# Black-Box Extension Fields and the Inexistence of Field-Homomorphic One-Way Permutations

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**Abstract**

The black-box field (BBF) extraction problem is, for a given field $\mathbb{F}$, to determine a secret field element hidden in a black-box which allows to add and multiply values in $\mathbb{F}$ in the box and which reports only equalities of elements in the box. This problem is of cryptographic interest for two reasons. First, for $\mathbb{F} = \mathbb{F}_p$ it corresponds to the generic reduction of the discrete logarithm problem to the computational Diffie-Hellman problem in a group of prime order $p$. Second, an efficient solution to the BBF problem proves the inexistence of certain field-homomorphic encryption schemes whose realization is an interesting open problems in algebra-based cryptography. BBFs are also of independent interest in computational algebra.

In the previous literature, BBFs had only been considered for the prime field case. In this paper we consider a generalization of the extraction problem to BBFs that are extension fields. More precisely we discuss the representation problem defined as follows: For given generators $g_1, \ldots, g_d$ algebraically generating a BBF and an additional element $x$, all hidden in a black-box, express $x$ algebraically in terms of $g_1, \ldots, g_d$. We give an efficient algorithm for this representation problem and related problems for fields with small characteristic (e.g. $\mathbb{F} = \mathbb{F}_{2^n}$ for some $n$). We also consider extension fields of large characteristic and show how to reduce the representation problem to the extraction problem for the underlying prime field.

These results imply the inexistence of field-homomorphic (as opposed to only group-homomorphic, like RSA) one-way permutations for fields of small characteristic.

**Keywords:** black-box fields, generic algorithms, homomorphic encryption, one-way permutations, computational algebra.

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Black-Boxes and Generic Algorithms

Algebraic structures like groups, rings, and fields, and algorithms on them, play a crucial role in cryptography. In order to compute in an algebraic structure one needs a representation of its elements as bitstrings. One can consider algorithms that do not exploit any property of the representation, i.e., that are *generic*. This generic model is of interest for two reasons. First, generic algorithms can be used no matter how the structure is represented, and second, this model allows for significant lower bound proofs for certain computational problems. For instance, Shoup [Sho97] proved a lower bound on the complexity of any generic algorithm for computing discrete logarithms in a finite cyclic group.

Representation-independent algorithms on a given algebraic structure $S$ are best modeled by a black-box [BS84, BB99, Mau05] which initially contains some elements of $S$, describing the instance of a computational problem in consideration. The black-box accepts instructions to perform the operation(s) of $S$ on the

values stored in it. The (internal) values are stored in addressable registers and the result of an operation is stored in a new register. The values stored in the black-box are hidden and the only information about these values provided to the outside (an hence to the algorithm) are equalities of stored elements. This models that there is no (need for a) representation of values but that nevertheless one can compute on given values. The equality check provided by the black-box models the trivial property, of any (deterministic) representation, that equality is easily checked.[1]

A basic problem in this setting is the *extraction problem*: The black-box contains a secret value $x$ (and possibly also some constants), and the task of the algorithm is to compute $x$ (explicitly).

For example, a cyclic group of prime order $p$ is modeled by a black-box where $S$ is the additive group $\mathbb{Z}_p$ (and which can be assumed to contain the constants 0 and 1 corresponding to the neutral element and the generator, respectively). The discrete logarithm problem is the extraction problem for this black-box. Shoup's result implies that no algorithm can extract $x$ (if uniformly chosen) with fewer than $O(\sqrt{p})$ operations. Actually, this many operations are required to provoke a single collision in the black-box, which is necessary for the algorithm to obtain any information about the content of the black-box. Both the baby-step giant-step algorithm and the Pohlig-Hellman algorithm are generic algorithm which can be described and analyzed in this model.

### 1.2 Black-Box Fields and Known Results

If one assumes in the above setting that the black-box not only allows *addition* but also *multiplication* of values modulo $p$, then this corresponds to a *black-box field* (BBF).

An efficient (non-uniform) algorithm for the extraction problem in $\mathbb{F}_p$ was proposed in [Mau94] (see also [MW99]), where non-uniform means that the algorithm depends on $p$ or, equivalently, obtains a help-string that depends on $p$. Moreover, the existence of the help-string, which is actually the description of an elliptic curve of smooth order over $\mathbb{F}_p$, depends on a plausible but unproven number-theoretic conjecture.

Boneh and Lipton [BL96] proposed a similar but *uniform* algorithm for the extraction problem in $\mathbb{F}_p$, but its running time is subexponential and the analysis also relies on a related unproven number-theoretic conjecture.

### 1.3 Black-Box Extention Fields

Prime fields differ significantly from extension fields, which is relevant in the context of this paper:

Since a prime field $\mathbb{F}_p$ is, in contrast to an extension field $\mathbb{F}_{p^k}$ (for $k > 1$), generated by any non-zero element (for instance 1), there is a unique isomorphism between any two instantiations of $\mathbb{F}_p$ that is given by mapping the 1 of the first instance to the 1 of the second. In particular there is a unique isomorphism between a BBF over $\mathbb{F}_p$ and any explicit representation of $\mathbb{F}_p$. Therefore there is a unique element in an explicit representation corresponding to a secret value $x$ inside the black-box and the extraction problem as stated above is well defined.

As an extension field $\mathbb{F}_{p^k}$ (for $k > 1$) contains non-zero elements that do *not* algebraically generate the entire field, it is not sufficient to give a secret value $x$ inside the black box in order to describe an arbitrary extension field. Rather the field must be given by a set of elements (generators) in the black-box (algebraically) generating the field. A (vector space) basis of $\mathbb{F}_{p^k}$ over $\mathbb{F}_p$ would be a natural choice, but our goal is to make no assumption whatsoever about how the given elements generate the field.

Furthermore, extension fields $\mathbb{F}_{p^k}$ (for $k > 1$) have non-trivial automorphisms, so there is *no unique* isomorphism between a black-box extension field and an explicit representation. Therefore the extraction

[1] Note that this model is simpler than Shoup's model which assumes a random representation.

problem as originally posed is not well defined for extension fields. We hence formulate a more general problem for extension fields, the *representation problem*: Write a secret $x$ inside the black-box as an algebraic expression in the other elements (generators) given in the black-box.

When an explicit representation of the field is given outside of the black-box (say in terms of an irreducible polynomial of degree $k$ over $\mathbb{F}_p$), then one can also consider the problem of efficiently computing an isomorphism (and its inverse) between this explicitly given field and the BBF.

### 1.4 Contributions of this Paper

We present an efficient reduction of the representation problem for a finite black-box extension field to the extraction problem for the underlying prime field $\mathbb{F}_p$. If the characteristic $p$ of the field in question is small, or if $p$ is large but an efficient algorithm for the extraction problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$ exists, then this yields an efficient algorithm for the representation problem for the extension field. Under their respective number-theoretic assumptions one can also use the results of [Mau94, BL96, MW99].

**Theorem 1** (informal)**.** *The representation problem for the (finite) black-box (extension) field $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ of characteristic $p$ is efficiently reducible to the representation problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$. If the characteristic $p$ is small (e.g. $p = 2$) then the representation problem for $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ is effciently solvable.*

Furthermore, our algorithms provide an efficiently computable isomorphism between the black-box field and an explicitly represented (outside the black-box) isomorphic copy. If preimages of the generators inside the black-box under some isomorphism from an explicitly represented field into the black-box are known or if the black-box allows inserting elements from an explicitly represented field, we may even efficiently extract any element from the black-box field, i.e., find the element corresponding to an $x$ in the black-box in the explicit representation.

In particular, these results imply that any problem posed for a black-box field (of small characteristic) can efficiently be transformed into a problem for an explicit field and be solved there using unrestricted (representation-dependent) methods. For example, they imply that computing discrete logarithms in the multiplicative group over a finite field (of small characteristic) is not harder in the black-box setting than if the field is given by an irreducible polynomial.

### 1.5 Cryptographic Significance of Black-Box Fields

A BBF $\mathbb{F}_p$ can be viewed as a black-box group of prime order $p$, where the multiplication operation of the field corresponds to a Diffie-Hellman oracle; therefore an efficient algorithm for the extraction problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$ corresponds to an efficient generic reduction of the discrete logarithm problem to the computational Diffie-Hellman problem in any group of prime order $p$ (see [Mau94]). So an efficient algorithm for the extraction problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$ provides a security proof for the Diffie-Hellman key agreement protocol [DH76] in any group of order $p$ for which the discrete logarithm problem is hard.[2]

Boneh and Lipton [BL96] gave a second reason why the extraction problem is of interest in cryptography, namely to prove the inexistence of certain field-homomorphic encryption schemes.

The RSA trap-door oneway permutation defined by $x \mapsto x^e \pmod n$ is group-homomorphic; the product of two ciphertexts $x^e$ and $x'^e$ is the ciphertext for their product: $x^e \cdot x'^e = (x \cdot x')^e$. This algebraic property has proven enormously useful in many cryptographic protocols. However, this homomorphic property is only for one operation (i.e., for a group), and an open problem in cryptography is to devise a trap-door oneway

[2] In this context it is not a problem that Maurer's efficient algorithm [Mau94] for the extraction problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$ is non-uniform, because one can construct a Diffie-Hellman group of order $p$ together with the help-string and hence the equivalence really holds.

permutation that is field-homomorphic, i.e., for addition *and* for multiplication. Such a scheme would have applications in multi-party computation, computation with encrypted data (e.g. server-assisted computation), etc. [SYY99, ALN87, DF02].

A solution to the extraction problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$ implies an equally efficient attack on any $\mathbb{F}_p$-homomorphic encryption scheme that permits checking the equality of two encrypted elements (which is for example true for any deterministic scheme). Indeed, a black-box field can be regarded as an idealized formulation of a field-homomorphic encryption scheme which allows for equality checks. Any algorithm that succeeds in recovering an "encrypted" element hidden inside the black-box will also break an encryption scheme that allows the same operations. In particular, an efficient algorithm for the extraction problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$ implies the inexistence of a secure $\mathbb{F}_p$-homomorphic one-way permutation.

This generalizes naturally to the extension field case yielding the following corollary to Theorem 1:

**Corollary 1.** *For fields of small characteristic $p$ (in particular for $\mathbb{F}_{2^k}$) there are no secure field-homomorphic encryption schemes*[3] *that permit equality checks. In particular, there are no field-homomorphic one-way permutations over such fields.*

The same holds even for large characteristic $p$ if we admit non-uniform adversaries under the assumption of [Mau94, MW99].

Beyond its cryptographic significance, the representation problem for black-box extension fields is of independent mathematical interest. The representation problem for groups, in particular black-box groups, has been extensively studied [BB99, BS84], inciting interest in the representation problem for other algebraic black-box structures.

# 2 The Representation Problem for Finite Black-Box Fields

## 2.1 Preliminaries on Finite Fields

We assume the reader to be familiar with the basic algebraic concepts of groups, rings, fields, and vector spaces and we summarize a few basic facts about finite fields.

The cardinality of every finite field is a prime power, $p^k$, where $p$ is called the *characteristic* and $k$ the *extension degree*. There exists a finite field for every prime $p$ and every $k$. Finite fields of equal cardinality are isomorphic, i.e., for each cardinality $p^k$ there is up to isomorphism only one finite field, which allows one to refer to it just as $\mathbb{F}_{p^k}$.

Prime fields $\mathbb{F}_p$ (i.e., $k = 1$) are defined as $\mathbb{Z}_p = \{0, \ldots, p-1\}$ with addition and multiplication modulo $p$. An extension field $\mathbb{F}_{p^k}$ can be defined as the polynomial ring $\mathbb{F}_p[x]$ modulo an irreducible polynomial $m(x)$ of degree $k$ over $\mathbb{F}_p$. It hence consists of all polynomials of degree at most $k-1$ with coefficients in $\mathbb{F}_p$.

For every $x \in \mathbb{F}_{p^k}$, the $p$-fold sum of $x$ (i.e., $x + x + \cdots + x$ with $p$ terms), denoted $px$, is zero: $px = 0$. Moreover, $x^{p^k-1} = 1$ for all $x \neq 0$, as $p^k - 1$ is the cardinality of the multiplicative group of $\mathbb{F}_{p^k}$, which is actually cyclic.

An extension field $\mathbb{F}_{p^k}$ is a vector space over $\mathbb{F}_p$ of dimension $k$. For appropriate $g \in \mathbb{F}_{p^k}$ there exist bases of the form $(1, g, g^2, \ldots, g^{k-1})$. The only automorphisms of a finite field $\mathbb{F}_{p^k}$ are the Frobenius automorphisms $x \mapsto x^{(p^i)}$ for $i = 0, \ldots, k-1$. In particular, a prime field has no non-trivial automorphisms.

[3] In the public-key case we can efficiently recover the encrypted field element, in the private-key case this is only possible up to isomorphism, as we may have no knowledge of the plaintext field.

For every $\ell$ dividing $k$, there is a subfield $\mathbb{F}_{p^\ell}$ of $\mathbb{F}_{p^k}$. The *trace function* $\mathrm{tr}_{\mathbb{F}_{p^k}/\mathbb{F}_{p^\ell}} : \mathbb{F}_{p^k} \to \mathbb{F}_{p^\ell}$, defined as

$$\mathrm{tr}_{\mathbb{F}_{p^k}/\mathbb{F}_{p^\ell}}(a) = \sum_{i=0}^{(k/\ell)-1} a^{(p^{i\ell})},$$

is a surjective and $\mathbb{F}_{p^\ell}$-linear function [LN97].

## 2.2 The Black-box Model

We make use of the abstract model of computation from [Mau05]: A black-box field $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ is characterized by a black-box $\mathbf{B}$ which can store an (unbounded number of) values from some finite field $\mathbb{F}_{p^k}$ of known characteristic $p$ but not necessarily known extension degree in internal registers $V_0, V_1, V_2, \ldots$. The first $d+1$ of these registers hold the initial state $I = [g_0, g_1, \ldots, g_d]$ of the black-box. We require the size $d+1$ of the initial state to be at most polynomial in $\log(|\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}|)$.

The black-box $\mathbf{B}$ provides the following operations: It takes as input a pair $(i, j)$ of indices and a bit indicating whether addition or multiplication should be invoked. Then it performs the required operation on $V_i$ and $V_j$, stores the result in the next free register, say $V_\ell$, and reports all pairs of indices $(m, n)$ such that $V_m = V_n$.[4]

Since we only allow performing the field operations $+$ and $\cdot$ on the values of the black box, the black-box field $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ is by definition the field $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}} = \mathbb{F}_p[g_0, g_1, \ldots, g_d]$ generated[5] by the elements $g_0, g_1, \ldots, g_d \in \mathbb{F}_{p^k}$ contained in the initial state $I = [g_0, g_1, \ldots, g_d]$ of the black-box.

A black-box field $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ is thus completely characterized by the

- **public values:** characteristic[6] $p$, size $d+1$ of the initial state,
- **secret values:** initial state $I = [g_0, g_1, \ldots, g_d]$ (hidden inside the black-box)

This is probably the most basic yet complete way of describing a finite field. The field $\mathbb{F}_{p^k}$, the elements of which the black-box can store, does not and need not appear here. Since no algorithm can compute any value not expressible as an expression in $+, \cdot$ and the elements initially given inside the black-box, we can without loss of generality assume that $k$ is such that $\mathbb{F}_{p^k} \cong \mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$, where $k$ is unknown, but can be efficiently computed as we shall see later.

Also, the operations "additive inverse" and "multiplicative inverse" and the constants 0 and 1 need not be provided explicitly, since they can be computed efficiently given the characteristic $p$ and the field size $|\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}| = p^k$: We can compute the additive inverse for an element $a \in \mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}^*$ as $-a = (p-1)a$, and the multiplicative inverse is $a^{-1} = a^{p^k-2}$. Furthermore, $1 = a^{p^k-1}$ for any non-zero $a$ and $0 = pa$ for any $a$. These expressions can be evaluated efficiently using square-and-multiply techniques.

When discussing the complexity of algorithms on black-box fields, we count each invocation of the black-box (field operation or equality check) as one step. Additionally we will take into account the runtime of computations not directly involving the black-box.

We consider an algorithm to be *efficient* if it runs in time at most polynomial in the bit-size of a field element, $\log |\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}|$.[7]

[4] Alternatively, equality checks could also be modeled as an explicit operation which must be called with two indices.

[5] By $\mathbb{F}_p[g_0, g_1, \ldots, g_d]$ we denote the field consisting of all polynomial expressions over $\mathbb{F}_p$ in the generators $g_0, g_1, \ldots, g_d$.

[6] If the characteristic $p$ is small it need not be given but can be recovered in time $O(\sqrt{p})$ using Baby-Step-Giant-Step [Mau05].

[7] The requirement that the size $d+1$ of the initial state be at most polynomial in $\log(|\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}|)$ is necessary for this to make sense.

## 2.3 The Representation Problem and Related Problems

We now turn to the problems we intend to solve. Let a characteristic $p$ be given and let $\mathbf{B}$ be a black-box with initial state $I = [x, g_1, \ldots g_d]$ consisting of generators $g_1, \ldots g_d$ and a challenge $x$, where $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}} = \mathbb{F}_p[x, g_1, \ldots g_d]$.We then consider the following problems:

**Definition 1** (Representability Problem, Representation Problem)**.** We call $x$ *representable* (in the generators $g_1, \ldots g_d$) if $x \in \mathbb{F}_p[g_1, \ldots g_d]$. The problem of deciding whether $x \in \mathbb{F}_p[g_1, \ldots g_d]$ is called the *representability problem*. If $x$ is representable, then finding a multi-variate polynomial $q \in \mathbb{F}_p[X_1, \ldots, X_d]$ such that $x = q(g_1, \ldots, g_d)$ is called the *representation problem*. $\Diamond$

We proceed to discuss two problems that are closely related with the representation problem. First, we state a generalization of the extraction problem, defined in [Mau05], that is applicable to all finite black-box fields. To do so, we need to specify an isomorphism $\phi$ from the black-box to some explicitly given field $K$. This is necessary for the extraction problem to be well-defined because, in contrast to prime fields, there are many isomorphisms between two isomorphic extension fields.

**Definition 2** (Extraction Problem)**.** Let $K$ be an explicitly given field (e.g. by an irreducible polynomial) such that $K \cong \mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$. Let the images $\phi(g_1), \ldots, \phi(g_d)$ of the generators $g_1, \ldots, g_d$ under some isomorphism $\phi : \mathbb{F}_p[g_1, \ldots g_d] \to K$ be given. The *extraction problem* is to compute $\phi(x)$.[8] $\Diamond$

*Remark* 1. Note that an efficient solution to the representation problem implies an efficient solution to the extraction problem. The expression $q(g_1, \ldots, g_d)$ returned as solution to the representation problem can simply be evaluated over $K$, substituting $\phi(g_i)$ for $g_i$ ($i = 1, \ldots, d$), which yields $\phi(x)$:

$$q(\phi(g_1), \ldots, \phi(g_d)) = \phi(q(g_1, \ldots, g_d)) = \phi(x).$$

Solving the extraction problem can equivalently be described as finding an algorithm for computing the isomorphism $\phi$ defined by giving the images of the generators. This naturally leads to the question whether the inverse $\phi^{-1}$ of $\phi$ can also be efficiently computed.

**Definition 3** (Isomorphism Problem)**.** Let $K$ be an explicitly given field (e.g. by an irreducible polynomial) such that $K \cong \mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$. The *isomorphism problem* consists of efficiently computing an (arbitrary but fixed) isomorphism $\phi : \mathbb{F}_p[g_1, \ldots g_d] \to K$ and its inverse $\phi^{-1}$ for arbitrary elements of $K$ and $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$. $\Diamond$

In the following we will exhibit an efficient reduction from the representation problem for any finite field to the representation problem for the underlying prime field. Moreover, our solution to the representation problem will also yield an explicitly given field (by an irreducible polynomial) $\mathbb{F}_{p^k} \cong \mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ with a solution to the isomorphism problem for $\mathbb{F}_{p^k}$ and $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$. This allows to solve any problem posed on the black-box field $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ in the explicitly given field $\mathbb{F}_{p^k}$ using the corresponding algorithms.

## 2.4 The Representation Problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$

First, we shall see that the representation, extraction and isomorphism problems are one and the same when the black-box field $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ is isomorphic to some prime field $\mathbb{F}_p$:

**Lemma 1.** *Let $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ be a BBF of characteristic $p$ with initial state $I = [x, g_1, \ldots, g_d]$. If $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}} \cong \mathbb{F}_p$, then the representation, extraction and isomorphism problems are efficiently reducible to one another.*

[8] The extraction problem also makes sense if the isomorphism $\phi$ is given in another fashion. For example, the black-box might offer an operation that allows inserting elements from an explicitly given field $K$. This would for instance correspond to a public-key field-homomorphic encryption scheme.

*Proof.* Note that there is a unique isomorphism $\phi : \mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}} \to \mathbb{F}_p$. Furthermore, as $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}} \cong \mathbb{F}_p$, there must be a $g_i \neq 0$ ($i \in \{1, \ldots, d\}$). This $g_i$ can efficiently be found by checking the inequality $g_i + g_i \neq g_i$ and the constant 1 can efficiently be computed inside the black-box as $g_i^{p-1}$ using square-and-multiply.

Reduction extraction to representation: Remark 1.

Reduction isomorphism to extraction: A solution to the extraction problem yields an efficient algorithm computing the isomorphism $\phi$. The inverse $\phi^{-1}$ of $\phi$ can efficiently be computed using the square-and-multiply technique, constructing $\phi(a)$ for $a \in \mathbb{F}_p$ as a sum of 1s inside the black-box. This solves the isomorphism problem.

Reduction representation to isomorphism: A solution to the isomorphism problem yields an efficient algorithm computing the isomorphism $\phi$. Then $\phi(x)g_i^{p-1}$ is a solution to the representation problem. □

Note that solving the extraction problem for a black-box field $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}} \cong \mathbb{F}_p$ with initial state $V^1 = [x]$ amounts to solving the discrete logarithm problem for a group of order $p$ (given as a black-box) for which a Diffie-Hellman oracle is given. The following results are known:

**Lemma 2** (Maurer)**.** *There exists a non-uniform algorithm that, under a (plausible) number-theoretic conjecture, solves the extraction (representation, isomorphism) problem for a black-box field $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}} \cong \mathbb{F}_p$ in time polynomial in $\log(p)$ with polynomial (in $\log(p)$) amount of advice depending on the characteristic $p$.*

**Lemma 3** (Boneh, Lipton)**.** *There exists a (uniform) algorithm that, under a (plausible) number-theoretic conjecture [BL96], solves the extraction (representation, isomorphism) problem for a black-box field $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}} \cong \mathbb{F}_p$ in time subexponential in $\log(p)$.*

For the remainder of this work we will only concern ourselves with reducing other problems to the representation problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$. The reader may generally assume that $p$ is small such that the representation problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$ is easy to solve.

### 2.5 The Representation Problem for $\mathbb{F}_{p^k}$ for given $\mathbb{F}_p$-Basis

Before we proceed to the general case, we first investigate the simpler case where the initial state of the black-box $\mathbf{B}$ is $I = [x, b_1, \ldots, b_k]$, and $b_1, \ldots, b_k$ form a basis of $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ as $\mathbb{F}_p$ vector space. We efficiently reduce this problem to the representation problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$ described in Section 2.4.

**Lemma 4.** *The representation problem for a black-box field $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ of characteristic $p$ with initial state $I = [x, b_1, \ldots, b_k]$, where $b_1, \ldots, b_k$ form an $\mathbb{F}_p$-basis of $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$, is efficiently reducible to the representation problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$.*

*Proof.* The proof relies on the well-known dual basis theorem [LN97]: For any $\mathbb{F}_p$-basis $\{b_1, \ldots, b_k\}$ of $\mathbb{F}_{p^k}$ there exists a dual basis $\{c_1, \ldots, c_k\}$ with the property $\mathrm{tr}_{\mathbb{F}_{p^k}/\mathbb{F}_p}(c_i b_j) = \delta_{ij}$ where $\delta_{ij}$ designates the Kronecker-Delta. We calculate the dual basis $\{c_1, \ldots, c_k\}$ for the basis $\{b_1, \ldots, b_k\}$ inside the black-box. This can be done efficiently as follows:

We write the elements of the dual basis as $c_i = \sum_{l=1}^{k} \alpha_{il} b_l$. Let $A = (\alpha_{il})_{i,l=1,\ldots,k}$ be the coefficient matrix, $B = (\mathrm{tr}(b_l b_j))_{l,j=1,\ldots,k}$ the trace matrix, and $I_k$ the identity matrix. Then the definition of the dual basis yields a matrix equation $AB = I_k$. Traces can be computed efficiently inside the black-box using square-and-multiply techniques. So the trace matrix $B$ can efficiently be computed inside the black-box. Since $B$ always has full rank [LN97], the matrix equation $AB = I_k$ can be solved for the $\alpha_{il}$ using Gaussian elimination (inside the box $\mathbf{B}$).

As the characteristic $p$ and the exponent $k$ are known, we can efficiently compute additive and multiplicative inverses (see subsection 2.2). Solving for the $k^2$ unknowns in the matrix $A$ using Gaussian elimination is

efficient and only requires field operations and equality checks. Hence it can be performed in the black-box and we can efficiently compute the dual basis elements $c_i$ inside the black-box.

To represent the challenge $x$ in the basis $\{b_1, \ldots, b_k\}$, we now calculate $\xi_i = \mathrm{tr}(c_i x) \in \mathbb{F}_p$ inside the black-box and have $x = \sum_{i=1}^{k} \xi_i b_i$ by the dual basis property. We use an oracle $\mathcal{O}$ that solves the representation problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$ (possibly instantiated according to subsection 2.4) to extract the $\xi_i$ from the black box, obtaining the required representation of $x$ in the given generators (basis) $\{b_1, \ldots, b_k\}$. □

# 3 The Representation Problem for $\mathbb{F}_{p^k}$ for Arbitrary Generating Sets

Now we turn to the general case, where a black-box field $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ of characteristic $p$ is not necessarily given by a basis, but by an arbitrary generating set $\{g_1, \ldots, g_d\}$.

## 3.1 Main Theorem

Before we get to our main result, we first discuss the representability problem.

**Lemma 5.** *The representability problem for a black-box field $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ of characteristic $p$ with initial state $I = [x, g_1, \ldots, g_d]$ can be solved efficiently and the extension degree $k$ such that $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}} \cong \mathbb{F}_{p^k}$ can be found efficiently.*

*Proof.* We need to efficiently determine whether $x$ is representable in the generators $g_1, \ldots, g_d$ and then find $k$ such that $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}} \cong \mathbb{F}_{p^k}$. To this end we first determine the size $k_i := k(g_i) := |\mathbb{F}_p[g_i]|$ of the subfield $\mathbb{F}_p[g_i] \leq \mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ of the black-box field $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ generated by $g_i$ for $i = 1, \ldots, d$. We have

$$k_i = k(g_i) = \min\{j \in \mathbb{N} : g_i = g_i^{p^j}\} \tag{1}$$

by the properties of the Frobenius homomorphism $y \mapsto y^p$ [LN97]. Eq. (1) can be evaluated efficiently using square-and-multiply.

Now $x$ is representable in the generators $g_1, \ldots, g_d$ if and only if $x \in \mathbb{F}_p[g_1, \ldots, g_d]$ or, equivalently, $\mathbb{F}_p[x] \leq \mathbb{F}_p[g_1, \ldots, g_d]$. But the field $\mathbb{F}_p[g_1, \ldots, g_d]$ generated by $g_1, \ldots, g_d$ is isomorphic to the smallest field $\mathbb{F}_{p^{k'}}$ where $k' = \mathrm{lcm}_{i=1}^{l}(k_i)$ that contains all the $\mathbb{F}_{p^{k_i}}$. Hence $x$ is representable in the generators $g_1, \ldots, g_d$ if and only if $k(x) \mid k'$. Moreover, independently of the representability of $x$ we have $k = \mathrm{lcm}(k(x), k')$. □

We can now state our main result, an efficient reduction from the representation problem for an extension field to the representation problem for the underlying prime field:

**Theorem 1.** *The representation problem for the black-box field $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ of characteristic $p$ with initial state $I = [x, g_1, \ldots, g_d]$ (not necessarily a basis) such that $x$ is representable in $g_1, \ldots, g_d$ is efficiently reducible to the representation problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$.*

We shall see later that from this theorem we can also obtain efficient reductions of the extraction and isomorphism problems to the representation problem for the underlying prime field $\mathbb{F}_p$.

## 3.2 Proof of Theorem 1

By assumption, the challenge $x$ is representable in the generators $g_1, \ldots, g_d$. We will show how to efficiently generate a $\mathbb{F}_p$-power-basis $\{g^0, g^1, \ldots, g^{k-1}\}$ for $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ inside the black-box. The representation problem can then be efficiently reduced to the representation problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$ using Lemma 4.

Algorithm 1 returns an $\mathbb{F}_p$-power-basis for $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ by computing an element $g \in \mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ (a generator), such that $\mathbb{F}_p[g] = \mathbb{F}_{p^k}$.

**Algorithm 1** Compute power-basis

$g := 1$
$m := 1$
**for** $i = 1$ to $d$ **do**
  $k_i := k(g_i) := \min\{j \in \mathbb{N} : g_i = g_i^{p^j}\}$
  **if** $k_i \nmid m$ **then**
    $m := \mathrm{lcm}(m, k_i)$
    $g :=$ `combine_gen`$(g, g_i)$
  **end if**
**end for**
**return** power basis $\{g^0, g^1, \ldots, g^{k-1}\}$

Algorithm 1 iterates over the generators $g_1, \ldots, g_d$, checking if the current $g_i$ is already contained in $\mathbb{F}_p[g]$ for the current $g$.[9] If not, Algorithm 1 invokes the algorithm `combine_gen`$(g, g_i)$ to obtain a new $g$ (which we call $g'$ for now) such that $\mathbb{F}_p[g'] = \mathbb{F}_p[g, g_i]$. Clearly $\mathbb{F}_p[g] = \mathbb{F}_p[g_1, \ldots, g_d]$ when the algorithm terminates and hence $\{g^0, g^1, \ldots, g^{k-1}\}$ is a $\mathbb{F}_p$-power-basis for $\mathbb{F}_p[g_1, \ldots, g_d] = \mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$.

As $g$ is computed inside the black-box from the initially given generators $g_1, \ldots, g_d$ using only field operations, the representation $q'(g_1, \ldots, g_d) = g$ of $g$ (and therefore of all basis elements) in the generators $g_1, \ldots, g_d$ is known. Now Lemma 4 gives a representation $q''(g^0, g^1, \ldots, g^{k-1}) = x$ of the challenge $x$ in the basis elements and a representation $q(g_1, \ldots, g_d) = x$ of $x$ in the generators $g_1, \ldots, g_d$ can be recovered by substitution:

$$q(g_1, \ldots, g_d) = q''(g^0, g^1, \ldots, g^{k-1}) = q''(q'(g_1, \ldots, g_d)^0, q'(g_1, \ldots, g_d)^1, \ldots, q'(g_1, \ldots, g_d)^{k-1})$$

Finally, Algorithm 1 is obviously efficient if the algorithm `combine_gen` is efficient.

So, to complete the proof of Theorem 1, we only need to provide an algorithm `combine_gen`$(a, b)$ that, given two elements $a, b \in \mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$, efficiently computes a generator $g$ such that $\mathbb{F}_p[g] = \mathbb{F}_p[a, b]$.

**Algorithm 2** `combine_gen`$(a, b)$

find $k'_a$ , $k'_b$ such that
- $k'_a \mid k(a)$, $k'_b \mid k(b)$,
- $\gcd(k'_a, k'_b) = 1$,
- $\mathrm{lcm}(k'_a, k'_b) = \mathrm{lcm}(k(a), k(b))$

find $a' \in \mathbb{F}_p[a]$ and $b' \in \mathbb{F}_p[b]$ such that $k(a') = k'_a$ and $k(b') = k'_b$
**return** $a' + b'$

**Claim 1.** *Given two elements $a, b \in \mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$, the algorithm* `combine_gen`$(a, b)$ *efficiently computes a generator $g$ such that $\mathbb{F}_p[g] = \mathbb{F}_p[a, b]$.*

*Proof.* We analyze algorithm `combine_gen`$(a, b)$ step by step:

[9] Note that the number of generators $g_i$ appearing in the representation of the generator $g$ (and thereby the representation of $x$) could be reduced by considering only the generators $g_i$ corresponding to maximal elements in the lattice formed by the $k_i$ under the divisibility relation (these suffice to generate the entire field $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$). For ease of exposition we do not do this.

**Step 1** can be performed in time polynomial in $k$ (where $p^k = |\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}|$) and hence in $\log(|\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}|)$ by factoring $k(a)$ and $k(b)$ (which both divide $k$). [10]

**Step 2** relies on the following lemma [Len05]:

**Lemma 6.** *Let $M \geq L \geq K$ be a tower of finite fields and let $b_1, \ldots, b_n$ be a $K$-basis of $M$. Then $\{\mathrm{tr}_{M/L}(b_1), \ldots, \mathrm{tr}_{M/L}(b_n)\}$ contains a $K$-basis of $L$.*

*Proof.* From [LN97, 2.23(iii)] we know that $\mathrm{tr}_{M/L} : M \to L$ is $L$-linear and surjective. Hence for all $c \in L$ there exists an $a \in M$ such that $\mathrm{tr}_{M/L}(a) = c$. Since $b_1, \ldots, b_n$ form a $K$-basis of $M$, the element $a \in M$ can be expressed as $a = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \alpha_i b_i$ where $\alpha_i \in K$ $(i = 1, \ldots, n)$. Hence using the $L$-linearity of $\mathrm{tr}_{M/L}$ we have

$$c = \mathrm{tr}_{M/L}(a) = \mathrm{tr}_{M/L}(\sum_{i=1}^{n} \alpha_i b_i) = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \alpha_i \, \mathrm{tr}_{M/L}(b_i).$$

As we can represent every $c \in L$ by a $K$-linear combination in $\{\mathrm{tr}_{M/L}(b_1), \ldots, \mathrm{tr}_{M/L}(b_n)\}$, this set must contain a $K$-basis of $L$. □

Knowing $k'_a$ and $k(a)$ from Step 1 and using the fact that $\{a^i : i = 0, \ldots, k(a) - 1\}$ form a $\mathbb{F}_p$-basis of $\mathbb{F}_p[a]$ we can compute the set $\{\mathrm{tr}_{\mathbb{F}_p[a]/\mathbb{F}_{p^{k'_a}}}(a^i) : i = 0, \ldots, k(a) - 1\}$ in time $O(k^3 \log(p))$ which contains by the lemma above a $\mathbb{F}_p$-basis of $\mathbb{F}_{p^{k'_a}}$.

The following claim is taken from [BvzGL02, Proof of Theorem 3.2]. For completeness we provide a short proof sketch.

**Claim 2.** *Any $\mathbb{F}_p$-basis of an extension field $\mathbb{F}_{p^\ell}$ contains a basis element $c$ such that $\mathbb{F}_{p^\ell} = \mathbb{F}_p[c]$.*

*Proof (Sketch).* The $\mathbb{F}_p$-dimension of the span of all proper subfields of $\mathbb{F}_{p^\ell}$ can be computed by application of the inclusion-exclusion principle (first adding the dimensions of all maximal subfields, then subtracting the dimensions of their intersections, then adding the dimensions of the intersections of the intersections, and so on). Using the Möbius function $\mu$ we can hence write the $\mathbb{F}_p$-dimension of the span of all proper subfields of $\mathbb{F}_{p^\ell}$ as $-\sum_{d|\ell, d\neq\ell} \mu(\ell/d)d = \ell - \phi(\ell) < \ell$. As the $\mathbb{F}_p$-dimension of the span of all proper subfields of $\mathbb{F}_{p^\ell}$ is smaller then the $\mathbb{F}_p$-dimension $\ell$ of $\mathbb{F}_{p^\ell}$, there must be a basis element $c$ which is not contained in any proper subfield of $\mathbb{F}_{p^\ell}$ and therefore $\mathbb{F}_{p^\ell} = \mathbb{F}_p[c]$. □

By Claim 2 there is a basis element $a'$, that generates $\mathbb{F}_{p^{k'_a}}$, i.e. $\mathbb{F}_{p^{k'_a}} = \mathbb{F}_p[a']$:

$$\exists a' \in \{\mathrm{tr}_{\mathbb{F}_p[a]/\mathbb{F}_{p^{k'_a}}}(x^i) : i = 0, \ldots, k(a) - 1\} \; : \quad k(a') = k'_a.$$

By checking this property for all candidate elements in $\{\mathrm{tr}_{\mathbb{F}_p[a]/\mathbb{F}_{p^{k'_a}}}(x^i) : i = 0, \ldots, k(a) - 1\}$ we find the generator $a'$ in time $O(k^3 \log(p))$.

Analogously we may determine $b'$ such that $k(b') = k'_b$.

[10] Bach and Shallit [BS96, Section 4.8] give a much more efficient algorithm for computing such values $k'_a$, $k'_b$ of complexity $O((\log k(a)k(b))^2)$.

**Step 3.** To complete the analysis of the algorithm `combine_gen`$(x, y)$, it only remains to show that given $a'$, $b'$ from step 2, we have $\mathbb{F}_p[a'+b'] = \mathbb{F}_p[a, b]$. Since $\mathrm{lcm}(k(a'), k(b')) = \mathrm{lcm}(k(a), k(b))$ by step 1, we have $\mathbb{F}_p[a', b'] = \mathbb{F}_p[a, b]$, so it only remains to show that $\mathbb{F}_p[a'+b'] = \mathbb{F}_p[a', b']$.

Obviously we have $\mathbb{F}_p[a', b'] = \mathbb{F}_p[a', a'+b'] = \mathbb{F}_p[a'+b', b']$ and $\gcd(k(a'), k(b')) = 1$, therefore

$$\mathrm{lcm}(k(a'), k(b')) = \mathrm{lcm}(k(a'), k(a'+b')) = \mathrm{lcm}(k(a'+b'), k(b')) = k(a')k(b').$$

It is easy to see that then $k(a'+b') = k(a')k(b')$ and therefore $\mathbb{F}_p[a'+b'] = \mathbb{F}_p[a, b]$ as required. □

### 3.3 Implications of Theorem 1

**Corollary 2.** *The extraction problem for any BBF $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ of characteristic $p$ is efficiently reducible to the representation problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$.*

*Proof.* Follows directly from Theorem 1 and Remark 1. □

The extraction problem asks for the computation of an isomorphism $\phi : \mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}} \to K$. Note that the computation of $\phi^{-1}$ also reduces efficiently to the representation problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$, because we can efficiently obtain a power-basis $\{g^0, g^1, \ldots, g^{k-1}\}$ inside the black-box as in the proof of Theorem 1. From this basis we can then compute the basis $\{\phi(g^0), \phi(g^1), \ldots, \phi(g^{k-1})\}$ for $K$. Hence the isomorphism $\phi^{-1}$ can simply and efficiently be computed by basis representation.

**Corollary 3.** *Let $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ be a BBF of characteristic $p$ and $K$ some explicitly given field (in the sense of [Len91]) such that $K \cong \mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$. Then the isomorphism problem for $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ and $K$ can be efficiently reduced to the representation problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$.*

*Proof.* We show that it is efficiently possible to find a field $K' \cong \mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ that is explicitly given by an irreducible polynomial, such that the isomorphism problem for $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ and $K'$ efficiently reduces to the representation problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$. The corollary then follows from [Len91] which states that the isomorphism problem for two explicitly given finite fields can be solved efficiently.

Hence, let an oracle $\mathcal{O}$ for the representation problem over $\mathbb{F}_p$ be given. From the proof of Theorem 1 we know that we can efficiently obtain a power-basis $\{g^0, g^1, \ldots, g^{k-1}\}$ inside the black-box. We can use Lemma 4 to obtain a representation $q(g^0, g^1, \ldots, g^{k-1}) = g^k$ of $g^k$ in the basis elements. Note that the minimal polynomial $f_g \in \mathbb{F}_p[X]$ of $g$ over $\mathbb{F}_p$ is exactly $f_g(X) = X^k - q(X^0, X^1, \ldots, X^{k-1})$. Let $K' = \mathbb{F}_p[X]/(f_g)$. Then the required isomorphisms $\phi$ and $\phi^{-1}$ are efficiently given by basis representation. □

## 4 Conclusions

We showed that, given an efficient algorithm for the representation problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$, we can solve the representability, representation, extraction and isomorphism problems for a black-box extension field $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}} \cong \mathbb{F}_{p^k}$ in polynomial time. We achieve this by efficiently constructing (in the generators) an $\mathbb{F}_p$-power-basis $\{g^0, g^1, \ldots, g^{k-1}\}$ for the black-box field $\mathbb{F}_{\mathbf{B}}$ inside the black-box, which is interesting in its own right.

For small characteristic $p$ we can immediately solve the above problems efficiently, as solving the representation problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$ (e.g. using Baby-Step-Giant-Step) is easy if $p$ is small.

As a consequence, field-homomorphic one-way permutations over fields of small characteristic $p$, in particular over $\mathbb{F}_{2^k}$, do not exist, because such a function would constitute an instantiation of a black-box field[11]

[11] Instead of generators we have here the possibility to "insert" elements of an explicitly given field into the "black-box" of the image of the function.

and could be efficiently inverted using the solution to the extraction problem given above. This implies that over fields of small characteristic there can be no field-homomorphic analogue to the group-homomorphic RSA encryption scheme, which constitutes a group-homomorphic trapdoor one-way permutation.

For the same reason, even probabilistic field-homomorphic encryption schemes (both private-[12] and public-key) over fields of small characteristic $p$, in particular over $\mathbb{F}_{2^k}$, cannot be realized, if they allow for checking the equality of elements. This is unfortunate because such schemes could have interesting applications in multi-party computation and computation with encrypted data (e.g. server-assisted computation) [SYY99, ALN87, DF02]. For instance we might be interested in handing encrypted field elements to a computing facility and having it compute some (known) program on them. If the encryption permits equality checks, the computing facility can recover the field elements up to isomorphism.

Furthermore, a polynomial-time solution to the isomorphism problem implies that any problem posed on a black-box field (i.e., computing discrete logarithms over the multiplicative group) can efficiently be transferred to an explicitly represented field (e.g. by an irreducible polynomial) and be solved there using possibly representation-dependent algorithms (e.g. the number field sieve). The solution can then be efficiently transferred back to the black-box field. So any representation-dependent algorithm for finite fields is applicable (in the case of small characteristic) to black-box fields. For example, computing discrete logarithms in the multiplicative group over a finite field is no harder in the black-box setting than if the field is given explicitly by an irreducible polynomial.

Of course these conclusions do not only apply to fields of small characteristic $p$ but to any scenario where we can efficiently solve the representation problem for the underlying prime field $\mathbb{F}_p$.

Hence we obtain subexponential-time solutions to the above problems under a plausible number-theoretic conjecture applying the work of Boneh and Lipton [BL96] for solving the representation problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$. Furthermore we can, under a plausible number-theoretic conjecture, solve the problems above efficiently, even for large characteristic $p$, if we are willing to admit non-uniform solutions (solutions that require a polynomial amount advice depending on the characteristic $p$) using an algorithm by Maurer [Mau94] for solving the representation problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$.

Compared to the case of small characteristic, the situation for fields of large characteristic is then more complex, because the only known efficient algorithm for solving the representation problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$ is non-uniform [Mau94, MW99], i.e. it requires a help-string that depends on $p$. When considering homomorphic encryption and homomorphic one-way permutations, this means that our impossibility results hold for cases where a malicious party $M$ may fix the characteristic $p$. In this case $M$ can generate $p$ along with the required help-string to break the scheme. On the other hand our impossibility results do not apply if the characteristic $p$ cannot be determined by $M$, for instance because it is generated by a trusted party.

It remains an open problem to resolve this issue by providing an efficient *uniform* algorithm for the representation problem for $\mathbb{F}_p$ or prove the inexistence thereof.

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[12] This result requires Theorem 1 whereas the results above already follow from Lemma 4. Also, note that in the private-key case it is only possible to recover encrypted field elements up to isomorphism, as we may have no knowledge of the plaintext field.

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