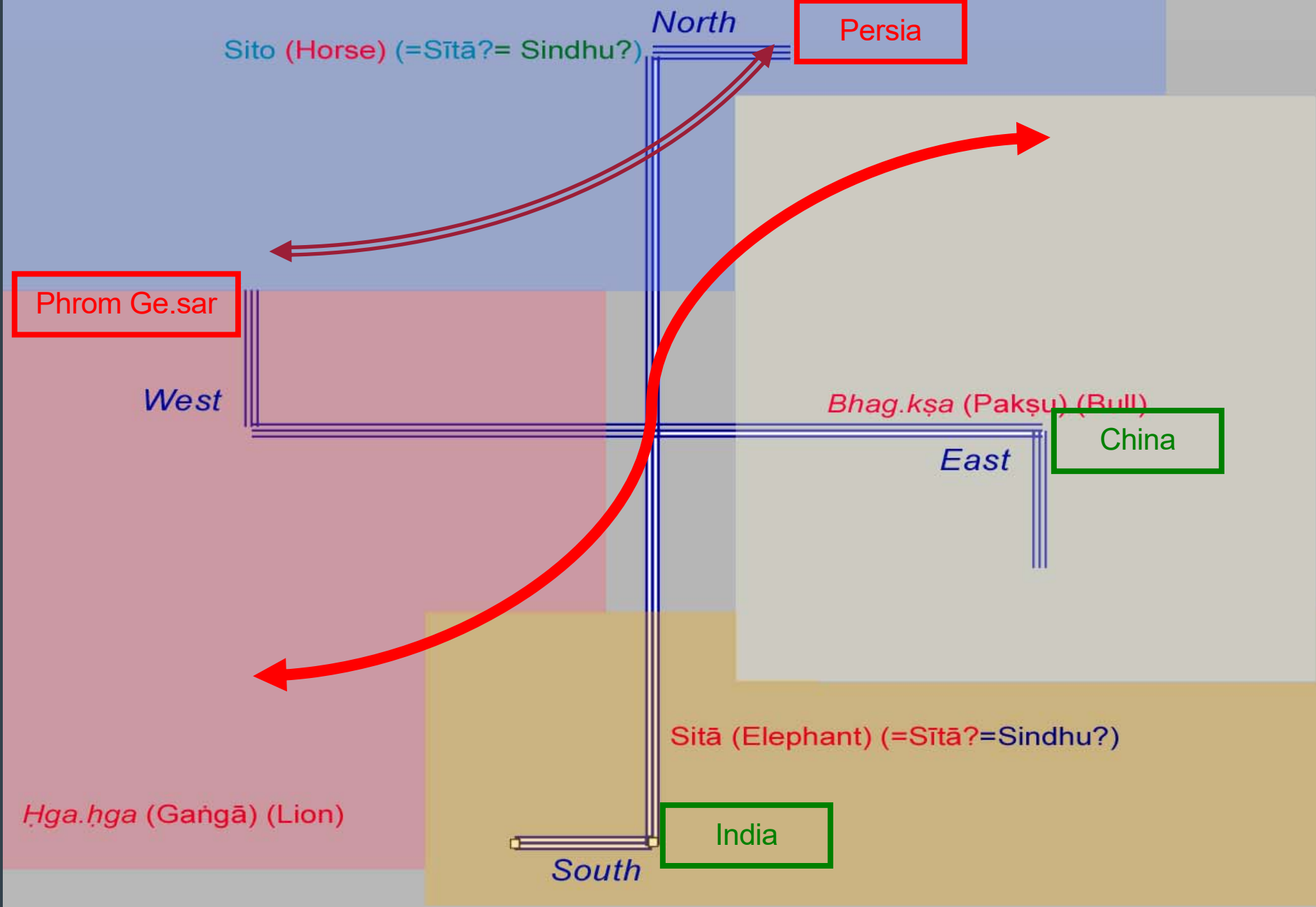
The river of the **North** comes down out of the mouth of a **horse**, and as for the name of this river, it is called **Si.to** (=Sītā? or real upper Indus?).

It is directed towards the hidden land of the North, that is, the king who possesses the ‘jewel’ of the **horses**, the owner of the many horses, swift and strong, the king(s) of **Persia** and the **Turks**, in the territory of the **Hbug.cor**.

- East: རྩོམ་ཀྲ་ *Bhan.kṣa* or རྩོག་ཀྲ་ *Bhag.kṣa*; **Pakṣu !**,  
bull's mouth (ཤར་གྱི་ཚུ་བོ་སྤང་གི་ཁ་ནས་),  
China,  
resources: people (མི་)
- South: སི་ཏ་ (Si.ta, i.e., Sindhu or Kaśmir Sītā?),  
elephant's mouth (ཕྱོལ་ལྷོ་བོ་བན་སྤང་གི་ཁ་ནས་),  
India,  
resources: sciences and elephants (གཞུག་ལག་བན་སྤང་གི་)
- West: འག་འག་ *Hga.hga*, i.e., **Gaṅgā !**,  
lion's (!) mouth (རུབ་ཕྱོགས་ཀྱི་ཚུ་བོ་སེང་འགའི་ཁ་ནས་),  
**Hphrom-Gesar (!)**,  
resources: many traders (ཚོང་དཔོན་མང་པོ་)
- North: སི་ཏོ་ (Si.to, i.e., Sītā ?),  
horse's (!) mouth (བྱང་གི་ཚུ་བོ་རྟ་འི་ཁ་ནས་),  
**Persia** (ཏ་ཟིག་ !) and the **Turks** (རྩུ་གུ་),  
resources: swift and strong horses (མགོ་གསལ་ཕྱུ་ལ་དང་ལྷན་ཞིང་རྟ་མང་པོ་)

It is possible that the association with particular 'jewels' or symbols in this template has led to a shift in position of the horse-related Pakṣu/Oxus. But one should also note the shift of Persia to the North, where one would usually find Gesar and Phrom, while the latter take the position of Persia or alternatively Žaňžuň.

So definitely something went wrong.



Old Tibetan LOKAPRAJÑAPTI (Pt 958)

Another scheme with the **Pakṣu in the East**, identifiable as **Brahmaputra**, and thus quite realistic in relation to a centre in Tibet, is found in a ‘biography of Bon women’ (192-vol. Bon Canon, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 189, fol. 200v5; Martin, n.d., no. 10).

A particular Bonpo feature is the **peacock** as southern animal. Buddhists authors may have a *khyun* (!) instead.

The Bonpo templates are often given in the left-turning order: east, north, west, south. But for better comparison they will be given here in the standard right-turning order.

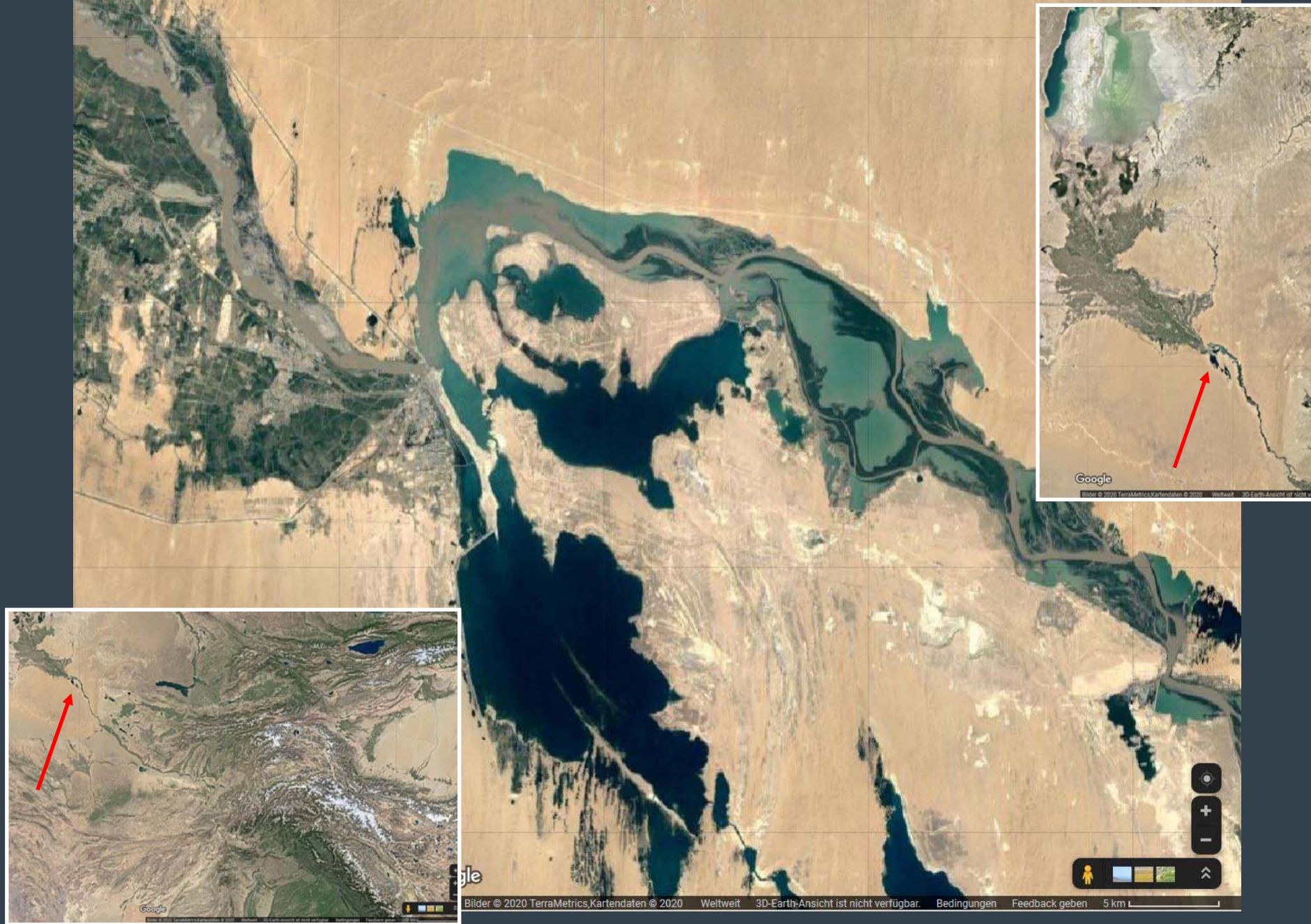
- East: བཀུ་ (*Bakṣu*, i.e., Pakṣu), horse's mouth, flows through Tibet (i.e., Brahmaputra)
- South: གང་ཀ་ (*Gaṅ.nā*, i.e., Gaṅgā), peacock's mouth, flows through India
- West: སིངྩི་ (*Sidhi*, i.e., Sindhu), bull's mouth, flows through 'Persia' (སྟག་གཟིག་ཡུལ་ *Stag.gzig.yul*, here most probably the Pamirian borderlands are meant)
- North: སེང་གེ་ (*Señ.ge*), lion's mouth, flows through ཧོར་ཡུལ་ (*Hor.yul*)



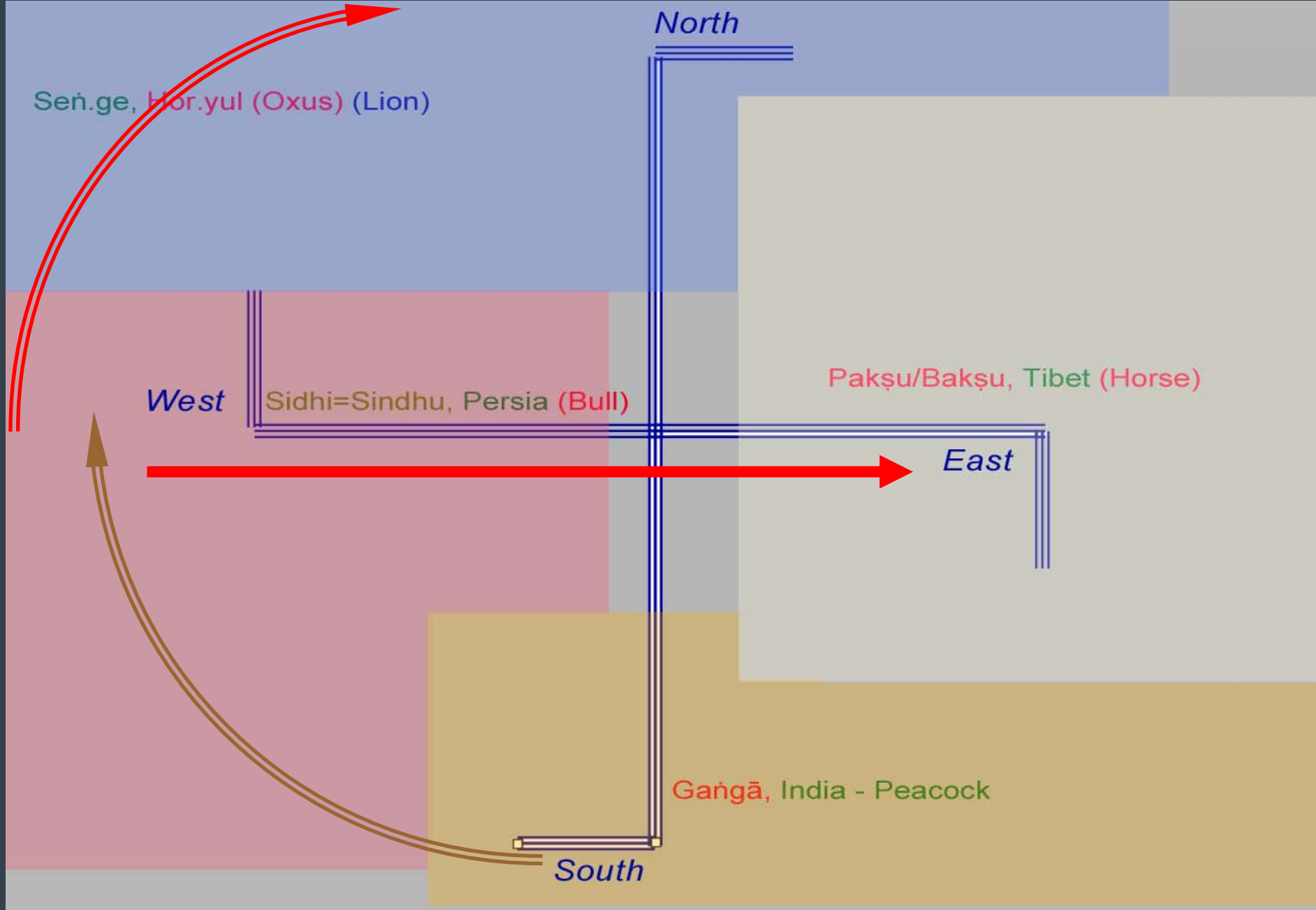
*Hor.yul* could be Turkestan, if the Tarim is meant or Kazakhstan/ Tajikistan/ Uzbekistan if the Iaxartes is meant.

It is possible, though, that the (real) Upper Indus is meant. In the ŠEL.DKAR ME.LON, *Hor* refers to the northwestern-most corner of the Indus, and thus possibly to the Gilgit region.

It should be noted, however, that the original Lion Mouth is a roaring *gorge of the Oxus!* (in Uzbekistan) not too far away from the Aral Sea, also known as Camels Neck.



Lions Mouth or Camels Neck



# Biography of Bonpo Women

Despite the early attestation of an adapted (or mirror-inverted) scheme, the ‘standard’ Abhidharma template with the **Gaṅga in the East** was taken over by Tibetan Buddhists and Bonpos alike.

Cf., e.g., the Bonpo text MDO.HDUS as cited in Martin (1995) and Namkhai Norbu (2013, with minor spelling variations) and the Buddhist BLON.PO BKAḤ.THAN (Dorje Rgyalpo 1986)

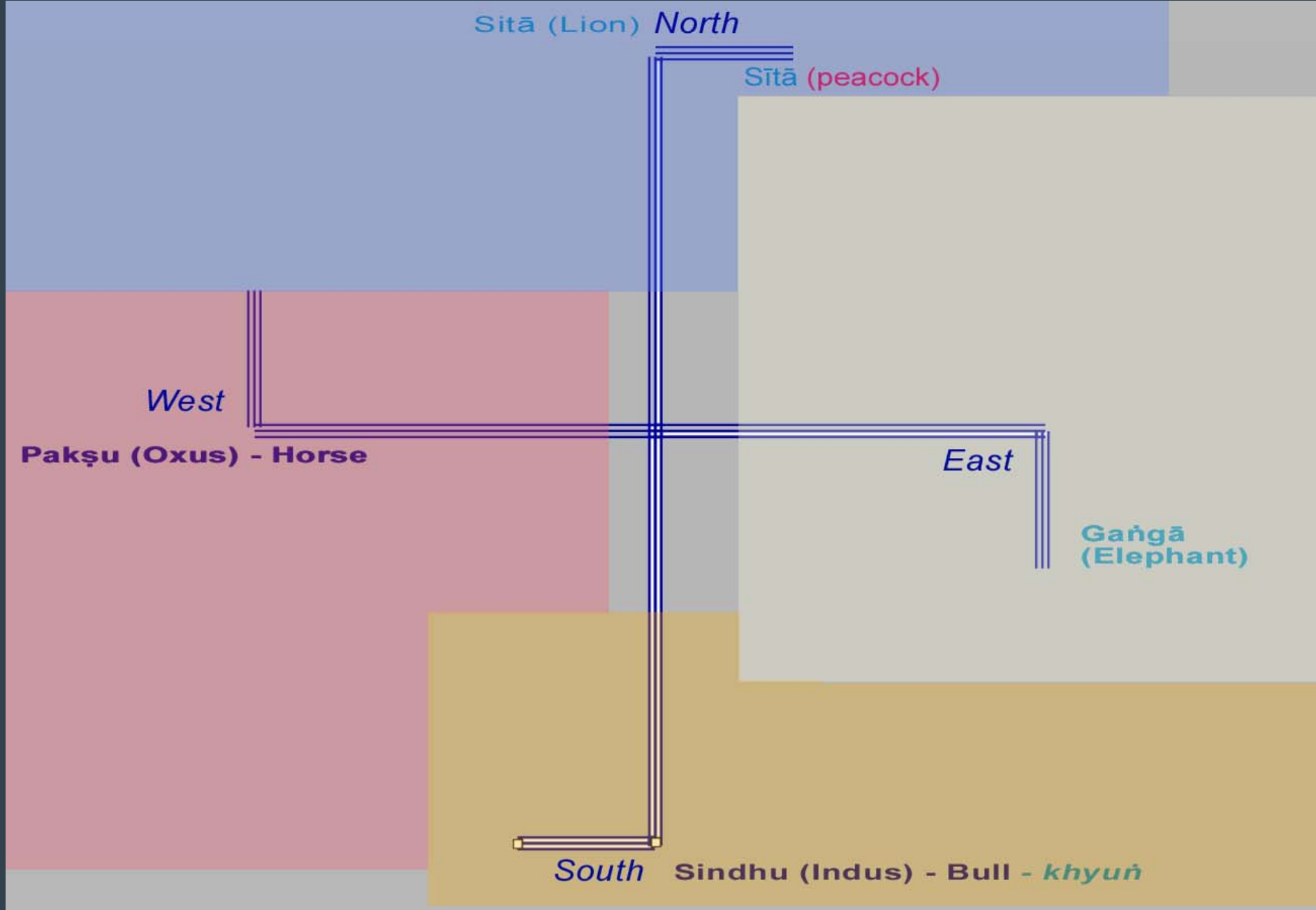
- East: གང་ཀ་ / གང་གྲ་ (*Gaṅ.kal Gaṅ.gḥa*), elephant's mouth
  - South: སིན་འདུ་ (*Sin.ḥdu*), bull's mouth (ཁྱུ་མཚོག་ *khyu.-mchog* 'best of a herd')
  - West: པག་ཤུ་ / པག་ཤུད་ (*Pag.ṣu(d)*), horse's mouth
  - North: སི་ཏ་ / སིན་ཏ་ (*Si(n).ta*), peacock's mouth(!)
- 
- East: གང་ག་ (*Gaṅ.ga*), elephant/bull's mouth, silver sands
  - South: སིན་ཏུ་ (*Sin.dhu*), *khyuñ*'s mouth, *baidūrya* sands
  - West: པཀླ་ (*Pakṣu*), horse's mouth, crystal sands
  - North: སི་ཏ་ (*Si.ta*, i.e., *Sītā*), lion's mouth, gold sand



Mimaki (2015) claims that the peacock could be associated with any river, but in most templates it is associated with the southern river, either the Sindhu or the ལྷ་རྩེ་ (ལྷ)ལྷ་རྩེ་, i.e., the नैरञ्जना Nairañjanā. In a few cases, the Nairañjanā and its peacock are shifted to the East.

Only in one of the two MDO.HDUS variants is the peacock associated with the northern river, given there as ལྷ་རྩེ་ (ལྷ)ལྷ་རྩེ་.

It is possible that this is due to a confusion between Sindhu and Sītā, both in the Chinese sources (*Sin-to/Sinduo* vs. *Si-to/Siduo*) and in the Old Tibetan *Lokaprajñapti* (*Si.ta* vs. *Si.to*), or due to a late interpolation at a time when the modern upper course of the Indus had become associated with the Sindhu, and thus with the peacock.



Bonpo MDO.HDUS 1 / Buddhist BLON.PO BKAḤ.THAN

What makes the picture so confusing is that quite often the rivers of the East (Gaṅgā or also the Upper Yangtze/Brahmaputra) and of the West (Pakṣu) including, or in opposition to, their animals (elephant or bull vs. horse) appear mirror-inverted, that is, in the opposite directions, while the rivers in the South and North and their animals are much more stable.

In my opinion this may indicate that sketches for prints and paintings were circulating (or also oral or written descriptions of such sketches),\* but that the respective authors were not always aware that they might have a mirror-inverted drawing at their hand, as prepared for a block print.



Some authors might have had both representations at hand; and it further seems that they may have had a mirror inverted representation only for either the rivers or the animals, cf. the following templates.

Namkhai Norbu (2013) mentions two mirror-inverted templates from a Bonpo DKAR.CHAG (cf. also Mimaki 2015).

As East and West are swapped, the perceived ‘wrong’ location of the གཎ་གླ་ *Gaṅ.gā* in the east (wrong only according to the modern model, but correct according to the original Abhidharma scheme) is ‘repaired’ by the description of the river as starting in the East, but flowing into the opposite direction.

The གཎ་གླ་ *Gaṅ.gā* is thus identified with the Satlej.

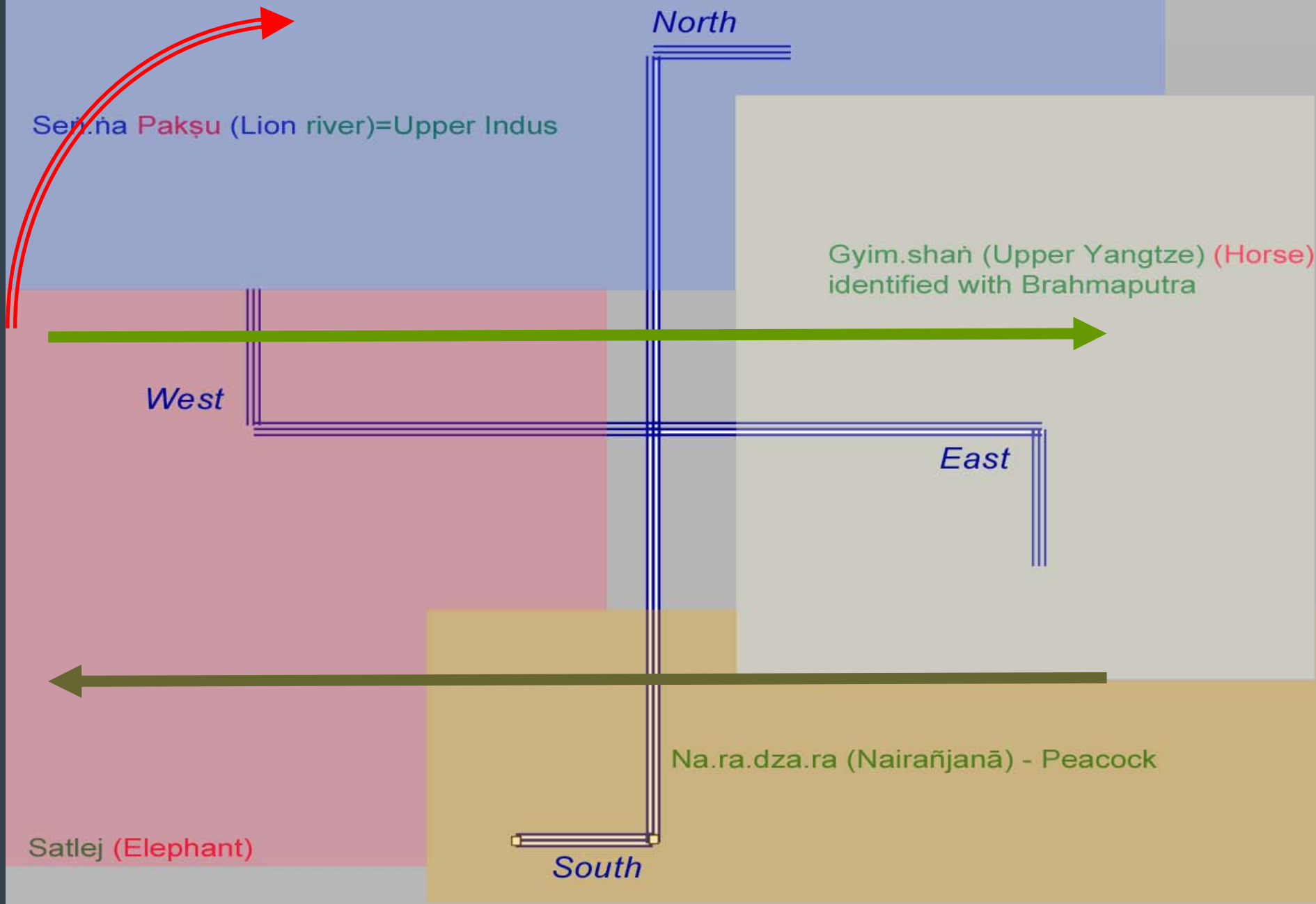
The same applies to the truly wrong location of the ཀྱིམ་གཎ་ *Khyim.ṣaṅ* river in the west, by the description of the river as flowing to the east, where it is identified with the Brahmaputra.

- East: རྩ་མཚོག་ཁ་འབབ་ *Rta.mchog Kha.ḥbab* (Horse-mouth spring) = གྱིམ་ཤང་འབྲིལ་བ་, (actually the *Jinsha Jiang*, Upper Yangtze; here, however, identified with the *Brahmaputra*), flowing through གཡས་རུ་ *G.yas.ru* (the ‘Right Horn’) and གྲོ་ཤོད་ *Gro.šod* (Western Tibet, north and south of the *Brahmaputra*, respectively)
- South: མི་བྱ་ཁ་འབབ་ *Rma.byahi Kha.ḥbab* (Peacock-mouth spring) = ན་ར་ཇོ་ར་ (Nairañjanā) flowing through ‘ཕུ་རོའ་ *Pu.roñ*’ (Purang, the south-western edge of Ngari)
- West: གླུང་ཆེན་ཁ་འབབ་ *Glañ.chen Kha.ḥbab* (Elefant-mouth spring) = གང་གྲུ་ (*Gaṅgā*) flowing west along རྩུང་ལུང་དངུལ་མཁར་ *Khyuñ.luñ* *Dñul.mkhar* (the Silver Castle, i.e., the upper *Satlej*, in the western part of Ngari)
- North: སེང་གེའི་ཁ་འབབ་ *Señ.geḥi Kha.ḥbab* (Lion-mouth spring) = སེང་ར་པ་རྒྱ་ (Lion-Pakṣu, i.e., the modern Upper Indus) flowing north through Ladakh

- East: གང་གཱ་ (*Gaṅ.gā*), from the eastern side of lake མ་པཎ་ (*Ma.paṅ*), flowing westwards along ལྷུང་ལྷུང་དངུལ་ མཁར་ *Khyuṅ.luṅ Diul.mkhar* (the Silver Castle, i.e., along the Upper Sutlej)
- South: ན་ར་ཇ་ར་ (*Na.ra.dza.ra*, i.e., Nairañjanā), reaches India
- West: གྱིམ་ཤང་འབྱིལ་བ་ (*Gyim.šan ḥkhyil.ba*, i.e., *Jinsha Jiang*, Upper Yangtze; but most likely thought to be the Brahmaputra), flowing eastwards
- North: སིང་ར་པཀུ་ (*Siṅ.na Pakṣu*, Lion-Pakṣu, i.e., modern Upper Indus), flowing through Ruthok

The name of the (originally) eastern river actually corresponds to the Upper Yangtze, Chin. *Jinsha Jiang* (“Gold Sand River”).

This may point to a particular interest of some East Tibetan Bonpo authors to shift the central mountain further east, towards their own (new) homeland, while the identification of both Gyim.šan and Pakṣu with the Brahmaputra may be the result of a later reworking and the attempt to bring back the eastern river to Central Tibet.



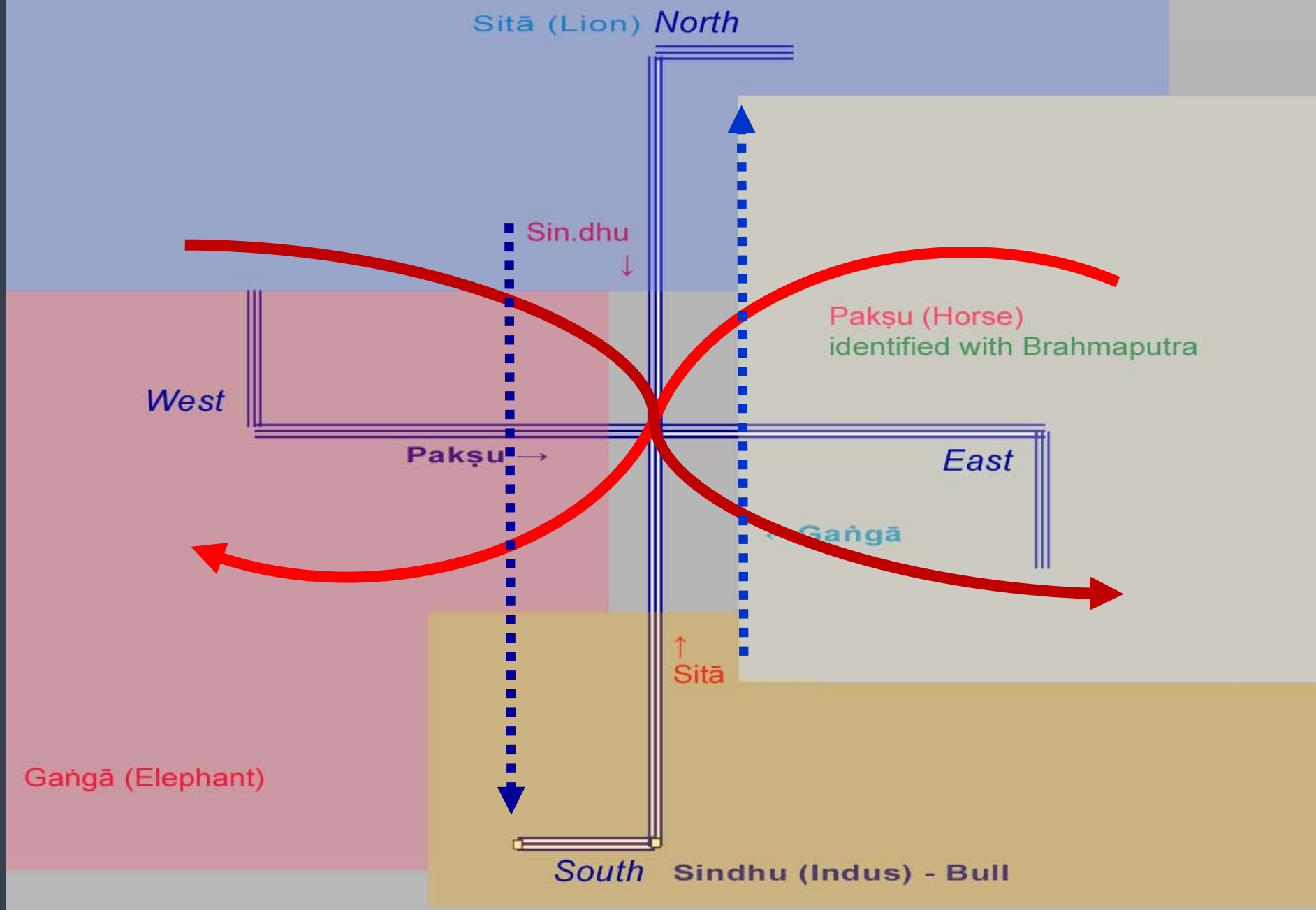
Bonpo DKAR.CHAG

Likewise, in the Buddhist ŠEL.DKAR ME.LOṄ (Huber & Tsepak Rigzin 1999), 2 mirror-inverted templates are found. Again in the second text, the original directions are ‘repaired’ by the assumption that the rivers cross the lake and appear in the opposite direction.

- East: པཀ་ཤུ་ (*Pakṣu*), horse’s mouth, silver sand
- South: སེན་ཏུ་ (*Sin.dhu*), bull’s mouth, precious stones
- West: གང་གྲ་ (*Gaṅ.gā*), elephant’s mouth, golden sands
- North: སི་ཏཱ་ (*Si.tā*, i.e., Sītā), lion’s mouth, diamond sand

- East: པཀ་ཤུ་ (*Pakṣu*) – flows from the west to the east, appears in a horse's mouth at གཅོང་བྱེ་མ་གཡུང་རྩུང་ Gtsan Bye.ma G.yun.drun, flows through Tibet; i.e., the Brahmaputra
- South: སིན་ཏུ་ (*Sin.dhu*) – flows southward from the north of the lake, appears in a peacock's or bull's mouth “in the upper valley of Lang-ka Pu-rang (!), from where it flows on cutting through Nepal (!) and the centre of India”
- West: གང་གཱ་ (*Gan.gā*) – originally it flew east, but later crossed the lake and appeared through the elephant's mouth in the highlands of Guge (!); i.e., the Satlej
- North: སི་ཏཱ་ (*Si.tā*, i.e., Sītā) – flows from the south of the lake to its north, appears in a lion's mouth, “in the Seng highlands of the 'Brong region behind [i.e., north of] Ti-se, and it flows on through countries which include Ladwags, Bhalti[stan] and Hor”, that is, the modern Upper Indus (!).





ŠEL.DKAR ME.LON 1 & 2 (H̄bri.guñ)

Swami Pranavānanda (1949) gives a similar turn-around-pattern from a text that he calls “Tibetan Kailas Purana” or “Kangri Karchak”.

Additional geographical errors have crept into the text, as the **Satlej** is said to flow through **Kāmarūpa**, which is (presently) a region in **Assam**. The **Lohita** is one of the northeastern confluences of the Brahmaputra, and originally was the name of the **lower Brahmaputra**. This brings us likewise to Assam.

Quite apparently parts of a full description of the Brahmaputra underly the river flowing from the ‘East to the West’. However, since the identity between the Brahmaputra with the Lohita lower course was established only in the late 19th century, the text cannot be very old (or Swami Pranavānanda has mixed up the names).

- East (!), originally westwards: “Tamchok khambab” (ཏཱ་མཚོག་ཁ་འབབ་, the **Horse**-mouth spring), flows from “Dulchu Gompa” to “Chhemo Ganga in *Gyagar* (India)” = “**Pakshu/Vakshu**” → **Brahmaputra**, sands of cat’s-eye
- South, originally northwards (!): “Mapcha khambab” (མེ་ཕྱ་ཁ་འབབ་, the **Peacock**-mouth spring), flows in the south from “Mapcha Chungo” in “Lankapur-ring” (!) and then westwards (!) to “Sindu-yul” = “Sindu” → **Karṇālī**, sands of silver
- West (!), [originally eastwards]: “Langchen khambab” (ལྷང་ཚེན་ཁ་འབབ་, the **Elephant**-mouth spring), flows from “a mountain in Chema-yungdung” to “Chang (Tashi-Lhunpo) and thence to **Kamarupa** in India, where it is called **Lohita**” = “**Ganga**” → **Satlej** (Skr. Shatadru), sands of gold
- North, originally southwards (!): “Senge khambab” (སེང་གེ་འེ་ཁ་འབབ་, the **Lion**-mouth spring), “flows from a mountain called Senge” to “Baltichen and Changhor” = “Sita” → **modern Upper Indus**, sands of diamond

Swaps like these may have led to the idea that the rivers turn around the central lake, one time, three times or even seven times. The younger the text, the more often.

The first Japanese 'world' map of 1710 features the central lake and the four rivers turning clockwise in a spiral, each one a full circle, until they flow into their respective directions:







# 南瞻部洲萬國掌圖



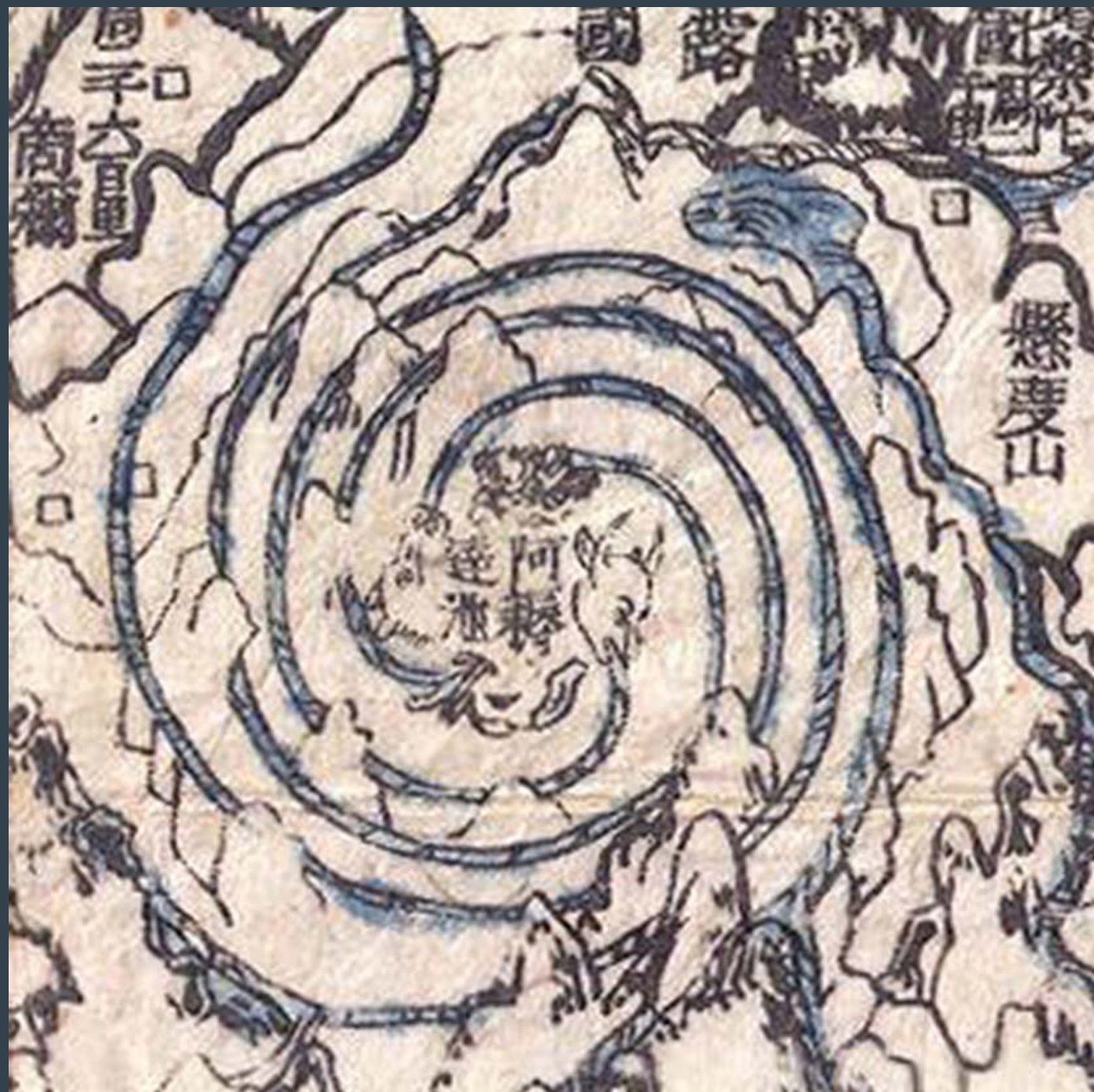
○擊俄夫四人懸案無憑而世界亦無邊洋以管懸觀則摩大千  
 界如掌中焉羅網使使百餘四天下若網羅網皆此四洋形人面  
 網大余一舉年而凡夫刺便不更分寸離離而百步後應而不  
 獲玄珠動鶴花散而竟不見丘山常人懸案如百計如何又應  
 魂乎於岸并能無由渡海而已懸案發者投身於城卒允之所奪  
 父之所殺有所天而有所道班超後而履未起疑審理而解非博  
 世我稱門三義法顯玄奘卷入萬死之地而臨臨而包成實可  
 謂窮其際矣然其所記述五天胡地處處皆奇之界有異而面全  
 備而而猶未極於海外胡詳日本琉球連羅瓜哇國等東歐草洲其  
 雖豈能及乎况乃歷世建軍充漢漢殊絕究一方之呼巨族與異之  
 俄是以史記說得備備在多所難盡從全從前若羅成耳北三才  
 國檢及圖書編明一統志等或述華梵首而反別國或南洋北漢之  
 地而列列亦辨其處或唯標石而不指方若東大洲而視小洲如  
 狹隙飛騰土而皆更不能盡五印地境勢公親紀立世界名體  
 與西十五之圖余偶得之以覽貨羅摩羅摩帝摩陀摩陀阿利  
 尤等及羅羅川管列於廣嶺東北定驗知俄俄西俄記不香  
 定方誌慈思德故也又不辨四九邊管風以布但落置  
 于印子國東亡初仰山此皆誤也自稱五印名稱  
 既故有五印國而四之方知劣于統紀且  
 大崩白混備陀山而於東南海之濱差一萬  
 里而風支生名處俱失五天之界排紛失  
 繁不更取也由是印人對見莫莫可復  
 余復見於斯師矣比嘗有所謂集  
 凡統合聯部應國編攷一掌概攝

曰萬國掌圖以此一且覽之則其  
 所未未識者不出戶庭與指掌同  
 他覽表御覽莫莫矣務微察察則見  
 不備也然覽余亦學于自管見此見  
 無不覽之明其大體矣昔因付相願  
 乎性廣而性不性耳凡板圖之覽于  
 意石而成以風守且圖一寸廣亦以  
 式其支那高麗日城琉球文島上等  
 彼者來熱則小辨去其其餘諸國  
 昔不相識者無由記其別國里之  
 於其各分界其作是列地排全固在  
 其視則如也如對形似尚有餘其  
 就集夫山江海珠璣其境尤萬里有  
 而一一齊風舒而盡一掌而兩手  
 萬凡學佛者指此圖每疑不足以其  
 面世而地止及萬里矣之能信且不知  
 世之展所以執以爲中國况知須大  
 替世所動無事帝制世界海其後學  
 項之漢世月也  
 大日本國次覽圖此月也









While the more recent Tibetan Buddhist authors tend to apply the name སེ་ཁྲ་ to the (real) Upper Indus, in the Bonpo texts, it is the སྐྱུ་ which is shifted to the north and re-identified with the (real) Upper Indus. (This may result in a compound name, *Sen.na Pakṣu*, in an apparent attempt of accommodation.)

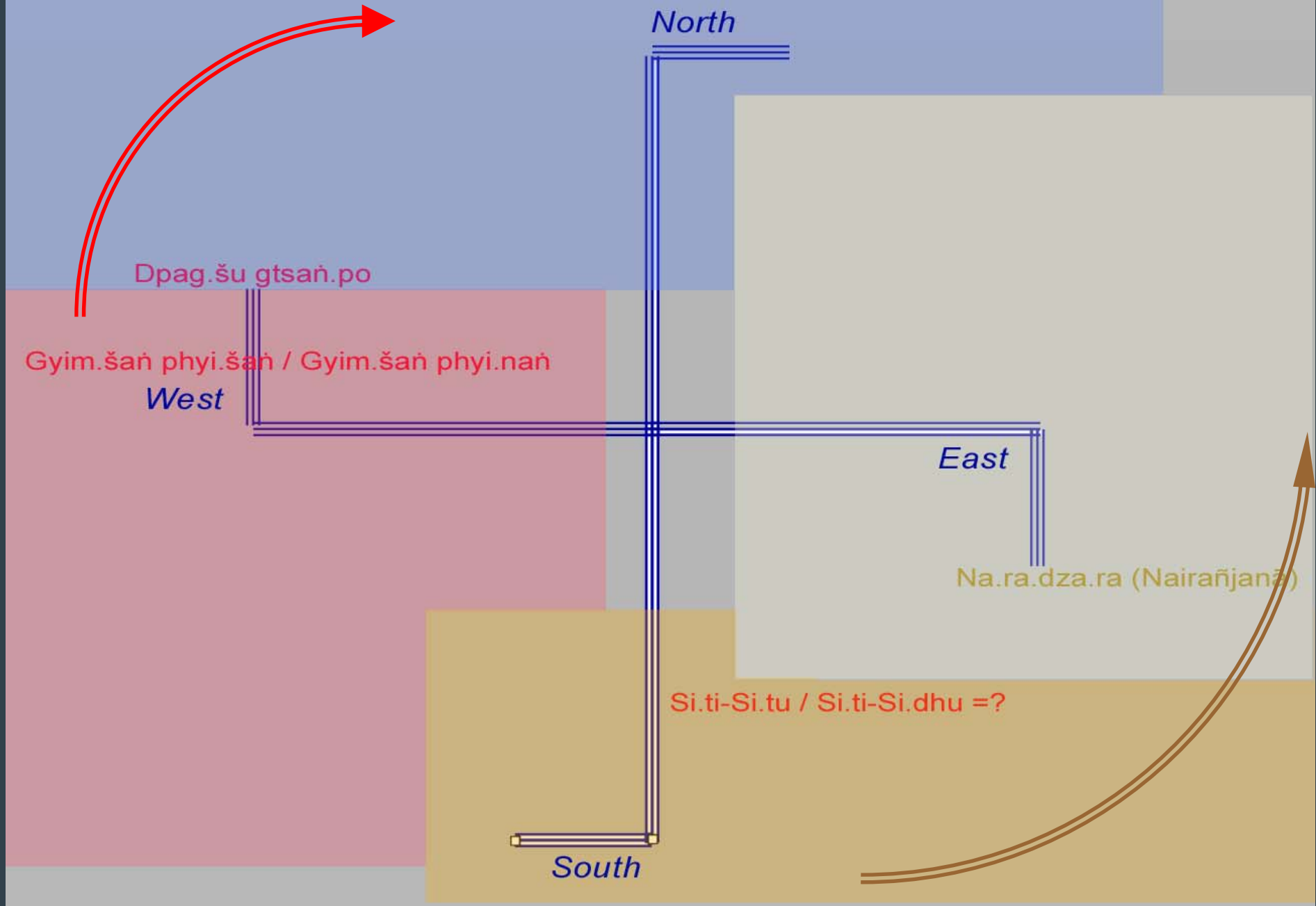
The original Sindhu in the South is usually replaced by the Bonpo authors with the ན་ར་འཇེ་ར་ *Na.ra.dza.ra* or Nairañjanā.

There are also mixed patterns with the Nairañjanā in the East and the Sindhu in the south, e.g., in the Bon.po RGYAL.RABS of Khyuñ.po Blo.gros Rgyal.mtshan (ed. Khedup Gyatso 1974).

- East: ན་ར་ཇ་ན་ (*Na.ra.dza.na*, i.e., **Nairañjanā**)
- South: སི་ཏི་སི་ཏུ་ (*Si.ti Si.tu*, i.e., Gilgit-Indus?, Kaśmīr Sītā?)
- West: གྱིམ་ཤར་ཕྱི་ཤར་ (*Gyim.šan phyi.šan*, i.e., **Upper Yangtze**)
- North: དཔག་ཤུ་གཙང་པོ་ (*Pag.śu gtsaṅ.po*, i.e., **Pakṣu**, implicitly re-identified with the modern Upper Indus)

This is possibly derived from another passage in the MDO.HDUS as given by Martin (1995):

- East: ན་ར་འཇ་ར་ (*Na.ra.ḥdza.ra*, i.e., **Nairañjanā**)
- South: སི་ཏི་སི་ཏུ་ (*Si.ti Si.dhu*, i.e., Sindhu ?)
- West: གྱིམ་ཤར་ཕྱི་ནང་ (*Gyim.šan phyi.naṅ*; i.e., **Upper Yangtze**)
- North: དཔག་ཤུ་རྩང་པོ་ (*Dpag.śu gtsaṅ.po*, i.e., **Pakṣu**)



Bonpo RGYAL.RABS and MDO.HDUS 2

Almost the same template is given by Mimaki (2015) and by Vitali (2015). The river names differ only in spelling. But the animals in Mimaki's template are clearly out of phase by one quarter of clockwise turn. The template presented by Vitali without animals is from a recent Bonpo source, called MGUL.RGYAN.

- East (!): 'Nara' / 'Nara-dzara' (i.e., Nairañjanā), lion
- South: སེན་ཏུ་ (*Sin.dhu*), elephant
- West (!): ཀྱིམ་ཤང་ (*Kyim.šan*) / གྱིམ་ཤང་ (*Gyim.šan*), i.e., Jinsha Jiang, Upper Yangtze, (if one prefers = Brahmaputra), peacock
- North (!): པཀ་སུ་ (*Pakṣu*), horse



North

Pakṣu (Horse)

West

East

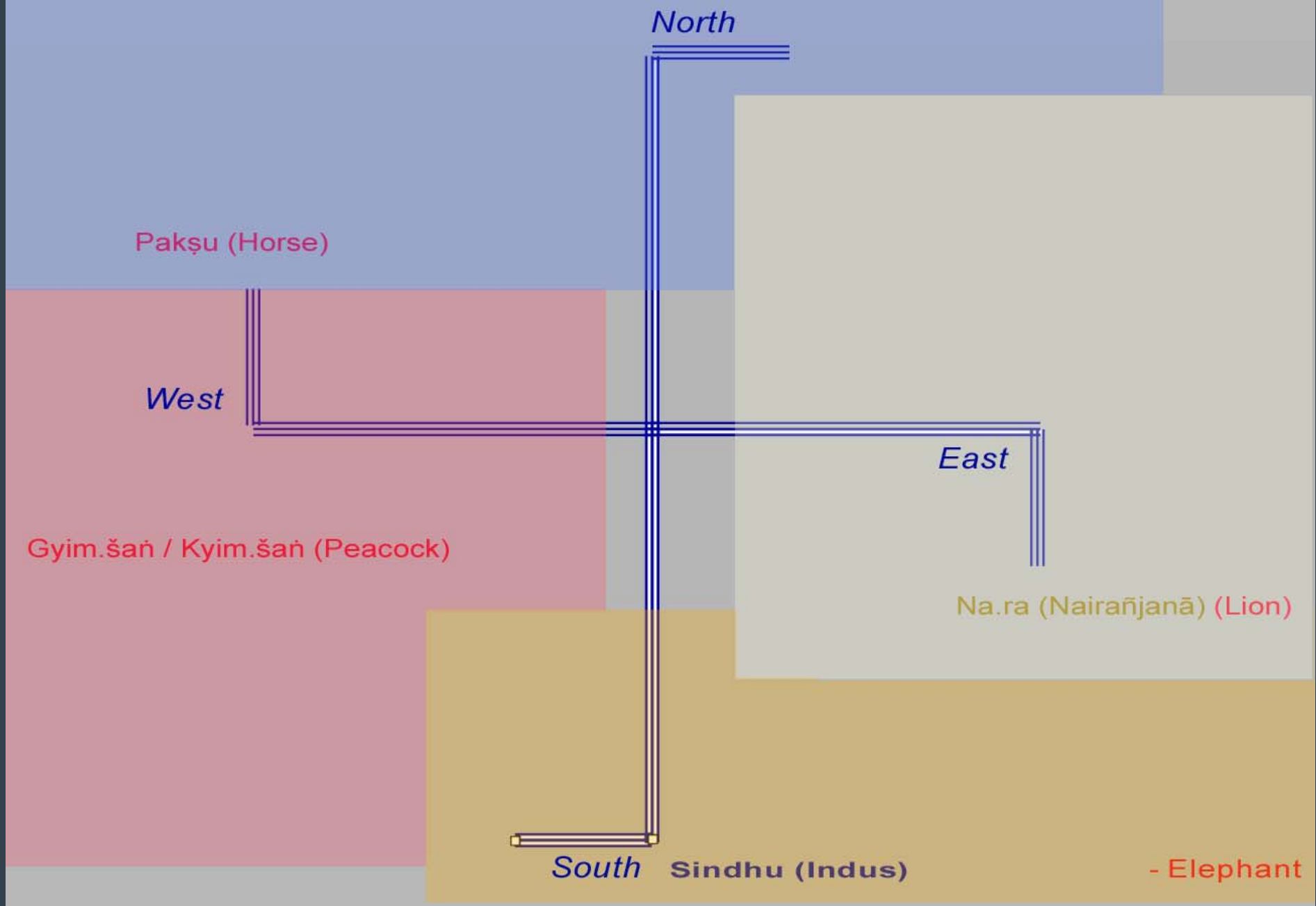
Gyim.šaṅ / Kyim.šaṅ (Peacock)

Na.ra (Nairāñjanā) (Lion)

South Sindhu (Indus)

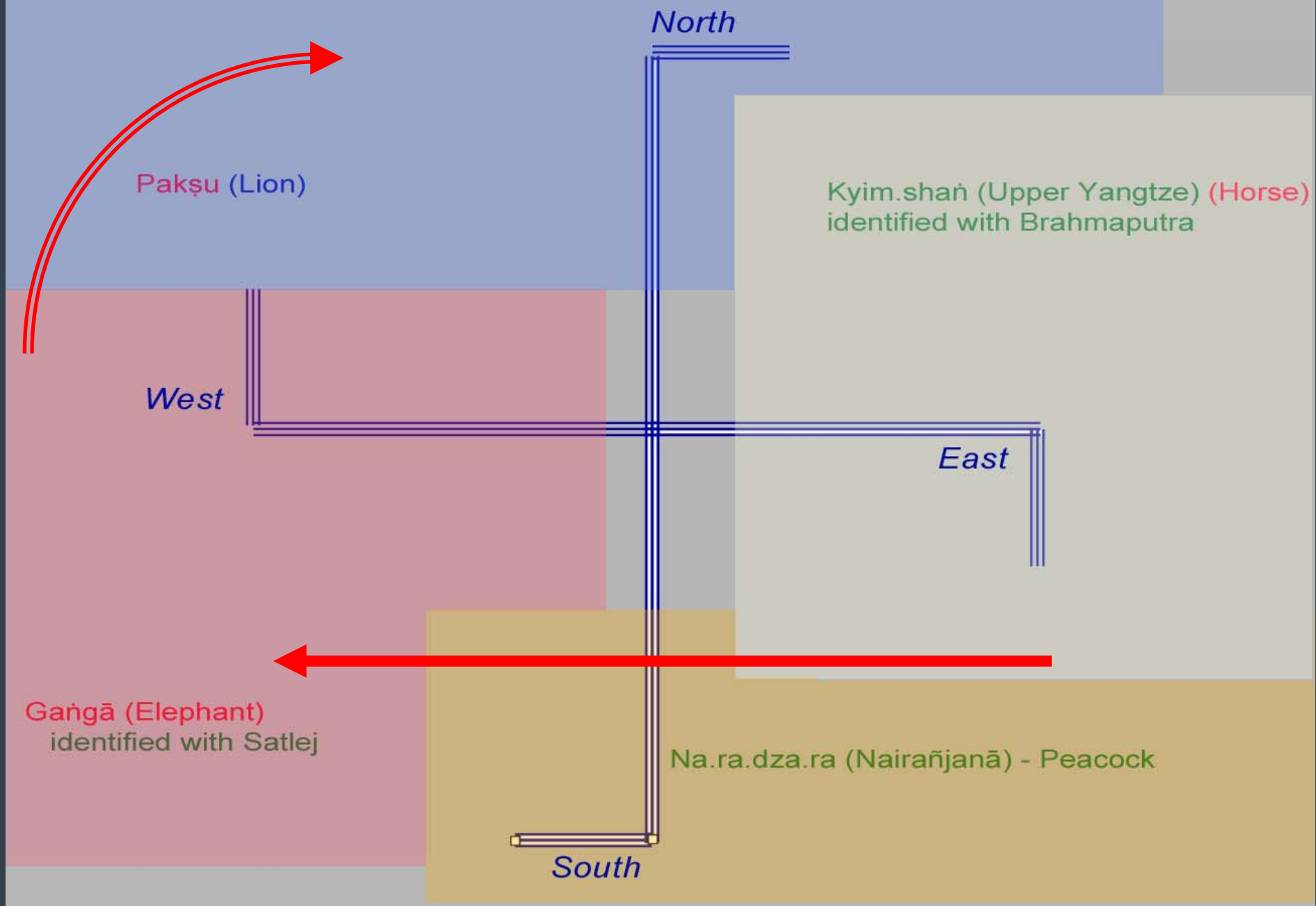
- Elephant

MGUL.RGYAN



Another scheme is given by Karmay (1975). Here the Gaṅgā is shifted to the West and identified with the Sutlej. The Nairañjanā thus finds its place again in the South. It is not clear which text Karmay is citing, but Mimaki (2015) thought it would be the same as the one just presented above.

- East: ཀྱིམ་ཤའ་, **horse's** mouth (*Kyim.šan*, Jinsha Jiang, Upper Yangtze)
- South: ན་ར་ཇེ་ (*Na.ra.dza*, Nairañjanā), peacock's mouth
- West (!): གཎ་གཎ་ (*Gan.gā*), **elephant's** mouth (corresponding to the Satlej)
- North (!): པཀ་སུ་ (*Pakṣu*), lion's mouth (corresponding to the modern Upper Indus)

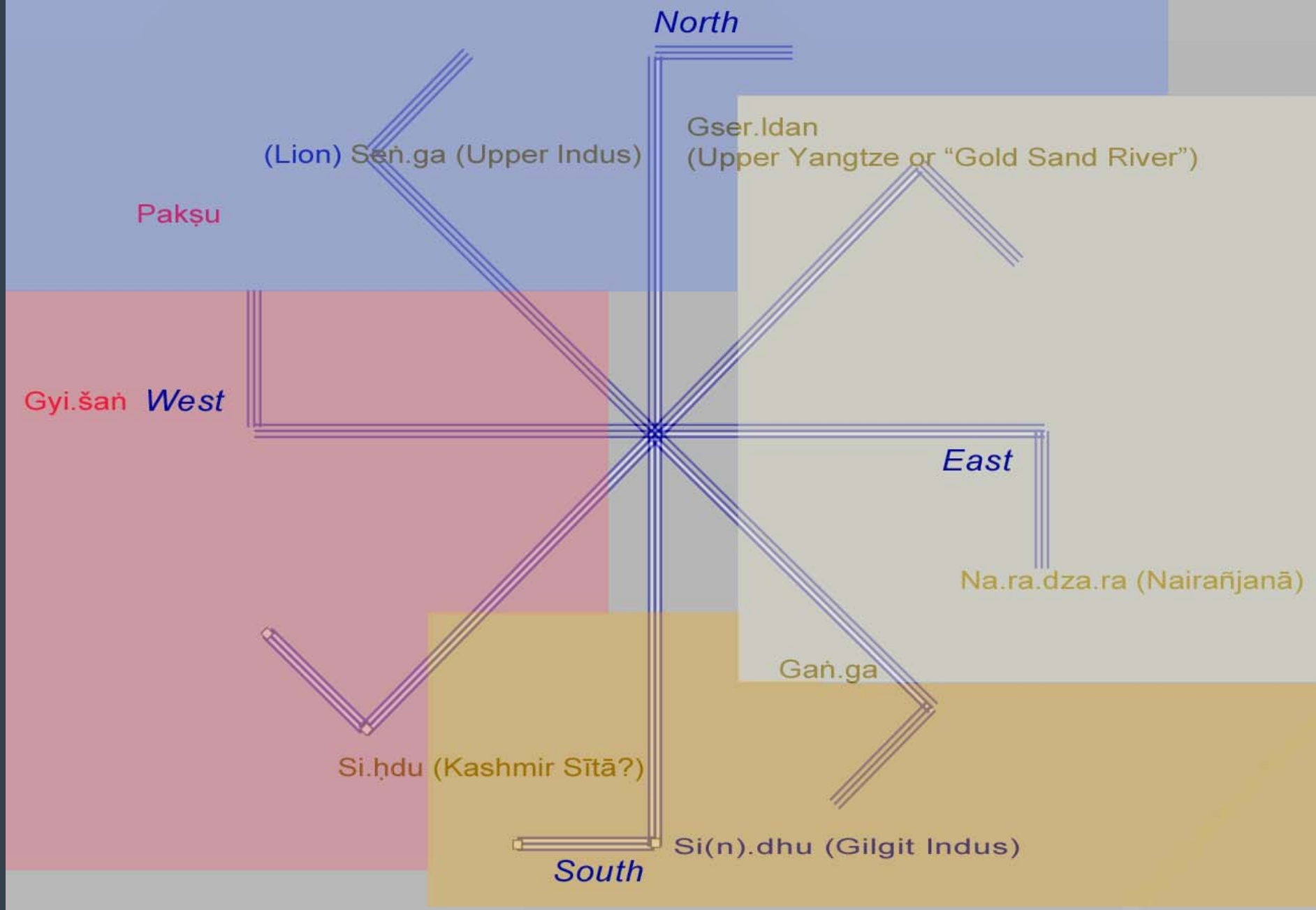


Karmay



Martin (n.d.) further presents an 8-fold river scheme of Ḥol.mo luṅ.rins, where two different, but related templates are combined, possibly with a turn of 45 degrees.

- East (!): ན་ར་ཇ་ར་ (*Na.ra.dza.ra*, i.e., Nairañjanā)
- East or South-East: གང་ག་ (*Gaṅ.ga*, i.e., Gaṅgā)
- South: སི(ན)་ཏུ་ (*Si(n).dhu*, i.e., Sindhu, Gilgit-Indus)
- South or South-West: སི་འདུ་ (*Si.ḥdu*, Kashmir Sītā ?)
- West (!): གྱི་ཤ་ (*Gyi.ṣaṅ !*, *Jinsha Jiang*, Upper Yangtze)
- West or North-West: སེང་ག་ (*Seṅ.ga*, Lion)
- North (!): པཀ་ཏུ་ (*Pakṣu*)
- North-East: གསེར་ལྷན་ (*Gser.lḍan*, Upper Yangtze ?)



Martin (n.d.) rivers of Ḥol.mo luṅ.rinṣ

## 5. Conclusion

One can see that the Tibetan authors, whether Buddhist or Bonpo, attempt to adapt a transmitted pattern – including some transmitted errors – to quite an unsuitable geographical setting, compounding thus the confusion.

What I find particularly interesting is the introduction of the Nairañjanā as the southern or eastern river and the peacock as its symbol by Bonpo authors.

The Nairañjanā (now also known under the name Lilājan) is deeply associated with the life of the Buddha. To be more precise: with his enlightenment after six years of ascetic practice on the banks of this river.

(Likewise astonishing is the use of the *khyun*, an essentially Bonpo symbol, by Buddhist authors!)





Sanchi, East Gate, left pillar, front face, third panel:  
The miracle of the Buddha walking on the waters of the Nairāñcana –  
aniconic representations by his throne, first on the water, then on the shore

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Miracle\\_of\\_the\\_Buddha\\_walking\\_on\\_a\\_River\\_-\\_East\\_Face\\_-\\_South\\_Pillar\\_-\\_East\\_Gateway\\_-\\_Stupa\\_1\\_-\\_Sanchi.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Miracle_of_the_Buddha_walking_on_a_River_-_East_Face_-_South_Pillar_-_East_Gateway_-_Stupa_1_-_Sanchi.jpg)

cf. Marshall 1918, A guide to Sanchi, p. 65.

If the Bonpos had been antagonists of the Buddhists from the very beginning, why would they have introduced or preserved this symbolic river?

Could it be that the early Bonpos were rather Krypto-Buddhists or more precisely: followers of a sect in the Iranian border lands that had been influenced or “compromitted” by Tantrism and Śaivism from Gandhāra and Swāt and further by Iranian religious ideas?

Could it be that their antagonism only developed when they reached Tibet and were confronted with a different (and more dominant) doctrine?



And could the shift of the central mountain to Tibet also have something to do with the migrations of these Bonpos or Krypto-Buddhists to the East and into Tibet?

Allen (1999) thinks of various migrations through the Iranian borderlands. Most importantly, the Hūṇa invasion in Gandhāra (ca. 500 CE) would have been “squeezing the Buddhist faithful in the Vale of Peshawar, leading to a wave of Buddhist migration northwards and eastwards into – and through – the Karakoram ranges and the western Himalayas.”

It is at least noteworthy that the Bonpos knew of a myth by which the tip of the Kailash was uprooted in Persia and thrown to its present place by Hanuman:

བོད་ཡུལ་གྱི་ཉི་ཤེ་འདི་ནི་ས་སྐྱ་པ་རྗེ་ཉ་ན་རེ། སྤྲུའི་རྒྱལ་པོ་ཉ་ལུ་མན་རྟ་ས་སྟག་གཟིགས་ཡུལ་གྱི་གངས་ཉི་ཤེ་  
ལས་ཚལ་གཅིག་བཅད་ནས་ཁྱེར་ཉི་བོད་ཡུལ་དུ་འཕངས་པ་ལས་གྲུབ་སྐད།

(Bonpo RGYAL.RABS, fol. 21f., cf. Laufer 1901: 26).

*Bod.yul.gyi Ti.se ḥdi-ni Sa.skya Paṇḍit na.re / spreḥuḥi  
rgyal.po Ha.lu.man.dhas Stag.gzigs.yul.gyi Gaṅs  
Ti.se.las tshal gcig bcad.nas khyer.te Bod.yul.du  
ḥphaṅs.pa.las grub skad /*

The myth of the translocation of Mt Kailash is mentioned also in the HDZAM.GLID by Bla.ma Btsan.po of 1820 (ed. Wylie 1962: 6).

The central mountain together with its rivers has also been shifted much further east.

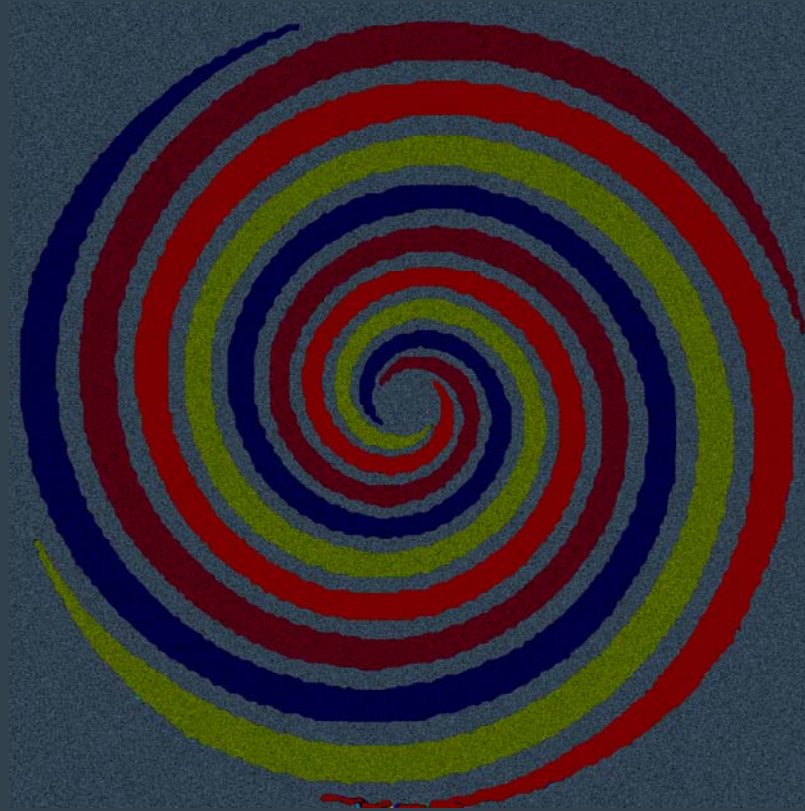
Ultimately, as shown by Stein (1959: 308, n. 77), the whole geographical template of the lands to the north-west of India was transferred far to the east, that is, to Bengal, Assam, and even Yunnan, at an unknown time and for unknown reasons. E.g., Parthia (Nangxi), Gandhāra, and Campodia were relocated in Yunnan, the (Upper) Sutlej region was relocated under the names of (Mahā)-Cīna and Suvarṇabhūmi in Assam, and the Yavanas (Bactrians or Indo-Greeks) were relocated even in Laos and Vietnam.

In this process of transfer, Mt Kelasa has found its new location in Bilin Township, Thaton district, Mon state of Myanmar (cf. Moore 2004: 13).

Its exalted model, Mt Meru, made it even up to northern Thailand, Laos, and Campodia (McKay 2015: 26f.).

But nowhere do the rivers whirl around like in Tibet!

But nowhere do the rivers whirl around like in Tibet!





**Sitā (Lion) North Bhadrā (Iaxartes) - Lion**

Sito (Horse) (=Sītā?= Sindhu?)

Sindhu =Upper Indus (Lion)  
Señ.ge, Hor.yul (Oxus) (Lion)  
Señ.na Pakṣu (Lion river)=Upper Indus  
(Lion) Señ.ga (Upper Indus)

Pakṣu (Lion)  
Pakṣu  
Pakṣu (Horse)  
Dpag.ṣu gtsaṅ.po

Sītā (peacock)

Gser.Idan  
(Upper Yangtze or "Gold Sand River")

Kyim.shaṅ (Upper Yangtze) (Horse)  
identified with Brahmaputra  
Gyim.shaṅ (Upper Yangtze) (Horse)  
identified with Brahmaputra  
**Pakṣu (Horse)**  
identified with Brahmaputra  
Pakṣu/Bakṣu, Tibet (Horse)  
**Bhag.kṣa (Pakṣu) (Bull)**

Sin.dhu  
↓

Gyim.šaṅ phyi.šaṅ / Gyim.šaṅ phyi.naṅ  
Gyi.šaṅ West Sidhi=Sindhu, Persia (Bull)

**Pakṣu (Oxus) - Horse** Pakṣu →

East

**Sītā (Tarim)  
- Elephant**

Gyim.šaṅ / Kyim.šaṅ (Peacock)

← Gaṅgā

**Gaṅgā  
(Elephant)**

Na.ra.dza.ra (Nairañjanā)  
Na.ra (Nairañjanā) (Lion)

Gaṅgā (Elephant)  
identified with Satlej  
Gaṅgā (Elephant)  
Hga.hga (Gaṅgā) (Lion)  
Satlej (Elephant)

Si.ḥdu (Kashmir Sītā?)

↑ Sitā Gaṅ.ga

Si.ti-Si.tu / Si.ti-Si.dhu =?

Sitā (Elephant) (=Sītā?=Sindhu?)

Na.ra.dza.ra (Nairañjanā) - Peacock

Gaṅgā, India - Peacock Gaṅgā/Karṇālī-Peacock

Gaṅgā - Bull

Si(n).dhu (Gilgit Indus)

South

**Sindhu (Indus) - Bull - khyuṅ - Elephant**

A whirling swastika of rivers

**Sitā (Lion) North Bhadrā (Iaxartes) - Lion**

Sito (Horse) (=Sītā?= Sindhu?)

Sindhu =Upper Indus (Lion)  
Señ.ge, Hor.yul (Oxus) (Lion)  
Señ.na Pakṣu (Lion river)=Upper Indus  
(Lion) Señ.ga (Upper Indus)

Pakṣu (Lion)  
Pakṣu  
Pakṣu (Horse)  
Dpag.ṣu gtsaṅ.po

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identified with Brahmaputra  
Pakṣu/Bakṣu, Tibet (Horse)  
**Bhag.kṣa (Pakṣu) (Bull)**

Sin.dhu  
↓

Gyim.ṣaṅ phyi.ṣaṅ / Gyim.ṣaṅ phyi.naṅ  
Gyi.ṣaṅ West Sidhi=Sindhu, Persia (Bull)

**Pakṣu (Oxus) - Horse** Pakṣu →

East

Dark blue: original template  
Turquoise: adaptation to India  
Green: adaptation to Tibet  
Brown: adaptation variants  
Red: swapped directions

**Sītā (Tarim)  
- Elephant**

**Gaṅgā  
(Elephant)**

Gyim.ṣaṅ / Kyim.ṣaṅ (Peacock)

← Gaṅgā

Na.ra.dza.ra (Nairañjanā)  
Na.ra (Nairañjanā) (Lion)

Gaṅgā (Elephant)  
identified with Satlej

Gaṅgā (Elephant)  
Hga.hga (Gaṅgā) (Lion)  
Satlej (Elephant)

Si.ḥdu (Kashmir Sītā?)

↑  
Sītā Gaṅ.ga

Si.ti-Si.tu / Si.ti-Si.dhu =?  
Sītā (Elephant) (=Sītā?=Sindhu?)  
Na.ra.dza.ra (Nairañjanā) - Peacock  
Gaṅgā, India - Peacock Gaṅgā/Karṇālī-Peacock  
Gaṅgā - Bull  
Si(n).dhu (Gilgit Indus)  
**Sindhu (Indus) - Bull - khyuṅ - Elephant**

South

A whirling swastika of rivers



**Sitā (Lion) North Bhadrā (Iaxartes) - Lion**

Sito (Horse) (=Sītā? = Sindhu?)

Sindhu = Upper Indus (Lion)

Señ.ge, Hor.yul (Oxus) (Lion)

Señ.na Pakṣu (Lion river) = Upper Indus (Lion) Señ.ga (Upper Indus)

Pakṣu (Lion)

Pakṣu

Pakṣu (Horse)

Dpag.ṣu gtsan.po

Sītā (peacock)

Gser Idan (Upper Yangtze or "Gold Sand River")

Kyim.shañ (Upper Yangtze) (Horse)

identified with Brahmaputra

Kyim.shañ (Upper Yangtze) (Horse)

identified with Brahmaputra

Pakṣu (Horse)

identified with Brahmaputra

Pakṣu/Bakṣu, Tibet (Horse)

Bhag.kṣa (Pakṣu) (Bull)

Gyim.šaṅ phyi.šaṅ / Gyim.šaṅ phyi.naṅ

Gyi.šaṅ West

Sidhi = Sindhu (Persian Bull)

**Pakṣu (Oxus) - Horse**

East

**Sītā (Tarim) - Elephant**

Gyim.šaṅ / Kyim.šaṅ (Peacock)

**Gaṅgā (Elephant)**

Na.ra.dza.ra (Nairañjanā)

Na.ra (Nairañjanā) (Lion)

Gaṅgā (Elephant)

identified with Satlej

Gaṅgā (Elephant)

Si.hdu (Kashmir Sītā?)

Si.ti-Si.tu? Si.ti-Si.dhu =?

Sītā (Elephant) (=Sītā? = Sindhu?)

Na.ra.dza.ra (Nairañjanā) - Peacock

Gaṅgā, India - Peacock Gaṅgā/Karṇālī - Peacock

Gaṅgā - Bull

Hga.hga (Gaṅgā) (Lion)

Satlej (Elephant)

Si(n).dhu (Gilgit Indus)

**Sindhu (Indus) - Bull - khyuñ - Elephant**

South

A whirling swastika of rivers



**Sitā (Lion) North Bhadrā (Iaxartes) - Lion**

Sito (Horse) (=Sītā? = Sindhu?)

Sindhu = Upper Indus (Lion)

Señ.ge, Hor.yul (Oxus) (Lion)

Señ.na Pakṣu (Lion river) = Upper Indus (Lion) Señ.ga (Upper Indus)

Pakṣu (Lion)

Pakṣu

Pakṣu (Horse)

Dpag.ṣu gtsan.po

Sītā (peacock)

Gser.ldan (Upper Yangtze or "Gold Sand River")

Kyim.šan (Upper Yangtze) (Horse)

identified with Brahmaputra

Kyim.šan (Upper Yangtze) (Horse)

identified with Brahmaputra

Pakṣu (Horse)

identified with Brahmaputra

Pakṣu/Bakṣu, Tibet (Horse)

Bhag.kṣa (Pakṣu) (Bull)

Gyim.šan phyi.šan / Gyim.šan phu.nan

Gyi.šan West

Sidhi = Sindhu (Persia/India)

**Pakṣu (Oxus) - Horse**

East

**Sītā (Tarim) - Elephant**

Gyim.šan / Kyim.šan (Peacock)

**Gaṅgā (Elephant)**

Na.ra.dza.ra (Nairāñjanā)

Na.ra (Nairāñjanā) (Lion)

Gaṅgā (Elephant)

identified with Satlej

Gaṅgā (Elephant)

Si.hdu (Kashmir Sītā?)

Si.ti-Si.tu? Si.ti-Si.dhu =?

Sītā (Elephant) (=Sītā? =Sindhu?)

Na.ra.dza.ra (Nairāñjanā) - Peacock

Gaṅgā, India - Peacock Gaṅgā/Karṇālī - Peacock

Gaṅgā - Bull

Si(n).dhu (Gilgit Indus)

Hga.hga (Gaṅgā) (Lion)

Satlej (Elephant)

South

**Sindhu (Indus) - Bull - khyuñ - Elephant**

A whirling swastika of rivers