

Northern Round Hall

This memorial chapel dedicated to the founding patron of Kofukuji Temple, Fujiwara no Fuhito (659–720), was originally constructed in 721. The original Northern Round Hall was burned down in 1049, and though replaced, was destroyed again in 1180 by troops under Taira clan commander Taira no Shigehira (1158–1185) during a battle known as the Burning of the Southern Capital (Nara). The current building was completed in 1210. Having survived major fires in 1327 and 1717 that destroyed most of Kofukuji, the hall is the oldest building at the temple today and houses a number of treasures.

The statues in the Northern Round Hall center on the principal image, Miroku Nyorai, the Buddha of the Future. It is flanked by gilded wooden images of the bodhisattvas Ho-onrin and Daimyoso, as well as sculptures of the monks Mujaku (Asanga in Indian Buddhism) and Seshin (Vasubandhu), all of which date to the Kamakura period (1185–1333) (see No. 37, Statues of the Monks Mujaku and Seshin). Nearby are four earlier sculptures, representing the Four Heavenly Kings of Buddhist mythology: Zochoten, Tamonten, Jikokuten, and Komokuten (See No. 22, Statues of Four Heavenly Kings). They are famous for their exaggerated facial expressions, which border on the humorous in the case of Jikokuten, whose bulging eyes appear about to pop out of his head. Completed in 791 and featuring wood-core dry-lacquer construction, they are listed as National Treasures.