

## The conservation project

The conservation of the fourteen icons in question was an important prerequisite for the successful organization of the exhibition in Thessaloniki. A new project on the conservation of the icons was initiated. The project started in 2008 and was planned to be completed in 2010. Several partners took part:

- The National Art Gallery in Sofia, which was responsible for the icon collection as owner or custodian of most of the icons.<sup>1</sup>
- The Municipality Museum in the town of Nessebar, owner of some of the icons.<sup>2</sup>
- The Byzantine Museum in Thessaloniki, which held the exhibition on its premises.<sup>3</sup>
- The European Centre for Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Monuments (EKBMM) in Thessaloniki, which initiated this project and was responsible for the preliminary investigation and technical examination of the icons.<sup>4</sup>
- A team of Bulgarian conservators, who were in charge of the conservation work on the icons.
- The A.G. Leventis Foundation, which supported the conservation financially.<sup>5</sup>
- The Association of Conservator-restorers in Bulgaria (ACB), whose experts were members of an external supervision commission.<sup>6</sup>

At the very beginning, the conservation project was faced with the need for substantial funding. The overall budget of the project received strong financial support from the A.G. Leventis Foundation.

Four major stages of the conservation project were defined:

- technical examination and analysis, necessary for successful conservation treatment;
- conservation treatment;
- presentation of the icons to the Bulgarian public prior to the exhibition in Thessaloniki;
- publication of the results of the conservation project.

## Technical examination

At the start of the project, only very limited data were available on the materials and technology of the fourteen icons. The previous conservation treatment had not been fully documented photographically and the few photographs available were mostly B&W. The conservation reports from the National Art Gallery archives provided very little information. Some, but not all, of the icons had been subjected to X-ray investigation. No results of chemical analysis were available. A new examination and analysis of the icons prior to the treatment was imperative. The Director of the Byzantine Museum in Thessaloniki