The Meaning of 

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THE Greek translators think of a little dagger (ἑιδῶν, Jos., Antt., v. 4, 2), and render ὄντας by σκιαμή, 'span, half cubit' (LXX., Theod., Syr. hex.), or παλαιστής, handbreadth (παλαιστίαν, sc. μάχαμ-παν, Sym.); similarly Jerome, palma manus. The Jewish interpreters generally take ὄντας as a cubit, or more specifically, as a short cubit, ἑλλιαν (cf. Jer. Yoma, iv. 4, fol. 41); so Rashi on Judges, and Rashbam on Baba bathra, 100a: "ὑνσιμι are small cubits without the fingers; others maintain that they are full cubits." This interpretation is cited also in the Aruch, s.v. ὄντας. So the word was understood by the Peshitto, which renders "ὑνσιμι. The native lex. explain ὄντας as "a cubit with the fingers bent," and the Arabic translator of Judges (from the Peshitto) renders it dira'un gaira qabdatihi, "a cubit without the fist," i.e. one-sixth shorter than the ordinary cubit.

The primary meaning of ὄντας is apparently, 'contract, draw up': the Targum renders Heb. דַּּם, Jud. iii. 15, xx. 16, by ὄντας; cf. also Pesachim 111a, Chullin 43a, Gittin 57a. The noun ὄντας may therefore originally have meant 'the clenched hand, fist.' So it seems to have been understood by some of the Greek translators. Aquila renders it by γρανθός, 'fist,' and has evidently the same thing in mind when, in Ezek. xxvii. 11, he translates בַּּם חַּּם, "men a πῦμαι (ὕντας) tall.' Another translator, whose version of Judges is preserved to us entire in Codex B, Cod. Brit. Mus. Add. 20002, and a considerable group of cursive MSS., renders ὄντας by δηάκ, which, in Lev. vi. 8 (15), ii. 2, v. 12, represents ὃκμα, 'closed hand, fistful.' Subsequently ὄντας came to mean 'a fist cubit,' i.e. one measured to the knuckles of the closed hand. This development of meanings is an exact parallel to that which we see in the Greek πῦμαι, 'fist,' then, the distance from the elbow to the knuckles of the clenched fist, six finger-breath less than a cubit.

1 Probably palma is here 'a span'; see Jerome on Ezek. xl. 5.
2 The variant ὄντας (Rashi, edd.; cf. Zebachim, 62b), a cubit cut short, is probably due to copyists, — an easier reading of obvious etymology and meaning.
3 See also Jastrow, Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, etc., s.v.
4 See Lagarde, Septuaginta Studien, 1892, i ff. B has here been conformed to LXX., Theod.