

## ETYMOLOGY OF RISK: Classical Greek origin – Nautical Expression – Metaphor for “difficulty to avoid in the sea”

The term risk may be traced back to classical Greek ρίζα, meaning root, later used in Latin for cliff. The term is used in Homer's Rhapsody M of Odyssey "Sirens, Scylla, Charybdee and the bulls of Helios (Sun)" Odysseus tried to save himself from Charybdee at the cliffs of Scylla, where his ship was destroyed by heavy seas generated by Zeus as a punishment for his crew killing before the bulls of Helios (the god of the sun), by grasping the roots of a wild fig tree. In the classical text there is an antique painting of Odysseus riding a turtle (that happened to be on the cliffs) and the fig tree on the right.

στ. 485      **μετά κρεμάσπηκα στην αγριοσυκιά:** πάνω από το στόμιο της Χάρυβδης φύτρωνε μια μεγάλη αγριοσυκιά· απ' αυτήν αρπάχτηκε ο Οδυσσέας και σώθηκε.



**Εικ. 96** Ο Οδυσσέας, σύμφωνα με την ομηρική εκδοχή, θα μείνει για ώρες γαντζωμένος από τα κλαριά μιας αγριοσυκιάς και θα σωθεί πάνω στα συντρίμια του караβιού του που θα ξεβράσει η Χάρυβδη. Στην παράσταση αυτή διακρίνονται δεξιά τα κλαδιά της αγριοσυκιάς, όμως ο Οδυσσέας εμφανίζεται να απομακρύνεται πάνω σε μια θαλάσσια χελώνα.

[Από μελανόμορφο σκύφο (αρχές του 5ου αι. π.Χ.), Παλέρμιο, Εθνικό Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο]

Latin and vulgar latin (*resicum, risicum, riscus* : *cliff, récif, Felsklippe*, is the direct formal origin for italian (*risico, risco, rischio*), spanish *riesgo* and french *risque*. English borrowed it from spanish, german from italian and both were confirmed by the French *risque* of the 18th century. Dictionaries confirm that the Latin word comes from a Greek navigation term *rhizikon, rhiza* which meant "root, stone, cut of the firm land" and was a metaphor for "difficulty to avoid in the sea". It might be of a certain interest that these lexical borrowings happened in the end of the middle-ages, when mentalities woke up and people dared to discover the world. So that from the 16<sup>th</sup> century on, the term got a benefit meaning, for example in middle-high-German *Rysigo 1507* a technical term for business, with the meaning "to dare, to undertake, enterprise, hope for economic success".

Rolf Skjong, DNV, February 25<sup>th</sup> 2005.