

## About the First Available and Documented MD Certificate Delivered in the World: “ IJAZAH ”

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**Doctor of Medicine** (Abbreviated **M.D.**, from the Latin: **Medicinae Doctor**) corresponds to a professional (medical) graduate degree awarded upon graduation from medical school. It is a primary vocational qualification required in many countries for a license or legally practice of medicine.

If practice of medicine has started earlier in ancient civilizations (Egyptian, Greek, Indian, medieval, Arabic & Islamic). From Imhotep, Charaka and Hippocrates Oath, moving by Chinese and Japanese traditional medicine, the “Canoon of Medicine” of Ibn Sina [1] and the Renaissance in Europe, the medical knowledge and education has been improved and institutional learning of medical sciences has been developed progressively.

The medical university of masters and students “Universitas medicorum” was established in Montpellier in 1220. Montpellier university is then considered as the oldest medical school still in operation in Occident [2, 3] ([Celebration of VIII<sup>th</sup> Centenary of Montpellier University of Medicine in August 20, 2020](#) [4]). There is no available data regarding the first MD delivered in Montpellier and M. Girard precised that the oldest available thesis in Montpellier collection was from 1661 [5]. However, it has been reported that Arnau çà Riera obtained a bachelor of Medicine in Montpellier in 1328 before attending the Estudi General de Lleida in 1344 [6]. The oldest French collection of thesis

is available in Paris with an archive since 1539. Baron and Thomas Bernard Bertrand notified that the first thesis was presented in Paris in 1395 [5].

In USA, the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York (which at the time was referred to as King's College of Medicine) was the 1<sup>st</sup> American university to grant the M.D. degree in 1767 instead of Scottish schools of medicine [7].

In 1703, Samuel Benion was issued with the academic degree of Doctor of Medicine from the University of Glasgow, considering him as the first MD in the world [8]. Howie reported that the examination proceeded in the presence of Professor Robert Sinclair (Professor of Mathematics and President of the session), Dr. Kennedy, Tran and 2 other regents [1]. It was resolved following this meeting the promotion of Mr. Benion to the degree of Doctor in Medicine [9].

In this paper, we are presenting what seems to be really the oldest known and documented MD degree delivered in the world. It has been awarded to the Doctor Abdellah Ben Saleh Al Koutami in 1207 AD (603 of Islamic Calendar) for practice of both medicine and veterinary. It has been called “IJAZAH” (**Figure 1**) corresponding to the Arabic: الإجازة, which means "permission", "authorization" or "license".





Figure 1: "IJAZAH" delivered in Medicine from AL Quaraouiyyine University in Fez- Morocco in 1207 A.J.C (603 of Islamic Calendar)

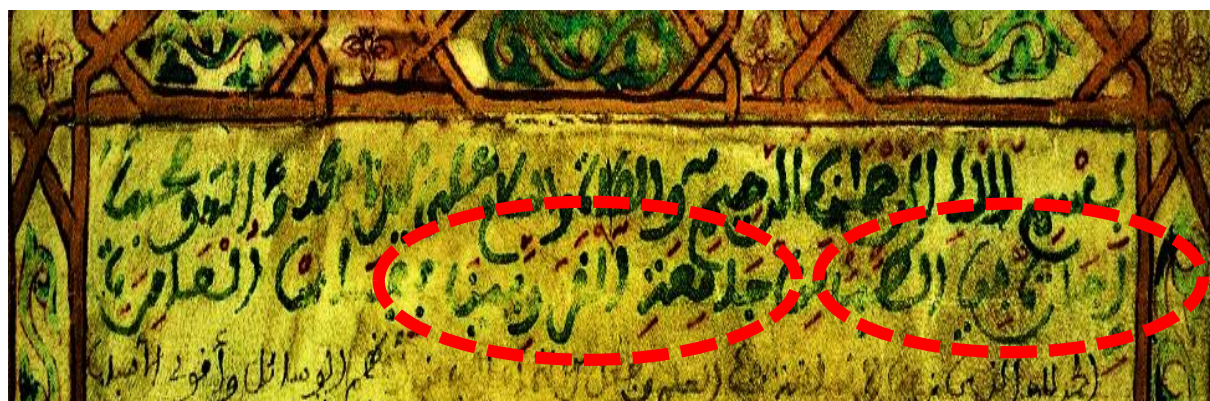


Many researchers were particularly interested in this field. In the 1930s, Alfred Guillaume, Professor of Arabic, cited the “**Ijazah**” as a precursor to the “**licentia docendi**”, supporting the Islamic origin of the “University Degree” [10]. With Syed Farid al-Attas (Professor of Middle Eastern Studies in the National University of Singapore-) and Devin J. Stewart (Emory University), they all agreed that there is a similarity between the “ijazah” and the university degree [11].

In 1989, George Makdisi, the professor of oriental and medieval culture, advanced the hypothesis that ijazat attadris (which corresponds to “license to teach” in Arabic) was a sort of qualification or doctorate degree

delivered in the educational medieval Islamic system (“madrasahs” or schools) [11, 12]. He stated that it was developed during the 9th century and was at the origin of the “licentia docendi” (European medieval doctorate). [12-14]

In the attached document, it is mentioned that the Degree of Ijaza has been awarded to the “Tabib” (Arabic equivalent of Doctor) Abdallah BenSaleh Al Koutami in 1207 A.J.C (603 in lunar calendar) in the Quaraouiyyine University in Fez- Morocco (**Figure 2**), which is the oldest existing, and “continually operating” university in the world according to UNESCO and Guinness World Records [15, 16].



**Figure 2:** At the head of the certificate, it's mentioned: MD degree “**IJAZAH**” & “Al Quaraouiyyine” is literally qualified as a University.

After praise of Allah and the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), an introduction was dedicated to the great value of medicine and medical sciences in Islam and its progress from cupping therapy (hijama) to all the research and works authored by scientists (“Ulama”) in all aspects of medicines, plant and herbal sciences. The Ijazah reports some of the criteria considered to attribute this medical degree to the candidate. It includes not only scientific expertise but also relational and

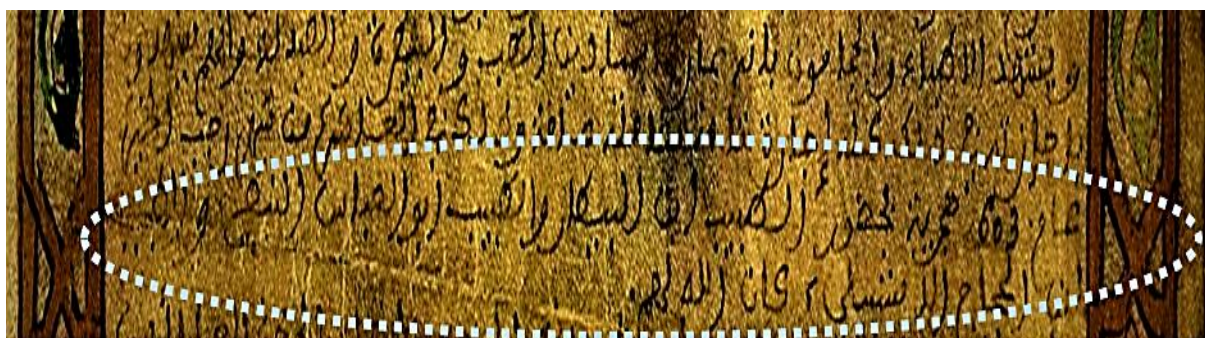
religious considerations. It is mentioned that Dr Abdallah Ibn Saleh Al Koutami has requested an authorization from the qualified authorities in the Idrissi city of Fez. His expertise and knowledge in medicine, veterinary and pharmacy has been recognized by referred doctors. He was an honest man with good reputation and no history of criminality or disloyalty, and he was so religious that he was regular in 5 prayers and benevolence (**Figure 3**).



**Figure 3:** Details of criteria for attribution of the degree to Dr Al koutami

The Ijazah “MD” has been delivered in the presence of prestigious Medical Doctors: Abul Abbas Annabati, Abu Mohammed Ibn Al Baytar and Al Ichbili Ibn Al Hajjaj along with

the judge “Qadi” of the Moroccan city of Fez: Mohammed Ibn Abdullah Taher and two “Adouls” as witnesses: Abdullah Ben Ali Cherradi and Sulaimane Ben Idriss (**Figure 4**).



**Figure 4:** Name of famous and eminent Doctors present for “IJAZAH” award and year of attribution

It was resolved that the candidate expertise allows the attribution of “Doctor in Medicine” degree to him. Those elements confirm the fact that there was an initiative of making this event as official and institutional as possible.

In conclusion, to our knowledge and on the basis of the attached document, this is the oldest available and known institutional certificate delivered for medical practice in the world. Dr

El Koutami seems to be the first issued with an official and institutional medical degree as it happens in our present time worldwide in modern medical Schools; the certificate has been delivered from the oldest university of Al Quaraouiyyine founded in 859 and still in activity today. This confirms what has already been stated by George Makdisi, Alfred Guillaume and all the authors cited before.

**Conflict of Interest:** none.



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