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HUMAN HERITAGE IN SPACE: UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

Abstract

Over 60 years ago, humankind ventured into outer space for the first time. Since then, humanity has continued to explore the heavens, collaborating and building off those who came before us. Along the way, humans have left a trail of historic objects and artifacts in space that represent the unparalleled achievements of all humankind. However, while our terrestrial human heritage is protected by one of the most ratified international treaties in history, our cultural heritage in space is not.

This paper commences with a brief background on human cultural heritage law on Earth, as well as international space law. This paper explores the World Heritage Convention and its nominating scheme, and analyzes relevant provisions of the Outer Space Treaty and the Liability Convention. The paper provides an overview of the objects and artifacts left on the lunar surface and identifies pertinent portions of the World Heritage process that may be borrowed, in accordance with international space law.

This paper argues that the recognition and protection of human heritage in space is essential to achieving the long-term sustainability of outer space. This paper suggests that given the commonality and universality of human cultural heritage on Earth, the recognition of extraterrestrial human heritage could provide the starting point for the negotiation of a lunar governance framework. This paper further argues that human heritage in space is an invaluable, non-renewable space resource that remains unrecognized and unprotected. Additionally, this paper proposes a framework for the identification and subsequent protection and preservation of human cultural heritage in space.