

“The Uncertain Method of Drops”: How a Non-uniform Fluid Unit Survived the Century of Standardization

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This paper follows the journey of two small fluid units throughout the 19th century in Anglo-American medicine and pharmacy, explaining how the non-uniform “drop” survived while the standardized *minim* became obsolete. I emphasize two roles these units need to fulfill: that of a physical measuring device, and that of a rhetorical communication device. First, I discuss the challenges unique to measuring small amounts of fluid, outlining how the modern medicine dropper developed out of an effort to resolve problems with the “minimometer,” which measured *minims*. Second, I explain how drops, utilized in “the open drop method” of administering general anesthesia, effectively communicated a gradual process and epistemically valuable heuristic to the audience of practitioners, whose attention to individual medical outcomes was important for verifying the proper dosage.