

## Trends and Traditions of Monogram

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The goal of this paper is to explore from the designer/thinker/influencer perspective to understand how the influence of Time, Politics, Geography, Culture has shaped the visual form of monogram.

## Abstract

Monogram is a motif made by overlapping two or more letters to form one symbol. These symbols take different role in different areas – In finance for currency exchange symbol, in fashion industry for luxury branding, in tours and travels for luxurious hospitality, in personalized objects, in politics and many more. This paper is a research made to understand the significance and evolution of the monogramming from ancient to contemporary logos by drawing a parallel between the history of lettering and monogramming. It is to understand the form monogram takes in different areas and the phyiology behind monogramming.

This study demonstrates that the monogram is versatile and manages to be relevant despite all the changes the society has gone through. It plays an important role in typography and graphic designing. Taking this into consideration, it is observed that monogram is an under researched field thus it's a challenge to understand and explore it.

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## 1 Details of Monogram

### 1.1 Definition

A monogram is a motif made by overlapping or combining two or more letters or other graphemes to form one symbol. Monograms are often made by combining the initials of an individual or a company, used as recognizable symbols or logos.<sup>1</sup>



*Monogram MG created by the author*

### 1.2 Categorise of monogram

The author (Sprague, 1927) of ‘How to design monogram’ divided this general idea of the monogram into three distinct categories: monograms, ciphers, and calligrams, giving the following definitions for each:

‘Monogram — a compound letter, or, as its names implies, the combination in one sign (simple or complex) of two or more letters no longer separate. Whether they are the initial s of a person’s several names, or whether they are used as badge, symbol or trade mark doesn’t matter. The point is that it is one sign conveying the significance of several letters.



*Wendel Ditterlein 1550-1599 | (Letner, 1950)*

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<sup>1</sup>Retrieved August 24,2019, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monogram>

Cypher — a cypher differs from a monogram in that it is not a contraction, not a separate sign compounded of several letters, but a commingling or interlacing of signs, each of which is in itself a perfect and independent letter, the one place in front of the other, or more commonly entangled with it.



*PG cypher | (Guerrero, 2015)*

Calligram — a calligram is similar to a monogram, with the exception that it contains the whole word instead of the initials alone. The letters in it are so planned as to make a pleasing design unit rather than a legible word’.



*Imperial Monogram 1880 AD| Google Art & Culture*

With time and usage of monogram the line between different motifs of monogram has eventually disappeared, as noted by Elizabeth and Curtiss Sprague (1927):  
 ‘This distinction between different symbols is probably very interesting but can be confusing, as the line between a monogram and a cypher is sometimes so close that it can hardly be determined and in that case the design evolved is neither one nor the other. And after all, the

name doesn't make much difference There is only one idea back off all three, the creating of the most effective design, using as your motif a given number of letters.'

## 2 History of monogramming

Although monograms sometimes include symbols and purely decorative elements, they almost always involve letters. It is impossible to consider monograms from a historical perspective without first considering the history of letters. Thus a parallel is drawn between the monogramming and lettering history.

The first finding of monogram was in the period 700BC of Roman alphabet creation on the wall paintings as religious symbols, over centuries monograms of names of Jesus Christ have been used as Christian symbols. Later in 350 BC the motifs were found on the coins, and blacksmiths producing swords for the Roman armies often inscribed the initials or symbols on the handles of the weapons to identify their marker. In 1<sup>st</sup> AD inscription on architectural stone has begun followed by the development of Rustic and Uncials in 3<sup>rd</sup> AD.

In the 400 – 500 AD Roman alphabets were reintroduced to Britain by Cristian Missionary in the same age the monograms were highly used as religious motifs.

The lettering in the 7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> AD was an artistic of decoration, 768-814 AD was the raise of holy Roman. In 1200 it was replaced with gothic. 15<sup>th</sup> century everyone could read and write and the letter were geometric, artist signed their paintings with their monograms.

18<sup>th</sup> century the Victoria era, magazines/ articles on monogram was published regularly.

These magazines encouraged people to create their own monogram. Though monogramming was a trend since centuries, it has received a huge hype in the recent times. Custom monogram designs are everywhere, you can spot people with monogrammed cases, mugs, glasses, bags and so on.



Wall paintings

700BC



Achaea coin

350BC



Faience polyhedron

1<sup>st</sup> AD



Funerary inscription

3<sup>rd</sup> AD



Patent of Christ

4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> AD



Visigoth reliefs

7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> AD



Coin in Charlemagne

768-814 AD



Decorated initial E

1200AD



Albrecht Durer artist sign

15<sup>th</sup> Century



Felix Buhot's stamp

18<sup>th</sup> Century



Roger Federer monogram

Present

### 3 Role of monogram

The role of monogram has changed throughout the history. We can find different purpose and context for different monogram motifs. These motifs can be for authentication, validation, ownership, responsibility, identification, exchange and decoration. Based on these the monogram's role can broadly be divided into the following three categories.

#### 3.1 Individual Use

Monograms are most elaborate and impressive group of artistic sign that are to be appreciated. There were signatures done with monogram motifs by artists, craftsman on paintings, sculpture and pieces of furniture which were the artistic expression of medieval taste. In Ancient times, all the skilful work by architects, sculptures, painters, scribes were signed with the names of the masters and not the artists. In the middle age when these artists began to break their slave rules, more and more of their personal marks appeared on their works and possessions.



Leontius  
484–488



Wendel Ditterlein  
1550-1599



Louis Philippe  
1773-1850



Personalized Saucer  
1750-1774

### 3.2 Collective Use

In the First half of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, cattle were shipped for breeding in waste lands. The Spaniards brought along the medieval customs of putting their family mark on everything they owned. Also in India, in many of the joint families make a motif of their initials on the utensils making sure that they won't mix-up with others. Similarly these motifs are used in heraldry and symbols to represent the armies. Monograms have played a major role in war times.



Dona Juana De Figueroa

Cattle Brand

1750-1774



Letter case Army

1800

### 3.3 Market Use

In the 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century monogramming has started to be used in market use for trading and there are many logos even now, made by monogramming the first initials. These monogram motifs are simple and elegant reflecting the value of the person/ organization.



RF Seal

1890



Louis Vuitton

1854



BGP Tarot Packaging

1920

## 4 Psychology of monogram

Monogramming is all about customizing according to one's name and most of us crave to get things customized. These motifs made of initials have been used on many objects and personal things thus making an impression of monogramming obsessions is self-obsession. There are enamours studies on the psychology behind customized the objects as per the person.

Specifically hearing one's own name as opposed to other names triggers greater brain activation, particularly in the middle frontal cortex (which is associated with social behaviour), the middle and superior temporal cortex (which are associated with long-term memory and auditory processing, respectively), as well as the cuneus (which is associated with visual processing).

Based on this research<sup>2</sup>, it's clear that hearing our own name definitely causes something special to happen in our brain.

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<sup>2</sup> Retrieved on August, 24<sup>th</sup> <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/psychology-personalization>

## 5 Monogramming is other areas

### 5.1 Exchange and Value

Monograms first appeared on Greek coins, as early as 350 BC. Often the first two letters of the city's name, the initials of rulers, kings were inscribed on the currency. The following are the examples collected.



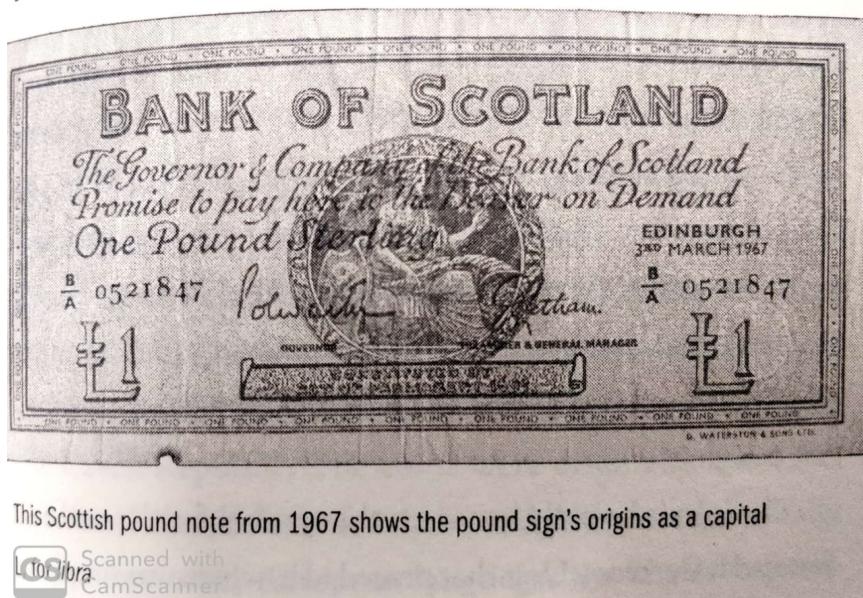
Achaea coin (350 BC)



Carolingian dynasty (700 AD)



Leontius Large M 695-698 AD



From the reference book (Piercy, 2013) it is evident that most of the symbols that represent the currency are also monogram motifs with the ruler's initials or the place initials, the following the examples to be considered:

The Pound (£) : This fancy looking L with a horizontal line is dated back to eight century, when King Offa of Merica introduced a currency system based on Europe by his contemporary, Emperor Charlemagne. Latin of this empire is known as Libra which was adopted as a symbol.

Euro (€): Based on the symbol for the notional European Currency CE and with the inspiration from Greek epsilon E and = for Certify the symbol Euro is formed.

Dollar (\$): The initials of United States, the letter 'U' is superimposed on letter 'S' to form the dollar symbol. Also, it is known that this symbol has been used for slave traders.

## 5.2 Politics

Monograms have been playing a significant role in politics since its origins. These motifs are considered to be royal motifs made by two or more letters which serve the royal name. The royal monogram has been used for centuries in Britain, but only in twentieth century it appeared on the coins. (Wie, 1999)

In 1927 the British half crown was redesigned to include a monogram of George V consisting of a double, interlocked, crowned “G”. The coinage extended the use of this monogram. Also no monogram coins have been minted since the redesign of British coinage. In the recent times, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi auctioned his pinstripe monogrammed suit. The two-piece ensemble was valued highly because of the person who wore it. He plans to utilise the money for Ganga River cleaning and girl's education. According to reports Modi wore the suit only once and builders, industrialists, diamond merchants made a beeline to buy it.



Monogrammed suit of Narendra Modi

### 5.3 Fashion

Monogram has evolved and sustained in the fashion industry. Brands like Burberry, Gucci, Fendi, Louis Vuitton, Valentino—stylized logos seem to maintain their cachet even as the brand they represent fades in and out of popularity. On clear observation Monogram motifs are used as logos for most of the luxurious fashion brand thus making a parallel with the monogram's used by royal people in the ancient times. It is evident that Monogramming is for luxurious experience, monogram motifs have been used in Fashion Industry is all different possible ways, for example: monogramming on bags, clothing, accessories, stationers, footwear and many more.



Monogramming on Cloths

Monogram motif on bag



Monogram motifs on stationary and accessories

## 5.4 Hospitality

Monograms are a trademark of Southern hospitality. To give a luxurious experience the initials of the visitors are monogrammed everywhere from shower curtains to backpacks thus addressing them and acknowledging their stay. It's a great Idea by Southern America to give the visitor an extraordinary experience.



Monogramming in hospitality

## 5.5 Tour and Travels

In the recent news<sup>3</sup>, to solve the issue of forge hotels, shops and travel agencies and to make tourist experience better, the Tourism Ministry of India has come up with a solution. To include a QR Codes in tourism ministry monogram. It's a good initiative taken by the tourism government against fake hotels, shops and etc. Also, the monogram of this QR code is going to be laughed in another 100 days' time.

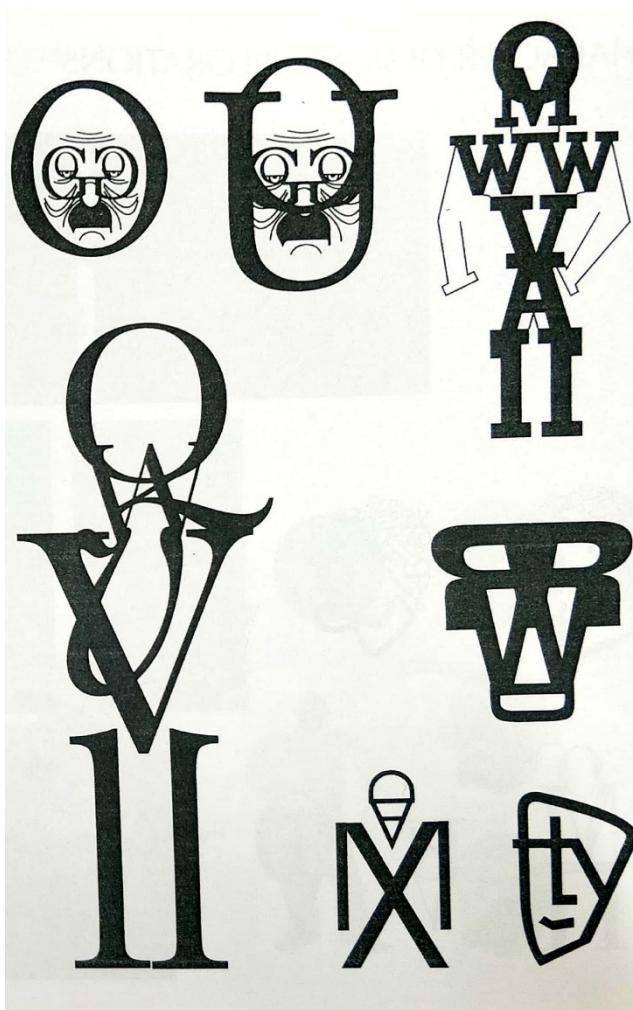
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<sup>3</sup> Retrieved on August, 24<sup>th</sup> <https://scanova.io/blog/blog/2019/08/16/qr-codes-to-tackle-misuse-of-tourism-ministry-monogram-in-india/>

## 5.6 Monogram motifs as Characters

It is a surprise to see a monogram motif taking a role to narrate stories, with the idea of building a stories with typography, Abrar Burk one of Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology alumni has formed the characters by combining different letters to represent the characters of the stories.

It is interesting to see the way different letters placed in different orientation can take a form and combined can be called as a monogram motif.



Characters designs with typography also represents the monogram motif  
Abrar Burk, documentation.

### 5.7 Monogram motif in Indian typography

Monogram motifs are not just limited to western languages, it extends its form to Indian languages too as the designers try to experiment with the Indian typography, one such experiment is *the link project* by Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology alumni Ishaan Bharat.



Monogram with Indian typography

The link project, 201

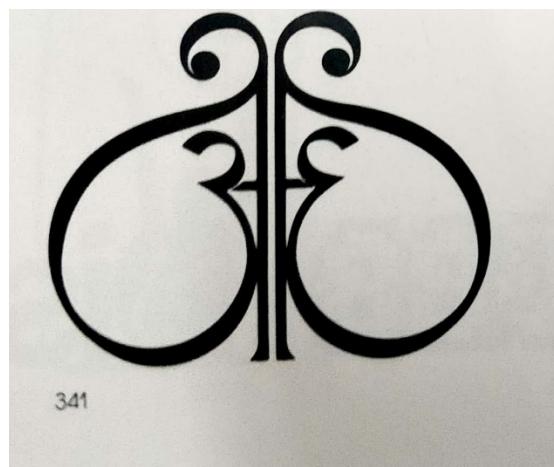
Ishaan Bharat

## 6 Collection of Indian monograms

These are the inspirations from the book “The world of symbols/logos and trademarks India.”



898



341

*Ali Perin by Nandan Nagwekar*

*Akshar Academy by Anil Dabhade*



Hotel Sagar Plaza by Dolly Biswas



Agarwal Nursing Home by Sohum Creative Team



All India Kashmiri Samaj by Sarawati D



Print-O-Drome by N K Chanda

## 7 Conclusion

Through this research it is evident that monogram has been in use since the lettering and are the most versatile motifs which evolved through the age. They have their influence in all possible areas like exchange, value, politics, fashion, hospitality, tours and travels, storytelling and many more.

This study has helped in understanding that the motif with letters combined can have a royal and luxurious impact. The question arises if monograms are losing its roots with the digitalized typography and the way the designers are combining letters from different digital fonts, also as many of the monograms in the ancient times made by the architects, artists, sculptures are creative and impressive.

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