

"respectable" local residents sitting amongst the visitors.

The seating arrangement reflected the peasant's view of how his universe was ordered, and the way in which he perceived his place within his group. Hence, the seating arrangement was continuously reassessed. As a newcomer arrived, each of those seated had to judge whether the newcomer was more respected than him. If he thought so, he vacated his position and insisted that the other should take it. To a certain extent, respect was shown to the elderly regardless of their social status.

This hierarchical ordering was reflected not only in the seating arrangement, but also in the manner in which visitors were received. Undistinguished visitors, such as peddlers, came into the madafah and left with little attention given to them, except by those seated next to them. The entrance of a distinguished person, such as the village sheikh or one of his honourable guests, was accompanied by many rituals. The sheikh's behaviour and movements indicated the status of the visitor. Visitors of higher rank than the village sheikh were received by the sheikh and his council of elders, who would go out to the saha to receive the guest. If the visitor was of equal status, then the sheikh would receive him at the door of the madafah. When the visitors were of unequal status, the sheikh would remain seated and shake hands with the visitors while sitting. Hence the distance between the sheikh's seating place and the reception point reflected the rank of the visitor. As distinguished visitors came in, everyone stood up to show his respect for the newcomer. The men would sit down only after the sheikh and his visitors were seated. A load of mattresses, pillows and cushions would also be brought in for the guests. The number and quality of mattresses and cushions brought in also reflected the status of the visitor. While important guests were flooded with cushions, peddlers and poor guests sat on strawmats like the rest. Complete silence usually prevailed while the sheikh or his visitor talked, addressing those present. Once the sheikh and his visitor started talking to one another, the rest of the group could whisper amongst themselves.

The way in which coffee and food was offered followed the same