

Special Issue

Spacecraft Sample Collection

Message from the Guest Editor

On 24 September 2023, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) successfully completed a seven-year mission to return to Earth a significant sample of the near-Earth asteroid (101955) Bennu. Also in recent years, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) and the China National Space Administration (CNSA) returned samples to Earth of the near-Earth asteroid (162173) Ryugu and the Moon, respectively. These missions are just the latest examples of successful robotic planetary sampling missions that go back more than 50 years to when the former Soviet Union returned to Earth a total of several hundred grams of lunar material during the *Luna* program. But missions such as these are just the start. In the near-future, even more ambitious and difficult planetary sample return missions will be attempted. For instance, in September 2023, NASA released an independent review board report regarding its Mars sample return plan. This report highlighted the tremendous technical, cost and schedule challenges of such an endeavor as well as the tremendous scientific promise.

Guest Editor

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