Impermeable thin Al_2O_3 overlay for TBC protection from sulfate and vanadate attack in gas turbines

Topical Report

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ABSTRACT

In order to improve the hot corrosion resistance of conventional YSZ TBC system, a dense and continues overlay of Al_2O_3 coating of about 25 μm thick was deposited on the surface of TBC by EB-PVD and high velocity oxy-fuel (HVOF) spray techniques. Hot corrosion tests were carried out on the TBC with and without Al_2O_3 coating in molten salts mixtures (Na_2SO_4 + 5%V_2O_5) at 950^{o}C for 10h. The microstructures of TBC and overlay before and after exposure were examined by means of scanning electron microscopy (SEM), energy-dispersive X-ray spectrometer (EDX), X-ray diffraction (XRD) and secondary ion mass spectrometry (SIMS). It has been found that TBC will react with V_2O_5 to form YVO_4. A substantial amount of M-phase of ZrO_2 was formed due to the leaching of Y_2O_3 from YSZ. During hot corrosion test, there were no significant interactions between overlay Al_2O_3 coating and molten salts. After exposure, the alumina coating, especially produced by HVOF, was still very dense and cover the surface of YSZ, although they had been translated to $\alpha - Al_2O_3$ from original $\gamma - Al_2O_3$. As a result, Al_2O_3 overlay coating decreased the penetration of salts into the YSZ and prevented the YSZ from the attack by molten salts containing vanadium. Accordingly, only a few M-phase was formed in YSZ TBC, compared with TBC without overlay coating. The penetration of salts into alumina coating was thought to be through microcracks formed in overlay Al_2O_3 coating and at the interface between alumina and zriconia due to the presence of tensile stress in the alumina coating.

In the next year, we will study the mechanisms of cracking of the overlay Al_2O_3 layer. The hot corrosion test of TBC with EB-PVD deposited Al_2O_3 coating will be again performed. However before hot corrosion tests, the post-annealing will be carried out in vacuum (residual pressure 10^{-3} Pa) at 1273K for 1h in order to transform the as-sputtered Al_2O_3 overlay to crystalline α-Al_2O_3 overlay. The effect of thickness of Al_2O_3 coating on hot corrosion resistance will also be investigated. We will prepare Al_2O_3 coating by sol-gel method. The corrosion resistance of TBC with sol-gel Al_2O_3 coating will be determined and discussed with the results of TBC with EB-PVD and HVOF Al_2O_3 coating.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Thermal barrier coatings (TBCs) are finding increased application in overall component design of gas turbine. TBCs reduce the severity of thermal transients and lower the substrate temperature, thus improving fuel economy, engine power and component durability in engines. Yttria-stabilized zirconia (YSZ) TBCs is widely used in aero gas turbines [1-2]. Attempts to bring the advantages of TBCs to industrial and marine engines have been limited, however, in part because YSZ coatings are degraded by the reaction of Yttria with traces of sodium, sulfur, and especially vanadium present in many industrial-quality fuels, although zirconia itself shows good resistance to the molten sulfate or vanadate compounds arising from fuel impurities [3-4]. The majority of present-day TBCs are 8% Y_2O_3-ZrO_2 type as they exhibiting superior performance in the absence of vanadium. The critical problem is that yttria reacts react with the V_2O_5 or $NaVO_3$ to form YVO_4 in the case of molten salt containing small amount of V_2O_5 as follows:

$$Y_2O_3\,(\text{in } ZrO_2) + V_2O_5\,(\text{in melt}) = 2\,YVO_4\,(\text{solid}) \qquad (1)$$

This reaction depletes the Y_2O_3 stabilizer from ZrO_2 matrix and causes destabilization (i.e., transformation of the zirconia from the tetragonal and/or cubic to monoclinic phase upon cooling, which is accompanied by a large destructive volume change.) and degradation of the YSZ coating. Destabilization of the TBCs eventually causes the delamination and spalling of the ceramics coating. In addition, molten salts can penetrate into the YSZ coatings along porous and cracks in YSZ TBC and react with the metallic bond coat.

Therefore, the proposed idea for preventing the YSZ coating system from hot corrosion is the development of a dense overlay on the outer surface of YSZ coating to isolate the YSZ coating system from the molten salts so that chemical or physical change of the YSZ coating does not occur.

Alumina (Al_2O_3) is a well-know oxide material that has diverse application as engineering ceramics. Alumina has a high melting point and stabilization without showing phase transition at high temperature like the ZrO_2 ceramics. In addition, Al_2O_3 has a small solubility particularly in molten salts and is expected to show an excellent corrosion resistance. Al_2O_3 layer on metallic substrate has exhibited a very important role against corrosion. This allows the potential application of Al_2O_3 in gas turbines. However, Al_2O_3 has relatively high thermal conductivity (0.02-0.06W/cmK) compared with YSZ. Therefore, in the present TBC design, the YSZ coating acts as a thermal barrier and the Al_2O_3 coating plays a role in preventing hot-corrosion.

In the present study, a high-purity Al_2O_3 overlay was deposited onto the surface of YSZ coating by means of EB-PVD and high velocity oxy-fuel (HVOF) spray techniques. Hot corrosion tests were carried out. By using XRD, SEM and EDX analyses, the microstructure, hot corrosion behaviors of the surface modified TBC system with alumina coating were described in comparison with the conventional TBC system.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overlay of Al_2O_3 coating deposited by EB-PVD and HVOF is mainly consisted of γ-Al_2O_3. The Al_2O_3 overlay was dense, continues and adherent to the TBC. Hot corrosion tests were done on TBC with and without the Al_2O_3. The results show that there were no significant interactions between overlay Al_2O_3 coating and molten salts. Al_2O_3 overlay coating can prevent the YSZ from the attack by molten salts containing vanadium and decrease the penetration of the salts into the YSZ TBC, although there were some cracks in alumina coating and at the interface between alumina and zirconia formed during the hot corrosion tests.

3. EXPERIMENTAL

The TBC system used in this study consisted of 6061 nickel-based superalloy substrate, CoNiCrAlY alloy bond coat as well as zirconia-8%yttira (YSZ) ceramic top coating. The bond coat and the YSZ TBC were produced by LPPS and APS, with the thickness of 100 and 250 μm, respectively. After receiving the TBC samples, overlay Al_2O_3 coating was deposited by EB-PVD and HVOF techniques. The thickness of Al_2O_3 coating was approximately 20-30 μm.

In order to compare the hot corrosion resistance of the TBCs with and without Al_2O_3 coating, hot corrosion experiments were carried out. The samples were exposed to molten salts mixtures (Na_2SO_4 + 5%V_2O_5) by placing them into a still air furnace at 950^oC for 10h exposures. A Philips PW1700 series diffractometer was employed to perform the phase analysis. X-ray diffraction (XRD) was used to determine whether reaction had taken place. XRD patterns were first obtained from the samples (YSZ TBC and YSZ TBC/Al_2O_3 overlay) before exposure

to the molten salt. After exposure, the samples were cooled down to room temperature in the furnace. The exposured samples were cleaned in distilled water. XRD analyses were then carried out to the exposured samples. The extent of destabilization (D) of the YSZ TBC was estimated by

$$\mathrm{D}\ (\%) = \frac{M}{T+M} \times 100 \qquad (2)$$

Where T is the height of the zirconia tetragonal (111) peak, and M is the height of the zirconia monoclinic $(11\bar{1})$ peak in XRD test. For the sample of TBC/Al_2O_3 overlay, in order to detect the same depth as that of TBC without Al_2O_3 overlay, XRD test was done again on the sample whose overlay Al_2O_3 coating has been removed.

The microstructures and composition changes on the coating surface and their cross-sections after hot corrosion tests were examined using scanning electron microscopy (SEM), energy-dispersive X-ray spectrometer (EDX) equipped in SEM and SIMS.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 CHARACTERS OF MATERIALS

4.1.1 Conventional YSZ TBC

SEM micrographs of the cross-section and surface morphology of as-sprayed TBC, shown in Fig.1, indicated that the TBC had a typical APS microstructure [5] and contained predominantly T-phase of ZrO_2 (see A in Fig.4), with inter-splat porosity and complex pattern of microcracks. It was found that the thickness of the bond coat and YSZ was $100\,\mu m$ and $250\,\mu m$, respectively. It was visible that there were microcracks and porous on the surface of the TBC, which are considered to be the path for molten salts to attack the TBC system.

4.1.2 TBC/EB-PVD overlay Al_2O_3 coating

Fig.2 shows the cross-section and surface SEM micrograph of the TBC with Al_2O_3 overlay coating sputtered by EB-PVD. It is seen that the Al_2O_3 coating is dense and adherent to the TBC. The thickness of the Al_2O_3 coating was estimated to be about $25\,\mu m$. The surface micrograph of as-deposited specimen revealed a 'cauliflower' type of structure or dome shaped. The XRD pattern of the specimen in the as-deposited condition (A in Fig.5) demonstrated that TBC contained predominantly T-phase and Al_2O_3 coating was mainly consisted of γ-Al_2O_3. The broad $\gamma - Al_2O_3$ peaks indicated either nanosize crystallites or stress within the overlay Al_2O_3 coating.

4.1.3 TBC/HVOF overlay Al_2O_3 coating

Fig.3 shows the cross-section and surface SEM micrograph of the TBC with Al_2O_3 overlay coating sprayed by HVOF technique. Al_2O_3 coating is also very dense and adherent to the TBC. The surface morphology of alumina overlay coating produced by HVOF was similar to that of ASP zirconia TBC layer, but the particle size was much smaller than that of TBC, probably due to the higher temperature and particle speed during HVOF deposit. Therefore, denser, non-cracks and continuous coating could be obtained. Al_2O_3 overlay coating sprayed by HVOF was comprised of γ - Al_2O_3 and a little bit of α - Al_2O_3 (A in Fig.6).

4.2 XRD analyses on TBC and TBC/Al_2O_3 samples

X-ray diffraction before and after exposure to molten slats has provided the information of the extent of reactions occurred during hot corrosion in TBC. The X-ray diffraction of as-sprayed TBC demonstrated that it contained predominantly T-phase of ZrO_2 (A in Fig.4). After exposure to the molten mixture of salts of Na_2SO_4 + 5%V_2O_5 at 950^oC for 10h, the XRD patterns (B in Fig.4) showed that corresponding to a remarkable decrease in intensity of T-phase of zirconia, a substantial amount of M-phase was formed due to the leaching of Y_2O_3 from YSZ resulting from the reaction of Y_2O_3 with V_2O_5 to form YVO_4 (which was found in XRD patterns) according the reaction (1) indicated in Introduction.

For the TBC/EB-PVD overlay Al_2O_3 coating system, the XRD patterns after exposure to molten slats (B in Fig.5) showed a few amount of M-phase in the specimen and no YVO_4 peaks could be detected. Overlay Al_2O_3 coating had undergone structure change from $\gamma - Al_2O_3$ crystalline $\alpha - Al_2O_3$. However, no reaction products between Al_2O_3 and mixed molten salts could be identified from the XRD results. From the XRD patterns of the sample whose Al_2O_3 coating was partially removed before XRD analyses, as shown in C in Fig.5, it can be found that remarkable increase in the intensity of T-phase was resulted, indicating the destabilization (D) of the TBC with overlay Al_2O_3 coating was much lower than that of TBC without overlay coating. Namely the attack of YSZ by molten salts was limited due to the present of Al_2O_3 overlay coating.

Similarly, B in Fig.6 shows the XRD patterns of TBC with HVOF Al_2O_3 coating after exposure. It was quite notable that just a little bit amount of M-phase was formed after exposure to molten salts. YVO_4 was not picked up by XRD in the specimen, probably due to its low content that was below the detection limit. A large amount of γ- Al_2O_3 was transformed to α-Al_2O_3 after subjecting to hot corrosion at high temperature.

Based on the XRD results, destabilization (D) could be obtained for different TBC system, as demonstrated in Fig.7. It clearly showed that Al_2O_3 overlay coating can prevent the YSZ from hot corrosion by molten salts containing vanadium.

4.3 SEM observation

4.3.1 Conventional YSZ TBC

For conventional YSZ TBC system, after exposure to the salts, characteristic surface crystals among the fine zirconia grain were formed which was rich in yttrium (40.53at%) and vanadium (36.31at%) and contained no zirconium (Fig.8). The essentially equal amounts of yttrium and vanadium indicated the crystal on the surface of TBC to be YVO_4. This was consistent with the results of XRD analyses in which the peaks of YVO_4 were clearly shown. From SEM microimages of cross-section (Fig.9), it was found that YVO_4 existed not only near the surface of TBC but also in the area near the bond coat, indicating that molten salts has deeply penetrated into the TBC along the porous and cracks.

X-ray maps of the cross-section of YSZ coating after a hot corrosion test are shown in Fig.10. Defects, such as pores and cracks, were observed along the cross-section. Sulphur, but no sodium, has been found in the interface region between the bond coat and substrate. Because the sample after exposure had been washed in water, sulphur was considered to come from sulphide, such as FeS, which can't be dissolved by water, as suggested by Chen et al [6]. Vanadium could not be detected in this magnification, probably due to its low content that was

below the detection limit. In addition, it can be seen that the bond coat has been visibly oxidated after exposure.

4.3.2 TBC/EB-PVD overlay Al_2O_3 coating

In the new TBC system that has overlay of Al_2O_3 coating deposited by EB-PVD, the surface morphology was transformed to uniformly faceted shape after exposure due to the formation and growth of $\alpha - Al_2O_3$ crystal (Fig.11(a)). In addition, there were crystallites marked with A in Fig.11(b) that grew along a preferred direction. By EDX analyses, it was found that they contained O, Na, Al and S, as show in Fig.11(c). These crystallites were considered to be $NaAlO_2$ that seemed to be dense, as suggested by Chen et al [6]. However, the morphology of $NaAlO_2$ crystallites were different from that described in literature [6] where $NaAlO_2$ covered the APS sprayed Al_2O_3 coating. Due to partially spallation of Al_2O_3 grains, fine zirconia grains beneath the alumina cover layer could also be found on the surface in some large interspaces between alumina grains, as shown in Fig.11(d). However, it seemed that there was no evidence of the reaction between Al_2O_3 and V_2O_5.

X-ray maps of cross-section of YSZ/EB-PVD Al_2O_3 coating after exposure are shown in Fig.12. The thickness of Al_2O_3 coating after exposure was about the same as that of as-deposited coating. Although Al_2O_3 layer was less dense comparing to the layer before exposure because of the presence of interspaces between Al_2O_3 grains and cracks in the Al_2O_3 overlay and at the interface between Al_2O_3 overlay and the TBC, sulpure could not be found along the cross-section maps. Moreover, less oxidation of the bond coat was observed.

4.3.3 TBC/HVOF overlay Al_2O_3 coating

In the case of TBC system that has overlay Al_2O_3 coating sprayed by HVOF, the surface was still dense even after exposure to the molten salts for 10h at 950^{o}C, as shown in Fig.13. It is quite notable that the microstructure of the surface did not have notable variation compared with that of as-sprayed specimen, although it has been translated to α- Al_2O_3 from γ-Al_2O_3. The much less formation of M-phase revealed the excellent barrier action of alumina layer sprayed by HVOF to prevent the TBC from the attack of molten salts.

X-ray maps of cross-section of YSZ/HVOF Al_2O_3 coating after exposure are shown in Fig.14. Obviously, Al_2O_3 overlay sprayed by HVOF was denser than that deposited by EB-PVD after exposure. Also, there was no distinct change for HVOF Al_2O_3 overlay before and after exposure. Accordingly, HVOF Al_2O_3 overlay is more effective in preventing the TBC from the attack by molten salts.

4.4 SIMS analyses

In order to detect the vanadium within TBC, The TRIFT TOF-SIMS was used. The primary ions were delivered using a 15keV liquid metal (Ga^+) ion gun with a beam current 600pA. The primary ions were focused on the YSZ layer in cross-section sample with a raster size of $600\times600\ \mu m^2$. The spectrum was acquired using a total ion dose of 1×10^{12} ions/cm^2. The result of SIMS is shown in Table1.

Table 1 Quantitatively comparison of vanadium content in the YSZ layer by SIMS

	YSZ	YSZ/EB-PVD Al_2O_3	YSZ/HVOF Al_2O_3
V/Zr	0.1	0.016	0.014

It was clearly showed that Al2O3 overlay coating significantly decreased vanadium content, which is a reflection of YVO4 formed in YSZ.

The main problem associated with the Al_2O_3 overlay is the cracking of alumina coating during hot corrosion tests. The reason for the formation of cracks was considered to be (1) the conversion to crystal $\alpha - Al_2O_3$ from γ - Al_2O_3 is associated with a volume shrinkage that easily causes internal cracking; (2) the heating cycle causes tensile stresses in the alumina due to the mismatch in thermal expansion coefficient (TEC) between alumina ($TEC \approx 8-9\times10^{-6}/^{o}C$) and zirconia ($TEC \approx 11-13\times10^{-6}/^{o}C$), which will very easily crack under this tensile straining.

5. PLANS FOR THE NEXT REPORTING PERIOD

In the next year, we will study the mechanisms of cracking of the overlay Al_2O_3 layer. The hot corrosion test of TBC with EB-PVD deposited Al_2O_3 coating will be again performed. However before hot corrosion tests, the post-annealing will be carried out in vacuum (residual pressure 10^{-3} Pa) at 1273K for 1h in order to transform the as-sputtered Al_2O_3 overlay to crystalline α-Al_2O_3 overlay. The effect of thickness of Al_2O_3 coating on hot corrosion resistance will also be investigated. We will prepare Al_2O_3 coating by sol-gel method. The corrosion resistance of TBC with sol-gel Al_2O_3 coating will be determined and discussed with the results of TBC with EB-PVD and HVOF Al_2O_3 coating.

6. CONCLUSION

An overlay Al_2O_3 coating with 25 μm thickness has been successfully deposited on TBC by EB-PVD and HVOF. It has been found that overlay Al_2O_3 coating was dense, continues and adherent to the TBC. In hot corrosion tests, Al_2O_3 coating rarely reacted with the molten salts. After exposure to the molten Na_2SO_4 + 5%V_2O_5 salts, just a few M-phase of zirconia was formed and no YVO_4 could be detected comparing to the conventional TBC system. As a result, Al_2O_3 coating play a key role in preventing the TBC from the attack by molten salts, although there were some cracks in overlay Al_2O_3 coating and at the Al_2O_3/TBC interface formed during hot corrosion tests.

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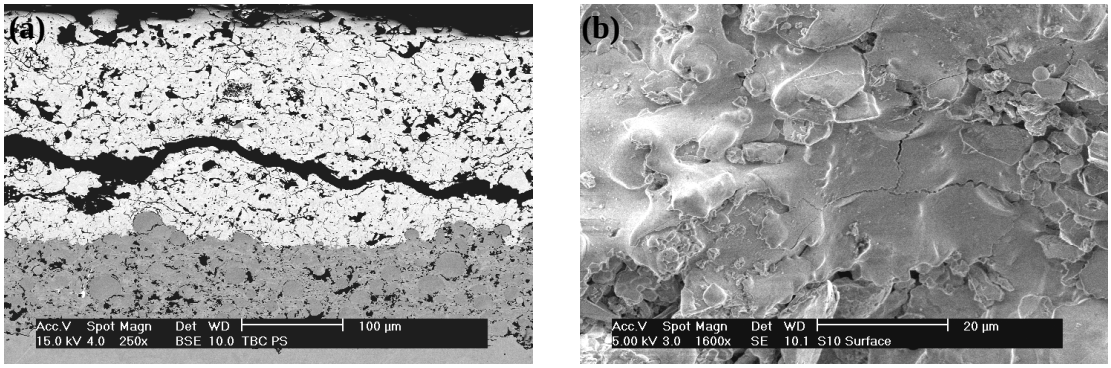


Fig.1 SEM micrographs of (a) cross-section and (b) surface of as-sprayed TBC

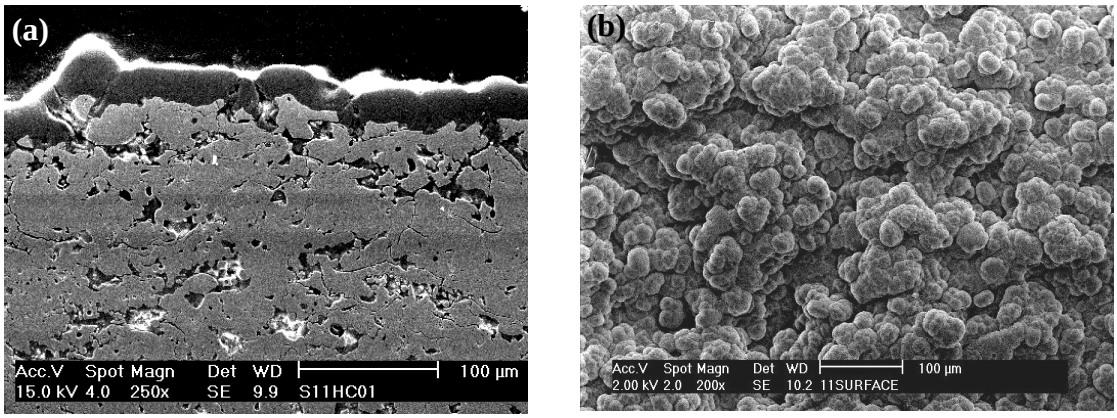


Fig.2 SEM micrographs of (a) cross-section and (b) surface of TBC with EB-PVD overlay Al_2O_3 coating

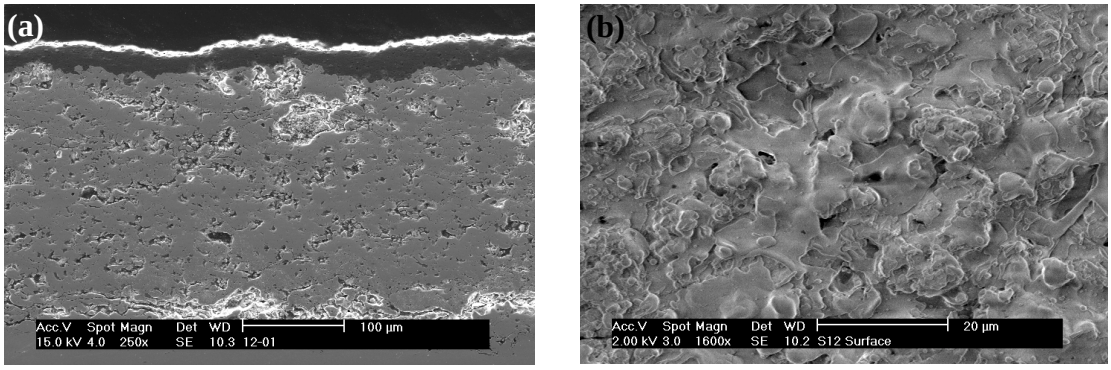


Fig.3 SEM micrographs of (a) cross-section and (b) surface of TBC with HVOF overlay Al_2O_3 coating

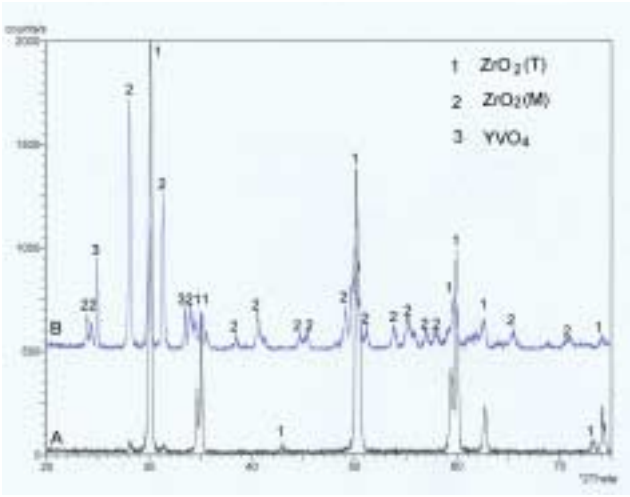


Fig.4 XRD patterns of TBC before and after exposure to the molten salts

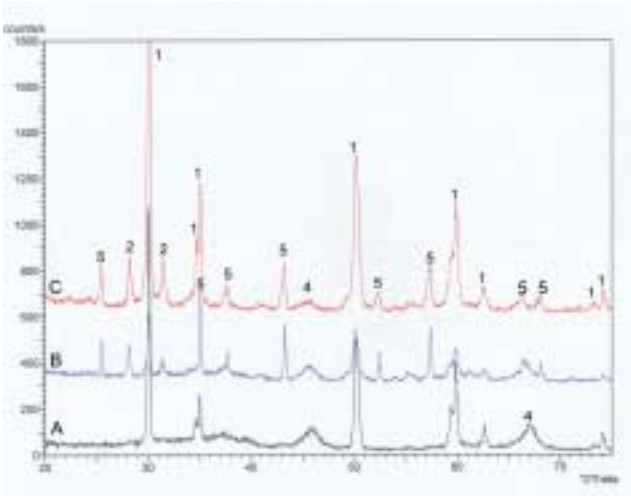


Fig.5 XRD patterns of TBC with EB-PVD Al_2O_3 overlay coating before and after exposure to the molten salts(4: γ - Al_2O_3, 5: α-Al_2O_3)

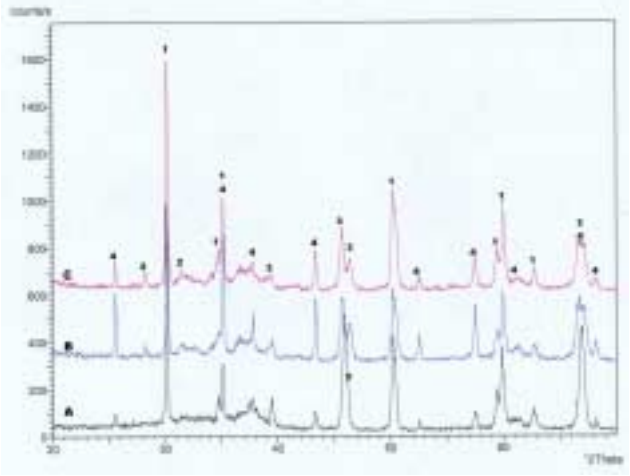


Fig.6 XRD patterns of TBC with HVOF Al_2O_3 overlay coating before and after exposure
(A: TBC with as-deposited overlay Al_2O_3 ; B: after exposure;
C: after partially removing Al_2O_3 overlay after exposure)

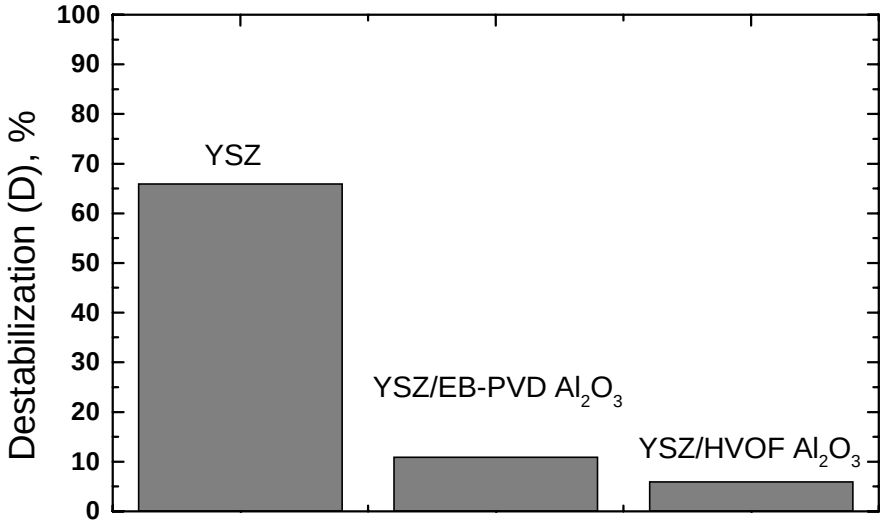


Fig.7 A comparing in destabilization (D) of the TBC with and without overlay Al_2O_3 coating

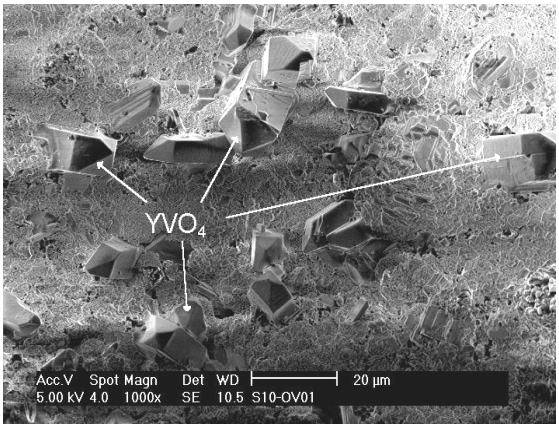


Fig.8 SEM surface micrograph of TBC after exposure showing the formation of YVO_4

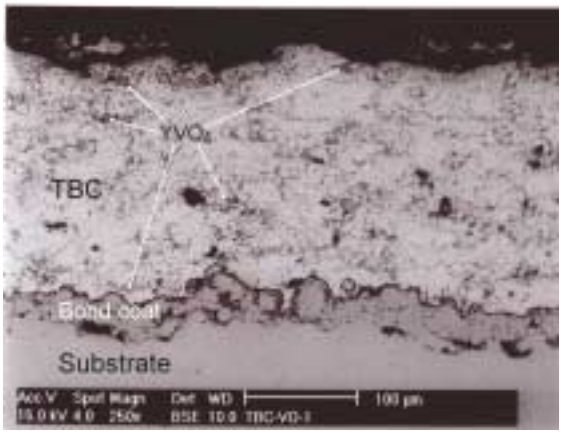


Fig.9 SEM microimages of cross-section of TBC after exposure

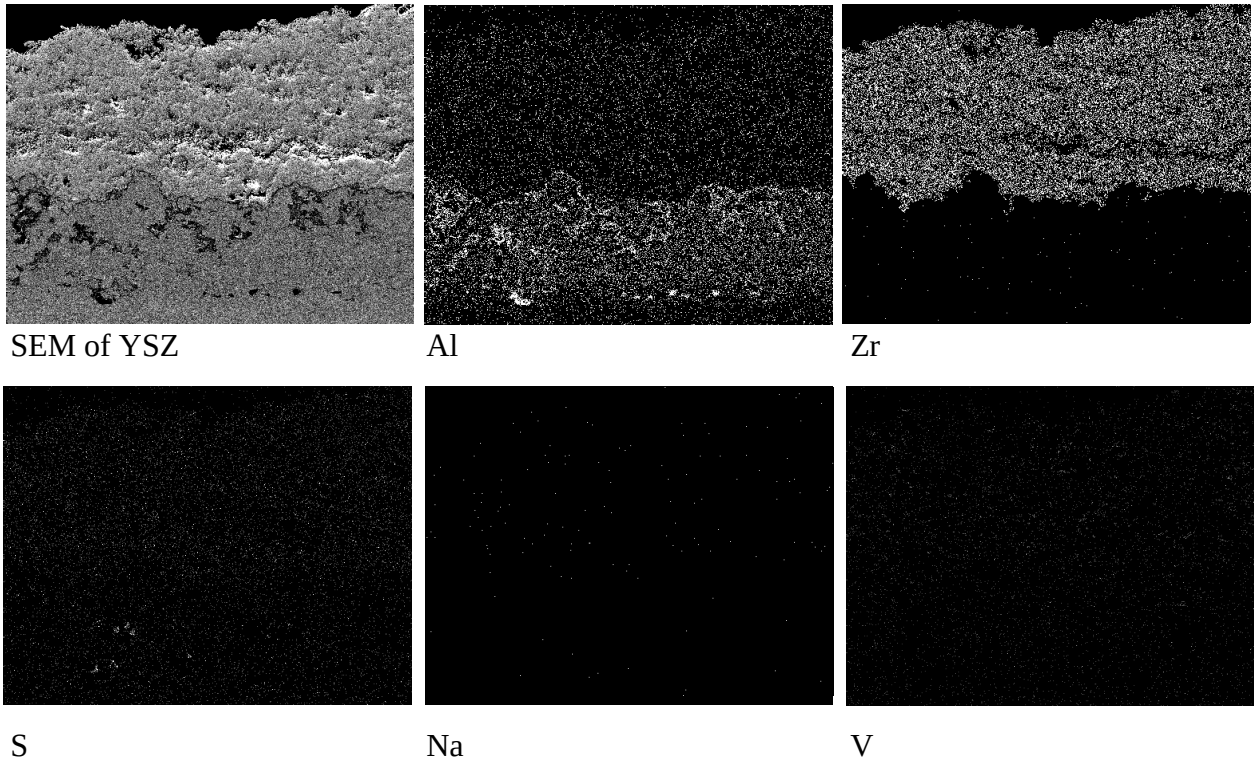


Fig.10 X-ray maps of the cross-section of YSZ coating after a hot corrosion test

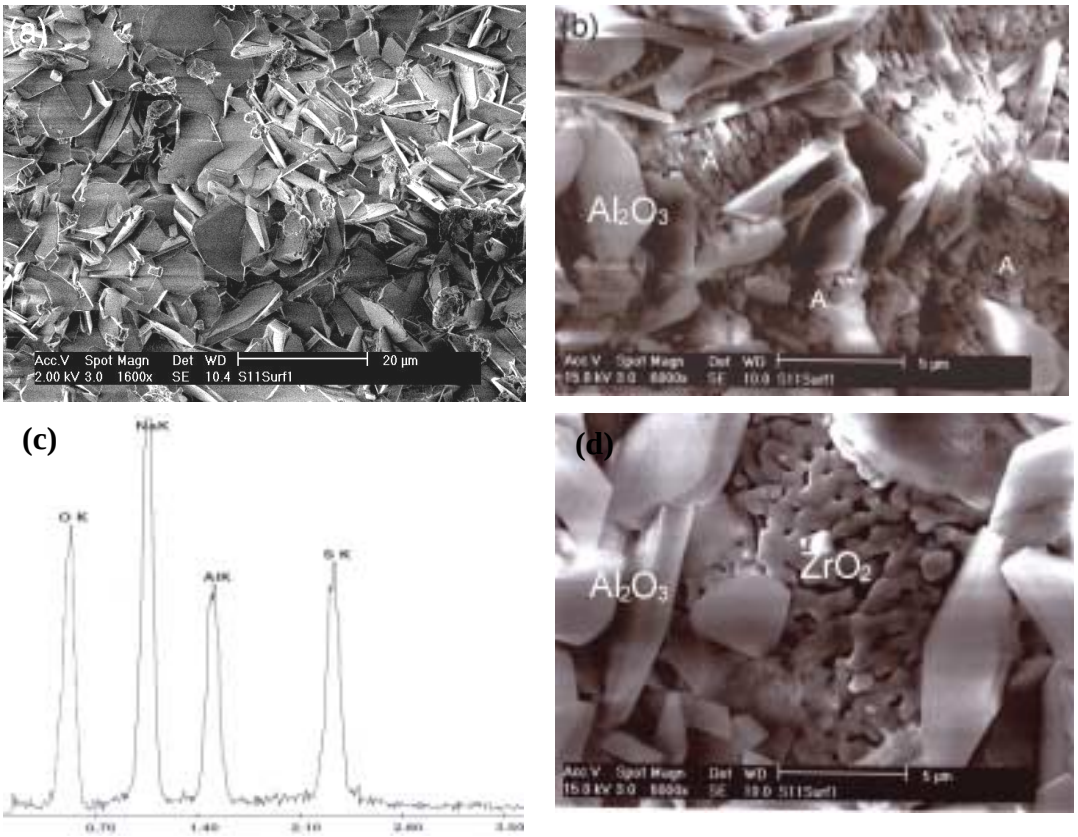
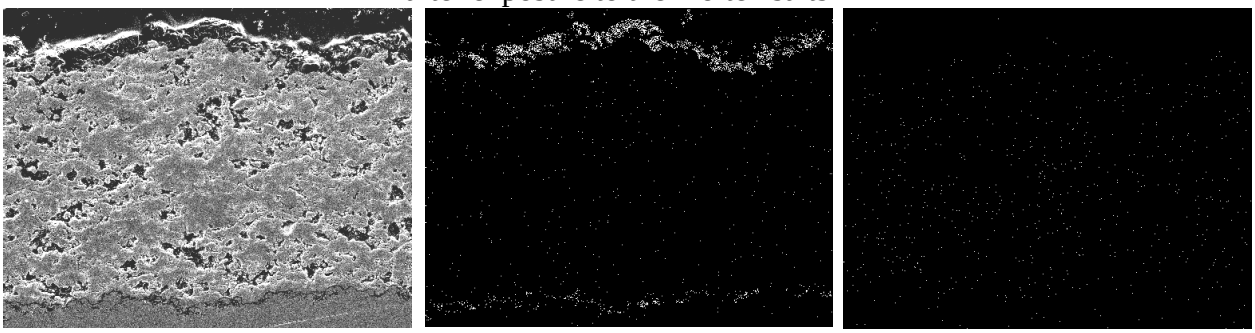


Fig.11 SEM surface micrograph of YSZ/EB-PVD Al_2O_3 coating after exposure to the molten salts



SEM Al S

Fig.12 X-ray maps of cross-section of YSZ/EB-PVD Al_2O_3 coating after exposure

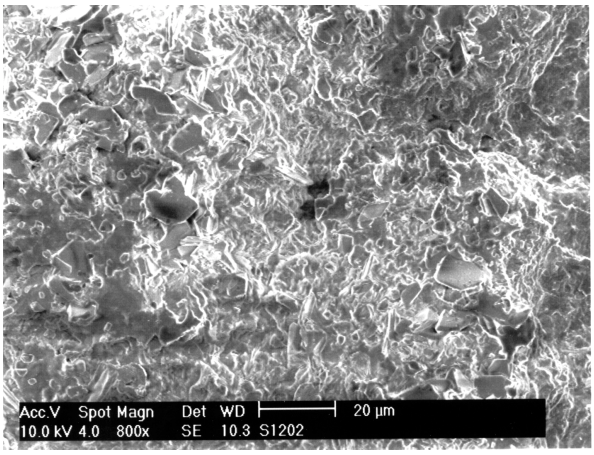
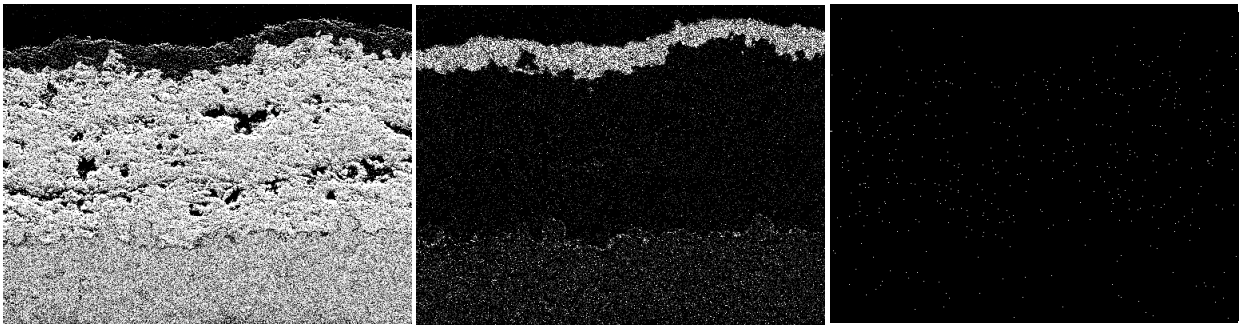


Fig.13 Surface SEM micrograph of HVOF overlay coating after exposure to the salts



SEM Al S

Fig.14 X-ray maps of cross-section of YSZ/HVOF Al_2O_3 coating