

Engineering Cryptographic Software

Scalar multiplication

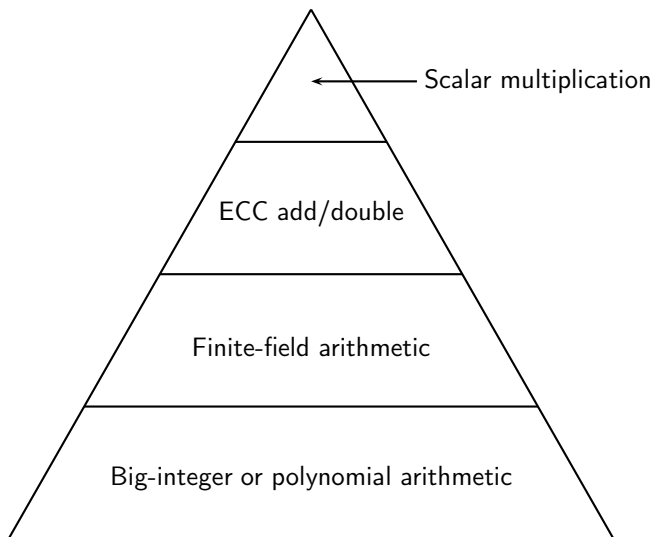
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Winter 2025/26

The ECC pyramid



The top of the pyramid

- ▶ Pyramid levels are *not* independent
- ▶ Interactions through all levels, relevant for
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- ▶ Setting for this lecture (peak of the pyramid):
 - ▶ Consider (finite, abelian) group G , written additively
 - ▶ Compute $k \cdot P$ for $k \in \mathbb{Z}$ and $P \in G$
 - ▶ This is the same as x^k for x in a multiplicative group G'
 - ▶ Same algorithms for scalar multiplication and exponentiation

The ECDLP

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- ▶ Typical setting for cryptosystems:
 - ▶ P is a fixed system parameter,
 - ▶ k is the secret (private) key,
 - ▶ Q is the public key.
- ▶ Key generation needs to compute $Q = kP$, given k and P

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- ▶ Alice computes joint key as $K = k_A Q_B$
- ▶ Bob computes joint key as $K = k_B Q_A$

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- ▶ Verify: compute $\overline{R} = SP + H(R, M)Q_A$ and check that

$$H(\overline{R}, M) \stackrel{?}{=} H(R, M)$$

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 - ▶ Key generation and Diffie-Hellman need *one* scalar multiplication kP
 - ▶ Schnorr signature verification needs double-scalar multiplication
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 - ▶ In key generation and Diffie-Hellman joint-key computation, k is secret
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- ▶ In the following: Distinguish these cases

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- ▶ Conclusion: we need algorithms that run in polynomial time (in the size of the scalar)

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- ▶ General algorithm: "Double and add"

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 $R \leftarrow P$ 
for  $i \leftarrow n - 2$  downto 0 do
     $R \leftarrow 2R$ 
    if  $(k)_2[i] = 1$  then
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- ▶ P does not need to be known in advance, no precomputation depending on P
- ▶ Handles single-scalar multiplication
- ▶ Running time clearly depends on the scalar: insecure for secret scalars!

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- ▶ We can do better (\mathcal{O} denotes the neutral element):

$R \leftarrow \mathcal{O}$

for $i \leftarrow \max(n_1, n_2) - 1$ **downto** 0 **do**

$R \leftarrow 2R$

if $(k_1)_2[i] = 1$ **then**

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- ▶ $\max(n_1, n_2)$ doublings, $m_1 + m_2$ additions

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- ▶ Let's just precompute $T = P_1 + P_2$
- ▶ Modified algorithm (special case of Strauss' algorithm):

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  if  $(k_1)_2[i] = 1$  AND  $(k_2)_2[i] = 1$  then  
     $R \leftarrow R + T$   
  else if  $(k_1)_2[i] = 1$  then  
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for  $i \leftarrow 0$  to  $n - 1$  do  
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- ▶ Eliminated all doublings in fixed-basepoint scalar multiplication!

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- ▶ Still not constant time, more later...

Let's rewrite that a bit ...

- ▶ We have a table $T = (\mathcal{O}, P)$
- ▶ Notation $T[0] = \mathcal{O}$, $T[1] = P$
- ▶ Scalar multiplication is

$$R \leftarrow P$$

for $i \leftarrow n - 2$ **downto** 0 **do**

$$R \leftarrow 2R$$

$$R \leftarrow R + T[(k)_2[i]]$$

end for

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- ▶ How about some nice numbers, like 4, 8, 16?

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```

 $R \leftarrow T[(k)_{2^w}[m-1]]$ 
for  $i \leftarrow m-2$  downto  $0$  do
  for  $j \leftarrow 1$  to  $w$  do
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- ▶ For ≈ 256 -bit scalars choose $w = 4$ or $w = 5$

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 - ▶ Remember that table lookups are generally not constant time!

Making it constant time

```
/* Sets r to the neutral element on the elliptic curve */
extern ec_point_setneutral(ec_point *r);

/* Adds p and q and stores the result in r */
extern ec_point_add(ec_point *r, const ec_point *p, const ec_point *q);

/* Doubles p and stores the result in r */
extern ec_point_double(ec_point *r, const ec_point *p);

/* For point P contains pre-computed multiples P, 2*P, 3*P,...,255*P */
extern ec_point precomputed[255];

ec_scalarmult_P(unsigned char scalar[32])
{
    int i,j;
    ec_point r;
    ec_setneutral(&r);

    for(i=31;i>=0;i--)
    {
        for(j=0;j<8;j++)
            ec_point_double(&r,&r);
        if(scalar[i] != 0)
            ec_point_add(&r,&r,precomputed[scalar[i]-1]);
    }
}
```

Making it constant time

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/* For point P contains pre-computed multiples 0, P, 2*P, 3*P,...,255*P */
extern ec_point precomputed[256];

ec_scalarmult_P(unsigned char scalar[32])
{
    int i,j;
    ec_point r;
    ec_setneutral(&r);

    for(i=31;i>=0;i--)
    {
        for(j=0;j<8;j++)
            ec_point_double(&r,&r);
        ec_point_add(&r,&r,precomputed[scalar[i]]);
    }
}
```

Making it constant time

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/* Sets r to the neutral element on the elliptic curve */
extern ec_point_setneutral(ec_point *r);

/* Adds p and q and stores the result in r */
extern ec_point_add(ec_point *r, const ec_point *p, const ec_point *q);

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/* For point P contains pre-computed multiples 0, P, 2*P, 3*P,...,255*P */
extern ec_point precomputed[256];

ec_scalarmult_P(unsigned char scalar[32])
{
    int i,j;
    ec_point r,t;
    ec_setneutral(&r);

    for(i=31;i>=0;i--)
    {
        for(j=0;j<8;j++)
            ec_point_double(&r,&r);
        ec_point_lookup(&t,precomputed,scalar[i]);
        ec_point_add(&r,&r,&t);
    }
}
```

ec_point_lookup

```
static void ec_point_lookup(ec_point *t, const ec_point *table, int pos)
{
    int i,j;
    unsigned char b;
    *t = table[0];
    for(i=0;i<256;i++)
    {
        b = (i == pos); // Not constant time!
        ec_point_cmov(t, &table[i], b); // Copy table[i] to t if b is 1
    }
}
```

ec_point_lookup

```
static void ec_point_lookup(ec_point *t, const ec_point *table, int pos)
{
    int i,j;
    unsigned char b;
    *t = table[0];
    for(i=0;i<256;i++)
    {
        b = int_eq(i, pos); // set b=1 if i==pos, else set b=0
        ec_point_cmov(t, &table[i], b); // Copy table[i] to t if b is 1
    }
}
```


int_eq and ec_point_cmov

```
unsigned char int_eq(int a, int b)
{
    unsigned long long t = a ^ b;
    t = (-t) >> 63;
    return 1-t;
}
```

```
void ec_point_cmov(ec_point *r, const ec_point *t, unsigned char b)
{
    unsigned char *u = (unsigned char *)r;
    unsigned char *v = (unsigned char *)t;
    int i;
    b = -b;
    for(i=0;i<sizeof(ec_point);i++)
        u[i] = (b & v[i]) ^ (~b & u[i]);
}
```

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}
```

- ▶ Recent compilers may re-introduce a branch in ec_point_cmov
- ▶ One solution: move ec_point_cmov to separate file, **compile without -flto**
- ▶ Cleaner solution: write in assembly

More offline precomputation

- ▶ Let's get back to fixed-basepoint multiplication
- ▶ So far we precomputed $P, 2P, 4P, 8P, \dots$

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- ▶ We can combine that with fixed-window scalar multiplication
- ▶ Precompute $T_i = (\mathcal{O}, P, 2P, 3P, \dots, (2^w - 1)P) \cdot 2^i$ for $i = 0, w, 2w, 3w, \lceil n/w \rceil - 1$

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- ▶ Perform scalar multiplication as

```
 $R \leftarrow T_0[(k)_{2^w}[0]]$   
for  $i \leftarrow 1$  to  $\lceil n/w \rceil - 1$  do  
     $R \leftarrow R + T_{iw}[(k)_{2^w}[i]]$   
end for
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    end for
```
- ▶ No doublings, only $\lceil n/w \rceil - 1$ additions
- ▶ Can use huge w , but:
 - ▶ at some point the precomputed tables don't fit into cache anymore.
 - ▶ constant-time loads get slow for large w

Fixed-window limitations

- ▶ Consider the scalar $22 = (1\ 01\ 10)_2$ and window size 2
 - ▶ Initialize R with P
 - ▶ Double, double, add P
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- ▶ More efficient:
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- ▶ Problem with fixed window: it's fixed.
- ▶ Idea: "slide" the window over the scalar

Sliding window scalar multiplication

- ▶ Choose window size w
- ▶ Rewrite scalar k as $k = (k_0, \dots, k_m)$ with k_i in $\{0, 1, 3, 5, \dots, 2^w - 1\}$ with at most one non-zero entry in each window of length w

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- ▶ Do this by scanning k from right to left, expand window from each 1-bit

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- ▶ Do this by scanning k from right to left, expand window from each 1-bit
- ▶ Precompute $P, 3P, 5P, \dots, (2^w - 1)P$
- ▶ Perform scalar multiplication

$R \leftarrow \mathcal{O}$

for $i \leftarrow m$ to 0 **do**

$R \leftarrow 2R$

if $k_i \neq 0$ **then**

$R \leftarrow R + k_i P$

end if

end for

Analysis of sliding window

- ▶ We still do $n - 1$ doublings for an n -bit scalar
- ▶ Precomputation needs $2^{w-1} - 1$ additions
- ▶ Expected number of additions in the main loop: $n/(w + 1)$

Analysis of sliding window

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- ▶ For the same w only half the precomputation compared to fixed-window scalar multiplication
- ▶ For the same w fewer additions in the main loop
- ▶ But: It's not running in constant time!
- ▶ Still nice (in double-scalar version) for signature verification

Differential addition

- ▶ Consider elliptic curves of the form $By^2 = x^3 + Ax^2 + x$.
- ▶ Montgomery in 1987 showed how to perform x -coordinate-based arithmetic:
 - ▶ Given the x -coordinate x_P of P , and
 - ▶ given the x -coordinate x_Q of Q , and
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 - ▶ compute the x -coordinate x_R of $R = P + Q$
- ▶ This is called *differential addition*
- ▶ Less efficient differential-addition formulas for other curve shapes
- ▶ Can be used for efficient computation of the x -coordinate of kP given only the x -coordinate of P
- ▶ For this, let's use projective representation $(X : Z)$ with $x = (X/Z)$

One Montgomery “ladder step”

const $a24 = (A + 2)/4$ (A from the curve equation)

function LADDERSTEP($x_{Q-P}, X_P, Z_P, X_Q, Z_Q$)

$$t_1 \leftarrow X_P + Z_P$$

$$t_6 \leftarrow t_1^2$$

$$t_2 \leftarrow X_P - Z_P$$

$$t_7 \leftarrow t_2^2$$

$$t_5 \leftarrow t_6 - t_7$$

$$t_3 \leftarrow X_Q + Z_Q$$

$$t_4 \leftarrow X_Q - Z_Q$$

$$t_8 \leftarrow t_4 \cdot t_1$$

$$t_9 \leftarrow t_3 \cdot t_2$$

$$X_{P+Q} \leftarrow (t_8 + t_9)^2$$

$$Z_{P+Q} \leftarrow x_{Q-P} \cdot (t_8 - t_9)^2$$

$$X_{2P} \leftarrow t_6 \cdot t_7$$

$$Z_{2P} \leftarrow t_5 \cdot (t_7 + a24 \cdot t_5)$$

return ($X_{2P}, Z_{2P}, X_{P+Q}, Z_{P+Q}$)

end function

The Montgomery ladder

Require: A scalar $0 \leq k \in \mathbb{Z}$ and the x -coordinate x_P of some point P

Ensure: (X_{kP}, Z_{kP}) fulfilling $x_{kP} = X_{kP}/Z_{kP}$

$x_1 = x_P$; $X_2 = 1$; $Z_2 = 0$; $X_3 = x_P$; $Z_3 = 1$

for $i \leftarrow n - 1$ **downto** 0 **do**

if bit i of k is 1 **then**

$(X_3, Z_3, X_2, Z_2) \leftarrow \text{LADDERSTEP}(x_1, X_3, Z_3, X_2, Z_2)$

else

$(X_2, Z_2, X_3, Z_3) \leftarrow \text{LADDERSTEP}(x_1, X_2, Z_2, X_3, Z_3)$

end if

end for

return X_2/Z_2

The Montgomery ladder (ctd.)

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Ensure: (X_{kP}, Z_{kP}) fulfilling $x_{kP} = X_{kP}/Z_{kP}$

$X_1 = x_P; X_2 = 1; Z_2 = 0; X_3 = x_P; Z_3 = 1$

for $i \leftarrow n - 1$ **downto** 0 **do**

$b \leftarrow \text{bit } i \text{ of } s$

$c \leftarrow b \oplus p$

$p \leftarrow b$

$(X_2, X_3) \leftarrow \text{CSWAP}(X_2, X_3, c)$

$(Z_2, Z_3) \leftarrow \text{CSWAP}(Z_2, Z_3, c)$

$(X_2, Z_2, X_3, Z_3) \leftarrow \text{LADDERSTEP}(x_1, X_2, Z_2, X_3, Z_3)$

end for

return X_2/Z_2

Advantages of the Montgomery ladder

- ▶ Very regular structure, easy to protect against timing attacks
 - ▶ Replace the if statement by conditional swap
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- ▶ Very fast (at least if we don't compare to curves with efficient endomorphisms)
- ▶ Point compression/decompression is free
- ▶ Easy to implement
- ▶ No ugly special cases (see Bernstein's "Curve25519" paper)

Multi-scalar multiplication

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- ▶ We looked at $n = 2$ before, how about $n = 128$?

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- ▶ **De-Rooij algorithm**
- ▶ Assume $k_1 > k_2 > \dots > k_n$.
- ▶ Use that $k_1 P_1 + k_2 P_2 = (k_1 - k_2)P_1 + k_2(P_1 + P_2)$
- ▶ Replace:
 - ▶ $(k_1 P_1)$ and $(k_2 P_2)$, with
 - ▶ $(k_1 - k_2)P_1$ and $k_2(P_1 + P_2)$
- ▶ Each step requires one scalar subtraction and one point addition
- ▶ Each step typically “eliminates” multiple scalar bits
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- ▶ Each step requires one scalar subtraction and one point addition
- ▶ Each step typically “eliminates” multiple scalar bits
- ▶ Can be very fast (but not constant-time)
- ▶ Requires fast access to the two largest scalars: put scalars into a heap
- ▶ Crucial for good performance: fast heap implementation

A fast heap

- ▶ Heap is a binary tree, each parent node is larger than the two child nodes
- ▶ Data structure is stored as a simple array, positions in the array determine positions in the tree
- ▶ Root is at position 0, left child node at position 1, right child node at position 2 etc.
- ▶ For node at position i , child nodes are at position $2 \cdot i + 1$ and $2 \cdot i + 2$, parent node is at position $\lfloor (i - 1) / 2 \rfloor$

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- ▶ Typical heap root replacement (pop operation): start at the root, swap down for a variable amount of times
- ▶ Floyd's heap: swap down to the bottom, swap up for a variable amount of times, advantages:
 - ▶ Each swap-down step needs only one comparison (instead of two)
 - ▶ Swap-down loop is more friendly to branch predictors

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- ▶ How about **variable** point, **fixed** scalar?
- ▶ Optimizing for the scalar means that the scalar has to be public
- ▶ Not the typical setting for ECC
- ▶ Some applications:
 - ▶ Inversion in finite fields (cmp. slides 55&56 of multiprecision.pdf)
 - ▶ Elliptic-curve factorization method (not in this lecture)

Addition chains

Definition

Let k be a positive integer. A sequence s_1, s_2, \dots, s_m is called an addition chain of length m for k if

- ▶ $s_1 = 1$
- ▶ $s_m = k$
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- ▶ An addition chain for k immediately translates into a scalar multiplication algorithm to compute kP :
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- ▶ Signed-scalar representations are “addition-subtraction chains”
- ▶ For fixed scalar we can spend a lot of time to find a good addition chain at compile time
- ▶ This is what will be used for inversion in $\mathbb{F}_{2^{255}-19}$
- ▶ Computing good addition chains? See <https://github.com/mmcloughlin/addchain>