

OPEN-CYCLE MHD POWER GENERATION

RESULTS OF RESEARCH CARRIED OUT BY MEMBERS
OF THE BRITISH MHD COLLABORATIVE COMMITTEE

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OPEN-CYCLE MHD POWER GENERATION

FOREWORD

MANY readers will be aware that for several years a very considerable research and development effort has been devoted by the Central Electricity Generating Board to the study of Magnetohydrodynamic Power Generation. Since 1964 the Board has been joined by the manufacturers of heavy electrical equipment (Associated Electrical Industries Limited, C. A. Parsons Limited, the English Electric Company Limited, the General Electric Company Limited), the Water Tube Boilermakers' Association and the National Coal Board in a programme of collaborative research. This collaboration became known as the British MHD Collaborative Committee, and it is the results of this research programme which are described in this book.

Work on this project began in 1959, when the C.E.G.B. set up a small study group to examine the possible application of the direct conversion method of electrical generation to central power station use. Preliminary and small-scale experiments were begun on fuel cells, on thermionic and thermoelectric devices, as well as on MHD. Obviously, a number of small-scale studies such as this could not all be taken through to large-scale development, and thermionic and thermoelectric devices were abandoned first. Both fuel cells and MHD were continued, and the laboratory experiments increased in scale to involve installations costing a few tens of thousands of pounds.

The continuing studies on MHD indicated by 1964 that many of the research problems had been identified, and that further progress towards a competitive source of power generation would require large-scale experimental work. An outline design of an MHD power station indicated that it would be competitive with nuclear stations (on the price assumptions current at that time) for several years provided it could be brought into commission in the period 1975-9. The difficulties in achieving this were recognized, but in spite of the risk, the profit to be gained from a successful outcome was sufficient to persuade us to make the effort. At this point the collaborative programme was initiated under the technical leadership of Dr. P. R. Howard. A very remarkable spirit of unity has prevailed since the first coming together of the collaborating groups all of whom have made substantial financial and technical contributions to the project. This is reflected in the number of contributors to this book. It has been a constant stimulation and encouragement to me as chairman of the main committee to have the support which has been so loyally provided.

The problems to be dealt with are described in detail in the following pages. Most of the small-scale work has been successfully completed, and

although several outstanding problems remain, the stage has been reached where a detailed efficiency and cost estimate for an MHD power station can be given. Thus the research stage of the project has been completed, and at present we cannot see any economic justification in the United Kingdom for the large expenditure which the development stage would require. The main reason for this is that in this country the cost of nuclear power stations of the A.G.R. type is still tending to fall, while costs of fossil-fuel-fired plant are now tending to rise. This has brought closer the date at which an MHD station must be commissioned and has reduced the period of time when it would be competitive with a nuclear station practically to zero.

The main purpose of this book is to collect together and present in a logical sequence the information which has allowed this appraisal to be made. In this way an up-to-date picture of the prospects for open-cycle MHD power generation is given. While this appraisal has led, in the United Kingdom, to the termination of large-scale research on this topic, this is not the case elsewhere in the world where different economic conditions may prevail. For this reason the presentation of the results of our research to a wider audience than has hitherto been possible seems well justified.

L. ROTHERHAM

PREFACE

THIS book describes the results of studies on open-cycle MHD power generation which were carried out by the British Collaborative Team over the 3–4-year period ending in 1968. Since the scope of the work embraces studies within the spectrum from fundamental research to engineering design, differences in approach to the basic studies and solution of technical problems have occurred. Also, since this book is compiled from the work of many contributors there are, inevitably, differences in style in the presentation of the various sections. Every effort has been made by the Editors to achieve uniformity whilst retaining the individual character of the reported work, but some sacrifice in consistency has been necessary in the integration of various sections. We hope that this does not detract too much from the complete and coherent account of our research work which we wish to achieve.

Similarly, as the work progressed it became necessary to modify some of the initial assumptions, and whilst every effort was made to avoid divergence, some minor differences in the boundary conditions occur for some of the studies, dependent on the stage at which the studies were carried out.

In most of the engineering studies Imperial units were used, whilst the duct studies used S.I. units. For consistency all units have been converted to S.I., but in some cases where it is useful to the reader, or where integer parameters were studied, the equivalent Imperial unit is given in parentheses.

The reported studies involve contributions by many workers over and above the authors of the main sections and their responsibility for much of the work is acknowledged. Finally, the Editors would like to record their appreciation of the efforts of the main contributors, the painstaking secretarial assistance of Miss Janice Cullum, Miss Daphne Gray and Miss Jennifer Gulliver in the preparation of the manuscript, and the excellent work of the Central Electricity Research Laboratories Illustrative Drawing Office in preparing the diagrams.

J. B. HEYWOOD
G. J. WOMACK

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	xi
PREFACE	xiii
1 Introduction	1
Nomenclature	1
1.1. General Principles of MHD Power Generation	1
1.2. Possible MHD Cycles	3
1.2.1. Open-cycle System	4
1.2.2. Closed-cycle System	7
1.2.3. Liquid-metal Cycles	9
1.3. Factors Leading to the Proposed Cycle	10
References	17
2 Directly Fired Air Heaters	18
Nomenclature	18
Types of Air Heater	19
2.1. Checker Brick Regenerator	28
2.1.1. Design of Regenerator	29
2.1.2. Switchover Valves	37
2.1.3. High-temperature Ducts	41
2.1.4. Cost Estimates of the Checker Brick Regenerator	44
2.2. Liquid Slag Regenerator	44
2.2.1. Flow and Physical Properties of Potassium Sulphate and Coal Ash	46
2.2.2. Atomization of Slag	54
2.2.3. Transportation of Liquid Slag	73
2.2.4. Heat and Mass Transfer in the Heat Exchange Chambers	89
2.2.5. Aerodynamics of Heat Exchangers	100
2.2.6. Transfer of Granular Particles from Air-heating to Slag-heating Chamber	109
2.2.7. Layout and Cost of Liquid-slag Regenerator	111
2.3. Miscellaneous Air Heaters	120
2.3.1. Chemical Regeneration of Enthalpy	120
2.3.2. Moving Fluidized Bed Regenerator	129
2.4. Materials for Directly Fired Air Heaters	131
2.4.1. Corrosion	132
2.4.2. Mechanical Properties	141
2.4.3. Seed Penetration	154
2.4.4. Valves for Directly Fired Air Heaters	156
2.4.5. Metals for Air-heater Construction	157
References	158
3 Separately Fired Air Heaters	162
Nomenclature	162
Introduction	163
3.1. Ceramic Recuperator	164
3.1.1. Tube Matrix Design	164
3.1.2. Ceramic Tube Joints	176

3.1.3.	Vibration of Tubes in a Tubular Counterflow Ceramic Recuperator	172
3.1.4.	Recuperative Air-heater System Layout and Operation	183
3.1.5.	Cost Estimates	
3.2.	Rotary Regenerator	
3.2.1.	Matrix Design	189
3.2.2.	Matrix Dimensions	190
3.2.3.	Design of Rotary Regenerator	191
3.2.4.	Air-heating Scheme and Cost Estimates of the Rotary Regenerator	191
3.3.	Falling Cloud Regenerator	194
3.3.1.	Heat Transfer Material	194
3.3.2.	Heat-exchanger Configuration	196
3.3.3.	Chamber Dimensions	200
3.3.4.	Method of Conveying Particles between Heat-exchanger Vessels	206
3.3.5.	Construction Details and Cost Estimate	209
3.4.	Stationary Matrix Regenerator	212
3.4.1.	General Description of Plant	214
3.4.2.	Aerodynamic Modelling of Heat-exchanger Assembly	221
3.4.3.	Matrix Optimization—Test Facility	227
3.4.4.	Switchover Valves	231
3.4.5.	High-temperature Ducting	236
3.4.6.	Cost Estimates of the Stationary Matrix Pebble Bed Regenerator	240
3.5.	Separately Fired Air-heater Construction Materials	241
3.5.1.	Corrosion	241
3.5.2.	Mechanical Properties	249
3.5.3.	Valves for Separately Fired Air Heaters	255
3.5.4.	Materials for Combustion Chambers for Separately Fired Air Heaters	255
3.5.5.	Heat Transfer Properties of Refractory Materials	256
3.6.	Conclusion	258
	References	258

4	Combustion	261
	Nomenclature	261
4.1.	Coal Combustion	262
4.1.1.	Introduction	262
4.1.2.	Pilot-scale Combustors	268
4.1.3.	Test Equipment	272
4.1.4.	Slag-flow Behaviour	276
4.1.5.	Volatilization of Mineral Matter	280
4.1.6.	Heat Transfer to the Walls of the Pilot-scale Combustors	284
4.1.7.	Electrical Conductivity of the Gases in the Pilot-scale Combustors	290
4.1.8.	The Space Needed to Burn the Coal	293
4.1.9.	Layout and Estimated Performance of a "60 MW" Combustor	304
4.2.	Oil Combustion—Fundamental Studies	308
4.2.1.	Introduction	308
4.2.2.	Experimental Plant	310
4.2.3.	Development of Air-Fuel Mixer	324
4.2.4.	Measurement of Flame Temperature	333
4.2.5.	Measurement of Gas Electrical Conductivity	344
4.2.6.	Heat Fluxes and Combustion Intensity Using a Plug Flow Combustion Chamber	350

4.2.7. Heat Fluxes and Combustion Intensity Using a Well-stirred Combustion Chamber	355
4.3. Large-scale Combustors	374
4.3.1. Reduction of Heat Transferred to the Chamber Walls	374
4.3.2. Design of the 2000 MW (T) Combustion Chamber	389
References	391
Duct Physics	393
Nomenclature	393
5.1. Physical Principles and One-dimensional Equations	395
5.2. Gas Properties	397
5.2.1. Thermodynamic Properties of Combustion Gases	397
5.2.2. Electrical Properties of Combustion Gases	403
5.3. Types of Generator and Loading Parameters	405
5.4. Heat Transfer and Friction Effects	407
5.5. Performance of Power Station MHD Ducts	416
5.5.1. Assumptions and Boundary Conditions	416
5.5.2. Methods of Analysis	419
5.5.3. Parameter Values for Duct Calculations	421
5.5.4. Design of a Segmented Electrode Faraday Generator	422
5.5.5. Optimum Design of a Single-load, Cross-connected Generator	425
5.5.6. Practical Single-load Generator Designs	429
5.6. Effects due to Finite Segmentation and Non-uniformities	433
5.6.1. Finite Segmentation: Basic Equations	434
5.6.2. Evaluation of the Coefficients	436
5.6.3. Numerical Methods	437
5.6.4. Conformal Mapping	437
5.6.5. Leakage Currents	442
5.6.6. Current and Voltage Distributions on the Wall	443
5.6.7. End Effects and Non-uniformities	444
5.6.8. The Effect of Swirl	449
5.6.9. Application of Results	449
5.7. Instabilities	450
5.7.1. Introduction	450
5.7.2. Outline of the Theory	451
5.7.3. Two-dimensional Instabilities	453
5.7.4. Absolute Instabilities in Two Dimensions	454
5.7.5. Conclusions	456
5.8. Some Supersonic Flow Problems	456
5.8.1. Characteristics of a Supersonic MHD Duct	456
5.8.2. Shock Electrodynamics	458
5.8.3. Boundary-layer Behaviour	460
References	462
6 MHD Test Facilities and Diagnostics	463
Nomenclature	463
6.1. Survey of Rigs Used for Multi-purpose Tests	467
6.1.1. The English Electric and International Research and Development Companies' Low-power Rigs	467
6.1.2. The Associated Electrical Industries' and Central Electricity Research Laboratories' Medium-power Rigs	469
6.1.3. Central Electricity Research Laboratories' Long-duration Rig	471

6.2. Large Oxygen-fired MHD Rigs	473
6.2.1. Factors Influencing the Design	473
6.2.2. Design of the 200 MW Subsonic Cross-connected Generator	476
6.2.3. Design for a 100 MW Supersonic Hall Generator	482
6.3. Diagnostics	486
6.3.1. Sodium D-line Temperature Measurement	487
6.3.2. Conductivity Measurement	491
6.3.3. c^* Measurement	494
References	497
7 Electrodes and Insulators	499
Nomenclature	499
7.1. Introduction	499
7.2. Metal Electrodes	506
7.2.1. Introduction	506
7.2.2. Erosion of Transverse Tubular Electrodes	507
7.2.3. Erosion of Planar Copper	510
7.2.4. Erosion of Other Electrode Materials	514
7.2.5. Supporting Theoretical Work	520
7.2.6. Electrode Capability under Generation Operating Conditions	524
7.2.7. Assessment of Metal Electrodes	531
7.3. Ceramic Electrodes	532
7.3.1. General Survey	532
7.3.2. Conduction Mechanisms in Zirconia Electrodes	539
7.3.3. Electrode Design Problems	548
7.3.4. Electrode Tests Using Ceramic Blocks	550
7.3.5. Brush and Mesh Electrodes	554
7.3.6. Ceramic Insert Electrodes	558
7.3.7. Electrode Replenishment	566
7.3.8. Lanthanum Chromite as an Electrode Material	568
7.3.9. Assessment of Ceramic Electrodes	570
7.4. Some Fundamental Erosion Experiments	571
7.4.1. Erosion in Pure Gases	571
7.4.2. Electrolytic Attack on Metals	575
7.4.3. Electrolytic Erosion of Some Ceramics	583
7.5. Protected Electrodes	586
7.5.1. Arc Electrodes	586
7.5.2. Quenched Arc Electrodes	590
7.6. Insulators	597
7.6.1. Requirements	597
7.6.2. Materials Properties	598
7.6.3. Designs	600
7.6.4. Tests on Individual Insulators	601
References	603
8 Magnets	606
Nomenclature	606
8.1. Magnetic Field Configuration Required	607
8.2. Electromagnetic Calculations	610
8.2.1. Fields, Forces and Stored Energy in Iron-free Coils	610
8.2.2. Effects with Iron	613
8.3. Choice of Materials	614
8.3.1. Possible Conductors	614

8.3.2. Cost Comparison	616
8.3.3. Iron	617
8.4. The Use of Superconductors	618
8.4.1. General Considerations	618
8.4.2. Stabilization by Parallel Normal Conductor	619
8.4.3. Protection	623
8.5. Superconducting MHD Generator Magnets	627
8.6. Assessment of Superconducting Magnets	634
References	637

9 Seed Recovery and Chemistry 638

Nomenclature	638
9.1. Introduction	639
9.2. Impurities in Recycled Seed	640
9.2.1. Build-up of Condensable Impurities	640
9.2.2. Impurities from the Fuel	641
9.2.3. Impurities from Plant Surfaces	642
9.2.4. The Composition of Recovered Seed	642
9.2.5. The Effect of Partial Purification of Recovered Seed	643
9.2.6. Phase Separation in Molten Steady-state Seed	643
9.2.7. "Steady-state Seed" Composition for Use in Experiments with Seed	645
9.3. The Evaporation of Seed Particles	645
9.3.1. Enthalpy Required for Seeding	645
9.3.2. Theoretical Calculation of the Evaporation Rate of Potassium Sulphate	647
9.3.3. Shock Wave Heating of Seed Particles	650
9.3.4. Measurement of the Diffusion Coefficient of Potassium Sulphate through Nitrogen	652
9.3.5. Spectroscopic Observation of the Evaporation and Decomposition of Potassium Sulphate in Flames	654
9.3.6. Evaporation of Captive Drops of Potassium Sulphate	656
9.4. The Chemical Behaviour of Potassium Seed in a MHD System	658
9.4.1. Theoretical Basis of the Calculations	659
9.4.2. Sources of Data	660
9.4.3. Fuel Composition and Seeding Levels	662
9.4.4. The Behaviour of Potassium	663
9.4.5. Behaviour of Nitrogen	667
9.5. Seed Condensation Temperatures	668
9.5.1. Vapour Pressure Measurements by the Effusion Technique	669
9.5.2. The Mass Spectroscopic Examination of K_2SO_4 Vapour	672
9.5.3. The Vapour Pressure of K_2SO_4 by the Transpiration or Flow Technique	672
9.5.4. The Effect of CO_2 and H_2O on the Evaporation of K_2SO_4	674
9.5.5. Practical Condensation Temperatures	674
9.6. The Chemistry of Seed Deposits on Heat Exchange Surfaces	676
9.6.1. The Nature of the Deposit	676
9.6.2. Experimental Procedure	677
9.6.3. The K_2SO_4 - SO_3 System	678
9.6.4. Effect of Adding V_2O_5 to the K_2SO_4 - SO_3 System	679
9.7. The Handling of Potassium in a Coal-fired System	680
9.7.1. Outline of the Problems	680
9.7.2. The Absorption of Potassium by Coal-ash Slag	680
9.7.3. Miscibility of Potassium Sulphate-Silicate System	683

9.8. The Rate of Deposition of Potassium Sulphate	685
9.8.1. The Rate of Condensation of Potassium Sulphate Vapour from Unsaturated Flue Gas	686
9.8.2. The Transport of Fume across the Boundary Layer and the Effect of Deposits on Heat Transfer	690
9.8.3. Combined Thermal Precipitation and Vapour Diffusion	696
9.8.4. Deposition of Seed in a Large Boiler	701
9.9. The Collection of Seed Fume from Exhaust Gases	701
9.9.1. Electrostatic Precipitation	702
9.9.2. The Nature of the Seed Collected in the Precipitator	703
9.9.3. Electrical Conditions	704
9.9.4. Dust Deposits on Electrodes	704
9.9.5. Collection Efficiency in Electrostatic Precipitators	705
9.9.6. The Effect of Rapping on Collection Efficiency	707
9.9.7. Comparison of Pilot and Full-scale Precipitators	707
9.9.8. Costs of Electrostatic Precipitators	710
9.9.9. Bag filters	711
9.10. The Purification of MHD Seed	712
References	714
 10 Steam Plant Equipment	 716
10.1. Boiler Metals	716
10.1.1. Modified Seed Composition	720
10.1.2. Interpretation of Corrosion Results above 700 K	720
10.1.3. Metals for Use below 700 K	721
10.1.4. Present Conclusions on Metals in Seed-contaminated Boiler Plant	721
10.2. Design of Steam Cycle Equipment for a 2000 MW (T) Plant	722
10.2.1. Comparison with Conventional Oil-fired Conditions	722
10.2.2. Proposed Steam Cycle	723
10.2.3. General Design Features	725
10.2.4. Relationships between the Steam Plant and Other Components	727
10.2.5. Steam Plant Components	728
References	751
 11 Cycle Analysis and Appraisal	 752
Nomenclature	752
11.1. Cycle Efficiency Calculations	753
11.1.1. Summary of Boundary Conditions	753
11.1.2. Analysis of a Directly Fired Air-heater Cycle	759
11.1.3. Analysis of Separately Fired Air-heater Cycles	761
11.1.4. Effect of Parameter Variation: All Low-grade Heat Absorbed	763
11.1.5. Effect of Parameter Variation: Excess Low-grade Heat Rejected	770
11.1.6. Integration of MHD with Existing Power Stations: a Method that Increases the Effective MHD Efficiency	773
11.1.7. Oxygen Enrichment	778
11.2. Economic Assessment	780
References	784
 AUTHOR INDEX	 785
SUBJECT INDEX	787

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION*

Nomenclature

B	magnetic field strength.
e	electronic charge.
k	Boltzmann's constant.
T	temperature.
v	fluid velocity.
V_i	ionization potential.
σ	electrical conductivity.
η_0	combined plant efficiency.
η_1	$\frac{\text{MHD electrical power output}}{\text{fuel thermal input}}$.

1.1 General Principles of MHD Power Generation

Magnetohydrodynamics (MHD) is the science underlying the interaction between an electrically conducting fluid and a magnetic field. It is not a new subject, and dates back to Michael Faraday in the early nineteenth century. In his pioneer work on electromagnetic induction in fluids he attempted to use the earth's magnetic field to measure the flow in the River Thames; he also postulated that the motion of the oceans influenced the earth's magnetic field, an idea which still has support today. In the last 10 years or so, work on MHD has expanded enormously because several applications of the subject have become practicable. It is one of these applications—power generation—which is the subject of this book.

MHD power generation† uses the interaction of an electrically conducting fluid with a magnetic field to convert part of the energy of the fluid directly into electricity. For an incompressible fluid this energy is kinetic; for a compressible fluid it may be both kinetic and thermal. When

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† Sometimes called magnetoplasmadynamic (MPD), magnetogasdynamic (MGD) or magnetofluidynamic (MFD) power generation.

a conducting fluid flows through a magnetic field an electric field is induced in the fluid normal to both the flow and magnetic field directions.* If the flow is in a duct, and an external load is electrically connected to the fluid, this induced field can drive electric currents in a closed path through the fluid and the load. These currents interact with the magnetic field and exert a braking force on the fluid. The flow does work against this force, and energy is transferred from the fluid to the external load; energy is converted directly to electricity.

The simplest MHD generating duct is shown diagrammatically in Fig. 1.1. It consists of a channel of rectangular cross-section with one pair of walls electrically insulating and one pair electrically conducting electrodes in contact with the fluid. The magnetic field is perpendicular to the insulating walls; the load is connected between the electrodes. The fluid may be

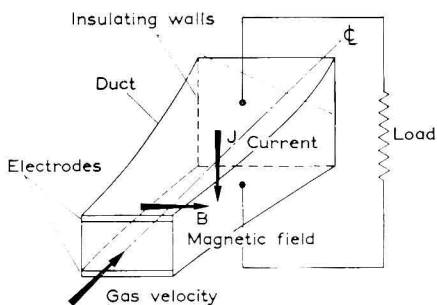


FIG. 1.1. Schematic arrangement of an MHD duct.

either compressible or incompressible. The energy is added to the fluid from either a fossil fuel or nuclear heat source upstream of the duct, the flow is accelerated in a nozzle and enters the duct. Obviously the power density in the duct is important since a smaller duct reduces heat loss and is of lower capital cost. The power density in the duct has a maximum value of $\frac{1}{4}\sigma v^2 B^2$, where σ is the electrical conductivity, v the fluid velocity, and B the magnetic field; obviously a high fluid velocity and conductivity are required for a given magnetic field.

Appropriate working fluids are liquid metals and ionized gases. Liquid metals have a high conductivity ($\sim 10^7$ mho m^{-1}), but it is difficult to convert the thermal energy in the heat source to the kinetic energy of the fluid. With gases, at the highest temperatures attainable with fossil-fuel combustion products or with the noble gases and a nuclear heat source, the difficulty is that the electrical conductivity is too low. The electrical

* In vector notation, this field is $\mathbf{v} \times \mathbf{B}$, \mathbf{v} and \mathbf{B} being the flow velocity and magnetic field. A fuller explanation of the basic principles of MHD can be found in Shercliff (1965).

conductivity of a weakly ionized gas in thermodynamic equilibrium at a temperature T varies with temperature approximately as $\exp(-eV_i/2kT)$, where V_i is the ionization potential, e the electronic charge and k is Boltzmann's constant. Hence, to obtain an acceptable electrical conductivity it is necessary to add a more easily ionizable substance (called seed) to the gas. The best substances are caesium ($V_i = 3.89$ V) and potassium ($V_i = 4.34$ V),* and these are added to give concentrations in the working gas of about 1 mol %. There are alternatives to thermal ionization and also methods of increasing the electron density. These include low- and radio-frequency induction, photoionization, electron-beam ionization, chemi-ionization, the use of radioactivity and thermionic emission and magnetically induced ionization. Only magnetically induced ionization shows promise of enhancing the electrical conductivity above the thermal equilibrium value, and then only in noble-gas systems. This book describes researches on the fossil-fuel-fired, open-cycle MHD power generator, and is therefore concerned exclusively with thermal ionization of the seed material to render the working fluid, combustion products, electrically conducting.

So far we have described only the MHD part of the system. In the successful exploitation of MHD for commercial power generation, the MHD generator must be incorporated into a complete cycle, and the other plant items in the cycle are of equal importance. In the fossil-fired system which is our subject here, the temperature of the gas at the MHD duct inlet, which determines the conductivity and hence power density at that point, depends on the performance of the combustion chamber. High power densities require high magnetic fields and the magnet design is therefore important. In the MHD duct the electrical conductivity falls rapidly with decreasing gas temperature along the duct, and it becomes uneconomic to extract electrical power directly from the gas by the MHD process below gas temperatures of 1800–2000°C. The remaining heat in the combustion gas stream must be extracted by some other process, and a regenerative air heater and a steam-raising plant are included in the system. The seed material must be recovered from the gas stream for economic and amenity reasons. As the cycle is described in more detail in the next section, the importance of all these plant items will become apparent.

1.2. Possible MHD Cycles

For large-scale generation there are basically three types of MHD cycle: (i) open, (ii) closed and (iii) liquid metal.

* Rubidium (4.18 V) lies between but is too costly to be of interest.

1.2.1. OPEN-CYCLE SYSTEM

In the open cycle the working fluid is finally rejected to the atmosphere and it must therefore be cheap. The only practical example is the fossil-fuel-fired cycle where the fluid is seeded combustion products. This combustion-fired system, sometimes called the “classical open cycle”, produces a high-temperature seeded gas by burning the fossil fuel (either coal, oil or gas) with highly preheated air, possibly enriched with oxygen, at high pressure. Seed is usually introduced into the combustion chamber in the form of a fine powder of a salt of the seed material. The gas is then accelerated in a nozzle before it enters the MHD generator. Obviously a high flame temperature is important in obtaining a high conversion efficiency in the cycle and in obtaining the highest possible electrical conductivity in the MHD duct. As electrical power is extracted from the flow in the duct the temperature falls, the conductivity falls more rapidly, and below 1800–2000°C the Joule dissipation in the gas becomes too large and MHD power generation is uneconomic. This limit is reached when the gas is still extremely hot by conventional steam-generating plant standards and the remaining heat must still be extracted. The gases are then diffused to a relatively low velocity and pass on to the heat and seed recovery plant.

One can show the importance of the air regenerator and the steam plant which make up the heat recovery plant by a simple heat balance. The specific heat and mass flow rate of combustion products are greater than for the air, and this makes complete regeneration of heat impossible. In a typical design of a plant with a fuel thermal input of 2000 MW,* the heat loss to combustion chamber, nozzle and duct walls is about 180 MW and the MHD power output is 550 MW with an MHD duct exit temperature of about 2000°C. The enthalpy of the gas stream is still slightly less than 2000 MW, whereas if it is exhausted to the atmosphere at 150°C, as in conventional plant, its enthalpy would be 104 MW. Even if the air preheat temperature could be brought up to the duct exhaust gas temperature of 2000°C only 1160 MW† could be regenerated. A practical limit on air preheat temperature is 1200–1500°C (see Chapter 2) which corresponds to regeneration of between 630 and 830 MW. The remaining energy in the flow is recovered with a Rankine steam cycle. Even this plant item must depart from the conventional design (see Chapter 10) since it must absorb the low-grade heat in the MHD combustion chamber and duct-wall cooling water; and since seed condensation takes place as the gas temperature

* For a 2000 MW (T) fuel input with air preheated to 1200°C the total enthalpy input to the gases is 2630 MW (T). (Air mass flow 663 kg s⁻¹; specific heat 10³ J kg⁻¹ °K⁻¹; air temperature rise 950°C.)

† Air mass flow 663 kg s⁻¹; specific heat 10³ J kg⁻¹ °K⁻¹; temperature rise 1750°C.