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Meissner and Ochsenfeld revisited

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Abstract To mark the 50th anniversary of its original publication a translation of the Meissner and Ochsenfeld article describing the exclusion of magnetic field from a superconductor is presented together with a brief commentary on its significance.

Zusammenfassung Anlässlich des 50sten Jahrestages der Veröffentlichung des Meissner–Ochsenfeld Effektes wird hier eine kommentierte Übersetzung des Originalartikels vorgelegt.

The paper by Meissner and Ochsenfeld which appears below in translation was first published in *Die Naturwissenschaften* in November 1933. The discovery described in that paper represents a major and crucial landmark in the development of our understanding of superconductivity and it would seem to be appropriate to acknowledge the 50th anniversary of its publication. It is an indication of its significance that it is frequently cited, particularly in reviews and textbooks on superconductivity, and consideration of the details of the original Meissner and Ochsenfeld work is of more than simple historical interest. A well respected textbook describing, in its third edition, the Meissner effect states, 'Careful measurements of the field distribution around a spherical specimen by Meissner and Ochsenfeld (1933) however, indicated that... the magnetic flux is expelled from the interior of the superconductor and the magnetic induction B vanishes'. Although this statement indicates how the Meissner effect might be described in an ideal superconductor it presents an entirely misleading view of the original Meissner and Ochsenfeld experiment.

The importance of the Meissner and Ochsenfeld experiment has been discussed in many texts (e.g. Rose-Innes and Rhoderick (1969), which is not the text quoted above!) and only a brief outline needs to be presented here. For 22 years prior to that experiment the most significant characteristic property of a superconductor was assumed to be its zero DC resistance. If a superconductor can be described simply as a perfect or resistanceless conductor it may be discussed in terms of classical electromagnetism. In particular, if one considers a closed loop of a perfect conductor it can easily be shown that any magnetic flux enclosed by such a loop must

remain constant, unaffected by subsequent changes in the magnetic field outside the loop. This argument can be extended to describe the behaviour of a bulk specimen of a perfect conductor. Since an infinite number of perfectly conducting paths can be postulated in such a specimen and since the flux through each must be fixed it follows that within the bulk the rate of change of magnetic field with time, \dot{B} , must be zero. For example, if a magnetic field is applied to a superconductor above its critical temperature and if it is then cooled below that temperature the magnetic field will be 'frozen-in' assuming the behaviour is that of a perfect conductor. Meissner and Ochsenfeld demonstrated that this certainly did not happen and that flux was actually expelled from the superconductor as it was cooled below its transition temperature. Although the quantitative evidence in their paper is limited their results suggested that virtually all the flux was expelled leaving no magnetic field in the interior of the superconductor. In other words, the superconducting material appeared to be perfectly diamagnetic. Of course, it is now recognised that this magnetic behaviour represents a clear distinction between a superconductor and a perfect conductor. In fact, even for an ideal superconductor, the magnetic field is not completely excluded but exists in a very narrow layer, the penetration depth, which is about 10^{-6} cm thick at the surface of the specimen. A detailed analysis indicating how the magnetic field falls off within the specimen has been given by London and London (1935).

In their second set of experiments Meissner and Ochsenfeld used a hollow lead cylinder, a tube, and investigated the magnetic field variation both inside and outside the tube as it cooled through the superconducting transition temperature. On the

assumption that the magnetic field is excluded from the lead one might expect that the magnetic flux density should increase both inside and outside the tube. However, while a superconductor is not just a perfect conductor, it is, *inter alia*, a perfect conductor and hence the magnetic flux threading the tube should remain constant. The field variation observed by Meissner and Ochsenfeld within the hollow cylinder was roughly consistent with this behaviour.

Shoenberg (1965) has suggested that the Meissner effect was confirmed by Tarr and Wilhelm (1934) in Toronto. They used a single, shorter tube of polycrystalline tin with five fixed search coils in various positions but their results are not really much more conclusive than those of Meissner and Ochsenfeld. A major difficulty for both groups lay in the fact that the magnetic field used was transverse to their cylindrical specimens and hence demagnetising effects were likely to be significant.

The demagnetising factor would be greatly reduced for a long thin cylindrical specimen positioned in a magnetic field which is parallel to the cylinder axis. This difficulty and others have been discussed in detail in a series of papers by Mendelssohn and his coworkers (see, for example, Keeley and Mendelssohn 1936) in their studies of the magnetic behaviour of superconductors.

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Ein neuer Effekt bei Eintritt der Supraleitfähigkeit

Translated by Allister M Forrest from Meissner W and Ochsenfeld R 1933 *Die Naturwissenschaften* **21** 787.

A new effect concerning the onset of superconductivity

If one places a cylindrical superconductor, e.g. lead or tin, above its transition temperature in a uniform magnetic field perpendicular to the cylinder axis the field lines pass virtually unhindered through it because of the very weak susceptibility of the superconductor (tin is slightly paramagnetic, lead, diamagnetic). According to previous views the field-line pattern would be expected to remain unchanged if, without altering the external magnetic field, the temperature was lowered below the transition temperature. Our investigations on tin and lead which contradict this view produced the following:

- (i) On cooling below the transition temperature the field-line pattern in the region outside the superconductor changes almost to that which would be expected if the permeability of the superconductor was zero, or the diamagnetic susceptibility was $-1/(4\pi)$.
- (ii) On the inside of a long lead tube the magnetic field in the central section of the tube remains almost the same below the transition temperature as it was above in spite of the corresponding change in the external magnetic field described in (i).

Two different experimental arrangements were used:

In the first, two parallel cylindrical superconductors approximately 140 mm long, 3 mm thick and

Ein neuer Effekt bei Eintritt der Supraleitfähigkeit

Bringt man einen zylindrischen Supraleiter, z. B. Blei oder Zinn, oberhalb seines Sprungpunktes in ein senkrecht zu seiner Achse gerichtetes homogenes Magnetfeld, so gehen die Kraftlinien wegen der sehr geringen Suszeptibilität der Supraleiter (Zinn ist schwach paramagnetisch, Blei diamagnetisch) fast ungehindert durch sie hindurch. Nach den bisherigen Anschauungen war zu erwarten, daß die Kraftlinienverteilung unverändert bleibt, wenn man die Temperatur, ohne an dem äußeren Magnetfeld etwas zu ändern, bis unter den Sprungpunkt erniedrigt. Unsere Versuche an Zinn und Blei haben im Gegensatz hierzu folgendes ergeben:

1. Beim Unterschreiten des Sprungpunktes ändert sich die Kraftlinienverteilung in der äußeren Umgebung der Supraleiter und wird nahezu so, wie es bei der Permeabilität 0, also der diamagnetischen Suszeptibilität $-1/(4\pi)$, des Supraleiters zu erwarten wäre.
2. Im Inneren eines langen Bleiröhrchens bleibt—trotz der dem 1. Effekt entsprechenden Änderung des Magnetfeldes in der äußeren Umgebung—beim Unterschreiten des Sprungpunktes das oberhalb desselben vorhandene Magnetfeld im mittleren Teil des Rohres nahezu bestehen.

Es wurden 2 verschiedene Versuchsanordnungen benutzt: Bei der ersten wurden zwei parallele zylindrische Supraleiter von etwa 140 mm Länge, 3 mm

1.5 mm apart were used. Between them a search coil approximately 10 mm long was positioned which could be rotated parallel to the axes of the superconductors. It was connected to a ballistic galvanometer so that the induced current in the coil could be determined. The ratio of the induced currents above and below the transition temperature was found to have the value 1.70 for two single crystals of tin—a result already reported in the Würzburg Physikertagung. Further measurements on two polycrystalline lead cylinders gave a value of 1.77. The field strength used was about 5 gauss. According to Maxwell's theory for the perfect conductor, with the help of formulae which have been derived in the calculations of v. Laue and Möglich¹, the zero value for the permeability yields in both cases the value 1.77. Discrepancies, within the possible error, arise because the spatial distribution of the windings of the search coil is not known exactly and also, in the case of the tin, the single crystals are not uniformly cylindrical.

In the second experimental arrangement a cylindrical lead tube was used; length, approximately 130 mm, outer diameter, 3 mm and inner diameter, 2 mm. The search coil connected to the ballistic galvanometer was again rotatable about an axis parallel to that of the lead cylinder and it could be positioned within or adjacent to the cylinder. On cooling through the transition temperature the flux of the magnetic field in the search coil increased by about 5 per cent inside the cylinder. The external magnetic field was again about 5 gauss. It could not be established if the field on the inside remained uniform since the search coil almost completely filled the inner cross-section. Outside the lead cylinder the field variation at the onset of the superconducting transition was again approximately that which would be expected if the permeability of the superconductor is zero.

On switching off the external field with the lead in the superconducting state the field on the inside of the cylinder remained unchanged. On the outside the field strength was not completely zero. For example, near the surface of the lead, where in the non-superconducting state the field was normal, several measurements indicated a field strength of 5–15 per cent of that which previously existed on the outside.

If the external field was turned on after the onset of superconductivity the field strength on the inside of the cylinder remained zero as was expected from the earlier evidence. The path of the field lines outside again correspond approximately to that which would be expected for zero permeability in the superconductor.

The representation of the results in terms of a statement about the change in the macroscopically defined permeability perhaps gives rise to difficulties concerning the processes inside the lead cylinder

Stärke und 1,5 mm Abstand verwendet. Zwischen ihnen befand sich eine Spule von etwa 10 mm Länge, die parallel zur Achse der Supraleiter drehbar und mit einem ballistischen Galvanometer verbunden war, so daß der Induktionsfluß durch sie ermittelt werden konnte. Es ergab sich bei zwei Einkristallen aus Zinn, wie schon auf der Würzburger Physikertagung berichtet wurde, für das Verhältnis des Induktionsflusses unterhalb und oberhalb des Sprungpunktes der Wert 1,70, für zwei polykristalline Bleizylinder nach weiteren, inzwischen angestellten Messungen der Wert 1,77. Die Feldstärke betrug hierbei etwa 5 Gauß. Nach der Maxwellschen Theorie für den vollkommenen Leiter ergibt sich mit Hilfe von Formeln, die sich aus Rechnungen von v. Laue und Möglich¹ ableiten lassen, mit dem Wert 0 der Permeabilität in beiden Fällen, der Wert 1,77. Die Abweichungen liegen wegen der nicht genau bekannten räumlichen Verteilung der Spulenwindungen und beim Zinn auch wegen der nicht genau kreiszylindrischen Form der Einkristalle innerhalb der möglichen Fehler.

Bei der zweiten Versuchsanordnung wurde ein zylindrisches Bleiröhrchen von etwa 130 mm Länge, 3 mm Außen und 2 mm Innendurchmesser verwendet. Die mit dem ballistischen Galvanometer verbundene Spule war wieder parallel zur Achse des Bleiröhrchens drehbar und konnte im Inneren und neben dem Bleiröhrchen angebracht werden. Im Inneren stieg der Magnetfeldfluß durch die Spule beim Unterschreiten des Sprungpunktes um etwa 5% an. Die Feldstärke im Außenraum betrug hierbei wieder etwa 5 Gauß. Ob das Feld im Inneren homogen blieb, konnte nicht festgestellt werden, da die Spule den inneren Querschnitt nahezu völlig ausfüllte. Außerhalb des Bleiröhrchens war der Feldverlauf nach Unterschreiten des Sprungpunktes wieder etwa so, wie er bei der Permeabilität 0 des Supraleiters zu erwarten ist.

Beim Ausschalten des äußeren Feldes im supraleitenden Zustand des Bleis blieb das Feld im Inneren des Bleiröhrchens unverändert bestehen. Die Feldstärke in der äußeren Umgebung wurde nicht völlig Null. Zum Beispiel blieb an der Stelle der Bleioberfläche, wo im nichtsupraleitenden Zustand das Feld normal zu ihr stand, bei verschiedenen Meßreihen eine Feldstärke von 5–15% derjenigen des äußeren Feldes bestehen.

Wurde das äußere Feld nach Eintritt der Supraleitfähigkeit eingeschaltet, so blieb die Feldstärke im Inneren des Bleiröhrchens, wie schon nach den bisherigen Anschauungen zu erwarten war, Null. Der Kraftlinienverlauf in der äußeren Umgebung entsprach wieder etwa dem bei der Permeabilität 0 des Supraleiters zu Erwartenden.

Die Darstellung des Befundes durch Angabe der Änderung der makroskopisch definierten Permeabilität stößt vielleicht für die Vorgänge im Inneren des Bleiröhrchens auf Schwierigkeiten, da möglicherweise kein eindeutiger Zusammenhang

der since possibly no unique connection any longer exists between the induction and the field strength. Instead of that one can obviously go more deeply and attempt to explain the results in terms of microscopic or macroscopic currents in the superconductor with the assumption that the permeability is 1 for current-free regions. In the new effect such currents obviously adjust themselves spontaneously or develop spontaneously at the onset of superconductivity.

The following further experimental results, which can only be briefly mentioned here, are connected with the new effect:

When the parallel superconductors are connected end-to-end in series and an external current is connected to flow through them above the critical temperature the magnetic field between the superconductors is increased below the transition temperature the external current being unchanged. If the superconducting transition for the tin single crystals is investigated with an uninterrupted external current flowing, in the absence of an external magnetic field hysteresis effects appear in which the transition point depends on whether the temperature is being raised or lowered.

Finally the analogy with ferromagnetism has already been pointed out by Gerlach² who has indicated the parallel with superconductivity.

Berlin, Physikalisch-Technische Reichsanstalt, October 16, 1933 W Meissner, R Ochsenfeld

1. *Berl. Ber.* **16** 544 (1933)
2. *Metallwirtschaft* **9** 1006 (1930)

zwischen Induktion und Feldstärke mehr besteht. Statt dessen kann man offenbar, tiefer gehend, die Ergebnisse darzustellen suchen durch Angabe von mikroskopischen oder makroskopischen Strömen in den Supraleitern unter Annahme der Permeabilität 1 an den stromfreien Stellen. Diese Ströme ändern sich offenbar spontan oder treten spontan neu auf beim Eintritt der Supraleitfähigkeit entsprechend dem neuen Effekt.

Mit dem neuen Effekt hängen folgende weitere experimentelle Befunde zusammen, die hier nur kurz erwähnt werden können:

Sind die parallelen Supraleiter durch eine an einem Ende angebrachte Verbindung hintereinandergeschaltet und wird durch sie von außen ein oberhalb der Sprungtemperatur eingeschalteter Strom hindurchgeschickt, so wird der Magnetfeldfluß zwischen den Supraleitern beim Unterschreiten des Sprungpunktes ohne Änderung des äußeren Stromes größer. Wird die Sprungkurve an Zinnekristallen bei niemals unterbrochenem äußeren Strom aufgenommen, so treten auch ohne äußeres Magnetfeld Hysteresisercheinungen auf, indem die Sprungpunkte beim Steigen und Sinken der Temperatur nicht zusammenfallen.

Schließlich sei noch auf die Analogie zum Ferromagnetismus hingewiesen, den schon früher Gerlach² in Parallele zur Supraleitfähigkeit gestellt hatte.

Berlin, Physikalisch-Technische Reichsanstalt, den 16 Oktober 1933. W. Meissner. R. Ochsenfeld.

- ¹ *Berl. Ber.* **16**, 544 (1933).
- ² *Metallwirtschaft* **9**, 1006 (1930).