

Is this ancient hashtag just a decoration or the first human symbol?

About 100,000 years ago, ancient humans started etching lines and hashtag patterns onto red rocks in a South African cave. Such handiwork has been cited as the first sign our species could make symbols—distinct marks that stand for some meaning—and thus evidence of a sophisticated mind.

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[Researcher Kristian] Tylén figured that if the marks were chiefly decorative, created because someone enjoyed looking at the pattern, the eyes of living humans would be able to see the patterns easily. If the markings were cultural traditions, they would need to be memorable, because the cave dwellers may have had to make them multiple times. And in that case, people today also ought to be able to remember and copy them.

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Tylén asked 65 Danish university students to examine 24 cleaned-up images of the original stone or shell markings, and then perform tasks such as sorting or copying the lines. The researchers wanted to know whether people could tell the marks from one site from those from the other, and whether they could copy them after looking at them briefly.

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[P]eople weren't able to sort the markings into the correct groupings by place, and weren't able to distinguish signs from each other. That's a minimal test of being a symbol—being distinct from another marking—and the engravings failed.

Read full, original post: [Is this 100,000-year-old hashtag the first humanmade symbol—or just a pretty decoration?](#)