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# Square-free values of the Carmichael function

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## Abstract

We obtain an asymptotic formula for the number of square-free values among  $p - 1$ , for primes  $p \leq x$ , and we apply it to derive the following asymptotic formula for  $L(x)$ , the number of square-free values of the Carmichael function  $\lambda(n)$  for  $1 \leq n \leq x$ ,

$$L(x) = (\kappa + o(1)) \frac{x}{\ln^{1-\alpha} x},$$

where  $\alpha = 0.37395\dots$  is the Artin constant, and  $\kappa = 0.80328\dots$  is another absolute constant.

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## 1. Introduction

Recall that an integer  $s \geq 1$  is called *square-free* if it is not divisible by the square of any prime number. We denote by  $\mathcal{S}$  the set of square-free positive integers, and let  $\varphi(n)$  to be the number of positive  $m \leq n$ , coprime to  $n$ .

Clearly, if  $n$  has at least two odd prime divisors then  $4|\varphi(n)$ . The same way, if  $p^3|n$  for a prime  $p$  then  $p^2|\varphi(n)$ . Thus, for  $n \geq 5$ ,  $\varphi(n) \in \mathcal{S}$  if and only if  $n$  is of the form  $n = p^2, 2p^2, 2p$  or  $n = p$ , where  $p \geq 3$  is a prime such that  $p - 1 \in \mathcal{S}$ . Thus, denoting by

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$F(x)$  the number of positive integers  $n \leq x$  for which  $\varphi(n) \in \mathcal{S}$ , we obtain

$$F(x) = \pi_{\mathcal{S}f}(x) + \pi_{\mathcal{S}f}(x/2) + O(x^{1/2}/\ln x), \tag{1}$$

where  $\pi_{\mathcal{S}f}(x)$  is the number of primes  $p \leq x$  for which  $p - 1 \in \mathcal{S}$ .

First, we recall the asymptotic formula  $\pi_{\mathcal{S}f}(x) \sim \alpha\pi(x)$ , see [15] and Lemma 3 below, which shows that the density of primes  $p$  with  $p - 1 \in \mathcal{S}$  is given by the Artin constant

$$\alpha = \prod_p \left( 1 - \frac{1}{p(p-1)} \right) = 0.37395\dots,$$

see [4,12]. Together with (1), this estimate immediately produces an asymptotic formula for  $F(x)$ .

We recall that the Carmichael function  $\lambda(n)$  is defined to be the largest possible order of any element in the unit group of the residue ring modulo  $n \geq 1$ . More explicitly, for a prime power  $p^v$ , we have

$$\lambda(p^v) = \begin{cases} p^{v-1}(p-1) & \text{if } p \geq 3 \text{ or } v \leq 2, \\ 2^{v-2} & \text{if } p = 2 \text{ and } v \geq 3, \end{cases}$$

and for arbitrary  $n \geq 2$ ,

$$\lambda(n) = \text{lcm}(\lambda(p_1^{v_1}), \dots, \lambda(p_s^{v_s})),$$

where  $n = p_1^{v_1} \dots p_s^{v_s}$  is the prime factorization of  $n$ . One also has  $\lambda(1) = 1$ .

We use the asymptotic formula for  $F(x)$  in combination with a theorem of Wirsing in order to derive that  $L(x) \sim \kappa x \ln^{a-1} x$ , for some constant  $\kappa > 0$ , where  $L(x)$  is the number of positive integers  $n \leq x$ , for which  $\lambda(n) \in \mathcal{S}$ .

We remark that various arithmetic properties of  $\varphi(n)$  and  $\lambda(n)$  have been considered in the literature, see [2,7–10,14] and references therein, but the question about square-freeness appears to be new.

Throughout the paper, the implied constants in symbols ‘ $O$ ’ and ‘ $\ll$ ’ may depend, where obvious, on a certain parameter  $A > 0$ , and are absolute otherwise (we recall that  $U \ll V$  is equivalent to  $U = O(V)$ ). As usual,  $p$  always denotes a prime number, and  $\pi(x)$  is the number of primes  $p \leq x$ .

## 2. Necessary tools

Our results depend on some analytic results.

We recall that an arithmetic function  $f(n)$  is called *multiplicative* if  $f(nm) = f(n)f(m)$  for any integers  $n$  and  $m$  with  $\text{gcd}(n, m) = 1$ . Then the theorem of Wirsing [20] can be formulated as follows.

**Lemma 1.** Assume that a real-valued multiplicative function  $f(n)$  satisfies the following conditions:

- $f(n) \geq 0, n = 1, 2, \dots;$
- $f(p^v) \leq c_1 c_2^v, v = 2, 3, \dots,$  for some constants  $c_1, c_2$  with  $c_2 < 2;$
- there exists a constant  $\tau > 0$  such that

$$\sum_{p \leq x} f(p) = (\tau + o(1)) \frac{x}{\ln x}.$$

Then for any  $x \geq 0,$

$$\sum_{n \leq x} f(n) = \left( \frac{1}{e^{\gamma\tau} \Gamma(\tau)} + o(1) \right) \frac{x}{\ln x} \prod_{p \leq x} \sum_{v=0}^{\infty} \frac{f(p^v)}{p^v},$$

where  $\gamma$  is the Euler constant, and

$$\Gamma(s) = \int_0^{\infty} e^{-t} t^{s-1} dt$$

is the gamma function.

Finally, we use partial summation in the following form.

**Lemma 2.** For any function  $g(t),$  having a continuous derivative in the interval  $[1, n],$  and any sequence  $a_1, \dots, a_n,$  we have

$$\sum_{k=1}^n a_k g(k) = A(n)g(n) - \int_1^n A(t)g'(t) dt,$$

where

$$A(T) = \sum_{1 \leq k \leq T} a_k.$$

The following result has appeared already, without a proof, in [15]. A proof, however, can easily be obtained from the representation

$$\begin{aligned} \psi_{sf}(x) &= \sum_{1 \leq m \leq x^{1/2}} \mu(m)\psi(x, m^2, 1) \\ &= \sum_{1 \leq m \leq x^{1/5}} \mu(m)\psi(x, m^2, 1) + \sum_{x^{1/5} < m \leq x^{1/2}} \mu(m)\psi(x, m^2, 1), \end{aligned}$$

where

$$\psi_{\text{sf}}(x) = \sum_{\substack{1 \leq n \leq x \\ n \in \mathcal{S}}} \Lambda(n) \quad \text{and} \quad \psi(x, k, l) = \sum_{\substack{1 \leq n \leq x \\ n \equiv l \pmod{k}}} \Lambda(n)$$

and  $\Lambda(n)$  is the von Mangoldt function, that is,  $\Lambda(n) = \ln p$  if  $n$  is a power of a prime  $p$  and  $\Lambda(n) = 0$  otherwise. Now one can apply the Bombieri–Vinogradov theorem, see [5] to the first sum and the trivial bound  $\psi(x, k, l) \leq xk^{-1} \ln x$  to the second sum. Finally, partial summation produces the following statement.

**Lemma 3.** *For any constant  $A > 0$  we have*

$$\pi_{\text{sf}}(x) = \alpha \pi(x) + O\left(\frac{x}{\ln^A x}\right).$$

In particular, from (1), Lemma 3 and the prime number theorem we conclude that

$$F(X) = \frac{3\alpha}{2} \pi(x) + O(x \ln^{-2} x).$$

Now we establish an analogue of the Mertens formula.

**Lemma 4.** *There exists an absolute constant  $\eta$  such that*

$$\prod_{\substack{p \leq x \\ p-1 \in \mathcal{S}}} \left(1 + \frac{1}{p} + \frac{1}{p^2}\right) = \eta \ln^\alpha x + O(\ln^{\alpha-1} x). \tag{2}$$

**Proof.** In view of the fact that

$$\ln\left(1 + \frac{1}{p} + \frac{1}{p^2}\right) = \frac{1}{p} + O\left(\frac{1}{p^2}\right),$$

it is equivalent to prove that there exists an absolute constant  $\zeta$  such that

$$\rho_{\text{sf}}(x) = \sum_{\substack{p \leq x \\ p-1 \in \mathcal{S}}} \frac{1}{p} = \alpha \ln \ln x + \zeta + O(\ln^{-1} x).$$

Observe that

$$\sum_{\substack{p \leq x \\ p-1 \in \mathcal{S}}} \frac{\ln p}{p} = \frac{\pi_{\text{sf}}(x) \ln x}{x} + \int_2^x \frac{\ln t - 1}{t^2} \pi_{\text{sf}}(t) dt = \alpha \int_2^x \frac{\ln t - 1}{t^2} \pi(t) dt + O(1).$$

The same arguments also imply that

$$\sum_{p \leq x} \frac{\ln p}{p} = \int_2^x \frac{\ln t - 1}{t^2} \pi(t) dt + O(1)$$

and the Mertens theorem, see Theorem 3.1 of Chapter 1 in [19], yields

$$\mathfrak{G}_{\text{sf}}(x) = \sum_{\substack{p \leq x \\ p-1 \in \mathcal{S}}} \frac{\ln p}{p} = \alpha \ln x + r(x),$$

where  $r(x) = O(1)$ . Applying Lemma 2 we derive

$$\begin{aligned} \rho_{\text{sf}}(x) &= \frac{\mathfrak{G}_{\text{sf}}(x)}{\ln x} + \int_2^x \frac{\mathfrak{G}_{\text{sf}}(x)}{t \ln^2 t} dt \\ &= \frac{\alpha \ln x + r(x)}{\ln x} + \int_2^x \frac{\alpha \ln t + r(t)}{t \ln^2 t} dt \\ &= \alpha \ln \ln x - \alpha \ln \ln 2 + \alpha + \int_2^x \frac{r(t)}{t \ln^2 t} dt + O(\ln^{-1} x) \\ &= \alpha \ln \ln x - \alpha \ln \ln 2 + \alpha + \int_2^\infty \frac{r(t)}{t \ln^2 t} dt + O(\ln^{-1} x) \end{aligned}$$

(here the existence of the improper integral follows from  $r(t) = O(1)$ ).  $\square$

### 3. Square-free values of the Carmichael function

We note that  $\lambda(n) \in \mathcal{S}$  if and only if  $\lambda(p_i^{v_i}) \in \mathcal{S}$  for every  $i = 1, \dots, s$ , where  $n = p_1^{v_1} \dots p_s^{v_s}$  is the prime factorization of  $n$ . Hence  $\lambda(n) \in \mathcal{S}$  if and only if  $n$  is not divisible by 16 and is not divisible by  $p^3$  for  $p \geq 3$  and is composed of primes  $p$  with  $p - 1 \in \mathcal{S}$ . Thus Lemmas 1 and 3 imply an asymptotic result concerning  $L(x)$ .

**Theorem 5.** *Let  $\kappa = 15\eta/14e^{\gamma_2}\Gamma(\alpha)$  where  $\alpha$  is the Artin constant,  $\gamma$  is the Euler constant and  $\eta$  is defined in Lemma 4. Then*

$$L(x) = (\kappa + o(1)) \frac{x}{\ln^{1-\alpha} x}.$$

**Proof.** Let us consider the multiplicative function  $f(n)$  for which  $f(p^2) = f(p) = 1$  if  $p - 1 \in \mathcal{S}$  and  $f(p^v) = 0$  if either  $v \geq 3$  or  $p - 1 \notin \mathcal{S}$ , for each odd prime  $p$ . We also put  $f(2) = f(4) = f(8) = 1$  and  $f(2^v) = 0$  if  $v \geq 4$ .

Therefore, for  $n \geq 5$ ,  $\lambda(n) \in \mathcal{S}$  if and only if  $f(n) = 1$ . From Lemma 3 we see that the conditions of Lemma 1 are satisfied with  $\tau = \alpha$ , so we have

$$\begin{aligned} L(x) &= \sum_{n \leq x} f(n) + O(1) = \left( \frac{1}{e^{\gamma\alpha} \Gamma(\alpha)} + o(1) \right) \frac{x}{\ln x} \prod_{p \leq x} \sum_{v=0}^{\infty} \frac{f(p^v)}{p^v} \\ &= \left( \frac{1}{e^{\gamma\alpha} \Gamma(\alpha)} + o(1) \right) \frac{15x}{8 \ln x} \prod_{\substack{3 \leq p \leq x \\ p-1 \in \mathcal{S}}} \left( 1 + \frac{1}{p} + \frac{1}{p^2} \right) \\ &= \left( \frac{1}{e^{\gamma\alpha} \Gamma(\alpha)} + o(1) \right) \frac{15x}{14 \ln x} \prod_{\substack{2 \leq p \leq x \\ p-1 \in \mathcal{S}}} \left( 1 + \frac{1}{p} + \frac{1}{p^2} \right). \end{aligned}$$

Using (2) we derive the result.  $\square$

We now derive an upper bound for the number of square-free values of  $\lambda(n)$  in a short interval. Let  $L(x, y)$  denote the number of positive integers  $x - y \leq n \leq x$ , for which the Carmichael function  $\lambda(n) \in \mathcal{S}$ .

**Theorem 6.** For any  $x > y > 1$  we have

$$L(x, y) \ll \frac{y}{\ln^{1-\alpha} y}.$$

**Proof.** We merely drop the condition that relevant values of  $n$  must not be divisible by a cube of a prime and write  $L(x, y) \leq S(x, y)$ , where  $S(x, y)$  is the number of positive integers  $x - y \leq n \leq x$  such that  $\gcd(n, p) = 1$  for any  $p$  with  $p - 1 \notin \mathcal{S}$ . Combining the first bound of Corollary 4 with Corollary 2.3.1 in Section 2.6 of [11] we finish the proof.  $\square$

#### 4. Calculations

Unfortunately, it seems that there are no closed form analytic expressions for the constants  $\alpha$ ,  $\eta$  and  $\kappa$ .

Using PARI [3], and Lemma 4 (with primes up to  $4 \cdot 10^8$ ) we have obtained the following approximation for  $\eta$ :

$$\tilde{\eta} = \frac{1}{(\ln 4 \cdot 10^8)^\alpha} \prod_{\substack{p \leq 4 \cdot 10^8 \\ p-1 \in \mathcal{S}}} \left( 1 + \frac{1}{p} + \frac{1}{p^2} \right) = 2.1171\dots$$

which implies

$$\tilde{\kappa} = \frac{15\tilde{\eta}}{14e^{\gamma\alpha} \Gamma(\alpha)} = 0.80328\dots \tag{3}$$

We have also computed (in a rather straightforward fashion, without any serious efforts to optimize the calculations)  $\tilde{\kappa}(x) = L(x)x^{-1} \ln^{1-\alpha} x$  which exhibits a rather slow convergence to  $\kappa$ :

$x$	$\tilde{\kappa}(x)$	$x$	$\tilde{\kappa}(x)$	$x$	$\tilde{\kappa}(x)$
$10^7$	0.8585513...	$6 \cdot 10^7$	0.8518393...	$20 \cdot 10^7$	0.8482225...
$2 \cdot 10^7$	0.8556957...	$7 \cdot 10^7$	0.8513639...	$30 \cdot 10^7$	0.8471133...
$3 \cdot 10^7$	0.8542084...	$8 \cdot 10^7$	0.8508742...	$40 \cdot 10^7$	0.8463676...
$4 \cdot 10^7$	0.8531435...	$9 \cdot 10^7$	0.8505291...		
$5 \cdot 10^7$	0.8524153...	$10 \cdot 10^7$	0.8502255...		

Furthermore, we have also computed

$$\tilde{\kappa}(x, y) = (L(x + y) - L(x))((x + y) \ln^{\alpha-1}(x + y) - x \ln^{\alpha-1} x)^{-1},$$

where the convergence to the value (3) seems somewhat faster.

$y$	$\tilde{\kappa}(10^{20}, y)$	$y$	$\tilde{\kappa}(10^{20}, y)$	$y$	$\tilde{\kappa}(10^{20}, y)$
$10^6$	0.8215991...	$5 \cdot 10^6$	0.8194758...	$9 \cdot 10^6$	0.8186230...
$2 \cdot 10^6$	0.8203167...	$6 \cdot 10^6$	0.8191755...	$10 \cdot 10^6$	0.8188303...
$3 \cdot 10^6$	0.8190902...	$7 \cdot 10^6$	0.8193178...	$11 \cdot 10^6$	0.8188164...
$4 \cdot 10^6$	0.8183822...	$8 \cdot 10^6$	0.8189953...	$12 \cdot 10^6$	0.8186914...

$y$	$\tilde{\kappa}(10^{30}, y)$	$y$	$\tilde{\kappa}(2 \cdot 10^{30}, y)$	$y$	$\tilde{\kappa}(3 \cdot 10^{30}, y)$
$10^7$	0.8144590...	$10^7$	0.8137660...	$10^7$	0.8139725...
$2 \cdot 10^7$	0.8142472...	$2 \cdot 10^7$	0.8138552...	$2 \cdot 10^7$	0.8146238...
$3 \cdot 10^7$	0.8145223...	$3 \cdot 10^7$	0.8140572...	$3 \cdot 10^7$	0.8138039...
$4 \cdot 10^7$	0.8145319...	$4 \cdot 10^7$	0.8140761...	$4 \cdot 10^7$	0.8136268...

We remark that observing how calculations behave, we give much more trust to the numerical value of  $\kappa$  which follows from (3) rather than to the approximations from the above tables.

### 5. $k$ -Free values of the Carmichael function

We recall that an integer is said to be  $k$ -free if it is not divisible by the  $k$ th power of any prime number.

The feature of the Carmichael function that allowed us to prove Theorem 5 is that the arithmetic function  $\mu^2(\lambda(n))$  is multiplicative. The same fact holds for  $k$ -free values of  $\lambda(n)$ . More precisely, if  $\mathcal{S}_k$  is the set of integers which are  $k$ -free, then  $\lambda(n) \in \mathcal{S}_k$  if and only if  $\lambda(p_i^{k_i}) \in \mathcal{S}_k$  for every  $i = 1, \dots, v$  where  $n = p_1^{k_1} \dots p_v^{k_v}$ .

One observes that the same arguments which give Lemma 3, which has been outlined in Section 2, gives for any  $A > 0$ ,

$$\#\{p \leq x \mid p \in \mathcal{S}_k\} = \alpha_k \pi(x) + O\left(\frac{x}{\ln^A x}\right),$$

where

$$\alpha_k = \prod_p \left(1 - \frac{1}{p^{k-1}(p-1)}\right). \tag{4}$$

Accordingly, we obtain

$$\prod_{\substack{p \leq x \\ p-1 \in \mathcal{S}_k}} \ln\left(1 + \frac{1}{p} + \dots + \frac{1}{p^k}\right) = \eta_k \ln^{\alpha_k} x + O(\ln^{\alpha_k-1} x). \tag{5}$$

Next one notices that, if  $p > 3$ , then  $\lambda(p^m) \in \mathcal{S}_k$  if and only if  $m \leq k$  and  $p - 1 \in \mathcal{S}_k$  while  $\lambda(2^m) \in \mathcal{S}_k$  if and only if  $m < k + 3$ . Now the application of the Wirsing theorem given in Lemma 1 yields:

**Theorem 7.** *Let*

$$\kappa_k = \frac{2^{k+2} - 1}{2^{k+2} - 2} \cdot \frac{\eta_k}{e^{\gamma \alpha_k} \Gamma(\alpha_k)},$$

where  $\alpha_k$  is defined in (4) and  $\eta_k$  is defined by (5). Then

$$L_k(x) = (\kappa_k + o(1))x \ln^{1-\alpha_k} x.$$

Interestingly, the problem of enumerating the  $k$ -free values of the Euler function for  $k \geq 3$  seems to be more involved than in the case  $k = 2$ . For example, the corresponding  $n$  may have a more complicated structure with up to  $k$  prime divisors  $p$ , for which the arithmetic structure of  $p - 1$  must be studied simultaneously.

**6. Remarks**

The proof of Lemma 3 which we have indicated uses only a fraction of the power of the Bombieri–Vinogradov theorem because we estimate the sums over perfect squares of a given interval by the sum over all integers of that interval. In fact, there is a seemingly more suitable form of the Bombieri–Vinogradov theorem where the summation is taken over any polynomial sequence of moduli, see [6]. Unfortunately, it does not seem to improve the error terms in our results.



On the other hand, it is clear that the Extended Riemann Hypothesis implies a much better error in Lemma 3. Indeed, using the bound

$$\psi(x, m^2, 1) = \frac{x}{\varphi(m^2)} + O(x^{1/2} \ln^2 x)$$

(for example, see (1.32) in Chapter 1 of [4] or (5.12) in Chapter 7 of [19]) for  $m \leq x^{1/4}$ ; and  $\psi(x, k, l) \leq xk^{-1} \ln x$ , for  $m > x^{1/4}$ ; we obtain an error term of order  $x^{3/4+\varepsilon}$  for any  $\varepsilon > 0$ .

It is also clear that the above method can be used to count square-free and, more generally,  $k$ -free values among  $p + a$ , for any integer  $a$ .

We remark that the regular behavior of  $\tilde{\kappa}(x) - \kappa$ , exhibited in Section 4 may suggest the existence of the second main term in the asymptotic formula for  $L(x)$ . Maybe more detailed calculations, in a wide range, may help to clarify this matter.

Finally, it would be interesting to study how often the multiplicative order  $l_g(n)$  of a given integer  $g \geq 2$  is square-free. The number of prime divisors and the largest prime divisor of  $l_g(n)$  have been studied in [16, 18, 1, 19], respectively. An asymptotic formula for the number of primes  $p \leq x$  for which  $(p-1)/l_g(p)$  is square-free is given in [17]. Some arithmetic properties of  $\lambda(n)/l_g(n)$  have been studied in [13].

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