Jeremiah 4:16-17 speaks of evil tidings that are to come from the north. A voice or rumour from Dan and the mountains of Ephraim will tell the nations concerning Jerusalem the following message:

"Nōšērim will come from the far-away country and make their shouts heard against the cities of Judah; like field-watchers they shall be against her all around."

The first rendering of nōšērim that comes to mind is of course "watchers", the translation of S, V, and the AV. "To watch", "guard" (in a friendly sense) is the meaning of the root in most passages. This is Proto-Semitic nṣr, which in South-Semitic – Arabic naṣara, South-Arabian nṣr, Shkhauri nṣor, Ethiopic naṣara — means "to look" (at, after, down upon), while in North-Semitic, as represented by Akkadian naṣāru, Punic nṣr, Aramaic nṣr, nṯr, Ugaritic nṯr, and our Hebrew word, it means "to guard", "watch".

The drawbacks of the rendering "watchers" are obvious. The context proves that the men spoken about are enemies, sent as a punishment, "because she has rebelled against me... this is your doom, and it is bitter", not solicitous guardians. They make a noise, which watchers would hardly do, whether friendly or hostile. They are compared to field-watchers, i.e. the people who scare the birds away with shouts and running about. Apart from the uselessness of comparing watchers with watchmen, this musical-comedy type of watchers is hardly what the prophet could have had in mind. On the other hand the image is an apt one if what he meant is an enemy actually attacking, and converging upon the city with shouts, as the bird-chasers converge upon the field.

1 MT; VSS: "in" or "to".
2 This argument is adduced by F. Giesebrrecht, HAT ad loc.; it is perhaps a little too rationalistic.
Ancient and modern translators and interpreters, therefore, have searched for other interpretations. We may dispose most easily of the statement of mediaeval Jewish commentators (Ibn Janâh, Solomon Parĥon, Joseph and David Kimhi) that nôšêrim is a gentile from Nebuchadnezzar. Not much better, linguistically, is the rendering “besiegers”, though adopted by the most modern translations: the RSV and the Dutch Nieuwe Vertaling (NV). The very multiplicity of ways in which it is reached should make us suspicious. It is either based on deriving nôšêrim from the root šwr, an idea first put forward by Rashi, to whom all weak roots and primae nun were biliteral and interchangeable. Or it attributes to nṣr the meaning “to besiege”, which cannot be found in any cognate language, and in Hebrew rests on some occurrences of the passive participle nôṣûr, none of which seems to have this meaning — although in the case of the part. pass. there is no difficulty in deriving the forms from šwr, if the meaning “besieged” were better. Finally, some emend to šâmûm, e.g. BH, invoking G, on which, however, see below.

Some of the ancient VSS have a rendering which is unlikely to be based on guesswork from the context, and shows an entirely different trend of thought.

1. G: σωστροφω — “crowds”, “noisy assemblies”. The word renders in G A Jud. 14: 8 ἐναθάν in the meaning “swarm” (of bees), and occurs in Acts 19: 40, AV “concourse”, RSV “commotion”. The Ethiopic (Asmara edn.) renders the Greek word in Jer. ma’lēt—“rebellion”, in Acts hakak—“tumult”.

2. S: κενσέ d’-ammē — “crowds of nations” or “gentiles”. The idea of noise and commotion is here left unexpressed, both because Syriac may have been lacking a suitable noun, and in keeping with the un-plastic manner of rendering peculiar to S.

3. T has fared badly at the hand of its interpreters. By almost general agreement, it has been credited with rendering nôšêrim as “vintners”, and with reading in its Vorlage: bôšērim. What T really has is a phrase consisting of three items: מֵפְשַרְשְׁמִים שלחַי נַפְטִיס — “armies of nations (or: gentiles), robbers, like vintners”. The first part of this is identical with the rendering of S. The following two words are also found in this exact combination in Jer. 49: 9 and Ob. 5, where, indeed, they render bôšērim of the Hebrew text. In both passages the “vintners” are in parallelism with “thieves”, in
Ob. also with “robbers” (T: bāzōzīn), and this is what may have led T — alone of all VSS — to add the rhyme-word ḥāṭophīn. It is possible that the inspiration came from some popular adage of the type קִפְטִים אַחֲוָאִים — “vinters are robbers”. I would suggest that in Jer. 4:16 the original text of T added only קִפְטִים, probably in an attempt to express the undertone of noise and commotion felt in nōṣērīm, which G was able to express in a special word. The קִפְטִים was then added by scribes under the influence of the other two passages, perhaps also in order to harmonize this hemistich with the “field-watchers” of verse 17.

4. We may now perhaps cite the above-mentioned mediaeval rendering, fanciful as it is, as a late echo of the tradition which understood nōṣērīm as a crowd or army.

This rendering, though wholly ignored by modern exegesis, can be backed by etymology. Besides nṣr, Semitic has a root nṣr, represented by Syriac nēṣar — “to chirp, murmur, mumble, grunt, sing, praise”, nusrāthā — “din of birds”, Jewish Aramaic nēṣar — “chirp” (a cricket), Mandaean nṣar — “to grunt” (pig), as well as whatever noise the earth makes when it trembles. In Ugaritic (Keret II, vi, 5) nṣr denotes the noise the witch Š’tqṭ makes on entering the house where Keret lies sick, in addition to weeping. Driver translates “shrilled”, but it might have been some other sound.

In describing a confused, inarticulate sound, nṣr resembles hāmāh. The latter is also used of the confused noise of a multitude and by metonymy of the multitude itself. It describes the gathering and commotion of enemies in Ps. 83:3, RSV: “for, lo, thy enemies are in tumult”. Similarly, nōṣērīm seems here to describe both the multitude and its confused noise. It seems to be a poetic substitute from a semi-synonymous root of the kind typical for slang and poetry, which provide freshness by throwing the Wortinhalt into sharper relief.

The meaning “crowd” seems also to have existed in Arabic, where nṣr means 1) the action of copious rain or, as noun, a tributary of a wady. This may be a development of the verb as describing the sound of rushing water, or a rain-storm, so often painted by the pre-Islamic poets. 2) naṣara — “help in a fight or struggle”, intaṣara — “be victorious”. The connection of this with the concept of a crowd is shown by the parallel Jewish Aramaic sayyā — “to help”, istayya — “to succeed”, from stēthā — “company”, “troop”, “public assembly” — which was taken over into Arabic as shī’a — “party”.

9 The meaning “victorious” has been claimed by O. Krückmann, AFO 16 (1952) 146, for Aramaic in the phrase: מַעֲרָא אֲחֹז עִם לֵב, Hatra XIII, 2, while A. Caquot, Syria 29 (1952) 96, translates “protected, favoured by”. One could perhaps appeal to the Arabic meaning, but translate “one who helps and loves whatever is good”.
The dictionary of Hava gives also as an Egyptian Arabic usage manṣar — “gang of thieves”.

Our word has the same sense in Jer. 31: 5 (6): “For the day is close when nōṣērîm will call in the mountains of Ephraîm, Arise and let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God”. Here S, V, AV, RSV, NV translate “watchers”; T speaks of the pious who “guard” the Law; G’s “who are defended” may represent a reading nēṣūrîm. Ehrlich and Giesebrrecht reject the meaning “watchers” and emend into bōṣērîm. Indeed, it is difficult to know what these “watchers” were there for, but neither seems there to be any occasion for vintners to be singled out. The reference is here to the hoped-for return of the inhabitants of the former Israel into the community of those worshipping at Jerusalem; this is underlined by putting the phrase “our God” into their mouths. “Joyful throng” would thus fit the context admirably.

It should be noted that Jer. 4: 16 and 31: 5 exhibit features which suggest that they were meant by the author to complement each other, the one a picture of doom, the other a picture of corresponding salvation. The lexical correspondences are listed in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jer. ch. 4</th>
<th>Jer. ch. 31</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>from Mount Ephraim (15)</td>
<td>in Mount Ephraim (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(warn) the nations (16)</td>
<td>(at the head of) the nations (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>announce ye (16)</td>
<td>announce ye (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that you may be saved (14)</td>
<td>save thou (6) (G.: He has saved)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from a distant land (16)</td>
<td>from the north country ...from the farthest parts of the earth (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(in the islands) in the distance (9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A further parallelism is added if we accept S. Talmon’s attractive suggestion to read in 4:16 for נָלָל אֲנָחָה, “and they imposed their crowd upon the cities of Judah”, corresponding to 31: 8: “a great crowd they shall return here”.

In the light of this it is clear that we must provide a translation for nōṣērîm which fits both passages (as we have done), and that there is no point in emending the word in one passage.

The renderings of G and S might be taken to imply not the pl. participle, but a noun in the pl., perhaps nēṣūrîm. One might even take nōṣērîm as a pl. of a segolate nōṣer in the manner of Mishnaic Hebrew in the Babylonian tradition. However, as we have here a poetical term, it may be that also an unusual

10 Randglossen 4, 320.
11 HAT ad loc.
form was employed, and in any case the *lectio difficilior* should be preserved unless there is clear evidence against it.

The word *hāmōn* in the sense of a human crowd is entirely absent from Jeremiah. Where the noun occurs, it refers to the noise of water, etc. We might be tempted to see in *nāšērīm* a purely Jeremianic usage. Nevertheless, I venture to propose two further passages where *ng̱r* is used in the senses indicated.

Is. 1: 8: And the daughter of Zion is left over
like a booth in a vineyard,
lake a lodge in a cucumber field,
כְּעִיר נַצְוֵר.

Though G, T, S, RSV, NV all translate “like a besieged city”, the objections, as summed up by G. B. Gray,13 are valid. S and V: “like a ravaged city”, and Saadia (Ar.): “like a city of reed-booths” do not make better sense. The poetic structure, with its three-times repeated “like”, is awkward. I would suggest a slight emendation (not supported by any version): to delete the *kaph* before the last member. If we then take *nēṣūrāh* in the sense we have discussed, we get a perfect chiasitic parallelism:

“And the daughter of Zion is left over  like a booth in a vineyard;
like a lodge in a cucumber field (the) humming city.”

Prov. 7: 10: “And lo, a woman comes towards him
dressed as a harlot and בְּרֵחוּת.
She is restless (*hōmiyyāh*) and wayward:
her feet do not stay at home.”

Except for Rashi’s “her heart is surrounded by wiles”, all interpretations seem to be based on reading *nāšereth*, part. act. The mediaeval Jewish lexicographers explain that she “guards” her heart, is self-controlled. The ancient VSS are unanimous in giving the verb the sense of captivating or exciting, and making *lēbh* mean the heart of the man. G: “causes to flutter”,14 S = T: “frightens”,15 Ar.: *khāliba*, a verb specifically meaning a woman captivating a youth.16 G V Ar. have “hearts” in the pl., thus making the expression a constant quality. G and S = T add to heart(s): “of youths”; this explanatory addition rests of course on the meaning attributed to the verb, and may at one time

13 ICC ad loc.
14 ἀναστρίζω. The related form ἀναστρίζονται translates in part of G of Hos. 11: 11 — לָשֵׁד.
15 Cp. in Arabic poetry rā’a, rawwā’a — “to frighten” and “to inspire love”.
16 Other reading *sāliba* — “snatching, robbing”.
have been a gloss to the Hebrew text. As for this meaning itself, it could be an obvious guess from the situation and inspired by lēbh. It may be an offshoot of the translation “besieged” in Is. 1:8. This view, that לֶבַח נָזָר refers to siege, is made explicit by the 16th-century commentary Meṣūdath Dāwīd: “she lays siege to the hearts of men so as to subdue them”. However, it may also be that this tradition is connected with the addition “snatchers” or “robbers” (ḥāṭophīn) in the Targum of Jer. 4:16, discussed above.17

The key to the understanding of the phrase in the MT pointing, where lēbh of necessity refers to the woman’s own mind, is supplied by hōmiyyāh in the following hemistich, which, as we have seen, is partly synonymous with naṣar, so that again we have a chiastic parallelism in which “wayward” corresponds to “dressed” as a harlot, and nēṣūrāth lēbh corresponds to hōmiyyāh. The latter epithet is applied Prov. 9:13 to “Dame Folly”, and there has the parallelism: נשי יתהת חמה.19 G translates ὑπάθα — “bold”. The word is difficult to render in English, as it includes both physical and mental restlessness, loudness of voice and behaviour, and brazenness — in short, the opposite of the ideal of the Biblical woman. It is to this that nēṣūrāth lēbh corresponds, perhaps with the additional shade of tumult and rebelliousness that this root seems to comport. We have here a case of passive participle with intransitive active meaning.20 Render perhaps: “with tumultuous mind”.

Our interpretation of nāṣērīm as “crowd” may help to account for the Semitic name of the Christians: Mishnaic Hebrew nāṣērīm, Aramaic in transliteration Naẓ̄ruṭai (Acts 24:5), Arabic naṣārā(i) (نصاري). This cannot, if only for reasons of grammar, be the gentile of the city of Nāṣērath (Naẓ̄ruṭ), which in any case appears in NT Greek as: ναζαρηνός; nor of naẓir (ναξερος, ναξαρος), though NT Midrash established connections with both.21

We must first of all establish the linguistic relation between Hebrew nāṣēr and Greek-Aramaic nāṣōr, which in all probability is also represented by

17 Cp. Egyptian Arabic manṣar, quoted above; and נֹשֶׁר of Rabbinic tradition (cp. Jastrow’s Dictionary p. 930, s.v. נֹשֶׁר IV), who is called a robber in B.T. Kethubboth 51b.
18 The accepted rendering. I would prefer to connect the word with Arabic washā — “to adorn, paint”. It is not necessary to emend to šēn, as irregular correspondences do occur. Then šēk would be a fem. segolate, like šēbhet from yēb. For the t instead of expected ḫay, cp. Bauer-Leander, Hebr. Gramm. p. 583 top: נושר. Translate, therefore: “a woman... (with) the adorning of a harlot”.
19 G S: “and does not know shame” — הלילה, or interpretation of מז? T: “does not know good”.
21 For Mt. 2:23 see below. Syriac nāṣārāy — “Christian”, on the other hand, is properly derived from Syr. Nāṣrath. W. F. Albright, JBL 65 (1946) 397–401 argues that Nāṣārāy is a possible, specifically Palestinian, gentilic from Nāṣrath, and that Hebrew Nāṣērīl is a “hyper-correct” Hebrew form based on a misinterpretation of the Aramaic gentilic.
Arabic *naṣārā*²², since also in other early words borrowed from Palestinian speech, Arabic represents Hebrew or Aramaic long *o* by its own long *a*.²³

This is the well-known equivalence of *qātōl*, pl. *qēṭēlōth*, both in Mishnaic Hebrew²⁴ and in Palestinian Jewish Aramaic,²⁵ to Hebrew *gōēl* as a *nomen agens*. For the coexistence of Hebrew and Aramaic forms for sect names cp. Hebrew מַשְׁרִית, Greek Φαρίσαεῖς = מַשְׁרִית, and perhaps Hebrew מַשְׁרִית, Greek Ἐσσαὶ = מַשְׁרִית.²⁶ This is further confirmation that *nōšērîm* here is a participle, not a gentilic.

In principle, *Nōšērîm*, as has been suggested to me by my friend and colleague S. Talmon, may mean “guardians”, *scil.* “of the Law”.²⁷ However, seeing that *nāṣar* “guard” is in Middle-Aramaic *nētar*, it should be expected that in the process of substituting an Aramaic nominal pattern also the phonetic adaptation would have been made, so that we would have had *Nāṭωρɔτi*. We may thus take it that in the popular mind *Nōšērîm* was not connected with the meaning “to guard”. As there is no verb in Mishnaic Hebrew that could have supplied such an alternative meaning, the probability is that the term contains a Biblical allusion, and such could be found only in our two Jeremiah passages.

The term “crowd, assembly” could of course have been chosen by a community as its own name, just as the Qumran sect called itself, *inter alia*, מַשְׁרִית; and in fact the Christians used for themselves the Greek name ἐκκλησία. However, if the Septuagint is anything to go by, ἐκκλησία was an equivalent of Hebrew לֵדָס. Note also that the only time Ἐκκλησία appears in the NT as a name of the Christian community (as apart from the frequent Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος, *viz.* Acts 24:5, it does so in the mouth of an opponent. It seems thus to have been at first a name given by the Jews to the Christians, and as in so many other cases, subsequently adopted by the group itself. In Jer. 4:16 T S add “gentiles”, and T is careful to provide a further opprobrious term. If these exegetical additions represent an old tradition, then it is possible that *Nōšērîm* really came into being as name for the Christians only in the life-

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²² This form can hardly have been borrowed from Syr. *nāṣrayē*, as suggested by A. Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an* (Baroda 1938) 281. True, also the long *a* of *nāṣrayayā* is not reproduced in *naṣārā*, but this is likely to be shortening by dissimilation.


²⁴ Cp. Segal, *op. cit.*, 106. Note the prevalence of this form in the plural.


²⁶ Note also the additional *ai* in Greek Φαρίσαεῖς, which shows that the *ai* in *Naζωραῖος* is not necessarily a gentilic taken from the Semitic original. Perhaps these Greek forms go back to archaic Aramaic plurals in *-ayā*.

²⁷ Cp. Lidzbarski’s view, below.
time of Paul, where it occurs in Acts, and is a slighting reference to the gentile constituents of the Church.

There are two possible further occurrences of the term as a group name, which, if true, would go a long way to support our analysis of its meaning. One is the much-debated self-designation of the Mandaeans as Naṣoraia, which would make sense as being originally a Jewish term applied to a gentile group, and re-interpreted by the latter as “preservers” of secret wisdom, either through a vague memory of the Akkadian naṣaru, or through a Midrashic association (learnt from Jews) with Biblical הָזְרֵר — “secrets” (Is. 48:6). The connection of this word with nāṣērīm was first seen by Lidzbarski (see below).

The other is the name Anšār applied to the Muslim community in the (largely Jewish) city of Medina. This could grammatically be a rare plural form of Arabic nāṣir or nasr — “helper” (and indeed was so interpreted in later Muslim usage), but a single member of this group is never called nāṣir, but always Anšārī, as if the term were a proper name. It is not impossible that the name was given to the group by the Jews of Medina, as an Arabic plural of Hebrew nōšēr, in allusion to Jer. 4:16 and Muhammad’s claim to be al-nābi al-ummī — “the gentile prophet”.

The suggestion to separate Naṣowpatot from Nazareth, and to derive it from a Hebrew nōšēr, in the sense of “observing”, scil. the Law, was made by M. Lidzbarski and much debated in its time. The weak point in his argumentation was put by himself with admirable clearness: “both nāṣērhē and nāsrērhē must have originated in circles where Aramaic was spoken, but because of the sade it is impossible to accept that they were original Aramaic: they must go back to a language in which Arabic звуч is represented by ʂ, i.e. either Hebrew or Babylonian.” I hope to have shown why ʂ was preserved in the Aramaic form and also to have made clear why this particular Hebrew word might have been chosen. Lidzbarski came to his conclusions from a study of the

29 As the latest Akkadian inscription is of ca. 40 A.D., some memory of the meaning of Akkadian words is quite likely to have survived in the early Christian era, just as many Cornishmen still know the meaning of words of the Cornish language, dead since the 18th century. Note also that nisiru means “secret”.
30 Strictly speaking, in Muslim usage, those who joined the community at Medina.
31 W. Wright’s Arabic Grammar, (Cambridge 1896) 1, 211 D–212 A.
33 Full discussion and bibliography by H. H. Schaeder, TWNT IV, 880 ff.
34 ZfS 1, 233.
name Naṣoraia for the Mandaeanst, but of course the theory can stand with
regard to the designation of the Christian community even if reasons are given
for rejecting it with regard to the Mandaeanst, as it can stand for either or both
if rejected in its application to the Medinean Muslims.

Finally we can, on the basis of our findings, make a contribution to the inter-
pretation of Mt. 2:23, where it has long been suspected that Naẓwarafoz
represents a reference to nēser in some OT verse, only that no suitable verse
came to hand.35 I would suggest that the verse in question is Is. 60:21:
(Q: nūmūm niẓwūqim lattolm yīwshar ari niṣ'a tmayim (mas.)
G reads ψυλάσσων i.e. nōser,36 and it is easy to
understand “he who guards the plant” as a reference to the Messiah. Once
nōserim had been accepted as a name for the Church, a Midrash connecting a
Biblical designation of the Messiah both with the name of the community
and the name of Jesus’ birthplace must have been most welcome. On the other
hand the form in -aioi is a clear pointer to the fact that the name of the com-
community came first, and that Naẓwarafoz as gentilic of Jesus was only changed
into Naẓwarafoz as a consequence of this Midrash. Note that CDC replaces
nēser by sōres,37 perhaps explicitly to remove a personal interpretation of
nōser for nēser, thus indirectly attesting that this reading was known to the
authors of the scroll. The form of DSIA is no evidence to the contrary as DSIA
also reads (or: מז' for CDC’s מזט)

35 Schaeder, loc. cit. 883.
36 In actual fact the text may have intended the segolate nōser as a variant form of nēser.
In Ben Sira 40:15, MS B reads הָרָקָע of B marg., of the Masada MS
(Y. Yadin, The Ben Sira Scroll from Masada [Jerusalem 1965] 14), and the VSS. For the
alternation of pē’el or pē’el with pō’el, cp. in MT: בֵּשָׂם יִבְשָׂם הָדָם רָקְע
(cp. Beth Migra 7, 2 [1962] 24) and in DSIA (E. Y. Kutscher, The Language... of the Isaiah
Scroll [Jerusalem 1959] 285, no. 28). Nēser has nothing to do with the two verbs
discussed here. It is connected with Arabic naṣir — “green, shiny”.
37 The idea was no doubt suggested either by Dan. 11:7: זָניָר שֵׁרנִיש, or by Is. 11:1:
מַעֵּן שֶׁרֶשֶׁרִיש. In the latter passage, T translates: “And the king will come out of
the sons of Jesse, and the Messiah will grow from among his grandsons”; it may have been
the view expressed in T of שֵׁרֶנִיש as the last generation, from which the Messiah will
spring, that is expressed in the substitution of CDC. I wonder whether it is not also Is.
11:1, in the interpretation of T, rather than 11:10 which Apoc. 22: 16 refers to in saying:
“I am the root and the seed (ניִ✈וֹך) of David”. Note that CDC, like G in both passages,
reads “root” in the singular.