

Communication by song

Something that I've come to realize, as I work with my recorded material, is that the songs really DID function as a means of communication, in a time where there was not even electricity or telephones, much less cell phones, where people lived. Here I would like to share some small examples of that.



Lakatitsa is probably about center in this clip

A particularly striking one, to me, is the day in the summer of 1988 (August 16, to be exact!) that I went with my husband Dick and my friend Erica to a place a bit outside of Govedártsi, south-west of Sámokov—a place they know by the name of Lakátitsa. (Peter, my son, was not with us that day— he had gone somewhere else with a friend.) It was along the road that leads north-west from the village in this screenshot from Google Maps.

So, instead of going out to the working site in the morning with the women, we were driven out later by someone, arriving towards the end of their noonday break. But the women (whose job at the time was to feed hay into the baling machine) were still sitting, showing no sign of working, because the baler was being repaired by the men. Once we arrive and settle in a bit, two women start singing for us. And while they are singing, suddenly, from wa-y-y-y high up the steep hill to the south of us, we hear another group of workers calling. A bit of a shouted conversation ensues— “Right away! We’re getting up right away!” After a moment three people started to sing. I tried to find something playable on my tape, but unfortunately they were so far away that we got next-to-nothing.

However, after they finished, the women told me the words to the song they were singing:

Море я ста'яйте да ста'яме, *дружино верна зговорна*
на поста(т) се наредете, *дружино верна зговорна*
да видиме коя нема! *дружино верна зговорна*

Come, stand up, let's stand up, *oh my faithful band [here: of co-workers]*
take your places, so we can see who's missing!

I later realized that with their song they were “asking” about what was happening—the kind of real “in context” singing that I had secretly hoped I might find! “*What’s going on down there? Why aren’t you working?!*” The noontime break is over, you should be back to work, why aren’t you?

Three years earlier in the village of Mádžare (just east of Govedartsi), Ánka Fílipova, a woman who eventually told me a large number of beautiful songs, had been telling me a song to which I will devote a whole post one day. It’s a song Anka considered particularly “hers” because the heroine is named Yána (a variant of Anna, as is Anka). “You see those two teeth-shaped mountains up there? [on the ridge of the Rila Mountain.] When I was a girl, I would go up there gathering blueberries, and when I sang, my father could hear me all the way down here in the village!” From the map, it looks to me as if this might have been a good 2 miles “up”. Yes, I thought, the woman had a strong, beautiful voice. And then...



These may not be the actual peaks Anka was talking about, but you get the idea. (I'll keep looking for a better photo.)

And then I thought more. What might it have meant to this man, whose daughter was all the way at the top of some of the highest mountains on the Balkan Peninsula, probably with a small group of friends, in mountains where bears, wolves, and all sorts of wild animals abounded, not to mention lonely shepherds, foresters, outlaws (you name the dangers), to hear her singing?

He could hear his daughter singing, and he knew she was all right—at least so far!

Boggles the mind.