Stimulated Optical Radiation in Ruby

Schawlow and Townes[1] have proposed a technique for the generation of very monochromatic radiation in the infra-red optical region of the spectrum using an alkali vapour as the active medium. Javan[2] and Sanders[3] have discussed proposals involving electron-excited gaseous systems. In this laboratory an optical pumping technique has been successfully applied to a fluorescent solid resulting in the attainment of negative temperatures and stimulated optical emission at a wave-length of 6943 Å.; the active material used was ruby (chromium in corundum).

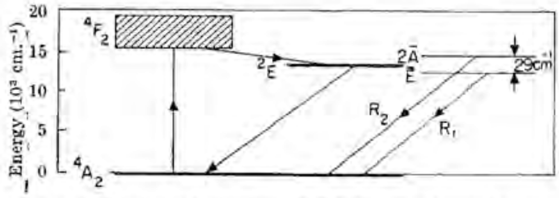

Fig. 1. Energy-level diagram of Cr^{3+} in corundum, showing pertinent processes

A simplified energy-level diagram for triply ionized chromium in this crystal is shown in Fig. 1. When this material is irradiated with energy at a wave-length of about 5500 Å., chromium ions are excited to the $^4F_2$ state and then quickly lose some of their excitation energy through non-radiative transitions to the ^2E state[4]. This state then slowly decays by spontaneously emitting a sharp doublet the components of which at 300° K. are at 6943 Å. and 6929 Å. (Fig. 2a). Under very intense excitation the population of this metastable state (^2E) can become greater than that of the ground-state; this is the condition for negative temperatures and consequently amplification via stimulated emission.

To demonstrate the above effect a ruby crystal of 1-cm. dimensions coated on two parallel faces with silver was irradiated by a high-power flash lamp; the emission spectrum obtained under these conditions is shown in Fig. 2b. These results can be explained on the basis that negative temperatures were produced and regenerative amplification ensued. I expect, in principle, a considerably greater ($\sim 10^3$) reduction in line width when mode selection techniques are used[1].

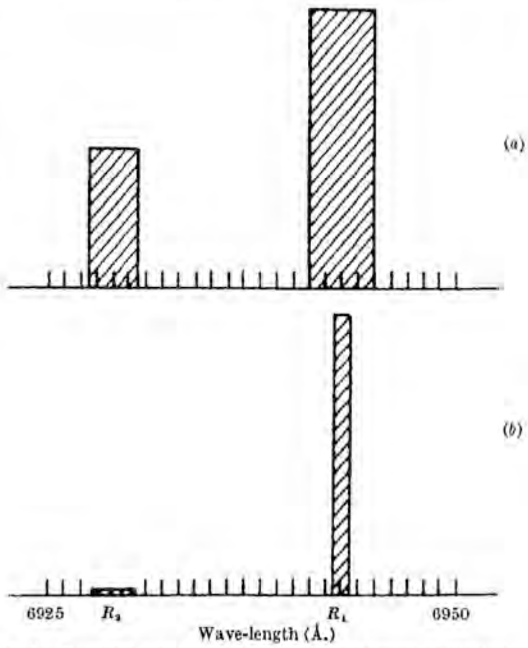

Fig. 2. Emission spectrum of ruby: *a*, low-power excitation; *b*, high-power excitation

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T. H. MAIMAN

Hughes Research Laboratories,
A Division of Hughes Aircraft Co.,
Malibu, California.

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