On a problem of Recaman and its generalization

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Abstract

We solve some cases of a conjecture of Pomerance concerning reduced residue systems modulo \( k \) consisting of the first \( \phi(k) \) primes not dividing \( k \). We cover the case when \( k \) is a prime, thus giving a complete solution to a problem of Recaman.

Key words: the problem of Recaman, the problem of Pomerance, Jacobsthal function, primes in residue classes

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Dedicated to Professor K. Győry on the occasion of his 70th birthday

1 Introduction

Let \( k > 1 \) be an integer and denote by \( \phi(k) \) Euler’s totient function. We say that \( k \) is a \( P \)-integer if the first \( \phi(k) \) primes coprime to \( k \) form a reduced residue system modulo \( k \). Note that a prime \( p \) is a \( P \)-integer if and only if the first \( p \) primes form a complete residue system modulo \( p \). In 1980, Pomerance [3] showed that there are only finitely many \( P \)-integers. Thereby he qualitatively solved the problem of finitely many prime \( P \)-integers which was raised earlier in 1978 by Recaman [4]. In his paper Pomerance conjectured that the largest

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$P$-integer is $k = 30$. It is easy to check that the only $P$-integers less than or equal to 30 are $k = 2, 4, 6, 12, 18, 30$.

In this paper we prove the conjecture of Pomerance in two “opposite” extremal cases: when $k$ is composed of “large” prime factors (i.e. when all the prime divisors of $k$ are above $\log(k)$), and when $k$ is composed of “small” prime factors (i.e. $k$ is the product of all primes $\leq x$ for some $x$). As a trivial consequence of the first result we get a complete quantitative solution for the problem of Recaman. Further, we verify the conjecture of Pomerance for all $k < 5.5 \cdot 10^5$. We note that Pomerance’s finiteness result for $P$-integers [3] in principle can be made effective: one can possibly get an explicit upper bound for $P$-integers $k$. However, according to our calculations, this bound is rather huge, and it seems that to cover the remaining gap some additional (theoretical and/or computational) arguments are needed. So the complete resolution of the problem of Pomerance still remains an open quest; we plan to attack it in a future paper.

The proofs of our results depend on some properties of the Jacobsthal function $g(m)$ as in [3]. Among others we use the exact values of $g(m)$ when $m$ is the product of first $h \leq 46$ primes, which were recently obtained by Hagedorn [1]. Further, we apply several formulas of Rosser and Schoenfeld [5], concerning various functions involving primes.

2 Main results

Our first result solves Recaman’s problem completely.

**Theorem 1** The only prime $P$-integer is 2.

In fact Theorem 1 is a trivial consequence of the following much more general result. For $k > 1$ let $\ell(k)$ be the least prime divisor of $k$.

**Theorem 2** Let $k > 1$ be an integer with $\ell(k) > \log(k)$. Then $k$ is a $P$-integer if and only if $k \in \{2, 4, 6\}$.

For fixed positive integer $r$ and positive real $X$ write

$$N_r := \{n \mid \omega(n) = r\} \quad \text{and} \quad N_r(X) := \{n \in N_r \mid n \leq X\},$$

where $\omega(n)$ denotes the number of distinct prime divisors of $n$. Further, for any positive real $x$, we let $\log_1(x) = \log(x)$ and for $t \geq 2$, $\log_t(x) = \log(\log_{t-1}(x))$. 

2
By a result of Landau it is known that

\[ |N_r(X)| \sim \frac{X (\log_2(X))^{r-1}}{\log(X)(r-1)!} \]

(see Theorem 437, p. 368 of [2]). Let \( N'_r(X) \) denote the set of integers \( n \) in \( N_r(X) \) with \( \ell(n) \leq \log(n) \). Then for any \( n \in N'_r(X) \) we have \( \ell(n) \leq \log(X) \) and \( n/\ell(n) \in N_{r-1}(X/\ell(n)) \). Applying Landau’s result to \( N_{r-1}(X/p) \) for every \( p \leq \log(X) \), and noting that \( \frac{(\log_2(x))^{r-2}}{\log(x)} \) is a decreasing function of \( x \) for sufficiently large \( x \), we find that

\[ |N'_r(X)| \leq c_1 \sum_{p \leq \log(X)} \frac{\log_2 \left( \frac{X}{p} \right)^{r-2}}{\log \left( \frac{X}{p} \right)(r-2)!} \leq c_2 \frac{X (\log_2(X))^{r-2}}{\log(X)(r-2)!} \sum_{p \leq \log(X)} \frac{1}{p} \leq c_3 \frac{X (\log_2(X))^{r-2}}{\log(X)(r-2)!} \log_3(X) \]

where \( c_1, c_2 \) and \( c_3 \) are absolute constants. Thus we see that almost all integers in \( N_r \) has \( \ell(n) > \log(n) \). In particular, \( k \) is not a \( P \)-integer whenever \( k \) is the product of twin primes.

Our third theorem verifies the conjecture of Pomerance for integers \( k \) being the products of the first few primes.

**Theorem 3** Let \( k \) be the product of the primes \( \leq x \) for some \( x \geq 2 \). Then \( k \) is a \( P \)-integer if and only if \( k \in \{2, 6, 30\} \).

Finally, we formulate a statement concerning the solution of the problem of Pomerance for “small” values of \( k \). Our main motivation of doing so is that this result will be very useful in the proof of Theorem 2.

**Proposition 4** Suppose that \( 1 < k < 5.5 \cdot 10^5 \). Then \( k \) is a \( P \)-integer if and only if \( k \in \{2, 4, 6, 12, 18, 30\} \).

3 Lemmas

We need many lemmas of different types to prove our theorems. We shall make use of several estimates of Rosser and Schoenfeld [5] concerning various functions related to prime numbers. Further, we need certain results due to Stevens [6] and Hagedorn [1] about the Jacobsthal function. Finally, we need a theorem of Pomerance about primes in residue classes modulo \( m \).
3.1 Lemmas concerning functions involving primes

The following four lemmas are estimates from Rosser and Schoenfeld [5] which we need later on.

**Lemma 5** Let \( p_n \) denote the \( n \)-th prime. Then

(i) \( p_n > n(\log(n) + \log_2(n) - \frac{3}{2}) \) for \( n > 1 \);

(ii) \( p_n < n(\log(n) + \log_2(n)) \) for \( n \geq 6 \).

**Lemma 6** For any \( x \geq 59 \) we have

\[
\frac{x}{\log(x)} \left( 1 + \frac{1}{2 \log(x)} \right) < \pi(x) < \frac{x}{\log(x)} \left( 1 + \frac{3}{2 \log(x)} \right).
\]

**Lemma 7** For \( x \geq 2 \) write \( \vartheta(x) = \sum_{p \leq x} \log(p) \). For any \( x \geq 563 \) we have

\[
x \left( 1 - \frac{1}{2 \log(x)} \right) < \vartheta(x) < x \left( 1 + \frac{1}{2 \log(x)} \right).
\]

**Lemma 8** For any \( x > 1 \) we have

\[
\prod_{p \leq x} \left( 1 - \frac{1}{p} \right) < \frac{0.56146}{\log(x)} \left( 1 + \frac{1}{2 \log^2(x)} \right).
\]

Note that here 0.56146 could be replaced by any number exceeding \( e^{-\gamma} \), where \( \gamma \) is Euler’s constant.

3.2 Lemmas about the Jacobsthal function

For \( n \geq 1 \) the Jacobsthal function \( g(n) \) is defined as the smallest integer such that any sequence of \( g(n) \) consecutive integers contains an element which is coprime to \( n \). This function has been studied by many authors, and good lower as well as upper bounds are known (see e.g. [6], [3] and [1] for history). Further, the exact values of \( g(n) \) when \( n \) is the product of the first \( h < 50 \) primes is given in Table 1 of [1].

It was observed by Jacobsthal that for integers \( k \) with \( \ell(k) > \log(k) \) we have \( g(k) = \omega(k) + 1 \). Further, \( g(k) \geq \omega(k) + 1 \) is obviously valid for any \( k \). We shall use these assertions throughout the paper without any further reference.

Our first lemma concerning the Jacobsthal function is a reformulation of the Theorem of Stevens [6].
Lemma 9 We have $g(k) \leq 2\omega(k)^{2+2\varepsilon \log(\omega(k))}$ for all $k > 1$. The next lemma is Proposition 1.1 of Hagedorn [1].

Lemma 10 We have

$$g\left(\prod_{i=1}^{h} p_i\right) \geq 2p_{h-1} \quad \text{for} \quad h > 2.$$ 

3.3 A result of Pomerance

Let $k$ and $l$ be positive integers with $\gcd(k, l) = 1$. Denote by $p(k, l)$ the least prime $p \equiv l \pmod{k}$. We write $P(k)$ for the maximal value of $p(k, l)$ for all $l$. Observe that $k$ is a $P$-integer if and only if $P(k)$ equals the $\varphi(k)$-th prime not dividing $k$. Since the number of primes dividing $k$ is $\omega(k)$, we get that if $k$ is a $P$-integer then

$$p_{\varphi(k)} \leq P(k) \leq p_{\varphi(k)+\omega(k)}$$

holds. Note also that since $\varphi(k) + \omega(k) \leq k$, we have $P(k) \leq p_k$ whenever $k$ is a $P$-integer.

To prove the finiteness of $k$'s which are $P$-integers, Pomerance [3] derived a lower bound for $P(k)$ which (for large $k$) turns to be larger than standard upper bounds for $p_{\varphi(k)+\omega(k)}$, obtained by using estimates from [5]. This lower bound of Pomerance is based upon the following result from [3].

Lemma 11 Let $k$ and $m$ be integers with $0 < m \leq \frac{k}{1+g(k)}$ and $\gcd(m, k) = 1$. Then $P(k) > (g(m) - 1)k$.

4 Proofs

Since in the proof of Theorem 2 we use Proposition 4, we start with the proof of the latter result.

Proof of Proposition 4. Let $k$ be arbitrary with $1 < k < 5.5 \cdot 10^5$. Let $q_1 < q_2 < q_3 < \ldots$ be the primes $> tk$ with $t = 1$ if $k$ is even and $t = 2$ if $k$ is odd, respectively. We find the first index $i$ such that $q_i - tk$ is a prime. For all $k$ in the considered interval we found $i \leq 34$. If $k + 2$ is a prime then let $q = k + 2$, otherwise set $q = q_i$ with the above defined index $i$. A calculation with Maple based upon Lemma 5 ensures that for $k > 210$ we have $q \leq p_{\varphi(k)}$. Thus there exist two primes $\leq p_{\varphi(k)}$ being coprime to $k$ in the same residue class modulo $k$, which proves that $k$ is not a $P$-integer in this case. Finally, for $k \leq 210$ we
check by Maple the first \( \varphi(k) \) primes not dividing \( k \) to get the assertion of the proposition. \( \square \)

**Proof of Theorem 2.** Let \( k \) be a \( P \)-integer with \( \ell(k) > \log k \). Assume first that \( k \geq 10^{90} \). We split the proof of this case into two parts. Suppose first that \( k < (\omega(k) + 2)^{20} \). Then, since we know that \( \omega(k) \log(\ell(k)) \leq \log(k) \), we obtain

\[
\omega(k) \leq \frac{\log(k)}{\log_2(k)}.
\]

Hence using our assumption for \( k \) we get

\[
k < \left( \frac{\log(k)}{\log_2(k) + 2} \right)^{20}.
\]

This implies that \( k < 10^{90} \), which is a contradiction, and the statement follows in this case. Suppose next that we have \( k \geq (\omega(k) + 2)^{20} \). Let

\[
h = \left\lfloor \frac{0.92 \log(k)}{2} \right\rfloor + 1.
\]

Then

\[
h < 0.946 \log(k) < \log(k).
\]

Hence by Lemma 5 (ii)

\[
p_h < 0.946 \log(k) < \log(k).
\]

Let \( m \) be the product of the first \( h \) primes coprime to \( k \). Since \( p_h < \log(k) < \ell(k) \), by assumption, we see that \( m \) is indeed the product of all the first \( h \) primes. Hence

\[
m < p_h^h < e^{0.946 \log(k)} < \frac{k}{\omega(k) + 2}
\]

since we assumed \( \omega(k) + 2 \leq k^{\frac{1}{10}} \). Thus by Lemmas 10 and 11, we have

\[
P(k) > (g(m) - 1)k \geq (2p_{h-1} - 1)k.
\]

Now

\[
h - 1 \geq 0.92 \frac{\log(k)}{\log_2(k)} - 1 > 0.894 \frac{\log(k)}{\log_2(k)}.
\]

Hence by Lemma 5 (i)

\[
p_{h-1} \geq X \left( \log(X) + \log_2(X) - \frac{3}{2} \right)
\]
where \( X = 0.894 \frac{\log(k)}{\log_2(k)} \). Let

\[
F(k) = 2X \left( \log(X) + \frac{3}{2} \right) k - k \log(k) - k \log_2(k) - k.
\]

Then \( F(k) = k \log(k) f(k) \) with

\[
f(k) := \frac{1.788}{\log_2(k)} \left( \log(X) + \frac{3}{2} \right) - 1 - \frac{\log_2(k)}{\log(k)} - \frac{1}{\log(k)}.
\]

Observe that \( f(k) \) is an increasing function of \( k \) and hence \( f(k) \geq f(10^{90}) \), since \( k \geq 10^{90} \). As \( f(10^{90}) \geq 0.0803 \), we find that \( F(k) > 0 \) which implies that \( P(k) > k \log(k) + k \log_2(k) > p_k \geq p_{\phi(k) + \omega(k)} \). Hence \( k \) is not a \( P \)-integer. This contradiction proves the theorem for \( k \geq 10^{90} \) with \( \ell(k) > \log(k) \).

Assume now that \( k < 10^{90} \). By Proposition 4 we may suppose that \( 5.5 \cdot 10^5 \leq k < 10^{90} \). We divide the interval \([5.5 \cdot 10^5, 10^{90}]\) into sub-intervals and assign a value \( h \) to each interval as follows. Let \( v_0 = 10^{90} \). The largest integer \( h \) such that \( p_h < \log(10^{90}) \) is 46. We set our initial sub-interval as \([u_0, v_0) = [10^{87}, 10^{90}]\), \( \alpha_0 = 87 \) and \( h_0 = h = 46 \). For any \( k \) with \( \ell(k) > \log(k) \) in this interval we have \( g(k) = \omega(k) + 1 < \log(k) + 1 < 209 \). We check that

\[
m_0 := \prod_{j=1}^{46} p_j < \frac{10^{87}}{210} \leq \frac{k}{g(k) + 1}.
\]

Now we proceed inductively. Let \( i \geq 1 \) and take \( h_i = h_0 - i \). We define the sub-interval \([u_i, v_i)\) as \([10^{\alpha_i}, 10^{\alpha_i - 1})\) satisfying the following properties:

\[
p_{h_i} < \alpha_i \log(10)
\]

and

\[
m_i := \prod_{j=1}^{h_0 - i} p_j < \frac{10^{\alpha_i}}{\alpha_{i-1} \log(10) + 2}.
\]

Let \( k \in [u_i, v_i) \) with \( \ell(k) > \log(k) \). Then \( p_{h_i} < \log(k) \) and hence by the assumption on \( k \), \( m_i \) is the product of the first \( h_i \) primes, and \( \gcd(m_i, k) = 1 \). Suppose that

\[
g(m_i) - 1 - \alpha_{i-1} \log(10) - \log(\alpha_{i-1} \log(10)) > 0.
\]

Then, since \( k \leq 10^{\alpha_{i-1}} \), we find by Lemma 11 and Lemma 5 (ii) that

\[
P(k) > k \log(k) + k \log_2(k) > p_k \geq p_{\phi(k) + \omega(k)}
\]

and hence \( k \in [u_i, v_i) \) is not a \( P \)-integer.

In Table 1 we give the values \( h_i = h, \alpha_i = \alpha \), and the exact value of \( g(m) \) with \( m = m_i \) from Table 1 of [4]. For these values, we check that (1), (2)
and (3) are satisfied and hence we conclude that \( k < 10^8 \). Now consider \( k \) in Table 1

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<tr>
<th>( h )</th>
<th>7</th>
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the intervals \([3 \cdot 10^7, 10^8)\) with \( h = 7 \) and \([5.5 \cdot 10^5, 3 \cdot 10^7)\) with \( h = 6 \) and \( g(m) = 22 \), respectively. Then conditions (1), (2) and (3) are satisfied again, showing that \( k \) is not a \( P \)-integer. Hence the statement follows. \( \square \)

**Proof of Theorem 3.** Assume first that \( x \geq 1000 \) and put \( k = \prod \text{p} \). Set \( m := \prod \text{p} \) with \( y = 1.777x \). First we show that by these choices we have \( m \leq k/(1 + g(k)) \). This inequality can be rewritten as

\[
1 + g(k) \leq \frac{\exp(2\vartheta(x))}{\exp(\vartheta(y))}.
\]

Using Lemma 9, it is sufficient to show that

\[
1 + 2\pi(x)^{2+2\log(\pi(x))} \leq \exp(2\vartheta(x) - \vartheta(1.777x)).
\]

With the help of Maple, by Lemmas 6 and 7 this can be seen to be true whenever \( x \geq 12000 \). For \( 1000 \leq x < 12000 \) the assertion can be checked by calculating the exact values of the functions \( \pi(x) \) and \( \vartheta(x) \).

Now we show that (still with \( x \geq 1000 \)) we have \( (g(m) - 1)k \geq p_{\varphi(k) + \omega(k)} \). By Lemma 11 this implies the statement. To prove this, observe that \( g(m) > \)
\( \omega(m) = \pi(y) - \pi(x) \). Hence using Lemma 5 (ii) it is sufficient to check that

\[
\pi(1.777x) - \pi(x) \geq \left( \prod_{p \leq x} \left( 1 - \frac{1}{p} \right) + \frac{\pi(x)}{\prod_{p \leq x} p} \right) (\vartheta(x) + \log(\vartheta(x)))
\]

for \( x \geq 1000 \). Again, by the help of Lemmas 6, 7 and 8 this inequality can be verified for \( x \geq 12000 \) with Maple. Further, for \( 1000 \leq x < 12000 \) the assertion can be proved by calculating the exact values of the expressions involved. Hence the statement is valid when \( x \geq 1000 \).

Assume now that \( x < 1000 \). Then we check the values of \( k \) one by one. For \( k \) given, let \( q_1 = p_{\pi(k)+1} \) and \( q_2 = p_{\pi(k)+2} \). A calculation by Maple shows that for \( k > 30 \) we have \( q_2 \leq p_{\varphi(k)+\omega(k)} \), and also that one of \( q_1, q_2 - k \) is a prime. Finally, as \( k = 2, 6, 30 \) are \( P \)-integers indeed, the statement follows. \( \Box \)

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References


