

# CHARLEMAGNE & ROME: DISCOVERING A LOST RENAISSANCE

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It's really hot today. It is one of those days of May in which summer seems to have pushed spring away. We are waiting for a key. After a few minutes, a keeper arrives and opens a little gate: we walk down a few steps and, slowly, we pass through thousands of years of history. You will never be able to say that you know everything about Rome: it will always surprise you, there will be everytime something to discover, that you didn't know before. While over our heads the traffic is flowing, we attend to a little miracle of urban archaeology: the early medieval houses in the Forum of Nerva are waiting for us, even if they are neglected every day by the rest of the world. But we must be very quick, because this area is not open to the public, we are not allowed much time, and it is very hot... Only twenty minutes, maybe less, then we must leave the archaeological site. Prof. Hodges and Prof. Mitchell are trying to use every single moment, in order to understand the importance of those buildings, but the keeper is waiting for them at the top of the stairs. He gently tells them off with his eyes: they should be a little bit faster. Some hours before, at S. Maria Antiqua, the charm of the place was also ruined by the same problem: we had to complete our visit in only fifteen minutes.



*An early-medieval house in the Forum of Nerva*

This is just a brief summary of what happened during the second day of a Masterclass organised by The American University of Rome, in partnership with the "Istituto Italiano di Studi Germanici" and "Zètema",

and with the financial support of “Fondazione Roma”: “[Turning Charlemagne into an Asset for Rome](#)”. The purpose of this course was to show to a group of professionals and students how to define, conceptualize and market a “cultural” asset. The Masterclass program had been well designed: during the first and the second day there were lectures, led by some important professors and introduced by Prof. Richard Hodges, in order to discuss which relationship there was between Charlemagne and Rome and which were the most important events and places of the Carolingian Rome (we were able to see some of them: S. Maria Antiqua, SS. Quattro Coronati, the Forum of Nerva, Crypta Balbi Museum); the main subject of the remaining days was “marketing”, with lectures, introduced by Prof. Peter Gould, useful to understand what a “cultural asset” is, and how to define and conceptualize it. Then, we were ready to achieve the real aim of the Masterclass: making a touristic project to value the Carolingian Rome. We suggested creating some urban itineraries, in order to help tourists to discover and visit the most important carolingian monuments and places around the city. What is really fascinating about this project it’s the fact that we already have these itineraries, made in the VIII and IX Century: the Einsiedeln Itinerary. We could suggest to the modern tourists to follow the itineraries of the medieval pilgrims. Through modern technologies (the internet, web sites, an App, etc.) we could easily reach a wide number of people, and they could discover some beautiful places to visit, in addition to St. Peter’s or the Colosseum. But are tourists really interested in Medieval Rome? On the last day of the course, we interviewed around a hundred tourists in the centre of Rome, and the result was astonishing: 85% of them wanted to know more about Medieval Rome and the Charlemagne’s Renaissance. The outcome of our work was presented to the audience during the conference “[Lost renaissance? The legacy of Charlemagne in Rome and its future](#)”, held at the “Istituto di Studi Germanici” on the last day of the Masterclass.



*The Masterclass work group*

I graduated in Italy, and this international Masterclass showed to me how we can think at Archaeology in a more modern and engaging way, compared to that I am used to. But for all of us, the participants, there was another important aspect, which didn’t leave us indifferent. We were witnesses of a clash between

two different worlds: on one side Prof. Richard Hodges, who can't understand the reason why, in Italy, we aren't able to value our incredible cultural heritage; on the other, the bureaucracy of the "Soprintendenze", unable to open up to the contemporary world. Why can't Italy value his cultural heritage? All the answers are in the anecdote I recounted at the beginning of the post: it isn't understood yet that it's a useless effort "protecting" monuments or archaeological sites without "sharing" them. If I can't discover a monument, if I can't visit and "touch" it, I will struggle to consider it something of mine, something I should preserve and defend. "Communicating" and "sharing". These are characteristics which give value to every story, and should be important for disciplines like Archaeology and History: otherwise, monuments will remain just a cultural and moral ruin.

[Turning Charlemagne into an Asset for Rome Masterclass \(Conference Video\)](#)