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Deben (unit)

The **deben** was an ancient Egyptian weight unit.

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Deben^[1]
 (w/"stone-block"-O39)
 (as determinative)
 (horiz. water-N)
 Egyptian hieroglyphs

Old and Middle Kingdom

Stone weights from the Old Kingdom have been found, weighing about 13.6 g (0.48 oz; 0.44 ozt). Similar weights from the Middle Kingdom were discovered at Lisht. From the Middle Kingdom date also *deben* weight units used for metals, referred to as copper deben and gold deben, the former being about twice as heavy (23.7 g (0.84 oz; 0.76 ozt)) as the latter.



Old Kingdom market scene: Two of the customers are seen carrying little boxes on their shoulders, suspected to have contained pieces of metal used as payment

New Kingdom

From the New Kingdom one *deben* was equal to about 91 g (3.2 oz; 2.9 ozt). It was divided into ten *kidet* (alt. *kit*, *kite* or *qedet*),^[2] or into what is referred to by Egyptologists as 'pieces', one twelfth of a *deben* weighing 7.6 g (0.27 oz; 0.24 ozt).^[3] It was frequently used to denote value of goods, by comparing their worth to a weight of metal, generally silver or copper.

Protocurrency

It has been speculated that pieces of metal weighing a deben were kept in boxes,^[4] taken to markets,^[5] and were used as a means of exchange.^[6] Archaeologists have been unable to find any such standardized pieces of precious metal. On the other hand, it is documented that *debens* served to compare values. In the 19th Dynasty, a slave girl priced four deben and one kite of silver was paid for with various goods: 6 bronze vessels, 10 *deben* of copper, 15 linen garments, a shroud, a blanket, and a pot of honey.^[7]

Legacy

Debens appeared in the computer game *Pharaoh* as its currency (in the form of gold).

See also

- [Ancient Egyptian units of measurement](#)
- [Egyptian units of measurement](#)

References

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 5. R. Lepsius, *Denkmäler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien*, Abth. II, Bl.96
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