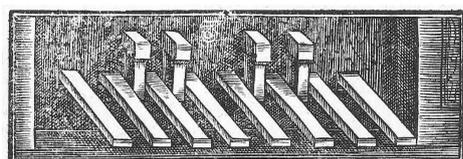


[Back to Index](#)  
[to David Rumsey's home page](#)  
[to David Rumsey's mediæval page](#)

**PEDAL** [pedalboard] -

keyboard placed on the floor under the manuals and organist, played with the feet.

Some sources, such as Netherlands builder, Albert van Os, say pedals were possibly invented c1120 since the Utrecht Nikolaïkerk organ of that date had provision for pedals on a chest which survived and was moved by van Os to Middelburg Korkerk in the 18<sup>th</sup>c. Praetorius, in 1618, however, gives c1220 for the first organ pedals. R. Schlechte in *Geschichte der Kirchen Music*, 1871 (p103) quotes a 1319-50 Flemish chronicle ascribing mention or invention of pedals to



Halberstadt (after Praetorius)

Ludwig van Vaelbeke of Brabant. c1370 the Norrlanda organ was endowed with pedals, a seemingly standard practice in such organs by then. Another very early mention comes from nearby Poland in 1381. In a restoration of the Beeskow organ near Frankfurt, old pedal pipes were found dated 1438 (Abdy Williams). It is sometimes also claimed that a German named Bernhard, an organist in Venice, introduced them in 1470, but in the light of so many earlier claims, and since there were apparently



Norrlanda (Ostheim reconstruction)

pedals at Halberstadt 1361/1495, he possibly only disseminated their use or made some improvements.

The earliest indication of pedals in the performance of organ music is the Ileborgh Tablature of 1448, followed closely by the Buxheimer Orgelbuch of c1455. Since early references to pedals are almost exclusively from Germany, it seems that they were probably of German origin or were first adapted and fully exploited there. By early 16<sup>th</sup>c Schlick could note that



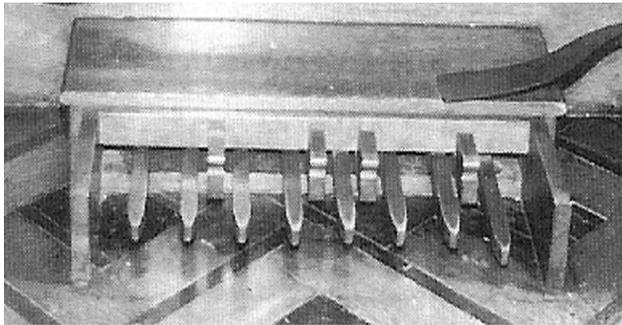
Al leggìo

“Playing only on the manuals has been standard practice outside the German countries hitherto, but now they are studying the pedals as well, and not without reason, for with the hands alone it is impossible to play every piece correctly and with the parts in proper relation” (Spiegel der Orgelmacher und Organisten, 1512).

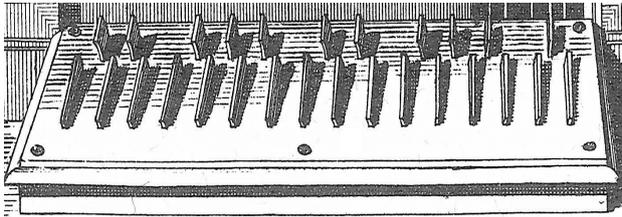
The different national schools developing out of Blockwerk traditions subsequently designed and used pedals quite differently. In Italy, Netherlands and South Germany/Austria in particular they were often initially simply "pull-downs" which either played the notes on the main manual but had no independent ranks or actually played the lowest pipes of a manual register instead of the manuals themselves. In Italy pedals compass was usually one octave, playing bass notes only and mounted *al leggìo*. In Spain and Portugal pedals had a similar function with small buttons (*tacones*) rather than



Tacones



British (Elliot 1813)



French classical

slats of wood to play, often barely protruding from the lower casework. In England there were no pedals until 18<sup>th</sup>c (and these were introduced with vitriolic resistance in some quarters - e.g. G. T. Smart.) In France before early 19<sup>th</sup>c, pedals were small slats with both a bass and cantus firmus (tenor) function. In Germany pedals came to be consistently around 2 octaves in compass by 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup>cs, played both bass and cantus firmus functions with much scope for variety of range and registration, including playing middle or upper parts as well as bass lines. Short octave was known in *ps* as well as manuals at this time, although not always consistently-endowed between manuals and pedals even in the same organ.

In southern Europe, as e.g. at Wien, Michaelerkirche 1714 and Klosterneuburg, Augustinerchorherrenstift 1550/1636 with short octave in the bass, a fully chromatic upper octave is provided with C<sup>#</sup> & D<sup>#</sup>:

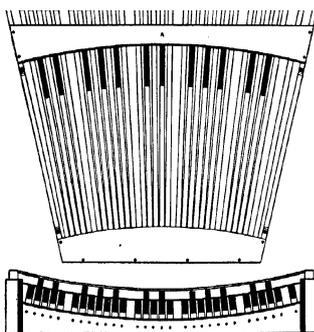
D E B<sup>b</sup> C<sup>#</sup> D<sup>#</sup> F<sup>#</sup> G<sup>#</sup> B<sup>b</sup>  
 \* C F G A B<sup>b</sup> C D E F G A B<sup>b</sup>  
 (\* Klosterneuburg = blank key.)

In such schemes a return pedal is frequently encountered e.g. at Venezia, S Martino Vescovo 1737 and Wien, Michaelerkirche. This was also a familiar practice with the introduction of pedals in England early 19<sup>th</sup>c.

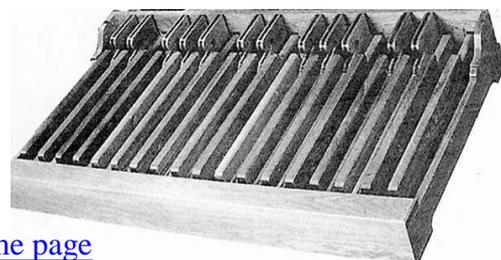


German 19<sup>th</sup>c double pedalboard  
(Stuttgart, Stiftskirche)

By late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>c, still with considerable variety of compass and design (flat and straight, concave and radiating &c.), a degree of standardization had begun to take place around the world. Nevertheless this era experimented with the pedals - sometimes two pedalboards were provided by 19<sup>th</sup>c builders such as Schulze in Paulinzelle, Reubke in Hausneindorf, or in Italy at Pisa, Chiesa Conventuale dei Cavalieri di San Stefano 1737 and Gavinana, S. Maria Assunta 1838/1852. Several, somewhat variant, standards are now set internationally (AGO, Royal College of Organists and German among others) but differences exist, especially when emulations or restorations of historic organs are involved



Modern British/American



Modern European

[Back to Index](#)  
[to David Rumsey's home page](#)  
[to David Rumsey's mediæval page](#)