Ancient wonders? There are many but too little-considered is the Temple of the Tooth, the Buddha’s tooth. It was in a shrine, on the high plateau of Kandy in the centre of Ceylon. The tooth was coveted by many as the constant pilgrim flow showed. They had come to worship from as far away as Burma a thousand years ago. Many kings and emperors had dared to acquire that treasure, that tooth of the great Buddha, that sacred thing. They had thought it had magic potential and so the king of Ceylon prospered, selling elephant teeth at exhorbitant prices. And if taken away the tooth would return always flying back through the air, leaving behind a simulacrum. And today, the one and only tooth is still there in a golden box within a box within an ascending scale of boxes. But it is no longer an elephant’s molar having grown into an elephant’s tusk. Is it any wonder that when you rub his tummy, the Buddha doesn’t smile?

GIOVANNI MALITO