

## Pedestal

The large rectangular pedestal on which the Healing Buddha sits is embellished with engravings that provide fascinating insights into seventh-century Japan and the global exchanges it enjoyed courtesy of the Silk Road—the ancient network of trade routes that connected the East and the West. The pedestal is made up of six different-sized layers, two at the top and four at the bottom, with a rectangular “box” sandwiched between them. The edges of the uppermost layer are decorated with vining patterns in relief, similar to Greek decorative designs, while the one below it and the vertical sides of the box feature engravings of lotus flowers in a vaguely Persian style. On each face of the box can be found depictions of *bansin* (“barbarians, or more politely, people from far away countries”). Some have seen a Hindu influence here. Below that, at the center of the next layer appear the “Four Symbols” or “Four Auspicious Beasts” from Chinese mythology, one on each side of the pedestal. Each creature is associated not only with a cardinal direction, season, and color but also with a particular virtue and with the Chinese elements of wood, fire, metal, water, and earth. Moving in a counterclockwise direction from the east side of the pedestal these mythical creatures are: the Azure Dragon, the Vermilion Bird, the White Tiger, and the Black Tortoise (the creature on the side facing out in this case). The pedestal thus reflects the cosmopolitanism of the era and is one reason why Nara was known as the easternmost terminus of the Silk Road.