American Freethinker
Elihu Palmer and the Struggle for Religious Freedom in the New Nation
Kirsten Fischer

“With crystalline prose, Kirsten Fischer rescues Elihu Palmer from obscurity and, more importantly, sets his ideas against the broad religious and intellectual contexts of the early United States. Her investigation extends beyond one iconoclastic freethinker to show the vibrancy of the period’s intellectual climate and the dynamism of freethought. This is a book of enduring significance.”—Erik R. Seeman, author of Speaking with the Dead in Early America

In this first biography of Elihu Palmer, Kirsten Fischer depicts a once notorious freethinker who countered Christianity with the idea of an interconnected universe infused with a divine life force. Denounced as “heretical,” Palmer’s speeches and writings shaped the contest over freedom of religion and of speech in the new United States.

Early American Studies