

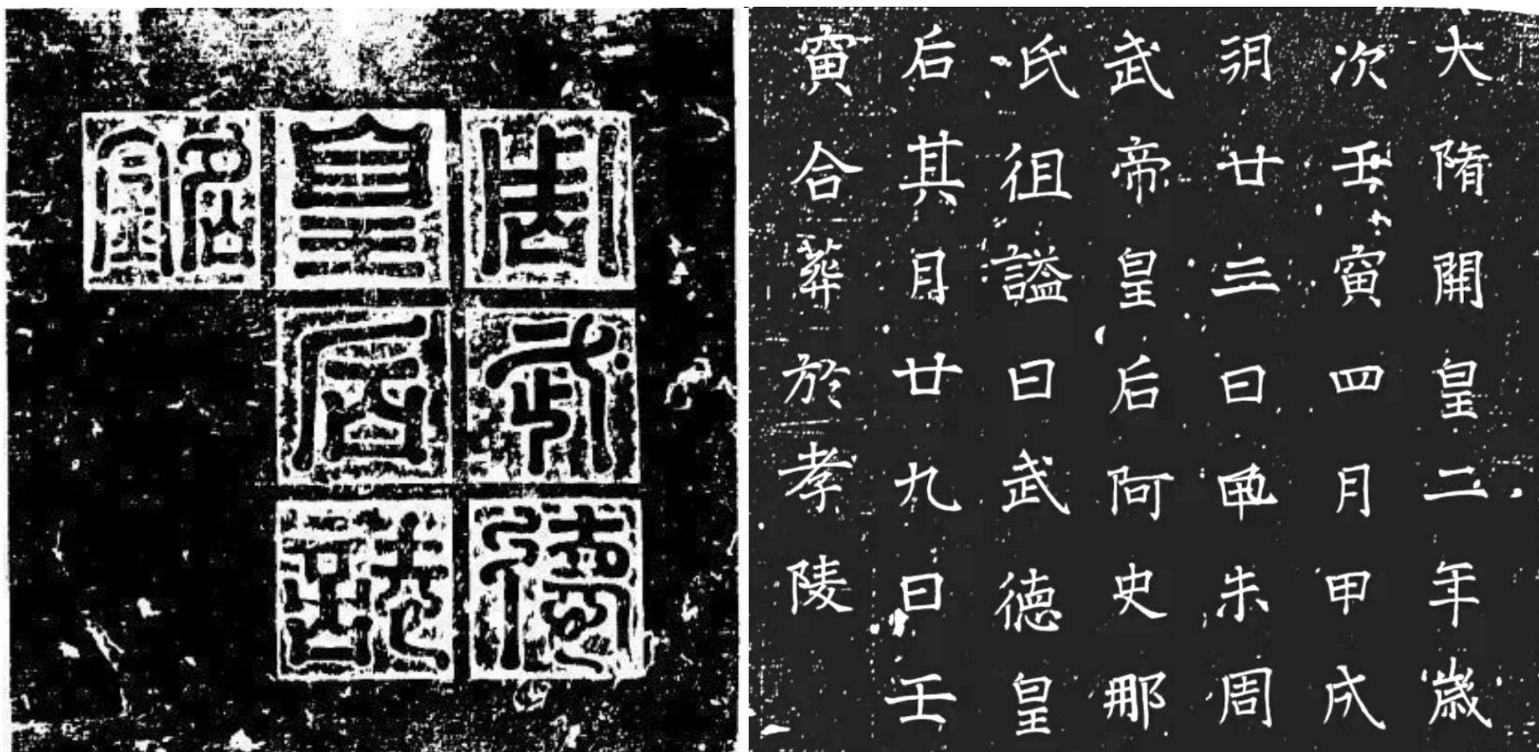
Description

Empress Ashina (551–582 C.E.) was a Göktürk princess, the daughter of Muqan Khagan, and wife of Emperor Wu of the Northern Zhou dynasty. Her marriage was a calculated diplomatic alliance designed to secure the northern borders of the state against nomadic incursion. She was buried in a high-status cemetery with traditional nomadic grave goods: gold ornaments and a bronze bucket. A 2023 genomic analysis of her remains has provided a rare biological portrait of the Ashina tribe: the legendary ruling house at the core of one of history's largest nomadic empires.



Contemporary depiction of a Turkic horseman from the Tomb of An Jia (579 CE).

The Göktürks built an empire stretching across the Eurasian steppe, and the Ashina tribe was its imperial heart. Historians had long debated whether the Göktürk ruling elite had West Eurasian origins, because the populations they governed often showed significant West Eurasian admixture, and some scholars assumed this reflected the elite's own ancestry. The genomic evidence resolved the question definitively.



Epitaph stone of Empress Ashina — funerary inscription from her tomb, carved 582 CE.

Empress Ashina's DNA revealed 97.7% Ancient Northeast Asian ancestry and a mitochondrial haplogroup within the F1c1 (or related East Eurasian) clade, placing her biological roots firmly among the Tungusic and Mongolic pastoralists of the Northeast Asian steppe — closely related to the Rouran and Xianbei peoples. While the broader Turkic population was genetically diverse, the core Ashina imperial tribe remained a tightly homogeneous group of Northeast Asian origin. The finding has significant implications for understanding how the Göktürk empire was structured: a genetically homogeneous ruling core presiding over a highly heterogeneous subject population, with the Ashina bloodline remaining biologically distinct from the peoples they governed throughout the empire's existence.

Modern population	Distance
Daur (China)	4.793
Hezhen	5.823

Modern population	Distance
Oroqen	6.245
Mongol (Mongolia)	6.840
Xibo	6.902
Khamnegan	7.267
Buryat	7.627
Nanai	7.969
Ulchi	8.917
Negidal	9.506

Source

Date: 1743–1793 CE

mtDNA: F1d

Location: China

Research: Ancient genome of Empress Ashina reveals the Northeast Asian origin of Göktürk Khanate

Sample(s): A42801