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Analytic Mechanics, Astronomy, and Linear Associative Algebra?: Context and Motivation for B. Peirce's Anomalous Paper

Throughout the nineteenth century, the mathematical work of Harvard professor Benjamin Peirce primarily involved analysis and astronomy. Nonetheless, Peirce's most well-known work today is *Linear Associative Algebra*, which appeared in the *American Journal of Mathematics* in 1881. This paper contains results foundational to the structure theory of algebras. Considered in context, it comes into focus as the culmination of a lifetime of thought and mathematical work, rather than a departure from earlier research interests.