

The Main Hall (Kondo)

The Main Hall is the world's oldest extant wooden structure and holds Horyuji's most important treasures. It and the Five-Story Pagoda form the centerpiece of the temple's Western Precinct. The artworks in the Main Hall include a canopy hanging from the ceiling adorned with phoenixes and celestial beings holding musical instruments from Central Asia. Under the canopy is the hall's gilt bronze statue of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, flanked by two attendants.

The sculpture of Shakyamuni and his two attendant bodhisattvas are works of a sculptor named Tori. The buddha-image is thought to have been cast in the image of Prince Shotoku himself in 623 and completed the following year. Tori was the most prolific sculptor of the Asuka period (593–710). He belonged to a hereditary guild of saddle-makers but came to cast bronze sculptures under the patronage of Prince Shotoku.

A sculpture of the healing Buddha, Yakushi Nyorai, sits to the east of the triad. This sculpture was installed in the hope of aiding Emperor Yomei's recovery from illness. A sculpture of the Buddha of the Pure Land, Amida Nyorai, sits to the west of the triad, installed to honor Shotoku's mother, Empress Anahobe no Hashihito.

Statues of the Four Heavenly Kings (Shitenno) stand in the Main Hall alongside wooden images of a standing Kichijoten, goddess of good fortune, and Bishamonten, god of war and protector of the country. Both Kichijoten and Bishamonten were added to the retinue in the Heian period (794–1185), as symbols of hope for the safety of the state. A sculpture of Seishi Bosatsu, one of two attendants of Amida Nyorai, was also once enshrined in the Hall, but disappeared from the temple in the Meiji era (1868–1912). This work later re-emerged at the Guimet Museum of Asian Art in Paris, where it remains today. The statue in the Main Hall is a replica. The elaborate paintings that originally covered the walls of the Hall were lost to fire in the mid-twentieth century.