

National Treasure Hall

Copper Lantern

National Treasure

This copper alloy lantern was cast in 816 and is the second-oldest lantern in Japan after a similar example at Todaiji Temple. Kofukuji's lantern was installed at the Southern Round Hall (Nanendo) completed in 813, and would have housed a flame burning day and night as an offering to the Buddha. Although the top ornament was lost and parts of the lantern were replaced over the centuries, it is still the only remaining artifact from the early days of the Southern Round Hall.

This lantern became a prototype for many lanterns found at Buddhist temples throughout Japan, and was so often copied that they are known as Southern Round Hall-type lanterns. The original panels are engraved with text composed by the scholar-monk Kukai (posthumously known as Kobo Daishi; 774–835), known as the founder of the esoteric Shingon sect of Japanese Buddhism.