

STUDY OF THE NAME OF MEASURES IN RUSSIAN

¹Ochildieva Dिल्фуза Shodievna, ²Saparova Zamira Ibragimovna

^{1,2}Teachers of the faculty of Russian language and literature of JSPU

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Abstract. *This article is about the naming of measures in Russian. The characteristic of the naming and use of measures in the Russian language is given.*

Keywords: *inches, fathom, foot, verst, length, measure, span, small span, large span, elbow, arshin, oblique fathom, "seven spans in the forehead".*

The first ideas about the number were acquired by people in immemorial antiquity. They arose from the counting of people, animals, fruits, various human products and other objects. At the early stages of the development of society, people almost did not know how to count. They distinguished aggregates of two and three subjects from each other, for example: they talked about the number of a group of two subjects: "How many, how many eyes a person has," and about a set of twenty objects: "As many as a person's fingers."

Then they counted on their fingers. When the fingers on one hand ended, they moved to the other, and if there were not enough fingers on two hands, they moved to their feet. Therefore, if in those days it meant that he had "two arms and one leg of chickens", it meant that he had fifteen chickens, and if someone had twenty goats, it was called "the whole man", that is, two arms and two legs. Any totality containing a greater number of items was combined into the concept of "many".

In Ancient Russia, an indeterminately large number meant the word "seven". Russian proverbs have preserved the memory of this era: "measure seven times – cut once", "seven nurses have a child without an eye", "seven troubles – one answer", "two plow, and seven wave their hands", "seven raise one straw", "seven do not wait for one".

The Russian system of measures is a system of measures traditionally used in Russia and the Russian Empire. It was standardized on the basis of English measures by an imperial decree of 1835: inch, line, dot, foot were introduced. An arshin is equated to 28 inches, a fathom — to 7 feet, a number of outdated measures (longitudinal in relation to a verst) are excluded [1]. Later, the Russian system was replaced by the metric system of measures, which was approved for use in Russia (optional) by the law of June 4, 1890. The use of the metric system of measures in the RSFSR became mandatory by decree of the SNK of the RSFSR of September 14, 1918, and in the USSR — by resolution of the SNK of the USSR of July 21, 1925[2]. The legalized basic ratios between the old Russian measures and metric: 1 arshin is equal to 0.711200 meters, 1 pound is equal to 0.40951241 kilos[3][4][5].

Despite the lack of practical application, the names of Russian measures continue to be used in phraseological turns and historical research.

Below are the measures and their values according to the "Regulation on Weights and Measures" (1899), unless otherwise indicated. Earlier values of these units could differ from those given; for example, by the Code of 1649, a boundary verst of 1 thousand fathoms (approximately 2,1336 km) was established, whereas in the XIX century the verst was 500 fathoms; versts of 656 and 875 fathoms were also used.

The three main Old Russian measures of length bear the names of body parts. Measures of length in Ancient Russia were measured using human body parts. The expression "seven spans in the forehead" is used in a conversation about a very intelligent person. And how much is it in centimeters? For our ancestors, the word "span" meant a hand. A smaller measure – a small span – is the distance between the extended thumb and index finger and corresponds to 19 cm; a large span is the distance between the thumb and little finger – about 22-23 cm (hence the name of icons with a width of 19 or 23 cm – "spans"). It becomes clear that "seven spans in the forehead" is an exaggeration.

Most of the bricks of the XII century are also 19 cm wide. To measure the fabric, the length of the "elbow" was most often used. The elbow is the distance from the elbow joint to the ends of the extended fingers and corresponds to two large spans; and this unit of measurement had its own version – an elbow with clenched fingers, the size of two small spans. This is the usual width of the canvas, extremely stable and ubiquitous, coming from ancient times.

In ancient Russia, they said about the heroes: "He has an oblique fathom in his shoulders." An oblique fathom is the distance from the tips of the fingers of one hand stretched up to the tips of the fingers of the other foot. There was also a simple fathom (flywheel fathom) - this is the distance between the arms spread apart. The name "fathom" comes from the verb "reach" ("reach", "reach"), and its meaning can be clearly illustrated by an example of an oblique fathom, which represented the distance between the sole of the left foot and the end of the middle finger of the right hand extended upwards, thus really reproducing the limit of reach for a person standing on the ground.

One fathom is the distance from the foot to the end of the upstretched arm (about 215 cm) with a height of 170 – 172 cm. The value of another type of this unit of measurement, the so-called simple fathoms, was determined by historians using an inscription on the Tmutarakan stone containing information about measuring the width of the Kerch Strait.

A simple fathom is the distance between the thumbs of a person of average height, stretched out to the sides. By dividing it sequentially by 4 and by 8, we get the small cubit and span already known to us. Apparently, a simple fathom preceded an ordinary, three-arched one.

Arshin. This is a new one, borrowed from the East, mentioned in literary sources since the middle of the XVI century. The origin of the name is not precisely established. It is usually produced from the name of the Turkish measure of length "arshin" (27.9 inches = 70.9 cm), or from the Persian "arshi" -length; divisions in vershins were usually applied to the arshin.

Vershok. The name comes from the word "top" ("top of the finger", i.e. finger). Vershok is mentioned in the "Trade Book" as 1/16 arshin. In the literature of the XVII century, there are also fractions of the vertex "half-vershka" and "quarter-vershka".

All these measures of length were extremely inconvenient and over time people switched to the metric system. After all, the length of a centimeter does not depend on a person's height in any way.

To determine long distances in Ancient Russia there was a mile, or field. A mile was the largest unit of length. It consisted of fathoms. Considering that everyone had their own fathom, there were from 500 to 750 fathoms in a mile. According to many researchers, this word comes from the verb "make up", meaning "distribute", "equalize", "equalize by comparison".1 verst = 1140 meters.

All these terms: span, elbow, fathom, verst, field are found already in the XI – XII centuries. The measure of length, like other measures, did not differ in stability and during the period of feudal fragmentation in Russia fluctuated from one principality to another, and at the same time changed over time. All these measures are subjective, since each person has their own and depend on growth. Therefore, for example, merchants selling fabrics were cunning and hired low sellers: their elbows were shorter, which means that less fabric was cut off.

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