hapax legomenon, n.

Pronunciation: Brit. /hapaks lɪˈɡɔrnən/, /ˌhapaks
lɪˈɡɔrnən/, U.S. /hæpaks ləˈɡɑrnən/

Inflections: Pl. hapax legomena;

Forms: 16 apax legomenon, 17– hapax legomenon.

Etymology: < Hellenistic Greek ἅπαξ λεγόμενον something that has been said once < ancient Greek ἅπαξ once ( < the same Indo-European base as same adj. + an ablaut variant (zero-grade) of the base of πηγάναι to fix, make solid: see PECTIC adj.) + λεγόμενον , use as noun of neuter of λεγόμενος , medio-passive present participle of λέγειν to speak (see LEXIS n.).

In plural hapax legomena after the Greek plural form.

Chiefly in linguistic and literary studies: a word or word form which is recorded only once in a text, in the work of a particular author, or in a body of literature.

The term has in the past been particularly associated with biblical commentary.

[1654 J. TRAPP Comm. Minor Prophets (Zech. xiv. 20) 605 'Tis ἅπαξ λεγόμενον read only here: and hence this variety of interpretations.]

1692 J. DUNTON Young-students-libr. 242/1 There are many words but once used in Scripture, especially in such a sence, and are called the Apax legomena.

1774 J. RHUDEDE Ribband (ed. 3) (Annotations section), The word 'Ribband', is of that order, called, hapax legomenon, [h.e. [sic] a word, found occurring but once] in respect, we mean, of our English Bible.

1838 W. JENKS Guide to Study Bible 1. ii. 6/3 in Suppl. to Comprehensive Commentary The ancient versions...must be regarded as having furnished us with the most important and valuable of all the subsidiary means, by which to ascertain the sense in cases of hapax legomena.

1882 F. W. FARRAR Early Days Christianity I. xi. 236 The number of the hapax legomena is remarkable, and some of them are full of picturesqueness.

1931 Eng. Stud. 13 124 An article that should certainly find a place in a miscellany in honour of the brave defender of Wulfila as a translator: Collitz on two hapax legomena in Wulfila's translation.

1957 C. BROOKE-ROSE Lang. of Love iv. 34 She saw herself go through the minutiae of scansion, dialect forms, emendation, haplography, hapax legomena and anacolutha in Beowulf.

1997 S. B. MORROW Names of Things 26 Commager taught us about the hapax legomenon, the word that is used only once, that is created for that occasion only.
This entry has been updated (OED Third Edition, December 2013).