Among Aristotle's extant works one of the most difficult is a treatise in two books entitled ΠΕΡΙ ΓΕΝΕΣΕΩΣ ΚΑΙ ΦΘΟΡΑΣ, De generatione et corruptione, On Coming To Be and Passing Away (hereafter GC). This title, not used by Aristotle himself in his references to parts of this work, derives from its opening words Περὶ δὲ γενέσεως καὶ ψθορᾶς (314a2) and by no means covers its entire contents. As the main sections forming the two books seem to have been hammered into a sort of whole at an early date, we may believe that it was soon referred to by others with the title deriving in the customary way from the opening sentence. Though much more than just coming to be and passing away are at issue, these play a major part in Aristotle's complicated enquiries, especially in the mini treatise consisting of the first four chapters of GC but of course also elsewhere in the work, and they are naturally discussed in other treatises of the corpus as well. Time and again, as is his habit, Aristotle develops his own views from and in contrast to a to some extent manipulated critical overview of, or reference to, views of his predecessors.

Such quasi-historical passages have been more influential in Antiquity than is often realized. My claim in the present paper is that several chapters in Aëtius, viz., 1.24 Diels ‘On coming to be and passing away’,

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1 Note that Plato, Phd. 95e–96a, has Socrates put the whole of natural philosophy on a par with the explanation of genesis and ththora. Galen, De locis affectis VIII 158.11–159.7 Kühn mentions the debate ως γενέσεως καὶ ψθορᾶς in a list of issues all of which recall Placita chapters and their headings, a passage I cannot deal with here.

2 The division into chapters of our editions has no ancient authority. I shall refer to them for the sake of convenience.
Περὶ γενέσεως καὶ φύσεως (both ps.-Plutarch and Stobaeus) and 1.30 Diels ‘On nature’, Περὶ φύσεως (ps.-Plutarch only) are very dependent on Aristotle’s dialectical forays in GC and elsewhere.

When one wishes to look for antecedents of Aët. 1.24 Diels in Aristotle, the first treatise one should consider is, naturally, the De generatione et corruptione. Matters, however, are more complicated, as also other Aristotelian passages are involved, as well as passages in [274] Plato. When attempting to trace the antecedents of chapters in the Placita one should always take into account that we do not know very much about the long period separating Aëtius in the first century CE from the Peripatetics. Furthermore, it may be quite hard, even impossible, to decide between rival ancestries. Finally, there is the vexing issue of what I call retrograde contamination. The doxographical tradition is various and flexible, liable to suffer losses through epitomization but also to gain extra material through accretion. The author, or user, of a doxography may be in a position to go back to the original source(s), or to authoritative intermediate sources such as Theophrastus, Aristotle and Plato, or to consult other, more peripheral literature, and he may well think it worthwhile to put in a few extra bits. And doxographies are of course brought up to date to some extent by the addition of more recent material.

What I propose to do in the present paper is, first, to look at passages in the De caelo (the beginning of book III) and the GC (the beginning of book I) where the views of others on coming to be and passing away are reviewed and discussed by Aristotle (section 5), next (sections 6–9) to study the lemmata of Aët. 1.24 Diels and their immediate sources,

3 Diels’ reference DG 327 (for the chapter-heading only) to Stob. Ecl. 1.41, which has the chapter-heading Περὶ φύσεως καὶ τῶν συμβαίνοντων ἐξ αὐτῆς αἰτίων, is misleading, though it is possible (but unlikely) that the lemmata of Aët. 1.30 Diels were lost in the course of the transmission of the Stobaeus chapter. In Aët. 1.1.2 Diels we have an account of Aristotle’s own views on nature, cf. below, text to n. 87.

4 For another example, pertaining to Cael. II.13 and Aët. 3.9–15 Diels, see Mansfeld, 1992a, pp. 94–109. On Aristotle’s dialectical method see e.g. the excellent pages of Algra, 1995, pp. 153–182 (cf. also below, n. 14); on its use by Theophrastus, see Baltussen, 1992. Runia, 1999a, is a good general introduction to the difficult issues of ‘doxography’.

5 Lachenaud, 1993, pp. 235–236 (as elsewhere, in other cases) has noted some parallels and antecedents in Aristotle, but his references are not always precise, and I shall mostly refrain from discussing them. This remark is not meant to imply that his comments are useless, for they are not. My main objection is that he comments on ps.-Plutarch as if it were an ordinary philosophical text instead of an epitome which is part of a flexible doxographical tradition. For a preliminary evaluation of his edition of ps.-Plutarch’s text see Mansfeld and Runia, 1997, pp. 179–181.