

The Sacra di San Michele, sometimes known as Saint Michael's Abbey, is a religious complex on Mount Pirchiriano, situated in northwestern Italy. The abbey, which for much of its history was under Benedictine rule, is now entrusted to the Rosminians. Little is known of the early years of the abbey. The oldest extant account is that of a monk, William, who lived here in the late 11th century. He says in his writings, that the foundation of the abbey was in 966.

What is certain is that what is now the crypt was built in the late 10th century. According to tradition, this building was constructed by the hermit Saint Giovanni Vincenzo at the behest of the archangel Michael to whom he was particularly devoted; and the building materials which the hermit had collected were transported miraculously to the top of the mountain.

In addition, it is noted that the cult of St. Michael, the archangel who warred with Lucifer, typically bases its churches on pinnacles or hard to reach places, for example, Mont Saint-Michel in France. In the following years a small edifice was added, which could house a small community of monks and some pilgrims. Later the abbey developed under the Benedictine rule, constructed a separate building with guest-rooms for pilgrims. The monastery fell into decline and was finally suppressed in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV. It remained abandoned until 1835, when King Charles Albert and the Pope asked Antonio Rosmini to restore and repopulate it. It is currently under the care of the Rosminians. The church is located atop a rocky crag base and towers above the valley.

The church façade leads to a staircase, the *Scalone dei Morti* ("Stairway of the Dead"), flanked by arches, niches and tombs in which, until recent times, skeletons of dead monks were visible (hence the name). At the top of the 243 steps is the marble *Porta dello Zodiaco*, a masterwork of 12th century sculpture. The church itself is accessed by a Romanesque portal in grey and green stone, built in the early 11th century. The church has a nave and two aisles, and features elements of both Gothic and Romanesque architecture. On the left wall is a large fresco portraying the *Annunciation* (1505). The complex includes the ruins of the 12th-15th centuries monastery, which had five floors. It ends with the *Torre della Bell'Alda* ("Tower of the Beautiful Alda") The so-called "Monks' Sepulchre" is probably the remains of a chapel reproducing, in its octagonal plan, the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

