



Mopsus (Mythical)

Summary :

Mopsus was the son of Manto, the Theban prophetess, and grandson of the seer Teiresias. Mopsus' exceptional prophetic abilities are made explicit through the contest with Calchas in the area of Claros. He is believed to have been the mythological founder of cities in southern Asia Minor.

Main Role

Mythological seer

1. Genealogy

Mopsus appears in ancient sources as the son of [Manto](#), the Theban prophetess. He is therefore often referred to as the grandson of the seer Teiresias.¹ His mother is closely associated with [Apollo](#) and Delphi: she is said either to have resorted to Delphi before the Epigonoι sacked her native city or to have been dedicated to the god by the conquerors. There are two main traditions about his father. Most ancient authors identify him with Apollo.² The creation of such a bond with the oracular god or with prestigious [prophets](#) is not surprising in the case of a seer; the example of the seer [Calchas](#) confirms this rule. This genealogy was clearly drawn to stress the exceptional abilities inherited by the hero. At the same time Mopsus was also credited with a human father usually mentioned as Rhakios.³ Some identified him as a Mycenaean whom Manto met at Delphi;⁴ others describe him as a Cretan leader whom Manto met in the area of [Claros](#),⁵ the oracular [sanctuary](#) of Apollo that was allegedly founded by the prophetess.⁶ These symbolic or genealogical bonds relating Mopsus to the oracular god explain their close iconographic connection on ancient coins minted at [Mopsuestia](#) (Cilicia)⁷ and at [Hierapolis](#) (Phrygia).⁸

The Chian historian Theopompus⁹ states that Mopsus had three daughters: Rhodes, Meliade and Pamphylia. The latter is elsewhere indirectly described as his sister.¹⁰ Archaic sources¹¹ testify the existence of an [Argonaut](#) and of a Calydonian Boar hunter called Mopsus; the latter is known as the son of Ampyx, and he is usually identified as a Lapith. Mopsus appears elsewhere as a seer and/or as a son of Apollo.¹² Even if the Roman sources underline the ethnic, genealogical and chronological differences between the two homonyms, it is uncertain whether these were clearly distinguished before the fifth century BC.¹³ Both figures, however, are certainly confused in later sources.¹⁴

2. The duel of the seers: Mopsus against Calchas

Mopsus' exceptional prophetic abilities are made explicit through a contest with another seer, named Calchas. The latter came to Claros – or to [Colophon](#), according to Hagias' *Nostoi*¹⁵ – right after the sack of Troy. Many different accounts of this competition survive. Most of them were put together by [Strabo](#) (14.1.27 and 14.4.3) and despite significant variations they all end with the death of Calchas in the area of Claros.¹⁶ The ultimate cause of this dramatic end is explained for the first time by Sophocles.¹⁷ Indeed Sophocles reports an oracle telling that Calchas, the renowned seer, would die when he met a prophet superior to him.¹⁸ The oldest version of the duel is to be found in Hesiod's *Melampody*.¹⁹ Calchas asked Mopsus – whose genealogy is omitted – how many figs a wild fig tree growing there was carrying. He replied "ten thousand"; he also provided their measure in medimni, adding that one fig could not be calculated into this measure. As he was right, "the eyes of Calchas were closed by the sleep of death". Another tradition occurs in Pherecydes.²⁰ In this version, the question was not about a wild fig tree but about a pregnant sow. Again Mopsus was right in predicting that the animal carried three pigs and that one of them was female. According to the geographer Strabo,²¹ other authors combine these two traditions. Apollodorus,²² for instance, reports that Calchas asked Mopsus about the figs and that the latter in return asked about the sow. Mopsus succeeded, while Calchas lost and died of grief. Conon²³ offers a different version of the quarrel: he agrees that it started in Colophon, but he suggests that it ended in [Lycia](#) differently. He reports that the local king Amphimachus asked the seers about the outcome of the military campaign he planned. Calchas predicted a glorious victory, while



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Mopsus advised the king against this enterprise. Amphimachus was defeated. Concurrently, Mopsus' fame increased so dramatically that Calchas decided to kill himself. Finally Strabo²⁴ recalls that Sophocles in his Reclaiming of Helen²⁵ located the entire duel scene in [Cilicia](#).

3. Mopsus, founder of cities in Asia Minor

Mopsus is sometimes described as the oikistes of Colophon.²⁶ He expelled the local [Carians](#) and he extended the territory of his city.²⁷ Most cities, in whose foundation he allegedly participated, are located in southern Asia Minor. After his victory over Calchas, Mopsus did not stay at Claros. He led the wandering people who followed Calchas to [Pamphylia](#).²⁸ Some of them stayed there; others, following their new guide, crossed the mountain Taurus and settled in Cilicia, in Syria and in Phoenicia.

In the region of Cilicia, Strabo²⁹ describes the joint foundation of Mallos by Mopsus and by Amphilocheus, son of Amphiaraus, an Achaean leader who formerly was Calchas' follower. This cooperation was not entirely successful. One day Amphilocheus left the city for a short period, endowing the entire sovereignty to Mopsus. On his return, the new monarch refused to share power again. A duel took place and both opponents died. Some sources add that Mopsus' tomb was in the neighbourhood of the Cilician polis Magarsos, near the Pyramos river.³⁰ Not far from there, but not in line of sight, lay Amphilocheus' tomb. This dispute must be connected with oracular features of the local sanctuary, since Amphilocheus was also involved in seer activities.³¹ Just as many wandering heroes, Mopsus was believed to have founded more cities on his way to Mallos. Strabo³² and Theopompus³³ name in this context the Cilician city Mopsuestia, the Greek translation of the term being "Mopsus' hearth" or "Altar".³⁴ The coins this polis issued, carrying Mopsus and an altar, date to the first century B.C., at the earliest.³⁵ Here the hero may also have been associated with an oracular sanctuary of Apollo.³⁶ Apparently the name "Mopsucrene" may have had an eponymic interpretation, along the same line.

[Pliny](#), the 1st cent. A.D. historian, reports that the whole of Pamphylia was once called 'Mopsopia', a name inspired by the famous seer.³⁷ The same association is also made by Theopompus, when he refers to Mopsus' eponymous daughter.³⁸ Three archaeological discoveries link Mopsus to Pamphylian cities. At [Perge](#), chief city of the Roman province, an inscribed statue base of Mopsus - erected at the time of [Hadrian](#) (117 – 138 AD) - describes him as a founder and underlines his Delphic bonds.³⁹ This sculpture formed part of a group of nine standing figures near the south gate of the city. Moreover, L. Robert identified the rider hunting a boar on the classical coins of [Aspendus](#) (ca. 420-360) with Mopsus, suggesting that he might have been considered as the founder of the city.⁴⁰ Be this as it may, there seems to be a causal relationship between Mopsus and the cult of the local Aphrodite Kastnietis. The same scholar reports that Mopsus' name appeared on a sculpture base found in the neighbourhood of Aspendus, at Sillyon, as well.⁴¹

Mopsus is also associated with Lycian traditions. Theopompus⁴² recalls that the city of [Rhodes](#) was named after one of his three daughters. The historians Athenaeus⁴³ and Pomponius Mela account how Mopsus became oikistes of Phaselis.⁴⁴ The phonetic likeness between this name and that of the father of the seer was probably the link the inhabitants of this city chose in order to relate their past to those prestigious figures.⁴⁵ Finally, it is reported that Hierapolis in Phrygia minted during the 2nd century A.D. bronze coins carrying the figure of Mopsus, with the name of the hero inscribed on them.⁴⁶

1. Str. 14.1.27; Mela, 1.17; Paus. 7.3.1, 9.31 ; Conon *FGrHist* 26, F 1.6 (Manto called Mante).

2. Str. 14.5.16; Clem. Al., *Strom.* 1.21, 134.4; Conon *FGrHist* 26, F 1.6; Apoll. 6.3 and a statue base inscription found at Perge (*SEG* 34, 1305 C : Delphic connection is underlined).



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3. Sometimes conflated with the Argive Lakios. See scholia to Apoll. Rhod., 1.308; Heropythos of Colophon, *FGrHist* 448 F 1 and Cic. *De div.* 1.40.
4. Referred to the authors of the *Thebais* by the scholiast of Apoll. Rhod. 1.308.
5. Paus. 7.3.2, 9.31.
6. Mela, 1, 17 also Theopompus *FGrHist* 115 F 346.
7. *Limc* 6.1 (1992), p. 653 n. 2 (E. Simon).
8. *Limc* 6.1 (1992), p. 653 n. 3 (E. Simon).
9. *FGrHist* 115, F 103.
10. Steph. Byz. s.v. Pamphylia calls her Pamphyle; Eust. *Comment on Dion*, 850 only mentions the eponym.
11. I.e., Hes. *Shield*, l. 181.
12. Val. Flac., 1.383-386; Stat. *Theb.* 3, 520-521. See also the multiple allusions in Hyg. *Fab.* 14.5; 29.128, 173.
13. Scheer, T.S., *Mythische Vorväter zur Bedeutung griechischer Heldenmythen im Selbstverständnis kleinasiatischer Städte* (Munich 1993) p. 154-161. The first one might be tied to the Thessalian city of Mopsion.
14. As Clem. Alex., *Strom.*, 1.21, 133.2; 134.4 and Amm. Marc. 14.8.3.
15. *EGF* (Davies), p. 67.
16. Callinus - *IEG* 2 F 8. The text mentions Callisthenes. The emendation is not fully accepted and the editor inserts it in the spurious fragments.
17. *TrGF* vol. 4 F 180 (Radt).
18. Also Str. 14.1.27, Apoll. *Epit.* 6.3.
19. F 278 – 279 (M.-W.).
20. *FGrHist* 3 F 142.
21. Str. 14.1.27.
22. *Epit.* 6.3-4.
23. *FGrHist* 26, F 1. 6.
24. Str. 14.1.27 and 14.5.16.
25. *TrGF*, vol. 4, F 180 (Radt).
26. Mela, 1.17; Dictys, 1.17 describes Mopsus as a Colophonian who led troops to Troy to help the Greeks.



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27. Paus. 7.3.2.
28. *IEG*, vol. 2 F 8. See note above.
29. Str. 14.5.16; Cic. *De Div.* 1.40.
30. Lyc., 439-446 and scholia v. 440 ; Euphrorio F 98 (A.C. Powell).
31. Eust. *Comment on Dion.*, 875; see also Scheer, T.S., *Mythische Vorväter zur Bedeutung griechischer Heldenmythen im Selbstverständnis kleinasiatischer Städte* (Munich 1993), p.168-173 (duel) and p. 222-241. D. Metzler, 'Der Seher Mopsos auf den Münzen der Stadt Mallos', *Kernos* 3 (1990), p. 235-250 recognises the Hero on some coins struck by this city.
32. Str. 14.5.19.
33. *FGrHist* 115 F 103.
34. Steph. Byz. s.v. Mopsou Hestia. See Scheer, T.S., *Mythische Vorväter zur Bedeutung griechischer Heldenmythen im Selbstverständnis kleinasiatischer Städte* (Munich 1993), p. 242-244. An inscription found at Karatepe in 1946 suggests that the name has originally Luwian (MPS/MUKSUS). Amm.Marc. 14.8.3 considers the city of Mobsuestia as a foundation of the Argonaut Mobsus (sic).
35. See *Limc* 6.1 (1992), p. 653, n.2. Later struck in 50/51 (Claudius) and 93/4 (Domitian).
36. Scheer, T.S., *Mythische Vorväter zur Bedeutung griechischer Heldenmythen im Selbstverständnis kleinasiatischer Städte* (Munich 1993), p. 241-252
37. Plin. *N.H.* 5.29.
38. *FGrHist* 115 F 103 also Steph. Byz. s.v. Pamphylia and Eust. *Comment on Dion.*, 850.
39. *SEG* 34, 1305C. See Weiss, P., 'Lebendiger Mythos. Gründerheroen und städtische Gründungstraditionen im Griechisch-römischen Osten', *WurzbJBB* 10 (1984) p. 179-207, esp. p. 179-182; *Limc* 6.1 (1992), p. 653, n. 1 (E.Simon) and Scheer, T.S., *Mythische Vorväter zur Bedeutung griechischer Heldenmythen im Selbstverständnis kleinasiatischer Städte* (Munich 1993), p. 187-192.
40. Robert L., 'Monnaies et divinités d'Aspendos', *Hellenica* 11-12 (1960) p. 177. He links this mention with the sacrifices mentioned in the *Iamb* 10 of Call (F 200a Pf.) and its diegesis. See also Eust. *Comment on Dion.*, 852.
41. Robert, L., 'Monnaies et divinités d' Aspendos', *Hellenica* 11-12 (1960) 197, p. 177-178, n. 5.
42. *FGrHist* 115 F 103.
43. Ath. 7. 297, quoting Philostephanus *FHG* 3, 29, F1.
44. Other traditions name Lakios instead of Mopsus: Steph. Byz., s.v. Gela; quoting the first book on Phaselis by Aristaenetus (*FGrHist* 771 F 1). See also Heropythos of Colophon, *FGrHist* 448 F 1; Scheer, T.S., *Mythische Vorväter zur Bedeutung griechischer Heldenmythen im Selbstverständnis kleinasiatischer Städte* (Munich 1993), p. 182-187.
45. Scholia in Appol. Rhod. 1,308; Prinz F., *Gründungsmythen und Sagenchronologie* (Munich 1979) p. 28 - 31.
46. *Limc* 6.1 (1992), p. 653, n.3 (E. Simon). This, however, might be a representation of Mopsus, son of Lydos, known by Athenaeus (8.346e; Scheer, T.S., *Mythische Vorväter zur Bedeutung griechischer Heldenmythen im Selbstverständnis kleinasiatischer Städte* (München 1993), p. 159-162), rather than of the son of Rhakios.



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