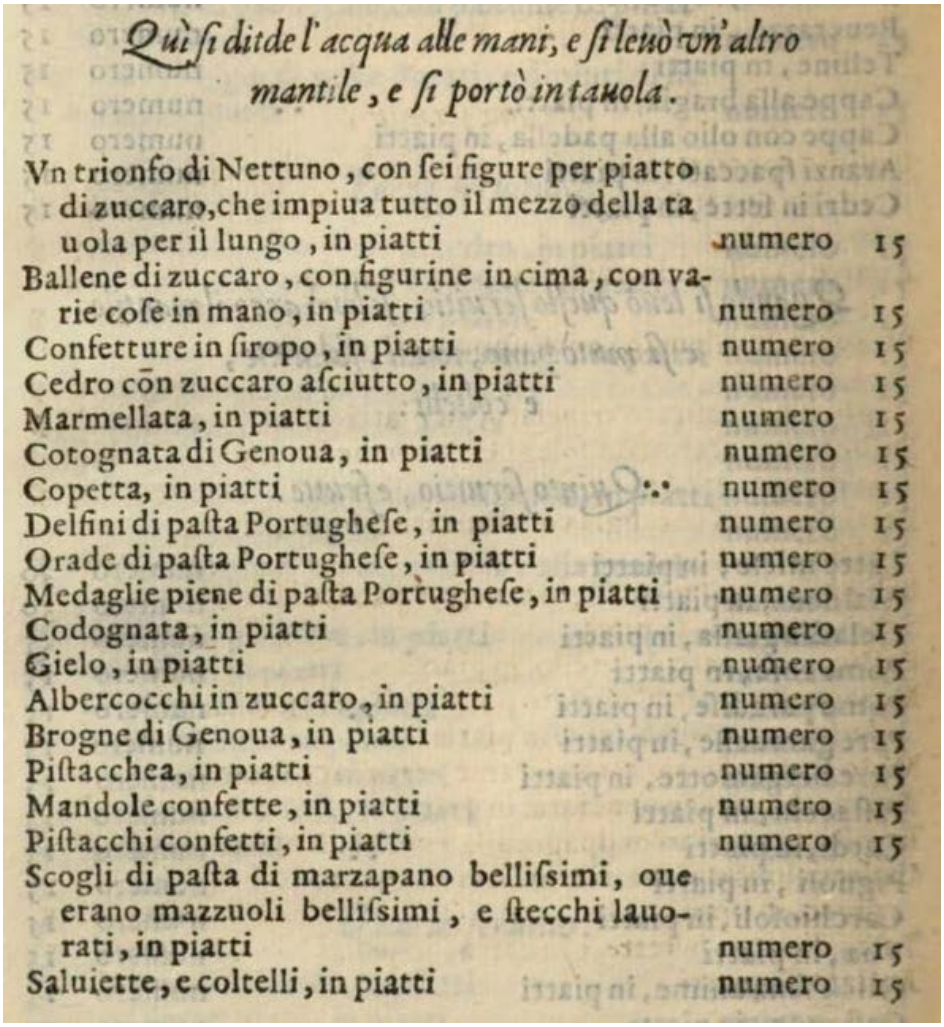
Trionfi di Nettuno - Stormhold baronial investiture

For the Stormhold Baronial Changeover (11th March, 2017), Benedict and I teamed up to make a sugar sculpture of Poseidon to present to Their Majesties. I based this on the same feast description that had included the “sugar whale” I had completed previously, but this time with greater understanding of the style and techniques that would have been used:

"*The marriage of Eccellentissimo Signor don Alfonso d'Este to Serenissima Duchessa Barbara d'Austria provides an extraordinary marine scenario created out of sugar: A* Trionfo *of Neptune with six figures of sugar per plate occupies the whole length of the table. Then there are giant Whales cast in sugar with small figures standing on top holding objects". (Di Schino 1994)*

The original description of this feast is found in Dello Scalco by Giovan Battista Rossetti (1584), who wrote a treatise on household stewardship for the D'Este family. In this book he details the full list of all foods served at the wedding, with a preface describing that the whole wedding was marine themed, from the ceiling which was painted with waves, the tablecloths were layered in waves also, and embroidered servants tabards which had scales on them. In the final remove, a sugar sculpture of Neptune is listed as the first dish presented.



Quì ſi ditde l'acqua alle mani, e ſi leuò vn'altro mantile, e ſi portò in tauola.

Vn trionfo di Nettuno, con ſei figure per piatto di zuccaro, che impiua tutto il mezzo della tauola per il lungo, in piatti numero 15
Ballene di zuccaro, con figurine in cima, con varie coſe in mano, in piatti numero 15
Confetture in ſiropo, in piatti numero 15
Cedro cõn zuccaro aſciutto, in piatti numero 15
Marmellata, in piatti numero 15
Cotognata di Genoua, in piatti numero 15
Copetta, in piatti numero 15
Delfini di paſta Portugheſe, in piatti numero 15
Orade di paſta Portugheſe, in piatti numero 15
Medaglie piene di paſta Portugheſe, in piatti numero 15
Codognata, in piatti numero 15
Gielo, in piatti numero 15
Albercocchi in zuccaro, in piatti numero 15
Brogne di Genoua, in piatti numero 15
Piſtacchea, in piatti numero 15
Mandole confette, in piatti numero 15
Piſtacchi confetti, in piatti numero 15
Scogli di paſta di marzapano belliſsimi, oue erano mazzuoli belliſsimi, e ſtecchi lauorati, in piatti numero 15
Saluiette, e coltelli, in piatti numero 15

Sugar was a luxurious and ephemeral material, and therefore our understanding of the size, detail and construction of these pieces is taken from sketches and existing bronzes cast in the same moulds as the sugar work. We don't know who the creators of the sugar sculpture for this banquet was, however many of the elaborate sugar sculptures of the time in Italy were created by famous baroque sculptors such as Giovanni Bologna, who would cast molten sugar in the same moulds used to cast bronze statues. Giovanni Bologna was one of the leading sculptors involved in creating the sugar sculptures presented to such royal families as Henry IV and the Medici's (Watson, 1978). Giovanni Bologna (1529-1608) was Flemish-born, and appointed master sculptor to the Medici court in Florence. He was commissioned to create the sugar sculptures for the marriage banquet of Maria de' Medici and Henri IV of France (1600), in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence (Young, 2002; Saslow 1996).

Although Giambologna was commissioned to create Hercules-themed sugar sculptures for the banquet, he engaged his assistant Pietro Tacca to create them instead (Young, 2002). The sugar sculpture by Tacca for a wedding feast for the Medici family, depicting Nessus (the centaur who was killed by Hercules, and whose blood in turn killed Hercules) and Deianira, is on display in bronze form at the Louvre.

Creating the model

Benedict created the model based on the style of Giambologna’s Neptune and Hercules.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AND SWEETS

Attempt 1: the first cast

We filled the mould with water to measure the volume, which was 1.6 litres.
We wanted to present 2 casts at the feast: one clear and one crystallized. We were aiming for a clear sugar cast first time around, so I added some glucose to inhibit crystal formation in the sugar.

We wrapped the mould tightly in plastic bags and duct tape, then pushed it into a bucket that Benedict had filled with expanding foam to fill the space between the mould and bucket (to keep it all together)

I boiled up 2 kg sugar (just to be sure) and 800 ml water, then as it reached a rapid boil, I added 200ml glucose. I periodically washed down the sides of the pot with water using a pastry brush to wash down any sugar crystals. When it reached 155 degrees (hard crack) we plunged the base of the pot into water to stop the temperature rising, then allowed it to cool for a couple of minutes before Benedict poured the sugar in the mould. Unfortunately we hadn't dried the mould enough so the water droplets vapourised and formed little sugar crystal balls throughout his body, which we could see straight away.

We expected the mould to be ready in about 4 hours, so at about midnight (after several rounds of cards) we demoulded him. He wasn't quite set and oozed, but the concept was successful.


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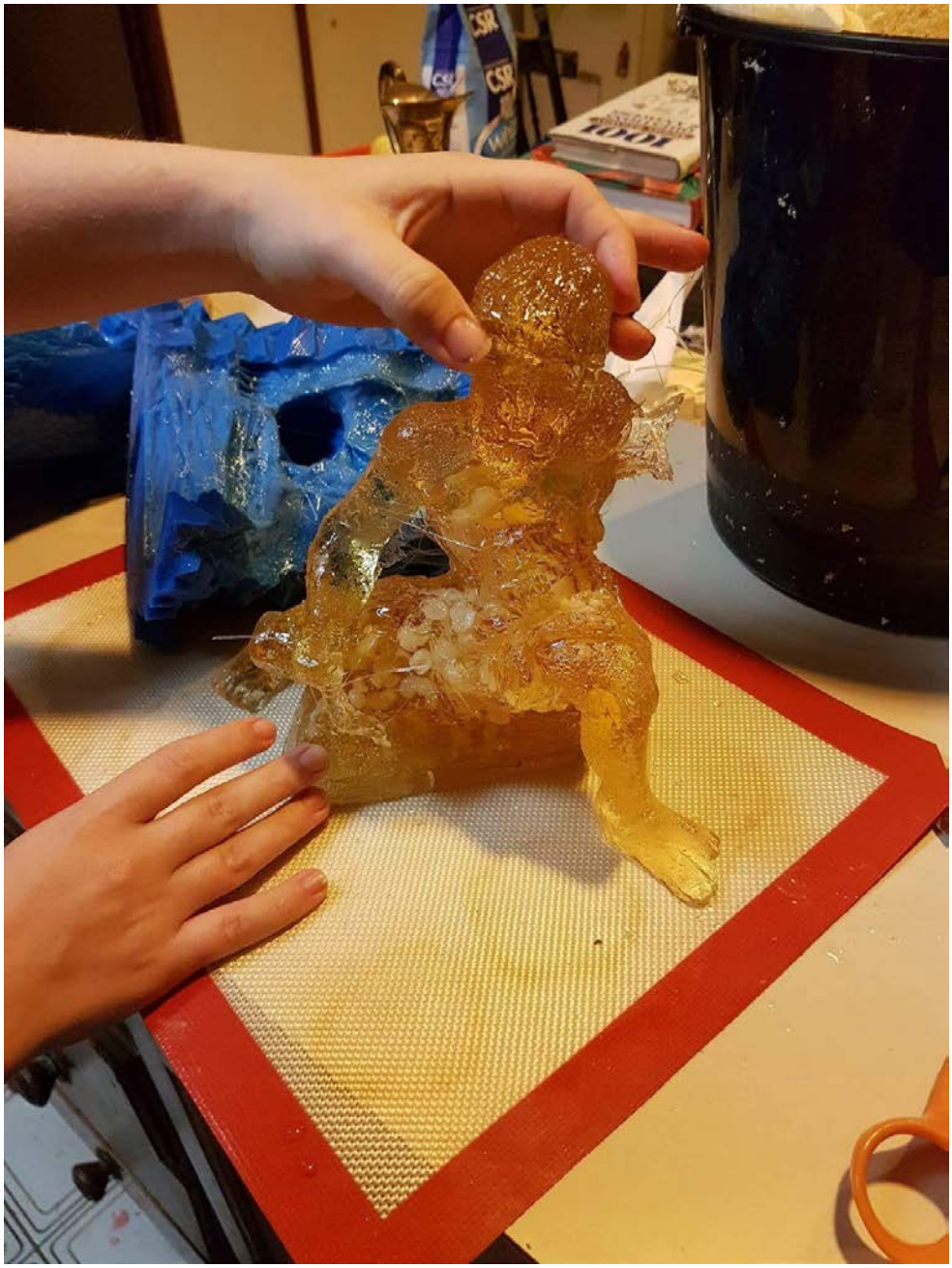


Attempt 2: securing the mould

1.8kg sugar, 750 ml water, 12ml lemon juice (instead of glucose, to act as a crystal inhibiting agent)

It was a disaster. Didn't secure the mould tightly. Sugar went everywhere.

Attempt 3: let's try a crystallized one

2kg sugar, 800 ml water

Boiled it to hard crack (155 degrees)

Poured it in the mould - success! Crystals formed straight away.

Left to cool for 24 hours before demoulding

Demoulding was easy (with 2 people)

Looked great! Had to keep the ants away though so I covered him in glad wrap and a towel.

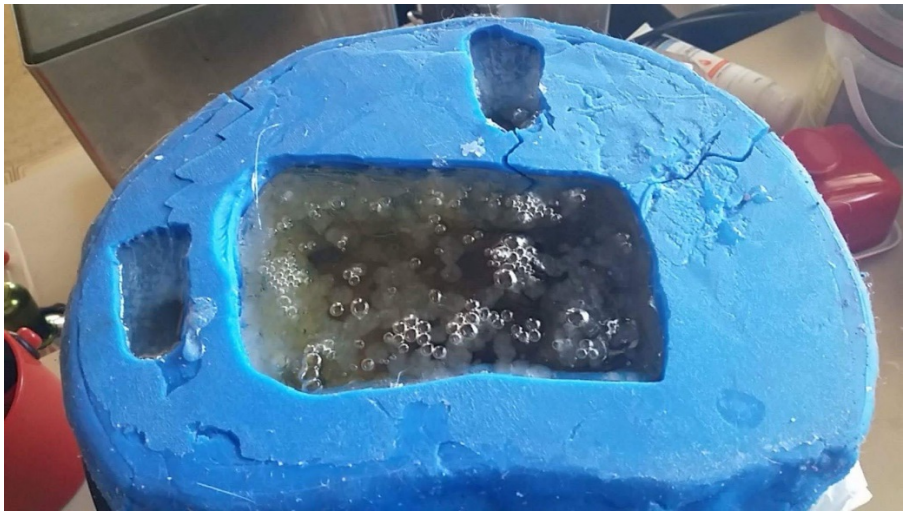
Attempt 4: let's try another crystallized one!

Replicate exactly the same steps as above, same outcome! Hooray!

Attempt 5: let's try another clear one!

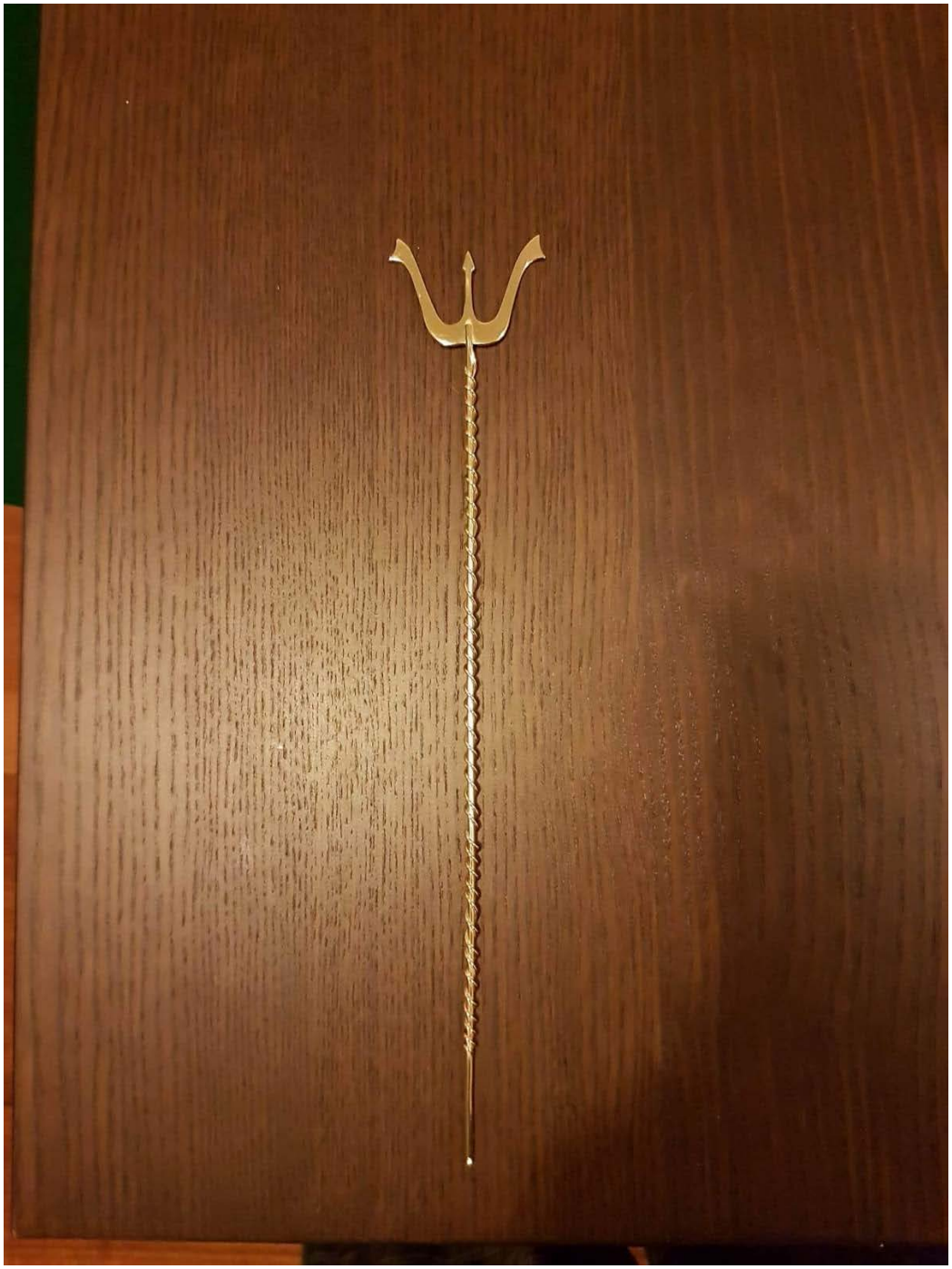
Replicate exactly the same steps as attempt 1, but this time wash and dry the mould more thoroughly. All good except that I didn't secure the mould tightly enough. Leaked everywhere, had to boil another 600ml sugar, by which time the surface of the sugar that was already in the mould had started to set, so when I poured the second batch in it partially crystallized.

Photos from Attempt 3, which was presented to Their Majesties:



5 mins after pouring you can see the seed crystals

2 hours after pouring



The final masterpiece