The Rings of the Lord
Assessing Symmetric Structuring in Numbers and Judges

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Abstract
Examining the ring compositions that recent studies claim to have discovered in Numbers and Judges, the article argues that in both cases the reconstructions involve questionable treatment of the text’s literary divisions and especially of the alleged and actual parallels between them. This, in turn, places a question mark over the entire quest for book-scale symmetric literary structures in the Hebrew Bible.

Keywords

1 Introduction
In a recent book, the famed anthropologist Mary Douglas noted that “a new interest in ring compositions has lately arisen” and claimed that with discovery of symmetric structures in “writings that used to baffle and dismay unprepared readers” such writings “turn out to be marvelously controlled and complex compositions.”¹ One of her showcase examples is the biblical Book of Numbers: contrary to the tendency of modern scholarship to treat it, explicitly or implicitly, as an amorphous collection of materials that did not find their

¹ M. Douglas, Thinking in Circles: An Essay on Ring Composition (The Terry Lectures; New Haven, 2007), p. 1. Douglas’s earlier monograph on Numbers (In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers [JSOTSup 158; Sheffield, 1993]) also briefly addresses, in collaboration with David Goodman, the book’s literary structure (pp. 102-126).
place elsewhere, Douglas maintains that it is tightly organized in several concentric tiers.\(^2\) Published just eight years ago, Douglas’s book is already finding followers among biblical exegetes: in particular, a 2014 article by Kenneth Way utilizes Douglas’s theoretical framework to refine and validate a reconstruction of a symmetric structure in the Book of Judges that D.W. Gooding proposed already in 1982.\(^3\)

Although few scholars have fully embraced the idea of a ring composition in either Numbers or Judges (or, for that matter, in any other canonical book) and some have explicitly rejected this idea as far as Judges is concerned, there are no detailed treatments of the issue.\(^4\) With a view to filling the gap, the present article offers a comprehensive critical evaluation of Douglas’s ring theory using her study of Numbers and Way’s study of Judges as test cases. I will demonstrate that in both instances the reconstruction of a symmetric literary structure is based, first, on arbitrary and inconsistent segmentation of the text,

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and second, on highly selective use of textual parallels, bordering on cherry picking.\(^5\) This analysis has important ramifications with regard to the literary status of the canonical books, especially within the Enneateuch, and, more broadly, to the inherent limits of the quest for chiastic and concentric schemas that has been increasingly popular in biblical studies since the advent of synchronic, literary-critical approaches in the 1970s and 1980s.\(^6\)

2 The Faulty Fault Lines

In many parts of the Hebrew Bible, major literary divisions are clearly indicated by superscriptions (e.g., Isa 11) or, much less frequently, infrascriptions (e.g., Ps 72:20). That, however, is not the case in the Enneateuch (Genesis-Kings), which leaves the exegetes free to rely on a variety of signals in drawing the fault lines between the units. Yet, this freedom is not absolute: at the very least, the chosen criteria must be defensible, and they must be employed consistently. In this part of the present article, I will check whether the segmentation of Numbers by Douglas and Judges by Way meets these two requirements.

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5 Boda, pp. 56-58, lists as many as thirteen possible “errors in the rhetorical analysis of chiasmus” (p. 56). Seven of them fall under my rubrics of “arbitrary and inconsistent segmentation” (“irregular arrangement” and “questionable demarcation”) and especially “selective use of textual parallels” (“arbitrary omission and inclusion,” “arbitrary labelling,” “methodological isolation,” “frequency fallacy,” and “accidental odds”) while two others are inapplicable to prose (“metrical maneuvering” and “metrical consistency”). “Lopsided design” (with allegedly matching units substantially differing in length) also does not look like a major problem as far as prose is concerned, but if it is one, the schemas of both Douglas and Way grossly fail the test: as will be seen below, the former sees 108-word Num 10:1-10 as a counterpart of Numbers 28-30, and the latter draws a similar connection between Othniel’s judgeship (84 words) and that of Samson (96 verses). Boda’s criterion of “atypical patterns” (“chiastic structures which have been discovered in numerous passages are more reliable than one restricted to the particular passage at hand”) is falsified by Gen 9:6a, which is clearly chiastic despite the fact that no similar structures are found in the chapter. Finally, the interrelated errors of “purposeless structure” and “presupposition that center is important” will be briefly addressed in the conclusion of the present article.

6 Biblical scholars often imprecisely use the term “chiasmus” to denote any kind of literary symmetry. In fact, only ABCB’A’ patterns (e.g., “I am stuck on Band-Aid, and Band-Aid’s stuck on me”) are properly chiastic whereas those of the ABCB’A’ type (e.g., “Friendly Americans win American friends”) are better termed concentric. The ring compositions posited by both Douglas and Way belong to the latter category.
2.1 Numbers

One obvious feature of Numbers is the alternation of narratives and commandments. Douglas believes that this alternation divides the book into twelve parts:7

| I (narrative) | chaps. 1-4 |
| II (commandments) | chaps. 5-6 |
| III (narrative) | chaps. 7-9 |
| IV (commandments) | 10:1-10 |
| V (narrative) | 10:11-14:45 |
| VI (commandments) | chap. 15 |
| VII (narrative) | chaps. 16-17 |
| VIII (commandments) | chaps. 18-19 |
| IX (narrative) | chaps. 20-27 |
| X (commandments) | chaps. 28-30 |
| XI (narrative) | 31:1-33:49 |
| XII (commandments) | 33:50-36:13 |

Generic shifts can indeed play a major role in the structuring of the biblical text: thus, the distinctive literary format of Psalms clearly defines it as a self-contained macro-entity even in the absence of an overall superscription. Unfortunately, in the Enneateuch—and especially in Numbers—matters are severely complicated by the fact that the generic pattern of the corpus is hierarchical: all non-narrative genres are subordinated to narrative. In particular, all commandments without exception are formulated as discourses of Yhwh or Moses and therefore as links in the chain of recounted events. Moreover, in some cases—which are more common in Numbers than elsewhere in the corpus—the commandments are promulgated in response to a narrated development (such as the request of Zelophahad’s daughters in Num 27:1-11) or spark a reported action (in 3:49-51, Moses fulfils Yhwh’s orders regarding the redemption of the firstborn). As a result, instead of a clear-cut edge between narratives and commandments there is a substantial penumbra.

As long as Douglas stays out of the gray zone, her segmentation judgments are for the most part sustainable. For example, the contrast between Numbers 16-17 that contains no commandments and chaps. 18-19 where narrative is limited to stereotypical reports of Yhwh speaking is indisputable. However, occasional inconsistencies happen even here: although Num 8:23-26; 10:1-11 are generically identical (both are commandments introduced by

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Douglas distinguishes the latter but not the former from the (supposedly) narrative segment in chaps. 7-9.

When it comes to the generically mixed pieces—which constitute a substantial portion of the book—uncertainties and concomitant inconsistencies begin to mount. For example, Douglas’s blanket characterization of chap. 15 as “law” is questionable in view of vv. 32-36 where the deity’s terse command (v. 35aβ-b) is embedded in what otherwise is a short story; moreover, this command strictly concerns the specific case that the story presents. The same problem arises with chap. 36: Douglas lumps it together with the “law” in chaps. 34-35 despite the fact that the commandment proper occupies barely a third of the former piece (vv. 6-9), while the rest clearly is narrative. Conversely, Num 31:1-4 looks like a self-contained genealogical fragment (cf. Gen 10:1; 11:10, 27), and Num 33:1-49, introduced by asyndetic ואלה מסעי and consisting almost exclusively of highly stereotyped lines, is a self-contained list, yet Douglas includes both in narrative segments.

Curiously but perhaps predictably, even by reducing the generic complexity of Numbers to a binary schema Douglas fails to arrive at a structure that would fit her ring theory. A symmetric arrangement of twelve units would obviously be chiastic. Yet, according to Douglas a true ring composition must be concentric because it “condenses the whole burden of its message into the mid-turn.”

8 It is difficult to agree with Douglas’s claim that the passage constitutes “an exception... the only real challenge to the consistency of the governing pattern” (1993, p. 108).
9 See also n. 13 below.
10 The form-critical commentary of R.P. Knierim and G.W. Coats, Numbers (FOTL 4; Grand Rapids, 2005), divides Numbers into a much larger number of “individual units” (six just in chaps. 7-9, pp. 97-129) arranged in two blocks—“Organization of the Sanctuary Campaign,” 1:1-10:10, and “Campaign Itself,” 10:11-36:13. Most other commentaries proceed in a similar way, isolating between two dozen and over 50 small units and often distributing them between two to four larger literary entities: thus, e.g., M. Noth, Numbers: A Commentary (OTL; Philadelphia, 1968); P.J. Budd, Numbers (WBC 5; Waco, 1984); J. Milgrom, Numbers (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia, 1990); D.T. Olson, Numbers (Interpretation; Louisville, 1996); B.A. Levine, Numbers 1-20 (AB 4a; New York, 1993); Levine, Numbers 21-36 (AB 4b; New York, 2000).
11 Douglas (2007, p. 47) defends the twelve-segment arrangement as reflecting “twelve principles of the universe, the sephirot, arranged in a circle” (citing D. Meijers, “The Structural Analysis of the Jewish Calendar and Its Political Implications,” Anthropos 82 [1987], pp. 604-610). In fact, the canonical number of the sephirot is ten, and the concept emerged only in late antiquity or early medieval times. Even if it were known in biblical period, there is no identifiable reason why Numbers—rather than any of the other 23 books of the Jewish canon—would be organized in accordance with it.
She identifies segment VII as the latter, leaving segment I without a symmetrical counterpart, and her idea of a triple connection between the “exposition,” the “mid-point,” and the “ending” fails to resolve the problem because including segment XII in this “latch” would turn segment II into a loose end. The net outcome is a reconstruction that matches segment XII to both segments I and II.\textsuperscript{13} It is neither perfectly symmetric nor otherwise harmonious:\textsuperscript{14}

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<tr>
<th>Segment</th>
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<tr>
<td>I</td>
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<td>VI</td>
<td>chap. 15</td>
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<td>VII (Mid-turn)</td>
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<td>XI</td>
<td>31:1-33:49</td>
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<tr>
<td>XII (Ending)</td>
<td>33:50-36:13</td>
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2.2 \textit{Judges}

Most of this book seems to be clearly structured by means of recurrent formulae that delineate six cycles of apostasy, oppression, repentance, and deliverance.\textsuperscript{15} Yet, upon closer inspection, the clarity proves illusory. First, several texts that are associated with individual cycles lie nevertheless beyond the cycles’ boundaries as demarcated by formulaic reports that the oppressor was subdued (3:10, 30; 4:23; 8:28; 11:33) and that calm prevailed for 40 or 80 years (3:11, 30; 5:31; 8:28). That includes the notes on so-called minor judges in 10:1-5; 13 Douglas, 2007, p. 68. In her earlier book on Numbers, Douglas regards chap. 36 as a separate unit (1993, pp. 103, 108). This would resolve both the problem of symmetry and that of generic distribution but completely destroy the “latch” (see 3.1.7 below). Ultimately, Douglas ascribes Numbers 36 to an inept editor (2007, pp. 68-71), in other words, brings diachronic speculations into an otherwise strictly synchronic discussion. If the current ending of Numbers is redactional, why not other parts of the book—as claimed, for example, by Noth, pp. 4-11? 14 Except by means of creative and subtly misleading graphics like that in Douglas, 2007, p. 48. 15 For a concise list of these formulae, see F.E. Greenspahn, “The Theology of the Framework of Judges,” \textit{VT} 36 (1986), p. 388.
12:8-15, the Abimelech narrative in 8:29-9:57, the story of Jephthah’s daughter in 11:34-40, and the account of his conflict with Ephraim in 12:1-7. Second, in two substantial portions of the book the recurrent formulae that delineate the cycles are largely or completely absent (11:3-6; 17:1-21:25), leading to uncertainty about both the internal structure of these portions and their relationship to the six-cycle sequence.

Gooding, Dorsey, and Way are unanimous in their response to these problems. First, they regard the Abimelech narrative as a major self-contained unit but subsume other pieces whose structural status is similar under the respective cycles. Second, they exclude both 1:1-3:6 and 17:1-21:25 from the sequence of cycles, describing the former as a “prologue” to it and the latter as an “epilogue.” Third, they maintain that the “prologue” and the “epilogue” each falls into two main parts, respectively 1:1-2:5; 2:6-3:6 and 17:1-18:31; 19:1-21:25, which occupy the same structural level as individual cycles. The overall structure of Judges then looks as follows:

A Introduction Part I (1:1-2:5)
B Introduction Part II (2:6-3:6)
C Othniel (3:7-11)
D Ehud (plus Shamgar) (3:12-31)
E Deborah, Barak, Jael (4:1-5:31)
F Gideon (6:1-8:32)
E’ Abimelech (plus Tola, Jair) (8:33-10:5)
D’ Jephthah (plus Ibzan, Elon, Abdon) (10:6-12:15)
C’ Samson (13:1-16:31)
B’ Epilogue Part I (17:1-18:31)

This reconstruction has multiple vulnerabilities. To begin with, it is inconsistent to regard 8:33-10:5 as a major unit while denying the same treatment to 3:31; 11:34-12:15 whose status vis-à-vis the Ehud and Jephthah cycles does not, as already mentioned, differ from that of the Abimelech narrative vis-à-vis the Gideon cycle. Of course, 8:33-10:5 is much longer than the two other pieces but that obviously cannot be a consideration: as already mentioned in n. 5 above, Othniel’s cycle is just five verses long while Samson’s stretches over at least

four chapters (as will be argued below, in fact it only ends in 1 Samuel 7). Way
maintains that despite failing to display any of the cycle-defining formulae
“the Abimelech story presents its own kind of cycle in which there is apos-
tasy (8:33-35), internal oppression (9:1-22), and divine deliverance (9:23-57)”18
Apostasy does play an important role in each cycle, but this is where similari-
ties end. The number of dissimilarities is much higher: (1) The narrator does
not present Abimelech's rise as the divine response to Israel's worship of Ba'al:
there is no formulaic reference to the burning of divine anger (contrast 2:14,
20; 3:8, 12; 4:2; 6:1; 10:7; 13:1) or any other indication of divine displeasure. The
people of Shechem install him voluntarily (9:1-6), and he does not explicitly
control any other location. (2) Although Abimelech's career begins with a
slaughter of his half-brothers, he is not described as oppressing anybody, and
no one is described as serving him (contrast 2:14-15; 3:8, 13-14; 4:3; 6:2-6; 10:8-9).
Accordingly, (3) neither the Shechemites nor anybody else “cries to Yhwh”
because of Abimelech (contrast 39, 15; 43: 6:6; 10:10); on the contrary, it is the
deity that causes the Shechemites to revolt against Abimelech in order to pun-
ish both sides for the massacre of Gideon's sons (9:23-24). (4) It is highly mis-
leading to describe this punishment, unfolding in 9:23-57 and leaving all the
culprits dead, as “divine deliverance”; even the innocent residents of Thebez
appear to survive Abimelech's onslaught not because Yhwh wanted to deliver
the city but because Abimelech had to pay with his life for the murder he had
committed (9:56).19 (5) No cycle in Judges features a protagonist who is closely
related to that of the preceding cycle.

It may seem that Globe’s schema (n. 17 above) avoids (some of) these dif-
ficulties by ascribing a structural role to the notices on Shamgar and five other
“minor” judges. Yet, his approach is even more problematic because he lumps
10:1-5; 12:8-15 into a single unit despite the fact that the two fragments are not
contiguous; in essence, the text he discusses is not the one represented by all
the existing versions. Moreover, if both 3:31 and 8:33-9:57 are units consistency
demands that each of the notices on “minor” judges, as well as the stories of
Jephthah's daughter and his clash with the Ephraimites, be assigned the same
status—with innumerable and unpredictable consequences for the ring

Judges 9,” JSOT 38 (1987), pp. 33-37, have noted parallels between Abimelech’s crime and
his death: having killed his half-brothers on “one stone” (9:5), he is killed by a stone tossed
by “one woman” (9:53).
structure and the intertextual connections that supposedly hold it together (3.2 below).

Further, while most of Judg 1:1-3:6 (1:27-3:6) indeed seems to serve as a bridge between Joshua (echoed in multiple ways in chap. 1 and 2:6-3:6)\(^{20}\) and the sequence of cycles that begins in 3:7 (and that is previewed in 2:11-19), the status of Judges 17-21 as an “epilogue” to this sequence is doubtful.\(^{21}\) Although Samson kills thousands of Philistines, there is no indication, formulaic or otherwise, that he delivered Israel from the Philistine oppression established in 13:1 (the concluding note in 16:31, echoing 15:20, draws a line only under Samson’s tenure as a judge). The cycle seems to reach its conclusion only in 1 Samuel 7, under the leadership of a new judge, Samuel (note “and the Philistines were subdued” in v. 13). This configuration implicitly subsumes Judges 17-21 under the Samson cycle and therefore under the entire sequence of cycles even though the five chapters never mention the Philistines or any other foreign overlords. Confirming as much is the presence in Judg 13:1, 7; 19:1 of the introductory formula (אחד נער/ויהי איש) ‘and there was a (certain) man/youth’ that ushers in the biographies of both Samson (Judg 13:2) and Samuel (1 Sam 1:1) as well as the narrative of Saul’s enthronement (1 Sam 9:1) but does not occur elsewhere.\(^{22}\) In other words, consistent application of the criteria that Way and similarly minded scholars use to divide most of Judges into cycles of apostasy, oppression, repentance, and deliverance yields an overall composition that is very different from what they suggest:

1. Introduction (Judg 1:1-3:6)
2. Othniel (3:7-11)
3. Ehud (plus Shamgar) (3:12-31)
4. Deborah, Barak, Jael (4:1-5:31)
5. Gideon (plus Abimelech, Tola, Jair) (6:1-10:5)
7. Samson (plus Samuel) (Judg 13:1-1 Sam 7:17)

\(^{20}\) Brettler, 2002, pp. 92-102, even argues that Judg 1:1-2:10 is the original conclusion of Joshua.


Finally, it is not obvious that either the prologue of Judges or its alleged epi-
logue is bipartite. In the former case, most scholars do draw a major line after
2:5, on the grounds that in the next verse the narrative seems abruptly to regress
to the point preceding Joshua’s demise (reported in Josh 24:29-30) and there-
fore the events introduced by “it happened after Joshua’s death” in Judg 1:1.23
Yet, as Marvin Sweeney pointed out a decade and a half ago, the text’s syntax
suggests otherwise: there is no interruption whatsoever in the string of the
recounted events not only in the immediate vicinity of 2:5-6 but also anywhere
in 2:1-9.24 Instead, the narrative thread is disrupted in a major way by 1:27-36,
with its glut of retrospective qatal verbs and three asyndetic clauses (vv. 30a, 31,
33α), and by 3:1-6, dominated by the enormous nominal sentence in vv. 1-3.25
Since both 1:27-36 and 3:1-6 are lists (respectively of the remaining non-Israelite
enclaves and the populations that occupied them and Canaan’s periphery),
it would be reasonable to conclude—especially in view of Douglas’s segment-
ing technique in Numbers—that their alternation with narratives divides

In Judges 17-21, a casual look may suggest two continuous and self-contained
stories, 17:1-18:31 and 19:1-21:25. However, narrative continuity is not a consid-
eration that Way and others consistently employ elsewhere: the account of
Abimelech’s abortive reign builds in many ways upon the Gideon cycle, yet all
symmetric reconstructions view the two pieces as separate units. Conversely,
the formula (אחד נער/ איש) that opens the self-contained stories of Samson
in Judges 13-16, Samuel in 1 Samuel 1-8, and Saul in 1 Samuel 9-12 is present not
only in Judg 17:1; 19:1 but also in 17:7.26 The implication is that although the
adventures of Jonathan the Levite (and the Danites) in 17:7-18:31 stem directly
from Micah’s theft and its aftermath in 17:1-5 and Micah is featured in the
former piece, 17:1-5 is told as Micah’s story and 17:7-18:31 as that of Jonathan.
Another formulaic pattern found in Judges 17-21—and unique to it—points in
the same direction. The reference to the absence of a monarchy occurs in its

       of Editing (BibInt 38; Leiden, 1999), pp. 135-136; Webb, The Book of Judges (NICOT; Grand
25    I have argued elsewhere that in fact it is 1:27-36 that sends the narrative back to a point pre-
       ceding Joshua’s death: S. Frolov, “Joshua’s Double Demise: Making Sense of a Repetition,”
       VT 58 (2008), pp. 315-323. A similar regression takes place in 3:1-6: after previewing the
       entire sequence of cycles in 2:11-19 the account reverts in 3:7 to the very beginning of this
       sequence.
26    I view 1 Samuel 12 as the terminus of the story that begins in chap. 9 because the (trun-
       cated) regnal formula in 1 Sam 13:1 seems to introduce a new unit.
full form—"in those days there was no king in Israel, everyone would do what was right in their eyes"—only in Judg 17:6; 21:25; in both instances, it immediately precedes (in the MT) the opening formula of the (יהוה איש/ איש איש type (Judg 17:7; 1 Sam 1:1). Since in Judg 21:25 the no-king-at-the-time formula clearly draws a line under a self-contained narrative, chances are that the same is the case in 17:6. If so, Judges 17-21 is tripartite: 17:1-6 (the Micah story) + 17:7-18:31 (the Jonathan story) + 19:1-21:25 (the story of an anonymous Levite).27

It should be also mentioned that unlike Gooding, Globe, and Dorsey, Way splits the Gideon cycle into four parts, 6:1-32; 6:33-7:25; 8:1-21; 8:22-32, identifying the boundary between the second and third parts as the pivotal point of the entire book.28 This division is patently arbitrary: there are no formulaic or syntactic signals of a major break after 7:25 or 8:21 (6:33-35, dominated by qatal verbs, does qualify as a substantial disruption). Way claims that thematically the four parts form a chiasmus: Gideon "faces idolatry" in 6:1-32, "forges idolatry" in 8:22-32, "fights enemies" in 6:33-7:25, and "fights Israel" in 8:1-21.29 Yet, it is a stretch to describe what Gideon does in 8:1-21 as "fighting Israel." Rather, he continues and concludes his campaign against the Midianites, crowning it with the execution of their kings; it is the refusal of Sukkoth and Penuel to support this campaign (vv. 4-9) that causes him to inflict corporal and capital punishment on their residents (vv. 14-17), whose Israelite identity is not even spelled out. If Gideon really turned against Israel, why would the people offer him the throne (v. 22)? Also, the idolatry that Gideon "faces" in chap. 6 is not exactly of the kind he "forges" in chap. 8. In the former, the problem is Israel's worship of Ba'אל and Asherah; in the latter, there is no indication that Gideon's "ephod," illegitimate as it might have been (8:27), was meant to celebrate anyone but Yhwh, whose kingship Gideon proclaims right before building the artifact (8:23).

The preceding discussion shows that the text-segmentation criteria employed by proponents of ring compositions are often questionable and/or inconsistent. It does not follow, of course, that every detail of their structural

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27 In Judg 19:3, a combination of the איש איש איש formula and a truncated, non-digressive version of the no-king-at-the-time reference opens a self-contained narrative. In 18a, the latter reference occurs on its own and therefore probably functions at a lower structural level, introducing an episode in the Jonathan story.

28 Way, 2014, pp. 254-255. He claims to follow Douglas's concept of a "latch" (2.1 above), but she does not split the central unit of her ring reconstruction in any way (which in any case would not be easy given the fragment's strong narrative continuity), seeking instead to connect it as a whole to the book's beginning and ending (3.1.7 below).

reconstructions is wrong, but given the precision with which these reconstructions must be balanced it is more than enough to cast a thick pall of doubt over them. The next part of the article will demonstrate that the other, arguably much more important pillar of the ring theory is even weaker.

3 Out-Procrusting Procrustes

Intratextual parallels constitute an indispensable aspect of ring reconstructions. Ultimately, any biblical or non-biblical text that has an internal structure can be represented as concentric or chiastic, depending on whether the number of parts into which it is divided is, respectively, odd or even. But no composition can be recognized as concentric or chiastic unless not only there are demonstrable parallels between its elements that are each other’s opposite numbers in the symmetric schema but these links are stronger and/or denser than those between all other elements. Thus, for a text divided into U, V, W, X, Y, and Z to be chiastic, U should correspond in one way or another to Z, V to Y, and W to X; moreover, these correspondences should eclipse those between U and X, V and Z, X and Y, etc.

Furthermore, for a parallel to support structural symmetry, it should, first, be valid: elements that allegedly correspond to each other, for example, W and X in the example above, must share verbal or conceptual elements n, m, o etc. Second, the parallel must be exclusive, i.e. run only between the units that correspond to each other in the symmetric schema. If n is shared by W, X, and Y, symmetry is not substantiated since there is no reason to privilege the link between W and X over those between W and Y or X and Y; rather, it is falsified because the schema does not call for the additional links.

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30 I prefer to describe the connections discussed here as intratextual rather than intertextual because they are drawn within a single composition that is regarded as synchronic unity. Intertextuality, at least as conceived by Julia Kristeva, who coined the term, is an essentially diachronic phenomenon linking otherwise unrelated literary entities: see, e.g., J. Kristeva, Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art (New York, 1980), p. 66; R. Barthes, “Theory of the Text,” in R. Young (ed.), Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader (Boston, 1981), p. 39.

31 Brettler, 2002, p. 11, was among the first to draw attention to this pattern. He quotes David P. Wright’s oral suggestion to call it “chiastic interference” (p. 118). Since this seems to presuppose the existence of a chiasmus, or at least the desirability of discovering it, I will henceforth use the strictly descriptive term “distributed parallel.”
In what follows, I will apply these criteria to each of the parallels that Douglas, Way, and others draw between the segments of the alleged ring compositions in Numbers and Judges.

### 3.1 Numbers

As mentioned in 2.1 above, according to Douglas a ring composition must display not only dual parallels that are equidistant from the center but also a triple parallel between the beginning, the “mid-point,” and the ending. I will start with the former and conclude with the latter.

#### 3.1.1 I-XII

Both segments repeatedly mention “fathers’ houses.”

*Discussion:* In addition to segments I (multiple occurrences in chap. 1) and XII (34:14), the consonantal sequence בֵּית אָבֵתָם appears in segments III (7:2), VII (17: 17, 18, 21), and IX (26:2).

*Assessment:* A distributed parallel.

Total valid, exclusive parallels: 0.

#### 3.1.2 II-XII

1. Numbers 6 discusses the proper procedure in the case of a Nazirite’s contamination by a “sudden” death of a person next to him or her (vv. 9-12); Numbers 35 stipulates that only those guilty of manslaughter by a “sudden,” i.e. unpremeditated action can take shelter in the cities of refuge (vv. 22-25).

   *Discussion:* Although otherwise the two provisions are entirely different, both use the rare term בְּפָטָע ‘suddenly’ that does not occur elsewhere in Numbers.

   *Assessment:* A valid, exclusive parallel.

2. In 5:1-3, Yhwh demands removal of ritually unclean persons (having discharge or contaminated by a corpse) from the camp; in 33:52-56, the deity commands expulsion of all Canaanites from the promised land.

   *Discussion:* The language of the two instructions is different (crucially, שָׁלַח is used for expulsion in chap. 5 and יִירָשׁ in chap. 33). The underlying conceptuality is also different: the Torah contains purification procedures for those rendered unclean by discharge (Lev 15:13-15, 28-30) and a corpse (Numbers 19) but no provisions for “de-Canaanization”; consequently, the expulsion per Numbers 5 is meant to be temporary and that per chap. 33, permanent.

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33 All the parallels discussed in sections 3.1.2-3.1.6 can be found in Douglas, 2007, pp. 49-56; Douglas, 1993, pp. 120-122.
Assessment: Not a parallel.
Total valid, exclusive parallels: 1.

3.1.3 III-XI
1. Israel’s journey from Sinai starts in Numbers 9; chap. 33 lists the stations of this journey.
Discussion: The journey from Sinai actually begins in Num 10:11-12 (Douglas’s segment V).
Assessment: Not a parallel between segments III and XI.
2. In both chaps. 7 and 31 (vv. 48-54), Israelite leaders offer precious objects to the tabernacle.
Discussion: The circumstances and the presented objects are different; at the same time, no other gifts of this kind are reported in Numbers.
Assessment: A valid, exclusive parallel.
Total valid, exclusive parallels: 1.

3.1.4 IV-X
1. In Num 10:1-10, Moses is commanded to make two trumpets to be blown on certain occasions; Num 29:1 mentions the “day of blowing.”
Discussion: The root רוע shared by Num 10: 5-7, 9; 29:1 also occurs in 23:21; 31:6—in the latter case in conjunction with תצנורות ‘trumpets’.
Assessment: A distributed parallel.
2. Both Num 10:10 and Num 28:11 mention ראשי חדשים ‘new moons.’
Discussion: The expression (in plural) does not occur elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.
Assessment: A valid, exclusive parallel.
3. Both Num 10:10 and Num 28:2 mention מועדים ‘festivals.’
Discussion: The word is also used in Num 9:2, 3, 7, 13 (segment III); 15:3 (segment VI); 16:2 (segment VII).
Assessment: A distributed parallel.
Total valid, exclusive parallels: 1.

3.1.5 V-IX
1. In both pieces, the people repeatedly complain about availability or quality of food and water (Num 11:4-6; 20:1-5; 21:4-5).
Discussion: The episodes in question are permutations of the same basic plot that occurs elsewhere in the Pentateuch (Exod 16:2-30; 17:1-7) but not in other parts of Numbers.
Assessment: A valid, exclusive parallel.
2. In Num 14:45 and Num 21:3, a battle takes place at Hormah.

Discussion: The toponym does not occur elsewhere in Numbers.
Assessment: A valid, exclusive parallel.

3. In Num 11:25-29, seventy elders prophesy under the influence of the divine spirit; in Num 24:2-9, the same happens to Balaam.

Discussion: Although the two episodes may seem similar, there are significant differences. In Num 11:25, the deity transfers to the elders the spirit that is already on Moses, while in 24:2 the spirit simply “is” on Balaam. In 11:25-29, “prophecy” is a generalized state of frenzy (cf. 1 Sam 10:5-6, 10-11; 18:10; 19:20-24) while 24:5-9 quotes a specific discourse. Finally, in chap. 11 the deity is consistently referred to as Yhwh whereas Num 24:2 mentions אלהים.

Assessment: Not a parallel.

Total valid, exclusive parallels: 2.

3.1.6 VI-VIII
Chaps. 15 and 18-19 both stipulate “priestly perquisites.”

Discussion: Chap. 15 does not mention anything that can be described as “priestly perquisites.”
Assessment: Not a parallel.

Total valid, exclusive parallels: 0.

3.1.7 I-VII-XII
Prominent in segments I and VII, the Levites are also featured in segment XII (35:1-8). Since these segments—exposition, mid-turn, and ending—function as the “latch” of the book’s ring composition, the status and role of the Levites is the book’s main theme.34

Discussion: The Levites are also prominent in chap. 8 (Douglas’s segment III), 18 (segment VIII), and 26 (segment IX).
Assessment: A distributed parallel.

Total valid, exclusive parallels: 0.

3.1.8 Synopsis
In at least three out of seven instances (43%), there are no valid and exclusive correspondences between the matching elements of the ring composition in Numbers as per Douglas. Devastatingly for her case, that includes the trio of units that is supposed to function as the composition’s crucial element—its “latch.” In three other instances, there is only one parallel, and there are

never more than two; moreover, almost all of these parallels are strictly verbal, limited to one or two words out of a fragment that is at least hundreds and usually thousands of words long. Only segments V and IX are exceptional in this respect, in that both parallels between them are at least partially conceptual; it is hardly accidental, however, that these are also by far the longest segments, covering between them more than a third of the book’s total length.

Much worse for Douglas’s purposes, similar numbers of exclusive parallels, many of them much stronger than those she cites, can be found between segments that according to her ring schema are not supposed to be matched. These parallels are too numerous to be listed in full, so I will limit myself to a few representative samples:

I-VIII: 1) Redemption of the first-born is stipulated in 3:44-51 and 18:15-16. 2) According to 3:10 and 18:7, a stranger who approaches the tabernacle is to be put to death.


V-XI: 1) Israel’s journey from Sinai begins in Num 10:11-12; chap. 33 lists the stations of this journey; 2) Both segments present the people’s reluctance to enter the promised land as a major problem (13:25-14:45; 32:1-15; note the explicit reference to the spy episode in 32:8-13).

VI-X: 1) Guilt offering (חטת) is prominent in chap. 15 (vv. 22-29) and even more so in chaps. 28 (v. 22) and 29 (vv. 5, 11, 16, 19, 22, 25, 28, 31, 34, 38). 2) Chaps. 15 and 28-29 both prescribe detailed and varied combinations of meat, flour, oil, and wine sacrifices.

IX-XII: 1) In both units, Yhwh and Moses resolve a civil case presented by Zelophahad’s daughters (27:1-11; 36:1-12). 2) In 26:54, Yhwh stipulates that the tribes’ allotments should correspond to their size; in 35:8, an almost identical expression is used with regard to the number of Levitical cities in each allotment.

These correspondences should suffice to leave little doubt that the intratextual patterns of Numbers do not in any way privilege Douglas’s ring schema; indeed, the opposite may be true.

35 Segment IV, by far the shortest in Douglas’s reconstruction, is 108 words long.
3.2 Judges

As already mentioned (2.2 above), most symmetrical reconstructions of the literary layout in Judges view the Gideon cycle (6:1-8:32) as a single central element of the composition and, accordingly, do not connect it to any other unit. By contrast, Way divides the cycle into four parts, 6:1-32; 6:33-7:25; 8:1-21; 8:22-32, seeking to link them to each other as well as, respectively, to 2:6-3:6; 1:1-2:5; 19:1-21:25; 17:1-18:31. Since he also regards the two parts of the book’s “introduction” as matching the two parts of the “epilogue,” his ring composition looks as follows:

For the sake of thoroughness, the assessments below will follow Way’s schema, except for the connections within the Gideon cycle that were addressed in 2.2 above.

3.2.1 B—F1

1. “Both contain a review of the exodus traditions (2:1, 12; 6:8-9, 13)”

   Discussion: Exodus is also referred to in 10:11 and 11:13, 16. The references are extremely brief but so is that in 2:12; as to 2:1, in Way’s schema it falls in segment A rather than B.

   Assessment: A distributed parallel.

2. “Both contain the indictment that Israel had disobeyed God's voice (2:2; 6:10).”

Discussion: Way admits that in his schema Judg 2:2 falls in segment A rather than B; his attempt to justify the inconsistency by claiming that 2:1-5 is “transitional” heavily smacks of special pleading.

Assessment: Not a parallel between segments B and F1.


Discussion: Idolatry is arguably the most common theme in Judges; apart from the references above, it is also singled out as a problem in 3:7 (segment C); 8:33-34 (E'); 10:6, 10-15 (D'). Almost all of these references mention Ba'al.

Assessment: A distributed parallel.

4. “Both feature the appearance of the angel of the Lord (2:1-4; 6:11-22).”

Discussion: As already mentioned, 2:1-4 is not in Way's segment B. Moreover, an angel also appears in chap. 13.

Assessment: Not a parallel between segments B and F1.

5. “Both emphasize God’s presence (2:8; 6:12, 16; cf. 1:19, 22).”

Discussion: As Way seems to realize, so do many other parts of Judges. In addition to chap. 1, that includes 3:10 (segment C); 4:15 (E); 5:4-5 (E); 11:21-24, 27, 32 (D'); 20:35 (A').

Assessment: A distributed parallel.

6. “Both recall God’s works on Israel's behalf (2:7, 10; 6:13).”

Discussion: In 6:13, the reference is explicitly to the exodus from Egypt. In 2:7, 10, however, it is to the conquest of the promised land (according to Num 26:64-65, among those who survived Joshua only Caleb could have a personal recollection of the exodus). The wording in 6:13 is also very different from that in 2:7, 10.

Assessment: Not a parallel.

7. “Both refer to the tearing down of altars (2:2; 6:25-32).”

Discussion: As already mentioned, 2:2 is not in Way’s segment B.

Assessment: Not a parallel between segments B and F1.

8. “Both refer to the people’s rejection of God's leader (2:17; 6:29-30).”

Discussion: In 2:17, the people are accused of “not listening” to the judges. In 6:29-30, they cannot possibly “listen” to Gideon because he is not telling

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39 All quotations from here through the end of section 3.2.4 are from Way, 2014, p. 255.
them anything. However, when his father Joash reasons with them, they prove eminently persuadable (6:31-32).

Assessment: Not a parallel.
Total valid, exclusive parallels: 0.

3.2.2 A—F2
1. “Both recount Israel’s confrontation with external military threats.”

Discussion: So do most segments of Judges, including B, C, D, E, F1, F3, D’, and C’. 
Assessment: A distributed parallel.
2. “Both emphasize that victory comes from the Lord (1:2, 4, 7, 19, 22; 6:36-37; 7:2, 7, 9, 14-15, 22; cf. 6:16).”

Discussion: The same is true of the entire book: each time Israel wins or loses a war it is identified as the deity’s doing.
Assessment: A distributed parallel.
3. “Both feature the employment of war oracles (1:1-2; 6:36-7:15).”

Discussion: As admitted by Way, this element “is also prominent in the second epilogue (see 20:8, 23, 27-28).”
Assessment: A distributed parallel.
Total valid, exclusive parallels: 0.

3.2.3 F3—B’
1. “Both passages feature stories of vengeful retribution and slaughter of Israelites.”

Discussion: As mentioned in 2.2 above, it is not entirely clear whether the residents of Penuel whom Gideon massacres in 8:17 are Israelites. At the same time, an unmistakable slaughter of Israelites for the sake of “vengeful retribution” is recounted in 12:1-6 (segment D’).
Assessment: A distributed parallel (at best).
2. “Gideon’s tactics in 8:14-16 are reminiscent of those used for taking the city of Bethel in the first prologue.”

Discussion: Since neither F3 nor B’ are supposed to match segment A, this parallel actually works against Way’s schema.
Assessment: Not a parallel between F3 and B’.
Total valid, exclusive parallels: 0.

3.2.4 F4—B’
“Both passages focus on aberrant religious practices and the construction of an ʾēphôd.”
Discussion: As Way correctly points out, in Judges the enigmatic cultic object called אָפָוד is only mentioned in 8:27; 17:5; 18:14-20.

Assessment: A valid, exclusive parallel.
Total valid, exclusive parallels: 1.

3.2.5 A—A’
1. “Both emphasize the leadership of the tribe of Judah (1:1-2; 20:18).”40

Discussion: Both the oracular inquiry in Judg 1:1 and the response to it v. 2 are strongly and uniquely echoed in 20:18.

Assessment: A valid, exclusive parallel.

2. “Both employ the key verb ‘to go up’ (1:1-4, 16, 22; 20:3, 18, 23, 26, 28, 30-31; 21:5, 8).”41

Discussion: With 890 occurrences, the verb עָלָה is much too common in the Hebrew Bible to serve as any kind of structural marker. In particular, it is also employed in Judg 4:10, 12; 5:3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 26, 28, 35; 8:8, 11; 9:48, 51; 11:13, 16; 12:3; 13:5, 16, 19, 20; 14:2, 19; 15:6, 9, 10, 13; 16:3, 5, 8, 17, 18, 31; 18:9, 12, 17. In layperson’s terms, it is all over the place.

Assessment: A distributed parallel.

3. “Both document instances of oracular inquiries to Yhwh (1:1; 18:5; 20:18, 23, 27).”42

Discussion: As seen already in this quotation, there are oracular inquiries outside A and A’ (18:5 falls in Way’s segment B’). Several oracles can also be found in chaps. 6 and 7 (3.2.2 above).

Assessment: A distributed parallel.


Discussion: Judges is famous for the uniquely prominent role that women, most of them wives, play in it. In addition to those featured in segments A and A’, they include Deborah, Jael, and Sisera’s mother in E, Jephthah’s daughter in D’, Samson’s wives/women in C’, and Micah’s mother in B’. Even in Dorsey’s more specific terms of “procuring wives,” the parallel would still connect segment A’ not only to A but also to B (the reference to multi-generational mixed marriages in 3:6) and C’ (Samson’s women/wives/concubines).44

44 Dorsey, pp. 118-119.
accidentally, Way and others draw a parallel between Achsah and Samson’s women (3.2.7 below).

**Assessment:** A distributed parallel.

5. “Both show the application of the ban (1:17; 21:11).”

**Discussion:** The circumstances are substantially different (extermination of Canaanites reported in 1:17 is mandated by Deut 20:17 whereas that of fellow Israelites, even those who break the communal solidarity, is not). Still, it is potentially meaningful that the root הָרָם is not used elsewhere in Judges.

**Assessment:** A valid, exclusive parallel.


**Discussion:** Apart from the two opening verses, Judges 1 deals with individual tribes: first Judah and Simeon, then Benjamin, then the Josephites, then several other northern tribes, and then the Josephites again. In this respect, the focus on the people as a whole in chaps. 20-21 is much better mirrored by 2:6-3:6 (segment B) where not a single individual tribe is mentioned except as a part of a toponym in 2:9.

**Assessment:** Not a parallel between segments A and A’.

7. Both segments mention Jerusalem/Jebus.

**Discussion:** Apart from 1:7, 8, 21; 19:10-12, the city is not mentioned in Judges.

**Assessment:** A valid, exclusive parallel.

8. Both segments mention Bethel.

**Discussion:** The city is also mentioned in 4:5 (segment E).

**Assessment:** A distributed parallel.

9. In 2:4-5, the Israelites weep (בכה) and make sacrifices; the same happens in 20:23, 26; 21:2, 4.

**Discussion:** The combination of the two actions is highly specific and unique to the discussed fragments.

**Assessment:** A valid, exclusive parallel.


**Discussion:** Unlike Judges 20 and 21, there is no specific reference in 1:1-2:5 to all tribes coming together. The divine messenger explicitly speaks to “all Israel” in 21:5, and a similar setting may be presupposed in 1:1-2, but the prophet’s

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50 Dorsey, p. 119.
address in 6:8-10 (segment F1) and the verbal exchange with the deity in 10:10-15 (D’) also involve the “children of Israel” in general.

Assessment: A distributed parallel.
Total valid, exclusive parallels: 4.

3.2.6 B—B’
1. “Both of these passages are about religious failure.”

Discussion: The same can be said about the entire Judges if not the entire Hebrew Bible.

Assessment: A (very broadly) distributed parallel.

2. “Both passages emphasize the pattern of generational drift away from Yahweh (2:10; 18:30).”

Discussion: While such a drift is indeed emphasized in Judges 2, there is none in chaps. 17-18. All the characters of the latter worship Yhwh; the problem, rather, is that from the narrator’s standpoint they do it incorrectly.

Assessment: Not a parallel.

3. Moses is mentioned in 3:4 and 18:30.

Discussion: Moses is also mentioned in 1:20 (segment A). The reference is minor but so are those in 3:4 and 18:30.

Assessment: A distributed parallel.

4. Sidonians are mentioned in 3:3; 18:7, 28.

Discussion: Sidonians are also mentioned in 10:6, 12 (segment D’). The references are minor but so are those in 3:3; 18:7, 28.

Assessment: A distributed parallel.
Total valid, exclusive parallels: 0.

3.2.7 C—C’
1. “Both accounts have a southern geographical orientation.”

Discussion: Way’s treatment of the units’ supposed geographical orientation (see also 3.2.8 and 3.2.9 below) is inconsistent because he does not make a clear distinction between the provenance of the oppressors and that of the deliverers. In this particular case, both Othniel and Samson are indeed “southerners”
but so is the Benjaminitc Ehud in segment D (certainly in relation to Barak, Gideon, or Jephthah). At the same time, while Samson’s antagonists—the Philistines—come from further south, Othniel defeats an enemy who hails from the extreme north (Aram Naharaim i.e. Upper Mesopotamia, 3:8) and thus resembles King Jabin of Hazor (4:2, segment E).

Assessment: A distributed parallel.

2. “Marriage plays a pivotal role in the outcome for both accounts.”

Discussion: Othniel’s marriage is not mentioned in 3:7-11. If Samson’s marriage(s) indeed parallel that of Othniel it connects segment C’ to segment A, not C.

Assessment: Not a parallel between segments C and C’.

3. Othniel’s tribe, Judah, also appears in 15:10-13.

Discussion: Judah is also prominently featured in chaps. 1, 20 (segments A and A’) and briefly mentioned in 10:9 (D’); 17:7-9; 18:12 (B’); 19:1-2, 18 (A’).

Assessment: A distributed parallel.

4. “Othniel is a foreigner who assimilates into Israel (Judah) while Samson is an Israelite (Danite) who assimilates into Philistia.”

Discussion: There is no indication of Samson assimilating. He does pursue Philistine—or Philistine-controlled—women (which according to 14:4 is Yhwh’s way of inciting him against the Philistines) but to Philistine men he is invariably antagonistic.

Assessment: Not a parallel.

5. “The Othniel account closes with 40 years of tranquility (3:11) while the Samson account opens with 40 years of oppression (13:1).”

Discussion: Tranquility in Judges always lasts either 40 or 80 years (3:11, 30; 5:31; 8:28).

Assessment: A distributed parallel.

6. Othniel is “blessed by his brave Israelite father-in-law” while Samson is “betrayed by his cowardly pagan father-in-law.”

Discussion: Although Othniel is introduced in 3:9 as Caleb’s relative, all the interaction between them takes place in chap. 1. If this is a parallel, it links segment C’ to segment A, not C.

Assessment: Not a parallel between segments C and C’.

Total valid, exclusive parallels: 0.

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61 Dorsey, p. 114.
3.2.8 D—D’

1. “Both accounts have an eastern geographical orientation dealing with Transjordanian oppressors.”  

*Discussion:* The Midianites in segment F also come from the Transjordan (6:33; 7:24-8:11).  

*Assessment:* A distributed parallel.

2. “In both accounts, the Israelite leader brings a message to a foreign king (3:15-25; 11:12-28).”  

*Discussion:* Jephthah sends messages to the king of Ammon, he does not “bring” them (11:12, 14, 28). Ehud does not have a message for Eglon; he just pretends to in order to gain access to the monarch.  

*Assessment:* Not a parallel.

3. “Both accounts feature an 18-year oppression (3:14; 10:8).”  

*Discussion:* The number is not round, and it does not occur elsewhere in Judges.  

*Assessment:* A valid, exclusive parallel.

4. “Both accounts relate the role of Ephraimites at the fords of the Jordan…”  

*Discussion:* The Ehud account does not explicitly mention Ephraimites—only a region called Mt. Ephraim (3:27). As acknowledged by Way, Ephraimites play a more explicit role at the fords of the Jordan in 7:24-8:3 (segment F).  

*Assessment:* Not a parallel between segments D and D’.

5. “Both accounts may depict forms of human sacrifice: the Moabite king Eglon may be viewed as a sacrificial victim… and the Israelite daughter of Jephthah tragically becomes a burnt offering…”  

*Discussion:* Way’s view of Eglon’s assassination as a sacrifice is based on Robert Alter’s two-sentence suggestion, in which the only argument is that the king’s name can be understood as “calf.” This is hardly sufficient but if it is, consistency demands that Gideon’s execution of two Midianite kings—one of whom is named יָבַכ sacrifice (8:18-21)—be also seen as a human offering.  

*Assessment:* Either not a parallel or a distributed parallel.

6. Both accounts are set in Benjamin.  

*Discussion:* Benjamin is barely mentioned in segment D’ (10:9), among several other tribes.

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68 Dorsey, p. 114.
Assessment: Not a parallel.
Total valid, exclusive parallels: 1.

3.2.9. E—E’
1. “Both stories have a northern geographical orientation.”69

Discussion: In terms of the characters’ provenance, the two segments are all over the place. The hometowns of Barak (4:6) and Jabin (4:2)—and therefore, most likely, Sisera—are located way to the north of Shechem, the only geographically identifiable location associated with Abimelech, and Deborah’s way to its south (4:5). Given that Ehud, Deborah, and Gideon all operate in the same geographical area called Mt. Ephraim (respectively, 3:27; 4:5; 7:24), segment E is better tied geographically to D and F than to E’.

Assessment: Not a parallel between segments E and E’.

2. “Resolution is achieved by the heroic efforts of a woman independently killing a villain by a blow to his head with an unconventional weapon (4:21; 5:26; 9:53).”70

Discussion: Remarkably, nowhere else in the Masoretic canon does a woman kill a warrior.

Assessment: A valid, exclusive parallel.

3. “Both stories blend poetic quotations (song and fable, respectively, in 5:1-31 and 9:7-20) with the events of the narratives.”71

Discussion: There are several poetic pieces in the Samson account: his riddle (14:14), the Philistines’ response to it (14:18a), his retort (14:18b), his taunt (15:16), and two victory songs of the Philistines (16:23, 24). Of course, these pieces are widely different in terms of genre and literary function from both Deborah’s song and Jotham’s fable, but the two latter texts are also widely different from each other in these respects.

Assessment: Not a parallel or a distributed parallel.

4. “Both stories conspicuously omit reference to a solo human judge/deliverer.”72

Discussion: In chaps. 4 and 5, no one is singled out as a deliverer because Deborah, Barak, and Jael all contribute to the overthrow of Sisera and Jabin. In chap. 9, there is no deliverer because, as argued in 2.2 above, there is no deliverance.

Assessment: Not a parallel.
Total valid, exclusive parallels: 1.

3.2.10 Synopsis

Although Way’s article is virtual cascade of parallels and Dorsey adds even more, intratextuality is actually even less kind to their cause than it is to Douglas’s. A critical look reveals that in five out of nine instances (56%), there are no valid, exclusive parallels between the opposite numbers of Way’s ring schema, and in further three, there is only one, usually purely verbal and limited to a word or two.

What is more, just like with Numbers (3.2.8 above) it is possible to trace a much greater number of parallels, many of them of a much stronger kind, between the segments of Way’s reconstruction that are not supposed to match each other. Some illustrations are as follows (the list is by no means exhaustive):

A—B: 1) Both segments refer to Joshua’s death (1:1; 2:8). 2) Both contain lists that pertain to the Canaanites remaining in the promised land (1:27-36; 3:1-6).

A—C: 1) Othniel (identically introduced in 1:13 and 3:9) is featured in both pieces as a military commander. 2) In 1:4-7 and 3:10, Judahites defeat a monarch in charge of a major territorial state: Adoni-bezek had seventy kings mutilated at his order (1:7), and Cushan-rishathaim controlled the entire territory between Upper Mesopotamia and Canaan (3:8).

A—E: 1) In Judges, Kenites appear only in chaps. 1 (v. 16) and 4-5. 2) The book mentions “chariots of iron” only in 1:19 and 4:3. 3) The only two occurrences of the verb צנח ‘to descend, to sink’ in the entire Hebrew Bible are in Judg 1:14 (= Josh 15:18); 4:21.

A—B’: 1) Both segments recount conquests by individual tribes. 2) According to 18:1, the tribe of Dan was looking for a place to settle because it did not have an allotment of its own; 1:34-35 explains why it did not.

F1—C’: 1) In both segments, an angelic visitation is not initially perceived as such (6:11-16; 13:3-14). 2) Offered food, the angel declines it (6:17-20; 13:15-16). 3) While the food is consumed by fire, the angel disappears (6:21; 13:19-20). 4) Thereupon, the being’s divine nature is recognized (6:22a; 13:21). 5) The ensuing consternation is quickly resolved (6:22b-23; 13:22-23). 6) Gideon demolishes a shrine of Ba’al and Asherah (6:25-28), and Samson that of Dagon (16:30).

D—E: 1) Both segments briefly (and enigmatically) mention Shamgar the son of Anat (3:31; 5:6). 2) Eglon and Sisera die from a single stab unexpectedly delivered by a person they trusted.

E’—D’: 1) Abimelech and Jephthah are introduced as sons of a major leader from a wife of lower rank (respectively, 8:31; 11:1). 2) Each assembles and heads a gang of אישים ריקים ‘empty men’ (9:4; 11:3). 3) Each is
succeeded by a string of “minor judges,” one of whom has 30 sons (10:1-5; 12:8-15).

C’—B’: 1) Samson and Micah are both portrayed as disobedient sons (respectively, 14:1-3 and 17:1-2). 2) Both segments have a woman receive 1100 shekels (16:5; 17:2-4); the number does not occur elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

B’—A’: 1) The protagonists of the two stories are itinerant Levites. 2) They travel between Bethlehem of Judah and Mt. Ephraim (17:7-9; 19:1-3).

Procrustes, a legendary ancient bandit, allegedly either stretched his victims, breaking their bones, or truncated their limbs when they did not fit his bed. As this part of the article amply demonstrates, Douglas, Way, and similarly minded exegetes do both to the intratextuality of Numbers and Judges in order to fit it into the Procrustean beds of ring compositions: they stretch the parallels that suit their purpose far beyond their capacity and truncate all others by passing them in silence.73 A less tendentious view of the Books’ intratextual network reveals that it does not support symmetric structural reconstructions.

4 Conclusion

It may come as a disappointment—and may even be perceived as a flaw—that while critiquing the ring schemas of Douglas, Way, and others the present article does not offer any alternatives. That, however, is precisely the point. The schemas in question do not work not because of insufficient effort or ingenuity invested in them but rather because they are unworkable.

One major stumbling point is the literary status of the canonical books. Obviously, only a composition in its own right can have a closed structure, but are Numbers and Judges such compositions? I have argued that this is not the case with the latter, and much of the evidence that I cite—absence of a superscription, overall summary, and coterminous formulaic patterns, lack of distinctiveness, generic as well as thematic and conceptual, and a plot that is open on both ends—applies to the former as well.74 The failure of Douglas, Way, and others to discover defensible ring structures in Numbers and Judges


thus serves as a warning that a canonical book is not necessarily a self-contained literary entity, certainly not in the Enneateuch.\textsuperscript{75}

An even more fundamental problem is that of scale. In a pithy saying (such as Gen 9:6a) or in a relatively short, well-defined composition, especially if it is poetic, symmetry can be traced clearly and confidently.\textsuperscript{76} In longer, more complex texts, uncertainties reign supreme.\textsuperscript{77} In particular, ambiguity of the literary structure grows exponentially: no single criterion or even set of criteria is uncontestable, and none of them is capable of yielding clear-cut results—leading to a frustrating (but also fascinating) multiplicity of the ways in which the Hebrew Bible can be segmented on every scale. For the vast majority of exegetical purposes, this is not particularly important, but ring compositions—and, more broadly, all symmetric reconstructions—require such precise calibration that a single vulnerability can result in a fatal loss of equilibrium. To complicate matters even further, intra- and intertextuality on the scale of a canonical book—where the sheer number of semantic levels can be stupendous—is far too rich and diverse to fit into a one-dimensional ring structure. As shown above, even as far as relatively large units are concerned (which, let us not forget, are themselves arbitrary in many respects), substantial intratextual connections can be found between many more of them than required by a symmetric reconstruction—and perhaps, with enough time and creativity,

\textsuperscript{75} Although the matter is hardly ever addressed explicitly, the vast majority of exegetes seem to take heed of it: out of 454 publications on the Hebrew Bible listed in J.W. Welch and D.B. McKinlay (eds.), \textit{Chiasmus Bibliography} (Provo: Research Press, 1999), pp. 77-115, only four (less than 1%) discuss symmetric arrangement of entire Enneateuchal books other than Judges. Unsurprisingly, one of these publications is by Douglas (“Poetic Structure in Leviticus,” in D.P. Wright, D.N. Freedman, and A. Hurvitz [eds.], \textit{Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom} [Winona Lake, 1995], pp. 239-256). It is also instructive that apart from Judges none of the dozens symmetric reconstructions offered by Dorsey is fully coterminous with an Enneateuchal book.

\textsuperscript{76} Again, it is probably not accidental that almost all the studies of the Hebrew Bible listed in Welch and McKinlay, pp. 77-115, deal with either subdivisions within canonical books, such as individual prophecies or psalms, or with very compact and undeniably self-contained books, such as Ruth, Song of Songs, and Jonah.

\textsuperscript{77} The findings of the present article confirm that Brettler had a good reason to be “skeptical concerning the extent to which chiasmus was a significant structuring device of large-scale literary units” (“Unresolved and Unresolvable: Problems in Interpreting the Song,” in P.S. Hawkins and L.C. Stahlberg, \textit{Scrolls of Love: Ruth and the Song of Songs} [New York, 2006], p. 190).
between any two of them.\textsuperscript{78} On top of that, there are parallels within the units and subunits as well as those leading beyond the canonical books—both of which should also be kept in view even though there is not enough space to address them here.\textsuperscript{79}

Of course, in terms of Douglas’s assertions quoted in the beginning of the present article it is highly regrettable that symmetric compositional structures cannot be reliably traced on the scale of biblical books because to her this is a simple and elegant way of making them more understandable, especially when otherwise they look “messy”—which is the case with Numbers.\textsuperscript{80} It is legitimate to ask, however, what exactly is gained by going Procrustes on Numbers or Judges—apart, that is, from an opportunity to marvel at the alleged literary genius of the biblical author who created the ring composition and the proven exegetical skill of the scholar who discovered it.\textsuperscript{81} As mentioned in 3.1.7

\textsuperscript{78} As strikingly—and hilariously—demonstrated by Butterworth’s experiment (pp. 53-57), in which he found a complex chiastic structure in a text constructed out of randomly picked verses from Isaiah.

\textsuperscript{79} One example should be cited nevertheless because it has to do with the discussion in 3.2 above. The relatively large number of parallels between Judg 1:1-2:5 and 19:1-21:25 may produce the impression that even though no full-fledged ring structure exists in Judges there is at least an inclusio around the book. Yet, even this becomes far from certain when the two units’ massive links to texts outside Judges—including Genesis, Joshua, and 1 Samuel—come into view (on Judg 1:1-2:5, see Butler, pp. 500-501; on 19:1-21:25, see C. Edenburg, \textit{The Story of the Outrage in Gibeah \[Jdg. 19-21\]: Composition, Sources and Historical Context \[Unpublished Ph.D. diss. Tel Aviv, 2003. Hebrew with English summary\]}, pp. 197-340).

\textsuperscript{80} Although it would take a major study to prove in a definitive fashion, my intuitive impression is that on a scale larger than that of the shortest books elements of symmetry can only be traced in the text’s development of particular themes, and even then only in very broad terms. One example is the pattern of Israelite leadership in the Enneateuch:

\begin{itemize}
\item A The patriarchs (Israel represented by a single individual; personal covenant with Yhwh)
\begin{itemize}
\item B Joseph (out of the land)
\begin{itemize}
\item B’ Joshua the Josephite (into the land)
\end{itemize}
\item A The monarchy (Israel represented by a single individual; personal covenant with Yhwh)
\end{itemize}
\item C Moses
\item Exodus-Deuteronomy
\item Judah
\item Joshua
\end{itemize}
\item Gen 12-36
\item Gen 37-50
\item Judges-Kings

\textsuperscript{81} It would also seem that symmetric reconstructions are commonly used, explicitly or implicitly, to defend traditional view of the Bible against historical critical analysis. Since this topic plugs into a much larger issue of the pre-modern piggybacking on the post-modern, discussing it would take us too far afield.
above, Douglas believes that since the Levites occupy the “central place” in the ring structure of Numbers this structure points to their responsibilities and status as the book’s primary topic.82 That looks like the case of a mountain giving birth to a mouse: on the one hand, even without a symmetric reconstruction, there is little doubt that the Levites play an important role in Numbers; on the other, this reconstruction does precious little to explain the presence of numerous pieces that have nothing to do with them.83 Way asserts that the ring structure in Judges “is employed by the narrator to emphasize a progressively depressing portrait of Israel’s apostasy during the period of settlement.”84 Yet, the linear dynamic that he describes here—and that is recognized by virtually all recent studies of the book—is much more likely to be obscured by a closed symmetric composition that he advocates.85 By pinning the delicate and intricate fabric of a biblical book to a rigid symmetric frame the exegetes can only stifle the search for meaning, not advance it.86

83 Douglas, 2007, pp. 64-67; also claims that Numbers is particularly interested in Josephite tribes and Benjamin, but she fails to demonstrate how her ring schema promotes this interest.
86 I would like to thank the anonymous colleague who reviewed the manuscript for Vetus Testamentum for helpful critiques and suggestions. All the remaining errors are my own responsibility.
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