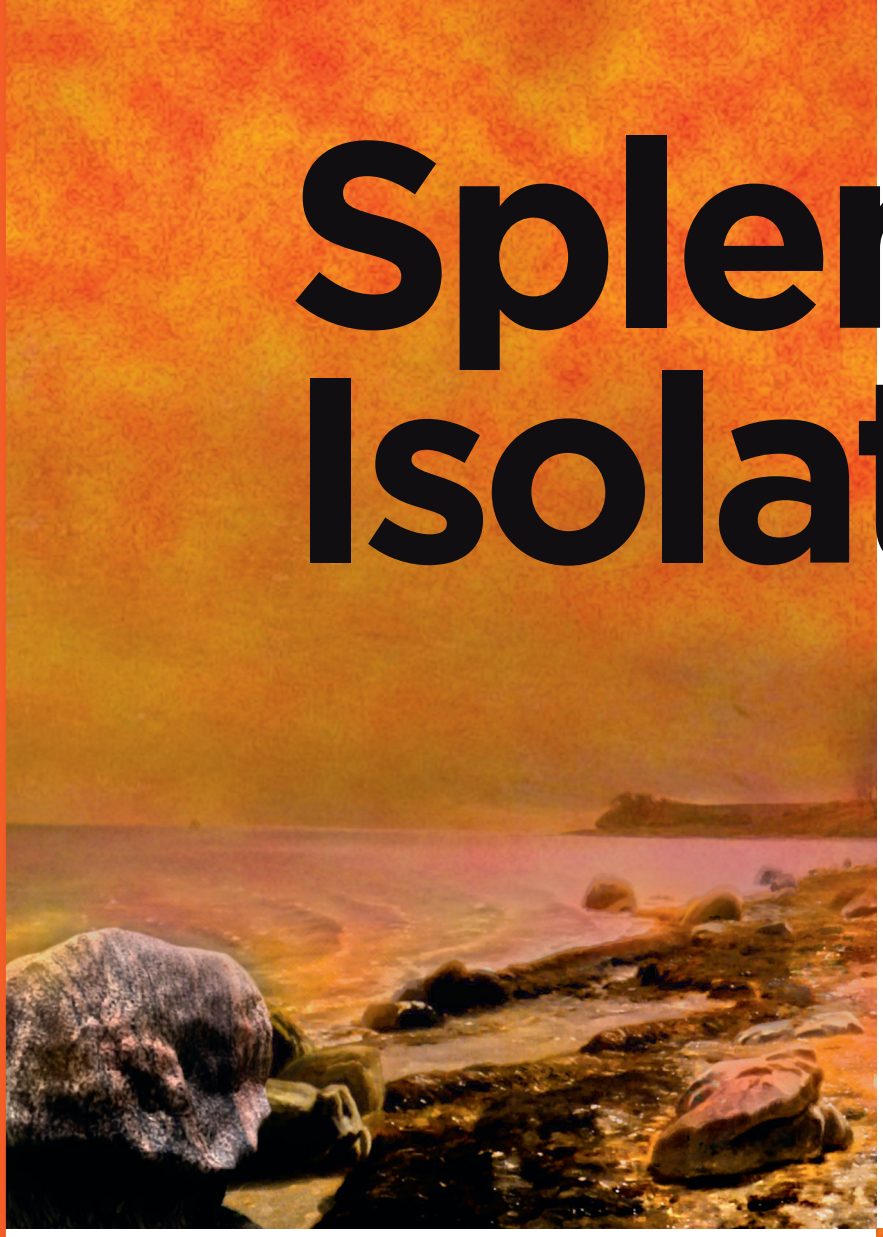
Splendid Isolation



The eruption of the Laacher See volcano and southern Scandinavian Late Glacial hunter-gatherers

By Felix Riede

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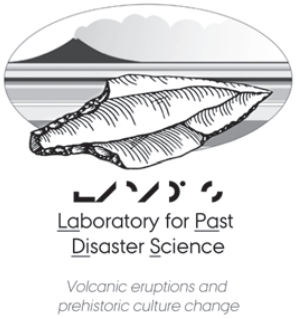

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Splendid Isolation

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/ In accordance with requirements of the Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science, the certification means that a PhD level peer has made a written assessment justifying this book's scientific quality.

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Preface

This book has been a long time in the making. I can clearly remember the rare day when – sometime in the latter half of my doctoral research – the idea come to me that my data on the size and shape of Late Glacial projectile points, the tephra fallout distribution of the Laacher See eruption and the then still new models for the loss of technological complexity may be related in interesting ways: The 'Laacher See hypothesis' was formulated. My Ph.D. research was about the period and region in question, but it was thematically quite distinct. Yet, connecting these elements turned out to be by far the most productive and controversial discovery generated from that research. Since then, for the last ten years, I have been pursuing, evaluating, testing, rejecting, and ultimately returning to this 'Laacher See hypothesis'. The project to which this book originally was linked has long since ended, but a new and bigger one is gathering pace just now. The Danish Council for Independent Research, to whom I am greatly indebted, has generously provided financing for both projects. In four years time we will know a great deal more about these curious Late Glacial foraging societies, about the Laacher See eruption, and how we might be able to articulate it with contemporary concerns of catastrophe and climate change.

Colleagues and friends too many to name have played a part in shaping this book throughout the years. Nick Conard invited me to present in Tübingen and advised me to frame the notion of impact as a hypothesis. You may not remember it, Nick, but that was a great idea. Erik Brinch Petersen, Mikkel Sørensen and Kristoffer Buck Pedersen have been stimulating interlocutors; always pointing the way towards where I need to turn my attention. Early on, Oli Bazely and Jeff Wheeler willingly collaborated, and volcanologists Claire Horwell, Peter Baxter as well as Clive Oppenheimer generously shared their expertise. Clive also welcomed me at the Department of Geography back in Cambridge when I was on research leave. Ofer Bar-Yosef kindly sponsored my prolonged stay at Harvard's Department of Anthropology, where most of this book was written. My colleagues at Aarhus University have been supportive throughout, and I sincerely cherish the collegiate environment we have built up. At Aarhus University Press, Sanne Lind Hansen has shown the necessary patience to nurse this project to completion.

Throughout researching for and writing this book, I have also been so fortunate to become father to two lovely boys. So a substantive thanks goes, of course, to my wife Christina, to Alexander and to Oskar for going along with my particular interests. Thanks to all.

Højbjerg, March 2017

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Front page inset image: When Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*, and Turner painted his famous red sunsets, they were strongly inspired by the unusual natural phenomena generated in the wake of the eruption of Tambora volcano (Indonesia) in 1815. These works of material culture are examples of the complex effects that far-away volcanic eruptions can have on people entirely unaware of such causal connections. The inset is based on a landscape painting by Janus La Cour (1837-1909) depicting Moesgård beach near Moesgård Manor, where the Aarhus University Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies is housed and where I have my office. The painting is modified towards the red scale as if it was bathed in a volcanic sunset (Zerefos, et al. 2014), and brings the far-field effects of volcanic eruptions right home. This is what a distant volcanic eruption might look from where I live. The inset image was constructed by Kristoffer Akselbo.

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