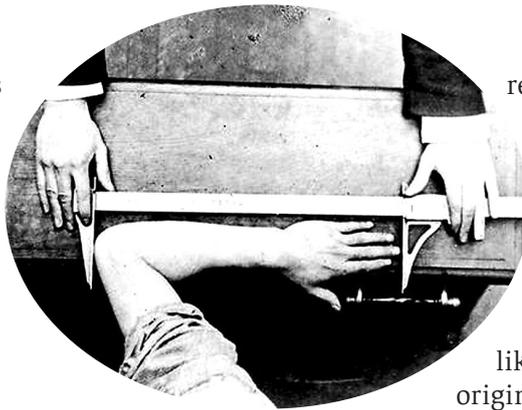


Ancient measuring systems

Ancient measuring systems were initially based on body parts, like the arm and foot; later, they were standardised, mainly for trade and construction, using objects like rods and weights or standardised weights.



representing a unit, which were kept in temples and used to create copies for distribution.

■ Measuring length

For measuring length, the most ancient civilisations used body parts, like the finger, hand, **span**, or foot. These measuring units could be used by everyone, but they were not very reliable. The Egyptian civilisation developed a standardised measuring unit for length, which they called the **cubit**, corresponding to the distance from the elbow to the fingertip. The standardisation of a body unit was made necessary when large construction projects like those of the pyramids started to be done.

Also, ancient Greek and Roman civilisations used their own standardised versions of feet and **strides** and developed measures like the Greek **stade** (or *stadium*), corresponding to approximately six hundred feet or 177 metres, and the Roman **mile** (*mille passus*), corresponding to one thousand strides or 1,480 metres.

The civilisations that followed tried to create reliable standards, using physical rods

carob: *carruba* **span:** *spanna* **stride:** *passo*

■ Measuring weight

Early weight measures in ancient civilisations were often based on the weight of seeds, like the **carob** seed, which is the origin of the modern carat. The carat was usually employed to weigh very small quantities and it is still used for measuring gold and diamonds.

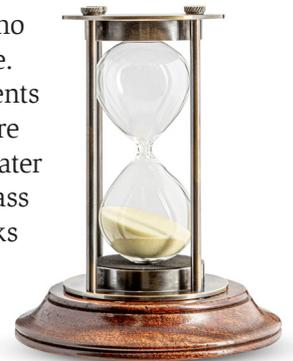
The carat was only standardised in 1832 in South Africa and its value defined as 0.2 grams.

■ Measuring volume

Egyptians used a unit for measuring volume like the **hekat**, corresponding to about five litres, while Romans used the **sextarius**, which was about half a litre, precisely 0.545 litres.

■ Measuring time and natural cycles

Measuring time and cycles was vital for ancient civilisations, who based their living on agriculture. Celestial cycles, i.e. the movements of the sun, moon, and stars, were used to track time and cycles. Later on, instruments like the hourglass and various types of water clocks were developed to measure shorter periods of time.



1 Complete the table with the missing information.

Measure	Quantity measured	Civilisation(s) that used it	Dimensions
1.	Length	Egyptian	Distance from elbow to fingertip
Stade	2.	3.	Six hundred feet (177 metres)
4.	Length	Romans	5.
6.	Weight	Various civilisation in ancient	7.
8.	Volume	Egyptian	9.
Sextarius	10.	11.	12.
13.	Time	Various civilisations	