In abidance with tradition, pilgrims arriving at the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela rested their hand on the central stone column of the Portico de La Gloria as they tapped their forehead on the Santo dos Croques (Saint of the Bumps, a sculpture of Master Mateo, the Cathedral’s medieval architect, that forms the base of the column), hoping to receive wisdom. Over the centuries, as millions of hands touched the column shaft, five holes developed on its surface in the shape of fingers. In 2010, preservationists ordered an end to the tradition to prevent the column’s further erosion. The monument had, in their view, reached its “carrying capacity,” a concept that describes the threshold number of visitors that can use a monument without causing irreparable damage. With the rise of mass tourism in the postwar era, preservationists began to identify well-meaning visitors as threats to monuments, alongside more traditional hazards such as the weather or war. If visitors were physically consuming monuments, could historic buildings be thought of as consumer products, meant to be worn out through use? Had the tourist industry turned not just their services, but also inadvertently the monuments themselves into commodities? As preservationists grappled with their place in the postwar capitalist economy, philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) offered a widely influential analysis of how postwar consumer culture, by reorganizing how people related to old and new objects around them, was changing The Human Condition (1958). Arendt tried to disprove the Marxist idea that under capitalism individuals could only relate to objects as commodities, as things to be consumed. Through careful analysis, she noted that it was possible to use objects without entirely consuming them. Some human-made objects endured their use, like the Santo dos Croques. In other words consumption and use, although related, were not the same. Consumption was a laboring relation to things. Following Marx, she defined labor as the effort that humans, like all living organisms or animal laborans, put into staying alive, finding and ingesting food, digesting, breathing, etc. The products of labor were immediately consumed when used, as part of a perpetual natural cycle of life. By contrast use was a working relation to objects. Work was the effort humans put into making things that could be used without being consumed. She thought Marx had missed this important distinction between labor and work. A farmed landscape was the product of labor because it was immediately consumed by nature unless it was tilled. A building was the product of work, not labor, because it could be used many times before it decayed again into nature. Products of work lasted long enough to be brought to market to be bought and sold. Therefore work was that part of human effort that could be alienated into commodities. For her, only things that endured their use could be properly called objects, because they were artificially stable, compared to natural things. Arendt recognized that because man-made objects were also subject to the laws of entropy, they changed even if they were not used. So she invoked preservation as a special type of work necessary to keep objects from prematurely loosing their durability. She claimed humans need to relate to durable objects in order to apprehend the world as objective. But objects are not as durable as we need them to be. So they must be supplemented artificially with the constant work of preservation in a way that makes it seem as if durability is their very essence. In Arendt’s thinking, preservation appeared as both self-effacing artifice and enabling element of the human experience of objectivity. Arendt studied philosophy at the University of Marburg with Martin Heidegger, and at the University of Heidelberg under Edmund Husserl and Karl Jaspers. Amid the rise of Nazism in Germany, she fled in 1933 to Paris, where she worked for
Jewish refugee aid organizations. In 1941 she left Vichy France for the U.S. In 1950, she became a U.S. citizen, and the following year published her first major book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, an examination of Nazism and Stalinism. Other of her best-known works include *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963), in which she coined the phrase “the banality of evil.” Arendt also taught at numerous U.S. universities.