

The Modernized Semi-Slav

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Key to Symbols

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
N	novelty
⊙	lead in development
⊙	zugzwang
=	equality
∞	unclear position
∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material
±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+−	White has a decisive advantage
−+	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
↔	with counterplay
Δ	with the idea of
⊃	better is
≤	worse is
+	check
#	mate

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Preface

I rarely using the name Semi Slav to describe this opening, I prefer to call it the Meran due to the origin of the line. In my opinion, the best way for Black to play is via ...e6 move orders. For instance, 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗f3 d5 4.♗c3 c6 is a really good move order to reach this system and it is a good repertoire as well. Many players, including myself, used to use the Slav move order 1.d4 d5 .2.c4 c6 3.♗f3 ♘f6 4.♗c3 e6. In my opinion the Meran has little to do with the dynamics of Slav positions.

The Meran is a very sharp opening which resembles the open Sicilian dynamics, but it also has a level of solidity due to having a central pawn on d5. In this book I did not analyze the Botvinnik Variation as I have previously published various ideas in several magazines on that system. In this volume I decided to give a modern approach to the 5.♙g5 move order.

Due to some interesting ideas that White players have recently been using you will find a section devoted to some improvements in the Catalan.

Throughout chess history top players have employed the Meran in their repertoires. In this century alone former World Champions Kramnik and Anand have both used the Meran.

Milos Pavlovic, 2024.

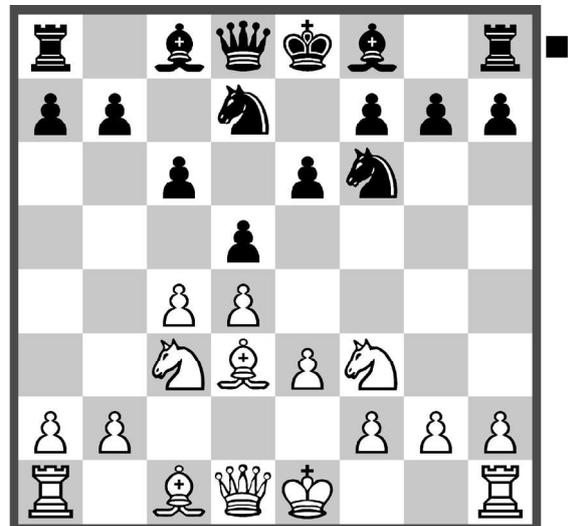
Part I

5.e3 – Meran & Anti-Meran



6. ♖d3 - Meran

1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. ♘c3 c6
4. e3 ♘f6 5. ♗f3 ♘bd7 6. ♖d3



Chapter Guide

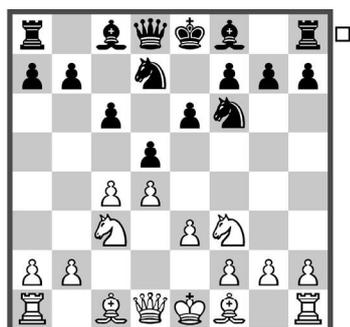
Chapter 1 – 6. ♖d3 – Meran

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♗c3 c6 4.e3 ♗f6 5.♗f3 ♗bd7 6.♖d3 dxc4 7.♖xc4 b5

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a) 8. ♖b3

1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. ♘c3 c6 4. e3 ♘f6 5.
 ♗f3 ♗bd7



Position after: 5... ♗bd7

We are entering the main line of the Meran or Semi-Slav as it is also called. It is a highly popular and reliable system that has been popular for decades. The positions are like the open Sicilian in that they are sharp and complex. You may wonder how that can be as the actual positions are completely different. The key is that in both defenses Black is seeking harmonious piece play and many times abandons the safety of his king in exchange for rapid counterplay! Further, we have a way to exchange our d5 pawn for the c4 pawn at some point allowing us to attack the center. This means we will have sharp play!

6. ♖d3

This is White's main idea. While Black can exchange on c4 with gain of tempo White counts on the fact that his

development is still faster, and he will have better play. The less popular 6. ♖c2 system will be examined later.

6... dxc4 7. ♖xc4 b5

That a main point here is that Black is ready to play ... ♖b7 with ...c5 coming to start creating pressure against the center.

8. ♖b3

Position after: 8. ♖b3

The other popular move is 8. ♖e2 which we will look at later.

8... b4

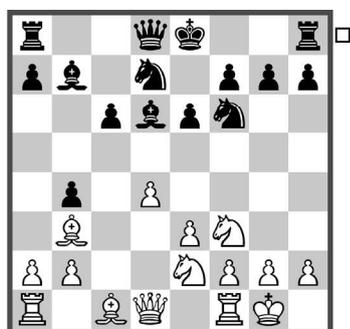
Best in my opinion.

9. ♘e2

From my own practice this is the critical move although another move is also possible.

9. $\text{N}a4$ $\text{B}b7$ 10. $\text{Q}d2$ $\text{Q}e7$ 11. $\text{R}c1$ 0-0 12. 0-0 a5 13. $\text{W}e2$ $\text{W}b8$ 14. e4 c5 15. e5 $\text{N}d5$ 16. dxc5 $\text{R}c8$ 17. $\text{Q}e3$ $\text{N}xe3$ 18. $\text{W}xe3$ $\text{W}a7$ 19. $\text{N}b6$ $\text{N}xb6$ 20. cxb6 $\text{W}a6$ Black has the preferable chances. ½-½ (38) Nikolic, P (2647) – Pavlovic, M (2593) Celje 2003.

9... $\text{Q}b7$ 10. 0-0 $\text{Q}d6$



Position after: 10... $\text{Q}d6$

White has two main ideas here.

11. $\text{N}f4$

11. $\text{N}g3$ c5 12. d5 [12. e4 cxd4 13. $\text{W}xd4$ $\text{Q}c5$ 14. $\text{W}d3$ $\text{W}b6$ 15. $\text{Q}f4$ 0-0 Black is fine.] 12... $\text{Q}xg3!$? 13. dxe6 $\text{Q}c7$



Position after: 13... $\text{Q}c7$

14. exd7+ [14. exf7+ $\text{Q}e7$ 15. e4 $\text{N}e5$ 16. $\text{Q}e3$ $\text{W}xd1$ This is not enough for White.] 14... $\text{W}xd7$ 15. $\text{Q}a4$ $\text{Q}c6$ 16. $\text{Q}xc6$ $\text{W}xc6$ 17. a3 0-0 18. axb4 cxb4 19. b3 $\text{N}e4$ 20. $\text{Q}b2$ the position is balanced.

11... 0-0 12. $\text{N}g5$

This is one of White's main ideas. Just like in the Sicilian White is ready to sacrifice on e6 or f7.

12... $\text{Q}xf4$

A good choice, and the safest.

13. exf4 c5



Position after: 13... c5

14. $\text{Q}e3$

White is counting on his bishop pair, and he has no weaknesses. Black is also very solid, and his pieces are in the proper places.

14. a3 $\text{W}c7$ 15. dxc5 $\text{N}xc5$ 16. $\text{Q}c4$ h6 17. $\text{N}f3$ $\text{R}fd8$ 18. $\text{W}e2$ $\text{N}cd7$ 19. $\text{N}e5$

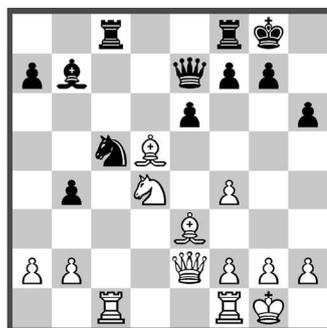
♗xe5 20. fxe5 ♖d7 21. ♕f4 ♗b6
22. ♕d3 ♚c6 Black is ok. ½-½
(49) Trebreh33, S – Stockfish 64 I
nternet (blitz) 2017.

14... ♚e7 15. ♖c1

A) 15. ♚e2 h6 16. ♗f3 ♖d5 17. ♕xd5
♕xd5 18. dxc5 ♗xc5 This is yet another
equal position. ½-½ (126) Stockfish 1.7.1
– Stockfish 1.9.1 Internet 2010.

B) 15. ♖e1 h6 16. ♗f3 ♖ac8 17. ♖c1
♖fd8 18. ♚e2 cxd4 19. ♗xd4 ♗d5
with an equal game.

15... h6 16. ♗f3 ♖ac8 17. ♚e2 cxd4
18. ♗xd4 ♗c5 19. ♕c4 ♗d5 20. ♕xd5



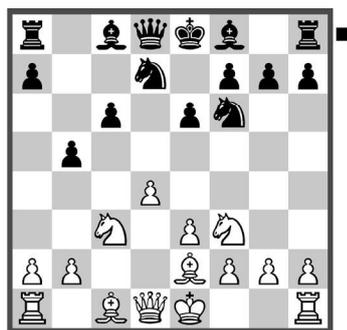
Position after: 20. ♕xd5

20... ♕xd5

With solid play for both sides. ½-½ (40)
Zunkovic, S – Farias, S corr. 2015.

b) 8. ♕e2

1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. ♗c3 c6 4. e3 ♗f6 5.
♗f3 ♗bd7 6. ♕d3 dxc4 7. ♕xc4 b5 8.
♕e2



Position after: 8. ♕e2

The positional response. White is not

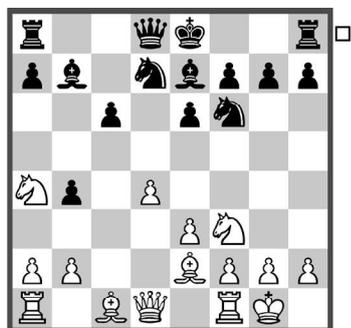
looking for a quick e4, but Black cannot
relax as there are some interesting
ideas here.

8... b4

I am quite fond of this early queenside
play which stops White's early e4 ex-
pansion while introducing some compli-
cations. Now White must try to stop
Black's ...c5.

9. ♗a4 ♕b7 10. 0-0 ♕e7

(see diagram next page)



Position after: 10... ♗e7

11. a3

This is White's main option and the most challenging.

A) 11. ♖c2 0-0 12. ♜d1 c5 basically it is better for White to include a3 if he is going for this plan. 13. dxc5 ♖c7 14. ♗d2 a5 15. ♜ac1 ♜fc8 16. ♗d4 ♗xc5 17. ♗xc5 ♖xc5 18. ♖xc5 ♗xc5 Black is fine. 1-0 (68) Oosterom, E – Rill, G Netherlands 1994.

B) 11. b3 0-0 12. ♗b2



Position after: 12. ♗b2

A solid approach with harmonious development but it is not very ambitious. 12... c5 [12... ♜c8 13. ♜c1 c5 14. dxc5 ♗xc5 15. ♗xc5 ♗xc5 16. ♖xd8 ♜fxd8

17. ♜fd1 ♗e4 18. ♔f1 a5 19. ♜xd8+ ♜xd8= 1-0 (36) Artemiev, V (2704) – Giri, A (2780) chess24.com INT 2021.] 13. ♗xc5 ♗xc5 14. dxc5 ♗xc5 15. ♗e5 ♖e7 16. ♗f3 so far both sides have played logically. 16... ♜fd8 17. ♖e2



Position after: 17. ♖e2

So far neither side has lost their balance in the position. 17... ♗d5 [17... ♗e4 18. ♜fd1 ♜ac8 19. ♜ac1 f6 20. ♗c4 ♜xd1+ 21. ♖xd1 ♜d8 with equal chances. ½-½ (42) Gull 3.0 – Komodo 9.2 12CPU Internet (blitz) 2015.] 18. ♜ac1 f6 19. ♗c4 a5 20. ♖c2 ♜ac8 this is also reasonable play from Black. ½ – ½ (20) Frias Pablaza, V (2440) – Vera Gonzalez Quevedo, R (2420) Havana 1983.

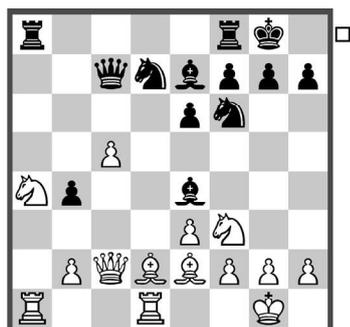
C) 11. ♗d2 0-0 12. ♜c1 a5



Position after: 12... a5

13. ♘e1 [13. ♖b3 c5! 14. dxc5 ♙d5 15. ♙c4 ♘xc5 16. ♘xc5 ♙xf3 17. ♘xe6 ♖xd2 18. ♘xf8 a4 19. ♖d3 ♖xd3 20. ♙xd3 ♙d5 21. ♘xh7 ♘xh7 22. ♙c4 ♙xc4 23. ♖xc4 a3 Black is fine here, the tactics are working for him.] 13... c5 14. dxc5 ♖c8 15. ♘d3 ♘e4 16. ♙f3 ♘df6 Black is very active. 0-1 (32) Volkov, S (2582) – Lastin, A (2510) Minsk 2000.

11... a5 12. ♖c2 0-0 13. ♖d1 c5 14. dxc5 ♖c7 15. axb4 axb4 16. ♙d2 ♙e4

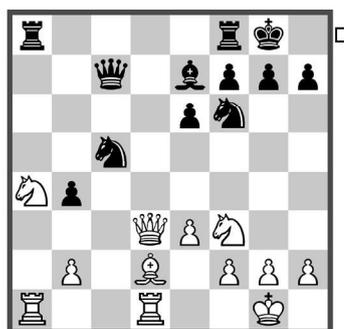


Position after: 16... ♙e4

17. ♙d3

17. ♖c4 ♙c6 18. ♖xb4 ♖fb8 19. ♖h4 e5 20. b3 ♖xb3 21. ♖c4 ♖bb8 22. ♙e1 h6 23. h3 ♙f8 with balanced play, the ♘a4 is weak. ½-½ (82) Houdini 6.0 – Komodo 11.3 Internet 2018.

17... ♙xd3 18. ♖xd3 ♘xc5



Position after: 18... ♘xc5

19. ♘xc5

19. ♖c4 has been mentioned in some books as a good option. It is a solid move but not more. 19... ♖fc8 20. ♘xc5 ♖xc5 21. ♖xc5 ♙xc5 22. ♘e5 ♙d6 23. ♖xa8 ♖xa8 24. ♘d3 b3 25. f3 ♘d7 26. ♙f2 f6 = ½-½ (53) Centaur – Stockfish 2016 64 Internet (rapid).

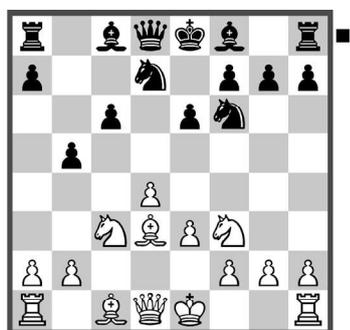
19... ♖xc5 20. ♖ac1 ♖b6 21. ♖c4 ♖fd8 22. ♖b3 ♖b7 23. ♖dc1 ♖ac8 24. h3 h6

Black has a solid position. ½-½ (31) Istomin, A – Johansson, C corr. 2011.

c) 8. ♙d3 ♙b7 9.a3 ♙d6 10.0-0 0-0 11.--

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♘f3 d5 4. ♘c3 c6 5. e3 ♘bd7 6. ♙d3 dxc4 7. ♙xc4 b5 8. ♙d3

This is the main response when White's plan is a quick e4.



Position after: 8. Qd3

8... Qb7

This has long been established as the best move order for Black and I will elaborate on that later. Normally Black aims for a quick ...b4 but in the last decade Black has found other moves which we will examine.

9. a3

Position after: 9. a3

This is a very important line, and we will see that it transposes into a specific variation of the 6. ♖c2 system which we will analyze separately. In the system we are currently reviewing we will see that the 6. ♘d3 and 6. ♖c2 lines actually

merge. I decided to analyze this line here as it is probably the best way for Black to investigate the specifics of the 6. ♖c2 lines before looking at the 6. ♘d3 ideas.

9... ♘d6

This is very popular and preferred to the older 9...b4. At some point the white queen will land on c2 although it is not forced it is the most desirable square for her majesty.

An older idea that was played in the past starts with 9...b4. However, after 10. ♘e4 ♘xe4 11. ♘xe4 bxa3 12. 0-0 ♘d6 now White has three possible options that create some problems for Black: 13. ♘d2; 13.b3; or 13.b4.

10. 0-0 0-0

Position after: 10... 0-0

We have reached the main branching off point. White has several ideas here including ♖c2 which is the main option.

11. ♖d2**A) 11. e4 e5**

A1) 12. ♖g5 exd4 13. ♗xd4 ♖c7 14. ♜c1? ♙xh2+ 15. ♚h1 ♙f4 Black is better. 0-1 (19) Smirnov, A (2416) – Hovhannisyan, R (2612) St Petersburg 2012.

A2) 12. ♗e2 ♜e8 13. ♜e1 ♖c7 14. ♗g3 exd4 15. ♗xd4 ♜ad8 16. b4 ♙e5 17. ♙e3 ♗f8 Black already has the better position. 0-1 (33) Hesham, A (2390) – Adly, A (2601) Cairo 2016.

A3) 12. ♙c2 This is an interesting nuance. White anticipates possible play along the d-file and this a sensible retreat. The play becomes sharp, and Black will look for opportunities on all fronts. 12... a5 13. ♗e2 [13. ♖g5 ♙a6 14. ♜e1 b4 15. ♗a4 ♜e8 16. ♙b3 h6 17. ♙h4 ♙b5 18. ♜c1 exd4 19. ♗xd4 ♖b8 Black's position it fine. ½-½ (26) Panov, S – Martynov, A corr. 2016.] 13... ♜e8 14. ♜e1 h6 15. ♗g3 exd4 16. ♗xd4



Position after: 16. ♗xd4

This complex position was tested twice. 16... ♗e5 [16... ♖c7 17. ♖e2 ♗f8 18. ♙e3 ♙e5 19. ♜ac1 ♜ad8 20. ♜ed1 ♜d7 21. b4 ♗g6 22. f3 ♜ed8 Black is ok. ½-½ (49) Panov, S – Denisov, T corr. 2015.] 17. ♗df5 ♙f8 18. f4 ♗eg4 19. ♖xd8 ♜axd8 20. h3 ♙c5+ 21. ♚f1 b4! with complications that give Black fine play. ½-½ (25) Panov, S – Tleptsok, R corr. 2015.

B) 11. b4 a5 12. ♜b1 axb4 13. axb4 ♖e7

Position after: 13... ♖e7

14. ♖b3 [14. e4 ♙xb4 taking the pawn is clearly an option here. 15. ♙d2 ♙xc3 16. ♙xc3 c5!

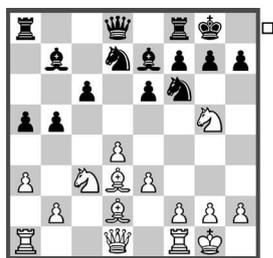


Position after: 16... c5!

17. ♜e1 ♜fd8 18. ♜xb5 ♙a6 19. ♜a5 ♙xd3 20. ♜xa8 ♜xa8 21. ♖xd3 ♜c8=] 14... ♗d5 15. ♗xd5 exd5 16. ♙d2

♞f6 17. ♞e5 ♞e4! 18. ♙xe4 dxe4
Black has a good position as White did not manage to open the game up with e4. ½-½ (41) Krasenkow, M (2622) – Adla, D (2508) Le Port Marly 2009.

C) 11. ♞g5 a5 Black does not want to allow b4. 12. ♙d2 ♙e7



Position after: 12... ♙e7

13. ♜c1 [13. ♚c2 h6 14. ♞h7 ♞xh7
15. ♙xh7+ ♚h8 16. ♙e4 ♚b6 17.
♜fc1 c5 18. dxc5 ♞xc5 19. ♙xb7 ♚xb7
Black is fine. ½-½ (38) Aloma Vidal, R (2434) – Alonso Rosell, A (2477) Barcelona 2011.] 13... b4 14. axb4 axb4 15. ♞ce4 h6 16. ♞xf6+ ♞xf6 17. ♞e4 ♞xe4 18. ♙xe4 ♚b6 19. ♚b3 ♜fc8 20. ♜fd1 c5 21. dxc5 White was not able to create any pressure on the c-file. ½ – ½ (21) Krasenkow, M (2604) – Ragger, M (2670) Belfort 2012.

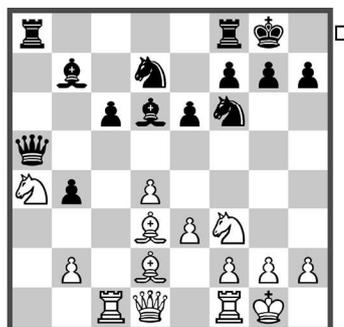
11... a5

Preventing b4 but also creating ...b4 as a possible idea.

12. ♜c1

12. ♞e4 ♞xe4 13. ♙xe4 ♚e7 14. ♜c1 ♜fc8 15. ♞e5 ♞xe5 16. dxe5 ♙xe5 17. ♙xh7+ ♚xh7 18. ♚h5+ ♚g8 19. ♚xe5 c5 Black has no problems here. ½-½ (22) Antonsen, M (2467) – Schandorff, L (2531) Skorping 2014.

12... b4 13. axb4 axb4 14. ♞a4 ♚a5



Position after: 14... ♚a5

15. ♜a1

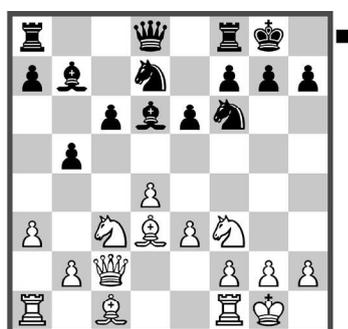
15. b3 c5 16. ♞b2 cxd4 17. exd4 ♚h5 Black is better. 0-1 (52) Dreev, A (2653) – Steingrimsson, H (2574) Cocoa Beach USA 2018.

15... e5 16. ♙e2 e4

Black is fine here as well. ½-½ (24) Akobian, V (2625) – Nyzhnyk, I (2638) Saint Louis USA 2019.

d) 8. ♖d3 ♖b7 9.a3 ♖d6 10.0-0 0-0 11. ♖c2

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♘f3 d5 4. ♘c3 c6
 5. e3 ♘bd7 6. ♖d3 dxc4 7. ♖xc4 b5
 8. ♖d3 ♖b7 9. a3 ♖d6 10. 0-0 0-0
 11. ♖c2



Position after: 11. ♖c2

We are in the 6. ♖c2 line but this line with 9.a3 actually belongs to both systems. I decided to review it here as this particular move order is very important for repertoires of those playing Black.

11... ♖c8

This is a more modern approach and also critical as Black looks to play ...c5 quickly.

The variation with 11... a5 was a critical line played by Anand and Shirov; but it has been replaced with the 13... ♖c8 line.

- A) 12. ♖d2 b4 13. ♘a4 c5!**



Position after: 13... c5!

14. dxc5 ♘xc5=

B) 12. ♖d1 Thematic but Black is ready with 12... b4! then after 13. ♘a4 c5!. A key move in this system. Black utilized that fact that the queen on c2 is absent from the kingside. 14. dxc5 ♖c8 15. ♖xh7+ ♘xh7 16. ♖xd6 ♖xf3 17. gxf3 ♖g5+ 18. ♖f1 ♘xc5 19. ♘b6 ♖c7 The position is balanced.

C) 12. ♘g5 h6 13. ♘ge4 ♖e7 14. ♖d1 ♖b6 15. ♘xf6+ ♘xf6 16. ♖e2 ♖fd8 17. b3 ♖a6 18. ♖b2 b4 19. axb4 ♖xd3 20. ♖xd3 ♖xb4 21. ♖c2 ♘d5



Position after: 21... ♘d5