

DESCRIPTION

The present invention relates to a process for manufacturing quartz resonators operating within a relatively high frequency range, typically from 20 to 100 MHz. More particularly, the invention relates to quartz resonators operating in the thickness shear mode.

It is known that in this type of resonator the operating frequency depends directly on the thickness of the active crystal (US Patent 3 694 677). To achieve frequencies as high as those mentioned above, the thickness of the resonant element has to be extremely small (of the order of a few microns up to 100 microns), such that mechanical fabrication methods are wholly unsuitable.

Furthermore, handling of the elements is a very delicate operation and during use shocks can be fatal and cause the element to break.

This is why it is proposed in the abovementioned US patent on the one hand to provide the resonator element with a reinforcing surround, which is considerably thicker than the resonator itself, and on the other hand preferably only to use non-mechanical fabrication methods such as chemical or ion etching at least in the last stage of the process leading to the desired thickness of the resonant element. Although these precautions can resolve to a certain extent the mechanical problems mentioned above, there nevertheless remain problems residing in the coupling which is between the resonator element and the reinforcing surround and which is too large. This leads to parasitic resonances and generally to a mediocre resonator characteristic.

US Patent 4 135 108 describes a quartz resonator of the type in which the quartz is mounted as a dielectric between the electrodes of a capacitor, these electrodes being deposited on plates which hold the resonator in place. To this end, the resonator may comprise a peripheral ring wedged between the plates and separated from the

resonator element proper by thinned-down portions which may take the form of simple connecting bridges extending radially between the peripheral ring and the resonator element.

The ring, the thinned-down bridges and the resonator element are of one piece and the shape of this whole unit is obtained by techniques such as abrasion, chemical attack or the like. In certain cases this unit may be of uniform thickness throughout, with the exception of the connecting bridges, the main surfaces being parallel. Adjustment of the frequency of the resonant element may be obtained by the removal of material, but such a precise machining operation then involves all the main surface or surfaces of the unit comprising the ring, the bridges and the resonant central portion, in such a way that it entails a general mechanical weakening of this unit, including the outer ring. This latter can thus no longer act as a mechanical reinforcement and serves ultimately only as a fixing member. Although this arrangement leads to better decoupling with respect to the support, it is still fragile and withstands handling with difficulty. Furthermore, if the ring is relatively thin the reduction in the thickness of the central portion cannot be as great as could be desired, taking into account the high resonance frequencies to be obtained.

It is also known from the Japanese reference JP-A-59-128 814 a resonator comprising an active central element surrounded by a reinforcing frame which is mechanically joined to the active element by means of a connecting member totally surrounding said active element. The resonator is such that the thickness of the reinforcing frame is larger than the thickness of the active element, said active element being larger than the thickness of the connecting member. Such a structure has an important drawback. When the resonator vibrates at high natural frequencies, the whole connecting member is subjected to vibrations and as a consequence to high mechanical stresses so that breakage risks appear.

The invention aims to provide a process for manufacturing a quartz resonator and the resulting product, which process and product allow the combining of mechanical rigidity of the resonator with a frequency as high as 100 MHz.

The subject of the invention is therefore a process for manufacturing quartz resonators, especially AT-cut resonators operating in the thickness shear vibration mode, each resonator comprising an active central element surrounded by a reinforcing frame from which it is separated by at least one thinner connecting member. The process consists in subjecting a quartz substrate with parallel faces to selective operations of chemical etching and photolithography, and the process is characterized in that it consists in reducing the thickness of the substrate in the marginal area corresponding to the connecting member of each resonator whilst preserving those areas which correspond to the said central element and to the said reinforcing frame, and then in further reducing the thickness of the said marginal area at the same time as reducing the thickness of the central portion, this second reduction in thickness again not affecting the thickness of the said reinforcing frame.

The invention also provides a resonator obtained by the process as defined above.

This resonator, according to the invention, has the advantage of combining a high fundamental frequency with highly satisfactory mechanical resistance and vibration decoupling.

Other characteristics and advantages of the invention will become more clearly apparent from reading the following description of various methods of implementing the invention, these being given as non-limiting examples.

Reference is made in the description to the drawings in which :

- figures 1A to 9B are respectively cross-sectional and plan views of a preferred method of implementing the manufacturing process according to the invention;

- figures 10 and 11 are plan views of two variants of a resonator obtained by this process.

According to this process, a quartz wafer is first prepared according to conventional techniques. This wafer is preferably AT cut, to enable the establishing of a thickness shear mode in the resonators whose manufacture is proposed.

The two faces of this wafer or substrate 1 are then coated with metal coverings which may comprise two superposed metal layers, respectively a layer of chromium 2 approximately 200 Å thick and a layer of gold 3 of approximately 2000 Å.

Next, the contours of the resonators to be manufactured and those of the networks of mechanical connections which allow the resonators to be handled during the various stages of the process are defined on the substrate. This stage consists (figure 2A) in applying a photoresist mask 4 to the two faces of the substrate. Thus, figure 2B shows the outline of a single resonator 5 fitted with connecting bridges 6 intended for linking the resonator to a connecting strip 7.

The next step is to carry out a selective chemical attack on the layers of gold and then chromium to expose the faces of the substrate outside the areas corresponding to the resonators, that is to say in the areas which are not masked by the photoresist.4.

The following stage of the process consists in applying to the two faces of the substrate a mask which only allows to be exposed to the light the areas forming a frame 8 (figure 3B) in each portion of the substrate corresponding to a resonator. The photoresist is exposed to the light and developed in such a way as to form a groove 9 (figure 3A) in the photoresist.

Another mask is then positioned on the unit thus treated, this mask enabling the central portions 10 of the resonators defined by the grooves 9 to be exposed to the light. However, at this stage these central portions are not developed, even after their exposure to the light, this being indicated in the figures by double hatching. At this point the substrate has the form shown in figure 4.

The next step is the chemical attack of the substrate itself, to separate the resonators from each other while preserving the connecting strip 7 and the connecting bridges 6 shown in figures 2B and 3B. The substrate now has the form shown in figure 5.

The following stage consists in carrying out a selective chemical attack on the metallized portions located below the grooves 9 in the photoresist, followed by an attack on the quartz enabling the creation in the substrate itself of a groove 11 at the base of the

grooves 9 in the photoresist. The substrate now has the form shown in figure 6.

The next step is to develop the already exposed photoresist in the central portion 10, followed by a selective attack on the underlying layers of metal in order to expose the quartz in the central portion.

Figure 7 shows the form obtained after the operations which have just been described. The substrate 1 comprises a central portion 1A which will become the resonator proper, a mechanical connecting portion 1B which will ensure the decoupling of the central portion's vibrations, and a reinforcing frame^{1C} surrounding the whole assembly. For the time being the portion 1C is still covered with metal layers and photoresist.

Starting from the form shown in figure 7 and according to an essential characteristic of the invention, the next step is once again to carry out a chemical attack on the substrate, in order to reduce and adjust the thickness of both the active portion 1A and the connecting portion 1B.

Then the rest of the photoresist and the remaining metal layers are removed, as a result of which operation the form shown in figure 8 is obtained.

The final stage of the process consists in applying two electrodes 12 and 13 by metallization, in accordance with figures 9A and 9B.

There are two important comments which should be made regarding the process just described.

1. The resonator which is finally obtained comprises the central portion 1A of the thickness t_1 , which thickness determines the fundamental frequency. The thickness t_1 may be between 16 and 160 microns for a frequency ranging approximately from 100 MHz to 10 MHz, these values being given purely by way of example. The central portion is surrounded by the connecting portion 1B of the thickness t_2 , which thickness may range from 10 microns to a value approaching t_1 , even a value only 5% lower producing excellent results with respect to decoupling the vibrations. Lastly the connecting portion 1B is

surrounded by a reinforcing ring or frame 1C, whose thickness t_3 may be considerably greater than t_1 and t_2 , a value located between 0.08 and 0.2 mm having proved favourable.

2. All the masking operations are carried out before the resonators are separated from each other, the exposure of the central portion 10 (figure 3B) taking place before the cutting-off or scribing operation (transition from figure 4 to figure 5). This particular feature allows a considerable reduction in manufacturing defects, as all the intensive handling necessary for masking and exposure is carried out while the quartz pellet substrate is still complete.

It has been supposed above that the active portion 1A of the resonator is attached to the reinforcing frame 1C all around the active portion's circumference. However, as is shown in figures 10 and 11 it is also possible when separating the resonators (transition from figure 4 to figure 5) to make slits 14 going right through the substrate.

The end result is that the resonator simply comprises connecting bridges joining the reinforcing frame to the active portion. In figure 10, these connecting bridges bear the reference numeral 15 and there are two of them, whereas in figure 11 there are four bridges bearing the reference numeral 16.

Of course, other variants can be imagined from that which has just been described. In particular, it is possible to vary the number of connecting bridges as in the embodiments shown in figures 10 and 11. In particular, it is possible to provide only one of these bridges, in such a way as to obtain a suspended mounting of the central portion of the resonator.

CLAIMS

1. A process for manufacturing a quartz resonator, especially for AT-cut resonator operating in the thickness shear vibration mode, each resonator comprising an active central portion (1A) surrounded by a reinforcing frame (1C) from which it is separated by at least one connecting member (1B) of a smaller thickness, said process consisting in subjecting a quartz substrate (1) with parallel faces to selective operations of chemical etching and photolithography, this process being characterized by the operations of reducing the thickness of the substrate (1) in the marginal area (8) corresponding to said connecting member (1B) of each resonator whilst preserving those areas corresponding to said central portion (1A) to said reinforcing frame (1B), further reducing the thickness of said marginal area (11) at the same time as reducing the thickness of said central portion, said further reduction again not affecting the thickness of said reinforcing frame (1C).

2. A process according to claim 1, characterized in that prior to carrying-out of said first reduction in thickness, said substrate (1) is coated with a layer of photoresist (4), a groove (9) is formed in said layer above said marginal area (8), the underlying area of said substrate being attacked until said first reduced thickness is obtained.

3. A process according to claim 2, characterized in that said second thickness reducing operation consists in eliminating said layer of photoresist above said central portion (1A) of said substrate (1) and then attacking the exposed portions (1A, 1B) of said substrate until said central portion (1A) reaches the thickness (t_1) corresponding to the frequency to be obtained.

4. A process according to any one of claims 1 to 3, characterized in that said first reduction in thickness is preceded by a scribing operation, effected by chemical attack of said substrate in order to define a plurality of resonators in said substrate.



5. A process according to claims 2 and 4 taken together, characterized in that said scribing operation is effected by means of said photoresist layer (4).

6. A process according to claim 5, characterized in that said scribing operation also consists in making at least one slit (14) in the part of said marginal area (1B) of said substrate excluding said connecting member or members (1B, 15, 16).

7. A process according to claim 6, characterized in that said photoresist layer (4) is exposed to light in the area corresponding to said central portion (1A) prior to said scribing operation and the corresponding portion (10) of said layer of photoresist (4) is developed after said scribing operation but before said first thickness reducing operation.

8. A resonator obtained in accordance with the process according to any one of the preceding claims comprising an active central portion (1A) of thickness t_1 surrounded by a reinforcing frame of thickness t_3 to which said central portion is joined mechanically by connecting means of thickness t_2 , with $t_3 > t_1 > t_2$, characterized in that the connecting means is in the form of a plurality of bridges (15, 16), the rest of a marginal area being occupied by a slit (14) going right through the substrate from one face to the other.

