Among the most striking identity markers of a Buddhist monastic community are the robes worn by its members. It is therefore not surprising that disciplinary (vinaya) texts contain a wealth of guidelines on robes, and that much research has been done on how to make and wear such robes. The present article focuses on a much less studied, yet equally essential, aspect: the care of monastic robes. As we will see, disciplinary texts are similarly informative on this issue, although in this instance the guidelines are scattered throughout the various chapters of the vinayas.

Taking care of one’s robes involved washing and dyeing them properly, and many details are provided on exactly how to do both. The vinayas offer a wealth of information on both the material culture of early Buddhist India and the monastic way to deal with the guidelines relating to robes. In sum, their rules provide an intriguing picture of how a Buddhist monastic community in India ideally took care of one of its most visible features – the monastic robe.

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