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Nicolaes Witsen and Shipbuilding in the Dutch Golden Age (Ed Rachal Foundation Nautical Archaeology Series)

A. J. Hoving

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In 1671, Dutch diplomat and scientist Nicolaes Witsen published a book that served, among other things, as an encyclopedia for the “shell-first” method of ship construction. In the centuries since, Witsen’s rather convoluted text has also become a valuable source for insights into historical shipbuilding methods and philosophies during the “Golden Age” of Dutch maritime trade. However, as André Wegener Sleeswyk’s foreword notes, Witsen’s work is difficult to access not only for its seventeenth-century Dutch language but also for the vagaries of its author’s presentation.

Fortunately for scholars and students of nautical archaeology and shipbuilding, this important but chaotic work has now been reorganized and elucidated by A. J. Hoving and translated into English by Alan Lemmers. In *Nicolaes Witsen and Shipbuilding in the Dutch Golden Age*, Hoving, master model builder for the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, sorts out the steps in Witsen’s method for building a seventeenth-century *pinas* by following them and building a model of the vessel. Experimenting with techniques and materials, conducting research in other publications of the time, and rewriting as needed to clarify and correct some vital omissions in the sequence, Hoving makes Witsen’s work easier to use and understand.

Nicolaes Witsen and Shipbuilding in the Dutch Golden Age is an indispensable guide to Witsen’s work and the world of his topic: the almost forgotten basics of a craftsmanship that has been credited with the flourishing of the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century.

To view a sample of Ab Hoving’s ship model drawings, please visit:
http://nautarch.tamu.edu/shiplab/AbHoving.htm

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