The main sources of *The Comedy of Errors* are familiar friends, possibly too familiar to receive the attention they warrant: Shakespeare drew the main plot of twins separated at birth from the *Menaechmi* of Plautus (possibly consulted in part in William Warner’s translation); further material, including the addition of a second set of twins, from the same playwright’s *Amphitruo*; and lesser details from such works as George Gascoigne’s *Supposes*, John Lyly’s *Mother Bombie* and John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*. The usual narrative of all this is of Shakespeare fleshing out, humanising and Christianising these disparate materials. That is what we find, for example, in T.W. Baldwin’s repeated attentions to the play, including his exhaustive *On the Compositional Genetics of “The Comedy of Errors,”* or more succinctly in R.A. Foakes’s Arden edition.¹

Christianising is an important element in the process, associated with Shakespeare’s translation of the action from Epidamnnum, in Plautus, to Ephesus. The hint for this may have come from the tale of Apollonius of Tyre in Gower, but if so the dramatist built extensively on this to incorporate most of the Biblical resonances of Ephesus (mainly associated with St Paul in the *Acts of the Apostles* and his *Epistle to the Ephesians*) into his story.² So much so that, as Joseph Candido puts it in one of the shrewder and more imaginative studies of Shakespeare’s use of his sources: “one could easily argue that Shakespeare’s play is at least as much Pauline as it is Plautine” (Candido 221). As Donna Hamilton succinctly summarises, “Ephesians includes statements on the need to maintain a hierarchical relationship between master and servant and husband and wife, and instructions to ‘Put on the whole armour of God that ye may be able to stand against the assaults of the devil’; in Acts, Ephesus is a place where evil spirits abound” (64).³ It will be readily apparent how much these themes inform the play that Shakespeare wrote. So Glyn Austen, in an explicitly Christian reading of the play, has no difficulty in suggesting that “Shakespeare’s primary reason for shifting the setting from the Epidamnum of his Plautine source to Ephesus would have been to
capitalize on the proverbial quality of the latter as a disordered society” (58).

So far so good. But traditional accounts both of the sources and of the change of location leave a good deal that is not explained about the play and its origins, late in the 1580s or early in the 1590s.⁴ Donna Hamilton’s is the one attempt to relate these matters fully to the religious tensions of the immediate period, taking the play to be an allegory of church politics at a time when the Church of England was reacting intemperately to criticism from nonconformists (59-85). I want to propose a different context, however, one suggested by a hitherto overlooked source which carries with it a considerable freight of Reformation baggage. In adapting Plautus, Shakespeare changed the name of the principal twins from Menacchmus (admittedly a mouthful in English) to Antipholus – or “Antipholis” as it appears twice in the First Folio text, the only early witness. What does the name mean, and where did Shakespeare find it? It is instructive here to follow T.W. Baldwin’s exhaustive labours on this, as on so many other features of the play, since he got very close to the answer but failed to recognise it because (I suggest) it did not square with what he wanted or expected to find.

Unable to identify a specific source for Antipholus, Baldwin examined a variety of options, concluding that it is the type-name of a lover, deriving from the Greek feminine ἀντιφίλα (Antiphila: “worthy of devotion”). In arguing this, Baldwin considered – only to reject – Henry Cunningham’s suggestion that Shakespeare’s usage parallels that of Philip Sidney and William Camden, who both use the name “Antiphilus”:⁵

Quite evidently also, Shakespeare did not get Antipholis, Antipholus from the correct Latin transliteration Antipholis of Sidney, as Cunningham suggested. In the Arcadia, “Erona irreligious gainst Loue, must loue the base Antiphilus” as punishment, since this Antipholus lived a “false-harted life, which had planted no strong thought in him, but that he could be vnkind.” This Antipholus is “vnkinde,” anti-love.

Also Camden dubs Ralph Brooke, who had attacked him, Antipholus, “mihi iugulum petit ueste Antiphilus”; this here cutthroat Antiphilus! Brooke had been “anti,” against or in opposition to “philus,” a calumniator, as Camden repeats. These Antiphili of Sidney and Camden certainly do not represent Shakespeare’s idea; they are anti, whether it be in Antiphilus, Antipho, etc.⁶