

Tamamushi Zushi Shrine

This small seventh-century altar-shrine, known as the Tamamushi no Zushi, is 233 centimeters tall and made of lacquered cypress and camphor wood.

According to temple records, the shrine was the personal possession of Empress Suiko (554–628). The Buddha statues originally contained inside the chest may have been stolen in the thirteenth century. The chest is famous for its richly detailed Buddhist art. The doors are decorated with two of the four Buddhist Heavenly Kings (Shitenno) who guard the four cardinal directions. Though now difficult to make out, there are also episodes from the story of the Buddha's previous lives: In one, he is hanging his clothes on a tree before jumping off a cliff to offer himself as sustenance to a starving tiger and her cub.