Following on from our article "Batik Miniatures - Miniatures as an Art Form" which appeared in the MyBatik Aug-Oct 2011 issue pp14-17, this article explains how we represent batik from Central Java in our miniatures.

There were many small kingdoms developing in Java from around the time of the Hindu/Buddhist Mataram (7th to 17th Century) and the Hindu Majapahit (13th to 15th Century) empires. They comprised a melding of various Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic faiths and cultures. From the sixteenth century onwards, the Europeans arrived and sought to dominate the spice trade in the Maluku Islands, culminating in the supremacy of the Dutch government.

In 1704, Sultan Amangkurat III of the Mataram Dynasty took the title Susuhunan and became Pakubuwono I. In 1745, his heir Pakubuwono II moved his court to the village of Solo and founded the Kraton Surakarta. The Kraton Yogyakarta was founded later, in 1755 by Sultan Hamengkubuwono I.

There are now several kratons of significance in Java, although the main ones are still at Yogyakarta and Surakarta. The kratons remain bastions of the Javanese aristocracy where the ideals of cultural refinement are developed to a remarkable level of refinement and complexity.

Life in the kraton is highly ritualized. The ruler lives within the kraton walls with his family, court officials, entertainers and abdi dalem (court attendants). Ceremonies and celebrations are carefully observed in great detail. The performing arts play a central role in the ceremonial and daily activities of the kraton.

COURT COSTUME AND BATIK

Javanese costume generally consisted of a large piece of coloured cloth, termed "sarong" or "kain panjang", which was wrapped around either the upper torso for women, or lower torso for men. Women may wear another piece of cloth termed a selendang around their upper torso. Men may be bare chested or wear a short tunic with sleeves. A keris is normally worn tucked into their sarong or kain panjang.

Royalty and court officials are dressed in a black jacket of Western influence, usually faced with gold embroidery, the amount varying on hierarchy. There are several types of headaddresses such as an iket (head scarf), a kuluk (cloth cap) in black or blue velvet ornamented with gold, and a black Madura hat. Coloured trousers may be worn as well with either a sarong, kain panjang or kain dodot. These are rectangular cloth of various sizes which are worn wrapped around the hips. The sarong is a tubular cloth which is wrapped around the lower torso and legs. The kain panjang is a longer piece of cloth which is worn wrapped around the lower torso and legs but with the additional length tucked into the waist or left loose to drape on the ground to create a dramatic effect. The kain dodot is even larger. Lithographs and other pictures of the period show various sarongs, kain panjang and kain dodot worn...