

# Ariadne Thread and Salt: New Multivariate Cryptographic Schemes with Public Keys in Degree 3

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**Abstract.** In this paper, we present two new perturbations for the design of multivariate schemes that we call “Ariadne Thread” and “Salt”. From these ideas, we present some efficient multivariate encryption and signature schemes with explicit parameters that resist all known attacks. In particular they resist the two main (and often very powerful) attacks in this area: the Gröbner attacks (to compute a cleartext from a ciphertext) and the MinRank attacks (to recover the secret key). Ariadne Thread and Salt can also be seen as new “perturbations” that we can use to enforce many multivariate schemes. The “Salt” perturbation works only for public key equations of degree (at least) 3. Similarly at present the “Ariadne Thread” perturbation seems to be particularly powerful with public keys of degree 3. Despite this, the size of the public key may still be reasonable since we can use larger fields (and also maybe non dense equations). Ariadne Thread perturbation seems to be particularly interesting for encryption. This is unusual since in multivariate cryptography encryption is generally more difficult than signatures.

**Keywords:** public-key cryptography, post-quantum multivariate cryptography, UOV, HFE, AES.

## 1 Introduction

Many schemes in Multivariate cryptography have been broken. Among the most spectacular attacks we can mention that the C\* scheme of Matsumoto and Imai [14] has been broken in [16], the SFlash scheme submitted to the NESSIE competition has been broken in [6, 10, 11], the LUOV scheme [5] submitted to the Post-Quantum NIST competition has been broken in [8], and the GeMMS schemes [7] has been broken in [18]. At present the two main general attacks in multivariate cryptography are the use of Gröbner bases in “direct attacks” (in order to find a solution of the public equations involved without finding the secret key, cf [12]), and the MinRank attacks in order to find the secret key [13, 2]. In many schemes the Gröbner attack is dangerous because the degree of regularity

of the public equations is smaller than for random quadratic equations. Recently the MinRank attacks have become much more powerful than before due to the introduction of the Minor equations [2].

Despite these dangerous and powerful attacks, multivariate cryptography remains an interesting area of research. This is mainly due to three facts. First, the schemes, if they can resist non-quantum attacks, are also expected to resist quantum computers, i.e. multivariate cryptography is one of the family of “post-quantum” cryptography (with lattices, codes, hash-based cryptography, isogenies, combinatorial schemes). Second, the MQ problem (solving a set of Multivariate Quadratic equations on finite field) is NP-hard on any finite field, and seems to be very difficult to solve when the equations are random and the number of variables is about the same as the number of equations. Third, some properties can be obtained at present only with multivariate cryptography such as ultra-short public-key signatures, or encryption with ultra-short blocs [15].

In this paper, we present two new tools that can be useful to design multivariate encryption scheme, or to enforce the security of any multivariate encryption scheme. We call these ideas “Ariadne Thread” and “Salt”. At present it is easier to design public key multivariate signature schemes than public key multivariate encryption schemes, therefore it is nice to have new encryption possibilities.

## 2 Ariadne Thread and Salt: main ideas

### 2.1 Notations

As in all classical multivariate schemes, we use a finite field  $\mathbb{F}_q$  with  $q$  elements and we deal with the ring of polynomials in  $n$  variables  $(x_1, \dots, x_n)$  (or simply  $x$ ) over  $\mathbb{F}_q$ , noted  $\mathbb{F}_q[x]$ . Therefore here  $\mathbb{F}_q[x]^m$  will refer to the ring module of  $n$ -ary  $m$ -dimensional polynomials, that we call  $(n, m)$ -polynomials for short. We note  $\deg(f)$  the degree of a polynomial  $f$ . Classically by extension, the degree of a  $(n, m)$ -polynomial is the maximum degree of its  $(n, 1)$ -components. In the particular case  $n = m$ , by the mean of an adequate isomorphism between  $\mathbb{F}_q^n$  and  $\mathbb{F}_{q^n}$ , we could note  $x^{q^i}$  the  $i$ -th iterate Frobenius mapping, considered as a  $(n, n)$ -polynomial of degree 1.

### 2.2 The tweak

We start from some trapdoor scheme,  $y = f(x)$ , where  $f$  is a degree- $d$   $(n, m)$ -polynomial that we can invert somehow. Typical examples of  $f$  are HFE and UOV among many others, but for the sake of our presentation, we can stick to a generic  $f$ . Our purpose is to add a perturbation to  $f$ , in order to get a new scheme, with stronger security, and in particular dismiss all possible “low rank” issues. We will discuss this point hereafter. Classical schemes have degree 2 such as HFE or UOV; we will consider here larger degrees, mainly  $d = 3$ , that provide more interest to our new perturbation.

We now introduce our new “tweak”:  $p(x)P(x)$ , where  $p$  and  $P$  are respectively random  $(n, 1)$ - and  $(n, m)$ -polynomials. We also require that  $\deg(p) + \deg(P) = d$ .

The new trapdoor can be expressed as  $\tilde{f}(x) = f(x) + p(x)P(x)$ . The advantages of this new trapdoor are the followings.

- Its degree is still at most  $d$ .
- Whatever the degree of  $p$ ,  $p(x)$  can only take  $q$  values (those of  $\mathbb{F}_q$ ). In turn, it follows immediately that  $p(x)P(x)$ 
  1. has probability about  $1/q$  to be zero, relatively to  $x$ ,
  2. can be approximate by a set :  $\mathcal{S} = \{aP : a \in \mathbb{F}_q\}$  of  $q$  polynomials.
- It gives the opportunity to design “high rank” schemes, since the polynomials  $p$  and  $P$  may be chosen adequately, and therefore thwarts the MinRank attacks.

### 2.3 Ariadne Thread for encryption

The Ariadne perturbation is the conjunction of our new tweak and a special mode of operation. In this mode, to invert the trapdoor  $y = f(x) + p(x)P(x)$ , we assume that  $p(x) = 0$ . Then, we are led to simply solve  $y = f(x)$ . So, we compute a first set  $\mathcal{S}_0$  of potential solutions of  $y = f(x)$  with the appropriate method, and keep the only solutions  $\mathcal{S}_1 = \{x \in \mathcal{S}_0 | p(x) = 0\}$ . Notice here, that in a single inversion, there is only a probability of about  $1/q$  that one gets a correct solution. The rest of the time, one gets unwanted solutions, or even no solution at all. However, with multiple inversions in an adequate protocol, this mode of operation is suitable for encryption as we will show later.

*Remark 1.* On the contrary, we explain here why Ariadne Thread is not suitable for the signature mode. Indeed, the signature mode would reveal publicly couples of the kind  $(m_i, \sigma_i)$  satisfying  $m_i = \mathcal{P}(\sigma_i)$ . Then all the signatures  $\sigma_i$  must also satisfy some equation  $p'(\sigma) = 0$ , where  $p'$  is a  $(n, 1)$ -polynomial related to the secret key. If enough signatures are known, a linear system leading to the coefficients of  $p'$  can be solved, so the key is broken.

### 2.4 Salt for signature

The Salt perturbation is the conjunction of the same tweak, but a different mode of inversion. In order to invert the trapdoor  $y = f(x) + p(x)P(x)$ , we make an exhaustive search on all the  $q$  possible values of  $p(x)$ . For one possible value  $a$ , we simply invert  $y = f(x) + aP(x)$ , and keep only the solutions satisfying  $p(x) = a$ . Of course, we have made here the additional assumption that  $y = f(x) + aP(x)$  is indeed efficiently invertible. This assumption is highly related to the choice of the initial scheme  $f$  but not difficult to fulfil. For instance, for HFE, it suffices to assume that the polynomial  $P$  has “HFE” shape, or for UOV, it is “UOV-compatible”, etc. This mode of operation is more suitable for signature, and costs also a factor  $q$  compared to the original scheme.

### 3 Security analysis of Ariadne and Salt in degree 2

We first give a word about these new perturbations when  $d = 2$ , and show that they have not much interest in this case. We analyse them particularly in the light of the HFE and UOV schemes, but the analyse can certainly be generalized to other schemes. The most restrictive condition we have to fulfil is  $\deg(p) + \deg(P) = 2$ , then we can imagine:

- $\deg(p) = 0, \deg(P) = 2$ . We skip this case, since  $p$  must be constant and therefore does not add entropy.
- $\deg(p) = 1, \deg(P) = 1$ . In this case  $p$  and  $P$  are linear. For HFE and regarding the MinRank Attack, this perturbation simply increases the rank of the secret polynomial by an amount of 1, which is not competitive, since the perturbation already costs a factor  $q$ . For UOV, this perturbation amounts to transform 1 ‘oil’ variable into 1 ‘vinegar’ variable, which is useless compared to the original scheme.
- $\deg(p) = 2, \deg(P) = 0$ . Here,  $p$  is a random quadratic form,  $P$  is a random element of  $\mathbb{F}_q^n$ . This case has already been described in literature as the “+” perturbation, i.e. adding a small amount of random quadratic polynomials to the original scheme. The effect of this perturbation can be cancelled by considering the adequate projection, and the natural isomorphism between  $\mathbb{F}_q^n$  and  $\mathbb{F}_{q^n}$ :

$$\begin{aligned} y &= f(x) + p(x)P \\ y^q &= f(x)^q + p(x)P^q \\ yP^q - y^qP &= f(x)P^q - f(x)^qP \end{aligned}$$

In particular, regarding the Gröbner basis computation attack, this shows, that the degree of regularity does not increase compared to the one of  $y = f(x)$

### 4 Security analysis of Ariadne and Salt in degree 3: Gröbner and MinRank

#### 4.1 Grobner

Our motivation for this new perturbation and particularly our interest in degree 3, lies in the behavior of Gröbner basis algorithms (see [1]). First, theory and also experiment can show that for “big enough”  $q$ , the degree  $D_{reg}$  of regularity of a random  $(n, n)$ -polynomial  $f$  of degree 3 is  $2n - 1$ . This can be infer from the index of the first non-negative coefficient of the Hilbert series:  $H(z) = (1 - z^3)^n / (1 - z)^n$  [1]. The complexity of solving a random system by Gröbner basis, of  $n$  equations in  $n$  variables of degree 3 over  $\mathbb{F}_q$  can be estimated as  $\binom{n + D_{reg}}{n}^\omega$ , where  $\omega$  is the greatest lower bound for the exponent of matrix multiplication algorithm. Taking into account the field equations  $x_i^q - x_i = 0$ , we get a more accurate formula for our case:  $D_{reg} = \min(2n - 1, q)$ . So for  $q$  big enough, we clearly hope to have smaller  $n$  in degree 3 than in degree 2 for same level of security.

## 4.2 Minrank

In degree 3, we consider that the most useful definition of rank that should apply to a  $(n, n)$ -polynomial  $f$  in our case, is the minimum  $r$  of “elementary” products occurring in a sum that amounts to  $f$ , or so to say :  $f(x) = \sum_{i=1}^r a_{3i-2}(x)a_{3i-1}(x)a_{3i}(x)$ , where  $a_i(x)$  are degree-1  $(n, n)$ -polynomials. Since  $d = 3$ , the condition  $\deg(p) + \deg(P) = d$  can non trivially be fulfilled with  $(\deg(p) = 2$  and  $\deg(P) = 1)$  or  $(\deg(p) = 1$  and  $\deg(P) = 2)$ . The (classical) rank of a random degree-2  $(n, 1)$ - or  $(n, n)$ - polynomial is  $n$ , with overwhelming probability. Hence, the rank of the tweak and therefore of the secret trapdoor, can be provably set to a value greater than  $n$ .

## 5 HFE-Ariadne in degree 3: examples of parameters and security results

We now propose a variant of HFE in degree 3 using the Ariadne Thread perturbation, for encryption mode.

### 5.1 Description of HFE-Ariadne

In this particular case, we have  $n = m$ , which enables us to use a natural isomorphism between  $\mathbb{F}_q^n$  and  $\mathbb{F}_{q^n}$ . We set  $f(x) = x^{q+2} + \alpha x^3$ , a cubic binomial,  $\alpha$  being chosen randomly in  $\mathbb{F}_{q^n}$ . The secret trapdoor is then  $\tilde{f}(x) = x^{q+2} + \alpha x^3 + p(x)P(x)$ , with  $\deg(p) = 1$ , and  $\deg(P) = 2$ . The public key is a composition  $\mathcal{P} = S \circ \tilde{f} \circ T$  where  $S$  and  $T$  are two secret linear bijective maps of  $\mathbb{F}_q^n$ . The secret key is a description of  $\alpha, p, P, S$  and  $T$ . Typical values of the parameters  $q$  and  $n$  are below 100, around 30 for instance. See below the Rationale section for parameter selection and further explanation.

### 5.2 Encryption protocol

We now describe the process for encryption and decryption. Alice and Bob first agree on a public symmetric cipher such as AES, that we note  $E(K, X)$  and where  $K$  is the symmetric key and  $X$  is a binary representation of the clear text. The role of the symmetric cipher is to prevent an attacker from deriving algebraic equations issued from many related inputs. Then Alice and Bob agree on a sufficiently large amount of symmetric keys  $K_i$ , and also a value  $l$ . The way Alice and Bob make the agreement is not important, the cipher and the keys have just to be public, or at least known by Alice and Bob at the right time. Alice wants to send confidentially a message to Bob. To do so, she embeds the message into  $X$  and sends the list of the first  $l$  computed values  $y_i = \mathcal{P}(E(K_i, X)), i = 1, \dots, l$ . The reason for doing so, is that, with high probability the Ariadne Thread condition is satisfied, namely one or more values satisfy  $p(T(E(K_i, X))) = 0$ . Individually, the condition has roughly a probability  $1/q$  to be fulfilled, so the list should

have around  $q$  elements, that is  $l \approx q$ . Then for each received value  $y_i$ , Bob computes all the solutions in  $z$  of  $f(z) = S^{-1}(y_i)$  and keeps the potential messages  $E^{-1}(K_i, T^{-1}(z))$ , for  $z$  satisfying  $p(z) = 0$ . To manage the detection of correct decryption, Alice and Bob can adopt for instance one of these strategies:

- $X$  is the message and Bob decrypts until two potential messages are equal.
- A part of  $X$  is reserved for a message authentication code (MAC), and Bob decrypts until one of the potential messages has the correct MAC.

In the event of failure, Bob may ask Alice to renew the list by using the next  $l$  keys. Fortunately, the probability of many retries decreases exponentially. Moreover Bob should also randomly ask Alice for a retry even in case of success, with an adequate probability, so that an eavesdropper may not distinguish the cases with failure from the successful ones.

### 5.3 Rationale, sizes and performance

One major interest of the Ariadne-perturbation is that it thwarts the MinRank attack. So we should only be concerned by direct Gröbner Basis attacks. We estimate that the degree of regularity is the same than for a random system, that is  $D_{reg} = \min(2n - 1, q)$ , and the complexity of the Gröbner attack is  $\binom{n+D_{reg}}{n}^\omega$ . Note also that hybrid attacks must be taken into account [3], but their complexity can be deduced by algorithm. We note  $\lambda$  the security level. So we should choose the parameter  $n$  such as the least complexity of hybrid attack is above  $2^\lambda$ . For the HFE polynomial, we can choose the smallest degree possible (over  $\mathbb{F}_{q^n}$ ), but we do not recommend only one monomial, so it should have at least two monomials, to avoid attacks such as the ones against  $C^*$  and SFlash, hence the choice  $x^{q+2} + \alpha x^3$ .

Then, there are many ways to choose  $(q, n)$ , which give different balances between size and performance. For instance we propose two sets of parameters for a level of security  $\lambda = 128$  (assuming  $\omega = 2.37$ ).

- $q = 7$ ,  $n = 47$ , the public key is 318 Kbytes, average encryption takes 0.08s, and average decryption 2s.
- $q = 11$ ,  $n = 40$ , the public key is 225 Kbytes, average encryption takes 1s, and average decryption 1s.

Of course, encryption and decryption are highly parallelizable, and could benefit from multicore CPUs.

## 6 UOV-Salt in degree 3: example of parameters and security results

We now propose a variant of UOV using the Salt perturbation and degree 3, for signature mode.

## 6.1 Description of UOV-Salt

In what follows,  $n_o$  and  $n_v$  are respectively the number of oil and vinegar variables. We note  $n = n_o + n_v$ , and the different variables  $x_o = (x_1, \dots, x_{n_o})$ ,  $x_v = (x_{1+n_o}, \dots, x_n)$ ,  $x = (x_1, \dots, x_n)$ .

We set  $f(x) = \sum_{i=1}^{n_o} x_i Q_i(x_v) + C(x_v)$ , the “classical” UOV trapdoor extended in degree 3, where  $Q_i$  are random degree-2  $(n_v, n_o)$ -polynomials,  $C$  is a random degree-3  $(n_v, n_o)$ -polynomial. This is the same idea as in the original scheme: the trapdoor is linear in  $x_o$ , hence it can easily be inverted if  $x_v$  is set. The UOV perturbed scheme becomes:  $\tilde{f}(x) = f(x) + p(x)P(x)$ , where  $p$  is a degree-2  $(n, 1)$ -polynomial,  $P$  is a degree-1  $(n, n_o)$ -polynomial compatible with the UOV structure. More precisely  $P(x) = \sum_{i=1}^{n_o} \alpha_i x_i + L(X_v)$  where the  $\alpha_i$  are random elements of  $\mathbb{F}_q^{n_o}$  and  $L$  is a random degree-1  $(n_v, n_o)$ -polynomial. One can easily check that when  $x_v$  is set and  $p$  is guessed, the perturbed trapdoor can be inverted as claimed. The public key is a composition  $\mathcal{P} = \tilde{f} \circ T$  where  $T$  is some secret linear bijective map over  $\mathbb{F}_q^n$ . The secret key is a description of  $Q_i, C, p, P$  and  $T$ . See below the Rationale section for parameter selection and further explanation.

## 6.2 Signature protocol

To sign a value  $y$ , the signer aims to find a value  $z$  such as  $\mathcal{P}(z) = y$ , or equivalently find  $x$  such as  $f(x) = y$ . In order to invert the trapdoor, the signer chooses at random  $x_v$ , makes all the  $q$  possible “guesses” on  $p(x)$ , invert each linear system on  $x_o$ , (if possible), and stops as soon as one guess on  $p(x)$  is correct, otherwise makes a new choice for  $x_v$ . Then, once a value  $x$  is found, the signer outputs  $z = T^{-1}(x)$ . To verify a signature  $z$  of  $y$ , the verifier, simply checks that  $\mathcal{P}(z) = y$ .

## 6.3 Rationale, sizes and performance

The direct attack using Gröbner basis computation can be performed by fixing  $n_v$  variables out of  $n$ . The resulting system has  $n_o$  equations in  $n_o$  variables. We estimate with simulation that the degree of regularity should be  $D_{reg} = \min(2n_o - 1, 2n_v - 1, q)$ . The solving complexity of hybrid attacks can be deduced by algorithm when  $n_o = n_v$ . We estimate that the Salt perturbation thwarts the Kipnis-Shamir attack, and as a rule of thumb, that  $q^{n_v} > 2^\lambda$  and  $q^{n_o} > 2^{2\lambda}$  should be sufficient to thwart other obvious attacks. We expect to have a more precise evaluation of these points in the future.

There are many ways to choose the parameters. So, for a security level of  $\lambda = 128$ , (assuming  $\omega = 2.37$ ) we propose the following parameters:  $q = 821$ ,  $n_o = 27$ ,  $n_v = 27$ . The public key size is 914 Kbytes, a signature size is  $(27+27) * 10 = 540$  bits (each element of  $\mathbb{F}_{821}$  is coded on 10 bits). On our Magma simulation, on average, a signature takes 330 ms and a verification 130 ms.

Here also the signature is parallelizable and could take benefit from multi-core CPUs.

## 6.4 Shorter signature thanks to UOV

In the previous section, we assumed that the input size of the signature function was twice the size of the security level, which enables to “plug” the output of a hash function of the same size, instead of the message itself, whenever the size of the message exceeds this size. This is the classical mode of signature using a hash function. In this section, we show how to reduce the size of the signature by exploiting the special property of UOV, which is that the inversion of UOV is based on the linearity of the oil variables.

Let’s now suppose that  $y$  is the hash to sign, its size is at least  $2\lambda$  bits as expected. Say it can be expressed as  $n'$  elements of  $\mathbb{F}_q$ . We define an UOV-Salt scheme  $\mathcal{P}$  as previously, with a parameter  $n_o$  satisfying  $q^{n_o} \approx 2^\lambda$  (instead of  $2^{2\lambda}$  previously). So  $\mathcal{P}(x)$  is a  $(n, n_o)$ -polynomial. We now introduce a public function  $L(x, y) : \mathbb{F}_q^n \times \mathbb{F}_q^{n'} \mapsto \mathbb{F}_q^{n_o}$ . We require this function to have the following properties : to be affine in  $x$ , to be easy to compute, and to be collision-free with good probability. First we may write :  $L(x, y) = g_0(y) + \sum_{i=1}^n x_i g_i(y)$  which is by design affine in  $x$ . Then for instance the public functions  $g_i$  may be random degree-1  $(n', n_o)$ -polynomials. Or, in order to avoid to describe them, they can be simulated by a pseudo random generator with adequate output size, with  $y$  used as a seed.

Now, to sign a value  $y$ , the signer must find a value  $z$  satisfying  $\mathcal{P}(z) = L(z, y)$  and proceeds as follows. As  $y$  is given, the term  $L(z, y)$  is evaluated in  $y$  and the equation becomes  $\mathcal{P}(z) = \alpha_0 + \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i z_i$ , where the  $\alpha_i$  belong to  $\mathbb{F}_q^{n_o}$ . Solutions in  $z$  can be found with the same method as before: make the change of variables  $z = T^{-1}(x)$ , draw vinegar variables at random, guess  $p(x)$ , solve the system in degree 1 obtained in the oil variables, check if  $p(x)$  is correct, then go back in  $z$  variable. To verify a signature  $z$  of  $y$ , the verifier, simply checks that  $\mathcal{P}(z) = L(z, y)$ .

For a security level of  $\lambda = 128$ , we propose the following parameters:  $q = 8$ ,  $n_o = 45$ ,  $n_v = 45$ . The public key size is 2070 Kbytes, the signature is  $(45 + 45) * 3 = 270$  bits. Note that in this case, the signature is just above 256 bits, which is nice!

## 7 Conclusion

“Ariadne Thread” and “Salt” are two new tool in Multivariate cryptography. From these ideas we have obtained multivariate scheme for encryption and signature with very nice properties: they are fast, have a reasonable size of public key, and they resist all the known attacks in multivariate cryptography. We think that it is particularly important to notice that MinRank attacks are thwarted. However since these ideas of “Ariadne Thread” and “Salt” are very new, and since many failures have occurred in multivariate cryptography it is natural to be suspicious about these ideas and to want to wait for more analysis before using these schemes in real life applications. The fact in this paper we use public equations of degree 3 (instead of 2 usually in multivariate cryptography) might also open the door to new and powerful attacks...



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