

Homework #4

Elliptic Curves

CNS Course Sapienza

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1 Homework Goal

This homework contains a basic introduction on Elliptic Curves (EC), the general idea on the math basis, the Discrete Logarithm Problem with EC and the practical utilize of EC in cryptography.

2 Elliptic Curves Motivation

Elliptic Curves are the main trend in asymmetric encryption today: why is their usage so spread? This question has a simple answer: it is sufficient to look at table 1, where there is a comparison of the key length needed to guarantee the same level of security.

Algorithm Family	Cryptosystems	Security Level (bit)			
		80	128	192	256
Integer Factorization	RSA	1024	3072	7680	15360
Discrete Logarithm	DH, DSA, Elgamal	1024	3072	7680	15360
Elliptic Curves	ECDH, ECDSA	160	256	384	512
Symmetric key	AES, 3DES	80	128	192	256

Table 1: Key length comparison in public key and symmetric key algorithm

The bare minimum number of bits is defined by the symmetric key encryption scheme, we cannot have a smaller key with respect to the symmetric case and

have the same level of security; then asymmetric schemes need, in general, a large number of bits to guarantee the same level of security, the fact is that elliptic curves cryptography needs less than $\frac{1}{10}$ of the bits needed for another asymmetric scheme supposed the same level of security, and this relationship become smaller as the level of security grows. Indeed, if one wants to use a public key cryptography scheme, elliptic curves are the suggested choice to guarantee security without using much computational effort.

3 Mathematical background

The base idea besides elliptic curves lies on common calculus background: everyone knows the circumference equation, isn't it? It is $x^2 + y^2 = r^2$, but what if we add coefficients in front of the variables? We end up with an ellipse: $ax^2 + by^2 = r^2$, whose graph can be seen in Fig. 1a.

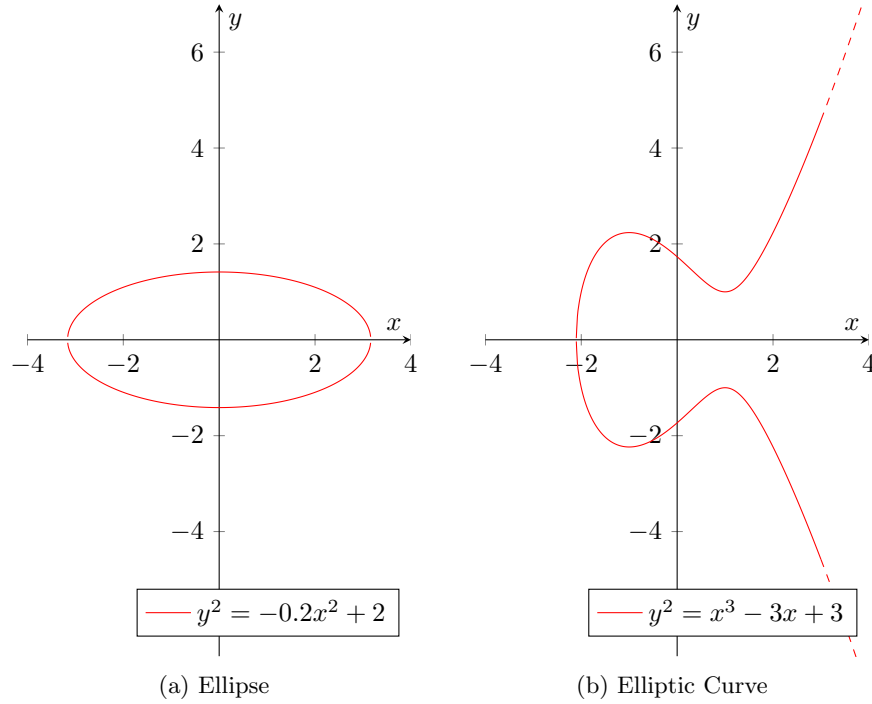


Figure 1: Graphical comparison of ellipse and elliptic curve

Well, an elliptic curve is something much similar: the general equation is $y^2 = x^3 + ax + b$, and an example of it can be seen in Fig. 1b. We can easily see from the plot that this family of curves has symmetry with respect to x axis.

In order to perform cryptography with elliptic curves, we need to reduce their usage to a special family of them: instead of defining them over the real domain \mathbb{R} , we use the integer group \mathbb{Z}_p (which is a set of integer numbers with a group operator and is closed w.r.t. this operation), with $p > 3$. In addition, the elliptic curve equation is reduced in $\text{mod } p$, and the coefficient must satisfy the following equation to remove useless or too easy to break curves: $4a^3 + 27b^2 \neq 0$. To fulfill the group operation, we need to add an imaginary point at infinity, \mathcal{O} .

Now that we have defined the elliptic curves of interest, we need to define a group over them, which is the basis of cryptography: in order to fulfill this task, we need a set of elements, which are the points belonging to the elliptic curves, and then we need a group operator to fulfill the group law. It is possible to have both a geometrical analytical interpretation of this operator; here we start with the geometrical one since it is easier to understand and more explicative.

The geometric interpretation starts by drawing the elliptic curve without modulo reduction and defined on \mathbb{R} , so we can easily visualize the curve in a 2D graph as those in Fig. 2. The group operation can be divided into 2 simpler case: the addition of two different point and the addition of the same point, called also doubling.

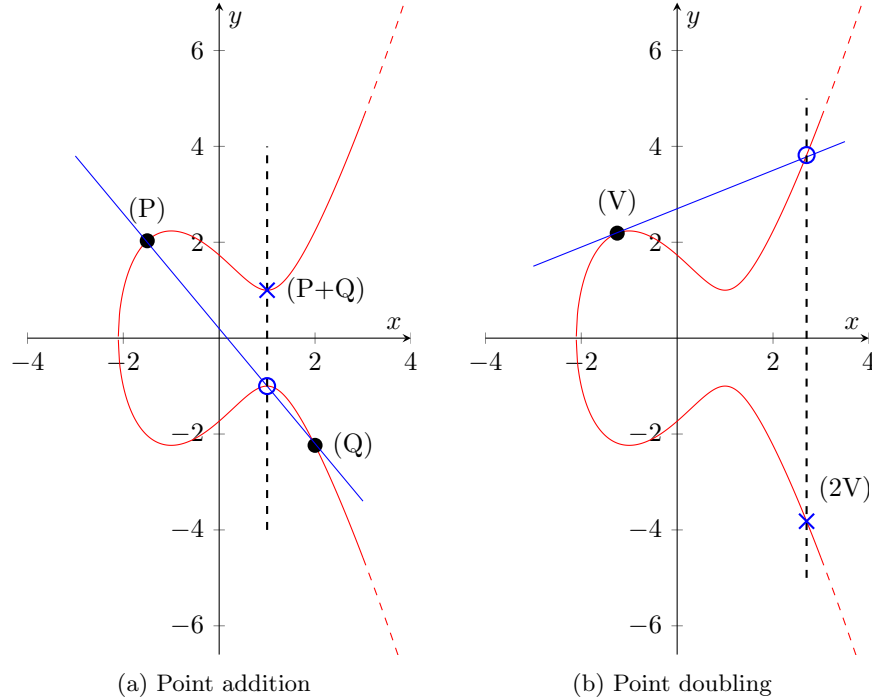


Figure 2: Graphical interpretation of group operator

The first situation is represented in Fig. 2a: we want to sum points P and Q, we draw the secant line passing through this two points, then, due to the particular

form of the elliptic curve, we are able to find a new intersection between the EC and the secant other than the two point to be summed, this new point is highlighted by a circle in the figure, finally this point is mirrored w.r.t. the x axis and the resulting point is the sum between P and Q, and it is denoted by an x in the plot.

In the other case, we need to develop something different: since we are adding the same point, we cannot define a secant line, but, if we think at point Q of Fig. 2a and we try to move it along the EC towards V, we easily see that the secant becomes the tangent to the EC in point P as in Fig. 2b. Given this mind set, it is easy to apply the same reasoning as in the previous case: we seek for the intersection between the tangent line and the EC, then project this point mirroring it w.r.t. the x axis and we end up with the point 2V. All this is represented in Fig. 2b.

The geometrical interpretation is fine to visualize the reasoning and the idea, but what if we want to use this mind set in practice? We need to develop an analytical formulation: take the idea in the case of addition, then with doubling it's similar. We start from the EC equation $EC : y^2 = x^3 + ax + b$ and we define the secant passing through points P and Q as $y = sx + m$, whose coefficient can be easily found once we have the values of the two points to be added. We want to find the point to be mirrored, so we solve the system between EC and $y = sx + m$, which simply is $s^2x^2 + m^2 + 2smx = x^3 + ax + b$, whose only unknown is the variable x (the other parameters are determined once we have the practical problem). This system admits 3 different solution: two of them are the points to be added and the third one is the point to be added. With some computations, we end up with the addition formula:

$$s = \frac{y_2 - y_1}{x_2 - x_1} \mod p \quad (1)$$

Equation 1 gives us the slope of the secant line. A little addition to this formula: implementing it we use $(y_2 - y_1)(x_2 - x_1)^{-1} \mod p$ since inversion is easier to compute than division (multiplicative inverse can be computed by means of Extended Euclidean Algorithm). Similar reasoning and computation drive us to the formula of the slope in the case of doubling:

$$s = \frac{3x_1^2 + a}{2y_1} \mod p \quad (2)$$

Now we are finishing our journey, but we still need one more thing: to define a group, it is necessary to have a neutral element for the group operator: something such that $P + ? = P$. If we understood correctly the addition mechanism, to end in P, we need to obtain a secant whose third intersection point with the EC is the mirror of P w.r.t. the x axis: so we need a vertical secant line, which is obtainable only by using an artificial point defined before as \mathcal{O} . This point is not a real point, we just created it to be at $+\infty$ or at $-\infty$ on y axis in order to obtain a vertical secant line. This behavior can be seen in Fig. 3.

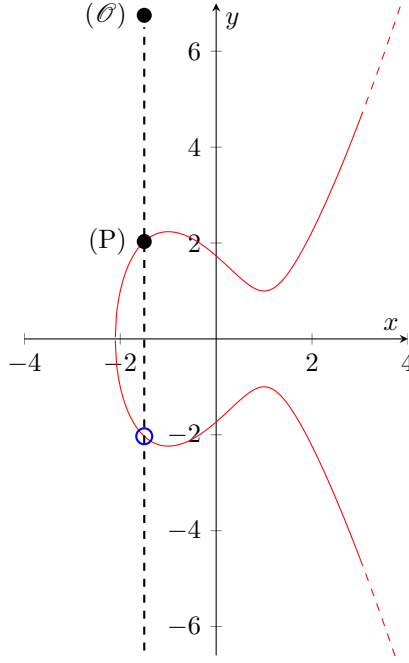


Figure 3: Group operator neutral element

The introduction of \mathcal{O} allows to fulfill two different group properties:

- $P + \mathcal{O} = P \quad \forall P \in EC$
- $P + (-P) = \mathcal{O} \quad \forall P \in EC$

The second property needs some more explanation: $-P$ is the mirror of the point P w.r.t. the x axis, so $-P = (x_p, -y_p)$, where the minus in front of P comes from the group operator, while the minus in front of y_p is the typical minus operation used in \mathbb{R} . With these properties the mathematical background comes to an end, we must only add a theorem without proof, which is the following:

Theorem. *The points on an EC , including \mathcal{O} , have a cyclic subgroup. Under certain conditions, all points on an EC form a cyclic group.*

This theorem comes in handy when dealing with cryptography, since we need a cyclic subgroup to guarantee that a computation is easy to do in one way but hard to reverse.

4 Discrete Logarithm Problem with Elliptic Curves

(a) Core

(b) Preprocessing

Figure 4: Mix columns base functions

5 Use of Elliptic Curves in Cryptography

6 Conclusion