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**PRIMITIVE ALGEBRAS WITH INVOLUTION**

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A well known theorem of Kaplansky ([1], p. 226, Theorem 1) states that *every primitive algebra satisfying a polynomial identity is finite dimensional over its center*. Related to this result is the following conjecture due to Herstein: *if  $A$  is a primitive algebra with involution whose symmetric elements satisfy a polynomial identity, then  $A$  is finite dimensional over its center*. Our main object in the present paper is to verify this conjecture in the special case where  $A$  is assumed to be *algebraic*. In the course of our proof we develop some results, which may be of independent interest, concerning the existence of non-trivial symmetric idempotents in primitive algebras with involution.

**1. Some preliminary remarks.** In the present section we mention a few definitions and observations which we shall need in the remainder of this paper.

By the term *algebra over  $\Phi$*  we shall mean an associative algebra (possibly infinite dimensional) over a field  $\Phi$ . A *primitive algebra over  $\Phi$*  is one which is isomorphic to a dense ring of linear transformations of a (left) vector space  $V$  over a division algebra  $\Delta$  containing  $\Phi$  (see [1], p. 32). The *rank* of an element  $a$  of a primitive algebra is the dimension of  $Va$  over  $\Delta$ . We state without proof the following three remarks.

REMARK 1. Let  $A$  be a primitive algebra with identity 1 containing a set of nonzero orthogonal idempotents  $e_1, e_2, \dots, e_m$  such that

(a)  $e_1 + e_2 + \dots + e_m = 1$

(b)  $\text{rank } e_i = r_i < \infty, i = 1, 2, \dots, m.$

Then the dimension of  $V$  over  $\Delta$  is  $\sum_{i=1}^m r_i < \infty$ .

REMARK 2. Let  $A$  be a primitive algebra with center  $Z$ . If  $za = 0$  for some  $z \neq 0 \in Z$  and some  $a \in A$ , then  $a = 0$ .

REMARK 3. Let  $A$  be a primitive algebra. If  $a$  and  $b$  are nonzero elements of  $A$ , then  $aAb \neq 0$ . More generally, if  $a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n$  are nonzero elements of  $A$ , where  $n$  is any natural number, then

$$a_1 A a_2 A \dots a_{n-1} A a_n \neq 0.$$

An *I-algebra* is an algebra in which every non-nil left ideal contains a nonzero idempotent. An algebra over  $\Phi$  is *algebraic* in case every

element satisfies a non-trivial polynomial equation  $f(t) = 0$ , where  $f(t) = \sum \alpha_i t^i$ ,  $\alpha_i \in \Phi$ . One can show that every algebraic algebra is an  $I$ -algebra. In the proof of this fact (see [1], p. 210, Proposition 1), however, the following sharper result is obtained.

REMARK 4. Let  $a$  be a non-nilpotent element of an algebraic algebra. Then the subalgebra  $[[a]]$  generated by  $a$  contains a nonzero idempotent.

An *involution*\* of an algebra  $A$  over  $\Phi$  is an anti-automorphism of  $A$  of period 2, that is,

$$\begin{aligned}(a + b)^* &= a^* + b^* \\ (\alpha a)^* &= \alpha a^* \\ (ab)^* &= b^* a^* \\ a^{**} &= a\end{aligned}$$

for all  $a, b \in A$ ,  $\alpha \in \Phi$ . It is to be understood that in the rest of this paper the characteristic of  $\Phi$  is assumed to be unequal to 2. An element  $a$  is *symmetric* if  $a^* = a$ ;  $a$  is *skew* if  $a^* = -a$ . \* is an involution of the *first kind* in case every central element is symmetric. \* is an involution of the *second kind* in case there exists a nonzero central element which is skew. Every involution is of one of these two kinds.

2.  $S_n$ -algebras. The notion of an algebra satisfying a polynomial identity can be generalized according to the following

DEFINITION. A subspace  $R$  of an algebra  $A$  over  $\Phi$  satisfies a *polynomial identity* in case there exists a nonzero element  $f(t_1, t_2, \dots, t_n)$  of the free algebra over  $\Phi$  freely generated by the  $t_i$  such that

$$f(x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n) = 0$$

for all  $x_i \in R$ .  $R$  will be called a *PI-subspace of degree  $d$*  if the degree  $d$  of  $f(t_1, t_2, \dots, t_n)$  is minimal.

The element  $f(t_1, t_2, \dots, t_n)$  is *multilinear of degree  $n$*  if and only if it is of the form

$$\sum_{\sigma} \alpha(\sigma) t_{\sigma_1} t_{\sigma_2} \cdots t_{\sigma_n}, \alpha(\sigma) \in \Phi, \text{ some } \alpha(\sigma) \neq 0,$$

where  $\sigma$  ranges over all the permutations of  $(1, 2, \dots, n)$ .

LEMMA 1. Let  $R$  be a *PI-subspace of degree  $n$*  of an algebra  $A$ . Then  $R$  satisfies a *multilinear polynomial identity of degree  $n$* .

This lemma is a slight generalization of [1], p. 225, Proposition 1.

The same proof carries over directly and we therefore omit it.

Our main purpose in this paper is to study algebras of the following type.

**DEFINITION.** Let  $A$  be an algebra with an involution  $*$  over  $\Phi$ . Suppose that the set  $S$  of symmetric elements is a  $PI$ -subspace of degree  $\leq n$ . Then  $A$  will be called an  $S_n$ -algebra. In case  $*$  is of the first (second) kind, we shall refer to  $A$  as an  $S_n$ -algebra of the first (second) kind.

It is surprisingly easy to analyze  $S_n$ -algebras of the second kind, as indicated by

**THEOREM 1.** *Let  $A$  be a primitive  $S_n$ -algebra of the second kind. Then  $A$  is finite dimensional over its center.*

*Proof.*<sup>1</sup> According to Lemma 1  $S$  satisfies a multilinear polynomial identity of degree  $n: f(t_1, t_2, \dots, t_n) = 0$ . Let  $z$  be a nonzero central element of  $A$  which is skew. If  $k$  is skew, then

$$(zk)^* = k^*z^* = (-k)(-z) = kz = zk,$$

and hence  $zk$  is symmetric. Therefore we have

$$0 = f(zk_1, s_2, s_3, \dots, s_n) = zf(k_1, s_2, s_3, \dots, s_n)$$

for all  $k_1 \in K, s_i \in S$ , where  $K$  is the set of skew elements. By Remark 2  $f(k_1, s_2, s_3, \dots, s_n) = 0$ . It follows that  $f(x_1, s_2, s_3, \dots, s_n) = 0$  for all  $x_1 \in A, s_i \in S$ , since every  $x \in A$  can be written  $x = s + k, s \in S, k \in K$ . Continuing in this fashion we finally have  $f(x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n) = 0$  for all  $x_i \in A$ . The conclusion then follows from the previously mentioned theorem of Kaplansky ([1], p. 226, Theorem 1).

**3. Some basic theorems.** The assumption that the symmetric elements of an  $S_n$ -algebra satisfy a polynomial identity is used chiefly to prove

**THEOREM 2.** *Let  $A$  be a primitive  $S_n$ -algebra over  $\Phi$ . Then there exist at most  $n$  orthogonal non-nilpotent symmetric elements.*

*Proof.* Suppose  $s_1, s_2, \dots, s_{n+1}$  are  $n + 1$  orthogonal non-nilpotent symmetric elements. Using Remark 3 and the fact that the  $s_i$  are non-nilpotent we may choose elements  $x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n \in A$  so that

$$s_1^2 x_1 s_2^2 x_2 \dots s_n^2 x_n s_{n+1} \neq 0.$$

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<sup>1</sup> A similar proof was communicated orally to the author by I. N. Herstein.

Now set  $u_i = s_i x_i s_{i+1} + s_{i+1} x_i^* s_i$ ,  $i = 1, 2, \dots, n$ . By Lemma 1  $S$  satisfies a multilinear identity of degree  $n$ :

$$(1) \quad f(t_1, t_2, \dots, t_n) = t_1 t_2 \cdots t_n + \sum_{\sigma \neq I} \alpha(\sigma) t_{\sigma_1} t_{\sigma_2} \cdots t_{\sigma_n},$$

where  $\sigma$  ranges over all the permutations of  $(1, 2, \dots, n)$  except the identity permutation  $I$ .  $f(u_1, u_2, \dots, u_n) = 0$  since the  $u_i$  are symmetric. To analyze the right hand side of (1) we first note that if  $u_i u_j u_k \neq 0$ ,  $i, j, k$  distinct, then either  $j = i + 1$  and  $k = i + 2$ , or  $j = i - 1$  and  $k = i - 2$ , because of the orthogonality of the  $s_i$ . It follows that

$$f(u_1, u_2, \dots, u_n) = u_1 u_2 \cdots u_n + \alpha u_n u_{n-1} \cdots u_1$$

for some  $\alpha \in \Phi$ . Hence

$$(2) \quad 0 = s_1 x_1 s_2^2 x_2 s_3^2 x_3 \cdots s_n^2 x_n s_{n+1} + \alpha s_{n+1} x_n^* s_n^2 x_{n-1}^* \cdots s_2^2 x_1^* s_1.$$

Multiplying (2) through on the left by  $s_1$ , we have  $0 = s_1^2 x_1 s_2^2 x_2 \cdots s_n^2 x_n s_{n+1}$ , a contradiction.

An idempotent  $e$  of an algebra  $A$  is called *non-trivial* in case  $e \neq 1$  (if  $A$  has an identity) and  $e \neq 0$ .

**THEOREM 3.** *Let  $A$  be a primitive  $I$ -algebra with an involution\*. Then:*

(a) *If there exists an  $x \neq 0 \in A$  such that  $xx^* = 0$ , then either  $A$  contains a non-trivial symmetric idempotent or  $A$  is isomorphic to the total matrix ring  $\Delta_2$ , where  $\Delta$  is a division algebra. In the latter case  $E_{11}^* = E_{22}$ , where the  $E_{ij}$  are the unit matrices,  $i, j = 1, 2$ .*

(b) *If  $xx^* \neq 0$  for all  $x \neq 0 \in A$ , then either  $A$  is a division algebra or  $A$  contains a non-nilpotent symmetric element which has no inverse in  $A$ . If  $xx^* \neq 0$  for all  $x \neq 0 \in A$  and  $A$  is algebraic over  $\Phi$ , then either  $A$  is a division algebra or  $A$  contains a non-trivial symmetric idempotent.*

*Proof.* Suppose first that there exists an  $x \neq 0 \in A$  such that  $xx^* = 0$ . We can choose an  $a \in A$  such that  $e = ax$  is a nonzero idempotent, because  $A$  is an  $I$ -algebra. Since  $xx^* = 0$ ,  $e \neq 1$ . From the equations  $ee^* = (ax)(ax)^* = axx^*a^* = 0$  it is easy to check that  $e + e^* - e^*e$  is a non zero symmetric idempotent. We may thus assume that  $1 \in A$  and  $e + e^* - e^*e = 1$ .  $eAe$  is a primitive  $I$ -algebra ([1], p. 48, Proposition 1, and p. 211, Proposition 2). If  $eAe$  is not a division algebra, then it contains an idempotent  $f = ebe$ ,  $f \neq 0$ ,  $f \neq e$ . Since  $ff^* = ebee^*b^*e^* = 0$ ,  $f + f^* - f^*f$  is a nonzero symmetric idempotent. It is unequal to 1 since otherwise  $e = e(f + f^* - f^*f) = f$ . We may therefore assume that  $eAe$  is a division algebra and consequently that  $\text{rank } e = 1$ . Since  $(1 - e^*)(1 - e) = 1 - (e + e^* - e^*e) = 0$ , a repetition of the above argu-

ment allows us to assume that  $1 - e$  is also an idempotent of rank 1. It follows from Remark 1 that  $A$  is the complete ring of linear transformations of a two dimensional vector space  $V$  over a division algebra  $\Delta$ .

If  $e^*e = 0$  as well as  $ee^* = 0$  it is easy to show that relative to a suitable basis of  $V$   $e = E_{11}$  and  $e^* = E_{22}$ . In this case we are finished. Therefore suppose  $e^*e \neq 0$ . We shall sketch an argument, leaving some details to the reader, whereby a non-trivial symmetric idempotent can now be found. First find a basis  $(u_1, u_2)$  of  $V$  such that  $u_1e = u_1, u_2e = 0, u_1e^* = 0, u_2e^* = \lambda u_1 + u_2$ , where  $\lambda \neq 0 \in \Delta$ . By setting  $v_1 = \lambda^{-1}u_1$  and  $v_2 = u_2$  we obtain a basis  $(v_1, v_2)$  of  $V$  relative to which  $e = E_{11}$  and  $e^* = E_{21} + E_{22}$ . From this we have

$$\begin{aligned} E_{11}^* &= E_{21} + E_{22} \\ E_{21}^* &= [(E_{21} + E_{22})E_{11}]^* = (E_{21} + E_{22})E_{11} = E_{21} \\ E_{22}^* &= e - E_{21}^* = E_{11} - E_{21} . \end{aligned}$$

Set  $E_{12}^* = \alpha E_{11} + \beta E_{12} + \gamma E_{21} + \delta E_{22}$ ,  $\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \delta \in \Delta$ . From the following three equations

$$\begin{aligned} E_{11} - E_{21} &= E_{22}^* = (E_{21}E_{12})^* = E_{12}^*E_{21}^* = \beta E_{11} + \delta E_{21} \\ E_{21} + E_{22} &= E_{11}^* = (E_{12}E_{21})^* = E_{21}^*E_{12}^* = \alpha E_{21} + \beta E_{22} \\ \alpha E_{11} + \beta E_{12} + \gamma E_{21} + \delta E_{22} &= E_{12}^* = (E_{11}E_{12})^* = E_{12}^*E_{11}^* \\ &= \beta E_{11} + \beta E_{12} + \delta E_{21} + \delta E_{22} \end{aligned}$$

we obtain  $\alpha = 1, \beta = 1, \gamma = -1$ , and  $\delta = -1$ . Hence

$$E_{12}^* = E_{11} + E_{12} - E_{21} - E_{22}$$

and  $-E_{12}E_{12}^* = E_{11} + E_{12}$  is then a non-trivial symmetric idempotent.

There remains the case in which  $xx^* \neq 0$  for all  $x \neq 0 \in A$ . We note that in this situation there exist no nonzero nilpotent symmetric elements, for, if  $s \neq 0$  is symmetric, then  $s^2 = ss^* \neq 0$ . If  $A$  is not already a division algebra then we can find an element  $x \neq 0 \in A$  such that  $xA$  is a proper right ideal. It follows that  $xx^*A \subseteq xA$  is also a proper right ideal, and so  $xx^*$  is a nonzero, and hence, non-nilpotent symmetric element which has no inverse. In case  $A$  is algebraic over  $\Phi$  the subalgebra  $[[xx^*]]$  generated by  $xx^*$  contains a non-trivial symmetric idempotent, by Remark 4.

**4. Total matrix rings with involution.** We begin by proving

**THEOREM 4.** *Let  $A$  be the total matrix ring  $\Delta_m$  with an involution  $*$ , where  $\Delta$  is a division algebra over  $\Phi$ . Then there exists a set of orthogonal symmetric elements  $e_1, e_2, \dots, e_{m_1}, f_1, f_2, \dots, f_{m_2}$  such that:*

- (a) *The  $e_i$  are non-nilpotent elements of rank 1. In case  $A$  is*

algebraic over  $\Phi$ , the  $e_i$  are idempotents of rank 1.

(b) The  $f_j$  are idempotents of rank 2, and  $f_j A f_j$  is isomorphic to  $A_2$ , with  $E_{11}^* = E_{22}$  (see Theorem 3).

(c)  $m_1 + 2m_2 = m$ .

*Proof.* Let  $s_1, s_2, \dots, s_h$  be a set of nonzero orthogonal symmetric idempotents, with  $h$  maximal. By the maximality of  $h$  we have

$$s_1 + s_2 + \dots + s_h = 1 .$$

Each  $s_i A s_i$  may itself be regarded as a total matrix ring  $A_{r_i}$  with an involution induced by  $*$ , where  $r_i$  is the rank of  $s_i$ . We first consider those  $s_i A s_i$  having the property: there exists an  $x \neq 0 \in s_i A s_i$  such that  $xx^* = 0$ . Theorem 3, together with the maximality of  $h$ , then says that  $s_i A s_i$  is isomorphic to  $A_2$ , with  $E_{11}^* = E_{22}$ . Relabeling these  $s_i$  as  $f_1, f_2, \dots, f_{m_2}$ , we have taken care of (b).

The remaining  $s_i$ , of course, have the property that  $xx^* \neq 0$  for all  $x \neq 0 \in s_i A s_i$ . As we have noted before,  $s_i A s_i$  can have no nonzero nilpotent symmetric elements, since  $xx^* \neq 0$ . Consider a typical  $s_i A s_i$  and select from it an element  $x_1$  of rank 1. Then  $y_1 = x_1 x_1^* \neq 0$  is a non-nilpotent symmetric element of rank 1. Now assume that  $k (< r_i)$  orthogonal non-nilpotent symmetric elements  $y_1, y_2, \dots, y_k$  of rank 1 have been found. Since the dimension of  $W = \sum_{i=1}^k V y_i$  is less than  $r_i$ , we can find an element  $x_{k+1}$  of rank 1 such that  $W x_{k+1} = 0$ . Then  $y_{k+1} = x_{k+1} x_{k+1}^*$  is a non-nilpotent symmetric element of rank 1 such that  $W y_{k+1} = 0$ , that is,  $y_i y_{k+1} = 0, i = 1, 2, \dots, k$ . Also  $y_{k+1} y_i = 0, i = 1, 2, \dots, k$ , since  $(y_{k+1} y_i)^* = y_i^* y_{k+1}^* = y_i y_{k+1} = 0$ . It follows that there exists in  $s_i A s_i$  a set of  $r_i$  non-nilpotent orthogonal symmetric elements  $y_1, y_2, \dots, y_{r_i}$ , each of rank 1. If  $A$  is algebraic over  $\Phi$  the subalgebra  $[[y_j]]$  generated by each  $y_j$  contains a nonzero idempotent  $z_j$  (necessarily of rank 1), and so we have  $r_i$  orthogonal symmetric idempotents  $z_1, z_2, \dots, z_{r_i}$ , each of rank 1. Repeating the argument for all the  $s_i A s_i$  and labeling either all the  $y_j$  or all the  $z_j$  as  $e_1, e_2, \dots, e_{m_1}$ , we have completed the proof of (a). (c) follows readily from the fact that rank  $e_i = 1$ , rank  $f_j = 2$ , and  $\sum_i e_i + \sum_j f_j = 1$ .

To illustrate Theorem 4 we consider the following simple example. Let  $A = \Phi_2$ , where  $\Phi$  is a field, and define an involution  $*$  in  $A$  by:

$$\begin{pmatrix} \alpha_1 & \alpha_2 \\ \alpha_3 & \alpha_4 \end{pmatrix}^* = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & -1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} \alpha_1 & \alpha_3 \\ \alpha_2 & \alpha_4 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ -1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}, \alpha_i \in \Phi .$$

The reader may verify that  $A$  contains no symmetric elements of rank 1. Similar examples of higher dimension can also be given.

In the remainder of this section we derive a result which will enable us, at least in the algebraic case, to “pass” from the total matrix ring

$A_m$  to the division algebra  $A$  itself.

**LEMMA 2.** *Let  $A$  be the total matrix ring  $A_2$ , algebraic over  $\Phi$ , with an involution  $*$ , where  $A$  is a division algebra over  $\Phi$ . Suppose  $E_{11}^* = E_{22}$ . Then one of the following two possibilities must hold:*

- (a)  *$A$  contains a symmetric idempotent of rank 1.*
- (b) *The involution  $*$  in  $A_2$  is of the form:*

$$\begin{pmatrix} \alpha_1 & \alpha_2 \\ \alpha_3 & \alpha_4 \end{pmatrix}^* = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & -\beta^{-1} \\ \beta^{-1} & 0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} \bar{\alpha}_1 & \bar{\alpha}_3 \\ \bar{\alpha}_2 & \bar{\alpha}_4 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} 0 & \beta \\ -\beta & 0 \end{pmatrix}$$

for all  $\alpha_i \in A$ , some  $\beta \neq 0 \in A$ , where  $\alpha \rightarrow \bar{\alpha}$  is an involution in  $A$ .

*Proof.* It is well known (see for example [2], p. 24, Theorem 9) that the involution  $*$  in  $A$  has the form:

$$\begin{pmatrix} \alpha_1 & \alpha_2 \\ \alpha_3 & \alpha_4 \end{pmatrix}^* = U^{-1} \begin{pmatrix} \bar{\alpha}_1 & \bar{\alpha}_3 \\ \bar{\alpha}_2 & \bar{\alpha}_4 \end{pmatrix} U$$

where  $U = \begin{pmatrix} \gamma & \beta \\ \pm\bar{\beta} & \delta \end{pmatrix}$  is a nonsingular element of  $A_2$  and  $\alpha \rightarrow \bar{\alpha}$  is an involution in  $A$ . Consider the equation  $E_{22} = E_{11}^* = U^{-1}E_{11}U$ , that is,

$$\begin{pmatrix} \gamma & \beta \\ \pm\bar{\beta} & \delta \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} \gamma & \beta \\ \pm\bar{\beta} & \delta \end{pmatrix}.$$

It follows that  $\gamma = \delta = 0$ , and hence  $U = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & \beta \\ \pm\bar{\beta} & 0 \end{pmatrix}$ .

At this point we observe that an element  $\begin{pmatrix} \gamma_1 & \gamma_2 \\ \gamma_1 & \gamma_2 \end{pmatrix} \in A$  is a non-nilpotent element of rank 1, unless  $\gamma_1 + \gamma_2 = 0$ . Now set  $B = \begin{pmatrix} \pm\bar{\beta} & \beta \\ \pm\bar{\beta} & \beta \end{pmatrix}$ . It is easy to check that  $B^* = U^{-1} \begin{pmatrix} \pm\beta & \pm\beta \\ \bar{\beta} & \bar{\beta} \end{pmatrix} U = \pm B$ , and hence  $B$  is either symmetric or skew. If  $\beta \pm \bar{\beta} = 0$ , i.e.,  $U = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & \beta \\ -\beta & 0 \end{pmatrix}$ , we are finished. Therefore assume that  $\beta \pm \bar{\beta} \neq 0$ . We then apply the observation made at the beginning of this paragraph to conclude that  $B$  is a non-nilpotent element of rank 1. Since  $B$  is either symmetric or skew, it follows that  $B^2$  is a non-nilpotent symmetric element of rank 1. The proof is complete when we note that, as  $A$  is algebraic over  $\Phi$ , the subalgebra  $[[B^2]]$  generated by  $B^2$  over  $\Phi$  contains a symmetric idempotent of rank 1.

**THEOREM 5.** *Let  $A$  be the total matrix ring  $A_m$ , algebraic over  $\Phi$ , with an involution  $*$ , where  $A$  is a division algebra over  $\Phi$ . Then there exists a division subalgebra  $D$  of  $A$  such that  $D^* = D$  and  $D$  is isomorphic to  $A$ .*



*Proof.* Theorem 4 asserts the existence of either (a) a symmetric idempotent  $e$  of rank 1 or (b) a symmetric idempotent  $f$  of rank 2, where  $fAf$  is isomorphic to  $\Delta_2$  with the induced involution  $*$  such that  $E_{11}^* = E_{22}$ . In case (a) we merely set  $D = eAe$  and the required conclusion follows. In case (b)  $\Delta_2$  satisfies the hypothesis of Lemma 2. If  $\Delta_2$  contains a symmetric idempotent of rank 1 we proceed as in case (a). Otherwise we conclude from Lemma 2 that the involution  $*$  in  $\Delta_2$  is given by:

$$\begin{pmatrix} \alpha_1 & \alpha_2 \\ \alpha_3 & \alpha_4 \end{pmatrix}^* = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & -\beta^{-1} \\ -\beta^{-1} & 0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} \bar{\alpha}_1 & \bar{\alpha}_3 \\ \bar{\alpha}_2 & \bar{\alpha}_4 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} 0 & \beta \\ -\beta & 0 \end{pmatrix}.$$

Let  $D$  be the division subalgebra of  $\Delta_2$  consisting of all elements of the form  $\begin{pmatrix} \alpha & 0 \\ 0 & \alpha \end{pmatrix}$ ,  $\alpha \in \Delta$ .  $D$  is obviously isomorphic to  $\Delta$ . Furthermore, one verifies that

$$\begin{pmatrix} \alpha & 0 \\ 0 & \alpha \end{pmatrix}^* = \begin{pmatrix} \beta^{-1}\bar{\alpha}\beta & 0 \\ 0 & \beta^{-1}\bar{\alpha}\beta \end{pmatrix} \in D$$

and we see that  $D^* = D$ .

**5. Division  $S_n$ -algebras.** We begin this section by stating

**LEMMA 3.** *Let  $\Delta$  be an algebraic division algebra over its center  $\Phi$  for which there exists a fixed integer  $h$  such that the dimension of  $\Phi(x)$  over  $\Phi$  is equal to or less than  $h$  for every separable element  $x \in \Delta$ . Then  $\Delta$  is finite dimensional over  $\Phi$ .*

Except for the restriction of separability, this lemma is virtually the same as [1], p. 181, Theorem 1. The proof appearing in [1] carries over directly, and we therefore omit it.

**LEMMA 4.** *Let  $\Delta$  be an algebraic  $S_n$ -division algebra of the first kind over its center  $\Phi$ . Suppose  $E$  is a finite dimensional field extension of  $\Phi$ . Then  $E \otimes_{\Phi} \Delta$  is isomorphic to the total matrix ring  $\Gamma_m$ , where  $\Gamma$  is a division algebra and  $m \leq 2n$ .*

*Proof.*  $E \otimes \Delta$  is well known to be a simple algebra over  $\Phi$  with minimum condition on right ideals. Hence  $E \otimes \Delta$  is isomorphic to  $\Gamma_m$ , where  $\Gamma$  is a division algebra and  $m$  is a natural number.

An involution  $\tau$  can be defined in  $E \otimes \Delta$  as follows:

$$(\alpha \otimes x)^{\tau} = \alpha \otimes x^*$$

for  $\alpha \in E$ ,  $x \in \Delta$ . It can be verified that  $\tau$  is a well-defined involution

and that every symmetric element (under  $\tau$ ) in  $E \otimes \Delta$  can be written in the form:

$$(3) \quad \sum_i \alpha_i \otimes s_i, \alpha_i \in E, s_i \in S.$$

Let  $f(t_1, t_2, \dots, t_n) = 0$  be the multilinear polynomial identity of degree  $n$  satisfied by  $S$ . Because this identity is multilinear and because  $E$  is the center of  $E \otimes \Delta$ , it follows from (3) that the set of symmetric elements of  $E \otimes \Delta$  under  $\tau$  also satisfies  $f(t_1, t_2, \dots, t_n) = 0$ .

Now regard  $E \otimes \Delta$  as the total matrix ring  $\Gamma_m$ , with involution  $\tau$ . By Theorem 4 there exists in  $\Gamma_m$  a set of at least  $k$  non-nilpotent orthogonal symmetric elements, where  $2k \geq m$ . Theorem 2 tells us that  $k \leq n$ , and hence  $m \leq 2k \leq 2n$ .

We are now able to prove

**THEOREM 6.** *Let  $\Delta$  be an algebraic  $S_n$ -division algebra. Then  $\Delta$  is finite dimensional over its center.*

*Proof.* By Theorem 1 we may assume that  $\Delta$  is an  $S_n$ -algebra of the first kind over its center  $\Phi$ . Suppose  $\Delta$  is not finite dimensional over  $\Phi$ . Then by Lemma 3 there exists a separable element  $x \in \Delta$  whose minimal polynomial  $g(t)$  over  $\Phi$  has degree  $r > 2n$ . Let  $E$  be a finite dimensional field extension of  $\Phi$  containing the  $r$  distinct roots  $\alpha_1, \alpha_2, \dots, \alpha_r$  of  $g(t)$ .

We claim now that the element  $x - \alpha_i$  is a zero divisor in  $E \otimes \Delta$ ,  $i = 1, 2, \dots, r$ . Indeed,

$$0 = g(x) = \prod_{j=1}^r (x - \alpha_j) = (x - \alpha_i) \prod_{j \neq i} (x - \alpha_j),$$

and it suffices to show that  $\prod_{j \neq i} (x - \alpha_j)$  is a nonzero element of  $E \otimes \Delta$ . Suppose  $\prod_{j \neq i} (x - \alpha_j) = 0$ , that is,

$$(4) \quad (x^{r-1} \otimes 1) - (x^{r-2} \otimes \sum_{j \neq i} \alpha_j) + \dots \pm (1 \otimes \prod_{j \neq i} \alpha_j) = 0.$$

Since  $x^{r-1}, x^{r-2}, \dots, 1$  are linearly independent over  $\Phi$ , all the corresponding terms of  $E$  in (4) must be zero, which is clearly impossible. Therefore  $x - \alpha_i$  is a zero divisor in  $E \otimes \Delta$ .

According to Lemma 4  $E \otimes \Delta$  is isomorphic to the total matrix ring  $\Gamma_m$ , where  $m \leq 2n$ . We may therefore regard  $E \otimes \Delta$  as the complete ring of linear transformations of an  $m$ -dimensional vector space  $V$  over the division algebra  $E$ . Set  $V_i = \{v \in V \mid v(x - \alpha_i) = 0\}$ ,  $i = 1, 2, \dots, r$ .  $V_i$  is a nonzero subspace of  $V$  since  $x - \alpha_i$  is a zero divisor in  $E \otimes \Delta$ . Using the fact that the  $\alpha_i$  are distinct elements belonging to the center  $E$ , we have that  $V_i$  are independent subspaces of  $V$ . It follows that

$$m \geq \dim \sum_{i=1}^r V_i = \sum_{i=1}^r (\dim V_i) \geq r > 2n .$$

A contradiction now arises since  $m \leq 2n$ . We must therefore conclude that  $\mathcal{A}$  is finite dimensional over its center.

**6. Primitive  $S_n$ -algebras.** We are now in a position to proceed with the proof of our main result.

**THEOREM 7.** *Let  $A$  be a primitive algebraic  $S_n$ -algebra. Then the center of  $A$  is a field, and  $A$  is finite dimensional over its center.*

*Proof.* Since  $A$  is primitive,  $A$  may be regarded as a dense ring of linear transformations of a vector space  $V$  over a division algebra  $\mathcal{A}$ . According to Theorem 2 there exist at most  $n$  orthogonal symmetric idempotents. Let  $e_1, e_2, \dots, e_m$  be a set of  $m$  orthogonal symmetric idempotents, with  $m(\leq n)$  maximal. For each  $i$ ,  $e_i A e_i$  is again a primitive algebraic algebra with involution induced by  $*$ . The same is true for  $(1 - e)A(1 - e)$ , where  $e = e_1 + e_2 + \dots + e_m$ , if  $A$  should not already happen to have an identity. We now use Theorem 3 in conjunction with the maximality of  $m$  to assert that the rank of each  $e_i$  is 1 or 2, and that  $A$  does have an identity  $1 = e_1 + e_2 + \dots + e_m$ . It follows that the dimension  $k$  of  $V \leq 2m$  and consequently that  $A$  is isomorphic to the total matrix ring  $\mathcal{A}_k$ . The center of  $A$  is, of course, a subfield of  $\mathcal{A}$ . Theorem 5 now says that  $\mathcal{A}$  is an algebraic  $S_n$ -division algebra. By Theorem 6  $\mathcal{A}$  is finite dimensional over its center. Hence  $A$  is finite dimensional over its center.

**COROLLARY.** *Let  $A$  be a primitive algebraic algebra with an involution  $*$  such that the set  $K$  of skew elements is a PI-subspace of degree  $n$ . Then  $A$  is finite dimensional over its center.*

*Proof.* Let  $f(t_1, t_2, \dots, t_n) = 0$  be the multilinear polynomial identity of degree  $n$  satisfied by  $K$ , according to Lemma 1. If  $s_1, s_2 \in S$ , where  $S$  is the set of symmetric elements of  $A$ , then  $s_1 s_2 - s_2 s_1 \in K$ . From this it follows that  $f(u_1 v_1 - v_1 u_1, u_2 v_2 - v_2 u_2, \dots, u_n v_n - v_n u_n) = 0$  is a non-trivial polynomial identity of degree  $2n$  satisfied by the elements of  $S$ . In other words,  $A$  is a primitive algebraic  $S_{2n}$ -algebra, and the conclusion follows from Theorem 7.

*Note.* Herstein's original conjecture was: if  $A$  is a simple ring (or algebra) with involution whose skew elements satisfy a polynomial identity, then  $A$  is finite dimensional over its center. In this paper we have verified his conjecture in the special case where  $A$  is a simple algebraic algebra which is not a nil algebra.

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# Pacific Journal of Mathematics

Vol. 11, No. 4

, 1961

A. V. Balakrishnan, <i>Prediction theory for Markoff processes</i> . . . . .	1171
Dallas O. Banks, <i>Upper bounds for the eigenvalues of some vibrating systems</i> . . . . .	1183
A. Białynicki-Birula, <i>On the field of rational functions of algebraic groups</i> . . . . .	1205
Thomas Andrew Brown, <i>Simple paths on convex polyhedra</i> . . . . .	1211
L. Carlitz, <i>Some congruences for the Bell polynomials</i> . . . . .	1215
Paul Civin, <i>Extensions of homomorphisms</i> . . . . .	1223
Paul Joseph Cohen and Milton Lees, <i>Asymptotic decay of solutions of differential inequalities</i> . . . . .	1235
István Fáry, <i>Self-intersection of a sphere on a complex quadric</i> . . . . .	1251
Walter Feit and John Griggs Thompson, <i>Groups which have a faithful representation of degree less than <math>(p - 1/2)</math></i> . . . . .	1257
William James Firey, <i>Mean cross-section measures of harmonic means of convex bodies</i> . . . . .	1263
Avner Friedman, <i>The wave equation for differential forms</i> . . . . .	1267
Bernard Russel Gelbaum and Jesus Gil De Lamadrid, <i>Bases of tensor products of Banach spaces</i> . . . . .	1281
Ronald Kay Gettoor, <i>Infinitely divisible probabilities on the hyperbolic plane</i> . . . . .	1287
Basil Gordon, <i>Sequences in groups with distinct partial products</i> . . . . .	1309
Magnus R. Hestenes, <i>Relative self-adjoint operators in Hilbert space</i> . . . . .	1315
Fu Cheng Hsiang, <i>On a theorem of Fejér</i> . . . . .	1359
John McCormick Irwin and Elbert A. Walker, <i>On <math>N</math>-high subgroups of Abelian groups</i> . . . . .	1363
John McCormick Irwin, <i>High subgroups of Abelian torsion groups</i> . . . . .	1375
R. E. Johnson, <i>Quotient rings of rings with zero singular ideal</i> . . . . .	1385
David G. Kendall and John Leonard Mott, <i>The asymptotic distribution of the time-to-escape for comets strongly bound to the solar system</i> . . . . .	1393
Kurt Kreith, <i>The spectrum of singular self-adjoint elliptic operators</i> . . . . .	1401
Lionello Lombardi, <i>The semicontinuity of the most general integral of the calculus of variations in non-parametric form</i> . . . . .	1407
Albert W. Marshall and Ingram Olkin, <i>Game theoretic proof that Chebyshev inequalities are sharp</i> . . . . .	1421
Wallace Smith Martindale, III, <i>Primitive algebras with involution</i> . . . . .	1431
William H. Mills, <i>Decomposition of holomorphs</i> . . . . .	1443
James Donald Monk, <i>On the representation theory for cylindric algebras</i> . . . . .	1447
Shu-Teh Chen Moy, <i>A note on generalizations of Shannon-McMillan theorem</i> . . . . .	1459
Donald Earl Myers, <i>An imbedding space for Schwartz distributions</i> . . . . .	1467
John R. Myhill, <i>Category methods in recursion theory</i> . . . . .	1479
Paul Adrian Nickel, <i>On extremal properties for annular radial and circular slit mappings of bordered Riemann surfaces</i> . . . . .	1487
Edward Scott O'Keefe, <i>Primal clusters of two-element algebras</i> . . . . .	1505
Nelson Onuchic, <i>Applications of the topological method of Ważewski to certain problems of asymptotic behavior in ordinary differential equations</i> . . . . .	1511
Peter Perkins, <i>A theorem on regular matrices</i> . . . . .	1529
Clinton M. Petty, <i>Centroid surfaces</i> . . . . .	1535
Charles Andrew Swanson, <i>Asymptotic estimates for limit circle problems</i> . . . . .	1549
Robert James Thompson, <i>On essential absolute continuity</i> . . . . .	1561
Harold H. Johnson, <i>Correction to "Terminating prolongation procedures"</i> . . . . .	1571