Reconstruction of Giovanni del Biondo's Hebrew Prophet

Giovanni del Biondo's Hebrew Prophet
Italian (Florentine)
Egg tempera and gold on a wooden panel ca. 1370
13 3/4 x 7 3/4 in. (35.2 x 17.8 cm)
Museo de Arte de Ponce, Puerto Rico

Pre-prepared panel
The underdrawing was likely sketched in using charcoal or was transferred from a cartoon. Note how the underdrawing differs from the final image.

A metal stylus was used to incise the outlines of the figure. The incising follows the initial drawing of the subject's proper right hand.
The underdrawing was reinforced with black ink.

Image of panel with completed underdrawing.
Red clay bole (a mixture of red clay and animal glue) was applied only to the areas intended to be gilded.

Image of panel with red bole. Note the changed underdrawing on the proper right hand.
Areas to be gilded were wet with a mixture of water, alcohol, and a tiny amount of animal glue. This mixture is often called gilder's liquor.

Pieces of gold leaf were then cut and maneuvered over the dampened bole using a brush. Historical gold was thicker than modern gold and did not require the use of special gilder's brushes called gilder's tips.
Image of panel after all gold leaf was applied.

Image of panel with the excess gold leaf brushed off but before burnishing.
The gold leaf was then burnished. In the Renaissance this was done with a dog's tooth but the thinness of modern gold necessitates the use of a polished agate burnisher.

Incised and punchwork designs were added to the gilded areas.
Image of the finished punchwork and incising.

Areas where gold leaf had adhered to the regions to be painted were painted out using a mixture of lead white and animal glue.
The painting was executed using traditional egg tempera paint. The blue robe was underpainted with mixtures of azurite and lead white.

The azurite blue was then glazed with lapis ultramarine blue and the deepest areas were shaded with mixtures of ultramarine and carbon black.

The ground was painted using mixtures of lead white, carbon black, green earth, red earth, and yellow earth. As before, medium dark colors were applied first, then lighter colors and finally the darkest shadows were glazed deeper.
The yellow inner lining of the robe was created using mixtures of lead-tin yellow, red lead, and small additions of vermilion. The deeper red orange on the left of the panel was created using primarily red lead with vermilion in the darker areas with small additions of lead-tin yellow to highlight.

The deep crimson robe was created using multiple steps. The general method was to paint darker areas first. The painting began with a deep crimson made from red lake with small additions of lead white and yellow earth. Lighter colors were hatched over the junctures between color changes to create the appearance of a smooth gradation. This was continued until the transitions on the robe were seamless. A transparent glaze of red lake was then applied over the whole to unify and create a more saturated color effect. The deepest shadows were reinforced using additional glazes of red lake and small amounts of carbon black.
The dark areas of the banner were painted first using carbon black, lead white, yellow earth, and a touch of green earth. Each successive lighter color contained less of the carbon black and earth colors. The light grey colors contained only lead white and carbon black and the lightest portions only lead white.

The flesh on Early Italian egg tempera paintings was usually underpainted in a greenish tone. It was painted using a mixture of green earth, yellow earth, and lead white.
As before, the flesh was painted starting with the medium dark colors composed of the same pigments but with far less lead white. Slightly lighter colors were hatched over these to create gradations. The original underpainting color was glazed over transitions to make them smoother. Lighter mixtures were then used to create pearlescent, lighter areas and eventually highlights. Thin, pure lead white was hatched over regions of the beard to create the appearance of hair. This was then glazed back to diminish the contrast. Finally, the brightest portions of the beard were painted using opaque lead white. Details were painted using darker mixtures of the same pigments and the lips and cheeks were warmed up using a mixture of vermilion, red earth, and a small addition of lead white.

The lettering was likely applied to the banner using some method of underdrawing. This may have been simply drawn using charcoal or transferred from a cartoon.
The lettering was painted using carbon black with a small amount of lead white.

Small gilded details were accomplished using mordant gilding. A thickened, fast drying oil was applied to the areas intended to receive gold. The oil was allowed to set until tacky and almost dry. Small pieces of gold leaf were then cut and applied over the sticky oil mordant, as seen here.
Un-adhered gold was then brushed away after the mordant had completely dried. The gold remained only where the mordant was applied.

Image of the panel after mordant gilding.