

Statue of Tamonten

Tamonten is the most powerful of the Four Heavenly Kings, who each take a cardinal direction in guarding the world against evil influences. This image of Tamonten exudes a determined calm, a trademark of Buddhist statuary from the Heian period (794–1185). He stands holding a wish-granting jewel in his left hand and a Chinese-style halberd in his right. The jewel represents Tamonten's ability to grant material wishes, and the spear symbolizes his fervent determination to guard against evil and protect the Buddhist faith.

Like the statue of Amida Nyorai, the body of this statue is carved from a single piece of wood. This differs from other statues around the temple, which were made by the assembled-block construction technique (*yosegi-zukuri*) that emerged in Japan during the latter half of the tenth century. The statue, imposing enough on its own, likely once stood as part of an assembly of all four Heavenly Kings as attendants to Amida, Buddha of the Western Paradise, in the temple's main hall. Alongside Tamonten, protector of the north, would have been Jikokuten, who guards the east; Zochoten, who guards the south; and Komokuten, who guards the west.