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“Dissolving Bodies in Byzantium”

The Byzantines delighted in liturgical celebrations. In sermons and song, Biblical characters would come to life in new ways. Would not such ritual literature focus on spiritual matters, and bracket bodies? Or would it not at least render their limbs beautiful, veiled and immaculate? This paper explores the story of Lazarus, as it is treated in liturgical texts. Lazarus was the man whom Christ raised from the dead. How do the Byzantine authors relate to the fact that “already there is a stench [from Lazarus’s body] because he has been dead four days,” as his sister Martha explains (according to John 11.39)? In other words, how did liturgical writers make bodies dissolve? And what purpose does it serve to let bodies disintegrate in church?