

CONCLUSION

On the front cover of this book is an image of a coin minted in 45 B.C. It shows the speaker's platform (*rostra*) in the Roman forum, decorated with the beaks of ships captured from the Antiates in 341 B.C., and the tribunes' bench. Above the image is the name of the coiner: 'PALIKANUS'. It is an appropriate image for a book which has been concerned above all with oratory as a series of occasions which happened at specific times and places and which derived its importance from the fact of performance. However, from that perspective any image of the *rostra* would be suitable.

The *rostra* is an unusual image to have on a coin of the Republican period. Palicanus' coin was minted during Caesar's dictatorship: a period during which the normal routines and mechanisms of the Roman constitution, including popular oratory, were profoundly disturbed. On the other side of this coin, however, is a woman's head, identified by lettering on the coin as *Libertas*, freedom. This coin is thus relating popular oratory to the concept of freedom. The most obvious reference for this image is the actions of M. Lollius Palicanus, tribune of the people in 71 B.C., when he agitated for the complete restoration of tribunician rights which had been severely restricted by Sulla.¹ The moneyer, presumably his son, was thus using his office to preserve the memory of his family. But it is rather striking that this coin appears at a time when both oratory and freedom seemed, to many members of the elite, at least, to be under profound threat.

Too little is known of Palicanus and the circumstances of his coining to be sure of what he wanted his coin to mean, though it is very attractive to conclude that it is an assertion that genuine freedom has been secured through Caesar.² But what it does encapsulate in visual form is that oratory, and the possibilities of oratory, are one of the ways in which Romans thought about their state and its operation. The orators whose words and actions have formed the material for this book were concerned for much of their time with private concerns: their reputation in relation to their rivals, their successes and failures in the courts, their capacity to attract the support of the people or the emperor. Ultimately, however, oratory at Rome was at the heart of how those who ran the Roman state understood their

¹ M. Crawford (1974: 482–483).

role, their importance, and their identity. The surviving written speeches give us a literary genre containing examples of great power and skill; full understanding of why that power and skill matter is grounded in the locations of Roman oratory and in the occasions when men spoke there.

² See Weinstock (1971: 133–142) for Caesar’s appeal to *libertas*.