

# .121221222... Is Not Quadratic

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## ABSTRACT

In this note, we show that if  $b > 1$  is an integer,  $f(X) \in \mathbb{Q}[X]$  is an integer valued quadratic polynomial and  $K > 0$  is any constant, then the  $b$ -adic number

$$\sum_{n \geq 0} \frac{a_n}{b^{f(n)}},$$

where  $a_n \in \mathbb{Z}$  and  $1 \leq |a_n| \leq K$  for all  $n \geq 0$ , is neither rational nor quadratic.

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## Introduction

There are many studies dealing with criteria to decide, from their base  $b$  expansions, the irrationality or transcendence of real numbers. For example, it is an easy application of Ridout's Theorem in Diophantine approximations that a number of the form

$$\sum_{n \geq 0} \frac{a_n}{b^{u_n}}$$

is transcendental whenever  $b > 1$  is an integer,  $a_n$  are integers which are bounded,  $(u_n)_{n \geq 0}$  is a sequence of positive integers with  $\liminf_n u_{n+1}/u_n > 1$  and  $a_n \neq 0$  for

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infinitely many  $n$ . A stronger result appears in [2], where it is shown that if  $(u_n)_{n \geq 0}$  is a sequence of positive integers such that the estimate

$$\#\{n \leq x : u_n < x\} < cx^\delta \tag{1}$$

holds for large enough values of  $x$ , where  $c$  is some constant, then

$$\sum_{n \geq 0} \frac{1}{2^{u_n}} \tag{2}$$

cannot be algebraic of degree smaller than  $1/\delta$ . In particular, if estimate (1) holds for a sequence of  $\delta$  tending to zero, then the number shown at (2) is transcendental. While the above result is too weak to allow one to decide if

$$z = \sum_{n \geq 0} \frac{1}{2^{n^2}}$$

is quadratic or not, in [2] it is shown that most binary digits of  $z^2$  are 0 and therefore  $z$  is not quadratic (the stronger assertion that  $z$  is fact transcendental follows from known results about the transcendence of values of theta functions at algebraic arguments, as is shown in [3, 5]). In this note, we generalize the above result in two ways: by replacing  $n^2$  with any quadratic polynomial which is integer valued, and by allowing arbitrary coefficients subject to the restriction that they are bounded and nonzero.

In what follows, for a positive integer  $n$  we write  $\tau(n)$  for the number of divisors of  $n$ . For a real number  $x > 1$  we write  $\log x$  for the natural logarithm of  $x$ . We use  $p$  to denote a prime number. We use the Vinogradov symbols  $\gg$  and  $\ll$ , as well as the Landau symbols  $O$ ,  $o$ , and  $\asymp$ , with their regular meanings. Recall that  $A \ll B$ ,  $B \gg A$ , and  $A = O(B)$  are all equivalent and mean that  $|A| \leq c|B|$  holds with some positive constant  $c$ , and that  $A \asymp B$  means that both  $A \ll B$  and  $B \ll A$  hold. Finally,  $A = o(B)$  means that the ratio  $A/B$  tends to zero. All implied constants may depend on the given data.

### 1. The main result

Our main result is the following:

**Theorem 1.1.** *Let  $b > 1$  be an integer,  $f(X)$  be an integer valued quadratic polynomial with positive leading term and  $K > 1$  be any real number. Then the number*

$$z = \sum_{n \geq 0} \frac{a_n}{b^{f(n)}} \tag{3}$$

*is not algebraic of degree  $\leq 2$  provided that  $a_n \in \mathbb{Z}$  is such that  $1 \leq |a_n| \leq K$  holds for all positive integers  $n$ .*

Since the number which appears in the title of this article is

$$.2222\dots - .101001000\dots = \frac{2}{9} - \sum_{k \geq 0} \frac{1}{10^{k(k+3)/2+1}},$$

we get that this number is not rational or quadratic. We point out that it is not known whether this number is transcendental. (See also [1] where a base 3 variant of this number appears.) We also mention that Duverney [4] proved that if  $q \geq 2$  is an integer, then

$$\sum_{n \geq 0} \frac{1}{q^{n(n+1)/2}}$$

is neither rational nor quadratic, which is a particular instance of our Theorem 1.1.

## 2. The proof

The proof of our Theorem 1.1 uses some elements from [7], although it is somewhat easier.

We begin by simplifying the problem. Replacing  $n$  by  $n + n_0$  where  $n_0$  is any fixed positive integer, we may assume that  $a_n \neq 0$  for all  $n \geq n_0$ . Multiplying  $z$  by  $b^{f(0)}$ , we may assume that  $f(0) = 0$ . Let

$$Uz^2 + Vz + W = 0 \tag{4}$$

be an equation with integer coefficients  $U, V, W$ , not all zero. Let us prove that  $U \neq 0$ . Indeed, if  $U = 0$ , then  $V \neq 0$  because otherwise  $U = V = W = 0$ . Replacing  $z$  by  $Vz + W$  (which can be done by replacing  $a_0$  by  $Va_0 + W$ ,  $a_n$  by  $Va_n$  for all  $n > 0$  and  $K$  by  $K(|V| + |W|)$ ), it follows that it suffices to show that  $z \neq 0$ . However, if  $z = 0$ , we then get the equation

$$\frac{A_n}{b^{f(n)}} = -\frac{a_{n+1}}{b^{f(n+1)}} - \sum_{m \geq n+2} \frac{a_m}{b^{f(m)}}, \tag{5}$$

where  $A_n$  is an integer. Since  $f(n + 1) - f(n)$  is a linear polynomial with positive leading term which is integer valued, it follows that  $f(n + 1) - f(n) \geq n + c$  where  $c$  is a constant. Equation (5) now shows that

$$|A_n| \ll \frac{1}{b^{f(n+1)-f(n)}} \ll \frac{1}{b^n},$$

which for large  $n$  implies that  $A_n = 0$ . Using again equation (5) we deduce that

$$\frac{a_{n+1}}{b^{f(n+1)}} = - \sum_{m \geq n+2} \frac{a_m}{b^{f(m)}},$$

which, by the same argument as above, leads to

$$|a_{n+1}| \ll \frac{1}{b^{f(n+2)-f(n+1)}} \ll \frac{1}{b^n},$$

which is impossible for large  $n$  because  $|a_{n+1}| \geq 1$ .

We may therefore assume that  $U \neq 0$ . The above equation (4) is equivalent to

$$(Uz + V)^2 + (4UW - V^2) = 0.$$

By replacing  $z$  by  $Uz + V$  (which can be done by replacing  $a_0$  by  $Ua_0 + V$ ,  $a_n$  by  $Ua_n$  for all  $n > 0$  and  $K$  by  $K(|U| + |V|)$ ), it follows that it suffices to show that  $z^2 \notin \mathbb{Z}$ . Let  $d = \gcd\{f(n) \mid n \geq 0\}$ . By replacing  $f(x)$  by  $f(x)/d$  and  $b$  by  $b^d$ , it follows that we may assume that  $d = 1$ . Since  $d = 1$  and  $f(0) = 0$ , it follows that we may write  $f(X) = aX(X + 1)/2 + bX$ , where  $a = f(2) - f(1) \in \mathbb{Z} \setminus \{0\}$ ,  $b = 2f(1) - f(2) \in \mathbb{Z}$ ,  $a$  and  $b$  are coprime if  $a$  is odd and  $a/2$  and  $b$  are coprime if  $a$  is even. The relation  $z^2 \in \mathbb{Z}$  is equivalent to

$$\sum_{n \geq 0} \frac{c_n}{b^n} \in \mathbb{Z}, \tag{6}$$

where

$$c_n := \sum_{\substack{(u,v) \\ f(u)+f(v)=n}} a_u a_v.$$

We observe that  $n = f(u) + f(v)$  if and only if

$$4an + (a + 2b)^2 = (au + av + a + 2b)^2 + (au - av)^2.$$

Thus, if we denote by  $r_2(n)$  the number of ways of writing  $n$  as a sum of two squares of integers, we have  $c_n \ll r_2(4an + (a + 2b)^2)$ . Furthermore, it is known that if

$$n = \prod_{i=1}^k p_i^{\alpha_i}$$

is the prime factorization of  $n$ , then  $r_2(n) = 0$  if there exists  $j \in \{1, \dots, k\}$  such that  $p_j \equiv 3 \pmod{4}$  and  $\alpha_j$  is odd, and

$$r_2(n) \leq \{ (u, v) \in \mathbb{Z}^2 : u^2 + v^2 = n \} = 4 \prod_{\substack{1 \leq i \leq k \\ p_i \equiv 1 \pmod{4}}} (\alpha_i + 1) \leq \tau(n),$$

otherwise. In particular,  $c_n \ll \tau(4an + (a + 2b)^2)$ . We shall prove the theorem only when  $a$  is odd, and we will indicate how to adapt the proof when  $a$  is even. Our strategy will be to prove that Theorem 1.1 is a consequence of the following lemma.

**Lemma 2.1.** *For a positive real number  $x$  we write  $t(x) := \log x$ ,  $m(x) := \lfloor t(x)^{1/3} \rfloor$  and  $s(x) := \lfloor t^2(x) \rfloor$ . There exists an infinite set  $\mathcal{A}$  of positive integers  $n$  such that the following properties hold.*

- (i)  $1 \leq |c_n| \ll 1$ ,
- (ii)  $c_{n \pm i} = 0$  for all  $i = 1, \dots, m(n)$ ,
- (iii)  $\tau(4a(n+i) + (a+2b)^2) < \exp(t(n)^{1/4})$  for all  $i = 1, \dots, s(n)$ .

Let us start by showing that, as claimed, in case  $a$  is odd Theorem 1.1 is a consequence of this lemma. Suppose, hence, Lemma 2.1 proved. For  $n \in \mathcal{A}$  write equation (6) as

$$\sum_{m < n} \frac{c_m}{b^m} \in - \sum_{m \geq n} \frac{c_m}{b^m} + \mathbb{Z}.$$

By condition (ii) of Lemma 2.1, the above equation leads to an equation of the form

$$\frac{B_n}{b^{n-m(n)}} = \frac{c_n}{b^n} + \sum_{n+m(n) \leq m \leq n+s(n)} \frac{c_m}{b^m} + \sum_{m > n+s(n)} \frac{c_m}{b^m},$$

where  $B_n$  is an integer. Clearly, by condition (iii) of Lemma 2.1, we have

$$\begin{aligned} \sum_{n+m(n) \leq m \leq n+s(n)} \frac{c_m}{b^m} &\ll \sum_{n+m(n) \leq m \leq n+s(n)} \frac{\tau(4am + (a+2b)^2)}{b^m} \\ &\ll \frac{s(n) \exp(t(n)^{1/4})}{b^{n+m(n)}} < \frac{1}{b^{n+\frac{m(n)}{2}}}, \end{aligned}$$

where the last inequality above holds for large  $n$ . Once  $m$  is large, we have that  $\tau(4am + (a+2b)^2) < m$ ; hence,

$$\begin{aligned} \sum_{m > n+s(n)} \frac{c_m}{b^m} &\ll \sum_{m > n+s(n)} \frac{\tau(4am + (a+2b)^2)}{b^m} < \sum_{m > n+s(n)} \frac{m}{b^m} \\ &\ll \frac{n}{b^{n+s(n)}} < \frac{1}{b^{n+\frac{m(n)}{2}}}, \end{aligned}$$

where the last inequality holds for large values of  $n$ . Thus, for large  $n \in \mathcal{A}$ , we have

$$\frac{B_n}{b^{n-m(n)}} = \frac{c_n}{b^n} + O\left(\frac{1}{b^{n+\frac{m(n)}{2}}}\right). \tag{7}$$

Using the fact that  $|c_n| \ll 1$  (see (i) of Lemma 2.1), the above relation shows that

$$|B_n| \ll \frac{1}{b^{m(n)}},$$

and since  $B_n$  is an integer, it follows that  $B_n = 0$  for large  $n$ . This together with equation (7) leads to

$$c_n = O\left(\frac{1}{b^{m(n)/2}}\right),$$

which is impossible for large  $n$  because by (i) of Lemma 2.1 we have that  $c_n$  is a nonzero integer.

It remains to prove Lemma 2.1.

*Proof of Lemma 2.1.* Let  $g(X, Y) \in \mathbb{Q}[X, Y]$  be the quadratic polynomial given by  $g(X, Y) = (2aX + 2b)^2 + a^2(2Y + 1)^2$ . We recall the following result from [6].

**Theorem 2.2.** *Let  $P(X, Y) \in \mathbb{Z}[X, Y]$  be a polynomial of degree two of the form*

$$P(X, Y) = AX^2 + BXY + CY^2 + DX + EY + F$$

*with  $\gcd(A, B, C, D, E, F) = 1$ , irreducible in  $\mathbb{Q}[X, Y]$ , which represents arbitrarily large odd numbers and depends essentially on two variables. Then*

(i)

$$\frac{x}{\log x} \ll \sum_{\substack{p \leq x \\ p=P(r,s)}} 1,$$

*if  $\Delta = AF^2 - BEF + CE^2 + (B^2 - 4AC)G = 0$  or  $\Delta_1 = B^2 - 4AC$  is a perfect square,*

(ii)

$$\frac{x}{(\log x)^{3/2}} \asymp \sum_{\substack{p \leq x \\ p=P(r,s)}} 1,$$

*otherwise.*

One checks now immediately that

$$g(X, Y) = (4a^2)X^2 + (4a^2)Y^2 + (8ab)X + (4a^2)Y + (4b^2 + a^2)$$

satisfies all the conditions (i) of the above Theorem 2.2. Let

$$\mathcal{C}(x) := \{p > x : p \text{ prime, } p = g(r, s) \text{ for some } r, s \in \mathbb{Z}_{>0}\}.$$

It then follows that for large enough  $x$ , we have  $\#\mathcal{C}(x) \gg x/\log x$ . Of the primes in  $\mathcal{C}(x)$ , only a subset  $\mathcal{C}_1(x)$  of cardinality  $O(x^{1/2})$  satisfies that  $|r - s| \leq n_0 + 1 + 2|b/a|$  and  $2r \leq 1 + 2|b/a|$ . Thus, we may look only at the primes  $p \in \mathcal{C}(x) \setminus \mathcal{C}_1(x)$ . Such primes satisfy the conditions  $|r - s| > n_0 + 1 + 2|b/a|$  and  $2r > 1 + 2|b/a|$ .

If we restrict our attention to such primes, we see that the integer  $r - s$  takes the same sign in a subset  $\mathcal{C}_2(x)$  of them with  $\#\mathcal{C}_2(x) \gg x/\log x$ . We will assume

that  $r > s$ , for the case  $r < s$  can be dealt with in a similar way. Setting  $u = r + s$  and  $v = r - s - 1$ , we note that both  $u$  and  $v$  are positive integers greater than  $n_0$ ,  $au + av + a + 2b = 2ar + 2b$  and  $au - av = a(2s + 1)$ . Thus,  $p = g(r, s) = (au + av + a + 2b)^2 + (au - av)^2$ . Therefore, if we set  $n(p) = (p - (a + 2b)^2)/4a$  for the primes  $p \in \mathcal{C}_2(x)$ , we have that  $n(p) = f(u) + f(v)$ . We now show that for most primes in  $\mathcal{C}_2(x)$ , the two pairs  $(u, v)$  and  $(v, u)$  with  $u$  and  $v$  constructed as above are the only ones such that  $n(p) = f(u) + f(v)$ .

Since  $p$  is prime, it follows that the only integer solutions  $(\alpha, \beta)$  of the equation  $p = \alpha^2 + \beta^2$  are  $(\alpha, \beta) = (\pm\lambda, \pm\nu)$ , where  $\lambda = 2ar + 2b$  and  $\mu = a(2s + 1)$ . We may hence assume that  $au_1 + av_1 + a + 2b = \varepsilon_1\lambda$  and  $au_1 - av_1 = \varepsilon_2\mu$ , where  $\varepsilon_1, \varepsilon_2 \in \{\pm 1\}$ . When  $(\varepsilon_1, \varepsilon_2) \in \{(1, 1), (1, -1)\}$ , we get  $(u_1, v_1) = (u, v)$  and  $(v, u)$ , respectively, which are already accounted for. When  $(\varepsilon_1, \varepsilon_2) = (-1, -1)$ , we get  $au_1 + av_1 + a + 2b = -2ar - 2b$ , therefore  $u_1 + v_1 = -2r - 1 - 2b/a$ , which is impossible because the right hand side of this equation is negative and the left hand side of it is positive, while when  $(\varepsilon_1, \varepsilon_2) = (-1, 1)$ , we get  $u_1 = s - r - 2b/a$ , which is again negative because  $r - s$  is positive and  $> 2b/a$ . Thus, for the primes  $p \in \mathcal{C}_2(x)$ , the corresponding numbers  $n(p)$  satisfy that  $c_{n(p)} = 2a_u a_v$ , and since both  $u$  and  $v$  are larger than  $n_0$ , it follows that  $c_{n(p)}$  fulfills (i) of Lemma 2.1. We now show that most of the numbers  $n(p)$  constructed from the primes  $p \in \mathcal{C}_2(x)$  fulfill both (ii) and (iii) of Lemma 2.1 when  $x$  is large.

For (ii), it suffices to show that  $p \pm 4ai$  is not a sum of two squares for  $i = 1, \dots, \lfloor t(x)^{1/3} \rfloor$ . Fix a number  $i$ . If  $p \pm 4ai$  is a sum of two squares, then it either is coprime to all primes  $q > t^2(x)$  which are congruent to 3 modulo 4, or it is divisible by the square of one such prime.

For every prime number  $q$  let

$$\rho(q) = \begin{cases} 2, & \text{if } t^2(x) < q < x \text{ and } q \equiv 3 \pmod{4}, \\ 1, & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

By Brun's Sieve, the number  $N_i$  of primes  $p \in \mathcal{C}_2(x)$  such that  $p + 4ai$  is free of primes  $q > t^2(x)$  which are congruent to 3 modulo 4 is

$$N_i \ll x \prod_{q < x} \left(1 - \frac{\rho(q)}{q}\right) \ll \frac{x \log \log x}{(\log x)^{3/2}},$$

and the same is true for  $p - 4ai$ . On the other hand, the number  $N'_i$  of primes  $p \in \mathcal{C}_2(x)$  such that  $p + 4ai < x + 4a \log x < 2x$  is a multiple of  $q^2$  for some  $q > t^2(x)$ , certainly does not exceed

$$N'_i \leq \sum_{q > t^2(x)} \frac{2x}{q^2} \ll \frac{x}{t^2(x)} < \frac{x \log \log x}{(\log x)^{3/2}},$$

and the same is true for  $p - 4ai$ . If we let  $i$  vary from 1 to  $\lfloor t(x)^{1/3} \rfloor$ , we get that the number  $M$  of primes  $p \in \mathcal{C}_2(x)$  such that  $n(p)$  does not satisfy condition (ii) of

Lemma 2.1, verifies

$$M \leq 2 \sum_{i \leq t(x)^{1/3}} (N_i + N'_i) \ll \frac{xt(x)^{1/3} \log \log x}{(\log x)^{3/2}} = \frac{x \log \log x}{(\log x)^{7/6}}.$$

Since  $\#\mathcal{C}_2(x) \gg x/\log x$ , we get that for most of the primes  $p \in \mathcal{C}_2(x)$ , the number  $n(p)$  satisfies (ii) of Lemma 2.1. Finally, we will take care of condition (iii) of Lemma 2.1. Since  $\#\mathcal{C}_2(x) \gg x/\log x$  and there are  $O(x/\log^2 x)$  primes  $p \leq x/\log x$ , we may assume that every prime  $p$  in  $\mathcal{C}_2(x)$  satisfies  $p > x/\log x$ . When  $p \in \mathcal{C}_2(x)$ , we have that the inequality

$$\sqrt{x} < \frac{x}{\log x} < p + 4ai < x + 4at^2(x) < 2x$$

holds for all  $i \leq t^2(x)$ . Fix a value for  $i$ . Since

$$\sum_{n < 2x} \tau(n) = O(x \log x),$$

it follows that only  $O(x \log x \exp(-(0.5 \log x)^{1/4}))$  primes  $p < x$  can exist such that

$$\tau(p + 4ai) > \exp((\log(p + 4ai))^{1/4}) > \exp((0.5 \log x)^{1/4}) \tag{8}$$

holds. Summing over  $i$ , we get that only  $O(x(\log x)^3 \exp(-(0.5 \log x)^{1/4}))$  primes  $p < x$  can exist such that inequality (8) holds for some positive integer  $i \leq t^2(x)$ . Since this last function is  $o(x/\log x)$ , and our set  $\mathcal{C}_2(x)$  of primes satisfies  $\#\mathcal{C}_2(x) \gg x/\log x$ , it follows that for most of the primes  $p \in \mathcal{C}_2(x)$ , the number  $n(p)$  satisfies both conditions (ii) and (iii) of Lemma 2.1. Putting  $n(p)$  in  $\mathcal{A}$  for such primes  $p \leq x$  and letting  $x$  tend to infinity, we complete the proof of the lemma.  $\square$

We end with some indications about how to proceed in the case in which  $a$  is even. The proof in such case is similar to the one we have just described for  $a$  odd. Only the polynomial  $g(X, Y)$  is different. For example, when  $a/2$  and  $b$  are of different parities, then  $n = f(u) + f(v)$  if and only if  $an + (a/2 + b)^2 = (a(u + v + 1)/2 + b)^2 + (a(u - v)/2)^2$ . We may then take  $g(X, Y) = (aX + b)^2 + (a(2Y + 1)/2)^2$ , and setting  $u = r + s$  and  $v = r - s - 1$ , one checks easily that  $ar + b = a(u + v + 1)/2 + b$  and  $a(u - v)/2 = a(2s + 1)/2$ . Hence,  $an + (a/2 + b)^2 = (a(u + v + 1)/2 + b)^2 + (a(u - v)/2)^2$  whenever  $an + (a/2 + b)^2 = g(r, s)$ . Finally, when  $a/2$  and  $b$  are both odd, we then have  $an/2 + ((a + 2b)/4)^2 = (au/2 + (a + 2b)/4)^2 + (av/2 + (a + 2b)/4)^2$  and we may take  $g(X, Y) = (aX/2 + (a + 2b)/4)^2 + (aY/2 + (a + 2b)/4)^2$ . In both cases above, one checks that condition (i) from the statement of Theorem 2.2 is fulfilled and so the previous argument extends in these cases as well.

### 3. Remarks

It can be seen that the number shown at (3) is irrational under the weaker condition that  $a_n \neq 0$  for infinitely many  $n$ . It is probably true that the number shown at (3) is not quadratic under this weaker condition either, but we could not find a proof of this fact. It can also be seen that the present proof of Theorem 1.1 shows that our result remains also valid if instead of  $a_n$  remaining bounded we impose the condition that  $a_n$  does not grow too fast with respect to  $n$ . (For example, the conclusion of Theorem 1.1 remains true when  $|a_n|$  stays smaller than a fixed power of  $\log n$ .) Our proof also shows that

$$\sum_{n \text{ perfect power}} \frac{a_n}{b^n},$$

where  $a_n$  satisfy the hypothesis from the statement of Theorem 1.1 is not algebraic of degree at most 2. (For this, note that if  $x$  is large, then there are at most  $O(x^{5/6})$  positive integers  $n < x$  which are a sum of two perfect powers but not a sum of two squares.) A similar method can be used to show that

$$\sum_{n \text{ powerful}} \frac{a_n}{b^n},$$

where  $a_n$  satisfy again the hypothesis from the statement of Theorem 1.1 is not algebraic of degree at most 2, but we shall provide the details of such an argument with a different occasion.

More generally, one can ask if it is true that given a polynomial  $f(X) \in \mathbb{Q}[X]$  which is integer valued and of degree  $d \geq 3$  then

$$z = \sum_{n \geq 0} \frac{a_n}{b^{f(n)}}$$

is not algebraic of degree smaller than  $d$  whenever  $|a_n| \leq K$  assuming either  $a_n \neq 0$  for all  $n$  or just for infinitely many of them. We do not know how to deal with such problems.

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