Early in the 1930s, the travel writer H. V. Morton found himself being questioned by Turkish police as he waited to change trains in the small town of Adana:

‘They want to know what you are doing here,’ [my interpreter] said.  
‘I have come to see Tarsus.’  
‘They want to know why.’  
‘Because I am writing a book about St Paul.’  
I could see that this shattered the morale of the police force.¹

The policemen who demanded Morton’s passport before permitting him to go on to Tarsus would have found him not only an exasperating but also a familiar type. He was just the latest of many travellers who since the early nineteenth century had taken ‘the Acts of the Apostles as his guidebook’ and followed St Paul around the Mediterranean basin before publishing guidebooks of their own.² In the Steps of Saint Paul was published in October 1936 and sold a quarter of a million copies before the year was out. It was a hearty narrative – a Mr Toad’s Pilgrimage – of the kind of trip that remains popular today, when tour operators whisk American tourists around Greece, Asia Minor and Israel in a fortnight. Morton took the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of Paul as his guidebook, just as he had taken the Gospels to the Holy Land in his still more successful In the Steps of the Master (1934). He contributed to a genre whose popularity became entrenched over the course of the long nineteenth century and on both sides of the Atlantic. This chapter seeks to explain the roots of Morton’s Pauline travelogue and why its hybridisation of edification and entertainment attracted so many readers. It shows that there had always been multiple motives for wishing to travel
in Paul’s footsteps and that this had produced writing in such different forms as oriental travelogue, biblical criticism, devotional writing and classical topography but had also favoured the production of texts that collapsed the distinctions between the registers such forms demanded. Not the least motive to do so was that following Paul obliged travellers to cross the boundaries between classical, biblical and oriental worlds, distinctions which were in any event being blurred by improvements in the speed and ease of travel that had to be accommodated by the kinds of writing analysed here.

The urge felt by students of the Bible to travel to its locations did not begin with the nineteenth century, but it intensified as the Ottoman Empire weakened and became increasingly porous to Western travellers and as first steamships and then railways made it more practicable to reach remote sites. These political and technological changes modernised without fundamentally altering the urge to pilgrimage. For many of the British travellers who wrote about the Near and Middle East in the early nineteenth century, antiquarian zeal or ethnographic curiosity was charged with Protestant piety. They believed that knowledge of oriental customs and places assisted in recovering the meaning of biblical language and verified biblical narratives. Their observations were integrated into contemporary biblical scholarship. Indeed the boundaries between travel writing and biblical criticism were blurred throughout the nineteenth century. The Reverend John Saul Howson, co-author with his fellow cleric William John Conybeare of the authoritative *The Life and Epistles of St Paul* (1854), had prepared for their task with extensive travel of the Mediterranean, which enabled him to offer more than a ‘mere transcript of the Scriptural narrative’ but rather ‘to call up the figure of the past from its tomb, duly robed in all its former raiment’. Works such as Conybeare and Howson’s *St Paul* found their way into the baggage of travellers and were recycled for use in the devotional and Sunday school literature of the mid and late nineteenth century. As early as 1855, the Reverend John Ross Macduff introduced *The Footsteps of St Paul* with the admission that he had followed in the ‘wake of great explorers, and [had not been] ashamed to profit by the lights they have hung out astern’ and with the (consequently unconvincing) disclaimer than his was no ‘mere compilation’. By the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the labours of evangelical entrepreneurs such as Thomas Cook had added mass tourism to Macduff’s armchair tourism of the region. That complicated further the responses of literary and scholarly travellers to Egypt, Palestine and Syria, who were dismayed to find them a ‘beaten track’, littered with jam jars, orange peel and scraps of