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SOME WOLSTENHOLME TYPE CONGRUENCES

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Abstract. In this paper we give an extension and another proof of the following Wolstenholme's type curious congruence established in 2008 by J. Zhao. Let s and l be two positive integers and let p be a prime such that $p \ge ls + 3$. Then

$$H(\{s\}^l; p-1) \equiv S(\{s\}^l; p-1) \equiv \begin{cases} -\frac{s(ls+1)p^2}{2(ls+2)}B_{p-ls-2} & \pmod{p^3} & \text{if } 2 \nmid ls \\ (-1)^{l-1}\frac{sp}{ls+1}B_{p-ls-1} & \pmod{p^2} & \text{if } 2 \mid ls. \end{cases}$$

As an application, for given prime $p \geq 5$, we obtain explicit formulae for the sum $\sum_{1 \leq k_1 < \cdots < k_l \leq p-1} 1/(k_1 \cdots k_l) \pmod{p^3}$ if $k \in \{1, 3, \dots, p-2\}$, and for the sum $\sum_{1 \leq k_1 < \cdots < k_l \leq p-1} 1/(k_1 \cdots k_l) \pmod{p^2}$ if $k \in \{2, 4, \dots, p-3\}$.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BASIC RESULTS

Our investigations are motivated by some recent results to multiple harmonic sums obtained by J. Zhao [12], Zhou and Cai [13]. These results are in fact, variations and generalizations of Wolstenholme's theorem. For more information on extensions and generalizations of Wolstenholme's theorem, see [5], [9], [10] and [11].

Throughout this paper we use the following definitions and notations.

For $n \in \mathbb{N}$, $l \in \mathbb{N}$ and $\mathbf{s} := (s_1, \ldots, s_l) \in \mathbb{N}^l$, define the finite harmonic sum

$$H(\mathbf{s};n) := H(s_1, \dots, s_l; n) = \sum_{1 \le k_1 < \dots < k_l \le n} \frac{1}{k_1^{s_1} \cdots k_l^{s_l}}$$

By convention we set $H(\mathbf{s}; r) = 0$ for $r = 0, \ldots, l-1$. Further, we define the sum

$$S(\mathbf{s};n) := S(s_1, \dots, s_l; n) = \sum_{1 \le k_1 \le \dots \le k_l \le n} \frac{1}{k_1^{s_1} \cdots k_l^{s_l}}.$$

If $s_1 = \ldots = s_l = s$ then $H(\mathbf{s}; n)$ is a homogeneous harmonic sum. In this case, we shall denote such a sum by $H(\{s\}^l; n)$, and hence

$$H(\{s\}^{l}; n) = \sum_{1 \le k_1 < \dots < k_l \le n} \frac{1}{(k_1 \cdots k_l)^s}$$

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In particular, we write H(s; n) instead of $H(\{s\}^1; n)$, that is,

$$H(s;n) = \sum_{1 \le k \le n} \frac{1}{k^s}$$

Analogously, we define $S({s}^{l}; n)$ and S(s; n) related to the sums S(s; n).

Recall that Stirling numbers St(n, j) of the first kind are defined by the expansion

$$x(x+1)(x+2)\cdots(x+n-1) = \sum_{j=1}^{n} St(n,j)x^{j}.$$

It is easy to see that for all $j = 1, \ldots, n-1$,

$$St(n,j) = \sum_{1 \le k_1 < \dots < k_{n-j} \le n-1} k_1 \cdots k_{n-j},$$

and that

$$St(n, j + 1) = (n - 1)! \cdot H(\{1\}^j; n - 1).$$

For example, St(n, n) = 1, St(n, n - 1) = n(n - 1)/2, and St(n, 1) = (n - 1)!.

Further, for any nonnegative integers j and $n \ge 1$, jth power-sum symmetric function is defined as

$$P(n,j) = \sum_{k=1}^{n} k^j.$$

By convention we set P(0, j) = 0 for all $j \ge 0$.

By Wolstenholme's theorem (see, e.g., [6, p. 89]), if p is a prime greater than 3, then the numerator of the fraction

$$H(1, p-1) = 1 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{3} + \dots + \frac{1}{p-1}$$

written in reduced form, is divisible by p^2 .

Denote by $\mathfrak p$ the parity of m which is 1 if m is odd and 2 if m is even. Bayat proved

Theorem A ([1, Theorem 3]; also see Remark 2.3 in [12]). For any positive integer s and a prime $p \ge s+3$ we have

$$H(s; p-1) \equiv 0 \pmod{p^{\mathfrak{p}(s+1)}}.$$

Zhao in [12, p. 74] reported that one can find on the Internet the following generalization of Wolstenholme's theorem by Bruck [2], although no proof is given here.

Theorem B ([12, Theorem 1.2]). For any prime number $p \ge 5$ and positive integers l = 1, ..., p - 3, we have

$$St(p, l+1) \equiv 0 \pmod{p^{\mathfrak{p}(l+1)}},$$

and

$$H(\{1\}^l; p-1) \equiv 0 \pmod{p^{\mathfrak{p}(l+1)}}.$$

The Bernoulli numbers B_k are defined by the generating function

$$\sum_{k=0}^{\infty} B_k \frac{x^k}{k!} = \frac{x}{e^x - 1}$$

It is easy to find the values $B_0 = 1$, $B_1 = -\frac{1}{2}$, $B_2 = \frac{1}{6}$, $B_4 = -\frac{1}{30}$, and $B_n = 0$ for odd $n \ge 3$. Furthermore, $(-1)^{n-1}B_{2n} > 0$ for all $n \ge 1$. These and many other properties can be found, for instance, in [7] and [3].

Recently, Zhao in [12] proved the following generalization of Theorem B to homogeneous multiple harmonic sums.

Theorem C ([12, Theorem 2.14]; cf. [12, Theorem 1.6]). Let s and l be two positive integers. Let p be a prime such that $p \ge ls + 3$. Then

$$H(\{s\}^{l}; p-1) \equiv S(\{s\}^{l}; p-1) \equiv \begin{cases} -\frac{s(ls+1)p^{2}}{2(ls+2)}B_{p-ls-2} \pmod{p^{3}} & \text{if } 2 \nmid ls \\ (-1)^{l-1}\frac{sp}{ls+1}B_{p-ls-1} \pmod{p^{2}} & \text{if } 2 \mid ls. \end{cases}$$

As an application, Zhao obtained the following result.

Theorem D ([12, Proposition 2.15]; also cf. [12, Theorem 1.5]). Let s and l be two positive integers. Let p be a prime such that $p \ge l+2$ and p-1 divides none of ks and ks + 1 for k = 1, ..., l. Then

$$H(\{s\}^l; p-1) \equiv S(\{s\}^l; p-1) \equiv 0 \pmod{p^{\mathfrak{p}(ls-1)}}.$$

In particular, if $p \ge ls+3$, then the above is always true, and so $p \mid H(\{s\}^l; p-1)$.

As noticed in [12, p. 85, Proof of Theorem 2.14], the above congruence for $H(\{s\}^l; p-1)$ follows immediately from [13, Lemma 2], while the above congruence for $S(\{s\}^l; p-1)$ then follows from the equality (2.11) in [12] and induction on l.

In Section 2 we give another proof of the above congruence for $H(\{s\}^l; p-1)$. Our result is as follows.

Theorem 1.1. Let s and l be two positive integers. Let p be a prime such that $p \ge ls + 3$. Then

$$H(\{s\}^{l}; p-1) \equiv (-1)^{l-1} \frac{H(ls; p-1)}{l} \equiv \begin{cases} -\frac{s(ls+1)p^{2}}{2(ls+2)} B_{p-ls-2} \pmod{p^{3}} & \text{if } 2 \nmid ls \\ (-1)^{l-1} \frac{sp}{ls+1} B_{p-ls-1} \pmod{p^{2}} & \text{if } 2 \mid ls. \end{cases}$$

Taking s = 1 in Theorem 1.1, we obtain the following result.

Corollary 1.2. Let p be a prime greater than 3, and let l be a positive integer such that $l \leq p - 3$. Then

$$H(\{1\}^{l}; p-1) := \sum_{1 \le k_{1} < \dots < k_{l} \le p-1} \frac{1}{k_{1} \cdots k_{l}} \equiv \begin{cases} -\frac{(l+1)p^{2}}{2(l+2)} B_{p-l-2} \pmod{p^{3}} & \text{if } 2 \nmid l \\ -\frac{p}{l+1} B_{p-l-1} \pmod{p^{2}} & \text{if } 2 \mid l. \end{cases}$$

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Corollary 1.3. Let p be a prime greater than 3, and let l be a positive integer such that $2 \le l \le p-2$. Then

$$St(p,l) \equiv \begin{cases} \frac{lp^2}{2(l+1)} B_{p-1-l} \pmod{p^3} & \text{if } 2 \mid l \\ \frac{p}{l} B_{p-l} \pmod{p^2} & \text{if } 2 \nmid l. \end{cases}$$

Proof. Since by Wilson theorem, $(p-1)! \equiv -1 \pmod{p}$, we get for all $l = 2, \ldots, p-2$

$$St(p,l) = (p-1)! \cdot H(\{1\}^{l-1}; p-1) \equiv -H(\{1\}^{l-1}; p-1) \pmod{p}$$

Therefore, both congruences follow immediately from the congruences given in Corollary 1.2. $\hfill \Box$

Remark 1.4. Observe that Corollary 1.2 does not contain a related congruence for the Stirling number St(p,1) = (p-1)!. In 1900 Glaisher [4] showed that $(p-1)! \equiv pB_{p-1} - p \pmod{p^2}$.

In order to prove Theorem 1.1, we use Theorem A in the proof of Lemma 2.2 given in Section 2. Note that Theorem A is an immediate consequence of a classical result of E. Lehmer [8] given by Lemma 2.7. On the other hand, Theorem B is an immediate consequence of Corollaries 1.2 and 1.3 and the fact that by Lemma 2.5, the denominator of the Bernoulli number B_l , written in reduced form, is not divisible by p for each integer l such that $0 \le l \le p-3$. Further, the congruence for $H(\{s\}^l; p-1)$ in Theorem C is given by Theorem 1.1. Finally, note that (see Remark 2.3) the proof of Theorem D is the same as that of Lemma 2.2.

2. Proof of Theorem 1.1

For the proof of Theorem 1.1, we will need some auxiliary results.

Lemma 2.1. Let n, s and l be positive integers such that $l \ge 2$ and $n \ge ls$. Then

$$\sum_{j=1}^{l-1} (-1)^{j-1} H(js;n) \cdot H(\{s\}^{l-j};n) = lH(\{s\}^l;n) + (-1)^l H(ls;n).$$
(2.1)

Proof. First note that (2.1) is trivially satisfied for l = 2. For simplicity, here we write $H({\mathbf{s}}^l)$ instead of $H({\mathbf{s}}^l; n)$, and denote

$$\sigma(j) = \sum_{i=0}^{l-j} H(\underbrace{s, \dots, s}_{i}, js, \underbrace{s, \dots, s}_{l-j}; n), \quad j = 1, \dots l,$$

whence we see that $\sigma(l) = H(ls; n)$. Now if $l \ge 3$, then for all j with $2 \le j \le l-1$, we have

$$H(js) \cdot H(\{s\}^{l-j}) = \left(\sum_{1 \le k \le n} \frac{1}{k^{js}}\right) \left(\sum_{1 \le k_1 < \dots < k_{l-j} \le n} \frac{1}{(k_1 \cdots k_{l-j})^s}\right)$$
$$= \sum_{\substack{k \notin \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-j}\} \\ = \sum_{i=0}^{l-j} H(\underbrace{s, \dots, s}_i, js, \underbrace{s, \dots, s}_{l-j-i}) \\ + \sum_{i=0}^{l-j-1} H(\underbrace{s, \dots, s}_i, (j+1)s, \underbrace{s, \dots, s}_{l-j-1-i}) \\ = \sigma(j) + \sigma(j+1).$$

Furthermore, for j = 1, we have

$$H(s) \cdot H(\{s\}^{l-1}) = \left(\sum_{1 \le k \le n} \frac{1}{k^s}\right) \left(\sum_{1 \le k_1 < \dots < k_{l-1} \le n} \frac{1}{(k_1 \cdots k_{l-1})^s}\right)$$
$$= \sum_{\substack{k \notin \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}\\ i = 0}}^{l-1} + \sum_{\substack{k \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}\\ i \in \{k_1, \dots, k_l\}}}^{l-1} + \sum_{\substack{k \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}\\ i \in \{k_1, \dots, k_l\}}}^{l-1} + \sum_{\substack{k \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}\\ i \in \{k_1, \dots, k_l\}}}^{l-1} + \sum_{\substack{k \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}\\ i \in \{k_1, \dots, k_l\}}}^{l-1} + \sum_{\substack{k \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}\\ i \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}}}^{l-1} + \sum_{\substack{k \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}\\ i \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}}}^{l-1} + \sum_{\substack{k \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}\\ i \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}}}^{l-1} + \sum_{\substack{k \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}\\ i \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}}}^{l-1} + \sum_{\substack{k \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}\\ i \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}}}^{l-1} + \sum_{\substack{k \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}\\ i \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}}}^{l-1} + \sum_{\substack{k \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}\\ i \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}}}^{l-1} + \sum_{\substack{k \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}\\ i \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}}}^{l-1} + \sum_{\substack{k \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}\\ i \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}}}^{l-1} + \sum_{\substack{k \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}\\ i \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}}}^{l-1} + \sum_{\substack{k \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}\\ i \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}}}^{l-1} + \sum_{\substack{k \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}\\ i \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}}}^{l-1} + \sum_{\substack{k \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}\\ i \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}}}^{l-1} + \sum_{\substack{k \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}\\ i \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}}}^{l-1} + \sum_{\substack{k \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}}}^{l-1} + \sum_{\substack{k \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}\\ i \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}\}}}^{l-1} + \sum_{\substack{k \in \{k_1, \dots, k_{l-1}$$

The above two equalities imply

$$\begin{split} \sum_{j=1}^{l-1} (-1)^{j-1} H(js) \cdot H(\{s\}^{l-j}) &= lH(\{s\}^l) + \sigma(2) + \sum_{j=2}^{l-1} (-1)^{j-1} (\sigma(j) + \sigma(j+1)) \\ &= lH(\{s\}^l) + \sigma(2) + \sum_{j=2}^{l-1} (-1)^{j-1} (\sigma(j) + \sigma(j+1)) \\ &= lH(\{s\}^l) + \sigma(2) - \sigma(2) + (-1)^{l-1} \sigma(l) \\ &= lH(\{s\}^l) + (-1)^l H(ls;n), \end{split}$$

as desired.

The following lemma is an extension of the congruence for harmonic sums $H(\{1\}^l; p-1)$ given by Theorem B. This is in fact the congruence for $H(\{s\}^l; p-1)$ from Theorem D when $p \ge ls + 3$.

Lemma 2.2 (cf. Theorem C). Let s and l be two positive integers, and let p be a prime such that $p \ge ls + 3$. Then $p^2 \mid H(\{s\}^l; p-1)$ if ls is odd, and $p \mid H(\{s\}^l; p-1)$ if ls is even.

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Proof. Putting n = p - 1 in (2.1) of Lemma 2.1, we obtain

$$\sum_{j=1}^{l-1} (-1)^{j-1} H(js; p-1) \cdot H(\{s\}^{l-j}; p-1) + (-1)^{l-1} H(ls; p-1) = lH(\{s\}^{l}; p-1). \quad (2.2)$$

We proceed by induction on the sum $\sigma := l + s \ge 2$. If $\sigma = 2$ then l = s = 1, and $p^2 \mid H(1; p - 1)$ by Wolstenholme's theorem. Now suppose that the assertion is true for some σ with $\sigma \ge 2$. This means that $p^2 \mid H(\{s'\}^{l'}; p - 1)$ whenever l' and s' are both odd such that $l' + s' \le \sigma$ and $p \ge l's' + 3$, and that $p \mid H(\{s'\}^{l'}; p - 1)$ whenever l's' is even such that $l' + s' \le \sigma$ and $p \ge l's' + 3$ In order to prove the assertion for all pairs l and s with $l + s = \sigma$ and $p \ge ls + 3$, we consider the following two cases.

Case 1. *ls* is odd; that is both integers *l* and *s* are odd. Then, for odd *j* with $1 \leq j \leq l-1$, we have $s + (l-j) = \sigma - j < \sigma$ and s(l-j) is even. Therefore, by the inductive hypothesis, $p \mid H(\{s\}^{l-j})$. Furthermore, for such a *j*, by Theorem A, $p^2 \mid H(js; p-1)$.

Similarly, if j is even with $1 \le j \le l-1$, we also have $s + (l-j) = \sigma - j < \sigma$, and s(l-j) is odd. Thus, by the inductive hypothesis, $p^2 \mid H(\{s\}^{l-j})$. Furthermore, for such a j, by Theorem A, $p \mid H(js; p-1)$.

Hence, in both cases it follows that $p^3 \mid H(js; p-1) \cdot H(\{s\}^{l-j}; p-1)$. This together with the fact that, by Theorem A, $p^3 \mid H(ls; p-1)$, implies that the sum on the right hand side of (2.2) is divisible by p^3 . Therefore, $p^3 \mid lH(\{s\}^l; p-1)$, whence, because $l \leq ls \leq p-3$, it follows that $p^3 \mid H(\{s\}^l; p-1)$. This concludes the inductive proof when ls is odd.

Case 2. *ls* is even. Then in the same way as in the first case, we obtain by induction on the sum l + s that $p^2 \mid H(\{s\}^l; p-1)$.

This completes the inductive proof.

Remark 2.3. Observe that the above proof holds if we replace the condition $p \ge ls + 3$ of the Lemma by the following conditions of Theorem D: $p \ge l + 2$ and p - 1 divides none of ks and ks + 1 for k = 1, ..., l. In other words, Theorem D can be proved in the same manner as Lemma 2.2.

We are now ready to state the following

Proposition 2.4. Let s and l be two positive integers, and let $t = \max\{1, l-1\}$. Let p be a prime such that $p \ge ts + 3$. Then

$$lH(\{s\}^{l}; p-1) \equiv (-1)^{l-1}H(ls; p-1) \begin{cases} \pmod{p^{3}} & \text{if } 2 \nmid ls \\ \pmod{p^{2}} & \text{if } 2 \mid ls. \end{cases}$$

Proof. If l = 1 and $p \ge s + 3$, then the above congruences reduce to the congruence for H(s; p - 1) given in Theorem A. If $l \ge 2$ and $p \ge (l - 1)s + 3$, by (2.2) of the proof of Lemma 2.2, we have

$$\sum_{j=1}^{l-1} (-1)^{j-1} H(js; p-1) \cdot H(\{s\}^{l-j}; p-1) = lH(\{s\}^l; p-1) - (-1)^l H(ls; p-1).$$

From the proof of Lemma 2.2, we see that each term of the sum on the left hand side of the above identity is divisible by p^3 if ls is odd, and by by p^2 if ls is even. Clearly, this fact implies both congruences from our Proposition.

Lemma 2.5. Let $p \geq 3$ be a prime, and let s be any even integer such that $0 \leq s \leq p-3$. Then the denominator of the Bernoulli number B_s , written in reduced form, is not divisible by p.

Proof. If p = 3, then s = 0, that is, $B_0 = 1$. Suppose now that $p \ge 5$. It is well known (see [7]) that Bernoulli numbers can be defined recursively as

$$B_{s} = -\frac{1}{s+1} \sum_{i=0}^{s-1} \binom{s+1}{i} B_{i}.$$

Now, by induction on even s with $0 \le s \le p-3$, the above equality immediately implies that the denominator of B_s , written in reduced form, is not divisible by p.

Remark 2.6. The above lemma is an immediate consequence of the von Staudt-Clausen theorem, which asserts that $B_{2m} + \sum_{p-1|2m} 1/p$ is an integer for all $m \in \mathbb{N}$, where the summation is over all primes p such that $p-1 \mid 2m$ (see, for example, [7, p. 233, Theorem 3]). If $B_{2m} = N_{2m}/D_{2m}$ with $gcd(N_{2m}, D_{2m}) = 1$, then, by this result, it follows that the denominator D_{2m} of B_{2m} is given by

$$D_{2m} = \prod_{\substack{p \ prime\\p-1\mid 2m}} p_{p}$$

whence Lemma 2.5 follows.

The following result is closely related to congruences of Glaisher [4], as quoted and proved by E. Lehmer (two congruences after (16) in [8]).

Lemma 2.7 ([8]; also cf. [12, Theorem 2.8]). Let $p \ge 5$ be a prime, and let m be any integer such that $1 \le m \le (p-3)/2$. Then

$$H(2m-1;p-1) := \sum_{k=1}^{p-1} \frac{1}{k^{2m-1}} \equiv \frac{m(1-2m)p^2}{2m+1} B_{p-1-2m} \pmod{p^3}, \quad (2.3)$$

and

$$H(2m; p-1) := \sum_{k=1}^{p-1} \frac{1}{k^{2m}} \equiv \frac{2mp}{2m+1} B_{p-1-2m} \pmod{p^2}.$$
 (2.4)

Proof. Consider the case when ls is odd, that is, when both l and s are odd. By the first congruence of Proposition 2.4 and the congruence (2.3) of the above lemma with ls = 2m - 1, we obtain

$$H(\{s\}^{l}; p-1) \equiv \frac{H(ls; p-1)}{l} \pmod{p^{3}}$$
$$\equiv -\frac{1}{l} \frac{sl(ls+1)p^{2}}{2(ls+2)} B_{p-ls-2} \pmod{p^{3}}$$
$$= -\frac{s(ls+1)p^{2}}{2(ls+2)} B_{p-ls-2} \pmod{p^{3}}.$$

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Similarly, using the second congruence of Proposition 2.4 and the congruence (2.4) of the above lemma with ls = 2m, we obtain the congruence of Theorem 1.1 for even ls.

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