

Ramón Acín and Huesca

Federico Balaguer (Huesca 1912 - 2001)

Historian, medievalist, passionate about art, historical and cultural popularizer, archivist, Official Chronicler of the city of Huesca from 1955 until his death.



The city of Huesca seen from the north, circa 1898

At the beginning of the 20th century Huesca still lived under the Romantic impulse of the *fin de siècle*. Many monuments had disappeared, university teaching had ceased more than half a century prior, and though an unquestionable economic decline had set in, the city still retained its peculiar physiognomy, and the expansive cathedral square was a religious center, a forum, and youthful laughter could still be heard in the old Sertorian classrooms. But above all, an air of renaissance could be sensed in the city's cultural and social life: Luis López Allué gave his novels and short stories to the press and penned the best pages in Aragonese literature; Manuel Bescós, ever an apologist of Costa, polished the gold of his masterly prose, and Joaquín Cajal, as a young engineer, devised the Upper Aragon irrigation plan.

Ramón Arsenio Acín Aquilué was the youngest of this group of select Huescans who ushered in an air of renewal. He was born on the Calle Cortes 3, the old home of the Ena family; across the street, that of the Ruiz de Castilla family is now a school, and that of the Esmir family is now a tax office. The house contained the headquarters of the CNT in 1936; previously, if I remember correctly, it was on San Salvador and Quinto Sertorio streets, in a locale rented out by Ramón to give Drawing classes.

On September 27, 1900, he passed his high school entrance exam, and for six years would move about the old university's stark octagonal cloister, and haunt the nearby mountains, and the poplar groves of Isuela. From his very first year, he would demonstrate a knack for artistic creation and a fruitful imagination, stunning his classmates and professors with the perfection of his maps, his sketches of picturesque landscapes, and his caricatures and portraits of learned teachers: the Romeos, Eyaralalar, Fernández Enciso, López Bastarán...



One of those educators, who was to teach into the 40s, Joaquín Monrás — tall, slim, idealistic, a federal republican, who always retained the musical accent of his native Tarragona — was the father of the woman who was to be his lifelong companion, in prosperity and misfortune, in life and in death. It is curious that, in spite of his artistic vocation and his exceptional talent, his grades in Drawing were unexceptional, in contrast to the honors he earned in Spanish Geography, possibly due to his flawless maps. Perhaps his innate rebelliousness prevented him from following the guidelines set down by his Drawing teacher, who, I suppose, was Manuel Ros, a highly skilled draftsman whose notes could be described as photographic.

Ramón always harbored fond memories of the classes taught by Huescan painter Félix Lafuente, whom he always called his *maestro*; "*I was the St John of his disciples*," he would later say when Lafuente passed away in 1927.

But Acín, who chose not to attend the School of Fine Arts, was horrified by Mannerism, and eschewed teachers or guides, only thought of expressing his experiences through new forms. Someone said of him that he was a libertarian artist, and I think he was right. His aim was to search for new styles, free of precepts or ties. His innovations were based on simplicity. I often heard him praise the natural, the simple; with humble materials he made his best works, such as those figures of light sheet metal, perhaps the best he produced.

This same attitude extended to the social and civic spheres. His aversion to domination, to what is usually called "power," and his fondness for the humble, spurred him to embrace anarcho-syndicalism. His struggle to spread libertarian ideology and to organize CNT unions in the Upper Aragon constitute one of the most relevant chapters in our history. He often sacrificed his artistic vocation to pursue this struggle for liberation, to which he devoted all his energies.

Despite his status as a universal Huescan, in constant contact with Spanish and foreign circles, Acín also felt deeply attracted to his land, the place where he was born, lived and died. It was here that he produced his artistic work and imparted his social teachings. A good part of his sculptural work remains in Huesca, especially those beautiful *Pajaritas (Little Birds)* in the park, perhaps the most magnificent monument in Aragon. Let us hope that one day, sooner than later, our museums will showcase his work as it ought to be displayed.

Fruit of his love for the city is a collection of drawings of streets, monuments and places in Huesca, which are currently being studied. Some were published in the regional press and in Ricardo del Arco's volume *Las calles de Huesca (1922)*. Sometimes he used older drawings as models, as they were of monuments that had already disappeared in his time; these include one of the tower of Santo Domingo, which seems to have been inspired by a painting by his master Félix Lafuente. His drawing of the façade of the old church of San Vicente, or La Asunción, adjacent to his house, of great historical interest, is particularly curious.

Others are natural sketches of Huescan streets, like the Costanilla de Lastanosa, or the Cuesta de la Compañía. Others, like that of the Calle de Santiago, that of the city's Good Friday processions, are within his interpretative line, related to the article he published in *El Diario de Huesca* on the *Vía Crucis* to Salas. His depiction of the Calle del Palacio was the first, or one of the first, in the abundant pictorial series of this classic Huescan artery.

Regarding urban design, Acín's suggestion to the mayor of the city, Mariano Carderera, for the



new streets to be named for colors, and for all the houses on each street to be painted the color of the name, is curious. Also interesting is his proposal, in the pages of *El Diario de Huesca*, for the founding of a diocesan museum.

This fondness for his native city sometimes gave rise to disappointments and bitterness, as when its council decided to commission an outsider, and a Mannerist at that, to create the sculpture commemorating the advent of the Second Republic.

If I had to choose a symbol of his life, I would choose one of his most beautiful works: "Un sueño en la prisión" (A dream in prison); those bars that open, that dove in search of freedom, express very graphically what his life was about. The path his life traced was ever straight and logical: he dreamed of freedom, for himself and for others, and detested violence. It is not good that tyrannies or despotisms exist, but what is truly tragic is to realize that, at any moment, we too can become despots. When one warm day in August, the month in which he was born, his life was brutally cut short, Ramón Acín beckoned us with his serene death, as I have said on other occasions, to fall as victims before becoming executioners. □

