

Pacific Journal of Mathematics

ZOLOTAREV'S THEOREM ON THE LEGENDRE SYMBOL

J. L. BRENNER

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Dedicated to Professor D. H. Lehmer

**Matrix-theoretic proof that $(a/p) = \text{sign of the permutation}$
 $i(\text{mod } p) \rightarrow ia(\text{mod } p)$ of the residue classes mod p .**

In [5], Zolotarev proved the quadratic reciprocity law on the basis of the above-stated result. Here is a short proof of that result; it uses matrix theory, together with a well-known result in number theory.

DEFINITION 1. An a -circulant is an $n \times n$ matrix such that each row (except the first) is obtained from the preceding by shifting each element a positions to the right.

DEFINITION 2. $P = (p_{ij})$ denotes the $n \times n$ permutation matrix that corresponds to the permutation $i \rightarrow i + 1 \pmod{n}$, i.e., $p_{i2} = p_{23} = \cdots = p_{n-1,n} = p_{n1} = 1$; $p_{ij} = 0$ otherwise.

Note that P^a , the a th power of P , is an a -circulant.

DEFINITION 3. $A(a)$ denotes the a -circulant, the first row of which has 1 in the a th column and zeros elsewhere.

Note that $PA(a) = A(a)P^a$.

THEOREM 4. $\text{Det } A(a) = \text{sign of the permutation } i(\text{mod } n) \rightarrow ia(\text{mod } n)$.

This follows from one of the usual definitions of the determinant function.

LEMMA 5. *If the first row of $A(a_1)$ is multiplied by the matrix $A(a_2)$, the product is: the row that has all zeros except for 1 in the position $a_1a_2(\text{mod } n)$. [Obvious.]*

THEOREM 6. *The product of an a_1 -circulant by an a_2 -circulant is an a_1a_2 -circulant.*

Proof. $PA(a_1)A(a_2) = A(a_1)A(a_2)P^e$, $e = a_1a_2$.

COROLLARY 7. $A(a_1)A(a_2) = A(a_1a_2)$;

$$\det A(a_1) \det A(a_2) = \det A(a_1a_2) .$$

COROLLARY 8. *For $(a, n) = 1$, the determinant of the set $\{A(a)\}$ is a character mod n .*

LEMMA 9. *If $a = g$ is a primitive root of the odd prime number $p = n$, then $\det A(g) = -1$.*

Proof. The corresponding permutation is an $(n - 1)$ -cycle; its sign is -1 .

THEOREM 10. *If n is an odd prime p , then $\det A(a) = (a/p)$, the Legendre symbol.*

Proof. The Legendre symbol is the only real character modulo a prime that actually assumes the value -1 .

COROLLARY 11. [Zolotarev]. $(a/p) = \text{sign of the permutation } i(\text{mod } p) \longrightarrow ia(\text{mod } p), \text{ where } p \text{ is a prime.}$

REMARK. The result $\det A(a) = (a/n)$ does hold in general [4]. When n is an odd prime power, this is obvious since n has a primitive root. For other odd n , it seems less obvious. See [2, 3] for proof.

Concluding remark. As Zolotarev showed, the argument of this article furnishes yet another proof, and the first matrix-theoretic one, of the quadratic reciprocity law.

Acknowledgment. I thank Professor D. H. Lehmer for asking whether the methods developed in [1] could be used to prove that $\det A(a) = (a/p)$.

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Received February 2, 1972. Supported by NSF Grant GP-32527.

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The *Pacific Journal of Mathematics* is issued monthly as of January 1966. Regular subscription rate: \$48.00 a year (6 Vols., 12 issues). Special rate: \$24.00 a year to individual members of supporting institutions.

Subscriptions, orders for back numbers, and changes of address should be sent to Pacific Journal of Mathematics, 103 Highland Boulevard, Berkeley, California, 94708.

PUBLISHED BY PACIFIC JOURNAL OF MATHEMATICS, A NON-PROFIT CORPORATION

Printed at Kokusai Bunken Insatsusha (International Academic Printing Co., Ltd.), 270, 3-chome Totsuka-cho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160, Japan.

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