Recentiores non deteriores

Literally ‘the more recent (witnesses need not) be the worse ones’ in Latin. This is a rule from 18th century textual criticism against the use of editing texts from the oldest extant manuscripts only. Before then textual variants were often selected by majority in all witnesses or according to the witness’s age. Both these procedures became obsolete with the genealogical, so-called Lachmannian method. Indeed, a very young manuscript may be a direct copy from a very good, lost old manuscript and should therefore not be left out of consideration only because of its age. The first to discriminate between äusserliche and inneres Alter (“exterior” vs. “interior” age), meaning that younger witnesses may contain older readings, is assumed to be the 18th century New Testament scholar Johann Salomo Semler (1765: 88-89).

Some remarks on the history of this maxim can be found in Timpanaro (1981, 39). Due to practical reasons (in very broad traditions), there are today still editions being made based only on a selection among the oldest extant manuscripts. Although this is understandable from a practical point of view, its inherent danger should not be neglected. A good example of the value of this rule is the new edition of Petrus Alfonsi’s Dialogus, a text contained in more than 80 extant witnesses. There, two of the best manuscripts (B2 and V7) for the constitutio textus are several centuries younger than the oldest ones which are very close in time to the original.

This principle was formulated e.g. by Friedrich August Wolf as: Novitas enim codicum non maius vitium est quam hominum adolescentia: etiam hic non semper aetas sapientiam affert. (Prolegomena ad Homerum 1795, 3). (“The recency of manuscripts, to be sure, is not a worse defect than men's youth: also there age does not always bring along wisdom”).

References
– Pasquali, Giorgio. 1952. Storia della tradizione e critica del testo. 2nd ed. Firenze: Le Monnier. || See in particular chapter 4 "Recentiores, non deteriores”.

In other languages
Latin term is used throughout.