

The Modernized Sicilian Kan

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Adrien Demuth

Key to Symbols

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

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Corr. Database, Chessbase
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Preface

When you are building your repertoire you have many choices available against 1.e4. Everyone knows the Sicilian is the most dangerous reply but there are so many choices! Most of them are highly theoretical such as the Najdorf or the Dragon. Some are very difficult to understand from a positional and dynamical point of view. The Kalashnikov and the Sveshnikov are two good examples, without even mentioning the amount of theory.

I have always been interested by less theoretical Sicilians. I have been playing the Classical Sicilian for a long time and right before the covid period, I decided to find a new one. The Sicilian Kan came to me as a very serious option, and I decided to work on it. In the meantime, my friend and editor Daniël Vanheirzeele offered me the chance to author a book about it. This came to me as a complete surprise, as I had no experience with it. In comparison with my work on the Reti and the Dutch (my two previous books), I am a newbie on the subject. But I decided to accept the challenge. I found it extremely interesting, as this gave me a fresh look at the positions. I think I managed to ask myself the questions everyone would have asked. I also work as a second for others and am accustomed to working on openings I do not necessarily play as well as finding the key ideas very quickly. So, after a deep initial work to understand the variations, I was ready to start writing! I knew that keeping the variations to a reasonable length would be a hard task as the opening is generally considered to be better for White.

In opposition to my prior efforts, I decided to start with the mainlines. I did it both during my work and then in the structure of the book. It seemed better to address the most difficult lines first to prove that Black gets playable positions, and then take care of the less challenging lines. This approach allows you to have an idea of the typical positions and then compare it with the less usual lines so you may understand why the sidelines are not as good.

I take this as an opportunity to share my knowledge of openings and how I analyze them. I started this book with the idea that I wanted it to be useful for all levels of playing strength, from amateurs to even top grandmasters. I really consider the best books to be those where everyone can understand the basics of the variations while also being of use to anyone that aims at going deeper into the theory.

I based many of the lines and conclusions in this book not only on computer evaluation, but also from a practical point of view. While I did a deep dive using strong engines when analyzing the lines I cannot say that they are perfect. The most important thing is that all of the evaluations are based upon my own understanding and knowledge of chess.

After writing this book, I had to take up another challenge: my personal decisions lead me to become an editor at Thinkers Publishing (once again, after the kind offer of Daniël), and I decided to edit the book myself. The bad thing with it, is that any problem with this book, about the layout of the chess content, I can't complain about anybody but myself!

I really hope this book will help you build a strong understanding of the Kan Sicilian and that it will bring you some nice results. I hope you enjoy the material as much as I did writing (and editing) it!

If you have any complains or questions, you can write me directly online at adrien.demuth@gmail.com. I also welcome simple and nice compliments!

Chartres, October 2021



5. ♖d3

1. e4 c5 2. ♗f3 e6 3. d4 cxd4
4. ♘xd4 a6 5. ♖d3



a) 6.--

1. e4 c5 2. ♗f3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 a6 5. ♖d3



Position after: 4... a6

Here is the start of our work! After 4... a6 we are playing the Sicilian Kan. Some people may call it the Paulsen variation, but that is normally played with a latter ...d6 which is often not the case here.

To explain the essence of this opening, Black is only playing flexible pawn moves for now. He allows White to have a wide choice of continuations since there is no immediate reaction in the centre. Thus, there are several systems that he can employ starting from this position. In reality, I am also providing a repertoire on White's earlier sidelines against 2...e6 which you will find in the last chapters of this book.

I consider the following to be the main line or the most dangerous.

White is also playing flexibly as he protects his centre, keeps the b1 knight's options open and waits before moving his c-pawn.

5... ♗c5



Position after: 5... ♗c5

The idea is to chase the knight from the centre and to simply develop the bishop before playing ...d7-d6. Black has a wide choice of moves but I like this approach more than the rest. I will not review the other possibilities here as you may investigate them independently as it is difficult to say which is best. 6. ♗b3 is clearly the main move, but for now we will concentrate on sidelines which are not dangerous and from which White does not score well.

6. ♖e3

Chapter Guide

Chapter 1 – 5. ♖d3

1.e4 c5 2. ♗f3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 a6 5. ♖d3 ♗c5

a) 6.-- 11

b) 6.c3 14

c) 6. ♗b3 ♖a7 7. ♗g4 ♗f6 8.-- 16

d) 6. ♗b3 ♖a7 7. ♗g4 ♗f6! 8. ♗g3 20

e) 6. ♗b3 ♖a7 7. ♗c3 ♗c6 8.-- 22

f) 6. ♗b3 ♖a7 7. ♗c3 ♗c6 8.0-0 25

g) 6. ♗b3 ♖a7 7. ♗c3 ♗c6 8. ♗e2 28

h) 6. ♗b3 ♖a7 7. c4 33

i) 6. ♗b3 ♖a7 7. ♗e2 39

j) 6. ♗b3 ♖a7 7.0-0 ♗e7 41

A) 6. c3 will be covered in the next subchapter.

B) 6. ♗f3?! Is anti-positional. Gone are the possibilities of ♗d1-g4, no more f2-f4, and no gain of tempo on the bishop after 6... d6. We just need ...d6 before ...♗f6 to prevent e4-e5. 7. 0-0 ♗f6



Position after: 10. ♖g5

[10. ♖d1?! ♗g4! Underlining some problems in White's set-up. 11. ♖f1 b5 12. h3 ♗ge5!; 10. h3 b5 11. ♖d1 ♗c7 12. ♖e3 ♖xe3 13. ♗xe3 ♖b7! 10... h6 11. ♖h4 ♖d7 12. ♖ad1 ♗d4 13. ♗xd4 ♖xd4! Black is completely fine here as he will play on the c-file.



Position after: 7... ♗f6

B1) 8. a3 ♗c6 9. h3?! Obviously, this is not the most useful move. But the following game is interesting. 9... h6 10. b4 ♖a7 11. ♖b2 e5! A strong way to change the pawn structure to something more active while simultaneously stopping the action of the bishop on b2. 12. ♗bd2 ♖e6 13. c4 0-0 14. ♗b3 ♗h5! 15. b5 axb5 16. cxb5 White is already in trouble, and in the game Gofshtein, L (2507) – Agrest, E (2554) Fuerth 1999, Black could have been more precise with: 16... ♗e7! 17. a4 ♖c8 18. a5 ♗f4!.

6... d6!



Position after: 6... d6!

B2) 8. ♗e2 0-0 9. ♗c3 ♗c6 In this kind of set-up White runs out of useful move very soon. 10. ♖g5

(see diagram next column)

There is no need to rush into something concrete. We are happy to develop logically while protecting the bishop against any nasty idea like ♗d4xe6, gaining the bishop on c5 (if you hadn't seen it yet, it was White's threat).

6... ♖b6? This has been tried a few times, but it is over optimistic. 7. c3 ♜xb2 8. ♘d2± ♜xc3? 9. ♜c1! – You can check this line by yourself, but Black is already in deep trouble.

7. 0-0

7. ♘d2 ♘f6 8. c3 0-0 9. ♖e2 ♜c7 10. 0-0 ♘bd7



Position after: 10... ♘bd7

Black's moves have all been natural. The next step is to find a spot for the light-squared bishop. 11. h3 In the game Kosteniuk, A (2530) – Van Wely, L (2653) Calvi 2015, Black could have chosen a different path from the game (instead of 11...e5), with: 11... ♘e5!N 12. ♘c2

♘d7 13. ♜fe1 ♘g6 14. ♜ad1 ♜ac8 15. ♘f3 h6=

7... ♘f6 8. ♖e2 0-0 9. ♘b3 ♘xe3 10. ♜xe3 ♘c6 11. ♜d1 ♜c7 12. c4 ♘e5 13. ♘1d2



Position after: 13. ♘1d2

We can differ from the game Jakovenko, D (2644) – Svidler, P (2740) Moscow 2005, with:

13... ♘d7!N 14. ♜ac1 ♜fd8 15. ♘d4 ♜b6±

White is playing a Maroczy set-up, but he traded his good bishop and has the minor pieces misplaced.

b) 6.c3

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 a6 5. ♘d3 ♘c5



Position after: 5... ♘c5

6. c3

This move is slow, just like the ones in the prior subchapter. But we are hard pressed to say it is a bad move.

6. ♘b3! This is the main continuation which we will cover in the following subchapters.

6... d6!

6... ♘f6? 7. e5! You must be accurate with your move order. 7... ♘d5 8. ♜g4± 0-0? 9. ♘h6+–

7. 0-0 ♘f6

(see diagram next column)



Position after: 7... ♘f6

White has many options here and we will examine the most logical ones.

8. ♘d2

A) 8. ♖e2 0-0 9. ♘g5 ♘bd7 10. ♘d2 Occurred in Adams, M (2719) – Hansen, S (2551) playchess.com INT 2003, and now: 10... h6!N



Position after: 10... h6!N

was a simple continuation to challenge the bishop. 11. ♘h4 ♘e5! 12. ♘c2

♘g6 13. ♘g3 ♜c7 Gaining a tempo with the treat of ...♘d4, winning a piece. 14. ♜ac1 e5 15. ♘f5 ♘f4†

B) 8. ♘h1 White would like to follow-up with f2-f4. So, we take the lead with 8... e5! We lost a tempo in the opening with the e-pawn, and we also weakened the d5-square, but White is unable to use it. 9. ♘b3 ♘a7 10. ♘g5 h6



Position after: 10... h6

11. ♘xf6 [11. ♘h4?! g5 12. ♘g3 h5! Very logical with the bishop on g3 and the king standing on h1. 13. f3 h4 14. ♘f2 ♘xf2 15. ♜xf2 g4+ Black has different threats, including ...g3 which weakens the dark squares around the white monarch.] 11... ♜xf6 We are very glad to see this trade. 12. ♘1d2 0-0 13. ♖e2 ♘c6 14. ♘c4 Occurred in Berelowitsch, A (2546) – Svidler, P (2693) Moscow 2003, and now I prefer: 14... ♘e6!N 15. ♘e3 ♘e7±.

8... 0-0 9. a4

9. ♘2b3 ♘a7 10. ♘e3 ♘bd7 11. ♖e2



Position after: 11. ♖e2

Timman, J (2607) – Bruzon Batista, L (2665) Curaçao 2005 11... ♘e5! 12. ♘c2 h6 This is an important move before playing...♜c7. We need to stop ♘e3-g5. 13. ♜ad1 ♜c7± 14. f4? ♘c4 15. ♘c1 e5 16. ♜xe5 ♘g4+–

9... e5 10. ♘4b3 ♘a7 11. ♘c4 ♘e6 12. ♖e2



Position after: 12. ♖e2

This position occurred in the game Carlsen, M (2872) – Caruana, F (2782) Zürich 2014. Caruana managed to win a fine game where he placed his knight on c6, but I prefer keeping more flexibility with:

12... ♘bd7!N 13. ♘g5

13. ♜d1?? ♘g4+–

13... h6 14. ♘h4 ♜e8 15. ♜fe1

15. ♜ad1? Is still tempting but still bad as it is so easy to forget the unusual bishop on a7. 15... g5! 16. ♘g3 ♘g4+–

15... g5 16. ♘g3 ♘f8±.

The plan is fairly easy for Black whereas we do not see anything obvious in White's position. In the short term our knight is heading toward g6, and probably f4 at some point.

c) 6. ♘b3 ♘a7 7. ♖g4 ♘f6 8.--

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 a6 5. ♘d3 ♘c5 6. ♘b3!



Position after: 6. ♘b3!

This is the main move, and it will occupy the remainder of this chapter. White gains a tempo on the bishop while asking Black to pick a diagonal. This is a tough question and theory has not yet determined which is best!

6... ♘a7!?

Quite an unusual place for the bishop in

the Sicilian, but not a bad one! It directly fights against Whites ♘c1-e3 or f2-f4. Now I can say that White has 3 main plans, and different move orders can lead to each of these plans. The first idea is ♜d1-g4, intending to attack g7 immediately. This is the subject of the current subchapter, and we will see a similar idea in the next one. Following this we will focus on the idea of ♖e2 connected with ♘e3. There are diverse ways to do this (the place of the knight on b1, and the side on which White castles are two of his options). And in the two last subchapters, we will have a look at the 0-0-ideas which are usually connected with c2-c4 to take control over the centre.

6... ♘e7 This has been played a bit more often, but I am really not fond of it. Not that the move is bad, but it is not to my liking. The main reason comes after: 7. ♖g4! This is one of the main lines and the threat on g7 more or less

forces us to create a weakness. 7... g6
8. ♖e2 d6 9. 0-0 ♘d7 10. a4



Position after: 10. a4

Black will have to play slowly which I find difficult. The following game went pretty smoothly for White. 10... b6 11. ♘a3 ♖b7 12. ♘c4 ♗c7 13. a5 b5 14. ♘b6 ♖b8 15. c4 bxc4 16. ♙xc4 ♘g6 17. ♙e3± Aronian, L (2780) – Jumabayev, R (2605) Batumi 2018.

7. ♗g4

Has been played quite often and is less dangerous than after 6... ♙e7.

7... ♘f6!



Position after: 7... ♘f6!

This time (compared to 6... ♙e7), we can confidently offer the g7-pawn because there is a hidden difference.

8. ♗g3!

A) 8. ♗xg7? ♖g8 9. ♗h6 ♙xf2+!



Position after: 9... ♙xf2+!

This makes all the difference. The bishop is untouchable, and the king has to move. Quite a bad deal for White.

A1) 10. ♘f2?? ♘g4+→ As obvious as it is, I prefer to show it.

A2) 10. ♙e2 e5! Again, an important move to stop e4-e5. 11. ♙g5! ♖g6 12. ♙xf6 ♗xf6 13. ♗h3□ [13. ♗h7?? d6 14. ♘d2 ♖xg2→ The threat of ...♙g4+ is obvious.] 13... ♙b6 14. ♘c3 ♗f2+ 15. ♘d1 ♗xg2±

A3) 10. ♘d1 e5! 11. ♘c3 [11. ♖f1 ♖g6 12. ♗d2 ♙a7 13. ♘c3N d6 14. h3 ♙e6± White has long term problems with his king...] 11... d6 12. ♙g5

(see diagram next page)



Position after: 12. ♙g5

12... ♖g6 13. ♙xf6 ♗xf6 14. ♗h7 ♗g5!± Black is really close to winning. In fact, White collapses immediately in the following game: 15. ♘d2? ♖h6 16. ♘f3 ♙g4 17. ♗f5 ♗g7 0-1 (17) Zwanzger, J (2340) – Raupp, T (2350) Germany 2004.

B) 8. ♗e2 A few players have retreated but it makes no sense since. 7. ♗e2 is a usual continuation after which the knight on f6 is perfectly fine. We now have an extra move. Only one game among grandmasters has seen this retreat: 8... d6 9. ♙e3 ♙xe3 10. ♗xe3 ♘c6 11. ♘c3 b5 12. f4 b4!



Position after: 12... ♖b4!

13. ♘a4 ♖b8 14. 0-0-0. Now, instead of

castling in the game Mamedov, R (2688) – Andreikin, D (2737) Tallinn 2016, Black could have tried: 14... e5! 15. ♖hf1 0-0±.

8... d6!

Stopping the move e4-e5 is a priority.

9. ♘c3 ♘c6



Position after: 9... ♘c6

10. 0-0

This is one of the most logical moves for White.

A) 10. ♙g5 Will be covered in the next subchapter.

B) 10. ♙d2 My engine wants to play this move immediately, but it seems cleverer to provoke Black to include ...h6. 10... b5 11. a3 [11. 0-0-0 b4 12. ♘e2 0-0!– In comparison to the main line this move is possible because there is no pawn hanging on h6.] 11... ♙b7 12. 0-0-0 ♘e5= It's fully playable!

10... b5



Position after: 10... b5

11. ♙g5

11. ♗h1 ♙b7 12. f4 b4 [12... h5!± 13. f5 ♘g4 14. ♙f4 e5 15. ♙d2 ♘b4 16. a4 ♘xd3 17. cxd3 b4 18. ♘d1 d5 19. ♙e3 dxe4 20. ♘xg4 hxg4± 0-1 (34) Berg, E (2604) – Hillarp Persson, T (2547) Vasteras 2011] 13. ♘e2 0-0



Position after: 13... 0-0

I like these “small centre” positions for Black with the pawns on d6 and e6 and the two bishops can soon become powerful. 14. f5 ♘e5 15. ♙g5 ♖c8 16. ♘a5 ♙a8!± [16... ♗xa5? 17. ♙xf6+]

11... ♘e5! 12. ♗h1 h6 13. ♙d2 g5!



Position after: 13... g5!

This strange-looking move is very efficient here. The idea is to stop the move f2-f4.

14. ♘e2 g4 15. f4 gxf3 16. gxf3 ♙d7 17. ♙c3

We have been following the game Acs, P (2606) – Smirin, I (2661) Paks 2011, which ended in a 23-move draw. However, we can try and improve with:

17... ♖g8!N 18. ♗h4 ♖c8

When the black king will remain in the centre. This is probably the safest place in this case thanks to the pawns and the many pieces around him. Black's activity will more than compensate for his odd piece arrangement.

19. ♘f4 b4 20. ♙xb4 ♘xd3 21. cxd3 e5± ...♖c2 and possibly ...♘g4 are coming.

d) 6. ♘b3 ♙a7 7. ♗g4 ♘f6! 8. ♗g3

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 a6 5. ♙d3 ♙c5 6. ♘b3! ♙a7!± 7. ♗g4 ♘f6! 8. ♗g3! d6! 9. ♘c3 ♘c6 10. ♙g5!±



Position after: 10. ♙g5!±

The goal of this move is to provoke ...h6 creating a potential target. Since he can not tolerate the bishop here, he must play ...h6.

10... h6! 11. ♙d2 b5!±

Definitely a sideline. Other interesting moves have been played more often, but this is my preference.

11... e5?! I am not fond of leaving the d5-square in White's hands. 12. ♘d5 ♘h5 13. ♗f3 ♘f6 14. 0-0-0± So, W (2646) – Andreikin, D (2648) Lubbock 2009.

12. 0-0-0

12. f4?!



Position after: 12. f4?!

This has been played a couple of times and the difference is that h6 is no longer under attack thus we can castle soon. 12... b4 13. ♘e2 0-0!N Black's pieces are great, and the tactics are working for him. 14. f5?! [14. e5 ♘d5 15. ♙e4 dxe5 16. 0-0-0 a5! 17. fxe5 ♗c7 18. ♙xh6 ♗xe5±] exf5 15. exf5 [15. ♙xh6? ♘g4+!] 15... ♘e5+→

12... b4 13. ♘e2



Position after: 13. ♘e2

13. ♖a4?! The knight is quite exposed here, and it is doing nothing. 13... ♘e5!N 14. ♙e2 0-0! 15. ♙xh6 ♘g6 16. ♙e3 ♘xe4 17. ♙f3 d5+

13... ♖f8!N

I like this new move. We simply protect the g7-pawn. The king is obviously not perfect on f8, but otherwise Black is in great shape. He can follow up with a6-a5-a4.

13... e5?!N This variation shows why we need to protect g7. 14. ♙xg7 ♙g8 15. ♙xh6 ♙g6 16. ♙h4 ♙g4 17. ♙h3 ♙g6 18. g4!



Position after: 18. g4!

[18. ♙h4 ♙g4=] 18... ♘xg4 19. f4! ♘f2 20. ♙h7! Objectively, this continuation is quite impossible to find over the board. [20. ♙h8+? ♘d7 21. ♙h5 ♘c7 22. f5 ♙g7] 20... ♘xh1 21. ♙xh1 ♙f6 22. f5 ♙g7 23. ♙h5±

14. e5!?

A) 14. ♖b1?! a5 [14... e5 15. f4 a5 16. ♘bc1 ♙b7] 15. ♙b5 ♙c7! White is

quite helpless. His pieces are doing nothing and there is a pawn storm coming. [15... ♙b7 16. f3 e5→] 16. ♙f4 e5 17. ♙e3 a4!



Position after: 17... a4!

18. ♙xa4 [18. ♘d2 a3 19. b3 ♙g4] 18... ♙xe3 19. ♙xc6 ♙xf2 20. ♙xf2 ♙xc6→

B) 14. f4!?



Position after: 14. f4!?

After this standard move the play might continue 14... a5! 15. e5 ♘d5! 16. ♖b1 a4 17. ♘bc1 a3 18. b3 dxe5 19. ♙e4 exf4 20. ♘xf4 ♙b8→ ... ♙f6 is coming with mating threats, but Black should also be cautious as the position is still pretty complicated. Anything can happen here!

14... ♘xe5 15. ♙xb4

The trade is strategically fair for Black, but at least White manages to get some initiative.

15... ♙b6! 16. a3

16. ♙xe5? ♙xb4 17. ♙g3 a5+

16... ♖g8!



Position after: 16... ♖g8!

Very precise. I could not manage to find full equality for White. For instance:

17. ♙xd6 ♘xd3+ 18. ♙xd3

18. ♙xd3? ♘e4 19. ♙f3 ♙b7→

18... ♙xf2 19. ♙hf1

19. ♖b1 ♙b7 20. ♙hf1 ♙xg2+

19... ♙e3+ 20. ♙xe3 ♙xe3+ 21. ♖b1 ♙b7. In this kind of endgame, the bishop pair enables Black to claim a small advantage.

e) 6. ♖b3 ♙a7 7. ♘c3 ♘c6 8.--

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 a6 5. ♙d3 ♙c5 6. ♘b3! ♙a7! 7. ♘c3

(see diagram opposite column)

This logical move is played slightly more often than 7. ♙g4. In general, it is played in connection with the idea of playing ♙d1-e2 and ♙c1-e3, but it is not necessary. Here, we will mainly focus on other minor ideas for White.



Position after: 7. ♘c3

7... ♘c6

In most of the examples we will start with this move since the square for this knight is obvious.

7... ♘e7 I would have chosen this move order as I did against most of White's 7th moves, but here there might be a slight issue with 8. ♙g4! thus 7... ♘c6 is my personal preference. However, both lines are likely to transpose into each other.

8. ♙f4

From a positional point of view this looks decent. White takes advantage of the deserted dark squares, but Black reacts immediately.

A) 8. ♙e2 as well as 8. 0-0 will be covered in the next subchapters.

B) 8. ♙g4 This is the third main move, but it does not really have an independent value and will merely transpose into the previous subchapter. 8... ♘f6!



Position after: 8... ♘f6!

Once again, we offer a free pawn with strings attached. 9. ♙g3 [9. ♙xg7? ♙g8 10. ♙h6 ♙xf2+!F We previously saw this trick and it is very similar to a line we examined in the 7. ♙g4-line.] 9... d6 This is a transposition into the previous subchapter with 7. ♙g4.

8... e5!?

This may seem contradictory to what we previously discussed as it weakens the d5-square. But we need to prevent the possibility of ♙d6, and we will take over the initiative so that the d5-square becomes irrelevant.

9. ♙g3



Position after: 9. ♙g3

9... h5!N

After the logical 9... d6 White would have an easier position with 10. ♙d2! [10. ♙c4?! h5! 11. ♙f3 ♙e6 12. ♙xe6 fxe6 13. h4 ♙f6 0-1 Berezjuk, S (2403) – Oral, T (2521) Czechia 2000.] 10... ♘f6 11. 0-0 ♙e6 12. ♙h4±