



The Necromantic Magic Circle

A Study of the Different Elements that Comprise a Magic Circle and their Functions



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Abstract

This thesis researches the phenomenon of magic circles in five medieval and early modern necromantic magical manuscripts. This study aimed to answer the question what elements comprised magic circles and which functions these different elements had. Although there are many different elements that comprise a circle, there are a few compulsory elements. The first is the circular outer band, the second the inscriptions which consist of names of God which were marked by crosses. Other elements were optional, these were mostly the elements which came through the influence of astral magic.

Key words: Magic, Magic circles, astral magic, necromancy, Sloane 3850, 3853, 3854, Additional 36674, Folger Shakespeare V.b.26.

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Introduction

During the Middle Ages magic was present in several forms throughout several cultures. Magic was a broad term used by theologians to describe all rituals dealing with occult powers. The Christian culture in England also featured magic. Christian cosmology assigned power to demons and angels and it was believed that they could be controlled by magical practitioners (Page 5). The most common form of magic present during the early middle ages was necromancy. At first necromancy meant “divination by means of communicating with the dead.” (Page 6). The term was derived from the Greek *Νεκρος* meaning dead, and *μαντεία* meaning divination. The people who practiced this form of magic were called necromancers and were defined by Isidore of Seville as “Necromantii sunt, quorum recantationibus videntur resuscitati mortui divinare, et ad interrogate respondere.”¹. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries magical texts of different cultures were translated into Latin and spread throughout Europe. New forms of magic influenced the already existing necromancy and the term became corrupted. Its original definition changed, necromancy no longer was a term that derived from the Greek *Νεκρος*, meaning dead, but became a term derived from “nigros”, meaning black. Therefore, the term necromancy no longer specifically meant the conjuring of dead people, but rather the conjuring of demons through complex rituals (Page 6). Necromantic magic came to be known as explicit demonic magic (*Magic in the Middle Ages* 152).

Evidence of magic being practiced has mostly survived in the form of magical manuscripts and other magical documents. These magical manuscripts often took the form of grimoires. They were actual guidebooks for practicing magicians to practice their magic. There were also some more philosophical handbooks that have survived. An example of this is Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa’s *De Occulta Philosophia*. It was a magical handbook which was focussed more on the philosophical side of magic than its practical side. It was meant as a contribution to the discussion about the powers of magic, instead of an actual manual of ritual magic.

According to Robert Mathiesen ritual magic can be seen as an art form. Like any other form of art, ritual magic uses patterns and symbols which are universally part of human culture and thus, according to Mathiesen, “they are also universals of magic”. These patterns

¹ Translation: “Necromancers are those by whose incantations the dead, having been resuscitated, seem to divine the future and reply to questions put to them.” Translated by Burnett in “Talismans: Magic as Science? Necromancy among the seven liberal arts.”

can be meaningless and the symbols meaningful, or the other way around, yet both are important to create magic, as it is with art in general (Mathiesen 89). Magic is as Frank Klaassen states “inextricably bound up with the issue of representation in spoken words, visual signs or physical gestures.” (33). One feature of necromantic magic was the fact that they incorporated magic circles into their rituals. These were often “stand-alone images constructed from names, symbols, characters, and liturgical language fitted into geometrical shapes, which were usually circular” (Page 33). These magical circles had a very specific iconography which identified them as a visual aspect of the ritual. Many of the magical manuscripts that have survived contain these types of necromantic circles. This specific iconography of magic circles is the subject of this research.

Throughout popular culture it has been their iconography which has made the magic circle a well-known image; bright colours and mysterious symbols fill a black background. Besides this well-known image, which has mostly become associated with astrological elements, there is another one. There is the image of the magician and his apprentice in their magic circle cast on the ground as they practice their magic. An example of this is the 2010 film *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. Before any magic can be practiced by the new apprentice he needs to stand inside a magic circle. A more recent example is the 2016 film *Dr. Strange* where the title character uses magic circles to do magic. The image of magic circles goes back to medieval times when Christopher Marlowe published *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* (1604). This is the first instance in popular culture where the magic circle is used in the way it used in contemporary culture. The story has the first detailed use of a magic circle by a sorcerer as a means of protection. What is curious about this depiction is that Doctor Faustus shows the use of this magic circle which was not detailed in magical manuscripts that were in circulation during this time. It is this image of Doctor Faustus in his magic circle, protected from the spirits he conjures that has pervaded popular culture ever since. However, it is not clear where this image has come from.

There are three different kinds of circles to be distinguished: circles on objects, circles to be drawn on the body, and circles drawn on the ground. The latter two categories are perishables, they have only survived through primary documentation. The first category is the one that has been researched most. It is also the only category of which archaeological evidence has been found; making these types of circles easier to research. The actual circles inside the objects help scholars discover their purposes and gives them clear examples of how these circles looked in practice. In the case of the circles that had to be drawn on a surface the only evidence that can be found is in magical documents. Not all of these documents have

survived and a lot of information about these circles has been lost. Yet there are still quite a few manuscripts which contain magic circles. The interesting thing is that they are unique and different in every manuscript. The iconography and elements that comprise a magic circle vary immensely. This is what makes them an interesting topic for research.

Magic circles have not been researched extensively. Richard Kieckhefer is one of the few scholars to have discussed them. He has written about them on two different accounts. His book *Magic in the Middle Ages* (1989) discusses rituals for conjuring spirits used in medieval magic. It is in this context that he begins to speak of magic circles. However, his explanation of magic circles is exactly one paragraph long. He describes magic circles as:

“[they] may be traced on the ground with a sword or a knife, or else inscribed on a piece of parchment or cloth. Sometimes they are simple geometrical forms with perhaps a few words or characters inscribed about the circumference. More often, however, they are complex, with inscriptions and symbols of various kinds inside, positions of various magical objects, and a designated place for ‘the master’.” (159).

As can be discovered from the passage above it is a very general description of magic circles. He explains some actual circles from manuscripts, for example he uses a circle found in a fifteenth century manuscript. He goes on to explain what is seen on the drawing of the circle, but there are no definitive features derived. In his later work *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (1997) there is an entire chapter dedicated to magic circles. This chapter is divided into several aspects of a magic circle. Firstly, he discusses the form of a circle. Next he explains the function of the circle. Afterwards he discusses circles in relation to astral magic, i.e. magic to do with celestial bodies. What is interesting is that in this chapter he notes that circles were possibly used as a protective measure. In his earlier book (1989) he said that circles were not meant for protection but were meant to give the magician power. In this chapter, he creates the basis for a theory about magic circles and their uses. He lists the recurring elements and tries to create a general rule for magic circles. He does that by studying the *Munich Manual*, a fifteenth century magical manuscript.

Interestingly enough, most magic circles discussed are being discussed by contemporary practicing magicians. Although they are not academics, they research Medieval and Early Modern magical manuscripts and create either grimoires or magical handbooks to

instruct practicing magicians. These grimoires contain the same magic circles and offer explanations on how they are to be constructed and used in practice. These books quote extensively from medieval magical documents and explain the numerological elements of circles, or at least how the contemporary magicians have interpreted it. These kinds of grimoires are very popular among contemporary practising magicians. Their works however cannot always be regarded as scholarly. Although these grimoires and handbooks quote from medieval magical manuscripts these sources will not be used for this thesis.

This thesis will aim to fill this gap about magic circles in medieval magic academic research. Many medieval magical documents have survived to this day and contain evidence necromantic circles. These circles were often intricate and unique and each manuscript contained different types of circles which all needed to be constructed in different ways. There appeared to be no definite way in which magicians would make their magic circles when they conjured spirits. Therefore this thesis will look at five magical manuscripts which were selected on the basis of being vernacular manuscripts and dating from the late sixteenth century to the early seventeenth century. Three of the chosen manuscripts came from the Sloane collection: London, British Library, Sloane 3850; London, British Library, Sloane 3853; London, British Library, Sloane 3854. The fourth chosen manuscript was the Washington D.C., Folger Shakespeare Library, V.b.26. Finally, the last chosen manuscript was the London, British Library, Additional 36674. These manuscripts will be looked at in light of Kieckhefer's theory about magic circles formed in his book *Forbidden Rites*. This research will try to see if this theory is applicable to Late Medieval and Early Modern manuscripts as well. It will also try and form a more encompassing theory about the elements that comprise a magic circle and their functions.

Chapter 1: Construction and Location

Magical manuscripts often contained instructions for the construction of magic circles. In some cases these instructions specifically stated with which material the circle had to be drawn or its location. The type of material stood in correlation with the place of construction. It depended on which type of surface the circle was drawn on. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa stated that a magic circle had to be made in a place that was “mundus, castus, occlusus, quietus, semotusque ab omni strepitu, nullis alienis aspectibus subiectus.”² (IV). This meant that there were multiple possible locations for the construction of a magical circle both inside and outside.

Richard Kieckhefer noted that the circles described in *Liber iuratus* and *The Negromancia* had to be drawn with chalk on the ground (171). Although a magic circle could be constructed with different materials, it seemed that chalk was the preferred material for those that had to be constructed inside a chamber or room. Occasionally the type of room was specified in the instructions. In other cases it was only stated that a circle had to be constructed outside. The instructions could also feature the dimensions of a circle. In these instances a circle needed to have specific measurements, indicated either in the instructions themselves or near its drawing. However, this was not a common occurrence. These different kinds of instructions concerning the construction of the circles indicates that they could be made in various ways. The circles themselves were extremely varied in their purposes and this was reflected in their construction.

1.1 Sloane Manuscripts

The Dannel is a magical book which is situated in the Sloane 3853 manuscript. It contains several circles which have detailed instructions for their construction. Most commonly these instructions stated with which type of material the circles had to be made. The first of these cases is found on folio 182v (fig. 6). It had to be traced in the ground with “a Sallowe wande that is of a yerris shote right and fayer of the yellovest” (182r). The circles on folio 184v (fig. 7) and 213v (fig. 13) both explicitly state in the running text of the manuscript that the circles had to be drawn with chalk. For example, for the circle on 213v the magician is instructed to “make this portrayture with chalke right as it is” (213r).

² Translation: “clean, pure, close, quiet, free from all maner of noise, and not subject to any strangers sight.” Translated by Robert Turner (London, 1655).

Apart from the instructions concerning the type of material, some circles were accompanied by instructions for their locations. The first circle in *The Dannel* on folio 182v (fig. 6) had to be made somewhere outside, because it had to be traced in the ground with a stick and had to have “a wall of the northesyd of the spyryt that the sonne maye rebound from the wall unto the spryt” (181v). In addition to the location of construction, there were also instructions for the dimensions of the circle. Underneath the drawing of the circle the scribe stated that “this sircle must be 14 fote or there a bout” (182v). There are several other circles accompanied by instructions stating that they have to be constructed inside. For example, the circle on folio 213v (fig. 12) has to be drawn on the floor of an “owt house that is prime” but the magician would have had to clean the floor beforehand (213v). Another example is the circle on folio 184v (fig. 7). Although it is accompanied by few instructions, it is stated that it had to be constructed in a “fayer bordyd chamber and to be clene from synne and with all your instrumentes belongyng to this art” (184r).

There are instances in these manuscripts where the scribes instructed magician to create a magic circle for an experiment, but only did this in the running text. These instructions were not accompanied by a visual drawing of a circle, but did supply the same information. There are two of these instances in *The Dannel*, the first of which can be found on folio 187r. The experiment detailed in this folio had to be performed in a specific room. It had to be a square chamber with a window in each wall, measuring “24 fote wyde at the most and 20 fote at the lest” (187r). It also states that the room had to be “boarded that you maye make your sercles karecteres letteres crosses and names so apparent that theye maye be well sene” (187r). The second example can be found on folio 232v. It features an experiment in which a spirit would appear in a glass to reveal the truth about stolen goods. The circle that is needed for this experiment had to be made in a “delectable place which is terra semincta³ soode ground” (232v), on which a circle has to be made which is “eyght or nyngte fote brod” (232v).

The first half of the Sloane 3853 manuscript has less detailed instructions accompanying its circles. None of them have an indication of the type of material with which they were constructed. Neither is the location of construction explicitly stated. There are two circles where the location can be deduced from the instructions of the experiment itself. The first instance is the circle on folio 60r (fig. 5). It had to be made “in somme secrete place”

³ The scribe most likely meant to write the Latin word “semiusta”. Terra semiusta means half-burned ground. This circle had to be drawn on ground which consisted partly of soot.

(60r). This place had to be large enough for the magician to be able to draw a circle and stand inside of it with a child in his arms. He also had to have a type of looking glass present as well, because the magician was instructed to bring with him a “clene and a cleere glasse in the whiche neuer woman loked” (58v). The second experiment is found on folio 91r (fig. 1) which had to be made in “a prevy place and a secrete” (89r). These different instructions regarding the place of construction are quite vague. However, from the information supplied it can be deduced which location is more likely. The circle on folio 60r (fig. 5) needed to be made inside. The location needed to be secret but there needed to be a type of looking glass present. Therefore it would make more sense for this experiment to be done inside a room or chamber. The other circle on folio 91r (fig. 1), is more ambiguous. The only information given is that it had to be made in a secret place, but both chambers and areas outside could be very secretive. It seemed that for this particular circle it would have been a matter of interpretation of the magician.

1.2 Folger Manuscript

If we look at the Folger Shakespeare manuscript V.b.26, entitled the *Book of Magic, with Instructions for Invoking Spirits*, there are some similarities. For example, if we look at the circle on page 68 (fig. 17) the instructions say that the circle must be made in a secret place. However, unlike the circle on 91r of the Sloane 3853, there is no ambiguity as to the location of the circle as it is explicitly stated that it needed to be drawn on the ground in a “secret place into a woode where noe man useth to come” (67). Another circle in which there is no ambiguity as to its the location is on page 136 (fig. 20). The instructions state that this circle had to be made in “a fayer chamber” (136). However, instead of having to draw the circle with chalk as was common in *The Dannel*, this circle had to be made with “a sworde or a knife” (136). Rather than being drawn on the surface of the floor, it was carved into it. There is a second instance in this manuscript where a circle had to be carved into the ground. The circle is on page 176 (fig. 23). This circle needed to be carved into the ground with a sword. Interestingly, this circle combines the carving with a sword with chalk because the carved outline of the circle had to be filled with chalk (175).

The circle on page 183 (fig. 25) is one of the more complex and intricate circles in this manuscript. The instructions that accompany it are more detailed. It had to be drawn on the ground with a “palme hallowed upon palme sundaye” and the ashes of the “palme soo hallowed” had to be “strawe aboute the circle” (181). This suggests that this circle needed to be drawn on a hard surface, like packed earth or a floor, in order to strew the ashes about it.

On soft ground, such as loose earth found outside, the ashes could mix too much with the ground or be blown away by the wind. The circle required the ashes to be strewn around it in the final part of the ritual to secure the magician's safety: "This done thou arte safe and neadest to feare nothinge for there maye noo spirite come within that circle" (181). If the circle were to be interrupted because of an uneven ground or because wind blew the ashes away, the magician's safety would be in jeopardy. The instructions also state the dimensions of the various circles which make up this intricate magic circle. It states "make they circle 7 foote from the middest to the bryme then make a syrkle 2 foote broade and 7 foote from the other circle" (181).

Not all circles clearly state their location of construction. Most of the remaining circles in the Folger manuscript have less instructions. The circle on page 130 (fig. 18) does not explicitly state that it had to be made outside. However, the purpose of the experiment is to find hidden treasure and the circle that the magician had to use had to be constructed thirty foot from the treasure in question. Therefore it is safe to assume that this circle had to be constructed outside, because that is where treasures were hidden. The instructions for the circle on page 200 (fig. 26) only state that it had to be drawn on the ground and the master had to stand inside of it. It is not stated whether it had to be outside or inside. Similarly, the circle on page 201 (fig. 27) had to be made on the ground (although it is stated that it can also be drawn on a table or on a board). In this case the type of material is explicitly mentioned, it had to be drawn with chalk (201). This means that the circle had to be drawn inside a room somewhere, because chalk as a material of construction did not work well with loose earth. The ground could be easily disturbed and was often difficult to mark clearly. This would make this lines of the circle unclear and thus endanger the magician when conjuring the spirit.

1.3 Additional Manuscript

Of all the manuscripts looked at in this thesis the Additional 36674 manuscript is in the poorest state, many of its pages have suffered damage. This damage has meant the loss of information accompanying the magic circles. Some of the information regarding the construction and location of the circles in question have survived, although not all of it. Therefore these circles are often a bit more ambiguous, simply because we do not have all the information that was available.

The first circle that has surviving information regarding its construction is on folio 17v (fig. 39). The circle is quite intricate and had a lot of instructions, these folios have not

been damaged much so most of this information is readable. This particular circle had to be carved into the floor with a knife that the magician had to make as part of the ritual. The magician had to “stike the knyfe in the mydst of the place and measure 9 foote on both sydes from the knyfe” (16v). It continues to state that the magician had to leave a space open for him to pass in and out of the circle. Then the magician is instructed as follows: “a fote behynde the circle make another circle, betwixt the 2 greate circles make the pentaceles ... in the top of everey corner make a cyrcle” (16v). These last instructions refer to the circle that is on folio 18r (fig. 40) which presents the space for the magician to pass through. Although the instructions are precise in detailing the construction of the circle, they do not state whether the circle had to be made outside or inside. The only thing we can say for certain is that it had to be made somewhere where the earth was fairly hard, because otherwise the knife would not be able to trace the circle clearly into the ground. Another circle that had to be constructed with a knife is on folio 152r (fig. 43). It had to be traced into the ground with a knife in “an even and tame place” (151v). This probably meant that the circle had to be made inside. Inside houses the floor consisted of packed earth, making it hard and level. The circle on folio 156v (fig. 44) had to be made inside with chalk and “in the midst of the house” (154v). Unfortunately the rest of the instructions have been lost, because the folio has been badly damaged. Another circle that had to be made inside is the circle on folio 162r (fig. 48) where the magician was instructed to “make this circle in your chamber” (161r). The type of material with which it had to be constructed is not mentioned, but it would be safe to assume this circle also had to be made with chalk, because that seemed to be the preferred material for indoor circles.

The circle on folio 157r (fig. 45) has a rare material for its construction. There is little evidence of these types of circles in magical manuscripts. The main reason we know of their existence is because of the London Wellcome library MS 1766 which contains multiple images of a magician kneeling or standing inside a magic circle (fig. 36-8). In the images a slight shadow can be seen underneath each of the circles, indicating that they were not drawn directly on the surface of the ground but were made on a different type of material and then placed there. This meant that these circles were portable and that they were constructed somewhere else. The magician would not have to spend time making the magic circle at the site, but could simply place the parchment circle down and step inside to start the experiment. These types of circles were probably multifunctional and could be used for more than one conjuration, while the magic circles already discussed seem to be particular to one certain type of spirit or experiment. The circle on folio 157r (fig. 45) is one of these types of circles.

It was used in an experiment to find hidden treasure, but it is unclear where it was hidden, because the folio has been damaged and the information is lost. The instructions for the construction of the circle were not lost, directly above the circle it is stated: “which must be made of velem parchment, of the compare of VIII foote over and layd upon the grounde and some loops to pin it downe” (157r).

1.4 Different Ways of Constructing a Magic Circle

The circles discussed in this thesis had limited options for their construction. The predominant way of constructing a circle was either to draw it with chalk or trace it into the ground. Most of the chalk circles were made inside, while those traced into the ground were made outside. However, based on evidence found in different sources there appeared to be other ways of constructing circles as well.

One example of a different type of construction can be found in the *Liber iuratus*, or *The Sworn Book of Honorius*. It does not contain any drawings of magic circles but there is a chapter on how to construct one. This magic circle had to be drawn on the ground like the other circles discussed above, however it had to be surrounded by an outer circle of stones. The magician had to:

“Accipe lapides duros et equales, in quibus non sint foramina vel ruptura, vel tegulas specialiter ad hoc factas. Operans vero sit a pollutione purgatus et habeat calcem et arenam litoris mixtam, cum quibus lapides vel tegule coniungantur. Tunc fiet ex eis locus, in quo protrahetur circulus, et iste locus taliter formabitur.”⁴ (CXII).

The instructions of this outer circle were very specific. The stones that were used had to be similar, plain and whole. The book also gives the exact dimensions of this outer circle and the exact shape in which the magician needed to place them:

“Primo fiet circulus equalis terre habens in longitudine et latitudine 9 pedes, 5 infra quem fiat circulus gibbosus ad modum semicirculi, alcior quam sit

⁴ Translation: “Take hard stones, and plain in the which there is neither hole nor rift ... and let him have lime and sand of the sea bank mingled together wherewith he shall join the stones. Then of them he shall make a place wherein the circle shall be drawn” (CXII pars 2). Translation from the British Library, Royal MS 17 A XLII.

alter, in longitudine et latitudine continens 7 pedes et in altitudine tres pedes cum dimidio.”⁵ (CXII)

Of the inner circle is it only stated that it has to be drawn in the ground, which is similar to many of the circles discussed in this chapter. However, the very detailed instructions on the outer circle make it obvious that it is an important feature of this particular magical circle.

1.5 Analysis

It does not seem likely that the circles arbitrarily needed to be made either outside or inside. There had to be an underlying reason as to why a certain circle had to be constructed in a particular location. All circles have in common that they had to be made in a secret place, which was a feature Agrippa identified in the fourth book of *De Occulta Philosophia*. The instructions are often explicit about the location having to be secret. It either needs to be in the woods, such as the circle on page 68 in the Folger manuscript, or in a secret chamber, such as the circle on folio 60r in Sloane 3853.

In total eight of the examined circles, which were accompanied by instructions regarding their construction, had to be made inside a secret room or a “fayer chamber” (*Sloane 3853 184r*). Three of those had to be drawn on the ground with chalk. One of the circles needed to be drawn with a hallowed palm and three had to be scratched into the floor with a sword or a knife, which was an uncommon way of constructing a circle. Four of the examined circles needed to be constructed somewhere outside, either in the woods, or in an unspecified outside location. One of the circles that had to be constructed outside had to be traced into the ground with a wand. The other circles that had to be drawn outside did not have specific instructions as to how it needed to be done. This suggests that it was unnecessary to mention their material of construction, because it could simply be traced into the ground with a stick or branch.

At first glance there does not seem to be anything that connects these circles. All of the circles were constructed for a different purpose. Eight of the circles were constructed for the purpose of conjuring specific spirits. In *The Dannel* these are the circles on folios 184v,

⁵ Translation: “First let the circle be equal with the earth, having in length and breadth fourteen feet, within the which make a crooked circle like half a circle, higher than the other in length and breadth, containing seven feet, and in height three feet and an half.” (CXII). Translation from the British Library, Royal MS 17 A XLII.

205v and 213v. The circle on folio 184v is meant for the spirits Almazin and Elicona, the one on 205v for Astherethe, Beliall and Eroglis, and the one on 213v for the four princes of hell: Sathan, Lucifer, Faciton and Dencalion. In the Folger manuscript these were the circles on pages 68, 136, 183 and 200. The circle on page 68 is meant for the four kings of the cardinal directions: Teltrion, Spyriion, Boytheon and Mayeryon. The circle on page 136 for Sathan, the one on page 183 for Mosacus and the last on page 200 for Oberion. If we compare these spirits with each other they have nothing in common. The four princes of hell and the four kings of the cardinal directions were some of the most powerful spirits that could be conjured. Belial and Oberion are sometimes seen to be other names for the devil. However, in the context in which they are used, the scribe seems to mean different spirits than the modern magical practitioners seem to have given them. For example, Oberion was also known as a fairy king and stems from a different magical tradition. Almazin and Elicona were gentle and loving spirits (Legard 1). The Sathan mentioned in the circle on page 136 in the Folger manuscript also seems to be a different Sathan than the prince of hell that is mentioned in *The Dannel*. The reason for this belief is that the circle in the Folger manuscript states that the experiment is for Roman spirits who have knowledge of the past, the present and the future, and that the spirit Sathan was invented for this experiment by William Bacon (135).

However, when looking at the type of experiment for which the circle was used there are similarities. Two experiments that had to be made outside were used to discover hidden treasure or to bring the magician treasure. Related to this is an experiment which would return stolen goods to the magician, this circle also had to be made outside. Considering this it would then also be safe to assume that the ambiguous circle on folio 91r in Sloane 3853 should be made outside as well, because this is an experiment to help a magician recover stolen objects and is similar to the other three. Three experiments that had to be constructed inside had the purpose of discovering hidden knowledge; either answering questions of a magician or divination of the future. Another experiment that had to be done inside is the one that accompanies the circle on folio 184v in *The Dannel*, its purpose was to obtain someone's love. It had to be done inside, because the magician actually called the person whose love he wanted to obtain to his circle. He could then make love to that person inside of the circle, without anyone seeing them. With this information it is possible to draw a hesitant conclusion on why certain circles had to be made in a particular location. Circles that had to do with obtaining knowledge or had the purpose of divination of the future needed to be made inside. Those that dealt with discovering treasure or stolen objects had to be made outside.

It is interesting that so few circles contain details of their location. Of the thirty-five

circles looked at for this thesis only twelve had instructions that mentioned the type of material or the location of construction. This means that the magicians had to have prior knowledge to determine whether a circle was constructed inside or outside. This idea is strengthened by the fact that if a circle was meant to conjure a specific type of spirit the location was not specified. The rest of the circles in *The Dannel* (206v, 207r, 207v) are for a specific type of spirit and do not contain instructions for their locations. The same is seen in the remaining circles in the Folger manuscript where the circles on pages 46, 68, 133 and 176 are all constructed for a particular spirit.

Another probable explanation for this is that the purpose of the experiment determined where the circle would have to be drawn. The purpose of the experiment would require certain spirits to be conjured. These spirits often needed to be conjured in certain locations. We can assume that elemental spirits, such as aquatic or earth spirits, had to be conjured outside and near their respective elements. For example, It would be logical for aquatic spirits to be conjured near water. It can also be assumed that the spirits of the cardinal directions would have to be conjured outside as well as they are closely related to the winds. The evidence for this is minimal because there is no definite list of what type of spirit a particular spirit is. When spirits are mentioned in magical manuscripts they are not identified as a type of spirit. The fact that spirit names were also often written in many different ways, makes it almost impossible to make such a definite list.

If this theory is applied to the circles discussed it seems plausible. The few circles that state which spirits were being conjured did indeed need to be constructed outside. The circle on folio 205v in *The Dannel* conjures three specific spirits: Astorethe, Beliall and Eroglis, and it had to be made outside. Interestingly, the spirit Astorethe has been mentioned in *The Dannel* before on folio 177r. The scribe in this instance wrote it as Ascarothe, which seems to be a variation of Astorethe, especially because the ‘c’ and ‘t’ were almost interchangeable. In this part of *The Dannel* it is stated that Ascarothe is a spirit “whiche abydethe in busshes and woodes” (177r). This means that Astorethe is an earth spirit and would need to be conjured somewhere outside, which is indeed the case for this circle. Another example is the first circle of the Folger Manuscript on page 68 where the four kings of the directions are called upon. They are the spirits of the cardinal directions, which means that they probably needed to be conjured outside. This experiment has to be made in a secret place in the woods. If we look at the circle on page 201 in the Folger Manuscript, it states that it was constructed with the purpose of conjuring “the four kings”. It does not say which four kings, but it is often interpreted that the four kings are in fact the four kings of the cardinal directions. If that is the

case for this circle, it seems to be an exception. As discussed above the four kings of the cardinal directions are elemental spirits and would most likely be conjured up outside, however this particular circle seems to have to be made inside.

1.6 Conclusion

It seems that magicians had prior knowledge about which type of experiment would require which location for their circles. This conclusion can be drawn because there are few circles which specifically state where and with what material the circle should be drawn. It seems that circles that had to do with hidden knowledge need to be drawn inside a room or chamber and most often with chalk. Experiments which featured treasure, hidden, or stolen objects needed to be performed outside. These type of experiments rarely stated with what type of material they needed to be constructed, because it was clear that the magician could simply trace the circle into the ground with a stick of some sort. If the circle was designed for a specific spirit, but the purpose was still undecided there was no mention at all about the type of material with which it needed to be constructed or its location of construction. When their purpose would be set, the magician could then deduce where to construct the circle. Another reason could be that the type of spirit determined the location of the circle. The magicians would know the type of spirit he was conjuring and could then construct his circle in the corresponding location.

Chapter 2: Astral Elements in Magic Circles

In sixteenth-century magical texts evidence can be found of multiple strands of magic. Frank Klaassen made a division between ritual magic and scholastic or astrological image magic. Ritual magic involved “the explicit binding, invoking, and employing of demons.” (57). Yet it also employed Christian rituals and engagement of the trinity and the archangels. A subcategory of this ritual magic was called necromancy, which employed the use of magic circles (57). Magicians who practiced necromancy were called necromancers. Isidore of Seville in his *Etymologiae* gave the following definition of necromancers: “Necromantii sunt, quorum recantationibus videntur resuscitati mortui divinare, et ad interrogate respondere. Νεκροϛ Graece mortuus, μαντεία divinatio nuncupatur.”⁶ (VII). However, during the Middle Ages this definition of the necromancer changed. Influences from Muslim magical traditions had caused the term to become corrupted. Its form changed from “necromantia” into “nigromantia”. The term came to be seen as a translation of the Arabic word for magic in general and thus received a broader meaning (Burnett 3). At this time Europe was flooded by new knowledge from rediscovered ancient writings and by texts that came from the more advanced Arabic world (Bailey 15). Magic as it existed in medieval England was influenced by this new knowledge. Ritual magic and necromancy became influenced by the Muslim tradition of astral magic, or as Klaassen calls it astrological image magic. It dealt with the science of astrology and allowed magicians to use the power of planets or constellations through their images and signs (*Magic in the Middle Ages* 131). This is also something that Agrippa noted in his *De Occulta Philosophia* (II.xxxv):

“sub certa consellatio fabricates, celestiste quondam illustrationem capi & miradum aliquod suscipi posse conirmant. Coelestiu enim corporum radii animati uiui sensules dotes mirificas potentiaq uehemeissima secum ferentes etia repentino mometo ac fubio tactu mirabiles in imaginibus imprimunt uires etiam in materia apta.”⁷.

⁶ Translation: “Those by whose incantations the dead, having been resuscitated, seem to divine the future and reply to questions put to them. For 'nekros' in Greek is 'dead', 'manteia' is 'divination'.”

Translated by Burnett in “Talismans: Magic as Science? Necromancy among the seven liberal arts.”

⁷ Translation: “Some Celestiall Illustration may be taken, and some wonderfull thing may be received; for the beams of the Celestiall bodies betng animated, living, sensuall, and bringing along with them admirable gifts, and a most violent power, do, even in a moment, and at the first touch, imprint wonderfull powers in the Images” (II.xxxv). Translated by John French (London, 1651).

Aside from using the power of images, astral magic involved a connection to astrology. This was a feature that also became incorporated into necromantic magic. Days and even hours had always been associated with certain planets and constellations and the archangels were directly related to a planet (Campbell 3). People had always believed that the planets and constellations could influence life on earth, but as this became linked to magic, it was believed that magicians could use this influence for good or evil (*Forbidden Rites* 176). As astral magic influenced necromancy it became important for magicians to practice their magic during the right time. This influence is particularly visible in magic circles. Most circles had to be constructed during specified astrological conditions and oriented in a certain direction. The circles had to be made during particular hours on particular days while facing a particular cardinal direction to make sure the magician could draw from the power of the constellations and planets. The circles themselves also contained the names and signs of spirits and angels which were connected to certain planets. These inscriptions will be dealt with in more detail in the fourth chapter.

Multiple facets of astral magic were incorporated into necromancy which is visible in magic circles. The most clear influence being that they had to be constructed during specified astrological conditions. Secondly, the experiments often contained an indication of orientation, either in the circles themselves by mentioning the cardinal directions, or during the conjuration when the magician had to face a certain direction. These two influences will be discussed in this chapter. Although evidence of the influence of astral magic on necromancy is clearly visible in the circles, it had been highly variable and not systematic. Even though some elements were incorporated into necromancy and the magic circles, they did not become mandatory features.

2.1 Cardinal Directions

Certain experiments had to be done while being oriented towards a particular direction. The four cardinal directions were sometimes noted down in the drawings of the circles. The traditional medieval way to indicate the directions on a map was to put east at the top (*Forbidden Rites* 172). The directions were also usually written in Latin. In some instances the conjuration rather than the circle itself needed to have a particular orientation. The magician would recite his conjuration while facing a particular direction.

2.1.1 Sloane Manuscripts

For three circles in *The Dannel* the cardinal directions have been indicated in their drawings. It was important for these circles to be oriented towards a certain direction. The circle on folio 182v (fig. 6) contains the standard medieval cartographical orientation. At the top of the circle the word “Est” is inscribed, meaning east. In the case of the circle on folio 213v (fig. 13) all four directions are featured in the drawing of the circle. However, instead of having east at the top, the directions appear to have shifted a quarter. At the bottom of the circle there is the word “sep” meaning “septentrio” which is Latin for north. On the left of the circle it says “Or” meaning “oriens”, which is Latin for east. The directions have moved one quarter counter clockwise and thus deviate from the cartographical standard. Another circle that deviates from the norm is the circle on folio 206r (fig. 9). Rather than having east at the top of the circle, the directions are inverted and east appears at the bottom. Although not all circles have the cardinal directions inscribed in their drawings, the magician would often have to face a certain way while doing his conjuration to make sure he could call upon the spirits. For example, on folio 233v in *The Dannel* an experiment is described where the scribe stated that the magician had to “saye this coniuration 3 or 9 tymes against the northe and then go forthe and shut up the sercle after the” (233v). There is no accompanying drawing of a circle in this case, meaning there is no orientation for the circle itself. Yet the magician had to face a certain direction to do his conjuration.

In the first part of the Sloane manuscript 3853 there is only one circle that features the cardinal directions. The circle on folio 50r (fig. 3) has ‘oriens’ inscribed on the top of the circle, meaning east. Thus it adheres to the standard medieval cartography. The other circles do not mention the cardinal directions at all. In Sloane 3850 there is also only one circle which features the cardinal directions. It can be found on folio 129r (fig. 30). Again ‘oriens’ is inscribed at the top, complying with the traditional cartography. In Sloane 3854 the circle on folio 39r (fig. 33) has been inscribed with both ‘oriens’ at the top and ‘occidens’ at the bottom. It is the only circle in this manuscript that stated the orientation of the circle and it complies with the medieval standard.

2.1.2 Folger Manuscript

Although the Folger manuscript contains twelve unique and detailed circles, none of them have been drawn with an indication of the cardinal directions. Neither are there any instructions for the magician to face a certain way during his conjuration. However, there is one instance in the manuscript in which a connection is made to the cardinal directions. On

page 67 the scribe gave the instructions for an experiment to make a thief return the stolen goods. Besides the circle, this ritual featured several plates. The magician had to:

“make 4 divers plates each by him selfe and write the name of the spirits and his signe by him. The name celtrion in the east, the name spyrion in the west, the name boyth in the south and the name mayeryon in the north”
(67).

These plates would then surround the circle in which the master stood. The four spirits which were conjured in this experiment were the four kings of the cardinal directions. Therefore they had to be oriented towards the right direction. There is another instance where the magician would have to face north. This is on page 80 during an experiment to summon the spirit Egn, rex of the north. This spirit is the king of the northern cardinal direction. This is a different magical tradition than astral magic. In this case the magician had to face north, because he was summoning the king of the north, not because he was drawing power from that direction through astral magic.

2.1.3 Additional Manuscript

There are several magic circles in the Additional manuscript which contain an orientation. The first of these is on folio 18r (fig. 40) where ‘North’ is inscribed at the bottom and ‘South’ at the top. There are two ways to view this orientation. First of all we can look at it from the point of view of the medieval standard. It deviates from this standard because rather than featuring east at the top it has south. The directions have been shifted one quarter clockwise. However, if we look at this from a contemporary cartographical standard, the directions have not been shifted, but rather inverted. This was a common occurrence in the directions. This inversion meant that rather than following an earthly cartographical standard, the circles were oriented following the celestial cartography. Another circle which features this type of orientation is on folio 156v (fig. 44). The word ‘Northe’ is on the bottom and east on the left. The directions are not aligned perfectly with the quarters of the circle, there is a slight deviation to the right. These are the only two circles in which the cardinal directions have been indicated. It is interesting to note that these directions were written in English. In the other manuscripts discussed they were written down in Latin rather than in English. This could be an indication that the Additional manuscript is a later manuscript or copying from a later manuscript than the Sloane manuscripts were.

Aside from the circles that have the cardinal directions indicated on their drawings, there are a few instructions in the manuscript that mention the orientation of the magician during his conjuration. For example, the circle on folio 158r (fig. 46) does not have an accompanying orientation with its drawing, yet in the instructions it is stated that the magician had to sit in the circle and say his conjuration while holding a “septer towards the north” (157v). Another example is the circle on folio 159r (fig. 47). Again the drawing does not feature the cardinal directions. In the instructions it is stated that if the spirit did not appear after having done the conjuration the first time, the magician had to repeat the conjuration facing “north or southe and repeat these coniuacions till they appeare” (158v).

2.1.4 Analysis

The different circles and their instructions in these manuscripts do not seem to have any similarities. The Folger manuscript does not indicate any orientation, nor does it feature the cardinal directions in the drawings of the circles. While the Sloane manuscripts as well as the Additional manuscript feature these orientations, the Sloane manuscripts feature them in Latin and in the Additional they are in vernacular English.

If the directions are compared to the medieval standard of that time, it is noticeable that only two circles adhere to the traditional cartography, both are situated in Sloane 3853. These are the only ones that have east or “oriens” inscribed at the top. Two other circles feature their cardinal directions in an inverted position from the standard of that time. Instead of having east at the top they have west. These are the circles on folio 206r in *The Dannel* and the circle on folio 282r in Sloane 3850. There are three other circles, two in the Additional manuscript and one in *The Dannel*, in which the cardinal directions have shifted a quarter in a clockwise direction: they each have south at the top instead of east.

When looking at the type of experiments that feature an indication of the directions the circles seem to have little in common. The circles which contain cardinal directions in *The Dannel* are made for different types of experiments. The first is an experiment in love (182v), the second is a general circle to conjure water spirits (206r) and the third is a circle to conjure the four princes of hell to grant a magician knowledge (213v). In the Additional manuscript there is one circle that is meant for speaking with spirits (18r). The second is for finding treasure in water (158r), and the third is a general circle to conjure water spirits (159r). If we look at this list, there are few similarities to discover. It is noticeable that of the seven circles of which the purpose is clear, three of them deal with water in one way or other. Two circles that contain the cardinal directions are for conjuring water spirits (*The Dannel*

206r, Additional 159r) and the last is to find treasure specifically in water (Additional 158r). This suggests a connection to the elements. Colin Campbell noted in *The Magical Seal of Dr. John Dee* that the cardinal directions were traditionally associated with an element. Earth is connected to the north, air to the east, water to the west, and fire to the south (Campbell 5). If we then look at the circles which are connected to aquatic spirits or experiments, it would be logical for them to be oriented towards the west. This is the case for the circle in *The Dannel*, which is made for conjuring water spirits and it indeed features west on top. Another example could be the circle in *The Dannel* on folio 213v. It is an experiment which summons the four princes of hell. If we then associate hell with the element of fire, which is a common association, south would be expected at the top which is indeed the case. If we accept this theory it would also explain why most of the circles do not feature the cardinal directions. Magicians would have known which element was associated with which cardinal direction. Therefore the circles in *The Dannel* on folios 207r and v did not need to state their orientations because they were made for conjuring air spirits, and since air is connected to the east, it would have had to be oriented towards the east.

Another explanation, although less likely, could be found in the connection between the archangels and the cardinal direction. Agrippa stated in *De Occulta Philosophia* (III.xxiv) that the four princes of angels, meaning the archangels, were connected to the cardinal directions:

“Sunt etia quatuor angelorum principes, qui perfecti sunt super quatuor uctos et super quatuor partes mundi, quorum Michael praefectus est super uentum orientalem: Raphael, super occidentalem: Gabriel, super borealem: Noriel, qui ab aliis Vriel dicitur, super australem.”⁸ (III.xxiv)

However, none of the experiments which feature a different cardinal direction have a particular mention of that angel. The circle that has south at the top, does not specifically call on Uriel during the experiment, nor is his name present in the circle.

Although some circles adhered to the cartographical standard of their time, the majority diverted from this standard. A possible explanation could be that the circles which

⁸ Translation: “There are also four Princes of the Angels, which are set over the four winds, and over the four parts of the world, whereof Michael is set over the Eastern wind; Raphael over the Western; Gabriel over the Northern; Nariel, who by some is called Uriel, is over the Southern.” Translated by John French (London, 1651).

feature an inverted orientation of the cardinal directions were adhering to the cartography of the celestial map. The scribes in these instances oriented their circles from the point of view from the heavens. The heavens in that time were believed to be inverted, and thus the directions would have to be inverted as well. Instead of having east at the top these circles would feature west at top of their circles.

The fact that the circles in the Additional manuscript more often feature north at the top instead of west as was the standard, has a different explanation. This combined with the fact that this manuscript also states its directions in English makes it possible that this manuscript is a younger manuscript than the Sloane manuscripts. It was copied either from a younger source or was made later than the Sloane manuscripts. It is probable that by the time this manuscript was made the compass had been more widely in use. Because the compass featured the orientation of the north, the cartography adapted itself to this orientation as well and the new standard became that north was at the top of the map. These circles in the Additional manuscript then adhere to the correct cartographical standard of their time.

2.2 Time of Construction

Klaassen notes that in the tradition of astral magic certain images had to be made in particular hours of particular days and names in certain images were related to astrological spirits or times (34). In the astral magic tradition these images were not magic circles but rather drawings of angels or other pictures. As astral magic started influencing necromancy the magic circles themselves became seen as a type of image. Therefore they too needed to be made during specific astrological circumstances. Kieckhefer noticed in the *Munich Manual* that certain experiments had to be made in “specified astrological conditions.” (*Forbidden Rites* 177). This is not a feature particular to the *Munich Manual* but can also be seen in many circles discussed in this thesis. Several of the manuscripts also contain lists of hours, days and even months, showing their connections to certain spirits or planets. For example, Sloane 3850 contains numerous lists with both the hours of the day connected to spirits as well as a list of hours connected to planets. An example of such a list is seen in image 1 and can be found on folio 164r. It states: “a table to know what planet rules ani heure of dai or night through out the year” (164r). It has the planets in the first and last column, and the days of the week at the top in the middle columns and then it shows which hours of which days are connected to which planet.

Image 1: table of planets connected to days. Sloane MS 3850, fol. 164r.

2.2.1 Sloane Manuscripts

Almost all of the circles have a clear instruction on when the magician would have to make them, especially the more intricate ones. For example, in *The Dannel* the circle on folio 205v can be made for “all sprytes of the erthe”. The scribe instructed the magician to change the characters in the outer band of the circle to those of the day on which he was calling to the spirit (205v). This is the case for all three following circles as well (206v, 207r, 207v respectively). The circle on folio 213v has to be drawn in the “saturne synge and in his howre” it also contains the caution that “yf thou make it not in one howre make it up in an other in the remaynyng of the same howre when it commethe” (213r). Not only the conjuration had to take place during the hour of Saturn, the drawing of the circle has to be done in the hour of Saturn as well. If the magician did not finish the circle in time he could not continue any other hour, but had to wait for the hour of Saturn in which he had started.

In the first half of Sloane 3853 the circle on folio 60r (fig. 5) is the only one that contains instructions for its time of construction. The scribe stated that the circle had to be made “on a Thursday between noone and one a clock in the new of the mone” (58r). Instead of providing the planets with which these hours were associated the scribe choses to leave that up to the magician. The magician would automatically know which planet or sign this hour would be associated with and thus be able to draw on its power. The instructions do explicitly refer to the moon, which in astral magic was a source of power as well.

2.2.2 Folger Manuscript

The Folger manuscript has no explicit reference to any of the planetary signs or hours with which they were associated. There is only one instance in which the scribe had mentioned the time of construction. The circle on page 130 is preceded by the instruction that the magician should make the circle during the first twenty-three nights when the moon was new, because this was the best time to make this circle: “the first 23 nightes are best when the mone in newe and the first is best” (127). However, there is no specific day or hour mentioned and there is no visible link to a particular planet or sign.

2.2.3 Additional Manuscript

Several of the circles in the Additional manuscript are accompanied by instructions for their time of construction. The first circle on folio 17v (fig. 39), of which the circle on folio 18r (fig. 40) is a blueprint, has to be made in “the first hower of mercury, and his daye in the morning” (14r). The second circle to contain such information in this manuscript is the circle

on folio 152r (fig. 43). This part of the manuscript is badly damaged causing some vital information to be missing with regard to the circles and their construction. However, an interesting feature has survived. There is a warning on folio 151r. The magician is warned that the experiment had to be made in the right hour of the right planet, otherwise the experiment would fail. The scribe then goes on to list what type of experiment had to be made in which hour of which planet:

“If you worke for love venus, her daye and howre
as for honor die Iovis and so the like
for wrong or to doe hurt die martis vel saturni and ther howres” (151r).

However, because the pages are damaged it is not stated which experiment this particular circle is made for. We only know that it had to be made because otherwise the spirit would not obey the magician (152r). The circle on folio 159r is also part of the damaged section. At the bottom of folio 158v, the scribe mentions hours and planets and that the circle had to be made at a certain time, however the bottom of the folio has been damaged and the information about which particular hour and planet have been lost for this circle.

There are several circles in this manuscript that needed to be constructed in the hour of Jupiter. For example, the experiment of the circle on folio 156v had to be done on “a thursdaye in the howre of Iubiter if the wheather be faire and cleare if not begin in the next howre of Iubiter when it is a fair cleare day” (156v). The circle on folio 158r (fig. 46) also had to be made on a Thursday, but in the hour of Saturn instead of that of Jupiter (157v). The second circle that had to be made in the hour of Jupiter is on folio 162r (fig. 48). However, what is interesting is that this circle has a dual purpose. Underneath the circle on folio 162r the magician is instructed that this experiment and its accompanying circle could also be used for an experiment about friendship. If the magician wanted to use this circle for that purpose, he needed to make his conjuration in the hour of Venus instead of that of Jupiter. This switch between Venus and Jupiter is also seen in the circle on folio 163r (fig. 49). This circle could be made either in the hour of Venus or that of Jupiter (162v). This is again from the damaged part of the manuscript, thus the reason why this circle could be made in either hour has been lost.

2.2.4 Analysis

The influence of astral magic meant that the planets gave the magician power for the experiments through the medium of images. By making circles in specific hours or days, they

would gain the power from those planets. If the manuscripts are compared with each other it is clear that the Additional manuscript contains the most circles with instructions featuring the time of construction. Sloane 3853 contains three circles, two of which are in *The Dannel*, which state when it had to be made. Again we see that the Folger manuscript does not contain this element of astral magic. There are no references to the planets and their signs. There is only one circle that states the time of construction, but rather than connecting it with a certain planet, it only states that is the magician can best make the circle during the first twenty-three nights of the new moon. From the circles in the Additional manuscript that contain these instructions, two had to be made in the hour of Saturn, one specifically on a Thursday (Additional 158r); three had to be made in the hour of Jupiter, one of which had to be made specifically on a Thursday (Additional 156v); two were made in the hour of Venus, depending on what type of experiment they were used for (Additional 162r and 163r). Finally, one circle has to be made in the hour of Mercury (Additional 17v).

There seemed to be no apparent reason why certain circles had to be made in a particular hour. There are no similarities in their experiments. Three circles were to discover treasure, one of which was found in water (Additional 158r). Four were to gain knowledge, but they all discovered a different type of knowledge. One was a general circle for water spirits, and one was to conjure a horse that allowed a magician to quickly travel wherever he wished. Also when looking at the circles themselves, which will be done in more detail in the fourth chapter, there is no clear link between the planet they have to be made in and the names inscribed in the circles. Most of them simply have the names of God written in them, two contain the names of the archangels (Additional 158r and 163r), but not the ones associated with the particular planet in which the circle had to be made, they contain the four princes of the angels; Michael, Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael. But these circles have to be made in different hours of different planets. The circle on folio 158r needs to be made in the hour of Saturn, while the circle on 163r can be either made in the hour of Jupiter or the hour of Venus.

It seems to be arbitrarily decided when certain circles had to be made. One possible explanation could be that some experiments required more power than other circles and that is why the magician would need to draw on the power of a planet to perform his experiment. However, a more likely explanation is that the purpose of the experiment determined in which hour of which planet the circle had to be constructed. The proof for this can be found on folio 151r in the Additional manuscript where the scribe stated which experiments needed to be done in what planet. Venus was the planet for experiments of love; Jupiter for

experiments concerning honour; and Mars and Saturn were for harmful experiments. Saturn especially was known as an evil planet. It made sense for experiments that conjured spirits from hell to be made during this planet. Which is the case for the circle on folio 205v in *The Dannel*. The magician would conjure the four princes of hell, which were powerful evil spirits. Therefore the circle had to be constructed during the hour of Saturn.

2.3 Conclusion

There has been a clear influence of astral magic visible in the Additional manuscript and several of the Sloane manuscripts. However, the Folger manuscript seems not to be influenced by this type of magic. It neither contains cardinal directions nor does it specify for its experiments when they have to be made in connection to the planets. It seems to be a purely necromantic magical manuscript. This means that although there was a clear influence of astral magic it was not a systematic change that necromantic magic underwent. It did not have a far reaching influence on necromancy and although some astral elements were incorporated into the magic circles, they did not become mandatory elements.

As for the circles that do contain astral elements the tentative conclusion can be drawn that the cardinal directions are connected to the elements. The fact that circles had to be made during specified astrological conditions is explained in the additional manuscripts. Furthermore the purpose of the experiment would determine in which hour of which sign the circle had to be made. Aside from this fact they were also made during these specific times to give the magician power to control the spirits they conjured and perform the experiments successfully.

Chapter 3: Elements of Magic Circles

Magical manuscripts contain evidence of the versatility of magic circles. They differ most notably in their appearances. There seemed to be a number of different ways for a magician to construct a magic circle. When looking purely at the shape of these circles it is clear that they consist of different elements. These elements were identified by Kieckhefer in *Forbidden Rites*. He made a division between inscriptions and various types of signs. The various signs were divided into two categories by Kieckhefer. These were the pentagrams and other miscellaneous figures (173). The miscellaneous figures are the geometrical shapes that can be found within the circles, apart from pentagrams.

He also identified the “positions of the master and child medium” (172), as a feature of magical circles. These were instructions, often contained in the drawings of the circles themselves, about where the magician performing the conjuration had to stand. They could either be written down in the circle itself or be mentioned in the instructions preceding it. This chapter will look at the outward appearance of magic circles, contained in the different manuscripts discussed to discover what the elements were that comprised them. This chapter will purely look at the outward appearance of the magic circles. Any inscriptions that are referenced will be explained more fully in the following chapter.

3.1 Magic Circle Shapes

There seemed to be two possible basic shapes for magic circles. The first, as the name suggests, is that of a circle. Yet the second surprisingly is a square. Although square magic circles were not common they can be found scattered among magical documents, written in both Latin and vernacular English. The predominant form is that of the circle. Of all the magical circles looked at in this thesis there are only five square magic circles to be found, while there are forty-one actual circles that are discussed. Agrippa explained the virtue of geometrical figures in magic. His explanation of the circular shape makes it clear why this was the predominant form for a magical circle:

“Ex his imprimis circulus responder unitati atq denario nam unitas omnium rerum centraum atq; circumferentia est; ipseq; ... dicitur que circulus linea infinita in qua no est terminus a quo, nec terminus ad

quem, cuius principium & finis est in quolibet puncto.”⁹

(II.xxiii).

A circle was seen as the perfect geometrical form and was related to God. Agrippa mentioned that a circle had a beginning and an end at every point in its line. A different name for God is the Alpha (beginning) and Omega (the end), by stating that a circle contains the alpha and the omega at every point he indirectly connects it to the power of God, which made this shape desirable for a magic circle. Of the square geometrical form Agrippa only stated that it was assigned to the earth by people like Pythagoras and Plato and thus not be passed over (II.xxiii). Nowhere does he explicitly state that the square is in itself a powerful form. It is only linked to the earth. However, in magical philosophy there were many systems which connected certain archangels to the elements. If the square was connected to the earth, then in these traditions it was also connected to the power of one of the archangels. Which archangel depended on which tradition was adhered to. For example, Agrippa would have linked the earth to the archangel Uriel, who together with Michael, Raphael and Gabriel ruled the four corners of the world, meaning he was a very powerful angel (III.vii).

3.1.1 Square Magic Circles

While round magic circles were clearly the predominant form, there were some square circles to be found in the manuscripts. Two of the manuscripts discussed in this thesis contain them. The first manuscript is Sloane 3853. The first half of this manuscript contains two square magic circles. Although they are both square they have quite distinct features. The first square is on folio 91r (fig. 1). This magic circle consists of a square outer band in which the magician has made inscriptions. Inside of it is a circular band, which also contains various inscriptions. The square and circle do not overlap each other but rather fit into one another. The unused space that is created by fitting a circle in a square is utilized by the magician by making various inscriptions. The second square magic circle is on folio 109v (fig. 2). This circle differs from the other square circle because it does not contain any circular shapes. It consists of a double concentric square outer band with various inscriptions. The centre of the square is left open. Interestingly, unlike the circle on folio 91r the outer band does not form

⁹ Translation: “a Circle doth answer to Unity, and the number ten; for Unity is the Center, and circumference of all things ... A circle is called an infinite line in which there is no *Terminus a quo*, nor *Terminus ad quem*, whose beginning and end is in every point” Translated by John French (London, 1651).

the border of the circle. The open space at the sides of the circle are utilized as well by making inscriptions.

Besides Sloane 3853, the Folger manuscript also contains square magic circles. In total there are three square circles in this manuscript, but they differ significantly from those in Sloane 3853. Instead of having clearly defined borders, the magic circles in the Folger manuscript use their inscriptions rather than the actual lines as borders. The first of these square magic circles is on page 130 (fig. 18). There are thin lines which form a square band around a double circle. These lines do not draw a reader's attention. However, the inscriptions do, because they have been made with different coloured ink. The inscriptions themselves form straight square lines and create a verbal border around the inner circle. Interestingly, this form is repeated in a smaller size inside the double circle. There is a small square with a circle inside it, overlapping with the square's edges. The second square magical circle is on page 136 (fig. 20). Although the lines here do form actual borders around the circle, the inscriptions reinforce this border. The inscriptions on the inside corners of the square also contribute to clearly defining the borders. Finally, the last square magic circle can be found on page 133 (fig. 19). This one differs from the other two circles in this manuscript. Instead of having a square band with inscriptions, this magical circle only has a square line surrounding four concentric circular bands containing inscriptions. The square outline contains this circle as well as inscription in each of the corners of the square.

3.1.2 Round Magical Circles

Apart from these five square magic circles, the other forty-one circles discussed in this thesis are in fact circles. They all have a circular outer band in which there are various types of inscriptions. This outer band seems to be a mandatory feature of the magic circle. Every magic circle has this band in some form or other, but as Kieckhefer noted in *Forbidden Rites*, there is some variation in the number of circular bands. He noted that most circles consisted of a single circular band, but could also consist of "varying numbers of concentric bands, between two and four." (172). Of the forty-one round magic circles discussed in this thesis, twenty-nine of them have only a single circular band. Eight of them have concentric bands, forming a broad border around the centre of the circle. The number of concentric bands indeed varies as Kieckhefer noted between two and four. Of the eight that have more than one band, four of them have a double concentric band; three of which are found in the Folger manuscript. These are the circles on page 68 (fig. 17), page 183 (fig. 25) and on page 200 (fig. 26). The circles on page 68 and 200 are similar to each other. They both have a double

concentric band as their only feature. There is no other geometrical shape inside these circles; they are very simplistic. The circle on page 183 is more intricate. It has a double concentric band in which there are inscriptions, but it also has inscriptions outside of those borders. Furthermore, it contains a diamond shape in its centre also featuring inscriptions. What makes this circle really different is the fact that it has another smaller circle beneath it. This smaller circle consists only of a single outer band. There are three magic circles that have three concentric bands. Two of those are in Sloane 3850, the first of which is on folio 18v (fig 28) and the second on folio 140r (fig 31). The circle on folio 18v has two concentric bands which contain inscriptions. The third concentric band also has inscriptions, but it can be argued that this is a different type of band than the others, because this band has been divided into four quarters by a cross that runs through the centre of the circle. The other circle in this manuscript on folio 140r does not have this divide. It only has the three concentric bands in which there are inscriptions. The other magic circle with three concentric bands is in the Additional on folio 101r (fig. 42). This circle is similar to the circle on folio 18v. The bands are also divided by a cross which runs through the centre of the circle. However, instead of dividing only one band like the circle on 18v, all of the bands are divided by the cross. Finally, there is one circle in the Folger manuscript that has four concentric bands. This is the only circle to contain four of these bands. The circle is on page 174 (fig. 22) and is fairly simple in its exterior. The four bands contain various inscriptions and the centre is kept clear. It also has another interesting feature; at the left of the circle the bands are interrupted. There is a small pathway cleared from inscription running from the edge of the circle to its centre. It seems to be an entrance through which the magician could enter the circle. By creating an open space in the bands, the magician would make sure that he would not disturb the inscriptions and thus make himself vulnerable to spirits while performing his conjuration.

3.1.3 Analysis

Of all the square magic circles, there is only one which does not contain a circular shape. The three Folger circles and the Sloane 3853 circle on folio 91r all contain at least one circular band inside their squares. Only the magic circle on folio 109v consists completely of squares. The fact that most of the square magic circles still contain circular shapes is logical in light of Agrippa's statement about circular shapes. Circles were powerful shapes and by incorporating them these types of circles would gain that power as well as having a direct link to the earth. Another possible explanation for the choice of a square comes from the bible. Although it has been known by scholars that medieval people did not think the earth was flat,

it can be argued that the square is a representation of the four corners of the world mentioned in the bible. In Isaiah 11.12 it says: “and shall gather together the dispersed of Juda from the four quarters of the earth.” (*Douay Rheims Bible*). This reference would then mean that the square is a representation of the earth, which would explain the connection to the earth that Agrippa noted. Another reason why it can be seen as a representation of earth can be found in Chinese lore. There is an analogous situation found in the representation of heaven and earth found in Chinese culture. In Chinese tradition the earth was a square with the sky like an inverted bowl suspended over it (Minford and Lau 40).

If we look at the overwhelming number of circular magic circles, it seems that the outer circular band was a mandatory element. Although the number of these bands was variable and could differ from one to four. The broader the concentric bands became the more difficult it was for a magician to enter the circle. This is why the circle with four concentric bands has a pathway cleared from the edge to the centre to allow the magician to safely step inside his circle without disrupting the inscriptions.

3.2 Geometrical Shapes Inside Magic Circles

Inside the outer band of the circles is where most of the different elements are to be found. Kieckhefer notes in *Forbidden Rites* that beyond the simple outer bands the circles have “various complicating factors” (172). This means that they contain various shapes and figures which can overlap with each other and with the outer band. Some of the circles are quite simplistic in their looks, featuring only the mandatory outer band and nothing else. However, the majority of the circles is more intricate and require another geometrical shape in their inner circle. In these more intricate circles there are certain recurring geometrical shapes: the pentagram, the triangle, the circle and the cross. These different shapes and their realisation in the different circles will be discussed in the following sections.

3.2.1 Pentagrams

The geometrical shape of the pentagram (or pentangle) is well known in magical documents. Kieckhefer in *Forbidden Rites* identified it as one of the elements of magic circles (173). A pentagram was a powerful geometrical shape therefore it made sense that magicians would incorporate them into their circles. Agrippa stated that:

“Ipse etiam pentagonus cum uirtute quinarum numeri mirandum in malos
daemones habet imperium tum ex lineature sua qua habet intus quinque;
angulos obtulos & extra quinque; acutos.”¹⁰

(II.xxiii)

Because the pentagram exerted control over evil spirits it was an excellent choice to incorporate into a magic circle. In the manuscripts discussed there is evidence of two different types of pentagrams. The first is the normal pentagram which resembles a star. Five magic circles incorporate this type of pentagram. However, there is another form present in the manuscripts as well. This pentagram is more rounded and does not have any sharp angles. It is better described as a pentagon.

Each of the manuscripts contains at least one circle that incorporates a pentagram. Although they all use the same geometrical shape, the way in which it is used differs. The first way in which it is incorporated into the circles can be seen in two circles in *The Dannel*. In these instances the pentagram's wedges do not exceed the borders of the circle. The first of these circles is on folio 207r (fig. 11). The pentagram is not entirely in the middle of the circle but is situated a little to the left. Its edges overlap with the outer band of the circle, but do not cross its border. Four of the wedges come together in points like they are supposed to, but one of the wedges does not. The lines of the bottom left wedge do not form an angle, but its lines are cut off by the outer band of the circle, closing off the wedge. The reason for this can be found outside of the circle. Just beyond the unfinished point there is a small circle. This was an assigned area in which a spirit would appear when being conjured. The wedge that points in the direction of the spirit is not closed off but left open. The reason for this could be that the magician's power would be concentrated and directed towards the spirit being conjured and thus keep it controlled. The second circle is in Sloane 3850 on folio 140r (fig. 31). The pentagram is small and situated at the centre of the concentric bands. Its wedges form acute angles which reach the all the way to the innermost concentric band, but they do not cross into them. However, the orientation of the pentagram is slightly deviated. It is not situated with the top wedge pointing towards the top, but it has been inverted. The wedge that would normally point towards the top is now situated on the bottom of the circle.

¹⁰ Translation: “The Pentangle also, as with the virtue of the number five, hath a very great command over evil spirits, so by its lineature, by which it hath within five obtuse angles, and without five acutes.” Translated by John French (London, 1651).

In the other three magic circles the pentagrams' wedges stretch outside of the borders of the outer bands. The first of these circles is in the Folger manuscript on page 201 (fig. 27). The pentagram is oddly shaped and not in its usual form: only three angles have been completed, the other two are left open. The edges also far exceed the borders of the outer circular band of the circle. This is odd given that the pentagram got its power over evil spirits through its five angles, according to Agrippa. The other two circles are more similar to each other. The first is in Sloane 3854 on folio 41r (fig. 34), the other is in the Additional on folio 159r (fig. 47). In both circles the pentagram is focussed around its centre but slightly askew. The angles in both cases are formed outside of the outer band of the circle. Another similarity is that the circle is cut across by a rectangular shape which also intersects the pentagrams. Both circles are extremely similar in their form. It appears to be the case that the circle in the Additional manuscript is actually an inverted variant of the circle from the Sloane 3854 circle.

The fact that some of these pentagrams have an extremely odd shape and some of them are slightly deviated or seemingly askew can be explained rather easily. The scribes did not have any examples which they traces into these manuscripts, they drew the pentagrams freely and therefore there was always a slight deviation (sometimes a larger one) of the pentagram's middle. What is interesting is that the pentagrams hardly ever reach outside of the circle at the top wedges. It is usually the bottom wedges that go beyond the borders or are left open.

The pentagon is the more common shape found in the magic circles discussed in this thesis. Again it is used in two different ways. The first way in which it is used is by forming an enclosed shape at the centre of the circle. In the second instance in how it is used the pentagon is left open on one side. Three of the circles feature the closed pentagons. These are the circles on folio 207v (fig. 12) in *The Dannel*, folio 48v (fig. 29) from Sloane 3850, and 81v (fig. 41) in the Additional. These three are very similar to each other, all of them are drawn oriented towards the top. This means that the top angle of the pentagon would also point towards the top. The lines are double so there is a space for the magician to make inscriptions, this is a feature that all of these pentagons possess. Another common feature is that their edges are all sealed off by the outer circular band of the circle. The inner lines of the bands of the pentagon come together to form an enclosed shape. The lines join together before reaching the edge of the outer band of the circle. Unlike the circle in *The Dannel*, this circle's pentagon does not form an enclosed shape. The top edge of the pentagon is not closed off, but the lines of the inner bands of the pentagon continue on through the outer circular

band to create an ellipse which ends outside of the circle. At the top of the folio the ellipse is fully formed.

The four other pentagons are used in the second way. They each feature an opening at one of their sides. Firstly, there is the circle on folio 50r (fig. 3) in Sloane 3853. The pentagon's edges lie outside of the outer band and are rounded instead of being acute angles. The pentagon itself consists of double lines, creating a pentagon shaped band in which inscriptions could be made. At the top of the circle the edges of the pentagon do not come together. They reach out of the outer band of the circle, but do not meet. Instead the lines come together to close off that part of the band. It seems that the circle on folio 31r (fig. 32) in Sloane 3854 is exactly the same, only in this case this scribe was slightly sloppier and had made the corners more angular. A similar circle can be found in Sloane 3850 on folio 282 (fig. 30). It resembles the closed pentagons previously discussed. Its edges do not come together but merge with the edges of the outer circular band. Again at the top of the pentagon the lines do not come together but leave an opening. The inner lines of the pentagon continue on, crossing through the outer band of the circle, but in diverging paths instead of converging. The last circle is in the Additional manuscript on folio 156v (fig. 44). This one is different from the others in that it is not aligned with the top but a bit askew. It also has a very large opening, while the others all had relatively small openings. This opening is almost as large as one of the sides of the pentagon, the rest of the shape is similar to the circle on folio 282 in Sloane 3850.

3.2.2 Triangles

The triangle like the pentagram is another geometrical shape which holds power over evil spirits through its angles (Agrippa II.xxiii). It is a common shape found in magic circles. There are seven circles which incorporate a triangle in their design. Most of these circles have a normal triangle but two of them feature inverted triangles. This inverted triangle is a common occurrence in magical documents and is also identified by Kieckhefer in *Forbidden Rites* (172). The two circles which feature this inverted triangle can be found on page 177 of the Folger manuscript (fig. 24) and on folio 163r of the Additional manuscript (fig. 49). In both cases the triangle is centred in the middle, but its apex is pointed downwards. It is not clear why these circles have an inverted triangle rather than a normal one, but it had to be of significance to be featured in this way.

The other five circles feature the normal standard triangle. Two of them are in the Additional manuscript, the first of which is on folio 152r (fig. 43) and the second on folio

162r (fig. 48). They have similar appearances, however the triangle in the circle on folio 152r is slightly tilted while the circle on folio 162r is perfectly straight. Another difference is that the triangle on folio 162r consists of three separate rectangular bands which join together to form the triangle, while the triangle on 152r consists of one uninterrupted band. This is also the case for the triangles in the circles on folio 64v in Sloane 3854 (fig. 35), and on page 167 in the Folger manuscript (fig. 21). The triangles in these case are straight and consist of one band without interruptions. The last circle is on folio 205v in *The Dannel* (fig. 8), and it differs significantly from the others. While the other triangles remained inside the outer band of their circles, and only connected with them at the edges, this circle overlaps the outer band at the top. Its edges connect with the circle but at the apex of the triangle rises through the outer circular band and reaches the second line of the band instead of the first line as the other triangles did.

3.2.3 Crosses

There are two circles which contain shapes that are very different from the rest. They contain large crosses in the centre of their circles. One of them is in *The Dannel* on folio 182v (fig 6). The centre of the circle is divided by a vertical band and a horizontal band which together form a cross. The bands are inscribed with different inscriptions. The edges connect with the outer band of the circle, forming four closed off sections inside the circle. The second circle also incorporates a cross but in significantly a different way. It is found in the first half of Sloane 3853 on folio 60r (fig 5). At its centre it contains a Christian cross, of which the edges do not connect to the outer band but leave a space between the edge of the cross and the outer band for inscriptions.

Even though this form is not often found in magical documents, Agrippa was aware that the cross was actually a very powerful symbol. He stated:

“figuram autem crucis aegyptii atq; arabes summam potentiam habere confirmabant quod que sit omnium coelestium uirium atq; intelligentiarum firmissimum recepta culum quia ipsa sit figura omnium rectissima continens quatuor angulos rectos sitq; prima superficiei description, habens longitudinem & latitudinem dicebantq; eam caelestium fortitudine conspiratam quia

eorum fortitude per rectitudinem angulorum atq; radiorum resultat”
(II.xviii).¹¹

The cross was a powerful symbol that received its power from the heavens. A magician using this shape in his circle would thus be connected to that power and it enabled him to use it during his conjurations. It must be noted that the Christian cross is the only one that is used in this way as a way to gain power. There two other forms of the cross, the Greek one that resembles a capital T and the cross which is tilted and resembles an X, both of these versions are not featured in these manuscripts in this way.

3.2.4 Circles and Squares

Some of the circles are more simplistic in their appearances. They only contain circles or small squares at their centres. The circle in the Folger manuscript on page 67 (fig. 16) is one of those simplistic ones. At the centre of the circle there is a small simple outline of a square. There is no band in which there could have been inscriptions. There are other circles containing squares which are a bit more intricate. For example, the circle on folio 39r in Sloane 3854 (fig. 33), which is the same as the circle on folio 158r in the Additional, contains two squares which overlap each other. One of the squares is tilted into a diamond shape, while the other remains a square. The shapes fit into each other, creating little triangle shaped spaces in which inscriptions could be written.

Besides simple squares there are also magic circles which only have simple circles inside. The first of these is in *The Dannel* on folio 213v (fig. 13). This small circle is at the centre, but it is divided by a cross which runs across the entire circle. Another one is in the Folger manuscript on page 46 (fig. 15). This smaller circle is also a band in which inscriptions can be made, similar to the circle in *The Dannel* this circle is also divided by a cross.

¹¹ Translation: “The Egyptians, and Arabians confirmed that the figure of the Cross hath very great power, and that is the most firm receptacle of all Celestial powers, and intelligencies, because it is the rightest figure of all, containing foure right angles, and it is the first description of the superficies, having longitude and latitude: And they said it is inspired with the fortitude of the Celestials, because their fortitude results by the straitness of angles and rayes.” Translated by John French (London, 1651).

3.2.5 Various Other Shapes

Apart from these various geometrical and other more simplistic shapes there were a few circles which contained exceptional and uncommon shapes. The circle on 206v (fig. 10) is the most intricate of these. The folio preceding it contains a blue print for this circle, so the magician could see how the circle had to be drawn. It is shaped like an eight-pointed star, but instead of acute angles the wedges form ellipses. This creates a small square at the centre of the circle. Another exception can also be found in *The Dannel* on folio 184v (fig. 7). Again a square is created in the centre of the circle. But the shape itself is different. It consists out of four half circles which are divergent from each other. Instead of forming circles together they are faced towards the outer band of the circle and overlap with each other and end at the outer edge of the circle.

Apart from these exceptional forms there are three other circles which feature two geometrical shapes in their circles. These are the only three instances in which this occurs. They each feature a regular triangle at their centre, which is also their dominant geometrical form, but they each have another form which overlaps both the triangles and the their outer bands. These are the circles on page 167 of the Folger manuscript (fig. 21), on folio 64v in Sloane 3854 (fig. 35), and on folio 163r of the Additional manuscript (fig. 49). Both the circle from the Sloane manuscript and the Additional manuscript have another triangle which is connected to the one in the centre of the circle, but its apex lies outside of the circle. This appeared to be create extra consecrated space which the magician make use of during his conjuration. The other magic circle is in the Folger manuscript. Its second shape is similar to that of a triangle, but instead of having an apex, its angle is rounded off.

3.3 Position of Spirit and Operator

Another common element found in magic circles is identified by Kieckhefer as the “positions of the master and child medium” (172). Most circles required the magician performing the conjuration to stand within it, sometimes along with certain objects or with an apprentice, known as a fellow. Or sometimes as Kieckhefer noted accompanied by a child. Often the circles had open centres in which the scribes wrote: “for the master and his fellowes”. This phrase which served to indicate the master’s place varied immensely. Apart from several vernacular variations of this sentence, scribes could also note down the Latin “Locus Magistri” or “Magister” to indicate the position.

Apart from an indication of the position of the master and fellow, some of the circles also gave an indication where the spirit that was being conjured would appear, often with a

small round circle that is easily overlooked. Interestingly, this is not one of the features that Kieckhefer identifies as being part of a magic circle.

3.3.1 Position of the Spirit

In a minority of the number of circles looked at, the scribe has indicated where the spirit appeared in relation to the circle. Three circles in *The Dannel* have this indication. In the first instance on folio 182v (fig. 6) there is a capital “N” in the top left hand corner. This “N” stood for ‘Nomen’, and indicated that a spirit, whose name could vary per experiment would appear in that location. The other two circles on folio 206v (fig. 10) and folio 207r (fig. 11), both indicated the place where the spirit appeared with a small circle at the bottom left side of the circle. The interesting thing is that the geometrical shape of the pentagram contained inside the circle on folio 207r (fig. 11) seems to point towards this location. One of the points of the pentagram does not close, but remains open and points in the direction of that smaller circle.

In two cases the place where the spirit appeared was marked clearly. The first of these is the circle on page 183 (fig. 25) in the Folger manuscript. Instead of having just a small indication that the spirit will appear, this magic circle features a large circle, with the spirit name ‘molascus’ written inside of it beneath the master’s circle. The instructions are also very clear that this smaller circle is made specifically for the spirit to appear in:

“make a syrcle of 2 foote broade and 7 foote frome the other circle and write the spirite name therin and bidd hime appeare in likenes of a child of 3 yeares of adge” (181).

The second instance can also be found in the Folger manuscript on folio 174 (fig. 22). At the bottom of the folio, beneath the master’s circle there is a smaller circle which contains the name “satan”. This was the designated appearing place for this spirit. These were the only two instances in which the place of the spirit was so clearly marked. Apart from the other smaller indications most circles do not contain a designated space for the conjured spirits. Sometimes while there was not a designated space indicated in the drawing there would be one given in the instructions. For example, the Folger Shakespeare manuscript contains a circle on page 136 (fig. 20), where the instructions stated that the “sprite will appeare in a basson of water” (135).

3.3.2 Position of Master and Fellow

There were multiple ways for a scribe to indicate the place of the master in the circle. A common way of indicating it was to use a Latin phrase inscribed at the centre of the drawing of the circle. For example, the circle on folio 109v (fig. 2) in Sloane 3853 has “locus magister” in the centre. This is also the case for the circle on folio 50r in Sloane 3853, the circle on folio 248 in Sloane 3850, the circle on folio 31r in Sloane 3854, and folio 81v in the Additional manuscript.

Most of the circles contain the phrase “for the master” written in vernacular English. A few of the circles only specifically mention the master. For example, on folio 207v in *The Dannel* (fig. 12) states that the circle is “for the master” (207v). More often the master would have been accompanied into the circle by one or more fellows or apprentices. Therefore, the most common text to be found in these types of circles is “for the master and his fellowes” which can be found in the circle on folio 184v in *The Dannel* (fig. 7). In the case of the circle on folio 17v in the Additional manuscript (fig. 39 and 40), the scribe indicated in the centre of the circle that it was for the master. However, in the instructions for this particular circle there is a detailed explanation on how the master had to enter the circle with his fellows:

“your circles must be made with the afornameyed knyfe ... stick the knyfe in the midst of the place and measure 9 foote on both sydes from the knyfe but remember to leave a space open, wherby you may go yn and out” (16v).

After the master has finished making the circle the scribes stated that “all which beyng donne, let the master bryng yn hys companions by the gate of the cyrcle” (16v). Even though only the master is indicated in the drawing of the circle, he would have been accompanied into the circle by multiple fellows.

There are also instances where it is mentioned in the instructions that the master had to stand inside the circle, but it was not made explicit in the drawing of the circle. This is the case for the circle on page 183 (fig. 25) in the Folger manuscript. The instructions accompanying it contain a specific way for the master to step into the circle. First of all, he had to make the circle while reciting a prayer. Then he had to “put thy right foote into the circle” (181) while saying another prayer. The scribe then stated that:

“this done thou arte safe and neadest to feare nothinge for there maye noo spirte come within that circle but I warne thee come not out of they

circle until thou have avoided spirits for if thou doo he will sley hee without the greate mercye of god defend thee therefore I commande thee in the name of god to keepe thee within thy circle” (181).

This is the only circle which explicitly states that the master stood inside of the circle for protection from the spirit he was conjuring.

3.3.3 Analysis

The caution on page 181 in the Folger manuscript suggests that necromantic circles were purely meant for protection. However, if we turn to *The Dannel* there are two similar circles to be found on folios 213v and 259v (fig. 13 and 14 respectively). These two circles both conjure the four princes of hell. The master in this experiment does not stand within the circle, instead there is a burning candle in the middle of the circle. The circle also has no other inscriptions than the names of the spirits that are being conjured. If these circles were meant to protect the magicians from the spirits they are conjuring, one would expect this circle to be very different. The magician in this experiment seems unprotected because he is not inside it. Yet the princes do appear because in his conjuration the magician has to give license to send the spirits away again:

“and when this thunge or this treser is browght a gayne to this place then saye I command you sprytes by the sacrament of the bodye of owr lord Ihesu cryst ye goo a gayne to that place that ye com from and do no harme to none crystyn creature or thyng that he made by the virtue of owr lord that is and was and euer shalbe world withoute ende amen.” (213r).

This meant that the spirits were actually thought to have appeared, yet the magician was not inside a circle to protect himself. One possible explanation for this is that most protection against the spirits during conjurations came from the invocations contained in the conjuration. Kieckhefer notes that conjurations contained certain elements. One of those elements was called the invocations. The magician would “call upon the sacred power of numinous beings, names and events” (*Forbidden Rites* 133). By calling upon these sacred names the magician could gain power over the spirits that were being conjured and forced them to do the master’s bidding (*Forbidden Rites* 133). It would seem that this was sufficient

to control the spirits that were conjured. The circles could then be seen as an extension of that power, as they often contain these sacred names in writing.

3.4 Conclusion

All magic circles were constructed out of an outer band which contained space for inscriptions. Though the circular form was more powerful and more common, there were also a few instances in which there was a square outer band. However, these square magic circles often contained circular shapes inside of them. Inside this mandatory outer band there were various geometrical shapes which the magician could choose from to construct the circle. All of these shapes were powerful and would presumably add to the power of the magician and his hold over the spirit he conjured. The most common shapes were the pentagram, triangle and cross.

Almost all of the magic circles had a clear space at their centre, which was usually meant for the master to stand in. Although quite a considerable number of the circles had a written indication that the master (and his fellow) had to stand in the centre, it was not a mandatory feature. Some of them had no written indication in the circle, but mentioned it in their instructions because stepping into the circle was part of the ritual. Finally, only a few circles indicated where the spirit would appear in relation to it. In the instances that this indication was present, it was most often done so with a small circle. Only in two instances was there a clear designated space for the spirit to appear in.

Chapter 4: Inscriptions

Magic circles were often intricate in their appearances, not only because of their featured geometrical forms, but also because of the various inscriptions inside their bands. These inscriptions could be both verbal and non-verbal. The non-verbal inscriptions consisted out of small geometrical shapes and what magicians called characters. These were signs consisting out of strange lines and angles which represented angel or spirit names. The verbal inscriptions consisted out of sacred names or spirit names. In Sloane 3850 the scribe had explicitly stated the reason for inscribing circles with names and characters: “consecrate thy circle ... with names and characters: which dost line and raigne world without end” (99r). This is followed by another piece of information contained in the conjuration itself:

“I coniure you with you circules and exorcize you with all the names, letters characters and crosses and every of you virtues and seales of salomon that you be unto me, and my fellowes all thinges contained ahold and fort against all malignant spirite” (99r).

The names and inscriptions were used to consecrate the circle and to give the magician power over the spirit that was being conjured. Both the shapes and verbal inscriptions were present in a lot of different forms. There seemed to be much freedom in the choice of which inscriptions the magician could make. However, there do seem to be certain elements that were mandatory.

4.1 Non-verbal Inscriptions

The reason why magic circles often look very intricate is because they contain non-verbal inscriptions, which take the form of small geometrical shapes such as a pentagram or a cross, or non-verbal signs, called characters, which were used to represent certain angels or spirits. These signs consist of strange shapes and often look very confusing, but for magicians they were a common occurrence.

4.1.1 Small Shapes

There are two common shapes which are found in magic circles. Firstly, there is the Christian cross. As mentioned in the previous chapter the cross was a powerful symbol and it is used in magic circles quite often. Thirty nine of the circles discussed in this thesis have small crosses

inscribed in them. The crosses are used in three different ways. Most commonly they are found within the bands of the circles and are used to surround the names that are inscribed in the circles. For example, in the circle on folio 50r in Sloane 3853 (fig. 3) every name is surrounded by a cross on each side of it. The second way in which they were used is that they were placed outside of a circle's borders. This can be seen in the circle on folio 207v in *The Dannel* (fig. 12). It features five crosses, which are placed around the outside of the circle. Yet their placement is not arbitrary: they are placed at the ends of the angles of the pentagon which is inside of the circle. Whenever the crosses were on the outside of the circle they were placed at the ends of the geometrical shape. The third way in which they are used can be seen on folio 206v in *The Dannel* (fig. 10). The circle on folio 48v in Sloane 3850 (fig. 29) also contains crosses situated at the edges of its pentagon, but rather than being outside of the circle they are inside its outer band. Only the cross at the top of the circle is situated outside of its borders, but it is still within the borders of the ellipse. There are a few other circles which also feature the top cross outside of its borders. This cross would usually be larger than the other ones.

Apart from the shape of the cross, there were also circles which contained a small pentagram. In the manuscripts looked at ten circles contain pentagrams, but they are utilized in different ways. For example, the circle on folio 60r in Sloane 3853 (fig. 5) uses pentagrams to contain the letters of the four letter name of God: AGLA. Whereby each pentagram contains one letter, in clockwise order. Another circle which infuses the use of pentagrams with sacred names is the circle on folio 17v in the Additional manuscript (fig. 39). However, instead of featuring letters inside the pentagrams, the letters surround the pentagrams. Each letter is separated by a wedge of the pentagram. The letters spell out various sacred names. The three square magic circles in the Folger manuscript on pages 130, 134 and 136 (fig. 18, 19 and 20 respectively), use the pentagram shape differently as well. Because they consist of circles fitted in squares, an open space is created in each inside corner of the square. Each of these circles has small pentagrams in their inside corners. Another different way in which the pentagrams are featured can be seen on folio 18v in Sloane 3850 (fig. 28). Similar to the way the crosses in *The Dannel* are used, the pentagrams are located outside of the circle. However, instead of being near the edge of the circle they are situated in the corners of the circle, almost forming a square border around the circle.

There are two similar circles, although they feature the pentagrams inside of them. The first is the circle on folio 101r in the Additional manuscript (fig 42) and the second is the circle on page 200 in the Folger manuscript (fig 26). In both cases the pentagrams are inside

the circle, but because these circles have been divided into four sections, each pentagram is situated in one quarter. The type of pentagram that is used is also noteworthy, because instead of being an actual five angled pentagram, it is a star of David. During the late sixteenth century the star of David began to replace the pentagram in magical manuscripts. This could mean that the Additional manuscript is a younger manuscript than the others. However, there were some younger manuscripts that did use the pentagram instead of the star of David, so only if the star of David is seen can we say that the manuscript is more likely from the late sixteenth century while if it is missing, it does not tell us anything, because some later manuscripts copied the original manuscripts faithfully.

4.1.2 Characters

Apart from these two shapes there are other various shapes to be found in circles. These are not geometrical shapes but consists of seemingly random angles, circles and lines. In some ways they even resemble letters. They were called characters and were signs representing either angel or spirit names. The signs are often hard to decipher because there is no definite list with transliteral translations for them. Eleven of the circles examined contain these characters.

Two of the circles feature only one type of character. These two circles are on page 134 of the Folger manuscript and on folio 18v in Sloane 3850 (fig. 19 and 28 respectively). Interestingly enough they both contain the same sign, which can be seen in image 2. This is the sign of the archangel Michael. Both of the circles feature the name of Michael in their bands, which is then followed by his sign. These are the only two instances where the sign of Michael is

Image 2: image of the sign of Michael, found in the manuscripts.

featured. The other characters are smaller and usually only contain one shape instead of multiple different ones linked together as in this case. An example of this is the circle on folio 207r in *The Dannel* (fig. 11). However, these characters are placed outside of the circle, rather than inside of it as was the norm. There are five different characters placed around the circle. The other circles which contain these types of characters all have them inside the circle. Most commonly they are found in the outer band of the circle itself. In some cases, such as the circle on folio 163r in the Additional manuscript (fig. 49), they can also be found inside the geometrical shape at the centre of the circle.

4.1.3 Analysis

As Agrippa stated in his *De Occulta Philosophia* geometrical shapes were powerful, they allowed a magician to exert control over spirits. Therefore it was logical for crosses and pentagrams to be incorporated in magic circles, because they were powerful forms. The cross is the most common shape to be found. It is used after every name, but not when this name represents a spirit. This meant that it was probably a mandatory feature. Magicians had to indicate sacred names, either those of angels or sacred names of God, with small crosses. The pentagram is used more sparsely; they would only be incorporated if they had a function. For example, one of the circles has four pentagrams inside of it with inside each pentagram one letter of the sacred four letter word of God. In another instance the pentagrams are at the centre of the circle, one could imagine the magician would stand inside of one to gain extra power. It could also be that these shapes were only used when the magician would conjure powerful spirits, because these pentagrams would then grant him more power of these spirits.

The characters which were featured in the circles often belonged to angels and planets, but sometimes they could also represent spirits. The reason they were used in the circles is unclear. There is little written evidence in the manuscripts about these characters. There is one instance on folio 99r in Sloane 3850, where the scribe has stated that the characters, names and letters used were for the purpose of first consecrating the circle and then to control to spirit. There is also an instance in *The Dannel* where it was stated that a magician had to put a certain sign on his forehead. The scribe stated that the magician when conjuring spirits had to wear certain signs:

“also thou mayst well understand thou oughtest to haue
thes to syns in thi brest or on the forhed or else thaye dred
the not and when thaye se these synes they dred the and
thou mayst haue thi wyll” (178v).

Image 3: Planetary signs the magician needs to carry on him.

If we examine this passage it is clear that the spirits would fear these signs that the magician wore and thus fear him by extension. The magician could then exert his power over the spirits and make them do his bidding. It would be logical for the other signs to have this function as well. By inscribing these signs into the circle in which the magician stood, the spirits feared it and would not break through to harm the magician. In addition it would also give the magician power over the spirits he conjured.

4.2 Verbal Inscriptions

Verbal inscriptions were the inscriptions consisting of written words or names. There is evidence of multiple types of these inscriptions. The first and most common type of inscriptions were names. Kieckhefer in *Forbidden Rites* divided the names inscribed in magic circles into three categories: sacred names, spirit names and miscellaneous inscriptions (173). With sacred names he meant the names of God and angelic names. There were many different names of God which are known in both the Christian and the Jewish traditions. Magicians used names from both of these traditions. Besides the names a magician could also make other inscriptions. Kieckhefer refers to these as miscellaneous inscriptions. He noted that at times magicians would use other languages to make their inscriptions, either Latin or Hebrew. The Latin inscriptions were most commonly prayers or other liturgical formulas, while the Hebrew was mostly used to depict sacred names.

4.2.1 Names of God

In Christian culture there was a practice of listing the sacred names of God. These lists of divine names were used in all corners of Christian culture: from the official ceremonial practices to theology. As magic was a part of Christian culture it was also present there (Izmirlieva 2). The names had different uses such as to instruct and glorify, but in its use in magic it is most likely that these names had a protective function. However, as Valentina Izmirlieva indicates this practice was not solely done in the Christian world. It was done by other cultures as well who, like the Christians, had a “zeal for embracing the divine realm in a list.” (2). In magic we see that besides Christian divine names there are also names derived from the Jewish tradition. For example, the name Adonay is frequently used in the magic circles. This name came from the Hebrew Adonai and substituted the name of God according to Kohler “at least as early as the fourth pre-Christian century” (20). The idea of the 72 names of God also derives from a shared Judaeo-Christian tradition and is rooted in the Jewish Kabbalah as Izmirlieva demonstrates (2). Kabbalah is the Jewish tradition in which Moses acquired the particular meaning of sacred tradition of divine origin, which is found in the scriptures. The word Kabbalah is an abbreviation for “divine truth received by Moses from God” (Dan 2). In the thirteenth century it became a way of getting closer to the divine truth by studying the scriptures and receiving the oral information from previous generations (Dan 3).

This all suggests that there were many names of God that a magician could choose from when inscribing his circle. However, Kieckhefer does not identify many different names

of God. His list consists of the names: Agla, Tetragrammaton, Adonay, Sabaoth, Emanuel and Alpha et Omega (173). This list is by far not exhaustive, but these names are a few of the most common that were used in the magic circles. In the circles looked at in this thesis the name Agla is found most often. It is inscribed in twenty-four different circles. In a few of them it is actually featured more than once. This is the case for the circle on page 67 (fig. 16) in the Folger manuscript. Around the small inner square the name Agla is repeated four times, once on every side of the square. In three other circles the name is repeated twice in the same circle. In the case of the circles on page 134 and 175 (fig. 19 and 22 respectively) in the Folger manuscript it is simply the name Agla that is repeated, but in the third circle on folio 81v in the Additional manuscript (fig. 41) there is a slight variation. It features the name Agla in one instance, but at the top of the circle it says “salvator agla”. Salvator in Latin means “The Saviour” or “one who exercises a protective power” (Niermeyer 936). In connection with a name of God it could either mean God the saviour, or it meant that God exercises a protective power. By invoking this name the magician called on the protective power of God. There is another instance in which the name Agla is found. However, in this instance it is not meant as a name, but as the acronym for which it actually stands. This circle is on folio 60r in Sloane 3853 (fig. 5), the letters A.G.L.A. are set in pentagrams around the cross in the middle of the circle. The letters together form the word Agla, but it stands for “Atah Gebur Le-olahm Adonai” which is a Hebrew four letter word for God (Conley 87).

After Agla the most common names are: Emmanuel, which appears in twenty-two circles, Sabaoth, which appears in seventeen, and Adonay which appears in fifteen circles. These three names like Agla are also derived from the Jewish tradition. Both the names Sabaoth (often also seen as Sabaothe) and Adonai (more often written as Adonay) are also used in the old testament in Christian doctrine (Izmirlieva 59). Emmanuel is a Hebrew name which means “The lord is with us” (Izmirlieva 127).

Hebrew is also a common occurrence in magic circles. When Hebrew is present, it is used to spell out the four letter word of god: Y.H.W.H. An example of this is the circle on folio 60r in Sloane 3853 (fig 5). At the top of the cross it features the letters יהוה which transliterally mean YHWH, the four letter word for God. It is repeated at every arm of the cross. In the Jewish tradition there was a practice of avoiding the pronunciation as well as the writing out of the holy name of God (Lauterbach 39). These letters will always be pronounced as Adonai when reading the Torah. Some of the instances of Hebrew are correct, such as in the instance of the circle on folio 163r in the Additional manuscript (fig. 49). However, more often what we find in the circles is pseudo Hebrew. One of the examples of

pseudo Hebrew can be found in the circle on folio 175 in the Folger manuscript (fig. 22). At the right side of the circle there are four letters which resemble Hebrew letters. If we compare these letters to the Hebrew alphabet they resemble the letters KCZC. These letters together form nothing. Most likely the scribe meant to write YHWH, the four lettered sacred name of God, but did not have any knowledge of Hebrew. This is also seen in the circle on folio 39r in Sloane 3854 (fig. 33). In this case it is clearly pseudo Hebrew because it has been written from left to right, instead of right to left as Hebrew was supposed to be written. Instead of saying YHWH, the letters actually say HWHY, which then does not refer to the four letter name of God as it was intended to do.

There are also names which are derived from Greek. The first and most obvious one is of course the Tetragrammaton, which is found in eleven circles. The word itself means “consisting out of four letters”. It refers to the Jewish four letter name of God YHWH. The reason why there was a Greek word for this is because the Jewish people have been present in Egypt since the bronze age. At around 350 BC Egypt became a part of the Grecian empire and became known as Alexandria. Greek became the main language and thus Jewish traditions became practiced in Greek language as well. The Old Testament was also first translated into Greek before it was translated into Latin and lastly into vernacular English. This explains why many sacred names have Greek origins. The second common Greek term is the Alpha and the Omega, which stands for the Beginning and the End. It derives from the Book of Revelations where God is said to say “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end” (*Douay Rheims Bible*, Rev. 1.8). This name appears in twelve of the circles discussed in this thesis. It is always depicted in the circles in Latin: “Alpha et omega”. In a few instances omega is not written out but the scribes tried to make the lowercase Greek omega: ω . For example this can be seen in the circle on folio 248 in Sloane 3850 (fig. 29), inside the pentagon the scribe has written “Alpha ω ”. However, most scribes were not educated in Greek and the omega became interpreted as something resembling either an infinity symbol or two separated o’s: “oo”. An example of such a case can be found on folio 31r in Sloane 3854 (fig. 32) where in the right top band of the pentagon it says “et oo” by which the scribe meant “et ω ”. Another clear derivation from Greek is the name Soter. It appears in sixteen circles and is derived from the Greek word *Sother*, which means savior (Izmirlieva 70). This seems to suggest that Soter is not a name used for God, but rather for Jesus, because in Christian theology Jesus Christ is seen as the saviour.

There are several other names featured in the magic circles which refer to Jesus Christ instead of directly to God. First and foremost the name Jesus Christ itself appears in the

circles. His full name appears in twelve circles. Another seven feature simply the name Jesus, and four only have Christ. The name Jesus for modern day readers is not immediately recognizable. The “j” was not a letter that was used in the medieval alphabet so they used the *ilonga*, which was a long i. Furthermore the name Jesus was often abbreviated extensively. The most common abbreviation of the name is the one that is in the circle on folio 50r in Sloane 3853 (fig. 3). At the top of the circle in the opening of the pentagon it says: “Ihe” with a vertical line over the “h”, this according to Clemens and Graham was the abbreviation for “iesus”, whereby the “h” represented the Greek eta “for which the capital form was H” (89). But this is not the only abbreviation that can be found. For example, the circle on folio 184v in *The Dannel* has the abbreviation “xps Ihs” with a bowed line above the p, and a line across the “h”. “Ihs” is another abbreviation for Jesus and xps is the abbreviated form of Christus, “where the first two characters were the Greek letters chi and rho.” (Clemens and Graham 89). There are a few instances in which the name is not abbreviated. For instance the circle on folio 48v in Sloane 3850 (fig. 29) contains in the left outer band “Jesus” and inside the circle between the outer band and the band of the pentagon it says “christus”.

Another name for Jesus was the messiah. The messiah, unlike in Jewish traditions, in Christianity is another term for the son of God. It is used in this capacity in these circles as well. There are ten circles which contain the name messiah, only it was written as the Latin “Messias”. In some cases it occurs together with the name of Jesus Christ. For example, in the Folger manuscript on page 68 (fig 17), “Messias” is in the outer band on the left, and in the inner band it says “Ihus”, the abbreviation for Jesus. The reason that Jesus Christ is also often invoked is because magicians would often call upon the holy trinity in their invocations for conjuring a spirit and Jesus Christ is the son in that holy trinity.

There are three other names of God that are derived from Greek. The most common of those is Agios, which is sometimes also seen as Agies, which appears in eleven circles. In Greek it means Holy (Izmirviela 127), as a name it would refer to the holy one, which of course is God. A second name that is Greek and appears in eight circles is Yskyros. It comes from the Greek Iskiros and means “the Mighty one”. Finally, there is Althanatos or Althanates which also appears in eight circles which is Greek for “immortal” (Peterson). There are two other names of God as well, the first is Otheos, which is identified on esoteric archives as one of the 72 holy names of God. Another name is Eloy which is contained in the *Liber Iurates* in a list of names of God. There are more names which are featured in the magic circles, but these names all appear only once. These are all also most likely to be names of God, but apparently were less frequently chosen to be inscribed in the circles.

4.2.2. Names of Angels

Apart from the names of God magic circles also featured other sacred names. These are names of the angels and most often the archangels. There is not much variation in these names as there are only a limited number of archangels. Agrippa identifies the four main archangels as Michael, Raphael, Gabriel and Uriel (II.vii). These four are the only ones that are inscribed in the circles. Nine of the circles have all four of the names inscribed. There are four circles that contain the names of Raphael, Michael and Gabriel. Three circles only contain Gabriel and Michael. And there are two circles which only contain the name of Michael. Only the archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael are mentioned in the Old Testament. Uriel is only mentioned in The Book of Enoch. There is one circle in which the names of the angels are written down in Hebrew, namely the one on folio 60r in Sloane 3853 (fig. 5). The top arm has: מִכָּאֵל, the right arm has: רַפָּאֵל, the bottom arm has: גַּבְרִיאֵל, and the left arm has: אֶזְרִיאֵל. If we look at their transliterated transcriptions the letters mean the following: the top arm means Mkal, this stands for the archangel Michael. The right arm states Rpal, which stands for Raphael, also an archangel. The bottom arm is Gkryal which means Gabriel, another archangel and finally the left arm states Azwyal which stands for Ezikiel, who was a Hebrew prophet.

Another term that is found in three circles and is connected to the angels is seraphim. In these circles it is written as “seraphin” as can be seen in the circle on folio 206v (fig. 10) from *The Dannel*. Seraphim are the highest class of angels in Christianity. They are the ones that surround God and praise him. It was around the fourth century that this hierarchy of angels was created by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in *De Coelesti Hierarchia*. Honorius in *Liber Iuratus* also comments on the hierarchy of angels and of the nine choirs of angels, of which the seraphim are the first, states: “they always stande before the deuyne maiestye and are neuer separated from his presens” (7r).

4.2.3 Names of Saints

Apart from names of God and the names of angels sometimes the scribes would use names of apostles or saints in their circles. For example, in the circle on folio 184v in *The Dannel* (fig. 7), the inner bands of the circle are filled with the names of different saints. The band on the left side contains “s Jacobs” which referred to St. Jacob, and “s pauls”, which referred to St. Paul. This is also the case for the circle on folio 207v also in *The Dannel* (fig. 12). The names of St. Jacob and St. Andreas are written in the right band of the pentagon. In the case of the circle on page 183 on the Folger manuscript (fig. 25), there is one entire concentric band

featuring the names of the saints. This band has: “sanctus Iohannes sanctus matheus sanctus marcus sanctus lucas” inscribed in it. They are the saints John, Matthew, Marcus and Luke. In the circle on folio 81v in the Additional manuscript (fig. 41), the inner bands of the pentagon also contain the names of the saints. The top right band has “s petrus s paulus” meaning St. Peter and St. Paul. The bottom left band has “s Iohannes baptis Andres” which means St. John the Baptist and St. Andrew.

4.2.4 Liturgical Formulas

Several circles contained Latin, mostly to make liturgical formulas, either prayers or short phrases to do with God or Christ. First and foremost it is used in the form of prayers. The bands of the circles in these cases are filled with prayers which the magician would either have to recite during the conjuration, or they were meant to provide further protection from the spirits being conjured. An example of this is found in the Folger manuscript on page 136 (fig. 20). The circular band contains a prayer: “per crucis hoc signum sugiat perocul de maligum et per idem signum saluet avodis benignum per signum sanctum crucis deinimus nostris libra nos deus noster amen.”¹² A similar prayer can be found on page 130 (fig. 18). In the circular band it says: “per crucis hoc signum sugiat de maligum et per sanctum signum salvatur benignum per signum sancta crucis libera nos deinimicis nostri deus noster”¹³. These were two common prayers that would protect the magician from harm. They called upon the cross and on God to protect the magician from evil.

The second way in which Latin was used, had to do with holy names as can be seen in the circle on page 167 of the Folger manuscript (fig. 21). Surrounding the triangle at the centre of the circle and in the circle itself are several Latin phrases. On the outside of the triangle it says “sanctus deus”, “sanctus fortis” and “sanctus et immortalis”. On the inside it says: “deus pater”, “deus filius” and “Deus christus sanctus”. These types of phrases were common religious terms. Sanctus means “holy, sacred, or dedicated to God” (Niermeyer 937). The outer band meant “holy God”, “sacred power” and “sacred and immortal”, these phrases all referred to God in some way or other, which is also the case for the inner band. Deus is Latin for God so it would loosely translate to “heavenly father” “son of God” and “God holy spirit”. The inner band invokes the holy trinity of the father, the son and the holy

¹² Translation: may the cross put the evil within him to flight but preserve the good, and that by the sign of the cross we may be delivered from our enemies.

¹³The translation of this second prayer is nearly identical to the first one. And can be found in the first footnote. These two prayers were a prayer to god and are featured in other manuscripts as well.

ghost. A second example is on page 177 of the Folger manuscript (fig. 24). It states: “Ihesu fili virginis”, “rex celeste agminis”, and “matris tue precibus” on the outside of the inverted triangle but inside the circle. Again these phrases refer either to Jesus or God and invoke the higher power.

4.2.5 Names of Spirits

There is also evidence of scribes inscribing spirit names in their circles. The first example of this is the square circle on folio 91r in the Sloane 3853 manuscript (fig. 1). The names inscribed in the outer band of the square are names of spirits. At the top it says Teltrien, on the right: “spirion vel sireou vel spridon”, the bottom: “beltheron vel betheron vel bethereon”, and on the left: “mahireon vel mahereon”. The fact that the same name is repeated but in different forms was a common occurrence. Scribes often did not know how to write a spirit’s name or were unsure which form was correct, they inscribed various forms of the same name to make sure the correct spirit would appear.

The other square circle contains names of spirits in its outer band. In the inner band the scribe has added the titles of the three spirits “uriens vel oriens rex oriental”, “paymon rex occident”, and “Egyn rex septentriona” these are the three kings of the cardinal directions. Uriens or Oriens of the east, Paymon of the west and Egyn of the north. A further two circles also contain only the names of spirits. They are similar in appearance and function and were meant to conjure the same spirits. The names “satahan, lucifer, dencalion and faciton” can both be found in the circles on folio 231v and folio 259v in *The Dannel* (fig. 13 and 14 respectively).

4.2.6 Analysis

When we look at the inscriptions of names there is one striking pattern. The majority of the circles features the names of the four archangels in the outer band of the circle and several names of God in the inner shape of the circle. This construction appears in eleven circles. If the circles, as the evidence seems to suggest, were indeed used for protection, then it makes sense that the band closest to the magician would contain names of God. These sacred names would carry most of the power and therefore offer more protection than being surrounded by the names of the archangels.

It made sense for magicians to invoke the saints in their conjurations because according to the doctrine in the Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches there is something called the intercession of the saints. This is the belief

that the saints who are in God's presence would offer their own prayers to God in support of a man and thus help one gain the protection or help of God himself ("Intercession."). By invoking the saints they would ask them to ask God for his protection, and because these saints were in the presence of God they could offer a direct link to Him. Combined with the sacred names in the outer band of the circle the magician would be protected from the spirits.

The circles which only inscribe spirit names offer a problem. In one of these circles (fig. 2) the magician actually had to stand inside of the circle like he would in another circle, but in the circle on folio 213v in *The Dannel* (fig. 13) the place of the magician is not indicated. These circles appeared not to have a protective function for the magician. The only protection he would get from these spirits would be in the invocation which he had to say to conjure the spirits. But most of the experiments would require such an invocation as well as a protective magic circle. There is also no indication where the spirits would appear. One possible explanation for this circle could be that the spirits appeared where their names were inscribed and that they are unable to leave its bounds. Because the invocation both calls on the power of God, Christ and Saturn the spirit would be bound and not be able to break through the circle. However, this explanation would be unlikely for the circle on folio 109v from Sloane 3853 (fig. 2), because the magician stood inside of it. If the spirits were to appear where their names were it would mean they would be extremely close to the magician which would make him vulnerable.

4.3 Conclusion

A magician had quite a lot of choices with how to inscribe his circle, but there were certain elements which were mandatory. For example, if he used sacred names these would have to be bracketed by Christian crosses. If he chose to incorporate names of God he would have had to use several of them and spread them out evenly among the bands. The names of God that were used came from different traditions. This It also explains why some names of God have Greek origins, while others are found in the Jewish tradition. These sacred names were often inscribed closest to the magician who was stood inside the circle. The reason for this was because the names of God were the most powerful and the magician would be protected by them.

A second feature that was often seen, although optional, was that a magician could include the names of the archangels, or only one of them (usually Michael), and the name of Christ in some form or other. It was also an option to use Hebrew letters to form the four letter sacred name of God, although this often was not done correctly. The purpose of these

names and shapes were to make sure the magician had enough power to control the spirits he conjured and furthermore protect the magician from harm from the spirit.

Conclusion

Magic circles have not been researched extensively by academics. Apart from one chapter by Kieckhefer in *Forbidden Rites* there are virtually no other sources, while the phenomenon of magic circles has a long history. They were very common in necromantic manuscripts and many of these manuscripts have survived. There are many magic circles to be found in late medieval and early modern magical documents. Although these manuscripts usually date from around the sixteenth century, they often copied older magical texts. This thesis has looked at magical circles found in the following manuscripts: Sloane 3850, 3853 and 3854, Additional 36674, and the Folger Shakespeare Library V.b.26. In total forty-six magic circles have been studied to answer this thesis' main question: What were the elements that comprised magic circles and what were their functions?

Magic circles contain evidence of multiple strands of magic influencing each other and mixing together. The most clear influence was that of astral magic on necromancy. Of the manuscripts studied only the Folger Manuscript V.b.26 had remained a purely necromantic manuscript without any influence of astral magic. The fact that magic circles were influenced by different magical traditions explains why they were extremely varied in their appearance. At first glance they have very little in common but after studying them extensively it has become possible to find similarities and recurring elements in the circles. Most of the similarities were to be found in the outward appearances of the circles. They all consisted out of a type of outer band, circular being the predominant form, but there were also some square ones. There were four circles which had square outer bands, they were found in Sloane 3853 on folios 91r and 109v (fig. 1 and 2), and in the Folger manuscript on folios 130, 133 and 136 (fig. 18, 19 and 20). Inside there was a geometrical shape, either a triangle, pentagram or pentagon, square or another circle. These geometrical shapes were featured in the circles because of their power. Agrippa noted that many of these shapes were powerful and allowed a magician to exert power over spirits that were conjured. The circle was the most common shape, it usually appeared in the form of concentric bands, with their numbers varying up to four. The second common shape was the pentagon, which could either form and enclosed shape, as for example can be seen in the circle on folio 207v in *The Dannel* (fig. 12), or it had an opening at the top angle as can be seen in the circle on folio 129r in Sloane 3850 (fig. 30). The circles and their geometrical shapes contained inscriptions of various kinds. Although a magician had freedom to choose which inscriptions he wanted to use, every circle contained names of God, these names would be marked as holy names by

a cross. The various sacred names used were derived from several different traditions, but the most common ones were the Greek, Christian and Jewish traditions. The most used Greek name was the Tetragrammaton, which is a Greek word for the four letter word of god. From the Jewish tradition came the name Adonay. This name was also present in another form. When reading the Torah Jewish people have the tradition of avoiding the pronunciation of the four letter word of god: YHWH, instead they would speak the name Adonay. This four letter word for God is also often found in the circles, but it is found in its Hebrew shape: יהוה. Finally, from the Christian tradition we mostly see the name Jesus Christ. These inscriptions were used to give the magician power to control the spirits he conjured but also to protect the magician from harm from the spirit.

There were some other elements featured in magic circles that were common but not mandatory, since not all of the circles contain them. Firstly, some circles were accompanied by instructions for their place of construction. For example, the circle on page 68 in the Folger manuscript (fig. 17), stated that it had to be constructed in a “secret place into a woode where noe man bveth to come” (67). However, for a majority of the circles it was not explicitly stated whether it had to be made either in a room or in the open air. It seemed that the spirit that was being conjured dictated the place of the magical circle. It follows that elemental spirits would have to be conjured outside close to their corresponding element. The materials with which a circle had to be drawn could be deduced from the place where it had to be made. Usually circles that had to be made outside were drawn with a stick and simply traced into the ground, while circles which were made inside were usually drawn with chalk on the ground. It also followed that some experiments had to be made outside because of the type of experiment. For example, experiments that were meant to discover treasure had to be made outside near the actual treasure that the magician wanted to find. This was the case for the circle on page 130 in the Folger manuscript (fig. 18) where it was stated that the magician had to “goo there from 30 foot and kneell downe ” (127).

In the Sloane manuscripts and the Additional manuscript the influence of astral magic has caused some optional features to appear in the magic circles. Some of the circles in these manuscripts contained the cardinal directions in their drawings, showing the orientation. The Sloane manuscripts adhered with this feature to the medieval cartographical standard, which featured east at the top. The Additional manuscript adhered to the modern cartographical standard and featured north at the top. A second feature is that certain experiments had to be made at certain hours of certain days, because they needed to be connected to the planets. But not all of the circles influenced by astral magic actually contained these elements. It seemed

that the cardinal directions were connected to the elements. Thus circles to do with water needed to be oriented towards the north. Aside from this one possible connection there are no other connections to be found with regard to the time of construction of certain circles. It seemed to be arbitrary which circles need to be made in a certain hour. The only thing that is clear is that they are made in certain hours to give the circle and therefore the magician the power to control the spirits they conjure and perform their experiments successfully.

Finally, although most similarities can be found in the circles' outward appearances there are also some different features present. The majority of the circles are in fact circular, but there are a few instances in which there is a square outer band. In the manuscripts examined there were five of these exceptional forms. Furthermore, almost all of the magic circles had a clear space at their centres, which was usually meant for the master to stand in. Although quite a considerable number of these circles had a written indication that the master (and his fellow) had to stand in its centre, it was not a mandatory feature. Some circles had no written indication in them, but mentioned in their instructions the ritual that was part of stepping into the circle. This was the case for the circle on page 183 in the Folger manuscript (fig. 25) where the scribe had stated: "put they right foote into the circle sayenge in nomine patris etc. and there stand still" (181). Only a few circles indicated where the spirit appeared in relation to the magic circle. When it was indicated it was done so with either a small circle located outside of the outer band or with a capital "N", which stood for "Nomen". In two instances was there a clear designated space for the spirit to appear in. These were both found in the Folger manuscript on folios 175 (fig. 22) and 183 (fig. 25). In both cases beneath the master's circle there is another circle in which the spirit's name is inscribed.

In the inscriptions there are also some variants to be found. For example, a magician could include the names of the archangels, or only one of them (usually Michael), in the outer band of the circle. In a few instances the archangels are mentioned in the inner shape of the circle. Another possible inscription was the name of Christ in some form or other. It was also an option to use Hebrew letters to form the four letter sacred name of God, although this often was not done correctly. And lastly he could inscribe prayers in Latin in the inner bands of the circle. This was not a common occurrence and is found in only two different circles that were examined in this thesis. They were found on pages 130 (fig. 18) and 136 (fig. 20) in the Folger manuscript.

In conclusion, there were a lot of different elements which comprised a magic circle and most of the elements were not mandatory features. The magicians had to have previous knowledge in many instances in order to create the circle they needed, because often

information was missing from the drawings of the circle. It is clear that the most important features of the circles were to do with the circle's function. The shape of the circle and its inscriptions were mandatory and were needed to grant the magician the power over the spirits he conjured and to make them do his bidding. In certain instances the inscriptions would also have had a protective function, this is especially the case in the Folger manuscript Vb. 26. This is also the only manuscript in which it is explicitly stated that the circle was meant to protect the magician and if the ritual was done properly that the spirit will not be able to cross into the circle and thus the magician is safe when he is stood inside of it. This warning was found on page 181:

“thou arte safe and needest to feare nothinge for there maye noo spirite come within that circle, but I warne thee come not out of thy circle until thou have worded spirit for if thou doo, he will sley thee”.

This thesis has only looked at a small portion of magic circles that have survived. Even though there are a few similarities and general rules to discover, there are several exceptions to be found as well. This meant that the art of magic was not a simple one and required a lot of knowledge. The fact that this thesis has only looked at a few manuscript means that there is room for further research into this topic. There have been two exceptions to the general found in this research which are interesting topics for possible future research. The first is the phenomenon of the square magical circles. There are only a few of them to be found. Some of them incorporate a circular inner band, but there is also an instance which consists only of squares. The second exception is the case of circles which did not have the standard inscriptions of sacred names, but which contained only names of spirits. This is exceptional, because it is understood that the inscriptions were meant as a protective measure as well as a means to gain power over the spirits. By featuring the names of the spirits these circles seem to miss an important piece of protection and power to perform the experiments, yet they are found and were most likely used.

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Appendix

Figure 1:

Sloane MS 3853 fol. 91r

Figure 2:

Sloane MS 3853 fol. 109v

Figure 3:

Sloane MS 3853 fol. 50r

Figure 4:

Sloane MS 3853 fol. 141v

Figure 5:

Sloane MS 3853 fol. 60r

Figure 6: *The Dannel*

Sloane MS 3853 fol. 182v

Figure 7: *The Dannel*

Sloane MS 3853 fol. 184v

Figure 8: *The Dannel*

Sloane MS 3853 fol. 205v

Figure 9: *The Dannel*
Sloane MS 3853 fol. 206r

Figure 10: *The Dannel*

Sloane MS 3853 fol. 206v

Figure 11: *The Dannel*
Sloane MS 3853 fol. 207r

Figure 12: *The Dannel*

Sloane MS 3853 fol. 207v

Figure 13: *The Dannel*

Sloane MS 3853 fol. 213v

Figure 14: *The Dannel*

Sloane MS 3853 fol. 259v

Figure 15: *Book of Magic, with Instructions for Invoking Spirits.*

Folger Shakespeare MS V.b.26 page 46

Figure 16: *Book of Magic, with Instructions for Invoking Spirits.*

Folger Shakespeare MS V.b.26 page 67

Figure 17: *Book of Magic, with Instructions for Invoking Spirits.*

Folger Shakespeare MS V.b.26 page 68

Figure 18: *Book of Magic, with Instructions for Invoking Spirits.*

Folger Shakespeare MS V.b.26 page 130

Figure 19: *Book of Magic, with Instructions for Invoking Spirits.*

Folger Shakespeare MS V.b.26 page 133

Figure 20: *Book of Magic, with Instructions for Invoking Spirits.*

Folger Shakespeare MS V.b.26 page 136

Figure 21: *Book of Magic, with Instructions for Invoking Spirits.*

Folger Shakespeare MS V.b.26 page 167

Figure 22: *Book of Magic, with Instructions for Invoking Spirits.*

Folger Shakespeare MS V.b.26 page 174

Figure 23: *Book of Magic, with Instructions for Invoking Spirits.*

Folger Shakespeare MS V.b.26 page 176

Figure 24: *Book of Magic, with Instructions for Invoking Spirits.*

Folger Shakespeare MS V.b.26 page 177

Figure 25: *Book of Magic, with Instructions for Invoking Spirits.*

Folger Shakespeare MS V.b.26 page 183

Figure 26: *Book of Magic, with Instructions for Invoking Spirits.*

Folger Shakespeare MS V.b.26 page 200

Figure 27: *Book of Magic, with Instructions for Invoking Spirits.*

Folger Shakespeare MS V.b.26 page 201

Figure 28:

Sloane MS 3850 fol. 18v

Figure 29

Sloane MS 3850 fol. 48v

Figure 30:

Sloane MS 3850 fol. 129r

Figure 31:

Sloane MS 3850 fol. 140r

Figure 32:

Sloane MS 3854 fol. 31r

Figure 33

Sloane MS 3854 fol. 39r

Figure 34:

Sloane MS 3854 fol. 41r

Figure 35:

Sloane MS 3854 fol. 64v

Figure 36:

Wellcome Library MS 1766 fol. 32

Figure 37:

Wellcome Library MS 1766 fol. 58

Figure 38:

Wellcome Library MS 1766 fol. 62

Figure 39:

Additional MS 36674 fol. 17v

Figure 40:

Additional MS 36674 fol. 18r

Figure 41:

Additional MS 36674 fol. 81v

Figure 42:

Additional MS 36674 fol. 101r

Figure 43:

Additional MS 36674 fol. 152r

Figure 44:

Additional MS 36674 fol. 156v

Figure 45:

Additional MS 36674 fol. 157r

Figure 46:

Additional MS 36674 fol. 158r

Figure 47:

Additional MS 36674 fol. 159r

Figure 48:

Additional MS 36674 fol. 162r

Figure 49:

Additional MS 36674 fol. 163r