



MATERIAL ANALYSIS – IN SITU AND LABORATORY MATERIAL CHARACTERIZATION

ABSTRACT

As explained in the previous session, Session 3.1 Material Analysis – Earth as a Building Material, earthen materials have distinct chemical, mechanical and behavioral properties. These properties—like those of any other building material—should be measured and quantified so that their behavior and performance can be characterized and better understood. Certain test results can provide parameters for assigning different soil types within classification systems, thus providing indicators for a soil's suitability for both repair and new construction.

In the field of earthen building conservation, material characterization should provide information about both existing and new materials for the purpose of repair and intervention. Analysis of historic materials are conducted to understand why and how these materials have changed (or not) over time, their expected performance in the near future, and how to better protect these materials from further deterioration. For conservation, one of the main objectives of analyzing new materials is to properly establish their compatibility with historic ones, in case new materials must be introduced for the purpose of intervention.

In the last couple of decades, the conservation field has identified, applied and, in some cases, adapted laboratory tests from the construction industry. In comparison, however, to the tests available for industrialized materials such as concrete, the current testing protocols for earthen materials characterization are still not standardized and/or well-established. The procedures used for earthen material characterization and analysis must be formally standardized to be able to form comparisons through time or between sites.

Guillaud (2008) identifies the following properties and characteristics as significant to the performance of earthen materials:

- Particle size distribution – Percentage of different particles (gravel, sand, silt, clay)
- Plasticity - workability and water content
- Cohesion
- Compactability
- Shrinkage
- Porosity, permeability, and capillarity (void indices)
- Erosion resistance
- Chemistry - Salinity, humus content, quantity of oxides, calcium, carbonates, pH, etc.
- Mineralogy – Clay content and type, ion exchange capacity
- Compressive strength
- Bending strength
- Shear strength
- Hardness
- Adherence (especially for renders)
- Expansion and contraction coefficients (freezing and thawing, thermal)

Since the 1st International Conference on the Conservation of Mud-Brick Monuments in Iran in 1972, material testing has been performed at a series of sites and now it is considered fundamental to know at least basic properties to understand material behavior for a site conservator, architect or engineer to design proper interventions. A series of studies on characterization techniques for earthen materials have been published, however fully standardized procedures have yet to be established. Furthermore, there is very little scientific



correlation between the obtained results and the material deterioration mechanisms. Parameters have not yet been defined for the diagnoses of material decay. For example, we can determine the permeability of a material, but we do not know the acceptable range of permeability for a material exposed to humid environments.

It is fair to say, never the less, that despite the gaps in our current knowledge, there is a series of field and laboratory analysis that can be performed to understand material properties, patterns of deterioration and, most importantly, to plan and design interventions. The more practitioners perform these tests and establish correlations to material diagnoses, the better the field to design proper interventions.

Houben and Guillaud (1984) identify six basic groups of tests that can be used to analyze earthen materials: Identification, Developments, Performance, Characterization, Control and Acceptance. These groups also fall into two main types of testing i) On site testing, which are carried out in the field with accessible and inexpensive equipment and, ii) Laboratory testing, which are performed with non-portable sometimes sophisticated equipment and under a controlled environment, providing in some cases important complementary information regarding earthen materials.

OBJECTIVES

As a result of this session, the participant should be able to:

- Identify the basic tests for earthen material characterization
- Define the objectives of each test
- Define, explain and justify margins of errors and degree of subjectivity on each test
- Properly characterize an earthen sample
- Write a report for earthen material characterization
- Design and elaborate non-standardized testing

CONTENT

Classroom Lecture

The classroom lecture will introduce the subject of laboratory and in-situ testing for earthen material characterization. During the lecture format, active class participation will be continually encouraged.

To meet the objectives of this section, the instructor will present:

- Introduction
 1. Review the previous session and activities for this session, encouraging student participation
- Theoretical background
 1. Discuss the objectives of testing and the need for proper standardization and defined parameters by showing specific examples
- Testing
 1. Discuss and describe the existing testing methods¹
 - a. **Identification, characterization and development tests:** Visual examination (color), Grain size distribution, Sedimentation, Plastic and liquid limit; Bulk, Volumetric and Linear Shrinkage; Proctor Test, Bulk density, Mineralogical

¹ An effort has been made to group the most important testing procedures to be performed either in the laboratory or in the field; however they can be thought of as a continuous series of tests.



- identification through X-Ray Diffraction (XRD) and Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM); Soluble salt content, pH
- b. **Performance, control and acceptance test:** Optimal moisture content, Water Vapor Transmission, Permeability, Capillarity; Thermal expansion; Compressive, Tensile and Shear strength; Young's modulus of elasticity
- 2. Laboratory and in-situ testing
 - a. Advantages and disadvantages
 - b. Results and methods to collect data
- 3. Explain and emphasize the need for accurate and relevant data
- 4. Explain and emphasize the need for practical testing methods for practitioners
- Summary
 - 1. Importance of accurate testing
 - 2. Importance of standardized testing for the field of earthen conservation
 - 3. Problems of adopting tests from other fields
 - 4. Need to design new tests, aiming for standardization

In situ/field testing

The in-situ or field testing will allow the students to properly characterize an earthen sample and to write a report of the findings. The instruction will give a brief introduction to the in-situ tests emphasizing practicality and importance and will then explain the layout of the field exercise.



Figure 3.2.1 (left) and 3.2.2 (right)
Demos of in situ testing by PAT instructors
PAT course, 1999 © J. Paul Getty Trust



The exercise will need to be located at an earthen site and selected soil samples will be given to the students to perform the following testing²:

1. Visual examination: Munssel color chart – ASTM³ D 1535-80
2. Smell test
3. Needle test
4. Touch test
5. Washing test
6. Luster test
7. Adhesion test
8. Sedimentation⁴ - ASTM C940-81, NF P18-369
9. Shrinkage – Three days
 - a. Linear: ASTM C 490
 - b. Volumetric: ASTM C 474
10. Decantation
11. Fine mortar testing:
 - a. Dry strength test
 - b. Water retention test
 - c. Consistency test
 - d. Cohesion test



Figure 3.2.3
PAT students performing in-situ sedimentation test
PAT course, 1999 © J. Paul Getty Trust

The students write up their findings in the form of a report and present to the rest of the class for discussion.

Laboratory session

The assignment will be to properly characterize an earthen sample and to write a report of the findings. Please note that safety training should be provided to the students before the class according the laws of your country. Students will be given pre-selected earthen samples to perform the following testing:

Characterization testing

- Particle size distribution (PSD) – Wet sieving and sedimentation
 1. CRATerre's testing procedures
 2. ICCROM, ARC Laboratory Manual for Conservator's procedure
 3. ASTM D 422-63; BS1377
- Plastic and Liquid limits
 1. CRATerre's testing procedures
 2. ICCROM, ARC Laboratory Manual for Conservator's procedure
 3. ASTM D4318-84, BS 1377
- Clay-identification and characterization
 1. Methylene blue test – AFNOR⁵ P18-592
 2. X-ray Diffraction⁶ (XRD)
 3. Scanning Electron Microscopy⁷ (SEM)



Figure 3.2.4
Demos of PSD test by PAT instructor
PAT course, 1999 © J. Paul Getty Trust

² For a detailed explanation of the testing, please see Houben and Guillaud. *Earth Construction. A comprehensive guide.* Intermediate Technology Publications 1994:Yorkshire, pp. 48-53

³ American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM)

⁴ This test should last at least 8 hours. Data will need to be collected and analyzed later.

⁵ Association Française de Normalisation (AFNOR).

⁶ X-Ray Diffraction can be performed at soil mechanics laboratories. Data will need to be interpreted by a material scientist with expertise on interpreting results.



- Organic matter quantity identification


Performance testing

- Water content
 1. CRATerre's testing procedures
 2. ASTM D6780 - 05
- Shrinkage
 1. Apparatus, linear: ASTM C 1148-92a
- Water Drop Absorption
 1. ICCROM, ARC Laboratory Manual for Conservator's procedure
- Penetration of Water: Capillary absorption
 1. CRATerre's testing procedures
 2. ICCROM, ARC Laboratory Manual for Conservator's procedure
 3. NORMAL⁸ 11/85
 4. RILEM⁹ II-6
- Water vapor transmission
 1. CRATerre's testing procedures
 2. ICCROM, ARC Laboratory Manual for Conservator's procedure
 3. ASTM E-96
 4. RILEM II-2
 5. NORMAL 21/85
- Determination of pH
 1. ICCROM, ARC Laboratory Manual for Conservator's procedure
- Behavioral SEM¹⁰

The students will write their findings up in the form of a report and present to the rest of the class for discussion.

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⁷ Scanning Electron Microscopy can be performed at soil mechanics laboratories. Data need to be interpreted by material scientist with expertise on the interpretation of results.

⁸ Italian standards




⁹ International Union of Laboratories and Experts in Construction Materials, Systems and Structures

¹⁰ Behavioral SEM (Scanning Electron Microscopy) can be performed at soil mechanics laboratories. The results are essentially SEM samples exposed to particular environmental conditions and the result is in the form of a time-lapse video.



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