

National Treasure Hall
Copper Lantern Inscriptions
National Treasures

These copper alloy plates from the Southern Round Hall lantern, which dates to 816, are inscribed 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. While there were originally six panels on the lantern, only four survive.

The text itself focuses on the concept of offering light to sentient beings of the world. The calligraphy, arranged in seven columns of nine characters, was written by Tachibana no Hayanari (782–844), known as one of the great calligraphers of the Heian period (794–1185). Another was Kukai himself, and these inscriptions are the only existing work in which two of three great Heian calligraphers collaborated.