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On Carmichael numbers, Poulet numbers, Mersenne numbers and Fermat numbers

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§1. Introduction.

The theorem of Fermat says that $a^{p-1} \equiv 1 \pmod{p}$ for all primes p and for all integers a which are prime to p.

For odd p and a=2 this result was already known to the Chinese, who incorrectly believed that also the converse of this theorem is true, which says that all integers satisfying

(1) $$2^{m-1} \equiv 1 \pmod{m}$$

are prime. If this were true it would give us a means for testing a number m on primality. In order still to be able to apply this test for integers which are not too large, Poulet [1]) made a table of composite m which are $< 10^8$ and satisfy (1).

We shall call every composite m which satisfies (1) a Poulet number or pseudo prime. Banachiewicz [2]) gave in 1909 five Poulet numbers < 2000 and later found the two others < 2000.

We shall prove that there exist infinitely many Poulet numbers. Proofs of this result were already given by Sierpiński [3]) and Jarden [4]).

Sierpiński considered numbers $m_0, m_1, \ldots,$ satisfying

I $$m_{h+1} = 2^{m_h} - 1 \qquad (h = 0,1,\ldots), \qquad (m_0 \text{ prime})$$

whereas Jarden used the sequence

II $$u_h = 2^{2^h} + 1 \qquad (h = 0,1,\ldots).$$

We shall generalise their results and deduce further results on the sequences I and II.

Further we consider composite integers m for which (1) holds for all integers a prime to m. We shall call these integers of which Carmichael [5]) proved some properties Carmichael numbers and derive properties of them.

§2. The sequence I.

Definition. A Mersenne number is a number of the form 2^p-1, where p is prime. Consequently a prime of the form 2^p-1 is a Mersenne number.

Theorem 1. If m satisfies (1), then $M = 2^m-1$ also satisfies (1) [3].

Proof. From $m \mid 2^{m-1}-1$ we infer

$$M = 2^m-1 \mid 2^{2^{m-1}-1}-1 \mid 2^{2^m-2}-1 = 2^{M-1}-1.$$

Corollary . Every Mersenne number is a prime or pseudo prime.

Theorem 2. There exist infinitely many Poulet numbers [3].

Proof. The sequence I with $m_0 = 11$ gives in virtue of $m_1 = 2^{11}-1 = 23.89$ for all integer $h \geq 1$ composite numbers m_h which by theorem 1 satisfy (1). Hence there exist infinitely many Poulet numbers.

We deduce further properties of the Mersenne numbers and of sequence I.

Obviously either every element of sequence I is prime or there exists a positive integer k such that m_k is prime, m_{k+1} is composite. From theorem 1 we then see that all elements m_h with $h \geq k+1$ are pseudo prime.

In order to find a further result on composite numbers of sequence I we use a special case of a result of Bang generalised by C.G. Lekkerkerker [6] which says that for every odd m the number 2^m-1 possesses a prime factor which does not occur in any number 2^d-1 with $0<d<m$. We use this result to prove the following

Theorem 3. If the number m possesses at least s different odd prime factors, then $M = 2^m-1$ possesses at least $S = 2^s-1$ different prime factors.

Proof. Put $m = p_1p_2\dots p_sn$, where $p_1,\dots,p_s$ are different primes. Now let $i_1,\dots,i_t$ be a combination of t of the s integers $1,\dots,s$ $(1 \leq t \leq s)$. Put $q_{i_1\dots i_t} = 2^{p_{i_1}\dots p_{i_t}} - 1$. Then any $q = q_{i_1\dots i_t}$ possesses at least one prime factor which does not occur in any $q_{i_1\dots i_u}$ with $u = 1,\dots,t$, which differ from q. In fact every common prime factor of $q_{i_1\dots i_t}$ and such a $q_{i_1\dots i_u}$ is a prime factor of a $q_{i_1\dots i_v}$ with $v < t$ and by Bang's result a prime factor of q exists which does not occur in any $q_{i_1\dots i_v}$ with $v < t$. Consequently by considering all $\binom{s}{t}$ divisors $q_{i_1\dots i_t}$ of M we find $\binom{s}{t}$ different prime divisors of M. Using this result for $t = s, s-1,\dots,1$ we obtain certainly $\sum_{j=1}^{s}\binom{s}{j} = 2^s-1$ different prime factors of M.

Corollary 1. By the general result of Bang we can apply the theorem also to expressions of the form $\frac{a^m-b^m}{a-b}$ instead of 2^m-1 for all $m \geq m_0$ where m_0 only depends on a and b.

Corollary 2. If s(m) denotes the number of different prime factors of m and $T(m) = 2^m-1$, then the result of theorem 3 may be formulated as follows

$$s(T(m)) \geq T(s(m)).$$

Corollary 3. Considering the sequence I with $m_0 = 11$, we have $s(m_1) = 2$, hence by theorem 1 there exist Poulet numbers the number of prime factors of which is greater than every given integer.

Theorem 4. If in sequence I the element $m = m_k$ is prime, $M = m_{k+1}$ composite, then every composite divisor of M is a pseudo prime [7].

Proof. For the composite divisor M of M the assertion follows from theorem 1. Now let n be a composite divisor of M. We prove the theorem by induction and may assume the assertion proved for any divisor $> n$ of M. Let N be a composite divisor of M such that $q = \frac{N}{n}$ is prime. Since $q \mid 2^m-1$ and since m is prime we have $m \mid q-1$. Hence $n \mid M = 2^m-1 = 2^{q-1}-1$. Since $N > n$ we have by induction $n \mid N \mid 2^{N-1}-1 = 2^{qn-1}-1$. Hence $n \mid 2^{n-1}-1$.

Remark. It is not true that if m has the property that all its divisors are prime or pseudo prime, also $M = 2^m-1$ has this property. For instance take $m = 2^{11}-1 = 23.89$. By theorem 1 the integer m is a pseudo prime of two factors, hence all divisors of m are prime. The number $M = 2^m-1$ possesses the factors $2^{23}-1$, $2^{89}-1$ and hence also the factor 47 of $2^{23}-1$. The divisor $d = 47(2^{89}-1)$ of M however does not satisfy $2^{d-1} \equiv 1 (\mathrm{mod}\ d)$ for $2^{89}-1 \nmid 2^{47(2^{89}-1)-1}-1$, because $47(2^{89}-1)-1 \equiv 46 (\mathrm{mod}\ 89)$.

In order to find Poulet numbers of the form $m = pq$, where p and q are different primes, we remark that **from** $p \mid m \mid 2^{m-1}-1$ and $p \mid 2^{p-1}-1$ follows $p \mid 2^{q-1}-1$ and similarly $q \mid 2^{p-1}-1$. Conversely from the last two relations follows for different primes p and q that pq satisfies (1). For instance, take $p = 11$, then $q \mid 2^{10}-1 = 3.11.41$, hence we must try either $q = 3$ or $q = 41$. Now $q = 3$ does not satisfy $11 \mid 2^{q-1}-1$, but $q = 41$ does. So $m = 11.41$ is a pseudo prime.

Similarly Poulet numbers of the form $m = pqr$ (where p, q and r are different primes) can be found from $p \mid 2^{qr-1}-1$, $q \mid 2^{pr-1}-1$, $r \mid 2^{pq-1}-1$ and so on. For instance $p = 3$, $q = 5$ gives $m = 3.5.43 = 645$.

§ 3. The sequence II.

Definition. A Fermat number is a number of the form $2^{2^h}+1$ where h is a non negative integer. Consequently every prime of the form 2^n+1 is a Fermat **number**.

Theorem 5. If $0 \leq k \leq 2^n-n-1$, the number $u = \prod_{h=n}^{n+k} (2^{2^h}+1)$ is a Poulet number.

Remark. For $k = 0$ and $k = 1$ (supposed $n \geq 2$) this property was proved by Jarden [4].

Proof. Put $u_h = 2^{2^h}+1$ $(h = 0,1,\ldots)$. Consider an arbitrary positive integer n and an integer k satisfying $0 \leq k \leq 2^n-n-1$. If $0 \leq i < j$ the integers u_{n+i} and u_{n+j} are relatively prime, for if a prime p divides u_{n+i} we have

$$2^{2^{n+i}} \equiv -1 (\mathrm{mod}\ p),\quad 2^{2^{n+i+1}} \equiv 1 (\mathrm{mod}\ p),\quad 2^{2^{n+j}} \equiv 1 (\mathrm{mod}\ p);$$

hence $p \nmid u_{n+j}$. Consequently to prove the theorem it is sufficient to prove $u_i \mid 2^{u-1}-1$ for $i = 0, 1, \ldots, k$. Now for $i = 0, 1, \ldots, k$ we get on account of $n+i+1 \leq n+k+1 \leq 2^n$ the relations

$$2^{n+i+1} \mid 2^{2^n} \mid (2^{2^n}+1)(2^{2^{n+1}}+1)\ldots(2^{2^{n+k}}+1)-1 = u-1,$$

hence

$$u_{n+i} = 2^{2^{n+i}}+1 \mid 2^{2^{n+i+1}}-1 \mid 2^{u-1}-1,$$

which proves the theorem.

Corollary. For all $n \geq 0$ the integer k may be taken $= 0$, hence every non prime Fermat number is a Poulet number.

Second proof of theorem 2.

By theorem 5 there exist Poulet numbers with arbitrary many prime factors. This proves theorem 2.

Theorem 6. If the number $M = 2^{2^m}+1$ is composite, every composite factor of M is a Poulet number.

Proof. For the divisor M of M the assertion follows from theorem 5, corollary. Now let n be a composite divisor of M. We prove the theorem by induction and may assume the assertion proved for any divisor $> n$ of M. Let N be a composite divisor of M such that $q = \frac{N}{n}$ is prime. Since $q \mid 2^{2^a}+1$ we have $q \mid 2^{2^{a+1}}-1$ and $q \nmid 2^b-1$ for $0 < b < 2^{a+1}$. Hence $2^{a+1} \mid p-1$, $2^{2^{a+1}}-1 \mid 2^{p-1}-1$ and on account of $n \mid M = 2^{2^a}+1 \mid 2^{2^{a+1}}-1$ we have $n \mid 2^{p-1}-1$. Since $N > n$ we have by induction $n \mid N \mid 2^{N-1}-1 = 2^{qn}-1$. Hence $n \mid 2^{n-1}-1$.

§ 4. Carmichael numbers.

We now consider the above defined Carmichael numbers. By definition they satisfy

(2) $\qquad a^{m-1} \equiv 1 \pmod m$

for each a which is prime to m. Obviously every Carmichael number is a Poulet number. In order to deduce some properties of these numbers we prove the

Lemma. If a, m and n are positive integers with $(a,m) = 1$, then there exists a positive integer b satisfying $b \equiv a \pmod m$ and $(b,mn) = 1$.

Proof. Suppose $n = n_1 n_2$, where n_1 contains only prime factors which divide m and where $(n_2,m) = 1$. Then by the Chinese remainder theorem an integer b exists with

$$b \equiv a \pmod m; \quad b \equiv 1 \pmod{n_2}.$$

We then have

$$(b,n_2) = 1, \quad (b,m) = (a,m) = 1, \text{ hence } (b,n_1) = 1,$$

whence we find

$$(b,mn) = (b,mn_1n_2) = 1.$$

Corollary. If a primitive root mod m exists, there also exists a primitive root mod m which is prime to mn, where n is an arbitrary integer.

In fact let a be a primitive root mod m, then $(a,m) = 1$. By the lemma there exists an integer b with $b \equiv a \pmod m$ (hence also b is a primitive root mod m) and with $(b,mn) = 1$.

Theorem 7. A Carmichael number is [5]:

1°. Odd ;

2°. Quadratfrei;

3°. The product of at least three different prime factors.

Proof.

1°. If $m = 2pn$, where p is an odd prime, is a Carmichael number, then by the corollary of our lemma a primitive root b of p exists which is prime to m. From $b^{p-1} \equiv 1 \pmod p$ and $b^{2pn-1} \equiv 1 \pmod p$ we deduce $p-1 \mid 2pn-1$, which is impossible since $p-1$ is even and $2pn-1$ odd.

In the case no odd prime divides the composite even number m we have $m = 2^h$ $(h \geq 2)$. If $h = 2$, thus $m = 4$ we have the relation $3^3 \equiv -1 \not\equiv$ $\not\equiv 1 \pmod 4$, hence m is no Carmichael number. If $h \geq 3$ a number a can be found satisfying $a^{2^{h-2}} \equiv 1 \pmod{2^h}$, $a^k \not\equiv 1 \pmod{2^h}$ if $0 < k < 2^{h-2}$. If a were a Carmichael number we had $a^{2^h-1} \equiv 1 \pmod{2^h}$ hence $2^{h-2} \mid 2^h-1$, which is impossible.

2°. Suppose that $m = p^2n$, where p is an odd prime, is a Carmichael number. By the corollary of the lemma an integer b exists which is a primitive root mod p^2 with $(b,m) = 1$. Then from $b^{p(p-1)} \equiv 1 \pmod{p^2}$ and $b^{p^2n-1} \equiv 1 \pmod{p^2}$ we deduce $p(p-1) \mid p^2n-1$ which is impossible since p does not divide p^2n-1.

3°: Suppose $m = pq$, where p and q are different odd primes. By the corollary of the lemma a primitive root b mod p exists which is prime to m. From $b^{p-1} \equiv 1 \pmod p$ and $b^{pq-1} \equiv 1 \pmod q$ we deduce $p-1 \mid pq-1$, hence $p-1 \mid q-1$. Similarly $q-1 \mid p-1$, hence $p-1 = q-1$, $p = q$ which contradicts the assertion.

Theorem 8. If $m = p_1p_2 \cdots p_s$ where $p_1, \ldots, p_s$ are different primes and $s \geq 3$, then the number m is a Carmichael number if and only if

$$p_i-1 \mid m_i-1, \text{ where } m_i = \frac{m}{p_i} \qquad (i = 1,\ldots,s).$$

Proof. For $i = 1,\ldots,s$ we know by our lemma the existence of a primitive root a_i mod p_i which is prime to m. Then from $a_i^{p_i-1} \equiv 1 \pmod{p_i}$, $a_i^{m-1} \equiv 1 \pmod{p_i}$ we obtain $p_i-1 \mid m-1$, hence $p_i-1 \mid m_i-1$.

Conversely if $p_i-1 \mid m_i-1$ for $i = 1,\ldots,s$, then we have for $i = 1,\ldots,s$ $p_i-1 \mid m-1$, hence for all a prime to m we have

$$p_i \mid a^{p_i-1}-1 \mid a^{m-1}-1, \text{ thus } m \mid a^{m-1}-1.$$

Remark. Using this property Ore finds Carmichael numbers [8].

I do not know whether there are infinitely many Carmichael numbers.

Remark. It is obvious that there are only a finite number of Carmichael numbers $m = p_1p_2\cdots p_s$ ($p_1,\dots,p_s$ prime) of which s-1 of the s prime factors are given. In fact by theorem 9 we have for the remaining prime p_s the relation $p_s-1 \mid p_1p_2\cdots p_{s-1}-1$, so only a finite number of values of p_s are possible.

Beeger [9]) proved that there are only a finite number of Carmichael numbers $m = pqr$ (p,q,r prime), the smallest prime factor of which is given (if one of the other prime factors is given, this property is obvious from the above remark).

I prove the following extension of Beeger's theorem.

Theorem 9. There exist only a finite number of Carmichael numbers $p_1p_2\cdots p_s$ ($p_1,\dots,p_s$ prime) of which s-2 prime factors are given [10]).

Proof. Without loss of generality we may suppose that the Carmichael number $m = npq$, where n is given and where the primes p and q satisfy the relation $p < q$.

By theorem 8 positive integers x and y must exist with

(3) $$qn-1 = x(p-1); \quad pn-1 = y(q-1).$$

We then have $x > y$, and further $x \neq 1$, $y \neq 1$ (since p and q are prime), Eliminating q from the relations (3) we find

(4) $$p-1 = \frac{(n-1)(n+y)}{xy-n^2}.$$

Since $p \leqslant q-2$ the second relation (3) gives

$$y = \frac{pn-1}{q-1} \leqslant \frac{pn-1}{p+1} = n - \frac{n+1}{p+1},$$

thus

(5) $$y \leqslant n-1.$$

We now distinguish two cases.

1°. $xy-n^2 \geqslant 2$. Then from (4) and (5) it follows

$$p \leqslant 1 + \frac{(n-1)(2n-1)}{2} < 1 + (n-1)(2n+\tfrac{1}{2}-\sqrt{n-\tfrac{3}{4}}).$$

2°. $xy-n^2 = 1$. By (5) and $y \neq 1$ we may put $y = n-d$ with $1 \leqslant d \leqslant n-2$. Then we have $x = \frac{n^2+1}{y} = \frac{n^2+1}{n-d} = n+d+\frac{d^2+1}{n-d}$, hence $x \geqslant n+d+1$. Thus

$$1 = xy-n^2 \geqslant (n+d+1)(n-d)-n^2 = -d^2+n-d,$$

hence

$$d \geqslant -\tfrac{1}{2}+\sqrt{n-\tfrac{3}{4}}.$$

Then (4) gives

(6) $$p \leqslant 1+(n-1)(2n+\tfrac{1}{2}-\sqrt{n-\tfrac{3}{4}}).$$

From the second relation (3) and $y \geqslant 2$ we conclude $q \leqslant 1+\frac{1}{2}(pn-1)$, which proves the assertion.

Remark. The relation (6) is rather sharp as is seen by taking $n = 43$, in which case it gives $p \leqslant 3361$ and actually $m = 43\cdot 3361\cdot 3907$ is a Carmichael number.

1) P. Poulet, Table des nombres composés vérifiant le théorème de Fermat pour le module 2 jusqu'à 100 000 000, Sphinx 8(1938), 42-52.

2) T. Banachiewicz, Spraw Tow Nauk, Warsaw 2(1909), 7-10, found the 5 numbers

$341=11.31$; $561=3.11.17$; $1387=19.73$; $1729=7.13.19$; $1905=3.5.127$,

to which he added afterwards

$645=3.5.43$; $1105=5.13.17$.

3) W. Sierpiński, Remarque sur une hypothèse des chinois concernant les nombres $\frac{2^n-2}{n}$, Coll. Math. I(1947), 9.

4) D. Jarden, Existence of an infinitude of composite n for which $2^{n-1} \equiv 1 (\mathrm{mod}\ n)$, Riv. Lemat. 4(1950), 65-67.

5) R.D. Carmichael, Note on a new number theoretic function, Bull. Amer. Math. Soc. 16(1909), 232-238.

R.D. Carmichael, On composite numbers P which satisfy the Fermat Congruence $a^{P-1} \equiv 1 (\mathrm{mod}\ P)$, Amer. Math. Monthly 19(1912), 22-27.

6) C.G. Lekkerkerker, Prime factors of the elements of certain sequences of integers, Math. Centrum, Rapport ZW 1953-003.

7) H.J.A. Duparc, On Mersenne numbers and Poulet numbers, Math. Centrum, Rapport ZW 1953-001.

8) O. Ore, Number theory and its history, New York 1948, 329-339.

9) N.G.W.H. Beeger, On composite numbers n for which $a^{n-1} \equiv 1 (\mathrm{mod}\ n)$ for every a prime to n, Scripta Math. 16(1950), 133-135.

Instead of (8) he proves the relation $p \leqslant 1+2(n-1)^2$, which is stronger than our result only for n = 3 and 5.

10) H.J.A. Duparc, On Carmichael numbers, Simon Stevin, 29(1952), 21-24.