Not all hymns cleave the skies with shouts of praise; some are secret, “hidden in silence,” considered essentially spiritual acts, and yet borrow their name from the louder part of ritual performances. This is the case with the hymns in the XIIIth Hermetic Tractate and in the Hermetic Nag Hammadi text On the Eighth and the Ninth (NHC VI, 52–63), and probably also with the hymns and hymn-like passages in other parts of Hermetic literature. A brief survey of the occurrences of hymns in the Corpus Hermeticum and related texts\footnote{Corpus Hermeticum I–IV (ed. Arthur D. Nock & A.-J. Festugiere; Paris: Société d’édition “Les Belles lettres”, 1945–54). There is an excellent English translation: Brian P. Copenhaver, Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation, with Notes and Introduction (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) with a learned and bibliographically meticulous commentary. For the Coptic text On the Eighth and the Ninth, cf. Martin Krause & Pahor Labib, Gnostische und hermetische Schriften aus Codex II und Codex VI (Abhandlungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Kairo. Koptische Reihe 2; Glückstadt: J. J. Augustin, 1971), 170–84 with German translation. Cf. also the edition (with English translation) by Peter A. Dirkse, James Brashler & Douglas M. Parrott in The Coptic Gnostic Library (ed. James M. Robinson; Vol. 3; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 341–73.} may be the best way to present the scope of this paper:

Towards the end of the Poimandres (CH I, 31–32), when the “I” of the text has obtained gnosis through the teachings of Poimandres and has even become a preacher of the new insight himself, he is said to “give praise (eulogia) to God the father out of his soul and all his strength.” Then follows a ninefold hymnic veneration of God as hagios, three times in the third, and then six times in the second person. This litany is consecrated as “a pure sacrifice in words,” and followed by a prayer in which the adept petitions never to fall away from gnosis, pledges to work for the illumination of those in agnoia, and affirms his own journey into life and light. The repeated hagios may reflect the praise of the seraphim in Isa 6:3 and other Jewish texts; indeed, much of the form and the vocabulary of the text suggests substantial influence from Hellenistic Judaism.\footnote{C. H. Dodd, The Bible and the Greeks (London: Hodder & Stoughton, (1935) 1964), 194–200.}
The Fifth tractate of *Corpus Hermeticum* (CH V, 10–11) deals with God and nature, and not least the role of contemplation; in continuation of these teachings it concludes with a subtle mixture of considerations on the impossibility of praise together with the offering of an actual hymn. The intellectual character of the hymn provides a clue, to which we shall return, pointing to the role of hymns in these texts in general.

In the XIIIth tractate—R. Reitzenstein’s famous “Lesemysterium”—the long hymn likewise occurs towards the end, in CH XIII, 17–20, as a secret text that Tat learns from his father Hermes Trismegistus. It is the final lesson in a progressive religious education, and it puts Tat in a position to extend his own praise to God from his own heart. It is quite obvious from the context that the performance of the hymn coincides with the spiritual breakthrough of the adept, in this case Tat, but potentially any devoted reader of the text. In addition, Reitzenstein observed a certain ritual character, perhaps a progressive initiatory structure, in the text. Both observations contributed to his idea of the *Lesemysterium*, a text that performs a mystery initiation on its reader and at the same time causes an illumination of his mind. He emphasized that the text was also a *Lehrschrift* and thus combined teaching with performance.3

Reitzenstein’s idea continues to be of interest in the study of Hermetic and Gnostic texts,4 and justly so, but it was probably never a very precise idea. If a *Lesemysterium* is a text that combines spiritual teaching (which may be instrumental towards the spiritual breakthrough of its reader) with ritual performance, then what exactly identifies it as a ritual performance? While Reitzenstein seems to have thought in terms of structures of initiation, a more obvious answer, at least in CH XIII, is the hymn itself. The hymn is a well-known element in the liturgy of all the traditions relevant to the formation of Hermetism, and when the hymn addresses gods and other entities, it establishes the dramatic interpersonal element pointed out by Jan Assmann as characteristic of hymns.5 To address somebody, gods or humans, is also by implication to establish a here and now

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3 Richard Reitzenstein, *Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1927), 52 and 64.