Differential precession due to the planet's quadrupole moment tends to destroy the alignment of particles in inclined rings. We propose that alignment is maintained by the self-gravity of the ring. This hypothesis predicts that $\delta i/\delta a > 0$ across the ring. If $\delta i/i_0 < 1$, $\delta e/e_0 < 1$, and $\delta a e/\delta a < 1$, a further prediction is that $\delta i_i = \delta e/e_0$. The $\alpha$ and $\beta$ rings of Saturn may be used to test these predictions.

I. INTRODUCTION

As data from stellar occultations by the rings of Uranus accumulate, the shapes and kinematics of the rings become better defined. A recent analysis by French et al. (1982) has uncovered yet another remarkable feature of the ring system; several of the rings are inclined to the planet's equator. The inclinations $i$ (rad) are small, $\leq 10^{-3}$, and generally of the same order as the eccentricities. It is not known whether the narrow ringlets in the Saturn system possess substantial inclinations. Non-zero inclinations have only been established where bending waves are excited near the 5:3 and 8:5 inclination resonances of the satellite Mimas (Shu, Cuzzi, and Lissauer 1982).

The existence of inclined ringlets raises two questions. How are the inclinations produced? What maintains node alignment across an inclined ring? In similar discussions involving ring eccentricity (Goldreich and Tremaine 1978, 1979, 1981), it was found that the two analogous questions largely decoupled, the latter being much simpler. Accordingly, we only address the problem of node alignment here and consider the hypothesis that the ring's self-gravity cancels the tendency for differential node precession due to the planet's multipole moments.

We digress to discuss the evidence for self-gravity as the mechanism for maintaining apse alignment in eccentric rings. First, apse locking by self-gravity requires that the ring's self-gravity cancels the tendency for differential wave (Cuzzi et al. 1981; Holberg et al. 1982) and the scattering of the Voyager 1 radio signal (Tyler 1982).

For simplicity we restrict our attention to circular rings. The circular approximation is self-consistent because the interactions among circular and inclined ringlets do not generate secular perturbations of eccentricity. It is straightforward although somewhat tedious to extend the analysis to eccentric and inclined rings.

II. DYNAMICS

We represent the ring as a collection of circular inclined wires. For a wire of mass $m$ and radius $a$, the linear density is

$$\rho = m/2\pi a.$$  

(1)

The force per unit mass exerted by the wire on a ring particle $p$ with semimajor axis and inclination $a_p$ and $i_p$ is

$$F = 2Gp/d^2,$$  

(2)

where $d$ is the perpendicular from the particle to the wire, $d = |d|$, and $G$ is the gravitational constant. Since the rings under investigation are narrow, $\delta a/a < 1$, the wire may be locally approximated as straight.

The geometry is shown in Fig. 1. We assume that the nodes of the particle and the wire are aligned since we are only concerned with the maintenance of this alignment. The angle $\vartheta$ is measured from the common nodal line. A simple exercise in geometry shows that

$$d = d_0 [\cos(\vartheta + \vartheta) \hat{e}_x + \sin(\vartheta + \vartheta) \hat{e}_y] + a\Delta i \sin \vartheta \hat{e}_z,$$  

(3)

where

$$\Delta a = a - a_p,$$  

(4a)

$$\Delta i = i - i_p,$$  

(4b)

with the subscript $p$ denoting the ring particle. In deriving Eq. (3), it is implicitly assumed that $O(\Delta a/a) = O(i) = O(\Delta i)<1$; higher-order terms are discarded. Note that $\Delta \vartheta = \vartheta - \vartheta_p = O(|\delta i|, \Delta a/a)$, where $\vartheta_p$ locates the intersection of $d$ with the wire.
The node precession rate due to F is (Brouwer and Clemence 1961)

$$\frac{d\Omega_p}{dt} = \frac{\sin \vartheta_p F_z}{n_p a_p i_p}, \quad (5)$$

where $n_p$ is the mean motion. Combining Eqs. (2), (3), and (5) yields

$$\frac{d\Omega_p}{dt} = \frac{m n}{\pi M} \left( \frac{a}{\Delta a} \right)^2 \Delta i \frac{\sin^2 \vartheta}{i_p (1 + q^2 \sin^2 \vartheta)}, \quad (6)$$

where

$$q \Delta i / \Delta a,$$

and $M$ is the planet's mass. In writing Eq. (6) we do not distinguish $a$ from $a_p$ and $n$ from $n_p$ because $\Delta a / a < 1$. We average the precession rate over the orbital period to obtain

$$\left\langle \frac{d\Omega_p}{dt} \right\rangle = \frac{m n a \tanh \chi}{\pi M a \cos 2\chi}, \quad (8)$$

where

$$2\chi \equiv \sin^{-1} q.$$  

Equation (8) for $\left\langle d\Omega_p / dt \right\rangle$ is the analog of Eq. (11) for $\left\langle d\bar{\omega}_p / dt \right\rangle$ in Goldreich and Tremaine (1979).

Next we sum the contributions to the node precession from all parts of the ring. Let the semimajor axes of the inner and outer boundaries of the ring be $a_{in}$ and $a_{out} = a_{in} + \Delta a$. Divide the region $a_{in}$ to $a_{out}$ into $N$ equal intervals of width $\Delta a / N$, each of which contains a wire of mass $m_k$, semimajor axis $a_k = a_{in} + (k - 1/2) \Delta a / N$, and inclination $i_k$, $k = 1, ..., N$. We write $m_k = h_k m_r$, where $m_r$ is the total ring mass and

$$\sum_{k=1}^{N} h_k = 1. \quad (10)$$

The nodal precession rate of wire $j$ due to all other wires is

$$\left\langle \frac{d\Omega_j}{dt} \right\rangle_{\text{SG}} = \frac{N a}{n_j \Delta a} \frac{m_r}{M} \sum_{k \neq j} \frac{n_k}{\cosh 2\chi_{jk}} \tanh \chi_{jk}. \quad (11)$$

where

$$\sin 2\chi_{jk} = \frac{Na}{\delta a} \left( \frac{i_k - i_j}{k - j} \right). \quad (12)$$

The node precession rate due to the quadrupole moment $J_2$ of the planet is

$$\left( \frac{d\Omega_j}{dt} \right)_{Q} = \text{const} + \frac{21 J_2}{4} \left( \frac{R}{a} \right)^2 \frac{n_j \delta a}{N a}, \quad (13)$$

where $R$ is the planet's radius. The condition that the node precession rate be the same for all wires reads

$$\frac{f A}{N} + \sum_{k \neq j} \frac{h_k}{n_j} \tanh \chi_{jk} = B, \quad j = 1, ..., N, \quad (14)$$

where $B$ is a constant and

$$A = \left( \frac{21 \pi}{4} \right) J_2 \left( \frac{M}{m_r} \right) \left( \frac{R}{a} \right)^2 \left( \frac{\delta a}{a} \right)^2.$$

If the inclinations of the ring boundaries, $i_s$, and $i_e$, were known, these $N$ equations could be solved for $m_r$, $\Omega$, and $J_2$, $i_s$, $i_e$, $N-1$. This procedure would complete the analogy with the treatment of the eccentric epsilon ring for which $e_i$ and $e_N$ are well determined. Unfortunately, the quality of the observational data collected to date probably does not permit a reliable determination of $\delta i$ across any ring.

Rather than solve Eq. (14) for assumed values of $i_s$ and $i_e$, we explore further the analogy between the node and apoapex precessions. To do so we note that for $a \delta i / \delta a \ll 1$ and $\delta i / i_0 \ll 1$, Eq. (14) reduces to

$$\frac{j C}{N} + \sum_{k \neq j} \frac{h_k \chi_{jk}}{n_j} = D, \quad j = 1, ..., N, \quad (15)$$

where $C = i_0 A, D = i_p B$, and $i_p$ is the mean inclination of the ring. For $a \delta e / \delta a \ll 1$, the corresponding apoapex precession Eq. (14) from Goldreich and Tremaine (1979) reduces to an expression equivalent to Eq. (15), except that $i_k$ is replaced by $e_k$. These results prove that if $a \delta i / \delta a \ll 1$ and $a \delta e / \delta a \ll 1$, then $\delta i / i_0 = \delta e / e_0$.

There is an alternative way to interpret Eq. (14) which reveals a close relation between inclined rings and bending waves. An analogous relation exists between eccentric rings and density waves. Consider a ring of mass $m_r$. We expect that, subject to appropriate boundary conditions, Eqs. (14) would yield $N$ independent solutions for the $\{i_j\}$, each accompanied by a different $B$, or precession rate. The solutions are probably uniquely characterized by the number of sign changes of the $i_j$ which range from 0 to $N - 1$. A sign change in the $i_j$ is equivalent to a reversal of the ascending and descending nodes. These solutions are standing bending waves; the $B$ value gives the pattern speed; the number of sign changes of the $i_j$ is the number of radial nodes. The nodeless solution is the appropriate one for an inclined ring. In the linear limit, $X_{jk} \ll 1$, Eq. (14) reduces to Eq. (15). For $h_k = 1 / N$, or uniform surface mass density, the condition for the vanishing of the determinant of Eq. (15)
yields the WKB dispersion relation for linear bending waves (Shu, Cuzzi, and Lissauer 1982).

III. DISCUSSION

The self-gravity hypothesis predicts that $\delta i/\delta a > 0$. The hypothesis is as plausible for node alignment as for apse alignment. An observational determination of both $\delta i$ and $\delta e$ would provide an excellent test of the hypothesis. If $a\delta i/\delta a \ll 1$ and $a\delta e/\delta a \ll 1$, the hypothesis would predict that $\delta i/i_0 = \delta e/e_0$. The $\alpha$ and $\beta$ rings of Uranus are the best-known candidates for such a test. For ring $\alpha$, $e_0 \approx 8 \times 10^{-4}$, $\delta e \approx 4 \times 10^{-5}$, $i_0 = 3 \times 10^{-4}$, which implies $\delta i \approx 1.5 \times 10^{-5}$. For ring $\beta$, $e_0 \approx 4 \times 10^{-4}$, $\delta e \approx 8 \times 10^{-5}$, $i_0 \approx 1 \times 10^{-4}$, which implies $\delta i \approx 2 \times 10^{-5}$. An inclination gradient would produce a variation of the projected width of the ring on the plane of the sky of magnitude $\approx a \delta i$ which would be modulated at the node precession rate. The value of $a \delta i$ is of order 1 km for both the $\alpha$ and $\beta$ rings.

We thank J. L. Elliot and P. D. Nicholson for enlightening conversations. We are grateful to F. H. Shu for bringing to our attention the relation between the determinant of Eq. (15) and the WKB dispersion relation for linear bending waves. During the period this research was accomplished N.B. held a NSF U.S.-France exchange postdoctoral fellowship and a grant from ATP Planétologie 1981. P.G. acknowledges support from NSF Grant No. AST 80-2005 and NASA Grant No. NGL-05-002-003. S.T. acknowledges support from NASA Grants No. NSG-7643 and No. NGL-22-009-638.

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