

Walls, markets and guilds

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

Between 1478 and 1528 the town built a new ring of walls, in several stages, with six round towers and three gate towers.¹ The walls enlarged the town considerably and enclosed space for later growth. They also expressed the self-confidence of a town that had secured its place in the Confederation and wished to demonstrate it. Most of the walls were dismantled in the nineteenth century. The demolition began in 1835 and reached the Ägeritor, one of the gates, which was removed in 1879.² Several towers survive and give the old town its character.

The town was the market centre of the region. It held weekly markets, annual fairs and an autumn fair. It maintained strict monopolies on the grain trade and on the sale of merchandise within its territory.³ These monopolies were typical of the pre-modern town economy. They protected the burghers against competition from the countryside and secured the town's revenues. They also made the town a gatekeeper between the rural producers and the wider markets of Zurich, Lucerne and Italy. The oldest guilds of the town date back to around 1400.⁴ Unlike in Zurich or Basel, the guilds of Zug never acquired a dominant political role. The government remained in the hands of a small number of families who owed their position to landholding, to office and, above all, to foreign military service. Craftsmanship nonetheless reached a high level in certain fields. The Bossard family of organ builders, the goldsmiths and the glass painters of Zug achieved a reputation beyond the region.⁵ A printing press was introduced in the town in 1670.⁶ By the end of the eighteenth century, the town had more than 2,000 inhabitants.⁷

1 Notes

1. HLS, "Zug (Gemeinde)": construction of the new ring walls in stages from 1478 to 1528, with six round towers and three gate towers. ↩

Walls, markets and guilds

2. HLS, "Zug (Gemeinde)": defortification began in 1835; city walls dismantled in 1879, including the Ägeritor. ↩
3. HLS, "Zug (Kanton)", section on trade: Zug as regional market hub with weekly markets, annual fairs and an autumn fair; strict monopolies of the town on the grain trade and the sale of merchandise. ↩
4. HLS, "Zug (Kanton)": the oldest guilds date back to around 1400. ↩
5. HLS, "Zug (Kanton)": notable artisans, including the Bossard family of organ builders, goldsmiths and glass painters, achieved regional significance. ↩
6. HLS, "Zug (Gemeinde)": introduction of the printing press in 1670. ↩
7. HLS, "Zug (Gemeinde)": population of more than 2,000 in the late eighteenth century; 2,809 in 1817, one fifth of the canton. ↩

For general information only. This article does not constitute legal or tax advice, does not replace advice on an individual case and creates no lawyer-client relationship. It reflects the legal position as of September 2026.

Online version: helveticaregister.com/zug-walls-markets-and-guilds