

Corrosion behavior of metallic alloys in molten chloride salts for thermal energy storage in concentrated solar power plants - A review

Wenjin Ding^{a,*}, Alexander Bonk^a, Thomas Bauer^b

^a*Institute of Engineering Thermodynamics, German Aerospace Center (DLR), Stuttgart, Germany*

^b*Institute of Engineering Thermodynamics, German Aerospace Center (DLR), Cologne, Germany*

*Corresponding author. Tel.: +49 2203 601 3162. E-mail address: wenjin.ding@dlr.de.

Abstract

Recently, more and more attention is paid on applications of molten chlorides in concentrated solar power (CSP) plants as high-temperature thermal energy storage (TES) and heat transfer fluid (HTF) materials due to their high thermal stability limits and low prices, compared to the commercial TES/HTF materials in CSP - nitrate salt mixtures. A higher TES/HTF operating temperature leads to higher efficiency of thermal to electrical energy conversion of the power block in CSP, however causes additional challenges, particularly increased corrosiveness of metallic alloys used as containers and structural materials. Thus, it is essential to study corrosion behaviors and mechanisms of metallic alloys in molten chlorides at operating temperatures (500-800°C) for realizing the commercial application of molten chlorides in CSP. The results of studies on hot corrosion of metallic alloys in molten chlorides are reviewed to understand their corrosion behaviors and mechanisms under various conditions (e.g., temperature, atmosphere). Emphasis has also been given on salt purification to reduce corrosive impurities in molten chlorides and development of electrochemical techniques to in-situ monitor corrosive impurities in molten chlorides, in order to efficiently control corrosion rates of metallic alloys in molten chlorides to meet the requirements of industrial applications.

Keywords

Corrosion mechanisms, impurities, metallic corrosion, salt purification, electrochemical techniques.

1. Introduction

Molten chlorides have wide applications in industrial processes, e.g., as electrolytes in high-temperature electrochemical plating and extraction of metals such as Li, Na, Ca and Mg [1-3]. Recently, more and more attention is paid on their promising applications as high-temperature thermal energy storage (TES) and heat transfer fluid (HTF) materials in concentrated solar power (CSP) plants [4-5] due to their good thermophysical properties and low prices. Over the course of the SunShot Initiative, the U.S. Department of Energy has supported the molten chloride salt development for the next generation CSP [4].

CSP technology is emerging as one important technology in the future renewable energy system. It is reported that global installed CSP-capacity has increased nearly fifteen-fold from 2005 to 2015 (up to 4.8 Gigawatts) and grew at an average rate of 50 percent per year from 2010 to 2015 (see Figure 18 in [6]). In CSP plants as illustrated in Figure 1, inexpensive storage of the heat from sunlight in TES materials such as molten salts allows them to generate dispatchable power during the absence of sunlight and adds value to such power plants. In commercial CSP plants, a non-eutectic salt mixture of 60 wt% Sodium Nitrate and 40 wt% Potassium Nitrate, commonly known as Solar Salt, is typically utilized as the TES material. For instance, the 110-MWe Crescent Dunes tower CSP plant (see Figure 2) in Nevada, USA, uses ~32 000 tons Solar Salt for 10 hours of storage and realizes an annual capacity factor of 52 %. Figure 3 shows a molten salt storage tank (container) for this CSP plant, which has huge size, 12.2 meters tall and 42.7 meters in diameter.

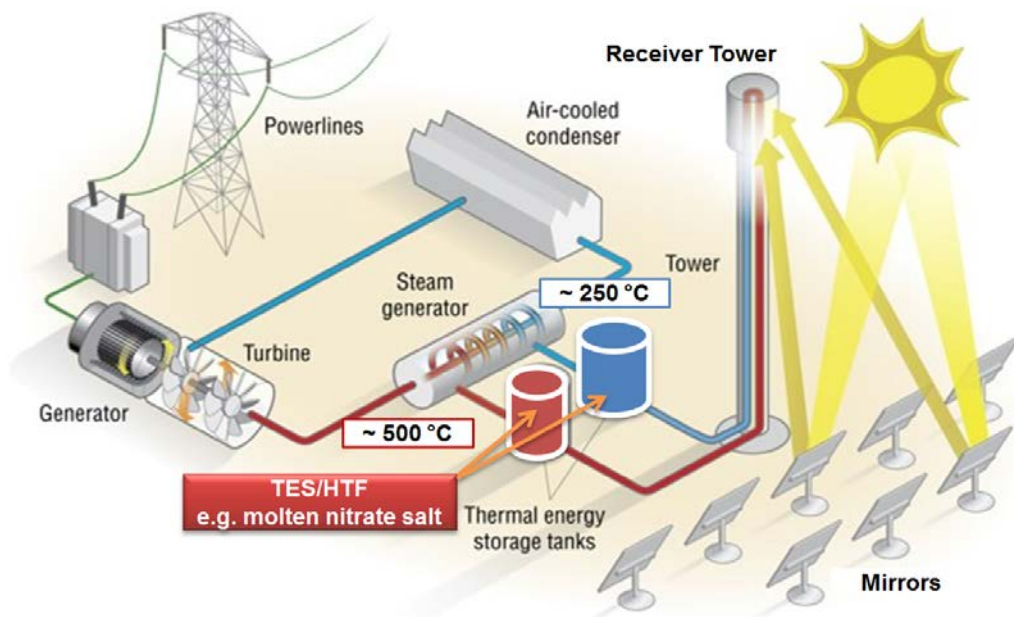
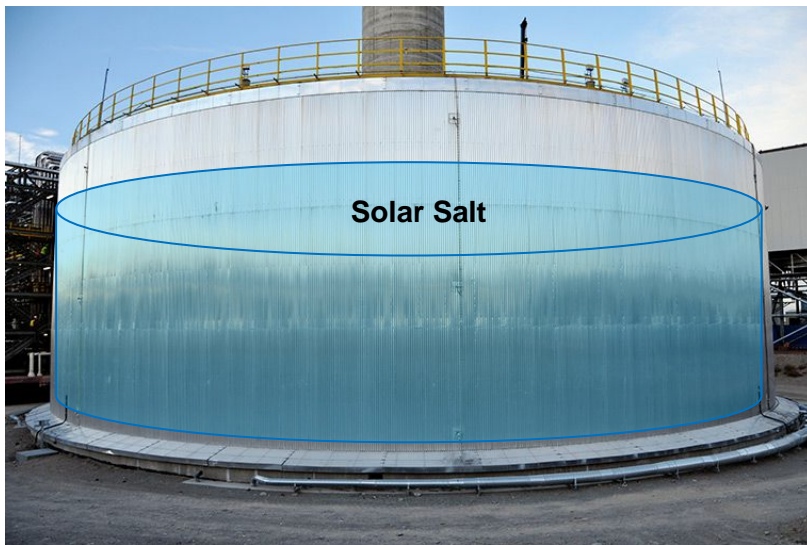


Figure 1: Concentrated solar power plants with molten salts as TES and HTF materials (source: US Department of Energy).



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2 Figure 2: 110-MWe Crescent Dunes tower CSP plant in Tonopah, Nevada, USA, with 10 hours of
3 thermal storage in ~32 000 tons Solar Salt. (source: SolarReserve)



4

5 Figure 3: A molten salt storage tank (container) for the Crescent Dunes solar power plant. Size of tank:
6 12.2 meters tall and 42.7 meters in diameter. Storage capacity: 32 000 tons molten salt. (source:
7 SolarReserve)

8 However, as Solar Salt decomposes at temperatures around 550°C [7, 8], the temperature
9 difference (or heat storage capacity) defined by the hot and cold salt temperature is limited.
10 More importantly, it would be attractive to raise the upper operation temperature to > 550 °C
11 in order to increase the efficiency of the power cycle. Table 1 compares the thermophysical
12 properties and large-scale prices of commonly considered molten salts as TES and HTF
13 materials in CSP. From the comparison, it can be concluded that:

- 1 - Commercial **nitrate/nitrite salts** have high heat capacities and low prices, but low
 2 thermal stability limits (decomposed at ~550°C).
 3 - **Carbonate salts** have high thermal stability limits (stable > 650°C) and high heat
 4 capacities, but high prices particularly when containing expensive Li₂CO₃.
 5 - **Fluoride salts** have high thermal stability limits (stable > 700°C) and high heat
 6 capacities, but are toxic and expensive.
 7 - **Chloride salts** have high thermal stability limits (stable > 800°C), moderate heat
 8 capacities, and low prices.

9 Table 1: Properties and prices of commonly used molten salts as TES/HTF in CSP [4, 7-10].

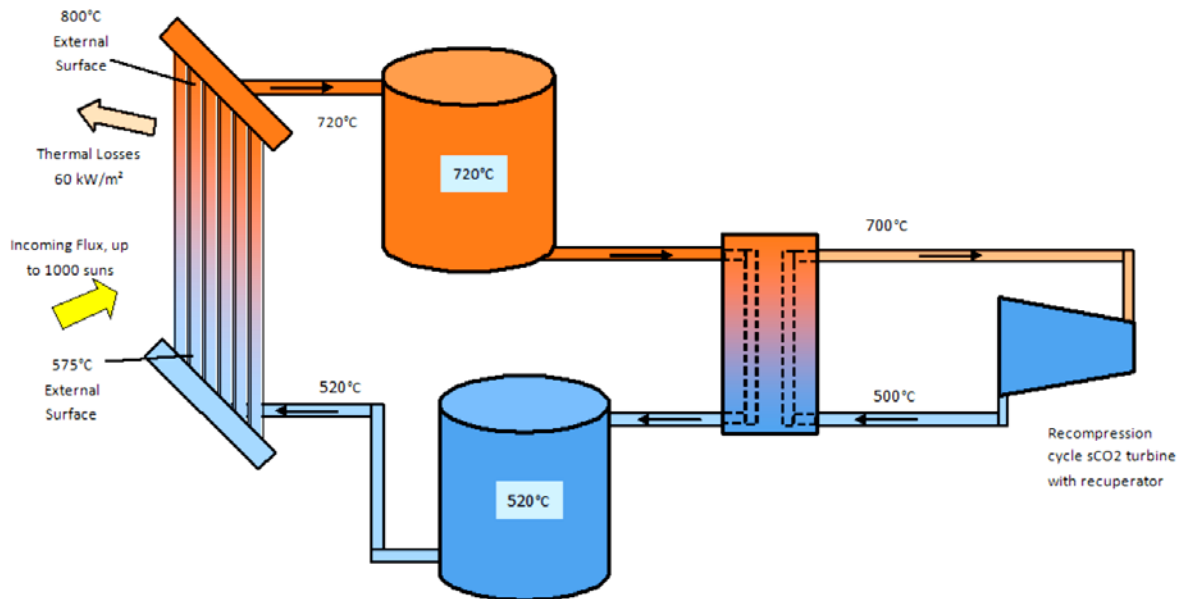
Molten salts composition (wt. %)	Melting point (°C)	Stability limit (°C)	Density (g cm⁻³)	Heat capacity (kJ kg⁻¹ K⁻¹)	Material Cost (US \$/kg)
Solar Salt KNO ₃ /nANO ₃ (40/60)	240 [8]	530-565 [8]	~1.8 [8] (400°C)	~1.5 [8] (400°C)	0.8 [4] 0.5 [7]
Hitec KNO ₃ /NaNO ₃ /NaNO ₂ (53/7/40)	142 [8]	450-540 [8]	~1.8 [8] (400°C)	1.5 [8] (400°C)	0.9 [7]
LiNaK carbonates K ₂ CO ₃ / Li ₂ CO ₃ /Na ₂ CO ₃ (32/35/33)	397 [8]	>650 [8]	2.0 [8] (700°C)	1.9 [8] (700°C)	2.5 [4] ~1.3 [7]
LiNaK fluorides KF/LiF/NaF (59/29/12)	454 [8]	>700 [8]	2.0 [8] (700°C)	1.9 [8] (700°C)	>2*
ZnNaK chlorides KCl/NaCl/ZnCl ₂ (23.9/7.5/68.6)	204 [7]	850 [7]	~2.0 [9] (600°C)	0.8 [7] (300-600°C)	0.8 [4] <1 [7]
MgNaK chlorides KCl/MgCl ₂ /NaCl (17.8/68.2/14.0)	380 [10]	>800 [4]	~1.7 [9] (600°C)	~1.0 [9] (500-800°C)	<0.35 [4]

*The prices are estimated with the approximate large-scale prices for salts.

10

11 Regarding the thermophysical properties and large-scale prices, chloride salts containing
 12 MgCl₂ or ZnCl₂ have been identified to be one of the most promising TES and HTF materials
 13 in the next generation CSP defined by U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), combining the
 14 supercritical carbon dioxide (sCO₂) Brayton cycle (T > 720°C) for increasing thermo-electric
 15 conversion efficiency (see Figure 4) [4]. However, the high operating temperature of chloride
 16 salt mixtures causes additional challenges, particularly increase corrosiveness of structural

1 alloys in the containers and tubes [4, 11, 12]. Addition of $MgCl_2$ or $ZnCl_2$ in chloride salt
2 mixtures leads to low melting points. However, $MgCl_2$ and $ZnCl_2$ are strongly hydrophilic
3 chlorides. A small amount of inherent water leads to a severe corrosion of alloys in the
4 molten chlorides [4, 11]. Thus, studies on decomposition and purification of hydrophilic
5 chlorides, and on corrosion behaviors and mechanisms of alloys in molten chlorides at high
6 operating temperatures (500-800°C), are essential to realize the applications of molten
7 chlorides in CSP and high-temperature industrial processes [1, 4].



8

9 Figure 4: High temperature molten salt loop schematic with potential surface and fluid temperatures [4].
10 Adapted from Concentrating Solar Power Gen3 Demonstration Roadmap of NREL, USA.

11 Reviews on corrosion of metallic alloys in molten salts at high temperatures have been
12 published in several books, e.g., in molten nitrates/nitrites, carbonates, sulphates [13, 14]
13 and molten chlorides [14]. Moreover, to assist the corrosion control, the use of
14 electrochemical techniques such as polarization curves was introduced to study and monitor
15 steel corrosion in molten salts [13]. Currently, Patel et al. [15] reviewed the results of recent
16 studies on compatibility of molten salts (fluorides, nitrates, chlorides, sulphates, carbonates)
17 with the structural alloys and materials. Emphasis of this review [15] was also given on
18 corrosion kinetics of the structural alloys and materials in these molten salts with focus on
19 reaction mechanisms and corrosion products. However, all the publications above did not
20 give in-depth insight into the effect of corrosive impurities in molten chloride salts and
21 atmosphere over molten chloride salts on the corrosion rates of alloys. To our best
22 knowledge, a review focusing on corrosion studies of alloys in molten chlorides is also not
23 available.

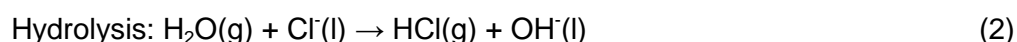
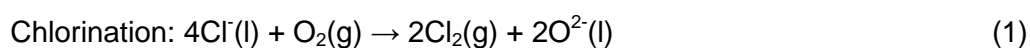
1 Corrosion of metallic alloys in molten chlorides consists of: 1). interaction of chloride melts
2 with covering gases (i.e., atmosphere), 2). reactions in chloride melts and 3). interaction of
3 metallic alloys with chloride melts. Thus, the first part of this review discusses the interaction
4 of chloride melts with covering gases (Chapter 2). Then, decomposition and purification of
5 chloride salts with hydrated water (impurities production during heating and its suppression),
6 as well as a novel electrochemical technique developed by DLR to in-situ monitor corrosive
7 impurities remaining in molten chlorides are introduced in Chapter 3. Finally, Chapter 4
8 reviews corrosion rates and mechanisms of various alloys in molten chlorides under various
9 conditions, as well as a brief introduction of corrosion mitigation methods available in
10 literature.

11 **2. Interaction of chloride melts with gases**

12 In the molten salt storage tanks for TES, the molten salts are covered with a covering gas for
13 salt stabilization (e.g., air for nitrates/nitrites, CO₂ containing gases for carbonates), or to
14 avoid intake of corrosive gases such as O₂ and water vapor from the atmosphere (e.g., inert
15 gases like argon for chlorides).

16 Table 2 summarizes the solubilities of gases O₂, H₂O, HCl, Cl₂ and CO₂ in molten chlorides
17 (H₂ in molten fluorides) and their interaction with molten chlorides. The gases O₂, H₂O, HCl,
18 Cl₂, CO₂ and H₂ possess a low solubility in molten alkali and alkaline-earth chlorides/
19 fluorides [12, 16]. At 850-925 °C, the solubility constants (i.e., Henry's law constant) of H₂O,
20 HCl, Cl₂ and CO₂ in single chlorides or chloride mixtures are in the range of 10⁻⁷ to 10⁻⁵ mol
21 cm⁻³ atm, while O₂ has an even smaller solubility constant of ~10⁻⁸ mol cm⁻³ atm [12]. The
22 solubility constant of H₂ in molten LiF-BeF₂ (66-34 mol%) at 600°C is 4.3x10⁻⁸ mol cm⁻³ atm
23 [16].

24 In spite of low solubilities, the oxidizing gases O₂ and H₂O dissolved in molten chlorides
25 cause a significant metal corrosion even if the metal has no direct contact with the gases [12].
26 As shown in Table 2 and reactions (1-2), the oxygen gas [12, 17] and water vapor [4, 11, 18]
27 can react with the molten chlorides to form Cl₂ and HCl.



28 Although the equilibrium constant of reaction (1) at 700-900°C is 10⁻²⁵-10⁻²⁹ and the
29 concentrations of Cl₂ and of O²⁻ in the melts have to be very low [12], the chlorination
30 reaction can be enhanced, if such cations as Zn²⁺, Mg²⁺, Al³⁺, Fe²⁺, Cr²⁺, Ni²⁺, etc., which can
31 form low-solubility oxides with oxygen ions [12, 17], are present in the melts. Moreover, if

1 these cations can form stable metal-hydroxyl ions (e.g., MgOH^+) in the melts with hydroxyl
2 ions [11, 18], the hydrolysis reaction (reaction (2)) can be shifted to the right side. The
3 reaction products Cl_2 and HCl as well as metal-hydroxyl ions have higher solubilities than O_2
4 in molten chlorides, which leads to an enhanced metal corrosion even if the metal has no
5 direct contact with the gases. Thus, in order to control corrosion of alloys in molten chlorides
6 for a long lifetime of CSP, the intake of O_2 and H_2O from the atmosphere and presence of O_2
7 and H_2O in the covering gases should be avoided. Moreover, the chloride salts with
8 adsorbed O_2 and H_2O should be purified.

9

Table 2. Gas solubilities in molten halides and gas interaction with pure molten chlorides.

Gases	O ₂	H ₂ O	HCl	Cl ₂	CO ₂	H ₂
Henry's law constant (mol cm⁻³ atm)	~10 ⁻⁸ (chlorides) [12]	9.5x10 ⁻⁶ (NaCl, 900°C) [16] 1.1x10 ⁻⁵ (KCl, 900°C) [16]	1.3x10 ⁻⁶ (NaCl, 907°C) [16] 2.5x10 ⁻⁶ (KCl, 907°C) [16] 8.4x10 ⁻⁷ (MgCl ₂ , 904°C) [16] 2.0x10 ⁻⁶ (MgCl ₂ /KCl, 50/50 mol%, 875°C) [16]	5.4x10 ⁻⁷ (NaCl, 900°C) [16] 1.9x10 ⁻⁶ (KCl, 900°C) [16] 7.3x10 ⁻⁷ (MgCl ₂ , 925°C) [16] 3.4x10 ⁻⁷ (MgCl ₂ /NaCl/KCl, 50/27.7/23.3 wt %, 903°C) [16]	6.19x10 ⁻⁷ (NaCl, 904°C) [16] 7.9x10 ⁻⁷ (KCl, 903°C) [16] 3.6x10 ⁻⁶ (MgCl ₂ , 850°C) [16]	4.3x10 ⁻⁸ (LiF-BeF ₂ , 66-34 mol%, 600°C) [16]
Interaction	Yes [12, 17] Chlorination 4Cl ⁻ (l) + O ₂ (l,g) → 2Cl ₂ (l,g) + 2O ²⁻ (l)	Yes [11, 18] Hydrolysis H ₂ O(l,g) + Cl ⁻ (l) → HCl(l,g) + OH ⁻ (l)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

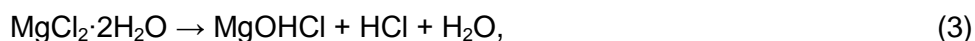
3. Impurities in chloride melts

3.1. Decomposition and purification of hydrophilic chlorides

Effort to reduce corrosiveness of the molten chloride salts with hydrophilic chlorides has been made to reduce the corrosive impurities by suppressing the side reactions of hydrolysis during the salt heating [18-20]. In this review, the decomposition and purification of MgCl_2 is discussed as an example to understand the decomposition and purification of chlorides.

Maksoud et al. [18] have investigated the purification of a MgCl_2 -NaCl-KCl salt mixture (60-20-20 mole %, melting temperature of $\sim 400^\circ\text{C}$) containing hydrated MgCl_2 ($\text{MgCl}_2 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$) via thermal analysis (differential scanning calorimetry (DSC)/thermogravimetric analysis (TGA)) coupled to mass spectrometry (MS), salt analysis (X-ray diffraction (XRD)) and monitoring produced HCl gas (PH-value analysis of the wash water with a PH electrode). In their work, an advanced process technology and purification approach (i.e., sweeping the salt with inert gas during the heating and keeping the temperature at 350°C before heating above the melting point until the salt is completely dehydrated) has been developed yielding improved salt quality with less impurities like corrosive MgOHCl and HCl and thus reduce corrosiveness [18].

Kipouros et al. [19] used multi-step heating to purify the hydrated MgCl_2 according to a vapor pressure diagram of H_2O and HCl over the hydrates of MgCl_2 (see Figure 5). As shown in Figure 5, with the temperature increasing, the hydrophilic MgCl_2 at room temperature - $\text{MgCl}_2 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$ was dehydrated to $\text{MgCl}_2 \cdot 4\text{H}_2\text{O}$ at T_1 , to $\text{MgCl}_2 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$ at T_2 and to $\text{MgCl}_2 \cdot \text{H}_2\text{O}$ at T_3 , sequentially [19]. In order to reduce the side reaction of $\text{MgCl}_2 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$ to MgOHCl and HCl (see reaction (3)) and release more water vapor, the temperature was controlled between T_3 and T_4 , until all the $\text{MgCl}_2 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$ is dehydrated to $\text{MgCl}_2 \cdot \text{H}_2\text{O}$ [19]. At the temperature higher than T_4 , the side reactions of $\text{MgCl}_2 \cdot \text{H}_2\text{O}$ and $\text{MgCl}_2 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$ to MgOHCl and HCl (see reactions (3) and (4)) can take place before the target reaction of $\text{MgCl}_2 \cdot \text{H}_2\text{O}$ to MgCl_2 at T_5 [19]. These side reactions were averted by increasing the partial pressure of HCl in the gas around the salt, e.g., by sweeping the salt with HCl [19].



However, even after salt purifications [18-20], still a small amount of hydroxide impurities remains in the salts. The formed MgOHCl can be dissolved in the molten chlorides (to MgOH^+ and Cl^-) and decomposes further to MgO and corrosive HCl at high temperatures ($>555^\circ\text{C}$) [19]. Thus, metal-hydroxyl chloride salts such as MgOHCl are considered to be the

most critical corrosive impurities in molten chlorides containing hydrophilic chlorides under inert atmosphere.

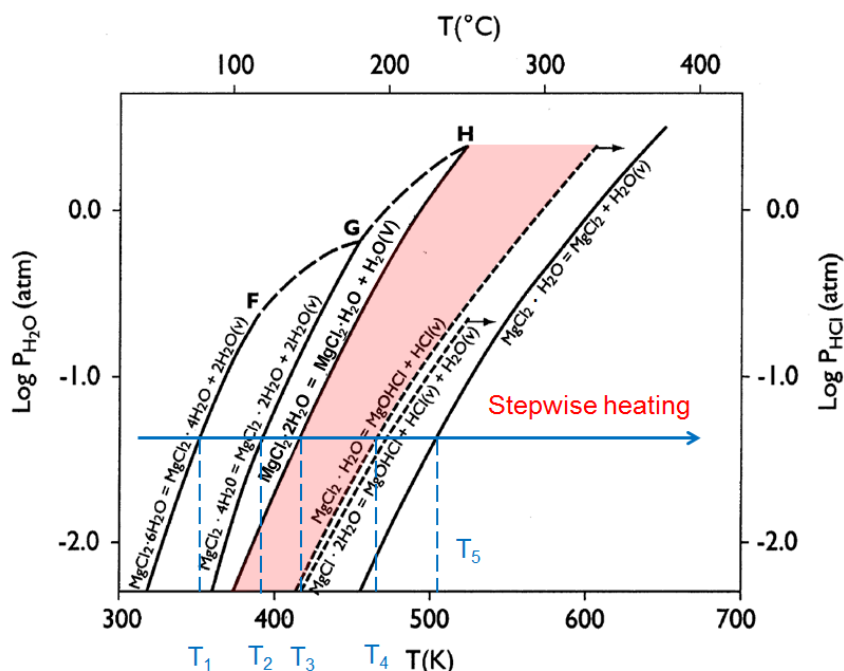


Figure 5: Vapor pressure of H₂O and HCl over the hydrates of MgCl₂ [19].

3.2. Cyclic voltammetry to in-situ monitor corrosive impurities

Cyclic voltammetry (CV) has been used to analyze the electrochemistry of molten chlorides, e.g., MgCl₂/NaCl (730-850°C) for measuring hydroxide/oxide impurities [21], or LiCl/KCl/TiCl₂ (430-500°C) for the synthesis of Ti alloys [22]. For an efficient control of corrosive impurity concentrations in molten chloride salts, earlier studies conducted by the authors of this review [23-25] used CV to in-situ measure the corrosive impurities in molten chlorides, e.g., hydroxide containing ion MgOH⁺ in molten NaCl-KCl-MgCl₂. Compared to the *ex-situ* methods such as titration [21, 24], generally *via* collecting and analyzing a salt sample out of the melt, *in-situ* measurements of the impurities such as hydroxide containing ions with an electrochemical analytic system based on cyclic voltammetry (CV) provide unique possibility to monitor impurity concentrations and thus control the technological processes [21, 24].

It was found that in melts such as MgCl₂-NaCl [21], NaCl-KCl [26], MgCl₂-KCl [26], LiCl-KCl [26], CaCl₂-CaO [27], CaCl₂-KCl [28], the heights of the reduction peaks of hydroxide/oxide species in cyclic voltammograms (CVG) were directly proportional to the concentrations of hydroxide/oxide species. This phenomenon was also observed by the CV experiments in our studies [23-25] for the concentration of MgOH⁺ corrosive impurity in molten NaCl-KCl-MgCl₂ (60/20/20 mole%) salts at temperatures of 500-700°C. A typical cyclic voltammogram by

using the tungsten working electrode [24] is shown in Figure 6. The peak B was considered to represent the following electrochemical reaction [24]:

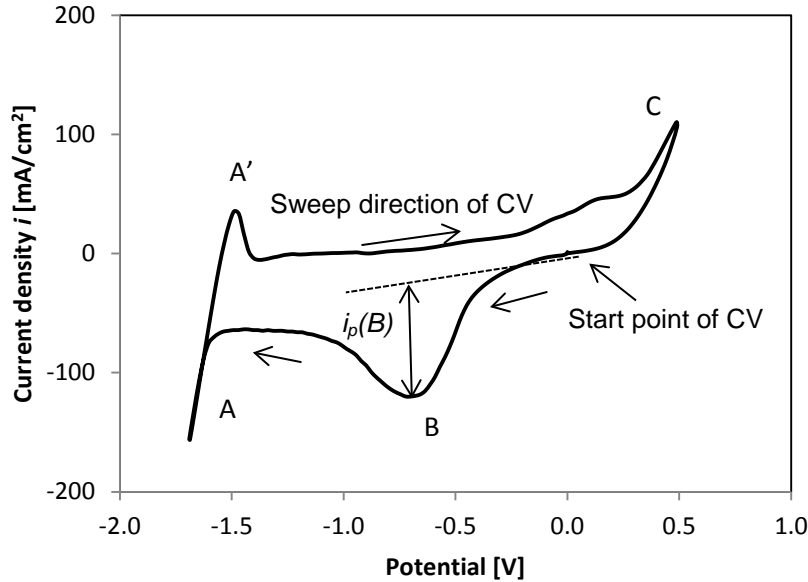
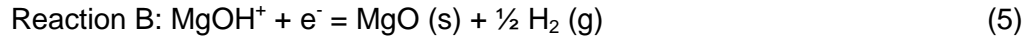


Figure 6: Cyclic voltammogram in $\text{MgCl}_2/\text{KCl}/\text{NaCl}$ at 500°C obtained by a tungsten working electrode. Sweep rate: 200 mV/s . Tungsten reference electrode. $i_p(B)$: peak current density for reaction B. Adopted from [24].

By fitting the CV data with those from the acid consumption measurements (i.e., titration) on the simultaneously collected salt samples, it was found that the peak current density of the peak B ($i_p(B)$) was proportional to the bulk concentration of MgOH^+ ($c^\infty(\text{MgOH}^+)$) in the studied temperature range, i.e., at $500\text{-}700^\circ\text{C}$ [23-25]:

$$i_p(B) = k(T, \nu)(B) \cdot c^\infty(\text{MgOH}^+), \quad (6)$$

where i_p represents the peak current density in mA/cm^2 ; $k(T, \nu)$ is a constant, i.e., the slope of peak current densities vs. concentrations of the reacting species in $(\text{ppm O})/(\text{mA/cm}^2)$, which depends on the temperature T and ν potential sweep rate; c^∞ is the bulk concentration of the reacting species in ppm O. As shown in Figure 7 from [25], the slope rates of current densities vs. concentrations of MgOH^+ at $500\text{-}700^\circ\text{C}$ were determined, which compare well with literature [21]. Thus, the peak current densities of the peak B obtained *via* CV could simply be used to *in-situ* monitor the concentration of the hydroxide impurity in the molten NaCl-KCl-MgCl_2 [25]. This method may be extended to other molten chloride salts with hydroxide impurity or other impurities.

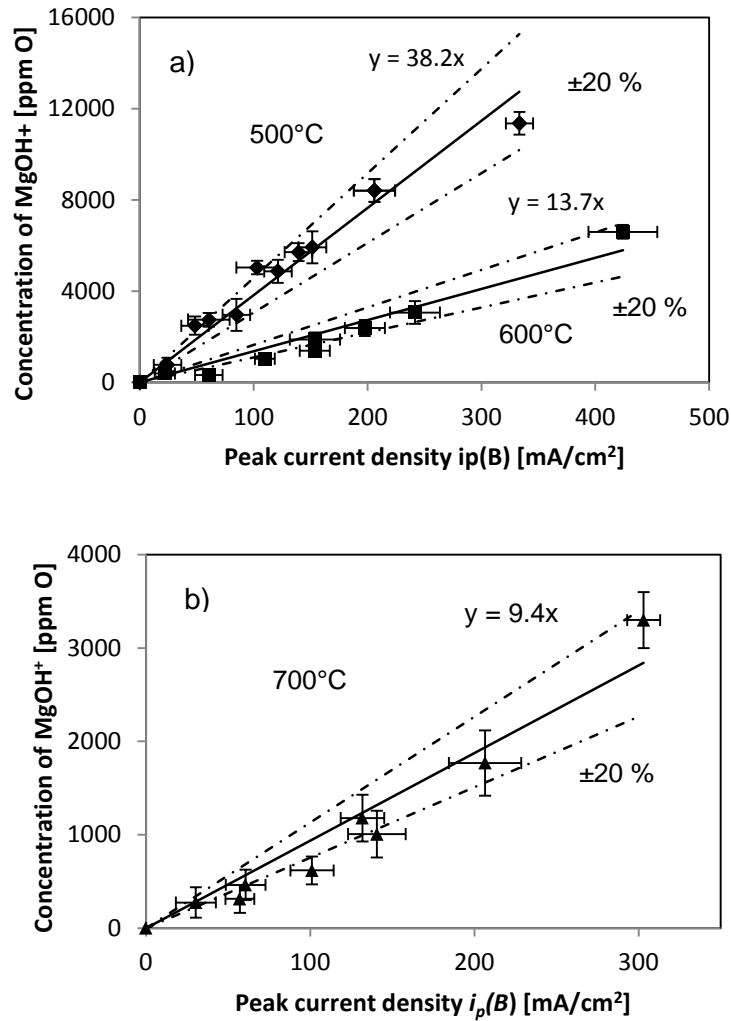


Figure 7: Peak current densities vs. concentrations of corrosive MgOH^+ in molten $\text{MgCl}_2/\text{KCl}/\text{NaCl}$ (60/20/20 mole%) at a) 500, 600°C and b) 700°C. Error bars represent the standard deviations in the CV (three measurements) and AC measurements (three measurements). Adopted from [24].

4. Corrosion of alloys in molten chlorides

4.1. Corrosion rates of alloys in molten chlorides

As molten chlorides are promising TES and HTF materials in the next generation CSP regarding their thermal properties and prices [4], corrosion behaviors of alloys in them have been investigated intensively in the last years (e.g. starting with the work in the US SunShot Initiative). Table 3 summarizes the corrosion rates of various alloys (stainless steels, nickel-based superalloys, some model alloys) in molten chloride mixtures under various conditions (e.g., various temperatures, under oxidizing or inert atmosphere) [14, 29-35].

The corrosion rates (CR) were conventionally determined with a mass loss measurement (referred to method “I+M”) or microstructural analysis (referred to method “I+MS”) on the exposed alloy specimens after immersion tests in the melts according to the following equations [14, 29]:

$$\text{method “I+M”}: CR = \frac{\Delta m}{\rho \cdot A} \cdot \frac{365 \cdot 24}{t} \cdot 10^4, \quad (7)$$

$$\text{method “I+M”}: CR = S_{corr} \cdot \frac{365 \cdot 24}{t}, \quad (8)$$

where CR has the unit of $\mu\text{m}/\text{year}$; Δm is the mass change of the exposed alloy specimen after immersion test, g; ρ is the density of the exposed alloy specimen, g cm^{-3} ; A is the contact area of the exposed alloy specimen with the melt, cm^2 ; t is the immersion time, hour; S_{corr} is the thickness of the corrosion layer of the exposed alloy specimen, μm .

Besides these post-analysis methods (methods “I+M” and “I+MS”), the electrochemical techniques such as potentiodynamic polarization (PDP) [30-32, 34, 35] and electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS) (for alloys in KCl/MgCl_2 at $550\text{-}700^\circ\text{C}$ [36]) were used for in-situ and fast measurements of the corrosion rates. The corrosion current obtained with the electrochemical techniques can be used to calculate an estimated corrosion rate according to Faraday law [14, 30-32]:

$$CR = k[(I_{corr} \cdot EW) / \rho \cdot A], \quad (9)$$

where the corrosion rate (CR) has the unit of μm per year, $k = 3.27$ in $\mu\text{m g } \mu\text{A}^{-1} \text{ cm}^{-1} \text{ yr}^{-1}$, I_{corr} is the corrosion current in μA , A is the contact area of the working electrode (studied alloys) with molten chlorides, EW and ρ are the equivalent weight (dimensionless) and density (g cm^{-3}) of the alloy sample, respectively [31].

Compared to the conventional immersion methods, which generally require several immersion days to detect the mass loss and microstructural change of the exposed alloy specimens, the electrochemical techniques can give indicative corrosion rates of alloys within several minutes. Thus, they can be used for parametric studies of corrosion rates of alloys. Compared to PDP and EIS, post analysis on the exposed alloy specimens after immersion tests can provide more information on the corrosion layers and mechanisms by analyzing the corrosion products and microstructures of the exposed alloys.

From Table 3, it can be concluded that the temperature of molten chlorides and the atmosphere (with or without oxidizing species) above the molten chlorides have significant effect on the corrosion of alloys in molten chlorides. The corrosion rates of alloys in molten chloride mixtures increase with increasing temperature, significantly, in particular above

600 °C. For instance, the corrosion rate of Ha C-276 in molten $\text{ZnCl}_2\text{-NaCl-KCl}$ under air increased more than 10-fold (from 40 to 500 $\mu\text{m}/\text{year}$), when the temperature increased from 500 to 800 °C [31].

As oxidizing species O_2 and H_2O existing in air as covering gas can accelerate the corrosion of alloys. Alloys in molten chlorides have much higher corrosion rates under air atmosphere than under inert atmosphere, e.g., SS 304, Ha C-22 and Ha C-276 in molten $\text{ZnCl}_2\text{-NaCl-KCl}$ [31]. However, severe corrosion occurred also in inert atmosphere, e.g. SS and Incoloy alloys in molten NaCl-KCl under nitrogen atmosphere at 650-700°C [32], SS alloys in molten KCl/NaCl/VCl_2 under argon atmosphere [34], if corrosive species such as O_2 , H_2O , V^{2+} exists in the melts. Moreover, it was concluded that molten chlorides were too aggressive to be used at 900 °C under the atmosphere with O_2 and H_2O , and reducing these oxidizing impurities in molten chlorides can also significantly reduce the corrosiveness of the molten chlorides [14].

For the corrosion behavior of commercial alloys in molten nitrate salt mixtures such as Solar Salt it is well understood, that the corrosion resistance of alloys to molten nitrate salt mixtures improves with increasing nickel content [14]. From the available corrosion data in literature for alloys in molten chlorides summarized in Table 3, it can be concluded that nickel-based superalloys such as Incoloy, Inconel and Hastelloy, which have higher prices due to higher Ni contents, mostly have better corrosion resistance in molten chloride salts than stainless steels [32-33]. However, the conclusion that the resistance of alloys improves with increasing nickel content, is not always true for alloys to molten chlorides. In some cases, the alloys with higher Ni-content have worse corrosion resistance, e.g., Ha N (~71% nickel) has higher corrosion rates in molten $\text{ZnCl}_2\text{-NaCl-KCl}$ than Ha C-22 (~56% nickel) and Ha C-276 (~57% nickel) at 250-500°C [30], also in NaCl-KCl-MgCl_2 than SS 304 (8-11% nickel) and SS 316 (10-14% nickel) at 450-500°C [14]. Ha N has been found to be most suitable in molten fluoride salts after extensive studies for nuclear applications at temperatures of > 700°C under vacuum or an inert atmosphere [14]. However, other studies [14, 30] indicate that Ha N is not suitable for molten chloride salts under air or vacuum.

Table 3: Results of corrosion studies metallic alloys in molten chlorides.

Molten Salts (wt. %)	Alloy (Ni wt.%)	T (°C)	Atmosphere	Method	Corrosion rate (µm/year)	Ref.	
KCl/NaCl/ZnCl₂ (24.0/7.4/68.6)	Ha N (~71)	250	air	PDP	37	[30]	
		500	air	PDP	160	[30]	
	Ha C-22 (~56)	250	air	PDP	16	[30]	
		500	air	PDP	50	[30]	
	Ha C-276 (~57)	250	air	PDP	11	[30]	
		500	air	PDP	42	[30]	
	SS 304 (8-11)	250	air	PDP	22	[31]	
		500	air	PDP	381	[31]	
	Ha C-22 (~56)	400	absence of air	I+M (1000 h)	14	[31]	
		250	air	PDP	15	[31]	
		500	air	PDP	42	[31]	
		400	absence of air	I+M (1000 h)	8	[31]	
		800	absence of air	I+M (1000 h)	14	[31]	
		Ha C-276 (~57)	500	air	PDP	40	[31]
			800	air	PDP	500	[31]
			400	absence of air	I+M (1000 h)	3	[31]
800	absence of air		I+M (1000 h)	4	[31]		
500	air	I+M (1000 h)	80	[31]			
	<hr/>						
	CaCl₂/MgCl₂/NaCl (43.6/17.7/38.7)	Inc 625 (~62)	600	air	I+M (504 h)	121	[29]
		Ha X (~47)	600	air	I+M (504 h)	153	[29]
		Ha B-3 (~65)	600	air	I+M (504 h)	144	[29]
<hr/>							
KCl/MgCl₂/NaCl (20.4/55.1/24.5)	SS 304 (8-11)	450-500	vacuum	I+M (1000 h)	<10	[14]	
	SS 316 (10-14)	450-500	vacuum	I+M (1000 h)	~10	[14]	
	SS 347 (9-12)	450-500	vacuum	I+M (1000 h)	~120	[14]	

	Ha N (~71)	450-500	vacuum	I+M (1000 h)	~50	[14]
	SS 304 (8-11)	900	N ₂ -(0.1-1%H ₂ O)-(1-10%O ₂)	I+M (144 h)	Disintegrated	[14]
	SS 316 (10-14)	900	N ₂ -(0.1-1%H ₂ O)-(1-10%O ₂)	I+M (144 h)	Disintegrated	[14]
	In 800H (30-35)	900	N ₂ -(0.1-1%H ₂ O)-(1-10%O ₂)	I+M (144 h)	23725	[14]
	Ha 230 (~57)	900	N ₂ -(0.1-1%H ₂ O)-(1-10%O ₂)	I+M (144 h)	20345	[14]
KCl/NaCl/VCl₂ (53.3/41.7/5.0)	SS 316L (13.5-15.0)	750	Argon	I+M (6 h)	54000	[34]
		750	Argon	PDP (6 h)	1600	[34]
	SS 316Ti (12-14)	750	Argon	I+M (6 h)	61000	[34]
		750	Argon	PDP (6 h)	7000	[34]
	SS 321 (9-11)	750	Argon	I+M (6 h)	22200	[34]
		750	Argon	PDP (6 h)	15100	[34]
KCl/NaCl (56.1/43.9)	SS 316L (13.5-15.0)	750	Argon	I+M (80 h)	~157	[35]
	SS 316Ti (12-14)	750	Argon	I+M (80 h)	~168	[35]
	SS 321 (9-11)	750	Argon	I+M (80 h)	~225	[35]
KCl/LiCl (55.8/44.2)	SS 304 (8-11)	400	absence of air	I+M (N/A)	2	[14]
		500	absence of air	I+M (N/A)	6	[14]
	SS 316 (10-14)	400	absence of air	I+M (N/A)	2	[14]
	SS 347 (9-12)	500	absence of air	I+M (N/A)	2	[14]
LiCl/NaCl (68.6/34.4)	SS 347 (9-12)	650	nitrogen	PDP	7490	[32]
	SS 310 (~20.5)	650	nitrogen	PDP	6420	[32]
		700	nitrogen	PDP	12450	[32]
	In 800H (30-35)	650	nitrogen	PDP	5940	[32]
		700	nitrogen	PDP	14310	[32]
	Inc 625 (~62)	650	nitrogen	PDP	2800	[32]

MgCl₂/NaCl	Ni (>99.97)	520	air	I+M (140 h)	57	[33]
(52/48)	GH 4033	520	air	I+M (140 h)	142	[33]
	(Ni72.1/Cr20.5/Fe4.0/Ti2.6 /Al0.8)					
	GH 4169	520	air	I+M (140 h)	246	[33]
	(Ni52.9/Cr19.0/Fe18.5/Ti0. 9/Al0.84/Mo3.1/Nb5.2)					

SS: Stainless steel; Ha: Hastelloy; In: Incoloy (Ni wt % < 50 %); Inc: Inconel (Ni wt % > 50 %).

PDP: potentiodynamic polarization. I+M (immersion time): Immersion test + mass loss. I+MS (immersion time): Immersion test + Microstructural analysis.

4.2. Interaction of chloride melts with metallic alloys

Corrosion mechanisms of metallic alloys in molten chloride salts are complex with different interactions between atmosphere, molten salts, outer corrosion layer, inner corrosion layer and the matrix of metallic alloys [17, 29, 33, 37]. The interaction between atmosphere (covering gases) and molten chlorides has been discussed in section 2.2. In this section, the interaction between molten chlorides with corrosive impurities (e.g. O_2 , Cl_2 , HCl , OH^- containing species) and metallic alloys is discussed by reviewing the available literature [17, 29, 33, 35, 37].

As summarized in Table 4, research efforts have been made to understand the corrosion mechanism of metallic alloys in molten chloride salts under oxidizing [17, 29, 33, 37] or inert [35] atmosphere. Analysis methods like SEM, EDS, XRD, EAS and electrochemical methods like OCP, LV, EIS were used to analyze the corroded alloys, corrosion products and corrosion behaviors (see Table 4). It can be concluded that the interaction between molten chlorides with corrosive impurities and metallic alloys has two stages (see Figure 8): 1). Oxidation of elements in alloys, 2). Dissolution, precipitation and/or vaporization of oxidized metallic elements. As shown in Table 5, the alloying element M, e.g., Cr, which has a stronger electromotive force (EMF) [38], i.e., lower standard electrode potential in molten chlorides [39], reacts with oxidizing impurities faster. Thus, in theory, the alloying elements (Al, Mn, Cr, Fe, Ni) oxidized by oxidizing impurities in molten chlorides (e.g. O_2 , Cl_2 , HCl , OH^- containing species) to metallic ions tend to be depleted from alloys according to the sequence of $Al > Mn > Cr > Fe > Ni$. This phenomenon has been observed and reported in different studies [17, 29, 33, 35, 37]. The metallic ions dissolved in the molten chlorides interact with the ions in the melt further to form, e.g., stable chloride ions $M_xCl_y^{z-}/M_xCl_y^{z+}$, oxide precipitates M_xO_y , gases $M_xCl_y/M_xCl_yO_z$, which can enhance the oxidation reactions of the alloying elements with the oxidizing impurities in the molten chlorides (stage 1) [17, 29, 33, 35, 37].

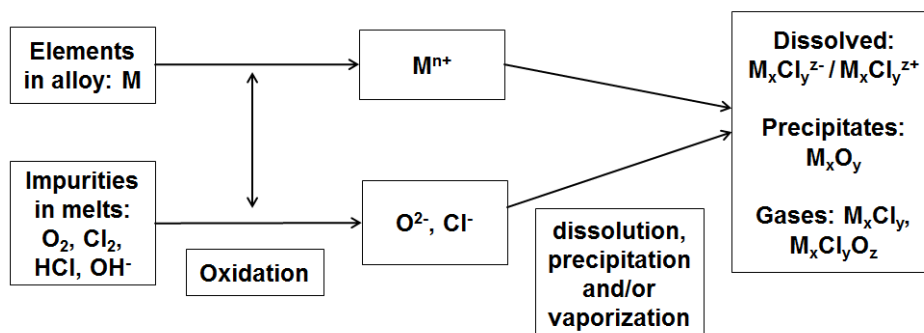


Figure 8: Interaction between molten chlorides with corrosive impurities and metallic alloys.

Table 4: Corrosion of metallic alloys in molten chlorides.

Molten chlorides (wt. %)	Alloys	Atmosphere / temperature	Procedures	Corrosion mechanism	Ref.
CaCl₂/MgCl₂/NaCl (43.6/17.7/38.7)	Ni-based commercial superalloys	air / 600°C	SEM, EDS, XRD, TC	Preferential depletion of Cr and Fe Intergranular corrosion	[29]
MgCl₂/NaCl (52/48)	Ni-based alloys (Ni 52.9-99.97 wt. %)	air / 520°C	SEM, EDS, XRD	Combined effect of alloy dissolved as anode, preferential oxidization and chlorination	[33]
KCl/NaCl (56.1/43.9)	Stainless steels	argon / 750°C	EAS, XRM, SEM, OCP, LV, EIS	Intergranular corrosion Preferential depletion of Cr, Fe and Mn.	[35]
KCl-ZnCl₂ (69.1/30.9)	NiAl and FeAl model alloys	air / 400-450°C	SEM, EDX, XRD, EPMA	Preferential depletion of Al Formation of Al ₂ O ₃ within the pores of corrosion layer	[17]
MgCl₂/NaCl (MgCl ₂ wt. % 0.0, 48.9, 61.0, 93.6)	GH 1140 (Ni37.5/Cr21.5/Fe35.85/Ti0.9/Al0.4/Mo2.25/W1.6)	air / 850°C	SEM, EDS, XRD	Without MgCl ₂ : dissolution as anode – oxidizing – peeling off of oxide film With MgCl ₂ : dissolution as anode – oxidation – reduction - peeling off of oxide film	[37]

SEM: scanning electron microscopy, EDS: Energy dispersive spectroscopy, XRD: X-ray diffraction, TC: Thermodynamic calculation, EAS: Electronic adsorption spectroscopy, XRM: X-ray microanalysis, OCP: Open circuit potential, LV: Linear voltammetry, EIS: Electrochemical impedance spectroscopy, EDX: Energy-dispersive analysis, EPMA: Electron probe microanalysis.

Table 5: Standard electrode potentials of metallic elements in molten MgCl₂/KCl/NaCl (50/20/30 mol%) at 475°C [39].

Elements	Al	Mn	Cr	Fe	Ni
E_m⁰ (V)	-1.886 (Al ³⁺ /Al)	-1.794 (Mn ²⁺ /Mn)	-1.396 (Cr ²⁺ /Cr)	-1.183 (Fe ²⁺ /Fe)	-0.792
Vs. Pt²⁺/Pt			-1.131 (Cr ³⁺ /Cr)	-0.852 (Fe ³⁺ /Fe)	(Ni ²⁺ /Ni)

Liu et al. [29] investigated the corrosion mechanism of commercial Ni-based (Ni-Cr-Fe) superalloys in molten MgCl₂/CaCl₂/NaCl **under air atmosphere** at 600°C by analyzing the corroded alloys via SEM and EDS and corrosion products via XRD, as well as based on the thermodynamic calculation (TC) of corrosion reactions. The combined effect of dissolution, oxidization and chlorination was considered in the corrosion mechanism of alloys in molten chlorides [29]. During the exposure, oxygen and water in air were continuously dissolved in

the molten chlorides and reacted with the molten chlorides to form corrosive HCl and Cl₂. These corrosive impurities could accelerate the corrosion of alloys, particularly the Cr element in the alloys, which has lower standard electrode potential in molten chlorides compared to Fe and Ni [39] (see Table 5). In this system, gases like CrCl₄ and CrO₂Cl₂, and oxide precipitates like MgCr₂O₄ and MgO were considered to be the main products of corrosion reactions based on the thermodynamic calculation [29]. Wang et al. [37] investigated the influence of MgCl₂ content on corrosion behavior of metallic alloys in MgCl₂/NaCl under air atmosphere at 850°C. It was found that corrosion mechanisms were different with or without MgCl₂ in molten chlorides. With MgCl₂, a MgO layer was formed on the alloy surface but could not protect the alloy against corrosion due to its porous structure and peeling off from the alloy surface [37].

Abramov et al. [35] studied corrosion mechanisms of stainless steels (SS 316L, 316Ti and 321) in molten KCl/NaCl **under inert atmosphere** at 750°C by analyzing the molten salts and corroded alloys via EAS, SEM, X-ray microanalysis (XRM), as well as using electrochemical methods like open circuit potential (OCP). The dissolution sequence of the alloying elements was determined by combination of EAS for melts with consecutive chemical analysis of quenched melts. Fe, Cr and Mn species were in the major products of the anodic dissolution of these studied stainless steels [35]. Moreover, intergranular corrosion of these studied stainless steels in molten chlorides was characterized by electrochemical methods like OCP measurements [35].

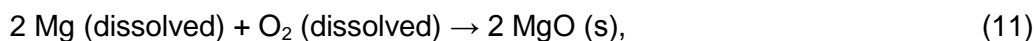
Table 3 clearly shows the difficulty to control the corrosion rates of alloys exposed to molten chlorides under oxidizing atmosphere below 15 μm/year (≥ 600 °C), due to the effect of oxidizing species like O₂ and H₂O. Compared to oxidizing atmosphere, the alloys have much lower corrosion rates when exposed to the molten chlorides under inert atmosphere. However, there is still a lack of reliable data and research on the corrosion rates and mechanism of metallic alloys in molten chlorides under inert atmosphere. Thus, more research is essential to cover this gap for realizing the application of molten chlorides in CSP.

4.3. Corrosion mitigation methods

Some methods like adding corrosion inhibitors [40-42] in the melts or forming a protective layer on alloys [36, 43-45] have been studied to mitigate the corrosion rates of metallic alloys in molten chlorides at high temperatures.

Cathodic protection is a well-known method for preventing metallic corrosion in aqueous solutions to the previous alloy corrosion potential, either by using impressed current or by using a sacrificial anode. The protection method of using a sacrificial anode has been used

to reduce the corrosiveness of the molten chloride salts by saturation of a salt with a liquid metal (i.e., LiCl with Li metal [40-41]), or adding active metals such as Mg [42] in the molten chlorides, to reduce the redox potential of the melts, i.e., the concentration of the corrosive impurities like metal-hydroxyl ions and dissolved O₂/Cl₂, e.g., via the following reactions:



The results of corrosion inhibition experiments in [42] showed that the corrosion rate of the Ni-based (Ni-Cr-Fe) superalloy Ha 230 in MgCl₂-KCl containing 1.15 mol% Mg under inert atmosphere at 850°C showed 35 times lower corrosion than baseline tests with no corrosion inhibitor and met the requirements in industrial applications (CR < 15 μm/year). Additional experiments to aggravate corrosion by adding convective flow using a thermosiphon showed that the corrosion rate with convective flow and no Mg corrosion inhibitor increased by a factor of 3 [42], whereas thermosiphon tests with the 1.15 mol% Mg corrosion inhibitor reduced corrosion below 15 μm/year [42]. However, this method was not studied in real solar power applications.

Besides adding corrosion inhibitors in the melts, surface passivation by forming a protective layer on the alloys is another promising corrosion mitigation approach. Compared to the corrosion inhibitor approach, the alloy with a protective layer could be exposed to both the liquid and the vapor phases of the molten chlorides [43]. In the protective layer development for molten chlorides, research focused on 1). Ceramic layers like Al₂O₃ [36, 43-45] and Ytria-stabilized zirconia (YSZ) [45], 2). Metallic layers such as nickel based alloy coatings [44-45]. These studies showed that surface passivation by forming a protective layer on the alloys could reduce the corrosion rates of metallic alloys in molten chlorides significantly. However, there are a number of parameters to be considered for choosing an appropriate coating for a specific substrate material and environment such as corrosion environment, thermal stress (or differences in expansion coefficient of substrate and protective coating), heat resistance, dissolution of the protective layer in the melt [45].

5. Summary and conclusions

After reviewing the molten chloride development for CSP and results of studies on hot corrosion of commercial alloys in molten chlorides, it can be concluded that:

1. Molten chloride mixtures such as $\text{MgCl}_2\text{-KCl-NaCl}$ are promising heat transfer fluid and thermal energy storage media for next generation CSP plants with operation temperatures up to 750 °C.
2. Molten salt temperature, atmosphere over the salt and corrosive impurities in the salt have a significant effect on corrosion rates.
3. Nickel-based superalloys such as Incoloy, Inconel and Hastelloy, which have higher prices due to higher Ni contents, typically have better corrosion resistance in molten chloride salts than stainless steels. However, the conclusion that the resistance of alloys improves with increasing nickel content, is not always true for alloys in contact with molten chlorides.
4. Corrosion of alloys in molten chlorides under air and inert atmosphere has different corrosion mechanisms due to the interaction between atmosphere and molten chlorides. This should be considered in the development of corrosion mitigation methods.
5. Corrosion rates of alloys in molten chlorides can be reduced via salt purification by e.g. stepwise heating, as well as via corrosion mitigation methods such as adding corrosion inhibitors or forming a protective layer on alloys.
6. Electrochemical techniques like cyclic voltammetry, open circuit potential measurement, polarization curves and electrochemical impedance spectroscopy are useful tools for corrosion studies and determination of impurity levels.

The following future works, which help to realize the commercial applications of molten chlorides in next generation CSP, are suggested:

1. Corrosion study of **suitable metallic structural materials** for molten chlorides up to 750 °C including aspects such as corrosion in molten salt flow and thermal cycling.
2. Study on durability of the promising **protective coatings** on alloys,
3. Study on combining the **salt purification** and **corrosion mitigation** methods for efficient corrosion control,
4. Study on **corrosion mechanism** of alloys in molten chlorides with corrosion inhibitors like Mg metal,
5. Development of **electrochemical techniques** for commercial applications in order to monitor salt quality and corrosion,
6. Development of components and instrumentation (e.g. pumps, valves), as well as their demonstration in lab-scale molten salt test loops.

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