

UNDERSTANDING THE “PIT PEOPLE”:  
AN IMAGINARY CONVERSATION IN THE CENTRAL JORDAN  
VALLEY DURING THE LATE SEVENTH OR  
SIXTH CENTURY B.C.E.

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*“Mister, mister. I am very sorry to disturb your daily work, but could you help me? Somehow I got lost on my way to my hometown nearby the ruins of Shechem. I am astonished to meet a living person in this barren valley. Why are you here if the hills around you are fertile and green? Well, let’s consider me lucky to have found you. Inhabitants of Rabbath-Ammon, the city where I came from, told me to descend into the valley and to walk to the point where the Jabbok River meets the Jordan River. There will be a ford to cross the river, they said. Is that place nearby? Furthermore, they told me that I had to pass several artificial mounds with ruins on top. Is this one of those mounds? But if so, where are the ancient buildings? Do you know that the people on the plateau share a lot of memories of this area? They explained to me that once the valley was a crowded place with beautiful villages, thriving markets, communal sanctuaries and regional pottery workshops. The place to be, so to say. The summers were not as hot in those days and the winters were mild and ideal for humans, plants and animals. The people are dreaming to return to the valley. However, if I look around, I really doubt that will happen anytime soon—much too dry and empty. Mister, please forgive me for asking so many questions. Could you be so kind to show me the fastest way to the ford which is said to be situated near the ancient city of Adama?”*

The person looked at the stranger with some curiosity. Not many people had passed the area lately. And that was no wonder. Even though it was considered to be the rainy season, the area supported little vegetation and drinking water was scarce. Yes, along the few wadis reed and grass could be found, but the valley floor was yellowish-brown and