

## *The Tecolote*

I was walking along an area where a road grader had leveled the ground around the town water treatment plant of Zacualpan when the sun's rays cast a shadow upon a rock next to my right foot. I looked down and picked up a large rock, which was now part of the roadway. At first, as the sun shined onto the rock I could not discern what I was looking at. However, when I took the rock next to the shadow of a tree I saw a face resembling an owl had been carved into the stone. The Owl is a sacred, yet contradictory, bird in Native American mythology. In the Navajo Kwakiutl myth, when this creature calls, it means someone is going to die. As messenger of death, the owl is not evil, but it can be foreboding. In the Pueblos along the Rio Grande in New Mexico, the owl is definitely a bird of dark omen. In Mexico the Owl is called the Tecolote and is also considered a bad omen. The Aztecs and

Maya considered the owl a symbol of death and destruction. The Aztec god of death, Mictlantecuhtli, was often depicted with owls. There is an old saying in Mexico that is still in use: *Cuando el tecolote canta, el indio muere* ("When the owl cries/sings, the Indian dies"). In old Europe many people feared the night-flying bird as an omen of death.

The interesting thing about the owl rock was that the water treatment plant was adjacent to the town cemetery, which was also a burial ground for the Tecoxquine Indians before the arrival of the Spanish. This area is presently littered with many fragments of the past and petroglyph symbols. When considering the myth of the Owl and the contextual association of finding this ancient stone in a burial location, a place of the dead, it is more likely than not that the stone is an ancient Tecoxquine artifact associated with their burial practices.

