

## Isomorphisms of symplectic planes

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**Abstract.** Every nondesarguesian symplectic spread is also symplectic over its kernel. Any equivalence of nondesarguesian symplectic spreads preserves the resulting symplectic structures over the kernels.

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### 1 Introduction

A *spread* of a  $2n$ -dimensional vector space  $V$  is a set  $\Sigma$  of  $n$ -dimensional subspaces such that each nonzero vector is in one and only one member of  $\Sigma$ . A spread determines an affine plane  $\mathfrak{A}(\Sigma)$ , whose points are the vectors and whose lines are the translates of the members of  $\Sigma$ . A spread  $\Sigma$  of  $V$  is called *symplectic* if there is a nondegenerate alternating bilinear form  $(\ , \ )$  on  $V$  such that each  $X \in \Sigma$  is totally isotropic:  $(X, X) = 0$ . Then  $\mathfrak{A}(\Sigma)$  is called a *symplectic plane*. Finite symplectic planes have been studied, for example, in [5, 2, 9, 6, 7, 8, 1, 4]; finite ones in characteristic 2 have properties not shared by planes defined using arbitrary spreads.

The *kernel*  $\mathbf{K}(\mathfrak{A}(\Sigma))$  of the spread  $\Sigma$  or plane  $\mathfrak{A}(\Sigma)$  is the set of all additive endomorphisms  $g$  of  $V$  such that  $Xg \subseteq X$  for all  $X \in \Sigma$ . This is the largest skew field  $\mathbf{K}$  over which  $V$  can be viewed as a vector space  $V_{\mathbf{K}}$  such that  $\Sigma$  consists of subspaces. Note that  $\mathfrak{A}(\Sigma)$  and  $\Sigma$  are nondesarguesian precisely when  $\dim V_{\mathbf{K}} > 2$ .

Two spreads of  $V$  are called *equivalent* if there is an invertible semilinear transformation sending one to the other. Our goal is to study this notion in the case of symplectic spreads.

**Theorem 1.** *Let  $\Sigma_1$  and  $\Sigma_2$  be nondesarguesian symplectic spreads in a  $K$ -space  $V$  equipped with a nondegenerate alternating bilinear form  $(\ , \ )$ . Assume that  $g \in \Gamma\mathbf{L}(V)$  sends  $\Sigma_1$  to  $\Sigma_2$ .*

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- (i) Then  $\Sigma_i$  is a symplectic spread of the  $\mathbf{K}_i$ -space  $V = V_{\mathbf{K}_i}$ , where the kernel  $\mathbf{K}_i$  of  $\Sigma_i$  is commutative ( $i = 1, 2$ ).
- (ii) Let  $(\ , \ )_{\mathbf{K}_i}$  be a nondegenerate alternating bilinear form on  $V_{\mathbf{K}_i}$  with respect to which  $\Sigma_i$  is symplectic. Then  $g$  sends  $\mathbf{K}_1$  to  $\mathbf{K}_2$ ,  $V_{\mathbf{K}_1}$  to  $V_{\mathbf{K}_2}$  and preserves the symplectic structure:  $(ug, vg)_{\mathbf{K}_2} = k_2[(u, v)_{\mathbf{K}_1}]^\sigma$  for some  $k_2 \in \mathbf{K}_2^*$ , some  $\sigma \in \text{Aut}(\mathbf{K}_2)$ , and all  $u, v \in V$ .

This theorem also holds trivially when the spreads are desarguesian and the kernels are fields (cf. Section 4).

For the situation in (ii), in [5, Theorem 3.5] we asked whether there is some  $h \in \mathbf{K}_2^*$  such that  $gh^{-1}$  preserves the symplectic geometry over the *original* field  $K$ . In general we see no reason why this should occur, even when  $V$  is finite, but it does hold under suitable numerical assumptions:

**Theorem 2.** *Let  $\Sigma_1$  and  $\Sigma_2$  be spreads in a finite  $K$ -space  $V$  that are symplectic with respect to the nondegenerate alternating bilinear form  $(\ , \ )$ . Assume that  $g \in \Gamma\text{L}(V)$  sends  $\Sigma_1$  to  $\Sigma_2$ . If  $\mathbf{K}_2$  is the kernel of  $\Sigma_2$ , and if either  $|K|$  is even or  $[\mathbf{K}_2 : K]$  is odd, then  $g = sk_2$  with  $k_2 \in \mathbf{K}_2^*$  and  $s \in \Gamma\text{L}(V)$  satisfying  $(us, vs) = k(u, v)^\sigma$  for some  $k \in K^*$ , some  $\sigma \in \text{Aut}(K)$ , and all  $u, v \in V$ .*

Versions of the last theorem were proved in [5, Theorem 3.5] and [9], assuming that  $|K|$  is even or  $\dim V = 4$ , respectively. In practice, “usually”  $\mathbf{K}_2 = K$ , in which case the theorem is a special case of Theorem 1.

The elementary proofs of the above results use the associated symplectic polarities.

## 2 Background

We refer to [3] for the standard background concerning spreads, translation planes and their kernels. For example, any isomorphism  $\mathfrak{A}(\Sigma_1) \rightarrow \mathfrak{A}(\Sigma_2)$  that sends 0 to 0 is induced by a semilinear transformation sending  $\Sigma_1$  to  $\Sigma_2$ . We refer to [10] for background concerning symplectic geometry. If  $(\ , \ )$  is a nondegenerate alternating bilinear form on  $V$ , then  $\Gamma\text{Sp}(V) = \{g \in \Gamma\text{L}(V) \mid (ug, vg) = k(u, v)^\sigma \text{ for some } k \in K^* \text{ and } \sigma \in \text{Aut}(K), \text{ and all } u, v \in V\}$  (cf. the statements of both of the above theorems). Associated with  $(\ , \ )$  there is a *symplectic polarity*  $\theta: W \rightarrow W^\theta = \{v \in V \mid (v, W) = 0\}$  of the projective geometry  $\text{PG}(V)$  of  $V$ , and the corresponding centralizer  $C_{\Gamma\text{L}(V)}(\theta) = \text{P}\Gamma\text{Sp}(V)$  is  $\Gamma\text{Sp}(V)$  modulo scalars.

## 3 Uniqueness

Before proving the theorems, we record a very simple observation (implicit in [5, Theorem 3.5] and reappearing in Section 5):

**Proposition 1.** *Suppose that  $\Sigma$  is a spread in a  $K$ -space  $V$ , where  $K$  is the kernel of  $\Sigma$ . Then  $\Sigma$  is symplectic with respect to at most one symplectic polarity of  $V$ .*

*Proof.* If  $\Sigma$  is symplectic with respect to the symplectic polarities  $\theta$  and  $\theta'$ , then  $\theta$  and  $\theta'$  send each member of  $\Sigma$  to itself. Hence, so does  $\theta\theta'$ . The collineation  $\theta\theta'$  of  $\text{PG}(V)$  is induced by a semilinear transformation that fixes every member of  $\Sigma$  and so is in the kernel  $K$ . Then  $\theta\theta'$  fixes every member of  $\text{PG}(V)$ , and hence  $\theta\theta' = 1$ .  $\square$

In general, if  $\mathbf{K}$  is the kernel of  $\Sigma$  then  $\theta'$  lies in the coset  $\theta(\mathbf{K}^*/K^*)$ .

### 4 Lifting symplectic structures

We will be viewing a vector space  $V$  over more than one skew field. As in the statement of Theorem 1, if one of these skew fields is called  $F$ , and we wish to emphasize that we are viewing  $V$  as an  $F$ -space, we will write  $V_F$  instead of  $V$ .

**Theorem 3.** *Let  $\Sigma$  be a nondesarguesian symplectic spread of the  $K$ -space  $V$ , with kernel  $\mathbf{K} \supseteq K$ . Then  $\mathbf{K}$  is commutative, and there is a nondegenerate alternating bilinear form  $(, )_{\mathbf{K}}$  on  $V_{\mathbf{K}}$  such that*

- (i)  $\Sigma$  is a symplectic spread of  $V_{\mathbf{K}}$  with respect to  $(, )_{\mathbf{K}}$ ,
- (ii)  $f((, )_{\mathbf{K}})$  is the given nondegenerate alternating bilinear form on  $V$  for some nonzero  $K$ -linear functional  $f: \mathbf{K} \rightarrow K$ , and
- (iii)  $(, )_{\mathbf{K}}$  and  $f$  are uniquely determined up to multiplication by elements of  $\mathbf{K}^*$  and  $K^*$ , respectively.

*Proof.* (i) Let  $G$  denote the group of all automorphisms and all anti-automorphisms of  $\text{PG}(V)$  that fix each member of  $\Sigma$ . Then  $G$  contains the given polarity  $\theta$  and has a normal subgroup  $\mathbf{K}^*/K^*$  consisting of the elements of  $\text{P}\Gamma\text{L}(V)$  that induce the identity on  $\Sigma$ . It follows that  $\theta$  permutes the set of  $\mathbf{K}$ -invariant subspaces of  $V$ ; these are precisely the subspaces of  $V_{\mathbf{K}}$ . Consequently, by restricting  $\theta$  to the subspaces of  $V_{\mathbf{K}}$  we obtain a polarity  $\theta_{\mathbf{K}}$  of  $\text{PG}(V_{\mathbf{K}})$ . Clearly,  $\Sigma$  is still a spread of  $V_{\mathbf{K}}$ , while each member of  $\Sigma$  is still sent to itself by  $\theta_{\mathbf{K}}$ . Each point of  $\text{PG}(V_{\mathbf{K}})$  lies in some member of  $\Sigma$  and hence is perpendicular to itself. Thus, since we are assuming that  $\dim V_{\mathbf{K}} > 2$ , by [10, p. 53]  $\mathbf{K}$  is commutative and  $\theta_{\mathbf{K}}$  is a symplectic polarity determined by a nondegenerate alternating bilinear form  $(, )_{\mathbf{K}}$  on  $V_{\mathbf{K}}$ , as required.

(ii) If  $W$  is any  $\mathbf{K}$ -subspace then  $W\theta_{\mathbf{K}} = W\theta$ . Hence, if  $u, v \in V$  and  $(u, v)_{\mathbf{K}} = 0$  then  $(u, v) = 0$ . For fixed  $u \neq 0$  it follows that  $f_u((u, v)_{\mathbf{K}}) := (u, v)$  is a well-defined map  $f_u: \mathbf{K} \rightarrow K$ , and hence is a  $K$ -linear functional. Similarly, any two such maps  $f_u$  agree on each  $v \in V$ . This implies (ii).

(iii) Each symplectic polarity arises from an alternating bilinear form that is uniquely determined up to a scalar.  $\square$

This result and Theorem 1 also hold in the desarguesian case if  $\mathbf{K}$  is commutative. When  $\mathbf{K}$  is noncommutative, there is no symplectic structure possible on  $V_{\mathbf{K}}$ , but it is not clear whether or not, in this case, a desarguesian spread can be symplectic when viewed over a subfield of  $\mathbf{K}$ ; it is also not clear that this is even an interesting question.

**Proof of Theorem 1.** Theorem 1(i) and Theorem 3(i) are the same. For Theorem 1(ii), observe that the uniqueness part of Theorem 3(iii) implies that  $g$  must send the form  $(\ , \ )_{\mathbf{K}_1}$  to  $(\ , \ )_{\mathbf{K}_2}$  up to a scalar and a field automorphism (since  $g$  is semilinear but not necessarily linear).  $\square$

## 5 Proof of Theorem 2

Let  $\theta$  be the symplectic polarity of  $\text{PG}(V)$  associated with  $(\ , \ )$ ; it is the identity on both  $\Sigma_1$  and  $\Sigma_2$ . Then  $\theta$  and  $\theta^g = g^{-1}\theta g$  are symplectic polarities each of which is the identity on  $\Sigma_2$ . It follows that  $\theta\theta^g$  arises from an element of  $\Gamma\text{L}(V)$  that is the identity on  $\Sigma_2$ , and hence lies in  $\mathbf{K}_2$ . Since  $(|\mathbf{K}_2| - 1)/(|K| - 1)$  is odd by hypothesis,  $\theta\theta^g$  is an element of  $\text{P}\Gamma\text{L}(V)$  of odd order. Then  $\theta^{\bar{h}} = \theta^g$  for some  $\bar{h}$  in the dihedral group  $\langle \theta, \theta^g \rangle$ , and hence  $\bar{g}\bar{h}^{-1}$  commutes with  $\theta$ , where  $\bar{g}$  is the element of  $\text{P}\Gamma\text{L}(V)$  induced by  $g$ . Consequently,  $\bar{g}\bar{h}^{-1} \in \text{P}\Gamma\text{Sp}(V)$ .

As in Proposition 1,  $\bar{h}$  is induced by some  $h \in \mathbf{K}_2^*$ . Thus,  $g = skh$  with  $s \in \Gamma\text{Sp}(V)$  and  $k \in K^*$ , and then  $kh \in Kh \subseteq \mathbf{K}_2$ .  $\square$

**Remarks.** 1. When  $\mathbf{K}_1 = \mathbf{K}_2 = K$  the theorem states that  $(us, vs) = k(u, v)^\sigma$  for some  $k \in K^*$ ,  $\sigma \in \text{Aut}(K)$  and all  $u, v \in V$ ; that is,  $g \in \Gamma\text{Sp}(V)$ . The above argument is simply that  $\theta^g = \theta$  as in Proposition 1, and hence  $g \in \Gamma\text{Sp}(V)$ . This is already contained in Theorem 1(ii). For nondesarguesian  $\Sigma$ , this is exactly the case considered in [9].

2. An immediate consequence of Theorem 2 is that, under the stated numerical hypotheses regarding the kernel, *if  $\Sigma_1$  and  $\Sigma_2$  are equivalent then some element of  $\Gamma\text{L}(V)$  sends  $\Sigma_1$  to  $\Sigma_2$  while preserving the symplectic structure.*

Kernels can be nontrivial [5] or difficult [7] to determine. When the characteristic is 2 there is no need to find the kernel in order to use the above consequence; and this was the crucial use made of Theorem 2 in those references. However, it seems doubtful that the preceding consequence holds (for finite  $V$ ) without any numerical assumptions.

3. It is natural to ask: how does the above proof differ from the argument in [5, Theorem 3.5]? Here we have used the fact that  $\theta\theta^g$  lies in the kernel of the spread as a *projective* transformation of  $V$ , which enabled some of the problems in the odd characteristic case to disappear. This should have been noticed 20 years ago. It wasn't. Therefore, only the characteristic 2 case was handled at that time.

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