

Statue of Shitenno

The Four Heavenly Kings (Shitenno) were carved from camphor wood in the mid-seventh century. This is the oldest known set in Japan. The Kings stand at the four points of the compass, protecting the realm of the Buddha. Jikokuten looks to the east, Zochouen guards the south, Komokuten observes the west, and Tamonten protects the north. Tamonten is also sometimes identified as the deity Bishamonten. The *Nihon shoki* (Chronicles of Japan) records that Prince Shotoku (574–622), the founder of Horyuji Temple, prayed to the Four Heavenly Kings for help in his campaign against forces opposed to the spread of Buddhism in Japan.