

# Boszorkány-sziget of Szeged (“Island of witches”)

Category: natural environment – repository of values in Szeged

Motto: „A memory of a black era”

## Story of Boszorkány-sziget

**Did you think, witches exist only in the fairy tales? You are wrong. Witches really lived far back in the Middle Ages; also here, in Szeged, not only far away and in fairy tales. There is a place which preserves their memories. Where? Keep reading and you can know where you should look for them.**

### Did you know?

1. In Szeged, there is a street named after the island (Boszorkány-sziget street).
2. According to the folk belief, **witch** is a woman (later also man) who has magical, demonic skills and she brings bad, illness and devastation.
3. According to some people, witches exist because of the fear of the unknown.
4. According to the folk belief, on 1<sup>st</sup> May, *Witches' Sabbath*, witches meet with the devils.
5. According to another belief, at Christmas, you can see witches from a “Luca chair” during the midnight mass.
6. Maria Theresa prohibited the witchcraft trials in the whole Monarchy in 1755, in this way, she ended the battles of his father against pagans, Kuruc people and the Turkish Empire.
7. The oldest known Hungarian witchcraft trial was against Klára Botzi in Cluj Napoca in 1565.
8. The Hungarian word “boszorkány” has Turkish origin.
9. Spells, wands, magic, brooms and black cats are also parts of witchcraft.



## The “island”

### Location

Boszorkány-sziget is situated near the centre of Szeged, on the right bank of River Tisza. It is 50-200 m wide and 2 km long. Boszorkány-sziget isn't an island but a peninsula.

**GPS coordinates:** N: 46.23284°, E: 20.14439°

### Origin of its name

Its name comes from one of the darkest eras of the Hungarian history. The half of the 124 Hungarian witchcraft trials were held in Szeged in the Middle Ages. All trials ended with execution.

### Who is a witch?

Anyone could be a witch who was said to be a witch. A charlatan, a sorcerer, a midwife, a healer...

Witchcraft charges were verified by several inquiries. In the framework of the inquiries, there were water-ordeal and balance-ordeal. Who was “too light”, he/she was judged. Other procedure was stabbing with long needles. According to the belief, the bodies of witches were insensible and didn't bleed from those points, where the marks of the devil were.

Moreover, those people could be accused of witchcraft whose underarms were smooth or who had a suspicious birthmark because this referred to inhuman nature.

## Witches of Szeged

### About Szeged

The reasons of the witchcraft trials in the 17<sup>th</sup> century were droughts, floods and the starvation of the earlier years. In the beginning of the 1700s, the local people in Szeged became restless. In Szeged, which was liberated from the Turkish occupation of Hungary in 1686, life was really hard. The number of tramps and beggars were increased. Incidents were common between the old inhabitants and the Serbian, Croatian and German people who settled down in Szeged in that time. The local people in Szeged imputed these harms to the witches. The most famous witch of Szeged was the 82 years old Dániel Rózsa, who was the chief justice and the most wealthy citizen of Szeged.

The crime of Rózsa was the following: *He and his accomplices sold the precipitation for 7 years to the Turkish Empire. According to the charge, he put rain in a bag and hid it under his barrels.*

In July 1728, there were more executions in Szeged by burning on stake. Rózsa and his accomplices were also burnt that time. The convicts were tortured and the women were burnt beheaded.

### References about witchcraft trials of Szeged

[http://www.rubicon.hu/magyar/oldal/a\\_szegedi\\_nagy\\_boszorkanyper\\_1728/](http://www.rubicon.hu/magyar/oldal/a_szegedi_nagy_boszorkanyper_1728/)

<http://www.bibl.u-szeged.hu/reizner/01/1338.htm>

<http://boszorkanyper.atw.hu/>

## Natural values of the Boszorkány-sziget of Szeged

There are 78 protected and specially protected living creatures on the island. On hot summer days, on the trunks of willow woods, you can see European musk beetles and at sunset special capricorn beetles (*A. scabricorne*). In the bushy woods, there are several songbirds, in the hollow trees, sparrow owls and tawny owls live.

## Since when has Boszorkány-sziget called as Boszorkány-sziget?

Since 1840, there have been several variations of naming the peninsula of Szeged. Before the great flood (1879), it was named as "Boszorkányok szigete", "Szél utca" or "Boszorkányporond". When the bridges were built up and River Tisza was controlled, the two brooks (Fok and Kis-Tisza) - which surrounded Boszorkány-sziget - were disappeared so instead of an island, it became a peninsula. According to the folk belief, the accused people of the witchcraft trials in 1728 were burnt there.

## Fairy tales

### In the fairy tales

For the first time, everyone meets witches in the fairy tales during their childhood. Everybody remembers Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, The Wizard of Oz or the classic witch fairy tales of Grimm brothers (Hansel and Gretel). A real witch has a broom with - which she flies - and an iron nose. Witches are frequent players of the folk-tales or other fairy tales. Their popularity is constant in the world of fairy tales and motion-picture industry. Nowadays, several animated film and other films for children and adults and books are inspired by them. (Harry Potter, Bibi Blocksberg; Sabrina, the Teenage Witch, Charmed...)

## Links

References:

Reizner János: Szeged története 1899-1901

Szeged története 2. kötet. Szeged, 1985

Péter László: Szeged utcanévei. Szeged, 1974

<http://www.szegedvaros.hu/ertektar/7754-szegedi-boszorkany-sziget.html>

Gaskó Béla: Csongrád megye természetes és természetközeli élőhelyeinek védelméről I. Studia Naturalia 4. Szeged, 2008

