EXAMINATION OF GILDED BRONZE USING NONDESTRUCTIVE EDDY CURRENT TECHNIQUES

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Objective
This research examines the use of nondestructive eddy current testing techniques to characterize gilding layers on bronze. The main goal is to distinguish the layers by composition and application method.

Introduction
An artist's choice of gilding technique results in a gold surface layer of specific chemical composition and thickness. The properties of the layer vary depending on the gilding method used. Previous technological studies of gilded objects have been undertaken to identify gilding methods and materials using chemical and microscopic techniques. However, these techniques may be inadequate or inappropriate. Often, only limited sampling of museum objects and archaeological artifacts is acceptable, if sampling is permitted at all. The use of nondestructive eddy current techniques can overcome these sampling limitations.

EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES
An impedance analyzer was used to measure the change in coil probe impedance from 5 kHz to 2.5 MHz. Samples consisting of gold layers on a bronze were tested. The samples varied by gold layer composition, thickness and application method. The experimental set-up is shown at left.

RESULTS
Measurements were made on gold layers of different composition using four different probes, each with a different frequency range. These results show the difference in real impedance for each layer for (a) 500 kHz – 1 MHz and (b) 1 – 2.5 MHz ranges. The differences are particularly clear at the upper end of each range.

Eddy currents are produced in the samples by electromagnetic induction. The magnetic field accompanying the current in the wire produces a secondary, or eddy, current in an adjacent conductive material, as shown at right.

The eddy current skin depth, δ, can be calculated as a function of AC frequency, f, the permeability of the material, μ, and the conductivity of the material, σ:

\[ \delta = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi f \mu \sigma}} \]

Gilding layer thickness:
- Fire gilding: 1 - 50 μm
- Foil: 1 - 50 μm
- Leaf: 0.1 - 1 μm
- Deplating: 0.2 - 2 μm

Impedance measurements were also made with gold layers of varying thicknesses. These results show the difference for (a) 500 kHz – 1 MHz and for (b) 1 – 2.5 MHz. The real impedance changes most dramatically as the thickness of the gold layer increases.

CONTINUING RESEARCH
- Measurements will be made on Chinese Buddhist bronzes dating from the 5th to 19th centuries in the Freer Gallery of Art collection. These results will be compared with previous metallographic analyses [3].
- Development of eddy current test probe appropriate for use on art objects for use with commercially available, relatively inexpensive impedance analyzers. For example, this may include the design of curved probe heads and flexible cables.
- Adaptation of software in commercially available instruments for art objects applications.

REFERENCES

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