

ESSENTIAL NUMBER THEORY

On the Northcott property for infinite extensions

Martin Widmer

2023

vol. 2 no. 1



On the Northcott property for infinite extensions

Martin Widmer

We start with a brief survey on the Northcott property for subfields of the algebraic numbers $\overline{\mathbb{Q}}$. Then we introduce a new criterion for its validity (refining the author's previous criterion), addressing a problem of Bombieri. We show that Bombieri and Zannier's theorem, stating that the maximal abelian extension of a number field K contained in $K^{(d)}$ has the Northcott property, follows very easily from this refined criterion. Here $K^{(d)}$ denotes the composite field of all extensions of K of degree at most d .

1. Introduction

Heights are an important tool in Diophantine geometry to study the distribution of algebraic points on algebraic varieties, and in arithmetic dynamics to study preperiodic points under endomorphisms of algebraic varieties. There are various different heights but the most standard one is probably the Weil height on \mathbb{P}^n . However, their common fundamental property is that there are only finitely many points of bounded height over a given number field. To which fields of infinite degree does this finiteness property extend? This is the question we are concerned with in this article.

All algebraic field extensions of \mathbb{Q} are considered subfields of some fixed algebraic closure $\overline{\mathbb{Q}}$. Let K be a number field, and for $P = (\alpha_0 : \cdots : \alpha_n) \in \mathbb{P}^n(K)$, with representative $(\alpha_0, \dots, \alpha_n) \in K^{n+1}$, let

$$H(P) = \prod_{v \in M_K} \max\{|\alpha_0|_v, \dots, |\alpha_n|_v\}^{d_v/[K:\mathbb{Q}]}$$

be the absolute multiplicative Weil height of P . Here M_K denotes the set of places of K . For each place v we choose the unique representative $|\cdot|_v$ that either extends the usual Archimedean absolute value on \mathbb{Q} or a usual p -adic absolute value on \mathbb{Q} , and $d_v = [K_v : \mathbb{Q}_v]$ denotes the local degree at v . A standard reference for heights is [Bombieri and Gubler 2006]. We use $\mathbb{N} = \{1, 2, 3, \dots\}$ for the set of positive natural numbers.

MSC2020: primary 11G50, 11R04; secondary 11R06, 11R20, 37P30.

Keywords: Weil height, Northcott property, property (N), Northcott's theorem, abelian extensions, Silverman's inequality.

The unique prime factorization of \mathbb{Z} implies that $\prod_{M_{\mathbb{Q}}} |\alpha|_v^{d_v} = 1$ for every nonzero $\alpha \in \mathbb{Q}$. This identity is known as the product formula and extends to arbitrary number fields K [Bombieri and Gubler 2006, Proposition 1.4.4]. Consequently, the value of the height is independent of the representative $(\alpha_0, \dots, \alpha_n)$ and thus defines a genuine function on $\mathbb{P}^n(K)$. Choosing a representative of P with a coordinate equal to 1 shows that $H(P) \geq 1$. The fundamental identity $\sum_{M_K} d_v = [K : \mathbb{Q}]$, valid for every number field (see [Bombieri and Gubler 2006, Corollary 1.3.2]), shows that the height $H(P)$ is also independent from the number field K containing the coordinates of P . Hence, $H(\cdot)$ is a well-defined function on $\mathbb{P}^n(\overline{\mathbb{Q}})$. D. G. Northcott [1950, Theorem 1] proved the following simple but important result.

Theorem 1 [Northcott 1950]. *Given a number field K , $n \in \mathbb{N}$, and $X \geq 1$, there are only a finite number of points P in $\mathbb{P}^n(K)$ such that $H(P) \leq X$.*

For $P = (1 : \alpha_1 : \dots : \alpha_n) \in \mathbb{P}^n(\overline{\mathbb{Q}})$ we obviously have $H(P) \geq \max_i H((1 : \alpha_i))$. Consequently, **Theorem 1** holds true for a given field $K \subseteq \overline{\mathbb{Q}}$ if and only if it holds for $n = 1$. We define the height $H(\alpha)$ of an algebraic number α to be $H((1 : \alpha))$, and so we are led to the following notion, formally introduced by Bombieri and Zannier [2001].

Definition 2 (Northcott property). A subset S of $\overline{\mathbb{Q}}$ has the *Northcott property* (or shorter, *Property (N)*) if

$$\{\alpha \in S; H(\alpha) \leq X\}$$

is finite for every $X \geq 1$.

Theorem 1 was merely an intermediate step in Northcott's seminal work [1950] to show that for any morphism $f : \mathbb{P}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{P}^n$ of algebraic degree at least 2 and defined over a number field K there are only finitely many preperiodic points in $\mathbb{P}^n(K)$ under f . His proof also shows that one can replace number field by any field with Property (N).

Another somewhat surprising application of Property (N) builds on work of J. Robinson [1962]. It has been observed by Vidaux and Videla [2016] that the work of Robinson [1962] implies the undecidability of each ring of totally real algebraic integers with Property (N). This connection was further exploited in [Martínez-Ranero et al. 2020] and in [Springer 2020].

These two applications extend interesting properties of number fields to fields with Property (N), suggesting that Property (N) fields behave similarly as number fields. However, this view was shattered by Fehm's discovery [2018, Proposition 1.2] that some fields with Property (N) are pseudoalgebraically closed (PAC).

Next we discuss two arithmetic properties with respect to which *all* fields of infinite degree with Property (N) behave radically different from number fields.

Gaudron and Rémond [2017] introduced the notion of a Siegel field, which is a subfield of $\overline{\mathbb{Q}}$ over which Siegel’s lemma holds true; see [Gaudron and Rémond 2017, (*)] on page 189]. It is classical that number fields are Siegel fields, and work of Zhang [1995], and independently of Roy and Thunder [1996], shows that $\overline{\mathbb{Q}}$ is also a Siegel field. A priori it is not easy to find counterexamples but Gaudron and Rémond [2017, Corollaire 1.2] proved that a field of infinite degree with Property (N) cannot be a Siegel field.

A very recent paper of Daans, Kala and Man [Daans et al. 2023] investigates the existence of universal quadratic forms over totally real fields of infinite degree. Whereas it is well-known that for totally real number fields such a form always exists, the existence of a universal quadratic form over a given totally real field of infinite degree is not clear at all. However, they prove [loc. cit., Theorem 1.2] that such a form cannot exist if the field has infinite degree and Property (N).

A point $P = (\alpha_0 : \cdots : \alpha_n) \in \mathbb{P}^n(\overline{\mathbb{Q}})$ defines a number field $\mathbb{Q}(\alpha_i/\alpha_j; \alpha_j \neq 0)$, and the degree of P is the degree of this number field. To prove Theorem 1 Northcott [1950, Lemma 2] proved a stronger result; that for any given $d \in \mathbb{N}$ and $X \geq 1$ there are only finitely many points $P \in \mathbb{P}^n(\overline{\mathbb{Q}})$ of degree d and height $H(P)$ at most X . The latter is a direct consequence of what nowadays is usually understood as “Northcott’s theorem”; see [Bombieri and Gubler 2006, Theorem 1.6.8].

Theorem 3 (Northcott’s theorem). *Let $d \in \mathbb{N}$, then the set $\{\alpha \in \overline{\mathbb{Q}}; [\mathbb{Q}(\alpha) : \mathbb{Q}] \leq d\}$ has Property (N).*

Northcott’s theorem already implies the existence of fields of infinite degree with Property (N). Indeed, let K be a number field and let $X \geq 1$ be given. Any two distinct quadratic extensions of K only intersect in K , and there are infinitely many such extensions. Hence, there must be one whose elements outside of K all have height bigger than X . Constructing an infinite tower $\mathbb{Q} = K_0 \subset K_1 \subset K_2 \subset \cdots$ where we choose a quadratic extension K_{i+1} of K_i whose elements outside of K_i all have height larger than i say, yields an infinite extension $L = \cup_i K_i$ with Property (N).

Dvornicich and Zannier [2008] observed that Northcott’s theorem remains true when replacing the ground field \mathbb{Q} by any field with Northcott property, i.e., if L is a field with Property (N) and $d \in \mathbb{N}$, then the set

$$\{\alpha \in \overline{\mathbb{Q}}; [L(\alpha) : L] \leq d\}$$

also has Property (N). In particular, Property (N) is preserved under finite field extensions. However, it is not always preserved under taking Galois closure over \mathbb{Q} , or taking compositum of two fields; see [Widmer 2011, Theorem 5].

Bombieri and Zannier [2001] were the first authors that studied the Northcott property for infinite field extensions of \mathbb{Q} .¹ In view of Northcott's theorem it is very appealing to consider the field $\mathbb{Q}^{(d)}$ generated over \mathbb{Q} by all algebraic numbers of degree at most d . Bombieri and Zannier [2001] raised the following question.

Question 4 [Bombieri and Zannier 2001]. Let $d \in \mathbb{N}$. Does $\mathbb{Q}^{(d)}$ have Property (N)?

There is a whole zoo of properties for subfields of $\overline{\mathbb{Q}}$ (including the properties (P), (SP), (\bar{P}), (R), (\bar{R}), (K), see [Narkiewicz 1995; Liardet 1972]; and (SB), (USB), see [Fili and Miner 2015; Pottmeyer 2015]) in arithmetic dynamics, that are all implied by Property (N); see [Checcoli and Widmer 2013; Pottmeyer 2015]. For some of these properties the analogue of Question 4 was posed, explicitly or implicitly.² We will not discuss any of these more exotic properties but let us mention that Pottmeyer [2015, Theorem 4.3] showed that $\mathbb{Q}^{(d)}$ has the properties (USB) and (P) (solving a conjecture of Narkiewicz from 1963). However, (USB) and (P) are both strictly weaker than (N), as shown in [Fehm 2018, Proposition 1.3] and in [Dvornicich and Zannier 2008, Theorem 3.3] respectively.

Question 4 is still open but a remarkable step was already made in [Bombieri and Zannier 2001]. For $d \in \mathbb{N}$ and K a number field we write $K^{(d)}$ for the composite field of all extensions of K of degree at most d . Then $K^{(d)}/K$ is a Galois extension, generated over K by all algebraic numbers of relative degree $[K(\alpha) : K]$ at most d . Let $K_{ab}^{(d)}$ be the composite field of all abelian extensions F/K with $F \subset K^{(d)}$. Then $K_{ab}^{(d)}$ is the maximal abelian subextension of $K^{(d)}/K$. If $d \geq 2$ then $\mathbb{Q}(\sqrt[n]{n}; n \in \mathbb{Z}) \subset K_{ab}^{(d)} \subset K^{(d)}$, and so $K_{ab}^{(d)}$ and $K^{(d)}$ both have infinite degree over \mathbb{Q} , and thus also over K .

Theorem 5 [Bombieri and Zannier 2001]. *Let K be a number field and let $d \in \mathbb{N}$. The field $K_{ab}^{(d)}$ has the Northcott property. In particular, $K^{(2)}$ has the Northcott property.*

Taking $K = \mathbb{Q}(\zeta_d)$ for a primitive d -th root of unity, and applying Theorem 5 proves that the field

$$\mathbb{Q}(1^{1/d}, 2^{1/d}, 3^{1/d}, 4^{1/d}, \dots) \tag{1.1}$$

has the Northcott property.

¹It is worthwhile mentioning that Julia Robinson [1962] proved that the ring of integers of $\mathbb{Q}(\sqrt[n]{n}; n \in \mathbb{N})$ has the “Northcott property” with respect to the house (instead of Weil height), and deduced from this that \mathbb{N} is first order definable in this ring.

²Narkiewicz [1971; 1963, Problem 10(i)] conjectured that $K^{(d)}$ has (P) for all d . Further, for various pairs of these properties it was asked whether they are equivalent to each other; see [Narkiewicz 1995; Checcoli and Widmer 2013].

Theorem 5 is a very interesting result for its own sake but it also has interesting applications. Specifically, to list some of the recent applications, **Theorem 5** was used:

- In [Vidaux and Videla 2016] to show that the maximal totally real subfield of $K_{ab}^{(d)}$ is undecidable, in [Springer 2020] to show that $\mathbb{Q}_{ab}^{(d)}$ is undecidable, and in [Martínez-Ranero et al. 2020] as one of the ingredients that led the authors to conjecture that $K^{(d)}$ is undecidable (proved for $\mathbb{Q}^{(2)}$ in the same paper).
- In [Daans et al. 2023] to deduce that if L is a totally real subfield of $K_{ab}^{(d)}$ of infinite degree, then no universal quadratic form exists over L . In particular, this holds if $L \subset \mathbb{Q}^{[d]}$ and d is a prime or a prime square, where $\mathbb{Q}^{[d]}$ denotes the compositum of all totally real Galois fields of degree exactly d over \mathbb{Q} .
- In [Checcoli and Dill 2023, Corollary 1] to prove that if K is a number field, A is an abelian variety defined over K , and $K(A_{\text{tors}})$ is the minimal field extension of K over which all torsion points of A are defined, then each subfield of $K(A_{\text{tors}})$ which is Galois over K , and whose Galois group has finite exponent, has the Northcott property.

An abelian extension L/\mathbb{Q} lies in $\mathbb{Q}^{(d)}$ for some d if and only if its Galois group has finite exponent; see [Checcoli 2013, Theorem 1]. As pointed out in [Checcoli and Dill 2023, Section 5] this remains true when replacing the ground field \mathbb{Q} with an arbitrary number field K . Therefore **Theorem 5** gives a purely Galois theoretic criterion for the Northcott property of a field, i.e., every abelian extension of a number field K with finite exponent has the Northcott property.

However, the restriction to abelian extensions (and finite exponent) in **Theorem 5** is very rigid and rules out many interesting examples. In a survey article Bombieri [2009, page 52] states:

“It remains an open problem to determine whether the Northcott property holds for $K^{(d)}$ if $d \geq 3$ and, more generally, to determine workable conditions for its validity.”

In this paper we are particularly concerned with the second part of Bombieri’s statement.

Problem 6 [Bombieri 2009]. Determine workable conditions for the validity of the Northcott property for subfields of $\overline{\mathbb{Q}}$.

The author [Widmer 2011] gave a criterion which is robust and often easy to apply. For an extension M/K of number fields we write $D_{M/K}$ for the relative discriminant, and we write $N_{K/F}(\cdot)$ for the norm from K to F . If $F = \mathbb{Q}$ and \mathfrak{A} is a nonzero ideal in the ring of integers \mathcal{O}_K of K then we interpret $N_{K/F}(\mathfrak{A})$ as the unique positive rational integer that generates the principle ideal $N_{K/F}(\mathfrak{A})$.

Theorem 7 [Widmer 2011, Theorem 3]. *Let K be a number field, let $K = K_0 \subsetneq K_1 \subsetneq K_2 \subsetneq \cdots$ be a nested sequence of finite extensions and set $L = \bigcup_i K_i$. Suppose that*

$$\inf_{K_{i-1} \subsetneq M \subset K_i} (N_{K_{i-1}/\mathbb{Q}}(D_{M/K_{i-1}}))^{1/([M:K_0][M:K_{i-1}])} \rightarrow \infty \quad (1.2)$$

as i tends to infinity where the infimum is taken over all intermediate fields M strictly larger than K_{i-1} . Then the field L has the Northcott property.

Theorem 7 implies the following refinement of (1.1). Let K be a number field, let $p_1 < p_2 < p_3 < \cdots$ be a sequence of positive primes and let d_1, d_2, d_3, \dots be a sequence of positive integers. Then the field

$$K(p_1^{1/d_1}, p_2^{1/d_2}, p_3^{1/d_3}, \dots)$$

has the Northcott property if and only if $\log p_i/d_i \rightarrow \infty$ as i tends to infinity. The fact that every direct product of finite solvable groups can be realized over \mathbb{Q} by a Galois extension with Property (N) can also easily be deduced from **Theorem 7**; see [Checcoli and Widmer 2013, Theorem 4]. Fehm's aforementioned construction of PAC fields with Property (N) also used **Theorem 7**. And finally, **Theorem 7** allows to construct fairly large nonabelian subfields of $\mathbb{Q}^{(d)}$ with Property (N) (see [Widmer 2011, Corollaries 3, 4, and 5]), providing another result on **Question 4**.

Theorem 7 is based on a fundamental height lower bound of Silverman [1984, Theorem 2]. Here we give only a simplified version sufficient for our purposes. Let $\alpha \in \overline{\mathbb{Q}}$, let F be a number field, let $K = F(\alpha)$, $m = [F : \mathbb{Q}]$, and $d = [K : F]$. Then

$$H(\alpha) \geq \frac{1}{2} N_{F/\mathbb{Q}}(D_{K/F})^{1/(2md^2)}. \quad (1.3)$$

Using the optimal choice of F for given α to maximize the right hand-side in (1.3) plays an important role in our results. For the convenience of the reader we will give a proof of inequality (1.3) in **Section 2**.

Obviously **Theorem 7** does not follow from **Theorem 5**. How does one prove **Theorem 7**? Let $\alpha \in L$ be of height at most X , and let K_{i_0} be the maximal field not containing α . Applying (1.3) with $F = K_{i_0}$, and using (1.2), shows that i_0 is bounded from above in terms of X and L , and thus, by Northcott's theorem, the field L has the Northcott property.

However, the choice K_{i_0} for the ground field F can be far from optimal, and so we do not use the full force of (1.3). Therefore, **Theorem 7** does not seem strong enough to deduce **Theorem 5** either.

The aim of this short note is to provide a refined criterion, using the full force of (1.3), that easily implies **Theorem 7** and **Theorem 5**. To this end we introduce the following invariant for an extension of number fields M/K :

$$\gamma(M/K) = \sup_{K \subset F} (N_{F/\mathbb{Q}}(D_{MF/F}))^{1/([MF:\mathbb{Q}][MF:F])}, \quad (1.4)$$

where the supremum runs over all number fields F containing K , and MF denotes the composite field of M and F . We can now state a more powerful version of the criterion given in [Theorem 7](#).

Theorem 8. *Let K be a number field, and let L be an infinite algebraic field extension of K . Suppose that*

$$\liminf_{K \subset M \subset L} \gamma(M/K) = \infty,$$

where M runs over all number fields in L containing K . Then L has the Northcott property.

Proof. Suppose that L does not have the Northcott property. Thus there exists $X \geq 1$ and a sequence $(\alpha_i)_i$ of pairwise distinct elements in L with $H(\alpha_i) \leq X$ for all i . By Northcott's theorem the degrees of $M_i = K(\alpha_i)$ must tend to infinity. After passing to a subsequence we can assume all the M_i are distinct. Note that $M_i F = F(\alpha_i)$ for each F that contains K . We apply inequality (1.3) to get

$$\begin{aligned} 4X^2 &\geq \liminf_i (2H(\alpha_i))^2 \\ &\geq \liminf_i \left(\sup_{K \subset F} N_{F/\mathbb{Q}}(D_{M_i F/F})^{1/([M_i F:\mathbb{Q}][M_i F:F])} \right) \\ &\geq \liminf_{K \subset M \subset L} \left(\sup_{K \subset F} N_{F/\mathbb{Q}}(D_{MF/F})^{1/([MF:\mathbb{Q}][MF:F])} \right) \\ &= \liminf_{K \subset M \subset L} \gamma(M/K). \quad \square \end{aligned}$$

[Theorem 8](#) implies [Theorem 7](#),³ but why does it also imply [Theorem 5](#), and how does this proof differ from the original one in [[Bombieri and Zannier 2001](#)]? We will discuss these questions in detail in [Section 3](#).

Are there any known criteria for Property (N) for field extensions of infinite degree that we have not mentioned so far? The author is only aware of one such criterion. Let L/\mathbb{Q} be a Galois extension and let $S(L)$ be the set of rational primes for which L can be embedded in a finite extension of \mathbb{Q}_p . For $p \in S(L)$ let e_p and f_p be the ramification index and the inertia degree above p . [Bombieri and Zannier \[2001, Theorem 2\]](#) proved that

$$\liminf_{\alpha \in L} H(\alpha) \geq \exp\left(\frac{1}{2} \sum_{p \in S(L)} \frac{\log p}{e_p(p^{f_p} + 1)}\right). \quad (1.5)$$

In particular, L has the Northcott property whenever the sum on the right hand-side of (1.5) diverges. The above criterion does not seem very workable. [Bombieri and](#)

³Let (M_j) be a sequence of distinct fields with $K \subset M_j \subset L$ and $\gamma(M_j/K) < X$, and let $i = i(j)$ be minimal with $M_j \subset K_i$. Set $M'_j = K_{i-1}M_j$ so that $K_{i-1} \subsetneq M'_j \subset K_i$. The choice $F = K_{i-1}$ on the right-hand side of (1.4) shows that (1.2) has a bounded subsequence.

Zannier asked whether this sum can diverge for infinite extensions but considered this unlikely. However, it was shown by Checcoli and Fehm [2021] that there are Galois extensions L/\mathbb{Q} of infinite degree for which the above sum diverges, and even such extensions for which neither Theorem 5 nor 7 applies, so it constitutes an independent criterion for the Northcott property, albeit one for which natural examples still need to be found.

2. Silverman's inequality

In this section we give a proof of Silverman's inequality (1.3). For the special case $F = \mathbb{Q}$ a very simple proof was given by Roy and Thunder [1995, Lemmas 1 and 2]. We extend the argument in [loc. cit.] to arbitrary ground fields F , providing a slightly different proof from Silverman's original one [Silverman 1984]. Yet another proof of Silverman's inequality was given by Ellenberg and Venkatesh [2007, Lemma 2.2].

We first fix the notation and recall some basic facts. Let F be a number field of degree m , let K/F be a field extension of degree d , and let $\sigma_1, \dots, \sigma_d : K \rightarrow K^{(G)}$ be the d distinct field homomorphisms of K to the Galois closure $K^{(G)}$ of K/F , fixing F . Let (z_1, \dots, z_d) be a d -tuple of elements in K . Then $D_{K/F}(z_1, \dots, z_d) = \det[\sigma_i(z_j)]^2$, and for a nonzero ideal \mathfrak{A} in \mathcal{O}_K the discriminant $D_{K/F}(\mathfrak{A})$ is the ideal in \mathcal{O}_F generated by the numbers $D_{K/F}(z_1, \dots, z_d)$ as the tuples (z_1, \dots, z_d) run over all F -bases of K and each basis element is contained in \mathfrak{A} . In particular, $D_{K/F}(\mathfrak{A})$ divides the principle ideal in \mathcal{O}_F generated by $D_{K/F}(z_1, \dots, z_d)$ for each such tuple (z_1, \dots, z_d) ; see [Lang 1994, III, Section 3]. Recall that we write $D_{K/F}$ for $D_{K/F}(\mathcal{O}_K)$. We will use the basic identity (see [Lang 1994, III, Section 3, Proposition 13])

$$D_{K/F}(\mathfrak{A}) = D_{K/F} N_{K/F}(\mathfrak{A})^2. \quad (2.1)$$

Lemma 9 [Silverman 1984]. *Let F be a number field of degree m . Let $\alpha \in \overline{\mathbb{Q}} \setminus F$, set $K = F(\alpha)$, and $d = [K : F]$. Then*

$$H(\alpha) \geq d^{-1/(2(d-1))} N_{F/\mathbb{Q}}(D_{K/F})^{1/(2md(d-1))}.$$

Proof. Choose $\omega_0, \omega_1 \in \mathcal{O}_K$ such that $\omega_0 \neq 0$ and $\alpha = \omega_1/\omega_0$. For $1 \leq j \leq d$ let $z_j = \omega_0^{d-j} \omega_1^{j-1}$, so that $P = (1 : \alpha : \dots : \alpha^{d-1}) = (z_1 : \dots : z_d) \in \mathbb{P}^{d-1}(K)$ and $H(\alpha)^{d-1} = H(P)$. We will bound

$$H(P)^{2md} = \prod_{v \nmid \infty} \max_j \{|z_j|_v\}^{2d_v} \prod_{v \mid \infty} \max_j \{|z_j|_v\}^{2d_v}$$

from below. Note that z_1, \dots, z_d is an integral F -basis of K . Let $\mathfrak{A} = \sum_j z_j \mathcal{O}_K$ be the ideal in \mathcal{O}_K generated by the z_j . For the non-Archimedean places of K we

have

$$\prod_{v|\infty} \max_j \{|z_j|_v\}^{2d_v} = N_{K/\mathbb{Q}}(\mathfrak{A})^{-2}.$$

For each embedding $\tau : F \rightarrow \mathbb{C}$ we choose an extension $\tilde{\tau} : K^{(G)} \rightarrow \mathbb{C}$ of τ to $K^{(G)}$. Then the d distinct maps $\tilde{\tau} \circ \sigma_i : K \rightarrow \mathbb{C}$ are precisely the d embeddings of K that extend τ . Ranging over all embeddings τ of F gives the full set of embeddings of K . Hence, for the Archimedean places of K we get

$$\prod_{v|\infty} \max_j \{|z_j|_v\}^{2d_v} = \prod_{\tau} \prod_{i=1}^d \max\{|\tilde{\tau} \circ \sigma_i(z_1)|, \dots, |\tilde{\tau} \circ \sigma_i(z_d)|\}^2.$$

Writing $\mathbf{z}_{\tau,i}$ for the complex row vector $(\tilde{\tau} \circ \sigma_i(z_1), \dots, \tilde{\tau} \circ \sigma_i(z_d))$, and applying Hadamard's inequality yields

$$\begin{aligned} \prod_{i=1}^d \max\{|\tilde{\tau} \circ \sigma_i(z_1)|, \dots, |\tilde{\tau} \circ \sigma_i(z_d)|\}^2 &\geq d^{-d} \prod_{i=1}^d |\mathbf{z}_{\tau,i}|^2 \\ &\geq d^{-d} |\det[\tilde{\tau} \circ \sigma_i(z_j)]|^2 \\ &= d^{-d} |\tilde{\tau}(\det[\sigma_i(z_j)]^2)| \\ &= d^{-d} |\tau(\det[\sigma_i(z_j)]^2)|, \end{aligned}$$

where in the last step we used that $\det[\sigma_i(z_j)]^2 = D_{K/F}(z_1, \dots, z_d)$ lies in F . Taking the product over all τ , and using that $D_{K/F}(\mathfrak{A})$ divides the ideal generated by $\det[\sigma_i(z_j)]^2$ in \mathcal{O}_F , yields

$$\prod_{v|\infty} \max_j \{|z_j|_v\}^{2d_v} \geq d^{-md} N_{F/\mathbb{Q}}(D_{K/F}(\mathfrak{A})).$$

Now we use (2.1), and that $N_{F/\mathbb{Q}}(D_{K/F}N_{K/F}(\mathfrak{A})^2) = N_{F/\mathbb{Q}}(D_{K/F})N_{K/\mathbb{Q}}(\mathfrak{A})^2$ to get

$$H(\alpha)^{2md(d-1)} = H(P)^{2md} \geq d^{-md} N_{F/\mathbb{Q}}(D_{K/F}),$$

which proves the claim. \square

3. Theorem 8 implies Bombieri and Zannier's Theorem 5

In this section we show that Theorem 8 gives a short and straightforward proof of Theorem 5. We also compare this new proof with the original one from [Bombieri and Zannier 2001]. Both proofs have a common part which we extract and formulate below as a separate lemma.

Lemma 10 [Bombieri and Zannier 2001]. *Let $d \in \mathbb{N}$, let K be a number field, and let M be a number field with $K \subset M \subset K_{ab}^{(d)}$. Then p_M , the largest prime that ramifies in M , tends to infinity as M runs over all such intermediate fields M . Further, if $p > d$ is prime and \mathfrak{B} is a prime ideal in \mathcal{O}_M above p and $\mathfrak{p} = \mathfrak{B} \cap K$, then the ramification index $e(\mathfrak{B}/\mathfrak{p})$ divides $d!$.*

Proof. We follow Bombieri and Zannier's argument [2001]. Let M be a number field with $K \subset M \subset K_{ab}^{(d)}$. Then M/K is an abelian extension of exponent dividing $d!$,⁴ and thus $\text{Gal}(M/K)$ is isomorphic to a direct product $A_1 \times \cdots \times A_r$ of cyclic groups of order dividing $d!$. Therefore M can be written as composite field of extensions E of K of degree at most $d!$. Indeed, let $\varphi : A_1 \times \cdots \times A_r \rightarrow \text{Gal}(M/K)$ be an isomorphism and let $E_i = \text{Fix}(\varphi(H_i))$ where H_i is the subgroup that picks the trivial group in the i -th component and the full A_j in all other components. By the Galois-correspondence we have $\text{Gal}(M/E_1 \cdots E_r) = \cap_i \varphi(H_i) = \varphi(\cap_i H_i) = \{id\}$. Hence, $M = E_1 \cdots E_r$. Now the largest power of a prime dividing the discriminant of E can be bounded solely in terms of K and d ; see [Bombieri and Gubler 2006, Theorem B.2.12]. Thus, by Hermite's theorem, p_M , the largest prime that ramifies in M , tends to infinity as M runs over all such intermediate fields M .

For the second claim note that the inertia group $I(\mathfrak{B}/\mathfrak{p})$ is a subgroup of $\text{Gal}(M/K)$, and so its order is not divisible by p , whenever $p > d$ is prime. Since the ramification index $e(\mathfrak{B}/\mathfrak{p})$ is equal to the order of $I(\mathfrak{B}/\mathfrak{p})$ it follows that \mathfrak{p} is tamely ramified in M . Hence (see [Bombieri and Gubler 2006, B.2.18(e)]), $I(\mathfrak{B}/\mathfrak{p})$ is cyclic, and thus $e(\mathfrak{B}/\mathfrak{p})$ divides $d!$. \square

Now let us show that [Theorem 8](#) together with [Lemma 10](#) implies [Theorem 5](#).

Proof of Theorem 5. Let M be a number field with $K \subset M \subset K_{ab}^{(d)}$. Then M is abelian over K . By [Lemma 10](#) $p_M > |D_{K/\mathbb{Q}}| + d$ for all but finitely many M , and thus we can assume p_M is unramified in K and $p_M > d$. Therefore, one of the prime ideal divisors of $p_M \mathcal{O}_K$, say \mathfrak{p} , must ramify in M . Let $\mathfrak{p} \mathcal{O}_M = (\mathfrak{B}_1 \cdots \mathfrak{B}_g)^e$ be the decomposition in \mathcal{O}_M with $\mathfrak{B}_1, \dots, \mathfrak{B}_g$ distinct prime ideals. Let T_i be the fixed field for the inertia group $I(\mathfrak{B}_i/\mathfrak{p})$, and let $\mathfrak{p}_i = \mathfrak{B}_i \cap T_i$. Then $e(\mathfrak{p}_i/\mathfrak{p}) = 1$, and $e = e(\mathfrak{B}_i/\mathfrak{p}_i) = [M : T_i]$. It follows that $\mathfrak{p}_i^{e-1} \mid D_{M/T_i}$, and that $f(\mathfrak{B}_i/\mathfrak{p}) = f(\mathfrak{p}_i/\mathfrak{p})$ for the residue degree. Now the $I(\mathfrak{B}_i/\mathfrak{p})$ are conjugated to each other and since M/K is abelian they are all equal, and thus all the fixed fields T_i are equal to T , say. Therefore $(\mathfrak{p}_1 \cdots \mathfrak{p}_g)^{e-1} \mid D_{M/T}$, which implies $p_M^{[M:K]^{1/2}} \leq N_{T/\mathbb{Q}}(D_{M/T})$. Choosing $F = T$ in [\(1.4\)](#) shows that $\gamma(M/K) \geq p_M^{1/(2e[K:\mathbb{Q}])}$ which, by [Lemma 10](#),

⁴If K_1, K_2 are two finite Galois extensions of K then $\sigma \rightarrow (\sigma|_{K_1}, \sigma|_{K_2})$ induces an injective group homomorphism from $\text{Gal}(K_1 K_2/K)$ to $\text{Gal}(K_1/K) \times \text{Gal}(K_2/K)$. This implies that for each Galois extension M/K with $M \subset K^{(d)}$ the Galois group $\text{Gal}(M/K)$ has exponent dividing $d!$, and no prime $p > d$ divides the order of $\text{Gal}(M/K)$.

tends to infinity as M runs over all number fields with $K \subset M \subset K_{ab}^{(d)}$. Applying [Theorem 8](#) completes the proof. \square

Remark 11. Alternatively, one can use the decomposition of M as compositum of extensions E of K of degree at most $d!$ as in the proof of [Lemma 10](#). Hence, \mathfrak{p} ramifies in at least one of the fields E , and thus $\mathfrak{p} \mid D_{E/K}$. Since $D_{M/K} = D_{E/K}^{[M:E]} N_{E/K}(D_{M/E})$ we conclude $\mathfrak{p}^{[M:E]} \mid D_{M/K}$. Since \mathfrak{p} is unramified in T , and $D_{M/K} = D_{T/K}^{[M:T]} N_{T/K}(D_{M/T})$ we get $\mathfrak{p}^{[M:E]} \mid N_{T/K}(D_{M/T})$. Taking norms and using $[M : T] = e$ gives $\gamma(M/K) \geq p^{1/([K:\mathbb{Q}]d!e)}$.

To compare we now discuss Bombieri and Zannier's original proof of [Theorem 5](#). We leave out some of the more technical details but the basic argument is as follows. We mostly use the notation of [\[Bombieri and Zannier 2001\]](#); see also [\[Bombieri and Gubler 2006, Theorem 4.5.4\]](#) for a slightly more detailed approach.

Proof of Theorem 5 (after Bombieri and Zannier). By enlarging K we can assume K contains a primitive $d!$ -th root of unity. Let $\alpha \in K_{ab}^{(d)}$ be of height at most X , and set $L = K(\alpha)$. Then L is abelian over K . Let $p > d$ be a prime unramified in K , let v be a place in K above p , and write e for the ramification index of v in L . Then e divides $d!$ by [Lemma 10](#).

Now set $\theta = p^{1/e}$. Then $L(\theta)$ is again an abelian extension of K . Since $x^e - p \in K[x]$ is a v -Eisenstein polynomial it follows that $[K(\theta) : K] = e$ and v is totally ramified in $K(\theta)$. By Abhyankar's Lemma the ramification indices of the places in $L(\theta)$ above v are again e . As $\text{Gal}(L(\theta)/K)$ is abelian the inertia groups of each place in $L(\theta)$ above v are equal, and of size e . Let U be their common fixed field, so that $[L(\theta) : U] = e$. Now v is unramified in U and totally ramified in $K(\theta)$ and thus $[U(\theta) : U] = e$. Hence, $L(\theta) = U(\theta)$, and thus

$$\alpha = \beta_0 + \beta_1\theta + \cdots + \beta_{e-1}\theta^{e-1}$$

for certain coefficients $\beta_i \in U$. Now the trace from $U(\theta)$ to U of $\alpha\theta^{-j}$ is the sum of the conjugates of $\alpha\theta^{-j}$ over U . It is not hard to see that this trace is also just $e\beta_j$. Combining both, and using standard height inequalities, gives an upper bound for the height of $\gamma_j := \beta_j p^{j/e}$ in terms of d and X .

Let us now assume that $1 \leq j \leq e - 1$ and $b_j \neq 0$. Let u be a place in $U(\theta)$ above v , and let $\mathfrak{q} = \mathfrak{q}_u$ be the corresponding prime ideal in the ring of integers of $U(\theta)$. Then the exact order to which \mathfrak{q} divides b_j is a (possibly negative) multiple of e , whereas the exact order to which it divides $p^{j/e}$ is j . This implies that the exact order to which \mathfrak{q} divides γ_j is nonzero. Using this fact for all places in $U(\theta)$ above v yields a lower bound for the height of γ_j of the form $H(\gamma_j) \geq p^{1/(2e[K:\mathbb{Q}])}$, provided $1 \leq j \leq e - 1$ and $b_j \neq 0$.

Combining the upper and lower bounds for the height of γ_j , and using that e is bounded in terms of d , gives an upper bound $B(K, d, X)$ for p in terms of d , $[K : \mathbb{Q}]$, and X , whenever one among b_1, \dots, b_{e-1} is nonzero.

This means that for each place v of K lying above a prime $p > B(K, d, X)$ we have $\alpha \in U$, and v is unramified in U . Therefore, $K(\alpha)$ is unramified at each prime p whenever $p > B(K, d, X)$ (assuming, as we can, $B(K, d, X) > |D_{K/\mathbb{Q}}|$). But, by [Lemma 10](#), the largest prime p ramifying in $K(\alpha)$ tends to infinity when $K(\alpha)$ runs over an infinite set of subfields of $K_{ab}^{(d)}$. Hence, we conclude that α lies in a number field, depending only on K, d and X , and thus, by Northcott's theorem, there are only finitely many possibilities for α . This completes the proof. \square

The first proof of [Theorem 5](#) (using [Theorem 8](#)) only requires e to be bounded in terms of d , whereas the second proof above requires the ramification index e to divide $d!$ to conclude that $L(\theta)/K$ is Galois (and abelian).

The fact that $K_{ab}^{(d)}/K$ is abelian is used in both proofs in three different ways, namely to ensure that:

- (i) p_M in [Lemma 10](#) tends to infinity.
- (ii) M/K is Galois for every number field $K \subset M \subset K_{ab}^{(d)}$.
- (iii) The inertia groups $I(\mathfrak{B}/\mathfrak{p})$ for the different prime ideals $\mathfrak{B} \subset \mathcal{O}_M$ above $\mathfrak{p} \subset \mathcal{O}_K$ are all equal.

The second claim of [Lemma 10](#) remains true for $K^{(d)}/K$ (replace M by its Galois closure over K in the proof) but the proof of the first claim falls apart for $K^{(d)}$ when $d \geq 3$. This is because not all finite extensions of K in $K^{(d)}$ can be written as compositum of number fields of uniformly bounded degree over K as was shown by Checcoli [[2013, Theorem 1](#)], at least if $d \geq 27$. Gal and Grizzard [[2014, Corollary 1.2](#)] showed that $d \geq 3$ suffices.

However, Gal and Grizzard also showed [[2014, Theorem 1.3](#)] that every number field in $K^{(3)}$ that is Galois over K can be written as a compositum of extensions of K of degree at most 3. This means that if we only consider α in the set $K_G^{(3)} = \{\alpha \in K^{(3)}; K(\alpha)/K \text{ is Galois}\}$ then (i) and (ii) are automatically satisfied for each $M = K(\alpha)$. This raises the question whether $K_G^{(3)}$ has the Northcott property. An affirmative answer would be a significant extension of the case $d = 3$ in [Theorem 5](#).

Acknowledgements

It is my pleasure to thank the anonymous referees for their numerous and valuable comments, they have substantially improved this article.

References

- [Bombieri 2009] E. Bombieri, “Problems and results on the distribution of algebraic points on algebraic varieties”, *J. Théor. Nombres Bordeaux* **21**:1 (2009), 41–57. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Bombieri and Gubler 2006] E. Bombieri and W. Gubler, *Heights in Diophantine geometry*, New Mathematical Monographs **4**, Cambridge University Press, 2006. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Bombieri and Zannier 2001] E. Bombieri and U. Zannier, “A note on heights in certain infinite extensions of \mathbb{Q} ”, *Atti Accad. Naz. Lincei Cl. Sci. Fis. Mat. Natur. Rend. Lincei (9) Mat. Appl.* **12** (2001), 5–14. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Checcoli 2013] S. Checcoli, “Fields of algebraic numbers with bounded local degrees and their properties”, *Trans. Amer. Math. Soc.* **365**:4 (2013), 2223–2240. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Checcoli and Dill 2023] S. Checcoli and G. A. Dill, “On a Galois property of fields generated by the torsion of an abelian variety”, preprint, 2023. [arXiv 2306.12138v2](#)
- [Checcoli and Fehm 2021] S. Checcoli and A. Fehm, “On the Northcott property and local degrees”, *Proc. Amer. Math. Soc.* **149**:6 (2021), 2403–2414. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Checcoli and Widmer 2013] S. Checcoli and M. Widmer, “On the Northcott property and other properties related to polynomial mappings”, *Math. Proc. Cambridge Philos. Soc.* **155**:1 (2013), 1–12. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Daans et al. 2023] N. Daans, V. Kala, and S. H. Man, “Universal quadratic forms and Northcott property of infinite number fields”, preprint, 2023. [arXiv 2308.16721v1](#)
- [Dvornicich and Zannier 2008] R. Dvornicich and U. Zannier, “On the properties of Northcott and of Narkiewicz for fields of algebraic numbers”, *Funct. Approx. Comment. Math.* **39** (2008), 163–173. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Ellenberg and Venkatesh 2007] J. S. Ellenberg and A. Venkatesh, “Reflection principles and bounds for class group torsion”, *Int. Math. Res. Not.* **2007**:1 (2007), art. id. rnm002. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Fehm 2018] A. Fehm, “Three counterexamples concerning the Northcott property of fields”, *Atti Accad. Naz. Lincei Rend. Lincei Mat. Appl.* **29**:2 (2018), 309–314. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Fili and Miner 2015] P. Fili and Z. Miner, “Equidistribution and the heights of totally real and totally p -adic numbers”, *Acta Arith.* **170**:1 (2015), 15–25. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Gal and Grizzard 2014] I. Gal and R. Grizzard, “On the compositum of all degree d extensions of a number field”, *J. Théor. Nombres Bordeaux* **26**:3 (2014), 655–673. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Gaudron and Rémond 2017] E. Gaudron and G. Rémond, “Corps de Siegel”, *J. Reine Angew. Math.* **726** (2017), 187–247. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Lang 1994] S. Lang, *Algebraic number theory*, 2nd ed., Graduate Texts in Mathematics **110**, Springer, 1994. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Liardet 1972] P. Liardet, “Sur les transformations polynomiales et rationnelles”, (1972), art. id. 29. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Martínez-Ranero et al. 2020] C. Martínez-Ranero, J. Utreras, and C. R. Videla, “Undecidability of $\mathbb{Q}^{(2)}$ ”, *Proc. Amer. Math. Soc.* **148**:3 (2020), 961–964. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Narkiewicz 1963] W. Narkiewicz, “Problèmes”, *Colloq. Math.* **10**:1 (1963), 183–187. Problème 414.
- [Narkiewicz 1971] W. Narkiewicz, “Some unsolved problems”, pp. 159–164 in *Colloque de Théorie des Nombres, Univ. Bordeaux* (Bordeaux, 1969), Supplément au Bull. Soc. Math. France **Volume 99**, Soc. Math. France, Paris, 1971. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Narkiewicz 1995] W. a. a. Narkiewicz, *Polynomial mappings*, Lecture Notes in Mathematics **1600**, Springer, 1995. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)

- [Northcott 1950] D. G. Northcott, “Periodic points on an algebraic variety”, *Ann. of Math. (2)* **51** (1950), 167–177. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Pottmeyer 2015] L. Pottmeyer, “Heights and totally p -adic numbers”, *Acta Arith.* **171**:3 (2015), 277–291. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Robinson 1962] J. Robinson, “On the decision problem for algebraic rings”, pp. 297–304 in *Studies in mathematical analysis and related topics*, Stanford Studies in Mathematics and Statistics **IV**, Stanford Univ. Press, 1962. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Roy and Thunder 1995] D. Roy and J. L. Thunder, “A note on Siegel’s lemma over number fields”, *Monatsh. Math.* **120**:3-4 (1995), 307–318. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Roy and Thunder 1996] D. Roy and J. L. Thunder, “An absolute Siegel’s lemma”, *J. Reine Angew. Math.* **476** (1996), 1–26. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Silverman 1984] J. H. Silverman, “Lower bounds for height functions”, *Duke Math. J.* **51**:2 (1984), 395–403. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Springer 2020] C. Springer, “Undecidability, unit groups, and some totally imaginary infinite extensions of \mathbb{Q} ”, *Proc. Amer. Math. Soc.* **148**:11 (2020), 4705–4715. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Vidaux and Videla 2016] X. Vidaux and C. R. Videla, “A note on the Northcott property and undecidability”, *Bull. Lond. Math. Soc.* **48**:1 (2016), 58–62. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Widmer 2011] M. Widmer, “On certain infinite extensions of the rationals with Northcott property”, *Monatsh. Math.* **162**:3 (2011), 341–353. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)
- [Zhang 1995] S. Zhang, “Positive line bundles on arithmetic varieties”, *J. Amer. Math. Soc.* **8**:1 (1995), 187–221. [MR](#) [Zbl](#)

Received 31 May 2022. Revised 27 Sep 2023.

MARTIN WIDMER:

martin.widmer@rhul.ac.uk

Department of Mathematics, Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, United Kingdom

ESSENTIAL NUMBER THEORY

msp.org/ent

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Lillian B. Pierce
Duke University
pierce@math.duke.edu

EDITORIAL BOARD

Adebisi Agboola
UC Santa Barbara
agboola@math.ucsb.edu

Valentin Blomer
Universität Bonn
ailto:blomer@math.uni-bonn.de

Frank Calegari
University of Chicago
fcale@math.uchicago.edu

Laura DeMarco
Harvard University
demarco@math.harvard.edu

Ellen Eischen
University of Oregon
eeischen@uoregon.edu

Kirsten Eisenträger
Penn State University
kxe8@psu.edu

Amanda Folsom
Amherst College
afolsom@amherst.edu

Edray Goins
Pomona College
edray.goins@pomona.edu

Kaisa Matomäki
University of Turku
ksmato@utu.fi

Sophie Morel
ENS de Lyon
sophie.morel@ens-lyon.fr

James Newton
Oxford University
newton@maths.ox.ac.uk

Raman Parimala
Emory University
parimala.raman@emory.edu

Jonathan Pila
University of Oxford
jonathan.pila@maths.ox.ac.uk

Peter Sarnak
Princeton University/Institute for Advanced Study
sarnak@math.princeton.edu

Richard Taylor
Stanford University
rtaylor@stanford.edu

Anthony Várilly-Alvarado
Rice University
av15@rice.edu

John Voight
Dartmouth College
john.voight@dartmouth.edu

Melanie Matchett Wood
Harvard University
mmwood@math.harvard.edu

Zhiwei Yun
MIT
zyun@mit.edu

Tamar Ziegler
Hebrew University
tamar.ziegler@mail.huji.ac.il

PRODUCTION

Silvio Levy
(Scientific Editor)
production@msp.org

See inside back cover or msp.org/ent for submission instructions.

Essential Number Theory (ISSN 2834-4634 electronic, 2834-4626 printed) at Mathematical Sciences Publishers, 798 Evans Hall #3840, c/o University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720-3840 is published continuously online.

ENT peer review and production are managed by EditFlow[®] from MSP.

PUBLISHED BY
 **mathematical sciences publishers**
nonprofit scientific publishing
<https://msp.org/>

© 2023 Mathematical Sciences Publishers

ESSENTIAL NUMBER THEORY

2023 vol. 2 no. 1

| | |
|---|----|
| On the Northcott property for infinite extensions MARTIN WIDMER | 1 |
| The Kelley–Meka bounds for sets free of three-term arithmetic progressions THOMAS F. BLOOM and OLOF SISASK | 15 |
| On gamma factors for representations of finite general linear groups DAVID SOUDRY and ELAD ZELINGER | 45 |
| Sur la conjecture de Tate pour les diviseurs BRUNO KAHN | 83 |
| Ranks of matrices of logarithms of algebraic numbers, I: The theorems of Baker and Waldschmidt–Masser SAMIT DASGUPTA | 93 |