

# A characteristic property of the ellipse

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## Problem

Let  $(c)$  be a compact smooth convex curve in  $E^2$  and A,B are interior points. The point  $M \in (c)$  and we denote  $\epsilon(M)$  the support line of the point M and  $\vec{\epsilon}_0$  the unit tangent vector at the point M. We suppose that:

$$\angle(\vec{AM}, \vec{\epsilon}_0) = \angle(\vec{BM}, -\vec{\epsilon}_0) \quad (1)$$

Prove that  $(c)$  is an ellipse.

Formulate the analogous problem for the hyperbola and the parabola.

## Proof

Let  $O$  an interior point and  $\vec{r} = r(\vec{M})$  the position vector of the point  $M \in (c)$ .

Suppose  $\phi = \angle(\vec{r}, \vec{\epsilon}_0)$ . We will have:

$\vec{r} = r\vec{r}_0$  or,

$$\frac{d\vec{r}}{ds} = \vec{\epsilon}_0 = \frac{dr}{ds}\vec{r}_0 + r\frac{d\vec{r}_0}{ds} \quad (2)$$

or

$$\vec{r} \cdot \vec{\epsilon}_0 = r \frac{dr}{ds} \quad (3)$$

that is:

$$\frac{dr}{ds} = \cos\phi. \quad (4)$$

Therefore, denoting.  $AM = r_1$  and  $BM = r_2$  we will have:

$$\frac{dr_1}{ds} = \cos\phi, \frac{dr_2}{ds} = \cos(\pi - \phi), \quad (5)$$

that is

$$\frac{dr_1}{ds} = -\frac{dr_2}{ds}, \text{ or } \frac{d(r_1 + r_2)}{ds} = 0, \quad (6)$$

and

$$r_1 + r_2 = \text{const.} \quad (7)$$

The formulation for the hyperbola can be.

Let  $(c) = (c_a) \cup (c_b)$  be a smooth curve in  $E^2$ , where  $(c_a), (c_b)$  are convex and A,B are interior points in  $(c_a)$  and  $(c_b)$  respectively. The point  $M \in (c)$  and we denote  $\epsilon(M)$  the support line of the point M and  $\vec{\epsilon}_0$  the unit tangent vector at the point M. We suppose that:

$$\angle(\vec{AM}, \vec{\epsilon}_0) = \angle(\vec{BM}, \vec{\epsilon}_0) \quad (8)$$

Then  $(c)$  must be an hyperbola.

The proof is exactly the same as in the ellipse.

The formulation for the parabola is the same with the ellipse except the compactness of  $(c)$  and supposing that  $B = \infty$ .

For the solution we point out that we determine the point  $O$  so that  $AO$  be perpendicular to the tangent to the point  $O$  of  $(c)$  and we choose  $OA$  as axis  $OX$ . Using Analytical Geometry we take an easy differential equation. We also can find a synthetic Geomtrical proof using the reduction ad absurdum method. That is, we consider the parabola  $(c_1)$  with vertex  $O$  and focus  $A$  and then we prove that  $(c) = (c_1)$ .