

ANCIENT UNITS OF MEASUREMENT

MEASURED BY NATURE. PASSED DOWN BY CIVILIZATIONS.

EGYPT



UNIT	EQUALS (APPROX.)	BASED ON
CUBIT	52.3 cm	Length of forearm from elbow to tip of middle finger
PALM	7.6 cm	Width of the hand
DIGIT	1.9 cm	Width of a finger
REMEN	52.3 m	100 royal cubits (used in land measurement)
HEKAT	4.8 L	Capacity of a small basket
DEBEN	91 g	Weight of a copper lump

Egyptians were master surveyors. Many units were standardized during the Middle Kingdom (ca. 2000 BCE).

ROME



UNIT	EQUALS (APPROX.)	BASED ON
PES (FOOT)	29.6 cm	Length of a human foot
PALMUS (HANDSPAN)	22.2 cm	Width of the open hand
PASSUS (PACE)	1.48 m	One double step
ACTUS	120 m	About 100 paces
MILLE PASSUS (ROMAN MILE)	1.48 km	1,000 paces
LIBRA (POUND)	327 g	Standard weight

Roman units were practical and standardized, spreading throughout their vast empire.

GREECE



UNIT	EQUALS (APPROX.)	BASED ON
PODOS (FOOT)	29.6 cm	Length of a human foot
SPITHAME	22.2 cm	Span between thumb and little finger
ORGUEIA (CUBIT)	44.4 cm	Length of the forearm
STADION	185 m	Length of a running stadium
PLETHON	6.2 L	Volume of a wine jar
DRACHMA (WEIGHT)	4.3 g	Weight of silver coin

Greek units influenced science, architecture, and trade across the Mediterranean.

MESOPOTAMIA



UNIT	EQUALS (APPROX.)	BASED ON
SAG (LENGTH)	53 cm	Long cubit based on the forearm
KUS (LENGTH)	44 cm	Short cubit
NINDA (AREA)	~36 m ²	Square of 60 x 60 cubits
GUR (VOLUME)	~300 L	Capacity of a large jar
SHEKEL (WEIGHT)	8.3 g	Weight of barley or silver

Mesopotamians developed one of the world's earliest standardized systems (ca. 3000 BCE).

INDIA



UNIT	EQUALS (APPROX.)	BASED ON
ANGULA (FINGER)	1.9 cm	Width of one finger
VITASTI (HANDSPAN)	22.9 cm	Span of thumb to little finger
HASTA (CUBIT)	45.8 cm	Length from elbow to fingertip
DHANUS	1.83 m	Length of a bow
KROSA	3.2 km	Distance one can call out
TOLA (WEIGHT)	11.66 g	Weight of a grain or seed

Indian texts on architecture (Vastu) and astronomy used precise traditional measurement systems.

CHINA



UNIT	EQUALS (APPROX.)	BASED ON
CHI (FOOT)	31.1 cm	Length of a human foot
CUN (INCH)	3.1 cm	One-tenth of a chi
ZHANG	3.1 m	Ten chi
LI (DISTANCE)	~415 m	Distance one can walk in half an hour
SHI (VOLUME)	~10 L	Capacity of a standard vessel
DAN (WEIGHT)	~59 g	Weight of a seed or grain

Chinese units were used for engineering, agriculture, and trade for thousands of years.

DID YOU KNOW?

Ancient civilizations measured the world with their bodies, tools, and environment. These units were the foundation of trade, construction, astronomy, and daily life.

- BASED ON THE HUMAN BODY
- BASED ON EVERYDAY OBJECTS
- BASED ON DISTANCE & MOVEMENT
- BASED ON NATURE & AGRICULTURE

“All things are numbers.”
— Pythagoras

MEASURE THE PAST. UNDERSTAND THE PRESENT.

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