In the past, clandestine immigration ship “Ben Hecht”. The ship was purchased with the money donated by the American-Jewish organization “The League for Free Land of Israel”. Ben Hecht was an assimilated Jewish American author and playwright who, after the WW II, approached Jewish revisionist circles. In 1946, he wrote a play “A Flag is born” in which he raised the issue of the Jewish rights to a free immigration to, that time, Palestine. The play was a success on Broadway and all over the world. The earnings from the play were donated to the League who financed the purchase of the ship.
The ship was built as a private yacht named “Argosy”. During the civil war in Spain she carried contraband arms for the Republicans. During the WW II she was purchased by the US Navy and served as Coast Guard ship named USS “Cythera”(PK - 31).

In 1946 she was purchased from US Coast Guard by an imaginary “Thyne Shipping Company” in order to be used as a clandestine immigration ship. She was renamed “ABRIL” (“April” in Spanish) and on the 27th of December 1946, hoisting the flag of Honduras and manned by American volunteers, sailed for France. She arrived at Port de Bouc, near Marseille, on the 10th of January 1947 and there she was fitted for accommodating immigrants. On the 1st of March 1947, she sailed with over 600 immigrants and crew. Two American journalists also joined the ship.

The ship approached the coast of Eretz Israel on 8th of March 1947. She was spotted by British reconnaissance aircraft, stopped by British destroyers, boarded and without opposition towed to Haifa. The Maapilim were exiled to Cyprus and the American crew, after different adventures, repatriated to the States.

With the establishment of the Israeli Navy, “Ben Hecht” entered Navy service. She was renamed “Maoz” (“Stronghold”) and marked Q- 24. She served as the parent ship of explosion boats unit commanded by Yochai Bin Nun. In this capacity, on 22nd of October 1948, near the coast of Ashquelon she took part in the attack on two Egyptian Navy ships, the flagship Emir el Farouq and the escorting minesweeper. Both ships were sank.

In September 1955 she was registered as Israel merchant ship, under her previous name “Abril”. Three businessmen, probably in the purpose of selling her abroad, owned her. She was sold to Italy and renamed “Santa Maria del Mare” in the ownership of Navigazione Libera di Golfo. She serves till today under Italian flag, as a ferry in the Gulf of Naples.

"ABRIL"/ "SANTA MARIA DEL MARE" IN 2002