

## **BYZANTINE AND CHRISTIAN MUSEUM and Villa Ilissia**

The Byzantine and Christian Museum, which is based in Athens, is one of Greece's national museums. Its areas of competency are centered on –but not limited to– religious art facts of the Early Christian, Byzantine, Medieval, post-Byzantine and later periods which it exhibits, but also acquires, receives, preserves, conserves, records, documents, researches, studies, publishes and raises awareness of.

The museum, has over 25.000 art facts in its possession. These date from between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century AD, and their provenance encompasses the entire Greek world, as well as regions in which Hellenism flourished. The size and range of the collections and value of the exhibits makes the Museum a veritable treasury of Byzantine and post-Byzantine art and culture.

The Villa Ilissia, which nowadays houses the Byzantine and Christian Museum, is one of the loveliest buildings erected in Athens during its early years as capital of the newly-founded Greek State. When Athens was officially declared the capital, in 1834, it as a town of some 7000 souls. Within two years, however, its population has doubled, as the new administrative authorities were installed here and many new inhabitants arrived from all over Greece and other countries too. From 1837, among the newcomers to the city, was Sophie de Marbois-Lebrun, Duchess of Plaisance (or Piacenza). The Duchess commissioned the architect Stamatis Kleanthis to construct a total of six buildings in Athens and its environs, including the Castello Phododaphni on Penteli and the Villa Ilissia, her winter palace.

