

FALSE PLURALS

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A number of words in English are more commonly found in their classical plural form than in their classical singular form. Because of this dominant usage of the plural form, many people remain unaware that each of the words is already a plural and they treat them as if they were singular forms. Consequently, they pluralize these already pluralized forms. For example, the word APOCRYPHA (writings of doubtful authorship) is the plural of APOCRYPHON. But as APOCRYPHA is often regarded as the singular, the erroneous plural APOCRYPHAS is sometimes encountered.

This isn't the only case. Webster's Second Edition tells us that a CHERUB is a Biblical being. It lists the two plural forms CHERUBIM (the Hebrew plural) and CHERUBIN (a form of the plural which appears in the Vulgate). This dictionary goes on to say that CHERUBIM and CHERUBIN are often treated as singulars and that the erroneous plurals CHERUBIMS and CHERUBINS have arisen. Significantly, Webster's Third Edition, a dictionary based more on usage than on classical correctness, lists CHERUBIM and CHERUBIN as alternative singular forms, and CHERUBIMS and CHERUBINS as the corresponding plurals. It gives no indication that the latter two are classically erroneous and that the former two are plurals and not singulars. Yet another case is that revolving about the word INSIGNIA. Webster's Second informs us that an INSIGNE is a mark of authority, and that the plural is INSIGNIA. But Webster's Third lists INSIGNIA (as well as INSIGNE) as a singular form having the plural INSIGNIAS. So, INSIGNIAS must be regarded as the plural of an already-existing plural.

We haven't run out of examples yet. Bear with us! Webster's Second tells us that a SERAPH is a member of an order of celestial beings. The plurals SERAPHS and SERAPHIM are given. Also listed, but as an obsolete erroneous plural, is SERAPHINS; SERAPHIMS too is listed as erroneous, but apparently not obsolete (see Isaiah 6:2 and 6:6). Finally, the two plurals ZAMZUMMIM and ZUZIM (certain aboriginal giants in the Old Testament) have been erroneously pluralized by tacking on an S. Any more examples?