

Reading Dates on Japanese Swords

When reading basic dates on Japanese swords, usually the easiest way to achieve this point is by the following.

Example: Showa (昭和) Ju (十) Hachi (八) Nen (年) - 18th year of Showa period, is calculated as Showa (1926) + 17, as the first year is counted as one. So therefore, Showa 18 is calculated as 1926 (1 year), 1927 (2nd year), 1928 (3rd year) and so on until you reach the 18th year which would be 1943.

If the sword is dated as Meiji (明治) Ga Nen Ni Gatsu Hi, with “Ga” (元) being the character used a lot for first, would then translate to “the first year of Meiji, February” (1868). The kanji for “1” is never used for the first year in traditional Japanese dating.

Usually after the kanji for year is the number for the month, then the kanji for month. Following this, is the kanji number for which day, the kanji for lucky, or just the character for day. In some cases, the more confusing zodiac animal year configurations are included after the stated year. In other times, the kanji for one of the 4 seasons of the year are used instead of the month and day.

Heian Period

782-1191 (Early Koto Times)

Kamakura Period

1192-1330 (Early to Mid Koto Times)

Nanbokucho Period

1330-1389 (Mid Koto Times - Yoshinocho)

Muromachi Period

1390-1570 (Late Koto Times - Sengoku jidai)

Momoyama Period

1571-1647 (Early Shinto Times - Keicho Shinto / Early Edo)

Edo Period

1648-1852 (Mid to Late Shinto / Early Shinshinto Period)

Bakumatsu Period

1853-1876 (Shinshinto Period / 1868 Meiji jidai Kindaito Period)

Modern Times

Since 1877 (Kindaito / Gendaito / Shinsakuto Period)

The following is a list of Japanese era dates used when dating swords.

Tai-ka	大化	645	Bun-ryaku	分曆	1234
Haku-chi	白雉	650	Ka-tei	嘉禎	1235
Haku-Hō	白鳳	672	Ryaku-nin	曆仁	1238
Shu-chō	朱鳥	687	En-ō	延應	1239
Dai-hō	大寶	701	Nin-ji	仁治	1240
Tai-hō	大寶	701	Kan-gen	寛元	1243
Kai-un	慶雲	704	Hō-ji	寶治	1247
Wa-dō	和銅	708	Kan-cho	建長	1249
Rei-ki	靈龜	715	Kō-gen	康元	1256
Yō-rō	養老	717	Shō-ka	正嘉	1257
Jin-ki	神龜	724	Shō-gen	正元	1259
Ten-pyō	天平	729	Bun-ō	文應	1260
Ten-pyō-shō-hō	天平勝寶	749	Kō-chō	弘長	1261
Ten-pyō-hō-ji	天平寶字	757	Bun-ei	文永	1264
Ten-pyō-jin-go	天平神護	765	Ken-ji	建治	1275
Jin-go-kei-un	神護景雲	767	Kō-an	弘安	1278
Hō-ki	寶龜	770	Shō-ō	正應	1288
Ten-ō	天應	781	Ei-nin	永仁	1293
En-ryaku	延曆	782	Shō-an	正安	1299
Dai-dō	大同	806	Ken-gen	乾元	1302

Kō-nin	弘仁	810	Ka-gen	嘉元	1303
Ten-chō	天長	824	Toku-ji	徳治	1306
Shō-wa	承和	834	En-kei	延慶	1308
Ka-shō	嘉祥	848	Ō-chō	應長	1311
Nin-ju	仁壽	851	Shō-wa	正和	1312
Sai-kō	齊衡	854	Bun-pō	文保	1317
Ten-an	天安	857	Gen-ō	元應	1319
Jō-gan	貞觀	859	Gen-kyō	元享	1321
Gan-kei	元慶	877	Shō-chū	正中	1324
Nin-wa	仁和	885	Ka-reki	嘉曆	1326
Kan-pyō	寛平	889	Gen-toku	元徳	1329
Shō-tai	昌泰	898	Gen-kō	元弘	1331
En-gi	延喜	901	Shō-kei	正慶	1332
En-chō	延長	923	Ken-mu	建武	1334
Shō-hei	承平	931	En-gen	延元	1336
Ten-kei	天慶	938	Ryaku-ō	曆應	1338
Ten-ryaku	天曆	947	Kō-koku	興國	1340
Ten-roku	天徳	957	Kō-ei	康永	1342
Ō-wa	應和	961	Tei-wa	貞和	1345
Kō-hō	康保	964	Shō-hei	正平	1346
An-wa	安和	968	Kan-ō	觀應	1350
Ten-roku	天祿	970	Bun-wa	文和	1352

Ten-en	天延	973	En-bun	延文	1356
Jō-gen	貞元	976	Kō-an	康安	1361
Ten-gen	天元	978	Tei-ji	貞治	1362
Ei-kan	永觀	983	Ō-an	應安	1368
Kan-wa	寬和	985	Ken-toku	建徳	1370
Ei-en	永延	987	Bun-chū	文中	1372
Ei-so	永祚	989	Ten-ju	天授	1375
Shō-ryaku	正曆	990	Ei-wa	永和	1375
Chō-toku	長徳	995	Kō-ryaku	康曆	1379
Chō-hō	長保	999	Ko-wa	弘和	1381
Kan-kō	寬弘	1004	Ei-toku	永徳	1381
Chō-wa	長和	1012	Gen-chū	元中	1384
Kan-nin	寬仁	1017	Shi-toku	至徳	1384
Ji-an	治安	1021	Ka-kei	嘉慶	1387
Man-ju	萬壽	1024	Kō-ō	康應	1389
Chō-gen	長元	1028	Mei-toku	明徳	1390
Chō-ryaku	長曆	1037	Ō-ei	應永	1394
Chō-kyū	長久	1040	Shō-chō	正長	1428
Kan-toku	寬徳	1044	Ei-kyō	永享	1429
Ei-shō	永承	1046	Ka-kichi	嘉吉	1441
Ten-ki	天喜	1053	Bun-an	文安	1444
Kō-hei	康平	1058	Hō-toku	寶徳	1449

Ji-ryaku	治曆	1065	Kyō-toku	享徳	1452
En-kyū	延久	1069	Kō-shō	康正	1455
Shō-hō	承保	1074	Chō-roku	長祿	1457
Shō-ryaku	承曆	1077	Kan-shō	寛正	1460
Ei-hō	永保	1081	Bun-shō	文正	1466
Ō-toku	應徳	1084	Ō-nin	應仁	1467
Kan-ji	寛治	1087	Bun-mei	文明	1469
Ka-hō	嘉保	1094	Chō-kyō	長享	1487
Ei-chō	永長	1096	En-toku	延徳	1489
Shō-toku	承德	1097	Mei-ō	明應	1492
Kō-wa	康和	1099	Bun-gu	文亀	1501
Chō-ji	長治	1104	Ei-shō	永正	1504
Ka-shō	嘉承	1106	Tai-ei	大永	1521
Ten-nin	天仁	1108	Kyō-roku	享祿	1528
Ten-ei	天永	1110	Ten-bun	天文	1532
Ei-kyū	永久	1113	Kō-ji	弘治	1555
Gen-ei	元永	1118	Ei-roku	永祿	1558
Hō-an	保安	1120	Gen-ki	元亀	1570
Ten-ji	天治	1124	Ten-shō	天正	1573
Dai-ji	大治	1126	Bun-roku	文祿	1592
Ten-shō	天承	1131	Kei-chō	慶長	1596
Chō-shō	長承	1132	Gen-wa	元和	1615

Hō-en	保延	1135	Kan-ei	寬永	1624
Ei-ji	永治	1141	Shō-hō	正保	1644
Kō-ji	康治	1142	Kei-an	慶安	1648
Ten-yō	天養	1144	Shō-ō	承應	1652
Kyū-an	久安	1145	Mei-reki	明曆	1655
Nin-pyō	仁平	1151	Man-ji	萬治	1658
Kyū-ju	久壽	1154	Kan-bun	寬文	1661
Hō-gen	保元	1156	En-pō	延寶	1673
Hei-ji	平治	1159	Ten-wa	天和	1681
Ei-ryaku	永曆	1160	Tei-kyō	貞享	1684
Ō-hō	應保	1161	Gen-roku	元祿	1688
Chō-kan	長寬	1163	Hō-ei	寶永	1704
Ei-man	永萬	1165	Shō-roku	正徳	1711
Nin-an	仁安	1166	Kyō-hō	享保	1716
Ka-ō	嘉應	1169	Gen-bun	元文	1736
Shō-an	承安	1171	Kan-pō	寬保	1741
An-gen	安元	1175	En-kyō	延享	1744
Ji-shō	治承	1177	Kan-en	寬延	1748
Yō-wa	養和	1181	Hō-reki	寶曆	1751
Ju-ei	壽永	1182	Mei-wa	明和	1764
Gen-ryaku	元曆	1184	An-ei	安永	1772
Bun-ji	文治	1185	Ten-meï	天明	1781

Ken-kyū	建久	1190	Kan-sei	寛政	1789
Shō-ji	正治	1199	Kyō-wa	享和	1801
Ken-nin	建仁	1201	Bun-ka	文化	1804
Gen-kyū	元久	1204	Bun-sei	文政	1818
Ken-ei	建永	1206	Ten-pō	天保	1830
Shō-gen	承元	1207	Kō-ka	弘化	1844
Ken-ryaku	建暦	1211	Ka-ei	嘉永	1848
Ken-pō	建保	1213	An-sei	安政	1854
Shō-kyū	承久	1219	Man-en	萬延	1860
Tei-ō	貞應	1222	Bun-kyū	文久	1861
Gen-nin	元仁	1224	Gen-ji	元治	1864
Ka-roku	嘉禄	1225	Kei-ō	慶應	1865
An-tei	安貞	1227	Mei-ji	明治	1868
Kan-ki	寛喜	1229	Tai-shō	大正	1912
Jō-ei	貞永	1232	Shō-wa	昭和	1926
Ten-puku	天福	1233	Hei-sei	平成	1989