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Corinthian Bronze

One of the most highly valued metals of the Roman world was Corinthian bronze, a compound of gold and silver mixed with either copper or bronze. The metal was produced in Corinth and used throughout that city to gild the tops of columns that were carved in a distinctive floral pattern. Corinthian columns (with or without the decorative overlay) became famous throughout the empire.

The origin of Corinthian bronze is lost in legend, but all sources agree that it was invented by accident. Plutarch reports that a house containing the right proportions of gold, silver, and copper caught fire, and the three metals melted together to yield a happy surprise (*Oracles* 395.2). Petronius says that the Carthaginian general Hannibal produced the first batch when he destroyed the city of Ilium and burned its treasures (*Satyricon* 50).

Whatever the metal's origin, the Roman philosopher Seneca expresses sardonic disgust for consumers who were so driven by the metal's faddish popularity that they would pay outlandish prices to own anything made of Corinthian bronze (*On Shortness of Life* 12.2; *Helvia on Consolation* 11.3). Seneca was the brother of Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia mentioned in Acts 18:12–17. Gallio was a wealthy and powerful citizen of Corinth, and we probably can

assume that he had a different attitude toward avid consumers of his city's chief export than that expressed by his intellectual sibling.

Indebted to Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 329.