The exhibition, *Mani—The Lost Religion of Light*, hosted by the Chester Beatty Library to coincide with the Seventh International Conference of Manichaean Studies (Dublin), was the first public exhibition on this subject and a first for the IAMS. The exhibition raised many issues regarding the interpretation of such complex material; for the small academic community which knew its contents well and therefore might find an exhibition aimed at the general public a gross reduction of years of academic toil to crass simplification; for the general public who may not have engaged with such material before and for whom the subject matter, Mani, was a novelty and his religion, an esoteric concoction of unbelievably complex belief systems.

While *prima facie* the exhibition had to take into account what the texts represented for the history of philosophy and ideas, it also needed to explain how Alfred Chester Beatty (1875–1968) had acquired such material. The exhibition however had other stories to tell concerning the modern history of the collection and the extraordinary efforts made by its owner, several academics and, most importantly, the original conservators, all of whom helped preserve these ancient manuscripts and bring their contents to light. The collection’s later history during the Second World War and its aftermath proved to be the most accessible element for the public and the press.

Modern students of Manichaeism owe a profound debt to Chester Beatty for his preservation of these ancient texts. His library holds the world’s largest collection of Mani’s writings in the Coptic language and while the collection has been known to the scholarly community since its discovery in the late 1920s, its existence was largely unnoticed and its importance unappreciated by the general public.

* The exhibition could not have taken place without the assistance and support of Prof. Dr. Siegfried Richter (Münster) and I would like to record my sincere thanks for all his endeavours.
Even as a student of manuscript studies in Dublin, I had never come into contact with such ancient material until my appointment to the staff of the Library in 1990. Almost at once, before I had even a chance to absorb what was before me, I received a delegation of Manichaean scholars; Professors Søren Giversen and Martin Krause, accompanied by their very young students, Nils Arne Pedersen, Siegfried Richter and Gregor Wurst. Their ambitious publication plans would renew academic interest in the collection and as their work progressed over the decade, their publications would provide new avenues for scholarly interpretation of these ancient texts. Other Manichaean scholars would soon follow as attention was drawn again to this collection.

The relationship between scholar(s) and curator proved an important catalyst for promoting this collection. Without users, a collection stagnates, even in well-endowed institutions; consigned to ‘lesser-used’ status, akin to a state of Purgatory, waiting patiently to be re-discovered. Without a curator, a collection is marginalised as financial and other resources are targeted on those collections which are promoted by their custodians. It may appear strange, but Library or Museum collections need lobbyists to persuade financial-controllers of their importance. The uniqueness of a collection can never be taken for granted and for a collection like the Coptic Manichaean manuscripts of the Chester Beatty Library, promotion was difficult, particularly when there was no local university department to nurture such a collection. Once the International Association for Manichaean Studies had agreed to the invitation to come to Dublin, the Chester Beatty Library was committed to promoting an exhibition of its Manichaean collection.

Strategically the 1990s will be seen as one of the most important decades in the history of the Chester Beatty Library. It began in dire financial and other circumstances and ended in triumph, as the Library was transformed by its new Director, Professor Michael Ryan from one of Ireland’s neglected cultural institutions into one that would win national and later international awards for excellence in its field. Hosting the conference and the associated exhibition was only made possible by these new facilities enjoyed by the Library since it moved location from its former home to Dublin Castle.

As the transformation was taking place, I was encouraged to attend the Fourth International Conference in Berlin (1997) where I witnessed for myself the interest in the Chester Beatty Manichaean collection among the scholarly community. The conference and associated visit to see the Berlin Manichaean collection proved enlightening as it was here that the late Prof Hans-Martin Schenke displayed ‘the Chester Beatty turf’ to the delegates. On reporting this to the Trustees of the Library on my return, they immediately agreed that the Director and I should open discussions with our colleagues in Berlin for