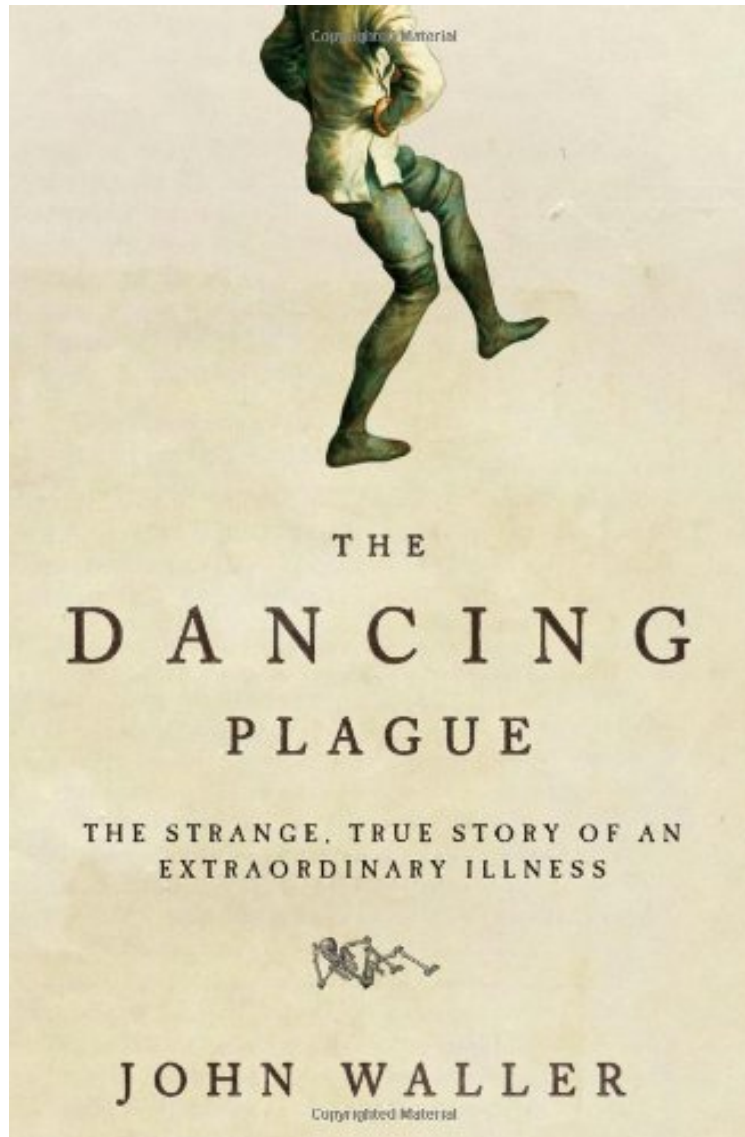


# The Dancing Plague: The Strange, True Story of an Extraordinary Illness

*John Waller*

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**John Waller : The Dancing Plague: The Strange, True Story of an Extraordinary Illness** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Dancing Plague: The Strange, True Story of an Extraordinary Illness:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Good, informative history written with a somewhat scholarly bentBy James A. WhiteJohn Waller is a great storyteller, and he certainly makes history interesting and scientific history, in

particular, accessible. This excellent little account of a forgotten dancing epidemic in 1518 Strasbourg is well-written, informative, and interpretive of the history. As a previous reviewer noted, it's an excellent synthesis of fact, interpretation, and myth. Waller evokes the hardships, struggles, and ever-present religious atmosphere of late medieval Europe to develop his theory about the causes of the illness that plagued thousands of people in a few separate epidemics during the Middle Ages. The story is very well-told and supplied with plenty of facts and good research. Though it's meant to be a "lay" book, and it's certainly very readable and should be of interest to a wide audience, the only reason I gave it four stars instead of five was, in my opinion, the somewhat spotty footnotes. Waller certainly cites many of his sources, but at times, I found myself wondering where he got his information. The only other detraction from the book is the final chapter, in which Waller delves into more modern interpretations of trance. Waller is a scientific historian and not an anthropologist or a psychologist; thus, I felt this section of the book was weaker than the others, if still interesting. Bottom line: A good interpretation of a fascinating, little-known history, fleshed out with facts. Although more citations and a reworking of the last chapter would make it even better, these points should not deter you from picking up a copy of this book and enjoying it. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great Read! By The West Family Got this for Christmas. I have a degree in history and weird history has always fascinated me. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By JCThanks

A gripping tale of one of history's most bizarre events, and what it reveals about the strange possibilities of human nature In the searing July heat of 1518, Frau Troffea stepped into the streets of Strasbourg and began to dance. Bathed in sweat, she continued to dance. Overcome with exhaustion, she stopped, and then resumed her solitary jig a few hours later. Over the next two months, roughly four hundred people succumbed to the same agonizing compulsion. At its peak, the epidemic claimed the lives of fifteen men, women, and children a day. Possibly 100 people danced to their deaths in one of the most bizarre and terrifying plagues in history. John Waller compellingly evokes the sights, sounds, and aromas; the diseases and hardships; the fervent supernaturalism and the desperate hedonism of the late medieval world. Based on new evidence, he explains why the plague occurred and how it came to an end. In doing so, he sheds light on the strangest capabilities of the human mind and on our own susceptibility to mass hysteria.

From Publishers Weekly In Strasbourg in 1518, a dance craze began that, far from being a mere fashion, was a form of hysteria in which people literally danced themselves to death. The plague began on July 14, 1518, when Frau Troffea stepped into the streets of Strasbourg and danced madly for hours despite extreme exhaustion and swollen, bleeding feet. In the end, over 100 people died of what came to be known as St. Vitus's dance. What caused this dancing plague? In his sometimes compelling and often superficial tale, Michigan State medical historian Waller draws on fresh historical evidence to recreate a society stricken by famine, in which illness was seen as a punishment from God, and laypeople resented the corruption of priests and nobles. These factors resulted in hysteria that contributed to the dance plague, and Waller concludes that the dancers entered a deep trance that enabled them to dance through their exhaustion. But compared with other historical examinations of mass hysteria, Waller's analysis lacks breadth and depth; a shame, given the fascinating material he has to work with. (Sept.) Copyright copy; Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. "An original, curious subject rendered in readable prose." - Kirkus About the Author John Waller is an Assistant Professor of the History of Medicine at Michigan State University and an honorary research fellow at Harvard University. He is the author of five books, including *Einstein's Luck*, and has written for several history journals.