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► **To cite this version:**

Shalom Eliahou, Jorge Ramirez Alfonsin. On the number of numerical semigroups of prime power genus. 2012. hal-00732344

**HAL Id: hal-00732344**

**<https://hal.science/hal-00732344>**

Preprint submitted on 14 Sep 2012

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# On the number of numerical semigroups $\langle a, b \rangle$ of prime power genus

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September 14, 2012

## Abstract

Given  $g \geq 1$ , the number  $n(g)$  of numerical semigroups  $S \subset \mathbb{N}$  of genus  $|\mathbb{N} \setminus S|$  equal to  $g$  is the subject of challenging conjectures of Bras-Amorós. In this paper, we focus on the counting function  $n(g, 2)$  of *two-generator* numerical semigroups of genus  $g$ , which is known to also count certain special factorizations of  $2g$ . Further focusing on the case  $g = p^k$  for any odd prime  $p$  and  $k \geq 1$ , we show that  $n(p^k, 2)$  only depends on the class of  $p$  modulo a certain explicit modulus  $M(k)$ . The main ingredient is a reduction of  $\gcd(p^\alpha + 1, 2p^\beta + 1)$  to a simpler form, using the continued fraction of  $\alpha/\beta$ . We treat the case  $k = 9$  in detail and show explicitly how  $n(p^9, 2)$  depends on the class of  $p \bmod M(9) = 3 \cdot 5 \cdot 11 \cdot 17 \cdot 43 \cdot 257$ .

**Keywords.** Gap number; Sylvester's theorem; Special factorizations; Euclidean algorithm; Continued fractions; RSA.

## 1 Introduction

A *numerical semigroup* is a subset  $S \subset \mathbb{N}$  containing 0, stable under addition and with finite complement in  $\mathbb{N}$ . The cardinality of  $\mathbb{N} \setminus S$  is then called the *gap number* or the *genus* of  $S$ . It is well known that, given  $g \in \mathbb{N}$ , there are only finitely many numerical semigroups of genus  $g$ . Yet the question of *counting them* seems to be a very hard problem, analogous to the one of

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counting numerical semigroups by Frobenius number. See [1, 2] for some nice conjectures about it. The problem becomes more tractable when restricted to semigroups  $S = \langle a, b \rangle = \mathbb{N}a + \mathbb{N}b$  with two generators. So, let us denote by  $n(g, 2)$  the number of numerical semigroups  $S = \langle a, b \rangle$  of genus  $g$ . On the one hand, determining  $n(g, 2)$  is linked to hard factorization problems, like factoring Fermat and Mersenne numbers [3]. On the other hand, the value of  $n(g, 2)$  is known for all  $g = 2^k$  with  $k \geq 1$ , and for all  $g = p^k$  with  $p$  an odd prime and  $k \leq 8$ . Indeed, exact formulas are provided in [3], showing in particular that  $n(p^k, 2)$  for  $k = 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7$  and  $8$  only depends on the class of  $p$  modulo  $3, 1, 15, 7, 255, 31, 36465$  and  $27559$ , respectively. See also Section 7, where these formulas are given in a new form.

Our purpose in this paper is to extend our understanding of  $n(p^k, 2)$  to arbitrary exponents  $k \in \mathbb{N}$ . Giving exact formulas in all cases is out of reach since, for instance, a formula for  $n(p^{4097}, 2)$  would require the still unknown factorization of the 12th Fermat number  $2^{2^{12}} + 1$ . However, what can and will be done here is to show that, *for all  $k \geq 1$ , the value of  $n(p^k, 2)$  only depends on the class of  $p$  modulo some explicit modulus  $M(k)$ .*

This result is formally stated and proved in Section 4. Here is how  $M(k)$  is defined:

$$M(k) = \text{rad}\left(\prod_{i=1}^k (2^{i/\text{gcd}(i,k)} - (-1)^{k/\text{gcd}(i,k)})\right),$$

where  $\text{rad}(n)$  denotes the product of the distinct prime factors of  $n$ , i.e. the largest square-free divisor of  $n$ . We start by recalling in Section 2 that  $n(g, 2)$  can be identified with the counting function of certain special factorizations of  $2g$ . In Section 3, we reduce  $\text{gcd}(p^\alpha + 1, 2p^\beta + 1)$  for  $\alpha, \beta \in \mathbb{N}$  to the simpler form

$$\text{gcd}(p^{\text{gcd}(\alpha,\beta)} \pm 2^\rho, c)$$

where  $\rho, c \in \mathbb{Z}$  only depend on  $\alpha, \beta$  and not on  $p$ . This reduction uses the continued fraction of  $\alpha/\beta$  and directly leads to our main result in Section 4. In Section 5, we introduce basic binary functions  $X_{a,q}$  which will serve as building blocks in our formulas. The case  $k = 9$  is treated in detail in Section 6, where we give an explicit formula for  $n(p^9, 2)$  depending on the class of  $p \pmod{M(9) = 3 \cdot 5 \cdot 11 \cdot 17 \cdot 43 \cdot 257}$ . We also provide a formula in the case  $k = 10$  with somewhat less details. Finally, in the last section we give and prove new formulas for  $n(p^k, 2)$  with  $k \leq 8$  in terms of the  $X_{a,q}$ .

Background information on numerical semigroups can be found in the books [4, 5].

## 2 Special factorizations of $2g$

We first recall from [3] that  $n(g, 2)$  can be identified with the counting number of factorizations  $uv$  of  $2g$  in  $\mathbb{N}$  satisfying  $\gcd(u + 1, v + 1) = 1$ . In formula:

$$n(g, 2) = \#\{\{u, v\} \subset \mathbb{N} \mid uv = 2g, \gcd(u + 1, v + 1) = 1\}. \quad (1)$$

This follows from the classical theorem of Sylvester [6] stating that whenever  $\gcd(a, b) = 1$ , the genus  $g$  of the numerical semigroup  $S = \langle a, b \rangle$  is given by

$$g = \frac{(a - 1)(b - 1)}{2}.$$

For  $g = p^k$  with  $p$  an odd prime, an immediate consequence of (1) is the following formula.

**Proposition 2.1** *For any odd prime  $p$  and exponent  $k \geq 1$ , we have*

$$n(p^k, 2) = \#\{0 \leq i \leq k \mid \gcd(p^i + 1, 2p^{k-i} + 1) = 1\}. \blacksquare$$

Thus, in order to understand the behavior of  $n(p^k, 2)$ , we need to gain some control on

$$\gcd(p^\alpha + 1, 2p^\beta + 1)$$

for  $\alpha, \beta \in \mathbb{N}$ , and hopefully find ways to determine when this greatest common divisor equals 1. This is addressed in the next section.

## 3 On $\gcd(p^\alpha + 1, 2p^\beta + 1)$

Here is the key technical tool which will lead to our main result in Section 4. Given  $\alpha, \beta \in \mathbb{N}$ , we shall reduce the greatest common divisor

$$\gcd(p^\alpha + 1, 2p^\beta + 1)$$

to the simpler form

$$\gcd(p^\delta \pm 2^\rho, c),$$

where  $\delta = \gcd(\alpha, \beta)$  and where  $\rho, c \in \mathbb{Z}$  only depend on  $\alpha, \beta$  and not on  $p$ . For this purpose, it is more convenient to work in the ring  $\mathbb{Z}[2^{-1}]$  where 2 is made invertible. Moreover, one may effortlessly replace  $\mathbb{Z}[2^{-1}]$  by any unique factorization domain  $A$ , and 2 by any invertible element  $u$  in  $A$ . Of course then, the gcd is only defined up to invertible elements of  $A$ . The proof in this more general context remains practically the same.

**Proposition 3.1** *Let  $A$  be a unique factorization domain and let  $x, u \in A$  with  $u$  invertible. Let  $\alpha, \beta \in \mathbb{N}$  and set  $\delta = \gcd(\alpha, \beta)$ . Then there exists  $\rho \in \mathbb{Z}$  such that*

$$\gcd(x^\alpha + 1, ux^\beta + 1) = \gcd(x^\delta \pm u^\rho, u^{\alpha/\delta} - (-1)^{(\alpha-\beta)/\delta}).$$

The proof is based on a careful study of the successive steps in the Euclidean algorithm for computing gcd's.

**Proof.** First note that, since  $u$  is invertible, we have

$$\gcd(x^\alpha + 1, ux^\beta + 1) = \gcd(x^\alpha + 1, x^\beta + u^{-1}).$$

Set  $r_0 = \alpha, r_1 = \beta$ . Consider the Euclidean algorithm to compute  $\gcd(r_0, r_1)$ :

$$r_i = a_i r_{i+1} + r_{i+2} \tag{2}$$

for all  $0 \leq i \leq n-1$ , where  $0 \leq r_{i+1} < r_i$  for all  $1 \leq i \leq n-1$ ,  $r_{n+1} = 0$ ,  $r_n = \gcd(r_0, r_1)$ . Of course, the  $a_i$ 's are the *partial quotients* of the continued fraction  $[a_0, a_1, \dots, a_n]$  of  $\alpha/\beta$ . We have

$$\begin{pmatrix} r_i \\ r_{i+1} \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} a_i & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} r_{i+1} \\ r_{i+2} \end{pmatrix} \tag{3}$$

for all  $0 \leq i \leq n-1$ . Set  $(s_0, s_1) = (1, 1)$  and  $(t_0, t_1) = (0, -1)$ . Then we have

$$\begin{aligned} x^{r_0} + 1 &= x^{r_0} - (-1)^{s_0} u^{t_0}, \\ x^{r_1} + u^{-1} &= x^{r_1} - (-1)^{s_1} u^{t_1}. \end{aligned}$$

For  $i = 0, \dots, n-1$ , recursively define

$$\begin{aligned} s_{i+2} &= s_i - a_i s_{i+1}, \\ t_{i+2} &= t_i - a_i t_{i+1}. \end{aligned}$$

Then as in (3), we have

$$\begin{pmatrix} s_i \\ s_{i+1} \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} a_i & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} s_{i+1} \\ s_{i+2} \end{pmatrix}, \tag{4}$$

$$\begin{pmatrix} t_i \\ t_{i+1} \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} a_i & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} t_{i+1} \\ t_{i+2} \end{pmatrix} \tag{5}$$

for all  $0 \leq i \leq n-1$ . Finally, for all  $0 \leq j \leq n+1$ , set

$$f_j = x^{r_j} - (-1)^{s_j} u^{t_j}.$$

Note that  $f_0 = x^{r_0} + 1$ ,  $f_1 = x^{r_1} + u^{-1}$ , and

$$f_{n+1} = 1 - (-1)^{s_{n+1}} u^{t_{n+1}} \quad (6)$$

since  $r_{n+1} = 0$ .

**Claim.** For all  $0 \leq i \leq n-1$ , we have

$$\gcd(f_i, f_{i+1}) = \gcd(f_{i+1}, f_{i+2}). \quad (7)$$

Indeed, it follows from (2) that

$$\begin{aligned} f_i &= x^{r_i} - (-1)^{s_i} u^{t_i} \\ &= (x^{r_{i+1}})^{a_i} x^{r_{i+2}} - (-1)^{s_i} u^{t_i}. \end{aligned}$$

Now, since

$$x^{r_{i+1}} \equiv (-1)^{s_{i+1}} u^{t_{i+1}} \pmod{f_{i+1}},$$

we find

$$\begin{aligned} f_i &\equiv ((-1)^{s_{i+1}} u^{t_{i+1}})^{a_i} x^{r_{i+2}} - (-1)^{s_i} u^{t_i} \pmod{f_{i+1}} \\ &\equiv (-1)^{a_i s_{i+1}} u^{a_i t_{i+1}} x^{r_{i+2}} - (-1)^{s_i} u^{t_i} \pmod{f_{i+1}}. \end{aligned}$$

Thus,

$$\begin{aligned} (-1)^{-a_i s_{i+1}} u^{-a_i t_{i+1}} f_i &\equiv x^{r_{i+2}} - (-1)^{s_i - a_i s_{i+1}} u^{t_i - a_i t_{i+1}} \pmod{f_{i+1}} \\ &\equiv x^{r_{i+2}} - (-1)^{s_{i+2}} u^{t_{i+2}} \pmod{f_{i+1}} \\ &\equiv f_{i+2} \pmod{f_{i+1}}. \end{aligned}$$

Consequently, we have  $f_i \equiv (-1)^{a_i s_{i+1}} u^{a_i t_{i+1}} f_{i+2} \pmod{f_{i+1}}$ . Using the equality

$$\gcd(f, g) = \gcd(g, h)$$

whenever  $f \equiv h \pmod{g}$  for elements in  $A$ , we conclude that

$$\begin{aligned} \gcd(f_i, f_{i+1}) &= \gcd(f_{i+1}, (-1)^{a_i s_{i+1}} u^{a_i t_{i+1}} f_{i+2}) \\ &= \gcd(f_{i+1}, f_{i+2}) \end{aligned}$$

since  $(-1)^{a_i s_{i+1}} u^{a_i t_{i+1}}$  is a unit in  $A$ . This proves the claim.

As a first consequence, we get

$$\gcd(f_0, f_1) = \gcd(f_n, f_{n+1}). \quad (8)$$

Denote now

$$A = \prod_{i=0}^{n-1} \begin{pmatrix} a_i & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} \alpha_{11} & \alpha_{12} \\ \alpha_{21} & \alpha_{22} \end{pmatrix}.$$

We have  $\det A = (-1)^n$ , and it follows from repeatedly applying (3) that

$$\begin{pmatrix} r_0 \\ r_1 \end{pmatrix} = A \begin{pmatrix} r_n \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}.$$

This implies, in particular, that  $\alpha_{11} = r_0/r_n$  and  $\alpha_{21} = r_1/r_n$ . Similarly, using (5) repeatedly, we have

$$A^{-1} \begin{pmatrix} t_0 \\ t_1 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} t_n \\ t_{n+1} \end{pmatrix}.$$

Since  $A^{-1} = (-1)^n \begin{pmatrix} \alpha_{22} & -\alpha_{12} \\ -\alpha_{21} & \alpha_{11} \end{pmatrix}$  and  $\begin{pmatrix} t_0 \\ t_1 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ -1 \end{pmatrix}$ , this implies that

$$t_{n+1} = (-1)^{n+1} \alpha_{11} = (-1)^{n+1} r_0/r_n.$$

Finally, using (4) repeatedly, we have

$$A^{-1} \begin{pmatrix} s_0 \\ s_1 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} s_n \\ s_{n+1} \end{pmatrix}.$$

As above, and since  $\begin{pmatrix} s_0 \\ s_1 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix}$ , we find that

$$s_{n+1} = (-1)^n (-\alpha_{21} + \alpha_{11}) = (-1)^n (r_0 - r_1)/r_n.$$

Summarizing, it follows from the equality (8), the expression (6) for  $f_{n+1}$ , and the above values of  $s_{n+1}, t_{n+1}$ , that

$$\begin{aligned} \gcd(x^\alpha + 1, ux^\beta + 1) &= \gcd(f_n, f_{n+1}) \\ &= \gcd(x^{r_n} - (-1)^{s_n} u^{t_n}, 1 - (-1)^{s_{n+1}} u^{t_{n+1}}) \\ &= \gcd(x^\delta - (-1)^{s_n} u^{t_n}, u^{\alpha/\delta} - (-1)^{(\alpha-\beta)/\delta}). \end{aligned}$$

■

The special case of interest to us, namely where  $A = \mathbb{Z}[2^{-1}]$  and  $u = 2$ , reduces to the following statement.

**Corollary 3.2** *Let  $1 \leq i \leq k$  be given integers, and set  $\delta = \gcd(i, k)$ . Then there exists  $\rho \in \mathbb{Z}$  such that for any odd prime  $p$ , we have*

$$\gcd(p^i + 1, 2p^{k-i} + 1) = \gcd(p^\delta \pm 2^\rho, 2^{i/\delta} - (-1)^{k/\delta}).$$

**Proof.** First observe that  $\gcd(p^i + 1, 2p^{k-i} + 1)$  is odd since the second argument is, so we may as well work in  $\mathbb{Z}[2^{-1}]$  when computing this gcd. Set  $\alpha = i$ ,  $\beta = k - i$ . Since  $\gcd(i, k - i) = \gcd(i, k)$ , the values of  $\delta$  in Proposition 3.1 and here are the same. Now  $(\alpha - \beta)/\delta = (2i - k)/\delta$ , and so

$$(-1)^{(\alpha-\beta)/\delta} = (-1)^{k/\delta}.$$

The claimed formula for  $\gcd(p^i + 1, 2p^{k-i} + 1)$  now follows directly from that in Proposition 3.1. ■

Consequently, given  $1 \leq i \leq k$ , an odd prime  $p$  satisfies the condition

$$\gcd(p^i + 1, 2p^{k-i} + 1) = 1$$

if and only if  $p$  belongs to a certain union of classes mod  $(2^{i/\delta} - (-1)^{k/\delta})$ , where as above  $\delta = \gcd(i, k)$ . This is the key to our main result below.

## 4 The main result

For a positive integer  $n$ , let  $\text{rad}(n)$  denote the *radical* of  $n$ , i.e. the product of the distinct primes factors of  $n$ . For instance,  $\text{rad}(4) = 2$  and  $\text{rad}(6) = \text{rad}(12) = \text{rad}(18) = 6$ . Given  $k \geq 1$ , let us define

$$M(k) = \text{rad}\left(\prod_{i=1}^k (2^{i/\gcd(i,k)} - (-1)^{k/\gcd(i,k)})\right).$$

Note that if  $k$  is odd, the formula becomes

$$M(k) = \text{rad}\left(\prod_{i=1}^k (2^{i/\gcd(i,k)} + 1)\right),$$

whereas if  $k$  is even there is no such reduction in general, since the exponent  $k/\gcd(i, k)$  may assume both parities. Here is our main result.



**Theorem 4.1** For any odd prime  $p$  and  $k \geq 1$ , the value of  $n(p^k, 2)$  only depends on the class of  $p$  modulo  $M(k)$ .

**Proof.** Recall the formula given by Proposition 2.1:

$$n(p^k, 2) = \#\{0 \leq i \leq k \mid \gcd(p^i + 1, 2p^{k-i} + 1) = 1\}. \quad (9)$$

If  $i = 0$ , then  $\gcd(2, 2p^k + 1) = 1$  always, since  $p$  is odd. Assume now  $1 \leq i \leq k$ , and set

$$m_k(i) = 2^{i/\gcd(i,k)} - (-1)^{k/\gcd(i,k)}.$$

By Corollary 3.2, the value of  $\gcd(p^i + 1, 2p^{k-i} + 1)$  only depends on the class of  $p \bmod m_k(i)$ . Therefore, it follows from (9) and this property of  $m_i(k)$  that if we set

$$M(k) = \text{rad}\left(\prod_{i=1}^k m_k(i)\right),$$

the value of  $n(p^k, 2)$  only depends on the class of  $p \bmod M(k)$ . ■

For concreteness, Table 1 gives the value of  $M(k)$  for  $1 \leq k \leq 10$ . We have seen that  $n(p^k, 2)$  only depends on the class of  $p$  modulo  $M(k)$ . But  $M(k)$  is not necessarily the *smallest* modulus with this property, only a multiple of it. For instance, we have  $M(4) = 21$ , but the value of  $n(p^4, 2)$  only depends on the class of  $p \bmod 7$ , as stated in the Introduction. However, for all *odd*  $k$  in the range  $1 \leq k \leq 9$ , the modulus  $M(k)$  actually turns out to be optimal for the desired property. (See [3] and Section 7.)

$k$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
$M(k)$	3	3	15	21	255	465	36465	82677	30998055	16548735

Table 1: First 10 values of  $M(k)$ .

## 5 The basic functions $X_{a,q}$

We now introduce numerical functions  $X_{a,q}$ , with values in  $\{0, 1\}$ , which will subsequently serve as building blocks in our explicit formulas for  $n(p^k, 2)$

with  $k \leq 10$ . Given integers  $a, q$  with  $q \geq 2$ , the definition of

$$X_{a,q} : \mathbb{Z} \rightarrow \{0, 1\}$$

depends on the distinct prime factors of  $q$ , as follows.

- If  $q$  is prime, then  $X_{a,q}$  is the indicator function of the complement of the subset  $a + q\mathbb{Z}$  in  $\mathbb{Z}$ , i.e.

$$X_{a,q}(n) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } n \not\equiv a \pmod{q}, \\ 0 & \text{if } n \equiv a \pmod{q}. \end{cases}$$

- If  $q_1, \dots, q_t$  are the distinct prime factors of  $q$ , then we set

$$X_{a,q} = \prod_{i=1}^t X_{a,q_i}.$$

In particular, since  $X_{a,q}$  only depends on the prime factors of  $q$ , we have

$$X_{a,q} = X_{a,\text{rad}(q)}.$$

Note that  $X_{a,q}$  only depends on the class of  $a \pmod{q}$ . It is also plain that  $X_{a,q}(n)$  only depends on the class of  $n \pmod{q}$ .

We now establish a few more properties of these functions. The first one links  $X_{a,q}(n)$  with  $\gcd(n - a, q)$ , and so will be useful to capture occurrences of the equality  $\gcd(p^i + 1, 2p^{k-i} + 1) = 1$ .

**Proposition 5.1** *Let  $a, q$  be integers with  $q \geq 2$ . For all  $n \in \mathbb{Z}$ , we have*

$$X_{a,q}(n) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } \gcd(n - a, q) = 1, \\ 0 & \text{if not.} \end{cases}$$

**Proof.** Let  $q_1, \dots, q_t$  be the distinct prime factors of  $q$ . Then we have

$$\begin{aligned} X_{a,q}(n) = 1 &\iff X_{a,q_i}(n) = 1 \quad \forall i \\ &\iff n \not\equiv a \pmod{q_i} \quad \forall i \\ &\iff \gcd(n - a, q_i) = 1 \quad \forall i \\ &\iff \gcd(n - a, q) = 1. \end{aligned}$$

Since  $X_{a,q}(n)$  only takes values in  $\{0, 1\}$ , this implies that  $X_{a,q}(n) = 0$  if and only if  $\gcd(n - a, q) \neq 1$ . ■

Next, for determining  $n(p^k, 2)$ , we often need to evaluate  $X_{a,q}(p^s)$  with  $s \geq 2$ . The next two properties help remove that exponent  $s$ . The first one reduces the task to the case where  $s$  divides  $q - 1$ . It suffices to consider the case where  $q$  is prime.

**Proposition 5.2** *Let  $q$  be a prime number, and let  $a, s$  be integers with  $s \geq 2$ . Write  $s = te$  with  $t = \gcd(s, q - 1)$ , so that  $\gcd(e, q - 1) = 1$ . Let  $d \in \mathbb{N}$  satisfy  $de \equiv 1 \pmod{q - 1}$ . Then*

$$X_{a,q}(n^s) = X_{a^d,q}(n^t)$$

for all integers  $n$ .

**Proof.** This is the heart of the RSA cryptographic protocol, which relies on the fact that exponentiation to the power  $e$  in  $\mathbb{Z}/q\mathbb{Z}$  is a bijection, whose inverse is exponentiation to the power  $d$ . We have

$$\begin{aligned} X_{a,q}(n^s) = 0 &\iff n^s \equiv a \pmod{q} \\ &\iff (n^t)^e \equiv a \pmod{q} \\ &\iff (n^t)^{de} \equiv a^d \pmod{q} \\ &\iff n^t \equiv a^d \pmod{q} \\ &\iff X_{a^d,q}(n^t) = 0. \end{aligned}$$

■

Thus, we may now assume that the exponent  $s$  divides  $q - 1$ .

**Proposition 5.3** *Let  $q$  be a prime number, and let  $a, s$  be integers with  $s$  dividing  $q - 1$ . Let  $g \in \mathbb{N}$  be an integer whose class mod  $q$  generates the multiplicative group of non-zero elements in  $\mathbb{Z}/q\mathbb{Z}$ . We have:*

- If  $a$  is not an  $s$ -power mod  $q$ , then  $X_{a,q}(n^s) = 1$  for all  $n$ .
- If  $a$  is an  $s$ -power mod  $q$ , then  $a \equiv g^{si} \pmod{q}$  for some integer  $i$  such that  $0 \leq i \leq (q - 1)/s - 1$ , and

$$X_{a,q}(n^s) = \prod_{j=0}^{s-1} X_{g^{i+j(q-1)/s},q}(n)$$

for all integers  $n$ .

**Proof.** In the group  $(\mathbb{Z}/q\mathbb{Z})^*$  of nonzero classes mod  $q$ , the set of  $s$ -powers is of cardinality  $(q-1)/s$  and coincides with

$$\{g^{si} \bmod q \mid 0 \leq i \leq (q-1)/s - 1\}.$$

First, if  $a$  is not an  $s$ -power mod  $q$ , then  $n^s \not\equiv a \bmod q$  for all  $n$ , implying  $X_{a,q}(n^s) = 0$  for all  $n$ . Assume now  $a$  is an  $s$ -power mod  $q$ . By the above remark, there exists  $0 \leq i \leq (q-1)/s - 1$  such that  $a \equiv g^{si} \bmod q$ . We have

$$\begin{aligned} X_{a,q}(n^s) = 0 &\iff n^s \equiv a \bmod q \\ &\iff n^s \equiv g^{si} \bmod q \\ &\iff \left(\frac{n}{g^i}\right)^s \equiv 1 \bmod q. \end{aligned}$$

This means that  $n/g^i$  is of order dividing  $s$  in the group  $(\mathbb{Z}/q\mathbb{Z})^*$ . Now, the elements of order dividing  $s$  in this group constitute a subgroup of order  $s$  generated by  $g^{j(q-1)/s}$ . Thus, there exists an integer  $j$  such that  $0 \leq j \leq s-1$  and satisfying

$$\frac{n}{g^i} \equiv g^{j(q-1)/s} \bmod q,$$

yielding

$$X_{a,q}(n^s) = 0 \iff n \equiv g^{i+j(q-1)/s} \bmod q.$$

Summarizing, for  $a \equiv g^{si} \bmod q$ , we have established the equivalence

$$X_{a,q}(n^s) = 0 \iff \prod_{j=0}^{s-1} X_{g^{i+j(q-1)/s},q}(n) = 0,$$

whence the claimed equality  $X_{a,q}(n^s) = \prod_{j=0}^{s-1} X_{g^{i+j(q-1)/s},q}(n)$ . ■

**Example 5.4** In order to establish our formula for  $n(p^{10}, 2)$  in Section 6, the term  $X_{8,17}(p^2)$  turns out to be involved. Now 8 is a square mod 17, namely  $8 \equiv 5^2 \equiv 12^2 \bmod 17$ . Thus, the above result yields

$$X_{8,17}(p^2) = X_{5,17}(p)X_{12,17}(p).$$

## 6 The cases $k = 9, 10$

Explicit formulas for  $n(p^k, 2)$  with  $p$  an odd prime and  $k \leq 6$  or  $k = 8$  are given in [3]. Here we go further and treat the case  $k = 9$  in detail. This will show how Corollary 3.2 can be applied, and will also give a sense of the increasing complexity of these formulas. We also briefly address the case  $k = 10$ . The main ingredients are the basic functions  $X_{a,q}$  defined in the preceding section.

Here comes our formula for  $n(p^9, 2)$ . The fact that it depends on the class of  $p \pmod{M(9)}$  follows from this prime decomposition:

$$M(9) = 30998055 = 5 \cdot 17 \cdot 257 \cdot 3 \cdot 11 \cdot 43.$$

**Theorem 6.1** *Let  $p$  be an odd prime. Then we have*

$$n(p^9, 2) = 1 + 2X_{3,5}(p) + X_{9,17}(p) + X_{128,257}(p) + X_{2,3}(p) \cdot (3 + X_{2,11}(p) + X_{8,43}(p)).$$

**Proof.** By Proposition 2.1, in order to determine  $n(p^9, 2)$ , it suffices to count those exponents  $i$  between 0 and 9 satisfying  $\gcd(p^i + 1, 2p^{9-i} + 1) = 1$ . Using Corollary 3.2 and the calculations leading to it, these gcd's may be reduced as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \gcd(p^0 + 1, 2p^9 + 1) &= 1 \\ \gcd(p^1 + 1, 2p^8 + 1) &= \gcd(p + 1, 3) \\ \gcd(p^2 + 1, 2p^7 + 1) &= \gcd(2p - 1, 5) \\ \gcd(p^3 + 1, 2p^6 + 1) &= \gcd(p^3 + 1, 3) = \gcd(p + 1, 3) \\ \gcd(p^4 + 1, 2p^5 + 1) &= \gcd(2p - 1, 17) \\ \gcd(p^5 + 1, 2p^4 + 1) &= \gcd(p - 2, 33) \\ \gcd(p^6 + 1, 2p^3 + 1) &= \gcd(2p^3 + 1, 5) \\ \gcd(p^7 + 1, 2p^2 + 1) &= \gcd(p - 8, 129) \\ \gcd(p^8 + 1, 2p^1 + 1) &= \gcd(2p + 1, 257) \\ \gcd(p^9 + 1, 2p^0 + 1) &= \gcd(p^9 + 1, 3) = \gcd(p + 1, 3). \end{aligned}$$

Now, by Proposition 5.1 and the properties of the functions  $X_{a,q}$ , these equal-

ities imply the following equivalences:

$$\begin{aligned}
\gcd(p^0 + 1, 2p^9 + 1) = 1 & \quad \text{always} \\
\gcd(p^1 + 1, 2p^8 + 1) = 1 & \iff X_{2,3}(p) = 1 \\
\gcd(p^2 + 1, 2p^7 + 1) = 1 & \iff X_{3,5}(p) = 1 \\
\gcd(p^3 + 1, 2p^6 + 1) = 1 & \iff X_{2,3}(p) = 1 \\
\gcd(p^4 + 1, 2p^5 + 1) = 1 & \iff X_{9,17}(p) = 1 \\
\gcd(p^5 + 1, 2p^4 + 1) = 1 & \iff X_{2,33}(p) = 1 \\
\gcd(p^6 + 1, 2p^3 + 1) = 1 & \iff X_{3,5}(p) = 1 \\
\gcd(p^7 + 1, 2p^2 + 1) = 1 & \iff X_{8,129}(p) = 1 \\
\gcd(p^8 + 1, 2p^1 + 1) = 1 & \iff X_{128,257}(p) = 1 \\
\gcd(p^9 + 1, 2p^0 + 1) = 1 & \iff X_{2,3}(p) = 1.
\end{aligned}$$

Read sequentially, this table directly yields the following first formula for  $n(p^9, 2)$ , with 10 summands, in terms of the functions  $X_{a,q}$ :

$$\begin{aligned}
n(p^9, 2) &= 1 + X_{2,3}(p) + X_{3,5}(p) + X_{2,3}(p) + X_{9,17}(p) + X_{2,33}(p) \\
&\quad + X_{3,5}(p) + X_{8,129}(p) + X_{128,257}(p) + X_{2,3}(p) \\
&= 1 + 3X_{2,3}(p) + 2X_{3,5}(p) + X_{9,17}(p) + X_{2,33}(p) + X_{8,129}(p) \\
&\quad + X_{128,257}(p).
\end{aligned}$$

Among the moduli involved above, the only non-prime ones are  $33 = 3 \cdot 11$  and  $129 = 3 \cdot 43$ . By definition of  $X_{a,q}$  for non-prime  $q$ , we have

$$\begin{aligned}
X_{2,33} &= X_{2,3}X_{2,11} \\
X_{8,129} &= X_{8,3}X_{8,43}.
\end{aligned}$$

Moreover, since  $X_{a,q}$  only depends on the class of  $a \pmod q$ , we have

$$X_{8,3} = X_{2,3}.$$

Substituting these equalities in the above formula for  $n(p^9, 2)$ , we get

$$n(p^9, 2) = 1 + 2X_{3,5}(p) + X_{9,17}(p) + X_{128,257}(p) + X_{2,3}(p) \cdot (3 + X_{2,11}(p) + X_{8,43}(p)),$$

as claimed. ■

We now derive another version of our formula for  $n(p^9, 2)$ , from which its values are easier to read. Given positive integers  $q_1, \dots, q_t$ , we denote by

$$\rho_{q_1, \dots, q_t} : \mathbb{Z} \rightarrow \mathbb{Z}/q_1\mathbb{Z} \times \dots \times \mathbb{Z}/q_t\mathbb{Z}$$

the canonical reduction morphism  $\rho_{q_1, \dots, q_t}(n) = (n \bmod q_1, \dots, n \bmod q_t)$ . Moreover, we write  $n \equiv -a \bmod q$  instead of  $n \not\equiv a \bmod q$ . For example, the condition

$$\rho_{5, 17, 257}(p) = (3, -9, -128)$$

means  $p \equiv 3 \bmod 5$ ,  $p \not\equiv 9 \bmod 17$  and  $p \not\equiv 128 \bmod 257$ .

**Corollary 6.2** *Let  $p$  be an odd prime. Consider the following functions of  $p$  depending on its classes mod 5, 17, 257 and 11, 43, respectively:*

$$\lambda(p) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } \rho_{5, 17, 257}(p) = (3, 9, 128) \\ 2 & \text{if } \rho_{5, 17, 257}(p) \in \{(3, 9, -128), (3, -9, 128)\} \\ 3 & \text{if } \rho_{5, 17, 257}(p) \in \{(3, -9, -128), (-3, 9, 128)\} \\ 4 & \text{if } \rho_{5, 17, 257}(p) \in \{(-3, 9, -128), (-3, -9, 128)\} \\ 5 & \text{if } \rho_{5, 17, 257}(p) = (-3, -9, -128), \end{cases}$$

$$\mu(p) = \begin{cases} 3 & \text{if } \rho_{11, 43}(p) = (2, 8) \\ 4 & \text{if } \rho_{11, 43}(p) \in \{(2, -8), (-2, 8)\} \\ 5 & \text{if } \rho_{11, 43}(p) = (-2, -8). \end{cases}$$

Then we have

$$n(p^9, 2) = \begin{cases} \lambda(p) & \text{if } p \equiv 2 \bmod 3, \\ \lambda(p) + \mu(p) & \text{if } p \not\equiv 2 \bmod 3. \end{cases}$$

**Proof.** This directly follows from the preceding result and the easy to prove equalities

$$\begin{aligned} \lambda(p) &= 1 + 2X_{3,5}(p) + X_{9,17}(p) + X_{128,257}(p), \\ \mu(p) &= 3 + X_{2,11}(p) + X_{8,43}(p). \end{aligned}$$

■

It is still clearer now that  $n(p^9, 2)$  is determined by the class of  $p \bmod M(9) = 3 \cdot 5 \cdot 17 \cdot 257 \cdot 11 \cdot 43$ , and that  $M(9)$  is the smallest modulus with this property.

We close this section by briefly treating the case  $k = 10$ . The formula obtained shows that  $n(p^{10}, 2)$ , for  $p$  an odd prime, is determined by the class of  $p$  modulo  $M(10)/15 = 7 \cdot 17 \cdot 73 \cdot 127$ .

**Theorem 6.3** *Let  $p$  be an odd prime. Then we have*

$$n(p^{10}, 2) = 7 + X_{3,7}(p)(1 + X_{36,73}(p)) + X_{5,17}(p)X_{12,17}(p) + X_{123,127}(p).$$

**Proof.** After reducing  $\gcd(p^i + 1, 2p^{10-i} + 1)$  for  $0 \leq i \leq 10$  as in Corollary 3.2, and using Proposition 5.1 involving the functions  $X_{a,q}$ , we obtain this first raw formula:

$$\begin{aligned} n(p^{10}, 2) = & 2 + X_{-1,3}(p^2) + X_{3,7}(p) + X_{-2,5}(p^2) + 1 + X_{2,9}(p^2) + X_{123,127}(p) \\ & + X_{8,17}(p^2) + X_{255,511}(p) + X_{-1,3}(p^{10}). \end{aligned}$$

We now invoke Proposition 5.3 several times. Since  $-1$  is not a square mod 3, we have  $X_{-1,3}(p^2) = 1$ . The same reason yields  $X_{2,9}(p^2) = X_{-1,3}(p^{10}) = 1$ . Similarly, we have  $X_{-2,5}(p^2) = 1$  as  $-2$  is not a square mod 5. As already explained in Example 5.4, we have  $X_{8,17}(p^2) = X_{5,17}(p)X_{12,17}(p)$ . Finally, since  $511 = 7 \cdot 73$ , and since 255 is congruent to 3 mod 7 and to 36 mod 73, we have

$$X_{255,511}(p) = X_{3,7}(p)X_{36,73}(p).$$

Inserting these reductions into the raw formula gives the stated one, where now the only argument of the various basic functions  $X_{a,q}$  is  $p$  and all involved  $q$ 's are primes. ■

## 7 The cases $k \leq 8$ revisited

While explicit formulas for  $n(p^k, 2)$  with  $k \leq 6$  and  $k = 8$  are given in [3], we provide here new, shorter formulas in terms of the basic functions  $X_{a,q}$  for  $k \leq 8$ , including  $k = 7$ . The construction method is similar to the cases  $k = 9, 10$  and relies on the reduction of  $\gcd(p^i + 1, 2p^{k-i} + 1)$  provided by Corollary 3.2.



**Theorem 7.1** *Let  $p$  be an odd prime. Then we have*

$$\begin{aligned}
n(p^1, 2) &= 1 + X_{2,3}(p) \\
n(p^2, 2) &= 3 \\
n(p^3, 2) &= 1 + 2X_{2,3}(p) + X_{2,5}(p) \\
n(p^4, 2) &= 4 + X_{3,7}(p) \\
n(p^5, 2) &= 1 + 3X_{2,3}(p) + X_{3,5}(p) + X_{8,17}(p) \\
n(p^6, 2) &= 6 + X_{15,31}(p) \\
n(p^7, 2) &= 1 + X_{2,3}(p)(3 + X_{7,11}(p)) + X_{2,5}(p)(1 + X_{6,13}(p)) + X_{2,17}(p) \\
n(p^8, 2) &= 6 + X_{5,7}(p) + X_{23,31}(p) + X_{63,127}(p).
\end{aligned}$$

**Proof.** Corollary 3.2 and its proof method yield the following reductions of  $\gcd(p^i + 1, 2p^{k-i} + 1)$  for  $i = 1, \dots, k$ . The case  $i = 0$  is omitted, as  $\gcd(p^0 + 1, 2p^k + 1) = 1$  always. A few more arithmetical reductions are also applied. For instance, the equality  $\gcd(p^2 + 1, 3) = 1$  below follows from the fact that  $-1$  is not a square mod 3. This is one easy case of Proposition 5.3.

$$k = 1 :$$

$$\gcd(p^1 + 1, 2p^0 + 1) = \gcd(p + 1, 3)$$

$$k = 2 :$$

$$\gcd(p^1 + 1, 2p^1 + 1) = \gcd(2p + 1, 1) = 1$$

$$\gcd(p^2 + 1, 2p^0 + 1) = \gcd(p^2 + 1, 3) = 1$$

$$k = 3 :$$

$$\gcd(p^1 + 1, 2p^2 + 1) = \gcd(p + 1, 3)$$

$$\gcd(p^2 + 1, 2p^1 + 1) = \gcd(2p + 1, 5)$$

$$\gcd(p^3 + 1, 2p^0 + 1) = \gcd(p^3 + 1, 3) = \gcd(p + 1, 3)$$

$$k = 4 :$$

$$\gcd(p^1 + 1, 2p^3 + 1) = \gcd(p + 1, 1) = 1$$

$$\gcd(p^2 + 1, 2p^2 + 1) = \gcd(2p^2 + 1, 1) = 1$$

$$\gcd(p^3 + 1, 2p^1 + 1) = \gcd(2p + 1, 7)$$

$$\gcd(p^4 + 1, 2p^0 + 1) = \gcd(p^4 + 1, 3) = 1$$

$$k = 5 :$$

$$\begin{aligned}\gcd(p^1 + 1, 2p^4 + 1) &= \gcd(p + 1, 3) \\ \gcd(p^2 + 1, 2p^3 + 1) &= \gcd(2p - 1, 5) \\ \gcd(p^3 + 1, 2p^2 + 1) &= \gcd(p - 2, 9) \\ \gcd(p^4 + 1, 2p^1 + 1) &= \gcd(2p + 1, 17) \\ \gcd(p^5 + 1, 2p^0 + 1) &= \gcd(p^5 + 1, 3) = \gcd(p + 1, 3)\end{aligned}$$

$$k = 6 :$$

$$\begin{aligned}\gcd(p^1 + 1, 2p^5 + 1) &= \gcd(p + 1, 1) = 1 \\ \gcd(p^2 + 1, 2p^4 + 1) &= \gcd(p^2 + 1, 3) = 1 \\ \gcd(p^3 + 1, 2p^3 + 1) &= \gcd(2p^3 + 1, 1) = 1 \\ \gcd(p^4 + 1, 2p^2 + 1) &= \gcd(2p^2 + 1, 5) = 1 \\ \gcd(p^5 + 1, 2p^1 + 1) &= \gcd(2p + 1, 31) \\ \gcd(p^6 + 1, 2p^0 + 1) &= \gcd(p^6 + 1, 3) = 1\end{aligned}$$

$$k = 7 :$$

$$\begin{aligned}\gcd(p^1 + 1, 2p^6 + 1) &= \gcd(p + 1, 3) \\ \gcd(p^2 + 1, 2p^5 + 1) &= \gcd(2p + 1, 5) \\ \gcd(p^3 + 1, 2p^4 + 1) &= \gcd(2p - 1, 9) \\ \gcd(p^4 + 1, 2p^3 + 1) &= \gcd(p - 2, 17) \\ \gcd(p^5 + 1, 2p^2 + 1) &= \gcd(p + 4, 33) \\ \gcd(p^6 + 1, 2p^1 + 1) &= \gcd(2p + 1, 65) \\ \gcd(p^7 + 1, 2p^0 + 1) &= \gcd(p^7 + 1, 3) = \gcd(p + 1, 3)\end{aligned}$$

$$k = 8 :$$

$$\begin{aligned}\gcd(p^1 + 1, 2p^7 + 1) &= \gcd(p + 1, 1) = 1 \\ \gcd(p^2 + 1, 2p^6 + 1) &= \gcd(p^2 + 1, 1) = 1 \\ \gcd(p^3 + 1, 2p^5 + 1) &= \gcd(p + 2, 7) \\ \gcd(p^4 + 1, 2p^4 + 1) &= \gcd(2p^4 + 1, 1) = 1 \\ \gcd(p^5 + 1, 2p^3 + 1) &= \gcd(4p + 1, 31) \\ \gcd(p^6 + 1, 2p^2 + 1) &= \gcd(2p^2 + 1, 7) = 1 \\ \gcd(p^7 + 1, 2p^1 + 1) &= \gcd(2p + 1, 127) \\ \gcd(p^8 + 1, 2p^0 + 1) &= \gcd(p^8 + 1, 3) = 1.\end{aligned}$$

As in the case  $k = 9$ , the claimed formulas follow by reading these tables sequentially and using properties of the functions  $X_{a,q}$  from Section 5. ■

In particular, these formulas confirm that for  $k = 1, \dots, 8$ , the value of  $n(p^k, 2)$  at an odd prime  $p$  is determined by the class of  $p$  modulo 3, 1,  $3 \cdot 5$ , 7,  $3 \cdot 5 \cdot 17$ , 31,  $3 \cdot 5 \cdot 11 \cdot 13 \cdot 17$  and  $7 \cdot 31 \cdot 127$ , respectively.

## 8 A question

We shall conclude this paper with an open question. On the one hand, we have obtained explicit formulas for  $n(p^k, 2)$  in all cases  $k \leq 10$ . On the other hand, we know from [3] that no such formula can be expected in the case  $k = 4097$ , at least as long as the prime factors of the 12th Fermat number  $2^{2^{12}} + 1$  remain unknown. Well then, what happens in the intermediate range  $11 \leq k \leq 4096$ ? Are there fundamental obstacles which would prevent us to obtain exact formulas for  $n(p^k, 2)$  all the way up to  $k = 4096$ ?

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