It has been suggested that the origins of rebetiko are connected with the songs of prison. The first reference to the songs of prison goes back to the middle of the 19th century. In 1850 the French nobleman Appair visited Greece in order to study the problem of the Othonian prisons and he referred to the songs that were heard there. Several others made a reference to these songs, such as Papadiamantis and Kar­kavitsas, who visits Moria in 1890 and in 1891 records in "Estia" magazine (a magazine published by G. Drosinis) several of them.

From the establishment of the neo-Hellenic state up to about 1880, the Italian opera dominates in Athens. All "Greek" songs of this period were based on the melodies of the Italian operas. The first attempt for the creation of Greek songs begins with the Ionian Islands serenade and the Athenian songs. Of course, the influence of the Italian opera is clear but assimilated to an extent so as not to be superficially presented.

In 1871 the Conservatory of Athens is established and the same year the first sandan-cafι opens in Athens. In 1873 the first sandur-cafι opens (from 1886 onwards the sandur-cafιs are renamed aman-cafιs). In 1880 Athens was divided into two. On the one side there were the "lovers of the Asian muse" and on the other side all those who believed that the long-drawn-out love songs (amane) had not at all Greek features. That led to many discussions concerning the music of the Orient. By 1886 Athens was full of aman-cafιs. The complete dominance of the long-drawn-out love song will last ten years. Towards the end of the century the decay of the aman-cafιs, the appearance of the shadow play and the Athenian revue are observed.

Along with this theatre genre, the love of the audience for the foreign music was rekindled. The music at the revues, apart from few "unsuccessful" cases, was a true copying of foreign melodies. The revue’s success was tremendous. It dominates over the first two decades of the 20th century. The revue’s content changes after 1922 and so do the audience’s interests.

After the Catastrophe in Asia Minor, the aman-cafιs return for a while but operetta dominates (from 1916). Its music was Greek and it was not at all related neither to the revue nor to the "amanetzidika". In the 1930s the songs of the wine, which started being written during the first years of operetta, reach their pinnacle. Along with the appearance of discography, the theatre, which was the most mass way of communication, loses ground. This is the point where we should look for the reasons that led to the decay of operetta.