

Interpreting a Silenced Heritage: One Parcel of Land in Jaffa and Tel Aviv

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As a consequence of the 1948 war in Palestine, vast tracts of land were expropriated and absorbed into the newly independent State of Israel under the Absentee Property Law of 1950. The law provided the legal structure for transferring the property of Palestinians who fled their homes, or were deported during the war, to Israeli hands. An orange grove at the edge of Jaffa, near the newly-built Jewish neighborhoods of Tel Aviv, suffered the same fate (Fig. 1,2). Around 1950, this L-shaped parcel was annexed to Tel Aviv and settled by Jewish immigrants and small manufacturers, transforming it into a neighborhood of modest houses, workshops, and warehouses (Fig. 3). Nevertheless, in the mid-sixties, this community was displaced by a private developer who borrowed on the precarious nature of this parcel's ownership status and acquired its properties as local authorities were instigating corporate development of former urban frontiers. Such a development was conceived when the Central Bus Station of Tel Aviv (CBS) was planned along the exact absentee property lines as a privately owned public facility integrated with vast commercial spaces (Fig. 4). The construction process of the 230,000 square meter megastructure of raw

concrete was financed by parceling and selling some 1,200 individual properties that were partially sold during and before construction began in 1967 (Fig. 5). The CBS was finally inaugurated in 1993 after an exhausting planning process and financial hardships, coupled with constant ownership conflicts that resonate in its architecture.

Today the labyrinth-like building is mostly vacant and considered unsafe in some areas but thrives with informal communal activities in others, however, pioneering advocacy attempts for the station's preservation as a infrastructural heritage site are being taken. This paper examines the role property ownership has played in the production of the built environment by intimately reading the station's architectural and design testimonies and by interpreting a single war time site story to better plan its future. Based on geo-referencing methodologies for visual historical documents this paper further argues that various scales of property violence have abused architecture as a vehicle of dispossession through war and concealment on the outskirts of the modernist White City of Tel Aviv.

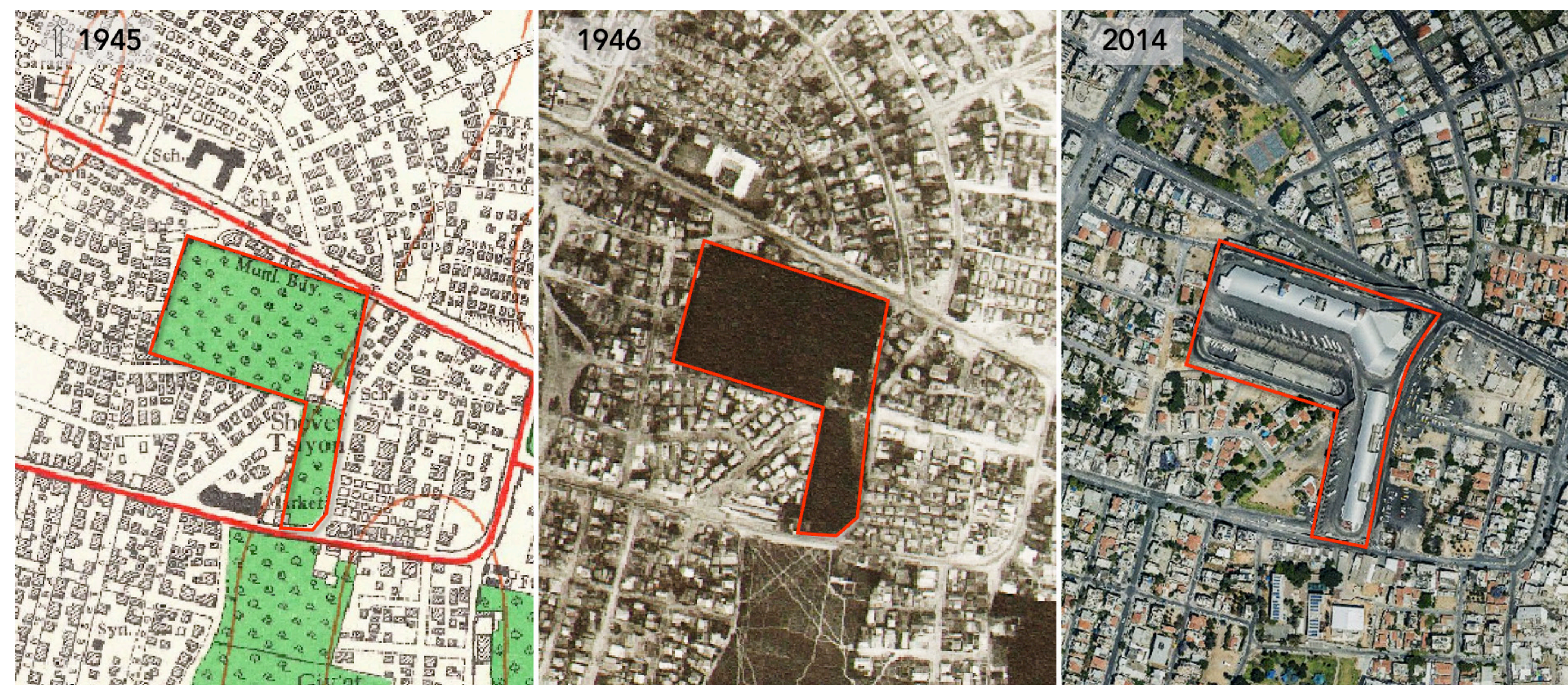


Fig. 1. Left: Jaffa Tel Aviv 1:10,000 Sheet 2, 1945; Middle: Jaffa aerial photograph, Dev 12. 6076, 1:10,000, 28.1.1946 (The Micha Granit Maps Library at the Department of Geography, Tel Aviv University); Right: Tel Aviv-Yafo, aerial photograph, 1:10,000, 2014 (Tel Aviv-Yafo municipal GIS, gisn.tel-aviv.gov.il)

Fig. 2. In 19th century Jaffa, orchards were planted around a walled farmstead, known as a well-house (bayyara), which was primarily responsible for maintaining an irrigation system that included a well, a reservoir, and a network of irrigation canals. Nachum Gutman, A house in an orchard, 1927 (Nachum Gutman Museum, Tel Aviv)



Fig. 3. Modest industrial buildings that were built during the civil war in 1947-8 on the former Arab orange orchard.

Tel Aviv, Aerial photo, 14.10.1949 (Maps Library, Dep. of Geography, Tel Aviv Uni.)

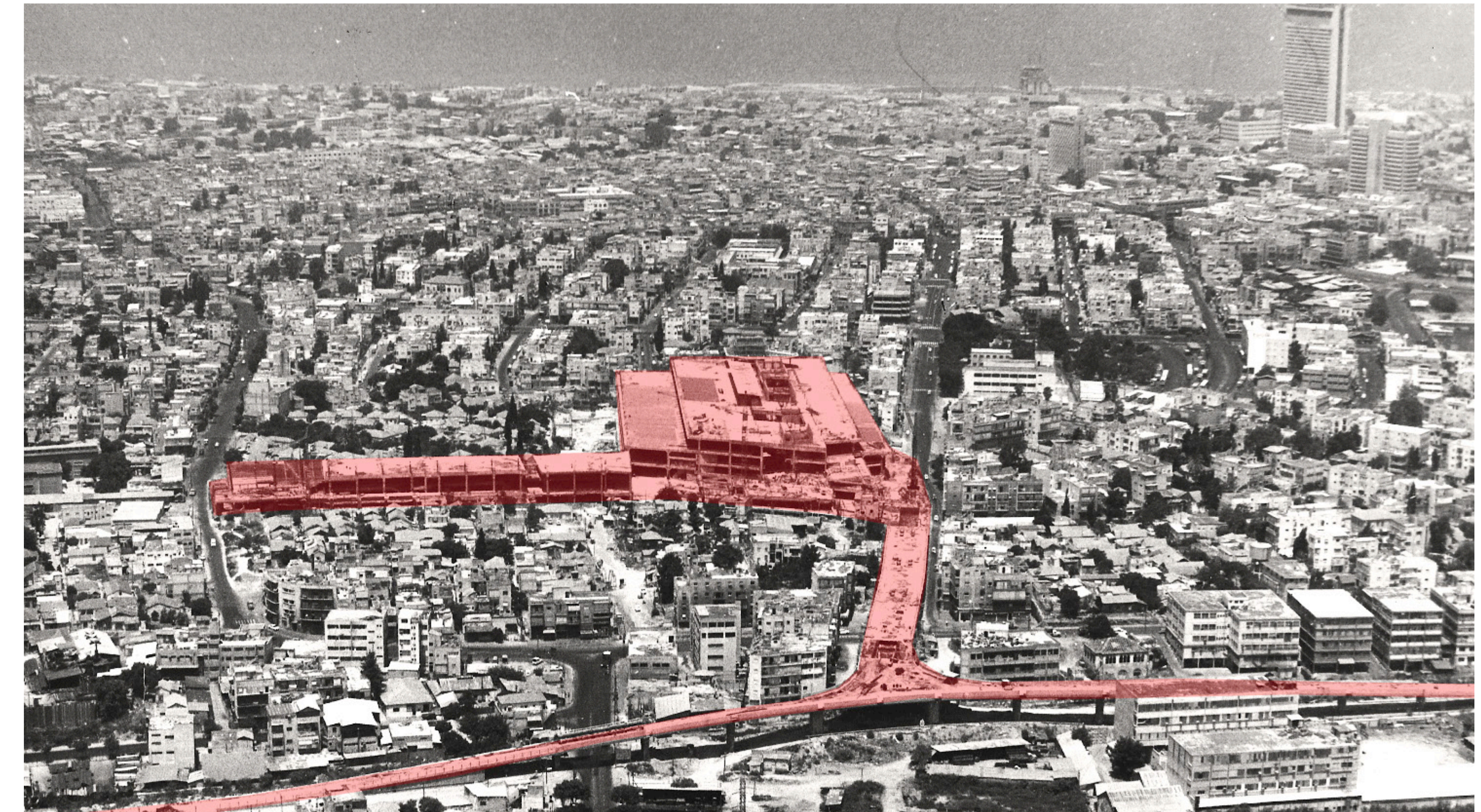


Fig. 4. Aerial photograph of the central station under construction, mid-1970s (Shimon Fox, Ram Carmi Collection, Azrieli Architectural Archive, Tel Aviv Museum of Art)

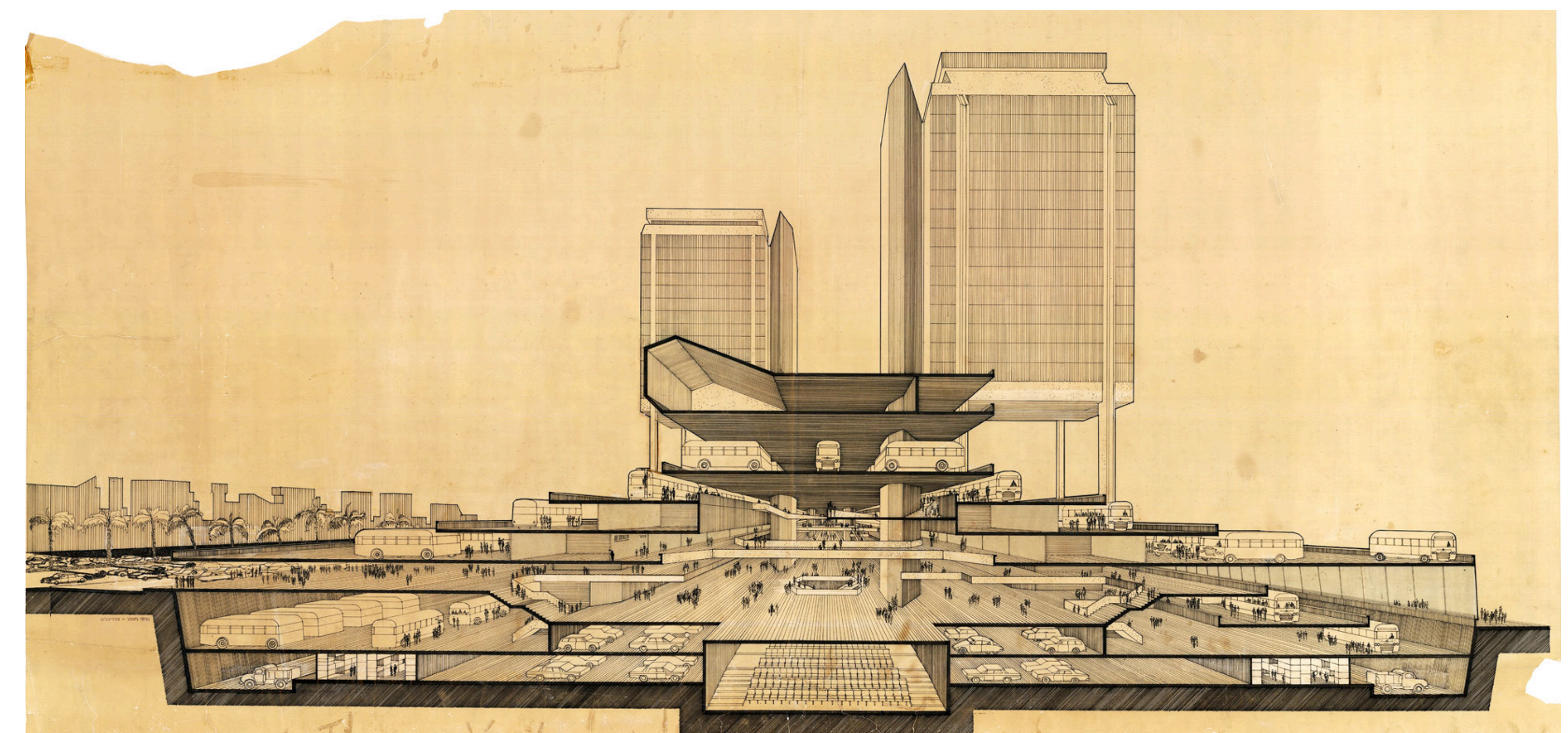


Fig. 5. The Central Bus Station, Third design iteration, Ram Carmi, 1965 (Carmi Collection, Azrieli Archive, Tel Aviv Museum)