



Dante Barrera

SANTO DOMINGO GRANDE

The Dominicans arrived in the province of Guaxaca in 1529, the same year that the first mayor of Antequera, Juan Peláez de Berrio, took office. He ordered Alonso García Bravo, who had laid out Mexico City, to plan Villa de Antequera, now known as the city of Oaxaca. One of the first constructions to go up was the monastery of the preaching friars which would be known as San Pablo or Santo Domingo Soriano. The remains of this building, although substantially modified, are still extant on the eastern side of the city's main plaza.

In 1558, the Dominicans acquired the lands where they built a new monastery, known in the records as Santo Domingo Grande. Since construction work was very irregular, it did not begin again until 1575, but it then continued well into the seventeenth century until the building was finished. When first inhabited in 1608, the building still had no doors or windows, and the cloister's monumental staircase and the choir had yet to be built. Severe, frequent earthquakes in the area rendered San Pablo uninhabitable. The new cloister itself had to be rebuilt three times before 1669 for the same reason.

In the last decade of the sixteenth century, the Dominicans of New Spain had divided into two pro-

vinces. Santo Domingo was the headquarters of the new Dominican province San Hipólito Mártir. Its extensive jurisdiction was soon covered with curacies or houses not classified as monasteries because they had few friars living in them. During the colonial period, the friars had as many as 70 curacies in the two nations of Oaxaca, the Zapotec nation and the Mixtec nation. Santo Domingo Grande was built with the resources of these houses and the allotment of indigenous labor.

From 1812 on, the building was used by the military, although the friars still lived there. The Reform Laws of the mid-nineteenth century turned the building completely over to the military. Under Bishop Eulogio Gregorio Gillow, in 1895, the order recovered the church and the Rosario Chapel from the government. The former cavalry barracks on the southwest corner of the perimeter were built in 1909. The cloister was turned into a museum in 1972, restoration began on the rest of the former monastery in 1994 when the army vacated it to occupy new quarters and, in 1998, it was finally inaugurated as a cultural center. **MM**

Manuel Esparza
Historian