

# Oxford English Dictionary | The definitive record of the English language

## hapax legomenon, *n.*

**Pronunciation:** Brit. /,hʌpəks lɪ'ɡɒmɪnən/ , /,hʌpəks

lɪ'ɡɒmɪnən/ , U.S. /,hæpəks lə'ɡɑmə,nən/

**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 πηγνύναι 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. RHUDE *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* I. 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).

**Oxford University Press**

Copyright © 2015 Oxford University Press . All rights reserved.