THE PERUVIAN GUANO TRADE: BOOM AND BUST, 1845-1879

Purpose: To show through postal and relevant collateral material the boom and bust cycle of the guano trade in Peru. A second theme involves the marketing of guano. Minor sources of guano in the South Pacific and Caribbean are accorded passing treatment insofar as they were related to Peru’s guano.

Scope: The first exports of Peruvian guano to Europe began in the early 1840s. The boom years encompassed 1845-1879. A much-reduced trade continued into the 1890s.


Challenge: Letters from ship captains at the guano islands that specifically reference the loading of guano are very difficult to locate. Without access to archive of the French-Peruvian company of Thomas Lachambre development of the French dimension of the trade would not be possible.

Highlights (importance/significance) are matted in red. Postal/philatelic information is in blue. The story line is in italics.

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Humboldt ascertained the value of nitrogen-rich Peruvian guano to farmers during his 1802-04 South American trip.