

the first Australian Labor government in 23 years, which encouraged the development of organisations advocating ethnic rights. Finally, the 1970s also saw the arrival in Australia of a new 'post-68' generation of Italian migrants – educated and above all politically conscious. In these very favourable circumstances, FILEF was able to establish its branches, coagulate the diverse sections of the Italian Left in Australia, and start lobbying in favour of the Italo-Australian working class. Through FILEF, hundreds of Italian migrants either began or continued their political activism and were involved in social and cultural activities. FILEF, with the decisive support of the PCI, not only stoked the political consciousness of migrants, but also contributed to their cultural growth.

What emerges throughout the book is the importance of Ignazio Salemi to FILEF's development in Australia. A PCI cadre, Salemi arrived in the country as a FILEF official in early 1974, tasked by the party with promoting the Italian migrant and communist causes. This he did, using his organisational skills to expand and intensify FILEF's political and cultural activities. In the final part of the book, Battiston looks at the media controversy provoked by a 1975 article in the Melbourne-based *Age* newspaper, which suggested that Italian communists (Salemi was named and pictured) were trying to take control of the city's Italian community. The article provoked a wave of anti-communist hysteria that led to cuts in federal government funding and, eventually, to Salemi's deportation in 1977.

In general, Italian-Australian migrant studies have looked at issues such as cultural maintenance, settlement and social integration, neglecting post-war ethnic political activity. Battiston's study responds to this gap in Italian-Australian historiography. Battiston provides us with a picture of the difficulties faced and the results obtained by the political activism within a small-scale community. A chronology of events and a section of 46 pictures conclude this well-researched volume, which represents a successful example of micro-historical research.

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**La Repubblica del Presidente. Gli anni di Carlo Azeglio Ciampi 1999–2006**, by Rosario Forlenza, Reggio Emilia, Diabasis, 2009, x + 153 pp., €16.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-88-8103-747-6

In their analyses of the presidency of Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, political scientists have primarily focused on the implications of his repeated intervention in the drafting of government bills and, in so doing, have sought to highlight the limits of and challenges to presidential action. Historians have been more inclined to reflect on Ciampi's peculiar take on matters that required an engagement with the national past. Yet, as Forlenza notes, they have frequently criticised the presidential attempt to articulate a novel interpretation that would act as a twenty-first-century 'civic religion', often failing to see the merits of a discourse based on the notion of 'republican patriotism' aimed at helping Italians to reconnect with and take pride in the country's democratic institutions. *La Repubblica del Presidente* concisely investigates this crucial dimension of Ciampi's term, which makes this study a welcome addition to the existing scholarship.

According to Forlenza, Ciampi saw his *settennato* as an opportunity to build on the approach adopted by his predecessor Oscar Luigi Scalfaro. His presidential strategy combined aspects that are typical of the so-called ‘public use of history’. The thorough re-examination of what he believed to be the key moments in Italian history (Risorgimento, Resistenza, and Repubblica) went hand in hand with the decision to give a new lease of life to neglected republican festivals, rituals and symbols. The main case in point is obviously the anniversary of the establishment of the Italian Republic (2 June 1946). Ciampi strove to rebrand this near-forgotten anniversary, which he reinstated as a national holiday, connecting it both to the war to liberate Italy from German occupation and to the nineteenth-century movement for national independence. In other words, the President locked Italy’s present and past into a cause–effect relationship that strengthened the country’s rather weak foundation myths and legitimised its republican institutions. The decision to refashion the chief ritual that marked this anniversary – the highly contested military parade – into an event involving fire-fighters, the *Protezione Civile*, the Italian Red Cross, and a wide range of volunteers is described as having helped to transform a previously divisive event into a celebration of national cohesion that would resonate with as many Italians as possible.

Ciampi predicated his approach on the belief that the Risorgimento epitomised the ideals and passions of a selfless generation that had fought to ensure the successful completion of the process of national unification. This romanticised interpretation enabled him to draw a parallel with his own generation, thus openly suggesting that the Resistance (in which he had actively participated) should be viewed as a ‘second Risorgimento’, since the men and women who joined the war of liberation had ultimately been inspired by the same ideals, i.e. ‘the acquisition of civil rights and constitutionally granted freedoms’ (p. 17). Forlenza is correct in highlighting the weaknesses inherent in such a problematic account of the Resistance. While commending the President’s attempt to assign a ‘universal meaning’ to both periods, he warns the reader as to the manner in which this teleological reading tends to downplay their respective complexities. The risk, he notes, is that the public may view the transition from the Kingdom of Italy to the Italian Republic as a linear process. Yet, this is clearly not the case. In spite of Ciampi’s best efforts to present it as the concluding stage in a shared journey that had commenced long before the year 1945, 25 April (Liberation Day) remains haunted by longstanding divisions between the Italian Left and Right. Likewise, his courageous attempt to rebrand 8 September (Armistice Day) as the date that prompted the rebirth of the *Patria* has failed to persuade a large percentage of academics and non-academics alike to refrain from treating it as a shameful caesura in Italian history.

Ciampi’s remarks about the new meaning to be assigned to 8 September were intended as a means whereby ‘national reconciliation’ could finally be achieved. During his countless travels across Italy (the details of which appear in the last chapter of Forlenza’s study), the President often reiterated his condemnation of the choice made by those who decided to join the Social Republic. Yet, he qualified his position by noting that their fateful decisions had often been inspired by the type of ideals – the ‘love of the Fatherland’ and the ‘desire to defend national unity’ – that had led him to participate in the Resistance. Ciampi’s inclusive notion of patriotism (discussed in chapter two) has been the target of criticism, and Forlenza very effectively rebuts some of the objections made by Antonio Tabucchi (*l’Unità*, 21 October 2001) in relation to the President’s conciliatory attitude towards the *saloini*. In fact, one of the merits of this book is that it draws attention to the influence that the work of several scholars (e.g. Quentin Skinner, Philip Pettit, and Maurizio Viroli) had on the President’s decision to employ ‘constitutional patriotism’ as the foundation for his narrative of the national past.

The sources examined in this study (which comprise a considerable number of speeches given by Ciampi during his term in office, an impressive number of opinion columns and news

articles that were published in the national press, and a wide selection of secondary literature) are effective in their support of the argument put forward by Forlenza. Yet, there is little engagement with the theory behind one of the author's key concepts, that of 'civic pedagogy'. Forlenza employs the term throughout the study, without any real attempt to explore its possibilities and limitations of reference. The study also falls short of engaging with recent contributions to the field of cultural memory studies. Lastly, while the chapters work well as stand-alone essays, they each feature several repetitions and an unusually large number of typos. This gives the impression that they may have been initially intended as journal articles, and that the editorial process was perhaps rushed.

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**Graces Received: Painted and Metal Ex-votos from Italy**, edited by Rosangela Briscese and Joseph Sciorra, New York, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, 2012, 118 pp., \$35.00, ISBN 978-0-9703403-7-5

*Graces Received* originates from an exhibition of the same name held at the John D. Calandra Institute's Manhattan gallery between September 2011 and January 2012, featuring the private collection of ex-votos (votive offerings) owned by folklorist and religious studies scholar Leonard Norman Primiano.

Over the centuries, ex-votos have taken many different forms and adorned churches, chapels, sanctuaries, etc., in most Catholic countries in Europe and South America. Primiano's selection is interesting and representative, not very large in number (53 pieces in total), featuring metal and painted artworks, and covering the years 1832–1959.

The book looks very much like a catalogue of the exhibition, including all but four of the works that were on display, and is enriched by three interesting essays: 'Catholiciana Unmoored: Ex-votos in Catholic Tradition and their Commercialization as Religious Commodities', by Leonard Norman Primiano; 'Miracles in a Land of Promise: Transmigratory Experiences and Italian-American Ex-votos', by Joseph Sciorra; and 'Laminae Ex-votos: Resonant Objects, Spiritual Materialism', by Kate Wagle.

Primiano's essay is in two parts. In the first part, he illustrates what an ex-voto is, its history and its place within the Catholic tradition; in the second, he focuses on his experience as a collector of ex-votos. The first part is very informative and, together with the rich bibliography at the end of the essay, is an excellent starting point for whoever wishes to approach or deepen their knowledge of the subject. Ex-votos, as expressions of Catholic faith, spirituality and art, are the best source for investigating vernacular religion, which exists alongside – yet is independent of – the institution itself, since they are 'inspired by personal belief, created by artistic negotiators of the various traditions, and then assembled and housed around altars within the normative framework of an institutionally sanctioned Church building' (p. 15).

The second part of the essay is simply a narrative of Primiano's efforts to put together his personal collection. He recalls when he did not have enough money to travel to Italy to buy