

The Name Hythlodæus

The name of More's character Hythlodæus in *Utopia* has been explained in various ways. While there is no doubt that the first element derives from the Greek *hythlos* which means "nonsense", the second element is harder to interpret. * In what is now the standard edition by Surtz and Hexter, a preference is expressed for G.J. Vossius' view that it comes from *daios*, "cunning" (*CW4*: 301). Surtz and Hexter also mention H. Brockhaus' idea that More had in mind the root of *daiomai*, "burn", with the meaning "ardent". As they imply, this is less plausible.

But there are difficulties with the other proposal, because the normal meaning of the word *daios* in Greek is "hostile, destructive". "Cunning" is found only in a dubious passage of Plutarch's *Moralia* (1097C, quoting Epicurus) and in an epigram in the Greek Anthology (16.119). In the Plutarch passage most editors remove it with a plausible emendation, and one may have doubts about leaving a unique example in the epigram, in which there is at least one other textual problem. If More knew the word *daios*, as he probably did, it is virtually certain that he knew it in the common sense of "destructive". So what meaning would result? "Hostile to, destructive of nonsense" or "damaging nonsense" appear to be the possibilities. The first would give a certain irony to the name.

Lupton in his edition of 1895 (p. 26 n. 2) took it as obvious that the second element in the name is *daiein*, "distribute", though the recent editors do not deign to notice his view.

Another possibility for the second element in the name comes from *hodaïos*, used in the *Odyssey* (8.163, 15.445) in the neuter plural *hodaïa* to mean "merchandise". More could easily have formed the compound intending it to mean "merchant, purveyor of nonsense". The irony is then quite clear. It is confirmed by Hythlodæus having as a travelling companion one Tricius Apinatus, both names deriving from Latin words for "trifles, nonsense".

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* Though I have not burdened this note with full references to the secondary literature, it seems appropriate to add that the recent study by Dominic Baker-Smith, *More's Utopia* (London & New York 1991), mentions the question at pp. 88ff. He accepts without further discussion the view that the second element in the name means "skilled".