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## Isotopy and invariants of Albert algebras

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**Abstract.** Let  $k$  be a field with characteristic different from 2 and 3. Let  $B$  be a central simple algebra of degree 3 over a quadratic extension  $K/k$ , which admits involutions of second kind. In this paper, we prove that if the Albert algebras  $J(B, \sigma, u, \mu)$  and  $J(B, \tau, v, \nu)$  have same  $f_3$  and  $g_3$  invariants, then they are isotopic. We prove that for a given Albert algebra  $J$ , there exists an Albert algebra  $J'$  with  $f_3(J') = 0$ ,  $f_5(J') = 0$  and  $g_3(J') = g_3(J)$ . We conclude with a construction of Albert division algebras, which are pure second Tits' constructions.

**Mathematics Subject Classification (1991).** Primary 17C40.

**Keywords.** Jordan algebras, isotopy, Albert algebras, invariants.

## Introduction

Let  $k$  be a field with characteristic different from 2 and 3. The exceptional central simple Jordan algebras over  $k$  are now called *Albert algebras*. There are rational constructions of Albert algebras due to Tits. These are referred to as the *first Tits' construction* and the *second Tits' construction*. In the first construction, one associates to a pair  $(A, \mu)$ , where  $A$  is a degree 3 central simple algebra over  $k$  and  $\mu \in k^*$ , an Albert algebra  $J(A, \mu)$  over  $k$ . For the second construction, one starts with a quadratic extension  $K/k$  and a degree 3 central simple algebra  $B$  over  $K$  with an involution  $\sigma$  of second kind. To any unit  $u \in B$  with  $\sigma(u) = u$  and  $N(u) = \mu\bar{u}$  for some  $\mu \in K$ , one associates an Albert algebra  $J(B, \sigma, u, \mu)$  over  $k$  (cf. [P-R 1]). There are cohomological invariants attached to these algebras. Let  $J$  be an Albert algebra over  $k$ . One assigns two mod 2 invariants to  $J$ ,  $f_3(J) \in H^3(k, \mathbb{Z}/2)$ ,  $f_5(J) \in H^5(k, \mathbb{Z}/2)$  and a mod 3 invariant  $g_3(J) \in H^3(k, \mathbb{Z}/3)$  (cf. [P-R 1]). Serre asked whether these invariants determine the isomorphism class of  $J$ . The question is known to have affirmative answer for the *reduced* Albert algebras (cf. [P-R 1]). It was proved in ([P-S-T]) that if the Albert algebras  $J(B, \sigma, u, \mu)$  and  $J(B, \sigma, u', \mu')$  have the same invariants  $f_3$  and  $g_3$ , then they are isomorphic. In this direction, Petersson and Racine had asked a weaker question ([P-R 1]), namely, if two Albert algebras have same  $f_3$  and  $g_3$ , are they isotopic? In this paper, we answer this question for the Albert algebras  $J(B, \sigma, u, \mu)$  and

$J(B, \tau, v, \nu)$ , in the affirmative (§2). The same authors had asked in another paper ([P-R 2]), whether for a given Albert algebra  $J$ , there exists an Albert algebra  $J'$  with  $f_3(J') = 0$ ,  $f_5(J') = 0$  and  $g_3(J') = g_3(J)$ . We answer this question in the affirmative in (§3). We end with a construction of pure second Tits' construction Albert division algebras over a field  $k$  (§4).

## 1. Preliminaries

### 1.1. Isotopes of Jordan algebras

Let  $J$  be a Jordan algebra over  $k$  with 1. Let  $a \in J$  be an invertible element. One defines a new multiplication on  $J$  by

$$x_a y = \{xay\},$$

where  $\{xyz\}$  is the Jordan triple product in  $J$ , given by

$$\{xyz\} = U_{x,z}(y),$$

$$U_{x,z} = R_x R_z + R_z R_x - R_{xz},$$

$R_x$  denoting the homothety on  $J$  given by  $x$ . The algebra  $J$ , with this new multiplication, is a Jordan algebra (cf. [J]), called the  $a$ -isotope of  $J$ . It is denoted by  $J^{(a)}$ . Two Jordan algebras  $J_1$  and  $J_2$  are *isotopic* if  $J_1^{(a)}$  is isomorphic to  $J_2$  for some invertible  $a \in J_1$ . Isotopy is an equivalence relation on the class of Jordan algebras (cf. [J]).

### 1.2. Constructions of Albert algebras

In the following, we give a brief review of the Tits' constructions and the Freudenthal's construction of Albert algebras.

**Tits' first construction:** Let  $A$  be a central simple  $k$ -algebra of degree 3. Let  $\mu \in k^*$ . On the  $k$ -vector space

$$J(A, \mu) = A_0 \oplus A_1 \oplus A_2, \text{ where } A_i = A \text{ for } i = 0, 1, 2,$$

we define a multiplication by

$$\begin{aligned} (a_0, a_1, a_2)(a'_0, a'_1, a'_2) \\ = (a_0.a'_0 + \widetilde{a_1 a'_2} + \widetilde{a'_1 a_2}, \widetilde{a_0 a'_1} + \widetilde{a'_0 a_1} + \mu^{-1} a_2 \times a'_2, a_2 \widetilde{a'_0} + a'_2 \widetilde{a_0} + \mu a_1 \times a'_1). \end{aligned}$$

Here, for  $a, b \in A$ ,

$$a.b = \frac{1}{2}(ab + ba), \quad a \times b = a.b - \frac{1}{2}t(a)b - \frac{1}{2}t(b)a + \frac{1}{2}(t(a)t(b) - t(ab))$$

and  $\tilde{a} = \frac{1}{2}(t(a) - a)$ ,  $t$  being the reduced trace on  $A$ . It is known that  $J(A, \mu)$  is an Albert algebra. Further, it is a division algebra if and only if  $A$  is a division algebra and  $\mu$  is not a reduced norm from  $A$ .

**Tits' second construction:** Let  $K$  be a quadratic extension of  $k$  and let  $(B, \sigma)$  be a central simple  $K$ -algebra of degree 3 with an involution  $\sigma$  of the second kind over  $k$ . Let  $u \in B^*$  be such that  $\sigma(u) = u$  and  $N(u) = \mu\bar{u}$  for some  $\mu \in K^*$ ,  $\bar{\phantom{x}}$  denoting the nontrivial  $k$ -automorphism of  $K$ . Let  $(B, \sigma)_+$  denote the  $k$ -vector space of  $\sigma$ -symmetric elements in  $B$ . Let  $J(B, \sigma, u, \mu) = (B, \sigma)_+ \oplus B$ . We define a multiplication on  $J(B, \sigma, u, \mu)$  by

$$(b_0, b)(b'_0, b') = (b_0b'_0 + bu\widetilde{\sigma(b')} + b'u\widetilde{\sigma(b)}, \widetilde{b_0b'} + \widetilde{b'_0b} + \bar{\mu}(\sigma(b) \times \sigma(b'))u^{-1}).$$

Then  $J(B, \sigma, u, \mu)$  is known to be an Albert algebra and

$$J(B, \sigma, u, \mu) \otimes_k K \simeq J(B, \mu)$$

over  $K$  (cf. [MC]). Further,  $J(B, \sigma, u, \mu)$  is a division algebra if and only if  $B$  is a division algebra and  $\mu$  is not a reduced norm from  $B$ .

**Freudenthal's construction:** Let  $C$  be a Cayley algebra over  $k$  and let  $\Gamma = \langle \gamma_1, \gamma_2, \gamma_3 \rangle$  be a diagonal invertible matrix with  $\gamma_i \in k$ . Let  $M_3(C)$  denote the algebra of  $3 \times 3$  matrices with entries in  $C$ . The map  $X \mapsto \Gamma^{-1}\bar{X}^t\Gamma$  stabilizes  $M_3(C)$ , where  $\bar{X}$  is the matrix obtained by applying the involution bar on  $C$  to the entries of  $X$ . Let

$$\mathcal{H}_3(C, \Gamma) = \{X \in M_3(C) | \Gamma^{-1}\bar{X}^t\Gamma = X\}.$$

This is closed under the multiplication  $X.Y = \frac{1}{2}(XY + YX)$  and is known to be an Albert algebra (cf. [J]). These are the so called *reduced* Albert algebras.

### 1.3. Cohomological invariants of Albert algebras

Let  $k$  be as before. Let  $J$  be an Albert algebra over  $k$ . It is a fact that  $J$  carries a linear trace form  $T$  defined on it (cf. [J]) and this gives rise to a quadratic form  $Q_J$  on  $J$  given by

$$Q_J(x) = \frac{1}{2}T(x^2).$$

There exists a 3-fold Pfister form  $\phi_3$  and a 5-fold Pfister form  $\phi_5$  over  $k$  such that

$$Q_J \perp \phi_3 \simeq \langle 2, 2, 2 \rangle \perp \phi_5$$

over  $k$  (cf. [S]). Further, this property characterizes  $\phi_3$  and  $\phi_5$  upto isometry. For an  $n$ -fold Pfister form  $\phi_n = \langle \langle a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n \rangle \rangle = \langle 1, -a_1 \rangle \otimes \dots \otimes \langle 1, -a_n \rangle$ , one has the Arason invariant  $A(\phi_n) \in H^n(k, \mathbb{Z}/2)$  given by

$$A(\phi_n) = (-a_1) \cup (-a_2) \cup \dots \cup (-a_n),$$

where, for  $a \in k^*$ ,  $(a)$  denotes the class of  $a$  in  $H^1(k, \mathbb{Z}/2)$ . The mod 2 invariants for  $J$  are defined as

$$f_3(J) = A(\phi_3), \quad f_5(J) = A(\phi_5).$$

If  $J = \mathcal{H}_3(C, \Gamma)$  then  $f_3(J) = A(n_C)$  and  $f_5(J) = A(\langle 1, \gamma_1^{-1}\gamma_2 \rangle \otimes \langle 1, \gamma_2^{-1}\gamma_3 \rangle \otimes n_C)$ , where  $n_C$  is the norm on the Cayley algebra  $C$ , which is known to be a 3-fold Pfister form. Rost ([R]) attached an invariant mod 3 to  $J$ , denoted by  $g_3(J)$ , which is defined as follows. If  $J = J(B, \sigma, u, \mu)$  for some central simple algebra  $B$  of degree 3 over a quadratic field extension  $K$  of  $k$ , with an involution of second kind, then define

$$g_3(J) = -\text{Cor}_{K/k}([B] \cup [\mu]) \in H^3(k, \mathbb{Z}/3),$$

and if  $J = J(A, \nu)$  for a central simple algebra  $A$  of degree 3 over  $k$ , then define

$$g_3(J) = ([A] \cup [\nu]) \in H^3(k, \mathbb{Z}/3).$$

These are independent of the expression of  $J$  as a first or a second Tits' construction (cf. [R], [P-R 3]). Rost showed ([R]) that  $J$  is a division algebra if and only if  $g_3(J) \neq 0$ . Further,  $g_3$  is compatible with base change.

## 2. Classification of Albert algebras upto isotopy

The question, whether the invariants  $f_3$  and  $g_3$  classify a given Albert algebra upto isotopy, itself is an important question. We answer this question in a particular case of second Tits' construction. Namely,

**Theorem 2.1.** *Let  $K$  be a quadratic extension of  $k$  and let  $B$  denote a central simple algebra of degree 3 over  $K$ , which admits involutions of second kind over  $k$ . Let  $J = J(B, \sigma, u, \mu)$  and  $J' = J(B, \sigma', u', \mu')$  be second Tits' construction Albert algebras. Assume that  $f_3(J) = f_3(J')$  and  $g_3(J) = g_3(J')$ . Then  $J$  and  $J'$  are isotopic.*

We need the following result. We supply a proof for the sake of completeness.

**Theorem 2.2.** ([P-R 1]). *Let  $J_1$  and  $J_2$  be two Albert algebras over  $k$  which are isotopic. Then  $f_3(J_1) = f_3(J_2)$  and  $g_3(J_1) = g_3(J_2)$ .*

*Proof.* Since isotopic first Tits' constructions Albert algebras are isomorphic ([P-R 4], 4.9), we may assume that  $J_1$  and  $J_2$  are both second Tits' constructions. Let  $J_1 = J(B, \sigma, u, \mu)$  and let  $K$  be the centre of  $B$ . There is a cubic extension  $L$  of  $k$  such that  $J_1 \otimes_k L$  is reduced. Since  $J_1$  is isotopic to  $J_2$ , for some invertible  $v \in J_1$  we have,

$$J_1^{(v)} \simeq J_2.$$

Thus

$$(J_1 \otimes_k K)^{(v)} \simeq J_2 \otimes_k K.$$

But  $J_1 \otimes_k K \simeq J(B, \mu)$  over  $K$  (cf. [MC]), and using the fact that isotopic first Tits' Albert algebras are isomorphic ([P-R 4], 4.9), we get

$$J_1 \otimes_k K \simeq J_2 \otimes_k K$$

over  $K$ . This proves  $g_3(J_1) = g_3(J_2)$ .

To compare the  $f_3$  invariant, we appeal to the following

**Theorem 2.3.** (cf. [F], 1.9) *Let  $J$  be an Albert algebra isotopic to  $\mathcal{H}_3(C, \Gamma)$ ,  $C$  a Cayley algebra over  $k$  and  $\Gamma \in GL_3(k)$  a diagonal matrix. Then there is an isomorphism of  $J$  onto  $\mathcal{H}_3(C, \Gamma')$  for some  $\Gamma' \in GL_3(k)$ , a diagonal matrix.*

Now we base change to  $L$  to reduce  $J_1$ , so that over  $L$  we have,

$$(J_1 \otimes_k L)^{(v)} \simeq J_2 \otimes_k L.$$

Let  $J_1 \otimes_k L \simeq \mathcal{H}_3(C, \Gamma)$  for some Cayley algebra  $C$  over  $L$  and  $\Gamma$  defined over  $L$ . By the above theorem,  $J_2 \otimes_k L \simeq \mathcal{H}_3(C, \Gamma')$  for some  $\Gamma'$ . By a theorem of Serre and Rost (cf. [P-R 5], 1.8), there exists a Cayley algebra  $\mathcal{O}$  over  $k$  such that  $\mathcal{O} \otimes_k L \simeq C$ . Now, by the definition of  $f_3$ , it follows that  $f_3(J_1) = f_3(J_2)$ .

For the proof of Theorem 2.1, we need the following

**Theorem 2.4.** ([P-R 5], 1.5). *Let  $(B, \sigma)$  be as above. Let  $v \in B^*$  be such that  $\sigma(v) = v$ . Let  $\sigma' = \text{Int}(v)\sigma$ . Then the map*

$$(a_o, a) \mapsto (v^{-1}a_o, a)$$

*is an isomorphism from  $J(B, \sigma', uv^\#, N(v)\mu)$  onto  $J(B, \sigma, u, \mu)^{(v)}$ .*

**Theorem 2.5.** ([P-S-T], 2.8) *Let  $J = J(B, \sigma, u, \mu)$  and  $J' = J(B, \sigma, u', \mu')$  be Albert algebras arising from Tits' second construction. Assume  $f_3(J) = f_3(J')$  and  $g_3(J) = g_3(J')$ . Then  $J$  is isomorphic to  $J'$ .*

*Proof of Theorem 2.1.* We have  $J = J(B, \sigma, u, \mu)$  and  $J' = J(B, \sigma', u', \mu')$ . Let  $v \in (B, \sigma)_+$  be such that  $\text{Int}(v)\sigma = \sigma'$ . Then, by Theorem 2.2,

$$f_3(J) = f_3(J^{(v)}), \quad g_3(J) = g_3(J^{(v)}).$$

Now, invoking Theorem 2.4, we have,

$$J^{(v)} \simeq J(B, \sigma', uv^\#, N(v)\mu).$$

Thus

$$f_3(J) = f_3(J(B, \sigma', uv^\#, N(v)\mu)), \quad g_3(J) = g_3(J(B, \sigma', uv^\#, N(v)\mu)).$$

Therefore, by Theorem 2.5, we get

$$J(B, \sigma', u', \mu') \simeq J(B, \sigma', uv^\#, N(v)\mu) \simeq J(B, \sigma, u, \mu)^{(v)}.$$

Hence  $J$  and  $J'$  are isotopic.

### 3. Albert algebras with trivial mod 2 invariants

In this section, we construct, for a given Albert algebra  $J$ , an Albert algebra  $J'$  with  $f_3(J') = 0$ ,  $f_5(J') = 0$  and  $g_3(J') = g_3(J)$ . We begin with reviewing some results on involutions of second kind. Let  $K/k$  be a quadratic extension. Let  $(B, \sigma)$  be a central simple algebra of degree 3 over  $K$  with an involution  $\sigma$  of second kind over  $k$ . The restriction  $Q_\sigma$  of the trace quadratic form  $x \mapsto T(x^2)$  to  $(B, \sigma)_+$ , the  $k$ -space of  $\sigma$ -symmetric elements in  $B$ , is a quadratic form with values in  $k$ . It is shown in ([H-K-R-T]) that  $Q_\sigma$  is an invariant of  $\sigma$ . The decomposition of  $Q_\sigma$  is given by the following

**Theorem 3.1.** ([H-K-R-T], 4) *Let  $K = k(\sqrt{\alpha})$ . Then there exist  $b, c \in k^*$  such that*

$$Q_\sigma \simeq \langle 1, 1, 1 \rangle \perp \langle 2 \rangle \langle \alpha \rangle \langle -b, -c, bc \rangle.$$

In the same paper, it is shown that the Arason invariant of the 3-fold Pfister form  $\langle \langle \alpha, b, c \rangle \rangle$  determines the isomorphism class of  $\sigma$ . More precisely,

**Proposition 3.2.** ([H-K-R-T], 15) *The following statements are equivalent for  $(B, \sigma)$ , with  $B$  as above.*

- (1)  $\sigma \simeq \sigma'$ .
- (2)  $A(\langle \langle \alpha, b, c \rangle \rangle) = A(\langle \langle \alpha, b', c' \rangle \rangle)$ . Where  $b', c'$  are the elements of  $k^*$ , corresponding to the decomposition of  $Q_{\sigma'}$ .

The invariant  $A(\langle \langle \alpha, b, c \rangle \rangle) \in H^3(k, \mathbb{Z}/2)$  is also denoted by  $f_3(B, \sigma)$ . An involution  $\sigma$  on  $B$  is called *distinguished* if  $f_3(B, \sigma) = 0$ . The following result from ([H-K-R-T]) will be needed.

**Proposition 3.3.** ([H-K-R-T], 17) *On any central simple algebra  $B$  of degree 3 over  $K$ , with an involution of second kind, there exists a distinguished involution.*

We now come to the promised construction. We note first that we need only consider the case of second Tits' construction Albert algebras.

**Theorem 3.4.** *Let  $J = J(B, \sigma, u, \mu)$  be an Albert algebra,  $B$  a degree 3 central simple algebra over a quadratic extension  $K/k$  and with an involution of second kind. There exists an Albert algebra  $J'$  with  $f_3(J') = 0$ ,  $f_5(J') = 0$  and  $g_3(J') = g_3(J)$ .*

*Proof.* By ([K-M-R-T], 39.2), we may assume that  $N(u) = 1 = \mu\bar{\mu}$ ,  $\bar{\mu}$  denoting the nontrivial  $k$ -automorphism of  $K$ . Let  $\sigma'$  be a distinguished involution on  $B$  (3.3). Set  $J' = J(B, \sigma', 1, \mu)$ . Then by ([K-M-R-T], 40.2), we have  $f_3(J') = f_3(B, \sigma') = 0$  and  $f_5(J')$ , being a multiple of  $f_3(J')$ , is zero as well. Further,  $g_3(J) = -\text{Cor}_{K/k}([B] \cup [\mu]) = g_3(J')$ . This completes the proof.

#### 4. Pure second Tits' construction Albert algebras.

In this brief section, we exhibit how one can construct pure second Tits' construction Albert division algebras. We recall (cf. [P-R 6]) that an Albert algebra  $J$  over  $k$  is called a *pure second Tits' construction* if it does not arise from Tits' first construction.

Let  $B$  be a central division algebra of degree 3 over a quadratic extension  $K/k$ . Assume that  $B$  admits involutions of second kind. Assume further that  $\sigma$  is an involution on  $B$  which is not distinguished. In the terms of the invariant mod 3 associated to  $(B, \sigma)$ , this means that  $f_3(B, \sigma) \neq 0$ . Let  $\mu \in K^*$  be such that  $\mu\bar{\mu} = 1$  and  $\mu$  is not a reduced norm from  $B$ . Set  $J = J(B, \sigma, 1, \mu)$ . Then  $J$  is an Albert division algebra over  $k$ . Further, by ([K-M-R-T], 40.2),  $f_3(J) = f_3(B, \sigma) \neq 0$ . Thus by ([K-M-R-T], 40.5),  $J$  is a pure second Tits' construction. We record this as

**Theorem 4.1.** *Let  $(B, \sigma)$  be a central division algebra of degree 3 over  $K$ , with an involution  $\sigma$  of second kind. Assume that  $f_3(B, \sigma) \neq 0$ . Let  $\mu \in K^*$  be such that  $\mu$  is not a reduced norm from  $B$  and  $\mu\bar{\mu} = 1$ . Then the Albert algebra  $J(B, \sigma, 1, \mu)$  is a pure second Tits' construction division algebra.*

#### Remarks.

- (1) The construction of  $J'$  in the proof of Theorem 3.4 yields a division algebra if  $J$  is division.
- (2) The Albert algebra  $J'$  as above, must be a first Tits' construction due to the fact that Albert algebras of first Tits' type are precisely those with the  $f_3$  invariant zero ([K-M-R-T], 40.5).
- (3) As a consequence of Remark 2 and Theorem 3.4, we see that  $g_3(J)$  is always decomposable, i.e., is a product of  $H^1$ -classes, since this is the case when  $J$  is a first Tits' construction (cf. also [K-M-R-T, 40.9]).
- (4) In light of the fact that the Albert algebra  $J(B, \sigma, u, \mu)$  has the  $f_5$  invariant zero if and only if  $\sigma$  is distinguished ([K-M-R-T], 40.7), we note that the invariant

- $f_5$  is sensitive to isotopy, in contrast with  $f_3$  and  $g_3$  (2.2). For example, if  $\sigma' = \text{Int}(v)\sigma$  is distinguished, then  $f_5(J(B, \sigma, u, \mu)^{(v)}) = 0$ . Whereas by (2.2), the  $f_3$  and  $g_3$  for this isotope are the same as for  $J(B, \sigma, u, \mu)$ .
- (5) The Albert algebra  $J(B, \sigma, u, \mu)$  can be pure even when  $\sigma$  is distinguished, as the above remark shows.

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