CULTURAL HISTORY OF BHUTAN AND THE HIMALAYAS

RELB 2559, 3 credits

This course explores the cultures of the broader Himalayan range through focused investigations of key sites – urban centers, temples, monasteries, reliquaries, shrines, rivers, mountains, caves etc. – within the Thimphu valley and their historic connections with other cultural zones throughout and beyond the Himalayan region. The course is arranged thematically around the kinds of material and expressive forms encountered at these sites and their associations with the cultural complexes of local peoples. While foregrounding the region’s cultural and religious diversity and eclecticism, topics will include orientations toward sacred cityscape and landscape, temple and monastery architecture, pilgrimage practices, relics and reliquaries, sacred statuary and painting, and home and neighborhood shrines, among others. Each set of topics will be introduced by site visits, where faculty in collaboration with local partners will orient students to the cultural expressions under investigation.

Class activities will center on discussions of assigned readings and multi-media presentations on select topics. Assignments will include a series of short reflective essays (25%), an individual multimedia presentation done in collaboration with local partners (25%), a written examination to demonstrate mastery of the material covered in the course (25%), and a final essay on a select topic (25%).