



FONDAZIONE BANCA DEL MONTE DI LOMBARDIA

Pavia e la sua provincia



4-Basilica of San Michele

The basilica of San Michele was built after the earthquake of 1117 on a previous basilica, whose origins are lost in time. It is certain though, that it was strictly tied to the court and that it witnessed the passing of Gothic, Longobardian and Frank kings along its magnificent naves. Here took place the crowning ceremonies of the antique Italian kings: from that of Berengario, who was the first in 888 and that of Federico Barbarossa in 1155, the same year that the new basilica was consecrated.

Built according to the standards of the lombardian romanesque style, the basilica is oriented: in the sense that the apse is towards the Orient, east, where the light of Christ came from. The typology of the three facades is also Romanesque hut shaped: the principle one, richly decorated by bands of bas-relief; also the minor ones, on the sides. Exactly across the beautiful, sculpted portal, that opens onto the façade of the northern transept, the future sovereigns would make their entrances for the nomination ceremonies.

The sandstone is witness to the particular dignity of the basilica that, covering it almost entirely with its warm golden tones, it distinguishes it from all the other churches of Pavia. Unfortunately, the material, that comes from the Oltrepò caves, is particularly friable and, beyond having suffered the injustices of the weather and ice, in the last century it has greatly suffered the effects of pollution.

The main facade is articulated vertically by four semi pilasters that divide it into three sections. Each section, on the lower part, is open by an elegant portal. Above the portals a first order of two openings are aligned to which is added, in the central part, a second order of mono openings and then a third, constituted by two oculus' on the sides of a cross.

As a crowning, an agile lodging runs along the slopes of the roof, held up by little columns and ornated by sculptures where the arcs lean.

The inferior part of the facade is crossed by horizontal bands of bas-relief while other sculpted decorations twist around the portals.

The siren with two tails can be admired – symbol of double -, the griffons – that allude to the double nature of Christ, human and divine, and the life scenes of farmers and hunting. Together with other mythological creatures and fantasies, they peek through grape vine leafs, spirals and palm groves.

At one time, these works were revived by colours of which today only sporadic traces are left here and there. Missing role call, but their sunken roots can still be seen, are the ceramic basins that once interposed mainly the central area of the façade.

On the major portal, the archangel Saint Michael is sculpted, proprietor of the basilica, in the act of trampling on the dragon.

On the minor ones instead, are the figures of Saint Eleucadio, bishop of Ravenna, and Saint Ennodio, bishop of Pavia.

Underneath each of the skylights is an angel with its grand wings folded being the intermediary between the devoted and God.

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