Forum Geometricorum
Volume 14 (2014) 237–240.

FORUM GEOM
ISSN 1534-1178

A Simple Property of Isosceles Triangles with Applications

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Abstract. In this paper we prove a simple property of isosceles triangles and give two applications: construction of third proportional line segments and construction of the inverse point with respect to a circle.

1. Introduction

Here we give an interesting property of isosceles triangles. It is known that if a and b are two given line segments, then their third proportional line segment c can be constructed geometrically; see [2, VI.11]. We can more easily construct the third proportional line segment by using the simple geometric property of the isosceles triangles. Two points A and B are inverse points with respect to the inversion circle with center O and radius r, if $OA \cdot OB = r^2$; see [3]. We can construct the inverse point with respect to a circle by using the same property of the isosceles triangle.

2. The property

Lemma 1. *Let ABC be an isosceles triangle with $AB = BC$. Let D be a point on the ray BC and let h be the ray obtained by reflecting the ray AD in the line AC. Then the ray h cuts the ray BC in a point E which lies outside the segment BC if the point D lies inside this segment* (see Figure 1) *and inside the segment BC if the point D lies outside* (see Figure 2).

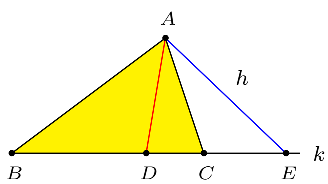

Figure 1

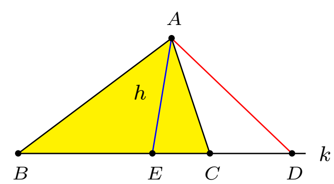

Figure 2

Proof. For Figure 1, let k denote the ray which is the part of the ray BC outside the segment BC. Then,

$$\begin{aligned}\angle(k, CA) + \angle(AC, h) &= \pi - \angle ACB + \angle(AC, h)\\ &= \pi - \angle BAC + \angle(AC, h)\\ &= \pi - \angle BAC + \angle DAC\\ &< \pi.\end{aligned}$$

Publication Date: September 9, 2014. Communicating Editor: Rudolf Fritsch.

The author would like to thank Professor Rudolf Fritsch and an anonymous referee for their help in the preparation of this paper and for their suggestions.

The second equality holds since the triangle ABC is isosceles, the third by reflection, and the fourth since D is an interior point of the segment BC. Now according to Euclid's fifth postulate the rays k and h meet in a point E. By the properties of reflection it is obvious that this intersection point E must lie on the ray BC outside the segment BC.

For Figure 2, $\angle(h, AC) = \angle CAD < \angle ACB = \angle BAC$. The first equality holds by reflection, the inequality by the Exterior Angle Theorem, the second equality since the triangle ABC is isosceles. Thus, the ray h runs first within the triangle ABC and meets the side BC in an interior point E. $\square$

Theorem 2. *If ABC is an isosceles triangle and points D, E are given as in* Lemma 1, *then $BC^2 = BD \cdot BE$, i.e., BC is the geometric mean of BD and BE.*

Proof. Firstly, we assume the point D inside the segment BC. The triangles ABD and EBA share the angle at vertex B. Now consider the angle sums of the triangles ABC and ABD.

$$\angle ABC + \angle BCA + \angle CAB = \pi,$$
$$\angle ABD + \angle BDA + \angle DAB = \pi.$$

Note, that $\angle CAB = \angle CAD + \angle DAB$. Thus, comparison of the two angle sums yields $\angle BDA = \angle BCA + \angle CAD$. But $\angle BCA = \angle CAB$ since the triangle ABC is isosceles and $\angle CAD = \angle EAC$ by reflection. Thus,

$$\angle BDA = \angle CAB + \angle EAC = \angle EAB.$$

Therefore the triangles ABD and EBA are inversely similar, and

$$BC : BD = AB : BD = BE : BA = BE : BC.$$

From this, $BC^2 = BD \cdot BE$.

Secondly, if the point D lies outside the segment BC then interchanging the roles of the points D and E in the previous argument yields the same result. $\square$

3. Applications

3.1. *Construction of third proportional line segments.* Let a and b be the lengths of two line segments, and we have to draw a line segment of length c such that the square of b equals the product of a and c.

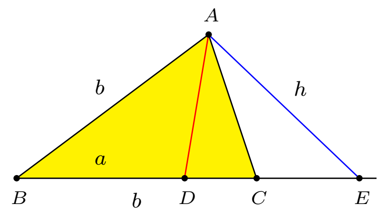

Figure 3

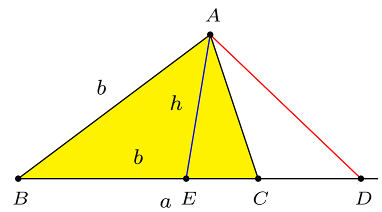

Figure 4

For this, construct an isosceles triangle ABC with $AB = BC = b$ (see Figures 3 and 4). Let D be a point on the ray BC such that $BD = a$ and let h be the line obtained by reflecting the ray AD in the line AC. By Lemma 1 the ray h cuts the ray BC in a point E. Theorem 2 implies $BE = c$.

3.2. *Construction of the inverse point with respect to a circle.* Consider a circle $\mathcal{C}$ with center B and D a point which may lies inside or outside of the circle $\mathcal{C}$. In both cases we can follow the same steps to construct the inverse point of D with respect to the circle $\mathcal{C}$, a case distinction as in the usual treatments, see for example [1, pp.108–109], is not needed.

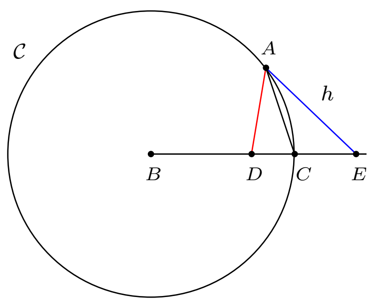

Figure 5

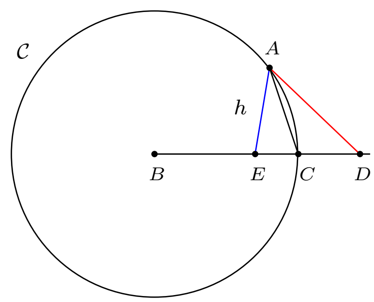

Figure 6

Take the intersection point C of the ray BD with the circle $\mathcal{C}$, see Figures 5 and 6. Connect the point C with an arbitrary point A on the circle $\mathcal{C}$ (different from C) and let h be the ray obtained by reflecting the ray AD in the line AC. The ray h cuts the ray BC in a point E by Lemma 1 which is the inverse point of D with respect to the circle $\mathcal{C}$ in view of Theorem 2.

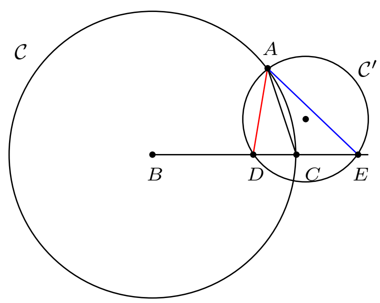

Figure 7

Note that the circumcircle $\mathcal{C}'$ of the triangle ADE is orthogonal to the circle $\mathcal{C}$, since it is invariant under the inversion at the circle $\mathcal{C}$ (see Figure 7).

References

[1] H. S. M. Coxeter and S. L. Greitzer, *Geometry revisited*, Random House, New York, 1967.
[2] T. L. Heath, *The Thirteen Books of Euclid's Elements*, 3 volumes, Dover reprint, 1956.
[3] E. W. Weisstein, *Inverse Points*, MathWorld – A Wolfram Web Resource,
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