

hear and now

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The latest scoop on coffee

Let me extol the virtues of trimethylxypurin — that wondrous awakener of humankind! Labeled "the milk of thinkers and chess players," often blamed for the foment of revolutions, counteragent to the stupefying grape-squeezings of Bacchus and faithful companion to the book-weary student, this odorless and faintly bitter drug is one of nature's finest miracles. Caffeine is its name, the coffee bean most worthy of its vessels and black as the Black Stone of the Ka'ba its color. Dubbed "the wine of Islam," that steaming mug of liquid stimulant seated nest to your toast and eggs each morning has a far reaching history — one that ties together Mohammed, Louis XIV and the French Revolution as well as most of the great literary figures of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But unless you're drinking the "real" stuff — as opposed to the freeze-dried conveniently bastardized and tasteless brew made popular on the home front — you're probably wondering why all the fuss? Why the high prices, why the sacred art of coffee-tasting, why the drastically altered course of Western history? Please turn to Page 4B for at least a partial explanation.