There were many influences responsible for the glories of Neo-Viennese medicine. Ferdinand Von Hebra (1816-1880) is considered as the founder of classical dermatology. Hebra was born in Moravia, and received his medical degree from University of Vienna. He was appointed in Josef Skoda’s chest clinic at the Allgemeines Krankenhause. Skoda, seeing his interest in diseases of skin put him in charge of the entire division for skin diseases encouraging him to study dermatology intensively.

Prior to him the beginning of 19th century witnessed the wisdom of modern dermatology in France through the efforts of Alibert, Cazenava and their famous pupil Gilbert ( pityriasis rosea), and Bazin (erythema induratum). However, the French dermatology was dominated by humoral concepts (dyscrasias).

The combination of Skoda’s precepts of clinical medicine, with investigation in pathology by Rokitansky, led to a new concept of cutaneous medicine. Hebra was successful in his pursuits, and deserves full credit for classification of cutaneous disorders, based on structural alterations. The first treatise on classification, Hautkrankenheiten, was published in 1845, and became the basis of Atlas der the monument, released in 1856.

The false belief of humoral pathology of scabies was completely dispelled by Hebra when he showed it to be a local disease, produced by itch mite. He concluded that external irritations were responsible for a variety of skin reactions, which were limited to outer shell of the body. Among the many types which he described (and many of which he named) were lupus, eczema, impetigo, lichen, erythema, and syphilitic skin conditions. He rediscovered the value of mercury in treatment of syphilis.

Erythema multiforme is called Hebra’s disease after his initial
description. He described Seborrhea congestive, which was subsequently found to be a form of lupus erythematosus. Hebra also reported the first case of rhinoscleroma.

The present concept of systemic disorder with cutaneous manifestations, although not rejected completely, was somehow de-emphasized by Hebra. He regarded most cutaneous disorders as purely local and devised mainly local (external) remedies. Yet as a champion of nihilistic therapy, he is said to have followed Skoda in feigning treatment in some cases to show that they could get well by themselves.

Von Hebra was warm, sympathetic, witty in conversation and clear in reasoning. His reputation as a teacher spread far and wide. Students from all over the world came to study dermatology in Vienna. Many honors and titles were bestowed on Hebra. He became Professor of Dermatology in 1869, and was elevated to nobility by Emperor Joseph.

He was a good friend of Simmelweis. Hebras’s son-in-law, Moritz Kaposi, carried on the tradition, and revised Hebra’s book. It was translated in English, by the New Sydenham society, and subsequently in French, Italian and Russian languages. Von Hebra died in 1880 at the age of 64. He was buried in the same cemetery as Rokitanski and Skoda. The three stars of Vienna Medical School thus remain together for eternity.