

Summary of the CASIS Saturday Night Lecture by Prof. Dr. Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas on 9th June 2012

The Origins of Civilizations

Prepared by Khalina Khalili

June 9, 2012 was not an average Saturday night. After a decade-long hiatus, Tan Sri Professor Dr. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas continues his life-long mission of spreading true knowledge to the masses at the Dewan Jumuah of the University Technology of Malaysia (UTM) that night. As part of UTM's Centre for Advanced Studies in Islam, Science and Technology (CASIS)'s intellectual contribution to the university, the Saturday Night Lecture Series feature discourses by Tan Sri Al-Attas every fortnight, with cross-generational audience in attendance. The Vice-Chancellor of UTM, Datuk Ir. Dr. Zaini Ujang and Datuk Dr. Mohd. Ghazali b. Mohd Nor from the Board of Trustees of Yayasan Iqra along with other notable academicians, students and members of the public are fortunate to be part of this ongoing discourse.

The Origin of Civilizations

Tan Sri Al-Attas began his Saturday Night Lecture series probing the origin of civilizations. He stressed the fundamental role of religion in the establishment of civilization. Fittingly, the audience were transported back in time, at least in their intellectual imagination, to sample a kind of snapshots in history about the great flood of Gilgamesh which in all likelihood, is the same epic as that of the Prophet Nuh. Tan Sri Al-Attas boldly challenged contemporary scientists' assumptions about pre-modern man, lumping them all and referring to them as "homo" when in fact, they lacked key attributes of the thinking human - the homo sapiens. The human intellect gave rise to a systemic order - what we call "law" and consequentially forming "madāni" or cities that are run efficiently, the highlight of a

civilization.. This Arabic term originated from the word “dīn” meaning religion, signifying the important role that religion plays in a civilization.