

COEPIMUS ET LAPIDE PINGERE:
MARBLE DECORATION FROM THE SO-CALLED
BATHS OF DIOCLETIAN IN PALMYRA

DAGMARA WIELGOSZ

In the 35th book of his *Naturalis Historia* Pliny wrote:

(...) *nunc vero in totum marmoribus pulsa, iam quidam et auro, nec tantum ut parietes toti operiantur, verum et interraso marmore vermiculatisque ad effigies rerum et animalium crustis. Non placent iam abaci nec spatia montes in cubiculo dilatantia: coepimus et lapide pingere* (NH, XXXV, 2–3)

“(...) but at the present day, it (painting) is completely banished in favour of marble, and even gold. For not only are whole walls now covered with marble, but the marble itself is carved out or else marqueted so as to represent objects and animals of various kinds. No longer now are we satisfied with formal partitions of marble, or with slabs extended like so many mountains in our chambers, but we must begin to paint the very stone itself!”

The classical translation by John Bostock cited here can and should be modified significantly in the last part of the quoted fragment. Pliny says *coepimus et lapide pingere*, which should be translated as “we begin to paint even with the stone”.¹ The translator changed Pliny’s text, unable to

1 See however a French translation in the “Belles Lettres” collection, where the author, Jean-Michel Croisille, understood the text correctly: “nous nous sommes mis à peindre même avec la pierre”. The issue is even more complicated by the fact that Pliny’s text in this place has two readings: *lapidem pingere* in two codices, and *lapide pingere* in the remaining ones.