In Plato's day, the Greek city of Syracuse was one of the most powerful polities in the Mediterranean. The great Athenian philosopher visited the court of the tyrants of Sicily several times. The nature of his actual dealings there have been debated extensively by modern scholars. Even in antiquity, Plato's admirers and detractors held widely divergent opinions about his reasons for involvement and the effects of his political activity there. Was he an idealist hoping for a better future for the Greeks, or an opportunistic tyrant flatterer? A loyal friend to lovers of philosophy or an incompetent meddler who brought down those who put their hope in him? Matters are made difficult both because Plato’s trips to Sicily became the stuff of legend in later ancient authors, and because the authenticity of the most important primary text, a letter numbered 7 in Plato's epistolary collection, has been frequently challenged in modern times. The consensus appears to have shifted against Plato's authorship of the letter. In this talk, I present some new reasons why we should take it more seriously as a genuinely Platonic historical document.

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