

## **Tomb of Kikuchi Masataka**

The short life of Kikuchi Masataka (1491–1509) illustrates the weakened state of the Kikuchi clan in the 1500s. By Masataka's time, several warlord-led families within the clan had gained enough power and influence to challenge the leadership directly. In 1505, the year after Masataka had been made head of the clan at the age of 13, his generals overthrew him and seized control, installing a local strongman named Aso Korenaga as clan leader.

Masataka and those who remained loyal to him left the castle town of Waifu to bide their time and raise an army capable of retaking command of the Kikuchi. Their attempt to do so in 1509 proved unsuccessful, and Masataka's remaining force of 200 warriors retreated to the area around Ankokuji Temple. There the sides clashed again, and the defeated Masataka retreated to Ankokuji, where he committed suicide before the temple was burned down by Aso Korenaga's warriors.

Internal conflicts and threats from rival warlords continued to weaken the Kikuchi in the decades following Masataka's fall. The clan gradually lost its lands, and was then vanquished entirely in the mid-1500s.

Kikuchi Masataka's tomb stands behind Ankokuji Temple. The current headstone was erected at some point during the Edo period (1603–1867), on a base in the shape of a *kifu*, a Chinese mythological creature with the features of a turtle and a snake that was considered auspicious. This style was popularized in Japan during the Edo period and was used on the graves of several Kikuchi lords when they were rebuilt in the 1700s and 1800s.