The Artefacts Project :
an Encyclopedia of Archaeological Small Finds

During the last three decades, archaeology *benefitted* from two major changes: a complete renewal of methods, with the generalized use of computers and the internet; and a spectacular increase in the mass of available data, partly due to the development of large rescue excavations. It also *suffered* from two major changes – the same ones. One of the reasons is that the marvelous tools we now have at our disposal were neither generally nor consistently used to balance the inconveniences of such a huge documentation.

There was a time when I complained about not having enough data to study, and this was often a cliché among most people studying small finds; but as time passed, I no longer find that this is so. On the contrary, now we all know that we ignore an increasing part of the available documentation, even when it is published (let alone what is not). A single researcher cannot cover all the documentation available, and so s/he is forced to reduce the scope of any study undertaken, which is certainly contrary to the overall aim of any research.

I believe that the time has come to change our working methods, i.e. to build international databases that allow specialists to share the available data, as physicians or biologists have long ago achieved. We now have the tools to make this little revolution happen, but only if we accept the consequences of this new era...

This project, **Artefacts**, that I describe below for Lucerna readers, should not become a book either in the near future, or ever. Its aim is to bring to common knowledge the thousands of objects which are available, either in publications, museums, archaeological archive stores or private collections. In comparison with existing databases, it has the ambition to classify the objects as soon as they are registered, thus allowing another researcher not only to find them, but also to improve the scientific information available for that particular artefact-type. I know that **Artefacts** will never be exhaustive, yet it can provide the main data (identification, date, bibliography...) for a great number of objects, thus becoming a highly useful tool for archaeologists, museums and collectors.

The working group **Artefacts** is open to anyone having the qualifications to join it; these are detailed at the end of this article.

1/ An online database

Artefacts is the visible part (on the internet) of a much larger database, **Dicobj,** an online database, which means that it can only be opened or modified while using a quick-access (adsl) internet connection. It is presently not available to the public on the internet but makes use of dedicated software, called **Syslat©**. For security as well as convenience, the researcher has a copy of the images on his hard drive, and whatever he changes among images is first
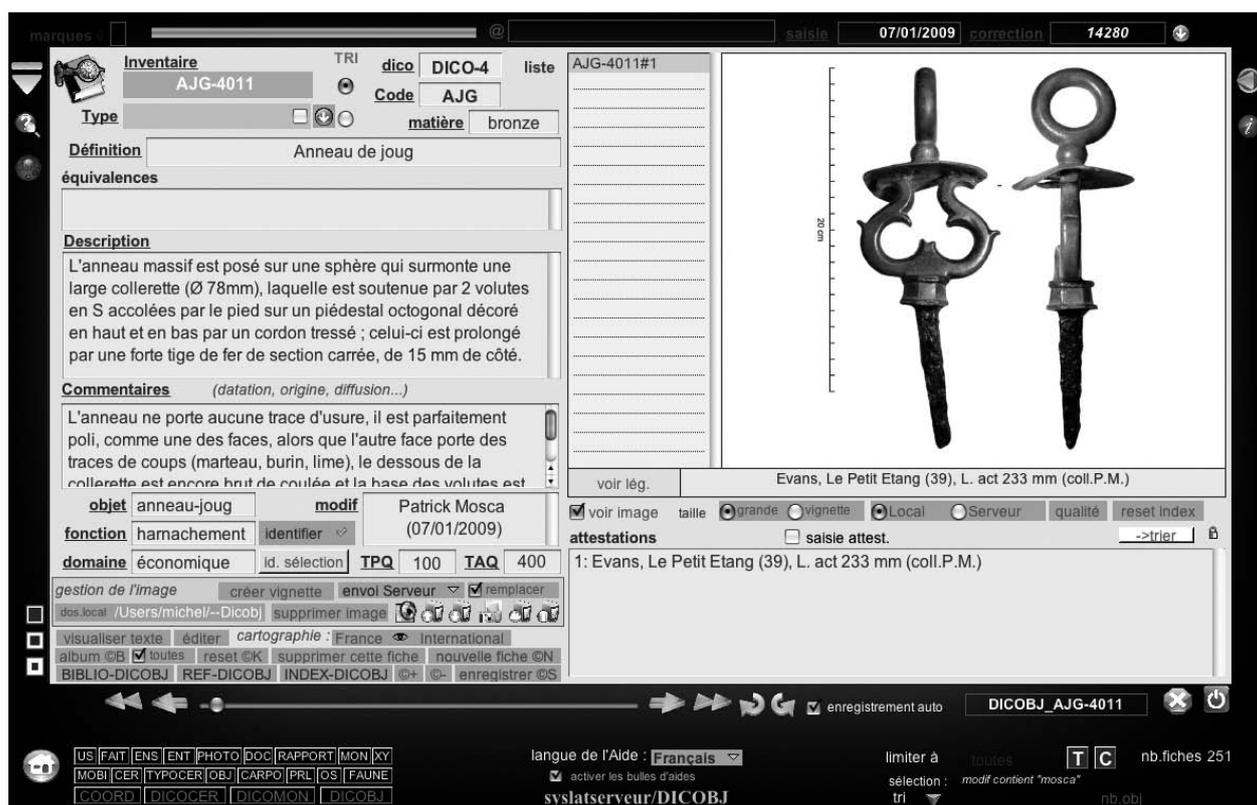

Fig. 1

album

1 aller page ▾ double clic sur une image pour l'agrandir (et l'extraire) ; clic droit (ou ctrl+clic) pour accéder à la fiche d'origine fermer
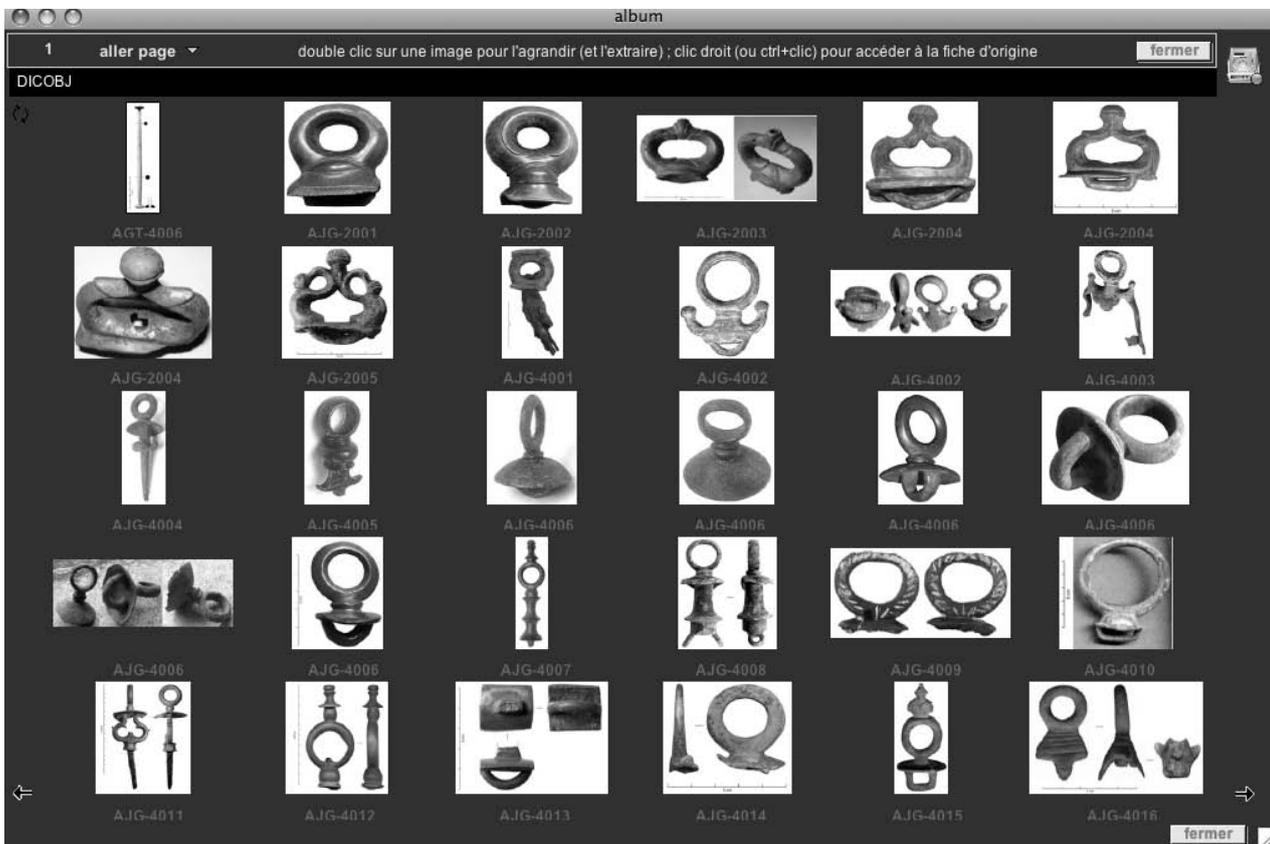
DICOBJ

Fig. 2

registered on his computer, then sent to the server. Other information, such as changes in the text or keys, are registered directly on the server.

One of the consequences of this is that the data sent by one author can be seen by everyone, so information is immediately shared. But of course, at this stage, the network must be limited to confirmed and responsible researchers, as any of them is allowed to make any change s/he wants in the database. The whole thing now contains 8094 type files, for a total of 27865 registered objects, which is probably a half, if not a quarter, of the 'critical mass' which will make **Artefacts** a useful database.

2/ An organized corpus

The principle of **Dicobj/Artefacts** is to register the objects in the correct section, with a proper period identification, which of course is something which can be improved in the course of time. The entry number given to every type contains two identification elements: a 3-letters code refers to a category, for example FIB for brooches (fr. 'fibule') or AJG for terret (fr. 'anneau de joug'). It is followed by 4 numbers, the first one linked to the chronology: 4 is Roman (30 BC – AD 500), 5 is early medieval (AD 500-800), etc. A type is therefore identified by a short code, like FIB-4232 or AML-2005 (the first one being a Roman fibula and the latter a La Tène amulet).

We had to make a choice for those chronological limitations, and this choice can be criticised; but we should see it as merely conventional sections of chronology to put together the objects of the same period of time. Of course, dating in Britain and other European countries is different to that of France, and even within Britain there is not a straight switch into the Roman period in AD 43 for all areas –

indeed, in some areas there was no "Roman" period at all. Similarly, only the first decade or so of the 5th century can be said to be 'Roman'. But if we use the chronological limitations rather than any cultural naming, this should not be a problem.

Let us look a at a typical **Artefacts** file, for example, AJG-4011 (Fig. 1). This file belongs to the Roman section (DICO-4) and is described as an 'anneau de joug'. There is a decription and a commentary but no 'parallels', as we do not know of any study of this type at the moment. The file is signed ('modif') and associated with a large chronology (AD 100-400), which is only a guess at the moment. There is only one object in this file, a find from Evans (F, 39) which is illustrated in the picture window. There could be several occurrences and as many pictures as we like, if it proved necessary, and of course if we can find any.

3/ How to register an object ?

How does one register an object in **Dicobj / Artefacts**...? Let us take a concrete example: you first need to be an archaeologist to recognize a terret ... If not, for example if you only guess that what you want to register is a Roman item, you would have to look at all the images of the Roman section one by one until you recognize a similar object. But by knowing what it is, you can very easily find the code for a terret in the list of codes in alphabetical order, then check through all the terrets in the database (Fig. 2) to see if examples of the same type have been already registered (bottom left of the window). Finally you can access the file and fill in the data for the object.

The type files use two 'libraries', one for the bibliography (BIBLIO-DICOBJ), with the usual abbreviation 'Name date' , and another for the sites quoted (COORD), which has faci-

Fig. 3

COORDONNÉES   accès à : Googel Earth   geoPORTAIL

Fichier courant   COORD_dicobj

commune, site (département) | commune | départ. ou pays
Wood Burcote [Nortants.] (GB) >

Lambert I   X   Y
Lambert II   X   Y
Lambert III   X   Y
Lambert II étendu X   Y
Lambert 93   X   Y

ED50   longitude 0,-59,-7   latitude 52,6,60
WGS 84   longitude -0.98574   latitude 52.116442   xy

corriger coord (France)
ajouter coord (France)
☑ mode SAISIE
effacer   enregistrer
supprimer
copier   coller

Visualisation   Interface Google Earth
vue aérienne
Photo Google Maps   échelle 14
localisation sur carte
MapQuest   Carte Google Maps   échelle 12
GeoPortail IGN
localiser

index sites
Whelford, Longdoles Field (GB)
White Colne [Essex] (GB)
Whithchurch [Buckinghams.] (GB)
Wien (AT)
Wien*, Museum (AT)
Wiesbaden (DE)
Wiltshire* (GB)
Winchester (GB)
Winchester, Grange Rd. (GB)
Windisch, Vindonissa (CH)
Windisch, Vindonissa-Est (CH)
Winterton [Humberside] (GB)
Withersfield [Suffolk] (GB)
Wood Burcote [Nortants.] (GB)
Woodcuts (GB)
Woodford [Norths] (GB)
Wroxeter (GB)
Wylie (GB)
Xanten (DE)
Yavneh Yam (IL)
Yonne* (89)
York, Fortress (GB)
Yvelines* (78)
Zemun-Gardos (SR)
Zeugma (TR)
Zugmantel (DE)
Zülpich-Enzen (DE)

☑ enregistrer auto   ☐ vue auto

US FAIT ENS ENT PHOTO DOC RAPPORT MON XY
MOBI CER TYPOCER OBJ CARPO PRL OS FAUNE
COORD DICOCER DICOMON DICOBJ
langue de l'Aide : Français
☑ activer les bulles d'aides
syslatserveur/COORD
○ navigateur interne
● navigateur externe
CARTO

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

LA MANCHE
OCEAN ATLANTIQUE
MER MEDITERRANEE
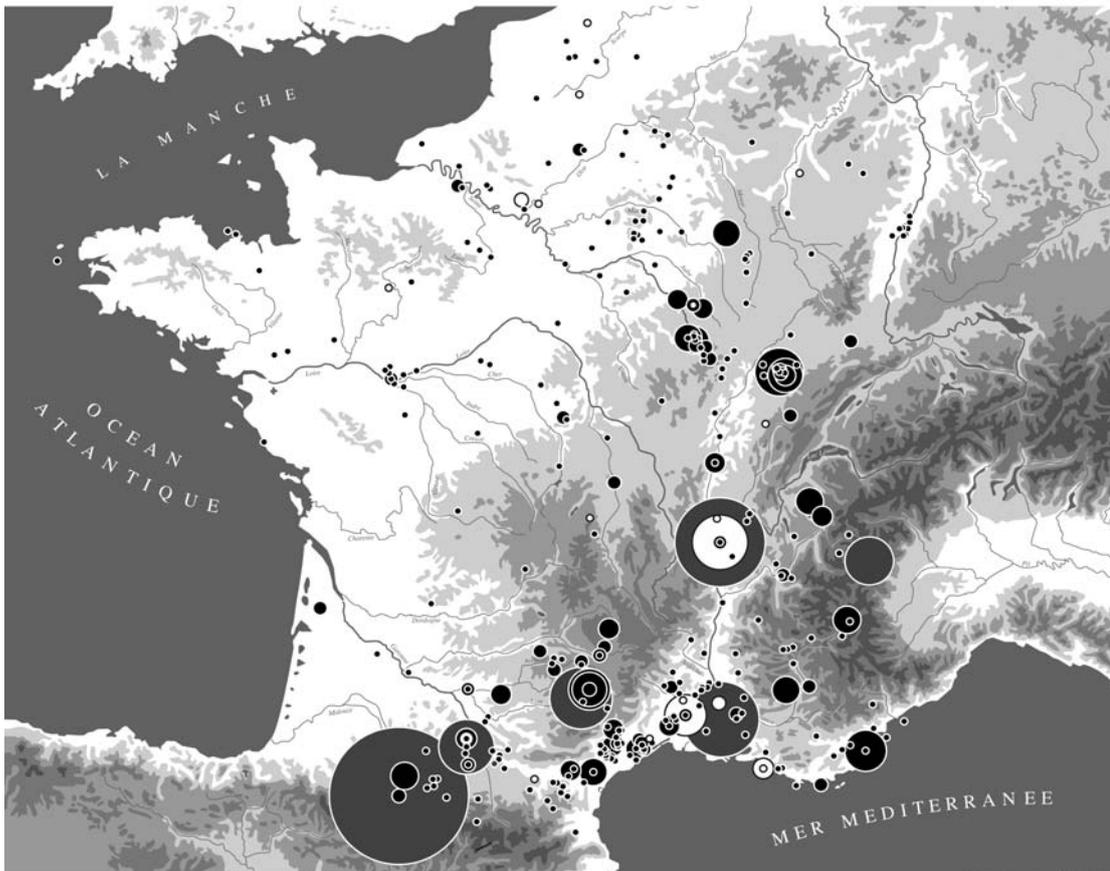© Thérèse Pancuillères, CNRS, UMR5140

Fig. 4

lities to locate a site in any country and import its coordinates (Fig. 3). The system allows the items from any file, or from a group of files, to appear on distribution maps automatically edited in a post-script format. There is a variety of maps on the server, for any region, country or larger areas. See, for example, the map of Roman brooches (FIB-4 etc) in France presently in the database (Fig. 4).

4/ An international project, really... ?

At the moment, **Dicobj / Artefacts** is a project initiated by researchers from Southern France, which has so far raised interest from researchers from the whole country. But, technically as well as scientifically, there is no reason why it should be restricted to one country. In the pre-Roman Iron Age as well as in Roman or later times, many object-

types travelled long distances, and their study cannot be limited to the boundaries of our modern states. There is, therefore, a strong need for such a project to remain wide open to contributions from other countries, which will benefit from the database just like our fellow citizens.

At the moment **Dicobj/Artefacts** is a French software: the lists, aids and descriptions are in French, but there is no reason why we should not work on translations in different languages, depending on the investment of researchers from other countries.

We therefore strongly wish to welcome foreign colleagues to our working-group!

5/ Who can join the group ?

Contributing to **Artefacts** requests the following abilities :

- a specialized interest in small finds, either in general or in one category (for example, lamps, militaria, brooches, tools...etc). The time needed to use Artefacts is only justified if you are either working on small finds as a job, or have a bit of time to devote to them as a private hobby...;

- dealing with the images presumes that you are familiar with the *ad hoc* softwares: for example, how to cut a picture and paste it onto a white background, change its size and add a graphic scale;

- to work on the database you need to be familiar with basics computer processes: such as importing images, saving in the right folder etc. ;

- last but not least, as everything is in French at the moment, you need some basic knowledge of this language, if only to recognise the types, or the fields and their contents... We do work on an English translation, but this is not available yet.

Starting with **Artefacts** needs constant support, so I advise potential candidates to use a Skype or IChat account to allow me to hold their hand. On both of those, I am available during work hours under the following name: 'michelfeugeretpc'. Iif you want to know more about **Artefacts**, please do not hesitate to contact me, either like that or by e-mail. I really hope this will bring some of you to get involved with **Artefacts** and enlarge our present working-group.

<div align="right">
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Fig. 5 — The internet home page : http://www.instrumentum-europe.org/Artefacts/home.php