

Summary

The Ancient authors, such as Pomponius Mela, Pliny the Elder, Ptolemy, and from later centuries Marco Polo and Luigi Varthema, were convinced about existence of *Terra Australis*. In 1512 Antonio d'Abreu of Portugal noticed for the first time an unknown land lying to the East of the Moluccas. Then in 1526 another Portuguese, J. de Meneses, made some comments in writing on dwellers of this region, called Papuans. From 1528 the Spaniards prevailed in the Moluccas and in southwest Melanesia, and step-by-step they discovered more and more of today's New Guinea. Very famous Spanish sailor-explorers of this time were: Alvaro de Saavedra, H. Grijalva together with Pedro de Alvarado, Bernardo de la Torre and Inigo Ortis de Retes who first named the big Island "New Guinea". In 1567 Spaniards discovered and named the "Solomon Islands". At the beginning of the XVII century they accidentally visited New Hebrides (Vanuatu) and then sailed through Torres Strait, finally confirming that New Guinea and Australia exist as separated territories. Commencing from the same century the prominent navigators in Melanesia were now those coming from Britain, France and Holland who discovered other important geographical archipelagos of Melanesia: Fiji and New Caledonia, and other smaller islands in the South Pacific.

The first evangelisation in the Pacific is that the missionaries made their efforts and try to get in touch with the locals while arriving at the certain islands. Their main task was to perform the Eucharist while travelling under the command of Ferdinand Magellan and then under other captains, reaching Solomon Islands, Papua offshore and New Hebrides. If in some cases they baptised captured Melanesians on their ships, this can hardly be called the missionary activity. The real and standard missionary movement in Melanesia, and in New Guinea as well, took place and expanded in XIX century.